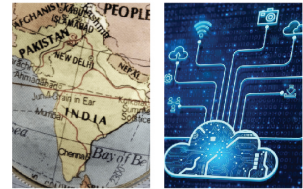




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Govt. Sets up Panel to Plan Exam Reforms

Hours after announcing an expert committee to suggest changes for exams and review the National Testing Agency (NTA), the Union government removed Subodh Kumar Singh from his position as NTA chief.

About National Testing Agency (NTA)

- The NTA was established in November 2017 by the Ministry of Education to standardize the conduct of entrance exams for higher educational institutions across the country.
- **Functions: Conducting Exams; Developing Question Papers; Result Processing**
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi

Govt Sets Up Panel to Plan Exam Reforms

- The **Union government removed Subodh Kumar Singh from his role as NTA chief** and placed him on "compulsory wait" in the Department of Personnel and Training.
- This decision coincided with the **postponement of the NEET PG exam.**
- The Education Ministry later announced that the CBI, **already investigating the UGC-NET paper leak**, will also look into alleged irregularities in NEET-UG.
 - The Health Ministry postponed the NEET-PG exam, which is crucial for admissions to postgraduate medical programs, to assess the integrity of the examination process.
 - The Education Ministry also postponed the CSIR-UGC NET for similar reasons. UGC-NET is the qualifying exam for admission to PhD programs, and to apply for an entry-level teaching position at an Indian university

Expert Committee to Recommend Changes in NTA's Functioning

- An expert committee, chaired by former ISRO chairman **K Radhakrishnan**, has been formed to recommend exam reforms and data security protocols, and to review NTA's structure and functioning.
- The committee aims to improve the examination process, prevent malpractice, and strengthen NTA's protocols and structure.
- The committee, including prominent academics and experts, has two months to submit its recommendations.

About NEET-UG Results Controversy

On June 4, NTA released the results for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test, Undergraduate (NEET UG) 2024 examination.

Approximately 2.4 million candidates participated in the NEET UG test held across 571 cities, including 14 centers outside India.

The exam sought to fill the **1,08,940 available MBBS seats** distributed among more than 700 medical institutions nationwide.

Allegations

- ☞ Post evaluation, there have been complaints about the unusually high number of students (67) who hit the perfect score of **720/720**.
- ☞ Also, there are complaints about students who scored "**statistically impossible**" marks, while some cases of cheating by proxy were also reported.
- ☞ Other cases pertaining to **question paper leak**.
- ☞ On June 13th, the Supreme Court was reviewing petitions challenging the award of grace marks to 1,563 candidates from six NEET centres who experienced technical issues and weren't given the full time to complete the exam. These grace marks were awarded based on a court order and a recommendation from a committee formed by NTA.

These charges led to nationwide protests from students and political parties.

The **Supreme Court, subsequently, declared the NEET-UG examination as void and asked the Government to form a committee.**

Issues Faced by the NTA

- **Conduct computer-based tests only:**
 - This is to ensure that high volume can be processed in a short period of time.
 - As the NIC [National Informatics Centre] does not have the capacity or IT infrastructure needed, third-party technical partners are being engaged.
 - However, third-party players **take accountability out of the government's hands** and leave loopholes in the system which can be exploited by unscrupulous players.
- **Agency is severely understaffed:** The agency was set up with only about 25 permanent staff positions and its functions have been outsourced to technical partners from the very beginning.
- **Absence of robust security mechanisms:**
 - These are needed to handle a large-scale pen-and-paper examination, including the
 - Setting of the question paper and its encryption,
 - Selection of external printing presses and exam centres,
 - Transportation to printing presses,
 - Storage and distribution to examinees at examination centres and
 - Then the collection and transportation of answer sheets to evaluation centres.
 - Each of these is a stage where malpractice can occur without robust security mechanisms.

Criticism of Public Examinations (Prevention Of Unfair Means) Act 2024

- **Fate of public examinations cancelled due to unfair means**
 - The Act does not specify a time frame for rescheduling exams canceled due to unfair means.
 - It is recommended that canceled exams be re-conducted within six months to preserve candidates' merit and preparation, ensuring fair opportunities for all.
- **Invigilators and Officials are unaware of examination procedures**
 - Invigilators and administrative officers often lack proper training, leading to inefficiencies and opportunities for unfair practices.
 - To prevent this, *eligibility criteria for invigilators* should be established. Intensive training programs and workshops should be conducted to equip invigilators with necessary skills.
- **Investigation referred to a DSP level officer**
 - The Act designates officers of at least Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) or Assistant Commissioner of Police rank to investigate unfair means in public examinations.
 - However, given the significant impact on candidates, a specialized investigation and regulation authority should be established for systematic investigation.
- **Underutilization of Modern Technology and AI**
 - Authorities have yet to effectively use technology to counteract offenders who are increasingly using it for their schemes.
 - Electronic methods can streamline the question paper-setting process, reduce time, and allow for digital verification of question sets.
 - Centralized question banks can make managing and updating questions more efficient.
 - Electronic printing and distribution of exam papers can also minimize the risk of paper leaks.
 - Integrating technology like AI can enhance the evaluation stage by catching discrepancies overlooked by humans.



Special Category Status (SCS)

Recently, the leaders of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar raised demands for Special Category Status (SCS) for their states.

About Special Category Status (SCS)

This scheme aims to help States that are disadvantaged in terms of their geographic, social or economic status to improve their position on par with other, more developed Indian States.

Evolution of SCS- It was introduced in 1969 based on the recommendations of the Fifth Finance Commission (chaired by Mahavir Tyagi) to benefit certain backward states like Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland (first three states). More states were given SCS when they attained statehood like Himachal Pradesh (1970-71), Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura (1971-72); Sikkim (1975-76); Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (1986-87) and Uttarakhand (2001-02).

Who is Authorized to Grant SCS?

The decision to grant SCS to current States was taken by the National Development Council (NDC) of the erstwhile Planning Commission.

✓ NDC (Now not in operation) was set up in 1952 as the apex body for decision making and deliberations on development matters.

Related Constitutional/Legal Provisions

There are no separate constitutional provisions, legislation or executive orders for granting SCS.

Criteria- States must have

- Hilly and difficult terrain.
- Low population density and /or a sizable share of the tribal population.
- Strategic location along borders with neighboring countries.
- Economically and infrastructurally backward status.
- A non-viable nature of state finances.
- The low-income per capita/ state struggling with a resource shortage

Which States at Present have SCS? Currently, 11 states have SCS including Assam, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Uttarakhand, and Telangana (the latest one in the list post bifurcation in 2014).

Current Status of SCS: No new states have been granted SCS post 2014. Instead, special funding patterns for Northeastern and Himalayan states are based on recommendations from a Sub-Group of Chief Ministers, rather than through SCS designation.

Benefits-

- Central assistance of as much as 90% in the form of grants and 10% loan for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). (With Special Plan Assistance for projects of special importance to the state)
- For Non-Special Category Status, the Normal Central Assistance was calculated as 30% grant & 70% loan.
- The unspent funds do not lapse at the end of the financial year and are carried forward.
- SCS states also get tax concessions to attract investment.

Why was the Scheme Scrapped? It was scrapped on the recommendation of the 14th Finance Commission (FC) which stated that SCS was a burden on the Centre's resources. After the dissolution of the Planning Commission, it suggested to fill the resource gap of the states by increasing the devolution of tax to 42% from the existing 32%. (the same has been continued by 15th FC (41%))

** However, with the 16th Finance Commission already established and working on the formula for tax devolution between the Centre and states for the five-year period starting April 1, 2026, granting special category status to these two states may become a simpler task.

What Has Been The Centre's Stand On These Demands?

- *Rejected the Demands*- The Centre has repeatedly maintained that it will not consider such demands as the concept has already been scrapped. Moreover, entertaining such demands from AP and Bihar will trigger similar demands by other states, especially those which are stressed for resources, and are backward.
- *Special Packages*- may be provided to the two states like funds for building the capital city Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh or more Central projects for the city.
- *Request 16th FC*- States may be asked to place their request for SCS to the 16th FC under Arvind Panagariya.

Way Forward

- *Increased Fund Allocation Incentivizes Bad Policies* and penalizes more developed States which have adopted better policies. Since long, states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have suffered slow growth and high poverty levels due to their bad policies that discouraged investments considered crucial to boosting growth.
- *Need for Stronger and Better Policies*- Bihar has now managed to increase its per capita income level and the size of its overall economy at a brisk pace in recent years. For instance, Bihar's gross domestic product grew at 10.6% in 2022-23 as against the national average of 7.2% while its per capita income level in real terms grew by 9.4% in the previous year. In AP's case, the conditions required to be declared as an SCS are not met. Although the Centre might provide it with a special package for short-term relief. So, instead of providing more fiscal help, such states need a stronger rule of law and better policies to further improve its economy as more funds might offer the state short-term relief, but not long-term economic prospects.

Why are states demanding SCS?

BIHAR

- ** Bihar has sought SCS since Jharkhand, a mineral-rich region, was separated from it in 2000.
- Bihar's Per Capita Income of around ₹60,000 is among the *lowest* in the country. (The demand comes in the backdrop of the findings from the "Bihar Caste-based Survey, 2022", which revealed that nearly one-third of Bihar's population continues to live in poverty.)
- *Below Average performance in several human development indicators.*
- Bihar's *fiscal situation has been adversely affected* by the bifurcation of the State that caused industries to move to Jharkhand.
- *Lack of sufficient water resources* for irrigation, and frequent natural disasters.
- The National Family Health Survey 5 indicates *33.76% of the State's population is multidimensionally poor.*

ANDHRA PRADESH

- *Unjust and inequitable bifurcation* under AP Reorganization Act 2014 resulted in it inheriting nearly 59% of the population, debt, and liabilities of the original state, but only 47% of its revenues. For example, of the Rs 57,000 crore of software exports from AP for the year 2013-14, Hyderabad city with Telangana after the bifurcation alone accounted for Rs 56,500 crore.
- AP at present is *essentially an agrarian state, with low economic buoyancy, leading to huge revenue disabilities.* For instance, per capita revenue of Telangana for 2015-16 was Rs 14,411, while it was only Rs 8,397 for AP.
- *Need for funds* to reinstate Amravati as the state capital.
- *To encourage investments* in speciality hospitals, five-star hotels, manufacturing industries, high-value service industries such as IT, and premier institutions of higher education and research.

Extra Mile: Difference between Special Category Status & Special Status among States

	Special Category Status	Special Status
Basis	Policy-based (National Development Council recommendations)	Constitutional provisions (10 states have special provisions under Articles 371, 371-A to 371-H, and 371-J.)
Scope	Economic & developmental support	Political & administrative autonomy
Benefits	Higher central assistance, preferential grant allocation, special financial dispensation, tax incentives	Unique autonomy over internal matters, own constitution, specific rights for residents (e.g., property rights in J&K before 2019)
Example/s	Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya etc.	Jammu & Kashmir (under Article 370 before its abrogation in 2019)



e-Migrate Portal

Recently, the *Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)* and the SBI signed an MoU to integrate SBI's payment gateway, SBlePay, with the eMigrate portal.

- ✓ SBlePay is a Payment Aggregation service provided by SBI which provides electronic secured connectivity between various financial institutions like Banks at one end and various Merchants on the other, thus facilitating e-Commerce/m-Commerce transaction. It accepts and validates online payments via Credit Card, Debit Card, Net banking and Mobile Payment from the end customers in real-time.

About The e-Migrate Portal

This portal was launched in 2014 by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for providing online and transparent immigration process to Indian workers (especially for protection of less educated blue-collar workers) going to *Emigration Check Required (ECR)* countries for employment.

- ✓ Immigration referring to the arrival in a new country and Emigration referring to the *departure from one's home country*.
- ✓ Key features and functions of the e-Migrate Portal are Recruitment Agency Registration; Employer Registration; Emigrant Registration; Approval and Clearance; Grievance Redressal; Information and Awareness etc.
- ✓ Emigration Clearance (EC) is required for ECR passport holders going to ECR countries, which is processed online through the eMigrate system.
- ✓ The Overseas Employment (OE) and Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) division under the MEA oversees the emigration of Indian workers (semi-skilled and skilled) under the Emigration Act, 1983 to prevent them from being exploited by unscrupulous recruitment agents or foreign employers.
- ✓ Passports having ECR stamps are called ECR category passports. Protector of Emigrants (POE) provides emigration clearance to workers seeking employment in ECR countries. The workers who have not obtained clearance from POE are liable to be stopped at Immigration.
- ✓ There are 18 ECR countries which include Afghanistan, Bahrain, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, UAE and Yemen.

The international practices for protection of migrant workers are governed by two conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO): (India has not ratified both conventions)

1. Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949
2. Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975.

Objective

- To provide efficient, convenient, cost-effective and reliable emigration services to migrants in a transparent manner.
- Net-working all the stakeholders like Recruiting Agents (RAs), Foreign Employers (FEs), Protector of Emigrants (POE) offices, PGE office Bureau of Immigration offices (BoI), insurance agencies, Passport system of the MEA and Indian Missions /Posts for enhanced collaboration and efficiency and to facilitate seamless, safe and legal migration.

Features

- *Voluntary Registration*- It provides for voluntary registration of emigrants holding ECR category passports proceeding for overseas employment.
- *Integrated with Passport Seva Project (PSP)* for online validation of passport details of the ECR category workers being registered.
✓ PSP was introduced in 2010 by MEA
- *Integrated with Bureau of Immigration*- system of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), used at Immigration Check Post (ICP) at airports for online validation of the emigration clearance granted by POEs. This enables the e-Migrate system to record departure details of the ECR category workers.
- *Online Database of Emigrants*- It provides MEA a comprehensive and online database of emigrants, Recruiting Agents, Foreign Employers to make the whole emigration cycle faster.

Benefits

- *Hassle Free Emigration Process* and curtails malpractices adopted by Recruiting Agents and employers.
- *Detects Fake Passports*- Integration with PSP helps in detecting fake passport cases and checking data entry errors at registration stage itself.
- *Detect Foreign Employers with Pending Cases*- Online database of emigrants helps detect any foreign employers with complaint cases pending against them and alert POE officials at the time of clearance of new recruitment for these foreign employers.

Extra Mile: e-Migrate Services Through CSC

Recently, a MoU was signed between MEA, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and CSC eGovernance Services India Limited (a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956) to **integrate eMigrate portal with CSC's portal** with the aim of providing following services to the citizens through CSCs:

- Registration of applicants.
- Uploading and processing the required documents for the applicants.
- Booking for medical and other services required by migrant workers or registered applicants.
- Creating awareness about eMigrate services.

CSC 2.0

- Launched in 2015, the program extended its reach to all gram panchayats across the country, aiming to establish **at least one CSC** in each of the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats.

- CSC 2.0 utilizes infrastructure already created in the form of SWAN (State Wide Area Network), SSDG (State Service Delivery Gateway), e-District, SDC (State Data Centre), and NOFN (National Optical Fiber Network)/BharatNet.

Objective- To integrate the twin goals of entrepreneurship and social services, into a sustainable business model for achieving rapid socio-economic change in rural India.

Achievements-

- At present, more than 5.50 lakh CSCs are delivering more than 700 digital services to citizens in assisted mode with enhanced ease and convenience.



Extra Mile: Government Initiatives for the Welfare of Immigrants

1. **India Centre for Migration (ICM)**- formerly known as Indian Council for Overseas Employment, it is a 'not for profit' society established in 2008 which serves as a research think-tank to MEA on all matters relating to international migration and mobility. It monitors and analyses the trends and dynamics of the international labour market and contributes towards skill development and skill upgradation programs to facilitate employment opportunities overseas.
 - ✓ ICM provides skill development courses to potential migrants from the North-East States of India.
2. **Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY- 'Surakshit Jaaye Prashikshit Jaaye')**: Collaborative effort between MEA and the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) to enhance overseas employment opportunities for Indian workers, in line with international standards to facilitate overseas employment. Sixteen customized India International Skill Centres have been set up by National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC)
3. **Social Security Agreement (Totalization Agreement)**- has been signed by the Central government with several countries to ensure that Indian workers do not remit contribution to the country they are working in, get the benefit of totalization period for deciding the eligibility for pension, may get the pension in the country where they choose to live, and the employers are saved from making double social security contributions for the same set of employees. The Employees Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) has been authorized to issue the Certificate of Coverage (CoC) to the employees posted to the countries which signed the Agreement with India.
4. **Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC)**- To educate the intending emigrants about the risks involved in irregular migration and the precautions to be taken while seeking overseas employment and to provide need based information to overseas emigrants - a toll free 24x7 helpline has been set up.
5. **Indian Community Welfare Fund**- run by MEA, has been useful in mitigating the suffering of Overseas Indian community, particularly workers and women. It provides- **Boarding and lodging** for distressed Indian workers; emergency medical care; air passage to stranded Indians; initial legal assistance in deserving cases; expenditure on transportation of mortal remains to India or local burial of the deceased Indians; payment

of penalties in respect of Indian nationals for illegal stay in the host country where prima facie the worker is not at fault; payment of small fines/penalties for the release of Indian nationals in jails/detention centre.

6. **Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana (PBBY)**- It is a *compulsory insurance* for Indian workers holding ECR passports going to ECR countries. It provides an insurance cover of Rs.10 lakh in case of death/permanent disability; Medical expenses in case of injuries/sickness/ailment/diseases of up to Rs.50,000; Repatriation cover in case of sick/medically unfit to work; Family hospitalization cover in India up to Rs.25,000; Maternity benefits to women workers of Rs.25,000; and cost of transportation of mortal remains besides one way economy class fare of one attendant. Premium charge is only Rs. 275 (for 2 years) and Rs. 375 (for 3 years) plus taxes.



Notified Disasters

The ongoing spell of heatwave in the country has led to discussions of including heatwaves in the list of notified disasters under the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005.

- ✓ As per India Meteorological Department (IMD) definition, Temperatures above 45 degrees Celsius are considered to have heatwave-like conditions. Conditions when mean temperatures exceeding 4.5 degrees or more above the normal temperature for any place also result in heatwaves. For example, places in Himalayan States with temperatures in the mid-30s have reported heatwaves, because it is several degrees above normal.

About Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005

What is the DM Act, 2005? It was enacted in the wake of 1999 Odisha super-cyclone and the 2004 tsunami for effective management of disasters by continuous and integrated process of planning, organizing, coordinating and implementing measures necessary for-

- prevention of any disaster; mitigation of risk of any disaster or its severity or consequences;
- capacity-building; preparedness & prompt response to deal with any disaster;
- assessing the severity or magnitude of effects of any disaster;
- Evacuation, rescue and relief; Rehabilitation and reconstruction;

** The Act designates **the Ministry of Home Affairs** as the nodal ministry for steering the overall national disaster management.

Definition of Disaster- The Act defines a disaster as a “catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence” arising from “natural or man-made causes” resulting substantial loss of life, destruction of property, or damage to the environment and which is “beyond the coping capacity” of the community.

Key Features-

1. **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**- headed by the Prime Minister (PM) as the chairperson, consists of members (not exceeding nine) nominated by the PM. It is responsible for laying down policies, plans and guidelines for disaster management for ensuring timely and effective response to disaster.
 - ✓ The Act also provides for Disaster Management Authorities for State and Districts i.e. SDMA (headed by Chief Minister of respective State) and DDMA (headed by District Collector/District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner) respectively. They are responsible for preparing and implementing disaster management plans at state and district levels.
2. **National Executive Committee (NEC)**- assists NDMA in discharging its functions and implements its policies and plans. It also ensures the compliance of directions issued by the Central Government for disaster management in the country.
 - ✓ NEC prepares a **National Plan** for disaster management for the whole of the country. It is reviewed and updated annually and provides roles and responsibilities of different Ministries.

3. *National Institute of Disaster Management*- has been setup under for planning and promoting training and research in disaster management, documentation
4. *National Disaster Response Force*- has been constituted for specialist response to a threatening disaster situation or disaster. It works under the superintendence of NDMA and its command and supervision is vested in director General appointed by the Central Government.
5. *National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)* - has been constituted for meeting any threatening disaster situation or disaster. It is made available to NEC for meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation. It gets its contribution from the central government.
 - ✓ There are similar funds at state and district levels for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation purposes at state and district levels i.e. SDRF and DDRF. States contribute 25% of the money in the SDRF (10% in case of special category states), the rest comes from the Centre.
 - ✓ The money in these funds cannot be used for any purpose other than response and management of notified disasters.
 - ✓ The states first utilize the funds available in the State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) and only if the magnitude of the disaster is unmanageable with SDRF, states seek the money from NDRF.
6. *National Disaster Mitigation Fund*- has been constituted for projects exclusively for the purpose of mitigation and are used by NDMA.
7. *Penalties*- The act imposes following penalties for various offences:

Failure of an Officer in performing his duties under the Act-	Imprisonment of upto 1 year or a fine or both.
False Claim for obtaining any relief, assistance, repair, reconstruction or other benefits consequent to disaster from Government/NDMA/SDMA-	Imprisonment of upto 2 years and a fine.
Misappropriation of any money or materials meant for providing relief in any threatening disaster situation or disaster-	Imprisonment for upto 2 years, and a fine.
Circulating false alarm or warning about a disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading to panic-	Imprisonment of upto 1 year or a fine or both.

What Are Notified Disasters?

The disasters which are notified under the DM Act are called Notified Disasters. The list includes 13 categories- cyclones, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslides, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack frost/ cold waves and COVID-19.

Why Are Heatwaves Not A Part Of Notified Disasters?

- *Not an Unusual Event*- Heatwaves were not included in the list of Notified Disasters initially as they are a common occurrence every summer and not an unusual weather event.
- *Increasing Severity*- In the last fifteen years, heatwaves have become more severe, adversely affecting the part of population that remains outside for their livelihoods or other purposes by resulting in heat stroke, dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion etc.

What Are The States Doing To Deal With The Impacts Of Extreme Heat?

- With the frequency of heatwaves rising, State, district, and cities have prepared **heat action plans (HAPs)** with support from NDMA and the India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- HAPs provide-
 - A snapshot of a region's heat profile along with the details of past heatwave events, yearly trends in the summer maximum temperature, land surface temperature, and so on;

- A vulnerability assessment maps out regions that require immediate attention & a response plan.
- For creation of shaded spaces; For ensuring availability of cool water in public places;
- For distribution of simple oral solutions (ORS); and
- For reorganizing the schedules of schools, colleges and office working hours.

Why Is There A Demand For Including Heatwaves In The List Of Notified Disasters?

- *Requirement of Funds*- As heatwaves are not considered notified disasters, the state governments are unable to use their SDRF for this purpose, this puts extra pressure on state finances.
- *Use SDRF*- Inclusion of heatwaves under the DM act will allow the states to use their disaster response funds to provide compensation and relief and carry out a range of other activities
- *Better Management of Heatwaves*- Inclusion will result in better reporting of heat-related illnesses and deaths and authorities would be more alert to minimize the impacts of heatwaves resulting in better management.

What Is The Response Of The Centre To The Demand Of Adding Heatwaves as a Notified Disaster?

The Centre has rejected this demand because of the following reasons-

1. Finance Commission (FC) Reluctance-

- States have demanded inclusion of heatwaves from last three FCs, but they were not entirely convinced by this demand.
- As per the 15th Finance Commission (headed by N.K.Singh), the existing list of notified disasters covers the needs of the states mostly and did not find merit in the request to include heatwaves.
- But it suggested allowing the states to utilize a part of the SDRF money (up to 10%) for local disasters such as lightning or heatwaves which the states could notify on their own (this idea was suggested by the 14th FC).
 - ✓ At least four states Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Kerala have added heatwaves as local disasters.
- The 16th Finance Commission headed by economist Arvind Panagariya may review fresh requests of inclusion by States.

2. Financial Implications-

- As for a notified disaster, the government must provide monetary compensation of Rs 4 lakh for every life lost and compensate grievous injuries.
- Heat waves claim many lives every year, even though the recorded number of deaths are low. But this year, more than 500 heat-related deaths have already been reported and if the government is mandated to provide compensation, a larger number of deaths could be revealed.

3. Attributing Deaths to Heatwaves-

- People don't die directly from heat but due to other pre-existing conditions, made worse by the impact of extreme heat.
- But it is often difficult to ascertain if one died due to heat impact as in case of other disasters, the identification of victims is easier. Although doctors can declare or rule out suspected cases of heatwave illness based on medical guidelines, these are often applied unevenly.

Extra Mile: International Agreements for Disaster Risk Reduction

1. *SENDAI Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*- adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015 at the World Conference to reduce Disaster Risk by 2030.
2. *Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)*: India has signed the HFA, a global initiative aimed at reducing disaster-related losses in terms of lives, economic resources, and environmental assets.

3. *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*- is an international treaty adopted by 200 governments in 1992 to prevent dangerous climate change by organizing Conference of Parties (COP) annually.
4. *Paris Agreement of 2015 at COP 21*- built upon the UNFCCC, brought 178 nations together to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change, adapt to its effects, and provide enhanced support to developing countries.



Arbitration

The Union Finance Ministry recently circulated a memorandum to all ministries including the departments of public enterprises and financial services, and to all states directing them to restrict arbitration clauses in government contracts to disputes of less than Rs 10 crore stating that the arbitration processes are expensive and time consuming.

What is Meant By Arbitration?

It is an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism, where the parties to a dispute try to resolve their dispute outside the court by appointing an arbitrator (independent & neutral third party). The decision of the arbitrator is binding on the parties.

- ✓ The main features of arbitration are Neutrality, Flexibility, Time and cost-efficiency, Confidentiality, Enforceability, Final and Binding.

Types of Arbitration

1. *Domestic Arbitration*- both parties must be Indians and the conflict must be decided in accordance with the substantive law of India. It typically completes within 12-18 months.
2. *International Arbitration*- arbitration can happen either within or outside India and the parties or subject of the dispute are of foreign origin. The applicable law in this case can be Indian or foreign depending upon the facts and circumstances of the case.
3. *International Commercial Arbitration*- deals with disputes arising out of a commercial contract and at least one of the parties is of foreign origin whether it is an individual or a company.
4. *Institutional Arbitration*- When an arbitral Institution conducts arbitration, it is called Institutional Arbitration. One or more arbitrators can be appointed from a pre-selected panel by the governing body of the institution or the disputants themselves can select their panel. Several institutions provide arbitration services in India like Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA); International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR); Mumbai Centre for International Arbitration (MCIA); Delhi International Arbitration Centre (DIAC) etc.
5. *Ad-hoc Arbitration*- If the parties agree among themselves and arrange for arbitration without having an institutional proceeding. It can either be domestic, international or foreign arbitration.
6. *Fast track Arbitration*- completes arbitration process in a timely manner.

Statutory Backing- Arbitrations in India are governed by the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 enacted as a solution for moving commercial litigation away from overburdened courts.

The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996

- It was enacted in 1996 based on the UNCITRAL Model Law (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) on International Commercial Arbitration 1985. Its *key objectives* include:

Reducing Court Intervention

Court

Speedy Disposal of Disputes

Amicable, Swift and Cost-efficient Settlement of Disputes

Ensuring Just, Fair and Effective Arbitration Proceedings	Facilitating arbitrator to resort to mediation, conciliation or other procedure to encourage settlement of disputes.	Enforcing every arbitral award as if it were a decree of the court.
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Key Amendments- It was amended in 2015, 2019 and 2021. The Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2021 introduced-

- *Unconditional Stay on Awards:* it introduced an automatic stay on enforcement of arbitral awards if the arbitration agreement or contract is prima facie fraudulent or corrupt.
- *Qualifications of Arbitrators:* It specified qualifications and experience required for arbitrators to ensure quality and competence.

Process of Arbitration

- *Initiation:* The process is initiated with an arbitration agreement where the aggrieved party sends a notice of arbitration to the other, stating the intent to arbitrate, detailing the dispute, and suggesting an arbitrator if not already agreed upon.
- *Appointment of Arbitrators:* Parties either mutually appoint an arbitrator or use a default appointment process where courts may appoint the arbitrator(s). The number of arbitrators may be one or three, as specified in the agreement, or a sole arbitrator if unspecified.
- *Arbitral Proceedings:* allows the parties to submit their claims and defenses, presenting evidence and arguments, either personally or virtually.
- *Interim Measures:* can be sought by parties from the arbitral tribunal or courts to protect their interests, including injunctions or security deposits.
- *Arbitral Award:* is a binding decision resolving the dispute.
- *Enforcement and Challenge to Arbitral Award:* The arbitral award is enforceable as a court decree. It can be challenged on limited grounds such as procedural issues or public policy conflicts- within three months of receiving the award.
- *Appeals:* An appeal can be filed in a court against an arbitral award on an application by an aggrieved party. The Courts generally upholds the arbitration award but can also set aside the award if the party making the application proves that-
 - It was under some incapacity; or
 - the arbitration agreement was invalid; or
 - it was not given proper notice about the appointment of an arbitrator or of the arbitral proceedings;

****Judicial Recommendations on Arbitration-** Judiciary wants to make India one of the top international destinations for commercial arbitration. As per the current Chief Justice of India (CJI), arbitration is no longer an alternative but the preferred method of seeking commercial justice.

What Are The Recent Recommendations Made By The Finance Ministry Regarding Arbitration In Its Latest Circular?

- *Upper Limit of 10 crore rupees for Disputes-* has been introduced to streamline arbitration process for resolving commercial disputes having government or Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) as a party.
- *Arbitration Clause can't be included automatically-* in large contracts.
- *Avoid Amicable Settlements-* It advised all the government entities to avoid amicable settlement of disputes.
- *Long-term Public Interest-* should be kept in mind while taking decisions along with keeping legal and practical realities in view and without denying genuine claims of the other party.
- *Encourage to Adopt Mediation-* under the Mediation Act, 2023 or negotiated amicable settlements for resolution of disputes.

- **High Level Committee (HLC) to Resolve High Value Cases:** has been recommended comprising of a retired judge and a retired top official or technical expert. In such cases, effort should be to negotiate directly with the other party and place a tentative proposed solution before the HLC. HLC can also be used as a mediator. This will enable decisions taken for resolving disputes in appropriate matters to be scrutinized by HLC and promote fair and sound decisions in the public interest.

Why Did The Finance Ministry Introduce These Guidelines?

1. **Expensive and Time-consuming Arbitration Process.**
2. **Wrong Decisions and Improper Application of the Law-** There have been decisions regarding impropriety on behalf of arbitrators due to reduced formality and binding nature of decisions. There is no accountability for such wrong decisions.
3. **Lack of Qualified Arbitrators-** as they are not subjected to high standards of selection applied in the selection of judiciary and to judicial conduct.
4. **Lack of Transparency-** as the proceedings are conducted behind closed doors and not in open court.

Extra Mile: Arbitration Council of India (ACI)

- ACI was established under the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- ACI is tasked with promoting and encouraging arbitration, mediation, conciliation, and other ADR mechanisms. The Council conducts and promotes research and studies in the field of ADR, aiming to improve and modernize ADR practices in India.
- The ACI will be headed by a chairperson with two full-time members. The Secretary of Department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Law & Justice; Secretary of Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, and Chief Executive Officer, will be ex-officio Members.
 - ✓ The chairperson would be a Judge of the Supreme Court or a Chief Justice or Judge of a High Court or any eminent person who has special knowledge and experience in the administration or consult of arbitration.
 - ✓ two full-time members will be amongst eminent arbitration practitioners and academicians.



Neighborhood First Policy

- As Narendra Modi took oath as Prime Minister for the third time, attention turned to India's foreign policy for the next five years.
- India invited leaders from Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Seychelles to the ceremony, showing the importance of the Neighborhood First Policy.

Neighborhood First Policy

- **Success / Major Initiatives**
 - **SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Initiatives**
 - **SAARC Satellite:** Launched to provide communication and meteorological services to SAARC member countries.

About Neighborhood First Policy

India's 'Neighbourhood First policy' guides its approach towards the management of relations with countries in its immediate neighbourhood, that is, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The policy prioritises improving physical, digital, and people-to-people connectivity within the region, while also boosting trade and commerce.

Over time, the Neighborhood First Policy has become a key institutional focus across various government departments responsible for managing relations and policies with our neighbours. The policy officially came to being in 2008.

- **SAARC Development Fund:** Financial assistance for regional projects in areas like education, health, and agriculture.
- **Economic Cooperation and Trade**
 - **Bilateral Trade Agreements:** Enhancing trade with countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.
 - **Border Haats:** Setting up local markets along borders with Bangladesh to boost trade and local economy.
- **Infrastructure Development**
 - **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline:** For High-Speed Diesel (HSD) supply.
 - **BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement:** Facilitating road connectivity between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal.
 - **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project:** Improving connectivity between India and Myanmar.
 - **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway:** Enhancing road connectivity
 - **Rail Links:** Reviving old rail links and establishing new ones with Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**
 - **Operation Maitri:** Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake.
 - **Cyclone Relief:** Providing assistance to neighboring countries affected by natural disasters, such as Cyclone Fani in Bangladesh.
- **Energy Cooperation**
 - **Hydropower Projects:** Collaborating with Bhutan and Nepal
 - **Cross-Border Electricity Trade:** Agreements for electricity trade with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.
- **Health Cooperation**
 - **COVID-19 Assistance:** Providing medical supplies, vaccines (Vaccine Maitri initiative), and technical assistance to neighboring countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - **SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund:** Contributing to the fund to combat the pandemic in the region.

Significance of the Policy

Close cooperation with neighboring countries is critical for -

- **Countering Chinese influence** in the Indian Ocean region
- **Support in multilateral forums:** By strengthening India's leadership role in representing the interests of the Global South at international forums. This fosters better understanding and cooperation on global issues.
- **Ensuring territorial integrity** and tackle separatist threats effectively.
- **Increasing maritime security** which enables India to tackle transnational security challenges more effectively.
- **Addressing energy security** particularly concerning the import of oil and gas through sea routes.
- **Bridging development deficits** This helps in the development of India's northeastern states, thus narrowing development disparities in the region.
- **Leveraging soft power diplomacy:** India's deep cultural and historical connections with its neighbours strengthen people-to-people ties, solidifying India's influence in the region.

Challenges Associated with the Policy

- **Geopolitical tensions:** Issues like border disputes and political disagreements can complicate relationships.

- **Implementation issues:** Difficulties in executing cross-border projects due to logistical and bureaucratic challenges.
- **Economic differences:** Different levels of economic development among neighboring countries can affect the balance and effectiveness of cooperation.



Visit of Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina to India

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was on an official visit to India for two days. She held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

Key Highlights Of The Visit

- **Three vision documents released**
 - **India – Bangladesh Vision Document for Future**
 - It is titled as “India-Bangladesh Shared Vision for Future: Enhanced Connectivity, Commerce and Collaboration for Shared Prosperity”.
 - This vision document seeks to realize the respective national development visions of Viksit Bharat 2047 and Smart Bangladesh vision of 2041.
 - **Focused on digital partnership**
 - It is titled as ‘Shared Vision for India-Bangladesh Digital Partnership’. It aims at enhancing digital infrastructure and cooperation.
 - **Green Partnership**
 - It focuses on ‘Green Partnership for a Sustainable Future’.
 - It talks about putting joint efforts for sustainable development and climate-resilient growth.
- **Counter-Terrorism and Border Management**
 - **Intensified Cooperation:** Agreement to enhance collaboration on counter-terrorism, counter-radicalization, and border management.
 - **Rivers Management:** Formation of a joint technical committee for the renewal of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty and conservation of the Teesta River.
- **Maritime and Disaster Management**
 - **Blue Economy and Oceanography:** Renewal of MOUs on maritime cooperation and oceanography for R&D.
 - **Disaster Management:** Strengthening disaster response and risk reduction, co-leading the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) pillar.
- **Space and Defense Cooperation**
 - **Space Technology:** MOU on space technology, including the launch of a jointly developed small satellite for Bangladesh.
 - **Defense Modernization:** Support for the modernization of Bangladesh Armed Forces and defense industrial cooperation.
- **Connectivity Initiatives**
 - **Rail and Road Services:** New passenger train service between Rajshahi and Kolkata; goods train trial run planned between Gede-Darshana and Haldibari-Chilahati.

- **Bus Services and Inland Development:** New bus service between Kolkata and Chittagong; development of the inland container depot in Sirajganj.
- **Power Trade:** Agreement on sub-regional power trade, including a high-capacity interconnection project between Bihar and Assam via Bangladesh.
 - The **first sub-regional power trade** has been agreed with the decision to export 40 megawatts of power from Nepal to Bangladesh through the Indian grid.
 - There has also been an agreement that would expedite construction of the 765 kilowatt high-capacity interconnection between Bihar and Assam via Bangladesh with suitable Indian financial assistance.
- **People-to-People Exchanges**
 - **E-Medical Visas:** Introduction of e-Medical Visa facility for Bangladeshi patients traveling to India.
 - **New Consular Office:** Opening of an Indian Assistant High Commission in Rangpur.
 - **Human Resource Development:** Agreements on training and capacity building across various sectors.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation**
 - **CEPA Negotiations:** Early commencement of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations.
 - **Border Haats:** Opening new border haats to benefit people living along the borders.
 - **Fisheries and Health:** Renewal of MOUs in fisheries and health sectors.
- Overall, ten agreements were concluded during the visit, highlighting the substantive and purposeful discussions between the two leaders, aiming to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship.

India-Bangladesh Shared Vision for Future: Enhancing Connectivity, Commerce and Collaboration for Shared Prosperity

1. Enhanced Connectivity

- **Multi-modal Transport and Infrastructure:** Commitment to expanding physical connectivity, including cross-border trade and transit infrastructure.
- **Sub-regional Connectivity:** India to extend transit facilities for Bangladeshi goods to Nepal and Bhutan; operationalization of BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement and new MOU on Railway Connectivity.
- **Energy and Digital Connectivity:** Development of intra-regional electricity trade and high-capacity interconnection projects; initiatives for a "Shared Vision for India-Bangladesh Digital Partnership."

