



Key Highlights

- Italy withdraws from BRI
- 28th COP at Dubai
- India Leads GPAI
- **Hornbill Festival**
- Peace Agreements in Manipur
- India-Maldives Relations
- Consumer Rights Protection
- World Malaria Report
- Advocates Amendment Bill 2023
- India Infrastructure Report 2023
- Purchasing Manager's Index
- FAO Report on Healthy Diet
- Femicide on Rise Globally
- Anarcho-Capitalism in Argentina
- Odisha's Bali Jatra

Places in News

MCQ Based Current Affairs

One Liners for Prelims

Prelims Special Polity and Governance Part-1

Brain Boosters

- Garba Dance
- Good Governance Day
- Global River Cities Alliance

Facts For Prelims

- Codex Alimentarius Commission
- BRIC Society
- Table-Top Exercise
- Satyajit Ray Awards
- Booker Prize
- Welcome to Paradise
- Pranab, My Father: A Daughter Remembers

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Message



Vinay Singh
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Current Affairs has an important role in the examinations conducted by Union Public Service Commission and State Public Service Commissions. It is necessary for the candidate to have knowledge of relevant information on issues of national and international importance. Perfect 7 Magazine is being presented fortnightly to the students to fulfill this requirement. Preparation of civil services exam is only completed when candidates have holistic knowledge and analysis of the dynamic nature of the current affairs. 'Perfect7' keeps this vision and approach and understands the multidimensional need of students at the content level, so this magazine has presented the current affairs with relevant issues of general studies. Keeping in mind the needs of mains exam, current articles on 7 burning issues, Ethics Case Studies, Biographies of important personalities, coverage of most useful topics of various sections of General Studies and the most important current affairs issues are being covered for Preliminary Examination in which emphasis is being given on national, international, environment, ecology, art and culture, science and technology, economic issues.

Brain boosters with 7 themes based graphics are being presented in a concise form to enhance the conceptual understanding of the students. Apart from this, updated information on Global Initiatives, Global Institutions, Structure of Organizations, Functioning, Important Reports, and Indices will be included in this magazine, which is asked prominently in the Civil Services Examination. To give emphasis on facts and analysis, keeping in view the trends of new nature of questions in Preliminary and Main Examination of Civil Services, an inclusive magazine is being provided to the students so that they can give the right direction to their preparation by understanding the new requirements of Civil Services Examination. Columns have been included in the format of the magazine keeping in mind the factual needs of the candidates, mental development, developing writing technique etc. Along with this, we have been introducing new segments according to the changing needs of the candidates and these initiatives will continue in future also. Hope this issue will prove useful for all of you. Your suggestions are always welcome.

Best wishes.



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Important Issues

- 1. Withdrawal of Indian Troops From Maldives: The Current State of India-Maldives Relations** **5-6**
- 2. Central Government's Action Concerning Militancy & Peace Agreements in Manipur** **7-8**
- 3. Migrant Workers: Protection of Their Rights & Efforts by the Government** **9-10**
- 4. Reforms in IMF: Necessary Step for the Global Economy** **11-12**
- 5. Upholding Tribal Interests: Laws & Policies** **13-14**
- 6. Consumer Rights Protection: Need for Policy Interventions** **15-16**
- 7. India Leads the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence** **17-18**

➤ National	19-23
➤ International	24-28
➤ Environmental	29-33
➤ Science and Tech	34-38
➤ Economy	39-43
➤ Miscellaneous	44-47
➤ Brain Boosters	48-54

Pre Special

➤ News of National and International Importance	55-58
➤ Current Affairs at a Glance	59
➤ Places in News	60
➤ MCQ Based on Current Affairs	61-63
➤ Polity and Governance Part-1	64-78
➤ Important Days	78

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Withdrawal of Indian Troops From Maldives: The Current State of India-Maldives Relations

The President of Maldives has been emphasising the removal of Indian troops from the country. Recently, after attending the UNFCCC COP-28 Summit in UAE, Maldivian President Mohammed Muizzu announced that India has agreed to withdraw its forces from Maldives. The impact of such announcement on India-Maldives relations is now a centre of discussion. With a change of government in Maldives recently, the new President of Maldives upon assuming his office, expressed his intention to end the presence of Indian troops in Maldives. He announced that his primary responsibility was to eliminate foreign military presence in Maldives. This is a challenge to India's foreign policy because India is seen in the role of net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

Issues for India-Maldives Relations:

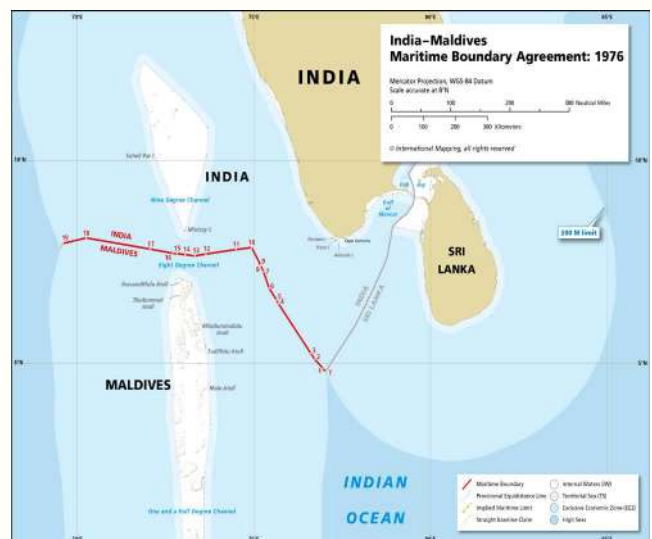
- **India's military and naval presence in Maldives:** India, through its SAGAR Vision (Security and Growth for All in the Region), has always projected its military or naval presence in the Indian Ocean countries positively. About 70 Indian military personnel are currently stationed in the Maldives, maintaining New Delhi-sponsored radar stations and surveillance aircraft that help Indian warships patrol the Maldives' Exclusive Economic Zone. These soldiers have been deployed on Lamu and Addu islands in Maldives since 2013.
- Apart from this, Indian naval personnel are also deployed in Maldives. Indian Navy has installed 10 coastal surveillance radars, which insinuates that India considers Navy deployed in Maldives as a means of capacity building of Coast Guard. However, the new president's victory in the Maldives has escalated the power politics between China and India for their respective influence in the Indian Ocean Region. Both India and China have made huge investments to develop the infrastructure of Maldives.

'India Out' Campaign and view of the current President of Maldives:

- India considers Maldives as an integral part of its Neighbourhood First Policy, Sagar Vision and Island Diplomacy. However, since the anti-India elements in Maldives launched the India Out campaign, India had become more cautious of its bilateral relations with Maldives. In this series, Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohammed Solih, who followed the India First policy, lost the elections and the new China-oriented President Mohammed Muizzu was crowned.
- Even during the election campaign, Muizzu had given the slogan of 'India Out' and contested his election on the 'India Out' campaign. Muizzu got 53 percent of the votes while former President Ibrahim Mohammad Solih got 46 percent of the votes. In his first rally after winning the elections, Muizzu had said, 'Maldives' sovereignty and independence matter most. People do not want Indian soldiers to stay in

Maldives and they cannot stay here against our feelings and wishes.

- **Impact of China Factor on India Maldives Relations:** Ever since China has started facing challenges to its Belt and Road Initiative and String of Pearls policy, it has tried to bring India's neighboring countries under its sphere of influence. The pre-2018 government of Abdulla Yameen in Maldives, also known for its anti-India stance, worked to strengthen economic and strategic ties with China. It was during Yameen's tenure that in 2017, Maldives became the second South Asian country, after Pakistan, to sign a Free Trade Agreement with China. It is worth mention that Abdulla Yameen was also part of the India Out campaign and he tried to reduce Indian investment and presence of Indian companies in Maldives to the maximum.



Necessity of Democratic and Secular Government in Maldives:

- A democratic and secular government in Maldives is crucial for India's interests. A peaceful, stable and prosperous Maldives is important for the security of the entire South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. However, the manner in which religious fanaticism and

extremist forces have spread here is a matter of concern. This island country located in the Indian Ocean is 98 percent Muslim. The remaining 2 percent belong to other religions, but they are not allowed to practice their religious symbols or celebrate festivals in public. Even if someone wants Maldivian citizenship, he has to be a Muslim, that too a Sunni Muslim. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls religious matters here.

- The US Department of State released a report on Religious Freedom in Maldives in the year 2022. As per the report, three Indian tourists were arrested for installing idols of God on the island there. Even NGOs working in Maldives had appealed against International Yoga Day on the grounds that such events promote un-Islamic practices. Although about 29 thousand Indians are living in this country, but either they have adopted Islam, or they hide their official religion.
- Islamic fundamentalism has been so strong in Maldives that even religious conversion is not allowed. Any Muslim citizen of Maldives cannot adopt another religion of their own free will. Under the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, there can be severe punishment for this. The US State Department report even says that religious conversion is punishable by death under Sharia law, although the Maldives government has never given any direct statement on this.
- Pro-democracy leadership has often faced challenges in Maldives. In the first parliamentary elections held in Maldives in 2008, the government of Mohammed Nasheed was formed which was targeted by Islamic extremist forces in Maldives. At the same time, India has always wanted that Maldives should remain free from Islamic fundamentalism. It emphasised on the fact that the leadership should take necessary steps to ensure that the ideology of ISIS does not spread among the youth there. India is also concerned with the increased possibility of narco-terrorism in Maldives. The current situation of Maldives calls for better security arrangements but the current President's approach has more emphasis on autonomy, independence, sovereignty, and ideology.

Importance of Maldives for India:

- Maldives is crucial for India in several regards. Various international sea routes located in the region of Maldives in the Indian Ocean supply oil from the Middle East to countries like India, Japan and China. More than 90 percent of India's international trade in quantitative terms

and more than 75 percent in terms of value takes place through the international trade shipping lane of Maldives situated in the Indian Ocean. Maldives is also very important for India for the development of Blue Economy or Ocean Economy.

- Furthermore, Maldives is crucial for the security of the coastal areas of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. The distance of India's Minicoy from Maldives is only 70 nautical miles. To protect these island coastal areas from China's espionage activities, it is necessary for India to get cooperation from Maldives. Keeping these things in mind, India focused on capacity building of Maldives and started meeting about 70 percent of its defence needs. This was also better for the national interests of Maldives, however, the new leadership of Maldives has something else in mind.
- This also reflects the mentality of linking it to Maldivian nationalism. Today when all the countries are moving on the path of indigenization as per their capacity, in matters like technology, infrastructure development, security etc., Maldives has also tried to give the same message. Change of power in South Asian countries has definitely emerged as a challenge before India's foreign policy, nevertheless, India has tried to find a solution to it through its efficient diplomacy. India's support to Maldives has such an impact that the new President of Maldives has said, "I am talking about taking out Indian soldiers from Maldives, it does not mean that we will replace them with soldiers of any other country. Soldiers from China or any other country will also not stay here." He has further said that we want to have such relations with India where both nations get benefitted mutually.

Conclusion:

During the COVID period, India has shown its economic strength as the fifth largest economy based on medical diplomacy. It has shown this to its neighbouring South Asian countries and the entire world and subsequently to the leadership of regional and international organizations. However, many anti-India factors in the neighbourhood have got the opportunity to carry out anti-India conspiracies as they do not approve of India's leadership skills. To deal with such elements, India continues the policy of providing economic, strategic, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to its neighbouring country.

Central Government's Action Concerning Militancy & Peace Agreements in Manipur

The central government released the vision document of an 'insurgency-free and prosperous North-East' and also said that there has been an 89 percent reduction in extremist violent acts in North-East India. Although, the Government of India is committed to the overall and inclusive development of North-East India, there have been several challenges from time to time that hinder this path. This situation can be exemplified by the latest case of Manipur, which has been a victim of internal unrest for a long time. The central government has been continuously looking for ways to restore peace and stability there, but violence has once again erupted in the northeastern state of Manipur.

The incident of violence recently took place in Letithu village in Tengnoupal district of the state, where 13 people were killed in firing between two militant groups. This village is adjacent to the Myanmar border. There is also a possibility that people from the People's Liberation Army, who also have links with militant groups in Myanmar, were involved in this incident. This incident happened at a time when the Central Government was busy preparing peace agreements with the militant organizations of Manipur and preparing them for surrender. Conflicts between ethnic communities, separatist movements and insurgency have now once again gained momentum in Manipur.

Government Actions to deal with insurgency in Manipur:

- **The Peace Agreement between the Government of India and UNLF:** Amidst these difficult circumstances, the State Government and the Central Government are exploring every possibility of peace talks and peace agreements. After the oldest separatist militant organization of Manipur, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Government of Manipur and the Government of India reached a peace agreement on November 29, about 25 leaders/cadres of National Revolutionary Front Manipur, led by Major Boicha (Army-Vice Chief of NRFM) along with 25 arms also joined the UNLF peace agreement on 2 December 2023.
- This was the first time that a valley-based Manipuri armed group had agreed to give up violence and return to the mainstream, respecting the Constitution of India and the laws of the country. This agreement not only envisaged ending the conflict between the UNLF and the security forces, which claimed precious lives on both sides for more than half a century, but also provided an opportunity to address the long-standing concerns of the community. With this, most of the members of the organization gave up violence and joined the mainstream of society. This development seemed to be a major step towards the efforts that sought to restore peace and normalcy in Manipur. However, when the situation of violence was seen in Manipur once again, a slight change was observed in the approach of UNLF factions.
- The UNLF, a dangerous valley-based militant

organization in Manipur, had signed a peace agreement with the Government of India, however, some components of UNLF now are not ready to compromise on the goal of independent and sovereign Manipur. The UNLF acting chief, who belongs to the Panbei faction, says that even though they have signed the peace agreement, they will not lay down their arms until the demands of sovereign Manipur are met.

United Nation Liberation Front, (UNLF) was formed in 1964 and operates both within and outside Indian territory. It considers the agreement of merger of Manipur with the Indian Union in 1949 as illegal and has been working to get Manipur independent from India by cancelling it.

It has two factions i.e. Panbei and Koireng. The Panbei faction of UNLF is raising the question of the sovereignty of Manipur in the minds of Panbei. Whereas the Koireng faction of UNLF has accused the Panbei faction of compromising on political principles. The Koireng faction of the UNLF is considered stronger than the Panbei faction and still aims to separate Manipur from India.

- The necessity of peace talks and agreements cannot be undermined but it is equally important to discuss and be vigilant about the possible likelihood of conspiracy against peace accords by different factions and components of extremist organizations.
- Action against Meitei militant organizations in Manipur: The Meitei militant groups are another militant organization in Manipur which are trying to influence public opinion and enlist their help through arms and training to achieve their separatist objective. They are seeking foreign sources to set up camps in neighbouring countries for sanctuaries, training and covert purchase of arms and ammunition.
- The Home Ministry of the Government of India using the provisions of the Terrorism Prevention Act, of 1967, has declared the Meitei militant organizations as illegal. These organisations were promoting the separatist movement in Manipur and hence they have been declared illegal organizations. In the notification, the Home Ministry said that the Government believes that if the Meitei extremist organizations are not immediately curbed, they may seek opportunities to mobilize their cadres to increase

their separatist, subversive, terrorist and violent activities and may conspire to separate Manipur from India. Therefore, the Meitei extremist organizations have been declared unlawful organizations for a period of five years and thus are banned.

- These organisations comprise the People's Liberation Army and its political wings, the Revolutionary People's Front, the United National Liberation Front and its arm wing Manipur People's Army, the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleypak (PREPAK) and its armed forces, the Kangleypak Communist Party (KCP) and its armed forces Red Army, Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup and the Alliance for Socialist Unity Kangleipak.
- As per the government, these organizations will purchase illegal arms and ammunition from across the international border and may propagate anti-national activities through their harmful forces. They may even cause brutal harm to civilians and may target police and security forces personnel. The notification said that these organizations have also collected money from the public for illegal activities and thus it was necessary to ban these Meitei extremist organizations.

Government Actions to Ensure Stability in Northeast:

- To deal with the separatist groups, the government must formulate a sharp strategy so that peace agreements and negotiations can truly be metamorphosed into the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.
- The success of the peace talks in Manipur can be seen in relation to the peace talks in Nagaland and the subsequent challenges. When the Government of India observed that Nagaland's most lethal insurgent separatist organization NSCN (IM) was not committed to the Naga Peace Framework Agreement, then with a strategy of isolating it among the insurgent groups of Nagaland and formed by Naga National Political Groups. The organization of Naga insurgent groups started surrendering by holding peace talks with them, after which the original insurgent group of Nagaland, NSCN (IM), was infuriated.
- Last year in December, the Government of India and the Government of Manipur signed an agreement with Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF), a militant organization active in Manipur for more than a decade, to end insurgent activities. It was then believed that the agreement would significantly promote the peace process in Manipur. This agreement was signed by senior officials of the Union Home Ministry and Manipur Government and representatives of ZUF in the presence of Manipur CM N. Biren Singh.

