



VAJIRAM & RAVI

Institute for IAS Examination

THE

RECITALS

Current Affairs (July 2023)



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- Article 370
- Panchayat Development Index
- Dark Patterns
- SC Holds Back-to-Back Service Extensions to ED Chief Illegal
- Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Amendment Bill, 2023
- Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021
- Indus Water Treaty
- SCO Summit 2023
- India weighs better market access to join IPEF trade pillar
- NATO Summit 2023
- BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' meet

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Pronab Sen Committee: Is There A Need To Overhaul National Surveys?

The Government of India recently appointed a panel under the chairmanship of Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician of India, to review the methodology of the National Statistical Organisation (NSO).

About Pronab Sen Committee

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has formed a new **Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS)** to advise on official data generated by NSO.
- This panel will replace the **Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES)** that was formed in **2019** to advise on economic data.
- **Role to be played by NSC:** While the new panel will help finalise survey results, the National Statistical Commission (NSC) will have the **ultimate authority to approve the publication of those results.**

SCoS vs SCES

- **The SCES was mandated to review the framework for economic indicators** such as those pertaining to the industrial and services sectors, along with labour force statistics.
 - Its focus was limited to **“Reviewing” high-frequency data** like the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI), apart from surveys and enumerations like:

Economic Census

Annual Survey of Industries

Periodic Labour Force Survey(PLFS)

- **SCoS has enhanced terms of reference** that enable it to advise the Ministry not just on all existing surveys and data sets, but also -
 - *Identify areas where data gaps exist,*
 - *Suggest ways to fill them and carry out pilot surveys and*
 - *Studies to fine-tune new approaches for capturing better data.*
- **The new committee** is also half the size of the 28-member panel that was reviewing economic data.

The Statistical set-up of the Government of India:

- The **MoSPI** came into existence as an Independent Ministry in 1999 after the merger of the Department of Statistics and the Department of Programme Implementation.
- **The Ministry has two wings**, one relating to Statistics and the other Programme Implementation.

The **Statistics Wing** called the NSO consists of the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the Computer center and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

Besides these two wings, there is **National Statistical Commission (NSC was created through a resolution)** and one autonomous Institute - **Indian Statistical Institute** - an institute of National importance.

NSO is Mandated with the Following Responsibilities:

- **Acts as the nodal agency** for the planned development of the statistical system in the country.
- **Coordinates the statistical work** in respect of the Ministries/Departments of the Government of India.
- **Prepares national accounts** as well as publishes annual estimates of national products.
- **Maintains liaison with international statistical organizations**, such as the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), IMF, ADB, FAO, ILO, etc.
- **Compiles and releases the Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** every month in the form of ‘quick estimates’.
- **Conducts the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI).**
- **Provides statistical information** to assess and evaluate the changes in the growth, composition and structure of the organised manufacturing sector.
- **Organises and conducts periodic all-India Economic Censuses** and follow-up enterprise surveys.

Why Is There A Need To Review The Methodology Of The NSO?

- **National level data is a key resource** for research, policymaking and development planning, so it is of utmost importance to understand and analyse the data in the light of existing evidence.
- **Usage of outdated survey methodology by national surveys** such as the National Sample Survey (NSS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and PLFS, have systematically underestimated India's development.
 - **This archaic methodology** has failed to capture reality in the recent past as the Indian economy has been incredibly dynamic in the last 30 years.
 - **For example**, India's key economic indicators such as retail inflation, GDP or even the extent of poverty (revised), continue to be based on the 2011-12 numbers.
 - **It compels the government to rely on proxy data** such as Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) account numbers to gauge employment trends and the National Family Health Survey to assess poverty levels.
- **The credibility of some of NSO's data has been questioned.**
 - **For example**, in 2019, the government decided to junk the results of two major NSSO household surveys carried out to assess the employment and consumption expenditure levels in Indian households **due to data quality issues**.

Case of NFHS

- Conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the last 30 years with the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) as the nodal agency. **NFHS has rural bias in terms of representation.**
- The survey methodology, which depends heavily on the last Census data, **systematically overestimates the rural population** (when compared with WB data).
- **For example**, there is evidence that rural population overestimation seems to have taken place by NFHS-2 and NFHS-5. *However, these errors seem random rather than systematic.*

How Can These Errors Be Minimised?

- **If the sample weights are appropriately assigned**, after taking into account all possible sources of error, then over/ underrepresentation seems to get corrected to a large extent.
- **Pronab Sen Committee** needs to address these concerns to make the sample adequately representative rather than go for a complete overhaul of the survey methodology.
- Traditionally, the NSO used to appoint committees to advise on design and methodology for Surveys.
 - **However, the new panel explores the availability of administrative statistics** that can be useful for surveys and generating more data.
- The new panel is **expected to help address issues raised from time to time** on the results and methodology of surveys.
- With survey design and features evolving, **the panel can seek to sensitise data users about the nuances involved to ensure better interpretation of the numbers.**
- The SCoS [whose official data will be assessed by the independent NSC, to check whether it is fit for release/ not] **must seek to rebuild the credibility of India's statistics.**



Article 370

A five-judge bench led by CJI D Y Chandrachud will be hearing petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370 which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

How Scrapping Article 370 Was Done?

- President issued the president's rule after the tenure of Governor's rule ended.
- Using the power under **Article 356 (1) (b)**, the President declared that the powers of the **Legislature of the State** shall be exercisable by or under the authority of **Parliament**.

BACKGROUND OF THE PETITIONS

- ▶ The President in 2019 issued two orders in which-
 - Superseded the 1954 Presidential order that introduced **Article 35A (empowered J&K to define its permanent residents rights and privileges)**.
 - Revoked the special status provided to J&K under Article 370.
- ▶ The Parliament also passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act in 2019 which led to the bifurcation of the state into two union territories, namely- 1) Jammu and Kashmir and 2) Ladakh.
- ▶ This is the first time that a state has been converted into a UT. Out of the 6 Lok Sabha seats held by the state of Jammu and Kashmir, 5 are to be retained by the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, and 1 is assigned to Ladakh.
- ▶ The UT of Jammu and Kashmir has an Assembly, like in Delhi and Puducherry. The J&K Assembly would now serve a five-year term instead of the previous six-year term.
- ▶ India's state count decreased from 29 to 28. Kashmir would no longer have a Governor; instead, it would have a Lieutenant Governor like Delhi or Puducherry.
- ▶ These presidential notifications were challenged in the Supreme Court through several petitions on the grounds that it is unconstitutional and violated the basic structure of the constitution.

- President issued a **presidential order** under Article 370 (1) of the Constitution. The order amended **Article 367**.
 - Article 367 contains guidance on how to read/ interpret some provisions. The amended Article declares "**the expression 'Constituent Assembly of the State...'** in Article **370 (3)** shall be read to mean '**Legislative Assembly of the State'**".
 - Article 370(3) provided that the Article 370 was to be amended by the concurrence of the Constituent Assembly. However, because of the amendment, it can now be done away by a recommendation of the state legislature.

In other words, the government used the power under 370(1) to amend a provision of the Article 367 which, then, amends Article 370(3)

About Article 370

<p>What?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It provided special status to J&K by permitting it to form its own constitution. • It restricted Parliament's legislative powers as the approval of state government was required before applying laws in the state except the ones related to defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications.
<p>Changes After Abrogation of A370</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jammu & Kashmir would no longer maintain its distinct constitution, flag, or anthem. • The residents of Jammu and Kashmir would no longer possess dual citizenship. Since the newly formed union territory of Jammu and Kashmir will be governed by the Indian Constitution, its citizens will now enjoy the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Indian constitution. • Article 360, which allows for the declaration of a Financial Emergency, would also be applicable. • All laws enacted by Parliament, including the Right to Information Act and the Right to Education Act, would be enforceable in Jammu and Kashmir. • Now even if a woman of Jammu and Kashmir marries a temporary resident, she would get the right to property. Earlier, women were given property rights on marrying a temporary resident, but in this way women's children were deprived of property rights. • Any citizen of the country (outside the state) can now get a job in Jammu and Kashmir. • People are more empowered now, unjust laws no longer exist, those discriminated since ages are now getting their due along with comprehensive development. • With the conduct of elections of Panchayati Raj Institutions such as Panches and

	<p>Sarpanches, Block Development Councils and District Development Councils, the 3-tier system of grassroots level democracy has now been established in Jammu and Kashmir.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized stone-pelting incidents have come down from 1,767 in 2018 to zero in 2023. Bandhs and hartals have become a distant memory.
Historical Evolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After independence, sovereignty of 600 princely states was restored and they were given three options under Indian Independence Act, 1947: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To remain independent. To join Dominion of India. To join Dominion of Pakistan. Joining either of the two countries was to be through an Instrument of Accession (IoA) and the joining state could specify their own joining terms. The maxim for these contracts between states was <i>Pacta Sunt Servando</i>, i.e., promises between states must be honored and for a breach of contract, the general rule was to restore the parties their original position. In October 1947, the then Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, signed the IoA with India, allowing the Centre to take decisions only on three subjects w.r.t. the state- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign affairs Defence Communications The IoA had a clause which stated that it cannot be varied by any amendment of the Act or of Indian Independence Act unless such amendment is accepted by the Maharaja by an Instrument supplementary to this Instrument. India regarded this accession as purely temporary and provisional, and its stated policy was to settle a dispute on accession in accordance with the wishes of people rather than a unilateral decision of the ruler. Following this, an interim government was appointed in J&K in 1948 with Sheikh Abdullah as its Prime Minister who along with his three other colleagues joined the Indian Constituent Assembly and negotiated & drafted the special status of J&K. The original draft went through modifications and negotiations and Article 306A (now 370) was finally passed in the Constituent Assembly and was finally included in the Constitution by India's Constituent Assembly in 1949.
Temporary/ Permanent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is listed under the Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions in Part XXI of the constitution. It could be interpreted as temporary as the J&K Constituent Assembly had a right to modify/delete/retain it. It decided to retain it. As per the constitution, it was temporary until a plebiscite. But the Supreme Court (SC) in 2018 held that despite the headnote using the word "temporary", Article 370 is not temporary. In Sampat Prakash v. State of Jammu and Kashmir (1969), the SC refused to accept Article 370 as temporary and held that as Article 370 has never ceased to be operative thus, it is a permanent provision.
Can it be deleted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, Article 370(3) permits its deletion by a Presidential Order, but it must be preceded by the concurrence of J&K's Constituent Assembly.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since such an assembly was dissolved in 1957, one view is it cannot be deleted anymore, and the other view is that it can be deleted with the concurrence of the State Assembly.
Significance for India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 370 has been more useful to India as it has been to J&K as it has acted as a tunnel through which the provisions of Indian Constitution have been extended to J&K. • Using this, India almost nullified the effect of J&K's special status by Presidential orders. • It was used to change provisions for the Governor being elected by the Assembly, to convert it into a nominee of the President. • To extend President's rule beyond one year in Punjab, the government needed the 59th, 64th, 67th and 68th Constitutional Amendments, but achieved the same result in J&K just by invoking Article 370. • It was used to extend Article 249 (power of Parliament to make laws on State List entries) to J&K without a resolution by the Assembly and just by a recommendation of the Governor.

Critical Analysis Of Situation In Kashmir After Abrogation Of Special Status

- **Terrorism & Cross border infiltration:** Since the revocation of special status, there has been a notable absence of significant terror attacks. However, there has been a shift in the nature of these attacks, with incidents now focused on targeted killings of laborers, truck drivers, apple traders, school staff aimed at instilling fear and panic among individuals. Terror recruitment has dropped from 199 in 2018 to 12 in 2023.
- **Governance & Democratic Processes:** The recently concluded panchayat elections have achieved success, evident from the high voter turnout of approximately 98%. Notably, even regions like South Kashmir (Anantnag - 94%), Jammu (99%), and Srinagar (100%).

Nevertheless, this has also resulted in an excessive proliferation of bureaucracy, which could potentially hinder the development of grassroots democracy. For instance, in certain areas, acquiring approvals from officials to allocate funds still poses challenges.

Way Forward

- The abrogation of Article 370 alone cannot address the issue of Kashmiri alienation. Apart from implementing a "security-oriented approach" to combat radicalization and reduce terrorist activities and infiltrations, the government should focus on strengthening the democratic framework in the region.
- To win the hearts and minds of the people, the government needs to enhance governance and promote economic empowerment. Furthermore, improving public perception of the Indian government and the state requires collaboration with community organizations and encouraging public participation in governance.



Panchayat Development Index

Recently, the Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj released the Panchayat Development Index at the National Workshop on Panchayat Development Index (PDI).

About Panchayat Development Index (PDI)

What?	It is a computation score for grading panchayats across the country based on the development work carried by them towards the achievement of LSDGs (Localization of Sustainable Development Goals). The LSDGs consists of following 9 themes (Each of these themes covers several SDGs):			
	1. Poverty Free and Enhanced Livelihoods in Village	2. Healthy Village	3. Child-Friendly Village	4. Water Sufficient Village

	5. Clean and Green Village	6. Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure	7. Socially Just and Socially Secured Village	8. Village with Good Governance	9. Women Friendly Village												
	<p>✓ SDGs localization is the process of translating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the local context and challenges. Defining, implementing and monitoring local actions and strategies contribute to the global achievement of the SDGs.</p>																
Prepared by	A committee constituted by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj consisting of members from different ministries and departments of Union and State governments.																
Objective	To assess the ground realities of development in Panchayats and the efforts made by the local Governments in implementing various development programmes, realizing the developmental targets and achieving the SDGs.																
How?	<p>PDI provides rankings for panchayats at different levels, including district, block, and village. The panchayats will be ranked in following categories based on their scores-</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Grade</th> <th>Score</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Grade A+</td> <td>> 90%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grade A</td> <td>75% to 90%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grade B</td> <td>60% to 75%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grade C</td> <td>40% to 60%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grade D</td> <td>< 40%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					Grade	Score	Grade A+	> 90%	Grade A	75% to 90%	Grade B	60% to 75%	Grade C	40% to 60%	Grade D	< 40%
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Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per Census 2011, nearly 70% of India lives in rural areas. Attainment of SDGs at the National level requires action at the grassroots level, and this is possible only through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). • For this purpose, 17 SDG goals have been trimmed down into 9 broad themes (With 144 local targets) for Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) at the grassroots level to enable easy understanding, acceptance & implementation by Panchayats with community involvement. • But to identify whether all the themes have been covered or not through the development plans for achieving these LSDGs and for further motivating the panchayats to perform well, this index will play a pivotal role. 																
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will help identify where the development fund has been spent, its result and the areas that need to be focused on. • It will pave way for outcome-oriented development goals at Panchayats. • It will help the Panchayats to set local targets & local action points with measurable indicators while preparing thematic Gram Panchayat Development Plan. • It will help in reflecting the status of the Panchayats to take concerted actions for achieving development goals <i>through building institutional mechanisms</i>. • It will help in turning villages equivalent to cities with all amenities available at local level. 																
Highlights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from four districts (In Maharashtra) namely-Pune, Sangli, Satara and Solapur were compiled on pilot basis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 70% of the panchayats from these areas are in Grade C and 27% are in Grade B; • The pilot study showed how no attention has been paid to themes like 'being women friendly' or 'identifying the kind of development required'. 																

Extra Mile: Similar Initiatives

- 1. National Panchayat Awards:** Launched with the aim of incentivizing the best performing panchayats. The primary objective of these awards is to assess the performance of Panchayats in attaining SDGs, promoting competitive spirit among themselves and catalyzing the process of attaining LSDGs through Panchayati Raj Institutions by 2030.
- 2. People's Plan Campaign (PPC):** It is organized by Ministry of Panchayati Raj for preparing Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GDP) as 'Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas' throughout the country. The paradigm has been shifted to preparation of *thematic Panchayat Development Plans in PPC-2022*, converging all flagships schemes & resources to saturate SDGs by 2030. Under the program, all Gram Panchayat have been directed to prepare holistic Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GDP) through the lens of 9 themes.
- 3. Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA):**
 - It was launched on 24th April 2018 (National Panchayat Day), as an umbrella scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, to develop governance capabilities of PRIs, deliver on the SDGs and to Recognize and incentivize PRIs based on performance.
- 4. Revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:**
 - The RGSA scheme has been extended for a period of four years from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2026 with the aim of developing the PRIs governance capabilities.
 - The main focus of the revamped RGSA is to equip the Elected Representatives & Functionaries of the PRIs with adequate knowledge and skills for effective delivery on the SDGs through concerted and collaborative efforts of Central Ministries and State line departments with 'Whole of Government' approach at all levels.

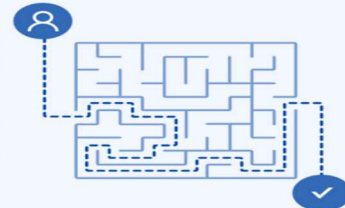


Dark Patterns

Recently, the Department of Consumer Affairs warned e-commerce giants to refrain from using dark patterns which harm consumer interests by influencing their choices.

WHAT ARE DARK PATTERNS?

- This term was first coined by UI/UX (user interface/user experience) researcher and designer Harry Brignull in 2010. It refers to the unethical user interface designs employed by companies on the internet to manipulate user choices for financial gains.
- These patterns usually trick users into agreeing to terms or clicking on a link, resulting in their inboxes being flooded by promotional e-mails which are difficult to unsubscribe. For example-
 - Amazon uses the multi-step cancellation process of prime subscription, which is a headache for users.
 - Through LinkedIn, users receive unsolicited, sponsored messages from influencers and disabling this option is a difficult process as it requires familiarity with the platform controls.
 - Continuous pop-ups for subscribing to YouTube premium or the thumbnails of other video links at the end of an ongoing video makes the watching experience frustrating while using YouTube.
 - In Instagram, suggested posts and sponsored video ads get scattered between reels and stories that users originally opted to view, tricking them for several seconds before they can see the small "sponsored" label. Users also have no option to permanently set their preferences.



Techniques Used

Drip Pricing	This technique involves gradual revealing of additional costs during the purchase process, leading to the final price being significantly higher than the one initially shown. This leads to confusion and frustration in the consumers who may not have anticipated or budgeted for the hidden charges.
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Bait and Switch	This technique involves attracting the consumers with an enticing offer, only to redirect them to a different, less desirable option resulting in customer disappointment and dissatisfaction.
Fake Scarcity	Through this technique, the advertisers create a sense of urgency or scarcity, pressuring consumers to make impulsive decisions and rushed purchases.
Disguised Ads	Advertisements are presented in a deceiving or misleading manner such that it becomes difficult for the users to differentiate between regular content and paid promotions. This results in compromised user trust and undermines their ability to make informed decisions.
Confirm Shaming	Using this technique, users are pressurized into opting for something they don't want to, like sharing their contact details or subscribing to a newsletter, by making the other option seem undesirable.
Nagging	It involves asking the users the same thing again and again through pop-ups or notifications.
Pre-selection	It is the practice of leaving the checkboxes automatically ticked hoping that the user might not notice it.
Visual Interference	It is the act of hiding, obscuring, or disguising important information on a page when it should be displayed clearly. This is common in the case of legal details, refund policies, or other particulars a website or app may want a user to miss. It is usually done by using small, low-contrast text or putting information at places where users may not notice.
Roach Motel	In this technique, signing up for a subscription or service is straightforward, but cancellation for the same is very difficult.
Sneak-into-Basket	In this technique, additional, unwanted items are placed in a shopper's basket/cart without their knowledge while using an e-commerce site.
Forced Continuity	Through this practice the users are deceived into subscribing to paid subscriptions at the end of free trials as it uses credit card details taken at the time of free trial to automatically subscribe users to paid services without warning or requiring any affirmative action from them.

Why Do Companies Use Such Tactics?	Implications
<p>E-commerce companies use such practices to-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maximize the sale of their product or services 2. Collect as much user data as possible to generate revenue as the data collected is further used by the companies themselves or transferred to third party advertisers so that user choices can be manipulated by showing them ads based on their data and past choices. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial and Data Exploitation: Making the users save their bank account details or share more personal information leads to enhanced vulnerability to financial and data exploitation. 2. Confused and Frustrated Users: by introducing online obstacles, making simple tasks time-consuming, forcing them sign up for unwanted services/products, pay more than they intended, lengthy cancellation processes lead to user confusion and frustration. 3. Violates Right to Privacy: As dark patterns erode individual privacy, it eventually compromises the liberty and dignity of individuals, as they are deprived of their decision-making ability. 4. Violates Consumer Rights: By incorporating dark patterns in online interface, the companies manipulate consumer choice and violate 'consumer rights'.

How To Avoid Dark Patterns?

User Perspective	Company Perspective
1. Spending time: More time should be spent on reading terms and conditions before agreeing to them and	1. Stringent Guidelines: should be introduced for the designers to follow.

<p>more attention should be paid to check boxes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Restrictive Privacy Settings: users should be aware of the information being collected from them and make their privacy settings as restrictive as possible. 3. Know Your Rights: Users should be familiar with their rights granted by the law of their country to protect their interests as a consumer. 4. Reporting Offenders: Users should call out offenders publicly on social media, or anonymously report the behavior to Consumer Forums. 5. Educate Others: Users should stay alert while dealing online, educate others about the same and always take precautions to avoid data and financial loss. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Favoring User Interest: Websites should be designed with empathy, keeping in mind the user interest. 3. Prefer user Experience over Number: Instead of focusing on increasing the number of users one should focus on providing the best user experience to satisfy the customer and build a strong customer relationship. 4. Transparency: The websites should do what it says. The checkboxes, forms, buttons all actions should align with what they are promising to ensure transparency and winning user trust.
<p>Government Perspective</p> <p>The Governments should come-up with stricter guidelines and a stronger regulatory mechanism to control and tackle the spread of dark patters.</p>	

Global Laws Against Dark Patterns

- **USA-** States of California and Colorado have passed consumer privacy legislation banning the use of dark patterns, and other states are contemplating doing the same. The **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** has the authority to prosecute companies for unfair or deceptive trade practices including the use of dark patterns.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the U.S., the FTC has taken note of dark patterns and their risks. In a report released in September 2022, the regulatory body listed over 30 dark patterns. • The FTC report outlined its legal action against Amazon in 2014, for a supposedly free children’s app that fooled to make in-app purchases that their parents had to pay later for. • The report also says, as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) platforms and devices grow in usage, dark patterns will likely follow users to these new channels as well.

- **European Union (EU)-** The European Data Protection Board adopted “Guidelines on dark patterns in social media platform interfaces” on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Article 60. These guidelines provide designers and users of social media platforms with practical tips on how to identify and prevent so-called “dark patterns” in social media interfaces that violate GDPR rules.
- **India-** The Indian Government has constituted a 17-member task force to prepare guidelines on protecting consumers against dark patterns. E-commerce giants have been issued warning by the Central consumer protection authority to refrain from using dark patterns and the proposed Data Protection Bill contains provisions for protecting user data.



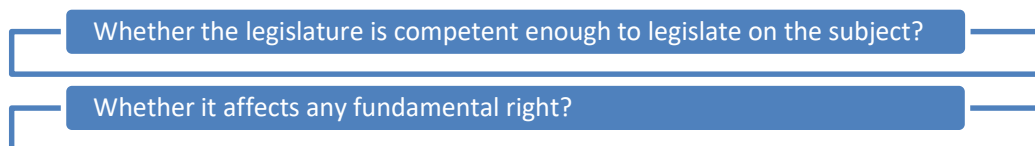
SC Holds Back-to-Back Service Extensions to ED Chief Illegal

The Supreme Court (SC) recently held the 3rd extension tenure given to Enforcement Directorate (ED) Chief Sanjay Kumar Mishra *illegal and invalid* even as it upheld the statutory **amendments** made to the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2021, Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 2021, and the Fundamental Rules, 2021 which facilitate the tenures of the Central Bureau of Investigation and the ED Chiefs of up to five years.

Background			
<p>1) Appointment & Extension: The current ED Chief was first appointed in 2018 with a fixed tenure of 2 years. Then, starting in 2020, he was given 3 one-year extensions.</p>	<p>2) Challenge in SC: The first extension (in 2020) was challenged in the SC by an NGO named Common Cause. In its judgement in 2021, the court issued a specific mandamus that <i>no further extension shall be granted to the ED Chief.</i></p>	<p>3) Amendments: Following the judgement, the Centre introduced the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Act, 2021, Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Act, 2021, and Fundamental (Amendment) Rules, 2021 which <u>allowed the extension of service of ED and CBI chiefs for a period of three years beyond their two-year tenure by granting extensions of one-year each in the public interest.</u></p>	<p>4) Re-extension & Re-challenge: The amendments allowed the government to avoid the court's direction and grant Mr. Mishra another two extensions. This decision along with the amendments was challenged in the SC through a bunch of petitions contending that this would defeat the directive issued by SC in its 1997 judgement in Vineet Narain and Others v. Union of India.</p>
<p>** Mandamus means giving orders to a person or body to perform a public or quasi-public duty, which they have refused to perform, and where no other adequate legal remedy exists to enforce the performance of that duty.</p> <p>**In the Vineet Narain vs Union of India (1997) case judgement, the SC held that the CBI and the ED chiefs should have a minimum tenure of two years.</p>			

Highlights of Current SC Ruling

- **On Tenure Extensions:** The SC held the *back-to-back service extensions* illegal and gave Mr. Mishra time till July 31 to quit office to aid with the “smooth transition” of official responsibilities to his successor.
- **On the Amendments:** Upholding the amendments, the court stated that the scope of judicial review in a legislative action is very limited and could be interfered based on two grounds:



The Court was of the view that as the legislature was competent to legislate on the subject, none of the fundamental rights were violated, and it didn't manifest arbitrariness, thus the amendments are valid.

Critical Analysis

- **Carrot and Stick Policy:** These amendments can be used by the Centre as a ‘carrot and stick’ policy so that the CBI and ED Directors work according to its wishes as the officials would succumb to the pressure of the government for getting further extension.
- **Written Reasons:** As the court observed, the committees recommending the extension of tenure should submit in writing the reasons validating their decision to recommend a person for tenure extension.
- **Weakening Public trust:** Giving continuous tenure extensions weakens the trust of public in the government institutions as it gives the impression that the government is taking this step for its own personal gains. Also, the people in power can use their position to suppress and exploit the public.
- **Independence of ED:** The possibility of service extensions may sway the directors to align their actions with the government's wishes, compromising the agencies' autonomy.

Extra Mile: ED's Power to Arrest and Seek Custody

The Madras High Court (HC) has declared that ED is entitled to arrest and seek police custody of an accused in a money laundering case.

Background

- The case is related to Tamil Nadu Minister V. Senthil Balaji who was arrested and placed under judicial custody by the ED in a money laundering case related to cash-for-jobs scam.
- After the Minister was arrested, his wife filed a **habeas corpus petition** in the High Court seeking permission to shift the Minister to a private hospital for medical treatment.
 - ✓ **Habeas Corpus** is an order issued by the court to a person who has detained another person, to produce the latter before it. The court then examines the cause and legality of detention.

- The ED challenged the Madras HC in the Supreme Court (SC) for accepting the petition and passing an interim order arguing that it was not maintainable.
- The vacation bench of the SC adjourned the hearing until the HC gave its verdict. But the two-judge bench of HC gave a split verdict with one judge opposing the arrest and ordering a release and another supporting the arrest.
- Following the diametrically opposite verdicts, the ED approached the SC to immediately transfer and decide the question of the Minister's custody. The SC ordered the case to be transferred to a three-judge bench which has now given its verdict.

The Madras HC Verdict

- The HC ruled that the ED can subject any person accused in a case booked under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, to custodial interrogation. Thus, the Minister can be taken into custody even after the expiry of 15 days from his arrest on June 14.
- The court accepted the argument that “ED officials are not police officers” as per the law laid down by the SC in **Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022)**.
 - In **Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. UOI** case, the SC stated that ED officials are not police officials as they are acting under PMLA whereas police officers act under CrPC. Investigations done under both these acts are different from each other and statements given to the ED are admissible as evidence under the PMLA whereas such is not the case under CrPC.
- The court stated that the argument **could not** be stretched to the extent of denying ED an opportunity to investigate the offence of money laundering effectively.
- It emphasized that the ED could not be left without remedy when it had not been able to interrogate the Minister since he was arrested, as he was admitted to a hospital.
- The court also took into consideration the SC's ruling in **Y. Balaji v. Karthik Desai (2023)** where the court refused to discharge Mr. Balaji in the cash-for-jobs scam by outlining that the accused and the complainant have compromised on ‘justice, fair-play, good conscience and the fundamental principles of criminal jurisprudence.’

ABOUT THE ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE (ED)

- It is a multi-disciplinary organization mandated with investigation of offence of money laundering and violations of foreign exchange laws.
- Established first in 1956 as an ‘Enforcement Unit’ under the Department of Economic Affairs.
- Later, in 1957, this Unit was renamed as ‘Enforcement Directorate’.
- Now, it is administered by the **Department of Revenue** (under the Ministry of Finance).



Functions-

- It enforces the provisions of the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA)** by conducting investigation to trace the assets derived from proceeds of crime, to provisionally attach the property and to ensure prosecution of the offenders and confiscation of the property by the Special court.
- It conducts investigation into suspected contraventions of foreign exchange laws and regulations, to adjudicate and impose penalties on those adjudged to have contravened the law under **Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA)**.
- It is mandated to attach the properties of the **fugitive economic offenders** who have escaped from the India warranting arrest and confiscates their properties to the Central Government under the **Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 (FEOA)**.

Appointment of Director

- He is appointed by the central government on the recommendation of a committee chaired by the Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) and members comprising of Vigilance Commissioners, Home Secretary, Secretary DOPT and Revenue Secretary.

Related Judgements

1. Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022):

- **Section 19 of the PMLA** suggests the manner in which the arrest of a person involved in money laundering can be affected. The provision had been challenged on the ground that it confers **unequivocal power of arrest without a warrant**.
- In this landmark judgement, the **SC upheld various provisions of the PMLA related to the powers of arrest, attachment, search, and seizure conferred upon the ED** as it believed that all the provisions under PMLA have a reasonable nexus with the objects sought to be achieved by the Act to prevent money-laundering effectively.
- The purposes and objects of the 2002 Act is not limited to punishment for offence of money-laundering, but also to *provide measures for prevention of money-laundering*. It is also to provide for attachment of proceeds of crime.
- The Act is also to compel the banking companies, financial institutions, and intermediaries to maintain records of the transactions and to furnish information of such transactions within the prescribed time in terms of the 2002 Act.

2. **Central Bureau of Investigation v. Anupam J. Kulkarni (1992)**- In this case, the SC laid down the law that no police custody can be allowed beyond the first 15 days from the date of arrest and any further remand during investigation can only be in judicial custody. It also stated that this restriction would not apply in the case where the same arrested accused is involved in a different case arising out of a different transaction. However, in April this year, a SC bench observed that this 1992 decision requires reconsideration as the remand period can be over by the time a higher court sets aside an incorrect decision denying custody.

3. **Dr. Manik Bhattacharya v. Ramesh Malik (2022)**- The court observed that interim protection granted against CBI action cannot operate against the ED even if there are factual similarities vis-à-vis the allegations.

4. **P. Chidambaram v. Directorate of Enforcement (2019)**- In this case, while rejecting a prayer for anticipatory bail with respect to an offence of money laundering and proceeding to grant custody to the ED, the court stated that a money laundering case involves many stages of placement and layering of funds for which a 'systematic and analyzed' investigation is required and granting a pre-arrest bail in this scenario frustrates the investigation process.

The court also cautioned that it must only exercise its inherent powers under Section 482 CrPC to interfere in an investigation into a *cognizable offence* if it is convinced that the power of the investigating officer is exercised mala fide.



Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Amendment Bill, 2023

The Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Amendment Bill, 2023 which seeks to amend the Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969 was passed in the Lok Sabha by a voice vote.

- ✓ RBD Act was passed in 1969 to promote uniformity and comparability in the registration of Births and Deaths across the country. The act mandates registering births, stillbirths and deaths within 21 days of occurrence and for this purpose, the States and Union Territories are required to maintain individual databases on the **Civil Registration System (CRS)** which comes under the operational control of the Registrar General of India (RGI).

About the RBD Amendment Bill, 2023

The amendment bill provides for a **real-time, dynamic** national-level population database which could be linked with other demographic databases like ration cards and passports, voter rolls and the National Population Register (NPR) for efficient and transparent delivery of public services and making it more citizen friendly.

- The NPR is a register of usual residents of the country. It is mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR. It includes both Indian citizens as well as a foreign citizen.
- NPR was first prepared in 2010 and updated in 2015 under the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003, framed under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

Background (Need) In Which This Amendment Bill Was Introduced

- Presently, Aadhaar is not mandatory for registration of births and deaths and the proposed amendment to the 1969 Act will give it legal teeth.
- Recently, the Centre allowed the Registrar General of India (RGI) to perform Aadhaar authentication during registration of births and deaths in the country.
- To minimize the proliferation of fake documents and to ensure efficient and transparent delivery of public services.
- To eliminate the need for multiple documents to prove the date and place of birth.

Key Amendments In the Proposed Bill vs the RBD Act, 1969

Amendments	RBD Act, 1969	RBD Amendment Bill, 2023
National Database	It authorizes the Registrar General to give directions for the registration of births and deaths and provides for the appointment of Chief Registrar and District Registrars by the state governments for coordinating and supervising the registration process in individual databases.	It renames the Registrar General as the Registrar General of India and authorizes him to maintain a national database of births and deaths. It authorizes the Chief Registrar to take steps for registering births or deaths and maintaining a unified database of registered births and deaths at the State level and the States will share granular, real-time data, by giving the RGI access to the Application Programming Interface (API). This will enable the central data reservoir to be updated in real-time, without any human interface and independent of location.
Requirements of Aadhaar Details	It requires people (medical officer, jailor, village headman etc.) having knowledge of birth or deaths to report the same to the registrar along with his name, description and place of abode.	It mandates the people reporting the information to the registrar to also update the Aadhaar details of the parents and informant in case of births and of the informant in case of death.
Usage of Information		
<p>In RBD Act, 1969: No such provision</p> <p>In Proposed Amendment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the prior approval of the Central Government, the database of registered births and deaths may be made available to the authorities dealing with the preparation or maintenance of other databases like population register, electoral rolls, Aadhaar card, ration card, passport etc. • The information provided in the database could be used to prove the date and place of birth of a person born on or after the date of enactment of the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023, for the purposes of— 		

(a) admission to an educational institution; (b) issuance of a driving license; (c) preparation of a voter list; (d) registration of a marriage; (e) appointment to Government job; (f) issuance of a passport; (g) issuance of an Aadhaar number; and (h) any other purpose as may be determined by the Central Government.		
Certificate of Registration	On completion of the registration process of a birth or death the registrar will give, free of charge, an extract of the prescribed particulars under his hand from the register relating to such birth or death.	On completion of the registration process of a birth or death the registrar will give, free of charge, electronically generated certificate under his signature within seven days to the person who gives information.
Registration for adopted/orphan	No such provision.	It facilitates registration process of adopted, orphan, abandoned, surrendered, surrogate child and child to a single parent or unwed mother.
Appeal	It provides for penalty for the person violating the provisions of this act but there is no provision for appeal.	Under the bill, any person aggrieved by any action or order of the <i>Registrar or District Registrar may appeal to the District Registrar or Chief Registrar, respectively</i> within 30 days from receipt of such action or order and the decision should be given within 90 days from the date of appeal.
Sub-Registrar	It provides for the appointment of Sub-Registrar by the Registrar with the prior approval of the Chief Registrar but doesn't contain any provision regarding special sub registrar.	It includes the provision for appointing special sub-registrars in case of disasters or epidemics to speed up the registration process.

Significance of the Proposed Bill versus Concerns Raised

<u>Significance</u>	<u>Concerns</u>
<p>It will bring individual databases onto a common platform, a repository that will be maintained by the RGI.</p> <p>It will enable 360-degree surveillance and help the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to track people in real time and identify what welfare measures can be taken up.</p>	<p>A security breach can threaten the entire database. Lack of privacy and surveillance laws can impose a risk to all the data which can easily be misused. For example, the report of CoWIN data breach using a telegram bot risked the personal data (such as name, Aadhaar and passport numbers) of lakhs of registered individuals.</p>
<p>It can be used to update other databases automatically such as electoral rolls, national population register etc. Thus, it will help save resources and costs to update individual databases.</p>	<p>Integration of inaccurate birth and death data with other repositories may pose a risk of widescale exclusions. For example, recently 5 crore names were excluded from MGNREGS due to non-Aadhaar linkage.</p>
<p>It will help simplify the process of applying and obtaining birth and death certificates which has till now been a time-consuming process and for the uneducated and illiterate population it has been something used to exploit them financially.</p>	<p>People having lack of technical knowledge can still be prone to exploitation until they are made fully aware of the new system.</p> <p>For example, in Bihar the CRS representatives demanded bribes from people for issuing certificates available free of cost.</p>

Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021

The Lok Sabha recently passed the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to amend the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. Major amendments include-

- (i) Encouraging cultivation of medicinal plants and Indian system of medicine.
- (ii) Fast-tracking the process of research, patent application, and transfer of research results.
- (iii) Decriminalizing offences.
- (iv) Attracting more foreign investment in the preservation and commercial utilization of India's biological resources.
- (v) Simplifying and streamlining processes to make compliance with provisions easier.

