

Monthly Current Affairs – December 2023

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Art and Culture

Santiniketan

Context: Visva-Bharati University has finally replaced the controversial plaques commemorating UNESCO's world heritage tag to Santiniketan with a board approved by the Centre.

Shantiniketan

- Residence of Rabindranath Tagore, where he crafted numerous literary works, encompassing songs, poems, and novels.
- Situated in Birbhum District, West Bengal, India.
- Established by Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore.
- Hosts festivals like Briksharopan (Planting Saplings) and Halakarshan (Plowing the Fields).

<p>Santiniketan is a renowned cultural and educational institution (comprising Visva Bharati University) located in the Birbhum District of West Bengal, India.</p>		
Meaning of Name	Santiniketan literally means "abode of peace" in Bengali.	
Origin	Initially, it started as an ashram (hermitage) founded by Rabindra Nath Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore , but eventually developed into a centre of art, culture, and learning.	
Teaching	It is known for its unique educational philosophy , which emphasizes the integration of nature, creativity, and holistic learning . It follows the concept of an open-air classroom where students are encouraged to learn in close connection with nature.	
Key Features	Santiniketan is also adorned with splendid sculptures, frescoes, murals, and paintings created by renowned artists such as Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose (one of the pioneers of modern Indian art) and Ramkinkar Baij (master sculptor and painter) among others.	
Significance	Cultural and heritage place, associated with Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore	
West Bengal's Representation	If selected, Santiniketan would be the second cultural symbol from West Bengal to be included in the UNESCO list (1 st being 'Durga Puja in Kolkata' in UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2021)	
UNESCO World Heritage site	Landmarks or areas selected for their cultural, historical, scientific, or other significant value	
Selection Criteria	Sites must be already-classified landmarks , unique and significant culturally or physically	
World Heritage Committee	Selects and monitors World Heritage Sites , manages the World Heritage Fund, and provides financial assistance	
Membership	India is a member of the World Heritage Committee (2021-2025)	

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

- Recognized by UNESCO for its exceptional cultural or physical significance.
- Managed by the International 'World Heritage Programme,' overseen by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
- Selection criteria include the classification as landmarks, uniqueness, and cultural or physical significance (e.g., ancient ruins, historical structures, cities, monuments).
- India has been a member of the World Heritage Committee thrice in the past (1985-91, 2001-07 & 2011-15) and is currently serving its fourth term (2021-25).
- India boasts 41 World Heritage Sites, comprising 33 cultural, 7 natural, and one mixed-type site - Khangchendzonga National Park.

Edinburgh to Kozhikode: UNESCO's City of Literature list

Context: Kozhikode in Kerala has made it to the prestigious creative cities list of UNESCO for contributions in the fields of literature.

- Kozhikode District, once the **capital of the Zamorins**, was a renowned commercial center and is now among the best cities in Kerala.
- Home to acclaimed writers like M.T. Vasudevan Nair and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, as well as storyteller S.K. Pottekkatt.

- **Boasts a vibrant theatre tradition with notable figures** such as K.T. Muhammed and Thikkodiyan.
- Produced top Malayalam cinema scriptwriter, Ranjith.

UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

- The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), **established in 2004, fosters cooperation among cities prioritizing creativity** for sustainable urban development.
- Nearly 300 cities worldwide collaborate to place creativity and cultural industries at the core of local development and work actively at the international level.
- **The Network spans seven creative fields:** Crafts and Folk Art, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature, and Music.
- **Edinburgh was the first City of Literature**, while Kozhikode holds the distinction of being India's first City of Literature.
- **Gwalior has been named a City of Music this year**, a title previously awarded to Varanasi (2015) and Chennai (2017), with cities submitting bids to justify their consideration.

Sahitya Akademi Award

Context: Tamil author Rajasekaran (Devibharathi), Telugu writer T. Patanjali Sastry and Malayalam writer E.V. Ramakrishnan are among those named for the Sahitya Akademi awards for 2023.

- Nine books of poetry, six novels, five short story collections, three essays and one literary study have won the awards.

About Sahitya Akademi Award

- Established in **1954, Sahitya Akademi** is a prestigious literary institution.
- The annual literary honor presented by Sahitya Akademi serves as a recognition of excellence in literature, as part of India's National Academy of Letters.
- **Each year, Sahitya Akademi grants 24 awards** to outstanding literary works in recognized languages, including translations. Notably, this encompasses English and Rajasthani, in **addition to the 22 languages mentioned** in the Indian Constitution.
- Beyond the constitutional languages, Sahitya Akademi extends recognition to English and Rajasthani, incorporating them into the fabric of its initiatives.
- The **Sahitya Akademi award holds a distinguished status** as the **second-highest literary** accolade bestowed by the Government of India, trailing only the Jnanpith award.

Jain Sculptures Discovered in Mysuru District

Context: Three Jain sculptures dated to around 11th century CE were discovered in Varuna village in Mysore district recently.

About the Sculptures

- One of the sculptures represents a Jain Teerthankara, but its identity remains elusive due to the presence of effaced or damaged symbols.
- The collective region of Varuna, Varakodu, and Vajamangala in Mysore, Karnataka, was once a flourishing hub of Jainism.

About Jainism

- Jainism, one of India's oldest religions dating back to at least the mid-first century B.C.E., remains an integral part of Indian culture today.
- Jain teachings emphasize the path to enlightenment through nonviolence and minimizing harm to all living beings, including plants and animals.
- Similar to Hindus and Buddhists, Jains believe in the cycle of reincarnation, where one's karma determines the pattern of birth, death, and rebirth.

Philosophical Tenets

Ahimsa (Non-violence)

- The central principle underscores non-violence in thought, word, and deed towards all living beings.

Aparigraha (Non-possession)

- Advocating minimal attachment to material possessions and practicing detachment from worldly desires.

Brahmacharya (Celibacy or ethical sexual conduct)

- Encouraging responsible and mindful sexual behavior, subject to varied interpretations among different sects.

Satya (Truthfulness)

- Promoting truthful speech and discouraging deception in any form.

Anekantavada (Many-sidedness)

- Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of reality and embracing diverse perspectives.

Geography

Cyclone Michaung

Context: Heavy rain in Tamil Nadu's capital caused havoc. Union Home assures Chief Minister of full support from the Centre.

Cross-Basin Cyclones

If a tropical cyclone originates in the south China Sea, crosses Thailand, and enters the Bay of Bengal, its name remains unchanged. This system guarantees the distinct identification of cyclones and prevents name repetition.

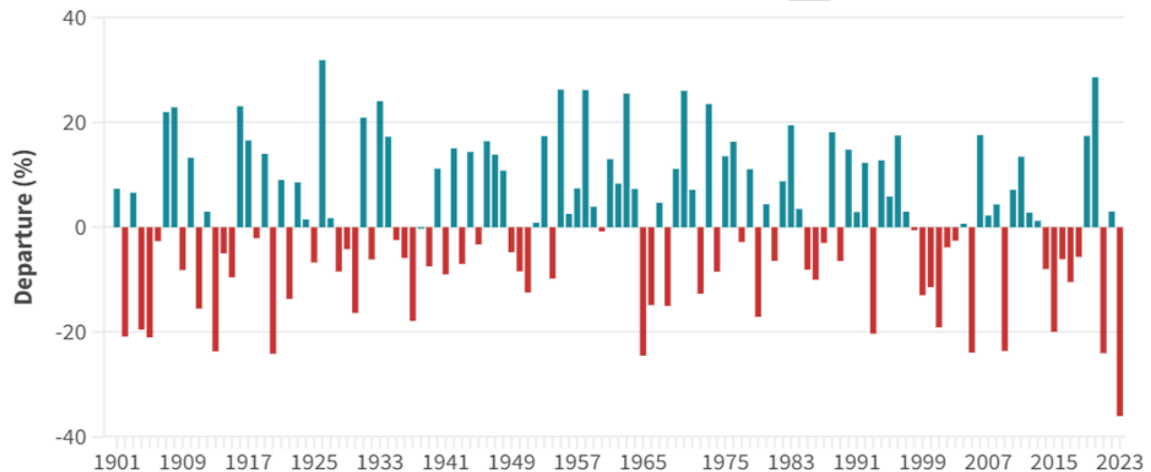
Origin	Originating in the South-West Bay of Bengal, Cyclone Michaung draws its name from a suggestion by Myanmar, symbolizing strength and resilience.
Cyclone Statistics in 2023	Upon reaching full formation, Cyclone Michaung will become the fourth cyclonic storm in the Bay of Bengal and the sixth cyclone to emerge in the Indian Ocean during 2023.
Cyclone Naming Process:	The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) oversees rotating name lists for tropical cyclones. Cyclones receive names from Regional Specialized Meteorological Centers (RSMCs) and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centers (TCWCs) globally, with six RSMCs worldwide.
Role of RSMCs in Naming	RSMCs, such as the Indian RSMC with 13 member nations, propose names for cyclones in their respective regions. This practice replaces the historical naming conventions based on locations, objects, or saint feast days.
Naming Sequence	The naming sequence follows a column-wise approach, starting from the first row of column one to the last row in column thirteen. Once a name is assigned to a north Indian Ocean cyclone, it is not reused, ensuring unique identification.

India Sees Lowest August Rainfall In A Century

Context: India sees lowest August rainfall in a century; September is likely to be 'normal'.

About Lowest rainfall in a century

- **About:** Rainfall in August had been the least in over a century, with India getting 36% less rain than it usually does in the month.
- **Second most rainfall month:** August usually sees the most amount of rainfall (25.4 cm) after July's 28 cm.
- **Severe deficits:** The last time India recorded such severe deficits in August was in 2005, when the shortfall was about 25% of the normal, and in 2009, when India saw its biggest drought in half a century and August rainfall was 24% less than what was due.



Reason for such a low rainfall

El-Nino

Strengthening of the El Nino.

Sea condition

Unfavourable conditions both in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

Global Climate Change

Climate change can alter weather patterns and lead to shifts in rainfall distribution. Some regions may experience reduced rainfall due to changing climate conditions.

Natural Climate Variability

There are natural climate variability factors, such as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO), which can cause fluctuations in rainfall patterns over time.

Deforestation

Human activities like deforestation can disrupt local weather patterns and reduce rainfall by disrupting the natural water cycle and decreasing the amount of moisture released into the atmosphere through transpiration.

Urbanization

Urban areas with concrete and asphalt surfaces can create what is known as the "urban heat island" effect. This can lead to changes in local atmospheric circulation, potentially reducing rainfall in urbanized region.

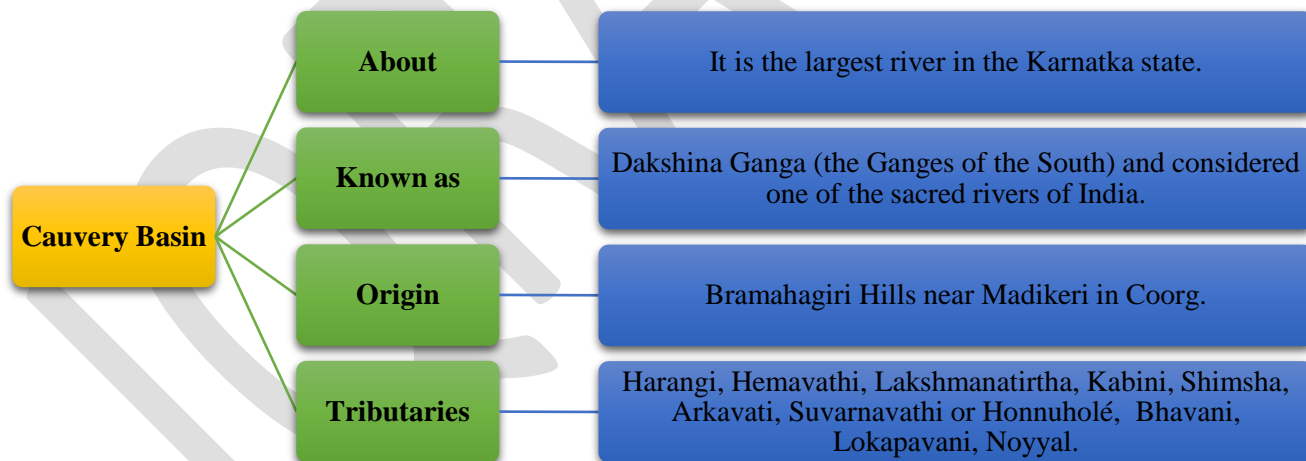
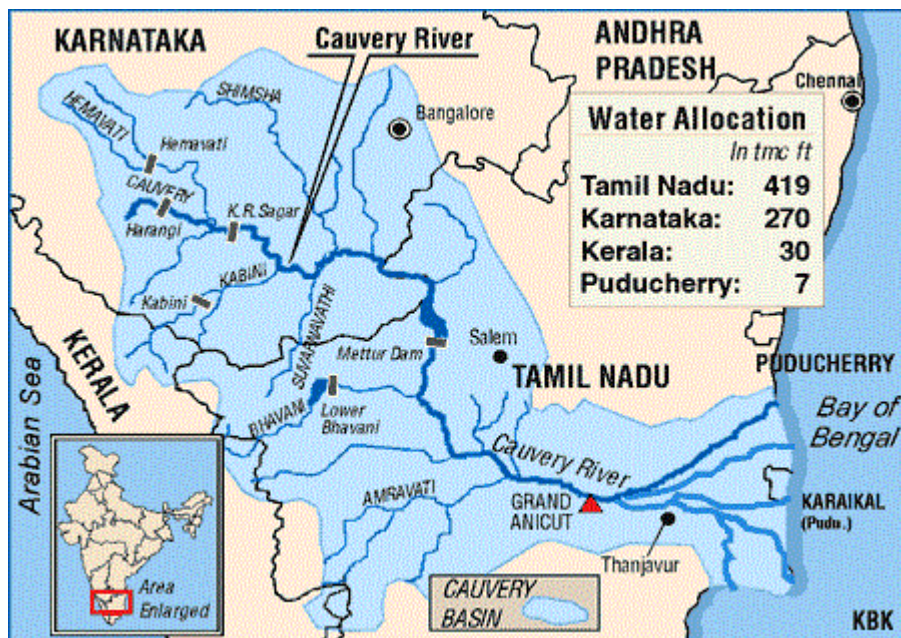
Cauvery Basin

Context: Recently, a paper published by scientists and researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, revealed that natural vegetation on nearly 12,850 sq. km of land in the Cauvery basin was lost in the 50 years between 1965 to 2016.

- Karnataka has lost much more than any other State in the basin.

Key Points

- The Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, and the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary have witnessed negative alterations in their forest cover.
- Bannerghatta National Park, specifically its moist deciduous forest area, has undergone a decline from 50% in 1973 to 28.5% in 2015. This reduction is linked to the "anthropogenic pressure" exerted on the National Park and its adjacent areas.



Polity

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

Context: The Central Government recently appointed seven people, including a former Delhi police commissioner, as 'special monitors' of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

About NHRC

- **Established on October 12, 1993**, under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, the NHRC is a statutory body.
- It functions as the country's **watchdog for human rights**, aligning with the Paris Principles (1991).
- Objectives include **strengthening institutional arrangements** for comprehensive human rights addressing and investigating excesses independently of the government.
- **Composition** consists of a chairperson (retired Chief Justice of India) and eight members (four full-time and four deemed members).
- **Members are appointed by the President** based on the six-member committee's recommendations for a term of 3 years or till the age of 70.
- **NHRC functions include investigating human rights violations**, intervening in relevant court proceedings, visiting detention institutions, promoting human rights literacy, and studying international instruments for recommendations.
- **Empowered with the authority of a civil court**, NHRC can summon witnesses, grant compensation for police brutality victims, and approach higher courts if necessary.
- **NHRC can take "suo motu" cognizance** of human rights violations, even without a formal complaint.

PARAMETERS	DETAILS
ORIGIN	Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993
COMPOSITION	1 Chairperson + 4 Members + 4 Ex-officio members
QUALIFICATION	Chairperson: Retired Chief Justice of India 1 Member: Serving or retired judge of the Supreme Court 1 Member: Serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court 2 Members: Knowledgeable in human rights 4 Ex-officio members: Chairpersons of NCSC, NCST, NCW and NCM (Serving Supreme Court judge or serving Chief Justice of a High Court can be appointed after consultation with the Chief Justice of India)
APPOINTED BY	President
RECOMMENDED BY	Six Member Committee: 1. Prime Minister 2. Home Minister 3. Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha 4. Speaker of the Lok Sabha 5. Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha 6. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha
REMOVED BY	President

Nari Adalat

Context: Government to implement the component of "Nari Adalat" in a phased manner under Mission Shakti.

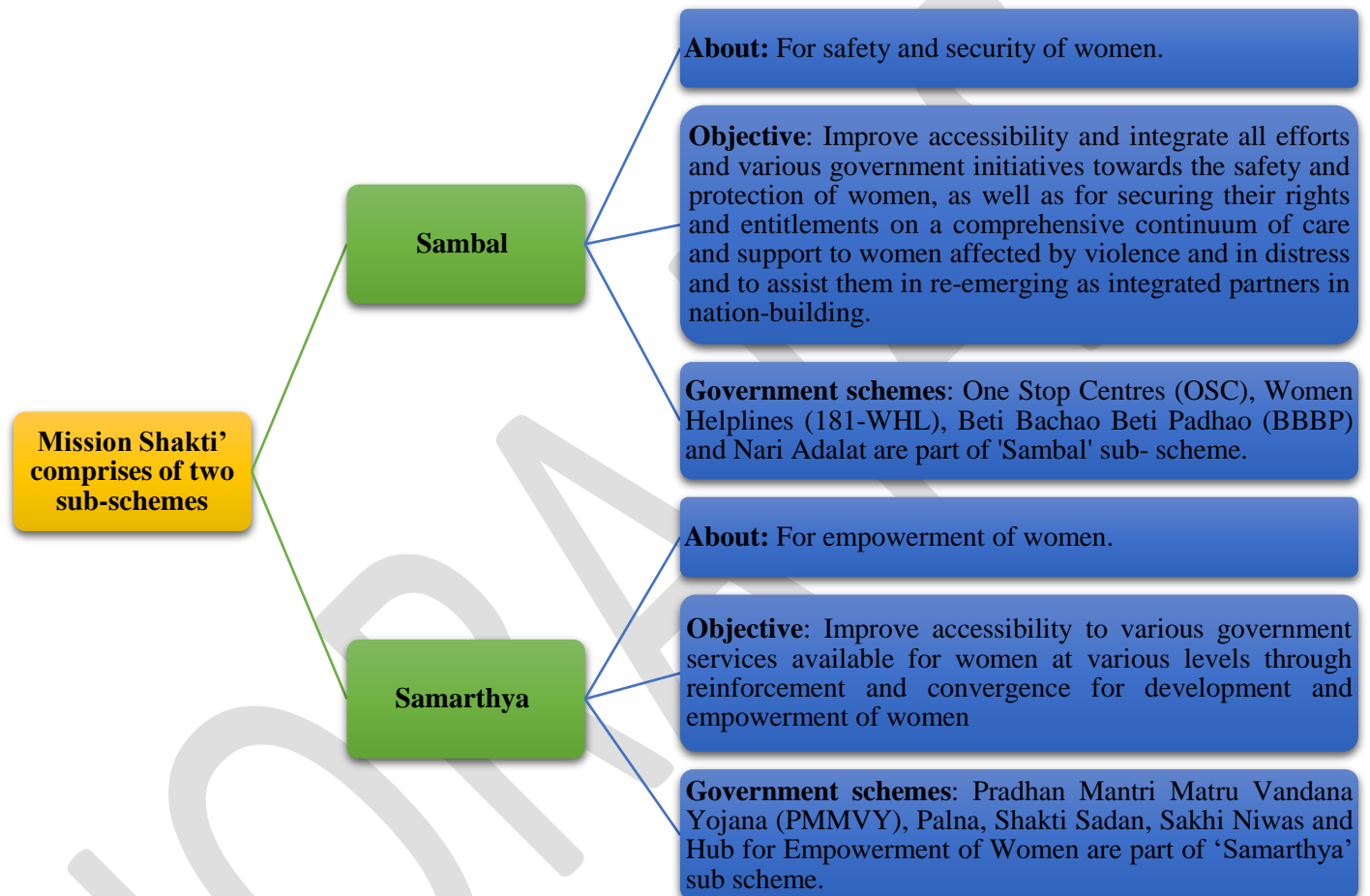
About Nari Adalat

- Providing women with an alternate Grievance Redressal Mechanism for resolving cases of petty nature (harassment, subversion, curtailment of rights or entitlements) faced by them at local level.
- The scheme is part of the **Mission Shakti umbrella scheme**.
- No remuneration to the selected members shall be provided.
- Out-of-pocket expenses will be provided by the Ministry for organising the meetings and for providing the badge/ uniform to the members.
- **Implemented by:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development
- **Implemented in phase manner:** In the first phase, it is being implemented in 7 blocks in 7 districts of Assam and two aspirational districts of Kupwara and Baramulla in UT of J&K.

Mission Shakti

- An integrated women empowerment programme as umbrella scheme for the safety, security and empowerment of women for implementation during the 15th Finance Commission period.

- Mission seeks to realise the Government's commitment for 'women-led development' by addressing issues affecting women on a life-cycle continuum basis and making them equal partners in nation-building through convergence and citizen-ownership.
- It also focuses on strategies for improving convergence across Ministries/ Departments and at different levels of governance.
- **Aim:** Strengthening interventions for women safety, security and empowerment.



J&K Reorganisation and Reservation Bill

Context: The Lok Sabha recently passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

Background

- Parliament read down the **Special Status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370** in August 2019.
- The former state was bifurcated into two Union Territories – Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, as per the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.
- Initially, the **Legislative Assembly in Jammu and Kashmir had 100 members**, with 24 allocated for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) until 1988.
- **In 1988, the total seats were increased to 111.**



- The 24 PoK seats were excluded from quorum calculation, resulting in a total of 87 contestable seats, which included four for Ladakh.
- **After delimitation in 2020, the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly increased to 114**, now including the seats for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023	Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed bill aims to amend the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. • The bill suggests an increase in the total seats in the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly from 107 to 114. • Seven seats are earmarked for scheduled caste members, and nine seats are designated for legislators from scheduled tribes. • According to the bill, the Lieutenant Governor is empowered to nominate up to two members from the Kashmiri migrant community to the Legislative Assembly. • The bill specifies that one of the nominated members must be a woman. • "Kashmiri Migrants" are defined as individuals who migrated from the Kashmir Valley or any other part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir after November 1, 1989, and are registered with the Relief Commissioner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed bill aims to modify the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, 2004, which currently outlines provisions for job and educational reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and socially and educationally backward classes. • The bill suggests replacing the terms "weak and underprivileged classes" with "other backward classes" as identified by the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Inquiry Committees of Parliament

Context: The ethics committee of the Lok Sabha have recommended the expulsion of Minister of Parliament Mahua Moitra for her “unethical conduct” and “breach of privileges”.

Categories of Parliamentary Committees

Standing Committees: These committees are established either annually or periodically and operate continuously.

Ad Hoc Committees: These are temporary committees formed for a specific task and disband upon completing their assigned objectives.

Committees for Inquiry: This type includes the following:

Committee on Petitions

Committee of Privileges

Ethics Committee

Ethics Committee

- It is a **standing committee with a one-year term that upholds the code of conduct** for parliamentary members.
- It reviews complaints against members filed by peers, outsiders through a member, or as referred by the Speaker.
- The **Speaker appoints 15 members to the committee**, and it holds the authority to determine the ethical nature of any act, as the term 'unethical' is left undefined.

Historical Background of Ethics Committees

- The concept of ethics panels was initially proposed during a Presiding Officers' Conference in 1996.
- **In the Rajya Sabha, the Ethics Committee** was inaugurated in 1997 by Vice President K R Narayanan, following the rules applicable to the Committee of Privileges.
- **In the Lok Sabha, an ad hoc Ethics Committee** was constituted in 2000 on the recommendation of the Committee of Privileges during the 13th Lok Sabha. This ad hoc committee later became a permanent fixture of the House in 2015.

Privileges Committee

- The Privileges Committee investigates cases involving breaches of parliamentary privileges by the House or its members.
- Its functions are semi-judicial in nature, aiming to protect the "freedom, authority, and dignity of Parliament." These privileges extend to both individual members and the House as a whole.

Citizenship Act, 1955

Context: A Constitution Bench, under the leadership of the Chief Justice of India, is currently adjudicating multiple petitions that challenge the constitutionality of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

Legislative Background

- Enacted as part of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985.
- Originated from the Assam Accord of 1985, a tripartite agreement among the Central Government, the Assam State Government, and leaders of the Assam Movement, aiming to address the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh.

Specifics of the Assam Accord

- Signed in 1985, introducing Section 6A exclusively for Assam in the Citizenship Act of 1955.
- Primarily targeted large-scale migration before the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.
- Mandates the detection and deportation of foreigners who entered Assam after March 25, 1971, the date of Bangladesh's creation.

Historical Context

- Reflects the unique historical and demographic challenges faced by Assam during the critical period preceding and following the Bangladesh Liberation War.
- Provisions and Implications:
 - **Citizenship Status:** Persons of Indian origin arriving from Bangladesh before January 1, 1966, are deemed citizens of India as of that date.
 - **Registration Requirement for 1966-1971 Migrants:** Individuals of Indian origin entering Assam between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971, detected as foreigners, needed to register.
 - Citizenship granted after 10 years of residence, subject to specific conditions.

Article 14 Implications

- Critics argue that Section 6A could violate Article 14, which guarantees the right to equality.
- Perceived as discriminatory for singling out Assam with specific citizenship criteria.
- Selective application sparks concerns about fairness compared to other states facing similar migration issues.

State Emergency

Context: Recently, the Supreme Court held that the declaration of a State emergency under Article 356 and the subsequent actions of the President should have a "reasonable nexus."

National Emergency (Article 352)

- **Grounds of Declaration:** Under Article 352, the President can declare a national emergency when the security of India or a part of it is threatened by war or external aggression or armed rebellion.
- **External Emergency:** If the national emergency is declared based on the grounds of 'war' or 'external aggression,' it falls under the category termed as 'External Emergency.'
- **Internal Emergency:** Conversely, if the declaration is based on the grounds of 'armed rebellion,' it is categorized as an 'Internal Emergency.'
- **44th Amendment Impact:** The term 'armed rebellion' was introduced in the 44th amendment, replacing the previous term 'internal disturbance' in the context of declaring emergencies.
- **Parliamentary Approval:** The proclamation of Emergency must be approved by both the Houses of Parliament within one month from the date of its issue
- **Duration:** The emergency continues for six months, and can be extended to an indefinite period with an approval of the Parliament for every six months.
- **Revocation of Proclamation:** By the President at any time by a subsequent proclamation. Such a proclamation does not require the parliamentary approval.

Emergency Provisions in India

- The Emergency provisions are contained in Part XVIII of the Constitution, from Articles 352 to 360.
- During an Emergency, the Central government becomes all powerful and the states go into the total control of the Centre

Historical Events of National Emergency

- **1962 Indo-China War:** The first instance was in 1962 during the Indo-China War.
- **1971 Indo-Pakistan War:** The second instance was in 1971 during the Indo-Pakistan War.
- **1975 Internal Disturbance:** The third instance was in 1975, proclaimed by President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed under advice from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The 38th Amendment Act of 1975 initially shielded the declaration of a National Emergency from judicial review. However, the 44th Amendment Act of 1978 later removed this provision. In the Minerva Mills case (1980), the Supreme Court established that a National Emergency could be contested in court if there were allegations of malafide intent or if the declaration was founded on entirely extraneous and irrelevant facts.

President's Rule (Article 356)

- **About:** An Emergency due to the failure of the constitutional machinery in the states. It is also known by two other names—'State Emergency' or 'constitutional Emergency'. However, the Constitution does not use the word 'emergency' for this situation.
- **Under Article 356:** If a state government is unable to function according to Constitutional provisions, the Union government can take direct control of the state machinery.
- **Imposed in a State:** On recommendation of Governor in case of failure of constitutional machinery.
- **Duration:** 6 Months, A maximum of 3 years by approval of Parliament after every 6 months
- **Termination:** By President, any time (s)he deems fit; does not need Parliament's approval.
- **Parliament's Role:** Every such proclamation must get Parliament's approval within two months from date of issue.
- **New Provision:** The 44th Constitutional Amendment 1978 states that the President's Rule can't be imposed in any state beyond 1 year unless.

Article 365 says that whenever a state fails to comply with or to give effect to any direction from the Centre, it will be lawful for the president to hold that a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.



Financial Emergency (Article 360)

- **About:** It occurs when the financial stability or credit of India, or any of its regions, is endangered. This provision is stipulated in Article 360 of the Indian Constitution.
- **Proclamation:** A proclamation endorsing the financial emergency must receive approval from Parliament through a simple majority within two months.
 - If the Lok Sabha (LS) is not in session or has been dissolved, the proclamation remains in effect until 30 days from the first sitting of the LS after its reconstitution, provided the Rajya Sabha (RS) has endorsed it in the interim.
- **Parliamentary Approval:** In contrast to a National Emergency, a Financial Emergency can persist indefinitely without the need for parliamentary approval.
- **Effects on States:** During an Emergency, the President can instruct states to adhere to specific financial standards and require approval for the introduction of Money Bills or other Financial Bills in state legislatures.
- **Salary Adjustments:** Government officials' salaries, including those of judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts, can be reduced during a Financial Emergency.
- **Incidents of Financial Emergency:** As of now, India has never experienced a declared Financial Emergency.

SC Upholds Repeal Of J&K's Special Status

Context: The Supreme Court in a 5-0 unanimous ruling upheld the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

Key Highlights of the Judgement

The Temporariness of Article 370: The court asserted that Article 370 served as a "temporary provision" designed to facilitate the accession of the princely State to the Union during a period of internal strife and war.

Presidential Authority in Abrogating Article 370: Confirming the President's authority, the Court supported the decision to abrogate Article 370 in August 2019.

Continuing Power of Parliament and President: The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir in 1957 did not nullify the power of either the Parliament or the President to revoke Article 370.

SC's Reference to SR Bommai Judgment: Relying on its pivotal 1994 SR Bommai v Union of India judgment, the Supreme Court emphasized that the President's power to dismiss a State government is not absolute.

Reasonable Nexus: The Court held that the declaration of State Emergency under Article 356 must have a "reasonable nexus," building on the actions of the President.

Karan Singh's Proclamation of 1949: Citing Karan Singh's 1949 proclamation, the Court concluded that Jammu and Kashmir relinquished any element of sovereignty after joining the Union, marking a "full and final surrender" to India.

Truth-and-Reconciliation Commission: In response to human rights violations since the 1980s, the Supreme Court mandated the creation of a Truth-and-Reconciliation Commission for both state and non-state actors in Jammu and Kashmir.

Special Status of J&K

- Article 370 served as a pivotal provision in the Indian Constitution, offering special status to the former state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- In March 1948, Maharaja Hari Singh appointed an interim government in the state, designating Sheikh Abdullah as the prime minister.
- Sheikh Abdullah, along with three other colleagues, joined the Indian Constituent Assembly in July 1949. Their negotiations resulted in the adoption of Article 370, formalizing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Article 370 conferred certain autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, allowing the state to have its own constitution, a distinct flag, and limited jurisdiction for the Central government.
- Article 35-A, incorporated under Article 370 of the Constitution, was introduced through a presidential order in 1954 to uphold the old provisions of the territory regulations.
- Article 35-A empowered the Jammu and Kashmir state legislature to define the permanent residents of the region.

10 Years of PoSH Act, 2013

Context: The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (PoSH) has completed 10 years of implementation.

- The **Act precisely defines sexual harassment, encompassing unwelcome actions** such as physical contact, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually colored remarks, displaying pornography, and any other unwanted sexual conduct, whether physical, verbal, or non-verbal.
- The Act **extends its coverage to all workplaces, including both organized and unorganized sectors**, public and private sectors, as well as government and non-government organizations.
- The Act provides recourse to all women employees, irrespective of their employment status—regular, temporary, contractual, ad hoc, daily wage, apprentices, interns, or those employed without the principal employer's knowledge.
- **Employers are mandated to establish an ICC in each office** or branch employing 10 or more individuals. The committee, headed by a woman, should include at least two women employees, another employee, and a third party, such as an NGO worker, possessing five years of relevant experience.
- **The Act necessitates the creation of a Local Committee (LC)** in every district to receive complaints from women working in firms with fewer than 10 employees.
- **Women can submit a written complaint within three to six months** of the incident. Resolution options include conciliation (non-financial) or the initiation of an inquiry by the committee, leading to appropriate actions based on findings.
- **Failure to establish an ICC or comply with other provisions subjects** the employer to fines, starting from ₹50,000 and escalating for repeat offenses.

Significance of the Act

- The Act facilitates swift and effective resolution of cases related to sexual harassment.
- Promotion of a Safe Work Environment:
 - It contributes to fostering a secure and harassment-free work environment.
 - The legal framework, coupled with penalties for non-compliance, serves as a deterrent against workplace sexual harassment.
 - The Act ensures that protections against sexual harassment are extended to a diverse range of workplaces, promoting inclusivity.
 - The Act underscores the importance of maintaining confidentiality during the inquiry process, encouraging victims to come forward and report incidents.

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act

Context: Recently, the Lok Sabha passed two Bills to extend the provisions of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, which grants 33% reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, to the Union Territories of Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir.

About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, mandates the reservation of one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. This includes seats reserved for SCs and STs.
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reserved seats' implementation will take effect after the publication of the census conducted following the commencement of the Act. The reservation will endure for a 15-year period, and any potential extension will be determined by parliamentary action.
Rotational Allocation of Reserved Seats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rotation of seats allocated for women will be governed by parliamentary legislation after each delimitation process, ensuring a fair and systematic distribution.
Current Representation Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 15% of the total members in the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) are women. In state legislative assemblies, women, on average, constitute 9% of the total members.

Bill for Appointment of CEC, ECs

Context: The Rajya Sabha recently passed the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill.

Features of Bill

- The Bill pertains to the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs), replacing the 1991 Election Commission (Conditions of Service and Transaction of Business) Act.
 - It addresses aspects such as appointment, salary, and removal procedures for these positions.
- Appointment Process:** The President will appoint the CEC and ECs based on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.
 - This Committee includes 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. The Selection Committee's recommendations remain valid during committee vacancies.
 - A Search Committee, led by the Cabinet Secretary, proposes a panel of five names to the Selection Committee, which may consider candidates beyond the Search Committee's suggestions.
- Eligibility Criteria:** The CEC and ECs must possess integrity, knowledge, and experience in managing and conducting elections. Additionally, they should be, or have been, Secretary (or equivalent) to the government.
- Term and Reappointment:** Members of the Election Commission will serve a six-year term or until they reach the age of 65, whichever comes earlier. **Reappointment is not allowed.** If an EC is appointed as CEC, the total term may not exceed six years.
- Removal Procedure:** The Bill retains the Constitution-specified removal process for CEC and ECs. The CEC can be removed similarly to a Supreme Court Judge, while ECs can only be removed upon the CEC's recommendation.



Suspension of Members of Parliament (MPs)

Context: Fourteen opposition MPs were suspended from the Lok Sabha for the remainder of the Winter session of the parliament for disregarding the chair's direction and disrupting the house proceedings.

- The suspension of Members of Parliament (MPs) serves as a disciplinary measure for those breaching parliamentary rules. The authority to suspend rests with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

Grounds for Suspension

Suspensions are based on various grounds, including unruly behavior, rule violations, or any actions deemed breaches of parliamentary etiquette. The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha outline the specific rules and procedures.

Rules in Lok Sabha	Rules in Rajya Sabha	Judicial Intervention	Restrictions After Suspension
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule 374: The Speaker may name and suspend a Member for persistent obstruction of business or disregarding the Chair's authority.• Rule 374A (2001): Introduced to expedite suspension, it allows automatic suspension for Members persistently obstructing the House's business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule 255: Empowers the Chairman to direct the immediate withdrawal of any Member displaying grossly disorderly conduct.• Rule 256: Allows the Chairman to name and suspend a Member for abusing house rules, with the possibility of adopting a motion for suspension.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While Article 122 of the Constitution shields parliamentary proceedings from court scrutiny, courts have occasionally intervened in legislative procedural matters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suspended MPs are barred from entering the House premises, prohibiting participation in debates, discussions, or voting. They may also lose specific parliamentary privileges, such as attending committee meetings or submitting notices for discussion.

State Funding of Elections

Context: Recently, there has been increased talks about bringing the State Funding of elections in India.

Key Highlights

- State funding in elections **refers to the government supplying funds** to political parties and candidates for election campaigns, replacing reliance on private or party funds.
- **Purpose:** The primary goal is to eliminate the need for contestants to seek money from powerful interests, promoting a cleaner electoral process.
- **Conditions:** Effective state funding requires stringent accounting and transparency measures to ensure accountability.
- **Eligibility:** The criteria include the share of votes obtained in previous elections and the number of seats held in legislative bodies.
- A minimum threshold for votes is often set to prevent potential misuse by newly-formed parties contesting numerous seats.

Types of State Funding

- Direct funding involves providing funds directly to political parties or candidates.
- Indirect funding takes the form of media access, tax benefits, free public space for campaign displays, and various provisions like utilities, travel expenses, security, etc.

Current State Funding Status in India

- Despite commitments, progress on implementing state funding in India has been limited.
- Existing measures include providing free airtime on public broadcasters for national parties during general elections and for registered state parties in state legislature elections.
- National parties also receive benefits such as security, office space, and utility subsidies.
- Registered political parties in India are exempt from paying income tax, serving as another form of indirect state funding.

Sub-Categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SCs)

Context: Prime Minister of India declared that his government will set up a committee to consider the sub-categorisation of the Madiga community in Telangana within the Scheduled Castes (SCs) category.

Background

- In 1994, the Madiga community initiated the quest for sub-categorization through the Madiga Dandora movement.
- The Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS) was formed to advocate for sub-categorization, sustaining the movement.
- In 1996, Justice P. Ramachandra Raju led a commission to examine the Madiga community's demands for sub-categorization.

Sub-Categorisation of Scheduled Caste

- Certain Scheduled Castes (SCs) are argued to remain under-represented despite existing reservation policies.
- Reports highlight inequalities within SCs, emphasizing the need to address disparities.
- Special quotas have been implemented in various states to address under-representation.
- Initiatives in Specific States: Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Bihar have introduced special quotas for the most vulnerable Dalits.

Rohini Commission

- **Establishment:** Set up by the President under Article 340 of the Indian Constitution on October 2, 2017.
- **Objectives:** Appointed to examine issues related to the sub-categorization of Other Backward Castes.

Madiga Community

- **About:** Madiga is a Telugu caste from southern India.
- **Majority:** Primarily residing in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka, with a minority in Tamil Nadu.
- **Occupation:** Engaged in tannery, leatherwork, and small handicrafts.
- **Population:** Constitutes at least 50% of the total Scheduled Castes in Telangana.

Telecommunications Bill, 2023

Context: Recently, the Union minister for Communications, Electronics & Information Technology introduced the Telecommunications Bill, 2023 in the Lok Sabha.

- The **Bill of 2023 seeks to amend and consolidate laws** related to the development, expansion, and operation of telecommunication services and networks, spectrum assignment, and related matters.
- The **new Bill is crafted to replace the outdated Indian Telegraph Act of 1885**, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1933, and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act of 1950.
- The **central government has the authority to establish standards** and assessments for telecom equipment, infrastructure, networks, and services.

- Providers of telecommunication facilities may **request a right of way over public or private property to establish telecom infrastructure**. The right of way should be provided on a non-discriminatory and non-exclusive basis to the greatest extent possible.

Importance of the Telecommunication Sector

The **Bill underscores the telecommunication sector's significance** as a vital driver for economic and social development.

