

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

By



SOURCES



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2. GoI and ADB sign \$400 million loan to support urban services -Live Mint
3. Centre likely to give direct sops to get EV manufacturing in top gear-Indian Express
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Important News Articles

GS I

1. Nepal govt bans TikTok, regulates other social media.-Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

News:

- Nepal government has **banned social media** platform TikTok with immediate effect.
- It has decided to **regulate other platforms** to prevent their misuse.

What is the issue ?

- TikTok is the **most popular** social media platform in Nepal.
- In a **follow up action**, The Government of Nepal singled out TikTok imposing a **total ban** on it.
- The Government alleged that TikTok was being used to **defame** political leaders both in ruling and opposition sides
- Most users were using **fake identities** for the purpose.

Regulations of the Nepal Government over Social Media Platforms

- The Nepal Government has issued a declaration regarding the **regulation** of all social media platforms.
- The government has granted **three months time** to all social media platforms to set up Nepal offices to address grievances.
- The government directives for social media users **prohibited use of fake identities**.
- It has also warned the platforms of **engaging in** defamatory activities.
- The platforms were also asked to reveal the **real identity** of the user
- They have been **ordered to cooperate** in investigations.

Recent Developments in the Social Media Regulations of India

- Recently an amendment was introduced to the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** in India.
- The amendment was introduced to **replace** the previous guidelines.
- The amendment sought to **regulate** intermediaries and digital news media.
- The media platforms are **mandated to provide** technological solutions to identify the first originator of any information risking privacy.
- The amendments introduced in April 2023 **give the government power**
 - to decide for itself what information is bogus
 - To exercise wide-ranging powers of censorship
 - To compelling intermediaries to take down posts deemed fake or false.

Prelims Takeaway

- Social Media Platforms
- Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

2. GoI and ADB sign \$400 million loan to support urban services-PIB / GoI and ADB sign \$400 million loan to support urban services -Live Mint

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

News:

- India has signed a \$400 million **policy-based loan agreement** with the Asian Development Bank (ADB)
 - To create high-quality urban **infrastructure**
 - To improve **service delivery**
 - To promote efficient **governance systems**

Integrated Planning Reforms with Asian Development Bank

The programme also envisages **integrated planning reforms**

- To control **urban sprawls**
- To foster **systematic** and **planned** urbanisation
- To enhance the entire **ecosystem** of legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms.

Prelims Takeaway

- AMRUT- 2.0
- Asian Development Bank

Subprogram-1 of Integrated Planning Reforms of the Asian Development Bank

- The sub-programme 1 was approved in 2021
- It aimed at
 - The **financing** of \$350 million
 - Establishing national-level **policies** and **guidelines** to improve urban services.

Subprogram-2 of Integrated Planning Reforms of the Asian Development Bank

- The sub-programme 2 **supports investment planning and reform** actions at the state and urban local body (ULB) levels.
- The loan agreement for the sub-programme 2 **was signed by** India and ADB recently.
- The Subprogram-2 supports the government's **urban sector strategy** with a focus on reforms aimed at
 - making cities **livable** and **centres** of economic growth
 - provisioning of **inclusive, resilient** and **sustainable** infrastructure.
 - operationalising the national flagship programme of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0
 - Targeted for **universal access** to water supply and sanitation.
- The sub-programme also supports **other mission objectives** for ensuring
 - urban water security through **reducing water losses**
 - **recycling treated sewage** for non-domestic use
 - **rejuvenation** of water bodies
 - maintaining **sustainable** groundwater levels
- ULBs will **promote**
 - modernisation of building bylaws
 - land pooling
 - urban agglomeration
 - comprehensive urban mobility planning
 - transit-oriented development
 - well-planned city centres of economic growth.
- Such integrated planning processes **will incorporate**
 - climate and disaster resilience
 - promoting nature-based solutions
 - improving urban environment
 - improving cities' financial sustainability through generation of additional revenues.
- Cities will be incentivised on **enhancing their revenues**
 - property taxes
 - user charges
 - improve their efficiencies
 - rationalise their expenditures.
- This will substantially **help cities to mobilise** innovative financing such as commercial borrowings
 - issuance of municipal bonds
 - sub sovereign debts
 - public-private partnerships to bridge significant deficits in urban infrastructure investments.

3. Centre likely to give direct sops to get EV manufacturing in top gear-Indian Express

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

News:

- The Centre is **considering a new policy** for electric vehicles (EVs) that will incentivize manufacturer.
- The policy will include foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs)

Prelims Takeaway

- FAME Scheme
- PLI Scheme
- Phased Manufacturing Programme

- looking to **set up a base in India**, as part of a comprehensive policy for the **sunrise sector**.