About The Biological Diversity Act, 2002

- It was enacted to fulfill its commitments made under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 1992 for sustainable, fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.
 - ✓ **The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** was signed in Rio De Janeiro in 1992. Under this agreement, countries including India agreed on three things-
 - i) Indiscriminate use of biological resources to be halted.
 - ii) Sustainable use of these resources, for their medicinal properties for example, to be regulated.
 - iii) People and communities helping in protecting and maintaining these resources to be rewarded for their efforts.
- It formulated a three-tier structure-
 - **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)**- Established at the national level to advise the central government on issues related to conservation and sustainable use of biological resources.
 - **State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)**- Established at the State level to advise state governments.
 - **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)**- Established at local body levels for promoting conservation, sustainable use and documentation of biological diversity.

Need for Amendment

- Several stakeholders, like representatives from the Indian system of medicine, the seed sector, pharmaceutical, and the research community etc. had objected to the provisions of the act which mandated prior approval of NBA and SBBs before accessing biological resources as this provision restricted their activities.
- The provision barring foreign companies and citizens from accessing Indian biological resources violated Nagoya Protocol, under which biodiversity-rich countries are required to provide access to their biological resources to those wanting to use it for research or commercial reasons, and the user agencies, in turn, are mandated to share the benefits of their use with the local communities.

Key Amendments In The Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021

Amendments	The Biological Diversity Act, 2002	Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021
Restrictions	Foreign citizens and companies, NRIs and companies registered in India but having foreign equity or partnership	Companies registered in India and controlled by Indians will now be treated Indian, irrespective of any foreign equity or partnership, thereby

	were barred from obtaining any biological resource occurring in India or related knowledge for research or for commercial utilization or for bio-survey and bio-utilization without the permission from NBA.	reducing the restrictions on them for accessing India's biological resources.
Prior Intimation to SBBs	Indian citizens and companies were required to give prior intimation to SBBs for accessing biological resources occurring in India for commercial utilization.	Prior intimation will also be required for accessing associated knowledge for commercial utilization.
Exempted Stakeholders from Prior Intimation to SBBs	Local people and communities including growers and cultivators of biodiversity, and vaidas and hakims practicing indigenous medicine.	Codified traditional knowledge, cultivated medicinal plants and their products, AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) practitioners.
Approval for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)	NBA approval was mandatory before (a) applying for IPR based on research conducted on biological resources available in India or (b) sealing the patent.	Approval will be required before the grant of IPR and not before the application for IPR. Foreign entities will be required to get approval from NBA whereas domestic entities will be required to register with NBA.
Benefit Sharing	<p>It included activities like research, commercial utilization, as well as bio-survey and bio-utilization for certain entities. NBA was responsible for determining the terms for benefit sharing in accordance with the mutually agreed terms and conditions between the applicant, local bodies concerned, and the benefit claimers.</p> <p>✓ Benefit sharing refers to sharing monetary and non-monetary benefits between applicants, benefit claimers (conservers of biodiversity, or creators or holders of associated traditional knowledge) and local people.</p>	<p>The act excludes <u>research, bio-survey and bio-utilization</u> from benefit sharing provisions and authorizes the SBB to determine benefit sharing while granting approvals to domestic entities as per the regulations by NBA.</p> <p>The terms for benefit sharing will be in accordance with the mutually agreed terms between the applicant and the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) represented by NBA.</p>
Decriminalizing Offences	Offences like failing to take approval or providing prior intimation for various activities were punishable with imprisonment of up to five years, or a fine, or both.	<p>It decriminalizes the offences instead imposes a penalty between one lakh rupees and Rs 50 lakh. Continuous contravention may attract an additional penalty of up to one crore.</p> <p>This Bill withdraws the power given to the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) to file a First Information Report (FIR) against defaulting parties.</p>
Adjudicating Officer		
In Original Act: No such provision.		

In Proposed Bill:

- It provides for an adjudicating officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India or a Secretary to the State Government to be appointed by the central government, to hold inquiry and impose the penalties.
- The Bill introduced the post of 'Member-Secretary' to be appointed by the Central Government. The Member-Secretary would serve as the chief coordinating officer and convener of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) and assist the Authority in discharging its functions under the Biological Diversity Act.

Significance of This Bill

- **Promotion of Indian traditional knowledge & Medicine:** Advocates the advancement of Indian medicine by granting practitioners of Indian systems of medicine an exemption from making payments towards the access and benefit-sharing mechanism.
- **Faster Approval:** It will streamline the approval process for using biological resources in scientific research and filing patent applications, leading to reduced processing time.
- **More hand to Domestic companies:** Considering companies registered in India and controlled by Indians as Indian entities, regardless of foreign equity or partnership, alleviates certain restrictions imposed on them.
- **Boost to Research & Business Environment:** The intended modifications in the Bill seek to foster a more favorable business environment through the streamlining of the patent application process. By expediting research and investments, this initiative has the potential to accelerate innovation and technological progress in the realm of biodiversity

Concerns Raised

1. **Bio-Piracy:** As per the Environmentalist organizations, these amendments have been made to benefit AYUSH Ministry and can pave the way for "bio piracy."
 - ✓ Bio-piracy refers to the practice of commercial exploitation of biochemicals or genetic materials which occur naturally.
2. **Ambiguity over 'Codified Traditional Knowledge':** The bill exempts *codified traditional knowledge* from intimating SBBs but has not mentioned *what codified traditional knowledge is?*

As per World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), codified traditional knowledge may be defined as "traditional knowledge, which is in some systematic and structured form, in which the knowledge is ordered, organized, classified and categorized in some manner."
3. **No direct Role of Local Communities:** NBA will decide the terms of benefit sharing based on the mutually agreed terms between the applicant and the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) excluding the concerned local bodies and benefit claimers. Thus, the local bodies will have no say in the benefit sharing terms. Also, there is no provision of seeking the consent of local communities for accessing available resources. This violates the Nagoya Protocol which requires a signatory country to ensure that prior informed consent or approval and involvement of indigenous and local communities is obtained for access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge.
4. **No Distinction between Different Offences-** The Bill only provides for a range of penalties that can be imposed on violation of the act but fails to categorize the offences as to which offence will attract how much penalty?
5. **Adjudicating Authority-** It provides for a government official to be appointed as an adjudicating officer for the purpose of conducting enquiries and imposing penalties. The question is whether it is appropriate to confer such discretion to government officials.

Indus Water Treaty

Recently, the Hague based **Court of Arbitration (CoA)** ruled that it has competence to consider matters concerning the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

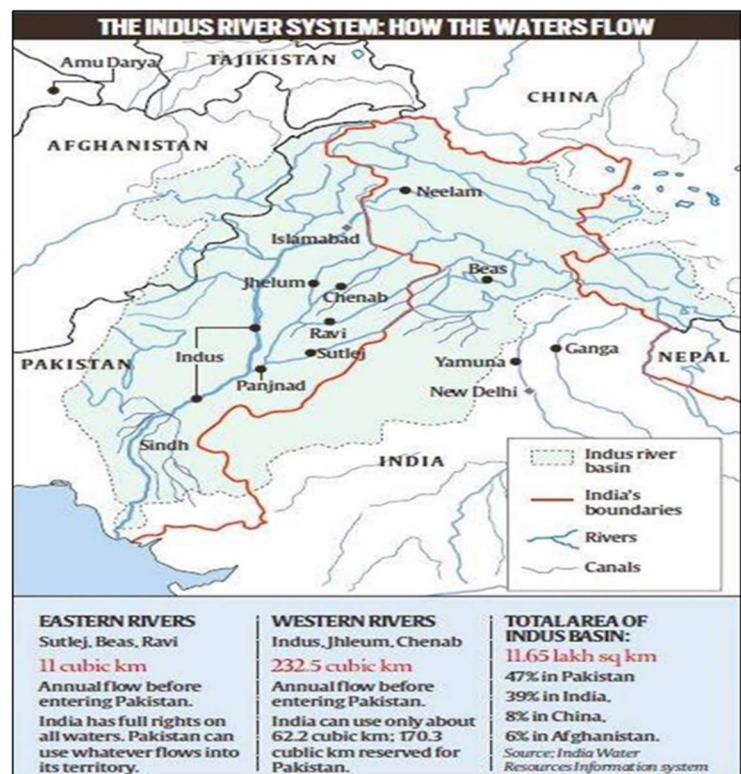
- Pakistan had opposed the construction of these projects and had approached CoA.
- After this, India reiterated its position that the constitution of the “Court of Arbitration” is in contravention of the provisions of **1960 Indus Waters Treaty**.

Indus Water Treaty (IWT)

- The Treaty is a water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank.
- According to this treaty, **three rivers: Ravi, Sutlej and Beas were given to India** and the other three: Sindh, Jhelum and Chenab were given to Pakistan.
- **Rights & obligations under this treaty**
 - India is under obligation to let the waters of the western rivers flow, except for certain consumptive use.
 - The treaty allocates Pakistan approx. 80% of the entire water of the six-river Indus system and reserved for India just remaining 19.48% of the total waters.
 - India can construct storage facilities on western rivers of up to 3.6-million-acre feet, which it has not done so far.
 - The IWT permits run of the river projects and require India to provide Pakistan with prior notification, including design information, of any new project.

What are the Dispute Redressal Mechanisms Under The Indus Water Treaty?

- Article IX of the Treaty is a dispute resolution mechanism - **graded at three levels** to resolve a difference or a dispute related to projects on the Indus waters.
- **First level**
 - Either party has to inform the other side if they are planning projects on the Indus River with all the information that is required or asked for by the other party.
 - This process is done at the level of the **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)**, created to implement and manage the goals of the IWT.
 - If PIC is unable to solve the question in contention, the question becomes difference and goes to second level.
- **Second level**
 - The second grade is the World Bank appointing a neutral expert to resolve the differences.
 - If a neutral expert cannot resolve the issue, the difference becomes a dispute and goes to third level.



- **Third level**
 - At this level, the matter goes to a Court of Arbitration (CoA) whose chair is appointed by the World Bank.

Background

- **Dispute over two hydroelectric power projects that India is constructing**
 - The present development is the fallout of a longstanding dispute over two hydroelectric power projects that India is constructing:
 - one on the **Kishenganga river, a tributary of Jhelum**, and
 - the other on the **Chenab - Ratle Hydro Electric Projects**.
 - In 2015, Pakistan requested the appointment of a Neutral Expert to examine its technical objections to these projects.
- **Resolution of issue through Permanent Indus Commission**
 - In 2016, Pakistan unilaterally retracted its request to appoint a Neutral Expert and proposed that a Court of Arbitration adjudicate on its objections.
 - On the other hand, in 2016, **India requested a Neutral Expert** to be appointed as this was an important part of the process which Pakistan was trying to skip.
 - As a result, the World Bank paused the process since two separate requests had been made by the two sides.
 - It asked India and Pakistan to resolve it through the PIC level of Indus commissioners.
- **Actions on both the Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration processes initiated**
 - Despite the directive from World Bank, Pakistan refused to discuss the issue during the meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission.
 - In March 2022, at Pakistan's continuing insistence, the World Bank initiated actions on both the Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration processes.
 - The World Bank resumed the concurrent process and went ahead and appointed a Neutral Expert and chair of the Court of Arbitration.
- **India opposed the constitution of the CoA**
 - India has opposed the constitution of the CoA and contends that it is in contravention of the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty.
 - Till date, India has not exercised its right under Treaty to appoint two arbitrators to the CoA.
 - New Delhi has not attended the court's proceedings and has sent its correspondence to World Bank.
 - India insisted that there cannot be two processes for the same dispute.
 - If the two give different outcomes, then the workability of the IWT comes into question.
 - Such parallel consideration of the same issues is not covered under any provision of the IWT.

Key Highlights Of The Recent Development

- **Statement Issued by Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)**
 - PCA said that the tribunal considered objections to the competence of the court raised by India through its communications with the World Bank.
 - PCA is an **intergovernmental organization** established in 1899 and based in **The Hague, Netherlands**.
 - It provides a forum for the peaceful resolution of disputes between member states, international organizations, or private parties.

- In a unanimous decision, **which is binding on the Parties and without appeal**, the Court rejected each of the objections raised by India.
- It determined that the Court is competent to consider and determine the disputes set forth in Pakistan's Request for Arbitration.
- **India's Reaction**
 - India has been participating in the **Treaty-consistent Neutral Expert proceedings**.
 - The last meeting took place at The Hague in February. The next meeting of the Neutral Expert process is scheduled to be held in September.
 - India cannot be compelled to recognise or participate in illegal and parallel proceedings not envisaged by the Treaty.



SCO Summit 2023

- Under **India's first-ever Chairmanship**, the 23rd Summit of the SCO Council of Heads of State was held in the virtual format.
 - India has taken over the chairmanship of the SCO from Uzbekistan after the SCO Summit in Samarkand in September 2022.
- It was chaired by PM Modi and was attended by President Xi of China, PM Sharif of Pakistan and President Vladimir Putin of Russia.
- The **theme** of India's chair-ship of SCO- **SECURE** is derived from the acronym coined by PM Modi at 2018 SCO Qingdao Summit.
 - It stands for S: Security, E: Economic development, C: Connectivity, U: Unity, R: Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, E: Environmental protection.

Key Highlights Of The Summit

- **Virtual summit in place of in-person summit**
 - One of the reasons cited for the virtual format was that given the current state of India's relations with both China and Pakistan, the environment was not appropriate for an in-person meeting.
- **Summit statement**
 - The New Delhi Declaration was issued at the end of the leaders' summit which mainly talked about a **"multi-polar" and "democratic order"**.
 - India refused to sign off on the paragraph supporting Xi's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
 - India had refused to sign on a similar formulation in the Samarkand Declaration of 2022 as well.
 - India has always opposed the BRI, because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of the Initiative, **violates India's territorial integrity and sovereignty.**
 - India also did not sign off on the SCO Economic Development Strategy for 2030, which had Beijing's imprint.
 - The Economic Development Strategy for 2030, a proposition by the SCO, was designed to amplify economic cooperation between member countries.
 - The strategy aims to cultivate cooperation in key areas such as digital economy, transportation, finance, and energy.

- India was the only member which did not sign the strategy document. It sensed a strong Chinese influence within the economic blueprint and hence, chose not to endorse it.
- **On terrorism**, the New Delhi Declaration used language similar to that of the Samarkand Declaration.
 - It urged members to pay attention to preventing the spread of religious intolerance, aggressive nationalism, ethnic and racial discrimination, xenophobia, ideas of fascism and chauvinism.
- There was **no mention of the Ukraine war**. The member states reaffirmed their commitment to peaceful settlement of disagreements and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultations.
- **Member Countries spoke about de-dollarization**
 - Russian President said that Over 80 % of commercial transactions between Russia and China are made in Rubles and Yuan.
 - Chinese President Xi Jinping also pitched for SCO countries to conduct trade in local currencies.
- **Entry of Iran:** During the summit, Iran formally became a member of the SCO.

Analysis

- **Strategic Autonomy**
 - India's hosting of the SCO summit is seen as a sign of its strategic autonomy, which New Delhi guards zealously.
 - The fact that the SCO summit took place so soon after the PM's visit to the US, is seen as a key marker of New Delhi's diplomatic position in the context of the Ukraine war and the US-China polarisation.
- **Iran's Entry into SCO**
 - Iran's entry will help Tehran in countering the perception that it has been isolated regionally.
 - India has developed the first phase of Chabahar Port. The project is important not just in the context of it being a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, but also to Europe via the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
 - India's ties with Iran, which is close to Russia and China, are also a reiteration of its foreign policy which emphasises strategic autonomy.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

About

- SCO is a **permanent intergovernmental international organisation**, created in June 2001 in Shanghai (China).
- Founding members included Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan.
 - The five countries had come together to work on regional security, reduction of border troops, and terrorism in the post-Soviet era in 1996.
 - In 2001, the Shanghai Five

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF SCO

The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO, it meets once a year.

The Council of Heads of Government is the second-highest council in the organisation.

The Council of Foreign Ministers hold regular meetings, where they discuss the current international situation.

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), based in Tashkent, is established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.

inducted Uzbekistan into the group and named it the SCO outlining its principles in a charter that **promoted what was called the Shanghai spirit of cooperation.**

- SCO represents **approximately 42% of the world's population, 22% of its land area and 20% of its GDP.**
- **Official working languages:** Chinese, Russian
- **SCO Secretariat:** Beijing, China

Members, Observers and dialogue partners

- **8 member states**– China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan.
 - India and Pakistan became full members at the Heads of State Council meet in Astana in 2017.
 - **Iran to be the newest member (9th) of the SCO in 2023** under the chairmanship of India.
- **4 Observer members** – Afghanistan, Belarus, **Iran**, Mongolia
 - In 2021, the procedure of granting Iran the status of Member State was started at the SCO Summit in Dushanbe.
 - In 2022, a similar procedure was launched for **Belarus** at the SCO Summit in Samarkand
- **9 Dialogue Partners** – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Egypt, Cambodia, Qatar, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.
 - In 2022, the procedure for granting the status of Dialogue Partners to Bahrain, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates was initiated at the SCO Summit in Samarkand.

India's Association With SCO

- India joined the SCO in 2005 as an observer country and became a **full member of the group at the Astana Summit in 2017.**
- During its presidency, India created **five new pillars and focus areas of cooperation in SCO** -- Startups and Innovation, Traditional Medicine, Digital Inclusion, Youth Empowerment and Shared Buddhist Heritage.
- Two new mechanisms in SCO -- Special Working Group on Startups & Innovation and Experts Working Group on Traditional Medicine -- were also created at India's initiative.
- **Kashi/ Varanasi** was celebrated as the **1st SCO Tourist and Cultural Capital of SCO 2022-23.**

Challenges Faced by India at SCO

- SCO as a platform is seen by the West as **an organization to forward Chinese interests.**
- **Growing convergence with China and Russia** will be another challenge for India.
- **Differences between India and Pakistan** might hamper the functioning of the SCO.
- All members of SCO have supported One Belt One Road (OBOR) except India. It might lead to **isolation of India on this platform.**
- It would be difficult for India to **overcome the burden of geography** and make tangible gains in terms of trans-regional connectivity.



India Weighs Better Market Access To Join IPEF Trade Pillar

- India is learnt to have asked for better market access in order to be a part of the **trade pillar** of the IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework).

- As of now, market access has not been agreed upon for India, which is being seen as a crucial factor to join the trade pillar (Pillar-I).
- **India has an observer status on the trade pillar negotiations.**

India's Dilemma With Respect To Trade Pillar of IPEF

- The Union Commerce Ministry is currently discussing whether New Delhi should:
 - make a commitment to join, even without knowing the specific benefits, or
 - join now because 13 countries are already negotiating the details.
- If India joins later, it may be at a disadvantage because it would have missed out on the negotiations.
 - Since the beginning, India felt that it is not getting much out of trade pillar of IPEF. Also, the environmental and labour laws conditions have been stringent.
 - Some of the other countries are also finding these conditions as stringent and they are also negotiating it.
- India had also been reluctant earlier to join Pillar-I in view of concerns to protect its domestic agricultural, labour and digital sectors without being completely sure about the impact of joining the IPEF.

Current Status of IPEF

- The fourth negotiating round of IPEF for all pillars was underway in July, hosted by Korea in Busan.
 - The first negotiating round was held in Australia in December 2022, followed by a special negotiating round on Pillars II-IV in India in February 2023.
 - The second negotiating round was held in Indonesia in March 2023, followed by the third negotiating round in Singapore in May 2023.

- Text-based negotiations under the supply chain pillar (Pillar-II) were substantially concluded in the **second ministerial meeting** in May 2023 in the US.
 - In May, the IPEF partners met in Detroit, Michigan for a ministerial meeting.

Background:

Origin

- US President Biden first spoke about the IPEF at the October 2021 East Asia Summit.
- At this summit, he said that United States will explore with partners the development of IPEF.
- This framework will define our shared objectives around:
 - trade facilitation, standards for the digital economy and technology, supply chain resiliency, decarbonization and clean energy, infrastructure, worker standards, and other areas of shared interest.
- The IPEF will not include market access commitments such as lowering tariff barriers, as the agreement is more of an **administrative arrangement**.



Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

- **Members**
 - The IPEF has **14 partner countries** including Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India,

About

- Launched in Tokyo, in May 2023, IPEF aims to strengthen economic engagement among the member countries to advance growth, peace and prosperity in the region.
- According to an insight paper on IPEF put out by the US Congressional Research Service, the **IPEF is not a traditional trade agreement**.
- Rather, it would include different modules (**four pillars**) covering various aspects.

Four Pillars of IPEF

- Pillar I - fair and resilient trade,
- Pillar II - supply chain resilience,
- Pillar III - infrastructure and decarbonization
- Pillar IV - tax and anticorruption.
 - Countries would have **to sign up to all of the components within a module (pillar)**, but do not have to participate in all modules.

Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the US.

- **Significance**

- The 14-nation IPEF bloc is seen as crucial as it accounts for about 40 per cent of the world's GDP and 28 per cent of the world's trade in goods and services.
- It is seen as an economic and trade strategy backed by the US to counter China's economic influence in the region.

- **India and IPEF**

- In September 2022, India joined three pillars of the IPEF. These are:
 - supply chain, decarbonisation and infrastructure, and tax and anticorruption pillars.
- However, it had decided to remain out of the trade pillar.



NATO Summit 2023

- The 2023 NATO summit took place in July 2023, in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania.
 - The 2022 summit was held in Madrid, Spain.
- The participating leaders discussed the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine as well as Ukraine and Sweden's prospective memberships into NATO.

Key Outcomes Of The NATO Summit 2023

- **New forum for deepening ties with Ukraine**

- NATO leaders launched a new forum for deepening ties with Ukraine, known as the **NATO-Ukraine Council**.
- This council is intended to serve as a permanent body where the alliance's 31 members and Ukraine can hold consultations and call for meetings in emergency situations.
- The setting is part of NATO's effort to bring Ukraine as close as possible to the military alliance without actually joining it.

- **No clear path for Ukraine's membership in NATO**

- The summit did not provide a firm timeline for when the Ukrainians will become official members.
- In their communique summarising the summit's conclusions, the leaders said that Ukraine can join when allies agree and conditions are met.
 - Experts say that quick admittance of Ukraine to NATO could potentially increase Russian aggression and drag out the war even farther.
 - Hence, the membership of Ukraine is being delayed.

- **Membership of Sweden**

- Recently, Turkey withdrew its objections to Sweden joining the

NATO

- Formed in 1949 with the signing of the Washington Treaty, NATO is a security alliance of 31 countries from North America and Europe.
- In April 2023, Finland joined the alliance as its 31st member.
- NATO's fundamental goal is to safeguard the Allies' freedom and security by political and military means.
- It is a system of collective defence where independent member states agree on mutual defence in case of any attack by external party.
 - Article 5 of the Washington Treaty states that an attack against one Ally is an attack against all.
- This article forms the core of the Alliance, a promise of collective defense.
 - Headquarter - Brussels, Belgium.

alliance.

- This paves ways for Sweden to join the alliance as the **new entries must be approved by all existing members**.
 - NATO had formally invited Sweden and Finland to join the military alliance at Madrid summit held in 2022.
 - However, Turkey had raised objection regarding the membership of Sweden and Finland in NATO.
 - Turkey, which has been a member of NATO since 1952, had repeatedly opposed Finland and Sweden's entry.
 - It accused the two Nordic countries of supporting Kurdish militant groups which it deems to be terrorist organizations.
 - In March 2023, Tukey withdrew its objection to Finland and later, in April 2023, Finland became the 31st member of grouping.

FUNCTIONS

- **Political**
 - NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- **Military**
 - NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes.
 - If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.



BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' meet

- The **first-ever Foreign Ministers' meeting** of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was held in Bangkok, Thailand.
- India was represented by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

What is Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

• About

- It is an economic bloc that came into being in June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.
 - BIMSTEC was initially formed with four member states- Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand in June, 1997.
 - Myanmar joined in December 1997 during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok
 - Nepal became an observer state in 1998 and became full-time member of the bloc along with Bhutan in February 2004.

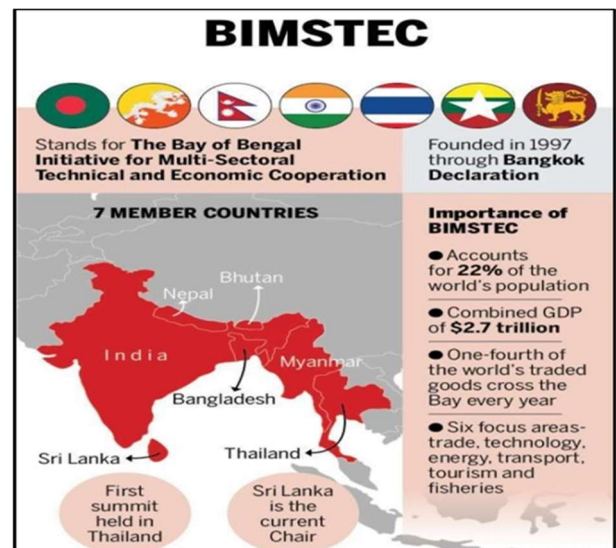
○ **Members** - Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan.

○ All 7 countries have sustained average annual rates of growth between 3.4% -7.5% from 2012 to 2016.

○ **Permanent Secretariat** - Dhaka, Bangladesh

• Aim

- To counter the onslaught of globalisation by accelerating regional growth through mutual cooperation by utilising regional resources and geographical advantages.



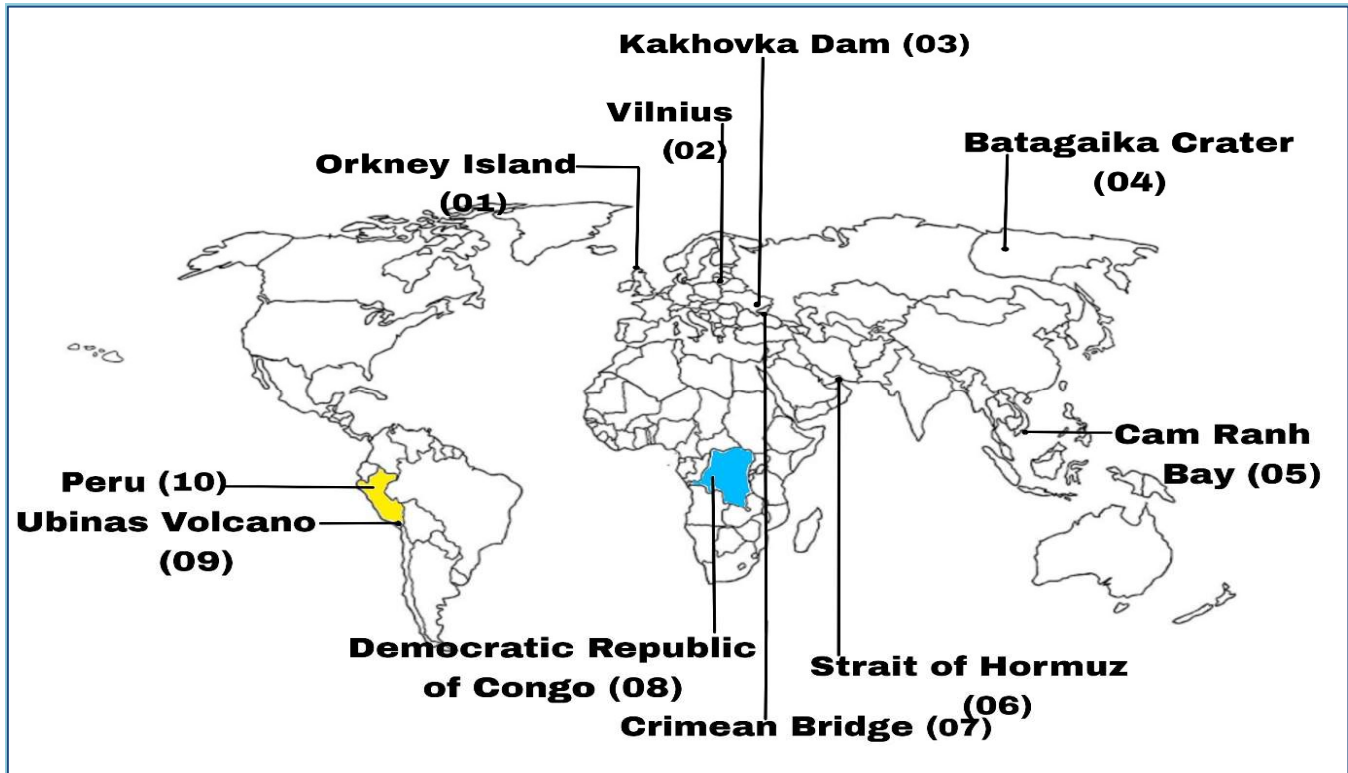
- **Areas of cooperation**
 - Other than 6 focus areas, BIMSTEC has 14 priority areas of cooperation.
 - Climate change was added as the 14th priority area of cooperation in 2008.
 - Among these priority areas, a member country chooses which of the 14 priority areas it is willing to take lead.
 - **India is lead country** for Transport & Communication, Tourism, Environment & Disaster Management, Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime.
- **Growth of BIMSTEC as a regional forum**
 - The grouping had been largely ignored until **India gave it a renewed push in October 2016**, a month after the terrorist attack in Uri.
 - Alongside the BRICS summit in Goa, India hosted an outreach summit with leaders of BIMSTEC countries.
 - After the Uri attack, various countries had supported New Delhi's call for a boycott of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit scheduled in Islamabad that November.
- **Significance of BIMSTEC for all member countries**
 - **Bangladesh** views BIMSTEC as a platform to position itself as more than just a small state on the Bay of Bengal.
 - **Sri Lanka** sees it as an opportunity to connect with Southeast Asia and serve as the subcontinent's hub for the wider Indo-Pacific region.
 - **Nepal and Bhutan** aim to connect with the Bay of Bengal region and escape their landlocked geographic positions.
 - For **Myanmar and Thailand**, connecting more deeply with India would allow them to access a rising consumer market and, at the same time, balance Beijing and develop an alternative to China's massive inroads into Southeast Asia.
 - **For India**, the region's largest economy, a lot is at stake. It is a natural platform to fulfil India's key foreign policy priorities of Neighbourhood First and Act East.

BIMSTEC and assertive China

- **Battleground for India-China dominance**
 - China has undertaken a massive drive to finance and build infrastructure in South and Southeast Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative.
 - It has done so in almost all BIMSTEC countries, except Bhutan and India.
- **Platform to counter Chinese investments**
 - BIMSTEC could allow India to push a constructive agenda to counter Chinese investments, and instead follow best practices for connectivity projects based on recognised international norms.
 - The Chinese projects are widely seen as violating these norms.
- **Open and peaceful Bay of Bengal**
 - The Bay of Bengal can be showcased as open and peaceful, contrasting it with China's behaviour in South China Sea.
 - It could develop codes of conduct that preserve freedom of navigation and apply existing law of the seas regionally.
- **Help stop the increasing military presence in the region by creating a Bay of Bengal Zone of Peace.**
 - This zone would aim to restrict aggressive actions by outside powers.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

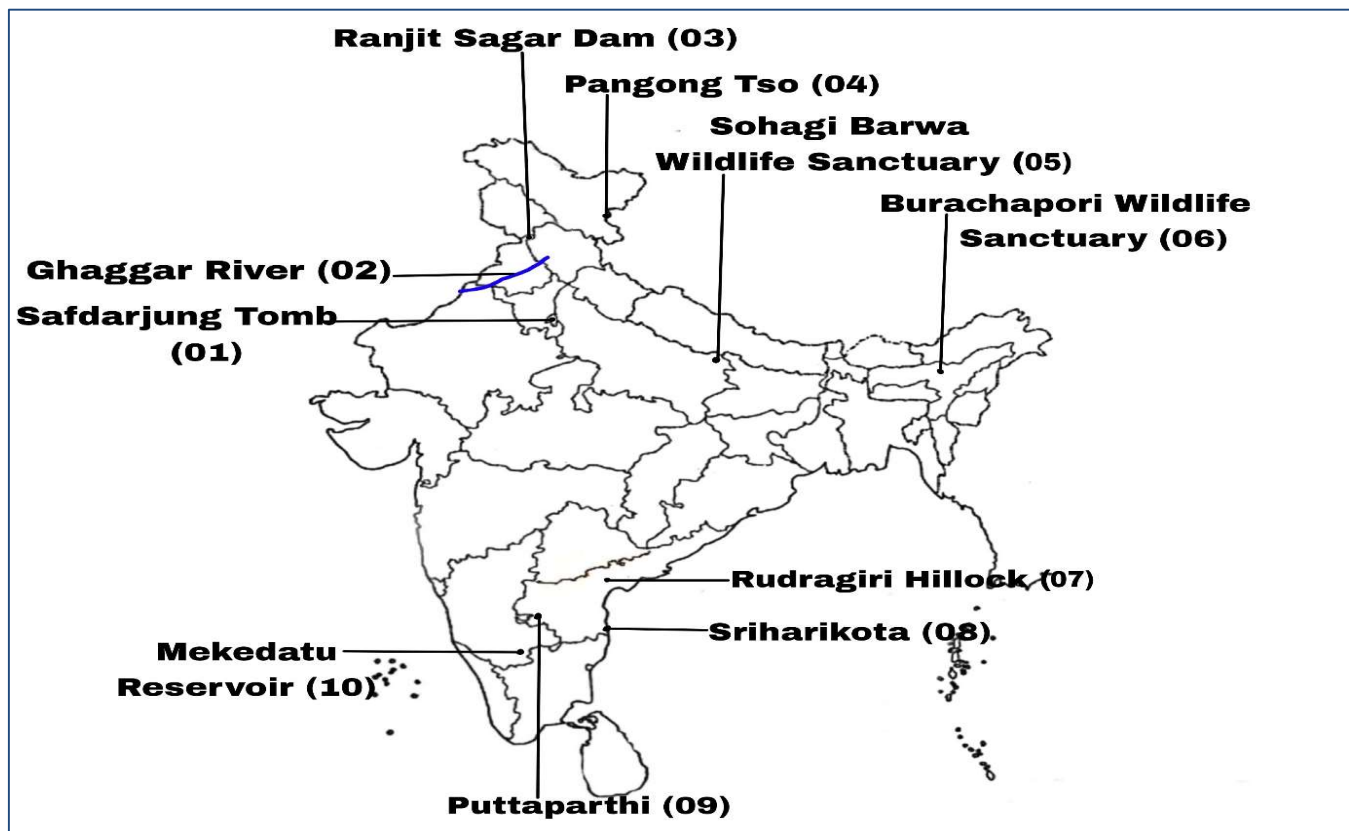
International Places In News



01	Orkney Islands	Orkney Islands is looking at ways to split off from the U.K. and potentially become a self-governing territory of Norway. It is an archipelago consisting of 70 individual islands, of which only 20 are inhabited. The four monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney is designated as UNESCO world Heritage site.
02	Vilnius	The NATO summit 2023 has been concluded in the Vilnius. It is the capital and the largest city of Lithuania. It is known for the architecture of its old town, one of the largest and best preserved old towns in Northern, Eastern and Central Europe, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994.
03	Kakhovka Dam	Recently a huge Soviet-era Kakhovka dam collapsed. It was located on the Dnieper or Dnipro River in southern Ukraine which was built as part of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant. The primary purposes of the dam were hydroelectric power generation, irrigation, and navigation.
04	Batagaika Crater	Stunning drone footage has revealed details of the Batagaika crater which is getting affected due to climate change. It is a thermokarst depression in the Chersky Range area. It is the biggest permafrost crater in the world. It administratively belongs to the Sakha Republic, Russia. It is also called as "gateway to the underworld,"
05	Cam Ranh Bay	Indian Naval Ship Kirpan handed over to Vietnam People's Navy (VPN) at the strategic military port of Cam Ranh Bay. It is a deep-water bay in Vietnam in Khanh Hoa Province. It is located at an inlet of the South China Sea situated on the south eastern coast of Vietnam. It is considered the finest Deepwater shelter in Southeast Asia.
06	Strait of Hormuz	Iran made an attempt to seize two oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz. It is located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. It separates Iran and Oman, linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

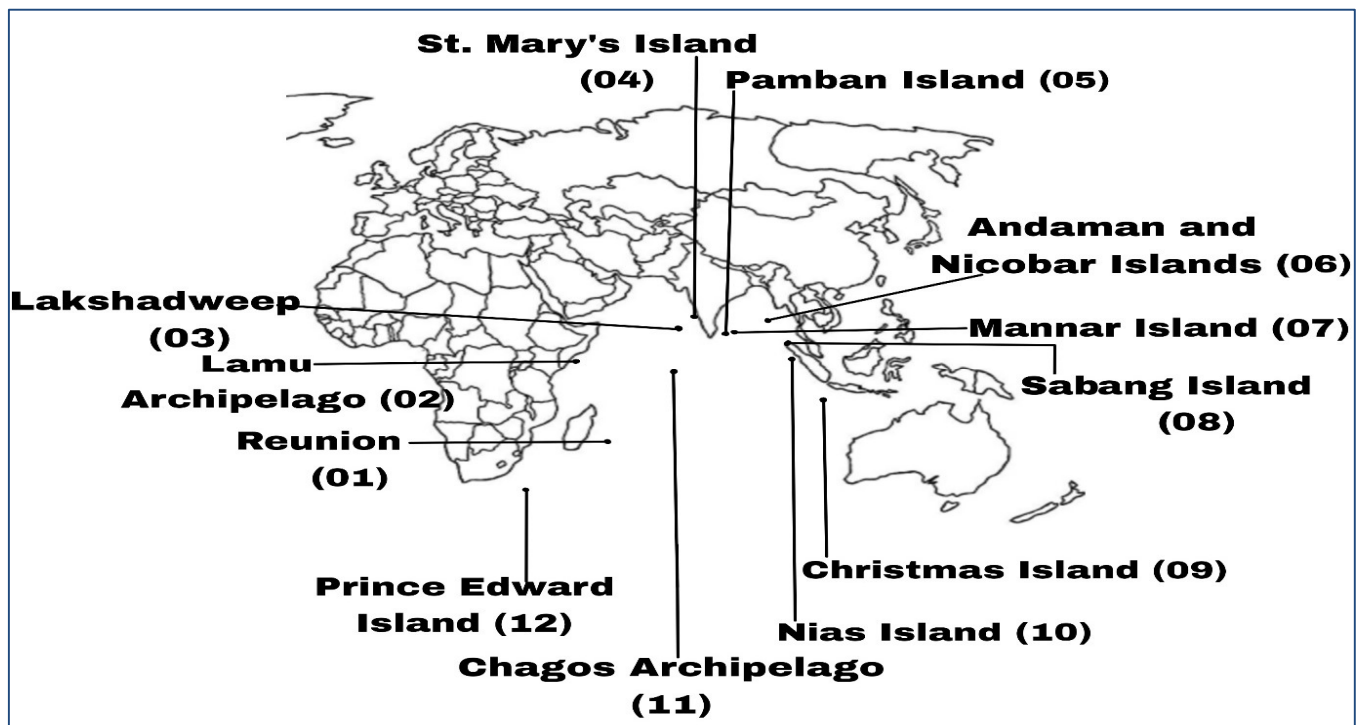
07	Crimean Bridge	Two people were killed after one of the sections of the rail-and-road Crimea bridge was blown up recently. It is also known as Kerch bridge opened in 2018, is a crucial transportation route between Russia and Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014.
08	Democratic Republic of Congo	A recent spike in cholera cases raised concerns in Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a country in Central Africa. By land area, it is the 2 nd largest country in Africa. Its capital and largest city is Kinshasa. It is bordered by the Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, the Cabinda exclave of Angola and the South Atlantic Ocean.
09	Ubinas Volcano	Peru announced a state of emergency in the Moquegua region due to the ongoing activity of the Ubinas volcano. It is a strato-volcano located in the Central Volcanic Zone of the Andes. It is part of a group of seven volcanoes in southern Peru located within a volcanic zone that extends from southern Peru to northern Chile.
10	Peru	Peru declared a state of National emergency amid a surge in patient suffering from Guillain-Barre Syndrome. It is the 3 rd largest country in South America, after Brazil and Argentina. The world's largest rain forest, the Amazon, covers nearly half of Peru. It is bordered by Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and the Pacific Ocean.

