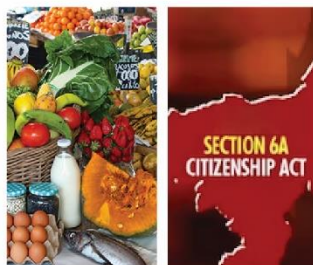




# the recitals

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# Elimination of Child Labour: India Needs Uniform Definition of 'Child'

The 52nd report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles and Skill Development has been tabled in the parliament. The report highlights that the implementation of a policy to eliminate child labour has a long way to go before achieving its ultimate goal by 2025 and the country needs a uniform definition of 'child' under various laws.

## Child Labour: Meaning, Prevalence and India's Commitment to Eliminate

- According to the ILO, child labour includes any work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, physical or mental development.
- It perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty (due to poor education-health, less economic opportunities), denying children their fundamental rights and a better future.
- Article 24 of the Constitution of India prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or in any hazardous employment.
- According to the estimates by ILO, there are about **10.1 million working children** between the age of 5 to 14 in India.
  - UP leads with an estimated 2.1 million child labourers and together with Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and MP constitute nearly 55% of the total working children in India.
- The prevalence of child labour in rural areas (~14%) is close to three times higher than in urban areas (~5%). Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls at every age.
- The agriculture sector accounts for 70% of child labour, followed by services (20%) and industry (10%).
- India resolves to eliminate child labour (by 2025) as per -
  - The commitments made by the county after ratification of ILO conventions, &
  - The target stipulated in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 to end all forms of child labour.

## Definition of 'Child' as per Various Laws/Initiatives in India



As per the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 (CALPRA), 'child' means a person who has not completed his/her 14 years of age.

— The amendment made to the Act in 2016 bars the employment of adolescents in occupations that deal with hazardous working conditions such as chemical plants and mines.



Under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, 'Child' means a male or female aged 6-14 years.



As per the Minimum Wages Act 1948 vide its amendment in 1986 a 'child' is defined as a person who has not completed his 14 years of age.



The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 defines 'child' as a person who has not completed 18 years of age.

— The term 'adolescent' is not defined in JJ Act, 2015.

— The employment of children in contravention of the CALPRA Act is a cognizable offence, whereas under the JJ Act 2015, it is a non-cognizable offence.



The Rashtriya Kishore SwasthyaKaryakaram under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare defines an adolescent as a person between 10-19 years.

## Suggestions In the Parliamentary Standing Committee's Report

- The discrepancies (in the age of child as well as the provisions of offence) be examined with a view to ensuring that these do not lead to any ambiguity as well as delay in justice to the aggrieved children.
- In the positive list of occupations and processes where adolescents can work, the labour ministry should not include those which are hazardous in nature.
- The panel urged the labour ministry
  - To formulate suitable guidelines for the utilisation of the fund (collected as fine for child labour employer) and

- To take immediate steps to increase the fine of Rs 20,000/(govt) contribution of Rs 5,000, keeping in view the inflation.
  - ✓ Contribution @ Rs.20,000/- per child to be paid by the offending employers of children to a welfare fund to be established for this purpose;
  - ✓ Employment to one adult member of the family of the child so withdrawn from work and if that is not possible a contribution of Rs.5,000/- to the welfare fund to be made by the State Government;
- To ensure timely deposit of the amount in the account of the rescued child/adolescent so as to have their secure future.
- It also suggested the ministry take steps for creating a **district-level fund** of appropriate amount for child labourers.
- **The panel recommended some stricter punishment** in the form of cancellation of licence, attachment of property, etc., also need to be incorporated.
- It noted that the functions of DPS (district project societies) with regard to uploading information of the rescued child on **PENCIL Portal (Platform for Effective Enforcement of No. Child Labour)**, awareness generation, facilitating vocational training, etc., have not been assigned to anyone.
  - It recommends that **an appropriate mechanism** in this regard be put in place in a time-bound manner.
- It noted that there are inherent provisions in **the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012** for action against police for not registering FIRs.
  - It desires that similar provisions need to be made in the CALPRA Act.
- It also desires that the responsibility of reporting children selling goods or begging at traffic lights be assigned to the **traffic police** and they may also be held accountable for not reporting such instances.
- The Committee also desires that steps be taken to establish a **National Level Child Tracking Mechanism** to facilitate coordination among the states/Centre.
  - This will facilitate prevention, tracing, tracking, rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of the rescued children.



## The SC Upholds Abrogation of Article 370

A 5-judge Constitution Bench led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) upheld the abrogation of Article 370 through a Presidential Order in 2019 and led to the reorganization of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into two Union Territories i.e. J&K and Ladakh and denuded it of its special privileges.

### Judgement on Key Issues

#### 1. Sovereignty of Jammu and Kashmir

- The court examined the constitutional set-up of the erstwhile state to examine its element of sovereignty, which would allow Article 370 to operate in “unique circumstances” and noted that -
  - Article 1 (Name and territory of the Union) of the Constitution of India provides that “India is a Union of States” and Article 1(3) lists Jammu and Kashmir (before 2019) in the First Schedule of the Constitution.
  - Section 3 of the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir declared that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India and any amendment to this section was prohibited under Section 147 of the J&K Constitution.
- It held that these provisions contradict the argument that an agreement of merger was necessary for Jammu and Kashmir to surrender its sovereignty.

#### 2. Whether Article 370 Was Temporary Or Permanent?

- The petitioners argued that abrogating article 370 is not possible because:
  - It had attained permanence and is part of the basic structure of the constitution, which cannot be

tinkered with.

- No constitutional means existed to abrogate Article 370 as the J&K Constituent Assembly had ceased to exist and the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of the State (which has ceased to exist) was a prerequisite to abrogate Article 370.
- The court held that Article 370 was always meant to be a *temporary* feature as-
  - It was intended as an interim arrangement until the Constituent Assembly of the State was formed. After the enactment of J&K Constitution and the state was adopted as a part of India, this arrangement was not necessary.
  - It was adopted because of the special circumstances in the state as it was experiencing war conditions.

### 3. Legality of Abrogation of Article 370

- **Process of Abrogation:** It was abrogated through two constitutional orders (CO)-
  - i) CO 272- It amended Article 367 and added a new meaning i.e., the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir now meant Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir.
    - ✓ Article 367 deals with the interpretation of the constitution.
  - ii) CO 273- It aimed at seeking Parliamentary consent (which had assumed powers of the J&K legislature) to recommend that all clauses of article 370 should cease to be operative.
- **Court's Opinion:** It held that there was no need to change the meaning of Constituent Assembly of J&K. After the Constituent Assembly of the state was dissolved, its power to make recommendations also ceased to exist and the President could have always unilaterally abrogated Article 370.

### 4. Action Taken under Article 356 (President's Rule)

- The petitioner's challenged the extent of powers that can be appropriated during President's rule and argued that the Union took "irrevocable" action without the state's consent.
- The court while relying on the 'S R Bommai v Union of India' judgement, held that the exercise of power by the President after the issuing the Proclamation is subject to judicial review and it must have a reasonable nexus with the object of the Proclamation.
  - In the S R Bommai v Union of India case, a nine-judge bench of SC defined the contours of proclamation of President's rule.
- The person challenging the exercise of power must *prima facie* establish that it is a *mala fide* or *extraneous* exercise of power and once a *prima facie* case is made, the onus shifts to the Union to justify the exercise of such power.

### 5. Status of the Constitution of J&K

The court held that the Constitution of India is a complete code for constitutional governance and following its application in its entirety to the State of Jammu and Kashmir by CO 273, the Constitution of the State of Jammu and Kashmir is inoperative and is declared to have become redundant.

### 6. Challenge to the Reorganization Act

Based on the statement of the Solicitor General that the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir will be restored (except for the carving out of the Union Territory of Ladakh), the court did not find it necessary to determine whether the reorganization of the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir is permissible under Article 3 or not. It also ordered the Election Commission of India to conduct elections to the legislative assembly of J&K by 30 Sep 2024.

- Article 3 deals with the formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States by a law made by the Parliament

## Arguments Regarding The SC Verdict

Favour	Against
<p>1. <b>Beacon of Hope-</b> Many in the government welcomed the verdict terming it a beacon of hope, a promise of a brighter future and a testament to a collective resolve to build a stronger and united India.</p> <p>2. <b>Positive Changes-</b> The judgement will help in bringing aplenty of positive changes in the valley some of which have already been witnessed like the national flag was not allowed to be hoisted in the Valley, but post abrogation of article 370 campaigns like <i>harghartiranga</i> became a big success; theatres are operating now and shooting for more than 100 films have been done in the Valley locales in the past three years; tourism infrastructure has improved with the number of tourists increasing manifold; Moharram procession could be held after 30 years; more colleges, including IIT, IIM and medical colleges, have been opened.</p>	<p>1. <b>Undermines Federalism &amp; Weakens Institutional Limitations</b> - SC's unconscionable conclusion that Parliament can do any act, legislative or otherwise even one with irreversible consequences on behalf of the State legislature while a State is under President's Rule undermines federalism- a basic feature of the Constitution as enunciated by the Court itself and may have grave implications for the rights of States, permitting a range of hostile and irrevocable actions in the absence of an elected body.</p> <p>2. <b>Gives Political Boost to the Ruling Party at Centre-</b> and its audacious move to strip Kashmir of its special status and bring it on a par with other States by ruling in the favour of the Centre.</p> <p>3. <b>Judicial Evasion-</b> is easily visible in the verdict as the Court chose not to adjudicate on the question "whether the Constitution permitted reorganization of J&amp;K into two UTs" that arose directly from the use of Article 3 of the Constitution for the first time to downgrade a State. The court evaded the question by relying only on the assurance given by the Solicitor-General that the Statehood of J&amp;K would be restored.</p> <p>4. <b>Threat to Powers Devolved to the States-</b> This judgement can allow the Centre in future, to impose the President's rule to carry out extraordinary actions through its own parliamentary majority that an elected government in a State may never do, like ratification of Constitution amendments, abrogation of inter-State agreements, withdrawal of crucial litigation and bringing about major policy changes.</p> <p>5. <b>No Word on Panchayat Polls-</b> while the SC directed the ECI to hold Assembly elections, there was no word on the third tier of governance in the Union Territory as more than 700 panchayats comprising over 12,000 seats remain vacant since December 2018.</p>

### The Verdict w.r.t. India and World

- This verdict has given ballast to New Delhi's global diplomatic strategy to communicate to the world that Kashmir is an integral part of India.
- India's position that J&K is its "internal matter" with no external repercussions has been accepted and the only two issues flagged by the major powers on which New Delhi needs to work on now were-
  - The human rights of the people of J&K, which includes the right to free and fair elections, should be protected.
  - Avoiding possible escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan.

### Way Forward

- Although the judgment has been met largely with silence that is ambiguous in Jammu, disappointed in Kargil, welcoming in Ladakh (with reservations), and ominous in the Valley, the Union administration could start a new peace process by restoring J&Ks statehood, holding elections and returning freedom of expression.
- The Centre may also opt to return to the blueprint for a solution that was developed by A.B. Vajpayee which included the disarmament of armed groups and demilitarization of the area, a soft border with autonomy for both J&K and its Pakistan-held parts, together with an option of joint development for the former state.

# Article 356

In upholding the abrogation of Article 370, the Supreme Court relied heavily on its landmark 1994 judgement in **SR Bommai v Union of India**.

- ✓ In J&K's case, a key question was whether Article 370 could be abrogated with the state under the President's Rule. The Court held that "the exercise of power cannot be held mala fide merely because Article 356 (1)(b) is a non-law-making power or that it furthers an important federal principle"
- ✓ In Bommai Case (drew a redline for Centre-state relationships), a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court interpreted Article 356 of the Constitution to define the limits of the President's Rule.

## What is Article 356?

It contains provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in States i.e., it allows the President to impose President's rule if the State Government fails to carry out its responsibilities in accordance with the Constitutional provisions.

### Historical Evolution

- It is inspired from section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 which empowered the Governor of a province to take up all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by a provincial body or authority including the Ministry and the Legislature (in case of the failure of provincial government) and to discharge those functions in his discretion.
- For the British, this provision allowed for a 'controlled democracy' – while providing some autonomy to provincial governments.

### Provisions

1. If the President is satisfied that such a situation has arisen, whether based on a report received from the Governor of the State or otherwise, then by a proclamation, he may-
  - assume to himself all or any of the functions of the State Government and all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor other than the Legislature of the State;
  - declare that the powers of the State Legislature shall be exercisable by or under the authority of Parliament;
  - make any incidental and consequential provisions which he may find necessary for giving effect to the objects of the Proclamation, but he cannot assume to himself any of the powers vested in or exercisable by a High Court.
2. Any such proclamation may be revoked (without parliamentary approval) or varied by a subsequent Proclamation.
3. This power comes under restriction i.e., every proclamation under this article needs to be laid before each House of Parliament for approval within two months of its issuance otherwise it ceases to exist.
  - This condition is not required if it is a Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation.
4. A Proclamation approved by both the Houses of Parliament unless revoked remains valid till a period of six months from the date of its issuance. However, it can be extended beyond six months subject to the approval of Parliament for a further period of six months with an outer limit of three years.
  - Earlier this period was one year, it was reduced to six months by the 44th Amendment Act.
5. The 44<sup>th</sup> amendment also introduced some constraints on the imposition of the President's Rule and said that President's Rule cannot be extended beyond one year unless:
  - there is a national emergency in India.
  - the Election Commission of India (ECI) certifies that it is necessary to continue the President's Rule in the state because of difficulties in conducting assembly elections in the state.



### What Happens After The President's Rule Has Been Imposed In A State?

- The Governor carries on with the administration of the state on behalf of the President with the help of the state's Chief Secretary and other advisors/administrators appointed by him.
- The state legislative assembly is either suspended or dissolved by the President.
- The President has the power to declare that the state legislature's powers would be exercised by the Parliament.
- It has no effect on the Fundamental Rights of the citizens.
- When the Parliament is not in session, the President can promulgate ordinances with respect to the state's administration.

### Related Judgements

- **State of Rajasthan vs. Union of India, 1977**- In this case, the apex court held that although it cannot go into the adequacy of facts and circumstances on which the satisfaction of the central government is based. But, if the satisfaction was made on mala fide intention, wholly extraneous and irrelevant grounds, then the courts will have the jurisdiction to examine it because in such cases, there would be no presidential satisfaction present concerning the matter.
- **S.R Bommai v Union of India, 1994**- In this landmark judgement by a nine-judge bench, the Supreme Court overruled its 1977 judgement in *State of Rajasthan vs. Union of India case* and tried to end the union government's unconstitutional dismissal of State governments. The court held that generally the President's satisfaction is not questionable, but the governor's report can be examined to ascertain the grounds for the President's satisfaction. It gave seven opinions-
  1. Federalism could not be imposed in a strict sense.
  2. Proclamation of the President's rule is subject to judicial review (on grounds of mala fide intention), but it will be limited only to the administrative aspect and restricted to the relevant material based on which the President corroborates his subjective satisfaction.
  3. The court reserves its right to its right to repeal any verdict that ultra vires with the Constitution.
  4. If the proclamation is proved to be unconstitutional, the court has the power to reinstate the status quo ante and thus restore the Legislative Assembly.
  5. State Assembly could not be dismissed without prior approval from Parliament, and the President is allowed only to suspend the Assembly.
  6. Article 356 can only be invoked when disobedience of the Constitution is of a nature that leads to a situation of impasse, and there is no scope of the remedy, and the functioning of the State has become impossible. Hence, Power under Article 356 is to be used only in case of exigencies.
  7. Floor tests must be conducted mandatorily to determine the legitimacy of government.
- **Rameshwar Prasad vs Union of India, 2006**- This case was a critical analysis of Governors role in the implementation of Presidents rule. The majority judgment held that the power under Article 356(1) is an emergency power and not an absolute power. If there is absence of reasonable grounds in the governor's rule, the court can question the President's decision of imposing President rule.
  - ✓ The situation should be grave as a mere violation of certain provisions of the Constitution can't be termed as a failure of Constitutional machinery.

### Sarkaria Commission (1983) Recommendations

- 1. Cautious Use-** It recommended using Article 356 very cautiously, only in the rarest of rare scenarios and only as a last remedy after all possible alternatives have been exhausted to resolve and avert any circumstance where the constitutional machinery has collapsed in a state.
- 2. Situations for Imposing Article 356-** The Commission specified the following situations when President's rule could be imposed-
  - If a state government intentionally acts unconstitutionally even after giving necessary, scope and warnings for rectifying their wrong.
  - State government do not oblige with instructions given through Article 353 in an emergency after issuing warnings.
  - If the State government fails to notify the Central government when there is a threat to State security.
- 3. Duty of Governor-** It is the duty of the Governor to investigate all possible alternatives before the government retaining the majority support in the Assembly is dismissed in case of political breakdown. If the government is incapable of being reinstated and fresh elections can be conducted swiftly and without much difficulty, then it is the responsibility of the Governor to ask the departing Ministry to remain and function as a caretaker government on the condition that the ministry has no serious accusations of corruption. The Governor must dismiss the Assembly, and the interim government has no power to pass important decisions on policy matters.
- 4. Proclamation-** It stated that each proclamation must be placed before both houses of Parliament as early as possible before the expiry of two months duration.

### Perspective of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001)

The commission recommended that the elimination of Article 356 is not currently warranted in the constitutional progress. However, it suggested that the responsible utilization of the Article could be guaranteed through suitable amendments.

### Punchhi Commission (2007) Recommendations

- The central government should consider extending its jurisdiction solely to address specific troubled areas & this intervention should be limited to a brief period, not exceeding 3 months.
- The commission suggested amending existing laws to incorporate the guidelines established by the Supreme Court in the Bommai case.
- The commission proposed the introduction of a 'Localized Emergency' provision, allowing the central government to address issues at the town or district (local) level without dissolving the state legislative assembly. Simultaneously, it would fulfill the Union's duty to protect states in accordance with Article 355.

### States Under President's Rule

- Since 1950, the President's Rule has been imposed a total of 134 times across 29 states and UTs and at least once a year in 53 out of 74 years with the 1960s and 1970s witnessing its most frequent use.
- **Barring I K Gujral**, each of India's 14 Prime Ministers (PMs) has imposed President's Rule during their tenures at least once with Indira Gandhi implementing it 51 times (the highest among all PMs) in nearly 16 years of her tenure as the PM.

### Maximum Instances

- 1. 1977-** President's rule was imposed 14 times following a two-year period of Emergency.
- 2. 1992-** It was imposed 6 times of which 4 occurred in UP, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh due to communal violence following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, UP.

#### Highest Number

1. Manipur tied with Uttar

#### Longest Duration

1. Jammu & Kashmir (12 years, 9

#### Shortest Duration (7 days)

1. West Bengal (1962)

Pradesh (10 times each)	months)	2. Karnataka (1990)
2. Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir (9 times each)	2. Punjab (10 years, 7 months)	3. Bihar (1995)
	3. Puducherry (7.5 years)	

**No Instances of President's Rule** has been witnessed in the Chhattisgarh, Telangana and the Union Territory of Ladakh.

### Concerns Raised Regarding the Misuse

- 1. Political Tool-** It has been often used as a political tool by the Centre collapsing well-functioning state governments to pave the way for the Central government to acquire power in the state.
- 2. Vague and Subjective Nature-** of Article 356 fails to define what is the failure of Constitutional machinery is and what sort of failure can be used as a reasonable ground for encroaching into the arena of state government? This vagueness leaves a space for political parties to use this extraordinary power for satisfying their interests.
- 3. Violates Basic Structure-** Its misuse directly impacts a country's federal structure thereby violating the basic structure of the Constitution.

### Way Forward

- Article 356 can be amended to provide a specific definition of phrases 'otherwise' and 'failure of Constitutional machinery' to fix the scope of Article 356.
- The intensity or gravity of acts that can be cited as reasonable and justifiable grounds to contend that there is a failure of Constitutional machinery should be defined properly.
- For the enhancement of federalism, it is crucial for the governor to exercise discretion and personal judgment judiciously, impartially, and efficiently. In this regard, it is recommended to adhere to the principles outlined by the Sarkaria Commission and Punchhi Commission in their true essence.



## Suspension of MPs

Recently, the Lok Sabha (LS) and Rajya Sabha (RS) suspended 141 opposition MPs for disrupting parliamentary proceedings while protesting Parliament security breach.

### About The Suspension of MPs

Four broad reasons have been identified for disorder in legislatures-

1. Less time given to opposition MPs for raising important matters;
2. Unresponsive attitude of the government and retaliatory posture by Treasury benches;
3. Deliberate disruption by parties for political or publicity purposes; and
4. Absence of prompt action against MPs disrupting Parliamentary proceedings.

\*\* The concept of treasury benches is the same as in the House of Commons of the British Parliament. The benches to the right of the Speaker which are traditionally reserved for the Council of Ministers (CM) are termed as treasury benches.

**By Whom?** The Presiding Officer i.e. the Speaker in case of LS and the Chairman in case of RS play the major role in suspending the MPs (following same process).

\*\* To guarantee the appropriate conduct of proceedings, the Speaker/Chairman possesses the authority to compel a member to leave the House.

### Process of Suspension

1. **General Rule:** The presiding officers can direct an MP to withdraw from the House for any disorderly conduct (in accordance with Rules 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of LS and Rule 255

of RS rules).

2. **To deal with more recalcitrant (uncooperative):** If it does not work and the said MP continues to disrupt the House proceedings, the presiding officer can “name” the legislator (Rule 374 in LS, 256 in RS) post which the House can move a motion to suspend the MP until the end of the session.
3. **Introduction of ‘Automatic Suspension’:** LS further empowered the Speaker in 2001 (during Speaker G M C Balayogi’s tenure) to deal with “grave and disorderly conduct” under the new rule (Rule 374A), which states that an MP “named” by the Speaker shall automatically stand suspended for a period of five days or the remaining part of the session without any need for the House to pass a motion for suspension.
  - ✓ This provision has not been incorporated in the procedures of RS. This means, unlike Lok Sabha (under rule 374A), Rajya Sabha cannot suspend its members without passing a motion for the same.

### Consequences of the Suspension

- The members cannot enter the Chamber, the Inner Lobby and Galleries.
- The member is suspended from participating in the sessions of Parliamentary Committees, of which they may be a member. Notices for Committee meetings scheduled during the suspension period are not communicated to the members.
- During the suspension period, the member is ineligible to cast a vote in Committee elections.
- The member's name is not included in the List of Business for any items.
- Notices submitted by the member are not considered valid during the duration of the suspension.

### Types of Punishment for Misconduct

A person found guilty of breach of privilege or contempt of the House may be punished either by imprisonment, or by admonition (warning) or reprimand. Two other punishments may also be awarded to the members for contempt, namely, ‘suspension’ and ‘expulsion’ from the House.

Reprimand	Withdrawal	Suspension	Expulsion
Mild offences are punished by admonition or reprimand (warning).	If any MPs conduct is found to be grossly disorderly by the presiding officer of the House (LS rule 373) then he may be directed to withdraw immediately from the House for the rest of the day’s sitting.	If any MP continuously disrespects the orders of the Presiding Officer, then he can be suspended from the House for the remainder of the session. ✓ He may be reinstated by the House at any point of time by passing a motion.	The House may expel a member in case of extreme misconduct to get rid of the persons unfit for the membership.

### Difference Between Expulsion & Disqualification

A member of either of the house of Parliament can be expelled or disqualified, based on incidents that lead to it.

- While an expelled member (This results in the MP losing their seat in Parliament.) can contest the elections again and get re-elected as an MP in the next term, a disqualified MP can’t do so.
- While the reasons for an MP’s disqualification can include mental unsoundness and getting convicted in a criminal case.

\*\* Congress MP Rahul Gandhi was disqualified earlier this year after he was convicted by a Surat court in a criminal defamation case. However, the Lok Sabha Secretariat restored its membership, after the Supreme Court stayed his conviction four months later.

\*\* Another prominent case of disqualification happened in 2013 after former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav was disqualified from the Lok Sabha after being convicted in the fodder scam.

### Is Suspension a ‘Common’ Thing?

- While it is a strong step, the number of suspensions has gone up over the last few years.

- This winter session saw the suspension of 143 MPs, highest in the history of Indian Parliament since March 1989, when 63 MPs were suspended under the Rajiv Gandhi regime.

### **Role of Parliament in Addressing the Issue**

- The Parliament has no say in this matter until its rules are changed as-
  - The decision about the time available for discussions rests with the government.
  - Parliamentary procedure also prioritizes government business over other debates that take place in the legislature.
- Moreover, the stance of political parties on uninterrupted parliamentary functioning depends on whether they belong to the ruling party/coalition or to the Opposition party.

### **Can the Courts Intervene?**

Although parliamentary proceedings are protected from judicial scrutiny under Article 122 of the constitution, courts have at times intervened in the procedural functioning of legislatures. For example, the matter of suspension of 12 MLA's (Members of Legislative Assembly) through a resolution passed by the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly in its 2021 Monsoon Session came before the Supreme Court, which held the resolution ineffective in law beyond the remainder of the Monsoon Session.

### **What are the Drawbacks of Suspension of MPs?**

- **Impact on Representation:** The suspended members are unable to participate in debates, raise concerns, or represent the interests of their constituents during the period of suspension.
- **Potential for Misuse of Power:** There may be instances where the ruling party/Majority Party uses suspension as a tool to suppress dissent or sideline opposition voices, raising concerns about the fairness and impartiality of the decision.
- **Impact on Public Perception:** It may lead to the perception that dissenting voices are being stifled, affecting the overall credibility of the legislative process.

It undermines the fostering of cooperation and the building of consensus, which are vital for the well-being of a thriving democracy.

### **Suggestions**

- For Parliament to work effectively, penalizing MPs will not be enough. Its rules of procedure need to be changed to allow the Opposition to also set the agenda for debate in the two Houses.
- Currently, only private members get two-and-a-half hours every Friday to discuss important legislative and policy issues but there is no mechanism where a group of opposition MPs can have a specific discussion in Parliament without worrying about the time. The only mechanism available with them is to force a debate by passing a no-confidence motion.
  - A no-confidence motion is a parliamentary process that allows the opposition to challenge the government's majority and ability to govern. If the motion is passed, the government must resign.
- The Parliament therefore should think about incorporating specific days for the Opposition in its calendar of sittings for deliberating on issues that the Opposition considers important.

### **Extra Mile: Expelled Members of Parliament (MPs) and their Legal Options Ahead**

Lok Sabha MP Mahua Moitra was recently expelled as Lok Sabha MP on the recommendations of the Ethics committee of Lok Sabha in the cash-for-query case.

- The MP was found guilty of accepting gifts and cash from a businessman to ask questions on her behalf in the Parliament.

#### **Legal Options Available with the Expelled MP**

1. **Appeal in Court of Law-** The expelled MP can challenge the decision before the Supreme Court or a High Court on the

#### **Immunity to Parliamentary Proceedings**

Article 122 provides immunity to parliamentary proceedings from a

grounds of potential illegality, unconstitutionality or a denial of Principle of natural justice (PNJ) during the committee's investigation.

2. **Challenge Ethics Committee's Jurisdiction and Conduct-** on the grounds that the committee overstepped its mandate, its proceedings were irregular, or whether they were conducted with malice or prejudice.
3. **Seek Intervention-** through her party or independent avenues, senior Parliament or government officials, alleging bias, prejudice or any sort of malfeasance in the proceedings of the Ethics Committee.
4. **Defamation Suit-** can be filed if the MP can prove that the accusations against her were slanderous, fabricated, or damaging to her reputation.

challenge in court.

- It states that the validity of any proceedings in Parliament cannot be called into question on the grounds of any alleged irregularity of procedure.
- It also provides immunity to any officer or Member of Parliament in whom powers are vested by or under this Constitution for regulating procedure or the conduct of business, or for maintaining order, in Parliament from action in any court with respect to the exercise by him of those powers.

#### Similar Judgements

- **Raja Ram Pal Case, 2007-** Raja Ram Pal was among the 12 MPs expelled for alleged involvement in the cash-for-query scam of 2005. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) in 2007 by 4-1 majority, dismissed the petitions filed by the expelled MPs and upheld their expulsion, terming it a "self-protection" exercise by Parliament. It also held that MPs cannot claim absolute immunity from the Parliamentary proceedings under Article 105(3) of the Constitution and the correctness or adequacy of the material relied upon by the Legislature for taking an action cannot be questioned in any court.
  - Article 105 deals with the powers, privileges and immunities of each House of Parliament, and of the Members and the committees of each House.
  - **Codification of Privileges:** Article 105(3) states that these powers, privileges and immunities will be defined by the Parliament by law, and, until defined, shall be those of that House and of its Members and committees immediately before the coming into force of Section 15 of the Constitution (Forty-fourth Amendment) Act, 1978.
- **Amarinder Singh vs Special Committee, Punjab Vidhan Sabha, 2010-** In this case, a five-judge SC bench deemed the expulsion of former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh unconstitutional. It underscored the potential misuse of legislative privileges to target political opponents or dissenters, especially concerning their legislative acts from previous terms and raised concerns over vague grounds for expulsion such as lowering the dignity of the House.

{For more information on Cash-for-Query Case, please refer to The Recitals- October 2023 edition}



## Section 6A of Citizenship Act, 1955

Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Central government to submit details on the number of immigrants who were conferred Indian citizenship through Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. The Supreme Court (SC) reserved its verdict on a batch of petitions challenging Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

- ✓ The Citizenship Act, 1955 defines and regulates the conditions for the acquisition and termination of Indian citizenship.
- ✓ The court clarified that its scope was restricted to assessing the legality of Section 6A and did not extend to the examination of the Assam National Register of Citizens (NRC).

## Background

- Section 6A of the Citizenship Act 1955 was challenged in 2012 by Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha, a Guwahati-based civil society organization (CSO), on the ground that the provision is discriminatory in nature as it permits different cut-off dates for regularizing illegal migrants entering Assam & rest of the country.
- It also sought the court's intervention in directing the concerned authority to update the National Register for Citizens (NRC) concerning the State of Assam by considering the details available following the 1951 National Census instead of the electoral rolls before March 24, 1971.
- A three-judge bench in 2014 while hearing the case framed 13 questions covering various issues raised against the constitutionality of Section 6A, including-
  1. Whether the provision diluted the "political rights of the citizens of the State"?
  2. Whether it was a violation of the rights of the Assamese people to conserve their cultural rights?
  3. Whether an influx of illegal migrants in India constitutes 'external aggression' and 'internal disturbance'?
  4. Whether it violates following constitutional provisions? -
    - ✓ Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) as the lives and personal liberty of the state citizens have been affected adversely by the massive influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh?
    - ✓ Article 325 (no person to be ineligible for inclusion in electoral-roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex) and Article 326 (elections based on adult suffrage) by diluting the political rights of the citizens of the State of Assam?
    - ✓ Article 355 which makes it the duty of the Union to protect States against external aggression and internal disturbance?
    - ✓ Article 14 (equality before law) by singling out Assam from other border States and discriminating against it?
  5. Whether there was no rational basis for having a separate cut-off date for regularizing illegal migrants who enter Assam as opposed to the rest of the country?
- The case was referred to a Constitution Bench in 2015.

## About Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1971 (Introduced to give effect to the Assam Accord)

It is a special provision for Assam which classified immigrants from Bangladesh (or East Pakistan) into Assam in three categories-

1. Those who entered before 1 January 1966 were deemed to be citizens of India.
2. Those who entered after 1 January 1966 and before 25 March 1971 were categorized as foreigners and were required to register themselves for citizenship (to be granted after ten years). Such persons were given the same rights and obligations as a citizen, except the right to vote.
3. Those who entered after 25 March 1971 were deemed illegal immigrants.

## The Assam Accord

- **About-** It was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed in 1985, between the Union government (under Rajiv Gandhi's Prime Ministership) and leaders of the Assam movement that brought to an end the Assam Movement.
  - The Assam Movement led by the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad was a popular six-year (1979–1985) anti foreigners' agitation that demanded the identification and deportation of all illegal foreigners (particularly Bangladeshi immigrants) from the state.
- **Provisions-** As per the Accord, the Indian Government agreed to secure the international border of the country against future infiltration by:
  - Erecting physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places.
  - Deploying a patrol by security forces on land and river routes all along the international Bangladesh-India border.
- **Significance-**
  - **Sovereign Power to States-** By acknowledging the demand of the sons of the soil through the Accord, the Centre

- The verdict was awaited all these years as the SC monitored the preparation and publication of the final Assam NRC list in August 2019, which saw the exclusion of over 19 lakh people following which the Assam NRC authority has now approached the court seeking a re-verification.
  - The National Register of Citizens (NRC) which was first formulated following the 1951 national census is a register containing names of Indian citizens and all their necessary information for identification.
  - The Assam NRC is meant to identify illegal immigrants in the State who migrated from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971.

established that while India remained a quasi-federation with a strong unitary bias, States could nevertheless demand and secure a limited amount of sovereignty to preserve their own sub-nationalist identity.

- **Challenges the Idea of Uniform Citizenship Law-** It changed the law of citizenship in Assam, which in turn theoretically challenges the idea of any uniform citizenship law in the country.

### Impact of Illegal Migration on Assam

- *Changing Demographics:* Esp Northeast (Assam NRC 13 lakhs/3 crore)& *Strain on Resources.*
- *Disturbance of Law and Order:* Deprivation & lack of representation- radicalization, militancy, lack of opportunities (smuggling)
- *Threat to Security, Threat to cultural identity & Communal tensions* (Kokrajhar).

### Arguments and SC Observations

Petitioners	Centre's Stand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Change in Demographic Pattern-</b> due to application of Section 6A to Assam alone which has resulted in reduction of locals of Assam to a minority in their own state.</li> <li>• <b>Incentivizes Illegal Immigrants-</b> to continue staying in Assam in violation of the law.</li> <li>• <b>Violates the Constitutional Guarantee of Equality for Assam-</b> and singles out Assam as the provision applies only to Assam, which is discriminatory, because migrants from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) had also entered other border states, including Bihar and West Bengal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a part of the legislative policy of Parliament, arising from a political settlement with relevant parties, based on certain relevant considerations of State policy &amp; foreign policy &amp; as such is not arbitrary.</li> <li>• <b>Rejected Singling-Out Charge-</b> and argued that the state has been singled out to bear the load of the illegal migrants.</li> <li>• <b>Provision based on Intelligible Differentia-</b> as it is possible to classify different states of India differently based on historical and geographical grounds.</li> <li>• <b>Rejected the Arguments of Arbitrariness-</b> as the guarantee against non-arbitrariness under Article 14 does not require that every law must have universal application irrespective of dissimilarity or of the nature or attainments of the persons to whom it relates.</li> </ul>

### SC Observations

- The court observed that an “unlimited influx” of illegal migrants from Bangladesh not only changes demographics but also poses a burden on resources meant for Indian citizens.
- The court questioned the Centre that why Section 6A was made applicable only in Assam and not in West Bengal, which shared a larger portion of the border with Bangladesh.
- It directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to submit data on the inflow of illegal migrants to Assam and Northeastern states after 25 March 1971 (post Bangladesh independence) and to provide data-based disclosures on issues including the grant of citizenship to immigrants in different time periods and workings of the Foreigners Tribunals.
  - ✓ The Centre submitted that 32,381 people were “detected to be foreigners” in Assam since 1966.



However, it is not possible to collect accurate data of illegal migrants living in various parts of the country as they enter the country in a “surreptitious and clandestine manner”.

#### Extra Mile: Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs)

- Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs) are quasi-judicial bodies that determine whether a person is or is not a foreigner under Foreigner's Act 1946. They were first set up in 1964 and are unique to Assam.
- Under the provisions of Foreigners Act 1946 and Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964, only Foreigners Tribunals are empowered to declare a person as a foreigner.
- Any person not listed in the conclusive National Register of Citizens (NRC) has the opportunity to present their case before the appellate authority, namely the Foreigners Tribunals (FT).
- In 2019, the MHA amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and empowered district magistrates in all States and UTs to set up tribunals. Previously, the Centre had sole authority to constitute tribunals.



## Regional Overview of Food Security & Nutrition

- The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations launched the *Asia Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and Trends*.
- The report is a glimpse on the progress in meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and World Health Assembly (WHA) global nutrition targets.

#### Key Findings

- The prevalence of undernourishment in the Asia and the Pacific region decreased to 8.4 percent in 2022 from 8.8 percent of the previous year.
- This is equivalent to around **12 million fewer undernourished people** than in 2021, but 55 million more than in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- With **370.7 million undernourished** people, the Asia Pacific region represents **half of the world's undernourished people**.
- There are **more severely food insecure individuals in Southern Asia** than any other subregions.
- Southern Asia accounts for almost **314 million** of the region's **undernourished people**. This represents 85 percent of undernourished people in the Asia Pacific region.
- **Women** across the subregions, except for Eastern Asia, tend to be **more food insecure than men**.
- **Anaemia among women** aged 15 to 49 years is a severe problem in the region, with **more than 40 percent prevalence** in 2019.
- Prevalence of **adult obesity** increased from 2000 to 2016, with Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) showing the steepest upward trend over this 16-year period.

#### Findings In Children

- **Stunting** among children under 5 years of age, with a prevalence of **23.4 percent**, continues to be a public health problem in the region despite the declining trend from 2000.
- Among the subregions, Oceania is experiencing a rise while the other subregions are slowly declining.
- Overall, the region has **double the percent children** under five affected by **wasting** when **compared to the world's average** in 2022. Of the subregions, Southern Asia had the highest percent (14.3 percent).
- The prevalence of **overweight children** under five in the region has remained the same for 2020 and 2021 (5.1 percent), which is slightly lower than the world prevalence (5.6 percent).

- The region had a 17.8 percent prevalence of **low birthweight babies**, which is higher than the world's average of 14.6 percent in 2020.
  - By subregion, Southern Asia had the highest prevalence of **low birthweight** (24.4 percent) followed by Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) at 17.9 percent (similar to the regional prevalence).
- Nearly all subregions in Asia and the Pacific region have made progress with increasing prevalence of **exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months** of life from 2012 to 2021.
- Of the subregions, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and Southern Asia already achieved the WHA (World Health Assembly Nutrition Indicators) target of at least 50 percent prevalence, while the region as a whole also achieved the WHA target in 2021.

#### Access To Healthy Diet

- In 2021, the average cost of a healthy diet in the region changed by as much as 5.3 percent and was estimated at 4.15 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) dollars per person per day.
- There were 1.9 billion people who could not afford a healthy diet in 2021. This is an improvement of 80.4 million people compared to 2020.
- By subregion, Southern Asia had the highest number of people who could not afford the cost of a healthy diet in 2021 (1.4 billion). South-eastern Asia follows with 357.4 million people, an increase of 8.4 million – or 0.9 percent points – compared to 2020.

#### Findings From India

- 16.6% of the country's population is undernourished. 74.1% of Indians were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021. In 2020, the percentage was 76.2.
  - In Pakistan, the figure is 82.2% and in Bangladesh, 66.1% of the population faced difficulties in finding healthy food.
- 31.7% of children of the country under five years of age suffered with stunted growth.
- For wasting (low weight for height), India recorded the highest rate in the region with 18.7% children under five years of age facing this major health problem.
- 53% of the country's women aged between 15 to 49 had anaemia, which was the largest prevalence rate in the region in 2019.
- India has the highest prevalence of low birthweight in the region (27.4%), followed by Bangladesh and Nepal.
- On exclusive breastfeeding among infants 0–5 months of age, India has improved the prevalence with a percentage of 63.7%, which is higher than the world prevalence – 47.7%
- 1.6% of the country's adults are obese as of 2000. The figure has increased to 3.9% by 2016.



## U.S. Launches Multinational Push To Safeguard Red Sea Commerce

- U.S. Defense Secretary had announced the creation of a **multinational operation** to safeguard commerce in the Red Sea.
- This was following a series of missile and drone attacks by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis.
- The seriousness of the attacks has led multiple shipping companies to order their ships to hold in place and not enter the Bab el-Mandeb Strait until the security situation can be addressed.