Way Forward:

- Since ethnicity is a vulnerable aspect of the Manipur administration, any kind of ethnic conflict and violence in North Eastern India can give rise to separatist activities. Taking advantage if such vulnerability, the rebel and insurgent groups in Myanmar and its surrounding areas can conspire against India by allying with the revolutionaries of North-East India. The Government of India and the State Governments need to deal with ethnic issues effectively using emotional intelligence and considering human sensitivities.
- Today, the Kuki Chin community living in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh is fighting the Bangladesh Army for a separate state in that area and its spill over effect should not reach Manipur. Therefore, it is necessary to detect and control any possible possibility of the Nagaland based militant organization NSCN (IM) instigating the Greater Nagalim movement and the demand for a separate Naga Constitution and flag in the hilly areas of Manipur. It is crucial to make the ethnic communities of Manipur understand that Manipur is not a stage of 'valleys versus mountains'.
- To avoid the rise of inter-state disputes, there is a need to increase the sense of credibility towards the government among the ethnic communities of North Eastern India through development works. Any separatist activities should not be allowed to emerge in Manipur at all. The unruly elements playing with the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Manipur should be dealt effectively. The Government of India has promised to protect the culture, tradition, language, religion and ethnic identity of all the communities living throughout the state.
- In the last 4 years, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has concluded the Bodo, Karbi, Bru/Reang Peace Accord and has made development the only option for these communities by deciding on special development packages. Manipur government also needs to do the same thing today. Illegal migrants and suspected refugees should be dealt harshly in Manipur because Manipur does not want another round of anti-India insurgency. At the same time, the Government of Manipur should take impartial action on the welfare of all the ethnic communities living legally in the state, their basic needs, their problems. There is a need to plan carefully and find as many solutions as possible because allowing prejudice and preconceived notions against the government in any community is dangerous.

Migrant Workers: Protection of Their Rights & Efforts by the Government

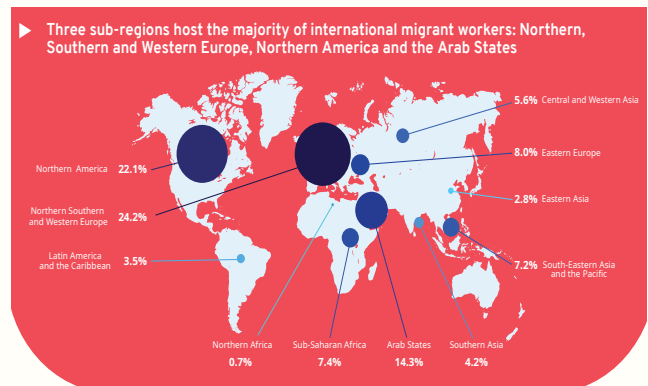
- Protecting the rights of workers in India is a constitutional commitment. Both central and state governments are expected to protect the rights of workers under the Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 42 of the Indian Constitution requires the State to ensure just and humane conditions of work. By safely evacuating 41 labourers who were trapped in Uttarkashi's Silkyara tunnel, the Uttarakhand government has recently given momentum to the issue of protecting migrant workers' rights, in line with this constitutional commitment and the fundamental ideal of social and economic justice.
- These workers were trapped in the tunnel in Uttarakhand, among which many of them were migrant workers belonging to other states. After the Silkyara Tunnel accident in Uttarkashi, the Central Government has taken a big decision in the interest of the migrant workers. The government has talked about making a unique ID card mandatory for all building and construction workers across the country to ensure that the rights of migrant workers are protected. This identity card will be linked to the worker's Aadhaar as well as with the e-Shram database and aid in achieving the objectives related to the physical, social and economic security of the workers.
- Initiatives as such will help in dealing with the challenges arising from increasing cases of contractors employing unregistered labourers. Along with this, the four labour codes will require the contractors to provide comprehensive benefits to these workers as per the provisions of the Interstate Migrant Workers Act. These include minimum wages, occupational safety and access to basic facilities like toilets and crèches at work. It is noteworthy that the Labour Secretary of the Government of India, Aarti Ahuja while addressing 'The Migration Conclave' organized by the All India Organization of Employers (AIOE) and the industry body FICCI in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, had commented on this decision of the Central Government for the rights of migrant workers.

Steps taken for the Betterment of Migrant Workers:

Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan and Migrant Workers:

- 'Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan (GKRA)' was launched in the wake of the outbreak of COVID-19, to provide employment and livelihood opportunities to the migrant workers who have been forced to return to their villages as well as to the citizens of similarly affected rural areas. This campaign is being run as a mission to provide employment to those migrant workers

who have returned to their native villages in 6 states namely Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This campaign is now empowering the villagers by providing them livelihood opportunities in 116 districts of these states. The success of this campaign so far can be seen as the harmonious efforts of 12 Ministries/Departments and State Governments, which are working towards providing livelihood opportunities to migrant workers and providing wide-ranging benefits to rural communities.



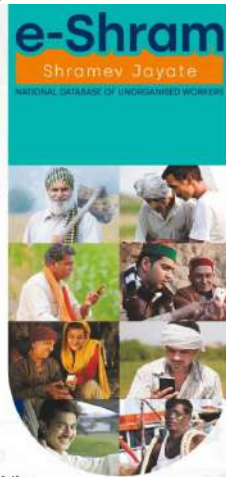
“Shramshakti” Digital Data Solution for Migrant Workers:

- During the Covid Pandemic, the biggest challenge for state and national governments was to formulate effective strategies and policy decisions for the welfare of migrant workers in both source and destination states due to the lack of actual data on migrants. Particularly, when it comes to migration of tribal population, it is often driven by crisis with migrants going through difficult and unsafe conditions. Sometimes they face problems like trafficking or wage harassment at the workplace, along with many occupational barriers.
- Keeping these things in mind, in the year 2021, “Shramshakti”, a National Migration Assistance Portal, was launched by the Union Minister of Tribal Affairs through video conference at an event organized in Panjim, Goa. This portal helps in the smooth formulation of state and national-level programs for migrant workers effectively. In the interest of migrant workers, a Tribal Migration Cell, a Tribal Museum and a training booklet “Shramsathi” for migrant workers were also launched in Goa. On this occasion, the Chief Minister of Goa launched a dedicated Migration Cell in Goa to facilitate and support the migrants coming to Goa from different states.
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India has stated that the Tribal Migration

Repository will be successful in bridging the gap related to manpower, and data and empowering the migrant workers who generally migrate in search of employment and income. It will also help the government in connecting the migrant population with the existing welfare schemes under Atmanirbhar Bharat. The various data to be captured through manpower will include details related to demographic profile, livelihood options, skill profile and migration trends.

Benefits for Unorganised workers registering on e-SHRAM Portal

-  e-SHRAM Card received after registration will be accepted across the country
-  Accidental Insurance coverage through PMSBY for a year.
-  Rs. 2 lakh in case of accidental death and permanent disability.
Rs. 1 lakh in case of partial disability.
-  Social Security benefits will be delivered through e-SHRAM Portal.
-  Helpful for Central & State Government while providing assistance during calamities/pandemic.



Protection of Interests of Migrant Workers Through the e-Shram Portal:

- The government has ensured to provide the necessary facilities in the e-Shram portal to protect the rights of the Migrant workers. This portal is used for enrolment, registration, collection and identification of essential data of unorganized workers. A facility to enter the family details of migrant workers has been added to the e-Shram portal which can aid in providing child education and women-centric schemes to migrant workers migrating with their families. Additionally, it will also have a data-sharing portal and a data analytics portal.
- The data sharing portal will allow the sharing of data of e-Shram beneficiaries with the respective States and Union Territories securely for targeted implementation of social security/welfare schemes for unorganized workers registered on e-Shram. In this way, employees registered in e-Shram can now connect with employment opportunities, skilling, apprenticeship, pension schemes, digital skilling and state schemes through the e-Shram portal.

All India Survey of Migrant Workers:

- Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) part of All India Quarterly Establishment based

Employment Survey (AQEES) have been flagged off by the Union Minister of State for Labor and Employment. These two surveys are among the five all-India surveys conducted by the Labor Bureau of the Ministry. The software used for these surveys has also been launched. To mark the beginning of field-based work, the Bureau also conducted training programs for trainees and supervisors for these surveys. The results of both surveys will provide extremely useful data for effective policy-making in the field of labour and employment. Despite the very short time, the way the Labor Bureau started the survey keeping in mind the time limit is praiseworthy.

- With the launch of these surveys, the Bureau will survey lakhs of households over the next few months to collect valuable data on migrant workers. The Bureau will involve various units under AQEES to collect data on the employment situation and bring about changes for the same. These surveys will provide important data for policy making in the field of labor and employment. The main objective of the AQEES survey is to collect employment data on a quarterly basis. This survey has been designed for a unit-based employment survey and it will survey the employment needs of units employing 10 or more workers and on a quarterly basis for units employing 9 or fewer workers filling the biggest gap in Indian labour market data. Similarly to the Migrant Workers Survey, the first survey to study the socio-economic and working conditions of migrant workers, this survey will also assess the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers in India.
- There is no official data on inter-state migrants in the country, but according to estimates based on the 2011 census, National Sample Survey Organization survey and Economic Survey, there are a total of 65 million inter-state migrants in the country, out of which 33 percent are migrants who are workers. Registration of migrant workers, fair treatment by employers, fair wages, insurance protection, basic facilities, all these matters require the central and state governments to intervene at regular intervals, both at the policy level and implementation level. Migrant workers are often seen as criminals due to the temporary nature of employment and social media has further fuelled this mentality. It is necessary to end this mentality. Under inclusive thinking, arrangements should be made to provide schemes like MNREGA, Ujjwala, and Public Distribution System for migrant labourers in every state of the country.

Reforms in IMF: Necessary Step for the Global Economy

- There have been growing demands for the essential structural and operational changes to be made to international financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and WTO in order to safeguard the rights of poor nations. To keep the global economy sustainable, it is crucial that international economic organizations play their role in an independent, impartial and non-discriminatory manner. Even in developed nations, discussions have begun about how liberal institutions like the IMF must be when lending to developing nations, as well as when and by how much the voting and shareholding percentages of ASEAN, Brazil, India, and South Africa should be increased in the IMF transparently and equitably. It was revealed during the G20 meeting that the United States will raise issues of reform in the IMF and World Bank and will propose to increase the lending capacity of these two organizations to 200 billion dollars.
- In this context, India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has also raised the issue of IMF reforms. Expressing India's view, the minister said that presently when there is a situation of global economic slowdown in many parts of the world, the impartial role of organizations like the IMF and World Bank increases further. The IMF must formulate a policy to ensure that balance is maintained in the international payment system and that inflationary conditions do not cause major shocks to the global economy.
- Many IMF members are struggling with pressure from mounting debt, and some members are dealing with a severe Balance of Payments crisis. Other members may encounter a similar situation in the future. Countries that are facing the challenge of trade deficit hope for IMF aid, through its special bailout package while the IMF fears that assisting emerging or least developed nations in overcoming their economic difficulties, its own budget may deteriorate. The President of the World Bank has pointed out that the debt of the poor countries of the world has increased by 35% (reaching 62 billion dollars) compared to the year 2021. The debt crisis is spreading beyond poor countries, reaching middle-income countries and these countries may prove to be defaulters in future. The IMF's net administrative budget for fiscal year 2023-24 is \$1411 million. While it is necessary to provide financial support to member countries facing Balance of Payments problems, it is equally important to improve the IMF's budget in terms of replenishing international reserves, stabilizing

currency exchange and disbursing loans for economic development.

Structure of International Monetary Fund:

- The International Monetary Fund is an important global financial organization that works for international monetary stability. Formed after the discussions held at the Bretton Woods Conference in the year 1944, the IMF started functioning on March 1, 1947. Its headquarters are located in Washington DC. In November 1947, an IMF agreement was signed with the United Nations for mutual cooperation. IMF is known as the twin institution of the World Bank. On becoming a member of the IMF, one also gets a membership of the World Bank, whereas on withdrawing from the IMF, they lose their membership of the World Bank as well. At present, IMF has a total of 190 member countries with Andorra being the latest one.

Board of Governors of IMF:

- It is the top decision-making body of the IMF. There is a Governor and an alternate Governor for each member country. The governor is appointed by the member country and is usually that country's finance minister or head of the central bank. The Board of Governors has given most of its powers to the Executive Board of the IMF, however, the primary authority on issues like approval of an increase in the quota of a member country, SDR allocation, entry of new members into the IMF, mandatory withdrawal of members from the IMF etc. rests with the Board of Governors only. The Board of Governors elects or appoints the executive directors of the IMF. It is the supreme authority for the interpretation of matters related to the IMF's Articles of Agreement. The Board of Governors of the IMF and the World Bank usually meet once a year. The annual meetings of the IMF are chaired by a Governor of the World Bank and the IMF and the chair is given to the members on a rotating basis each year. The Governors of the World Bank and the IMF elect Executive Directors to their respective Executive Boards during their annual meetings every two years.

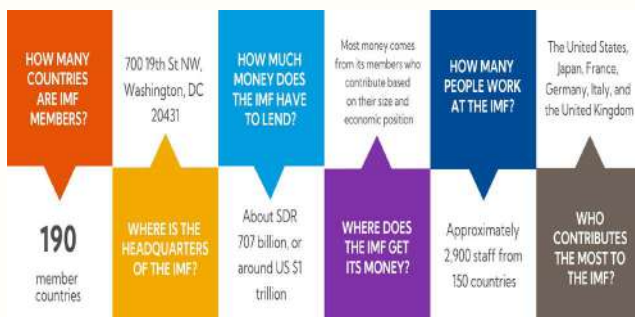
Goals and functions of the International Monetary Fund:

The International Monetary Fund works to deal with the challenges facing the global macro economy. These challenges include global unemployment, poverty, inflation, deflation, negative effects of currency devaluation, imbalance in currency exchange rates, economic recession etc. Further, it also works on the following:

- Strengthening multinational payment and

transfer systems for current account transactions and making efforts to eliminate foreign exchange restrictions that hinder the development of world trade.

- Promoting balanced development of international trade and contributing to the development of productive capacity.
- Bringing stability to the international payment system and promoting consultation and cooperation regarding international currency issues.
- Enhancing policies to promote high employment and sustainable economic growth.
- Providing financial support and protection to member states from the effects of balance of payments crises. If we look at the loan facility of the IMF, it helps the countries facing economic crises to fix the Balance of Payments problems (BOP) through Stand-By Arrangement (SBA).



Quota system in IMF:

The IMF's quota system is a system for managing its financial resources, also called its Financial Resource Mechanism. When a new country joins the IMF as a member, the IMF provides it with a quota. This quota determines 3 things regarding the new member country and the already affiliated member countries:

- The maximum financial contribution of a member country to the IMF.
- The percentage of voting rights of the member country in IMF. This shows what place a member country will have in important decisions taken under the banner of the IMF.
- To what extent will the member countries have financial access to the IMF. In other words, how much maximum financial support will the IMF provide to any member country.
- Quota is expressed in Special Drawing Rights. That means the quota system operates through SDR currency. The IMF has included the following points in the parameters determining the quota:
 - » Contribution to GDP - 50 percent
 - » Openness in the economy - 30 percent

- » Economic convertibility - 15 percent
- » International Reserve Fund - 5 percent

Special Drawing Rights (SDR):

- Special Drawing Rights are an international reserve asset created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement the official currency reserves of its member countries. This system was started to provide help through SDR in case of irregularities in the foreign exchange reserves of the member countries or in the Balance of Payments. SDR is also known as paper gold, although is not a real currency. It is shown in the form of a basket of the world's 5 most popular hard currencies and this basket is known as SDR basket. These 5 international currencies and their importance in percentage terms in the SDR basket are as follows:

- » US Dollar - 43.38 percent
- » Euro currency - 29.31 percent
- » Chinese Renminbi or Yuan - 12.28 percent
- » Japanese Yen - 7.59 percent
- » British Pound Sterling - 7.44 percent

- SDR provides support to the official currency reserves or reserves of the member countries. So far the IMF has allocated 204.2 billion SDR (\$291 billion) to its member countries, of which 182.6 billion was allocated to deal with the global economic crisis in 2009. It is noteworthy that the SDR was created by the IMF under the fixed exchange rate system of Bretton Woods, but after the dissolution of the Bretton Woods system in 1973, the major currencies leaned towards the floating or floating exchange rate system. This increased reliance on SDRs as a global reserve asset.

- The SDR serves as a unit of account for the IMF and some international organizations. It is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members. The SDR basket is reviewed every five years, or sooner if necessary, to ensure that the SDRs reflect the comparative or relative importance of the currencies in the global trading and financial systems. China's renminbi currency was included in the SDR basket on October 1, 2016. Member states can also buy and sell SDRs in the voluntary market. The IMF can designate members to purchase SDRs when necessary. For a currency to be included in the SDR basket, it needs to meet the IMF export criteria, that is the issuer of the currency should be a member of the IMF and must be among the top exporters in the world. Also, the proposed currency should be widely used for payments in international transactions.

