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Heat waves & India's Cooling Sector:

Gs 1- Important Geophysical Phenomena:

In Context

- Recently, the report, “**Climate Investment Opportunities in India's Cooling Sector**” was released by the **World Bank**.

Report Highlights

- **Exposure to heat waves:**
 - From 2030 onwards, **more than 160 to 200 million people** could be exposed to a **lethal heat wave** in India every year.
- **Productivity Decline:**
 - Around 34 million Indians will face job losses due to **heat stress-related productivity decline**.
- **Demand for cooling:**
 - By 2037, the demand for cooling is **likely to be eight times more than current levels**, the World Bank has said in a report.
 - In this scenario, it is imperative for India to **deploy alternative and innovative energy-efficient technologies** for keeping spaces cool.
- **Significance of India's Cooling Sector:**
 - India's Cooling Sector could open an investment **opportunity of \$1.6 trillion by 2040** besides **reducing greenhouse gas emissions significantly** and creating **3.7 million jobs**.
 - With the demand for cooling shooting up, **there will be a demand for a new air-conditioner every 15 seconds**, according to the report.
 - This demand will lead to an **expected rise of 435%** in annual **greenhouse gas emissions** over the next two decades.
 - Thus, there is a **need to shift to a more energy-efficient pathway** which could lead to a substantial reduction in expected CO2 levels.

What is Heat Wave?

- It is a **period of abnormally high temperatures**, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs during the summer season.
- It typically occurs **between March and June**, and in some rare cases even **extends till July**.
- The extreme temperatures and resultant atmospheric conditions **adversely affect**

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people living in these regions as they cause physiological stress, sometimes resulting in death.

Criterion for declaring heat waves in India

- Heat wave is considered if the maximum temperature of a station reaches **at least 40°C or more for Plains** and **at least 30°C or more for Hilly regions**.
- Based on Departure from Normal Heat Wave: **Departure from normal is 4.50°C to 6.40°C.**
- Severe Heat Wave: **Departure from normal is >6.40 degree C.**
- Based on Actual Maximum Temperature Heat Wave: When actual maximum temperature ≥ 45 degree C.
- Severe Heat Wave: When actual maximum temperature ≥ 47 degree C.
- If the above criteria met at least in 2 stations in a Meteorological subdivision for at least two consecutive days and it was declared on the second day.

Causes

- The **prevalence of extreme temperatures** around the world is the result of local factors and also global warming.
- Scientists have made clear how **greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions exacerbate temperatures** in the oceans, leading to soaring temperatures.
- Anthropogenic GHG emissions are culprit in the current plight from intense weather.
- Crucially, heatwaves and wildfires are ‘unimaginable’ without human-caused climate change.

Suggestions by the report

- **India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) 2019:**
 - The report proposes a roadmap to support India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) 2019, through new investments in three major sectors:
 - Building construction,
 - Cold chains and
 - Refrigerants.
- **Climate-responsive cooling techniques:**
 - Adopting climate-responsive cooling techniques as a norm in both private and government-funded constructions can ensure that those at the bottom of the economic ladder are not disproportionately affected by rising temperatures.

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- The report suggests that India's affordable housing program for the poor, the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)**, can adopt such changes on scale.
- **Policy for district cooling:**
 - It also proposed enacting a policy for district cooling which could lead to the consumption of 20-30% less power than the most efficient conventional cooling solutions.
 - District cooling technologies generate chilled water in a central plant which is then distributed to multiple buildings via underground insulated pipes.
 - This brings down the cost for providing cooling to individual buildings.
 - Apart from this, guidelines for implementation of local and city-wide urban cooling measures such as cool-roofs should also be considered.
- **Fixing gaps in cold chain distribution networks:**
 - To minimise rising food and pharmaceutical wastage during transport due to higher temperatures, the report recommends fixing gaps in cold chain distribution networks.
 - Investing in pre-cooling and refrigerated transport can help decrease food loss by about 76% and reduce carbon emissions by 16%.
- **Lowering global warming footprint:**
 - Improvements in **servicing, maintenance and disposal** of equipment that uses hydro chlorofluorocarbons, alongside a shift to alternative options with a lower global warming footprint, are also recommended.
 - This can create two million jobs for trained technicians over the next two decades and reduce the demand for refrigerants by around 31%.

Way Ahead

- The right set of policy actions and public investments can help leverage large scale private investment in this sector.
- India's cooling strategy can help save lives and livelihoods reduce carbon emissions and simultaneously position India as a global hub for green cooling manufacturing.

Source: TH

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Delimitation exercise of J&K :

Gs 2- Government Policies & Interventions:

In News

- Recently, the Supreme Court questioned petitioners about the reason for not challenging the constitutional validity of a specific provision in the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.

More about the news

- **Delimitation exercise in question:**
 - A provision in the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019** that confers the Delimitation Commission with the **power to “carry out” the re-adjustment of constituencies** in the Union Territory formed after the **abrogation of Article 370** in the erstwhile State was in question.
- **Issue:**
 - **Authority to conduct delimitation:**
 - The petitioners alleged that Sections 60 and 61 of the 2019 Act, which defined the role of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** in the process of delimitation of constituencies, were in contradiction to Section 62.
 - The petitioners argued that only the **ECI, under Section 60 of the J&K Reorganisation Act**, was empowered to conduct the delimitation exercise.
 - **Census in consideration:**
 - They further argued before the Bench that **Article 170 of the Constitution** barred **delimitation exercise on the basis of the 2011 census**.
 - It had to either happen **on the basis of 2001 census** or await the first census after the year 2026.
- **Government’s response:**
 - The government has countered that there were two alternative mechanisms to carry out delimitation for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - By virtue of Sections 60-61, while the power to determine delimitation was conferred on the **ECI**, Section 62(2) and 62(3)

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conferred powers to carry out delimitation on the **Delimitation Commission**.

About Delimitation of J&K

- **Delimitation Meaning:**
 - Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time.
- **Role of Delimitation Commission:**
 - This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned before any court.
- **Delimitation Exercises in J&K:**
 - **Before J&K Reorganization Act:**
 - The erstwhile J&K state had **111 seats**.
 - 46 in Kashmir, 37 in Jammu, and four in Ladakh — plus 24 seats reserved for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
 - When Ladakh was carved out as a Union Territory, J&K was left with 107 seats, including the 24 for PoK.
 - The Reorganisation Act increased the seats to 114 — 90 for Jammu & Kashmir, besides the 24 reserved for PoK.
 - In the erstwhile state, delimitation of parliamentary constituencies was **governed by the Constitution of India** and that of Assembly seats was carried out by the then state government under the **Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957**.
 - **After enactment of J&K Reorganization Act:**
 - **After the abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019**, the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in the newly-created Union Territory would be as per the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
 - On March 6, **2020**, the government set up the **Delimitation Commission**, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, which was tasked with winding up delimitation in J&K in a year.
 - As per the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, the **number of Assembly seats in J&K would increase from 107 to 114**, which is expected to benefit the Jammu region.

Recommendation of Delimitation Commission for J&K:

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- **Constituencies redrawal:**

- Delimitation Commission has recommended seven additional constituencies:
 - 6 for Jammu
 - 1 for Kashmir
 - Jammu Division will now have 43 seats compared to 37 earlier
 - While Kashmir Valley will have 47 seats compared to 46 earlier.

- **Major Recommendations:**

- Reorganisation of the Parliamentary constituencies so that 5 Lok Sabha seats constitute 18 Assembly constituencies each, taking the total number of assembly constituencies to 90.
- Reserving 9 Assembly seats for Scheduled Tribes, 6 in Jammu while 3 in Kashmir.
- Doing away with regional distinction between Jammu and Kashmir and treating it as one.
 - The Anantnag region in Kashmir has been combined with Rajouri and Poonch in Jammu to carve out Anantnag-Rajouri as one Parliamentary constituency.

- **Kashmiri Migrants:**

- The Commission has recommended provision of at least two members from the community of Kashmiri Migrants (Kashmiri Hindus) in the Legislative Assembly.
- It has also recommended that Centre should consider giving representation in the J&K Legislative Assembly to the displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, who migrated to Jammu after Partition.

- **Schedule Tribes:**

- The Commission has reserved nine Assembly seats for Scheduled Tribes. Six of these are in the redrawn Anantnag parliamentary seat, including in Poonch and Rajouri, which has the highest ST population.

Delimitation Commission:

- **About:**

- The Delimitation Commission in India is a high-power body whose orders have the force of law.
- Its orders cannot be called in question before any court.
- These orders come into force on a date to be specified by the

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President of India on this behalf.

- The copies of its orders are laid before the House of the People and the State Legislative Assembly concerned, but no modifications are permissible therein by them.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 82:** This provides the Parliament with the authority to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census.
 - **Article 170:** This provides for the States to get divided into territorial constituencies as per the Delimitation Act after every Census.
- **Functions:**
 - To determine the number and boundaries of constituencies in a way that the population of all seats, so far as practicable, is the same.
 - Identifying seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes wherever their population is relatively large.
 - In case of difference of opinion among members of the Commission, the will of majority prevails.
- **Composition:**
 - The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the President of India includes following members:
 - Retired Supreme Court judge
 - Chief Election Commissioner
 - Respective State Election Commissioners.
- **Frequency:**
 - In India, such Delimitation Commissions have been constituted 4 times:
 - In 1952 under the Delimitation Commission Act, 1952
 - In 1963 under Delimitation Commission Act, 1962
 - In 1973 under Delimitation Act, 1972
 - In 2002 under Delimitation Act, 2002.

Source: IE

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Rising Cyber Attacks in India

(Gs-3 Cyber Crime & Security)

In News

- Recently, the premier medical institute in the country, the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences New Delhi (AIIMS)** was crippled by a major cyberattack.

More about the news

- Most of its servers stopped working as also the **eHospital network** managed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.
- AIIMS servers had the critical health data of several individuals at the helm of the country's government.

More about the Cyberattacks

- **Definition:**
 - Cyberattacks are unwelcome attempts to steal, expose, alter, disable or destroy information through unauthorized access to computer systems.
 - Typically such forms of attacks **to keep networks from functioning** after encrypting data, are carried out by **ransomware-seeking entities** and organisations are **sent demands which are often negotiated and paid without informing law enforcement**.
- **Cyberterrorism:**
 - Cyberterrorism is often defined as any premeditated, politically motivated attack against information systems, programs and data that threatens violence or results in violence.
- **Significance of Cyberattack on medical institutes:**
 - Cyber attacks on medical institutes are **getting common** and the **pandemic has been a turning point**.
 - During the pandemic, hackers and criminal syndicates have realised the **dependence of these institutes on digital systems to optimally manage medical functioning** as well as **store and handle large volumes of patient data, including their reports**.
 - It is a natural target for cyber attackers and ransom seekers because the data available here is very precious.

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- **What are the reasons for increasing Cyberattacks?**
 - **Increasing dependency on technology:**
 - As we grow faster, more and more systems are being shifted to virtual space to promote access and ease of use.
 - However, the downside to this trend is the increased vulnerability of such systems to cyber-attacks.
 - **Asymmetric and covert warfare:**
 - Unlike conventional warfare with loss of lives and eyeball-to-eyeball situations, cyber warfare is covert warfare with the scope of plausible deniability, i.e. the governments can deny their involvement even when they are caught.
 - Therefore, cyber warfare has increasingly become the chosen space for conflict between nations.

Challenges

- **Health not categorised as Critical information (CI) infrastructure:**
 - Most countries define the health and medical sector as critical information (CI) infrastructure.
 - An organisation like AIIMS New Delhi could be counted as a “strategic and public enterprise”, health is not specified directly as a CI infrastructure.
- **Lack of skill set:**
 - Nearly two-thirds would find it challenging to respond to a cybersecurity incident due to the shortage of skills within their team.
 - The survey found that 50% of all respondents would find it challenging to respond and recover from a cyberattack due to the shortage of skills within their team, and less than 25% of companies with 5,000 to 50,000 employees, have the people and skills they need today.
 - The dearth of staff security positions is a major threat to business continuity and even to national defence.
- **Poor Prioritisation:**
 - The survey indicates that whereas about 85% of cyber leaders agree that cyber resilience is a business priority for their organization, one of their most prominent challenges is to gain decision-makers’ support when prioritising cyber risks, against a plurality of other risks.
 - These discordant results indicate that highlighting cyber resilience as a business priority alone is necessary but insufficient.

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Way ahead

- **Need of the national cyber security strategy:**
 - This incident is a wake-up call for organisations across sectors to shore up cyber security measures, it is also important to push and announce the national cyber security strategy.
 - **Cyber readiness:**
 - That strategy will be a guiding document to motivate and monitor the preparedness of cyber readiness of institutes and also enhance capacity on many fronts including forensics, accurate attribution and cooperation.
- **Budgetary preference:**
 - Significant budgets have to be allocated by various ministries to ensure that cyber security measures don't remain the last priority.
- **Capacity enhancement:**
 - The capacity enhancement for the National Critical Information Infrastructure Centre (NCIIPC) and CERTIn has to be undertaken to address the emerging sophisticated nature of threats and attacks and sectoral CERTs have to be set up for many areas including health.
- **International cooperation:**
 - International cooperation on countering cyber attacks has to gain more teeth beyond the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) meetings and the US-led Counter Ransomware Initiative (CRI) of 37 countries and the European Union.

Major Government Initiatives for Cyber Security

- **CERT-In:**
 - It is an organisation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology with the objective of securing Indian cyberspace.
- **Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative:**
 - It is an initiative from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) that aims at creating a robust cybersecurity ecosystem in India. This program was in association with the National e-Governance Division (NeGD).
- **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre:**
 - NCIIPC is a central government establishment, formed to protect critical information of our country, which has an enormous impact on national security, economic growth, or public healthcare.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):**

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- The MHA launched this I4C Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre program to combat cybercrime in the country, through a coordinated and efficient method.
- **Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre):**
 - It is an installation under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- **Information Technology Act, 2000:**
 - IT Act of 2000 came into effect in India on 09 June 2000. IT Act states in its preamble that the purpose of the legislation is to provide legal recognition to electronic transactions.

Source: TH

RBI's Modified Digital Lending Norms comes into Effect:

Gs-3: Indian Economy & Related Issues:

In News

- The modified guidelines on digital lending by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have come into effect from 1st December, 2022.
 - Its new regulations are based on recommendations from a working group set up in 2021 on **Digital lending including lending through online platforms and mobile apps (WGDL)**.

Who are digital lenders?

- **RBI has categorised digital lenders into three groups:**
 - Entities which are **regulated by the RBI** and are allowed to carry out lending business.
 - Entities that are **authorised to carry out lending as per other statutory or regulatory provisions** but are not regulated by the RBI.
 - Entities **lending outside the purview of any statutory or regulatory provisions**.

India's digital lending

- Digital lending involves **giving and recovering loans through web platforms or mobile apps**.

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- It facilitates **speedy disbursement and helps lower costs.**
- **Lending Service Providers (LSPs) operate in collaboration with Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)** who disburse credit to customers using the LSPs platform.
 - These platforms often **resort to reckless practices by lending beyond a borrower's repayment capacity.**

What are the new guidelines?

- **Objective:**
 - The digital lending modified guidelines aim to protect customers from exorbitant interest rates and keep a check on unethical loan recovery practices.
 - The regulatory framework is basically focussed on the digital lending ecosystem of RBI-regulated entities and the lending service providers.
- **Loan disbursements and repayments:**
 - These are to be executed only between the bank accounts of the borrowers and the regulated entities such as the banks and the NBFCs.
 - There will be no pass-through/pool account of the Lending Service Providers (LSPs).
- **Fees and Charges:**
 - Any fees or charges payable to Lending Service Providers (LSPs) in the credit intermediation process shall be paid directly by Regulated Entities and not by the borrower.
- **Applicability:**
 - Instructions are only applicable for the existing customers availing fresh loans and to new customers getting onboarded.
- **Data collection:**
 - Data collected by digital lending apps must be need-based, with the borrower's prior consent, and can be audited if required.
- **Increase in credit limit:**
 - Borrower's consent on the increase in the credit limit is must.
 - An automatic credit increase without the consent would be prohibited.
- **Grievance redressal officer:**
 - A nodal grievance redressal officer will also be deployed.
 - Such grievance redressal officers shall also deal with complaints against their respective Digital Lending Apps (DLAs).

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- Digital Lending Apps (DLAs) are mobile and web-based applications with user interfaces that allow a borrower to borrow from a digital lender.
- **Ombudsman:**
 - The borrower can complain to the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme of the RBI if their grievance is not resolved by the bank within 30 days.
- **Credit Information Companies (CICs):**
 - Regulated Entities are required to ensure that any lending carried out through digital lending apps has to be reported to Credit Information Companies (CICs).
 - Lending through the Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) mode also needs to be reported to the CICs.

Major Issues

- **LSPs often resort to reckless lending practices** by endowing credit beyond a borrower's repayment capacity. The risk is mitigated by spreading it to all users by charging higher interest rates.
- **There is absence of standardised disclosure and regulatory norms** which made it cumbersome to assess a participant's operational legitimacy.
- **Unregulated apps:** There were about 1,100 lending apps available for Indian android users of which about 600 were illegal. They were either unregulated by the RBI or had NBFC partners with an asset size of less than 1,000 crore, prompting doubts on its operability.
- **The space is largely dominated by NBFCs:** Its customers particularly include small borrowers without a documented credit history and thus, not served by traditional financial institutions.
- **Others:** The concerns primarily relate to unbridled engagement of third parties, mis-selling, breach of data privacy, unfair business conduct, charging of exorbitant interest rates, and unethical recovery practices.

Significance

- **Tackling concerns:** The guidelines aim to tackle concerns like unscrupulous lending practices and involvement of third parties, mis-selling and data privacy.
- **Regulated market:** Licensed and compliant players will have an advantage over fintech's with other NBFC partnerships and are likely to see rising market share in the future.

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- **Financial inclusion:** with new innovations underway, digital lending has enabled many Financial Service Providers a way to offer much better products to the masses at a much faster rate which is even more cost-efficient.
- **Reaching to the remotest area:** Digital lending can prove to be a tool acting towards the growth of higher quality financial services to underserved businesses and people.
- **Avoiding delay:** Online lending has played a pivotal role in evading cumbersome red-tapism usually involved while availing loans offline in a traditional setting.

Way forward

- The need of the hour is **competent systems and processes** that would further **strengthen data privacy and security of confidential information** shared between customers and regulated entities.
- This regulation would also **address concerns emanating from TechFin** which are companies that are primarily tech-based service providers, say e-commerce, and also offer financial services.

Enhanced Access and Service Excellence (EASE) Program

- It was **launched in 2018**.
- It is driven by **Indian Banks' Association (IBA)**.
- **EASE aims to foster new-age reforms in Public Sector Banks (PSBs)** to improve profitability, asset quality, customer service and digital capabilities.
- The EASE programme **sets a common reforms agenda** for public-sector banks every year.
 - It stresses on **data analytics, automation, and digitization**.
- **The fourth edition of EASE** was focussed on technology-enabled simplified and collaborative banking.
- **EASE 5.0** will continue to focus on driving an enhanced digital experience along with data-driven, integrated, and inclusive banking across all banks.

Source: TH

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SC moots idea of 'Project Great Indian Bustard' :

Gs-3 concervation:

In News

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) sought **Centre's review** on the idea of '**Project Great Indian Bustard (GIB)**' to save endangered birds.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The Supreme Court had set up a three-member committee to assess the feasibility of laying high-voltage underground power cables.
 - SC directed the committee to submit an updated status report on steps to safeguard the GIB.
 - Project GIB is on the lines of 'Project Tiger', which was started in 1973 to save the big cats.
- **SC's Demands:**
 - It sought reports from the chief secretaries of Rajasthan and Gujarat on:
 - Installation of **bird diverters** in priority areas
 - All bird diverters shall be in compliance with the quality required by the committee appointed by this court
 - Assess the **total length of transmission lines** in the two states where under-grounding of electric wires have to be done to ensure the birds do not die of electrocution.

Great Indian Bustard



Image Courtesy: Britannica

- **About:**
 - It is considered India's **most critically endangered** bird species.

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- It is especially found in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- One of the heaviest flying birds endemic to the Indian subcontinent.
- State Bird of Rajasthan
- **Extinction:**
 - As per the 2021 report of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), they are on the verge of extinction with hardly 50 to 249 of them alive.
- **Scientific Name:** *Ardeotis nigriceps*
- **Features:**
 - It is a large bird with brown-and-white feathers with black crown and wing markings. It is one of the heaviest birds in the world.
 - Males have whitish necks and underparts with narrow black breast-bands.
 - Females are smaller, with a greyer neck and typically no or incomplete breast-band.
- **Habitat:**
 - Untamed, Arid grasslands.
 - A Maximum number of GIBs were found in Jaisalmer and the Indian Army-controlled field firing range near Pokhran, Rajasthan.
 - Other areas: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
 - The species occurs in the Indian Subcontinent, with former strongholds in the Thar desert in the north-west and the Deccan tableland of the Peninsula.
 - This species inhabits arid and semi-arid grasslands with scattered short scrub, bushes and low intensity cultivation in flat or gently undulating terrain.
- **Population:**
 - As per the studies conducted by Wildlife Institute of India, there are around 150 Great Indian Bustards left across the country which includes about 128 birds in Rajasthan and less than 10 birds each in the States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
 - Bustard deaths have reached a total of seven this year (2022).
- **Protection Status:**
 - IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.
 - Listed in Wildlife Protection Act's Schedule 1.
- **Threats to the Bird:**
 - Hunting, Intensification of agriculture, Power lines.
 - It has an extremely small population that has undergone an extremely rapid decline.

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- Widespread hunting for sport and food precipitated its decline, accelerated by vehicular access to remote areas.
- High intensity poaching still continues in Pakistan and egg-collecting was rampant in many states during the early 19th century.
- However, the current threats are mostly from habitat loss and degradation, caused by
 - Widespread agricultural expansion and mechanization of farming.
 - Infrastructural development such as irrigation, roads, electricity pylons, wind turbines and constructions.
 - Mining and industrialization.
 - Well intended but ill-informed habitat management.
 - Lack of community support.
- Power companies' high tension wires are major threat factors, leading to death of about 15 percent of GIB population due to collisions with power lines, according to the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

Indian Initiatives for Protection of GIB

- **‘Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach’:**
 - The Ministry with financial support from National Authority for Compensatory Afforestation Funds has sanctioned an outlay of Rs. 33.85 crores for the duration of five years for the programme titled ‘Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach’.
 - The objective :
 - to build up the captive population of Great Indian Bustard and to release the chicks in the wild for increasing the population and also to promote in-situ conservation of the species.
- **Task Force:**
 - The Ministry has also constituted a Task Force for suggesting Eco-friendly measures to mitigate impacts of power transmission lines and other power transmission infrastructures on wildlife including the Great Indian Bustard.
- **The Great Indian Bustard has been included in the Appendix I of Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) on the basis of a proposal submitted by India.**

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- It was also the mascot of the prestigious 13th CMS Conference of Parties held in Gandhinagar giving wider publicity for the conservation of the species.
- Important habitats of Great Indian Bustards are designated as **National Parks/Sanctuaries** for their better protection.
- The species has been identified for conservation efforts under the component ‘Species Recovery Programme’ of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)-**Development of Wildlife Habitat**.
- **Directions of the National Green Tribunal (NGT):**
 - NGT ordered a time-bound action plan for the implementation of mitigation measures such as installation of bird diverters and their regular maintenance and monitoring by power agencies.
- A **Bustard conservation breeding centre** in Rajasthan has been set up in Jaisalmer.
- **Conservation Reserves:** Great Indian Bustard habitats to be declared as conservation reserves.

Way Ahead

- The **bird diverters should be expeditiously installed** in priority areas.
- It now requires an **urgent acceleration in targeted conservation actions** in order to prevent it from becoming functionally extinct within a few decades.
- Formulate **landscape conservation strategies** in priority areas.
- Consolidate **core breeding areas** identified across the species’ range by creating strict refuges during prime breeding months (March–September).
- **Assess the efficacy** of these conservation actions by systematic, country-wide population monitoring on alternate years for the next 10 years.
- Commencing an **ex-situ conservation breeding programme** as an insurance against extinction.
- The local people and their **active participation** are central to conserving the species.
- **Community outreach and linking local livelihoods** with bustard conservation in priority areas by subsidy/incentive-driven agro-environmental schemes that promote bustard-friendly practices.
- Regulate and **control eco-tourism** to minimise disturbance to the species.

Source: TH

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Facts in News

World AIDS Day: (GS-2 Health)

In News

- Every year December 1st is observed as World AIDS Day.

World AIDS Day 2022

- **About:**
 - **The World Health Organization (WHO) founded World AIDS Day on December 1 in 1988.**
 - It aims to **promote information sharing** between local and national authorities, international organisations, and private citizens.
 - **"Equalize"** is this year's World AIDS Day theme.
- **Importance:**
 - **Approximately 38 million individuals globally carry the HIV virus.**
 - Despite the virus being discovered in 1984, it has claimed the lives of almost 35 million people.

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

- **Meaning:**
 - Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS is **caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).**
- **Transmission:**
 - It can be transmitted through the **use of contaminated syringe** for medical purposes or shared activities such as injecting drugs into the bloodstream, **sexual intercourse which is not protected** or from an infected mother to child during pregnancy, birth or through breastfeeding.
- **Prevention:**
 - There is **no cure for HIV/AIDS.**
 - **Prevention is the best way** to safeguard oneself against AIDS.
 - Health experts insist upon **using protection during sex** and getting tested for HIV before planning a family.

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- **Effective antiretroviral treatment (ART) prevents HIV transmission from mother to child during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding.**
 - **ART does not cure HIV but reduces its replication in the blood**, thereby reducing the viral load to an undetectable level.

Steps taken by Government of India

- **National AIDS Control Programme (NACP)** (Central Sector Scheme)
- **India has achieved the 6th Millennium Development Goal (MDG 6)** of halting and reversing the HIV epidemic.
- **Prevention from Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT) programme**
- **HIV/AIDS Act 2017** (prohibits discrimination or unfair treatment of HIV-infected people on any grounds)
- **PALS (PPTCT ART Linkages Software) System** (Repository of HIV positive pregnant women)
- **90:90:90 strategy** as adopted by UNAIDS (90% (diagnosed, treatment (by anti-retroviral treatment (ART)) & suppression)) by 2020.
 - Extended by 10 years with the goal post of 95-95-95.
- **Social Awareness** through workshops.
- **Viral Load Testing Facilities:** They have been scaled up, and HIV counselling, testing and community-based screening for early diagnosis have been ramped up to achieve the target of Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV.
- **Project Sunrise:** It was launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2016) to tackle the rising HIV prevalence in north-eastern states.

Source: HT

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Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) :

GS-2 Important International Institutions:

In News

- Prasar Bharati, India's Public Service Broadcaster, is hosting the **59th Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) General Assembly 2022**.

About ABU

- It was established in **1964** as a **not-for-profit, non-government, non-political**, professional association with a mandate to assist the development of broadcasting in the region.
- It is the **biggest broadcasting union** in the world.
- It works closely with the **regional broadcasting unions** in other parts of the world on matters of common concern.
- **Members:** ABU's membership footprint covers around **70 countries and regions** on five continents.
 - The Union serves its diverse 250 members with tailored capacity-building in news, sports, programming, and technology.
- **Functions:** It promotes the **collective interests of television and radio broadcasters** as well as key industry players and facilitates regional and international media cooperation.
 - It provides rights-free content acquisition for developing countries, negotiates rights for major sports events, and organises coverage for the region.
 - It facilitates high-quality co-productions between members bringing together the talent of **Asia and the Pacific**.

Source: Air

Nagaland Statehood Day

GS-2 Polity and Governance:

In News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his wishes to the people of Nagaland on their Statehood day.

About Nagaland Statehood day

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- Nagaland is celebrating its **60th statehood day**.
- It became the 16th State of the Union of India on 1st December 1963.
- It is bounded by **Assam in the West, Myanmar** (Burma) in the east, **Arunachal Pradesh** and part of **Assam** in the North, and **Manipur** in the South.
- The State consists of 16 (Sixteen) Administrative Districts, inhabited by **17 major tribes** along with other sub-tribes.
 - **Each tribe** is distinct in character from the others in terms of customs, language, and dress.
- Its people belong to the **Indo-Mongoloid stock**, whose ancestors lived off nature's abundant gifts, blessed with sturdy formidable dispositions.
- The **State is replete with festivities** throughout the year, as all tribes celebrate their own festivals with a pageantry of colour, music, and dance.
 - A common feature is that the festivals revolve around agriculture, the mainstay of the Naga economy. These festivals hark back to times prior to the advent of Christianity.

Source: Air

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)

Gs 2- Important

In News

India wins the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) Vice Presidency and Strategic Management Board (SMB) Chair for the 2023-25 term.

About IEC

- The IEC is a **global, not-for-profit membership** organization that brings together **more than 170 countries** and coordinates the work of **20 000 experts globally**
- It is an **international standard-setting body** that **publishes international Standards** for all electrical, electronic, and related technologies.
- Standardization Management Board (SMB) is an apex governance body of the IEC responsible for technical policy matters.
- **Mission:**
 - It aims to achieve worldwide use of IEC International Standards and Conformity Assessment Systems to ensure the safety, efficiency,

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reliability, and interoperability of electrical, electronic and information technologies,

- It aims to enhance international trade, facilitate broad electricity access and enable a more sustainable world.

Source: PIB

Asian Tiger Mosquitoes:

Gs-3 Species:

In News

- Recently, a man from Germany **underwent the worst experience** of his life after he was bitten by an **Asian tiger mosquito**.

Asian Tiger Mosquito



- Also known as **Aedes Albopictus** and the forest mosquito. Tiger mosquito is an exotic species that get their "**tiger**" name from the **single white stripe down** the center of their head and back.
- **Location:**
 - Native to the tropical and subtropical areas of **Southeast Asia**.
 - Later, it spread to many countries in **Europe** as well.
- **Characteristics:**
 - usually bites during the **daytime**,
 - Hosts many viral pathogens, including the **yellow fever virus, Chikungunya** fever as well as **filarial nematodes** like *Dirofilaria immitis*, and **Zika virus**.
 - Also a carrier of **dengue fever**

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- **Common signs and symptoms:**
 - Several stomach-aches
 - Persistent vomiting and nausea
 - Breathlessness
 - Bleeding through gums and nose
 - Fatigue and constant tiredness
- **Concern:**
 - According to the WHO, the number of reported dengue cases has **increased over eight-fold** over the last two decades, from 505,430 cases in 2000 to over 5.2 million in 2021.
- **Prevention and Control:**
 - Prevention of mosquito breeding,
 - preventing mosquitoes from accessing egg-laying habitats,
 - disposing of waste properly,
 - Covering, emptying, and cleaning domestic water storage containers every week,
 - Wearing clothing that minimizes skin exposure to mosquitoes, and
 - educating the community on the risks of mosquito-borne diseases.

Source: [times now](#)

Dr Verghese Kurian :

Gs-3

In News

- Recently, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying celebrated “**National Milk Day**” to commemorate the **101st birth anniversary of Dr. Verghese Kurien**.

About

- He was born on November 26, 1921, in present-day- **Kozhikode, Kerala**.
- His ideas and contributions made him the “**Father of the White Revolution in India**” and the ‘**Milkman of India**’.
- **Achievements:**
 - Played an instrumental role in making India the **largest milk producer** in the world.

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- He was the man behind **Operation Flood** which led to dairy farming becoming the country's largest self-sustaining industry, as well as the **largest rural employment sector**.
- He also helped set up the **Amul cooperative society** in 1946, in Gujarat's Anand.
- In 1965, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri assigned Dr. Kurien to create the **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)**.
- Dr Kurien also **founded the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA)** in 1979 and managed the Delhi Milk Scheme by correcting the prices.
- **Awards:**
 - Padma Vibhushan (1999),
 - the World Food Prize (1989),
 - Krishi Ratna (1986),
 - Padma Bhushan (1966),
 - Padma Shri (1965),
 - Ramon Magsaysay Award (1963), etc.

Operation Flood

- **About:**
 - It was the **world's biggest dairy development program** which gave a major thrust to the milk production of the nation. .
 - Launched in **1970**, it was the brainchild of Dr Verghese Kurein.
- **Objectives:**
 - Increase milk production ("a flood of milk")
 - Augment rural incomes
 - Reasonable prices for consumers

Source: PIB

Women in Judiciary

GS 1

In News

- The **third time in the history of the Supreme Court** that a bench comprising only women judges was hearing cases.

More about the news

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- **All-woman bench of Apex Court:**
 - Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud has set up the bench comprising Justices Hima Kohli and Bela M Trivedi.
 - The first time the Supreme Court had an all-woman bench was in 2013 & the second occasion came in 2018.
- **Women Judges in Supreme Court:**
 - The apex court had its **first woman judge in 1989**, when Justice **M Fatima Beevi** was appointed after her retirement as a judge of Kerala High Court.
 - **Since its inception, India has seen only 11 women judges in the Supreme Court and no women CJI for that matter.**
 - **The apex court currently has only three women judges:**
 - Justices Kohli, B V Nagarathna, and Trivedi.
 - Justice Nagarathna is set to go on to be the country's first woman Chief Justice in 2027.

Status of Women in Indian Judiciary

- **Data of representation:**
 - **High Courts:**
 - In High Courts, women judges constitute 11.5%.
 - Out of a total of 37 women candidates recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium for appointment as high court judges, only 17 have been appointed so far, while the rest of the names are pending with the central government.
 - For the high courts, Collegium has recommended 192 candidates so far.
 - Out of these, 37, that is 19 percent, were women.
 - **Subordinate Courts:**
 - About 30 percent are women judicial officers in the subordinate courts.
 - **Advocates:**
 - Of the 1.7 million advocates, only 15% are women.
 - **Bar Council:**
 - Only 2% of the elected representatives in the State Bar Councils are women.
 - There is no woman member in the Bar Council of India.

Challenges in Women's participation

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- **Stereotypes & lack of infrastructure:**
 - As pointed out by the previous Chief Justice Ramana, the **lack of infrastructure, gender stereotypes and social attitudes** have plagued the entry and progress of women in the legal profession.
 - “Clients’ preference for male advocates, uncomfortable environment within courtrooms, lack of infrastructure, crowded courtrooms, lack of washrooms for women etc. — all these deter women from entering the profession.
 - The survey found out that out of 6,000 trial courts, nearly 22% have no toilets for women
- **Male dominating appointment structure:**
 - Presently, many women candidates deserve to be appointed as a Judge, but the main problem lies with the male-dominant collegium structure of the Supreme Court.
- **Hostile Atmosphere in Courtroom:**
 - The hostile and sexist environment at the apex courts makes it extremely difficult for female litigators to grow as professionals.
- **Domestic responsibilities:**
 - Many women advocates had been offered judgeship in the past, but all have declined to hold the office, citing their domestic responsibilities.

Significance of Women's participation in Judiciary

- **Need for diversification:**
 - Diversification brings positive institutional changes, and the judiciary needs to be more diverse.
- **Balanced justice delivery system:**
 - The presence of women as judges and lawyers will substantially improve the justice delivery system.
- **Balanced and empathetic approach:**
 - Improving the representation of women in the judiciary could go a long way towards a more balanced and empathetic approach in cases related to sexual violence.
 - The issue of gender sensitization has been raised many times, especially in cases where male judges failed to show empathy for the female victims.
- **Legitimacy:**
 - The judiciary will not be trusted if it is viewed as a bastion of elitism, exclusivity and privilege.

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- Therefore, the presence of women is essential for the legitimacy of the judiciary.

Suggestions & way ahead:

- **More in corporate than in decision making:**
 - Women are outnumbering men in law school classrooms and are increasingly joining the corporate sector, but their underrepresentation in such decision-making institutions is deplorable.
- **Suggestions by the previous Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana:**
 - **50% representation:**
 - Previous CJI also voiced his support for 50% representation for women in judiciary.
 - **Legal Education:**
 - He has highlighted the need to increase gender diversity in **legal education**.
 - There should be a fixed number of seats, reserved for women candidates, in all colleges and universities providing law courses.
 - states such as Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and Rajasthan have benefited from such reservation as they now have 40-50% women judicial officers.
 - **Availing basic facilities:**
 - He said the need for basic facilities, especially for women, need to be addressed immediately.
 - **Need of separate entity:**
 - He repeatedly pressed for the need to form a separate entity — **National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation** — to introduce **inclusive designs for court complexes** and create a more **welcoming environment in them**.
- **Enhancing transparency:**
 - There is a requirement to enhance transparency in the judicial system.
 - This will create more opportunities for women to prove their mettle and create a level playing field.

Source: IE

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India's G20 Presidency as a Watershed moment

GS 2 AGREEMENTS Involving India &/or Affecting India's Interests

In News

- India has formally assumed the presidency of G-20 on December 1, 2022.
 - India will hold the presidency **till 30th November 2023**.
 - India's theme as stated by the Prime Minister is — **“One Earth, One Family, One Future”**.