Government Initiative to Promote EV in India

- The government currently runs different schemes for **EV promotion**
 - **The FAME**
 - The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India (FAME) Scheme provides **financial incentives** to both EV manufacturers and buyers.
 - The scheme will **run till 2024** with a total budget of \$1.3 billion.
 - **PLI schemes.**
 - The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Automotive Sector has an **outlay of \$3.1 billion**.
 - It provides **incentives to manufacturers** of advanced automotive technology (AAT) products, including EVs.
 - Another PLI for **advanced chemistry cell (ACC)** battery storage provides incentives to manufacturers of ACC batteries, which are a key component of EVs.
 - The scheme has a **budgetary outlay of \$2.1 billion**.
 - **Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP)**
 - The Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP) of the government **aims to promote** the localisation of EV production in India.
 - The PMP has **different timelines** for different components of EVs, with the aim of making India self-sufficient in EV production by 2030.
 - Though PLI for batteries is **yet to take off**, the Indian EV manufacturing sector is growing rapidly.

Current Developments on New Policy on Electric Vehicles

- The discussion process on **new policy is being led by** the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
- The proposed policy **will differ** from these as it will roll out direct incentives linked to quantum of investments rather than offer consumer subsidies,
- The policy would aim **at increasing the domestic value addition** in the EV ecosystem to at least 50%.
- The policy seeks to **expedite adoption** of EVs in the country.

Current Status of Electric Vehicles in India

- In 2022-23, India **produced over** 450,000 EVs, up from 230,000 lakh in the previous year.
- The Economic Survey 2023 predicts that India's **domestic electric vehicle market** will see a 49% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2022 and 2030. M
- The survey assesses **annual sales** of 10 million by 2030.

4. Rishi Sunak 'keen' to visit India, but many difficult issues remain in FTA: U.K. envoy-The Hindu

Relevance: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

News:

- India's External Affairs Minister is **visiting London**.
- Negotiations for a India-United Kingdom **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** are the main focus of ties between the two countries at present,
- The British Prime Minister is "**keen**" to visit India, but that the focus on the FTA talks came first.

FTA Talks Drag on

- Mr. Sunak's proposed bilateral visit to India in **October-November, 2023** is understood to have been put off due to delays in the FTA talks.
- The talks, which began **after Brexit in January 2022**, are now in their 14th round, with about five of the **26 chapters still unresolved**.
- Recently, in a **telephone conversation** the Prime Minister of India and the British Prime Minister also discussed the progress in the FTA talks.

Prelims Takeaway

- Sikhs for Justice Group
- Safe States List

Current Development related to the FTA between India and UK

- The External Affairs Minister will hold **several high-level meetings** in London to discuss strategic ties.
- He will also express India's concerns over the issue of **Khalistani extremism** in the U.K.
- Diplomatic sources have said that the U.K. FTA is **India's top priority** at present.
- The Prime Ministers of both countries are hopeful that the FTA will be **completed by early 2024**, but have not set any deadline yet.

Problems of FTA between India and UK

- The problems include
 - The **Rules of Origin**, given that the U.K. has an integrated supply chain with the European Union.
 - India wants to **favour goods** that include a higher value addition from the U.K. itself.
- In addition, **tariffs over goods** like
 - Scotch whiskey and automobiles, including electric vehicles, **from the U.K.**
 - Leather and textiles **from India** are among the sticking points.
 - India has yet to commit to giving legal and financial U.K. **firms access** to the Indian market.
 - **Mobility, or more visas** for Indians, are not included in the agreement.

Tackling 'illegal' migration between India and UK

- The Safe States List of the UK is a move that is **tightening regulations** for non-legal immigrants.
- The list is important for Indians as they became the **second biggest migrant group** crossing the Channel, behind Afghans, in 2022.
- Indians are
 - The **largest recipients** of work visas to the U.K. Students
 - **Visitors and skilled professionals** received a third of the total number of visas issued

Countering Khalistani Extremism

- India-U.K. had **spat over protests** by Khalistani extremists at the High Commission in London
 - Including the **most recent video** by the Sikhs for Justice group, banned by India, that threatened any passengers taking Air India flights on November 19.
- So far the UK Government **did not confirm** whether it would ban the SFJ as a terror group.