National Places In News



01	Safdarjung Tomb	The Archaeological Survey of India is set to finish conservation and restoration work on the central dome of Safdarjung Tomb soon. It is the last garden tomb constructed in the late Mughal Empire Style. It is located New Delhi. It was built in 1753- 54 as mausoleum of Safdarjung, the viceroy of Awadh under the Mughal Emperor, Mohammed Shah. It was built by his son, Nawab ShujaudDaula.
02	Ghaggar	The Ghaggar River caused havoc in the region after a breach in their embankments. Its Originates from Himachal Pradesh in the Shivalik hills. Its tributaries are Kaushalya,

	River	Tangri, Markanda, Beghna, Sarsuti, Chautang and Sukhna rivers. It flows south through the Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan, eventually entering Pakistan where it dries out before reaching the Arabian Sea.
03	Ranjit Sagar Dam	The Ranjit Sagar Dam project has achieved a new record of 153.97 lakh units in single-day power generation from its four units. It is also known as the Thein Dam, is a major water reservoir and hydroelectric power project located on the Ravi River in the Punjab. It was constructed to harness the waters of the Ravi River.
04	Pangong Tso	It is an endorheic (landlocked) lake situated in the Ladakh Himalayas. It is the world's highest saltwater lake. One-third of the Pangong Lake lies in India and the other two-thirds in China. India holds one-third of the boomerang-shaped Pangong lake. It is also known to change colours, appearing blue, green, and red at different times.
05	Sohagi Barwa Wildlife Sanctuary	A leopard was found dead in the Sohagi Barwa Wildlife Sanctuary. It is situated in the Maharajganj, Uttar Pradesh. On the northern side, it shares boundary with Nepal, and on the eastern border is <i>Bihar's Valmiki Tiger Reserve</i> . It was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1987. It is drained by the great Gandak, the little Gandak, Pyas and Rohin rivers.
06	Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary	Several people injured over clash between forest team and illegal encroachers at Bura Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary. It is located on the southern bank of river Brahmaputra in the Sonitpur, Assam. It is a part of the Laokhowa-Burachapori eco-system. It comprises of a mosaic of wet alluvial grassland, riparian and semi-evergreen forests dotted by wetland and river systems.
07	Rudragiri hillock	A fascinating combination of prehistoric rock paintings from the Mesolithic period and exquisite artwork from the Kakatiya dynasty were discovered in the Rudragiri hillock. Rudragiri hillock, nestled amidst the Eastern Ghats. It is located in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. This site unveils a combination of prehistoric rock paintings from the Mesolithic period around 5000 B.C.
08	Sriharikota	The Chandrayaan-3 spaceship lifted off from the launchpad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota. It is a barrier island in the Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. It supports the launch-based infrastructure for ISRO and is chosen as an ideal site for the launch of geostationary satellites because of its proximity to the equator.
09	Puttaparthi	Prime Minister of India virtually inaugurated the Sai Hira Global Convention Centre in Puttaparthi. It is located on the banks of <i>Chitravathi River</i> which is a tributary of Penna River in Andhra Pradesh. It is widely known for the birthplace of the Indian spiritual leader and <i>guru Sathya Sai Baba</i> and his ashram, Prasanthi Nilayam.
10	Mekedatu Reservoir	The Karnataka Assembly has unanimously adopted a resolution requesting clearance for the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project. This project aims to create a balancing reservoir on the Cauvery River in Karnataka. It involves the construction of a reservoir near the town of Kanakapura, which would help regulate water flow and provide drinking water to Bengaluru.



01	Reunion	It is an overseas department and region of France in the Indian Ocean. It is located approximately 950 km east of the island of Madagascar and 175 km southwest of the island of Mauritius. It is an outermost region of the European Union and is part of the eurozone.
02	Lamu Archipelago	It is located close to the northern coast of Kenya; to which it belongs. The island lies between the towns of Lamu and Kiunga. The largest town in the archipelago is Lamu Town, on Lamu Island. The town is on the World Heritage List.
03	Lakshadweep	It is a tropical archipelago of 36 atolls and coral reefs in the Laccadive Sea . But currently, there are 35 islands, as the Parali island submerged in water due to sea erosion. The islands form the smallest union territory of India. Kavaratti serves as the capital of the Union Territory and the region comes under the jurisdiction of Kerala High Court. These islands were earlier known as Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi Islands.
04	St. Mary's Islands	It also known as Coconut Island and Thonsepar, are a set of four small islands in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Malpe in Udipi, Karnataka. They are known for their distinctive geological formation of columnar rhyolitic lava. The monument is considered an important site for "Geo Tourism".
05	Pamban Island	It also known as Rameswaram Island, located between peninsular India and Sri Lanka, on the Rama Setu archipelago. It belongs to India and forms the Rameswaram taluk of Tamil Nadu. It is the largest island in Tamil Nadu by area.
06	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	It is a union territory of India consisting of 572 islands, of which 38 are inhabited, at the junction of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. It comprises two island groups, the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands, separated by the 150 km wide Ten Degree Channel . The island chains are a submerged extension of the Arakan Mountains .
07	Mannar Island	It lies off the north-western coast of Sri Lanka, is part of Mannar District, Sri Lanka. The island lies at the eastern end of Adam's Bridge.
08	Sabang Island	It is a town name on an island north of Banda Aceh on the northern tip

		of Sumatra. The island is best known for its snorkelling and diving. In Indonesia it is known as being the (north) westernmost point of the Indonesian archipelago, known as 'kilometre zero'.
09	Christmas Island	It is an Australian external territory. It is located in the Indian Ocean to the south of Java and Sumatra. It is situated at the peak of a basalt volcanic seamount which arose from the ocean floor in the Eocene era about 60 million years ago.
10	Nias Island	It is the largest of the islands off Sumatra that are part of North Sumatra province. It is located off the western coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. It is mostly a lowland area rising to around 800 m above sea level.
11	Chagos Archipelago	It is a group of seven atolls comprising more than 60 islands in the Indian Ocean about 500 km south of the Maldives. It had been part of Mauritius since the 18th century when the French first settled the islands. All of the islands of French colonial territory in the region were ceded to the British in 1810.
12	Prince Edward Island	It is an uninhabited island in the sub-Antarctic Indian Ocean that are part of South Africa. It has been declared Special Nature Reserves under the South African Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act.

SOCIAL ISSUES

No Accurate Count of Population of Persons with Disabilities

Union government was pulled up by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment for failing to accurately estimate the current population of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in the country.

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee said that at least until the results of Census 2021 were made available, which might take “considerable time”, the **government ought to use every resource it has to correctly estimate the population of PwDs.**
 - This may include collaborating with State governments, using data from surveys they are conducting, consulting experts, and sensitising surveyors of the Ministry of Statistics.
- **Identity Cards for PwD –**
 - The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities said that the government had introduced a measure to provide **Unique Disability ID (UDID) cards** to all those covered under schemes meant for them.
- The committee said that this measure is not enough as the **department has issued 94.09 lakh UDID cards so far whereas the PwD population even 10 years ago was more than double that number.**
- Further, the Opposition and rights activists had cornered the government over dropping of the disability-related questions from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6) last month.
 - The Health Ministry said that most of this data were already available through the 76th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) conducted in 2018.
- The committee said that there is an urgent requirement to explore innovative solutions to this issue.

Disabilities In India:

- According to an estimate by the World Health Organisation, globally, 15 percent of the population live with some form of disability, while over 80 percent of that share live in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.
- In India, **over 2.2 percent of the total population endures some form of severe mental or physical disability.**
- Conceptually, since the condition of disability is rather transient than static, **there is no one universal definition of what comprises a disability or who is considered disabled.**
- In India, the list of criteria that categorizes people as disabled was revamped in 2016 and came into effect with the Rights of People with Disabilities Act.

Salient Features of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:

- It came into force to give effect to the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).**
- The Act has categorized person with disability into three:
 - Person with benchmark disability;
 - Person with disability;
 - People with disabilities having high support needs.
- The Act increases type of disability from 7 to 21 types and the Central Government has the power to add more to the list.
- These **21 types of disabilities** include: Blindness, Low-vision, Leprosy Cured persons, Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing), Locomotor Disability, Dwarfism, Intellectual Disability, Mental Illness, etc.

- The Act has increased the quantum of reservation for people suffering from disabilities from 3% to 4% in government jobs and from 3% to 5% in higher education institutes.
- Every child with benchmark disability between the **age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education.**
- A **separate National and State Fund** be created to provide financial support to the persons with disabilities.

National Policy for PwD, 2006:

- The existing National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2006.
- Implementing Agency: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
- The policy seeks to recognize that PwDs are valuable human resource for the country and seeks to create an environment that provides them equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society.
- The focus areas of the policy include:
 - **Prevention of Disabilities:** The policy calls for programme for prevention of diseases, which result in disability and the creation of awareness regarding measures to be taken for prevention of disabilities.
 - **Rehabilitation Measures** includes physical rehabilitation, educational rehabilitation, and economic rehabilitation.
 - **Women with disabilities:** Special programmes will be developed for education, employment and providing of other rehabilitation services to women with disabilities keeping in view their special needs.
 - **Children with Disabilities:** The Government would strive to Ensure right to care, protection and security for children with disabilities;
 - **Barrier-free environment:** The goal of barrier free design is to provide an environment that supports the independent functioning of individuals so that they can participate without assistance, in everyday activities.

Manual Scavenging in India: 530 Districts Reported as Free of the Practice

According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ&E), a total of 530 districts (out of total 766) across the country had so far reported themselves to be free of manual scavenging.

- **While 100% of districts in States** like Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and a few others have declared themselves free of manual scavenging, in several States and UTs, only about 15% to 20% of the districts have reported so.
- **For instance**, in Manipur, just two of the 16 districts have reported as being manual-scavenging free.
- Similarly, in **J&K**, just 30% of the districts have declared themselves free of the practice with a similar number in **Telangana**. However, **UP**, which had the highest number of manual scavengers (32,473) in two surveys conducted till 2018, has nearly 90% districts reporting that they had been made free of manual scavenging.

Manual Scavenging in India:

In India, **~58,098** people worked as manual scavengers as of 2018 and **941 people have died** (since 1993) due to accidents while undertaking hazardous cleaning of sewer and septic tanks.

Attempts to Abolish Manual Scavenging in India:

- **The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993.**
 - It covered only dry latrines and the definition of manual scavenging was restricted to a person employed for manually carrying human excreta.

- Also, there was **no stress laid upon the rehabilitation** of these workers and the **lenient penal punishment** could not create deterrence in society.

- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act 2013** replaced the Act of 1993.

- Unlike the previous act, which was drafted with cleanliness in mind, the current legislation emphasises the **human dignity, rights and rehabilitation of manual scavengers.**

Salient Features of the PEMSAR Act 2013

- It **bans manual scavenging** and **widened the definition of manual scavengers** - to include all forms of manual removal of human excreta like an open drain, pit latrine, septic tanks, manholes and removal of excreta on the railway tracks.
- It **calls for a survey of manual scavenging** in urban and rural areas and the conversion of insanitary latrines into sanitary latrines.
- It makes it obligatory for employers to provide **protective tools** to the workers.
- It **lays key focus on rehabilitating the manual scavengers** by providing them with ready-built houses, financial assistance and loans for taking up alternate occupation.
- The offence of manual scavenging has been made **cognizable and non-bailable.**



- **Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014):** The SC highlighted the importance of rehabilitation, to prevent present as well as future generations from working as a manual scavenger.

Other Efforts to Abolish Manual Scavenging in India:

- **Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS):** It was revised in 2013, with the:
 - Provision of One Time Cash Assistance of Rs. 40,000/- to one identified manual scavenger in the family.
 - Capital subsidy upto Rs. 3.25 lakh to identified manual scavengers and their dependents for self-employment projects upto Rs. 10.00 lakh.
 - Skill Development Training upto two years to identified manual scavengers and their dependents with stipend @ Rs. 3,000/- per month during the training period.
- **NAMASTE scheme:** The National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) scheme was launched in 2022-23 for 100% mechanisation of sewer work by 2025-26. The SRMS has now been merged with the NAMASTE scheme.
- **Launch of the Swachata Mobile App in 2016:** To complain for possible signs of ongoing manual scavenging.

Concerns Regarding Implementation of Above Measures:

- **Non-compliance:** With mandated safety measures and standard operating procedures (SOP) still causes fatal accidents in sewers and septic tanks.
 - **330 people have died** while being engaged in cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the last five years.
- **Lack of financial assistance:** Union Budget 2023-24 showed an allocation of only ₹100 crore for the NAMASTE scheme.
- **Low conviction rate:** In cases either under the Prohibition of Manual Scavenging Act or under the SC/ST Act.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

- The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), in a written reply to the Lok Sabha, informed that **names of over five crore workers have been deleted under the MGNREGS in the financial year 2022-23.**
- There has been a hike of 247% in the deletions during 2022-23 as compared to 2021-22.
- According to the MoRD, **deletions are a “regular exercise”** conducted by State governments.

- **West Bengal** (5,199%) has reported the largest hike in deletion, followed by **Telangana** (2727%) and **Andhra Pradesh** (1147%).
- **The State governments have listed five reasons for the deletions**, including - fake job card, duplicate job card, not willing to work, family shifted from gram panchayat permanently and single person in job card and the person is expired.
- According to some reports, the deletions are spiralling **because of the government's emphasis on linking MGNREGS job cards with Aadhaar cards** and making wage payments through the Aadhaar-Based Payments System (ABPS).

Key Facts About the MGNREGS:

- **Right to get unemployment allowance** in case employment is not provided within 15 days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
- MGNREGS focuses on the economic and social empowerment of women.
- MGNREGS provides **“Green” and “Decent” work**.
- **Social Audit of works is mandatory**, which lends to accountability and transparency.
- **MGNREGS works address the climate change vulnerability** and protect the farmers from such risks and conserve natural resources.
- **The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers** to raise their voices and make demands.
- **It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat** which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGS and fix their priority.

Issues With Implementation of the MGNREGS:

- **Delayed payment of wages:** This is mainly due to failed payment transfers arising from **inactive Aadhaar and closed, blocked, or frozen bank accounts**.
- **Delay in compensation:** In case of delay in payment of wages under MGNREGA, beneficiaries are entitled to compensation at the rate of 0.05% of unpaid wages per day for the duration of delay.
- **Unemployment allowance:** State governments determine the rate of this allowance. In 2019-20 and 2020-21, only Rs 12,000 and Rs 3,000 respectively was paid as unemployment allowance.
- **Poor implementation of social audits provision:** In 2020-21, only 29,611 Gram Panchayats were audited at least once and social audit reports are not publicly available.
- **Appointment of ombudsperson:** Under the Act, there should be an ombudsperson for each district who will receive grievances, conduct enquiries, and pass awards.
 - **So far only 263 ombudsmen** have been appointed which shows poor coordination between central and state nodal agencies.

Recommendations of the Standing Committee Report to further Strengthen MGNREGS:

- **Increase in number of days of work** (from 100 days to 150 days).

What is MGNREGA/MGNREGS?

- The MG National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), also known as MGNREGS is an Indian legislation enacted in 2005.
- It provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.
- The MoRD is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

Procedure to Enrol under the MGNREGS

- **Adult members of rural households** submit their name, age and address with a photo to the Gram Panchayat.
- The **Gram Panchayat registers** households after making enquiry and issues a job card.
- **The job card** contains the details of the adult member enrolled and his/her photo.
- Registered person can submit an application for work in writing (for at least fourteen days of continuous work) either to Panchayat or to Programme Officer.
- The employment will be provided **within a radius of 5 km** and if it is above 5 km extra wage will be paid.

- **Revision of permissible works:** It recommended including **area-specific works under MGNREGA as per local needs.**
- **Uniform wage rate:** Need to devise a mechanism for a unified wage rate across the country as wage rates currently range from Rs 193 to Rs 318 in different states/UTs.
- **Increase in wages commensurate with inflation.**

Global Report on the Food Crises (GRFC), 2023

The Global Report on the Food Crises (GRFC) 2023, prepared by the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC), released recently estimated that between 691 million and 783 million people in the world suffered from hunger in 2022.

What is Food Security?

- Food security means availability, accessibility and affordability of food to all people at all times.
 - **Availability** of food means food production within the country, food imports and the previous years' stock stored in government granaries.
 - **Accessibility** means food is within reach of every person.
 - **Affordability** implies that an individual has enough money to buy sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet one's dietary needs.

Key Highlights of Global Report on Food Crises 2023:

- The Global Report starts with a **qualified assertion** that hunger is no longer on an alarming path upwards at the global level, but still far above pre-COVID pandemic levels.
- In 2022, an **estimated 2.4 billion people did not have access to adequate food.** This is still 391 million more people than in 2019.
- Some good news is that **stunting**, defined as the condition of being too short for one's age, **among children under five years of age has declined steadily**, from 204.2 million in 2000 to 148.1 million in 2022.
- Simultaneously, **child wasting**, caused by insufficient nutrient intake or absorption, declined from 54.1 million in 2000 to 45 million in 2022.
- In terms of children who are overweight or obese, the study indicated a **non-significant increase from 5.3% (33 million) in 2000 to 5.6 % (37 million) in 2022.**

About Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC):

- It was founded by the EU, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and World Food Programme in 2016.
- It is an **alliance of humanitarian and development actors working together to prevent, prepare for and respond to food crises and support the SDG to End Hunger (SDG 2).**
- The Report is the result of a consensus-based and multi-partner analytical process involving 17 international humanitarian and development partners.

What are the Key Drivers of Food Insecurity?

- Slowing down, due to lockdowns, economic downturns, and other pandemic-related disruptions in 2020 that led to job losses and reduced incomes for many people;
- Ukraine war;
- Governmental policies that may not be entirely favourable; and
- *Increasing urbanisation that drives changes through the agri-food systems.*

The report's comparison of food insecurity among rural, peri-urban and urban populations reveals that **global food insecurity is lower in urban areas.**

What are the Solutions Ahead?

- The report helps “identify vulnerable population groups, contributing to inform decision-making and effective action through the appropriate targeting and design of policies and programmes.”
- Sound nutrition is fundamental to the achievement of the SDGs and must be central in government policy and supported by civil society and the private sector.
 - Some of its recommendations include supporting healthier food outlets
- Policy incentives are necessary to encourage shops to sell greater amounts of fresh and minimally processed foods.
- Another key input is on street foods, which an estimated 2.5 billion people worldwide consume every day, due to the convenience and cost factor.
- The report calls for **addressing multiple infrastructure and regulatory gaps to improve nutritional safety and quality of street food.**
- The GRFC also suggests building rural infrastructure, including quality rural and feeder roads to connect remote farms and enterprises to main road networks.
- Other public investments to support linkages between (mainly small) farms and small and medium enterprises could include warehousing, cold storage, dependable electrification, access to digital tools and water supply.

Food Security System In India:

- This system has two components: (a) buffer stock, and (b) public distribution system.
- **Buffer Stock:**
 - Buffer Stock is the stock of food grains, namely wheat and rice, procured by the government through the Food Corporation of India (FCI).
 - The FCI purchases wheat and rice from the farmers in states where there is surplus production. The farmers are paid a pre-announced price for their crops. This price is called **Minimum Support Price (MSP)**.
- **Public Distribution System** through government regulated ration shops.

Challenges:

- With nearly 195 million undernourished people, India shares a quarter of the global hunger burden.
- Nearly 47 million or 4 out of 10 children in India are not meeting their full human potential because of chronic undernutrition or stunting.
- The government has large-scale food security and anti-poverty programmes but there are critical gaps in terms of inclusion and exclusion errors.
- Women and girls are particularly disadvantaged.
- Despite the achievement of national food self-sufficiency, new challenges have emerged:
 - Slowing agriculture growth, climate change, land degradation, shrinking bio-diversity.
 - Large tracts of farmlands in India have become barren due to imbalanced fertiliser use and excessive use of a single fertiliser, urea.

Online Portal Launched to Report Violation of Ban on E-cigarettes

- Despite the ban imposed by the Union government in 2019, e-cigarettes continue to be sold on e-commerce sites, even to children below 18.

- Now to curb this, the Health Ministry has launched an [online portal\(www.violation-reporting.in\)](http://www.violation-reporting.in) to facilitate reporting of violations under the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act (PECA).

{For more about E-cigarettes refer The Recitals-May2023}

India Recorded All-time High of 93% DPT3 Immunisation Coverage in 2022

- The 2022 WHO/UNICEF estimates of National Immunization Coverage (WUENIC) for its 195 member states have been released.
- As per this estimate, the coverage rate for DPT3, the third dose of diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccines, in India rose to an all-time of 93% in 2022.
 - This has surpassed the previous pre-pandemic best of 91% recorded in 2019.
 - It also marks a sharp increase from the 85% recorded in 2021.

WHO and UNICEF Estimates For National Immunisation Coverage

- Each year WHO and UNICEF jointly review reports submitted by Member States regarding *national immunization coverage, finalized survey reports as well as data from the published and grey literature*.
- Based on these data, with due consideration to potential biases and the views of local experts, WHO and UNICEF attempt to distinguish between situations:
 - where the available empirical data accurately reflect immunization system performance and
 - those where the data are likely to be compromised and present a misleading view
- WHO and UNICEF estimates are country-specific; that is, each country's data are reviewed individually, and data are not borrowed from other countries in the absence of data.

Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)

- **Background**
 - Expanded Programme on Immunization was launched in 1978. It was renamed as Universal Immunization Programme in 1985 when its reach was expanded beyond urban areas.
 - In 1992, it became part of Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme.
 - In 1997 it was included in the ambit of *National Reproductive and Child Health Programme*.
 - Since the launch of **National Rural Health Mission** in 2005, Universal Immunization Programme has always been an integral part of it.
- **About**
 - UIP is one of the largest public health programmes targeting close of 2.67 crore newborns and 2.9 crore pregnant women annually.
 - Under UIP, immunization is provided free of cost against 12 vaccine preventable diseases:
 - **Nationally against 9 diseases** - Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Measles, Rubella, severe form of Childhood Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and Meningitis & Pneumonia (caused by Hemophilus Influenza type B)
 - **Sub-nationally against 3 diseases** - Rotavirus diarrhoea, Pneumococcal Pneumonia and Japanese Encephalitis;
 - A child is said to be fully immunized if child receives all due vaccine as per national immunization schedule within 1st year age of child.

- **Major milestones**

- The two major milestones of UIP have been the **elimination of polio in 2014** and **maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination in 2015**.

Key Findings of WUENIC

- **Global coverage**

- Global immunisation services reached around 4 million more children in 2022 compared with 2021.
- In 2022, about 20.5 million children remained either unvaccinated or under-vaccinated (missed out on one or more vaccines delivered through routine immunisation services).

Mission Indradhanush (MI)

- MI was launched in December 2014 and aims at increasing the full immunization coverage to children to 90%.
- Under this drive, focus is given on pockets of low immunization coverage and hard to reach areas where the proportion of unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children is highest.
- A total of 6 phases of Mission Indradhanush have been completed covering 554 districts across the country.
- In 2017, the government introduced the **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)** to significantly enhance the immunization campaign.



- **Coverage in India**

- India accounted for 1.6 million of the unvaccinated and under-vaccinated children for DPT-3 (diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus).
 - This vaccine is **administered to children in 3 doses**, for children below 7 years of age.
 - The coverage of this vaccine is often used to assess how well countries are doing in providing routine immunisation services to children.
- India achieved 93 per cent coverage for its 22.5 million infants in 2022.

- **Performance of the WHO South-East Asia Region**

- The region had the best immunisation recoveries among all the WHO regions.
- This can be majorly attributed to the efforts being made by India and Indonesia.

- **Impact of inequities in immunisation coverage**

- The inequities in immunisation coverage leading to accumulation of pockets of unvaccinated children posed the risk of outbreaks of measles, diphtheria, and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

13.5 Crore Indians move out of Multidimensional Poverty in 5 Years

NITI Aayog has published the 2nd edition of the Multidimensional Poverty Index titled '*National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A progress of Review 2023*'.

- At the core of India's priorities, lies **SDG target 1.2**, with its powerful mission to **reduce poverty in all its forms by at least half by 2030**.

National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

- The MPI has been used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its flagship Human Development Report since 2010.
- In this context, NITI Aayog had published the first edition of *National Multidimensional Poverty Index for India* in **2021**.
- **Purpose –**
 - A national MPI statistic for a country is tailored to the national priorities and therefore, countries choose their own set of dimensions, indicators, weights, and cut-offs, according to their plans and contexts.

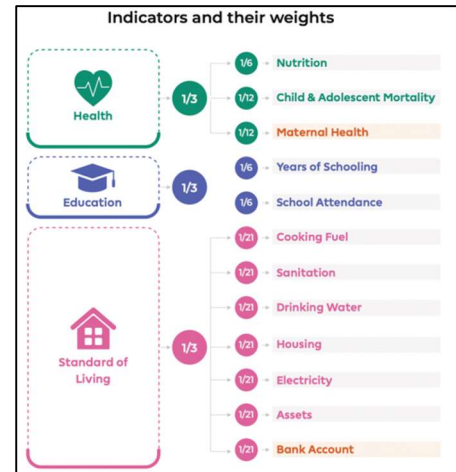
- The report presents an in-depth analysis of the headcount ratio and intensity of multidimensional poverty at the national, State/UT, and district levels.
- The first report was based on reference period of 2015-16 of the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)- 4**.

MPI Parameters & Methodology

- The Index is based on the **Alkire-Foster (AF) methodology** and has three equally weighted dimensions –



- These three dimensions are represented by **12 indicators**–
- The index is calculated by first setting the **deprivation cut-offs for each indicator**, i.e., the level of achievement considered normatively sufficient for an individual to be considered not deprived in an indicator.
- For example, the individual has completed *at least six years of schooling*.



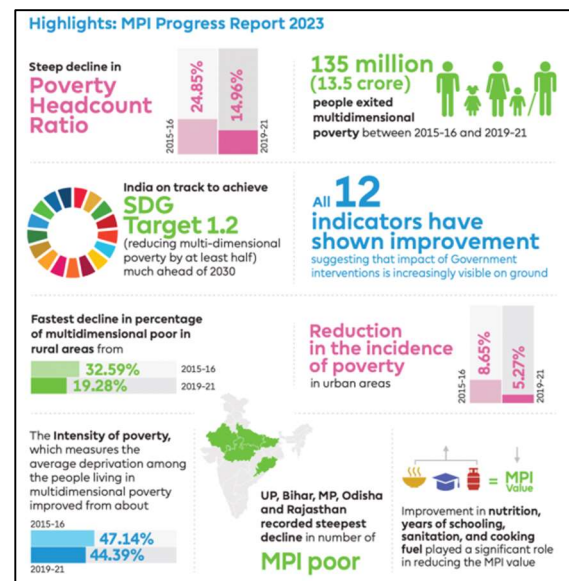
- Weights are added to each indicator and a composite metric is then used to calculate the index.

National Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023:

- The report is based on the latest **National Family Health Survey (2019-21)** and represents progress made by India in reducing multidimensional poverty between the two surveys, **NFHS-4 (2015-16)** and **NFHS-5 (2019-21)**.

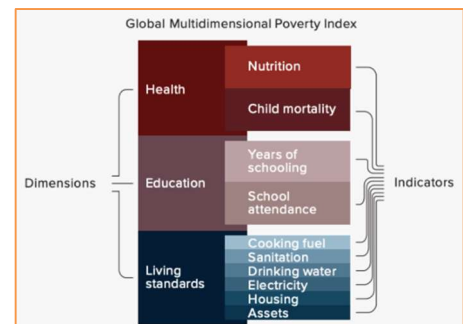
Key Results – Steep Decline in Poverty

- India has achieved a remarkable reduction in its MPI value and Headcount Ratio between 2015-16 and 2019-21.
- About **135.5 million (13.5 crore) persons have exited poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21**.
- Rural areas saw a faster reduction in their MPI value, compared to urban areas.
- Nearly 3.43 crore people escaped poverty in **Uttar Pradesh**, registering the largest decline among the 36 States and UTs.



Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023

- The global **Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2023** was recently released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).
- First developed in **2010**, it measures poverty across **three equally weighted dimensions: health, education and standard of living**, comprising **10 indicators**. The MPI value ranges from 0 to 1, and **higher values means higher multidimensional poverty**.
- If a person is deprived in at least one third of the indicators, they are identified as **‘MPI poor’**.
- It also measures the **extent (or intensity)** of their poverty through the percentage of deprivations they are experiencing.



Key Findings

- According to the index, 1.1 billion out of 6.1 billion people (just more than 18%) live in acute multidimensional poverty across 110 countries.
- Sub-Saharan Africa (534 million) and South Asia (389 million) are home to approximately five out of every six poor people.
- Nearly two-thirds of all poor people (730 million people) live in middle-income countries, making action in these countries vital for reducing global poverty.
- Although low-income countries constitute only 10% of the population included in the MPI, these are where 35% of all poor people reside.
- Children under the age of 18 account for half of MPI-poor people (566 million). The poverty rate among children is 27.7%, while among adults, it is 13.4%.
- Poverty predominantly affects rural areas, with 84% of all poor people living in rural areas. Rural areas are poorer than urban areas across all regions of the world.
- 25 countries, including India, successfully halved their global MPI values within 15 years, showing that rapid progress is attainable.
- These countries include Cambodia, China, Congo, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Serbia, and Vietnam.
- The report demonstrates that poverty reduction is achievable. However, the lack of comprehensive data during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic poses challenges in assessing immediate prospects.
- It is crucial to consider context-specific multidimensional poverty indices that reflect national definitions of poverty since the global MPI assesses multidimensional poverty with the same methodology.

Indian Scenario

- A total of 415 million people moved out of poverty in India within just 15 years from 2005-06 to 2019-21, with incidence falling from 55.1% in 2005/2006 to 16.4% in 2019/2021.
- In 2005/2006, about 645 million people were in multidimensional poverty in India, with this number declining to about 230 million in 2019/2021.
- The report noted that deprivation in all indicators declined in India and the poorest States and groups, including children and people in disadvantaged caste groups, had the fastest absolute progress.
- People who are multi-dimensionally poor and deprived under the nutrition indicator in India declined from 44.3% in 2005-06 to 11.8% in 2019-21, and child mortality fell from 4.5% to 1.5%.

POCSO Act

While the SC and several HCs have underlined concerns over criminalisation of adolescent sex, the *22nd Law Commission of India is not in favour of lowering the age of consent for minors* (which is currently 18 under the POCSO Act).

- The Commission (headed by Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi) is set to release its report on the minimum age of consent under the POCSO Act 2012.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act:

- **About:**
 - It is the **first comprehensive law** in the country dealing specifically with sexual abuse of children, enacted in **2012** and is administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
 - It was **intended to protect children from sexual assault**, sexual harassment and pornographic violations, as well as to establish **Special Courts** for such trials.

- In **2019**, the Act was amended to strengthen the penalties for specified offences in order to deter abusers and promote a dignified upbringing.
- **Key provisions:**
 - **Gender-neutral legislation:** Act defines a child as "any person" under the age of 18.
 - **Non-reporting is a crime:** Any person in charge of an institution (excluding children) who fails to report the commission of a sexual offence involving a subordinate faces punishment.
 - **No time limit for reporting abuse:** A victim may report an offence at any time, even years after the abuse has occurred.
 - **Keeping victim's identity confidential:** The Act forbids the disclosure of the victim's identity in any form of media unless authorised by the special courts established by the Act.
- **Concerns:**
 - **Such abuse is on the rise:** Particularly since the Covid-19 outbreak, when new forms of cybercrime have emerged.
 - **Lack of awareness or knowledge:** On the part of minor girls, boys, parents and society as a whole.
 - **Criminalisation of adolescent sex:** The CJI D Y Chandrachud asked lawmakers to look into growing concern over criminalisation under the POCSO Act of adolescents who engage in consensual sexual activity.

What is the Issue of Minors being Booked for Minors Consensual Act?

- **Minors aged between 16 and 18** who engage in a consensual act that may come under the definition of sexual activity under the law run the risk of being booked under POCSO.
- While these cases of adolescent sex **may not necessarily result in conviction of a minor boy**, the law is such that it could result in **denial of bail and prolonged detention**.
- According to a study, **one in every four cases** under the POCSO Act in West Bengal, Assam and Maharashtra constituted "romantic cases" where the victim was found to be in a consensual relationship with the accused.