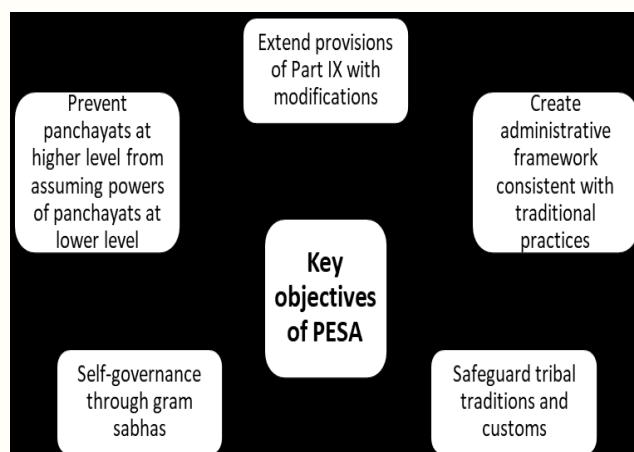
Upholding Tribal Interests: Laws & Policies

- The empowerment of Scheduled Tribes has emerged as a shared priority for both Central and State Governments. While there's much yet to accomplish in genuinely empowering these groups, certain states have initiated policy-level actions, displaying sensitivity towards tribal welfare. In this context, the Odisha government has recently introduced a law allowing Scheduled Tribe members to sell their lands to non-tribal communities. Although, this law restricts the sale of their entire land, it still has managed to spark discussions about its potential impact.
- Consequently, the Odisha Cabinet has decided to amend this law, enabling Scheduled Tribe residents in Scheduled Areas to sell land to non-tribals with State Government approval. This amendment aimed to prevent individuals from becoming landless or homeless by prohibiting the sale of their entire land. The state government anticipated that this move will stimulate industrial growth within the state. During a Cabinet meeting led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, it was highlighted that, based on recommendations from the Scheduled Tribe Advisory Council and in consideration of the broader interests of the ST community, there would be an amendment to the Odisha Scheduled Area Immovable Property Transfer Regulation, 1956. However, due to mounting opposition, the state government has halted this decision. Actually, the Orissa Land Reforms Act, of 1960 prohibits the transfer of tribal land to non-tribal.
- The Indian Constitution's Fifth Schedule and Article 244 (1) outline directives concerning the governance of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes. The Orissa government's new tribal land law faces opposition based on certain provisions within these constitutional provisions. The Fifth Schedule allows the Governor to report to the President on Scheduled Areas' administration and supports the establishment of a Tribal Advisory Council for overseeing these regions. This council advises the Governor on advancing the welfare and interests of Scheduled Tribes. Additionally, the Fifth Schedule empowers the Governor to regulate land transfers among Scheduled Tribe members in these areas and manage land allotments. It also extends control

over lending money to Scheduled Tribes. These provisions aim to ensure the safety and welfare of tribal residing in scheduled areas.

Empowering Tribal: Safeguarding Interests via PESA Legislation

- To integrate residents of Fifth Schedule areas, Parliament revised the "Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996" (PESA) under Article 243M(4)(b) of the Constitution. This amended legislation extends Part IX of the Constitution pertaining to Panchayats of these regions, with specific exceptions outlined in section 4 of the Act. This grants authority for legislating on all matters within these areas.
- PESA serves as legislation to broaden the scope of Part IX of the Constitution concerning Panchayats to Scheduled Areas. As defined in section 2 of this Act, "Scheduled Areas" refers to those specified in clause (1) of Article 244 of the Constitution. Among the ten PESA states, eight—Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Telangana—have formulated and officially announced their state-specific PESA regulations within their respective state Panchayati Raj laws.

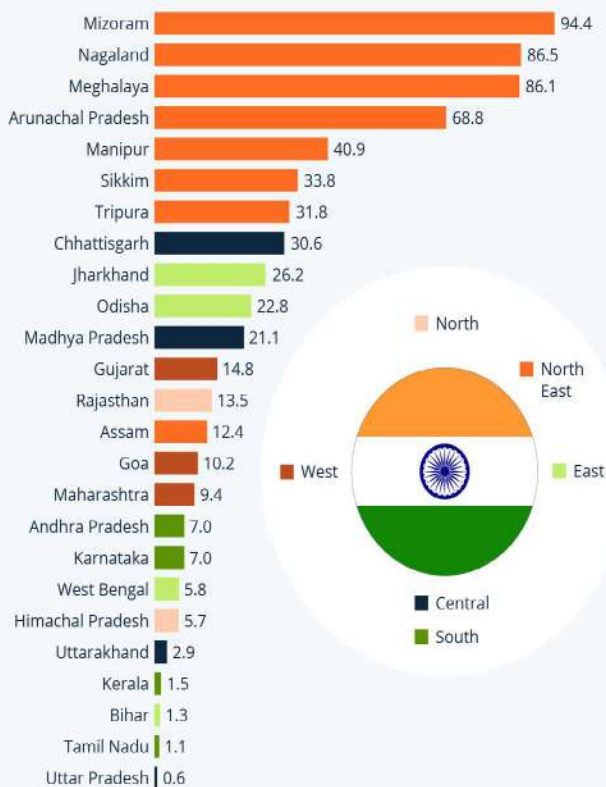


- In commemoration of India's 75 years of progress and the 25th anniversary of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, hosted the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. As a component of this celebration, a one-day National Conference

on the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 (PESA) took place on November 18, 2021, at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi. The primary objective of this conference, organized by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, was to assess states' progress in implementing PESA and to foster a collective understanding of its impact at the grassroots level. The event aimed to promote a collaborative approach. Not only does this National Conference commemorate 25 years of PESA implementation nationwide, but it also charts a course to address challenges and bridge gaps in effectively implementing PESA in Scheduled Areas.

North-East Is India's Tribal Stronghold

Scheduled tribes as a share of total population, by Indian state (in percent)



projects. Additionally, their advice is necessary for land resettlement, rehabilitation of displaced individuals, and preserving tribal culture and beliefs. The Gram Sabha also ensures the welfare of tribals concerning minor forest produce ownership, local dispute resolution, rural market management, regulation of liquor production, prohibition, and oversight of loans to tribals from moneylenders. The PESA Act empowers the Gram Sabha for enhanced local governance in tribal regions. However, instances have arisen where state governments, corporate entities, bureaucracy, and local administration have curtailed the powers of the Gram Sabha, rendering it ineffective and violating tribal rights.

Tribal Justice Campaign:

- The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has sanctioned the Pradhan Mantri-Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) with a total budget of Rs 24,104 crore (Central share: Rs 15,336 crore and State share: Rs 8,768 crore). This initiative focuses on 11 key areas across related ministries and was announced by the Prime Minister during Tribal Pride Day in Khunti. Additionally, the Pradhan Mantri PVTG Vikas Mission will be introduced to uplift the socio-economic status of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), as outlined in the Budget Speech 2023-24. The mission aims to provide fundamental necessities like secure housing, clean water, sanitation, improved access to education, healthcare, nutrition, road and communication connectivity, and sustainable livelihoods to PVTG settlements and families. An allocation of Rs 15,000 crore has been earmarked for the mission's implementation over the next three years through the Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST). According to the 2011 census, India's Scheduled Tribe population stands at 10.45 crore, with 75 communities in 18 states and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). These PVTGs encounter challenges related to social, economic, and educational insecurities.

- Under the PESA law in five Scheduled Area states, the Gram Sabha possesses special authority to safeguard tribal interests. Mandatory consultation with the Gram Sabha is required for land acquisition for development

Consumer Rights Protection: Need for Policy Interventions

Consumer Rights Protection is a crucial responsibility in a democratic nation with a market-driven economy. It is not just about economic accountability but Consumer Rights Protection also ensures social justice and security.

- Recent actions by the Central Consumer Protection Authority, led by Chief Commissioner Nidhi Khare, highlighted this. The Central Consumer Protection Authority issued a notification under Section 18(2) (j) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 to caution consumers against purchasing acid on e-commerce platforms. CCPA, being the watchdog of consumer interests in India, has detected the sale of highly corrosive acids on e-commerce platforms. The availability of dangerous acids in such a free and easily accessible manner can be dangerous and unsafe for consumers and the general public.
- Consumer protection is one of the objectives included in the Preamble of this Act. 'Consumer rights', as defined under Section 2(9) of the Act, include the right to be protected against the marketing of goods, products or services which are hazardous to life and property and to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, and standard. It also includes the right to be informed about the price, as the case may be, to protect the consumer from unfair trade practices.

Measures Taken Towards Consumer Rights Protection:

Strengthening the infrastructure of consumer commissions:

- The Central Government is providing financial assistance to the State Governments under the scheme 'Strengthening of Consumer Fora' to strengthen the infrastructure of the Consumer Commissions. This is done so that a minimum level of facilities can be provided in each Consumer Commission. Financial assistance is provided for construction areas up to 5000 sq. ft. for the District Commission Building and up to 11000 sq. ft. for the State Commission Building, including 1000 sq. ft. for the construction of the Arbitration Cell in both cases. Assistance is also provided for non-building assets for the purchase of furniture, computers, office equipment, books for the library etc. under the overall cost limit of Rs. 25 lakh in respect of the State Commission and Rs. 10 lakh in respect of the District Commission.

Resolution of consumer complaints:

- Section 38 (7) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 states that every complaint shall be

disposed of as expeditiously as possible and the decision on the complaint shall be made within three months from the date of receipt of the notice by the opposite party. The goods are not required to be analysed or tested and where analysis or testing of the goods is required, the same shall be disposed of within five months.

- During 2022, the number of consumer cases settled has been more than the number of cases registered.

National Consumer Helpline (NCH):

- The Department of Consumer Affairs has also set up a National Consumer Helpline (NCH) to resolve consumer complaints. The website – www.consumerhelpline.gov.in has been launched by the Department of Consumer Affairs to generate awareness, provide advice and redress consumer complaints and act as a central registry for registering consumer complaints. Under the convergence model, which is an out-of-court dispute resolution mechanism, NCH partners with companies that have a proactive approach for efficient consumer complaint resolution. NCH takes immediate follow-up action with the convergence company as soon as the complaints are received and related complaints are submitted to NCH.
- Consumer Commission has developed an online application portal named "edaakhil.nic.in" to facilitate consumers/advocates to file consumer complaints online from home or from anywhere through e-filing portal. E-Daakhil is operational in 35 States/Union Territories of the country. The Department of Consumer Affairs is also running a scheme called Computerization and Computer Networking of Consumer Fora in Country (CONFONET) to completely computerize all the consumer commissions facilitating access to information and speedy disposal of cases. Under this scheme, hardware, software and technical manpower are provided to consumer commissions.

Institutional Measures for Consumer Rights Protection:

- The Consumer Protection Act of 2019 established a three-tier quasi-judicial system, known as the Consumer Redressal Commission, operating at the district level (District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission), state level (State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission), and national levels (National Consumer Disputes

Redressal Commission). These commissions are designed to safeguard consumer rights, expedite dispute resolution, and have the authority to provide specific relief and award compensation to consumers as needed.

- The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has been set up under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 to regulate matters relating to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices and false or misleading advertisements causing harm to public and consumer interests.

Social Media and Awareness for Consumer Rights Protection:

Use of Platforms:

- The Department of Consumer Affairs is running a countrywide multimedia awareness campaign named “Jago Grahak Jago”. Through simple messages, consumers are made aware of fraud or problems and about mechanisms for effective redressal. These campaigns are run through print media, TV, radio, cinema theatres, websites, hoardings/display boards etc.
- Further, to create awareness among the people living in rural and backward areas, the Department takes part in important fairs/festivals/events of various States/Union Territories. Since a large number of people from backward areas attend these fairs/festivals/events, these events have a strong influence on the rural and backward areas. The Department also releases grants-in-aid to States/Union Territories for carrying out consumer awareness activities with local content.
- Further, the Department uses social media to generate awareness among consumers through creative/captions on consumer rights and redressal mechanisms. Digital social media channels are professionally managed and relevant creative content for consumer awareness and protection of consumer rights is posted in the department’s social media channels. A mascot “Jagruti” has also been launched by the department to empower consumers and generate awareness about their rights.

Alertness of Consumer Ministry on ‘Dark Pattern’ Incidents:

- Dark patterns involve using framing and choice to trick, coerce, or influence consumers into making choices that is not in their best interests. Section 2(9) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 strictly advises not to indulge in ‘unfair

trade practices’ through dark patterns in its online interface. Engaging in such deceptive and manipulative conduct by using dark patterns in online interfaces unfairly exploits the interests of consumers and constitutes an ‘unfair trade practice’ under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Examples of Dark Patterns:

- **Artificial Urgency:** This tactic creates a sense of urgency or lack of urgency to pressure consumers into making a purchase or taking some action.
- **Basket Sneaking:** Websites or apps use dark patterns to add additional products or services to a shopping cart without the user’s consent.
- **Subscription Trap:** This tactic makes it easy for consumers to sign up for a service but makes it difficult for them to cancel because the cancellation option is often hidden or requires them to take a series of steps.
- **Confirmation Shaming:** This involves creating guilt to keep consumers engaged. It criticizes or attacks consumers for not conforming to a particular opinion or viewpoint.
- **Coerced Actions:** This involves forcing consumers to take actions they do not want to take, such as signing up for a service to access content.
- **Nagging:** This refers to constant, repeated, and annoyingly persistent criticism, complaints, and requests for action.
- **Interface Interference:** This tactic involves making it difficult for consumers to take certain actions, such as canceling a subscription or deleting an account.
- **Bait and Switch:** A product or service is advertised, but delivery is often of a different, lower quality product.
- **Hidden Costs:** This tactic involves hiding additional costs from consumers until they have already committed to making a purchase.
- **Pseudo-Ads:** Pseudo-ads are advertisements that are designed to look like other types of content, such as news articles or user-generated content.
- With increasing internet penetration and increasing smartphone usage in India, consumers are increasingly choosing e-commerce as their preferred mode of shopping. In such a scenario, it is imperative that online platforms do not indulge in unfair trade practices by inculcating dark patterns which may result in harmful or undesirable consequences for the consumer.

India Leads the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence

India has taken up the responsibility of chairing the Global Alliance on Artificial Intelligence for the year 2024. The GPAI Summit (Global Alliance on Artificial Intelligence Summit) was organized in New Delhi from 12-14 December and it was inaugurated by the Indian Prime Minister. India advocates for AI accessibility globally, emphasizing its vision to ensure the widespread benefits of Artificial Intelligence. Whether it's India's 'Airavat' securing the 75th spot among the top 500 supercomputers or the creation of the world's initial AI-driven law in a Brazilian city with the assistance of AI ChatGPT, it's evident that AI is yielding favorable outcomes worldwide.

- India stresses on the importance of safe Artificial Intelligence utilization, actively promoting research and development to maximize anticipated advantages in this domain. AI is expected to add US\$967 billion to the Indian economy by 2035 and US\$450-500 billion to India's GDP by 2025, which is 10 percent of the country's GDP target of US\$5 trillion.
- Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's seven AI working groups introduced the inaugural India Artificial Intelligence (India AI) report. The Indian Prime Minister advocates for AI's presence and its contribution to India. India, a founding member of GPAI in 2020, now serves as the incoming Support Chair and will lead GPAI in 2024. Hosting the annual GPAI Summit from December 12 to 14, 2023, India holds the role of Lead Chair for GPAI in 2024. Extending its global scientific leadership into new and emerging areas of science, India has joined the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) as a founding member to support responsible and human-centric development and use of Artificial Intelligence. India's involvement in GPAI signifies its commitment to fostering responsible and human-centered AI development and utilization, expanding its scientific leadership in new and emerging scientific domains.
- During the summit, several sessions were organized on diverse topics such as AI and Global Health, Education and Skills, AI and Data Management and ML Workshop. Other highlights of the summit include the Research Symposium, the AI Gamechangers Award and the India AI Expo. More than 50 GPAI experts and 150 speakers from across the country participated in the summit. Top AI gamechangers from across the globe including Intel, Reliance Jio, Google, Meta, AWS, Yota, Netweb, Paytm, Microsoft, Mastercard, NIC, STPI, Immerse, Jio Haptic, Bhashini etc. have participated in various events of this summit.

Benefits of AI to the Indian Navy:

- INS Valsura, the premier technical training

institute of the Indian Navy, had last year organized a workshop on the topic 'Reaping the Benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the Indian Navy'. The Indian Navy is focusing on incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) in critical mission areas. INS Valsura, based at Jamnagar, has already been designated as a Center of Excellence (CoE) in the field of Big Data. Apart from this, a state-of-the-art laboratory on AI and Big Data Analysis (BDA) has been established here in January 2020. Presently the Navy is in the process of creating a Center of Excellence (CoE) in the field of AI at INS Valsura, which will conduct pilot projects related to the adoption of AI and BDA in the field of maintenance, human resources and perception assessment in collaboration with academia and industry. Additionally, the Navy is seriously engaged in unifying and reorganizing its enterprise data, as data is the fuel for all AI engines. Organizationally, the Navy has formed an AI Core Group, which meets twice every year to assess all AI/ML initiatives.