5. Submit details of funds from poll bonds, EC tells parties- The Hindu

Relevance: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

News:

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has once again **asked political parties to submit details of funds** received by them through electoral bonds
- **The Supreme Court had directed ECI** to produce before it in a sealed cover the "up to date" data of funds received by parties through electoral bonds till September 30, 2023.

Electoral Bonds

- The electoral bonds system was **introduced in 2017 by way of a Finance bill** and was implemented in 2018.
- They serve as a means for individuals and entities to **make donations to registered political parties** while maintaining **donor anonymity**.

Key Features

- **State Bank of India (SBI)** is the **authorised issuer** and the bonds are issued through **designated SBI branches**.
- SBI issues the bonds in **denominations** of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh and Rs 1 crore.
- Can be **purchased digitally or through cheques** by **Indian citizens or entities established in India**.
- Purchased Can be bought **individually or jointly** with other individuals.
- Payable to the bearer **on demand and interest-free**.
- Valid for **15 calendar days** from the date of issue.

Prelims Takeaway

- Electoral Bonds

- **Encashment** only through an **authorised bank account** of the political party.

Eligibility of Political Parties

- Political parties **registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**
- Must have **secured not less than 1% of the votes polled in the last general election** to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly

Transparency and Accountability

- Parties must **disclose their bank account** with the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- Donations are made through **banking channels**, ensuring transparency.
- Political parties are obligated to **explain the utilisation of the funds received**.

GS III**6. Minimum six-month jail term proposed by parliamentary panel for those selling adulterated food-Indian Express**

Relevance: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

News:

- A **parliamentary panel has proposed amendments** to address the inadequacies in the punishment for selling adulterated food and drinks
- It also emphasises the **severity of health risks associated with such offences**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita

Adulterated Food or Drinks

- **The panel recommends a minimum imprisonment of six months** and a minimum fine of Rs 25,000 for those selling adulterated food or drinks.
- The existing **punishment under this clause is deemed insufficient**.

Sale of Noxious Food or Drinks

- the panel suggests a **minimum imprisonment of six months** and a minimum fine of Rs 10,000 for the sale of noxious food or drinks.
- The panel **deems the current penalty inadequate**.

Community Service as Punishment

- The **introduction of "community service"** as a punishment under the proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) is acknowledged as a positive step.
- The committee views **community service as a reformatory approach to reduce the burden on prison infrastructure** and enhance prison management.

Community Service Recommendations

- The committee recommends **specifying the term and nature of community service** as part of the law.
- A provision should be included for assigning a person **to supervise punishments delivered in the form of community service**.

Rectification of Errors

- The panel notes **typographical and grammatical errors in the proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita** and urges the Ministry to rectify these errors,
- It also emphasizing the potential misinterpretation and dilution of the law's intent.

7. World severely off track to limit planet-heating emissions: U.N-The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

News:

- Recently, the United Nations (UN) released a report, **criticizing global efforts to address climate change as inadequate**.
- The assessment comes just ahead of crucial climate negotiations and emphasizes **the urgent need for decisive action to curb greenhouse gas emissions**.

Prelims Takeaway

- COP28

Key Findings: Failing to Meet Targets**Inadequate Progress**

- The report reveals that **current climate pledges from nearly 200 nations would only result in a 2% reduction** in carbon emissions by 2030 compared to 2019 levels.

Discrepancy with IPCC Targets

- This falls significantly **short of the 43% reduction recommended** by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
 - To meet the Paris Agreement's target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre industrial levels.

Call for Urgent Action

- The UN Secretary-General emphasises the **need for a "climate ambition supernova" in every country**, city, and sector, stressing the inadequacy of gradual progress.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) Assessment

- Under the Paris Agreement, countries are **required to submit more ambitious emission-cutting plans (NDCs)**.
- **The report assesses 20 updated NDCs submitted** between September 2022 and September 2023.
- **Emissions are projected to be 8.8% higher in 2030** compared to 2010, showcasing only fractional improvement since the previous report.

COP28 Meeting and Global Stocktake

- The response to a global stocktake will be a focal point at the COP28 meeting.
- The world's progress in averting severe climate impacts is deemed off-target, **with global greenhouse gas emissions needing to peak by 2025**.

Challenges and Critical Response

- Planned production increases in major petrostates, **as per a UN Environment Programme report**, could result in significantly higher fossil fuel production, exacerbating emissions.
- The report stresses the critical nature of the response to the stocktake, **representing the only chance to align future climate targets (due by 2025) with the necessary actions**.
- **The UN report underscores the imperative for immediate, comprehensive climate action** to prevent surpassing global warming limits and mitigate severe climate consequences.