It **highlights the role of telecommunication as the gateway to digital services** and stresses the need for a legal framework ensuring secure telecommunication networks for digitally inclusive growth.

The Bill confers authority upon the government to assume control of telecom services and intercept messages during times of national security concerns or emergencies.

It **specifies that in the event of a public emergency or disaster management**, the Central Government, State Government, or specially authorized officers can temporarily take possession of telecommunication services or networks. The Bill also outlines mechanisms to prioritize the routing of messages from authorized users during public emergencies.

LS Passes Bills to Replace British-Era Criminal Laws

Context: Lok Sabha (the Lower house of the Parliament of India) passed the Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita (2023), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita (2023), and the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill (2023) to replace British-era criminal laws.

Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill (BNSS)

- The BNSS replaces the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, introducing 358 sections in contrast to IPC's 511.
- **Continuity and Modification of Offences:** Despite the replacement, the BNSS preserves most offences from the IPC, integrating community service as a novel form of punishment.
- **Changes in Sedition Laws:** Sedition ceases to be an offence under the BNSS. Instead, a new offence targets acts jeopardizing India's sovereignty, unity, and integrity.
- **Transformation from Rajdroha to Deshdroha:** The concept of sedition or offences against the government (Rajdroha) is replaced with offences against the nation or country (Deshdroha).
- **Inclusion of Terrorism as an Offence:** Terrorism becomes a distinct offence under the BNSS, defined as acts intending to threaten the country's unity, integrity, security, or economic stability, or to instill terror in the populace.
- **Adoption of UAPA's Definition of Terrorism:** Section 113 of the revised BNSS incorporates the definition of terrorism from the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA), aligning it with Section 15 of the UAPA.
- **Organised Crime as an Offence:** BNSS introduces organised crime as a punishable offence, encompassing acts like kidnapping, extortion, and cyber-crime carried out on behalf of a crime syndicate. Petty organised crime is also now recognized as an offence.

The Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill (BSB)

- The Indian Evidence Act (IEA), 1872, was replaced by the new Bill on the subject (BSB). This replacement involved the integration of 170 sections and a broadened scope of documents, now encompassing electronic records.
- **Preservation of Key IEA Provisions:** Despite the overhaul, the BSB preserves many facets of the IEA, such as regulations concerning confessions, the relevancy of facts, and the burden of proof.

- **Expansion of Secondary Evidence in the BSB:** The BSB extends the category of secondary evidence to include oral and written admissions. Furthermore, it recognizes the significance of testimony from an individual skilled in document examination, thereby broadening the admissible forms of evidence.

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita Bill (BNSSS)

- It replaced the lengthy Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, comprising 531 sections.
- The new legislation introduced the concept of Zero FIR nationwide, streamlining the process of filing initial complaints.
- **Arrest, Prosecution, and Bail:** It outlines the procedures for arrest, prosecution, and bail in criminal cases.
- **Electronic Mode for Trials:** All trials, inquiries, and proceedings are permitted to be conducted in electronic mode.
- **Production of Digital Evidence:** The legislation allows the presentation of electronic communication devices containing digital evidence for investigative purposes.
- **Forensic Investigation Mandates:** The law permits the collection of specimen signatures and handwriting for investigative purposes.
- **Pre-Arrest Sampling Authorization:** Samples can be taken from individuals who have not been formally arrested.
- **Imposition for Serious Offences:** The legislation mandates forensic investigation for offenses carrying a punishment of seven years of imprisonment or more.
- **On-Site Forensic Evidence Collection:** Forensic experts are required to visit crime scenes to collect evidence and meticulously record the investigative process.

Assam-Meghalaya Panels on Boundary

Context: The regional committees on the boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya have been asked to submit their reports by December 31.

- The boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya has persisted since Meghalaya was carved out of Assam in 1972.
- Assam and Meghalaya initially had 12 disputed sectors along their 884.9-km boundary.
- An agreement signed on March 29, 2022, successfully resolved the disputes in six of these sectors.
- The six remaining disputed sectors are Langpih, Borduar, Nongwah-Mawtamur, Deshdoomreah, Block-I, Block-II, and Psiar-Khanduli.
- Both states established three regional committees for three districts to study the disputed sectors, engage with stakeholders, and submit reports to their respective governments.



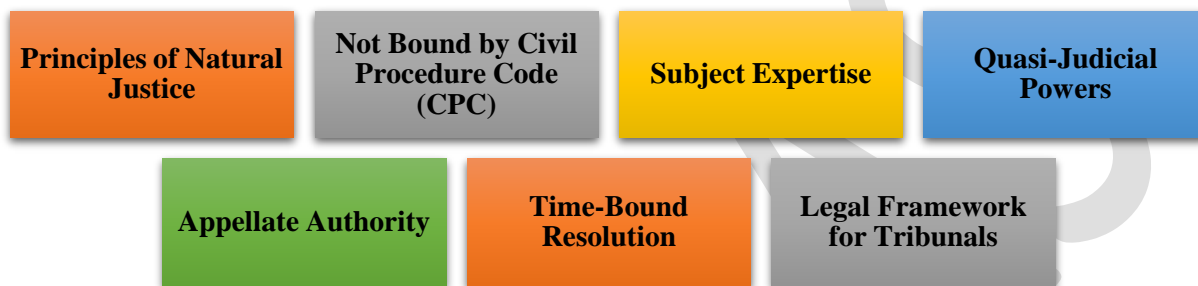


Tribunals in India

Context: The Supreme Court has clarified that tribunals functioning under the strict parameters of their governing legislation cannot direct the government to make policy.

- A tribunal is a quasi-judicial institution responsible for resolving disputes related to administration, taxation, environment, securities, and more.
- Tribunals in India function as adjudicatory bodies, offering an alternative to the traditional court system.

Salient Features of Tribunals in India



- **Principles of Natural Justice:** Tribunals adhere to the principles of natural justice, ensuring fair and impartial hearings for all parties involved.
- **Not Bound by Civil Procedure Code (CPC):** Unlike traditional courts, tribunals are not constrained by the strict rules of procedure and evidence outlined in the CPC.
- **Subject Expertise:** Tribunals boast members with specialized expertise in the subject matter under their jurisdiction.
- **Quasi-Judicial Powers:** Empowered with quasi-judicial powers, tribunals can hear evidence, examine witnesses, make findings of fact, apply the law, and issue binding decisions.
- **Appellate Authority:** Decisions made by tribunals can be appealed to higher courts, providing a multi-tiered system for dispute resolution.
- **Time-Bound Resolution:** Tribunals offer a faster adjudicatory process compared to traditional courts, ensuring efficient and timely dispute resolution.
- **Legal Framework for Tribunals:** The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 introduced Part XIV-A, titled 'Tribunals,' comprising two articles – Article 323A for administrative tribunals and Article 323B for tribunals covering other matters.

Classification of Tribunals

Administrative Tribunals	
Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAT holds original jurisdiction over recruitment and service matters for public servants under its coverage. • This extends to All-India services, Central civil services, civil posts under the Centre, and civilian employees of defense services. Not covered are members of the defense forces, Supreme Court officers and servants, and the Parliament's secretarial staff. The President appoints the CAT chairman and members after consulting with the Chief Justice of India.
State Administrative Tribunals (SATs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered by the Administrative Tribunals Act of 1985, the Central government can establish SATs upon specific requests from state governments. Similar to CAT, SATs have original jurisdiction over recruitment and service matters for state government employees.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The President appoints SATs' chairman and members after consulting with the respective state Governor.
Joint Administrative Tribunal (JAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Administrative Tribunals Act of 1985 allows for the creation of Joint Administrative Tribunal (JAT) for two or more states. JAT exercises jurisdiction and powers similar to individual administrative tribunals for the involved states. The President appoints JAT's chairman and members after consulting with the Governors of the concerned states.

Other Tribunals	
National Green Tribunal (NGT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, NGT expedites cases related to environmental protection. Principal Bench: New Delhi; Other Benches: Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata, and Chennai.
Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quasi-judicial bodies determining a person's foreigner status under the Foreigner's Act 1946. Unique to Assam; in the rest of India, illegal stay cases are prosecuted locally.
National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quasi-judicial body adjudicating issues related to Indian companies. Established under the Companies Act 2013 in 2016.

Appointment of Judges in High Court

Context: The Supreme Court Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India has recommended the appointment of Chief Justices to five High Courts.

Appointment of Judges: Constitutional Provision

- As per Article 217, the President appoints judges for high courts.
- The Chief Justice is appointed by the President in consultation with the Chief Justice of India and the relevant state's governor.
- The Chief Justice of the concerned high court is consulted for the appointment of other judges.
- If a high court serves multiple states, the President consults with the governors of all relevant states.
- The Constitution does not specify a minimum age for high court judge appointments.

Supreme Court Judgements

- In the Second Judges case (1993), the Supreme Court decreed that no high court judge appointment can occur without aligning with the Chief Justice of India's opinion.
- In the Third Judges case (1998), the Supreme Court asserted that for high court judge appointments, the Chief Justice of India must consult a collegium consisting of the two most senior Supreme Court judges.
- Therefore, the Chief Justice of India's singular opinion does not fulfill the 'consultation' process.

Qualifications of Judges

To become a high court judge, a person must:

- Be an Indian citizen.
- Have ten years of judicial service in India, or
- Have practiced as an advocate in a high court (or consecutive high courts) for ten years.

Governance & Social Justice

Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G)

Context: World Bank published a departmental working paper highlighting the “most concerning” trend of toilet usage declining in rural India since 2018 despite early gains of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin.

About SBM-G

- **Launch:** 2014
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Jal Shakti
- **Objective:** To expedite efforts toward achieving universal sanitation coverage with a specific focus on sanitation.
- **Implementation:** Executed as a nationwide campaign, Janandolan, aimed at eradicating open defecation in rural areas.
- **SBM-G Phase-I:** At the commencement on October 2, 2014, rural sanitation coverage stood at 38.7%. Over 10 crore individual toilets have been constructed since the mission's launch, leading to the declaration of rural areas in all states as Open Defecation Free (ODF) by October 2, 2019.
- **SBM(G) Phase-II:** Emphasizes sustaining Phase I accomplishments and providing adequate facilities for Solid/Liquid & Plastic Waste Management (SLWM) in rural India.

Significance of Swachh Bharat Mission

- Sustained employment generation and support for the rural economy will persist, facilitated by the construction of household toilets, community toilets, and the development of infrastructure for Sustainable Low-Cost Sanitation and Waste Management (SLWM), including compost pits, soak pits, waste stabilization ponds, and material recovery facilities.
- The initiative will contribute to addressing the solid and liquid waste management challenges in rural India, fostering significant advancements in the health conditions of the country's villagers.

Green Credit Initiative

Context: Recently, the Prime Minister of India announced a 'Green Credit Initiative,' emphasizing the creation of carbon sinks through public participation, and also proposed to host the UN climate conference in 2028, known as COP33, in India.

- The initiative operates under the idea that personal growth is connected to environmental conservation.
- Its primary focus is on establishing carbon sinks through active participation of individuals.
- The initiative entails compiling an inventory of degraded wastelands suitable for planting, to be utilized by both individuals and organizations.
- Individuals engaging in environmentally beneficial activities will be rewarded with tradable green credits.
- The entire process, covering registration, planting, verification, and issuance of green credits, will be digitized.
- This initiative bears similarities to the Green Credit Programme.

Green Credit Programme

- **Launch:** Initiated during the 2023-24 budget under Mission LiFE.

IN FOCUS

Areas which will be part of the credit system

- Tree plantation
- Water
- Sustainable agriculture
- Waste management
- Air pollution reduction
- Mangrove conservation and restoration
- Ecomark
- Sustainable building and infrastructure

■ The mechanism will be implemented in a phased manner

■ Initially, two to three activities from the eight sectors are under consideration for designing and piloting the Programme

■ Further, more activities will be added from the selected sectors

- **Implementation:** The Ministry of Environment has introduced the draft 'Green Credit Programme Implementation Rules 2023' in accordance with the Environment Protection Act of 1986.
- **Eight Sectors:** The program encompasses green credits in eight sectors—tree plantation, water conservation, sustainable agriculture, waste management, air pollution reduction, mangrove conservation and restoration, eco-mark initiatives, and sustainable building and infrastructure.
- **Objective:** The goal is to establish a market-driven system that encourages voluntary environmental actions and individual or community behaviors, aligning supply and demand.

Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT)

Context: The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) recently, quashed regulator Sebi's order banning Future Retail chairperson Kishore Biyani and some other promoters from the securities market for one year in an insider trading case.

Key Highlights

- The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) was **established on 27th May, 2014**, with its headquarters in Mumbai.
- **SAT operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance** and is a statutory body formed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.
- Its primary objective is to hear and resolve appeals against decisions made by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) or adjudicating officers under the Act.
- **SAT safeguards the interests of entities dissatisfied with SEBI's** decisions, as it is constituted to handle appeals against such decisions.
- The **tribunal is established under Section 15K** of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992, and has the authority to hear appeals related to orders from SEBI and adjudicating officers, as well as exercise jurisdiction under various laws.
- SAT also **adjudicates appeals concerning orders from the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)** under the PFRDA Act, 2013.
- Additionally, **SAT hears and resolves appeals related to orders** from the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India (IRDAI) under various insurance-related acts and regulations.
- The **composition of SAT includes a Presiding Officer and two other Members**, and it possesses powers equivalent to those of a civil court.
- Individuals dissatisfied with SAT's decisions or orders have the option to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Context: The President and the Prime Minister of India paid tributes to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India on his birth anniversary.

About Dr. Rajendra Prasad

He was an Indian independence activist, lawyer, scholar and subsequently, the first President of India, in office from 1950 to 1962.

Role in freedom movement

- He was instrumental in the formation of the Bihari Students Conference in 1906.
- He was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and he formally joined the Indian National Congress in the year 1911, when the annual session was again held in Calcutta.
- He was known for his role in the Champaran satyagraha.
- He was imprisoned by British authorities during the Salt Satyagraha of 1931 and the Quit India movement of 1942.

- He was elected as the President of the Indian National Congress (INC) during the Bombay session in October 1934.
- He again became the President of INC when Subhash Chandra Bose resigned in 1939.
- He served as the President of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Constitution of India.
- He also chaired the Constituent Assembly's committee on food and agriculture.
- **Legacy:** His legacy as a freedom fighter, statesman, and India's first President continues to inspire.
- His humility, dedication, and profound commitment to the principles of democracy remain the touchstone of public service in India.
- **Noted books:** 'Satyagraha at Champaran' (1922), 'India Divided' (1946), his autobiography 'Atmakatha' (1946), 'Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar, Some Reminiscences' (1949), and 'Bapu ke Kadmon Mein' (1954)
- **Awards and Recognition:** In 1962, he was subsequently awarded the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian award.

Women Representation in Defence Forces

Context: Recently, the Prime Minister stated the government's dedication to enhancing the representation of women in the armed forces.

Key Highlights

- The integration of women into the Indian Army, Air Force, and Navy began in 1992 through short-service commission (SSC) roles, initially limited to the medical stream.
- A pivotal moment occurred in 2015 when the Indian Air Force (IAF) allowed women to join the fighter stream.
- In 2020, the Supreme Court mandated permanent commission (PC) for women officers in the Army's non-combat support units, rejecting gender-based restrictions.
- The Indian Navy made history in early 2021 by deploying four women officers on warships after a 25-year hiatus, signaling a shift in gender roles. The Army further diversified roles by inducting women into the Corps of Military Police in May 2021, marking their entry into the non-officer cadre.
- Despite these advancements, certain combat arms like Infantry and Armored Corps still remain inaccessible to women.
- Globally, the trend toward gender-inclusive military roles is gaining momentum, as evidenced by the U.S. in 2013 and the UK in 2018. Emphasizing that gender should not be a barrier to qualifications, the importance lies in highlighting technical expertise and decision-making skills over physical strength.
- **Challenges:** There is a call for advocating a mixed-gender force, considering concerns about declining recruitment and retention rates.
 - Overcoming traditional norms is crucial, recognizing the need for training to integrate women into combat units and acknowledging the evolving nature of military culture.

BharatNet Project

Context: The Ministry of Communications recently said 6,658 gram panchayats had been made service-ready under the BharatNet Phase II project in Tamil Nadu.

Key Highlights

- BharatNet, also recognized as the **National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN)**, seeks to deliver high-speed broadband connectivity to every Gram Panchayat in India.
- This initiative, sanctioned by the Union Cabinet on October 25, 2011, stands as one of the largest rural telecom projects globally.

- The implementation of **BharatNet is undertaken in stages with the goal of connecting all Gram Panchayats**, totaling around 2.5 lakh, across the nation. The aim is to offer impartial broadband access to telecom service providers.
- The **primary objective is to empower access providers** such as mobile operators, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Cable TV operators, and content providers. This empowerment facilitates the introduction of various services like e-health, e-education, and e-governance in rural and remote regions of India.
- **Execution of the project is entrusted to a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** named Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL), established under the Indian Companies Act 1956.

Status of the Project

- Progressively, **approximately 1.94 lakh villages have already been connected**, with the remaining villages slated for connectivity by 2025.
- Additionally, **as of July 24, 2023, 583,551 Fibre-To-The-Home (FTTH)** connections have been activated, and 104,674 Wi-Fi hotspots have been installed to ensure last-mile connectivity.

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

Context: The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) recently signed a Memorandum of Common Purpose (MoCP) with the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI), which represents 124 cities/towns situated along the banks of the Mississippi River, the United States.

- The organization is a **registered society under the Ministry of Jal Shakti**, Government of India. Its primary objectives are to prevent, control, and reduce environmental pollution in the river Ganga, ensuring a continuous and sufficient water flow to rejuvenate the river.
- Initially serving as the implementation arm of the **National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), which was formed under the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986**, the NGRBA was dissolved on October 7, 2016.
- This dissolution occurred following the establishment of the National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection, and Management of River Ganga, commonly known as the National Ganga Council.
- The **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) now strives to fulfill the objectives set by the NGRBA**, focusing on effective pollution abatement and the rejuvenation of the river Ganga.
- It adopts a river basin approach, encouraging inter-sectoral coordination for comprehensive planning and management. Another key goal is to maintain minimum ecological flows in the river Ganga to ensure water quality and environmentally sustainable development.

Structure

- NMCG operates with a **two-tier management structure** consisting of the Governing Council and the Executive Committee, both headed by the Director General.
- The Executive Committee is empowered to approve projects up to Rs. 1000 crores. At the state level, State Programme Management Groups (SPMGs) act as the implementing arms of State Ganga Committees. The Director General of NMCG holds the position of an Additional Secretary in the Government of India.

Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)

Context: Recently, the **National Capital Region Transport Corporation initiated the trial run of the Namo Bharat train**, covering the 12-km stretch between Duhai and Modinagar as part of the Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) corridor.

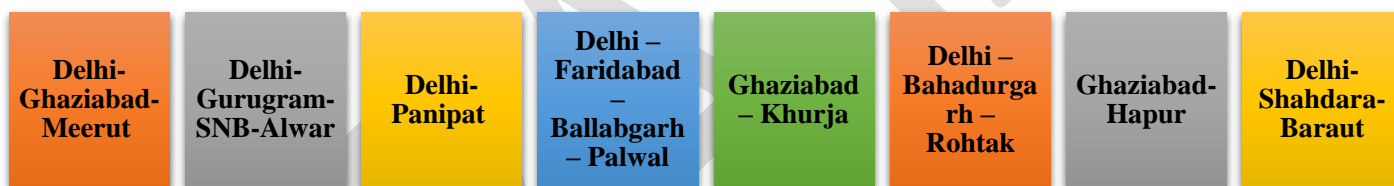
Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)

- **About:** RRTS is an integrated, mass transit network which aims to ensure “**balanced and sustainable urban development**” through better connectivity and access across the NCR
- **Launched:** October, 2023.
- **Constructed by:** The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC).
- **NCRTC:** It is a joint venture company of the Central government and the governments of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- **Objective:** to ensure “balanced and sustainable urban development” through better connectivity and access across the NCR.
- It is a state-of-the-art regional mobility solution, comparable to the best in the world.
- **Speed:** RRTS trains will travel **significantly faster than metro trains**.
- These will operate at a speed of 160 km/hour but are designed to be able to run at speeds up to 180 km/hour.

Namo Bharat Trains

- “Namo Bharat” is the name of India’s first regional rapid train operating between Delhi and Meerut.
- The Prime Minister is scheduled to inaugurate the priority section of the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor and flag off the “RapidX train” connecting Sahibabad and Duhai Depot.

Eight Identified RRTS Corridors



Indira Gandhi Prize

Context: The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2023 has been jointly awarded to Daniel Barenboim and Ali Abu Awwad for Israel-Palestine conflict resolution efforts.

Key Highlights

- The Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust in India **annually presents an award** named after the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, established in 1986.
- The award aims to **acknowledge significant contributions** to international understanding, peace promotion, the development of a new international economic order, and the reinforcement of democracy.
- **The award is distributed in three categories:** Peace, recognizing efforts for international peace and security; Disarmament, acknowledging contributions to the reduction of weapons of mass destruction; and Development, honoring work in economic and social development.
- The **award ceremony typically occurs on November 19th**, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Indira Gandhi.

Kaleshwaram Project

Context: The allegations of lapses in the completion of Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project were raised.

- The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) is a multi-purpose initiative situated at the confluence of the Pranahita River and Godavari River in Kaleshwaram, Bhupalpally, Telangana.
- KLIP aims to provide irrigation water to a significant agricultural area and fulfill drinking water needs.



Godavari River

- The Godavari River, India's second-longest (Dakshina Ganga), originates at Trimbakeshwar, Nashik, Maharashtra.
- Spanning 1,465 km, the Godavari flows through Maharashtra, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh before draining into the Bay of Bengal.
- The Godavari's basin is categorized into three sections: Upper (source to Manjira confluence), Middle (Manjira to Pranahita confluence), and Lower (Pranhita confluence to mouth).
- Tributaries include Banganga, Purna, Pranhita, Indravati, Pravara, Sindphana, Manjira, Penganga, Wardha, Wainganga, Maner, and Sabri.
- Dams associated with the Godavari River include Jayakwadi Dam, Devadula Irrigation Scheme, Polavaram Project, etc.
- **The Pranahita River**, covering 34% of the Godavari's drainage basin, is its largest tributary.
- Pranahita is formed by the confluence of smaller tributaries like Wardha, Penganga, and Wainganga Rivers.

PM-DevINE Scheme

Context: The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) has held meeting with Chief Ministers of northeast States over lag in Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE) scheme.

- The 2022-23 Union Budget announced the PM-DevINE scheme with an initial allocation of ₹1,500 crore.

- PM-DevINE is **classified as a Central Sector scheme** and is funded entirely by the Central government.
- The primary goal of PM-DevINE is **to facilitate the rapid and comprehensive development of the North-East Region** by financing infrastructure and social development projects based on the identified needs of the States.
- The scheme's **objectives include funding infrastructure projects in alignment with PM GatiShakti**, supporting social development initiatives reflecting the needs of the North Eastern Region (NER), promoting livelihood activities for youth and women, and addressing developmental gaps in various sectors.
- The defined time frame for PM-DevINE scheme projects is from 2023-24 for sanctioning to 2025-26 for completion.
- **Implementation of the scheme will be overseen by the Ministry of Development** of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) through the North Eastern Council, Central Ministries/agencies, or State Government agencies.

Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme

Context: The Union government is trying to work out a mechanism to provide tax remission benefits on exports of sugar, which was placed in the 'restricted' category in mid-2022, and is also considering a demand from tea exporters to raise their tax remission rates.

Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme	
About	The scheme aims to enhance the cost competitiveness of Indian products and establish a level playing field for exporters in the global market.
Implementation	Effective from 1st January 2021.
Objective	Designed as an export duty remission program, it seeks to boost the export of goods that have historically exhibited limited export activity.
Replaced	Replaces the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).
Features	Under the RoDTEP scheme, exporters receive refunds for previously unreimbursed Central, State, and local duties/taxes.
Refund Mechanism	Refunds are granted in the form of transferable electronic scrips, and the entire process is managed by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) through a comprehensive IT system.

Ayushman Bharat Scheme

Context: The Health Ministry has released data related to the achievements under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme.

- **AB PM-JAY is recognized as the world's largest publicly funded** health assurance initiative, offering a health cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family annually for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- The scheme encompasses up to 3 days of pre-hospitalization and 15 days of post-hospitalization expenses, covering diagnostics and medicines.

- Benefits are portable nationwide, allowing beneficiaries to receive cashless treatment at any empanelled public or private hospital in India, without restrictions on family size, age, or gender.
- **Eligibility is determined based on the deprivation** and occupational criteria of the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011 (SECC 2011) for rural and urban areas.
- This includes families covered under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) not present in the SECC 2011 database.

Achievements under AB PM-JAY

Establishment of Ayushman Arogya Mandir, resulting in the creation of 1,50,000 Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs).

These centers, **formed by upgrading Sub Health Centres (SHCs)** and rural/urban Primary Health Centres (PHCs), aim to **provide Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC)** and follow-up care to the community.

Approximately 28.45 Crore Ayushman Cards have been issued since the scheme's inception, with a total of 26,901 hospitals, including 11,813 private hospitals, empanelled under AB PM-JAY.

Gender equity is evident in the program, with women constituting about 49% of total Ayushman cards created and approximately 48% of total authorized hospital admissions.

Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) Scheme

Context: The Government recently raised the interest rates on the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) scheme by 20 basis points to 8.2 percent from the existing 8 percent.

- SSY, launched in 2015, is part of the Government of India's "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" initiative, focusing on promoting the education of girl children.
- **Tailored Savings:** SSY is a specialized small-deposit scheme designed specifically for the financial benefit of girl children.
- **Account Opening:** Guardians can open a savings account for their girl child with an authorized commercial bank or India Post branch.

Account Features

- Minimum and maximum annual deposits are Rs. 250 and Rs. 1.5 lakh, respectively, in multiples of 100.
- Deposits are made for 15 years, and the scheme matures after 21 years.
- No interest is payable after 21 years from the account opening.

Partial Withdrawal

- Withdrawal up to 50% of the preceding financial year's amount is allowed for the account holder's education.
- Withdrawal is permitted after the account holder turns 18 or completes the 10th standard, whichever is earlier.

Eligibility Criteria

- The girl must be an Indian resident.
- The account can be initiated by the parent or legal guardian.
- The girl child must be below 10 years old at the account opening.
- Only one SSY account is allowed per girl child.
- A family can open a maximum of two SSY scheme accounts.
- NRIs are not eligible for account opening.
- The girl must operate the account after turning 18.

Tax Benefits

- Investments in SSY qualify for Section 80C deductions up to Rs. 1.5 lakh.
- The interest earned is tax-exempt under Section 10 of the Income Tax Act.
- Proceeds from maturity or withdrawal are also exempt from income tax.

Same Sex Marriage

Context: A recent statement by a Member of Parliament that same-sex marriages are against the (so-called) cultural ethos of India has once again stirred up the debate on marriage equality.

Key points from Supreme Court's five-bench ruling on same-sex marriage

- **No legal recognition** of same-sex marriages.
- **No constitutional or fundamental right** to civil unions.
- **Centre's high-powered committee to examine** concerns of same-sex couples.
- **No constitutional protection to civil unions** and adoption rights for queer couples.

Special Marriage Act, 1954

- It is an Indian law that establishes a **legal framework for marriages** between individuals of diverse religions or castes.
- It **primarily regulates civil marriages**, with the state's endorsement rather than religious institutions.
- **In India, the legal recognition of both civil and religious marriages** mirrors the provisions of the UK's Marriage Act of 1949.
- **Applicability:** The Act is applicable to individuals of all faiths, encompassing Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, and Buddhists, throughout India.

Same Sex Marriage

- Marriage **between two men or two women** is the practice known as same-sex marriage.
- **In most countries worldwide**, laws, religious beliefs, and customs have regulated same-sex marriage.
- **Over 30 countries legally perform and recognize** marriages between same-sex couples as of 2022.
- **Mexico is the most recent country** to legalize same-sex marriage.
- The **right to marry is not expressly recognized** either as a **fundamental or constitutional right** under the Indian Constitution.

Arguments from both sides

WHAT CENTRE SAID

- Family issues are far beyond mere recognition and registration of marriage between persons belonging to the same gender
- Living together as partners and having sexual relationship by same-sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept of a husband, a wife and children which necessarily presuppose a biological man as a 'husband', a biological woman as a 'wife' and the children born out of the union between the two

PETITIONERS' RESPONSE

- The government's position is curious given the (Hindu Marriage) Act itself wiped out several recorded Hindu traditions that existed prior to codification. Whoever drafted the response also seems clueless about the 60-odd genders recognised in Hindu historical texts not to mention it has failed to provide any textual basis prohibiting the marriage of these 60-odd genders.
- The progeny argument is particularly ridiculous because it implies any marriage shorn of biological offspring is not a marriage





Other Countries

- **Netherlands:** The Netherlands became the first country to give Same-sex couples the legal right of marriage and adoption.
- **Taiwan:** Taiwan became the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriages after the country's Constitutional Court found a law.

International Relations

India-Korea Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES)

Context: India-Korea Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES) for faster clearance of imported goods launched.

- The **objective is to facilitate the seamless implementation of the India-Korea** Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) through the electronic exchange of origin information between the customs administrations of both nations for goods traded under the CEPA.
- Data fields in a **Certificate of Origin (CoO) will be shared electronically** by the exporting customs administration with the importing customs immediately upon issuance, expediting the clearance of imported goods.
- The success of the EODES project is anticipated to become a global model for international Customs cooperation.

India Korea Relation

Diplomatic Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomatic relations were established on December 10, 1973. • The countries established a "Strategic Partnership" in 2010, which was elevated to a "Special Strategic Partnership" in 2015 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State Visit to Seoul.
India's Role in Korean War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India played a crucial role in the Korean peninsula post-Korea's independence in 1945. • Former Indian diplomat Shri K P S Menon chaired the 9-member UN Commission in 1947 to conduct elections in Korea. • India sent the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance, consisting of 627 medical personnel, during the Korean War, treating around 220,000 patients.
High-Level Exchanges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State Visit in May 2015 upgraded the bilateral relationship to a 'Special Strategic Partnership.'
Economic Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade and economic relations gained momentum with the implementation of CEPA in 2010. • The 'Korea Plus' initiative was launched to promote and facilitate Korean investments in India. • Bilateral trade in 2022 reached a record level of US\$ 27.8 billion, with India's imports at US\$ 18.8 billion and exports at US\$ 9 billion.
Defence Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defence Ministers of ROK and India have interacted regularly since 2015. • Annual service level talks across the three military arms are conducted. • A Defence Industries Cooperation Roadmap was signed in September 2019.
Cultural Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Cultural Centre (later renamed Swami Vivekananda Culture Centre) was established on July 1, 2011, as a cultural wing of the Embassy of India in Seoul. • SARANG, the festival of India in Korea, has been organized annually since 2015 by the Embassy to showcase India's diverse art and music in various regions of ROK.

Germany's Debt Brake Rule

Context: The government's decision to reallocate €60 billion from unused funds designated for pandemic emergency purposes to a "climate and transformation fund" was declared unlawful by Germany's constitutional court.

- Enacted in 2009 in Germany, the debt brake rule, also known as the balanced budget rule, imposes a limit on government borrowing for funding public projects.
- The fiscal rule prevents the German federal government from exceeding a fiscal deficit of 0.35% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and extends to prohibiting deficit spending by the country's 16 regions.
- Concerns raised by a court ruling include objections to the government's redirection of underutilized allocations between sectors and apprehensions about carrying over debt from one fiscal year to the next.

Myanmar World's Biggest Opium Producer

Context: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a report "Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023: Cultivation, Production and Implications".

- In 2023, Myanmar surpassed Afghanistan to become the leading global producer of opium, marking a significant shift in opium cultivation trends.
- Afghanistan, a long-time top producer, experienced a decline in opium farming following the Taliban's commitment to eradicating illegal drug production.
- Opium cultivation in Southeast Asia is attributed to factors such as poverty, inadequate government services, challenging macroeconomic conditions, instability, and insecurity.
- Reasons for Increased Production in Myanmar:

- **Golden Triangle:** Northeastern Myanmar is situated in the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand converge.
- **Lawlessness in Border Areas:** The central government of Myanmar lacks control over various ethnic minority militias, some of whom are involved in the drug trade.
- **Economic Hardships:** Factors like poor market access, deficient state infrastructure, and rampant inflation contribute significantly to farmers opting for increased opium production.



Opium

- Opium is derived from the sap in unripe poppy-seed pods.
- The sap, when dried, forms a brown latex containing alkaloids that are used in the production of various narcotic and pharmaceutical drugs, such as heroin, methamphetamine, morphine, and codeine.

Impact on India

- **Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime:** The surge in opium production can fuel illegal drug trade and the growth of organized crime networks.

- **Establishment of Trafficking Routes:** Once trafficking routes are established, criminal activities and violence tend to increase.
- **Challenges for Law Enforcement:** Law enforcement agencies face heightened challenges in combating illegal activities associated with the drug trade.
- **Public Health Issues:** Increased heroin production contributes to drug addiction and associated health problems, including the potential spread of HIV/AIDS and other bloodborne diseases due to unsafe drug use practices.
- **Terror Funding:** Drug trafficking linked to terrorist activities poses a threat to national security.
- **Overburdened Treatment Facilities:** The prevalence of drug abuse can overwhelm existing healthcare facilities and rehabilitation centers, making it difficult to provide adequate treatment.

Maldives Ends Pact With India On Hydrographic Survey

Context: The Maldives government has decided to not renew an agreement with India that allowed India to conduct hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters.

- The agreement, signed in 2019 during President Ibrahim Solih's tenure, faced a recent request from President Mohamed Muizzu's government for India to withdraw its deployed military personnel.
- Hydrographic surveys, **conducted by ships using methods like sonar**, analyze water bodies for depth, seafloor and coastline shape, obstructions, and other features to enhance maritime transportation efficiency and safety.
- Three joint hydrographic surveys **occurred in 2021, 2022, and 2023, creating updated Navigational Charts/Electronic Navigational Charts** to benefit sectors like Tourism, Fisheries, and Agriculture.
- This survey aligns with India's policy to support the Maldives in establishing Hydrographic facilities within the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF).
- **India's oldest Hydrographic Survey ship, INS Sandhayak**, conducted over 200 surveys along the Indian peninsula coasts, the Andaman Sea, and neighboring countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.
- Indian survey ships have also assisted **countries such as Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Maldives, Oman, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania** in the past.

GPAI's New Delhi Declaration on AI

Context: The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit, chaired by India, announced the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

- The **New Delhi Declaration on AI emphasizes collaborative development** in healthcare and agriculture, with a focus on addressing the needs of the Global South in AI development.
- India proposes to host a GPAI Global Governance Summit within the next six months to finalize the suggested framework.
- Japan plans to establish a third 'expert support center' for AI, aligning with the India AI Program's official AI policy.
- **Global discussions on AI regulations** will continue at the Korea Safety Summit in mid-2024.

Major Outcomes

- **GPAI New Delhi Declaration fosters consensus** among members to advance safe, secure, and trustworthy AI, pledging support for the sustainability of GPAI projects.
- Agreement to use GPAI as a platform for creating a global framework on AI trust and safety, ensuring AI solutions benefit all.
- **India shines as a global hub for AI innovation**, showcasing leadership in AI talent and ideas.
- The **GPAI New Delhi Summit brings together major AI initiatives**, including the UN Advisory Group on AI and the UK AI Safety Summit.



- Emphasis on AI Research Analytics and Knowledge Dissemination Platform (AIRAWAT) and the National Program on Artificial Intelligence in shaping India's AI ecosystem.
- Recognition and felicitation of **AI Game Changers Awards and Youth for Unnati & Vikas with AI Awards (YUVAi)** winners organized by Intel in partnership with NeGD during the Summit.

Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)

- A global initiative, **established in June 2020**, connects AI theory and practice.
- **Initially with 15 member countries**, it now boasts 29, including Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.
- **Governed by a Council**, Steering Committee, and Executive Council, supported by a Secretariat hosted by the OECD.

Features two Centers of Expertise

- **Montreal:** The International Centre of Expertise in Montreal for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (ICEMAI).
- **Paris:** The French National Institute for Research in Digital Science and Technology (INRIA).

China Bans Export of Rare Earth Technologies

Context: China recently banned the export of technology to extract and separate the strategic metals.

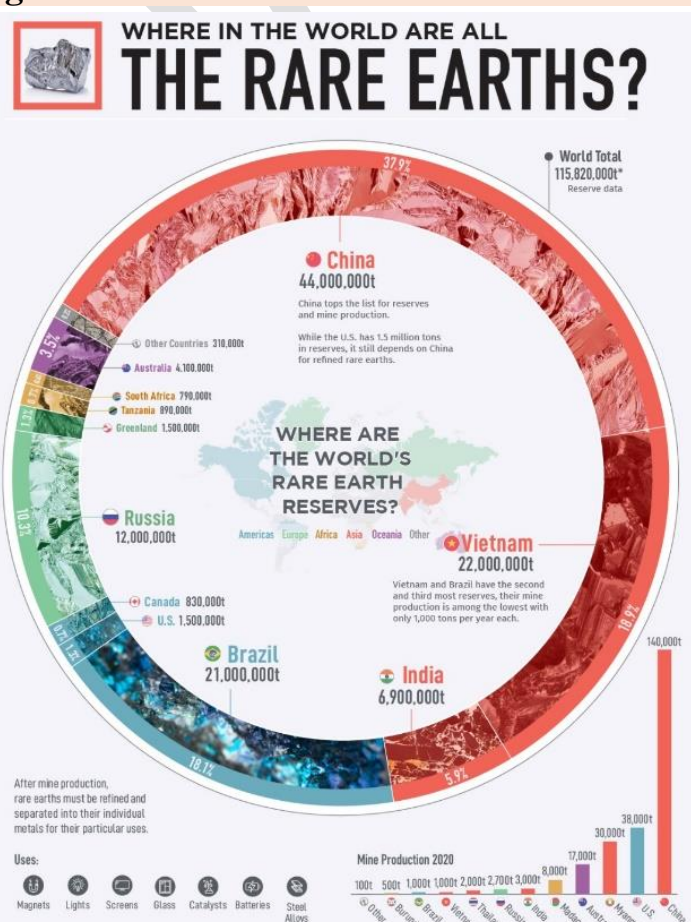
- Rare earths are a group of 17 metals used to make magnets for use in EVs and other electronics.
- These 17 elements are: Lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, promethium, samarium, europium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, lutetium, scandium, yttrium.

Properties

- These metals exhibit unusual fluorescent, conductive, and magnetic properties, rendering them highly valuable when alloyed with more common metals like iron in small quantities.
- They are characterized by a lustrous silvery-white appearance and are soft, heavy metals.

Production

- China dominates the global rare earth production, contributing to 90% of the total output.
- Other significant producers include Australia, the USA, Russia, Malaysia, and Vietnam.



Indian Scenario

- India, like the rest of the world, is a net importer of rare earths.
- As of 2020, according to Statista, India's rare earth imports stood at 1,800 tonnes, constituting approximately 0.67% of the worldwide imports.
- India's contribution to global rare earth imports is modest, reflecting the relatively low maturity of its downstream industries such as electronics, defense, and aerospace.
- With the progress of the Make in India initiative in these sectors, there is a growing demand for rare earths in the country.

Red Sea

Context: Recently, a Liberia-flagged merchant vessel, Chem Pluto, was struck by a suspected drone just outside the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), raising concerns about a potential crisis in the Red Sea extending into Indian waters.

About

- The Red Sea, situated between Africa and Asia, serves as an inlet of the Indian Ocean.
- Approximately 12 percent of global trade traverses through the Red Sea, connecting to the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal, with 30 percent of container traffic.
- **Bordering Countries:** The Red Sea is bordered by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti.
- It is a part of the African Rift Valley, specifically the Great Rift Valley.
- **Resource:** The Red Sea region is rich in resources, including petroleum deposits, evaporite deposits (such as halite, sylvite, gypsum, and dolomite formed through evaporation), sulfur, phosphates, and heavy-metal deposits.

