

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

By



SOURCES



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Important News Articles

1. Stay orders of HCs won't lapse automatically: Supreme Court - The Hindu/ No automatic vacation of stay orders after six months, says SC - Indian Express
2. Cabinet okays ₹75,000-crore 'free electricity' solar scheme - The Hindu/ Cabinet OKs ₹75k cr rooftop solar scheme, 1 cr households to get subsidy of up to ₹78k - Indian Express
3. Education Minister launches SWAYAM Plus platform - Indian Express
4. Lancet study shows obesity rates going up across world - The Hindu/ India's young sitting on rising obesity curve, shows Lancet study - Indian Express
5. Big leap for chip mission: 3 plants, Rs 1.26 lakh crore investment get Govt nod - Indian Express
6. RBI tweaks norms related to Regulatory Sandbox scheme - The Economic Times
7. India's leopard population rises to 13,874; M.P. on top - The Hindu/ Modi hails increase in leopard numbers; report says feline count highest in MP - Indian Express
8. Cabinet approves establishment of International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) - PIB/ India to establish international alliance to protect big cats - The Hindu
9. Govt. capex shrank 40.5% in January leaving fiscal deficit at 64% of target - The Hindu

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Important News Articles

GS II

1. Stay orders of HCs won't lapse automatically: Supreme Court - The Hindu/ No automatic vacation of stay orders after six months, says SC - Indian Express

Relevance: Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

News:

- Recently, the Supreme Court addressed a reference concerning the validity of a 2018 judgement in the **Asian Resurfacing of Road Agency Vs CBI**.
- This case questioned the **automatic expiration of interim stay orders** passed by **High Courts** after six months unless extended.

Prelims Takeaway

- Article 142
- High Courts

The Judgement

- The **Supreme Court cannot arbitrarily overturn well-considered interim orders of High Courts** staying criminal and civil proceedings.
- The apex court lacks the authority to impose a **blanket rule** that a stay order issued by a High Court would **expire after six months**.
- Such constraints would **encroach upon the jurisdiction of High Courts** under Article 226 of the Constitution.
- Further, the judgement clarified that the SC should refrain from **imposing fixed timelines for the disposal of cases** by High Courts or trial courts.
 - Orders fixing the outer limit for the disposal of cases should be passed only in exceptional circumstances to meet extraordinary situations.
- The SC's authority under **Article 142** to ensure complete justice does not extend to **excessive interference with orders** passed by High Courts.
- Article 142 can be invoked only to deal with **extraordinary situations** for doing complete justice between the parties before the court.

2. Cabinet okays ₹75,000-crore 'free electricity' solar scheme - The Hindu/ Cabinet OKs ₹75k cr rooftop solar scheme, 1 cr households to get subsidy of up to ₹78k - Indian Express

Relevance: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

News:

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the **PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana** with a budget of ₹75,021 crore.

PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

- The free electricity scheme was earlier announced by the Finance Minister in the interim budget speech.
- **Objective:** To promote rooftop solar installations across India, promising 300 units of free electricity per month to one crore households.

Financial Support

- The government guarantees **no financial burden** on the beneficiaries
 - by providing significant subsidies directly to their bank accounts
 - by offering highly concessional bank loans.
- It will fund **60% of the installation cost for 2 kW systems** and **40% for systems from 2-3 kW capacity**.
- Systems beyond 3 kW won't be eligible for central subsidies.

Prelims Takeaway

- PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana
- One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG) Initiative
- Renewable Energy

- The remaining installation costs will be covered by households through **collateral-free, low-interest loans**, currently available at around 7%.

Additional Components

- Provisions for developing a "**Model Solar Village**" in each district to showcase rooftop solar adoption in rural areas.
- The Urban Local Bodies and Panchayats will be **incentivised** to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.
- **Payment security** for renewable energy service companies (**RESCOs**)
- **Dedicated funds for innovative projects** in rooftop solar technology.

The Implementation

- The scheme emphasizes the use of **Indian-made solar panels and systems** to boost local manufacturing.
- Each public sector unit will engage with specific states to execute the programme, forming **special purpose vehicles (SPVs)** with private companies.

Expected Benefits

- **Savings** up to fifteen to eighteen thousand rupees annually for households
 - from free solar electricity and selling the surplus to the distribution companies
- Charging of electric vehicles
- **Entrepreneurship opportunities** for a large number of vendors for supply and installation
- **Employment opportunities** for the youth with technical skills in manufacturing, installation and maintenance.