## Key Highlights Of The Mission

### • Countries Joining The Mission

- United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain have joined the mission.
- Some of these countries will conduct joint patrols while others provide intelligence support in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

### • Nature of protection provided under the mission

- Under the new mission, the military ships will not necessarily escort a specific vessel, but will be positioned to provide umbrella protection to as many as possible at a given time.

### • New mission will coordinate with the already existing Combined Task Force 153

- The **Combined Task Force 153** was set up in April 2022 to improve maritime security in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden.

## Drone Strike Hits Mangalore-bound Merchant Ship Off Gujarat Coast

- As per two maritime agencies, a drone strike damaged a merchant ship off the coast of India on December 23 but caused no casualties.
  - This came amid a flurry of drone and missile attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on a vital shipping lane in the Red Sea
- Both agencies said the attack occurred 200 nautical miles southwest of Veraval, Gujarat.
- Indian Navy's *Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)* is coordinating the communication between the Navy and shipping company.

### Information Fusion Centre- Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)

In December 2018, India launched the IFC-IOR, at Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) Gurugram.

It was established for regional collaboration on maritime security issues such as:

- Maritime terrorism, illegal unregulated and unreported fishing (IUUF), piracy, armed robbery on the high seas, and human and contraband trafficking.

The IFC-IOR aims to engage with partner nations and multi-national maritime constructs.

The idea is to develop comprehensive maritime domain awareness and share information on vessels of interest (i.e., information on white shipping).

White shipping information refers to exchange of advance information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels.

## Red Sea

### • About

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

### • Significance

- The Red Sea contains some of the world's hottest and saltiest seawater.
- It is one of the most heavily travelled



## Houthi

### About

- › The Houthis are a Shiite Muslim sect and political and military organization that emerged in Yemen (which is predominantly Sunni) in the 1990s.
  - Named after the Houthi tribe, they are Zaydi Shias.
  - Zayadism is a sub-sect of Shia Islam and it believes in following the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad's family, as the political leader of the state.
- › The Houthis are also known as Ansar Allah, which translates to "Supporters of God".

### Involvement in civil war of Yemen

- › The Houthis are one side of the Yemeni civil war that has raged for nearly a decade.
- › Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when Houthi insurgents took control of Yemen's capital and largest city, Sanaa.
- › By early 2015, Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf states and with U.S. support, was launching airstrikes against the Houthis, who are backed by Iran.
- › A ceasefire was finally signed in 2022. It lapsed after six months but the warring parties haven't returned to full-scale conflict.

### Houthis attacking Red Sea ships

- › The Houthis support Hamas, and vowed on November 19 to target vessels they believe are heading to and from Israel.

waterways in the world, carrying maritime traffic between Europe and Asia.

- **Significance for India**

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



## French President To Be Chief Guest This Republic Day

French President Emmanuel Macron will visit India as Chief Guest for the 75th Republic Day celebrations, days after it became clear that US President Joe Biden will be unavailable. This will be the sixth time a French leader will be the Chief Guest at the R-Day celebrations.

### India-France Bilateral Relations: Background

- **Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1948**, India and France have enjoyed 75 years of close and friendly relations.
- **In 1998**, India and France elevated their diplomatic relationship to **Strategic Partnership** which completed 25 years in January 2023.
- This Strategic Partnership, **first for France outside the EU**, has been instrumental in the comprehensive growth of India-France relationship.

### Key Pillars of India-France Cooperation

- **Defence Cooperation:** *The Agreement on Defence Cooperation* signed in 2006 and renewed for another 10 years in 2016 gives the framework for all defence cooperation activities between India and France.
- **Trilateral exchanges:** Apart from bilateral dialogues, India and France also have separate trilateral institutional exchanges with **Australia and UAE** respectively
- **Space Cooperation:** ISRO and the French Space Agency, CNES have been carrying on various joint research programmes and collaborating in satellite launches.
  - **For example**, in June 2022, **GSAT-24** communication satellite of New Space India Ltd (NSIL) was successfully launched on-board Ariane-5 from Kourou, French Guiana.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:** An agreement on civil nuclear cooperation was signed between India and France in **2008**.
  - Further, India is a member of **ITER**, a multi-national consortium formed to construct an experimental fusion reactor, located in Cadarache, France.
- **Economic Cooperation:** They have important bilateral investments and trade & commercial cooperation, particularly in sectors involving **IT corridors, smart-cities, railways, capital and trade exchanges, skill development, etc.**



**Significance of India Inviting French President for the 75th Republic Day Celebrations**

- ▶ In New Delhi, the choice of guest has been guided by a set of imperatives: strategic and diplomatic, blending business, global geo-politics and bilateral engagement.
- ▶ This year, both are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership.
- ▶ The Indian PM was the Guest of Honour at the Bastille Day Parade held on 14 July 2023 in Paris. President Macron visited India for the G-20 Summit on 8-9 September 2023.
- ▶ In 2022, the Indian PM had made a stopover in Paris, on his way back from Denmark, to meet President Macron, thus becoming the first world leader to meet the French President after he won his second term.
- ▶ Thus, India's invitation to France signals and reinforces the depth of the bilateral relationship.

- Bilateral trade reached an impressive **\$13.4 Bn in 2022-23**, marking a significant 7.72% increase from the previous year.
- France has emerged as the **11th largest investor in India**, with FDI inflow of \$10.5 Bn from April 2000 to March 2023.
- **Digital Cooperation:** India-France Roadmap on Cybersecurity and Digital Technologies was one of the outcomes of the visit of the PM of India to France in 2019.
- **Culture and Tourism Cooperation:** There are many Indo-French cultural associations which organise various events across France.
  - **For example**, the Government of India organised ‘**Namaste France**’ cultural festival in several cities of France in 2016.
- **Marine and Maritime Cooperation:** Indo-French Maritime Cooperation is based on the India-France Roadmap on **Blue Economy and Ocean Governance** adopted in **2022**.
- **Community in France:** The Indian community, including NRIs in mainland France number around 109,000, largely originating from French enclaves of **Puducherry, Karaikal, Yanam, Mahe and Chandernagore**.

#### Convergence Between India and France on a Range of Regional and Global Issues

- France has continued to support India’s claim for a permanent membership of the **UN Security Council** and the reforms of the UN.
- France’s support was vital in India’s accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (**MTCR**), Wassenaar Arrangement (**WA**) and Australia Group (**AG**).
- France continues to support India’s bid for accession to the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**. India played a key role in France’s membership of Indian Ocean Rim Association (**IORA**) and France supported India’s joining of Indian Ocean Commission (**IOC**) as an observer country.
- India and France have consistently condemned **terrorism** and have resolved to work together for adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (**CCIT**) in the UN.
- Both have seen a widespread convergence in the issues of **climate change; renewables and sustainable growth**.
  - **For example**, at the 2015 Paris COP21, India and France announced the creation of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** to promote this key resource to help the world move away from fossil fuels.



## India, Oman Adopt Vision Document To Expand Ties

Oman’s Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is on an official visit to India. This was his first trip to India as the top leader of the influential Gulf nation.

#### Key Highlights

- **Vision document adopted**
  - In this joint vision, concrete action points have been agreed upon in 10 different areas.
  - This includes maritime cooperation and connectivity, digital payments, space, green energy, tourism, agriculture, food security and cricket.
  - The cooperation in clean energy will also focus on green hydrogen.
- **Third tranche of Oman-India investment fund**
  - The two sides announced the third tranche of **Oman-India investment fund worth USD 300 million**.
  - This fund would be used for channelising investment into the fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy.

- The fund was started as a 50:50 joint venture between the SBI and the Oman investment authority, with the first tranche of USD 100 million followed by USD 200 million.
- **Trade in Rupee and possibility of Oman utilising India's digital payment system**
  - There was also a discussion on the possibility of Oman utilising India's digital payment system UPI with a corresponding Omani platform, besides an exchange of views on trade in Rupee.
- **CEPA to be signed in near future**
  - Saying that a **comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA)** will add a new dimension to economic ties, PM Modi expressed hope that both sides will soon be able to sign the pact.

### **India-Oman Bilateral Relationship**

- The Sultanate of Oman is a **strategic partner** of India and an important interlocutor at Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) fora.
- Diplomatic relations were established in 1955 and the relationship was upgraded to Strategic partnership in 2008.
- Visits at the highest level have been exchanged frequently between India and Oman. PM Modi visited Oman in February 2018.

### **Economic & Commercial Relations**

- Economic cooperation between India and Oman is reviewed through the institutional mechanism of Indo-Oman Joint Commission Meeting (JCM).
- During 2019-20, bilateral trade was US\$ 5.93 billion and during 2020 – 21 (April 2020 – February 2021) the total trade was **US\$ 4.6 billion**.
- **Major Exports:**
  - Mineral fuels and products of their distillation, textiles, machinery, electrical items, chemicals, iron and steel, tea, coffee, spices, rice and meat products and seafood.
- **Major Imports:**
  - urea, LNG, polypropylene, lubricating oil, dates and chromite ore.
- **Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF)** is a 50-50 Joint Venture between State Bank of India and erstwhile State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) of Oman.
- Indian firms have invested heavily in Oman in various sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilizers, textile, cables, chemicals, automotive, etc.

### **Defence Cooperation**

- India and Oman have a close defence partnership, and defence cooperation is a key pillar of their strategic partnership.
- Oman is the first Gulf country with which all three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises.
- The Indian Navy has berthing rights in Oman and has used the ports to conduct anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.
- In August 2022, a 13 day joint military exercise Al Najah IV was held in Rajasthan.

### **Indian Community in Oman**

- There are about **624,000 Indians in Oman** (February 2021), of which about 4,83,901 are workers and professionals.
- The Basic Law of Oman recognizes the right to different forms of worship.
- The Hindu merchant community has two temples, including one over a century old, and their own cremation grounds.



# Article 99 of the UN Charter

- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres used a rarely used power to warn the Security Council of a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. He urged the members to demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire.
- He **invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter**, a diplomatic tool that allows the UN head to raise issues that may threaten international peace and security.

## Past Uses of Article 99

- The provision has been rarely invoked.
- It's only been invoked four times in the past — in the Congo (1960), East Pakistan (1971), Iran (1979) and Lebanon (1989).
- The article was initially designed as a preventative tool, a bit like a warning system. Its use was meant to deter conflicts from escalating.

## Power of Article 99 to End The Conflict

- Article 99 gives power to the Secretary-General to call a meeting of the Security Council on the important issue which may threaten international peace and security.
- However, it does not give the Secretary-General any powers to force the Security Council to adopt a resolution.
- Hence, he can force a discussion, he can bring the parties together and encourage them to reach some kind of compromise.
- But because of the veto, the only way the Security Council can adopt a substantive resolution on the issue is for each of the five permanent members to choose not to veto it.
  - To be adopted, a resolution needs **at least nine votes in favour and no vetoes by the five permanent members.**
  - China, Russia, the US, the UK and France – hold this veto power.

## Has It Brought Peace Before?

- The use of Article 99 has had mixed results in the past, though it has never really brought peace.
- That's because the secretary-general's intervention does not "fundamentally change the political calculation of the Security Council's most powerful members".

### Article 99 of the UN Charter

#### Background

- The UN Charter is the founding document of the United Nations. Based on the powers conferred through it, the UN can take action on a wide variety of issues.
- The Charter is considered an international treaty, meaning UN Member States are bound by it.
- However, in practice, there is little that member countries can be forced to do.

#### Article 99

- Article 99 of the UN Charter is a special political tool that allows the UN Secretary-General to call a meeting of the Security Council.
- The Secretary-General can use this tool to bring to the Security Council's attention any matter that they believe may threaten international peace and security.

#### Features

- Article 99 is the only independent political tool given to the Secretary-General in the UN Charter.
- It is seen as a discretionary power.
- According to the UN, the President of the Security Council is under the obligation to call a meeting of the Council if the Secretary-General brings to the attention of the Council any matter under Article 99.



# India's 1st Arctic Winter Expedition

- Raman Research Institute (RRI) is participating in the first winter Indian expedition to the Arctic region.
  - RRI is an autonomous research institute engaged in research in basic sciences.
  - It was founded in 1948 by the Indian physicist and Nobel Laureate Sir C V Raman.
  - It was restructured in 1972 to become an aided autonomous institute receiving funds from the Department of Science and Technology, Gol.

- Now, India will have around-the-year manning of the Arctic with the launch of the **first-ever winter expedition in this region**.
  - India's Himadri has become only the **fourth research station in the Arctic to be manned around the year**.

### Key Highlights Of The Expedition To Arctic

- **Month-long scientific expedition to Arctic launched**
  - The month-long scientific expedition, scheduled between December 19, 2023 and January 15, 2024, is being funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
  - The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa, is the nodal agency spearheading the expedition.
- **Scientists will conduct SARAS series of experiments**
  - RRI have been at the forefront of developing the **SARAS** (Shaped Antenna measurement of the background RAdio Spectrum) series of experiments.
  - SARAS focuses on studying the faint cosmological signal from hydrogen, known as the 21-cm signal, during the Cosmic Dawn and the Epoch of Reionization.
    - **Cosmic Dawn** denotes the period when the *first stars and galaxies were born in the universe*.
    - These are the two vital phases which the universe underwent during its early stages of evolution several billions of years ago.
    - These periods in cosmic history are not well understood due to lack of observations.
  - Sensitive electronic instruments will be used to study the incoming radio signals in the frequency range 5 – 500 megahertz (MHz) at the accessible sites in the vicinity of Himadri.

### Why Is The Arctic Region Being Studied?

- The region above the **Arctic Circle, north of latitude 66° 34' N**, includes the Arctic Ocean.
- Scientific evidence has shown that the Arctic ice and the sea ice have the potential to affect humans outside the Arctic region, as sea levels rise, and to influence atmospheric circulations.
- Due to unprecedented changes owing to global warming, the Arctic could become a more habitable and less hostile place.
- In no time, there could be a rush to explore and exploit the region's resources and minerals, and to gain supremacy over the trade, navigation and other geo-economic and strategic sectors.

### Why Are Expeditions To The Arctic Challenging?

- Due to a hostile environment, performing both outdoor and indoor scientific observations or sampling has remained largely limited to the summer months.
  - So far, only **three research stations** have had permanent staff deployment in the Arctic round-the-year.
- With **multiple state jurisdictions in the Arctic**, there is limited space available for establishing independent research stations.
- Geopolitical tensions, such as amid the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war, could cut off the Arctic regions from explorations.

### India's Involvement In Arctic

- **Initial Phase**
  - India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to 1920 with the signing of the Svalbard Treaty in Paris.
  - India is one of the very few countries to set up a permanent station in the Arctic for the purposes of scientific research.
  - It launched its first scientific expedition to Arctic in August, 2007.
    - Subsequently, India has been sending scientific teams every summer and winter for carrying out studies in the Arctic.



- Indian studies is primarily focused in the fields of glaciology, hydrochemistry, microbiology, and atmospheric sciences.
- **Subsequent involvement**
  - **Himadri research station**, located in Ny Alesund, Svalbard in Norway, was started in July 2008.
  - In 2014, India deployed **IndArc**, a multisensory observatory in Kongsfjorden.
  - In 2016, India's northernmost atmospheric laboratory was established at Gruvebadet.
    - It was established to study clouds, precipitation, long-range pollutants, and other background atmospheric parameters.
- **India is an observer in the Arctic Council**
  - India is Observer to the Arctic Council since 2013. Its membership as an observer was renewed in 2019 for another five years.
    - The Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation on common Arctic issues.
    - Established by the eight Arctic States — the countries whose territories fall in the Arctic region — through the **Ottawa Declaration of 1996**.
    - **Member Nations of the Council** - Canada, Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden and United States.
- **Arctic Policy launched**
  - In March 2022, the Indian government unveiled an Arctic policy.
  - It envisages India's engagement in the Arctic region for climate research, environmental monitoring, maritime cooperation and energy security.
  - The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (under the Ministry of Earth Sciences) will serve as the nodal agency in implementing the Arctic Policy.



## GPAI Summit 2023

The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) - an alliance of 29 member countries, has unanimously adopted the **New Delhi declaration**. The declaration underscored the need to mitigate risks arising from the development and deployment of AI systems, and promote *equitable access to critical resources for AI innovation*.

### **The New Delhi Declaration**

- **It promises to position GPAI** at the front and centre of shaping the future of AI in terms of both innovation and creating *collaborative AI* between partner nations to create applications in healthcare, agriculture, etc.
- All GPAI members had also agreed that the **group would lead global conversations on shaping** the future of AI governance as well as keeping it safe and trusted.
- **GPAI will be an inclusive movement** that will increasingly focus on including countries from the Global South and making available the benefits of AI, its platforms and solutions to all of the people.
- The declaration acknowledged the **need to harness new opportunities** and mitigate the risks arising from the development and deployment of AI. This includes -
  - Concerns around misinformation and disinformation,
  - Unemployment,
  - Lack of transparency and fairness,
  - Protection of intellectual property and personal data, and
  - Threats to human rights and democratic values.

- The declaration also acknowledged **the need for equitable access to resources**, which must be considered, accounted for, or addressed in order for societies to benefit from and build competitive AI solutions.

### Significance of New Delhi Declaration

- This was the first time the group's members were meeting after generative AI platforms like **ChatGPT and Google Bard** burst into the scene, propelling conversations around AI into the mainstream.
- GPAI members also agreed to support AI innovation in the **agriculture sector** as a new "thematic priority".
  - **India** was pushing for the inclusion of agriculture as a priority sector in AI innovation.
  - This is essential for **implementing resilient agricultural practices** that increase productivity and production.
- The development of and access to risk-proportionate trustworthy AI applications is **essential for ensuring sustainable food production systems** and **strengthening capacity for mitigation and adaptation to climate change**.

### Significance of the New Delhi Declaration for India

- This is a significant win for India, which has battled for a collaborative approach towards building AI systems as it looks to push its model of **digital public infrastructure (DPI)** across the world.
- Access to computing capabilities from member nations will also **boost New Delhi's plans of building a sovereign AI system**, crucial for countering dominance from a handful of foreign companies in the space.

### Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)

- **About**
  - It is **an international initiative** established to guide the responsible development and use of AI in a manner that respects human rights and the shared democratic values of its members.
  - **The partnership was first proposed** by Canada and France at the 2018 44th G7 summit, and officially launched in (June) **2020**.
  - Started with 15 member countries, today GPAI has grown into an alliance of 29 member countries.
    - It includes countries like **India**, United State, UK, France, Japan, Canada, etc.
    - **China**, a major tech superpower, is not part of the multilateral grouping.
  - GPAI is hosted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**).
- **Objectives of GPAI:**
  - It is a multi-stakeholder initiative which **aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice on AI** by supporting cutting-edge research and applied activities on AI-related priorities.
  - **It brings together engaged minds and expertise** from science, industry, civil society, governments, international organisations and academia to **foster international cooperation**.

### India's AI Mission: Centre to Step up Compute Capacity, Offer Free Services to Startups

As part of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Mission to develop its own 'sovereign AI', the Centre is looking to build computational capacity in the country and offer compute-as-a-service to India's startups.

#### Key Highlights

- The capacity building will be done **both within the government and through a public-private partnership (PPP) model**.
- **In total**, the country is looking -
  - To build a compute capacity of anywhere between 10,000 GPUs (graphic processing units) and 30,000 GPUs under the PPP model, and
  - An additional 1,000-2,000 GPUs through the PSU Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).
- The government is also **exploring various incentive structures for private companies** to set up computing centres in the country, ranging from
  - **A capital expenditure subsidy model** which has been employed under the semiconductor scheme,

- A model where companies can be incentivised depending on their operational expenses, to offer them a “usage” fee.

### Significance of Building Computing Capacity

- **Computing capacity** or compute is among the **most important elements of building a large AI system** apart from algorithmic innovation and datasets.
  - **It is also one of the most difficult elements to procure** for smaller businesses looking to train and build such AI systems.
- **Given that AI is being seen as a crucial economic driver** in the years to come, the government plans to substantially beef up the country’s computing capacity.
- To expedite such additions, the government **plans to invite the private sector** by offering it incentives.
- **The government’s idea is to create a digital public infrastructure (DPI)** out of the GPU assembly it sets up.
  - By this, **startups can utilise its computational capacity for a fraction of the cost**, without needing to invest in GPUs which are often the biggest cost centre of such operations.

### India’s AI Mission

- The PM Modi, at the GPAI Summit 2023, announced that India will launch an AI mission.
- **The aim of this mission will be to establish sufficient AI compute power in the country.** This will help India’s innovators and startups get better facilities.
- Under this mission, AI applications in *agriculture, healthcare & education-related sectors* will be promoted.

### Other Plans of Government to Push AI in India

- Apart from building computing capacities, the government is also working on **building datasets** and making them available to Indian startups.
  - Earlier, the MeitY released a draft of the **National Data Governance Framework Policy** under which it proposed the creation of an India Datasets platform.
  - **The platform will consist of non-personal and anonymised datasets** from Central government entities that have collected data from Indian citizens or those in India.
  - The idea is that the non-personal data housed within this programme would be accessible to startups and Indian researchers.
- Among the stated objectives of the policy is **to modernise the government’s data collection**, with an aim to improve governance and to enable AI and data-led research and startup ecosystems in the country.
- **The Centre is also considering issuing a directive** to big tech companies like Facebook, Google and Amazon to share anonymised personal data in their possession with the India Datasets platform.

### Governance of Artificial Intelligence

- **Global stand**
  - In May 2023, members of the European Parliament reached a preliminary deal on a new draft of the European Union’s ambitious **Artificial Intelligence Act**.
    - The Act envisages establishing an EU-wide database of high-risk AI systems and setting parameters so that future technologies can be included if they meet the high-risk criteria.
  - The **U.S. does not currently have comprehensive AI regulation** and has taken a fairly hands-off approach.
  - **China came out with some of the world’s first nationally binding regulations** targeting specific types of algorithms and AI.
- **India’s stand**
  - Earlier, the Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology said that the government is not considering any law to regulate the growth of AI in India.
  - However, before G20 summit in September 2023, Indian govt indicated that it might regulate to AI.

- Officials said the upcoming Digital Personal Data Protection Bill 2022 will apply to AI developers who develop and facilitate AI technologies.
  - As AI developers will be collecting and using massive amounts of data to train their algorithm to enhance the AI solution, they might be classified as data fiduciaries and will be held responsible for how personal data is used.
- PM Modi recently said India is looking to "take a giant leap in AI to empower its citizens and is poised to be an active contributor to its evolution".



## Vivo Money Laundering Case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has made three fresh arrests in connection with its money laundering probe against Chinese smartphone-maker Vivo and some others. The three have been taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

### Vivo – India Case

- **Allegations made against Vivo – India**
  - **Siphoned off \$13 billion from India**
    - In October 2023, ED told a court that Vivo had siphoned off \$13 billion by hiding their profits for several months.
  - **Visa manipulation**
    - The agency also said that many people affiliated with Vivo concealed their employment while seeking visas for India.
  - **Some Employees of Vivo breached the rules**
    - By visiting the sensitive Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir.

### Chinese Commercial Entities (CCE) and India's Internal Security

#### Background

- A disturbing picture of Chinese Commercial Entities (CCE) has emerged after a series of actions by Indian authorities since 2020.
  - The investigation began after the June 15, 2020, incident in Ladakh's Galwan.
- Actions by Indian authorities included busting of spying rings, tax raids on major Chinese telecom companies, a crackdown on mobile apps and a study of incoming investments into India.
- The actions by these agencies revealed a web of companies and individuals indulging in espionage, profiling of high value individuals, large-scale tax evasion and exfiltration of bulk data.
- These facts point to Beijing's growing hunger for data and secrets.



#### What Is The Modus Operandi Of These Entities?

- Hundreds of small companies controlled by Chinese nationals have dummy Indian directors and managers for a show of legitimacy.
  - Many of these companies did not physically exist at their registered offices. However, their banking accounts were active and being operated from abroad.
- A cheap (and sometimes below production cost) pricing model that has given them control of a large chunk

of the telecom and hardware markets in India.

- Investigations also show that some senior Chinese employees of these companies are documented members of the Chinese Communist Party.
  - Hence, Beijing has a strong leverage on their operations in India.
- Agencies also found a seamless flow of data to Chinese servers through remote access of modems, switches, routers and networks sold and installed by these companies in India.
- Similarly, a seamless data link through Chinese origin mobile phones was also established during investigations.
  - The data collected has helped Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) engines create portraits, with biometric details of millions of Indians.

### **Chinese Commercial Entities: Threat for India's Internal Security**

- **Access to personal data of Indians**
  - Investments by Chinese companies such as Alibaba and Tencent were used to manage and control Indian companies which had a repository of large set of personal data of Indians.
  - Chinese entities have been storing away information and data using multiple methods, with the objective of gaining strategic advantage over India's economic and security systems.
- **Influencing minds**
  - Deep cover resident agents, posing as officials of these companies, are attempting to fund and influence masses in India.
  - This is being done to foment the sentiments of masses and create internal disturbances.
  - Such entities are also used to influence Tibetan monks living in India.
    - Chinese national Luo Sang, who was arrested for money laundering in August 2020, was actively sending money in packets to Tibetan monks.
    - Agencies are suspecting that it was intended to gather information about the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile.
- **Espionage and money laundering**
  - Small-size shell companies were also used as financial conduits to fund espionage rings and resident agents.
  - E.g., operating under the name of **Charlie Peng**, the web is believed to have laundered over Rs 1,000 crore, with some of the proceeds used to gather intelligence in India.
  - Recently, a top executive of a telecom company found in the possession of sensitive documents.
  - The investigation also revealed of exhaustive profiling of key business leaders.

### **Steps Taken By The Government**

- **Crackdown by investigating agencies**
  - CCEs are under sustained investigation by the intelligence agencies since 2020.
  - Multiple raids have been conducted by the ED under the provision of PMLA.
- **Clampdown on Chinese investment**
  - In 2020, Central govt declared that foreign investments from countries with which India shares land border shall be under approval route.
  - Since China shares a land boundary with India, this announcement clamped down on investments from China making prior government clearance mandatory for all forms investments, even indirect ones.
- **Ban on Chinese app**
  - The govt of India has banned more than 250 Chinese apps including PUBG Mobile, Tiktok, Shein, AliExpress and more.

- **Other steps**

- The Intelligence Bureau created a new wing — China Coordination Centre — to collaborate with financial enforcement agencies to investigate Chinese companies.
- The 57<sup>th</sup> Director General of Police conference, held in January 2023, discussed the issue of influence wielded by Chinese commercial firms.



## COP 28 & Related Global Initiatives

The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP28 (Conference of Parties), was held at Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). The key initiatives/events happened under COP28 are as follows:

### **ALTERRA FUND (Launched by UAE)**

- UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed announced a \$30 billion ALTERRA climate fund that aims to attract \$250 billions of investment by 2030. The fund will allocate \$25 billion to climate strategies and \$5 billion to incentivize investment flow into the Global South.
- The fund has four key pillars: 1) Energy Transition; 2) Industrial Decarbonization; 3) Sustainable Living; 4) Climate Technologies Top of Form.

\*\* The term "Alterra" commonly denotes a Latin term frequently employed in diverse contexts to indicate *alteration, transformation, or variation*.

### **Global Green Credit Initiative(Launched by India)**

- Under this initiative, green credits will be assigned to specific environmental activities, and will be treated as tradable commodities. These green credits will be able to be sold on domestic market platforms.
- The main purpose of this initiative is to boost voluntary environmental activities like tree plantation, water conservation, sustainable agriculture, & waste management by incentivizing it for big corporations & private companies, bringing about a change in the climate Change issues.
- There are two main priorities of the initiative – water conservation and afforestation.

### **Green Industrialization Initiative(Launched by African leaders)**

- The initiative aims to accelerate and scale green industries and businesses across Africa.
- It aims to promote climate mitigation and adaptation, and catalyse economic green growth on the continent.

### **Global Drought Snapshot Report (By UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD))**

The report states that drought causes more economic loss and affects more sectors of societies.

#### **Key Points Of The Report**

- **According to UNCCD**, 1.84 billion people were drought-stricken, out of which 4.7 percent were exposed to severe or extreme drought.
- **According to the World Bank**, around 85% of people affected by droughts live in low or middle-income countries.
- Around 23 countries (including India) declared **drought emergencies at a national or sub-national level** during 2022-23, according to new data from a **global drought map** compiled by the United Nations.
- The year 2023 has broken records when the world breached 2 degrees Celsius of warming on November 17, 2023.

### **Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT 2.0) (Launched by India & Sweden)**

- LeadIT initiative aims at accelerating the adoption of low-carbon technologies, and aligning with global environmental goals.

- The initiative, initially centered around pivotal sectors such as iron, steel, cement, and aluminum, focused on industry transition and knowledge sharing.
- Since its inception in 2019, LeadIT has grown into a collaborative effort involving 18 countries and 20 industry-leading companies.
- **Three core areas of LeadIT 2.0:** 1) Inclusive and Just Industry Transition; 2) Low Carbon Technology Development and Transfer; 3) Emerging Economy Technology Transfer

#### **Global Renewables & Energy Efficiency Pledge**

- The initiative was led by the European Union, the UAE and the US.
- 118 countries signed a renewable energy pledge at the COP28 climate summit to **triple the world's green energy capacity to 11,000 GW by 2030**, thereby reducing the reliance on fossil fuels in generating energy.
- According to Pledge, Countries have to “double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements from around 2% to over 4% every year until 2030”
- By checking the rise in emissions, governments hope to curtail global average temperature below the 2-degree Celsius temperature limit since pre-industrial times, if not the ambitious 1.5 degree Celsius of the 2015 Paris Agreement.
- The pledge is neither legally binding nor a part of the official COP28 calendar.

#### **India's stand**

India & China have stayed away as the initiative calls for phasing down of coal & “ending the continued investment in unabated new coal-fired power plants.

#### **Climate Club (Led by Germany and Chile and currently represent 55% of the global economy)**

- **Climate Club** is an initiative aimed at cooperation between countries in decarbonizing the industrial sector by developing strategies and standards for decarbonization.
- The Club has garnered support from 36 member countries including Kenya, the European Union, Switzerland and others.
- A secretariat will be formed to implement the work program. Currently, OECD and IEA are the joint interim heads of secretariat.

#### **Key Priorities for the Club**

- Standardising emission calculations for carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) intensities of certain products.
- Strategic discussions on definitions for net-zero emissions for steel and cement.

#### **Oil and Gas Decarbonising Charter (integral to the Global Decarbonization Accelerator (GDA))**

COP28 President Dr. Sultan Al Jaber and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced the official launch of the Oil and Gas Decarbonization Charter (OGDC).

#### **About Oil and Gas Decarbonization Charter (Dedicated initiative for the oil and gas sector)**

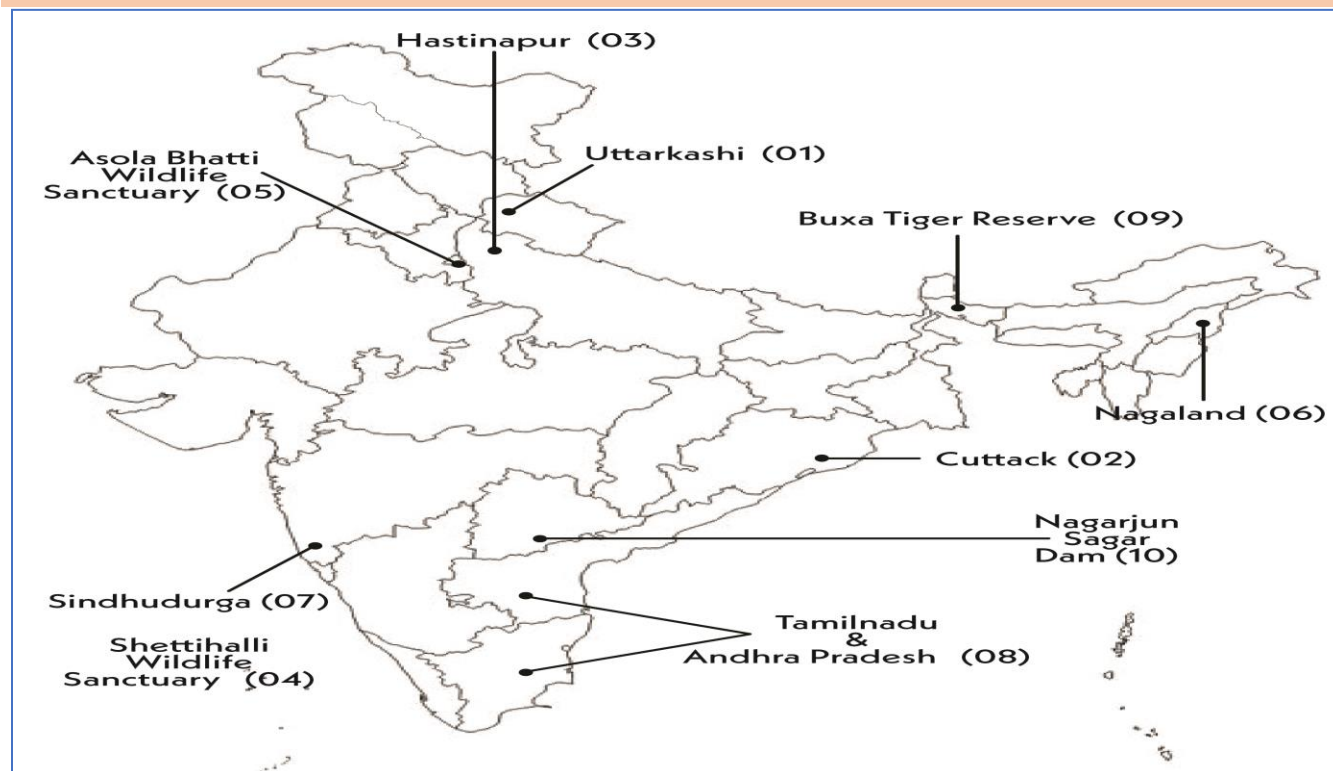
- It aims to induce substantial impact in addressing climate challenges.
- Currently, 50 companies, collectively responsible for over 40 percent of global oil production, have committed to the OGDC.
- National Oil Companies have shown historic participation, constituting over 60 percent of the total signatories, marking a noteworthy shift towards decarbonization within this sector.

#### **Extra Mile: Global Decarbonization Accelerator (GDA)**

- The GDA was introduced at the World Climate Action Summit.
- It focuses on three primary pillars: 1) Scaling the energy system of the future; 2) Decarbonizing the present energy system 3) Addressing methane & other non-CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gases.

## MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

### National Places In News

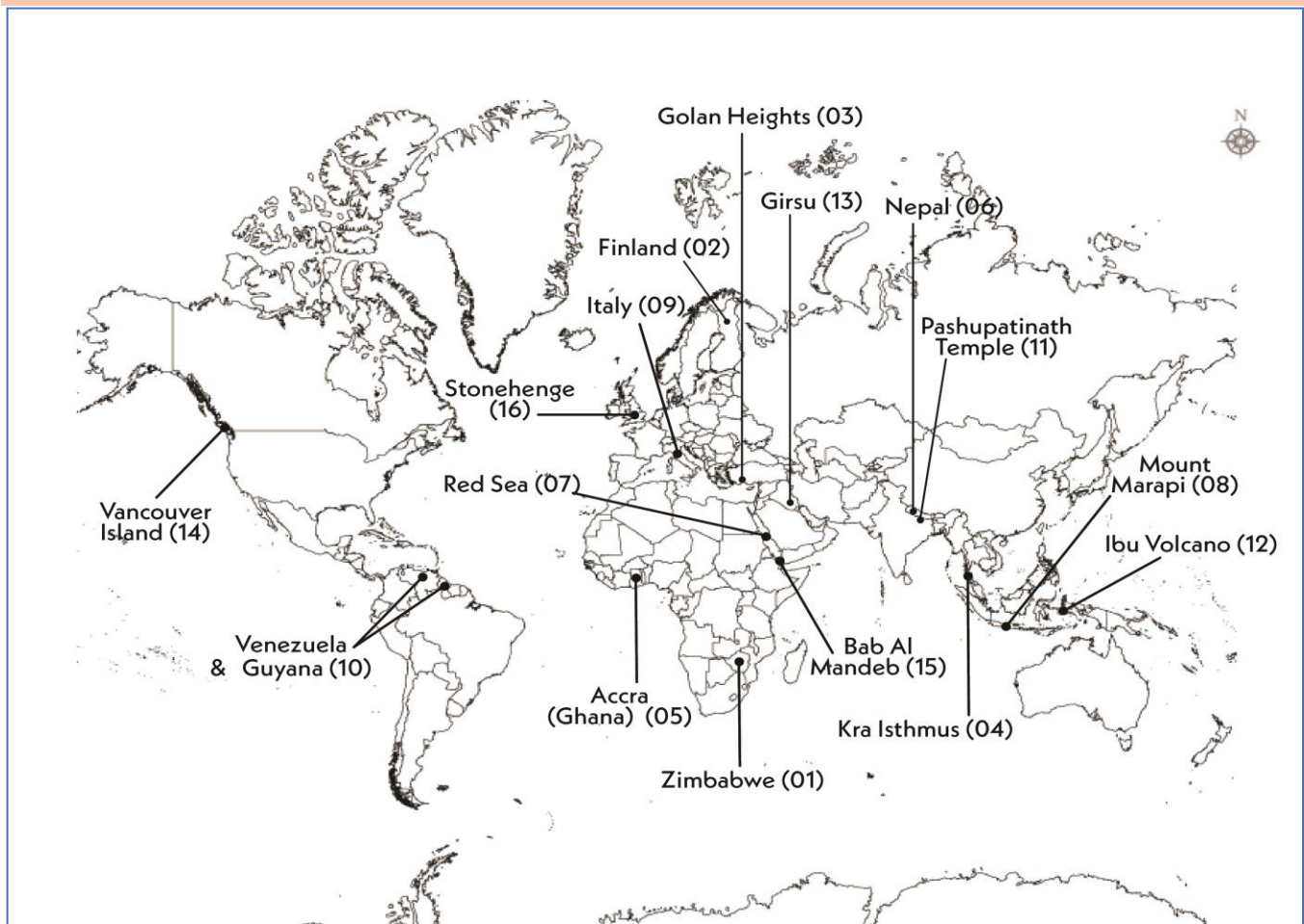


1.	<b>Uttarkashi</b>	Rat-hole mining was done to rescue the trapped workers in Uttarkashi tunnel. They were trapped in the Silkyara-Barkot tunnel.
2.	<b>Cuttack</b>	Odisha's Bali Jatra inaugurated on banks of <b>Mahanadi</b> River in Cuttack. About: Bali-yatra, literally 'voyage to Bali', is considered to be one of Asia's largest open trade fair.
3.	<b>Hastinapur</b>	A Black Stork (Immature) was spotted in Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary, now known as the State Swamp Deer Wildlife Sanctuary. Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary is spread across Meerut, Ghaziabad, Bijnor and Jyotiba Phule Nagar districts of Uttar Pradesh.
4.	<b>Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary</b>	It is situated in the state of Karnataka. Tunga Anicut Dam is situated within the sanctuary.
5.	<b>Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary</b>	The Delhi High Court recently indicated it may put a stay on a 'Walkathon' event inside the Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary. It lies in Southern Delhi and the northern parts of Faridabad and Gurugram districts of Haryana state. It is also part of the Sariska-Delhi Wildlife Corridor, which runs from the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan to Delhi Ridge. It is classified under Northern Tropical Thorn Forests.
6.	<b>Nagaland</b>	Nagaland Beekeeping and Honey Mission launched the first 'Bee Tourism'(Api tourism)in the hornbill festival to showcase Nagaland's rich beekeeping tradition and unique practices carried out across the state.
7.	<b>Sindhudurga</b>	The Indian Navy is set to celebrate Navy Day at the Sindhudurg Fort in Maharashtra. The fort lies in the Sindhudurg District in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. Sindhudurg island-fort was built in the 1660s by Shivaji I, the ruler of Maratha Empire. The Construction was supervised by Hiroji Indulkar. The fort was the naval headquarters of the Marathas.