2. Commerce and Trade

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** Commencement of negotiations for CEPA to enhance bilateral trade and investment.
- **Special Economic Zones (SEZs):** Operationalization of SEZs in Mongla and Mirsharai offered by Bangladesh to India.
- **Trade Facilitation:** Improvement of trade infrastructure, opening of new border-haats, and enhancement of road, rail, air, and maritime connectivity.

3. Collaborative Development Initiatives

- **Shared Vision for Sustainable Future:** Partnership in green and digital technologies for economic growth and climate-resilient development.
- **Emerging Technologies Collaboration:** Joint development in civil nuclear, oceanography, space technology, and small satellite for Bangladesh.

- **Water Resource Management:** Exchange of data and framework for interim water sharing; renewal of Ganges Water Sharing Treaty and Teesta River conservation.

4. Defense and Security

- **Defense Cooperation:** Modernization of Bangladesh Armed Forces through industrial cooperation and multifaceted military engagements.
- **Peace and Stability:** Commitment to a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region; co-leading the 'Disaster Risk Reduction and Management' pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

5. People-to-People Ties and Cultural Exchange

- **Cultural and Historical Linkages:** Promotion of exchanges among Muktiyoddhas, scholars, artists, tourists, students, and youth.
- **Medical and Educational Support:** Enhanced support programs for Muktiyoddhas and their families; extension of e-Medical Visa facility for Bangladeshi patients.
- **New Consular Services:** Opening of a new Assistant High Commission of India in Rangpur to facilitate consular and visa services.

6. Youth Development and Capacity Building

- **Educational and Skill Development:** Partnership to promote youth development through education, skilling, entrepreneurship, technology, sports, and cultural industries.
- **Capacity Building Programmes:** Expansion of capacity-building programs for civil services, judicial officers, police, and other specialized services in Bangladesh.

7. Regional and Global Cooperation

- **Regional Integration:** Vision for India-Bangladesh relationship to anchor regional and sub-regional integration under BIMSTEC, SAARC, and IORA architectures.
- **Global Platforms Collaboration:** Joint efforts on global platforms to promote common interests, especially for the Global South.

Conclusion

The visit emphasized deepening the India-Bangladesh partnership, built on mutual trust and benefit, aiming to transform the current '**Sonaali Adhyaay**' (**Golden Chapter**) into a future-ready relationship.



Delhi L-G grants prosecution sanction against Arundhati Roy

Delhi Lieutenant Governor has sanctioned the prosecution of author-activist Arundhati Roy and Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain, former professor at the Central University of Kashmir, under **Section 45 (1)** of the stringent **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**.

Background Of The Present Case

- **FIR Registered Against The Accused**
 - In 2010, an FIR was filed by social activist accusing Arundhati Roy and Dr. Sheikh Showkat Hussain of making provocative speeches at a conference titled "Azadi-The Only Way" at New Delhi auditorium.
 - The speeches allegedly promoted the idea that Kashmir was never part of India, was forcibly occupied by the Indian Armed Forces, and called for the independence of Jammu and Kashmir from India.

- **L-G Granted Sanction Under Section 196 of CrPC**

- In October 2023, Delhi L-G granted sanction under **Section 196 of the CrPC** to prosecute Roy and Hussain for promoting enmity between different groups and making statements likely to cause public mischief.
- Although the Delhi Police had sought prosecution under IPC Sections 153A, 153B, 504, 505, and Section 13 of the UAPA, the Lt Governor only granted sanction for three IPC sections (153A, 153B and 505)
 - **Section 13 of UAPA** – It deals with punishment for advocating, abetting or inciting any unlawful activity and is punishable with imprisonment up to seven years.
 - **IPC Section 153A** - Promoting enmity between different groups based on religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintaining harmony.
 - **IPC Section 153B** - Making imputations and assertions prejudicial to national integration.
 - **IPC Section 504** - Intentional insult with intent to provoke a breach of peace.
 - **IPC Section 505** - It pertains to statements conducing to public mischief. It is divided into three sub-sections, each addressing different forms of statements or rumors that can cause public disorder or incite violence.

- **Prosecution under UAPA**

- Now, the L-G has given sanction to prosecute these two under UAPA.

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 individuals as terrorists on the same grounds.
- **Approval for seizure of property by NIA:** 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).

About UAPA

- » 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.

Key provisions of UAPA

- » Wide ranging powers to Central Govt. to designate organisations as terrorist organisations and
 - It also prescribes 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.

Section 45 (1) of the UAPA

- Section 45 (1) of UAPA pertains to the requirement of prior sanction from the appropriate government authority before a court can take cognizance of any offense under the UAPA.
 - 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.
- Specifically, it states that no court shall take cognizance of any offense under **Chapter III (which deals with unlawful activities)** or **Chapter IV (which deals with terrorist activities)** without the prior sanction of the Central Government or, as the case may be, the State Government.
- This provision ensures that prosecutions under the UAPA, which involve serious charges related to national security, have oversight and approval from higher government authorities before proceeding in the judicial system.



2025 to be International Year of Quantum Science & Tech

- The United Nations has said 2025 will be designated the 'International Year of Quantum Science and Technology'.
- The current proclamation is the result of a resolution led by Mexico in May 2023 and which was soon joined by other countries.
 - A member state, a group of member states, or a UN agency typically initiates the process by submitting a proposal for an international year.
 - It does so through a relevant agency.
 - For example, India proposed 2023 as the International Year of Millets through the FAO.

Quantum Science and Technology

- **About**
 - It is an interdisciplinary field that combines principles of quantum mechanics with practical applications.
 - Quantum mechanics is the branch of physics that deals with the behavior of particles at the atomic and subatomic levels.
 - Quantum Science and Technology seeks to harness these principles to develop new technologies and improve existing ones.
- **Key Concepts**
 - **Superposition:** Particles can exist in **multiple states** at once until measured.
 - **Entanglement:** Particles can be interconnected in such a way that the state of one instantly influences the state of another, no matter the distance.
 - **Quantum Computing:** Utilizes quantum bits (qubits) which can be in superposition, enabling them to perform many calculations simultaneously.
 - **Quantum Cryptography:** Uses principles of quantum mechanics to create secure communication systems.
- **Applications and Usefulness:**
 - **Quantum Computing:**

- Speed and Efficiency: Quantum computers can solve complex problems much faster than classical computers.
- Optimization: Useful in fields like logistics, finance, and material science for optimizing large datasets.
- **Quantum Cryptography:**
 - Secure Communication: Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) ensures that communication is secure from eavesdropping.
 - Data Protection: Provides an unbreakable encryption method due to the principles of quantum mechanics.
- **Quantum Sensing:**
 - Precision Measurement: Quantum sensors can measure physical quantities like time, gravity, and magnetic fields with unprecedented precision.
 - Medical Imaging: Improved imaging techniques for medical diagnostics and treatments.
- **Quantum Materials:**
 - Superconductors: Materials that conduct electricity without resistance, leading to more efficient power grids and electronic devices.
 - Topological Insulators: Materials with unique properties that can be used in advanced electronic devices and quantum computers.
- **Quantum Communication:**
 - Internet Security: Quantum networks can provide ultra-secure communication channels.
 - Satellite Communication: Quantum satellites enable secure long-distance communication.
- **Fundamental Research:**
 - Understanding the Universe: Provides insights into the fundamental nature of reality, leading to advancements in both theoretical and applied physics.
 - New Technologies: Potential to develop new technologies and materials that are currently beyond our imagination.
- **Other uses**
 - Many researchers expect functional quantum computers will have transformative effects on electronics, clean energy, and drug development, given their superior computational abilities.
- **Steps taken by India to promote Quantum S&T**
 - The Government of India announced a **National Quantum Mission** in April 2023 at a cost of Rs 6,000 crore, to be implemented from 2023 to 2031 by the Department of Science & Technology (DST).
 - It will have four verticals: quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum sensing and metrology, and quantum materials and devices.



G7 Summit 2024

- As the Group of 7 (G7) President in 2024, Italy hosted the **G7 Summit in Apulia, Italy**. G7 Summit Communique was released at the end of three-day conclave.
- The Summit was attended by PM Modi as India was a special invitee along with Brazil, Argentina, UAE and Turkiye, among others.

Key Outcomes

1. Apulia G7 Leaders' Communiqué

- **Global Economy and Trade**
 - Reaffirmed the commitment to an open and rules-based multilateral trading system.
 - Emphasized the importance of WTO and called for its reform to address current and future challenges.
- **Climate and Environment**
 - Reiterated the urgency of addressing climate change and committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.
 - Announced the launch of the "Apulia Green Investment Plan" to support developing countries in their transition to clean energy.
- **Health**
 - Focused on strengthening global health systems and pandemic preparedness.
 - Committed to supporting the WHO and other international health initiatives.
- **Digital and Technology**
 - Emphasized the need for ethical AI and digital inclusivity.
 - Supported Italy's proposal to create the AI Hub for Sustainable Development.
- **Gender Equality**
 - Renewed efforts to close gender gaps and promote women's economic empowerment.
- **Support Extended to Various Infrastructure Projects**
 - **Support extended to IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor)**
 - IMEC is a major infrastructure initiative aimed at enhancing connectivity and economic integration between India, Middle East, and Europe.
 - **Support to other infrastructure project**
 - G7 also extended support for the Lobito Corridor (Central Africa) and Luzon Corridor and the Middle Corridor.
 - **Lobito Corridor** – It extends from the port city of Lobito on the Atlantic coast of Angola through the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and into Zambia.
 - **Luzon Corridor** - It is a strategic economic and infrastructure corridor located on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Luzon is the largest and most populous island in the Philippines.
 - **Middle Corridor** - The Middle Corridor, officially known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), is a key logistics and transportation route that connects Europe and Asia. It provides an alternative to the traditional Northern and Southern corridors, enhancing trade and economic cooperation between the regions it traverses.
 - The Middle Corridor begins in Southeast Asia and China, crosses Central Asia through countries such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and reaches Europe via Turkey.
 - **Support extended to PGII**
 - G7 leaders decided to promote concrete G7 PGII (Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment) initiatives, flagship projects.
 - At the 2022 G7 summit, the participating leaders formally launched the PGII.

2. Regional Focus

- **Africa and the Mediterranean**
 - Recognized Africa's demographic and economic potential.
 - Supported the integration of African Union into international decision-making bodies.
 - Launched the "**G7 Apulia Food Systems Initiative**" to enhance food security and agricultural resilience.
- **Energy**
 - Endorsed the "Energy for Growth in Africa" initiative to promote clean energy investments and industrial growth across the continent

3. Outreach Chair Summary

- **Global South and International Cooperation**
 - Discussed the disproportionate impact of global challenges on the Global South.
 - Emphasized the need for solidarity and shared responsibility in addressing these challenges.
- **Africa's Future**
 - Highlighted Africa's demographic growth and economic potential.
 - Supported initiatives to promote infrastructural, economic, and social development in the region.
- **Artificial Intelligence**
 - Addressed the potential and challenges of AI, emphasizing ethical use and digital inclusion.
 - Proposed the establishment of the AI Hub for Sustainable Development to support local digital ecosystems.
- **Energy and Climate**
 - Reaffirmed commitments to the Paris Agreement and the transition to a net-zero economy.
 - Welcomed the "Energy for Growth in Africa" initiative

4. \$50 billion loan to Ukraine

- The participating leaders agreed to engineer a \$50 billion loan to help Ukraine in its fight for survival.
- Interest earned on profits from Russia's frozen central bank assets would be used as collateral.

Group of Seven (G7)

- **Origin**
 - The origin of G7 lies in the **oil shocks of 1973 and the corresponding financial crisis**.
 - In order to address the situation after oil shock, the heads of the **world's six leading industrial nations decided to hold a meeting in 1975**.
 - These six nations were - US, UK, France, Germany (West), Japan and Italy.
 - These countries were **joined by Canada in 1976** and G7 came into existence.
- **Current Members:** US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan
 - The **European Union is also represented** within the G7.

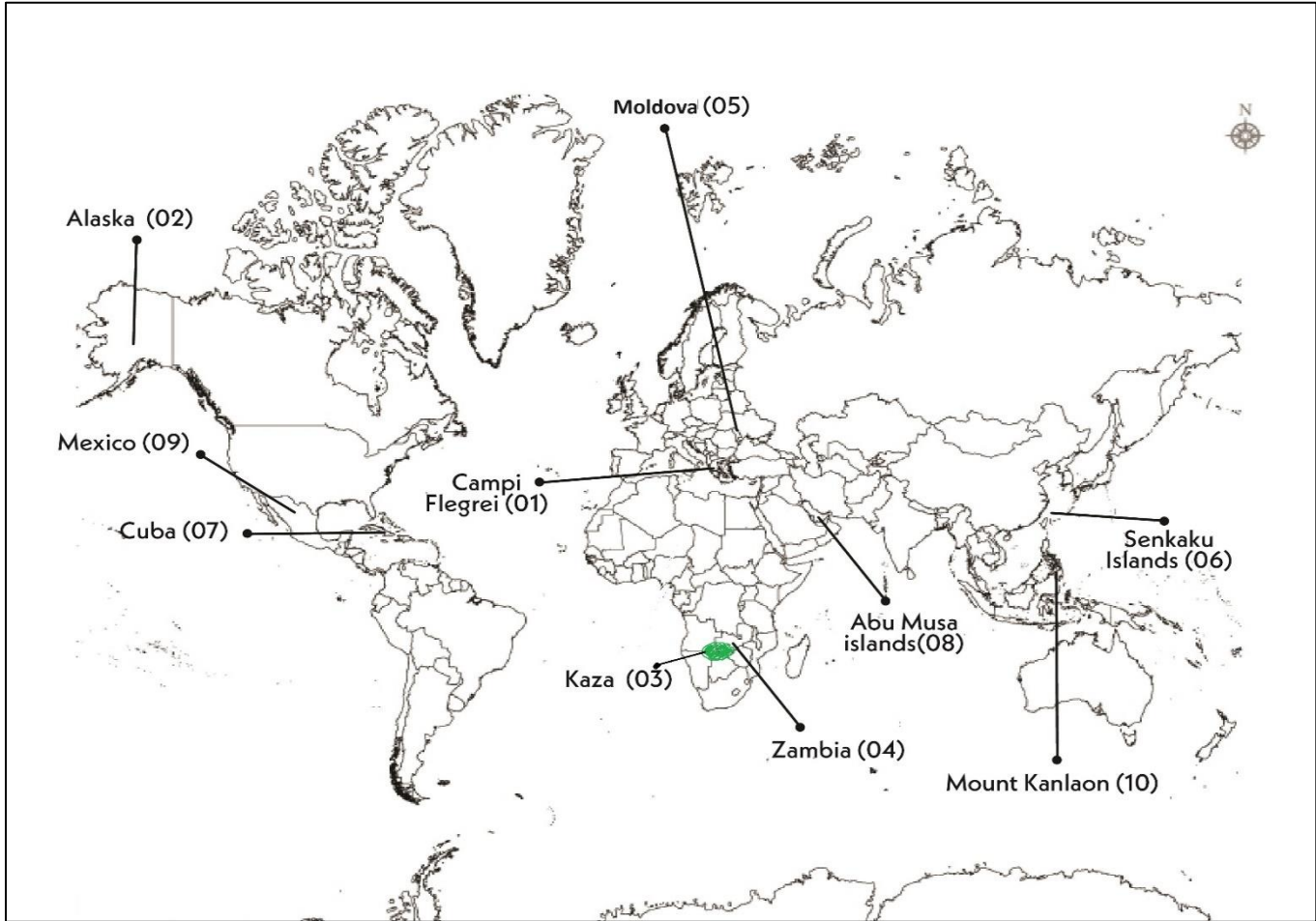
Criticism Faced By G7

- **Elitist, non-inclusive group**
 - The G-7 excludes three of the world's top 10 economies: China, India, and Brazil.
 - Unlike the G-20, it lacks representation from a broader spectrum of the world.

- **Membership Issues**
 - The G-7 has not expanded its membership and even reduced it by dropping Russia in 2014.
 - In contrast, BRICS has expanded, now including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia alongside the original members Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- **Challenges to Relevance**
 - The G-7's inability to change the course of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, stop Israel's bombardment of Gaza, or deter China's global economic influence raises questions about its relevance and effectiveness.
- **Future Uncertainty**
 - The G-7's future effectiveness is uncertain, especially with potential leadership changes due to upcoming elections in the U.K. and the U.S.
 - The next G-7 summit will be in Alberta, Canada, in 2025, and it remains to be seen if India will continue to participate on the sidelines.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

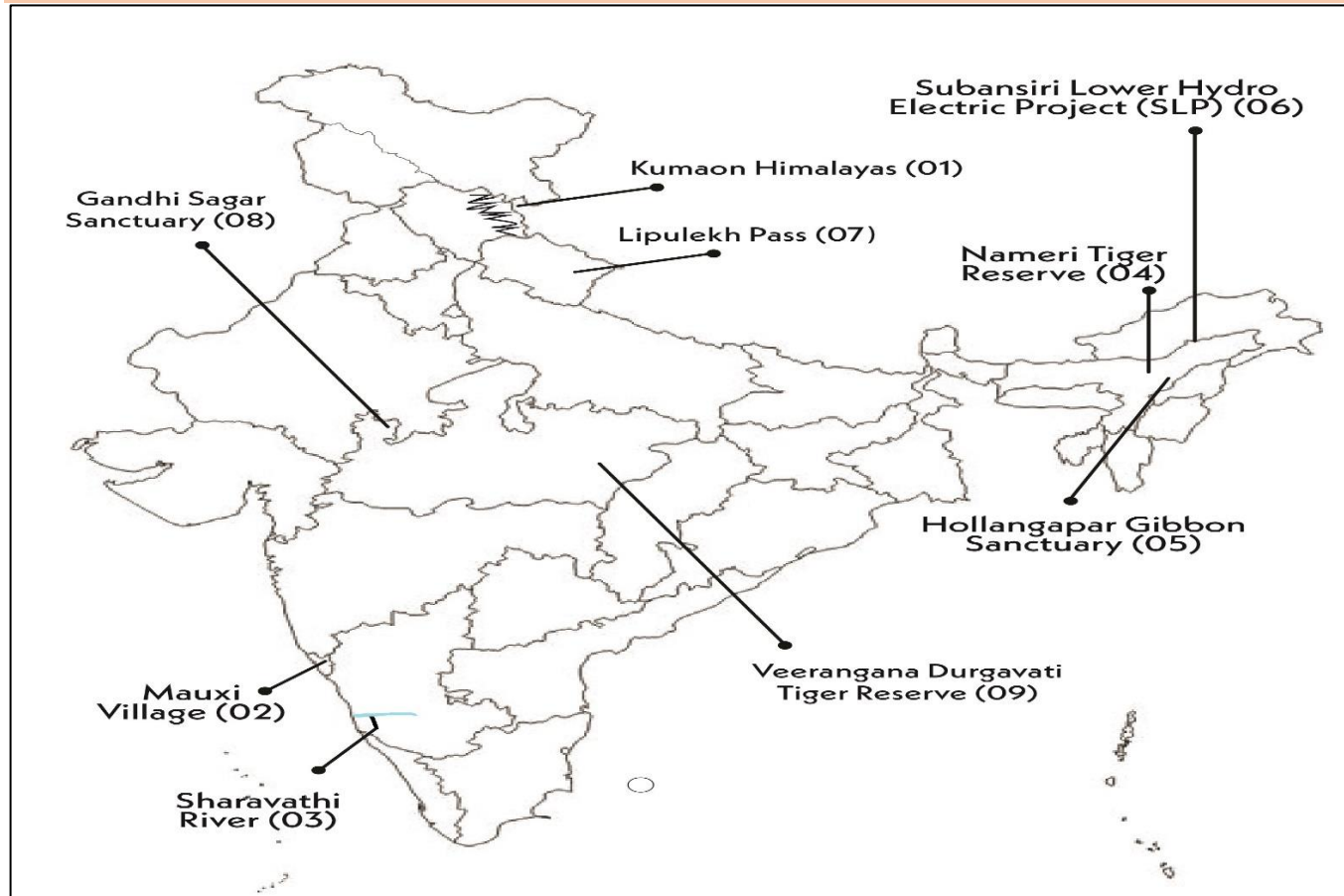
International Place In News



1.	Campi Flegrei	Recently, a 4.4 magnitude earthquake struck Italy's Campi Flegrei supervolcano region, causing mild damage in Pozzuoli and Naples. Campi Flegrei (Phlegrean Fields) is an active volcanic area near Naples, Italy, known for its complex volcanic system rather than a single volcano. The region's caldera, lies one-third under the Tyrrhenian Sea
2.	Alaska	Rivers and streams in Alaska are changing color from a clean, clear blue to a rusty orange because of the toxic metals released by thawing permafrost. As the earth warms, permafrost melts, exposing minerals like iron, zinc, copper, nickel, and lead, which taint the water.
3.	Kaza	Delegates gathered in Livingstone (Zambia), for the inaugural of <i>Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA) Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (TFCA) summit</i> . The KAZA region is a 520,000-square kilometre wetland paradise spanning five southern African nations (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) that have common international borders along the Okavango and Zambezi river basins
4.	Zambia	KAZA-TFCA Summit is taking place in Zambia. Zambia, is a landlocked country in southern Africa, boasts rugged terrain and abundant wildlife, featuring numerous parks and safari areas. It shares its border with eight countries.
5.	Moldova	U.S. pledged \$135 million in aid to Moldova for energy security. Moldova is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe, on the north-eastern corner of the Balkans.

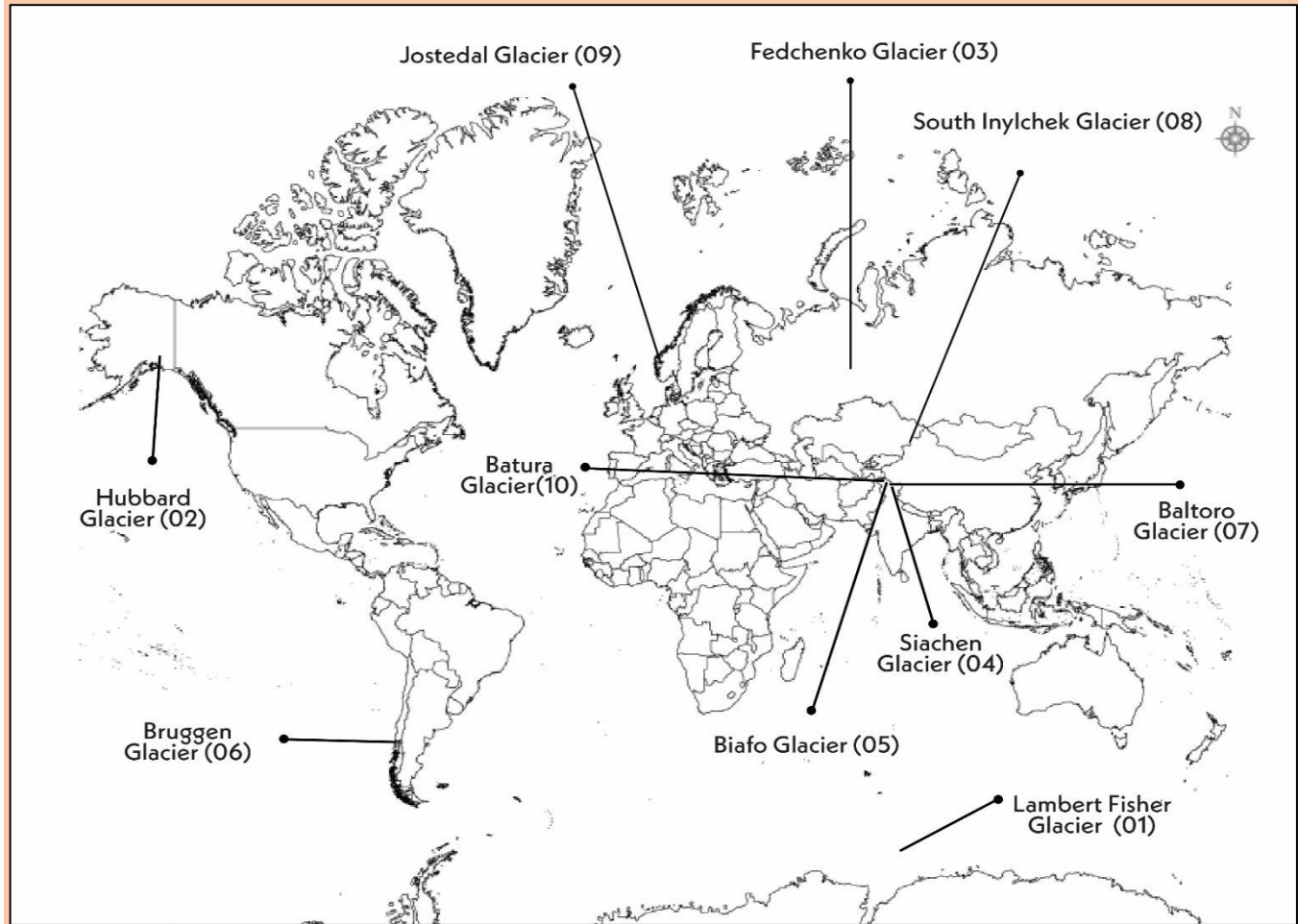
6.	Senkaku Islands	Chinese Coast Guard vessels have maintained presence in the waters surrounding the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea for a record 158 consecutive days. The Senkaku Islands have long been a contentious issue in Japan-China relations, with both nations asserting historical claims over the uninhabited rocky chain. It is located just 205 miles from China's east coast and 1,200 miles southwest of Tokyo.
7.	Cuba	The Government of India is extending Humanitarian Assistance to the Government of the Republic of Cuba. Havana is the largest city in Cuba and the country's capital. Cuba is located where the northern Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean meet.
8.	Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb islands	Iran summoned China's ambassador to protest a China-UAE statement on the sovereignty of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb islands, which are also claimed by the UAE but have been held by Iran since 1971. Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb are two small islands in the eastern Persian Gulf, close to the Strait of Hormuz. They lie around 12 kilometres from each other and 20 kilometres south of the Iranian island of Qeshm.
9.	Mexico	Claudia Sheinbaum was elected as the First Female President of Mexico. It is the 10 th most populous country and has the most Spanish speakers in the world.
10.	Mount Kanlaon	Mount Kanlaon, located in the central Philippines, erupted recently (through a Phreatic eruption), prompting hundreds of people to seek shelter in evacuation centres. It stands as the highest peak on Negros Island and is one of the active volcanoes within the Philippines Pacific Ring of Fire. The volcano comprises of various pyroclastic cones and craters, with its summit boasting a broad caldera and a crater lake.

National Places In News



1.	Kumaon Himalayas	The Supreme Court has temporarily halted a township project in the Kumaon Himalayas, challenging the “single window” clearance system. SC argued that single-window clearances cannot replace mandatory environmental approvals in such ecologically sensitive areas. Kumaon Himalayas are located in west-central Himalayas in northern India
2.	Mauxi Village	Mauxi (Mhaus) village in the Sattari taluka of Goa has emerged as a hotbed of neolithic discoveries. Here rock art found 20 years ago belong to Neolithic period. These rock art tells a lot about the early inhabitants of the region. A carving at Mauxi depicting a trident—a symbol associated with the Iron Age—suggests the site’s enduring significance through various historical epochs. Recently the 11 th edition of the Cultural and Heritage Walk, also known as Parikrama, was organised inside the Ravalnath Temple in Mauxi.
3.	Sharavathi River	The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed Karnataka government to stop any unlawful/illegal sand mining in Sharavathi river. The river originates and flows entirely within the state of Karnataka. It is one of the westward flowing rivers of India and a major part of the river basin lies in the Western Ghats. The river joins the Arabian Sea at Honnavar in Uttara Kannada district.
4.	Nameri Tiger Reserve	The Himalayan serow was recently spotted for the first time in the central region of Nameri National Park and Tiger Reserve. Nameri Tiger Reserve, located in the northern Sonitpur district of Assam near the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, shares its northern boundary with Pakke Tiger Reserve, creating a continuous habitat.
5.	Hollangapar Gibbon Sanctuary	The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) plans to construct canopy bridges in Assam’s Hollangapar Gibbon Sanctuary to help India’s only ape, the hoolock gibbon, safely cross railway tracks. The sanctuary, home to about 125 gibbons, faces fragmentation due to a railway track. These bridges, designed by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and NFR, will facilitate the arboreal species’ movement. Safety measures, including nets, will be implemented to prevent accidents.
6.	Subansiri Lower Hydro Electric Project (SLP)	A Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been signed for the implementation of a fisheries management plan at the 2000 MW Subansiri Lower Hydro Electric Project (SLP) in Assam. It is a gravity dam under construction on the Subansiri River (trans-Himalayan river known for its gold dust) flowing through Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tibet.
7.	Lipulekh Pass	Indian traders are demanding the resumption of border trade with China through Lipulekh pass which was closed during Covid-19 pandemic. It is located in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, near the tri junction of India, China, and Nepal. The pass serves as a route for pilgrims traveling to Kailash Mansarovar in Tibet. It is also one of the important points connecting India and Tibet, along with other passes like Nathu La and Shipki La.
8.	Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary	The Madhya Pradesh government has completed preparations for its ambitious cheetah reintroduction project at Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, which is the second home for cheetahs in India after Kuno National Park. It is located on western border of Malwa plateaus along the banks of the mighty Chambal river.
9.	Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve	A rare four-horned antelope has been sighted for the first time in the Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve. It spans Sagar, Damoh, and Narsinghpur districts in Madhya Pradesh, being the seventh in the state. It encompasses parts of the Nauradehi and Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuaries, featuring the historic Singorgarh Fort.

Glaciers In The World



1.	Lambert Fisher Glacier	Lambert Glacier is a major glacier in East Antarctica. It is the world's largest glacier. It drains 8% of the Antarctic ice sheet to the east and south of the Prince Charles Mountains and flows northward to the Amery Ice Shelf.
2.	Hubbard Glacier	Hubbard Glacier is a glacier located in Alaska. It holds the title of North America's largest tidewater glacier. This extraordinary ice giant, known as the "galloping glacier". Before it reaches the sea, Hubbard is joined by the Valerie Glacier to the west.
3.	Fedchenko Glacier	Tajikistan hosts the world's third-largest glacier, the Fedchenko Glacier, spanning 77 km in the non-polar Karakoram Mountain Range. It is the longest glacier in the world outside of the polar regions.
4.	Siachen Glacier	The Siachen Glacier is a glacier located in the eastern Karakoram range in the Himalayas northeast of the Line of Control between India and Pakistan. It is the longest glacier in the Karakoram and second-longest in the world's non-polar areas. The entire Siachen Glacier, with all major passes, has been under the administration of India as part of the union territory of Ladakh, located in the Kashmir region since 1984.
5.	Biafo Glacier	The Biafo Glacier is a glacier located within the Karakoram mountain range in the Hesper valley, Nagar District of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. It ranks as one of the largest glaciers in the entire Karakoram range.
6.	Bruggen Glacier	Brügger Glacier, also known as Pío XI Glacier, is in southern Chile. It is the longest glacier in the southern hemisphere outside Antarctica. It is notable for its unique feature of advancing rather than retreating, a rare occurrence among modern glaciers.

7.	Baltoro Glacier	It is located within the Shigar District of the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. The Baltoro Glacier flows through a section of the Karakoram mountain range, bordered by the Baltoro Muztagh to the north and east, and the Masherbrum Mountains to the south.
8.	South Inylchek Glacier	Inylchek Glacier is a glacier in the Central Tian Shan Mountains of Issyk-Kul Region, Kyrgyzstan. It ranks as the sixth longest non-polar glacier in the world and is the largest and fastest moving glacier in Kyrgyzstan. Meltwater from the glacier feeds a tributary of the Aksu River, which crosses the Chinese border into the Tarim Basin.
9.	Jostedal Glacier	Jostedal Glacier or Jostedalsbreen (Norwegian) is the largest glacier in continental Europe. It lies in Norway. The glacier is maintained by the high snowfall rates in the region, not the cold temperatures. This means the glacier has high melting rates in its snouts.
10.	Batura Glacier	Batura Glacier is one of the largest and longest glaciers outside of the polar regions. It lies in Gilgit-Baltistan region, Pakistan. It is situated in the Karakoram Range. The glacier flows west to east.

Tamil Nadu Hooch Tragedy

In Tamil Nadu's Kallakurichi, at least 34 people have died and around 100 others are in the hospital after drinking spurious liquor, also known as hooch.

Hooch/Spurious Liquor

- **About**
 - Hooch is a commonly used term for poor quality alcohol, derived from Hoochinoo, a native Alaskan tribe that was known to produce very strong liquor.
 - Unlike branded liquor which is produced in factories with sophisticated equipment and rigorous quality control, **hooch is made in more crude settings** (in many cases homemade) without any quality checks.
- **Process**
 - Like all alcohol, hooch is produced using two basic processes: fermentation and distillation.
 - Hooch is produced using distillation of a fermented mixture, generally of locally available yeast, and sugar or fruit (often fruit waste).
 - The fermented mixture which is to be distilled contains **more than just consumable alcohol (ethanol)**.
 - It also contains **methanol (CH₃OH)**, a different form of alcohol which is highly toxic for human beings.
 - During the distillation, both ethanol (boiling point of 78.37 °C) and methanol (boiling point of 64.7 °C) are concentrated.
 - Thus, if done incorrectly, distillation can lead to an end product which contains **high quantities** of toxic methanol.

Regulation of Methanol in India

- Schedule I of Manufacture, Storage & Import of **Hazardous Chemical Rules 1989** includes methanol.
- **The Food Safety and Standards (Alcoholic Beverages) Regulations 2018** stipulate the maximum permissible quantity of methanol in different liquors.
 - **For example**, these values span a wide range including “absent” in coconut fenny, 50 grams per 100 litres in country liquor, etc.
- **The Indian Standard (IS 517)** applies to how the quality of methanol is to be ascertained, and together with the Tamil Nadu Denatured Spirit, Methyl Alcohol, and Varnish (French Polish) Rules 1959, what signage, methanol packaging should carry

Science of Creating Alcohol

↘ Alcohol is produced using two basic processes: **fermentation and distillation**.

↘ **Fermentation** is a chemical reaction where yeast or bacteria react with the sugars (from grain, fruits, sugarcane, etc.) to produce **ethanol** (the alcohol in the drink).

- **Liquor is differentiated by its alcohol content** from the 5% by volume (beer) to the 12% (wine) to the 40% (distilled spirits).
- Distillation is important because with more of the sugar getting converted to alcohol, **the conditions become toxic**.



↘ **Distillation** is the process of physically separating the alcohol from the rest of the mixture using evaporation and condensation.

Adverse effect of Ethanol on Human Health

↘ Ethanol (C₂H₅OH) is **metabolised in the liver and the stomach** by alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH) enzymes to acetaldehyde.

↘ Then aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH) enzymes transform the **acetaldehyde** into acetate.

↘ The adverse effects of alcohol consumption, from the **hangover to cancer**, are due to acetaldehyde.

↘ Contrary to popular belief, WHO found that “no level of alcohol consumption is safe for health”.

How Can Methanol Poisoning be Treated?

- Once methanol is ingested, the body takes some time to completely eliminate it. There are **two immediate ways** to treat methanol poisoning.
- **One is to administer ethanol** (of a pharmaceutical grade, by healthcare workers). Ethanol competes with methanol for the ADH enzymes. As a result, the methanol is kept from being metabolised to formaldehyde.
- **The other option is to administer an antidote called fomepizole**, which slows the action of the ADH enzymes, causing the body to produce formaldehyde at a rate that the body can quickly excrete, preventing the deadlier effects from kicking in.

National Health Claim Exchange

The Health Ministry and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) are collaborating to launch the **National Health Claim Exchange (NHCX)**.

This digital platform aims to enable patients to access **quality healthcare quickly** and **reduce out-of-pocket expenses**. NHCX will connect insurance companies, healthcare service providers, and government insurance scheme administrators to streamline healthcare access and claims.

National Health Claim Exchange (NHCX)

• About

- It is a communication protocol that facilitates the exchange of health claim information between payers, providers, beneficiaries, and other entities.
- It is designed to be *interoperable, machine-readable, auditable, and verifiable, ensuring accurate and trustworthy information exchange*.
- It is an open standard-based communication protocol.
- It aligns with IRDAI's goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047' and will support streamlined, paperless, and secure interactions between hospitals and insurers.

• Expected working

- It will centralize health claims, reducing administrative burdens on hospitals that currently use multiple portals.
- Twelve insurance companies and one TPA have completed NHCX integration.

• Settlement of cashless claims

- A new timeline mandates that all cashless insurance claims must be processed within 3 hours of receiving discharge authorization from the hospital.
 - The insurance regulator has given providers a deadline of July 31 to implement the necessary systems and processes.

Current Claim Processing

Overview

- Currently, patients provide their insurance policy details or a card issued by a Third-Party Administrator (TPA) or insurance company when visiting a hospital.
- For Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) beneficiaries, the card is issued by the State Health Agency (SHA).
- Hospitals access specific claim processing portals to upload necessary documents for preauthorization or claim approval.
- The State Health Agency, insurance company, or TPA authenticates and digitizes the form using their internal portal, and the claims are adjudicated by the relevant team.
- In India, much of this process is manual, unlike many developed markets where over 90% of claims are auto-adjudicated.

Challenges of the Current Process

- The current process of exchanging claims lacks standardization across the ecosystem.
- Most data exchange occurring through PDF/manual methods.
- Additionally, there are no established health standards.
- Processes vary significantly among insurers, TPAs, and providers.