3. Education Minister launches SWAYAM Plus platform - Indian Express

Relevance: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

News:

- Recently, the Union Minister of Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship launched the '**SWAYAM Plus**' platform.

SWAYAM Plus Platform

- This platform **offers courses** developed collaboratively with industry leaders focusing on **employability** and **professional development**.
- It will offer programmes in several sectors like manufacturing, energy, computer science, engineering, management studies, healthcare, hospitality, tourism, and Indian knowledge systems.
- It features innovative elements such as **multilingual content** (available in 12 major Indian languages of the country), **AI-enabled chatbot** and **credit recognition**.
- The Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (**IIT Madras**) will **operate** the 'SWAYAM Plus' Platform.
 - IIT Madras is a founder institution of Swayam-NPTEL and the MOOC platform.

Objectives

- To **build an ecosystem** for all stakeholders in professional and career development
 - including learners, course providers, industry, academia, and strategic partners.
- To enable a mechanism for **recognizing high-quality certifications and courses** offered by the best industry and academia partners.
- To **reach a large learner base** across the country, with a particular emphasis on tiers 2 and 3 towns and rural areas.
- To bring in features such as mentorship, scholarships, and job placements to the platform, creating a **comprehensive digital ecosystem** for upskilling and re-skilling at all levels viz. certificate, diploma, or degree.

Significance

- The exposure through these courses would equip students with **theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and awareness of latest job market trends**.
- The courses would **bridge the gap between academia and industry**, making college graduates more job-ready and competitive.

Prelims Takeaway

- SWAYAM Plus Platform
- SWAYAM Platform

4. Lancet study shows obesity rates going up across world - The Hindu/India's young sitting on rising obesity curve, shows Lancet study - Indian Express

Relevance: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

News:

- A recent study published in The Lancet unveils **concerning trends in obesity** rates among children, adolescents, and adults worldwide.

Key Findings

- The **obesity rates among children and adolescents** worldwide have **increased fourfold since 1990**.
- Among **adults**, the obesity rates have **more than doubled** during the same period.
- The total number of individuals affected by obesity globally has **surpassed one billion**.
- 159 million children and adolescents and 879 million adults were obese in 2022.
- The study identifies obesity as the **most prevalent form of malnutrition** in many countries, alongside a decline in underweight prevalence since 1990.

Prelims Takeaway

- World Health organisation (WHO)
- Body Mass Index (BMI)

THE OBESITY NUMBERS					
India			World		
	1990	2022		1990	2022
Men	1.1	26	Men	67	374
Women	2.4	44	Women	128	504
Boys	0.2	7.3	Boys and girls (total)	31	160
Girls	0.2	5.2			

Source: Lancet All figures in million

The Study

- The study was conducted by the **NCD Risk Factor Collaboration (NCD-RisC)** in collaboration with the **WHO**.
- Over 1,500 researchers in more than 190 countries analysed weight and height measurements of over 220 million people aged five years or older.
- They reportedly looked at **body mass index (BMI)** to understand how obesity and underweight have changed worldwide from 1990 to 2022.

Indian Perspective

- The researchers note the **coexistence** of both **obesity** and **underweight** in India, with **increasing rates of abdominal and general obesity**.
- As per The Lancet paper, in India, the obesity rate increased from 0.1% in 1990 to **3.1% in 2022 for girls**, and 0.1% to **3.9%, for boys**.
- In the prevalence of obesity category for girls and boys, **India ranked 174th highest in the world in 2022**.
- Among adults in India, the obesity rate has surged, reaching **9.8% in women and 5.4% in men by 2022**, marking a substantial rise compared to 1990.

GS III

5. Big leap for chip mission: 3 plants, Rs 1.26 lakh crore investment get Govt nod - Indian Express

Relevance: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

News:

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved **three semiconductor projects** worth approximately Rs 1.26 lakh crore.
- This marked a significant step towards bolstering India's chip manufacturing capabilities.

Key Highlights

- The projects aim to address the **growing demand for chips** across various industries.
- This includes high-performance computing, electric vehicles, defence and consumer electronics.

The Projects

1. A semiconductor fab in Dholera, Gujarat

- This will be established by Tata Electronics in collaboration with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp.
- It will specialise in producing **high-performance computer chips** using 28 nm technology that will find applications in EVs, telecom, defence, etc.
- With a production capacity of 300 crore chips annually, this facility will play a crucial role in meeting the country's semiconductor needs.

2. A semiconductor unit in Morigaon, Assam

- This will be set up by the Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt Ltd (TSAT), with an investment of Rs 27,000 crore.
- This is poised to churn out an impressive 48 million chips per day, catering to the automotive and electric vehicle sectors.