Artificial Intelligence in the Defense Sector:

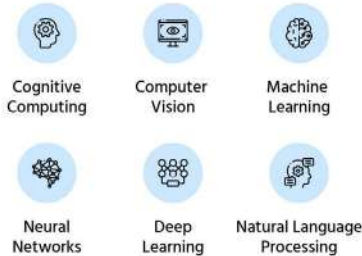
- Last year, the first-ever exhibition and symposium on 'Artificial Intelligence in Defense Sector' (AIDDEF), organized by the Department of Defense Production Ministry of Defense in New Delhi, was inaugurated by the Defense Minister of the Government of India. The event featured an exhibition aimed at showcasing cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled solutions developed by services, research organizations, industries, start-ups and innovators and launching AI products for market availability. During this period, 75 newly developed Artificial Intelligence products were launched by the Indian Defense Minister. The product domains included Automation/Unmanned/Robotics Systems, Cyber Security, Human Behavior Analytics, Intelligent Surveillance Systems, Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Speech/Voice Analytics and Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems and operational data analytics.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Major Fields of AI

Key fields of AI include cognitive computing, computer vision, machine learning, neural networks, deep learning, and natural language processing.

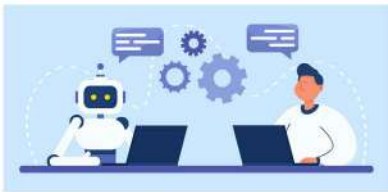


What is AI?

AI, or Artificial Intelligence, is the development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence.

How AI Works?

AI works by using algorithms and data to train models that can perform tasks, make predictions, or generate outputs similar to human intelligence.

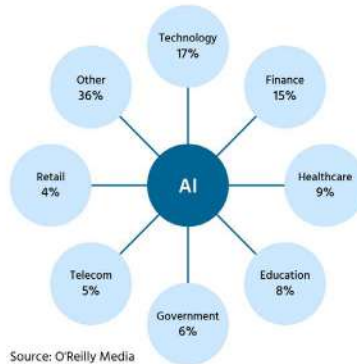


How Does AI Impact Society?

AI impacts society by transforming industries, revolutionizing automation, and raising ethical concerns about privacy, job displacement, and biases.

Global AI Adoption by Industry

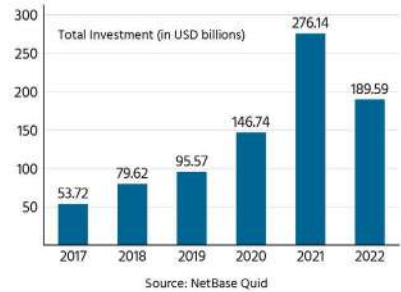
AI adoption is on the rise across various industries, with the technology sector leading the way at 17%, followed by finance at 15% and healthcare at 9%.



Source: O'Reilly Media

Global Corporate Investment in AI

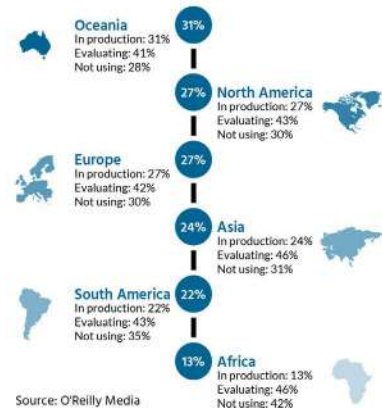
Corporate investment dips in 2022 from 2021 highs, still up 13-fold in last decade; biggest event is Microsoft's \$19.7B Nuance acquisition.



Source: NetBase Quid

Global AI Adoption by Continent

AI production highest in Oceania (31%), followed by North America and Europe (27%), Asia and South America (24%, 22%). Africa has the lowest (13%).



Source: O'Reilly Media

Use of AI in summer monsoon forecasting:

- The algorithm-developed technology powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help advance Indian Summer Monsoon Rainfall (ISMR) forecasting up to 18 months ahead of the season. Such calculation method is called Predictor Discovery Algorithm (PDA) and is designed to facilitate efficient forecasting of ISMR in time to make effective agricultural and other economic plans for the country using one of the ocean-related variables. It is notable that traditionally, researchers select predictors of the Indian summer monsoon based on the maximum correlation of atmospheric or oceanic variables with ISMR over a region of the world. The team consisting of Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune and Cotton University, Guwahati have developed a predictor discovery algorithm that maps the correlation between ISMR and D20 for the same period over the entire tropical region between 1871 and 2010

and generates forecasts in any lead month by projecting ocean thermocline depth (D20).

Structure and Objectives of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI):

- The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative. It aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice on Artificial Intelligence by supporting cutting-edge research and practical activities on Artificial Intelligence-related priorities. It was launched in June 2020 with 15 member countries. GPAI is the result of an idea developed within the G7. Today GPAI has 29 members including: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.

National Issue

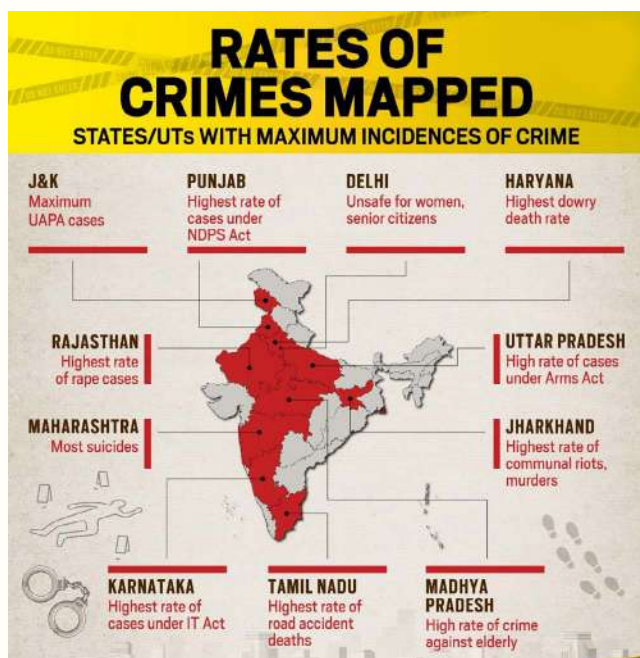
1 Crime in India 2022

Why in News:

The National Crime Records Bureau recently published its annual report on crime in India for the year 2022, providing the big picture of broad trends in crime registration in the country. The reports cover overall crimes, separately mentioning crimes against women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), cyber crimes, etc.

Situation of crime in India:

- **Accidental deaths and suicides in India:** There were 56,653 sudden deaths reported in 2022 with the maximum deaths (19,456) reported among the age group of 45-60 years. The suicide cases have increased from 1,70,924 in 2021 to 1,64,033 in 2022, while the accidental deaths have reached 4,30,504 in 2022, compared with 3,97,530 deaths in 2021.



- **Crimes against women:** A total of 4,45,256 cases were registered during 2022 with 4% increase from 2021. The majority of such cases under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) comprised 'cruelty by husband or his relatives' (31.4%), 'kidnapping and abduction of women' (19.2%), 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' (18.7%), and 'rape' (7.1%).
- **Crimes against children:** A total of 1,62,449 cases were registered during 2022 with an 8.7%

increase over 2021. Majority of such cases during 2021 comprised kidnapping and abduction (45.7%), and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 (39.7%), including child rape. A total of 30,555 cases have been registered against juveniles during 2022, depicting a decline of 2% over 2021.

- **Cybercrimes:** A total of 65,893 cases were registered with 24.4% increase over 2021 (52,974 cases). In 2022, 64.8% of the cybercrime cases registered were with the motive of fraud (42,710 out of 65,893 cases) followed by extortion at 5.5% (3,648 cases), and sexual exploitation at 5.2% (3,434 cases).
- Apart from this, crimes against senior citizens, SCs and STs also increased by 9.3% (28,545 in 2022 from 26,110 in 2021), 13.1% (57,582 in 2022 from 50,900) and 14.3% (10,064 in 2022 from 8,802 in 2021), respectively.

Conclusion:

A total of 58,24,946 cognizable crimes comprising 35,61,379 Indian Penal Code (IPC) crimes and 22,63,567 Special & Local Laws (SLL) crimes were registered in 2022 with a decline of 4.5% over 2021. The decline in crime rate (number of crimes committed per lakh inhabitants) from 445.9 in 2021 to 422.2 in 2022 is a good indicator since absolute crime rates increase with population growth.

2 FASTER 2.0 Portal

Why in News:

Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud recently launched the Faster 2.0 portal and the Hindi version of e-SCR portal to streamline legal processes on the occasion of Constitution Day. The Faster 2.0 portal is designed to provide information directly to jail authorities, trial courts and high courts about court orders related to the release of prisoners, while the Hindi version of the e-SCR portal will help in understanding past judgments of the Supreme Court in Hindi.

About Faster 2.0 Portal:

- Fast and Secure Transmission of Electronic Records' (FASTER) is a software that provides a digital platform for fast and secure transmission of court orders.
- It proposes transmission of e-certified copies of interim orders, stay orders, bail orders and records of proceedings to duty holders for compliance and proper execution through a secure electronic communication channel.
- At present the release process is hampered due

to delays. Since under the existing protocol, a physical copy of the official court order for the release of a person from jail passes through several government departments before reaching the jail authorities. The actual release from jail, despite the release order being issued by the court, therefore takes a lot of time.

- The Faster 2.0 portal will facilitate faster communication from the Faster 1.0 between concerned authorities which will contribute to strengthening the judicial system of the country.
- During the launch of this portal, Chief Justice Chandrachud underlined the role of the Supreme Court as the 'people's court' and encouraged the public not to be afraid of approaching the court. He stressed that disputes could be resolved democratically under the Constitution.
- It is also noteworthy that the Faster 1.0 platform was initially launched in March 2022 by then Chief Justice N. V. Ramanna so that common citizens can have quick, easy and convenient access to justice in a time-bound manner.

About e-SCR Portal:

- Judgments given by the Supreme Court of India are digitally archived through the e-SCR portal. This portal will now provide access to the orders of the Supreme Court in Hindi as well.
- This portal provides free access to more than 35 thousand judgments of the Supreme Court to lawyers, law students and the general public as these judgments are available on the apex court's website and National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG).
- Honourable Supreme Court with the help of the National Informatics Centre has developed a search engine incorporating elastic search techniques in the database of e-SCR which provides search options by case type, case year, judge and bench strength.

Way Forward:

This will help in reducing delays in disposal of cases and provide timely inputs for taking policy decisions for early disposal of pending cases. This will make it easier for the general public to access the court, which will speed up the inclusivity of justice and make the judicial process affordable and accessible.

3

Post Office Bill 2023

Why in News:

Recently, the Post Office Bill, 2023 was passed from the Lok Sabha. It will replace the Indian Post Office Act, 1898. It will become a medium for the delivery of various citizen-centric services whereas the 1898 Act had only focused on mail services.

About Post Office Bill 2023:

- The Bill will make the Department of Posts highly competitive and provide the required flexibility in pricing its services and will be based on a strong legal framework to provide citizen-centric services with prompt response to market demands.
- This Bill provides power to any officer to stop, seize, detain, or hand over to a customs authority any article in the interest of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, and public order.
- This Bill will empower any postal officer to deliver any article received from a domestic or international source to the Customs or any concerned authority.

Key Provisions of Post Office Bill 2023:

- This Bill empowers to make necessary rules related to postal services and determine postal charges based on market dynamics, which will eliminate the need for parliamentary approval.
- Under this bill, it is mandatory for postal authorities to report suspicious parcels, illegal content to the Customs Department for necessary legal action.
- The Post Office Bill 2023 gives the Post Office the prerogative to issue postage stamps and will outline rules relating to the supply and sale of postage stamps and stationery.
- The bill would promote modernization in mail and parcels, including the possibility of using drone delivery.
- This Bill will facilitate the development of post offices into a network for the delivery of citizen-centric services.

Why was the Indian Post Office Act 1898 replaced?

- The Indian Post Office Act 1898 was enacted in 1898 with the objective of controlling the functioning of the Post Office which mainly related to the mail services provided through the Post Office.
- Presently the services through the Post Office are diversifying and the Post Office network is becoming a medium for the delivery of various types of citizen-centric services. Apart from this, the Department of Posts has also started banking services with India Post Payments Bank, due to which there was a need for a new law.

Way Forward:

The provisions included in the new bill will prevent the possibility of smuggling and unlawful transmission of drugs and other contraband goods through postal parcels. There is no uniform legislation for courier firms. The market share of India Post in the Courier/Express/Parcel (CEP) industry is less than 15%, hence provision for opening or stopping of any item during postal transmission will be included.

4 Advocates Amendment Bill 2023

Why in News:

Recently, The Advocates Amendment Bill, 2023 was passed successfully in the Lok Sabha during the Parliament's Winter Session. Rajya Sabha has already passed the bill. Its primary objective is to address the issue of 'touts' in the legal system by repealing the Legal Practitioners Act, 1879 and amending the Advocates Act, 1961.

Need for Change:

- The Law Commission, in its 249th Report, recommended repealing the outdated 1879 Act due to its obsolescence. The Advocates Act of 1961 retained provisions related to touts, leading to the introduction of the Advocates Amendment Bill, 2023.

Key Provisions of the Advocates Amendment Bill, 2023:

- The new Bill inserts Section 45A into the 1961 Act, empowering High Courts and district judges to frame and publish lists of touts.
- Individuals' names won't be included without providing them an opportunity to contest the allegations.
- Alleged touts can be reported to subordinate courts for inquiry, with subsequent actions taken based on the findings.
- Conviction as a tout results in inclusion in a published list in every court, accompanied by potential imprisonment.

What is a Tout?

- "Tout" was defined as someone who procures, in consideration of any remuneration from any legal practitioner, the employment of a legal practitioner in any legal business or one who proposes to any legal practitioner or anyone interested in any legal business to procure, for remuneration, the employment of the legal practitioner in such business. In simple word tout is a middle men between client and legal practisers.

About Legal Practitioners Act of 1879:

- The Legal Practitioners Act of 1879 was enacted to consolidate and amend laws related to legal practitioners in specific provinces.
- The Act's Section 2 defined "tout" as someone procuring clients for a legal practitioner in exchange for payment, encompassing various locations like civil or criminal courts, revenue offices and railway stations.

About Advocates Act, 1961:

- The Advocates Act of 1961 was introduced post-

independence to consolidate laws related to legal practitioners and establish Bar Councils and an All-India Bar. It replaced three pre-independence Acts, including the 1879 Act, governing legal practitioners.

Conclusion:

The Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023, is a bold legislative effort to address the issue of touts in the legal profession. By empowering authorities to frame lists, conduct inquiries, and impose penalties, the amendment seeks to enhance the integrity of the legal system and protect the interests of both legal practitioners and the public.

5 Process of Expulsion from Lok Sabha

Why in News:

Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha for 'unethical conduct'. The development came soon after the Ethics Committee report on the cash-for-quary controversy was presented before the Lok Sabha. Opposition members had questioned the process adopted by the panel and demanded a discussion on the report. However, he was expelled without discussion.

What is the matter?

- Mahua Moitra is accused of continuously asking questions in Parliament to target Indian businessman Gautam Adani and his group of companies and that too by taking bribes.
- BJP MP Nishikant Dubey had sent a letter to the Lok Sabha Speaker alleging that Mahua had taken a bribe from a businessman named Darshan Hiranandani and had been asking questions to target the Adani Group and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Constitutional and Other Aspects:

- Article 101 of the Constitution refers to the automatic termination of membership in Parliament on certain grounds, such as when a member is elected to the other House of Parliament or a State Assembly and does not resign within the specified period, or when a member remains absent from the House continuously for 60 days without permission.
- On the other hand, expulsion of a member can also be done if he is found guilty by a committee constituted by the House. However, termination of membership is not automatic and hence outside the scope of Article 101.
- Articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution, which deal with the powers and privileges of the Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures respectively, are also silent on expulsion.

Stance of the Supreme Court:

- In the case of Raja Ram Pal v. Hon’ble Speaker, Lok Sabha (2007), a majority of four judges held that Parliament has the power to expel its members and that such power is equitable. The judges argued that Parliament retains the power and prerogative to take appropriate action against any individual member if the action taken by the MP is not justified. However, this can be done only through a resolution by the Parliament and will not fall under Articles 101 and 102, which deal with the disqualification of Members of Parliament.
- In 2010, another five-judge Constitution bench reviewed the law on the expulsion of members in the Punjab Assembly in Amarinder Singh vs. Special Committee, Punjab Assembly. In this case, Justice Balakrishnan and Ravindran, who had disagreed with each other in the Raja Ram Pal case, gave a unanimous verdict and termed Amarinder Singh’s removal as unconstitutional.
- However, the bench believed that with the legislature having such power, the courts would be flooded with cases related to political rivalry. The bench also said that such a scenario would defeat some of the basic objectives of parliamentary democracy.