More about the news

- **Agenda:**
 - The Prime Minister had described India's agenda at the G-20 as **“inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented”**.
- **Sharing India's experience:**
 - He added, “During our G-20 Presidency, we shall present India's experiences, learnings and models as possible templates for others, particularly the developing world.
- **Significance of 2023, G20 Summit that is scheduled to be held in New Delhi:**
 - The G20 summit would be qualitatively different from any of the previous multilateral summits that India has hosted.
 - **Assembly of World's largest economies:**
 - None of the previous summits had the world's largest economies assembled in one place nor did they have the entire P-5 (permanent members of the UN Security Council) represented.
 - In that sense, the G-20 summit would be the first of its kind in Indian history.
 - **Depoliticisation:**
 - To promote harmony within the human family, we will seek to depoliticise the global supply of food, fertilisers and medical products, so that geopolitical tensions do not lead to humanitarian crises.

Know about G20

- **Origin:**
 - The G20 was **formed in 1999** in the backdrop of the financial crisis of the

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late 1990s that hit East Asia and Southeast Asia in particular.

- Its aim was to secure global financial stability by involving middle-income countries.
- **As stated by the official G20 Website:**
 - “On the advice of the G7 Finance Ministers, the **G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors** began holding meetings to discuss the response to the global financial crisis that occurred,”
- **Objectives:**
 - Policy coordination between its members in order to achieve global economic stability, sustainable growth;
 - To promote financial regulations that reduce risks and prevent future financial crises; and
 - To create a new international financial architecture.
- **Members & guests:**
 - **Members:**
 - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, India, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.
 - Spain is also invited as a permanent guest.
 - **Others:**
 - Each year, the Presidency invites guest countries, which take full part in the G20 exercise. Several international and regional organizations also participate, granting the forum an even broader representation.



- **Together, the G20 countries include:**
 - 60 percent of the world’s population,
 - 80 percent of global GDP, and

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- 75 percent of global trade.
- **Presidency of G20 & Troika:**
 - The presidency of the G20 rotates every year among members.
 - The country holding the presidency, together with the previous and next presidency-holder, forms the ‘**Troika**’ to ensure continuity of the G20 agenda.

What can India share with the world during its Presidency?

- **Presenting Diversity:**
 - The G20 presidency is an opportunity to present the diversity that is India to the outside world.
- **Management during pandemic:**
 - Among large democracies, India has by far been the best performer in handling the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - For the world, the Indian public goods delivery mechanism, at a billion-plus scale, has set a new template.
 - The management of the economy by India during the pandemic has been extraordinarily prudent with prescient decision-making.
- **Independent foreign policy:**
 - India’s independent foreign policy, so visibly demonstrated in the ongoing NATO-Russia (Ukraine) war, has made the world sit up and take notice.
 - The assertion of its national interest is also markedly different from the “glory” days of Non-Aligned Movement.
- **Employment and environment:**
 - G20 can act as a forum to exchange experiences on **societal benefits and growth** as complementary goals would lead to fresh thinking on employment and environment.
 - India has its own initiatives like “LiFE Movement” & “The One Sun One World One Grid” to offer to the world.
- **India’s own success models to offer the world.**
 - From scaling up of a seamless **digital payment model built on the public digital infrastructure (UPI) to the unique digital identity**, and from the successful **financial inclusion model** of the bottom quintile to the **seamless transition to green energy**, India now has many models to showcase, particularly for the developing world.

Global challenges, opportunities & way ahead

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- Currently, there are **five challenges** plaguing the world that the G20 can attempt to fix.
 - First and the most pressing is the in-your-face **Russia–Ukraine conflict**.
 - The second challenge is of **rising prices**, particularly of **food**.
 - The third challenge is **energy**.
 - Russia is teaching the world that while sanctions against it could impact its economy in the future, in the short term, these sanctions are failing.
 - As rising food and energy prices lead to inflation, the fourth challenge is **the manner in which countries are attempting to fix the problem**.
 - The fifth challenge is the **threat of stagflation**.
- **Opportunities:**
 - Hosting the G20 Presidency would also result in economic opportunities in different sectors such as **tourism, hospitality, IT and civil aviation** among others.
 - The sectors of significant importance would be ranging from **energy, agriculture, trade, digital economy, health and environment to employment, tourism, anti-corruption and women empowerment**, including in focus areas that impact the most **vulnerable and disadvantaged**.

Source: BS

India Assumes Presidency Of UN Security Council For December

GS 2 Important International Institutions

In News

- Recently, India assumed the **monthly presidency** of the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - This is the **second time of monthly presidency in India's two-year tenure** as an elected member of the Council in 2021-22.
 - India had earlier assumed **UNSC presidency in August 2021**.
- **December Presidency:** Two signature events at the ministerial level

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- **Reformed Multilateralism:**
 - India will hold a “high-level open debate” on “**Maintenance of International Peace and Security: New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism**” at the Security Council.
 - **New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism (NORMS)** envisages reforms in the current multilateral architecture, with the UN at its centre, to make it more representative and fit for purpose.
 - This open debate is intended to encourage UN member-states to take this conversation forward by deliberating on the elements of a new orientation for multilateralism, and on how best to move forward in this regard in a time-bound manner.
- **Counter-Terrorism:**
 - The theme of this event is “**Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts: Global Approach to Counter Terrorism — Challenges and Way Forward**”
 - The threat of terrorism is grave, universal and transnational in character, this briefing intends to underscore the necessity of collective and coordinated efforts to combat the menace of terrorism.
 - In recent times there has been a resurgence of terrorist activities and that the existing and emerging threats call for a renewed collective approach to terrorism
 - The briefing will provide an opportunity for (UNSC) members to build on the recent deliberations of the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee meeting.
- Overall, during its eighth term as an elected member of the UNSC, India has endeavored to voice the **key concerns of the Global South**.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- **About:**
 - It is one of the UN’s **six main organs** and is aimed at maintaining international peace and security.
 - It held its first session on 17th January 1946 in Westminster, London.
 - **Headquarters:** New York City.
- **Membership:**

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- The Council is composed of 15 Members:
 - **Permanent members with veto power :**
 - China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.
 - **Ten non-permanent members:**
 - Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, United Arab Emirates.
 - More than 50 United Nations Member States have never been Members of the Security Council.
- **Functions and Powers:**
 - To maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations;
 - To investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction;
 - To recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement;
 - To formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments;
 - To determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken;
 - To call on Members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression;
 - To take military action against an aggressor;
- **About UNSC elections:**
 - Each year the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members (out of 10 in total) for a two-year term.
 - The **10 non-permanent seats** are distributed on a regional basis as follows:
 - Five for African and Asian States.
 - One for the Eastern European States.
 - Two for the Latin American and Caribbean States;
 - Two for Western European and other States
 - To be elected to the Council, candidate countries need a two-thirds majority of ballots of the Member States that are present and voting in the Assembly.
 - The UNSC elections were traditionally held in the General Assembly hall with each of the 193 member states casting its vote in a secret ballot.
- **Membership of UNSC:**

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- Since its inception, the UNSC has been enlarged only once.
- Even after that, P-5 has remained fixed, which is problematic as the membership of the UN has grown almost four times since its formation.
- **Veto Power:**
 - It has been the exclusive domain of P-5 members, which has been questioned by a lot of members.
 - Many countries have put question marks on the existence of veto, which is contrary to democratic principles.
- **Methods of Working:**
 - For example, before a document is adopted, each document must be translated into six languages, which mostly leads to discussions on the accuracy of these languages. This process has many times delayed the adoption of texts in the UN.
- **Criticisms of UNSC**
 - It has been criticised for **losing relevance, credibility and narrow leadership**.
 - Due to the differences among the P-5 and other countries, the UN is losing coherence and focusing on issues of priority to all member states.
 - The council's lack of multilateralism has also been criticised in the wake of the Syrian war crisis and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.
 - No veto rights leave the non-permanent members toothless as they cannot assert their will on any matter of international concern and can merely persuade or dissuade other member states.
 - India has also constantly pointed to the lack of movement on reforms in the UNSC.
- **Need for UN Reforms:**
 - **Equitable World Order:** There is a need for a more equitable world in order to uphold the principles of democracy at the global level.
 - **Inclusivity:** Developing countries like the African countries, need to be made stakeholders in the multilateral institutions and involved in the decision-making process.
 - **Mitigation of New Threats:** With rising protectionism, increased incidents of terrorism and the threat of climate change, the multilateral system must become more resilient and responsive.

Challenges for India at UNSC

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- **Chinese Challenge:**
 - India is entering the UNSC at a time when China is asserting itself at the global stage much more vigorously than ever. It heads at least six UN organisations — and has challenged the global rules.
 - China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific, as well as the India-China border, has been visible in all of 2020, and India will have to think on its feet to counter China.
 - China has aggressively tried to raise the issue of Kashmir at the UNSC.
- **Unstable West Asia and US-Russia relations:**
 - With relations between the US and Russia deteriorating, India has the challenge to balance both.
 - Even India has to opt balanced approach in the case of Israel and Palestinian and West Asia approach.

Way Ahead

- **Asian Conflicts:** Four major Asian conflicts are raging and diplomatic analysts say India should focus on resolving the conflicts in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Yemen and find a lasting solution to the troubles in Syria.
- **Focus on demands of those who elected us:** India is an elected non-permanent member of the Security Council and had received support from the Asia-Pacific countries during the election. It is therefore hoped that the immediate issues of unfolding conflicts in the nearby areas will find greater attention during August.
- **Promote International Peace:** There is a need to generate more focused attention and serve as a call for action in situations where global responses have been insufficient, and poorly coordinated.
- **Uphold rules-based multilateral system:** Maintain a rules-based, multilateral system to face today's many ongoing crises.

Source: IE

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Kirit Parikh Panel for Gas Pricing

Gs 3 Indian Economy & Related Issues:

In News

- Recently, the government appointed a **Kirit Parikh committee** to review the gas pricing formula.

Major recommendations of the committee

Seeks Mkt-Determined Price From 2027

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- **Ceiling price**
 - There is a need for a fixed **pricing band** for gas from old fields which is called APM (Administrative Price Mechanism) gas.
 - These fields account for **two-third of natural gas produced in the country.**
 - This would **ensure a predictable pricing regime for producers** while also **lowering prices of CNG and piped cooking gas.**
 - The prices have **risen by 70% since 2021** due to an increase in input costs.
 - Currently, the legacy or old fields are governed on a nomination basis without any condition of sharing profits and therefore the government controls its price.
- **Linking the price**
 - The panel has sought a **link in the gas price to imported oil.**
- **Improved profits**
 - If the recommendations are implemented then the state-run ONGC and OIL **will have to reduce prices from the current level** and this will **help improve the margins of city gas companies** like IGL, MGL and Gujarat Gas.

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- **No-cut category**
 - The **city gas will continue to get top priority** in the allocation of APM gas.
 - The sector will be in the 'no-cut' category which means that the supplies to other consumers will be cut first in case of a decline in production.
- **Other recommendations:**
 - **To include gas in GST** with compensation for five years.
 - This would be done by **subsuming excise duty** charged by the central government and varying rates of **VAT** levied by state governments.
 - **Caps on gas prices** must be **removed in three years**.
 - Government should **gradually come out of the gas allocation business**.
 - No changes to the existing pricing formula for **fields with difficult geology**.
 - Currently, fields in Deepsea or in high-temperature, high-pressure zones are governed by a different formula that includes an element of imported LNG cost and is subject to a ceiling.

Need of this committee

- The committee was tasked with **suggesting a fair price to the end-consumer** while ensuring a **market-oriented, transparent and reliable pricing regime** for India's long-term vision for ensuring a gas-based economy.
- The mandate is to suggest a regime that would **help raise domestic production to help meet the goal of 15% of energy coming from gas by 2030**.

Way forward

- **The administered pricing mechanism (APM):** is still determined by the government on the basis of a formula.
 - The need is that domestic producers must have complete pricing freedom which is the only **way to up local production**.
- **India needs to increase its share of gas consumption** from 6 percent currently and needs to protect consumers from getting implicitly subsidised gas.

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- **Lowering import prices will impact domestic producers** and the government should look at giving complete freedom on pricing.

What is Indian Basket (IB)?

- It is also known as the **Indian Crude Basket**.
- It is the weighted average of **Dubai and Oman (sour) and the Brent Crude (sweet) crude oil prices**.
- It is used as an **indicator of the price of crude imports in India** and the Government of India watches the index when **examining domestic price issues**.

Source: **TH**

Hornbill Festival

GS 1 Art and Culture

In News

- Recently, the Vice President Jagdeep inaugurated the **23rd edition of the Hornbill Festival** at Naga heritage village in Nagaland.

About the Festival

- Often cited as “**festival of all festivals**”
- Hornbill Festival usually takes place between the **1st and the 10th of December** every year in Nagaland.
- **Aim of the festival:** To revive and protect the rich culture of Nagaland and display its extravaganza and traditions.
- It is held at **Naga Heritage Village, Kisama** which is about 12 km from Kohima.
- The festival gets its name from the **Indian Hornbill**.
- The Hornbill is a **common bird** among the folklores and tribes of Nagaland and can be commonly seen prancing around in the forests of Nagaland.
- **Many tribes** take part in the festival: Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Dimasa Kachari, Garo, Khamniungan, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yumchungru, and Zeliang.

Great Hornbill

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- It is also known as the concave-casqued hornbill, great Indian hornbill or great pied hornbill is one of the larger members of the hornbill family.
- It is found in the **Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia**.
- Its impressive size and colour have made it important in **many tribal cultures** and rituals.
- The great hornbill is long-lived, living for nearly **50 years in captivity**.
- It is predominantly **frugivorous**, but is an opportunist and will prey on small mammals, reptiles and birds.
- **IUCN status:** Vulnerable

Additional Information

- Tsiiphie - Traditional Naga headgear
- Amula kaxa - Naga shawl

Source: PIB

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

Gs 3 Agriculture

In News

- Recently, the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare stated that it is open to **taking pro-farmer changes in Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** in response to the **recent climate crisis and rapid technological advances**.

More about the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

- **Aim:**
 - A flagship scheme of the Government of India, PMFBY aims to provide **financial support to farmers suffering crop loss/damage** arising out of **natural calamities**.
- **Objectives:**
 - To provide **insurance coverage** and financial support to the farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crops as a result of natural calamities, pests & diseases.
 - To **stabilise the income of farmers** to ensure their continuance in farming.

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- To encourage farmers to **adopt innovative and modern agricultural** practices.
- To ensure **flow of credit to the agriculture sector**.
- **Implementing Agency:**
 - The Scheme shall be implemented through a **multi-agency framework** by selected insurance companies under the overall guidance & control of the **Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW)**.
- **Payment of premium:**
 - Farmers have to pay a maximum of **2 percent of the total premium** of the insured amount for Kharif crops, **1.5 percent for rabi food crops and oilseeds** as well as **5 percent for commercial/horticultural crops**.
 - The **balance premium** is shared by the Union and state governments **on a 50:50 basis and on a 90:10 basis** in the case of **northeastern states**.
- **2020 revamp:**
 - The scheme was revamped enabling voluntary participation of the farmers.
 - It also made it convenient for the farmer to report crop loss within 72 hours of the occurrence of any event - through the **Crop Insurance App**.
- **Grievance Redressal:**
 - Through its State/District Level Grievance Committee's, the scheme also enables farmers to submit their grievances at the grassroots level.
- **Other Highlights:**
 - **Claims** are worked out on the basis of **shortfall in actual yield**, vis-a-vis the threshold yield in the notified area.
 - There is **no upper limit on Government subsidies**.
 - The premium rates to be paid by farmers are very low and the balance premium is paid by the Government to provide the full insured amount to the farmers.
 - The scheme will be launching a doorstep distribution drive to deliver crop insurance policies to the farmers '**Meri Policy Mere Hath**' in all implementing States.
- **Status & Claims:**
 - PMFBY is currently the **largest crop insurance scheme in the world** in terms of farmer enrolments, averaging 5.5 crore

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applications every year and third largest in terms of premium received.

- Over 36 crore farmer applications have been insured under PMFBY, with over INR 1,07,059 crores of claims have already been paid under the scheme as of 4th February, 2022.

Source: LM

Horticulture Cluster Development Programme

Gs 2 Government Policies & Interventions:

In News

- Recently, the Union Ministry of **Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** has prepared the Horticulture Cluster Development Programme (CDP).

About

- **Nodal Agency:** The National Horticulture Board (NHB)
- **Aim:**
 - To improve exports of targeted crops by about 20% and create cluster-specific brands to enhance the competitiveness of cluster crops.
- **Objectives:**
 - To promote the Agriculture sector in the country and
 - to increase the income of the farmers by giving them a reasonable price for their produce.
- **Key Features:**
 - CDP will support integrated interventions to enhance the competitiveness of **targeted clusters**.
 - The interventions have been classified into the following three verticals:
 - Pre-production and Production
 - Post-harvest Management and Value Addition
 - Logistics, Marketing and Branding
 - MoA&FW has identified 55 horticulture clusters.
 - The geographical specialization of horticulture clusters will be leveraged.

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- It will promote integrated and market-led development of pre-production, production, post-harvest, logistics, branding, and marketing activities.
- **Implementation Framework:**
 - NHB shall provide **financial assistance and supervise** the overall implementation of the programme.
 - A government/public sector entity, recommended by state/central government, shall be appointed as a **Cluster Development Agency (CDA)** for each identified cluster for the implementation of CDP.
 - CDA will establish a **Cluster Development Cell (CDC)** with a dedicated team of officers within the CDA for smooth implementation of the programme.
- **Significance:**
 - The CDP will **benefit around 10 lakh farmers** and related stakeholders along the value chain.
 - The **interest of the farmers** should be paramount in the center of any programme/scheme.
 - The **overall development of horticulture** in the country would be focused with the help of the implementation of this Programme.
- **Way Ahead:**
 - Emphasizing crop diversification and linking this ambitious programme with the market for **produce sale and capacity building**.
 - There is a need for **geo-tagging of infrastructure** for benefitting small and marginal farmers, tracking of activities implemented in the fields, monitoring purpose, etc.

Source: PIB

Zombie Virus

Gs 2 Health

In News

- Recently, the **French scientists** have warned of the **onset of another outbreak** after they revived a **48,500-year-old zombie virus** buried under a **frozen lake in Russia**.
 - This has **broken the previous record** held by a 30,000-year-old virus discovered by the same team in **Siberia in 2013**.

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What is a Zombie Virus?

- **Zombie virus is the term given to a virus that is frozen in ice and therefore dormant.**
- **The virus emerged due to the thawing of permafrost as the global temperature is rising.**
- **It is a group of viruses which have been dormant for thousands of years.**
- **It is dubbed Pandoravirus yedoma after the mythological character Pandora which was 48,500 years old and has the potential to infect other organisms.**
 - **It was discovered below the bottom of a lake in Yukechi Alas in Yakutia, Russia.**

What could be the cause of it?

- **One-quarter of the Northern hemisphere is underlain by permanently frozen ground which is referred to as permafrost.**
 - **Due to climate warming, irreversibly thawing permafrost is releasing organic matter frozen for up to a million years and most of which decomposes into carbon dioxide and methane which further enhances the greenhouse effect.**
 - **Part of this organic matter also consists of revived cellular microbes (prokaryotes, unicellular eukaryotes) as well as viruses that remained dormant since prehistoric times.**

Is the virus potentially harmful?

- **All of the zombie viruses have the potential to be infectious and hence pose a health danger.**
- **It is believed that pandemics like Covid-19 will become more common in the future as melting permafrost releases long-dormant viruses.**

Source: ET

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

Gs 2 Government policies and Intervention

In News

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- Atal Innovation Mission recently launched fresh applications for **Community Innovator Fellowship**.

About Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

- **Agency**
 - It was launched by **NITI aayog**.
- **Aim**
 - To create and promote an **ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship** across the country via interventions at school, university, research institutions, MSME and industry levels.
 - To provide **platform and collaboration opportunities for different stakeholders**.
- **Initiatives:**
 - **Atal Tinkering Labs:** Creating a problem-solving mindset across schools in India.
 - **Atal Incubation Centres:** Fostering world-class startups and adding a new dimension to the incubator model.
 - **Atal New India Challenges:** Fostering product innovations and aligning them to the needs of various sectors/ministries.
 - **Mentor India Campaign:** A national mentor network in collaboration with the public sector, corporates and institutions.
 - **Atal Community Innovation Centre:** To stimulate community-centric innovation and ideas in the unserved /underserved regions including Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
 - **Atal Research and Innovation for Small Enterprises (ARISE):** To stimulate innovation and research in the MSME industry.
 - It has also launched **AIM Prime, AIM iCREST** to boost industrial exposure of students and innovators.

Source: PIB

Natovenator polydontus

GS 3 Species

In News

Recently , Natovenator polydontus was seen in the news.

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About Natovenator polydontus,

- It is part of the dinosaur group called **theropods** – sharing traits including bipedalism – best known for large meat-eaters including Tyrannosaurus, Tarbosaurus, and Giganotosaurus.
- It lived about 72 million years ago during the **Cretaceous Period** and was built like a **diving bird** with a **streamlined body** while **possessing a goose-like elongated neck** and a **long flattened snout** with a mouth bearing more than 100 small teeth.
- **Characteristics:** It measured about 18 inches (45 cm) long, with a skull about 3 inches (7 cm) long.
 - Its front limbs appeared somewhat flattened, perhaps as an adaptation for paddling and swimming.
 - The streamlining of its body is shown by ribs that point toward the tail, as in diving birds, an arrangement that reduces drag in the water and allows efficient swimming.
- **“Natovenator** – which means ‘swimming thief’ – is an amazing little animal for several reasons.
 - It is small and delicate. It looked more like a lizard or mammal skeleton than a dinosaur.
 - It is very specialized for living in an environment not typical for an animal related to Velociraptor and its other relatives.
- It was adapted to a **semi-aquatic lifestyle** in a **freshwater ecosystem**, perhaps **floating on rivers and lakes**, paddling with its front limbs, and using its flexible neck to catch fish and insects or diving underwater to capture its prey
- it was a cousin of the speedy little **predator Velociraptor**.
- A close relative of Natovenator named Halszkaraptor, described in 2017, lived a similar lifestyle at roughly the same time in the same region.
 - Both had a very bird-like appearance and were closely related to the bird lineage.
- Its well-preserved remains – a skeleton about 70% complete – were unearthed in the Gobi Desert, which over the decades has been a treasure trove for dinosaur fossils.

Source:IE

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Baguette and UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list

Gs 1 Art and Culture:

In News

Recently, Baguette — **the staple French bread** — was inscribed into the UN’s list of intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

- In March 2021, France nominated the baguette as its candidate for consideration within the UNESCO ICH list.
 - It drew attention to the steady decline in the number of bakeries in the country as around 20,000 of them have closed down since 1970.

What is a baguette?

- The baguette is a long and thin loaf made of flour, water, salt, and yeast, and is consumed as a **staple in France**.
- Some believe that it was invented by **August Zang**, a baker and an entrepreneur from **Vienna in 1839**, who introduced the world to the taste of crusty bread with softer insides, using a steam oven.
- It gained its **official name in 1920**.
- The **history of the bread** is uncertain, some also believe that **Napoleon Bonaparte**, the French military leader, **ordered thin sticks of bread for consumption** by his soldiers as they could be carried from one place to another more conveniently.

About intangible cultural heritage

- UNESCO defines “intangible” as “expressions that have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments, and contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity.
- Intangible cultural heritage includes “oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge, and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.”
- It ascribes importance to “the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next,” which necessitates their preservation.

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- The adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003 was a crucial step towards preserving intangible heritage from across the globe.
- UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was established in the year 2008.

the criteria for the selection

- There are three criteria for an intangible cultural heritage to be inscribed in the United Nations list.
- The entity must “
 - be recognized by communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals as part of their cultural heritage,
 - be transmitted from generation to generation and be constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history and
 - provide them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity

India's intangible cultural symbols on the UNESCO list

- This year, India nominated Garba, a traditional dance form that originated in the state of Gujarat, for inscription on UNESCO's ICH list.
- The elements which have been on the representative list of intangible cultural heritage from India in the past decade include Kolkata's Durga Puja (2021), Kumbh Mela (2017), Navroz (2016), Yoga (2016), traditional brass and copper craft of utensil-making among coppersmiths of Punjab (2014), Sankirtana, a ritual musical performance of Manipur (2013), and the Buddhist chanting of Ladakh (2012)
- Before 2011, the list included Chhau dance, Kalbelia folk songs and dance of Rajasthan, and Mudi yettu, a dance drama from Kerala (2010), Ramman, a religious festival and theatre performance of Garhwal in the Himalayas (2009), and Kutiyattam or Sanskrit theatre, and Vedic chanting (2008).
- Ramlila, a traditional performance of Ramayana, was also included in 2008

Who manages nominations to the UNESCO list in India?

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- several autonomous bodies within the Ministry of Culture actively function towards promoting and preserving intangible cultural heritage within the country.

Source:IE

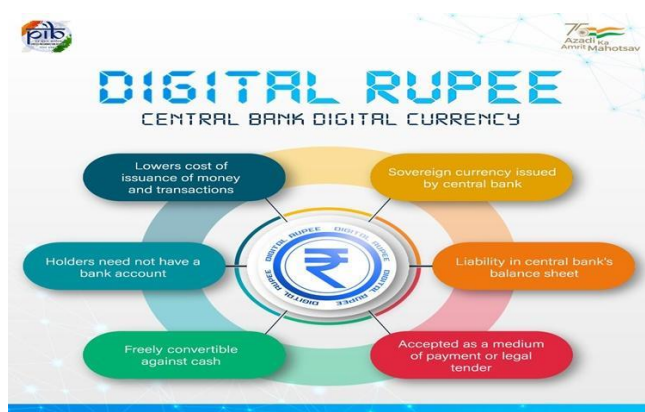
Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)

Gs 3 Indian Economy & related Issue

In News

- Recently, the RBI has announced the launch of India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) from December 1.

What is Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)?



- It is the **legal tender** issued by a **central bank in a digital form**.
- It is the **same as a fiat currency** and is **exchangeable one-to-one with the fiat currency**.
 - Only its **form is different**.
- It will be an **electronic version of cash**.
- It will be **primarily meant for retail transactions**.
- It will be potentially available for use by all which includes the **private sector, non-financial consumers and businesses**.
- It will be able to **provide access to safe money for payment and settlement**.
- It will be the **direct liability of the central bank**.

Who can use the retail CBDC?

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- **It is the first phase of a pilot project** that will cover select locations and banks in a closed user group (CUG) comprising participating customers and merchants.
- **It will initially cover the four cities of:**
 - Mumbai
 - New Delhi
 - Bengaluru
 - Bhubaneswar.
- **Four banks will be involved in the controlled launch of the digital currency in these four cities:**
 - State Bank of India
 - ICICI Bank
 - Yes Bank
 - IDFC First Bank.
- **The service will be subsequently extended to the cities:** Ahmedabad, Gangtok, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Indore, Kochi, Lucknow, Patna, and Shimla.
 - **Four more banks:** Bank of Baroda, Union Bank of India, HDFC Bank, and Kotak Mahindra Bank will join the project later.

How will the retail digital rupee work?

- It will be issued in the **same denominations as paper currency and coins** and will be distributed through banks.
- Users will be able to **transact through a digital wallet** which would be stored on **mobile phones and devices**.
- **Transactions can be both:**
 - Person to person (P2P)
 - Person to merchant (P2M).
- Payments to merchants can be made using **QR codes** displayed at merchant locations.
- It will **not earn any interest** and can be converted to other forms of money like deposits with banks.
- **RBI has demarcated the digital rupee into two broad categories:**
 - General purpose (retail)
 - Wholesale
 - The RBI has **already launched the digital rupee for the wholesale segment** to settle secondary market transactions in government securities.

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- Wholesale CBDC is designed for **restricted access to select financial institutions.**
- It has the potential to **transform the settlement systems for financial transactions** undertaken by banks in the government securities (G-Sec) segment, inter-bank market and capital market more efficiently and securely in terms of operational costs, use of collateral and liquidity management.

Challenges

- **Lack of Consumer Protection:** No Dispute Settlement Mechanisms and control of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- **Digital Illiteracy:** The population of India is currently not equipped to deal with cryptos.
- **Security Risks:** Cyberattacks on wallets, exchange mechanism (Crypto jacking).
- **Shield to Crime:** If not regulated and monitored properly, it can be used for illicit trading, criminal activities, & organised crimes.
- **Popularity of Cryptocurrencies:** RBI has repeatedly flagged concerns over money laundering, terror financing, tax evasion, etc with private cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ether, etc.

Advantages

- **It aims at reduction in operational costs** involved in physical cash management, fostering financial inclusion, bringing resilience, efficiency and innovation in the payments system.
- **It will add efficiency to the settlement system** and boost innovation in **cross-border payments space.**
- It will provide the public with the uses that any private **virtual currencies can provide without any associated risks.**
- **It will curb issues such as** money laundering, terror financing, tax evasion, etc.

Fiat Money

- It is a **government-issued currency that is not backed by a commodity such as gold.**
- It gives central banks **greater control over the economy** because they

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can **control how much money is printed.**

- Most modern paper currencies such as the **US dollar are fiat currencies.**
- One danger of fiat money is that **governments will print too much of it, resulting in hyperinflation.**

Source: IE

India-Israel Relations

Gs 2 International Organisations & Groupings

Agreements Involving India & Affecting India's Interests

In News

- Recently, the President of Israel attended a cultural event at the Israel Museum to inaugurate the new exhibition titled **'Body of Faith: Sculpture from the National Museum of India'**.

Israel on ties with India: Key Highlights

- This exhibition, literally **'spirit within matter'** in Hebrew, is yet another byproduct of the growing friendship between the Indian and Israeli nations and a reflection of the deep resonance of arts and culture that our nations share.
- Israel's President made a rare appearance at an exhibition here **featuring Indian deities and temple rituals.**
- India and Israel are **"natural allies"** who are united by a fundamental commitment to the democratic ideals upon which they were founded
- The display features **14 exquisite large-scale Indian sculptures** created between the **fourth and thirteenth centuries**, some on loan from the National Museum in New Delhi and some from the Israel Museum's collection.

India-Israel Relations

- **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - India officially recognised Israel in 1950. Soon after, Israel established an immigration office in Bombay which was later converted into a Trade Office and subsequently a Consulate.

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- However full diplomatic relations were established only in 1992 and Embassies were opened.
- **Economic and Commercial Relations:**
 - The bilateral merchandise trade grew from USD 200 million in 1992 to USD 6.35 billion (excluding defence) during the period 2021-2022, with the balance of trade being in India's favour.
 - India is Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally.
 - In recent years, bilateral trade has diversified into several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security.
 - Israeli companies have been instrumental in transferring technology to India in areas like renewable energy, telecom, water technologies. Many of them have also set up R&D centers in India.
 - The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries is also on cards.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - India imports critical defence technologies from Israel. There are regular exchanges between the armed forces.
 - There is cooperation on security issues, including a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.
 - Indian armed forces use Israeli Phalcon AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control Systems), Heron drones and Barak anti-missile defence systems.
- **Cooperation in Agriculture:**
 - A three year joint work program has been signed between the two countries in 2021 for development in agriculture cooperation.
 - It is aimed at establishing Centers of Excellence, intensifying value chains and encouraging private investment.
 - India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in horticulture mechanization, orchard and canopy management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management.
 - Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India. Some Israeli companies and experts are providing expertise to manage and improve dairy farming in India through their expertise in high milk yield.
- **Science & Technology:**
 - The two countries have established a Joint Committee on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993.

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- India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) has been set up to secure cooperation between the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, and the Israel Innovation Authority, Government of Israel to promote, facilitate and support joint industrial R&D projects.
- It will address the challenges in the agreed 'Focus Sectors'.
- **Energy:**
 - Tamar and Levianthan gas fields off the coast of Israel were explored recently and India has been one of the first countries to bid for an exploration licence in order to extract and import natural gas from the fields.
 - India's ONGC Videsh, Bharat PetroResources, Indian Oil and Oil India were awarded an exploration licence by the Israeli government, a clear sign of the ongoing diversification in ties between the two countries.

Way Ahead

- **P2P contact:** Despite increasing bonhomie between the two states, the people to people contact still lacks. Increased citizens engagement will give further depth to the relations between the two countries.
- **Bigger trade volumes:** Though the trade volumes between the two countries have been increasing year on year, still it's much below its potential level. FTA should be executed soon and the trade basket must expand.
- **Striking balance:** Though Israel comes across as a natural partner, India should also be concerned about the human rights issues in Palestine. So far, India has been able to balance its geostrategic needs and international morality.
- **China and Israel:** Of late China's engagement has been continuously growing with Israel primarily for the latter's technology. India should be proactive in evolving its partnership with Israel from hereon.

Source: IE

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Rising Remittances to India

Gs 2 Important International Institutions

In News

- In a recent forecast, the **World Bank (WB)** stated that remittance to India is set to cross the **\$100-billion mark** in 2022.

Key Findings

- **About:**
 - In its **Migration and Development Brief**, the World Bank has said India's remittance will grow 12 percent from 7.5 percent last year, resulting in \$100 billion flow as compared to \$89.4 billion in 2021.
- **Percentage of GDP:**
 - Despite reaching a historic milestone at \$100 billion and retaining its position as the top recipient of remittances globally, India's remittance flows are expected to account for only 3 percent of its GDP in 2022.
- **Remittances flow to South Asia:**
 - Led by strong performances in India and Nepal, the WB has predicted that this year will grow 3.5 percent to reach \$163 billion in 2022.
 - The overall remittance growth in South Asia reflects a disparity in individual country results
 - While India has gained 12 percent and Nepal 4 percent, other countries have reported an aggregate decline of 10 percent.
 - The report also says that despite global challenges in 2022, remittances to **low- and middle-income countries** will grow by 5% to \$626 billion.
 - **Reason:** This is, however, a slowdown from the 6.7 percent gain of 2021, reflecting the impact of an amalgam of external global shocks (inflation, slowing demand) in destination and source countries alike, as well as domestic factors.
- **Reason for this rise:**
 - The large share of Indian migrants earning **relatively high salaries** in the United States, United Kingdom and East Asia.
 - There's been a gradual **shift in destinations** for Indian migrants.

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- Migrants moved from largely low-skipped, informal employment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to a dominant share of high-skilled jobs in high-income countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and East Asia (Singapore, Japan, Australia, New Zealand).
- A structural shift in **qualifications** helped them move into the highest-income-earner-category, especially in services.
- Higher education mapped onto high income levels with direct implications for remittance flows.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, Indian migrants in high-income countries benefited from **work-from-home and large fiscal stimulus packages**.
 - As the pandemic eased, the wage hikes and “record-high employment conditions” helped migrants send money home despite high global inflation.
- Despite **Indian migrants** in the Gulf Cooperation Council **returning to India** during the pandemic, price support policies kept inflation at bay and demand for labour increased with higher oil prices, which in turn increased remittances for Indian labourers.
- **Depreciation of the Indian rupee** to the US dollar — it fell 10 percent between January and September 2022 — proved to be advantageous for Indian migrants and increased remittance flows.
- In 2022, **vaccinations and the resumption of travel** helped migrants resume work, increasing remittance to the country.
- **Global remittance: What’s predicted in 2023:**
 - The growth of remittance flows into South Asia in 2023 is expected to slow to 0.7 percent.
 - The year will stand as a test for the resilience of remittances from white-collar South Asian migrants in high-income countries.
 - Remittance flows in India, specifically, are predicted to decrease due to inflation and an economic slowdown in the United States.
 - Decline in economic growth in the GCC coupled with a fall in oil prices will further pull remittance flows down to all South Asian countries, the report states.

Remittance

- **Definition:**

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- The sum of worker's remittances, compensation of employees, and migrants' transfers as recorded in the IMF Balance of Payments. Workers remittances are current transfers by migrants who are considered residents in the source.
- Remittances are a vital source of household income for low- and middle-income countries.

Significance

- Money sent home by migrants is one of the **largest financial inflows** to developing countries.
- **Workers' remittances** are a significant part of international capital flows, especially with regard to labour-exporting countries.
- Remittances can provide the receiving countries with **much-needed foreign exchange**.
- Remittances are a **more stable and reliable** form of foreign earnings in many developing countries in comparison to FDI or international aid.
- It helps in **alleviating the Balance-Of-Payments (BOP)** and the debt crisis of such countries.
- Remittances are a **stabilising factor for national currencies** of developing countries.
- Remittances are helping to meet **families' increased need** for livelihood support.
- As COVID-19 still devastates families around the world, remittances continue to **provide a critical lifeline** for the poor and vulnerable.

Way Ahead

- Growing significance of remittances as a source of external financing for low- and middle-income countries, there is a **need for better collection of data on remittances**, in terms of frequency, and timely reporting.
- **Supportive policy responses**, together with national social protection systems, should continue to be inclusive of all communities, including migrants.
- The World Bank is assisting member states in **monitoring the flow of remittances through various channels**, the costs and convenience of

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sending money, and regulations to protect financial integrity that affect remittance flows.