Nearby Important Locations

- **Bab el Mandeb Strait:** Connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden in the Indian Ocean.
- **Gulf of Aqaba:** A sizable gulf located at the northern tip of the Red Sea, east of the Sinai Peninsula and west of the Arabian Peninsula.
- **Its coastline is divided among four countries:** Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.



Mediterranean Sea

Context: Recently, an Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander warned that the Mediterranean Sea could be closed if the U.S. and its allies persist in committing "crimes" in Gaza, without providing an explanation for the proposed action.

Location

- **Intercontinental Sea:** Bordered by Europe to the north, Asia to the east, and Africa to the south.
- **Western Connection:** Linked to the Atlantic Ocean via the narrow Strait of Gibraltar.
- **Northeast Connection:** Connected to the Black Sea through the Dardanelles Strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus Strait.
- **Southeast Connection:** Linked to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal.

Bordering Countries

- **European Countries:** Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, and Greece.
- **West Asian (Middle Eastern) Countries:** Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine (Gaza Strip), and Cyprus.
- **North African Nations:** Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.



Geographical Features

- **Coastline:** Encompasses a 46,000 km (28,600 mi) long coastline and includes 15 marginal seas like the Balearic Sea, the Adriatic Sea, the Levantine Sea, and the Ionian Sea.
- **Depth:** Average depth of about 1,500 m with a maximum depth of 5,267 m at its deepest point, the Calypso Deep in the Ionian Sea.
- **Rivers:** Drained by numerous rivers including the Ebro, Rhone, Po, Nile, Tiber, etc.

Islands

- **Prominent Islands:** Corsica, Crete, Cyprus, Chios, Euboea, Lesbos, Mallorca, Rhodes, Sicily, and Sardinia.
- **Largest Island:** Sicily holds the distinction of being the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea.

Rohingya Refugees

Context: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on December 25 expressed gratitude to Indian authorities at Andaman and Nicobar Islands for taking care of 142 Rohingya refugees, whose boat was intercepted by coastal security agencies near Shaheed Dweep.

- The Rohingya, mainly Muslims, form an ethnic group primarily located in the Western Myanmar province of Rakhine.
- They use a Bengali dialect, setting themselves apart from the widely spoken Burmese language.
- Despite residing for generations, Myanmar perceives them as migrants who arrived during the Colonial era, labeling them as "resident foreigners" or "associate citizens."
- Officially, Myanmar designates the Rohingya as "resident foreigners" or "associate citizens," representing a unique legal classification within the country.

India's Policy on Refugees

- **Non-Signatory Status:** India has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol.

- **Legal Framework for Foreign Nationals:** Undocumented foreign nationals in India fall under the governance of The Foreigners Act (1946), The Registration of Foreigners Act (1939), The Passport (Entry into India) Act (1920), and The Citizenship Act (1955).

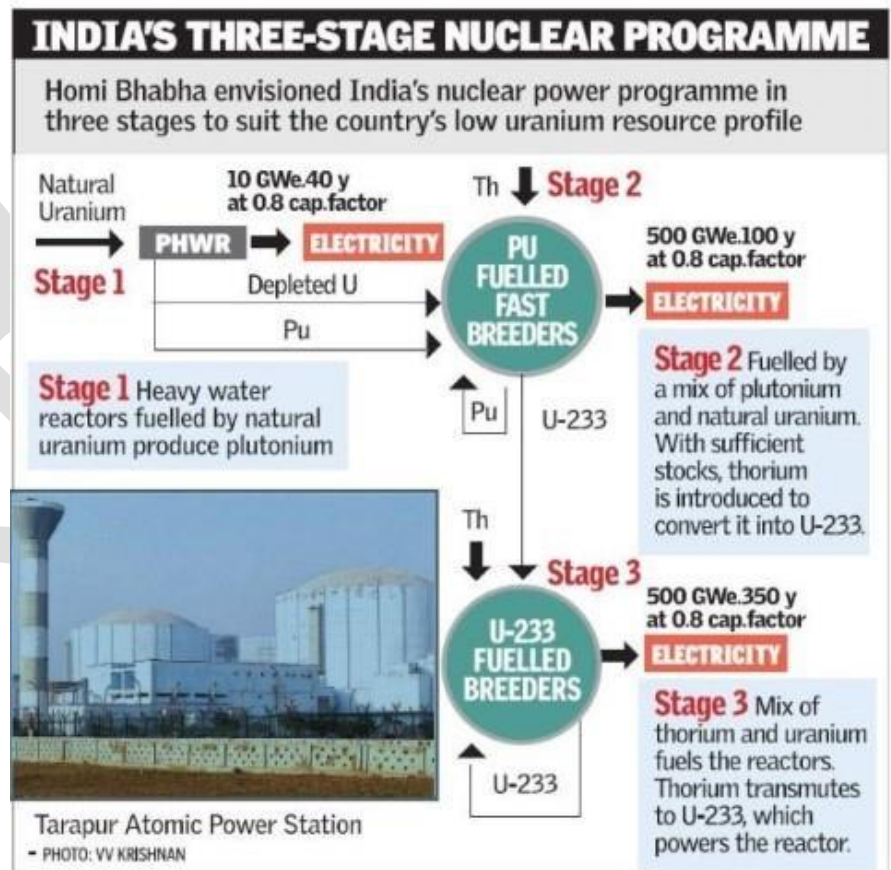
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- UNHCR is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights, and fostering a brighter future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless individuals.
- **Supportive Initiatives:** UNHCR actively assists these populations in voluntary repatriation, resettlement, or local integration efforts, promoting stability and well-being.
- **Headquarters:** Located in Geneva, Switzerland,
- **Legal Foundation:** The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol form the fundamental legal framework guiding UNHCR's mission and actions, directing its efforts to address the needs of displaced and stateless individuals worldwide.

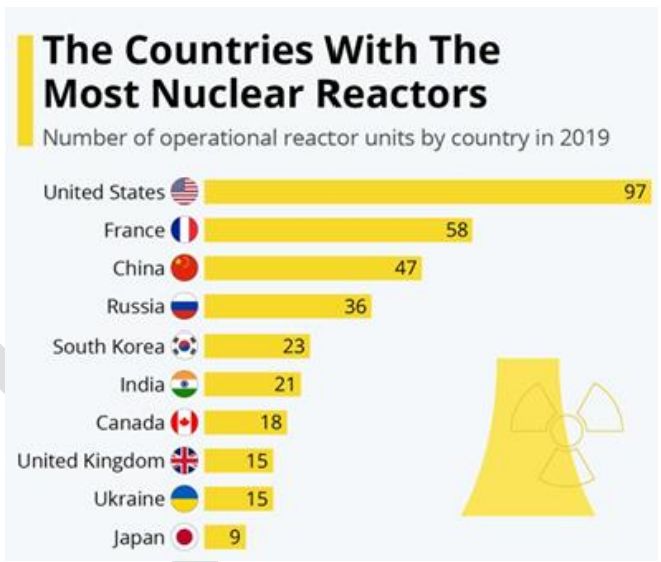
Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant

Context: India and Russia signed agreements related to the construction of the future power-generating units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant.

- KKNPP, located in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu, holds the distinction of being India's largest nuclear power station, with construction starting on March 31, 2002, despite facing significant delays attributed mainly to opposition from local fishermen.
- A collaborative effort between Atomstroyexport, the Russian state company, and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), KKNPP is designed to accommodate six VVER-1000 reactors, boasting a total installed capacity of 6,000 MW of electricity.
- Commissioning occurred in stages, with power units No. 1 and No. 2 being commissioned in 2013 and 2017, respectively.
- Power units No. 3, 4, and No. 5, 6 represent the second and third stages of the plant.
- Ongoing construction efforts at KKNPP focus on power units 3, 4, 5, and 6, signifying the continual expansion of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.



OPERATIONAL NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS IN INDIA



India's Lithium Deal with Argentina

Context: India is close to striking a deal on acquiring five lithium blocks for exploration and development in Argentina.

Lithium

Elemental Properties	Industrial Applications	Energy Storage Technology	Global Production Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lithium, identified by the symbol Li and atomic number 3, is classified under the alkali metal group on the periodic table. It presents as a soft, silvery-white metal with high reactivity, characteristic of its alkali metal classification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lithium finds widespread use in various industries, particularly in rechargeable lithium-ion batteries. These batteries are integral components in electronic devices such as smartphones, laptops, and electric vehicles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lithium-ion batteries have emerged as pivotal technology for energy storage, playing a crucial role in portable electronic devices, electric vehicles, and grid energy storage. This technology is instrumental in the global shift towards renewable energy sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of global lithium production is concentrated in countries like Australia, Chile, and Argentina. These nations, boasting significant lithium reserves, play key roles in the worldwide lithium market.

Lithium Triangle

- **Geographical Focus:** The term "Lithium Triangle" designates a triangular region in South America encompassing parts of Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile. This area is renowned for holding some of the world's largest lithium reserves.
- **Reserve Concentration:** Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile collectively possess approximately 58 percent of the world's known lithium reserves, making them substantial contributors to the global lithium market.

India's Engagement with Lithium Triangle Countries (LTCs)

- **Diplomatic Efforts:** India has been actively engaging with LTCs to secure access to lithium resources, driven by the escalating demand for lithium-ion batteries, particularly in the realms of electric vehicles (EVs) and renewable energy storage.
- **Strategic Initiatives:** India has initiated an ambitious plan to manufacture Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) under the PLI scheme, aiming to bolster battery production. Despite these efforts, India currently relies entirely on imports for lithium metal, primarily sourcing from East Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Republic of Korea.
- **Regional Focus:** Certain Indian states, like Telangana, aspire to become hubs for EV manufacturing. Simultaneously, India is exploring its domestic lithium deposits, including those in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, to enhance self-sufficiency in critical minerals.



Kuril Islands

Context: Earthquake of magnitude 6.3 jolts Japan's Kuril Islands.

- The **Kuril Islands consist of four volcanic islands located between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean**, situated to the north of Japan's northernmost prefecture, Hokkaido.
- This archipelago, comprising **56 islands and numerous minor rocks**, is part of Sakhalin Oblast in the Russian Far East.
- The Kuril Islands are positioned within the Ring of Fire, a region of tectonic instability encircling the Pacific Ocean.
- Notably, the area experiences frequent seismic activity due to its geological characteristics.
- With strategic importance, **the Kuril Islands hold economic value**,

The Kuril Islands kerfuffle between Russia and Japan

Post Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Japan has elevated its claim over the Kuril Islands which is currently under the control of Russia. On April 22, Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022 described the Kuril Islands as being under Russia's "illegal occupation."



particularly in fisheries and mineral resources such as pyrite, sulfur, and various polymetallic ores.

- Despite being **under Russian control since the conclusion of World War II**, both Russia and Japan assert claims of sovereignty over the Kuril Islands, leading to a longstanding diplomatic issue between the two nations.

HISTORY OF THE KURIL DISPUTE	
<p>■ 1855: The Treaty of Shimoda gives southern Kurils to Japan and rest of the island chain to Russia. Sakhalin Island to be under joint administration</p>	
<p>■ 1875: The Treaty of St. Petersburg cedes all Kurils to Japan in exchange for Russian jurisdiction over Sakhalin</p>	
<p>■ 1905: After Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, Japan gains control of southern Sakhalin</p>	
<p>■ 1945: The Soviet Union occupies the entire Kuril chain and southern Sakhalin after declaring war on Japan during the final days of World War II</p>	
<p>■ 1951: Japan renounces claim to Kurils in the Treaty of San Francisco, signed between Japan and the Allied powers. The Soviet Union does not sign, and Japan later claims that the four southern islands are not part of the Kuril chain</p>	<p>■ 1956: The Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration restores diplomatic ties between the two countries. The Soviet Union agrees to cede islands of Shikotan and Habomai to Japan after signing of formal peace treaty. Japan claims territorial rights to all four southern islands, so no agreement is signed</p>

Military Exercises, Defence & Security

Exercise Milan

Context: The Indian Navy is preparing for its largest multilateral exercise, "Exercise Milan," scheduled for February 2024, coinciding with Navy Day on December 4.

- MILAN, the flagship event, is a biennial multilateral naval exercise.
- Initiated by the Indian Navy in 1995.
- Originally aligned with India's 'Look East Policy.'
- Over the years, MILAN has expanded to include participation from Friendly Foreign Countries (FFCs) due to the 'Act East policy' and PM of India Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative.
- It involved participation from 39 countries.

Rafale Marine Jets

Context: Recently, India has received price bids from France for the purchase of 26 Rafale-M carrier-based fighters, along with three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines.

- **Naval Variant:** The Rafale Marine fighters serve as the naval version of the Rafale jets, and India currently operates 36 of them within the Indian Air Force.
- **Advanced Multirole Fighters:** Manufactured by Dassault Aviation, the Rafales are advanced twin-engine, multirole fighter jets equipped with cutting-edge sensors, radar, and the latest weapon systems.

Other Naval Exercise

- **CORPAT** - India and Thailand
- **JIMEX** - India and Japan
- **Konkan Shakti** - India and UK
- **Samudra Shakti** - India and Indonesia
- **SIMBEX** - India and Singapore

RAFALE SPECIFICATIONS





- **India-Specific Enhancements:** Tailored specifically for India, these jets have undergone enhancements that give them the capability to execute a diverse range of missions.
- **Anti-ship Strike Mechanism:** The Rafale M is set to feature the AM39 Exocet missile, enhancing its capability for anti-ship strikes.
- **Payload Capacity:** With a capacity to carry up to 9.5 tonnes of weaponry, fuel tanks, and pods on 13 external hardpoints (14 for the air force variant), the Rafale M demonstrates proficiency in low-level, high-speed penetrations for evading enemy radar.
- **Expanded Weapon Capabilities:** Rafale Marine jets boast an extended arsenal, capable of carrying a broader range of weapons, including anti-ship and air-to-surface missiles.

Environment

Green Turtle

Context: Green turtles nesting range expands under warming climate.

Green Turtle

- **About:** The green sea turtle is the **largest hard-shelled** sea turtle.
- **Food:** They are unique among sea turtles in that they are **herbivores**, eating mostly seagrasses and algae.
- **Green colour:** This diet is what gives their fat a **greenish colour** (not their shells), which is where their name comes from.
- **IUCN status: Endangered.**
- **Distribution:** The range of the green sea turtle extends throughout **tropical and subtropical oceans worldwide**.
- The two major subpopulations are the **Atlantic and the eastern Pacific** subpopulations.
- Each population is **genetically distinct**, with its own set of nesting and feeding grounds within the population's known range.

About Turtle

- **About:** Turtles are reptiles of the order Testudines that have bodies encased in bony shells.
- **Types:** There are more than 350 species of turtles.
- **Oldest:** Turtles have existed for 200 million years, making them the oldest of all surviving reptiles.
- **Food:** Turtles eat plants, animals, or both.

Feature

- They are toothless, have a horny beak, and range from less than 10 cm to more than 1.5 m) long.
- They have sturdy, sprawling limbs with short feet or paddlelike flippers (marine turtles).
- Some species bend the neck sideways, but most pull the head and neck backward into the shell.
- Almost half of the known turtle species are rare, threatened, or endangered.
- Most species are aquatic or semiaquatic; some are terrestrial.

Threats

Fisheries bycatch

- Worldwide, hundreds of thousands of sea turtles a year are accidentally caught in shrimp trawl nets, on longline hooks and in fishing gillnets.
- As fishing activity expands, this threat is more of a problem.

Habitat loss

- Sea turtles are dependent on beaches for nesting.
- Uncontrolled coastal development, vehicle traffic on beaches, and other human activities have directly destroyed or disturbed sea turtle nesting beaches around the world.

Overharvesting and illegal trade

- Worldwide, the green turtle continues to be hunted and its eggs harvested.
- Much of that is for human consumption, but trade of turtle parts remains a profitable business.



Green Rising Initiative

Context: Recently, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s Generation Unlimited in collaboration with India's Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change unveiled the "Green Rising" initiative at COP28 in Dubai.

Key Highlights

- The initiative's primary focus is to involve youth in impactful environmental actions at the grassroots level, aligning with the global efforts to combat the severe impacts of climate change.
- The collaborative "Green Rising" initiative and the "Green Rising India Alliance" involve UNICEF, Generation Unlimited, and a diverse network of public, private, and youth partners. This aims to mobilize millions of young people worldwide, encouraging their active participation in green initiatives addressing and adapting to climate change impacts on their communities.
- In India, the YuWaah campaign emphasizes engaging youth in driving impactful environmental actions at the grassroots level.

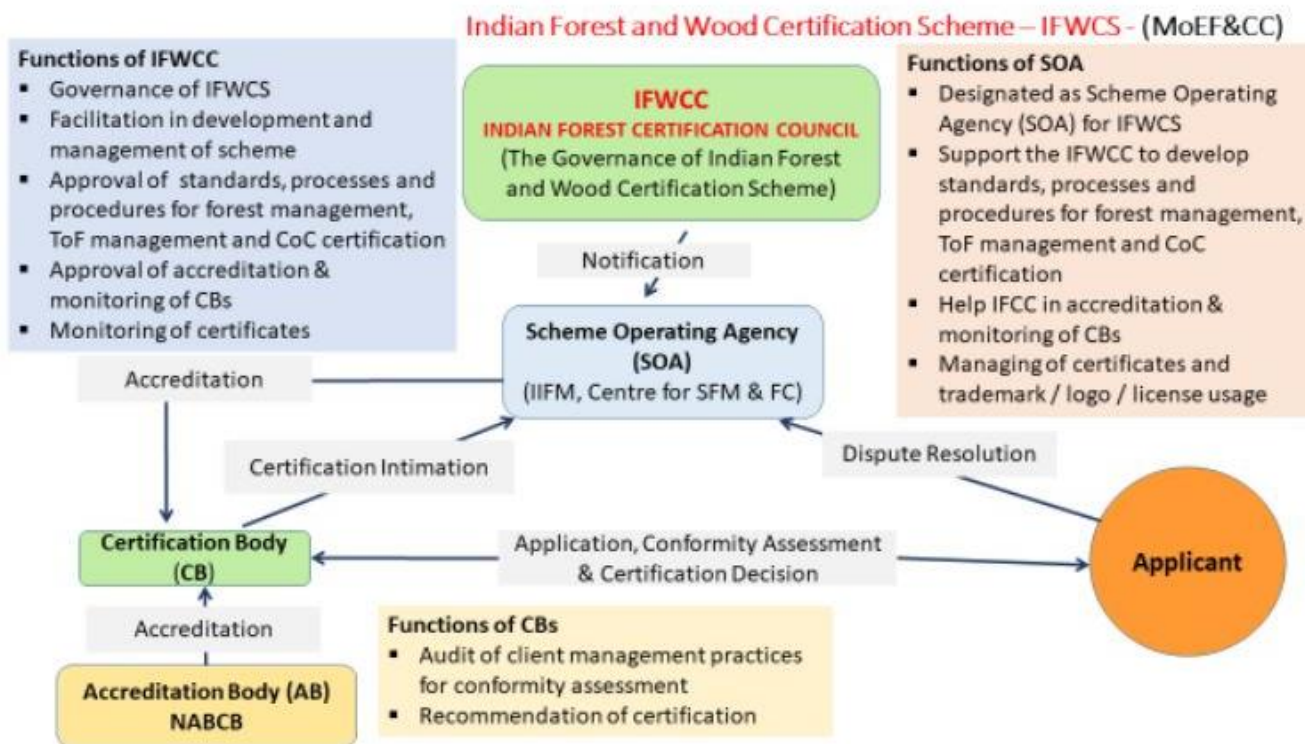
UNICEF

- Originally founded as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).
- Established by the UN General Assembly on December 11, 1946, to provide emergency food and healthcare to children and mothers in post-World War II devastated countries.
- A leading source of information on the global situation of children.
- It relies solely on contributions from governments and private donors.
- The Executive Board consists of 36 Member States, elected to three-year terms by the Economic and Social Council, with regional allocations: Africa (8 seats), Asia (7), Eastern Europe (4), Latin America and Caribbean (5), and Western Europe and Others (12).
- Headquarters located in New York City.

Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS)

Context: The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has launched the Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme.

Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme	
Aim	To provide market incentives for entities, including state forest departments, farmers, and wood-based industries, that adhere to responsible forest and agroforestry practices.
Standards	The Forest Management certification is based on the Indian Forest Management Standard, with a newly introduced Trees Outside Forests Standard.
Applicable	Forest areas and Trees Outside Forest plantations on government, private, agroforestry, and other lands.
Certification Covers	Timber and non-timber forest produce.
Nodal Agency	Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council, Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, and National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies.



Overview of Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS)

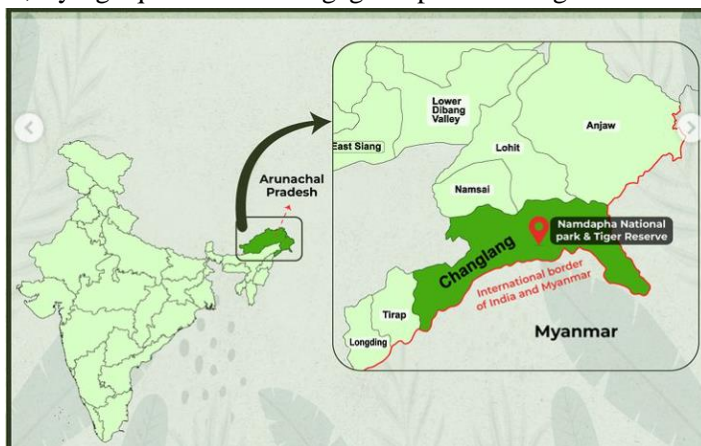
Namdapha Flying Squirrel

Context: A nocturnal flying squirrel has resurfaced in Arunachal Pradesh after going missing for 42 years.

- An Arboreal Nocturnal Flying Squirrel Endemic to Arunachal Pradesh
- In 1981, a solitary individual was discovered in Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh.
- Adorned in reddish, grizzled fur with a white upper coat, this species features a pale grey crown, an orangish patagium, and white underparts. Despite their name, flying squirrels don't engage in powered flight like birds or bats; instead, they gracefully glide between trees.
- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered
- **Threatened by:** Poaching for food within the park and potential habitat destruction pose severe threats to this species.

Namdapha Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh
- **Tiger Project Designation (1983):** Declared as the 15th Tiger Project in the country.
- Core area spans 1985.245 Sq.Km with an additional buffer area of 245 Sq.Km.



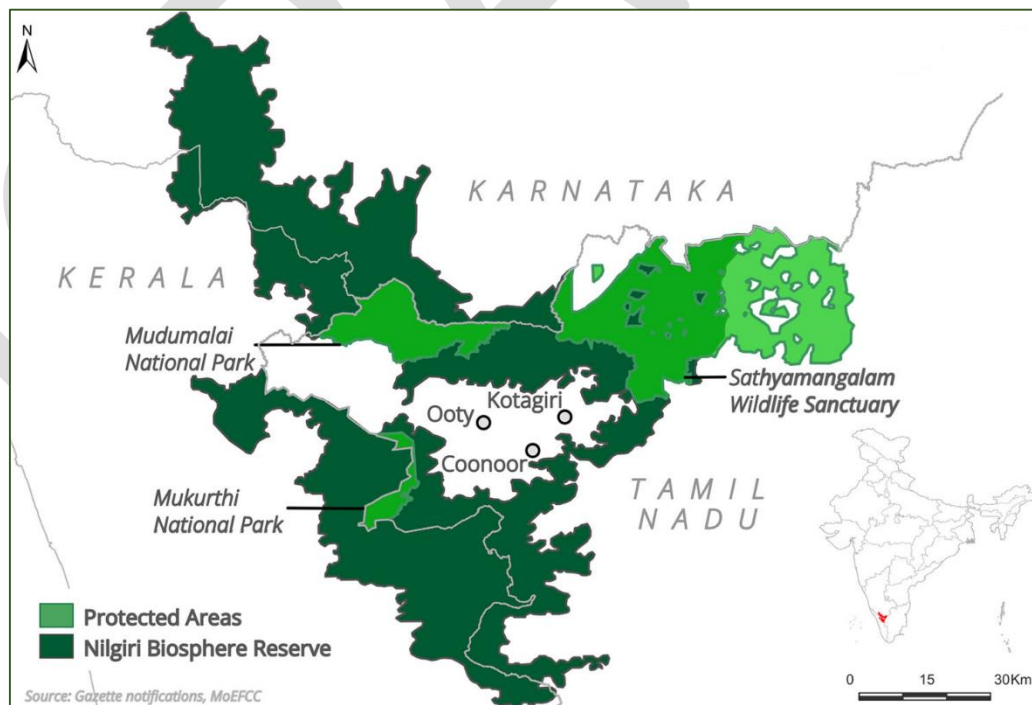
- **Wildlife Sanctuary Status (1972):** Initially declared a Wildlife Sanctuary under the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 on 2nd Oct.'1972.
- **National Park Declaration (1983):** Upgraded to National Park status on 12th May 1983, in accordance with the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

Mukurthi National Park

Context: Recently, the Tamil Nadu's Forest Department has begun an investigation of a private helicopter's unauthorised flyby over Mukurthi National Park.

About Mukurthi National Park

- **Location:** Mukurthi National Park is situated in the western corner of the Nilgiris Plateau in Tamil Nadu.
- **Biosphere Reserve:** It is an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.
- **Surrounded by Notables:** The park is sandwiched between Mudumalai National Park and Silent Valley National Park.
- **Establishment:** Established with the primary goal of conserving its keystone species, the Nilgiri Tahr.
- **Recognition:** A UNESCO World Heritage Site, formerly known as Nilgiri Tahr National Park.
- **Prominent Peak:** Home to Mukurthi Peak (2,554m), the fourth highest peak in the Nilgiri Hills.
- **River Flow:** Pykara and Kundah rivers, along with various perennial streams, traverse the park, eventually draining into the Bhavani Puzha.
- **Diverse Vegetation:** Landscape predominantly covered with shrubs and mountainous grasslands. Higher elevations with ample rainfall boast sholas and lush green tropical grasslands.
- **Floral Diversity:** Varied flora includes Sholas, Gaultheria fragrantissima, Helichrysum, Berberis tinctoria, Rhododendrons, Cinnamon, Mahonia, Satyrium, Raspberries, and more.
- **Rich Fauna:** Diverse fauna featuring Nilgiri tahr, Indian elephants, Nilgiri Langur, Bengal tiger, bonnet macaque, among others.

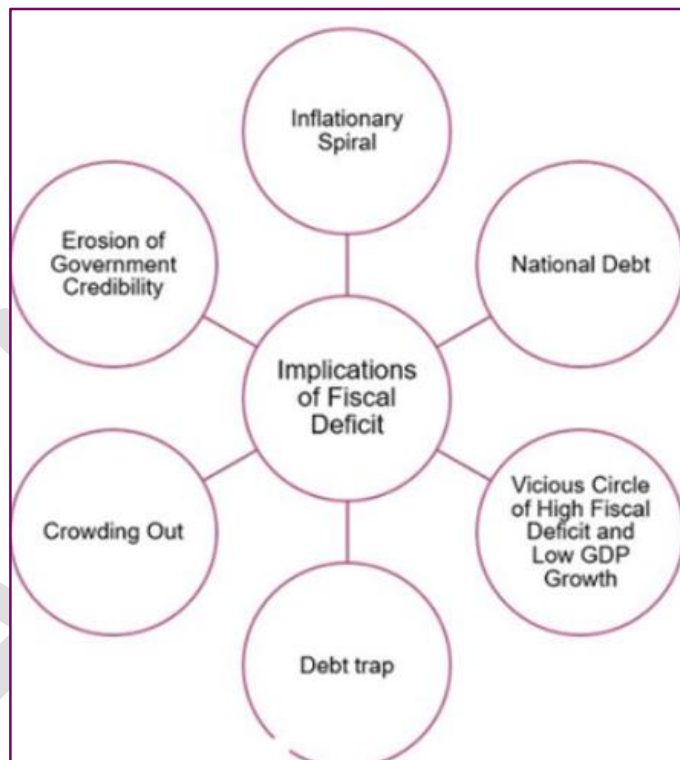


Economy

Fiscal Deficit

Context: The government's fiscal deficit at the end of October stood at ₹8.03 lakh crore, or 45% of the full-year budget estimate, according to data released by the Controller General of Accounts.

- **Definition of Fiscal Deficit:** The fiscal deficit is the difference between the government's overall income, comprising taxes and non-debt capital receipts, and its total expenditure.
- **Formula:** Fiscal Deficit = Total government expenditure (including capital and revenue expenditure) – Total government income (Revenue receipts + recovery of loans + other receipts).
- **Causes:** It occurs when government spending exceeds its income.
- **Representation:** It indicates the extent to which the government has spent more than its earnings, often expressed as a percentage of the GDP.



Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act

- **Establishment:** The FRBM Act was enacted in 2003 with the objective of setting targets to reduce fiscal deficits.
- **Committee Formation:** In May 2016, a committee under NK Singh was formed to review the FRBM Act, addressing concerns that the targets were too inflexible.
- **Government's Perspective:** The government believed that the existing targets needed reevaluation.
- **Proposal:** The committee recommended that the government target a fiscal deficit of 3 percent of the GDP until March 31, 2020, reduce it to 2.8 percent in 2020-21, and further cut it to 2.5 percent by 2023.

Core Sector

Context: Recently, India's eight core sectors recorded a growth of 12.1 percent in October, as reported by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI)

- **Issued by:** Office of the Economic Adviser (OEA), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GOI.
- **Frequency:** Monthly release.
- **Base Year:** 2011-12.

Core Sector

- **About:** Core sectors in an economy represent its pivotal industries.
- **Eight Core Sectors in the Indian Economy:** Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizer, Steel, Cement, Electricity.
- **Significance in IIP:** Combined, these sectors contribute over 40.27% to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- **Weightage Ranking:** Refinery Products > Electricity > Steel > Coal > Crude Oil > Natural Gas > Cement > Fertilizers.

Purchasing Managers Index (PMI)

Context: Recently, the manufacturing sector has experienced a boost in November, driven by an upswing in demand and a reduction in pricing pressure, as indicated by the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) reaching 56, according to the survey released by S&P Global.

- PMI, which stands for Purchasing Managers' Index, serves as a business activity indicator for both manufacturing and services sectors.
- This survey-based measure **gauges respondents' perceptions** of key business variables compared to the previous month.
- **PMI is derived from five major surveys:** New orders, Inventory levels, Production, Supplier deliveries, and Employment.
- **Two main types of PMI exist:** Manufacturing PMI and Services PMI.
- The calculation involves separately assessing manufacturing and services sectors, followed by creating a composite index.
- **PMI is expressed as a numerical value ranging from 0 to 100**, where a score above 50 signifies business activity expansion, while anything below 50 indicates contraction.
- **Globally, the Global PMI is an economic indicator** generated from questionnaires sent to manufacturing and services companies across more than 40 countries.

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

Context: Recently, the Union Finance Minister of India highlighted that approximately 13.5 crore people escaped "multidimensional" poverty in the last five years. India, maintaining its momentum as the fastest-growing major economy, witnesses significant contributions from all sectors to economic activities.

- **India has become the fifth largest economy** from being the tenth largest in 2015.

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

- **Definition:** This index serves as a crucial global measure for assessing severe multidimensional poverty in over 100 developing nations.
- **Collaboration:** Developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).
- **Calculation Method:** The MPI is derived by multiplying the incidence of poverty with the average intensity of poverty.
- **Scale:** The MPI ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a higher level of poverty.

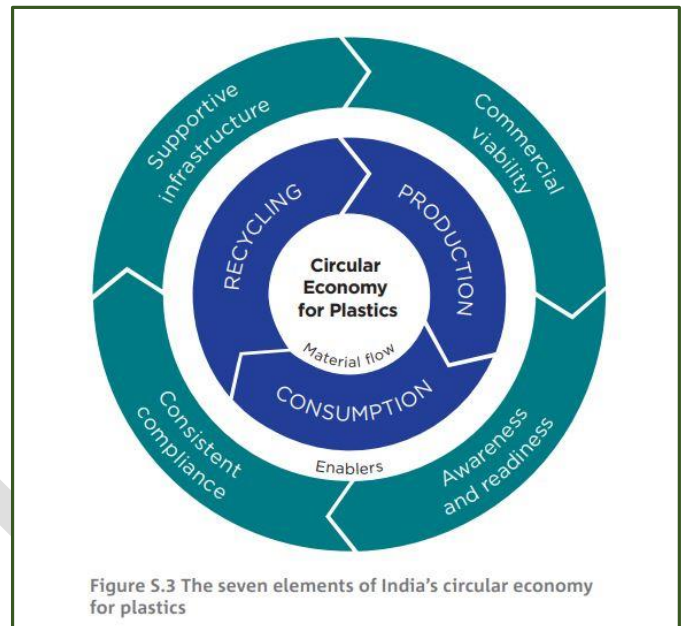
National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

- **Overview:** This index is constructed based on the most recent National Family Health Survey conducted between 2019 and 2021.
- **Survey Conducted by:** The International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, administers the NFHS.
- **Inaugural Release:** The first edition of the National MPI was unveiled in 2021.
- **Responsible Body:** NITI Ayog acts as the nodal agency overseeing the National MPI.
- **Indicators:** The index incorporates three equally weighted dimensions - Health, Education, and Standard of living.

National Circular Economy Roadmap for Plastic Waste Reduction

Context: Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh released a flagship document on 'National Circular Economy Roadmap for reduction of Plastic waste in India'.

- Leading research institutions from India and Australia are collaboratively developing a roadmap for India's shift to a circular economy in the plastics sector.
- **India and Australia are actively engaged** in negotiations for a **Global Plastics Treaty**, set to be finalized next year.
- The **need for a policy roadmap arises due to India's daily generation of 26,000 tonnes** of plastic waste, making it one of the largest plastic waste producers globally, second only to the USA and the European Union.
- Presently, only **8% of plastic in India is recycled, 29% is mismanaged**, while the remaining is incinerated or dumped.
- A **substantial portion of household waste comprises plastic**, of which 50-80% is collected, and only 40% is segregated for resource recovery.
- Improperly managed plastic waste contributes to marine pollution; hence, transitioning to a circular economy for plastics is essential.
- The circular economy approach aims to minimize the use of virgin plastic and maximize the utilization of recycled material.
- The **National Circular Economy Roadmap envisions, by 2035**, recycling two-thirds of all plastics, phasing out single-use plastics, reducing greenhouse emissions by 20-50% through diverting plastic waste into resources, and improving air quality.



Disinflation

Context: Recently, central bank officials noted that a slowdown in the rate of inflation could potentially lead to a reduction in global interest rates, foreseeing a possibility of further global growth deceleration and disinflation in 2024.

- Disinflation is characterized by a temporary slowdown in price inflation, reflecting a modest decline in the inflation rate over a short period.
- Measurement of Disinflation:
- In contrast to inflation and deflation, which indicate the direction of prices, disinflation specifically focuses on the rate of change in the inflation rate.
- Maintaining a controlled level of disinflation is crucial for preventing economic overheating and fostering a balanced and sustainable economic environment.
- Disinflation can be triggered by an increase in the available money supply within a nation's economy.
- Alternatively, inflation may arise when the economy experiences an 'overheating' phase due to excessive aggregate demand, known as demand-pull inflation.
- Disinflation involves a reduction in the inflation rate, whereas deflation signifies negative inflation, indicating an overall decrease in price levels.

Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs)

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently placed on its website, a 'Draft Omnibus Framework for recognising Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs) for its Regulated Entities (REs)'.

- An SRO, or Self-Regulatory Organization, is a **non-governmental entity responsible for establishing and enforcing industry rules and standards.**
- The primary objective is to safeguard customers while promoting ethics, equality, and professionalism among its members.
- SROs implement self-regulatory processes through impartial mechanisms, ensuring that members operate within a disciplined environment.
- Beyond industry self-interests, an SRO is tasked with addressing concerns that extend to the protection of workers, customers, and other participants in the ecosystem.
 - This reflects a commitment to the overall well-being of stakeholders.
- The regulations, standards, and dispute resolution processes instituted by an SRO serve as supplements to existing laws and regulations, reinforcing the legal framework rather than replacing it.
- Recognized SROs play a crucial role as a two-way communication channel between their members and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). This facilitates effective coordination and collaboration in maintaining industry standards.

Regulated Entities(REs)

- REs encompass all Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs), Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), Local Area Banks (LABs), Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks (UCBs), State and Central Co-operative Banks (StCBs/CCBs), and any other entity licensed under Section 22 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949. Collectively, this group is referred to as 'banks.
- Additionally, the category includes All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs), All Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs), Miscellaneous Non-Banking Companies (MNBCs), and Residuary Non-Banking Companies (RNBCs).

Stagflation

Context: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials believe the risk of stagflation — a portmanteau of economic stagnation with high inflation — has lowered further to 1% compared with 3% in August based on available data, using two approaches.

- **About:** Stagflation is a state characterized by a simultaneous increase in prices and stagnation of economic growth.
- **Coined Term:** The term "Stagflation" was introduced by Iain Macleod, a Conservative Party MP in the United Kingdom, in November 1965.
- **Economic Situation Description:** Stagflation is depicted as an economic scenario where the growth rate slows down, unemployment remains persistently high, and inflation or price levels remain elevated simultaneously.
- **Economic Peril:** Stagflation poses a significant threat to the economy.
- **Economic Stimulus:** In situations of typically low growth, central banks and governments often attempt to stimulate the economy through increased public spending and lower interest rates to boost demand.
- **Challenge in Economic Tools:** However, these measures, while aiming to spur growth, may also contribute to higher prices and inflation. Consequently, breaking out of the low growth-high inflation trap becomes challenging when inflation is already prevalent.

Science & Technology

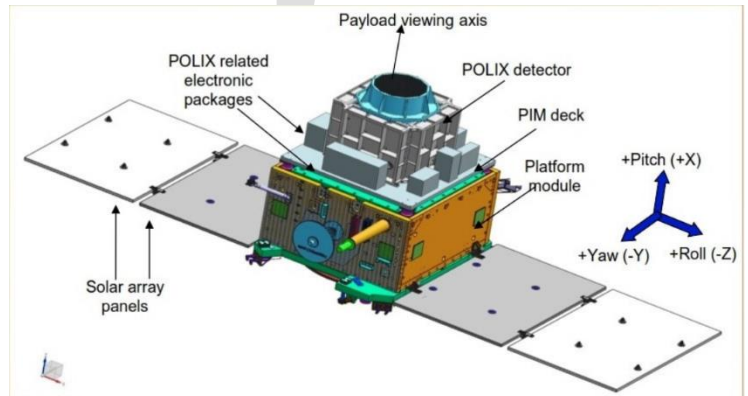
X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat)

Context: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced that India is set to launch its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat), aiming to investigate the polarisation of intense X-Ray sources.

Features and Payloads

- The XPoSat spacecraft is designated for observation from Low Earth Orbit.

- It carries two scientific payloads facilitating simultaneous studies of temporal, spectral, and polarization features of bright X-Ray sources.
- **Objectives:** To measure X-Ray polarization in the energy band of 8-30 keV from X-Ray sources.
 - Another goal is to conduct long-term spectral and temporal studies of cosmic X-Ray sources in the energy band of 0.8-15 keV.
- **Observation Period:** The observation period is expected to last approximately five years.
- During this time, the payloads will observe X-Ray sources while the spacecraft transits through Earth's shadow, specifically during the eclipse period.
- **Primary and Secondary Payloads of XPoSat**
 - **POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays):** It measures polarimetry parameters in the medium X-ray energy range of 8-30 keV. It was developed by the Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bengaluru.
 - **XSPECT (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing):** It provides spectroscopic information within the energy range of 0.8-15 keV. It was developed by the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), ISRO.