- **Incentives under NHCX**

- To promote digital health transactions and the digitization of patient health records, the National Health Authority introduced the Digital Health Incentive Scheme (DHIS) in January 2023.
- According to the Health Ministry, under the DHIS, hospitals shall receive financial incentives of ₹500 per insurance claim transaction through the NHCX or 10% of the claim amount, whichever is lower.

Why Is NHCX Being Brought In?

- **Finding of a study**

- A paper titled 'Health Insurance Coverage in India: Insights for National Health Protection Scheme' highlights that hospitalization cases are highest for those with private insurance (54.4 per 1,00,000 persons) overall.
- Urban areas seeing the highest cases under government-funded schemes (60.4 per 1,00,000 persons), and rural areas experiencing higher cases for private insurance purchases (73.5 per 1,00,000 persons).
- Urban areas generally have higher in-patient cases compared to rural areas.

- **Challenges**

- **Improving the relationship between hospitals and insurance companies**
 - Health insurance accounts for about 29% of the total general insurance premium income in India.
 - The main challenge is improving the relationship between hospitals and insurance companies, which requires digitization efforts, IT system upgrades, and workforce training.
- **Other issues:** Issues like discharge delays and miscommunication complicate matters.
- **Building trust** among policyholders depends on efficient service delivery.

- **Benefits of National Health Claim Exchange (NHCX)**

- **Interoperability:** NHCX will standardize and enable seamless exchange of health claims data, documents, and images between payers (insurance companies, TPAs, government scheme administrators) and providers (hospitals, labs, polyclinics).
- **Efficient Claims Processing:** NHCX is expected to enable transparent and efficient claims processing, reducing operational costs.
- **Standardized Healthcare Pricing:** Industry experts note that the platform will bring uniform data presentation and centralized validation of claims, leading to a more standardized approach to healthcare pricing.
- **Reduction in Claims Processing Costs:** Digitization and centralization efforts through NHCX are anticipated to significantly decrease the cost of processing claims.

Delhi's Water Crisis: Causes, Impact and Solution

The Supreme Court directed the Himachal Pradesh government to release 137 cusecs of water it has in surplus and asked Haryana to do the needful to resolve the drinking water crisis in Delhi. This came after the AAP government in Delhi had approached the SC (alleging the BJP-government in Haryana for stopping Yamuna's water supply), amidst a surge in water demand during prolonged heatwave.

Where is the Water in Delhi Coming From, and Water Stress in Delhi?

- Delhi gets most of its water from the **Yamuna, Ravi-Beas and Ganga rivers**.
 - From the **Ganga**, via the Upper Ganga Canal in UP, Delhi receives 470 cusecs/ roughly 254 million gallons per day (MGD) of water.

- Two channels (carrier lined channel (CLC) Munak and the Delhi sub-branch (DSB) canals) entering Delhi from Haryana supply Delhi (1049 cusecs) with water from the **Yamuna and Ravi-Beas** rivers.
- **The Delhi Jal Board (DJB)** also takes water directly from the **Yamuna** and supplements its river-water supply with **ground water** drawn from Delhi's **tubewells and wells**.
- According to the Composite Water Management Index released by NITI Aayog in 2019, five of the world's 20 largest cities under water stress are in India, with **Delhi being second on the list**.

Reasons for Water Scarcity in Delhi

- **Over-extraction of groundwater:** According to the Economic Survey 2023-24, Delhi has a daily water demand of 1,290 MGD, of which the DJB currently produces 1,000 MGD. The gap is met by Delhi's groundwater reserves.
- **Pollution of water sources: High ammonia levels** (more than 2.5 parts per million) in the Yamuna have long contributed to poor water supply in parts of Delhi.
 - Numerous drains and rivulets **discharge toxic waste** from small and medium industries into the Yamuna river, eventually affecting Delhi's clean water supply.
- **Impact of climate change:** According to the draft of the Delhi State Action Plan on Climate Change, the city is projected to incur economic losses of Rs 2.75 trillion by 2050 as a result of climate change impacts.
 - **Rising temperatures & erratic precipitation** patterns pose significant challenges to city's water supply.
- **Inefficient water management:** The Opposition alleges that the annual water shortage during summers is solely because of the inefficient water management of the state government.
 - Central Water Commission's inefficient role in managing the three barrages in Wazirabad, ITO, and Okhla indicates **poor coordination and transparency among Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh governments**.
- **Inter-state water disputes:** Water disputes between Haryana and Delhi have centred around the allocation of water from the Yamuna river. Haryana alleges that Delhi is drawing more water than allocated under various agreements.
- **Water treatment plant (WTP) capacity:** The WTP in North Delhi's Wazirabad was functioning below its capacity because the Yamuna did not have enough water (due to deficit rainfalls) for the DJB to draw from the Wazirabad reservoir.

Challenges Posed by Water Scarcity

- **Health issues:** With the reduced availability of clean water, marginalised communities living in unauthorised colonies have to rely on unsafe water sources, leading to **waterborne diseases**.
 - Insufficient water supply also hampers the maintenance and cleanliness of public toilets. When water is scarce, sewage systems can fail, which increases the risk of diseases such as **cholera**.
- **Social and economic impact:**
 - Increased illness due to poor hygiene and sanitation leads to **higher healthcare costs** for individuals and the government.
 - Frequent illnesses **impact productivity** as people miss work or school, affecting their economic well-being and academic opportunities.
 - **The dependence on water tankers** for domestic needs can be unreliable and costly, leading to further economic strain for the marginalised communities.

Solutions to Address Water Scarcity

- **Water conservation and management:**
 - Recently, the Delhi government ordered a **crackdown on water misuse**, authorising inspection teams to fine offenders using pipes to wash cars, allowing water tanks to overflow, and using domestic water supply for construction.

- The teams are also authorised to **disconnect illegal water connections at construction sites** or commercial establishments.
- To stop waste discharge from entering Yamuna, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** and the State Pollution Control Boards need to take the initiatives.
- **Water rationing strategies** must be announced during summer months.
- **Technological interventions:**
 - The DJB, in collaboration with Hitachi India, is using **field sensors and smart metres** at the Pitampura water distribution network.
 - Such technological intervention could **enable remote and real-time monitoring** and control of plant operations.
- **Infrastructure development:** The DJB can be **more commercially-oriented** and customers (households, businesses and industries) should be prepared to pay for the 'real cost' of supply. The DJB has recently increased infra charges for new water connections.
- **Policy and governance reforms:**
 - State and city governments should consider water resource availability in the region while creating city plans and providing permits for new establishments.
 - **They must restrict any development activities that are not sustainable in terms of water management.**
- **Community participation in rainwater harvesting:**
 - Delhi's rainwater harvesting potential amounts to a staggering 907 billion litres annually.
 - To effectively implement rooftop rainwater harvesting, various awareness campaigns can be organised at the community level.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

New Bank To Bridge Credit Gap For MSMEs

The government is considering a proposal to set up a separate bank for direct lending to the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

MSMEs in India

- MSMEs are often called the **powerhouse of the Indian economy** as they contribute significantly to *employment generation, exports, and overall economic growth*.
- They reportedly account for **more than 11 crore jobs and contribute around 27.0% of India's GDP**.
- The sector consists of **around 6.4 crore MSMEs**, with 1.5 crore of them registered on the Udyam portal and employs around 23.0% of the Indian labour force, making it the **2nd-largest employer in India after agriculture**.
- They account for 38.4% of the total manufacturing output and **contribute 45.03% of the country's total exports**.

Parameters	Micro	Small	Medium
Investment in Plant and Machinery	< 1 Crore INR	< 10 Crore INR	< 50 Crore INR
Annual Turnover	< 5 Crore INR	< 50 Crore INR	< 250 Crore INR
No. of MSMEs (Based on NSS data)	6.3 Crore	3.3 Lakh	5 thousand
No. of MSMEs (Based on Udyam data as on 31st March 2023)	1.5 Crore	4.6 Lakh	41 thousand

Significance & Problems Faced by Them

- Significance of MSMEs for Indian economy:** Labour intensive sector, promotes inclusive growth, leads to financial inclusion and promotes innovation. The 64 million-strong MSMEs are the backbone of the Indian economy.
- Problems faced by MSMEs:**
 - Problem of dwarfism:** While dwarfs (firms that continued to remain small despite ageing) consume vital resources (could possibly be given to infant firms), they contribute less to job creation and economic growth as compared to infant firms.
 - Lack of funding:** ~90% of the MSME funding comes from informal sources.
 - Poor integration of digital technologies** such as big data, AI and virtual reality (Industry 4.0) into manufacturing operations.
 - Environmental impact:** The sector lacks cleantech innovation and entrepreneurship, which produce environment friendly products, promotes energy efficiency and has the potential to accelerate the transition to a circular and low carbon economy.



New Bank To Bridge Credit Gap For MSMEs

- **Proposal**

- Government is planning to set up a separate bank for direct lending to MSMEs.
- Among the details to be worked out is the ownership structure of the bank, which might include a hybrid (public-private partnership) model.

- **Current scheme**

- The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) primarily provides refinance to banks lending to MSMEs, helping to lower the cost of finance for these units.

- Established under an Act of Parliament in 1990, SIDBI's majority shareholders include:

Government of India (20.85%)	SBI (15.65%)	LIC (13.33%)	NABARD (9.36%)
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- SIDBI accesses low-cost funds from banks that fall short of their priority sector lending (PSL) targets.
- SIDBI's growth prospects depend on the coverage achieved by scheduled commercial banks in meeting their PSL targets.
- Additionally, state financial corporations and state industrial development corporations, among others, lend directly to MSME units.


- **Need for new bank**

- According to a report, MSME credit penetration is still 14% in India compared with 50% in the US and 37% in China.
- There is a credit gap of Rs 25 trillion for the Indian MSME sector, reflecting the large untapped credit market.
 - The outstanding credit to MSMEs by scheduled commercial banks expanded by 20.9% annually to Rs 26 trillion at the end of December 2023.
- Access to adequate, timely and low-cost finance is seen as a key bottleneck, stymieing MSMEs' growth to bigger enterprises.
 - Large banks don't understand the requirements of the MSMEs.

Amending The Insolvency Resolution Process For Corporate Debtors

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has proposed amendments to the Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Process regulations. These amendments are expected to enhance the efficiency (and reduce costs) and transparency of the *Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP)*, and benefit creditors and other stakeholders involved in the CIRP.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)



- ➔ **Insolvency vs Bankruptcy:** While insolvency results from an inability to pay debts due to a lack of assets, bankruptcy occurs when an application is presented to an authority declaring insolvency and requesting to be declared bankrupt.
- ➔ **About the IBC 2016:** It is the bankruptcy law of India which seeks to **consolidate the existing framework** by creating a single law for insolvency and bankruptcy. It is a **one stop solution** for resolving insolvencies which previously was a long process that did not offer an economically viable arrangement.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)

- ➔ It is the **regulator for overseeing insolvency proceedings** and entities like Insolvency Professional Agencies (IPA), Insolvency Professionals (IP) and Information Utilities (IU) in India.
- ➔ It was **established on 1 October 2016** and given statutory powers through the IBC 2016.
- ➔ It functions under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs** and covers Individuals, Companies, Limited Liability Partnerships and Partnership firms.

Process Followed Under the IBC

- **When a corporate debtor (CD) or a company** which has taken loans to run its business, defaults on its loan repayment, either the creditor or the debtor can apply for the *initiation of a CIRP*.
- Earlier, the minimum amount of default after which the creditor or debtor could apply for insolvency was ₹1 lakh.
 - But, considering the stress on companies amid the pandemic, the government increased **the minimum amount to ₹1 crore**.
- **To apply for insolvency**, one has to approach adjudicating authority (**AA**) under the IBC.
 - The various benches of the National Company Law Tribunal (**NCLT**) across India are the designated AAs.
- **The Tribunal has 14 days to admit or reject** the application or has to provide a reason if the admission is delayed.
 - The CIRP or resolution process begins once an application is admitted by the AA.
 - The amended mandatory deadline for the completion of the resolution process is **330 days**.

Recent Proposal of IBBI

- **A comprehensive valuation report for the corporate debtor:**
 - The IBBI proposed that the registered valuer should submit a comprehensive valuation report for the corporate debtor as a whole, rather than separate valuations for different asset classes.
 - For companies with an asset size of up to Rs 1,000 crore and MSMEs, the board proposes to appoint **only one registered valuer** for providing the estimates of the *fair value and the liquidation value*.
 - However, keeping in view the complexities involved, they can have two valuers.
- **Interim resolution professional:** To prevent delays in the appointment of authorised representatives (AR) for creditors, the IBBI also proposed to allow the interim resolution professional.
- **Issue of release of guarantees in the resolution plan:** Resolution plan submitted by the applicant will not extinguish the rights of creditors to proceed against guarantors and enforce realisation of guarantees governed through various agreements.
- **Significance of these proposals:**
 - These proposals **seek to eliminate inconsistencies** between the CIRP regulations and the Companies (Registered Valuers and Valuation) Rules.
 - These measures will reduce CIRP costs and expedite the process for small entities.

SEBI Tightens Norms On Financial Influencers, Eases Rules For Delisting

SEBI has asked brokers and mutual funds to stop using the services of unregulated financial influencers for marketing and advertising campaigns.

In addition to regulating influencers, SEBI has introduced a fixed price process for delisting frequently traded shares and established a delisting framework for Investment and Holding Companies (IHC).

Finfluencers

About

- > These are people with public social media platforms offering advice and sharing personal experiences about money and investment in stocks.
- > Their videos cover budgeting, investing, property buying, cryptocurrency advice and financial trend tracking.

Popularity of influencers

- > It is evident from their massive subscriber counts, often exceeding those of leading broking firms.
- > This has resulted in substantial earnings for the most successful influencers, with estimates ranging from Rs 15 lakh to Rs 30 lakh per month.
- > However, the low barriers to entry in this space have also led to increased exposure to potential bad actors and questionable advice.

Need to Regulate Finfluencers

- There has been a sharp rise in the number of various 'unregistered' investment advisors giving unsolicited social media 'stock' tips on various social media platforms.
 - The rise of finfluencers can be attributed to India's low financial literacy rate of 27% and the influx of new investors during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - With the democratization of trading through new-age broking apps and affordable smartphones, many first-time investors turned to finfluencers for guidance.
 - However, the lack of financial education and the focus on market updates by business news channels created a vacuum that finfluencers have been filling.
- There were also reports that certain companies used social media platforms to boost their share prices through such finfluencers.
 - Recently, an online portal claimed that finfluencers get paid Rs 7 to 9 lakh per endorsement to push financial products on social media.

Criticism

- Critics claim that finfluencers render advice to their followers which comes under the ambit of Freedom of Expression of the Constitution.
- Followers are not forced to take action based on the recommendations of these finfluencers.
- They point towards the fact that often celebrities endorse certain products without having any expertise. Also, they take money to promote the products.
- In this context, these critics claim that regulating the finfluencers would be improper.

New Rules By SEBI

- **SEBI Tightens Norms on Financial Influencers**
 - Under the new rules, brokers and mutual funds are prohibited from using the services of **unregulated financial influencers** for marketing and advertising campaigns.
 - However, financial influencers engaged in investor education will be exempt from these restrictions.
 - The regulated entities will be responsible for ensuring that the individuals they associate with adhere to the rules of conduct set by SEBI, including avoiding promises of assured returns.
- **Changes to Derivative Trading Regulations**
 - SEBI has introduced new criteria to determine *which stocks can be linked to derivative products, such as futures and options*.
 - The total number of stocks eligible for derivative trading is expected to increase slightly.
- **Eased Delisting Rules**
 - The regulator has approved changes to delisting rules, making it easier for companies to exit from stock exchanges.
 - Currently, delisting is carried out via reverse book-building.
 - Reverse book-building is primarily used by companies that wish to delist their shares from a stock exchange.
 - The objective is to determine the exit price at which shareholders are willing to sell their shares back to the company or promoters.
 - Companies can now offer their shareholders **fixed prices** for shares as an alternative to the current reverse book-building mechanism.

- The fixed price must be at least 15% above a floor price, which will be determined by rules set by the regulator.
- The regulator has also decided to remove financial disincentives for the managing director and chief technology officer of exchanges and other market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) in the event of technical glitches.

Preston Curve

- The Preston curve refers to a relationship between life expectancy and per capita income in a country.
- It was first proposed by American sociologist **Samuel H. Preston** in his 1975 paper “The changing relation between mortality and level of economic development”.
- Preston found that people living in richer countries generally had longer life spans when compared with people living in poorer countries.
- This is likely because people in wealthier countries have better access to healthcare, are better educated, live in cleaner surroundings, enjoy better nutrition etc.
- When a poor country begins to grow, its per capita income rises and causes a significant increase in life expectancy initially as people are able to consume more than just subsistence calories, enjoy better healthcare etc.
- Other development indicators such as infant and maternal mortality, education, healthcare, etc. also improve when the per capita income of a country rises.
- The average per capita income of Indians rose from around ₹9,000 per year in 1947 to around ₹55,000 per year in 2011. During the same period, the average life expectancy of Indians rose from a mere 32 years to over 66 years.
- However, the positive relationship between per capita income and life expectancy begins to flatten out after a certain point.
- In other words, an increase in the per capita income of a country does not cause much of a rise in the life expectancy of its population beyond a point, perhaps because human life span cannot be increased indefinitely.

Problems With The Curve

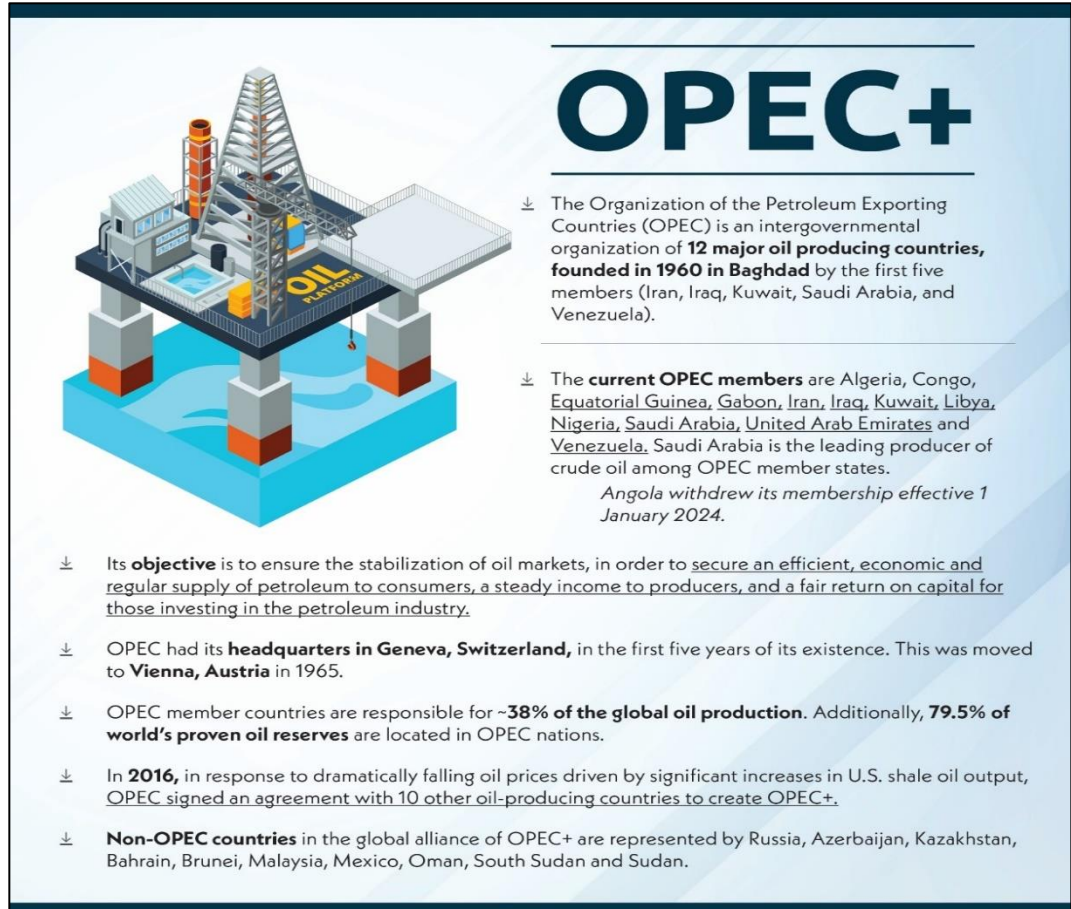
- Many economists have used this positive relationship to argue that the way to improve development outcomes in a country is to encourage economic growth.
- The rapid economic growth of India and China over the last few decades, which has helped improve life expectancy and other development indicators, has been cited as an example of faster economic growth leading to better development outcomes.
- However, experts have disagreed over the causal relationship between income levels and human development indicators. As per them most improvements in life expectancy have come from a **shift in the Preston curve** rather than due to a movement along the curve.
- That is, higher life expectancy has been achieved by countries even at low per capita income levels. Such improvement in life expectancy at low-income levels, could be due to improvements in medical technology, such as the development of life-saving vaccines.
- Thus, improvement in life expectancy and other development outcomes is seen as the result of public investment in human development.
- Critics of this view, however, argue that technological advancement itself is linked to income levels; richer countries tend to possess better technologies.

- However, poor countries can benefit from technologies that have already been developed by richer countries. They may thus be able to achieve higher life expectancy even at very low levels of income, thus providing a boost to their development indicators.

OPEC+ Extends Production Cuts

- OPEC+ has announced an extension of its substantial oil production cuts into 2025, aiming to stabilise the market amid sluggish demand growth, elevated interest rates, and increasing U.S. oil production.
- Brent crude oil prices have been trading near \$80 per barrel in recent days, below what many OPEC+ members need to balance their budgets.
- Worries over slow demand growth in top oil importer China have led to low prices alongside rising oil stocks in developed economies.

- OPEC+ is currently implementing cuts amounting to 5.86 million barrels per day (bpd), representing approximately 5.7 per cent of global demand.
- Specifically, OPEC+ is looking for lower interest rates and more consistent global economic growth, rather than isolated growth spurts, to ensure a stable market environment.
- The production cuts will be gradually phased out over the year, from October 2024 to September 2025.



OPEC+

↓ The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is an intergovernmental organization of **12 major oil producing countries, founded in 1960 in Baghdad** by the first five members (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela).

↓ The **current OPEC members** are Algeria, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela. Saudi Arabia is the leading producer of crude oil among OPEC member states.
Angola withdrew its membership effective 1 January 2024.

± Its **objective** is to ensure the stabilization of oil markets, in order to secure an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consumers, a steady income to producers, and a fair return on capital for those investing in the petroleum industry.

± OPEC had its **headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland**, in the first five years of its existence. This was moved to **Vienna, Austria** in 1965.

± OPEC member countries are responsible for **~38% of the global oil production**. Additionally, **79.5% of world's proven oil reserves** are located in OPEC nations.

± In **2016**, in response to dramatically falling oil prices driven by significant increases in U.S. shale oil output, OPEC signed an agreement with 10 other oil-producing countries to create OPEC+.

± **Non-OPEC countries** in the global alliance of OPEC+ are represented by Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Bahrain, Brunei, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, South Sudan and Sudan.

Unified India Organic Logo

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) have jointly developed a “Unified India Organic” logo to replace the India Organic and Jaivik Bharat logos.



- > It is a statutory body under the administration of **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
- > It was established by the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, which consolidated all former acts and orders related to food safety
- > Headquartered in New Delhi, it regulates the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale, and import of food articles, while also establishing standards to ensure food safety.

- The India Organic logo was used on organic products complying with the **National Programme for Organic Products (NPOP)**, while Jaivik Bharat was used on organic products certified by FSSAI.
- The new logo has been developed to bring uniformity and convergence in implementation of Indian regulations by NPOP and FSSAI.
- The certification bodies will get three months of transition time for implementation which will be given from the date the logo is notified.

APEDA

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

Functions

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

Committee for Clearing Corporations

Capital markets regulator *Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)* has established a committee led by former Deputy Governor of RBI Usha Thorat, to review the ownership and economic structure of Clearing Corporations.

Need To Set Up The Committee

- Given the substantial growth of Indian securities markets in recent years, the importance of CCs as central risk management institutions has grown significantly.
- The aim of setting up the committee is to ensure that the CCs function as resilient, independent and neutral risk managers.
- As of now, the current ownership structures of CCs is dominated by the parent exchange, with all clearing corporations under Sebi's regulations being subsidiaries of their parent exchanges.
 - As per the current norms, at least 51 percent of the paid-up equity share capital of a recognised CC to be held by one or more stock exchanges;
 - No person resident in India or outside India, other than stock exchanges, can hold more than 5% of the paid-up equity share capital in a CC;

Clearing Corporations



- And some categories (depository, banking company, insurance company, their foreign counterparts including foreign stock exchange) can hold up to 15 percent of the paid-up equity share capital.
- The dominance of the parent exchange in the ownership structure can make them vulnerable to the expectation of the exchange's shareholders and dependent on the exchange for capital infusion and increase of reserves.
- Infusion of capital in a CC by a parent exchange might be against the economic interest of an exchange and its shareholders.

Committee's Task

- The committee will deliberate on the feasibility of broadening the list of eligible investors, who are allowed to be shareholders in a CC & suggest categories of investors who can acquire stakes in such CCs.
- Additionally, it will examine the need to alter the caps on the shareholding of various entities in a CC.
- The suggested alternatives should keep in view the periodic capital needs of a CC towards increasing its settlement guarantee fund.
- The suggested alternatives should also keep in sight the need for a CC to ensure sufficient capital/ liquidity in times of market-wide systemic stress

Syndicated Loan

- Shriram Finance Ltd, a private non-banking financial company (NBFC) has raised \$425 million and EUR 40 million through syndicated loan transaction.
- The three-year external commercial borrowing facility was structured as a social loan.
- The funds raised through the social loan would be used to empower small entrepreneurs and vulnerable groups across India.
- **Syndicated loan** is a form of loan business in which **two or more lenders jointly provide loans** on the same loan terms.
- The borrower can be a corporation, a large project, or a sovereign government.
- Syndicated loans involve large sums, which allows the risk to be spread out among several financial institutions to mitigate the risk in case the borrower defaults.

External Commercial Borrowings (ECB)

- ECBs are commercial loans taken by eligible resident entities who raise ECBs from recognised non-resident entities.
- They are used widely in India to facilitate access to foreign money by Indian corporations and PSUs (public sector undertakings). All entities except a Limited Liability Partnership are allowed to raise ECBs.
- ECBs include commercial bank loans, buyers' credit, suppliers' credit, credit from official export credit agencies and commercial borrowings from the private sector window of multilateral financial Institutions such as International Finance Corporation, Asian Development Bank etc.
- ECB can be raised in Indian Rupees and/or any convertible currency.
- The DEA (Department of Economic Affairs), Ministry of Finance along with RBI, monitors and regulates ECB guidelines and policies. Transactions on ECB are governed by Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.
- ECB can be raised through **Automatic Route or Approval Route**.
- There are certain eligibility regulations created by the government for availing of finance under the **automatic route**. These regulations relate to amounts, industry, the end-use of the funds, etc.

- The **approval route** requires companies that fall under certain pre-specified sectors to get the RBI's or the government's explicit permission before raising funds through ECB.

Benefits of ECB

- The value of funds is generally lower when borrowed from external sources, as some economies have a lower interest rate compared to India.
- Since the markets are larger when raising funds through ECB, companies can meet larger requirements from international players in comparison with what can be achieved through domestic players.
- Moreover, the investor base can be diversified by the borrower.

World Wealth Report 2024

- The Capgemini Research Institute recently released the World Wealth Report 2024.
- The report covers 71 countries, accounting for more than 98% of global gross national income and 99% of world stock market capitalization.
- High-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) are individuals with **investable assets of USD 1 million or more**, excluding their primary residence, collectibles, consumables, and consumer durables.
- HNWIs are segmented into **three categories** based on wealth bands: Ultra-HNWIs (USD 30 million or more), Mid-Tier Millionaires (USD 5-30M) and Millionaires Next Door (USD 1-5M).

Highlights Of The Report

- Global HNWI wealth expanded by 4.7% in 2023 reaching **\$86.8 trillion**. Similarly, the HNWI population increased by 5.1% to **22.8 million** globally.
- This upward trend offsets last year's decline and puts HNWI trends back on a growth trajectory. As HNWI growth improves, asset allocations are starting to shift from wealth preservation to growth.
- In 2023, **North America** registered the strongest HNWI recovery worldwide with year-on-year growth at 7.2% for wealth and 7.1% for population. Solid economic resilience, cooling inflationary pressures, and a strong US equity market rally drove momentum.
- The **Asia-Pacific (APAC)** HNWI segment (4.2% and 4.8%) and **Europe** (3.9% and 4.0%) experienced more modest wealth and population growth.
- **Latin America** and the **Middle East** recorded limited HNWI growth, with wealth up 2.3% and 2.9%, and population up 2.7% and 2.1%.
- In contrast, **Africa** was the only region where HNWI wealth (-1.0%) and population (-0.1%) fell due to falling commodity prices and declining foreign investment.
- Among the best performers in the APAC region were India and Australia. A resilient economy and robust performance of the equity markets drove wealth growth in both of these countries.
- The **number of HNWI in India** increased by 12.2% in 2023 vs 2022, bringing the total number of HNWI population to 3.589 million.
- The **financial wealth of India's HNWIs** increased by 12.4% in 2023 to \$1,445.7 billion.
- India's **country's market capitalisation** increased by 29.0% in 2023, after an increase of 6% in 2022. The country's national savings as a percentage of GDP too increased to 33.4% in 2023 compared to 29.9% in 2022.
- India's **unemployment rate** decreased to 3.1% in 2023, down from 3.6 in 2022.

Pump and Dump Scheme

- SEBI recently imposed a fine of Rs 7.75 crore on several individuals for allegedly operating a 'pump and dump' scheme.
- In the stock market, a pump and dump scheme is a type of manipulation activity that involves artificially inflating the price of a stock through false and misleading information, only to sell the stock at the inflated price and leave investors with significant losses.
- This manipulative tactic is particularly prevalent in the micro-cap and small-cap sectors, where companies often have limited public information and trading volumes are lower.
- This selling pressure causes the stock price to drop, often leaving unsuspecting investors with significant losses as the stock returns to its actual value or even lower.

Regulations

- Under the SEBI guidelines, pump and dump schemes are **completely banned**.
- Participants in pump and dump manipulation can face severe legal penalties, including fines, extraction of profits, and imprisonment.



- First, a significant amount of stock in a relatively small or thinly traded company is acquired. These stocks are often referred to as 'penny stocks' because they trade at low prices and are more susceptible to price manipulation due to low trading volumes.
- Then the stock is **aggressively promoted** to create a buzz and attract investors.
- This promotion can take various forms, including sending out mass emails or newsletters with exaggerated claims about the company's prospects, as well as misleading social media posts.
- As the promotion gains traction, more investors buy into the stock, driving up its price due to increased demand. Sometimes, fraudsters may also engage in coordinated buying to further boost the price.
- Once the stock price has been pumped up sufficiently, the sell-off begins at the inflated prices.

Direct Seeding of Rice

The Punjab government has been actively promoting the direct seeding of rice (DSR), or 'tar-wattar' technique.

- However, despite its benefits, and government incentives (Rs 1,500 per acre, this year), this technique is yet to see widespread adoption in Punjab.
- Last year, only 1.73 lakh acres of the 79 lakh acres under paddy cultivation in Punjab saw the use of this technique.
- Even the government's target of bringing 7 lakh acres under DSR this year represents less than 10% of Punjab's total rice acreage.

Normal Transplantation Technique

- In transplanting, farmers prepare nurseries where the paddy seeds are first sown and raised into young plants. These seedlings are then uprooted and replanted 25-35 days later in the main field.

BACKGROUND



01 Rice is the major kharif crop of India and is grown in all the major agrarian states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

02 Since groundwater is the main source of irrigation in these states, rice cultivation by **transplanting** has depleted the water table.

03 In Punjab, for instance, the groundwater declined in about 85% of the state between 1984 and 2016, according to Central Ground Water Board data.

04 There are only two ways to save groundwater. Either diversify from paddy to other crops or adopt water-saving techniques to grow paddy.

- For the first three weeks or so after transplanting, the plants have to be irrigated almost daily (if there are no rains) to maintain a water depth of 4-5 cm.
- This is done because paddy growth is compromised by weeds that compete for nutrition, sunlight and water.
- Water prevents growth of weeds by denying them oxygen in the submerged stage. Water thus acts as herbicide for paddy.

Direct Seeding of Rice

- DSR is also called the ‘**broadcasting seed technique**’, under which pre-germinated seeds are directly drilled into the field, roughly 20-30 days prior to when they would have been transplanted. It **requires no nursery preparation or transplantation**.
- The field is irrigated and laser leveled prior to the seeding process which is carried out using a seed drill.
- *A seed drill is a device used in agriculture that sows seeds by positioning them in the soil. It gives farmers much greater control over the depth that the seed is planted and the ability to cover the seeds without back-tracking.*
- *The result is an increased rate of germination, and a much-improved crop yield. It also facilitates weed control.*
- Seed treatment is crucial, with seeds soaked in a fungicide solution for eight hours, then dried for half a day before sowing.
- The first round of irrigation is carried out 21 days after sowing, followed by 14-17 more rounds at 7-10 day intervals, depending on soil type and the quality of the monsoon.
- The final irrigation takes place 10 days before harvest. The traditional method requires 25-27 irrigations in total.

Factors that influence DSR: Experts emphasise that soil suitability is crucial for the successful implementation of DSR.

Soil texture

- Farmers should **avoid DSR in light-textured soils** — it is **more suitable for heavy or medium-to-heavy-textured soils**. This is primarily because light-textured soils do not retain water well.
- Heavy-textured soils contain more clay and less sand, whereas light-textured soils have less clay and more sand.
- DSR in unsuitable soils, leads to the need for irrigation every second or third day. This completely counteracts the water-saving benefits of DSR, and in fact, ends up consuming more water.

Importance of iron content

- Soil with severe iron deficiency and weed problems must not be cultivated using DSR technique. This is likely to be more of a problem in fields previously cultivated with crops such as cotton, maize, and sugarcane.
- Experts recommend that soils with plant-available iron are ideal for DSR.
- Lack of iron content can severely impact yields and lead to major financial losses for farmers. Sometimes, farmers might even have to transplant the crop anyway, after a month or so, leading to DSR losing its labour-saving benefits.

Advantages of DSR	Drawbacks of DSR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The biggest advantage in DSR is of water saving, as the first irrigation (apart from the pre-sowing) under DSR is necessary only 21 days after sowing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main issue is <u>availability of the herbicides</u>. Even the seed requirement for DSR is also higher, at 8-10 kg/acre, compared to 4-5 kg in transplanting.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can reduce water use by 15% to 20% (the traditional method requires 3,600 to 4,125 litres of water to grow a single kilo of rice). • The second savings is that of labour. About three labourers are required to transplant one acre of paddy in a single day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further, <u>laser land levelling</u>, which costs Rs 1,000/acre, is compulsory in DSR, which is not the case in transplanting. • The <u>time of sowing</u> is also important, and the seeds have to be sown by the first fortnight of June, as the plants have to come out properly before the monsoon rains arrive. • There is no such problem in transplanting, where the saplings have already been raised in the nursery.
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Way Ahead for DSR

- A basic lack of awareness and understanding is holding DSR back. After using the method on unsuitable soil, farmers do not get the expected yields.
- They then developed doubts regarding DSR and returned to the traditional puddling method.
- Experts say that comprehensively educating farmers is key to enable the adoption of a new technique, and departure from age-old, tried and tested methods.
- Extensive training and a ready helpline should be provided, to handhold the farmers through the whole process, from pre-sowing to harvesting. This can instill confidence among farmers regarding DSR's efficacy.
- Additionally, if farmers incur losses during the initial years of adoption, adequate compensation should also be provided, to not disincentivise them from trying again.

Duty Drawback Through PFMS

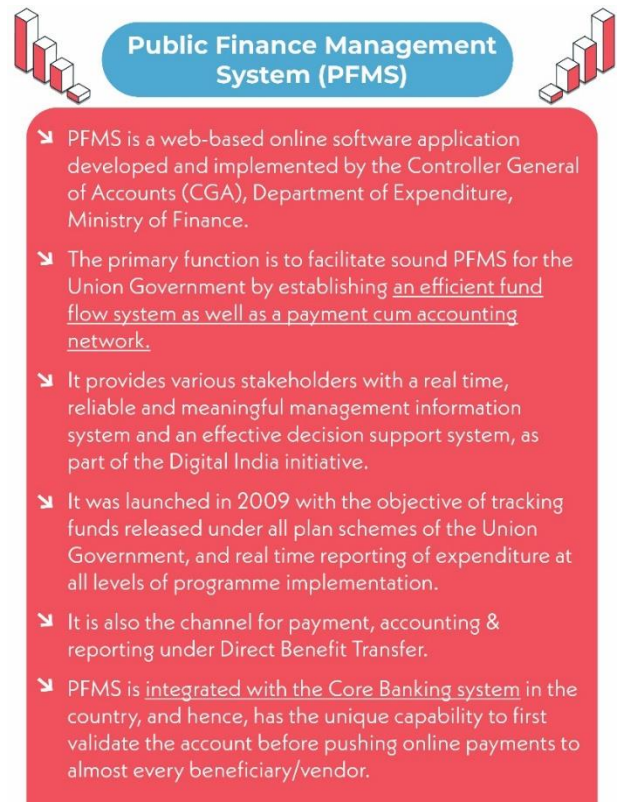
The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has decided to electronically disburse duty drawback amount directly to exporter's bank account through the Public Finance Management System (PFMS).