- It is working with the G20 countries and the global community to **reduce remittance costs and improve financial inclusion** for the poor.

Source: IE

Blackhole

Gs 3 Space:

In News

- A **mysterious and intensely bright flash of light** coming from halfway across the universe earlier this year had stunned astronomers worldwide.

Key Findings

- The source of the intense beam has now been identified — a **supermassive black hole** ripping apart a star, pointing directly at Earth.
- The jet of light was brighter than **1,000 trillion suns**.
- Scientists from multiple institutions, including India, helped trace the activity powered by the black hole, **8.5 billion light years** away from Earth.

About Black Holes

- A black hole is a place in space where gravity pulls so much that **even light cannot escape**.
- The **gravity is so strong** because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space. This can happen when a star is dying.
- **How Do Black Holes Form:**
 - Scientists think the smallest black holes formed when the **universe began**.
 - Stellar black holes are made when the center of a very big star falls in upon itself or collapses. When this happens, it causes a supernova. A supernova is an exploding star that blasts part of the star into space.
 - Scientists think supermassive black holes were made at the same time as the galaxy they are in.

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- **Visibility:**
 - Because no light can get out, they are invisible.
 - Space telescopes with special tools can help find black holes.
 - The gases swirling around actually help in getting their images.
- **Size:**
 - Black holes can be big or small.
 - Scientists think the smallest black holes are as small as just one atom. These black holes are very tiny but have the mass of a large mountain.
 - Another kind of black hole is called "stellar." Its mass can be up to 20 times more than the mass of the sun.
 - The largest black holes are called 'supermassive' and they have masses that are more than 1 million suns together.
- **SgrA*:**
 - The supermassive black hole at the center of the Milky Way galaxy is called Sagittarius A.
 - It has a mass equal to about 4 million suns and would fit inside a very large ball that could hold a few million Earths.

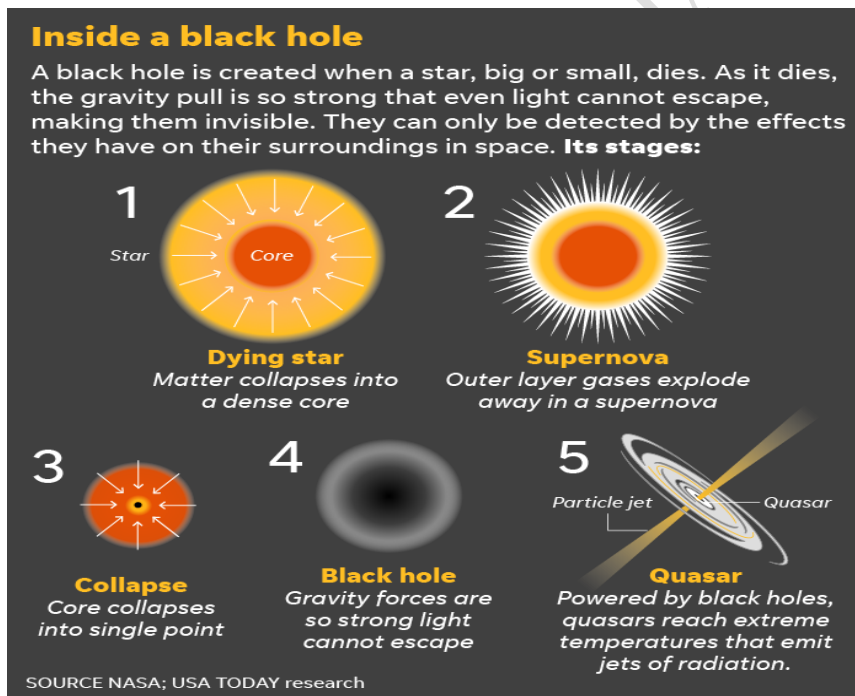


Image Courtesy: [USA Today](#)

Source: [DTE](#)

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International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Gs 2

In News

- President to conferred National Awards for outstanding work towards empowerment of persons with disabilities on International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December.

About International Day of Persons with Disabilities

- The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992, by the **United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3**.
- The observance of the Day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.
- It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

Source:PIB

Silchar-Sylhet Festival

Gs 1 Art and Cultural

In Context

The first festival celebrating the linguistic and cultural ties between the Barak Valley region of Assam and the Sylhet segment of Bangladesh began

About Silchar-Sylhet Festival

- Organised by the India Foundation and has been supported by the Union Ministry of Culture and the Assam government in association with the Bangladesh India Friendship Society and India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- the festival underlines the commonalities between India and Bangladesh, specifically the Sylheti variant of the Bengali language and the Sylheti culture.

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- **Significance**

- It aims of revisiting the common values and shared heritage of the twin cities and their people separated by international borders.
 - the festival will showcase tribal culture, cuisine, arts, crafts and local produce, entertainment and bring together eminent people from both sides to discuss and deliberate on issues of mutual growth and opportunity
 - In addition, the festival will provide a platform to explore multi-disciplinary trade opportunities in sectors such as healthcare, tourism, education, and digital infrastructure.

Source: TH

Wassenaar Arrangement:

Gs 2

In News

India will assume the chairmanship of the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), a multilateral technology control agreement, on 1 January 2023, for a period of one year.

- India joined the Wassenaar Arrangement, a multilateral export control regime, in 2017 and became its 42nd member.

Wassenaar Arrangement

- The **Wassenaar Arrangement** is an elite club of countries that subscribe to arms export controls, similar to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime.
- The body came into being in **1996 to succeed the Cold War-era Coordinating** Committee for Multilateral Export Controls.
 - The name comes from Wassenaar, a suburb of The Hague, where the agreement to start such a multi-lateral cooperation was reached in 1995.
- **Objectives:** The goal of the Arrangement is to "promote transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies".
 - Participants are required to "ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military

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capabilities which undermine the goal". The aim is also to prevent the acquisition of these items by terrorists.

Source:LM

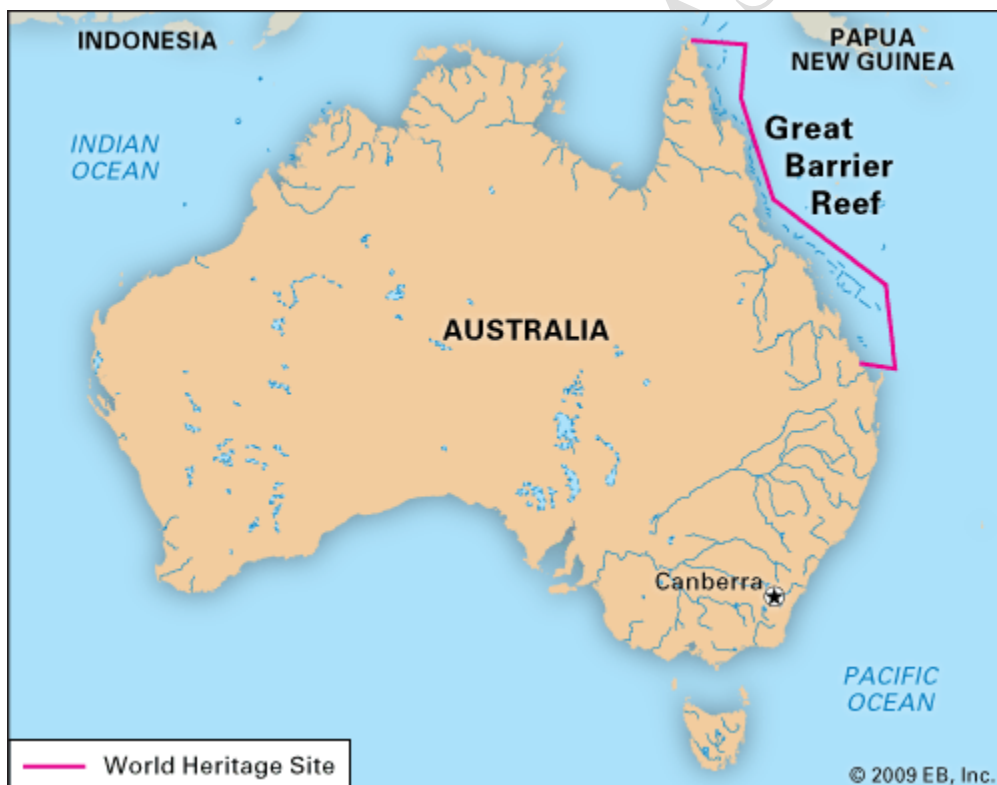
The Great Barrier Reef

Gs 3 Biodiversity and Environment

In News

- Recently, a joint report by the **IUCN and UNESCO's World Heritage Centre** has recommended that the Great Barrier Reef should be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in **Danger** which has been **opposed by Australia**.
 - The reef is currently **not in the endangered list**.

What is the Great Barrier Reef?

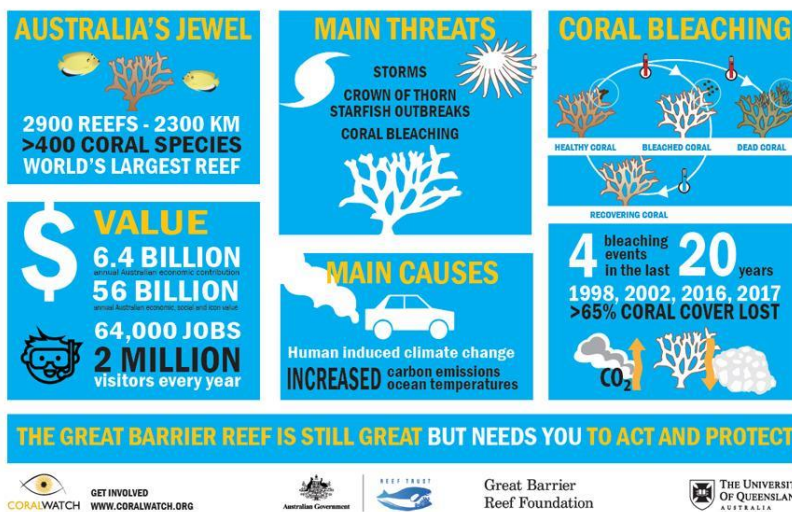


- It is located off the coast of **Queensland in Australia**.

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- It is the **world's largest coral reef system** with over 2,900 individual reefs, 900 islands and an area covering approximately 344,400 square kilometres.
- It is **one of the biggest biodiversity hotspots in the world** as well as one of its **largest carbon sinks**.
- **It is managed as a multiple use area** where a range of commercial and tourism activities are permitted.

GREAT BARRIER REEF FACTSHEET



What does the IUCN-WHC report say?

- It is adversely and significantly impacted by **climate change** factors affecting its resilience to sustain and regenerate itself.
- **Frequent bleaching events** have made many reefs sterile.
- **Degraded water quality** poses a particular threat to marine life and corals.
- **Pollutants from agricultural and construction activities** have been damaging and other proposed developments around the Queensland coast are matters of concern.

What does putting GBR on the List of World Heritage in Danger entail?

- The List of World Heritage in Danger is designed to **inform the international community of conditions** which threaten the characteristics for which a property was inscribed on the World Heritage List and to **encourage corrective action**.

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- **Under the 1972 World Heritage Convention:** inscribing a site on the List allows the WHC to allocate **immediate assistance from the World Heritage Fund** to the endangered property.
- It will invite **greater scrutiny for the site.**

Source: IE

Wages for MGNREGA Mates prioritised


Gs Economy & Related Issues

In News

- Recently, there have been regular complaints from **Mates (site supervisors)** that their **wages under the MGNREGA are delayed** for which the Union Rural Development Ministry has **devised a protocol** which would **prioritise payment to Mates.**

NREGA National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

You have the
RIGHT TO WORK!



Under EGA, you have the right to
100 days employment
in a year, for each family
within 5 km of your residence
within 15 days from application
on local development project

You will find more information in the [NREGA backgrounder]
or at your Gram Panchayat

About

- **Who are Mates?**
 - They are the **frontline supervisors of the programmes.**

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- They are **listed as semi-skilled workers** because of the **specialist nature of their job**.
- **Payments under MGNREGA:**
 - Wages of unskilled workers are to be **paid within 15 days** and if there is a **delay in payment then the Centre has to compensate them**.
- **What is the main issue?**
 - Wages of Mates come from the **material component** of which **60% is paid by the Union government**.
 - This component is now being **released erratically, caught up in bureaucratic delays and chronic fund crunch**.
 - Due to this, Mates have started **listing themselves as unskilled workers** to get the wages on time.
 - **The difference in wages** as compared to the unskilled workers is **usually minor** and they can beat the delay in the payments for semi-skilled workers which can go up to a year.
- **Steps to resolve this issue:**
 - The ministry has **streamlined the process by which the attendance and wages of the Mates are recorded**.
 - **The muster roll for Mates must be issued** soon after generating muster roll for unskilled workers.
 - A muster roll register is a **register that contains the names of all the employees** or workers working in a particular unit.
 - **Reports on day-wise pendency in payment** to Mates may be generated.
 - States will have to **clear the payments for the Mates, before they can distribute the funds to the vendor**.
 - Eventually, Mates wages should be **completely delinked with the material component**.

Source: **TH**

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Coastal Red Sand Dunes

Gs 1

In News

- Recently, Scientists urged the Andhra Pradesh government to **protect glacial-period coastal red sand dunes** of Visakhapatnam.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The city of Visakhapatnam is blessed with a number of sites that have geological importance. One among them is the coastal red sand dunes, popularly known as '**Erra Matti Dibbalu**'.
- **Location and Spread:**
 - The site is located along the coast and is about 20 km north-east of Visakhapatnam city and about 4 km south-west of Bheemunipatnam.
 - The Erra Matti Dibbalu are spread across an area of about 20 sq km and the entire area has been notified as a Geo Heritage Site.
- **Geo Heritage Site:**
 - This site was declared as a geo-heritage site by the **Geological Survey of India (GSI)** in 2014 and the Andhra Pradesh government has listed it under the category of '**protected sites**' in 2016.
 - This site has much significance geologically, archaeologically and anthropologically and it needs to be protected for further study and evaluation.
- **Uniqueness in the Site:**
 - The red sediments are a part of the continuation of the evolution of the earth and represent the late quaternary geologic age.
 - With a height of up to 30 m, they exhibit badland topography with different geomorphic landforms and features, including:
 - Gullies,
 - sand dunes,
 - buried channels,
 - beach ridges,
 - paired terraces,
 - the valley in the valley,

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- wave-cut terrace,
- knick point and
- waterfalls.
- **Depicts real time effects of Climate Change:**
 - About 18,500 years ago, the sea (Bay of Bengal) was at least 5 km behind from the present coastline.
 - Since then it has been undergoing continuous active changes till about 3,000 years ago and still the changes are on.
- **Geochemically unaltered**
 - The top light-yellow sand unit, which is estimated to have been deposited around 3,000 years ago, could not attain the red colouration as the sediments were geochemically unaltered.
 - These sediments are **unfossiliferous** and deposited over the **khondalite basement**.
 - The dunes consist of light yellow sand dunes at the top followed by a brick red sand unit, a reddish brown concretion bearing sand unit with yellow sand at the bottom.
 - This bottom-most yellow sand unit is **fluvial** while the other overlying three units are **aeolian** in origin.

Significance of the Site

- Study the impact of climate change, as **Erra Matti Dibbalu** has seen both the glacial and the warm periods.
- The site is about **18,500 to 20,000 years old** and it can be related to the last glacial period and will tell about the archaeological history.
- The site also has archaeological significance, as studies of artefacts indicate an **Upper Palaeolithic horizon** and on cross dating assigned to **Late Pleistocene epoch**, which is 20,000 BC.
- The site was **home to the prehistoric man** as the excavations at several places in the region revealed stone implements of three distinctive periods and also the pottery of the Neolithic man.
- Such sand deposits are **rare** and have been reported only from three places in the tropical regions in south Asia such as **Teri Sands in Tamil Nadu, Erra Matti Dibbalu in Visakhapatnam and one more site in Sri Lanka**.
 - They do not occur in equatorial regions or temperate regions due to many scientific reasons, which make it geologically very important.

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Source: TH

Aviation Safety in India

Gs 2 Government Policies & Interventions

In News

- In the latest rankings by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), India's position has **jumped to the 48th place** from the 102nd spot in 2018.

Key Highlights

- **Total number of countries:**
 - The rankings are for 187 countries and assessments were done at different points of time.
 - Under its Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) Continuous Monitoring Approach, an ICAO Coordinated Validation Mission (ICVM) was undertaken from November 9 to 16.
- **The Effective Implementation (EI) of six areas were assessed:**
 - **LEG** is Primary Aviation Legislation and Specific Operating Regulations;
 - **ORG** is Civil Aviation Organisation;
 - **PEL** is Personnel Licensing and Training;
 - **OPS** is Aircraft Operations;
 - **AIR** is Airworthiness of Aircraft; and
 - **AGA** is Aerodrome and Ground Aid.
- **Coordinated Validated Mission:**
 - So far for India, the ICAO has done the Coordinated Validated Mission four times, including the last one in November this year.
 - It did the mission in December 2012 that covered all the areas and the EI score rose from 79.84% to 81.32%.
 - The mission was next conducted in August 2013 that looked at two areas – OPS and AIR. At that time, the score improved from 79.73% to 81.19%.
 - Another mission was done in November 2018. It covered LEG, ORG, AIR, ANS and AGA. During that time, the EI score declined from 71.86% to 69.95%.

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- AIG is Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation; ANS is Air Navigation Services.
- **Eight critical elements:**
 - The ICAO looks at these elements for the safety oversight system, including primary aviation legislation, specific operating regulations, resolution of safety issues and surveillance obligations.
- **Score:**
 - With a score of 85.49% each, India and Georgia are at the 48th position.
 - Neighbouring Pakistan's score is 70.39%.
 - The rankings are topped by Singapore with a score of 99.69%.
 - It is followed by the UAE at the second position with a score of 98.8% and the Republic of Korea is at the third place (98.24%).
 - **Others in the top ten** are France (4th; 96.42%), Iceland (5th; 95.73%), Australia (6th; 95.04%), Canada (7th; 94.95%), Brazil (8th; 94.72%), Ireland (9th; 94.6%) and Chile (10th; 93.9%), as per the DGCA officials.
- **Against China:**
 - The ranking, which also places it ahead of China (49), is the highest ever received by India.
- **Coming out of the impacts of COVID 19:**
 - The country's aviation sector is slowly coming back into the growth trajectory after being severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the domestic air traffic is also inching towards the pre-pandemic level.

Aviation Sector in India

- **About:**
 - India is one of the fastest growing aviation markets in the world.
- **Domestic:**
 - Its domestic traffic makes up 69% of the total airline traffic in South Asia.
- **Capacity:**
 - India's airport capacity is expected to handle 1 billion trips annually by 2023.
- **Responsible Ministry:**
 - The Ministry of Civil Aviation is responsible for formulating national aviation policies and programmes.
- **Airports Authority of India (AAI):**

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- It is responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing civil aviation infrastructure in the country.
- As on June 23, 2020, it operates and manages **137 airports** in the country.
- AAI has leased out eight of its airports through Public Private Partnership (PPP) for operation, management and development on a long term lease basis.
- **Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN):**
 - The top 15 airports in the country account for about 83% of the total passenger traffic.
 - These airports are also close to their saturation limit, and hence the Ministry notes that there is a need to add more Tier-II and Tier-III cities to the aviation network.
 - The Regional Connectivity Scheme was introduced in 2016 to stimulate regional air connectivity and make air travel affordable to the masses.
 - The budget for this scheme is Rs 4,500 crore over five years from 2016-17 to 2021-22.
 - As of December 16, 2021, 46% of this amount has been released. In 2022-23, the scheme has been allocated Rs 601 crore, which is 60% lower than the revised estimates of 2021-22 (Rs 994 crore).

Challenges

- **Maintaining:**
 - The challenge now is to maintain and further improve the air safety ecosystem.
- **Financial:**
 - The aviation sector came under severe financial stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. After air travel was suspended in March 2020, airline operators in India reported losses worth more than Rs 19,500 crore while airports reported losses worth more than Rs 5,120 crore.
- **Congestion at Airports:**
 - Domestic air traffic has more than doubled from around 61 million passengers in 2013-14 to around 137 million in 2019-20.
 - International passenger traffic has grown from 47 million in 2013-14 to around 67 million in 2019-20, registering a growth of over 6% per annum.

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- As a result, airports in India are witnessing rising levels of congestion.
- Most major airports are operating at 85% to 120% of their handling capacity.
- **Resource availability:**
 - Lack of availability of land and creation of regional infrastructure has led to delays in the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN).
 - Issues with obtaining licenses and unsustainable operation of awarded routes also contribute to the delay.
- **Capacity and infrastructure:**
 - Due to the rapid expansion, airspace, parking bays and runway slots will become increasingly scarce over the next few years,
- **Skilled workers:**
 - According to a study conducted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Indian aviation could directly support 1.0 to 1.2 million jobs by 2035.
 - This implies that about 0.25 million persons will need to be skilled over the next 10 years.
 - But there is a shortage and gaps in availability of industry-recognised skills.
- **High cost to passengers and of air cargo:**
 - **Tariff determination:** The government has mandated that all airports move from a single to a hybrid till structure. It raises costs for airlines and passengers.
 - **Taxes on aviation turbine fuel (ATF):** Due to high taxes and lack of competition among providers, ATF is relatively expensive in India. It is also outside the ambit of GST which creates high regional disparity in its price.
 - **Incidence of GST on Aircraft Leases and Spare Parts:** It also raises cost for the sector.
 - **Profitless Growth:** Rising aviation turbine fuel cost, slowdown in capacity addition, and decline in the value of rupees leading to a scenario of Profitless Growth.
 - **Aviation safety:** Although, the number of aviation safety violations in 2017 (337) has declined in comparison to 2016 (442), the absolute number still remains high.
 - **Security and Terrorism:** Rising global terrorism and airports have become preferred targets of terrorist groups.

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- **Lack of Draft Passengers Charter:** In the absence of such a draft, adequate services to passengers cannot be ensured.
- **Rising cost of Aviation Turbine Fuel:**
 - The cost of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) forms around 40% of the total operating cost of airlines and impacts their financial viability.
 - ATF prices have been consistently rising over the past years, placing stress on the balance sheets of airline companies.
 - As per recent news reports, airfares are expected to rise as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is making ATF costlier.

Way Ahead

- The Government should go for **privatisation of some airports** to address the problem of congestion.
- ATF should be included **within the ambit of GST** and that applicable GST should not exceed 12% on ATF with full Input Tax Credit.

International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)

- ICAO is funded and directed by 193 national governments to support their diplomacy and cooperation in air transport as signatory states to the **Chicago Convention** (1944).
- **Vision:**
 - Achieve the sustainable growth of the global civil aviation system.
- **Mission:**
 - To serve as the global forum of States for international civil aviation. ICAO develops policies and Standards, undertakes compliance audits, performs studies and analyses, provides assistance and builds aviation capacity through many other activities and the cooperation of its Member States and stakeholders.
- **Core functions:**
 - To maintain an administrative and expert bureaucracy (the ICAO Secretariat) supporting these diplomatic interactions
 - To research new air transport policy
 - Standardisation innovations as directed and endorsed by governments through the ICAO Assembly, or by the ICAO Council which the assembly elects.

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- In addition to these core diplomatic and research capabilities, ICAO also serves as a critical coordination platform in civil aviation through its seven Regional Offices.

Source: TH

Chinese Presence in the Indian Ocean

(Gs2 India & Foreign Relations)

International organisations & Groupings

Agreements Involving India & Affecting India's Interests)

In News

- Recently, China's top development aid agency convened the **first "China-Indian Ocean Region Forum"** in the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The meet is organised by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)
 - It is the latest Chinese initiative focusing on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
 - Such moves underline Beijing's growing strategic interests in a region where its economic footprint has been deepening.
- **Theme:**
 - Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy.
- **China on India's position in this:**
 - India, as a major country in the Indian Ocean region, was invited to this forum
 - China looks forward to meeting India at the next forum".
- **India's stand:**
 - India has viewed China's recent moves in the region warily, including the recent visit of a Chinese military tracking vessel, the Yuan Wang 5, to Sri Lanka.
 - India sees the IORA as an already established platform for the region, which has 23 members, including Australia and Maldives

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with 10 dialogue partners which include China, Japan, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.

China Indian Ocean Region Forum

- **About:**
 - It is headed by the former Vice Foreign Minister of China.
- **Jointly Held:**
 - The forum was “the first high-level official development cooperation forum jointly held by China and countries in the Indian Ocean Region
 - Over 100 participants, including senior officials from 19 countries bordering the Indian Ocean attended.
- **China’s Proposal:**
 - To establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region
- **Other country’s proposal:**
 - To strengthen policy coordination,
 - Deepen development cooperation,
 - Increase resilience to shocks and disasters,
 - Enhance relevant countries’ capacity to obtain economic benefits through use of marine resources such as fisheries, renewable energy, tourism, and shipping in a sustainable way.
- **Supporting Countries:**
 - 19 countries: Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, and Australia.
 - But at least two of those countries, Australia and Maldives, subsequently released statements rebutting the claim, emphasising that they did not participate officially.

China’s Plans for the IOR

- China’s prominent role in global supply chains, the vast resource base of the Indian Ocean, and the passage of strategic sea lines of communication through the IOR.
- Earlier, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during a visit to Sri Lanka, proposed creating a forum “on the development of Indian Ocean island

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countries” to “build consensus and synergy, and promote common development”.

- China is establishing a more frequent military presence in the waters of the IOR. Beijing’s first ever overseas military facility was set up in Djibouti near the Horn of Africa.
- Chinese military planners have previously said the PLA Navy, which earlier this year launched its third aircraft carrier, has a long-term plan to deploy six aircraft carriers to secure China’s maritime interests, and that two of them will be based in the Indian Ocean Region.

Issues

- China’s initiation of a new forum for IOR countries despite the other successfully established forums is **worrisome**.
- China has been **relentlessly trying to ramp up political, economic and security inroads** in the region despite being geographically far from IOR.
- Apparently aimed at **countering India’s strong influence** in the region.
- China has often been accused of engaging in “**debt diplomacy**”.

Way Ahead

- India has a central role in the region and for regional actors. Thus, IOR countries should not ignore **India’s strategic interests and concerns**.
- India’s importance in the region can not be marginalised as there is a **growing trust deficit** when it comes to China.

Source: TH

India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide:

Gs 2 Government Intervention and Policies

In Context

- Recently, the NGO Oxfam India released ‘**India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide**’.

Report highlights

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- **Data from CMIE:**
 - The report analyses the primary data from **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's (CMIE) household survey** held from Jan 2018 to Dec 2021.
- **Indian Women internet users:**
 - Indian women are 15 percent less likely to own a mobile phone and 33 percent less likely to use mobile internet services than men.
 - Women constitute only one-third of internet users in India.
 - **India's position globally:**
 - In Asia-Pacific, India fares the worst with the widest gender gap of 40.4 percent, says the study.
- **Rural-urban digital divide:**
 - The report also points to the rural-urban digital divide.
 - Despite registering a significant (digital) growth rate of 13 percent in a year, only 31 percent of the rural population uses the Internet compared to 67 percent of their urban counterparts, says the report.
 - **Caste-wise divide:**
 - In rural India, the tendency to use formal financial services is lowest for ST households, followed by SC households and OBC households.
 - The likelihood of access to a computer is more for the General and OBC groups than for the SC and ST populations.
 - The difference between the general category and ST is as high as seven to eight percent between 2018 and 2021.
 - **Religion-wise:**
 - Among all religions, Sikhs have the highest likelihood of having a computer followed by Christians, Hindus and lastly Muslims.
- **Data of states:**
 - Among states, Maharashtra has the highest internet penetration, followed by Goa and Kerala, while Bihar has the lowest, followed by Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the report said.
- **Access to computer & internet for education:**
 - As per the National Service Scheme [NSS (2017-18)], only about 9 percent of the students who were enrolled in any course had access to a computer with internet and 25 percent of enrolled students had access to the internet through any kind of devices.

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- The chances of having a computer are higher with higher levels of education as well as income.
- **Effect of pandemic & digital payments:**
 - The digital push driven by the pandemic resulted in India experiencing the largest number of real-time digital transactions in 2021 at 48.6 billion.
 - However, the likelihood of a digital payment by the richest 60 percent is four times more than the poorest 40 percent in India.
- **Citing other indices:**
 - According to UN's **e-participation index (2022)**, which is a composite measure of three important dimensions of e-government, namely provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity, India ranks 105 out of 193 nations.

More about the digital divide

- **Meaning:**
 - The digital divide is a term that refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology (ICT), and those that don't or have restricted access.
 - This technology can include the telephone, television, personal computers and internet connectivity.
 - Even among populations with some access to technology, the digital divide can be evident in the form of lower-performance computers, lower-speed wireless connections, lower-priced internet use connections such as dial-up and limited access to subscription-based content.
- **Bridging the divide:**
 - Proponents for bridging the digital divide include those who argue it would improve digital literacy, digital skills democracy, social mobility, economic equality and economic growth.
- **Loopholes causing the divide:**
 - **Online safety:**
 - According to a survey, more than half of young women have experienced violence online, including sexual harassment, threatening messages and having private images shared without consent.

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- The vast majority believe the problem is getting worse.
- Women's rights defenders and female journalists were targeted for abuse more than most.
- **Inadequate artificial intelligence:**
 - The third threat comes from badly designed artificial intelligence systems that repeat and exacerbate discrimination.

Solutions & way ahead

- **Addressing the divide:**
 - Addressing the digital divide requires special, urgent and focused efforts of the government.
 - A large investment needs to be made, year after year, in digital infrastructure.
 - The establishment of a **Broadband Infrastructure Fund** with a large corpus from private, multilateral and government sources, including spectrum auction revenues, is a must.
- **Creation of an entity:**
 - An empowered entity needs to be set up which is accountable for quality and timeliness to design and construct digital highways, their rural branches, and ensure their optimum utilisation by sharing the infrastructure
- **Online safety of women:**
 - Social media sites can use their “algorithm power” to proactively tackle the issue of safety.
 - Governments need to strengthen laws that hold online abusers to account, and the public to speak up whenever they witness abuse online.
- **Skills:**
 - Digital skills, required today both for life and for livelihoods, must be imparted on a war footing by transforming government digital literacy programmes into skilling missions, expanding outreach, including through the private sector.
- **Delivery of services:**
 - The last mile delivery of services has to be made a reality and connectivity, devices and handholding assistance of trained persons at village service centres, schools and clinics is imperative.

Government initiatives to bridge the digital divide

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- **Digital India Initiative:**
 - **Aim:**
 - To transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.
 - **Vision Areas:**
 - Digital Infrastructure as a Core Utility to Every Citizen
 - Governance & Services on Demand
 - Digital Empowerment of Citizens
 - **Achievements:**
 - India today is home to more than 75 crore smartphones, 133 crore Aadhaar cards, more than 80 crore internet users, has 4G and is now accelerating towards 5G.
 - Above all, it has among the lowest data tariffs in the world.
- **Digital Payments**
 - India has emerged as the fastest-growing ecosystem for fintech innovations.
 - India's digital payments revolution is being appreciated globally.
 - This was made possible due to innovative digital payment products like UPI and Aadhaar-Enabled Payment Systems (AEPS). When banks and ATMs were shut during Covid-19, AEPS-based micro-ATM at CSCs and post offices provided doorstep delivery of cash.
- **The Jan-Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity:**
 - It has ensured that the poorest receive every penny of their entitled benefits.
 - Financial benefits worth nearly Rs 23 lakh crore have been transferred using DBT technology in the last eight years.
- **Bharat Net:**
 - To provide high-speed broadband to all the villages, optical fibre has been laid in 1.83 lakh gram panchayats under Bharat Net.
- **Education:**
 - **PM e-VIDYA:** Launched to enable multi-mode access to education.
 - **One class-One Channel:** Dedicated TV channel per grade for each of the classes 1 to 12.
 - **E-PG Pathshala:** An initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to provide e-content for studies.

Sources: TH

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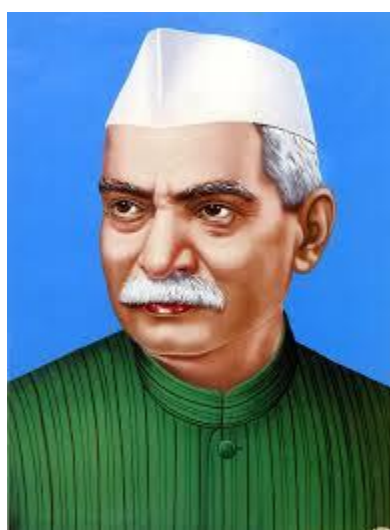
Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Gs1 Modern Indian History ; Personalities

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister paid tributes to **India's first President Rajendra Prasad** on his birth anniversary on **3rd December 2022**.

About Dr. Rajendra Prasad



- **Birth:** He was born on 3rd December 1884 in the Siwan district of Bihar.
- **Education:** He joined the famed **Calcutta Presidency College in 1902**. After completing his **Master's degree in Economics** from the University of Calcutta in 1907, he went on to study law at the **Calcutta Law College** and practised at the Calcutta High Court.
 - He completed his **Doctorate in Law from Allahabad University in 1937**.
 - In the early 1920s, he became the editor of a Hindi weekly *Desh* and an English biweekly, *Searchlight*.
- **Role in India's Independence Movement:** In 1911, he became a member of the Indian National Congress and subsequently served as its President thrice.
 - He was imprisoned during the **Salt Satyagraha in 1931 and the Quit India movement in 1942**.

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- While Gandhiji was on a fact finding mission in Champaran district of Bihar to address grievances of local peasants, he called on Dr. Rajendra Prasad came to Champaran with volunteers.
- Initially he was not impressed with Gandhiji's appearance or conversation. In time, however, he was deeply moved by the dedication, conviction and courage that Gandhiji displayed.
- The **Rowlatt Act of 1918** and the **Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919** pushed Rajendra Prasad closer to Gandhiji.
- In 1914 floods ravaged Bihar and Bengal. He became a **volunteer distributing food and cloth to the flood victims.**
- Dr. Prasad called for **non cooperation in Bihar** as part of Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement. He gave up his law practice and started a National College near Patna, 1921.
- In March 1930, Gandhiji **launched the Salt Satyagraha.** He planned to march from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi seashore to break the salt laws. A salt Satyagraha was launched in Bihar under Dr. Prasad.
- He presided over the **Bombay session of the Indian National Congress** in October 1934. Following the resignation of **Subhash Chandra Bose as the President of the Congress in April 1939,** He was elected President.
- **Contribution to Constitution Making:** In 1946, Rajendra Prasad joined the Interim Government of India as the Minister of Food and Agriculture.
 - As a firm believer in the maximization of agricultural production, he crafted the **slogan "Grow More Food."**
 - He was elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly from the Bihar Province where he served as the president of the Constituent Assembly from 1946 to 1950.
 - On 24th January 1950, at the last session of the Constituent Assembly, Prasad was elected as the President of India and has the distinction of being the only President to have been re-elected for a second term.
 - Committees of Constituent Assembly under the chairmanship of Dr. Prasad includes:
 - Ad hoc Committee on the National flag
 - Committee on the Rules of Procedure
 - Finance and Staff Committee
 - Steering Committee

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- **Writings:** He recorded his life and the decades before independence in many books, among the more noted of which are “**Satyagraha at Champaran**” (1922), “**India Divided**” (1946), his autobiography “**Atmakatha**” (1946), “**Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar, Some Reminiscences**” (1949), and “**Bapu ke Kadmon Mein**” (1954).
- **Awarded Highest Civilian Award:** In 1962, after 12 years as President, Dr. Prasad retired, and was subsequently awarded the Bharat Ratna, the nation’s highest civilian award.

Source: TH

Navy Day

Gs 3 Defence

In News

- Recently, The Indian Navy celebrated Navy Day for the first time outside Delhi, in Visakhapatnam.

About Navy day

- The Navy day is celebrated each year on December 4 to acknowledge the role of the service and to also commemorate the navy’s achievements in ‘Operation Trident’ during the Indo-Pak war of 1971.
- **Significance:**
 - The Navy Day celebrations are aimed at fostering greater outreach, renewing maritime consciousness amongst our citizens and highlights the Navy’s contributions towards national security.

About Indian Navy

- On October 2, 1934, the naval service was **renamed Royal Indian Navy (RIN)**.
- With India becoming a Republic on January 26, 1950, the prefix 'Royal' was dropped, and it was rechristened as the Indian Navy.
- It is a well-balanced and cohesive three-dimensional force, capable of operating above, on, and under the surface of the oceans, efficiently safeguarding our national interests.

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- The Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) exercises operational and administrative control of the Indian Navy from the Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence (Navy).

Source:ET

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) +

Gs 3 Indian Economy & related Issues

In News

- OPEC+ agreed to stick to its oil output targets at a meeting.