8. Demand for travel to smaller cities drives passenger growth at Bengaluru airport- The Hindu

Relevance: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc
News:

- India's **third-largest airport** in terms of passenger traffic, the Bengaluru International Airport, has seen a rapid proliferation of travel
 - To domestic destinations since COVID-19, **spurred by a demand** for travel to smaller cities.
- The airport recorded 28.12 million **domestic passengers** out of a total 31.91 passengers in the financial year 2022-2023.

Reasons for Spurt in the Travel to Small Cities

- Before COVID-19, the share of passengers **traveling to metropolitan cities** like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Chennai accounted for 75% of total passengers,
- This share has **now shrunk to 42%** as the share of non-metro travellers grew from 25% to 58%.
- The demand from these travellers during COVID-19, when train travel was **no longer a preferred choice** for many due to health safety protocols.
- This has also often led to airlines **opening new routes**.
- The new routes are providing **more frequencies** on them.
- **New routes** like Bangaluru to Jamnagar(Gujarat), Jaisalmer (Rajasthan), Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), Agartala (Tripura), Jharsuguda (Odisha) have been developed. These far-flung towns account for 45% of the total non-metro traffic from Bengaluru.
- **Alongwith** Jaipur, Lucknow, Pune and Goa constitute 30% of the total non-metro traffic.

Prelims Takeaway

- Russia-Ukraine Conflict
- UDAN Scheme
- Digi Yatra
- NABH

- The **remaining 25% of the traffic** is to cities such as Trichy, Salem and Vizag which are within a 75-minute flying distance.

Status of Domestic and International Travel to India

- The number of domestic passengers at the **airport is now** at 105% of the pre-COVID level.
- The number of **international passengers** last fiscal (3.78 million) though lagged behind the pre-COVID level by around 10%
 - as foreign carriers are **yet to restore capacity** to the levels seen in 2019-2020 due to
 - supply-chain constraints
 - the Russia-Ukraine conflict which has closed a part of the European sky.
- However, by the end of this fiscal the airport is **expected to exceed** the pre-Covid passenger number of 33 million and record between 36 million to 37 million total passengers.
- Among Indian airports, Bengaluru has among the **highest yields** for routes to Europe, and the U.S.

9. The growth dichotomy: On September's Index of Industrial Production data- The Hindu

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

News:

- In September, India's **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** increased by 5.8%, a **significant drop from the 14-month high** of 10.3% growth in August.
- Economists had expected a 7-8% increase, especially **during the festive season**.
- This slower growth marked a **2.4% decline in production** compared to August, with **manufacturing being the leading contributor** to this decline.

Prelims Takeaway

- Index of Industrial Production
- Eight core sectors

Overall Economic Picture

- Despite the slowdown in September, the **average factory output growth** for Q2 stands at 7.4%, contributing to a **6% growth** in the first half of 2023-24.
- While this **aligns with RBI's expectations** of Q2 GDP growth surpassing the official projection of 6.5%, it reveals an **economic asymmetry**.

Index of Industrial Production

- IIP is an indicator that measures the changes in the **volume of production of industrial products** during a given period.
- It is a **composite indicator** that measures the **growth rate of industry groups**.
 - The industry groups that it measures are **classified** as
 - **Broad sectors** like manufacturing, mining, and electricity.
 - **Use-based sectors** like capital goods, basic goods, intermediate goods, infrastructure goods, consumer durables, and consumer non-durables.
- It is used by **government agencies** including the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India, etc, **for policy-making purposes**.
- It is compiled and published **monthly** by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- Base Year for IIP is **2011-2012**.

Eight Core Sectors

- These comprise **40.27%** of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- The eight core sector industries in **decreasing** order of their weightage: **Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilisers**.

Editorials, Gists and Explainers

1. Arms Man and AI- Indian Express

Relevance: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Context:

- Like all major technological advances, **artificial intelligence poses major challenges to the world in developing** responsible use in civil and military domains.
- While the discussion on **promoting and regulating the civilian use of AI** has gained much ground in recent years, the discourse on military uses has begun to gain international traction

Global Dynamics on AI in Military

- **UN General Assembly Resolution:** The UN General Assembly recently voted to address the challenges posed by lethal autonomous weapons, marking a significant step in the campaign by human rights and arms control activists against autonomous weapons.
- **Divergent Positions:** While major powers, including the US, China, and India, are all developing autonomous weapons, they voted differently on the UN resolution.
- The US and allies supported it, China abstained, and India voted against it.