The 22nd Law Commission of India's Recommendations wrt POCSO:

- The Law Commission is of the view that **lowering the age of consent may be counterproductive for women**.
- The Commission is likely to recommend **awareness measures on adolescent health care** including making sex education mandatory and teaching the basics of consent under the POCSO Act in schools.

Why Is The Commission Against Lowering The Age Of Consent?

- Its decision is influenced by two key issues -
 - **The government's proposal to increase the minimum age of marriage for women and**
 - **The incongruity between Muslim personal law and the POCSO law.**
- **Under the law**, the age of consent under the POCSO Act, the age of majority is **18 years**.
- The Union Cabinet cleared a proposal to raise the legal age of marriage for women **from 18 to 21 years to bring it on par with men**.
 - The government cited **gender neutrality, risks of early pregnancies and overall empowerment of women** as reasons to increase the age of marriage.
- **Under Muslim personal laws**, marriage for girls is at puberty, which is presumed to be at age 15.
 - This gap between Muslim personal laws and the special legislation is prohibiting child marriage.
- Lowering the age of consent for sexual activity under POCSO could potentially have an impact on these aspects too.

Centre Adding More Services To Ayushman Bharat-Health And Wellness Centres

India's Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) programme is undergoing its biggest ever expansion of services.

Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)

• Background

- Ayushman Bharat (AB) was launched to deliver comprehensive range of services spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care.
- It has two components which are complementary to each other.
 - 1st: 1,50,000 Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) is created.
 - 2nd: Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).
 - It provides health insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per year to over *10 crore poor and vulnerable families for seeking secondary and tertiary care*.

• About AB-HWCs

- Started in 2018, AB-HWCs aims to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care, that is universal and free to users.
- It focuses on wellness and the delivery of an expanded range of services like maternal and child health, services to address communicable and non-communicable diseases and services for elderly and palliative care.
- AB-HWCs provide free essential medicines and diagnostic services, tele-consultation, and health promotion including wellness activities like Yoga.

• Target

- 1,50,000 Sub Health Centres(SHC), Primary Health Centres (PHC) and Urban Primary Health Centres (UPHC) to be transformed as Health Wellness Centres(HWC) by **2022**.
 - As of 8 July 2023, there are 1,60,074 functional HWCs in India.
 - As on June 30, 2023, more than 2.16 crores wellness sessions have been conducted with participation of 23.83 crores individuals

• Key Components

- The delivery of comprehensive primary health care through HWCs involve complex task as it requires a paradigm shift at all levels of health systems.

Key Highlights Of Addition Of Services

- Under the latest expansion spree, the Central government is adding services, including:
 - screening, prevention, control & management of non-communicable diseases,
 - care for common ophthalmic & ENT problems,
 - basic oral health care,
 - elderly and palliative health care services,
 - emergency medical services, and
 - screening and management of *mental health ailments*.
- **The essential list of medicines and diagnostics has been expanded**



- The essential list of medicines and diagnostics has been expanded to make available 171 medicines at Primary HWCs and 105 at Secondary Health Care-HWC and 63 diagnostics at PHC-HWC and 14 at SHC-HWC.
- **New cadre of Community Health Officers**
 - 1.29 lakh in position, has been introduced at the level of SHC-HWC.
 - They will act as clinicians as well as public health managers. They will lead the team of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Anganwadi Workers (AWW) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM).

Performing Grade Index

According to the Union Ministry of Education's Performing Grade Index (PGI), Chandigarh and Punjab emerged as the best performers in school education for the year 2021-22.

India's School Education System:

- The Indian Education System is **one of the largest in the world** with more than 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million teachers and 250 million children from varied socio-economic backgrounds.
- **SDG4** adopted by India in 2015 seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.
- Such a goal will require **proper assessment and monitoring of indicators** set out in goals.

What is the Performance Grading Index (PGI) on School Education?

- It was designed by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, and launched in **2017**.
- It helps States/UTs to **identify specific interventions** required to make **transformational changes in school education**.

PGI 2.0:

- In the last 4 years, **States/UTs reached saturation level in many indicators of PGI**, and few indicators became redundant due to rapid changes adopted during COVID-19 period.
- Certain policy initiatives and interventions introduced post implementation of **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** also necessitated for aligning indicators of PGI for proper tracking the progress.
- **PGI was revised for the year 2021-22** and renamed as PGI 2.0. The new structure includes 73 indicators grouped into two categories:

Categories	Domain	Indicators	Total Weight
1. Outcomes	Learning Outcomes and Quality (LO)	12	240
	Access (A)	7	80
	Infrastructure & Facilities (IF)	15	190
	Equity (E)	16	260
2. Governance Management (GM)	Governance Processes (GP)	15	130
	Teacher Education & Training (TE&T)	8	100
Total		73	1000

Highlights of the PGI for the year 2021-22:

- The two domains - **access and equity** - are the only ones where any state (Delhi) managed the top grade (Daksh).
- **For learning outcomes**, one of the key indicators of good performance, the top performers are Punjab, Chandigarh and Rajasthan while **no states/ UTs could achieve the top grade for teacher education and training**.
- **Punjab and Chandigarh** find place in the sixth grade (Prachesta- 2) while six states could make it to the seventh grade (Prachesta-3).
- **The three poorest performing states/UTs** are Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

PUNJAB, RAJ, CHANDIGARH BEST IN LEARNING OUTCOMES

Grade	Overall grade Score	States/UTs attaining overall grade	Learning Outcomes	Access	Infra	Equity	Governance Processes	Teacher education & Training
Daksh	941-1000	NIL	NIL	Delhi	NIL	Delhi	NIL	NIL
Utkarsh	881-940	NIL	NIL	8	NIL	31	NIL	Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Delhi, Chandigarh
Atti-Uttam	821-880	NIL	NIL	10	NIL	4	Gujarat	10
Uttam	761-820	NIL	NIL	12	Chandigarh	NIL	Kerala	13
Prachesta -1	701-760	NIL	NIL	4	5	NIL	11	5
Prachesta -2	641-700	2 (Chandigarh, Punjab)	Punjab, Chandigarh & Rajasthan	1	10	NIL	15	2
Prachesta -3	581-640	6	4	NIL	14	NIL	7	1
Akanshi-1	521-580	13	19	NIL	6	NIL	1	NIL
Akanshi-2	461-520	12	10	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Akanshi-3	401-460	3	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL

- Highlighting the **inter-state disparity**, the maximum and minimum scores obtained by states/ UTs in 2021-22 are 659.01 and 420.64 respectively.
 - The deviation of **23.8%** indicates that states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram **have to put more effort to reach the top slot.**
 - **This disparity was 51%** in 2017-18 indicating that PGI also helped bridge the performance gap among states/UTs over the years.

UGC's Changed Rule To Hire Entry-Level Professors

- It is no longer mandatory to have a PhD degree to apply for the post of assistant professor in colleges and universities.
- It is enough to clear the National Eligibility Test (NET), State Eligibility Test (SET), or State Level Eligibility Test (SLET) to be eligible for appointment.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) had recently notified this change

What Was The System Earlier?

- **2010 notification**
 - As per the 2010 notification, candidates for assistant professor must qualify in the NET, SET, or SLET. However, candidates who had PhDs were exempted from this eligibility condition.
 - In other words, if a candidate had a doctoral degree, she could apply for appointment even if she had not cleared NET, SET, or SLET.
- **2018 notification of UGC**
 - "The PhD Degree shall be a mandatory qualification for direct recruitment to the post of Assistant Professor in Universities with effect from 01.07.2021."
 - UGC also directed universities and colleges to implement the new minimum criteria for recruitment from 2021.
 - However, due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the UGC pushed the July 2021 deadline to July 2023.
- **Current status**
 - However, even before 2023 deadline could kick in, UGC has once again notified that a PhD is no longer mandatory.

Why Did UGC Reverse The Decision It Had Announced In 2018?

- Analysts believe that the purpose of current change is to increase the accessibility by removing an inessential entry barrier.
 - In certain disciplines such as policy-making, design, foreign languages, law, architecture and other similar subjects, universities often find it difficult to get candidates with a PhD.
 - Removal of mandatory PhD conditions at the entry level will help universities in recruiting candidates with a flair for teaching but without a PhD.
- At the same time, it also ensures quality as the new entrants will need to complete PhD to move to the next level (of associate professor).
- India produces more than 25,000 PhDs every year. In major disciplines, there is intense competition to select the best PhDs for faculty positions. Therefore, removing PhD as a mandatory condition at the entry-level assistant professor position will not affect the quality of education.

How Has The Academic Community Reacted?

PhD is a longer research degree that requires a commitment of time and money. People coming from marginalised sections find it very difficult to prolong their studies, mainly women, Dalits, and Adivasi candidates. Removing the PhD requirement allows people to enter the profession at a younger age.

Nirbhaya Fund

Union Minister for Women and Child Development launched a special scheme under the aegis of the **Nirbhaya Fund** to provide shelter, food and legal aid for pregnant minor victims of sexual assault who have no family support.

- The Ministry additionally leveraged the administrative structure of **Mission Vatsalya** in collaboration with State governments and **Child Care institutions (CCIs)** to actualise this support to minor victims.

What is the Mission Vatsalya Scheme?

- Launched in 2021 by the MWCD, the scheme provides a **roadmap to achieve development and child protection priorities** aligned with SDGs.
- It lays emphasis on **child rights, advocacy and awareness** along with strengthening of the juvenile justice care and protection system with the motto to 'leave no child behind'.
- **The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015** [JJ Act] provisions and POCSO Act 2012 form the basic framework for implementation of the Mission.
- The Scheme is implemented as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** in partnership with State Governments and UT Administrations

About The New Scheme:

- **In 2021, the NCRB** reported 51,863 cases under the POCSO Act and 64% cases out of those pertain to penetrative sexual assault .
- **The scheme** (with an outlay of Rs 74.10 crore) **aims to provide** shelter, food, daily needs, safe transportation for attending court hearings and legal aid to minor girls who have been abandoned by their family -
 - Due to forced pregnancy, either due to rape or gang rape, etc., and
 - Have no other means to support themselves.
- **The fund will help in setting up shelters for such victims.** This could be in the nature of standalone shelters, or wards earmarked for such victims in existing Child care Institutions (CCIs), as state governments see fit.
- Thus, the new scheme **aims to provide integrated support and assistance to girl child victims under one roof**, facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services, including Access to education, Police assistance, Health care (including maternity, neo-natal and infant care), Psychological and legal support.

What is Nirbhaya Fund?

- Government of India established the Nirbhaya Fund in response to **Nirbhaya Case in 2013.**
- **It is aimed specifically at projects for improving women's safety and security** and is managed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- **The Empowered Committee (EC)**, which is composed of officials from several ministries and is chaired by the Secretary of the MWCD, recommends programs/schemes for funding under Nirbhaya Fund.
- **Some of the major projects** under the fund are Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF), One Stop Centers (OSCs), Universalization of Women Helpline (WHL), Mahila Police Volunteer (MPV), etc.
- Since Nirbhaya Fund's founding, the EC has approved programmes worth ~Rs. 9800 crores.



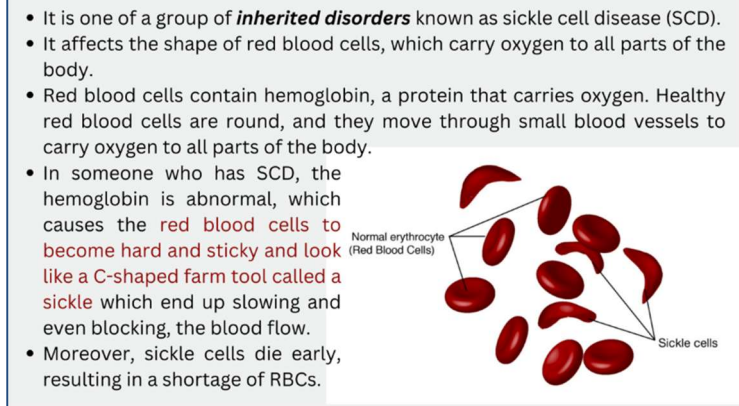
Sickle Cell Anaemia Eradication Mission (NSCAEM) 2047

PM Modi launched National Sickle Cell Anaemia Eradication Mission (NSCAEM) 2047 by unveiling a portal.

- The mission aims to address the pressing health challenges posed by sickle cell disease, particularly among the tribal population.
 - It was announced in the Union Budget 2023.
- He also released a guideline for the management of the disease and different modules for its monitoring.
- The PM also distributed **Sickle Cell colour-coded counselling cards** to a few beneficiaries.

Can SCA Be Treated?

- Sickle cell anaemia is a genetic disorder, making complete elimination a challenge that requires a major scientific breakthrough.
- The only cure comes in the form of gene therapy and stem cell transplants — both costly and still in developmental stages.
 - In gene therapy, the DNA inside the haemoglobin gene is edited to stop the disease.
 - In stem cell transplants, the bone marrow affected by sickle cell anaemia is replaced with healthy bone marrow from a donor.
- **Blood transfusion**, wherein red blood cells are removed from donated blood and given to a patient, is also a trusted treatment in the absence of permanent cures. But challenges include a scarcity of donors, fears around safe supply of blood, risk of infection etc.



SCA In India

- **India is the second-worst affected country** in terms of predicted births with SCA. In India, around 18 million people have sickle cell traits and 1.4 million patients have sickle cell disease (SCD).
- SCD is widespread among the tribal population in India where about 1 in 86 births among STs have SCD.
- A few states in India have a significantly higher SCD prevalence. These include:
 - Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Odisha, Kerala and Rajasthan.
 - Collectively, these states are referred to as the sickle cell belt.

What Has India Done So Far?

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has launched the **Sickle Cell Disease Support Corner** to bridge the gap between patients and health care services in tribal areas.
 - The Portal provides a web-based patient powered registration system which will collate all information related to SCD among tribal people in India.
- **National Council on Sickle Cell Disease** has also been constituted for timely and effective action.
- In the Budget 2023-24, the government announced its plans to distribute “**special cards**” across tribal areas to people below the age of 40.
 - The cards will be divided into different categories based on the screening results. The mission will receive funding under the National Health Mission.

National Coal Index

- The National Coal Index (NCI) has shown a significant decline of **33.8%** in May 2023 at 157.7 points compared to May 2022, where it was at 238.3 points.
- This **indicates a strong supply of coal in the market**, with sufficient availability to meet the growing demands.
- The peak of NCI was observed in June 2022 when the index reached 238.8 points. However, subsequent months have experienced a decline, indicative of abundant coal availability in the Indian market.
- The National Coal Index (NCI) is a **price index** that combines coal prices from all sales channels, including notified prices, auction prices and import prices.
- Established with the **base year** as fiscal year **2017-18**, it serves as a reliable indicator of market dynamics, providing valuable insights into coal price fluctuations.
- Additionally, the premium on coal auctions indicates the pulse of the industry, and the sharp decline in coal auction premiums confirms sufficient coal availability in the market.
- The downward trend in the NCI signifies a more balanced market, aligning supply and demand.
- With sufficient coal availability, the nation can not only meet the growing demand but also support its long-term energy requirements, thus building a more resilient and sustainable coal industry.

Delisting of Securities

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is reviewing delisting regulations for listed companies in order to stop the manipulation of shares of a company that has opted for delisting from the stock exchanges.
- SEBI said it may allow companies to delist shares at a **fixed price**, instead of the current 'reverse book-building' process.

Delisting

- Delisting means removing the securities of a listed company from a stock exchange. Once delisted, the securities of that company can no longer be traded on the stock exchange. Delisting can be either voluntary or compulsory.
- In **voluntary delisting**, a company decides on its own to remove its securities from a stock exchange.
- In **compulsory delisting**, they are removed as a penal measure for the company not making submissions or complying with requirements in the listing agreement within the prescribed timeframes.
- If a company wants to delist its securities, it needs to buy back 90% of the total issued shares.

Reverse Book-Building Process

- Reverse book-building is the **process used for price discovery**.
- During the period for which the reverse book-building is open, offers are collected from shareholders at various prices, which are above or equal to the floor price. The buyback price is determined after the offer closing price.

Issue With Reverse Book-Building

- Because of the way in which the reverse book-building process is formulated, and because of the 90% threshold, there is a possibility of misuse by certain operators who are specialists in the delisting of shares.

- Certain players in the market, in anticipation of the delisting, acquire shares and increase the price of shares to unsustainable levels.
- By doing so, when the delisting proposal comes, they extract a higher price, which need not always be a fair price.
- If the price of a share that has been in the market for a reasonable period of time jumps up by, say, 70% only because of delisting, it may not be a fair price.

Future Outlook

- SEBI has said it has been thinking of reviewing delisting regulations for some time now. The regulator has said it has received the recommendations of the committee headed by **Keki Mistry**, the former vice-chairman and CEO of HDFC Ltd, on delisting norms, and it would soon seek comments from various stakeholders on it.
- It may allow companies to delist shares at a fixed price instead of using the reverse book-building mechanism.
- The benefits of the new process can be assessed only after SEBI announces the methodology to arrive at the fixed price.
- While fixed price methodology can help in resolving some of the present issues, it would depend on what the formula will be to arrive at this fixed price.

First Loss Default Guarantee

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has allowed **default loss guarantee (DLG)**, a safety-net arrangement among banks, non-banking finance companies, and **lending service providers (LSPs)**, popularly known as fintech players) in the digital lending space.

Lending Service Providers

- Lending service providers are new-age players who use technology platforms in the lending space.
- They are agents of a bank or NBFC who carry out one or more of a lender's functions (in part or full) in customer acquisition, underwriting support, pricing support, disbursement, servicing, monitoring, recovery of specific loan or loan portfolio on behalf of regulated entities(REs) etc.

FLDG Arrangement

- DLG is also known as First Loss Default Guarantee (FLDG). FLDG is an arrangement in which a third party such as a financial technology (fintech) player (LSP) compensates lenders if the borrower defaults.
- The LSP provides certain credit enhancement features such as first loss guarantee **up to a pre-decided percentage of loans generated by Banks/NBFIs**
- From the perspective of the fintechs, offering FLDG acts as a demonstration of its underwriting skills. From the perspective of the lender, it ensures the platform's stake in the business.
- For all practical purposes, credit risk is borne by the LSP without having to maintain any regulatory capital.
- Underwriting is the process through which an individual or institution takes on financial risk for a fee.

RBI's Earlier Concerns

- RBI had expressed its concerns on the FLDG arrangement because it felt that the model could pose a systemic risk.
- An RBI report in 2021 observed that in some cases, fintechs were undertaking balance-sheet lending in partnership with a bank/ NBFC or on a standalone basis, while not satisfying the principal business criteria to remain outside regulation.

- **This was happening outside the RBI regulations.** There were higher operational risks arising due to the *increasing reliance of lenders on third-party service providers.*
- The RBI issued guidelines on digital lending in Sept' 2022, but it did not provide clarity on FLDG structure.
- In the absence of clear directions, regulated entities like banks had stopped entering into such arrangements with fintech players, posing a threat to their business.
- Thus, the fintech industry was demanding that the RBI should allow FLDG arrangements.

RBI's FDLG Guidelines

- The LSP-providing DLG must be incorporated as a company under the Companies Act, 2013.
- The RBI has allowed banks to accept DLG in digital lending only **if the guarantee is in the form of a cash deposit, or fixed deposits in a bank.**
- Banks and NBFCs should ensure that the total amount of DLG cover on any outstanding portfolio *does not exceed 5% of the amount of that loan portfolio.*

Significance

- A well-defined structure will facilitate all players to participate in an effective and transparent manner and make the best use of the DLG facility.
- It will facilitate entry of small and medium fintechs into the digital lending space in partnerships with banks or NBFCs.

Credit Guarantee Scheme for Livestock Sector

- Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying (DAHD) under the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has launched the **first ever Credit Guarantee Scheme for Livestock Sector.**
- The scheme under the **Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)** aims to facilitate **collateral-free credit for MSMEs in the livestock sector.**

Objectives of Scheme

- The scheme facilitates access to finance for the *un-served and under-served* livestock sector.
- Thus, making the availability of financial assistance from lenders to mainly first-generation entrepreneurs and underprivileged section of society, **who lack collateral security** for supporting their ventures.
- The main objective is to encourage lenders to focus on the viability of projects and provide credit facilities based on the primary security of the assets being financed.

Details

- The DAHD has set up a credit guarantee fund trust of Rs 750 crore, which will cover up to 25 per cent of credit facilities extended to eligible MSMEs by lending institutions.
- The trust, formed in partnership with NAB Sanrakshan Trustee Company Private Ltd, a subsidiary of NABARD, ensures credit guarantee for MSMEs under the AHIDF scheme.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)

- AHIDF scheme has been approved under the Prime Minister's AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package of Rs.15000 crores to incentivise investments in:
 - a. Dairy processing and product diversification infrastructure
 - b. Meat processing and product diversification infrastructure
 - c. Animal feed plant
 - d. Breed Improvement Technology and Breed Multiplication Farms
 - e. Setting up of Veterinary Vaccine and Drugs Production Facilities
 - f. Animal Waste to Wealth Management (Agri waste management)
- Individual entrepreneurs, private companies, farmers producers organizations (FPOs) and Section 8 companies are encouraged to invest in the livestock sector through this fund.



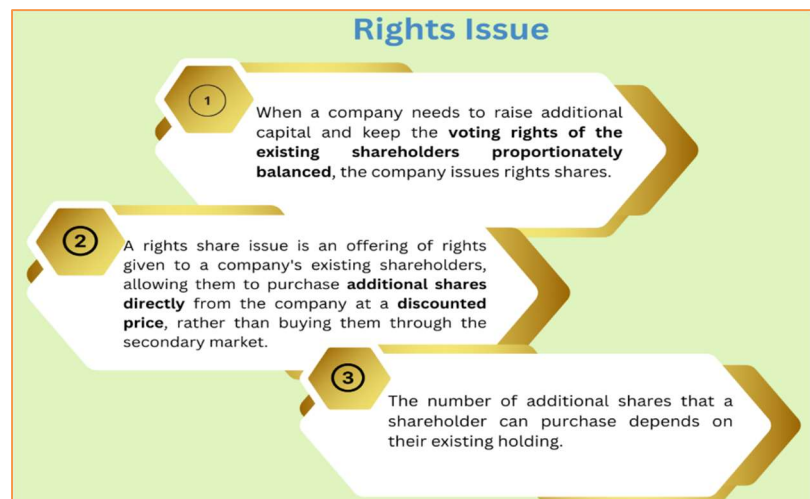
- Interest subvention of three per cent loan of up to 90 per cent of the total project cost from any Scheduled Bank, National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).
- The credit guarantee portal has been developed as a "rule based B2B portal." The portal is a user-friendly platform that allows eligible lending institutions to enroll under the scheme, issue/renew credit guarantee covers, and handle claims.

Significance

- This initiative enhances the number of MSME units benefiting from the AHIDF scheme and strengthens the ecosystem for collateral-free credit from banks.
- With this scheme, the participation of *MSMEs in the Livestock sector* is expected to increase, leading to improved credit flow and bolstering the overall rural economy.
- It will promote investments in various areas of the livestock sector, such as *dairy and meat processing, animal feed plants, breed improvement technology, waste management, and veterinary vaccine and drug manufacturing facilities.*

Rights Issue of Shares

- Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's top oil firm, plans to raise capital through rights issue of equity shares.
- The step is a part of the government's plan to infuse capital into three state-owned fuel retailers to fund their **net zero carbon emission projects**.
- The government, which is the majority owner of the company, is likely to subscribe to the rights issue and infuse equity in the company.



Features of Right Issue of Shares

- Corporations issue rights when they need cash for various purposes. This process allows the company to raise funds without incurring underwriting fees.
- A rights issue gives existing shareholders preferential treatment by giving them the right, rather than the obligation, to purchase shares at a lower price on or before a certain date.
- Existing shareholders also have the right to trade with other interested market participants until new shares are available for purchase. Rights shares are traded in the same manner as ordinary equity shares.
- Existing shareholders may choose to forego the rights shares. However, if they do not purchase additional shares, their existing holdings will get diluted once the additional shares are issued.

Reasons for a Right Issue of Shares

- When a company plans to expand its business, it may require additional capital for various reasons such as a need to pay off debt, purchase equipment, or acquire another company.
- Rather than opting for debt, they may prefer equity to avoid interest payments.
- When raising equity, rights issues are a quick and easy way for capital expansion.
- Similarly, projects in which debt financing is unavailable, inappropriate, or expensive will typically result in companies raising capital through the issuance of rights.
- Companies looking to improve the debt-to-equity ratio can similarly raise capital.

- Additionally, distressed companies may issue rights shares to pay off debt and improve their financial health.

Greedflation

- Accusations have been made in the United States for **corporate greed** being the major reason for the historically high price inflation in the U.S. since the pandemic.
- Called Greedflation, it refers to price inflation caused by corporate greed for high profits.
- The proponents of the idea of greedflation argue that corporate profit margins have risen significantly since the pandemic even though the larger economy has struggled and that this has contributed to high inflation.
- They believe that the U.S. corporations have allegedly increased the prices of their goods by more than what was necessary to compensate for higher input costs caused by supply-chain bottlenecks.

Counterview To Greedflation

- Economists who disagree with the idea of greedflation argue that businesses, whether they are large corporations or small companies, cannot arbitrarily set prices as many people seem to wrongly believe.
- Businesses set prices for their products based on what consumers would be willing to pay for these products.
- In other words, businesses cannot force consumers to pay a certain price for their goods; they can only try to gauge the maximum price that consumers would be willing to pay and set prices accordingly in order to maximise their profits.
- If a business sets the price of its product too high, this would cause its goods to go unsold and the business would have no choice but to lower the price of its product to clear its unsold stock.
- In short, while businesses have the freedom to raise or lower the prices of their products, it is ultimately consumers who determine the price of any product in the market.

The Primacy Of Consumers

- Moreover, inflation refers to a **general rise in the price level** (meaning a widespread rise in the prices of goods and services across the broader economy) rather than in the prices of individual goods and services.
- The only way corporations can influence the overall price level is by reducing the supply of goods and services.
- There is, however, no evidence to suggest that there has been a deliberate reduction in the output of U.S. corporations recently.
- Even if corporations cut down their output, the drop in output is likely to be temporary as other suppliers would rush to meet the demand.
- It is thus highly unlikely that U.S. corporations caused prices to rise across the board in recent years by somehow adversely influencing the aggregate supply of goods.
- The current spell of high inflation in the U.S., most economists believe, is better explained by the **U.S. Federal Reserve's expansionary monetary policy** during the pandemic which put more money in the hands of U.S. consumers.
- *The U.S. money supply rose by a significant 40% during the pandemic and this combined with supply-chain bottlenecks caused by stringent lockdowns led to high inflation.*

Urea Gold

- The Prime Minister recently launched "Urea Gold"--a new variety of urea that is coated with sulphur during an event in Rajasthan.
- It is a new variety of urea which is expected to address sulphur deficiencies in the soil.

- This innovative fertiliser is **more economical and efficient** than neem-coated urea.
- Urea coated with sulphur helps in slow release of nitrogen, therefore increasing its availability and uptake.
- Due to the sulphur coating, the plants also get nourishment of sulphur. This ensures less use of urea, while at the same time, more nourishment that would increase the produce.
- Urea Gold *has added humic acid* to enhance longevity of the fertiliser. It is said that 15 kg of Urea Gold is comparable to 20 kg of conventional urea.
- Thus, it ensures improved nitrogen use efficiency, reduced consumption, and enhanced crop quality.

Growth Recession

- Indian stock markets are soaring. A big reason for that is the optimism in the United States and its stock markets.
- Two of the key benchmark indices in the US — namely the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq 100 — have registered quite remarkable gains over just the past six months.
- What makes these gains in US stock markets stand out is the fact that at the start of 2023 it was clearly expected that the US, which is the world’s largest economy, as well as the other developed economies would experience recession.
- A recession implies that the total **economic activity in an economy contracts for two consecutive quarters**.
- In other words, if an economy’s GDP in the first three months of the year (first quarter) is lower than what it was in the first quarter of last year and the same thing happens in the second quarter, then the economy is said to have gone into a recession.
- A big reason for such fears was the action of central banks in the US and Europe. Faced with historic inflation, central bankers **were rapidly raising interest rates** to bring down economic activity and reduce inflation.
- Typically, during such phases, stock markets tend to suffer for two reasons:
 - If interest rates are moving up, an investor feels less inclined to invest money in the riskier stock markets when they can earn more by just keeping it in the bank.
 - A slowing economy essentially means more unemployment, lower consumption levels and, consequently, lower profitability of companies.
- That, in turn, reduces the incentive to lend to these companies by investing in the stock markets. But, US stock markets have experienced growth, suggesting investors are quite optimistic about the future.

Growth Recession

- Several economists suggest that this is happening because US is experiencing *Growth Recession*.
- In other words, they expect the US may avoid a full-blown recession. This is another way of saying that the US economy may have a “soft-landing” as against a crash of recession.
- Growth recession is something above zero but below potential. For instance, for the US the potential GDP growth rate is 1.8%. In 2022, the US grew by 1% and in 2023, it is expected to grow even lower.
- But crucially, instead of contracting below the 2021 level, the US GDP continued to grow in 2022. The same is likely to happen in 2023.

Potential Growth Rate Of An Economy

- The potential GDP growth rate is that rate of growth at which an economy can grow without spiking inflation.
- US has the potential to grow (its GDP) by 1.8% each year. It is a combination of (increased) productivity (accounting for 1.5%) and changes in labour force (accounting for the remaining 0.3%).

Scenario In India

- At first glance, India doesn't seem to be undergoing whatever US is going through. However, there are some key facts about the Indian economy that are noteworthy.
- India's potential GDP growth rate has been sliding since the Global Financial Crisis of 2009. It used to be 8% during the high growth phase of 2004-2009.
- Since then it has been coming down and had fallen to just 6% by 2019, just before the pandemic hit the economy.
- India's GDP growth decelerated sharply between 2016-17 and 2019-20. In fact, it grew at less than 4% in 2019-20 –well below its potential GDP growth rate of 6% at that time.
- This was also the phase when unemployment levels, breached a 45-year record. Consumption levels dropped as well for the first time in India's history.
- Coming out of the pandemic, India's economy has grown much faster and giving India the tag of the world's fastest growing major economy. However, the following few trends also exist alongside:
 - ✓ A big reason why India seems to have grown faster in the last two financial years has been the effect of a low base, due to the Covid-induced contraction in 2020.
 - ✓ Growth rates have started decelerating again. From 9.2% in FY22 to 7.2% in FY23 to likely around 6% in the current financial year.
 - ✓ Further, no matter what metric one looks at — unemployment rate, employment rate or labour force participation rate — the stress in the labour market is clearly visible.
 - ✓ Consumption levels of average Indians have largely remained low, which also reflects in the fact that companies have held back from aggressively increasing fresh investments.

Youth Co: Lab

- Twelve top start-ups from across 9 Indian states working in agriculture, ed-tech, women's livelihood, circular economy, and biodiversity were announced as winners at the 5th Edition of *Youth Co:Lab National Innovation Dialogue India*.
- The winners across each thematic area received a seed grant of US\$ 5,000; while the runners-up received US\$ 3,000. This funding will help the winners scale their ideas into tangible products or services.
- Youth Co: Lab was co-created in **2017** by **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Citi Foundation**.
- It is a multi-dimensional and multi-level response to tackle the challenges young people face by positioning youth for finding solutions to global challenges tackling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- It aims to establish a common agenda for Asia-Pacific countries to invest in and empower youth to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs through leadership, social innovation, and entrepreneurship.
- Till now, it has been implemented in 28 countries and territories in Asia Pacific.
- The national dialogues, regional summits, social innovation challenges, and workshops have reached over 240,000 participants.
- The national youth social innovation and entrepreneurial skills development activities have served over 14,000 young people and launched or improved 1,530 youth-led social innovation teams.

Youth Co:Lab in India

- Youth Co:Lab was **launched in India in 2019** in partnership with Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog.
- With 254 million young people aged between 15 and 24 years, India has a unique opportunity to lead innovation and social entrepreneurship and make the voices of young people count.

- Social startups are not just businesses; they are catalysts for social change. They address pressing social and environmental challenges, stimulate economic growth, inspire other businesses, leverage technology, and promote collaboration.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION (AIM)

- AIM is the Union Government's attempt to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Its objective is to serve as a platform for the promotion of world-class innovation hubs, grand challenges, start-up businesses, and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology-driven areas.

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

- It is a United Nations organization with the mandate to help countries eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth and human development.
- Formed in 1965, it is headquartered in New York City and is the largest UN development aid agency.



Report Fish Disease App


- The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has launched the **Report Fish Disease** app.
- It has been developed by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources (NBFGR), Lucknow and launched under the National Surveillance Programme for Aquatic Animal Diseases (NSPAAD).
- The app will be a central platform for connecting and will integrate fish farmers, field-level officers and fish health experts seamlessly.

Benefits

- With the launch of the app, NSPAAD will be able to meet the national and international obligations through transparent reporting.
- It will help the farmers in reporting the incidence of diseases in finfish, shrimps, and molluscs on their farms.

NATIONAL SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME FOR AQUATIC ANIMAL DISEASES (NSPAAD)

- India is the **third-largest fish-producing country** with a fish production of **14.73 million metric tonnes**. Further, it is one of the largest exporters of farmed shrimp at around 7 lakhtonnes.
- However, **fish diseases cost the country approximately 7,200 crores per year**. Therefore, early detection and managing the spread of diseases are considered crucial for controlling the diseases.
- For this, the government has implemented the NSPAAD **since 2013**, with a focus on **strengthening the farmer-based disease surveillance system**.
- The objective is to ensure that **disease cases are reported immediately, investigated, and farmers receive scientific assistance**.
- The results of the first phase proved the reduction in revenue losses due to diseases, **increased farmers' income and exports**.
- To continue the efforts, **NSPAAD: Phase-II** was launched in 2023 under the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**. Under it, Rs. 33.78 crore has been allocated for a period of three years.
- Phase II will be implemented across India, and all the state fisheries departments, along with the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) are expected to play an important role in this nationally important surveillance programme.



- The farmers using this app will be able to connect directly to district fisheries officers and scientists.

- Farmers and stakeholders can make self-reporting of diseases through this app for which scientific technical assistance will be provided through the same app by scientists/ experts to the farmers.
- Early warning system and scientific advice will help the farmers to reduce their losses due to diseases and will further strengthen the disease reporting by fish farmers in the country.

Tomato Grand Challenge Hackathon

- The Centre has announced the Tomato Grand Challenge (TGC) hackathon aimed at addressing the availability and affordability of tomatoes for consumers and ensuring fair value for tomato farmers.
- Through the challenge, the Government also aims to tackle price fluctuations that come from seasonal variations, supply chain disruptions, adverse weather conditions and local production surpluses.
- The hackathon has been formulated by the Department of Consumer Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (Innovation Cell).
- The hackathon invites entry of participants under two tracks:
 - ✓ Students, research scholars and faculty members
 - ✓ Industry individuals, Indian start-ups, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), Limited Liability Partnership (LLPs), and professionals.
- The challenge has invited innovative ideas across the tomato value chain - from cropping and market insights for the farmers, value-addition through interventions that can increase shelf-life, improve transportation, innovative packaging and storage.
- Winning ideas will be evaluated, developed into prototypes, and implemented on a large scale.

