

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

By



SOURCES



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Important News Articles

GS I

1. 10th century Kadamba inscription written in Kannada and Sanskrit found in Goa - The Hindu

Relevance: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

News:

- An inscription written in **Kannada and Sanskrit** and said to be of 10th century A.D.
- The **Kadamba period** has been discovered in the **Mahadeva temple at Cacoda in southern Goa**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Chalukyas
- Kadamba period

Background

- The Kadambas of Goa were the subordinates of **Chalukyas of Kalyana**.
- **Chalukyan emperor Tailapa II** appointed Kadamba Shasthadeva as mahamandaleshwar of Goa for his help in overthrowing the Rashtrakutas.
- **Kadamba Shasthadeva conquered the city of Chandavara** from the Shilaharas in 960 A.D.
- Later, he conquered the **port of Gopakapattana (present Goa)**.
- **Gundayya**, the son of Talara Nevayya, may have participated in this battle, and **won the port at the cost of his life**.
- His father may have erected a memorial stone with the inscription in the **temple of Mahadev of Cacoda** to commemorate the heroic fight of his son.

The Chalukyas

- It ruled parts of **Southern and Central India** between the 6th century and the 12th century.
- There were three distinct but related Chalukya dynasties.

Badami Chalukyas

- The earliest Chalukyas with their capital at **Badami (Vatapi) in Karnataka**.
- They ruled from the mid-6th century and declined after the death of their greatest king, Pulakesin II in 642 AD.

Eastern Chalukyas

- **Emerged after the death of Pulakesin II** in Eastern Deccan with capital at Vengi.
- They ruled till the 11th century.

Western Chalukyas

- **Descendants of the Badami Chalukyas**, they emerged in the late 10th century and ruled from Kalyani.

2. SC report exposes severe gaps in accessibility for disabled persons across courts in India - 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:

- A recent report by the **Centre for Research and Planning of the Supreme Court** exposes significant **deficiencies in the infrastructure of District Courts across India**, emphasising the challenges faced by people with disabilities in accessing justice.

Prelims Takeaway

- Supreme court
- District Court

Key Findings

- **Concern of** disable
- Over half of the District Court complexes lack ramps.
- Only 25.2% provide wheelchairs for accessibility.

Tactile Paving for Visual Impairments

- Only 5.1% of District Courts have tactile paving to assist those with visual impairments.
- Emphasises the importance of tactile or auditory instructions for inclusivity.

Accessible Toilets

- **Only 30.4% of District Court** complexes **have separate disabled-friendly toilets.**
- Underscores the fundamental importance of accessible facilities.

Hearing Impairment

- Positive instances of virtual arguments with sign language interpreters in higher courts.
- However, **only 2.8% of districts in India have access to sign language interpreters** for court proceedings.

Infrastructure Gap

- Out of 25,081 sanctioned judges, there is an **infrastructure gap of 4,250 courtrooms.**
- 73.5% of court premises are owned by the judiciary, with 2.6% being rented.
- Alterations in old buildings or those in temporary accommodations face challenges due to structural limitations and space constraints.
- Few High Courts cite difficulties in modifying existing structures.

Recommendations

- The report calls for **regular inspections by agencies** like the Public Works Department, in coordination with District Judges, to explore modifications in existing court buildings for enhanced accessibility.
- It emphasises the **urgent need for attention and action** to address this critical shortcoming in judicial infrastructure.

3. Over 100 active permafrost structures identified in Jhelum basin, can cause catastrophic disasters in future: Study - Down to Earth

Relevance: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone. etc.

News:

- A new study has mapped over **100 permafrost structures** known as '**rock glaciers**' in the **Kashmir Himalayas.**
- The study raises concerns about the **impact of permafrost melting** on the region and its potential contribution to **natural disasters.**

Rock Glaciers

- These are a **mass of rock, ice, snow, mud, and water** that moves slowly down a mountain under the **influence of gravity.**
- Unlike an ice glacier, rock glaciers usually have **very little ice visible at the surface.**
- These rock glaciers, with **ice volumes within,** are crucial **indicators of permafrost movement or melting.**
- They typically form in **mountainous regions with permafrost, rock debris, and ice.**
- While research on permafrost is advanced in areas like Greenland, Alaska, and Siberia, **little is known about rock glaciers in the Himalayas.**

Study Findings

Prelims Takeaway

- Rock Glaciers
- Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)
- Kashmir Himalayas

- More than 100 rock glaciers in the Kashmir Himalayas were identified through satellite images and field visits.
- The researchers classified them as '**active**' or '**relict**' based on permafrost status.
- Active rock glaciers, indicating permafrost movement, raise concerns about **instability and potential natural disasters** as the region warms.

Implications of Permafrost Melting

- The melting permafrost **makes areas unstable**, posing risks to nearby settlements and critical infrastructure.
- The study points out the dangers posed by rock glaciers, including the risk of **glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs)**.
- Rock glaciers near glacial lakes, such as Chirsar Lake, **increase the risk of GLOFs**, which can cause massive damage in surrounding areas.
- It may also **make landslides more frequent** with the land on the melting ice becoming loose.

4. India's oldest living city found in Vadnagar: multi-institution study- The Hindu

Relevance: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

News:

- A joint study by five prominent institutions has found evidence of a **cultural continuity in Vadnagar in present-day Gujarat even after the collapse of the Harappan civilisation**, thus making it likely that the "Dark Age" was a myth.

Key Highlights

- The study also indicates that the **rise and fall of different kingdoms during the 3,000-year period** and recurrent invasions of India by central Asian warriors were driven by severe changes in climate like rainfall or droughts.
- **Vadnagar was a multicultural and multireligious** (Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Islamic) settlement.
- The **period between the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the emergence of the Iron Age** and cities such as Gandhar, Koshal, and Avanti is often depicted as a **Dark Age** by archaeologists.
- **evidence makes Vadnagar the oldest living city** within a single fortification unearthed so far in India.
- Some of our recent unpublished radiocarbon dates suggest that the settlement could be as old as 1400 BCE contemporary to the very late phase of post-urban Harappan period.

Harappan Civilization

- The **history of India begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)**, also known as Harappan Civilization.
- It flourished around 2,500 BC, in the western part of South Asia, in contemporary Pakistan and Western India.
- The Indus Valley was home to the largest of the four **ancient urban civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China**.
- In the 1920s, the Archaeological Department of India carried out excavations in the Indus valley wherein the ruins of the two old cities, viz. **Mohenjodaro and Harappa were unearthed**.
- In 1924, **John Marshall**, Director-General of the ASI, announced the discovery of a new civilisation in the Indus valley to the world.

Prelims Takeaway

- Mesopotamia
- Dark Age

5. ONGC makes back-to-back gas discoveries in Mahanadi basin block - The Economic Times

Relevance: distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent); factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India).

Prelims Takeaway

- Natural gas
- coal

News:

- State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) **achieves back-to-back natural gas discoveries in the Mahanadi basin** deepwater block in the Bay of Bengal.
- The discoveries are part of ONGC's strategic move into high-risk deepwater exploration.

Discovery Details

- The discoveries occurred in the MN-DWHP-2018/1 block, secured by ONGC in the third round of auction under the **open acreage licensing policy in 2019**.
- Notably, the discoveries are in an area previously designated as a **'no-go' zone due to national security interests**.
- The first discovery, named **Uktal, is at a water depth of 714 metres** and exhibited a significant flow of gas during initial testing.

Implications for India's Energy Security

- The **discoveries contribute positively to India's energy security**, aiming to reduce dependence on gas imports.
- India **aims to increase the share of natural gas** in its energy mix to 15% by 2030, with natural gas playing a role in transitioning towards net zero carbon emissions by 2070.

Government Initiatives and Exploration Acceleration

- ONGC's exploration was **expedited following the government's decision** to free almost one lakh square kilometres of area from restrictions in 2022.
- Previously classified as 'no-go' areas due to missile testing or satellite launch routes, **these restrictions were lifted**, allowing energy companies to explore for oil and gas.

Collaboration and Technical Expertise

- ONGC collaborated with French energy giant TotalEnergies to **exchange information on deepwater offshore acreage** in the Mahanadi and Andaman basins.
- The collaboration aimed to leverage TotalEnergies' technical expertise in deepwater exploration and production.

Future Outlook

- ONGC's discoveries align with India's efforts to enhance domestic production and reduce reliance on imported gas.
- **Natural gas, with its lower carbon footprint**, is considered a transitional fuel in India's shift away from fossil fuels.
- Increased natural gas usage is expected **to replace coal in power generation** and liquid fuels in industries.

6. Rainfall rising in over half of India's sub-districts, says four-decade study - The Hindu

Prelims Takeaway

- Southwest monsoon

Relevance: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone. etc., geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

- North east monsoon

News:

- **Rainfall is increasing in more than half of India's 4,400-odd tehsils or sub-districts**, according to a granular analysis of changes in the Indian monsoon, conducted for the first time at the tehsil level.
- 55% of tehsils have seen a rise in rainfall, about 11% of them have experienced decreasing rainfall.

Key Highlights

- More worryingly, this decrease occurred **largely during the critical southwest monsoon**.
- Most of these tehsils are in the Indo-Gangetic plains — which contribute to more than half of India's agricultural production
 - As well as in northeastern India, and the Indian Himalayan region.

Extremes at the district level

- An analysis at the district level reveals that **30% of India's districts witnessed several more years of deficient rainfall** and 38% saw many years of excessive rainfall.

Increasingly erratic rainfall patterns

- Rainfall from the northeast monsoon — that sets in during October, November and December, primarily in peninsular India
 - It has increased by more than 10% over the last decade (2012-2022) in approximately 80% of tehsils in Tamil Nadu, 44% in Telangana, and 39% in Andhra Pradesh, respectively.
- **The southwest monsoon accounts for nearly 76%** of India's annual rainfall, with about 11% coming from the northeast monsoon.
- Several tehsils of **Maharashtra and Goa, Odisha and West Bengal** on the east coast have also been **reporting increasing rainfall** during these winter months.
 - This increase could partly be **attributed to cyclonic activity** in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.
 - With increasing extreme weather events, **hyper-local climate risk assessments and action plans are the way to go for India** to keep leading in climate action and disaster risk reduction.

7. The Indian tectonic plate is breaking into two. It's happening beneath Tibet - India Today

Relevance: Salient features of world's physical geography.

News:

- In a **new discovery** that could reshape our understanding of the **forces shaping the Earth's highest mountains**
- Researchers have unveiled **new seismic data** indicating that the **Indian tectonic plate is splitting in two beneath the Tibetan plateau**.

Key Highlight

- This revelation was presented at the American Geophysical Union conference in San Francisco and offers a fresh **perspective on the colossal Himalayan mountain range's formation**.
- For decades, geologists have known that the **Himalayas owe their towering presence to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian continental plates**.
- The process, which began around 60 million years ago

Prelims Takeaway

- Helium-3
- Tectonic plates

- It has been likened to the crumpling of a car's hood in a head-on collision, with the Indian plate being driven beneath its northern neighbor by the currents of molten rock within the Earth's mantle.
- Over time, this tectonic interaction has thrust the Eurasian landmass skyward, **creating the planet's highest elevations.**
- However, the **latest analysis challenges previous assumptions about the subduction** of the buoyant Indian plate.
- Rather than sinking smoothly into the mantle's depths, the seismic data suggests a more complex scenario where the plate is delaminating.
- The **dense base of the Indian plate is peeling away** and descending into the mantle, while its lighter top portion continues to scrape just beneath the Eurasian plate.
- The findings indicate that the **Indian slab** is neither gliding along nor crumpling uniformly but is **undergoing a dramatic structural separation.**
- Some sections of the plate appear relatively intact, while others are fragmenting approximately 100 kilometers below the surface, allowing the base to deform into the Earth's fiery core.
- This seismic investigation aligns with geological models **based on helium-3 enriched spring water** and patterns of fractures and earthquakes near the surface.
- Together, these pieces of evidence paint a picture of tectonic turmoil deep beneath the Himalayas.
- The implications of this study are profound, not only for our understanding of mountain formation but also for earthquake prediction methods.

8. With no iron or steel, Ayodhya temple is a study in sandstone - The Hindu

Relevance: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Prelims Takeaway

- Percota
- Bansi Paharpur

News:

- A new landmark of India — both structural and spiritual — has risen on Ayodhya's horizon on January 22 in the form of a new-age architectural marvel of elegant sandstones
 - diligently carved by craftspeople with dedication and devotion to Lord Ram.

Key Highlights

- The majestic Ram Temple in Ayodhya is a sprawling structure, **built by overcoming engineering challenges and with due sensitivity to nature.**
- The new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the temple, an event led by the Prime Minister who said it marked **the advent of a new era.**
- **No iron or steel has been used** in the construction of the grand structure.
- **Stones** have been sourced from **Rajasthan's Bansi Paharpur area.**

Nagara style

- The temple complex, **built in the traditional Nagara style**, will be 380 feet long from the east to the west, 250 feet wide and 161 feet high.
- During the excavation work, **it was found that the ground was unsuitable for laying the foundation stone**
 - A challenge that engineers overcame by creating an "artificial foundation" over which the superstructure sits.
- Images of Lord Hanuman, other deities, peacocks and flower patterns have been carved onto the stones, lending the structure a divine look.

Unique feature

- Around the grand temple is a rectangular periphery called **percota**, a feature found in temples in south India, but not generally in north India

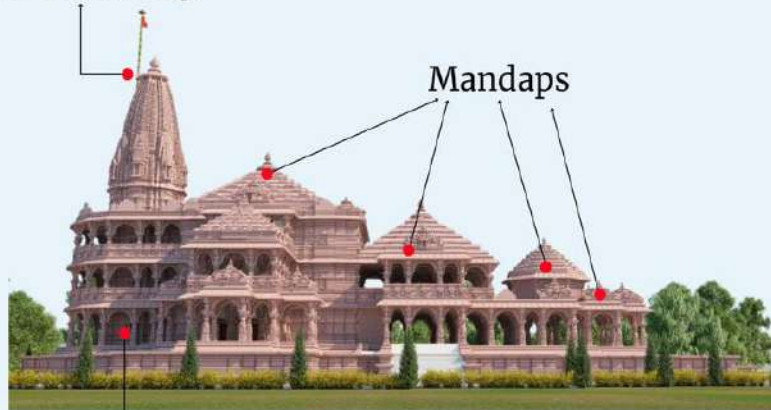
- The pericota will be 14 feet wide and the periphery span 732 metres.
- The temple will be **nestled within the pericota periphery**.
- Ornate statues of elephants, lions, Lord Hanuman and Garuda were installed at the main entrance leading to the temple earlier this month.
- The top court backed the construction of the Ram temple at the disputed site.
- It ruled that an alternative five-acre plot must be found for building a mosque.
- Later, the Uttar Pradesh government allotted the land for the mosque in Dhannipur area of Ayodhya district.



Mentorship
India

Ram temple at Ayodhya

Shikhara (Flag)



Mandaps

Garbh Griha
(Temple sanctum)

- Ram Darbar comprises **statues of Ram, Sita, Lakshman, & Hanuman**

- Temple can accommodate **1500** people at a time
- Expected daily footfall: **1-2 lakh**
- Expected footfall on special days: **upto 5 lakh**



Pradhakshin patha

16 ft.

32 steps

THE HINDU

9. Court tells ASI to make Gyanvapi report public - The Hindu

Relevance: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

News:

- A **Varanasi district court agreed** to make the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)'s scientific survey **report on the Gyanvapi Mosque complex** available to both the Hindu and the Muslim sides.
- The concerned parties will have to submit an affidavit in this regard.

Prelims Takeaway

- Gyanvapi
- ASI

Key Highlights

- The development comes over a month **after the Archaeological Survey of India submitted its report** before the Varanasi District Court in a sealed cover
- However, the ASI had sought the postponement of the release of its Gyanvapi Survey report to the public domain.
- **The panel had urged a Varanasi district judge to delay the disclosure**
 - Fearing that the report's content to the public would be inappropriate and fuel rumours and misinformation.
- **The ASI carried out a scientific survey of the Gyanvapi premises**, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple
 - To determine whether the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple.
- The **survey had begun after the Allahabad High Court upheld the Varanasi district court order**
- It ruled that the step was "necessary in the interest of justice" and would benefit both the Hindu and Muslim sides in the dispute.
- **After the Allahabad High Court order**, the Gyanvapi committee moved the Supreme Court against the order.

10. J'khand's in R-Day parade showcases skill of tribal women in Tasar silk production- The Print

Relevance: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

News:

- Jharkhand's tableau in the Republic Day parade on Friday showcased the skill of tribal women in the production of Tasar silk.

Prelims Takeaway

- Tropical Tussar
- Geographical Indication tag

Tasar Silk

- It is a type of wild silk, which is **made from silkworms that feed on plants like Asan and Arjun**.
- People from different parts of India call it tusaar, tusser, tushar, tusa, tassore, and tasar etc.
- Globally, it is **produced in China, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh**.
- **India is the second-largest producer** of tussar silk and the exclusive producer of Indian tussar (also known as tropical tussar)
 - Which is largely tended to by tribals.
- In India, it is primarily produced in **Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh**.
- Currently, **Jharkhand** is one of the **largest producers**.
- Jharkhand has also applied for the prestigious GI (Geographical Indication) tag for its Tasar Silk

Selection Process of Tableaux

- **The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is responsible for conducting** the parade and coordinating arrangements with States and other agencies.
- Preparations for the ceremony, which has become synonymous with national pride and patriotism, begin months in advance.
- This process includes **the selection and shortlisting of tableaux.**
- The Ministry of Culture collaborates with the MoD in the selection process, given the cultural and artistic nature of the tableaux, **supporting in the evaluation and promotion of cultural displays.**

11. India nominates 12 forts of Marathas for UNESCO World Heritage List - The Hindu

Relevance: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

News:

- India has nominated the “**Maratha Military Landscapes**”, for inclusion in the **UNESCO World Heritage list for 2024-25.**
- It is a network of forts that showcase the strategic military powers of Maratha rule,

Key Highlights

- The 12 components of this nomination are:
 - the forts of Salher
 - Shivneri, Lohagad
 - Khanderi, Raigad
 - Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra and Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu.

Extraordinary fortification

The “**Maratha Military Landscapes**”, which developed between the 17th and 19th centuries.

- Represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers.
- Eight of these are **protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**
 - while four are protected by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra.

From Shivaji's times

- The inception of the **Maratha military ideology dates back to 17th century** during the reign of the Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj from 1670 CE
 - And continued through subsequent rules until the Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.
- The nomination is in the **category of cultural property**
- At present in India, there are 42 World Heritage sites out of which 34 are cultural sites, seven are natural sites and one is a mixed site.
- The “Maratha Military Landscapes” is the sixth cultural property nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List from Maharashtra
 - It had been earlier included in the Tentative List of World Heritage sites in 2021.

Prelims Takeaway

- Maratha
- World Heritage sites

GS II

12. Case-by-case exemption from new MGNREGS payment system: Centre - The Hindu/ Aadhaar-based system must now, Govt says may give exemptions on case basis - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Aadhaar-Based Payment System
- Aadhaar

News:

- With the **Aadhaar-based payment system** (ABPS) now mandatory for payment of wages to NREGA workers
- The Government said it may consider **exemptions on a “case-by-case basis”** should any gram panchayat face “technical issues”.

Background

- Under ABPS, workers' 12-digit **Aadhaar numbers are linked with their job cards** as well as their bank accounts.
- The system was first made mandatory with effect from February 1, 2023
 - but, through several extensions, the Centre allowed until December 31, 2023 the mixed route — of ABPS and NACH, an interbank system used for bulk payments such as subsidies and salaries.
- With no extension granted to states beyond December 31, the ABPS became mandatory from January 1, 2024.
- “The Government of India has decided to make the wage payment of unskilled workers through APBS
 - to ensure the payment of beneficiaries into their bank accounts, even in case of frequent change of bank account by the beneficiary

Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS)

- This system was first **introduced in 2017**.
- This system **utilises the Aadhaar number of the recipient to identify** them for the purpose of transferring funds.
- This system promotes transparency in wage payments and helps to prevent any unauthorised access.
- It prevents any **disruptions in workers' wage payments** caused by issues with their bank accounts.
- As per the government data, 84% of the transfers in March '23 were based on ABPS.

13. India and Pak. exchange list of nuclear installations - The Hindu/ India, Pakistan exchange list of nuke installations - Indian Express

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

News:

- Continuing with an over three-decade practice, **India and Pakistan recently, exchanged a list of their nuclear installations** under a bilateral pact
- It **prohibits** the two sides **from attacking each other's atomic facilities**.

Background

- The exchange of the list took place under the provisions of an agreement on the prohibition of attack against nuclear installations and facilities,

Prelims Takeaway

- Nuclear power plant
- Nuclear energy

- It was done simultaneously through diplomatic channels in New Delhi and Islamabad.
- The agreement was signed on **December 31, 1988** and **entered into force on January 27, 1991**.
- It mandates the two countries **to inform each other of nuclear installations** and facilities to be covered under the agreement on the first of January of every calendar year.
- This is the **33rd consecutive exchange of such lists between the two countries**, the first one having taken place on January 1, 1992.

14. Levy 20-30% health tax on food high in sugar, salt, fat: study - The Hindu

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

News:

- A **health tax of between 20% to 30% in addition to GST** can be considered to be imposed on sugar, sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs)
- The **recommendation is an outcome of a study commissioned by Niti Aayog**, which is studying the impact of imposing health taxes and warning labels on food products

Prelims Takeaway

- Goods and Service Tax (GST)
- Health Tax

Improving health outcomes using sin tax

Currently, sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) attract 28% GST plus a 12% cess, while high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) products only attract 12% GST

■ While the global average consumption of sugar is 22 kg per person per year, it is 25 kg per year per person in India

■ Free sugar consumption in India is five times the WHO recommended threshold

■ For SSBs, a health tax of 10-30% could result in 7-30% decline in demand

■ For HFSS, 10-30% health tax could result in 5-24% decline in demand

■ If sugar costs ₹100 base price, with current GST at 18% it costs ₹118. With a proposed additional tax increase of 10-30%, estimated price to consumers will be ₹128-148

Precedent:
Up to 70 countries have imposed a health tax on SSBs and HFSS products.

■ For SSBs with a ₹100 base price, current GST at 18% plus 12% additional cess, the price to consumers is ₹140. This will increase to ₹150-170 with a proposed additional tax of 10-30%

■ For HFSS products with a ₹100 base price and GST at 12%, the price to consumers is ₹112. This will increase to ₹122-142 with additional tax of 10-30%



15. MHA seeks to pacify truckers protesting new hit-and-run law - The Hindu/ Protesting new hit-and-run law, truckers dial down after talks with Home Secretary - Indian Express

Relevance: Pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

News:

- **Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita** has enhanced the punishment for hit-and-run cases.
- This has led to the **strike** by transporters across the country.
- The meeting of **All India Motor Transport Congress** has been called in by the **Union Ministry of Home Affairs**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Section 304-A of IPC
- Section 106 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita

What is the issue ?

- Transporters, including bus and taxi unions, have called a nationwide strike from **January 1 to January 30**.
- The strike is to protest **Section 106** of the BNS
- The section prescribes a maximum of **punishment of 10 years** in cases of rash and negligent driving.
- The government has not notified the implementation of the section.

Impact of the Strike

- Truckers strike sets off **panic buying of fuel** in several States.
- The drivers have **refused to ply** their vehicles on the roads.
- The impact of the strike was **being felt all over the country**,
 - specially in the northern States of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh.

What is the stance of the Government ?

- If a driver had accidentally hit someone and informed the police on time, then he or she would face a **lesser punishment of five years**.
- The duration of sentences in such cases had been increased to 10 years because of the **observations made by the Supreme Court**

Claims of Drivers

- Whenever an accident takes place, the **case is always registered against the driver of the heavy vehicle**,
 - even though the driver of the small vehicle is at fault.
- There are chances of being **thrashed**.
- In some instances, drivers have been **lynched**.
- Drivers are an **unorganised lot**.
- Sometimes the drivers run to **save themselves from lynching**.

Different Punishment under New Law

- Under new law, doctors face **two years of imprisonment** for death due to negligence
- Section 106(1) of the BNS provides for a punishment of "**0-5 years**", while Section 106(2) provides for a punishment of "**0-10 years**" in "hit and run" cases.
- **Section 106(1)**, where the sentence is lesser, that is, up to **five years**, and is a bailable offence. **Section 106(2)** is a non-bailable offence.

Current Position on Punishment

- Currently, under **Section 304A** of the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)**, which will be replaced by the Sanhita, the punishment for causing death by negligence is **two years imprisonment** and fine, or both.

16. 'CAA rules may be notified before Lok Sabha election' - The Hindu/ Govt ready with rules for CAA, set to be notified before LS polls announcement - Indian Express

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

Prelims Takeaway

- Assam Accord
- CAA, 2019

News:

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act was passed by the Parliament of India in December 2019.
- The rules for its implementation will be notified before the Lok Sabha Elections of 2024.

Status of The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019

- The Bill, sought to fast-track Indian citizenship to **Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians** but **not Muslims**
 - who migrated to India owing to religious persecution in **Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh**.
- The bill got the consent of the **President of India in 2019**.
- After the implementation of the rules the process of granting citizenship will start.

Process for Getting Citizenship

- The applicants will have to declare the year when they entered India **without travel documents**.
- **No document** will be sought from the applicants.
- Requests of the applicants, who had applied after 2014, will be converted as per the new rules.
- The Centre has so far availed **eight extensions** of the date to frame the rules.
- In the last two years, over **30 District Magistrates and Home Secretaries** of nine states have been given powers to grant Indian citizenship under the Act.

Impact of CAA on Assam Accord

- The protests in Assam were fuelled by fears that the legislation would **permanently alter the demographics** of the state.
- The CAA is seen in Assam as a violation of the **1985 Assam Accord** which allows foreign migrants who came to Assam after **January 1, 1966** but before **March 25, 1971** to seek citizenship.
- The cut-off date for citizenship to be extended under the CAA is **December 31, 2014**.

Petitions against Law

- A clutch of petitions, including by the Indian Union Muslim League, are before the Supreme Court, challenging the constitutional validity of the CAA.
- The petition alleges that CAA leaves out the persecuted Rohingya of Myanmar, Tibetan Buddhists from China and Tamils from Sri Lanka.

The Stand of the Government

- The Centre said the basis of the "**reasonable classification**" made by the 2019 Act was not religion
 - but "**religious discrimination**" in neighbouring countries which are "functioning with a state religion".
- The legislation was **not** meant to be an **omnibus solution** to issues across the world.
- The Indian Parliament cannot be expected to take **note of possible persecutions** that may be taking place across various countries in the world.
- The current Act is a **kind of amnesty** against i.e. persecution on the ground of religion in theocratic countries.
- The constitutionality of CAA ought to be tested **within that legislative domain**.
- The constitutionality **cannot be conflated to extend beyond that object** and the reasons behind the Parliamentary cognizance of the issue.

17. Pleas in SC challenge new law on appointment process for CEC, ECs - The Hindu/ Plea challenges new law on appointment of CEC, ECS - Indian Express

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

News:

- Recently, a **PIL** was filed in the Supreme Court over the recent amendments to the **appointment process of the CEC and ECs**.
- The PIL sought the **quashing** of the new law that **grants the central government extensive powers** in making appointments to the Election Commission.

Prelims Takeaway

- Public Interest Litigation (PIL)
- Election Commission of India

Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023

- The new law was criticized for **dropping the CJI from the selection committee**.
- It now empowers the **President to appoint the CEC and ECs** based on the **recommendation of a Selection Committee** consisting of
 - The Prime Minister
 - The Leader of Opposition in the House of the People
 - A Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister
- It includes provisions for a **search committee** chaired by the **Union Law Minister** to prepare a **panel of candidates** for the selection committee's consideration.

Opposition's Allegations

- The opposition accuses the government of **defying a March 2023 Supreme Court order**.
- The March 2023 SC order specified the **involvement of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the CJI** in selecting the CEC and ECs

Seeking an Independent System

- The PIL calls for the implementation of an **"independent and transparent system of selection"**.
- It suggests constituting a **neutral and independent selection committee** for the appointment of the CEC and ECs.
- It seeks the **inclusion of the CJI** in the selection committee, emphasizing the importance of a **fair and unbiased process** in appointing the key electoral authorities.

18. SC's translation projects raced ahead in 2023 as ret'd. HC judges, law clerks help AI - The Hindu

Relevance: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

News:

- The Supreme Court of India successfully **accelerated its translation initiative** in 2023.
- It completed the translation of over 31,000 judgments into various Scheduled Languages through the **e-SCR portal**.

Translation Process

- The translation process gained momentum under the current CJI, employing retired High Court judges and law clerks to correct AI-based software translations.

Prelims Takeaway

- e-SCR Portal
- Common Core Vocabulary Initiative
- National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)

- The initiative faced challenges in **translating legal terminology**, particularly in languages like Tamil, where a standardised glossary is lacking.

Challenges and Concerns

- Legal experts question the **practical utility of translated judgements** when High Courts are not conducting proceedings in regional languages, except in Hindi-speaking states.
- The absence of standardized legal glossaries in regional languages raises **concerns about accuracy and coherence**.

Common Core Vocabulary Initiative

- The Bar Council of India is working on creating a "**Common Core Vocabulary**" to standardize legal terminology in all Indian regional languages.
- Critics argue that allowing regional languages in court proceedings is **essential for developing a comprehensive glossary** that aligns with the **understanding of the common man**.

e-SCR Portal

- Initiative to provide the **digital version of the apex court's judgements** in the manner as they are reported in the official law report.
- It provides **free access** to about 34,000 judgements of the SC to lawyers, law students, and the common public.
- These verdicts will be available on the apex court website, its mobile app, and on the judgement portal of the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG).
- The Supreme Court has developed a **search engine** with the help of the National Informatics Centre comprising **elastic search techniques** in the database of e-SCR.
- The **search facility in e-SCR** provides for free text search, search within search, case type and case year search, judge search, year and volume search and bench strength search options.

19. SC upholds SEBI probe, turns the spotlight on Hindenburg's 'conduct' - The Hindu/ SC rejects pleas for court-monitored CBI probe into allegations against Adani firms - 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.

Prelims Takeaway

- SEBI
- Supreme Court

News:

- Recently, the **Supreme Court issued a judgement**, highlighting concerns over the actions of Hindenburg Research
- It **instructed** the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and **investigating agencies to examine potential legal infractions related to the Adani Group's short position**.

Background

- The court's decision stemmed from petitions **citing a decline in investor wealth and market volatility** following Hindenburg Research's report
 - accusing the Adani Group of manipulating share prices and violating SEBI regulations.

Impact Assessment

- The judgement emphasised that the SEBI's investigation into the Adani Group **inspired confidence and dismissed the idea of transferring the case to other agencies**.

SEBI Investigation and Amendments

- The court ordered the SEBI to conclude pending investigations within three months
- It rejected claims that SEBI's regulatory amendments hindered the investigation.

- The amendments allegedly pertained to Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) Regulations and Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) Regulations.

Regulatory Amendments

- The court dismissed these claims, stating that the amendments had tightened the regulatory framework.

Allegations of Conflict of Interest:

- The court dismissed allegations of conflict of interest against members of the Justice Sapre Committee, emphasizing that they were not worth serious consideration.

Relief for regulator

Key takeaways from the SC judgment in Adani-Hindenburg case:

- SEBI directed to investigate if the short position taken by Hindenburg amounted to any infraction of law

- Judiciary's review of regulatory framework/policies of SEBI is limited to check if there is any manifest arbitrariness or violation of fundamental rights

- SEBI probe is comprehensive; it has completed 22 out of 24 investigations against Adani Group

- The threshold to transfer investigation from SEBI to another agency is not present

- Petitioners did not verify the OCCRP findings; it cannot be used as conclusive proof or credible evidence against a statutory regulator

- Allegations of conflict of interest against members of the Justice A.M. Sapre Committee are dismissed



20. PM unveils projects worth Rs 1,150 cr in Lakshadweep - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

- Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation for various projects worth Rs 1,150 crore in the Union Territory.

Key projects

- Lakshadweep is now connected through a **submarine optical fibre cable**, marking a significant shift in communication infrastructure.
- This will enhance internet services, telemedicine, e-governance, education, digital banking, currency usage and literacy in the islands
- The Prime Minister also inaugurated the **Low Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) plant at Kadmat**, which will produce 1.5 lakh litres of clean drinking water every day.
- Additionally, he dedicated to the nation the **Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC)** in all households on the Agatti and Minicoy islands.
- Other projects launched by Modi include the **solar power plant at Kavaratti**, which is the first battery-backed solar power project in Lakshadweep.

Prelims Takeaway

- Map based question
- Kavaratti

- He also laid the **foundation stone for the renovation of the primary healthcare facility** in Kalpeni and the construction of five model Anganwadi centres (Nand Ghars) in the five islands of Androth, Chetlat, Kadmat, Agatti and Minicoy.

Lakshadweep

- India's smallest Union Territory Lakshadweep is an archipelago consisting of **36 islands with an area of 32 sq km**
- It is a **uni-district Union Territory** and the islands were constituted a union territory in 1956.
- It comprises 12 atolls, three reefs, five submerged banks and **ten inhabited islands**.
- The principal islands in the territory are **Minicoy and those in the Amindivi group**.
- The easternmost island lies about 185 miles (300 km) from the coast of the state of Kerala.
- Ten of the islands are inhabited.
- Its Capital is **Kavaratti**

21. SC guidelines for courts: Do not summon govt officials as first resort - 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.

Prelims Takeaway

- High court
- Supreme court

News:

- The Supreme Court has issued **detailed guidelines cautioning against the routine summoning and humiliation of government officials by courts**.
- This move follows an April 2023 Allahabad High Court order, which led to the arrest of senior Uttar Pradesh government officials over issues related to rules for domestic help for former high court judges.

Key Highlights

Guidelines to Maintain Respectful Environment

- The Chief Justice of India **established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** emphasising the importance of **cultivating an environment of respect in judicial proceedings**.

Need for Physical Presence

- The SOPs state that the **physical presence of officials may be required** only when dealing with **evidence such as documents or oral statements**.
- Otherwise, courts are advised to rely on affidavits and other documents, avoiding routine directives for physical appearances.

Exceptional Cases and Video Conferencing

- In exceptional cases requiring in-person appearances, the court is advised to consider **video conferencing as the first option**.
- Reasons for directing personal presence should be recorded, and **officials should be given sufficient notice and a designated time slot for preparation**.

Professionalism and Dress Code

- Courts are urged to maintain professionalism and refrain from making remarks on officials' appearance, clothes, education, or social standing.
- The SOPs emphasise avoiding comments on dress unless a specified dress code violation occurs.

Uttar Pradesh Case Background

- The guidelines were prompted by the **Supreme Court's disapproval of the Allahabad High Court's frequent summoning** of Uttar Pradesh government officials.

- **The High Court had taken actions against officials**, including issuing bailable warrants, over non-compliance with its directives on rules for domestic help to former high court judges.
Court's Disapproval and Warning
- The Supreme Court criticised the High Court's conduct, stating that summoning **officials should not be a routine measure and should only be employed in limited circumstances.**

22. Caste discrimination in prisons needs to be addressed, says SC - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Model Prisons Act 2023
- Fundamental rights

News:

- The Supreme Court recently said **caste-based discrimination of prisoners within the four walls of jails across India is a "very important issue" and needs to be addressed.**

Key points

- A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India found that prison manuals in more than **10 States continue to have provisions which sanction discrimination and forced labour on the grounds of caste in prisons.**
- The state includes Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala,

Sunil Batra case

- A prisoner enjoys all constitutional rights and protections except those that are impaired naturally and directly as a result of the confinement

Model Prisons Act 2023

- Provisions of **punishment** for prisoners and jail staff for **use of prohibited items such as mobile phones in jails.**
- Establishment and management of high security jails, open jail (open and semi-open).
- Provisions for protecting society from the criminal activities of hardened criminals and habitual offenders.
- **Providing legal aid to prisoners**, parole, furlough and premature release to incentivize good conduct.
- There are **provisions for use of technology in prison administration** with a view to bring transparency in prison administration,
 - Provision for videoconferencing with courts, scientific and technological interventions in prisons, etc.

23. 55% of patients given antibiotics only as a preventive measure, says survey - The Hindu

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

News:

- Recently, the **Health Ministry** released the results of a survey conducted by the **National Centre for Disease Control.**
- The survey mapped the patients across 20 tertiary care institutes in 15 States and two UTs between November 2021 and April 2022.

Antibiotic Resistance Concerns

Prelims Takeaway

- Antimicrobial Resistance
- Access, Watch and Reserve (AWaRe)
- National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)

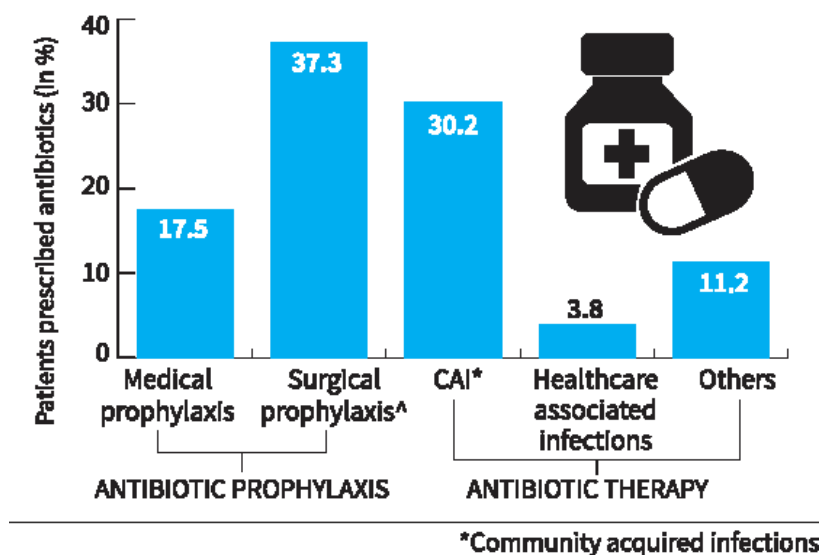
- Antimicrobial Resistance is the **resistance acquired** by any microorganisms **against antimicrobial drugs** that are used to treat infections.
- It occurs when a **microorganism changes over time** and no longer responds to medicines making infections harder to treat.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as **one of the top threats to public health**.
- **Excessive and inappropriate antibiotic use** is a key driver of antibiotic resistance.

Key Findings

- **Over 50%** of nearly 10,000 surveyed hospital patients in India were **prescribed antibiotics for prevention** rather than treatment.
- **94% received antibiotics before a confirmed diagnosis**, contributing to concerns about rising antibiotic resistance.
- About **3% of prescriptions** were from the **"not recommended"** group.

Is prevention better than cure?

As per a NCDC survey, 55% of eligible patients were given antibiotics for disease prevention (prophylaxis), with 37.3% receiving antibiotics for preventing surgical site infections^A



Global Scenario

- WHO's **global point prevalence survey methodology** aims to understand the prescribing patterns in hospitals.
- It tries to address the **limited information** on how antibiotics are prescribed and used at the patient level.
- Few studies have been conducted in India using this methodology.

Hospital Disparities

- **Wide variations among hospitals**, ranging from prescribing antibiotics to 37% of patients to 100% in others.
- Overall, there were 12,342 antibiotic prescriptions, with **86.5%** prescribed through the **parenteral route** i.e. not taken orally.

Antibiotic Classification as per WHO's Access, Watch, and Reserve (AWaRe)

- **Access**
 - antibiotics used to treat the most common and serious infections.
 - Only 38% of prescriptions were for Access group antibiotics, offering the best therapeutic value.
- **Watch**
 - antibiotics available at all times in the healthcare system.
 - 57% were for Watch group antibiotics, with a higher potential for antibiotic resistance.

- **Reserve**
 - antibiotics to be used sparingly or preserved and used only as a last resort.
 - Just 2% were from the "last resort" Reserve group.

Tracking AMR in India

- The NCDC is the **nodal agency** for India's national programme on AMR containment.
- It **monitors antibiotic usage** through the **National Antibiotic Consumption Network (NAC-NET)** established by it.
- Through NAC-NET, the network sites **compile data** on antibiotic consumption in their respective health facilities and **send it to NCDC**.

24. Himachal Pradesh HC stays inclusion of Hatties on ST list - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Lokur committee
- Scheduled Tribes

News:

- Days after the **Himachal Pradesh government issued directives to include Hatties in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list, the Himachal Pradesh High Court issued an interim stay** on January 4, 2024,
- The court questioned the rationality of Parliament's decision and called for responses from the State and Union governments.

Court's Critique on Inclusion Criteria:

- The court highlighted concerns over the inclusion of dominant caste communities, such as Brahman and Rajput, as Hatties, stating that it treated unequals as equals.
- It emphasised that mere residence in a difficult geographical area should not entitle forward castes to claim the disadvantages faced by Scheduled Tribes.

Lack of Characteristics for Inclusion:

- The court pointed out that the Deputy Solicitor General and the Attorney General were **unable to explain how dominant caste communities satisfied** the four characteristics outlined by the **Lokur Committee**
- **Lokur committee** was formed in 1965 to set parameters for ST inclusion:
 - primitive traits
 - distinctive culture
 - shyness of contact
 - backwardness.

25. SC declines to take up plea by Indian held in Prague for 'plot' to kill Pannun - The Hindu

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- **The Supreme Court rejected a plea by an Indian national detained in Prague** accused of conspiring to murder Khalistani activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.
- Justice Sanjiv Khanna emphasized that the **matter involves public international law**, and it's the **government's responsibility to address**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Vienna Convention
- United Nations

Judicial Respect for International Law

- Justice Khanna stressed the importance of respecting international law and the sovereignty of courts.
- **Consular access under the Vienna Convention was acknowledged**, with the judge advising the petitioner to approach authorities if denied.

Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations

- The Convention was adopted on 14th April 1961 by the **United Nations Conference on Diplomatic Intercourse and Immunities** held in Vienna, Austria. India has ratified the convention.

- It entered into force on April 24, 1964, and is **nearly universally ratified, with Palau and South Sudan being the exceptions.**
- It sets out the **special rules – privileges and immunities** – which enable diplomatic missions to act without fear of coercion or harassment through enforcement of local laws and to communicate securely with their sending Governments.
- **It makes provision for:**
 - withdrawal of a mission – which may take place on grounds of economic or physical security
 - for breach of diplomatic relations which may occur in response to abuse of immunity or severe deterioration in relations between sending and receiving States.
- A “receiving State” refers to the host nation where a diplomatic mission is located.

26. Election Commission tweaks rules for allocation of symbols to new parties - The Hindu

Relevance: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

News:

- The Election Commission of India brought in **new rules for allocation of symbols to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs)**

Key Highlights

- EC making it mandatory for Political parties to furnish :
 - audited accounts of last three financial years
 - expenditure statements of last two elections
 - the signature of the authorised office-bearer of the party along with the application form for symbols.

Background

- RUPPs are either newly-registered parties or those which have not secured enough percentage of votes in the Assembly or general election to become a State party
 - or those that have never contested elections after being registered.
- Common symbols are provided to RUPPs based upon an undertaking that they would put up “at least 5% of total candidates with regard to said Legislative Assembly election of a State”.
- Earlier the RUPPs were giving these details separately.
- Now these details are being made part of the format of application for common symbols.
- The EC receives the applications from RUPPs in prescribed proforma for allotment of symbols under **Provisions of Para 10B of the Election Symbols (Reservation & Allotment) Order, 1968.**
- In September 2022, the EC had **de-listed 86 non-existent RUPPs** and declared another 253 as ‘Inactive RUPPs’.