3. A semiconductor unit in Sanand, Gujarat

- This will be established by CG Power with an investment of Rs 7,600 crore.
- It is in conjunction with Japan's Renesas Electronics Corp and Stars Microelectronics of Thailand.

Significance

- The approvals underscore India's efforts to **strengthen its semiconductor industry** amidst geopolitical tensions and global supply chain disruptions.
- The initiative is expected to bolster India's semiconductor market, projected to reach \$63 billion by 2026.
- These developments are part of India's broader vision to position **India as a global hub for semiconductor manufacturing**.
- The projects are expected to **create around 1 lakh indirect jobs**, contributing to economic growth and offering leverage in the global chip industry.

Government Incentives

- The projects benefit from the government's **Rs 76,000 crore chip incentive scheme**, which provides **subsidies** for a plant's capital expenditure costs.
- There are also schemes like the **production linked incentive (PLI)** plan for smartphone and laptop manufacturing.
- Additionally, states offer incentives such as **land acquisition** benefits to attract semiconductor investments.

Prelims Takeaway

- Semiconductors
- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme

6. RBI tweaks norms related to Regulatory Sandbox scheme - The Economic Times

Relevance: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

News:

- Recently, the RBI revamped its **regulatory sandbox framework to promote innovation in the financial sector.**

Key Changes in the Framework

- The new framework enables technology firms to **submit on-tap proposals**, replacing the previous cohort-based system.
- Timelines** for various stages of the regulatory sandbox process have been **extended** from seven months to **nine months**.
- The **target applicants** for entry to the RS are fintech companies, including startups, banks, financial institutions, any other company, Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) and partnership firms, partnering with or providing support to financial services businesses.
- Sandbox entities are now required to comply with provisions of the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, ensuring data security and privacy.

Addressing Concerns

- The move comes amidst concerns that RBI's stringent stance on regulatory compliance, as seen in the case of Paytm Payments Bank, could stifle innovation.
- The new framework aims to strike a **balance between fostering innovation and ensuring regulatory compliance.**

Regulatory Sandbox (RS) Scheme

- The RBI had issued the '**Enabling Framework for Regulatory Sandbox**' in August 2019.
- The scheme involves **live testing of new financial products or services** in a **controlled regulatory environment**.
- It acts as a **"safe space"** for business as the regulators may or may not permit certain relaxations for the limited purpose of testing.
- It allows regulators, innovators, financial service providers, and customers to test new financial innovations, collecting evidence on benefits and risks.
- It facilitates the development of **innovation-friendly regulations**, enabling the delivery of **low-cost financial products**.
- It is potentially an important tool which enables more **dynamic, evidence-based regulatory environments** that adapt to emerging technologies.

Prelims Takeaway

- Regulatory Sandbox (RS) Scheme
- Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023
- Payments Bank

7. India's leopard population rises to 13,874; M.P. on top - The Hindu/ Modi hails increase in leopard numbers; report says feline count highest in MP - Indian Express

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

News:

- Recently, the Environment Ministry released a report on the **Status of Leopards in India.**
- The survey **covered 20 states**, focusing on approximately **70% of the leopard's expected habitat**, including tiger reserves and protected forest areas.

Key Findings

- India's leopard population **increased** from 12,852 in 2018 to **13,874 in 2022, an 8% rise.**
 - But, this estimation covers 70% of leopard habitat, excluding areas like the Himalayas and semi-arid regions.

Prelims Takeaway

- The Indian Leopard
- Status of Leopards in India
- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- **Madhya Pradesh** reported the **highest** number of leopards (**3,907**), followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.
- While **Central India** witnessed a **stable or slightly growing population**, regions like the **Shivalik hills** and **Gangetic plains** experienced a **decline**.
 - Uttarakhand experienced a 22% decline in leopard numbers due to poaching and man-animal conflict.
 - Approximately 65% of the leopard population exists outside protected areas in the Shivalik landscape.
- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and West Bengal collectively saw a 150% rise in leopard numbers, reaching 349 animals.
 - The sharp rise in leopard numbers in northeastern states was attributed to sampling artefact.
- Tiger Reserves or sites with highest leopard population are, **Nagarajunasagar Srisailam (AP)**, followed by Panna (MP), and Satpura (AP).

The Indian Leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*)

- The Indian Leopard, **smallest of the big cats**, is a leopard subspecies widely distributed in the Indian subcontinent.
- They are known for their **ability to adapt to a variety of habitats**.
- They are **strong** and **agile predators** that can **climb trees** and drag their prey up for safety.
- **Conservation Status**
 - IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

8. Cabinet approves establishment of International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) - PIB/ India to establish international alliance to protect big cats - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation
News:

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)** with **headquarters in India**.