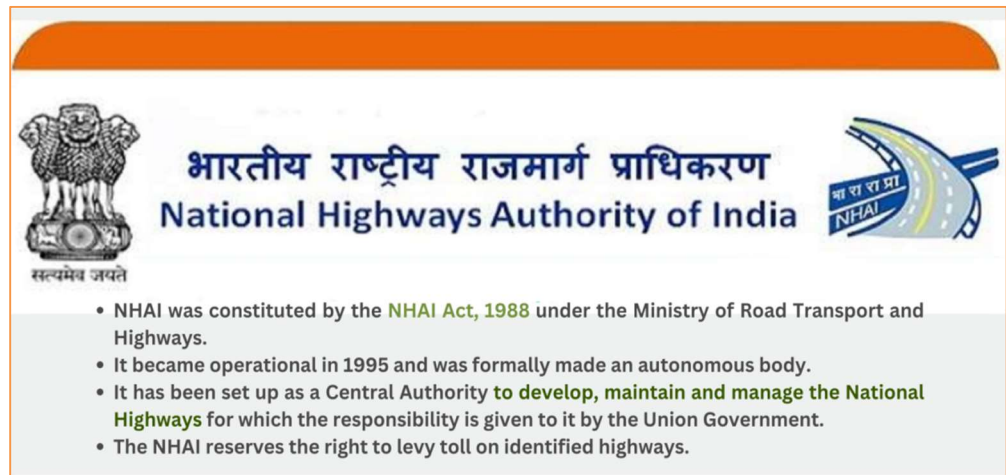
Tomato Production In India

- Tomato is produced almost in all the states in India, though in varying quantities.
- Maximum production is in **southern and western regions** of India, contributing **56%-58% of all India production**. Southern and Western regions being surplus states, feed to other markets depending on production seasons.
- The production seasons are also different across regions. The peak harvesting season occurred in December to February.
- The periods during July-August and October-November are the lean production months of tomato. July coinciding with monsoon season, adds to further challenges related to distribution and increased transit losses adding to price rise.
- The cycle of planting and harvesting seasons and variation across regions are primarily responsible for price seasonality in tomato.
- Apart from the normal price seasonality, temporary supply chain disruptions and crop damage due to adverse weather conditions etc. often led to sudden spikes in prices. Conversely, excess production at local levels has also led to dip in prices causing huge loss to the farmers.

Bahubali Cattle Fence

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has decided to implement the Bahubali Cattle Fence along highways in India to prevent the cattle from crossing the road and causing dangerous accidents that result in the loss of human life.
- The cattle fence is constructed using bamboo and offers a fully effective and environmentally friendly solution.

- The bamboo is treated with creosote oil and coated with high-density polyethylene (HDPE), a nature-friendly solution tested to be a stronger alternative to steel, hence termed Bahubali.
- The fence has a fire rating of Class 1, ensuring safety, and aligns with the principles of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which aims to make all highways sustainable and minimize harm to wildlife and cattle.
- The fence will be 1.20 meters high and will be installed on section 23 of NH-30 as a comprehensive solution.



Farmers Distress Index

- The Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA), an institution under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is developing an early warning system called **farmers distress index**.
- The main aim behind creating the index is to minimise the agrarian distress in the form of crop loss failure and income shock.
- Farmers' exposure to shocks have increased in the recent years, with an increase in extreme climate events as well as market and price fluctuations, many times driving them to death by suicides.
- The index will try to anticipate this distress and prevent its spread from a few farmers to the village or block level by pre-warning different stakeholders, including central, state, local and also non-government agencies, so that they can take preventive measures.

Methodology

- The first step will be to search through local newspapers, other news platforms and social media platforms for any report on incidence of farmers distress like localised cases of issues with debt repayment, death by suicide, pest attacks, drought, floods, migration.
- There are two possibilities in these cases. One these could be isolated cases, the second that these cases could have the potential to spread wider.
- Following this, contacts of marginal and small farmers or tenant farmers from the area will be collected to conduct telephonic interviews, which will have **21 standardised questions** to gauge early signs of distress.
- The answers will be mapped against **seven indicators**:
 - Exposure to droughts, floods, crop failure due to pest attacks, livestock deaths;
 - Debt
 - Adaptive capacity of farmer and local government through different schemes
 - Land holding and irrigation facilities
 - Sensitivity, mitigation strategies like growing of contingency crops if main crops fail.
 - Triggers for immediate distress like health-related expenditure
 - Socio-psychological factors and impacts.
- Based on these 21 questions, the degree of distress will be identified.

- The index will have values from 0-1. A value between 0-0.5 will indicate 'low distress', 0.5-0.7 will indicate 'moderate' distress and above 0.7 will indicate 'severe' distress.
- If the index is severe, it will identify which component, among the seven, is more severe and contributes maximum to farmers' distress.

Interventions

- The index will be made available to different state governments, agriculture departments, rural development departments, agriculture universities, which have databases of local farmers as well as non-profits and civil society organisations.
- These different agencies can then carry out interventions to prevent income shocks to farmers depending on the severity of distress.
- *The current solutions that are being thought upon are direct money transfer, mid-term release of claims under PradhanMantriFasalBimaYojana, providing work under MGNREGA, enhanced rationing under Public Distribution System(PDS).*
- For example, insurance claims under PMFBY are only given when a full survey is completed but, in this case, if the index suggests severe distress in the coming few weeks, then the government can provide interim relief under the scheme.

New Initiatives Under SAMARTH

- The panel of implementing partners under **Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector (SAMARTH)** has been broadened, with the empanelment of 43 new implementing partners.
- With this, the Ministry of Textiles has partnered with 157 Textile Industries / Industry Associations, 16 Central / State Government Agencies and 3 Sectoral Organizations of the Ministry for undertaking training programmes under SAMARTH.
- Further, around 75,000 beneficiaries have been allocated to the training partners to enable imparting of skill to the workforce.
- The funding pattern has also been revised with an *increment of 5% in cost norms*, which will give much needed additional financial support to industries imparting skill under this Scheme.

SAMARTH

- Samarth is a **demand driven and placement-oriented umbrella skilling programme** of Ministry of Textiles.
- The scheme was formulated under the broad skilling policy framework adopted by **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship**. Its implementation period is **up to March 2024**.
- The scheme is **implemented through** Implementing Partners (IPs) comprising of Textile Industry/ Industry Associations, State government agencies and Sectoral Organizations of Ministry of Textiles like Development Commissioner (DC) Handloom, DC (Handicrafts) and Central Silk Board.
- Samarth **aims to** incentivize and supplement the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the organized textile and related sectors, covering the entire value chain of textiles, excluding spinning and weaving.
- The training programme and course curriculum have been rationalized keeping in view the technological and market demand of the domestic and international economies.
- In addition to the entry level skilling, a special provision for upskilling/re-skilling programme has also been operationalized towards improving the productivity of the existing workers.
- It also caters to the upskilling/ re-skilling requirement of traditional textile sector such as handloom, handicraft, silk and jute.
- Furthermore, a total of 184 courses aligned with **National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF)** have been adopted under the scheme.

- **Employment linkage** is mandated in the courses under organized textile sector with **mandatory placement 70% in entry level & 90% for Upskilling programmes.**

Impact

- The scheme has been penetrated across 28 States and 6 Union territories of the country and caters to all sections of the society including SC, ST and other marginalized categories.
- Out of the skilling target of 4.72 lakh beneficiaries allocated so far, **1.88 lakh beneficiaries have been provided training.**
- More than **85% of the beneficiaries trained** so far are **women.** More than **70% of the beneficiaries trained** in organized sector courses have been **provided placement.**

International Tracked Packet Service

- India Post entered into an agreement with Canada Post to introduce International Tracked Packet Service (ITPS) between the two countries to facilitate e-commerce exports. ITPS is a competitive service for transmission and delivery of packets.
- It has been designed to meet the cross-border shipping requirements of e-commerce exporter including MSMEs, small businesses, merchants, etc. to promote exports of their products using local post offices.
- India Post already provides this service with 38 partner countries and Canada will be the 39th. The service was extended from 16 countries to 38 countries by adding 22 new partners from June 01, 2023.
- The ITPS rates are kept very economical in comparison to International EMS (Speed Post) and other market products.
- Thus, it will provide an affordable shipping solution up to 2 kg to exporters along with the pick-up and volume-based discount to contractual customers.

BHARAT Campaign

- The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has launched a new campaign for banks under **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)** titled **BHARAT (Banks Heralding Accelerated Rural & Agriculture Transformation).**
- The one month-long Campaign (from 15th July 2023 to 15th August 2023) has been launched with a target of Rs 7200 crore.

Objectives

The financing facility will fulfil numerous objectives for different stakeholders in the agriculture eco-system viz:

Farmers

- Improved marketing infrastructure to allow farmers to sell directly to a larger base of consumers and hence, increase value realization for the farmers. This will improve their overall income.
- With investments in

AGRICULTURE INFRA FUND

- Agriculture Infra Fund is **pan-India Central Sector Scheme** launched in 2020.
- It provides a medium - long-term debt financing facility for the creation of post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets through interest subvention and financial support.
- Under the scheme, **Rs 1 lakh crore is to be disbursed by financial year 2025-26** and the interest subvention and credit guarantee assistance will be given till the year 2032-33.
- Funds will be provided by banks and financial institutions as loans to Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), Marketing Cooperative Societies, Farmer Producers Organizations (FPOs), SHGs, and farmers.
- Loans are also extended to the Joint Liability Groups (JLG), Multipurpose Cooperative Societies, agri-entrepreneurs, startups, Aggregation Infrastructure Providers and PPP projects sponsored by the government agency or local body.
- Loans under the scheme will have interest subvention of **3% per annum up to a limit of Rs. 2 crore.** This subvention will be available for a maximum period of seven years.
- The scheme has resulted in creation of more than 31, 850 agri infra projects in the country with Rs 24,750 crore as loan amount under AIF with an outlay of Rs 42,000 crore.

BENEFITS OF AIF

- Credit Guarantee on Loan up to Rs. 2.00 Crore
- Easy Finance with lower rate of interest within 60 Days
- Interest Subvention of 3% for 7 Years
- Capital Subsidy as eligible
- Prior Project Approval From Department of Agriculture

logistics infrastructure, farmers will be able to sell in the market with reduced post-harvest losses and a smaller number of intermediaries. This will further make farmers independent through improved access to market.

- With modern packaging and cold storage system access, farmers will be able to further decide when to sell in the market and improve realization.
- Community farming assets for improved productivity and optimization of inputs will result in substantial savings to farmers

Government

- Government will be able to direct priority sector lending in the currently unviable projects by supporting through interest subvention, incentive through convergence and credit guarantee.
- This will initiate the cycle of innovation and private sector investment in agriculture.
- Due to improvements in post-harvest infrastructure, government will further be able to reduce national food wastage percentage thereby enable agriculture sector to become competitive with current global levels.
- Central/State Government Agencies or local bodies will be able to structure viable projects on their own or PPP projects for attracting investment in agriculture infrastructure.

Agri-entrepreneurs and Startups

- With a dedicated source of funding, entrepreneurs will push for innovation in agriculture sector by leveraging new age technologies including IoT, AI, etc.
- It will also connect the players in ecosystem and hence improve avenues for collaboration between entrepreneurs and farmers.

World Debt Report

The UN Global Crisis Response Group has released a report titled **A World of Debt**.

Highlights Of The Report

- Last year global public debt reached a record \$92 trillion, of which developing countries shoulder 30% – a disproportionate amount. This is a five-fold rise in public debt since 2000.
- Borrowing costs are four times higher for African countries than for the United States and eight times higher than for the wealthiest European economies.
- A total of 52 countries – almost 40 per cent of the developing world – are in serious debt trouble.
- Half of all developing nations spend a minimum of 7.4% of their export revenues on servicing external public debt.
- Around 3.3 billion people suffer from their governments' need to prioritize debt interest payments over essential investments in the Sustainable Development Goals or the energy transition.
- At least 19 developing nations allocate more money to interest payments than education, and 45 allocate more to interest than health expenditure.
- Poorer nations rely increasingly on private creditors. The increasing reliance on private creditors, who offer more expensive debt and shorter maturities than official sources, has also complicated debt restructuring for developing countries.
- Currently, private creditors hold 62% of external public debt, up from 47% a decade ago. There is, however, no mechanism to address how to restructure debt across different creditor classes.

Urgent Reforms

- The report calls for a comprehensive reform of the International Financial Architecture.

- The high cost of debt and increasing risk of debt distress should be addressed on an urgent basis.
- Developing countries, especially those with high debt burdens, require increased liquidity during times of crisis. Otherwise, a liquidity crisis risks turning into a debt crisis.
- This can be achieved by expanding contingency finance. Measures such as enhancing the use of Special Drawing Rights, temporarily suspending IMF surcharges, and broadening access to emergency financing through increased quotas must be pursued.
- The report also calls for a massive scale-up of affordable long-term financing, by transforming the way that Multilateral Development Banks function, re-engineering them to support sustainable development and utilizing private resources.
- Additionally, there is an urgent need for more concessional finance to fulfill aid and climate finance commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Export Preparedness Index 2022

- NITI Aayog has released the *third edition* of the report titled ‘Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2022’ for States/UTs of India.
- Prepared by **NITI Aayog** in association with the **Institute for Competitiveness**, EPI 2022 aims to assess the readiness of the states, in terms of their export potential and their performance.
- Its primary goal is to generate competition among all Indian states (‘Coastal’, ‘Landlocked’, ‘Himalayan’, and ‘UTs/City-States’)
- It can be used by states and UTs to benchmark their performance against their peers and analyse potential challenges to promote export-led growth at the sub-national level.
- It intends to bring about favourable export-promotion policies, ease regulatory framework, create the necessary infrastructure for exports, and assist in identifying strategic recommendations for improving export competitiveness.

Methodology

- EPI 2022 looks into district-level export trends, state profiles, category-wise, pillar and sub-pillar wise rankings of all states. In addition, each state has a detailed score-card in the report which can help them understand their performance
- The index evaluates the performance of the states across **four pillars**:



- **Policy Pillar** evaluates states and UTs’ performance based on its adoption of export-related policy ecosystem at a state and district level as well as the institutional framework surrounding the ecosystem.
- **Business Ecosystem** assesses the prevailing business environment in a state/UT, along with the extent of business-supportive infrastructure, and a state/UTs’ transport connectivity.
- **Export Ecosystem** focuses on the export-related infrastructure in a state along with the trade support provided to the exporters, and the prevalence of Research and Development in the state to foster innovation.
- **Export Performance** is an *output-based* indicator which gauges the growth of a state’s export over the previous year and analyses its export concentration and footprint on the global markets.
- These pillars are further based on **ten sub-pillars**:

- Export Promotion Policy; Institutional Framework; Business Environment; Infrastructure; Transport Connectivity; Export Infrastructure; Trade Support; R&D Infrastructure; Export Diversification; and Growth Orientation.
- The index uses **56 indicators** which holistically capture the export preparedness of States and UTs in terms of exports at both the state and district-level.

Rankings

- Most 'Coastal States' have performed well, with the states of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat being the top-performers in the Index across the country, in all categories of states.
- The report states that the higher average of coastal states represents their better preparedness and higher contribution to national export.
- Tamil Nadu is followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, in the ranking of **Coastal States**.
- Tamil Nadu's top rank reinforces the State's top rank in facilitating ease of doing business. Tamil Nadu has long been an export leader in sectors such as automotive, leather and textiles, and it recently became the No. 1 exporter of electronic goods.
- Among **hilly/Himalayan states**, Uttarakhand has been ranked at the top position. It is followed by Himachal Pradesh, Manipur.
- Haryana topped the chart among the **landlocked regions**. It was followed by Telangana, Uttar Pradesh.
- In the category of **union territories/small states**, Goa was ranked first followed by Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar and Ladakh.

Findings

- The efforts of state governments in improving the policy ecosystem have led many states to create export promotion policies and district-level export action plans.
- 73% of districts have an export action plan, and over 99% are covered under the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme.
- 100 districts are responsible for nearly 87% of the country's export.
- Highlighting the lack of adequate transport connectivity, the report mentions that the absence of air connectivity hampers the movement of goods across regions especially in the landlocked states.

Recommendations

- There is a scope for improvement in business and export ecosystem in many states which is necessary to improve their export performance.
- The report encourages state governments to create solutions to their context-specific challenges to exports.
- The states can also exploit their innate diversity by promoting products unique to them and helping them reach the global market.
- Consistent investment in research and development can facilitate innovation, which in turn can facilitate higher efficiency in exports, and diversification of India's export basket.
- Further it is important to identify new markets and export diversified products according to state's competitive advantage.
- Moreover, for a comprehensive evaluation of the export preparedness of states, important indicators such as source of origin of export data, and service exports need to be assessed as they are currently not being captured at the sub-national level.

New Wheat Variety

- The Punjab Agricultural University has bred a new wheat variety with high amylose starch content, known to reduce risks of type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.
- Eating chapatis made from this wheat — called PBW RS1, with RS being short for **resistant starch** — won't cause an immediate and rapid rise in glucose levels.
- The *high amylose and resistant starch*, instead, ensure that glucose is released more slowly into the bloodstream.
- Being slower to digest also increases a feeling of satiety; a person consuming 4 chapatis from normal wheat would now feel full after having just two.
- It has total starch content, almost the same as the 66-70 per cent in other wheat varieties. But it has 30.3 per cent resistant starch content as against only 7.5-10 per cent for other varieties.
- Chapatis and biscuits made from its whole grain flour also have **lower glycemic index** (a value used to measure how specific foods increase blood sugar levels), which is linked to the decreased digestibility of the starch.
- So, it can help bring down the prevalence of diet-related diseases, including obesity and diabetes (especially type 2).
- But PBW RS1 has a significant drawback. The average grain yield from the variety at PAU's field trials has been recorded at 43.18 quintals per hectare. This is below Punjab's average yield of 48 quintals, which has touched 52 quintals in some years with many farmers harvesting 60 quintals or more.

ONDC Academy

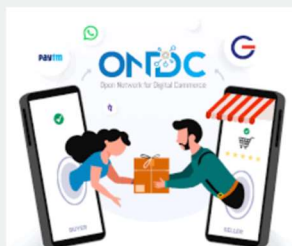
- The **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)**, the government-backed e-commerce protocol, has launched the ONDC Academy.
- The academy was launched by ONDC in collaboration with **NSE Academy Ltd**, a subsidiary of the National Stock Exchange (NSE).
- In e-commerce, the main stakeholders include sellers, buyer apps, and logistics providers.
- The academy is a repository of educational and informative textual and video content. It will provide a curated learning experience providing guidance and best practices for a successful e-commerce journey with fewer setbacks.
- As the academy grows, the learning modules will cater to various roles within ONDC, including programmes for sellers as well as buyer network participant, and will be available in multiple Indian languages.
- The academy will empower sellers and network

ONDC

- Launched in December 2021, ONDC is an initiative of the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It has been incorporated as a private sector-led non-profit company, to create a facilitative model to help small retailers take advantage of digital commerce.
- It is **not an application, platform, intermediary, or software but a set of specifications** designed to facilitate open, unbundled, and interoperable open networks.
- It aims at promoting open networks developed on open-sourced methodology, using open specifications and open network protocols independent of any specific platform.

Need:

- The e-commerce market is currently operated and **dominated by a few platforms like Amazon and Flipkart**.
- These large platforms have been **accused of discriminating among sellers on their platforms and promoting certain seller entities** in which they hold indirect stakes.
- The government wants to change the fundamental structure of the e-commerce market from the current **platform-centric model to an open-network model**.
- Through this platform, consumers can potentially discover any seller, product or service by using any ONDC-compatible application or platform, thus increasing freedom of choice for consumers.



participants to make informed decisions, provide best practices to manage the online business efficiently - including content from industry experts - and provide a forum to seek views from experts.

- It would also enable certification issued by NSE Academy to individuals completing an assessment developed by the institute, which provides a badge to validate their correct understanding of managing operations across the network.

Functioning of ONDC

- The ONDC project is modelled around the successful Unified Payments Interface (UPI) project. The UPI project allows people to send or receive money irrespective of the payments platforms on which they are registered.
- Similarly, the government wants to ensure that buyers and sellers of goods in the e-commerce market can transact irrespective of the platforms on which they are registered.
- The platform basically works on **two ends** — the seller side and the buyer side. The ONDC platform lies in the middle of the interfaces hosting the buyers and the sellers.
- Till now, the buyer side interface is being hosted by Paytm, whereas the seller side interface is being hosted by other players like GoFrugal, etc.
- When a buyer searches for an item on the Paytm app, for where ONDC has gone live, the app will connect to the ONDC platform, which will connect it to seller side interfaces that will list all the sellers that have listed that particular item.
- On the ONDC, there will be several other backend partners such as logistics service providers, enterprise resource planners, e-commerce store hosting service providers, etc.

Benefits

- ONDC is expected to digitise the entire value chain, standardise operations, promote inclusion of suppliers, derive efficiency in logistics, and enhance value for consumers.
- It will create a level playing field for smaller offline traders who have been hurt by the unfair trade practices of e-commerce giants.
- It will provide access to a large repository of buyer and seller data for those joining the open-source platform. Such data has so far been accumulated by large e-commerce marketplaces without providing access to this data for their individual sellers.
- It will also help merchants to save their data to build credit history and reach consumers.
- The platform will also be compliant with the Information Technology Act, 2000 and designed for compliance with the emerging Personal Data Protection Bill.

Heli Summit 2023 and UDAN 5.2

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation organised the **Heli Summit 2023** (5th Helicopter and Small Aircraft Summit). At the event, **UDAN 5.2** and **Heli-Sewa App** were also launched.
- The Summit was jointly **organized by** the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), in association with the Government of Madhya Pradesh, Pawan Hans Ltd., and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).
- **Theme** of the event was "Reaching the Last Mile: Regional Connectivity through Helicopters & Small Aircraft".

Note: UDAN 5.1 marks the first round under RCS-UDAN specifically designed for helicopter routes.

Objectives of the Summit

- Providing a common platform for all industry stakeholders, and policymakers to discuss the growth story of the Indian Helicopter and Small Aircraft industry.
- Enhancing the scope of the UDAN Scheme in remote and hilly terrains and expanding the country's rural-to-urban connectivity.
- Boosting Helicopter & Small Aircraft connectivity to places with existing and potential tourism hotspots by providing uninterrupted services.

HeliSewa

- The MoCA also launched the Heli-Sewa mobile application at the summit.
- The **HeliSewa Portal** is an initiative of the MoCA under Digital India to create an ecosystem between the helicopter operators and the district authorities, to promote travel, tourism and enhance last mile connectivity.
- The portal facilitates operators to file their landing requests and intimate the district authorities online using digital platform to undertake commitments at short notice for the corporate, charter, VIP flying, HEMS (helicopter emergency medical services) etc.
- It facilitates the helicopter operators to obtain permissions, approvals and clearances, etc. within 48 hours and will thus reduce the hurdles of obtaining permissions in physical format.
- The district authorities have the facility to upload/ update helipad details in their respective districts specifying the available infrastructure at the respective helipads for the convenience of the helicopter operators.
- The mobile application will make it more convenient to use in terms of user experience, loading content, and usability of functions.

Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) 5.2

- UDAN 5.2 was also launched at the summit to enhance the connectivity to remote and regional areas of the country and achieve last-mile connectivity through small aircraft such as 1A (with less than nine seats) and Category 1 (with less than 20 seats).
- Under it, 22 routes have been awarded which underlines the fact that air travel facility is being made available to citizens living in remote areas.

- Under UDAN 5.2, the fare cap has also been reduced and the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) has been increased. **VGF** is a grant to support projects that are economically justified but not financially viable.



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Solicitor General (SG) of India

Recently, the Appointments Committee of the Union Cabinet approved the reappointment of Tushar Mehta as the Solicitor General of India for three years.

About Appointments Committee

- The Union Cabinet works through different committees called **cabinet committees** which are responsible for reducing the workload of the cabinet and ensuring better coordination among different ministries. These committees include:

Appointments Committee of the Cabinet	Cabinet Committee on Accommodation	Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs	Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth
Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs	Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs	Cabinet Committee on Security	Cabinet Committee on Employment & Skill Development

- These are extra-constitutional in nature i.e.; they are not mentioned in the constitution and are established through parliament's rules of business.
- The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet is responsible for finalizing appointments to various top positions under the Government of India and is currently composed of the Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Cooperation.

** All cabinet committees except the Cabinet Committee on Accommodation and Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs are headed by the Prime Minister.

About Solicitor General of India

- The Solicitor General of India assists the Attorney-General of India in fulfilling his duties along with the additional Solicitor General (ASG) and is the second highest law officer in the country.
- The constitution doesn't contain any mention about this post and only defines the role and responsibilities of the Attorney General of India under Article 76.
- Rules regulating the remuneration, duties and other terms and conditions of the Solicitor-General for India along with Attorney General and Additional Solicitor-General are defined under Law Officer (Conditions of Service) Rules, 1987.
- **Terms of Office:** The Solicitor General remains in the office for a period of three years and is eligible for re-appointment for a further term not exceeding three years. His appointment can be terminated by three months' notice in writing by either side at any time during his tenure.

Duties	Restrictions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To advise the Government on legal matters, and to perform duties of a legal character referred to or assigned to him by the Government.• To represent the Government in the Supreme Court or in any High Court in cases (including suits, writ petitions, appeal and other proceedings) where the government is concerned as a party or is otherwise interested;• To represent the Government in any reference made by the President to the Supreme Court under article 143 of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He cannot hold briefs in any court for any party except the Government of India or the Government of a State or any University or any other Government entity.• He cannot advise any party against the Government of India or a Public Sector Undertaking.• He cannot defend an accused person in a criminal prosecution, without the permission

<p>the constitution;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Article 143 deals with the power of the President to consult the Supreme Court and seek its opinion on question of law or fact of public importance that has arisen or is likely to arise regarding matters of public importance. • To discharge other functions conferred by or under the constitution or any other law for the time being in force. 	<p>of the Government of India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He cannot accept appointment to any office in any company or corporation without the permission of the Government of India. • He cannot advise any Ministry or Department of Government of India or any statutory organization or any Public Sector Undertaking without any orders from the Ministry of Law and Justice.
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New Web Portal for Political Parties to File Financial Account Details

The political parties will now be able to file their financial account details online to the Election Commission of India (ECI) through a new web-portal (<https://iems.eci.gov.in/>).

✓ Political parties are required to submit their financial account details to the Election Commission/Chief Electoral Officers of States/Union Territories, as per the Representation of People's Act, 1951 & transparency guidelines issued by the Commission, from time to time for adhering to the principles of democratic functioning and ensuring transparency in electoral processes.

ABOUT THE PORTAL

- It will help in online filing of Contribution Report, Audited Annual Account and Election Expenditure Statements by the Political Parties.
- It has a facility for SMS reminders on the registered mobile number and registered emails of the authorized representatives of the political party so that the dates of compliances are not missed.
- It consists of a comprehensive guiding manual with graphical representations and FAQs.

Objective

- To facilitate political parties in overcoming the difficulties in filing the reports physically.
- To ensure timely filing of financial statements in the prescribed/standardized formats.

What If Any Political Party Does Not Want To Use Online Mode?

In such a case, it will have to convey the reasons for not using the online platform and should furnish its financial details offline in hard copy along with CDs/Pen drive in the prescribed formats. The commission will, in turn, publish all such reports online, along with a letter of justification sent by the party for not using the online option of filing the reports.

Why Is ECI Emphasizing Online Reporting?

- This move is a part of its 3C strategy i.e., Cleanup, Crackdown and Compliance.
- The ECI in 2022 **delisted** around 284 Registered Unrecognized Political Parties (RUPPs) and declared 253 more inactive on the charges of tax evasion and other financial impropriety.
 - ✓ While the ECI has the power to register political parties under the RPA, 1951, it cannot deregister inactive parties and can only delist them and refer the matter to the Central Government for further action.
- Although, the RP Act as well as the Income-tax Act allow for exemption or deduction benefits to both the registered political parties and their donors but such benefits are subjected to certain conditions like timely and correct filing of Contribution Report, filing of Income Tax Return, maintenance of proper books of accounts, getting such accounts audited and complying with the upper limits imposed on cash donations, prohibition on contribution from foreign sources and government companies etc.
- To avoid the problems faced during filing these reports, saving time and for identifying parties evading taxes, EC has provided this online platform to make compliance easier.

About Registered Unrecognized Political Parties (RUPPs)

Registered Unrecognized parties are the ones that have-

- i) been registered newly with the Election Commission of India; or
- ii) not secured enough percentage of votes in the Assembly or General Elections to fulfill the conditions of becoming a state party; or
- iii) never contested elections since their registration.

Process of Registration

- Article 324 of the Constitution and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 authorize the ECI to register political parties.
- The applicant has to publish a proposed party name in two national daily newspapers and two local daily newspapers.
- Any party seeking registration must file to the Secretary to the ECI an application within 30 days of its formation along with-
 - A demand draft of Rs 10,000.
 - Certified extracts from the latest electoral rolls in respect of at least 100 members of the party (including all office-bearers/members of main decision-making organs like Executive Committee/Executive Council) to show that they are registered electors.
 - An affidavit duly signed by the President/General Secretary of the party and individual affidavits from at least 100 members of the party to prove that no member of the party is a member of any other registered political party.
 - Details of bank account and permanent account number in the name of the party.

Benefits of Registration

Although, registration with the ECI is not mandatory, it has some advantages:

- Nominated Candidates by a political party registered with the ECI will be given preference over purely independent candidates in the allotment of free symbols.
- Registered political parties can claim an income tax exemption on donations under Section 13A of the Income-tax Act.
- The registered parties can be recognized as a state or a national party in future if they meet the conditions outlined by the Commission in the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968. For example,
 - ◆ If it is designated as a 'state party,' it is entitled for exclusive use of its reserved symbol for its candidates in the state in which it is designated.
 - ◆ If it is recognized as a 'national party,' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol for its candidates set up by it throughout India.
 - ◆ Recognized 'state' and 'national' parties require only one proposer to file a nomination and are entitled to two sets of electoral rolls free of charge as well as broadcast or telecast facilities over state-owned Akashvani or Doordarshan during general elections.

Article 324- It empowers the Election Commission to monitor, direct and control the elections.

Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951- It deals with the registration of associations and bodies as political parties with the Election Commission.

Section 13A of the Income-tax Act- It contains special provisions relating to incomes of political parties and states that *income from house property or income from other sources or any income by way of voluntary contributions* received from any person shall not be included in the total income of such political party provided that all the records are maintained, and accounts are audited.

Extra Mile

Difference Between Representation of People Act, 1950 and Representation of People Act, 1951

- Parliament enacted the Representation of People Act, 1950 (RPA,1950) and Representation of People Act, 1951 (RPA,1951) to implement the provisions under Articles 324–329 which aim to regulate the electoral process and ensure free, fair and impartial elections in the country.

RPA,1950	RPA,1951
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provides rules related to the preparation for elections. Provides for actual allocation of seats in Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Legislative Assembly and Legislative Councils. Provides for reservation of seats in the Parliament for SC/STs. Lays down voter qualifications. Lays down procedures for the preparation of electoral rolls and the manner of filling seats. Provides the procedure for delimitation of constituencies. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Makes provisions for the actual conduct of elections. Provides administrative machinery for conducting elections. Deals with the registration of political parties. Specifies the qualifications and disqualifications for membership of the houses. Provisions to curb corrupt practices and other electoral offences. Procedures for settling doubts and disputes arising out of elections. Provides rules for political parties for accepting donations.

Action Taken Report (ATR) Module of Audit Online Launched For Auditing Panchayat Accounts

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) launched the *Action Taken Report (ATR) module* for auditing all the Panchayat Accounts.

About ATR Module

What?	This module provides status of action taken on audit observations (addressed or unresolved issues) so that the audit report be displayed in public domain.
Implemented By	Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR).
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the Operational guidelines issued by 15 Finance Commission (FC), states must ensure that all tiers of Panchayats, constituting 100% of rural local bodies, have audited accounts for the 2021-22 period through the AuditOnline platform. ✓ AuditOnline was introduced in 2019 as an open-source application to facilitate internal & external audit of Government department / Panchayati Raj Institutions. To achieve accountability and to enhance the online audit process, ATR has been launched.
Objective	To provide a more structured approach to the audit process, ensuring clarity on the actions taken in response to audit findings.

Guidelines

1. **Timely Response to the Auditors:** The auditees (Panchayats) should respond to the objections / observations raised by the Auditors within 15 days.

2. **Responsibility Matrix:** To be followed across the three tiers of panchayats for timely response to auditors.

Panchayat Level	Responsibility
Gram Panchayats & equivalent	Panchayat Secretary
Block Panchayats & equivalent	Block Development Officer
Zila Panchayat & equivalent	CEO, ZP

3. **Speedy Action on Closure of Provisional Accounts:** The auditees should close the provisional accounts before 31st march of every Financial Year (FY) for the audit process to commence on time.

4. **Prompt Audit of Provisional Accounts:** State audit departments should complete the audit of previous year

and current FY and finalize an audit report (as per the Standardized Auditor Certificate) before 30th September otherwise an intimation is sent to complete it by 31st December.

5. Information to be Provided: Account statements, voucher details, assets list, user charges collected, rebates given, penalty collected etc.

6. Action Taken Report: It is mandatory to start the action taken procedure once the audit has been completed and to file an action taken report before 31st December. It should then be shared with the auditees to seek their response to each observation, based on their response the auditor decides to either drop the observation or do follow ups.

7. Final Audit Report: It should be provided to the Panchayats along with the ATR for placing it before subsequent gram Sabha/ Block Sabha/ District Sabha. It should then be published online to make it accessible to the public.

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will promote digital governance at the grassroots level. • It will enhance transparency and accountability. • It will ensure the funds are being used for the welfare of public. • It will help in reducing corruption. • It will help with better financial management. • It will help to address the existing issues.
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Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB)

Recently, the Chief Election Commissioner along with three members from the Election Commission of India (ECI) attended the 11th meeting of the executive board of the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) at Cartagena, Columbia.

About the A-WEB

What?	Founded in 2013, it is World's largest international organization in the field of election management comprising of 121 Election Management Bodies (EMBs) from 111 countries.
Vision	To foster efficiency and effectiveness in conducting free, fair, transparent and participative elections worldwide.
Composition	It is composed of the General Assembly, the Executive Board, the Oversight & Audit Committee and the Secretariat in Seoul (Republic of Korea).
Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election Management Capacity Building Program- to enable election officials to further develop professional capability and explore ways to address the challenges faced by election management bodies (EMBs). • Specialized Training Program- for policy-making authorities and engineers to strengthen their election management capacity using ICT in practice. • A-WEB Election Visitor Program- to increase understanding of different election systems and to share and spread better practices through observing the election administration of member EMBs
Theme	For 2023: A global view on the challenges of regional elections 2023.

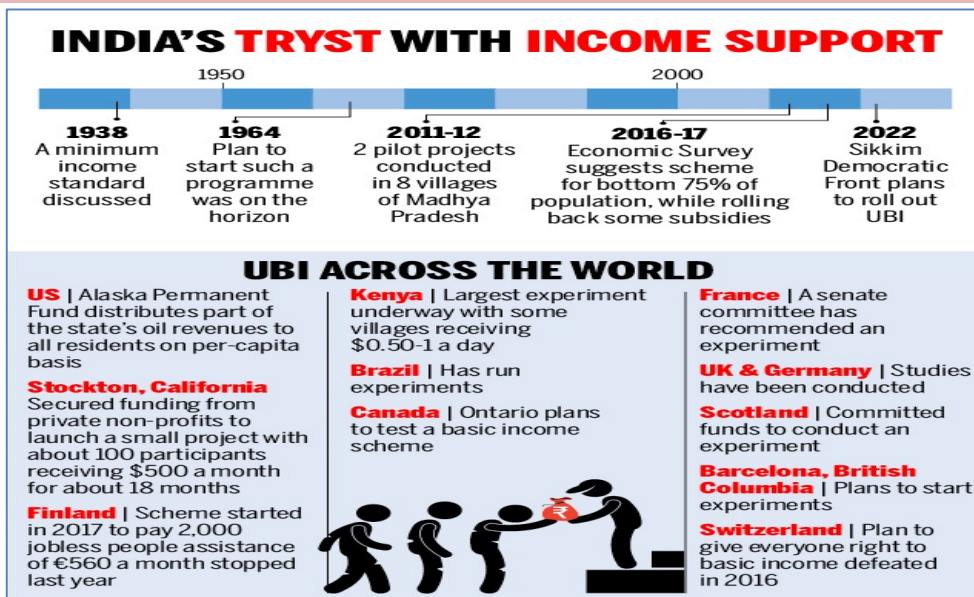
India As a Member of A-WEB

- India is represented by the Election Commission of India (ECI) at A-WEB.

- ECI has been very closely associated with the process of formation of A-WEB since 2011-12 and has been its Executive Board Member, since its inception in October 2013 for two consecutive terms (2013-15 and 2015-17). ECI took over as Vice-Chairperson of A-WEB for 2017-19 term.
- The ECI took over as Chairperson of A-WEB for 2019-22 term and is presently a member of its Executive Board for 2022-24 in its capacity as immediate former Chair of A-WEB.
- A-WEB Centre has been established in New Delhi for documentation and research, sharing the best practices and training and capacity building of officials of A-WEB members.

Rajasthan Minimum Guaranteed Income Bill, 2023

The Rajasthan Assembly recently passed the Rajasthan Minimum Guaranteed Income Bill which guarantees 125 days of work a year for all families in the state. With this Bill, Rajasthan has become the first and the only state in the country to guarantee minimum income with legislative backing and make pension a legal right.