Voice Over New Radio (VoNR)

Context: Reports indicate Reliance Jio, India's largest mobile carrier, has been testing Voice over New Radio (VoNR) behind the scenes.

- Voice over 5G, also known as Voice over New Radio (VoNR), enables voice calls over 5G networks, surpassing the current 4G standard.
- Vo5G leverages the benefits of 5G technology, including speed, capacity, and responsiveness, specifically for voice communication.
- It focuses on establishing the necessary infrastructure and interoperability well in advance.
- To use Vo5G, you require a compatible phone, a carrier offering Vo5G services, and access to a 5G signal in your area.
- VoNR outperforms VoLTE with higher bandwidth, lower latency, and improved call quality due to advanced audio codecs.
- Faster connection times ensure a seamless user experience, and enhanced reliability aims to eliminate call drop issues during transitions between 5G and 4G.
- Lower packet loss contributes to improved reliability, minimizing voice cutouts during calls.

Discovery of Six New Exoplanets

Context: Six exoplanets orbiting around a nearby bright star HD 110067 in the Coma Berenices constellation have been discovered.

Exoplanets

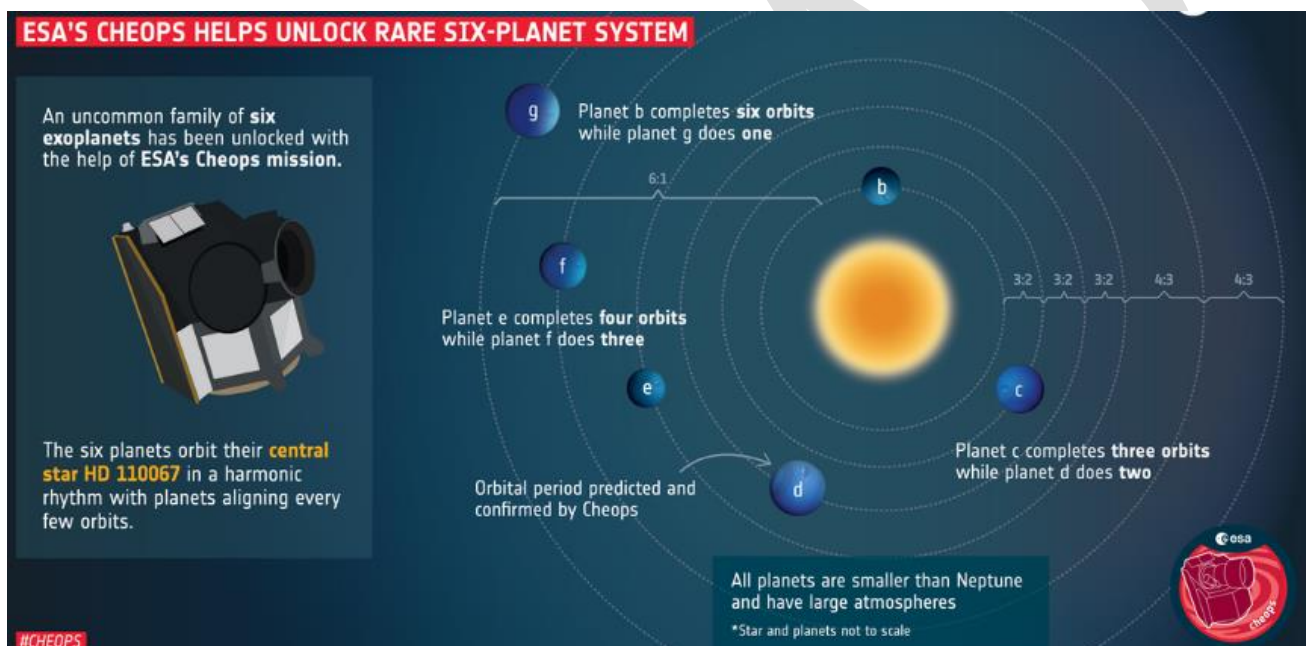
- An exoplanet is a planet located outside our solar system.
- Most exoplanets orbit stars, but rogue planets, known as free-floating exoplanets, navigate the galactic center without being tethered to any star.

Discovery of HD 110067 System

- HD 110067, a luminous star in the Coma Berenices constellation, was observed from Earth's Northern Hemisphere.
- NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) detected brightness dips in HD 110067 in 2020 and 2022.
- Further observations by the 'CHARacterising ExOPlanets Satellite' (CHEOPS) confirmed six planets passing in front of the star.

Physical Traits of Newly Discovered Exoplanets

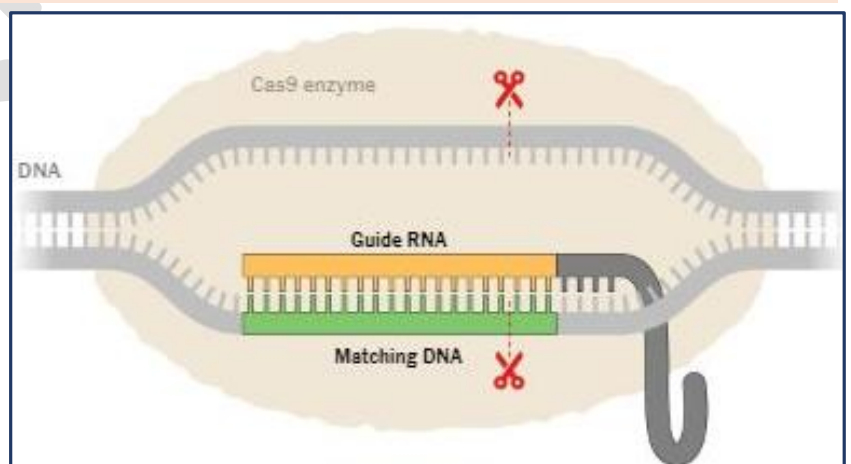
- The recently found exoplanets have radii ranging between Earth and Neptune.
- These planets exhibit low mass and density, possibly due to substantial, hydrogen-rich atmospheres.
- All six exoplanets follow resonant orbits, indicating a stable system that has likely remained unchanged for at least four billion years.



CRISPR Gene Therapy for Sickle Cell Disease

Context: The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved two gene therapies for sickle cell disease, making one of them the first treatment based on the Nobel Prize-winning CRISPR gene editing technology.

- The Casgevy, developed jointly by Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics, and Lyfgenia, developed by Bluebird bio, have received approval from the US FDA for individuals aged 12 years and older.



- Both Casgevy and Lyfgenia are positioned as one-time treatments, set to be accessible in early 2024.
- Casgevy utilizes CRISPR technology, employing molecular 'scissors' to selectively trim defective gene segments, which can then be either disabled or replaced with new strands of normal DNA.
- In contrast, Bluebird's gene therapy, Lyfgenia, employs a cell-based gene therapy approach, introducing modified genes into the body through disabled viruses. Lyfgenia utilizes a lentiviral vector, serving as a gene delivery vehicle for genetic modification.

Significance

- These therapies mark a significant breakthrough in the treatment of sickle cell disease, offering hope for enhanced management and the potential for transformative impact.
- The significance of these treatments is particularly pronounced for the Black community, which faces a disproportionate burden of sickle cell disease.

Issues involved

- **Limited Data Availability:** The companies must address the challenge of limited data availability by conducting a 15-year follow-up study after approval to assess potential long-term safety risks.
- **Limited donors available:** A key hurdle lies in the scarcity of donors for the only longer-term treatment for sickle cell disease, which involves a bone marrow transplant requiring compatible donors.

Sickle Cell Disease

- Sickle cell disease, a group of inherited blood disorders, is most prevalent among African Americans. The primary issue involves a mutation in hemoglobin, a protein within red blood cells responsible for delivering oxygen to the body's tissues.
- This mutation causes red blood cells to take on a crescent or 'sickle' shape, impeding blood flow in vessels and limiting oxygen supply to the body's tissues. This results in severe pain and organ damage known as Vaso-Occlusive Events (VOEs) or Vaso-Occlusive Crises (VOCs).
- Anemia is a consequence, as sickle cells easily disintegrate and have a lifespan of only 10 to 20 days, compared to the normal 120-day lifespan of red blood cells. The rapid cell breakdown leads to a shortage of red blood cells.
- The recurrence of these crises can result in life-threatening disabilities or premature death.

Treatment

- Complete elimination of this genetic disorder poses a significant challenge, requiring a major scientific breakthrough.
- Standard care for sickle cell patients involves the use of the chemotherapy drug hydroxyurea, administered once daily, with the goal of slowing down the breakdown of red blood cells.
- Gene therapy and stem cell transplants are currently in the developmental stages as potential treatments for sickle cell disease.

Electric eel

Context: Recently, a research group from Nagoya University in Japan found electric eels can release enough electricity to genetically modify small fish larvae.

Species Information

- The species is known scientifically as *Electrophorus Electricus* and exclusively inhabits freshwater environments.
- It possesses the capability to discharge up to 860 volts, sufficient to power machinery.
- Utilizes a faint electric signal for navigation, mate location, and prey detection.

Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characterized by a slender, snake-like body and a flattened head. • Features three distinct electric organs—main electrical organ, Hunter's organ, and Sachs' organ—comprising approximately 80 percent of its body. • The ability to deliver shocks stems from its nervous system housing disc-shaped electrogenic cells, known as electrocytes.
Habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily resides in the muddy bottoms of rivers and occasionally swamps. • Prefers shaded regions with considerable depth.
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found in regions spanning Brazil, the Guianas, Suriname, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.
Conservation Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the IUCN, the species is classified as "Least Concern."
Electroporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electroporation employs an electric field to create transient pores in cell membranes, enabling the entry of molecules such as DNA or proteins into the target cell.

Use of mRNA as Medicine

Context: The therapeutic use of mRNA has fueled great hope to combat a wide range of incurable diseases.

What is mRNA?

- Messenger RNA (mRNA) is a type of nucleic acid responsible for carrying genetic information.
- In cells, mRNA conveys codes from the DNA in the nucleus to the protein synthesis sites in the cytoplasm, specifically the ribosomes.
- DNA information must be transcribed into mRNA before decoding into proteins.

Benefits of mRNA-based Medicine

Scalability

- The laboratory production of mRNA is efficient and uniform, allowing scientists to generate large quantities consistently.

Meet the Needs of the Patient

- Cells naturally degrade unnecessary mRNA, enabling easy dosage adjustments based on changing patient requirements.

Cure for Diseases

- mRNA can correct protein-related issues in cells, offering a potential cure for diseases caused by incorrect, mutant, or insufficient protein production.

Future of mRNA-based Medicine

- mRNA-based medicine holds promise for treating various conditions, including heart disease, neurodegenerative disease, and bone loss.
- mRNA drugs can stimulate the formation of new blood vessels, aiding in the improved wound healing of diabetic patients with circulation issues.
- Propionic acidaemia, a condition characterized by low levels of liver proteins, can potentially be treated with mRNA to prevent toxic by-products from accumulating in the body.

Nematocysts - A Cellular Weapon

Context: Evolution has come up with many strange ways to help animals defend themselves. One is a specialised cell called a nematocyst.

- Nematocysts are found in some animals, but especially jellyfish, corals, sea anemones, and hydras, that serve as potent weapons to hunt prey and fend off predators.

- Nematocysts are specialized cells found in jellyfish, corals, sea anemones, and hydras, and act as potent weapons for defence and hunting.
- Composed of capsules containing coiled tubules and toxins, nematocysts rapidly eject these tubules with extreme acceleration when triggered.
- Nematocysts play a crucial role in the feeding and defence strategies of cnidarians in particular. Cnidarians are animals that contain cells called cnidocytes.
- When potential prey comes into contact with a cnidocyte, specialised sensory structures on the cell's surface trigger the release of the nematocyst. The tubule then unfurls, piercing the prey's outer layer or injecting toxins into its body.
- **Adaptation for Survival:** Nematocysts' complexity contributes to cnidarians' success in diverse aquatic environments.
- This adaptation makes cnidarians formidable creatures, aiding in their survival and dominance in various ecosystems.

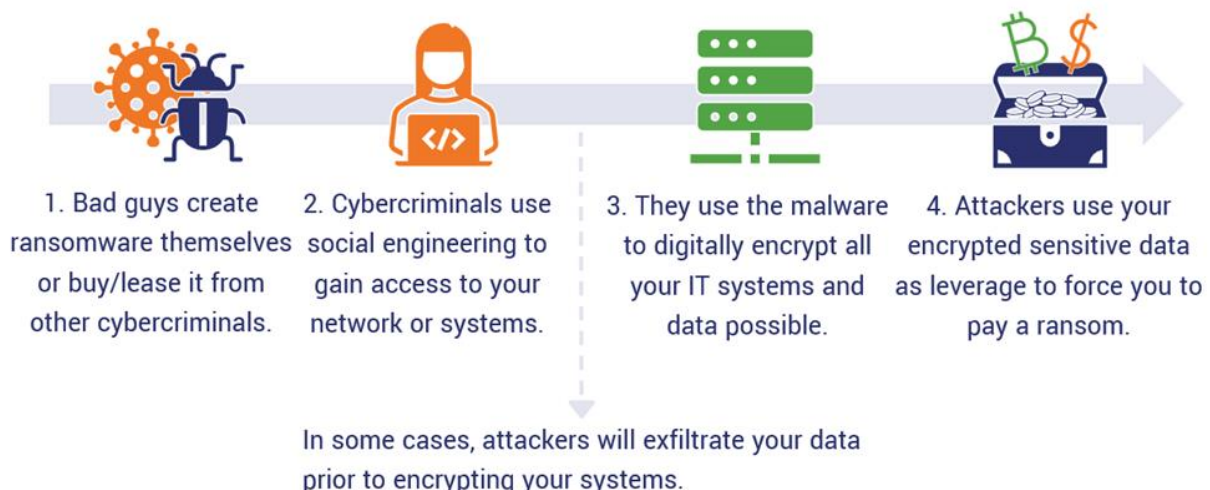


Ransomware Attacks

Context: Recently, IT services provider HCL Technologies said that it was hit by a ransomware incident.

- Ransomware is a form of extortion software crafted to lock or encrypt a device or data on a system, followed by a demand for a ransom for its release.
- The attacks operate on a straightforward plan where assailants gain entry to a device or safeguarded cloud data.
- Depending on the ransomware's characteristics, it may proceed to lock or encrypt devices, data stored in the cloud, or an entire internal network of an organization.
- Perpetrators typically leave behind a message detailing the ransom amount, mode of transfer, or instructions on how to contact them for further guidance.

How Ransomware Works



Recent Ransomware Attacks in India

- **AIIMS:** In 2022, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) experienced a ransomware attack that encrypted patient data and demanded a \$1 million ransom. AIIMS declined to pay, and the attackers released the data on the dark web.
- **Nagpur's Solar Industries Limited:** In 2023, Solar Industries Limited (SIL), an industrial and defense explosives manufacturer, fell victim to a ransomware attack by a group identifying as BlackCat or ALPHV. They claimed to have stolen 2 terabytes of data from the company's servers.
- **Fullerton India:** In April 2023, Fullerton India, a non-banking financial company (NBFC), was subjected to a ransomware attack by Lockbit 3.0, a group known for sophisticated attacks and high ransom demands.

Ransomware Attacks: a Matter of Concern

- A 2023 study by Sophos, a cybersecurity company, revealed that 73% of organizations reported falling victim to ransomware attacks, up from 57% the previous year.
- Among these, 77% of organizations reported successful data encryption by attackers, with 44% opting to pay the ransom for data retrieval, a significant drop from 78% compared to the previous year.
- Despite paying the ransom, companies faced double the cost of recovery for data held hostage by threat actors compared to organizations that did not pay and relied on backups.
- The Indian ransomware report by India's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) highlighted a 51% increase in ransomware incidents in 2022, with a majority targeting data centers, IT, and TeS sectors in the country.

Advisory on Deep Fakes

Context: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology recently sent an advisory to social media firms to comply with the Information Technology Rules, 2021.

- The advisory **aims to prompt social media companies** to take more robust measures against artificially generated 'deepfake' videos using artificial intelligence.
- It requires intermediaries to clearly and precisely convey prohibited content, especially as outlined in **Rule 3(1)(b) of the IT Rules, to users.**
- Under the due diligence section of the IT rules, Rule 3(1)(b) mandates intermediaries to communicate their regulations, privacy policy, and user agreement in the user's preferred language.
- **Rule 3(1)(b)(v) specifically prohibits the dissemination** of misinformation and patently false information.

About Deepfake

- Deepfakes represent a novel form of audiovisual manipulation, enabling the creation of realistic simulations involving someone's face, voice, or actions.
- These manipulations allow **individuals to make it appear as though someone said or did something they did not**, or fabricate events that never actually took place.
- The creation process relies on deep learning algorithms, specifically Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), which analyze and learn from extensive datasets of images and videos.
- Facial swapping involves replacing the face of one person in a video with another's, while voice cloning synthesizes speech to mimic another person's voice, allowing them to seemingly say anything in recorded media.
- Deepfakes can also alter body movements and expressions, contributing to the blurring of lines between reality and manipulation.

Applications

- In the realm of entertainment and satire, deepfakes find use in creating humorous parodies and unexpected mashups featuring celebrities or public figures.

- Within the film and visual effects industry, this technology can be harnessed to produce realistic special effects or de-age actors in movies.
- Deepfakes offer potential in education and training by providing immersive learning experiences through simulations and scenarios across various fields.

Ammonia

Context: Ammonia gas leaked from an underwater supply pipeline to an industrial unit, near Periyakuppam in Ennore, Tamil Nadu.

- **Chemical Composition:** Ammonia is a chemical compound composed of nitrogen and hydrogen, represented by the formula NH_3 .
- **Occurrence:** Found naturally in the environment, ammonia is present in the air, soil, water, plants, and animals, including humans.
- **Human Impact:** Elevated levels of ammonia can lead to skin, mouth, throat, lung, and eye irritation and burns. Excessive exposure may result in severe lung damage or even death, posing a potential risk to workers.

Uses

- **Storage:** Ammonia is stored either in a liquid state under high pressure or as a gas under low temperatures for various industrial applications.
- **Fertilizer Production:** Ammonia plays a crucial role in the global production of fertilizers, with over 80% of its output dedicated to this industry.
- **Widespread Industrial Application:** As one of the most extensively manufactured synthetic chemicals worldwide, ammonia finds applications beyond fertilizers, notably in the synthesis of formaldehyde.

Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) Spacecraft

Context: Japan's Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) spacecraft recently entered into orbit around the moon after a months-long journey, marking a significant milestone ahead of its planned moon-landing attempt on January 19.

- Developed and launched by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) on September 7, 2023, SLIM is a spacecraft that departed from the Tanegashima spaceport.
- **Weight Disparity:** SLIM's launch weight of 590 kg stands in sharp contrast to the significantly heavier Chandrayaan 3, which weighed 3,900 kg at the time of launch.
- **Mission Accompaniment:** SLIM was sent into space alongside XRISM, a state-of-the-art X-ray space telescope, utilizing an H-2A rocket for the joint launch.
- **Lunar Orbit Entry:** On December 25, SLIM successfully achieved lunar orbit entry, completing this milestone in approximately three minutes. The orbit's farthest point (apogee) is at 4,000 km, while the closest point (perigee) is 600 km above the lunar surface.
- If successful, Japan will become the fifth country to soft-land a robotic craft on the moon, following India's Chandrayaan 3 mission success in August.
- LUPEX, an Indian-Japan joint enterprise scheduled for launch in 2026, will explore an area closer to the moon's south pole than Chandrayaan 3, marking a significant difference in objectives.

SLIM Overview	
About	SLIM (also called "Moon Sniper") is Japan's first lunar surface mission. Previously, Soviet Union (Interkosmos), the United States (NASA), China (CNSA) and India (ISRO) are the only four nations to have successfully achieved soft landings
Objective	To showcase precision soft landing capabilities on the Moon, targeting a landing within 100 meters of its chosen site near the Shioli crater .

Launch	Built by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) , it was launched on September 7, 2023 , along with the X-Ray Imaging and Spectroscopy Mission (XRISM) space telescope.
	XRISM is focused on studying X-ray emissions from celestial objects to better understand the universe's structure and evolution. It will observe phenomena like black holes, neutron stars, and galaxy clusters .
	Unlike Chandrayaan-3's Hohmann transfer orbit , SLIM followed a longer, fuel-efficient path, taking four months to reach the moon.
Weight	Weighs 590 kg, approximately one-seventh of Chandrayaan-3's weight (3,900 kg).
Features	Upon soft landing, SLIM will deploy two small rovers (Lunar Excursion Vehicle 1 and 2) to study the lunar surface, collect temperature and radiation readings, and attempt to study the moon's mantle.
Significance for Chandrayaan 4	Success of SLIM, especially in terms of low weight and precision landing, could play a crucial role in the Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) Mission (also called Chandrayaan 4) a joint effort of ISRO and JAXA.
Challenges of Lunar	The moon's polar regions, characterized by rocky terrain, craters, and steep slopes , demand highly accurate landing capabilities.

Pegasus Wire

Context: A forensic investigation by Amnesty International's Security Lab in partnership with The Washington Post has claimed that two Indian journalists were among those "recently targeted with Pegasus spyware on their iPhones".

Pegasus Spyware

- **Origin:** Developed by the Israeli company NSO Group, Pegasus is a spyware designed to infiltrate both Android and iOS smartphones, effectively turning them into surveillance tools.
- **Targeted Usage:** Pegasus is specifically employed for precise spying on criminals and terrorists, distinguishing itself from mass surveillance tools due to its focused application.
- **Exploiting Undisclosed Vulnerabilities:** It functions by exploiting undisclosed vulnerabilities or bugs, enabling it to infect phones even with the latest security patches.

How Pegasus infiltrates a phone and what it can do

Attack vectors

Pegasus can be installed on a phone through vulnerabilities in common apps, or by tricking a target into clicking a malicious link

- SMS
- WhatsApp
- iMessage
- Unknown vulnerability



Capabilities

Once installed, Pegasus can theoretically harvest any data from the device and transmit it back to the attacker

- SMS
- Emails
- WhatsApp chats
- Photos and videos
- Activate microphone
- Activate camera
- Record calls
- GPS data
- Calendar
- Contacts book

Zero-Click Exploit

- This type of malicious software allows spyware installation on a device without the owner's consent, eliminating the need for any user actions to initiate or complete the installation.
- **Installation Process:** Unlike regular apps that may require user interactions such as clicking 'install' or 'confirm,' a zero-click exploit does not demand any actions from the device owner.
- **Exploit Identification:** The exploit allegedly used on two devices is referred to as "BLASTPAST," previously known as "BLASTPASS."

Two-Phase Operation

- **Phase One:** The initial phase of the attack aims to establish a connection with the Apple HomeKit on the target's device, providing a pathway to control various smart devices.
- **Phase Two:** The second phase involves sending malicious content through the iMessage app to the target, constituting the delivery of the full spyware "payload."

Supreme Court's Involvement

- In the aftermath of the 'Pegasus Project' revelations, activists submitted multiple petitions to the Supreme Court, alleging a government-led mass surveillance effort to stifle free speech and democratic dissent.
- In response, the Supreme Court requested the Centre to submit a comprehensive affidavit regarding its use of Pegasus. However, the Centre declined, arguing that a public affidavit could compromise the nation's security.

Health

Meftal & DRESS Syndrome

Context: Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) has issued a drug safety alert for commonly used painkiller mefenamic acid, popularly sold under the brand name Meftal.

- The adverse drug reaction found during preliminary analysis was eosinophilia and systemic symptoms called DRESS syndrome.

About Meftal

- Meftal primarily **contains Mefenamic acid, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug** prescribed for mild to moderate pain relief.
- Meftal is commonly prescribed by doctors for conditions such as menstrual cramps and rheumatoid arthritis, and it requires a doctor's prescription for use.
- The **Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) operates autonomously** under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It establishes standards for drugs in the country and regularly updates the standards for commonly used medications.

About Dress Syndrome

- DRESS syndrome is a severe and potentially life-threatening idiosyncratic reaction to specific medications.
- The **syndrome is characterized by a delayed onset of symptoms**, including fever, skin rash, lymphadenopathy, eosinophilia (an increase in a type of white blood cells), and various systemic manifestations.

Organ Donation in India

Context: Recently, the government has ordered a probe into the findings of an investigation alleging that poor Myanmar villagers were being lured into giving their kidneys to rich patients from that country.

Transplantation of Human Organs Act (THOA) 1994

- **Transplant Source:** Organs for transplantation can come from either a deceased person's family members or a living individual known to the recipient.
- **Living Donations According to the Act:** The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994 allows living donations, primarily from close family members (parents, siblings, children, spouse, grandparents, and grandchildren).
- **Altruistic Donations Criteria:** Altruistic donations from distant relatives, in-laws, or long-time friends are permitted after additional scrutiny, ensuring no financial transactions take place.

- **Documentation for Living Donations:** For living donations from close relatives, whether Indian or foreign, various documents such as identity proofs, family tree, pictures, and documents establishing the donor-recipient relationship must be submitted.
- **Unrelated Living Donations Requirements:** Donations from unrelated individuals necessitate the submission of documents and photographic evidence demonstrating a long-term association or friendship, with an external committee thoroughly examining such cases to prevent illegal activities.
- **Legal Consequences:** Engaging in transactions involving payment for organs, advertising such arrangements, seeking organ suppliers, or aiding in the creation of false documents are all punishable offenses.
- **Penalties:** Those found guilty of such offenses may face imprisonment for up to 10 years and fines of up to Rs 1 crore.

Authorisation Committee

- The Committee plays a pivotal role in overseeing and approving organ transplant procedures involving non-relatives, especially when donations are driven by affection, attachment, or special circumstances, ensuring ethical adherence and preventing illicit practices.
- In accordance with Section 9(4), the composition of the Authorisation Committee is subject to prescription by the Central Government.
- States and Union Territories are required, as per the same section, to establish one or more Authorisation Committees, with members nominated by the respective governments.
- Section 9(5) mandates the Committee to conduct a thorough inquiry while reviewing transplant applications.
- A critical aspect involves verifying the authenticity of both the donor and recipient, aiming to ensure that the donation is devoid of commercial motives.
- Section 24 empowers the Central Government to formulate rules, pending parliamentary approval, to fulfill various purposes outlined in the Act.

National Organ Transplant program(NOTP)

- **Aim:** To promote organ donation and transplantation across all the states and union territories.
- The provisions under the programme include:
 - Setting up of **State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisations (SOTTOs) in each State/UT.**
 - Setting up of **National/ Regional/State Bio-material centres.**
 - **Financial support for establishing new Organ Transplant/retrieval facilities** and strengthening of existing Organ Transplant/retrieval facilities.
 - Training to transplant experts including surgeons, physicians, transplant coordinators, etc.
 - **Financial support for hiring of Transplant Coordinators** to medical colleges and trauma centres.

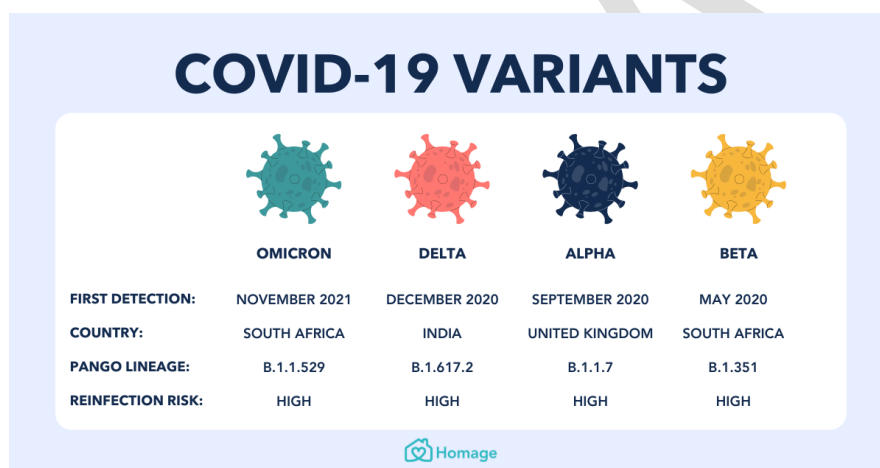
National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO)

- **About:** The organization operates at a national level and falls under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- **Apex Coordination Centre:** It serves as the apex center overseeing coordination and networking for the procurement and distribution of organs and tissues.
- **Two Divisions:** National Human Organ and Tissue Removal and Storage Network and National Biomaterial Centre
- **Mandate:** Establishing a network for organ procurement and distribution.
- Maintaining a national registry focused on organ donation and transplantation.

JN.1 Subvariant of COVID19

Context: A case of JN.1 subvariant of COVID19 has been detected in Kerala, as part of the ongoing routine surveillance activity by INSACOG.

- JN.1 is a severely immune-evasive and fast-spreading variant, markedly different from XBB and all other prior versions of this virus.
- **Origin:** The sub-variant JN.1 traces its lineage to the BA.2.86 variant, commonly known as Pirola, rather than being an entirely new variant.
- **Early Detection:** The first instances of the JN.1 variant were identified in the United States in September. Globally, the initial case was detected as early as January in the same year.
- **Genetic Distinction:** While JN.1 shares similarities with Pirola, it only possesses one additional mutation on the spike protein. In contrast, Pirola harbors more than 30 mutations on this crucial protein.
- **Symptoms:** There is no evidence to suggest that JN.1 can cause worse symptoms or spread faster than the variants already in circulation.



About India SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG)

- It is jointly initiated by the Union Health Ministry of Health, and Department of Biotechnology (DBT) with Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- **Formation:** It is a collaborative effort involving 54 laboratories.
- **Aim:** At monitoring genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 virus through sentinel sequencing.
- **Initiative Facilitated by:** National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi, in partnership with the Central Surveillance Unit (CSU) under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP).
- **Purpose of INSACOG:** In response to the unprecedented global public health challenges posed by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19), INSACOG was established to conduct comprehensive whole genome sequencing across the nation.
- **Genetic Code Monitoring:** Changes or mutations in the genetic code of the SARS-CoV-2 virus are closely observed through analysis and sequencing of samples conducted in laboratories under INSACOG.

Objectives of INSACOG

- INSACOG seeks to **ascertain the status of Variants of Interest (VoI)** and Variants of Concern (VoC) within the country.
- **Establishing sentinel surveillance and surge surveillance mechanisms** to detect genomic variants early on, aiding in the formulation of effective public health responses.

- Determining the presence of genomic variants in samples collected during super-spreader events and in areas reporting an increasing trend of cases, deaths, etc.

E-cigarettes

Context: The World Health Organisation (WHO) said that e-cigarettes are not effective for quitting tobacco at the population level, and there is an urgent need to control to minimise health harms to the population.

- E-cigarettes, or ENDS, produce aerosol by heating e-liquids, often containing nicotine.
- Commonly known by various names like 'e-cigs,' 'vape pens,' and 'mods.'
- The act of using an e-cigarette is referred to as 'vaping.'
- E-cigarettes and traditional cigarettes both carry health risks.
- E-cigarette aerosol contains fewer toxic chemicals compared to the 7,000+ in regular cigarette smoke.



Regulations and Monitoring

- **WHO consistently monitors** and assesses the evidence regarding Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) and health, providing guidance to governments.
- The WHO highlights concerns that e-cigarettes are openly available in the market and aggressively promoted to young individuals.
- **E-cigarettes are banned in 34 countries**, while 88 countries have no minimum age restrictions for their purchase.
- In 74 countries, there are no established regulations for e-cigarettes.
- The **WHO issues the biennial Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic**, tracking the tobacco situation globally and interventions to address it.
- In India, possession of e-cigarettes and similar devices is a violation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarette Act (PECA) 2019.

High Fat Sugar Salt

Context: The consumption of High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) foods is one of the major risk factors to a host of health issues that include obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

- HFSS foods are processed or packaged items characterized by high levels of unhealthy fats, added sugars, and sodium.
- These components are linked to various health issues, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and specific cancers.

Specifics of HFSS Foods

- Rich in saturated and trans fats, contributing to elevated bad cholesterol levels and an increased risk of heart disease.
- High in added sugars, leading to weight gain, diabetes, and tooth decay.
- Elevated sodium content, causing high blood pressure and escalating the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Deficient in fiber, vitamins, and minerals, resulting in nutritional deficiencies.

Current Global Scenario

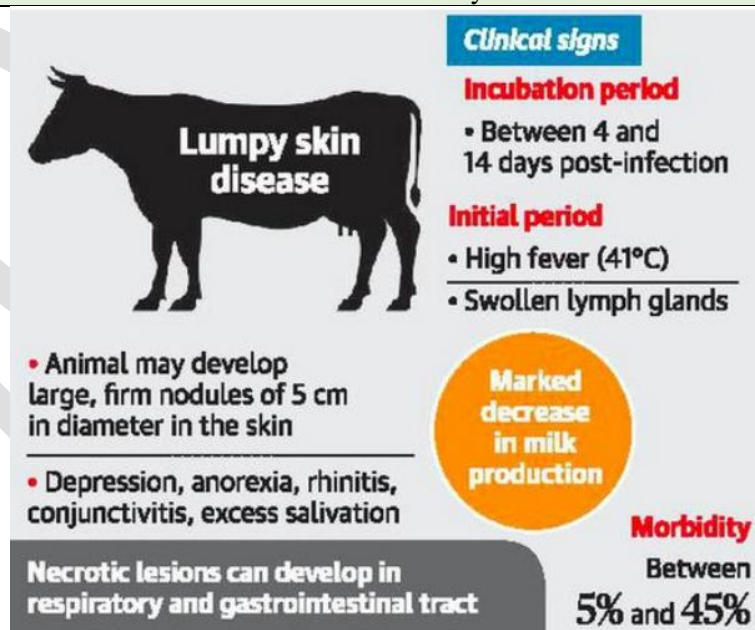
- According to a 2019 World Bank report, 70% of overweight and obese individuals worldwide reside in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, with a 55% increase in rural areas.
- Challenges the misconception that obesity is confined to high-income countries and urban affluent communities.
- In India, the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) surged from 38% in 1990 to 65% in 2019.
- A recent study reported 31 million new diabetes cases in India between 2019-21 alone.
- The global burden of diseases study indicates that annually, 1.2 million deaths in India can be attributed solely to dietary risks.
- The economic impact of overweight and obesity in India was estimated at \$23 billion in 2017, projected to rise to \$480 billion by 2060 if not addressed.

Lumpy Skin Disease

Context: Questioning the Union Animal Husbandry Ministry’s data that more than two lakh cattle and buffaloes had died by lumpy skin disease in 2022 and 2023.

- Lumpy skin disease is a viral infection affecting cattle and is genetically linked to the goatpox and sheeppox virus family.

Transmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disease is transmitted by blood-feeding insects, including certain species of flies, mosquitoes, and ticks.
Causes and Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disease causes fever, skin nodules, and can lead to death, particularly in animals not previously exposed to the virus.
Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incubation period for the disease is approximately 14 days post-infection. • After an initial period of high fever and swollen lymph glands, animals may develop large, firm nodules up to 5 cm in diameter on the skin, especially on the head.
Prevention Guidelines for Lumpy Skin Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement preventive measures, including the control of animal movement, restriction of contact with affected animals, and vaccination. • Adopt bio-security measures such as regular disinfection of premises and immediate isolation of sick animals from healthy ones.



Clinical signs

Incubation period

- Between 4 and 14 days post-infection

Initial period

- High fever (41°C)
- Swollen lymph glands

Marked decrease in milk production

Morbidity

Between 5% and 45%

• Animal may develop large, firm nodules of 5 cm in diameter in the skin

• Depression, anorexia, rhinitis, conjunctivitis, excess salivation

Necrotic lesions can develop in respiratory and gastrointestinal tract

India SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG)

Context: Recently, the India SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) stated that there was no need for an additional fourth booster dose of vaccine against COVID-19 amid the surge in cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-variant.

- INSACOG is jointly initiated by the Union Health Ministry of Health, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- The collaborative effort involves 54 laboratories.
- The primary goal is to monitor genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 virus through sentinel sequencing.
- The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi, in partnership with the Central Surveillance Unit (CSU) under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) plays a crucial role.
- In response to the unprecedented global public health challenges posed by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19), INSACOG was established.
- It conducts comprehensive whole genome sequencing across the nation.
- Changes or mutations in the genetic code of the SARS-CoV-2 virus are closely observed through analysis and sequencing of samples conducted in laboratories under INSACOG.

Objectives of INSACOG

- INSACOG seeks to ascertain the status of Variants of Interest (VoI) and Variants of Concern (VoC) within the country.
- Establishing sentinel surveillance and surge surveillance mechanisms to detect genomic variants early on, aiding in the formulation of effective public health responses.
- Determining the presence of genomic variants in samples collected during super-spreader events and in areas reporting an increasing trend of cases, deaths, etc.

Management of Tuberculosis (TB)

Context: Studies suggest that shorter-duration treatment approaches for tuberculosis are crucial to enhance TB management in India.

- Recent studies in **adults with tuberculosis (TB) in their lungs explored** the use of a combination of new and existing drugs, currently utilized for other diseases.
- The study findings indicated that the duration of the treatment regimen for patients can be reduced from six months to four months, presenting a transformative approach and enhancing the feasibility of implementing TB programs.
- **Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease primarily** affecting the lungs, caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It spreads through the air when infected individuals cough, sneeze, or spit.
- **TB manifests in two forms:** latent TB infection, where the bacteria are present but controlled by the immune system without symptoms, and active TB disease, characterized by symptoms such as persistent cough, chest pain, weight loss, fatigue, and fever.
- **Symptoms of TB include** prolonged cough (sometimes with blood), chest pain, weakness, fatigue, weight loss, fever, and night sweats, varying based on where in the body TB becomes active.
- **Tuberculosis is preventable and curable**, with antibiotic treatment for the disease. The Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine is the only licensed vaccine, providing moderate protection against severe forms of TB in infants and young children.
- **India holds the highest country-wise burden**, contributing to around 27% of global TB cases. The national goal is to eliminate TB by 2025, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to eliminate TB by 2030.

- The **theme for World Tuberculosis Day in 2023** was “Yes, we can end TB,” reflecting the global commitment to achieving the UN SDGs for TB elimination.

Anaemia

Context: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Delhi, has now invited Expression of Interest (EoI) from the eligible organisations/companies/startups manufacturing ‘non-invasive hemoglobinometer’ useful in effective screening of anaemia.

- Anaemia is a condition characterized by a deficiency in the number of red blood cells or the concentration of haemoglobin within them, falling below normal levels. Hemoglobin, a protein present in red blood cells, plays a crucial role in transporting oxygen from the lungs to all organs in the body.
- **Causes:** The condition manifests through symptoms such as tiredness, weakness, iron deficiency, and shortness of breath. Various types of anaemia include iron-deficiency anaemia, vitamin B12-deficiency anaemia, and hemolytic anaemia.
- **Symptoms:** Common signs of anaemia include weakness or fatigue, headaches, difficulty concentrating or thinking, and irritability.
- **Significance:** Anaemia poses a significant global public health concern, particularly impacting young children, menstruating adolescent girls, and pregnant or postpartum women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 40% of children aged 6–59 months, 37% of pregnant women, and 30% of women aged 15–49 worldwide experience anaemia.
- **Prevalence:** As per the National Family Health Survey 5 (2019-21), the prevalence of anaemia among different groups is as follows:

25.0% in men
(15-49 years)

57.0% in
women (15-49
years)

31.1% in
adolescent boys
(15-19 years)

59.1% in
adolescent girls

52.2% in
pregnant
women (15-49
years)

67.1% in
children (6-59
months)

Revising Growth Standards to Measure Malnutrition

Context: The Indian Council of Medical Research has constituted a committee to revise the Growth Standards to measure malnutrition in India.