Prelims Takeaway

- Registered Unrecognised Political Parties
- Election commission

27. India, Nepal sign power pact, MoU in renewable energy - Indian Express

Relevance: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

News:

- India’s External Affairs Minister is on a **two-day visit** to co-chair with his Nepalese counterpart the seventh **Nepal-India Joint Commission.**

Power Export Agreement

- Nepal and India signed a long-term agreement for the **export of 10,000 MW of power to India over the next 10 years.**
- The agreement is seen as a major breakthrough in Nepal's power sector.

Renewable Energy Cooperation

- An **MoU for cooperation in renewable energy** was signed between Nepal Electricity Authority and National Thermal Power Corporation Limited, India.

Prelims Takeaway

- Nepal-India Joint Commission
- Renewable Energy
- Location Based Questions

- The agreement reflects mutual efforts to enhance **collaboration in the field of renewable energy** between the two nations.

Cross-Border Transmission Lines

- **Three cross-border transmission lines** were virtually inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister and his Nepalese counterpart.
- The transmission lines include the 132 kV Raxaul-Parwanipur, 132 kV Kushaha-Kataiya, and New Nautanwa-Mainahiya lines, completed with **India's assistance**.

Scope of Discussions

- Discussions focused on **various aspects of bilateral ties**, including
 - trade and economic relations, connectivity projects, defence and security cooperation, agriculture, energy, power, water resources, disaster management, tourism, civil aviation, people-to-people and cultural exchange, and development partnership.
- The External Affairs Minister mentioned that discussions covered the **broader spectrum of Nepal-India relations**, emphasizing cooperation in multiple sectors.

28. India committed to redefining ties with neighbourhood partners: EAM in Nepal - Indian Express

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

News:

- INDIA under the leadership of **Prime Minister is committed to redefining its relationship with partners in its neighbourhood**, especially Nepal

Key Highlights

- His remarks came a day after the two countries **signed a slew of pacts during a meeting of the 7th India-Nepal Joint Commission**
 - including an agreement for India to import 10,000 MW of hydroelectricity over the next 10 years.
- India has also decided to extend a **financial package of Nepali Rs 1,000 crore (or USD 75 million) for reconstruction of infrastructure** in the districts affected in the 2015 earthquake.
- The two sides reviewed all aspects of bilateral relations as well as areas of cooperation.
- The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950, security and boundary-related matters were also discussed
- PM during his visit to Nepal in 2014 had given the '**HIT**' formula for India-Nepal relations. "HIT as in H for highways I for Iways and T for Transways

Prelims Takeaway

- India-Nepal Joint Commission
- Nepal

29. Red Sea disruption: Costs up, crisis may deepen, says official - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- **Disruptions along the Red Sea trade route** have begun pushing up shipping and insurance costs as **shippers have begun taking longer routes** fearing further attacks,

Key Highlights

- **Traders diverting all vessels from Red Sea routes around Africa's Cape of Good Hope** for the foreseeable future, warning customers to prepare for significant disruption.
- Shippers across the world are switching away from the Red Sea **(the shortest route from Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal)**
 - after Iranian-backed Houthi militants in Yemen stepped up attacks on vessels in the Gulf region to show their support for Palestinian Islamist group Hamas fighting Israel in Gaza.

Prelims Takeaway

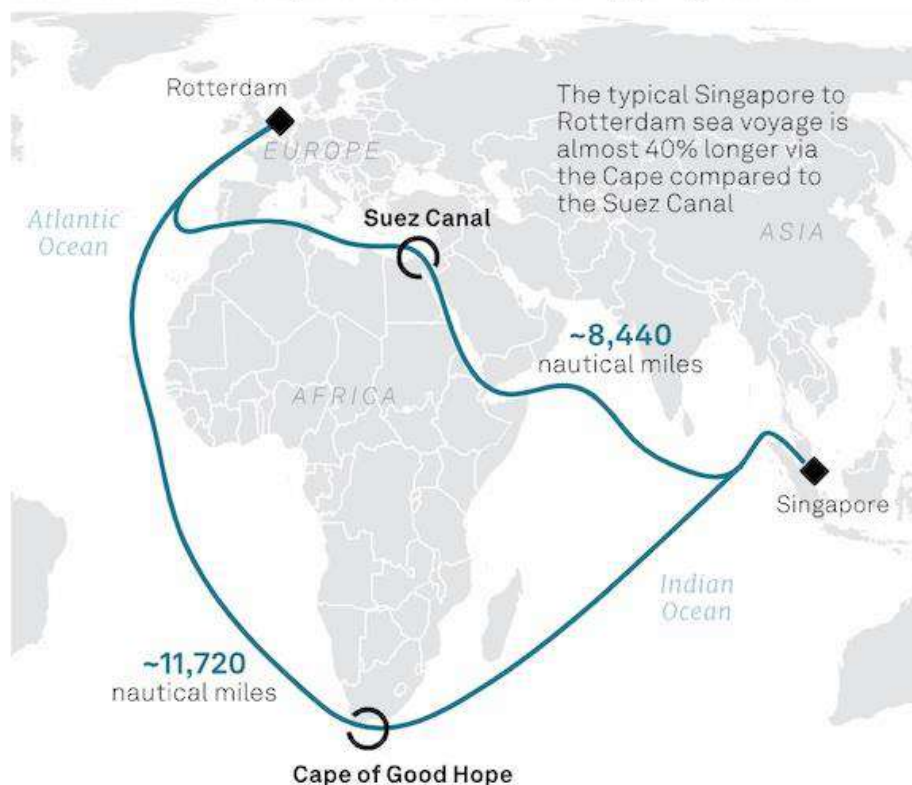
- Red sea
- Cape of good hope

- The trip round Africa can add about 10 days to journey times and requires more fuel and crew-time, jacking up shipping costs.
- **Denmark' it would pause all vessels bound for the Red Sea following an attack on one of its ships by Houthi militants**, and has since begun redirecting ships around Africa.
- Earlier this week, the US and eleven other countries issued a joint statement reiterating a call for an end to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

Red sea

- An inlet of the Indian Ocean between **Africa and Asia**.
- One of the **most saline bodies** of water in the world.
- Bordering Countries: **Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti**.
- Connected to the Indian ocean in the south through the Bab el Mandeb strait and the Gulf of Aden.
- In the north are the Sinai Peninsula, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Gulf of Suez (leading to the Suez Canal).
- It occupies a part of **Great Rift Valley** (Afro-Arabian Rift Valley).

Suez Canal vs. Cape of Good Hope shipping routes



Source: Global Maritime Hub, S&P Global Commodity Insights

30. Ministry of Education launches PRERANA program - PIB

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

News:

- Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India has launched '**Prerana: An Experiential Learning program**

Key Points of scheme

- **Objectives**

Prelims Takeaway

- Vernacular School
- National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

- To offer a meaningful, unique, and inspiring experience to all participants, thereby empowering them with leadership qualities.
- To integrate principles of the Indian education system and the philosophy of value-based education which is a **cornerstone of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- Prerana is a **week-long residential program for selected students of class IX to XII**.
- It is an experiential and inspirational learning program for students with the **best-in-class technology** where heritage meets innovation.
- **A batch of 20 selected students (10 boys and 10 girls) will attend the program**, every week from various parts of the country.
- Prerana program will run from a **Vernacular School, established in 1888**, in one of the oldest living cities of India, Vadnagar, district Mehsana, Gujarat.
- The day-wise program schedule will feature yoga, mindfulness, and meditation sessions, followed by experiential learning, thematic sessions, and hands-on interesting learning activities.
- Evening activities will include visits to ancient and heritage sites, inspirational film screenings, mission life creative activities, talent shows etc. ensuring a holistic learning approach.
- Apart from this, students will engage in diverse activities, embracing indigenous knowledge systems, latest State-of-Art technologies, and learning from inspirational personalities.

31. Cabinet clears PRITHVI initiative for ease of research in earth sciences - Indian Express

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

News:

- The government recently granted approval for a new initiative named 'PRITHVI'.

'PRITHVI' Initiative

- It allows for **cross-disciplinary projects** and **combined utilization of funds** within the Ministry of Earth Sciences allocated for separate verticals **over a five-year period**.
 - Unlike traditional verticals, such as atmosphere, cryosphere, geosphere and ocean science.
- **Objective:** To streamline earth sciences research, promote cross-disciplinary projects, and enhance the ease of conducting research.
- It treats earth system sciences as a **unified entity**.
- The ministry holds a budget of Rs 4,797 crore, encompassing allocations for **five distinct sub-schemes** related to earth sciences.
- **Sub-schemes**
 - Atmosphere and Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems and Services
 - Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology
 - Polar Science and Cryosphere Research
 - Seismology and Geosciences
 - Research, Education, Training and Outreach
- It also enables the Ministry of Earth Sciences to **collaborate with overseas institutes** by awarding research projects to them.

Prelims Takeaway

- PRITHVI Initiative
- Ministry of Earth Sciences

32. No local body members in J&K from tomorrow - The Hindu

Relevance: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

News:

- The people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have not had **any Assembly representation since 2018**, will cease to have any electoral representation at the grassroots level as well.

Key Highlights

- The five-year term of almost 30,000 local representatives is set to expire
- There is no clarity on when the next election to municipal bodies and panchayats will be held
 - as the Union government has decided to first conduct a delimitation exercise.
- Panchayat elections **were last held in the erstwhile State of J&K in late 2018**.
- A total of 27,281 panches (panchayat members) and sarpanches (village headmen) were elected, and **took the oath of office on January 10, 2019**.
- There are **12,776 vacant sarpanch and panch seats in J&K**.

Delimitation proposals

- the Panchayati Raj Department sent letters to all block development officers in J&K, directing them to submit detailed proposals to redraw the boundaries of municipal wards and panch constituencies
 - in such a way that each will have an equal number of electors, as far as possible.
- On December 11, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission of India to hold Assembly elections in J&K by September 30, 2024.
- In September 2018, the Union government transferred the functions of 29 subjects to the panchayats under the 73rd amendment to the Constitution.
- **J&K had partially adopted the recommendations after the 73rd** Constitutional Amendment Act
 - providing a constitutional status to the panchayati raj institutions, was passed by the Parliament in 1993.
- In 2020, the Union Cabinet approved the adaptation of the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989 that was amended by the Ministry of Home Affairs the same year.
- This paved the way for the creation of District Development Councils in the UT, whose members are directly elected by the people
 - The elected members of the legislative Assembly have no say in this process.
- The move will help establish all the three tiers of grass root-level democracy like in other parts of the country

Prelims Takeaway

- District Development Councils
- 73rd amendment

33. India, Saudi sign Haj agreement, this year pilgrim quota 1.75 lakh - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

News:

- India and Saudi Arabia on Sunday signed a **bilateral agreement under which New Delhi has been allocated a quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims** for this year's annual Haj pilgrimage.
- The Government's **initiative for encouraging participation under the Ladies without Mehram (LWM) category** was also discussed and lauded, it added

Prelims Takeaway

- Mecca
- Haj pilgrimage

Haj Subsidy

- It refers to **discounted airfares given by government-owned airlines**.
- It also includes **assistance to Muslim pilgrims for domestic travel** to reach specially designed Haj departure airport terminals, lodging, medical care and meals.
- The Haj subsidy was first introduced in 1932 when the British government provided for a government-funded Haj committee and named Bombay and Calcutta as two ports from where Muslims could embark upon their pilgrimage.

The Haj pilgrimage

- The Haj is an **annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca**, Saudi Arabia, the holiest city for Muslims.
- It is considered to be a mandatory religious duty for all adult Muslims physically and financially capable of doing so.

34. Shah to take stock of generic drug plan - The Hindu

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

News:

- The **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** are set to operate as **Jan Aushadi Kendras**
- The Cooperation Minister will take stock of the new initiative at the “National PACS Mega Conclave” to be held here in the national capital.

Prelims Takeaway

- Jan Aushadi Kendras
- PACS

Key Highlights

- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendras (PMBJKs) **provide quality generic medicines to the general public**
 - which cost 50-90% less than the branded medicines available in the open market.
- More than 2,000 types of generic medicines and about 300 surgical items are made available through the kendras to common citizens at affordable prices.
- PACS were recently allowed to operate Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendras.
- More than 4,400 PACS/cooperative societies from 34 states/UTs have submitted their online applications on the Government of India’s Department of Pharmaceuticals portal for this initiative
- Out of which, more than 2,300 cooperative societies have **already received initial approval and 149 of them are ready to function as Jan Aushadhi Kendras**

More rural jobs

- It will also **help create employment opportunities** in rural areas, it said.
- The **government has taken several steps to strengthen the PACS** including their computerisation, diversify their business activities, and put in place model bye-laws.

35. Govt. to announce quality norms for 2,500 items soon - The Hindu/ Govt to bring more products under quality norm, says Piyush Goyal - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

- Union Commerce, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal said that the **Centre will soon bring Quality Control Orders (QCO) for nearly 2,500 items**.

Prelims Takeaway

- National Education Policy (NEP)-2020
- PARAKH

Key Highlights

- Addressing a meeting on the 77th foundation day of the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), he pointed out that there had been only 14 QCOs for 106 products till 2014
 - but this increased to 156 QCOs for 672 products by 2024.

Prime Minister's vision

- The Prime Minister had put forth the vision of '**zero defect, zero effect**' to ensure the making of high-quality products that are sustainable, eco-friendly and have zero climate impact
- The Union Minister said the youngsters can promote e-learning
 - They can upgrade performance assessment, review, and analysis of knowledge for holistic development (PARAKH) initiatives in colleges and universities.

PARAKH

- It has been launched as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020
 - that envisaged a standard-setting body to advise school boards regarding new assessment patterns and latest research, and promote collaborations between them.
- It will act as a constituent unit of the NCERT.
- It will also be tasked with holding periodic learning outcome tests like the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and State Achievement Surveys.
- It will work on three major assessment areas: large-scale assessments, school-based assessment, and examination reforms.

36. Centre notifies revised rules for quality control of pharma products - The Hindu/ Govt notifies new drug-making standards after overseas deaths - Indian Express

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

News:

- The Union Health Ministry has announced **updated rules under Schedule M of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945**
- It aimed at **ensuring robust quality control for pharmaceutical** and biopharmaceutical products.

Prelims Takeaway

- Schedule M
- drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945

Background

- Schedule M outlines Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)** for pharmaceutical products.
- GMP was first introduced in 1988**, with the last amendment in June 2005.
- The revised Schedule M replaces '**Good Manufacturing Practices**' with '**Good Manufacturing Practices and Requirements of Premises, Plant and Equipment for Pharmaceutical Products.**'
- Its aim is to align with global standards**, particularly those of the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Notified changes include:
 - the introduction of a pharmaceutical quality system (PQS)
 - quality risk management (QRM)
 - product quality review (PQR)
 - qualification and validation of equipment
 - A computerised storage system for drug products.

Manufacturer Responsibilities

- Manufacturers are mandated to ensure the quality of pharmaceutical products**, compliance with licensing requirements, and avoidance of risks to patients.

- **Market release is allowed only after satisfactory test results of ingredients**, with retention of sufficient product samples for verification.

Categories and New Guidelines

- **Revised Schedule M includes 13 parts** with guidelines for manufacturing pharmaceutical drugs.
- **Introduces five new categories of drugs**, including those with hazardous substances (sex hormones, steroids, cytotoxic substances, biological products, and radiopharmaceuticals)

37. 'Look into delisting of Kukis, Zomis from ST list' - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Meiteis
- Lokur Committee

News:

- The Manipur government is urged by the Centre to examine a request for the **removal of "Nomadic Chin-Kuki" from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list in Manipur.**

Background

- In 2023, various **Meitei groups sought inclusion in the ST list**, with an appeal from Meitei Pangals.
- The **conflict between valley-based Meitei people and hill-based Kuki-Zo people** erupted in May 2023, resulting in numerous casualties and displacements.
- A Manipur High Court order on March 19, 2023, triggered the conflict, **directing the state government to recommend ST status for Meiteis.**

Criteria for STs and Objections

- **The Lokur Committee's 1965 criteria for declaring communities as STs** include primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness, and backwardness.
- Specific concerns include the absence of tribe names in the ST list, **allowing room for enrollment of non-indigenous individuals.**

Historical Rejections of Meiteis' Inclusion

- Records reveal that the **Meitei community's proposal for inclusion in the ST list was rejected in 1982 and 2001**
 - with authorities citing their lack of tribal characteristics and listing them as the "dominant group" in Manipur.

38. Rule of law vs right to liberty: What Court said - 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

Prelims Takeaway

- Article 142
- Article 14

News:

- The Supreme Court, while overturning the **Gujarat government's decision to grant remission to Bilkis Bano case** convicts, delves into the intersection of personal liberty and the rule of law.

The Importance of Rule of Law

- The court acknowledges personal liberty as a **fundamental right under Article 21** but raises the question of whether the rule of law can override it.
- The rule of law, as defined by John Adams, is characterized as a **check against executive lawlessness**, ensuring no arbitrary arrest or detention without legislative sanction.

Court's Interpretation of Rule of Law

- The court interprets the rule of law as a mechanism **to ensure that the state fulfills its duties, preventing abuse of legal processes due to inaction**, arbitrary actions, or failures to comply with legal obligations.
- **Breaching the rule of law is seen as negating equality under Article 14**, making judicial scrutiny necessary for its enforcement.

Judiciary as Guardian of Rule of Law

- The court emphasises that the judiciary must be a beacon in upholding the rule of law to prevent selective application and a dangerous state of affairs in democracy.

Rule of Law vs. Arbitrariness

- The court cites Justice H R Khanna's dissenting judgement, stating that **the rule of law is the antithesis of arbitrariness**.
- It references a 2014 ruling, noting that justice encompasses not only the rights of convicts but also those of victims and law-abiding sections of society.

Rejecting Plea for Liberty

- The court rejects the convicts' plea for protection of liberty, asserting that the rule of law must prevail, and the orders of remission should be set aside.
- It invokes **Article 142 of the Constitution**, stating that it cannot be used to allow individuals to remain out of jail when orders are deemed null and void.

Restoration of Status Quo

- Complying with the principle of equal protection of law under Article 14, the court justifies the deprivation of liberty for the convicts as they were erroneously set at liberty against the law.
- The court emphasizes restoring the status quo ante, as the remission orders have been quashed, rejecting the plea for protecting the convicts' liberty.

39. 'Viksit Bharat Yatra aims to help schemes reach all beneficiaries' - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

- The Prime Minister said the main goal of **Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY) was to ensure that government schemes** reached all deserving people.

Key Highlights

- The government has planned to further increase the number of such beneficiaries to two crore, **via programmes like 'NaMo Drone Didi Scheme' under which about one lakh drones had been demonstrated during VBSY**.
- At present, training is being given for the use of drones in the agricultural sector only.

Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra

- It is a nationwide campaign to raise awareness through outreach activities to achieve saturation of schemes of Govt. of India across the country covering all Gram Panchayats, Nagar Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies.
- The campaign is being taken up by adopting a whole of government approach with active involvement of various Ministries/Departments of Government of India, State Governments, Central Govt. Organizations and Institutions.

Prelims Takeaway

- Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra
- NaMo Drone Didi Scheme

- It aimed to reach out to the vulnerable who are eligible under various schemes but have not availed benefit so far.

40. Regulation by statute does not rob a varsity of minority status: Justice Chandrachud - The Hindu/ SC: Regulation doesn't take away character of minority institution - 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 seven-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India observed that an **educational institution does not lose its minority status** merely on the ground that its administration is regulated by a statute.

Key Highlights

- The court noted that an **educational institution need not offer just religious courses**.
- **Article 30** of the Constitution does not envisage that the administration of the educational institution ought to be absolutely by the members of a minority community.
- The administration could be secular and students from any community could get admission
- The court is considering a reference on questions about the indices for treating an educational institution as a minority educational institution.
- The points of reference in the case stemmed from a **1967 judgement by a five-judge Bench of the court in S. Azeez Basha vs Union of India**
 - which validated amendments made to the Aligarh Muslim University Act of 1920.
- **The Basha judgement** had concluded that the varsity was a central university and minority status cannot be conferred on it.

Prelims Takeaway

- S. Azeez Basha vs Union of India
- Article 30

41. Rule of law vs right to liberty: What Court said - 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:

- The Supreme Court, while overturning the **Gujarat government's decision to grant remission to Bilkis Bano case** convicts, delves into the intersection of personal liberty and the rule of law.

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Prelims Takeaway

- Article 142
- Article 14

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42. India, U.K. sign two deals during Defence Minister's visit - The Hindu

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

News:

- India and the UK recently signed significant agreements during India's Defence Minister's visit.

The Agreements

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for **bilateral international cadet exchange programme.**
- A Letter of Arrangement (LoA) on **defence collaboration in Research and Development.**
 - The LoA on R&D was signed between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL).

Key Highlights

- This is the **first visit by an Indian Defence Minister** to the UK after over two decades.
- The Defence Minister highlighted fruitful discussions on a **wide range of issues.**
 - These include defence cooperation, security and also on enhancing defence industrial cooperation.
- The signed documents will **provide impetus to**
 - the people-to-people exchanges particularly among the youth
 - larger area of defence research collaboration between the two countries

Prelims Takeaway

- India and United Kingdom
- Location Based Questions

43. After a record 1,111 NGOs got FCRA nod in 2023, 30 get clearance in Jan. - The Hindu

Relevance: Development processes and the development industry —the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- NGOs
- FCRA

- A Taiwan-headquartered **Buddhist monastic order in Delhi** has been granted **clearance under** the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, enabling the organisation to receive foreign funds.

Background

- The Fo Guang Shan Cultural and Educational Centre **has received FCRA registration for its “religious, cultural, economic, educational and social” programme.**
- The Fo Guang Shan monastic order originated in Taiwan in the 1960s and the Delhi centre was established in 2008.
- “It is a **Buddhist religious trust.**
- In all, 30 Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and associations have been granted FCRA registration in the first month of the year.

NGO with FCRA registration

- Last year, a **record number of 1,111 NGOs were granted permission** to receive foreign donations, the highest since 2014.
- MHA data shows nearly **half of fresh FCRA registrations** under the religious category are for **Christian NGOs**
- Registration under FCRA is mandatory to receive foreign donations.
- The NGO must have a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to get registered.
- According to data available with the Ministry, as many as 3,294 associations were granted fresh registration from 2014 to 2023.
- The Ministry also informed the Lok Sabha on December 19, 2023 that out of the total 1,615 applications received for registration under FCRA in the years 2021 and 2022,
 - as many as 722 were granted clearance while 225 applications were rejected.
 - The refusal of these applications was due to not fulfilling the eligibility criteria in accordance with the provisions of the FCRA, 2010 and rules made thereunder,” the Ministry said.
- It added that a total of 13,520 associations received foreign contributions worth ₹55,741.51 crore across the financial years 2019-2020, 2020-21, and 2021-22.
- As on January 10, **there were 16,987 FCRA-registered NGOs active in the country.**
- The FCRA registrations of nearly 6,000 NGOs had become inoperative from January 1, 2022 as the **Ministry refused to renew their application or the NGOs did not apply for one.**
- The registration is valid for five years.

44. U.K. to send advanced naval groups for training with Indian forces - The Hindu/ UK to send navy ships to Indian Ocean this year: Defence Secy - Indian Express

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

News:

- The U.K. Navy will send its **Littoral Response Group to the Indian Ocean region** later this year, with plans for its Carrier Strike Group to visit India in 2025.
- Both will operate and **train with Indian forces**

Key Highlights

- The two nations also discussed future cooperation in defence from joint exercises to knowledge sharing and instructor exchanges.

Prelims Takeaway

- Indian Ocean region
- Atlantic ocean

- These steps build on the comprehensive strategic partnership envisaged in the 2030 India-U.K. roadmap, announced in 2021

Common challenges

- In the coming years, the **U.K. and India will also embark on more complex exercises between their respective militaries**
 - Building up to a landmark joint exercise to be conducted before the end of 2030
 - Supporting shared goals of “protecting critical trade routes and upholding the international rules-based system,” the statement said.
- **Collaboration with industry** is also key in the strategic defence partnership between the U.K. and India
- The two nations working together on electric propulsion systems that will power our future fleets, and cooperating on the development of complex weapons
- The two sides also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for bilateral international cadet exchange programme and also a Letter of Arrangement (LoA) on defence collaboration in research and development.

45. Launch of the Traditional Medicine Morbidity codes of Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani Chapter in International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 11 as Module 2 - PIB

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

Prelims Takeaway

- Traditional diseases
- WHO

News:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Ayush are **set to launch the ICD 11 TM Module 2**, Morbidity Codes, event in New Delhi
- This initiative aims to integrate data and terminology **related to diseases based on Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani systems** into the WHO's International Classification of Diseases (ICD) series.

Key Developments

Global Uniformity in ASU Medicine

- **Inclusion of Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani data** in ICD11 for global uniformity.
- Establishing a universal code of vocabulary to define diseases in ASU medicine.

CBHI's Role and Ayush Code Development

- Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI), under the Ministry of Health, is **WHO Collaboration Centre for ICD activities**.
- Ministry of Ayush developed Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani Medicine codes through NAMSTE portal.

Donor Agreement and Strengthening Public Healthcare:

- The Ministry of Ayush signed a Donor Agreement with WHO.
- This collaboration **aims to enhance India's public healthcare delivery**, research, Ayush insurance coverage, and policy-making systems.

Inclusion of Traditional Medical Diseases

- Codes to be used in controlling diseases and formulating future strategies.
- Other WHO member countries express willingness to adopt a similar approach.

Disease Classification Examples

- **Traditional diseases** like infectious diseases (e.g., Malaria) and lifestyle diseases (e.g., chronic insomnia) included.
- Specific examples from Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani for disorders like Vertigo Guidance Disorder.

46. Maldives, China commit to greater strategic cooperation, sign 20 MoUs - The Hindu

Relevance: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

News:

- Recently, **China and Maldives** announced an elevation of their relationship to a **comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership**.
- A joint press communique mentioned increased strategic cooperation, expanded practical collaboration and **joint efforts towards a shared future**.

Prelims Takeaway

- India and Maldives
- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
- Colombo Security Conclave

Diplomatic Developments

- Both nations commit to **strengthening collaboration on international and multilateral affairs**.
- The move follows Maldives's participation in the **Global Security Initiative (GSI)**.
- They agreed to draw up an "action plan" for building a **China-Maldives Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership from 2024 to 2028**.
- Both governments sign **20 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** covering several areas.
 - These include the blue economy, digital economy, infrastructure development linked to BRI, disaster and risk mitigation, and news cooperation.

Shift in Foreign Policy

- Notable decisions came after **Maldives skipped the India-led Colombo Security Conclave's NSA-level meet** in December.
- This suggests a **departure** from the earlier policy of the Solih government, which emphasised **close defence and security collaboration** with India and the United States.

Diplomatic Tensions with India

- Maldives President's visit coincides with a **diplomatic row between Maldives and India**, sparked by controversial remarks against the Indian Prime Minister.
- The tensions lead to online campaigns calling for a boycott of Maldives, impacting the country's crucial tourism sector.

Tourism Focus

- Maldives President encouraged **Chinese tourists to reclaim the top spot** in arrivals, previously held by Indian tourists for the last two years.
- In meetings, the Maldivian President highlighted **support for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** and expressed enthusiasm for expanding cooperation.
- China pledged respect and support for the Maldives's development path, firmly **opposing external interference** in its internal affairs.

47. South Africa accuses Israel of genocide in Palestine, asks UN court to intervene - The Hindu/ ICJ begins hearing SA's genocide case against Israel as Gazans return to ruins - Indian Express

Prelims Takeaway

- Genocide Convention

Relevance: World Affairs

- International Court of Justice (ICJ)

News:

- South Africa has brought a case to the ICJ accusing **Israel of committing genocide** in its military response to the 7 October Hamas attack.
- The South African case includes references to the Israeli use of blanket bombing and the cutting of food, water and medicine supplies to Gaza.

Jurisdiction of ICJ in the present case

- The **ICJ cannot automatically decide** all cases involving breaches of international law.
- It can only decide cases that are **brought before it by States that consent to its jurisdiction.**
 - According to the convention, disputes about interpreting, applying, or fulfilling the Convention, including a State's responsibility for genocide, must go to the ICJ if any party involved asks for it.
 - Both South Africa and Israel are parties to the Convention.
- If ICJ passes an order, it will have **legal significance for all States** that are parties to the Genocide Convention.

UN's 1948 Genocide Convention

- The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is an international human rights treaty that **codified the crime of genocide for the first time.**
- This was the **first human rights treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly** on December 9, 1948, and has been in effect since January 12, 1951.
- The Convention defines genocide as **five physical acts** viz.
 - killing members of a group
 - causing serious bodily or mental harm
 - inflicting on the group, conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction
 - imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group
 - forcibly transferring children of the group to another group - committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

48. 6 countries share top spot for most powerful passports - Hindustan Times

Relevance: Reports and Indices

Prelims Takeaway

News:

- Henley Passport Index
- Visa

- The recently released **2024 Henley Passport Index** reveals a significant **increase in the average number of visa-free destinations** since 2006.

- The average number of visa-free destinations for travellers has **nearly doubled, from 58 in 2006 to 111 in 2024.**

Top-Ranked Passports

- **Six countries secure the top position**, providing citizens with visa-free access to 194 out of 227 global destinations.
- These include France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Singapore and Spain.
- Japan and Singapore maintain their leadership for the fifth consecutive year.
- The top 10 is largely dominated by **European nations.**
- **Afghanistan ranks at the bottom** with access to only 28 countries without a visa.

India's Passport Ranking

- India holds the **80th position** on the 2024 Henley Passport Index.

- Indian passport allows **visa-free access to 62 destinations**, including popular tourist spots like Thailand, Indonesia, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Maldives.

Henley Passport Index

- It is the original, authoritative ranking of all the **world's passports** based on the number of destinations their holders can visit **without obtaining a visa in advance**.
- The number of countries that a specific passport can access becomes its **visa-free 'score'**.
- It is compiled and published by **Henley & Partners**, a global citizenship and residence advisory firm. Based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- Includes **199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations**.

49. Surat, Indore cleanest cities; Maharashtra tops State list - The Hindu/ Indore, Surat cleanest cities, Maharashtra 1st among states - Indian Express

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

Prelims Takeaway

- Swachh Survekshan
- Swachh Bharat Mission

News:

- Recently, **Surat and Indore** were jointly declared **cleanest cities of India** at the annual clean city awards 2023 of the Union Urban Affairs Ministry.
- Both cities exhibit **100% door-to-door waste collection, 98% source segregation, and 100% remediation of dumpsites**.
- This was for the seventh year in a row that Indore has been ranked as the cleanest city in India.

Swachh Survekshan 2023 Key Highlights

- **Maharashtra** was recognized as the **cleanest state** with 89.24% door-to-door waste collection and 67.76% source segregation.
- **Bottom Five States:** Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Nagaland and Tripura
- **Chandigarh** was honoured for the **best safety standards for sanitation workers**.
- **Varanasi and Prayagraj**, both in Uttar Pradesh, won the **top two awards amongst the cleanest Ganga towns**.
- The **Mhow Cantonment Board** in Madhya Pradesh was adjudged the **cleanest cantonment**.

Ranking cleanliness

The tables list the cleanest cities with more than 1 lakh population and the best-performing States, according to the Swachh Survekshan Awards. Indore bagged the tag of India's cleanest city for the seventh consecutive time

Cleanest cities with >1 lakh population		States ranking	
Rank	City	Rank	State
1	Indore	1	Maharashtra
1	Surat	2	M.P.
3	Navi Mumbai	3	Chhattisgarh
4	Greater Visakhapatnam	4	Odisha
5	Bhopal	5	Telangana



Swachh Survekshan

- Swachh Survekshan is the **world's largest urban sanitation and cleanliness survey**.
- Started in 2016 with 73 cities, the annual ranking covers 4,416 urban local bodies, 61 cantonments, and 88 Ganga towns in 2023.
- It is conducted under the ambit of the **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)**.
- It was launched by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** with **Quality Council of India (QCI)** as its implementation partner.
- Objective:** To encourage large-scale citizen participation and create awareness amongst all sections of society about the importance of working together toward making towns and cities better places to reside in.
- The **methodology** for measuring cleanliness rests on two main criterias viz. **citizen feedback and field assessment**.

50. Ministry notifies revised rules to ensure quality of medicines - The Hindu

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

News:

- The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** in India recently introduced revised rules under **Schedule M of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945**.

Objective of Revision

- The revision of Schedule M aims to **strengthen pharmaceutical manufacturing standards** in India.
- This is in response to global scrutiny and concerns about **sub-standard medicines exported from India**.
- The focus is on ensuring the manufacture of **safe, effective, and high-quality drugs** compliant with international quality standards.

Prelims Takeaway

- Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945
- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)

- It aims to align **Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)** recommendations with **global standards**, particularly those of the WHO.

Global Scrutiny

- India faced global scrutiny after the WHO issued an alert regarding the contamination of cough syrups with diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol, considered toxic and potentially fatal.
- QP Pharmachem Ltd, a Punjab-based company, had its manufacturing licence suspended after its cough syrup was linked to child deaths in Gambia and Uzbekistan.

Revised Categories and Sections

- **Five new categories of drugs** have been introduced, including pharmaceutical products containing hazardous substances.
 - These include sex hormones, steroids, cytotoxic substances, biological products, and radiopharmaceuticals.

Additional sections include

- Introduction of a pharmaceutical quality system (PQS), quality risk management (QRM), product quality review (PQR)

Qualification and validation of equipment

- Computerized storage system for drug products
- The **manufacturer** is required to assume **responsibility for the quality of pharmaceutical products**.
 - They must ensure they are fit for use, comply with licence requirements, and do not pose risks to patients.

Quality Assurance Measures

- Companies must market a finished product only after **obtaining satisfactory results** from tests of ingredients.
- **Adequate samples** of intermediate and final products must be **retained for repeated testing or verification** of a batch.

Implementation Timeline

- Small manufacturers with an **annual turnover of less than Rs 250 crore** will have **12 months** to implement the revised rules.
- Large manufacturers with an **annual turnover exceeding Rs 250 crore** will be given **six months** for implementation.

51. Govt set to roll out vaccine drive to fight cervical cancer - Indian Express

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

News:

- The Indian government is set to launch a **human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign** to reduce the incidence of **cervical cancer**.

The HPV Vaccination Campaign

- It is planned in three phases over three years, and aims to immunize around 8 crore children.
- It will target **girls aged 9-14 to combat cervical cancer**, the second most common cancer among Indian women.
- The vaccine also protects against HPV strains causing **cancers of the anus, vagina, oropharynx and genital warts**.
- Currently priced at Rs 2,000 per dose commercially, it will be available for free once included in the government's immunization program.

Cervical Cancer Burden in India

- India accounts for about a **fifth of global cervical cancer cases**, with 1.25 lakh new cases and 75,000 deaths annually.
- About **83 percent of invasive cervical cancer cases** are attributed to **HPV 16 or 18 in India**.

Prelims Takeaway

- HPV Vaccine
- Cervical Cancer
- World Health Organisation (WHO)

Vaccination Logistics

- The immunization drive will be conducted through **schools and existing vaccination points**.
- Serum Institute of India's indigenously developed **quadrivalent vaccine, Cervavac**, will be used.

Single-Dose Regimen

- The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI) recommends ICMR conduct trials on the **efficacy of a single-dose regimen in the 9-15 age group**.
- While **HPV vaccines available globally** recommend a **two-dose schedule**, **WHO allows a single-dose regimen for public health programs**.

52. SC refuses to stay law on selection of CEC, EC - The Hindu/ SC declines to stay new law on picking CEC, ECs - Indian Express

Relevance: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

News:

- The Supreme Court declined a request for an **interim stay of the new law excluding the Chief Justice of India from the panel** to select the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (ECs).

Key Highlights

- **Article 324(2)** of the Constitution says that the CEC and ECs shall be appointed by the President, with aid and advice of the Council of Ministers
 - till Parliament enacts a law fixing the criteria for selection and conditions of service and tenure.
- Subsequently, the government enacted a new law — The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 **excluding the CJI from the selection panel**.

The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023

- It replaces the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991.
- It provides for the appointment, salary, and removal of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).
- The CEC and ECs will be appointed by the President **upon the recommendation of a Selection Committee**.

Selection committee

- The Selection Committee will consist of the **Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and Leader of Opposition/leader of the largest opposition party in Lok Sabha**.
- Recommendations of the Selection Committee will be valid even when there is a vacancy in this Committee.
- A Search Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary will propose a panel of names to the Selection Committee.
- Eligibility for the posts includes holding (or having held) a post equivalent to the Secretary to the central government.
- The salary and conditions of service of the CEC and ECs will be **equivalent to that of Cabinet Secretary**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Search Committee
- Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023

- Under the 1991 Act, it was equivalent to the salary of a Supreme Court Judge.

Points of contention

A look at what the Sections 7 and 8 of the CEC and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 say



- **Section 7 mandates the selection committee to consist of the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha**

- **Section 8 allows the selection committee to regulate its own procedure in a transparent manner and consider persons other than those suggested by the search committee**

53. Supreme Court issues summons to Centre on Kerala's suit alleging financial curbs - 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 Supreme Court has agreed to examine an original suit filed by Kerala, **alleging that the Centre's interference with the state's finances is violating the federal structure of governance**

Key Highlights

Legal Summons and Interim Reliefs:

- Kerala seeks interim reliefs, including an injunction against the Centre from restricting the state's borrowing of ₹26,226 crore.
- Kerala argues that, in a federal system, a **state has exclusive power to regulate its finances through budget** preparation and management.
- Recent actions, amendments, and executive orders by the Centre are seen as attempts to reduce Kerala to financial distress.

Allegations of Arbitrary Borrowing Restrictions:

- The state contends that the **Centre imposed a net borrowing ceiling arbitrarily**, limiting borrowings from all sources, including the open market.
- Deductions from state-owned enterprises' borrowings and imposed conditions on foreign loans are cited as measures causing financial strain.

Prelims Takeaway

- Fiscal deficit
- Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003

- Kerala claims that amendments to the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003**, infringe upon the state's legislative domain.
- These changes allegedly violate fiscal federalism by imposing unconstitutional limits on the state's ability to borrow and regulate its finances.

54. Rajnath's visit to UK: Progress in talks to get key tech for warships - Indian Express

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

News:

- Discussions on acquiring **electric propulsion technology for Indian warships** from the United Kingdom progressed during the Defence Minister's recent two-day visit to the country.

Key Highlights

Government-to-Government Agreement:

- Exploration of a potential government-to-government agreement for securing electric propulsion technology from the UK, specifically for powering larger Indian Navy warships, was a focal point.

Current Propulsion Systems:

- **Indian warships currently use diesel engines, gas, or steam turbines**, lacking electric propulsion systems.
- In contrast, the UK's Royal Navy utilizes integrated full electric propulsion vessels in their Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers.

Joint Working Group:

- A joint electric propulsion working group between India and the UK was established, meeting in the UK in February and on the Royal Navy frigate HMS Lancaster in Kochi in March of the previous year.

Testing and Implementation:

- The proposed **electric propulsion technology is anticipated to apply to larger Indian warships** with a displacement of over 6,000 tonnes.
- Initial testing is expected on Landing Platform Docks and next-generation destroyers.

Prelims Takeaway

- Electric Propulsion Technology

55. Railway Ministry includes Udupi station under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme for redevelopment - The Hindu

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

News:

- The **Udupi station under Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd. (KRCL)** network that was in **dire need of attention**
- It has been **included in the Railway Ministry's Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)** for redevelopment.

Key Highlights

- The Ministry informed KRCL about the inclusion of Udupi.
- **None of the KRCL stations were included under ABSS** when it was initially announced in February 2023 in the Union Budget, covering 1,275 stations of the Indian Railway network.

Prelims Takeaway

- Amrit Bharat Station Scheme
- Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd.

- It was because **KRCL continued to remain a public sector undertaking** under the Railway Ministry and was not an integral part of the Indian Railways.
- The non-inclusion caused much heartburn among railway patrons on the west coast — **Maharashtra, Goa, and Karnataka**
 - Who chided the Ministry for leaving out the network from the scheme that was launched to mark 75 years of India's independence.
- The scheme involved creating master plans for redevelopment and executing them in a phased manner.
- The redevelopment broadly includes **platform improvement** with covered shelters, covered foot overbridge, improved circulating and vehicle parking areas

56. Maharashtra Speaker's decision conflicts with court ruling on factions- 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:

- **Maharashtra Speaker discerned from the “legislative majority”** held by the faction led by Maharashtra Chief Minister that they were the “real” Shiv Sena.

Key Highlights

- However, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, deciding the Shinde versus Uddhav Thackeray dispute, had directed in a May 2023 judgment
 - That the “Speaker must not base their decision as to which group constitutes the political party on a blind appreciation of which group possesses a majority in the Legislative Assembly”.
- The **Constitution (Ninety-first Amendment) Act, 2003 deleted the provision** of ‘split’ in Paragraph 3 of the Tenth Schedule.
- The inevitable consequence of the deletion of **Paragraph 3 from the Tenth Schedule** is that the defense of a split is no longer available to members who face disqualification proceedings.
- To hold otherwise would be to permit the entry of the defense of ‘split’ in the Tenth Schedule through the back door.
- This is impermissible and would render the deletion of Paragraph 3 meaningless.

Anti-Defection Law

- The anti-defection law **punishes individual Members of Parliament (MPs)/Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)** for leaving one party for another.
- Parliament added it to **the Constitution as the Tenth Schedule in 1985** in order to bring stability to governments by discouraging legislators from changing parties.
- **The Tenth Schedule** - popularly known as the Anti-Defection Act - was included in the Constitution via the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985.
- It sets the provisions **for the disqualification of elected members** on the grounds of defection to another political party.
- It was a response to the toppling of multiple state governments by party-hopping MLAs after the general elections of 1967.

Prelims Takeaway

- Anti-Defection Law
- Constitution (Ninety-first Amendment) Act, 2003

57. Ayodhya mosque to be 'better than Taj' - 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.

Prelims Takeaway

- Babri mosque
- Taj mahal

News:

- The Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF), overseeing Ayodhya mosque construction, plans a **revamped funding strategy inspired by the success of the Ram Temple project.**

Key Highlights**Initial Plan and Challenges**

- **It aims to build one of India's largest mosques**, surpassing the Taj Mahal, with the world's biggest Quran.
- The mosque will have five minars, a zero-carbon-footprint design, and a water-and-light show synchronized with prayers.
- Plans include a giant fish aquarium and retention of the hospital and community kitchen.
- Construction is scheduled to begin in the second half of 2024, post-Ramzan.
- **A symbolic brick with Quranic verses will travel to Saudi Arabia** and prominent dargahs before being laid at the site.

Historical Context:

- The mosque, allotted a five-acre plot in Dhannipur, Ayodhya, in 2020, **emerged in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's approval for the Ram Temple's construction**, replacing the demolished Babri Masjid.

Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid dispute

- It is about a plot measuring 2.77 acres in Ayodhya that houses the Babri mosque and Ram Janmabhoomi.
- This particular **piece of land is considered sacred among Hindus** as it is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram.
- Muslims argue that the land houses Babri mosque, where they had offered prayers for years before the dispute erupted.
- **The controversy is over whether the Babri mosque was built on top of a Ram temple** after demolishing or modifying it in the 16th century.
- Muslims, on the other hand, say the **mosque was built by Mir Baqi in 1528 and that Hindus took control over it in 1949**, when some people placed idols of Lord Ram inside the mosque

58. Modi and Putin discuss 'special strategic' ties, future roadmap - Indian Express

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

News:

- The Indian Prime Minister and Russian President held a "good conversation," discussing various aspects of the "**special and privileged strategic partnership**" between India and Russia.
- Both leaders agreed to formulate a roadmap for future initiatives during the discussion.

Key Highlights**Coordination on BRICS Agenda and International Issues**

- Both countries **affirmed their readiness to closely coordinate approaches to the BRICS agenda**, with India expressing its intention to support Russia's chairmanship goals.