8.	<b>Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh</b>	Cyclone Michaung was a tropical cyclone that made landfall on the coasts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Cyclone Michaung was the fourth tropical cyclone of the year over the Bay of Bengal. Michaung was named by Myanmar according to the tropical cyclone naming convention.
9.	<b>Buxa Tiger Reserve</b>	The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken suo motu cognisance of a report on the mowing down of three elephants by a goods train at Buxa Tiger Reserve. It lies in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Its northern boundary runs along the international border with Bhutan. The Sinchula hill range lies all along the northern side of Buxa Tiger Reserve, and the eastern boundary touches that of Assam State.
10.	<b>Nagarjun Sagar Dam</b>	Andhra Pradesh recently took control of half of the Nagarjuna Sagar dam on the Krishna River, sparking a dispute with Telangana. It is built between the Nalgonda district of Telangana and the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. It is built across the River Krishna. It is the largest and highest masonry dam in the world.

### International Places In News

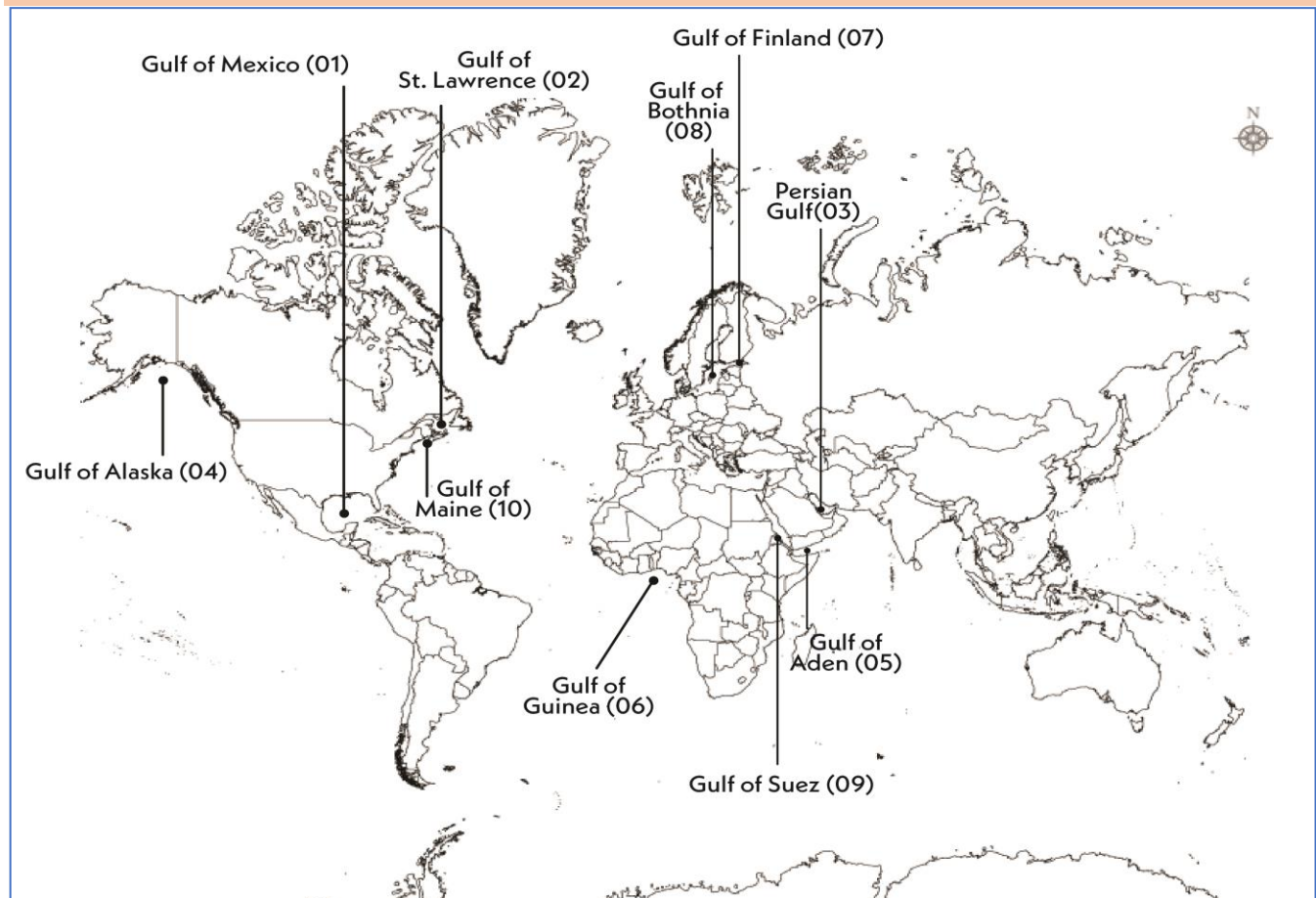


1.	<b>Zimbabwe</b>	Zimbabwe to construct first utility geothermal power plant. Project aims to reduce Zimbabwe's reliance on hydropower energy sources, which are under threat due to climate change.
2.	<b>Finland</b>	Recently, Finland announced that it will close its last remaining road border with Russia due to its concerns over migration. It shares borders with Russia to the east, the Gulf of Bothnia, and Sweden to the west. Capital: Helsinki. Finland forms a symbolic northern border between Western and Eastern Europe.

3.	<b>Golan Heights</b>	India has voted in favour of a UN General Assembly draft resolution expressing deep concern over Israel's failure to withdraw from the Syrian Golan Heights. The Golan Heights, spanning about 1,800 km <sup>2</sup> , is a basaltic plateau bordered by the Yarmouk River, the Sea of Galilee, Hula Valley, Mount Hermon, and Wadi Raqqad. It was captured by Israel from Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War.
4.	<b>Kra Isthmus</b>	It located on the Malay Peninsula in Thailand, has gained strategic importance due to a proposed transit artery that could connect the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. This project could potentially reduce the sailing distance between the Indian Ocean Region and the waters of East Asia.
5.	<b>Accra (Ghana)</b>	The 2023 United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial Meeting held at Accra, Ghana, with participation from over 85 countries and international organizations. It touches the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean to the south, sharing borders with Ivory Coast in the west, Burkina Faso in the north, and Togo in the east. Accra is the capital of Ghana, on the Atlantic coast of West Africa.
6.	<b>Nepal</b>	Recently, Nepal formally registered the first case of same-sex marriage. Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia and is bordered by China and India. It is located in the Himalayas. It is divided into three main geographical regions: Himalayan region, mid hill region and the Tarai region. Highest Point: Mount Everest. Capital: Kathmandu.
7.	<b>Red Sea</b>	It is a semi-enclosed inlet (or extension) of the Indian Ocean between the continents of Africa and Asia. It is the world's northernmost tropical sea. It is one of the world's warmest seas. It is connected to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean to the south through the Gulf of Aden and the narrow strait of Bab el-Mandeb
8.	<b>Mount Marapi</b>	Recently, Indonesia's Mount Marapi in West Sumatra province erupted. It is a volcanic mountain peak located near the centre of the island of Java, Indonesia. This complex volcano has been highly active for thousands of years. It has steep slopes with dense vegetation on its lower flanks.
9.	<b>Italy</b>	Italy, the only major Western nation to join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2019, has confirmed its withdrawal from the project ahead of the year-end deadline. The BRI, a massive trade and infrastructure initiative, has faced criticism, with the US labelling it "debt-trap diplomacy."
10.	<b>Guyana And Venezuela</b>	Guyana and Venezuela are in conflict over the resource-rich Essequibo region, historically claimed by both nations. The dispute intensified after Exxon Mobil's 2015 oil discovery, leading to a Venezuelan referendum in December 2023, supporting Essequibo as a new province. Despite ICJ warnings, Venezuela proceeded. Guyana responded by raising its flag, alerting defence forces, and seeking international support.
11.	<b>Pashupatinath Temple</b>	The sale and consumption of meat, alcohol, and other intoxicants have been restricted around the Pashupatinath Temple area due to the Hindu festival of Bala Chaturdashi. It is a Hindu temple dedicated to Pashupati, a form of Shiva. It is located on banks of the Bagmati River of Kathmandu, Nepal. The temple's age is not exactly certain, but legend indicates its existence dates back to 400 BC. In 1979, the temple was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

12.	<b>Ibu Volcano</b>	The Ibu volcano in Indonesia's North Maluku province erupted recently, prompting authorities to warn locals and tourists to stay away from the area. It is a stratovolcano located on Halmahera Island, in the province of Maluku, East Indonesia. It is one of the most isolated and least accessible volcanoes in Indonesia.
13.	<b>Girsu</b>	Archaeologists recently discovered two temples, one buried atop the other, in the ancient megacity of Girsu in Iraq. Girsu was a city of the Sumer civilization. It was significant as it revealed to the world the existence of the Sumerian civilization, as well as bringing to light some of the most vital monuments of Mesopotamian art and architecture.
14.	<b>Vancouver Island</b>	A team of geologists, mineralogists, and Earth and ocean scientists affiliated with institutions in Canada, the U.S., and France recently discovered a 72-kilometer fault line on Canada's Vancouver Island.
15.	<b>Bab Al Mandeb</b>	It is strait between Arabia (northeast) and Africa (southwest) that connects the Red Sea (northwest) with the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean (southeast). It forms a vital strategic link in the maritime trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal
16.	<b>Stonehenge</b>	As per recent reports, Stonehenge is at risk of being 'de-listed' as a UNESCO World Heritage site if the A303 tunnel goes ahead. The efforts to stop the construction of a two-mile road tunnel are being done. It is located at Salisbury Plains of England. It is not clear who built Stonehenge. The site has been used for ceremonial purposes and modified by many different groups of people at different times.

### Major Gulfs In the World



1.	<b>Gulf of Mexico</b>	The largest gulf in the world, bordering the US, Mexico, and Cuba. The gulf is connected with Atlantic Ocean by the Florida straits. Renowned for its biodiversity, energy production, and hurricane activity. Its floor consists of sedimentary rocks and recent sediments.
2.	<b>Gulf of St. Lawrence</b>	It lies in eastern Canada. It is largest estuary, home to diverse marine life and crucial for shipping and fishing. It is the largest estuary in the world. The gulf is the outlet of the North American Great Lakes via St. Lawrence river into the Atlantic Ocean.
3.	<b>Persian Gulf</b>	Situated between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, it extends from the Strait of Hormuz in the southeast to the Shatt al-Arab River in the northwest. Countries with coastline on the Persian gulf are Iran, Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq.
4.	<b>Gulf of Alaska</b>	Situated between the southern coast of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, this area is characterized by the convergence of cold, nutrient-rich waters from the north and warm currents from the south.
5.	<b>Gulf of Aden</b>	Connecting the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, this busy shipping lane has historically been prone to piracy. Socotra, a large island with unique flora and fauna, is the most notable island in the Gulf.
6.	<b>Gulf of Guinea</b>	Located off the west coast of Africa, it is an economic powerhouse due to its oil and gas resources but also faces maritime security challenges. Stretches from Cape Lopez in Gabon to Cape Palmas in Liberia, encompassing the coastlines of several West African countries like Nigeria, Angola, and Ivory Coast.
7.	<b>Gulf of Bothnia</b>	Lies in the northernmost part of the Baltic Sea, separating Finland on the east and Sweden on the west. Features numerous islands, particularly in the northern archipelago. The Gulf of Bothnia has two major basins: the Bothnian Bay and the Bothnian Sea.
8.	<b>Gulf of Finland</b>	It is located in Baltic Sea bordering Finland and Estonia, crucial for trade and home to the beautiful St. Petersburg. It is relatively shallow compared to other gulfs, Receives freshwater from numerous rivers, resulting in a unique blend of marine and freshwater species. The eastern part of the gulf belongs to Russia
9.	<b>Gulf of Suez</b>	Connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal, it is a vital global shipping route connecting Europe and Asia. It lies to the west of the Sinai Peninsula and the east coast of African mainland. Major ports like Suez and Ain Sukhna facilitate international trade and energy exports, particularly oil and gas.
10.	<b>Gulf of Maine</b>	It is a large gulf of Atlantic Ocean located on the east coast of North America. Located between the US and Canada, this ecologically significant gulf boasts diverse marine life and a historic fishing industry. Features numerous islands, including Great Duck Island, Appledore Island, and Malaga Island, creating diverse habitats and scenic landscapes. <del>Cold</del> It has cold nutrient-rich waters Providing a thriving environment for diverse marine life, including whales, dolphins, seals, lobsters, fish, and seabirds.

## PM JANMAN Scheme

- On November 29, the Union Cabinet approved the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN).
- The Scheme is aimed at providing PVTG households and habitations with:
  - basic facilities such as safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation,
  - improved access to education, health and nutrition,
  - road and telecom connectivity, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- In addition, saturation will also be ensured for schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), Sickle Cell Disease Elimination, TB Elimination, 100% immunisation, PM Poshan, PM Jan Dhan Yojana, etc.
- This initiative is part of the **Pradhan Mantri-PVTG Development Mission** announced in India's 2022-23 Union Budget.
  - The govt has allocated Rs 15,000 crore over three years to develop them.

### Challenges in PVTGs Development

- PVTGs are severely marginalised due to their isolation, low population, and distinct socio-economic and cultural traits.
- They struggle with limited access to basic services, social discrimination, and vulnerability to displacement from development and natural disasters.
- They have little political representation, hindering their participation in decision-making.
- Mainstream society often **overlooks their traditional knowledge** and practices, and stereotypes about their backwardness are prevalent.
- They are also battling loss of traditional livelihoods and resource rights, lack of market knowledge for Non-Timber Forest Produce, and exploitation by middlemen, threatening their traditional occupations.

### Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

#### About

- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups.
- In 1975, the Government of India declared 52 tribal groups as PVTGs on the recommendation of Dhebar commission.
- Currently, there are 75 such groups in 22,544 villages across 18 states and one Union Territory of India, totalling about 28 lakh individuals.
- Odisha has the highest number (more than 2.5 lakh) of PVTGs.

#### Characterised by

- Population – stagnant/declining
- Technology – pre-agricultural
- Literacy Level – extremely low
- Economy – Subsistence level

#### Variance in population

- Population sizes vary significantly, from under 1,000 in some groups, such as the Great Andamanese (around 50) and the Onge (around 100), to over 1 lakh in others, such as Maria Gond of Maharashtra and Saura in Odisha.
- Some tribes in central India, like Birhor, face stagnation, while the Onge and Andamanese are experiencing a decline.

### Schemes Floated By The Govt. For Them

- The **PVTG Development Plan** provides education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities while preserving traditional knowledge.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM)** focuses on market linkages and Minor Forest Produce (MFP) procurement at Minimum Support Prices.
- Other significant schemes include the **Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana, Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)**.
  - These schemes collectively aim for the holistic development of tribal areas.

### What Does PM-JANMAN Do Differently?

- Proper Identification And Recognition**

### Other Measures Include

- Eklavya Model Residential Schools
- Land titles under the Forest Rights Act 2006
- Support to Tribal Research Institute (STRI) scheme
- Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989
- The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996
- Direct recruitment through reservations further aid in education, self-governance, and protection against discrimination.

- The criteria for identifying PVTGs have been criticised for being outdated.
  - Some PVTGs are not recognised as Scheduled Tribes in certain states, and the list containing repetitive names has led to confusion and exclusion.
  - A **2014 report by Dr.Hrusikesh Panda**, Secretary of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and a **2015 report by Virginius Xaxa** highlighted these concerns.
- Baseline surveys have only been conducted for about 40 PVTG groups, emphasising the need for targeted development planning.
- The government’s initiative to create a Human Development Index for PVTGs is a significant step towards addressing these vulnerabilities.
- **Participatory Bottom-up Approach**
  - To help PVTGs effectively, the scheme abandons the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach in favour of customised strategies that respect their unique needs and priorities.
  - It actively involves PVTGs in decision-making, addressing land rights, social inclusion, and cultural preservation.
- **Livelihood Promotion**
  - Providing skills training and resources, like land and credit, will help in sustainable livelihoods.
  - Implementing the Forest Rights Act by granting land titles secures access to forest resources.
    - ✓ Section 3(1)(e) of the FRA specifically supports the rights of primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities.
  - Additionally, encouraging traditional technologies and skill enhancement through industry partnerships will help maintain cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development.
- **Health, Nutrition And Education**
  - Outreach strategies like Mobile Medical Health Units will be crucial for providing healthcare in remote areas.
  - Incorporating their culture and language into the curriculum, providing transportation, and training teachers about PVTG cultural contexts can enhance education accessibility.
- **Infrastructure Development**
  - The habitations of PVTGs often don’t meet the criteria for schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Jal Jeevan Mission due to factors like population requirements or lack of surveys.
  - Guidelines for infrastructure schemes, thus, have been relaxed to improve access to housing, water, sanitation, electricity, and connectivity.

### Railway Officers To Be Trained In Disaster Management

- The Ministry of Railways has made training in disaster management **mandatory** for railway officers.
- The National Academy of Indian Railways (NAIR), Vadodara, and the Indian Railway Institute of Disaster Management (IRIDM), Bengaluru, would work together in imparting the comprehensive training programme.

### National Academy of Indian Railways (NAIR)

- NAIR is a training institute for Indian Railways (IR) officers.
- It was established in 1930 as the Railway Staff College and moved to its current location in Vadodara, Gujarat in 1952.
- Recently, the Railway Board has ordered NAIR to hand over all its assets, including buildings and other infrastructural facilities, to the **Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV)**.
  - GSV is a central university in Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

- It was established in 2018 as the National Rail and Transportation Institute (NRTI) and upgraded to a central university in 2022.
- The university is sponsored by the Ministry of Railways and is mandated to work across railways, shipping, ports, highways, roads, waterways, and aviation.

### Indian Railways Institute of Disaster Management (IRIDM)

- IRIDM is a national institute in Bengaluru that offers disaster management courses and training.
- IRIDM envisioned in High Level Committee (HLC) on Disaster Management in Indian Railways, was Commissioned in the year 2019.
- In the year 2021, it was brought under Indian Railways Institute of Mechanical & Electrical Engineers (IRIMEE), Jamalpur, a century old Centralized Training Institute.

### Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS)

- **About**
  - CRS is a statutory body. It is headed by the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety.
  - It deals with matters related to safety of rail travel and operations, as laid down in the Railways Act, 1989.
  - Investigating serious train accidents is one of the key responsibilities of the CRS. The commission also makes recommendations to the government.
- **Headquarters:** Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.
- **Administrative control**
  - The CRS does not report to the Ministry of Railways of the Railway Board.
  - It is under the **administrative control of Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA).**

## Reasons behind this step

### Need of faster disaster response

- › The move comes after investigation into the devastating Odisha train tragedy that the disaster response could have been faster.
  - In June 2023, three trains collided in Balasore district in Odisha.
- › In the recent floods in southern districts of Tamil Nadu, a Superfast Express was stopped at Srivaikuntam railway stations after the railway track got breached a few hundreds of metres ahead.
- › The first help arrived several hours later after the Indian Air Force helicopters hovered over the railway station and dropped food packets.



### The report of the Commissioner of Railway Safety, Eastern Circle

- › As per this report, Railway Board should review the system of disaster response in the Zonal Railways.



### Reliance on the State administration and Central agencies for relief and rescue operations

- › The railways have Accident Relief Trains stationed at major junctions across the railway network with adequate manpower and equipment to reach accident sites or any scene of disturbance.
- › However, the focus would be more on restoring rail traffic.
- › The railways rely more on the State administration and Central agencies for relief and rescue operations.



## Women Participation in NREGS Continues to Rise, 59% This Fiscal

Women participation in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was the highest in 10 financial years.

- The rates of participation of women in the MGNREGS, defined as women person-days out of the total in percentage, stood at 57.47% in 2022-23 and 54.82% in 2021-22.
- Data on NREGS portal shows of the total 238.62 crore person-days under the NREGS during 2023-24 till December 24, the figure of women person-days was 141.37 crore or 59.25%.
- As per the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**, published by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the female Labour Force Participation Rate (**LFPR**) has increased in the country in recent years.

- The rise was sharp in rural areas. In rural areas, the female LFPR, defined as the % of persons in labour force among the persons in the population, **increased to 30.5% in 2022-23 (July-June) from 18.2% in 2017-18.**
  - Female unemployment rate has declined to 1.8% in 2022-23 from 3.8% in 2017-18.

### **Salient Features of the Scheme**

- **Legal Right to Work:**
  - The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for wage employment.
  - Every rural household has the right to register under MGNREGA.
  - Also, at least one-third of the beneficiaries of the scheme have to be women.
  - There are legal provisions for allowances and compensation both in cases of failure to provide work on demand and delays in payment of wages for work undertaken.
- **Demand-Driven:** Provision of work is triggered by the demand for work by wage-seekers.
- **Decentralized mode of implementation:**
  - The State governments have powers to make rules and amend the concerned State scheme.
  - Gram Panchayats (GPs) are to implement at least 50% of the works in terms of cost.
  - Plans and decisions regarding the nature and choice of works to be undertaken, the order in which each work is to be triggered, site selection etc. are all to be made in open assemblies of the Gram Sabha and ratified by the GP.
- **Annual Report tabled in the Parliament:**
  - An Annual Report prepared by the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC), on the outcomes of MGNREGA is required to be presented annually by the Central Government to Parliament.
    - CEGC is a **statutory body** set up under Section 10 of the MGNREGA.
    - It is chaired by the Union **Minister for Rural Development**.
- The MGNREGA covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population.

### **Performance Of The Scheme In Last 3 Years**

In 2022-23, **6.19 crore households availed work under the scheme.**

### **Challenges/Loopholes in the Scheme**

- **Fund Misappropriation:**
  - Over the last four years, Social Audit Units (SAU) under Rural Development Departments (RDD) across India have found **financial misappropriation of Rs 935 crore** .
  - Only about Rs 12.5 crore of this amount — 1.34% — has been recovered so far.
- **Delay in Payments:**
  - The Union Ministry of Rural Development considers wages paid once the FTO (Fund Transfer Order) is signed by the second signatory.
  - However, delays take place even in the processing of signed FTOs, for which the Management Information System (MIS) does not calculate compensation.
- **Banking Puzzle:**
  - The rural banks are highly understaffed and thus always remain hugely overcrowded. The workers normally have to visit the banks more than once to withdraw their wages.
  - Often, the workers do not get their wages during times of need due to the hassle and the cost involved in getting wages from the bank.

(Rs. in crore)			
Year	Budget Estimate	Revised Estimate	Fund released
2020-21	61,500.00	1,11,500.00	1,11,170.86
2021-22	73,000.00	98,000.00	98,467.85
2022-23	73,000.00	89,400.00	90,810.00
2023-24	60,000.00	-	* 56,105.69
(*as on 04.10.23)			



## Housing For Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- The Centre has begun survey and registration to identify eligible beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) among 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) across 18 states and Union Territories.
- The government aims to release the first instalment to them by mid-January.
- 4.9 lakh houses are to be built for PVTGs under the **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)**.
  - PM-JANMAN was approved by the Central government in November, 2023.
- Apart from housing, the Centre aims to provide clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition, road and telecom connectivity facilities to these groups under respective Central schemes.

### Cost Sharing of (PMAY-G)

- The cost of the unit is shared in a 60:40 ratio between the Central and State governments in plain areas, i.e., **Rs. 1.20 lakh** of assistance for each unit.
- In the Himalayan states, north-eastern states, and the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu & Kashmir, the ratio is 90:10 with up to **Rs. 1.30 lakh** of assistance for each unit.
- 100% financing from the Centre for other Union Territories including the UT of Ladakh.

### Salient Features of the Scheme

- Beneficiaries are identified using parameters from Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data and verified by Gram Sabhas.
- Beneficiaries are entitled to 90/95 person-days of unskilled labour under MGNREGS.
- Assistance for construction of toilets of up to Rs.12,000 to be provided under Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) in collaboration with MGNREGS or other schemes.
- Payments are made electronically directly to bank accounts or post office accounts that are linked to Aadhaar.

### Achievements so Far

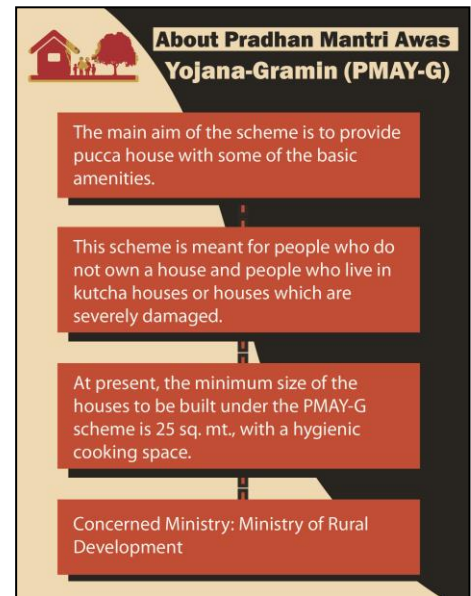
- Against the mandated target of construction of 2.95 crore houses under PMAY-G, the Ministry has allocated a target of 2.94 crore houses to the States/UTs.
- Of these, the States/UTs have sanctioned 2.85 crore houses to the beneficiaries and 2.22 crore houses have already been completed till 24.03.2023.

## Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, and The Kashi Tamil Sangamam

PM Modi on a two-day visit to Varanasi addressed a Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra event. He is also scheduled to inaugurate the second edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam during this visit.

### Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra

- **About**
  - It is a government initiative being undertaken across the country, to raise awareness and track the implementation of flagship central schemes.
  - These schemes include programmes like Ayushman Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana, PM Surksha Bima, PM SVANidhi, etc.



- **Aims**
  - Reach out to the vulnerable who are eligible under various schemes but have not availed benefit so far;
  - Dissemination of information and generating awareness about schemes;
  - Interaction with beneficiaries of government schemes through their personal stories/ experience sharing; and
  - Enrolment of potential beneficiaries through details ascertained during the Yatra.
- **Implementation:** The programme is being undertaken with the active involvement of various Union ministries and state governments.
- **Achievement:** According to the government's PIB:
  - In a short span of just one month, the Yatra has reached more than 2.50 crore citizens across 68,000 Gram Panchayats (GPs);
  - nearly 2 crore individuals have taken Viksit Bharat Sankalp; and
  - over 2 Crore beneficiaries of Central Government Schemes have shared their experiences under 'Meri Kahani Meri Zubani' initiative.

### About

- Kashi-Tamil Sangamam is an initiative by Government of India as a part of "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav" and to uphold the Spirit of "Ek Bharat Shreshta Bharat".
  - Ek Bharat Shreshta Bharat initiative portrays unity among the cultural diversity of various states and Union Territories.
- The objective of the programme is to celebrate, reaffirm and rediscover the age-old links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi - two of the country's ancient seats of learning.
- It aims to provide an opportunity for people from all walks of life including scholars, students, philosophers, etc. from the two regions to come together, share their knowledge, culture and best practices and learn from each other's experiences.
- IIT Madras and BHU are the two implementing agencies for the programme.
- The **first edition of the Sangamam was held in 2022**. This year, it was held from 17th-31st December.

**Kashi Tamil Sangamam: Background**

- ✗ The National Education Policy 2020 lays emphasis on nurturing a generation that is modern and in sync with the 21st century mindset, while being rooted in the Indian culture and ethos.
- ✗ Among other things, the policy recommends research to integrate the wealth of Indian Knowledge Systems with the more recent body of knowledge.
  - Few examples where fusion of the traditional with the modern have had enriching results:
    - Mainstreaming Yoga, Ayurveda to bolster modern medicine
    - Use of new technology for producing ancient crafts, Integrating ancient vaastushilpa with modern archaeology
    - Innovative renditions of old Raagas, etc.
- ✗ Keeping this in mind, month long Kashi-Tamil Sangamam has been launched.

### Road Crash Deaths In India Continue To Rise – WHO

- As per the WHO's Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023, annual number of road traffic deaths has dropped by 5% to 1.19 million per year.
- India, however, registered a 15% increase in fatalities.

#### Key Highlights Of The Global Status Report On Road Safety 2023

- **Countries succeeding in reducing road traffic deaths by over 50%**
  - Ten countries succeeded in reducing road traffic deaths by over 50%.
    - These are - Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Denmark, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela.
  - Thirty-five more countries made notable progress, reducing

**Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023**



The WHO Global status report on road Safety 2023 is the fifth in a series measuring progress in reducing road traffic deaths.

This report covers progress between 2010 and 2021 and sets a baseline for efforts to meet the United Nations Decade of Action 2021–2030 target to halve road traffic deaths by 2030.

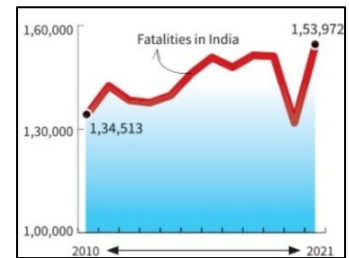
- The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 in September 2020.
- The goal is to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries by 50% by 2030.

This report was produced with support from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

- Since 2007, Bloomberg Philanthropies has committed \$500 million to support road safety interventions in low- and middle-income countries and cities across the world.

road traffic deaths by 30% to 50%.

- As of 2019, **Road traffic crashes have been the leading killer for children and young people (5 to 29 years)**
  - These crashes are the 12th leading cause of death when all ages are considered.
- **5% reduction in absolute numbers of road traffic fatalities in last decade**
  - This was accompanied with a growth in global population by nearly 14 billion.
  - This translates into the road fatality rate declining from 18 per 1 lakh people in 2010 to 15 per 1 lakh in 2021.
    - This represents a 16% decline in the road traffic death rate since 2010.
- **Region wise traffic deaths**
  - 28% of global road traffic deaths occurred in the WHO's South-East Asia Region,
  - 25% in the Western Pacific Region,
  - 19% in the African Region,
  - 12% in the Region of the Americas,
  - 11% in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and
  - 5% in the European Region.
- **Situation in low- and middle-income countries**
  - Nine in 10 deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, and fatalities in these countries are disproportionately higher (3 times) when set against the number of vehicles and roads they have.
- **Just 6 Countries meet WHO best practice for all risk factors**
  - Risk factors (speeding, drunk-driving, and use of motorcycle helmets, seatbelts, and child restraints).
  - 140 countries (two-thirds of UN Member States) have such laws for at least one of these risk factors.
- **India Specific observation**
  - In India, the number of deaths reported due to road crashes in 2018 was 1,50,785 and it rose to 1,53,792 in 2021. The number was 1.3 lakh in 2010.



## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- December 10, 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- UDHR is the landmark document enshrining human rights and fundamental freedoms for all individuals.

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

- **Background**
  - On 10 December 1948, the UN General Assembly approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at a meeting in Paris.
  - It was a response to the atrocities of World War II and an effort to establish a common understanding of the basic rights and freedoms to which all people are entitled.
- **About**
  - These rights are considered universal, meaning they apply to all people regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other status.
  - It is not a **legally binding treaty**, but it has served as a source of inspiration for the development of international human rights law.
- **Features**
  - **Articles**
    - The UDHR consists of a preamble & 30 articles that articulate a broad range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

- The declaration says that “all are equal before the law” and that everyone is entitled to “a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.”
- And it says that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”

### Achievements of UNDHR

- It is recognized as having inspired and paved the way for more than 70 human rights treaties at global and regional levels, according to the U.N.
- It inspired the decolonization movement, the anti-apartheid movement.
- It also inspired freedom fighters all around the world, be it on gender issues, be it on LGBTIQ+ issues, be it against racism.

### What Is The Situation Now

- The 75th anniversary comes as human rights are challenged in the war between Israel and Hamas, Russia’s war in Ukraine, internal conflicts in Myanmar and Sudan and in a host of other places and situations.
- U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the universal declaration has been too often misused and abused. It is exploited for political gain and it is ignored, often, by the very same people.
- However, Amnesty International says the declaration is living proof that a global vision for human rights is possible & can be realized.
- Despite the many times the declaration has been ignored or exploited, it is still relevant, and the world should honour its successes and learn from its failures.



### Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN)

Eight years after its inception, the Ministry of Education is gearing up to restart the fourth phase of the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN).

#### Salient Features of GIAN

- An honorarium is paid to the foreign experts to cover their travels and other expenses.
- Short term courses are conducted by these experts/faculties in Indian Institutions.
- This programme was first launched to establish collaboration between India and The United States of America, but later, the scope of the programme was extended.
- The duration of courses differ for different courses. The

### About Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN)

GIAN in Higher Education was launched in 2015. It is a program of Ministry of Education.

**Aim:** Tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs internationally to encourage their engagement with the institutes of Higher Education in India.

#### Objectives:

- To improve the quality of higher education through international collaboration.
- To increase the touch of reputed international faculty to Indian academic institutes.
- To bring in international academic excellence in India's higher education institutions.
- To augment the country's existing academic resources, accelerate the pace of quality reform, and elevate India's scientific and technological capacity to global excellence.

Nodal Agency: IIT Kharagpur

minimum duration is one week and the maximum duration is 3 weeks.

- A lump-sum amount of up to **US\$ 8000 (~ ₹7 lakh) for 12 to 14 hours** of contact and up to **US\$ 12000 (~ ₹12 lakh) for 20 to 28 hours** of contact can be paid to the foreign experts covering their travel and honorarium.

#### **Significance of GIAN Programme**

- The Central government has spent at least **₹126 crore** in payment to support foreign faculty's travel and honorarium since the inception of GIAN.
- Since the beginning of the scheme in 2015-16, **1,612 foreign faculty members have visited the country to deliver courses from 59 countries.**
- As many as 692 (39%) of 1,772 courses were delivered in IIT campuses, while the second largest cohort of lectures, 436 (24.6%), took place in the **National Institute of Technology (NITs).**
- Up to 41.4% (668) of academicians who visited India belonged to the U.S. The rest consisted of experts from the U.K. (143), Germany (93), Canada (89), etc. **Up to 72,000 Indian students directly benefitted.**

### Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) Scheme

The Union Government recently extended the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) Scheme until December 2028. The scheme was about to end in December 2023.

#### About the PMGKAY Scheme (Under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution)

- **The Inception:** The scheme, initially launched by the government in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (as part of the broader Atmanirbhar Bharat/Self-Reliant India).
- **Integration:** In January 2023, PMGKAY was merged with the NFSA, providing all ration for AAY (Antyodaya Anna Yojana) and PHH (Priority Households) families for free and eliminating the additional provisions introduced during the pandemic.
- **Scope and Objectives:** It aims at ensuring food and nutrition security to 81.35 crore people of the country, at an estimated cost of Rs. 11.80 lakh crore over a 5-year period by providing them 5kg of free food grains per month in addition to the subsidized (Rs 2-3 per kg) ration provided under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to families covered under the Public Distribution System (PDS). The food grain and the amount may be variable.
- **ONORC Initiative for Portability:** It will allow beneficiaries to lift free of cost food-grains from any fair price shop in the country under the ONORC-One Nation One Ration Card- initiative. This initiative is of enormous benefit for migrants, facilitating both intra and inter State portability of entitlements as part of technology-based reforms under Digital India.
- **Nation-wide Uniformity through Common Logo:** It would also provide Nation-wide uniformity in delivery of food grains free of cost in all States/UTs through a network of over 5 lakh Fair Price Shops under a common logo.
  - The NFSA provides a legal right to persons belonging to “eligible households” to receive food grains at subsidized price i.e., rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg and coarse grain (Millets) at Rs 1/kg under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
  - It legally entitled up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized food grains under TPDS.

### Gram Manchitra

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj recently launched a Geographic Information System (GIS) application “Gram Manchitra” (<https://grammanchitra.gov.in>) to encourage the Spatial Planning by the Gram Panchayat.

#### Key Highlights

- **Facilitate and Support-** Gram Panchayats to perform planning at Gram Panchayat level using geo-spatial technology using a single/unified Geo Spatial platform to better visualize the various developmental works to be taken up across the different sectors and provide a decision support system for Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).
- **m-ActionSoft-** is a mobile based solution launched along with this application to help in capturing photos with Geo-Tags (i.e. GPS Coordinates) for the works which have assets as an output. Geo-tagged assets using the m-ActionSoft application will be available on Gram Manchitra, enhancing the visualization of various developmental works in the Gram Panchayats.
- **Geo-tagging of Assets-** to be done in three stages viz. (i) before start of the work, (ii) during the work and (iii) on completion of work. This would provide a repository of information on all works and assets related to natural resource management, water harvesting, drought proofing, sanitation, agriculture, check dams and irrigation channels etc.

- **Planning Tools-** on the Gram Manchitra application use GIS technology to help Gram Panchayat officials develop realistic and achievable development plans and provide a decision support system viz. tools for identifying potential sites for development projects, asset tracking, estimating the costs of projects, and assessing the impact of projects.

### Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative

The National e-Governance Division (NeGD) division of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) recently organized the 40th Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) Deep-Dive training programme under the Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative.

#### About National e-Governance Division (NeGD)

- Established in 2009 by the MeitY, the NeGD is an Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation {erstwhile Media Lab Asia} and has been playing a pivotal role in-
    - ✓ supporting MeitY in Programme Management & implementation of e-Governance Projects;
    - ✓ providing technical and advisory support to Ministries/ Departments, both at Central and State levels along with other Government organizations.
  - Its major operational areas include programme management, project development, technology management, capacity building, awareness and communications related activities under the flagship Digital India Programme.
- \*\* The Digital India Mission (launched in 2015) for New India is being driven by many initiatives, including: Bharat Net, Digital Literacy Mission, e-Governance etc.
- It has developed and is managing several National Public Digital Platforms such as DigiLocker, UMANG, Rapid Assessment System, OpenForge, API Setu, Poshan Tracker, Academic Bank of Credits, National Academic Depositories, National AI Portal, MyScheme, India Stack Global, Meri Pehchaan, etc.

#### About the Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative

It is a first Public-Private Partnership (PPP Model) of its kind launched by MeitY in cooperation with NeGD and various industry partners like Microsoft, Intel etc. to fortify India's cyber security system with regard to the Government's vision of a Digital India.

\*\* This initiative includes National Informatics Centre (NIC), Computer Emergency Response Team-India (CERT-In), and Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC) are knowledge partners from the Government side.

**Objective-** To spread awareness about cybercrime and build the capacities of Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) and frontline IT officials across all government departments.

#### Features

- It is based on three principles: education, awareness, and enablement.
- It includes several workshops on the best enablement and practices of the officials with cybersecurity health tool kits for the management and mitigation of cyber threats.
- Under this initiative, several training programs are conducted all over the country from time to time, which will be attended by CISOs and technical officials from the central government, state governments, PSBs, UTs, PSUs, defense PSUs and technical arms of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- It aims at educating and enabling CISOs to understand cyber-attacks through deep dive training programme and get the necessary exposure to the latest technologies for safeguarding e-infrastructure.
- The training focuses on providing a holistic view of legal provisions, enabling CISOs to formulate policies for cybersecurity and build concrete cyber crisis management plans.

## All India Judicial Services

Addressing the Supreme Court Constitution Day celebration (November 26), President Draupadi Murmu called for an “All-India Judicial Service” to recruit judges to help make the judiciary diverse by increasing representation from marginalized social groups.

### About the All-India Judicial Services

- Article 312 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of All India Judicial Service (AIJS) along the lines of central civil services.
- Under AIJS, the judges of lower judiciary will be recruited centrally and then assigned to states just as the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) conducts the central recruitment process and assigns successful candidates to cadres (Like the present All-India Services such as IAS and IPS).
- The AIJS will not include any post inferior to that of a District Judge.
  - ✓ A District Judge (defined in Article 236) can include a city civil court judge, additional district judge, joint district judge, assistant district judge, chief judge of a small cause court, chief presidency magistrate, additional chief presidency magistrate, sessions judge, additional sessions judge, and assistant sessions judge.