About

- **OPEC:** Founded in **1960**, the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** initially comprised **Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela** as its founding members to ‘**unify and co-ordinate** its member nations’ petroleum policies in order to secure a regular supply of petroleum to consumers and a fair return to investors.
 - Countries like Qatar, Indonesia, Libya, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Algeria (1969), Nigeria, Ecuador, Gabon, Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Congo later joined the group.
 - However, Ecuador, Indonesia and Qatar suspended their membership in 2020, 2016 and 2019 respectively – reducing the strength to thirteen countries currently.
- **OPEC+:** In 2016, OPEC+ was created with the OPEC member nations allying with ten other oil-producing countries **Russia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, South Sudan and Sudan** – inflating the group’s strength to twenty-three.
 - While the OPEC Statute states that ‘any country with a substantial net export of crude petroleum, which has fundamentally similar interests to those of Member Countries may be admitted under special conditions, the formation of the OPEC+ group was seen as a response to protect their interests amid the rise of the U.S. shale industry.
- OPEC countries effectively control more than 79% of the world’s crude supplies, regulating oil prices as per their interests.

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Source: TH

Indo-French Partnership on Kaziranga Project

Gs 3 Biodiversity and Environment

In Context

- Some measures at the **Kaziranga National Park** in Assam will form the **cornerstone of an Indo-French initiative.**

Measures

- With French and Indian technical and financial support, the Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership will facilitate partnership activities for interesting natural parks of the Indo-Pacific region.
- These activities include biodiversity conservation, wildlife management and engagement with local communities.

About The Kaziranga project,

- The Kaziranga project is a part of a larger **Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC)** for which the **Agence Française de Développement (AFD)** has committed funding of €80.2 million for a 10-year period, between 2014-2024.
- The project conceptualised the reforestation of 33,500 hectares of land and the training of 10,000 community members in alternate livelihoods by 2024.
 - Kaziranga National Park that remains the heart of the programme.
- **The AFD programme** has been most effective in the skilling of communities in the area, particularly forest-dwelling communities.
 - The Assam government has now begun a massive reforestation drive with the help of the AFD.
 - The project has also developed infrared-based early warning systems, triggered by elephant footfall, to either scare off herds from human habitat or to warn villagers.

Kaziranga National Park

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- It is the **largest undivided representative area of Brahmaputra valley floodplain** grassland, a complex ecosystem of grassland, where various stages of biotic succession in the grassland ecosystem are explicit.
- The Park is the abode of more than **70% of One Horned Rhinoceros** in the world.
- It is one of the **oldest wildlife conservancy** reserves of India, first notified in 1905 and constituted as a Reserved Forest in 1908.
- It was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1950, and notified as Kaziranga National Park in 1974 under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, of 1972.
- It was declared a **World Heritage Site back in 1985**. It is recognized as an **Important Bird Area by BirdLife International**.

Source: IE

Global employment scenario post-pandemic

Gs 3 Growth and Development

In News

Recently, the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** released two reports that gave an indication of the **global employment scenario post-pandemic**.

About Reports

- The **‘Global Wage Report 2022-2023: The Impact of inflation and COVID-19 on wages and purchasing power’**.
 - It discuss the twin crises:
 - Inflation
 - Economic slowdown
 - They created a “striking fall” in real monthly wages around the globe.
 - **Methodology:** In each edition of the Global Wage Report the objective is to collect wage data from as many countries and territories (about 190) which are then grouped into five separate regions
- The **‘Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2022: Rethinking sectoral strategies for a human-centred future of work’**
 - It stated that the Asia-Pacific region lost about 22 million jobs in 2022.

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- The decrease in wages is placing millions of workers in a dire situation.
- Income inequality and poverty will rise if the purchasing power of the lowest paid is not maintained.
- **Reasons for Crisis:**
 - The war in Ukraine
 - The global energy crisis for this situation.

Key Findings

- **The real and nominal wages of employees were considered:**
 - The word “wage”, was defined as the total gross remuneration including regular bonuses received by employees during a specified period for time (monthly for the report) worked as well as for time not worked.
- **Nominal wage data:**
 - The adjusted figures after accounting for consumer price inflation while real wage growth refers to the year-on-year change in real average monthly wages of all employees.
- **Global wages:**
 - They were reduced in 2022 for the first time since 2008. It also added that monthly wages have declined by 0.9 per cent in real terms in the first half of 2022. This is the first negative growth of real global wages in the 21st century.
 - The United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, South Korea, Bulgaria and Spain are some of the countries that witnessed a fall in the minimum wages. While Italy, Japan, Mexico and the UK facing a decrease in overall wages in real terms compared to 2008.
- **Cost of living:**
 - It has the greatest impact on lower-income earners and their households as they have to spend most of their disposable income on essential goods and services, which generally experience greater price increases than non-essential items.
- **Inequality:**
 - At the **Asia-Pacific level**, only the jobs in high-skill occupations saw a recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, which is true across all subregions. It is raising concerns about increased inequality.
- **Employment:**

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- While there is an employment gain of 1.6% among high-skill workers between 2019 and 2021, there is no such substantial gain among low-to-medium-skill workers.
- Among the **G-20 countries**, a significant gap, in the average level of real wages between advanced G-20 countries and emerging G-20 countries such as India, is seen.
- **Poverty:**
 - 75 to 95 million people were pushed into extreme poverty during COVID-19.
- **India:**
 - In India, the nominal wages rose to ₹17,017 per month in 2021 from ₹4,398 in 2006.
 - But when inflation is factored in, the real wage growth in India plunged to -0.2% in 2021 from 9.3% in 2006.
 - The negative growth in India started after the pandemic.
- **Other Asian Countries:**
 - In China, the growth decreased from 5.6% in 2019 to 2% in 2022.
 - In Pakistan, the growth is -3.8%.

Pandemic Impacts

- **Overall:**
 - COVID-19 intensified informality, led to the withdrawal of workers from the labour market, reduced earnings, increased unemployment and widened inequality
 - They struggled to find shelter, food, and even drinking water for their families.
- **World Bank on Global Growth:**
 - Global growth is expected to decelerate markedly from 4.1 per cent in 2022 and 3.2 per cent in 2023 as pent-up demand dissipates and as fiscal and monetary support is unwound across the world.
- **Major causes for slowdown:**
 - Lengthy lockdown months,
 - Excess expenditure on health infrastructure
 - Loss of human resources.
 - Decreasing purchasing power of people around the world.
- **Results:**
 - The current slowdown in demand and escalating inflation in the world market are a few repercussions that the world is facing due to the advent of the pandemic.

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- Lesser earnings further proceed to the lesser demand in the market and eventually create an economic condition of recession where the purchasing power of people does not allow them to consume the current supply rate.

Suggestions

- **Labour market policies:**
 - There is a need to strengthen labour market institutions and wage policies.
 - The creation of decent formal wage employment is a prerequisite for a more equitable distribution of wages and income, and is a key contributor to equitable and sustainable wage growth.
- **Gender pay gap:**
 - Governments should focus on the gender pay gap as when women leave the labour market, they are less likely to return than men.
- **Multipronged approach:**
 - There is an urgent need to address the negative effects of climate change; increasing inequalities; the poverty, discrimination, violence and exclusion endured by millions of people, including the discrimination that women and girls continue to suffer in many parts of the world; the lack of vaccines and access to adequate sanitation and essential healthcare for all; and the growing digital divide between poor and wealthier countries.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- It is a **specialised agency** of the United Nations.
- It is the **only tripartite U.N. agency** since 1919.
- **Aim:** To promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues.
- India is a **founder member** of the ILO.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- Received the **Nobel Peace Prize** in 1969:
 - For improving peace among classes
 - Pursuing decent work and justice for workers
 - Providing technical assistance to other developing nations
- **Flagship Reports of ILO are:**
 - Global Wage Report

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- World Employment and Social Outlook
- World Social Protection Report
- World of Work Report

Source: TH

Forcible religious conversion

Gs 1 & 2 Population & Associated Issues ; Government Policies & Interventions

In News

- The Supreme Court recently said that while charity is welcome, its purpose should not be to convert the gullible.

More about the news

- **Issue:**
 - The court was examining the "very serious issue" of forcible or deceitful conversions in the country.
- **Apex Court's opinion:**
 - **Examining the intentions of charity:**
 - The Supreme Court said that the purpose of charity should not be conversion.
 - The court said it would examine such veiled intentions behind religious conversions through allurements by offering food, medicines, treatment, etc.
 - Everybody has a right to choose their religion. But that should not be by luring, by giving some aid.
 - **Differentiating the true belief:**
 - As stated by the court, conversion on the basis of a voluntarily felt belief in the deity of a different faith is different from belief gained through allurements.
- **Centre's opinion:**
 - Solicitor General for the Centre, said that, a **neutral authority** will decide whether it is in lieu of grains, medicines, treatment offered that a person is converting or whether there is a religious or philosophical change of heart.

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- **Background:**

- Union government has also told the Supreme Court that it is “cognisant of the menace” of forced conversions and will take “appropriate steps” to deal with it.
- Court has also directed the Centre to provide details of anti-conversion laws in various States and other materials.

Right to Freedom of religion in India

- The Indian Constitution allows individuals the freedom to live by their religious beliefs and practices as they interpret these.
- In keeping with this idea of religious freedom for all, India also adopted a strategy of separating the power of religion and the power of the State
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 25:** Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion
 - **Article 26:** Freedom to manage religious affairs
 - **Article 27:** Freedom to pay taxes for promotion of any particular religion
 - **Article 28:** Freedom to attend religious instruction or worship in certain educational institutions.

Conversions & conflict with the right to freedom to religion

- The right to freedom to religion, and more importantly **the right to conscience of all citizens of the country**, is an **extremely cherished and valuable rights** which ought to be protected by the Executive and the Legislature.
- But, “**the right to freedom of religion does not include a fundamental right to convert people to a particular religion**”.

Legislation against Forced Conversions in India

- **About the regulation of Conversions in India:**
 - In **1954**, Parliament took up for consideration the **Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill**.
 - Six years later, another law, the **Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill, 1960**, was proposed to stop conversion.
 - Both were dropped for want of support.
- **State Laws:**

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- There are a few states (Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand) which have enacted upon anti-conversion law in India.
- **Aim:**
 - The basic aim of the legislation was to prevent the individual and communities from converting one's religion of their forefathers to another religion mainly weaker or influential sectors of society namely women, children, backward classes and untouchables.
- **Major Criticisms**
 - The Anti-Conversion law enacted a restriction on conversion to one's choice of religion, practice, propagate and promote so converted religion and thereby infringes the right to privacy of individuals.
 - Religious leaders of minority communities faced apprehension of being arrested and prosecuted under anti-conversion law.
 - The report states: In most cases, Christians have been forced to **shut down their places of worship** and stop assembling for their Sunday prayers.
 - Even though their proposed purpose is to protect the minorities it has a detrimental impact on our society.
 - It has also been criticised that such acts & bills are against the Constitution as there is an **attempt to disturb peace in the country** and divert public attention for political reasons.

Conclusion and Way ahead

- There may be freedom of religion but there may not be freedom of religion by forced conversion and Everybody has the right to choose their religion, but not by forced conversion or by giving temptation.

Soil management & food security

Gs 3 Agriculture

In News

- Recently, '**World Soil Day**' was celebrated to raise awareness about the importance of healthy soils and soil fertility.

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More about the news

- **About:**
 - World Soil Day (WSD) is celebrated annually on December 5th.
 - WSD 2022 had a guiding theme, ‘Soils: Where food begins’.
- **Significance of the day:**
 - It is a means to raise awareness on the **importance of maintaining healthy soils**, ecosystems and human well-being by addressing the **growing challenges in soil management**, encouraging societies to improve soil health, and advocating the sustainable management of soil.

Significance of healthy soil:

- **Nutrition & Survival:**
 - Healthy soils are essential for our survival. They support healthy plant growth to enhance both our nutrition and water percolation to maintain groundwater levels.
- **Regulating climate:**
 - Soils help to regulate the planet’s climate by storing carbon and are the second largest carbon sink after the oceans.
 - They help maintain a landscape that is more resilient to the impacts of droughts and floods.
- **Food production:**
 - As soil is the basis of food systems, it is no surprise that soil health is critical for healthy food production.

Degradation and its consequences

- **Soil nutrient loss:**
 - Today, nutrient loss and pollution significantly threaten soils, and thereby undermine nutrition and food security globally.
 - The reasons behind soil nutrient loss range from **soil erosion, runoff, leaching and the burning of crop residues**.
- **Soil degradation:**
 - The main drivers contributing to soil degradation are **industrial activities, mining, waste treatment, agriculture, fossil fuel extraction and processing and transport emissions**.
 - Further, **excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, and irrigation with contaminated wastewater** are also polluting soils.

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- **Consequences:**
 - Soil degradation in some form or another **affects around 29% of India's total land area.**
 - This in turn **threatens agricultural productivity, in-situ biodiversity conservation, water quality and the socio-economic well-being** of land dependent communities.
 - Nearly **3.7 million hectares suffer from nutrient loss in soil** (depletion of soil organic matter, or SOM).
 - Impacts of soil degradation are **far-reaching** and can have **irreparable consequences** on human and ecosystem health.

India's conservation initiatives

- The Government of India is implementing a five-pronged strategy for soil conservation. This includes
 - Making soil chemical-free,
 - Saving soil biodiversity,
 - Enhancing & Maintaining soil moisture,
 - Mitigating soil degradation and
 - Preventing soil erosion.
- **Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme:**
 - **Need:**
 - Earlier, farmers lacked information relating to soil type, soil deficiency and soil moisture content.
 - **About:**
 - To address these issues, the Government of India launched the Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme in 2015.
 - The SHC is used **to assess the current status of soil health**, and when used over time, **to determine changes in soil health.**
 - **Significance:**
 - The **SHC displays soil health indicators** and associated descriptive terms, which **guide farmers to make necessary soil amendments.**
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana:**
 - Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana aims to
 - prevent soil erosion,
 - regeneration of natural vegetation,
 - rainwater harvesting and
 - recharging of the groundwater table.

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- **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA):**
 - The National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) has schemes promoting traditional indigenous practices such as organic farming and natural farming, thereby reducing dependency on chemicals and other agri-inputs, and decreasing the monetary burden on smallholder farmers.
- **Initiatives by FAO:**
 - The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) undertakes multiple activities to support the Government of India's efforts in soil conservation towards fostering sustainable agrifood systems.
 - **Rainfed areas:**
 - The FAO is collaborating with the National Rainfed Area Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) to **develop forecasting tools** using data analytics that will aid vulnerable farmers in making informed decisions on crop choices, particularly in rainfed areas.
 - **Supporting Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission's (DAY-NRLM):**
 - The FAO, in association with the Ministry of Rural Development, supports the Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission's (DAY-NRLM) Community Resource Persons to increase their capacities towards supporting on-farm livelihoods for the adoption of sustainable and resilient practices, organic certification and agri-nutri-gardens.

Way ahead:

- **Strengthening communication channels:**
 - There is a need to strengthen communication channels between academia, policymakers and society for the identification, management and restoration of degraded soils, as well as in the adoption of anticipatory measures.
 - These will facilitate the dissemination of timely and evidence-based information to all relevant stakeholders.
- **Greater cooperation and partnerships:**
 - Greater cooperation and partnerships are central to ensure the availability of knowledge, sharing of successful practices, and

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universal access to clean and sustainable technologies, leaving no one behind.

- **Individual efforts:**

- As consumers and citizens, we can contribute by planting trees to protect topsoil, developing and maintaining home/kitchen gardens, and consuming foods that are mainly locally sourced and seasonal.

Mahaparinirvan Diwas

Gs 1

In News

Recently, Prime Minister paid homage to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on Mahaparinirvan Diwas.

Mahaparinirvan Diwas

- December 6 is observed as the Mahaparinirvan Diwas, or the **death anniversary, of Dr BR Ambedkar**, the Father of the Indian Constitution.
- **Parinirvan** can be translated as ‘nirvana’ after death, or freedom from the cycles of life and death.
 - It is considered as liberation from Samara, karma, and the cycle of death and birth. It is the most sacrosanct day in the Buddhist calendar.
 - As per the Buddhist texts, the death of Lord Buddha is considered to be Mahaparinirvan – the Sanskrit term which means 'nirvana after death.

Dr BR Ambedkar on Religion

- **Religion and Ambedkar:**
 - Because of his trenchant criticism of major religions, Ambedkar is often mistaken to be against religion, when he was deeply spiritual and conscious of the importance of religion in public life.
 - His views on Buddhism being superior to other religions are well-known.
- **Buddhism and Marxism:**
 - In an essay, Ambedkar has compared Buddhism with Marxism, saying that while both strive for the same end of a just and happy

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society, the means propounded by Buddha are superior to those of Marx.

- If the Marxists keep back their prejudices and study the Buddha and understand what he stood for I feel sure that they will change their attitude.
- **Similarities - The basic philosophy of both condensed into few points:**
 - The function of Religion is to reconstruct the world and to make it happy and not to explain its origin or its end;
 - That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another;
 - It is necessary for the good of Society that this sorrow be removed by removing its cause; and All human beings are equal.
- **Ambedkar on Marxism, all that is left is a residue of fire.:**
 - The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world;
 - That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation;
 - That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property.
- **Similar Means in Buddhism and Marxism:**
 - To establish a happy and fair society, the Buddha had laid down a path for believers.
 - It is clear that the means adopted by the Buddha were to convert a man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily.
 - The means adopted by the Communists are equally clear, short and swift. They are:
 - Violence
 - Dictatorship of the Proletariat
 - It is now clear what are the similarities and differences between Buddha and Karl Marx. The differences are about the means. The end is common to both.
- **Importance of religion**
 - Communists claim the State will eventually wither away, they don't answer when that will happen, and what will replace the state.
 - Of the two questions, what is more, important is what replaces the state, and if it is anarchy, then the building up of the Communist state would have been a useless effort.

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- The only thing which could sustain it after force is withdrawn is **Religion**.
- But to the Communists Religion is anathema. Their hatred to Religion is so deep-seated that they will not even discriminate between religions which are helpful to Communism and religions which are not.

Buddhism

- **About:**
 - It is one of the world's largest religions and originated **2,500 years ago in India**.
 - Buddhists believe that human life is one of suffering, and that meditation, spiritual and physical labor, and good behavior are the ways to achieve enlightenment, or nirvana.
 - It originated in India in 563–483 B.C.E. with Siddhartha Gautama, and over the next millennia it spread across Asia and the rest of the world.
- **About Buddha:**
 - **Born:** 563 BC in Lumbini (modern-day Nepal) as Prince Siddhartha Gautama.
 - He attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya and gave his first sermon at Sarnath near Varanasi which is known as **Dharma-Chakra-Pravartana** (turning of the wheel of law).
 - He taught in the area around Rajgir, where he was living in a forest monastery built by king Bimbisara of Magadha, and he lived the largest part of his life as The Buddha in Shravasti.
 - He delivered his last sermon in Vaishali.
- **Buddha's Teachings**

Source: IE + TH

Vizhinjam Port

Gs 3 Environmental Pollution & Degradation

In News

The **Kerala government** has agreed to the opposition's demand for an **adjournment debate** in the Legislative Assembly on the Latin Catholic Church-backed **fishers' agitation against the Vizhinjam port**.

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Vizhinjam Port

- **About:**
 - Located on the **southern tip** of the Indian Peninsula
 - Just 10 nautical miles from the major international sea route and east-west shipping axis
 - A natural water depth of more than 20m within a nautical mile from the coast.
- **Significance:**
 - It is likely to play a pivotal role in the maritime development of the country and Kerala.
 - The port is expected to leverage the growth of minor ports in Kerala and other regional ports, creating thousands of employment opportunities.
 -
- **Agitation:**
 - The Church-supported Vizhinjam Action Council (VAC) has been on the warpath **against the ports' breakwater construction**.
 - The VAC demanded the government halt the port construction till a **credible impact assessment study** by independent experts.
- **Concerns:**
 - The encroaching sea rendered scores of fishers in Vizhinjam homeless.
 - The port construction caused choppy waters, making **fishing perilous** in the littoral waters.

Source: TH

Digi Yatra

Gs 3 Science & Techonology

In News

Union Minister for Civil Aviation launched Digi Yatra from the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi for three airports in the country, namely New Delhi, Varanasi, and Bengaluru.

About Digi Yatra

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- Digi Yatra is conceived to achieve contactless, seamless processing of passengers at airports based on **Facial Recognition Technology (FRT)**.
- It envisages that travelers pass through various checkpoints at the airport through paperless and contactless processing, using facial features to establish their identity, which would be linked to the boarding pass.
- With this technology, the entry of passengers would be automatically processed based on the facial recognition system at all checkpoints – including entry into the airport, security check areas, aircraft boarding, etc.
- Facial recognition technology is beneficial as it makes flying more convenient and reduces congestion at airports.

How is DigiYatra being implemented?

- The project is being implemented by the DigiYatra Foundation — a joint-venture company whose shareholders are the Airports Authority of India (26% stake) and Bengaluru Airport, Delhi Airport, Hyderabad Airport, Mumbai Airport and Cochin International Airport. These five shareholders equally hold the remaining 74% of the shares.

Source:IE

International Lusophone Festival

Gs1 Art and Culture

In News

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in partnership with the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Government of Goa is organizing the International

Lusophone Festival in Goa from 3-6 December 2022.

About Lusophone Festival

- The festival seeks to further India's connection with the Lusophone world.
- Goa has had historical linkages with the Lusophone world, which has been nurtured through the presence of Portuguese cultural institutions like the Orient Foundation and the Camoes Institute, which promote Portuguese language and culture in India.

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- This has deepened our economic, cultural co-operation and people-to-people ties with the Community of Portuguese Language (CPLP) member countries.
- As part of the festival, workshops on Lusophone music for artists and volunteers, as various workshops and exhibitions of unique Goan architecture, Goan handicrafts and Goan furniture are being organised.
- The Lusophone Food and Spirits Festival will also showcase the culinary links between India and the Lusophone world.

Do You Know?

- The **Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking countries)** world is spread in nine countries across four continents, and Portuguese is the most widely-spoken language in the Southern Hemisphere.
 - from Vasco da Gama onwards, India's Portuguese connection has not been diplomatically leveraged.
- **Lusophone** economies are among the fastest-growing in the world, with Brazil, Angola, Portugal, and Mozambique being some of them.
- India's trade with the Lusophone world has grown six-fold in the last decade.

The Community of Portuguese Language Countries (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa)

- It is also known as the Lusophone Commonwealth (Comunidade Lusofona)
- It is a multilateral forum, founded on 17 July 1996 at the 1st CPLP Heads of State & Government Summit in Lisbon.
- The founding members were Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal and Sao Tome e Principe; while Timor Leste and Equatorial Guinea joined later.
 - These 9 Lusophone countries comprise approximately 300 million people in 4 different continents (Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe).
- India joined CPLP as an associate observer in July 2021.
 - As part of India's engagement with CPLP, the Ministry of External Affairs celebrated the World Portuguese Language Day in Delhi on 5 May 2022, soon after joining CPLP.

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Source: IE

Open Standard Digital Trunking Radio System' (OS-DTRS)

Gs 3 Internal security

In News

- The Delhi Police is set to design, install and supply the 'Open Standard Digital Trunking Radio System' (OS-DTRS) and will phase out the current tetra net wireless network services.

About OS-DTRS

- The project will cost close to Rs 100 crore and it will be a more efficient internal communication system, aimed at a faster exchange of information and bigger networks.
- The trunking system provides multiple channels and common groups for policemen.
 - This way, they are communicating with more personnel using fewer groups.
 - Groups are formed based on geographical area and function.
- It will also have a voice logger system, which can be used to describe a crime scene, interrogation details and evidence.
 - The logs are saved in the system.
- The project's master site will be at the Delhi Police HQ.
- the master site will have OS-DTRS control and switching equipment, a network management system, 90 IP-based logger systems, 50-inch or bigger LED monitors, an antenna system, and maintenance systems.
- Equipment and services are expected to run for at least 10 years and fix network issues faced by personnel on the ground.

Source: IE

India-Central Asia meeting of NSAs

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Gs2 Agreements Involving India & Affecting India's Interests

In News

- India's National Security Advisor recently chaired the **first India-Central Asia meeting of NSAs and Secretaries of Security Councils** in Delhi

More about the meeting

- **About first India-Central Asia meeting of NSAs:**
 - The meeting was the outcome of the India-Central Asia virtual summit held in January 2022, where Indian Prime Minister hosted leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and **agreed to have security chiefs meet on a regular basis to discuss India's "extended neighbourhood."**
 - **Participants:**
 - The NSAs of **India, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan** participated in the meeting.
 - **Turkmenistan** was represented by its ambassador in New Delhi.
- **Highlights of the meeting:**
 - **Situation in Afghanistan & A joint communique:**
 - A joint communique issued after the meeting said that the Security Advisors discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the security and stability of the region.
 - They also reiterated strong support for a peaceful, stable and secure Afghanistan, emphasising respect for its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and urging non-interference in its internal affairs.
 - Countries spelled the need to ensure that terrorist groups don't find safe haven there.
 - **Transport & Connectivity:**
 - **Chabahar port & NSTC:**
 - The participants supported India's proposal to include the Chabahar port within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor that connects Iran to Russia via Central Asia,
 - **Uzbekistan's Termez Transport and Logistics Hub:**

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- The communique noted Uzbekistan's creation of the “**Multifunctional Transport and Logistics Hub**” in **Termez** that helped channel aid to Afghanistan.
- **TAPI Project:**
 - Turkmenistan made a push for the **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan- India (TAPI) pipeline** that was launched in 2016.
 - TAPI pipeline project has run into trouble over the Afghan conflict, and breakdown of India-Pakistan ties, and the NSAs agreed on the importance of TAPI in expanding connectivity.
- **Addressing individual efforts:**
 - The countries gathered also noted
 - India's special conferences involving UNSC and NMFT (No Money for Terror) on countering terror financing,
 - Kazakhstan's work on the International Agency for Biological Safety,
 - Kyrgyzstan's efforts on climate change, and the
 - Dushanbe declaration on border security cooperation to prevent terrorist movements.
- **Push for the adoption of UN-CCIT:**
 - The communique also called for the early adoption of the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT), which India had first proposed in 1996, but has been held up for decades, primarily over differences on the definition of terrorism.

Significance:

- **First of its kind:**
 - It is the first time that India is hosting the top security officials of the central Asian countries.
 - The NSAs will be meeting again under the rubric of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in India next year as well.
- **India's relations with Central Asian countries:**
 - India considers the Central Asian countries as the heart of Asia.

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- The meeting coincides with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between India and the Central Asian countries.
- These countries are also members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
 - This communique shows India's efforts in taking forward this regional cooperation in a comprehensive manner.
- **Connectivity:**
 - Central Asian countries remain a key priority for India to invest and build connectivity in the region.
 - While expanding connectivity it is important to ensure that connectivity initiatives are transparent and participatory, with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.
- **Central Asia as a Land bridge:**
 - Central Asia for India serves as a land bridge between Asia and Europe and is rich in natural resources.
- **Importance of Afghanistan for India:**
 - India has intensified its engagement with the Taliban regime, with the head of the Indian Mission in Kabul meeting with its "Interim" Ministers to discuss restarting Indian projects in Afghanistan.
- **UN-CCIT:**
 - India is expected to make a push for the CCIT and other formulations on terrorism this month as it ends its two-year tenure as member of the UN Security Council.

Challenges

- **Geographic non-accessibility:**
 - India's major limitation in this strategically important region is geographic non-accessibility. India does not share borders with the CARs.
- **Lack of mutual trust:**
 - Land-locked Central Asian countries can benefit immensely by connecting with India's vast market.
 - Unfortunately, many connectivity options are not open to them due to the lack of mutual trust.
- **Tensions with Pakistan and China:**
 - India's tensions with Pakistan mean there is no viable land route towards Central Asia.
- **Instability in Afghanistan:**

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- The takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban has severely set back India's plans in Central Asia.

Way ahead:

- India is committed to taking its ties with Central Asia to the next level and floated a 'four C' approach focusing on commerce, capacity enhancement, connectivity, and contacts to further expand the cooperation between the two sides.

Do you Know?

- The Central Asia region (CA) comprises the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
- It is a diverse region with a mix of upper-middle and low-income countries with major strategic importance due to their geographic location and natural resource endowments.

Source: IE

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of the US:

Gs 2 India and Foreign relation

In News

- The European Union has recently expressed its concerns regarding the USA's new green energy subsidy package.

What is the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act?

- **It is a \$430 billion package** of federal spending, tax breaks, credits, and levies that are aimed at fighting climate change and reducing healthcare costs and making large corporations pay their fair share in taxes.
 - It is a scaled-down version of USA's Build Back Better plan which did not get approval.
- **It aims at bringing down inflation.**
 - It is the biggest climate action package in U.S. history for climate-focused funding and investments aimed at cutting emissions by around 40% below 2005 levels by 2030.

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- **Healthcare-related provisions:** the Act extends expiring Medicare subsidies to 13 million Americans and aims to bring down the cost of prescription drugs for which Americans pay two to three times more than citizens of other countries.
- **Tax code:** The Act also aims to make the U.S. tax code fairer and points out that the top 1% of earners are estimated to evade \$160 billion in taxes each year.
 - The IRA imposes a **minimum tax of 15% on America's wealthiest** and most profitable corporations.
- **IRA combines climate action goals with industrial policy** aiming to transition to clean energy by incentivizing local manufacturing of renewable energy components.
 - It also seeks to **reduce American reliance** on China for materials and components for the clean energy industry.
- **Electric Vehicles (EVs):** Transportation accounts for a quarter of America's greenhouse emissions.
 - To promote the use of electric vehicles and to secure domestic supply chains for their manufacturing, the federal tax incentive policy for EVs has been changed.
 - Now, only passenger EVs assembled in North America (U.S., Canada, and Mexico) are eligible for a \$7,500 tax credit incentive.
- **Renewable energy:** It provides a tax credit of 30% of the cost of building or upgrading factories for renewable energy components and gives extended new production and investment credits for renewable energy generation from sources such as solar, wind, hydrogen, and nuclear technologies.
- **Power costs:** The package offers 10 years of consumer tax credits to make American homes energy efficient and clean energy dependent, making heat pumps, solar panels, and so on affordable.

Challenges and Concerns

- **UN climate targets:** Europe's high energy dependence on Russia led to energy shocks in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war which is leading to energy shortages, and skyrocketing power prices.
 - EU countries also need to meet their declared UN climate targets.
- **Discriminatory Act:** IRA tax credits and subsidies to EVs and other green product makers in North America and free-trade partner countries

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put European companies at a disadvantage and may push them to move critical parts of their supply chains to America.

- **Components:** EU countries are worried their companies will suffer because of U.S. tax breaks for components used in renewable energy technologies like electric cars on condition they are made in North America.
- **Violation of WTO rules:** EU countries consider that 200 billion euros of the U.S. subsidies are tied to locally produced content provisions that potentially violate World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.
- **EU state aid rules** in their current form prevent member countries from offering similarly generous tax breaks to companies looking to set up factories.
- **Other markets:** South Korea is also concerned that its carmakers will not be eligible for the U.S. tax breaks.

Conclusion and Way forward

- **Exemptions:** The need of the hour is to secure exemptions along the same lines as those already granted to Canada and Mexico.
- There is a possibility of solutions through the EU-U.S. **Trade and Technology Council meeting**.
- **Europe can file a complaint at the WTO:** But there is resistance from traditionally free-trade-friendly nations such as the Netherlands and Sweden.
- **Recovery fund:** There are around 200 billion euros in EU pandemic recovery funds which are available and could be repurposed to support industry.
- **Cross-border projects:** European governments can also pool resources to subsidise cross-border projects deemed to be in the broader EU interest.
- **Fit for 55:** The EU's own new green plan 'Fit for 55' is targeting to cut CO2 emissions from cars by 55% and vans by 50% by 2030 and all emissions from cars by 2035. For this, it will need to significantly increase its uptake of electric vehicles.

Source: TH

17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM)

Gs 2 Agreements Involving India & Affecting India's Interest

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In News

Recently, International workers' groups criticised India's labour policies, including four new labour codes, at the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) held at Singapore.

Key Points Highlighted

- **India's new labour codes** violates the **tripartite agreements** — between workers, employers and the government — and gives a free hand to employers.
 - The **power of inspection** has been left with employers through the new codes, and it will threaten the tripartite system in the country.
 - Trade unions in India have been opposing such policies.
- **Other Challenges**
 - India has the largest youth population in the world.
 - The country is observing a technological and entrepreneurial boom with start-ups and small businesses mushrooming across the country.
 - 90% of the workforce belongs to the unorganised sector and there are persistent challenges of low-paid jobs and poor working conditions.
 - Declining productivity growth has a negative impact on workers, on the sustainability of enterprises — especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises — on economies, and on communities.

Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM)

- **About:**
 - It brings together representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organisations from Asia, the Pacific and the Arab states.
 - The 17th APRM comes at an important juncture for the world of work as the region faces multiple challenges, including the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic compounded by the global food, energy and finance crises.
 - The Meeting offers a timely opportunity to reconfirm decent work and social justice as the driving forces for a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient.
 - 2022 APRM will discuss action to enhance job-rich growth that is inclusive and transformative, as well as measures to strengthen

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regional cooperation and multilateralism on world of work issues.

- It will also help forge commitment among the tripartite constituents on common priorities for action that will help shape ILO's work in both regions for years to come.
- **4 key Thematic Areas:**
 - **Thematic area 1:** Integrated policy agenda for a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient
 - **Thematic area 2:** Institutional framework to support transitions towards formality and decent work
 - **Thematic area 3:** Strong foundations for social and employment protection and resilience
 - **Thematic area 4:** Revitalising productivity growth and skills for more and better jobs

Suggestions

- **Enhancing productivity** will be critical to economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work.
- Recognising **persisting skills challenges** and that effective and **demand-driven skills development**.
- **Lifelong learning** benefits governments, employers and workers by advancing and promoting employability, sustainable development, productivity growth and economic prosperity.
- Digital skills, core skills, entrepreneurial skills and soft skills should be better harnessed.
- Identifying workers in the **unorganised sector** and **prioritising their needs** through platforms like the E-Shram portal
- **Extending health coverage** through ESIC, to extend universal social security that is leading to reduction in inequality.
 - Till date, about 29 crore unorganised sector workers have been registered on the E-Shram portal in our country.

Best Practice: The Progressive Wage Model (Singapore)

- The approach provides a roadmap to raise lower-wage workers' wages at a sustainable pace, avoiding job losses, which could hurt workers' livelihoods.
- This is done by raising wages in tandem with productivity growth achieved through upskilling workers and transforming businesses.
- By 2023, the Progressive Wage Model will be expanded to cover more than

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8 in 10 full-time lower-wage workers.

- This approach has helped to raise real income at the 20th percentile of full-time employed residents by 2.7% per annum from 2016 to 2021, compared to the median income growth of 2.1% per annum, helping to reduce the income gap.

Source: ILO + TH + ILO

Google's New Anti-misinformation Project

Gs 3 Challenges to Internal Security ; Communication Networks, Media & Social, Networking sites

In News

Google's Jigsaw subsidiary is launching a **new anti-misinformation project** in India, aimed at preventing misleading information that has been blamed for inciting violence.

Key Points

- **About the Initiative:**
 - **Cutting at root:** The initiative will use “prebunking” videos – designed to counter false claims before they become widespread – circulated on the company's YouTube platform and other social media sites.
 - **Collaboration:** Working in collaboration with the **Alfred Landecker Foundation**, a pro-democracy organization based in Germany, the philanthropic investment firm Omidya Network India, and a number of smaller regional partners, Jigsaw has produced five videos in **three different languages**.
 - **Awareness:** After watching the videos, viewers will be asked to fill in a short multiple-choice questionnaire, designed to gauge what they have learned about misinformation.
 - **Anticipated results:** The company's recent research on the subject suggested viewers were 5% more likely to identify misinformation after watching such videos. Results are expected to be published in summer 2023.
- **Experiment in Countries:**

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- **Europe:** Google recently conducted an experiment in Europe where it sought to counter anti-refugee narratives online in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- **India:** The experiment in India will be bigger in scope as it will deal with multiple local languages — Bengali, Hindi and Marathi — and cover diverse sections of a country populated by over a billion people.
 - Like other countries, misinformation spreads rapidly across India, mostly through social media, creating political and religious tensions.
- **Government of India's Actions:**
 - **Blocking channels:**
 - The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) has repeatedly invoked “extraordinary powers” to block YouTube channels, and some Twitter and Facebook accounts, allegedly used to spread harmful misinformation.
 - **Messaging services:**
 - Inflammatory messages have also spread via Meta’s messaging service Whatsapp, which has more than 200 million users in India.
 - In 2018, the company curbed the number of times a message could be forwarded, after false claims about child abductors led to mass beatings of more than a dozen people, some of whom died.

About Misinformation /Fake News (Yellow Journalism)

- It refer to false propaganda published under the guise of authentic news.
- It is deliberately created to misinform the readers.
- Fake news can be propagated through any media: print, electronic and social.

Effects

- It is a potential disaster.
- It can be used to influence public opinions.
- It polarizes public opinion and affects political institutions
- It affects social & communal harmony .