Prelims Takeaway

- Map based questions
- BRICS

- International issues, including the **situation around Ukraine, were discussed**, highlighting the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

India's Role in Ukraine Peace Talks

- The phone call follows a meeting of national security advisors in Davos, where **Switzerland emphasised India's potential role in Ukraine peace** talks due to its influence with Russia.

Annual Summit Challenges

- The visit did not take place last year.
- Scheduling challenges have been cited, with the last summit occurring on December 6, 2021

59. Received details from India on social security pact, more work required on subject: USTR- The Hindu

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

News:

- The U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) said the U.S. had received information from **India recently on the proposed social security agreement** and there was much work to be done on the subject.

Prelims Takeaway

- India-US Trade Policy Forum (TPF)
- Social Security Pact

Key Highlights

- Social security totalisation agreement is one of the **key asks from the Indian side in the meeting of the Trade Policy Forum (TPF)**
 - as it will significantly contribute towards enhancing services trade between countries and help Indian IT professionals who temporarily work in the U.S.
- India has submitted all the relevant data on its social security schemes** which was sought by the U.S. to start negotiations on the agreement.
- Under the agreement, **an expatriate in either country need not contribute to the social security scheme** of the host country.
- It will **benefit a number of Indians**, particularly from the IT sector, who are working in America and **paying social security but are unable to get any benefit out of it.**

India-US TPF

- The India-US TPF **aims to activate its working groups** in the fields of agriculture, non-agriculture goods, services, investment, and intellectual property
- to meet frequently and address issues of mutual concern in a mutually beneficial manner.
- The idea is to **deliver tangible benefits to both countries** by resolving outstanding market access issues.

60. Crisis can impact India as 80% of exports to Europe takes place via Red Sea: Official - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- The **Red Sea shipping crisis could impact India's exports to Europe**
 - about 80 per cent of the outbound shipments to Europe takes place through the Red Sea region,

Prelims Takeaway

- Export Credit Guarantee Corporation
- Map based question

Key Highlights

- This assumes significance as **India's goods exports to the European Union (EU) have already slowed** due to weakening demand in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war.

- The **EU contributes to over 15 per cent of India's** total goods exports.
- A number of environmental related trade measures such as **the carbon border adjustment mechanism and EU's deforestation law** are feared to **hit India's exports** going forward.
- The ministry said that there has been an increase in attacks on commercial shipping vessels
 - travelling through the lower Red Sea since mid-November and 80 per cent of India's merchandise trade with Europe passes via the Red Sea.

Global issue

- **Whole of commodity across the globe** moves from the eastern to the western part **through the Red Sea route**
- the Red Sea region is vital for 30 percent of global container traffic and 12 percent of global trade
- About **95 percent of vessels have rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope**, adding 4000 to 6000 nautical miles and 14 to 20 days to journeys.
- Indian shipments of low value products such as agriculture and textiles to Europe are primarily expected to face the impact of disruption in the Red Sea region.
- The union government has asked **Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) not to raise insurance premiums** amid rising cost of shipping to Europe.

61. Home Ministry cancels FCRA registration of Centre for Policy Research - The Hindu

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

News:

- The **Union Home Ministry has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)** registration of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), a prominent public policy research institution in New Delhi.

Chronology of Suspension

- FCRA registration suspended for CPR on grounds of violation.

Reasons for Cancellation

- The Home Ministry cites "violation" as grounds for cancellation, specifically noting that CPR published reports on "current affairs programs," deemed a violation of FCRA.

CPR's Compliance and Perspective

- **CPR maintains it has operated within the legal framework**, conducting globally recognized high-quality research on issues significant to Indian public life and policy-making.
- CPR remains committed to its core goals and believes the matter will be resolved in accordance with constitutional values.

Income Tax Department's Actions (2023)

- **Tax Exemption Cancellation:** In 2023, the Income Tax department cancels CPR's tax exemption status.
- **Allegations:** CPR is accused of making payments to individuals who haven't filed personal Income Tax returns, and the nature of books published by CPR is questioned.

CPR's Response to IT Department

- **CPR denies allegations** raised by the IT department.
- The FCRA registration cancellation adds to the challenges faced by CPR, which is actively contesting the allegations brought forth by both the Home Ministry and the Income Tax department.

Prelims Takeaway

- FCRA
- Centre for Policy Research

62. ICMR starts revising current National Essential Diagnostics List for first time - The Hindu

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

News:

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has commenced the **revision process for the National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL)**,
 - Citing the need for an update since its initial release in 2019.

Prelims Takeaway

- Indian Council of Medical Research
- NEDL

Purpose of NEDL

- The NEDL serves to catalogue fundamental diagnostic tests deemed essential at various healthcare levels
- including village, sub-health centers, health and wellness centers, and primary health centers.
- It **aims to ensure the availability of crucial tests** across the healthcare pyramid, aligning with World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations from 2018.

Criteria for Inclusion

- ICMR emphasises that the inclusion of diagnostic tests in the NEDL is based on careful consideration of disease burden data alignment with national programs, and adherence to Indian public health standards.
- The **Council outlines essential diagnostic tests** as those prioritizing healthcare needs, considering disease prevalence, public health relevance,

Stakeholder Involvement

- Stakeholders are urged to **assess the essentiality of proposed tests**, considering disease burden, alignment with public health standards, and availability of equipment, infrastructure, and manpower.
- The suggested diagnostic tests should focus on **high disease burden** conditions with clear impacts on disease diagnosis and management.
- **Alignment with Indian Public Health Standards** for 2022 is emphasized in the proposal.

63. What is 'prior approval', and why is it needed before investigating public officials accused of corruption?- 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:

- **The Supreme Court delivers a split verdict** on the plea by former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister to **quash an FIR related to an alleged skill development scam.**

Key Highlights

Dissenting Opinions on 'Previous Approval' Requirement

- 2 judges hold differing views on whether the Andhra Pradesh CID needed 'previous approval' from the state government before initiating an inquiry into the allegations against Naidu.

Justice Bose's Perspective

- Asserts that **prior approval was necessary** for the CID's inquiry.
- Points out the **absence of approval** during the inquiry initiation.

Justice Trivedi's Perspective

- **Argues that approval is required** only for offences committed post-2018, when the requirement was introduced.

Prelims Takeaway

- Centre for Public Interest Litigation
- CBI v R R Kishore

Evolution of 'Previous Approval' Requirement

- **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act Amendment (2003)**
- Required approval for investigating corruption offenses **if the official held a rank higher than joint secretary.**
- Struck down by the Supreme Court in 2014.

Prevention of Corruption Act Amendment (2018)

- Introduced a similar 'previous approval' provision as Section 17A.
- Approval required for investigations involving public servants committing offenses during official duties.

Challenge to the Provision by CPIL (2018)

- Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL)
- Challenges constitutionality, arguing it hinders investigations and protects corrupt officials.
- Refers to a 2014 case where a similar requirement was struck down.

SC's Previous Stance on Retroactive Application

- Constitution Bench Decision (2023)
- Officials cannot claim immunity under Section 6A retrospectively, even for offenses predating its removal (**CBI v R R Kishore**).
- **Rakesh Asthana Case (2018-2022)**
- Former Delhi Police Commissioner investigated for bribery.
- Opinion against prior approval by Additional Solicitor General P S Narasimha.
- Case adjourned and declared infructuous after Asthana's retirement in 2022.

64. India's KABIL acquires five lithium blocks in Argentina - The Hindu

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

News:

- Recently, **India announced the acquisition of five lithium blocks in Argentina.**
- The Mines Ministry, through Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL), signed an agreement with Argentina's State-owned CAMYEN.

Key Highlights

- With this agreement, KABIL has obtained Exploration and Exclusivity Rights for five blocks.
- The agreement will allow the State-owned entity to evaluate, prospect, and explore.
- Upon subsequent discovery of lithium minerals, exploitation rights for commercial production have also been granted.
- This is the **first-ever lithium exploration** and mining project undertaken by a government company in India.
- This will not only boost the country's quest for sourcing lithium but also **bring in technical and operational experience** for brine-type lithium exploration, exploitation, and extraction.
- **India's lithium requirements**, amounting to around ₹24,000 crore, are met through imports, with the majority of supplies coming from China.
- **Lithium, often called 'white gold'**, forms the cornerstone of the country's transition to green energy options.
- It is used across various categories, **including energy storage solutions, batteries for mobile phones, and in EVs.**
- Argentina is part of the world's "Lithium Triangle", along with Chile and Bolivia, and the three together have more than half of the world's total lithium resources.

Prelims Takeaway

- Argentina
- 'white gold',

- **Argentina also has the distinction of having the second-largest lithium resources, third-largest lithium reserves and fourth-largest production in the world.**

65. These PM-JANMAN beneficiaries make sure no one is left out - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- PVTG
- PM-JANMAN

News:

- The government's **PM-JANMAN package**, aimed at developing **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**,
 - witnesses the active involvement of women beneficiaries who serve as messengers to extend the benefits to the remotest community members.

Key Highlights

PM Releases Funds for Pucca Houses

- The Prime Minister releases the first instalment of funds under the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN),
- focusing on essential facilities for PVTGs, such as pucca houses, power, and water connections.

Women as Janman Sangis (Volunteers)

- Key beneficiaries, including women from the Pahari Korba tribe,
 - are becoming Janman Sangis, volunteering to educate their communities about the schemes under the package.

Objectives of PM-JANMAN Campaign

- The PM-JANMAN campaign, launched on November 15

Objective:

- **aims to provide basic facilities to 22,000 habitations** with an estimated 36 lakh people from PVTG communities, focusing on 11 interventions of nine Ministries.
- The PVTGs are considered the most backward among the Scheduled Tribes.

Information and Education Campaign

- The **package includes an information and education campaign**, conducting camps in PVTG habitations
 - to register inhabitants for essential documents such as Aadhaar, PM Jan Dhan cards, caste certificates, Kisan Samman Nidhi cards, etc.

Financial Allocations

- **The Union Cabinet approves a plan** to spend over ₹24,000 crore on the package over the next three years.
- Projects worth ₹4,700 crore, including the construction of pucca homes for one lakh beneficiary families, have already been sanctioned.

66. India defends Iran, cites its position of no compromise against terrorism - The Hindu

Prelims Takeaway

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

- Rupee-Rial trade
- Map based question

News:

- India expressed **support for Iran's missile strikes on alleged terror camps** in Pakistan's Balochistan province, characterizing it as an act of self-defense.

Key Highlights

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) highlighted its uncompromising stance on terrorism while refraining from commenting on Iran's strikes in Kurdish areas of Iraq and Syria on the same day.

Bilateral Nature of the Issue

- The MEA emphasized that the matter was bilateral between Iran and Pakistan, and India holds a zero-tolerance position on terrorism.

International Response and Tensions in West Asia

- **India's support for Iran's actions contrasts with condemnation** from the White House National Security Council, criticizing the strikes against Iraq as reckless and imprecise.
- Tensions in West Asia, particularly involving the U.S., Israel's actions in Gaza, U.S. strikes in Yemen, and Houthi rebel attacks, add complexity to the situation.

Iran's Perspective

- Iran's Foreign Minister reiterated the strikes were aimed at enhancing the security of Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, and the region.
- He emphasized respecting the sovereignty of Pakistan and Iraq while asserting Iran's commitment to addressing terrorist threats within and outside its borders.

India and Iran bilateral relation

- Over the years, India's trade with Iran has **seen significant fluctuations**.
- In 2019-20, India's imports from Iran, primarily crude oil, fell by about 90% to USD 1.4 billion compared to USD 13.53 billion in 2018-19.
- Also, Iran has seen a depletion of its rupee reserves in the vostro account, affecting its ability to import key Indian commodities like basmati rice and tea.
- To revive trade between India and Iran, which has been impacted by US and Western sanctions, both nations are considering the option of rupee-rial trade.

Rupee-Rial trade

- it refers to trade between India and Iran using their respective currencies, the Indian Rupee (INR) and the Iranian Rial (IRR)
 - instead of using widely accepted international currencies like the US Dollar (USD).

67. Where do China-Taiwan relations stand? - The Hindu

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- On January 13, **Taiwan concluded its democratic elections**, resulting in the election of Lai Ching-te from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as the new President.

Key Highlights

Diplomatic Shift

- Shortly after the election, Nauru, a small island nation, announced a diplomatic shift from Taipei to Beijing.

Beijing's Strategy

- **China has employed a strategy of enticing smaller nations** with promises of financial investment and infrastructure development to reduce Taiwan's diplomatic space.

Prelims Takeaway

- Map Based questions
- Taiwan

- **The DPP's perceived pro-independence stance has increased pressure from Beijing**, leading to a decline in the number of countries recognizing Taiwan.

China-Taiwan Ties and 1992 Consensus

- The main point of contention is President Tsai's **refusal to accept the '1992 consensus,' which acknowledges 'one China.'**

Chinese President's Goals

- The Chinese President has expressed the goals of rejuvenating the Chinese nation and reunifying Taiwan, considering it a 'sacred territory.'
- Despite China's displeasure, the DPP's electoral victory indicates that the Taiwanese people are not in a rush for reunification.

Democracy in Taiwan

- Taiwan's democracy, established in 1996, has strengthened over the years, despite Chinese discontent.
- Taiwan's functioning democracy challenges the notion that the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the sole political option for the Chinese people.

68. Govt proposes repealing Indian Stamp Act, seeks public input on draft Bill - Indian Express

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

News:

- The government has **proposed repealing the Indian Stamp Act, 1899** and bringing in a new legislation for the stamp duty regime in the country.
- The Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance has **invited suggestions on the draft 'Indian Stamp Bill, 2023'** from the public within a period of 30 days.

Key Highlights

- "The Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, has prepared a draft 'Indian Stamp Bill, 2023' to align it with the modern stamp duty regime.
- Once enacted, the **Bill shall replace the Indian Stamp Act, 1899**
- The Indian Stamp Act, 1899 **lays down the legal provisions for tax levied in the form of stamps on instruments recording transactions.**
- Stamp duties are **levied by the central** government, but **within the states are collected and appropriated by the concerned states** in terms of provisions of Article 268 of the Constitution.
- The stamp duties on documents specified in **entry 91 of the union list of the Seventh Schedule including**
 - Bills of exchange, cheques, promissory notes, bills of lading, letters of credit, policies of insurance, transfer of shares, debentures, proxies and receipts) are levied by the Union.
- Other stamp duties on documents are levied and collected by the states.
- The Indian Stamp Act, 1899, a pre-Constitution Act, has been amended from time to time to enable a more modern stamp duty regime, the ministry said.

Prelims Takeaway

- Seventh Schedule
- 'Indian Stamp Bill, 2023

69. Union Minister Rao Inderjit Singh launches the MPLADS e-SAKSHI Mobile Application for the Revised Fund Flow Procedure under MPLAD Scheme - PIB

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

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- e-SAKSHI
- MPLADS

- The Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, **launched the MPLADS e-SAKSHI Mobile Application**
- The aim is for the **revised fund flow procedure** under the MPLAD Scheme in New Delhi.

Objective of MPLAD Scheme

- The MPLAD Scheme aims to empower Members of Parliament (MPs) **to recommend developmental projects** focusing on creating durable community assets based on local needs.
- The revised guidelines intend to expand the scheme's scope, emphasizing improved functionality, implementation, and monitoring.

Benefits of e-SAKSHI Mobile Application

- It will revolutionize how **MPs engage with and manage development projects** in their constituencies, offering convenience and accessibility.
- It enables MPs to propose, track, and oversee projects in real-time, enhancing decision-making and facilitating swift responses to emerging needs.

Transparency and Accountability

- The **e-SAKSHI mobile app promotes transparency by providing MPs** with instant **updates on the status** and progress of their proposed projects.
- This transparency enhances accountability and builds public trust in the allocation and utilization of MPLADS funds.

Budget Management Features

- The mobile application incorporates features for budget management, allowing MPs to monitor expenditures related to their recommended projects.
- This ensures financial oversight and responsible use of MPLADS funds.

70. India says it hopes to resolve issue of troops in Maldives - The Hindu/ Jaishankar, Maldives minister meet in Uganda: 'Will boost ties' - Indian Express

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

News:

- Recently, India said **it continues to hope for a resolution of the tussle** with the Maldives over stationing of Indian troops in the islands
- The Maldivian government set a deadline of March 15 for their removal.

Key Highlights

- The date for the removal of troops is significant, as the next Maldives Majlis or Parliamentary elections are due to be held on March 17
 - Especially important for Mr. Muizzu after his ruling coalition lost the Male Mayoral election this week.
- Mr. Muizzu is the first Maldivian President not to make his first visit abroad to India.

Importance of Maldives

- The Maldives are crucial for **maintaining the region's political stability** and security, as well as for safeguarding Indian commerce and investment.
- India and Maldives clearly have a responsibility to ensure stability and security in the Indian Ocean.
- Due to the **strategic significance of the Maldives' geographic location** in relation to important international shipping lanes (ISLs).
- The **Indian Ocean is a major route for the transfer of energy** and trade around the world.

Prelims Takeaway

- Gulf of Aden
- Strait of Malacca

- The **Strait of Malacca and the Gulf of Aden**, two chokepoints in the western Indian Ocean, are located on either side of the Maldives, which is situated physically like a “**toll gate**” between them.
- Maldives supports India’s permanent membership and India’s candidature for a non-permanent seat to the year 2020-21.

71. Sub-categorisation of SCs: panel to look into even distribution of benefits - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Madiga Community
- Sub-categorization among SCs

News:

- The Union government has **established a five-member committee** to assess and devise a fair method for the distribution of benefits, schemes, and initiatives among the more than 1,200 Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India.
- The **primary focus is on addressing the grievances of the most backward** communities that have been overshadowed by relatively forward and dominant ones.

Background

- Simultaneously, the Supreme Court is set to deliberate on the permissibility of sub-categorization among SCs and Scheduled Tribes.
- The committee, **chaired by the Cabinet Secretary**, is mandated to avoid discussing reservation-related questions currently sub-judice.

Madiga Community's Struggle

- The Madiga community, **constituting 50% of Telangana's SC population**, has been advocating for sub-categorization since 1994.
- Previous commissions have acknowledged the feasibility of sub-categorization, emphasising the need for targeted benefits.

State-Level Attempts and Legal Considerations

- States like **Punjab, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu** have attempted state-level reservation laws for sub-categorization, pending the Supreme Court's decision.
- In 2005, **the Union government considered legal options**, with opinions divided on the constitutional amendment's necessity.
- Legal experts argue for a comprehensive caste census and socio-economic data to justify sub-categorization.

72. China widens trade highway in South America with new mega port project - The Hindu

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- In September, a delegation of **Brazilian farmers and officials visited the Peruvian town of Chancay**, where a new \$3.5 billion Chinese mega port is under construction.

Key Highlights

Prelims Takeaway

- Map Based questions
- Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

- This port, **majority-owned by China's Cosco Shipping**, represents Beijing's ambitious push to enhance trade ties with South America
 - surpassing the U.S. as the region's largest trade partner over the past decade.

Chancay Mega Port Overview

- The \$3.5 billion deep water port, controlled by China, is set to begin operations later this year.
- It is located 80 kilometres north of Lima and is the first Chinese-controlled port in South America.

Strategic Importance

- Part of China's 'Belt and Road' initiative, the **Chancay port aims to provide China with a direct gateway to South America's** resource-rich region.
- China's trade dominance in South America has helped it gain political, financial, and technological leverage in the region.
- The Chinese President may **inaugurate the port during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Peru.**
- Plans for resolving logistical, sanitary, and bureaucratic hurdles at the border to facilitate Brazilian trucks' access to the port.

US and China Influence in Latin America

- **China has overtaken the U.S. as the dominant trade partner** in South America over the last decade.

73. The train from China - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- China is pursuing the **construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway (CKU-R)** as part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
- It aims to **enhance connectivity in Central Asia.**

Key Highlights

- The project, initially **conceived in the 1990s**, is gaining momentum due to geopolitical shifts and the need for alternative trade routes.
- However, it **faces significant challenges, including financial hurdles**, security concerns, and geopolitical complexities.

Current Connectivity and China's Opportunity

- Presently, only **two outlets connect China's Xinjiang to South and Central Asia.**
- China sees an opportunity to **strengthen its presence in the region with the CKU-R**, linking Kashgar to Osh and Andijan, ultimately connecting with the European railway network.

Strategic Significance

- CKU-R is a strategic and economic boon for China, providing a direct link between Xinjiang and Fergana Valley, the heart of Eurasia.
- The **railway aims to boost China's presence in Central Asia, South Caucasus**, and Europe-bound freight, bypassing longer routes through Russia.

Challenges and Hurdles

- Kyrgyzstan's political and financial challenges, including a lack of funds (\$4.7 billion) for its part of the route, hinder progress.
- The fear of **falling into a debt trap** and concerns about Chinese expansionism pose obstacles to the project.

Geopolitical Considerations

Prelims Takeaway

- Central Asian countries
- China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway (CKU-R)

- Central Asian geopolitics, including **ties to Russia and Uzbekistan's openness to the West, add complexity to the project.**
- China's changing terms of engagement favor bilateral approaches, reducing reliance on consensus-based groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Comparison with Russia's Role

- China's trade with Central Asian countries, **surpassing Russia's in some cases, reflects a shift in economic influence.**
- Unlike Russia's assertive stance, Chinese diplomats adopt a subtler approach, focusing on economic engagement.
- The project could potentially reshape regional connectivity and influence, **challenging Russia's dominance in the south-north directed connectivity.**

74. China, Philippines agree to ease tensions - The Hindu/ China, Philippines agree on lowering tensions over South China Sea - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- China and the Philippines said they have agreed to work on **lowering tensions after a year of public and tense confrontations in the South China Sea** between their ships that have raised concerns of armed engagement in the region.

Prelims Takeaway

- South China Sea
- Ren'Ai reef

Key Highlights

- Ren'Ai reef is the Chinese name for what the Philippines call **Ayungin Shoal** and the U.S. calls the Second Thomas Shoal
The site of multiple confrontations between the two countries' ships in recent months.
- In November, Manila said that a Chinese coast guard ship and accompanying vessels conducted dangerous maneuvers
 - Blasted a Philippine supply ship with a water cannon in disputed waters. China disputed the account, saying it acted appropriately.
- China and the Philippines said they agreed to **limit tensions at a meeting on the South China Sea** in Shanghai, the eighth in a series that began in 2017.
- The **territorial disputes in the South China Sea** are widely seen as a potential flashpoint for armed conflict.
- Multiple countries have **claimed waters in the South China Sea**, including Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Malaysia and China.
- Taiwan, a self-ruled island claimed by China, chose a candidate from a party that considers Taiwan independent.

75. 'Coaching centres cannot enrol students below 16 years of age' - The Hindu

Prelims Takeaway

- Ministry of Education Guidelines to regulate Coaching Centres

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

- Mental Health

News:

- The Ministry of Education has recently introduced **comprehensive guidelines to regulate coaching centres**.
- **Objective:** To establish a legal framework and manage the uncontrolled growth of private coaching centres.
- These guidelines are introduced in response to complaints regarding student suicides, fire incidents, and deficiencies in coaching facilities.

Key Guidelines

Age Restrictions and Academic Qualifications

- Coaching centres cannot enrol students **below 16 years of age**. Student enrolment should be only after **secondary school examination**
- **Tutors** must have qualifications of at least **graduation**.
- The coaching centres cannot hire the services of any tutor or person who has been **convicted of any offence involving moral turpitude**.

Misleading Promises

- Coaching institutes are prohibited from making misleading promises, guaranteeing ranks, or ensuring good marks to parents.
- **Publication of misleading advertisements** about coaching quality or results is strictly forbidden.

Mental Well-being

- Coaching centres should take steps for the mental well-being of students.
- **Immediate intervention mechanisms** for students in distress should be established.
- Tutors may undergo **training in mental health issues** to effectively communicate improvement areas to students.

Counselling System

- Coaching centres must have a **counselling system**, and the **institute will not be registered without it**.
- **Trained counsellors** should be appointed, and information about their availability must be provided to students and parents.

Fair and Reasonable Fees

- Tuition fees must be fair and reasonable and **receipts for the fee charged must be made available**.
- Refund policies are specified, ensuring **pro-rata refunds for students** leaving courses mid-way.
- **Penalties**, including fines up to ₹1 lakh or registration cancellation, for charging exorbitant fees causing stress leading to student suicides or engaging in malpractices.

Monitoring and Registration

- **Registration** of new and existing coaching centres within **three months of guideline implementation**.
- **State governments will monitor** coaching centre activities and ensure compliance with eligibility criteria.
- Coaching centres shall have a **website with updated details** of the qualification of tutors, courses/curriculum, duration of completion, hostel facilities, and the fees being charged.

76. Andhra becomes 2nd State to take up 'caste census' - The Hindu

Prelims Takeaway

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

- SECC
- Census

News:

- The Andhra Pradesh government **kicked off its comprehensive caste census** to enumerate all communities in the state.

Key Highlights

- Andhra Pradesh becomes the **second state after Bihar** to take up the caste census.
- The YSRCP government has set the caste census as a major goal and feels that the enumeration can transform the living standards of people.
- As part of this exercise, the **Andhra Pradesh government elicited opinions from caste representatives across the state.**
- **Aiming to conduct the caste census** in a fair and comprehensive manner, the southern state wants to project its enumeration exercise as a role model across the country.
- Though the caste census was initially announced to cover only the **139 Backward Classes (BC) communities**, its scope now includes all castes in Andhra Pradesh.

Census in India

- The origin of the Census in India dates back to the **colonial exercise of 1881.**
- Census is used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, access resources, map social change, and conduct delimitation exercises.
- However, it has been criticised as a **blunt instrument unsuited for specialised inquiry.**

SECC (Socio-Economic and Caste Census)

- **SECC was first conducted in 1931** which aimed to collect information on the economic status of Indian families, both in rural and urban areas, to identify indicators of deprivation.
- It also collects data on specific caste names to evaluate the economic conditions of different caste groups.

77. Centre forms committee to examine steps to safeguard interests of SCs - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Madigas
- Sub-categorisation of SCs

News:

- **A high-level panel has been formed to examine** the administrative steps that can be taken to safeguard the interests of scheduled caste communities like the Madigas,

Key Highlights

- The panel will seek to **ensure fair allocation of benefits** to the most disadvantaged communities within the Scheduled Castes
 - which have been overshadowed by comparatively affluent and influential groups.
- It will examine the **administrative steps that can be taken to safeguard** the interests of the scheduled caste communities, like the Madigas and other such groups
 - who have represented that they are not evenly getting their due share of benefits.
- The **committee will comprise**

- secretaries of the Ministry of Home Affairs
- the Department of Personnel and Training
- the Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- the Department of Legal Affairs
- the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The government has been in receipt of representations from state governments, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka for the sub-categorisation of SCs
 - which includes the Madiga community, on the grounds that the benefits of reservation and welfare/developmental schemes are not percolating evenly among them.
- The matter has been placed before various courts of law and is at present under consideration of a seven-judge SC bench.

78. India-Myanmar border to be fenced soon, says Home Minister Amit Shah - The Hindu/ India-Myanmar border to be fenced, says Shah - Indian Express

Relevance: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

News:

- The Union government will soon **fence the 1,643 km border between India and Myanmar**, and will consider ending its free movement regime (FMR) agreement with the neighbouring country

Prelims Takeaway

- Myanmar
- Free movement regime

Key Highlights

- The FMR, implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East Policy
 - allowed residents of both countries living along the border to travel up to 16 km into each other's territory without a visa.
- Much of **India's 4,096 km border with Bangladesh** has been double-fenced to stop the unauthorised entry of people into India, a major concern for the northeastern States, especially Assam.

No more free movement

- The government is also reconsidering India's **FMR agreement with Myanmar and will soon end the free movement into India**
- **Manipur wants the Myanmar** border to be fenced, and the free entry of Myanmar nationals, accused of stoking the ongoing ethnic conflict, stopped.
- **Mizoram and Nagaland**, on the other hand, are against the dual move on the Myanmar front as the people on either side of the international border in those States belong to the same ethnic communities.
- Some 30,000 Chin people from civil war-torn Myanmar have also taken shelter in Mizoram since February 2021.

79. India to send industry delegation for copper mining opportunities in Zambia - Indian Express

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

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- Coppers
- Map based questions

- The Mines Ministry of India has suggested sending a **joint industry delegation to Zambia** to discuss **potential copper exploration** and mining projects.
- Notable companies expressing interest include Vedanta, Hindustan Zinc, Ola Electric, and lithium-ion battery recycler LOHUM.

Zambia's Copper Reserves and Importance

- **Zambia holds approximately 6% of the world's copper reserves** and was the eighth-largest copper producer in 2022.
- Copper is vital in various industries, including construction, consumer durables, transportation, and clean energy technologies such as solar panels and electric vehicles.

Joint Working Group (JWG) Meetings

- The second meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG), established under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Ministries of Mines in India and Zambia, is set to take place in Zambia.
- The goal is to facilitate **collaboration in mineral resources between the two countries**.

Recent Developments

- In December 2023, met with the High Commissioner of India to Zambia to explore possibilities of expanding bilateral cooperation in the mining sector.
- KABIL has also signed an agreement with a state-owned company in Argentina for lithium exploration.

Indian Presence in Zambia's Copper Mining

- India currently has a **limited presence in Zambia's copper mining sector**.
- Vedanta, in control of Konkola Copper Mines (KCM), plans to invest over \$1.2 billion in Zambia to increase copper output.
- Other investors in Zambia's copper include Canada-based First Quantum Minerals and China's CNMC.

Growing Indian Demand for Copper

- Domestic copper demand in **India grew by 16% in FY2022-2023**, with a 32% increase in demand for copper in clean energy technologies.
- Limited domestic supply has led Indian mining companies to consider overseas acquisition of copper mining blocks.

80. Expulsion of Indians from Uganda by Idi Amin was a mistake: Museveni - The Hindu

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

News:

- Nearly **52 years after the Ugandan dictator expelled the Indian community** of his country, the **President of Uganda** called that move a **"mistake"**

Key Highlights

- President comment which came at the **19th NAM summit held in capital Kampala** was a rare expression of regret about an event
 - That has long been considered one of the traumatic incidents that struck the Indian diaspora in the 20th century.
- The NAM countries also sometimes make mistakes like here in Uganda.
- **In August 1972**, Idi Amin **ordered the expulsion of Indians and other south Asians** who were an integral part of Ugandan life till that point.

Prelims Takeaway

- India-Uganda Relations
- Map based questions

- At the end, around 80,000 **Indians and thousands of Pakistanis and Bangladesh citizens were expelled** from Uganda prompting them to seek refuge in other countries
 - Including the U.K., Canada, Kenya and India.
 - Many of those expelled Indians went on to carve a future for themselves in new locations.

India-Uganda Relations

- India established its diplomatic presence in 1965, even though the countries relationship dates back to the era
- Traders ferried goods in dhows across the Indian Ocean which eventually led to a number of Indians to settle in East Africa, and many made Uganda their home.
- **India's freedom struggle** inspired early Ugandan activists to fight colonialism and the country achieved freedom in 1962.
- In the 1970s under the dictatorship of Idi Amin, nearly 60000 **Indians and PIOs were expelled from Uganda.**
- However, this policy was reversed in the 80s and currently, there are over 30000 Indians/PIOs in the country

81. WTO dispute settlement body revival faces delays over country differences: GTRI - Indian Express

Relevance: Important International institutions, agencies and for-
their structure, mandate.

News:

- According to the **Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) report**, the reinstatement of a **fully functional WTO dispute settlement body** is facing delays.
- This is due to significant differences between **developed and developing countries.**

Protectionism and US Involvement

- The **absence of a functional dispute settlement body** has led to an **increase in protectionism.**
- Since 2017, the US has been **obstructing the appointment of new judges** to the WTO's appellate court, claiming that it is detrimental to its interests.
Over a quarter of all disputes involve challenges to US laws or measures

India's Priority at MC13

- The GTRI, emphasizes that reforming the dispute settlement system is a **crucial priority for India** at the 13th ministerial conference (MC13).
- Without a reliable method for resolving conflicts, **WTO rules remain ineffective.**

WTO Dispute Settlement

- A **dispute arises** when a member government believes another member government is **violating an agreement** that it has **made in the WTO.**
- There are **two main ways** to settle a dispute once a complaint has been filed in the WTO
- The parties find a mutually agreed solution, particularly during the phase of bilateral consultations.
- Through adjudication which are binding upon the parties once adopted by the Dispute Settlement Body.
- There are **three main stages to the WTO dispute settlement process**
 - Consultations between the parties.
 - Adjudication by panels and, if applicable, by the Appellate Body.
 - Implementation of the ruling

Prelims Takeaway

- World Trade Organisation
- WTO Dispute Settlement

- It includes the possibility of countermeasures in the event of failure by the losing party to implement the ruling.

WTO's Appellate Body

- The Appellate Body, **set up in 1995**, is a **standing committee of seven members**.
- It **presides over appeals** against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.
- Countries can approach the Appellate Body if they feel the **report of the panel** set up to examine the issue **needs to be reviewed on points of law**.
- However, **existing evidence is not re-examined** but **legal interpretations are reviewed**.
- The Appellate Body can **uphold, modify, or reverse the legal findings of the panel** that heard the dispute.
- The appellate body at the WTO **stopped functioning from December 2019**, but the **panels are still working**.

82. PM announces solar rooftop scheme for 1 crore households - The Hindu/ PM announces scheme to install rooftop solar systems in 1 cr homes - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

- The Prime Minister publicly announced a scheme **to electrify one crore households with solar electricity**.

Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana

- The scheme has the **target of installing rooftop solar on one crore houses**.
- Currently, **there is no centrally compiled estimate of the number of households** in India with rooftop solar installations.
- As of July 31, 2023, **only 2.2 GW (1 GW is 1,000 MW) worth of rooftop installations** were reportedly installed in Indian homes, according to information presented to the Lok Sabha.
- The government, since 2010, has been claiming to install 100 GW by 2022 — 60 GW from utility project (mega concentrated solar parks) and 40 GW from rooftop solar.
- So far, **about 56 GW has been installed in the utilities** (July 2023) and 12 GW in rooftops.
- Rooftop solar installations include **panels in offices and homes**.
- Of the nearly 12 GW of rooftop solar installations as of July 2023, **about 87% are "non-residential"**, according to a report by JMK Research.
- India has consistently added around 2 GW annually (rooftop) but most of these are in offices and buildings.
- Currently, the **incentive structures are such that it benefits commercial entities more than individual houses** (to install solar panels)

Prelims Takeaway

- Solar energy
- Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana

83. Centre not to re-work RoDTEP scheme as it is WTO compliant: officials - The Hindu/ No relook at duty remission scheme needed due to US, EU action: Official - Indian Express

Prelims Takeaway

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

- RoDTEP
- WTO

News:

- The **Centre has no plans of re-working** the popular Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (**RoDTEP**) scheme for exporters

Key Highlights

- The government order despite the **US government imposing anti-subsidy duties against it**
- the problem **was not with the WTO** compatibility of the scheme but with the inability of exporters to provide adequate documents to US investigating teams,
- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (**DGFT**) and the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (**DGTR**) **are now working on familiarising exporters**

'Remission scheme'

- "RoDTEP is a remission scheme and **is fully WTO compliant.**
- **The RoDTEP scheme, announced in January 2021, replaced the WTO-incompatible MEIS scheme**
 - which had faced several challenges from partner countries at the WTO as it was not transparently determined.
- RoDTEP was designed carefully to ensure that **it was totally transparent and the refund rates** were based on embedded duties and taxes
 - such as VAT on fuel used in transportation, mandi tax and duty on electricity used during manufacturing of the exported items.
- However, earlier this fiscal, both the US and the EU imposed countervailing (anti-subsidy) duties on Indian products, against RoDTEP payments availed.

84. Spiking tensions: On peace in Korean Peninsula

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims Takeaway

- Seoul
- Pyongyang

News:

- **North Korea's decision to declare South Korea as an enemy state** of the North

Key Highlights

- The idea of peaceful reunification was abandoned, signaling that Pyongyang is adopting a more aggressive stand.
- It is evident from these actions that the Kim regime is seeking to alter the status quo.
- The government sees the **growing military convergence between South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. as a security threat.**
- The three countries **recently linked up their missile radar data with one another.**
- **The U.S. and South Korea also routinely conduct joint military exercises**, which triggers sharp reactions from the North.
- In the past, despite its rhetoric, **North Korea was open to diplomatic engagement with the South and the U.S.**

Agreement with USA government

- In 1994, it reached the **Agreed Framework with the Clinton administration.**
- As part of this, it agreed to freeze the operation and construction of its nuclear reactors.
- It was **after the collapse of the Agreed Framework** during the George Bush Jr. administration that **Pyongyang went nuclear.**

- In an apparent rejection of the path of reconciliation with the **U.S., Pyongyang has ruled out talks on denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula** and has taken measures to strengthen ties with China and Russia.
- **A direct conflict between the two Koreas**, one a nuclear power and the other backed by the world's most powerful country, would be disastrous for the entire region.
- Dialling down tensions and rebuilding confidence in **inter-Korean relations should be an immediate priority for all stakeholders — Seoul, Pyongyang, and Washington.**

85. Maldives rules out research by Chinese vessel in its waters - The Hindu/ Amid row with India, Maldives allows Chinese vessel to dock - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- Chinese research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03 **will not be carrying out research in Maldivian waters**, but will arrive for a port call, the Government of Maldives has said.

Key Highlights

- Reports of the Chinese vessel heading to the Maldives have drawn considerable attention in India
 - Especially in the wake of **Sri Lanka announcing a one-year moratorium on foreign research vessels** calling at the island's ports, after India voiced concern over visits by a Chinese vessel.
- The vessel would not be conducting any research while in the Maldivian waters," the Ministry said
- The Ministry said the Maldives **"has always been a welcoming destination for vessels of friendly countries"**
 - And continues to host both civilian and military vessels making port calls for peaceful purposes.
- Such port calls not only enhance bilateral ties between the Maldives and its partner countries, but also demonstrate the centuries old tradition of the Maldivian people
- **The vessel had earlier called at Sri Lankan ports**, but did not obtain clearance for a visit early this year
- **The visit of the Chinese vessel to the Maldives** is the latest source of tension for New Delhi, during a challenging phase of its ties with Male.

Trincomalee Port

- Trincomalee harbour is on the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka.
- It is situated on a **peninsula in Trincomalee Bay**—formerly called Koddiiyar Bay.
- Trincomalee is the nearest port to Chennai, India.
- Geopolitical and Strategic Significance: The location of this port in the Indian ocean has strategic significance, **it has been of interest to several countries, including India, Japan and the US.**
- **Japan commissioned the 2020 ADB** (Asian Development Bank) study on the development of Trincomalee port.

Prelims Takeaway

- Asian Development Bank
- Trincomalee Port

86. French marching contingent at Republic Day parade has members from India and Nepal - The Hindu

Prelims Takeaway

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

- The National Day of France
- Rafale fighter

News:

- **Six Indians and six Nepalis will be part of the 95-member French Foreign Legion contingent** that will march on the Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Republic Day.
- **French President Emmanuel Macron is the chief guest** at the parade this year.

Key Highlights

- The French marching contingent will be accompanied by a 33-member French military band.
- **Two Rafale fighter jets and one Airbus-a330 multi-role tanker transport aircraft** of the French Air and Space Force **will be part of the flypast.**

For the First Time

- An advanced radio frequency monitoring system, drone jammers, and medium-range surface-to-air missile will be on display for the first time at the parade
- An all-woman tri-services contingent will also take part in the parade for the first time,
- On July 14, 2023, **Indian Prime Minister was the chief guest at the French Bastille Day parade**
 - Which saw a 242-member Indian tri-service contingent marching on Champs-Élysées. Rafale jets of the Indian Air Force also took part in the flypast.

French Bastille Day

- **The National Day of France**, also known as Bastille Day, is celebrated on July 14 every year.
- **Known as La Fete Nationale or Le 14 Juillet in French**, the day is celebrated with fireworks and a parade.
- One of the most important days in the history of France, it marks the fall of the Bastille, a military fortress and political prison, then considered a symbol of the monarchy and armoury.

87. T.N. Cabinet approves new policy aimed at 'holistic development of women' - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- National Policy for Women 2016
- State's New Policy for Women

News:

- **Tamil Nadu** Cabinet approved the **State's New Policy for Women**, the draft of which was released in December 2021.

Key Highlights

- A State-level committee headed by **Chief Secretaries and district-level committees** headed by Collectors
 - will be constituted to monitor the implementation of the policy and to address any issues of discrimination.
- **The Social Welfare and Women Empowerment department** will also monitor the implementation.
- She pointed out the State has formulated a new policy 23 years after the **national-level policy was released in 2001.**
- When asked about the delay in the formation of gender budgeting cells in all departments as announced by the government last year, the Minister said the process was underway.

National Policy for Women 2016

- In 2016, **the union government of India** unveiled the Draft National Policy for Women

- It aimed at “re-scripting” women’s empowerment by following a “**socially inclusive rights-based approach**”.
- It was **released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)**.
- The policy is roughly based on the **Pam Rajput Committee report** set up by the MWCD in 2012
 - Which submitted its recommendations in 2016, including a suggested national policy for women and an action plan to end violence against women.
- **Maternal and prenatal mortality will remain a priority area**
 - Focusing on a coordinated referral transport system for safe deliveries
 - Emergency obstetric care to be made available in difficult, remote and isolated areas.
- It focuses on prioritising the nutrition of women of all ages and strengthening geriatric services to address women aged above 60, who form 8.4% of the population.

88. Centre's sovereign AI push: Compute mission may get over ₹10,000 crore - 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 State for Electronics and IT revealed that the **Indian government's AI Mission** is set to seek Cabinet approval with a proposed budget exceeding Rs 10,000 crore.

Objectives of the AI Mission

- To **develop 'sovereign AI'**, enhance computational capacity domestically, and provide compute-as-a-service to Indian startups.
- To **harness AI for economic growth**, focusing on sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and education.

Computing Capacity and Partnerships

- The government plans to **build compute capacity** through a **public-private partnership (PPP)** model, targeting **10,000 to 30,000 GPUs**.
- An additional 1,000-2,000 GPUs are to be developed through the PSU Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).

Incentive Structures

- Various incentive structures are being explored to **encourage private companies to establish computing centres** in India.
- **Incentive models include** capital expenditure subsidies, operational expense-based incentives, and a "usage" fee.
- The government envisions creating a **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** from the GPU assembly to **offer startups cost-effective access to computational capacity**.

Data Initiatives

- Alongside computing capacity, the government is actively working on **building datasets** and making them available to Indian startups.
- A **National Data Governance Framework Policy** proposes the creation of an **India Datasets platform** containing **non-personal and anonymized datasets** accessible to startups and researchers.
- The government is considering **directives for major tech companies** like Facebook, Google, and Amazon to **share anonymized personal data** with the India Datasets platform.

Prelims Takeaway

- Indian government's AI Mission
- Artificial Intelligence
- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)
- Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)

89. Top U.S. officials to come to India to discuss bilateral ties and Quad dates - The Hindu

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

News:

- **Top U.S. diplomats will travel to Delhi** this week to discuss bilateral issues, energy cooperation

Prelims Takeaway

- Quad
- Russian oil

Key Highlights

- They are expected to discuss possible dates for the **Quad Summit with the U.S.-Australia-Japan-India leaders** as well as shore up ties amidst speculation of a 'pause' in the past few months.
- New Delhi had earlier proposed to hold the summit this weekend, on January 27,
- The Indian Prime Minister had invited the U.S. President as chief guest for Republic Day on the 26th.
- However, after the **U.S. declined the invitation last month**
- **French President agreed to step in**, and is due to arrive in India on Thursday.
- The U.S. decision to turn down the Republic Day invite, and the U.S.'s allegations in the Pannun matter had led to speculation over trouble in the India-U.S. relationship.
- Recently, the U.S. treasury announced it was imposing its first sanctions of the year on a UAE company for transporting Russian oil above the "price cap"
 - That prohibits services like insurance, shipping and freight to such transactions.
 - While India does not accept non-UN unilateral sanctions, it has thus far kept its purchases below the price cap, officials said.