Military Developments in Major Powers:

- **US Initiatives:** The US, China, and India are actively engaged in developing autonomous weapons.
- The US, for instance, deployed uncrewed ships and has ambitious plans for uncrewed systems.
- It emphasizes the integration of AI into defense management.
- **Chinese Advancements:** China is centralizing AI in building an intelligent People's Liberation Army (PLA), utilizing AI for various military functions, including reconnaissance and combat.

India's Pragmatic Approach

- **UN Vote Significance:** India's negative vote at the UN reflects a pragmatic turn in its engagement with global issues, prioritizing a balanced approach to national security, ethics, and global governance.
- **National Security Considerations:** Given the military imbalance with China, India sees AI as crucial for national defense.
 - However, it acknowledges the technological gap and is working to enhance its national capabilities.

Challenges and Opportunities for India

- **Technological Partnership with the US:** India's blossoming technological partnership with the US in AI necessitates significant investment in national capabilities, including AI sciences, technological capabilities, military doctrines, and institutions.
- **Global Governance Role:** While building national AI capabilities, India aims to contribute to shaping international norms.
- It seeks to collaborate with like-minded countries to ensure responsible military use of AI, emphasizing human control over autonomous weapons.

Conclusion

- India's approach reflects a pragmatic understanding of the strategic importance of AI in national defense while actively participating in global discussions to influence norms and ensure responsible AI applications in the military domain.

2. Community rights and forest conservation- The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context:

- The **Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023**, has raised concerns about its **impact on the forests and its inhabitants.**
- The historical context of forest laws reveals a **lack of recognition for the rights of these communities.**

New Amendment Objectives

- The amendment primarily focuses on addressing climate change and deforestation by emphasising effective management and afforestation.
- However, it achieves this by removing certain forest areas from legal jurisdiction, allowing its economic exploitation.
- Key Provisions
 - Applicable exclusively to areas categorised under the 1927 Forest Act and those designated as such on or after October 25, 1980.
 - Not applicable to forests that
 - were converted for non-forest use on or after December 12, 1996
 - land which falls under 100 kilometres from the China and Pakistan border where the central government can build linear projects.
 - The central government is authorised to construct security measures in areas up to ten hectares.
 - To establish security infrastructure and facilities for surveillance.
 - This provision also applies to areas (up to five hectares) which are designated as vulnerable.
 - Within these regions, the government, with the necessary approvals, can implement security protocols.
 - Initiatives like ecotourism, safari, environmental entertainment, and more may also be implemented.

Reasons for the Amendment

- The amendment responds to the Godavarman Thirumulkpad case, 1996, interpreting forest land broadly.
 - This led to an interpretation of forest land in accordance with its 'dictionary meaning'.
 - Subsequently, all private forests were brought under the ambit of the 1980 law.
- Its aim is seen as accommodating industrial needs, generating opposition from private landowners and conservationists.
- Concerns about its impact on indigenous communities surfaced during the parliamentary discussions.

Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)

Recommendations

- The JPC submitted its report in three months, largely dismissing critical comments.
- The Bill, thus, passed in Parliament without substantial debate.
- There have been no collaborative discussions with the southern States concerning matters related to their specific geographical locations.

Impact on 'Prior Consent'

- The Forest Conservation Act underwent important amendments in 2016 and 2017.
- The 2016 and 2017 amendments requiring tribal gram sabhas consent for non-forest use have been removed.
- State governments can proactively engage in specific activities within this framework through the inclusion of grama sabhas, by establishing State-level steering committees.
- However, hesitations persist due to perceived opposition to development.

Compensatory Afforestation Concerns

- As outlined in the new legislation, it encompasses various projects and schemes that can be undertaken by both private individuals and organisations for afforestation or reforestation purposes.
- It encountered significant challenges in the past, primarily due to ambiguities in the original legislation and shortage of available land.
- The goal of the new amendment is to streamline the process.
- However, there is apprehension regarding the potential environmental implications of this amendment.
- The law mandates that for every parcel of land that is lost due to afforestation efforts, an equivalent amount of land must be afforested elsewhere.
- It does not specify the type of trees that should be planted, leaving room for discretion.

Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Adivasi Concerns

- The FRA has had notable impacts in various regions, such as the Mendha-Lekha in Maharashtra, Loyendi in Odisha, and Malakkappara in Kerala.
- Despite the initial enthusiasm, both the Central and State governments have become less enthusiastic about implementing the FRA in their States.
 - Viewed as a hindrance to non-forest land use.
 - Granting community rights could weaken the State's authority over the forest.
- To navigate this situation, the government opted to reduce or dilute the extent of forest areas, thereby limiting the potential for additional Adivasi claims.
- The amendment also fails to address the growing issue of human-animal conflicts in forest areas, particularly in the Adivasi hamlets of the Western Ghats region.