**Objective:** To ensure a transparent & efficient method of centralized recruitment of judges at the level of additional district judges & district judges for all states to attract the best talent in India’s legal profession.

### Proposed By

- This idea was first mooted by the Law Commission in 1958 in its ‘Report on Reforms on Judicial Administration’ then by the Law Commission Report of 1978 and again in 2006 by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice, in its 15th Report.
- The 116<sup>th</sup> Law Commission report proposed the National Judicial Service Commission consisting of retired and sitting judges of the Supreme Courts, members of the bar and legal academics.

### Process

- The 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976 amended (after the Swaran Singh Committee’s recommendations) Article 312(1) of the Constitution and empowered the Parliament to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services.
- Accordingly, under Article 312(1) of the Constitution, if a resolution supported by at least two-thirds of its members present and voting is passed by the Rajya Sabha demanding to create a service in “national interest,” then the Parliament may create AIJS (common to the Union and the States) by simple majority amending Article 233 and Article 234 and regulate the recruitment and service conditions of persons appointed to any such service.
  - ✓ Article 233 deals with the Appointment of District Judges in States.
  - ✓ Article 234 (For Subordinate Judicial Officers) deals with the appointment of persons other than district judges to the judicial services.
- Amendment of the Constitution under Article 368 is not required.

### Need

- To strengthen the overall justice delivery system by inducting suitably qualified fresh legal talent selected through a proper all-India merit selection system.
- To address the issue of social inclusion by enabling suitable representation of women, marginalized, and deprived sections of society.

### The Present System of Recruitment

- Currently, the district judges are selected by the State Public Service Commissions and the concerned High Court (HC), since HCs exercise jurisdiction over the subordinate judiciary in the state.
- The candidates first have to appear for a written examination following which the qualified candidates are



interviewed by a panel of HC judges and then the deserving candidates are appointed to the post in the judiciary.

- All judges of the lower judiciary up to the level of district judges are selected through the Provincial Civil Services (Judicial) exam which is commonly referred to as the judicial services exam.

### **View of Supreme Court (SC)**

- The SC in *All India Judges' Association v. UOI, 1992* case directed the Centre to set up an AIJS. But, while reviewing its judgement in 1993, the SC left the Centre at liberty to take initiatives on the issue.
- In 2017 again, the Supreme Court took Suo motu cognizance of the issue of appointment of district judges and mooted a "Central Selection Mechanism" based on which a concept note was circulated among all states that recommended conducting a common examination instead of separate state exams and interviewing the qualified candidates by HCs for appointing the judges.

### **Government Efforts in this Direction**

1. **Comprehensive Proposal:** was introduced by the Centre in 2012 for constituting the AIJS. It was approved by the Committee of Secretaries and included as an agenda item in the Conference of Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of the High Court. But it was decided that the issue needs further deliberation and subsequently, the views of state governments and HCs were sought on the proposal, but no consensus could be reached.
2. **Agenda in Chief Justices Conference, 2015:** was included for creating AIJS to help with the recruitment for the post of district judges and the review the selection process of judges and judicial officers at all levels. But it was decided that the respective HCs would evolve appropriate methods within the existing system to fill up the vacancies for appointing district judges.
3. **2017 Proposal:** which included aspects of AIJS, like eligibility, age, selection criteria, qualification, and reservation, was discussed in a meeting chaired by Minister of Law and Justice, with participation from India's Attorney General, Solicitor General, and DoJ secretaries but it failed to reach implementation stage.

### **Arguments on AIJS**

<b>Favour</b>	<b>Against</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Judge-to-Population Ratio:</b> As per the 116th Law Commission report, India should have 50 judges per million population as against 10.50 judges (then). This figure currently stands at 21 judges in terms of the sanctioned strength. As of July 2023, the working strength of the subordinate judiciary was 19,858 against the sanctioned strength of 25,246 which means almost 5,000 posts still remain vacant.</li> <li>• <b>Pendency of Cases:</b> The total number of pending cases of all types and at all levels are above 5 crores at present out of which 4.3 crores (more than 85% cases) are pending in district courts. As per a 2012 report of the National Court Management Systems, the number of cases being filed will reach 15 crores in 30 years requiring 75,000 judges.</li> <li>• <b>Absence of Career Growth:</b> Most of the judicial officers manage to reach only the rank of district judges and only 25% of them are elevated as judges of High Courts. AIJS will provide an opportunity for younger people to be a part of higher judiciary.</li> <li>• <b>Accountability:</b> Having a centralized recruitment process will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Concentration of Power:</b> in few hands if AIJS is created resulting in favoritism.</li> <li>• <b>Reservation:</b> People benefiting from state quotas for recruitment to such posts will have to face tough competition at the national level in absence of reservation as some communities like OBCs get quotas at state levels but not at the central level. This can affect their representation proportion in the judicial services.</li> <li>• <b>Language Barriers:</b> Judges being allotted cadres through AIJS may face language issues due to lack of local knowledge when posted in a new state which may further affect court proceedings, especially in civil and</li> </ul>

<p>lead to a more accountable, transparent and efficient judiciary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Save Costs</b>- Single examination for recruitment across states will help states save the cost and resources required for conducting the recruitment and will also speed up the process.</li> </ul>	<p>criminal cases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A consensus among the Centre, States and Judiciary</b> is required first to implement an effective AIJS proposal.</li> </ul>
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### SATHEE Portal

SATHEE (Self-Assessment, Test and Help for Entrance Examination) portal has been launched by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education in collaboration with IIT Kanpur to offer quality education to students preparing for competitive examinations.

#### About the SATHEE Portal(Open learning platform available to students at no cost)

It is a portal launched to provide quality education to every student who intends to appear for competitive examinations like JEE (For Engineering Entrance), NEET (For Medical Entrance), various State level Engineering and other Examinations.

- It makes use of an indigenously developed AI programme called *Prutor* developed by IIT-Kanpur.
- It is in line with the National Education Policy and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4., with the goal of providing inclusive, high-quality education even to remote parts of the country.

**Objectives**- Provide students with quality education for preparing for competitive exams & enhancing their knowledge.

#### Features

- The portal provides a 45-day crash course (live and recorded lectures available in 5 languages including English) to support students preparing for JEE and other engineering examinations curated by IIT toppers, academicians and subject experts.
- It is equipped with an AI based translation tool developed by All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) which supports 22 Indian languages. Several workshops/Seminars have been organized in institutions/colleges to create awareness regarding this.
- It provides preparation material for entrance exams, including JEE and NEET with Video solutions in regional languages for entrance exams along with JEE and NEET entrance exam preparation ideas webinars, student stories of struggles and achievement, solve with me sessions and motivational sessions.

\*\* All India Mock tests are conducted every weekend, following the same format utilized by the National Testing Agency (NTA) in organizing the JEE.

- **SATHEE for Schools:** It combines both the NCERT studies and JEE learning standards into an extensive curriculum, allowing you to find content that meets both your teaching needs - helps students score well in board exams and also prepare for JEE at the same time.
- **Parent Reports:** If your child is studying and you are concerned about their progress, then you can look at the parent reports. These reports measure what students know and are able to do in relation to the NCERT XI and XII and also JEE standards.

#### Benefits

- **Bridge Education Gap**- It will help bridge the gap as students who cannot afford coaching facilities for competition exams will now be able to access quality education at their fingertips.
- **Mastering the Concepts**- Help students learn from the best faculty free of cost at their own pace and time allowing them to master their weak concepts.
- **Enhanced Accessibility and Inclusivity**- as it makes educational resources available to a wider audience.

#### Extra Mile: e-Education: Digital Initiatives in India

The National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT) is a major initiative of the Ministry of Education to infuse digital education solutions to improve the access to quality contents. Following various initiatives have

been taken up under NMEICT programme:

1. **PM e-Vidhya**- initiated as part of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan in 2020, it unifies all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode access to education to all the students across all the states free of cost.
2. **DIKSHA**- provides quality e-content for school education in States/UTs and QR coded Energized Textbooks for all grades (one nation, one digital platform).
3. **Shiksha Vani**- is a CBSE podcast for providing education through extensive use of radio.
4. **Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY)**- for providing special e-content in sign language for visually and hearing impaired on NIOS website/ YouTube.
5. **Skilling e-Labs**- will be established for providing stimulated learning environment and to promote crucial critical thinking skills and to give space for creativity.
6. **e-Pathshala**- for showcasing and disseminating all educational e-resources including textbooks, audio, video, periodicals, and a variety of other print and non-print materials.
7. **National Digital Library of India (NDL) Project**: It has been entrusted to IIT Kharagpur to develop the overall framework of a facility that can provide a single window access to learners for e-contents/resources.
8. **e-Yantra** is a project entrusted to IIT Bombay for enabling effective education across engineering colleges in India on embedded systems and Robotics.
9. **SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active - Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) Portal**- dedicated to bridging the digital divide, extending educational opportunities to students who have thus far been underserved by the digital revolution, thereby enabling them to participate more fully in the knowledge economy.
10. **SWAYAM PRABHA**: It is an initiative to provide 32 high quality educational channels through DTH (Direct to Home) across the length and breadth of the country on 24X7 basis.
11. **MOOCs on SWAYAM**- for the development and dissemination of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for School Education specifically catering to Classes IX to XII through "SWAYAM".
12. **The FOSSEE (Free/Libre and Open-Source Software in Education) Project**: It promotes the use of FLOSS (Free/Libre and Open-Source Software) tools to improve the quality of education in our country. It aims to reduce the dependency on proprietary software in educational institutions. It is being implemented by IIT Bombay.
13. **Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT)**: Faculty Development Programme (FDP) of higher education faculty is also being offered through MOOCs under SWAYAM platform, for training maximum number of faculty with technology enabled learning.
14. **NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement)**- is a capacity building programme for "Improving Quality of School Education through Integrated Teacher Training".

### NCRB 2022 Report on Crime in India

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recently released its annual report titled 'Crime in India' for the year 2022 which provides a big picture of broad trends in crime registration as it includes data ranging from crimes against women to economic and financial crimes.

#### About NCRB

Established in 1986, NCRB functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs (headquartered in New Delhi) as a clearing house of information on crime and criminals (operating at National and International levels).

Objectives	Functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide training facilities to Crime Records bureau personnel.</li> <li>• Cater to the data processing and training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To store, coordinate and disseminate information on inter-state and international criminals among States, national investigating agencies, courts and prosecutors.</li> </ul>

needs for computerization of Central Police Organizations.

- To function as the National storehouse of fingerprint (FP) records of convicted persons (including foreigners) and help trace interstate criminals.

- To collect and process crime statistics at the National level.

- To receive from and supply data to penal and correctional agencies for remand, parole, premature release etc.

- To coordinate, guide and assist the State Crime Records Bureau.

### Achievements

- It monitored, coordinated and implemented the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project in 2009.
- In 2017, it launched the National Digital Police Portal which allows police officers to look for a criminal or suspect on the CCTNS database and gives citizens with services such as online complaint filing etc.
- NCRB manages the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) which is a country-wide searchable database of crime- and criminal-related fingerprints.
- NCRB with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) implements Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) to enable seamless transfer of data & information among different pillars of the criminal justice system, like courts, police, jails and forensic science laboratories, from one platform.

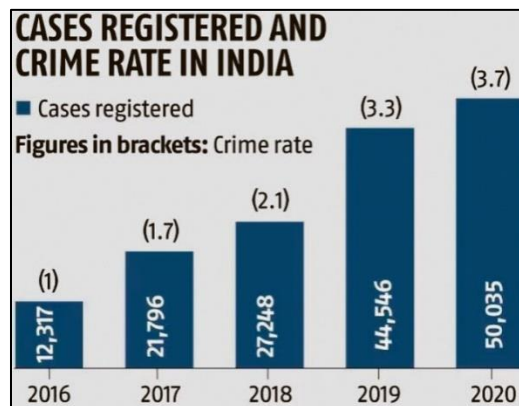
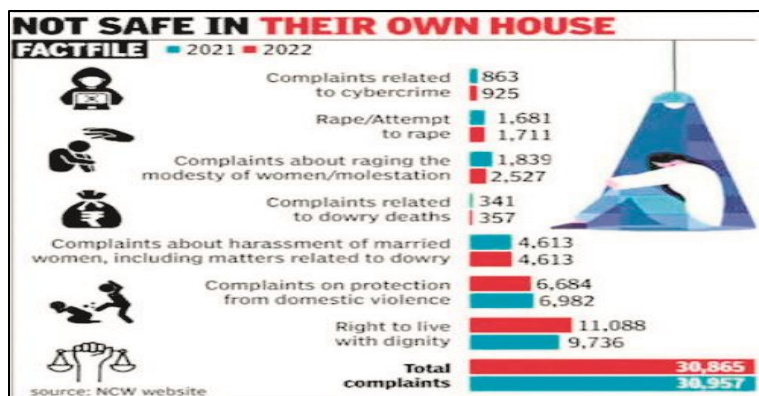
### Reports Published

Crime in India	Prisons Statistics India
Reports on Missing Women and children in India.	Accidental Deaths and Suicides

### Process of Compiling “Crime in India” Report

- Information is obtained from the police forces of 36 states and Union Territories.
- Similar data are furnished for 53 cities with populations exceeding 10 lakh each as per the 2011 Census, by respective state-level crime records bureaus.
- The information is then entered by state/UT police at local police stations, validated at the levels of the districts and states, and finally, by the NCRB.

### Key Highlights of NCRB Report



1. **Decline in Case Registration-** A decline of 4.5% was observed in the registration of cases over the second pandemic year, 2021.
2. **Declining Crime Rate-** Crimes registered per lakh population, declined from 445.9 in 2021 to 422.2 in 2022 although the absolute numbers on crime increased as the population increases.
3. **Decline in Murder Cases-** A total of 28,522 FIRs of murder were registered in 2022 down from 29,272 in 2021 and 29,193 in 2020. “Disputes” was the motive in the highest number of murder cases, followed by “personal vendetta or enmity” and “gain”.

#### 4. Increase in Reporting of-

Crimes Against Women	Cyber Crimes	Suicide Cases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reporting increased by 4% over the 2021 numbers.</li> <li>The largest share of crimes against women were registered under-               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives (31.4%);</li> <li>Kidnapping &amp; Abduction of Women (19.2%);</li> <li>Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty (18.7%).</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reporting increased by 24.4% compared to 2021.</li> <li>Around 64.8% of registered cases were of fraud, followed by extortion (5.5%), and sexual exploitation (5.2%).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reporting increased by 4.2% in 2022 as compared to 2021.</li> <li>Family Problems (other than marriage-related problems) (31.7%) + Marriage Related Problems (4.8%) + Illness (18.4%) together accounted for 54.9% of total suicides during 2022.</li> <li>Overall male-to-female ratio of suicide victims was 71.8:28.2.</li> </ul>

#### 5. Headline Trends in State-Wise Data-

Charge	FIRs Against Women	Unlawful Activities	Sedition Cases (Section 124A of IPC)
<b>Sheeting</b> The states/UTs reporting the highest sheeting rate under IPC crimes are- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kerala (96.0%)</li> <li>Puducherry (91.3%)</li> <li>West Bengal (90.6%)</li> </ol>	In absolute numbers, maximum number of FIRs in 2022 were registered in following states which together contributed to 50.2% of the total cases lodged- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uttar Pradesh (maximum)</li> <li>Maharashtra</li> <li>Rajasthan</li> <li>West Bengal</li> <li>Madhya Pradesh</li> </ol>	<b>Prevention Act (UAPA) Cases</b> Over 3/4 <sup>th</sup> of all UAPA cases in 2022 were registered in Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh witnessing a rise in the last three years. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The UAPA enacted in 1967 lays down the definitions and rules for designating an organization as an "unlawful association" if it is engaged in certain types of activities.</li> </ul>	1/4 <sup>th</sup> of sedition cases were registered in West Bengal alone followed by 3 each in Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, and Uttar Pradesh but the cases have come down since 2020. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Sedition refers to any act or attempt to bring hatred or contempt towards the government established by law in India, or to incite disaffection or resistance against it.</li> <li>✓ Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code penalizes a crime against the state.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maharashtra registered the highest cases of rioting in 2022.</li> <li>Delhi was reported to be the most unsafe metropolis in crimes involving juveniles followed by Chennai.</li> <li>Kolkata emerged as the safest city in India for the third consecutive year, recording the least number of cognizable offences per lakh population among metropolises. (followed by Pune and Hyderabad)</li> <li>✓ Cognizable crimes are those for which cases are registered under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL). For such crimes, the police can make an arrest without a warrant or prior court permission.</li> </ul>			

#### Other Crimes

- Crimes Against Senior Citizens:** In 2022, crimes against senior citizens (aged 60 and above) increased by 9%, with a total of 28,545 cases reported, indicating a concerning trend of harm towards older people.
- Crimes Against Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST):** Crimes against SCs witnessed a 13.1% increase, with 57,582 cases reported in 2022. Similarly, crimes against STs rose by 14.3%, totaling 10,064 cases, compared to the 2021 count of 8,802 points. MP and Rajasthan consistently ranking among the top five states with the highest occurrences of crimes and atrocities against SC and ST communities.
- Economic Offences:** Economic offences significantly increased, with all time high of 1,93,385 cases registered in 2022—an 11.1% increase from the previous year.

- **Escalating Animal attack Incidents:** there is a troubling surge in the fatalities & injuries resulting from animal attacks with 19% rise in 2022 as compared to the 2021. In addition, the number of animal/reptile and insect bites cases also increased by 16.7%.
- **Environment-Related Crime:** The total number of environmental crimes in India decreased by around 18% in 2022, compared to 2021.

### Concerns Raised With The Report

- **Data not reflective of actual occurrence of crime-** and records only the incidence of registered crime. When reported crimes against women in Delhi rose significantly in the aftermath of the 2012 Nirbhaya Case, it may have been a reflection of increased awareness about the need for registering crimes both among those affected and the police, rather than an actual increase in the incidence of crime against women.
- **Principal Offence Rule-** followed by the NCRB which means that among the many offences registered in a single FIR, the crime that attracts the most severe punishment is considered as the counting unit. Therefore, 'Murder with Rape' would be counted as 'Murder' and not rape, this undercounts the crime of rape.
- **Impact on Accuracy of Data-** as the report is only a compilation of data submitted at the local level and any inefficiencies or gaps in data at that level may have an impact on the accuracy of the report. For example, in case of farmer suicides, the FIR recorded for the suicide would depend entirely on how the policeman or policewoman visiting the place of crime understands the situation and lists the reason.
- **Ignoring Socio-economic causative factors-** Because of a range of reasons, including the fear of an uncooperative or a hostile response from the police, certain groups may not be willing to come forward and register cases. A shortage of police officers or unfilled vacancies in the relevant posts at the local level may hinder the collection of data.

### The Gyanwapi Case

The Allahabad High Court, while dismissing petitions by the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board and the mosque committee, held that the 1991 original suit is not barred by provisions of The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 and gave a 6 month deadline to Varanasi court to complete the proceedings in Gyanwapi case.

### Background

- It is the original title suit filed in the Gyanwapi issue on behalf of the deity Adi Vishweshwar.
- In 1995, a trial court of Varanasi framed eight key issues to be adjudicated in the plea. Among these was the crucial aspect of whether the suit would be barred under the Places of Worship Act, 1991.
  - ✓ The Act prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th of August 1947.
- The court initially decided that the suit was barred under the 1991 Act. But this decision was set aside by a revisional court after the Hindu side filed a revision application and held that the suit had to be decided on merits.
- This revision order and effectively the suit was stayed by the Allahabad High Court in 1998.
- A SC judgement in 2018 *Asian Resurfacing of Road Agency P Ltd Director vs CBI case* that "the interim order of stay granted by courts other than the SC itself will stand vacated automatically after six months unless they are specifically extended" prompted the petitioners to file several new pleas on behalf of other deities, including Maa Shringar Gauri (seeking the right to worship) in 2021 to revive their claim over the Gyanwapi mosque.
- The petitioners argued that as the stay was not in operation, the case must be heard again. This was challenged by the Muslim side before the High Court.

### The 1991 Suit

- It seeks an order that the “structure” (mosque) on top of the cellars (taikhana), the adjoining part of the “old temple” of Lord Vishweshwar, and some other structures are the property of Lord Vishweshwar and devotees.
- **Basis of these Claims-**
  - The petitioners claimed that at the mosque location, there existed a prior to puranic period Swayambhu Jyotirlinga of Lord Shiva popularly known as Lord Vishweshwar constructed by King Vikramaditya about 2050 years ago.
  - The original temple consisted of four mandaps around the temple known as Mukti Mandap, Gyan Mandap, Aishwarya Mandap and Shringar Mandap.
  - The Gyanvapi Mosque was built in 1669 during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, by demolishing the existing Vishweshwar temple.

\*\* The Archaeological Survey of India was ordered by a FastTrack court to get a comprehensive archaeological physical survey done of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple-Gyanvapi Mosque complex to find out as to whether the religious structure standing at present at the disputed site is a superimposition, alteration or addition or there is a structural overlapping of any kind, with or over, any religious structure.

\*\* The mosque is not an ASI-protected site, and the ASI has no role in its maintenance or upkeep.

### Arguments In The Case

#### Hindus (Petitioners/Plaintiff)

- They claimed that the Muslim community had illegally occupied the property and therefore Hindus have every right to use it as a place of worship and to renovate and reconstruct their temple.
- They denied the claim of entire Muslim community of having any right on the mosque and their right to occupy the structure and requested the court to pass an order directing the defendants “to vacate the property and hand over possession its possessions to petitioners.

#### Muslims (Defendants)

- They claimed that the petitioners have every right to offer their prayer in the temple in question and are neither debarred nor stopped by anyone to perform religious rites inside the temple.
- As the Places of Worship Act, 1991 was promulgated to foreclose any controversy in respect of any places of worship and Muslims are using the mosque premises to offer Namaz since 15th August 1947, its religious character cannot change, and it cannot be converted into a temple.

#### Extra Mile: The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

- **About:** The act prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947.
- **Key Provisions:**
  - The Act defines "place of worship" as a temple, mosque, gurudwara, church, monastery, or any other place of public religious worship. It bars judicial review which is a basic feature of the Constitution.
  - **Prohibition of Conversion:** The Act bars the conversion of a place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different religious denomination or even a different segment of the same religious denomination (Section 3).
  - **Maintenance of Religious Character:** The religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it existed on August 15 1947 and any suit or legal proceeding with respect to the conversion of any place of worship existing on August 15 1947 pending before any court, shall abate and no fresh suit or legal proceedings shall be instituted (Section 4).
  - It exempts the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case from its ambit and to any suit, appeal or proceeding relating to it (Section 5).

- Section 5 also exempts Ancient & historical monuments and archaeological sites & remains that are covered by the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Sites & Remains Act, 1958.
- **Penalties (Section 6):** Specifies penalties, including a maximum imprisonment term of three years and fines, for violating the Act.
- **Why was it enacted?**
  - It was introduced in 1991 to prevent any new controversies from arising relating to conversion of places of worship as then the Ram Temple Agitation was at its peak.
- **Concerns Raised-** The SC has pending before it two petitions which challenge the Act on the grounds that it-
  - **Arbitrariness:** It bars 'judicial review', a basic structure of the constitution by imposing an arbitrary, irrational and retrospective cut-off date and impinges the constitutional right of seeking judicial review of a grievance.
  - **Abrides the Right to Religion:** of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs as it provides no remedies against illegal encroachment on the places of worship and pilgrimages and bars Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs from filing any suit or approaching the Courts under Article 32 (Writ in Supreme Court) or Article 226 (Writ in High Court).
  - **Beyond Legislative Jurisdiction:** The Act is unconstitutional and beyond Parliament's law-making power as it has deviated from the principle of law 'ubi jus ibi remedium (where there is a right, there is a remedy)', thus violating the concept of justice and Rule of Law, which is core of Article 14.
  - **Against Religious Right:** as it violates Article 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion).

#### Extra Mile: Mathura's Shahi Idgah Mosque

The Allahabad High Court (HC) recently allowed a court monitored survey of Shahi Idgah mosque adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura.

✓ The inspection will be done by a three-member team of advocate commissioners.

#### What Is The Case?

- A plea on behalf of the Hindu deity, Bhagwan Shri Krishna Virajman and seven others was filed in the Allahabad HC claiming that the mosque was built over Krishna Janmabhoomi (birthplace) land, on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1670 (Finds in Official Court Bulletin (Akhbarat)).
  - The area was regarded as nazul land - non-agricultural state land owned by the Marathas, and then the British.
- The main suit (filed in 2020) seeks removal of the mosque from the more than 13-acre complex it is built on.
- A similar plea was filed in the Mathura local court 2020 by the same petitioners but the court dismissed the suit citing the bar on admitting the case under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. This judgement was by a district judge in May 2022.
- In May 2023, the Allahabad High Court allowed a plea moved by the Hindu side seeking the transfer of the suit from the trial court to itself.

#### MLA faces Disqualification after Conviction

Recently, the Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister was convicted in a disproportionate assets case under Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) after an appeal by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC).

- ✓ The MLA now faced the risk of disqualification from the legislative assembly.
- ✓ The DVAC has been setup by the Tamil Nadu Government to conduct enquiries into the allegations of corruption and allied misconducts referred to by the State Vigilance Commission/Government.
- ✓ "Disproportionate assets" refer to wealth acquired by an individual that significantly exceeds what can be reasonably expected based on their known sources of income and legitimate earnings.



### About the Prevention of Corruption Act (PoCA)

- The act seeks to create a balance between the corrupt & honest government officials by punishing the corrupt for taking undue advantage & includes corrupt acts like bribes, misappropriation, obtaining a pecuniary advantage, possessing assets disproportionate to income etc.
- It brings under its ambit the persons and organizations giving an undue advantage to a public servant- a punishable offence. It also mandates prior sanction from government before investigating and prosecuting a public servant.
- It also includes “criminal misconduct by a government official” under its ambit and makes it a punishable offence attracting imprisonment extendable up to seven years.

### Disqualification of Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA)

An MLA can be disqualified-

1. Through Article 191 of the constitution (Article 102 in case of Member of Parliament (MP)) for holding an office of profit, being of unsound mind or insolvent or not having valid citizenship.
2. Through the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution i.e. under the Anti-Defection Law if the MP/MLA-
  - Voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
  - Disobeys the directions of his political party or votes or does not vote in the legislature contrary to the directions of his political party.
  - Joins another political party after the elections.
  - Joins any political party 6 months after becoming an MLA (in case of a nominated member).
3. Under the following provisions of Representation of The People Act (RPA), 1951-
  - Section 8 of the RPA which deals with disqualification for conviction of offences such as
    - i. promoting enmity between two groups, bribery, and undue influence or personation at an election (Section 8(1)).
    - ii. hoarding or profiteering, adulteration of food or drugs and for conviction and sentence of at least six months for an offence under any provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act (Section 8(2)).
    - iii. If sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years (Section 8(3)). He is disqualified from the date of such conviction and shall continue to be disqualified for a further period of six years since his release.
    - iv. A disqualification takes place only after three months from the date of conviction. Within this period of three months the convicted MLA can file an appeal against the conviction in a high court (HC) (Section 1(4)). This provision was struck down by the SC in the *Lily Thomas vs Union of India, 2013 Case*.
  - **Section 9** deals with disqualification for dismissal for corruption or disloyalty, and for entering government contracts while being a lawmaker.
  - **Section 10**: Disqualification for office under Government company.
  - **Section 11**: Removal or reduction of period of disqualification.

### Can the Disqualification be Reversed?

A disqualification can be reversed if a HC grants a stay on the conviction or gives a decision in the favour of the convicted MLA. A stay on conviction is important before filing an appeal for preventing disqualification.

### Permitting Puja and Rituals at Protected Monuments

A report on ‘Issues relating to Untraceable Monuments and Protection of Monuments in India’ presented by a Parliamentary Committee. The Committee recommended permitting puja and worship at monuments protected by the Archaeological Survey of India(ASI) that have religious significance.

## Background

- In 2022, Prayers were held at the ruins of the eighth-century Martand Sun Temple in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag.
- When the ASI took over the temple ruins in the 20th century for conservation, no puja or Hindu ritual was being held there. Therefore, when puja was conducted on the temple complex twice last year, the ASI raised objection as it was a violation of ASI norms since the temple is considered a non-living monument.
  - Many other protected monuments also witness "unauthorized worship" which include Lal Gumbad, Sultan Ghari's tomb and Ferozeshah Kotla, all in Delhi.

## About the Martand Sun

### Temple

- It was commissioned by the Karkota dynasty king Lalitaditya Muktapida (725 AD- 753 AD) in 8<sup>th</sup> century, and it once used to be a thriving place of worship.
- It was destroyed by Sikandar Shah Miri in the 14th century.

## The Present ASI Rules

- ASI allows prayers at its protected sites only if they were "functioning places of worship" at the time it took charge of them.
- No religious rituals are allowed at non-living monuments.
  - The non-living monuments are the ones where there has been no continuity of worship when it became an ASI-protected site.
- A little less than a fourth of all the centrally protected monuments and archaeological sites maintained by the ASI have places of worship, while no new religious rituals can be started or conducted at non-living monuments.
- The sites that have places of worship (living ASI monuments) include temples, mosques, dargahs and churches. For example, the Taj Mahal where namaz is held every Friday, Roman Catholic Church in Meerut, Nila Mosque in Delhi's Hauz Khas Village.

## Committee Recommendations

The committee, headed by YSR Congress Rajya Sabha MP V Vijaisai Reddy, recommended the ASI to explore the possibility of permitting puja/worship/certain religious activities at Centrally Protected Monuments of religious significance if such activities do not have any detrimental effect on the state of conservation and preservation of the monuments.

## Concerns Against the Committee's Recommendations

- Permitting religious activities at protected monuments could jeopardize the integrity, authenticity, and historical significance of these monuments. Such activities may expose the monuments to potential alterations, additions, modifications, or damage from devotees or authorities.
- Permitting religious activities at protected monuments could give rise to conflicts and disputes among various religious groups. These conflicts may involve claims of ownership or rights over the monuments and objections to the activities of other groups.

## Is It Possible To Permit Rituals At Protected Monuments?

- As per the Ministry of Culture the revival of worship is not allowed where it was not in vogue at the time of protection (by the ASI) or has been abandoned for a long time.
- Also, permitting rituals will open a Pandora's Box since many of the protected monuments include dilapidated temples, dargahs, churches and other religious sites.

## About the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) (under the Ministry of Culture)

- ASI is the premier organization for archaeological research and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham (Father of Indian Archaeology).
- It is responsible for maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance.

- It regulates all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.
  - The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 provides for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance, for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.
  - Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972 was enacted to regulate the internal and external dealing in antiquities in India.

### Important Bills Passed by Both Houses in Winter Session 2023

1. **The Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023**- It seeks to repeal the Legal Practitioners Act, 1879 and incorporate the provisions of Section 36 of the Legal Practitioners Act 1879 (deals with the power to frame and publish lists of touts) in the Advocates Act, 1961.
  - ✓ Advocates Act, 1961 seeks to amend and consolidate the law relating to the legal practitioners and to provide for the constitution of Bar Councils and an All-India Bar.
2. **The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023** seeks to change in nomenclature of 'weak and under-privileged classes (social castes) to 'Other Backward Classes' in the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, 2004.
3. **The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Amendment) Bill, 2023** seeks to provide nomination of not more than two members, one of whom shall be a woman from the community of Kashmiri Migrants and one member from Displaced person from Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir to the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly.
4. **The Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2023** seeks to amend the Central Universities Act, 2009 for establishment SammakkaSarakka Central Tribal University at Mulugu in the State of Telangana.
5. **The Repealing and Amending Bill, 2023** seeks to Repeal 76 redundant and obsolete laws.
6. **The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023** seeks to regulate the appointment, conditions of service and term of office of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners, the procedure for transaction of business by the Election Commission and for matters connected therewith. According to the bill, the salary and conditions of service of the CEC and ECs will be equivalent to that of Cabinet Secretary (earlier it was equivalent to the salary of a Supreme Court Judge).
7. **The Telecommunications Bill, 2023** seeks to amend and consolidate the laws relating to development, expansion and operation of telecommunication services and telecommunication networks; assignment of spectrum; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
8. **The National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2023** seeks to extend the validity of the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second Act, 2011 for a further period of three years from 01.01.2024 to 31.12.2026 thereby providing protection from punitive action to certain forms of unauthorised Developments in Delhi.

### New Criminal Bills 2023

The President recently gave her assent to the new criminal bills namely the Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill, 2023 (to replace IPC 1860), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, 2023 (to replace the CrPC of 1973 (originally enacted in 1898)) and the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill, 2023 (to replace the Indian Evidence Act of 1872).

- ✓ After being introduced in Aug' 2023, the bills were subsequently referred to a 31 members Parliamentary Standing Committee. Instead of moving different official amendments, new Bills were introduced.

## Key Highlights of Revised Bills

### 1. Bhartiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill, 2023-

- **Redefines Terrorism**- It entirely adopts the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) definition to cover the terrorist activities with respect to *any* counterfeit Indian paper currency, coin or of any other material.
- **Defines Cruelty** against a woman by her husband and his relatives, which is punishable with a jail term of up to three years.
- **Unauthorized publication of court proceedings**- Those who print or publish 'any matter' concerning court proceedings in rape or sexual assault cases without permission would be punished with a two-year jail sentence and a fine.
- **'Mental Illness' replaced by 'unsoundness of mind'**- and adds the term 'intellectual disability' along with unsoundness of mind.
- **Enhanced Punishment for Mob Lynching**- of seven years and penalizes mob lynching at par with murder.
- **Ignores Adultery and Section 377**- Two crucial recommendations of the panel to include a gender-neutral provision criminalizing adultery, and a clause that criminalizes non-consensual sex between men, women, transpersons, and acts of bestiality have been ignored.
- **Redefines 'Petty organized crime'**- as the one including trick theft, theft from vehicle, dwelling house, or business premises, cargo theft, pickpocketing, theft through card skimming, shoplifting, and theft of Automated Teller Machine (ATMs).

### 2. Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, 2023-

- **Defines Community Service**- as a 'work which the Court may order a convict to perform as a form of punishment that benefits the community, for which he shall not be entitled to any remuneration.' It also empowers a Magistrate of the First or Second Class to impose this punishment and to encourage a more reparative approach to minor crimes.
- **Allows Handcuffing**- by the police beyond the time of arrest to include the stage of production before court as well.
- **Police Custody**- It ignores the concerns of the parliamentary panel regarding a provision which allows police custody beyond the initial fifteen days of arrest. Also, any police officer can request a medical examination of the accused in certain cases, including rape cases.
- **Preventive Detention**- It allows the detained person to be produced before the Magistrate or released in petty cases within 24 hours.

### 3. Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill, 2023-

- **Admissibility of Electronic Evidence**- will now be subjected to section 63 (corresponding to the requirement of a certificate under section 65B of the Indian Evidence Act).

## Concerns Raised

1. **Police Accountability**- The bills lack enhanced police accountability to the people at a time when the judiciary is often unable to protect citizens from false, malicious and selective prosecution and prolonged incarceration in absence of proper charges.
2. **Ignore Mindful Suggestions**- Important recommendations made by the parliamentary standing committee have been ignored like- non-consensual sexual acts covered by IPC Section 377 should continue to be criminalized; grounds must be provided by the Executive for commutation of sentences; and a special provision be included to protect healthcare workers.
3. **Impacts Civil Liberties**- The current law limits police custody to the first 15 days of arrest. The expansion under the revised law heightens the risk of exposure to police excesses, given widely acknowledged concerns about the safety of arrested persons in police custody, and the heightened risk of coerced and fabricated evidence after prolonged detention.

## ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)

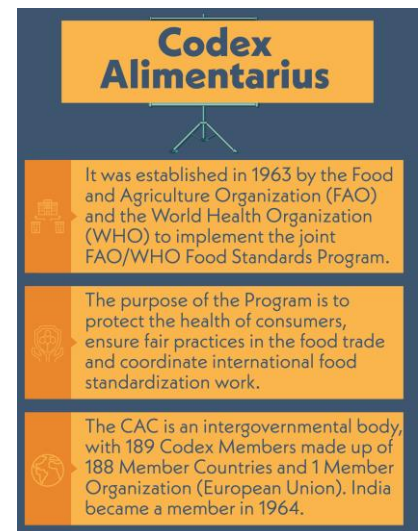
- India has been elected as a member representing Asian region in the **Executive Committee of Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)** during its meeting held at FAO Headquarters at Rome.
- India's proposal for setting up group standards for millets was also accepted by the Commission.
  - India has framed a comprehensive group standard for 15 types of millets specifying 8 quality parameters, which was acknowledged by the Commission and supported by the member countries. Codex currently has standards for Sorghum and Pearl Millet.
- India put forward a proposal for the development of global standards for millets, particularly for Finger millet, Barnyard millet, Kodo millet, Proso millet and Little millet as group standards as in case of pulses.

### Codex Standards

- The collection of food standards and related texts adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission is known as the Codex Alimentarius. The term **Codex Alimentarius** is Latin and means **food code**.
- Codex standards are **international food texts** i.e. standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other recommendations.
- They include provisions *covering food hygiene, food additives, residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs, contaminants, labelling and presentation, methods of analysis and sampling, and import and export inspection and certification.*
- They are **not a substitute for, or alternative to national laws**. Every country's laws and administrative procedures contain provisions with which it is essential to comply.

### Significance of Codex standards

- Thus, the standards help to enhance trust among consumers regarding the safety and quality of the food products they buy.
- It also helps to build trust among importers as the food ordered by them, is in accordance with the required specifications.



### Drone Scheme for Women

- The Union Cabinet has approved a **Central Sector Scheme for providing Drones to the Women Self Help Groups (SHGs)**, with an outlay of Rs. 1261 Crore.
- The scheme aims to provide drones to **15,000 selected Women SHGs** during the period 2023-24 to 2025-2026 for providing rental services to farmers for agriculture purpose.
- **Central Financial Assistance @ 80% of the cost of drone** and accessories/ancillary charges up to a maximum of Rs. 8 Lakh will be provided to the women SHGs for purchase of drones.
- The Cluster Level Federation (CLFs) of SHGs may raise the balance amount (total cost of procurement minus subsidy) as **loan** under **National Agriculture Infra Financing Facility (AIF)**. Interest subvention @ 3% on the AIF loan will be provided.
- One of the members of the women SHGs who is well qualified, 18 and above years of age will be elected for training.
- Considering the difficulties which SHGs may face in procuring the drones, repair and maintenance of drones through drone companies, the Lead Fertiliser Companies (LFCs) will act as a bridge between drone supplier companies and SHGs.
- LFCs will also promote use of Nano Fertilizers such as Nano Urea and Nano DAP by the drones with SHGs.

## Benefits

- It will help to infuse advance technology in agriculture for improved efficiency, enhance crop yield and reduced cost of operation for the benefit of farmers.
- It will provide sustainable business and livelihood support to 15,000 SHGs and they would be able to earn additional income of at least Rs. 1 lakh per annum.

## Technology Development Fund Scheme (TDF)

- TDF scheme has so far sanctioned 70 projects amounting to Rs 291.25 crore to various industries and 16 defence technologies have been successfully developed/realized.
- Launched in 2016, the TDF scheme is a flagship programme of Ministry of Defence executed by DRDO under 'Make in India' initiative.
- It aims to boost MSMEs and startups' engagement in designing and development of various defence technologies indigenously.

## Objectives Of The Scheme

- Provide **Grant in Aid** to Indian industries, including MSMEs and Start-ups, as well as academic and scientific institutions for the development of defence and dual use technologies that are currently not available with the Indian defence Industry.
- Focus on research, design & development of niche technologies which are being developed for the first time in the country.
- Create a bridge amongst the Armed Forces, research organizations, academia and qualifying/certifying agencies with private sector entities.
- Support the futuristic technologies having a Proof of Concept and converting them into prototype.