90. WHY TURKEY HAS FINALLY BACKED SWEDEN'S NATO MEMBERSHIP BID - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- Sweden's attempt to join NATO cleared a major hurdle after Turkey's parliament supported its membership.

Key Highlights

- For a new country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), **all the existing members have to approve it.**
- **Turkey and Hungary had been opposing Sweden's entry** for almost the past two years.

Sweden's Motivation to Join NATO

- Sweden's historical neutrality and avoidance of war for two centuries
- Shift in stance after Russia's invasion of Ukraine
- Public opinion favoring NATO membership
- Joint application with Finland in 2022, with Finland's bid already approved

Turkey's Opposition to Sweden's NATO Bid

- Accusations against Sweden of leniency towards groups like the PKK
- Controversial Quran-burning protests affecting relations
- Linkage of Turkey's support to Sweden with the potential sale of F-16 fighter jets by the U.S.

Sweden's Contribution to NATO

- **Geopolitical significance:** NATO gaining almost all Baltic Sea coastline, except Russia-controlled areas

Prelims Takeaway

- NATO
- Map based question

- **Strategic advantages:** Proximity to Russia, streamlined supply lines, and enhanced defense capabilities
- **Overview of Sweden's modern and experienced military** with advanced aircraft and submarine capabilities

91. Centre releases three-drug regimen for treating leprosy - The Hindu

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

News:

- The Indian government recently gave its approval for a **new treatment regimen for leprosy**, with the goal of **halting transmission at the sub-national level by 2027**.

Key Developments

- The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has received approval from the competent authority to **implement a three-drug regimen for Pauci-Bacillary (PB) cases**.
- The three-drug regimen for PB cases will replace the existing two-drug regimen for six months.
- The shift is based on the latest **globally accepted scientific research studies and evidence-based practices**.
- The revised classification and treatment regimen for PB and multi-bacillary (MB) cases will be **effective from April 1, 2025**.
 - The World Health Organization (WHO) will supply the revised drug regimen from April 1, 2025.
- All states and union territories have been instructed to requisition anti-leprosy drugs 12 months in advance.

Expert Perspectives

- Concerns have been raised about **potential side effects**, with clofazimine causing a distinctive red coloration of the skin.
- Healthcare experts argue that the **two-drug regimen has adequate efficacy**, and the addition of a third drug **may not be strictly necessary**.

Leprosy Disease

- Leprosy, caused by **Mycobacterium leprae**, is a **chronic infectious disease**.
- The disease predominantly **affects the skin and peripheral nerves**. Left untreated, the disease may cause progressive and permanent disabilities.
- It is more common in **tropical and subtropical areas**.
- It is a **neglected tropical disease (NTD)** which still occurs in more than 120 countries, with more than 200 000 new cases reported each year.
- It is known to **occur at all ages** ranging from early childhood to old age.

Transmission: Through droplets from the nose and mouth during close contact with untreated cases.

Symptoms

- Disfiguring skin sores, lumps, or bumps that don't go away after several weeks or months.
- Nerve damage can lead to loss of feeling in the arms and legs; and muscle weakness
- The WHO-recommended treatment regimen, known as **multi-drug therapy (MDT)**, includes three drugs viz. **dapsone, rifampicin, and clofazimine**.

92. Providing clean water to all - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

- Tap water in almost all regions, **provided by the Jal Jeevan Mission**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Leprosy Disease
- National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP)

- **Launched by the Prime Minister in 2019**, the Jal Jeevan Mission has already provided tap water to 73% of rural households.

Jal Jeevan Mission

- **Launched in 2019, it envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day** to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.
- **JJM looks to create a jan andolan for water**, thereby making it everyone's priority.
- It comes under Jal Shakti Ministry.

Objective:

- **The mission ensures functionality of existing water supply** systems and water connections, water quality monitoring and testing as well as sustainable agriculture.
- It also ensures conjunctive use of conserved water; drinking water source augmentation, drinking water supply system, grey water treatment and its reuse.
- JJM focuses on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level.
- **Creation of local infrastructure** for source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, like:
 - rainwater harvesting
 - groundwater recharge
 - Management of household wastewater for reuse, is undertaken in convergence with other government programmes/schemes.
- **The Mission is based on a community approach** to water and includes
 - extensive Information, education and communication as a key component of the mission.
- Paani Samitis plan, implement, manage, operate and maintain village water supply systems.
- **The committees prepare a one-time village action plan**, merging all available village resources. The plan is approved in a Gram Sabha before implementation.

93. Proposed Broadcasting Bill may result in greater government control of broadcast, digital media: NWMI-The Hindu

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

News:

- The proposed **Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023** has raised the concerns of over-control and over-regulation.
- The **Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI)** made a submission to the Information & Broadcasting Ministry in this regard.
- The bill at present is **open to receiving feedback** from the public and stakeholders.

Key Highlights

- The Broadcasting Bill seeks to replace the **Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995**.
- It aims at providing a **comprehensive regulatory regime** for all forms of broadcasting content from television to streaming platforms.
- The government bestows **inordinate powers** on itself through this Bill.

List of Concerns Raised by NWMI

- The bill needs wider and exhaustive **consultations**.
- The media landscape need **not be over-controlled**.
- This intent to control and over-regulate is not in the interests of a **healthy, independent media**.
- **Free press, free speech** and **creative freedom** in India need to be protected.
- The bill contains vaguely worded provisions, including its definition of **'news and current affairs programmes**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995.
- Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023
- Broadcast Advisory Council

- The bill will unduly cover individual **YouTubers, the social media accounts of professional journalists** and even **citizen journalists**.
- The Bill places **extra-requirements** and **burdens** on news organisations.
- The bill is injurious to **small news operators**.

Centre Government Sway Over the Media and OTT Platforms

- The outline of the **Programme Code and Advertising Code** as a part of the bill has not been thoroughly consulted.
- The bill subject the work of newspersons to **Content Evaluation Committees (CECs)**.
- The Bill gives the Central government an overriding role in the formation of Content Evaluation Committees (CECs).
- In the context of **OTT platforms**, CECs look set to mimic the functioning of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) which itself is subject to criticism.
- The Committee of Experts on OTT chaired by **Shyam Benegal** suggested the liberal control of these platforms.
- The formation of a **Broadcast Advisory Council** under the bill will be in the hands of the Centre Government.

94. Women steal the show at Republic Day Parade-The Hindu

Relevance: Indigenisation of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- The women led the **75th Republic Day Parade on Kartavya Path** on January 26.

Key Highlights

- Major Saumya Shukla of the **Army Service Corps** unfurled the National Flag.
- Lieutenant Priyanka Sevda of the **262 Field Regiment** led the **Pinaka Rocket System**.

Pointers of Nari Shakti

- An **all-woman tri-services contingent** marched down Kartavya Path for the first time.
- Women personnel of the **CRPF**, the **BSF**, and the **SSB** performed daredevil stunts on motorcycles.
- The Republic Day parade comes just a few months after the **women's reservation Bill** was passed by Parliament.
- The law seeks to reserve one-third of seats for women in the **Lok Sabha** and the **State Legislative Assemblies**.
- India has a **woman President**, that too from the tribal community.

Prelims Takeaway

- Nari Shakti Vandan Act
- Kartva Path

95. Day after judge accuses fellow judge, SC stays all proceedings before Calcutta HC over matter-The Indian Express

Relevance: Structure, organisation and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

News:

- In the Calcutta High Court, a judge accused a fellow judge of acting clearly for some political party in this State.

Key Highlights

- The Supreme Court **issued a notice** to the West Bengal government and the Calcutta HC.

Prelims Takeaway

- Division Bench
- Interim Stay

- The Hon'ble Court also **stayed directions** for a CBI probe into alleged irregularities in the admission of MBBS candidates in the state.

The Judicial Dissensions and Aftermath

- A single-judge bench of the Calcutta High Court had directed that a **CBI investigation** be ordered into alleged irregularities in MBBS admissions in the state.
- An **interim stay** on the single-bench order was issued by the division bench of the Calcutta High Court.
- This investigation was ordered to be continued, despite an **order of a division bench to the contrary**.
- The Supreme Court has set up a **five-judge bench** in this regard.
- It will **consist of** the CJI D Y Chandrachud and four most senior judges of the Supreme Court i.e. Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose
- The top court further **stayed all related proceedings** before the Calcutta High Court in the matter.

96. Netanyahu slams genocide case as 'outrageous', says Israel will continue to defend itself-The Indian Express

Relevance: Important International institutions, agencies, their structure and mandates

News:

- Israeli Prime Minister claimed that Israel will "continue to do what is necessary" to defend itself

Key Highlights

- The statement came in the backdrop of a ruling from the top UN i.e. **The International Court of Justice. (ICJ)**
- The ICJ criticised **Israel's war against Hamas** in the Gaza Strip.
- The International Court of Justice stopped short of **ordering a cease-fire** in Gaza in a genocide case filed by South Africa.
- The court demanded that **Israel try to contain death and damage** in its military offensive in the tiny coastal enclave.
- The Israel PM **rejected the genocide claims** as "outrageous"
- Israel **vowed to press ahead** with the war to protect its country and people.

What is Genocide ?

- According to the United Nations, genocide refers to the **deliberate and systematic destruction** of a specific ethnic, racial, religious, or national group.
- This destruction may manifest through **various methods** such as :
 - mass killings,
 - forced relocation
 - the imposition of harsh living conditions
 - widespread death.
- The UN outlines **two primary components** constituting the crime of genocide:
- **Mental Element:** Involves the intent to annihilate, either wholly or partially, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.
- **Physical Element:** Encompasses specific acts exhaustively listed, including:
 - Killing members of the group.
 - Inflicting serious bodily or mental harm upon members of the group.

Prelims Takeaway

- Genocide
- The International Court of Justice. (ICJ)

- Deliberately imposing conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction, either wholly or partially.

97. India and France agree to set up 'joint surveillance missions' in Indian Ocean - The Hindu

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

News:

- India and France have agreed to intensify their cooperation in the Southwest Indian Ocean, **building on the "joint surveillance missions"** carried out from French La Reunion in 2020 and 2022

Prelims Takeaway

- Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul
- joint surveillance missions

Key Highlights

- **France is the first major Western military power** with which India has conducted joint patrols
 - Under which Indian Navy P-8I maritime patrol aircraft were deployed to the French island territory of La Reunion.
- They also welcomed the **extension of those interactions in India's maritime neighbourhood.**
- The two countries have also committed to **"revitalising" the trilateral cooperation with Australia, deepen the one with the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** and explore new ones in the region.
- In this regard, the **joint statement noted the establishment of the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) for LEAP engines** in India by Safran
- The plans to add MRO for Rafale engines, a comprehensive helicopter partnership with a joint venture for Indian Multi-Role helicopter (IMRH) engine between HAL and Safran
 - And the additional Scorpene submarines constructed in India, including indigenisation.
- **Jet engine deal with France will give 100% access to technology**, says Indian envoy

Space cooperation

- In the realm of space cooperation, the two countries had launched the Strategic Space Dialogue in June 2023 to provide **"strategic guidance and direction" across all aspects of space cooperation.**

98. US blocks fresh proposal to restart dispute settlement mechanism - Indian Express

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

News:

- A proposal supported by 130 WTO members to **restart the selection process for filling vacancies on the WTO's Appellate Body faces rejection from the United States.**

Prelims Takeaway

- MPIA
- WTO

Key Highlights

- The ongoing deadlock raises concerns about the functionality of the Appellate Body, exacerbating global trade tensions amid geopolitical challenges and protectionist trends.

Persistent U.S. Obstruction:

- The United States, **for the 73rd time, blocks the proposal initiated by Guatemala** to launch the selection process for Appellate Body members.
- Since 2017, **the U.S. has opposed the appointment of new judges**, citing concerns over judicial activism at the WTO and issues related to U.S. sovereignty.

Global Trade Impact

- The **absence of a functional Appellate Body** is worrisome; especially as global trade is already slowing amid growing geopolitical tensions.
- Developed countries adopting inward-looking trade measures, such as carbon taxes, further complicate the trade landscape, impacting countries like India.

WTO Ministerial Conference and Reform Efforts

- Ahead of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, **India aims to advocate for a resolution to the system.**

Controversial U.S. Perspective

- The U.S. asserts that the old system was not working for multiple members, emphasizing that **relaunching the Appellate Body selection process does not address underlying concerns.**
- The statement received surprise from some members, given the significant support for the proposal among 130 co-sponsoring countries.

Alternative Measures and U.S. Impact

- **Seven members suggest exploring the multi-party interim appeal arrangement (MPIA)** to maintain appeal rights in the absence of a functioning Appellate Body.
- The U.S. Trade Representative argues that the proper functioning of the Appellate Body disproportionately affects the U.S., citing a high number of disputes challenging U.S. laws.

99. Govt plans accreditation system overhaul - Indian Express

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

News:

- The **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** recently announced significant **reforms in the accreditation system for higher education institutes.**

Key Reforms

Binary Accreditation System

- Higher education institutions will now be categorised as either **"Accredited" or "Not Accredited,"** eliminating the current grading system.
- "Not Accredited" includes two categories viz. **"Awaiting Accreditation" and "Not Accredited,"** based on their compliance with standards.
- **Awaiting Accreditation:** Those institutes that nearly meet the requirements but need improvement
- **Not Accredited:** Those institutions that are far below the standards for accreditation.
- Introduces a **maturity-based graded system** for accredited institutions to progress from "level one" to "level five."
- Incentivizes improvement, with the ultimate goal of achieving **"Institution of Global Excellence for Multi-Disciplinary Research and Education"** status.

One Nation, One Data Platform

- A new public platform, **"One Nation, One Data,"** will collect and display a **comprehensive dataset from** universities.
- **Objective:** To enhance transparency, credibility, and streamline processes such as permission, accreditation, and rating over time.
- Replaces the existing manual of assessment and accreditation where experts are responsible to visit campus and verify the data submitted.
- To ensure credibility of data, the platform will also have a built-in mechanism to **cross-check the data's veracity.**

Prelims Takeaway

- National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)
- One Nation, One Data Platform
- University Grants Commission (UGC)

Future Implications for IITs

- There is uncertainty regarding whether IITs will be **mandated to participate in the new accreditation system**.
 - The **Radhakrishnan Committee** had recommended that the IITs be brought under a unified accreditation process.
- Currently, IITs follow their **internal systems for periodic evaluation and assessment** of their programmes.

100. EWS seats not filled? Schools can carry it forward to next yr: HC - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Article 21
- RTE Act

News:

- The Delhi High Court ruled that **carrying forward unfilled vacancies in the Economically Weaker Section/Disadvantaged Group (EWS/DG)** category is valid
- The ruling was related to a particular class.

Key Highlights

- A single-judge bench observed that **carrying forward unfilled EWS/DG** vacancies to the next class in the subsequent year **does not violate** the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act or any other legal provision.
- **Admitting EWS/DG students to the extent of at least 25%** of the strength of its entry-level class is the statutory obligation of every school, which falls within Section 2(n)(iv) of the RTE Act.
- If a school defaults, there is nothing illegal in directing it to make up the deficit in the next higher class in the next year," the HC underscored.

RTE Act

- The RTE Act **aims to provide primary education to all children aged 6 to 14 years**.
- It enforces Education as a **Fundamental Right (Article 21)**.
- **The act mandates 25% reservation for disadvantaged sections** of the society where disadvantaged groups include:
 - SCs and STs
 - Socially Backward Class
 - Differently abled
- It also makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.
- It had a clause for **"No Detention Policy"** which has been removed under The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019.

101. Banked on 2011 caste census report to revise BC list: Kerala - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India
- Caste census

- **The Kerala government** told the Supreme Court that it had pinned its hopes on a **caste census held by the Centre in 2011 to identify socio-economic Backward Classes in the State**

Key Highlights

- The State is facing contempt proceedings in the Supreme Court for **“wilfully disobeying” judicial orders to periodically revise its Backward Class list**
- in order to ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of reservation in public employment.
- While States like Bihar **have held its own caste survey ahead of the Lok Sabha election**
- The State had requested the Centre on November 4, 2022, for a copy of the 2011 caste survey data report in order to identify Backward Classes in Kerala.
- The report was forwarded to the Kerala State Commission for Backward Classes chairman only in May 2023.
- As per the state government, the report was not at all helpful for identification of socially and educationally backward classes within the State of Kerala.

Caste Census

- Conducted by - **Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation – Urban Areas.**
- **Ministry of Rural Development – Rural Areas**
- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India – responsible for the caste census.

102. Kejriwal unveils new solar policy, says will help cut power bill to zero - The Hindu/ Install rooftop solar panels and get zero electricity bills: CM announces new policy - Indian Express

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Takeaway

- PM-KUSUM
- SRISTI Scheme

News:

Delhi Chief Minister unveiled the **Delhi Solar Policy-2024**

- under the policy, consumers installing solar power panels on their rooftops will be given generation-based incentives.

Key Highlights

- According to the government, **around 20% of Delhi’s electricity consumption will come from solar power by 2027.**
- The government will spend ₹570 crores for the implementation of the policy.
- The Chief Minister said the scheme would help cut households’ power bills to zero if their electricity consumption is below 200 units a month after adjusting against the electricity they generate.

India initiative toward becoming solar power

- **Solar Park Scheme:** The Solar Park Scheme plans to build a number of solar parks, each with a capacity of nearly 500 MW, across several states.
- **Rooftop Solar Scheme:** The Rooftop Solar Scheme aims to harness solar power by installing solar panels on the roof of houses.
- **National Solar Mission:** It is a major initiative of the Government of India and State Governments to promote ecologically sustainable growth while addressing India's energy security challenge.
- **SRISTI Scheme:** Sustainable rooftop implementation of Solar transfiguration of India (SRISTI) scheme to promote rooftop solar power projects in India.

- **International Solar Alliance:** International Solar Alliance is an action-oriented, member-driven, collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies.
- **Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM):** The PM-KUSUM scheme was launched by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) to support installation of off-grid solar pumps in rural areas and reduce dependence on grid, in grid-connected areas.

103. Taliban minister discusses regional ties with diplomats of 11 countries - Indian Express

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

News:

- **Taliban's Foreign minister held a meeting of diplomats from 11 neighbouring** and regional countries, including India
- He proposed establishing a "region-centric narrative."

Objective of meeting

- It aimed at **developing regional cooperation** for a positive and constructive engagement between Afghanistan and regional countries."
- This is the first publicised meeting between the Taliban foreign minister and diplomats from India based in Kabul.
- Since June 2022, **India has stationed a technical team**, with the stated objective of delivering humanitarian aid and support to Afghanistan.
- regional cooperation could be focused on exploring region-centric and engagement pathways based on common regional benefits
 - Creating a region-centric narrative for positive and constructive engagement with the Afghan government to tackle existing and potential threats in the region;

History of India-Afghanistan Relations

- The contact between the **people of modern-day India and Afghanistan has existed since the days of the Indus Valley Civilization.**
- A number of **invaders invaded the northern regions of India between the 10th century to the mid 18th century** by a number of invaders
- **Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan** was one of the prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement and active supporters of the Indian National Congress.
- Even though the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) became the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan
- unanimous Pashtun support for the Indian freedom struggle led to great sympathy in India for the cause of Pashtun autonomy and freedom.
- The Indian government **continued to support Pashtun leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in lobbying for greater Pashtun freedom in the NWFP.**

Prelims Takeaway

- North-West Frontier Province
- Taliban

104. To push cyber infra, Govt may push use of made in India products - Indian Express

Prelims Takeaway

- National Cybersecurity Reference Framework (NCRF)

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

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| • Indian Emergency Team | Computer Response |
|-------------------------|-------------------|

News:

- India is poised to recommend the **use of domestically developed cybersecurity products and services**, particularly for critical sectors such as banking, telecom, and energy.
- The initiative is driven by the need to **enhance national security** in the face of escalating cybersecurity threats.

The National Cybersecurity Reference Framework (NCRF)

- The government has formulated the NCRF, a comprehensive policy to **establish a clear framework for cybersecurity, outlining roles and responsibilities**.
- The NCRF **draws upon existing legislations, policies, and guidelines** to provide an implementable measure.
- It has been developed by the **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)** with support from the **National Cybersecurity Coordinator (NCSC)**. NCIIPC reports to the Prime Minister's Office.
- However, the NCRF is a guideline i.e. its **recommendations will not be binding**.
- It was shared privately with companies and other government departments for consultation last year, but is yet to be made public.

Cybersecurity Budget Allocation

- The NCRF may recommend that enterprises allocate **at least 10% of their total IT budget** specifically for cybersecurity.
- This allocation should be **separate from general IT resources**, aligning with global best practices and aiming to enhance organizational cybersecurity posture.

Regulatory Oversight

- The NCRF could also suggest that regulators overseeing critical sectors **define information security requirements**.
- Additionally, these regulators may need effective **Information Security Management Systems (ISMS)** instances to **access sensitive data** related to critical sector operations.
- It may prescribe that national nodal agencies develop platforms and processes for **machine-processing of data** from different entities.
 - This approach aims to facilitate **sectoral and cross-sectoral analysis** of audit compliance, audit effectiveness, and grading of auditors.

Rising Cybersecurity Incidents

- Recent high-profile cyber attacks, including the **2022 breach of AIIMS Delhi systems**, have underscored the urgency for a robust cybersecurity framework.
- The lack of an overarching framework has prompted concerns among union ministers, emphasizing the need for sector-specific legislations.

105. Curbs on liquor sale do not extend to municipal areas: SC - The Hindu

Prelims Takeaway

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

- Brasilia Declaration
- Article 47

News:

- **The Supreme Court** has asserted that its December 2016 **ban on the sale of liquor** within 500 metres of the outer edge of national and State highways **will not extend to municipal areas.**

Key Highlights

- The March 2023 order had set aside a Madras High Court decision confirming the permission granted by the Puducherry Excise Department to a liquor retailer

Ban on the sale of liquor within 500 metres

- The court prohibited signages and advertising of availability of liquor on highways and ordered the existing ones to be removed forthwith from both national and State highways. It noted that the highway should be absolutely free from any distraction or attractions.
- Neither should they be directly accessible from the highways nor should they be situated within a distance of 500 metres from the outer edge of the highways or service lanes.
- One of the pleas noted that, India being a signatory to the **Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety**
- It is imperative that policy guidelines are framed to control road accidents.
- The exercise policies of Indian states and Union territories should be amended to conform to the spirit of **Article 47 & Article 21 of the Constitution of India.**

106. Philippines, Vietnam sign agreement on cooperation in South China Sea - The Hindu

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

Prelims Takeaway

- South China Sea
- Map based questions

News:

- **Philippines and Vietnam sign agreements** to prevent incidents in the South China Sea
- Growing alliance likely **to face disapproval from China**

Key Agreements and Cooperation

- Discussions on enhancing information-sharing and training exchanges
- Boosting trade and investment
- Signing a crucial deal on rice

Tensions in the South China Sea

- Background on tense confrontations with China
- Intensification of territorial faceoffs

Vietnamese Reaction and Agreement Details

- Specific details of agreements on preventing and managing incidents not released
- Importance of implementing the accord on maritime cooperation quickly

Joint Submission to UN Commission

- Interest in a joint submission with Vietnam to the UN commission on continental shelf limits
- Willingness to collaborate at the appropriate time

Rice Deal

- Vietnam to supply 1.5 to 2 million metric tons of rice annually to the Philippines Framework creation for stable rice supplies
- Vietnamese rice accounting for 85% of imported rice in the Philippines

107. Corruption perceptions index: India at 93 among 180 countries - Indian Express

Relevance: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability

Prelims Takeaway

- Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)

News:

- According to the **Transparency International Report**, India ranks **93** out of 180 countries in the **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2023**.
- The overall score remains **largely unchanged**, dropping from 40 in 2022 to 39 in 2023.

Concerns for India

- India sees a further **narrowing of civic space** before elections.
- This included the passage of a telecommunication bill that raises concerns about fundamental rights.
- India exhibits **minor fluctuations** in scores, making it challenging to draw firm conclusions about **any substantial changes**.

Regional Stagnation

- The **Asia Pacific region** records **little to no meaningful progress** in curbing corruption.
- The **average CPI score** for the region **stagnates** at 45 for five consecutive years.
- Weak scores below the regional and global averages reflect a **lack of delivery on anti-corruption agendas**.

71% of countries in Asia and the Pacific have CPI scores below the regional and global averages.

Global Leaders and Laggards

- **New Zealand** (3) and **Singapore** (5) maintain top positions globally in corruption control.
- **China** (76) noted for its aggressive anti-corruption crackdown relies heavily on **punishment**, raising doubts about long-term effectiveness.
- In **South Asia**, Pakistan (133) and Sri Lanka (115) face challenges with their respective debt burdens and political instability.
- The **bottom** of the index includes **fragile states with authoritarian regimes**, such as North Korea (172) and Myanmar (162).

Afghanistan (162) is facing one of the **worst humanitarian crises** in history.

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)

- The index ranks 180 countries and territories by their **perceived levels of public sector corruption**, according to experts and business people.
- It uses a **scale of zero to 100**, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.
- It is published annually by the non-governmental organisation **Transparency International** since 1995.
- The CPI generally defines corruption as an **“abuse of entrusted power for private gain”**.

GS III

108. Ministries flagged MSP concerns: Low returns to rising oil imports - Indian Express

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

Prelims Takeaway

- WTO
- MSP

News:

- The **Cabinet approved an increase in MSP for rabi crops** for the marketing season 2024-25 on October 18, 2023.

- **RTI documents reveal concerns** raised by various Union ministries regarding the impact of high MSP on crop diversification.

Concern 1: Import Dependence

- The Department of Food & Public Distribution emphasises that the **MSP for oilseeds has not led to desired domestic production increase**.
- Despite estimates of increased oilseed production, **India still relies on imports for 55% of its edible oil needs**.
- The department suggests a **long-term MSP policy and higher MSP for oilseeds to incentivize production** and shift to high-yielding varieties.

Concern 2: Unequal Benefits

- The Department of Expenditure highlights **the skew in favor of wheat procurement, benefiting only a limited number of states**.
- **NITI Aayog suggests complying with 14 non-price** recommendations to enhance oilseed and pulse productivity.

Concern 3: WTO Obligations

- The Department of Commerce cautions about **India's WTO commitments, particularly the 'de-minimis' subsidy limit**.
- **India's breach of the de-minimis subsidy limit for rice** and emphasizes the need for predetermined targets for MSP-based crop procurement.

109. 4G services will be provided at 1,117 border outposts in six years: Centre - The Hindu

Relevance: Security challenges and their management in border areas – linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

News:

- The Union government allocates ₹1,545.66 crore for **4G mobile services at over 1,100 border outposts**.
- **Tripartite agreement** signed between the Department of Telecommunications, MHA, and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited.

Prelims Takeaway

Indo-China Border Road Project
4G

Key Highlights

Progress in Ladakh Under 4G Saturation Project

- Out of 379 villages and hamlets in Ladakh, mobile towers were established at nine sites, with foundation work completed at 34 sites.
- Slow progress attributed to the 2020 India-China standoff in eastern Ladakh.

Border Road Projects and Infrastructure Development

- **Construction of 48.03 km of roads** along the China border in the current year.
- Addition of four border outposts and three helipads.
- **Sanctioning of 32 roads and construction/upgrading of 32 helipads along the China border** post the Galwan incident.

Indo-China Border Road Project (ICBR) Phases

- **Initiation of the ICBR project's first phase** in 2005 for 27 priority roads along the China border.
- **Approval of the second phase** on September 21, 2020, for further infrastructure development.

Border Village Development and Connectivity

- Emphasis on **strong infrastructure development in border areas**.
- Efforts to **provide welfare benefits** and improve connectivity to border villages.

- Introduction of the Vibrant Villages program for comprehensive development in 19 districts and 46 border blocks, covering 663 villages in the first phase.

110. Expedite NARCL's onboarding of bad loans, focus on preventing frauds' - Indian Express

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

News:

- **The Finance Ministry urges PSBs to expedite the acquisition of stressed accounts** by the National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL).
- **Emphasis on regular meetings between NARCL and banks** to facilitate swift on-boarding of stressed accounts.

Prelims Takeaway

- National Asset Reconstruction Company
- PSB

Mobilisation of Deposits and Innovation

- The Finance Minister **emphasises the importance of mobilising deposits for PSBs.**
- **innovation and attractive deposit schemes** to enhance the deposit base, enabling increased credit extension was encouraged

Responsible Lending Practices

- The Finance Minister highlights the impact of **willful defaults on the financial health of lenders and credit flow in the economy.**
- Urges PSBs to adopt responsible lending practices, enhanced due diligence before loan disbursement, and **take swift legal action in cases of willful default.**

Legal Action and Performance Reviews

- **Call for performance reviews of lawyers** representing PSBs to ensure better outcomes in legal cases against defaulters.
- **Instructions to take strict administrative action** against conniving officials involved in fraud and willful defaults.

111. India in 2023: strides in climate action, criticism of conservation - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

News:

- In 2023, India made significant strides in **climate change mitigation, wildlife conservation and biodiversity laws.**
- However, challenges and criticisms surfaced, particularly concerning the **cheetah translocation project and changes in forest and biodiversity laws.**

Climate Change Initiatives

- **COP33 Proposal:** India proposed **hosting the UN climate conference in 2028 (COP33)** and launched the '**Green Credit Initiative**' focused on creating carbon sinks to address climate challenges.
- **Dubai Climate Summit:** Developing countries, including India, urged rich nations to achieve **negative carbon emissions** instead of just net zero **by 2050.**
- **Per Capita Emissions:** Despite a 5% increase in per capita CO₂ emissions in 2022, India's levels remained less than half of the global average.

Prelims Takeaway

- Biological Diversity Act
- Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act
- International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)
- Green Credit Program

- **National Communication:** India submitted its third national communication to the UNFCCC, highlighting a **33% reduction in GDP emission intensity** between 2005 and 2019.
- **Wildlife Conservation**
- **Tiger Population:** Data revealed a **6% annual increase in the tiger population** from 2,967 in 2018 to 3,682 in 2022.
- **Cheetah Translocation Project**
 - The cheetah conservation project faced criticism over the **deaths of six imported cheetahs**.
 - Challenges included unexpected **development of winter coats** and subsequent health issues.
- **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**
 - Launched in April, the IBCA aims to **conserve the world's seven principal big cats**.
 - It includes the tiger, lion, snow leopard, leopard, jaguar, puma, and cheetah.
- **Changes in Forest and Biodiversity Laws**
- **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act**
 - Amendments drew criticism for **exempting certain categories of land**, impacting the applicability of the Forest (Conservation) Act.
 - The amended Act exempts
 - forest land up to 10 hectares for constructing security-related infrastructure
 - area falling within 100 km of international borders, Line of Control (LoC) and Line of Actual Control (LAC) for “strategic and security-related projects of national importance”.
 - Concerns were raised about potential effects on **tribal and traditional forest-dwelling communities**.
- **Biological Diversity Act**
 - Amendments aimed to **promote growing medicinal plants**, support traditional medicine, facilitate research, patents and foreign investments.
 - However, concerns were raised about changes in **benefit-sharing rules**, with fines replacing jail terms for violations.

112. Free Movement Regime at Myanmar border to end soon, entry into India will need visa - The Hindu/ Govt plans to end Free Movement Regime along international border with Myanmar - Indian Express

Relevance: Security challenges and their management in border areas – linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

News:

- The Indian government recently decided to terminate the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** along the **India-Myanmar border**.

Free Movement Regime (FMR)

- The FMR was established in 2018 under the **Act East policy**.
- It facilitates the **movement of tribes** residing along the India-Myanmar border **up to 16 km** into each other's territory **without requiring a visa**.
- It allows members of hill tribes to cross over with a **border pass, valid for one year, and stay for up to two weeks**.
- The India-Myanmar border spans **1,643 km** across the states of **Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh**.

Government's Strategy

Prelims Takeaway

- Free Movement Regime (FMR)
- Act East Policy
- National Register of Citizens
- Location Based Questions

- The decision comes as part of a broader plan to **enhance border security** by implementing an **advanced smart fencing system** throughout the entire India-Myanmar border.
- **Reasons for Ending FMR**
 - To curb the misuse of the FMR by insurgent groups for attacks on the Indian side and then escape into Myanmar.
 - To address concerns related to illegal immigration, drug trafficking and gold smuggling along the border.

Chief Minister's Call for Termination

- The Manipur Chief Minister had earlier urged the Centre to **permanently end the FMR** in September 2023, citing concerns about **illegal immigration**.
- The state is actively working towards implementing a **National Register of Citizens** and **reinforcing the border with Myanmar**, especially in Manipur.
 - Only about 10 km of the 390 km border is currently fenced in Manipur.

Impact and Future Plans

- The introduction of smart fencing and the termination of the FMR are expected to
 - strengthen border security
 - address security concerns
 - regulate the movement of individuals across the India-Myanmar border
- The government's focus on enhancing security measures aligns with **broader geopolitical considerations and national interests**.

113. Inoperative accounts: How will RBI's revised guidelines benefit customers? - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

News:

- The RBI has introduced revised guidelines regarding the **classification** of accounts and deposits as **inoperative and unclaimed**.
- As per the norms, account holders can **reactivate their accounts** by submitting KYC documents.

Inoperative Account and Unclaimed Deposits

- A savings or current account is deemed inoperative if there are **no 'customer induced transactions'** for over **two years**.
- Customer induced transactions include **financial and non-financial activities** initiated by the account holder.
- **Unclaimed Deposits**
 - Balances in savings/current accounts not operated for 10 years
 - Term deposits unclaimed within 10 years

Revised RBI Guidelines

- Banks are required to conduct an **annual review** for accounts lacking customer-induced transactions for **over a year**.
- In cases without **explicit term deposit renewal mandates**, banks must review accounts where customers haven't **withdrawn or transferred proceeds post-maturity**.

Communication and Reactivation

- Banks are instructed to **notify account holders** via letters, email or SMS about inactivity for the last year.

Prelims Takeaway

- Inoperative Accounts
- Reserve Bank of India

- If no operations occur in the next year, the **account becomes 'inoperative,'** requiring KYC document submission for reactivation.

Account Classification Criteria

- Only **customer-induced transactions** are considered for classifying an account as inoperative.
 - It excludes bank-induced transactions like charges and fees.
- Account classification is **specific to the account,** not the customer.
- **Zero-balance accounts** for government beneficiaries and student scholarships are **exempt.**

Reactivation Process

- Banks should offer KYC updation at all branches and through **video-customer identification process (V-CIP)** upon request.
- Reactivation must **adhere to KYC guidelines,** and **no charges** should be imposed for activation.

Non-maintenance Penalty and Interest

- **No penal charges** are allowed for non-maintenance of minimum balances in inoperative accounts.
- **Interest on savings accounts must be credited** regularly, irrespective of the account's operational status.

114. India to participate in the international mega science project SKA - PIB

Relevance: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- The Government of India has accorded its approval for India's participation in the international mega science project, **Square Kilometre Array (SKA), at an estimated cost of ₹ 1250 Cr.**

Key Highlights

- This approval covers funding support for the construction phase of the international **SKA Observatory (SKAO) spread over the next 7 years.**
- The project will be jointly funded by the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Department of Science and Technology (DST),** with DAE as the lead agency.
- SKA is a state of the art, mega science international facility to build the world's biggest and most sensitive radio telescope for addressing a wide variety of cutting-edge science goals.
- The SKAO, collocated in Australia (SKA-Low) and South Africa (SKA-Mid) with operational headquarters in the UK, is expected to revolutionize radio astronomy,
 - while driving the growth of many important new state-of-the-art technologies.
 - Subsequent to this approval, India will be signing the SKAO treaty to become a full-fledged member of the SKA Observatory
- Participation in this project will open up possibilities for **development of niche skills in Indian industry and research organisations** in different areas of next generation technologies
 - such as modern antenna design, sophisticated cryogenic receiver systems
- The approval for India's participation in this project underlines the emphasis laid by the Government of India on basic, applied and advanced science research.
- Earlier during the year, the Government of India committed to the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) Fermi National Laboratory towards:
 - collaborative development of the Proton Improvement Plan-II Accelerator

Prelims Takeaway

- SKA Observatory
- LIGO

115. New antibiotic could target drug-resistant bacterium: scientists - The Hindu

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

News:

- Researchers recently identified a new class of **antibiotics** with the potential to tackle a **drug-resistant bacterium, Acinetobacter baumannii**.

Antibiotic Zosurabalpin

- Researchers reported the identification and analysis of the **antibiotic zosurabalpin** that can kill **Acinetobacter baumannii**.
 - This bacterium, especially its **carbapenem-resistant strains (CRAB)**, poses a significant challenge in clinical treatment.
- They identified a **tethered macrocyclic peptide (MCP)** that selectively kills A. baumannii.
- Through optimization for effectiveness and tolerability, zosurabalpin emerged as a promising drug candidate in combating antibiotic-resistant strains.

Unique Mode of Action

- Researchers highlight that zosurabalpin operates through a novel mode of action, inhibiting the **transport of lipopolysaccharide (LPS)**.
- Zosurabalpin **targets a protein complex** which is crucial for **transporting LPS to the bacterial surface** to create the **outer-membrane structure** of Gram-negative bacteria..
- It disrupts the LPS transport, leading to the **accumulation of LPS** in the bacterial cell, ultimately causing the **bacterium's demise**.

Efficacy Against CRAB

- The antibiotic was **effective** against more than 100 CRAB clinical samples tested in the laboratory.
- Furthermore, it considerably **reduced the levels of bacteria** in mice with CRAB-induced pneumonia.
- It also **prevented the death of mice** with sepsis, an abnormal immune response induced by CRAB.

Prelims Takeaway

- Antibiotic Zosurabalpin
- Acinetobacter baumannii

116. Researchers engineer plant cells to produce drug for cancer - The Hindu

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

News:

- Researchers from IIT Madras and Mandi have made strides in **metabolically engineering plant cells** to enhance the production of the **anti-cancer drug camptothecin (CPT)**.
- The allopathic medicine is produced using **Nathapodytes nimmoniana**, a native, endangered plant.

Current Challenges

- The extraction of camptothecin from Nathapodytes nimmoniana demands a **significant amount of plant material**, approx 1,000 tonnes to yield 1 tonne of CPT.
- The plant's **endangered status** prompted the **exploration of alternative sources** for this vital anti-cancer compound.

Prelims Takeaway

- Camptothecin (CPT)
- Nathapodytes nimmoniana
- Cancer

Camptothecin

It is majorly produced in the southeast Asian region, with the plant being largely found only in China and India.

The Chinese variety of the plant used to extract the cell is listed as critically endangered.

In India the plant is a native of western ghats and there was a 20% decline in population in the last decade .

Research Development

- In 2021, IIT Madras researchers identified a **microbe** as a sustainable and high-yielding **alternative source for CPT**.
- They then developed a **genome-scale metabolic model** for *N. nimmoniana* plant cells using computational tools to enhance the **understanding of the plant's metabolic pathways**.

Sustainable Production Approach

- The study presents a breakthrough in **sustainable and efficient commercial production** of CPT and other medically important alkaloids.
- By **metabolically engineering plant cells**, the researchers **aim to**
 - reduce the need to cut down endangered plants
 - cater to the increasing market demand for the drug
- The platform developed for metabolic engineering could extend to **enhance the production** of various **high-value phytochemicals**, showcasing broader applications.

117. Navy thwarts hijacking attempt in Arabian Sea - The Hindu

Relevance: Security challenges and their management in border areas – linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

News:

- In a recent incident in the North Arabian Sea, **Indian Navy MARCOS successfully averted a hijacking attempt on the merchant vessel Lila Norfolk**.
- The operation resulted in the safe evacuation of all 21 crew members, including 15 Indians.

Prelims Takeaway

- Exclusive Economic Zone
- MARCOS

Hijacking Attempt Details

- The bulk carrier *Lila Norfolk* reported a hijacking attempt via the UK Maritime Trade Operations portal, stating that approximately five to six armed individuals had boarded the vessel.

Indian Navy's Swift Response

- The Indian Navy responded promptly, **diverting the anti-piracy patrol destroyer INS Chennai to intercept the vessel**.
- **Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) established** contact with the vessel, ensuring the safety of the crew.
- **INS Chennai intercepted the vessel, and Marine Commandos (MARCOS)** carried out sanitization operations on board.

Broader Maritime Security Measures

- The Indian Navy has significantly **increased maritime surveillance efforts in the Central and North Arabian Sea**.

Response to Recent Incidents

- **Attacks by Houthi rebels on merchant ships in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea** have led to heightened vigilance.

- The **Indian Navy is coordinating with the Coast Guard to maintain enhanced surveillance** within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) and Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC IOR) are **actively monitoring white shipping**, with a focus on Indian-flagged merchant vessels.

Ships in distress

In the last month of 2023, India responded to three distress calls from ships in trouble



Dec 14: Malta-flagged vessel *m.v. Ruen*, with an 18-member crew, sent a mayday message indicating boarding by about six unknown persons around 700 nautical miles from the Indian coast

Dec 23: *m.v. Chem Pluto*, with 21 Indian and 1 Vietnamese crew members, reported a projectile attack around 217 nautical miles southwest of Porbandar. Initial investigation by the Navy indicated a drone attack

Dec 23: A Gabon-flagged crude oil tanker *m.v. Saf Baba* with an all-Indian crew heading to India was hit by a one-way attack drone in the Southern Red Sea; no injuries were reported

Safe and secure: The cargo ship *Lila Norfolk*, after the rescue, prepares to move to the next port of call. PTI

118. 'Deep tech' policy to be sent to Cabinet for approval, says scientific adviser - The Hindu

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

News:

- A note on a **new 'deep tech' policy for India** in the coming weeks will be sent to the Union Cabinet for approval.

Key Highlights

- In July 2023, the **government unveiled a draft of the policy for public comment** and following feedback from industry, a final version is reportedly ready.
- **'Deep tech' is a buzzword in tech and startup circles** with no precise definition as yet.
- India's draft policy document on 'deep tech' cites Startup India's database, which claims that there are **10,298 startups recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade**
 - which are classified across various sub-sectors within the larger deep tech space as of May 2023.
- Deep tech startups have **developed intellectual property that promise an outsize impact but are yet to be realised, and are premised on new scientific breakthroughs.**
- Crucially, businesses and startups based on ideas that are **easily replicable do not qualify as deep tech startups.**
- The DSIR would in the coming days focus on **transferring technology to medium and small scale industries**
- The CSIR would target industry at large and the National Research and Development Corporation, also a CSIR entity, would focus on startups,

Prelims Takeaway

- CSIR
- Deep tech

119. ISRO tests fuel cell-based power system in space - The Hindu/ ISRO tests fuel cell to potentially power space missions - Indian Express

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

News:

- The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** has achieved a milestone by successfully demonstrating a **fuel cell in space**.

The Experiment

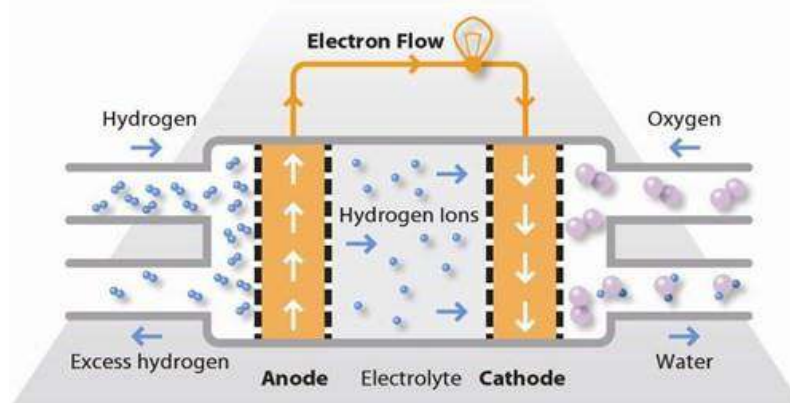
- ISRO tested a 100 W class **Polymer Electrolyte Membrane Fuel Cell based Power System (FCPS)** on its orbital platform, **POEM3**.
- Objective:** To assess the operation of Polymer Electrolyte Membrane Fuel cells in space and gather data for designing systems for future missions.
- The fuel cell, deployed on the **fourth stage of the PSLV**, generated 180W of power during a brief test.
- The fuel cell, developed by the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC)**, serves as a **precursor to future power systems for space stations**.