Challenges in controlling

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- **No standard definition**
- **Lack of regulation**
- **Difficult to achieve balance**

Way Ahead

- The government should bring out a draft seeking an opinion from stakeholders regarding issues of controlling fake news.
- Social media houses should also come forward to bring in measures to curb the menace of fake news such as Facebook recently announced that it has tied up with Boom Live, an Indian fact-checking agency, to fight fake news during the Karnataka elections.
- People must be made aware of the menace of fake news, its dissemination.

Source: IE

International Year of Millets

Gs 3 Agriculture

In News

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi conveyed his message at the opening ceremony of the International Year of Millets at the headquarters of the Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome, Italy.

About International Year of Millets

- The United Nations General Assembly has declared the year 2023 as the 'International Year of Millets'.
- It is the Prime Minister's vision and initiative that led to this United Nations Resolution being adopted with support from more than 70 nations across the globe.
- It will help in creating awareness throughout the world about the significant role of millet in sustainable agriculture and its benefits as a smart and superfood.
- India is poised to become the global hub for millets with a production of more than 170 lakh tonnes which makes for more than 80 % of the millets produced in Asia.

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- The earliest evidence for these grains has been found in the Indus civilization and was one of the first plants to be domesticated for food.
- It is grown in about 131 countries and is the traditional food for around 60 crore people in Asia & Africa.
- **Objectives:** The Government of India has declared to celebrate IYOM, 2023 to make it a people's movement so that the Indian millets, recipes, and value-added products are accepted globally.

Source:PIB

ChatGPT

Gs 3 Science and Technology

In News

Artificial Intelligence (AI) research company OpenAI announced ChatGPT,

About ChatGPT

- ChatGPT is a prototype dialogue-based AI chatbot capable of understanding natural human language and generating impressively detailed human-like written text.
- It is the latest evolution of the GPT – or Generative Pre-Trained Transformer – family of text-generating AIs.
- It is trained using a machine learning technique called Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF),
- It can simulate dialogue, answer follow-up questions, admit mistakes, challenge incorrect premises and reject inappropriate requests.

Usage

- A tool like ChatGPT could be used in real-world applications such as digital marketing, online content creation, answering customer service queries or as some users have found, even to help debug code.
- The bot can respond to a large range of questions while imitating human speaking styles.

Limitation

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- OpenAI claims ChatGPT will occasionally produce inaccurate information and that its knowledge is restricted to global events that occurred before 2021.
- AI technology can also perpetuate societal biases like those around race, gender, and culture.

Source:ET

Armed Forces Flag Day

Gs 3 Defence:

In News

Every year on December 7, India commemorates Armed Forces Flag Day

About Armed Forces Flag Day

- The Defense Minister's Committee on August 28, 1949, created the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund.
- In 1993, the Defense Ministry of India amalgamated all relevant welfare funds, including funds for war victims, the Kendriya Sainik Board Fund, the ex-welfare servicemen's fund, and other units, to establish the Armed Forces Flag Day fund.
- It aims to raise donations for the welfare of the Armed Forces Staff.
- This day is observed to honour Indian soldiers, sailors, and pilots.
- The day also pays tribute to hundreds of thousands of men who have died protecting the country.
- **Significance:** This day is observed to encourage public engagement and support across the country for the following goals:
 - To provide rehabilitative assistance to the relatives of war victims.
 - To take initiatives to safeguard the well-being of service members and their families.
 - To assist former service veterans and their families with their welfare and resettlement.

Source:ET

Goblin Mode

Gs 4

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In News

‘Goblin Mode’ is **Oxford’s Word of the Year** for 2022.

About Goblin Mode

- It is a “**slang term**”.
- **Meaning:** “a type of behaviour which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations”.
- **Usage:** often used in the expressions ‘in goblin mode’ or ‘to go goblin mode’
- The first Oxford word of the year to be **chosen by public vote**.

Oxford’s Word of the Year 2022

- **About:**
 - It is a word or expression that has attracted a **great deal of interest** over the last 12 months.
 - Decided every year
 - Reflects the **ethos, mood, or preoccupations** of that particular year and has lasting potential as a word of **cultural significance**.
- **Second place:** Metaverse
- **Third place:** #IStandWith

Source: IE

National Single Window System (NSWS)

Gs 3 Indian economy and related issues

In the News

Recently, the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution and Textiles said that the National Single Window System (NSWS) would help realize Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of transforming red tape into the red carpet.

About National Single Window System (NSWS)

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- It is a digital platform for the guidance of investors to identify and apply for approvals as per their business requirements.
- The platform is built to serve as an advisory tool to identify approvals based on user input and is to be used for guidance purposes only.
- **Management:** Invest India, under the guidance of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), manages the National Single Window System project and is involved in conceptualizing and designing the portal, onboarding of the various Ministries and States, maintaining the portal, and monitoring the performance of the portal.
- **Aim:** is to serve as a digital platform that acts as a guide for investors to identify and to apply for approvals as per their business requirements.
 - It brings together several State Governments, Central Ministries, and Departments onto one platform and provides a one-stop solution for investors to apply for approvals and registrations required during the pre-establishment and pre-operation stages of setting up a business in India.

Source:PIB

Exit Polls

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention : Issues Arising out of their Design & Implementation

In Context

- Recently, the voting for Gujarat elections ended & the much-awaited exit polls will be out soon.

About the exit Polls

- An exit poll asks voters which political party they are supporting after they have cast their votes in an election.
- An exit poll is supposed to give an indication of which way the winds are blowing in an election, along with the issues, personalities, and loyalties that have influenced voters.
- **Difference between Opinion poll & Exit Poll:**
 - **An opinion poll** is a pre-election survey to gather voters' views on a range of election-related issues.

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- **An exit poll**, on the other hand, is conducted immediately after people have voted, and assesses the support for political parties and their candidates.
- **Who conducts the polls & how?**
 - Today, exit polls in India are conducted by a number of organisations, often in tie-ups with media organisations.
 - The surveys can be conducted face to face or online.
- **Significance of Exit Polls:**
 - An exit poll is supposed to give an indication of which way the winds are blowing in an election, along with the issues, personalities, and loyalties that have influenced voters.
- **Criticisms:**
 - Exit polls can be controversial if the agency conducting them is perceived to be biased.
 - Critics say the projections of these surveys can be influenced by the choice, wording and timing of the questions, and by the nature of the sample drawn.
 - Political parties often allege that many opinion and exit polls are motivated and sponsored by their rivals, and could have a distorting effect on the choices voters make in a protracted election, rather than simply reflecting public sentiment or views.
- **Mandates on publishing these polls:**
 - The issue of when exit polls should be allowed to be published has gone to the Supreme Court in various forms.
 - Currently, exit polls can't be telecast from before voting begins till the last phase concludes.
 - The EC also mandated that while carrying the results of exit and opinion polls, newspapers and channels should disclose the sample size of the electorate, the details of polling methodology, the margin of error and the background of the polling agency.
- **Global presence of Exit Polls:**
 - **Sixteen European Union 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.
 - The **French** ban has been reduced to 24 hours ahead of voting day.
 - In the **UK**, there are no restrictions on publishing results of opinion polls — however, results of exit polls can't be published until the voting is over.

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Source:IE

Global status of Black Soils

Gs 3 Environmental Pollution and degradation:

In News

Recently, the Food Agricultural Organisation (FAO) released the **Global status of black soils Report** on the occasion of World Soil Day.

Key Points

- **About World Soil Day:**
 - World Soil Day is celebrated on December 5, 2022.
- **Threat to Black Soil and food security:**
 - Black soils feed the global population and are under threat.
 - Most are losing at least half of their **soil organic carbon (SOC)** stocks.
- **Goodness of black Soil:**
 - The **inherent fertility** of the soils make them the food basket for many countries and are considered essential to the global food supply.
- **Reason for the changes:**
 - Land-use change,
 - unsustainable management practices
 - Excessive use of agrochemicals.

Black Soil

- **Characteristics:**
 - These soils are characterised by a thick, dark-coloured soil horizon rich in organic matter.
 - Most of the black soils suffered from **moderate to severe erosion processes**, as well as nutrient imbalances, acidification and biodiversity loss.
 - Black soils are **extremely fertile** and can produce high agricultural yields thanks to their elevated moisture storage capacity.
- **India:**
 - Among the in situ soils of India, the black soils found in the lava-covered areas are the most conspicuous.

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- Those soils are often referred to as **regur** but are popularly known as “**black cotton soils**,” since cotton has been the most common traditional crop in areas where they are found.
- Black soils are derivatives of trap lava and are spread mostly across interior **Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh** on the **Deccan lava plateau and the Malwa Plateau**, where there is both moderate rainfall and underlying basaltic rock.
- Because of their high clay content, black soils develop wide cracks during the dry season, but their **iron-rich granular structure** makes them resistant to wind and water erosion.
- They are poor in humus yet highly moisture-retentive, thus responding well to irrigation.
- Those soils are also found on many peripheral tracts where the underlying basalt has been shifted from its original location by fluvial processes.
- **Global coverage:**
 - They constitute **5.6 percent of global soils** and contain 8.2 percent of the world’s SOC stocks.
 - Despite representing a small portion of the world’s soils, black soils were key for food security and the global economy.
 - Globally in 2010, 66 percent of sunflower seeds, 51 percent of small millet, 42 percent of sugar beet, 30 percent of wheat and 26 percent of potatoes were harvested from black soils.
- **Most significant trait:**
 - Its SOC Stocks which is approximately 56 billion tonnes of carbon.
 - This signifies their importance for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
 - The ability of the soils to remove carbon from the atmosphere and lock it up in soil organic matter (called carbon **sequestration**) has been proposed as an important solution to mitigate human-induced climate change.
 - Black soils have the potential to provide 10 percent of the total SOC sequestration globally if they receive proper attention.
 - **Europe and Eurasia** have the highest potential at over 65 percent and **Latin America and the Caribbean** at around 10 percent.
- **Reason of concern:**
 - They are quickly losing their SOC stocks. They have lost 20 to 50 percent of their original SOC stock, with the carbon being released into the atmosphere mostly as carbon dioxide, exacerbating global warming.

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- **Cropland distribution:**

- The distribution of black soil areas used as croplands varied in each region.
- Europe and Eurasia accounted for 70 percent of the soil in the total cropland, while North America, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia had 10 percent each.

Suggestions

- **Preserving** natural vegetation on black soils such as grasslands, forests and wetlands
- Adopting **sustainable soil management approaches** on cropped black soils.
- To reduce the impact of **tillage and seeding systems** on soil health, the frequency (number of passes across the field that results in a soil disturbance) and intensity (mass of soil disturbed in a single pass) must be reduced.
- **Cover crops** can be a good practice for sustainable black soil management and needs to be adapted to the farming system, black soil types and climate.
- **Double cropping**, the production of a second crop after the first crop has been harvested, provides an opportunity to utilize late season moisture and heat resources after the harvest of the cash crop.
 - Early maturing crops, including annual forages or winter cereals can provide a window of opportunity for double cropping with cover crops
- Maintaining a low quantity but high frequency of **mulch** might efficiently boost soil health without compromising crop yields and as well optimize the use of stover.

Source: DTE

Crimes against Tourists

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

Crimes against tourists and other foreign nationals appear to be on the rise in India.

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Key Findings

- **Reported and unreported crimes:**
 - There have been various reported (and unreported) incidents of foreigners falling victim to crimes in our country.
 - For every crime committed against foreigners, there would be several others that go unreported for multifarious reasons, with one of them being the fear instilled in them by the threats of these criminals.
- **Main victim:**
 - Women are more prone to sexual attacks by criminals on the prowl in tourist destinations.
- **States:**
 - **Delhi** recorded 27 cases of crime against foreigners last year, a drastic decline from 62 cases reported in 2020 and 123 in 2019.
 - **Rajasthan** has shown a sharp reduction in registration of crimes from 16 in 2019 to just 4 in 2020 and two cases last year, which could be attributed to the sharp decline in tourist arrivals due to COVID-19.

Number of crimes committed against foreigners in India

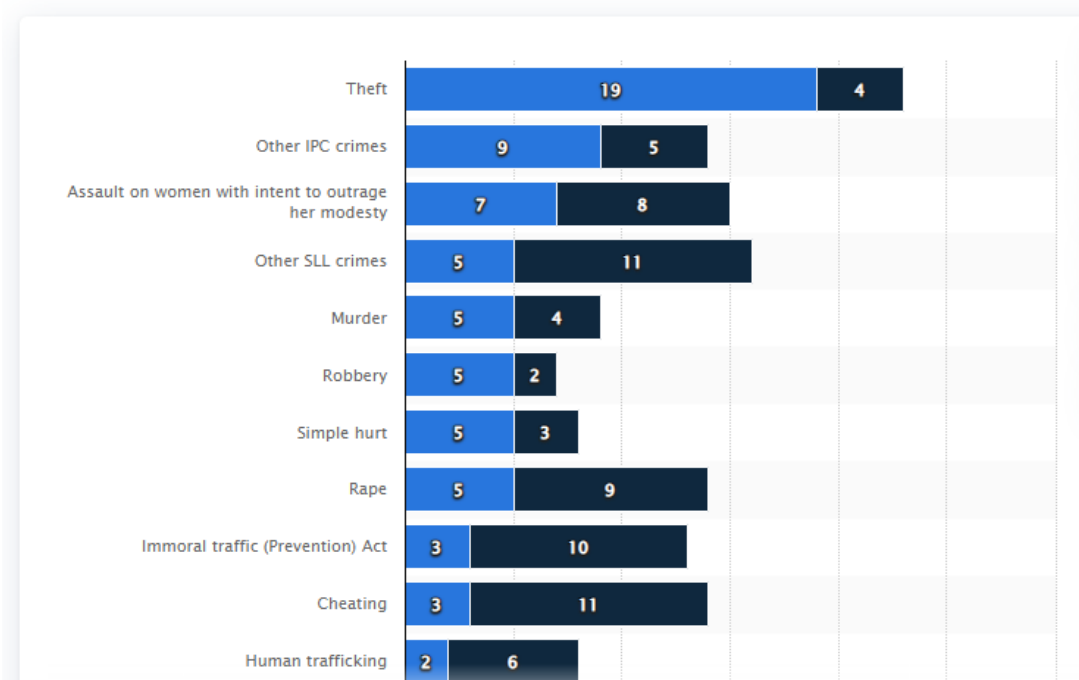


Image Courtesy: 2021 Data

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- **Crimes:**

- **Murder:** As many as 29 foreigners were murdered in the last three years.
- **Rape:** While 14 foreigners fell victim to rape last year, 16 were raped in 2020 and 12 in 2019.
- **Assault:** As many as 15 cases of assault to outraging modesty of foreign women were registered last year across the country, apart from 14 complaints of cheating.
- **Theft:** While 142 cases of theft were lodged by foreigners in 2019, it declined to 52 in 2020 and further dipped to 23 in 2021.

Tourism in India

- Tourism happens to be one of the biggest foreign exchange earners for India and constant effort needs to be made to raise earnings.
- While India's earnings through tourism was \$30.06 billion in 2019, it declined to \$6.958 billion in 2020 due to COVID-19 and the resultant restrictions in foreign tourists entering the country.
- A marginal increase of \$8.797 billion was recorded last year.

Impact

- **Global image:** Crime against foreigners dents our image globally.
- **Tourist inflow:** It could also adversely affect the inflow of foreign tourists, which is a vital source of income for our country.

Tourist Police Scheme

- **Origin:** Though the concept of 'tourist police' has been in vogue for the past few years, it has not been given the kind of attention it deserves.
- **States having:** The States that have tourist police are Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Rajasthan and Kerala.
- **Scheme by:** The **Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD)** has brought out a booklet on the tourist police scheme detailing the mode of setting up of tourist police stations and control rooms, outposts, uniforms, recruitment, qualifications, training and logistics requirements for tourist police stations.

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- **Tourist spots identified:** As many as 25 popular tourist spots have been identified in the country where the tourist police necessarily need to be deployed to help foreigners.
- **Incentive:** As an incentive, a 30% deputation allowance has been recommended for the police personnel who join the tourist police on deputation.

Way Ahead

- With optimistic predictions of about 13.34 million foreign tourists arriving by 2024, there is a pressing need to **upgrade our security systems** specially to provide a flawless security blanket cover to foreign tourists.
- Sensitise the specific requirements of the tourists for effective implementation of **Uniform Tourist Police Scheme** at pan-India level.
- Much needs to be done to instil a **sense of security in tourists** even before they leave their countries for India.
- With theft being the most common crime committed against foreigners, all criminals in and around tourist spots need to be **identified and kept under constant surveillance**.
- Since foreigners come for short durations, the cases cannot be allowed to linger on in courts for long. **Fast track courts** should be set up immediately to try cases of crime against foreigners and the culprits punished speedily.

Best Practice

- It may be recalled that a rape convict, Bitihotra Mohanty, was tried for raping a German national in Alwar (Rajasthan) on March 21, 2006 and he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment on April 12, that is, within **22 days**.
- Such speedy disposal of cases of crime against foreigners can be replicated if we have the will.

Source: TH

Introduction of Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022

Gs 2

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In News

- The Central Government recently introduced the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022 in Lok Sabha.

More about the news

- **About:**
 - The Bill proposes to amend the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002 in light of the 97th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2011 which inserted Part IXB in the Constitution.

Highlights of the Bill

- **Cooperative election authority:**
 - The Bill also seeks to establish a “cooperative election authority” to bring “electoral reforms” in the cooperative sector.
 - As per the proposed amendment, the authority will consist of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a maximum of three members to be appointed by the Centre.
- **Establishment of a Fund & concurrent audit:**
 - The Bill seeks to insert a new Section related to the “**establishment of the Cooperative Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development Fund**” for revival of “sick multi-state cooperative societies”.
 - It also proposes to insert Section relating to “**concurrent audit**” for such multi-state societies **with an annual turnover or deposit of more than the amount as determined by the Centre.**
- **Complaints redress:**
 - The government has proposed to insert a Chapter relating to “complaints redress”.
 - This proposes to appoint **one or more “cooperative ombudsman”** with a **territorial jurisdiction** to inquire into **members’ complaints.**
 - **Role of the ombudsman:**
 - The ombudsman will complete the process of inquiry and adjudicate within a period of three months from the date of receiving the complaint and may issue necessary directions to the society during the course of inquiry.
- **Monetary penalties & imprisonment:**

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- The government has also proposed to amend the existing Act to increase monetary penalties on multi-state co-op societies for violating provisions of the law to a maximum Rs 1 lakh.
- The **imprisonment term** has also been proposed from a maximum six months at present to up to one year in the proposed amendments.
- **Cooperative information officer:**
 - The Centre has also proposed to make provisions for the “appointment of cooperative information officer” to provide information on affairs and management of the multi-state co-op society concerned to members of such society.
- **Contentious clause of the Bill:**
 - **Merger of cooperative society:**
 - The Bill proposes merger of “any cooperative society” into an existing multi-state cooperative society.
 - **Original statute:**
 - As per the present law, enacted 20 years ago, only multi-state cooperative societies can amalgamate themselves and form a new multi-state cooperative society.
 - **Amendment:**
 - But now, “any cooperative society may, by a resolution passed by majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting at a general meeting of such society, decide to merge into an existing multi-state co-operative society: Provided that such resolution shall be subject to provisions of the respective State Cooperative Societies Act for the time being in force, under which such cooperative society is registered.

The objective of the introduction of the Bill:

- The bill is introduced with an objective to enhance transparency and accountability and improve the ease of doing business by reducing the period of registration.

Criticisms:

- **No provision in the Constitution:**

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- According to the critics, the Constitution distinguishes between Cooperative Societies of State and Multi-State Cooperative Societies which are governed by the Union of India.
- No provision of the Constitution makes way for merging a cooperative society which is incorporated under State law with a Multi-State Cooperative Society.
- **Centre's encroachment:**
 - Through the introduction of the Clause concerning the merger through the Bill, the Centre is indirectly encroaching on the rights of State Co-operative Societies according to critics.
 - It is being argued that such actions "impinges" on the rights of the States and is against India's federal structure.
- **Beyond legislative competence:**
 - It is also being claimed that this is beyond the legislative competence of the Union as State cooperative societies are within the exclusive jurisdiction of States.

Conclusion

- Developments over the years also necessitated changes in the existing Act so as to strengthen the cooperative movement in multi-state cooperative societies.
 - Therefore, the government proposed to amend the Act."

More about the Cooperative Societies

- **About:**
 - A co-operative society is a voluntary association of individuals having common needs who join hands for the achievement of common economic interest.
 - Its aim is to serve the interest of the poorer sections of society through the principle of self-help and mutual help.
- **97th Constitutional Amendment Act 2011:**
 - It established the right to form cooperative societies as a fundamental right (**Article 19**).
 - It included a new Directive Principle of State Policy on the Promotion of Cooperative Societies (**Article 43-B**).
 - It added a new Part IX-B to the Constitution titled "The Co-operative Societies" (**Articles 243-ZH to 243-ZT**).
 - It authorizes the Parliament to establish relevant laws in the case of **multi-**

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state cooperative societies (MSCS) and state legislatures in the case of other cooperative societies.

Ministry of Cooperation

- The Union Ministry of Cooperation was formed in 2021, its mandate was looked after by the Ministry of Agriculture before.

Price cap on Russian crude oil

Gs 2 Effect of Policies & Politics of Developed & Developing Countries on India's Interests:

In News

- European Union and Australian proposal imposing a price cap on Russian seaborne oil recently came into effect.

More about the news

- **About**
 - the **European Union** said it would implement a plan originally floated way back in May, with the **G7 and Australia** also signing up on **the plan to impose the price cap on Russian crude oil shipments**.
 - The price cap is pegged at **\$60 to a barrel for now**.
- **Significance of the price cap**
 - When the EU first proposed the ban, the inference was that this would deal a major blow to Russia's oil cash flows.
 - It was also noted that the European shipping liners and insurers have long had a stranglehold on global energy markets.
- **Need for a price cap:**
 - If Russian oil does not make its way into the global oil market, then crude prices could potentially spike, impacting consumers in the EU and the US, alongside those in the rest of the world.
 - The concern of an inflationary spike is very real. So, the floor price formula was decided on.
- **How will it work?**
 - The price cap is essentially aimed at preventing firms in signatory nations from extending **shipping, insurance, brokering and other**

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services to **Russian crude oil shipments** that are sold at any value above the designated per-barrel price, i.e. \$60 for now.

- Since it came into effect on December 5, the cap will only apply to shipments that are “loaded” onto vessels after the date and not apply to shipments in transit.
- **The price cap seeks to balance two contrasting objectives:**
 - How to cut **Russia’s oil and gas earnings, without simultaneously crimping the global supply of oil**, which could stoke runaway inflation further.

Challenges & ineffectiveness of the ban:

- **Only marginally below the current market price:**
 - Essentially, the embargo and price cap scheme has little bite, given that it is just marginally below the current market price for Russian crude.
 - Russian oil is already trading at a discount of about \$68 per barrel as compared to \$85 for Brent crude.
- **Existing oil profits:**
 - It took nearly 6 months for the grouping to come up with a price cap of \$60, and this figure barely makes a dent in Russia’s oil profits that it is using to sustain the war with Ukraine.
- **Availability of diversion routes:**
 - The price cap also does not fully address blends that include Russian crudes, suggesting that there may be additional opportunities to divert Russian barrels “through refined or partially refined products.
 - The main concern for the EU and the US would be the routing of Russian oil, outside of the price cap remit, through non-European shipping channels to countries such as China, Turkey, Indonesia and India.

India’s position

- **India’s doubled trade with Russia:**
 - Despite the United States-led sanctions on Russia post its invasion of Ukraine, India has decided to not just continue with, but also double its trade with Moscow in the “near foreseeable future”.
 - **Discounted price:**

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- The increase in trade volumes between the two countries have mainly come on the back of sharply higher import of discounted Russian crude by India.
- **Data on India's oil imports:**
 - India, which imported less than 1 percent of its total crude from Russia before the Russia-Ukraine war, now imports over 20 per cent of its total requirement from it.
 - Crude imports from Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which were the top two suppliers of crude to India, constitute around 21 and 16 per cent, respectively, of India's total import.
- **Sustaining India's need:**
 - As stated by India's External Affairs Minister, as the world's third-largest consumer of oil and gas, as a consumer where the levels of income are not very high, it is our fundamental obligation to ensure that the Indian consumer has the best possible access on the most advantageous terms to international markets.
 - And in that respect the India-Russia relationship has worked in India's advantage.
- **Non-committal to Price caps:**
 - So, India's stand, for now, has been to remain non-committal on any such pricing cap arrangement.

Way ahead

- India's decision on purchasing oil from Russia will continue to be guided by its energy security requirements.
- In practice, the price cap will work only if the service providers ask their clients for proof that they have bought Russia-linked crude at a cap-compliant price.

India's Stand on Russia's War with Ukraine

- India's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been **distinctive among the major democracies** and among U.S. strategic partners.
- Despite its discomfort with Moscow's war, New Delhi has adopted **studied public neutrality toward Russia**.
- It has abstained from successive votes in the **UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Human Rights Council** that condemned Russian aggression in Ukraine and thus far has refused to openly call out Russia as the instigator of the crisis.

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- India has been under **immense indirect pressure from Western nations** that have openly condemned Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.
- India has been pressing for the **resolution of the crisis through diplomacy and dialogue.**

RBI's monetary policy review Highlights

Gs 3 Indian Economy & Related issues

In News

- Recently the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) unveiled its latest review of the monetary policy.

Major Highlights

- In the reviewed policy the RBI has
 - **Increase the policy repo rate** under the **liquidity adjustment facility (LAF)** by 35 basis points to **6.25 percent** with immediate effect.
 - Consequently, the **standing deposit facility (SDF)** rate stands adjusted to **6.00 percent** and the **marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate to 6.50 percent.**
 - Remain focused on the **withdrawal of accommodation** to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while supporting growth.
 - Cut India's GDP (gross domestic product) growth forecast for the current financial year,
 - Scaled down GDP growth hopes for the year to 6.8% from 7%
 - Retained its **inflation projection for 2022-23 at 6.7%**
- **Expected Outcomes:**
 - **Lending rates of banks** are expected to go up as the cost of funds is expected to rise further.
 - **EMIs on the vehicle, home, and personal loans** will also rise.
 - **The external benchmark linked lending rate (EBLR) of banks** will rise by 35 bps.
 - One basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point— as such loans are linked to the Repo rate.

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- **Marginal cost of funds-based lending rates (MCLR)**, which accounts for 49.2 percent of the loans portfolio of banks, are also expected to move up.
 - The hike will help in moderating inflation in the country.
- **Deposit rates** are also expected to rise in the near future.
- **Significance:**
 - The RBI has hiked the policy rate in a bid to bring down inflation from the current level.
 - Capital flows to India will improve and external financing conditions will ease.

Challenges

- **Inflation with low economic output:**
 - Indian policymakers are facing an odd quandary. Over the past couple of years, India has had to deal with a scenario where inflation has been high even as economic output struggles to grow.
 - This has happened for a variety of reasons.
 - **COVID related disruptions:**
 - In particular, India was already experiencing a severe growth slowdown before the Covid pandemic.
 - This was made worse by the lockdowns during Covid.
 - **Global issues:**
 - Inflation has also shot up on account of supply disruptions, first due to the pandemic and then due to Russia's war in Ukraine.
- **Prioritising Economic recovery:**
 - For a while, the RBI has prioritised economic recovery but that has meant high inflation, which hurts the poor the most.
 - In fact, since the start of 2022, inflation has been above the 6% mark.
- The biggest risks to the outlook continue to be the headwinds emanating from protracted geopolitical tensions, global slowdown and tightening of global financial condition
- **RBI's hawkish stance:**
 - Most observers saw the latest policy statement as "hawkish".
 - The term "hawks" refers to central banks that have a very low threshold for tolerating variation from the targeted inflation level.

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- What makes the RBI's current stance more "hawkish" is the **RBI's reference to "core inflation"**.
 - The trouble is if core inflation is high, it takes a while to come down, because it implies that inflation has become broad-based (**i.e., higher prices have seeped through all parts of the economy**).
 - RBI traditionally targets the headline rate, which is moderating.
 - Core inflation, on the other hand, is going up and thus, it may push the RBI to take a more hawkish stance from here on.

Way Ahead

- The rupee, which has been resilient and stable, should be allowed to find its level and the central bank is only striving to rein in excessive volatility in the exchange rate.
- We must deal with the current global hurricane with confidence and endurance

More about the Inflation & Monetary tools

- **Responsibility & objective:**
 - In India, the **RBI** is entrusted with the **responsibility of devising monetary policy** with the **primary objective of maintaining price stability** while keeping in mind **the objective of growth**.
- **About Inflation:**
 - **Maintaining the inflation level:**
 - The central bank is supposed to target a 4% retail inflation level, although the RBI has the leeway of inflation going up to 6% or falling to 2% in any particular month.
 - Some degree of inflation is desirable as it promotes economic activity.
 - **Relation of growth & inflation:**
 - Typically when an economy experiences fast economic growth — that is, there is a lot of demand in the economy — prices rise.
 - **Drivers of Inflation:**
 - **Demand-pull Inflation:**
 - Increases in prices due to the gap between the demand (higher) and supply (lower).

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- **Cost-push Inflation:**
 - Higher prices of goods and services due to increased cost of production.
- **Exchange Rates:**
 - Exposure to foreign markets is based on the dollar value. Fluctuations in the exchange rate have an impact on the rate of inflation.
- **Demand-supply gap:**
 - High demand and low production or supply of multiple commodities create a demand-supply gap, which leads to a hike in prices.
- **RBI's Monetary tool to tackle inflation:**
 - When inflation runs high, RBI raises the repo rate — the interest rate it charges banks when it lends them money.
 - Doing this incentivizes savings and disincentivizes expenditure, thus curtailing overall demand and GDP.
 - That, in turn, reduces the inflation rate.
 - In times of weak economic activity, RBI cuts the repo rate and by the reverse logic, boosts demand and economic output.
 - All these critical decisions about the repo rate are taken by the MPC, which meets once every two months to assess inflation and growth outlook.
- **Headline, core & retail inflation:**
 - **Headline inflation:**
 - Headline inflation refers to the change in the value of all goods in the basket.
 - Headline inflation is more relevant for developing economies than developed economies.
 - **Core inflation:**
 - Core inflation is arrived at by removing the inflation in food and fuel from headline inflation. By removing food and fuel inflation (since these prices fluctuate more wildly), core inflation provides a more robust measure of inflation in the economy.
 - Core inflation is less volatile than headline inflation.
 - **Retail inflation:**
 - Retail inflation is the inflation (or rise in the general price level) that everyday consumers face.

Source: TH

Chairman of Rajya Sabha

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Gs 2

In News

Recently, Rajya Sabha welcomed its new Chairman, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar.

Chairman of Rajya Sabha

- **Vice-President of India** is ex-officio Chairman of the Council of States i.e., Rajya Sabha.
- **Powers and Functions:**
 - As Presiding Officer of the House
 - Powers and Duties of the Chairman, as laid down by the Constitution of India
 - As the Principal Spokesman of the House
 - Powers Conferred on the Chairman under the Rules of Procedure of the Rajya Sabha
 - Right of the Chairman to interpret the Constitution and Rules
 - Role in the Deliberations of the House
 - Casting of Vote by the Chairman
- **Salaries and allowances:**
 - Fixed by the Parliament by law.
 - Specified in the Second Schedule.

About Rajya Sabha

- Rajya Sabha is a **permanent House** and is not subject to dissolution.
- To ensure continuity, **one-third of its members retire after every second year.**
- The House also elects a **Deputy Chairman** from among its members.
- Besides, there is also a **panel of "Vice Chairmen"** in the Rajya Sabha.
- The **Fourth Schedule** to the Constitution provides for allocation of Rajya Sabha seats to the states and Union Territories, on the **basis of the population** of each state.
- Of **245 members**, 12 are nominated by the President and 233 are representatives of the States and Union territories of Delhi and Puducherry.

Source: IE

Kangaroo Courts

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Gs 2 Executive & judiciary

In Context

- In a Dalit hamlet in Krishnagiri, a ‘kangaroo court’ undermines individuals’ right to love

More about the Kangaroo Courts

- **What is the kangaroo court?**
 - Oxford Dictionary defines it as “an unofficial court held by a group of people in order to try someone regarded, especially without good evidence, as guilty of a crime or misdemeanour”.
 - In a less literal sense, it is used to refer to proceedings or activities where a judgement is made in a manner that is unfair, biased, and lacks legitimacy.
- **Issues:**
 - The system does not work on the standards of law or justice.
 - In Kangaroo Court, the procedure is **only conducted as a formality**.
 - Kangaroo Courts are known for **working against** the phrase” innocent **until proven guilty**”.
 - The court **does not allow** to appeal against its judgement.
- **When did the usage begin, and why ‘kangaroo’?**
 - The origin of the phrase is not clearly known, but it is believed to have been used from the 19th Century onwards. Why the word ‘kangaroo’ is used is also not clear, but there are several theories.
 - It could be to evoke a sense that “justice progresses by leaps and bounds” in case of kangaroo court verdicts.
 - The Kangaroo Courts were common during the **Stalin era** in the **Soviet Union**, famous as the “**Moscow Trails**” of the Soviet Great Purge.
- **Media as a Kangaroo Court:**
 - Ill-informed, biased and agenda-driven debates in the media on issues pending in courts are affecting justice delivery.
 - **Lack of accountability of media:**
 - **Print media** still has a certain degree of accountability.
 - Whereas, **electronic media** has zero accountability as to what it shows vanishes in thin air.
 - **Still worse is social media.**

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Source: TH

Karthigai festival

Gs 1 Art and Culture

In News

As part of the Karthigai festival, devotees light Lakshadeepam (lighting of one lakh lamps) at Sri Soundararaja Perumal Temple in Tamil Nadu.

About Karthigai festival

- **Tamil Nadu** celebrates Karthigai Deepam as the traditional festival.
- It is also celebrated in neighboring states like **Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.**
- It is **very old** and people for a long back have been associated with this auspicious occasion.
- The actual history may not be clearly stated in the scriptures but some citations have been found in the ancient writings.
 - One can find a reference to this festival of lights in the age-old literature of Tamils known as **Ahananuru, a collection of poems.**
 - It is one of the great books of **Sangam literature** that talks about the happenings between 200 BC and 300 AD.
 - Avaiyyar, a renowned woman of Sangam age also mentions **karthigai Deepam in her poems.**

Source: TH

Koundinya wildlife sanctuary

Gs 3

In News

An 18-member herd of all female elephants from the forests of Gudiyattam and Pernambattu of Tamil Nadu are currently on the prowl in the Koundinya wildlife sanctuary zone in Chittoor district, apparently “in search of mates”

About Koundinya wildlife sanctuary

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- It is located in Palamner - Kuppam forest ranges of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, on the Andhra Pradesh - Chittoor road.
- This Sanctuary comes under Project elephant - a Countrywide Elephant Conservation Project taken up by the Government of India.
- **Uniqueness:** The only home for Asiatic elephants in the State of Andhra Pradesh.
- **Forest Type:** Southern tropical dry deciduous forest, with patches of thorn, scrub, and grassy plains.

Source: TH

Conjugal visits for prisoners

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

The State of Punjab has furthered the cause of the right to life and personal liberty of prisoners by allowing conjugal visits for inmates.

- It is expected that this initiative will strengthen matrimonial bonds and ensure prisoners' good conduct.

About Conjugal Rights

- They are rights created by marriage, that is, the right of the husband or the wife to the company of their spouse.
- **In the context of prisons**, however, conjugal visits refer to the concept of allowing a prisoner to spend some time in privacy with his spouse within the precincts of a jail.
- It is argued that conjugal visits are a fundamental right of the spouses of the prisoners.
 - Prisoner rights are internationally recognised through the **United Nations Standard Minimum Rules** for the Treatment of Prisoners, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights etc.
 - Through such instruments, prisoners are guaranteed the right to life and inherent dignity. The right to maintain family relations including conjugal visits are included in these treaties.

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- Most prison Acts and Rules across the country accept the importance of maintenance of continuity in family and social relations.
- **Relevance**
 - Conjugal visits can have positive impacts in the form of psychological health benefits for prisoners, preservation of marital ties, and, reduction in the rates of homosexuality and sexual aggression within prisons.
- **Judicial views:**
 - In the case of **Sunil Batra vs Delhi Administration (1979, SC)**, Justice Iyer observed that “visit to prisoners by family and friends are solace in isolation: and only a dehumanised system can derive vicarious delight in depriving prison inmates of this humane amenity.”
 - The High Court held that the right to conjugality is available to prisoners under **Article 21**, subject to restrictions.
 - However, in the case of **Meharaj vs State (2022)**, the Madras HC while considering the question of whether conjugal rights form part of the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21, observed that there have to be differential standards in enforcement of Article 21 for law abiders and law violators.
 - The Court observed that even though conjugal visits could not be held as a fundamental right, the prisoner would still be eligible to avail leave for conjugal visits if there are ‘extraordinary reasons’ such as ‘infertility treatments.’

Source: TH

SpaceTech Innovation Network (SpIN)

Gs 3

In News

- Recently, The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) signed an MoU with Social Alpha to launch SpaceTech Innovation Network (SpIN).