- Malnutrition encompasses deficiencies or excesses in nutrient intake, an imbalance of essential nutrients, or impaired nutrient utilization.
- The term malnutrition includes **two main categories**:
 - **Undernutrition**, which involves stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age), and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (lack of vital vitamins and minerals).
 - **Overweight**, obesity, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards** serve as a **diagnostic tool for monitoring** and assessing the nutritional status of infants and children up to the age of 5.
- These standards, based on height and body weight tracking, identify children or populations not growing properly, underweight, or at risk of being overweight.
- **Common measures of childhood undernutrition** include anthropometric standards like height-for-age (stunting/chronic undernutrition) and weight-for-height (wasting/acute undernutrition).
- India, like most countries, uses the globally accepted WHO Growth Standards to measure malnutrition.

Revision of Growth Standards in India is essential due to the following reasons

- WHO standards are based on a Multicentre Growth Reference Study (MGRS) conducted in six countries from 1997 to 2003, including India.
- The purpose was to determine growth patterns in children without known deficiencies, but India's diverse population necessitates consideration of various socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.
- Breastfeeding practices, influencing infant and child growth, must be taken into account, considering prevalence and duration in India.
- Comparisons with WHO-MGRS norms may be misleading due to significant differences in study conditions.

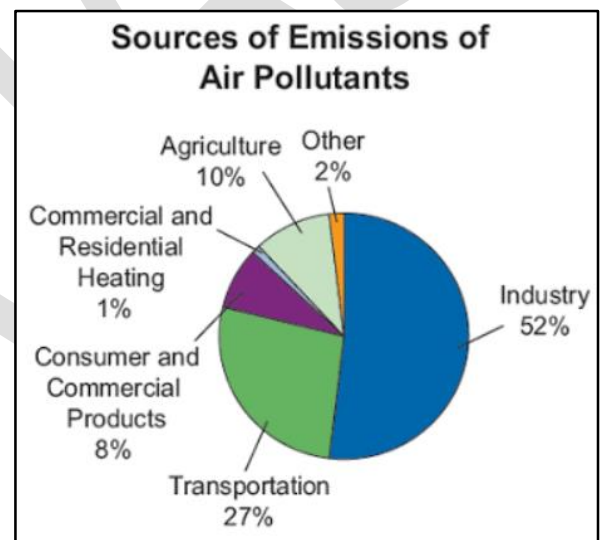
Report & Index

Study on Air Pollution

Context: A recent modelling study published in The BMJ reveals that outdoor air pollution from all sources contributes to 2.18 million deaths per year in India, making it the second-highest globally after China.

Highlights of the Study

- The **research examined four scenarios**, ranging from eliminating all sources of fossil fuel-related emissions to removing all human-induced air pollution, leaving only natural sources.
- **In 2019, fine particles (PM_{2.5}) and ozone (O₃) in ambient air** were responsible for 8.3 million global deaths, with 61 percent (5.1 million) linked to fossil fuels. China and India had the highest attributable deaths from ambient air pollution, with 2.44 million and 2.18 million per year, respectively.
- The study underscores the **health impacts of phasing out fossil fuels**, especially in South, Southeast, and East Asia, where approximately 3.85 million preventable deaths could be avoided annually.
- The researchers **advocate for replacing fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy** sources, aligning with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement and offering substantial public health and climate co-benefits.
- They propose that **ongoing climate change negotiations, such as COP28**, present an opportunity to make significant progress in phasing out fossil fuels, with a focus on prioritizing health benefits.



About the Study

- The **Max Planck Institute for Chemistry** in Germany conducted the study.
- The data utilized in the study was sourced from the Global Burden of Disease 2019 study.
- Additionally, **information was obtained from NASA's satellite-based** fine particulate matter data and population statistics.
- The **study incorporated atmospheric chemistry, aerosol, and relative risk** modeling, all specifically focused on the year 2019.

2023 World Malaria Report

Context: The recently published 2023 World Malaria Report from the World Health Organization (WHO) highlights the concerning malaria situation both in India and worldwide.

Key Findings of the Report

- The 2023 World Malaria Report reveals a worldwide resurgence, surpassing pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 249 million cases reported in 2022.
- **Global Malaria Response:** Various challenges, including disruptions caused by Covid-19, drug resistance, humanitarian crises, and the impacts of climate change, pose significant threats to global efforts in combating malaria.
- **Malaria Cases in 29 Countries:** A mere 29 countries account for a staggering 95% of global malaria cases, emphasizing the concentrated nature of the challenge faced by the international community.
- **Malaria Hotspots:** Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and Mozambique collectively contribute to almost half of the global malaria cases, with Nigeria leading at 27%.
- **WHO South-East Asia Region:** India, constituting 66% of malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region, confronts challenges, including a surge in 2023 linked to unseasonal rainfall. Plasmodium vivax accounts for nearly 46% of cases in the region.
- **Regional Variances:** Africa bears the highest malaria burden, with 94% of cases and 95% of global malaria deaths reported in 2022.
 - In contrast, the WHO South-East Asia Region, including India, achieved a notable 77% reduction in cases and deaths since 2000.
- **Global Eradication Goals:** WHO's 2025 and 2030 malaria reduction targets face significant gaps, with a 55% shortfall in incidence reduction and a 53% gap in fatality rate reduction, highlighting the challenges in achieving global eradication goals.

- **Global Scenario:** In 2022, global malaria cases reached 249 million, surpassing the pre-pandemic level by 16 million.
 - Pakistan witnessed the largest increase, reaching 2.6 million cases in 2022 compared to 500,000 in 2021.
 - Significant increases were also noted in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, and Uganda.
- **India's Situation:** India contributed 1.4% to global malaria cases.
 - In 2022, India experienced a 30% decrease in malaria cases and a 34% decline in deaths.
 - Key factors in India's success include preventive practices, mosquito population control, point-of-care tests, and effective case management.
 - Investments were made in insecticide mosquito nets, antimalarial drugs, and rapid diagnostic tests.

Malaria

- Caused by Plasmodium parasites transmitted by infected Anopheles mosquitoes.
- Parasites multiply in the liver cells and then attack Red Blood Cells (RBCs).
- Five Plasmodium species cause malaria in humans, with P. falciparum and P. vivax posing the greatest threat.
- Predominantly found in tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, South America, and Asia.
- Symptoms include high fever, chills, headache, and flu-like symptoms.

Global Initiatives

- **WHO's Global Malaria Program (GMP):** Oversees Global Malaria Control and Elimination Efforts.
- **Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030:** Driven by WHO's GMP
 - Aims for a 90% Reduction in Global Malaria Incidence and Mortality by 2030

- **Malaria Elimination Initiative**
 - Spearheaded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
 - Emphasizes Treatment Access, Mosquito Population Reduction, and Technology Development
- **E-2025 Initiative**
 - Launched by WHO in 2021
 - Goal: Halt Malaria Transmission in 25 Countries by 2025
 - National Framework for Malaria Elimination 2016-2030 to Eliminate Malaria in India by 2030
- **National Vector-Borne Disease Control Programme**
 - Addresses Vector-Borne Diseases, Including Malaria
 - Focus on Prevention and Control Measures
- **National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP)**
 - Launched in 1953
 - Key Activities: Insecticidal Residual Spray, Monitoring, Surveillance, and Patient Treatment
- **High Burden to High Impact (HBHI) Initiative**
 - Initiated in 2019 in Four States
 - Focuses on Malaria Reduction Through Insecticidal Net Distribution.

Challenges

- Challenges include disruptions from COVID-19, drug and insecticide resistance, humanitarian crises, resource constraints, climate change impact, and delays in program implementation.

Suggestions

- Emphasis on strengthening surveillance and tailoring malaria interventions at sub-national levels using data-driven approaches is crucial.
- Planning for extreme weather events can reduce malaria incidence.
- The goal of malaria elimination by 2030 requires strategic planning and resource allocation.

Crime in India Report 2023: NCRB

Context: The National Crime Records Bureau has released the annual edition of Crime in India Report. Data for the report is gathered by the State Crime Records Bureaux (SCRxBx) from the District Crime Records Bureaux (DCRBx) and transmitted to NCRB at the conclusion of each calendar year. The report encompasses comprehensive details on cases registered and their resolutions, as well as individuals apprehended and their outcomes.

Findings of the Report

- **Increase in Crime:** Crimes against women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), children, cybercrimes, and offenses against the state witnessed a surge in 2022 compared to 2021.
- **Crime Against Women:** A 4% upswing in cases registered under crimes against women in 2022 versus 2021.
 - Predominantly, cases were filed for 'cruelty by husband or his relatives' (31.4%), followed by 'kidnapping and abduction of women' (19.2%), 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' (18.7%), and 'rape' (7.1%).
- **Crime Against Children:** An 8.7% increase in cases of crimes against children compared to 2021.
- **Juveniles in Conflict with Law:** Registration of cases against juveniles declined by 2.0%, totaling 30,555 cases in 2022. The crime rate dropped from 7.0 in 2021 to 6.9 in 2022.
 - Crime Against Senior Citizens: A 9.3% increase in registered cases compared to 2021.
- **Cyber Crime:** In 2022, 64.8% of cybercrime cases were motivated by fraud, followed by extortion at 5.5%, and sexual exploitation at 5.2%.
 - A total of 65,893 cybercrime cases were registered, marking a 24.4% increase over 2021.

- **Decrease in Registration of Crime:** The report indicates a 4.5% decline in the registration of cases compared to 2021.
 - Significant drops were observed in cases registered under 'disobedience to order duly promulgated by a public servant' (Section 188 of the IPC) and 'other IPC crimes'.
- **Chargesheeting:** States/UTs with the highest chargesheeting rates under IPC crimes are Kerala (96.0%), Puducherry (91.3%), and West Bengal (90.6%).
- **Metropolitan Cities (19):** Cities with the highest chargesheeting rates under IPC crimes are Kochi (95.9%), Patna (89.9%), and Kozhikode (89.4%).
 - Delhi leads in theft cases, followed by Mumbai, Jaipur, and Bengaluru.
 - Delhi is deemed the most unsafe metropolitan city for women, recording an average of three rape cases daily.

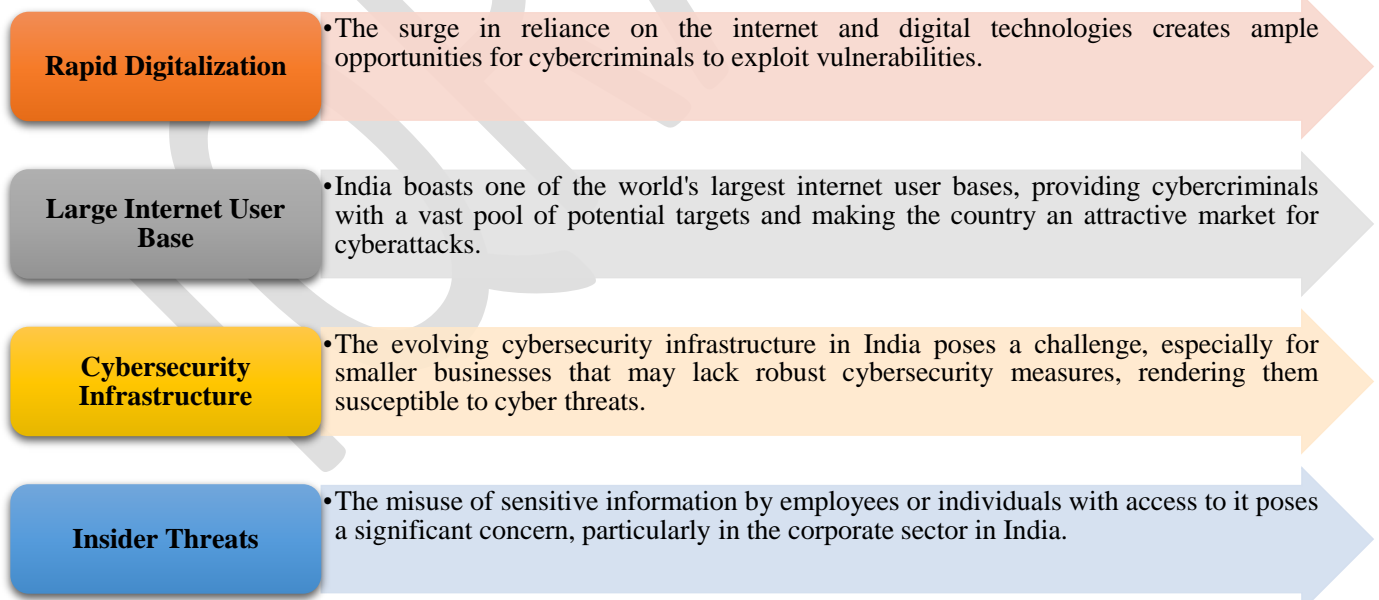
National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) plays a pivotal role in gathering and analyzing crime data, while also managing national databases pertaining to crime and criminals.
- Founded in 1986, it was established based on recommendations from the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task Force (1985) and operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Prior to the NCRB's inception, individual states in India were responsible for collecting and maintaining crime data, resulting in inconsistencies in reporting formats and standards.
- Operating as a centralized repository, the NCRB consolidates information on crime and criminals, facilitating its utilization by law enforcement agencies and policymakers for more effective planning and decision-making.

Legal Perspective on Cybercrimes

As per the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution, cybercrimes fall under the jurisdiction of State subjects, highlighting the legal framework governing such offenses.

Factors Contributing to the Rise in Cybercrime



Government Initiatives for Cybersecurity

Information Technology Act, 2000: Sections 43, 66, 70, and 74 of the IT Act, 2000 address hacking and cyber crimes, establishing a legal framework for dealing with such offenses.

Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In): CERT-In issues alerts and advisories regularly, keeping individuals and organizations informed about the latest cyber threats, vulnerabilities, and countermeasures.

National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC): The NCCC aims to enhance situational awareness regarding existing and potential cyber threats. It facilitates timely information sharing for proactive, preventive, and protective actions by various entities.

Cyber Swachhta Kendra: This initiative focuses on detecting malicious programs and provides free tools to remove them, contributing to a cleaner and safer online environment.

Bharat NCX: Geared towards strategic leaders, Bharat NCX aims to improve understanding of cyber threats, assess readiness, and foster skills for cyber crisis management and cooperation.

India Infrastructure Report (IIR)

Context: The India Infrastructure Report 2023 on Urban Planning and Development was released in December 2023.

- The India Infrastructure Report (IIR) is an annual publication that originated in 2001 through the efforts of the IDFC Foundation.
- **Collaborators:** IDFC Foundation, Infrastructure Development Corporation (Karnataka) Ltd. (iDeCK), and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).
- **IDFC:** The IDFC Foundation, a not-for-profit institution, focuses on philanthropic endeavors in the realm of social infrastructure.
- **iDeCK:** Established in 2000, iDeCK stands as a joint venture involving the Government of Karnataka, IDFC Foundation, and HDFC.
- **Objectives of IIR:** The primary objectives of the India Infrastructure Report are to identify and comprehensively analyze various facets of infrastructure development, providing essential resources for the formulation of urban policies.

India Infrastructure Report 2023 Highlights

- **Policy Landscape:** The report comprises 25 chapters that delve into the policy ecosystem, offering insights into the present state of urban development.
- **Urban Governance:** IIR 2023 addresses crucial aspects such as urban transportation planning and urban redevelopment within the realm of urban governance.
- **Digital Transformation in Urban Spaces:** The report explores the role of digital technology in urban transformation, emphasizing the concepts of smart cities and the performance-based ranking of cities.
- **Financial Dimensions:** IIR scrutinizes the financial sustainability of urban local bodies, delves into the dynamics of public-private partnerships (PPP), and assesses the efficacy of municipal bonds.
- **Key Focus Areas:** The report places particular emphasis on housing and migration, along with an examination of public service delivery in urban contexts.

State of the Climate (2011-2020) by WMO

Context: The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), a UN weather agency, reported that the Antarctic ice sheet lost 75% compared to the previous ten years.

Key Findings

Rise in Temperature

- The Earth has been experiencing a consistent rise in temperature, with each decade since the 1990s surpassing the previous one. This alarming trend shows no immediate signs of reversal.

Melting of Glaciers

- Glaciers are thinning at a rate of approximately 1 meter per year, posing long-term threats to water supplies for millions. The resulting sea level rise is a significant concern for the existence of low-lying coastal regions and states.
- From 2011 to 2020, Greenland and Antarctica witnessed a 38% increase in ice loss compared to the previous decade, contributing to the overall concern of rising sea levels.

Warming Oceans and Ice Sheets

- The warming oceans and melting ice sheets have led to a nearly twofold increase in the rate of sea-level rise in less than a generation, highlighting the rapid environmental changes occurring.

Weather and Climate-Related Events

- Weather and climate-related events have been responsible for nearly 94% of recorded disaster displacement over the past decade. Additionally, they have significantly impeded global efforts to combat hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

Floods

- India has witnessed intense and widespread flooding, resulting in over 2000 flood-related deaths in India and neighboring countries. Specific events, such as the 2013 Uttarakhand floods and recurring floods in Kerala (2018, 2019, and 2020), highlight the severity of the situation.

Droughts

- Droughts have had major socioeconomic and humanitarian impacts, leading to severe food and water insecurity. In India, 11 out of 28 states declared drought, exacerbating the situation due to inequalities in water availability and access.

Food Insecurity and Crop Failures

- Droughts resulted in substantial crop failures, placing 82% of households in affected areas at risk of food insecurity.

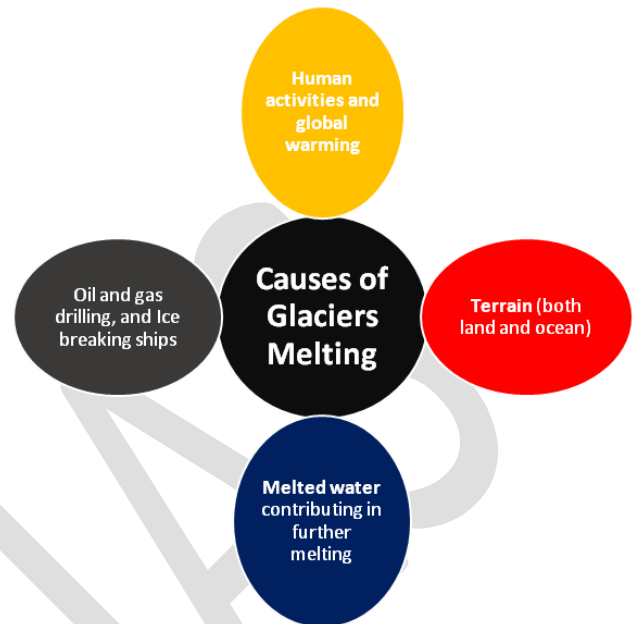
Suggestions highlighted in the Report

- Building Collective Resilience to Address Present and Future Global Crises
- Reinforcing the Interaction between Science, Policy, and Society
- Fostering Institutional Capacity Growth and Encouraging Cross-Sectoral and Global Collaboration
- Securing Policy Consistency and Coordination
- Creating a Comprehensive Action Framework

- Recognizing Cities as Platforms to Concentrate on Climate and Development Synergies

About the State of the Climate

- A collaborative initiative involving multiple agencies, including National Meteorological and Hydrological Services in the region, the WMO, National Statistics Offices, and Specialized agencies of the United Nations, presents a comprehensive overview of climate conditions, extreme events, and their socio-economic consequences spanning from 2011 to 2020.
- This report marks the second installment in a series, succeeding the initial decadal analysis covering the period from 2001 to 2010.
- Offering an extended temporal viewpoint, the report serves as a valuable complement to the WMO's annual State of the Global Climate reports.



Concerns About Crypto Asset Intermediaries

Context: The Financial Stability Board (FSB) has published a report assessing the risks posed by multifunction crypto-asset intermediaries (MCIs).

- Crypto assets are digital assets that utilize public ledgers on the internet to demonstrate ownership.
- They employ **cryptography, peer-to-peer networks, and distributed ledger technology**, such as blockchain, for the creation, verification, and security of transactions.
- Generally functioning **independently of central banks, authorities, or governments**, crypto assets serve various purposes, including acting as a medium of exchange, a store of value, or for other business-related uses.
- **There are several types of crypto assets**, including



- Additionally, multi-function crypto-asset intermediaries (MCIs) play a crucial role in providing a range of crypto-based services and products, with a focus on operating trading platforms.
 - **Examples of MCIs include** Binance, Bitfinex, and Coinbase. These entities primarily generate revenue through transaction fees associated with trading activities. Moreover, they may also earn income by operating blockchain infrastructure and collecting transaction validation fees.
- Another potential source of revenue for MCIs is proprietary trading, involving the use of their own capital to pursue profits rather than relying on client funds.

Global Status Report On Road Safety

Context: Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that road traffic deaths fell by 5% to 1.19 million annually worldwide between 2010 and 2021, with 108 United Nations member countries reporting a drop.



Key Findings of the Report

- **Reduction in Global Road Traffic Deaths:** The annual worldwide road traffic deaths decreased by 5%, reaching 1.19 million fatalities between 2010 and 2021.
- **Death Reduction by Ten Countries:** Belarus, Denmark, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela, achieved a remarkable over 50% reduction in road traffic deaths.
- **Majority of Deaths Among Working-Age Population:** Two-thirds of road traffic deaths are concentrated among individuals of working age.
- **Declining Road Fatality Rate:** The road fatality rate showed a decline from 18 per 1 lakh people in 2010 to 15 per 1 lakh in 2021, marking a 16% reduction in the road traffic death rate since 2010.
- **Regional Distribution of Road Traffic Deaths:**
 - 28% of global road traffic deaths occurred in the WHO’s South-East Asia Region.
 - 25% in the Western Pacific Region.
 - 19% in the African Region.
 - 12% in the Region of the Americas.
 - 11% in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.
 - 5% in the European Region.
- **Disparity in Death Risk between Income Groups:** Despite having only 1% of the world’s motor vehicles, low-income countries face a threefold higher risk of road traffic deaths compared to high-income countries.
- **About India:** India witnessed a 15% rise in fatalities.
 - **Total Road Traffic Fatalities:** The overall number of road traffic fatalities increased from 1.34 lakh in 2010 to 1.54 lakh in 2021.

YEAR-BY-YEAR IN THE COUNTRY

Year	Deceased	Living
2022	1,541	10,164
2021	830	8,275
2020	516	4,970
2019	1,138	8,613
2018	1,164	6,772

Steps taken by government to reduce road accidents

Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019: Implements heightened penalties for traffic infractions, defective vehicles, and underage driving.

Establishes the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund to mandate compulsory insurance coverage.

Carriage by Road Act, 2007: Governs common carriers, placing restrictions on their liability and specifying the declared value of transported goods.

Control of National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2000: Exercises control over land situated along National Highways, delineating rights of way and overseeing traffic flow.

National Highways Authority of India Act, 1998: Establishes an authority responsible for the development, upkeep, and administration of National Highways.

World Health Organization

- **About:** WHO is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health.
- **Establishment:** April 7 1948
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland
- **Leading Role:** The WHO has played a leading role in several public health achievements, most notably the eradication of smallpox, the near-eradication of polio, and the development of an Ebola vaccine.



Logistics Ease Across Different State (LEADS) 2023

Context: The Ministry of Commerce & Industry has released the 5th edition of “Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2023” report.

- Logistics involves managing the flow of resources between points of origin and destination.
- LEADS Index was inspired by the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index in 2018.
- It is a composite indicator evaluating international trade logistics across Indian states and Union territories.
- Deloitte conducted a stakeholders' survey for the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to establish the index.

Performance highlights from LEADS 2023

Coastal Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievers: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu • Fast Movers: Kerala, Maharashtra • Aspirers: Goa, Odisha, West Bengal
Landlocked Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievers: Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh • Fast Movers: Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand • Aspirers: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand
North-East Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievers: Assam, Sikkim, Tripura • Fast Movers: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland • Aspirers: Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram
Union Territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievers: Chandigarh, Delhi • Fast Movers: Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Puducherry • Aspirers: Daman & Diu/ Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh

Steps taken by Government of India

- Logistics sector granted infrastructure status for easier access to affordable finances.
- **PM Gati Shakti's initiative:** National Master Plan for multimodal connectivity by 2024-25.
- **National Logistics Policy (NLP)** launched in 2022 to address transport challenges, aiming to reduce logistics costs to 8% of GDP by 2030.
- **Construction of Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs)** like Eastern and Western DFCs in progress.
- **Bharatmala Pariyojana:** Flagship road and highways development program for enhanced connectivity.
- **Sagarmala Project** focuses on port-led development to reduce logistics costs for domestic and international trade.

IEA's 'Coal 2023' Report

Context: The International Energy Agency (IEA) has released its annual coal market report named Coal 2023. The IEA's annual Coal Report, established in 2011, has been the global standard for medium-term coal supply, demand, and trade forecasts.

Key Report Findings

- **Global Coal Consumption (2022):** Reached a record high with a 4% year-on-year increase.
- Notable increases in China (4.6%), India (9%), and Indonesia (32%).
- **Coal Demand (2023):** Expected to rise by 1.4% globally.
- Advanced economies, including the EU and the U.S., experienced sharp declines, while emerging economies like India (8%) and China (5%) maintained strong demand.
- **Decline in Demand (2026):** Anticipated 2.3% decrease in global coal demand by 2026 compared to 2023 levels.
- **Renewable Capacity Expansion:** Over half of global renewable capacity expansion is projected in China, a major coal consumer.

- **Coal Production (2023):** China, India, and Indonesia expected to set production records, accounting for over 70% of global production.
- **Global Coal Trade:** Expected contraction in trade due to declining demand, though 2023 will see a peak, driven by Asian growth.

Coal Sector in India

- **Coal Reserves:** India possesses significant coal reserves and is among the world's largest producers.
- **Coal Production:** India ranks among the top three global coal producers, with Coal India Limited (CIL) being the largest government-owned producer.
- **Coal Consumption (2022):** India experienced an 8-9% growth in power demand.
- **Industrial and Commercial Consumption:** Significant energy consumption in India stems from industrial and commercial activities.
- **Import and Export:** Despite being a major producer, India imports coal to meet demand due to transportation challenges and specific industry needs.

Lancet Study on Child Marriage in India

Context: One in five girls and nearly one in six boys are still married below the legal age of marriage in India(18), as per a new study published in the Lancet Global Health recently.

- Despite significant reductions in child marriage over the past 30 years, recent data suggests a halt in progress.
- **In India, the prevalence of child marriage in girls** dropped from 49.4% in 1993 to 22.3% in 2021, and for boys, it decreased from 7.1% in 2006 to 2.2% in 2021.
- Except for Manipur, all states witnessed a decline in girl child marriage between 1993 and 2021.
- Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra accounted for over half of the total burden of child marriages in girls, while Gujarat, Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh contributed to over 60% of the burden for boys.

About the Child marriage

- Child marriage is defined as marrying individuals under 18 years old for both men and women.
- **According to NFHS-5 (2019-21)**, 14.7% of urban and 27% of rural women aged 20-24 were married before turning 18.

Evolution of Marriage Age in India

- In pre-colonial times, there was no codified minimum age for marriage in India.
- During the colonial period, the Sharda Act (1929) was the first attempt to set minimum marriage ages, initially at 14 for girls and 18 for boys.
- **Post-independence, the Indian Constitution (1950)** did not explicitly address child marriage.
- The **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)** established the legal minimum age for marriage as 18 for females and 21 for males.





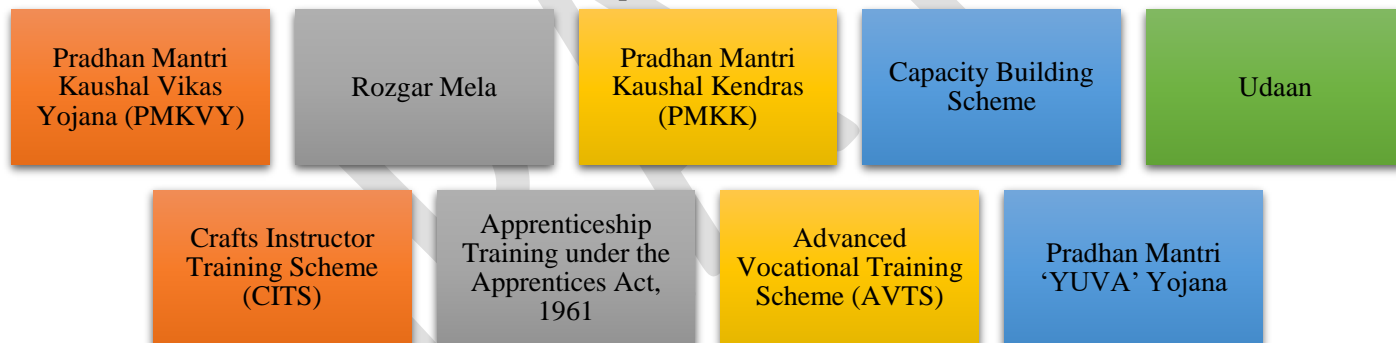
India Skills Report 2024

Context: The 11th edition of India Skills Report 2024 has been released by the talent assessment firm Wheebox.

Major Highlights

- The report, based on a National Employability Test, reveals a positive trend in India's employability, with 51.25% of assessed youths demonstrating the required skills.
- **AI Skill Leadership:** India takes a global lead in Artificial Intelligence (AI) skills, boasting a remarkable score of 3.09. The country has 416K AI professionals in 2023, set to meet the demand of 629K, projected to surge to 1 million by 2026.
- **Emerging Job Hubs:** Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala have emerged as the top choices for youth employment in India.
- **Regional Employability Hotspots:** Haryana, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Telangana have the highest concentration of highly employable youth.
- **Age-Specific Talent Concentration:** In the age range of 22 to 25 years, Uttar Pradesh stands out with the highest talent concentration at 74.77%, closely followed by Maharashtra at 71.97%.
- **Computer Skills Excellence:** Thiruvananthapuram claims the top position in nurturing computer skills, contributing to Kerala's overall third position among states.
- **Female Job Aspirants' Top Choice:** Among Indian cities, Kochi stands out as the top choice for female job aspirants.

Government of India's Initiatives for Skill Development



Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23

Context: The report from the Reserve Bank of India, titled 'Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23,' underscores the increasing menace of fraud and data breaches, alongside noting advancements in asset quality within the banking sector.

Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23

- **Overall Increase in Fraud:** The report highlights a significant surge in fraud cases within the banking sector during the first half of the financial year 2022-23.
- **Comparative Analysis:** In the first half of the current financial year, 14,483 fraud cases involving ₹2,642 crore were reported, in contrast to 5,396 cases (₹17,685 crore) during the same period the previous year.
- **Segment-Specific Increase:** The card and internet-related frauds saw a substantial rise, reaching 12,069 incidents during H1FY24.
- **Financial Impact:** The amount involved in these frauds amounted to ₹630 crore, a significant increase from the 2,321 cases totaling ₹87 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

- **Highlighted Threats:** The report underscores the escalating threat of fraud and data breaches originating from cyber threats.
- **Critical Need for Safeguarding:** Safeguarding banking and payments systems from these threats is identified as a critical need.
- **Multifaceted Risks:** According to the report, frauds within the banking sector pose risks to reputation, operations, overall business, and potentially erode customer trust.
- **Implications for Stability:** These risks carry implications for financial stability, emphasizing the need for proactive measures.
- **Contrasting Trends:** Despite the surge in fraud cases, the total number of reported frauds by banks in 2022-23 declined to a six-year low.
- **Lowest Average Amount in a Decade:** The average amount involved in fraud during this period was noted to be the lowest in a decade, marking a notable trend in the financial landscape.

Important Days

Date	Event	Details and Significance
1 December	World AIDS Day	To raise awareness and knowledge about HIV and a call to move toward ending the HIV epidemic. It was first celebrated in 1988. The theme of 2023 is "Lead The Communities".
2 December	National Pollution Control Day	To raise awareness about pollution and its hazardous effects. This day is observed in memory of the people who lost their lives in the Bhopal gas calamity which is considered one of the biggest industrial disasters.
2 December	International Day for the Abolition of Slavery	It was observed on 2 December to make people aware of the modern slavery that works against human rights. Do you know more than 40 million people in the world are victims of modern slavery? This day reminds the situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse due to threats, violence, coercion or abuse of power.
3 December	World Day of the Handicapped or International Day of Persons with Disabilities	World Day of the Handicapped is also known as the International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPD). It is observed on 3 December to raise awareness about understanding and accepting people with disabilities. The theme for 2021 was "Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world."
4 December	Indian Navy Day	Indian Navy Day is celebrated every year on 4 December to highlight the role, achievements, and difficulties that Navy people face.
5 December	World Soil Day	World Soil Day is observed on 5 December to raise awareness about the importance of soil, healthy ecosystems, and human well-being.
7 December	Armed Forces Flag Day	Armed Forces Flag Day is observed across the country on 7 December to collect funds from the common people and honor the martyrs and the men who fought with bravery on the borders to safeguard the country's honor.
7 December	International Civil Aviation Day	International Civil Aviation Day is observed on 7 December worldwide to raise awareness about its importance to the social and economic

Date	Event	Details and Significance
		development of States and the role that ICAO plays in International air transport.
8 December	Bodhi Day	Every year on December 8, Bodhi Day is observed all over the world, usually under various names. To honor Gautam Buddha and his preachings, it typically occurs on the eighth day of the 12th month of the lunisolar calendar.
9 December	International Anti-Corruption Day	International Anti-Corruption Day is observed on 9 December every year to highlight how corruption affects health, education, justice, democracy, prosperity, and development.
10 December	Human Rights Day	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. This day is observed to protect the fundamental human rights of all people and their basic human freedom.
11 December	International Mountain Day	To educate children and people about the role that mountains play in providing fresh water, clean energy, food, and recreation.
11 December	UNICEF Day	It is observed on 11 December by the United Nations. UNICEF stands for United Nations International Children Emergency Fund.
12 December	Universal Health Coverage Day	The United Nations proclaimed 12 December as International Health Coverage Day (UHC) by resolution 72/138 on 12 December 2017. The purpose behind celebrating the day is to spread awareness of the need for strong and resilient health systems and universal health coverage with multi-stakeholder partners.
14 December	National Energy Conservation Day	It is observed on 14 December to raise awareness about the need for energy and its conservation in daily life. Since 1991, it is celebrated every year on 14 December by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the Ministry of Power.
16 December	Vijay Diwas	Vijay Diwas is celebrated on 16 December in India to remember the martyrs, and their sacrifices, and to strengthen the role of armed forces for the cause of the nation.
18 December	Minorities Rights Day in India	Minorities Rights Day in India is observed on 18 December to preserve and promote the rights of minority communities in India. This day focuses on issues like the safety of minorities in the state. On this day several campaigns, seminars, and events are conducted to inform and educate people about them.
18 December	International Migrants Day	International Migrants Day is celebrated on 18 December to raise awareness about the protection of migrants and refugees. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is calling on the international community to come together and remember the migrants and refugees who have lost their lives or have disappeared while reaching a safe harbor.
19 December	Goa's Liberation Day	The Liberation Day of Goa is celebrated on 19 December annually. On this date in 1961, Goa was released from the Portuguese dominion after an army operation and extended freedom movement. This day is celebrated in

Date	Event	Details and Significance
		commemoration of the Indian armed forces that helped Goa to receive freedom from Portuguese rule.
20 December	International Human Solidarity Day	International Human Solidarity Day is observed on 20 December annually to highlight the importance of unity in diversity. This day also reminds people to work together in fighting poverty, hunger, and disease.
21 December	World Saree Day	An effort has been made to recognize and celebrate the elegance of this traditional clothing on World Saree Day. It is observed every year on December 21. Sarees are among the most exquisite, graceful, and beautiful gifts made by Indian artisans and handed down through the ages.
22 December	National Mathematics Day	To commemorate the birth anniversary of the famous mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. He had made remarkable contributions to various fields of mathematics and its branches. He was born on 22 December 1887 in Erode (today in the city of Tamil Nadu).
23 December	Kisan Diwas	Kisan Divas or Farmer's Day in India or National Farmer's Day is celebrated on 23 December across the country to commemorate the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh. On this day various events, seminars, functions, and competitions are organized on agriculture and its importance to educate and provide knowledge to the people.
24 December	National Consumer Rights Day	National Consumer Rights Day is observed on 24 December annually with a particular theme across the country. The Consumer Protection Act, of 1986 received the assent of the president on this day. No doubt it is considered a historic milestone in the consumer movement in the country. This day also provides awareness about consumer rights and responsibilities.
25 December	Good Governance Day (India)	Good Governance Day in India is observed on 25 December to commemorate the birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, His Samadhi namely 'Sadiav Atal' was dedicated to the nation and reflects his personality as a poet, humanist, statesman, and a great leader.
27 December	International Day of Epidemic Preparedness	International Day of Epidemic Preparedness is observed on December 27 to fulfil the great need to raise awareness, the exchange of information, scientific knowledge and best practices, and quality education to curb the fatality of the Epidemic.

Important Editorials of the Month

Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370

Why in News?

The Supreme Court verdict upholding the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 of the Constitution represents not merely judicial deference, but a retreat from the Court's known positions on federalism, democratic norms and the sanctity of legal processes.

Key Highlights

- It is undoubtedly a political boost to the ruling BJP and an endorsement of its audacious move in August 2019 to strip Kashmir of its special status and bring it on a par with other States.
- However, it is also a verdict that legitimises the subversion of federal principles, fails to appreciate historical context and undermines constitutional procedure.
- The most potent attack on federal principles is the Court's unconscionable conclusion that Parliament, while a State is under President's Rule, can do any act, legislative or otherwise, and even one with irreversible consequences, on behalf of the State legislature.
- This alarming interpretation comes close to undermining a basic feature of the Constitution as enunciated by the Court itself and may have grave implications for the rights of States, permitting a range of hostile and irrevocable actions in the absence of an elected body.
- The government and its supporters have much to cheer about as the Constitution Bench has endorsed its stand and rejected strong arguments from the petitioners, especially the point that the government had acted in a mala fide manner by imposing President's Rule preparatory to the intended abrogation of special status without the need to involve any elected representative from J&K.
- The government had adopted a complicated process to give effect to the ruling BJP's long-cherished ambition of removing the State's special status. It had gone on to divide and downgrade it into two Union Territories (UT).
- It began with a Constitutional Order on August 5, 2019 applying the whole of the Constitution to J&K and changing some definitions so that the State's Legislative Assembly could recommend the abrogation instead of its now-dissolved Constituent Assembly, as originally envisaged in Article 370(3).
- Ultimately, the Court ruled that parts of the August 5 order were unconstitutional as they, in effect, amounted to amending Article 370 itself, which was impermissible; but, in a peculiar twist, it held the consequential notification on August 6 declaring Article 370 as valid and that the President was empowered to do so even without the legal underpinnings of the previous day's notification that sought to bolster the validity of the action.
- The President could remove the State's special status without any recommendation. The Court has reasoned that the Constitution of India has been applied incrementally from time to time even after the Constituent Assembly was dissolved in 1957 and that the removal of special status is nothing but the culmination of the process of its integration.
- Even if this line of argument is seen as unobjectionable, the idea that in the absence the Constituent Assembly and in view of the subordination of J&K to the sovereignty of India, there is no fetter on the government's intention to hollow out its residual autonomy is opposed to all canons of federalism and democracy.
- There is no doubt that J&K is not vested with any sovereignty. The Court says Article 370 represents no more than a form of asymmetric federalism and that additional features — such as having a separate Constitution, residuary power of legislation and requirement of its consent to some legislative subjects before Parliament can make law on them — will not clothe it with sovereignty.
- All of this is true. But, how this can mean that historical obligations owed to it and promises made by constitutional functionaries can be blown away at the ruling dispensation's whim is beyond comprehension.
- Forgotten is the fact that the process of integration itself was by and large built on a constant dialogue between Kashmir's leaders and the Union government, the context and conditions in which it acceded to India, the terms of the Instrument of Accession and the progressive extension of constitutional provisions with the consent of the State government over the years.