Benefits

- This new functionality is expected to reduce time taken for payment of drawback amount by eliminating manual intervention in the drawback disbursement mechanism and increase transparency.
- It will also remove the need for physical documentation and hence reduce delays in the entire process.
- It will help to improve the ease of doing business by contributing to trade facilitation.

Duty Drawback

- Duty Drawback under section 75 of the Customs Act, 1962 rebates customs duty chargeable on any imported materials or excisable materials used in the manufacture of export goods.
- It assists exporters in offsetting some of the expenses incurred throughout the export process, especially in the supply or value chain.



Public Finance Management System (PFMS)

- PFMS is a web-based online software application developed and implemented by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA), Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.
- The primary function is to facilitate sound PFMS for the Union Government by establishing an efficient fund flow system as well as a payment cum accounting network.
- It provides various stakeholders with a real time, reliable and meaningful management information system and an effective decision support system, as part of the Digital India initiative.
- It was launched in 2009 with the objective of tracking funds released under all plan schemes of the Union Government, and real time reporting of expenditure at all levels of programme implementation.
- It is also the channel for payment, accounting & reporting under Direct Benefit Transfer.
- PFMS is integrated with the Core Banking system in the country, and hence, has the unique capability to first validate the account before pushing online payments to almost every beneficiary/vendor.

National Financial Reporting Authority

- The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) started its first annual inspection of eight audit firms.
- The inspection, focused on the processes and standards adopted by auditors, could reveal how NFRA plans to strengthen the country's audit and accounting ecosystem to limit corporate frauds and uphold shareholders' interests in a fast-growing economy.
- The NFRA was constituted in **2018**, by the Union Government under the **Companies Act, 2013**.

Functions

- Recommend accounting and auditing policies and standards to be adopted by companies for approval by the Central Government;
- Monitor and enforce compliance with accounting standards and auditing standards;
- Oversee the quality of service of the professions associated with ensuring compliance with such standards and suggest measures for improvement in the quality of service.

Composition

- NFRA has a chairperson, who is appointed by the Central Government and a maximum of 15 members.
- The members should have expertise in accountancy, auditing, finance or law.
- All the members including the chairperson who are in full-time employment should not be associated with any audit firm (including related consultancy firms) during their term of office and 2 years after their term.

Krishi Sakhi

- The Prime Minister recently granted certificates to more than 30,000 self-help groups (SHGs) as Krishi Sakhis.
- Krishi Sakhi is one dimension under the **Lakhpati Didi program**, which aims to create 3 crore Lakhpati Didis.
- In 2023, the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare** and **Ministry of Rural Development** signed an MoU to enhance the skills of rural women.
 - **Krishi Sakhi Convergence Program (KSCP)** is an initiative under this MoU.



Lakhpati Didi

- Launched in 2023, Lakhpati Didi is an initiative of the **Ministry of Rural Development**.
- It aims to empower women associated with SHGs by *encouraging them to start micro-enterprises* so that they can *have an annual household income exceeding Rs. 1,00,000* through adopting sustainable livelihood practices.
- SHGs support this journey with collective action, financial literacy, and skill development, empowering members for entrepreneurial ventures.

Criteria for identifying potential lakhpati Didi

- A SHG member who has completed a minimum of 2 years and has availed of the Community Investment Fund (CIF).
- A beneficiary of livelihood intervention through DAY-NRLM and practising at least two livelihood activities.

- The initiative facilitates diversified livelihood activities, by ensuring convergence across all Government departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, private sector and market players. The strategy includes focused planning, implementation and monitoring at all levels.

- KSCP aims to transform rural India through the empowerment of rural women as Krishi Sakhi, by imparting *training and certification* of Krishi Sakhis as **Para-extension Workers**.
- Krishi Sakhis are chosen as agriculture para-extension workers because they are trusted community resource persons and experienced farmers themselves.
- Krishi Sakhis are trained on various agricultural extension services for 56 days on several modules.

- The modules include agro ecological practices from land preparation to harvest, organising farmer field schools, establishment and management of seed banks, soil health, soil and moisture conservation practices, integrated farming systems, basics of livestock management etc.
- Till now, 34,000 Krishi Sakhis out of 70,000 have been certified as Para-extension workers. This certification course aligns with the objectives of the *Lakshpati Didi Program*.
- The training program has been rolled out in 12 states in Phase – 1: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Meghalaya.

e-Shram Portal at International Labour Conference

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment recently showcased the e-Shram portal at the 112th International Labour Conference (ILC) at Geneva, Switzerland.
- Launched in 2021, e-Shram portal is aimed at building a comprehensive **National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW)** in the country.
- As of May 2024, over 29.67 crore unorganised workers have already been registered on e-Shram portal.
- The portal is presently integrated with National Career Service (NCS) Portal, Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH), myScheme portal and Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhaan (PMSYM) scheme.
- The Ministry aims to develop e-Shram portal as **One-Stop-Solution for Unorganised Workers** of the country.
- It aims to facilitate **access of various social security schemes** being implemented by various Ministries/ Departments for the benefit of the unorganised workers through e-Shram portal.
- Integration of few schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) is a priority agenda of the Ministry.
- Further, other schemes like PM-SVANidhi, MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna – Gramin (PMAY-G) and Ration Card data etc. are also being integrated with e-Shram in a time bound manner.

International Labour Conference (ILC)

- > Often called an **international parliament of labour**, ILC establishes and adopts international labour standards and is a forum for discussion of key social and labour questions.
- > The broad policies of ILO are set by the ILC, which meets annually in June, in Geneva, Switzerland. It also adopts ILO's budget and elects the Governing Body.
- > The conference brings together governments', workers' and employer's delegates of the ILO member States.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- > ILO was created in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I.
- > In 1946, 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, for improving fraternity and peace among nations, pursuing decent work and justice for workers, and providing technical assistance to other developing nations.



Authorized Economic Operator Programme

Ministry of Finance has assigned the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) status to the gem & jewellery sector.

Authorised Economic Operator (AEO)

- AEO is a **voluntary programme** under the **World Customs Organization (WCO) SAFE Framework of Standards**.

- Under AEO, a business engaged in international trade is approved by Customs as compliant with supply chain security standards and granted AEO status and certain benefits.
- AEOs include manufacturers, importers, exporters, brokers, carriers, consolidators, intermediaries, ports, airports, terminal operators, integrated operators, warehouses and distributors.
- An entity with an AEO status is considered a **secure trader** and a **reliable trading partner**.
- This segmentation approach enables Customs resources to focus on less or non-compliant or risky businesses for control.
- Thus, the aim of AEO programme is to secure global trade by enhancing international supply chain security and facilitate the movement of goods.
- In India, AEO certification was implemented in 2011 and there are three tiers of AEO certification, AEO T1, AEO T2 and AEO T3 in the increasing degree of benefits and compliance requirements.

Benefits Under AEO

- Incentivize business entities through defined benefits that translate into savings in time and cost, which helps to promote ease of doing business.
- Facility of Direct Port Delivery (DPD) of import containers and/ or Direct Port Entry (DPE) of export containers.
- Enhanced border clearance privileges in **Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA)** partner countries.
- Customs advice/assistance if trade faces unexpected issues with Customs in MRA partner countries.
- Secure supply chain from point of export to import.

World Customs Organization (WCO)

- WCO is an independent intergovernmental body **headquartered in Brussels, Belgium**. It was established in 1952, with the objective of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
- It is internationally acknowledged as the global centre of customs expertise and plays a leading role in the discussion, development, promotion and implementation of modern customs systems and procedures.
- It develops international standards, enables cooperation and builds capacity to facilitate legitimate trade.
- The WCO maintains the **international Harmonized System (HS) goods nomenclature** and administers the technical aspects of the **WTO Agreements on Customs Valuation and Rules of Origin**.
- It represents 186 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.

SAFE Framework

- In 2005 the WCO Council adopted the SAFE Framework of *Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade* (SAFE Framework).

- The framework intends to act as a deterrent to international terrorism, to secure revenue collections and to promote trade facilitation worldwide.

SAFE is based on **four core elements**:

- It harmonizes the advance electronic cargo information requirements on inbound, outbound and transit shipments.
- Each country that joins SAFE commits to employing a consistent risk management approach to address security threats.
- At the request of the Customs administration of the receiving nation, the customs administration of the sending nation will perform an outbound inspection of high-risk containers and cargo.
- Definition of benefits that Customs will provide to businesses that meet minimal supply chain security standards and best practices.

Coal Mines Auctioned Under Revenue Sharing Model

- In a move aimed at boosting domestic coal production, state-owned Coal India Limited (CIL) has awarded 23 of its discontinued underground mines to private players. It is a step to utilise the nation's coal resources through the public-private partnership.
- These mines have a combined production capacity of 34 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) and will be operated by successful bidders under a revenue-sharing model.
- Private sector coal miners bid to share a minimum of 4 per cent revenue with CIL for a period of 25 years.
- **In FY24, India produced 997.4 MT of coal** and aims to produce 1,080 MT in the ongoing financial year. In FY24, India's coal imports increased by 7.7 per cent to 268 MT.
- Demand for coal has grown considerably over the years, especially from the power sector. The demand for coal-based power has grown by 7.3 per cent in this financial year compared to last year in the same period. This is the highest ever demand for coal.

Revenue Sharing Model

- Revenue sharing is the division of the total revenue generated by the firm among its stakeholders. The percentage of revenue shared is pre-determined and is bound by a legal agreement.
- Besides, if the business incurs a loss, the same is also divided among the stakeholders if it has been agreed upon in the agreement.
- Businesses looking for more partners to expand their network and sales usually opt for the revenue-sharing model.

Revenue Sharing vs Profit Sharing

- The basic difference between revenue sharing and profit sharing models is that in the former, the entire revenue is distributed among stakeholders.
- However, under profit-sharing, the profit, which is calculated by deducting expenses from revenue, is distributed. Thus, expenses are absorbed in the profit-sharing model, unlike in the revenue-sharing mechanism.
- Moreover, revenue has to be shared every time it is generated. It does not regard the actual profitability of the business.

Overseas Investment Proposal for Indian Mutual Funds

- SEBI has **proposed** a framework for facilitating investments by domestic mutual funds (MFs) in their overseas counterparts, or unit trusts (UTs) that invest a certain portion of their assets in Indian securities.
- The existing framework does not explicitly permit domestic MFs to invest in overseas MF/UTs with exposure to Indian securities.

Mutual Fund

- A mutual fund is an investment instrument where many investors pool their money to earn returns on their capital over a period. In India, mutual funds are **regulated by SEBI**.
- This pool of funds is managed by an investment professional known as a fund manager or portfolio manager.
- It is his/her job to invest the money in different securities such as bonds, stocks, gold and other assets and seek to provide potential returns.
- The gains (or losses) on the investment are shared collectively by the investors in proportion to their contribution to the fund.

Purpose of the Proposed Framework

- Noting India's strong economic growth prospects, SEBI observes that Indian securities offer an attractive investment opportunity for foreign funds.
 - The unique MF investors in the country has grown from 1 crore in 2014 to 4 crore in 2024.
 - The asset under management (AUM) of the Indian MF industry has grown six-fold in a decade from ₹9.45 trillion in 2014, to ₹57.26 trillion as on April 30, 2024.
- The existing framework does not explicitly permit domestic MFs to invest in overseas MF/UTs with exposure to Indian securities.
 - Investments in international markets provide diversification opportunities to Indian investors. They also provide investment opportunities in sectors or industries that may not be available in the Indian listed market space.
 - Therefore, they are a useful avenue for diversifying investor portfolios as well as generating significant risk adjusted returns.
- This has led to several international indices, exchange traded funds (ETFs), MFs, and UTs allocating a part of their assets towards Indian securities.
- Indian MFs, diversify their portfolios by launching 'feeder funds' which invest in overseas instruments such as (units of) MF, UTs, ETFs and/or index funds.
- However, if the fund has significant exposure to Indian securities, the purpose of making an overseas investment is defeated.
- Moreover, an indirect investment through an (indirect) overseas investing instrument is not cost-effective for an end-investor in comparison to a direct investment made in Indian securities — thus, fulfilling no purpose.

SEBI's Proposals

- The **upper limit** for investments made by overseas instruments (in India) **has been capped at 20% of their net assets**.
- This would help achieve a balance between facilitating investments in overseas funds with exposure to India and preventing excessive exposure.
- Indian MFs must also ensure that all investors of the overseas instrument are receiving gains proportionate to their contribution – and in no order of preference.
- Indian MFs would also have to ensure that the overseas instrument is managed by an officially appointed, independent investment manager/fund manager who is actively involved in making all investment decisions for the fund.
- These investments are to be made autonomously by the manager without any influence from the investors or undisclosed parties.
- SEBI is also seeking public disclosures of the portfolios of such overseas MF/UTs periodically for the sake of transparency.
- Finally, it warns against the existence of any advisory agreement (business agreement) between the Indian MF and the overseas MF/UT. This is to prevent conflict of interest and avoid any undue advantage.

Breach of 20% Limit

- If the overseas instrument breaches the 20% limit, the Indian MF scheme which is investing in the overseas fund would slip into a **6-month observance period**.
- This period is to be utilised by the overseas fund to rebalance its portfolio following the cap.
- During this time, the domestic MF cannot undertake any fresh investment in the overseas MF/UT.

- If the portfolio is not rebalanced within the observation period, the Indian MF **must liquidate its investment** in the overseas instrument within 6 months.

RBI Transfers Gold From UK To India

- RBI recently transferred 100 metric tonnes of its gold from the United Kingdom to its domestic vaults. This transfer is one of India's largest gold movements since 1991.
- As of March 2024, the RBI's total gold reserves were **822.10 metric tonnes (MT)**, with around 500 MT stored abroad and 300 MT in India.
- The recent transfer has increased the locally stored quantity to over 408 MT, resulting in an almost even split between local and foreign holdings.
- The RBI has also significantly increased its gold purchases recently, acquiring one and a half times the amount of gold in the first four months of 2024 compared to the entire previous year.
- Economists suggest that this aggressive buying is partly due to declining confidence in dollar assets among central banks globally.

Gold Reserves

- Gold reserves refer to the physical gold bullion or coins held by a national central bank. These reserves are distinct from gold jewellery or privately held gold.
- In the past, gold played a central role in the international monetary system. Currencies were directly linked to the price of gold, meaning a specific amount of gold guaranteed the value of a nation's currency. It was known as the **gold standard**.
- However, **this system ended in 1973**. Though the gold standard is no more, gold reserves remain an essential asset for central banks.

Reasons For Keeping Gold Reserves By RBI

- **Stability and Trust:** Gold has been considered a store of value for centuries. It is recognized globally and trusted for its intrinsic value. Thus, holding gold reserves provides financial security for a nation.
 - For instance, during the 2008 global financial crisis, gold prices surged as investors rushed towards safe-haven assets.
- **Risk management:** Central banks diversify their reserves to reduce risks. Holding a mix of currencies, bonds, and gold reduces the risk associated with any single asset class.
- **Protection against inflation:** Gold is an effective hedge against inflation. As the value of fiat money decreases with inflation, gold typically retains its value, preserving purchasing power.
 - For example, in the 1970s, when inflation rates were high globally, gold prices increased significantly, providing a buffer against the currencies' devaluation
- **Settlement of International Trade:** Gold is a liquid asset that can be converted into cash or other currencies within no time.
- **Central bank credibility:** Maintaining gold reserves boosts confidence in the central bank's financial strength and credibility. It reassures investors and international partners of the country's economic stability.
 - During periods of economic turmoil, such as the 1991 economic crisis in India, the RBI pledged part of its gold reserves to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), demonstrating its financial stability and credibility.
- **Managing liquidity and stability:** Gold reserves can be used by central banks as a monetary policy tool to manage liquidity and stabilize the economy.

Reasons For Storing Gold Overseas	Reasons For Transferring Gold Back To India
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storing gold with foreign banks is a common practice in many countries, including India. The primary locations where RBI store gold overseas are Bank of England in the United Kingdom and Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Switzerland. • High security: Foreign banks, particularly those in major financial centers like London, New York, and Zurich, have state-of-the-art security measures. These institutions have extensive experience and infrastructure designed to safeguard large quantities of gold. • Market proximity: Storing gold in major financial centres ensures quick access to global gold markets. These locations facilitate the rapid buying, selling, or swapping of gold, enhancing liquidity. • Diversification: Diversifying storage locations internationally helps reduce geopolitical risks. In the event of political instability or conflict in one country, gold reserves stored abroad remain secure. • Professional handling: Foreign banks specializing in gold storage offer professional handling and management services. The services include regular audits, efficient transportation, and secure storage practices. • Central Bank Cooperation: Foreign banks in major financial centres often have strong relationships with global central banks, facilitating cooperation and coordination in times of financial need. 	<p>The RBI has not given specific reasons for this move. However, according to experts some reasons for this decision by the RBI are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geopolitical considerations: Geopolitical tensions can create uncertainty about the safety of international assets. • The <u>recent freezing of Russian assets by Western nations and concerns about the UK economy</u> has possibly increased the Indian government’s worries about the safety of gold reserves overseas. • Security and Control: Bringing gold back home will give the RBI <u>more direct control and potentially reduce reliance on foreign vaults</u>. • Cost savings: Storing gold abroad can <u>incur storage and insurance fees</u>. Bringing it to India could save on these costs. • Economic signal: It could be a signal of confidence in the Indian economy and its financial stability.

ONDC Hits Record Transaction

- The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) recorded an all time high of 8.9 million transactions across retail and ride-hailing segments. This represents a 23 per cent month-on-month increase in transaction volume.
- The retail segment, hit a new peak of 5 million orders last month, up from 3.59 million in April.
 - The ride-hailing segment witnessed slower growth, increasing from 3.6 million trips in April to 3.8 million in May
- Among the States, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra remained the top three in terms of placing orders. Uttar Pradesh saw orders near double, while Bihar reported 42 per cent growth.
- ONDC now has 5,35,000 sellers across over 1,200 cities, with 84 per cent being small sellers. These small sellers contribute 56 per cent of the total orders, aligning with the ONDC’s goal of benefiting small businesses.

ONDC

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

- It has been incorporated as a private sector led non-profit company, to create a facilitative model to help small retailers take advantage of digital commerce.
- It is **not an application, platform, intermediary, or software but a set of specifications** designed to facilitate open, unbundled, and interoperable open networks.
- It aims at promoting open networks developed on open-sourced methodology, using open specifications and open network protocols independent of any specific platform.

Need to Develop ONDC

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

Functioning of ONDC

- The ONDC project is modelled around the successful Unified Payments Interface (UPI) project. The UPI project allows people to send or receive money irrespective of the payments platforms on which they are registered.
- Similarly, the government wants to ensure that buyers and sellers of goods in the e-commerce market can transact irrespective of the platforms on which they are registered.
- The platform basically works on **two ends** — the seller side and the buyer side. The ONDC platform lies in the middle of the interfaces hosting the buyers and the sellers.
- On the ONDC, there will be several other backend partners such as logistics service providers, enterprise resource planners, e-commerce store hosting service providers, etc.

Benefits

ONDC is expected to digitise the entire value chain, standardise operations, promote inclusion of suppliers, derive efficiency in logistics, and enhance value for consumers.

It will create a level playing field for smaller offline traders who have been hurt by the unfair trade practices of e-commerce giants.

It will provide access to a large repository of buyer and seller data for those joining the open-source platform. Such data has so far been accumulated by large e-commerce marketplaces without providing access to this data for their individual sellers.

It will also help merchants to save their data to build credit history and reach consumers.

The platform will also be compliant with the Information Technology Act, 2000 and designed for compliance with the emerging Personal Data Protection Bill.

Meaning of open-source

- Making a software or a process open-source means that the code or the steps of that process is made available freely for others to use, redistribute and modify.
- For example, the operating system of Apple's iPhones — iOS — is closed source, meaning it cannot be legally modified or reverse engineered.
- However, Google's Android operating system is open-source, and therefore it is possible by smartphone makers such as Samsung, Xiaomi, OnePlus, etc to modify it for their hardware.

Bank Clinic

- The All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) has launched an online 'Bank Clinic' to assist bank customers with grievance redress.
- It is an initiative amid rapid expansion in technology and a series of RBI guidelines on retail banking.
- The Bank Clinic will **not be liable to resolve the customer's query** but **will guide them on available remedies**.
- It serves as an additional channel alongside the normal Banking Ombudsman process.
- A customer can fill details of her complaint, create a ticket, and receive a reply in five working days on the remedies available and information on what the RBI guidelines prescribe on that matter.

AIBEA

- Founded in 1946 in Kolkata, AIBEA is the oldest and largest national trade union of bank employees in India.
- It plays an important role in advocating the rights, welfare and interests of bank workers.

Rise in India's external debt

- India's external debt at the end of March 2024 was placed at \$663.8 billion, an increase of \$39.7 billion from its level at end-March 2023.
- If the valuation effect were excluded, external debt would have increased by \$48.4 billion instead of \$ 39.7 billion.
 - Valuation effect due to appreciation of the U.S. dollar vis-à-vis the Indian rupee and other major currencies such as yen, euro & SDR amounted to \$8.7 billion.
- Despite the rise, the country's external debt to GDP ratio declined to 18.7 per cent at end-March 2024 from 19 per cent at the end of March 2023. The ratio comprises both government and non-government debt.
- Outstanding debt of both government and non-government sectors increased. The **government's external debt stood at 4.2 per cent of GDP** while the non-government sector's external debt was placed at 14.5 per cent.
- **US dollar-denominated debt remained the largest component** of India's external debt, with a share of **53.8 per cent**, followed by debt denominated in the Indian rupee (31.5 per cent), yen (5.8 per cent), SDR (5.4 per cent), and euro (2.8 per cent).
- **Loans remained the largest component of external debt**, with a share of **33.4%**, followed by currency and deposits (23.3%), trade credit and advances (17.9%) and debt securities (17.3%).
- For the said period, **long-term debt (with original maturity of above one year)** was placed at \$ 541.2 billion, recording an increase of US\$ 45.6 billion from a year before.
- However, on the other hand, the share of **short-term debt (with original maturity of up to one year)** in total external debt declined to 18.5 per cent in the same period.
- The share of outstanding debt of non-financial corporations in total external debt was the highest at 37.4%, followed by deposit-taking corporations (except the central bank) (28.1%), general government (22.4%) and other financial corporations (7.3%).

Fall in Global Unemployment

- The International Labour Organization's (ILO) **World Employment and Social Outlook 2024** update predicts that the **global unemployment rate is expected to fall slightly to 4.9%** from 5% in 2023.

- The figure revises downward the previous ILO projection of 5.2 per cent for this year. However, the downward trend for joblessness is expected to flatten in 2025, with unemployment remaining at 4.9 per cent.
- The **jobs gap** - which measures the number of persons without a job but who want to work - stands at **402 million persons** in 2024. This includes 183 million people who are counted as unemployed.
- Despite the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, progress in reducing poverty and informality has slowed down in comparison to the previous decade.
- The number of workers in informal employment has grown from approximately 1.7 billion in 2005 to 2.0 billion in 2024.

Gender Inequality

- Women, especially in low-income countries, are disproportionately affected by the lack of opportunities.
- The **jobs gap for women** in low-income countries reaches a striking 22.8 per cent, versus 15.3 per cent for men. This contrasts with high-income countries, where the rate is 9.7 per cent for women and 7.3 per cent for men.
- These differences are just the tip of the iceberg, as significantly more women than men are completely detached from the labour market. Family responsibilities is the reason behind the difference seen in women's and men's employment rates.
- Globally, **45.6 per cent of working-age women are employed** in 2024, compared to **69.2 per cent of men**.
- Even when women are employed, they tend to earn far less than men, particularly in low-income countries.
- While women in high-income countries earn seventy-three cents compared to a dollar earned by men, this figure drops to just forty-four cents in low-income countries.

Vadhavan Port

- The Union Cabinet has approved setting up a Major Port at Vadhavan, Palghar District, Maharashtra.
- The Project will be constructed by **Vadhavan Port Project Limited (VPPL)**, an **SPV formed by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) and Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB)** with a shareholding of 74% and 26%, respectively.
- The Vadhavan Port will be developed as an **all-weather Greenfield deep draft major port**. A **greenfield** project refers to a completely new project and **brownfield** projects are pre-existing projects that are modified or upgraded.
- It will be India's **13th major port** and the first major port to be developed in partnership with a state government (Maharashtra). It will be developed in two phases, under the landlord model, widely followed globally.
 - In the **landlord port model**, the publicly governed port authority acts as a regulatory body and as landlord, while private firms carry out port operations, mainly cargo handling activities.
- The landlord port, in return, gets a share of the revenue from the private entity.
- The total project cost, including the land acquisition component is **Rs.76,220 Crore**. This will include development of core infrastructure, terminals and other commercial infrastructure in public-private partnerships (PPP) mode.
- The cabinet also approved establishing the road connectivity between the Port and National Highways by Ministry of Road Transport & Highways and rail linkage to the existing rail network and the Dedicated Rail Freight Corridor by Ministry of Railways.

- The Port will comprise nine container terminals, each 1000 meters long, four multipurpose berths, including the coastal berth, four liquid cargo berths, a Ro-Ro berth, and a Coast Guard berth.

Significance

- Vadhavan Port, on completion, will be **one of the top ten ports of the world**. It will create a **cumulative capacity of 298 million metric tons (MMT) per annum**.
- This will include around 23.2 million TEUs (Twenty-foot equivalents) of container handling capacity, which no other Indian ports have due to natural limitations.
- The capacities created will also **aid EXIM trade flow through IMEEC (India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor) and INSTC (International North South Transportation Corridor)**.
- It will create state-of-the-art terminals capable of handling mainline mega vessels plying on international shipping lines between the Far East, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas.
- The project, aligned with the objectives of PM Gati Shakti program, will add to further economic activity and also have the potential for direct and indirect employment opportunities for around 12 lakh individuals, thereby contributing to the local economy.

Major Ports

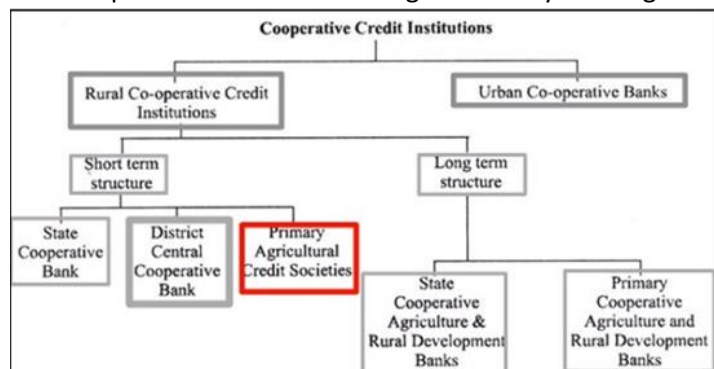
- **Major ports** are under the **administrative control of Ministry of Shipping** and **non-major ports (minor ports)** are under the **jurisdiction of respective State Maritime Boards/ State Government**.
- There are 12 major ports and 200 non-major ports (minor ports) in the country.

RBI Cancels License of City Co-operative Bank

- RBI has cancelled the licence of City Co-operative Bank Ltd, Mumbai as the bank does not have adequate capital and earning prospects.
- The bank with its present financial position would be unable to pay its present depositors in full and public interest would be adversely affected if the bank is allowed to carry on its banking business any further.
- On liquidation, every depositor would be entitled to receive deposit insurance claim amount of her deposits up to a monetary ceiling of Rs 5 lakh from **Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC)** subject to the provisions of DICGC Act, 1961.
- About 87% of the depositors are entitled to receive full amount of their deposits from DICGC.

Co-operative Banks

- Cooperative bank is an institution established on the cooperative basis and dealing in ordinary banking business. It belongs to its members, who are both owners and customers of their bank.
- These banks have mostly been centred around communities and localities lending to small borrowers and businesses.
- Like other banks, the cooperative banks are founded by collecting funds through shares, they accept deposits and grant loans.



****Primary Cooperative Banks (PCBs)**, also referred to as Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs), cater to the financial needs of **customers in urban and semi-urban areas**.

Regulation of Co-operative Banks

- Cooperative Banks are registered under the **Cooperative Societies Act**.

- Banking laws were made applicable to cooperative societies in 1966 through an amendment to the **Banking Regulation Act, 1949**.
- Since then, **banking related functions are regulated by the RBI** and **management related functions are regulated by respective State Governments/Central Government**.
- Powers have also been delegated to National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (**NABARD**) to **conduct inspection** of State and Central Cooperative Banks.
- However, **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies** and long-term co-operatives fall outside the purview of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and hence are **not regulated by the RBI**.

Significance of Co-operative banks	Issues with Co-operative Banks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Credit Source: The rural population benefits from cooperative banking as they provide credit at a lower rate as compared to the money lenders who tend to provide credit at a higher rate of interest. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This protects the rural population from the monopoly of the money lenders. • Encourages Productive Borrowing: Previously the cultivators used to borrow for consumption and other unproductive purposes. Co-operative banks have created a culture of productive borrowing by discouraging unproductive borrowing. • Encouragement to Saving and Investment: Cooperative credit movement has encouraged saving and investment by developing these habits among the agriculturists. Instead of hoarding money the rural people tend to deposit their savings in the cooperative or other banking institutions. • Improvement in Farming Methods: Cooperative credit is available for purchasing improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, modern implements, etc. Hence, cooperative banks have also greatly helped in the <u>introduction of better agricultural methods</u>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They suffer from low or weak quality of loan assets and from highly unsatisfactory recovery of loans. • Most of the cooperative banks are plagued with a lack of professional management and reluctance in technology adoption. • Due to weak corporate governance they have become <u>places of political patronage, corrupt financial practices and gross mismanagement</u>. • Another problem arises from the duality of control i.e. RBI and as well as respective state governments. • Further, they unduly depend on government capital rather than member capital.

National Litigation Policy

With an aim to reduce the burden of pending court cases in which the government is a party, the Union Ministry of Law and Justice approved the National Litigation Policy, which will now be sent to the Cabinet for approval.

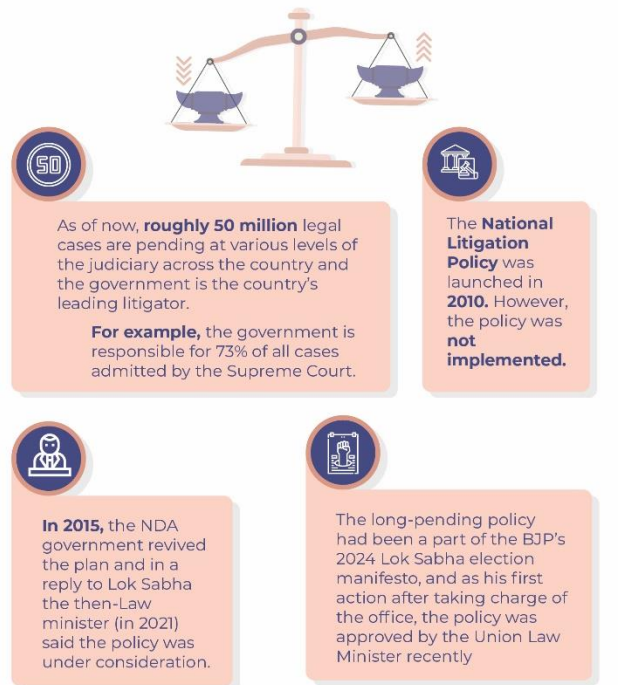
About the National Litigation Policy

- It is based on the recognition that **the government and its various agencies are the predominant litigants in courts and tribunals** in the country.
- Its aim is to **transform the government into an efficient and responsible litigant**.
 - **Efficient litigant means:** A litigant who -
 - Is represented by competent and sensitive legal persons.
 - Focus on the core issues involved in the litigation and address them squarely.
 - Manage and conduct litigation in a cohesive, coordinated and time-bound manner.
 - Ensure that good cases are won and bad cases are not unnecessarily pursued.
 - **Responsible litigant means:**
 - That false pleas and technical points will not be taken and shall be discouraged.
 - Ensuring that correct facts & all relevant documents will be placed before the court.
 - Nothing will be concealed from the court and there will be no attempt to mislead any court or Tribunal.
 - **Prioritisation in litigation** has to be achieved with particular emphasis on welfare legislation, social reform, weaker sections.
- The policy suggests that the pending cases with the government as party to be **reviewed on priority basis** to enable quick disposal.
- It also proposed a **monitoring and review mechanism** to sensitise government in important cases and avoid delay and neglect of the same.

Significance of the National Litigation Policy

- **Reduce Government litigation in courts** so that valuable court time would be spent in resolving other pending cases.
- This will help the judiciary to achieve the goal in the National Mission for Justice Delivery & Legal Reforms to **reduce average pendency time from 15 years to 3 years**.
- The policy recognises the fact that it is the responsibility of the government -
 - **To protect the rights of citizens, to respect fundamental rights and**
 - Those in charge of the conduct of government litigation should never forget this basic principle.

Background of National Litigation Policy



NOTA

More than 2 lakh None of the Above (NOTA) votes were polled in Indore Constituency in the recently held Lok Sabha Elections.

About NOTA

NOTA allows the electors to formally reject all the running candidates by opting not to vote for any of them, indicating a stance of disapproval or lack of confidence in the available choices. Its symbol appears in the last panel on all Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

** It's also used in countries like France, Belgium, Brazil, Finland, and Sweden.

When was it Introduced and Why?

- It was first introduced back in **2013** during the Assembly elections of Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh- on the directions of the Supreme Court (SC) in the *PUCL vs Union of India* case and later in the 2014 General Lok Sabha Elections.
- *PUCL vs Union of India, 2013*- The court in this case accepted a decade old recommendation of Election Commission of India (ECI) to introduce NOTA option in EVMs and ballot papers to protect voter secrecy as well as allow voters to express their dissent/disapproval against the contesting candidates and to reduce bogus voting. And directed the ECI to install NOTA button on EVMs stating that "NOTA will force political parties to accept the will of the people and field candidates known for their integrity".

Is NOTA allowed in Rajya Sabha Polls?

The Supreme Court ruled that NOTA is not applicable in Rajya Sabha elections due to the following reasons:

- **Nature of Elections:** Rajya Sabha elections are not direct elections by the people but rather by elected representatives. The court argued that introducing NOTA in such a system could lead to issues like corruption and horse-trading.
- **Purpose of NOTA:** The court emphasized that the purpose of NOTA is to allow the electorate to express their disapproval of all candidates in direct elections, which is not analogous to the Rajya Sabha electoral process.
- **Constitutional and Legal Framework:** The ruling stated that NOTA could not be applied uniformly to all forms of elections due to the differing nature of these elections and their legal frameworks.

Impact on Elections

- **Shows Dissatisfaction of Voters & Compel Parties to Nominate Better Candidate** - Even though a NOTA vote represents a neutral stance and has no contribution in determining the winning total, it serves as a valuable metric to gauge the level of dissatisfaction among voters revealing the number of voters dissatisfied with contesting candidates.
- **Fluctuates Victory Margin**- NOTA votes contribute to fluctuations in victory margins by diverting the anticipated votes.
- **Protecting Secrecy:** It allows voters to maintain the secrecy of their ballot while rejecting all candidates. Without NOTA, voters might spoil their ballots or abstain, which can be less clear in its intent.

What happens if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in a constituency?

If the highest number of votes in a seat are polled for NOTA, the candidate with highest number of valid votes (runner-up candidate) wins the election as NOTA votes have no numerical significance in the outcome of elections. Although this has never happened in Lok Sabha elections.

Current Petition

- The Supreme Court is considering a petition to frame guidelines for elections to be declared "null and void" if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in the constituency.

- The petition invokes Maharashtra, Haryana, Puducherry, Delhi, and Chandigarh as examples of states and union territories where the State Election Commission (SEC) passed orders declaring NOTA as a “Fictional Electoral Candidate” in local elections (including elections for panchayats and municipal bodies) and directs to hold fresh election if the NOTA votes exceed the votes received by all other individual candidates.

EXIT Polls

The Exit polls for the Lok Sabha 2024 elections were way off the mark this time as the performance of the BJP-led NDA was far below its forecast of over 350 seats.

History and Regulations of Exit polls

- **Introduction-** The exit polls were first released in **1957** during the second Lok Sabha elections by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion.
- **Ban by ECI-** During 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the ECI issued guidelines under Article 324 of the Constitution (empowers ECI to monitor, direct and control the elections)- **prohibiting** newspapers and news channels from publishing results of pre-election surveys and exit polls between 5 pm on February 14 (*Before 48 hours of election start*) and 5 pm on March 7 (Last day of election). The first votes were scheduled to be cast on February 16 and the last votes on March 7.
 - The guidelines also mandated newspapers and channels to disclose the sample size of the electorate, the details of polling methodology, the margin of error and the background of the polling agency while publishing the survey results.
- **Challenge by Media-** The guidelines were challenged by media in the Supreme Court (SC) and the High Courts (HC) of Delhi and Rajasthan on the ground that it violated their fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression. The SC refused to stay the guidelines, making the 1998 Lok Sabha elections the only elections in the country in which both opinion and exit polls were banned for close to a month.
- **Attempt to Re-impose the Guidelines-** The ECI tried to re-invoke these guidelines ahead of the 1999 Lok Sabha elections but was opposed by sections of the media. ECI referred the matter to SC’s Constitution Bench, which held that the guidelines cannot be enforced without any statutory backing.
- **Amendment to Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951-** The ECI in 2004 approached the Law Ministry seeking an amendment to the RPA to provide for a ban on both exit and opinion polls for a specified period. In 2010, the recommendation was accepted in part, and restrictions were imposed only on exit polls through the introduction of Section 126(A) in the Act.
 - ✓ **Section 126A of the RPA, 1951** provides for restriction on publication and dissemination of result of exit polls by means of the print or electronic media from the **first hour of the first day of poll till half an hour after closing of the poll in all the States and UTs**. Violation of this provision may attract imprisonment for a term of up to two years or a fine or both.
 - ✓ The restrictions were proposed to avoid influencing voters who are yet to vote.