The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

- The concept of IBCA was introduced by the **Prime Minister of India** during **Global Tiger Day** in 2019.
- **Objective:** To spearhead efforts towards the protection and conservation of the **seven major big cats** viz. tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar, and cheetah.
 - Out of these five big cats viz. Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard and Cheetah are found in India.
- It aims to unite 96 big cat range countries, non-range countries, conservation partners, scientific organizations, and corporate entities
- **Funding**
 - The Government of India has allocated a one-time budgetary support of Rs.150 crore for the period from 2023-24 to 2027-28.
 - The alliance will also explore contributions from bilateral and multilateral agencies, financial institutions, and donor agencies to augment its corpus.
- **Activities:** knowledge sharing, capacity building, networking, advocacy, financial support, research, technical assistance, education, and awareness.
- The alliance emphasizes on integrating biodiversity policies with SDGs and mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors.

Governance and Funding

- IBCA's governance structure includes a **General Assembly of Members**, a **Council of elected member countries** and a **Secretariat**.

Prelims Takeaway

- The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)
- Project Tiger
- International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- The **General Assembly** appoints the **Secretary General** of IBCA upon the **recommendation of the Council**.
- The **framework** of agreement is modelled after the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and will be finalised by the **International Steering Committee (ISC)**.

9. Govt. capex shrank 40.5% in January leaving fiscal deficit at 64% of target - The Hindu

Relevance: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- Fiscal Deficit
- Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act

Spending squeeze

Govt. shrinks January capital expenditure by a sharp 40.5% to ₹47,600 crore containing 10-month fiscal deficit at 64% of RE

■ Overall fiscal deficit stood at ₹11 lakh crore by January

■ Full-year capex likely to undershoot by at least ₹50,000 crore: ICRA's Nayar

■ Less than 70% of planned expenditure met at agriculture, consumer affairs ministries: BoB's Sabnavis



India

Editorials, Gists and Explainers

10. On cross-voting in Rajya Sabha elections - The Hindu

Relevance: Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Context:

- The **recent Rajya Sabha elections** in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka have witnessed **cross-voting by MLAs**.
- This has once again raised concerns about the sanctity of the election process.

How Rajya Sabha Elections Are Conducted

- As per Article 80 of the Constitution, representatives of each State to the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly by the elected members of their Legislative Assembly.
- The polls for Rajya Sabha will be required only if the number of candidates exceed the number of vacancies.
- Historically, these elections were often uncontested until the 1998 Maharashtra elections witnessed cross-voting.

Legal Provisions

- In order to rein in the MLAs from cross-voting, an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was carried out in 2003.
- Section 59 of the Act was amended to provide that the voting in elections to Rajya Sabha shall be through an open ballot.
- The MLAs of political parties are required to show their ballot paper to the authorised agent of their Party.
- Not showing the ballot paper to the authorised agent or showing it to anyone else will disqualify the vote.
- Independent MLAs are barred from showing their ballots to anyone.

The Tenth Schedule

- The 52nd constitutional amendment introduced the 'anti-defection' law through the Tenth Schedule in 1985.
- However, it does not apply to Rajya Sabha elections, as clarified by the Election Commission in 2017.
- The Supreme Court ruled that voting against one's party candidate does not warrant disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.
- Furthermore, political parties cannot issue any whip to its members for such elections.

Supreme Court and the Tenth Schedule
1. Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India (2006)

- The Supreme Court upheld the system of open ballot for Rajya Sabha elections.
- It emphasised that transparency can counteract corruption if secrecy is compromised.
- However, the court clarified that an MLA voting against their party candidate in such elections would not face disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.

- Instead, they may face disciplinary action from their political party.

2. Ravi S. Naik and Sanjay Bandekar vs Union of India (1994)

- The Supreme Court determined that voluntarily giving up party membership under the Tenth Schedule isn't limited to formal resignation.
- It extends to the member's conduct both inside and outside the house to infer if it qualifies as voluntarily giving up membership.

The Way Forward

- Despite legal safeguards, instances of cross-voting persist, undermining the electoral process.
- The Supreme Court should reconsider its stance on whether cross-voting in such elections can be a valid ground for disqualification under the Tenth Schedule, serving as a deterrent for future cross-voting incidents.