About The Bill

What?	The bill introduces a scheme called <u>the Mahatma Gandhi Minimum Income Guarantee Scheme (MGMIGS)</u> , an amalgamation of the Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme, the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the pension scheme. It guarantees 125 days of work to all state adults and a pension to the elderly, the specially abled, widows and single women.
Effect to DPSP	The Bill was implemented in consonance with Articles 39(a) (that the citizens, men, and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood), 41 (right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases) and 43 (living wages, etc. for workers) of the directive principles of the state policy (DPSP).

Major Provisions (Understanding the 3 Broad Categories)

- 1. Minimum Guaranteed Income:** It guarantees to provide eligible categories with a minimum pension of Rs 1,000 and a minimum income for 125 days a year to all the adult citizens of the state through-
 - a. Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (IGUEGS)
 - b. Chief Minister Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (CMREGS)
- 2. Right To Guaranteed Employment:**
 - It gives every adult person residing in the rural and urban areas of the state a right to get guaranteed employment for doing permissible work of at least additional 25 days (for rural) (As the state will supplement the MGNREGA’s 100 days by providing jobs for an additional 25 days in rural areas.) and of at least 125 days (for urban) and to receive minimum wages weekly or in any case not later than a fortnight.
 - It also provides for appointing a program officer (not below the rank of Block Development Officer in rural areas and an Executive Officer of the local body in urban areas) by the state government to ensure that the

work site is within a radius of five kilometers of where the job card is registered in both rural and urban areas.

- If the program officer fails to provide employment within 15 days from the date of application, the applicant will be entitled to unemployment allowance from the state government on a weekly basis or in any case not later than a fortnight.

3. Right To Guaranteed Social Security Pension: It entitles every person from the category of old age/especially abled/widow/single woman, with prescribed eligibility, to a pension. An important component of the pension which will automatically increase over the base rate in two instalments i.e., 5 per cent in July and 10 per cent in January of each financial year starting from 2024-25.

How is it different?

- **Ensures Minimum Income Guarantee for All-** The scheme provides employment guarantee to urban and rural population who can work and guarantees social security to the ones who cannot work, thus ensuring minimum income guarantee to all.
- **Legislative Backing-** It is the first time that an urban employment scheme has got legislative backing as similar schemes in different states have been introduced only by an executive order.
- **Pension as a Legal Right-** For the first time in the country, pension will be a legal right under this bill.
- **Universal Application-** The bill doesn't differentiate people based on their social status and covers all citizens unlike other centrally sponsored pension schemes extended only for Below Poverty Line families.

Critical Analysis

This bill is a welcome step as it brings a ray of hope for crores of vulnerable families in desperate need of a minimum income and employment guarantee across the country. But it will also burden the state economy and increase the fiscal deficit when Rajasthan already lists among the most fiscally vulnerable states of India.

Four Women Parliamentarians Appointed to the Panel of Vice-Chairpersons

The Rajya Sabha Chairman appointed four women MP's namely, PT Usha, Phangnon Konyak, Fauzia Khan and Sulata Deo (all first-time members of the Rajya Sabha) to the panel of Vice-Chairpersons with the aim to ensure gender parity.

- This is the first time in the history of the Upper House that equal representation has been given to women members in the panel of Vice-Chairpersons.
- S. Phangnon Konyak becomes first woman member from Nagaland to Preside over Rajya Sabha.

About Panel of Vice-Chairpersons

- As per the rules of Rajya Sabha, the Chairman nominates a panel of not more than six Vice-Chairpersons from amongst the members of Rajya Sabha. W.e.f. 17th July, the panel reconstituted before the Monsoon Session contains a total of eight names, out of which half are women.
- One of these vice chairpersons may preside over the House in the absence of the Chairman or the Deputy Chairman or when requested by the chairman (but not when the post of chairman and deputy chairman is vacant).
 - ✓ During such time, the Chairman's duties are to be performed by such member of the House as the president may appoint for the purpose.
- The nominated vice-chairperson holds the office until a new panel of vice-chairpersons is nominated.
- While performing the duty of the Chairman, he/she will have the same powers as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

- If a member from this panel is absent, any other person as determined by the House acts as the Chairman.

Significance of the Move

- There are currently 83 women members (14.9%) in 17th Lok Sabha (2019) and 33 in Rajya Sabha. This number is very less when compared to their male-counterparts.
- Although the number has been increasing with each election due to various efforts put in by the government like the Womens reservation bill, reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions etc. But there is still a long way to go.
- This is not only the first step towards achieving the goal of gender equality in parliament, but it will also motivate more women to participate in politics, boost their confidence and bring women-centric approach while deciding on various matters.

Gujarat Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act, 1985 Soon to Be Implemented in Delhi

Recently, a proposal by the Delhi Home Department of extending Gujarat Prevention of Anti-Social Activities (PASA) Act, 1985 to Delhi was approved by the Lieutenant Governor (LG) and forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Once implemented, the Delhi Police will get more stringent powers of Preventive Detention under this law.

- An identical law from Telangana (The Telangana Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, property offenders, etc. Act, 1986) was also examined and it was found that the Gujarat law is more reasonable and better.

Gujarat Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act, 1985

<p>What?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originally, this act provided for the preventive detention of bootleggers, dangerous persons, drug offenders, immoral traffic offenders and property grabbers for preventing their anti-social and dangerous activities prejudicial to the maintenance of public order. • The 2020 amendment to the act brought under its ambit the persons operating gambling dens and prostitution rackets, offenders of cow-slaughter, sexual offences and cyber-crimes, those involved in usury (practice of lending money at very high rates of interest), and repeated offenders of the Arms Act. ✓ A bootlegger is a person who distills, manufactures, stores, transports, imports, exports, sells or distributes any liquor, intoxicating drug or other intoxicants.
<p>Detention Rules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under Section 3 of this Act, if the State Government or the District Magistrate or Commissioner of Police is satisfied that a person needs to be prevented from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order, it may give orders to detain that person. • If the orders are given by the District Magistrate or Commissioner of Police, then he needs to report about the same to the State Government, along with the grounds on which the order has been made. No such order can remain in force for more than twelve days from the date of issuance. Unless, in the meantime, it has been approved by the State Government. • A person can be booked under PASA only by an officer whose territorial jurisdiction he resides in. • The individual can be detained at any location in Gujarat and transferred from one detention facility to another within the state. • A person can be booked on multiple grounds, each to be mentioned separately. • There should be more than one FIRs filed against the accused at any police station in the state.

<p>Advisory Board</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constituted by the State Government, the board consists of a Chairman (Sitting or Retired High Court Judge) and two other members who are, or have been, Judges, of any High Court or are qualified to be appointed as a High Court judge. • The detention order along with the grounds on which the detention has been made is submitted to this board within three weeks from the date of detention. • Upon taking into consideration all the facts, the board decides if the detention is valid or not. • All its proceedings and reports are confidential.
<p>Detention Period</p>	<p>The maximum period for detention is one year.</p>
<p>Related Judgements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Visaman bhai D. Dhola versus State of Gujarat, 2007: In this landmark judgement, the court observed that the police could not prove the petitioner was a criminal and deemed the detention order “illegal”, “improper” and “malicious” and directed the authorities to pay the petitioner a compensation of Rs. 1.5 lakh. ✓ Haidarsha Abdulsha Pir versus State of Gujarat, 2020: In this case, the then Chief Justice Vikram Nath of Gujarat HC (now a SC judge), laid down a set of guidelines for preventive detention orders which included- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conveying the detention order in a language understandable to the detenu. ✓ Mentioning the specific grounds of such an order. ✓ Furnishing documents relied upon for each of the grounds with all details. ✓ Laying all documents concerning the detention orders, along with the detenu’s representation in front of the advisory board. ✓ In case the person’s representation was not considered by the advisory board, the government shall do so, before passing its order of confirmation on the preventive detention. ✓ Gujarat HC had also set a precedent by ruling that “preventive detention matters should be treated as the Habeas Corpus Petitions and a Habeas Corpus Petition, questioning the legality and validity of an order of preventive detention, should be heard by a Division Bench of this Court and not by a Single Judge.”
<p>Related Concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The law has a long history of rampant misuse by state authorities as it confers a broad discretion on the government to detain any person and empowers the police to conceal the grounds of detention from detenu and deny them legal representation. • It infringes upon a person’s personal liberty. • It allows booking a person under multiple grounds. Even if one ground is held invalid, the detention orders will still be valid based on other grounds. • Misuse of criteria for multiple FIRs through complaints filed years ago, for which the detainee has not been convicted. • Ordinary people are being detained under this draconian law and finally their detentions are quashed by the High Court. This not only wastes the precious time of the judiciary but also affects the detenu’s professional and personal life. No amount of compensation can make-up for the sufferings caused to the detenu.

Can A State Law Be Enacted In Union Territories?

Yes, Section 2 of the Union Territories (Laws) Act, 1950, allows the Central Government (through a notification in the Official Gazette) to extend any enactment which is in force in a State to the Union territory of Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur or Tripura or to any part of such territory.

How Will It Benefit Delhi Police?

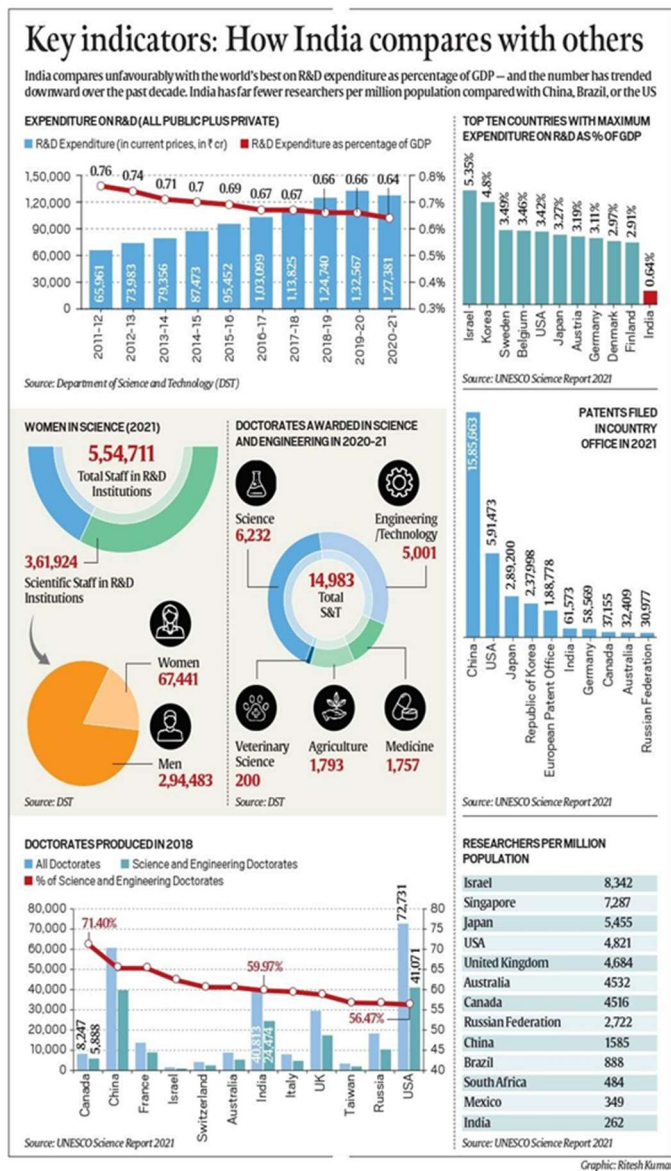
It will provide more power to the Delhi Police to deal with criminals and will ensure effective deterrence against crimes such as chain snatching, bootlegging, drug peddling etc. along with guaranteeing wellbeing of citizens.

National Research Foundation (NRF) Bill 2023

The Union Cabinet approved the National Research Foundation (NRF) Bill, 2023, in the Parliament. It will establish NRF as an apex body to provide high-level strategic direction to scientific research and development (R&D) in the country.

State of Science Research in India

- Government funding for R&D is done via two modes- core grants and extramural grants.
 - ✓ **Core Grants-** Most of the expenditure is done through core grants. In the year 2016-17, Rs 42,074 crore was spent on R&D and the three major recipients of the funding were DRDO (31.8 per cent), DoS (19.1 per cent), and DAE (11.3 per cent).
 - ✓ **Extra Mural Grants:** Given by Department of Science and Technology through Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), it serves the R&D aspirations of the central universities, state universities including agricultural universities, colleges, deemed universities, institutions of national importance like IISc and IITs, and even the national laboratories. In 2016-17, around Rs 2,454 crore (5.8 per cent of the total expenditure on R&D) was spent on extramural grants to fund around 4,711 projects.
- Only 0.65 per cent of country's GDP (0.41 per cent by the public and 0.24 per cent by private funding) is being spent on R&D. These investments are much lower than those being made by the developed and newly emerged economies of East Asia (more than 2 % of GDP).
- Women comprise only 18% of total scientific researchers in India, while globally this number was 33%.



About The NRF Bill, 2023

What?

- The Bill seeks to set up the National Research Foundation (NRF), a centralized body to fund scientific R&D in the country by providing research grants to individuals; seeding, growing and facilitating research in Indian universities.
- If the bill is passed, the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) Act 2008, will be repealed and subsumed by NRF.
 - ✓ The SERB Act establishes SERB as a statutory body of the Department of Science and

	<p>Technology (DST) and has played an important role in building a sustainable research ecosystem through a diverse programme portfolio that includes grant funding, fostering young researchers, recognizing and rewarding research excellence, promoting scientific networks and partnerships, and enhanced gender and social inclusiveness.</p>
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of NRF was <u>first recommended by the Kasturirangan Committee in 2019 in draft National Education Policy</u> highlighting the lack of a conducive research ecosystem and underinvestment in research in India. • This recommendation was adopted in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) as it suggested to establish NRF for managing competitive grant system for R&D across all Indian universities and institutes involved with higher education (especially the less well-heeled institutions) as they were facing the issues of expertise, funds and infrastructure.
Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Spending on Research- India's spending on research has always lagged between 0.6%-0.8% of GDP, or lower than the 1%-2% spent by countries with an economic base reliant on science and technology. • Less Contribution by Private Sector- The private sector in countries like China, the U.S. and Israel contributes nearly 70% for research purpose whereas in India, private sector contributes only about 36% of India's total research expenditure. • Competitive Grant System- With increasing number of institutes /universities /medical schools, the number of doctoral students is also increasing significantly. However, the overall funding under extra mural grants has remained static resulting in poor doctoral-level training. • Accelerated Research- To accelerate research in new and unexplored areas and motivating people to take up research as profession as number of researchers per million population in India is 262 which is extremely low compared to countries like Brazil (888), South Africa (484), Mexico (349). • Boosting Patents and Publications: Indian researchers published only 5% of all the articles in the science and engineering journal whereas Chinese researchers contributed 23%, while the US researchers accounted for 15.5%. In 2021, India stood at sixth position in the world by registering a total of 61,573 patents but it was nowhere close to the 16 lakh patents filed in China, and about six lakhs in the US that year. <p>Thus, the Government has introduced NRF to increase research spending, attract private sector investment, for timely fund distribution, accelerating research and patent registration.</p>
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>To ensure equitable funding in scientific institutions across the country and greater participation from the private sector</u> as eminent institutions like the IITs and IISc get a bulk of research funding while State universities get very little (~10%) share of it. • <u>To prioritize research funding.</u> • <u>To forge collaborations among industry, academia, government departments and research institutions.</u> • <u>To facilitate Ease of Doing Science</u> by reducing the time taken for completing grant approval formalities, managing all the paperwork and finances effectively. • <u>Capacity building at universities and colleges.</u> • <u>To grow and nurture excellence in cutting-edge research</u> across various disciplines. • <u>To support research for societal impact.</u>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will operate with a budget of 50,000 crore for five years starting from 2023-2028.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of this, 28% (14,000 crore) will be provided by the government (it will increase eventually to 20,000 crore per year) and the remaining 72% (36,000 crore) will come from the private sector. • Out of the government's share, 4,000 crores will be given by the SERB budget.
Governing Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will be managed by a Governing Board consisting of- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prime Minister as its ex-officio Chairman. ✓ Union Minister of Science & Technology and Union Minister of Education as ex-officio Vice-Chairmen. ✓ A 15-member executive council consisting of secretaries or representatives of ministries that fund research, as well as directors or representatives of other major funding bodies such as Department of Science & Technology, Department of Atomic Energy, Department of Biotechnology, ICAR, ICMR, UGC etc. • A President to the board will be selected from among the council members. • The board will formulate a future roadmap for NRF based on input from all stakeholders and submit its report to the Prime Minister. • The president of the board, along with the vice-president would be accountable to the funding agencies and to government.

Significance

- **Democratization of Science Funding:** NRF will emphasize on funding projects in peripheral, rural and semi-urban areas, which have always been neglected.
- **Finding solutions to the bigger problems:** NRF will promote research not just in the natural sciences and engineering, but also in social sciences, arts and humanities.
- **Provides an efficient and integrated management system:** For the implementation of the missions such as the supercomputer mission or the quantum mission.
- **Ease of Doing Science** by reducing the time for applying for a grant till approval, digitally processing all the paperwork, all the financial queries will be handled by the NRF and financial department of the institute, timely release of money for research.
- **Addressing chronic Issues:** Issues like no uniform infrastructure for scientific research, lack of uniformity in funding etc.

Concerns Raised

1. Although the NRF bill mentions timely disbursement of funds, a proper mechanism is required to facilitate and implement it.
2. There is a need for explicit spending guidelines for researchers which provide flexibility to work along with making them accountable.
3. It is unclear how the government will raise 36,000 crores from the private sector for funding NRF and how transparent the whole system be?

Way Forward

- NRF along with focusing on boosting the investment, should also focus on the quality of work done under R&D, its impact on India's research output, publications and patent registration and improving India's position in scientific community across the world.
- R&D across state universities and institutes should be given preference to motivate students to take up research.
- Exchange of students should be encouraged with foreign universities for facilitating knowledge transfer.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

European Parliament Calls On India To Act Promptly To End Manipur Violence

- The European Parliament has adopted a motion on the Manipur violence. The motion called on the government to act promptly to halt the violence in Manipur and protect religious minorities.
- The Indian government responded by saying that the issue is an entirely internal matter.

Key Highlights Of The Resolution Passed By The European Parliament

- **Protect all religious minorities:** The final EP resolution asks the government to protect all religious minorities, such as Manipur's Christian community, and to pre-empt any further escalation.
- **Unhindered access to the area:** It also calls on authorities to grant unhindered access to the area by journalists and international observers and to end internet shutdowns.
- **Repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act** in line with the recommendations of the UN Universal Periodic Review.
- **Make human rights prominent in dialogue:** It called on the E.U. to make human rights prominent in its dialogue and relationship with India.

European Parliament (EP)

• About

- European Parliament is the directly elected legislative body of the European Union (EU).
- It is one of the EU's main institutions and represents the citizens of the EU member states.
- The Parliament, along with the Council of the European Union, is responsible for making laws, adopting budgets, and overseeing the EU's policies and programs.
- The Parliament is **headquartered** in Strasbourg, France, but its work is conducted in three locations: Strasbourg, Brussels (Belgium), and Luxembourg.

• Composition

- The European Parliament consists of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who are elected by EU citizens every five years.
- The number of MEPs for each country is roughly proportionate to its population, but this is by degressive proportionality:
 - no country can have fewer than 6 or more than 96 MEPs and
 - the total number cannot exceed 705 (704 plus the President).

• Functions

○ Legislative

- Passing EU laws, together with the Council of the EU, based on European Commission proposals.
- Deciding on international agreements
- Deciding on enlargements
- Reviewing the Commission's work programme and asking it to propose legislation

○ Supervisory

- Democratic scrutiny of all EU institutions
- Electing the Commission President and approving the Commission as a body. Possibility of voting a motion of censure, obliging the Commission to resign
- Granting discharge, i.e., approving the way EU budgets have been spent

- Examining citizens' petitions and setting up inquiries
- Discussing monetary policy with the European Central Bank
- Questioning Commission and Council
- Election observations
- **Budgetary**
 - Establishing the EU budget, together with the Council
 - Approving the EU's long-term budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework
- **How does the Parliament work?**
 - Parliament's work comprises two main stages:
 - ◆ Committees - to prepare legislation
 - ◆ Plenary sessions – to pass legislation.

U.S. Student Loan Crisis

United States President Joe Biden has released a new plan to cancel billions in student loan debt.

Joe Biden's Student Debt Cancellation Plan

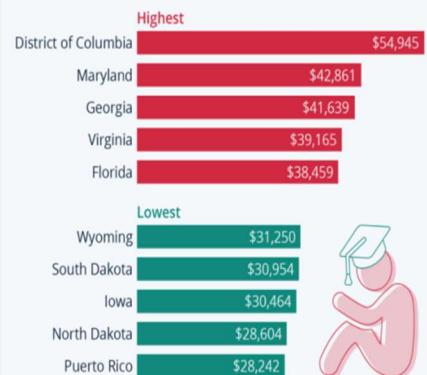
- In 2022, the **President announced a plan to cancel USD 10,000 in federal student loan debt** for those making less than USD 125,000 a year or households making less than USD 250,000.
- The plan made 43 million borrowers eligible for some debt forgiveness, with 20 million possibly having their debt erased entirely.
- As per the Congressional Budget Office, the **program would cost about USD 400 billion over the next three decades.**

SIZE OF U.S. STUDENT LOAN

- As per the latest Federal Reserve figures, more than 45 million Americans owe a total of **USD1.77 trillion** in student debt to the U.S. government.
- **Between 2006 and 2019, the outstanding balance of student loans has nearly quadrupled.**
- In the U.S., the **federal government is the primary source of student loans**, running several loan programmes to help students and their families finance higher education.
- The U.S. government makes loans using federal capital, meaning funds from the U.S. Treasury Department, after which the outstanding loans become assets of the federal government.

Where U.S. Student Debt Is Highest & Lowest

Average student loan debt per borrower in the U.S. in 2022



Intervention By Supreme Court

- The Supreme Court of the U.S. (SCOTUS) in June 2023 blocked the U.S. President Joe Biden's student debt cancellation plan.
- The SCOTUS held that the administration needs Congress' endorsement before undertaking such a costly programme.
- However, **on the day of the SCOTUS ruling, the U.S. President announced that the Education Secretary had initiated a new rule making process for the alternative plan.**

Numerous federal student loan repayment and forgiveness programmes providing targeted relief to individuals in certain circumstances currently exist. However, proposals for broader-scale student loan debt relief—including cancellation of all or a portion of federal student loan debt—have gained considerable attention in recent years.

Arguments In Favour of Debt Cancellation

- As the cost of education increases while wages stagnate, it has become harder for students to pay off their loans.
- Studies also point out how **federal grants and scholarships have not kept pace with the increasing cost of education and attendance.**
- President Biden has explained the need for loan cancellation by arguing that higher education “should be a ticket to a middle-class life, but for too many, the cost of borrowing for college is a lifelong burden that deprives them of that opportunity.

Arguments Against Debt Cancellation

- Critics of broad-based cancellation of loans point out how one-time loan cancellation may fail to address the underlying causes of crushing loan debt.
- One major cause is the **skyrocketing cost of education and the need for an overhaul of the system.**
- Another factor flagged by studies is the **increasing availability and utilization of loan repayment plans that allow borrowers to make monthly payments** lower than the interest accruing on their loans.
- Analysts have highlighted that policies providing loan cancellation may result in higher-income households receiving more cancellation benefits compared to lower-income households.
- Besides, **large cancellation plans may also significantly impact federal budgets and debt.**

Israel Parliament Passes Law That Curbs Powers Of Supreme Court

- Amid widespread protests, Israel successfully passed a highly contentious bill that reportedly curbs the power of the Supreme Court in the country.
- With this, the Israeli Parliament has limited the country’s Supreme Court’s ability to overturn decisions made by government ministers.
- **It is the first to be approved in a series of bitterly contested reforms** aimed at curbing the power of courts.
 - In an effort to overhaul the country’s judicial system, Israeli government had proposed **four major reforms.**
 - Of these, the first reform, concerning the ability of the supreme Court to overturn decisions made by government ministers, has been passed.

New Measure Passed By The Parliament

- Under the new law, the Supreme Court **cannot overrule the national government using the legal standard of reasonableness.**
 - A decision is deemed **unreasonable** if a court rules that it was made without considering all relevant factors or without giving relevant weight to each factor, or by giving irrelevant factors too much weight.
- It should be noted that Israel has no constitution, and many of the rights and freedoms that its people enjoy are contained in **Basic Law.**
- Hence, Israeli judges previously used the legal standard of reasonableness to strike down decisions made by lawmakers and ministers.
- Netanyahu’s government has argued that the change would help democracy foster in the country as it gives more power to the elected legislators in comparison to unelected judges.

Other Proposed Reforms

- The government first officially announced its plans to make changes in the judicial system back in January.
- Apart from reasonableness, there are three other major reforms that have been proposed.

- First, the government wants to enable the 120-member Parliament (Knesset) to override any Supreme Court judgement by a simple majority of 61 votes unless those rulings are unanimous.
- Second, a law that would give a greater role to lawmakers in the **appointment of Supreme Court judges**.
 - As of now, a committee comprising professionals, justices and lawmakers elevate judges to the top court.
 - The new change would provide lawmakers a majority in the committee.
- Third, a new measure that would allow ministers to choose their own legal advisors instead of using independent professionals.

Reasons Behind This Reform

- Conservatives and the right-wing in Israel have for a long time seen the judiciary as a left-leaning impediment to its legislative agenda.
 - For instance, the ruling ultra-right coalition seeks more power in a bid to overturn court judgements that:
 - expanded social reforms to support the LGBTQ community and
 - barred previous governments from constructing Israeli outposts on private Palestinian land.
- The government has defended the judicial change proposals saying they will restore a proper balance between the three branches of the government.
 - Netanyahu's coalition government has claimed that its reform plans would restore power to elected representatives instead of interventionist judges.

Criticism

- As Israel's Opposition lawmakers don't have enough numbers in the Parliament to stop the reforms, non-parliamentary organisations have taken to the streets.
- Since December 2022, when Netanyahu's coalition came to power, large demonstrations have been taking place in different cities of the country.
- As per them, the proposed reform would:
 - tighten political control over judicial appointments;
 - limit the Supreme Court's powers to overturn government decisions or declare Knesset laws unconstitutional.
- It would also empower the government to overrule the court's decisions.
- It will undermine the rights of minorities and open the doors to more corruption.

U.K Formally Signs Up To Trans-Pacific Trading Bloc

- U.K. government signed the accession protocol for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in New Zealand.
- It makes the United Kingdom the first new member and first European nation to join the bloc since it was created in 2018.

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)

- **About**
 - CPTPP is a landmark pact agreed upon in 2018 that cuts trade barriers among 11 countries.
 - Basically, it is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between these 11 countries.
 - These countries were - Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

- It was initially known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) but was renamed after the United States withdrew from the agreement in January 2017.
- **Features**
 - The pact requires countries to eliminate or significantly reduce tariffs and make strong commitments to opening services and investment markets.
 - It also has rules addressing competition, intellectual property rights and protections for foreign companies.
- **Significance**
 - **Economic**
 - Once fully implemented, CPTPP will form a trading bloc representing 500 million consumers and 13.5% of global GDP.
 - The agreement will provide the member countries with preferential access to key markets in Asia and Latin America.
 - **High-standard free trade agreement**
 - CPTPP is an ambitious and high-standard free trade agreement covering virtually all aspects of trade and investment.
 - The agreement features ambitious market-access commitments in trade in goods, services, investment, labour mobility and government procurement.
 - **Transparency in doing business**
 - It has **dedicated chapters** covering key issues like technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, customs administration, transparency and state-owned enterprises.
 - **Protection of the environment and labour right**
 - CPTPP features chapters on the protection of the environment and labour rights, which are enforceable by dispute settlement.
 - **Bulwark against China's dominance**
 - CPTPP is seen as a bulwark against China's dominance in the region, although Beijing has applied to join, along with Taiwan, Ukraine, Costa Rica, Uruguay and Ecuador.
- **Difference with Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)**
 - The TPP was originally negotiated among 12 countries which included the USA. The CPTPP is the result of a renegotiation of the TPP after the United States withdrew from the agreement.
 - The CPTPP retained most of the provisions of the original TPP, but some provisions related to intellectual property and other areas were suspended or modified due to the absence of the United States.
 - The original TPP included an Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism that allowed foreign investors to bring claims against host governments through international arbitration.
 - The CPTPP retained the ISDS mechanism but made certain modifications to address concerns.
 - For instance, some provisions related to tobacco control measures were altered to provide more flexibility to governments.

U.K Illegal Migration Bill

- In a victory for the Rishi Sunak government, the U.K. House of Lords passed the **Illegal Migration Bill (IMB)**.
 - The bill will become law after it obtains royal assent.

- The law will make it the Home Secretary's duty to remove illegal migrants from the U.K. and significantly change existing protections for asylum seekers.
- By decreasing access to routes to asylum, the Bill seeks to deter illegal migration to the country – especially via small boats crossing the English Channel.
 - The English Channel, also known simply as "the Channel," is a body of water that separates *southern England from northern France*.
 - It is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean and is part of the western extent of the North Sea.
 - The **Strait of Dover** is the narrowest part of the English Channel, and it is where the waters of the Channel and the North Sea meet. It connects the English Channel to the North Sea and separates England from mainland Europe.

Measures Proposed By The Bill

- The Bill, when passed into law by the U.K. Parliament, will:
 - require that the **Home Secretary** detain and remove those arriving in the U.K. illegally, either to Rwanda or another "safe" third country;
 - would deny migrants the right to bail or judicial review for the first 28 days of their immigration detention;
 - block such migrants from returning to the U.K. or seeking British citizenship going forward.
- The Bill would also seek to set a cap on the number of refugees who will be permitted to settle in the U.K. through "safe and legal routes".
 - This, at the moment, only applies to people from Afghanistan and Ukraine, or British National status holders in Hong Kong.
- The new Bill would also permit the government to detain children for up to eight days, and that too only if they applied for bail.

Criticisms Of This Bill

- **Incompatible with international law**
 - Recently, the U.K.'s Home Secretary admitted that there was a more than 50% chance that the new bill is incompatible with international law.
 - This is more evident in the concept of non-refoulement - that refugees should not be returned to a country where they face threats to life and liberty.
 - This concept is encapsulated in the **1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees** as well as the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**.
 - U.K. is a signatory of both the conventions.
- **Criticised by UNHCR**
 - The proposed plan to deport to origin or remove asylum seekers arriving in the U.K. by boat to a third country has been sharply criticised by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.
- **Extinguishes the right to seek refugee protection in the UK**
 - The effect of this Bill (in this form) would be to deny a fair hearing and to deny protection to many genuine refugees in need of safety and asylum.

Zero FIRs

Hundreds of zero FIRs registered in police stations across Manipur and the stalled investigations in these cases are among key challenges the state police are facing.

About FIR

- The term first information report (FIR) is **not defined** in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1973 or in any other law.
- In police regulations or rules, **information recorded under Section 154 of CrPC is known as FIR.**
- **Section 154** states that every information relating to the commission of a **cognizable offence**, if given orally to an officer in charge of a police station, shall be reduced to writing.
 - **A copy of the information** (as recorded) shall be given (free of cost) to the informant.
- **In essence, 3 important elements of an FIR:**
 - the information must relate to the commission of a cognizable offence,
 - it should be given in writing or orally to the head of the police station and
 - **it must be written down and signed by the informant, and its key points should be recorded in a daily diary.**

Zero FIR

- A zero FIR **can be filed in any Police Station by the victim**, irrespective of their residence or the place of occurrence of crime.
- A police station that receives a complaint regarding an alleged offence committed in the jurisdiction of another police station, **registers an FIR and then transfers it to the relevant police station for further investigation.**
 - **No regular FIR number is given** and after receiving the Zero FIR, the relevant police station **registers a fresh FIR** and starts the investigation.
- It came up after the recommendation in the report of the **Justice Verma Committee** set up after the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape case to suggest amendments to the Criminal Law.
- **The objective of a Zero FIR** is to ensure the victim doesn't have to run from pillar to post to get a police complaint registered.
- The provision is meant to provide **speedy redressal to the victim so that timely action can be taken after the filing of the FIR.**

Issue Of Zero Firs In Manipur

- **Filed in huge scale:**
 - **In the state, which has seen nearly 3 months of violence**, thousands of zero FIRs have been registered across the state.
 - **For example, 202 zero FIRs** have been registered at Saikul (a foothill area bordering Meitei-dominated areas) police station since the start of the violence.
 - These are mostly in cases where there has been violence in Kuki-dominated areas.
 - **In some other police stations** like Churachandpur police station (over 1,700 zero FIRs), Kangpokpi police station (over 800) many more such FIRs have been registered.
- **A peculiar challenge**

- With fault lines in the state running deep, **just transferring cases to relevant police stations has been a challenge.**
- **For example**, in the case of three Kuki-Zomi women being stripped and sexually assaulted in Meitei-dominated Thoubal district, a zero FIR **was transferred to the relevant police station more than a month later.**
- **Police investigation: a challenge**
 - Investigating cases of such transferred FIRs is a challenging process, exacerbated by tensions in the state.
 - **For example**, police personnel (IO) from one community cannot go to another community's area and **it is hard to proceed with the investigation without meeting the victim.**

Cluster Munitions

The United States has decided to send cluster munitions to Ukraine to help its military push back Russian forces entrenched along the front lines.

Cluster Munitions

- **About**
 - A cluster munition is a bomb that opens in the air and releases smaller bomblets across a wide area.
 - The bomblets are designed to take out tanks and equipment, as well as troops, hitting multiple targets at the same time.
 - In previous conflicts, cluster munitions have had a high dud rate, which meant that thousands of the smaller unexploded bomblets remained behind and killed and maimed people decades later.
 - The US last used its cluster munitions in battle in Iraq in 2003.
 - Later, it decided not to continue using them as the conflict shifted to more urban environments with more dense civilian populations.
- **Use of cluster munition – A war crime?**
 - Use of cluster bombs itself does not violate international law, but using them against civilians can be a violation.
 - As in any strike, determining a war crime requires looking at whether the target was legitimate and if precautions were taken to avoid civilian casualties.
 - A convention banning the use of cluster bombs has been joined by more than 120 countries.
 - These countries agreed not to use, produce, transfer or stockpile the weapons and to clear them after they've been used. **However, the US, Russia and Ukraine haven't signed on.**

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

12th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) Meeting

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar co-chaired the 12th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) meeting in Bangkok along with his Laos counterpart.
- While addressing the summit, EAM said that peace and prosperity in the Mekong region play a pivotal role in realising India's vision for security and growth for all countries in the region under its Act East policy.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

- **About**
 - It was launched in 2000 at **Vientiane, Lao PDR**.
 - Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilizational rivers, and the MGC initiative aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two major river basins.
 - The MGC is also indicative of the cultural and commercial linkages among the member countries of the MGC down the centuries.
 - The MGC meetings are co-chaired alternatively every year between India and one of the 5 Mekong countries.
- **Members**
 - **India and five ASEAN countries** — Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Objectives**
 - Promoting economic cooperation and trade among member countries,
 - Enhancing cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and
 - Fostering dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest
- **Areas of cooperation**
 - **4 foundational areas** of cooperation under MGC include tourism, culture, education, and transport & communication.
 - It has further expanded to include new areas like health and traditional medicine, agriculture and allied sectors, small and medium enterprises, water resources management, science and technology, skill development, and capacity building.

Act East Policy

- **About**
 - India's 'Act East' policy is a diplomatic initiative which seeks to enhance India's engagement with the countries of East Asia, particularly the ASEAN member states.
 - Basically, it aims to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels.
 - The policy was launched in 2014 by PM Modi, as a continuation and upgrade of the earlier Look East Policy (LEP).
 - LEP was launched by former PM P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991.
 - The main focus of this policy was to shift the country's economic focus from the west and neighbours to the booming South East Asian countries.
- **Differences between LEP and Act East Policy**
 - LEP

- Focus was to increase **economic** integration with South East Asian countries only.
- **Act East Policy**
 - It seeks to deepen and diversify engagements through greater connectivity, trade, investment, and cultural exchanges.
 - It focusses on the **extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region**.
- **Objective**
 - To promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.
 - To increase the interaction of the North-Eastern Indian states with other neighbouring countries.
 - This will be done by providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region including Arunachal Pradesh with other countries in our neighbourhood.
 - The North East of India has been a priority in Act East Policy (AEP).
 - To curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region.
- **Major projects under this policy**
 - Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Border Haats and Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, etc.