## Benefits

- Capacity and capability building of Indian industries for design and development of defence technologies in the country.
- Creation of an ecosystem of R&D where industry and academia work together to meet the current and futuristic requirement of Armed Forces and defence sector.
- Building of defence manufacturing ecosystem in country.
- Achieving Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) in defence technology.



**Key findings**

- Price rise in pulses this year may have been due to low production prospects amid an uneven monsoon.
- However, commodities like oilseed, pulses and fruits are expected to experience a supply and demand gap in the coming years.
- As per capita incomes rise, the consumption basket of people tends to diversify towards nutritious and high-valued commodities, including fruits and vegetables and dairy products and away from staples such as rice and cereals.
- So, demand growth for non-cereals and high-valued commodities is expected to exceed the population growth rate and cereal commodities' growth in coming years.

## Prospects of Agricultural commodities

- A research report on 'Prospects of India's Demand and Supply for Agricultural Commodities towards 2030' was recently published.
- It has been developed by the *National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)* and *Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)*.

## Projections

- The report projected demand for different farm products up to 2030-31 based on different alternative growth scenarios that assumed **per capita income (PCY) growth ranging from 4.1% to 6.1%**.
- The demand for fruits and vegetables will increase from 289.32 MT in the base year (2019-20) to 431.1 MT under the assumption of 4.1% PCY growth and 501.8 MT under 6.1% PCY growth by the end of 2030-31.
- The demand for pulses will range between 37.99 to 42.21 MT depending upon various growth scenarios in 2030-31.

- If the previous 10 years' growth trends continue, pulses supplies are expected to be at 34.9 MT by 2030-31, and if the 15-year trends persist, they may rise to 39.2 MT by then.
- Oil seeds production is expected to rise to around 35 to 40 million tonnes (MT) by 2030-31, with the gap between demand and supply likely to expand to 3 MT by 2025-26 and 6 MT by 2030-31, even if per capita incomes rise just 5.1%.

### Way Ahead

- Food deficits increase reliance on imports and raise the food import bill in the long run.
- Therefore, there is a need to increase the level of production and productivity of oilseeds, pulses, and fruits since their demand in the future shows an increasing trend.
- The report has called for policy attention to ensure a balance between domestic production and the absorption of these commodities.
- It also recommends diversification towards high-value commodities that require major investments in market infrastructure, processing, and cold storage and warehousing facilities to build an efficient and reliable value chain. Such measures can significantly reduce food wastage.

### World Soil Day

- The World Soil Day (WSD) was recently celebrated on 5th December to focus attention on the importance of healthy soil and to advocate for the sustainable management of soil resources.
- This year's theme is '**Soil and water, a source of life.**' The planet's survival depends on the precious link between soil and water.
- Over 95 percent of the food originates from these two fundamental resources. This symbiotic relationship is the foundation of the agricultural systems.
- However, in the face of climate change and human activity, soil is being degraded, putting excessive pressure on water resources.
- Erosion disrupts the natural balance, reducing water infiltration and availability for all forms of life.
- Sustainable soil management practices, such as minimum tillage, crop rotation, organic matter addition, and cover cropping, improve soil health, reduce erosion and pollution, and enhance water infiltration and storage.
- These practices also preserve soil biodiversity, improve fertility, and contribute to carbon sequestration, playing a crucial role in the fight against climate change.

### Background

- ▶ An international day to celebrate soil was recommended by the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) in 2002.
- ▶ Under the leadership of the Kingdom of Thailand and within the framework of the Global Soil Partnership, FAO supported the formal establishment of WSD as a global awareness raising platform.
- ▶ In December 2013, the UN General Assembly responded by designating 5 December 2014 as the first official World Soil Day.
- ▶ The date was chosen because it corresponds with the birthday of late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the King of Thailand, for his efforts in raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil management and rehabilitation for food security and poverty alleviation.

### Off-budget Borrowing

- Off-budget borrowings by states rose sharply in 2020-21 and 2021-22. However, after the Centre's crackdown in March 2022, off-budget borrowings have shown a declining trend.
- The states have already started working on it. In FY22, the total off-budget borrowing stood at 67,000 crore. It was reduced to Rs 18,500 in FY23.
- Off-budget borrowing refers to a government's practice of raising funds for various purposes **without reflecting these expenditures in the official budget.**

- When the government borrows through the central bank or issues bonds, the loan goes into the books. This is reflected in the fiscal deficit. In off-budget borrowing, the loan **does not add to the fiscal deficit**.
- It involves using **alternative financing mechanisms** to meet specific objectives or to keep certain expenses off the books, thus not showing the full extent of government liabilities in the budget documents.

### Reasons for Using Off-Budget Borrowings

- **Meeting Short-Term Objectives:** Sometimes, the government needs to fund short-term expenses not reflected in the official budget, such as pre-election expenditures or unforeseen emergencies.
  - Off-budget borrowing allows them to access funds without altering the fiscal deficit targets.
- **Reducing Fiscal Deficit:** To maintain fiscal discipline and meet deficit targets, governments may use off-budget mechanisms. By keeping certain expenses off the books, they can report a lower fiscal deficit.
- **Encouraging Investments:** The government might want to encourage private investment in certain sectors without burdening the official budget. Off-budget financing mechanisms can be used to attract investments by offering tax incentives or other benefits.

**Methods of off-budget borrowings**

**Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs):**  
State-owned enterprises, or PSUs, can borrow on behalf of the government for specific projects or purposes. This debt is not directly part of the central government's budget.

**Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV):**  
The government can set up SPVs to raise funds for specific projects or purposes. These SPVs might borrow from the market, and their debt does not directly affect the official budget.

**Small Savings Schemes:**  
The government may raise funds from small savings schemes such as the Public Provident Fund (PPF), National Savings Certificate (NSC), and the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF).

### Issues With Off-Budget Borrowings

- **Lack of Transparency:** Off-budget borrowing can cover the true financial health of the government. It makes it challenging for policymakers, investors, and the public to accurately assess the government's fiscal position.
- **Risk of Fiscal Profligacy:** Governments might misuse off-budget mechanisms to overspend or undertake projects without proper evaluation, as these expenses are not examined as much as those in the official budget.
- **Legacy Issues:** Borrowings from PSUs and small savings schemes can lead to legacy issues where the government is burdened with repayment obligations that were undertaken in the past.

### NTPC Wins Brandon Hall Group's Awards

- NTPC, India's largest integrated power company, has been declared as the winner at the **Brandon Hall Group's Excellence in Technology Awards 2023**.
- NTPC stands out as the only PSU in India to secure dual accolades in the Technology Awards category.
  - The company received silver awards in two distinct categories: "**Best Advance in Corporate Wellbeing Technology**" and "**Best Advance in Augmented and Virtual Reality.**"
- The award in the "Best Advance in Corporate Wellbeing Technology" Category was for NTPC's efforts in utilising technology to design an Individual-Centric Health Care Ecosystem.
  - It overcomes the limitations due to the remoteness of NTPC Sites and provides effective medical

**Brandon Hall Group**

- The US based Brandon Hall Group is a professional development company that offers data, research, insights, and certification to learning and talent executives and organizations.
- Their HCM Excellence Awards program was the first to recognize organizations for learning and talent and is known as the "Academy Awards of Human Capital Management."
- The awards recognize the best organizations that have successfully developed and deployed programs, strategies, modalities, processes, systems, and tools that have achieved measurable results.



services to all employees across all locations.

- The award in the “Best Advance in Augmented and Virtual Reality “Category was for being a leader in adapting innovative technologies. NTPC has implemented several AR/VR initiatives under the umbrella, ‘iGuru’.

### FSB Report on Multi-function Crypto-asset Intermediaries (MCIs)

The Financial Stability Board (FSB) has released a report on multi-function crypto-asset intermediaries (MCIs) operating globally.

#### Revenue Sources of MCIs

- The primary source of revenue for these platforms are the **transaction fees generated from trading-related activities**. The **traded securities** in some cases are *self-issued* crypto assets.
- Trades may also indirectly drive additional demand for other services offered by the platform. These may include **prepaid debit cards and lending**.
- Both Binance and Coinbase issue debit cards that convert crypto-assets in individual wallets to fiat currency for ATM withdrawals and retail purchases.
- The overall mechanism is based on both **economies of scale** (higher cost advantage with increase in quantity) and **economies of scope** (higher cost advantage when diversity of goods increase).
- MCIs may also generate revenue from **operating a blockchain infrastructure** for which they may collect **transaction validation fees**.
- Another source of revenue could be **proprietary trading** (trading with their own individual capital rather than that of clients, with aim of acquiring profits).
- This shows that the MCIs intend to go beyond just trading to become a “one-stop shop” for crypto-based services.
- As per the report, the amount of these revenue sources is unclear because of the limited publicly disclosed information.

#### Risks Involved

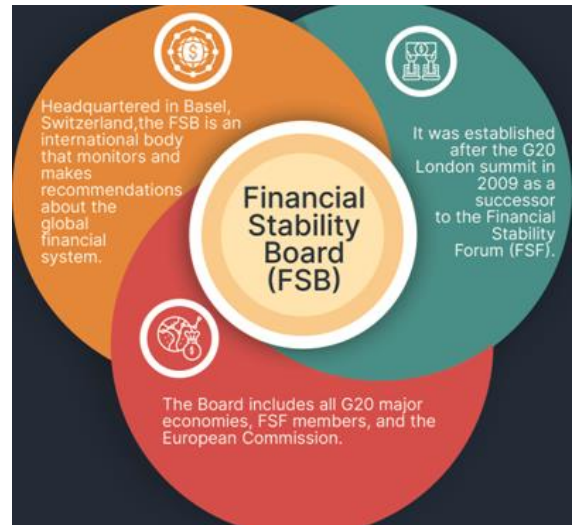
- Most MCIs are generally not transparent about their corporate structure, as they are privately held.
- MCIs have failed to create a meaningful separation between potentially conflicting business lines and provide clear account of transactions and activities or audit practices, among other things.
- This could be intentional, to limit understanding of their vulnerabilities, economic models and activities and to avoid regulatory oversight.
- Even if they disclose information, it is generally for a small part of their business, specific to a jurisdiction. Most of the available information has been made available through press coverage, court filings and regulatory actions and not public disclosures.
- **Poor risk management** may make it easier for insiders to engage in misconduct that increases MCI vulnerabilities.
- **Market dominance and concentration** are also among potential vulnerabilities. One or more MCIs could become the major source of liquidity in crypto-asset markets. This would not be ideal for realising the correct price as per market dynamics and existing conditions.
- Illiquidity and concentrated holdings combined with opaque information about supply and circulation could allow *prices of self-issued crypto assets to be inflated*.



- High concentration along with hosting multiple services could also facilitate **anti-competitive behaviour**, increasing the ecosystem's vulnerabilities further.
- For example, MCIs may raise entry barriers and increase costs for users to switch to a competitor.
- Other than this, lack of transparency could mean that risks from lack of effective governance and risk management or lack of profitability of the business model would be hidden until the negative shocks fully materialise.

### Impact On The Traditional Financial System

- Based on available evidence, the threat to global financial stability and to the real economy from the failure of an MCI is **presently limited**.
- However, the recent closure of crypto-asset-friendly banks (such as Silvergate Capital after the FTX collapse) highlight the risks to firms whose business models rely in some form on crypto assets.
- MCIs depend on formal banks and payment service providers for 'on-ramp' and 'off-ramp' transaction services (that is, conversion of crypto currencies to fiat currencies and vice versa), among other things.
- It may lead to **counterparty risks** if the trading platform stops operating or if the bank fails to provide real-time operations.
- The banks can also be exposed to **credit risks**, if the banks provide loans and credit lines to MCIs, especially when backed by crypto-based collaterals, which have a probability of decline in value in the future.



### Way Ahead

- It is important to enhance cross-border cooperation and information sharing among local authorities, to effectively regulate and address gaps in MCIs operating globally.
- Regulatory frameworks need to be developed to ensure investor protection and financial stability.
- Measures should be taken to enhance transparency at MCIs, in order to improve corporate governance and operations.

### ADB Loan For Uttarakhand's Power Infrastructure

- The Centre has signed an agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for availing a \$200 million loan to improve the quality, efficiency, and reliability of power supply in Uttarakhand.
- The project will enhance the power system **network's capabilities**, facilitating the seamless integration and transmission of renewable energy to load centers.
- Simultaneously, it involves **upgrading the distribution system** to minimize power outages and reduce technical losses.
- It will modernise Dehradun city's power network infrastructure by introducing an **advanced and climate-resilient underground cable system**.
- Additionally, it will enhance the current power system by **installing upstream substations** that will help meet increasing electricity demand, reduce network congestion, and improve power distribution reliability in urban and suburban areas.
- It will **empower women self-help groups** in rural hilly districts, providing them with access to renewable energy sources and energy-efficient equipment to enhance their livelihoods.

- The **Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific**, financed by the Government of Japan through ADB, will provide a **\$2 million grant** to support livelihood enhancement, training, and awareness-raising activities of the project.
- ADB will support the capacity development of the Power Transmission Corporation of Uttarakhand Limited and the Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited by **conducting leadership and project management programs** to develop climate-resilient power sector projects.
- It will also collaborate with the Energy Department to formulate an energy transition road map to **support Uttarakhand's low-carbon transition**.



### Value Investing

- Value investing refers to a style of investing that involves buying assets such as stocks, bonds, real estate etc. at a price that is below their intrinsic value hoping to sell them at a higher price in the future.
- Value investors believe that an asset's price may fluctuate widely in the short-run, but will move towards its intrinsic value in the long-run.
- For example, the intrinsic value of a company's stock may be 100 rupees per share, but it may be trading at a market price of only 60 rupees.
- This difference between the price and the intrinsic value of an asset gives an opportunity for value investors to buy the asset at a price that is below its intrinsic value.
- Over time, as more investors begin to notice the gap between the price and the intrinsic value of the asset, the price of the asset goes up towards its intrinsic value.
- This in turn allows value investors who bought the asset when it was underpriced to sell at a profit. A value investor generally sells an asset once its price has exceeded its intrinsic value.

### Judging Intrinsic Value

- The price of an asset may differ from its intrinsic value for various reasons.
- Estimates of the intrinsic value of an asset may vary **depending on the opinions of investors**.
- For example, if the majority of investors fail to expect a major rise in the future cash flow of a company, they may undervalue the company's share and would only be willing to pay only a low price for it.
- This gives value investors an opportunity to buy the asset at a cheap price, and sell it later when other investors finally recognise the enhanced earnings power of the company.
- The price and the intrinsic value of an asset can also vary during times of crisis when investors sell their assets in panic.
- So crises can offer value investors a great opportunity to buy undervalued assets. In fact, value investors believe that market panics are the best time to buy and booms the best time to sell.

### Efficient Market Theorists

- The philosophy of value investors differs from that of *efficient market theorists (EMTs)*. As per EMTs the price at which an asset is traded in the market closely tracks its intrinsic value.
- They believe that markets are so efficient that all information that is relevant to an asset is quickly reflected in its price, thus offering very little opportunity for value investors to purchase undervalued assets.

## Growth Investing

- Some investors differentiate value investing from growth investing, which primarily focuses on purchasing assets such as stocks that are expected to witness rapid earnings growth.
- However, value investors believe that even growth investing is based on the core value investing principle of exploiting the difference between the price of an asset and its intrinsic value.

## Sub-schemes Under RAMP Programme

- The Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has launched **three sub-schemes under the RAMP Programme**. The schemes were launched at the 2nd meeting of the *National MSME council*.
  - ✓ **MSME Green Investment and Financing for Transformation Scheme** (MSE GIFT Scheme) will help enterprises adopt green technology with interest subvention and credit guarantee support.
  - ✓ **MSE Scheme for Promotion and Investment in Circular Economy** (MSE SPICE Scheme) is the first ever scheme in the government to support circular economy projects. It will be done through credit subsidy and will aim for realizing the goal of zero emissions by 2070 under the MSME sector.
  - ✓ **MSE Scheme on Online Dispute Resolution for Delayed Payments** is a first of its kind scheme to synergise legal support with modern IT tools and Artificial Intelligence to address the incidences of delayed payments for Micro and Small Enterprises.
- **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)** is the implementing agency for MSE GIFT and MSE SPICE schemes.
- **National Informatics Centre Services Inc.** is the implementing agency for MSE Scheme on Online Dispute Resolution for Delayed Payments.

## Other Initiatives by the Ministry

- The Ministry is also taking new initiatives under the existing schemes to provide enhanced support to the MSMEs.
- The **Support for Commercialisation of IP Programme (MSME – SCIP Programme)** will enable the innovators in the MSME sector to commercialize their Intellectual Property Rights.
- In addition, the **ZED Scheme** (Zero Defect and Zero Effect) of the Ministry has now been made completely free for women led MSMEs. The government guarantees payment of 100 percent financial support for the certification cost.

## Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) Scheme

- Launched in **2022**, RAMP is a **World Bank** assisted **Central Sector Scheme** that aims to improve the performance of MSMEs in India.
- RAMP will be implemented over a period of **five years**, beginning 2022-23.

Objectives	Benefits to MSMEs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improving access to market and credit for MSMEs.</li><li>• Strengthening institutions and governance at the central and state levels.</li><li>• Improving center-state linkages and partnerships.</li><li>• Addressing issues of delayed payments.</li><li>• Greening of MSMEs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased access to markets and credit.</li><li>• Improved access to technology and training.</li><li>• Reduced delays in payments.</li><li>• Increased environmental sustainability.</li></ul>

## National MSME Council

- It has been set up to work as an administrative and functional body to oversee inter-Central Ministerial/Departmental co-ordination.
- It will facilitate Centre State synergies and monitor progress on the reforms mandated in the MSME sector

including the RAMP programme.

### Paat-Mitro App

- The Ministry of Textiles has launched the Paat-Mitro mobile application to facilitate jute farmers.
- Developed by the **Jute Corporation of India Limited (JCI)** the app is available in **six languages**.
- It will provide important information about **Minimum Support Price (MSP) and agronomy** to jute farmers.
- In addition, jute gradation parameters, farmer-centric schemes like 'Jute-ICARE' (*Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise for Jute*), weather forecasts, JCI's purchase centers' locations, procurement policies are also made available in the app.
- Farmers will also be able to track status of their payments for the raw jute sold to JCI under MSP Operation. Technology features like Chatbot is included for farmer's queries.

### Jute Corporation of India Limited

- JCI is a **Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE)** under the **administrative control** of **Ministry of Textiles**.
- It was set up in 1971 to protect the interest of jute growers through procurement of raw jute at the MSP.
- It has a clear mandate for the procurement of raw jute without any quantitative limit from the growers. This protects the jute growers from exploitation by middlemen.

### PPP Beginner's e-course

- The World Bank Group and the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) have jointly launched the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Beginner's e-course.
- The course is an **infra-focused capacity-building programme**. It aims to provide foundational knowledge and insights to individuals keen on understanding and contributing to the domain of PPPs in India.
- The course on PPPs comprises **5 modules** which covers the major elements associated with lifecycle of PPP projects.
- The course will help in structuring and implementing successful PPP projects across **different infrastructure sectors** in the country.

### Need For The Course

- Infrastructure is a catalyst of economic growth and an important focus area for the government.
- It requires both the *public and private sector* to work together to meet the requirements of infrastructure development.
- Successful delivery of PPP infrastructure projects and other infrastructure initiatives require significant capacity building to ensure effective planning, execution, and maintenance.
- Thus, continuous learning and adaptation are crucial for meeting the dynamic challenges within infrastructure development, emphasizing the necessity for ongoing training efforts.

### Key Features

#### Accessible Learning

- Available online, the course ensures accessibility to a wide audience across the country

#### Expert-Driven Content

- Curated by industry experts and policymakers, the course content reflects current trends and best practices in PPPs

#### Interactive Learning

- Engaging multimedia elements, quizzes, and discussions facilitate interactive learning experiences

#### Certification

- Learners will receive a certificate recognizing their proficiency in PPP fundamentals

## Zuari Bridge

- The Zuari bridge in Goa recently became fully operational.
- It is located on the Zuari river at Cortalim village on Margao-Panaji National Highway.
- It is India's **second longest cable-stayed bridge**. Mumbai's Bandra-Worli sea link is India's longest cable stayed bridge.
- It will improve connectivity between northern and southern Goa thus boosting tourism and commerce in the times to come.

## VGF for Battery Energy Storage Systems

- The Ministry for Power and New & Renewable Energy has approved the scheme for Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for development of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).
- The scheme aims development of **4,000 MWh of BESS projects by 2030-31**.
- It will provide **financial support of up to 40% of the capital cost** as budgetary support in the form of Viability Gap Funding (VGF).
- The VGF shall be disbursed in five tranches linked with the various stages of implementation of BESS projects.
- The projects under the scheme will be approved during a period of 3 years (2023-24 to 2025-26).
- Public and private sector entities shall be selected through a transparent bidding process to be conducted by the implementing agencies.
- To ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach the consumers, a minimum of 85% of the power from VGF-funded BESS projects shall be offered to Distribution Companies (Discoms) before making it available for others.

## Benefits

- Designed to harness the potential of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, the scheme aims to provide clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to the citizens.
- The move is expected to bring down the **cost of battery storage systems** increasing their viability.
- It will not only enhance the integration of renewable energy into the electricity grid but also minimize wastage while optimizing the utilization of transmission networks.
- Consequently, this will reduce the need for costly infrastructure upgrades.

## Viability Gap Funding (VGF) Scheme

- The Scheme for Financial Support to PPPs in Infrastructure (VGF scheme) was launched by the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA) as a Central Sector Scheme in 2005.
- The scheme is administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.
- It provides financial support in the form of grants, to economically desirable but commercially unviable infrastructure projects undertaken through PPPs to make them commercially viable.
- A revamped scheme was later approved in the year 2020.
- The revamped scheme includes higher VGF support of upto 60% of the total project cost (maximum up to 30% by the Central and State Governments each) for the social sector.
- And upto 80% of the total project cost (maximum up to 40% by the Central and State Governments each) for Pilot/Demonstration Projects in Health and Education sectors.
- For other sector projects, VGF up to 40% of the total project cost (maximum upto 20% by the Central and State Government each) is available.

## Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB)

- Tax Inspectors Without Borders has launched a programme in Saint Lucia. India has been chosen as a partner in the programme and India will provide tax experts for this programme.
- India aims to aid Saint Lucia in strengthening its tax administration by transferring technical knowledge and skills and by sharing best practices.
- The focus of the programme will be on effective use of automatic exchange of information under the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) framework.

## Common Reporting Standard (CRS)

- CRS is a **global reporting standard** for the automatic exchange of information (AEOI) developed by-OECD.
- The idea was based on the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) implementation agreements.
- Under CRS, jurisdictions have to obtain information from their financial institutions and **automatically exchange that information** with other jurisdictions on an annual basis.
- It sets out the financial institutions required to report, the different types of accounts and taxpayers covered, as well as common due diligence procedures to be followed by financial institutions.

## Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB)

- TIWB is a joint initiative of the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**.
- It deploys qualified experts in developing countries across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The experts help to build tax capacity in the areas of audit, criminal tax investigations and the effective use of automatically exchanged information.

## Purpose of CRS

- Allow tax authorities to obtain a **clearer understanding of financial assets held abroad** by their residents.
- Combat perceived **offshore tax evasion**.
- Provide minimum set of standards and framework to **increase efficiency and decrease cost** associated with exchange of information.

## ILO Report on Working Environments

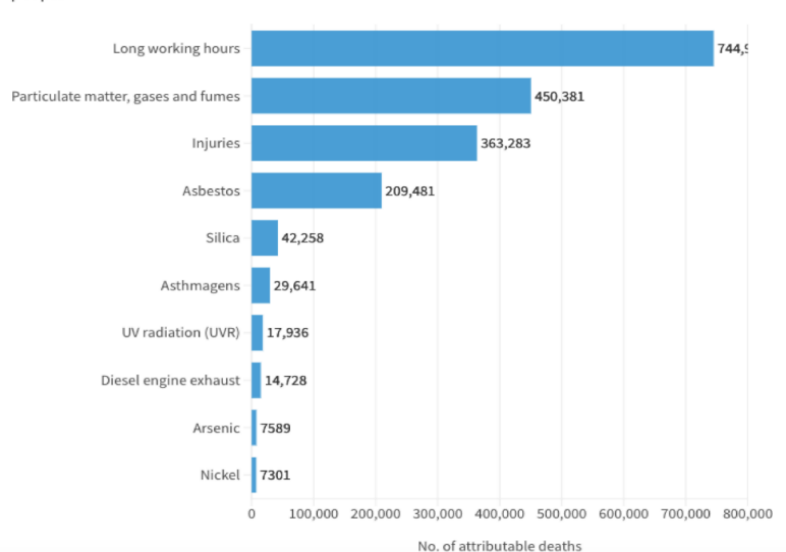
The International Labour Organization (ILO) has released a report, titled A Call for Safer and Healthier Working Environments.

### Key Findings

- Nearly **30 lakh workers die every year** globally due to work-related accidents and diseases. More than 63% of these deaths are reported from the Asia-Pacific region.
- **Exposure to long working hours** (55 hours or more per week) was the biggest killer, with almost 7.45 lakh people dying of it in 2016.
- Mining and quarrying, construction, and utilities sectors were the three **most hazardous sectors** globally.
- A majority of these work-related deaths, 26 lakh, was attributed to

### Top 10 occupational risk factors and total number of attributable deaths

Among the occupational risk factors considered, the one with the largest number of attributable deaths was exposure to long working hours ( $\geq 55$  hours per week), which killed almost 7.45 lakh people



work-related diseases, while work accidents resulted in 3.3 lakh deaths.

- Work-related deaths is estimated to be highest in Africa (7.39%), followed by Asia and the Pacific (7.13%) and Oceania (6.52%).

### Fatal Disease Trends

- The diseases that caused most work-related deaths were circulatory diseases, malignant neoplasms (Cancerous tumours) and respiratory diseases.
- The rate of trachea, bronchus, and lung cancers attributable to occupational exposure to chromium doubled between 2000 and 2016.
- On the other hand, deaths due to exposure to asthmagens and particulate matter, gases, and fumes decreased by over 20%

### ILO Conventions

- So far 79 out of the 187 member countries have ratified the *ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155)*.
  - And 62 countries have ratified the *Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)*.
  - However, India has **not ratified** both the conventions.
- In the wake of the Uttarkashi tunnel incident, the Central Trade Unions has urged the Union government to ratify the conventions.
- In line with the core principles of the two fundamental Conventions, a sound and resilient national *occupational safety and health (OSH) framework*, is essential for the realisation of the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment.

### Recommendations

- The report recommended five categories of “Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work” for ensuring safety and health at work:
  - Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.
  - Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour.
  - Abolition of child labour.
  - Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
  - A safe and healthy working environment.

### International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- ILO was created in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I.
- In 1946, the ILO became a specialized agency of the newly formed United Nations, which made it the first and the oldest specialised agency of the United Nations.
- Its mandate is to advance social and economic justice through setting international labour standards.
- Headquartered in **Geneva**, the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969.

### National Transit Pass System

- The central government has recently launched the **National Transit Pass System (NTPS)** to facilitate seamless transit of **forest goods** across the country through a single permit.
- NTPS is a **web-portal** as well as **mobile application system**, facilitating online filing of applications from anywhere in the country for seeking permission to transport forest products as well as for obtaining no-objection certificate (NOC).
- The NTPS is envisioned as a **One Nation-One Pass regime**, which will enable seamless transit across country.
- Before the introduction of NTPS, obtaining transit permits from *each different states* along the route was a time-consuming process, causing hurdles in transporting timber and forest products across the states.



- NTPS offers seamless transit permits, managing records for both *inter-state and intra-state transportation* of timber, bamboo and other forest produce obtained from various sources like private lands, government owned forest and private depots.
- Instead of regional languages, the permit issued by NTPS will be a QR-coded, machine-read permit which can be decoded by forest department of any state of the country.

#### Benefits of NTPS

- Expedite issuance of transit permits for timber, bamboo and other minor forest produce without physically going to forest offices.
- Replace manual paper based transit system by online transit system.
- One permit for whole India will facilitate **ease of doing business**.
- **Seamless movement** across state borders from origin to destination through Mobile App.
- Prevent hardships of timber and bamboo producers, farmers and transporters in obtaining permits and at forest check posts.
- Promotion of agro-forestry activities.
- Saving of transportation cost and time which will benefit farmers and traders and will in turn help in increasing farmers' income.

#### World Investment Conference (WIC)

- WIC was recently held in India for the **first time**.
- WIC is an annual flagship event of *World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA)*.
- WIC serves as a platform for global investment promotion and innovation stakeholders.
- The conference brings together Investment Promotion Agencies (IPAs), international organisations, academia, and the private sector, including startups, to discuss investment policies and trends, and an opportunity for collaboration, trade, investments and knowledge sharing.

#### World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA)

- WAIPA is an international non-governmental organization established in 1995 by the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**.
- Its **secretariat** is based in **Geneva**, Switzerland since 1995. Since 2015 its **headquarters** are established in **Istanbul, Turkey**.

#### Objectives

- Promote and develop understanding and cooperation amongst IPAs;
- Strengthen information gathering systems, promote the efficient use of information and facilitate access to data sources;
- Share country and regional experiences in attracting foreign investment and enhancing outward investments;
- Assist IPAs to advocate the promotion of policies, within their government, which are beneficial to increasing FDI and promoting economic development;
- Facilitate access to technical assistance and promote training of IPAs.

#### C-PACE

- Since the setting up of the **Centre for Processing Accelerated Corporate Exit (C-PACE)** in May 2023, more than 7,700 companies have voluntarily closed down their business in India.
- **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)** has set up the C-PACE to centralise the process of striking off companies from the MCA Register. The establishment of C-PACE is part of MCA's efforts towards **ease of doing business and ease of exit for companies**.

- It is intended to reduce the burden on the registry and provide stakeholders with hassle-free filing, timely and process-bound striking off of their company's names from the register.
- It is operational through the **Registrar of Companies (RoC)** for the purpose of processing and disposal of applications.
- It will work under the supervision of the **Director General of Corporate Affairs (DGCoA)**.
- It is located at the **Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), Gurgaon**.

### Credit Information Companies (CIC)

- The credit score of an individual is based on their full loan history, which is stored in the database of a credit information company (CIC) which is registered with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- There are **four CICs**, TransUnion CIBIL, Experian, Equifax, and CRIF High Mark, all of which are regulated by the RBI.
- They maintain credit information of borrowers — including individuals, corporates, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) — which can be accessed by banks and other lending institutions.
- CICs also capture the names of directors, guarantors, and partners involved in the loans.
- They collect information from a variety of credit providers, including banks, credit card companies, and non-bank financial institutions, and rate borrowers on a scale of 300-900 with 900 being the highest rating.
- Banks and finance companies normally take a decision on giving a loan based on the rating given by the credit bureaus. Banks mandate the use of *credit information report* (CIRs) in their credit appraisal process.
- Both CICs and banks are supposed to keep the credit information collected/ maintained by them updated monthly, or at mutually agreed shorter intervals.

### Ideal Credit Score

- The closer the score is to the maximum of 900, the better it is. A score between 550 and 700 is deemed to be fair, and 549 and below is deemed to be poor.
- If the borrower's score is more than 800, she will likely get a loan or credit card easily and at a lower interest rate. On the other hand, scores nearer to 300 mean there is little chance of the borrower getting a loan or credit card.
- Ratings change with the repayment behaviour. If a borrower defaults, her score will fall. Once it falls to below 500, chances of getting low interest rates and even loans or cards also decline accordingly.

### EBRD Increases Capital Base

- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) shared that its board has approved a 4-billion-euro capital increase that will enable the bank to double its Ukraine investments once reconstruction begins there.
- The increase, the third in the bank's history, will bring its capital base to 34 billion euros once it takes effect on December 31, 2024.
- The EBRD has been the largest institutional investor in Ukraine for the past 30 years, greatly boosting its support since Russia's 2022 invasion. It deployed 3 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) to Ukraine for 2022-2023.

### European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)

- EBRD is an international financial institution founded in 1991. As a multilateral developmental investment bank, the EBRD uses investment as a tool to build market economies.
- Initially focused on the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, it expanded to support development in more than 30 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia.
- Similar to other multilateral development banks, the EBRD has members from all over the world (North America, Africa, Asia and Australia), with the biggest single shareholder being the United States, but only

lends regionally in its countries of operations.

- Headquartered in London, the EBRD is owned by 71 countries, the European Union, and the European Investment Bank. Despite its public sector shareholders, it invests in private enterprises, together with commercial partners.

### Framework on Green Deposits

- RBI recently clarified its stand on the 'Framework for Acceptance of Green Deposits'. The framework became effective from **June, 2023**.
- The framework's purpose is to encourage offering of green deposits to customers, protect interests of depositors, aid customers to achieve their sustainability agenda, address greenwashing concerns and improve the flow of credit to green activities/projects.

### Green Deposits

- Green deposits are **interest-bearing fixed deposits** denominated in Indian rupees, similar to regular fixed deposits. The proceeds from green deposits are set aside for allocation into projects or activities that yield environmental benefits.
- In recent years, several public-sector and private banks have begun offering green deposit options to retail and institutional customers.
- Some banks issue a green certificate to depositors, highlighting their contribution to creating a greener and more sustainable planet.

### Key Points From The Framework

- Funds raised through green deposits must be **utilised for activities** promoting energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions and greenhouse gases, aiding climate resilience and adaptation, and preserving and enhancing natural ecosystems and biodiversity.
- The deposits raised under the framework are covered by the **Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC)**.
- It is **not mandatory for banks and NBFCs to raise green funds**, but in case they intend to do so they must follow the prescribed framework.
- Banks can temporarily park proceeds of green deposits, in liquid instruments with maximum maturity up to one year, pending allocation towards green activities/projects.
- The banks cannot finance green activities/ projects first and raise green deposits later. Besides, the framework is applicable for green deposits raised by banks on or after June 1, 2023.
- Since the activities listed in the framework for green deposits are the same as given in sovereign green bonds, **investment in sovereign green bonds are therefore covered** under the framework.
- The **banks must pay interest** on green deposits to their customers. Banks are **permitted to offer overdraft (OD) facilities** to their customers against green deposits.
- There is **no restriction on premature withdrawal** of green deposits. Premature withdrawals will also not have any bearing on activities/projects undertaken using the proceeds of green deposits.
- The framework **does not permit** green deposits to be denominated in **any foreign currency**.

### Connected Lending

- The RBI is planning to bring in a unified regulatory framework on 'Connected Lending' (CL) for the regulated entities.
- According to World Bank, CL is the extension of credit to individuals or firms connected *through ownership or the ability to exert control, whether direct or indirect*.

- Examples of connected parties include a firm's parent, major shareholders, subsidiaries, affiliated companies, directors, and executive officers. Firms are also connected where they are controlled by the same family or group.
- In short, CL means **loans extended by a bank to its owners or managers and to their related businesses** on terms *softer* than the market-determined terms.

### Contrasting Views on CL

- There are two contrasting views on CL. The favourable view, known as “**information view**”, finds close ties between banks and borrowers as valuable to both.
- It improves credit efficiency by facilitating smooth two-way information flow leading to improvement in forecast risk characteristics of investment projects and consequent decisions.
- Thus, it mitigates the twin problems of moral hazard and asymmetric information.
  - ✓ **Moral hazard** is a situation in which one party gets involved in a risky event knowing that it is protected against the risk and the other party will incur the cost. It arises when both the parties have incomplete information about each other.
- Further, when there is mutual equity holding, neither banks nor firms can act against each other, without harming their mutual interests.
- As per the contrasting view, known as “**looting view**”, close ties between banks and borrowers allow insiders to divert resources from depositors or minority shareholders to themselves.
- As borrowers are assured of liquidity, **information flow suffers**. Moreover, the bank would not be incentivised to appoint observers in the company to identify and rectify the problems, or make provisions for non-performing loans.
- Thus, both information asymmetry and moral hazard issues would exist. Basically, this implies that **CL benefits the borrower, but may hurt the bank's finances**.

### Country Evidence

- In Mexico, CLs were offered on easier terms and constituted a large fraction of the banking business in 1995, and subsequently when recession set in, the proportion doubled for the banks which later went bankrupt.
- CLs reported high default; and the defaulters were closest to the banks' controllers.
- In Spain, the Rumasa Group was a holding company which owned 20 banks and over 700 other companies. CL to the Group led to the Spanish banking crisis of the 1980s.
- Many Russian firms are shareholders (some even major shareholders) in banks that finance them. Firms related to banks get preferential loan limits.
- CL led to banking problems in Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand.
- In 1996, a detailed research of 29 systemic banking crises revealed that CLs (along with government interference) played significant role in at least one-third of the crises.
- Political connections worsen CL.

### Akkadi Saalu

- Recently a film brought the Akkadi Saalu farming system into limelight.
- Akkadi Saalu is a **mixed cropping system** often found in the drylands of Karnataka. It encourages biodiversity on the farm and is traditionally practised on rainfed agricultural land as dryland agriculture.
- Multi-cropping gives farmers with smaller landholdings more security, as there is less risk of losing all crops at the same time.
- While the advantages of lower input costs in many natural farming systems are well known, one common criticism is that avoiding pesticides makes crops more vulnerable to pests. However, farmers following Akkadi Saalu view weeds favourably and pests with tolerance, instead of trying to destroy them.

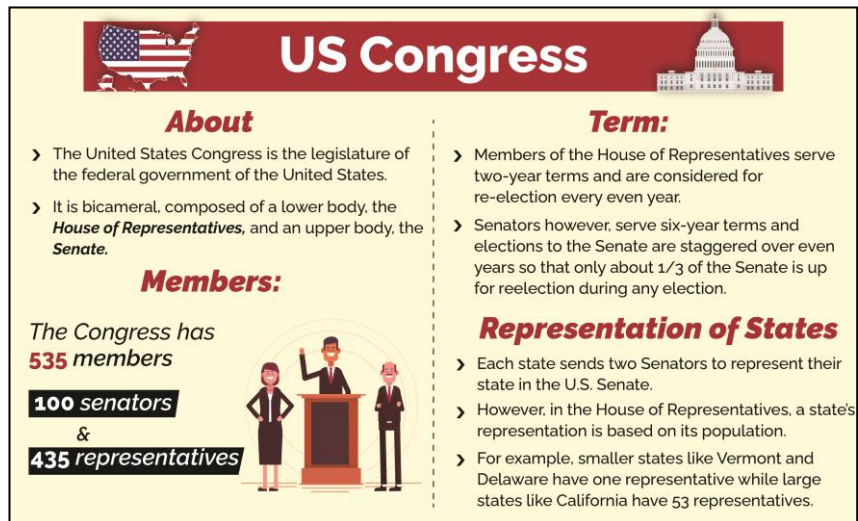
# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Indicted Republican Lawmaker George Santos Expelled From US House

George Santos, a member of the United States Congress, has been expelled from the House, over criminal corruption charges and accusations of mispending campaign money. He was elected from New York's 3rd congressional district in the mid-term elections in 2022.

### Reasons For His Expulsion

- **Fake Identity:**
  - The New York Times found out that he did not graduate from the college where he claimed to have studied.
  - Nor did he work in Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, or start an animal rescue charity as he claimed.
  - His repeated claims of having descended from Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust were also found to be untrue.
- **Multiple Criminal Allegations:**
  - These include pocketing funds ostensibly raised for animal welfare to skimming card information from ATMs.
  - In May, 2023, he pled guilty and agreed to pay fines in a remote court hearing in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in a cheque-book fraud case.
- **Ethics Committee Report**
  - An ethics committee, set up by the Congress, found that Santos "sought to fraudulently exploit every aspect of his House candidacy for his own personal financial profit."
  - The pattern of personal use of campaign money was so extensive, that the report claimed that Santos' election "has called into question the integrity of the House."