More about the news

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- **About Social Alpha:**
 - Social Alpha is a multistage innovation curation and venture development platform for science and technology start-ups.
- **About SpIN:**
 - **Space entrepreneurship:**
 - SpIN is India's **first dedicated platform for innovation, curation, and venture development** for the **burgeoning space entrepreneurial ecosystem**.
 - **Public-private collaboration:**
 - The space agency said that the tie-up is a one-of-a-kind public-private collaboration for start-ups and SMEs in the space industry.
 - SpIN will primarily focus on facilitating **space tech entrepreneurs** in three **distinct innovation categories:**
 - Geospatial Technologies and Downstream Applications;
 - Enabling Technologies for Space & Mobility; and
 - Aerospace Materials, Sensors, and Avionics.
- **Significance of SpIN:**
 - **Shaping policies:**
 - This novel partnership is a significant step forward in providing further stimulus to **India's recent space reform policies**.
 - **Creating market potential & ecosystem:**
 - It will work towards identifying and unleashing the **market potential** of the **most promising space tech innovators and entrepreneurs** in India.
 - The SPIN platform is also expected to create a level playing field for various stakeholders to collaborate and contribute to the space ecosystem in the country.
- **SpIN innovation challenge:**
 - In line with the partnership announcement, SpIN has launched its first innovation challenge.
 - **Areas of innovation:**
 - Early-stage start-ups for developing solutions in areas of maritime and land transportation, urbanisation, mapping, and surveying, disaster management, food security, sustainable agriculture, environmental monitoring, and natural resources management, among others are encouraged to apply.
 - **Significance of the innovation challenge:**

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- The selected start-ups and innovators will be able to access both Social Alpha's and ISRO's infrastructure and resources as per the prevailing guidelines.
- They will be provided active hand-holding in critical areas, including access to product design, testing and validation infrastructure, intellectual property management, go-to-market strategy, and access to long-term patient capital, among other technical and business inputs.

Source: TH

Global South

Gs 2

In News

Recently, the Indian External Affairs Minister said that **India would be the “voice of the Global South**, that is otherwise under-represented in such forums”.

- India assumed the presidency of the G20 group of countries for 2022 to 2023.

About Global North and Global South:

- Global North refers loosely to countries like the US, Canada, Europe, Russia, Australia and New Zealand
- Global South includes countries in Asia, Africa and South America.
- **Why is it in the news now?**
 - The **economic emergence** of some of these South countries, such as India and China, in the last few decades.
 - Many consider the world to now be **multipolar** rather than one where the US alone dominates international affairs.
 - The progress achieved by many Asian countries is also seen as challenging the idea that the North is the ideal.

Need for the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’

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- **Easier analysis:** For a long time in the study of international political systems, the method of **categorising countries** into broad categories for easier analysis has existed.
 - The concepts of **‘East’ and ‘West’** is one example of this, with the Western countries generally signifying greater levels of economic development and prosperity among their people, and Eastern countries considered as being in the process of that transition.
 - Another similar categorisation is of **First World, Second World and Third World countries**, referring to countries associated with the Cold war-era alliances of the US, the USSR, and non-aligned countries, respectively.
- **Change and clear names were required:** In the post-Cold War world, the First World/Third World classification was no longer feasible, because when the Communist USSR disintegrated in 1991, most countries had no choice but to ally at some level with the capitalist US – the only remaining global superpower.
 - The East/West binary was seen as often perpetuating stereotypical thinking about African and Asian countries.
- **Terms did not explain the real condition of the countries:** The idea that some countries were ‘developed’ while others were not was thought to be too wide a classification, inadequate for accurately discussing concerns.
 - Categorising incredibly diverse countries into a monolith was felt to be too simplistic.
- **Old names for present times, not working:** Some so-called developing countries have come so far that it’s fair to say they have developed. A handful of failed states are hardly developing at all. Most countries are somewhere in the middle.

World Systems Approach

- It was introduced by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in 1974, emphasising an **interconnected perspective** of looking at world politics.
- There are three major zones of production:
 - Core,
 - Peripheral and
 - Semi-peripheral.
- The core zones reap profits, being the owners of cutting-edge technologies – countries like the US or Japan.
- Peripheral zones, on the other hand, engage in less sophisticated production

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that is more labour-intensive.

- In the Semi peripheral (middle) are countries like India and Brazil.

How is Global South an upgrade on previous terms?

- **Better term for similar countries:**
 - They are arguably more accurate in grouping countries together,
 - Measures similar in terms of wealth, indicators of education and healthcare, etc.
 - Most have a history of colonisation, largely at the hands of European powers.
- **Exclusion:**
 - This classification trains more focus on the Global South.
 - Region's historical exclusion from prominent international organisations – such as from the permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.
 - As bodies like the UN and the IMF are involved in major decision-making that affect the world in terms of politics, economy and society, the exclusion is seen by these countries as contributing to their slower growth.

Cause of Inequalities in different categorisation

- different levels of health and education;
- The nature of a country's economy and its industrial sectors;
- International trading policies and access to markets;
- How countries are governed and international relationships between countries;
- Conflict within and between countries;
- A country's vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change.

Criticism of the classification

- **The term is too broad:**
 - The problem of proper naming is still not resolved.
 - North countries paying for funding green energy, having historically contributed to higher carbon emissions, many in the Global North have objected to China and India's exclusion from this, given their increasing industrialisation.
- **Is the objective different from previous classifications?**

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- There is also the question of whether the South simply aims to replace the North and the positions it occupies, again continuing a cycle in which a few countries accumulate crucial resources.

Way Ahead

- In this multipolar world, the whole North and South needs to **come together to fight the issues of developed and developing countries** and promote the East like the West.

Source: IE

Abuse on Elderly persons in India

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

- Recently, the Report of Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) was released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
 - As per the recent Report, around 5.2% of senior citizens surveyed reported ill-treatment/abuse.

Data on the issues faced by the elderly population in India

- **Health:**
 - **Self-reported health condition:**
 - According to the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) 2017-18, there are 24.2 per cent of people aged 60 years and above and 12.1 per cent people aged 45-59 years of age who have claimed poor self-rated health conditions.
 - **Mental Health:**
 - LASI in its previous report has pointed out two domains to understand mental health. One is cognition and the other is depression.
- **Economic:**
 - **Currently working:**
 - There are nearly 61.9 per cent of people aged 45-59 years and 35.7 per cent of aged 60 years and above who are currently working. They are mostly engaged in agricultural and allied activities.

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- **Seeking a job:**
 - According to LASI, there are 4.4 per cent of people aged 45-59 years and 1.5 per cent of age 60 years and above, are seeking jobs.
- **Social:**
 - **Living arrangement:**
 - There is around 5.7 per cent of people aged 60 years and above who live alone.
 - **Perceived life satisfaction with social status:**
 - Life satisfaction among the elderly is less than 50 per cent. Only 43.9 per cent of people aged 60 years and above are satisfied with their own life.
- **Abuse & Crime:**
 - **Substance abuse:**
 - Substance abuse increases with an increase in age according to the LASI findings. It is 13.8 per cent for people aged 60 and above in contrast to 10.8 per cent for 45-59 years age.
 - **Crimes against senior citizens:**
 - As per the NCRB data, As many as 4,264 cases of various crimes against senior citizens were reported in 19 metropolitan cities in 2021

Government initiatives for the protection of Elderly population in India

- **The National Policy on Older Persons, 1999:**
 - The policy envisages State support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter, protection and other needs of older persons to improve quality of their lives.
- **The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act:**
 - It was enacted in 2007 to ensure need-based maintenance of parents and senior citizens and their welfare including shelter, healthcare, protection of life and property, against abandonment etc.
- **“National Programme for the Health Care of Elderly”:**
 - Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is implementing the “National Programme for the Health Care of Elderly”.
- **Atal VayoAbhyudayYojana (AVYAY):**
 - The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment is implementing AVYAY for senior citizens.

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- It has the **following components** for providing different services to senior citizens:
 - **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY):**
 - For bringing near normalcy in the bodily functions of those BPL senior citizens who suffer from age-related disabilities/ infirmities, by providing them with free of cost assisted living devices.
 - **Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity (SACRED) Portal:**
 - Many senior citizens have experience, time and energy which can be used by the business enterprises looking for stable employees with experience.
 - The portal allows bringing these people together by virtual matching of preferences.
 - **Promoting Silver Economy:**
 - To encourage the entrepreneurs to think about the problems of the elderly and come out with innovative solutions, by providing upto Rs. 1 crore as financial assistance in the form of maximum 49% equity participation, through an open invitation on a portal namely **Seniorcare Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE)**.

Way ahead

- India is considered a young country. But the United Nations projects that Indians over the age of 60 years will double by 2050, constituting almost 19.6 per cent of the total population.
- Life expectancy has shown considerable improvement. But if these added years are dominated by declines in physical and mental capacities, the implications for the older population and society will be much more negative.
- Hence, an integrative approach to align the needs of elderly as well as older adults in programmes and policies is the need of hour.

Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI)

- **About:**
 - The LASI is a full-scale national survey of scientific investigation of the health, economic, and social determinants and consequences of population ageing in India.

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- The LASI is a nationally representative survey over 73,000 older adults age 45 and above across all states and union territories of India.
- **Function:**
 - LASI is envisioned to be conducted every 3 years for the next 25 years.
 - It is well-positioned to evaluate the effect of changing policies on the behavioural outcomes in India.
- **Features unique to India:**
 - Additionally, LASI considers the features that are unique to India, including its institutional and cultural characteristics.

Jallikattu & issues surrounding the sport

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court recently reserved for judgment a batch of petitions seeking to strike down the law that protects Jallikattu.

More about the news

- **Precursor:**
 - In 2014, the Supreme Court, in the **A. Nagaraja judgment** had held Jallikattu as cruelty to bulls.
- **Issue:**
 - The bone of contention is the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act of 2017** and the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules of 2017**, which had re-opened the gates for the conduct of the popular bull-taming sport **in the name of culture and tradition** despite a 2014 ban by the Supreme Court.
- **Examining the relevant laws:**
 - The primary question involved was **whether Jallikattu should be granted constitutional protection as a collective cultural right under Article 29 (1)**.
 - The court examined if the laws “perpetuate cruelty to animals” or were actually a means to ensure “the survival and well-being of the native breed of bulls”.
 - The Bench also heard parties on whether the **new Jallikattu laws** were “relatable” to Article 48 of the Constitution.

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- **Apex Court's action:**
 - Supreme Court reserved the judgment claiming that the bull-taming sport is a cultural heritage of the State and is protected under Article 29 (1) of the Constitution.

About Jallikattu

- Jallikattu is a **bull-taming sport** that has traditionally been part of the festival of **Pongal**.
- The festival is a **celebration of nature**, and **thanksgiving** for a bountiful **harvest**, of which **cattle worship** is part.
- Contests in Avaniapuram, Peelamedu, and Alanganallur, villages neighbouring Madurai, set the tone for the season, which continues until April.
- **How is it played?**
 - The elite Jallikattu breeds test the strength and guile of farm hands in especially-constructed arenas.
 - It is a violent sport, and there is only one winner, man or bull.
- **Arguments in favour of the sport:**
 - **The political economy of Jallikattu:**
 - It is about showcasing the quality of cattle, the breeding skills of cattle rearers, the centrality of cattle in an agrarian economy, and the power and pride they bring to farmers and land-owning castes in rural Tamil Nadu.
 - Jallikattu is a cultural manifestation of this political economy.
 - **Act of cultural resistance to an urban modernity:**
 - For agrarian communities like Thevars and Maravars, Jallikattu is one of the few markers of their social standing and identity in a fast-changing world.
 - The contest, which evidently celebrates masculinity, is almost an act of cultural resistance to an urban modernity that tends to marginalise rural and agrarian values.
- **Arguments against the sport:**
 - **Harming both, bulls & humans:**
 - The practice of Jallikattu has long been contested, with **animal rights groups and the courts** concerned over issues of **cruelty to animals** and the **bloody and dangerous nature of the sport** that causes death and injuries to both the bulls and human participants.

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- **Apex Court's view & the Upanishadic wisdom:**
 - In 2014, the Supreme Court had ruled that the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, “over-shadows or overrides the so-called tradition and culture”.
 - The court drew upon Upanishadic wisdom and advised Parliament to “elevate rights of animals to that of constitutional rights so as to protect their dignity and honour”.
 - **“Bulls are beaten, poked, prodded, harassed and jumped on by numerous people. They have their tails bitten and twisted and their eyes and noses filled with irritating chemicals,”** the judgment said.
- **Statutory provisions:**
 - **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Tamil Nadu Amendment Act 2017:**
 - Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2017.
 - An Act to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 so as to preserve the cultural heritage of the State of Tamil Nadu and to ensure the survival and wellbeing of the native breeds of bulls.
 - **The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules of 2017** also recognised the culture and traditions of the people as a fundamental right.

Way ahead

- Governments at the state and Centre have wrestled with formulating a regulatory mechanism for Jallikattu, and a matter relating to whether Tamil Nadu can conserve it as a cultural right under Article 29(1) of the Constitution.
- Tradition and culture are not immune to change. But it is facile to argue that the rights discourse can be conducted ignoring the cultural context.
-

Constitutional provisions protecting animal rights in India

- **Article 21:**
 - Under **Article 21** of the Constitution, the expression ‘life’ has been expanded to include all forms of life including animal life which is essential

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for human life. Moreover, the Right to Dignity and fair treatment is also significant to animal rights.

- **Article 29 (1):**
 - **Article 29 (1)** is a **fundamental right** guaranteed under **Part III** of the Constitution to **protect the educational and cultural rights** of citizens.
- **Article 48**
 - **Article 48** of the Constitution of India is one of the Directive Principles which directs the state to make efforts for banning animal slaughtering of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.
 - It further states to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines.
- **Article 51 A (g):**
 - **Article 51 A (g)** states that every citizen has a fundamental duty to safeguard and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and animals as well as to have compassion for living creatures.
 - This Constitutional provisions were introduced by the 42nd amendment in 1976.

India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group (JWG)

Gs 2 International relation

In News

Recently, India-Bangladesh held the **18th meeting** of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on **security and border management**.

Key Points

- **Issues discussed:**
 - They agreed to **deepen and strengthen mutual cooperation** on security and border-related issues.
 - To implement **Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP)** in letter and its spirit for effective guarding of the Indo-Bangladesh border was the main issue.
 - **Bilateral issues** such as border fencing and developmental works within 150 yards of the International Border, illegal crossing, bilateral cooperation in checking insurgency.
 - Combating terrorism, organised crimes and smuggling were also discussed.
- **Recent history:**

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- In the last more than four decades, the two countries have continued to consolidate their political, economic, trade and cultural relations and have built a comprehensive institutional framework to promote bilateral cooperation.
- Both countries share 54 rivers, out of which, a treaty is already in existence for sharing of the Ganges water and both sides are working for early finalisation of agreements for sharing of water of other common rivers.
- Both countries are also cooperating in the conservation of the entire Sundarbans ecosystem, which is a common biodiversity heritage.

India Bangladesh Relations

- **Political:** India was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh and establish diplomatic relations immediately after its independence in December 1971.
 - Internationally both the nations share the following platforms: SAARC, BIMSTEC, Indian Ocean Coastal Regional Cooperation Association, and Commonwealth.
- **Trade and investment:**
 - Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia.
- **Power and energy cooperation:**
 - Cooperation in the power sector has become one of the hallmarks of India -Bangladesh relations.
 - Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of India.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - High level exchanges at the level of services chief of Indian Navy, Bangladesh Navy and Indian Air Force, conduct of second annual defense dialogue and inaugural tri-services staff talks, service specific talks of Navy and Air Force.
 - Various Joint exercises take place between the two countries:
 - Exercise Sampriti (Army) and
 - Exercise Milan (Navy).
- **Multimodal Connectivity:**
 - **The passenger trains between India and Bangladesh:**
 - **Bandhan Express:**
 - **Maitree Express:**
 - **Mitali Express:**

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Way Ahead

- India needs to look at more ways to **deepen its ties with Bangladesh**, especially keeping in mind the shifting nature of geopolitics and geoeconomics in South Asia.
- India and Bangladesh have more or less agreed on most issues and this **stability must be maintained**.
- India needs to find a fine balance in respecting Bangladesh's economic growth while maintaining its economic progress.

Source: Air + TH

Ad Hoc Judges

Gs 2

In News

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) stated that the process to **appoint ad hoc judges must be less cumbersome**.

SC's Suggestions

- **Need of "out-of-the-box" thinking:** Roping in senior lawyers to act as ad hoc judges in High Courts to meet the rising tide of pendency.
- **Less Cumbersome Procedure:** Once the Chief Justice recommends it should happen in a matter of days.
- **Utilising Expertise of Retired Judges:** The retired judges who were willing to come back to the Bench as ad hoc judges would bring their experience in dealing with arrears.

Ad hoc Judges in High Courts

- **Article 224A** of Indian Constitution deals with the appointment of ad hoc judges in High Courts.
- The **Chief Justice** of India may at any time, with the **prior approval of the President of India**, request a person who has been in the office of Judge of that court or any other High Court to act as Judge of the High Court of that State.
- The **Chief Minister** will forward his recommendation to the **Union Minister of Law and Justice** after consultation with the Governor.

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Apex Court's Guidelines for the Appointment of Ad hoc Judges

- If a high court has **vacancies that are more than 20%** of its sanctioned strength;
- If cases of a **specific category are pending** for more than five years;
- If over **10% of the high court's cases** are pending for **more than five years**;
- If the rate of disposal of cases is **lower than the rate of institution of cases ('case clearance rate')**;
- Even if the number of old cases is low, it is likely there will be a situation of mounting arrears due to a **consistently low case clearance rate** for a year or more.

Source: TH

Extension of RoDTEP Scheme

Gs 3

In the News

the government decided to extend the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme to the pharmaceuticals, chemicals and iron & steel sectors with effect from December 15.

- The move is aimed at boosting exports at a time they have been impacted due to the global economic slowdown and demand slowdown in major markets such as China and the European Union.

About RoDTEP scheme

- It was introduced in January 2021 to replace an earlier merchandise export incentive scheme
- The RoDTEP scheme rebates or refunds the embedded central, state, and local duties and taxes to the exporters that were so far not being refunded.
 - the rebate is issued as a transferable electronic scrip by the **Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs**.
- It is based on the globally accepted principle that taxes should not be exported, and taxes and levies borne on the exported products should be either exempted or remitted to exporters.

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- It is meant to provide a 'zero rating' of exports or ensure that no domestic taxes are added to goods meant for export.

Source:TH

Nai Roshni scheme

GS1

In News

Since inception, about 4.35 lakh beneficiaries have been trained under the 'Nai Roshni' scheme.

About Nai Roshni scheme

- It aims to empower and enhance confidence in Minority women by providing knowledge, tool and techniques for the Leadership Development of Women.
- It is a six-days non-residential/five-days residential training programme conducted for women belonging to a minority community between the age group of 18 years to 65 years.
- The training modules cover areas related to Programmes for women, Health and Hygiene, Legal rights of women, Financial Literacy, Digital Literacy, Swachh Bharat, Life Skills, and Advocacy for Social and Behavioural changes.
- The scheme was implemented through Programme Implementing Agencies (PIAs). Now, the scheme has been merged with PM VIKAS as a component.
- It is run with the help of NGOs, Civil societies and Government Institutions all over the country.

Source:PIB

Changes in UPI

Gs 3 Indian Economy and Related Issues

In Context

- RBI governor recently announced an additional function for Unified Payments Interface (UPI) platforms.

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More about the new changes to UPI

- **The current function:**
 - The UPI currently includes functionality to undertake recurring payments and single-block payments.
- **Changes:**
 - It is now being enhanced to allow customers to block funds in their accounts for multiple payments of specific nature.
- **Significance:**
 - This is expected to improve the ease of making payments for online shopping and investments in securities.
 - With the new feature, the merchant can make multiple debits up to a permitted amount.
 - The feature will also be helpful in the purchase of government securities using the RBI's retail direct scheme.
- **Implementation:**
 - Separate instructions will be issued to the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to implement the enhancement.
 - RBI governor also announced an expansion in the scope of Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS) to include all payments and collections.

About Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

- **About:**
 - Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
 - The interface facilitates inter-bank peer-to-peer (P2P) and person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions.
- **Transfer of funds:**
 - It is used on mobile devices to instantly transfer funds between two bank accounts. The mobile number on the device is required to be registered with the bank.
 - The UPI ID of the recipient can be used to transfer money.
- **Function & regulation:**

It runs as an open-source **application programming interface (API)** on top of **Immediate Payment Service (IMPS)** and is regulated by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.

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Recognition of National or State Party

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In Context

- Recently, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is on track to be recognised as a national party by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

More about the National Parties

- **About:**
 - The name suggests that a national party would be the one that has a presence 'nationally', as opposed to a regional party whose presence is restricted to only a particular state or region.
 - A certain stature is sometimes associated with being a national party, but this does not necessarily translate into having a lot of national political clout.
- **Criteria for recognition as a National Party:**
 - **Authority & fulfillment:**
 - The ECI has laid down the technical criterion for a party to be recognised as a national party.
 - A party may gain or lose national party status from time to time, depending on the fulfillment of these laid-down conditions.
 - **A political party would be considered a national party if:**
 - It is 'recognised' in four or more states; or
 - If its candidates polled at least 6% of total valid votes in any four or more states in the last Lok Sabha or Assembly elections and has at least four MPs in the last Lok Sabha polls; or
 - If it has won at least 2% of the total seats in the Lok Sabha from not less than three states.
 - **To be recognised as a state party, a party needs:**
 - At least 6% vote-share in the last Assembly election and have at least 2 MLAs; or
 - have 6% vote-share in the last Lok Sabha elections from that state and at least one MP from that state; or
 - At least 3% of the total number of seats or three seats, whichever is more, in the last Assembly elections; or

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- At least one MP for every 25 members or any fraction allotted to the state in the Lok Sabha; or
- Have at least 8% of the total valid votes in the last Assembly election or Lok Sabha election from the state.

AAP's current position:

- The AAP is in power with big majorities and very large vote shares
 - In Delhi and Punjab. And in the Goa Assembly elections held in March, it received 6.77% of the vote.
- This meant that going into the Gujarat-Himachal elections, the party already fulfilled the criteria for recognition as a state party in three states.
- It now required 6% of the vote in the Assembly elections in either Himachal or Gujarat to be recognised in a fourth state — which would qualify it for recognition as a national party.

India's renewable power capacity : IEA report

Gs 3 Conservation

In News

Recently, an International Energy Agency (IEA) report stated that India will almost **double its renewable power capacity** in the next 5 years.

Key Points

- **Global Renewable energy:** It will comprise 90 percent of global electricity capacity expansion in the next five years and much of it will be in India.
 - Renewable energy's installed power capacity addition will grow to 2,400 gigawatts (GW) between 2022 and 2027.
 - This expansion was 85 percent faster than the previous five years and will be equal to the entire installed power capacity of China today.
- **India:**
 - With the addition of 145 gigawatt (GW), India is forecast to almost double its renewable power capacity over 2022-2027.
 - **Sources:** Solar photovoltaic (PV) accounts for three-quarters of this growth, followed by onshore wind with 15 percent and hydropower providing almost all the rest.

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- **Other countries:**
 - China, the European Union and the United States will be three other geographies contributing majorly to this upward trend besides India.
- **Reason of major contribution:**
 - This is primarily owing to the favourable policies and market reforms in all four.
- **Wind vs Solar:**
 - Wind energy is a different ball game compared to solar because the good sites are only located in coastal states. Even within a coastal state, there are tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3 sites depending on the wind intensity.
- **DISCOM:**
 - Raising the capability of DISCOMs to procure more renewable energy will be crucial to achieving faster growth.

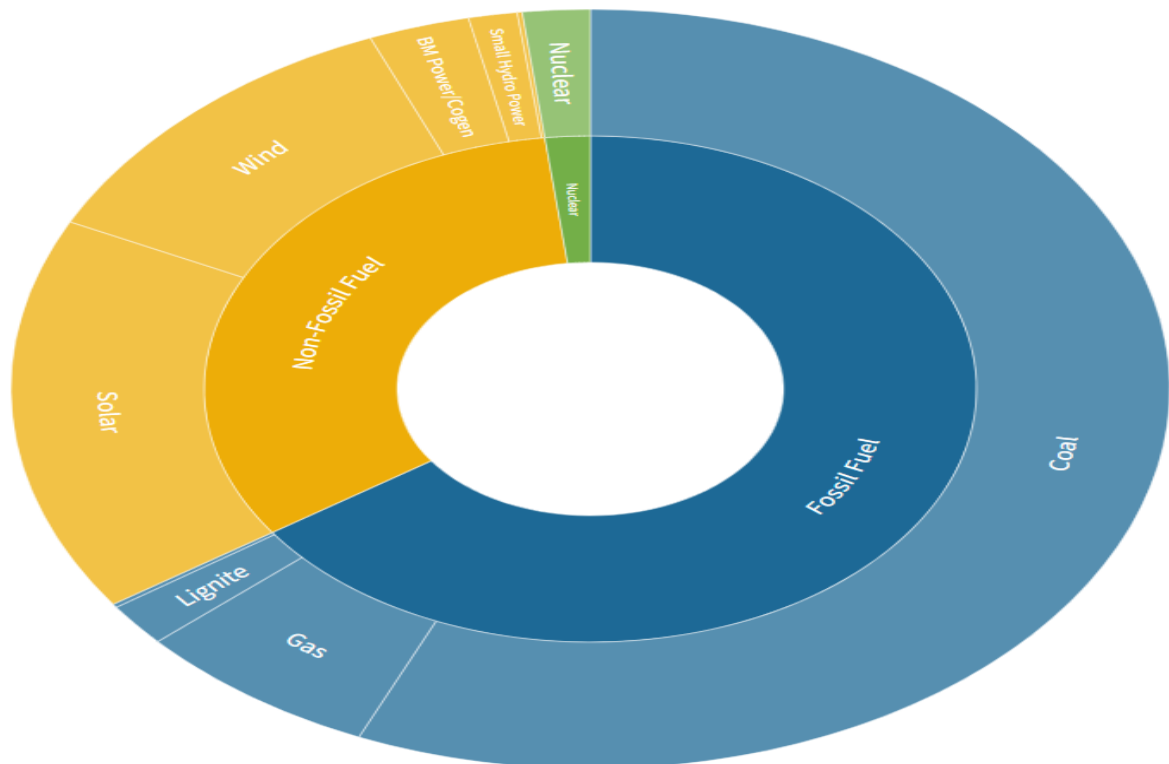
Renewable Energy in India

- **Finances:**
 - India's plan to **install 500 GW (gigawatt)** of renewable energy capacity by 2030 will involve an investment of at least ₹2.44 lakh crore or ₹2.44 trillion.
 - As part of its international climate commitments, India has said that it would source roughly half its energy needs from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. Financing the energy transition of developing countries such as India is among the thorniest geo-political issues, with India having said multiple times at United Nations climate conferences that “trillions of dollars” will be required.

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India's Energy Mix

Data as on October 19, 2022



Source: [Ministry of Power](#) • The Hindu Graphics

Image Courtesy: [TH](#)

- **Transmission Plans:**
 - It includes systems required for transporting 10 GW of off-shore wind-based energy located in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu at an estimated cost of ₹28,000 crore.
 - With the planned transmission system, the inter-regional capacity will increase to about 1.50 lakh MW by 2030 from 1.12 lakh MW at present.
 - **Energy storage:** Because renewable-energy generation is only available for a limited time every day, the plan envisages installing battery storage capacity worth 51.5 GW by 2030 to provide “round-the-clock power to end-consumers.
- **Non fossil fuel Generation Centres:**
 - The plan has identified major upcoming centres in the country, including at Fatehgarh, Bhadla and Bikaner in Rajasthan, Khavda in Gujarat, and Anantapur and Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Capacity at present:**

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- The installed electricity-generating capacity in the country at present is 409 GW, including 173 GW from non-fossil fuel sources, which is about 42% of the total.

Significance

- Clean energy transitions are driving down the costs of energy storage technologies, expected to reduce further with an increase in scale and innovations.
- Suspending reverse bidding was a positive thing because for a good four or five years, it did not lead to higher wind capacity addition.

Indian Policies

- **Raising Import duty:**
 - The duty on imports was increased to 40 percent for PV modules from 15 percent and to 25 percent for solar cells in April 2022.
 - This was done to reduce dependence on China and increase domestic manufacturing.
 - This is expected to add 16 GW of PV capacity, 60 percent higher than last year.
- **The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme:**
 - It sanctioned 9 GW of PV manufacturing capacity to provide an ecosystem of local manufacturing.
 - This programme aims to expand India's solar PV cell and module manufacturing capacity to over 70 GW in this decade, including 29 GW of manufacturing capacity fully integrated across the whole supply chain.

Way Ahead

- **Policy support:** Consistent policy support from the Indian government may enable the transition, particularly by promoting local manufacturing of solar modules.
- **Replace China:** There are bottlenecks in the supply chain from China, and India can make a good place in the global world, utilising this.
- **Schemes like PLI and raising import duty:** Similar measures are expected to meet the growing demand of the renewable energy industry and help in the diversification of supply chains in the long term.

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- **Increasing Storage** will play a key role in the hybrid project, particularly to overcome the intermittency of RE and enhance grid balancing.
- **Closed - envelope submissions:** Currently, the government is considering closed-envelope submissions. This could raise tariffs for wind energy and make it a more competitive market.
- **Improving the financial performance of DISCOMs** and increasing penalties for non-compliance with renewable purchase obligations should limit delays in signing PPAs with auction winners, making developers and investors more willing to undertake new utility-scale projects.
- **Increase rooftop PV deployment** in their grids should encourage them to attract tens of millions of potential prosumers by facilitating investment, thereby tripling main-case distributed PV deployment for 2022-2027

Hybrid Auctions

- Hybrid projects refers to innovative combinations of solar and wind power at a site. It can include solar, wind, and battery or pumped hydro storage. Bundling coal with renewables is also another option.
- Almost a quarter of the capacity awarded since 2021 has been contracted through hybrid auctions.
- These auctions are thus expected to be an increasingly important growth driver as the penetration of wind and PV technologies in India's power system grows and grid integration challenges emerge.

Source: DTE + TH

National Judicial Commission Bill, 2022

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

- National Judicial Commission Bill, 2022 was recently introduced in Rajya Sabha.

More about the news

- **About:**

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- NJAC, 2022 is a private member bill **to regulate the appointment of judges** through the National Judicial Commission was introduced in Rajya Sabha.
- **Aim:**
 - It aims to regulate the procedure to be followed by the National Judicial Commission for recommending people for appointment as the Chief Justice of India and other judges of the Supreme Court and Chief Justices and other judges of High Courts.
- **Highlights of the bill:**
 - **Transfer of Judges:**
 - The bill, if approved, will also regulate the transfers of Judges and lay down judicial standards.
 - **Accountability of judges:**
 - It will provide for accountability of judges, and establish a credible and **expedient mechanisms for investigating individual complaints for misbehaviour or incapacity of a judge** of the apex court or of a high court and to regulate the procedure for such investigation.
 - **Removal of judges:**
 - It also proposes the **presentation of an address by parliament to the president** in relation to proceeding for the removal of a judge and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

More about the National Judicial Commission (NJAC)

- **Significance:**
 - The need for the National Judicial Appointment Commission was aroused because many jurists criticised the existing collegium system, stating that **India is the only country where judges appoint themselves** and have the **power of determining their transfers**.
- **Statute for NJAC:**
 - The NJAC was proposed via the **National Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, 2014**.
 - In order to have a more transparent system, the National Judicial Appointment Commission Act was enacted.
 - The commission was established by the **99th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2014**.

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- The Act proposed that the members of NJAC would be composed of members from the legislative, judicial, and civil society.
- **Apex Court's action:**
 - In a collective order, in 2015, the Supreme Court by a majority of 4:1 struck down the NJAC Act, of 2014.
 - The NJAC Act was termed unconstitutional citing it as having affected the independence of the judiciary.

Issues with NJAC

- **SC's previous action:**
 - The concept of NJAC has come under the consideration of the Supreme Court three times in 1993, 1998, and 2016.
 - All three times, while giving importance to the independence of the judiciary, the Supreme Court dismissed the framework of the NJAC.
- **Issue of political influence:**
 - It is cited critics that the judiciary is the only independent institution left in the country.
 - It is harmful to allow political influence over it.
 - It is also stated that the collegium system is functioning smoothly.
 - There is scope for improvement, but not for any political interference. The central government should in no manner be allowed to control the appointment of the judiciary.
- **Culture of reciprocity:**
 - The involvement of the legislature in the appointment of judges might lead to the creation of a culture of 'reciprocity.'
 - Meaning that judges might have the feeling of having to pay back the political executive as a consideration for their appointment to the post of judge
- **Constitutional impossibility:**
 - The recent bill was opposed in the Rajya Sabha, calling it a "constitutional impossibility".

About Collegium system

- **About:**
 - Judges of **the High Courts and the Supreme Court** are appointed by the provisions mentioned in Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution of India.
 - **Articles 124 and 217** state that the President shall appoint judges to

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the Supreme Court and high courts after consultation with the Chief Justice of India and other judges.

- **Significance of the system:**
 - The collegium system was created **to maintain the basic structure of the Constitution** by keeping the **judiciary independent**.
 - It was also to ensure that the Chief Justice of India does not impose his or her individual opinion regarding the appointment of judges, but rather it is a collective opinion of the entire body.
- **Issues with the current collegium system:**
 - The collegium system **does not provide any guidelines or criteria** for the appointment of the Supreme Court judges and it increases the ambit of **favouritism**.
 - In the collegium system, there are no criteria for testing the candidate or for **doing a background check to establish the credibility of the candidate**.
 - The **absence of an administrative body** is also a reason for worry because it means that the members of the collegium system are **not answerable for the selection** of any of the judges.

Way ahead

- The matter is very critical and complex because, on the one hand, the judiciary should act independently, but on the other hand, the legislature and the executive cannot be completely excluded.
- The only reasonable solution is to frame NJAC Act in a manner in which the powers of legislature and executive are diluted but at the same time a guideline needs to be formed and the judicial appointment should be carried out in its accordance to ensure transparency and to give a methodical approach towards the appointment of judges.

Source: IE

Corruption in India

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

- Recently the **International Anti-Corruption Day-2022** was organised by the CBI on **'Anti-Corruption efforts – A sine qua non for Development and Security**.

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About the Corruption

- Corruption refers to misusing public power for personal gain. It can be done by an elected politician, civil servant, journalist, administrator of a school, or anyone in authority.
- Apart from public corruption, we also have private corruption between individuals and businesses.
 - Thus, the corruption definition applies to different forms.
- **Corruption in India:**
 - Corruption in India is not limited to collusive high-level scams. Petty corruption, which affects the delivery of basic services and rights to people, is rampant.
 - **Global surveys/indices:**
 - India has the highest rate of bribery and use of personal links to access public services such as healthcare and education in Asia, according to a survey released by **global civil society Transparency International**.
 - India is in the 85th position among 180 countries in the **Corruption Perception Index, 2021**.

Issues Linked to it

- Corruption has a disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable, increasing costs and reducing access to services, including health, education and justice.
- Corruption **encourages dysfunctionality** in government, **perpetrates economic inefficiency** and can be a serious **threat to national security**.
- the impact of corruption is especially heavy on common citizens, and even more on poorer and vulnerable persons in communities.
- **Changing nature of Corruption:** Since liberalisation in India, the nature of corruption has become more complex.
 - With technological development, there are opportunities to prevent corruption but also areas where corruption can be much more difficult to trace, particularly in fields like **cryptocurrency**.

Government initiatives:

- Indian government has constituted a **Special Investigation Team (SIT)** on black money.

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- It has enacted a comprehensive and more stringent new law – the **Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015**.
- There's also a **Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016**, which empowers the authorities to attach and confiscate benami properties.
- Law enforcement agencies such as CBI have done a great deal to reduce corruption.
- **Prevention of Corruption Act:**
 - The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to combat corruption in government agencies and public sector businesses in India.
 - **Amendment to the Act:**
 - As the Prevention of Corruption Act saw limited success in preventing corruption in Government departments and prosecuting and punishing public servants involved in corrupt practices, an amendment was enacted (Amendment Act) and brought into force in 2018.
 - The Amendment Act attempted to bring the Prevention of Corruption Act in line with United Nations Convention against Corruption 2005, which was ratified by India in 2011.
- **Right To Information Act, 2005**
 - The intent behind the enactment of the Act is to promote transparency and accountability in the working of Public Authorities.
- **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014**
 - The Act seeks to protect whistleblowers, i.e. persons making a public interest disclosure related to an act of corruption, misuse of power, or criminal offense by a public servant.
 - It is provided by the Right To Information Act, 2005, it has been an important weapon for whistleblowers in previous years.
 - The RTI Act, 2005 is also called as a 'twin sister' of whistleblowing.
- **The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013:**
 - The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013 provided for the establishment of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States.
 - The Lokayukta is an anti-corruption authority constituted at the state level.