UNHRC Condemns Sweden Quran Burnings

- The UN Human Rights Council voted to condemn recent Koran burning incidents, but many countries declined to back the resolution, fearing it encroached on free speech.
 - An Iraqi immigrant to Sweden burned the Quran outside a Stockholm Mosque last month.
 - This sparked outrage across the Muslim world and demands by Muslim states for action.
 - Sweden has condemned the Quran burning but maintains the country has a constitutionally-protected right to freedom of assembly, expression and demonstration.
- The resolution was introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- India was among the 28 countries who voted in favour, 12 voted against and seven countries abstained.
- The resolution was strongly opposed by the United States and the European Union, who say it conflicts with their view on human rights and freedom of expression.

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

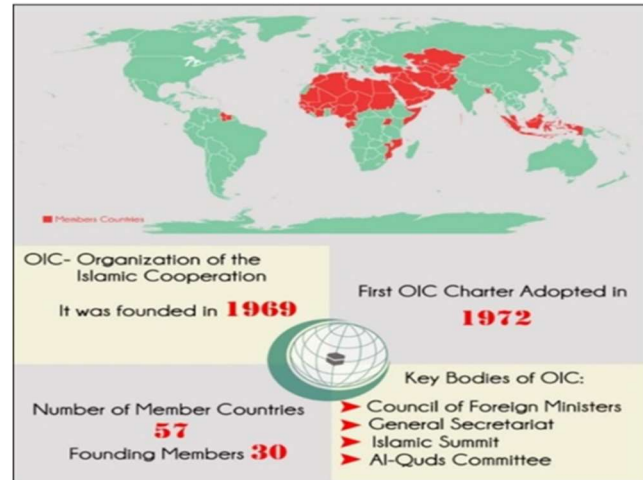


Primary Functions of UNHRC

- **Promoting human rights**
- **Monitoring and reporting** – It monitors human rights situations worldwide and conducts investigations or commissions inquiries into alleged human rights abuses.
- **Universal Periodic Review (UPR):** The UPR is a unique mechanism where each UN member state's human rights record is reviewed by other member states.
- **Special procedures:** The UNHRC appoints special rapporteurs, independent experts, and working groups to examine and report on specific human rights issues or themes.
 - These experts conduct fact-finding missions, raise awareness, and make recommendations to address human rights violations.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

- OIC (formerly known as Organization of the Islamic Conference) is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- OIC is the collective voice of the Muslim world to ensure and safeguard their interest on economic socio and political areas.
- It has **membership of 57 states** spread over four continents.
- It has a **permanent secretariat in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.**



Origin of OIC

- The Organization was established upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco in September 1969.
 - This summit was a result of criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

Criticism of OIC

- This organization has been termed a toothless tiger by many analysts when it comes to dealing with squabbles among member states.
- Every member has a veto. As a result, the organization fails to take a critical stand on serious disputes that are shaping in the middle east.

India's Relationship with OIC

- At the **45th session of the summit in 2018**, Bangladesh suggested that India should be given observer status. It was vetoed by Pakistan.
 - This suggestion was on the basis that more than 10% of the world's Muslim population live in India.
- It was Qatar that first proposed '**Observer' status** for India at the OIC Foreign Ministers' meet in 2002.
- India was invited to attend the OIC meeting in 1969 but Pakistan prevailed upon and got the invite withdrawn.
- However, **India, in 2019, made its maiden appearance at the OIC summit, as a guest of honour.**
 - The then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj addressed the inaugural plenary in Abu Dhabi.
- Despite this, **the organisation is known for its anti-India rhetoric under the influence of Pakistan.**

Deep Sea Mining

The International Seabed Authority — the UN body that regulates the world's ocean floor — is preparing to resume negotiations that could open the international seabed for mining.

International Seabed Authority (ISA)

• About

- ISA is an autonomous international organization established under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- Its primary mandate is to regulate and manage all mineral-related activities in the international seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.
- ISA came into existence in November **1994**, upon the entry into force of UNCLOS.
 - It became fully operational as an autonomous international organization in June 1996.



• Headquarter - Kingston, Jamaica.

• Functions

- The ISA is responsible for granting licenses and regulating activities related to the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources in the international seabed.
- Its ensures that these activities are carried out in a manner that protects the marine environment and promotes the equitable and efficient utilization of resources.

About Deep Sea Mining

- Deep sea mining involves removing mineral deposits and metals from the ocean's seabed.
- There are three types of such mining:
 - taking deposit-rich **polymetallic nodules** off the ocean floor,
 - mining massive seafloor **sulphide deposits** and
 - stripping cobalt crusts from rock.
- These nodules, deposits and crusts contain materials, such as nickel, rare earths, cobalt and more.
- These minerals are needed for batteries and other materials used in tapping renewable energy and also for everyday technology like cellphones and computers.

Regulation of Deep Sea mining: Current Status

- The high seas and the international ocean floor are governed by the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas**.
 - Water beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast of a country is known as high sea.
 - High seas are the areas of the ocean for which no one nation has sole responsibility for management.
- It is considered to apply to states regardless of whether or not they have signed or ratified it.
- Under the treaty, the seabed and its mineral resources are considered the common heritage of mankind.
- As per the treaty, this heritage must be managed in a way that protects the interests of humanity through the sharing of economic benefits, support for marine scientific research, and protecting marine environments.

Environmental Concerns Associated With Deep Sea Mining

- Conservationists worry that ecosystems will be damaged by mining, especially without any environmental protocols.
- Damage from mining can include noise, vibration and light pollution, as well as possible leaks and spills of fuels and other chemicals used in the mining process.
- **Sediment plumes** from some mining processes are a major concern.
 - Once valuable materials are extracted, slurry sediment plumes are sometimes pumped back into the sea.
 - That can harm filter feeding species like corals and sponges, and could otherwise interfere with some creatures.

GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

Diversity for Restoration (D4R) Tool

Researchers at Biodiversity International have developed a tool called **Diversity for Restoration (D4R)**.

Diversity for Restoration (D4R) tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a decision support tool that helps in species selection and seed sourcing for restoration using local site conditions and user-determined restoration objectives. It contains information on 100 plant functional traits of 237 important native trees of Western Ghats which have socio-economic significance.
Aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To help better decision-making and bring the best outcome for those plantation programmes.
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tool helps the user in identifying species that match their restoration objectives. It further helps identify species that can resist local stresses and adapt to evolving environmental conditions. It also helps pinpoint areas and regions to procure the seeds for the required species. It will inform the user whether the tree species offers timber, fruit, manure or other commercial benefits. It also informs if the tree is resilient to physiological stresses such as extreme high or low temperatures, salinity or acidity tolerance in the soil among others
Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It will help improve the effectiveness of restoration programmes by providing manifold benefits to interested stakeholders while promoting sustainable development. It could improve socio-ecological perspectives.

Floral and Faunal Database

India has updated its flora and fauna database in the year 2022.

Compiled By	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) compiled the faunal discoveries in a publication called “Animal Discoveries – New Species and New Records 2023”. The Botanical Survey of India (BSI) published the “Plant Discoveries 2022”. 				
Faunal Discoveries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India added a total of 664 animal species to its faunal database in 2022. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ These comprise 467 new species and 197 new records, species found in India for the first time. The maximum number of new faunal discoveries has been of invertebrates with 583 species, while vertebrates constitute 81 species. The new mammal species included a long-fingered bat, and a bamboo-dwelling bat, both found in Meghalaya. Sela macaque (named after the Sela Pass), a new macaque species discovered in Arunachal Pradesh. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Vertebrates</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Invertebrates</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Vertebrates are animals characterized by possessing a backbone or spine, a well-developed internal skeleton, a distinct head with a brain, bilateral symmetry,</td> <td>Invertebrates are animals that lack a backbone or spine. They typically have either an exoskeleton or a soft body, exhibit various body plans, and possess simpler internal</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Vertebrates	Invertebrates	Vertebrates are animals characterized by possessing a backbone or spine, a well-developed internal skeleton, a distinct head with a brain, bilateral symmetry,	Invertebrates are animals that lack a backbone or spine. They typically have either an exoskeleton or a soft body, exhibit various body plans, and possess simpler internal
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	and complex internal organs.	organ systems.
	Examples: mammals, birds, and reptiles	Examples: insects, worms, and jellyfish

Floral Discoveries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India added 339 new plant taxa to its floral database in 2022. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It consists of 186 taxa new to science and 153 taxa as new distributional records within the country. Seed plants contributed the maximum discoveries, of which dicotyledons contribute 73% and monocotyledons 27%. 37% are of seed plants, 29% fungi, 16% lichen, 8% algae, 6% bryophytes, 3% microbes and remaining 1% pteridophytes. Among the new genus of plants discovered are NandadeviaPusalkar, a genus common throughout the foothills and warm outer valleys of the Uttarakhand Himalayas, and NilgiriellaPusalkar, endemic to the southern Western Ghats of India and distributed in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Among the new records in orchid species, Calanthe lamellosa, earlier recorded in China and Myanmar, and found for the first time in India in the Japfu mountain range in Kohima, Nagaland.
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Region wise Discoveries	
Animal Discoveries	Plant Discoveries
The state of Kerala accounted for the highest number of new animal discoveries, making up 14.6% of the total, with Karnataka following closely at 13.2% and Tamil Nadu at 12.6%.	About 21% of the total discoveries were made from the western Himalayas followed by 16% from the Western Ghats.

	BSI (HQ: Kolkata)	ZSI (HQ: Kolkata)	
Establishment	In 1890 under the direction of Sir George King	In 1916	
Objective	To explore the plant resources of the country and to identify plant species with economic value	To promote research and documentation on various aspects of animal taxonomy in Indian subcontinent	
Both research organizations are under the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change.			

EXTRA MILE: INDIA BIODIVERSITY PORTAL

- It is an online platform that provides access to information on the country's biodiversity.
- It was launched in 2008 by the National Biodiversity Authority
- It is managed by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment.
- It contains information on over 1.5 million species, including their scientific names, common names, distribution, and conservation status.
- One of the key features of the portal is its citizen science platform, which allows anyone to contribute observations of plants and animals from across the country.

The infographic features a central globe with India highlighted. Surrounding the globe are illustrations of various animals with their respective percentages: an elephant for Mammals (12%), a bird for Birds (4.5%), a lizard for Reptiles (45.8%), and a frog for Amphibians (55.8%). A plant is also shown with the label Plants 33%.

Metallurgical Coke

India has started a safeguard probe into sudden and sharp increase in the imports of metallurgical coke.

<p>Metallurgical Coke (Coke breeze Or Met Coke Or Blast Furnace Coke)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a carbonaceous material made by heating coal to high temperatures in the absence of air, which drives off volatile compounds and leaves behind a solid, carbon-rich material. (Met coke sounds like a soda beverage, but it's not.) It is a vital component in the production of steel & Iron and is used in several ways in the steel-making process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Today, metallurgical coke is used in the production of over 70% of the world's steel.
<p>Metallurgical coke should not be confused with petroleum coke or foundry coke. Petroleum coke is a by-product of oil refining and has different properties, while foundry coke is a similar carbonaceous material used in foundries for melting metals.</p>	

Coal and coke are both carbonaceous fuels, but there are significant differences.

	Coal	Coke
Composition	Coal is a naturally occurring sedimentary rock. It is formed from the remains of ancient plants that have undergone geological processes over millions of years.	Coke, on the other hand, is a fuel produced by heating coal in the absence of air. It is derived from coal through a process called carbonization or coking
Properties	Heterogeneous material with a range of properties depending on its type and grade	More homogeneous and pure form of carbon. It has a low moisture content and is virtually free of volatile components and impurities
Uses	Coal has a wide range of applications. It is primarily used as a fuel for electricity generation in power plants and for heat generation in industrial processes.	Coke has specific applications, particularly in the iron and steel industry. It is used as a fuel and reducing agent in blast furnaces for the production of iron and steel.

Properties and Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The carbon content of metallurgical coke is typically between 90% and 95%, which makes it an ideal fuel for the smelting process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The smelting process is a metallurgical technique used to extract metals from their ores by heating them at high temperatures in a furnace. It possesses a porous structure that allows for the efficient flow of gases. It has a low ash content, and high mechanical strength.
Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is used as a fuel in blast furnaces, which are used to extract iron from iron ore. It is used in electric arc furnaces, which are used to melt scrap steel and other metals. It is also used as a reducing agent in the production of ferroalloys. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ferroalloys are alloys that are made by combining iron with other metals, such as chromium, manganese, or silicon.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental impact - The production of metallurgical coke involves the release of large amounts of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane. Large amounts of energy - The production of metallurgical coke requires large amounts of energy, which can contribute to air pollution and other environmental problems as well as Health Issues. High cost - The production of metallurgical coke is a complex process that requires

	specialized equipment and skilled workers.
Way forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement new technologies (such as hydrogen-based steel making) and practices that reduce the amount of energy required to produce metallurgical coke and minimize greenhouse gas emissions • Explore alternative fuels and raw materials. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For example, biomass and waste materials can be used as a source of fuel in the production of steel, which can reduce the environmental impact.

Gravity Hole: Anomaly In Indian Ocean

- Indian scientists have uncovered the cause of the mysterious giant anomaly referred to as a gravity hole in the Indian Ocean.
- It is also known as the **Indian Ocean Geoid Low (IOGL)** and was discovered in 1948 during a survey by Dutch geophysicist.
 - IOGL covers more than three million square kilometres of the ocean.

Concept of Gravity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While it is easy to imagine the Earth as a perfect sphere that has uniform gravity all over, but that is not the case; • Our planet is flat at the poles, and it bulges at the equator. Also, it doesn't have uniform gravity everywhere. • For example, there is a massive "gravity hole" in the Indian Ocean and now, researchers have uncovered why that is the case.
About Gravity Hole & It's Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are areas where the gravitational pull is significantly stronger than in the surrounding areas. • These anomalies are caused by variations in the gravitational pull of the Earth due to differences in the density of the materials that make up the Earth's crust.
Effect of Gravity Hole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can have a profound effect on the ocean currents and the movement of water around them. • The gravitational pull of a gravity hole can cause water to be pulled towards it, creating a vortex that can suck in anything that comes too close. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This can be dangerous for ships and other vessels that are navigating the area. • It can also influence the geology of the surrounding area. The increased gravitational pull can cause the rocks and sediment in the area to be compressed, which can lead to the formation of new geological features.
Indian Ocean Geoid Low (IOGL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a negative geoid anomaly, meaning that the sea level in this region is lower than what would be expected based on the Earth's gravitational field. • It has important implications for oceanography, climate science, and geodynamics. • It affects the ocean circulation patterns, the distribution of heat and salt in the ocean, and the sea level rise projections for the Indian Ocean region.

Different Anomalies in the world

South Atlantic Anomaly (SAA):

- The SAA is a region in the **Earth's magnetic field** where it is significantly weaker than in other parts of the globe. This anomaly is located in the South Atlantic Ocean, extending from South America to the southern coast of Africa.

Karakoram Anomaly:

- ‘Karakoram Anomaly’ is termed as the stability or anomalous growth of glaciers in the central Karakoram, in contrast to the retreat of glaciers in other nearby mountainous ranges of Himalayas and other mountainous ranges of the world.

Temperature anomaly:

- The term temperature anomaly means a departure from a reference value or long-term average.
- A positive anomaly indicates that the observed temperature was warmer than the reference value, while a negative anomaly indicates that the observed temperature was cooler than the reference value.
- For Example, March 2023 was the second warmest March on record. The warmest March occurred in 2016, when the biggest El Niño of the 21st century triggered a ‘mini’ global warming.

Shelf Clouds

A video circulating on social media that showcases a captivating shelf cloud formation during the monsoon in Haridwar.

Shelf Clouds (Arcus Cloud)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a low-hanging cloud that appears to be attached to the front of a storm. • It is often dark and ominous, and it can give the impression that the storm is moving in quickly. • These clouds are sometimes seen beneath cumulonimbus clouds, the dense, towering vertical cloud that causes intense rain.
Formation of Shelf Clouds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are formed when a thunderstorm pushes a gust of wind ahead of it. • This gust of wind can be so strong that it lifts the warm, moist air in front of it. • As the warm air rises, it cools and condenses into a cloud, which becomes the shelf cloud. • The shelf cloud is often accompanied by a strong gust of wind, which can be dangerous to those caught in its path. • This rush of cold air often occurs in a thunderstorm’s downdraught, where cold air rushes towards the ground before spreading out to create a gust front. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A thunderstorm is a rain shower during which you hear thunder. Since thunder comes from lightning, all thunderstorms have lightning.
Distinctive Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These have a distinct horizontal appearance (Roll Cloud), stretching across the sky in a straight line. • They often take on a wedge-like or arc-shaped structure, curving upward toward the storm’s main cloud base. • These have a well-defined, solid line separating the cloud formation from the sky.
Impact/ Indication of Shelf Cloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is often a sign of severe weather, which can cause damage to structures, power lines, and other infrastructure. • The storm that follows the shelf cloud can also produce heavy rain, hail, and even tornadoes, which can cause flooding, landslides, and other hazards.
Frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In India, Arcus clouds formation is rare phenomenon. • However, they are seen around the world routinely in places such as Australia, Alaska, California, etc., during powerful thunderstorms.

E20 Fuel

According to Petroleum Minister E20 Fuel is now available at 1,350 fuel retail outlets and will be available all over the country by 2025.

- India has advanced the target date for achieving 20% ethanol-blending in petrol by five years to 2025.

E20 fuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a blend of gasoline (Petrol: 80%) and ethanol (20%) with respect to volume. • It is designed to be used in vehicles that are designed to run on higher ethanol blends, such as flex-fuel vehicles.
Benefits of E20 Fuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower Greenhouse Gas Emissions & Improved air quality- It has a lower carbon footprint than traditional gasoline (Petrol Vehicles). • Renewable Fuel - Ethanol, which is a key component of E20 fuel, can be produced from renewable feedstock's, such as corn, sugarcane, and switchgrass. • Improved Engine Performance - Ethanol has a higher-octane rating than gasoline, which can help to reduce engine knock and improve fuel efficiency. • Sustainable energy source & Increased Energy Security along with Job Creation - By increasing the use of domestic renewable resources, E20 fuel can help to enhance energy security and reduce reliance on foreign oil.
Issue with E20 Fuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited Availability & Compatibility with Older Vehicles. • Higher Cost & Lower Energy Content- It can be more expensive & lower energy than traditional gasoline, which can make it less attractive to consumers. • Infrastructure Challenges - The production, storage, and distribution of E20 fuel require specific infrastructure, which may not be readily available. • Seasonal Variability & Fluctuation in Food Prices- Ethanol production can be impacted by seasonal factors, such as weather and crop yields, which can lead to fluctuations in availability and price.
Government Steps to Promote the Use of E20 Fuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India achieved the target of 10 % ethanol blending in petrol in June 2022. The government has advanced & set a target of achieving 20% ethanol blending in petrol by 2025. • The government has announced a new ethanol procurement policy that aims to provide a guaranteed market for ethanol producers and encourage the production of ethanol from a variety of feedstocks. • The government has revised the pricing of ethanol to make it more attractive for oil marketing companies to procure and blend ethanol with petrol. • Government's policy push like Ethanol Blending Program and National Green Hydrogen Mission will fuel Indian economy towards its target of 5 trillion-dollar economy and realizing Net Zero by 2070.

Extra Mile

Ethanol Based Fuel Around the world

- The United States is the world's largest producer of ethanol, having produced over 15 billion gallons in 2021. Together, the United States and Brazil produce 82% of the world's ethanol.
- The vast majority of U.S. ethanol is produced from corn, while Brazil primarily uses sugarcane.
- Brazil has the largest and most successful bio-fuel programs in the world. It is considered to have the world's first sustainable biofuels economy.

India & Flex-Fuel Vehicle

- The government of India has started production of flex fuel in India. These are classified as E95, E90 and E85 depending on the petrol-ethanol ratio.
- Toyota Corolla Altis Hybrid is a first-of-its-kind pilot project vehicle that is based on Flexi-Fuel Strong Hybrid Electric Vehicles (FFV-SHEV) technology.
- Oil marketing companies are now allowed to sell E100 but only to flex-fuel vehicles.

Anthropocene Epoch

Scientists said that the sediments of Crawford Lake in Canada provide evidence of the beginning of the Anthropocene epoch.

About Anthropocene Epoch

- The term "Anthropocene" combines "Anthropo," meaning human, and "cene," referring to a geological epoch. The term "Anthropocene" was 1st proposed by the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000.
- It is a geological epoch that marks the period during which human activity has had a significant impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems.
- It is suggested that the Anthropocene follows the Holocene Epoch, which represents the current geological epoch and has been characterized by relatively stable climatic conditions over the past approximately 11,700 years.
- It is not yet officially recognized as a geological epoch by the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which is responsible for defining and naming geological time periods.

Key Features of Anthropocene Epoch

- **Human Intervention:** It is characterized by a range of human-induced changes to the Earth's systems, including climate change, deforestation, land use change, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss.
- **Climate Change & Biodiversity Loss:** These changes have resulted in significant alterations to the Earth's atmosphere, oceans, and land surface, and are expected to have long-term impacts on the planet's ecosystems and human societies.
- One of the key drivers of the Anthropocene is the release of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane from the burning of fossil fuels.

Extra Mile: The Geological Time Scale (GTS)

GTS provides a chronological framework for understanding the history and evolution of the Earth and the life forms that have existed on the planet over millions of years. It is divided into several hierarchical units. The basic units of the Geological Time Scale, from largest to smallest, are as follows:

- 1) **Eon:** The largest division of time, spanning billions of years. The two primary eons are the Phanerozoic Eon (the most recent) and the Precambrian Eon (the time before complex life forms).
- 2) **Era:** A subdivision of an eon, representing a significant period of geological time. The Phanerozoic Eon is divided into **three eras: Paleozoic, Mesozoic, and Cenozoic.**
- 3) **Period:** A subdivision of an era, representing a substantial interval of time characterized by distinct geological and biological events. For example, the Paleozoic Era is divided into the Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous, and Permian periods.
- 4) **Epoch:** A subdivision of a period, representing a smaller interval of geological time. For example, the Quaternary Period is divided into the Pleistocene and Holocene epochs.
- 5) **Age:** The smallest unit of the Geological Time Scale, representing a relatively short span of time within an epoch. Ages are often named after specific geological formations or key fossil assemblages.

Lightning - Not a Natural Disaster

The Union government is not in favour of declaring lightning a natural disaster.

Lightning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a rapid and massive discharge of electricity into the atmosphere, some of which is directed towards the Earth. • There is occurrence of a natural 'electrical discharge of very short duration and high voltage between a cloud and the ground or within a cloud', accompanied by a bright flash and sound, and sometimes thunderstorms. ➤ Inter cloud or intra cloud (IC) lightning is visible and harmless. ➤ Cloud to Ground (CG) lightning is harmful as the 'high electric voltage and electric current' leads to electrocution. • Discharges are produced in huge moisture clouds that are 10-12 km long.
Formation of Lightning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As water vapour moves upwards in the cloud, it condenses due to the falling temperature. As they drop to a temperature below 0°C, the water droplets turn into tiny ice crystals. • They continue to grow until they become so heavy that they begin to fall to the earth. This leads to a system in which, at the same time, smaller ice crystals are moving up and larger crystals coming down. • Electrons are released and triggered after a collision; a process similar to the production of electric sparks. As the moving free electrons cause more collisions and more electrons, a chain reaction occurs. • This process results in a situation in which the upper layer of the cloud becomes positively charged, while the middle layer becomes negatively charged. • The electric potential difference between the two layers is very large, in the order of one billion to 10 billion volts. In a very short time, a huge current, on the order of 100,000 to one million amperes, begins to flow between the layers. • Earth is a good conductor of electricity; it is electrically neutral. However, compared to the middle layer of the cloud, it becomes positively charged. • As a result, about 15%-20% of the current is directed towards the earth as well.
Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2021-22, about 1.49 crore strikes were registered across the country. • It cannot be predicted, making it more challenging to issue timely warnings. • According to National Crime Records Bureau data, at least 2,000 deaths have been caused by lightning every year since 2005. ➤ More than 96% of lightning-related deaths occur in rural areas • Buildings, communication networks, power plants etc. are often destroyed by lightning incidents. Occasionally, lightning and thunder can cause potentially devastating forest fires.
Lightning-prone Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madhya Pradesh has recorded the highest number of ground lightning, followed by Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal. • Other states with high strike rates include Bihar, UP, Karnataka, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu. • The most lightning activity on Earth is seen on the shore of Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela.
What will be the benefit after considering it as a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been demands by States such as Bihar and West Bengal that deaths due to lightning be covered as a natural disaster. • The victims will be entitled to compensation from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) once this is notified. As much as 75% of funds to SDRF are contributed by the Centre.

natural disaster?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>According to present norms, cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold waves are considered disasters that are covered under the SDRF.</u>
Government Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued Common Alert Protocol (CAP) system to warn people about impending thunderstorms and lightning. • The Lightning Alert System provides location-specific forecast of thunder, lightning, strong winds, high winds, hailstorm occurrences for up to 48 hours. • ISRO provides satellite information about convective clouds from INSAT-3DR, which is uploaded every 15 minutes. • Damini app was developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology and Earth System Science Organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It warns users of lightning near them by a GPS notification under 20 km and 40 km radius.
Precautions Need to be Taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid wet ground because people are most commonly struck by ground currents. • Do not take shelter under a tree. It is dangerous, as it may attract lightning. • Go indoors in a storm, however, avoid touching electrical fittings, wires, metal, and water even indoors. • Pay attention to alerts and warnings.

Waterspouts

A magnificent golden waterspout was filmed on the Kama River in Russia's Perm region.

About Waterspouts

What is it?	A waterspout is a tornado-like column or funnel of violently rotating air that usually forms over the surface of the sea.
Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterspouts are typically formed in warm and humid environments when there is a temperature difference between the warm water surface and the cooler air above. • As warm, moist air rises from the water's surface, it can encounter cooler air aloft, leading to the development of a rotating updraft. If the rotation intensifies, it can lead to the formation of a waterspout.
Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are two types of waterspouts: tornadic and fair-weather. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tornadic waterspouts are more common and are formed from a rotating thunderstorm cell. ➤ Fair-weather waterspouts, on the other hand, form from a single cumulus cloud and are less common.
Distribution	Waterspouts form mostly in tropical and subtropical areas. But regions, including Europe, Middle East, Australia, New Zealand and Antarctica also report these on rare occasions.
Appearance	Waterspouts can vary in size and intensity. Some waterspouts may appear as a slender, rope-like funnel, while others can be larger and more pronounced, resembling tornadoes over water.
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterspouts are generally not as powerful as tornadoes, but they can still pose risks to boaters and swimmers if they move close to the shore. • They have the potential to cause waterspouts, and occasionally, waterspouts can come ashore as weaker tornadoes.

Important Days in July

International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem: 26 July

- Adopted by the General Conference of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015
- Mangroves are unique kinds of trees or shrubs that can grow in saltwater environments and provide habitat for a wide variety of marine and bird species, and they are an important source of food and livelihood for many coastal communities.

International Tiger Day: 29 July

- Established in 2010 at St Petersburg Tiger Summit in Russia to raise awareness about the decline of wild tiger numbers.
- The tiger population has shown a steady increase from 1,411 in 2006 to 1,706 in 2010, 2,226 in 2014, 2,967 in 2018, and 3,167 in 2022.
- India has achieved the remarkable feat of doubling the tiger population in 2018 itself, 4 years ahead of the targeted year 2022.
- India currently has 53 tiger reserves, Guru Ghasidas National Park of Chhattisgarh is the 53rd Tiger Reserve.
- 14 Tiger Reserves in India have already been awarded with international CA|TS (Conservation Assured Tiger Standards) accreditation.

Silvopasture System

What is it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an ancient and proven practice that harmoniously integrates trees, forage and livestock on the same land. • By combining these elements, silvopasture brings numerous environmental advantages, including improved local climate resilience.
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trees on silvopasture lands act as natural carbon sinks, sequestering significantly five to ten times more carbon than pastures, without compromising productivity. • It can play a vital role in reversing the negative trend of deforestation for pastureland.

How Silvopasture System Is Different From Open Pasture System?

	Open Pasture System	Silvopasture System
Tree Integration	Involves unmanaged grazing on natural grasslands with no deliberate inclusion of trees or woody plants.	Involves intentionally integrating trees with forage and livestock production, providing shade, shelter.
Forage Quality	Depends solely on the natural vegetation, which may decline over time without proper management.	Offers a diverse range of forage options from both trees and understorey vegetation.
Soil Health	May be more prone to erosion without the stabilizing effect of trees.	Helps control soil erosion with tree root systems, improving soil health.
Management and Sustainability	Requires less initial investment and management but may be less resilient and sustainable over time.	Requires more deliberate planning and investment but offers long-term sustainability and ecological benefits

Solar Maximum & Solar Minimum

	Solar Maximum	Solar Minimum
What is it?	<p>The greatest number of sunspots in any given solar cycle is designated as "solar maximum." The lowest number is "solar minimum."</p> <p>Both are two distinct phases in the solar cycle, which is an approximately 11-year cycle of varying solar activity. The most recent solar maximum occurred in 2014, and the next one is expected to occur in 2025.</p>	
Impact	Both can impact space weather, potentially affecting satellites, communication systems, power grids, and astronauts.	
Solar Flares and CMEs (Coronal Mass Ejections)	more frequent and intense. These events are driven by the increased magnetic activity associated with sunspots.	less frequent and less intense during a solar minimum due to the reduced sunspot activity.
Auroras (Northern and Southern Lights)	more frequent and can be more vivid. This is because increased solar activity produces more charged particles interacting with Earth's atmosphere.	While auroras can still occur during a solar minimum, they tend to be less frequent and less intense.

Plasticulture

- It refers to the use of plastic materials in agriculture ("ag plastics") to improve crop production.
- It involves the use of plastic mulch, drip irrigation, and greenhouse coverings to protect crops from pests, weeds, and extreme weather conditions.
- While it can be beneficial for crop production, there are also concerns about the environmental impact of plastic materials.

Global Biofuel Alliance

Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by India , with support from Brazil and the United States. • Countries that are not part of the G20 can become members of the GBA by giving their endorsement to the foundational document.
Objective	To leverage the transformative potential of biofuels in economic growth, rural development, energy self-sufficiency, reduced air pollution, and the global transition to clean energy.

Desiccation-tolerant (DT) vascular plants

- India's biodiversity hotspot, the Western Ghats (WG), is home to 62 Desiccation-Tolerant Vascular Plant Species
- Vascular plants are equipped with specialized tissues dedicated to transporting water, nutrients, and sugars across their anatomies. These specific tissues, known as vascular tissues, encompass the xylem and phloem components.




What are	DT plants are able to withstand extreme dehydration, losing up to 95% of their water content,
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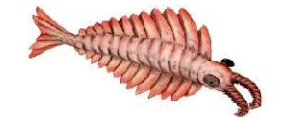

they?	and they revive themselves once water is available again.
Key Points	These plants are able to withstand long periods of drought and extreme temperatures by entering a state of suspended animation when water is scarce.
Distribution	World: found in a variety of habitats, including deserts, tundras, and alpine regions. India: In the inventory of 62 species, 16 are Indian endemic, and 12 are exclusive to the Western Ghats outcrops, highlighting WG's importance as a global DT hotspot.

Cryptobiosis (Anabiosis)

- It is a state of suspended animation in which an organism's metabolic processes are slowed down or stopped completely. This allows the organism to survive in extreme conditions of heat or cold, lack of water, or exposure to radiation.
- It is found in a variety of organisms, including tardigrades, brine shrimp, and some types of bacteria.

SPECIES IN NEWS

American bald eagle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a large, predatory raptor that are recognizable for their brown body and wings, white head and tail, and hooked yellow beak. • It is the only sea eagle endemic to North America. • It is listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Red list. • It has been the national emblem of the United States since 1782.
Sea lion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a marine mammal belonging to the Otariidae family. • It is known for semi-aquatic lifestyle, spending considerable time on both land and water. • It can be found in various regions including the Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean and parts of the Indian Ocean. • Adult males develop a thick mane of hair around their necks. • Currently, there are 6 subspecies of sea lions – Australian sea lions, California sea lions, Galapagos sea lions, New Zealand sea lions, South American sea lions and Steller sea lions.
Octopus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a sea animals famous for their rounded bodies, bulging eyes, and eight long arms. • They live in all the world's oceans but are especially abundant in warm, tropical waters. • It has three hearts, two of which pumps blood to the gills and the third heart circulates blood to rest of the body. • It has blood that is coloured blue, mainly because of the presence of hemocyanin, a copper-based protein in its blood cells. • All octopuses are venomous – it does not make the venom by itself, but are produced by symbiotic bacteria instead.
Gucchi Mushroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a species of fungus. • It is pale yellow in colour with large pits and ridges on the surface of the cap,

	<p>raised on a large white stem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is replete with health benefits. It is rich in antioxidants, also rich in potassium, vitamins and copper. • It is found naturally in the forests of various districts of Himachal Pradesh, including Chamba, Kullu, Shimla and Manali.
<p>Santa Fe frog</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is known for its striking “leopard-print” appearance. • It is an extremely rare species found only in South American countries namely Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. • It is listed as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red list. • Its existence is threatened by habitat loss caused by deforestation in the Dry Chaco.
<p>Tunicates</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are marine invertebrate species belonging to phylum Urochordata. • They are commonly called sea squirts. • They spend most of their lives attached to docks, rocks or the undersides of boats. • Their body structure is sac or barrel like with two siphons, a tubular opening. • These are considered as closest relatives of vertebrates such as fish, mammals, and people.
<p>Atlantic menhaden</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a commercially important Atlantic Ocean fish, also known as Fatback, Bunker, Pogie. • It is found in coastal and estuarine waters from Nova Scotia to northern Florida. • It is a major source of omega-3 fatty acids, so they are also used to develop human and animal supplements. • It is listed as Least concern in the IUCN Red list.
<p>Anomalocaris Canadensis</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an ancient shrimp like creature that existed during the Cambrian period. • It was a notable inhabitant of the ancient seas. • It was a fascinating mix between a shrimp and a cuttlefish. • Researchers believed that this ancient creature had a fearsome reputation due to its hunting habits and physical attributes.
<p>Cicada</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are hemipteran insects, also known as true bugs. • There are more than 3,000 known species of cicadas. • Most diversity of this species is found in Indian and neighbouring country Bangladesh. • This species is an indicator of soil health and vegetation. • They are used in folk medicines. While in some regions they act as religious and monetary symbols. • The dead body acts as a nutrient source, nitrogen to be specific, which helps in growth of the plants.
<p>Pilot Whale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the largest members of the dolphin family, but are treated as whale for the Marine Mammals Protection Regulations 1992.



- They are also called blackfish or pothead whale.
- It is characterized by a round bulging forehead, a short beaklike snout, and slender pointed flippers.
- Males are larger than females and are much heavier and bulkier than females, and have larger heads and dorsal fins.

Gambusia Fish



- It is also known as mosquito fish, and is widely used as a biological agent for controlling mosquito larvae.
- It is native to the waters of the south-eastern United States.
- It has been a part of mosquito-control strategies for over a century in various parts of the world, including India.
- It is listed as invasive alien species by IUCN

Ludwigia Peruviana



- It is an aquatic plant with pale yellowish flowers.
- It is popularly called primrose willow, is a native of Central and South America.
- Its introduction to new regions has resulted in it becoming an invasive weed, causing ecological disruptions in various swampy areas worldwide.
- It is an aquatic plant. It thrives in wetlands and water bodies.
- It is among the 22 priority invasive plants in Tamil Nadu.

Gravitational Wave

- Scientists have found evidence to suggest that the universe is filled with **low-frequency** gravitational waves.
 - The North American Nanohertz Observatory for Gravitational Waves (NANOGrav) is a collaboration of scientists using radio telescopes to detect gravitational waves in the low frequency (long wavelength) range.
 - **Long-wavelength** gravitational wave signal is believed to have resulted from the merger of supermassive black holes.

Key Findings Of The NanogravCollaboration On Gravitational Waves

- It has found that the gravitational waves that they are detecting have a frequency of about 100 nanohertz (Low frequency & Long Wavelength).
 - This frequency is very low and corresponds to gravitational waves that result from the merger of supermassive black holes.
- It has also found that the gravitational waves that they are detecting are getting stronger over time.