Challenges and Issues

- The seemingly straightforward law presents challenges in practice.
- Afforestation incentives clash with decentralised forest governance principles.
- The definition of strategic projects remains vague.
- Internal environmental security concerns are overshadowed, particularly in disaster-prone states.

3. With a little help from the sun - Indian Express

Relevance: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Context:

- A **private sector-led revolution** is addressing energy poverty by deploying **clean energy mini-grids in rural communities** across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Small Island Developing States.
- This **second-generation effort** builds on government-supported mini-grids, emphasising **adaptability to local needs and sustainable operational models**.

Solar Mini-Grid Effectiveness

- The World Bank aims to fund a thousand mini-grids in Nigeria, focusing on private sector-owned and operated solar mini-grids.
- These are deemed the most cost-effective and sustainable means to bring electricity to 75% of the 675 million people worldwide living without power, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The shift from expensive and polluting diesel generation to solar mini-grids is cited as environmentally beneficial.

Beyond Electricity Provision

- Mini-grid companies also offer additional services like mobile telephony, irrigation, agro-processing, and e-mobility.
- They act as rural development accelerators
 - fostering prosperity by providing sales and financing for appliances
 - creating opportunities in healthcare and agriculture

Adaptation to Climate Shocks

- Decentralised energy systems, such as solar mini-grids, are identified as crucial in responding to climate shocks like droughts, heat stress, and flooding.
- Their adaptability and resilience are particularly significant for farming-dependent rural areas in Africa and Asia.

Complementing Centralized Grids

- In cases where centralized grid infrastructure reaches communities, mini-grids complement these efforts.
- Cambodia illustrates how formerly isolated mini-grids become part of the national grid, benefiting over a million consumers.

Success in India

- India showcases success with about 700 solar mini-grids owned and operated by private companies in states like UP, Bihar, and Jharkhand.
- Unlike state-run mini-grids, these are unsubsidized and commercially viable, contributing to progress on sustainable development goals.

Global Solar Investments Disparity

- While solar is recognized as the cheapest energy form, global solar investments are insufficient to achieve net-zero emissions.
- Developing countries, home to over 50% of the population, receive only 15% of renewable energy investments, highlighting a significant imbalance.
- Innovative financial mechanisms and guarantees are essential to unlock the potential of smaller-scale solutions like solar mini-grids.

International Solar Alliance's Role

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is actively addressing this imbalance through its Global Solar Facility (GSF).
- GSF places special emphasis on underserved regions in Africa
- With a \$100 million fund, the GSF aims to enable \$10 billion in investments, providing clean energy access for 35-40 million African households by 2030.
- This fund, fortified by payment guarantees, insurance, and investment vehicles mitigate risks and boost investor confidence in decentralised solar applications in Africa.

Solar Energy Viability

- Solar energy, with its competitive cost, financial viability, and reduced reliance on fossil fuels, presents a path to energy independence and security.
- The drop in solar module costs over the past decade supports the case for investing in solar energy.

Conclusion

- **Private mini-grids**, combining solar with battery storage, are positioned as **affordable, technically mature, easily deployable and bankable solutions**.
- There is an **urgent need for more support**, considering their significance in **addressing energy access and climate action**.

Quick Look

1. Mount Etna

- It is an active stratovolcano on the east coast of Sicily, Italy.
- It is Europe's most active volcano and one of the largest in the world.
- Its recorded volcanic activity dates back to 1500 B.C. and since then, it has erupted more than 200 times.
- It has displayed a variety of eruption styles, including violent explosions and voluminous lava flows.

2. VadHAVAN Port

- It is a proposed Rs 75,000 crore container port project at VadHAVAN in Maharashtra.
- It will be developed as a joint venture by the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) and the Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB).
- The new port has a natural draft of about 20 metres close to the shore, making it possible for it to handle bigger vessels.
- It will enable the call of container vessels of 16,000- 25,000 TEUs capacity, giving advantages of economies of scale and reducing logistics cost.
- It will be designed to handle around 254 million tonnes (MT) of cargo.
- It will be developed as a Green Port.
 - It is planning to provide green fuel to ships coming to the port.
 - The construction and operations are planned to keep in mind the environmental issues.