The infographic titled "US Congress" features a red header with an American flag on the left and the US Capitol building on the right. It is divided into three columns. The first column, titled "About", lists two points: "The United States Congress is the legislature of the federal government of the United States" and "It is bicameral, composed of a lower body, the House of Representatives, and an upper body, the Senate." The second column, titled "Members:", states "The Congress has 535 members" and lists "100 senators & 435 representatives" with an illustration of a man at a podium and two women. The third column, titled "Term:", lists two points: "Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms and are considered for re-election every even year" and "Senators however, serve six-year terms and elections to the Senate are staggered over even years so that only about 1/3 of the Senate is up for reelection during any election." The fourth column, titled "Representation of States", lists two points: "Each state sends two Senators to represent their state in the U.S. Senate" and "However, in the House of Representatives, a state's representation is based on its population. For example, smaller states like Vermont and Delaware have one representative while large states like California have 53 representatives."

## Indonesia's Marapi volcano eruption

- The death toll from a volcanic eruption in Indonesia has gone up to 22. This eruption of Mt. Marapi was the deadliest since 1979, when an eruption killed 60 people.
- Frequent volcanic eruptions in Marapi have hampered rescue efforts for days.

### Mount Marapi

- It is a volcanic mountain peak located near the centre of the island of Java, Indonesia.
  - It is located on Sumatra, the westernmost and third largest of Indonesia's 18,000 islands. It stands 2,891m high.
- Mount Marapi, which means "Mountain of Fire", is among the most active of Indonesia's 127 volcanoes and



is also popular among hikers.

- The Indonesian archipelago sits on the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity.

### 14th Amendment of the US Constitution

The Supreme Court in Colorado ruled that Trump stands “disqualified from holding the office of President under Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

- ✓ Section 3 of 14th Amendment says that if any person previously elected to any government office took part in an insurrection or rebellion, they cannot hold office again.

### 14th Amendment of the US Constitution

#### • Background - Civil war

- The war was fought between the Northern and Southern states over the issue of slavery.
- As American states sought to expand westward, a growing divide between the two sides came to the fore.
- *The North wanted slavery to be abolished, while the South wanted to retain it.*
  - The Southern states’ economies were also comparatively more dependent on agriculture, where most of the workers were African-American slaves.
- Following the election of President Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and the support that he enjoyed from the Northern states, it took only a few months for seven southern states to secede from the United States.
- As a result, war began between the **Unionists** (The North) and the **Confederacy** (The South).

#### • End Of Civil War & Amendments To The US Constitution

- The war ended with the victory of the Unionists and the led to subsequent abolishment of slavery.
- The 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments were introduced after the Civil War ended.
- These Amendments were passed and ratified by the US Congress between 1866 and 1868.
- It extended liberties and rights granted by the Bill of Rights to formerly enslaved people.

#### • Rationale Behind This Amendment

- People seeking political and constitutional changes must play by the rules set out in the Constitution.
- In a democracy, people cannot substitute force, violence or intimidation for persuasion, coalition building and voting.
- Therefore, the idea that an elected official would have rebelled against the constitution itself would be seen as a threat to that system of constitutional politics.

### Background of the verdict

- ▶ The judgment was related to Trump’s alleged role in the January 6, 2021 attacks on the US Capitol – the seat of the country’s government.
- ▶ Trump supporters were protesting the election victory of Democratic candidate Joe Biden in 2020, claiming the polls were rigged.
- ▶ They rioted and entered the premises of government offices in Washington DC. At least five people died in the aftermath and some were injured.



### Impact of this judgement on Trump’s candidacy for 2024

- ▶ Section 3 has “rarely been tested” in court. This marks the first time that it has been mentioned in relation to a former President.
- ▶ Even if the court agrees with the Colorado judgment, it would simply mean Trump cannot be voted for in that state in 2024.
- ▶ Traditionally, Colorado has seen the Democratic party’s candidate win the state’s electors, so the new ruling is not seen as particularly harmful to Trump’s electoral prospects.

### House Approves Impeachment Inquiry Into US President Biden

- The US House has approved an impeachment inquiry into United States President Joe Biden and his family.
- This was after Republicans raised allegations against his son Hunter Biden for profiting in business dealings with foreign entities.

### Impeaching A US President

#### • About

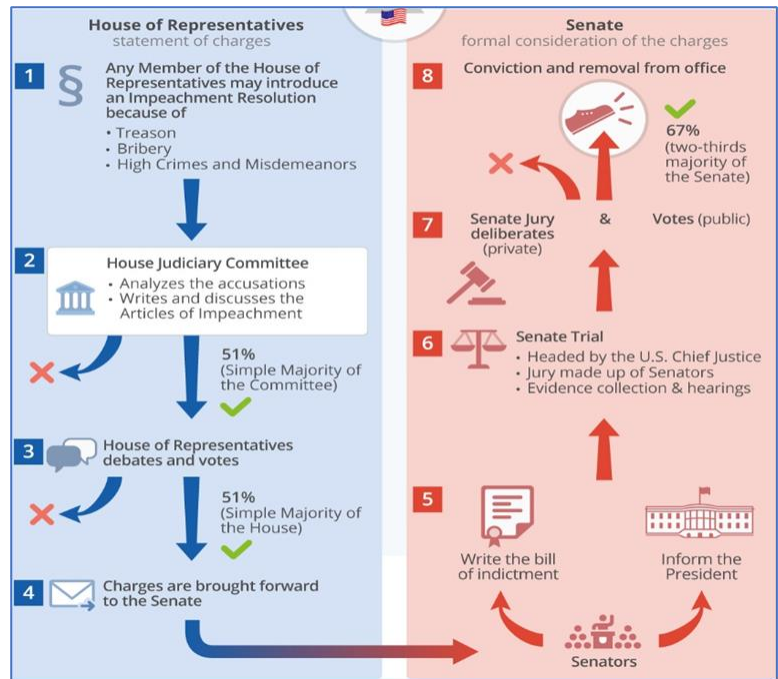
- Impeachment is a process that involves a legislative body or tribunal charging a public official with misconduct.

- Under the US Constitution, the President can be removed from office for “**treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.**” However, these terms have not been defined.
- Criminal charges cannot be brought against a sitting President.
- However, the Constitution does allow for separate criminal charges once a President is removed.

○ It is a process that involves both political and legal elements.

● **History of Impeachment in US**

- So far, no US President has been removed from its post as a result of impeachment.
- The Presidents impeached by the House were:
  - Andrew Johnson in 1868;
  - Bill Clinton in 1998;
  - Donald John Trump in 2019 and 2021.
- Richard Nixon, the 37th President of the United States, faced the threat of impeachment in the context of the Watergate scandal.
- Instead of going through the impeachment process, Nixon chose to resign from office.



**Javier Milei, The New President of Argentina**

- Recently, **Javier Milei, a far-right libertarian**, was sworn into office as the President of Argentina.
- He won the election by defeating the left-leaning Economic Minister of Argentina, Sergio Massa.
- **Milei’s Policy Proposals:**
  - He presented a proposal to **kill Argentina’s inflation** of more than 140%. This proposal includes:
    - Dollarise the economy, and
    - Implement spending cuts equal to five per cent of the economy,
    - A limited government, respect for private property, and
    - Privatisation of state-owned media
  - He also stated that public works projects would be halted, and Argentina’s trade and currency controls would be lifted.

**Dollarization**

- Dollarization is the term for when the U.S. dollar is used in addition to or instead of the domestic currency of another country. It is an example of currency substitution.
- It usually happens when a country's own currency loses its usefulness as a medium of exchange, due to hyperinflation or instability.
- E.g., - In 2000, Ecuador decide to dollarize its economy following the economic and financial crisis in the country.

## UK To Increase Salary Threshold For Foreign Worker Visas

- The UK government announced that the minimum annual salary threshold for foreign workers will increase by 48% from £26,200 to £38,700, starting in spring 2024.
- The same salary amount will apply to those applying under the family visa category, which currently stands at £18,600.
- The changes are part of a wider crackdown intended to reduce net migration by about 300,000.
- The government is also reforming the list of jobs where exceptions are made due to shortages, and toughening rules on whether workers can bring their families.

## India of UK Visa

- India dominates the tally of skilled workers, medical professionals and students from overseas.
- In the student visa category, Indian nationals continued to represent the largest group of students granted leave to remain on the relatively new post-study Graduate visa route.
- And, there were 133,237 sponsored study visa grants to Indian nationals in the year ending September 2023.
- On the dependent visa front, Indian nationals had the second highest number of dependents after Nigeria.

## EU Agrees New Rules On Hosting Migrants

- The European Union has reached an agreement on reforms designed to share the cost of hosting migrants and refugees, and limit the numbers of people coming in to the bloc.
- The reform includes:
  - speedier vetting of irregular arrivals,
  - creating border detention centres,
  - accelerated deportation for rejected asylum applicants and
  - a **solidarity mechanism** to take pressure off southern countries experiencing big inflows of migrants.
    - The solidarity mechanism supports member states that cannot cope with the number of irregular arrivals into their territory.
- The new rules combine mandatory solidarity with flexibility for member states to choose their contributions.
  - Countries not at the border will have to choose between accepting their share of 30,000 asylum applicants or paying at least 20,000 euros per person into an EU fund.
- Migrant arrivals in the European Union were over 1 million in 2015 but have decreased since then. However, they have been slowly increasing from a low point in 2020.
- In the year up to November 2023, there were 255,000 arrivals. More than half of these migrants crossed the Mediterranean from Africa, primarily heading to Italy.

## Kuwait's Ruling Emir Dies

- Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the emir of Kuwait, died on December 16, 2023 at the age of 86.
- Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah, 83, was named as his successor.
- The emirs of Kuwait are members of the **Al Sabah dynasty**.

## India Announces \$250 Mn Line Of Credit To Kenya In Agri Sector

Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto was on a three-day state visit to India. During this visit, India extended a \$250 million Line of Credit for modernization of agriculture in Kenya.

### Key Highlights

- The two countries also signed 5 agreements and issued a **vision document for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean**.



- Looking to intensify defence cooperation, the leaders agreed to continue working towards expanding training exchanges, including deputation of Indian experts, in Kenyan defence institutions.
- PM Modi said both sides will carry out joint military exercises and will collaborate on counter-terror projects.

### India-Kenya Bilateral Relationship

- **Political Relation**

- India established the office of Commissioner for *British East Africa resident* in Nairobi in 1948.
- Following Kenyan independence in December 1963, a High Commission was established in **Nairobi**, capital of Kenya.
- India has had an Assistant High Commission in **Mombasa**, coastal city in southeastern Kenya.
- The State visit of PM Narendra Modi to Kenya in 2016 gave a new impetus to bilateral partnership.

- **Bilateral Trade:**

- An India-Kenya Trade Agreement was signed in 1981, under which both countries accorded Most Favored Nation status to each other.
- As a follow-up to the Agreement, the India-Kenya Joint Trade Committee (JTC) was set up at Ministerial level in 1983.
- A bilateral **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) was signed in 1989.**
- Revised DTAA was signed in July 2016 and came into force in 2017.
- As of April-February 2022-23, the bilateral trade volume between India and Kenya was **approximately USD 2.95 billion**. India is one of Kenya's largest trading partners.
  - Indian exports to Kenya were USD 2.84 billion, and imports from Kenya stood at USD 0.11 billion.
- **Exports:** The main products that India exported to Kenya are Refined Petroleum, Packaged Medicaments, and Semi-Finished Iron.
  - During the last 26 years the exports of India to Kenya have increased at an annualized rate of 9.46%, from \$243M in 1995 to \$2.55B in 2021.
- **Imports:** The main products that Kenya exported to India were Dried Legumes, Carbonates, and Tea.

- **Development Cooperation:**

- India offers development assistance to Kenya in the form of loans and credit.
- This includes a loan of Rs. 50 million to Government of Kenya in 1982 and Lines of Credit by EXIM Bank to Industrial Development Bank Capital Ltd.

- **Social Ties:**

- About 80,000 to 100,000 people in Kenya are of Indian origin.
- This makes Kenya the African country with the largest Indian community after South Africa.
- Kenyan government in 2017, recognized Indian descent as the **44th tribe in the country**.
- India is the third largest source (other than neighbours) of inbound tourists to Kenya.
- There are about 3,500 Kenyan students currently studying in 50 Institutions throughout India.

### India Agrees To Pull Out Soldiers From Maldives

- Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu said that the Indian government has agreed to withdraw its soldiers from the island nation.
  - It should be noted that Muizzu won the presidential election in September, having campaigned to change the Maldives's "India first" policy.
  - He had also promised to remove a small presence of these 77 personnel.
- The island nation has **two helicopters and an aircraft** provided by India to the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) for emergency medical evacuations and disaster relief operations.
  - There are 77 Indian military personnel in Maldives to operate these platforms.

[Also refer the topic **“Presidential Election in Maldives”** from The Recitals – October 2023]

#### **Maldives To Not Renew 2019 Water Survey Pact With India**

- The **Maldives government has decided to not renew** an agreement with India that allowed India to conduct hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters.
- The agreement was signed in 2019 during PM Modi’s visit to the islands, when President Ibrahim Solih was in power.
  - The pact was in line with India’s policy of supporting the Maldives to set up Hydrographic facilities within the MNDF.
  - So far, three joint hydrographic surveys have been undertaken – in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

#### **Iran Announces Visa-Free Travel For Indian Citizens**

- Iran has announced that it was lifting visa requirements for citizens of India as well as 32 other countries.
- This move is aimed at boosting tourism with more visitors from across the world.
- It is also aimed at showcasing Iran’s commitment to global interaction and to counter negative perceptions and rumours about Iran.

#### **India Has Rising Market For Outbound Tourism**

- Different market analysis showed that India has one of the fastest growing markets for outbound tourism — with **13 million such tourists in 2022**.
- **Waiver of visa requirement for Indian citizens**
  - Kenya, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam have also recently waived visa requirements for the citizens of India.
    - In December 2023, Thailand had announced a visa exemption for Indian citizens, from November 10 to May 10 next year.
  - At present, 27 countries provide visa-free entry to the citizens of India.
- **The top five destinations for Indian citizens**
  - According to data provided by the Ministry of Tourism, the top five destinations for Indian citizens are the UAE, the USA, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Thailand.

#### **India, Russia Sign Pacts On Future Units Of Kudankulam Plant**

- India and Russia signed agreements related to the construction of the future power-generating units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant.
- The Kudankulam nuclear power plant is being built in Tamil Nadu with the technical assistance of Russia. The construction began in March **2002**.
- Since February 2016, the first power unit of the Kudankulam NPP has been steadily operating at its design capacity of 1,000 MW.
- The plant is expected to start operating at full capacity in 2027.

#### **Qatar Commutes 8 former Indian Navy men’s death sentence**

- The Court of Appeal of Qatar commuted the death sentence of eight former Indian Navy personnel.
- These personnel were arrested last year in connection with an alleged case of espionage.
- On August 30, 2022, eight former Indian Navy personnel, along with two others, were arrested on undeclared charges. They were put in solitary confinement.
  - On October 26, 2023, the death sentence was handed to all eight men by the Qatar Court.

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

# SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

## India Climate Action Rated Fourth Strongest

- Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2024 was released on the sidelines of the ongoing COP28 at Dubai.
- India ranked 7th in this year's CCPI, up one spot from the previous one.

## Key Highlights Of The Report

### • Top performers

- It should be noted that none of the countries have been able to achieve a very high rating over the last few years.
  - Hence, **the first three ranks are left vacant.**
- Denmark retained the top spot (*ranked fourth*) with a score of 75.59 per cent.
- Estonia and the Philippines occupied the second and third spots respectively, with 72.07 and 70.70.
  - India followed closely with 70.25 per cent (**4<sup>th</sup> best performer**)
  - India's high population, which automatically reduces its per capita energy use, plays a major role in giving it a high position in climate performance.

### • Worst performers

- Most developed countries fared poorly compared to last year including the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy and others.
- **Saudi Arabia was at the bottom — 67th —** in the performance list, while the host country United Arab Emirates occupied the 65th position.

## India Specific Observation In The Report

### • India's rank in different categories

- India was ranked **9th in GHG Emissions** and **10th in Energy Use** among assessed countries.
- In Climate Policy too, India was ranked 10<sup>th</sup>.
- In Renewable Energy, India is ranked 37th, barely remaining within the 'high' performance category.

### • India on track to meet a benchmark of well below 2°C

- The report highlighted that in the per capita GHG category, the country is on track to meet a benchmark of well below 2°C.

### • India's coal use was pointed out

- The report said that while India is trying to meet its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) but India's growing energy needs are still being met by its heavy reliance on coal, along with oil and gas.
- This dependence is a major source of GHG emissions and causes severe air pollution, especially in the cities.
  - India is among the most air-polluted countries of the world.

**Climate Change Performance Index**

**About**  
CCPI is a scoring system that measures the climate protection performance of countries. It was first published in 2005. It also allows for the comparison of climate protection efforts.

**Function**

- The CCPI uses a standardized framework to compare the climate performance of 63 countries and the EU, which together account for over 90% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- The climate protection performance is assessed in four categories: GHG Emissions, Renewable Energy, Energy Use and Climate Policy.
- The analysis also reports on the extent to which each country is taking actions in the areas of emissions, renewable energy and energy use in order to achieve the climate goals set in Paris.

**Ranking based on each country's overall score**

- No country performs well enough in all index categories to achieve an overall very high rating.

**Published annually by:**

- Germanwatch, the NewClimate Institute and the Climate Action Network

## India Re-elected to IMO Council

- India was re-elected to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Council at elections held at its Assembly in London for the 2024-25 biennium.
- India got re-elected with the highest tally and its re-election falls under the Category of 10 states with "the largest interest in international seaborne trade".
  - India is elected alongside Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

## The International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

- **About**
  - IMO is a **specialized agency of the UN** which is responsible for measures to improve the safety and security of international shipping and to prevent pollution from ships.
  - The Organization consists of an Assembly, a Council and five main Committees: the Maritime Safety Committee; the Marine Environment Protection Committee; the Legal Committee; the Technical Cooperation Committee and the Facilitation Committee and a number of Sub-Committees support the work of the main technical committees.
- **Function**
  - It has an integral role in meeting the targets set out in **UN SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**.
  - It is also involved in legal matters, including liability and compensation issues and the facilitation of international maritime traffic.
- **HQ:** London, United Kingdom
- **Assembly:** This is the highest Governing Body of the Organization. It consists of all Member States and it meets once every two years in regular sessions, but may also meet in an extraordinary session if necessary. The Assembly is responsible for approving the work programme, voting the budget and determining the financial arrangements of the Organization. The Assembly also elects the Council.
- **IMO Council**
  - The council is the executive organ of IMO and is responsible, under the assembly, for supervising the work of the organization.
  - It has 40 members elected for a period of two years.
  - *Between sessions of the assembly*, the council performs the functions of the assembly, except that of making recommendations to governments on maritime safety and pollution prevention.

## India-led Global River Cities Alliance Launched at COP28

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has launched the **Global River Cities Alliance (GRCA)** at the COP 28 in Dubai.
  - NMCG implements the government's flagship Namami Gange programme
- **About**
  - It is a first of its kind initiative in the world to promote river-sensitive development in cities around the world.
    - It will do so by integrating urban water management into Urban Planning.
  - It will mainstream rivers in urban planning without a regulatory mindset.
  - It has been inspired by *India's River Cities Alliance (RCA)*.
    - RCA was launched in 2021 to foster the sustainable development of river cities.
    - Since its inception, RCA has expanded to include 143 member cities in India, including the city of Aarhus, Denmark.
    - It has emerged as a catalyst for key frameworks for sustainable urban river management.

- **Aim:** To coordinate global efforts toward river conservation and sustainable water management.
- **Members:** The alliance consists of 9 members:
  - India, Denmark, Cambodia, Japan, Bhutan, Australia, Netherlands, Egypt, and Ghana.
- **Secretariat of the GRCA**
  - The **National Mission for Clean Ganga**, under the Jal Shakti ministry and Housing and Urban Affairs ministry's **National Institute for Urban Affairs (NIUA)**.
  - These institutions will take on the role of the Secretariat of the GRCA to generate the initial momentum of the alliance activities.

### UNHCR Thanks India For Taking Care Of 142 Rohingyas Intercepted In Andaman

The UNHCR expressed gratitude to Indian authorities at Andaman and Nicobar Islands for taking care of 142 Rohingya refugees, whose boat was intercepted by coastal security agencies near Shaheed Dweep.

- ✓ The Port Blair police control room received a call from the local intelligence about suspicious boat movement (carrying Rohingya refugees) near Shaheed Dweep (previously known as Neil Island).

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- **UNHCR - the UN Refugee Agency**, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.
- Headquartered in **Geneva** (Switzerland), UNHCR assists in the voluntary repatriation of refugees, their local integration or resettlement to a third country.
- **UNHCR was created in 1950** to address the refugee crisis that resulted from World War II.
- **The 1951 Refugee Convention** established the scope and legal framework of the agency's work, which initially focused on Europeans uprooted by the war.

### Rohingyas As Refugees In India

- According to the Indian government's estimate, over 40,000 of about 1,68,000 Rohingyas who had fled Myanmar since 2012, have entered India illegally.
- In legal terms, a person living in India can be either a citizen or a foreigner defined under **the Foreigners Act, 1946.**
- India has also not been a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention or the 1967 Protocol - both relating to the Status of Refugees and included in the UNHCR statute.

### Issues With Rohingyas in India

- According to the Indian government, many Rohingyas **have acquired documents meant for Indian citizens** (like Aadhaar, PAN and Voter-ID).
  - This raises the **concern of naturalisation of illegal migrants** by fraudulent means.
  - Given the socio-economic complexities of Indian society and politics, identifying and monitoring Rohingyas will be difficult.
  - Since intelligence agencies have warned that terrorist organisations are looking to exploit the vulnerability of Rohingyas this could **jeopardise India's national security.**
- Till now the successive governments have **dealt with refugee questions on a case-by-case basis.**
  - In 2015, a Private Member's Bill titled the Asylum Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha.
  - The Bill seeks to provide for the establishment of a legal framework to deal with the refugee problem.
  - But the Bill has not yet been taken up for consideration.

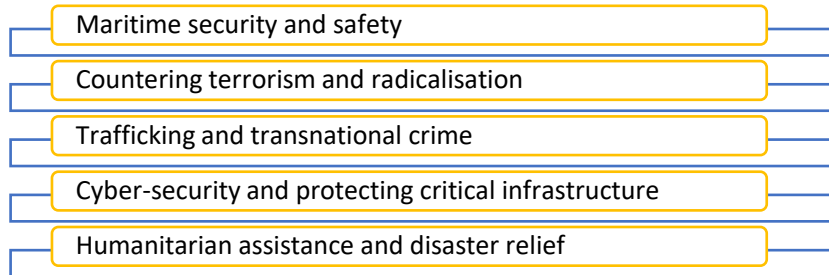
### 6th NSA-level Meeting of CSC

- The 6th NSA-level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) was held in Mauritius.

- It was attended National Security Advisers of India, Mauritius and Sri Lanka, as well as delegates from the Seychelles and Bangladesh.
- During the conclave, member States reviewed the progress of the decisions taken at the 5th NSA-level Meeting and agreed on a Roadmap of Activities for 2024.

### Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)

- CSC was formed in 2011 as a trilateral maritime security grouping of India, Sri Lanka & Maldives.
- **Five pillars of CSC**



- **Secretariat:** A permanent Secretariat was established in Colombo.
  - This Secretariat coordinates all activities of the conclave and is also responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken at the NSA level.
- **Members**
  - CSC started as a trilateral grouping. However, it came to a standstill after 2014 due to rising tensions between India and the Maldives.
  - Later, at the **fourth meeting** (held in 2020) India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives agreed to expand the scope and membership of the group and renamed it as the Colombo Security Conclave.
  - At the fifth meeting, held in 2022, **Mauritius was included as the fourth member**. Bangladesh and Seychelles participated as observers.
  - Hence, current members include – India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Mauritius.
- **Significance**
  - This **India-driven mini-lateral grouping** is being seen as India's outreach to the Indian Ocean to underline regional co-operation and shared security objectives.
  - The CSC hopes to restrict China's influence in an area of strategic importance, and to reduce the Chinese footprint in the member countries.
  - Country's national security is deeply intertwined with the collective security aspirations in the Indian Ocean Region.
    - The geographical proximity of the member countries allows them to be first responders for each other in crisis situations.
    - E.g., Indian Coast Guard helped douse the MT New Diamond and X-press Pearl ship fires in Sri Lankan waters
  - In this context, CSC is being described as the region's 911.
    - The number "911" is the universal emergency number in the United States.

### The State of Food and Agriculture 2023

- The State of Food and Agriculture 2023 - a report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), has revealed the massive hidden costs of the global agrifood systems, which exceed an astounding \$10 trillion.
- In middle-income countries like India, these costs constitute nearly 11% of the GDP, which manifests as higher poverty, environmental harm and health-related impact (undernourishment, unhealthy dietary patterns, etc).

### Highlights of State of Food and Agriculture 2023

- The report highlights massive hidden costs of the global agrifood systems, exceeding an astounding \$10 trillion.
- **The report blames unsustainable business-as-usual activities** and practices for these escalating costs, pointing to a need to transform agrifood systems.
- One way to do so is **to shift to multi-cropping systems** that have the potential to protect farmers' well-being, improve nutritional outcomes for the communities, and positively impact ecological health.

### Agri-Food Systems

- Agrifood systems have three main components:
  - **Primary production:** It includes food from agricultural and non-agricultural origins.
  - **Food distribution:** It links production to consumption through food supply chains and domestic food transport networks.
  - **Household consumption:** It is the downstream outcome of functioning agrifood systems, subject to varying degrees of demand shocks.

### State of Food and Agriculture 2023 Report

- **This edition of the report** introduces the concept of the hidden costs and benefits of agrifood systems and provides a framework through which these can be assessed.
- **The report aims to initiate a process** that will better prepare decision-makers for actions to steer agrifood systems towards environmental, social and economic sustainability.

### Improvements in Agricultural Productivity in India and its Adverse Impacts

- This has been achieved over the last five decades by mainstreaming monocropping systems and chemical-intensive farming practices.
- **The Green Revolution** focused credit on inputs and marketing of high-yielding varieties of paddy and wheat on agricultural lands, which now constitute more than 70% of India's agricultural production.
- However, the infusion of seeds purchased from multinational corporations and fertilisers undermined seed sovereignty and dismantled Indigenous knowledge systems.
- **This trend also compromised the nutritional needs** of households and resulted in adverse ecological consequences including soil fertility and excessive extraction of groundwater.
- **This privatisation and deregulation of agricultural inputs** also increased indebtedness among agrarian households.
  - **In 2013**, the debt to asset ratio of a farmer household in India was 630% higher than in 1992.

### Steps Needed To Help Farmers In India

- **A systemic shift in food regimes**, from local to global value chains, is essential.
- **Diversified multi-cropping systems**, rooted in agro-ecology principles, could be a viable solution to revitalise degraded land and soil.
  - Practices known by various names locally, like '**akkadisaalu**' in Karnataka, involve intercropping with a combination of legumes, pulses, oilseeds, trees, shrubs, and livestock.
- **Alternative farming systems** may increase farmer's income and improve the environment.
  - **For example**, millets, whose yield per hectare is comparable to those of rice and wheat, are more nutritious and grow in semi-arid conditions without burdening groundwater tables.
- **By redirecting subsidies**, currently accruing to corporations, farmers can be paid for their contribution to sustaining natural capital, instead of incentivising them to deplete it.

## Navy Plans To Get Undersea Chariots For Special Operations

- The Indian Navy is planning to acquire indigenously made swimmer delivery vehicles also known as underwater chariots and midget submarines.
- This is part of efforts to modernise and strengthen the capabilities of its **Marine Commandos (MARCOS)** for special undersea operations.

### The Chariots

#### • About

- These are highly specialised platforms used by almost all advanced navies in the world.
- These are self-propelled vehicles which can be launched from ships or submarines, depending on their size and the roles they are to perform.
- In World War II, manned human torpedoes were referred to as chariots.

#### • Function

- They can be used for a range of missions which include shallow-water surveillance, attacking the adversary's coastal installations, and even their ships in harbour.
- The chariots allow marine commandos to access areas close to the adversary's harbour – which submarines are not able to reach due to *shallow waters*.
- These chariots aid transportation of weapons and equipment to areas of operations.

#### • Use of chariots in India

- Not much information is publicly available on the swimmer delivery vehicles currently used by the Navy.
- Some sources point to the use of Italian-made chariots by the Navy for several years now.
- Around 2012, the Ministry of Defence had asked Hindustan Shipyard Limited to build two of these submarines.

**Marine Commandos (MARCOS)** 

**About**

- > It is a special operations force of the Indian Navy that conducts operations in air, water, and land.
- > It was founded in February 1987 and is also known as the Marine Commando Force (MCF).
- MARCOS are modelled after the US Navy SEALs and the Royal Marines.

**Function**

- > MARCOS are trained to conduct the following operations:
- Maritime and amphibious warfare; Counter-terrorism; Unconventional warfare; Rescue missions; Reconnaissance; Raids; Swift and stealthy response in denied territories.

## 13 Minors on Plane Held in France Over Suspected Human Trafficking

- 13 unaccompanied minors are among the more than 300 Indian passengers of a Nicaragua-bound plane held in France over suspected human trafficking.
- The plane has been held at Vatry airport, 150 km east of Paris, since arriving from Dubai, following an anonymous tip-off that it was carrying potential victims of human trafficking.

### Constitutional and Legislative Provisions Related to Trafficking in India

- Trafficking in Human Beings or Persons is prohibited under the Constitution of India under **Article 23 (1)**.
- **The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956 (ITPA)** is the premier legislation for prevention of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.
- **The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013** has come into force wherein Section 370 of the **Indian Penal Code** has been substituted with Section 370 and 370A IPC. This provides for comprehensive measures to counter the menace of human trafficking including trafficking of children for exploitation in any form including -
  - physical exploitation or any form of sexual exploitation,
  - slavery, servitude, or the forced removal of organs.



- **The Protection of Children from Sexual offences (POCSO) Act 2012** is a special law to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.
  - It provides precise definitions for different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative sexual assault, sexual harassment.
- There are **other specific legislations** enacted relating to trafficking in women and children, such as the
  - Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006,
  - Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976,
  - Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986,
  - Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994, etc.
- **State Governments** have also enacted specific legislations to deal with the issue (e.g., The Punjab Prevention of Human Smuggling Act, 2012).

### Measures Taken by the Government of India to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking

**Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**, Government of India has undertaken a number of measures such as:

- **Anti-Trafficking Cell (ATC):** Anti-Trafficking Nodal Cell was set up in the MHA to act as a focal point for communicating various decisions and follow up on action taken by the State govts to combat Human Trafficking.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs' scheme:** MHA under a Comprehensive Scheme for Strengthening law enforcement response in India, has released funds for establishment of Anti-Human Trafficking Units for 270 districts of the country.
- **Strengthening the capacity building:** For this, various Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for Police officers were held throughout the country.
- **Judicial Colloquium/Seminar:** In order to train and sensitise the trial court judicial officers, Judicial Colloquium on human trafficking is held at the High court level.



### ULFA Signs Peace Accord With Centre, Assam Govt

- The pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) signed a peace accord with the Central government and the Assam government.
  - In the last five years, 9 peace and border-related agreements have been signed across Northeast.
  - In November 2023, a peace agreement was signed with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in Manipur, a Meitei separatist group.
- With this Memorandum of Settlement, the ULFA faction has formally agreed to shun violence and join the mainstream.
- The ULFA pro-talks faction was led by its chairperson **Arabinda Rajkhowa**.
  - This faction joined peace talks with the government on September 3, 2011, after an agreement for Suspension of Operations was signed between it and central and state governments.
  - The hardline faction of the ULFA headed by Paresh Baruah is still not part of the peace accord.
    - Baruah reportedly lives along the China-Myanmar border.

[For detailed discussion, refer the topic "Insurgency in Assam" from The Recitals – May 2023.]

## Indian Navy Unveils New Design Of Epaulettes For Its Top-Rank Officers

- The Indian Navy has unveiled the new Design of Admirals' Epaulettes, which has been inspired by the Rajmudra of Chhatrapati Shivaji.
  - The design was introduced by PM Modi during his address on December 4 on the occasion of Navy Day.
  - Epaulettes is a shoulder piece that signals an officer's rank.
- It has been released for the ranks of Admiral, Vice Admiral and Rear Admiral, the three senior-most positions in the Indian Navy.
  - The design comprises a golden navy button, an octagon, a sword, and a telescope.
- The adoption of the new design reaffirms India's commitment to the two pillars of "Panch Pran - Virasat Par Garv and Ghulami ki Mansikta se Mukti".
- PM Modi had also announced that the nomenclature of naval ranks will also bear the Indian traditions.
  - Navy has initiated series of changes since last year:
    - it discontinued using of batons for commanders,
    - adopted new ensign and
    - allowed traditional Indian wears in officers' mess.

## Parliament Security Breach

- On December 13, two persons jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the visitor's gallery and opened canisters that emitted yellow smoke.
- This happened hours after leaders and lawmakers led the nation in paying tribute to those who died in the line of duty this day in 2001 during the terror attack on Parliament House.
- They were carrying visitors' passes, issued to them on the request of BJP Mysuru-Kodagu MP Pratap Simha.

### Existing Rules for Parliament visitors

- Visitors' ("strangers" in parliamentary parlance) admission, withdrawal and removal is governed by **Rule 386 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha**.
- This rule states that the admission of strangers during the sittings of the House to those portions of the House which are not reserved for the exclusive use of members shall be regulated in accordance with orders made by the Speaker.
- **Rule 387** gives the Speaker the power to withdraw "strangers" from any part of the House if he/she deems it fit.

### 2001 Parliament Attack

- On the morning of December 13, 2001 five terrorists entered Parliament House Complex around 11:40 am in an Ambassador car fitted with a red light.
  - They had forged Home Ministry sticker on the car's windshield.
- A firefight ensued, lasting over 30 minutes. All five terrorists were killed, along with eight security personnel and a gardener. At least 15 people were injured.
  - The 100 or so ministers and MPs in Parliament at the time were unhurt.
- The terrorist assault on the Parliament House was executed jointly by Pakistan-based and supported terrorist outfits, namely, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

## CISF To Be Roped In For Parliament Security

- Days after the Parliament security breach, the MHA has asked the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to carry out a survey of the Parliament premises for regular deployment.
- The CISF will work with the **Parliament Security Services** to control access to the new and old Parliament complex.

### Existing Security System In Parliament

- At present, access control such as frisking and scanning the baggage is the responsibility of the Delhi police.
  - Eight Delhi police security personnel who were responsible for frisking and baggage scanning were suspended after the incident.
- The **Parliament Duty Group (PDG)**, an armed component of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is deployed in case an armed intervention is required.
- The **Parliament Security Service** under the Lok Sabha Speaker is the overall in-charge of security.

### Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)

- **About**
  - CISF is one of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) established under an Act of Parliament, "Central Industrial Security Force Act, 1968.
  - CISF was established in 1969 to provide integrated security cover to certain sensitive public sector undertakings with a strength of only three battalions.
  - It works under the administrative control of Ministry of Home Affairs and its headquarter is located at New Delhi.
- **Responsibilities of CISF:**
  - **Critical Infrastructure:**
    - CISF is currently providing security cover to 353 establishments through the length and breadth of the country.
    - Some of which includes Atomic Power Plants, Space Installations, Defence Production Units, Mines, Oil Fields and Refineries etc.
  - **VIP security:**
    - CISF has also been mandated to provide protection to the VIP protectees of Z+, Z, Y and X category across the country.
  - **Fire Protection:**
    - The CISF also has its own Fire Wing which provides services to 104 of the above establishments.
  - **Airports:**
    - The specialized task of airport security was assigned to CISF in the year 2000 in the wake of hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 to Kandahar.
  - **Private sector:**
    - The CISF Act was amended to enable the Force to provide security, on payment basis, to private / joint venture industrial undertakings, which are vital for the security and economy of the country.
    - E.g. - The Infosys campuses in Mysuru, Bengaluru and Pune, the Patanjali Food and Herbal Park in Haridwar and the Reliance refinery in Gujarat's Jamnagar
  - **Overseas Deployment:**
    - CISF has contingents deployed at United Nations Stabilizations Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).
- The CISF is the only Central Armed Police Force with a daily public interface; in the airports, in the Delhi Metro and in the iconic monuments.

### Nina Singh Becomes 1st Woman To Head CISF

- The Centre appointed Nina Singh as the Director General of CISF.
  - Nina Singh was the first woman IPS officer allocated to the Rajasthan cadre where she served in many important assignments across the state.
- The Centre has also appointed ITBP chief Anish Dayal Singh as the Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

## INS Imphal Commissioned

- INS Imphal (Pennant D68) has been commissioned into the Indian Navy.
- It is the third of four warships of **Project 15B** that together form the Visakhapatnam class stealth-guided missile destroyers.
  - Destroyers are a category of warships that have high speed, maneuverability and longer endurance.
  - They are designed to be part of naval formations like a fleet or a carrier battle group also known as carrier strike group.
- These ships are equipped with **BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles** and long-range **Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM)**.
- The class also has a **total atmospheric control system (TACS)** that offers protection to the crew from chemical, biological and nuclear threats.
- It can operate two multi-role helicopters, including Sea King or HAL Dhruv.

## Project 15B

- Between 2014 and 2016, the Indian Navy commissioned three guided missile destroyers of Kolkata class under a project codenamed '15A'.
- The **Visakhapatnam-class destroyers**, also classified as the **P-15 Bravo class**, or simply P-15B, is a class of guided-missile destroyers currently being built for the Indian Navy.
  - The Destroyers **come next only to an Aircraft Carrier (INS Vikramaditya)** in terms of their reach and endurance.
  - The Visakhapatnam class is an upgraded derivative of its predecessor, the **Kolkata class**, with improved features of stealth, automation and ordnance.
- A total of four ships are being built by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL), under the **Make in India** initiative.
  - These four ships are **Visakhapatnam, Mormugao, Imphal, Surat**.
- The first vessel of the class, **INS Visakhapatnam** was commissioned in November 2021. The second ship **INS Mormugao** in December 2022.

## Hurriyat Chief's Outfit Declared Unlawful Association Under UAPA

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has declared the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) as an unlawful association.
- The organisation has been declared unlawful under **Section 3 (3)** of the **anti-terror Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** for five years.
- As per the MHA, this organization and its members are involved in anti-national and secessionist activities in J&K.
  - They are involved in supporting terrorist activities and inciting people to establish Islamic rule in J&K.

## The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967

### About

- Enacted in 1967, UAPA is the primary counter-terror law in India.
- It was enacted to outlaw and penalise unlawful and terrorist activities, which pose a threat to the integrity and sovereignty of India.
- These activities include:

Aiding and abetting terrorists

Funding terrorists

Inciting anti-national feeling in the masses

Other unlawful activities against state

### Key Provisions of UAPA

- **Wide ranging powers to Central Govt**

- To designate organisations as terrorist organisations and
  - Prescribes the penalties for taking part in the activities of such organisations.
- **Applicability:** It is also applicable if the offences are committed outside India. Both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.
- **Timeline**
  - A charge sheet can be filed in maximum 180 days after the arrests.
  - The investigation has to be completed within 90 days.
  - If investigation is not completed with the stipulated time, the accused is eligible for default bail.
- **Special court:** The act establishes a special court designated to conduct trials.
- **Sanction to prosecute under UAPA**
  - Section 45(1) of the UAPA says no court shall take cognizance of any offence under the Act without the previous sanction of the central or state government or any officer authorised by them.
  - Under Section 45(2), the sanction for prosecution has to be given within a prescribed time only after considering the report by the competent authority.
  - The authority is expected to make an independent review of the evidence gathered by the investigation agency before making a recommendation to the government for the sanction.
- **Few important sections of UAPA**
  - **Section 13** - Punishment for unlawful activities
  - **Section 16** - Punishment for terrorist act
  - **Section 17** - Punishment for raising funds for terrorist act
  - **Section 18A** - Punishment for organising of terrorist camps
  - **Section 22** - Punishment for threatening witness

### 2019 Amendment of UAPA

- The original act was amended in the years 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2019 to increase its scope and ambit. 2019 amendment changed the following:
  - **Who may commit terrorism:**
    - The amendment additionally empowers the government to designate even individuals as terrorists on the same grounds.
  - **Approval for seizure of property by NIA:**
    - The Amendment adds that if the investigation is conducted by an officer of the NIA, the approval of the Director General of NIA would be required for seizure of such property.
  - **Insertion to schedule of treaties**
    - The Act defines terrorist acts to include acts committed within the scope of any of the treaties listed in a schedule to the Act.
    - The Schedule lists nine treaties, including the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997), and the Convention against Taking of Hostages (1979).
    - The Amendment adds another treaty to the list. This is the International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005).