Polymer Electrolyte Membrane (PEM) Fuel Cells

- Also known as **proton exchange membrane fuel cells**, they are **electrochemical devices** that convert chemical energy into electrical energy.
- They use a **proton-conducting polymer membrane** as the **electrolyte** and typically use **hydrogen as the fuel**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Fuel Cells
- Polymer Electrolyte Membrane (PEM) Fuel Cells



Significance of Fuel Cells

- Fuel Cells utilise **hydrogen and oxygen** to generate electricity while producing **heat and water as byproducts**.
- These are deemed **ideal for human space missions** due to the **dual benefits** of generating power and essential byproducts like heat and water.
- This integrated system can cater to **multiple mission requirements** simultaneously.
- They **produce electricity directly** and are **efficient, emission-free, and ideal for space missions**.

- The zero-emission fuel cells may find applications on Earth as **potential replacements for vehicle engines.**

Silicon-based Cell

- ISRO also successfully demonstrated a **Silicon-based cell** developed by VSSC, offering a **cost-effective** and **lighter alternative to current cells.**
- This innovation utilizes a **silicon-graphite composite**, providing **higher energy generation per unit weight** compared to conventional Li-ion cells.

Operational Missions and Mass Saving

- The demonstrated fuel cell is expected to be utilized in upcoming operational missions, offering a significant **battery mass saving of 35-40%.**
- The design incorporates **cost-effective hardware** and a **crimped sealing mechanism**, reducing fabrication costs.

120. GST revenues reveal a dissonance in consumption growth across States - The Hindu

Relevance: Economy

News:

Uneven growth

Eight States, including Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, saw more than 15% growth in GST collections so far this year. While Gujarat and West Bengal are among the top 10 contributors with slower growth



Major States with higher growth

Madhya Pradesh	18.80%
Maharashtra	18.20%
Karnataka	18.10%
Haryana	17.60%
Uttar Pradesh	17.30%
Tamil Nadu, Telangana	16.90%

Major States with lower growth

Gujarat	9.50%
West Bengal	9.80%
Odisha	10.70%
Rajasthan	10.90%
Bihar	11.50%
Andhra Pradesh	12.50%

Source: Ministry of Finance, Bank of Baroda research

Prelims Takeaway

- Goods and Service Tax (GST)
- GST Council

121. Aditya-L1 reaches destination, in orbit around L1 - The Hindu/ Aditya-L1, ISRO's first mission to study Sun, in final orbit; another landmark: PM - Indian Express

Relevance: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- ISRO has achieved a significant milestone as the **Aditya-L1 spacecraft** reached its destination, the **Lagrangian point L1** recently.
- This solar mission marks **India's first observatory** dedicated to **studying the sun.**

Aditya-L1 Mission

Prelims Takeaway

- Aditya L1 Mission
- Lagrange Points

- Launched by **ISRO** to the **L1 orbit** which is about **1.5 million km from the Earth**.
- **Objectives**
 - To study the **Sun's corona, Sun's photosphere, chromosphere, solar emissions, solar winds and flares and Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs)**.
 - To carry out **round-the-clock imaging of the Sun** without occultation, providing vital information on solar activities.
- **Mission Lifetime:** 5 years

Launch Vehicle and Payloads

- Launched using the **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)**
 - PSLV also launched the Chandrayaan-1 (2008) and the Mars Orbiter spacecraft (2013).
- **Seven payloads** on board viz.
 - Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC)
 - Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT)
 - Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS)
 - Aditya Solar wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX)
 - High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS)
 - Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA)
 - Advanced Tri-axial High Resolution Digital Magnetometers
- The L1 allows four payloads to directly view the sun, while three payloads conduct in-situ studies of particles and fields at the L1 point.

Future Prospects

- Aditya-L1's observations will **provide crucial information** on coronal heating, coronal mass ejections, flare activities, space weather dynamics, and particle and field propagation.
- The satellite is expected to spend its entire mission life orbiting around L1, contributing to a **deeper understanding of solar phenomena**.

Lagrange Points

- Lagrange Points are positions in space where a **small object tends to stay in a two-body gravitational system**.
- These points in space can be used by the spacecraft to **remain at these positions** with **reduced fuel consumption**.
- For two-body gravitational systems, there are a total of **five Lagrange points**, denoted as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5.

L1 Point

- The L1 point lies between the **Sun-Earth line**, approximately 1.5 million km from Earth.
- The distance of L1 from earth is approximately **1% of the earth-sun distance**.
- This provides a unique advantage for **continuous solar observations** without occultation or eclipse.
- Currently, **four operational spacecraft** are positioned at L1, contributing to solar and heliospheric studies.
 - These include WIND, Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO), Advanced Composition Explorer (ACE) and Deep Space Climate Observatory (DISCOVER).

122. Should India study wastewater to track malaria, dengue? - The Hindu

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

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- Malaria
- Dengue
- Wastewater Surveillance

Identifying priority pathogens

Wastewater surveillance has been routinely used for decades for tracking polio virus



Independent: Wastewater surveillance does not rely on access to healthcare and people getting tested. MANOJKUMAR

- During the pandemic, countries relied on wastewater surveillance to track new SARS-CoV-2 variants and to know the extent of virus spread in the community

- Many countries have used wastewater surveillance to track other diseases such as monkeypox, influenza and cholera

- U.S. researchers have suggested that wastewater surveillance be expanded to track dengue, malaria, Zika and typhoid

- Unlike in India, malaria and dengue outbreaks are rare in the U.S. and European countries. Developed countries also have excellent sewage network, which makes it easy to track these pathogens

- Besides humans shedding the pathogens through stools, several mammals, including nonhuman primates, serve as reservoir hosts of malaria and dengue

- For vector-borne diseases, wastewater surveillance is not an ideal solution in India

123. Saved by sponge - Down to Earth

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

News:

- **As oceans warm up**, women in Zanzibar **switch from seaweed to climate-resilient sponge farming** to stay afloat

Sponge

- Sponges, unlike seaweed, possess remarkable resilience to climate change
- They require **minimal maintenance, and command premium market prices**, according to marine biologist Aziza Said from the University of Dodoma, Tanzania.
- Additionally, sponge farming requires little financial resources and technical expertise, as these organisms grow and propagate naturally.
- Most sponges are hermaphrodites, harbouring both male and female reproductive organs, enabling them to self-propagate effortlessly.
- **New sponges emerge from small buds** that detach from the parent sponge and begin independent growth.
- Even damaged or fragmented sponges can regenerate into new individuals.
- This remarkable regenerative ability underpins the ease and feasibility of commercial sponge farming.
- **Unlike synthetic sponges, sea sponges are free from harmful substances** like chemicals and microplastics

Uses

- These sponges are used for bathing and general hygiene
- Their skeletons break down into microscopic pieces of silicon, which helps control the carbon cycle in the ocean and reduces the greenhouse effect.

Prelims Takeaway

- Sponge
- Global warming

- Dissolved silicon is critical for the growth of diatoms, tiny organisms which absorb large amounts of CO₂ in the ocean using photosynthesis.

124. Karnataka HC bans mining activity near KRS reservoir - The Hindu

Relevance: Disaster and disaster management.

News:

- The High Court of Karnataka has **banned all types of mining and quarrying activities** within a 20-km radius of the historic Krishnarajasagar (KRS) dam in Mandya district.

Prelims Takeaway

- Dam Safety Act, 2021
- The National Dam Safety Authority

Key points

- The ban will apply even for those **mining activities within a 20-km radius** for which permissions/licences were already granted by the authorities
 - or already operating in the area, or were permitted on the orders of the court in earlier rounds of litigation, the High Court said.
- The court also said that the ban will be in force till the completion of a study by experts and the decision to be taken by the State committee on dam safety
 - set up as per the provisions of the **Dam Safety Act, 2021**.

Dam Safety Act, 2021

- The Act provides for the surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of all specified dams across the country.
- These are dams with height more than 15 metres, or height between 10 m -15 m with certain design and structural conditions.
- **Institutional Mechanism**
 - The National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS)
 - The National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA)
 - State Dam Safety Organisations
 - The State Committee on Dam Safety

125. Income inequality declines, says SBI research unit countering K-shaped eco recovery claims - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

News:

- The Economic Research Department of the State Bank of India recently reported a **decline in income inequality** in India.
- It attributes this decline to a **higher tax base** and a **shift in taxpayers from lower to higher income tax brackets**.

Migration to Higher Income Brackets

- **36.3% of taxpayers** have moved from lower to higher income tax brackets, resulting in a **21.3% increase in additional income**.
- Income-tax returns filed by individuals earning between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh increased by 295% between AY 2013-14 and AY 2021-22.

Contribution of Top Taxpayers

- **Top 2.5% of taxpayers' contribution in income declined** from 2.81% in FY14 to 2.28% in FY21.
- Share of combined income of top earners with over Rs 100 crore income decreased from 1.64% in FY14 to 0.77% in FY21.

Trends in Small Firms and Consumption

Prelims Takeaway

- K-shaped Recovery
- Gini Coefficient

- 19.5% of small firms transitioned into larger ones through **MSME value chain integration**.
- Consumption of the bottom 90% of the population increased by Rs 8.2 lakh crore post-pandemic.

K-shaped Recovery

- The report dismisses claims of a K-shaped recovery as "**flawed, prejudiced, and ill-concocted.**"
 - The concept of K-shaped recovery came to light during the **covid 19 pandemic**.
 - It signifies a **diverging economic scenario** where certain sectors of the economy will be thriving while other sectors will continue to decline or struggle to recover.
- Growth is seen in all income classes but its skewedness has been decreasing with **convergence of income towards the middle**, indicating a positive economic trend.

Other Key Findings

- **Gini coefficient of taxable income declined** significantly from 0.472 to 0.402 during FY14-FY22.
- Decline in two-wheeler sales is attributed to a **shift towards four-wheelers** and not rural distress.
- **Female tax filers constitute around 15%** of individual tax filers.
- Consumption data from platforms like Zomato suggests **rising experience-centric income groups**, refuting claims of distress.

126. Rapid rise in Web blocking orders, shows RTI reply - The Hindu

Relevance: Reports and Indices

News:

- A recent reply to a Right to Information (RTI) reveals a significant **rise in website blocking orders**.

Data Highlights

- Website blocking orders have grown over a 100-fold, from 62 in 2013 to **6,954 until October 2023**.
- The statistics pertain to orders issued under **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000**.
- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) had recently directed Internet service providers (ISPs) to **compile IP addresses of servers** in India for **quick blocking**.

Internet Usage and Blocking Orders

- The increase in blocking orders coincides with a **massive uptick in Internet use**, particularly after the drop in mobile data prices.
- The data reflect blocking orders sent to **social media and content firms** for specific pages, profiles and videos.
- However, the IT Ministry refused to provide a **breakdown of these statistics**, citing the **confidentiality clause** in the rules.

Section 69A of IT Act, 2000

- It allows the Union government to **block online content** in the interest of India's sovereignty, integrity, defence, security, friendly relations, or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence.
- DoT's recent order emphasises the **tracing of web/application servers' location** for immediate action.
- However, industry experts have expressed concerns about the **practicality and implementation challenges** of DoT's directive.
 - Difficulty in tracing the location of web/application servers, especially with encryption technologies and the scale of the request.

IP Address Listing Challenges

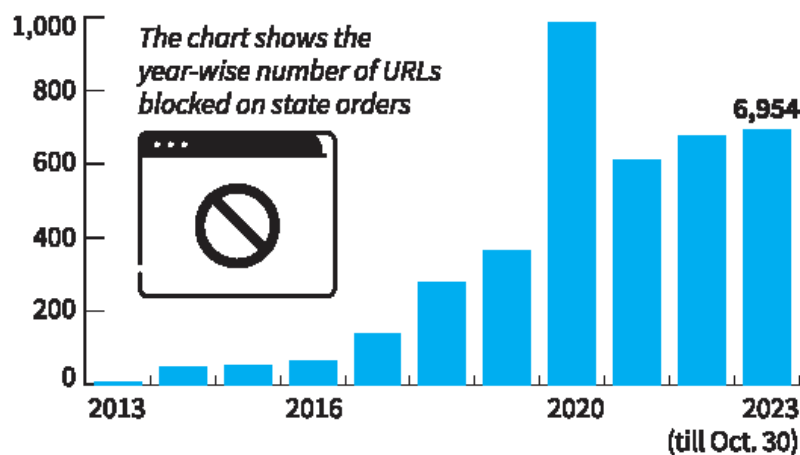
Prelims Takeaway

- Section 69A of IT Act, 2000
- Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

- Listing IP addresses may face resistance from data centre providers and web hosting firms due to **corporate security concerns**.
- Experts suggest collaboration with **content delivery networks (CDNs)** for more effective website blocking.

Banning websites

The number of URLs blocked under Section 69A has drastically increased in the past decade, according to a recent RTI response



127. Govt sets up task force to resolve trade barrier issues for exporters - Indian Express/ Commerce ministry sets up task force to resolve trade barrier issues for exporters - The Economic Times

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

News:

- The commerce ministry has set up a **task force to identify and resolve trade barriers** being faced by exporters in other countries
 - a move which would help provide greater market access to domestic goods, an official said.

Prelims Takeaway

- Non-tariff barriers
- Global Trade Research Initiative

Key Highlights

- **Many times India's exports suffer from these barriers** such as time taking prior registration requirements and unreasonable domestic standards/rules in many countries.
- **The ministry is also looking at improving mutual recognition agreements (MRAs)** with different countries so that product standards are as per the requirements of the importing countries.
- **Standards for goods and services should help in promoting global trade** and not act as non-tariff barriers, the official added.
- According to a report of the economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India needs to act in a fast-track manner for removal of non-trade barriers (NTBs)
 - being faced by domestic exporters in different countries like the US, China and Japan, to achieve one trillion dollar outbound shipment target for goods by 2030.
- It has asked for upgrading domestic systems, in cases where Indian products are rejected due to quality issues
 - and retaliating if unreasonable standards or rules continue to obstruct exports from New Delhi.

- **Key Indian exports that routinely face high barriers** include chillies, tea, basmati rice, milk, poultry, bovine meat, fish, chemicals products to EU
 - sesame seed, black tiger shrimps, medicines, apparels to Japan; food, meat, fish, dairy, industrial products to China
- According to the report, the other products which face these barriers include ceramic tiles in Egypt; chili in Mexico; medicines in Argentina; microbiological reagents in Saudi Arabia
- Most **non-tariff measures (NTMs)** are domestic rules created by countries **with an aim to protect human, animal or plant health and environment**.
- NTM may be technical measures like regulations, standards, testing, certification, pre-shipment inspection or non-technical measures like quotas, import licensing, subsidies, government procurement restrictions.
- When **NTMs become arbitrary**, beyond scientific justification, **they create hurdles for trade and are called NTBs (non-tariff barriers)**.

128. Nasa launches Peregrine lander to explore Moon's 'Bay of Stickiness'- India today

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

News:

- **The Peregrine Lunar Lander was launched** aboard the United Launch Alliance's Vulcan rocket to embark on **its pioneering journey to explore the Moon**.

Peregrine Lander

- **It is designed to carry scientific instruments** and other payloads to the Moon's surface, specifically targeting the Sinus Viscositatis region.
- This area, also known as the Bay of Stickiness, lies **adjacent to the Gruithuisen Domes near the Oceanus Procellarum, or Ocean of Storms**.
- Its objective is to locate water molecules on the moon, measure radiation and gases around the lander, and evaluate the lunar exosphere (the thin layer of gases on the moon's surface)"

Objective:

- To analyse the lunar exosphere, assess the thermal properties and hydrogen content of the lunar regolith, study magnetic fields, examine the radiation environment, and test advanced solar arrays.
- **Peregrine Mission 1** will transport approximately ten payloads, with a total mass capacity of 90 kilograms.
- The **scientific payload features** cutting-edge instruments such as
 - Laser Retro-Reflector Array (LRA)
 - Linear Energy Transfer Spectrometer (LETS)
 - Near-Infrared Volatile Spectrometer System (NIRVSS)
 - PROSPECT Ion-Trap Mass Spectrometer (PITMS)
 - Neutron Spectrometer Peregrine Lander System (NSS).

Prelims Takeaway

- PROSPECT Ion-Trap Mass Spectrometer (PITMS)
- Peregrine Mission

129. Majority of Indian cities far from clean air target, says study - The Hindu

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

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- National Clean Air Programme
- Air Pollution

- The **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** in India aims to improve air quality, with a **focus on reducing particulate matter concentrations**.
- However, an analysis by Respirer Living Sciences and Climate Trends reveals varying success rates in different cities.

Key Highlights

- **Original Targets and Adjustments**
- The NCAP originally aimed for a 20-40% reduction in pollution by 2024 but later **extended the deadline to 2026**.
- The ultimate goal is a **40% reduction in particulate matter** concentrations in 131 cities compared to 2017 levels.

City-wise Progress

- Of 49 cities with consistent particulate matter data for five years, only 4 met or exceeded the targeted decline.
- Delhi's PM 2.5 levels decreased by 5.9%, while Navi Mumbai, Mumbai, Ujjain, Jaipur, and Visakhapatnam experienced varying levels of increase.

Positive Outliers

- Cities like Varanasi, Agra, and Jodhpur showcased remarkable progress, achieving reductions of 50-72% in PM 2.5 levels.
- Notably, all cities meeting the 2026 targets are from Uttar Pradesh.

Influence of Monitoring Stations

- The availability and spread of continuous ambient air quality monitors impact annual pollutant concentrations.
- Cities like Mumbai and Delhi, with numerous monitoring stations, fare better in assessing pollution levels compared to those with fewer than five stations.

Geographical Factors

- The variations in pollution levels are attributed to geographical locations, diverse emission sources, and meteorological influences.
- The contribution of emissions versus meteorology requires further study.

Concerns and Suggestions

- While the NCAP has made progress, challenges persist, with some cities experiencing an increase in pollution.
- Strengthening monitoring infrastructure and achieving the revised 40% reduction goal by 2026 reflect a commitment to environmental targets.

Lagging behind

The table shows PM 2.5 levels (annual average) in India's most polluted cities from 2019 to 2023. It remained higher than the acceptable level of 40 micrograms per cubic metre in all the years



AP

Rank in 2023	City	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Delhi	108.4	95.3	107.6	99.5	102
2	Patna	119.6	72.8	76.5	91.3	89.5
3	Faridabad	94.5	87.6	95.6	95.3	87.9
4	Muzaffarpur	108.1	67.4	122.6	85.7	83.6
5	Noida	113.8	97.9	100.8	79.3	83.6

130. 'AI-powered misinformation biggest short-term threat to global economy' - The Hindu

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

News:

- **The World Economic Forum's latest Global Risks Report** highlights the **immediate threat posed by false and misleading information**, driven by cutting-edge artificial intelligence.
- The report outlines the risks associated with misinformation, environmental challenges, and the impact of AI on global society.

Key Findings

- **AI-Driven Misinformation at the Forefront**
- The report **identifies false and misleading information** fueled by advanced AI as the most pressing short-term risk to the global economy.
- Rapid technological advancements are exacerbating existing problems and creating new challenges.

Generative AI Chatbots Raise Concerns

- The rise of generative AI chatbots, exemplified by technologies like ChatGPT, is noted as a potential tool for creating sophisticated synthetic content.
- **Concerns arise as this technology becomes more accessible**, allowing manipulation of large groups beyond those with specialized skills.

AI's Impact on Democratic Processes

- **AI-powered misinformation coincides with upcoming elections** in various countries, raising concerns about its potential impact on democratic processes.
- The ease of leveraging AI for deepfakes can lead to societal polarization and challenges in verifying facts.

AI's Broader Risks:

- **AI is recognized as a tool that can empower malicious actors**, making cyberattacks more accessible, automated, and potent.

Climate Change as a Global Concern

- After AI-driven misinformation, extreme weather is **identified as the second-most-pressing short-term risk**.
- In the long term, climate change-related risks, including critical changes to Earth systems, biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and natural resource shortages, take precedence.

Prelims Takeaway

- AI
- ChatGPT

131. ILO warns of rise in unemployment, decline in real wages - The Hindu

Relevance: Economy

News:

- **The International Labour Organisation (ILO) released its World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024** report in Vienna
- It emphasises an anticipated increase in the global unemployment rate in 2024.

Key Findings

Macroeconomic Deterioration in 2023

- Despite joblessness falling below pre-pandemic levels, the **report raises concerns about persisting social inequalities and stagnant productivity**.

Prelims Takeaway

- ILO
- World Employment and Social Outlook

- The report notes a significant deterioration in the macroeconomic environment in 2023.
- **Geopolitical tensions and inflation** led to aggressive moves by central banks, impacting global industrial activity, investment, and trade.

Global Growth and Labour Market Resilience

- Despite economic challenges, global growth in 2023 exceeded expectations, with labour markets showing resilience.
- Strong job growth led to improvements in both the unemployment rate and the jobs gap, although the latter remained elevated at nearly 435 million.

Concerns about Structural Labour Market Imbalances

- The report warns that labor market imbalances may be structural rather than cyclical, even as imbalances eased in 2023.

Real Wage Decline and Increase in Extreme Poverty

- Real wages declined in most G20 countries due to wage increases lagging behind inflation.
- Workers in extreme poverty (earning less than \$2.15 per day in PPP terms) increased by about one million globally in 2023.

Positive Real Wages in India and Other Countries

- Real wages in India are reported as "positive" compared to other G20 nations, with positive growth also observed in China, Russia, and Mexico.
- China and Russia experienced the strongest wage gains due to high labor productivity growth.

132. Direct tax kitty crosses 80% of 2023-24 target - The Hindu

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

News:

Prelims Takeaway

taxation System of India
Income Tax
Budget

Tax mop-up

Direct tax collections are at 80.61% of the Budget estimates for FY24 as of January 10

- Gross direct tax collections amount to ₹17.18 lakh crore, showing a year-on-year growth of 16.77%

- Net direct tax collection, after refunds, stands at ₹14.70 lakh crore, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 19.41%

- The net corporate income tax has grown by 12.37%, and the net personal income tax has grown by 27.26% year-on-year

- Refunds amounting to ₹2.48 lakh crore have been issued between April 1, 2023, and January 10, 2024



133. Need legislative change for group insolvency framework: RBI's Das - Indian Express

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

News:

- The RBI Governor recently called for the establishment of a **specified framework** for **group insolvency** and the **development of a vibrant market for stressed assets** to enhance the functioning of the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)**.
- The IBC, 2016 is the **bankruptcy law of India** that consolidates and amends the existing laws relating to **insolvency and bankruptcy**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)
- Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

Group Insolvency Mechanism

- The group insolvency mechanism has been **evolving under court guidance** due to the absence of a specified framework.
- Legislative changes are needed to lay down **appropriate principles**.
- Challenges in the group insolvency process include **asset intermingling, defining a 'group,'** and **addressing cross-border aspects**.

Vibrant Market for Stressed Assets

- The **absence of a vibrant market for stressed assets** limits the pool of prospective resolution applicants under the IBC.
- A robust **secondary market for loans** can be a crucial mechanism for **managing credit exposures** by lending institutions.

Recovery and Behavioural Shift

- Creditors have realised Rs 3.16 lakh crore out of the admitted claims of Rs 9.92 lakh crore as of September 2023, with a recovery rate of 32%.
- The RBI Governor emphasized that the most interesting outcome of the IBC has been the **substantial behavioural shift** ushered in by the code.
 - This is evident in the withdrawal of 26,518 applications for initiation of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) till August 2023.

Criticisms of IBC

- **Time taken for resolution** and the **extent of haircuts** in comparison to admitted claims.

Delays in resolution processes

- 67% of ongoing CIRP cases exceed the total timeline of 270 days as of September 2023.
- Concerns over the **conduct of Committees of Creditors**, impacting the value of assets.

134. Focus on best practices as global meet on pulses returns to India - The Hindu

Relevance: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, – different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Prelims Takeaway

- NAFED
- Global Pulse Confederation

News:

- About 800 representatives of governments, as well as commercial and non-profit organisations will attend the Global Pulse Convention to be held here in February.
- It was **jointly organised by** the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) and the Global Pulse Confederation (GPC)

Key Highlights

- The conference will see experts in the field sharing their views and experiences with various stakeholders and policymakers.
- Union Consumer Affairs said that pulses production has increased in India and the government is keen to learn and share practices globally.
- It's a tricky task to keep the balance between the interest of the domestic farmers and the consumers.
- **Pulses are vital in the development of sustainable food systems** and key players when it comes to food security and nutrition in India.

Superfood

- **India was the biggest producer and consumer of pulses** worldwide, the GPC was bringing the global industry to India.
- This conference is being held in India after 18 years.
- Pulses contribute to the **reduction of greenhouse gas emissions**.
- Pulses help in diversifying the production, as they can be grown in arid conditions with less water.
- **It is a superfood** in a way, as it is nutritious and healthy.
- It gives **nitrogen to the soil**.

135. Science Ministry team visits Hawaii to take stock of telescope project - Indian Express

Prelims Takeaway

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

News:

- Recently, an official delegation from the Department of Science and Technology visited **Mauna Kea, Hawaii**, to discuss challenges facing the **Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project**.

Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) Project

- TMT is a 30-meter diameter **optical and infrared telescope designed for deep space observations**.
- It is a collaborative effort involving the **US, Japan, China, Canada and India**.
- Indian participation in the project was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2014.
- It will allow **deeper exploration into space and observe cosmic objects with unprecedented sensitivity**.

Challenges Faced by TMT Project

- Mauna Kea, chosen as the original site, faced **local opposition due to religious and cultural concerns**.
- Permits for construction were **invalidated by the Supreme Court of Hawaii** in 2015, later restored in 2018.
- Continued local opposition has **delayed the project**, prompting considerations for an alternate site.
- Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos (ORM)** on La Palma in Spain's Canary Islands is considered as an alternative.

India's Contribution to TMT Project

- India is expected to be a major contributor, providing **hardware, instrumentation, and software** worth \$200 million.
- India will contribute **83 of the 492 precisely polished mirrors** needed for the telescope.
- Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIAP)** is leading the consortium of Indian institutions involved in the TMT project.

Progress and Future Decision

- The construction has not begun, but progress has been made in **developing necessary components**.
- Discussions are ongoing to **ensure consensus and support of local people**, with a decision on the site expected in the next two years.

- Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) Project
- Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIAP)

136. Retail inflation rises to 5.7% in December - The Hindu

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

News:

- India's **retail inflation** increased to a **four-month high of 5.7%** in December 2023, up from 5.55% in the previous month.
- The uptick in December's inflation was **driven by the food and beverages segment**, particularly vegetables.
- Food prices recorded a **national increase of 9.5%**, with urban consumers experiencing a rise of 10.42%.
- Urban consumers faced a higher inflation rate of 6%**, while rural consumers experienced slightly lower food price hikes but a higher overall inflation rate of nearly 6%.

Inflation

Prelims Takeaway

- Inflation
- Inflation Targeting

- A **long-term increase** in the **general price level** of goods and services in a given economy.
- It considers the **pricing of most everyday or standard products and services**.
- These include food, clothes, housing, recreation, transportation, consumer staples, etc.
- It is **positive** when it helps **improve consumer demand** and **consumption**, and **operate economic growth**.
- Even inflation is meant to keep **deflation in check** and is a **drag on the economy**.

Inflation Targeting

- It is a **central banking policy** that focuses on **altering monetary policy to attain a set annual inflation rate**.
- **Assumption: Preserving price stability**, which is achieved by managing inflation, is the greatest way to **generate long-term economic growth**.
- Under the RBI Act, 1934, the **Central Government, in consultation with the RBI**, determines the **inflation target** in terms of the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**, **once in five years**.
- It provides for the constitution of a **six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** to determine the **policy rate required to achieve the inflation target**.
- Currently, the RBI aims to **keep inflation at 4%** but will tolerate inflation between the **range of 2% to 6%**.

Retail Inflation

- Also known as **Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation**.
- It is the rate at which the **prices of goods and services** that **consumers buy for personal use increase over time**.
- It **measures the change in the cost of a basket of goods and services** that are **typically purchased by households**.
- These include food, clothing, housing, transportation and medical care.

Core Inflation

- It is the **change in the costs of goods and services** but **does not include those from the food and energy sectors**.
- Food and energy prices are **exempt** from this calculation because their **prices can be too volatile** or fluctuate wildly.

137. Nov. factory output growth drops to 8-month low of 2.4% - The Hindu

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

News:

- **India's industrial output growth** decelerated to an **eight-month low of 2.4%** in November.
- This follows a **16-month high growth of 11.6%** recorded in October.

Prelims Takeaway

- Index of Industrial Production
- Eight core sectors

Losing steam

November industrial output drops from a 16-month high of 11.6% in October led by a significant drop in manufacturing



■ Electricity generation falls to its lowest level since February and computer and electronics output drops 25%

■ Base effects from Nov. 2022, when IIP rose 7.6%, play a role in moderating growth rate

■ Output of consumer durables collapse to lowest level since June 2021, which was marred by the pandemic

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**.

138. Last of Mizoram's Bru refugees to settle down in Tripura- The Hindu

Relevance: Security challenges and their management in border areas – linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

News:

- The Tripura government has allocated land for the **rehabilitation of the last batch of Mizoram Bru refugees**
 - Who were granted permanent settlement in Tripura through a Home Ministry-initiated quadripartite agreement signed on January 16, 2020.

Key Highlights

Prelims Takeaway

- Bru refugees
- Map based questions

- As per the agreement, a total 6,959 Bru (also known as Reang) **tribe families comprising 37,136 persons, were to be permanently settled in 12 different locations** across four districts in the State.
- **The settlement process has now been completed with the State government** identifying and allocating land for the final group of refugees.
- The 12th settlement colony has been established in Laungangsom, located in the Santirbazar subdivision in south Tripura district
- The last settlement colony will accommodate 633 Bru families.
- It will be spread over an area of 30 hectares that was previously unused.

Monthly ration

- Apart from land allocation, the refugees are receiving monthly rations in accordance with the quadripartite **agreement signed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the governments of Tripura and Mizoram with the representatives of the Bru refugees** who fled ethnic tensions in Mizoram in October 1997.

139. Rising sea, shrinking sands erode vibrancy of Ganga Sagar Mela - The Hindu

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

News:

- **The Ganga Sagar Mela in Sagar Island, West Bengal, is facing challenges from rising sea levels and beach erosion**
- It prompted the state government to seek "national fair" status for the religious congregation.

Prelims Takeaway

- Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra river system
- Meghna delta

Key Highlights

Impact on Pilgrimage

- Warning signs have been erected, and pilgrims are redirected to alternative beaches for the holy dip.

Government's Response

- West Bengal government ministers express helplessness in combating nature.
- Tetrapods, concrete wave-dissipating blocks, have been installed along the Ganga Sagar beach to mitigate erosion, with their effectiveness to be assessed after the monsoon.

Financial Investment:

- **The government has spent ₹25 crore on dredging the island**, constituting 10% of the estimated ₹250 crore budget for the Ganga Sagar Mela.

Political Embarrassment:

- Erosion becomes a source of embarrassment as the state government aims for national fair status.

Environmental and Human Factors

- Sea level rise threatens the Kapil Muni temple, with experts noting that **earlier temples had already submerged**.
- Human interventions, such as clearing sand dunes for Mela ground extension, contribute to increased wave attacks.
- **Violations of Coastal Regulation Zone in Sagar Island** construction exacerbate the issue.

Concerns Raised by Experts

- the lack of **sediment influx from the Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra river system**, leading to land accretion towards the Meghna delta and land loss in the Sundarbans.

140. Centre yet to take a call on beginning HPV vaccination campaign for girls- The Hindu

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

News:

- The Union Health Ministry is yet to decide on **initiating a vaccination campaign against human papillomavirus (HPV)**
- It is despite the **National Technical Advisory Group for Immunization (NTAGI) recommending vaccination** for adolescent girls aged 9 to 14.

Prelims Takeaway

- Cervical cancer
- HPV vaccine

Key Highlights

Background and Recommendations:

- In June 2022, the **NTAGI suggested including the HPV vaccine in the universal immunization programme** after evaluating evidence on cervical cancer burden and vaccine effectiveness.
- The proposed plan involves a one-time catch-up shot for girls aged nine to 14, followed by routine vaccination for others at the age of nine.

Past Setbacks and Vaccine Trials:

- Over a decade ago, the **HPV vaccine faced backlash in India due to reported deaths during vaccine trials** conducted by the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in collaboration with the government.
- The parliamentary committee termed the situation "intriguing and fishy" and raised concerns about potential commercial exploitation.

Global and Indian Cervical Cancer Burden:

- **Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women globally** and the second most common in Indian women. India contributes significantly to the global cervical cancer burden.

Potential for Prevention:

- Experts emphasize the efficacy of HPV vaccination, citing its potential to prevent over 90% of HPV-attributable cancers.
- Trials conducted in India and abroad indicate an 81% reduced risk of HPV-associated cancer in vaccinated women.

Pending Decision and Way Forward:

- The Health Ministry is yet to decide on initiating the vaccination campaign, despite the potential benefits in preventing cervical cancer.

141. FCI should emerge as a trusted partner of farmers, says Goyal- The Hindu

Relevance: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

News:

- The Food Minister **lauded the role of Food Corporation of India** on its 60th founding anniversary.
- He said the FCI should emerge as a trusted partner of farmers and people of the country.

Background

- The role of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) is not only to deliver rations but also to **instill confidence in farmers and beneficiaries** by bringing in transparency, efficiency, and accountability,
- The FCI plays a **crucial role in facilitating** flagship schemes such as **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana [PMGKAY]** by providing ration to beneficiaries in every corner of the country,

Prelims Takeaway

- Open Market Sale Scheme
- Food Corporation of India

- The FCI should embrace digitisation and technology to improve efficiency.
- Quality can be achieved in areas such as inspection, procurement, transportation, distribution, and storage,” he said.
- the FCI to reduce operational costs through route optimisation, mechanised loading/unloading, innovative storage solutions, and other methods.
- **The open market sale scheme** (domestic) operations had also proved to be an effective tool in moderating the prices of wheat and rice.

Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS)

- **FCI sells surplus stocks of wheat and rice** at predetermined prices through e-auction in the open market from time to time to enhance the supply of food grains.
- The purpose of OMSS is to dispose of surplus stocks of wheat and rice held by FCI, and to regulate the prices of wheat in the open market.
- **FCI conducts weekly auctions for the OMSS** for wheat on the platform of the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX).
- NCDEX is a commodity exchange platform in India that provides a platform for trading in various agricultural and other commodities

142. Delhi AQI severe, curbs back on cars and construction- Indian Express

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

News:

- The **air quality in Delhi** turned ‘severe’.
- This has led to a ban on **construction** and on the running of **BS-III petrol** and **BS-IV diesel four-wheelers**.
- The fine for violating the restriction on running BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers is Rs 20,000.

Prelims Takeaway

- GRAP
- AQI

Environmental Ambience in Delhi

- Delhi’s average AQI on **January 14, 2024** was 447.
- **The India Meteorological Department** held low wind speed and high moisture levels, responsible for accumulation of pollutants.
- **The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** held local pollution sources, including large-scale open burning, responsible for it.
- Earlier the Commission has brought in the restrictions under **phase III of the Graded Response Action Plan** to curb such pollutants.
- The ban will cover **construction** and **demolition activities**,

Exceptions to the Ban

- **Exceptions** have been granted for following projects:
 - Railways,
 - Metro rail,
 - Airports, “projects of national importance”,
 - Hospitals, water supply and sanitation
 - Linear public projects (including roads, flyovers, bridges, highways and pipelines).

Recent Development on Environment Pollution in Delhi

- Delhi’s average air quality in **November** and **December** has been poorer than in previous years.
- With the AQI touching the **severe** (400) or ‘**severe +**’ category (450+) several times in these two months
- The CAQM had imposed GRAP restrictions **multiple times**.

- These were revoked on **January 1, 2024**.

GRAP-Graded Response Action Plan

- GRAP is a set of emergency measures implemented to prevent the deterioration of air quality in Delhi-NCR.
- Stage 1 of GRAP is activated when the AQI is in the 'poor' category (201 to 300).
- Stage 2 of GRAP is activated when the AQI is in the 'very poor' category (301 to 400).
- Stage 3 of GRAP is activated when the AQI is in the 'severe' category (401 to 450).
- Stage 4 of GRAP is activated when the AQI is in the 'very severe' category (above 450).

143. President Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi wish Indian Army on Army Day- Hindustan times

Relevance: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

News:

- The President and Prime Minister conveyed their warm wishes to **Indian Army personnel on the occasion of Army Day on January 15**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Field Marshal
- Army Day

Indian Army Day

- Indian Army Day is **celebrated every year on January 15**.
- On the special occasion of Army Day, the officials will perform a parade in the presence of higher dignitaries, and its salute is taken by the Indian Army Chief.

Background

- On January 15, 1949, **Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa became the first** Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, and took over authority from the British Commander-in-Chief General Francis Butcher
- He became the first Indian to command the Army in its long, rich history.
- From 1949 until 2022, the **Army Day parade was organised at the Cariappa Parade Ground in the Delhi Cantonment**.
- In 2023, the Southern Command was responsible for the parade in Bengaluru. It was the first time the Army Day parade was held outside the country's capital.

Field Marshal KM Cariappa

- He was the **First Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army** and led the Indian forces on the Western Front during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1947.
- He is one of the two Indian Army officers to hold the highest rank of Field Marshal (the other being Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw).
- He was **appointed as the first Commander-in-Chief** of an independent Indian Army on 15 January 1949 which is celebrated as Indian Army Day.
- He took over the **command of the Indian Army from General Sir FRR Bucher**, the last British Commander-in-Chief.
- The Government of India conferred the **rank of Field Marshal on Cariappa in 1983**.

144. What are the complaints about Digi Yatra?- The Hindu

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

News:**Prelims Takeaway**

- Digital Personal Data Protection Act
- Digi Yatra app

- **Concerns arose about the collection of facial biometrics for the Digi Yatra app** at airport entry gates without passengers' consent or knowledge.

Key Highlights

Complaints from Air Traveler

- Air travellers lodged complaints about the "coercive and deceptive" practices of private staff and CISF personnel enrolling them for Digi Yatra without their permission.

Digi Yatra and Its Objectives

- Digi Yatra is an initiative **promoting digital processing of passengers for paper-less and seamless movement** through airport checkpoints.
- Launched in 2018 as a voluntary program, **Digi Yatra was implemented from December 2022 at three airports** and has expanded to 13 airports, with plans for 24 more in 2024.

Ownership and Implementation

- **Digi Yatra app is owned by a consortium**, Digi Yatra Foundation, with shareholders including the Airports Authority of India and five private airports.
- The aim is to enhance operational efficiency, track delayed passengers, and improve security.

Issues with Implementation

- Government asserts **no central storage of passenger data**; it's encrypted and stored on mobile devices.
- Shared with departure airport on the day of travel, data is purged within 24 hours.
- Concerns raised about compliance with **data protection laws**.
- **The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, is passed**, but rules are pending.
- Criticisms include **broad powers for government agencies to exempt themselves**, aligning with exemptions in Digi Yatra policy.
- Policy allows access to passenger data by security agencies based on existing protocols
- It provides the **Biometric Boarding System the ability to change data purge settings** for security reasons.

145. Fintech SRO should be development-oriented, independent: RBI draft - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

News:

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has released a draft framework for self-regulatory organisations (SROs) in the fintech sector.

Self Regulatory Organisations (SROs)

- An SRO is a **non-governmental organisation** that **sets and enforces rules and standards** relating to the **conduct of entities** in the industry (members).
- **Objective:** To protect the customer and promote ethics, equality, and professionalism.
- It can act as a **watchdog** and encourage members to adopt responsible and ethical practices.
- It can provide a **link between the regulator and market participants** through a less formal set-up.
- Earlier, in September 2023, RBI had asked fintechs to **establish an SRO themselves**.

RBI's Draft Framework

- An SRO in the fintech sector should **operate independently, be development-oriented and actively contributing to the industry's growth**.
- It should maintain **impartiality, avoid conflicts of interest**, and ensure **unbiased oversight** over its members.

Prelims Takeaway

- Self Regulatory Organisations (SROs)
- Fintech Industry
- Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

- Independence would enhance the reputation of the SRO-FT as a **neutral and reliable entity**, essential for gaining the trust of both industry participants and regulators.

146. India's multidimensional poverty rate down to 11.28% in 2022-23 from 29.17% in 2013-14 - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

News:

- A recent paper by NITI Aayog reveals a significant **improvement in India's multidimensional poverty**, projecting a decline from 29.17% in 2013-14 to **11.28% in 2022-23**.
- Approximately **24.82 crore people** are believed to have **escaped multidimensional poverty** over the last nine years.

Prelims Takeaway

- National Multidimensional Poverty Index
- National Family Health Survey

National Multidimensional Poverty Index

The MPI seeks to **measure poverty** across its **multiple dimensions**.

In effect, it complements existing poverty statistics based on per capita consumption expenditure.

Objective: Deconstructing the Global MPI and creating a globally aligned and yet customised India MPI.

For drawing up **comprehensive Reform Action Plans** with the larger goal of **improving India's position in the Global MPI rankings**.

It measures simultaneous deprivations across three equally weighted dimensions of **health, education, and standard of living** represented by **12 SDG aligned indicators**.

These include nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, maternal health, years of schooling, school attendance, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets.

It **uses** the globally accepted and robust methodology developed by the **Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)** and the **UNDP**.

Geographical Impact

- States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan witnessed the sharpest decline in the number of people classified as poor.
- The **severity of deprivation decreased at a slightly lower rate** between 2015-16 and 2019-21.
- However, the **reduction in the share of MPI poor out of the total population was faster** after 2015-16.
 - This is attributed to a lesser number of years in the latter period.

Impact of COVID-19

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty **may not be fully reflected**, as part of NHFS-5 data collected between 2019-21 was before the pandemic.
- Despite this, India is expected to **achieve SDG Target 1.2**, reducing the proportion of people living in poverty.

Improvement in Standard of Living Indicators

- Indicators related to the standard of living dimension showed the **highest levels of deprivation in 2005-06**.
- Notably, there was a decline in deprivation related to cooking fuel, sanitation facilities, and access to bank accounts.

147. Defence upgrade roadmap: Apex body led by PM, MoD sci-tech unit - Indian Express

Prelims Takeaway

Relevance: Defence

News:

- An expert committee led by former Principal Scientific Advisor Prof **K Vijay Raghavan** has recommended the creation of a **Defense Technology Council**.
- **Objective:** To determine India's defense technology roadmap and decide on major defence projects and their execution.

- Defense Technology Council
- Chief of Defence Staff
- DRDO

Proposed Defense Technology Council

- Chaired by the **Prime Minister**.
- **Vice Presidents:** Defense Minister and National Security Advisor
- **Executive Committee:** Chaired by the Chief of Defence Staff.
- Principal Scientific Advisor, three service chiefs, and their vice chiefs as members.
- Representation from academia and industry with two members from each sector.

Background

- The nine-member Vijay Raghavan panel was set up by the government to **review the functioning of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- The **review comes amid concerns about project delays**, as highlighted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defense and the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Committee Observations on DRDO

- DRDO should focus on **research and development for defence** and avoid involvement in productization, production cycles and product management.
- There is a necessity to **identify expertise** within India and internationally **for specific defense technologies**.
- The Defense Technology Council aims to **streamline decision-making** and identify the **right players for specific defence technologies**.