3. Birsa Munda

- He was a folk hero and a tribal freedom fighter hailing from the Munda tribe.
- He spearheaded an Indian tribal mass movement that arose in the Bihar and Jharkhand belts in the early 19th century under British colonisation.
- He rallied the tribals to fight against the forceful land grabbing carried out by the British government, which would turn the tribals into bonded labourers and force them to abject poverty.
- He declared "Ulgulan", or revolt, against the British and "the Dikus" the outsiders.
- He created a faith called 'Birsait'.
- He stressed the need for the tribals to study their own religion and not forget their cultural roots.
- Birsa Munda propagated the principles of Hindu religion.
- His struggle led to a big hit against the British government in the form of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act being passed in 1908.
 - The act restricted the passing on of land from the tribal people to non-tribals.
- In recognition of his impact on the national movement, the state of Jharkhand was created on his birth anniversary in 2000.

Prelims Track Question

Q1. With reference to the Information and Technology Act, 2000 , consider the following statements :

1. IT rules derive their authority from the Act.
2. Under the Act , the social media intermediaries have immunity in India as long as they follow due diligence
3. Recently, an amendment to the Act granted unrestricted power to the Ministry of Home Affairs to create a "fact check unit" to identify false or misleading online content.

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

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

Q2 With reference to the AMRUT-2.0 , consider the following statements :

1. The mission was launched for the period of four years.
2. The mission is aimed at providing both guaranteed supply of water and sewer connection.
3. The mission is run by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

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

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

Q3. With reference to the FAME India Scheme, consider the following statements

Statement-I- This scheme encourages electric vehicle manufacturers to manufacture a higher number of electric vehicles in the country.

Statement-II- The scheme aims to reduce vehicular emissions and air pollution levels within the country.

Which one of the following statements is correct?

- A. Statement I is correct but statement II is incorrect
- B. Statement I is incorrect but Statement II is correct
- C. Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is the correct explanation for Statement I
- D. Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is not the correct explanation for Statement I

Q4. Consider the following countries

1. India
2. Albania
3. Georgia
4. Switzerland

Why did these countries remain in the news recently ?

- a. These countries have formed a grouping for Free Trade Agreement
- b. These countries have presented their neutral stand on Israel-Hamas Conflict
- c. These countries have created a group to promote affiliate cricket.
- d. These countries are related to the developments concerned with the Safe States List of the UK.

Q5. With reference to the Electoral Bonds System in India , consider the following statements :

1. The system was introduced as a part of Money Bill.
2. The bonds do not maintain the anonymity of the donor.
3. All Public Sector Banks registered under the Schedule-II of the Reserve Bank of India are authorised to issue bonds.
4. The bonds can be issued in denominations of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore.
5. The bonds are payable to the bearer on demand and interest-free.

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

- A. Only two
- B. Only three
- C. Only four

D. All five

Q6 Consider the following statements about Intended Nationally Determined Contributions

1. China targeted a 60-65% reduction of greenhouse gases emitted.
2. United States aimed to reduce greenhouse gases by 26-28%
3. European Union Sought to reduce greenhouse gases by 40%
4. India Submitted a target of 33-35% per unit of GDP

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

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. All four

Q7 Consider the following statements about DIGI YATRA'.

1. It is a project conceived to achieve contactless, seamless processing of passengers at Airports, based on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT).
2. It provides a decentralized mobile wallet-based identity management platform which is cost effective and addresses privacy/data protection issues

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Q8. Consider the following statements about Eight Core Sectors

1. These comprise 40.27% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
2. Refinery Products, Electricity, Coal, Cement, Fertilisers are among the eight core sector industries

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 Consider the following statement:

1. ML is a subset of AI that involves the development of algorithms that allow computers to learn from data without being explicitly programmed.
2. DL is a subset of ML that uses artificial neural networks to learn from data in a way that is similar to how the human brain learns.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Q10. Consider the following statements Solar mini-grids

1. These are small-scale electricity generation and distribution systems that use solar photovoltaic (PV) technology to generate electricity and store it in batteries.
2. They are typically designed to provide electricity to communities or areas that either need to be connected to the main power grid or experience frequent power outages.