**ECI in 2013 recommended to the Law Ministry to forbid publishing results of opinion polls as well from the date of notification of elections until the end of polling. The demand was supported by all political parties except for the BJP. But no action has been taken on it so far by the Ministry.

About Exit Polls

Exit polls are an estimate of the votes polled in an election. It is conducted right after the people have voted; hence the name exit polls. Using the swing model, the results are based on the data collected by interviewing large number of voters over a phone call or face-to-face using a structured questionnaire and by using the previous election results (historical data). The results are released on the last day of voting.

- Survey agencies conduct exit polls with as big as 10 lakhs voters.

How are Exit Polls different from Opinion Polls?

An opinion poll is a survey conducted before the elections to gather views of voters on different election-related issues whereas an exit poll is conducted immediately after the voters have casted their votes.

How Accurate Are The Exit Poll Results

- The results are not always accurate. For instance, in the recent general elections, all exit polls predicted the victory of NDA with over 350 seats, with News 24-Today's Chanakya predicting 400 seats for the alliance. While India Today-Axis My India predicted 361-401 seats for NDA and 131-166 seats for the opposition INDIA bloc in the 543-member Lok Sabha.
- But in reality, the NDA secured 292 seats and the opposition I.N.D.I.A bloc bagged 233 seats.

Challenges Faced While Conducting Exit Polls

1. **Diversity in all Aspects-** i.e., in terms of location, caste, religion, language, education and economic levels- impact the voting behavior. Over or under-representation of any of these diverse sections of voters also affects the accuracy of estimates.
2. **Changes in Poll Alliances-** A split or a merger of parties between two elections poses difficulty in estimating the seat share as swing model uses the results of previous elections in predicting the same. For example, BJP and JD(U) in Bihar. The complexity of swings increases as more and more political players are added.
3. **Faulty Basic Premise:** Exit polls operate under the assumption that voters will truthfully reveal their choices during personal interviews. But this cannot be always true, some people can intentionally provide socially acceptable answers rather than revealing their true preference while others, particularly from marginalized or vulnerable communities, may feel pressured to conceal their true opinions.
4. **Cost-Cutting and Methodological Pressures:** Budget constraints and time limitations can compromise the quality of exit polls. The pressure to deliver results promptly can also lead to shortcuts in methodology, such as relying on computer-assisted telephone interviews, this may not reflect the ground realities accurately.
5. **Sampling Errors:** Human involvement in sampling introduces the possibility of error.
6. **Reliance on Historical Data:** for analysis may not provide an accurate representation of current sentiments. Factors such as population growth, changes in voter lists, and shifts in turnout can complicate predictions.
7. **Lack of Caste and Socio-Economic Data:** makes it difficult to assess the impact of caste dynamics on electoral outcomes. The limited information on the economic profiles of voters can also hamper the predictive accuracy of exit polls.
8. **Insufficient Representation of Women:** in the sample size of exit polls can lead to errors in projecting electoral outcomes, particularly in constituencies where women outnumber men.
9. **Close Elections:** When elections are very close, pollsters rarely tend to be accurate on vote and seat shares. In this case, the survey should be considered only if the polling agency reveals in its methodology- the sample size, the mode of survey, the representation of the sample, and inbuilt error margins.

Criticism

- **Biased Results-** Exit as well as opinion polls can be controversial if the agency conducting them is perceived to be biased.
- **Influenced Results-** These surveys can be influenced by the choice, population sample, wording and timing of the questions.
- **Motivated by Rival Parties-** Opinion and exit polls can be motivated and sponsored by rival parties and could have a distorting effect on the choices voters make in a protracted election, rather than simply reflecting public sentiment or views.

Global Scenario

- **European Union (EU)-** Sixteen EU countries ban reporting of opinion polls, with ban timeframes ranging from a full month to just 24 hours before polling day. Only Italy, Slovakia and Luxembourg have a ban of more than 7 days.

- *United Kingdom*- There are no restrictions on publishing results of opinion polls but results of exit polls can't be published until the voting is over.
- *USA*- The media coverage of opinion polls is regarded as an integral part of free speech in elections, and publication is allowed at any time. The only restriction that exists is not reporting the results of exit polls before voting is over on election day. News organizations commissioning the polls voluntarily impose this restriction upon themselves.

What Next for Jailed Candidates Who Won the Election?

Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh and Engineer Rashid, both of whom are currently imprisoned, won the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections from Punjab's Khadoor Sahib and Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla constituency respectively.

What Next For These Jailed Leaders

- **Taking Oath as Parliamentarians**- The elected duo now has a constitutional mandate as parliamentarians, despite being in prison and therefore taking oath is the first step towards fulfilling their role as parliamentarians. For this purpose, they will have to seek permission from relevant authorities for temporary parole to be escorted to Parliament for the oath-taking ceremony.
- **Duties as a Lawmaker**- The jailed MPs must write to the Speaker that they will not be able to attend the proceedings since their seats can be declared vacant for being absent from the house proceedings for over 60 days without prior sanction from the chair under Article 101(4) of the Constitution. The Speaker will then refer their requests to the *House Committee on Absence of Members* which will recommend if the members should be allowed to remain absent from House proceedings. The recommendation will then be put to the vote of the House by the Speaker for the final decision.
 - ✓ The *Committee on Absence of Members* from the sittings of the House is constituted under *Rule 325 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha* for one year. It consists of 15 members nominated by the Speaker and its Chairperson is appointed by the Speaker from amongst the members of the Committee.
- **Functioning from Jail**- Performing duties as an MP from jail is complex. The jailed lawmakers may continue to discharge their duties from prison by communicating their directives to the House through their party colleagues or family members or legal teams and stay involved in legislative activities. However, their ability to participate in parliamentary sessions and committee meetings is severely restricted.
- **Impact on Constituencies**- The representation and governance will be effective in the constituencies concerned. People from these constituencies may face challenges in accessing their elected representatives. Although the

Why are these Leaders Imprisoned?

- Amritpal Singh has been in Dibrugarh jail of Assam under the National Security Act (NSA) since March 2023.
 - NSA is a preventive detention law under which the government can detain individuals for up to 12 months without pressing formal charges.
- Rashid, a former MLA, has been in jail for the last five years under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) on charges of money laundering in an alleged terror-funding case.
 - UAPA is the primary counter-terror law in the country.

Previous Instances of Temporary Parole for Oath-Taking Ceremony

George Fernandes, 1977-

The trade unionist who was elected from the Muzaffarpur seat while in jail during the Emergency, was released from prison before the oath ceremony.

Atul Rai, 2020-

Allahabad High Court granted parole to Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader to take his oath as a MP.

Sanjay Singh, 2021- The Aam Aadmi Party leader, imprisoned in Tihar Jail on money laundering charges, was granted permission by a court to take his oath as a Rajya Sabha MP for a second term.

Akhil Gogoi, 2021- After winning from Sibsagar, Assam, was allowed by an NIA court to temporarily leave the prison to take his oath as a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly.

elected MPs can provide some level of service and representation from jail, their ability to fully engage in parliamentary duties and advocacy is inevitably compromised.

- **Disqualification**- As per Section 8 of the Representation of People Act (1951), Conviction and a sentence of two or more years will lead to their disqualification from Parliament. Additionally, they face a further six-year disqualification from participating in elections, starting from the date of their release.
 - ✓ This disqualification applies only after a person has been convicted and does not extend to those who have merely been charged with criminal offences.
 - ✓ While a lawfully imprisoned person is prohibited from voting under Section 62(5) of the RPA (if they are confined in a prison, whether on a sentence of imprisonment or transportation or otherwise or if they are in the lawful custody of the police)

Cabinet Committee on Security

Starting with a new term in office, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi retained his core team leaving the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) unchanged.

About The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

It is headed by the PM and is responsible for all major decisions related to significant appointments, issues of national security, and the country's defence expenditure.

Members- Prime Minister, Union Minister of Home Affairs, Defence, Finance and Foreign Affairs.

** The National Security Adviser (NSA), the Cabinet Secretary and the Defence Secretary have also been attendees of the CCS meetings.

Functions- The CCS deals with:

1. All defence related issues & all matters relating to atomic energy.
2. **Defense Policy and Expenditure:** Making decisions on defense matters, including the approval of defense acquisitions, budget allocations, and modernization of the armed forces.
 - ✓ For Example: In February 2024, CCS cleared the acquisition of over 200 BrahMos extended-range supersonic cruise missiles for deployment on its warships.

What are Cabinet Committees?

Cabinet Committees are constituted by the PM with selected members of the Cabinet. They resolve issues and formulate proposals for the consideration of the Cabinet and take decisions on matters assigned to them. The Cabinet is empowered to review such decisions.

These committees are constituted or reconstituted whenever a new government is formed, or the Cabinet undergoes a reshuffle. They are extra-constitutional in nature.

The PM can change the number of committees and modify the functions assigned to them.

Each committee consists of three to eight members. Usually, only Cabinet ministers are members of these committees. They are partly designed to reduce the burden on the Union Cabinet

If the Prime Minister is a member of any such committee, then he acts as the head of that committee.

Presently, there are eight Cabinet committees- 1) Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, 2) Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, 3) Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, 4) Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth (introduced in 2019), 5) Cabinet Committee on Security, 6) Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs, 7) Cabinet Committee on Employment & Skill Development (introduced in 2019), and 8) Cabinet Committee on Accommodation.

All committees are headed by the PM except the Cabinet Committee on Accommodation (Headed by Home Minister) and Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs (Headed by Home Minister).

3. **National Security Policy:** Issues relating to law and order & National (Economic and political issues) and internal security (with Manpower Requirement).
4. **Counter-Terrorism & Intelligence Coordination:** Ensuring effective coordination among various intelligence agencies to combat terrorism.
5. **International Relations:** Policy matters concerning foreign affairs that have internal or external security implications, including cases relating to agreements with other countries on security-related issues.
6. All cases involving capital expenditure of more than 1000 crore rupees in respect of Department of Defence Production Department of Defence Research and Development.

National Crisis Management Committee (NCCM)

Recently, the *National Crisis Management Committee's (NCCM)* meeting was held to review the preparedness to deal with heat wave and forest fires.

About National Crisis Management Committee (NCCM)

It is country's apex body to **handle any emergency**. At the national level, Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and NCCM are the key committees involved in the top-level decision-making wrt **Crisis Management**.

NCCM plays a crucial role in managing natural disasters by reviewing preparedness measures, coordinating relief efforts, and providing logistic and financial support to state governments to minimize damage and loss of life.

- ✓ The basic responsibility for undertaking relief, rehabilitation, preparedness, mitigation and response measures in the event of a disaster rests with the concerned state government. The central government through NCCM supplements these efforts.
- ✓ It continuously monitors the crisis situation & reports to the Prime Minister and other high-level authorities, keeping them informed of the response progress and challenges.
- ✓ Logistic support includes deployment of aircrafts and boats, specialist teams of Armed Forces, Central Paramilitary Forces (CAPF) and personnel of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), arrangements for relief materials and essential commodities including medical stores, restoration of critical infrastructure facilities including communication network etc.

Composition

- *Cabinet Secretary (chairman);*
- Secretaries to Prime Minister and Ministries of Home Affairs, Agriculture, Defence & Cooperation;
- Directors of RAW and Intelligence Bureau (IB).

Key Functions

- **Coordination & Resource Allocation:** Oversee the Command, Control and Coordination of the disaster response in the country including natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and cyclones, as well as man-made crises like *industrial accidents and terrorism*.
- **Crisis Management & Strategic Planning:** Give directions to the **Crisis Management Group (CMG)** as deemed necessary.

Crisis Management Group (CMG)-

- Annually reviews contingency plans formulated by the central ministries/departments.
- Reviews measures required for dealing with a natural calamity.
- Coordinates the activities of the central ministries and state governments in relation to disaster preparedness and relief.
- Obtains information from the nodal officers on measures relating to the above.

It is headed by the Relief Commissioner and consists of senior officers from various ministries and departments. It meets at least twice a year and as often as desired by the Relief Commissioner.

Extra Mile: How Is NDMA Different From NCMC?

- NDMA was created as per Disaster Management Act, 2005 with the **Prime Minister** as its Chairperson. NDMA, as the apex body, is mandated to lay down the policies, plans and guidelines for **Disaster Management** (approving the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP)).
- NDMA establishes and oversees disaster management *policies, plans, and guidelines, ensuring coordinated prevention, mitigation, response, and capacity building* at national and state levels, and supports international disaster relief as needed.
 - ✓ The Disaster Management Act, 2005 has provided the **legal and institutional framework** for disaster management in India at the national, state and district levels.
- NDMA has developed a *Web Based Dynamic Composite Risk Atlas & Decision Support System (Web DCRA& DSS) tool* for Cyclone impacts forecasting covering all the 13 Coastal States and UTs.
- During India's G-20 Presidency in 2023, NDMA steered the constitution of a G20 Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).
- NDMA uses the National Disaster Management Information System (NDMIS) to monitor progress on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR).
 - ✓ The SFDRR is a major agreement that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 following the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan.
 - ✓ The framework also works with other 2030 Agenda agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

{For more about NDMA refer the topic Notified Disaster in Editor's Cut Section}

Postal Ballots

Recently, during the counting of votes for the general elections, the opposition raised concerns regarding the counting of postal ballots.

About Postal Ballots

Postal ballots allow those registered voters to cast their votes by mail who are unable to vote in person due to various circumstances like being away from their home constituency, facing a disability, or performing essential services on election day.

Who Is Eligible to Vote Through Postal Ballots

- *Service Voters*: including members of the armed forces, paramilitary forces,
- *Absentee Voters*: Individuals unable to vote in person due work commitments, illness
- *Electors on Election Duty*: like government officials and polling staff assigned duties at polling stations other than their own.
- *Electors Under Preventive Detention*
- *Electors Covering Polling Day Activities*: such as media persons with authorization letters from the Election Commission (EC) and those involved in essential services such as metros, railways, and healthcare.
- *Senior Citizens over the age of 85 and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)*.

How Can One Apply For Postal Ballots?

- Eligible voters must apply, Form 12 D (request letter for issuance of postal ballot), to the Returning Officer (RO) of their respective constituency containing personal details, voter id details and the reason for seeking a postal ballot. The RO verifies eligibility and issues the postal ballot if the criteria are met.
- For service voters, the postal ballot paper is sent through the record office directly or through the Ministry of External Affairs if the service voters are serving outside India.
- For senior citizens, this service is provided through a team of two polling officials, a videographer, and security personnel who visit the residence of the elector to facilitate this process. The date and time of the officials' visit is informed via SMS.

Process Of Voting Through Postal Ballots

1. *Receiving the Postal Ballot:* After examining the applications, the RO prints the required postal ballots and within 48 hours of printing, sends the **ballot papers** to eligible voters on their registered address, along with declaration form, secrecy sleeve, and pre-paid return envelope.
2. *Marking the Ballot:* Voters mark their preferred candidate(s) on the ballot paper in the secrecy sleeve to ensure confidentiality and fill out the declaration form, providing their signature and other relevant details.
3. *Returning the Postal Ballot:* After sealing the marked ballot paper and declaration form inside the secrecy sleeve, it is placed into the pre-paid return envelope and mailed to the designated address before the hour fixed for commencement of counting of votes.

Counting of Votes Received Through Postal Ballots

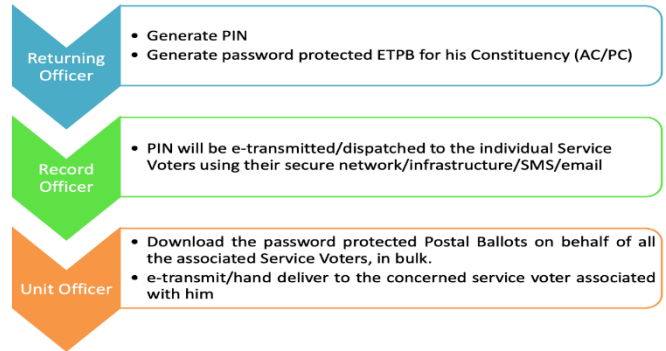
- *Process-* These votes are counted separately from votes cast on EVMs. The postal ballots are collected by postal authorities on the counting day and brought to the counting center. The RO and election officials then scrutinize postal ballots for validity and integrity, adding valid ballots to the respective candidate's vote count.
- *Old Guidelines-* Till the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the counting of postal ballots was taken up first followed by EVM counting after 30 minutes. All postal ballots had to be counted before the EVM counting could be completed and the second-to-last round of EVM counting only began after postal ballots were fully counted.
- *New Guidelines-*
 - The ECI after the 2019 elections decided to tweak the guidelines as:

- the number of postal ballots had increased with the introduction of the *Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)*
- the mandatory counting of VVPAT slips of 5 randomly selected polling stations per Assembly constituency

- As per the new guidelines, EVM counting can now proceed regardless of the postal ballot count stage i.e. after 30 minutes of the commencement of postal ballot counting, the EVM counting can start and continue irrespective of the stage of postal ballot counting. Once EVM counting is done, VVPAT slips can be counted.
- The rule for mandatory re-counting of postal ballots was also revised. Previously, a recount occurred if the victory margin was less than the total postal ballots. But now, only invalid postal ballots are to be re-verified if the margin is less than the number of such rejected ballots.

Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETBPS)-

- ETPBS was introduced which allows transmitting the ballot through Electronic Means to the service voters i.e. Members of armed forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force) serving outside their home states, government workers stationed outside of India, and their wives. Overseas Voters can also use this facility.
- It enables the voters to cast their vote on an electronically received postal ballot from their preferred location, which is outside their originally assigned voting constituency.
- The specific quick response code ensures confidentiality and prevents the duplication of cast ETPB.
- ETPBS works in following manner (*given in fig.*)



Concerns Raised by the Opposition Parties Regarding New Guidelines

- Over Counting Process as the number of postal ballots expected to increase.
- Cited Bihar's Example- The winning margin in the 2020 Bihar elections conducted after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic- was 12,700 votes for the state, while the number of postal ballots was 52,000. The postal ballots were counted at the end of the counting of EVM votes. This sequence raised concerns among the public and opposition parties as it could have influenced the outcome, especially in cases where the winning margins are narrow and could potentially impact the perceived transparency and fairness of the election results.
- 2019 Guidelines undermine Rule 54A of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961- which says that the RO should first deal with the postal ballot papers. The opposition parties also claimed that the EC cannot nullify the rules through executive directions by issuing letters and therefore should withdraw the 2019 notification.

GREAT Scheme

Recently, the Empowered Programme Committee (EPC) of National Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM) approved 7 startup proposals under the GREAT scheme to boost innovation and sustainability and to foster transformative developments in the Textile Industry.

- ✓ GREAT: **G**rant for **R**esearch & **E**ntrepreneurship across **A**spiring Innovators in **T**echnical Textiles. Under GREAT, Ministry of Textiles (MoT) shall provide grant-in-aid of normally upto INR 50 Lakhs for a period of 18 months.
- ✓ It encourages young innovators, scientists/technologists, and startup ventures to translate their ideas into commercial technologies/products
 - ✓ Support under GREAT scheme to any individual/start-up will only be provided for once.

About National Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM)

What is NTTM? The NTTM was approved in 2020 as a four-year programme starting from FY 2020-21 to 2023-24 with an aim to position India as a global leader in technical textiles.

- ✓ Technical Textiles are functional fabrics with applications ranging from agriculture, roads, railway tracks, sportswear, health to bullet proof jacket, fireproof jackets, high altitude combat gear and space applications.
- ✓ Its products are manufactured primarily for technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic characteristics and are divided into 12 broad categories- Aggrotech, BuildTech, ClothTech, Geotech, HomeTech, Indutech, Mobilitech, Meditech, Protech, SportsTech, OekoTech, PackTech depending upon their application areas.

Key Features

- *Promotion of Innovation through 'start-up' and 'ventures' & Trust for Research Output to Develop Indigenous Machineries.*
- *Focus on Development of Biodegradable Technical Textiles Materials-* through research particularly for agro-textiles, geo-textiles and medical textiles.
- *Develop Equipment for Sustainable Disposal-* of used technical textiles, with emphasis on safe disposal of medical and hygiene wastes.

Need- India shares nearly 6% of world market size of 250 billion USD in technical textiles sector & the annual average growth of India is 12% as compared to 4% world average growth but the penetration level of technical textiles in India is just 5-10%, against 30-70% in advanced countries which is very low. Therefore, NTTM aims to improve the penetration level of technical textiles in the country.

Implementation- The mission is being implemented using a three-tier mechanism constituting-

Tier (Chaired By)	Function/Responsibility
1. Mission Steering Group (MSG) (the Union Textiles Minister)	for approving all scientific/technical research projects under NTTM and all financial norms related to various schemes
2. Empowered Programme Committee (EPC) (Secretary, Ministry of Textiles)	approves all projects within the financial limit of each programme as approved by the MSG, except Research Projects and guides the Mission Directorate of NTTM
3. Committee on Technical Textiles on Research, Development & Innovation (Member (Science & Technology) of NITI Aayog)	identifies and recommends all research projects related to strategic sectors such as defence, paramilitary, security, space, and atomic energy to MSG for approval and recommends any change in financial parameters of these approved projects to EPC.

Components- It has four components:

Component	Feature/s
1. Research, Innovation & Development	To conduct fundamental & application-based research activities in Centre for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) laboratories, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) as approved by MSG
2. Promotion & Market Development	To increase the average growth rate of technical textile through market development under 'Make in India' initiatives
3. Export Promotion	By an Export Promotion Council for Technical Textiles
4. Education, Training, Skill Development	Covers its application areas covering engineering, medical, agriculture, aquaculture, and dairy segments

Objective of GREAT Scheme

- *Utilizing Inexhaustive Talent Pool/expertise* to bring innovative products/technologies to the market.
- *Support Young Innovators/Entrepreneurs-* to translate their prototypes to technologies/products.
- *Support Commercialization-* of technologies developed by innovators/startups.

What Is The Funding Criteria Under GREAT Scheme?

- *Grant-in-Aid:* It provides grant-in-aid of up to Rs. 50 lakhs for 18 months. The allocated fund will be released in three instalments (40%:40%:20%), provided that the project is implemented in a Milestone-based manner with at least Two Milestones.

- **Financial Support to Associated Incubators (AI):** The funding to an Individual/Startup Company is to be channeled only through AI which are associated with the Individual/ Startup Company. 10% of the total amount sanctioned to the startup/individual shall be given to the AI in proportion to the approved milestones-based funding pattern for the startup. For example, if the total amount sanctioned to the startup is INR 50 lakhs then the total amount released will be 55 lakhs rupees (50 lakhs for the startup and 10% i.e. 5 lakhs for AI). An AI will receive separate funding for each startup/individual it is associated with.

✓ AI can be chosen from any IITs, National Institute of Technology (NITs), Indian Institute of Science Education & Research (IISERs), Textile Research Associations (TRAs), Centre of Excellence (COE), and Institutions associated/affiliated with Ministry of Textiles like National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) etc.

What Are The Eligibility Criteria Under The Scheme?

For Individual	For Start-Up
<p>The applicant must-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an Indian citizen of minimum age of 21 years. • Be the Project Leader and shall be responsible for all communication and decision making related to the grant. • Be incubated in an Incubator. MoU with the Incubator is required for final approval. • Have a registered company/Start-up before the release of the grant. • Produce a No Objection Certificate (NOC) if the applicant is under formal employment/associated (or a student/researcher) with an academic or research organization. 	<p>The Startup should-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be incorporated as a private limited company or registered as a partnership firm or a limited liability partnership with a turnover less than INR 100 Crores in any of the previous financial years. • A minimum of 51% of the capital should be owned by resident Indian citizen(s). • Be working towards innovation/ improvement of existing products, services, processes & should have the potential to generate employment/create wealth. • Be registered under the Indian Companies Act, 1956/2013 and its incorporation date should not be more than 5 years at the time of application for GREAT scheme. • Have adequate & functional Research & Development (R&D) facilities to execute the project.

Exclusions

- Basic Ideas/exploratory research projects and projects lacking novelty shall not be funded.
- Funding cannot be used to support a PhD or any other academic research.
- The proposed objectives & deliverables should not have received funding support from any other agency.

National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme (NFIES)

The Union Cabinet recently approved the *National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme (NFIES)* to boost scientific investigations across the country & to achieve better conviction rates in criminal cases.

About National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme (NFIES)

What is NFIES? It is a Central Sector Scheme (CSS) introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) with a total financial outlay of Rs. 2254.43 crore for the period from 2024-25 to 2028-29 to enhance the forensic infrastructure in the country.

✓ Its financial outlay will be provisioned from MHA's own budget.

Components

1. Establishment of Campuses of the **National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU)** in the country.
2. Establishment of Central Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSL) in the country.

3. Enhancement of existing infrastructure of the Delhi Campus of the NFSU.

** There are 7 CFSL locations: Hyderabad; Kolkata; Chandigarh; New Delhi; Guwahati; Bhopal; Pune

** Each location has a different area of specialization: Hyderabad: chemical sciences; Kolkata: biological sciences; Chandigarh: physical sciences; New Delhi: under the Central Bureau of Investigation

Functions & Responsibilities of CFSLs

- **Analysis of evidence:** CFSL analyzes evidence collected from crime scenes, such as DNA, fingerprints etc
- **Expert testimony:** CFSL experts provide testimony in court
- **Crime scene investigation:** Including collection and analysis of evidence.
- **DNA profiling:** CFSLs generate DNA profiles from crime scene evidence and compare them with DNA samples from suspects, victims, or missing persons.

Need-

1. *For Effective and Efficient Criminal Justice System-* and to strengthen the existing infrastructure and provide high quality, trained forensic professionals for timely & scientific examination of evidence.

2. *Addressing the shortage of Manpower-* New Criminal Laws mandate forensic investigation for offences involving punishment of 7 years or more. This would significantly increase the workload of forensic science laboratories. But currently there is a significant shortage of trained forensic manpower in the Forensic Science Laboratories (FSL) in the country. Establishment of additional off-campus of NFSU and new CFSLs would address the shortage of trained forensic manpower.

- ✓ The new criminal laws (Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bhartiya Nagari Suraksha Sanhita & Bhartiya Sakshya Adhinyam) came into effect from July 1, 2024.

3. *Secure High Conviction Rate-* Opening new institutes and strengthening the existing infrastructure and manpower will help alleviate the case load / pendency of forensic laboratories and help the Government achieve its goal of securing a high conviction rate of more than 90%.

Extra Mile: About NFSU

What is NFSU? It was established under the NFSU Act 2020 as an institution of national importance under MHA and is the world's first and only University dedicated to facilitating study and research in Forensic, behavioral, cybersecurity, digital forensics, and allied Sciences.

** Initially known as Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (GFSU), later upgraded to NFSU in October 2020. (Has 9 campuses across India and 1 in Uganda, Africa.)

Objective- To fulfill the acute shortage of Forensic Experts in the Country and the World and to carry out Research in Forensic Science, Crime Investigation, Security, Behavioral Science and Criminology.

Enemy Agents Ordinance

Recently, Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police (DGP) said that the ones found assisting militants in J&K should be tried by investigating agencies under the Enemy Agents Ordinance, 2005 which is more stringent than the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and has the punishment of either a life term or a death sentence.

- ✓ Ordinance is a decree or law promulgated by a state or national government without the consent of the legislature

About Enemy Agents Ordinance

What is Enemy Agent Ordinance? The ordinance prescribes punishment for an enemy agent i.e. the one who has an intention to aid the enemy, conspire with any other person to give assistance to the enemy or to impede the military or air operations of Indian forces or to endanger life or is guilty of incendiarism.

Evolution

- **Introduction-** This ordinance was first issued in 1917 by the then Dogra Maharaja of J&K (laws made during the Dogra rule were called ordinances).
- **Amendment-** After Partition, the ordinance was incorporated as a law in the erstwhile state and was also amended. (This act was introduced to counter Pakistani raiders or invaders in 1948).
- **Promulgation-** The Enemy Agents Ordinance 2005 (1948) was promulgated under Section 5 of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution Act 1996 (dealt with executive and legislative powers).
 - ✓ In *Rehman Shagoo vs State of Jammu and Kashmir Case, 1959*, the Supreme Court upheld the enemy agent ordinance. (Arrest without a warrant)
- **Post Abrogation of Article 370-** in 2019, J&K's legal framework also underwent several changes. The J&K Reorganization Act listed out state laws that were to continue while several others were repealed and replaced with Indian laws. Security laws such as Enemy Agents Ordinance and Public Safety Act remained but the Ranbir Penal Code was replaced with the Indian Penal Code.

Key Provisions

1. **Punishment-** Any person found guilty as an enemy agent under the law will be punishable with death or rigorous imprisonment for life or with rigorous imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine.
2. **Trials-** are conducted by a special judge appointed by the government in consultation with the High Court (HC) and the accused cannot engage a defending lawyer unless permitted by the court.
3. **Appeal-** No appeal can be made against the verdict and only a special judge (appointed by the Government from among the judges of the HC) can review the decision and his decision is considered final.
4. **Suspension of Habeas Corpus-** One of the most controversial aspects was the suspension of the right to habeas corpus for individuals detained under the ordinance. This meant that detainees could not challenge their detention in a court of law, significantly curtailing their legal rights.
5. **Disclosure or Publication of Case-** The ordinance bars disclosing or publishing any information with respect to any proceedings or with respects to any person proceeded against under this Ordinance, without the previous authorization of the Government. Doing so attracts imprisonment for up to two years, or a fine, or both.

Previous Cases- Many Kashmiris have been tried and sentenced under this ordinance. Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front founder Maqbool Bhat, who was hanged in Tihar Jail in 1984, was also charged under this ordinance.

Impact and Criticism

Criticism and Controversy	Effectiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Violating civil liberties and fundamental rights.• Allowing for indefinite detention without trial.• The potential for misuse and abuse of power by authorities.	<p>In deterring espionage & sabotage activities during the war. It provided a legal framework for swift and decisive action against perceived threats.</p>

e-Samridhi Portal

Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare and Rural Development urged the state governments to encourage more and more farmers to register on e-Samridhi portal to avail the facility of assured procurement.

About e-Samridhi Portal

It facilitates farmer registration and procurement of **pulses** at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) from registered farmers.

- ✓ MSP is the minimum rate at which the government buys crops from farmers to prevent farmers from market fluctuation and offering them stability and income security.

✓ MSP is recommended by Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) based on various factors, but the final decision on MSP is taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), headed by the Prime Minister.

Parent Company- National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED)

Key Features and Benefits-

1. *Registration-* Farmer can register themselves on this portal either through website or the app, using a rigorous three-layer verification process which includes checking the Aadhar, mobile, bank details of the farmer seeking registration and integrating the details with state land records for accuracy and security. This guarantees transparency, allowing only verified farmers to participate, ensuring authenticity and reliability.
2. *Procurement-* Post registration, records of all the procured and rejected lots are updated on the portal, a unique number is assigned to each lot, and the inventory is updated. The users can see the list of procured lots and assayers can add assaying details at any stage of the process. Each bag is tagged with a QR code that is mapped with the e-Samridhi procurement portal.
3. *Payment-* Procurement and inventory management are integrated on the portal. Thus, direct payments can be made to farmers as the portal is integrated with banks. Farmers benefit from timely, hassle-free payments directly to their accounts, fostering financial stability and well-being by eliminating delays through this streamlined process.

Lok Adalat

The Supreme Court (SC) of India in its 75th year of establishment will be organizing a Special Lok Adalat from 29th July 2024 to 3rd August 2024 to facilitate amicable settlements of suitable pending cases.

About Lok Adalats (People's Court)

It is an alternative dispute redressal (ADR) mechanism & a statutory organization introduced under the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987 to settle/ resolve the disputes/cases pending in the court of law or at pre-litigation stage. It is conducted by the National Legal Service Authority (NALSA) along with other Legal service institutions at state and district levels.

- ✓ Lok Adalat promotes the constitutional mandate of Article 39A (a Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP)) which directs the state to provide free legal aid to promote justice based on equal opportunity and ensure that justice is not denied to any citizen due to economic or other reasons.
- ✓ NALSA was constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of society. Chief Justice of India (CJI) is its Patron-in-Chief and the Senior most SC Judge is the Executive Chairman of the Authority.
- ✓ Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) encompasses various types like Arbitration, Mediation, Conciliation, Negotiation & Lok Adalat.
- ✓ The concept of Lok Adalat is rooted in the ancient Indian practice of resolving disputes through Panchayats (village councils). The first Lok Adalat camp was organized in Gujarat in 1982.

Can One Appeal Against The Decision of a Lok Adalat

No, the decision given by Lok Adalat is deemed to be a decree of a civil court. It is final and binding on all parties and no appeal can be made against it before any court of law. But unsatisfied parties can initiate litigation in a court by filing a case.

What Kind Of Cases Are Dealt With In Lok Adalat

It deals with the cases pending before any court or any dispute which is likely to be filed before the court like property requisition, financial disputes and matrimonial issues etc.

✓ Lok Adalat doesn't settle matters relating to an offence not compoundable under the law i.e. serious crimes that can't be settled and require full trials for justice.

What Are The Types Of Lok Adalat

There are three types of Lok Adalat-

1. *National Lok Adalat*- are held on a specific subject matter every month for a single day throughout the country, in all the courts right from the Supreme Court (SC) till the Taluk Levels wherein cases are disposed off in huge numbers.
2. *Permanent Lok Adalat*- has been set up as permanent bodies with a Chairman and two members for providing compulsory pre-litigative mechanism for conciliation and settlement of cases relating to Public Utility Services like transport, postal, telegraph etc. Its jurisdiction is up to Rs. 10 Lakhs.
3. *Mobile Lok Adalat*- are organized in various parts of the country. They travel from one location to another to resolve disputes.

How Is A Lok Adalat Constituted

They are constituted in following manner at various levels of judicial hierarchy-

- *At the State Authority Level* – is organized by State Legal Services Authority (SALSA) and each of its bench comprises of-
 - a. a sitting or retired High Court (HC) judge or a sitting or retired judicial officer; and
 - b. one or both of- a member from the legal profession; a social worker engaged in the upliftment of the weaker sections and interested in the implementation of legal services schemes or programmes (these members are common in all Lok Adalat whether at state level, high court level, district level or taluka level).✓ SALSA has been constituted in every state to give effect to the policies and directions of NALSA and to give free legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalats. Chief Justice of the respective HC is its Patron-in-Chief and the seniormost HC Judge is its Executive Chairman.
- *At High Court Level*- The HC Legal Services Committee constitutes benches of the Lok Adalat comprising of a sitting or retired HC judge and any one or both of- a member from the legal profession and a social worker.
- *At District Level*- is organized by the District Legal Services Authority comprising of a sitting or retired judicial officer and any one or both of a member from the legal profession and/or a social worker (preferably a woman).
- *At Taluk Level*- is organized by the Taluk Legal Services Committee comprising of a sitting or retired judicial officer and any one or both of either a member from the legal profession; and/or a social worker (preferably a woman).

Benefits of Lok Adalat

- *Free of Cost Service*- No fee is charged for placing the matter before the Lok Adalat. If any court fee has already been charged then the amount will be refunded to the litigants, if their dispute is settled in Lok Adalat according to the rules.
- *Procedural Flexibility and Speedy Trial*- of the disputes. There is no strict application of procedural laws like Civil Procedure Code and Evidence Act while assessing the claim by Lok Adalat.
- *Prevents Delay*- As the final decision of Lok Adalat is binding on the parties and is non-appealable, it prevents delay in the final settlement of disputes.
- *Commitment to Accessible and Efficient Justice Delivery*- for all sections of the society without any discrimination based on economic or social status.

Criteria for Awarding Death Sentence

The President recently rejected a mercy petition filed by Pakistani national Mohammed Arif who was sentenced to death for the terrorist attack of 2000 at the Red Fort.

Article 72 of the Constitution empowers the President to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence in cases where the-

- punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial;
 - punishment or sentence is for an offence against any Union law;
 - sentence is a sentence of death.
- ✓ This exercise of power by the President under article 72 is **not** subject to judicial review except where the presidential decision is arbitrary, irrational, mala fide, or discriminatory
- ✓ Supreme Court in *Kehar Singh v Union of India*, 1988 case reiterated its stand and held that the grant of pardon by the President is an act of grace and, therefore, cannot be claimed as a matter of right.
- ✓ This power can be exercised only under article 74 i.e. on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers (*Maru Ram v Union of India* case (1980))

About Death Penalty

When is a Death Penalty Awarded? It is the most severe form of punishment awarded for the most heinous, grievous and detestable crimes against humanity. The extent of such crimes varies from country to country.

- ✓ According to Amnesty International, 55 countries still have death sentence in their statute books. Death by hanging is the most prevalent mode of execution, especially in the former British colonies.

Related Laws

- *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)*- provides death penalty for gang rape of a woman under 18 (Clause 70(2)), murder by a mob (Clause 101(2)), Organized Crime (Clause 109), Offence of a Terrorist Act (Clause 111) etc. It has increased the no. of offences punishable by death from 12 under IPC (1860) to 18 under the act
- *Special Laws*: Certain special legislation, such as the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS), and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), also prescribe the death penalty for specific crimes.

Validity of Death Penalty in India

- *Valid under Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty)* - which states that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. This has been legally construed to mean that if there is a fair and valid procedure then the state, by framing a law, can deprive a person of his life.
- *View of Central Government*- It has consistently favoured in retaining the death penalty in the statute books to act as a deterrent, and for those who are a threat to society.
- *Supreme Court (SC)*- It has upheld the constitutional validity of capital punishment (death penalty) in *Jagmohan Singh vs State of Uttar Pradesh (1973)*, *Rajendra Prasad vs State of Uttar Pradesh (1979)*, and in *Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980)* and held that if capital punishment is provided in the law and the procedure is a fair, just and reasonable one, death sentence can be awarded to a convict, but this should only be in the "rarest of rare" cases and "special reasons" should be given by the courts for granting such punishment.