- The Court's failure to give its ruling on whether the Constitution permits the reorganisation of J&K into two UTs is an astounding example of judicial evasion.
- It is shocking that the Court chose not to adjudicate a question that arose directly from the use of Article 3 of the Constitution for the first time to downgrade a State.
- The only reason given is that the Solicitor-General gave an assurance that the Statehood of J&K would be restored. It is questionable whether a mere assurance of a remedial measure can impart validity to any action.
- At the same time, the Court upheld the carving out of Ladakh as a separate UT. On this point, the verdict is an invitation to the Union to consider creation of new UTs out of parts of any State.
- The Court's position that there is no limit on the President's power or Parliament's competence to act on behalf of the State government and its legislature is equally fraught with danger.
- In particular, the reference to "non-legislative" powers of the State Assemblies poses a significant threat to the powers devolved to the States. A future regime at the Centre could impose President's rule to carry out extraordinary actions through its own parliamentary majority that an elected government in a State may never do.
- The view that some of these may be restored by a subsequently elected government or House is of little consolation if actions taken under the cover of President's Rule cause great damage to the State's interests.
- This is a verdict that weakens institutional limitations on power, and, while rightly upholding Indian sovereignty over J&K, it undermines federalism and democratic processes to a frightening degree.

Special Status of J&K

- On August 5, 2019, the President of India, under Article 370(1), issued the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.
- Modified Article 370 without revocation, significantly altering Jammu and Kashmir's relationship with the Indian Union.

Background of Article 370 (1949)

- Added to the Indian Constitution on October 17, 1949, as a 'temporary provision.'
- Granted Jammu & Kashmir the authority to draft its own Constitution and limited the legislative powers of the Indian Parliament in the state.
- Introduced by N Gopalaswami Ayyangar as Article 306 A.

Article 370 Overview

- Empowered the Constituent Assembly of Jammu & Kashmir to recommend the application of specific Indian Constitution articles to the state.
- Dissolved J&K Constituent Assembly after drafting the state's constitution.
- Clause 3 of Article 370 granted the President of India authority to amend its provisions and scope.

Article 35A Origin (1954)

- Stemmed from Article 370 and introduced through a 1954 Presidential Order, based on J&K Constituent Assembly's recommendation.
- Empowered the Jammu & Kashmir legislature to define permanent residents, along with their special rights and privileges.
- Included in **Appendix I** of the Constitution of India.



Comparison with Other States

- Several states, such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and those in the North East, have distinct constitutional guarantees codified in Articles 371, 371A-I.

Article 370

- Article 370 in the Indian constitution granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, a region disputed by India, Pakistan, and China.
- Drafted by N Gopaldaswami Ayyangar, a Constituent Assembly of India member, and added as a 'temporary provision' in 1949.

Key Features

- Allowed Jammu and Kashmir to have its own constitution, flag, and autonomy in most matters, excluding defence, foreign affairs, and communications.

Instrument of Accession Basis

- Based on the terms of the Instrument of Accession signed in 1947 by the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh.
- The accession aimed to join India after an invasion by Pakistan.

Key Implications

- Provides autonomy to the state and allows for special privileges to its "permanent residents."
- Non-application of Emergency provisions without State concurrence.
- State's name and boundaries protection without legislature consent.
- State's own constitution, flag, and Ranbir Penal Code.
- Six-year duration for the state's Assembly.
- Specific parliamentary powers limited to Defense, External affairs, and communication matters.
- Presidential order applicability for Union laws, with State Assembly concurrence.
- President's authority to cease Article 370 operation based on Constituent Assembly recommendation.

APPENDIX I

¹THE CONSTITUTION (APPLICATION TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR) ORDER, 1954

C.O. 48

In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of article 370 of the Constitution, the President, with the concurrence of the Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, is pleased to make the following Order:—

1. (1) This Order may be called the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954.

(2) It shall come into force on the fourteenth day of May, 1954, and shall thereupon supersede the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1950.

2. ²[The provisions of the Constitution as in force on the 20th day of June, 1964 and as amended by the Constitution (Nineteenth Amendment) Act,

WHAT DID THE COURT SAY?

ARTICLE 370 AS TEMPORARY PROVISION

- Court clarified Article 370 was temporary.
- No internal sovereignty for J&K.

CONCURRENCE NOT REQUIRED FOR ARTICLE 370 REMOVAL

- President can unilaterally notify Article 370 cessation.
- No need for State government's concurrence.

UPHOLDING J&K REORGANISATION ACT, 2019

- Court supports carving Ladakh as a Union Territory.
- State legislature's views are recommendatory, not binding on Parliament.

RESTORING J&K'S STATEHOOD AND ELECTIONS

- J&K statehood to be restored.
- Legislative assembly elections by September 30, 2024.
- Suggestion for a Truth-and-Reconciliation Commission.
- Similar to South Africa's post-apartheid model.
- Addresses human rights violations in J&K since the 1980s.



Article 35A

- An extension of Article 370, empowering Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature.
- Allows defining "permanent residents" with special rights, restricting non-state residents from working or owning property.
- Aims to preserve J&K's demographic structure.
- Constitutional debates arise due to the amendment procedure, but similar provisions exist for other states, making repeal challenging.

How did the Government Repeal Article 370?

Presidential Order

- In 2019 Presidential orders, Parliament redefined "constituent assembly of Jammu and Kashmir" to mean "Legislative Assembly."
- The President, under the rule, assumed Legislative Assembly powers to repeal Article 370.

Resolutions in Parliament

- On August 5th and 6th, 2019, both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha passed concurrent resolutions.
- These resolutions revoked remaining Article 370 provisions and introduced new ones.

Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act

- Parliament passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act on August 5th, 2019.
- The act resulted in the bifurcation of the state into two Union Territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Key Changes Brought Out by the Order of 2019

Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019

- Replaced the 1954 Presidential Order.
- Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, divided the state into two Union Territories: Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- Marks the first conversion of a state into Union Territories.

Representation Changes

- Of six Lok Sabha seats, five go to Jammu and Kashmir UT, while one is allocated to Ladakh.

ART 370 FOR INTEGRATION, NOT DISINTEGRATION: SC

WHAT ART 370 SAYS ABOUT SCRAPPING PROVISIONS

Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this article, the **President may, by public notification, declare that this article shall cease to be operative...**

Provided that the **recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of the State... shall be necessary** before the President issues such a notification

> Petitioners said that since J&K constituent assembly had ceased to exist, **Art 370 became a permanent feature**

> SC says '**President had the power to issue a notification** declaring that Article 370(3) ceases to operate without the recommendation of the constituent assembly'. Also says '**President did not have to secure the concurrence**' of the state gov't or Union gov't acting on behalf of the state gov't

WHAT SC JUDGMENT SAYS

1 **Erstwhile J&K state did not have internal sovereignty different from other states** of the country after it became part of India

2 '**Exercise of presidential power to issue constitutional order abrogating Article 370 of Constitution**' is valid

3 **Constituent assembly of J&K was never intended to be a permanent body**; Article 370 was a temporary provision

4 **Creation of the UT of Ladakh upheld**; not necessary to look into the same for UT of Jammu & Kashmir since it is temporary

5 EC to conduct **elections to J&K legislative assembly by Sept 30, 2024**. 'Restoration of statehood shall take place at the earliest

> Bench pronounced **3 separate and concurring judgments**

> Justice S K Kaul sought '**impartial truth & reconciliation**' panel to probe human rights violations by state and non-state actors

“ It is a resounding declaration of hope, progress and unity for our sisters and brothers in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh... (It is) a testament to the collective resolve to build a stronger, more united India

—PM MODI



PM's article in TOI | P 12

“ Full statehood must be restored immediately... we believe elections should be held immediately, there is no reason to wait till September 2024 —CONGRESS

“ It is nothing less than a death sentence not only for J&K, but for the idea of India —MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP

“ (Quoting Faiz) My heart is helpless, but not hopeless, the evening of sorrow is long, but it's just an evening —OMAR ABDULLAH | NC

- Jammu and Kashmir UT will have a legislative Assembly, while Ladakh becomes a UT without legislature.
- Transition from a Governor to a Lieutenant Governor for Kashmir.

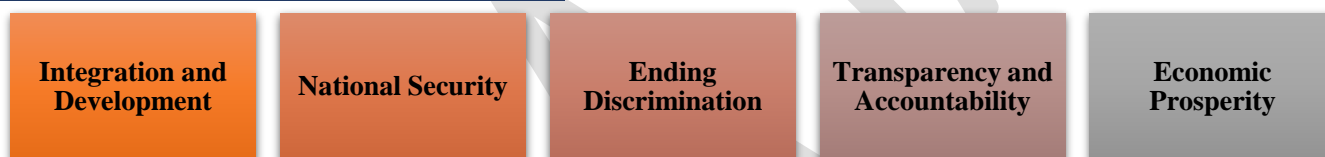
J&K Union Territory Status

- J&K Assembly reduced from a six-year term to five years.
- Section 32 of the J&K 2019 Bill empowers the Assembly to legislate on various subjects, excluding "public order" and "police," similar to Puducherry and Delhi.
- Unlike Delhi, J&K Assembly can legislate on land matters.

Abolishment of Special Status

- Jammu & Kashmir loses its separate constitution, flag, and anthem.
- Dual citizenship for Jammu and Kashmir citizens is discontinued.
- Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution apply to J&K citizens.
- Article 360, allowing the declaration of Financial Emergency, is now applicable.
- All Indian laws, including Right to Information and Right to Education Acts, become applicable.
- Indian Penal Code replaces Jammu and Kashmir's Ranbir Penal Code.
- Article 35A, stemming from Article 370, is declared null and void.

Why was the Article 370 Abrogated?



Integration and Development

- Hindered complete integration of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union.
- Created a sense of separatism and impeded development.
- Full integration believed to provide better access to resources, infrastructure, and opportunities.

National Security

- Exploited by Pakistan to support terrorism and separatism.
- Abrogation aimed to strengthen national security by allowing more control and crackdown on terrorist activities.

Ending Discrimination

- Discriminated against women, Dalits, and marginalized groups.
- Abrogation aimed to bring them under Indian laws for equal rights and opportunities.

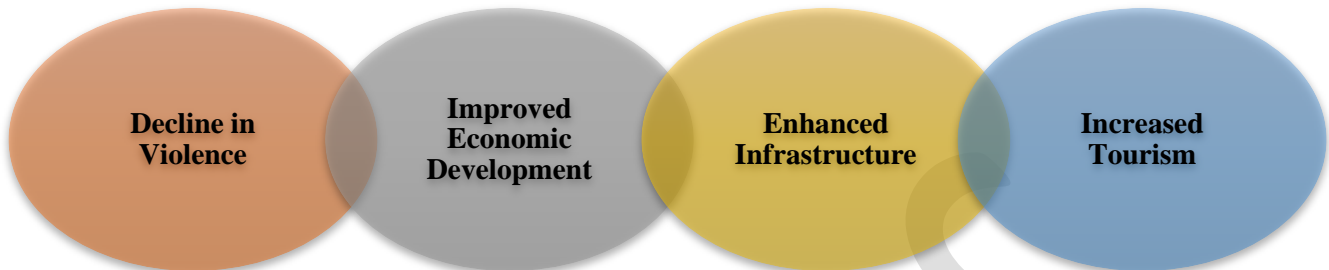
Transparency and Accountability

- Created a lack of transparency and accountability in governance.
- Abrogation aimed to bring the state under Central Vigilance Commission and Right to Information Act.

Economic Prosperity

- Hindered economic development in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Abrogation aimed to allow greater investment, tourism, and job creation.

Impact of Article 370 Abrogation



Decline in Violence

- Significant decline in violence in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Over 50% reduction in terrorist incidents; security forces killed over 300 militants in four years.

Improved Economic Development

- Initiatives like PMDP and IDS implemented for economic development.
- Increased investment, job creation, and economic growth; 31% tax revenue growth.

Enhanced Infrastructure

- Heavy investment in infrastructure development.
- Construction of new roads, bridges, tunnels, and power lines for easier travel and business.

Increased Tourism

- Significant increase in tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir.
- Improved security, better marketing, and new tourism initiatives; 1.62 crore tourists in 2022, highest in India's 75 years of independence.

Issues That Were Associated With The Revoking Of Article 370 And 35A



Perceived Autonomy

- The right of permanent settlement is seen as the primary autonomy for Kashmiris.
- Tampering with it could trigger a massive backlash.

Repealing Article 35A

- Repealing Article 35A would revert J&K to its pre-1954 status.
- Union government retains powers in defence, foreign affairs, and state communications.

Erosion of Autonomies

- Arguments suggest many autonomies granted by Article 370 have eroded.
- Majority of union laws apply to J&K; questioning the need for preservation.

Constitutional Reversion

- If Article 35A is repealed, J&K will constitutionally return to its status before the 1954 act.
- Union government limited to powers related to defence, foreign affairs, and state communications.

Autonomies under Scrutiny

- The erosion of autonomies granted by Article 370 is a point of contention.
- Questioning the relevance and effectiveness of these autonomies in the present context.

Union Laws Applicability

- Majority of the laws of the union apply to J&K, diminishing the uniqueness of Article 370.
- Reconsideration needed regarding the continued relevance of special provisions.

Debates on Preservation

- Ongoing debates about the erosion of Article 370 autonomies.
- Evaluating the necessity and effectiveness of preserving these provisions in the current scenario.

Different Legal Challenges in Abrogation of Article 370

Constitutional Challenges

Presidential Order Controversy

Violation of Article 3

Federalism Issue

SC Rulings on Article 370

Constitutional Challenges

- The 2019 Presidential order modified Article 370 (3), replacing "Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir" with "legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir."
- Changed "Government of Jammu and Kashmir" to mean "Governor of Jammu and Kashmir acting on the aid and advice of the council of ministers."
- The government aimed to dilute autonomy without a Constitutional Amendment, challenged in the Supreme Court.

Presidential Order Controversy

- Presidential order faced challenges for adding Article 35A through a Presidential Order, bypassing parliamentary approval.
- The order sought to alter the special status without the required two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Violation of Article 3

- Conversion of Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory questioned for violating Article 3.
- Bill not referred to the President by the State Assembly, and the Governor's concurrence deemed as the government's concurrence.

Federalism Issue

- The Instrument of Accession, treated like a treaty, raised concerns about violating federalism principles.
- Historical reasons for Jammu and Kashmir's special status recognized in legal precedents.

SC Rulings on Article 370

- In Santosh Kumar v. State of J&K & ors (2017), the Supreme Court emphasized Jammu and Kashmir's special status due to historical reasons.
- In SBI v Zaffar Ullah Nehru (2016), the SC held that Article 370 cannot be repealed without the Constituent Assembly's concurrence.

Conclusion

While the recent Supreme Court verdict appropriately affirmed Indian sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir, it poses a significant threat to federalism and democratic processes. A comprehensive approach is essential for a successful transition, intertwining economic growth and inclusive governance to secure a brighter future for the region, all while safeguarding its sovereignty and integrity.

Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill

Why in News?

The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill released in November by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) is part of an arc of endeavours to regulate broadcasting in an integrated manner.

Key Highlights

- The last initiative to take on this ambitious task was back in 2007, in the form of the Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill.
- Ten years before that, when cable and satellite broadcasting was in its infancy, the Broadcasting Bill of 1997 scripted the first effort to visualise an integrated regulatory framework for this sector.
- The recent third rendition of a Broadcasting Bill comes on the heels of a pre-consultation paper on 'National Broadcasting Policy' by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), a document initiated following a reference from the MIB.
- There appear to be three positive propositions in the current Bill, albeit each requiring crucial refinements.
- First, it obliges broadcasting network operators and broadcasters to maintain records of subscriber data, and subject this to periodic external audits, as is the international norm.
- Second, the Bill seeks to stipulate a methodology for audience measurement, and the sale of ratings data. Both mechanisms will bring the much-needed transparency in the opaque value chain of the cable and satellite television business in our country.
- That said, the Bill completely lacks any guardrails to shield the privacy of subscribers and audiences in such practices of data collection.
- Third, the provision to permit private actors in terrestrial broadcasting will encourage competition to Doordarshan, the state broadcaster, as is in many G-20 countries. Back in 2016, TRAI had initiated consultations on this.
- At that time, there was an opinion about terrestrial broadcasting proving viable only for large players, including those already in cable and satellite broadcasting; consequently, such a move, it could be argued, is likely to diminish the diversity of suppliers in broadcasting as a whole.
- This anxiety can be pacified if the Bill allows terrestrial broadcasting to those not involved in other forms of broadcasting.

- Apart from these potentially positive provisions, there are numerous apprehensions that arise from the Broadcasting Bill's manifest scope as well as its noteworthy silences.
- A major concern is the Bill including Over-the-Top (OTT) content suppliers in the definition of broadcasting services — as also proposed in TRAI's 'National Broadcasting Policy'.
- Intriguingly, both moves come amidst intense discussions catalysed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) (hitherto mandated to deal with the online media) on licensing OTT players.
- Now, the MIB appears to poach on MEITY's jurisdiction — a territorial slugfest typical in countries with a fragmented regulatory architecture. For the news media and their audience, there is a different concern.
- The Bill's expanded definition of broadcasting constricts the conditions in which journalists and news outlets that are not a part of large, multi-lingual television networks can continue their professional pursuits.
- While it is fruitful for a news outlet to have an oversight body, warranting a 'Content Evaluation Committee' takes the Bill in a questionable direction: mandating an internal body to self-certify news programming.
- The issue is not only of feasibility and costs but also of desirability. Since the role of an internal oversight mechanism is to maintain the accuracy of news and quality of journalism, its design is best left to individual news outlets.
- They could decide whether to design this along the lines of an ombudsperson, as some newspapers attempted in the past, or akin to a 'Readers' Editor', as practised by few online news outlets.
- Now, the two crucial silences in the Bill. Like the TRAI paper, the Bill is mum on issues of ownership.
- While the Bill is keen to stipulate a methodology for audience measurement, there is no desire to measure the extent of cross-media and vertical ownership.
- Both these forms of media power thwart the diversity of suppliers, and perhaps, consequently, that of viewpoints, in the marketplace of news. In fact, just last year, TRAI itself had drawn attention to extensive cross-media ownership between newspapers and news broadcasters through indirectly owned affiliates, and the need to evolve a system to capture this.
- Amusingly, one such news outlet with cross-media interests was apprehensive about inroads by telecom companies into broadcasting.
- They rightly feel such inroads add another dimension to vertical integration, since some cable and DTH distributors also own, in a roundabout manner, news broadcasters.
- Both renditions of vertical integration risk the ability of the audience to access, avail, and/or afford news from a diverse range of suppliers.
- The Bill is equally silent on creating an independent broadcast regulator, as hinted in TRAI's paper.
- This was first mooted in the 'airwaves' judgment of 1995, subsequently in the 1997 Broadcasting Bill, and reiterated in the 2007 iteration of the Bill.
- Instead, this Bill plans a 'Broadcast Advisory Council' to examine viewers' grievances and violations of the Programme Code and Advertisement Code.
- This raises two concerns: first, the capacity of such a Council to track and address grievances, genuine or motivated, raised by over 800 million TV viewers; and second, the lack of autonomy accorded to this body, since the Bill empowers the Central government to ultimately decide on the Council's advice.
- In addition, the Bill empowers the government to inspect broadcasters without intimating them in advance, and to impound their equipment, presumably including those issued to their employees.
- Furthermore, violations of the Programme Code and Advertisement Code attract deleting or modifying content, in addition to existing measures such as ceasing transmissions for particular durations.

- Finally, the Bill grants tremendous leeway to government to curtail broadcasting and its distribution in “public interest”, a term that is distressingly left undefined.
- All these intrusive mechanisms augment the vulnerabilities of professional news suppliers to external pressure groups.
- This should worry those who will deliberate over legislating the Bill, irrespective of which benches they occupy in Parliament.
- As the latest extension of the arc of endeavours to devise an integrated regulatory framework for broadcasting, this Bill must not lose the opportunity to protect press freedom and diversity.
- To do so, it has to will its way to incorporate some startling omissions, review its intrusive commissions, and fine-tune potentially positive provisions.

Over the Top (OTT) Platforms

OTT, or over-the-top platforms, refer to audio and video hosting and streaming services initially designed as content hosting platforms. Over time, they expanded their scope to include the production and release of short movies, feature films, documentaries, and web series. These platforms offer a diverse range of content and leverage artificial intelligence to suggest personalized content recommendations based on users' past viewing habits. Typically, OTT platforms provide some content for free, with a monthly subscription fee for access to premium content not readily available elsewhere. Premium content is often produced and marketed by the OTT platform in collaboration with established production houses known for their work in feature films. Examples of OTT platforms include Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, Peacock, CuriosityStream, Pluto TV, among many others.

Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023

Consolidated
Regulatory
Framework

Inclusion of Over-
the-Top (OTT)
Content and Digital
News

Modernization of
Definitions and
Provisions

Structural
Components

Streamlining
Regulatory
Processes

Consolidated Regulatory Framework

- Aims to establish a unified framework for regulating broadcasting services in the country.
- Seeks to replace the existing Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, and other Policy Guidelines.

Inclusion of Over-the-Top (OTT) Content and Digital News

- Broadens the regulatory scope to include Over-the-Top (OTT) content and digital news.
- Reflects an effort to adapt to the evolving landscape of broadcasting services.

Modernization of Definitions and Provisions

- Introduces contemporary definitions and provisions to accommodate emerging technologies.
- Reflects an intention to keep pace with advancements in the broadcasting sector.

Structural Components

- Comprises 6 chapters, 48 sections, and 3 Schedules.
- Provides a comprehensive and organized structure for the regulatory framework.

Streamlining Regulatory Processes

- Aims to streamline regulatory processes governing broadcasting services.

- Enhances efficiency and effectiveness in the oversight of the broadcasting sector.

Need for the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023

Alignment with Prime Minister's Vision

- Introduced in accordance with the Prime Minister's vision for ease of doing business and ease of living.

Adaptation to Digitization

- Addresses the impact of digitization on the broadcasting sector, particularly in cable TV.
- Recognizes the necessity to adapt and streamline the regulatory framework in response to technological advancements.

Key Features of the Draft Broadcasting Regulation Bill, 2023

Consolidation and Modernisation

- Addresses the longstanding need to consolidate and update regulatory provisions for various broadcasting services under a single legislative framework.
- Extends regulatory purview to encompass Over-the-Top (OTT) content, digital news, and current affairs regulated under the IT Act, 2000.

Contemporary Definitions and Future-Ready Provisions

- Introduces comprehensive definitions for contemporary broadcasting terms.
- Incorporates provisions for emerging broadcasting technologies to keep pace with evolving services.

Enhanced Self-Regulation Regime

- Strengthens self-regulation with the introduction of 'Content Evaluation Committees.'
- Evolves the existing Inter-Departmental Committee into a more participative 'Broadcast Advisory Council.'

Differentiated Programme Code and Advertisement Code

- Allows a differentiated approach to Programme and Advertisement Codes.
- Requires self-classification by broadcasters and robust access control measures for restricted content.

Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

- Addresses the specific needs of persons with disabilities.
- Provides enabling provisions for the issuance of comprehensive accessibility guidelines.

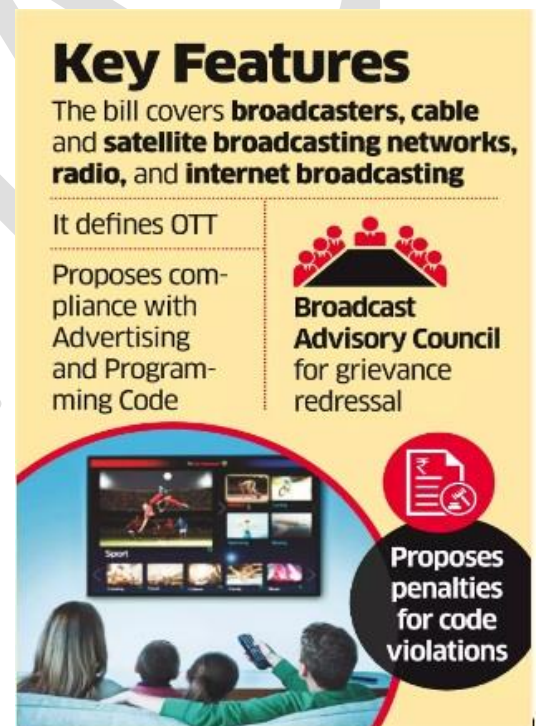
Statutory Penalties and Fines

- Introduces statutory penalties like advisory, warning, censure, or monetary penalties for operators and broadcasters.
- Imprisonment and/or fines reserved for very serious offenses, ensuring a balanced regulatory approach.

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Key Features

The bill covers **broadcasters, cable and satellite broadcasting networks, radio, and internet broadcasting**

It defines OTT

Proposes compliance with Advertising and Programming Code

Broadcast Advisory Council for grievance redressal

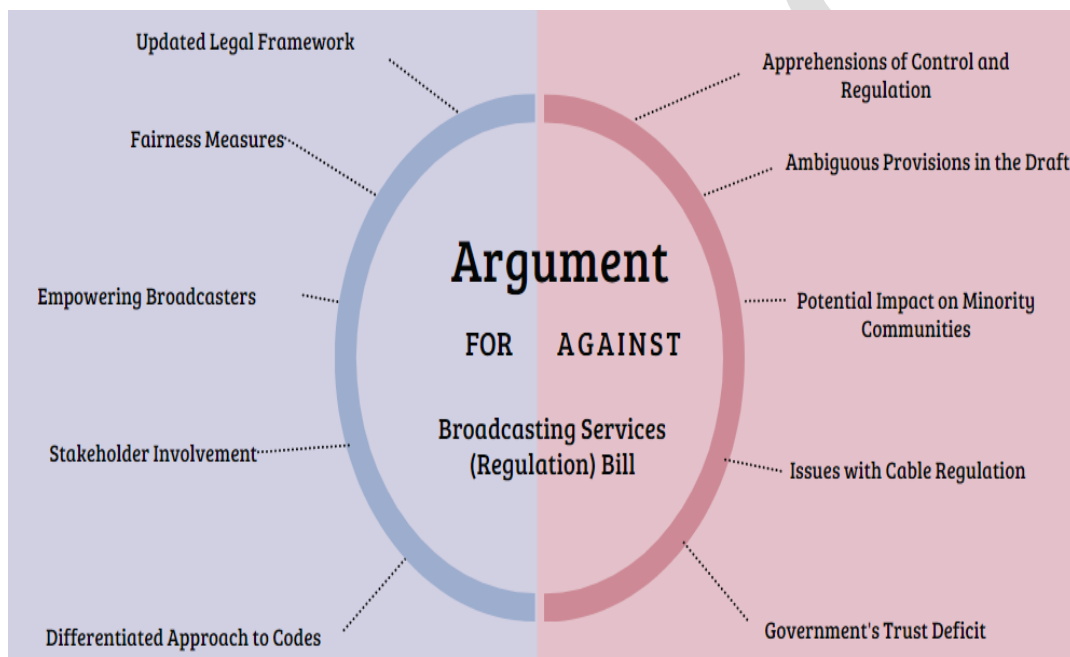
Proposes penalties for code violations

Equitable Penalties

- Links monetary penalties and fines to the financial capacity of the entity.
- Takes into account their investment and turnover to ensure fairness and equity.

Infrastructure Sharing, Platform Services, and Right of Way

- Includes provisions for infrastructure sharing among broadcasting network operators.
- Addresses relocation and alterations more efficiently in the Right of Way section.
- Establishes a structured dispute resolution mechanism.



<u>Arguments in Favor of the Bill</u>	<u>Arguments Against the Bill</u>
<p>Updated Legal Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represents a transition from the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act of 1995. • Described as a "pivotal legislation" by the Information & Broadcasting Minister, aiming to modernize the regulatory framework. <p>Empowering Broadcasters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces provisions empowering broadcasters with self-regulation mechanisms. • Strikes a balance between regulatory oversight and industry autonomy. <p>Differentiated Approach to Codes</p>	<p>Apprehensions of Control and Regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises concerns about whether the focus is genuinely on public service or increasing government control and regulation. • Apprehensions that the Bill may intensify government control over digital infrastructure and citizens' viewing choices. <p>Ambiguous Provisions in the Draft</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific provision (point 36) in the draft emphasizes broad and ambiguous language granting authorities the power to prohibit content. • Questions raised about the influence of "authorized officers" working under government direction. <p>Potential Impact on Minority Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns that the bill might lead to the erasure or selective representation of Indian minority communities.

- Allows for a differentiated approach to Programme and Advertisement Codes across various services.
- Provides flexibility and relevance to content creators by tailoring regulations to suit the nature of linear and on-demand content.

Fairness Measures

- Monetary penalties linked to the investment and turnover of the entity for fairness.
- Proportionally determines penalties based on the financial standing of the entity.

Stakeholder Involvement

- Indicates stakeholder involvement through public consultation.
- Welcomed by the industry for the government's initiative to establish a unified law, anticipating streamlined compliance and enforcement processes.

- Vague language in the draft could be exploited to promote a universal majority identity of India.

Issues with Cable Regulation

- Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, aimed at curbing illegal cable operators, lacked transparency due to nexus involving operators, politicians, entrepreneurs, and broadcasters.
- The new bill fails to address loopholes and issues in the implementation of the existing Act, including conflicts of interest and opaque practices within the Indian media industry.

Government's Trust Deficit

- Examines the recent history of the ruling government with media regulation, highlighting a pattern of unfulfilled promises and questionable outcomes.
- Draws parallels with the controversial IT Rules, 2021, introduced for national welfare.

Oligopolistic Media Ownership Tendencies

- Amid debates on "cultural invasion" and "anti-national" programming, the nexus of government officials and media houses may promote oligopolistic media ownership.

Steps Ahead for Effective Broadcasting Regulation in India

Comprehensive Legislation

- Develop a modern legislative framework covering all aspects of broadcasting.
- Encourage competition, avoiding media ownership concentration for diverse voices.

Stakeholder Consultation

- Prioritize stakeholder consultation with industry experts, creators, broadcasters, and the public.
- Gather diverse perspectives for well-informed regulations.

Adaptability to Technology

- Design regulations adaptable to technological advancements.
- Ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness amid evolving media landscapes.

Decoding the legislation



WHAT IS THE BROADCASTING BILL?

- The proposed Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023, seeks to directly regulate streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+Hotstar as over-the-top broadcaster, in addition to regulating terrestrial channels, radio, local cable operators, etc.
- Anybody who broadcasts news and current affairs programmes online as a "systematic business, professional or commercial activity" is liable to attract the same obligations as OTT streaming services

WHO IS EXCLUDED?

- A physical newspaper and its e-replica
- Online users who occasionally post news are excluded. For instance, a civilian who decides to stream a riot live will not be covered

There is no change in the status of how online news publishers are governed. If they are governed under the IT Rules, they [textual news websites] will continue to be governed here.

— a senior govt official familiar with the matter

Content Classification and Ratings

- Implement a robust content classification and rating system.
- Provide clear guidelines for informed choices and content regulation based on appropriateness.

Independent Regulatory Body

- Establish an independent regulatory body for enforcement and compliance monitoring.
- Ensure transparency, impartiality, and accountability in regulatory decisions.

Differentiated Approach for Platforms

- Recognize platform diversity – traditional TV, OTT, and digital media.
- Adopt differentiated regulations considering unique platform characteristics.

Regular Review and Update

- Create a mechanism for regular review and updates.
- Stay abreast of technological changes, societal shifts, and emerging challenges.

Clear Enforcement Mechanisms

- Define clear enforcement mechanisms for regulatory violations.
- Establish a fair and efficient process for complaints, investigations, and sanctions.

Promote Media Literacy

- Invest in media literacy programs for responsible consumption.
- Informed viewership contributes to a healthier media environment, reducing the need for excessive regulations.

International Best Practices

- Study and incorporate international best practices in broadcasting regulation.
- Learn from global experiences, considering India's unique cultural and social context.

Significance of the Bill

**Modernising the
broadcasting sector**

**Adapting to
dynamic
technologies**

**Efficient relocation
and alterations**

**Fair monetary
penalties**

Inclusivity

Modernising the broadcasting sector

- Pivotal legislation replacing outdated Acts, Rules, and Guidelines.
- Unifying the regulatory framework for a future-focused approach.

Adapting to dynamic technologies

- Addresses OTT, Digital Media, DTH, IPTV, promoting technological advancement.
- Ensures the regulatory framework evolves with the service landscape.

Efficient relocation and alterations

- Streamlines the 'Right of Way' section for efficient relocation and alterations.
- Establishes a structured dispute resolution mechanism.

Fair monetary penalties

- Links penalties to the financial capacity of entities.
- Ensures fairness and equity by considering investment and turnover.

Inclusivity

- Aims to make broadcasting more inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities.

Challenges & Criticisms

Promoting linear representation

- Concerns about erasure or selective representation of minority communities.
- Potential normalization of a universal unifocal identity of India.

Questions over "authorized officer"

- Concerns about political and personal influence on officers working under government directions.

Application of same rules for different media

- Contradictions in applying stringent rules to "OTT" broadcasting services compared to traditional media.
- Potential financial and compliance burdens impacting user experience and choice.

Selective targeting

- Allegations of potential misuse of rules, with instances of curbing anti-government agendas.

Way Ahead

Global regulations

- Most countries lack a clear statute-backed framework for OTT regulation.
- Countries like Singapore and Australia stand out with regulatory approaches.

Regulation of media & Role of civil society

- Emphasizes better self-regulation by the media.
- Advocates for an informed, cultivated, and interested civil society as the best watchdog over politics and the media.

Sickle Cell Disease and Gene therapy

Why in News?

Less than a month after the UK drug regulator approved Casgevy, the gene therapy to treat people above 12 with sickle cell disease and beta thalassemia, the U.S. FDA has approved two gene therapies — Casgevy and Lyfgenia — to treat sickle cell disease in patients over 12. Its decision on approving Casgevy gene therapy for treating beta thalassemia is expected by March 2024.

Key Highlights

- These landmark decisions mark the beginning of gene therapy using the CRISPR-Cas9 tool to treat diseases that could otherwise be cured only through bone marrow transplantation.

- While Lyfgenia uses a disabled lentivirus as a vector to introduce into the blood stem cells a new gene for haemoglobin that mimics the healthy version, Casgevy uses the gene-editing tool of CRISPR-Cas9 to disable a particular gene (BCL11A) that turns off foetal haemoglobin production in blood stem cells.
- While about 10% of adults continue to produce foetal haemoglobin, in others, the BCL11A gene prevents the production of foetal haemoglobin. By disabling the BCL11A gene, foetal haemoglobin that is produced, which does not have the abnormalities of adult haemoglobin, helps treat patients with sickle-cell disease or beta thalassaemia.
- In clinical trials, 28 of 29 sickle-cell disease patients who received Casgevy gene therapy were relieved of the debilitating effects of the disease for a year; for beta thalassaemia, 39 of 42 patients did not require blood transfusion for one year, and in the remaining three the need for blood transfusion reduced by more than 70%.
- In the case of clinical trials involving Lyfgenia, 30 of 32 sickle cell disease patients did not suffer from severe blocked blood flow caused by sickle cells, while 28 of 32 patients did not experience any blocked blood flow events six to 18 months post-infusion.
- Since both gene therapies use patients' own blood cells for gene editing, the number of patients who can potentially be treated will be huge as these treatments do not rely on matching bone marrow donors.
- But in reality, these treatments would be exorbitantly expensive. Also, much like bone marrow transplantation, only certain hospitals will be equipped to extract a patient's blood stem cells and use the genetic editing tool to the stem cells before reinjecting them, thus limiting the number of beneficiaries.
- With clinical trials evaluating the therapies in a very small number of patients and for shorter duration, the compulsion to continuously monitor their safety and efficacy through real world data cannot be overemphasised: the possibility of unintended genetic modifications and their resultant side effects are real when the CRISPR-Cas9 tool is used.

Did You Know?

In budget 2023, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that the government will work in mission mode to eliminate Sickle cell anaemia (SCA) by 2047.

Sickle Cell Disease (SCD): An Overview

About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) constitutes a cluster of inherited disorders affecting red blood cells (RBCs). • Normal RBCs are characterized by round shapes and contain hemoglobin, a protein essential for oxygen transport. • In SCD, abnormal hemoglobin transforms RBCs into rigid, sticky formations resembling the curve of a sickle, a farming tool.
Symptoms	<p>Symptoms associated with sickle cell disease can vary, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic Anemia: Resulting in fatigue, weakness, and paleness. • Painful Episodes (Sickle Cell Crisis): Episodes causing sudden and intense pain in bones, chest, back, arms, and legs. • Delayed Growth and Puberty.
Treatment	<p>Various treatments are available, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood Transfusions: Alleviating anemia and minimizing the risk of pain crises.



- Hydroxyurea: Medication to reduce the frequency of painful episodes and prevent long-term complications.
- Bone Marrow or Stem Cell Transplantation.

Casgevy Therapy Process

Utilizes CRISPR-Cas9 to precisely edit the patient’s own blood stem cells. Targets the BCL11A gene responsible for the transition from foetal to adult haemoglobin.

Foetal Haemoglobin Advantage

- Aims to enhance production of foetal haemoglobin, naturally present at birth without the abnormalities of adult haemoglobin.

Mechanism for Symptom Alleviation

- Leverages the body’s mechanisms to increase foetal haemoglobin, thereby alleviating symptoms of sickle cell disease and thalassaemia.

Single Casgevy Treatment

- Involves a single treatment session where blood stem cells are extracted via apheresis.
- Editing process spans approximately six months before reintroduction into the patient.

Apheresis Procedure

- Apheresis, a medical procedure, extracts specific blood components and returns the rest to the body.

CRISPR Technology

Aspect	Description
CRISPR Technology	Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) is a gene editing technology utilizing the Cas9 protein, inspired by bacteria's natural defense against viruses. Described as 'Genetic Scissors,' it employs a 'cut-copy-paste' mechanism in gene editing.
Mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gene Identification: Identifies problematic gene sequences. • Cas9 Intervention: Cas9 breaks DNA at specific points for removal. • Intervention with Correct Sequence: Scientists supply the correct genetic sequence during auto-repair. • Programmable Efficiency: Programmable and efficient, with potential for minimal errors.

WHAT IS SICKLE CELL ANAEMIA?