### Assam Rifles Plans Op Changes For Deployment On LAC

- The Assam Rifles is planning critical operational changes so that it can be deployed for conventional roles along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in contingencies.
- At the same time, it will continue to perform its traditional counter-insurgency duties in the Northeast and guarding the India-Myanmar border.
- There are plans to ensure availability of more than 70 per cent of Assam Rifles soldiers for deployment along the LAC in the next few months in case of an immediate requirement.

- The operational plans of all corps of the Army's Eastern Command includes Assam Rifles for various offensive and defensive roles.
- Also, every year soldiers of Assam Rifles are to practice with the Army in various exercises on different operational scenarios.

### Pegasus Infection Found On Indian Journalists' Phones After Apple Alert

- The Washington Post and Amnesty International report claims that Pegasus spyware targeted journalists in India.
- The intrusion was detected in October 2023 after Apple warned users, including MPs, of potential 'state-sponsored attacks' on their iPhones.
  - The journalists had received an alert from Apple that they were being targeted by **state-sponsored hacking**.
  - Following which, these journalists provided their phones to Amnesty International's Security Lab for testing.

### Pegasus Spyware

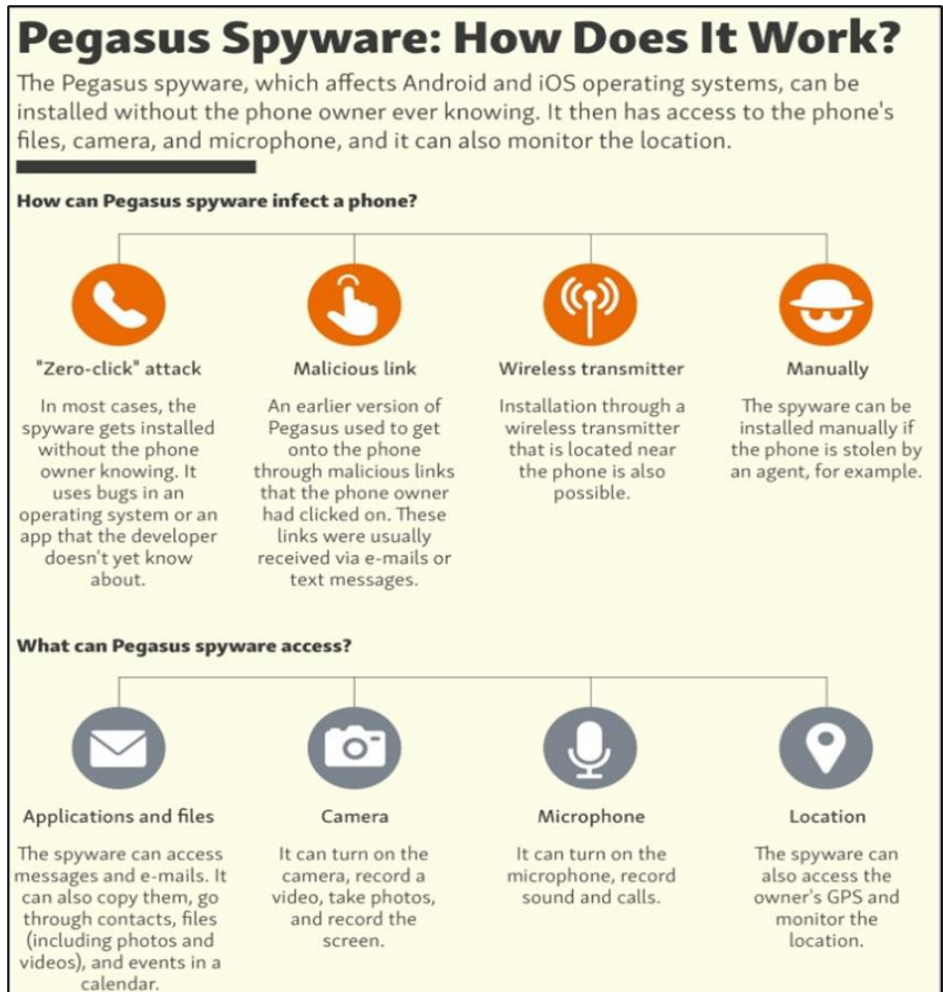
#### • About

- Pegasus is a malware/spyware developed by Israel's NSO Group.
- The spyware suite is designed to access any smartphone through zero-click vulnerabilities remotely.
- Once a phone is infiltrated, the spyware can access entire data on that particular phone.
- It also has real-time access to emails, texts, phone calls, as well as the camera and sound recording capabilities of the smartphone.

### Zero-click Exploit

#### • About

- A zero-click exploit refers to malicious code installed on a device without the device owner's consent.
  - More importantly, it does not require the device owner to perform any actions to initiate or complete the installation.
- **Specific exploit used in the present case involving Indian journalists**
- The specific exploit allegedly in use on the two devices is called **BLASTPAST** (previously identified as BLASTPASS).
  - It plays out in two phases.
  - In the first, the attack attempts to establish a link with the Apple HomeKit - which gives users a way to control multiple smart devices - on the target's device.



- The purpose of the first phase could be to determine how the device can be exploited or to keep it in sight for further exploitation in the future.
- In the second, some malicious content is sent via the iMessage app to the target.
  - This phase is the one that delivers the full spyware payload.

[Also refer the topic “**Apple’s state-sponsored attackers alert**” from The Recitals – November 2023.]

### VINBAX-2023

The fourth edition of Joint Military Exercise VINBAX-2023 was conducted at Hanoi, Vietnam.

- Exercise VINBAX is a joint military training exercise between the armies of **India and Vietnam**.
- Aim of the exercise is to foster collaborative partnership, promote inter- operability and share best practices between the two sides under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter on Peace Keeping Operations.
- The exercise was first held in 2018 at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.

### Operation Storm Makers II

Operation Storm Makers II was a law enforcement operation **led by Interpol**.

- The operation targeted human trafficking and cyber scams, and involved law enforcement agencies in 27 countries across Asia and other regions.
- This operation shed light on the **growing network of fraud schemes associated with human trafficking**.
- Victims are often lured through fake job ads and forced to commit online fraud, while enduring physical abuse.
- Fraud schemes include fake cryptocurrency investments, as well as work-from-home, lottery, and online gambling scams.

# ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

## Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

The Department of Fisheries (Under Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying) organized the 19<sup>th</sup> Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS19) of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in Mumbai.

<b>Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (Headquarters: Victoria, Seychelles)</b>	
<b>About</b>	It's an intergovernmental organization responsible for the management of highly migratory tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. ** The Indian Ocean is the second-largest tuna fishery in the world.
<b>Establishment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 1993 under the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization).</li> </ul>
<b>Working</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The IOTC works with member countries and cooperating non-members to set policies and regulations for fishing activities in the Indian Ocean.</li> <li>The IOTC establishes mechanisms for monitoring &amp; controlling fishing activities which includes measures to combat illegal, unreported, &amp; unregulated (IUU) fishing practices.</li> </ul>	
<b>Membership</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The IOTC currently has 31 contracting parties who are members of the IOTC and two cooperating non-contracting parties, Liberia and Senegal.</li> <li><b>Membership of the IOTC is open to:</b> Indian Ocean coastal countries; countries, or regional economic integration organisations, that are members of the UN; countries that fish for tuna in the Indian Ocean. India is a member of this organisation.</li> </ul>	

### About Tuna Fish

Tuna is a popular and commercially important fish species that belongs to the Thunnini tribe. These fish are found in warm seas and oceans and are known for their streamlined bodies & powerful tails.

- **Migration:** Tuna are known for their extensive migrations. They travel across ocean basins in search of food and suitable breeding grounds.
- **Diet:** Tuna are predatory fish that feed on smaller fish & squid. Their streamlined bodies & powerful tails enable them to swim at high speeds.
- **Commercial Importance:** Tuna is highly valued in the global fishing industry for its meat, which is commonly used in various cuisines, especially in the form of sushi and sashimi.
- **Health Benefits:** Tuna is nutritious and packed with protein, healthy fats, and vitamins. It's rich in omega-3 fatty acids, magnesium, potassium, zinc, selenium, vitamin C, and vitamin B complex.
- **Conservation Efforts:** Organizations like the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) work to regulate and manage tuna fisheries to ensure their sustainability.

## Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has given six months deadline to the state government to resolve the issues that have led to the delay in the notification of eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) status for the Shettihalli wildlife sanctuary (WLS) in Shivamogga.

<b>Shettihalli WLS: (Karnataka, declared in 1974)</b>	
<b>Location</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandagadde Natural Bird Sanctuary, present on a small island in the river Tunga is also a part of this</li> </ul>	



Sanctuary. The famous Jog Falls is also located near this sanctuary.

- The Tunga Anicut Dam is situated within this WLS & provides shelter for otters & water birds.

#### Vegetation

- It is mainly covered by tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests. The eastern and central parts are mostly covered by dry and moist deciduous forests, while the western parts have semi-evergreen forests.
- **Flora:** Major tree species include silver oak, teak, Indian Thorny Bamboo etc.

<b>Important Fauna:</b>	Houses animals such as white-backed vultures, Indian nightjar, and white-bellied dingo.
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#### Extra Mile: Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ)

Eco-sensitive zones are the areas declared under the Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986. ESZs are created as “shock absorbers” for the protected areas, to minimize the negative impact on the “fragile ecosystems” by certain human activities taking place nearby.

- As per the **National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016)**, land within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks & wildlife sanctuaries is to be notified as eco-fragile zones or ESZ.
- In order to manage and conserve biodiversity across the Protected Areas, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notifies Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) around the Protected Areas. On the basis of proposals and recommendations of the State Government.
- The Supreme Court in its recent order has mandated to establish 1 km Eco-Sensitive Zones around all Protected Areas, Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks. It has directed all states to have a mandatory 1 km ESZ from the demarcated boundaries of every protected forest land, national park, and wildlife sanctuary. It also stated that no new permanent structure or mining will be permitted within the ESZ.

#### Classification of activities in ESZ (with Some Examples):

Prohibited	Regulated	Permissible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial mining</li> <li>• Setting of industries causing pollution</li> <li>• Commercial use of firewood</li> <li>• Establishment of major hydroelectric projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Felling of trees</li> <li>• Establishment of hotels</li> <li>• Widening of roads</li> <li>• Introduction of exotic species</li> <li>• Sign boards &amp; hoardings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing agriculture &amp; horticulture practices by local communities</li> <li>• Rainwater harvesting</li> <li>• Organic farming &amp; Use of renewable energy sources</li> </ul>

#### Press Mud

Sugarcane byproduct press mud can help generate 460,000 tonnes of compressed biogas (CBG) valued at Rs 2,484 crores. It is a byproduct of the sugar cane processing industry. Its properties and applications vary depending on the processing methods and type of sugar produced.

#### Composition

It contains organic matter, cellulose, lignin, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and other trace elements. This nutrient content makes it a valuable organic fertilizer, enhancing soil fertility and structure.

#### Characteristics

- **Color:** The color of press mud can range from dark brown to black, reflecting its rich organic origin.
- **Nutrient Content:** It's a source of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and other essential nutrients, contributing to soil fertility.
- **Moisture Content:** The moisture level varies but is generally relatively high, impacting its application and handling.

- **Bulkiness:** It can be bulky and needs proper management during storage and transportation.
- **pH Levels:** Press mud typically has a neutral to slightly alkaline pH, which can influence its effect on soil pH.
- **Odor:** Press mud may have a distinct odor due to the presence of organic materials undergoing decomposition.

#### Applications

- **Soil Amendment & Soil Conditioner:** It's used as an organic fertilizer to enhance soil fertility, improve soil structure & aeration, and promote microbial activity.
- **Crop Nutrient Source:** Applied directly or as a component of compost, it provides nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to plants.
- **Biofuel Production:** It can be utilized in biogas production due to its organic composition, contributing to renewable energy sources.
- **Waste Management:** Recycling press mud reduces waste in the sugar production process and minimizes environmental impact by utilizing the byproduct.
- **Erosion Control:** The application of press mud on slopes or areas prone to erosion can help control soil erosion.
- **Landfill Cover:** Press mud has been explored as a material for landfill cover due to its ability to control odors and reduce the attraction of pests.

### Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC)

The first-ever meeting of the BRIC Society after its registration was held recently. The Union Minister of Science and Technology launched the 'Zero Waste Life on Campus' program in this background.

#### About Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC)

- It is an **apex body** formed after merging of 14 top Science autonomous institutions (AIs) under department of Biotechnology (Ministry of Science and Technology).
- Each of the 14 subsumed BRIC Institutions will maintain their distinct research mandates, governed by one Governing Body, at BRIC.
- BRIC and its Institutes can engage in public-private research partnerships and receive endowments including funds from non-Governmental resources for research-related activities.

#### About Zero Waste Life on Campus Program

- It is aimed at achieving sustainability through application and adoption of knowledge and technologies focused on co-responsibility, on each BRIC campus.
- The diverse locations, cultures and climatic conditions of the 13 BRIC campuses will provide an opportunity to understand the benefits and challenges related to recycling technologies and techniques.

### Tiger Reserves (TR) In The News

#### Satpura Tiger Reserve (In Madhya Pradesh)

**Relevance:** The Satpura Tiger Reserve's forest department recently discovered a rock painting in Narmadapuram, Madhya Pradesh, dating back 10,000 years.

- **Geography:** Surrounded by Pachmarhi Hill Station, Bori Wildlife Sanctuary. The Dhoopgarh peak, the highest point in central India, lies within the reserve.
- **Unique Geological Formations:** Sandstone cliffs and gorges, sculpted by millions of years of erosion, add to the reserve's rugged beauty. Dinosaur fossils and ancient rock formations offer a glimpse into the region's geological past.
- **Rivers:** Tawa River forms the western boundary, while the Denwa and Machak rivers carve their way

through the heart of the reserve.

- **Flora (Riparian Forests and Grasslands):** Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests: Dominant vegetation, characterized by teak, mahua, and aonla trees.

\*\* Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests: These denser forests, found in valleys and along rivers, support higher biodiversity with sal, ebony, and bamboo trees.

- **Fauna:** Tigers are the undisputed ruler of the reserve, with an estimated population exceeding 100 individuals with Leopards, Gaur, Spotted Deers, Sambar, Sloth Bears, Wild boars etc.
- **Cultural Significance:** The area has been inhabited for centuries, with evidence of human settlements dating back 1500 to 10,000 years. Rock shelters and caves found within the reserve offer insights into the history and culture of the region.

#### **Kawal Tiger Reserve**

**Relevance:** The Kawal Tiger Reserve is evolving into a thriving haven for an intriguing aquatic species, the smooth-coated otter, referred to as “Neeti Pilli” in Telugu.

- **Location:** Located in the north-eastern part of Telangana, with the Godavari River on one side and the Maharashtra border on the other. It forms part of the Deccan peninsula-central highlands.
- **Rivers:** The reserve is the catchment for the rivers Godavari and Kadam, which flow towards the south of the sanctuary.
- **Corridor:** It has connectivity to the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve of Maharashtra in the North and to the Indravati Tiger Reserve of Chhattisgarh towards its north-eastern side.
- **Vegetation:** Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forest. Teak is found extensively, along with Bamboo.
- **Fauna:** The major wild animals include nilgai, chousinga, chinkara, black buck, sambar, spotted deer, wild dog, wolf, jackal, fox, tiger, leopard, and the jungle cat.

#### **Valmiki Tiger Reserve (West Champaran district of Bihar)**

Valmiki Tiger reserve has witnessed rise in Tiger popular due to reduced human activity, including mining bans.

- **Bordering areas:** North: Nepal’s Chitwan National Park, West: Gandak River, Other parts: West Champaran district. The reserve encompasses varied terrain, including Foothills of the Shivalik Hills, Bhabar tract, Terai land, Champa Forest.
- **River:** The mighty Gandak River forms the western boundary of the reserve.
- **Vegetation:** The vegetation types include mainly Moist mixed deciduous, Open-land vegetation, Sub-mountainous semi-evergreen formation, Freshwater swamps, Riparian fringes, Alluvial grasslands, high hill savannah and Wetlands.

#### **Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC)**

Recently, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has gathered in Nairobi (Kenya) for the third meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-3) Under the UNEA (United Nations Environment Assembly) Resolution 5/14.

- ✓ **UNEA Resolution 5/14-** UNEA adopted a resolution to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

#### **About INC (Legally binding agreement assisted by the IUCN)**

Its operations commenced in November 2022 at Punta del Este, Uruguay (INC-1). The subsequent gathering (INC-2) occurred in May-June 2023 in Paris, France.

**Objective:** To develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment between 2022 and 2024. (Plastic Pollution). The INC is tasked with delivering a global plastics treaty by 2025.

## Ennore Oil Spill

During Cyclone Michaung, Kosasthalaiyar river in Ennore witnessed an oil spill from the Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited.

### What is Oil spill?

- An oil spill is the release of a liquid petroleum hydrocarbon into the environment, especially the marine ecosystem (may also occur on land), due to human activity, and is a form of pollution.

### Major Incidents of Oil Spill

At Global Level	In India
1) Venezuela: In 2020 oil leakage from the El Palito refinery.	1) Chennai 2017: Oil spill due to collision of Two ships at Kamarajar Port
2) Russia: Arctic (Norilsk diesel fuel spill)	2) Sundarban 2014: Oil spill in Sela River, Bangladesh

### Global Efforts To Deal With Oil Spills:

- **International Maritime Organization (IMO):** IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee sets standards for ship design, operation & maintenance to minimize oil spills during maritime.
- **MARPOL (International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships):** It sets regulations to prevent oil pollution from operational and accidental discharges from ships.
- **International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC):** The IOPC Fund was established to provide financial compensation for oil pollution.
- International agreements such as the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation (OPRC), and the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matters (London Convention and Protocol) provide a framework for international cooperation and response to oil spills

### Indian efforts to deal with Oil spills:

- **National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP):** This plan (comes under the purview of the National Disaster Management Authority, Ministry of Home Affairs.) is spearheaded by the Indian Coast Guard, outlines a framework for preparedness and response to oil spills across Indian waters. Regular drills and exercises are conducted to ensure readiness.

\*\*The National Level Pollution Response Exercise (NATPOLREX-IX) was conducted by the Indian Coast Guard off Vadinar, Gujarat recently.

## Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary

A tiger was recently spotted for the first time at Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary.

### About Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary Uttarakhand)

- It is situated at an elevation of 2500 m. It provides awe-inspiring panoramic vistas of snow-covered Himalayan peaks, including Chaukhamba, Nanda Devi (The highest mountain in the Kumaon Himalayas), Nanda Kot, Panchachuli, and Kedarnath.
- **Rivers:** Saryu River, Ramganga River

### Flora & Forest types

- The higher altitudes are dominated by lush, temperate broadleaved forests with oak, rhododendron, and maple trees.
- Lower slopes transition into pine forests, offering varied habitats for different species. Other notable plants include laurel, birch, fir, and cypress.
- Binsar is known for its wealth of medicinal plants, including wild ginger, chirata, and barberry.

### Fauna:

- BirdLife International has also declared this reserve an 'Important Bird Area (IBA). Extremely rare species of

birds like the Forktail and Blackbird can be spotted here.

- Binsar boasts a rich butterfly diversity.
- Migratory species like Rufous-bellied Niltava and the Pied Cuckoo journey through the sanctuary.

#### **Cultural uniqueness**

- The Binsar Mahadev Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva
- Sacred Groves: Scattered throughout the sanctuary are pockets of protected forests known as “Van Gujjars.”

### **Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS)**

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has launched own “national” forest certification scheme The Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme to validate entities that adhere to sustainable practices in management of forests and its products.

- ✓ IFWCS will offer an alternative to the private foreign certification agencies that have been operating in the Indian market for the last two decades.

#### **About IFWCS**

- This scheme offers voluntary third-party certification which includes forest management certification, tree outside forest (TOF) management certification & chain of custody certification.
- The certification is applicable for both timber and non-timber forest produce (NTFP).
- It can provide market incentives to various entities that adhere to responsible forest management and agroforestry practices in their operations. This includes state forest departments, individual farmers, or Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) engaged in agroforestry and farm forestry, as well as other wood-based industries in the value chain.
- The Forest Management certification is based on the Indian Forest Management Standard which is an integral part of the National Working Plan Code 2023, launched earlier this year.
  - ✓ A separate Trees Outside Forests Standard, is now introduced as a part of the newly launched Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme.
  - ✓ The National Working Plan Code, initially embraced in 2004 and subsequently amended in 2014, established uniformity and served as the guiding principle for formulating working plans for the scientific management of various forest divisions in our nation.
- Forest certification is regarded as an environmental label/ECOMARK for sustainable forest management practices. These activities include afforestation, water-harvesting, conservation and restoration efforts, as well as the production of timber as a sustainable construction and infrastructure development material.

#### **Operating & Accreditation Agencies**

- Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal will act as the scheme operating agency and will be responsible for overall management of the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme.
- This scheme will be overseen by the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council, which will act as a multistakeholder advisory body.
- The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the Quality Council of India will accredit the certification bodies which will carry out independent audits and assess adherence of various entities on the standards prescribed under the scheme.

#### **Significance of IFWCS**

- **Ensure sustainable forest management:** It will offer an alternative to existing foreign certification systems, providing greater control flexibility. This will promote responsible forestry practices in line with national standards and international guidelines.
- **Enhance trust and transparency:** Increase transparency in the wood supply chain and build trust among

consumers about the origin and legality of wood products.

- It will ensure fair labor practices and respects the rights of indigenous communities living in and around forests.
- It is probable that it will develop into an autonomous body similar to the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) or the Quality Council of India (QCI).

### Indian Tent Turtle

Recently, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) (Zonal Unit, Lucknow) seized 436 baby Indian Tent turtles from a person illegally transporting them interstate.

- ✓ DRI is an enforcement agency on anti-smuggling matters under the aegis of Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) which comes under the Ministry of Finance.

**About Indian Tent Turtle** (Distinctive “tent-like” shell with Small to medium-sized grows up to 26.5 cm)

#### Characteristics

- Color variations: Olive, brownish, or greenish hues with yellow, orange, or pink markings. Males tend to be brighter than females.
- **Distribution:** The species is native to India, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- Mating occurs in water: Males woo females with head nods and tail vibrations.
- Eggs laid on land: Females lay 3-9 eggs in burrows near the water’s edge.
- Hatchlings independent: Young turtles fend for themselves after hatching.
- Lifespan: Can live for 30-40 years or more in the wild.
- Protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Hunting & trade are prohibited.
- IUCN Status: Least Concern & CITES: Appendix II

#### Habitat and Behavior

- **Prefers freshwater environments:** Rivers, streams, swamps, and ponds with plenty of vegetation.
- **Semi-aquatic:** Spends time both in water and on land, often basking on rocks or logs.
- **Diurnal:** Most active during the day.
- **Shy and secretive:** Can be difficult to spot in the wild.

#### Dietary Nature

- **Omnivorous:** Feeds on a variety of aquatic plants, algae, insects, worms, crustaceans & small fish.
- **Diet varies with age and sex:** Juveniles and males tend to be more carnivorous, while females lean towards an herbivorous diet.

### Blue Dragon

Blue dragons, a type of sea slug, have been spotted on the beach of Chennai.

Also, Researchers have unearthed a new mosasaur in Japan, the “blue dragon,” that rivals the size of a great white shark, dating back 72 million years.

#### About Blue Dragon (Wakayama Soryu)

- An extinct, large marine reptile from the Late Cretaceous period (72 million years ago). Belonged to the Mosasauridae family.

#### Features

- **Impressive Size:** Estimated to be about 8 meters long, similar in size to a great white shark.
- **Predatory Features:** Possessed powerful jaws and sharp teeth, indicating its predatory nature.
- **Exceptional Fins:** unusually large front & rear fins, suggesting agility & maneuverability in water
- Its long, paddle-like tail likely provided efficient propulsion for swift swimming.

### Why Is It Significant?

- Sheds light on the diversity & adaptability of mosasaurs, showcasing their ecological dominance.
- Provides insights into the marine ecosystem of the Late Cretaceous Pacific Ocean.
- Offers unique clues about the evolutionary transition from aquatic reptiles to land mammals.

### Namdapha Flying Squirrel

A nocturnal Namdapha flying squirrel missing for 42 years has resurfaced again in Arunachal Pradesh.

#### About Namdapha Flying Squirrel (An arboreal, nocturnal mammal endemic to Arunachal Pradesh)

<b>IUCN Status</b>	Critically Endangered & under Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
<b>Body Features</b>	Relatively small, with a tail exceeding its body length. It has a furry membrane stretching between its forelimbs and hindlimbs, allowing it to glide between trees.
<b>Habitat</b>	Limited to Mesua ferrea jungles & on hill slopes in the catchment area of Dihing River
<b>Threats</b>	Habitat loss, destruction, landslides, flooding, and poaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This Squirrel was identified as one of the 25 species categorized as "most wanted lost species," a focus of the Global Wildlife Conservation's initiative known as the "Search for Lost Species."</li><li>• These squirrels are not capable of flight like birds or bats; instead, they glide between trees.</li></ul>	

### Fanged Frog Species

World's Tiniest Fanged Frog Species is found in The Indonesian Jungle.

#### About Fanged Frogs (around 75 species- most well-known species is the Asian house frog)

- Fanged frogs are a group of frogs that have sharp, pointed teeth.
- Fanged frogs use their teeth to grip their prey, such as insects, spiders & worms. However, unlike many snakes, these frogs don't use their fangs to bite humans or inject venom into their bodies.
- Fangs are a unique adaptation that helps frogs to survive in their environment. They provide various advantages, including the ability to capture prey, defend themselves & mate.

### Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forest recently issued a draft notification declaring a one-kilometer area from the boundaries of the Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh as an eco-sensitive zone.

#### About Pong Dam Lake wildlife sanctuary (Declared a Ramsar Site in November 2002)

- It is a manmade reservoir formed due to the construction of Pong Dam on the Beas River in the wetland zone of Shivalik Hills (Sub-tropical type climate).
- **Flora:** Shisham, Mango, Jamun & Aquatic Plants such as water lilies, lotus, hydrilla etc
- **Fauna:** Sambar deer, Barking deer, Wild boars, Nilgai, Monkeys and langurs with Aquatic life (Mahseer, Otter)

### Viola Arvensis

Scientists have found evidence that the plant field pansy, scientifically known as Viola arvensis, is self-pollinating.

#### What is self-pollination?

- Is a type of pollination where pollen from a flower's male reproductive organ (anther) reaches the female reproductive organ (stigma) of the same flower or another flower on the same plant.
- This results in fertilization and seed production without the need for an external pollinator like bees, wind,

or bird.

### Types of Self-pollination

- **Autogamy:** Pollen reaches the stigma directly within the same flower, often before the flower even opens. This is common in plants like wheat, rice, and tomatoes.
- **Geitonogamy:** Pollen travels from one flower to another flower on the same plant. This can happen through wind, gravity, or by insects visiting the flowers but not flying far enough to reach another plant.

### About *Viola arvensis* (field pansy or corn violet)

- It is an annual wildflower native to Europe, western Asia, and North Africa. It has become naturalized in many other parts of the world, including North America, and can be found in fields, meadows, disturbed areas, and even cultivated gardens
- **Appearance:** Typically, white with a yellow center & often tinged with purple or blue towards the top petals & Green. It has rounded to oval leaves in shape.
- **Blooms:** Flowers from spring to early summer (April to June) in temperate climates. In warmer climates, it may rebloom in fall.
- **Uses:** Ornamental, Medicinal, Food

### Other Species In News

#### Black Stork



- Black Stork (Immature) was spotted in Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary, now known as the State Swamp Deer Wildlife Sanctuary
- The black stork is a large bird in the stork family (Blackbuck)
- The adult black stork has mainly black plumage, with white underparts, long red legs and a long pointed red beak.
- **IUCN Status:** Least concern

**Breeding locations:** Across Europe (predominantly in Portugal and Spain, and central and eastern parts), and east across the Palearctic to the Pacific Ocean.

#### Gangetic Dolphin



- The Ganges River dolphin has a sturdy, yet flexible, body with large flippers and a low triangular dorsal fin.
- Females are larger than males.
- They are among the oldest creatures in the world along with some species of turtles, crocodiles, and sharks.
- Generally blind.
- They emit an ultrasonic sound that reaches the prey. So they known as Susu
- **IUCN Status:** Endangered (IUCN).
- **Habitat:** Ganges river dolphins prefer deep waters, in and around the confluence of rivers.

**Distribution:** India covers seven states namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.






#### De Winton's Golden Mole


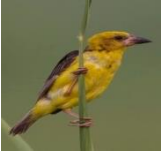




- It is an elusive blind mole that “swims” through sand, lives in inaccessible burrows.
- **Distribution:** It is endemic to South Africa.
- **Habitat:** Its natural habitats are subtropical dry shrubland, Mediterranean-type shrubby vegetation, and sandy shores.
- **IUCN status:** Critically Endangered. It is currently the only golden mole species with that classification.

It is among the 25 “most wanted lost” species that are the focus of Global Wildlife Conservation’s “Search for Lost Species” initiative.



<p><b>Double Humped</b></p>  <p><b>Camels</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double Humped Camels or Bactrian camels, have two humps on their backs where they store fat.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> They are native to the harsh and arid regions of Central Asia.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN Red List:</b> Critically Endangered</li> <li>• They typically live in herds of 6-20 members, although they can occasionally be solitary or in groups of up to 30 individuals.</li> <li>• <b>Diet:</b> They are omnivores but are primarily herbivores that constantly graze on grasses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Megamouth Shark</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is an extremely rare and unusual species of deep-water shark.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> They are believed to exist between latitudes 40°N and 40°S. These sharks inhabit the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN Red List:</b> Least Concern</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> They are found in deep, warm Oceanic water.</li> <li>• They are filter feeders, and they swim with their mouths constantly wide open in order to filter out their preferred planktonic prey.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Salamander</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A salamander is an amphibian with a slender body and a long tail.</li> <li>• Most salamanders look like a cross between a lizard and a frog. They have moist, smooth skin, like frogs, and long tails, like lizards.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> Salamanders range in North America, Europe, Asia, the northern parts of South America, and North Africa</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> They live in or near water or find shelter on moist ground.</li> <li>• They are <b>nocturnal</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Indian Bison</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indian Bison are one of the largest extant bovines. (Wildlife Institute of India (WII))</li> <li>• They are found on the forested hills and grassy areas of south to southeast Asia.</li> <li>• In India, they are found in Nagarhole, Bandipur, Masinagudi National Parks and BR Hills.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN status:</b> Vulnerable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Electric eel</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They can release up to 860 volts, which is enough to run a machine.</li> <li>• It can deliver a shock because its nervous system contains a number of disc-shaped electrogenic (electricity-producing) cells called electrocytes.</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> They dwell mainly on the muddy bottoms of rivers and occasionally swamps, preferring deeply shaded areas.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> Its range spans across Brazil, the Guianas, Suriname, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN Status:</b> Least concern</li> </ul>
<p><b>Green Turtle</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Green turtle is one of the largest sea turtles and the only herbivore among the different species.</li> <li>• In the Eastern Pacific, a group of green turtles that have darker shells are called black turtles by the local community.</li> <li>• They graze on seagrasses and algae, which maintains the seagrass beds and makes them more productive.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> Green turtles are found mainly in tropical and subtropical waters.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN:</b> Endangered, <b>CITES:</b> Appendix I</li> </ul>

<p><b>Indian Mouse Deer</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Indian Mouse Deer or Spotted Chevrotain is the smallest deer in India and is highly nocturnal.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> It is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent. It is mainly found in peninsular India, with some old records from Nepal.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN status:</b> Least Concern</li> </ul>
<p><b>Finn's weaver</b></p>  <p>bird:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finn's weaver bird, which until now was listed as "vulnerable" in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List has been uplisted to "endangered" category.</li> <li>• The bird is primarily found in Terai grasslands in Uttarakhand and western Uttar Pradesh, apart from a few pockets in Assam.</li> <li>• Has population less than 500.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Smooth-Coated</b></p>  <p>Otter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a species of otter, the only representative of the genus Lutrogale.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> They are found in southeast Asia,</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> They are mostly found in lowlands, coastal mangrove forests, peat swamp forests, freshwater wetlands, large forested rivers, lakes, and rice paddies.</li> <li>• <b>Features:</b> They are the largest otter in Southeast Asia.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN status:</b> Vulnerable</li> </ul>
<p><b>Saiga Antelope</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a large migratory herbivore.</li> <li>• <b>Appearance:</b> This antelope has an extremely unusual appearance with an over-sized and flexible nose, the internal structure of which acts like a filter.</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> It inhabits open dry steppe grasslands and semi-arid deserts.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> The antelope were once found throughout the Eurasian Steppe, the great band of grassland that stretches from Hungary in Europe to Manchuria in Asia.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN status:</b> Near threatened, <b>CITES:</b> Appendix II</li> </ul>

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## Project Q\*

Project Q\*, a groundbreaking development in AI (Artificial Intelligence) by OpenAI, has generated controversy and raised apprehensions regarding its potential risks to humanity.

### What is Project Q\*?

- Q\* is essentially an algorithm that is capable of solving elementary mathematical problems by itself, including those that are not part of its training data.
- This makes it a significant leap towards the much-anticipated Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).

\*\*AGI is a hypothetical capability of AI that makes it perform any intellectual task that the human brain can do.

### Why Project Q\* could be a threat to humanity?

- **Advanced logical reasoning and understanding of abstract concepts:** This is a tremendous leap as no AI model so far is capable of it. While on a practical level, it is a breakthrough, but this could also lead to unpredictable behaviours or decisions that humans may not be able to foresee or understand beforehand.
- **Deep learning and programmed rules:** the name Q\* implied a fusion of two known AI methods such as Q-learning and A\* search. This new model could combine deep learning with rules programmed by humans, and this may make the model more powerful and versatile than any other current AI model. Essentially, this could lead to an AI model that not only learns from data but also applies reasoning like humans, which makes it difficult to control or predict.
- **A giant leap towards Artificial General Intelligence (AGI):** Q\* is seen as a step closer to achieving AGI, something that has been a matter of contention in the AI community. AGI could likely surpass human capabilities in many areas, and this may lead to issues of control, safety, and ethics.
- **Unintended consequences and misuse:** The advanced capabilities of Q\* could also lead to possible misuse or unintended consequences. If in the wrong hands, an AI of this magnitude could spell doom for humanity.

### Extra Mile: Difference between Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) & Generative AI

AGI and Generative AI are related concepts, but they differ in scope and purpose.

	AGI	Generative AI
<b>Scope and Capabilities</b>	A type of AI that possesses the ability to understand, learn, & apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks and domains at a level comparable to human intelligence.	Algorithms designed to generate new content, such as text, images, or other media. Typically specialized for specific tasks and lacks the comprehensive cognitive abilities associated with AGI.
<b>Versatility</b>	Capable of applying intelligence across diverse scenarios without the need for extensive reprogramming or specialized training for each task	Generative AI models, while powerful in their specific domains, are usually less versatile. They are trained on specific datasets and excel in generating content within those predefined parameters.

## Pirola & JN.1 (Covid-19 variants)

The world is facing another wave of COVID-19 infections as a new variant, called "Pirola" or BA.2.86, spreads rapidly across the globe (predominantly circulating in the US & UK).

- ✓ The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified the JN.1 sub-variant of Covid-19 as a "variant of interest" **distinct from its parent lineage.**

### About JN.1

- It was first detected in the United States in September 2023 with rising cases seen in several countries,

including India, China, and the United States.

- It seems to be spreading faster than other circulating Omicron subvariants like BA.5.
- **Symptoms:** fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, fatigue, etc.
- It contains an additional spike protein mutation (L455S) which might increase its ability to evade the immune system.
- It does not seem to cause more severe illness compared to previous Omicron variants.

### About Pirola Variant(BA.2.86) (Named after a large asteroid that hangs out near Jupiter)

Pirola, is an Omicron subvariant that causes great concern because it has been found to contain a large number of mutations.

#### Key Features

- **Genetic Mutations:** It was designated by WHO as a “variant under monitoring” because of more than 30 mutations it carries on the critical spike protein — the protein that attaches with receptors on human cells to enter the body.
- **Transmissibility:** The disease is more common in females than males and mainly affects old age people (over 60 years of age).

### Gajraj Suraksha

Indian Railways has introduced a cutting-edge technology named ‘Gajraj’ to prevent elephant accidents on railway tracks.

#### About Gajraj Suraksha

- It uses an AI-based algorithm and a network of sensitive optical fibers cables to detect elephants getting closer to railway tracks.
- It aims to address the issue of elephant fatalities resulting from train accidents.

#### Working

- Gajraj Suraksha senses pressure waves generated by the movement of elephants along the tracks.
- As elephants move, the optical fibers detect vibrations caused by their footsteps.
- These vibrations trigger signals within the Optical Fibers Cable (OFC) network, enabling the system to identify the presence of elephants up to 200 meters ahead of their arrival on the track.
- The OFC-based Intrusion Detection System works by sending alarms to station masters whenever movement is detected along the tracks.
- The network is designed in such a way that it can track the movement of the elephant with great accuracy and report it to nearby station masters.

#### Extra Mile: Optical Fiber

- **Structure:** These are made of thin, cylindrical strands of glass with a diameter close to the diameter of human hair.
- **Working Principle:** Light signals are transmitted through the core of the optical fiber using the principle of total internal reflection (TIR).
- **Applications:** These fibers can carry information, such as text, images, voices, videos, telephone calls, and anything that can be encoded as digital information, across large distances almost at the speed of light. They are also used in endoscopes and other medical devices.

\*\* BharatNet is the world’s largest rural broadband connectivity programme using Optical fiber with aim to provide on demand, affordable broadband connectivity of 2 Mbps to 20 Mbps for all households and on demand capacity to all institutions, to realize the vision of Digital India.

### Advantages Of Optical Fibers

- They are strong, light, and flexible, and ideal for being buried underground, drawn underwater, or bent around a spool.
- **High Bandwidth:** Optical fibers can transmit a large amount of data over long distances.
- **Low Signal Loss:** Optical fibers experience less signal loss compared to traditional copper cables.
- **Immunity to Electromagnetic Interference (EMI):** Since they transmit light, optical fibers are not susceptible to electromagnetic interference.
- **Security:** It's difficult to tap into an optical fiber without disrupting the signal.

### Methotrexate (MTX) & Its Detection

A new highly fluorescent material has been developed using phosphorene, cystine, and gold (Ph-Cys-Au) for detecting anti-cancer drug MTX overdose of which has toxic effect on lungs, stomach, and heart.

#### About Phosphorene, Cystine, and gold (Ph-Cys-Au)

Ph-Cys-Au has exceptional optical properties and thus can be used as a visual sensing platform for detecting the anti-cancer drug MTX over dosage.