11. Mauritius, Maldives, and India - Indian Express

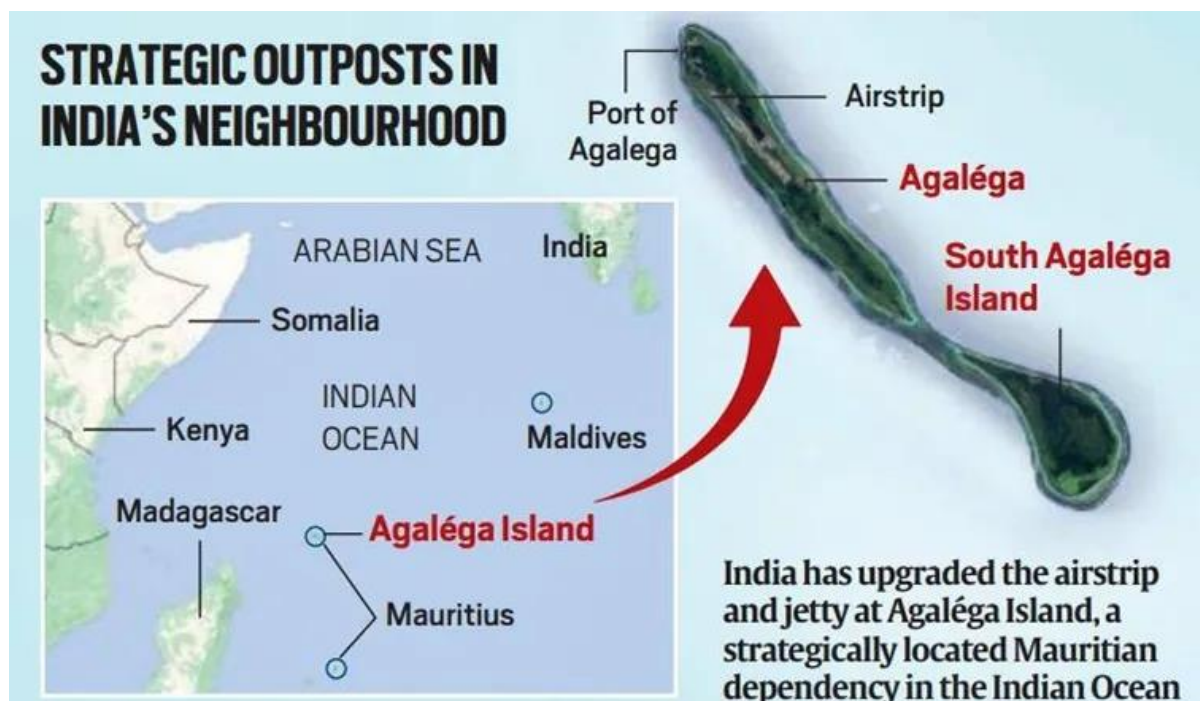
Relevance: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Context:

- Recent developments in the Maldives and Mauritius underscore **India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean**, particularly in response to China's increasing presence in the region.

The Maldives case

- The President of Maldives, perceived as pro-China, requested India to withdraw its military personnel from Maldives, after coming to power in November 2023.
- The first team of Indian "technical personnel" reached the Maldives to take charge of one of the three aviation platforms stationed in the country.
- They will replace Indian military personnel whose first batch is required to leave the islands by March 10.
- This is in line with an agreement between India and the Maldives to withdraw Indian military personnel by May 10.



The Mauritius case

- Following the Indian PM's visit to Mauritius in March 2015, India signed a MoU for the "improvement in sea and air transportation facilities" at Agaléga island.
- Recently, India and Mauritius jointly inaugurated an airstrip and jetty on Agaléga island, enhancing connectivity and security in the region.
 - Agaléga is a two-island Mauritian dependency 1,100 km to the north of Port Louis and 2,500 km southwest of Malé.
- The inauguration underscores India's commitment to supporting Mauritius in meeting its development goals and enhancing maritime security.
- This would lead to more effective monitoring of Mauritius' vast 2.3 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone.
- Further, it will equip Mauritius to better counter-piracy, terrorism, narcotics and human trafficking, and illegal and unregulated fishing.

China's Presence in the Indian Ocean

- China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean poses challenges to India's strategic interests, particularly in maritime security and regional stability.
 - China is the only nation with an embassy in each of the six islands in the Indian Ocean viz. Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros.
 - None of the traditional players viz. the United States, the UK, India, or France have embassies on all six.
- China's diplomatic, economic, and military engagements with Indian Ocean island nations raise concerns about its long-term intentions in the region.
- Analysts anticipate further expansion, highlighting the need for India to bolster its partnerships and strategic initiatives in response.