Sickle cell anaemia is hereditary blood abnormality predominantly seen among various tribal communities in the country. The disease occurs due to inherited abnormal haemoglobin (Hb) gene which produces Hb-S (Hb-sickle). The normal human red blood cells (RBC) carry adult haemoglobin (Hb-A) helping in the transportation of oxygen in the body, but among the sickle cell cases after transferring oxygen to tissues in body, the RBCs convert into half-moon (sickle) shaped because of Hb-S. The sickle-shaped RBCs get trapped in narrow blood vessels and blood flow slows down



PRESENCE IN COUNTRY

Source: Lok Sabha Data

States	Sickle Cell Disease	Sickle Cell Traits
Gujarat	29,266	7,29,561
Maharashtra	14,141	1,69,191
Odisha	2,999	25,461
Chhatisgarh	590	21,267
Madhya Pradesh	312	611
India	47,311	9,49,057

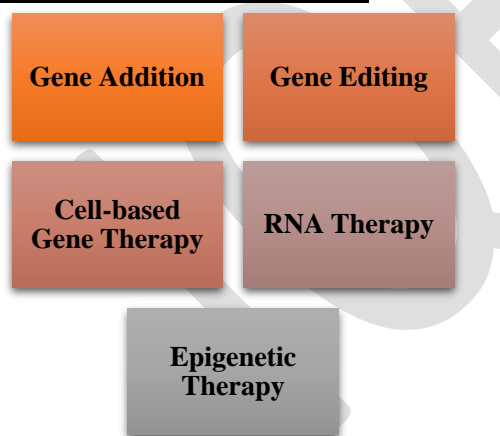
Aspect	Description
Significance of CRISPR-based Therapeutic Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Treatment: Customized treatment involves extracting, editing, and re-injecting cells for disease correction. • Permanent Cure of Genetic Diseases/Anomalies: Holds potential for curing genetic diseases and hereditary conditions.
Related Ethical Dilemma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for Misuse: CRISPR's power raises concerns about potential misuse, exemplified by the 2018 case of a 'designer baby.' • Inherited Changes: Changes made in embryos using CRISPR may be heritable, raising ethical questions about permanence and transmission to future generations.
Benefits of CRISPR Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Treatment: Corrects underlying genetic issues for disease treatment. • Permanent Cure of Genetic Diseases/Anomalies: Offers a potential permanent cure for a wide range of genetic diseases and disorders. • Effectiveness: Therapeutic benefits are long-lasting, addressing the root cause of diseases. • Accuracy: Provides precision in influencing specific genes compared to traditional pharmacological approaches.
Challenges Associated with CRISPR Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity of Gene Delivery and Activation: Successful application requires delivering a healthy gene accurately, preventing errors and unwanted immune responses. • Immune Response: Must evade the body's immune system to prevent unwanted responses to introduced genes. • Vulnerability to Disrupt Other Cells: Long-lasting changes should be precise to avoid disrupting other genes and causing unintended problems. • Commercial Viability: High development costs make it less appealing for treating extremely rare genetic disorders. • Ethical Concerns: Concerns include potential misuse, difficulties in obtaining informed consent for germline therapy, and the creation of classes based on engineered genomes. • Use of Embryos: Some scientists express moral and religious objections to using human embryos for genome-editing research.
Applications of CRISPR Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment of Rare Diseases: CRISPR aids in treating rare and debilitating diseases with limited treatment options. • Gene Editing Approaches: Utilizes gene addition, gene editing, cell-based gene therapy, RNA therapy, and epigenetic therapy for treating various disorders.

Gene Therapy: Definition and Approaches

Gene therapy involves the introduction, removal, or alteration of genetic material, typically DNA and RNA, within a patient's cells to address inherited or acquired diseases. This therapeutic approach aims to replace faulty genes or introduce new ones to cure ailments or enhance the body's ability to combat diseases.

- Genetic material, often a functioning copy of a gene, is transferred into target cells.
- Due to the challenge of inserting genes into cells, vectors, commonly viruses (or alternatives like liposomes and electroporation), are employed to facilitate gene insertion.
- Once inside the cell, the functional gene copy produces proteins, overcoming defects and contributing to disease resolution.

Gene Therapy Approaches



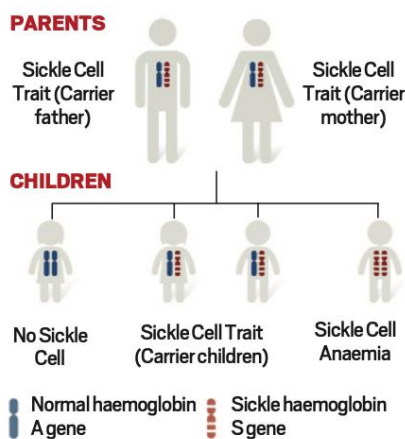
Gene Addition

- Involves collecting stem cells from the patient.
- A lab modifies these cells by adding an extra copy of a missing gene, such as the hemoglobin A gene for sickle cell disease.

GLOBAL BURDEN OF SICKLE CELL DISEASE



INHERITANCE OF SICKLE CELL



ABOVE, each parent has one normal haemoglobin A gene and one haemoglobin S gene. This means each of their children has:

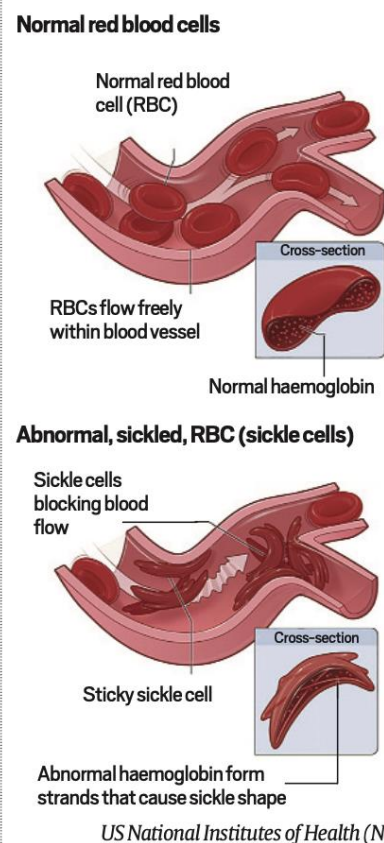
25% CHANCE of inheriting two normal A genes. This child will not have either sickle cell trait or sickle cell disease

50% CHANCE of inheriting one normal A gene and one S gene. This child will have sickle cell trait, and be a carrier

25% CHANCE of inheriting two S genes. This child will have sickle cell disease

EACH TIME the couple has a child, chances of the child having sickle cell disease remain same

IMPACT ON RED BLOOD CELLS



- The modified cells can then produce the lacking protein.

Gene Editing

- Aims to remove, disrupt, or correct faulty DNA elements within genes.
- Utilizes precise systems to make changes inside cells.
- Two types: Gene Silencing (silencing faulty gene segments) and Gene Correction (fixing the faulty gene variant).

Cell-based Gene Therapy

- Merges Gene Therapy with Cellular Therapy.
- Transplants genetically altered cells with specific functions to replace or repair damaged tissue.
- Examples include CAR T Cell Therapy, modifying immune cells to target cancer cells.

RNA Therapy

- Utilizes RNA fragments to treat disorders.
- Interacts with messenger RNA (mRNA) to influence protein production, compensating for genetic alterations.
- Examples include antisense oligonucleotide (ASO), small interfering RNA (siRNA), and microRNA (miRNA) therapies.

Epigenetic Therapy

- Affects epigenetic changes by modifying specific DNA tags controlling gene activity.
- Corrects abnormal epigenetic patterns underlying genetic disorders.

Benefits of Gene Therapy

Treatment of Rare Diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective for rare, debilitating diseases with limited treatment options.• Slows or halts the progression of rare inherited diseases.
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides long-lasting therapeutic benefits, addressing the root cause of diseases.• Offers sustained effectiveness without frequent interventions.
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enables the design of specific therapeutic agents influencing any of the body's roughly 20,000 genes.

Challenges Associated with Gene Therapy



Complexity of Delivery and Activation

- Requires precise delivery of a healthy gene to a large number of cells in the right tissue.
- The introduced gene must activate and remain active to produce the desired protein.

Immune Response

- Gene-delivery vectors must evade the body's immune surveillance to prevent adverse immune responses.

Disruption of Other Cells

- Long-lasting gene therapy necessitates the permanent integration of the introduced gene into the target cell's genome.
- Misplacement of the gene could disrupt other genes, leading to complications.

Commercial Viability

- Development costs make gene therapy less appealing for treating extremely rare genetic disorders.

Ethical Concerns related to Gene Therapy

Safety

Concerns about off-target effects and mosaicism raise ethical questions regarding the safety of gene editing.

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent for germline therapy, which affects embryos and future generations, poses challenges.

Justice and Equity

Worries about unequal access to genome editing, potentially creating genetic classes based on engineered genomes.

Use of Embryos

Moral and religious objections to using human embryos for genome-editing research have been raised by some scientists.

COP 28

Why in News?

The COP28 Declaration has left almost all the problems where they were before; nothing much of substance has been gained in Dubai.

Key Highlights

- Much rested on COP28 in Dubai, a milestone event slated to take up the first five-yearly global stocktake with respect to goals set under the Paris Agreement to combat the climate crisis.
- The global stocktake covers mitigation, adaptation, financing and other support to developing countries, for which a report of technical deliberations and a synthesis report had been prepared as inputs to the COP.

- Based on the global stocktake review at COP28, countries would be required to submit raised emissions reduction targets by mid-2025 for finalisation at COP30.
- The global stocktake input reports conveyed what is already known from all major scientific studies, i.e., the window for restricting global heating to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels is rapidly closing.
- Global average temperature rise is already dangerously close to that limit, having already touched it on many days this year.
- Severe heat waves, droughts, forest fires, floods and extreme rainfall are already being witnessed more frequently across the world, along with possible irreversible melting of polar and glacial ice and sea-level rise.
- The urgency to rein in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions causing climate change was clearly top of the agenda in Dubai.
- From the outset, fossil fuels, responsible for around 75% of all greenhouse gases and about 90% of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, took centre stage at COP28, astonishingly for the first time ever in climate COPs.
- Anxieties about the influence of the oil industry and supporting governments had already been swirling around, with the COP being held in the Gulf.
- The COP28 President, Sultan Al Jaber, a United Arab Emirates Minister and head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), one of the world's largest oil and gas producers, further set the cat among the pigeons by claiming in an interview that “there was no science” that called for cutting back on fossil fuels to tackle climate change.
- Journalists and activists had also noted that fossil fuel companies had been steadily increasing their presence at the COPs, often even as members of official country delegations, giving them access to the main negotiation rooms. Their numbers had shot up to 2,000 at Dubai, larger than any country's delegation.
- On the positive side, all three successive global stocktake draft texts echoed the GST input findings that the 1.5°C target would require “deep, rapid and sustained” reduction in global emissions of 43% by 2030 and 60% by 2035 relative to 2019 levels, reaching net-zero CO₂ by 2050, with global emissions expected to peak around 2020 or latest by 2025.
- After the initial draft text drew mixed responses, especially over phase-down or out of fossil fuels, the second draft was circulated much later on the penultimate day, and evoked furious reactions.
- It gave only a bullet list of options that countries “could” take towards emissions cuts, including “reduction” of fossil-fuel production and use, and underplaying financial support from developed countries.
- Small island states called the text a death sentence, African countries said they would not leave without assurances on funding, and the European Union threatened to walk out saying the 1.5°C target could not be attained with such a text.
- Inevitably, the COP was extended by a day and a fresh text was tabled in the morning of December 13.
- This draft sought to square the circle on fossil fuels by calling for “transitioning away” from fossil fuels, which several countries and observers suggested be read as signalling the end of the fossil fuel era. In the relief over this compromise, other serious lacunae were overlooked.
- The final draft had many loopholes that could prolong production and use of fossil fuels, and favoured the industry as well as rich developed countries with advanced technologies.
- While calling for a phase-down of “unbated” coal power, the door was left open for “low-carbon fuels”, “low-emission” technologies, “low-carbon hydrogen”, and “transitional fuels,” (widely used in Europe and the United States to describe natural gas) — all terms with very loose definitions.

- It also made special mention of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) which has not achieved commercial viability and whose eventual emissions savings are unknown.
- On emission reductions and shift to clean energy, the draft also did not adequately refer to equity or common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR), possibly under pressure from the U.S. looking to treat all countries on a par.
- This draft also did not take the issue of financial support by developed countries further, causing much anguish to climate vulnerable countries.
- The draft did express concern that the earlier commitment of \$100 billion per year by 2020, however inadequate, had not been met.
- It repeated the global stocktake reports' estimation that developing countries needed about \$5.8-\$5.9 trillion for the pre-2030 period, with adaptation alone requiring \$215-\$387 billion per year and clean energy transition requiring about \$4.3 trillion per year, both until 2030.
- Yet, no fresh targets were mentioned in the draft, not even for the new Loss and Damage fund formally set up on the first day and gathering pledges for a meagre \$470 million.
- The closing plenary was called just a few hours after the final draft was published, giving country delegations little time for discussions.
- While delegates were milling about, the COP President quickly tabled the draft, noted that there were no objections, and gavelled it through!
- On the live webcast, the delegates appeared stunned, then a ripple of applause grew slowly into the usual standing ovation.
- As often happens at fraught climate COPs, the relief at any closure, good or not, seems better than opposing an apparent consensus.
- Yet, voices of disquiet were expressed post facto. The delegate from Samoa, representing the small island states, said that she and other island delegations were outside discussing the text when it was gavelled through in their absence, and went on to spell out a long list of their objections.
- Many more such voices followed — for example from Africa, chiefly criticising the lax attitude towards fossil fuels and the lack of financial support announced.
- The COP28 Declaration has left almost all the problems where they were before. Other than recording a decision to “transition away” from fossil fuels, which countries were already doing in practice, and noting the broad global target for higher emissions reduction to achieve the 1.5°C goal, nothing much of substance has been gained at COP28.
- A road map towards new targets in 2025 was not drawn up. Financial assistance was not scaled up. The Global Goal on Adaptation was left half-baked.
- A number of other documents were not finalised or approved. On the other hand, the fossil fuel industry went back happy, as did the developed countries which successfully dealt yet another blow against inter-nation equity, and have again escaped putting serious funds on the table.

What are COPs?

- COPs refer to gatherings conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty established in 1992.
- These assemblies, identified by the acronym COP, function as the official sessions of the Conference of the Parties.

- Within these meetings, participating countries (referred to as Parties) assess global initiatives in line with the primary objective of the Paris Agreement, which seeks to limit global warming to around 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.
- Serving as the principal decision-making body of the UNFCCC, COPs adopt decisions and resolutions covering various facets of climate action, including mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology, and transparency.

What is COP28?

COP28 denotes the 28th yearly gathering of the United Nations (UN) focused on climate, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), spanning from November 30 to December 12, 2023. COP signifies the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This conference serves as a forum for governments to deliberate on strategies for anticipating and mitigating the impacts of impending climate change.

COP timeline and major developments

1992	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted (effective: 1994)
1995	COP1 held in Berlin (Germany)
1997	Kyoto Protocol adopted (effective: 2005) at COP3 in Kyoto (Japan)
2015	Paris Agreement adopted (effective: 2016) at COP21 in Paris (France)
2020	United States withdraws from the Paris Agreement
2021	United States re-admitted to the Paris Agreement IPCC releases the Sixth Assessment Report (WG1) Glasgow Climate Pact adopted at COP26 in Glasgow (UK), when Hitachi was a Principal Partner
2022	COP27 held in Sharm El Sheikh (Egypt)
2023	COP28 held in Dubai (UAE)

Key Highlights of COP28

Loss and Damage (L&D) Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At COP28, participating countries reached an agreement to operationalize the Loss and Damage (L&D) fund, designed to provide compensation to nations grappling with the impacts of climate change. • The World Bank is set to serve as the "interim host" for the fund for a four-year period, in alignment with both the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. • Eligibility for fund applications extends to all developing countries, with voluntary contributions encouraged from every nation. • A specific percentage is designated for Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.
Global Stocktake Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fifth iteration of the Global Stocktake (GST) text, a periodic review mechanism established under the 2015 Paris Agreement, was unveiled and adopted without objection at COP28. • The text outlines eight steps to achieve the goal of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. • These steps include tripling global renewable energy capacity, doubling the rate of energy efficiency improvements, accelerating the phase-down of unabated coal power, promoting net-zero emissions energy systems, and reducing non-CO2 emissions, among others. • India emphasizes the importance of adhering to its nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and the critical role of coal in meeting developmental needs.

Methane Emission Cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COP28 witnessed an agreement from nearly 200 countries to "transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems," marking the first global pledge of this nature. • Notably, the agreement does not specify methane emission reduction targets for 2030, addressing concerns from developing countries, including India, where such reductions may impact sensitive sectors like agriculture and livestock.
Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the pledge, signatories commit to collaborating to triple the world's installed renewable energy generation capacity to at least 11,000 GW by 2030. • Additionally, they aim to double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements from approximately 2% to over 4% annually until 2030.
Global Cooling Pledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This pledge, endorsed by 66 national governments, focuses on reducing cooling-related emissions across all sectors by at least 68% globally relative to 2022 levels by 2050.
Climate Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNCTAD estimates that developed nations owe developing countries USD 500 billion in 2025 under the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for climate finance. • The goal, confirmed in the 2015 Paris Agreement, aims to establish a new collective quantified goal before 2025, starting at a floor of USD 100 billion per year, covering mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. • The figure is anticipated to rise to USD 1.55 trillion by 2030.
Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced at COP28, the draft text on GGA addresses issues such as climate-induced water scarcity reduction, resilient food and agriculture production, and strengthening resilience against climate-related health impacts.
Declaration to Triple Nuclear Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched at COP28 with support from 22 national governments, this declaration aims to triple global nuclear energy capacity by 2050, encouraging shareholder support from international financial institutions.
Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) and Coal Transition Accelerator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPCA welcomed new members at COP28 and emphasized cleaner energy alternatives. France introduced the Coal Transition Accelerator, focusing on knowledge-sharing, policy design, and financial support for just transitions from coal to clean energy.
Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnership (CHAMP) for Climate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHAMP commitments, signed by 65 national governments, aim to enhance cooperation with subnational governments in planning, financing, implementing, and monitoring climate strategies.
India-Led Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two initiatives led by India were launched at COP28: the Global River Cities Alliance (GRCA) and the Green Credit Initiative. GRCA involves 275+ global river-cities in 11 countries, promoting sustainable river-centric development and climate resilience.

- The Green Credit Initiative focuses on incentivizing environmental activities such as water conservation and afforestation by major corporations and private companies.

COP28 Shortcomings

- Lack of clear timelines for fossil fuel phase-out.
- Ambiguity in the commitment to triple renewable energy capacity, causing uncertainty.
- Absence of specific measurement criteria for the phase-down of coal.
- Opposition from countries hindering progress on methane emission cuts, including India, which is not part of the Global Methane Pledge.
- Challenges in meeting urgent climate action expectations.
- The global adaptation framework adopted lacks financial provisions and requires further development.
- Developing countries face debt distress as the current \$100 billion goal of Climate Finance remains unmet.
- Criticisms of loopholes in the agreement from stakeholders, including the Alliance of Small Island States, challenging its transformative potential.
- Compromise on the absolute phase-out of hydrocarbons, highlighting challenges in negotiations and compromises made to secure the agreement.
- Calls for greater ambition from climate leaders like Manuel Pulgar-Vidal to effectively limit global warming.

Initiatives India Opposes for Climate Action

- Opposition to coal phase-out despite commitments to expand non-fossil fuel and renewable energy.
- Continuous resistance to international initiatives like the Global Methane Pledge, citing concerns about agriculture and electricity supply.
- Non-participation in the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge at COP28, emphasizing India's climate equity concept.
- Refusal to contribute to the Loss and Damage Fund, citing historical responsibility and objecting to the World Bank's temporary management.

Azerbaijan and Brazil hosting COP29 (2024) and COP30 (2025):

- Azerbaijan will host COP29 in 2024.

India's Climate Action Initiatives during COP28 Summit

Global River Cities Alliance (GRCA)

- Led by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- Launch signifies a significant step in global efforts toward river conservation and sustainable water management.



Green Credit Initiative

- Aims to create a global trade forum for the exchange of innovative environmental programs and instruments.
- Aligns with Mission LiFE, focusing on minimizing per capita carbon footprint through mindful utilization.

LeadIT 2.0

- Launched at COP28, focuses on co-development and transfer of low-carbon technology and financial assistance to emerging economies.

Green Development Pact

- Provides pathways for nations in achieving energy, climate, environment, and disaster resilience-related objectives.
- Key ambitions include tripling global renewable capacity by 2030.

Way Forward

While COP-28 has introduced new goals and pledges, significant follow-up actions are essential to realize these commitments.

- **Introduction of New Indicators:** Identifying new, tangible indicators is imperative to measure progress on each of the global goals established at COP 28.
- **Establishment of Financial Mechanism:** The prompt establishment of a financial mechanism to generate the estimated \$500 billion, as proposed by UNCTAD, is crucial. Developed nations must be held accountable for meeting their financial obligations without leeway.
- **Binding Commitments:** Initiatives should be taken to render renewable energy pledges binding on all member countries, ensuring a collective commitment to sustainable practices.
- **Clarity on Fossil Fuel Phase Down:** Ensuring clarity on the timeline and targets for the phase-down of fossil fuels should be prioritized in future COPs, providing a clear roadmap for transitioning to cleaner energy sources.
- **Climate Justice:** Upholding the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) should remain the guiding light in upcoming climate negotiations, ensuring fairness and equity in addressing the impacts of climate change.

Questionable searches under the Money Laundering Act

Why in News?

The enforcement of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (passed in the background of India's commitment to the international community to fight the drug menace and terrorism) has caused much consternation especially after its unusual interpretation by the Supreme Court of India in Vijay Madanlal Choudhary and Ors vs Union of India and Ors. (2022).

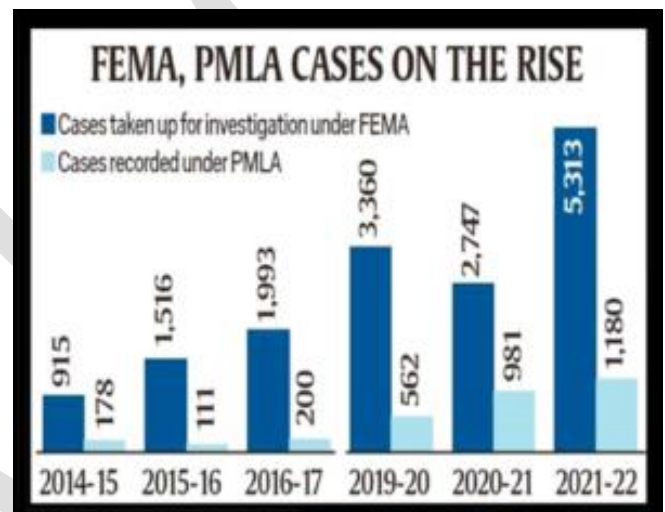
Key Highlights

- The Supreme Court of India limited its application to “on the wrongful and illegal gain of property as a result of criminal activity relating to a scheduled offence”. It also held that “the property must qualify the definition of “proceeds of crime” under Section 2(1)(u) of the 2002 Act”.
- It went on to hold that “the authority of the Authorised Officer... to prosecute any person for offence of money-laundering gets triggered only if there exists proceeds of crime within the meaning of Section 2(1)(u) of the 2002 Act and further it is involved in any process or activity”.

- The Court emphatically held that “Not even in a case of existence of undisclosed income and irrespective of its volume, the definition of ‘proceeds of crime’ under Section 2(1)(u) will get attracted, unless the property has been derived or obtained as a result of criminal activity relating to a scheduled offence”.
- The law thus declared by the Court, which binds one and all under Article 141, is clear — “If the offence so reported is a scheduled offence, only in that eventuality, the property recovered by the Authorised Officer would partake the colour of proceeds of crime under Section 2(1)(u) of the 2002 Act, enabling him to take further action under the Act...”.
- In clarity, the Court declared, “Absent existence of proceeds of crime, as aforesaid, the authorities under the 2002 Act cannot step in or initiate any prosecution”.
- The media has reported many cases of Enforcement Directorate (ED) searches, seizures and arrests — which are outside the ED’s powers, as held by the Court.
- Naturally, the conduct of the ED in this regard has resulted in severe criticism from the Supreme Court, as seen in Pankaj Bansal vs Union of India, recently.
- The Court, while setting aside the arrest orders along with orders of remand passed by the Sessions Judge Panchkula, and affirmed by the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, made damning observations: “This chronology of events reflects rather poorly, if not negatively, on the ED’s style of functioning.
- The ED, mantled with far-reaching powers under the stringent Act of 2002, must be seen to be acting with utmost probity, dispassion and fairness. In the case on hand, the ED failed to exercise its powers.
- The Court added, “Surprisingly, no consistent and uniform practice seems to be followed... as written copies of the grounds of arrest are furnished to arrested persons in certain parts of the country but in other areas,... the grounds of arrest are either read out to them or allowed to be read by them.”
- In November 2023, Justices Abhay S. Oka and Pankaj Mithal, in Pavana Dibbur vs The Directorate of Enforcement, 2023 INSC 1029, addressed key aspects of the PMLA: “On a plain reading of Section 3, unless proceeds of crime exist, there cannot be any money laundering offence,” and “To constitute any property as proceeds of crime, it must be derived or obtained directly or indirectly by any person as a result of criminal activity relating to a scheduled offence” Because, the existence of “proceeds of crime” is “sine qua non” for the offence under Section 3 of the PMLA.
- Yet, what is happening in some States that are governed by the Opposition is damaging to federalism.
- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 is not covered by the Schedule of the PMLA Act and offences in relation thereto are not “Scheduled Offences”.
- Yet, the ED in these States is conducting inquiries with respect to the alleged illegal mining of sand, a minor mineral under the control of States and not the Union.
- The Mines Act has extensive provision to curb evasion and enables penalty and prosecution for any illegal extraction of minerals . But, that power is with the State government.
- In Jharkhand, the ED purportedly registered an enforcement case investigation report (No. 07/2023) on January 30, 2023 against an MLA of the ruling party and his associates based on certain first information reports (FIR) filed by some persons.
- While these complaints were under investigation, a writ petition was filed in the High Court by one Bijay Hansda (who was apparently in jail, and who later, on oath, told the High Court that he had not authorised anyone to file that petition) to refer these police cases to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).
- Curiously, the ED was also made a party in this writ petition. The petition stated that the ED had started investigation “pertaining to illegal mining and on the laundering of the tainted monies generated from it” and

that the petitioner was issued a summons, where he appeared and offered assistance on the modus operandi of the alleged offenders, based on which the ED had apparently prepared a prosecution report.

- The ED affidavit said, “The suspects of the ECIR 07/2023 ... are habitual offenders who are a party in the activities connected with the proceeds of crime”. The ED claimed that “... illegal mining is being done in a rampant manner and the proceeds ... dealt in cash.” The ED, at that stage, was neither investigating a scheduled offence nor did it have any property of crime.
- Clearly, the process of the court was abused. The alleged petitioner, once out of jail, sought withdrawal of the petition. The High Court refused permission on August 8, 2023, and the next day delivered the judgment transferring the police cases to the CBI.
- It immediately registered the preliminary inquiry, and subsequently FIR, while a special leave petition (SLP) was filed by the alleged offenders before the Supreme Court stating that they had not been heard by the High Court before passing the judgment, besides contending that neither the CBI nor the ED had any jurisdiction in the matter.
- Even more shocking is the order of the Bench on September 18, 2023: “Permission to file Special Leave Petition is granted. Issue Notice.”
- In subsequent judicial developments, between September and November 2023, there were violations of procedure, such as the notice issuing Bench being changed contrary to the Supreme Court Rules, 2013 and the Handbook on Practice and Procedure and Office Procedure.
- Further, the later Bench was not persuaded by the arguments put forth by the senior advocate for the alleged offender to grant interim relief in a very deserving case where, besides questions of jurisdiction, there were pointers to the violation of natural justice.
- So now, the CBI and the ED have absolute freedom to do what is not authorised under the judgments of the Supreme Court.
- Interestingly, the ED in its affidavit before the High Court said that the “the Accused Pankaj Mishra is the MLA representative of Jharkhand Chief Minister and is a very influential person.”
- So, the design is clear. Clearly, the process of the law is being abused in an innovative and lethal manner to target the political party ruling Jharkhand. Efforts are on by the ED to implicate other governments in some States including Tamil Nadu.
- The ED is singularly inactive in States run by the Bharatiya Janata Party, where the incidents of illegal mining are far more serious. In Maharashtra, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the cases of illegal mining are 6,743, 324, 23,787, 8,713, and 9,361, respectively.
- This raises extremely disturbing questions not only about the abuse of authority by central investigating agencies but also the abuse of the process of court being permitted all along.
- If mines and minerals are not part of “scheduled offences” and in a case where “proceeds of crime” are non-existent, it is shocking that courts should allow such investigations to be carried out by the CBI and the ED.



- It is even more sad that the courts do not ask these agencies about such actions in other States but are ever so willing to condemn the administration in Opposition-governed States.
- Federalism is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution of India, but its foundation is being slowly chipped away through such processes.

Supreme Court's remarks regarding the PMLA

Definition of Proceeds of Crime

In the case of Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India (2022), the Supreme Court highlighted that only assets originating from criminal activities associated with a scheduled offence are considered "proceeds of crime" under Section 2(1)(u) of the PML Act 2002.

Enforcement Directorate's Operational Approach

- Overreach Critique - The Supreme Court, in the case Pankaj Bansal vs Union of India, specifically addressed concerns about the Enforcement Directorate's overreach, outlining issues with its approach.
- Fairness Necessity - In the same case, the Court stressed the importance of fairness in the Enforcement Directorate's actions, noting inconsistencies and a lack of transparency in its operations.

Procedural Violations

- Judicial Misuse - Examining cases like Pavana Dibbur vs The Directorate of Enforcement, 2023 INSC 1029, the Supreme Court identified procedural violations and misuse, emphasizing the imperative for the Enforcement Directorate and other authorities to strictly adhere to legal standards.

Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002

Enacted in response to India's global commitment (Vienna Convention) to combat money laundering, the PMLA is influenced by various international agreements, including the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988, Basle Statement of Principles 1989, Forty Recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering 1990, and the Political Declaration and Global Program of Action adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990.

- The PMLA is a criminal law designed to prevent money laundering and facilitate the confiscation of property linked to money laundering activities.
- It serves as a fundamental component of India's legal framework to counter money laundering.



PREVENTION OF MONEY LAUNDERING ACT, 2002 (PMLA)

Money laundering is the method through which funds acquired from illicit activities, often referred to as black money, are camouflaged to appear as legal funds, ultimately presenting them as white money.

BASIC INFORMATION ON PMLA

- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) was enacted by the then-NDA government on January 17, 2003.
- The PMLA, 2002 became operational on July 1, 2005.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

The primary goal of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act is to prevent and control money laundering by confiscating proceeds derived from criminal activities.

COMMON FORMS OF MONEY LAUNDERING

- Hawala system,
- Smuggling bulk amounts of money ,
- Fictional loans,
- Business involving cash-incentives,
- Round-tripping,
- Laundering that is trade centric,
- Shell companies and trusts,
- Real estate,
- Fake invoicing,
- Gambling, etc.

FACT ABOUT PMLA

- The PMLA was enacted in response to India's global commitment (Vienna Convention) to combat the menace of money laundering.

- Applicable to financial institutions, banks (including the RBI), mutual funds, insurance companies, and their financial intermediaries, it encompasses various provisions aimed at combating illicit financial activities.

Recent Amendments

- **Clarification on Proceeds of Crime:** The definition of proceeds of crime now extends beyond property derived from scheduled offences, encompassing any property acquired through criminal activities related to or similar to scheduled offences.
- **Redefinition of Money Laundering:** Money laundering, previously contingent on another crime (predicate or scheduled offence), is now treated as a standalone crime. Section 3 of the PMLA considers individuals directly or indirectly involved in the proceeds of the crime as accused of money laundering.
- **Continuing Nature of Offence:** The recent amendment emphasizes that an individual remains implicated in the offence of money laundering as long as they continue to benefit from activities associated with money laundering. This recognition underscores the continuing nature of the offence, covering aspects such as concealment, possession, acquisition, use, projecting as untainted property, claiming as untainted property.

Issues with ED and PMLA

- **Misuse of PMLA for ordinary crimes:** PMLA is employed to investigate crimes unrelated to money laundering or organized crime, resulting in the attachment of assets belonging to innocent victims.
- **Lack of transparency and clarity:** The Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) is not provided to the accused, and the ED lacks clear criteria for selecting cases to investigate.
- **Blanket powers:** The ED is endowed with nearly unrestricted powers under PMLA for executing searches, seizures, investigations, and attaching assets deemed proceeds of crime.
- **Low conviction rate:** From 2005 to 2013-14, no convictions were recorded; between 2014-15 and 2021-22, only 23 out of 888 registered cases resulted in convictions.
- **Allegation of Political biases:** "Political figures aligning with the government have mysteriously received 'clean chits' or experienced the ED slowing down proceedings against them."

On ED's power under PMLA

An upshot of the judgment by the Supreme Court on the validity of certain provisions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act

- The offence of money laundering is as heinous an offence as terrorism
- Section 3 (definition of money laundering), Section 24 (reverse burden of proof), and Section 5 (attachment of property) to stay
- Stringency in granting bail under the Act is legal and not arbitrary
- It is not mandatory to give an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) in every case as it was not an FIR
- The statements made to ED are considered admissible
- Provision of attachment of property of accused as proceeds of crime 'balances' the interests of the accused and the State
- The question of enactment of PMLA amendments through the Money Bill route is to be decided by a larger Bench



Directorate of Enforcement

The Directorate of Enforcement is a multi-disciplinary organization mandated with investigation of offence of money laundering and violations of foreign exchange laws.

Category	Details
Establishment and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Directorate of Enforcement was established in 1956 with headquarters in New Delhi.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforces the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA), and specific provisions under the PMLA.
Administrative Hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operates under the administrative control of the Department of Revenue for operational purposes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy aspects of FEMA fall under the Department of Economic Affairs, and those of PMLA under the Department of Revenue.
Director and Special Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shri Sudhir Nath, an Additional Special, serves as the Director.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two Special Directors at Headquarters and one Special Director in Mumbai.
Zonal and Sub Zonal Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Zonal Offices, each led by a Deputy Director.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11 Sub Zonal Offices, each headed by an Assistant Director.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zonal offices located in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Cochin, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and Hyderabad.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub Zonal offices situated in Jaipur, Jalandhar, Srinagar, Varanasi, Guwahati, Calicut, Indore, Nagpur, Patna, Bhubaneshwar, and Madurai.
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect, develop, and disseminate intelligence on FEMA violations, sourcing information from various channels.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate suspected FEMA violations, including "hawala," foreign exchange racketeering, and non-realization of export proceeds.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjudicate cases of violations under erstwhile FERA, 1973, and FEMA, 1999.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realize penalties imposed post-adjudication.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handle adjudication, appeals, and prosecution cases under FERA, 1973.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process and recommend cases for preventive detention under COFEPOSA.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake survey, search, seizure, arrest, and prosecution actions against offenders of PMLA offenses.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide and seek mutual legal assistance with contracting states for attachment/confiscation of proceeds of crime and transfer of accused persons under PMLA.

Effects on Federalism

- Several states, governed by opposition parties, have experienced detrimental actions against the principles of federalism.
- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, not being part of the PMLA's schedule, results in its offenses not being categorized as "Scheduled Offenses."
- ED inquiries into illegal sand mining, under state jurisdiction, have sparked concerns.
- In Jharkhand, the ED initiated investigations without evidence of scheduled offenses or proceeds of crime.
- The High Court's decision to transfer cases to the CBI has prompted questions regarding jurisdiction and due process.
- There is a perception of selective targeting by the ED against states ruled by opposition parties.
- The ED's inactivity in states governed by the ruling party at the center, despite more significant cases of illegal mining, raises concerns.
- This selective approach undermines the principle of federalism.
- The abuse of authority by central investigating agencies, coupled with courts permitting such actions, is a cause for concern.
- Investigating non-scheduled offenses without proceeds of crime should not be permissible.
- The inconsistency in addressing such actions in different states highlights a double standard.
- These practices erode the foundation of Indian federalism and democratic principles.

Way Forward

- **Legal Clarity:** Amend the Money Laundering Act to provide clear definitions and guidelines.
- **Independent Oversight:** Establish an independent body to monitor the actions of investigative agencies.
- **Consistent Procedures:** Ensure uniform arrest procedures are followed nationwide.
- **Cooperation:** Promote collaboration between central and state agencies.
- **Public Accountability:** Raise public awareness and encourage accountability.

Forest Rights Act

Why in News?

On December 18, 2006, the Rajya Sabha endorsed the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, enacted by the Lok Sabha. This Act, commonly known as the Forest Rights Act, or FRA, marks a watershed in India's socio-environmental legislation, as it attempts to put an end to the long-drawn conflict over supposed 'forest encroachments'. Simultaneously, it seeks to create a much more democratic, bottom-up forest governance.

Key Highlights

- Unfortunately, the implementation of the FRA has been plagued by political opportunism, forester resistance and bureaucratic apathy, and the discourse around it by deliberate canards and misconceptions.
- Hence, 17 years after it was enacted, the FRA has barely begun to deliver on its promise of freeing forest-dwellers from historic injustices and democratising forest governance.
- To understand why this is so, we must first delve into what it sought to do and how.

- Prior to colonialism, local communities enjoyed customary rights over forests in their vicinity or even a large region. Even when kings or chieftains claimed (say) hunting rights in certain forests, local communities continued to enjoy all other forest benefits.
- The colonial takeover of India's forests, however, resulted in a massive disruption of these traditions. Based on the false idea of 'eminent domain' (that the ruler always owns all property), the 1878 (colonial) Indian Forest Act was passed and the takeover of India's forests began.
- The Imperial Forest Department was established to harvest and transform the forest to maximise timber and revenue, and was also tasked with protecting 'state' property against local communities, now deemed trespassers.
- The injustices imposed by this colonial forest policy took multiple forms. First, now that forests were seen as primarily a timber resource, shifting cultivation was banned.
- Second, the so-called survey and settlement of agricultural lands was incomplete and biased in favour of the state.
- Third, simultaneously, to ensure labour for forestry operations, 'forest villages' were created, wherein forest land was leased for agriculture to (mostly Adivasi) households in return for compulsory (virtually bonded) labour.
- Fourth, since forests were now state property, all access to forest produce was limited, temporary and chargeable, and always at the mercy of the forest bureaucracy that was armed with police powers.
- Any concessions to local livelihood needs were termed 'privileges' that could be modified or withdrawn any time.
- Fifth, even where access was permitted, the local community had no right to manage the forest, as the state logged valuable forests and made heavily used forest de facto open-access.
- Unfortunately, matters only worsened post-Independence. In the hurry to assimilate princely States and zamindari estates into the Union, their forest areas were declared state property without proper inquiry into who was residing in them. Legitimate residents and cultivators became 'encroachers' overnight.
- Later, forest lands were leased out under the 'Grow More Food' campaign and other initiatives to meet the needs of a growing population, but were never 'regularised'.
- Communities displaced by dams were not given alternative lands, and ended up 'encroaching' forest land elsewhere. And, forest exploitation continued as in colonial times, but in the name of national interest.
- The Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 (FCA), again conceived within the framework of eminent domain, became the sixth and seventh forms of injustice.
- Lakhs of communities were forcibly resettled when creating sanctuaries and national parks. And in 'diverting' forests for development projects, neither were the views or consent of local communities taken into consideration, nor, in spite of imposing hefty Net Present Value fees on the project, were the local communities compensated for the impact on their livelihoods.
- The FRA is remarkable because it first of all acknowledges these historical (colonial) injustices and their continuation post-Independence. Redress then takes three broad forms.
- The issue of so-called 'encroachments' is addressed through recognising individual forest rights (IFRs) to continue habitation and cultivation or other activities that existed before December 2005.
- Forest villages are to be converted into revenue villages after full rights recognition. The issue of access and control is addressed by recognising the rights of village communities to access and use forests and to own and sell minor forest produce, and, most importantly, to manage forests within their customary boundaries, including

in sanctuaries and national parks. This is the most far-reaching provision in the FRA, as it ensures decentralised forest governance, linking management authority and responsibility to community rights.