What Are the Criteria for Awarding Death Sentence

1. '*Rarest of Rare*' Doctrine- It was laid down by the SC in *Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab Case, 1980* where the court held that a death penalty should be awarded by a court only in rarest of the rare cases when alternative option is "unquestionably foreclosed".

2. *Weighing, Aggravating and Mitigating Circumstances (Manoj and ors. Vs State of MP (2022))* - A balance-sheet of aggravating and mitigating circumstances in a particular case must be drawn to ascertain if awarding any punishment less than the death sentence will deprive the victim of justice.

What Kind Of Cases May Be Considered Rarest Of Rare

The SC in *Machhi Singh vs. State of Punjab* laid down the following outlines of the circumstances which may be regarded as rarest of rare cases deserving extreme penalty-

1. *Manner of Commission of Murder*- If the murder is committed in an extremely brutal manner so as to arouse intense and extreme indignation in the community.
2. *Motive*- which evinces depravity and meanness.
3. *Anti-social or Socially Abhorrent Nature of the Crime*- where a scheduled caste or minority community person is murdered in circumstances which arouse social wrath;
4. *Magnitude of the Crime*- Crimes of enormous proportion, like multiple murders of a family or persons of a particular caste, community or locality.

Is Death Penalty Subjective To Judicial Review

Yes, the death sentence pronounced by a trial court must be confirmed by the High Court. Further, the SC can review the case under Article 137 of the Indian Constitution.

** After the dismissal of the review petition, the person can file a Curative Petition in case of gross violation of principles of natural justice.

Clemency Powers

If the SC turns down the appeal against capital punishment, the convict can submit a mercy petition to the President of India and the Governor of the State under Articles 72 and 161 respectively.

** Neither of these powers are personal to the holders of the Office but are to be exercised (under Articles 74 and 163, respectively) on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.

What Factors Are Considered While Deciding On A Mercy Plea

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) considers following factors while deciding on mercy pleas-

1. Personality of the accused like age, sex or mental deficiency or circumstances of the case such as provocation;
2. Cases in which the appellate Court expressed doubt as to the reliability of evidence but has nevertheless decided on conviction;
3. Cases where it is alleged that fresh evidence is obtainable mainly with a view to see whether fresh enquiry is justified;
4. Where the High Court on appeal reversed acquittal or on an appeal enhanced the sentence;
5. If there is any difference of opinion in the Bench of High Court Judges necessitating reference to a larger Bench;
6. Consideration of evidence in fixation of responsibility in gang murder case;
7. Long delays in investigation and trial etc.

** Mercy Petition can be filed by the convicts. It is to be filed within a period of seven days from the date when the Superintendent of jail informs the convicted person of the dismissal of the petition.

What Next for the Convict if the Mercy Petition is Rejected?

President's decision can be challenged in SC. The SC has previously commuted the death sentence in cases of inordinate delay in deciding mercy petitions, such as in *Shatrugan Chauhan v. State of U.P. (2014)* case.

Recommendations on Death Penalty

- The Law Commission in its 262nd Report (2015) recommended abolishing death penalty for all crimes other than terrorism-related offences and waging war.
- Amnesty International holds that the death penalty breaches human rights, in particular the right to life and the right to live free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Both rights are protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in 1948.

Extra Mile: Capital Punishment In International Human Rights Treaties

1. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*- It does not abolish the use of death penalty, but Article 6 guarantees the right to life, and contains important safeguards to be followed by signatories who retain the death penalty.
2. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*- its article 37(a) explicitly prohibits the use of death penalty against persons under the age of 18.
3. The Convention against Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ('the Torture Convention') and the UN Committee against Torture have been sources of jurisprudence for limitations on the death penalty as well as necessary safeguards.
4. Several resolutions of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) have called for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. In 2014, 117 States voted in favour of the most recent resolution. India has not voted in favour of these resolutions.

** India has ratified the ICCPR & the CRC and is signatory to the Torture Convention but has not ratified it.

Coalition Government and Economic Reforms in India

The elections to the Lok Sabha (18th) are over and India once again has a coalition government at the Centre. In the last two Lok Sabhas (16th & 17th), for the first time since economic reforms began (in 1991) the government had an absolute majority.

Will A Coalition Government Derail India's Economic Reforms

May be not. This could be answered by comparing a single party government and a coalition government at the Centre and a weakened mandate for the ruling party, there could be challenges in introducing economic reforms.

Detailed Analysis of Single Party Government & Coalition Government

<i>Single Party Government</i>	<i>Coalition Government</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political Stability & Reduced Political Conflict: This leads to long-term development for Efficient Decision Making.• Clear Accountability: easier to hold the ruling party accountable for success & failures• Lower Electoral Expenses: Without frequent elections and multiple parties, the costs associated with maintaining a political system are reduced.• Strong Leadership: It is easier to hold the ruling party accountable for successes & failures since there is no ambiguity.	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusivity and Representation: Smaller parties, representing minority groups get a chance to influence government policy, leading to more inclusive governance.• Collaborative Decision-Making & Reduced Polarization: Parties in a coalition need to negotiate and compromise, leading to more balanced and well-rounded policies.• Checks and Balances with Accountability: Coalition partners hold each other accountable, which can lead to more responsible governance.
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Disadvantages</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Disadvantages</u></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Democratic Representation: Opposition voices and dissenting opinions are often suppressed, leading to a lack of political plurality and freedom of speech. • Potential for Authoritarianism: With power concentrated in a single party, there is a significant risk of authoritarian rule that may lead to unchecked power, corruption & abuse of authority. • Social Discontent: A single-party system may neglect or actively suppress the interests and rights of minority groups, leading to social unrest and division. • Potential for Revolution: Prolonged suppression of political freedoms & dissent can lead to revolutionary movements & often violent, changes in government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged Negotiations & Policy Gridlock: The need for consensus and negotiation among coalition partners can slow down the decision-making process. • Unpredictable Policies, Instability and Uncertainty: Policy directions can be unpredictable as coalition partners may have divergent agendas and priorities. • Patronage Politics: Coalition governments may resort to patronage politics to keep coalition partners satisfied, leading to inefficiency and corruption. • Weak Leadership & Conflicting Priorities: Coalition partners may have conflicting priorities, making it difficult to present a unified direction for the government with indecisive leadership.
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Are There Any Notable Reforms Introduced By Coalition Governments?

Yes, following are some examples of economic reforms introduced by coalition governments-

- *The P.V.Narasimha Rao-led government*, which was essentially a minority government discarded centralized planning and opened the Indian economy to global completion by removing the licence-permit raj known as **LPG reforms of 1991**, referring to Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization. These included deregulations, reducing tariffs and taxes, and opening up the economy to foreign investment.
- *The short-lived Deve Gowda government (June 1996 - April 1997)* cut tax rates for both personal income tax, corporate taxes & customs duties. It continued the economic liberalization process & allocated significant funds to the National Renewal Fund to support workers affected by industrial modernization.
- *The Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government* framed the Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management (FRBM) law for fiscal rectitude and limited the government's ability to borrow within prudential limits. It pushed disinvestment of loss-making Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), focused on boosting rural infrastructure and connectivity through the PM Gram Sadak Yojana and introduced the Information Technology Act, in 2000 leading India to become e-Commerce giant.
 - ✓ It conducted the Pokhran-II nuclear tests, establishing India as a nuclear power. The government continued economic liberalization, promoting privatization and foreign investment, and launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to universalize elementary education.
- *The Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)* initiated the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005, which boosted transparency in India's democracy, the Right to Food, which ensured that no Indian should go hungry, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provided minimum employment to the rural poor and deregulated fuel prices.

Central Excise Bill 2024

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) recently invited suggestions from all stakeholders on the draft 'Central Excise Bill, 2024' by 26th June 2024.

About Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC)

What? Erstwhile Central Board of Excise & Customs, the CBIC is a part of the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance and administers all indirect tax related matters.

** CBIC is a statutory body created under the Central Boards of Revenue Act, 1963.

**CBIC was established in 1964 following the division of the Central Board of Revenue into the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Excise and Customs, which was later renamed the CBIC in 2018.

Functions- It is responsible for formulating policies concerning-

- Levy and collection of Customs, Central Excise duties, Central Goods & Services Tax and IGST.
- Prevention of smuggling and administration of matters relating to Customs, Central Excise, Central Goods & Services Tax, IGST and Narcotics.
- It is the administrative authority for its subordinate organizations, including Custom Houses, National Anti-profiteering Authority (GST), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Excise and Central GST Commissionerates and the Central Revenues Control Laboratory.
- It also ensures that taxes on foreign and inland travel are administered as per the law, and the collection agencies deposit the taxes collected to the public exchequer promptly.
- It is responsible for detecting and preventing tax evasion through its GST intelligence wing.

Organization- CBIC is headed by a chairman appointed by the Central Government and is divided into various divisions and zones, each headed by a Chief Commissioner or Director General.

About Draft "Central Excise Bill 2024"

What is Central Excise Bill 2024? The draft bill seeks to replace the Central Excise Act, 1944 and enact a comprehensive modern central excise law with an emphasis on promoting ease of doing business, repealing redundant provisions, simplifying the excise duty structure & enhancing compliance via digital solutions.

Key Provisions

1. *Excise Duty on Special Economic Zone (SEZs) Units-* It proposes to levy excise duty on goods produced or manufactured in SEZ units. It is currently exempted under the Central Excise Act, 1944.
2. *Eligibility Criteria for Central Excise Duty Credit-* has been proposed under the bill. Manufacturers or producers of final products will be able to take Central Excise Duty Credit and other prescribed duties, subject to certain conditions and restrictions. The credit can be used to pay any excise duty on final products or other amounts payable under the rules within prescribed limitations except for petrol and high-speed diesel, even if used in manufacturing final products.
4. *Extension of Time Limit for Recovery of Duties-* The time limit for the Central Excise Officer to serve a notice is proposed to be extended to 3 years from the relevant date if the duty has not been levied or paid, or in cases of short levy or payment, erroneous refunds, or wrongly availed or utilised Central Excise Duty Credit. The current limit is two years.
5. *Transition of Credit from Repealed Excise Act to the New Act-* Credit unutilized under the old law will be transitioned to the new one provided the duty was paid under the repealed act.
6. *Time for Rectification of Errors Apparent on the Face of Records-* has been reduced from 2 years to 6 months, except for clerical or arithmetic errors, which have no time limit for rectification.
7. *Change in Rate of Interest under Various Provisions-* The proposed Central Excise Bill includes changes in interest rates under various provisions. For example- Interest rate on delayed payment of tax, Central Excise Duty credit that is wrongly availed and utilized will not exceed 18% whereas under the current act it is 10-30% per annum.
8. *Power to Central Government-* The proposed Bill authorizes the Central Government to set different tariff values under the valuation provisions for the following:
 - Different classes or descriptions of the same excisable goods;
 - Excisable goods of the same class or description that are produced or manufactured by different classes of producers or manufacturers or sold to different classes of buyers.
9. Reduction in Rate of Duty for Certain Tobacco Products (Cigarettes/ filter cigarettes)

Living Will

Justice M S Sonak, a Bombay High Court judge serving on the Goa Bench became the first person in Goa to register a “living will”.

✓ Goa is the first state to implement and operationalize living will.

What Is A Living Will? It is an advance medical directive (or a written document) prepared by an individual detailing his/her preferences for medical care or for the termination of medical support in circumstances in which he is no longer able to make those decisions for himself.

How Is It Different From A Regular Will? A living will does not deal with disposal of any property and comes into effect only if individuals reach a state where they cannot express their wishes regarding their preference of medical treatment whereas a regular will is a formal, legal declaration of individuals with respect to their property which comes into effect after their death. Strict formalities apply to its execution and implementation.

Who Can Draw Up A Living Will? An adult of a sound and healthy mind who is in a position to communicate, relate, and comprehend the purpose and consequences of executing the document- can draw up a living will. The individual must be aware of the conditions in which curative treatments and life support systems will be halted. The decision to prepare a living will must be taken without any external compulsion and is voluntary.

What Are The Elements Of A Living Will? It contains-

- basic details of the individual executing the living will.
- the circumstances under which medical treatment shall be continued or be withdrawn to avoid any ambiguity, in case of terminal illness.
- details of immediate family members who will be authorized to give consent to refuse or withdraw medical treatment on behalf of the individual.
- Health Care Instructions: Detailed instructions regarding specific medical treatments, such as resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, tube feeding, dialysis, and other life-sustaining measures.
- Organ Donation: Wishes regarding organ and tissue donation after death.

**All the instructions must be clear and unambiguous.

**The will must be executed in the presence of two attesting witnesses and be attested by a gazetted officer or a notary. A copy must be handed over to the doctor and an assigned person (a close relative or friend). Copies of the living will should also be sent to the secretary of the local self-government and the district magistrate.

Legality of Living Will

- The Supreme Court legalized passive euthanasia in 2018 in *Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018)* while recognizing the living wills of terminally ill patients who could go into a permanent vegetative state and upheld the fundamental right to die peacefully and with dignity.
- The court also issued guidelines regulating the procedure for execution of a living will. These guidelines were modified in 2023 to make them simpler.

Procedure of Execution of Living Will

- *Ascertaining the Authenticity*- If the person with a *living will* becomes terminally ill and is undergoing prolonged medical treatment with no hope of recovery, then the treating physician can act on the living will after ascertaining the genuineness and authenticity of the document from the jurisdictional Judicial Magistrate First Class (**JMFC**).
- *Informing the Executor*- The physician then informs the guardian/close relative authorized to act upon the will about the details of the illness and the consequences of remaining untreated.
- *Constituting a Medical Board*- The hospital then constitutes a Medical Board to form an opinion on whether to certify the instructions regarding withdrawal or refusal of further medical treatment. If the Board certifies the instructions, the hospital shall forthwith inform the jurisdictional Collector about the proposal, who shall then

constitute its own Medical Board which jointly visits the hospital, and if they concur with the decision of the previous Medical Board, a certificate to carry out the instructions given in the Living Will is issued.

- **Authorization by JMFC-** The Chairman of the Medical Board conveys the decision of the Board to the jurisdictional JMFC. Thereafter, the JMFC visits the patient and, after examining all aspects, authorizes the implementation of the decision of the Board.
- **Intimating the High Court-** In case the life support is withdrawn, the same shall be intimated by the Magistrate to the High Court to maintain the requisite records in digital format.
- **In case of Difference of Opinion-** If there is a difference of opinion between the Medical Board and the Executor or his family members, a writ petition can be filed in the High Court concerned whose decision shall be final and binding.

Doctrine of Merger & Rule of Stare Decisis

The Supreme Court (SC) recently observed that its extraordinary powers under Article 142 is an exception to the doctrine of merger & rule of stare decisis to do complete justice between the parties.

✓ Article 142 empowers the SC to pass any decree or order necessary for doing complete justice in any case or matter pending before it.

Doctrine of Merger	Doctrine of Stare Decisis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning- It provides that when an appellate court passes an order, the order passed by the lower court is merged with that order. • Underlying Logic- There cannot be more than one decree or operative order governing the same subject matter (a single issue) at a given point of time. <p>Key Aspects of the Doctrine of Merger</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judicial Hierarchy: The doctrine reinforces the hierarchical structure of the judiciary, where decisions of higher courts take precedence over those of lower courts. • Finality of Judgment: Once a higher court has ruled on a matter, its decision is final, and the lower court's decision is subsumed into it, preventing further appeals or legal actions on the same issue. • Consistency in Legal Precedents: The doctrine helps maintain consistency in legal precedents, ensuring that lower courts follow the rulings and interpretations of higher courts. • Clarification- The order passed by the superior court, or the successive order would prevail, and the lower court order is merged with the superior court order. • Statutory Backing- It has no statutory recognition and is just a statement of judicial propriety which seeks to instill discipline in the functioning of subordinate adjudicating authorities, whether judicial, quasi-judicial, or administrative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning ("to stand by decisions and not disturb the undisturbed.")- It is a legal principle which directs the courts to adhere to previous judgments while resolving a case with allegedly comparable facts. Such previous decisions are known as "precedents". ✓ Precedents are legal principles or rules created by the decisions given by courts. Such decisions act as an example for the judges to decide future legal cases/issues similar in nature. <p>Key Principles of Stare Decisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binding Precedent: Courts are bound to follow the legal principles established by higher courts within the same jurisdiction. This ensures a hierarchical consistency in judicial decisions. • Persuasive Precedent: Decisions from other jurisdictions or lower courts can be considered as persuasive authority but are not binding. These can influence decisions if they are deemed relevant and well-reasoned. • Ratio Decidendi: This refers to the legal reasoning or principle upon which a court's decision is based. It is the binding element of a precedent. • Obiter Dicta: These are remarks or observations made by a judge that are not essential to the decision. They do not have binding authority but can be persuasive.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conditions required for Applicability-</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There must be a decision or order passed by a lower court in a suit. ▪ There must be a right to appeal or revision in the suit in which the order has been passed which must be exercised by either party. ▪ The superior court must either modify, reaffirm, or reverse the decision or order passed by the lower or subordinate court. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Obligation-</i> It creates an obligation on courts to refer to precedents when taking certain decisions. • <i>Advantages-</i> It reduces the need for successive litigation, saves time and energy of judiciary, inculcates flexibility in judiciary and brings stability, certainty and consistency in the law. • <i>Disadvantages-</i> It may result in preservation and propagation of certain cases with erroneous judgement.
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Extra Mile: Types of Judicial Precedents

- *Declaratory Precedent-* refers to a precedent where an already existing rule is applied in deciding a question of law.
- *Original Precedent-* where a new law is established to apply it in a legal issue.
- *Persuasive Precedent-* where there is no compulsion for the judge to abide by a certain precedent regarding a legal issue.
- *Absolutely Authoritative Precedents-* judges must follow and abide by a particular precedent in deciding a legal matter even if they have a dissenting opinion regarding such precedent.
- *Conditionally Authoritative Precedents-* the authoritative precedent must be followed as it is, but in certain special cases, a judge may disregard the decision of a court if it fails to be rational and lawful.

Treatment of Precedents by High Courts (HC)- for a case that has been earlier decided by a lower court:

- *Reversal of Decision-* The judgement of the lower courts shall cease to have any effect on the parties or the public.
- *Refusal to follow a Decision-* if the HC cannot reverse or overrule the lower court's decision.
- *Distinguish from the decision-* if a HC finds that the material facts of the case differ, and the principles decided in the precedence are extremely narrow to be adequately applied to the facts of the present case then the HC may distinguish such case from the precedent set by the lower court.
- *Overrule the decision-* taken by the lower court if a particular considered while taking a decision is wrong.

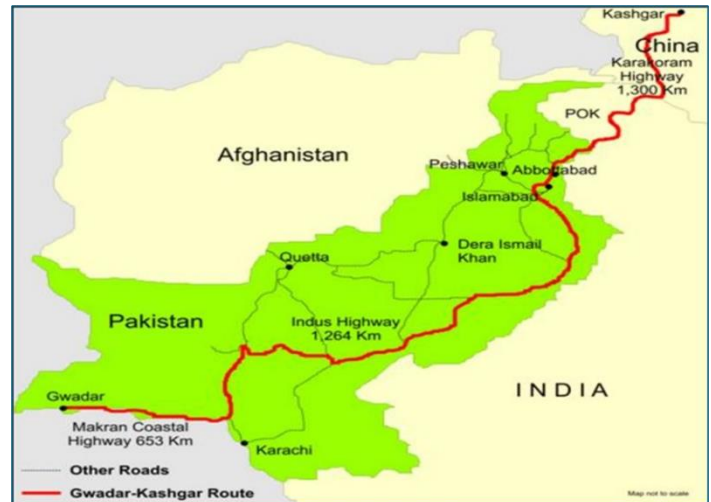
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Pakistan and China Agree To Upgrade CPEC

- Recently, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited China. During this visit, leaders of both the countries agreed on the upgradation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- They also decided to advance high-quality development of this project in the second phase.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

- During an April 2015 visit to Islamabad, Chinese President Xi Jinping and then Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif unveiled the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
 - CPEC quickly ballooned to \$62 billion in pledges—one-fifth of Pakistan's GDP—covering dozens of envisioned high-profile projects.
- The corridor links Xinjiang with Gwadar, and also passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) where China is investing in a number of projects.
- Often described as a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the stated goal of CPEC is:
 - to transform Pakistan's economy by modernizing its road, rail, air, and energy transportation systems; and
 - to connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to China's Xinjiang province and beyond by overland routes.



Different Phases of CPEC

- **First Phase (infrastructure creation)**
 - Various agreements such as energy, infrastructure, port development and the railway line construction have been signed under the first phase.
 - However, the progress in this phase has been patchy.
 - Data from the CPEC website show that of the 21 proposed power projects, 14 have been completed, two are under construction, and five are yet to start.
 - Of the 24 proposed transport-related projects (rail and road), six have been completed, but no work has started on 13.
 - According to the official Chinese news agency Xinhua, CPEC had brought direct investment of \$25.4 billion to Pakistan until 2022.
- **Second Phase**
 - In February 2022, during the visit of Pakistani PM to China, industrial cooperation agreement was signed.
 - The second phase primarily revolves around Special Economic Zones development and industrialisation.

Reasons Behind The Stalled Project Under CPEC

- **Chinese concerns**
 - CPEC faces significant challenges due to Chinese concerns over corruption, bureaucratic delays, and political instability in Pakistan.

- **Security situation in Gwadar**
 - The security situation in Balochistan, where Gwadar is located, is particularly problematic.
 - Numerous Chinese nationals have been killed in terrorist attacks by Baloch militants since 2018.
 - The Baloch people view Gwadar as a symbol of economic injustice, as CPEC has not generated quality jobs or economic benefits for the local population.
 - Pakistan's security issues as a major concern for future Chinese investments.
- **Chinese approach of not partnering with local companies**
 - It limits job creation for Pakistani youth.
 - While the CPEC was expected to create over 2 million jobs for Pakistanis, government data shows that fewer than 250,000 jobs have been generated so far.
 - Since Chinese companies are tax-exempt and bring their own labor from China, they do not rely on Pakistani businesses, further reducing local employment opportunities.

India & CPEC

- **CPEC and the Sovereignty & territorial integrity of India**
 - This corridor is not only passing through India's territory but also posing a threat to the sovereignty of India.
 - It passes through Gilgit-Baltistan area of Kashmir which is occupied by Pakistan.
 - The corridor enters into Gilgit-Baltistan through Khujerab Pass.
 - This area is a part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and claimed by India.
- **CPEC and Security threat to India**

- Ever since the construction of the corridor is started, the Chinese military presence in the area is also embarked.
- In 2017, Chinese troops marched in the parade of Pakistan's day in Islamabad.
 - This was the first time when Chinese military took part in any parade outside its country
- Apart from the naval vessels deployed in Pakistan, eight submarines are also delivered to it by China.

Debt burden of Pakistan and role of China

China's Growing Hold on Pakistan's Debt

- According to IMF, China's share of Pakistan's external debt has risen from \$4 billion in 2013 to roughly \$30 billion of the current \$126 billion.
- Between July 2021 and March 2022, more than 80% of Pakistan's bilateral debt service payments went to Beijing.

Concerns Over Debt Dependency

- There are concerns both within and outside Pakistan that this debt burden is unsustainable and may turn Pakistan into a client state of China.
- Critics link CPEC to a neo-colonial project, similar to the British East India Company's control over the Indian Subcontinent.

IMF's Bailout Package and Debt Obligations

- In March 2024, the IMF released a \$1.1 billion tranche of a \$3 billion bailout package to Pakistan.
- The government is negotiating a new package of \$6-8 billion, but debt obligations to China are a major hurdle.

Conditions for Further Assistance

- The IMF has stipulated that its resources should not be used to service Chinese debt.
- The IMF has indicated that any new agreement will require rescheduling the maturities of Chinese debt instruments due in the next three years to prevent a positive net outflow from Pakistan to China during the program period.





- China is planning to build its second a naval base in Gwadar port after Djibouti in 2017.
 - These activities of China are a serious security threat to India since China is encircling India into the Indian Ocean.

Mexico Elects Claudia Sheinbaum As First Female President

- Claudia Sheinbaum won a landslide victory to become Mexico's first female President. Ms Sheinbaum will replace her mentor, outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, on 1 October.
- In Mexico, the President is elected through a direct popular vote for a six-year term with no possibility of re-election.
- The candidate with the most votes wins, with no need for a runoff. The election is overseen by the National Electoral Institute (INE).

Iran Summons Chinese Envoy Over Disputed Gulf Islands

- Iran's foreign ministry summoned the Chinese ambassador in Tehran to protest a China-UAE statement concerning Iran's sovereignty over three disputed islands: **Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb.**
 - These three Islands are located at the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.
- These islands have been controlled by Iran since 1971, shortly before the UAE's formation and independence from Britain. The UAE, now an ally of the US, also claims these islands.

Elections in France

- After two rounds of polling on June 30 and July 7, France will elect a new National Assembly.
 - For the first time in 22 years, there is a real possibility that the President and the Prime Minister, leader of the National Assembly, will not be from the same party.
 - This phenomenon is called **cohabitation**, and has only occurred thrice ever since France transitioned into the Fifth Republic.
- **Current Political Regime in France**
 - The current political regime, called the Fifth Republic, first came into effect in 1958.
 - France is a semi-presidential, representative parliamentary democracy, with clearly defined roles for the President and the Prime Minister.
 - Since 1962, the French President has been directly elected by popular vote, while the Prime Minister is the leader of the largest party/coalition in the National Assembly.
- **President vs Prime Minister**
 - The President, elected for a term of five years, serves as the head of the state and Commander of the Armed Forces.
 - Until 2000, the President enjoyed seven-year terms, which was then reduced to five-year terms.
 - He/She enjoys regulatory power, exercising control of all decisions on matters of foreign policy and defence.
 - The parliament, headed by the Prime Minister, is responsible for all domestic policy decisions.
 - Article 21 of the French constitution allows the PM the power to direct the actions of the government.
 - The cabinet is appointed by the President under the PM's recommendation.

- The President can be impeached by the Parliament for willfully violating the Constitution or the national laws.
 - This requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of the French Parliament, as well as in a joint session of both Houses.
- **French parliament**
 - The French parliament is a bicameral legislature consisting of an upper house, the Senate, and a lower house, the National Assembly.
 - A party needs 289 seats to secure an absolute majority.

Just Stop Oil Activists Vandalise Stonehenge

- Climate activists of the Just Stop Oil group sprayed orange powder on to the stones of Stonehenge.
- Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument in Wiltshire, England, consisting of a circular arrangement of massive standing stones.
- Believed to have been constructed between 3000 and 2000 BCE, its exact purpose remains a subject of speculation and study.
- The monument is significant as a gathering place for rituals during the summer and winter solstices, as the position of the stones aligns in specific ways with the sun's trajectory on these days.

Cyril Ramaphosa re-elected as South Africa's President

- South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has been re-elected by lawmakers for a second term.
- This was after his African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) agreed to form a coalition, setting aside their rivalry in a historic governance pact.
 - The ANC lost its parliamentary majority in the May elections for the first time since it swept to power in 1994 at the end of apartheid.
- **Political System**
 - South Africa has a **bicameral parliament** and, as such, comprises two houses of parliament - namely, the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCoP).
 - The NA operates at the national level and has 400 seats comprising members of political parties; one of its functions is to elect the President.
 - The NA is required to elect the President at its first sitting after national elections or whenever necessary.
 - It follows the proportional representation system of government; and the total number of votes for a party determines the number of seats it gets in Parliament.
- **Governance system**
 - South Africa follows both a Presidential and a Parliamentary system of government.
 - Under this hybrid system, political parties have a decisive influence on the way in which government is composed and the executive power rests in the President and the Cabinet.
 - In this system, there is a strict demarcation between the powers of the executive and those of the legislature known as separation of powers.
 - Parliament must approve executive decisions before they are taken.
 - The President may be removed via the approval of a vote of no confidence.

Canada Says, India Second Biggest Threat to its Democracy

- A Canadian parliamentary committee report has labeled India as the **second-largest foreign threat** to the country's democracy, exacerbating the already tense bilateral relations following the June 2023 killing of a pro-Khalistan ideologue in British Columbia.
 - India and Canada have been in a heated diplomatic exchange since the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar on June 2023.
- The report by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians highlighted that India's interference in Canada's democratic institutions and processes has slowly increased.
 - It now includes targeting Canadian politicians, ethnic media, and Indo-Canadian communities, beyond just countering pro-Khalistani efforts.
- The report described China as the top foreign threat.

Indian Diaspora in South Africa

In South Africa's most recent elections, a number of Indian-descent candidates from different political parties achieved notable success and secured electoral wins in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures.

Identity Formation of Indian Diaspora in South Africa

- **The indentured labourers** endured difficult working circumstances as well as a variety of discriminatory practises.
- **During apartheid** (from 1948 and until the early 1990s), the Indian community in South Africa was subject to a number of discriminatory laws and rules, including restrictions on their right to own property and freedom of movement.
- Notwithstanding these obstacles, **the Indian community in South Africa started to expand** - in numbers and in their socio-economic-political status.

For example,

- The South African Indian origin community **numbers around 1 million today** and constitutes about 3% of South Africa's total population.
- About 80% of the Indian community lives in the province of KwaZulu Natal.
- South Africans of Indian origin are **well-represented in Government, business, media, legal and other professions.**
- One area where the Indian community in South Africa has thrived is **education**.
 - Today, a large number of Indian students in South Africa are pursuing advanced degrees in fields like law, medicine and engineering.
 - This is helping South Africa in **developing its knowledge economy**.
- In general, the socio-economic conditions of the Indian diaspora in South Africa are **complex and diverse**, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities that the country faces.

HISTORY OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN SOUTH AFRICA:



- | It dates all the way back to the 19th century.
- | The first Indians were sent to South Africa by the British Empire as **indentured labourers** for the purpose of working on the sugar cane estates in Natal.
 - The indentured labour system was a **type of bonded labour** where workers were guaranteed a return trip to India when their contract had expired.
 - **But in reality**, many of them remained imprisoned in South Africa due to debt or other circumstances.
- | **Between 1860 and 1911**, some 152,000 indentured labourers were transferred from India to South Africa.
- | **Mahatma Gandhi**, who spent several years (practising law) in South Africa and formed many of his ideas about nonviolent resistance there, was one of the most well-known individuals from this era.

Challenges Faced by Indian Diaspora in South Africa

- **Economic struggle:**
 - One of the main problems facing the Indian community in South Africa is **poverty**.
 - The most recent census figures show that many Indians in South Africa live barely over the poverty line, with about one in four of them living below it.
- **Cultural marginalisation:** Due to the country's education system's historical emphasis on Western culture, Indian culture and heritage are not adequately represented in schools and institutions.
- **Violence and hate crimes:**
 - **For example**, a wave of violence that broke out in Durban in 2019 led to the destruction of several Indian traders' shops.
 - According to reports, the attacks were carried out by locals who claimed that Indian traders were stealing their jobs and means of subsistence.

Recent Political Gains Made by Indian Diaspora in South Africa

- Of the 87 parliament members of the Democratic Alliance (DA), **four are of Indian descent**.
- While **Mergan Chetty** won his third consecutive stint in parliament, **Shara Singh**, a member of Provincial Legislature from KwaZulu-Natal, graduated to national politics and became a member of parliament.
- While most of the elected members of Indian lineage were born in South Africa, **Anilkumar Kesava Pillai**, a native of Thiruvalla in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala, established himself in the local politics of the country 40 years ago.
- Meanwhile, some of the independent candidates and political formations that had espoused the cause of Indians failed to secure enough support.

Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Sri Lanka

- EAM S Jaishankar commissioned the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) built with a USD 6 million grant from India during his first bilateral visit overseas after being re-appointed in the Cabinet.
- The MRCC includes a center at Navy Headquarters in **Colombo**, a sub-centre in Hambantota and unmanned installations at Galle, Arugambay, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Kallarawa, Point Pedro and Mollikulam.
- Jaishankar also joined President Wickremesinghe in virtually handing over:
 - 48 houses, 24 each in Colombo and Trincomalee, built under the Model Village Housing Project and
 - 106 houses in three up-country estates, built under Phase III of the Indian Housing Project.
 - Both these projects have been built with funding from India.

Home Ministry Designates Kollam Port as Immigration Check Post

- The Union govt has designated Kollam Port (Kerala) as an authorized immigration check post (ICP).
- This designation enables passengers with valid travel documents to enter and exit India through the port.
- The Kollam port will now attract more foreign ships and benefit from its proximity to the international shipping channel. The check post will also enable the starting of travel ship services from Kollam.
- ICP is a sanitized border crossing zone that integrates three main border-related functions:
 - **Customs:** Clearance of cargo, personal items, and currency
 - **Immigration:** Checking of passports, visas, and passenger identification
 - **Border security:** Maintaining security, preventing the flow of illegal weapons, and providing support to customs and immigration

- Till now, India had 31 authorised seaport ICPs and out of those 10 are under the direct control and management of the Bureau of Immigration, MHA. The remaining ICPs are controlled by State police agencies.

Fast Track Immigration – Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP)

- **About**

- The Indian government has launched the ‘Fast Track Immigration – Trusted Traveller Programme’ (FTI-TTP) at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, aiming to streamline the immigration process using a biometrics-based system.
- This system will initially serve Indian nationals and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) and will be extended to major airports in phases, eventually covering foreign nationals.
- The FTI-TTP system will capture passenger biometrics, stored in a database for real-time verification, allowing travellers to pass through automated gates with minimal human intervention.
- This service, which is free of cost, aims to facilitate faster, smoother, and safer immigration clearance.

- **Process**

- To enrol, applicants must register on an online portal and upload necessary documents. After verification, a whitelist of “trusted travellers” will be created.
- Biometrics will be recorded at the Foreigners Regional Registration office or at the airport.
- The registration is valid until the passport expires or for five years, whichever is earlier, and can be renewed.
- At the e-gates, registered passengers will scan their boarding pass and passport, and once biometrics are authenticated, the gate will open, completing the immigration process.

- **Nodal agency:** The Bureau of Immigration

Deputy NSA Vikram Misri is Next Foreign Secy

- Deputy National Security Advisor Vikram Misri will be the next foreign secretary.
- 1989-batch Indian Foreign Service officer will take charge after the incumbent Vinay Kwatra’s tenure ends.

US Government Report Criticised The State Of Religious Freedom In India

- US state department has criticised India’s record in its annual international religious freedom report for 2023.
- It alleged that the government had failed to protect members of religious minorities from violence or investigate hate crimes.
 - It raised concerns about increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship of members of minority faith communities in India.
 - Despite public criticism in annual report, the US state department is not expected to take action against India when it drafts its annual blacklist of countries over religious freedoms later this year.
- India, however, rejected this report criticising the state of religious freedom in the country. It termed the report as deeply biased and driven by vote bank considerations.
- As per India, human rights and respect for diversity have been and remain a legitimate subject of discussion between India and the US.

Pakistan Delegation In J&K To Inspect Power Projects Under Indus Water Treaty

- A five-member Pakistani delegation visited Jammu's Kishtwar to inspect hydroelectric power projects under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) of 1960.
 - Under the IWT, India has rights over the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej), while Pakistan controls the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab), with India allowed limited use of the western rivers for specific purposes.
- The delegation, along with Indian representatives and World Bank neutral experts, inspected the 850 MW Ratle hydroelectric project and the 1,000 MW Pakal Dul project on the Marusudar River, a Chenab River tributary.
- The visit follows Pakistan's ongoing technical objections to the Kishanganga (330 MW) and Ratle projects.
 - Pakistan has raised objections to several projects in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, including the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai projects, and flagged concerns about 10 other hydroelectric projects.

Indo-US NSA Meet

- India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, held a bilateral talk with the US' National Security Advisor, in New Delhi.
- Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in a range of areas — Defence technology, Space, Artificial Intelligence, High-Performance Computing, critical minerals among others.
- They are also committed to take concrete action in the coming months to address long-standing barriers to bilateral strategic trade, technology, and industrial cooperation, including in the commercial and civil space sector.
- Both the NSAs chaired the second meeting of the India-U.S. *Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)*.

Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)

Launched in 2023, it is a **framework agreed upon by India & U.S. for cooperation on critical and emerging technologies**. These emerging technologies include **artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors** and **wireless telecommunication**.

Focus Areas of iCET:

- Primarily, the **iCET seeks to position New Delhi and Washington D.C. as "trusted technology partners"** to build supply chains and support the co-production and co-development of items.
- **Key Areas Include:**
 - *Developing common standards & Setting up a research agency partnership* to drive collaboration in areas like AI;
 - Developing a new defence industrial cooperation roadmap for *joint development and production*;
 - Developing a roadmap to accelerate defence technological cooperation and 'innovation bridge' to connect **defence startups**;
 - Supporting the development of a **semiconductor** ecosystem;
 - Strengthening cooperation on **human spaceflight**;
 - Advancing cooperation on development in **5G** and **6G**; and
 - Adopting **OpenRAN network** technology in India.