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- It investigates allegations of corruption and mal-administration against public servants and is tasked with speedy redressal of public grievances.
- **The Lokpal and Lokayuktas (Amendment) Bill, 2016:**
 - The Bill amends the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 in relation to the declaration of assets and liabilities by public servants.
 - It requires a public servant to declare his assets and liabilities, and that of his spouse and dependent children.

Suggestions & way ahead

- Different steps can help in managing corruption and bringing it down.
- **Education:**
 - Education is one of the most critical steps. It can help in reinforcing the correct business practices.
 - Mandatory education courses like anti-money laundering must be introduced.
- **Accountability:**
 - Accountability mechanisms can also help in curbing corruption.
- **Efficient Reporting:**
 - Furthermore, it can be easier to reduce corruption if reporting it becomes simple.
- **Leading by the best practices:**
 - The senior employees in the management department must lead by example and cultivate an open and transparent culture.
- **Encouraging ethical culture:**
 - Similarly, rewards and incentives must be granted to encourage people to cultivate an ethical culture.
- **Need for innovative anti-corruption solutions:**
 - There is a the need for real-time information sharing between law enforcement agencies.

International Anti-Corruption Day (IACD)

- It has been observed annually, on 9 December, since the passage of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption on 31 October 2003
- **Significance of 2022 IACD:**
 - The 2022 IACD also marks the beginning of the twentieth anniversary of the UN Convention Against Corruption - UNCAC.
 - This is reflected by the theme of this year's international day, 'UNCAC at

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20: Uniting the World Against Corruption.'

- It seeks to highlight the **crucial link between anti-corruption and peace, security, and development.**

Source: IE

Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill

Gs 3 Conservation

In News

Recently, the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill 2022, was passed by Rajya Sabha.

Key Points

- **Present scenario:**
 - Rajya Sabha has invited scrutiny on two major issues:
 - The exemption made to allow the transfer of captive elephants, and
 - The sweeping powers given to the Centre to declare species as vermin.
- **Elephant dilemma:**
 - **Legal angle:**
 - The legal dilemma over the elephant's status — simultaneously an endangered wildlife species and a prized domestic animal — has persisted for long.
 - In 1897, the **Elephants' Preservation Act** prohibited the killing or capture of wild elephants unless in self-defence or to protect property and crops, or under a licence issued by the district collector.
 - In 1927, the **Indian Forest Act** listed the elephant as 'cattle', prescribing the highest fine of Rs 10 for every impounded jumbo — in comparison, a cow attracted a fine of Re 1, and a camel of Rs 2.
 - The **Wildlife (Protection) Act (WLPA), 1972**, identified the elephant, along with the bullock, camel, donkey, horse, and mule, as a "vehicle".

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- Given the highest legal protection in 1977, the elephant is the only animal in **WLPA's Schedule-I** that can still be owned legally — by means of inheritance or gift.
- In 2003, **Section 3 of the WLPA** prohibited trade in all captive wildlife and any (non-commercial) transfer across state boundaries without permission from the concerned chief wildlife warden.
- **Latest development:**
 - The **WLPA (Amendment) Bill 2021** proposed an exception to Section 43: This section shall not apply to the transfer or transport of any live elephant by a person having a certificate of ownership, where such person has obtained prior permission from the State Government on fulfilment of such conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.
- **The changed Bill, still vague:**
 - The transfer or transport of a captive elephant for a religious or any other purpose by a person having a valid certificate of ownership, subject to such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.
- **Criticism of the move:**
 - The blanket exemption is objected to by Animal welfare Groups, and it should be limited to temple elephants kept for religious purposes.
 - The prohibition on commercial transfer only drove the live elephant trade underground as traders switched to dressing up commercial deals as gift deeds to bypass the 2003 amendment.
 - The sweeping ambit of “any other purpose” in the present amendment will empower elephant traders, put wild populations at greater risk of capture, and defeat the very purpose of WLPA.
- **Favoring the move:**
 - The 2003 amendment did not benefit captive elephants who suffer when their owners fail to bear the expenses of their upkeep, particularly in the **post-Covid scenario**, and allowing such owners to transfer their elephants legally to those willing to and capable of looking after the animals is a welcome step.
- **The vermin conflict:**
 - **Problems to Farmers:** The damage due to crop depredation by wild animals has never been computed. But for lakhs of farmers around the many protected forests, it is the biggest challenge to livelihood, not to mention the occasional threat to life.

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- Since **1972**, the **WLPA** has identified a few species — fruit bats, common crows and rats — as vermin or nuisance animals that spread diseases or destroy crops and are not protected under the Act.
- **Killing animals outside this list was allowed under two circumstances:**
 - **Under Section 62 of WLPA**, given sufficient reasons, any species other than those accorded the highest legal protection (such as tiger and elephant but not wild boar or nilgai) can be declared vermin at a certain place for a certain time.
 - **Under Section 11 of WLPA**, the chief wildlife warden can allow the killing of an animal irrespective of its status in the Schedules, if it becomes “dangerous to human life.”
- **Decision making authority:**
 - The state governments took the decisions under Section 62 until 1991 when an amendment handed these powers to the Centre.
 - In recent years, however, the Centre has started using its powers under Section 62 to issue **sweeping orders** declaring species as vermin at even state levels, often without any credible scientific assessment.
- **Culling of Animals:**
 - **Wildlife targets crops either because:**
 - **There is insufficient food inside forests:** Stopping their access to non-forest food by electric fences, etc. may make them starve and bring down the population over time.
 - Contraptions such as electric fencing divert animals to the next village and merely shift conflict. Used extensively, it turns forests into fenced-in zoos without enough food.
 - **Fields offer more nutrient alternatives like sugarcane or maize:** Measures such as creating buffer zones so that crops do not stand at the edge of the forest, or promoting non-edible crops, may discourage but not eliminate conflict.
 - Effective compensation schemes work where the damage is reasonable. Elsewhere, the only option is to reduce the number of habitual crop raiders.
 - **Secret hunting:**
 - The absence of a legal option has not stopped farmers from secretly hunting ‘problem’ animals.

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- These unregulated culling encourages a practice that often extends to **poaching** of non-pest, rare and endangered species.

Way Ahead

- A wildlife standing committee with few members and in-depth technical knowledge for evolving effective site-specific plans/ mitigation strategies including recommendations on changing cropping patterns and for taking critical decisions at short notice, empowered under the law, is necessary.
- The controversial clause in the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021 that allows the “transfer and transport” of live elephants while recommending that the government could bring in additional checks to allow sale and purchase by religious institutions, should be amended.
- The well-planned, integrated approaches to managing human-wildlife conflict can reduce conflicts and lead to a form of coexistence between people and animals.

Human-animal Conflict:

- It refers to the interaction between wild animals and humans which results in a negative impact on people, animals, resources, and habitats.

Source: IE + TH + PRINT

Bt Brinjal Biopiracy Case

Gs 3 Environmental Pollution & Degradation

In News

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has ordered the Karnataka High Court to continue hearing **public interest litigation (PIL) on biopiracy** which it had sent to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2013.

About

- **Original PIL:**
 - A decade ago, Environment Support Group (ESG) filed a PIL before the Karnataka High Court.

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- It had stated that the seed of the Bt Brinjal, developed by the public-private partnership, was created by **accessing six varieties of indigenous brinjal seeds illegally.**
- The high court then transferred the petition to the NGT.
- **Current Status:**
 - The SC has now restored the petition back to the high court stating that the NGT did not have the power to look into petitions challenging the constitutional validity.

- **Biopiracy:**
 - Biopiracy is the term used to refer to the use of bio-resources by multinational companies and other organisations without proper authorisation from the countries and people concerned without compensatory payment.
- **Bt brinjal**
 - Brinjal has been genetically modified by inserting a protein gene from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* to give protection against certain pests.
 - The result is Bt brinjal

Source: DTE

Inclusion of Medicinal plant species in IUCN Red List

GS 3 species

In News

Three medicinal plant species found in the Himalayas have made it to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species following a recent assessment.

About

- **Meizotropis pellita**, commonly known as Patwa, is a perennial shrub with restricted distribution that is endemic to Uttarakhand.
- The species is listed as '**critically endangered**' based on its limited area of occupancy (less than 10 sq. km).
 - The species is threatened by deforestation, habitat fragmentation and forest fires.

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- The essential oil extracted from the leaves of the species possesses strong antioxidants and can be a **promising natural substitute for synthetic antioxidants** in pharmaceutical industries.
- **Fritillaria cirrhosa (Himalayan fritillary)** is a perennial bulbous herb.
 - “It is reasonable to conclude a decline of at least 30% of its population over the assessment period (22 to 26 years).
 - Considering the rate of decline, long generation length, poor germination potential, high trade value, extensive harvesting pressure and illegal trade, the species is listed as ‘**vulnerable**.’
 - In China, the species is used for the treatment of **bronchial disorders and pneumonia**. The plant is also a strong **cough suppressant** and source of expectorant drugs in traditional Chinese medicine
- **Dactylorhiza hatagirea (Salampanja)**: The third listed species, Dactylorhiza hatagirea (Salampanja), is threatened by habitat loss, livestock grazing, deforestation, and climate change.
 - It is extensively used in **Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and other** alternative systems of medicine to cure dysentery, gastritis, chronic fever, cough and stomach aches.
 - It is a perennial tuberous species endemic to the Hindu Kush and Himalayan ranges of Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan.
 - It has been assessed as ‘**endangered species**’

Source: TH

Scramjet engine

Gs 3 Space

In News

Scramjet engine’s hot test was conducted successfully at ISRO’s Propulsion Research Complex in Tamil Nadu

About scramjet

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- A scramjet engine is an improvement over the ramjet engine as it efficiently operates at hypersonic speeds and allows supersonic combustion.
 - Thus it is known as Supersonic Combustion Ramjet, or Scramjet.
- It allows supersonic combustion by breathing oxygen from the atmosphere and allows the oxygen to mix with hydrogen already stored in the vehicle to trigger combustion, and produce the desired thrust to lift the satellite to its designated orbit.

Ramjets

- A ramjet is a form of air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor.
- Fuel is injected in the combustion chamber where it mixes with the hot compressed air and ignites.
- A ramjet-powered vehicle requires an assisted take-off like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.
- Ramjets work most efficiently at supersonic speeds around Mach 3 (three times the speed of sound) and can operate up to speeds of Mach 6. However, the ramjet efficiency starts to drop when the vehicle reaches hypersonic speeds.

Source:TH

Extension of PM SVANidhi Scheme

Gs 3 Growth and Development

In News:

The Government of India has extended the PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme beyond March 2022

About PM SVANidhi Scheme

- PM SVANidhi is a Central Sector Scheme to facilitate street vendors to access affordable working capital loan for resuming their livelihoods activities, after easing of lockdown.
- It has been extended with the following provisions:

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- Extension of lending period till December 2024;
- Introduction of 3rd loan of upto ₹50,000 in addition to 1st & 2nd loans of ₹10,000 and ₹20,000 respectively.
- To extend 'SVANidhi Se Samridhi' component for all beneficiaries of PM SVANidhi scheme across the country;
- 42 lakh street vendors are to be provided benefits under PM SVANidhi Scheme by December 2024.

Source: PIB

Okavango delta

Gs 3 Conservation

In Context

- Recently, Oil companies are seen threatening Africa's iconic biodiversity hotspots like the Okavango delta in an effort to drill for oil.

More about the Okavango delta

- **About:**
 - This delta is located in north-west Botswana comprises permanent marshlands and seasonally flooded plains.
 - The Okavango delta is formed by the Okavango river, which originates in the highlands of Angola.
- **Recognitions:**
 - The Okavango delta is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in southern Africa.**
 - The delta was named as one of the Seven Natural Wonders of Africa.
- **Significant characteristics:**
 - **Endorheic delta:**
 - The Okavango Delta is one of a very few large inland delta systems without an outlet to the sea, known as an endorheic delta
 - Its waters drain instead into the desert sands of the Kalahari Basin.
 - **Flooding pattern:**

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- One of the unique characteristics of the site is that the annual flooding from the River Okavango occurs during the dry season, with the result that the native plants and animals have synchronized their biological cycles with these seasonal rains and floods.
- It is an exceptional example of the interaction between climatic, hydrological and biological processes.
- **Inhabitants:**
 - The delta is home to Africa's Big Five wildlife species: Savanna elephants, Cape buffaloes, rhinos, lions and leopards.
 - There are also giraffes, zebras, antelopes, pangolins, 400 bird species and over 1,000 plant species.
 - The delta is also the homeland of indigenous people like the San.

Source:DTE

Singapore Declaration

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

- The “Singapore Declaration”, was recently adopted during the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting of the International Labour Organisation (APRM of ILO).

More about the declaration

- **Social dialogue:**
 - The declaration said **social dialogue is key** to building trust, and resilient labour market institutions.
 - It is essential to sustained recovery and inclusive and sustainable growth, and needs to be strengthened in the regions.
- **Labour protection:**
 - It urged the governments to **ensure labour protection** for all through the promotion of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining throughout the regions.
 - It will be including for workers in vulnerable situations and workers in the informal economy, as enabling rights for decent work.

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- **Closing gender gaps:**
 - It called for **closing gender gaps** in the world of work through measures that increase women's labour force participation, promote equal pay for work of equal value, balance work, and responsibilities, and promote women's leadership.
- **Inclusive programs and policies:**
 - It suggested that governments must develop and implement **inclusive labour market programs and policies** that support life transitions and demographic shifts.
- **Informal to the formal economy:**
 - Pursue collective and determined efforts to promote and accelerate a smooth and sustained transition from the informal to formal economy.
- **Labor migration:**
 - The declaration also urged the governments to strengthen governance frameworks and respect for freedom of association to protect the rights of migrant workers, including improved accommodation, protection of wages, and extension of social protection and, where appropriate, through enhanced bilateral labor migration agreements between both sending and receiving countries.
 - Tripartite mechanisms should help promote cooperation between constituents to mitigate negative impacts and harness opportunities that arise from labour migration.
- **Protection in situations of crisis:**
 - It wanted the governments to facilitate the transition to peace, security and decent work in situations of crisis.

Source:TH

Stillbirth

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

A new study has found that countries with **higher rates of stillborn babies** had higher amounts of **fine particulate air pollution**.

Key Findings

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- **India** leads the list with the **highest average number of stillbirths** — 217,000 out of 25 million births each year.
- India was followed by Pakistan (110,000), Nigeria (93,000), China (64,000) and Bangladesh (49,000).
- The highest fraction of stillbirths attributable to particulate matter (PM) 2.5 pollution are:
 - Qatar (71.16 per cent);
 - Saudi Arabia (68.38 per cent);
 - Kuwait (66.08 per cent);
 - Niger (65.68 per cent) and
 - the United Arab Emirates (64.63 per cent)
- South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arabian Desert were hotspots of PM 2.5-related stillbirths due to high exposure and baseline stillbirth rate.
- The study covered 137 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where **98 percent** of stillbirths occurred.

About Stillbirth

- A stillbirth is the death or loss of a baby before or during delivery.
- Both miscarriage and stillbirth describe pregnancy loss, but they differ according to when the loss occurs.
- **World Health Organization's Classification** : A baby who dies after **28 weeks of pregnancy**, but before or during birth, is classified as a stillbirth.
- **Concerns:**
 - There are nearly **2 million stillbirths every year**, one each 16 seconds.
 - Over **40 percent** of all stillbirths occur **during labour**.
- **Prevention:**
 - Improved quality and **respectful care** during childbirth.
 - Routine monitoring and timely access to **emergency obstetric care** when required.

Source: DTE

Section 10 A of the Divorce Act, 1869

Gs 2

In News

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Recently, the Kerala high court (HC) **struck down the one-year waiting period (the cooling-off period)** for couples seeking divorce through mutual consent, holding it unconstitutional.

Key Points

- The order said the provision contained in **Section 10A of the Divorce Act (1869)** robbed people of their **right to liberty**.
- The judgment added that “ **Religion has no place** in identifying common good”.
- The HC asked the Union government to **consider bringing a uniform marriage law** in India.
- **Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** declares that everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating fundamental rights granted by the Constitution or by law.

Section 10A of the Divorce Act (1869)

- It mandated a **one-year wait from the marriage date** to file the plea.
- It requires the couple to be **separated for at least two years**.
- The couple needed to provide that they have **not been living as husband and wife during this period**.

Way Ahead

- There is a need to promote the **common welfare of spouses** in matrimonial disputes.
- In a secular country, the **legal paternalistic approach** should be on the common good of the citizens rather than based on religion.

Source: IE + HT + TOI

Distorted use of fertilisers

Gs 2 and Gs 3 Government policies & Intervention : Agriculture

In News

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- Recent data from the Department of Fertilisers shows a 3.7 per cent increase in the sale of urea during April-October 2022 over the corresponding seven months of the previous year.

More about the news

- **Issue:**
 - Two ambitious schemes of the incumbent government — **Soil Health Card** and **mandatory neem-coating of urea** — were supposed to promote balanced use of fertilisers.
 - **Urea:**
 - However, far from weaning farmers from urea, annual consumption of this nitrogenous fertiliser has risen from 30 to 35 million tonnes (mt) in the last five years.
 - **DAP:**
 - There is a another fertiliser — di-ammonium phosphate or DAP — that is seeing a similar phenomenon of over-application
 - **Sales of all other fertilisers:**
 - Sales of other fertilisers including complexes containing nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), K (potash) and sulphur (S) in different proportions – have fallen.
 - **Imbalanced use:**
 - In other words, instead of balanced use of plant nutrients based on soil testing and specific crop requirement, Indian farmers are effectively applying just urea and DAP — both high-analysis fertilisers containing 46 per cent N and P respectively.
- **Outcome:**
 - The effects of these – the current NPK ratio is about 13:5:1, as against the ideal 4:2:1 – would ultimately show up in crop yields.
 - Plants, like humans, will respond poorly to fertilisers if only one or two nutrients are given in excess.

Reasons behind this imbalance

- **Underpricing of other fertilizers:**

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- Government has fixed maximum retail prices of Urea & DAP. It has informally-fixed MRPs for NPKS complexes and muriate of potash (MOP).
- Prices of other fertilizers compared to Urea & DAP **are relatively higher**. So farmers have **little incentive to buy other fertilizers**.
- The fact that DAP does not contain K, S or other macro and micro nutrients wouldn't matter to a majority of farmers.
- For them, **choice of fertilisers is primarily a function of prices**.
- **Subsidisation & political motives:**
 - Underpricing of urea (a historical phenomenon) and DAP (recent) is a product of subsidy-induced market distortions.
 - High government subsidies are behind the low pricing, and high sales, of these two fertilisers.
 - The compulsions of electoral politics have clearly trumped concerns over soil nutrient imbalances.
- **Supply-side constraints:**
 - India is facing a **tight supply position in fertilisers**, especially of phosphatic and potassic nutrients.
 - The challenges include securing **supply from new sources, costlier raw material, and logistics**.
 - The pandemic has impacted fertilizer production, import and transportation across the world.

Government initiatives to rationalise the fertiliser use

- **The Soil Health Card Scheme:** Soil health card provides information to farmers on nutrient status of their soil along with recommendation on appropriate dosage of nutrients to be applied for improving soil health and its fertility.
 - **Objectives:**
 - To issue soil health cards every two years to all farmers, so as to provide a basis to address nutrient deficiencies in fertilization practices.
- **Neem Coated Urea (NCU):** It is a fertilizer and an agriculture scheme is supported by the Government of India to boost the growth of wheat and paddy.
 - Apart from the increase in yield, Neem Coated Urea application has other use full effect in paddy and wheat crops.

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- Farmers have observed that the incidence of white ant was reduced with the use of Neem coated Urea in wheat crop. This is because of **fragrance of Neem oil that on dissolution** was released in the standing water in the standing water and **insecticidal properties of Neem**.
- The move will **not only benefit the environment** and improve farmers' lives, but **curb illegal urea diversion for industrial use**.
- **'One Nation, One Fertilizer' scheme:**
 - Under the scheme, all fertiliser companies, **State Trading Entities (STEs)** and **Fertiliser Marketing Entities (FMEs)** will be required to use a single **"Bharat" brand for fertilisers and logo** under the PMBJP.
 - The new "Bharat" brand name and PMBJP logo will cover two-thirds of the front of the fertiliser packet.

Suggestions & Way ahead

- The government should replace subsidies on individual fertiliser products with a **flat per-hectare cash transfer, maybe twice a year**.
- Every farmer can have an **e-wallet account** into which this money can be credited **before the kharif and rabi planting seasons**.
 - The e-wallet **may be used only for the purchase of fertilisers**.

The government **can maintain a stock of basic fertilisers**, including urea and DAP, **to ensure no untoward price rise even in a decontrol scenario**.

Document on terror acts at the UN Security Council.

Gs 2 Agreements Involving India &/or Affecting India's Interests

In News

- Recently India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations circulated a document on terror acts at the UN Security Council.

More about the document highlights

- **Categorising terrorism:**
 - The document stated that the era of classifying terrorists as "bad" or "good" on the basis of "political convenience" must end immediately.

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- It also stated that categorising terror acts as "bad" or "good" on intent as religious or ideologically motivated will dilute the shared global commitment to fighting terrorism.
- **Recent history of terror attacks:**
 - The terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, were a turning point in the global approach to counter-terrorism.
 - Since then, London, Mumbai, Paris, and many parts of West Asia and Africa have also experienced terrorist attacks.
- **Transnational threat of terrorism:**
 - Terrorist actors and their supporters, facilitators, and financiers collaborate while remaining in different jurisdictions to organise acts anywhere in the world.
 - A transnational threat can be defeated only by the collective efforts of all States Members of the United Nations.
 - It said that existing and emerging threats call for a renewed collective approach to terrorism.
- **Terrorism sheltering in Afghanistan:**
 - The threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, Al-Qaida, Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent and terrorist groups sheltering in Afghanistan has increased following the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in August 2021.
- **Terrorism from Africa:**
 - Africa's home-grown terrorist groups have found ideological support from global terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and ISIL.
- **Radicalisation through the internet:**
 - The risk of radicalisation through the Internet and social media, and terror financing using cryptocurrencies and crowdfunding platforms, was heightened, particularly during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

India's presidency at UNSC

- **About:**
 - India assumed the monthly presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
 - This is the second time of monthly presidency in India's two-year tenure as an elected member of the Council in 2021-22.
 - India had earlier assumed the UNSC presidency in August 2021.
- **Events:**
 - India in its presidency will hold two signature events on **reformed**

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multilateralism and counter-terrorism.

- India's External Affairs Minister will chair the events.
- India also proposed to organise a briefing of the Security Council on '**Global counter-terrorism approach – principles and the way forward**'.
 - The briefing will be organised under the 'Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts' subject.

Terrorism

- An offence to intimidate a population or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act, which causes:
 - Death or serious bodily injury to any person.
 - Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment.
 - Damage to property, places, facilities, or systems resulting in or likely to result in a major economic loss.
 - It encompasses a range of complex threats like organized terrorism in conflict zones, foreign terrorist fighters, radicalised 'lone wolves', etc.
- **Factors Responsible for Growth of Terrorism:**
 - State-sponsorship and safe havens.
 - State-of-the-art communication systems.
 - Access to advanced technology.
 - Networking of terrorist groups with the criminal underworld.

Source: TH

Groundwater Protection

Gs 1

In News

The **United Nations-Water Summit on Groundwater 2022** underlined that **groundwater must be protected** at all costs since it is key to **global food production and food security**.

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Major Highlights

- **About the Conference:**
 - The conference was organised by UN-Water, UNESCO and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre.
 - The summit was organised to **raise awareness on groundwater conservation** at the global stage.
 - It also marked the completion of the “**Groundwater: Making the invisible visible**” campaign run by UN-Water throughout 2022.
- **UN 2023 Water Conference:**
 - The UN 2023 water conference in New York City offers **unprecedented potential for progress on SDG 6** (Sustainable Development Goal 6 is about clean water and sanitation for all) and all water-related goals of the 2023 agenda.
- **Groundwater management:**
 - It needs to apply **five acceleration instruments** to ensure that this succeeds:
 - Governance
 - Data and information
 - Innovation
 - Capacity development
 - Finance
- **Coalition:**
 - A coalition was formed on transboundary water cooperation.
 - Transboundary waters accounted for 60 percent of the freshwater that flowed globally.
 - Only 32 countries have 90 percent or more of their transboundary basin and aquifer area covered by operational agreements.
 - The gap between water supply and demand is increasing. So the combination of these three facts can represent a huge potential for future conflicts or it can be a driver of mutually beneficial cooperation.
- **South Asia:**
 - South Asia was the largest consumer of groundwater in the world today.
 - As of today, in the region, we are drawing over 600 billion cubic metres of groundwater every year — both from transboundary aquifers and from water sources that are very ancient.
 - This groundwater once drawn for use cannot be recharged back.

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- South Asia hosts not more than five percent of the global land cover.
- But it hosts more than a third of the irrigated land and more than a fourth of the global population.
- About 85 percent of the water required for irrigation to produce food and 90 percent of drinking water is drawn from groundwater in south Asia.
- The huge extraction of groundwater is also drying out the rivers. This is another big challenge for this region.

Threat to Groundwater

- **Degradation from human activities**, often associated with poor land, agricultural, and waste management threatens:
 - Current uses of groundwater and
 - Human and ecosystem health
 - Limits benefits of future generations
- The problem is more pronounced in South Asia because much of the groundwater is **heterogenous**. Some 70 percent of groundwater is hosted only in 30 percent of land cover in south Asia and the rest is hosted in **areas covered by Himalayan rivers**.
- **Water pollution** is another issue as much of the groundwater is polluted by contaminants like **arsenic and Fluoride**. More than 400 million people are exposed to these pollutants. So, it is not just a quantity issue but also a water quality issue in India.

Significance

- Ground water has become an **increasingly important natural resource** catering to the fresh water requirements of various sectors in India.
- Ground water has steadily emerged as the **backbone of India's agriculture and drinking water security**.
- Groundwater is the principal water source for a **fourth of the world's population**. India is the world's largest groundwater user; nearly 250 cubic kilometres was taken out in 2017.
- About 90% of this was used for irrigation, the rest went to towns and villages.

Way Ahead

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- **Governance, actions and investments** on groundwater should be prioritized in vulnerable and climate change / hazard-exposed regions, including sub-Saharan Africa, Small Island Developing States and coastal zones, areas with no or slowly renewable and vulnerable aquifers, and aquifers with naturally occurring but hazardous contaminants, like arsenic
- The focus should be on **underserved and hard-to-reach communities**, including women, youth, and indigenous people.
- **Actions for building capacity** should be taken in order to better govern and manage groundwater and achieve **sustainable development goals (SDG)**.
- **Protection of groundwater** must be guaranteed across all sectors including agriculture.
- South Asian governments need to strengthen an **integrated water management** which involves both surface water and groundwater.

Source: DTE

New Syria Escalation

GS 2 Effect of Policies & Politics of Developed & Developing Countries on India's Interests

In News

After weeks of **deadly Turkish airstrikes in northern Syria**, Kurdish forces and international players are trying to gauge whether **Turkey's threats of a ground invasion** are serious.

Key Points

- **Present Scenario:**
 - Turkish President has repeatedly warned of a new land incursion to drive Kurdish groups away from the Turkish-Syrian border, following a deadly bombing in Istanbul.
 - In the most recent development, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister flew to Turkey this week for talks on the situation in Syria.
- **Human Rights Watch:**
 - It has warned that the strikes are exacerbating a humanitarian crisis by disrupting power, fuel and aid.

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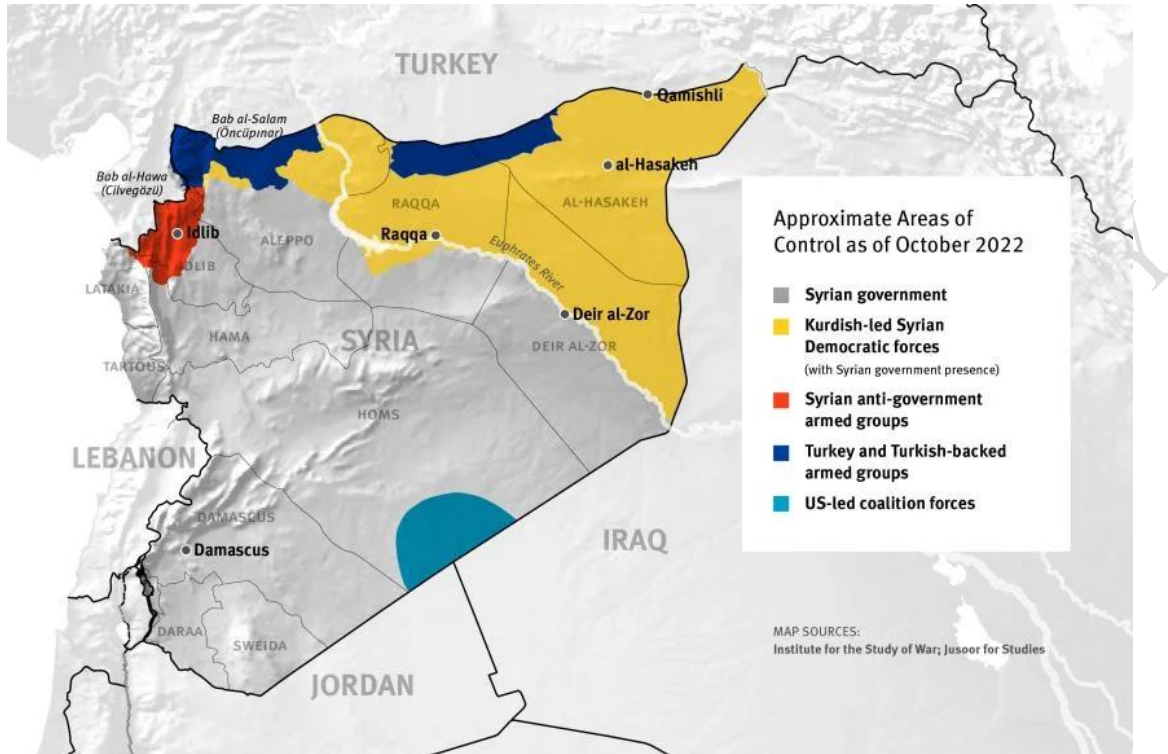


Image Courtesy: [HRW](#)

Different Foreign Powers Angle in this Scenario

- **Turkey:**
 - Turkey sees the Kurdish forces along its border with Syria as a threat and has launched three major military incursions since 2016, taking control of large swaths of territory.
 - The President of Turkey hopes to relocate many of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey to northern Syria and has begun building housing units there.
 - The plan could **address growing anti-refugee sentiment in Turkey** and bolster Erdogan’s support ahead of next year’s elections, while diluting historically Kurdish-majority areas by resettling non-Kurdish Syrian refugees there.
 - There are also plans to create a 30-kilometer (19-mile) **security corridor** in areas currently under Kurdish control. A planned

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Turkish invasion earlier this year was halted amid opposition by the U.S. and Russia.

- **Kurds:**

- Kurdish groups are pressing the U.S. and Russia, both of which have military posts in northern Syria, to once again prevent Turkey from carrying out its threats.
- The Kurds are worried that the West will stand aside this time to **appease Ankara** in exchange for approval of Sweden and Finland joining NATO.
- Kurdish groups, which fought against the Islamic State group alongside the U.S.-led coalition and now guard thousands of captured IS fighters and family members, warn that a Turkish escalation would threaten efforts to stamp out the extremist group.

- **Syria:**

- **Insurgents:**

- The so-called Syrian National Army, a coalition of Turkey-backed Syrian opposition groups with tens of thousands of fighters, would likely provide foot soldiers for any future ground offensive.
- In previous incursions, the SNA was accused of committing atrocities against Kurds and displacing tens of thousands from their homes.
- SNA states that they were ordered by Turkish authorities not to speak about plans for a new incursion.

- **Government:**

- The Syrian government has opposed past Turkish incursions but also sees the SDF as a secessionist force and a Trojan horse for the U.S., which has imposed paralyzing sanctions on the government of Bashar Assad.
- Damascus and Ankara have recently been moving to improve relations after 11 years of tension triggered by Turkey's backing of opposition fighters in Syria's civil war.
- Damascus has kept relatively quiet about the killing of Syrian soldiers in the recent Turkish strikes.

- **US:**

- The United States maintains a small military presence in northern Syria, where its strong backing of the SDF has infuriated Turkey.
- However, the U.S. at first said little publicly about the Turkish airstrikes, speaking more forcefully only after they hit dangerously

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close to U.S. troops and led to anti-IS patrols being temporarily halted.

- U.S.' assurances for Kurds, worried that the U.S. might abandon them to coax a NATO deal out of Turkey: There had been no changes to U.S. policy in the region.
- **Russia:**
 - Russia is the Syrian government's closest ally. Its involvement in Syria's conflict helped turn the tide in favour of Assad.
 - Although Turkey and Russia support rival sides in the conflict, the two have coordinated closely in Syria's north.
 - In recent months, Russia has pushed for a reconciliation between Damascus and Ankara.
 - Moscow has voiced concerns over Turkey's recent military actions in northern Syria and has attempted to broker a deal.

Source: IE

Prevalence of Anaemia in Men

Gs 2

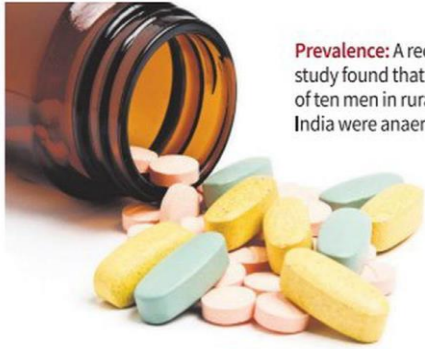
In News

- Recently, critics have said that anaemia among adolescent girls and boys and women has been studied extensively but **anaemia in men has been largely ignored.**

What is Anaemia?

Is iron supplementation needed for rural men?

Men are considered to have anaemia if haemoglobin concentration is less than 13.0 g/dL



Prevalence: A recent study found that three out of ten men in rural areas in India were anaemic.

■ While iron deficiency is the main cause of anaemia, particularly in women, other causes of anaemia are deficiency in folate, vitamin B12, or vitamin A

■ The latest study does not categorically state that anaemia in rural men is due

to iron deficiency as only haemoglobin concentration data were available

■ Anaemia in men may not be due to iron deficiency as men do not lose iron every month through menstruation

■ Men do not lose iron unless

they are bleeding from somewhere, or have some abnormal haemoglobin like thalassemia or sickle cell anaemia

■ Capillary blood samples were used for measuring haemoglobin. This can overestimate anaemia prevalence by as much as 33% to 50% in women, which may be the case in men too

■ Providing iron supplementation for men to tackle anaemia without knowing the cause may not be prudent

■ The focus should be on increasing the diversity of foods to improve iron and vitamin intake in men, without relying on iron supplementation

• **Meaning**

- Anaemia is a condition in which the **number of red blood cells or the haemoglobin concentration within them is lower than normal.**
 - **Haemoglobin is needed to carry oxygen** and if you have too few or abnormal red blood cells, or not enough haemoglobin, there will be a decreased capacity of the blood to carry oxygen to the body's tissues.

• **Causes of Anaemia**

- The most common causes of anaemia **include nutritional deficiencies which include iron deficiency.**
- Though **deficiencies in folate, vitamins B12 and A are also important causes;** haemoglobinopathies; and infectious diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and parasitic infections.

• **Symptoms**

- It includes **fatigue, weakness, dizziness and drowsiness.**
- **Children and pregnant women** are especially vulnerable, with an increased risk of maternal and child mortality.

• **Treatment**

- While iron deficiency anaemia is the most common form and is **relatively easy to treat** through dietary changes.

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- Other forms of anaemia require **health interventions** that may be less accessible.
- **Implications**
 - **It affects cognitive and physical development** in children and reduces productivity in adults.
 - Anaemia is an **indicator of both poor nutrition and poor health.**
 - It can also **impact other global nutritional concerns** such as stunting and wasting, low birth weight and childhood overweight and obesity due to lack of energy to exercise.
 - **School performance in children and reduced work productivity in adults** due to anaemia can have further social and economic impacts for the individual and family.

Data/Facts on Anaemia

- **The Lancet Global Health**
 - It revealed that nearly one in four men (23.2%) in the age group 15-54 years in India were anaemic (mild, moderate, or severe).
- **WHO Estimates**
 - WHO estimates that 42% of children less than 5 years of age and 40% of pregnant women worldwide are anaemic.
- **Fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)**
 - It found that three out of ten men in rural areas were anaemic.
 - Prevalence of anaemia was more in rural areas than in urban areas.

Government Interventions

- **Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB)**
 - It is a strategy with the target to reduce anaemia in women, children and adolescents in a life cycle approach.
 - **It includes** Testing of anaemia using digital methods and point-of-care treatment.
- **Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS)**
 - Government implements Anganwadi Services, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and a Scheme for Adolescent Girls under the Umbrella of ICDS as targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.