Conclusion

In any constitutional system, before the expulsion of a Member of Parliament, there is a need to pay close attention to various aspects related to it. Along with this, it is equally important to ensure accountability of all members of Parliament towards the temple of democracy; only then democracy can be made more powerful.

6 Supreme Court Ruling on Article 370

Why in News:

The Supreme Court upheld the Centre’s decision to scrap the provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution, which had granted special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. The decision was taken unanimously.

Key Points of the Ruling:

- The Supreme Court asserted that Jammu and Kashmir possesses no unique internal sovereignty compared to other Indian states.
- The Supreme Court upheld the validity of the Centre’s decision to carve out the union territory of Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. Once the Constituent Assembly ceased to exist, the President could unilaterally abrogate Article 370 in the exercise of the power under

Article 370(3).

BEFORE	NOW
● Special powers exercised by J&K	● No special powers now
● Dual citizenship	● Single citizenship
● Separate flag for Jammu & Kashmir	● Tricolour will be the only flag
● Article 360 (Financial Emergency) not applicable	● Article 360 will be applicable
● No reservation for minorities such as Hindus and Sikhs	● Minorities will be eligible for 16% reservation
● Indian citizens from other states cannot buy land or property in J&K	● People from other states will now be able to purchase land or property in J&K
● RTI not applicable	● RTI will be applicable
● Duration of Legislative Assembly for 6 years	● Assembly duration in Union Territory of J&K will be for 5 years
● If a woman from J&K marries out of state, she would lose the citizenship of the state	● If a woman marries out of state or country, she will still retain all her rights and Indian citizenship
● Panchayats did not have any rights	● Panchayats will have the same rights as in other states
● Right to Education (RTE) was not applicable	● Children in the state will benefit from RTE

- The Supreme Court directed that the restoration of statehood in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir shall be done at the earliest.
- The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission of India (EC) to hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 30 next year.
- The Court refused to rule on the validity of the Presidential rule imposed in Jammu and Kashmir in December 2018 since it was not specifically challenged by the petitioners.
- The Supreme Court held that Article 370 is a temporary provision. Two aspects indicate the provision’s temporariness: first, its interim status until the formation of the Constituent Assembly, and second, its adoption due to special circumstances, including war conditions in the state.
- The Court ruled that when a proclamation under Article 356 comes into force, countless decisions are taken by the Centre. Not every action can be challenged. Supreme Court has taken the view of S.R. Bommai’s case.

About Article 370:

- Article 370, which came into effect in October 1949, granted Kashmir autonomy of internal administration, allowing it to make its own laws in all matters except finance, defence, foreign affairs and communications.
- The Indian-administered region established a separate constitution and a separate flag and denied property rights in the region to outsiders.
- Article 35A, a further provision added to Article 370 in 1954, empowered state lawmakers to ensure special rights and privileges for permanent residents of the state.

Conclusion:

This decision not only settles a long-standing legal dispute, but also makes a significant contribution to the constitutional jurisprudence surrounding the relationship between the Union and its constituent states. As India is dealing with complex constitutional issues, this decision sets a precedent for the interpretation and application of key provisions in the evolving landscape of Indian governance.

7

Election Commission Appointment Bill

Why in News:

The Rajya has cleared the CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023 which seeks to remove the Chief Justice of India (CJI) from a panel to select the CEC and ECs. Bill repeals the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991 to provide for the appointment process and conditions of services for the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two Election Commissioners (ECs).

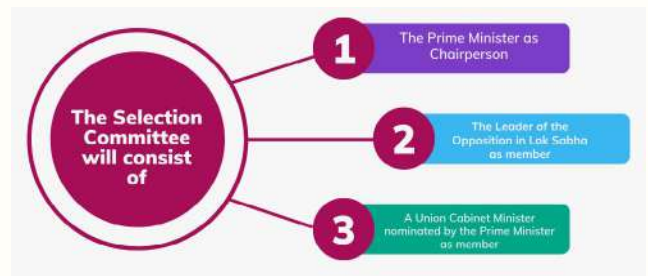
Background:

- The Supreme Court (SC) in March 2023 ruled that CEC and ECs will be appointed by the President of India on the advice of a Committee consisting of the Prime Minister, and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India until a law is enacted by Parliament on their appointments.

Key Features of the Bill:

- The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners will be selected by selection committee.
- The Selection Committee will consist of:
 - » The Prime Minister as Chairperson.
 - » The Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha as member.
 - » A Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister as member.

- The status of Election Commissioners will be equal to that of judges of the Supreme Court.
- Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners will be immune from criminal and civil proceeding from their official works.
- The Bill proposes the establishment of a Search Committee to prepare a panel of five persons for consideration for the positions of CEC and ECs.
- The Search Committee will be headed by law minister and will also include two members who have knowledge and experience in matters related to elections.



About the Election Commission:

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) operates as a constitutional body mandated by the Constitution of India to conduct and regulate elections in the country. Article 324 of the Constitution entrusts the Election Commission with the authority for the supervision, management, and regulation of elections to parliament, state legislatures, as well as the offices of the President and Vice-President of India.
- The Election Commission comprises the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time-to-time fix and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners is subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President.
- Since no parliamentary law was enacted as prescribed by Article 324 of the Constitution for appointment. The Bill now seeks to address this vacuum and set up a legislative process to make appointments to the EC.

Conclusion:

The bill proposes that the government will have the authority to appoint Election commissioners, a practice that is not ideal in a democratic nation. Given that elections form the bedrock of a successful democracy, an Election Commission lacking independence could jeopardize the integrity of the entire democratic framework.



International Issue



1 China in Micronesian and Polynesian Regions

Why in News:

China has emerged as an important partner for the Micronesian and Polynesian regions through its cooperative efforts. The Chinese investments focus on the strategic and geo-economic implications of these regions.

Implication of Chinese Investments in Micronesia and Polynesia:

- In January 2020, Kiribati became the 10th Pacific Island country (PIC) to join Beijing's transnational infrastructure and connectivity initiative the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Kiribati followed countries like Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Tonga and Niue which joined the BRI in 2019.
- During the Second Belt and Road Forum held in 2019, Chinese government officials promised the PICs with developmental aid worth millions of dollars, along with assistance from Chinese state and private companies in the construction of developmental infrastructure.
- To that effect, between 2013-2023, China invested in Samoa (US\$ 2.34 billion), FSM (US\$ 2 billion), Marshall Islands (US\$ 1.7 billion), Kiribati (US\$ 1.19 billion) and Cook Islands (US\$ 0.5 billion).



- Chinese aid and investments have spanned several economic sectors in these countries. Beijing's state-owned corporations have built roads, railways, airport strips, social infrastructure (schools, hospitals, affordable housing), and renewable energy infrastructure

worth US\$ 1 billion across the Polynesian and Micronesian islands.

India's Role in the Indo-Pacific Region:

- India launched the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) as a major initiative under the rubric of the Act East Policy for the PICs. It is a multinational grouping developed for cooperation between India and 14 PICs.
- On the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, the Indian Prime Minister announced a \$150 million worth line of credit to the group of Pacific island nations for undertaking solar, renewable energy and climate-related projects.
- Further, India has been one of the major players in the region. The nation conducts several naval exercises with the United States, countries of ASEAN, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

Way Forward:

The need to influence the PICs has become an even more pressing matter for China, with the emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as a major force in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis China. India, along with the US and its allies in the region must continuously encourage collective efforts to free these Pacific island countries from the Chinese debt trap and keep their sovereignty intact.

2 Italy withdraws from Belt and Road Initiative

Why in News:

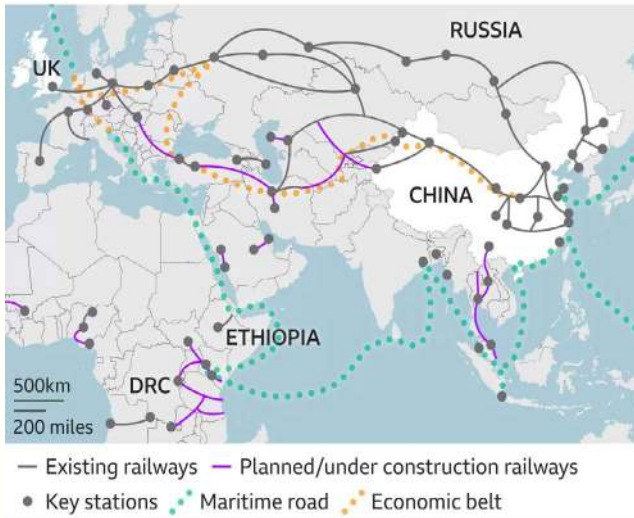
Italy's withdrawal from China's Belt and Road Initiative marks a significant shift, after being the sole G7 nation to be part of the project for four years.

Reason behind Italy's Withdrawal From the BRI: Bilateral Trade Deficit and Lack of Investment:

- Italian exports to China were worth €16.4bn in 2022, as compared to €13bn in 2019.
- On the other hand, Chinese exports to Italy rose to €57.5bn from €31.7bn over the same period, leading to an economic imbalance.
- The investments that were promised in Italian ports were never achieved.
- Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Italy dropped from \$650 million in 2019 to \$33 million in 2021, signaling limited economic benefits.
- Only a fraction of the up to €20bn worth of investment in Italy promised by China in 2019 was materialized.
- China trades far more with EU members like

France and Germany, even though these countries are not members of the BRI.

- Italy's entry into BRI was aimed at attracting investment and expanding exports into China's market, but the initiative failed to meet expectations.



Global Scenario:

- Since Italy will hold the G7 presidency next year, this announcement could hold Rome in good stead with its Western allies.
- India announced the new India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor in September, which is being dubbed as a game changer. Leaders of India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, Italy, and the European Union jointly unveiled this mega economic corridor on 9 September at the sidelines of Day 1 of the G20 Summit.
- Nations have borrowed heavily from China for BRI projects, and they now face challenges in repaying these loans. This has led to accusations of “debt trap diplomacy”.

India's Stand:

- India has been opposing the BRI as it included the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which connected Kashgar in China with the Gwadar port in Pakistan via Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Conclusion:

Italy joined the BRI when the Five Star Movement party-led government promoted it as a way of increasing trade with China while getting investments in major infrastructure projects. The future projections however never came out the way they have been promoted.

3 Article 99 of UN Charter

Why in News:

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter to establish a ceasefire amid the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, especially in its southern sector. In a letter addressed to the President of the UN Security Council, Guterres urged the Council to help avert a humanitarian catastrophe and appealed for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

What is Article 99 of the United Nations Charter?

- The United Nations Charter is the founding document of the United Nations which grants power to the United Nations to act on a wide variety of issues. The Charter is considered an international treaty, meaning that UN member states are bound by it.
 - Article 99 of the Charter states that ‘The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.’
 - In a 1945 report by the Preparatory Commission of United Nations, it was noted that this article would necessitate the Secretary-General to demonstrate exceptional political judgment, tact, and integrity to fulfil the assigned responsibility.
 - According to the United Nations, if the Secretary-General brings a matter to the attention of the Council under Article 99, it is the responsibility of the President of the Security Council to call a meeting of the Council.
 - Article 99 was initially invoked in response to the post-colonial unrest in the Republic of Congo following the end of Belgian rule in 1960, and subsequently, following Tunisia's complaint against the French Navy and Air Force attack in 1961. Since then, this article has been utilized in situations involving East Pakistan (1971), Iran (1979), and Lebanon (1989).
- #### About United Nations Security Council (UNSC):
- UNSC is one of the 6 main organs of the United Nations. It consists of five permanent members including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia, while 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms on a rotational basis. It is chaired by each of these 15 members for one month. Currently, the South American country Ecuador holds the presidency for December 2023.

Way Forward:

Amidst the Israel-Hamas conflict, over 17,000 lives have been lost among which approximately 40% were children. Advocating for the safeguarding of human values, this proposal should be deliberated in the United Nations Security Council. However, achieving unanimous support from permanent members appears unlikely, given that countries have been backing the war based on their own individual interests.

4 91st General Assembly of INTERPOL concluded

Why in News:

Recently, the 91st General Assembly of INTERPOL was held in Vienna where India pushed for concrete steps via INTERPOL to actively address cross-border crimes like terrorism, online radicalization, and cyber-related financial fraud in real time. The four-day gathering also celebrated the centenary of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), which was established in 1923.

Key Points of the 91st General Assembly of INTERPOL:

- The Indian team held detailed discussions on matters of police cooperation with delegations from the US, UK, Austria, UAE, Nepal, Brazil, Australia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Japan, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Singapore and Zambia.
- During the meeting, it was agreed to better share information on criminals through INTERPOL channels to expedite mutual legal assistance and extradition requests. India also supported the adoption of INTERPOL's 'Vision 2030'.
- At the General Assembly meeting, the five-member Indian delegation led by CBI Director Praveen Sood and NIA Director General Dinkar Gupta also stressed the need to adopt coordinated strategies to curb the operations of transnational criminal organizations.
- The creation of the INTERPOL Future Council was also discussed, which will be a council of experts to ensure that the development and implementation of 'INTERPOLVision-2030' takes into account the evolving needs of law enforcement in member countries.
- The Indian team discussed strengthening cooperation arrangements with the heads of Interpol, Europol, the Pacific Islands Police Organization and senior officials of the US Air Force Office of Special Investigations.
- Since joining INTERPOL in 1949, India has

hosted two General Assemblies so far. It is well known that last year India hosted the 90th General Assembly in which delegations from 168 countries participated.



What is INTERPOL?

- The International Criminal Police Organization (often known as Interpol) was founded in 1923 as a secure information-sharing platform that facilitates criminal investigations through information received from police forces of different countries.
- At present, it has 196 member countries which are led by the President who is elected for 4 years. Each member country has a nodal agency in INTERPOL. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the nodal agency in India.

Way Forward:

India has brought back 24 wanted criminals and fugitives this year, the highest ever in a year, due to the growing leverage of INTERPOL channels to deal with crime and criminals and relations with law enforcement agencies globally. However, it is not a front-line police force or investigation agency. INTERPOL issues different types of notices based on international requests for cooperation or alerts.

5 FAO Report on Healthy Diet

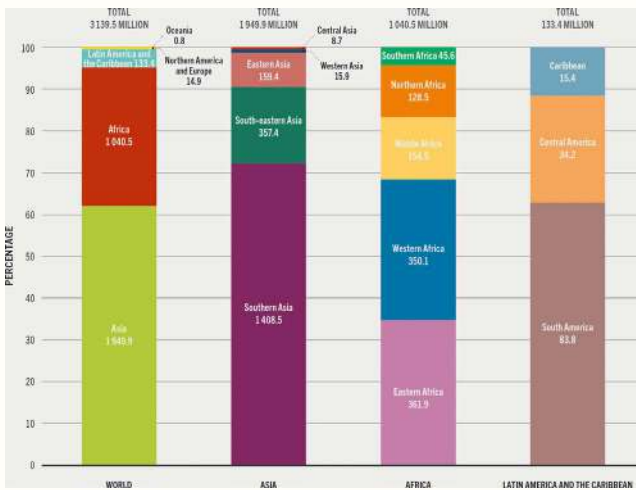
Why in News:

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released a report on Food Security and Nutrition static trends in Asia Pacific.

Key Findings of the Report:

- According to the report, 74.1% of Indians could not afford a balanced diet in 2021. This percentage was 76.2% in 2020. At the same time, 82.2% of people in Pakistan and 66.1% of people in Bangladesh reported having trouble obtaining healthy food.

- The report cautioned that if the rising food prices are not accompanied by increased income, more individuals will find it impossible to afford a nutritious diet.
- The report noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the region was impacted by the “5Fs” crisis – Food, Feed, Fuel, Fertilizers, and Finance. The protracted effects of these crises are still evident.
- 31.7% of the nation’s under-five children experienced stunted growth (low height-for-age).
- In 2022, 55 million more people in Asia were malnourished than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of these people lived in Southern Asia.
- In every sub-region except Eastern Asia, women fared worse than men. About 10% of women faced severe food insecurity, while 25% faced moderate insecurity.
- The average cost of a healthy diet in the Asia-Pacific was estimated at 4.15 purchasing power parity dollars per person per day.



Reasons for Increase in Unaffordability:

- A combination of higher food, feed and fuel prices and a slow recovery from the global pandemic have been the most important reasons for the rise in unaffordability.

About Healthy Diet:

- According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), A healthy diet is composed of a variety of nutritious and safe foods that provide dietary energy and nutrients in the amounts needed for a healthy and active life

About Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO):

- It is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to fight hunger.
- **Headquarters:** Rome, Italy.

- **Foundation:** 16th October, 1945
- **Aim:** To achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives.
- **Members:** With 195 members – 194 countries and the European Union, FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide. India is the founding member of FAO.