Gravitational Waves (GWs)

What are GWs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravitational waves are ripples in the fabric of space-time that propagate through the universe at the speed of light. They are generated by the acceleration or violent motion of massive objects, such as black holes, neutron stars, or supernovae. • These ripples are incredibly faint, but they can be detected using extremely sensitive equipment. • According to Einstein's theory of general relativity (Predicted in 1916), these waves are caused by the distortion of space-time due to the presence of mass and energy.
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Significance of Gravitational Waves

- 1) New Window into the Universe:** Gravitational waves offer a completely new way of observing and studying the universe. Unlike electromagnetic waves (such as light or radio waves), which can be absorbed or scattered, gravitational waves can travel through space unimpeded, providing a direct view of astrophysical phenomena that were previously hidden from traditional telescopes. This opens a new era of astronomy called gravitational wave astronomy.
- 2) Probing Extreme Astrophysical Events:** Gravitational waves are generated by some of the most violent and extreme events in the universe, such as the collision of black holes, the merger of neutron stars, or the explosive death of massive stars (supernovae). By detecting and analyzing gravitational waves, scientists can study these events in unprecedented details.
- 3) Cosmology and the Early Universe:** Gravitational waves carry information about the early stages of the universe, such as the Big Bang and the inflationary period.
- 4) Multi-Messenger Astronomy:** Gravitational wave observations can be combined with traditional electromagnetic observations, such as those in the optical, radio, and X-ray wavelengths. This multi-messenger approach allows scientists to obtain a more comprehensive and detailed picture of astrophysical events.

OpenKylin

China has launched 1st open-source computer desktop operating system, named OpenKylin.

About OpenKylin

- The system can be used in various sectors such as finance, energy, and space exploration.

- It is based on the existing open-source Linux operating system, it was built by a community of about 4,000 developers

About Open-source Operating System (OS)

Source Code Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source code is made available to the public, allowing anyone to view, modify, and distribute the code. • This allows users to examine how the operating system functions, understand its inner workings, and make modifications or improvements as desired.
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-source operating systems encourage collaboration among developers. This can take the form of bug fixes, feature enhancements, and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. • Collaboration often occurs through online communities, forums, mailing lists, and version control systems.
Transparency	Open-source operating systems prioritize transparency by making development processes, decision-making, and discussions publicly accessible.
Examples	Linux, FreeBSD, OpenBSD, ReactOS and Haiku

Cons Of Using Open-Source Operating Systems

- **Lack of Official Support** - It is often developed by a community of volunteers who may not have the resources to provide support to users. This means that users may need to rely on online forums and documentation to troubleshoot issues.
- **Fragmentation & Compatibility Issues** - It may not always be compatible with all hardware and software.
- **Limited Features** – It may not always have the same level of features and functionality as proprietary software.
- **Learning Curve:** Open-source operating systems often have a steeper learning curve compared to more user-friendly proprietary systems. They may require users to have a certain level of technical expertise and familiarity with command-line interfaces.
- **Lack of Accountability** - Because it is often developed by a community of volunteers, there may not be a clear chain of accountability if something goes wrong.

Mosaic Virus

Farmers in Maharashtra and Karnataka have said that their crops have been affected by the mosaic virus attack.

- **Cucumber Mosaic Virus (CMV) and Tomato Mosaic Virus (ToMV):** The two ‘mosaic’ viruses that hit tomato crop in Maharashtra and Karnataka. The current sharp increase in the price of tomato is due to lower production of the vegetable.
- Both viruses can cause almost 100% crop loss unless properly treated on time.

About Mosaic Virus

What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a parasite that destroys plants, gardens, and crops down to their molecular level. • It is characterized by leaves mottled with yellow, white, and light and dark green spots or streaks. (Resembles like Mosaic Pattern)
How do these viruses spread?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreads mainly through infected seeds, saplings, agricultural tools and often, through the hands of nursery workers who have failed to sanitise themselves properly before entering the fields. • Once a plant contracts the mosaic virus, the infected plant can then spread the virus to other

	<p>plants and even affect an entire harvest if left untreated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not harmful to humans or pets since the virus is specific to plants.
Infects on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It infects more than 150 types of plants, including many fruits, vegetables, and flowers (most infected plants include tomatoes, potatoes, squash, and cucumbers).
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once a plant is infected, there is no treatment available to cure or protect the plants. The best factor in controlling and reducing infection is to practice sanitation. • Remove any infected plants, including the roots, also discard any plants near those affected.

Brucellosis

A seven-year-old student from Kadakkal in Kollam has tested positive for Brucellosis.

Brucellosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a bacterial infection that can affect both animals and humans. • It is caused by the bacteria of the genus Brucella. • It is primarily transmitted from animals to humans (a zoonotic infection) through the consumption of contaminated animal products or direct contact with infected animals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It mainly infects cattle, swine, goats, sheep and dogs. ➤ Brucellosis is found globally and is a reportable disease in most countries. It affects people of all ages and both sexes. However, Person-to-person transmission is rare. • It is also sometimes referred to as Malta fever and Mediterranean fever.
Symptoms in Human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It includes fever, chills, sweats, weakness, headache, fatigue, joint, and muscle pain with increased platelet count, and a swollen face. • In severe cases, the disease can lead to complications such as endocarditis, meningitis, and osteomyelitis.
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through proper handling and cooking of animal products, such as meat and milk, and using protective clothing when handling infected animals.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment typically involves the use of antibiotics and can last several weeks to months. • The Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), a part of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), has developed the Brucella abortus S19Δ per vaccine specifically for the prevention of brucellosis in the dairy sector.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has a significant impact on human health and can also have economic consequences, as it can lead to reduced productivity in livestock and can result in trade restrictions.
Extra Mile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified Brucellosis as a neglected zoonotic disease. • The WHO estimates that there are more than 500,000 new cases of Brucellosis in humans each year, with the majority of cases occurring in developing countries.

Hwasong-18

North Korea tested its latest Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

About Hwasong-18

- It is a type of solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) developed by North Korea.
- It is the 1st ICBM to use solid fuel, which allows for faster launches.

- An ICBM is a long-range (greater than 5,500 km or 3,500 miles) ballistic missile typically designed for nuclear weapons delivery, that is, delivering one or more nuclear warheads.

Solid Fuel Missiles	Liquid Fuel Missiles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a solid propellant that is pre-mixed and stored in the missile until it is ignited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use two separate liquids that are combined in the missile just prior to launch.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally considered to be more reliable and easier to maintain, since the fuel is already stored in the missile and does not require any additional preparation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide greater propulsive thrust and power, but require more complex to operate and maintenance, since the two liquids must be stored separately.

Chandrayaan 3

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched its 3rd lunar mission - Chandrayaan 3 which aims to be the world's first mission to soft-land near the lunar south pole.

About Chandrayaan 3

- It is a follow-on mission to Chandrayaan-2 to demonstrate end-to-end capability in safe landing and roving on the lunar surface.
- It consists of:
 - 1) an indigenous Lander module (LM): for soft landing and deployment Rover
 - 2) Propulsion module (PM): To carry the lander and rover configuration till 100 km lunar orbit
 - 3) Rover: To carry out in-situ chemical analysis of the lunar surface
- Mission Life of Lander and Rover will be One lunar day (~14 Earth days)
- It was launched by Launch Vehicle Mark-III or LVM3 from, Sriharikota.
- If the mission is successful, India will become the 4th country along with the United States, China and Russia to successfully perform a controlled landing on the Moon.



Objectives of the Chandrayaan-3

- To study the lunar surface and its mineral composition, as well as to search for water ice deposits.
- It will also study the Moon's atmosphere and the interaction between the solar wind and the lunar surface.
- The data collected by the mission will be used to further our understanding of the Moon's origin and evolution, as well as its potential as a resource for future human exploration

To achieve the mission objectives, several advanced technologies are present in Lander such as, Altimeters, Velocimeters, Inertial Measurement, Propulsion System (Throttleable Liquid Engines),

Navigation, Guidance & Control (NGC), Hazard

Lander Payloads

- RAMBHA-LP Langmuir Probe**
To measure the near surface plasma (ions and electrons) density and its changes with time.
- ChaSTE Chandra's Surface Thermo-physical Experiment**
To carry out the measurements of thermal properties of lunar surface near polar region.
- ILSA Instrument for Lunar Seismic Activity**
To measure seismicity around the landing site and delineating the structure of the lunar crust and mantle

Rover Payloads

- APXS Alpha Particle X-Ray Spectrometer**
To derive the chemical composition and infer mineralogical composition to further enhance our understanding of lunar surface.
- LIBS Laser Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy**
To determine the elemental composition (Mg, Al, Si, K, Ca, Ti, Fe) of lunar soil and rocks around the lunar landing site.

Propulsion Module Payload

- SHAPE Spectro-polarimetry of HAbitable Planet Earth**
An experimental payload to study the spectro-polarimetric signatures of the habitable planet Earth in the near-infrared (NIR) wavelength range (1-1.7 μm).

Detection and Avoidance (Lander Hazard Detection & Avoidance Camera and Processing Algorithm) & Landing Leg Mechanism.

About LVM3 (Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3) (previously known as GSLV-MK III))

- LVM3 is the new heavy lift launch vehicle of ISRO for achieving a 4000 kg spacecraft launching capability to GTO (Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit) in a cost-effective manner.
- LVM3 is configured as a three-stage vehicle with two solid strap-on motors (S200), one liquid core stage (L110) and a high thrust cryogenic upper stage (C25).

Earlier Moon Missions by India

Chandrayaan-1 Mission (first lunar mission, in 2008) (Launch Vehicle: PSLV)	Chandrayaan-2 Mission (launched in 2019) (Launch Vehicle: GSLV-Mk 3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It Involved an orbiter and an impactor. It was the 1st to discover water on the Moon • It was operational for 312 days till August 29, 2009. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It involves an orbiter, a lander named Vikram and a rover named Pragyaan. • It was India's 1st to attempt a soft landing near the south pole of the Moon. Its lander crashed into the lunar surface.

Picolinic Acid

Recently, a new study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) and collaborators A has revealed that picolinic acid can block several viruses, including those responsible for SARS-CoV-2 and influenza A.

- The study describes the compound's remarkable ability to inhibit the entry of the enveloped virus into the host's cell and prevent infection.

About Picolinic Acid

What is it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an organic compound. It is a derivative of pyridine with a carboxylic acid substituent at the 2-position. • It is an isomer of nicotinic acid. • It is a white solid that is soluble in water. • It's important to note that while picolinic acid has various applications, it is not widely used or commercially available for general purposes due to its specific properties and potential complexities in handling.
Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination chemistry: Picolinic acid is used as a chelating agent to form coordination complexes with metal ions. These complexes have various applications in catalysis, pharmaceuticals, and industrial processes. • Dietary supplement: Picolinic acid is sometimes used as a dietary supplement, particularly in combination with minerals such as zinc, manganese, and chromium. The picolinate form is believed to enhance mineral absorption in the body. • Neurotransmitter and brain health: Picolinic acid is involved in the metabolism of the amino acid tryptophan and is considered to have a role in brain health and function. • Analytical chemistry: Picolinic acid is used in some analytical techniques, like high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), as a chelating agent to separate and identify metal ions. • Pharmaceutical applications: Picolinic acid and its derivatives have been investigated for potential medicinal properties, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antitumor activities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is effective against a variety of enveloped viruses, including flaviviruses like the Zika virus and the Japanese encephalitis virus. When the compound was tested in SARS-CoV-2 and influenza animal models, it was found to protect the animals from infection. It was also found to reduce viral load in the lungs when given to infected animals.
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Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC)

The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) has announced the re-bidding of performance linked incentives (PLI) for 20 GWh Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) manufacturing.

About Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery

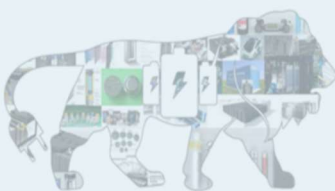
- It can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.
- These have major applications in the electric vehicles, maintaining grid stability, solar rooftop, consumer electronics etc.
- With India's commitment towards renewable energy and achieving net-zero by 2070, energy storage is expected to play a crucial role in the overall energy ecosystem.

NATIONAL PROGRAMME ON ADVANCED CHEMISTRY CELL (ACC) ENERGY STORAGE

- Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises, Government of India
- The plan is to set up 50-gigawatt hour (GWh) manufacturing capacity for ACC batteries by attracting investments totaling Rs. 45,000 crores.

Features of this Programme

- Only cells with higher performance specifications i.e., Energy Density & Cycle Life will be eligible to avail themselves of the incentives.
- The cash subsidy will be offered on output, i.e., the volume of cells manufactured and sold by the beneficiaries.



Aeolus Wind Satellite

The European Space Agency's (ESA) Aeolus (a satellite named after the Greek ruler of winds) wind satellite, after exceeding its planned life in orbit, is making its way back to Earth.

Aeolus Wind Satellite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a space-based observatory launched by the European Space Agency (ESA) in 2018 from the Guiana Space Centre in French Guiana. It is the 1st satellite (1360-kg) to measure wind speeds using laser technology.
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Its primary mission is to measure wind speeds and direction across the entire planet using advanced laser technology. It aims to provide accurate and comprehensive data on wind patterns in the Earth's atmosphere to improve weather forecasting, understand climate dynamics, and enhance our knowledge of the Earth's atmospheric circulation.
Instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It carries a single instrument called the Atmospheric Laser Doppler Instrument (ALADIN), which emits ultraviolet laser pulses towards Earth's atmosphere. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ALADIN is a Doppler wind lidar, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, that will measure the winds sweeping around the planet. These pulses reflect off air molecules, dust particles, and other atmospheric components, and are then detected by a telescope on the satellite.
Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can measure the wind speed and direction at different altitudes in the atmosphere. This information is used to create detailed maps of global winds, which are critical for weather forecasting, climate research, and atmospheric modeling.

Long March 10 rocket

China has successfully completed a trial test of the main engine for the Long March-10.

About Long March-10

- It is China's new carrier rocket designed for manned moon landing missions. The rocket will be capable of ferrying a crew module along with a lunar lander to Earth-Moon transfer orbit.
- It is being developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT), one of the leading rocket manufacturers in China.
- It is designed to be a heavy-lift launch vehicle, capable of carrying payloads of up to 100 tons into low Earth orbit (LEO).
- This makes it a significant upgrade from previous Long March rockets, which had a maximum payload capacity of around 25 tons.
- One of the key features of it is its use of liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen as fuel, which provides a high level of energy efficiency and reduces the environmental impact of the rocket.
- The rocket is also designed to be reusable, with the ability to land vertically on a platform at sea, like the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

Extra Mile

Tiangong space station (first space station built by China)

- Tiangong (Chinese for "Heavenly Palace") is a modular space station being constructed by the China National Space Administration (CNSA).
- Tiangong is currently in low Earth orbit (LEO), and it is expected to be operational until 2028.
- The station is about the size of the International Space Station (ISS), and it can accommodate up to three astronauts.
- China is only the third country to have put both astronauts into space and to build a space station, after the Soviet Union (now Russia) and the US.

ISRO Successfully Places Seven Singaporean Satellites

ISRO successfully launched its PSLV-C56 rocket carrying seven Singaporean satellites, from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh and placed them into intended orbits.

- The PSLV-C56 will be is the 58th mission of ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and the 17th flight of PSLV with Core Alone Configuration.
- A Core Alone version of the rocket means the vehicle would not use solid strap-on motors on its sides in the first stage as compared to other variants like PSLV-XL, QL, and DL which use six, four or two boosters, respectively.

About DS-SAR

The DS-SAR satellite is developed under a partnership between DSTA (representing the Government of Singapore) and ST Engineering.

- Once it is deployed and operational, it will support the satellite imagery requirements of various agencies within the government of Singapore.
- The satellite carries a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) payload developed by Israel Aerospace Industries. The payload allows DS-SAR to provide for all-weather day-and-night coverage and it is capable of imaging at 1-metre resolution.

Why Does India Launch Satellites Of Other Countries

- **International Cooperation & Diplomacy (Soft Power)** - Launching other countries' satellites can help India build and strengthen diplomatic relationships with other countries.
 - For example, India launched a satellite for South Korea in 2010, which helped to strengthen the relationship between the two countries.
- **Revenue Generation** - Launching other countries' satellites can be a source of revenue for India's space program.
- **Technology Demonstration** - Launching other countries' satellites can demonstrate India's technological capabilities and expertise in the field of space.
- **Capacity Building** - Launching other countries' satellites can help to build the capacity of other countries' space programs.
 - For example, India launched a satellite for Algeria in 2018 that was designed to provide training and capacity building for Algerian scientists and engineers.

STARFIRE Algorithm

Scientists at Raman Research Institute (RRI), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology, have developed an algorithm called STARFIRE.

About STARFIRE Algorithm

- STARFIRE stands for Simulation of Terrestrial Radio Frequency Interference in oRbits around Earth.
- It can estimate the Radio Frequency Interference emitted by FM radio stations, Wi-Fi networks, mobile towers, radar, satellites, and communication devices, and use this calculation for designing and fine-tuning the antennas.
- It can help design instruments that can offer optimal operations in the presence of RFI and thereby, enriches the data obtained from the future space-based Astronomy missions.
- To develop this algorithm, scientists utilized data on FM transmitter stations from six countries, including Canada, the USA, Japan, Australia, Germany, and South Africa.

Applications or Advantages of STARFIRE Algorithm

- STARFIRE will play a crucial role in missions like Probing ReionizATIOn of the Universe using Signal from Hydrogen (PRATUSH), which focuses on investigating the origin of stars and galaxies in the Universe.
- The algorithm is essential for optimizing antennas and instrument components, ensuring successful data collection during the mission.
- The algorithm's capabilities also extend to assisting in the selection of orbits for upcoming space missions.
- It can identify orbits with low Radio Frequency Interference (RFI), especially within the ~100 MHz frequency range, thus rendering them well-suited for a wide range of scientific experiments.

Radio Frequency Interference (RFI)	Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is the conduction or radiation of radio frequency energy that causes an electronic or electrical device to produce noise that typically interferes with the function of an adjacent device.• It is emitted by most electronic devices like switching power relays, industrial controls, medical instrumentation, electronic printers, personal computers, laptops, game consoles, computing devices, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is a type of passive wireless technology that allows for tracking or matching of an item or individual.• The technology has been approved since before the 1970s but has become much more prevalent in recent years due to its usage in things like global supply chain management and pet microchipping.

Markarian 421

Markarian 421	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is a blazar, located about 400 million light-years away from Earth, in the constellation Ursa Major.• It is one of the brightest sources of gamma rays and X-rays in the sky because it has a powerful jet of high-energy particles that is pointing directly towards Earth.
What is Blazar?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is a type of active galactic nucleus (AGN) that emits high-energy radiation.• It is powered by a supermassive black hole that is actively accreting matter.• It is characterized by their intense and variable emission across the electromagnetic spectrum, from radio waves to gamma rays.
Supermassive Black Hole	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is a very massive object whose gravitational pull is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape from it.• It is commonly found in the centers of galaxies, where they can grow by swallowing up gas, dust, stars and planets.• Their mass can be millions or billions of times more than our Sun.

Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS)

What is it?	It is the process of determining the complete DNA sequence (including both coding and non-coding regions) of an organism's genome at a single time. It provides a high-resolution, base-by-base view of the genome.
Procedure	This method involves breaking the DNA into small fragments, sequencing each fragment, and then assembling the fragments back together to create the complete genome sequence.
Applications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personalized Medicine: WGS can be used to identify genetic variations associated with diseases, drug responses. This information can be used to tailor medical treatments to an individual's genetic profile.• Cancer Genomics: WGS can reveal somatic mutations in cancer cells, helping to understand the genetic basis of cancer and identify therapeutic targets.• Rare Disease Diagnosis: by identifying disease-causing mutations.• Ancestry and Genealogy: WGS can provide information about an individual's ancestral origins and connections to specific populations.	

CH₃⁺ Molecule (Methyl Cation)

Scientists have found the fingerprints of a CH₃⁺ molecule in light coming from a rotating disk of dust and gas around a young star.

- It is a very simple organic molecule, only one carbon atom and 3 hydrogen atoms.
- It reacts with other molecules to form more complex molecules.
- Its presence in space tells us that the basic infrastructure for life is there.

Naegleria Fowleri

What is	A single-cell organism (brain-eating amoeba) found in warm freshwater environments such as
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it?	lakes, hot springs, and poorly maintained swimming pools.
Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The infection primarily occurs when contaminated water enters the nasal passages, which is why activities like diving, jumping, or falling into warm freshwater sources can pose a risk. • It migrates via the olfactory nerve to the brain, leading to severe inflammation & destruction of brain tissue. It does not spread from person to person.
Symptoms	Initial symptoms can include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, and a stiff neck. As the infection progresses, symptoms may worsen and can include confusion, seizures, hallucinations, coma, and death.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be treated by the combination of drugs. • Even with treatment, the chances of surviving with this infection remain low with a recorded death rate of 97 per cent.

Majorana Zero Modes (MZMs)

- These are a type of particle that exhibit unique behavior in the world matter physics and quantum computing.
- They are formed when two Majorana particles come into close proximity and combine to create a special particle known as a Majorana zero mode.
- MZMs are unique because they are their own antiparticles, and they exhibit properties that could make them useful for building robust and fault-tolerant quantum computers.

AI for Good Global Summit

- It is the leading action-oriented United Nations platform promoting AI.
- It is organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in partnership with 40 UN sister agencies and co-convened with the government of Switzerland.
- It aims to identify practical applications of artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate progress towards the SDGs by connecting AI innovators from the public and private sector.

BepiColombo

- It is an international mission consisting of two spacecraft (Each by The European Space Agency (ESA) and The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)) riding together to Mercury to orbit and to study the planet from unique vantage points.
- It was launched in October 2018 and is scheduled to begin orbiting Mercury in 2025.
- ESA's Mercury Planetary Orbiter (MPO) will study the planet's surface and interior.
- JAXA's Mercury Magnetospheric Orbiter (MIO) will study the planet's magnetic field.

Cosmic Diamond

What is it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cosmic diamonds, often referred to as "stellar diamonds" or "carbon stars," are a fascinating phenomenon in astronomy. • They are not literal diamonds like the ones found on Earth, They are thought to be formed
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	from carbon-rich materials that are present in certain types of stars, such as white dwarfs.
Formation	When these stars reach the end of their life cycle, they can explode in a supernova, and the intense heat and pressure can cause the carbon atoms to form into diamond crystals.
Importance	They can provide valuable insights into the formation and evolution of the universe.

Watson Crick Interaction And Hoogsteen Interaction

- Both are a type of **hydrogen bonding** that occurs between nucleotides in DNA.
- Watson-Crick interactions occur between the nitrogenous bases adenine and thymine, as well as between guanine and cytosine.
- Hoogsteen interactions occur between the nitrogenous bases in the minor groove of DNA.
- Both interactions are important for the stability and function of DNA, and they play a key role in many biological processes, including DNA replication, transcription, and repair.

The Hubble Constant (H_0)

- It is the rate at which the universe is expanding. It tells us how quickly galaxies are moving away (Red Shift) from us as the universe expands.
- It is named after Edwin Hubble, who discovered that the universe was expanding in the 1920s.
- The value of the Hubble Constant is currently estimated to be around 70 km/s/Mpc (megaparsec), which means that for every megaparsec of distance between two galaxies, the distance between them will increase by about 70 kilometers per second.
- It is an important tool for astronomers studying the evolution of the universe, and it is used to estimate the age of the universe and the amount of dark energy that is present.

Nanoflakes

What?	Thin, flat structures or particles with nanoscale dimensions.
Formation	Made from various materials, including metals, semiconductors, oxides, and polymers. They are often made from graphene.

Applications

Due to their unique geometry and size, nanoflakes often exhibit distinct physical, chemical, and electrical properties compared to bulk materials. These features make them useful in:

- 1) a variety of applications, such as in batteries, solar cells, and electronic devices.
- 2) water purification, as their large surface area makes them effective at removing pollutants from water.
- 3) sensor applications
- 4) In solar cells, nanoflakes can be utilized to increase light absorption and enhance electron mobility, potentially leading to more efficient energy conversion.

Hygroelectricity

- It is a type of static electricity that forms on water droplets (the humidity of the air) and can be transferred from droplets to small dust particles.

- The phenomenon is common in the earth's atmosphere but has also been observed in the steam escaping from boilers.
- It is a type of renewable energy that has the potential to be a major source of power in the future.

Fluorochemicals

What are they?	Fluorochemicals are a class of chemical compounds that contain fluorine atoms.
Properties	They exhibit unique properties due to the strong carbon-fluorine bonds, which impart traits such as high thermal and chemical stability, water and oil repellency, and electrical insulation.

CULTURE

Tankai Method

- The Ministry of Culture and the Indian Navy have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to revive and preserve the 2000-year-old technique of shipbuilding known as the **stitched shipbuilding method**, also known as the **Tankai Method**.
- The stitched ship holds significant cultural value in India, due to its historical importance and the preservation of traditional craftsmanship.
- Throughout history, India has had a strong maritime tradition, and the use of stitched ships played a vital role in trade, cultural exchange, and exploration.
- These ships, constructed by stitching wooden planks together rather than using nails, offered flexibility and durability, making them less susceptible to damage from shoals and sandbars.
- Although the arrival of European ships led to a shift in shipbuilding techniques, the art of stitching ships has survived in a few coastal regions of India, primarily for small local fishing boats.

Significance

- Reviving and rejuvenating this fading art is crucial to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations.
- It aims to revive the maritime memory and instill a sense of pride in India's rich maritime heritage among its citizens.
- By sailing along ancient maritime routes using traditional navigational techniques, the project aims to look into the historical interactions across the Indian Ocean, which facilitated flow of Indian culture, knowledge systems, traditions, technologies, and ideas.
- Additionally, it aims to promote cultural memories among the Indian Ocean littoral countries. Thorough documentation and cataloguing of the project will ensure that valuable information is preserved for future reference.

Meri Maati Mera Desh

- The Union government has launched the 'Meri Maati Mera Desh' campaign, as a culminating event of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebration of 75 years of Indian Independence.
- Events have been planned at the panchayat, village, block, urban local body, and State and national levels, respectively.
- The agenda includes the installation of a **shilaphalakam** (memorial plaque), as per specifications, bearing the names of those who have made the supreme sacrifice.
- For this purpose, *veers* (bravehearts) include freedom fighters, defence personnel, personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), and State Police, who laid down their lives in the line of duty.
- **A solemn pledge will be taken by people at the memorial site, affirming their commitment to the country.**
- Work for the shilaphalakam may be executed through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), utilising local materials and resources.
- **Vasudha Vandhan** envisages every gram panchayat or village renewing Mother Earth by planting 75 saplings of indigenous species and developing an Amrit Vatika.
- **Veeron Ka Vandan** will felicitate freedom fighters, and the families of deceased freedom fighters.

- Retired Defence, CAPF, and State Police personnel, and the families of those from these forces who lost their lives in the line of duty, will be honoured.
- Young volunteers and others will collect soil from every panchayat/village and bring it to the block, from where the 'Mitti Kalash' will be transported to Delhi.
- The *mitti* (soil) from all parts of the country will be utilised to develop a unique garden, called the **Amrit Vatika**, with the planting of indigenous species
- An **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav memorial**, dedicated to all the heroes who have contributed to the freedom, unity and integrity of the country, will be erected.

Mihir Bhoj

- Tension erupted between the Gujjar and Rajput communities after the statue of 9th century ruler Mihir Bhoj (also called Mihira Bhoj or Gurjar Pratihar Samrat Mihir Bhoj) was unveiled in Haryana's Kaithal.
- Mihir Bhoj was a ruler of the **Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty**. He succeeded his father Ramabhadra and was in power from 836 until 885 CE.
- Some of Bhoja's coins feature the term Adivaraha, which indicates that he was a devoted devotee of Vishnu.
- During his reign, Kannauj served as the state capital. Kannauj was known during his time as Panchala.
- Mihir Bhoj's kingdom extended from Multan in the west to Bengal in the east and from Kashmir in the north to Karnataka in the south. He dominated areas of northern India for more than 50 years.
- Mihir Bhoj was succeeded by his son Mahendrapala I (c.836 - 910 CE).

Namda Project

- The Namda craft of Kashmir is being successfully revived under a Skill India's Pilot Project as part of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), with nearly 2,200 candidates from the state, receiving training in the dying art form.
- Due to low availability of raw material, lack of skilled manpower and marketing techniques, the export of this craft has declined almost 100 percent between 1998 and 2008.
- The project sets a great example of the public-private partnership (PPP) model in the field of skill development, as it is being implemented in collaboration with local industry partners.
- The **Namda project** is an industry-based training program with beneficiaries involved in Namda Crafts Production who will contribute towards preserving and reviving the rich heritage associated with Namda craft in Kashmir.
- This will also improve the access of existing artisans of Namda crafts cluster in Kashmir and will improve their prospects of employability.

Namda Art

- Namda craft is a **rug made of sheep wool through felting technique** instead of normal weaving process.
- Namada is said to have begun in the 16th century when Mughal Emperor Akbar wanted to get a covering for his horses to protect them from the cold.
- The term Namda is derived from **Nubi**, the name of the person who came up with the idea of felted woollen carpets.
- It is believed that a Sufi saint named **Shah-e-Hamdan** introduced Kashmiris to the Namda art.
- Namda works are used by Kashmiris in the form of carpets, rugs, floor mats, and even bed covers.

- Namda rugs are of great utility to provide warmth. They are spread on the floors and are an important part of home decor.
- Namda has been practiced by the **Pinjara and Mansuri communities** and **Sama Muslims in Kachchh**. Although people working on this wool craft can be found across India, they are mainly seen in **Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Kashmir**.

Geographical Indication Tag

- Seven different products from Uttar Pradesh were recently given Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- ‘Amroha Dholak’, ‘Mahoba Gaura PattharHastashlip’, ‘Mainpuri Tarkashi’, ‘Sambhal Horn Craft’, ‘Baghpat Home Furnishings’, ‘Barabanki Handloom Product’ and ‘Kalpi Handmade Paper’ are the products that have been given the GI tag.

Amroha Dholak

- The **Amroha Dholak** is a musical instrument made of natural wood. Mango, jackfruit and teakwood is preferred for making the dholaks.
- Wood from mango and sheesham trees are used to carve the multiple sized and shaped hollow blocks, which are later fitted with animal skin, mostly goatskin, to create the instrument.

Baghpat Home Furnishings

- Baghpat and Meerut are famous for their exclusive handloom home furnishing product and running fabrics in cotton yarn since generations, and only cotton yarn are used in the handloom weaving process.
- Baghpat is famous for weaving on the frame loom instead of the pit loom since generations.

Barabanki Handloom Product

According to details available in the filing, there are around 50,000 weavers and 20,000 looms at Barabanki and adjoining area. The annual turnover of the Barabanki cluster is projected to be ₹150 crore.

Kalpi Handmade Paper

- Kalpi has historically been a centre of handmade paper manufacturing.
- Historical details available in the filing show that Munnalal ‘Khaddari’, a Gandhian, formally introduced the craft here in the 1940s, though many locals say that Kalpi’s association with paper-making dates further back into history.
- The handmade paper-making cluster at Kalpi is a huge cluster, engaging more than 5,000 craftsmen and approximately 200 units.

Mahoba Gaura PattharHastashlip

- The Mahoba Gaura PattharHastashlip is a stone craft. It is a very unique and soft stone with scientific name, the ‘Pyro Flight Stone’.
- Gaura stone craft is made of radiant white-coloured stone that is predominantly found in this region. It is cut into several pieces, which are then used for making various craft items.

Mainpuri Tarkash and Sambhal Horn Craft

- Tarkashi, a popular art form from Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh, is primarily brass wire inlay work on wood. It was mainly used for khadaous (wooden sandals), a necessity for every household, since leather was considered unclean.
- And for the Sambhal Horn Craft, the raw material is procured from dead animals. They are completely hand-made.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

The Prime Minister recently paid tributes to Bal Gangadhar Tilak on his birth anniversary on 23rd July 2023.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak was an Indian social reformer and freedom activist. He was one of the prime architects of modern India and one of the strongest advocates of Swaraj or Self Rule for India.
- His famous declaration "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it" served as an inspiration for future revolutionaries during India's struggle for freedom
- The British Government termed him as the "**Father of Indian Unrest**" and his followers gave him the title of 'Lokmanya', which means, one who is respected by the people.

Political Career

- Tilak joined the Indian National Congress in 1890 and soon started vocalizing his strong opposition to the moderate views of the party on self-rule.
- He maintained, that simple constitutional agitation was not enough against the British. Instead, he advocated an armed revolt to fight the British.
- Following the partition of Bengal in 1905, by Lord Curzon, Tilak wholeheartedly supported the Swadeshi (Indigenous) movement and boycott of British goods.
- Due to this fundamental difference in outlook, Tilak and his supporters came to be known as the extremist wing of Indian National Congress Party.
- Tilak's views were supported by fellow nationalists Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal and Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab. The trio were popularly referred as Lal-Bal-Pal.

Newspapers

- Towards his nationalistic goals, Tilak published two newspapers - **Mahratta** (in English) and **Kesari** (in Marathi).
- Both the newspapers stressed on making the Indians aware of the glorious past and encouraged the masses to be self-reliant. In other words, the newspaper actively propagated the cause of national freedom.
- In 1896, when the entire nation was facing famine and plague, Tilak fearlessly published reports about the government's irresponsibility and indifference.

Imprisonment

- Inspired by Tilak's articles, the Chapekar brothers carried out the assassination of Commissioner Rand and Lt. Ayerst in 1897. As a result of this, Tilak was imprisoned for 18 months on sedition charges for inciting murder.
- He openly supported the revolutionaries Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki's efforts to assassinate Chief Presidency Magistrate Douglas Kingsford in 1908.
- For this, he was charged with sedition and had to undergo six years (1908-1914) of rigorous imprisonment in Mandalay Jail, Burma.
- He continued to write during his years of imprisonment. He wrote the **Gita Rahasya** during imprisonment.

All India Home Rule League

- After completing his imprisonment Tilak returned to India in 1915 when the political situation was fast changing during the period of World War I. He then returned to politics with a different and less aggressive outlook.
- Deciding to re-unite with his fellow nationalists, Tilak founded the All-India Home Rule League in 1916 with Annie Besant.
- The stated goal of the Home Rule League was to achieve self-government in India.

- Tilak found the first home rule league at Belgaum in April 1916 and Annie Besant founded the second league at Adyar Madras in September 1916.
- Tilak's league worked in areas like Maharashtra (excluding Bombay city), Karnataka, Central provinces and Berar, and Annie Besant's league worked in the rest of India.

Social Reforms

- Throughout his life he advocated the cause of women education and women empowerment. He educated all of his daughters and did not marry them till they were over 16.
- Tilak proposed grand celebrations on 'Ganesh Chaturthi' and 'Shivaji Jayanti'. He believed that these celebrations could bring a sense of unity and inspire nationalist sentiment among Indians.

Lambani Art

- At the third G20 culture working group (CWG) meeting in Hampi, a Guinness world record was created for the 'largest display of Lambani items' with a total of 1755 items.
- The record was made under the 'Culture Unites All' campaign of the Culture Working Group, Ministry of Culture.
- This Guinness World Record is aligned with the PM's campaign of Mission 'LiFe' (Lifestyle for environment) and the CWG's initiative for 'Culture for LiFe', an environmentally conscious lifestyle and a concerted action towards sustainability.

Lambani Art

- Lambani embroidery is a vibrant and intricate form of textile decoration characterized by colourful threads, mirror work, and a rich arrangements of stitch patterns. It is practised in several villages of Karnataka.
- This rich embroidery tradition, predominantly upheld by the skilled women of the Lambani community, serves as a vital source of livelihood and sustenance, bringing together living practices with economic empowerment.
- The sustainable practice of patchworking is found in many textile traditions of India and around the world. Lambani craft tradition involves skillfully stitching together small pieces of discarded fabric to create a beautiful fabric.
- The embroidery traditions of the Lambanis are shared in terms of technique and aesthetics with textile traditions across Eastern Europe, West, and Central Asia.
- This refers to the movement of the nomadic communities across such regions historically, forming a shared artistic culture.
- This interconnectedness of cultures through the craft makes it an ideal symbol for the campaign 'Culture Unites All'.

Lambani Community

- Lambanis, also called Lambadis or Banjaras, were nomadic tribes who came from Afghanistan to Rajasthan and have now spread themselves across Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- In the 17th century, they are believed to have assisted the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb to carry goods to the southern part of India. Some of them settled there.
- In the 18th century the British authorities framed the Criminal Tribe Act of 1871 and stopped their free movement.