Creation of Department of Defense Science, Technology and Innovation

- The Committee also proposed a **separate department under the Defense Ministry** - the Department of Defence Science, Technology, and Innovation.
- Headed by a **technocrat**.

Purpose

- Promoting defence research and development in academia and start-up ecosystem.
- Serving as the secretariat for the Defense Technology Council.
- As the DTC secretariat, this department will **draw scientists from DRDO and academia**.
- It will build a **repository of knowledge on production expertise** and **conduct background research** aiding decisions on technology production.
- Moreover, the department will **operate labs for testing and certification**.

148. RBI panel proposes framework for state guarantees - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

News:

- A Reserve Bank working group has proposed that state governments in India to **charge a minimum fee for guarantees** extended by them on loans.

Prelims Takeaway

- State Guarantees
- Reserve Bank of India

Working Group Background

- The **32nd Conference of the State Finance Secretaries** in July 2022 led to the establishment of a Working Group to **address risks associated with state government guarantees**.
- The group aimed to assess the fiscal risks of guarantees extended by state governments on **their fiscal health and the banking system**.

Key Recommendations

- Recommends the state governments to **charge a minimum guarantee fee for guarantees** extended.
- Suggests an **additional risk premium** based on the **risk category and tenor** of the underlying loan.
- Proposes fixing a **ceiling for incremental guarantees issued** during a year at 5% of Revenue Receipts or 0.5% of Gross State Domestic Product, whichever is less.

Comprehensive Assessment and Risk Classification

- Recommends the state governments to **classify projects/activities** as high risk, medium risk, and low risk and **assign appropriate risk weights** before extending guarantees.
- The **purpose for which government guarantees are issued** should be **clearly defined**.
- There should not be any distinction made between Conditional/Unconditional, Financial/Performance guarantees concerning fiscal risk assessment.
- States should consider the risk of guarantees being invoked and undertake a **comprehensive assessment of loan proposals** without solely relying on state guarantees.

149. Greenland has lost 20% more ice than previously thought, says study - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

News:

- According to research, **Greenland's ice sheet has lost 20% more ice** than previously estimated due to climate change.
- Earlier studies suggested the **loss of approximately 5,000 gigatons of ice** from the Greenland ice sheet in the last 20 years, a major contributor to rising sea levels.

Prelims Takeaway

- Global Warming
- Greenland

New Findings

- Researchers compiled 240,000 satellite images of glacier terminus positions from 1985 to 2022.
- **Almost every glacier in Greenland has experienced thinning or retreat** over the past few decades.
- Over 1,000 gigatons, or **20%, of ice around Greenland's edges have been lost** in the last four decades, not previously accounted for.

Impact on Sea Levels

- The **lost ice around the edges**, already in the water, has a **minimal direct impact on sea level rise**.
- However, the findings suggest a potential for **increased overall ice melt, facilitating glacier movement towards the sea**.

Seasonal Sensitivity and Global Warming

- Glaciers in Greenland most susceptible to seasonal changes (expanding in winter, retreating in summer) are also the ones **most sensitive to the impact of global warming**
 - They have experienced the most significant retreat since 1985.
- Greenland's ice sheet, the world's second-largest after Antarctica, is estimated to have **contributed over 20% to observed sea level rise since 2002**.

150. Govt disburses *4,415 cr under PLI; low job creation a concern - Indian Express

Prelims Takeaway

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

News:

- The central government has successfully disbursed **Rs 4,415 crore** under the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for eight sectors.
- This initiative, launched in 2021, aims to **boost investments, technology adoption, and global competitiveness** in various industries.

- Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme
- MSMEs

Job Creation Concerns and Response

- There have been concerns about **low job creation** despite substantial investments.
- **Employment generation**, both direct and indirect, is reported to be **over 6.78 lakh**.
- The government acknowledges that **tech-driven productions often have limited job opportunities** and such challenges are expected to **evolve with the advent of Industry 4.0**.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

- Challenges in the **processing of claims** have been identified, including **prolonged communication** between Project Monitoring Agencies (PMAs) and companies.
- The government has directed ministries and PMAs to **create Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)** to streamline the processing of documents and reduce delays.

Scheme Achievements

- As of now, 746 applications have been approved in 14 sectors with an expected investment of over Rs 3 lakh crore.
- About 176 MSMEs are among the PLI beneficiaries in sectors like pharma and telecom.
- Exports under the PLI schemes have exceeded Rs 3.2 lakh crore, with notable contributions from electronics, pharma, food processing and telecom sectors.

Facilitating Foreign Investments and Achievements

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has established a system to facilitate **visa applications for PLI beneficiary companies**.
- Significant **foreign direct investment growth** is observed since the inception of the PLI scheme for the **electronics segment**.
- **Import substitution of 60 percent** has been achieved in the telecom sector.

151. GM crops will make edible oil cheaper: govt. - The Hindu

Relevance: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- The Supreme Court recently deliberated on the **cultivation of Genetically Modified (GM) crops**, particularly mustard asserting its commitment to the **well-being of India**.
- The government argued that it would make **quality edible oil more affordable, reducing the country's dependency on imports**.

Government's Perspective

- **Affordability of Edible Oil:** GM crops, specifically GM mustard, would contribute to making edible oil more cost-effective for the common man by growing oil seeds domestically.

Foreign Dependency Reduction

- Increasing the cultivation of GM crops aligns with national interests.

Prelims Takeaway

- Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)
- Genetically Modified (GM) Crops
- Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11 (DMH-11)
- Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

- It reduces the need for importing **approximately 50 to 60% of edible oil**, promoting food security, and lessening foreign dependency.

Statistical Support

- The government presented statistics from the Directorate of Economic and Statistics, illustrating the increasing demand for edible oil in India.
- 54% of the demand was met through imports in 2020-21, amounting to around ₹1,15,000 crore.

Supreme Court's Response

- The Supreme Court expressed its focus on what is best for India, underscoring its commitment to national interest.
- While considering PIL petitioners' concerns, the court emphasized the government's duty to **safeguard the people's right to affordable food**.

PIL Petitioners' Position

- The PIL petitioners raised concerns about **environmental damage caused by open field testing of GM crops**, particularly the genetically-engineered variant of mustard known as **Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11 (DMH-11)**.
- They argue that the regulatory system, specifically the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), had **conflicts of interest** and **lacked transparency**.

152. Airbus and CSIR-IIP to collaborate on producing sustainable aviation fuel - The Hindu

Relevance: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- Airbus and the **CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum (CSIR-IIP)** have signed an MoU to develop **new technologies** and to test and qualify indigenous sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) in the country.

Key Highlights

- The collaboration will address the Indian aerospace industry's decarbonisation ambitions by supporting SAF production and commercialisation
 - using a **new HEFA technology pathway** and locally sourced feedstocks.
- The entities will jointly work on technical assessment, approvals, market access and sustainability accreditation efforts for the production of SAF.
- SAF, including one developed by **CSIR-IIP**, will act as the measure with the biggest impact on the industry's decarbonisation effort
- All Airbus aircraft are certified to fly on 50% **SAF blend, while the goal is to achieve 100% SAF compatibility by 2030**.
- While CSIR-IIP will study fuel properties under the new pathway and the impact on aircraft systems and the environment

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

- It is also referred to as bio-jet fuel, and is **created using domestically developed methods using cooking oil and oil-rich seeds from plants**.
- The SAF samples produced by the institutes are undergoing strict **testing at the US Federal Aviation Administration Clearinghouse** to meet the standards required for the ASTM D4054 certification from ASTM International.
- The CSIR-IIP has created fuel using different materials, such as non-edible and edible oils, as well as used cooking oil.

Prelims Takeaway

- Sustainable Aviation Fuel
- CSIR

- They used various sources, including **palm stearin, sapium oil, palm fatty acid distillates, algae oil, karanja, and jatropa.**

153. Japan becomes 5th country to land on Moon - Indian Express

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

Prelims Takeaway

- SLIM
- JAXA

News:

- **Japan's Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) successfully landed on the moon,** becoming the fifth country to achieve this feat.
- The mission aimed to demonstrate precision landing technology and revitalize Japan's space program.

Landing and Solar Power Issues

- **Recently, SLIM landed on the moon** and re-established communication with Earth.
- However, **its solar panels were unable to generate electricity,** possibly due to incorrect angling.
- The spacecraft is currently operating on its battery, with a limited lifespan of a few hours.

Japan's Space Aspirations

- Japan seeks a larger role in space, **partnering with the U.S. against China.**
- JAXA aims to **send an astronaut to the moon** as part of NASA's Artemis program.
- Recent setbacks in rocket development, including a launch failure, have caused delays in space missions.

Previous Lunar Exploration Challenges

- **JAXA has faced challenges with lunar missions** due to the moon's gravity, making it difficult for landers to attempt a second landing.
- Three lunar missions by other entities have failed in the past year.

SLIM's Features

- The SLIM spacecraft is equipped with two main engines, 12 thrusters, solar cells, antennas, radar, and cameras, maintaining a lightweight design for cost-effective launches.
- It **successfully deployed mini-probes** upon landing.

Collaborative Development

- Tech giant Sony Group, toymaker Tomy, and Japanese universities jointly developed the robots deployed by SLIM.

154. Scientists map largest deep sea coral reef found till date in Atlantic off US - Indian Express

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

News:

- Scientists have **mapped the largest coral reef deep in the ocean,** stretching hundreds of miles off the US Atlantic coast.

Prelims Takeaway

- Deep coral reefs
- Great Barrier Reef

Key Highlights

- While researchers have known since the 1960s that some coral were present off the Atlantic
 - The reef's size remained a mystery until new underwater mapping technology made it possible to construct 3D images of the ocean floor.
- The **reef extends for about 310 miles** (499 kilometres) from Florida to South Carolina and at some points reaches 68 miles (109 kilometres) wide.
- The total area is nearly **three times the size of Yellowstone National Park.**

- The reef was found at depths ranging from 655 feet to 3,280 feet (200 meters to 1,000 meters), where sunlight doesn't penetrate.
- Unlike tropical coral reefs, where photosynthesis is important for growth, **coral this far down must filter food particles out of the water for energy.**
- **Deep coral reefs provide habitat** for sharks, swordfish, sea stars, octopus, shrimp and many other kinds of fish, the scientists said.
- Tropical reefs are better known to scientists — and **snorkelers**—because they're more accessible.
- The world's largest tropical coral reef system, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, stretches for about 1,430 miles (2,301 kilometres).
- Maps of the ocean floor are created using **high-resolution sonar devices carried on ships.**
- Deep reefs cover more of the ocean floor than tropical reefs.
- Both kinds of habitat are susceptible to similar risks, including **climate change and disturbance from oil and gas drilling**

155. Chandrayaan-3 lander on the moon successfully pinged by orbiting NASA spacecraft using laser - The Hindu

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

News:

- **NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO)** successfully **transmitted and reflected laser beams** between itself and India's Chandrayaan-3 lander on the moon.
- **Objective:** To precisely locate targets on the lunar surface, opening possibilities for future missions.

NASA's Laser Experiment

- NASA LRO's laser altimeter instrument sent laser pulses toward Vikram lander of Chandrayaan-3.
- After detecting light bounced back from a retroreflector on Vikram lander, NASA confirmed the success of the experiment.
- The technique involves **sending laser pulses towards an object and measuring the time it takes for light to bounce back**, commonly used for **tracking Earth-orbiting satellites.**

Future Improvements and Applications

- NASA aims to improve the technique to make it routine for missions using retroreflectors in the future.
- The techniques need to be refined for broader applications.

International Cooperation

- **NASA's Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA)** was accommodated on the Vikram lander under **international collaboration between NASA and ISRO.**
- It comprises **eight corner-cube retroreflectors** on a hemispherical support structure designed to last for decades on the lunar surface.
- While several LRAs have been deployed on the moon, the LRA on Chandrayaan-3 is a **miniature version** and is the **only one available near the south pole.**

Significance

- NASA's LRA on Chandrayaan-3 will serve as a **long-term geodetic station and location marker**, aiding in precise determination of the spacecraft's orbital position.
- It will contribute to **refining the lunar geodetic frame, providing insights into the moon's dynamics, internal structure, and gravitational anomalies.**

Prelims Takeaway

- NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO)
- Chandrayaan 3
- Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA)

- The success of the laser experiment marks progress in collaboration between NASA and ISRO, contributing to lunar exploration and future missions.

156. Wetland 'nature tourism' gets a fillip - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

News:

- The Central government has embarked on a mission **to boost tourism** at ecologically-sensitive wetlands, known as **Ramsar sites**.
- The goal is to shift from high-value tourism to **nature tourism** by supporting conservation efforts and **empowering local communities and economies**.

Ramsar Sites

- Ramsar sites are **wetlands of international importance** designated under the **Ramsar Convention** signed in 1971.
- India has **75 Ramsar sites**, including Chilika Lake, Sundarbans and Bhitarkanika Mangroves.

Amrit Dharohar Initiative

- Launched in June 2023, the scheme aims to **promote the conservation values of Ramsar sites, generate employment, and support local livelihoods**.
- The initiative is a part of the 2023-24 budget announcement.
- It is part of the '**Amrit Dharohar Capacity Building Scheme**' 2023, launched by the **Union Tourism Ministry** and the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.
- It is implemented in collaboration with various central government ministries, state wetland authorities, and formal and informal institutions.

Objectives

- Enhance livelihood opportunities for local communities through nature tourism at Ramsar sites.
- Shift from high-volume tourism to high-value nature tourism by supporting conservation actions.

Training Programs

- Facilitators, tourism service providers, and stakeholders are being **trained in collaboration with State Tourism Departments**.
- The focus is on **nature tourism activities** like birdwatching, photography, stargazing, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, and visiting parks.
- **Thirty participants from each site** undergo a 15-day training program.
 - This includes the Alternative Livelihood Programme (ALP) and Paryatan Navik Certificate (boatman certification for tourism).

Pilot Projects

- **Sixteen Ramsar sites** have been identified, with **five selected as pilot projects for skill development**.
- Pilot sites include Sultanpur National Park (Haryana), Bhitarkanika Mangroves (Odisha), Chilika Lake (Odisha), Sirpur (Madhya Pradesh), and Yashwant Sagar (Madhya Pradesh).

157. NISAR Mission on track for a launch soon: NASA official - The Hindu

Relevance: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- The **NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission**, designed to observe natural processes and changes in earth's complex ecosystems

Key Highlights

'Enormous data'

Prelims Takeaway

- Amrit Dharohar Initiative
- Ramsar Sites

Prelims Takeaway

- NASA
- L-Band

- Designed as a **low earth orbit (LEO) observatory**, the NISAR mission is unique in several respects
 - Not least the enormous amount of reliable, high resolution data expected from it over a three-year mission life.
- The volume of data will be enormous, and it helps us **to have a reliable set of measurements over any spot on the earth**
- Where we want to do science or monitoring applications, forest management, agriculture monitoring or even just looking at an approaching hurricane
- The mission will use a **synthetic aperture radar to scan earth's land** and ice-covered regions twice every 12 days in ascending and descending passes.
- **Capable of penetrating cloud cover** and operating day and night, NISAR is expected to revolutionise earth-observing capability.
- Among other things, it is also expected to be a reliable data source **for disaster monitoring and mitigation**.
- This single observatory solution is equipped with a **long wavelength band (L-Band) SAR payload** system provided by NASA and a short wavelength band (S-Band) ISRO payload.
- Operating together, they will supply, according to ISRO, "spatially and temporally consistent data
 - for understanding changes in earth's ecosystems, ice mass, vegetation biomass, sea level rise, groundwater and natural hazards, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides."
- For those disasters that evolve over slightly longer periods of time

158. Govt. expands financial services scope at IFSC - The Hindu

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

News:

- The government has **expanded the scope of activities** that can be undertaken at **the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC)**
- services such as bookkeeping, and accounting have now been included in it.

Key Highlights

- As per a gazette notification issued by the Ministry of Finance, various services, including
 - Book-keeping
 - Accounting
 - Taxation
 - Financial crime compliance has been included as part of financial services.
- financial services shall be offered by units in an International Financial Service Centre regulated by the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA)
- **They offer to non-residents** whose business is not set up either by splitting up of business already in existence in India
 - or reconstructing/reorganising of business already in existence in India
- The notification stipulates that these units should not offer services by way of **transferring or receiving existing contracts or work arrangements from their group entities in India**.

International Financial Services Centre

- An IFSC enables bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centres by Indian corporate entities
 - And overseas branches/subsidiaries of Financial Institutions (such as banks, insurance companies, etc.) to India.

Prelims Takeaway

- GIFT City
- IFSCs

- **It offers a business and regulatory environment** that is comparable to other leading international financial centres in the world like London and Singapore.
- **IFSCs are intended to provide Indian corporates with easier access to global financial markets**, and to complement and promote further development of financial markets in India.
- The first IFSC in India has been set up at the **Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) in Gandhinagar**.

159. MNRE launches scheme to incentivise production of green hydrogen - Down To Earth

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.

News:

- The **Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** in India has unveiled guidelines and incentives under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission** to promote green hydrogen procurement.
- Under the mission, Rs 17,490 crore has been set aside for the **Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) programme**.

The Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) Program

- **Objective:** To boost domestic electrolyser manufacturing and green hydrogen production.
- The incentives are designed to **facilitate cost reduction and rapid expansion**.
- Green hydrogen is crucial for removing sulphur content in crude oil to produce petrol and diesel.
- Implemented under **Mode-2B**, the scheme involves **aggregating demand and soliciting bids for green hydrogen** through a competitive selection process.

Oil and Gas Entities' Role

- The **execution of the scheme** will be entrusted to agencies nominated by the **Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas**, primarily oil and gas companies.
- Oil and gas entities, guided by the **Centre for High Technology (CHT)**, will seek competitive bids for green hydrogen.
 - To qualify for incentives, bidders must meet the criteria outlined in the 'National Green Hydrogen Standard.'
- CHT will provide **secretarial, managerial, and implementation support**.

Monitoring and Review

- A **scheme monitoring committee**, co-chaired by the secretaries of MoPNG and MNRE, will periodically **review the implementation and performance** of capacities awarded.
- The committee will also **recommend measures to address challenges**.

Prelims Takeaway

- SIGHT Program
- National Green Hydrogen Mission
- Green Hydrogen

160. Indian bourses now fourth-largest with combined stock value of \$ 4.33 trillion, surpasses Hong Kong - Indian Express

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

News:

- **India's stock market has overtaken Hong Kong's** for the first time in another feat for the South Asian nation

Key Highlights

- Its growth prospects and policy reforms have made it an investor darling.

Prelims Takeaway

- National Stock Exchange
- SEBI

- The **combined value of shares listed on Indian exchanges** reached \$4.33 trillion versus \$4.29 trillion for Hong Kong
 - According to data compiled by Bloomberg. That makes India the fourth-biggest equity market globally.
- Equities in India have been booming due to a growing retail investors base and corporate earnings.
- The world's most populous country has become a **global place for global investors**.
- The growing rally in the Indian stock market has coincided with a historic slump in Hong Kong.

Stock Market

- Stock markets are venues **where buyers and sellers meet to exchange equity shares of public corporations**.
- Stock markets are components of a Free-Market economy because they enable democratized access to investor trading and exchange of capital.
- A free-market economy is an economic system in which the prices of goods and services are determined by supply and demand, without interference from government regulation.
- India has two stock exchanges – **the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE)**.
- **SEBI is the regulator** of the securities market in India. They set the legal framework and regulate all entities interested in operating in the market.

161. Limits and borders - The Hindu

Relevance: Defence

News:

- **Litigation arises from inadequate consultation between central and state governments on BSF jurisdiction in Punjab.**

Prelims Takeaway

- BSF
- Article 131

Background

- **Punjab files suit under Article 131** challenging the Union government's decision to extend BSF's operational range from 15 km to 50 km.

Similar Concerns in Other States

- West Bengal shares Punjab's concerns, passing resolutions against BSF expansion.
- **Both states perceive it as a violation of federal principles** and an infringement on state police's law and order powers.

Central Government's Notification

- October 2021 notification under BSF Act standardizes operational jurisdiction.
- **Punjab, West Bengal, and Assam see an increase from 15 km to 50 km;** Gujarat decreases from 80 km to 50 km, and Rajasthan remains at 50 km.

Concerns Raised

- Despite valid reasons, the Union government must avoid encroaching on state governments' constitutional responsibilities for public order and police powers.

BSF's Role and Limitations

- **BSF focuses on preventing trans-border crimes** but lacks the power to investigate or prosecute.
- **It collaborates with local police,** and jurisdictional clashes should be avoided.

Key Questions Before the Supreme Court

- Does the Centre's notification encroach upon the State government's domain?
- What factors should be considered when determining the "local limits of areas adjoining the borders of India"?

162. Banking system liquidity deficit at record high of ₹3.4 lakh crore - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

Context:

- The liquidity in the **Indian banking system has reached a historic deficit** of Rs 3.4 lakh crore.
- This deficit is attributed to **reduced government spending, higher tax outflows and slower bank deposit growth.**

Factors Contributing to Liquidity Deficit

- The primary reason for this liquidity deficit is **reduced government expenditure.**
- The **Goods and services tax (GST) outflow** further impacted the liquidity.
- **Higher outflows from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs)** have also led to the widening of banking system liquidity.
- Bank deposits grew by 13% on a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis, while credit grew by 20%.
- A large amount of **retail deposits migrating to mutual funds** has also resulted in a **slower growth in deposits.**

RBI's Response and Current Liquidity Measures

- Banking system liquidity, as reflected by the amount of money injected by the RBI into the banking system, has been in deficit mode since last month.
- On a net basis, the RBI has injected liquidity averaging Rs 1.8 trillion from December 16, 2023, to January 14, 2024.
- The RBI has been **conducting VRR auctions to infuse liquidity** into the banking system, with the latest being a 15-day VRR worth Rs 2.5 lakh crore on January 24.

Experts Response

- Analysts anticipate, RBI may announce permanent liquidity measures such as **open market operations (OMO) purchases** to ease liquidity deficit conditions.
 - Instead of variable repo rate auctions (VRR) to infuse temporary liquidity.
- Bankers analyse that RBI's may be reluctant to ease liquidity due to **consumer-price inflation (CPI)** persistently exceeding the 4% target.

Potential Implications

- Sustained tightness in the banking system liquidity could **pose challenges for borrowers.**
 - It may worsen if government spending does not accelerate in a meaningful way.
- The monetary policy stance should **change to 'neutral'** from 'withdrawal of accommodation' to **maintain consistency of stance and action.**

Prelims Takeaway

- Open Market Operations
- Variable Rate Repo Auction

163. Flash PMI signals rebound in economic momentum in Jan. - The Hindu

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

News:

- Private sector industrial and services activity regained momentum this month as per a new HSBC Flash India PMI

Purchasing Managers Index (PMI)

- **It is a survey-based measure** that asks the respondents about changes in their perception of key business variables as compared with the previous month.

Prelims Takeaway

- Purchasing managers' Index (PMI)
- Core Sectors

- It is an index of the **prevailing direction of economic trends in the manufacturing and service sectors.**

Objective

- **It is to provide information about current and future business conditions** to company decision makers, analysts, and investors.
- It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is also constructed.
- The PMI is a number from 0 to 100.
- **A print above 50 means expansion**, while a score below that denotes contraction.
- A reading at **50 indicates no change**.
- If the PMI of the previous month is higher than the PMI of the current month, it represents that the economy is contracting.
- **It is usually released at the start of every month.**
- It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.

Flashing green

Private sector industrial and services activity rebounded this month as per a new HSBC Flash India Purchasing Managers' Index



- **The HSBC Flash India Composite PMI Output Index was at 61 compared with 58.5 in December**

- **Flash PMI is based on responses from about 75-85% of 800 services, industry firms that are surveyed each month**

- **Operating capacities remained under pressure, encouraging firms to hire additional workers**

164. Jet engine deal with France will give 100% access to technology, says Indian envoy-The Hindu

Relevance: Indigenisation of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- India is collaborating with France on manufacturing an engine for **India's fifth-generation fighter jet**.
- The new engine is meant to power the **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)**.

Key Highlights

Prelims Takeaway

- Cabinet Committee on Security
- Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).
- F-414 Engine
- Kaveri Project

- Discussions are in progress between **Safran** and the **Defence Research and Development Organisation's Aeronautical Development Agency** and **Gas Turbine Research Establishment**.
- They are **arriving at a set of specifications** that complies with the country's future fighter jet requirements.
- India is looking for transfer of **manufacturing technology** and to work in the actual **design** phase, **metallurgical** aspects, etc.
- Safran, French multinational firm that works in the aerospace and defence sectors, is willing to do so.

F-414 Engine deal between India and USA

- The deal with General Electric (GE) for the manufacturing licence of F-414 engine has been **approved by the USA**.
- With this deal the F-414 engine is set to be manufactured in India by **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited**.
- The deal will give India access to several technologies and industrial processes involved in the **manufacture of jet engines**.
- The F-414 engines are meant to power the indigenous **Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-MK2**.
- The development of the AMCA is planned in two phases: **MK1 with the F-414 engine**.
- **Mk2** with a more powerful engine in collaboration with France.

Project Kaveri-1989

- India earlier tried to have a proprietary right to jet engine technology under **Kaveri Project** but failed.
- The project was sanctioned by the **Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) in 1989**.

165. U.S. approves F-16 sale to Turkiye, F-35 to Greece after Turkiye ratifies Sweden's entry to NATO-The Hindu

Relevance: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting the Indian interests

News:

- The USA has approved the sale of **F-16 fighter jets** to Turkiye.
- The approval followed the Turkish government's ratification this week of **Sweden's membership in NATO**.
- The move is a significant development in the expansion of the **NATO Alliance**,

Prelims Takeaway

- F-16
- F-35
- Kurdish Militants of Turkiye

Key Highlights

- The US Congress has approved a \$23 billion **F-16 sale to Turkiye**.
- The Congress also approved the \$8.6 billion sale of advanced **F-35 fighter jets to Greece**.
- The move came just hours after Turkiye deposited its "**instrument of ratification**" for Sweden's accession to NATO with Washington.
- The sale to Turkiye includes **40 new F-16s** and equipment to modernise 79 of its existing F-16 fleet.
- The sale to Greece includes **40 F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters** and related equipment.

Other International Developments on the Multilateral Horizon

- Turkiye had delayed its approval of **Sweden's NATO membership** for more than a year.
- Sweden did not take Turkiye's national security concerns seriously enough, including its fight against **Kurdish militants**.
- Turkiye had made its ratification of Sweden's membership **contingent on the approval of the sale** of the new planes.
- Many Senators in the USA expressed objections due to **human rights concerns by Turkiye**.

NATO Expansion in the light of Russia Ukraine War

- NATO has approved **Sweden** and **Finland** into the alliance

- after the Nordic states dropped their long standing military neutrality following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- Sweden's formal accession to NATO now depends on **Hungary**, which is the last remaining NATO ally not to have approved its membership.
- The USA is also collecting its global allies in standing up to ongoing **Russian aggression with this deal.**

166. Red Sea woes: Exporters seek increased credit as freight rates jump 300%-The Indian Express

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

News:

- Indian exporters have asked the Central Government to help facilitate more **credit as freight rates** due to disruptions in **the Red Sea.**

Key Highlights

- Increasing attacks on ships sailing in the Red Sea Region has forced exporters to go for longer route past the **Cape of Good Hope**
- This has stretched delivery time by **15 to 20 days.**
- The freight rates have jumped nearly **300 per cent** due to the disruption in the Red Sea route.
- This has also increased the transit cost substantially because of incremental **freight rates** and **insurance premium.**
- Federation of Indian Export Organisations (**FIEO**) is keeping close look over the observations.

Impact on Indian Export Goods

- Indian companies use the Red Sea route through the Suez Canal to trade with **Europe, North America, North Africa, and parts of the west Asia.**
- As per CRISIL estimates, these regions accounted for 50 per cent of India's exports worth **Rs 18 lakh crore** and **30 per cent** of imports worth Rs 17 lakh crore in 2022-23.
- **Marine foods** –predominantly shrimp and prawn could also see a significant impact as 80-90 per cent of the production is exported, more than half of it through the Red Sea.
- Their perishable nature and lean margins make exporters vulnerable to rising freight cost and competitive pressure from **Latin American suppliers.**
- This is forcing global shipping lines to take longer trade routes, which is ultimately affecting **exports of low value** items such as Basmati rice.
- **30-35% of production of Basmati Rice** is shipped through the Red Sea.
- There is another challenge to ensure **smooth trade payments.**

Prelims Takeaway

- Cape of Good Hope
- Red Sea

167. OMCs to get half of budget provision for green energy, net zero initiatives-The Hindu Businessline

Relevance: Environmental Impact Assessment.

News:

- The government has **halved the amount of capital support** given to state-owned oil marketing companies.

Key Highlights

- The support was officially aimed at **beefing up investments** in energy transition projects.
- The provision had been made to compensate three fuel retailers who had **suffered huge losses** in 2022.
- The losses occurred when they held **retail petrol and diesel prices**

Prelims Takeaway

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
- Expenditure Finance Committee

- despite a spike in crude oil prices following **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**.

Budgetary Provisions for Capital Support

- The Union Budget for FY24 made a provision of **₹30,000 crore of capital support**
 - to Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL).
- The Finance Minister had proposed ₹5,000 crore for **buying crude oil to fill strategic underground storages** at Mangaluru in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.
- The equity support by the Finance Ministry has been halved to ₹15,000 crore and the plan for **filling strategic reserves** has been deferred.
- The decision is the background of the meeting of the **Expenditure Finance Committee in November, 2023**.
- Based on the recommendations of the EFC, approval of the **CCEA (Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs)** is being sought.

Equity Infusion to Green Energy

- The Equity Infusion to OMC's in 2022-23 will be utilised for **green energy initiatives**.
- The green energy initiatives have targets to achieve **energy transition, net zero, and energy security objectives**.
- There will be the revised capital infusion plan by **March 31, 2024**.

168. Minimal radioactive discharges from Indian nuclear plants: study - The Hindu

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

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant
- Fission and Fusion
- Criticality

No reason to worry

Minimal public doses underscore the safe operation of Indian nuclear power plants

■ Radiological data of 20 years (2000-2020) from six Indian nuclear power plants were analysed; for the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Station, the data were from 2013 to 2020

■ The study focussed only on the concentrations of fission products and neutron-activated nuclides values within 5 km of each nuclear plant; the monitored values were “insignificant” beyond 5 km radius

■ Fission product noble gases, Argon 41, radioiodine, particulate radionuclides — cobalt-60, strontium-90, caesium-137 — and tritium released as gaseous waste were studied

■ The liquid discharge consists of fission product radionuclides — radioiodine, tritium, strontium-90, caesium-137 — and activation products like cobalt-60

■ In air particulates, the average radionuclides and the average iodine-131 activity concentration were below 1 mBq per cubic metre. For caesium-137 and strontium-90, the average concentrations were below 10 mBq per cubic metre

■ In rivers and lakes, caesium-137 and strontium-90 concentrations were below 5 mBq per litre; the concentration was less than 50 mBq per litre in sea water near the nuclear plants



169. Govt brings non-urea fertilisers under price control, fixes profit margins - Indian Express

Relevance: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

News:

- The Indian government has brought fertilisers that receive nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) support under “reasonable pricing” controls.

Key Highlights

- Government to notify **di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), muriate of potash (MOP) and all other such fertilizer to be under “reasonable pricing” controls.**
- **NBS fertilisers** — unlike urea, whose maximum retail price (MRP) is fixed by the government — are technically decontrolled.
- Under the NBS scheme, introduced in April 2010, their **MRPs are supposed to be market-determined and set by the individual companies selling them.**
- The government merely pays a fixed per-tonne subsidy on each of these fertilisers, linked to their nutrient content or specific percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), potassium (K) and sulphur (S).
- The guidelines, have **prescribed maximum profit margins that will be allowed for fertiliser companies** – 8% for importers, 10% for manufacturers and 12% for integrated manufacturers
- The new guidelines impose indirect MRP controls on non-urea fertilisers by capping the profits that companies can earn from their sales.

Prelims Takeaway

- Non-urea fertilisers
- Nutrient Based Subsidy

- These will be based on their **“total cost of sales”, which would cover cost of production/ import, administrative overheads, selling and distribution overheads, and net interest and financing charges.**
- Deduction for dealer’s margin will be allowed to the extent of 2% of the MRP for DAP and MOP, and 4% for all other NBS fertilisers.
- The guidelines have mandated fertiliser companies to “self-assess” unreasonable profits, based on the cost auditor’s report along with audited cost data approved by their board of directors.
- This report and data has to be furnished to the DoF by October 10 of the following fiscal year.
- **“Non-urea fertilisers are already under informal price control, which will definitely continue till the Lok Sabha elections are over.**

170. Fingerprints to videos and picture NIA builds its own terror database - Indian Express

Relevance: Security challenges and their management in border areas – linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

News:

- The **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** recently established the **National Terrorism Data Fusion & Analysis Centre (NTDFAC)** at its headquarters in Delhi.

National Terrorism Data Fusion and Analysis Centre (NTDFAC)

- The centre, akin to the **US Global Terrorism Database**, consolidates **information on terrorists.**
 - including those affiliated with groups like Indian Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Khalistani militant organizations.
- This includes **case history, fingerprints, videos, pictures, and social media profiles.**
- It envisions expanding its capabilities by **including voice samples for improved identification.**
- At NTDFAC, the NIA has
 - National Automated Fingerprint Identification System with over 92 lakh records
 - Integrated Monitoring of Terrorism with data on 22,000 terrorist cases
 - National Integrated Database on Arrested Narco-Offenders with data of more than 5 lakh narco offenders etc.

Advance Systems

- The NTDFAC incorporates a **face recognition system**, enabling the **scanning of suspects from CCTV footage.**
- It aims to assist NIA officers and state police forces in identifying and tracking terrorists efficiently.

Prelims Takeaway

- National Terrorism Data Fusion and Analysis Centre (NTDFAC)
- National Investigation Agency (NIA)

171. EPFO's new survey seeks details on women workers to boost their share in workforce - Indian Express

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

News:

- The Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (**EPFO**) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (**WCD**) have launched a new survey on **“increasing women participation in the workforce”.**

Key Highlights

- The survey has also sought answers on whether there is **‘equal pay for equal work’ for male and female workers along with a query** on availability of flexible or remote working hours for women.

Prelims Takeaway

- EPFO
- LFPR

- The survey questionnaire has been shared by the EPFO with its nearly 30 crore subscribers across the country.
- The employer rating survey was launched at an event “**Women in the Workforce for Viksit Bharat**” by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment and the WCD** ministry
- Data shows women’s labour force participation rate (LFPR) has improved over the last few years but **much of this increase has been seen in the unpaid work category.**
- As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), **the female participation rate rose to 27.8 per cent in 2022-23 from 17.5 per cent in 2017-18**
- but a major **chunk of this is of the women reported as “helpers in household enterprises”**, who do not receive any regular salary for their work.
- According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, female LFPR reduced to 8.73 per cent in 2022-23 from 11.80 per cent in 2017-18.

Female LFPR in rural areas slowed to 9.68 per cent in 2022-23 from 12.16 per cent in 2017-18

- while that in urban areas moderated to 6.90 per cent in 2022-23 from 11.10 per cent in 2017-18.
- Globally, the **South Asia region had a female labour force participation rate of 26 per cent in 2022**
 - with India’s neighbouring countries registering female LFPR as per World Bank of
 - 33 per cent in Sri Lanka
 - 25 per cent in Pakistan
 - 29 per cent in Nepal
 - 38 per cent in Bangladesh
 - 61 per cent in China.

172. Setback for HUL, Nestle, Patanjali and others as HC upholds anti-profiteering provisions under GST - The Economic Times

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

News:

- The Delhi High Court on Monday **upheld the constitutional validity of the anti-profiteering provisions under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act**
- dealing a blow to more than 100 companies, including Hindustan Unilever, Nestle, Johnson & Johnson, Abbott, Patanjali and DLF

Key Highlights

- It had **challenged the provisions as well as the penalty** imposed by the National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA).
- A bench of acting chief justice and Justice held that the **GST law is a “consumer-centric” beneficial** legislation that eliminates the levy of multiple taxes,
- Companies from diverse sectors such as hospitality, fast-moving consumer goods and real estate had challenged the NAA’s order imposing penalty
 - for failing to pass on the commensurate benefit of reduction in the rate of tax or input tax credit to their consumers with interest and the validity of various provisions under the GST law.
- There is no space for allowing the **unfair retention of advantages** resulting from a decrease in tax rates or the availability of input tax credit by the manufacturer, supplier, or distributor.
- The court clarified that the anti-profiteering provisions do not constitute a **“price-fixing mechanism”**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Input Tax Credit
- Goods and Service Tax (GST)

- There cannot be a predetermined or mathematical formula established to ascertain profiteering.

173. Test tube rhinos: why rebuilding doomed species is a desperate race against time - Indian Express

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

Prelims Takeaway

- In vitro fertilization (IVF)
- Surrogacy

News:

- In 2015, **BioRescue**, an international consortium of scientists, initiated an ambitious project to rebuild the northern white rhino through **in vitro fertilisation (IVF)**.
- Recently, the scientists announced the **first-ever rhino pregnancy** through a **lab-made embryo** transferred into a surrogate southern white rhino.

Northern White Rhino

- The **death of the last male northern white rhino in 2018** made its extinction inevitable.
- The northern white rhino was **officially declared extinct in the wild in 2008** due to organised hunting for horns.

Challenges in the Process

- **Surrogacy** is the only option due to the inability of the remaining females to reproduce.
- Preparing a surrogate southern white female involves **an elaborate process**, including isolation and protection against bacterial infections.
- Identifying the fertile window for embryo implantation, known as **oestrus**, poses a significant challenge.

Genetic Viability Concerns

- **Limited genetic diversity** from eggs of two females and sperm from deceased zoo males poses challenges for a **viable northern white population**.
- Creating sperm and eggs from stem cells extracted from preserved tissue samples is a potential solution, but its success is **uncertain** in rhinos.

Behavioural Challenges in IVF Offspring

- While breakthroughs in IVF or stem cell technologies can produce northern white rhino calves, they **lack the genetic hardwiring** to behave as the species.
- The first IVF calves need to be raised by surviving northern white adults to **learn social and behavioural skills** critical for future generations.
- The urgency to produce IVF calves is emphasized by the **limited lifespan of the surviving females**.
- There are also concerns about **resource allocation** and whether the project addresses **threats to the natural habitat** of the species.



Mentorship
India

Quick Look

1. Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)

- The Union Home Ministry has designated Lakhbir Singh Landa, a Canada-based member of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), as an "individual terrorist" under Section 35 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).
- UAPA passed in 1967 aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
 - Unlawful activity refers to any action taken by an individual or association intended to disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.
- The Act assigns absolute power to the central government, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.
- Under UAPA, both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.
- The 2004 amendment added "terrorist act" to the list of offences to ban organisations for terrorist activities, under which 34 outfits were banned.
- Parliament also cleared the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019 to designate individuals as terrorists on certain grounds provided in the Act.
- The Act empowers the Director General of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property when the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

2. 16th Finance Commission

- Former NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya has been appointed as the Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission by the Central government.
- The Finance Commission is constituted by the President under Article 280 of the Constitution.
- The Finance Commission's recommendations will encompass the
 - distribution of net tax proceeds between the Union and States
 - allocation among States
 - principles for grants-in-aid from the Consolidated Fund of India
 - measures to augment State Consolidated Funds for Panchayats and Municipalities.
- The Commission is tasked with reviewing the current arrangements for financing Disaster Management initiatives.
- This includes assessing funds constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and making relevant recommendations.
- The Finance Commission is expected to submit its report by October 31, 2025, covering a five-year period from April 1, 2026.
- The recommendations will shape fiscal policies, resource allocation, and disaster response financing during this period.

3. National Transit Pass System

- Recently, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched the National Transit Pass System (NTPS) pan-India.
- Objective: To facilitate the seamless transit of timber, bamboo, and other forest produce across the country.

- The NTPS is envisioned as a "One Nation-One Pass" regime, which will enable seamless transit across the country.
 - Currently, the transit permits are issued for transport of timber and forest produce based on state specific transit rules.
- It offers seamless transit permits, managing records for both inter-state and intra-state transportation of timber, bamboo and other forest produce obtained from various sources like private lands, government owned forest and private depots.
- The QR coded transit permits generated under NTPS will allow check gates across various states to verify the validity of the permits and allow seamless transit.
- It is designed for user convenience, featuring desktop and mobile applications for easy registration and permit applications.
- Transit permits will be issued for tree species which are regulated, while the users can self-generate No Objection Certificates for exempted species.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

4. India's First All-Girls Sainik School

- The Defence Minister recently inaugurated India's first all-girl Sainik School in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh.
- Named Samvid Gurukulam Girls Sainik School, this institution is hailed as a historic moment for women empowerment.
- Objective: To provide quality education and career opportunities.
- The School accommodates nearly 870 students and operates under the CBSE affiliation.
- The training will be conducted by ex-servicemen, with a total of 120 seats available.
- This move reflects a broader vision to integrate women into the armed forces, recognizing their right to contribute to national security.
- The school is a part of the initiative to open 100 new Sainik Schools in collaboration with NGOs, private entities, and state government schools across states and union territories.
- The Defence Ministry, in 2019, approved the phased admission of girl children to Sainik Schools starting from the 2021-22 academic session.

5. Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)

- It consists of securities and other financial assets passively held by foreign investors.
- It does not provide the investor with direct ownership of financial assets and is relatively liquid depending on the volatility of the market.
- FPI is more liquid, volatile and therefore riskier than FDI.
- FPI is often referred to as "hot money" because of its tendency to flee at the first signs of trouble in an economy.
- It is part of a country's capital account and is shown on its Balance of Payments (BOP).
- Examples: Stocks, bonds, mutual funds, exchange traded funds, American Depositary Receipts (ADRs) and Global Depositary Receipts (GDRs).

6. Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

- CBAM is part of the "Fit for 55 in 2030 package", which is the EU's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.
- It is a policy tool aimed at reducing Carbon Emissions by ensuring that imported goods are subject to the same carbon costs as products produced within the EU.

7. 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.
- State Bank of India (SBI) is the authorized 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.
- Parties must disclose their bank account with the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- 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.
- Encashment only through an authorised bank account of the political party.
- Political parties are obligated to explain the utilization of the funds received.
- 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.

8. Salton Sea

- The US Department of Energy recently discovered the world's largest Lithium reserve beneath California's Salton Sea.
- Salton Sea is a shallow, saline lake located in the lower Colorado Desert, southern California,
- It is a geological depression tucked between mountain ranges and lying below sea level.
- The area that is now the lake was formerly a salt-covered sink or depression (a remnant of prehistoric Lake Cahuilla).
- Its salinity (some 45 parts per thousand) far exceeds that of seawater.
- It is an important stopping point for migratory waterfowl and serves as a critical habitat for birds moving south to Mexico and Central America.

9. "State of the Judiciary" Report

- Recently, a report titled 'State of the Judiciary' was published by the Centre for Research and Planning of the Supreme Court.
- Key Findings
 - Nearly one-fifth (19.7%) of district court complexes in India do not have separate toilets for women.
 - Existing women's toilets often suffer from broken doors and irregular water supply, compromising the hygiene and dignity of users.
 - Some court complexes have shared washrooms for male and female judges.
 - Only 6.7% of women's toilets in district court complexes are equipped with sanitary napkin vending machines.
 - Most district courts lack toilets specifically designated for transgender persons.
 - Judges in some instances personally engage sweepers and cleaners to ensure the cleanliness of the toilets.