- ✓ **Phosphorene** is a two-dimensional material composed of phosphorus atoms and it is primarily studied for its electronic and optoelectronic properties.
- ✓ **Cystine** is a non-essential amino acid (meaning the body can synthesize it). It is essential for the proper folding and stability of many proteins, including enzymes and structural proteins.
- ✓ **Gold nanoparticles** are being investigated for their potential use in cancer treatment. Gold nanoparticles are employed in medical imaging techniques, such as computed tomography (CT) scans. Their ability to absorb X-rays makes them useful as contrast agents, enhancing the visibility of specific tissues and structures.

#### About Methotrexate (MTX)

- **Application:** It is commonly used in chemotherapy to treat certain types of cancers including leukemia, lymphoma, and breast cancer.
- **Administration of MTX in body:** Methotrexate can be taken orally or administered by injection, depending on the specific condition being treated. For certain cancers, high doses of Methotrexate may be given intravenously.
- **Side Effects:** The MTX value of more than 10  $\mu\text{M}$  in blood plasma is hazardous. If it remains in the system for more than 10 hours, it can result in poisoning effects on the lungs, ulcers of the stomach, and heart stroke.
- **Challenges:** MTX is highly expensive, and the detection of unwanted overdoses using traditional procedures is time-consuming and involves complex instrumentation.
- **Precautions:** Regular monitoring of blood counts and liver function is often necessary during Methotrexate treatment & Folic acid supplementation is often prescribed alongside Methotrexate to help mitigate some of its side effects.

#### Working Mechanism of MTX

- It works by inhibiting the activity of an enzyme called dihydrofolate reductase, which is essential for the synthesis of DNA, RNA, and proteins.
- This interference hampers the growth of cancer cells and suppresses the immune system in autoimmune conditions.

## Anthrobots

Scientists have developed tiny robots (termed as Anthrobots) made of human cells that are able to repair damaged neural tissue.

### About Anthrobots (Lifespan: Anthrobots live for 45–60 days.)

Anthrobots are self-assembling biological robots made from human tracheal cells without any genetic modification, making them a potential patient-specific therapeutic tool.

#### About Anthrobots

- **Self-assembly:** Anthrobots self-construct in vitro, via a fully scalable method that requires no external form-giving machinery, manual sculpting, or embryonic tissues.
- **Superbot:** These are capable of both movement and healing neurons within a laboratory setting. They can spontaneously fuse together to form a larger structure called a superbot, which was able to encourage the growth of neurons.
- **Environment:** Anthrobots can only survive in very specific laboratory conditions.
- **Size:** With the smallest no wider than a human hair and the largest about the size of a pencil tip.

#### Working

- Clusters of human tracheal skin cells, developing anthrobots with cilia acting as oars be created.
- When placed on scratched neural tissue, anthrobots fused into a 'superbot,' leading to complete healing within three days without genetic modification.
- Person-specific anthrobots for tasks like clearing arteries, breaking up mucus, or drug delivery, with potential applications in regenerative medicine.

### Extra Mile: Anthrobots vs Xenobots

Features	Xenobots	Anthrobots
Source	Embryonic stem cells of frogs	Human tracheal cells
Self-organization	Capable of self-organizing cells for tasks	Spontaneous fusion to form superbots
Applications	Drug delivery, environmental cleanup, medical procedures	Regenerative medicine, wound healing, disease treatment

## Six New Exoplanets

With the help of European Space Agency's (ESA's) Cheops mission, Six exoplanets orbiting around a nearby bright star (HD 110067) in the Coma Berenices constellation have been discovered.

✓ The discovery of these planets brings the total number of known exoplanets to 5,502.

### About Exoplanets

- Exoplanets (extrasolar planets) are planets orbiting stars outside our solar system. They can be hot enough to boil metal or locked in deep freezer.
- They are a significant focus of astronomical research because they provide valuable insights into the formation and evolution of planetary systems beyond our own.
- By measuring exoplanets' sizes (diameters) and masses (weights), we can determine their compositions ranging from very rocky (like Earth and Venus) to very gas-rich (like Jupiter and Saturn).
- **Examples:** Proxima Centauri is our closest known exoplanet. Kepler-452b, a planet similar in size to Earth is discovered by NASA's Kepler mission.
- Other notable exoplanets include WASP-121b, known for its extreme heat, and HD 209458 b, one of the first exoplanets to have its atmosphere detected.

### **About HD 110067 (bright star in the Coma Berenices constellation)**

- It is visible from Earth's Northern Hemisphere (around 100 light-years away).
- NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) in 2020 and 2022 made observations about this star.

### **Project Kuiper**

Amazon's Project Kuiper completes successful tests of optical mesh network in low Earth orbit (LEO). Amazon recently signed an agreement with SpaceX to launch three of Elon Musk's Falcon 9 rockets to support deployment plans for its Project Kuiper.

#### **About Project Kuiper (Amazon's project)**

<b>Aim</b>	To build a network of 3,236 satellites in low Earth orbit, to provide high-speed internet to unserved and underserved communities around the world.
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#### **Project Kuiper has three main parts:**

**1) Ground infrastructure:** It includes gateway antennas that securely send and receive customer data to and from satellites, along with telemetry, tracking, and control (TT&C) antennas that keep the satellites properly operating. Global networking connects those gateway antennas to the internet, public cloud, or private networks.

**2) Satellites:** They operate in low Earth orbit (LEO) and relay data traffic to and from gateway antennas and customers.

\*\* LEO is an area of space that extends up to 2,000 kilometers (about 1,243 miles) above Earth.

**3) Customer terminals:** This is the technology that Project Kuiper customers use to receive broadband service. The terminals combine antennas and processors into a single, compact system to deliver connectivity.

### **Extra Mile: Space Internet-Other Initiatives**

#### **Starlink:**

- It is a project by SpaceX, the company founded by Elon Musk, to provide high-speed internet access to anywhere on the planet using a constellation of thousands of satellites.
- Unlike traditional satellite internet, which relies on a single geostationary satellite that orbits at around 35,000 km above the planet, Starlink satellites fly much closer to the surface, at about 550 km, reducing the latency and increasing the bandwidth of the connection.

#### **Jio Space Fiber:**

- India's first satellite-based giga fiber service to provide high-speed broadband to previously inaccessible geographies within the country.
- It will further enhance the availability and scale of Jio True5G in the remotest parts of the country at highly affordable prices

#### **One Web:**

- Airtel-backed One Web is a low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellite network provider that aims to provide high-speed internet to vessels at sea.
- In January 2023, One Web successfully launched 40 satellites, bringing the total number of satellites in its LEO constellation to 542.
- In November 2023, One Web received regulatory approval from the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) to launch commercial broadband services in India. One Web is the first entity in India to receive this approval.

#### **Loon Project: (Currently Inoperative)**

- It was a Google initiative that used balloons to provide internet access to remote areas.
- The project involved helium-filled balloons that remained in the stratosphere to create wireless networks.

The balloons were equipped with wireless transceivers & suspended 20 kilometers in the air.

## Pompe Disease

Recently, India's first patient diagnosed with the Pompe disease died after spending nearly six years in a semi-comatose state.

### About Pompe Disease (also known as glycogen storage disease type II)

- It is an autosomal recessive disorder, meaning that it occurs when a person inherits two copies of an abnormal gene (one from each parent) responsible for producing the enzyme acid alpha-glucosidase (GAA).
- It is a rare inherited disorder that affects one child per million. It affects males & females equally.

### How Does Pompe Disease Occur (Mutations in the GAA gene)

- Normally the GAA gene provides instructions for **producing an enzyme called acid alpha-glucosidase (also known as acid maltase)**.
- This enzyme is active in lysosomes, which are structures that serve as recycling centers within cells.
- Acid alpha-glucosidase normally breaks down glycogen into a simpler sugar called glucose, which is the main energy source for most cells.
- Mutations in the GAA gene prevent acid alpha-glucosidase from breaking down glycogen effectively, which allows this sugar to build up to toxic levels in lysosomes.
- This buildup damages organs and tissues throughout the body, particularly the muscles, leading to the progressive signs and symptoms of Pompe disease.

Some common **side effects and symptoms** include muscle weakness, respiratory issues, heart problems and difficulty swallowing. This disease can be:

- 1) **Infantile onset:** symptoms begin in the first few months after birth.
- 2) **Late-onset or delayed-onset:** symptoms appear later in childhood or in adulthood.

**Treatment:** The treatment includes enzyme replacement therapy (ERT) where a synthetic form of the missing enzyme (recombinant human acid alpha-glucosidase) is administered intravenously. ERT aims to reduce the accumulation of glycogen in tissues and alleviate symptoms.

## Solar Orbiter (SoLO)

The European Space Agency's Solar Orbiter recently captured the most detailed image of the Sun's full disc and outer atmosphere, the corona, to date.

### About Solar Orbiter (Joint mission of the European Space Agency (ESA) and NASA)

- It is a Sun-observing satellite with 10 science instruments, all designed to provide unprecedented insight into how the sun works.
  - It carries six remote-sensing instruments to observe the Sun and the solar corona and four in-situ instruments to measure the solar wind, energetic particles, and electromagnetic fields.
- The mission also examines the magnetic surroundings near the Sun, offering insights into the Sun's 11-year solar cycle and its recurrent release of solar storms.
- Solar Orbiter will be the first satellite to provide close-up views of the Sun's polar regions, which are very difficult to see from Earth, providing images from high latitudes.

Before SoLO	After SoLO
All solar imaging instruments have been within the ecliptic plane, in which all planets orbit and which is aligned with the sun's equator.	The new spacecraft will use the gravity of Venus and Earth to swing itself out of the ecliptic plane, passing inside the orbit of Mercury, and will be able to get a bird's eye view of the sun's poles for the first time.

\*\* The mission was launched in 2020 and is scheduled to last till 2027.



### Extra Mile: Other Country's Missions Related to Sun

- **NASA's Parker Solar Probe:** It is a spacecraft that launched in 2018 to study the Sun's upper atmosphere and solar wind.
- **Kuafu-1:** China launched its first space-based solar observatory- Advanced Space-based Solar Observatory (ASO-S), nicknamed Kuafu-1, to solve the mystery of the Sun's eruptions. It will provide insights into how the Sun's magnetic field causes coronal mass ejections (CMEs) and other eruptions.
- **Aditya-L1:** It is India's first space-based observatory to study the Sun. The mission's goal is to observe the Sun's particle and plasma environment, and to study the physics of the solar corona and its heating mechanism.

### Gemini AI Model

Recently, Google announced the launch of its latest, most powerful AI model, Gemini.

#### About Gemini AI (Artificial Intelligence) model

- Gemini is the first model to outperform human experts (**State-of-the-Art Performance**) on MMLU (Massive Multitask Language Understanding), one of the most popular methods to test the knowledge and problem-solving abilities of AI models.
- \*\* MMLU uses a combination of 57 subjects such as math, physics, history, law, medicine, and ethics for testing both world knowledge and problem-solving abilities.
- Gemini is a family of multimodal AI models developed by **Alphabet's Google DeepMind**.

#### Key Features Of Gemini AI

- **Multimodal:** Unlike most AI models that specialize in text or images, Gemini can seamlessly operate across texts, code, audio, images, and videos.
- **Generative and Interpretive:** Gemini can not only generate creative text formats like poems, code, scripts, musical pieces, and emails, but also interpret and explain existing information in different formats. This opens doors for deeper analysis and understanding of various media.
- **Flexible and Scalable:** Gemini comes in three sizes – Ultra, Pro, and Nano – to cater to different processing needs and computational resources. This makes it adaptable to a wide range of applications, from mobile devices to data centers.
- Gemini can understand, explain and generate high-quality code in the world's most popular programming languages, like Python, Java, C++ and Go.

#### How is Gemini AI different from ChatGPT-3.5/4?

- Gemini can work across text, code, audio, image & video. ChatGPT can't work on video natively.
- ChatGPT's free version offers only GPT-3.5 (Not for GPT-4). Gemini Pro will be free and integrated into Google's chatbot Bard and across Google Apps.
- During the code generation test at the HumanEval benchmarks, Gemini Pro scored higher than GPT-3.5 with 67.7% against 48.1%.

### JT-60SA (Nuclear Fusion reactor)

The EU (European Union) and Japan have marked the start of operations of the biggest and most advanced tokamak-type fusion reactor in the world – JT-60SA located in Japan.

- ✓ A tokamak is a type of magnetic confinement device used in nuclear fusion research to contain hot plasma in the shape of a torus (doughnut).

#### About JT-60SA (SA stands for "super, advanced")

- The JT-60SA, a six-story-high tokamak, is designed to contain and control plasma heated to a staggering 200 million degrees Celsius.

- **Objective:** To explore the viability of fusion as a secure, expansive, and carbon-neutral net energy source, where the energy produced surpasses more than the input required for its production.
- \*\* Fusion energy stands out for its safety advantages over fission, as it carries no risk of catastrophic accidents like the Fukushima disaster in 2011 & generates minimal radioactive waste.
- JT-60SA has been designed to support the operation of ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) by following a complementary research and development programme, and to investigate how to optimise the operation of fusion power plants that are built after ITER.

#### **International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) (Located in France)**

- It is the world's largest tokamak, a magnetic fusion device that has been designed to prove the feasibility of fusion as a large-scale and carbon-free source of energy based on the same principle that powers our Sun and stars.
  - **Fusion Fuel:** ITER will use a mixture of deuterium & tritium as fuel for the fusion reactions.
- \*\*Deuterium and tritium are isotopes of hydrogen & their fusion releases large amounts of energy.
- **The ITER Members:** China, the European Union, India, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States.
  - **Objective:** To investigate and demonstrate burning plasmas in which the energy of the helium nuclei produced by the fusion reactions is enough to maintain the temperature of the plasma, thereby reducing or eliminating the need for external heating.

#### **Kakrapar Nuclear Power Project**

The fourth unit of the Kakrapar Atomic Power Project (KAPP-4 with 700 MWe) in Gujarat attained criticality.

- ✓ Criticality in a nuclear reactor refers to the state where a **reactor is able to sustain a self-sustained chain reaction**, resulting in a steady state of power production.
- ✓ MWe stands for Megawatt electric, which is a unit of power commonly used to measure the electrical output of a nuclear power plant.

#### **Kakrapar Nuclear Power Plant (managed by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL))**

- Located in the Tapi river valley near Surat, Gujarat, India.
- Comprises four operational reactors (KAPS-1, KAPS-2, and KAPP-3) and (KAPP-4).
- All reactors are Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) with a capacity of 220 MWe for KAPS-1 (started operations in 1993) and KAPS-2 (commenced operations in 1995), and 700 MWe for KAPP-3 and KAPP-4.

#### **Key Aspects (Towards India's energy security, providing clean and reliable power)**

- KAPP-3, the first indigenously developed 700 MWe PHWR in India, achieved full capacity operation in August 2023.
- KAPP-4 achieved criticality (start of controlled fission chain reaction) in December 2023, marking a significant milestone in its commissioning process.

#### **Nuclear Power Plants across India**

India has 22 operational nuclear power plants with a total installed capacity of 6780 Megawatt electric (MWe). These plants are located across seven states in the country:

- **Maharashtra:** Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS-1 & 2)
- **Rajasthan:** Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS-1 to 4)
- **Tamil Nadu:** Madras Atomic Power Station (MAPS-1 & 2)
- **Gujarat:** Kaiga Generating Station (KGS-1 to 4)
- **Uttar Pradesh:** Narora Atomic Power Station (NAPS-1 & 2)
- **Karnataka:** Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP-1 & 2)
- **Madhya Pradesh:** Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)

### Future Plans Regarding Nuclear Energy

- India is building 10 more nuclear power plants with a total capacity of 8000 MWe. These reactors are at various stages of construction and are expected to be commissioned in the coming years.
- Nuclear power currently accounts for around 3.11% of India's total electricity generation.
- The government aims to increase this share to 10% by 2030 as part of its efforts to reduce carbon emissions and achieve energy security.

### DRESS Syndrome

Recently, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) has issued a drug safety alert for doctors and patients about the use of painkiller Meftal (contains mefenamic acid) can lead to Drug Reactions with Eosinophilia and Systemic Symptoms (DRESS) Syndrome.

- ✓ Meftal is commonly used as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), to get rid of pain.
- ✓ Eosinophilia refers to increased levels of a specific white blood cell.

### About DRESS Syndrome (Drug Rash with Eosinophilia and Systemic Symptoms)

<b>What is it?</b>	A Potentially Serious Drug Reaction to certain medications. It affects multiple organs and systems throughout the body. It is sometimes referred to as DIHS (Drug Induced Hypersensitivity Syndrome).
<b>Causes</b>	Certain medications, mostly antibiotics, anticonvulsants, and antivirals
<b>Symptoms</b>	Fever, skin rash, lymphadenopathy, hematological abnormalities
<b>Diagnosis</b>	A combination of clinical presentation, blood tests, and sometimes skin biopsies.
<b>Treatment</b>	Immediate discontinuation of adverse medication and supportive care with medication like corticosteroids.

### Extra Mile: Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) (HQ: Ghaziabad (UP); founded: 1956)

- The IPC is an autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India.
- Its mandate is to set standards for all drugs that are manufactured, sold & consumed in India.
- The IPC's responsibilities include Formulations, Active pharmaceutical ingredients (API), Vaccines & Medical devices.
- It promotes rational use of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.

### Red SPRITE

Recently, the European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut photographed an uncommon occurrence called a red sprite.

- ✓ SPRITE is also an acronym for Stratospheric/mesospheric Perturbations resulting from Intense Thunderstorm Electrification.

### About Red Sprite

- A red sprite represents an extraordinary meteorological phenomenon categorized as a Transient Luminous Event (TLE).
  - ✓ Understanding transient luminous events like red sprites contributes to our knowledge of the Earth's atmosphere and the complex interactions that occur during severe weather events.
- Unlike the more familiar lightning that occurs within clouds or between clouds and the ground, red sprites are transient luminous events appear high above thunderstorms, reaching into the Earth's ionosphere.
- These events are characterized by their red or orange glow and typically take place at altitudes of 40 to 100 kilometers (25 to 62 miles) above the Earth's surface.
  - ✓ Occasionally exhibit blue coloration at lower altitudes within the sprite structure.

- **Shape:** Sprites can take various shapes, including jellyfish-like forms with tendrils extending downward and columnar shapes known as “carrot sprites.”
- **Cause:** Discharge of electrical energy during thunderstorms occurring in the mesosphere by ionization of atmospheric gases like nitrogen and oxygen.
- **Duration of Event:** Extremely brief, typically lasting only a few milliseconds.
- It is a Global phenomenon which can be observed over thunderstorms around the world, most frequently in tropical regions.

## AKTOCYTE

Scientists from the Department of Atomic Energy and M/s. IDRS Labs Pvt. Ltd. Bengaluru have jointly developed nutraceutical AKTOCYTE tablets.

- ✓ Nutraceuticals are products that are derived from food sources and provide extra health benefits beyond basic nutritional value.

### About AKTOCYTE (Got approval from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI))

- AKTOCYTE is a tablet used during cancer treatment to reduce the side effects of radiotherapy.
- The tablets, designed as an adjuvant to cancer radiotherapy, regenerative nutraceutical, immunomodulator, and antioxidant, mark a significant advancement in cancer care.
- The AKTOCYTE tablets have shown remarkable results, particularly in pelvic cancer patients suffering from radiotherapy-induced Cystitis (Blood in urine).
- Patients treated with AKTOCYTE tablets demonstrated an extraordinary recovery, eliminating the need for surgical removal of the urinary bladder.

## PACE Mission

NASA is gearing up to enhance our understanding of Earth’s atmosphere with the upcoming Plankton, Aerosol, Cloud, Ocean Ecosystem (PACE) mission, scheduled for launch in early 2024 (with a planned End of Life in March 2027).

- ✓ Aerosols refer to a system of liquid or solid particles suspended in a gas.

### About PACE Mission:

- It’s an endeavor by NASA aimed at expanding our understanding of our planet’s delicate interplay between oceans, atmosphere, and climate.
- The mission is also used to clarify the exchange of carbon dioxide between the ocean and atmosphere, a crucial factor in understanding climate change.

#### Key Instruments

**Ocean Color Instrument (OCI):** Measures the color of ocean water to determine the abundance and type of phytoplankton, tiny marine plants that form the base of the ocean food web.

**Polarization and Spectral Exposure Corrected Sensor (SPEXone):** Provides additional information on aerosols and clouds, enhancing atmospheric data collection.

**Hyper Angular Rainbow Polarimeter-2 (HARP-2):** Delivers even more detailed data on aerosols and clouds, particularly their three-dimensional structure and properties.

#### Benefits and Applications

- PACE data will benefit oceanographers, meteorologists, climatologists, and environmental scientists by providing them with a more comprehensive picture of Earth's interconnected systems.
- It will improve weather forecasting and climate models, ultimately informing strategies for sustainable management of our planet's resources.
- Applications extend to diverse fields like water resource management, disaster response, ecological

forecasting, human health, and air quality, impacting millions of lives globally.

## Norovirus

The UK has been witnessing a steady increase in the number of norovirus cases in recent weeks.

### About Norovirus (winter vomiting bug or stomach flu)

<b>What?</b>	A highly contagious virus that causes unpleasant gastrointestinal illness.
<b>Transmission</b>	Ingestion of contaminated food or water, Person-to-person contact, Aerosols etc
<b>Occurrence</b>	Outbreaks usually happen seasonally in the colder months
<b>Symptoms</b>	Vomiting, Diarrhea, Nausea, Fever, Stomach cramps and Headache
<b>Treatment</b>	No vaccines but it is important to maintain hydration in the acute phase.

## Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

Researchers identified a protein named TAF15 present in the brains of patients suffering from frontotemporal dementia (FTD).

### About Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

- FTD is an uncommon type of dementia that causes problems with behaviour and language.
- \*\*Dementia is the name for problems with mental abilities caused by gradual changes and damage to the brain.
- Frontotemporal dementia (FTD) is a group of brain disorders that primarily affect the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain, leading to progressive damage and decline in function.
- It's a relatively rare but devastating condition, typically affecting individuals between the ages of 40 and 65, although younger and older individuals can also be affected.
- The cause of FTD is unknown, but Researchers have linked certain subtypes of FTD to mutations in several genes.

### Symptoms

- **Changes in personality and behavior:** Impulsivity, apathy, loss of empathy, disinhibition, social withdrawal, repetitive behaviors.
- **Language difficulties:** Difficulty in speaking, understanding speech, writing, finding words, naming objects.
- **Memory problems:** Difficulty remembering recent events, forgetting familiar people or places.
- **Movement problems:** Muscle stiffness, clumsiness, tremors, balance issues.

### Treatment

There's currently no cure for FTD or any treatment that will slow it down. But there are treatments that can help control some of the symptoms, possibly for several years.

- **Medications:** Some medications can help manage specific symptoms like mood swings, anxiety, or sleep problems.
- **Therapy:** Speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral therapy (with emotional support) can help address functional decline and communication difficulties.

## Noma Disease

The World Health Organization (WHO) has added one of the world's most underrecognized health challenges, noma, to its official list of neglected tropical diseases (NTD).

### About Noma (cancrumoris or gangrenous stomatitis)

<b>What is it?</b>	A severe gangrenous disease of the mouth & face with a mortality rate of approximately 90 per cent. The name of the disease comes from the Greek word "nomē", meaning "to devour", as noma eats away facial tissue and bones if not treated early.
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<b>Causes</b>	Malnutrition, poor access to sanitation & oral hygiene
<b>Symptoms</b>	Noma often begins with non-specific symptoms such as fever, malaise, and gingival ulcers. As the disease progresses, it leads to rapid and extensive tissue destruction, particularly of the soft tissues of the face, including the lips, cheeks, and nose.
<b>Affected Age</b>	It mainly affects children aged 2-6 years old and is found to be most common among those living in poor communities.
<b>Treatment</b>	Improving nutrition, promoting oral hygiene and surgical procedures to remove necrotic tissue and reconstruct the affected areas.

#### **Extra Mile: About Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)**

- They are a group of infectious diseases that predominantly affect populations in tropical and subtropical regions, particularly in low-income countries.
- These diseases are characterized by their association with poverty, limited access to healthcare, and a lack of attention in terms of research and development.
- The term "neglected" reflects the historical neglect in terms of research, funding, and public health efforts for these conditions.
- The term "Neglected Tropical Diseases" encompasses a diverse group of diseases caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses, and other pathogens. Examples include diseases like lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, trachoma, and others.
- Many NTDs are transmitted through vectors such as mosquitoes, flies, or snails.
- Kala azar is the 2nd largest parasitic killer in the world after malaria and is also one of the most dangerous neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).
- WHO's New Roadmap for 2021–2030: To prevent, control, eliminate and eradicate a set of 20 diseases, termed NTDs, by 2030

### **Ketamine**

A famous international actor died from the acute effects of ketamine.

#### **About Ketamine (multifaceted drug with a complex history and diverse applications.)**

- American chemist Calvin L Stevens synthesised it in his lab in 1962, which was used as an animal and human anaesthetic in the late 1960s and then in surgeries during the Vietnam war. It is used in short surgeries and procedures where muscle relaxation is not needed.
- It halts transmission of pain in the spinal cord and activates reward pathways of the brain. Hence ketamine began to be used in pain management.
- Then, over the last decade or so, it was found to be a promising new treatment for severe depression because of its euphoric quality & began to be prescribed to pull patients out of their thoughts

#### **Associated Risks**

- **Distorted perceptions:** Users may experience intense visual and auditory hallucinations, feeling detached from their body and reality.
- **Physical risks:** Ketamine can increase heart rate, blood pressure, and bladder problems. Long-term use can lead to addiction, cognitive decline, and bladder damage.
- **Mental health risks:** Ketamine can worsen anxiety, depression, and psychosis, especially in individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions.
- Unregulated high doses can cause schizophrenia and lead to drug dependence. Fatalities are more likely when ketamine is mixed with alcohol.

### Legal Status Across World

- Ketamine is a controlled substance in most countries, including the United States, with regulations restricting its use to medical and veterinary settings.
- In 2019, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a nasal spray and the first antidepressant based on ketamine.

### Regulatory Status of Ketamine in India

- In India, ketamine is regulated and classified as a Scheduled X drug under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.
- It is considered a psychotropic substance due to its potential for abuse and addiction
- The law prohibits unauthorized production or cultivation of ketamine, as well as illegal possession, transportation, and sale.
- Ketamine is allowed for medical and scientific purposes when procured through authorized channels, in compliance with the guidelines and regulations set by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN).

## Nematocyst

Recently, Research on nematocysts has revealed unique venom peptides with promising therapeutic properties. Some studies suggest their potential for developing pain relievers, anti-cancer drugs, and even treatments for neurodegenerative diseases.

### About Nematocyst

- Nematocysts are fascinating microscopic “stingers” found in cnidarians, a group of marine invertebrates that includes jellyfish, anemones, corals, and hydras.
- These tiny capsules act like harpoons, delivering a venomous punch to capture prey or defend against predators. The outer shell, made of chitin, contains a tightly coiled hollow thread.

### Functioning of Nematocyst

- **Stimulus and Trigger:** The nematocyst responds to various stimuli such as touch, pressure, or chemical signals. When a potential prey or threat comes into contact with the cnidocil, it triggers the discharge process.
- **Rapid Discharge:** The trigger mechanism initiates the rapid discharge of the nematocyst. The capsule inverts, and the coiled tubule is forcefully ejected.
- **Penetration and Injection:** If the nematocyst comes into contact with the target, it can penetrate the prey's skin or protective layers. The tubule, with its toxins or barbs, is injected into the prey.
- **Hunting:** Nematocysts help cnidarians immobilize prey like plankton or small fish. Once stung, the prey becomes easier to grasp and consume.
- **Defense:** They also serve as a powerful deterrent against predators. The sting can cause pain, paralysis, and even death in some cases, discouraging attackers.

### Applications of Nematocyst

- **Drug Development:** Venom peptides within nematocysts possess remarkable properties like pain relief, anti-cancer activity, and even potential for treating neurodegenerative diseases.
- **Gene Therapy:** The highly efficient delivery mechanism of nematocysts could be harnessed for gene therapy applications.
- **Tissue Engineering:** The adhesive properties of certain nematocysts are being explored for developing biocompatible adhesives and sealants for surgical procedures and tissue regeneration.
- **Biotechnology:** The unique properties of nematocysts, such as their elasticity and discharge mechanism, may

find applications in biotechnological processes. This includes the development of new materials or devices inspired by the structure and function of nematocysts.

- **Toxin Research:** The toxins found in some nematocysts can be of interest for pharmacological and biomedical research. Understanding the composition and action of these toxins may lead to the development of new drugs or therapeutic agents.
- **Aquatic Environmental Monitoring:** Nematocysts could be employed as part of monitoring systems in aquatic environments. Their sensitivity to environmental changes could be utilized for early detection of pollution or alterations in water quality.
- **Inspiration for Robotics:** The discharge mechanism of nematocysts has inspired researchers in the field of soft robotics. Mimicking the principles of nematocyst discharge could lead to the development of soft and flexible robotic systems with applications in various industries.



### Pandit Motiram Pandit Maniram Samaroha

- The **Department of Post, Ministry of Communications** recently released a commemorative Postal Stamp, to mark 50 years of Pandit Jasraj's music festival – 'Pandit Motiram Pandit Maniram Sangeet Samaroha'.
- The music festival was started by Pandit Jasraj in 1972 in the memory of his father, Sangeet Ratna Pandit Motiram and his elder brother and later his Guru, Sangeet Mahamopadhyay Pandit Maniram.
- It is the oldest festival of Hyderabad. For this unique contribution Pandit Jasraj was called **Son of Hyderabad**.

### Pandit Jasraj

- Pandit Jasraj was an Indian classical vocalist, belonging to the **Mewati Gharana** (musical apprenticeship lineage).
- His legacy includes memorable performances of classical and semi-classical vocal music, classical and devotional music, albums and film soundtracks, innovations in various genres including Haveli Sangeet.
- He took Indian classical music, Pushtimargiya music and Bhakti Pad of Vaishnav tradition to greater heights.

### Veer Bal Diwas

Prime Minister recently addressed the program marking 26<sup>th</sup> December as 'Veer Bal Diwas' to mark the **martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's younger sons, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh.**

### The History Of Martyrdom

- Guru Gobind Singh, founded the Khalsa in 1699 and was raising an army, which the neighboring hill kings were not comfortable with. The Mughal empire and the hill kings saw the Khalsa as a threat.
- Guru Gobind Singh's four sons -- Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh -- were all part of the Khalsa.
- The kings had fought several battles with the Sikhs in the last decade of the 17th century, but had been unable to dislodge them from Anandpur Sahib.
- Then came the attack of 1704 led by Bilaspur King Bheem Chand and Handuria King Raja Hari Chand.
- They cordoned off Anandpur Sahib with support from the Mughal empire and supplies to Anandpur Sahib were cut off for several months.
- Kings and Muslim Mughal governors reached an agreement with the Sikhs, and swore there would be no war if Guru Gobind Singh left Anandpur Sahib.
- The Sikh Guru agreed to give up the fort for the sake of his people. But Guru Gobind Singh and his followers were attacked near the river Sarsa, at a distance of about 25 kilometres from Anandpur Sahib.
- In the chaos, Guru Gobind Singh's family was separated, scattering in different directions.
- The Guru himself with his two eldest sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, moved toward Chamkaur Sahib.
- And in the historic battle of Chamkaur Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh both sacrificed their lives on December 22.
- Guru Gobind Singh's mother Mata Gujari ji and his other two sons, Zorawar Singh (aged 9) and Fateh Singh (aged 7), were kidnapped by Sarhand's Mughal governor Nawab Wazir Khan.
- The two younger Sahibzaade were offered riches and told to convert to Islam. However, they refused to convert or to bow to Wazir Khan.
- After efforts to make them give up their religion failed, Wazir Khan bricked the two boys alive. The same day, Mata Gujari ji died of shock.
- A few years later, Baba Banda Singh Bhadur avenged the execution of the Sahibzade, by attacking and capturing Sarhand.

## Tansen Samaroh

- Around 1,300 tabla players who performed recently at the **International Tansen Samaroh** entered the Guinness World Records for achieving the **largest tabla ensemble**.
- Tansen Samaroh is a tribute to Indian musical legend, **Shri Ramtanu Misra**, famously known as Tansen.
- Held every year in December in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, it is a 5-day musical extravaganza.
- It is organized jointly by Ustad Alauddin Khan Kala Evam Sangeet Academy and Department of Culture, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh.

## Mian Tansen

- Mian Tansen (born as Ramtanu Misra) was a prominent Indian classical music composer, musician and vocalist known for a large number of compositions.
- He was also an instrumentalist who popularised and improved the plucked rabab (of Central Asian origin).
- **Tansen** was the title given to him by **Raja Vikramjit of Gwalior**. Tansen was a court musician in the darbar of Raja Ramachandra of Bandavagarh (Rewa).
- Later he became one of the **Navaratnas** (nine jewels) at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jalal ud-din Akbar. **Akbar gave him the title Mian**, an honorific, meaning learned man.
- He composed many dhrupads on Ganesha, Shiva, Parvati and Rama. **Kalpadruma** is a compilation of 300 of his dhrupads.
- He invented the night raga Darbari Kanhra, morning raga Mian Ki Todi, mid-day raga, Mian ki Sarang, seasonal raga Mian ki Malhar. His descendants and disciples are called Seniyas.

## Kolattam Dance

- The Kolattam dance was recently performed in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh during a children's festival.
- 'Kol' means a small stick, and 'Attam' means play, hence, it is a play or dance performed with sticks.
- Kolattam dance is one of the most popular dances in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The dance form is also known as Kolkollannalu or Kollannalu.
- It is part of a religious offering, where women dancers pay homage to the temple Goddess.
- It is predominantly a **dance of women**. Men mostly take up the role as drummers or play the background music.
- The highlight of this dance is using sticks to represent the rhythm of the dance. The sticks are stroked against each other in a calibrated form for creating harmony.
- It is usually performed by about 8 to 40 artists. The dancers are led by a leader and move about in two circles. The inner circle receives the strikes on their sticks from the artists in the outer circle that deliver them.

## Punaura Dham

- The Chief Minister of Bihar recently launched a Rs 72-crore development plan for Goddess Sita's birthplace at Punaura Dham in Sitamarhi. The project has been undertaken by the State Tourism Department.
- As a part of the project, the government will build 'Sita-Vatika', 'Luv-Kush Vatilka', develop a 'parikrama path' and set up various convenience centres.

## Bihar's Link with Ramayana

- The Valmiki Ramayana has used four words to refer to Sita — **Vaidehi, Janaki, Sita and Mithilapuri**. Mithilapuri is a reference to Mithila, while Vaidehi and Janaki are names derived from her father, King Janak, also called Videh.
- Sita herself narrates the story of her birth (she was found in a field being ploughed by Janak) to Anusuiya (wife of Rishi Atri) during Ram's exile at Chitrakoot.

- As per Valmiki's account, after leaving Ayodhya, Chitrakoot was their first stop.
- Their second stop was near the confluence of Ganga and Saryu in the present-day Saran district. The third place they went to was Siddhashram near the Ganga in present-day Buxar.
- Mithila also features during the wedding of Ram and Sita, before which Ram snaps Shiva's dhanush (bow).

#### **Geographical Extent of Mithila**

- In the Vishnu Puran, Mithila is described as a place to the north of Ganga and south of Himalayas.
- Abul Fazl in Ain-e-Akbari mentions Mithila as one of the parganas (administrative divisions), designating its spread, which includes the present-day Darbhanga, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura and some adjoining areas of Bihar and Nepal.
- Mithila has also been called Mahla and finds mention in the revenue records of the erstwhile Sanyukt Prant (United Provinces) of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa.

#### **Birthplace of Sita**

- Until recently, it was believed that the Janaki Sthan in Sitamarhi, which has a pond and other religious structures, was the birthplace of Sita.
- But a new research, based on Valmiki Ramayan and some travellers' accounts, ruled in favour of Punaura Dham.
- When the Centre sought a report from the Bihar government on Sita's birthplace for the Ramayana Circuit, the name of Punaura Dham was submitted. This has been accepted by both the state and central governments now.

## PERSONALITIES IN NEWS/ AWARDS

### Prix Versailles

- Terminal 2 (T2) of Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport has been recognized as the '**World's most beautiful airport**' and was awarded the 'World Special Prize for an Interior 2023' at UNESCO's 2023 Prix Versailles.
- Bengaluru airport is the only Indian airport to receive this esteemed recognition.
- Announced each year at UNESCO since 2015, the Prix Versailles *is a series of architectural competitions that recognizes contemporary architecture and design projects worldwide.*
- It focuses on intelligent sustainability as a cultural driver, acknowledging innovation, creativity, reflection of local heritage, ecological efficiency, and values of social interaction.

### Terminal 2

- T2, also known as the Terminal in a Garden, was inaugurated in 2022.
- The terminal is built upon **four foundational pillars** — technological leadership, terminal in a garden, environmental and ecological stewardship, and a celebration of Karnataka's rich heritage and culture.
- The sustainable design of T2, the world's largest terminal pre-certified with a **Platinum LEED rating** by the **US Green Building Council** before operational commencement, reflects the airport's commitment to environmental responsibility.
- Additionally, it has received the prestigious **Platinum certification** under the **IGBC Green New Building rating system**.

### Sahitya Akademi Award

- 9 books of poetry, 6 of novel, 5 of short stories, 3 Essays and 1 Literary Study have won the Sahitya Akademi Awards 2023.
- The award is a **literary honour** in India, conferred by the Sahitya Akademi. It is conferred annually on writers of the most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the 24 major Indian languages.
- Besides the 22 languages enumerated in the Constitution of India, the Sahitya Akademi has recognised English and Rajasthani.

### Sahitya Akademi

- Inaugurated in 1954, Sahitya Akademi - **India's National Academy of Letters**, is the central institution for literary dialogue, publication and promotion in the country.
- Functioning as an **autonomous organization**, it is the only institution that undertakes literary activities in 24 Indian languages, including English.
- It also gives special awards called **Bhasha Samman** to significant contribution to the languages not formally recognized by the Akademi and for contribution to classical and medieval literature.

### Indira Gandhi Peace Prize

- The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2023 has been jointly awarded to Daniel Barenboim and Ali Abu Awwad.
- They have been awarded for their efforts in bringing together the youth and people of Israel and the Arab World for a non-violent resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- Maestro Barenboim is an Argentine-born distinguished classical pianist and conductor.
- Apart from his musical achievements, he is also known for his efforts in using music to facilitate harmony in West Asia.

- Mr. Awwad is an eminent Palestinian peace activist who has been working tirelessly with the people of Palestine and Israel for a peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

### **Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development**

- Indira Gandhi Peace Prize, also known as Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development was instituted in **1986** by **Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust**.
- The award carries a cash prize of **Rs 25 lakh** and a citation.
- It is given to individuals or organizations who are:
  - ✓ Working towards ensuring international peace and development;
  - ✓ Ensuring that scientific discoveries are used for the larger good of humanity;
  - ✓ Creating new international economic order; and
  - ✓ Enlarging the scope of freedom.

### **National Sports Awards 2023**

The **Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports** recently announced the National Sports Awards 2023. The awards will be given to the awardees by the President.

#### **List Of Awards**

- **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award** is given for the most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sportsperson over the period of the previous four years.
- **Arjuna Award for outstanding performance in Sports and Games** is given for good performance over a period of the previous four years and for showing qualities of leadership, sportsmanship and a sense of discipline.
- **Dronacharya Award for outstanding coaches in Sports and Games** is given to coaches for doing outstanding and meritorious work on a consistent basis and for enabling sportspersons to excel in international events.
- **Dhyan Chand Award for Lifetime achievement in Sports and Games** is given to honour sportspersons who have contributed to sports by their performance and who continue to contribute to promotion of sports event after their retirement.
- **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy** is given to the overall **top performing university** in inter-university tournaments.