Conclusion:

There is an urgent need to coordinate action between countries and international organisations to combat food insecurity in the Asia Pacific region. If these people get proper diets their working potential will increase and they will contribute to the development of the nation. These actions also realised the sustainable development goal.

6 China and Egypt Launched MisrSat-2 Satellite

Why in news:

China has launched a new spacecraft named MisrSat 2, increasing space cooperation with the African continent country Egypt.

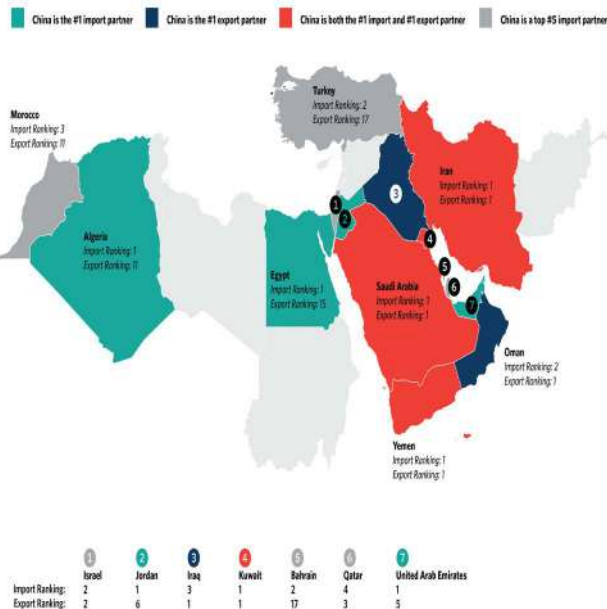
About the MisrSat 2:

- MisrSat 2 is an optical remote sensing satellite that was launched through China’s Long March 2C carrier rocket. It was launched from the Jiquan Satellite Launch Center which is located near the Gobi Desert.
- This satellite will help in matters like agriculture sector, national resources, urban planning, coastal change monitoring etc.
- China has also been pivotal in constructing a Satellite Assembly Integration Testing Center in Egypt. The nation has said that this will prove to be an event that will promote its deep high-tech aerospace cooperation with Egypt.

India and Egypt Relations:

- India had invited Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi as the chief guest on the occasion of the 74th Republic Day. This was the first time that an Egyptian President was given this honour.
- Apart from this, the first joint military exercise “Exercise Cyclone-I” between the armies of India and Egypt was conducted in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan on January 14, 2023 this year. This exercise is the first ever joint exercise between the armies of the two countries. Its aim was to promote defence cooperation between the two countries.

China is a Top Trading Partner With Most Middle Eastern Countries



Conclusion:

Both China and India have been striving to improve their relations with Egypt since it was announced as a potential new member of BRICS. Egypt's role in resolving disputes in West Asian politics has been quite effective. The nation holds strategic economic importance for both countries which can aid in solidifying their positions in Africa. China emphasized last year that they share a common vision and strategy with Egypt to safeguard their interests. Strengthening ties between China and Egypt is expected to impact India-Egypt relations. India is actively working on enhancing its bilateral connections with Egypt, which has played a significant role in resolving West Asian disputes.

7 New President of Argentina: Javier Milei

Why in news:

Javier Milei's ascent to the presidency of Argentina on December 10 has captivated global attention. He emerged victorious in a landmark election, defeating the left-leaning Economic Minister, Sergio Massa, with promises of drastic economic reforms and challenging the established political elite.

What are Milei's Policy Proposals:

- Javier Milei's policy proposals revolve around radical economic reforms and an anti-establishment stance. He aims to combat

Argentina's high inflation (exceeding 140%) by proposing to dollarize the economy and plans to implement substantial spending cuts equivalent to five percent of the economy.

- He advocates for a limited government, emphasizing respect for private property and proposing the reduction of federal ministries from 18 to 10.
- Further, Milei suggests privatizing state-owned media and lifting trade and currency controls. He aims to dismantle what he calls the "propaganda mechanism" of the left and promotes free-market principles. His campaign resonates with anti-establishment sentiments, promising to disrupt the status quo and challenge the perceived corruption within the political elite.
- His political agenda is characterized by its radical departure from traditional economic policies, leaning heavily towards libertarian ideals with a strong emphasis on reducing government intervention and promoting free-market principles.
- Milei's election holds profound implications for Argentina's socio-political landscape. His victory symbolizes a stark departure from traditional Peronist governance and represents a notable rise of the right-wing ideology in a nation historically steeped in Peronism.

What is Peronist Governance?

- Peronism is a movement that emerged in Argentina in the 20th century and has its roots in social justice. It is a blend of nationalism and populism and is partly inspired by Benito Mussolini's Italian fascism with more focus on labour reforms. The name of the movement comes after Juan Peron, who was a member of the Justicialist Party and was elected as Argentinian president thrice. After he died in 1974 his wife Isabella, and then from 2005-2015 the Kirchners took the legacy of the party. The party now is seen as almost dynastic and blamed for Argentina's economic downfall.

Way Forward:

Javier Milei's assumption of the presidency ushers in an era of uncertainty and change in Argentina. His bold economic proposals, such as dollarizing the economy and implementing significant spending cuts, stand as a testament to his commitment to challenge the status quo. The implications of Milei's presidency not only resonate domestically but also hold the potential for regional repercussions amidst the Latin American 'pink tide' which signifies countries electing left-leaning governments.

Environmental Issue

1 Ground Water Resource Assessment Report

Why in News:

Recently, The Union Minister of Jal Shakti, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, unveiled the Dynamic Ground Water Resource Assessment Report 2023 for the entire country. This is a collaborative effort between the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and various States/Union Territories. The main aim of the report is to provide a comprehensive overview for informed decision-making among stakeholders.

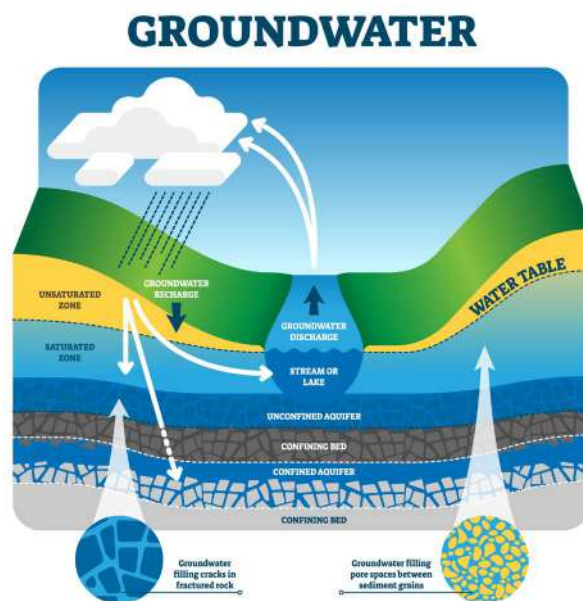
Key Findings of the Report:

- Nation witnessed a significant positive shift in ground water dynamics.
- The total annual ground water recharge reached 449.08 billion cubic meters (BCM), showcasing a notable increase of 11.48 BCM compared to the previous year (2022).
- Annual ground water extraction for the entire country stands at 241.34 BCM, maintaining a delicate balance in the nation's water resources.
- Decrease in the number of 'Over-exploited' units, indicating positive strides in sustainable water management practices.
- Among the 6553 assessment units nationwide, 4793 units have been categorized as 'Safe,' emphasizing the importance of implementing effective water conservation measures.
- The stage of ground water extraction currently stands at 59.23%, reflecting a cautious approach to resource utilization.
- The report attributes the increased ground water recharge to various factors, including enhanced seepage from canals, the return flow of irrigation water, and recharges from water bodies, tanks, and water conservation structures.

Key initiatives taken by Government for Water Conservation:

- **Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal):** It is a Rs. 6000 crore Central Sector Scheme with World Bank assistance, for sustainable management of ground water resources with community participation.
- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA):** It was launched in 2019 in 256 water stressed districts in the country to improve water availability including ground water conditions in these areas.
- **Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme:** The CGWB has taken up Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme.
- **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban**

Transformation (AMRUT): The Mission focuses on development of basic urban infrastructure in the AMRUT cities, such as water supply, sewerage & septage management, storm water drainage, green spaces & parks, and non-motorized urban transport.



Conclusion:

Water is a fundamental resource for life. Ground water has become an increasingly important natural resource catering to the fresh water requirements of various sectors in India. Sustainable development and efficient management of this scarce resource has become a challenge. Ground water has steadily emerged as the backbone of India's agriculture and drinking water security. Contribution of ground water is nearly 62% in irrigation, 85% in rural water supply and 50% in urban water supply. Thus protection and conservation of water should be national priority of all people and governments.

2 Climate Change Performance Index

Why in News:

In this year's Climate Change Performance Index, India has climbed to 7th place, marking an advancement from its prior ranking. The nation persists as one of the leading performers, as highlighted in the report unveiled at the COP28 global climate negotiations in Dubai.

More About the News:

- India remained at the top 10 position among the highest performers for the fifth year in a row, which is a significant improvement from 31st rank in 2014 to 7th in 2023. India also ranks best amongst the G20 countries.
- Only three countries - Denmark, Estonia and Philippines - are above India. No country has made it to the top three ranks as none of the countries has performed well enough in all four assessed categories to achieve a perfect score on CCPI.
- China, the largest current polluter, ranked 51st this year while the US, the 2nd largest current emitter and the highest historical polluter, secured the 57th position.
- The UAE, hosting COP28, claimed the 65th spot, while Saudi Arabia, another significant oil-producing nation, ranked last in the CCPI. Germany, a major historical emitter, ranks 14th, and the UK holds the 20th position.

- Assessment of climate protection performance involves four key areas:
 - » Greenhouse Gas Emissions (40% of the overall score).
 - » Renewable Energy adoption(20%).
 - » Energy Consumption(20%).
 - » Climate Policy implementation(20%).

Conclusion:

While India is the world’s most populous country, it has relatively low per capita emissions. In the per capita GHG category, the country is on track to meet benchmark of below 2°C. Nevertheless, its high performance in the GHG emissions and energy use categories does not coincides with its performance in the other two categories of climate policy and renewable energy. Although, it shows positive trend in the share of renewable category, its performance is advancing too slowly.

INDIA IN TOP 10 FOR 5TH YR IN A ROW



About Climate Change Performance Index:

- The German environmental and development organization, Germanwatch has devised the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) as a scoring mechanism with the aim of increasing transparency in global climate politics.
- It serves as a tool for fostering transparency in both national and international climate policies by employing consistent framework to evaluate and compare the climate efforts of 63 countries alongside the EU, encompassing more than 90% of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions.

3 Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme

Why in News:

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

Aim of the Scheme:

- To encourage sustainable forest management and agroforestry practices in India.
- Sustainable forest management involves the responsible and balanced use of forest resources to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Agroforestry is a land-use system that integrates trees or shrubs with crops or livestock on the same piece of land. It combines agricultural and forestry practices to achieve environmental, economic and social benefits.

About the Scheme:

- This national forest certification scheme offers voluntary third-party certification designed to promote sustainable forest management and agroforestry in the country.
- The scheme includes forest management certification, tree outside forest management certification, and chain of custody certification.
- This scheme can provide market incentives to various entities that adhere to responsible forest management and agroforestry practices in their operations. This includes state forest departments, individual farmers, or Farmer Producer Organizations engaged in agroforestry and farm forestry, as well as other wood-based

industries in the value chain.

- The Forest Management certification is based on the Indian Forest Management Standard, consisting of 8 criteria, 69 indicators and 254 verifiers, which is an integral part of the National Working Plan Code 2023, launched earlier this year.
- A separate Trees Outside Forests Standard is now introduced as a part of the newly launched Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme.

Implementing Agency:

- The Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme will be overseen by the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council, which will act as a multi-stakeholder advisory body. The Council is represented by members from eminent institutions.
- Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal will act as the scheme operating agency and will be responsible for overall management of the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme.

Audit agency:

- The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the Quality Council of India will accredit the certification bodies which will carry out independent audits and assess the adherence of various entities to the standards prescribed under the scheme.

Conclusion:

India is the third largest exporter of wood in the world. India exports most of its timber to the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom. Since many developed countries have imposed trade restrictions on the import of non-certified wood, forest certification can be an important step in increasing their market access to Western markets.

4 Global Status of Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems 2023

Why in News:

According to a “Global Status of Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems 2023” report from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the World Meteorological Organisation, half the countries lack adequate multi-hazard early warning systems.

Key Points of the Report:

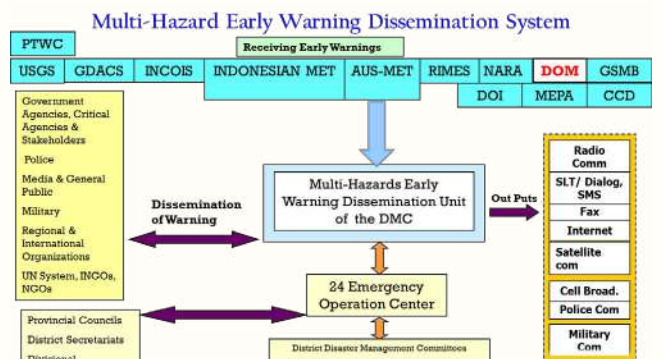
- The report highlighted that while more lives are now being saved from extreme weather and dangerous impacts of the climate crisis, there remains substantial progress which is yet to be made.
- Africa has doubled the quality of early

warning systems coverage but still falls below the global average. Less than half the Least Developed Countries and only 40% of Small Island Developing States have a multi-hazard early warning system. In the Arab States, risk knowledge to underpin early warning systems was found to be particularly low.

- The report also revealed that compared to last year, six more countries have reported having an early warning system, taking the total number of such countries to 101. The number has doubled since 2015. Maldives, Laos and Ethiopia now have dedicated national action plans and coordination structures in place. Benin has strengthened communications to reach communities at greatest risk. Fiji’s flash flood warning has been strengthened to protect the entire population of nearly 1 million people.

The Indian Context:

- The report highlights that in India, disaster risk knowledge and management, warning, dissemination and communication are not adequate, however, the preparedness, response capabilities and detection, monitoring, and forecasting capabilities are available.
- The report cited the flooding in Bangladesh in 2020 and the havoc Cyclone Amphan wreaked in the country and West Bengal in India in 2019 and said that some of the impacts were mitigated because of improved forecasting and through the activation of Early Action Protocols.



What are Early Warning Systems?

- Early warning systems effectively mitigate potential harm to individuals and property by providing advance notice of various imminent dangers such as storms, tsunamis, droughts, and heatwaves.
- Multi-hazard early warning systems on the other hand specifically tackle multiple hazards that could arise independently, concurrently, or in succession. However, numerous systems focus solely on specific hazards, such as floods

or cyclones.

Conclusion:

Given the heightened frequency and unpredictability of severe weather events due to climate change, the necessity for investing in multi-hazard early warning systems has become increasingly pressing. These systems are vital not only for alerting people about the immediate impacts of disasters but also for addressing subsequent effects, such as soil liquefaction post-earthquake, landslides, and disease outbreaks triggered by intense rainfall.

5 28th COP at Dubai

Why in News:

The 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was concluded in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Highlights of the COP28:

- **Loss and Damage (L&D) fund:** the countries reached an agreement to operationalize fund aiding nations affected by climate change. The World Bank is to be the interim host of the fund for four years, aligning with UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. All developing countries are eligible to apply, and every country is invited to contribute voluntarily. A specific percentage is earmarked for Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.
- **Global Stocktake (GST) text:** the fifth iteration of GST was released at COP28, which is a periodic review mechanism established under the Paris Agreement in 2015. The text proposes eight steps to keep the global temperature rise within the ambit of 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- **Methane emissions cut:** developing countries, including India, are extremely opposed to it. Since major sources of methane emission happens to be agriculture and livestock and making any cut to it would involve tweaking agricultural patterns.
- **Global cooling pledge:** 66 national government signatories committed to working together to reduce cooling-related emissions across all sectors by at least 68% globally relative to 2022 levels by 2050.
- The draft text on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) was introduced. It was established under the Paris Agreement to enhance climate change adaptation by increasing awareness and funding towards countries' adaptation needs in the context of the 1.5/2°C goal of the Paris

Agreement.

Conclusion:

- The rich world accounts for far more CO₂ emissions than the rest of the developing nations. The emission count per capita per year is: 17 tonnes in North America, 8 tonnes in Europe, 1.5 tonnes in South Asia and less than 1 tonne in Africa.
- Emphasizing the principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Related Capabilities (CBDR-RC) in tackling climate change, developing countries including India have asked rich countries to achieve negative carbon emissions, and not just reach Net-Zero by 2050.
- The developed countries, which consume more than 80% of the global carbon budget, should give developing countries their fair share of future emissions so that these countries contribute well to combatting climate change without jeopardizing their development.

6 Global Drought Snapshot by UNCCD

Why in news:

The report 'Global Drought Snapshot' was released by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in collaboration with the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) at COP 28, Dubai.