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

Prelims Track Answer

Ans. 1 Option B is correct

Explanation

Information and Technology Act, 2000

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 derive their authority from the Information Technology Act, 2000, which provides legal recognition for electronic commerce. **Hence, Statement 1 is correct.**
- The Act provides a "safe harbour" for intermediaries that observe due diligence in discharging their duties and follow guidelines prescribed by the state. **Hence, Statement 2 is correct.**
- Section 79 of the Act grants immunity to intermediaries, as long as they follow due diligence and state-prescribed guidelines.
- Intermediaries include social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
- The IT Rules impose obligations on intermediaries and require social media platforms to provide technological solutions to identify the first originator of any information on their service, under certain circumstances.
- Recently, the Indian government introduced a new amendment to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, or IT Rules, which gives the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) unrestricted power to create a "fact check unit" to identify false or misleading online content. **Hence, Statement 3 is incorrect.**

Ans. 2 Option B is correct

Explanation

AMRUT-2.0

- AMRUT 2.0 was launched in October 2021 for a period of 5 years, i.e., Financial Year 2021-22 to 2025-26. **Hence, Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- It is an extension of the AMRUT mission, which was launched in June 2015 and aims to provide every household with access to a tap with a guaranteed supply of water and a sewer connection. **Hence, Statement 2 is correct.**

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) is the nodal ministry for the scheme. **Hence, Statement 3 is incorrect.**

Ans. 3 Option D is correct

Explanation

FAME Scheme

- The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme was launched in April 2015 under the National Electric Mobility Mission.
- This scheme encourages electric vehicle manufacturers and related providers to manufacture a higher number of electric vehicles in the country. **Hence, Statement 1 is correct.**
- Its goal is to reduce vehicular emissions and air pollution levels within the country. **Hence, Statement 2 is correct.**
- This scheme also aims to establish an electric charging infrastructure.
- In addition, FAME India Scheme targets to convert 30% of total transportation into electric vehicles by the year 2030.

Ans. 4 Option D is correct

Explanation

UK Drafts Legislation on the List of Safe Countries for Immigration

- The bill tabled in the House of Commons (the UK) includes India and Georgia as the countries to be added to the list.
- The UK Home Office said the move aims to strengthen the country's immigration system and help prevent abuse by people making unfounded protection claims.
- This move would speed up the process of returning Indians who travel from the country illegally and rule out their chance of seeking asylum in Britain.
- Other countries deemed safe by the UK include Albania, Switzerland, the European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) states.

Ans. 5 Option A is correct

Explanation

Electoral Bonds System

- The electoral bonds system was introduced in 2017 by way of a Finance bill and it was implemented in 2018. **Hence, Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- They serve as a means for individuals and entities to make donations to registered political parties while maintaining donor

anonymity. Hence, **Statement 2 is incorrect.**

- SBI is the only authorised issuer. Hence, **Statement 3 is incorrect.**
- State Bank of India (SBI) issues the bonds in denominations of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore. Hence, **Statement 4 is correct.**
- The bonds are
 - Payable to the bearer on demand and interest-free. Hence, **Statement 5 is correct.**
 - Purchased by Indian citizens or entities established in India.
 - Can be bought individually or jointly with other individuals.
 - Valid for 15 calendar days from the date of issue.

Ans. 6 Option D is correct

Explanation

- During the COP 21 of the UNFCCC, in which the Paris Agreement was signed. The following INDCs was submitted:
- China: targeted a 60-65% reduction of greenhouse gases emitted.
- United States: aimed to reduce greenhouse gases by 26-28%
- European Union: Sough to reduce greenhouse gases by 40%
- India: Submitted a target of 33-35% per unit of GDP

Ans. 7 Option D is correct

Explanation

- It is a project conceived to achieve contactless, seamless processing of passengers at Airports, based on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT).
- The project envisages that any traveller may pass through various checkpoints at the airport through a paperless and contactless processing, using facial features to establish the identity which would be linked to the boarding pass.

- It provides a decentralized mobile wallet-based identity management platform which is cost effective and addresses privacy/data protection issues in implementation of Digi Yatra.

Ans. 8 Option C is correct

Explanation

- Eight Core Sectors
- These comprise 40.27% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- The eight core sector industries in decreasing order of their weightage: Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilisers.

Ans. 9 Option D is correct

Explanation

- The term AI, coined in the 1950s, refers to the simulation of human intelligence by machines. AI, ML and DL are common terms and are sometimes used interchangeably. But there are distinctions.
- ML is a subset of AI that involves the development of algorithms that allow computers to learn from data without being explicitly programmed.
- ML algorithms can analyze data, identify patterns, and make predictions based on the patterns they find.
- DL is a subset of ML that uses artificial neural networks to learn from data in a way that is similar to how the human brain learns.

Ans. 10 Option C is correct

Explanation

- Solar mini-grids are small-scale electricity generation and distribution systems that use solar photovoltaic (PV) technology to generate electricity and store it in batteries.
- They are typically designed to provide electricity to communities or areas that either need to be connected to the main power grid or experience frequent power outages.

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