- Finally, the Act lays down a democratic procedure for identifying whether and where wildlife conservation may require curtailing or extinguishing community rights.
- Simultaneously, having community rights over a forest translates ipso facto into the community having a say in, if not veto over, any diversion of that forest and a right to compensation if diverted.
- This right was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in the Niyamgiri case, and although the Forest Conservation Rules 2022 and FCA Amendment 2023 seek to bypass this right, States can still put in place such consent mechanisms.
- Unfortunately, the politicians in most States focused solely on individual rights and projected the Act as an ‘encroachment regularisation’ scheme. Some even encouraged illegal new cultivation in a few pockets.
- But even the recognition of IFRs was done rather shabbily, compromised by Forest Department resistance, the apathy and ignorance of other departments, and misuse of technology.
- Claimants were put through enormous hardship during claim-filing, subjected to faulty and non-transparent rejections and (equally important) arbitrary partial recognition (thereby getting tagged as ‘approved’ claims).
- Imposing absurd digital processes in areas with poor connectivity and literacy, such as the VanMitra software in Madhya Pradesh, is just a continuation of injustice. Even the open-and-shut case of ‘forest villages’ has not been addressed in most States.
- But the biggest lacuna in FRA implementation is the extremely slow and incomplete recognition of community rights to access and manage forests (loosely, community forest rights or CFRs).
- The (still colonially structured) forest bureaucracy is vehemently opposed to these rights, as it stands to lose its zamindari: our estimates show that 70%-90% of the forests in central India should be under CFRs.
- The other departments and political representatives can only visualise forest-dwellers as ‘labharthis’ (beneficiaries of state largesse), not as autonomous users and managers of their own forests.
- Maharashtra, Odisha, and, more recently, Chhattisgarh, are the only States to recognise CFRs substantially.
- But only Maharashtra has enabled their activation by de-nationalising minor forest produce, at least in Scheduled Areas, resulting in at least a thousand villages managing their own forests.
- Even here, illegal non-recognition of community rights in densely forested potential mining areas has led to protest and unrest.
- The non-recognition of community rights is convenient to the hardline conservationists and the development lobby alike: communities in Protected Areas are then precariously placed and easy targets for ‘voluntary rehabilitation’, and forests can be handed over for mining or dams without community consent.
- As political regimes change and the memory of the struggle that led to the passage of this Act fades, calls for shutting down the FRA’s implementation have emerged.
- Simultaneously, some States have talked of ‘saturating’ rights recognition in mission mode. However, as examples from Chhattisgarh show, mission mode implementation invariably plays into the hands of the Forest Department, leading to distorted rights recognition and reinstatement of technocratic control.
- Unless political leaders, bureaucrats and environmentalists all appreciate the spirit and the intent of the FRA, the historical injustices will remain unaddressed, forest governance will remain highly undemocratic, and the enormous potential for community-led forest conservation and sustainable livelihoods will remain unrealised.

Background of the Forest Rights Act

The evolution of forest rights in India reflects a intricate interplay among colonial policies, traditional practices of forest-dwelling communities, and attempts to rectify historical injustices.

Colonial Era

- During British colonial rule.
- Policies during the colonial period focused on revenue generation and resource extraction, leading to the declaration of reserved forests and stringent regulations.
- Tribal and forest-dwelling communities, traditionally in symbiotic relationships with forests, faced displacement and loss of access to resources.

Indian Forest Act of 1878

- Introduced by the British government in 1878.
- Based on the idea of 'eminent domain,' asserting the ruler's ownership of all property.

Indian Forest Act of 1927

- Introduced by the British Government.
- Rights of settlements provided by the procedure, with limited implementation.
- Creation of 'Forest Villages' for labor, leasing forest land for agriculture to households, mostly Adivasis.

Post-Independence Period

- Annexation of forest regions without determining the legal status of local populations.
- Government leasing forest tracts under programs like "Grow More Food," often mismanaged.

Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980 and Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972

- Emerged from eminent domain principles between 1980 (Forest Conservation Act) and 1972 (Wildlife Protection Act). It was introduced for conservation, but led to displacement of forest communities.

Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006

- Enacted post the Recognition of Forest Rights movement in 2006. The purpose was to recognize and vest forest rights in forest-dwelling communities.

Post-FRA Period

- Identification and vesting of forest rights in various states.
- Legal recognition provided to forest-dwelling communities.

Rights for the dwellers

What the Forest Rights Act, 2006, entails

- Tenurial security over the forestland under occupation prior to December 13, 2005
- Recognition of community right over forest and forest products
- Protection and conservation of community forest resources
- Conversion of all forest villages and habitation located inside the forestland into revenue villages
- In situ rehabilitation of displaced persons evicted without compensation prior to December 13, 2005
- Recognition of ancestral domain (habitat) right to



Residents of Gunduribadi village in Odisha's Nayagarh district get ready for mapping their land boundaries for the Forest Rights Act implementation. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- Seasonal access to nomadic, pastoral and semi-nomadic communities over forestland
- Conversion of all leases granted by erstwhile governments, zamindars and king into permanent land records

III MINT GRAPHITI

Law of the jungle

The bill proposes to give higher management powers to forest officers beyond what is provided in the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

10th India's world ranking in total land area under forest and tree cover.

421,000 sq. km Total forest cover in tribal districts

21.54% Total forest cover in India with regards to geographical area

2.99% Area classified as 'very dense' forest

15 states/UTs Have above 33% of geographical area under forest cover

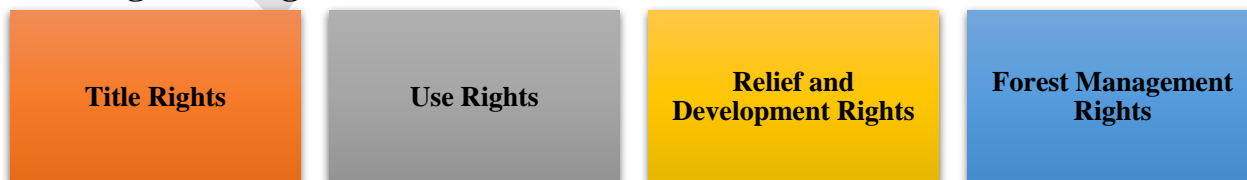


Understanding the Forest Rights Act of 2006 and its Provisions

The Forest Rights Act of 2006 acknowledges and vests forest rights and occupation in Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDST) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD) who have resided in these forests for generations.

- **Eligibility Criteria:** Members or communities who have, for at least three generations (75 years) before December 13, 2005, primarily lived in forest land for genuine livelihood needs.
- **Objectives:** Strengthens the conservation regime of forests. Ensures livelihood and food security for FDST and OTFD.
- **Gram Sabha Authority:** The Gram Sabha is the initiating authority for determining the nature and extent of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) or Community Forest Rights (CFR) or both for FDST and OTFD.

Types of Rights Recognized



1. Title Rights

- Provides ownership rights to FDST and OTFD for land cultivated by them, limited to a maximum of 4 hectares.
- Ownership applies only to land actively cultivated by the respective family, with no allocation for new lands.

2. Use Rights

- Extends dwellers' rights to extract Minor Forest Produce, use grazing areas, etc.

3. Relief and Development Rights

- Includes the right to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement.
- Grants access to basic amenities, with restrictions to ensure forest protection.

4. Forest Management Rights

- Empowers communities with the right to protect, regenerate, conserve, or manage any community forest resource traditionally safeguarded for sustainable use.

Challenges in Implementing the Forest Rights Act

Individual Rights vs. Community Rights

- Some states prioritize individual rights, transforming the Act into an 'encroachment regularization' scheme. This neglects essential community rights crucial for sustainable forest management.

Poor Recognition of Individual Forest Rights (IFRs)

- Recognition of IFRs faces challenges due to resistance from the Forest Department, apathy from other departments, and technology misuse. Claimants encounter difficulties, including faulty rejections and arbitrary partial recognitions.

Digital Processes in Areas with Poor Connectivity

- Implementation of digital processes, like the VanMitra software in Madhya Pradesh, poses challenges in areas with low connectivity and literacy rates, hindering effective filing and processing of claims.



Incomplete Recognition of Community Forest Rights (CFRs)

- Slow and incomplete recognition of community rights (CFRs) to access and manage forests is a significant gap. Forest bureaucracy resistance impedes local community empowerment.

Limited CFR Recognition in Most States

- While some states make progress (e.g., Maharashtra, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh), many lag. Challenges persist, especially in potential mining areas, despite positive examples like Maharashtra's de-nationalization of minor forest produce.

Convenient for Conservationists and Development Lobby

- Non-recognition of community rights benefits hardline conservationists and the development lobby. Communities in protected areas become vulnerable to 'voluntary rehabilitation,' and forests may be exploited without community consent.

Forest Villages Not Addressed

- The issue of 'forest villages' is inadequately addressed in most states, indicating incomplete implementation.

Advantages of the Forest Rights Act	Disadvantages and Challenges
<p>Empowerment of Forest Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The FRA empowers marginalized forest communities by recognizing and vesting rights, leading to improved socio-economic conditions and a heightened sense of ownership. <p>Biodiversity Conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By involving local communities in forest management, the act contributes to biodiversity conservation, leveraging their traditional knowledge for sustainable resource use. <p>Social Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRA addresses historical injustices by recognizing the rights of tribal and forest-dwelling communities, fostering social justice and inclusive development. <p>Protection of Livelihoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The act safeguards the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities by granting legal rights to access and use forest resources sustainably. <p>Participatory Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRA promotes a participatory approach to governance, engaging local 	<p>Implementation Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent implementation across states and regions has led to challenges in realizing the objectives of the FRA. <p>Challenges with Digital Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of digital processes, like the VanMitra software in Madhya Pradesh, faces hurdles in areas with poor connectivity and low literacy rates. <p>Lack of Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited awareness and understanding of the act's provisions among forest-dwelling communities hinder effective implementation. <p>Bureaucratic Hurdles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex administrative procedures and bureaucratic hurdles have slowed down the process of recognizing and vesting forest rights. <p>Conflict with Conservation Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing debates surround the perceived conflict between recognizing traditional rights and the need for conservation, particularly in protected areas. <p>Incomplete Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of recognizing and vesting rights remains incomplete in many areas, leaving forest-dwelling communities vulnerable and insecure. <p>Legal Challenges</p>

communities in decision-making processes related to forest management.

- Legal challenges and disputes related to the interpretation of provisions and verification of claims have resulted in delays and uncertainties.

Way Forward

Empowerment of Gram Sabha

Actively involve the Gram Sabha in decision-making processes related to forest management.

Inclusive Decision Making

Encourage rights holders' inclusion in decision-making processes to consider their perspectives and needs.

Education and Training

Conduct awareness programs and training sessions for forest dwellers about their rights under the FRA.

Capacity Building

Strengthen civil society organizations' capacity to support and advocate for forest dwellers' rights.

Monitoring Mechanisms

Establish monitoring systems to ensure adherence to FRA provisions and objectives by the Forest Department and other authorities.

Accountability Measures

Implement measures for accountability in cases of violations or non-compliance with the FRA to hold responsible authorities accountable.

Integrated Planning

Develop integrated plans that balance the development and conservation needs of forests while respecting the rights and interests of forest dwellers.

Consultative Processes

Engage in consultative processes involving all stakeholders to find a balance between development and conservation goals.

India's Defence Budgeting

Why in News?

The Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) programme of the Indian Air Force (IAF) earned the sobriquet of being the 'mother of all procurements' due its cost, pegged at around \$10 billion in 2007. A decade later, the purchase of 36 Rafale jets was of limited value because the requirement was for 126 aircraft. Consequently, many IAF chiefs have spoken of the depleting squadron strength in the IAF, which is now an abysmal 32.

Key Highlights

- The Indian Army and the Indian Navy fare no better either with the media reporting major deficiencies with them too.
- With India in election mode and sops being showered on the electorate (even more certain before the general election in 2024), the allocation for defence in Budget 2024-25, which starts getting planned now, could take a hit.
- This could impact India's deterrence posture, which defence preparedness is all about.
- The question is whether 'affordable defence' — due to the perennial guns versus butter dilemma — will be the driving factor. Or, will 'affordable effectiveness' drive the defence Budget allocation? This is best illustrated by the IAF going in for 97 more Tejas Mk1A fighters to overcome the deficit in squadron strength, though this was to be achieved by the 114 multi role fighter aircraft project that the IAF has been pushing for.
- So, to rephrase the question, should Budget (allocation) be allowed to determine defence potency (remember General V.P. Malik's quip during the Kargil conflict: "We will fight with what we have")? Or, should the required potency drive allocations for defence?
- The threat on the northern borders is a live one, and it would be unprofessional to dismiss our western neighbour's present benign stance as indicative of a lessening of risk.
- India needs to be prepared for both. The imperativeness of a judicious assessment of how India plans to prosecute the next war could not be more pressing in these days of electoral one-upmanship.
- Enough has been written on the inescapable necessity of accretion in sea power to deter China in the environs of the Malacca Strait and further east, as also in the Indian Ocean.
- The Army needs to modernise too and, considering its size, the Budget requirement would be considerable. The planning and budgeting in the Indian military before the Russia-Ukraine war was for a short sharp conflict.
- The logistics design was to stock up on 10i (10 days intense) war, and build up to a 40i scenario. The refrain has changed, with the leadership of the armed forces now visualising an extended war scenario, as seen in Ukraine.
- It is here that a recent prescient article in the authoritative website, War on the Rocks, titled 'You go to war with the industrial base you have, not the industrial base you want', weighs-in on the debate with its clairvoyant deductions, and needs to be studied given the publicity around the Atmanirbhar Bharat drive.
- It needs no reiteration that the armed forces should be technologically modern at any given time.
- However, developing a local defence industry takes decades, necessitating a smart balance to be maintained between imports and indigenous accretions to ensure the required potency.
- The Atmanirbhar Bharat public relations drive notwithstanding, a hard clinical view is required on the realities of the armament supply chain that would be in place in the near to mid-term.

- India's defence Budget, in real terms, has been more or less stagnant. Defence expenditure (revenue and capital), as a percentage of central government expenditure, has been declining — from around 16.4% in 2012-13 to 13.3% in 2022-23.
- The Ministry of Defence had asked for ₹1,76,346 crore in 2023–24 for capital acquisitions but only ₹1,62,600 crore was allotted, creating a deficit of ₹13,746 crore.
- In the sphere of research and development, the picture is not rosy either. The Global Innovation Index 2022 pegs India's research and development expenditure at just 0.7% of its GDP which places it 53rd globally.
- China, incidentally, spent \$421 billion in 2022, which is 2.54% of its GDP. Though the research and development allocation needs a substantial jump, it is good that 25% of the allocation was for the private sector
- The government's emphasis on indigenisation through the Innovations For Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme and service-specific projects such as the Baba Mehar Singh competition for unmanned aerial vehicles by the IAF, and similar ones in the other two services, are laudable.
- Similarly, the restructuring of the Ordnance Factory Board and promulgation of negative lists for imports instil confidence in the private sector for assured contracts.
- While all these are welcome, and the increase in defence exports heartening, it must be accepted that this drive still has a long gestation period.
- The momentum should be sustained with a continuum in policy making and adequate defence budgeting by making them election-proof in our boisterous democracy — bipartisan statesmanship would be key in this endeavour.
- Costs are important and one must not spend scarce monies to face a 10 feet tall adversary when a pygmy exists on the other side.
- But what if there are two of them, both militarily adept, and not pygmies? And, India is not 10 ft tall either. China's belligerence has resulted in the doubling of Japan's defence budget, the increased arming of Taiwan by the United States, a reshaping of regional alliances and a historic U.S.-South Korea-Japan summit.
- It would be naive, nay unprofessional, if our defence

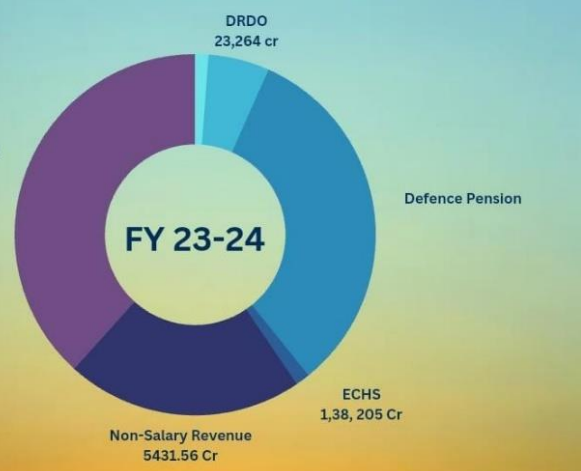
India's defence exports rose 24% in FY23, and tenfold in six years

India's defence exports (in Rs crore) and year-on-year change (%)



Other Budget Allocations

Capital Allocations - modern/infra
90,000 cr



Budget is not given its due and national security imperatives overridden by electoral imperatives.

Challenges Faced by India's Defense

Reduced Squadron Strength

- IAF's current squadron strength is 32, significantly below the desired number.
- Slow growth plan to reach 35 in ten years.

Budgetary Limitations

- Defense budget under pressure due to electoral commitments.
- In 2023-24, defense capital acquisition budget fell short by ₹13,746 crore from the requested amount.

Low R&D Expenditure

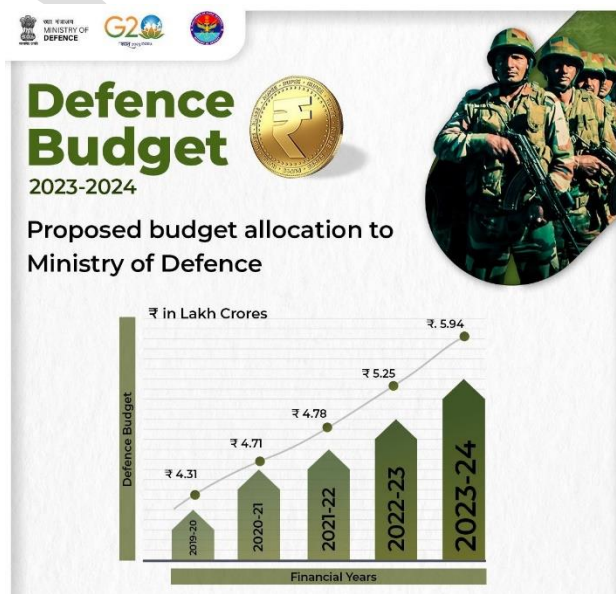
- India's defense research and development spending is only 0.7% of GDP.
- Global ranking in R&D spending is 53rd, significantly lower than China's 2.54%.

Change in Military Strategy

- Post Russia-Ukraine war, a shift in military strategy from short, intense conflicts to extended warfare scenarios.

Government's Initiatives

- **iDEX (Innovations For Defense Excellence):** Key initiative fostering innovation in defense for enhanced self-reliance.
- **Service-Specific Competitions:** IAF's Baba Mehar Singh competition promoting unmanned aerial vehicle development.
- **Ordnance Factory Board Restructuring:** Aimed at improving efficiency in defense manufacturing, a significant step in defense sector reform.
- **Private Sector Participation:** Emphasis on private sector involvement, allocating 25% of R&D funds to private companies.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Drive:** Promotion of self-reliance in defense, restricting certain imports, and boosting local manufacturing.
 - Significant rise in defense exports, reaching a record high of approximately Rs 16,000 crore in 2022-23, a tenfold increase from Rs 1,521 crore in 2016-17.



Indigenization of Defence Sector

Defence Indigenization is a strategic process focused on the development and manufacturing of defence equipment within the country. Aimed at reducing import dependency and achieving self-reliance in the defence sector.

The Role of DRDO

- Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) is a key player in driving India's self-reliance vision.
- Conducts research and development for cutting-edge defence technologies.

Contribution of DPSUs

- Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) play a crucial role in supporting and implementing self-reliance initiatives.

Significant Milestone in 1983

- Approval of the program in 1983 marked a pivotal moment in India's pursuit of self-reliance.
- Prithvi, Akash, Trishul, Nag, and Agni Ballistic Missiles developed under the program.

Importance of Indigenisation for India

- Essential for preparedness against hostile neighbors like China and Pakistan.
- Strengthens India's geopolitical stance as a net security provider.
- Drives progress in defence technology, cascading positive effects on other industries.
- Mitigates the economic drain caused by heavy spending on defence imports.

Challenges to Indigenisation Plan

- **Deficiency in Defence Planning:** Lack of comprehensive planning for defence requirements.
- **Institutional Capacity Issues:** Insufficient capacity for timely policymaking.
- **Infrastructure Constraints:** Lack of infrastructure for scaling up production and logistical support.
- **Dispute Resolution Deficiency:** Absence of a dispute settlement body to resolve issues.
- **Land Acquisition Restrictions:** Challenges arising from restrictions on land acquisition.

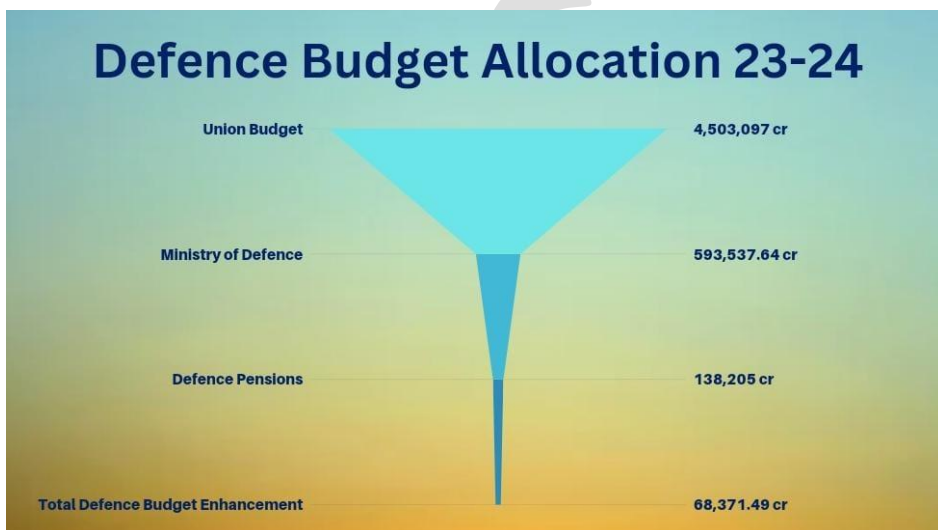
Defence Budget Highlight

- **Overall Allocation:** The Union Budget allocates Rs 5.94 lakh crore for Defence in 2023-24, reflecting a substantial 13% increase from the previous year.
- **Operational Allocations:** Non-Salary revenue outlay for Armed Forces sees a remarkable 44% jump, reaching Rs 90,000 crore, emphasizing the need for combat capability enhancement and critical operational needs.
- **Defence Pensions:** A significant allocation of Rs 1.38 lakh crore is dedicated to Defence Pensions, underlining the government's commitment to the welfare of retired personnel.

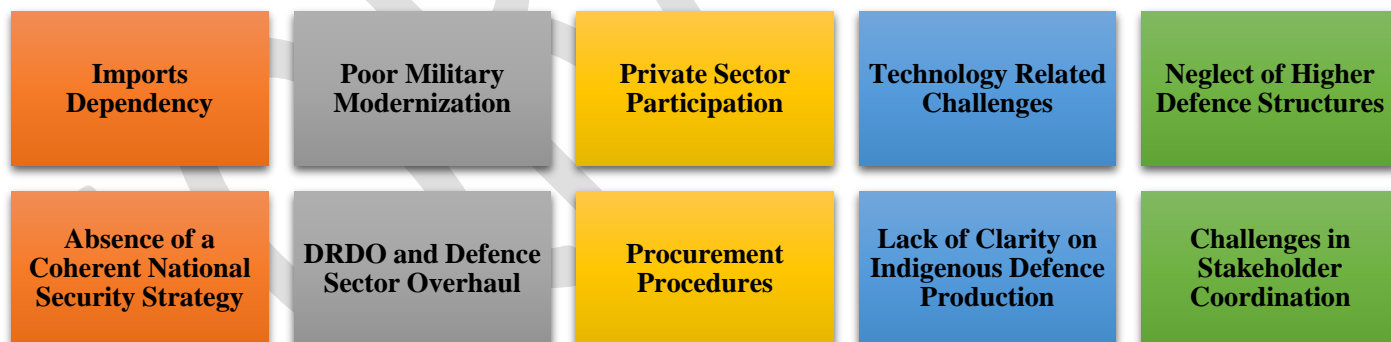
Defence Budget Highlights (2023-24)	Amount (in Rs Crore)	Percentage Change
Overall Allocation	5,94,000	13% Increase
Operational Allocations	90,000	44% Increase
Defence Pensions	1,38,000	-
Capital Outlay for Modernization	1,62,000	57% Increase
Border Roads Organization (BRO)	5,000	43% Increase
DRDO Allocation	23,264	9% Increase
Innovation Funding (iDEX)	116	93% Increase
Defence Pension Budget Increase	1,38,205	15.5% Increase



- **Capital Outlay for Modernization:** Capital outlay for modernization and infrastructure development experiences a substantial increase to Rs 1.62 lakh crore, marking a 57% rise since 2019-20.
- **Border Roads Organization (BRO):** The Capital Budget for BRO witnesses a notable 43% boost to Rs 5,000 crore, aimed at strengthening border infrastructure, including strategic tunnels.
- **DRDO Allocation:** A 9% increase in allocation to DRDO, totaling Rs 23,264 crore, emphasizes the focus on research, development, and technological advancement in the Defence sector.
- **Innovation Funding (iDEX):** iDEX receives a notable boost with Rs 116 crore, reflecting a 93% increase over the previous year, fostering innovation in the Defence Industrial ecosystem.
- **Defence Pension Budget Increase:** The Defence Pension Budget sees a remarkable 15.5% jump, reaching Rs 1,38,205 crore, with a focus on meeting the requirements of One Rank One Pension (OROP).



Challenges in India's Defence Sector



Imports Dependency

- Despite being the third-largest military spender, India is the second-largest arms importer, revealing significant dependence on foreign sources.
- Heavy reliance on imports leads to delays influenced by changing geopolitical circumstances.
- Pending deals, including the acquisition of Sukhoi-30MKI aircraft and MiG-29 fighter jets, contribute to import dependency.

Poor Military Modernization

- Budget allocations favor day-to-day expenditure over capital outlay for modernization.
- In the 2020-21 defence budget, a substantial portion was allocated for pension expenditure, limiting funds for modernization.

Private Sector Participation

- **Limited private sector involvement due to an unfavorable financial framework hinders innovation and product development.**
- Lack of conducive conditions restricts the growth of private enterprises in defence production.

Technology Related Challenges

- Inadequate design capability, low investment in R&D, and the inability to manufacture major subsystems hinder indigenous manufacturing.

Neglect of Higher Defence Structures

- Overlooking the need for reform in higher defence structures leads to a disconnect between Chiefs of Staff and national security planning.

Absence of a Coherent National Security Strategy

- Lack of a well-articulated National Security Strategy forces individual services to formulate conflicting concepts and doctrines.

DRDO and Defence Sector Overhaul

- Urgent need to revamp DRDO and associated entities.
- Encourage private sector involvement in arms manufacturing to reduce import reliance.

Procurement Procedures

- Cumbersome procurement procedures need refinement to expedite acquisitions and minimize corruption.
- Critical projects stalled due to bureaucratic apathy.

Lack of Clarity on Indigenous Defence Production

- Limited technology transfers and negligible enforcement of offset obligations hinder self-reliance efforts.

Challenges in Stakeholder Coordination

- Overlapping jurisdictions hinder defence manufacturing capability.
- Lack of cohesive approach and collaboration contributes to inefficiencies.

Way Forward

- **Private Sector Engagement:** Facilitate private sector entry into defence production. Regulate entry points to meet evolving Armed Forces' needs.
- **Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs):** Establish dedicated DICs to harness MSMEs and DPSUs. Extend corridors to facilitate raw material transit and optimize manufacturing.
- **Inclusive Policy Making:** Include defence entrepreneurs in policy-making processes. Streamline procurement and collaborate with new entrepreneurs.
- **Global Market Penetration:** Simplify export authorization procedures to promote Indian defence product exports. Launch the Defence Exim Portal for online mechanisms and targeted outreach.

- **Economic Strengthening:** Indigenization will boost the economy and reduce import dependence. Achieve strategic independence through the corporatization of the OFB.
- **Defence Investor Cell:** Strengthen investment in defence through a dedicated Defence Investor Cell. Integrate the SRIJAN portal for enhanced accessibility.
- **Arbitration and Dispute Resolution:** Establish a permanent arbitration cell for prompt dispute resolution. Ensure a level playing field for the private sector alongside DRDO, DPSU, and OFB.
- **Enhanced Export Capability:** Increase export capability to attract funding for indigenization efforts. Provide autonomy to DRDO and satellite organizations for increased efficiency.
- **Infrastructure and Technology Enhancement:** Enhance in-house design and testing infrastructure. Provide software support for AI and cybersecurity to stay technologically competitive.
- **Policy Continuity and Bipartisan Support:** Ensure continuity in policy-making for sustained momentum. Secure bipartisan support for adequate defence budgeting.
- **National Security Imperatives:** Analyze national security imperatives independently of electoral considerations. Allocate necessary resources for defence preparedness acknowledging external threats.

IMF's Sovereign Debt Risk Assessment

Why in News?

The Finance Ministry, last Friday, issued a statement titled 'Factual position vis-à-vis IMF's Article IV consultations with India'. For context, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), under its Articles of Agreement, holds bilateral discussions with members, usually every year.

Key Highlights

- IMF staffers collect economic and financial information, and discuss policies with top officials, before preparing a report that is discussed by the Fund's executive board.
- The Ministry statement, four days after the IMF released its latest India consultation details, noted that "certain presumptions have been made taking into account possible scenarios that does not reflect factual position".
- In particular, the Ministry was referring to an IMF view that adverse shocks could lift India's general government debt to, or beyond 100% of GDP in the medium-term (by 2027-28).
- The Ministry asserted this was only a worst-case scenario and not a fait accompli, and emphasised that other IMF country reports show much higher extreme 'worst-case' scenarios, for instance, at 160%, 140% and 200% of GDP, for the U.S., the U.K. and China, respectively.
- The combined debt of central and State governments stood at 81% of GDP in 2022-23, from 88% in 2020-21. Under favourable circumstances, the IMF reckons this could even go down to 70% by 2027-28.
- The shocks faced by India so far in this century were global, and affected the entire world economy, be it the 2008 financial crisis or the pandemic, the Ministry pointed out. Reacting to initial news flashes, it further clarified its statement was not a rebuttal to the IMF but "an effort to arrest misinterpretation or misuse" of its comments to imply that General Government debt would exceed 100% of GDP in the medium term. Semantics experts may argue whether the communiqué was confrontational or clarificatory.

Article IV of the IMF's Articles

Under Article IV of the IMF's Articles of Agreement, the IMF holds bilateral discussions with members, usually every year. A staff team visits the country, collects economic and financial information, and discusses with officials the country's economic developments and policies.

- India's Director on the IMF Board had already placed on record reservations about its staff's conclusions on debt risks ["sounds extreme"], and some other aspects of the economy.
- In the broader picture, IMF staff's perceptions of India's fiscal position have actually improved over the past year.
- From arguing in 2022 that India's fiscal space is at risk, they now believe sovereign stress risks are moderate.
- This is in no small part due to the ability of the Centre, whose debt levels were about 57% of GDP last year, to meet fiscal deficit targets in recent times.
- Reducing debt and spends to stay the course on its commitment to bring the deficit to 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26 from an estimated 5.9% this year, is critical. While reacting to an adverse detail in a report sometimes ends up drawing more attention to it, actions tend to always speak louder than words.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The primary goal of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is to foster sustainable growth and prosperity for its 190 member countries. Originating from a UN conference held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, in July 1944, the IMF is also known as the Fund.

The IMF achieves its objectives by endorsing economic policies that support financial stability and monetary cooperation. These policies are crucial for enhancing productivity, facilitating job creation, and promoting overall economic well-being. The organization operates under the governance of its member countries, maintaining accountability to them.

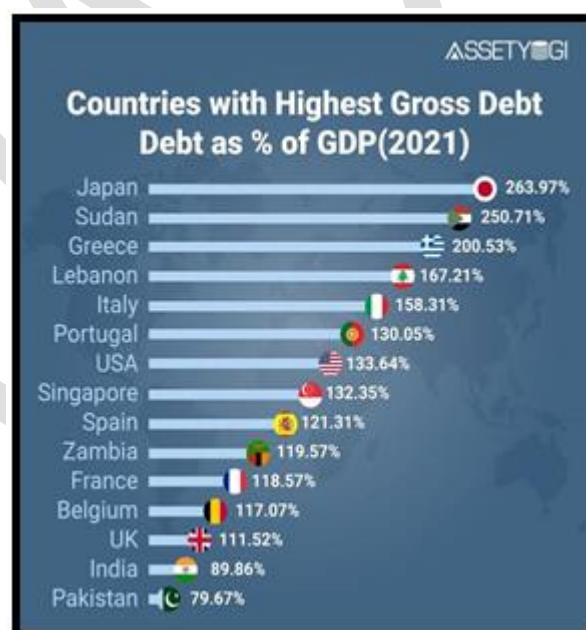
The IMF is entrusted with three key missions:

- Advancing international monetary cooperation,
- Promoting the expansion of trade and economic growth, and
- Discouraging policies that could jeopardize prosperity.

To carry out these missions effectively, member countries collaborate with one another and engage with various international entities.

Sovereign Debt

- Public debt, also known as sovereign debt, serves as a crucial means for governments to fund investments in growth and development. However, it is imperative that governments can consistently meet their debt obligations, ensuring the sustainability of their debt burden.
- The descent into debt distress can be a challenging process, posing threats to macroeconomic stability and impeding a country's development for an extended period. Managing debt risks and resolving debt distress for member countries stand at the core of the IMF's mission, taking various forms.
- The IMF's analytical endeavors aid in identifying risks associated with sovereign debt and offer policy advice on addressing these risks in their early stages.





- Collaboratively with the World Bank, the IMF promotes debt transparency and assists countries in enhancing their ability to report and manage public debt.
- Providing technical support to member countries in devising a debt management strategy and cultivating their local currency bond markets constitutes a pivotal aspect of this assistance, fostering a judicious debt structure and fortifying resilience against economic shocks.
- Countries grappling with high debt vulnerabilities must address them through a combination of adjustments and measures to revive growth.
- While an IMF-supported program can facilitate such adjustments, the IMF can only extend financial assistance if a member's debt is deemed sustainable. Instances exist where debt is unsustainable, even considering adjustment efforts.
- If a member country faces debt distress, the resolution typically involves the government deciding whether to engage in negotiations for debt restructuring with its creditors.
- In the context of a debt restructuring, an IMF-supported program can provide support by offering sound economic policies and new financing, thereby facilitating a return to macroeconomic viability.
- The IMF is actively contributing to enhancing the international framework for sovereign debt restructurings, aiming to expedite and enhance the effectiveness of debt reduction processes.

Key Points from IMF Executive Board 2023 Article IV Consultation with India

Economic Overview

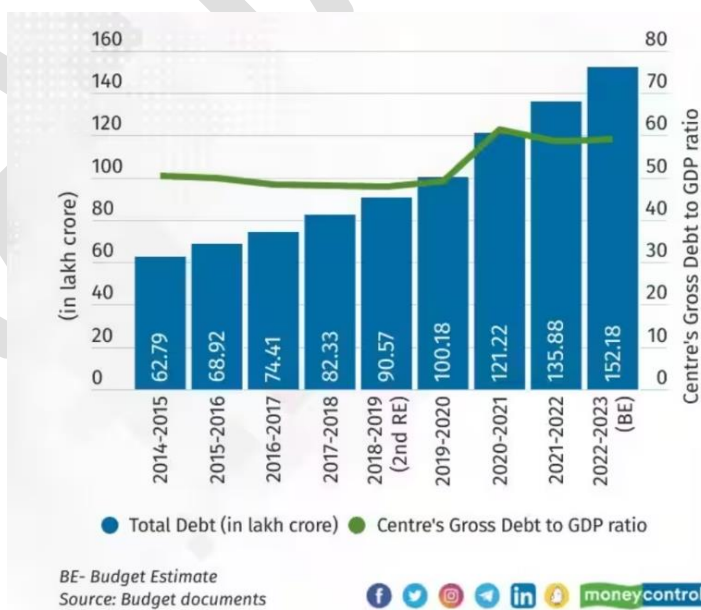
- India's economy exhibited robust growth over the past year.
- Headline inflation, on average, moderated but remains volatile.
- Employment has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, with the informal sector still dominant, but formalization has progressed.
- The financial sector has shown resilience, being the strongest in several years, and was largely unaffected by global financial stress in early 2023.

Economic Indicators

- Current account deficit widened in FY2022/23 due to post-pandemic domestic demand recovery and external shocks, despite robust services exports and oil import diversification.
- Budget deficit has eased, but public debt remains elevated, necessitating the rebuilding of fiscal buffers.
- India's 2023 G20 presidency highlights its crucial role in advancing multilateral policy priorities globally.

Future Economic Outlook

- Growth is expected to remain strong, with real GDP projected to grow at 6.3 percent in FY2023/24 and FY2024/25.



- Headline inflation is expected to gradually decline, and the current account deficit is anticipated to improve.
- Foundational digital public infrastructure and a strong government infrastructure program are expected to sustain growth.
- Potential for even higher growth exists with comprehensive reforms focusing on labor and human capital.

Risks and Challenges

- Risks to the outlook are balanced, with potential global growth slowdown affecting India through trade and financial channels.
- Global supply disruptions could lead to commodity price volatility, increasing fiscal pressures.
- Domestic weather shocks could reignite inflationary pressures.
- On the positive side, stronger-than-expected consumer demand and private investment could boost growth.

Executive Board Assessment

- Executive Directors commend India's prudent macroeconomic policies and reforms for its strong economic performance and financial stability.
- Directors call for continued appropriate policies to sustain economic stability and further progress in key structural reforms.
- Recommendations include ambitious medium-term consolidation efforts, improving revenue mobilization, and spending efficiency.
- Acknowledgment of the Reserve Bank of India's proactive monetary policy and the need for exchange rate flexibility.
- Emphasis on the stability of the financial sector and the need for continued supervision and prudential tools.

Structural Reforms and Governance

- Directors encourage comprehensive structural reforms to leverage India's favorable demographics.
- Focus on job-rich, inclusive, and greener growth, improving labor market functioning, and progressing in health, education, land, and agricultural reforms.
- Strengthening governance and the regulatory framework is emphasized, along with progress on designing and implementing climate policies.

Trade and Investment

- Directors acknowledge India's efforts in fostering new bilateral trade agreements and its strong leadership during the 2023 G20 Presidency.
- Stress on phasing out restrictive trade policies, liberalizing the FDI regime, and improving the investment climate.

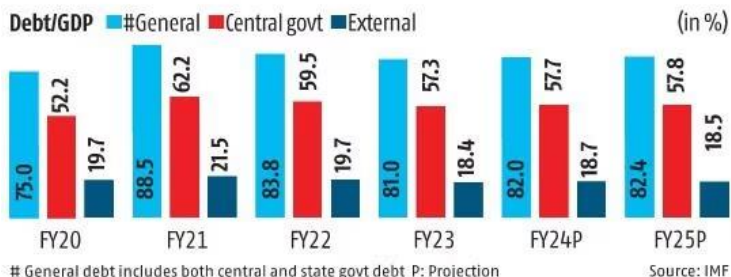
India's Response to IMF

- The Ministry disputed certain presumptions made by the IMF, particularly concerning adverse shocks potentially raising India's general government debt to or beyond 100% of GDP by 2027-28.
- Emphasized that this was a worst-case scenario, not a definitive outcome. Compared India's scenario to higher extreme 'worst-case' scenarios for the U.S., the U.K., and China.
- Highlighted that shocks faced by India, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the pandemic, were global in nature and impacted the entire world economy.



- The ability of the Centre to meet fiscal deficit targets has contributed to the improvement in perception.
- The government is committed to reducing debt and spending to achieve a fiscal deficit of 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26 from an estimated 5.9% this year.
- The Finance Ministry clarified that its statement was not a rebuttal but an effort to prevent misinterpretation or misuse of its comments regarding general government debt exceeding 100% of GDP.

DEBT BURDEN TO RISE?



POINT, COUNTERPOINT

Issue	IMF	INDIA
Govt securities	Sudden increase in sovereign risk premia may weigh on balance sheets, bank lending appetite	Concern far-fetched
Unsecured retail loans	Could stretch debt service capacity and pose balance sheet risks	Digitisation enabling credit growth, while mitigating credit risk
Inflation	High inflation or structural reforms may risk social discontent	No such evidence
Financial sector	External or domestic shock could lead to credit stress	Banking system in its best shape in over a decade