10. Exercise Desert Cyclone

- It is the inaugural edition of joint military exercise "Desert Cyclone 2024" between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- It will be held from January 2 to January 15 in Rajasthan.
- The exercise aims to enhance interoperability by learning and sharing best practices in Urban Operations.
- This exercise is marking a significant milestone in the strategic partnership.

11. Sarna Religion

- A recent study at IIT Indore on tribal culture, forest conservation, and wildfire in central India sheds light on the Sarna religion's tenets.
- Indigenous religious faith predominantly followed in the Chota Nagpur Plateau region.
- Concentrated mainly in the tribal belt states of Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam.
- Followers of the Sarna faith are nature worshippers.
- The holy grail of the Sarna faith is "Jal (water), Jungle (forest), Zameen (land)."
- Its followers pray to the trees and hills while believing in protecting the forest areas.
- Believers of the Sarna faith do not practise idol worship, nor do they adhere to the concept of the Varna system, heaven-hell, etc.
- Important Festivals: Sarhul, Karam, Faggu

12. National Judicial Data Grid

- NJDG is a database of orders, judgments and case details of Courts created as an online platform under the eCourts Project.
- It has been developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) in coordination with the Computer Cell Registry.
- Data is updated on a near real-time basis by the connected District and Taluka courts.
- Aligned with the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), NJDG provides an Open Application Programming Interface (API) to Central and State Governments.
- Through this one may access case related information, statistics such as institution, pendency and disposal of cases, case-types, year-wise break-up of the Supreme Court of India

13. MGNREGA

- MGNREGA is one of the largest work guarantee programmes in the world launched in 2005 by the Ministry of Rural development.
- It aims to guarantee 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do unskilled manual work.
- The act aims at addressing the causes of chronic poverty through a rights-based framework.
- If any rural adult fails to get work within 15 days of demanding it, an 'unemployment allowance' is given.
- The act mandates Gram sabhas to recommend the works that are to be undertaken and at least 50% of the works must be executed by them.
- At least one-third of beneficiaries need to be women.
- The Centre bears 60% of the cost of the materials used for MGNREGS work and the remaining 40% is provided by the State governments.

14. Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)

- According to an analysis by I4C, Aadhar Enabled Payment System (AePS) frauds were 11% of the cyber financial scams that had its origin in India in 2023
- I4C is an initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to combat cyber-crime in the country, in a coordinated and effective manner.

- Approved in October 2018 , it acts as a nodal point in the fight against cybercrime.
- Functions of I4C
 - Identify the research problems/needs of LEAs and take up R&D activities in developing new technologies and forensic tools
 - Prevent misuse of cyberspace for furthering the cause of extremist and terrorist groups
 - Suggest amendments, if required, in cyber laws to keep pace with fast changing technologies and International cooperation
 - Coordinate all activities related to implementation of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLAT) with other countries related to cybercrimes in consultation with the concerned nodal authority in MHA.

15. Scope for Mainstreaming Ayurveda Research among Teaching professionals (SMART) 2.0 Programme

- The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) along with National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) recently launched 'SMART 2.0' program.
- The program promotes robust clinical studies in priority areas of Ayurveda with Ayurveda academic institutions/hospitals across the country through mutual collaboration.
- Objective: To generate tangible evidence to demonstrate efficacy and safety of Ayurveda interventions using interdisciplinary research methods and translating it into public health care.
- The study aims at safety, tolerability and adherence to Ayurveda formulations in the priority research areas of Bal Kasa, malnutrition, insufficient lactation, Abnormal Uterine Bleeding, Osteoporosis in post-menopausal women and Diabetes Mellitus (DM) II.

16. Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme

- The tourism ministry has recently included Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary in the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme.
- The Swadesh Darshan Scheme, launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Tourism, is a Central Sector Scheme..
- Objective: To develop sustainable and responsible tourism destinations in the country.
- Under the scheme, the Ministry of Tourism provides financial assistance to State governments, UT Administration or Central Agencies for development of tourism infrastructure in the country.
- Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of the projects is the responsibility of the respective State Government/UT Administration.
- The Ministry of Tourism has revamped the scheme (Swadesh Darshan 2.0) for development of sustainable and responsible tourist destinations.
- The objective for the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme envisages increase in private sector investment in tourism and hospitality.

17. Project Cheetah

- Discussions to bring the Cheetah back to India were initiated in 2009 by the Wildlife Trust of India.
- Under the 'Action Plan for Reintroduction of Cheetah in India', 50 cheetahs will be brought from African countries to various national parks over 5 years.
- Most suitable site: Kuno Palpur National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh because of its suitable habitat and adequate prey base.
- Kuno also provides the possibility of harbouring four of India's big cats viz. tiger, lion, leopard and Cheetah, enabling them to coexist as they have in the past.

- As part of this project, 20 Cheetahs (8 from Namibia and 12 from South Africa) were Introduced in the KNP (since last year) to establish a free-ranging population for the first time since their extinction in India 70 years ago.

18. Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)

- ART refers to a range of techniques used to achieve pregnancy by handling sperm or egg cells outside the human body and transferring embryos into the woman's reproductive tract.
- It is regulated by Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act 2021 in India.
- ART in India is regulated by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- National Guidelines for Accreditation, Supervision, and Regulation of ART Clinics were established in 2005.
- ART encompasses various procedures, including sperm donation, in-vitro fertilization (IVF), and gestational surrogacy.
- It involves handling sperm and egg cells in a laboratory setting to facilitate fertilization and embryo development.

19. Wetland City Accreditation

- The Ramsar Convention during COP12 held in the year 2015 approved a voluntary Wetland City Accreditation system.
- It recognizes cities which have taken exceptional steps to safeguard their urban wetlands.
- It also recognizes the importance of wetlands in urban and peri-urban environments and to take appropriate measures to conserve and protect these wetlands.
- This scheme aims to further promote the conservation and wise use of urban and peri-urban wetlands, as well as sustainable socio-economic benefits for local populations.
- To be formally accredited, a candidate for WCA should satisfy the standards used to implement each of the six international criteria mentioned in Operational Guidance for WCA of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

20. Polygonum Chaturbhujam

- Recently, a new plant species of Polygonum genus has been discovered at Gol Pahadi Island of the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR), Maharashtra.
- The new plant species named Polygonum Chaturbhujam is an herb.
- Six plant species endemic to India have also been found in Pench.
- They are Aegineta indica, Boerhavia crispa, Habenaria gibsonii var foetida, Iphigenia pallida, Petalidium barlerioides and Barleria gibsonii.

21. Similipal Kai Chutney

- Recently, the Similipal kai chutney made with red weaver ants by the tribal people of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district (Odisha) received the GI tag.
- The savoury chutney is popular in Mayurbhanj region for its healing properties and also deemed important for nutritional security of the tribal people.
- Many indigenous people from Mayurbhanj district venture into nearby forest to collect kai pimpudi (red weaver ant).
- Health benefits
 - The scientists analysed the red weaver ants and found it contains valuable proteins, calcium, zinc, vitamin B-12, iron, magnesium, potassium, sodium, copper, amino acids etc.
 - Consuming the species can help boost the immune system and prevent diseases.

- The tribal healers also prepare a medicinal oil in which they dip the ants along with pure mustard oil which is used as body oil for babies and to cure rheumatism, gout, ringworm and other diseases by the tribes.
- The local people also consume this to stay fit and strong.

22. Northeast African Cheetah

- A group of experts have appealed to the IUCN to reclassify the status of the Northeast African Cheetah to 'endangered' from 'vulnerable'.
- Northeast African Cheetah, also known as the Sudan cheetah, is found in the Horn of Africa.
- This subspecies is more closely related to the Southern African cheetah than to Saharan cheetah populations.
- The cheetah's long tail helps it keep its balance when changing direction mid-chase. Appearance: The Northeast African cheetah is fairly large. Physically, it most resembles the East African cheetah.
- Distribution: South Sudan and Ethiopia; live in wide open lands, grasslands, semi-arid areas, and other open habitats where prey is abundant such as in the East Sudanian Savanna.
- The subspecies' cubs are being heavily trafficked across the Red Sea to Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable

23. INS Chennai

- It is the Indian Navy's indigenously designed and constructed guided missile destroyer.
- It is the third and last ship of the Kolkata-class stealth-guided missile destroyers (Project 15A).
- It was constructed by the Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) at Mumbai.
- It was commissioned into the Indian Navy on November 21, 2016.
- It measures 163 metres in length and has a beam of 17.4 metres.
- Displacement: Over 7,500 tons.
- Top Speed: 30 knots (approx. 55 KM/hour)
- It is powered by four reversible gas turbine engines.
- It can carry 350 to 400 people.
- Armament: It is armed with Vertical launch and long-range surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missile systems like supersonic BrahMos, 'Barak-8' Long Range Surface to Air missiles.

24. PRITHVI Scheme

- It is an initiative of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) to enhance the understanding of the Earth and its vital signs.
- This overarching initiative, with an allocation of Rs 4,797 crore for the period 2021-26, aims to significantly enhance research, modelling, and service delivery across crucial areas like weather, climate, oceans, and the polar regions.
- The Prithvi scheme integrates five existing sub-schemes:
 - Atmosphere and Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems and Services (ACROSS)
 - Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology (O-SMART)
 - Polar Science and Cryosphere Research (PACER)
 - Seismology and Geosciences (SAGE)
 - Research, Education, Training, and Outreach (REACHOUT).

25. Goods and Services Tax (GST)

- Recently, the GST authorities in India have identified 4,153 bogus firms engaged in suspected evasion of input tax credit (ITC), amounting to around Rs 12,036 crore during the October-December 2023 period.

- Maharashtra and Delhi top the list in terms of the number of bogus firms and the amount of suspected tax evasion.
- GST is a value-added tax levied on most goods and services sold for domestic consumption.
- Paid by consumers, but it is remitted to the government by the businesses selling the goods and services.
- Applicable on 'supply' of goods or services as against the old concept on the manufacture of goods or on sale of goods or on provision of services.
- Based on the principle of destination-based consumption taxation as against the present principle of origin-based taxation.
- India has dual GST with the Centre and the States simultaneously levying tax on a common base.
- Import of goods or services are treated as inter-state supplies and subject to Integrated Goods & Services Tax (IGST) in addition to the applicable customs duties.
- GST rates are mutually agreed upon by the Centre and the States.
- The rates are notified on the recommendation of the GST Council.

26. Night Landing at Kargil ALG

- An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130 Super Hercules tactical transport aircraft recently executed a night landing at the Kargil airstrip, situated near the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan.
- This accomplishment marks the first night landing at the Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) in Kargil and involved a team of Garud special forces.
 - The Kargil ALG is located at an altitude of around 10,000 feet and features a restricted airstrip with a unidirectional approach surrounded by rough terrain.
- The landing showcased enhanced capabilities in executing specialised missions round the clock in challenging terrains.
- In the broader region, the Indian Air Force has established airfields at various locations, including Srinagar, Awantipora, Udhampur, Jammu, Leh, Thoise, Nyoma, Fukche, and Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO).
- The Defence Ministry has undertaken projects to upgrade and operationalize Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) close to the border, with a focus on areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.

27. Project Veer Gatha

- It is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education instituted under the Gallantry Awards Portal (GAP) in 2021.
- Objective: To disseminate the details of acts of bravery of the Gallantry Awardees among the students to raise the spirit of patriotism and instil the values of civic consciousness.
- It provides a platform to the school students to do creative projects/activities based on gallantry award winners.
- As part of this, the students frame different projects through various media like art, poems, essays and multimedia on these gallantry award winners.
- Best projects are awarded at national level by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education.

28. Sohrai Painting

- Recently, a Bengal village began their New Year with workshop on ancient indigenous art i.e. Sohrai Painting.
- It is an indigenous mural art form that dates back to the Meso-chalcolithic period (9000-5000 BC).
- Theme: Natural elements of the universe which includes forests, rivers, animals amongst others.
- These ancient paintings are made by tribal women with the use of natural substances like charcoal, clay or soil.
- The very primitive form of Sohrai art was in the form of cave paintings.

- It is practiced by indigenous communities, particularly in the States of Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal.
- The region of Hazaribagh in Jharkhand has received the GI tag for this art form.
- It is the art of the women of the Kurmi, Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Agaria, Ghatwal tribes.
- Sohrai paintings are distinctive for their vibrant colours, intricate patterns, and symbolic motifs;
- There is a Sohrai festival held every year, marking the harvesting season and the arrival of winter.

29. Chandra X-ray Observatory

- Chandra X-ray Observatory recently captured a stunning image of 30 Doradus B.
 - It is a supernova remnant that is part of a vibrant region of space where stars have been forming for millions of years.
- It was launched by NASA on July 23, 1999.
- It is a telescope specially designed to detect X-ray emission from very hot regions of the Universe, such as exploded stars, clusters of galaxies and matter around black holes.
- Because X-rays are absorbed by Earth's atmosphere, Chandra must orbit above it, up to an altitude of 139,000 km (86,500 mi) in space.

30. Indrayani River

- It is a tributary of the Bhima River, which again is a tributary of the Krishna River.
- It originates in Kurvande village near Lonavala, a hill station in the Sahyadri mountains of Maharashtra.
- Fed by rain, it flows east from there to meet the Bhima River.
- It follows a course mostly north of the city of Pune.
- The river has great religious importance, and the two sacred towns of Alandi and Dehu are situated on its banks.
 - Dehu is known to be a sacred place for being the hometown of the poet Saint Tukaram, who was a popular saint of Maharashtra.
 - Alandi holds the samadhi of the poet Dnyaneshwar.
- Valvan Dam at Kamshet, situated on the Indrayani River, is a hydroelectric generating station.

31. Pallas Fish Eagle

- After 10 years, the Pallas fish eagle was recently sighted in the Chilika during the bird census carried out by the Chilika wildlife division.
- Also known as Pallas's sea eagle or band-tailed fish eagle, it is a large, brownish sea eagle.
- It can be seen near lakes, marshes and large rivers, from lowlands to 5,000 metres of elevation.
- It is partially migratory and feeds primarily on fish.
- It breeds usually near water in a large nest placed in a tall tree.
- It is found in the east Palearctic in Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, China, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- IUCN Status: Endangered
- Humans contribute to the decline of this species through habitat degradation, pollution, and draining or overfishing lakes.

32. Thanjavur Doll

- Thanjavur dolls are facing stiff competition from electronic toys and e-commerce platforms, besides a severe labour crunch and shortage of clay.
- The craft was brought to Thanjavur by Maratha ruler Raja Serfoji in the early 19th Century.
- Thanjavur dolls are primarily of two kinds, one is the bobble-head version, and the other is the tilting doll version.

- Materials used
 - Doll-makers use papier-mache, POP and other materials for the body.
 - A mixture of vandal mann (fine silt deposited by rushing streams of water), kali mann (clayey riverbed mud), and manal (loose aggregate) is required to make the dolls' pedestals.
 - Copper sulphate powder is added as a fungicide.
- The dancing doll has four sections, each balancing on the other with the help of inner metal loop hooks that create the light bobbing movement.
- It earned the Geographical Indication tag in 2009.

33. First Advance Estimates

- According to the First Advance Estimates (FAEs), India's GDP will grow by 7.3% in the current financial year (2023-24).
- The FAE is presented at the end of the first week of January every year and are only the first estimates of growth for that financial year.
 - By the end of February, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) releases the Second Advance Estimates and, by the end of May, the Provisional Estimates.
- The FAE are based on the performance of the economy over the first 7-odd months, and the data are extrapolated to arrive at an annual picture.
- They are the last GDP data released before the Union Budget for the coming financial year (which is presented on February 1) is finalised.
- As such, the FAEs constitute the base for the Budget numbers.
- This year's FAEs draw some additional significance as they provide the first complete picture of economic growth in the 10 years of the present government.

34. Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is a protected area of India in the Himalayan foothills of West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh.
- It conjoins Sessa Orchid Sanctuary to the northeast and Pakhui Tiger Reserve across the Kameng river to the east.
- It is situated in the biodiversity hotspot of Eastern Himalayas and home to over 500 bird species.
- It is also a part of the Kameng Elephant Reserve.
- It is notable as a prime birding site due to the extraordinary variety, numbers and accessibility of species.
- It derives its name from the Red Eagle Division of the Indian army which was posted in the area in the 1950s.
- Flora: The temperate cloud forest is intermixed with dense bamboo patches and broadleaved evergreen forest across a wide altitudinal range, with conifers and rhododendrons at the higher elevations.
- Fauna: Capped langur, Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, red panda, Asiatic black bear, Arunachal macaque and gaur.

35. Bobbili Veena

- It is a traditional 'Saraswati Veena' from Bobbili and is famed for its fine tune and distinctive notes.
- It is a large plucked string instrument used in Carnatic music.
- The making of the veena began in the 17th century during the reign of Pedda Rayudu, the king of Bobbili Samsthanam who was a great patron of music.
- These veenas are crafted from Jack-wood tree logs in Gollapalli, a town in Bobbili (Andhra Pradesh).
 - Jack-wood is preferred as it is light and the unique grain of the wood renders the quality of swara or tone.
- A single piece of wood is used to create the instrument giving it the name 'Ekandi Veena'.

- With their origin dating back to the 17th Century, these veenas are played in a distinctive style, which also led to the coinage of the 'Bobbili Veena Sampradayam'.
- It earned a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2012 for its unique design and high-quality craftsmanship.

36. iDEX

- It is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Defence, Govt of India launched in 2018.
- The objective of the scheme is to cultivate an innovation ecosystem in the Defence and Aerospace sector by collaborating with startups, innovators, MSMEs, incubators, and academia.
- iDEX offers grants and support for R&D with significant potential for future adoption in Indian defence and aerospace.
- It is currently engaged with around 400+ Startups and MSMEs.
- It is recognized as a game-changer in the defence ecosystem, iDEX has received the PM Award for Innovation in the defence sector.
- Funding: It will be funded and managed by a 'Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)' which has been formed as a 'not for profit' company as per the Companies Act 2013 for this purpose, by the two founder memberse. Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) - HAL & BEL.

37. Trichoderma

- The formulation named 'Tricholime', integrates Trichoderma and lime into a single product, making the application easier for farmers.
- Trichoderma is a fungal biocontrol agent, has proven effective in suppressing several soil-borne plant pathogens and serves as a successful bio-pesticide and bio-fertilizer in crop production.
- Recognizing the importance of Trichoderma and the challenges posed by traditional lime applications, the scientists at IISR developed 'Tricholime' to integrate lime and Trichoderma

38. Geographical Indication (GI) Tag

- It is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- This is typically used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts and industrial products.
- The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 seeks to provide for the registration and better protection of geographical indications relating to goods in India.
- This GI tag is valid for 10 years following which it can be renewed

39. Remission

- Prison being a State subject, Prison rules in each state govern remission, where prisoners can earn days off their sentences through reformatory and rehabilitative activities.
- Life convicts, in particular, must serve a minimum of 14 years before becoming eligible for remission.
- However, applying for remission does not guarantee its approval, as each case undergoes individual consideration by a committee.
- The committee assesses factors outlined by the Supreme Court in Laxman Naskar vs State of West Bengal (2000).
 - These include the nature of the offence, likelihood of reoffending, the convict's potential for criminal activity, the purpose of continued confinement, and the socio-economic conditions of the convict's family.
- Epuru Sudhakar vs State of Andhra Pradesh (2006) SC Judgement: It allows judicial review of remission orders only in cases of non-application of mind, mala fide intentions, consideration of irrelevant factors, or arbitrariness.

40. Chandubi Festival

- It is organised every year for five days starting from the first day of the New Year along the Chandubi lake, which is situated in the state of Assam.
- Objective: To promote eco-tourism in this biodiversity hotspot of Assam.
- Preserving the waterbody, the water level of which has rapidly been lowering over the years, has been the motive for organising the festival every year.
- The festival has been providing an opportunity to generate livelihood to different tribes viz. Rabhas, Garos, Gorkhas and tea tribes.
- The main attractions of the Chandubi festival are the local folk culture, ethnic cuisine, local handloom and dresses, boating, etc.

41. Sisal Plant

- Recently, a research team at Stanford University has found the absorption capacity of a sisal-based material to be higher than commercial menstrual pads.
- Sisal Plant is a xerophytic, monocarp, semi-perennial leaf fibre producing plant.
- The leaves are thick, fleshy and often covered with a waxy layer, typical characteristics of xerophytic plants.
- It is mainly propagated by vegetative means such as 'bulbils' and 'suckers'.
- It is well adapted to arid environments as the species is xerophytic in nature.
- It can withstand a maximum temperature 40-45°C and grows well with evenly distributed rainfall of 60-125 cm.
- It thrives best on dry, permeable, sandy-loam soils with a good amount of liming materials (Ca and Mg).
- In India it is grown in light calcareous and gravelly soils with good drainage.
- It is well adapted mainly in Odisha, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, part of Bihar, western part of West Bengal and many southern states.

42. Agnipath Scheme

- It allows patriotic and motivated youth to serve in the Armed Forces for a period of four years.
- Under this scheme, the youth joining the army will be called Agniveer. Youth will be able to be recruited into the army for a short duration.
- Under the new scheme, around 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers will be recruited annually, and most will leave the service in just four years.
- However, after four years, only 25% of the batch will be recruited back into their respective services, for a period of 15 years.

43. Aligarh Movement

- It was a systemic movement aimed at reforming the social, political and educational aspects of the Muslim community.
- The movement undertook to modernise Muslim's education by adapting English as a medium of learning and western education rather than just focusing on traditional teachings.
- Sir Syed established the Scientific Society in 1864, in Aligarh to translate Western works into Indian languages to prepare the Muslims to accept Western education
- The Aligarh Institute Gazette, a magazine published by Sir Syed was an organ of the Scientific Society

44. Caucus System

- The state of Iowa will play a pivotal role in shaping the 2024 US presidential race as Republicans gather for caucuses, marking the first step in selecting their party's nominee. The caucus is a unique process where voters express their preferences for the party's presidential nomination.

- Unlike primaries, caucuses are overseen by the state party, not the government, and do not involve traditional polling places.
- Republicans in Iowa will convene in small groups at local venues, where representatives advocate for their preferred candidates through speeches.
- Votes are cast through secret ballots, and the results determine the selection of delegates to the county convention.
- The final results are reported to the state party, and the outcome is typically announced within a few hours.

45. Fog

- Fog is a common weather phenomenon characterised by small water droplets formed when evaporated water cools down and condenses.
- It occurs when there is a temperature disparity between the ground and the air, common during Indian winters.
- The formation of fog is influenced by factors such as low temperatures, high humidity and the presence of abundant moisture near the surface.
- Two primary mechanisms contributing to fog formation are infrared cooling and radiation fog.
- The entire Indo-Gangetic plains, including northern India, are prone to fog formation during the winter season due to specific conditions.
- Low temperatures, low wind speed, moisture availability, and a high concentration of aerosols contribute to the formation of fog in the region.
- Moisture incursion can occur from Western Disturbances or the Arabian Sea, further enhancing fog formation.

46. Prasadam

- Recently, the Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare inaugurated 'Prasadam', at Neelkanth Van, Mahakal Lok, in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh.
- Prasadam is the country's first "Healthy and Hygienic Food Street".
- It will connect people in every corner of the country with pure and safe local and traditional food.
- It offers convenient and culturally rich dining options for the 1-1.5 lakh devotees who visit the Mahakaleshwar Temple daily.
- The food street is designed to provide various facilities including a kids' play area, drinking water facility, CCTV surveillance, parking, public conveniences and seating spaces.

47. Sky Dew

- Recently, Israel deployed Sky Dew along the Lebanese border as tensions with Hezbollah escalated.
- Sky Dew is a massive balloon-like structure in the shape of a puffed aircraft.
- The high-altitude observation balloon acts as a detection radar blip for small unmanned aircraft and cruise missiles.
- It is one of the largest aerial threat warning systems in the world.
- The project was entirely funded by the US Department of Defence.
- The radar on the balloon is capable of observing at 250 km and tracking multiple targets, including low-altitude ones and those in valleys.
- It offers a significant advantage in its ability to remain in surveillance for extended periods without needing fuel or crew replacement.

48. Ugram

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation recently launched an indigenous assault rifle named 'Ugram'.
- It has been developed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), a unit of DRDO, in collaboration with a private industry partner.

- It was developed in less than 100 days as per the General Staff Qualitative Requirements (GSQR) of the army into consideration.

49. Drishti 10 'Starliner'

- The Chief of Naval Staff recently flagged off the first indigenously manufactured Drishti 10 'Starliner' Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) for the Navy.
- It is an advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platform with 36 hours endurance and a 450 kg payload capacity.
- It is an all-weather military platform which has clearance to fly in both segregated and unsegregated airspace.
- The UAV's autonomous nature, coupled with its mission effectiveness and payload configuration options, makes it an invaluable asset for strategic operations.
- Its minimal maintenance requirements makes it cost-effective and operationally efficient.
- This ensures increased operational readiness, reducing downtime, and maximising deployment opportunities.
- It is equipped with advanced communication systems, including satellite communication and Line-of-Sight (LOS) data links, ensuring reliable and secure data transmission.

50. Republic Day Tableaux

- Recently, the Defence Ministry has proposed a rollover plan where every State and UT will get an opportunity within three years for Republic Day parade tableaux.
- According to a Ministry of Defence (MoD) circular, a select number of "State govts/UTs/Central ministries or departments" send their tableaux each year to the Republic Day parade.
- The selection process happens in a phased manner.
- STAGE 1
 - It involves the assessment of the initial proposals and the design sketch/blueprint sent to the MoD.
 - The Committee suggests modifications (if necessary) and a number of proposals may be rejected in this stage itself.
- STAGE 2
 - It involves assessment of 3-D models of the proposals.
 - If the Committee is satisfied with the model, then the tableau is selected and further sent for fabrication.
- The Committee has the final say on which tableaux are chosen (approx. 15 every year) and can order any modifications they feel are required.

51. Classical Language

- Recently, the West Bengal Chief Minister asked the central government to officially list Bengali as a "classical language".
- Currently there are six languages that enjoy the 'Classical' status in India viz. Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).
- All the Classical Languages are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- The Ministry of Culture provides the guidelines regarding Classical languages.
 - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years
 - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers
 - The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community

- The classical language and literature being distinct from modern
- Once a language is notified as a Classical language, the Human Resource and Development Ministry provides certain benefits to promote it.
 - Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages
 - A Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Languages is set up.
 - The University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages so declared.

52. Spiral Galaxy

- The Hubble Space Telescope recently captured an image of the spiral galaxy, MCG-01-24-014, revealing the enigmatic beauty of 'forbidden' light.
- Spiral galaxies are twisted collections of stars and gas that often have beautiful shapes and are made up of hot, young stars.
- Approximately 60% of all galaxies are thought to be spiral galaxies.
- Spiral galaxies are thought to evolve into elliptical galaxies as the spirals get older.
- The Milky Way, the galaxy that includes Earth and our solar system, is an example of a spiral galaxy.
- Structure
 - Most spiral galaxies contain a central bulge surrounded by a flat, rotating disk of stars.
 - The bulge in the centre is made up of older, dimmer stars and is thought to contain a supermassive black hole.
 - Approximately two-thirds of spiral galaxies also contain a bar structure through their centre, as does the Milky Way.
 - The disk of stars orbiting the bulge separates into arms that circle the galaxy.
 - These spiral arms contain a wealth of gas and dust and younger stars that shine brightly before their quick demise.

53. Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan (MMUA)

- Recently, the Assam government launched the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan (MMUA) to financially support rural women entrepreneurs.
- Objective: To empower women in rural self-help groups, transforming them into "rural micro-entrepreneurs" with a target annual income of Rs 1 lakh per member.
- Beneficiaries can choose from 145 government-prepared business plans.
- In the first year, eligible women receive Rs 10,000, followed by Rs 12,500 from the government and a Rs 12,500 bank loan over the next two years.
- Conditions include a cap on the number of children, aligning with the state's population norms policy.
 - General and OBC women cannot have more than three children to avail the scheme, while STs and SCs are allowed up to four children.
 - The Chief Minister justified the child limit by stating that it ensures women utilize funds for business instead of being occupied with childcare.
- Approximately 5 lakh women out of 39 lakh involved in rural self-help groups may be excluded due to the child limit.
- Beneficiaries must fulfill two other conditions viz. enrolling girl children in school and ensuring survival of trees planted under the government's tree plantation drive.
- Previous restrictions on government jobs for those with more than two children were implemented from January 2021.

54. Report Fish Disease App

- The National Surveillance Programme for Aquatic Animal Diseases (NSPAAD) project recently introduced a mobile app 'Report Fish Disease'.
- Purpose: To track and monitor fish diseases across the country.
- The mobile application intends to empower fish farmers with a convenient and efficient platform to report diseases on their farms.
- The app offers an easy disease reporting format, where farmers can easily report disease outbreaks by providing essential information such as location, species affected, symptoms observed, and images.
- Geo-tagging technology facilitates swift response from authorities and the receivers get real-time updates on the status of their reported cases.
- The app also serves as an information hub, providing farmers with valuable resources on disease prevention, treatment, and best aquaculture practices.

55. Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL)

- The Prime Minister will inaugurate the country's longest bridge over the sea - the 22 km Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) aka the Atal Setu Nhava Sheva Sea Link.
- It is a 22-km-long twin-carriageway six-lane bridge over the Thane Creek in the Arabian Sea, connecting Sewri in the island city of Mumbai to Chirle in Raigad district on the mainland.
- It includes a 16.5 km sea link and viaducts on land at either end with a cumulative length of 5.5 km.
- Objective: To improve connectivity in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region which comprises the districts of Mumbai, Thane, Palghar, and Raigad, and promote the region's economic development.

56. Kateel Yakshagana mela

- A century-old Yakshagana mela in Dakshina Kannada will resume its all-night performances following approval from the Karnataka High Court.
- Kateel Yakshagana mela is a famous Yakshagana troupe started in the mid-19th century.
- Yakshagana is a traditional folk-dance form popular in Coastal Karnataka.
- It is a rare combination of dance, music, song, scholarly dialogues and colourful costumes.
- Traditionally, men portray all roles, including the female ones, though women are now part of Yakshagana troupes.
- A typical troupe consists of 15 to 20 actors and a Bhagawatha, who is the master of ceremonies and the main storyteller.
- Elements of Yakshagana
 - The Act: Each performance typically focuses on a small sub-story (known as 'Prasanga') from ancient Hindu epics of Ramayana or Mahabharata.
 - The show consists of both stage performances by talented artists and commentary accompanied by traditional music.
 - The Music: Musical instruments include Chande (drums), Harmonium, Maddale, Taala (mini metal clappers) and flute among others.
 - The Dress: Large size headgear, coloured faces, elaborate costumes all over the body and musical beads on the legs (Gejje).

57. Exercise Sea Dragon-24

- It is an elite multinational maritime exercise that encourages professional exchanges and teamwork among participating navies.
- Participating countries: India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the US.
- The exercise seeks to improve skills in a variety of maritime combat domains through a number of aerial and ground-based tasks, including

- Anti-submarine warfare (ASW): Locating and neutralising enemy submarines hiding beneath the seas.
- Surface warfare: Coordinated attacks on hostile surface vessels using superior weaponry and tactics.
- Air defence: Putting up an impenetrable air barrier to keep friendly forces safe from aerial threats.
- Search and rescue (SAR): Tracking down and saving maritime personnel in need.
- Communication and coordination: Synchronising activities across several platforms and exchanging information in a seamless manner.

58. Einstein Probe (EP)

- A mission of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) dedicated to time-domain high-energy astrophysics.
- Objective: To explore the transient and variable X-ray sky, capturing powerful bursts of high-energy light emanating from objects such as merging neutron stars and black holes.
- It was successfully launched in 2024, from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in China with a "Long March-2C" rocket.
- Unlike conventional X-ray telescopes, Einstein Probe's unique design allows it to monitor almost a tenth of the sky simultaneously.
 - discovering new sources as they light up in X-rays
 - enabling in-depth studies of known and new celestial phenomena over extended periods
- It will also detect light from gamma-ray bursts, supernovae, flares from other stars, and events within the Solar System, such as emissions from comets.

59. Kala Ram Temple

- Recently, the Prime Minister visited the Kalaram Mandir in Nashik, Maharashtra.
- The Kalaram temple, built in 1792, features a black statue of Lord Ram, Sita, Lakshman, and a black idol of Hanuman.
- The temple is named after a black statue of Lord Ram, known as Kala Ram, and holds importance in Hindu religion.
- Sardar Rangarao Odhekar, who dreamt of a black statue of Lord Ram in the Godavari, played a key role in building the temple.
- The main temple has symbolic elements, including 14 steps representing Ram's 14-year exile and 84 pillars representing the cycle of 84 lakh species.
- The temple has significance in the Ramayana, with Lord Ram spending initial years of exile in this region.
- In 1930, B R Ambedkar and Pandurang Sadashiv Sane led an agitation demanding access for Dalits to Hindu temples.
- Ambedkar organised a protest outside Kalaram temple, demanding the right for Dalits to enter which continued until 1935.

60. Yuva Nidhi Scheme

- The Karnataka government recently launched the Yuva Nidhi scheme.
- Objective: To provide financial aid to graduates and diploma holders who are yet to secure employment, with training opportunities for skill development.
- Graduates and diploma holders need to register on the state government's skill connect portal.
- The scheme offers ₹3,000 per month to degree holders and ₹1,500 per month to diploma holders who have not secured a job in the past six months and are not pursuing higher studies.

- Financial aid will be provided for a maximum of two years or until the beneficiary secures employment, whichever comes first.
- Training will be provided to the registered individuals to enhance their skills and employability.

61. VIPER Rover

- VIPER is NASA's first mobile robotic mission to the Moon.
- It will directly analyse ice on the surface and subsurface of the Moon at varying depths and temperature conditions within four main soil environments.
- VIPER sends data back to Earth, aiding scientists in crafting resource maps that detail the location and concentration of lunar ice, distinguishing between various forms such as ice crystals or chemically bound molecules.
- Traversing the challenging terrain of the lunar South Pole, VIPER collects crucial data that enhances our comprehension of the Moon's history and the surroundings where NASA intends to dispatch Artemis astronauts.
- Mission duration: 100 Earth days, covering 3 cycles of lunar day and night.
- It will land at the South Pole of the Moon in late 2024.

62. Zero Defect Zero Effect (ZED) Scheme

- The Zero Defect Zero Effect (ZED) scheme by the MSME Ministry recently achieved the 1 lakh certification milestone.
- Launched in October 2016, the ZED scheme offers certification for environmentally conscious manufacturing.
- Objectives
 - To create proper awareness in MSMEs about ZED manufacturing and motivate them for the assessment of their enterprise for a ZED rating.
 - To drive manufacturing with the adoption of Zero-Defect production processes without impacting the environment (Zero Effect).
 - To encourage MSMEs to constantly upgrade their quality standards in products and processes.
 - To support the "Make in India" campaign.
- Currently, the scheme is applicable for manufacturing MSMEs only.
- MSME Sustainable (ZED) Certification can be attained in three levels after registering and taking the ZED Pledge
 - Certification Level 1: Bronze
 - Certification Level 2: Silver
 - Certification Level 3: Gold
- They are classified according to 20 performance-based parameters such as quality management, timely delivery, process control, waste management etc.

63. HD 63433d

- It is an Earth-like exoplanet that orbits a sun-like star called HD 63433 (also known as TOI 1726).
- The star is about 73 light years away from the sun and is part of the group of stars moving together that make up the constellation Ursa Major.
- The star HD 63433 shares similarities with our sun in size and type but is significantly younger, at roughly 400 million years old.
- It is the smallest confirmed exoplanet, younger than 500 million years old.
- It's also the closest Earth-sized planet discovered so far, and it's about 400 million years old.

64. AN-32 Aircraft

- The AN-32 (Antonov AN-32) is a Soviet-origin military transport aircraft.

- It is designed and manufactured by the Antonov Design Bureau of Ukraine for the Indian Air Force (IAF).
- It was purchased by India from the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1984. The IAF has a fleet of around 100 AN-32 planes.
- Its NATO reporting name is Cline.
- The aircraft is designed to manoeuvre day and night in tropical and mountainous regions, even in hot climatic conditions (up to 55°C).
- It is powered by two single-shaft turboprop engines.
- An-32 can fly at a maximum speed of 530 km/h, and its cruise speed is 470 km/h.
- The range and service ceiling of the aircraft are 2,500km and 9,500m, respectively.

65. Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar'

- The Government of India has announced the "Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar" in the field of Science, Technology and Innovation.
- The National Award recognizes outstanding and inspiring scientific, technological and innovation contributions of researchers, technologists and innovators.
Categories of awards
- Vigyan Ratna (VR): Maximum of three awards to be bestowed to recognize lifetime achievements & contributions made in a given field of Science and Technology.
- Vigyan Shri (VS): Maximum of 25 awards to be given to recognize the distinguished contributions in the given field of Science and Technology.
- Vigyan Yuva: Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (VY-SSB) award: Maximum of 25 awards to be given to recognize and encourage young scientists who made an exceptional contribution in the given field of Science and Technology.

66. Graded Response Action Plan

- GRAP is a set of emergency measures that kick in to prevent further deterioration of air quality once it reaches a certain threshold in the Delhi-NCR region.
- It was approved by the Supreme Court in 2016 and notified in 2017.
- The plan was formulated after several meetings between Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA), state government and experts.
- GRAP works only as an emergency measure.
- The plan does not include action by various state governments to be taken throughout the year to tackle industrial, vehicular and combustion emissions

67. Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)

- It has been conceived as a 30-metre diameter primary-mirror optical and infrared telescope that will enable observations into deep space.
- It is proposed as a joint collaboration involving institutions in the S., Japan, China, Canada, and India.
- It will be the world's most advanced and capable ground-based optical, near-infrared, and mid-infrared observatory.
- It will integrate the latest innovations in precisions control, segmented mirror design, and adaptive optics.
- At the heart of the telescope is the segmented mirror, made up of 492 individual segments. Precisely aligned, these segments will work as a single reflective surface of 30m diameter.

68. Cabo Verde

- It is also known as Cape Verde which comprises a group of islands that lie off the west coast of Africa.

- It is located nearby Senegal and is the nearest point on the continent.
- This volcanic archipelago includes ten islands and five islets, divided into the windward (Barlavento) and leeward (Sotavento) groups.
- Climate: Generally moderate, the climate is characterized by stable temperatures with extreme aridity.
- The terrain of the Cabo Verde islands varies from the geologically older, flatter islands in the east and the newer, more mountainous islands in the west.
- Population: The overwhelming majority of the population of Cabo Verde is of mixed European and African descent and is often referred to as mestiço or Crioulo.

69. Himalayan Wolf

- The Himalayan Wolf (*Canis lupus chanco*), a prominent lupine predator found across the Himalayas.
- It is also called Tibetan wolves, which live at more than 4,000 metres altitudes and are genetically distinct from grey wolves.
- Living at such high altitudes, these wolves have genetically adapted themselves to live in low oxygen (hypoxic) conditions.
- In China, the Himalayan wolf lives on the Tibetan Plateau in the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet, and western Sichuan.
- In northern India, it occurs in the Union Territory of Ladakh and in the Lahaul and Spiti region in northeastern Himachal Pradesh.
- Conservation status: IUCN: Vulnerable
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I

70. PM-eBus Sewa Scheme

- Under the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme, 10,000 e-buses will be deployed across cities in the country.
- The scheme was introduced to give a push to the slow adoption of e-buses in public transport.
- Under this scheme, city bus operations will be done on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.
- This scheme will support bus operations for 10 years.
- States/Cities shall be responsible for running the bus services and making payments to the bus operators.
- The Central Government will support these bus operations by providing subsidies to the extent specified in the proposed scheme.

71. India's First Dark Sky Park

- The Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Maharashtra is India's first Dark Sky Park within a tiger reserve for earmarking areas around the park that restrict light pollution for stargazers to access pristine dark skies.
- Dark Sky Place certification focuses on lighting policy, dark sky-friendly retrofits, outreach and education, and monitoring the night sky.
- This designation positions PTR as a sanctuary where tourists can witness celestial spectacles, shielded from the intrusion of artificial light pollution.
- PTR became the fifth such park in Asia.
- The certification was given by the International Dark-Sky Association, a global dark-sky movement to promote astronomy.

72. Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)

- It is the statutory committee constituted under the “Rules for the Manufacture, Use/Import/Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells (Rules, 1989)” framed under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- It functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF & CC).
- Functions: It is responsible for the
 - approval of activities involving large-scale use of hazardous living microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from an environmental perspective.
 - appraisal of proposals relating to the release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment, including experimental field trials.
- The committee or any person authorised by it has the power to take punitive action under the Environment Protection Act.
- Composition
 - GEAC is chaired by the Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC and co-chaired by a representative from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
 - Presently, it has 24 members and meets every month to review the applications in the areas indicated above.
 - The members comprise experts from other ministries as well as institutions such as the ICAR, ICMR, CCMB and so on.

73. Green Rupee Term Deposit (SGRTD) Scheme

- It is an initiative of the State Bank of India (SBI) with the aim of raising money to finance environment-friendly projects.
- The scheme is open to resident individuals, non-individuals, and non-resident Indian (NRI) customers.
- The current framework permits green deposits to be denominated in rupees only.
- It offers investors the flexibility to choose from three distinct tenors: 1,111 days, 1,777 days, and 2,222 days.
- It will offer 10 basis points (bps) interest rates below the card rate for retail and bulk deposits for respective tenors.
- Senior Citizens/ Staff/ Staff Senior Citizens are eligible for an additional interest rate over the applicable rate for the public.
- The benefit of additional interest shall not be available to NRI Senior Citizens/NRI Staff.
- Premature withdrawals and loan/ overdraft facility against the deposit are allowed under the scheme.

74. Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZA)

- The Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZA) in Darjeeling has successfully bred 77 snow leopards since the 1980s.
- Formerly known as Himalayan Zoological Park, it was established in August, 1958 in Darjeeling (West Bengal).
- The Park is striving for the maintenance of ecological balance in the Eastern Himalayas with the following objectives
 - Ex-situ Conservation and Captive Breeding of endangered Himalayan animal species.
 - Educating, motivating and initiating awareness campaigns among the local people as well as visitors on the importance of conservation of Himalayan Ecosystem.
 - Initiating applied research on animal biology, behaviour and health care.
- The zoo has been a pioneer for conservation breeding of endangered Eastern Himalayan Species in India.

- The first ex-situ conservation breeding program started in 1986 as a Snow Leopard conservation breeding project.
- The Red Panda project was started in 1990.
- It is the largest high-altitude zoo in the country.

75. Kachchhi Kharek

- Kachchhi Kharek, the indigenous variety of dates of Kutch, has become the second fruit of Gujarat to get a geographical indication (GI) tag.
- The presence of dates in Kachchh (Kutch) is believed to be around 400-500 years old.
- It is believed that date palm groves along the north-western border of India have developed from the seeds thrown by the settlers, who used to visit Middle-East countries for Haj.
- Dates grown in Kutch are harvested at the khalal stage, the stage when fruits have matured, accumulated sucrose, and have turned red or yellow but are still crisp as they can't withstand moist weather.
- The Kutch date season typically commences on June 15 each year, and the trees are known for their tolerance to salinity and adaptability to extreme drought and heat conditions.
- Kachchh is the only place around the globe where fresh dates are economically cultivated, marketed, and consumed.
- The area accounts for more than 85% of total date palm cultivation in India.

76. Multidimensional Poverty

- A person who is poor can suffer multiple disadvantages at the same time – for example they may have poor health or malnutrition, a lack of clean water or electricity, poor quality of work or little schooling.
- Focusing on one factor alone, such as income, is not enough to capture the true reality of poverty.
- Multidimensional Poverty is a measure of poverty that captures deprivations in education and access to basic infrastructure in addition to income or consumption at the \$2.15 international poverty line (as per World Bank).
- The World Bank defines the international poverty line at USD 2.15 (in 2017 purchasing power parity terms) daily to measure monetary value.

77. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

- Under the scheme, the Centre transfers an amount of Rs 6,000 per year, in three equal instalments, directly into the bank accounts of all landholding farmers irrespective of the size of their land holdings.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- It is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State / UT Governments.
- Objective
 - To supplement the financial needs of the Small and Marginal Farmers in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields.
 - To protect them from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expenses and ensure their continuance in the farming activities.
- According to the data with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, every fourth beneficiary added under the PM-Kisan scheme over the past two months is a woman.

78. Farsi Language

- The External Affairs Minister recently announced that the Government of India has decided to include Farsi as one of the classical languages in India under the New Education Policy.
- Farsi, also known as Persian Language, is the most widely spoken member of the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian languages, a subfamily of the Indo-European languages.
- It is the official language of Iran, and two varieties of Persian known as Dari and Tajik are official languages in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, respectively.
- Significant populations of Farsi speakers can be found in other Persian Gulf countries as well as large communities in the US.
- Farsi in Iran is written in a variety of the Arabic script called Perso-Arabic, which has some innovations to account for Persian phonological differences.

79. Windfall Tax

- It is a tax levied by governments against certain industries when economic conditions allow those industries to experience significantly above-average profits.
- The term “windfall” refers to an unexpected rise in profits, and the tax on windfall gains is known as the windfall tax.
 - These revenues cannot be linked to anything the company actively pursues, such as its business strategy or expansion.
- A recent example is the sudden rise in the profits of the oil and gas industries due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- Purpose
 - Redistribution of unexpected gains when high prices benefit producers at the expense of consumers
 - To fund social welfare schemes
 - As a supplementary revenue stream for the government
 - As a way for the Government to narrow the country’s widening trade deficit

80. 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' Initiative

- Recently, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) launched the 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative.
- The NHAI suggested tagging users to complete the Know Your Customer (KYC) process by the end of January 31 to avoid deactivation.
- Objectives
 - To enhance the efficiency of the Electronic Toll Collection system and provide seamless movement at the Toll Plazas.
 - To discourage user behaviour of using single FASTag for multiple vehicles or linking multiple FASTags to a particular vehicle.

81. El Nino and La Nina

- El Nino and La Nina are two opposing climate trends that deviate from the normal conditions and normally run nine to twelve months, but can often extend.
- These events occur every two to seven years on average (El Nino is more frequent than La Nina), but not on a regular basis and together are referred to as the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle by scientists.

- El Nino is typically known as the warm phase (a band of warmer water spreading from west to east in the equatorial Pacific Ocean) and La Nina is identified as the cold phase (a band of cooler water spreads east-west) of ENSO.
- Both El Nino and La Nina can have global effects on weather, wildfires, ecosystems and economics.

82. Paramyothecium indicum

- Recently, the scientists discovered a new species of phytopathogenic fungus in Kerala, named 'Paramyothecium indicum'.
 - Phytopathogens are parasites surviving on a plant host.
- They are responsible for "serious plant diseases which might negatively affect crop productivity.
- Paramyothecium leaf spots are a type of fungal disease that can affect a variety of plants.
- Some species of Paramyothecium produce secondary metabolites with bio-herbicidal potentials and, therefore, may find application in controlling weeds.

83. Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival

- The 9th edition of the Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival (PPHF), a state festival of Arunachal Pradesh, is about to take place at Seijosa in the Pakke Kessang district.
- Objectives
 - To recognise the role played by the Nyishi tribal group in conserving hornbills in Pakke Tiger Reserve (PTR).
 - To raise alternative sources of income for the region
 - To create awareness in the rest of India about the wonders of PTR and its surrounding areas.
- 2023 Theme: "Domutoh Domutoh, Paga hum Domutoh" that translates to 'Let Our Hornbills Remain' in the Nyishi language.
- This year's festival aims to underscore the critical need for preserving these iconic birds.

84. Panama Canal

- It is an artificial waterway that connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean.
- It cuts across the Isthmus of Panama and is a conduit for maritime trade.
- It is one of the two most strategic artificial waterways in the world, the other being the Suez Canal.
- It consists of a series of locks that raise and lower the water level to facilitate the passage of ships through the continental divide.
- Recently, scientists discovered a lost forest in the Panama Canal, dating back around 22 million years.

85. Blue Economy

- According to the World Bank, the blue economy is the "sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem."
- Fisheries and aquaculture are integral components of the Blue Economy, providing a substantial portion of the world's protein sources.
- Sustainable practices in these sectors are essential for global food security.
- By promoting responsible resource management, the Blue Economy supports the preservation of marine biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Healthy oceans play a crucial role in climate regulation and carbon sequestration.
- Coastal and marine tourism is a significant contributor to the global economy.

86. Greenland

- Greenland is an island country that is a part of Denmark.

- It is located between the Arctic and Atlantic oceans.
- Greenland is the world's largest island.
- The citizens of these countries are all Danish nationals.
- With a population of 56,081 (2020 data), it is the least densely populated region in the world.
- Greenland's capital is Nuuk, About a third of the population lives in Nuuk.
- It is the capital and largest city of Greenland.
- Though a part of the continent of North America, Greenland has been politically and culturally associated with Europe.

87. Competition Commission of India (CCI)

- It is a statutory body of the Government of India responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002.
- The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act) was repealed and replaced by the Competition Act, 2002, on the recommendations of the Raghavan committee.
- The Commission consists of one Chairperson and six Members who shall be appointed by the Central Government.
 - The Chairperson and other Members shall be whole-time Members.
- The Chairperson and every other Member shall be a person of ability, integrity and standing and who has been, or
 - is qualified to be a judge of a High Court
 - has special knowledge of, and professional experience of not less than 15 years in international trade, economics, business, commerce, law, finance, accountancy, management, industry, public affairs, administration or in any other matter which, in the opinion of the Central Government, may be useful to the Commission.
- The commission is a quasi-judicial body which gives opinions to statutory authorities and also deals with other cases.

88. Steadfast Defender 2024

- NATO is initiating its most extensive exercise since the Cold War, focusing on the reinforcement of European allies bordering Russia and its eastern flank in the event of a conflict with a "near-peer" adversary.
- Approximately 90,000 troops are set to participate in the Steadfast Defender-2024 drills, scheduled to continue through May.
- The exercise will involve more than 50 ships, ranging from aircraft carriers to destroyers, over 80 fighter jets, helicopters, and drones, along with at least 1,100 combat vehicles, including 133 tanks and 533 infantry fighting vehicles.
- This exercise surpasses the scale of previous events, with the last comparable exercises being Reforger in 1988 during the Cold War, involving 125,000 participants, and Trident Juncture in 2018, which had 50,000 participants.
- The drills aim to rehearse the execution of regional plans, representing the alliance's first defence plans developed in decades.
- It signifies NATO's proactive approach to addressing contemporary security concerns, particularly with regard to potential conflicts involving a significant adversary like Russia.

89. Second-Generation Distress Alert Transmitter (DAT-SG)

- ISRO has recently achieved a milestone in maritime safety with the second-generation Distress Alert Transmitter (DAT-SG).
- Operational since 2010, it has become a crucial tool for fishermen at sea, offering real-time distress signal capabilities.

- The DAT-SG is the evolution of the initial Distress Alert Transmitter launched in 2010.
- This feature not only confirms the receipt of emergency messages but also reassures fishermen that their signals are being addressed promptly.
- In addition to transmitting distress signals, the DAT-SG can receive messages from the control centre.
- This two-way communication enhances the system's effectiveness, ensuring a more comprehensive response to emergency situations.

90. Thiruvalluvar Day

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India paid tributes to Saint Thiruvalluvar on Thiruvalluvar Day.
- Thiruvalluvar was a poet and philosopher, and is regarded as a cultural icon by Tamils.
- His most popular work is Thirukkural, a collection of couplets on ethics, politics, economy and love.
- His primary work Thirukkural contains 1330 couplets (kurals) that are divided into 133 sections of 10 couplets each.
- The text is divided into three parts with teachings on dharma, artha, and kama (virtue, wealth and love).
- Each section covers a wide range of topics and imparts moral, ethical, and practical guidance to the readers.
- The couplets are composed in a concise and poetic form, making them easily memorable and quotable.

91. Qanat System

- It is an ancient type of water-supply system, developed and still used in arid regions of the world.
- It taps underground mountain water sources trapped in and beneath the upper reaches of alluvial fans and channels the water downhill through a series of gently sloping tunnels.
 - The quality of water coming from the mountains is much better than water on the plains.
 - It'll have lower salinity and be better for crops and people.
- The qanats have been used for centuries in arid and semi-arid parts of north Africa, the Middle East and Asia, where water supplies are limited.
- It's known by a variety of names, "foggara" in north Africa, "falaj" in Oman and "qarez" in parts of Asia.
- Many old qanats are still used in Iran and Afghanistan, chiefly for irrigation.
- Some of the region's qanat systems, like those in Iran, are protected under heritage status.
- The qanat is sustainable as it works with gravity and no electricity is needed.
- It can also be used to create clean energy.

92. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

- Antimicrobials – including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitic – are medicines used to prevent and treat infections in humans, animals and plants.
- AMR occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death.
- As a result of drug resistance, antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines become ineffective and infections become increasingly difficult or impossible to treat.
- It is estimated that bacterial AMR was directly responsible for 1.27 million global deaths in 2019 and 4,95 million deaths were associated with drug resistant infections.

93. GM Crop

- Conventional plant breeding involves crossing species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
- Genetic engineering aims to transcend the genus barrier by introducing an alien gene in the seeds to get the desired effects.
- The alien gene could be from a plant, an animal or even a soil bacterium.
 - Eg. Bt cotton has alien genes from soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt).
- It allows the crop to develop a protein, toxic to the common pest pink bollworm.
- In Bt brinjal, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borer.
- Seeds produced using genetic engineering are called Genetically Modified Seeds.

94. The Great Indian Bustard

It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.

- Its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan (State Bird) and Gujarat.
- Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- Threats: Collision/electrocution with power transmission lines, hunting (still prevalent in Pakistan), habitat loss and alteration as a result of widespread agricultural expansion, etc.
- Measures taken to protect GIB
 - It is kept under the species recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
 - MoEF&CC, Rajasthan government and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have established a conservation breeding facility in Desert National Park at Jaisalmer in June 2019.
 - Project Great Indian Bustard has been launched by the Rajasthan government with an aim of constructing breeding enclosures for the species and developing infrastructure to reduce human pressure on its habitats.
- Protection Status
 - IUCN: Critically Endangered
 - Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): Appendix I
 - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

95. Jagannath Temple

- Recently, the Chief Minister of Odisha unveiled a sprawling heritage corridor around the Jagannath Temple in Puri.
- Located in Puri, Odisha, it is one of the most famous and sacred Hindu temples in the world.
- It is dedicated to Lord Jagannath, a form of the Hindu deity Vishnu.
- It is believed to have been built during the reign of King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva, of the Eastern Ganga dynasty, in the 12th century.
- The Jagannath Temple is a striking example of Kalinga architecture, a distinct style prevalent in the Odisha region.
- The temple's main structure, the sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha) houses the idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra.
- Ratha Yatra is a Hindu festival associated with Lord Jagannath held at Puri in Odisha.
- The most famous Rath Yatra festival begins on the second day of the bright half of the lunar month of Ashadha (June–July) and lasts for nine days.

96. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

- It occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines.
- As a result, antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines become ineffective and infections become increasingly difficult or impossible to treat.

- It is estimated that bacterial AMR was directly responsible for 1.27 million global deaths in 2019 and 4,95 million deaths were associated with drug resistant infections.
- With antimicrobial resistance on the rise, the Union Health Ministry has urged doctors to write down the exact reason when prescribing antibiotics.
- The Director General of Health Services has also appealed to all pharmacists to strictly implement schedule H and H1 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules
- Antibiotics are included in the list of drugs specified under Schedule H; to be sold by retail on the prescription of a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) only.
- Some high-end antibiotics are included in the list of H1 drugs.

97. Khelo India Scheme

- It is being implemented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports through its five verticals which promote sports in the entire country including the rural areas.
- Khelo India is the basic platform to showcase sporting skills at the national level.
- Under the 'Talent Search and Development' vertical of this scheme, Khelo India Athletes are identified, selected, and provided annual financial assistance of Rs 6.28 lakh per annum per athlete.
- The Ministry organizes national-level multisport competitions, namely, Khelo India Youth Games, Khelo India University Games and Khelo India Winter Games.
- TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) is another flagship program of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports which is an attempt to provide assistance to India's top athletes.

98. Guruvayoor Sree Krishna Swamy Temple

- It is also known as the Dwarka of the South, is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and the young form of Lord Krishna.
- It is located in the small town of Guruvayur, in the Thrissur District of Kerala.
- The earliest temple records date back to the 17th century, but other literary texts and legends indicate that the temple may be around 5000 years old.
- Lord Krishna, or Guruvayoorappan, is the chief deity of this temple.
- The temple is built in the traditional Kerala architectural style.
- The central shrine is believed to have been rebuilt in 1638 C.E.
- Structures like the Nalambalam (temple structure surrounding the sanctum sanctorum), Balikkal (sacrificial stone), and Deepasthambham (pillar of lights) are situated on the temple premises.
- The wall of the sanctum sanctorum is decked with ancient 17th-century murals.

99. Central Consumer Protection Authority

- The Central Consumer Protection Authority issued notice to Amazon for sale of sweets under the misleading name of Shri Ram Mandir Ayodhya Prasad.
- The Central Consumer Protection Authority as per the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- Objective: To promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers as a class.
- It has a Chief Commissioner as head, and only two other commissioners as members.
 - One will deal with matters relating to goods
 - The other will look into cases relating to services.
- Powers
 - Conduct investigations into violation of consumer rights and institute complaints/ prosecution
 - Order recall of unsafe goods and services
 - Order discontinuation of unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements
 - Impose penalties on manufacturers/endorsers/publishers of misleading advertisements.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

100. Caddisflies

- Researchers recently discovered a novel species of Caddisfly, named *Rhyacophila masudi*, in Jammu and Kashmir.

Caddisflies are moth-like insects that are attracted to lights at night and live near lakes or rivers.

- They are found worldwide, usually in freshwater habitats and often in brackish and tidal waters too.
- Features
 - Adult caddisflies are commonly 3 to 15 millimetres in length.
 - Generally dull brownish, adult caddisflies resemble moths, with hairy wings and long antennae.
 - However, they do not have the long syphoning mouthparts that butterflies and moths have.
 - They hold their wings tent-like over their bodies when they are not flying.
- They feed primarily on plant juices and flower nectar, though a few are predaceous.
- Importance: They serve as a primary food source for various fish species, and also contribute to water purification by filtering algae and other potentially problematic organisms.

101. Indian Vulture

- The Indian vulture is an Old-World vulture native to Asia.
- They are also known as Indian long-billed vultures due to their comparatively longer beak.
- It is a medium-sized and bulky scavenger feeding mostly on the carcasses of dead animals.
 - Females of this species are smaller than males.
- These are native to India, Pakistan, and Nepal.
- They are usually found in savannas and other open habitats around villages, cities, and near cultivated areas.
- The Indian vulture has suffered a 99% population decrease due to poisoning caused by the veterinary drug diclofenac.
 - Diclofenac is given to working animals as it reduces joint pain and so keeps them working for longer.
- IUCN Status: Critically Endangered

102. Global Alliance for Global Good - Gender Equity and Equality

- India recently established "Global Alliance for Global Good - Gender Equity and Equality" to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.
- It is a new alliance for global good, gender equity, and equality established by India on the sidelines of the 54th annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos.
- It will bring together worldwide best practices, knowledge sharing, and investment opportunities in women's education, health, and enterprise.
- It has garnered support from industry leaders through the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- Supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the alliance will be housed and anchored by the CII Centre for Women Leadership.
- The WEF has come on board as a 'Network Partner' and Invest India as an 'Institutional Partner'.

103. 5. Kanger Valley National Park

- Location: Jagdalpur, in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state.
- It is located on the banks of the Kholaba River (tributary of the Godavari River).
- The entire Park constitutes the core area and there is no buffer zone.
- It is noted for its highly heterogeneous land formations, ranging from low, flat, and gentle areas to steep slopes, plateaus, valleys, and stream courses.
- It is home to three exceptional caves, famous for their amazing geological structures viz. Kutumbasar, Kailash, and Dandak-Stalagmites and Stalactites.

- It is known for the presence of underground limestone caves with stalagmites and stalactite formations.
- Tirathgarh Waterfall is located in the park.
- Flora: Mixed humid deciduous type of forest in which the Sal, Saugaun, teak, and bamboo trees are available in abundance.
- Major wild animals include tigers, mouse deer, leopards, wildcat, sambar, chital, barking deer, langurs, jackals, rhesus macaque, flying squirrel, etc.
- The aerial fauna at the park consists of common hill myna, red jungle fowl, spotted owlet, racket-tailed drongos, parrots, etc.

104. Madhika

- In the remote Kookanam colony near Karivellur grama panchayat, the Chakaliya community faces the imminent extinction of their unique language, Madhika.
- Madhika, without a script, resembles Kannada but contains influences from Telugu, Tulu, Kannada, and Malayalam.
- The Chakaliya community, once nomadic worshipers of Thiruvekatramana and Mariamma, migrated from the hilly regions of Karnataka to northern Malabar centuries ago.
- Initially recognized as a Scheduled Tribe, they later became part of the Scheduled Caste category in Kerala.
- With no documentation, Madhika's survival is at risk as the language is solely passed down orally.
- Social activists attribute the neglect of Madhika to the historical social stigma associated with the Chakaliya community.
- Considered untouchables, they faced dehumanizing treatment, leading many to disassociate from their language and prefer Malayalam.

105. Mosquitofish

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) introduced mosquitofish in 1928 to combat malaria.
- The strategy was for these fish to prey on mosquito larvae, reducing mosquito populations. However, investigations reveal widespread distribution of mosquitofish in India, with detrimental effects on native fauna, leading to the extinction of native fish, amphibians, and various freshwater communities.
- Mosquitofish are considered among the hundred most detrimental invasive alien species.
- In the 1960s, the introduction of mosquitofish, such as *Gambusia affinis* and *Gambusia holbrooki*, gained popularity as an environmentally friendly alternative to pesticides.
- Despite the WHO stopping the recommendation of *Gambusia* for mosquito control in 1982 and designating them as invasive alien species in 2018, India continues to introduce these fish, causing harm to indigenous biodiversity.

106. Kumki

- Kumki (also known as Thappana in Malayalam) is a term used in India for trained captive Asian elephants.
- They are used in operations to trap wild elephants, sometimes to rescue or to provide medical treatment to an injured or trapped wild elephant.
- Kumkis are used for capturing, calming and herding wild elephants or to lead wild elephants away in conflict situations.

107. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THCBD)

- In the battle against antibiotic resistance, scientists have uncovered a potential solution in cannabis-derived compounds known as phytocannabinoids.

- They extracted cannabidiol from cannabis and synthesized THCBD through a chemical process using hydrogen and palladium as a catalyst.
- It highlights the antibiotic properties of tetrahydrocannabidiol (THCBD), a semisynthetic phytocannabinoid, against *Staphylococcus aureus*.
 - It is a bacteria responsible for a significant number of antibiotic-resistant deaths globally.
- However, legal constraints and regulatory challenges associated with cannabis research in India pose obstacles.
- THCBD, despite its potential, faces solubility challenges that need to be addressed for further drug development.

108. Havisure Vaccine

- Recently, the Indian Immunologicals Ltd (IIL) launched India's first indigenously developed Hepatitis A vaccine 'Havisure' in Hyderabad.
 - IIL is a wholly owned subsidiary of National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).
- It is a two-dose vaccine with the first dose administered post 12 months of age and the second at least six months after the first dose.
- It is recommended for children as part of the routine immunisation as well as for individuals at risk of exposure or travel to the regions with high hepatitis A prevalence.
- In addition to this people with occupational risk of infection and suffering from chronic liver diseases also require Hepatitis A vaccination.

109. Parambikulam Tiger Reserve

- Location: Nelliampathy–Anamalai landscape of the Western Ghats Mountains in Palakkad and Thrissur districts of Kerala.
- The reserve supports diverse habitat types, viz., evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, dry deciduous, and shola forests.
- Other unique habitats like montane and marshy grasslands, locally known as 'vayals', are also found.
- Flora
 - The reserve houses teak, rosewood, sandalwood, and neem trees.
 - It is credited with the world's first scientifically managed plantation of teak.
 - It is home to the world's oldest and tallest teak tree named 'Kannimara', which is 450 years old and at a height of 40 metres.
- Fauna
 - The common animals found are Leopard, Elephant, Gaur, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Barking Deer, Common Langur, Nilgiri Langur, Malabar giant squirrel, Sloth Bear, and Wild dog.
 - The only South Indian wild goat, the Nilgiri Tahr is found on the high-altitude rocky hills and grasslands in the tiger reserve.
- The tiger reserve is also home to several rare small animals like Tarantula (large bodied spiders).

110. Article 341

- The President may with respect to any State or Union territory
 - where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification
 - specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes
 - in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be.
- Article 342: The President may with respect to any State or Union territory,
 - and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof

- by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities
- or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes (ST) in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be

111. Coalition of Epidemic Preparedness for Innovation (CEPI)

- It is a global partnership launched in 2017 to develop vaccines to stop future epidemics.
- It was founded in Davos (Switzerland) by the governments of Norway and India, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wellcome Trust and the World Economic Forum.
- Goal: Vaccines should be ready for initial authorisation and manufacturing at scale within 100 days of recognition of a pandemic pathogen, when appropriate.
- The Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, and Government of India has been implementing the IndCEPI mission 'India Centric Epidemic Preparedness through Rapid Vaccine Development: Supporting Indian Vaccine Development'.
- The objectives of this mission are aligned with that of CEPI and aims to strengthen the development of vaccines and associated competencies/technologies for the diseases of epidemic potential in India.

112. Exercise Cyclone

- The Indian Army contingent recently reached Egypt to take part in the India-Egypt Joint Special Forces Exercise CYCLONE.
- It is the 2nd edition of the Exercise Cyclone which will be conducted at Anshas, Egypt.
 - The first edition of the exercise was conducted last year in India.
- Objective: To acquaint both sides with each other's operating procedures in the backdrop of Special Operations in desert/ semi desert terrain under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter.
- It is designed to develop bilateral military cooperation and strengthen bond between two armies through conduct of discussions and rehearsal of tactical military drills.
- It will involve planning and execution of special operations in sub conventional domains and conducted in three phases.
- The Indian contingent is being represented by troops from the Parachute Regiment (Special Forces) and an Egyptian contingent is being represented by Egyptian Commando Squadron and Egyptian Airborne Platoon.

113. FAO's Committee on Fisheries

- India has been elected as the First Vice Chair of the Food and Agriculture Organization's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management.
- It is a subsidiary body of the Food and Agriculture Organization, established by the FAO Conference in 1965.
- Functions
 - Addressing international fishing and aquaculture issues, offering policy guidance on fisheries management, acknowledging global challenges, and advocating for collaborative solutions to ensure the environmental, economic, and social sustainability of the fishing industry.
 - Provides recommendations to the FAO Council or its Director-General and serves as a platform for negotiating global agreements and non-binding instruments.
 - It also reviews specific matters related to fisheries and aquaculture referred to it by the Council.
- Notably, a new sub-group, the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, was established under the COFI in 2022, during the 35th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in Rome.

- This sub-committee is set to collaborate closely with the existing Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

114. FiloBot

- Recently, a new innovative plant-inspired robot named FiloBot has been developed that climbs up structures just like climbing vines.
- It is different from conventional climbing robots as it doesn't depend on pre-programmed movements.
- It instead absorbs 3D printing filament through its head and extends its length over time, just like a creeper.
- The team utilised a combination of plant behaviours like phototropism, negative phototropism and gravitropism and utilises these naturally occurring behaviours in high-tech robots.

115. Scrub Typhus

- According to a new study conducted in Tamil Nadu's Vellore, every millimetre increase in rainfall could lead to a 0.5 to 0.7 per cent rise in monthly scrub typhus
- Scrub Typhus is an infectious disease caused by bacteria called *Orientia tsutsugamushi*.
- It is transmitted through infected mites and does not spread from person to person.
- The symptoms typically include fever, headache, body ache and sometimes a rash.
- In severe cases, the infection can lead to respiratory distress, brain and lung inflammation, kidney failure and multi-organ failure, ultimately resulting in death.
- Several factors like vector abundance, climatic factors, exposures like farming and owning domestic animals, outdoor activities and sanitation, affect its prevalence.
- This disease is more prevalent in cooler months.
- Treatment: Antibiotic doxycycline. Doxycycline can be used in persons of any age.
- There is no vaccine available for this disease.

116. Karpoori Thakur

- The Centre recently announced that it would award the Bharat Ratna posthumously to Karpoori Thakur, former chief minister of Bihar
- He was popularly known as "Jan Nayak".
- Served as the Chief Minister of Bihar from December 1970 to June 1971 (Socialist Party/Bharatiya Kranti Dal), and from December 1977 to April 1979 (Janata Party).
- left his graduate college to join the Quit India Movement.
- He spent 26 months in prison.
- leading P & T employees during the general strike of the Central Government employees in 1960.
- In 1970, he undertook a fast unto death for 28 days to promote the cause of Telco labourers.

117. World's First Melanistic Tiger Safari

- The Odisha Government recently unveiled plans to establish the world's first melanistic tiger safari near Baripada, the district headquarters of Mayurbhanj.
- Objective: To provide a unique experience for tourists to witness the rare and majestic melanistic tigers found exclusively in the Similipal Tiger Reserve.
 - The Similipal Tiger Reserve is the sole habitat for melanistic tigers in the wild globally, as reported in the 2018 All India Tiger Estimation.
- The melanistic tiger safari, covering an area of 200 hectares along NH-18, will be located about 15 km from the Similipal Tiger Reserve.
- Melanistic tigers, characterized by a dark coat due to excess melanin, have been captured on cameras installed in Odisha forests.

- The safari serves as a platform to raise awareness about the conservation needs of melanistic tigers and showcase Odisha's commitment to preserving its unique biodiversity.

118. Arambai Tenggol

- Arambai Tenggol is a Meitei activist organisation in the Indian state of Manipur, often described as a radical organisation.
- Initially established in 2020 as a cultural outfit, it has undergone a transformation into a radical organization.
- It is also a revivalist organisation that aims to reestablish the pre-Hindu, native Sanamahis religion among the Meiteis.
- It enjoys the patronage of Manipur's titular king and parliamentarian Leishemba Sanajaoba as well as the Manipur chief minister.
- The group is suspected to have played a significant role in the Meitei-Kuki clashes that started in May 2023.

119. Bharat Ratna

- It is the highest civilian Award of the country which was instituted in the year 1954.
- It is awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order in any field of human endeavour.
- Any person without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex is eligible for these awards.
- Though usually conferred on India-born citizens, the Bharat Ratna has been awarded to one naturalised citizen, Mother Teresa and to two non-Indians, Pakistan national Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and former South African President Nelson Mandela.
- The original statutes did not provide for posthumous awards but were amended in 1955 to permit them.
 - Former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri became the first individual to be honoured posthumously.
- The recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister himself to the President and no formal recommendations for this are necessary.
- The number of annual awards is restricted to a maximum of three in a particular year.
- On conferment of the award, the recipient receives a Sanad (certificate) signed by the President and a medallion. The award does not carry any monetary grant.

120. Batadrava Than

- Also known as the Bordowa Than, it is one of the most sacred sites for Assamese Vaishnavites.
- It is located in Nagaon district of Assam.
- It is a temple complex at the birthplace of revered Vaishnavite reformer-saint Srimanta Sankardeva.
- Features
 - It is enclosed by a brick wall and has two entrances.
 - The Kirtan Ghar, a capacious prayer house, was initially built by Sankardev using temporary materials.
 - Connected to the Kirtan Ghar is the Manikut, a place dedicated to housing sacred texts, scriptures, and manuscripts.
 - The campus encompasses diverse structures such as Natghar (Drama hall), Alohighar (Guest room), Sabhaghar (Assembly hall), Rabhaghar (Music room), Hatipukhuri, Aakashi Ganga, Doul mandir (festive temple), and others.
- A very big festival "Doul Mahotsava" (Holi) is a yearly attraction for the devotees in Bordowa.

121. Lake Retba

- The Lake Retba's waters are virtually devoid of life and are on the verge of disappearing due to pollution and mining.
- Also known as Lac Rose (the Pink Lake), it is located north of the Cap Vert peninsula of Senegal, northeast of Dakar (Senegal).
- The pink coloration is due to the proliferation of halophilic green algae (living in a salty environment), *Dunaliella salina*, which contain red pigments.
 - The algae is associated with halophilic bacteria of the genus *Halobacterium*.
- This microscopic alga's resistance to salt comes from its high concentration of carotenoid pigments, which protect it from light, and its high glycerol content.
- In fact, *Dunaliella salina* contains at least four antioxidant pigments (beta-carotene, astaxanthin, lutein and zeaxanthin), which are rich in vitamins and trace elements.
- When salinity is high, algae with red pigments thrive, and when salinity is low, they give way to other algae rich in green pigments.

122. Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

- Section 420 of the IPC, or IPC 420 as it is commonly known, deals with the act of cheating and dishonestly inducing
 - The person deceived to deliver any property to any person, or to make, alter, or destroy the whole or any part of a valuable security
 - Or anything which is signed or sealed and capable of being converted into a valuable security.
- Section 415 of the IPC defines the offence of cheating.
- In simpler terms, cheating is a dishonest act performed in order to gain some advantage out of it.
- Section 420 IPC is a serious form of cheating that includes inducement (to lead or move someone to happen) in terms of the delivery of property as well as valuable securities.
- This section is also applicable to matters where the destruction of property is caused by cheating or inducement.
- The person found guilty under this section shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term that may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to a fine.
- The offence is cognizable and non-bailable.

123. European Ports Alliance

- The EU has launched the "European Ports Alliance" to streamline methods for combating drug smuggling and criminal group infiltration at ports.
- The initiative was inaugurated at Belgium's Antwerp port, which serves as the primary gateway for cocaine entering Europe.
- It brought together EU interior ministers and representatives from 16 EU ports and sea transport organizations.
- The main goal is to enhance collaboration and coordination in addressing security challenges related to port activities..

124. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)

- The Ministry of Education has recently disclosed the findings of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the academic year 2021-22.
- This annual survey, initiated in 2011, comprehensively encompasses all higher education institutions across India.
- The report include a substantial increase in overall enrollment and a noteworthy uptick in enrollment across various categories.

- The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has experienced a significant jump, indicating an encouraging trend in educational participation.
- Ph.D. enrollment has seen a notable increase, showcasing a positive trajectory in advanced academic pursuits.
- The prevalence of undergraduate degrees remains prominent, reflecting the educational landscape's foundation.
- Social sciences emerge as dominant in postgraduate programs, as indicated by the survey's findings.
- The report sheds light on enrollment trends in STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), providing insights into the educational landscape's evolving dynamics.
- Additional aspects covered in the survey include the availability of infrastructure, the total number of institutions surveyed, and detailed information about the faculty.

125. Padma Awards-2024

- The Padma Awards, India's highest civilian honors, are conferred in three categories: Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri.
- Announced annually ahead of Republic Day, the awards recognize exceptional contributions across diverse fields.
- For 2024, a total of 132 Padma Awards are announced, including 2 duo cases where the award is counted as one.
- The list includes 5 recipients of the prestigious Padma Vibhushan, 17 eminent personalities receiving the Padma Bhushan, and 110 inspiring individuals conferred the Padma Shri.
- Among the awardees, 30 are women, and 8 non-resident or foreign awardees with roots in India are also recognized.
- Nine of the selected awardees will be honored posthumously.

126. Black Tiger Safari in Odisha

- Odisha has recently unveiled the world's first exclusive melanistic tiger safari, located next to the Similipal Tiger Reserve.
- The primary objective is to enhance tourism and provide improved research opportunities, along with enhanced public viewing access to the rare melanistic tigers, which are challenging to spot in forested areas.
- Black tigers, also referred to as pseudo-melanistic tigers, are essentially regular Bengal tigers characterised by heightened melanin production.
- These tigers exhibit dark stripes rather than the conventional orange and black pattern typically associated with Bengal tigers.
- Notably, the unique black tigers are currently found exclusively in Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR).

127. Bhutan Election : Victory of People's Democratic Party

- On January 10th, the Election Commission announced the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the winner in the Bhutan National Assembly elections, securing 30 out of 47 seats.
- The Bhutan Tendrel Party emerged as the opposition with 17 seats in this fourth National Assembly election since the country's democratization.
- Notably, there was a decline in voter turnout, reaching 63% and 65.6% for the two rounds, compared to 66.36% and 71.46% recorded in 2018.
- Bhutan underwent a transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy in 2008.

- The bicameral parliament consists of the National Council (upper house) and the National Assembly (lower house).
- The National Assembly elections employ a two-round voting system, involving a primary round with all parties and a general election between the top two contenders

128. ECOWAS

- The military regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger recently announced their immediate withdrawal from ECOWAS.
- It is the West African nation's regional group which was established in 1975 through the Lagos Treaty.
- Objective: To have a single common currency and create a single, large trading bloc in areas of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, financial issues and social and cultural matters.
- Beyond the goals of economic cooperation, ECOWAS has attempted to quell military conflicts in the region.
- ECOWAS also operated a regional peacekeeping operation known as ECOMOG, led by Nigeria in the 1990s and early 2000s.
- Members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo.
 - These countries have both cultural and geopolitical ties and shared common economic interests.
- Headquarters: Abuja, Nigeria.

129. Western Equine Encephalitis Virus (WEEV)

- In December 2023, the WHO was notified of a human case of Western Equine Encephalitis Virus (WEEV) in Argentina, the first since 1996.
- The outbreak has since grown to 21 confirmed human cases.
- WEEV is a mosquito-borne infection caused by the Western Equine Encephalitis Virus (WEEV).
- The virus belongs to the Togaviridae family of viruses with neurological symptoms in severe cases, and there is no specific antiviral treatment.
- It has an approximately 11.5 kilobases long single-stranded RNA genome.
- It is a recombinant of the eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEEV) and a Sindbis-like virus.
- Passerine birds are thought to be the reservoir and equine species as intermediate hosts.
- Exposures include veterinary work, construction and outdoor activities.

130. End-to-End Encryption (E2EE)

- Encryption is a way of protecting data from unauthorised access or tampering.
- It works by transforming the data into a secret code that only the intended recipient can decipher.
- This comes in useful for various cases, such as securing online communications, storing sensitive information, and verifying digital identities.
- There are two main types of encryption
 - Symmetric: It uses the same key to encrypt and decrypt the data.
 - Asymmetric: It uses a pair of keys viz. one public and one private. The public key can be shared with anyone, but the private key must be kept secret.
- End-to-end encryption protects data as it's transferred between a location – which is crucial wherever there's a rapid exchange of information.
- In an E2EE-enabled app, only the person on each end – the sender and receiver – can read any exchanged messages.

131. Sapinda Marriages

- Sapinda marriages involve individuals closely related within specified degrees, as per Section 3(f)(ii) of the HMA.
- The MHA prohibits sapinda marriages within a certain range of lineal ascent, ensuring that marriages do not occur between individuals with a common lineal ascendant within the defined limits.
- Sapinda marriages that violate Section 5(v) and lack an established custom permitting them are declared void.
- The sole exception to this prohibition arises when both parties' customs permit sapinda marriages, as defined in Section 3(a) of the HMA.

132. Places of Worship Act, 1991

- It was enacted to freeze the status of religious places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947
- It prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and ensures the maintenance of their religious character.
- Prohibition of Conversion (Section 3)
 - Prevents the conversion of a place of worship, whether in full or part, from one religious' denomination to another or within the same denomination.
- Maintenance of Religious Character (Section 4(1))
- Ensures that the religious identity of a place of worship remains the same as it was on August 15, 1947.

133. Grantham Inscriptions

- Two stone inscriptions of 'Grantha' and Tamil dating 11th and 16th centuries respectively were recently discovered at Pazhnchervazhi village near Kangayam.
- Grantha is an important historical script that was once used to write Sanskrit throughout South East Asia and greater Tamil Nadu.
- When the Malayalam language began to freely borrow words as well as the rules of grammar from Sanskrit, this script was adopted for writing that language and was known as Arya Ezhuthu.
- Both Grantha and Tamil scripts appear alike in modern forms. The evolution of both scripts from Brahmi was also more or less similar.
- The development of the Grantha script in Tamil Nadu may be divided into four periods viz. the archaic and ornamental (commonly known as Pallava Grantha), the transitional, the mediaeval; and the modern.

134. Humboldt's Enigma

- It is a term used to describe the puzzle of why some mountain regions, especially in the tropics, have exceptionally high biodiversity.
- It is a concept proposed by Alexander von Humboldt in the 19th century who explored the relationship between temperature, altitude, humidity and biodiversity.
- It challenges the conventional wisdom that the most biodiverse areas are the lowland tropical forests.
- The diversity decreases away from the tropics, but mountains have been an important exception which is the essence of Humboldt's enigma.
- The factors that drive biodiversity on mountains are climate, geology and evolutionary processes.
- The eastern Himalayas are cited as an example where climate dissimilarity and diverse geological composition contribute to high biodiversity.

135. Nitrogen Hypoxia

- Hypoxia is a medical term for a state of insufficient oxygen in the body.
- Nitrogen hypoxia is a process where pure nitrogen gas, or nitrogen gas at concentrations high enough to be lethal, is inhaled to the point of causing asphyxiation.
- It is a relatively new alternative to more common forms of capital punishment, like lethal injection and electrocution.
- In this method of execution, a respirator mask is placed over the inmate's face, and pure nitrogen is pumped into the person's lungs instead of oxygen.
- It leads to unconsciousness and then death from lack of oxygen.
- Recently, Alabama successfully executed a man who spent decades on death row using a new method called nitrogen hypoxia.

136. Alpenglow

- It is a natural phenomenon when mountain slopes are illuminated by the sun as it rises or sets.
- The slopes turn a rosy, reddish, or orange hue depending on the angle of the sun and atmospheric conditions.
 - This is because these are the longest warm rays of electromagnetic waves (light) that reach various surfaces.
 - Cold rays are shorter and disappear faster in the atmosphere.
- It occurs during the twilight hours before or after sunset; and can also occur in the first minutes after the sun rises or sets.
- It can change quickly depending on how fast the sun sets on any given day.

137. Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve

- It is a 17-square-kilometre biodiversity hotspot located in Arunachal Pradesh, near the famous Eagle nest Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It is home to critically endangered species such as the passerine bird Bugun *Liocichla* (*Liocichlabugunorum*), which is named after the Buguns community.
- It was one of the first bird species to be discovered in India since the country's independence in 1947, and it lives only on the Buguns' community lands.
- The Buguns are an indigenous community with a population of about 2,000 people, spread across 12 villages that are dotted outside the forests of Eagle nest Wildlife Sanctuary.

138. International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- The ICJ, also known as the World Court, is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN).
- It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the UN and began work in April 1946.
- It is supported by a Registry, its permanent administrative secretariat, which operates independently of the United Nations Secretariat.
- All hearings of the ICJ are conducted publicly. The official languages of the Court are French and English.
- The ICJ serves two main functions viz.
 - Contentious Cases: It acts as a dispute settlement body between two member states, addressing several issues such as land frontiers, maritime boundaries, territorial sovereignty, diplomatic relations etc.
 - Advisory Opinions: It can provide advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by UN bodies or specialized agencies, clarifying lawful functioning or strengthening authority in relation to member states.

- The court's judgments in contentious cases are final and binding on the parties to a case, and without appeal.
- Composition
 - It comprises 15 judges from different countries, each elected to nine-year terms by majority votes in the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.
 - One-third of the judges are elected every three years.
 - The ICJ Statute allows a state party involved in a case without a judge of its nationality on the bench to appoint a judge ad hoc for that specific case.

139. Shahi Idgah and Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple Dispute

- Raja Veer Singh Bundela of Orchha had also built a temple on the same premises in 1618 and the mosque was built by Aurangzeb in 1670 on the site of an earlier temple.
- The Krishna Janmasthan temple in Mathura is believed to have been built around 2,000 years ago, in the 1st century CE.
- A survey has been ordered due to demands by Hindu representatives for complete ownership of the premises where the Keshava Deva temple was destroyed on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1670.
- The area was regarded as nazul land — non-agricultural state land owned by the Marathas, and then the British.
- The temple was originally built in 1618 during the reign of Jahangir and was patronized by Aurangzeb's brother and rival, Dara Shukoh.
- In 1815, the Raja of Benaras purchased the 13.77-acre land from the East India Company.
- Later, the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust was established

140. National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)

- NCIIPC is a government organization that protects critical information infrastructure (CII) for the public. It was established in 2014 and is based in New Delhi.
- The NCIIPC's mission is to protect critical information infrastructure from unauthorized access, modification, use, disclosure, disruption, incapacitation, or destruction.
- It also provides advice to reduce the vulnerabilities of critical information infrastructure from cyber terrorism, cyber warfare, and other threats.
- The NCIIPC defines CII as computer resources whose incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating impact on national security, economy, public health, or safety.

141. Snow Leopard

- India has an estimated 718 snow leopards in the wild, according to a first-of-its kind, four-year long estimation exercise.
- The maximum number of cats were estimated to be in Ladakh (477), followed by Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (9).
- The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAII) began in 2019.
- It involves the Worldwide Fund for Nature-India and the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, along with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).
- Snow Leopard is found in the mountainous regions of central and southern Asia.
- In India, it is seen in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Hemis National Park has a good presence of Snow Leopard.

- They play a key role as a top predator, an indicator of the health of their high-altitude habitat, and impacts of climate change on mountain environments.
- Threats: free ranging dogs, human wildlife conflicts and poaching.
- Conservation Status
 - IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule I

142. Agasthyagama edge

- Recently, researchers discovered a new species of tiny lizards in the biodiverse forests of Western Ghats, describing them as a "diminutive dragon."
- The lizard, named Agasthyagama edge or the northern kangaroo lizard, belongs to the Agamidae family.
 - It is the second one of the Agasthyagama genus after A. beddomii or Indian kangaroo lizard that was previously reported from Sivagiri hills in Tamil Nadu.
- It is found in the southern Western Ghats at Kulamavu in Idukki.
- Characteristics
 - Maximum snout-vent length of 4.3 cm.
 - Poor climbers due to a reduced fifth toe, making them terrestrial
 - Feeds on small insects, runs fast, and hides within dry leaves to evade predators.
 - Found in areas with dense leaf litter cover.
 - Uniform dull olive-brown body with a slightly darker head.
 - White throat with a broad dark brown stripe on its dewlap and brick yellow scales on the outside.

143. Mitochondrial coxiella effector F (MceF)

- Recently, researchers discovered a previously unidentified protein named mitochondrial coxiella effector F (MceF) with antioxidant properties.
- It is a bacterial protein capable of keeping human cells healthy even when the cells have a heavy bacterial burden.
- It is produced by Coxiella burnetii, a Gram-negative intracellular bacterium.
- After invading host cells, Coxiella burnetii releases MceF into cells.
- MceF interacts with glutathione peroxidase 4 (GPX4) to improve mitochondrial function by promoting an anti-oxidizing effect that averts cell damage and death.
 - GPX4 is an antioxidant enzyme located in the mitochondria.

144. Exercise -Sada Tanseeq

- Recently, the militaries of India and Saudi Arabia are conducting their first Joint Military Exercise named as Sada Tanseeq at Mahajan, Rajasthan.
- Objective: To train troops of both sides for Joint Operations in Semi Desert terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
- It will enable both sides to share their best practices in the tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting operations in sub-conventional domains.
- It will facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops from both sides.
- It will involve Establishment of Mobile Vehicle Check Post, Cordon & Search Operation, House Intervention Drill, Reflex Shooting, Slithering and Sniper Firing.

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