India Eyes Mongolia For Key Minerals To Bypass China Route

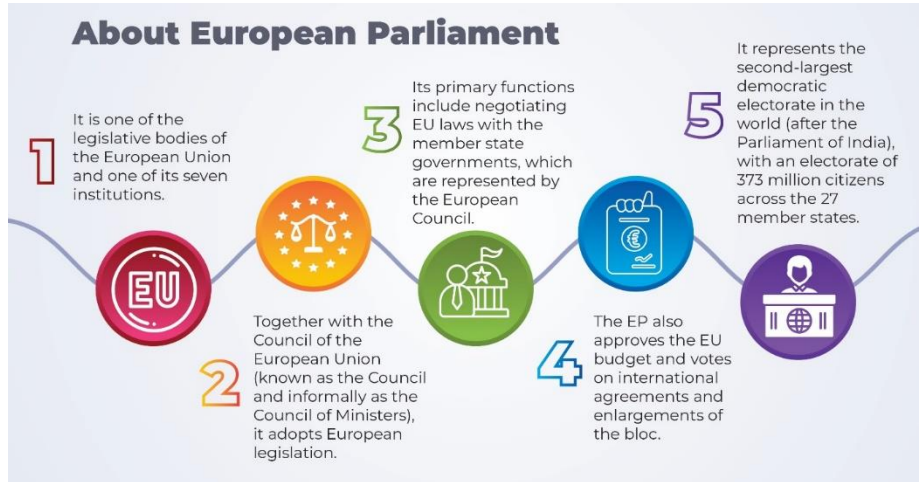
- India is looking to secure critical minerals like copper, coking coal, and rare earth elements from Mongolia to avoid using Chinese routes.
- Mongolia is rich in untapped mineral resources and has extensive deposits of coal, copper, fluorite, gold, iron, molybdenum, tungsten, uranium, and zinc.
- Currently, India is highly dependent on China for critical minerals, which are essential for transitioning to clean energy.
 - China dominates the sector and has opposed collaboration on supply chains.
- Against this backdrop, India has established joint working groups with the Mongolian embassy to explore collaboration.
 - One proposal is to form a *consortium of state-run companies* to set up the required infrastructure.
- India is also exploring alternative trading routes through Russia to strengthen its trade relationship with Mongolia.
 - India is funding and building Mongolia's first oil refinery, which is expected to be completed by 2025.

Elections in the European Parliament

The 2024 European Parliament election was held from 6 to 9 June. This was the tenth parliamentary election since the first direct elections in 1979, and the first European Parliament election after Brexit.

Elections in the European Parliament

- Since **1979**, the Parliament has been directly elected **every five years** by the citizens of the European Union through universal suffrage.
- The Parliament is composed of **705 members (MEPs)**, due to rise to 720 after the June 2024 European elections.
- The election process of the EU involves the following key steps:
 - **Voting System:**
 - Each member state has its own method of electing MEPs, but all use some form of proportional representation.
 - This system ensures that the number of seats a party wins is proportional to the number of votes it receives.
 - **Eligibility:**
 - Citizens of EU member states who are registered to vote can participate in the elections.
 - EU citizens living in a member state other than their own can choose to vote in either their home country or their country of residence.
 - Elected individuals cannot hold functions in national governments or other political bodies such as the EU Commission.
 - **Candidates:**
 - Political parties in each member state put forward lists of candidates.
 - Independent candidates can also run in some countries.
 - **Allocation of Seats:**
 - The number of MEPs each country elects is roughly proportional to its population, but smaller countries are slightly over-represented to ensure balanced representation.
 - **Voting Process:**
 - In some member states, voters can only choose closed lists that do not allow change of order for preferred candidates, while in others they can select individual candidates in a preferential system.
 - Depending on national laws, some electors abroad can vote at their national embassies, via mail or electronically.
 - **Counting Votes:**



- Once voting is completed, votes are counted in each member state, and seats are allocated to parties based on their share of the vote.
- **Formation of Political Groups:**
 - After the elections, MEPs form political groups in the European Parliament based on political affiliations rather than nationalities. Each group in Parliament must have at least 23 MEPs from seven EU countries.
 - These groups play a significant role in the legislative process.

Swiss Peace Summit

The two-day *Summit on Peace in Ukraine* titled **Path To Peace Summit** was concluded at the Bürgenstock resort in Switzerland with hopes for an end to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Key Outcome of Swiss Peace Summit

- **Final Joint Communiqué** was issued, supported by 80 countries and four organizations out of the 100 attending delegations.
- **Territorial integrity of Ukraine should be respected:** According to the communique, the territorial integrity of Ukraine should be the basis for any peace agreement to end Russia's war.
- **Important themes featured in the final statement:** The three themes of nuclear safety, food security and prisoner exchanges featured in the final statement.
 - It said that:
 - Any threat or use of nuclear weapons in the context of the ongoing war against Ukraine is inadmissible;
 - Food security must not be weaponized in any way.
 - Ukrainian agricultural products should be securely and freely provided to interested third countries
 - It emphasized that:
 - All prisoners of war must be released by complete exchange;
 - All deported and unlawfully displaced Ukrainian children, and all other Ukrainian civilians who were unlawfully detained, must be returned to Ukraine.
- **Humanitarian Aid**
 - The summit underscored the importance of providing humanitarian aid to those affected by the conflict, including displaced persons and civilians in war-torn areas.

India's Stand At The Summit

- **India attended the summit**
 - India was represented by the Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs.
- **Decided not to sign the joint communique:** By saying that only those options acceptable to both parties can lead to abiding peace.
 - It underlined that enduring peace can be achieved only through dialogue and diplomacy.
- **Reasons behind the Indian position of not becoming a signatory to the joint communique**
 - Russia - one of the two warring parties —declined to attend the summit. So, there can not be a lasting peace on this issue.

Sri Lanka Seals Debt Deal With Official Creditor Committee After Financial Crisis

Sri Lanka reached a final restructuring agreement for \$5.8 billion with its bilateral lenders' Official Creditor Committee (OCC) headed by India, Japan, and France.

Key Highlights

- **Background - Financial crisis in Sri Lanka**
 - Sri Lanka in mid-April of 2022 declared its first ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948.
 - International Monetary Fund (IMF) had made *external debt restructuring* conditional to the USD 2.9 billion bailout.
- **Final restructuring agreement**
 - Sri Lanka reached a final restructuring agreement for \$5.8 billion of debt with its bilateral lenders' Official Creditor Committee in Paris.
 - This agreement grants significant debt relief, allowing Sri Lanka to allocate funds to essential public services & secure concessional financing for development needs.
- **China's reluctance**
 - China, Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender, opted to stay out of the platform, but attended the discussions as an observer.
 - Colombo has been negotiating its debt treatment with Beijing bilaterally and has clinched a deal.
- **Significance of this agreement for Sri Lanka**
 - This agreement means that half of the government's external debt by creditor countries and organisations has been restructured.
 - Debt restructuring is a process used by companies, sovereign nations, or individuals facing financial distress to reorganize their outstanding debt obligations to make them more manageable and sustainable.
 - This milestone demonstrates the strong progress made by Sri Lanka in stabilizing its economy and moving towards reform and growth.
- **Role of India**
 - As one of the Co-Chairs of the OCC, along with France and Japan, India has been steadfast in its commitment to the stabilization, recovery and growth of the Sri Lankan economy.
 - This was also demonstrated by India's **unprecedented financial support of USD 4 billion** to Sri Lanka.
 - India was also the first creditor nation to convey financing assurances to IMF which paved the way for Sri Lanka to secure the IMF programme.

Official Creditor Committee (OCC) in Paris

- **Background**
 - OCC is a group formed to represent the collective interests of creditors during the debt restructuring or bankruptcy process of a debtor, typically a corporation or sovereign entity.
 - The OCC is often appointed in formal insolvency proceedings, such as those under the jurisdiction of bankruptcy courts, to ensure that the creditors' interests are protected and that the restructuring plan is fair and equitable.
 - This term OCC is used **more generally to describe any ad-hoc committee** formed to represent official creditors during debt restructuring negotiations.

- It does not refer to a single, permanent organization but rather to various committees that might be formed for specific cases.

- **About**

- The OCC that has signed a deal with Sri Lanka recently refers to a specific ad-hoc group of *official bilateral creditors*.
- It was formed in May 2023 with the aim of simplifying Sri Lanka's debt negotiations after the country defaulted on its external debt, in the wake of an unprecedented financial crash in 2022.

- **Members**

- The OCC is a platform comprising 17 countries including India and members of the Paris Club such as Japan, that have extended loans to Sri Lanka.

- **Headquarters**

- While not a permanent entity with a fixed headquarters, meetings for this OCC would typically be held in Paris, especially if coordinated with the Paris Club, which has its secretariat there.

- **Role and Function**

- The OCC's primary role is to negotiate and coordinate the restructuring of Sri Lanka's external debt, ensuring a fair and sustainable resolution for the country's debt crisis.

Paris Club

- **About** - It is an informal group of official creditors (primarily major industrialized countries) that coordinates solutions for debtor countries facing payment difficulties.
- **Headquarters** - Paris, France.
- **Members** - The Paris Club consists of 22 permanent member countries, which are primarily from Europe, North America, and Asia.

New Secretary General of NATO

- NATO's 32 nations appointed outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte as the alliance's next head.
- Mr. Rutte will take over from Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on October 1.

ITLOS Advisory Opinion on Climate Change Mitigation

- Recently, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) delivered an advisory opinion sought by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS).
- COSIS, an association of small island states established in 2021, requested the ITLOS to clarify the **specific obligations** of parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regarding climate change mitigation.

Key Highlights of the Advisory Opinion

- **Recognition of Anthropogenic Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions as Marine Pollution**
 - The ITLOS confirmed that under Article 194(1) of UNCLOS, parties have specific obligations to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution from anthropogenic GHG emissions.
 - It clarified that the release of carbon dioxide into the marine environment qualifies as a pollutant under Article 1(1)(4) of UNCLOS, thus reinforcing the scientific community's position on ocean acidification caused by CO2 emissions.

- **Impact on Climate Change Litigation**

- This advisory opinion has significant implications for future climate change litigation, particularly in the context of the upcoming advisory proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning the "Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change."
- By accepting COSIS's request, ITLOS has set a precedent for identifying the obligations of states beyond the parties to the COSIS Agreement.

Legal Significance and Obligations

- **Principle of Prevention or No Harm Rule**

- The opinion extends the principle of prevention, traditionally applied to avoid transboundary harm, to the regulation of climate change, emphasizing its collective nature over bilateral considerations.
- States are obligated to take necessary measures based on the best available science and relevant international agreements, including the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

- **Due Diligence and Equity**

- The ITLOS describes the obligation to take necessary measures as a due diligence obligation with a stringent standard due to the high risks of serious and irreversible harm from GHG emissions.
- The principle of equity must be considered, recognizing the varied capabilities and resources of different states.

- **General Nature of Obligations**

- While obligations are general, measures to reduce GHG emissions over time are considered sufficient, highlighting that states do not have unfettered discretion in addressing climate change.
- The advisory opinion identifies general obligations without detailing specific measures or methodologies for assessing the requisite level of mitigation action.

- **Political and Legal Influence**

- Although advisory opinions lack legal binding force, they hold significant political weight as authoritative judicial pronouncements.
- The opinion reinforces the notion that states must engage in substantial and concrete actions to mitigate climate change, beyond mere symbolic commitments.

International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS)

- **About**

- It is an independent judicial body established by UNCLOS.

- **Establishment and Purpose**

- **Creation:** ITLOS was established under UNCLOS, which was adopted in 1982 and came into force in 1994.
- **Purpose:** Its primary role is to settle disputes arising out of the interpretation and application of UNCLOS and to provide advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it.

- **Structure and Jurisdiction**

- **Composition:** ITLOS is composed of 21 independent judges elected by the states parties to the Convention. Judges serve nine-year terms and can be re-elected.
- **Jurisdiction:** The Tribunal's jurisdiction includes a wide range of maritime issues, such as territorial disputes, maritime boundaries, fishing rights, environmental protection, and navigation.

- **Functions**

- **Dispute Resolution:** ITLOS hears cases brought by states, international organizations, and other entities authorized by UNCLOS.
- **Advisory Opinions:** ITLOS can provide advisory opinions on legal questions related to UNCLOS at the request of the United Nations General Assembly, the Security Council, or other international organizations authorized by the Convention.
- **Headquarters:** Hamburg, Germany.

Biopharmaceutical Alliance

- South Korea, India, United States, Japan, and European Union have formed an alliance to create a resilient supply chain in the biopharmaceutical sector.
- Known as the Biopharmaceutical Alliance, it held its inaugural meeting in San Diego during the Bio International Convention 2024.
- The alliance aims to ensure a reliable and sustainable supply chain by coordinating bio policies, regulations, and research support measures.
- They will create a detailed pharmaceutical supply chain map in response to drug supply shortages experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian Navy Gets Its First Woman Helicopter Pilot

- Sub Lieutenant Anamika B. Rajeev became the *Indian Navy's* first woman helicopter pilot at the passing-out parade at naval air station INS Rajali in Tamil Nadu's Arakkonam.
- After IAF and Army, Indian Navy has also begun inducting women as helicopter pilots.
- In another milestone, Lieutenant Jamyang Tsewang, the first officer from Ladakh to be commissioned into the Navy, also successfully graduated as a qualified helicopter pilot.
- There are already 19 women flying fighters like MiG-21s, MiG-29s, Sukhoi-30MKIs and even the new omni-role Rafales in the IAF.
- On the other hand, there are over 145 women helicopter and transport aircraft pilots in the IAF, Army and the Navy.
- While women are still not allowed to join the infantry, armoured corps and mechanised infantry, women officers are now also being commissioned in the Regiment of Artillery.

India's 1st Joint Doctrine for Cyberspace Operations

The Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan released India's first **joint doctrine** for cyberspace operations, acknowledging that cyberspace has emerged as a crucial and challenging domain in modern warfare.

India's First Joint Doctrine for Cyberspace Operations – Key highlights

- **Background:**
 - **China** has built major capabilities in the cyberwarfare domain, including cyberweapons to degrade or destroy an adversary's military assets and strategic networks.
 - **India has been lagging far behind in this arena**, with the government only approving the creation of only a small **tri-service Defence Cyber Agency in 2019** instead of the full-fledged Cyber Command that the armed forces wanted.
- **Formulation of a new joint doctrine for cyberspace operations:**
 - The doctrine comes at a time when the Army is operationalising dedicated specialised units in each of its six operational or regional commands to handle the cyberspace domain.
 - The doctrine will **guide tri-services in planning and conducting cyberspace operations** in the current complex military operating environment.
 - It will give impetus to **ongoing process of integration** being actively pursued by Army, IAF & Navy.
- **Significance of the doctrine:** This doctrine –
 - Lays emphasis on understanding *military aspects* of cyberspace operations,

CYBER WARFARE

Meaning

- ✓ Cyber warfare are actions taken in cyberspace (dynamic and virtual space that connects the different computer systems) by state or non-state actors that
 - Either constitute a serious threat to a nation's security or
 - Are conducted in response to a perceived threat against a nation's security.
- ✓ Unlike territorial limits in the traditional domains of warfare (such as land, sea, and air), cyberspace is a global common and hence has shared sovereignty.
- ✓ Hostile actions in cyberspace can impact the nation's economy, cohesion, political decision making, and the ability to defend itself.

Types of Cyber warfare

- ✓ **Cyber terrorism:** It can be considered the **premeditated use of disruptive activities** (against computers and/or networks), with the intention to cause harm or further social, ideological, religious, political or similar objectives.
- ✓ **Cyber fraud:** aimed at getting monetary or related gains for the perpetrators.
- ✓ **Cyber spying:** aimed at gaining information for the perpetrators.
- ✓ **Cyber stalking or bullying:** designed to frighten and intimidate individuals rather than business or Government.

- Provides conceptual guidance to commanders, staff and practitioners in the planning, and conduct of operations in cyberspace, and
- Raise awareness of the Indian war fighters at all levels.

Vulnerability of India to Cyber Attacks and its Cyber Security Challenges

- **How vulnerable India is to cyber attacks?**
 - **Cyber security threats emanate** from wide variety of sources & manifest themselves in disruptive activities that target individuals, businesses, national infrastructure & Governments alike.
 - **In 2023, India** recorded 2,138 weekly cyber attacks per organization, a 15% increase from 2022.
 - This makes India the **second most targeted nation in the Asia Pacific region**, after Taiwan.
- **Cyber security challenges:**
 - **Lack of adequate human resource**, infrastructure, R&D and budgetary allocations to tackle cyber threats.
 - Threat emerging from servers hosted outside India.
 - Challenge posed by imported electronics/IT products.
 - Upcoming technology viz. Cloud computing, Big data, Internet of Things (IoT), etc.
 - **Balance between Cyber Security and Right to Privacy, etc.**

Extra Mile: Initiatives Taken Up by the Government to Check Cyber Crimes

- **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In):** is the national agency since 2004 for responding to computer security incidents in the country as and when they occur.
- **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C):** was established by Ministry of Home Affairs in 2018 to provide a framework and eco-system for **Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs)** for dealing with Cybercrime
 - **Joint Cyber Coordination Teams (JCCTs):** have been constituted under I4C covering the whole country based upon cybercrime hotspots/areas having multi-jurisdictional issues by on-boarding States/UTs to enhance the coordination framework among the LEAs of the States/UTs.
 - **CyTrain:** is a **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)** platform developed under I4C for capacity building of police officers/judicial officers through online course on critical aspects of cybercrime investigation, forensics, prosecution etc. along with certification.
 - **National Cyber Forensic Laboratory (Investigation):** established as a part of I4C, it provides early stage cyber forensic assistance to Investigating Officers (IOs) of State/UT Police.
- **Cyber Surakshit Bharat (CSB):** launched by MeitY in association with **National e-Governance Division** and industry partners to educate & enable the Chief Information Security Officers (CISO) & broader IT community of Central/State Governments, Banks and Public Sector Undertaking to address the challenges of cyber security in partnership with the industry.
- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (<https://cybercrime.gov.in>):** launched in 2019 to provide a centralized mechanism to the **citizens** for online reporting of all types of cybercrime incidents, with a special focus on cybercrimes against women and children.
- **Citizen Financial Cyber Frauds Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS):** developed as a part of National Cybercrime Reporting Portal, it provides an integrated platform, where all stakeholders including LEAs of States/UTs, all major Banks and financial intermediaries, payment wallets, crypto exchanges and e-commerce companies work in tandem to ensure that quick, decisive, and system-based effective action is taken to prevent the flow of money from victim's account to cyber fraudster's account. Since its inception (2021), an amount of more than Rs. 1000 Crore have been saved in more than 4 lakh incidents. A toll-free Helpline number '**1930**' has been operationalized to get assistance in lodging online cyber incidents.
- **Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC):** MHA has provided financial aid to the States/UTs for their capacity building such as setting up of cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories, hiring of junior cyber consultants and training of LEAs' personnel, public prosecutors and judicial officers.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** enacted to process the digital personal data in a such a manner that it recognizes the right of individuals to protect their personal data as well as the need to process such personal data for lawful purposes.
- **Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre):** to create a secure cyber space by detecting botnet infections and to notify, enable cleaning and securing systems of end users to prevent further infections.
- **National Cybersecurity Policy 2013:** It provides a framework for creating a secure cyber ecosystem and aims to protect information and other critical infrastructure.
- **NCIIPC:** The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) was established for the protection of critical information infrastructure in the country.

India Achieves an 'Outstanding Outcome' in FATF Mutual Evaluation

- India has achieved an outstanding outcome in the Mutual Evaluation conducted during 2023-24 by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- The Mutual Evaluation Report of India, which was adopted in the FATF plenary held in Singapore, places India in the **"regular follow-up" category**, a distinction shared by only four other G-20 countries.
- This signifies a high level of compliance in combating Money Laundering (ML) and Terror Financing (TF), though some non-financial sectors require improvement in supervision and preventive measures.
- The FATF highlighted India's success in mitigating ML/TF risks through digital economy initiatives like the JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) and stringent cash transaction regulations.
- This evaluation **enhances India's financial stability and integrity, boosting access to global financial markets and investor confidence**, and supporting the expansion of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- Founded in 1989, it is an initiative of the G7 countries to develop policies to combat **money laundering**.
 - In 2001, its mandate was expanded to include **terrorism financing**.
 - It has also started dealing with **virtual currencies**.
 - It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in money laundering.
 - It monitors progress in implementing its recommendations through "peer reviews" ("mutual evaluations") of member countries.
- **Headquarter** - The FATF Secretariat is located in **Paris**.
- **Members of FATF**: 39 members including two regional organizations (Gulf Cooperation Council and European Commission)
 - India became an Observer at FATF in 2006. In 2010, **India was taken in as the 34th country member of FATF**.
- **FATF's Mutual Evaluation Process**:
 - **Evaluation Team**: A team of experts from FATF member countries conducts the evaluation, analysing the country's measures and their effectiveness in preventing ML and TF in **compliance with international standards**.
 - **Country Reports**: The findings are compiled into a Mutual Evaluation Report, which provides a detailed analysis of the country's compliance and effectiveness. The report includes ratings and recommendations for improvement.
 - **Follow-Up**: After the evaluation, the country may be placed in follow-up processes to address any deficiencies. This involves periodic reporting to FATF on the progress made in implementing the recommended improvements.
 - **Public Disclosure**: The Mutual Evaluation Report is published, providing transparency and encouraging countries to enhance their AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism) regimes.

Bail In Money Laundering Cases

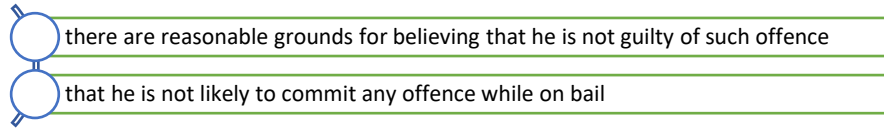
- A day after a trial court granted bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is in jail for money laundering charges, the Delhi High Court put a hold on that decision.
- The HC Bench heard an urgent request from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to stop the bail.

- ED argued that the trial court did not follow the '**twin test**' required for granting bail under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Section 45 of the PMLA

- **About**

- It speaks about the conditions set for bail. It states that no accused person shall be granted bail unless:
 - Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity to oppose the application for such release;&
 - where the Public Prosecutor opposes the application, the Court is satisfied that:



- **Stringent norms - twin conditions of bail**

- The burden of proof is entirely on the incarcerated accused, who would be often handicapped to fight the might of the state.
- The twin conditions make it almost impossible for an accused to get bail under the PMLA.

- **Analysis**

- **Bail as an exception** under PMLA
 - Section 45 of the PMLA first states that no court can grant bail except in a few exceptions.
 - The negative language in the provision itself shows that bail is not the rule but the exception.
- **Mandatory to hear the public prosecutor in all bail applications**
 - and when the prosecutor opposes bail, the court is required to apply a **twin test**.
- **Similar provisions in other statutes**
 - Section 36AC of The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940,
 - Section 37 of The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985,
 - Section 43D (5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
 -

Exercises

India to host Tarang Shakti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Air Force's <i>first multinational air exercise</i>, Tarang Shakti-2024, will be held in August. • It is likely to see the participation of ten countries, in addition to a few others acting as observers. • The exercise is now scheduled to be held in two phases. The first will be held in southern India in the first two weeks of August and the second will be in the western sector from the end of August to mid-September
Red Flag exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted by the U.S. Air Force (USAF) in June, it concluded at the Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This was the second edition of Red Flag this year; the exercise is hosted four times a year by the USAF. • Apart from the IAF, this edition saw the participation of the Singapore Air Force, the U.K.'s Royal Air Force, the Royal Netherlands Air Force, and the German Luftwaffe.
RIMPAC naval exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024 is the 29th iteration of the world's largest international maritime exercise.

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Held around the Hawaiian Islands, it involved 29 nations including India.• Theme - “Partners: Integrated and Prepared,” |
|--|--|

Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi Takes Command

- Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi has been appointed as the next Chief of the Army Staff, succeeding the incumbent General Manoj Pande. He will assume the position on June 30.
 - General Pande, initially due to retire on May 31, was given a one-month extension.
- The standard procedure is to elevate either the highest-ranking Army commander or the Vice-Chief of the Army to the position of Army chief upon the retirement of the current Chief of the Army Staff.
- The term for the Army Chief concludes either after three years in the role or upon reaching the age of 62, depending on which comes first.

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

Monsoon Croaks Bioblitz

Monsoon Croaks Bioblitz is aiming to document frog species in Kerala during the monsoon season, utilizing the iNaturalist app for public participation

About Monsoon Croaks Bioblitz

- It's a four-month citizen science program organized by Centre for Citizen Science & Biodiversity Informatics at Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI- Kerala hosts over 200 frog species.)
 - ✓ 41% of the world's frogs are on the IUCN Red List of endangered species.
- It aims to raise awareness about frog biodiversity and habitat conservation, with observations contributing to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility database.

Stromatolites

Evidence of living Stromatolites have been found on Sheybarah Island in the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia.

About Stromatolites (primarily found in shallow marine environments like tidal flats & Lagoon)

- They are layered, biochemical, accretionary structures formed in shallow water by the trapping, binding and cementation of sedimentary grains in biofilms (specifically microbial mats), through the action of certain microbial lifeforms, especially cyanobacteria.
- These structures are significant because they provide some of the earliest evidence of life on Earth, dating back to over 3.5 billion years ago. They represent some of the oldest known fossils, dating back to the Archean Eon.
- Cyanobacteria within stromatolites played a crucial role in the Great Oxygenation Event (GOE), which occurred around 2.4 billion years ago.
- Via photosynthesis, these microorganisms produced significant amounts of oxygen, leading to dramatic changes in Earth's atmosphere & paving the way for the evolution of aerobic life forms.

Red List of Mangrove Ecosystems

1st comprehensive global assessment of mangroves, the Red List of Mangrove Ecosystems has been issued by IUCN.

Key Findings of the Report

- **Classification and Risk Assessment:** World's mangrove ecosystems have classified into 36 different regions called provinces and assessed the threats and risk of collapse in each region.
- **High Risk of Collapse:** Over 50% of the world's mangrove ecosystems are at risk of collapse (classified as either vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered),
- **Impact of Sea-Level Rise:** This will severely affect One-third of the world's mangrove ecosystem provinces.

Regional Differences in Threat Levels

- **Critically Endangered:** The mangrove ecosystem in South India shared with Sri Lanka and Maldives, is categorized as "critically endangered".
- **Least Concerned:** In contrast, mangrove ecosystems in the Bay of Bengal region (shared with Bangladesh) and the western coast (shared with Pakistan) are classified as "least concerned".

- **Major threat** to 33 percent of global mangroves is climate change followed by deforestation, development, pollution, and dam construction

Biocover

Innovative use of biocovers, which utilise fine fraction from landfill mining, presents a compelling model for methane control in Estonia.

About Biocovers

- It is a sustainable technology designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly methane, from landfills. Biocovers are typically spread over an entire landfill area.
- They are often waste materials, such as diverse composts, mechanically-biologically treated waste, dewatered sewage sludge or yard waste.
- It essentially functions as a biological filter for captured landfill gas (LFG- primarily methane (CH₄)) and converting into CO₂.

Components

1. Gas Dispersion Layer: This layer typically consists of gravel, broken glass, or coarse sand. It allows LFG to passively migrate upwards through the cover.
2. Oxidation Layer: This layer is the heart of the biocover system. It's composed of mature compost, soil amended with organic materials, or wood chips. This layer provides a habitat for naturally occurring methanotrophic bacteria.

Parengyodontium Album

Marine fungus named Parengyodontium album has been discovered that can break down oceanic polyethylene (PE) plastic.

About Parengyodontium album (P. album)

- This fungus is most commonly found in marine environments, where it thrives on plastic debris, particularly polyethylene (PE), the most common plastic polluting our oceans.
- **Biotechnological Process:** It breaks down PE by using ultraviolet (UV) light to initiate the process and then utilizes the carbon from the plastic as an energy source for its own growth.
- **Habitat and Ecology:** It is not limited to the oceans. It has also been found in a variety of other environments, including Polar soils and areas with high salinity, Stone, wood, glass, or paper found in old buildings, caves, and historical landmarks.
- The fungus produces various enzymes, such as proteases and cellulases, which have potential applications in industrial processes. These enzymes can be harnessed for:
 - ✓ **Biodegradation:** Breaking down complex organic compounds in waste management.
 - ✓ **Bioremediation:** Treating contaminated environments by degrading pollutants.

Nagi and Nakti Wetlands

The Nagi and Nakti Bird Sanctuaries of Bihar have been recognized as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, taking the total number of Ramsar Sites in the country to 82.

- ✓ India and China are tied for third place globally in terms of the number of Ramsar Sites (82 sites).
- ✓ The United Kingdom holds the top position with 175 sites, followed by Mexico with 144. Over the past decade, India has seen a significant increase in its Ramsar Sites, rising from 26 to 82.

About the Nagi and Nakti Wetlands (Jamui district -Bihar, the Jhajha forest range)

- These man-made wetlands designated as bird sanctuaries for their importance as wintering habitats for several migratory species. (largest congregations of red-crested pochard (*Netta rufina*)) & shelter to the endangered Indian elephant and the vulnerable native catfish.
- Nakti Bird Sanctuary was formed after the construction of Nakti Dam on the Nakti River (a tributary of Koel River).
- According to the Asiatic Waterbird Census 2023, Nakti held the distinction of having the highest number of birds (7,844) followed closely by Nagi (6,938).
- ✓ The Kanwar Lake in Bihar was designated as the state's first Ramsar Site in 2020.

Cold Lava

Mount Kanlaon volcano in the Philippines witnessed rivers of cold Lava.

About Cold Lava: (also known as lahar)

- Lahar is a fast-moving slurry of superheated water, volcanic ash, rock fragments, and pumice.
- **Formation:** Forms when heavy rain mixes with volcanic ash from an eruption, creating a thick, mudflow-like consistency. Lahars can also form when the crater lake of a volcano overflows or when glaciers on a volcano melt rapidly.
- **Speed and Mobility:** Unlike slow-moving lava flows, lahars (with high mass, and density) can travel at incredibly high speeds, reaching up to hundreds of kilometers per hour
- **Temperature & Impacts:** While lahars aren't technically molten rock, they can still be extremely hot (Despite the name "cold lava,") due to the trapped volcanic material. This heat, combined with the abrasive nature of the debris it carries, can cause serious burns & property damage.
- **Secondary Hazards:** Lahars can create secondary hazards by damming rivers, leading to flooding, or by depositing large amounts of sediment into water bodies, causing siltation & affecting aquatic life.
- **Mitigation and Preparedness:** By combining early warning systems, engineering solutions, and community education, the impact of lahars can be mitigated, saving lives and reducing damage.
- **Case Study of Nevado del Ruiz, Colombia:** One of the most devastating lahar events occurred in 1985 when the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in Colombia erupted, melting its ice cap and triggering a massive lahar. The flow buried the town of Armero, killing over 23,000 people.

State of Ocean Report

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO launched the State of the Ocean Report 2024 publication (StOR) during the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference.

Key Findings of Report

- Alarming rate of ocean warming: The upper 2,000 meters of the ocean have warmed significantly, with an accelerated rate in the past two decades. Rate doubled in 20 years; 2023 saw a significant increase; Hotspots above 2°C in the Mediterranean, Tropical Atlantic Ocean & Southern Oceans.
- Rising Acidity: Due to absorption of carbon dioxide emissions, Ocean absorbs 25% of annual anthropogenic CO₂
- Increasing BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand): Ocean lost 2% oxygen since the 1960s; coastal areas are heavily impacted.
- ✓ BOD is a key indicator used in environmental science and water quality management.

IOC/UNESCO (UNESCO- Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) – Estd .1961

- It assists governments in addressing ocean and coastal management needs through knowledge sharing, technology, and capacity building.
- It plays a crucial role in the sustainable development discourse, supporting the creation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and engaging in partnerships for ocean sustainability

Air of the Anthropocene' Initiative

"Air of the Anthropocene" project uses light painting to visualise air pollution in India, Ethiopia & the UK

About the 'Air of the Anthropocene' Initiative (to raise awareness about air pollution)

- This project (combines art & science) has been exhibited at gallery shows in Los Angeles, Belfast & Birmingham to collect real-time data on particulate matter (PM), a major air pollutant.
- Air pollution is considered one of the main threats to both the environment and human health and a leading cause of death globally.
- WHO estimates 99 per cent of the global population breathe polluted air, causing approximately 7 million premature deaths worldwide each year.
 - ✓ Particulate Matter (PM) is the air pollutant most responsible for human morbidity & mortality. It includes both organic and inorganic particles such as dust, pollen, soot, smoke, and liquid droplets, which vary greatly in size, composition, and origin.
 - ✓ It has multiple impacts on physical health and is responsible for diseases, including heart disease, stroke, and cancers.

Dead Zone

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA-USA) forecasts above-average summer 'dead zone' in Gulf of Mexico (influenced by runoff from the Mississippi River).

Overall & Adverse Impacts because of Dead Zones

- Many marine species (Fish and Shellfish) either die or migrate away from hypoxic areas, leading to decreased biodiversity. (Habitats such as coral reefs and seagrass beds suffer from hypoxia)
- Benthic Organisms: Bottom-dwelling organisms, such as crabs and worms, are particularly affected due to their limited mobility.
- The loss of key species disrupts the entire food web, affecting predator-prey relationships and the overall health of the ecosystem.

ABOUT DEAD ZONE (OR HYPOXIC ZONES/ LOW-OXYGEN AREAS)

- ✓ Dead zones are areas in oceans and large lakes where there is a significant reduction in the amount of dissolved oxygen (DO) in the water.

CAUSES OF DEAD ZONES

- ✓ The primary cause of dead zones is eutrophication, which is the enrichment of water bodies with nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus. Sources of these nutrients are: Agricultural runoff; Industrial Discharge; Sewage etc.
 - Eutrophication is a process characterized by excessive growth of algae (algal blooms). When these algae die, they are decomposed by bacteria that consume large amounts of oxygen, resulting in hypoxia.

Bayesian Convolutional Neural Network (BCNN)

Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has developed the Bayesian Convolutional Neural Network (BCNN) to predict the emergence of El Nino & La Nina conditions in advance.

About Bayesian Convolutional Neural Network (BCNN)

- It is technology that harnesses the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI), deep & machine learning (ML). It has ability to account for the slow oceanic variations & their atmospheric coupling.
- It calculates the Nino 3.4 Index Value, a critical metric used in ENSO phase prediction, with improved precision which is obtained by averaging the sea surface temperature (SST) anomaly in the central equatorial Pacific (extending from 5°N to 5°S, and 170°W to 120°W).
 - ✓ ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation) is a climate phenomenon which involves changes in the temperature of waters in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, coupled with fluctuations in the overlying atmosphere. It can alter the global atmospheric circulation, which, in turn, influences weather across the world.
 - ✓ ENSO occurs in irregular cycles of 2-7 years and has three different phases — warm (El Niño), cool (La Niña), and neutral.

INCOIS (autonomous body at Hyderabad, Estd.1999, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES))

- It is mandated to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvements through systematic and focused research.
- The three primary services provided are the Tsunami Early Warning Service, Ocean State Forecast Service and Potential Fishing Zone Advisory Service.
- INCOIS launched Early warning systems like the Swell Surge Forecast System which gives forewarning seven days in advance. It also launched Algal Bloom Information Service and Small Vessel Advisory and Forecast Services System (SVAS).
 - ✓ 'SVAS' for small vessels navigating the coastal waters on the east and west coast alerting about any 'overturning' zones 10 days in advance.

Bio Bitumen

India is looking to start large-scale production of bio-bitumen from biomass or agricultural waste.

About Bio bitumen/ Bio-asphalt (Black or Brown in colour)

- It is an environmentally friendly alternative to traditional petroleum-based bitumen. It is produced from renewable biological resources, such as plant materials, algae, or waste products.
 - ✓ In 2022-23 India's import of Bitumen was 3.21 MT and in same period indigenous production was 5.24 MT. Currently, India imports about half of its annual bitumen requirement.
- It is widely used to bind the surfaces of paved roads as it possesses waterproofing & adhesive properties, making it a sustainable option for road construction and other applications.

Hindukush Himalaya Snow Update

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has reported the Hindu Kush Himalaya snow update.

Key Findings of ICIMOD

- The Ganga river basin experienced lowest snow persistence in 22 years, 17% below the long-term historical normal
 - ✓ **Snow Persistence** is the fraction of time snow is on the ground which after melting provides water to people and ecosystems. In the river basins of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), snowmelt is the biggest source of water in the streams.


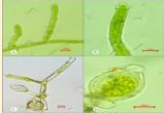


- Snow persistence in the Brahmaputra basin was 14.6% below normal in 2024.
- In the Indus River basin, snow persistence fell 23.3% below normal in 2023- 24.
- The reduced snow persistence is primarily attributed to weak western disturbances, which are crucial for bringing precipitation to the region during winter.
- The reduction in snow persistence poses serious risks of water shortages, especially in early summer when water demand peaks.






**The persistence of snow in China’s Yellow River basin exceeded the normal value by 20.2% in 2024.

About ICIMOD (Established in 1983, based in Kathmandu, Nepal)

- An intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre working on behalf of the people of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) for eight regional member countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.
- The organization's work is geared towards addressing climate change impacts, disaster risk reduction & sustainable livelihoods by implementing Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring & Assessment Programme (HIMAP); Mountain Environment Regional Information System (MENRIS).