Highlights of the Report:

Increasing frequency and severity of drought events:

- 15–20% of China's population facing more frequent moderate-to-severe droughts.
- 23 million people severely food insecure across the Horn of Africa in December 2022.
- 5% of the contiguous United States suffering severe to extreme drought in May 2023.
- Severe drought in the La Plata basin of Brazil–Argentina in 2022 affecting crop production and global markets.
- 170 million people expected to experience extreme drought with a 3°C temperature rise above pre-industrial levels.

Impact of drought on agriculture and forests:

- 70% damaged cereal crops in the Mediterranean while 33% of grazing land was lost in South Africa due to drought.
- Higher forest losses in the Mediterranean under 3°C warming compared to current risk.
- Five consecutive rainfall failures in the Horn of Africa causing severe drought and reduced agricultural productivity. Africa's drought-related economic losses in the past 50 years is

at \$70 billion.

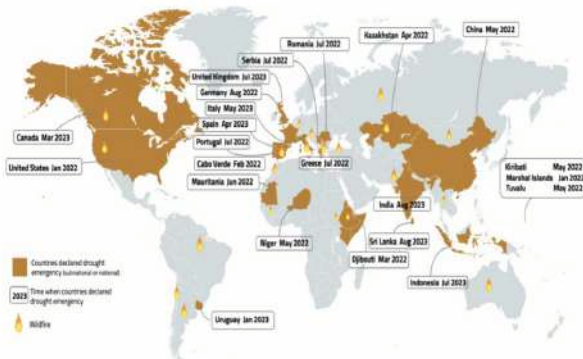
- Expected 44% drop in Argentina's soybean production is likely to contribute a 3% drop in Argentina's GDP for 2023.

Water Conditions:

- 75% reduction of cargo capacity on the Rhine due to low river levels.
- Record-low water levels in the Yangtze River affecting 5 million people in southern China.
- Backlog of barges on the Mississippi River causing supply chain disruptions and \$20 billion in economic damage

Social Dimensions:

- 85% of people affected by droughts live in low- or middle-income countries.
- 1.2 million people in the Central American Dry Corridor needing food aid after prolonged drought, heatwaves, and unpredictable rainfall.



Remedies:

- Nature-based solutions like restoring land can offset up to 25% of CO₂ emissions.
- If half of the meat and dairy products consumed are replaced by sustainable alternatives, global land conversion for agriculture could reduce by almost 100%.
- Switching from conventional sprinkler systems to micro-irrigation could potentially reduce water waste by 20 to 50%.
- In 2020, 45% of global disaster-related losses were insured, but many developing countries still have low insurance coverage for disasters.

Conclusion:

The report highlights the urgent need for global action to address drought resilience. Emphasizing the need for land restoration, sustainable agricultural practices, efficient water management, and robust disaster preparedness, it stresses the necessity for international cooperation and binding agreements. Climate - induced famine, forced migration, escalating water conflicts, and rapid ecological degradation highlight the importance of respecting planetary boundaries and taking proactive measures to mitigate drought's impact.

7 Blue Dragon

Why in News:

The researchers have unearthed a new mosasaur named the blue dragon in Pacific Ocean in Japan. It is same size great white shark and dating back 72 million years. This ancient marine predator, given the Japanese name Wakayama Soryu, offers new insights into the prehistoric seas of the Pacific.

About Blue Dragon:

- The Wakayama Soryu was found in the Wakayama Prefecture, along the Aridagawa River in 2006. It stands out for its exceptional size and unique physical features.

About Mosasaur:

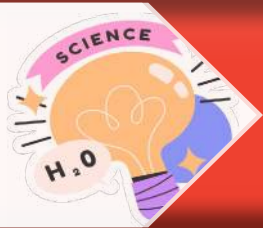
- It is a group of large predatory marine reptiles that inhabited all of the world's oceans during the Late Cretaceous epoch, between 90 and 66 million years ago.
- They are related to snakes and monitor lizards and were some of the largest marine organisms and the largest predatory reptiles of that time period.
- They lived near the surface of the water since they breathed air, much as whales do.
- They went extinct along with dinosaurs and many other animals, during the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous Period, 66 million years ago.

Characteristics:

- They were carnivores.
- Mosasaur species varied in length, some grew to be more than 50 feet long.
- The structure of their skull was very similar to that of the modern monitor lizards, to which mosasaurs are related.
- They had flipper-like paddles for arms and legs and a tail fin.
- They propelled themselves by mainly moving the large fin on their tail in a side-to-side motion.
- They were also covered in smooth scales, which were very dark in colour.

Conclusion:

Wakayama Soryu fossil specimen is the most complete mosasaur skeleton ever discovered in Japan or the northern Pacific. This underwater predator possessed distinct features that made easy categorisation challenging. According to experts, the animal featured a crocodile-like head and large paddle-shaped flippers. Its back flippers were larger than its front flippers.



1 World Malaria Report

Why in News:

WHO recently released World Malaria Report 2023, revealing the global surge in malaria cases with estimated 249 million cases in 2022.

Key Points of the Report:

- Global malaria cases dropped from 243 million to 233 million between 2000 and 2019. However, there was an increase of 11 million cases in 2020. They remained stable in 2021, before seeing another increase of 5 million in 2022 to 249 million.
- The number of malaria deaths also remained higher than the pre-pandemic levels. There were 608,000 deaths reported in 2022 as compared to 576,000 cases in 2019.
- With an estimated 33.8 lakh cases and 5,511 deaths, India saw a decline of 30 per cent in malaria incidence and 34 per cent in mortality in 2022, compared to the previous year.

Highlights of the report in the context of India:

- India's downward trend was reflected in the larger WHO South East Asian region that remained on track to achieving the 2030 target of reducing cases and deaths by 90 percent.
- India saw a 30% decline in malaria cases and a 34% decline in deaths in 2022 as compared to the previous year, accounting for 1.4% of total malaria cases globally.

Climate change and malaria:

- The annual report for the first time drawing an analogy between climate change and malaria, pointed out that climate change can directly increase geographies for malaria spread. Since climate change often is linked with increase in temperature and both malarial parasite and mosquitoes are sensitive to temperature humidity and rainfall, newer areas may emerge expanding the reach of disease.
- The situation can be best exemplified with Pakistan, where almost half of the five million additional malaria cases were reported globally in 2022 (2.1 million) mainly attributing to extreme floods.
- Climate change may also reduce access to healthcare and timely treatment, indirectly affecting the impact of the disease.

Way Forward:

India is doing well when it comes to malaria, however, issues such as drug resistance, insecticide resistance, and gene deletions in parasites which

make diagnosis difficult, might hinder its target of elimination by 2030. Further, there have to be intensified efforts to find and treat the scattered cases. In addition, updating policies and adopting new tools as per national and subnational needs in line with WHO guidance is critical.

2 Anthrobots

Why in News:

Researchers have developed a miniature robot that is capable of both movement and healing neurons within a laboratory setting.

What are Anthrobots?

- Anthrobots are biorobots made from human tracheal cells and possess self-assembly capabilities with the ability to transform themselves into various forms and dimensions.
- Anthrobots have showcased astonishing ability to heal damaged tissue holding an optimistic future for regenerative medicine, wound healing and disease treatment. They were able to perform this repair function without requiring any genetic modification.



Biorobots and their future potential:

- A biorobot is a microscopic programmable organism built by combining different biological tissues in a lab to perform some desired function. However, whether they are robots, organisms, or something else remains a subject of debate among scientists.
- The earlier forms of biobots, xenobots, were developed using clumps of embryonic frog cells. However, their application was limited as they had to be manually carved into the desired shape. At that time, it was not known if these capabilities were dependent on their being derived from an amphibian embryo, or if "biobots" could be constructed from cells of other species.

- The current study discovered that biobots can in fact be created from adult human cells, without any genetic modification demonstrating capabilities beyond what was observed with the Xenobots.

Future Potential:

- Anthrobots may pave way for a new revolution in the field of medicine by aiding in creation of personalised medicine. Scientists believe that Anthrobots made using persons own tissue might aid in delivering drugs, break up mucus, clear arteries, etc., with and without genetic engineering.
- By combining several cell types and exploring other stimuli, it might be also possible to develop biobots with potential applications in sustainable construction and outer space exploration.
- They can also help understand how natural body plans assemble, how the genome and environment work together to create tissues, organs and limbs, and how to restore them with regenerative treatments.

Conclusion:

In addition, outside of the body, Anthrobots can only survive in very specific laboratory conditions, and there is no risk of exposure or unintended spread outside the lab. Further, they do not reproduce, and they have no genetic edits, additions or deletions, so there is no risk of their evolving beyond existing safeguards.

3 White Lung Syndrome

Why in News:

There had been an emergence of mystery pneumonia, also known as the white lung disease, among children in China. This disease has been recently reported in Ohio, US and has increased the cases of child hospitalization.

About White Lung Syndrome:

- White lung Syndrome is a term coined to describe the mysterious respiratory disease that was observed in patients who had pneumonia-like symptoms. It is considered to be a combination of various respiratory illnesses, which include influenza, SARS-CoV-2, Respiratory Syncytial and mycoplasma pneumonia.
- This illness is characterised by the development of white patches all over the lungs. The lungs appear black on X-ray or CT scan images which indicate presence of air in the lungs. The lungs appear white whenever there is an inflammation or fluid build-up in the lungs, which restricts the air sacs. An infection caused by bacteria or

a virus could be the cause of presence of such white patches.

- White Lung Syndrome is not a scientific terminology rather a colloquial name given out of alertness. The lung X-ray shows white patches even in the case of flu.

Symptoms:

- Its symptoms include coughing, fatigue, sore throat, watery eyes and fever. Children who are below 5 years of age are also experiencing symptoms like vomiting and diarrhoea.

Treatment:

- The treatment of this disease as of now is symptoms-based and is focused on addressing the pneumonia and ensuring the respiratory health of the patient remains stable.
- On the individual level, people must ensure proper hygiene such as hand washing, maintaining physical distance, covering the mouth when coughing and staying home in case of illness.

Conclusion:

An outbreak of a White Lung Syndrome in northern China and Ohio in the US although has sparked speculation of a new pandemic threat after COVID-19, it is not a new infection or pathogen as is being mistakenly believed. It is a symptomatic manifestation of a viral or bacterial infection for which antibiotics are available. Also, the long COVID lockdowns, social distancing and stay-at-home routines have impacted the immune system among children, which is making them more susceptible to seasonal infections now that normal social patterns have returned everywhere.

4 Gene Therapy for Sickle Cell Disease

Why in News:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently approved two gene therapies for sickle cell disease, including the first treatment based on the breakthrough CRISPR gene editing technology.

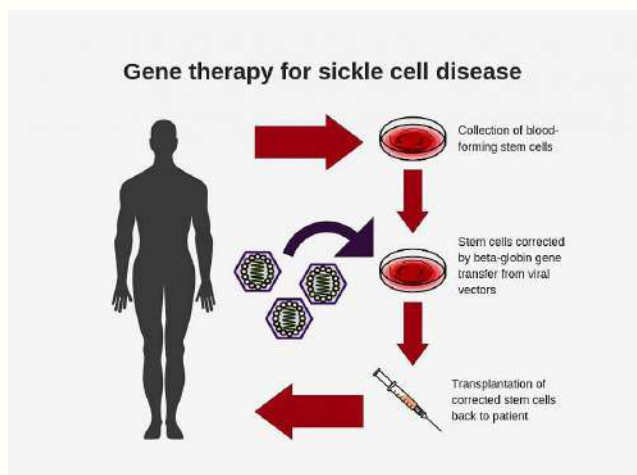
More about the News:

- The regulatory agency approved Lyfgenia, from bluebird bio and Casgevy, from partners Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics. Both treatments got approval for individuals aged 12 years and above.
- Bluebird bio's sickle cell therapy is designed to work by inserting modified genes into the body through disabled viruses to help the patient's red blood cells produce normal haemoglobin.
- For Vertex's therapy, patients must have stem cells harvested from their bone marrow. The cells are then sent to manufacturing facilities where

they are edited using CRISPR/Cas9 technology. Once the cells are incubated, they are infused back into the patient during a month-long hospital stay.

What is Sickle Cell Disease?

- Sickle cell disease is a painful, inherited blood disorder that can be debilitating and lead to premature death. Sickle cell disease involves the production of abnormal, sickle-shaped haemoglobin, which hinders the effective transport of oxygen by red blood cells to the body's tissues.
- The tendency of these sickle cells to clump together can block small blood vessels, resulting in severe pain and potential complications like strokes and organ failure.
- The sole longer-term treatment option for sickle cell disease remains a bone marrow transplant.



Sickle Cell Disease in India:

- In this year's Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made mention of sickle cell anaemia (SCA), a hereditary blood disorder. She emphasized the government's commitment to actively address and eliminate this condition by 2047 through dedicated efforts described as "mission mode."
- India ranks as the second-most impacted nation regarding the estimated number of births expected to have sickle cell anaemia (SCA). Studies and screening initiatives have revealed that blood disorders, known as haemoglobinopathies, are more prevalent among tribal populations in India.

Conclusion:

- Genetic therapies although hold promise to treat many diseases, but they are still new treatment approaches and may have risks. These therapies have been marketed as single-dose therapies, yet there is limited available data on the duration of

their effectiveness.

- Both gene therapies involve prolonged processes lasting months, which include high-dose chemotherapy carrying potential risks of infertility. While fertility preservation methods exist, they may lead to substantial out-of-pocket expenses.
- Additionally, concerns about unintended genomic alterations from the treatment have been raised by FDA staff, prompting the company to plan a 15-year follow-up study to assess long-term safety risks after approval.

5 Anticancer Drug (Methotrexate)

Why in News:

In a significant development, researchers at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), have successfully created a highly fluorescent material. This material serves as an innovative visual sensing platform specifically designed for the detection of the anti-cancer drug Methotrexate (MTX).

About Methotrexate (MTX):

Antimetabolite Class:

- Methotrexate (MTX) belongs to the class of drugs known as antimetabolites.

Medical Applications:

- MTX is utilized in the treatment of various medical conditions, with its primary focus on cancers, autoimmune diseases and specific inflammatory conditions.

Potential Hazards:

- An important aspect of MTX usage is the potential risk associated with an overdose in blood plasma. If the drug remains in the system for more than 10 hours, it can lead to hazardous effects such as poisoning, impacting the lungs, causing stomach ulcers, and even contributing to the risk of a heart stroke.

Significance of Monitoring MTX Levels:

- Monitoring the levels of MTX in the body is crucial due to its potential to cause severe side effects.
- An MTX value exceeding 10 μM in blood plasma becomes hazardous if it persists for more than 10 hours, leading to poisoning effects on vital organs such as the lungs, stomach and heart.

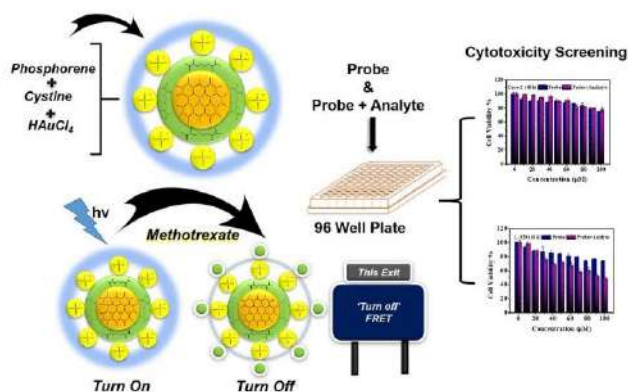
Challenges in Detection:

- Traditional methods for detecting unwanted MTX overdoses are both time-consuming and involve complex instrumentation.

- Given the high cost of MTX and the life-threatening consequences of overdose, there is a pressing need for fast and sensitive detection methodologies.

Ph-Cys-Au Fluorescent Material:

- Scientists at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) have developed a groundbreaking solution using a highly fluorescent material known as Ph-Cys-Au.
- The material composed of phosphorene, cystine, and gold, exhibits exceptional optical properties, rendering it an effective visual sensing platform for detecting MTX overdose.



Non-Enzymatic Approach for MTX Detection:

- The developed material introduces a non-enzymatic approach for the detection of MTX, offering a faster and more sensitive alternative to traditional procedures.

Biocompatibility and Detection Limit:

- The Ph-Cys-Au material stands out from previous systems due to its biocompatibility and remarkable detection limit.
- With a detection limit of approximately 0.0266 nM (for a linear range of 0–140 µL) and 0.0077 nM (for a linear range of 160–260 µL), the material demonstrates high sensitivity.

Way Forward:

This innovative solution not only enhances the efficiency of detection but also opens avenues for safer and more cost-effective therapeutic analysis, contributing to the evolution of anticancer drug monitoring technologies.