India's Response

- India recognizes the strategic significance of collaborating with Indian Ocean island nations to counterbalance China's influence.
- Hence, diplomatic efforts are focused on managing domestic politics in island nations while advancing our strategic interests and security cooperation.
- India's engagement with the Maldives and Mauritius reflects its commitment to upholding maritime security, regional stability, and economic development in the Indian Ocean region.

Quick Look

1. Melanochlamys Droupadi

- Recently, the Zoological Survey of India named a new marine species of head-shield sea slug after the President of India.
- It is a new marine species of head-shield sea slug, belonging to Melanochlamys genus, with a ruby red spot discovered from West Bengal and Odisha coast.
- Features
 - It is a small invertebrate with a maximum length of up to 7 mm.
 - It inhabits wet and soft sandy beaches.
 - This particular species of sea slug is hermaphrodite (having both male and female reproductive parts).
 - It has a shell inside the body. It has a posterior, accounting for 61 percent of its body length.
 - It continuously secretes transparent mucus to form a sheath that prevents sand grains from entering parapodial space.
 - It crawls beneath smooth sand to form a moving capsule where the body is rarely visible, leaving behind a trail like a turtle.

2. Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)

- Recently, the DRDO successfully conducted two flight tests of the Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) missile.
- VSHORADS is a fourth-generation Man Portable Air Defence System (MANPAD) specially designed to counter low-altitude aerial threats over short distances.
- These are short-range, lightweight, and portable surface-to-air missiles that can be fired by individuals or small groups.
- It has been designed and developed indigenously by DRDO's Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad, in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories and Indian industry partners.
- Key Features
 - It is designed to provide short-range air defence capabilities to protect ground forces and critical assets from aerial threats.
 - It incorporates many novel technologies, including a Dual-band IIR Seeker, a miniaturised Reaction Control System, and integrated avionics.
 - It is propelled by a dual-thrust solid motor.
 - The missile and its launcher are portable, which enables their quick deployment over difficult terrain.

3. BioTRIG

- A recent study claimed that BioTRIG, a new waste management technology based on the pyrolysis system, could help the rural Indians.
- It works by sealing the waste inside an oxygen-free chamber and heating it above 400 °C; useful chemicals are produced in the process.
- The researchers outlined three products of pyrolysis viz. bio-oil, syngas and biochar fertiliser that could help rural Indians live healthier and greener lives.
- Significance
 - The syngas and bio-oil facilitate heat and power the pyrolysis system in future cycles and surplus electricity is utilized to power local homes and businesses.

- The environmentally friendly bio-oil is utilized as a substitute for traditional cooking fuels in households, and biochar is used for carbon storage, enhancing soil quality and fertility.
- It could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions from communities by nearly 350 kg of CO₂-eq per capita per annum.
- It could help rural Indians cut indoor air pollution, improve soil health, and generate clean power.

4. Juice Jacking

- Recently, the RBI has issued a cautionary message to mobile phone users about juice jacking.
- The term “juice jacking” was first coined in 2011 by investigative journalist Brian Krebs.
- It is a form of cyberattack where a public USB charging port is tampered to steal data or install malware on devices connected to it.
- The attack is used by hackers to steal users’ passwords, credit card information, addresses, and other sensitive data stored on the targeted device.

5. Gene Therapy

- Recently, the Union Science and Technology Minister said that India has conducted the first human clinical trial of gene therapy for ‘haemophilia A’.
- Gene Therapy is a technique that modifies a person’s genes to treat or cure disease.
- Gene therapies can work by several mechanisms viz.
 - Replacing a disease-causing gene with a healthy copy of the gene
 - Inactivating a disease-causing gene that is not functioning properly
 - Introducing a new or modified gene into the body to help treat a disease
- Gene therapy products are being studied to treat diseases including cancer, genetic diseases, and infectious diseases.

6. Roen Olmi

- Recently, researchers in Goa synthesised gold nanoparticles from a wild mushroom species eaten as a delicacy widely in the coastal state.
- Roen olmi is a mushroom of the Termitomyces species that grows on termite hills.
 - They have no independent existence; they grow only in association with termites.
- It is an edible wild mushroom popular among Goans and consumed during the monsoons.
- It is endemic to the Western Ghats, where the thick forest cover and high humidity provide an ideal breeding ground.
- It plays a very important role as a powerful biodegrading fungus in forest and grassland ecosystems converting 50% of dead plant material on the ground into rich soil.
- Additionally, Termito-myces have been recognized for their ethno-medicinal importance in various indigenous communities throughout Asia and Africa.