Species in News

<p>Stellariamcclintockiae</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This new plant species was discovered in Kerala’s Nelliampathy hills and named after Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock • This is the first Stellaria species reported from South India. • The annual herb has unique petals, pollen, bracts, sepals, and seeds.
<p>Oedocladium sahyadricum</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This new algal species is discovered in Western Ghats. • The name ‘sahyadricum’ refers to the Western Ghats, also known as Sahyadri, which is rich in plant diversity and provides ideal conditions for the growth of terrestrial microalgae. • This is the first time a species in the Oedocladium category has been recorded in Kerala.
<p>Tmesipteris oblanceolata</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a rare species of fern boasting the largest genome known to date at 160.45 billion base pairs (Gbp), • With its 160 billion base pairs, it surpasses the human genome by over 50 times. • It grows primarily on the ground or atop fallen tree trunks on the island nation of New Caledonia.
<p>Paraparatrechina</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ant species discovered from Siang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh. • It marks the first addition to the Paraparatrechina genus from the Indian subcontinent. <p>The head is subtriangular with large eyes and has a triangular mouthpart (mandible) featuring five teeth.</p>
<p>Catla</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to a new report released by the United Nations, Catla was one of the top 10 species of aquatic animals harvested by humans in 2022.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a non-predatory fish and its feeding is restricted to the surface and mid-waters. • The natural distribution of Catla seems to be governed by temperature dependency rather than latitude and longitude. • It is a eurythermal species that grows best at water temperatures between 25-32 °C • IUCN Red List status: Least Concern.
<p>Przewalski's Horses</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These were found in Mongolia. • A wild horse species, returned to Kazakh steppes — the native habitat of this endangered species. • Their successful reintroduction led to the IUCN changing the status of Przewalski's horses from 'Extinct in the Wild' to 'Endangered' in 2011.
<p>Greater adjutant stork</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The greater adjutant stork also known as 'Garuda', one of the most endangered bird species, is facing severe threats due to rapid urbanization in Assam. • It is also known as the "Hargila" in Assam, India. • Mainly confined to small regions, primarily in Assam, India. • They are long-necked large birds. • IUCN Red List: Endangered, • Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule IV
<p>Filoboletusmanipularis</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rare species of <i>bioluminescent mushrooms</i>. • These mushrooms glow a bright green at night due to a chemical reaction in their cells. • They have been discovered in the forests of Kasaragod. • It is commonly found in Australasia, Malaysia, and the Pacific islands. • They thrive in tropical, humid environments, typically found in dense forests where there's plenty of decaying organic matter, like fallen trees and leaves.
<p>Striped caecilian (Ichthyophis spp)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This limbless amphibian, has been newly discovered in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. • They are classified under the order Apoda, a limbless amphibian known for spending most of its life burrowed under soil. • They can breathe through their skin and lungs and belong to the egg-laying genus Ichthyophis. • Caecilians are found in six families across Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia

Nidoviruses

In a variety of vertebrates, researchers had identified 40 novel Nidoviruses using artificial intelligence.

About Nidoviruses (notable for their large genomes and complex replication mechanisms)

- They are a large and diverse order of positive-strand RNA viruses (largest RNA genomes among viruses) that infect a wide range of vertebrates and invertebrates, including humans, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, arthropods, mollusks, and helminths
- They are named for the Latin nidus, meaning nest (includes several families of viruses), as all viruses in this order produce a nested set of subgenomic mRNAs during infection

Currently five recognized families within the order Nidovirales:

1. Coronaviridae: Includes viruses such as the common cold viruses, SARS-CoV (which causes severe acute respiratory syndrome), and SARS-CoV-2 (which causes COVID-19).
2. Arteriviridae: Includes viruses that can cause serious diseases in animals, such as porcine reproductive & respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV) in pigs, equine viral arteritis (EVA) in horses.
3. Roniviridae: includes viruses that infect fish, such as the infectious salmon anemia virus (ISAV).
4. Tobaniviridae: Includes viruses that infect plants like the tomato chlorotic dwarf virus (TCDV).
5. Mesoniviridae: includes viruses that infect insects, such as the bee-associated nidovirus (BV).

Lignosat

Researchers from Japanese Kyoto University and Sumitomo Forestry have developed the world's first wooden satellite, LignoSat.

About Lignosat (Latin word ligno (wood)) (promote the eco-friendliness and cost-effectiveness)

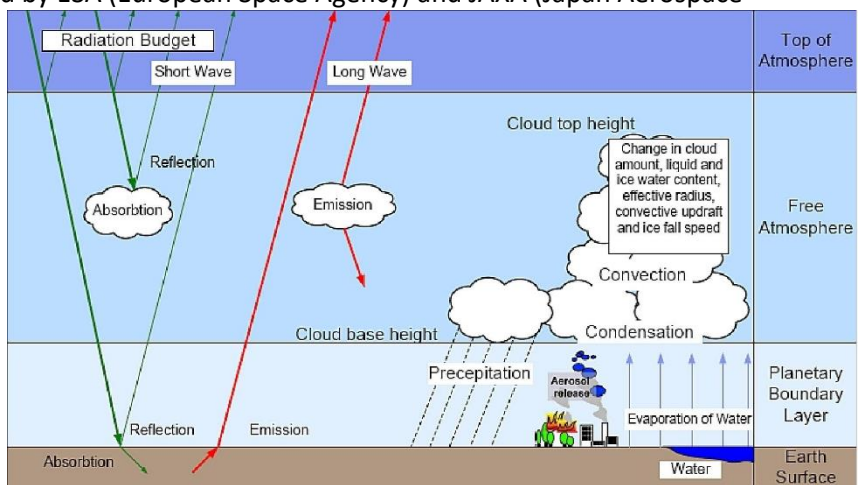
- This tiny cuboid craft, made from magnolia wood, measures 10 centimetres on each side and will be launched on a SpaceX rocket in September 2024 to the International Space Station (ISS).
- The wooden material is expected to burn up completely upon re-entry (releasing only water vapor and carbon dioxide), avoiding the creation of harmful metal particles (Its purpose is to help combat space debris and pollution)

EarthCARE Mission

Recently EarthCARE Mission was launched by ESA (European Space Agency) and JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) to measure the influence of clouds on the climate.

About EarthCARE (Earth Clouds, Aerosols and Radiation Explorer)

- It will further clear the understanding about the role that clouds and aerosols play in reflecting incident solar radiation (INSOLAR) back into space and trapping infrared radiation (Terrestrial Radiation) emitted from Earth's surface.



- EarthCARE employs high-performance lidar (use of light waves) and radar technology (Application of Radio Waves) that has never been flown in space before.
- It is the sixth mission of ESA's Earth Explorer Programme and is the largest and most complex Earth Explorer to date
- Equipped with four high-tech instruments: Cloud Profiling Radar (CPR), Backscatter Lidar (ATLID), Multi-Spectral Imager (MSI), Broadband Radiometer (BBR)

Recombinant Proteins

Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru have formulated method for mass-producing recombinant proteins.

About Recombinant proteins (This process is fundamental to genetic engineering & biotechnology.)

- These are artificial proteins produced by inserting a specific gene into a host organism (which then expresses the protein), typically bacteria or yeast. (Producing genetic material from different sources to create new sequences).
 - ✓ The first recombinant protein produced was human insulin, which revolutionized diabetes treatment.

Applications

- **Therapeutic Proteins:** Insulin, growth hormones, & monoclonal antibodies are produced as recombinant proteins.
- **Vaccines & Diagnostics:** Recombinant protein-based vaccines, such as the HPV vaccine, provide immunity against diseases + used in diagnostic tests, including ELISA and Western blot assays.
- **Enzymes:** Produce enzymes for food processing, biofuel production, and bioremediation.
- **Biocatalysts:** Synthesize chemicals and pharmaceuticals through biocatalytic processes.
- **Drug Development:** Screen for potential drug targets and evaluate drug efficacy.

Mechanisms of Recombinant Protein Technology

1. Gene Isolation: isolating the gene that encodes the desired protein from the original organism.
2. Vector Construction: This isolated gene is then inserted into a DNA molecule called a vector. The vector acts as a carrier
3. Transformation: The vector with the gene of interest is introduced into the host cells using various techniques.
4. Protein Expression: the machinery translates the introduced gene's instructions, producing the desired recombinant protein.
5. Purification: the recombinant protein is extracted and purified from the host cells for further use.

PraVaHa

Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) software named Parallel RANS Solver for Aerospace Vehicle Aero-thermodynamic Analysis (PraVaHa) has been developed by ISRO

About PraVaHa

- CFD simulates fluid flow, heat transfer, and related phenomena using numerical methods. It is one such tool to predict the aerodynamic and aerothermal loads which solve numerically the equations of conservation of mass, momentum, and energy.
 - ✓ Any aerospace vehicle while moving through the earth's atmosphere during 'launch' or 're-entry' is subjected to severe aerodynamic and aerothermal loads in terms of external pressure and heat flux.



PraVaHa Helps To Analyze

1. External & Internal Aerodynamics: How air flows around & within a launch vehicle, winged aircraft, or re-entry vehicle during different flight stages.
2. Aerothermal Loads: The combined effects of aerodynamic forces and heat transfer on the vehicle's structure

Significance of PraVaHa

1. Reduced Design Time and Cost with Enhanced Design Accuracy: PraVaHa allows for virtual testing of aerospace vehicles, reducing the need for expensive physical wind tunnel experiments.
2. Self-Reliance: PraVaHa reduces dependence on foreign commercial CFD software, promoting India's indigenous space technology development.
3. Support for Gaganyaan Program: PraVaHa played a vital role in the aerodynamic analysis of human-rated launch vehicles (HLVM3), Crew Escape System (CES) for India's Gaganyaan mission.

Hydroxyurea

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) invited Expressions of Interest (EoI) from various organisations for the "joint development and commercialisation" of low dose or paediatric oral formulation of hydroxyurea to treat sickle cell disease in India.

About Hydroxyurea (taken orally in the form of capsules or tablets)

- It's a medication used to treat certain types of cancer, such as chronic myelocytic leukemia (CML) and some head and neck cancers, as well as to reduce the frequency of painful crises in people with sickle cell anemia.
- It works by slowing the growth of rapidly dividing cells, including cancer cells and bone marrow cells that produce abnormal red blood cells in sickle cell disease.
 - ✓ Hydroxyurea inhibits the enzyme ribonucleotide reductase, which is crucial for DNA synthesis. It is used to decrease the high platelet count, reducing the risk of thrombosis.
 - ✓ Polycythemia Vera condition involves the overproduction of red blood cells. Hydroxyurea helps reduce the red blood cell count, lowering the risk of blood clots & other complications.
- Common side effects: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, mouth sores, hair loss, and skin rash, decreasing levels of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets in the blood.

Reverse Transcriptase (RT) Enzyme

Reverse Transcriptase played a pivotal role in both diagnostic testing and scientific research related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

About Reverse Transcriptase Enzyme

- It Plays a crucial role in the replication of some viruses, including HIV.
- It allows the virus to convert its genetic material, which is single-stranded RNA, into double-stranded DNA. This DNA can then integrate into the host cell's DNA and be transcribed to produce new viral particles.
 - ✓ Reverse transcriptase was independently discovered by Howard Temin and David Baltimore in 1970, for which they shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1975.

Applications

1. Researchers could now reverse-transcribe messenger RNAs into DNA fragments, clone that DNA into bacterial vectors, and study the function of corresponding genes.

2. Diagnosis: reverse transcriptase for RNA-to-DNA conversion can be used in diagnostics, especially for RNA viruses, including Hepatitis B, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and Human Endogenous Retroviruses and Neuropsychiatric Diseases.
3. In biotechnology, reverse transcriptase is widely used to create cDNA libraries and in techniques such as reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (**RT-PCR**).

Extra Mile: Difference among translation, Replication, transcription and reverse transcription (RT)

- **Transcription** is the process by which the genetic information in DNA is copied into messenger RNA (mRNA).
- **Replication** is the process by which a cell makes an exact copy of its DNA
- **Translation** is the process by which the mRNA sequence is used to synthesize a protein.
- **Reverse transcription** is the process by which RNA is used as a template to synthesize complementary DNA (cDNA).

TRISHNA Mission

ISRO, on the occasion of World Environment Day (5th June), provided details about its collaboration with the French national space agency CNES for the upcoming Thermal Infrared Imaging Satellite for High-resolution Natural Resource Assessment (TRISHNA) mission.

About TRISHNA Mission

- It is built to provide exceptional details about the Earth's land & water temperatures. These measurements are crucial for farming strategies like tracking urban heat & managing disasters.
- TRISHNA's data will contribute to several global initiatives, such as GEOGLAM for agricultural monitoring, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and targets, and the Global Water Watch.

TRISHNA satellite comes with two main payloads—

1. Thermal Infra-Red (TIR) Payload provided by CNES for infrared imaging sensor capable of high-resolution surface temperature and emissivity mapping.
2. Visible - Near Infra-Red - Short Wave Infra-Red (VNIR-SWIR) Payload developed by ISRO which includes seven spectral bands designed for detailed mapping of surface reflectance in VSWIR bands (Visible, Short-Wave Infrared) and will help generate important biophysical and radiation budget variables.

Objectives

- Deliver high-quality thermal images to improve understanding and address climate change and water management issues.
- Provide high spatial and temporal resolution monitoring of Earth's surface temperature, emissivity, and biophysical variables.

Gene-Drive Technology (GDT)

Research has shown that genetically modified (GM) mosquitoes using GDT can be used in outdoor but controlled conditions showing promising drops in mosquito populations, around 90% during the trials.

About Gene Drive Technology

- It is a powerful genetic engineering technique that alters the inheritance of genes in a population
- Unlike traditional Mendelian inheritance (50% chance of offspring inheriting a specific gene), gene drives dramatically increase the likelihood of a particular gene being passed on to future generations.
- It essentially hacks the natural process of heredity, making a specific gene much more likely to spread through a population.
- Gene drives typically involve inserting a specific genetic construct into an organism's genome. This construct includes: The desired gene (the one you want to spread), A copying mechanism that ensures the gene gets preferentially copied during reproduction, An optional editing mechanism that can alter or silence existing genes
- Applications: Disease Control, Pest Management, Conservation through Introducing genes for resistance to disease or improving survival rates could aid in the conservation of endangered species.

Green-beard Genes

Scientists have gained valuable new insights into natural altruism by studying the amoeba *Dictyostelium discoideum* & Green-beard' genes.

About Green Beard Genes

Green-beard genes are a hypothetical type of gene that explains how altruism, seemingly selfless behavior that benefits others, could evolve through natural selection. It could work as follow:

1. Green Beards Help Green Beards: Individuals with the green-beard gene would preferentially help other green-bearded individuals, even if it meant some cost to themselves.
2. Helping Spreads the Gene: By helping green-bearded relatives, they would indirectly help spread copies of the green-beard gene to the next generation.
3. Evolutionary Advantage: Over time, the green-beard gene would become more common in the population because it would increase the reproductive success of individuals carrying it.

Xylitol

Recent study revealed that Artificial sweeteners, particularly xylitol, may pose health risks by affecting platelets and blood clotting, leading to cardiovascular events.

About Xylitol (LCS sometimes carry the label "sugar-free" or "diet".)

- Xylitol is a sugar alcohol that looks and tastes like sugar but has fewer calories (Low-calorie sweeteners (LCS)) and doesn't raise blood sugar levels.
- It is a polyalcohol, or sugar alcohol, which means it contains multiple hydroxyl (OH) groups.
- It occurs naturally in small amounts in many fruits and vegetables, and even small quantities are produced by the human body during normal metabolism (Commercially, xylitol is often extracted from birch wood or corn cobs.)
- **Applications:** Xylitol is most commonly used as a sugar substitute and can be found in a variety of products, including Sugar-free chewing gum, Sugar-free candy, Diabetic foods, Toothpaste, Mouthwash, Nasal sprays (Xylitol is especially popular in dental care products because of its ability to reduce cavities and dental plaque.)
- Xylitol has a low glycemic index (GI), making it suitable for people with diabetes. It does not cause a rapid spike in blood sugar levels, unlike regular sugar.

****In 2023, the study found similar results for another low-calorie sweetener called erythritol.**

Craters on Mars Surface

The scientists of the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) discovered the three craters on Mars.

About Discovery (located in Tharsis Volcanic Region on Mars with extensive lava flows)

The discovery was made within the Mangala crater of Mars using SHARAD (Mars SHALLOW RADAR sounder), a subsurface sounding radar mounted on the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) probe — a spacecraft designed to search for the existence of water on Mars as part of NASA's Mars Exploration Program.

These craters are: (Names are approved by the International Astronomical Union (IAU))

1. Lal Crater (65 km wide, and the biggest among the three): Named after Prof. Devendra Lal, a renowned Indian geophysicist and former director of PRL from 1972-1983.
2. Mursan Crater: Named after a town in Uttar Pradesh, India, that was superimposed on the eastern side of the rim of the Lal crater.
3. Hilsa Crater: Named after a town in Bihar, superimposed on the western side of the rim of the Lal crater.

About PRL (Physical Research Laboratory, Established In 1947 by Dr. Vikram Sarabhai)

A unit of the Department of Space, it carries out fundamental research in selected areas of Physics, Space & Atmospheric Sciences, Astronomy, Astrophysics & Solar Physics, and Planetary & Geo-Sciences.

Extra Mile: Mars & It's Craters

- When a bolide collides with a planet, it produces an impact crater.
 - ✓ Bolides are any falling body such as a meteorite and are commonly made of rock, ice, or a combination of rock and ice.
- Craters come in different sizes. The largest crater on Mars (and, arguably the largest so far discovered in the solar system) is the Hellas basin measuring 1600 x 2000 km, roughly twice the size of Alaska. However, most Martian impact craters are smaller than 100 km.

Enterobacter Bugandensis

IIT Madras and NASA have studied the bacteria Enterobacter bugandensis on the International Space Station (ISS).

About Enterobacter Bugandensis (gram-negative, rod-shaped bacteria)

- It is associated with a range of infections, including respiratory tract infections, urinary tract infections, wound infections, and bacteremia (presence of bacteria in the blood).
- Habitat: While Enterobacter bugandensis was first identified in a clinical setting, other Enterobacter species are typically found in soil, water, sewage, and the feces and gut environments of animals and humans
- Some strains of Enterobacter bugandensis have been found to be resistant to multiple antibiotics (AMR-Antimicrobial Resistance), making them more difficult to treat.

Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS)

Recently nearly 1,000 cases of Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS) the flesh-eating bacteria" reported nationwide in Japan.

About Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS)

- STSS is caused by the rapid growth and release of toxins from Group A Streptococcus (GAS) bacteria. GAS is commonly known for causing strep throat and impetigo, but in rare cases, it can lead to STSS.

- It can develop from various starting points, including Skin and soft tissue infections like surgical wounds, impetigo, or even insect bites, Serious infections like pneumonia or meningitis.
- **Transmission:** GAS bacteria can be transmitted through respiratory droplets, direct contact with infected wounds or sores, and, less commonly, through contaminated surfaces.
- **Symptoms:** Sudden high fever, Rash that looks like sunburn, often starting on the groin, armpits, or perineum, and may later peel, Redness, swelling, and intense pain around a wound or infected area, Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, Dizziness, Muscle aches
- **Treatment:** Immediate hospitalization and a combination of drugs: Antibiotics, Supportive care, Surgery (to remove the source of infection)

Methanol

Methanol, often used to increase the potency of bootleg liquor

About Methanol (Methyl alcohol / Wood alcohol, Organic Compound- CH₃OH)

Properties

- Methanol is a low carbon, hydrogen carrier fuel produced from high ash coal, agricultural residue, CO₂ from thermal power plants and natural gas.
- Physical State: Colorless liquid at room temperature
- Odor: Faint alcoholics smell like ethanol (drinking alcohol) but can be pungent in crude forms.
- Flammability: Highly flammable and burns with a pale blue flame.
- Toxicity: Methanol is poisonous if ingested or inhaled in large quantities. It can cause blindness, organ damage, and even death.
- Solubility: Completely miscible with water and many organic solvents.

Production

- Traditional Method: Historically, methanol was obtained through the destructive distillation of wood, hence the name "wood alcohol". (can be produced from renewable sources like biomass)
- Modern Method: Produced industrially by the catalytic hydrogenation of carbon monoxide.

Applications

- **Industrial Applications:** It is used in the production of a variety of chemicals, including formaldehyde, acetic acid, and MTBE (a gasoline additive).
- **Fuel:** It can be used as a fuel for internal combustion engines and as a component in biodiesel production, though it's typically used in a blend with gasoline.
 - ✓ NITI Aayog's 'Methanol Economy' programme is aimed at reducing India's oil import bill, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and converting coal reserves and municipal solid waste into methanol. Rs 6000 crore can be saved annually by blending 20% DME (Di-methyl Ether, a derivative of methanol) in LPG.
- **Antifreeze:** Methanol's low freezing point makes it a component in de-icing fluids for windshields and airplane wings.
- **Solvent:** Used in laboratories and industry as a solvent for resins, dyes, and inks.

Claude 3.5 Sonnet

Anthropic, OpenAI's biggest rival, has launched its latest AI model called Claude 3.5 Sonnet.

About Claude 3.5 Sonnet (family of generative pre-trained transformers (GPTs))

- It excels at *visual tasks* compared to previous Claude models including interpreting charts, graphs, and even accurately transcribing text from images which can be useful in various fields like retail, logistics, and finance.
- It can handle complex cognitive tasks, going beyond just recognizing patterns or generating text.
- It strikes a balance between performance and speed, making it ideal for large-scale use cases.
- It can translate languages, analyze grammar, and even create content in multiple languages.

Superhydrophobic Catalyst

A global team comprising Assam-based scientists developed a superhydrophobic catalyst that can cut biodiesel cost.

About Superhydrophobic catalyst

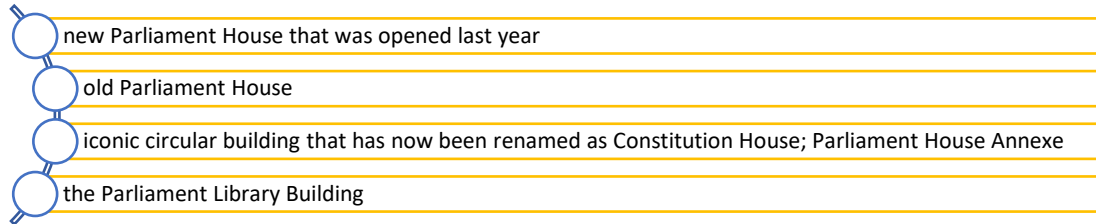
- It is a type of catalyst that has been engineered to **repel water**. This water-repellent property is achieved by creating a surface with a high degree of roughness and a low surface energy.
- Superhydrophobic catalysts can improve the efficiency and yield of these reactions. In some catalytic reactions, water can deactivate the catalyst or interfere with the reaction process.
- Superhydrophobic catalysts can be more durable than traditional catalysts, especially in environments where they may be exposed to moisture.
- Superhydrophobic catalysts could be used to develop more efficient and selective processes for the synthesis of pharmaceuticals.

Central Hall – A Historic Venue In Parliament

In a meeting of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), PM Modi was unanimously elected as the coalition's Parliamentary Party leader. The event took place at the *Central Hall of the old Parliament building*.

Parliament House Complex

- **About:** Parliament House Complex in the heart of New Delhi contains several buildings:



- **Custodian of the Parliament House Complex:** Speaker of Lok Sabha.

Central Hall in Indian Parliament

- **About**

- Since it was established in 1927, the Central Hall has witnessed several historical events.
- It is a pivotal and historically significant part of the Indian Parliament House, serving as a symbol of India's democratic legacy and governance.

- **Historical background**

- Central Hall was originally used as the library for the members of the legislature.
- In 1946, the Constituent Assembly needed a place to meet and discuss the Constitution of independent India.
- The Central Hall was updated with new benches and renamed the Constituent Assembly Hall. The Assembly met here for about three years, from 1946 to 1949.

- **First Independence Day and the Central Hall**

- On August 15, 1947, the Central Hall witnessed the transfer of power from British rule to independent India, with the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, delivering his famous "Tryst with Destiny" speech.

- **Architectural Features**

- **Design:** The Central Hall is an octagonal structure with a distinctive dome, emblematic of classical architectural styles.
- **Seating:** Designed to accommodate joint sessions of the two houses of Parliament—the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States).
- **Decor:** The Hall is adorned with portraits of prominent leaders of the Indian freedom movement and former Presidents and Prime Ministers of India.

- **Functions and Usage**

- **Joint Sessions:** The Central Hall was used for annual President's Address to Members of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. It was also the venue for farewells of the President, and Parliamentary events like the outstanding Parliamentarian award ceremony.
- **Meetings:** It serves as a venue for informal discussions and meetings among members of Parliament.
- **Ceremonial Occasions** including the swearing-in of Presidents and Prime Ministers.
- **Addresses by Heads of State of other countries:**

- The last address was by Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) President Duarte Pacheco in March 2021 and before him, it was then United States President Barack Obama in November 2010.
- **Current status of the old Parliament House where Central Hall is located**
 - The chambers of the old Parliament House are currently not being used for holding Sessions.
 - Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha meet in the new building. However, the Parliament Secretariat has some offices that continue to operate out of the old building.

Can Central Hall Be Used By Political Parties Or Coalitions For Their Private Events

- Political parties and groups are allocated office space inside the Parliament House complex.
- They can hold meetings with their members on the premises.
- In the past, political parties have held their Parliamentary Party meetings at venues within the complex, including at the Balayogi Auditorium in the Parliament Library Building.
 - In May 2014, soon after the announcement of that year's Lok Sabha election results, Modi was elected leader of the BJP Parliamentary Party at a meeting held in Central Hall.

Srinagar - World Craft City

- Srinagar recently became the fourth Indian city to be recognised as a World Craft City by the World Craft Council (WCC).
- **Jaipur, Malappuram and Mysore** are the other Indian cities that have previously been recognised as World Craft Cities.
- The achievement follows Srinagar's recognition as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) *Creative City for Crafts in 2021*.
- As of now, at least 10 different forms of craftsmanship survive in Srinagar including papier-mâché, walnut wood carving, carpets, Sozni embroidery and Pashmina and Kani shawls.
- The recognition will provide a boost to Kashmir's traditional linkages with Central Asia and Iran.
- Kashmir's shawl and carpet industry has been heavily influenced by Persian artisans in the past. Kashmir has carpet designs named after Iranian cities like **Kashan and Tabriz**.
- There are 14 Iranian cities listed as craft cities by the Council, and the inclusion of Srinagar will lead to knowledge exchange.
- Kashmir's handicraft sector is witnessing major economic gains, with exports in the last five years jumping from Rs. 1,000 to 2,000 crores.

Significance

- It will elevate Srinagar's crafts to new heights on the international market, increasing visibility and demand.
- This, in turn, is likely to attract greater investment and funding, essential for infrastructure development and the integration of modern techniques alongside traditional methods.
- Enhanced visibility and investment will lead to advanced training programmes, equipping artisans with new skills and enabling innovation in their crafts.
- Furthermore, it will support skill preservation, cultural heritage, and access to networks for collaboration and growth.
- It will also provide opportunities for sustainable income through increased sales and tourism.

World Crafts Council

- WCC is a **non-profit, non-governmental organization affiliated to UNESCO**.

- It was founded in 1964 by Aileen Osborn Webb, Margaret M. Patch, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay at the first World Crafts Council General Assembly in New York.
- WCC is organised into **five regions**: Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and North America.
- Its objective is to strengthen the status of crafts in cultural and economic life.
- It is dedicated to preservation, promotion, and advancement of global craftsmanship and traditional crafts.

Kabir Das

- Each year, on the **full moon of Jyeshtha** (May or June), the birth anniversary of Kabir Das is celebrated.
- Born in the city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Kabir was a **15th century Indian mystic, poet, saint and social reformer** whose writings influenced Hinduism's Bhakti movement.
- The exact details of Kabir's birth remain unclear, with most scholars placing it around 1398 CE.
- Kabir's journey goes beyond religious divides. He sought spiritual guidance from Hindu and Muslim teachers like **Ramananda and Sheikh Taqi**.
- This unique blend of influences shaped his philosophy, which proposed the idea of a single God and rejected religious extremism.

Kabir's Compositions

- Kabir's compositions can be classified into three literary forms – **dohas** (short two liners), ramanas (rhymed 4 liners), sung compositions of varying length, known as **padas** (verses) and **sabdas** (words).
- He composed his verses orally and is generally assumed to be illiterate.
- His poems were in vernacular Hindi, borrowing from various dialects including **Braj, Bhojpuri and Awadhi**. Most of his work was concerned with devotion, mysticism and discipline.
- His verses are found in Sikhism's scripture Guru Granth Sahib, Satguru Granth Sahib of Sant Garib Das and Kabir Sagar.

Kabir and the Bhakti Movement

- The Bhakti movement, which began in the 7th century in South India, had begun to spread across north India in the 14th and the 15th centuries.
- The movement was characterized by popular poet-saints who sang devotional songs to God in vernacular languages. They emphasized on intense emotional attachment with God.
- One school within the Bhakti movement was the **Nirguni tradition** and Sant Kabir was a prominent member of it. In this tradition, God was understood to be a **universal and formless being**.
- Many of the saints of the Bhakti movement came from the ranks of the lower to middle artisanal classes. Kabir was a low caste weaver (Julaha), Raidas was a leather worker and Dadu a cotton carder.
- Their voice against orthodoxy and rejection of caste made these poet-saints extremely popular among the masses and their idea of equality spread across India.

Kabir's Critique Of Religion And Caste

- Kabir questioned rituals and unethical practices of all religions primarily the wrong practices in Hindu and Muslim religion. He also dismissed the sacred authority of their religious books, the Vedas and the Quran.
- Kabir did use the name Rama in his poems, but he clarified that he was not referring to the avatar of Vishnu, but a formless and general Hindu name for the divine
- Instead of God being an external entity that resided in temples or mosques, Kabir argued that God existed inside everyone.

- He, like the other prominent saints of his time, held that one could attain salvation only through bhakti, intense love or devotion to God.
- In many of his verses, Kabir proclaimed that people of all castes have the right to salvation through the bhakti tradition.

Kabir's Legacy

- Kabir's message of equality led to a community of his followers called the Kabir Panth - a sect in northern and central India.
- Historians estimate that it was established in India between 1600 and 1650, one or two centuries after his death.
- Today, the sect exists as a large and distinct community, with various sects under different spiritual leaders. However, all regard Kabir as their guru and treat the Bijak as their holy scripture.
- The **Bijak** contains works attributed to Kabir and is believed to have been written in the 17th century.
- Kabir's teachings continue to shape various religious discourses in India today. In the Sikh tradition he is seen to have influenced Guru Nanak, for Hindus he is a Vaishnavite (devotees of Vishnu) and is respected by Muslims as a Sufi saint.

Kozhikode - UNESCO City of Literature

- Kozhikode in north Kerala, known for its rich cultural heritage, has been officially declared as **India's first UNESCO 'City of Literature'**.
- In October 2023, Kozhikode had also earned **a place in the 'Literature' category of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN).**
- From the next year, June 23 will be celebrated as the 'City of Literature' Day of Kozhikode and special awards will be announced in six categories.
- Known as the city of Zamorins once, Kozhikode, also known as Calicut during British rule, served as the gateway to the coast for many foreigners, such as Persians, Arabs, Chinese, and eventually Europeans, centuries ago.
- The cradle of the freedom movement in Kerala, Kozhikode has also been an important destination for book festivals for many decades.
- Kozhikode is a city where there are over 500 libraries functioning, and has been the base of literary activities of legendary Malayalam writer **M T Vasudevan Nair** for several decades.
- It is a place known for literary greats like late **S K Pottakkad** and **Vaikom Muhammed Basheer**.

UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

- UCCN is a project **launched by UNESCO in 2004** to "promote cooperation among cities which recognized creativity as a strategic factor in their urban development".
- Such cities work together towards a common objective of placing creativity and cultural industries at the core of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.
- UNESCO designates the creative cities in **seven fields** — Craft, Folk Art, Media Arts, Film Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.
- The network has 350 cities in more than a hundred countries. Apart from Kozhikode, the other Indian cities that are a part of this network are:
 - Srinagar and Jaipur (Crafts and Folk Arts);
 - Mumbai (Films);

- Chennai, Varanasi and Gwalior (Music);
- Hyderabad (Gastronomy).

Kheer Bhawani Mela

- Recently Kashmiri Pandits celebrated **Zyestha Ashtami** at the Kheer Bhawani temple at Tulmulla village in Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district.
- The festival, known as Kheer Bhawani Mela, held every year, is the largest gathering of Hindus in Kashmir after the annual Amarnath Yatra.
- The temple is constructed above a **sacred spring**, which is said to change its colours.
- **Goddess Ragnya Devi** – an incarnation of Goddess Durga – is the presiding deity of this temple.
- The temple gets its name from kheer, or milk and rice pudding, that pilgrims pour into the spring inside the temple complex as an offering to the goddess.
- **Maharaja Pratap Singh** built this temple in 1912, which was later renovated by Maharaja Hari Singh.
- According to mythology, Lord Rama worshipped the goddess during his exile.

Raja Parb

- The President of India recently attended the Raja Parb celebration at Rashtrapati Bhavan. This is the first occasion when the Raja Parb was celebrated at Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- The President also witnessed cultural performances which included Raja geet and dance performances such as Mayurbhanj Chhau dance, Sambalpuri dance and Karma dance.
- Raja Parb is one of the most celebrated festivals of Odisha. This three-day-long **agricultural festival** is celebrated during the **onset of monsoons**.
- Swings decorated with flowers and mango leaves are the main attraction of this festival.

Nalanda University

- The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the new campus of Nalanda University, an international University, close to the site of the ancient ruins of Nalanda in Rajgir, Bihar.
- The Parliament of India established the Nalanda University through the **Nalanda University Act, 2010**.
- The Act formed the basis for implementing the decisions arrived at the **second East Asia Summit (EAS) (Philippines, 2007)** for its establishment as an “international institution for pursuit of intellectual, philosophical, historical and spiritual studies.
- It started functioning in 2014 from a makeshift location and the construction work started in 2017.
- This international university, apart from India, has **participation from 17 other nations** — Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. These countries have signed MoUs in support of the University.
- The ancient Nalanda University was established in the 5th century and attracted students from all over the world. The ancient University flourished for 800 years before it was burnt down by invaders in the 12th century.

Ancient Nalanda University

- It was located near the city of Rajagriha (now Rajgir). It was established by emperor **Kumaragupta I of the Gupta Empire in 427 CE**.

- The earliest archaeological evidence from Nalanda is a coin inscribed with the name of Shakraditya (known in non-Buddhist sources as Kumaragupta I, the son of Chandragupta II “Vikramaditya”). The coin can be dated to 415-55 CE, when Shakraditya reigned.
- After the Guptas, **Harshavaradhana of Kannauj** (known in Buddhist sources as Siladitya) was the most notable patron.
- Even though royal patronage continued into the reign of the **Palas (8th-12th century CE)**, it witnessed a gradual decline due to a number of competing monasteries such as Vikramshila and Somapura came up during the Pala reign.
- The ancient University flourished for 800 years before it was attacked by **Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji in the 12th century**.
- At its peak, it housed thousands of students and teachers engaged in the study of subjects ranging from philosophy and religion to logic, grammar and medicine.
- It attracted students and scholars from China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia.
- The 7th century **Chinese monk Xuanzang** (also known as Hsuan Tsang or Mokshadeva), who travelled across India from 629–645 CE in search of Buddhist manuscripts and correct teachings, spent around five years in Nalanda.
- The ancient Nalanda University site is now a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

Nelson Mandela Award for Health Promotion

- The Nelson Mandela Award for Health Promotion for 2024 has been awarded to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) - the country's premier mental health institution.
- The award comes at a time when the institute is celebrating 50 years of its formation and the 70th anniversary of its precursor, the All India Institute of Mental Health (AIIMH)
- The Nelson Mandela Award for Health Promotion was established by WHO in 2019.
- It recognises individuals, institutions and/or governmental or non-governmental organisations that have demonstrated remarkable contributions to health promotion.

Odisha Extends Hockey Sponsorship

- The Odisha government has announced the extension of its sponsorship for Hockey India until 2036 – a year that marks the centenary of the state's formation in 1936.
- In 2018, the Odisha Mining Corporation Ltd (OMC), had entered into an agreement with Hockey India for sponsorship of the Indian Hockey Teams (Men/Women, Senior /Junior) for five years from 2018 to 2023.
- This was later extended for another 10 years to 2033, in recognition of the success of the men's and women's teams at the Tokyo Olympics.
- With the latest three-year extension, the sponsorship will continue to 2036 – a year in which the Olympic games will be held.

Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC)

- Incorporated in 1956, OMC is a **wholly owned corporation of Government of Odisha**. It was established to explore and harness the mineral wealth of Odisha.
- The major minerals mined by OMC are chrome, iron and bauxite ore which cater to the requirement of mineral-based industries such as steel, aluminium, sponge iron, pig iron, ferro-manganese, ferro-chrome, etc.

Hockey India

- Hockey India is recognised as the **National Sports Federation** by the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**, as the sole body responsible for governing and conducting all the activities for **both men's and women's hockey in India**.
- It was **formed in 2009** after the Indian Hockey Federation was dismissed in 2008.
- It is **affiliated to** International Hockey Federation (FIH), the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and Asian Hockey Federation (AHF).
- Hockey India's logo resembles the Ashok Chakra of the Indian flag and is made up of hockey sticks.

Hansa Mehta

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) recently honoured Hansa Mehta on the International Day for Women in Diplomacy (June 24).
- Hansa Mehta was a prominent scholar, educator, social reformer, writer and diplomat from India. Born in 1897, Mehta was a champion of women's rights.

- At the international level, Mehta played a pivotal role in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). She was the only other female delegate, apart from Eleanor Roosevelt to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
- She is credited for changing the phrase, "All men are born free and equal" to "**All human beings are born free and equal**" in Article 1 of the UDHR.
- The introduction of a more inclusive language in UDHR was an important milestone in the fight for women's rights and gender equality.
- As the **President of All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1946**, she led the drafting of the "Indian Women's Charter of Rights", which demanded gender equality, civil rights and justice for women in India.
- She was also **part of the Constituent Assembly** that drafted the Indian Constitution, a member of its Advisory Committee and sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights.
- Many provisions of AIWC's Charter formed the basis of gender-neutral provisions in the Indian constitution.