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- **POSHAN Abhiyaan:** It is a flagship national nutrition mission to improve nutrition among children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- **Introduction of community-based programmes**
- The introduction of community-based programmes for severe acute malnutrition, Jan Andolans, and community-based events, as well as the strengthening collaboration across departments has led to the implementation of a holistic approach to addressing malnutrition.
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** It is a school meal programme in India designed to better the nutritional standing of school-age children.

Way forward/ Suggestions

- **Biological viewpoint:** Men are not so likely to be iron deficiency as men do not lose iron every month through menstruation.
 - In fact, men do not lose iron unless they are bleeding from somewhere or have some abnormal haemoglobin like thalassemia or sickle cell anaemia.
- **Extension of policies:** The benefits of existing programmes and policies related to anaemia eradication should be extended to men as well.
- **Targeted interventions among susceptible groups of rural men** are advised to reduce the prevalence of anaemia.
- **Need of accurate calculation measures:** factor that might have overestimated the prevalence of anaemia in rural men is the use of capillary blood samples to measure haemoglobin.
 - Capillary blood samples inflate anaemia prevalence by as much as 33% to 50% in women.
- **Proper nutrition:** The need of the hour is to increase the diversity of foods to improve iron and vitamin intake in men, without chemicals.

Source:IE

Lecanemab

GS 2 Health

In News

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The drug, lecanemab, jointly developed by pharma companies Biogen and Eisai, was tested on patients with early Alzheimer's.

About Lecanemab

- Lecanemab belongs to a class of drugs called monoclonal antibodies.
- These antibody-mediated drugs target beta-amyloid, the protein deposition that is seen in patients with Alzheimer's disease, and disrupts cell function.
- Lecanemab appears to have shown modest effects in early dementia both via clinical improvements (scores in the CDR and ADAS-Cog rating scales) and reduction in amyloid plaques.

Source: TH

Biennale

GS 1 Art and culture

In News

Recently, the fifth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale opened

What are art Biennales?

- It is an international large-scale showcase of art that takes place every two years at a particular site
- It is usually non-commercial enterprises – unlike art fairs – that center around a curatorial theme.
- **History**
 - One of the most prestigious and oldest biennales in the world, the Venice Biennale was established through a resolution by the city council in 1893 to celebrate national artistic talent.
 - With its rising popularity, the 1900s saw the emergence of Biennales across the world, with Bienal de São Paulo being instituted as the first non-European biennial in 1951.
 - In 2009, a global Biennale Foundation was established with an “aim to create a platform for dialogue, networking, and knowledge sharing among contemporary art biennials around the world”.

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The significance of art biennales

- Biennales help showcase art, and often named after the host city, they become a reason for local pride, promoting cultural tourism and generating revenue through visitors.

A brief history of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

- An artist-led endeavour, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale was founded in 2011 by Kerala-born, Mumbai-based artists Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu with an aim to “create a platform that will introduce contemporary, global visual art theory and practice to India.”

Source: IE

Namami Gange Programme

Gs 3 Conservation

In News

The Union government’s flagship Namami Gange programme, conceived to improve the sanitation levels in the Ganga river is now geared towards conservation, tourism, and providing economic livelihoods.

- the thrust of decisions focused on having the Tourism Ministry develop a “comprehensive plan” for developing tourism circuits along the Ganga in line with “**Arth Ganga,**” organic farming, and cultural activities.

About

- Arth Ganga, or harnessing economic potential from the Ganga, follows from a directive by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December 2019 after chairing a similar meeting of the Ganga task force.

About ‘Namami Gange Programme’

- It is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as a ‘Flagship Programme’ by the Union Government in June 2014 with a budget outlay of Rs.20,000 Crore to accomplish the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation, and rejuvenation of the National River Ganga.

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- It is dynamic and evolving in nature to address the emerging needs and priorities for the rejuvenation of river Ganga & its tributaries.
- The main pillars of the Namami Gange Programme are
 - Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure
 - River-Front Development
 - River-Surface Cleaning
 - Bio-Diversity
 - Afforestation
 - Public Awareness
 - Industrial Effluent Monitoring
 - Ganga Gram

Source: TH

New framework for UG Courses

GS 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** is expected to announce a **new credit and curriculum framework** for under-graduate programmes.

Curriculum and Credit Framework for the Undergraduate Programme (CCFUGP)

- **About:**
 - It will replace the **Choice Based Credit System** that pre-dates the NEP.
 - The framework is **recommendatory** and not compulsory in nature.
- **Aim:**
 - To implement the recommendations in the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 for making higher education multidisciplinary.
- **Multiple Entries and Exits:** It will allow students multiple entries and exits
 - completing the first year will fetch a student a certificate,
 - two years will get them a diploma,
 - after three years they will get a bachelor's degree, and
 - after four years a bachelor's degree with honours.
- **Various Courses:**

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- Major stream courses, minor stream courses along with courses from other disciplines, modern Indian language and English language, skill enhancement courses and value added courses.
- The **value added courses** common to all students could carry 6 to 8 credits and will include subjects like understanding India, environmental science, digital and technological solutions, health and wellness, yoga education, sports, and fitness.
- There will be **separate skill enhancement courses** aimed at imparting practical skills, hands-on training and soft skills in order to enhance the employability of students.
- **Vocational education training** will also get 12 credits.
- Students will also receive credits for **summer internships**.
- **Research Option at UG Level:**
 - Students who secure 75% of marks and above in the first six semesters and wish to undertake research at the undergraduate level can choose a research stream in the fourth year, for which they will be awarded UG (Honours with research) degree.

Source: TH

NAVigation with the Indian Constellation (NavIC)

GS 3

In News

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is introducing the **L1 frequency in all its future satellites** with an aim to **promote the civilian use** of NAVigation with the Indian Constellation (NavIC).

About

- The seven satellites in the NavIC constellation so far use two frequencies for providing positioning data — **L5 and S band**.
- The next satellites, starting from **NVS-01 onwards**, will have an L1 band for civilian navigational use.
- The L1 frequency is one of the **most commonly used frequencies** in the Global Positioning System (GPS),
- **Advantages:**

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- It will increase the use of the regional navigation system in wearable devices and personal trackers that use **low-power, single-frequency chips**.

Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC)

- NavIC is an independent stand-alone navigation satellite system developed by the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**.
- NavIC was originally approved in 2006 at a **cost of \$174 million**.
- It was expected to be completed by late 2011, but only became **operational in 2018**.
- NavIC consists of **eight satellites** and covers the whole of India's landmass and up to **1,500 km (930 miles)** from its boundaries.
- **Application:**
 - It is being used in public vehicle tracking in India, for providing emergency warning alerts to fishermen venturing into the deep sea where there is no terrestrial network connectivity, and for tracking and providing information related to natural disasters.
 - NavIC finds utilization in national projects like public vehicle safety, power grid synchronization, real-time train information system and fishermen safety.
- **Significance:**
 - NavIC is an **indigenous positioning system** that is under Indian control.
 - Removing dependence on foreign satellite systems for navigation service requirements, particularly for **“strategic sectors.”**
 - There is **no risk of the service being withdrawn or denied** in a given situation.

L Band

- Operating frequency range of **1–2 GHz** in the radio spectrum.
- **Wavelength range:** 30–15 cm
- **Benefits:**
 - Has a low bandwidth due to its low frequency
 - Easiest to implement for many applications due to this low frequency.
- **Applications:**
 - Radars, global positioning systems (GPS), radio, telecommunications, and aircraft surveillance.

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S-Band

- Operating frequency range of **2 to 4 GHz** in the radio spectrum.
- **Applications:**
 - Radar systems such as surface ship radar, weather radar and various communication satellites.

Source: IE

Badri cow

Gs 3 Biodiversity & Environment

In News

- Recently, **Uttarakhand** plans genetic enhancement of its indigenous Badri cow.
 - This includes **Sex-sorted semen and embryo transfer technology** to improve the production of the cattle as part of the ten-year State plan.

About Badri cow



- Badri/Pahari desi cow is a **native cow species of Uttarakhand**.
- Badri cow is the **first registered cattle breed of Uttarakhand which has been certified by the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR)**.
- It grazes on the **medicinal herbs of the Himalayas**.

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- It is far away from toxic pollution, polythene, and other harmful things that cows in the plains eat.
- **Its milk has rich medicinal content** and high organic value.

Issue related with the breed

- **Its milk production capacity is quite less** as it gives one to three liters of milk per day.

Measures taken by the Government

- The state will **promote Badri ghee**.
- Marketing of **gaumutra ark (distilled cow urine) and cow dung**.
- **Panchgavya** (the five products of the cow, including milk, curd, ghee, dung, and urine).
- **New methods to be implemented:**
 - **Multiple Ovulation Embryo Transfer (MOET):** a conventional embryo flush which is the most common procedure used in advanced cattle breeding.
 - **Ovum pickup in vitro fertilisation (IVF):** It will be used to increase the yield per animal.
 - Introducing **Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)**.

Some Indigenous cattle breeds of India

- Alambadi, Amritmahal, Gir, Red Sindhi, Sahiwal, Bargur, Hallikar, Kangayam, Pulikulam

Source:TH

Wren Babblers

Gs 3 Biodiversity & Environment

In News

- Recently, Birdwatchers have discovered a new species of the wren babblers in remote northeastern **Arunachal Pradesh** which has been named by them as **Lisu wren babbler**.
 - Their finding was published by **Indian BIRDS** which is a peer-reviewed journal of south Asian ornithology.

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- There has been **only one report of the sighting of the wren babbler in India** way back in **1988 in the same mountain.**

About Wren Babblers



- **Babbler family:** There are about 20 species of small Asian birds belonging to the babbler family Timaliidae.
- **Features:**
 - They are 10 to 15 centimetres (4 to 6 inches) long, short-tailed and have a rather short and straight bill.
- **Habitat:** Wren-babblers occur chiefly in **southern Asia.**
- **Grey bellied wren babblers:** Which are almost similar to this new species are found mostly in Myanmar and in smaller numbers in China and Thailand.

Source:HT

Meitei script

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Gs 1

In News

- Recently, there have been **efforts made to replace** the Bengali script that's currently in use with Meitei Mayek or the Manipuri script in **Manipur**.

About Meitei script

- The Meitei script or the Meetei script is used for the Meitei language which is the **official language of Manipur state of India**.
- The script was once **patronised by Meitei rulers** but which fell into disuse with the **advent of Hinduism and eventually disappeared**.
 - It was used until the 18th century, when it was **replaced by the Bengali alphabet**.
- **The Meiteilon (Manipuri language) script is fairly old**.
 - According to **Mutua Bahadur of Mutua Museum** which houses artefacts from all over Manipur there are coins dating back to the reign of **Meidingu Ura Konthouba (568-658)** and **Meidingu Ayangba (821-910)** 'Meidingu' are kings who belong to the Ningthouja clan whose rule extends from 33 AD to 1949 AD.
- **The Manipur Official Language Act 1979**: It was enacted with the definition of Manipuri language as "Meiteilon written in Bengali script and spoken by the majority of Manipuri population."
 - Manipuri written in Meitei Mayek was **introduced in schools; now it is taught even at the university level** by replacing Bengali script.
- **Amendment Act of 2021**: the definition of "Manipuri language" in the Official Language Act was modified as Meiteilon in Meetei Mayek and spoken by the majority of Manipur population.

Source:IE

Sri Aurobindo

Gs 1

In News

- The Prime Minister of India will participate in a programme commemorating **Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary**.

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About Sri Aurobindo

- **Born:** in Calcutta on 15th August 1872
- **Early Life:**
 - Primary education from **England** - St. Paul's School, London, and at King's College, Cambridge.
 - Returned to India in 1893 and worked for the next thirteen years in the Princely State of Baroda and as a **professor** in Baroda College.
- **Contributions to India's Freedom Struggle:**
 - He also joined a **revolutionary society** and took a leading role in secret preparations for an uprising against the British Government in India.
 - In **1906**, soon after the Partition of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo quit his post in Baroda and went to **Calcutta**, where he soon became one of the leaders of the Nationalist movement.
 - He was the **first political leader** in India to openly put forward, in his newspaper **Bande Mataram**, the **idea of complete independence** for the country.
 - Prosecuted twice for **sedition** and once for **conspiracy**, he was released each time for lack of evidence.
- **Yogic Life:**
 - Sri Aurobindo had begun the practice of Yoga in 1905 in Baroda.
 - In 1908 he had the first of several fundamental spiritual realizations.
 - In 1910 he **withdrew from politics** and went to Pondicherry in order to devote himself entirely to his inner spiritual life and work.
 - During his **forty years in Pondicherry** he evolved a new method of spiritual practice, which he called the **Integral Yoga**.
 - Its aim is a spiritual realization that not only liberates man's consciousness but also transforms his nature.
 - In **1926**, with the help of his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, he founded the **Sri Aurobindo Ashram**.
- **Teachings:**
 - Propounded a philosophy of divine life on earth through spiritual evolution.
- **Literary Works:**
 - The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga and Savitri.
 - wrote a **series** on Bankim Chandra's Vande Mataram
- **Achievements:**

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- In 1943, he was **nominated** for the Nobel Prize for literature and in 1950, for the Nobel Peace Prize.
- **Died on:** 5 December 1950

Source: PIB

Women in Political Leadership Roles

Gs 1

Context

- It is necessary to get rid of inherent biases and perceptions about female effectiveness in leadership roles.

History of Women in decision-making roles in India

- **Women's suffrage:**
 - Independent India can rightly be proud of its achievement in so far as women's suffrage is concerned. Women were allowed to vote from 1950 onwards and so could participate on an equal footing with men from the first general election of 1951-52.
 - In contrast, In the U.S., it took several decades of struggle before women were allowed to vote in 1920. Most countries in Europe also achieved universal suffrage during the inter-war period.
- **Women leaders in Politics:**
 - India had and has charismatic female leaders like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, Sushma Swaraj and Mamata Banerjee among several others.

Issues & challenges

- **Data on women participation in Politics:**
 - **Ministerial position:**
 - Female members make up only about 10% of the total ministerial strength.
 - **Chief Minister:**
 - The underrepresentation of female Ministers in India is also reflected in the fact that Ms. Mamata Banerjee is currently the only female Chief Minister.

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- **Strength in Legislature:**
 - The underrepresentation of women in Indian legislatures is even more striking.
 - For instance, the 2019 election sent the largest number of women to the Lok Sabha.
 - Despite this, women constitute just over 14% of the total strength of the Lok Sabha.
 - This gives us the dismal rank of 143 out of 192 countries for which data are reported by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
- **Women's performance in the Legislature:**
 - **Token representatives:**
 - The study draws attention to **women's performance in the Lok Sabha** through a **quantitative analysis** of the **questions posed by women leaders** on the floor.
 - It claims that they act as mere **token representation** in political spheres.
 - **Question Hour:**
 - Women's performance during the Question Hour session becomes relevant as it is a space where **legislators act free from party regulation**.
 - Study contests claim that women members act as **silent dolls** or '**gungi gudiyas**' during the Question Hour in Parliament.
- **Access to power:**
 - India has **not had a single women's movement** that challenged **patriarchal and gender norms** in the last two decades.
 - Women have had to use **alternate methods to come to power**.
 - **Education and wealth** have aided women in political participation.
- **Extending Quotas for women:**
 - The establishment of quotas for women is one of the requirements to create a level playing field for women.
 - Attempts have also been made to extend quotas for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies through a Women's Reservation Bill.
 - Unfortunately, the fate of this Bill represents a blot on the functioning of the Indian Parliament.
- **Politics as men's profession:**

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- Politics is often seen as a **male bastion**, and women are discouraged from entering it on the pretext that it is not a 'feminine' profession.
- Female candidates were often made to **contest in elections as "namesakes"** for their husbands.

Government initiatives & international commitments

- **The Women's Reservation Bill(2008)(108th amendment):**
 - It has also been introduced in the national Parliament to reserve **33 percent of the Lok Sabha seats for women.**
- **Gender-neutral procedures and language:**
 - In 2014, under the leadership of the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the **Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha** were made entirely **gender neutral.**
 - Since then, each Lok Sabha Committee Head has been referred to as **Chairperson (not chairman)** in all documents.
 - This initiative is proof that amending legal documents to make them **inclusive for all genders** is an attainable goal if there is a will.
- **Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women:**
 - **India is a signatory** to the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.
 - The convention obliges states to **take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women** in political and public life and, in particular, to ensure that women are as eligible as men **to contest elections to all public bodies.**
 - They have the right to participate in contributing to **government policy and its implementation.**
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:**
 - **Article 25** of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which is **binding on signatory states including India.**
 - It says that "every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections.

Way Ahead

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- There is substantial evidence showing that increased female representation in policy making goes a long way in improving perceptions about female effectiveness in leadership roles.
- The problem of the **under-representation** of women is **only superficial**.
- What lies underneath is the **problem of structural inequality**, wherein women are **marginalised at different levels**.

Source: TH

The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In Context

- Recently, The Rajya Sabha passed the **Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022**.
 - The Bill seeks to amend the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

More about the news

- The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill mandates non-fossil sources of energy and establishes a domestic carbon market in India.
 - The bill was also amended in 2010.
- **Key provisions of the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill:**
 - The bill seeks to mandate the **use of non-fossil sources**, including **Green hydrogen, green ammonia, biomass, and Ethanol** for energy and feedstock;
 - Establish **Carbon Markets**;
 - Bring **large residential buildings** within the fold of the Energy Conservation regime;
 - Enhance the scope of the **Energy Conservation Building Code**;
 - Amend **penalty provisions**;
 - **Increase members in the governing council of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)**;
 - Empower the **State Electricity Regulatory Commissions** to make regulations for smooth discharge of its functions
 - To put in place **enabling provisions** to make the use of **clean energy**, including green hydrogen, mandatory and to establish carbon markets.

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Details of the Bill

- **Carbon Credits:**
 - **Issuing credits:**
 - According to **Global Energy Monitor**, the government will issue carbon credits to businesses or other institutions interested in the scheme.
 - Industries could sell and buy credits to meet their carbon budget.
 - **Selling Carbon Credits to other countries:**
 - Carbon credits will not be sold to other countries. When we sell credits to other countries, we cannot add them to our NDCs.
 - However, there is a provision to sell them to other countries when there is a surplus or a need to finance some cutting-edge technology.
- **Scope for Energy Conservation Building Code:**
 - The amended bill aims to bring large residential buildings under the Energy Conservation regime which enhances the scope of the Energy Conservation Building Code.
 - **Meaning of Energy Conservation Building Code:**
 - According to the draft, “energy conservation building codes” means the norms and standards of energy consumption expressed per square metre of the area where energy is used.
 - It also includes the location of the building.
- **Carbon Market:**
 - The Bill empowers the central government to specify a **carbon credit trading scheme**.
 - The proposed amendments aims to encourage the **development of a carbon market** by laying the **framework for issuance of carbon credits** against deployment of **clean technology**.
 - Investment in clean technology will help corporations in greening their business profiles and the attached carbon credits will provide an additional revenue stream.
 - Hence, the proposed amendments **seek to address a prominent gap in the climate change narrative** with respect to involvement of the private sector.
- **Reducing the connected loads of states:**
 - Bill aimed to bring large residential buildings, with a minimum connected load of 100 kilowatt (kW) or contract demand of 120

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Kilovolt Ampere (kVA), within the fold of the Energy Conservation regime.

- States, if they wished, could bring down the connected load and contract demand.

Carbon Credits

- A carbon credit is a **permit** that allows the company that holds it to **emit a certain amount of CO₂ or other greenhouse gases**.
- **One credit** permits the emission of a mass equal to one tonne of carbon dioxide.
- These were devised as a **market-oriented mechanism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions**.
- Companies get a set number of credits, which decline over time.
- They can sell any excess to another company.

Criticisms

- **Ultra vires of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001:**
 - While the Energy Conservation Act, of 2001 deals with saving energy, the present Bill deals with saving the environment and conserving climate change due to the usage of fossil and non-fossil fuels while generating electricity.
 - The scope and objective of the principal Act do not take in the purpose and object of the present Bill.
 - The Bill relates to monitoring and controlling of carbon emission and climate change which is an aspect of the environmental laws
- **Lack of coordinated approach:**
 - There is the Central Government discharging one set of roles, there are the State Governments which have been authorised under the Act to discharge a different set of roles.
 - What is missing is a coordinated approach between the Central Government and the State Government.
- **Inadequate opinion in BEE:**
 - The Bill proposes only five representatives of the States and it means that a majority of the States would not be able to register their opinion in the Bureau of Energy Efficiency.
- **Legal infirmities:**
 - It is being criticised that the Bill has a lot of legal infirmities which required re-consideration and re-introduction.

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Way Ahead

- India is currently marching towards its target of reducing its carbon intensity by 45 per cent by 2030. This goal is a part of India's updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).
- India needs to align public financial flows with announced targets on energy transition, to leverage private finance. This includes
 - **Shifting subsidies to clean energy,**
 - Mandating **SOE (state-owned enterprises)** investments in clean energy and Increasing targets on public finance for clean energy.

Source: TH

Friction between the Government and the Judiciary

Gs 2 Government policies and intervention

In News

- There is always a **conflict going on between the Government and the Judiciary** over appointments in judiciary where the Government is supporting NJAC and judiciary supporting the collegium system.
 - The collegium system of making appointments to the higher judiciary has come under focus largely due to **critical remarks made by the Union Law Minister.**

Background

- **Memorandum of Procedure (MoP)**
 - The procedure for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the High Courts in accordance with the Collegium system was laid down in the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) prepared in 1998.
 - It states that the initiation of a proposal for appointment of Supreme Court judges vested with the CJI and that of High Court judges with the Chief Justice of the High Courts concerned.
 - The MoP required the Chief Justices of High Courts to initiate the proposals six months prior to vacancies.

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- **The Constitution (99th Amendment) Act**
 - It was passed by Parliament to provide for a National Judicial Commission, which was duly formed by the NJAC Act.
 - In 2015 the court struck down the NJAC Act and the Constitution Amendment which sought to give politicians and civil society a final say in the appointment of judges to the highest courts.
- **Revised MoP:** The court directed the government to finalize a revised MoP in consultation with the CJI and the Collegium.

What was the NJAC? How did it differ from the collegium system?

- **Parliament passed the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act 2014** along with the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, 2014, providing for the creation of an independent commission to appoint judges to the Supreme Court and high courts to replace the collegium system.
- **Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution** deal with the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and high courts of the country.
 - **Article 124(2)** states every Judge of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President after consultation with the judges of the Supreme Court and the high courts as the President may deem necessary.
 - While the collegium system itself does not figure in the Constitution, its legal basis is found in three Supreme Court judgments usually referred to as the 'Judges Cases' concerning the higher judiciary.
- To replace the system, which received criticism over the years for its lack of transparency, the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act, **introduced three key Articles- 124 A, B, and C and amended clause 2 of Article 124.**
 - **Article 124A** created the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), a constitutional body to replace the collegium system.
 - **Article 124B** vested in this NJAC the power to make appointments to both the Supreme Court and the various high courts.
 - **Article 124C** accorded express authority to Parliament to make laws regulating the NJAC's functioning.
- **NJAC was to be composed of:**
 - The Chief Justice of India as the **ex officio Chairperson.**
 - Two senior-most Supreme Court Judges as **ex officio members.**

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- The Union Minister of Law and Justice as **ex officio member**.
- **Two eminent persons** from civil society (to be nominated by a committee consisting of the Chief Justice of India, Prime Minister of India and the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; one of the eminent persons to be nominated from SC/ST/OBC/minorities or women).
- **The Chief Justice of India and Chief Justices of the high courts** were to be recommended by the NJAC based on seniority while SC and HC judges were to be recommended based on ability, merit, and other criteria specified in the regulations.
 - The Act **empowered any two members of the NJAC to veto a recommendation** if they did not agree with it.
- **Collegium system:** a group of the senior-most judges makes appointments to the higher judiciary. This system has been operational for nearly three decades.

Independence of Judiciary and the “basic structure” doctrine

- **The principle of the independence of the judiciary was derived from the theory of separation of powers, enshrined in Article 50.**
 - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the drafting committee, said in the Constituent Assembly: “There can be no difference of opinion in the House that our judiciary must both be independent of the executive and must also be competent in itself. “
- **The “Basic Structure” doctrine meanwhile is a product of the Kesavananda Bharati judgment (1973).**
 - Article 368 grants Parliament a virtual plenary power to amend the Constitution but the Bench had held that the Constitution could not be read in a manner that destroyed or infringed the document’s basic structure.

Government’s View

- **Delay in appointments:**
 - The Centre argues that the Collegiums, both at the Supreme Court and High Court levels, are delaying judicial appointments.
 - The NJAC was a good law thwarted by the court.
- **Breach of time:**
 - It says that the High Courts are not making recommendations six months in advance of a vacancy.

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- There are 332 judicial vacancies in the High Courts out of a total sanctioned strength of 1,108 judges.
- **Dilution of Power:**
 - The Centre argued that the Act in no way took away the primacy of the judiciary but diluted the power of the executive as only one member (Law Minister) was in the NJAC as opposed to three SC judges.
- **Basic structure doctrine:**
 - The Amendment was perfectly consonant with the basic structure as it strengthened the independence of the judiciary, checks and balances and democracy, which were all part of the basic structure.
- **Lack of transparency:**
 - Collegium was a failure and worked on a system of intra-dependence where there was no transparency.

Supreme Court's View

- **Current Law:**
 - The court says the Collegium system combined with the MoP is the law as it exists now.
- **Delay by the Government:**
 - The government has either kept Collegium recommendations pending for no apparent reason or it has repeatedly sent back names reiterated by the Collegium.
 - The court accused the government of not appointing persons who are not palatable to it.
- **Unconstitutional:**
 - It is difficult to hold that the wisdom of appointment of judges can be shared with the political-executive.
- **Independence:**
 - The expectation from the judiciary to safeguard the rights of the citizens of this country can only be ensured by keeping it insulated and independent from the other organs of governance.

Source: TH

Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana

Gs 2

In News

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- Recently, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has revamped the existing **Scheme of Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSS) with Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna** for implementation during 2021-22 to 2025-26.

About Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana

- **Ministry:**
 - The scheme is being implemented by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.**
- **Objective:**
 - To ensure integrated development of the selected villages with **more than 50% SC population so that there is:**
 - **Adequate Infrastructure:** All requisite infrastructure necessary for the socio-economic development needs are to be provided under the Scheme.
 - **Improvement in Socio-Economic Indicators:** The identified socio-economic indicators, known as Monitorable Indicators, are to be improved so that the disparity between SC and non-SC population is eliminated and the level of indicators is raised to at least that of the National average.
 - **All BPL SC families** should have food and livelihood security, all SC children should complete education at least up to the secondary level, all factors leading to maternal and infant mortality are addressed and incidence of malnutrition, especially amongst children and women, is eliminated.
- **There are 50 Monitorable Indicators under 10 domains:**
 - Drinking water and Sanitation
 - Education
 - Health and Nutrition
 - Social Security
 - Rural Roads and Housing
 - Electricity and Clean Fuel
 - Agricultural Practices etc.
 - Financial Inclusion
 - Digitization
 - Livelihood and Skill Development
- **Vision of an 'Adarsh Gram':**

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- The Scheme provides for An ‘Adarsh Gram’ is one wherein people have access to various basic services so that the **minimum needs of all the sections of the society** are fully met and disparities are reduced to a minimum.
- **These villages would have all such infrastructure** and its residents will have access to all such basic services that are necessary for a dignified living, creating thereby an environment in which everyone is enabled to utilize her/his potential to the fullest.

Source: PIB

ASEAN 5 Point Consensus

Gs 2 Agreements Involving India &/or Affecting India’s Interests

In News

- Recently, the Indonesian Foreign Minister said that India and other countries should “**respect**” and **follow ASEAN’s “five point consensus”** on Myanmar rather than adopting a “different” path.

ASEAN “five point consensus”

- An immediate end to **violence** in the country;
- **Dialogue** among all parties;
- The appointment of a **special envoy**;
- **Humanitarian assistance** by ASEAN; and
- The **special envoy’s visit** to Myanmar to meet with all parties.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

- It is a **political and economic organization**.
- **Founded in:** 1967 by the five South-East Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- **Aim:** Promoting economic growth and regional stability among its members.
- **10 Members at Present:**
 - Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- **ASEAN Plus Three:**

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- It is a forum that functions as a coordinator of co-operation between the ASEAN and the three East Asian nations of **China, South Korea, and Japan.**
- **ASEAN Plus Six:**
 - The group includes ASEAN Plus Three as well as **India, Australia, and New Zealand.**

Source: TH

Cholera

Gs2 Health

In News

- Recently, several countries across the world have **reported a surge in cholera cases** this year raising concerns about a global resurgence of the disease.
 - These include **Kenya, Malawi, Haiti and the Philippines.**

Cholera

How cholera affects the body

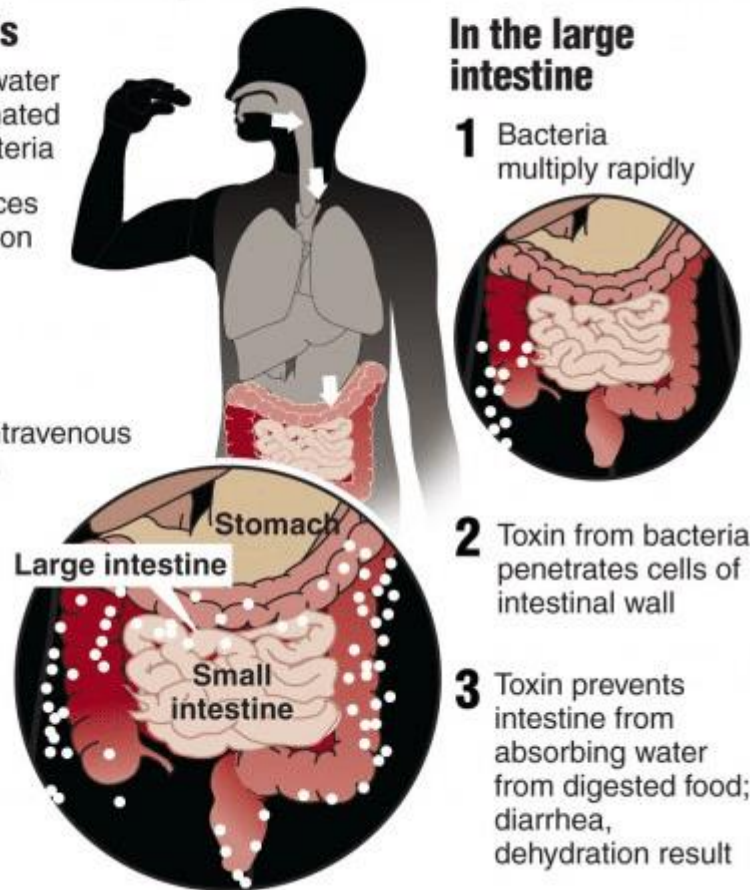
Cholera is an acute intestinal infection that causes severe diarrhea, dehydration and, if not treated promptly, death.

How it spreads

- People ingest water or food contaminated with cholera bacteria
- In epidemic, feces of diseased person is source of contamination

Treatment

- Salt solution, intravenous fluids, antibiotics
- In unprepared communities, death rates can be as high as 50 percent



© 2010 MCT
Source: World Health Organization

- **About:**
 - Cholera is a bacterial disease usually spread through contaminated water. It causes severe diarrhea and dehydration.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Severe watery diarrhea accompanied by vomiting which can quickly lead to dehydration.
- **Spread:**
 - The risk of a cholera epidemic is highest when poverty, war or natural disasters force people to live in crowded conditions without adequate sanitation.
- **Prevalence:**
 - Modern sewage and water treatment have virtually eliminated cholera in industrialized countries. But cholera still exists in Africa, Southeast Asia and Haiti.

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- **Prevention and control:**

- A multifaceted approach is key to control cholera, and to reduce deaths. A combination of surveillance, water, sanitation and hygiene, social mobilization, treatment, and oral cholera vaccines are used.

Source: DTE

Scheme for Providing Education to Madrasas/Minorities (SPEMM)

Gs 2 Government policies & intervention

In News

- Recently, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment pulled up the Union government for the **delay in approving the continuation of the Scheme for Providing Education to Madrasas/Minorities (SPEMM)**.

About

- It provides **financial assistance** to madrasas and minority institutes.
- **Ministry:** It was transferred from the Ministry of Minority Affairs to the **Ministry of Education** in 2021.
- **Two sub-schemes:**
 - The Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM) - seeks to bring about **qualitative improvement in Madrasas** to enable Muslim children attain standards of the National education system in formal education subjects.
 - Infrastructure Development of Minority Institutes (IDMI) - to augment Infrastructure in **Private Aided/Unaided Minority Schools/Institutions** in order to enhance the quality of education to minority children.
- The scheme is being implemented at the **national level**.
- Both the schemes are **voluntary** in nature.

Source: TH

End-to-end Encryption

Gs 3 Economy and related issue

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In News

- As part of a privacy effort, Apple announced that it will now provide full **end-to-end encryption**.

More about the End-to-end encryption

- **About:**
 - End-to-end encryption is a **communication process** that **encrypts data** being shared between two devices.
 - It prevents third parties like **cloud service providers, internet service providers (ISPs)** and **cybercriminals** from accessing data while it is being transferred.
- **Features:**
 - The process of end-to-end encryption **uses an algorithm** that transforms standard text into an unreadable format.
 - This format can **only be unscrambled and read by those with the decryption keys**, which are **only stored on endpoints** and not with any third parties including companies providing the service.
- **Significance:**
 - End-to-end encryption ensures that **user data is protected from unwarranted parties** including **service providers, cloud storage providers, and companies** that handle encrypted data.
- **Where is it used?**
 - End-to-end encryption has long been used when **transferring business documents, financial details, legal proceedings, and personal conversations**.
 - End-to-end encryption today is majorly used to secure communications.
 - Some of the popular instant-messaging apps that use it are **Signal, WhatsApp, iMessage, and Google messages**.
 - It is also used to secure passwords, protect stored data and safeguard data on cloud storage.
- **Shortcomings:**
 - However, end-to-end encryption **does not protect metadata**, which includes information like when a file was created, the date when a message is sent and the endpoints between which data was shared.

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- **Cryptographers and cybersecurity experts** argue that attempts by law enforcement to weaken encryption with backdoors are ill-advised and could compromise the reliability of the internet.

Source: TH

Vanikaran Project

Gs 3 Biodiversity & Environment

In News

- The Forest department in association with Noolpuzha grama panchayat has launched the '**Vanikaran**' (afforestation) Project.

About

- It aims to root out invasive plants, especially *Senna spectabilis*, and restore natural forests.
- The project was being executed on 30 hectares of forest land under the Sulthan Bathery forest range of the **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary**, where exotic invasive plants, including *Senna spectabilis*, *Eupatorium*, *Mikania micrantha*, and *Lantana Camara*, were posing a serious threat to the local species of trees.
- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is an integral part of **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve**.

Source: **TH**

Cactus Plantation and its Economic Usage

Gs 3 Biodiversity & Environment

In News

- Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Shri Giriraj Singh, convened a consultation meeting on '**Cactus Plantation and its Economic Usage**' in New Delhi

Cactus

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- It is a **Xerophytic Plant** which though grows relatively at a slower pace has an immense potential.
- Moreover, it will help in achieving **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)** and **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** for the country as well.
- Cactus plantation will be picked up by the **farmers of degraded land areas**, if the benefits outweigh their existing level of incomes.
 - **India has approximately 30% of its geographical area** under the category of degraded land.
 - Department of Land Resources (DoLR) has been mandated to restore degraded lands through its Watershed Development Component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (WDC-PMKSY).
- Experiences of countries like Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Morocco and various others are being explored which will be of great help for realisation of the objective.

Source:PIB

Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana

Gs 2 Government Policies & Interventions ; Management of Social Sector ; Health

In News

- The Union Health Ministry has launched the Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana in 2018 as part of **National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)**.

More about the Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana

- **About:**
 - The scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme under National Health Mission (NHM).
 - **All notified TB patients** are beneficiaries of the scheme.
 - **Financial incentive:**
 - Scheme provides for the financial incentive of Rs.500/- per month for each notified TB patient for the duration for which the patient is on anti-TB treatment.
 - **DBT component:**

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- The scheme is registered under Direct Benefit Transfer. The incentives can be distributed in Cash (only via DBT preferably through Aadhaar enabled bank accounts) or in-kind.
- **Ni-kshay Mitras:**
 - Ni-kshay Mitras can adopt and care for TB patients. They are volunteers who could be **individuals, NGOs, co-operative societies, corporates, and even political parties.**
 - They commit to help the TB patients through nutritional support, nutritional supplements, additional investigations and vocational support.
 - This public health initiative has already shown good uptake.
 - Within three months of its launch, more than 52,000 Ni-kshay Mitras have registered.
- **E-Nikshay platform**
 - It is developed and maintained by the **Central TB Division (CTD)**, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), and the World Health Organization.
 - It is the **web-enabled patient management system for TB control** under the **National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP).**
 - Each TB patient whether public or private sector notified must be notified on the Nikshay platform.

Source: PIB