Prelims Track Question

Q1. Consider the following statements

1. The Supreme Court has the authority to impose a blanket rule that a stay order issued by a High Court would expire after six months.
2. Article 142 allows the Supreme Court to impose fixed timelines for the disposal of cases by High Courts or trial courts as deemed necessary.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Q2. Consider the following statements with reference to the PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana

1. The scheme seeks to provide 300 units of free electricity per month to one crore households.
2. The scheme provides central subsidies for the installation cost for 10 kW systems.
3. It has provisions for developing a "Model Solar Village" in each district to showcase rooftop solar adoption in rural areas.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q3. Consider the following statements with reference to the SWAYAM Plus Platform

1. It offers courses developed collaboratively with the industry leaders focusing on employability and professional development.
2. It features innovative elements such as multilingual content, AI-enabled guidance and credit recognition.
3. It will be operated by NITI Aayog in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q4. What is the objective of the 75/25 initiative launched by the India government?

- A. A plan to increase agricultural exports by 75% and reduce imports by 25%.
- B. A program aimed at reducing carbon emissions by 75% by 2025
- C. A strategy to prioritize economic development with a 75% focus on infrastructure and 25% on social welfare.
- D. An initiative to screen and provide standard care to 75 million individuals suffering from hypertension and diabetes by 2025.

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding semiconductor fab

1. A semiconductor fab involves the transformation of raw silicon wafers into integrated circuits (ICs).
2. A key feature of semiconductor fab facilities is the inclusion of a clean room.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Q6. Which of the following statements best describes the term 'Regulatory Sandbox'?

- A. It is a live testing of new low-cost financial products.
- B. It is a framework to curb money laundering across the country.
- C. It is a technology to test adulteration of food products.
- D. It is a single window system to get licences for AI startups.

Q7. With reference to the Indian Leopard, consider the following statements

1. They are nocturnal animals.
2. They are known for their ability to adapt to a variety of habitats.
3. Tamil Nadu has the highest number of leopard population.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q8. Consider the following statements

1. All the seven major big cats are also found in India.
2. The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) is headquartered in Bangladesh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Q9. With reference to Rajya Sabha elections, consider the following statements

1. The representatives of each State to the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly by the elected members of their Legislative Assembly.
2. The voting in elections to Rajya Sabha shall be through an open ballot.
3. The provisions of the Tenth Schedule with respect to voting against the instruction of the party is not applicable for a Rajya Sabha election.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q10. The Agaléga island, seen in the news recently, is a dependency of which of the following countries?

- A. Madagascar
- B. Mauritius
- C. Indonesia
- D. Maldives

Prelims Track Answer

Answer 1 Option D is correct

Explanation

- Recently, the Supreme Court addressed a reference concerning the validity of a 2018 judgement in the Asian Resurfacing of Road Agency Vs CBI.
- This case questioned the automatic expiration of interim stay orders passed by High Courts after six months unless extended.
- The Supreme Court cannot arbitrarily overturn well-considered interim orders of High Courts staying criminal and civil proceedings.
- The apex court lacks the authority to impose a blanket rule that a stay order issued by a High Court would expire after six months. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- Such constraints would encroach upon the jurisdiction of High Courts under Article 226 of the Constitution.
- Further, the judgement clarified that the SC should refrain from imposing fixed timelines for the disposal of cases by High Courts or trial courts.
- Orders fixing the outer limit for the disposal of cases should be passed only in exceptional circumstances to meet extraordinary situations.
- The SC's authority under Article 142 to ensure complete justice does not extend to excessive interference with orders passed by High Courts. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**

Answer 2 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana with a budget of ₹75,021 crore.
- The free electricity scheme was earlier announced by the Finance Minister in the interim budget speech.
- Objective: To promote rooftop solar installations across India, promising 300 units of free electricity per month to one crore households. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The government guarantees no financial burden on the beneficiaries by providing significant subsidies directly to their bank accounts and by offering highly concessional bank loans.

- It will fund 60% of the installation cost for 2 kW systems and 40% for systems from 2-3 kW capacity. Systems beyond 3 kW won't be eligible for central subsidies. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- The remaining installation costs will be covered by households through collateral-free, low-interest loans, currently available at around 7%.
- It has provisions for developing a "Model Solar Village" in each district to showcase rooftop solar adoption in rural areas. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- The Urban Local Bodies and Panchayats will be incentivised to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.

Answer 3 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Recently, the Union Minister of Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship launched the 'SWAYAM Plus' platform.
- This platform offers courses developed collaboratively with industry leaders focusing on employability and professional development. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It will offer programmes in several sectors like manufacturing, energy, computer science, engineering, management studies, healthcare, hospitality, tourism, and Indian knowledge systems.
- It features innovative elements such as multilingual content (available in 12 major Indian languages of the country), AI-enabled chatbot and credit recognition. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT Madras) will operate the 'SWAYAM Plus' Platform. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 4 Option D is correct

Explanation

- The Union Health Ministry launched the 75/25 initiative, aimed at screening and providing standard of care for 75 million individuals with hypertension and diabetes by 2025. **Hence, option D is correct.**
- By prioritizing hypertension and diabetes, two prevalent NCDs, the aim is to improve the overall well-being of millions of individuals.

- This initiative acknowledges the significance of early detection, treatment, and adherence to Standard Care protocols in combating NCDs.

Answer 5 Option C is correct**Explanation**

- A semiconductor fab is a manufacturing plant in which raw silicon wafers are turned into integrated circuits (ICs). **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The process includes creating intricate patterns on the wafer using light and chemicals, depositing different materials to form components, and etching away unwanted materials.
- This results in the formation of transistors, interconnects, and other elements that make up a semiconductor device.
- A semiconductor fab facility always includes a clean room because its environment is carefully controlled to eliminate dust and vibrations and to keep the temperature and humidity within a specific narrow range. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

Answer 6 Option A is correct**Explanation**

- The RBI had issued the 'Enabling Framework for Regulatory Sandbox' in August 2019.
- The scheme involves live testing of new financial products or services in a controlled regulatory environment. **Hence, option A is correct.**
- It acts as a "safe space" for business as the regulators may or may not permit certain relaxations for the limited purpose of testing.
- It allows regulators, innovators, financial service providers, and customers to test new financial innovations, collecting evidence on benefits and risks.
- It facilitates the development of innovation-friendly regulations, enabling the delivery of low-cost financial products.

Answer 7 Option B is correct**Explanation**

- Recently, the Environment Ministry released a report on the Status of Leopards in India.
- India's leopard population increased from 12,852 in 2018 to 13,874 in 2022, an 8% rise.
- Madhya Pradesh reported the highest number of leopards (3,907), followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**
- The Indian Leopard, smallest of the big cats, is a leopard subspecies widely distributed in the Indian subcontinent.
- They are elusive and nocturnal animals whose size and colour depend on the habitat. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- They are known for their ability to adapt to a variety of habitats. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- They are strong and agile predators that can climb trees and drag their prey up for safety.

Answer 8 Option D is correct**Explanation**

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) with headquarters in India. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- The concept of IBCA was introduced by the Prime Minister of India during Global Tiger Day in 2019.
- Objective: To spearhead efforts towards the protection and conservation of the seven major big cats viz. tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar, and cheetah.
- Out of these five big cats viz. Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard and Cheetah are found in India. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- It aims to unite 96 big cat range countries, non-range countries, conservation partners, scientific organizations, and corporate entities
- Activities: knowledge sharing, capacity building, networking, advocacy, financial support, research, technical assistance, education, and awareness.

Answer 9 Option C is correct**Explanation**

- As per Article 80 of the Constitution, representatives of each State to the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly by the elected members of their Legislative Assembly. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- In order to rein in the MLAs from cross-voting, an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was carried out in 2003.
- Section 59 of the Act was amended to provide that the voting in elections to Rajya Sabha shall be through an open ballot. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The 52nd constitutional amendment introduced the 'anti-defection' law through the Tenth Schedule in 1985. However, it does not apply to Rajya Sabha elections, as clarified by the Election Commission in 2017.
- The Supreme Court ruled that voting against one's party candidate does not warrant disqualification under the Tenth Schedule. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- Furthermore, political parties cannot issue any whip to its members for such elections.

Answer 10 Option B is correct**Explanation**

- Recently, India and Mauritius jointly inaugurated an airstrip and jetty on Agaléga island, enhancing connectivity and security in the region.
- Agaléga is a two-island Mauritian dependency 1,100 km to the north of Port Louis and 2,500 km southwest of Malé. **Hence, option B is correct.**
- The inauguration underscores India's commitment to supporting Mauritius in meeting its development goals and enhancing maritime security.
- This would lead to more effective monitoring of Mauritius' vast 2.3 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone.
- Further, it will equip Mauritius to better counter-piracy, terrorism, narcotics and human trafficking, and illegal and unregulated fishing.



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+91 9999 057869
www.mentorshipindia.com

A-92, Third Floor, Hari Nagar
Delhi - 110064

 @mentorship.india