6 Discovery of a Rare Exoplanet Family

Why in News:

In a groundbreaking discovery, astronomers using the European Space Agency's Cheops mission have

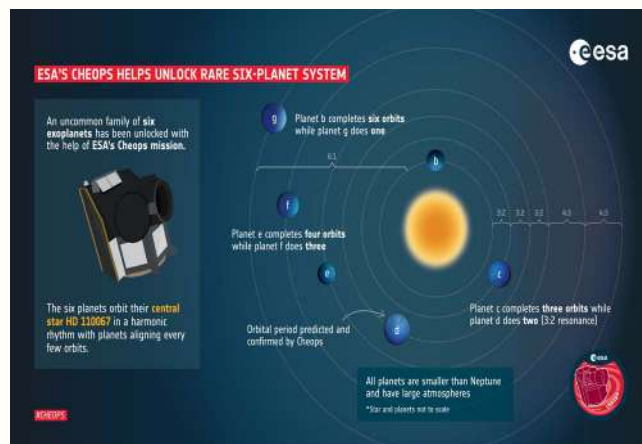
unveiled a rare family of six exoplanets orbiting a nearby bright star, HD 110067, situated in the Coma Berenices constellation. The findings, published in the journal 'Nature', shed light on the mysterious realm of sub-Neptunes planets with radii falling between Earth and Neptune.

HD 110067 Overview:

- HD 110067 is a bright star located in the Coma Berenices constellation.
- It is approximately 100 light-years away from Earth.
- The star is observable from Earth's Northern Hemisphere.

About Exoplanet:

- An exoplanet, short for "extrasolar planet," is a planet located outside our solar system, orbiting a star other than the Sun. These distant planets are identified by astronomers through various observational methods, such as measuring changes in the brightness of a star as a planet passes in front of it (transit method) or detecting the wobbling motion of a star caused by the gravitational pull of an orbiting planet (radial velocity method).



Characteristics of Exoplanets:

- **Diverse Sizes and Compositions:** Exoplanets come in a variety of sizes and compositions, ranging from rocky, Earth-like planets to gas giants like Jupiter.
- **Orbital Diversity:** They can have a wide range of orbital distances from their host stars, resulting in diverse environments with different temperatures and conditions.
- **Detection Techniques:** Astronomers use telescopes and specialized instruments to detect the presence of exoplanets indirectly by observing their effects on the light or motion of their host stars.
- **Transit Method:** In the transit method, astronomers observe periodic dimming of a star's

light as an exoplanet passes between the star and the observer, providing information about the planet's size and orbit.

About Sub-Neptunes:

- Sub-Neptunes have radii that fall within the range between Earth and Neptune.
- They are typically larger than Earth but smaller than the ice giants in our solar system, like Uranus and Neptune.
- These planets are often found in close-in orbits around their host stars, meaning they are located relatively close to their stellar bodies.
- More than half of all Sun-like stars are believed to have sub-Neptunes in close-in orbits.

Significance:

- Brightest star known to host more than four transiting exoplanets.
- Potential for undiscovered planets within or beyond the temperate zone.
- Opportunities to further explore the HD 110067 system.
- Learning how sub-Neptunes in this configuration might form.

Conclusion:

The revelation of the HD 110067 exoplanetary system opens a window into the complexities of sub-Neptunes, offering astronomers a unique opportunity to deepen their understanding of planetary formation and evolution.

7

Mefenamic Acid

Why in News:

Pharma standard body Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) has issued a drug safety alert for the commonly used painkiller mefenamic acid, popularly sold under the brand name Meftal, saying its constituent, triggers severe allergic reactions like the DRESS syndrome, which affects internal organs.

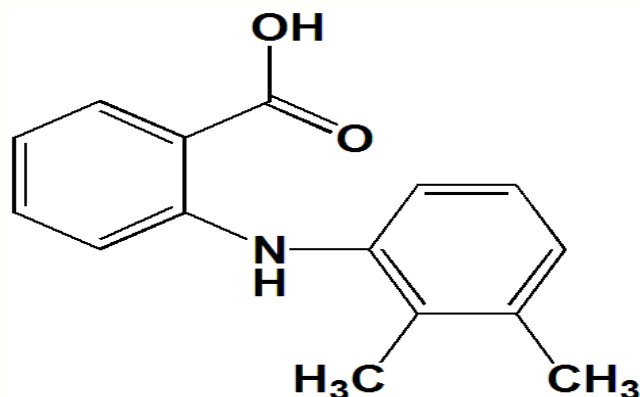
What is Mefenamic Acid:

- Mefenamic acid is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) used to treat mild to moderate pain. It may also be used to treat menstrual cramps and other conditions as determined by a doctor, and is available only with a doctor's prescription.
- Meftal has been linked to possible negative impacts on the cardiovascular system. Its continued usage could heighten the chances of stomach ulcers, bleeding, and associated issues. Additionally, certain specialists have raised concerns about potential kidney-related issues connected to Meftal usage.
- The adverse drug reaction found during the

preliminary analysis of meftal was eosinophilia and systemic symptoms called DRESS syndrome.

About DRESS Syndrome:

- DRESS syndrome (Drug Rash with Eosinophilia and Systemic Symptoms) is a severe allergic reaction affecting around 10% of individuals, potentially deadly and caused by certain medications.
- It is also called Drug-Induced Hypersensitivity Syndrome (DIHS), which denotes serious allergic reactions caused by specific medications.
- It is identified through symptoms like skin rash, elevated body temperature, enlarged lymph nodes, and potential complications within internal organs.



mefenamic acid

About Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC):

- Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is an Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that sets standards for drugs in the country. It regularly releases updates on the standards of commonly used drugs
- It publishes official documents for improving the Quality of Medicines by way of adding new and updating existing monographs in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) and promotes the rational use of generic medicines by publishing the National Formulary of India.
- The IPC also provides IP Reference Substances (IPRS), which serve as a unique identifier for testing an item and determining its purity, as outlined in IP guidelines.

Conclusion:

The healthcare professionals emphasise the importance of responsible and informed use of any medication. The importance of consulting healthcare providers before starting or continuing any medication should not be taken lightly. This especially applies to medications that have a history of gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, or renal issues.



Economic Issues



1 Purchasing Manager's Index

Why in News:

The S&P Global Purchasing Managers' Index highlighted India's manufacturing sector performance which grew to 56 in November from 55.5 in October. However, the services sector PMI experienced a slight dip, dropping from 58.4 in October to 56.9 in November. This PMI data is compiled by S&P Global for over 40 economies worldwide.

About Purchasing Managers Index:

- PMI or a Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is an indicator of business activity both in the manufacturing and services sectors.
- Started in 1948 by the US-based Institute of Supply Management, the Purchasing Managers' Index, or PMI, has now become one of the most closely watched indicators of business activity across the world.
- The PMI awards number from 0 to 100. PMI under 50 represents a contraction while reading at 50 indicates no change.

Better output

The purchasing managers index for manufacturing rose to 56 in November, up from 55.5 in October.



Highlights of the Index:

Manufacturing Sector:

- Having recorded a robust 7.6 per cent growth in the last quarter, the growth of this sector aligns with India's overall economic performance, positioning the country as one of the fastest-growing major economies this fiscal year.

- India's manufacturing industry maintained its robust performance in November, with output regaining growth momentum. The inflation rate fell to the lowest in a 40-month stretch.
- Key indicators contributing to the index sector's growth included a pick-up in output and new orders in November. New orders (30%), output (25%), employment (20%), delivery time of suppliers (15%) and stock of purchased goods (10%).

Service Sector:

- India's services sector activity expanded in November though at the slowest pace in a year, prompting businesses to maintain a positive outlook for the next 12 months.
- Services PMI was reported at 61 in September, 60.1 in August, 62.3 in July, 58.5 in June, 61.2 in May, 62 in April and 57.8 in March.
- Job creation also saw an increase, marking the eighth consecutive month of expansion in this aspect.
- The index highlighted that international demand for Indian services has improved further.

Way Forward:

The index projections align with India's overall economic performance, having recorded a robust 7.6 per cent growth in the last quarter, positioning the country as one of the fastest-growing major economies this fiscal year, with expectations for a continued strong performance in 2024.

2 RBI Monetary Policy

Why in News:

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India in its monetary policy has raised the GDP growth forecast for the current financial year 2023-24 to 7% as against 6.5% earlier. The Monetary Policy Committee kept the repo rate unchanged for the 5th time to 6.5%. The MPC also maintained the policy stance of 'withdrawal of accommodation' by the majority of 5 out of 6 members.

Key Points of Monetary Policy Statement:

- Amidst a globally unsettled economic environment, the Indian economy stands resilient and dynamic.
- Banks and corporates show stronger balance sheets, fiscal consolidation progresses, and forex reserves offer a buffer against external shocks.
- The global economy remains delicate, marked by a slowdown in world trade amidst increasing global protectionist measures.
- Despite considerable efforts to restore global

supply chains, factors such as high debt levels, ongoing geopolitical tensions, and severe weather conditions amplify the risks to both global growth and the inflation landscape.

- Declining inflation in advanced economies has raised prospects for an earlier conclusion to the tightening of monetary policies, boosting market confidence.
- Headline inflation has notably eased to 4.9% in October from 7.4% in July, observed across all components of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) - food, fuel and core (excluding food and fuel).
- Core inflation's broad-based reduction indicates the success of monetary policy in driving disinflation.
- In the future, private consumption is anticipated to receive backing from incremental rural demand, a bolstered manufacturing sector, and sustained vigor in services.
- Healthy financial standings of both banks and corporations, along with elevated capacity utilization, ongoing business confidence and the government's emphasis on infrastructure expenditure are likely to drive private sector capital expenditure.
- The downward pressure from external demand is predicted to ease, partly due to a potential upturn in both merchandise and services exports.
- Projections suggest real GDP growth at 7.0% for 2023-24, with risks balanced evenly.
- Food prices will significantly shape the inflation outlook. High global sugar prices also pose concerns. CPI inflation is anticipated at 5.4% for 2023-24.

Conclusion:

The main objective of monetary policy is to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth as price stability is an essential pre-condition for sustainable economic growth. Therefore, it is important that during the meeting of the MPC, both the objectives should be kept in mind and only controlling inflation should not be its aim.

3 India Infrastructure Report 2023

Why in News:

The India Infrastructure Report 2023 on Urban Planning and Development was released on 4 December 2023 by Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, former Vice-President of India.

About the Report:

- India Infrastructure Report (IIR) is a comprehensive document that covers various aspects such as planning and governance, smart initiatives, PPPs and financing, housing and

migration, public service delivery, integrating infrastructure, and urban redevelopment by subject matter experts.

- It is a collaborative effort of the IDFC Foundation, Infrastructure Development Corporation (Karnataka) Limited (iDeCK) and National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).

About iDeCK:

- iDeCK is a joint venture between the Government of Karnataka, IDFC Foundation and HDFC to work on sustainable infrastructure projects. It supports research and capacity building activities through IDFC Foundation and ICAP Trust.



Highlights of the India Infrastructure Report:

- Report systematically addresses key themes related to India's urban challenges. These include planning and governance, smart initiatives, public-private partnerships (PPP) and financing, housing and migration, public service delivery, infrastructure integration and urban redevelopment.
- The report said that poor planning has been highlighted as a major factor in urban challenges. According to the report, cities should adopt a redevelopment policy that emphasizes reclaiming land from private owners in exchange for higher floor space index (FSI) and better road connectivity. It also advocates the creation of dynamic cities in which emphasis has been laid on the need to increase the carrying capacity along with the development of cities.
- The report highlights the urgent need for financial sustainability by highlighting the analysis of financial management of urban local bodies. The report promotes PPPs and municipal bonds as important instruments for financing urban development initiatives.
- According to the report, while India has been a leader in PPPs in roads, ports, airports and energy sector, the urban sector has seen less PPP participation.

Urban scenario in India:

- India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and its growth is driven by cities.
- Cities contribute 66% to the national GDP, this number is expected to increase to 80% by the year 2050.
- India's seven largest metropolitan areas are Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad.

Conclusion:

IIR 2023 comprises 25 chapters covering the urban development and policy ecosystem on the current status of urban development in India. The report is helpful in identifying and analyzing the legal, fiscal, regulatory, technical, social and ideological aspects related to contemporary issues related to infrastructure development. It is an invaluable resource for those involved in urban policy formulation as well as those interested in India's infrastructure and urbanization development, such as policy makers, investors, academics, financiers and multilateral agencies.

4 Jute Industry

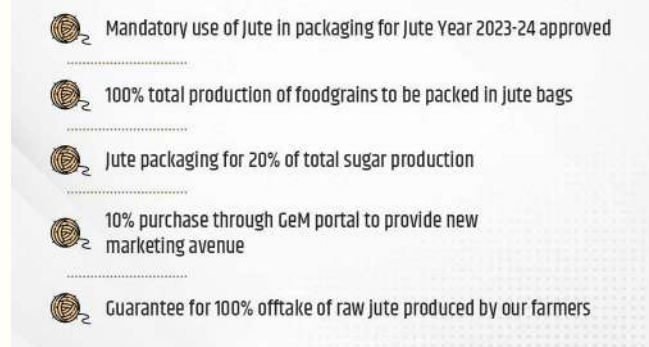
Why in News:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, has approved reservation norms for mandatory use of jute in packaging for the Jute Year 2023 -24 (1st July 2023 to 30th June 2024). The reservation is provided under The Jute Packaging Materials (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) Act, 1987.

About the Reservation Norms and its Benefits:

- The Mandatory packaging norms approved for Jute Year 2023-24 provide for 100% reservation of the food grains and 20% of sugar to be compulsorily packed in jute bags.
- 75% of the total production of the Jute Industry is Jute Sacking Bags of which 85% is supplied to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State Procurement Agencies (SPAs) and the remaining is exported/sold directly.
- Reservation for packaging in jute packaging material consumed around 65% of the raw jute produced in the country (in 2022-23).
- By bringing into effect the provision of the JPM Act, the Government will provide relief to 4 lakh workers employed in jute mills and ancillary units as well as support the livelihood of around 40 lakh farm families.
- It will also help in protecting the environment because jute is natural, bio-degradable, renewable and reusable fibre and hence fulfils all sustainability parameters.

- JPM Act, 1987 protects the interests of Jute farmers, workers and persons engaged in jute goods' production.



Key facts about Jute:

- India is the largest producer of jute followed by Bangladesh and China.
- Jute is one of the most important natural fibres after cotton in terms of cultivation and usage.
- Climatic conditions required for its growth
 - » **Temperature:** Between 25-35°C.
 - » **Rainfall:** Around 150-250 cm.
 - » **Soil Type:** Well-drained alluvial soil.
- It is mainly grown in eastern India because of the rich alluvial soil of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta.
- In India, major jute-producing states include West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura.

Conclusion:

The Jute industry occupies an important place in the national economy of India in general and Eastern Region in particular i.e. West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It is one of the major industries in the eastern region, particularly in West Bengal. The reservation norms in present proposal would protect the interest of domestic production of raw jute and jute packaging material in India, thereby, making India self-reliant in consonance with Atmanirbhar Bharat.

5 Bioeconomy in India

Why in News:

The Union Health Minister, Mansukh Mandaviya, highlighted an eightfold increase in India's 'Bio-Economy' over the past eight years, soaring from \$10 billion to \$80 billion. He emphasized the rapid growth of Bio Agriculture, Bio Pharmaceuticals, and Bio Services as emerging sectors, and said that India will soon become one of the top 10 bio economies of the world.

About Bio-Economy:

- Bioeconomy refers to the set of economic activities that involve the use of biotechnology and biomass in the production of goods, services, or energy.
- The biotech sector is primarily divided into five major segments: bio-pharma, bio-services, bio-agri, bio-industrial and bio-informatics, which together contribute to the Bioeconomy.

Bioeconomy in India:

- Presently, India's bioeconomy contributes 2.6% to the GDP. The 'Bioeconomy Report 2022' envisions this contribution to be closer to 5% by 2030. India has set a target for the biotechnology industry to grow to \$150 billion by 2025 and \$600 billion by 2030.
- There are more than 760 companies and 4,240 startups in the biotechnology sector in the country. As of 2020, the pharmaceutical sector contributed 62% to the Indian bioeconomy, followed by bio-agriculture (16%), and bio-services and bio-industries (together accounting for 22%).
- When it comes to fostering Innovation, India has the 3rd largest Startups ecosystem globally; and it is the largest vaccine manufacturer. Moreover, India's ranking in global science and technology indices continues to rise and India has been ranked 40th among the innovative economies as per Global Innovation Index, 2022.

Major steps by India to boost Bioeconomy:

- **National Biotechnology Development Strategy:** This strategy aims to make India globally competitive in biotechnology research, innovation, translation, entrepreneurship and industrial growth and be a \$150 billion Bioeconomy by 2025.
- The National Biotechnology Development Strategy 2022-25 has focused on skill development, R&D, knowledge sharing, commercialization facilities and public-private partnership mode to connect to the markets.
- **National Biofuel policy:** The Prime Minister's vision for an Atmanirbhar Bharat and energy self-reliance by 2047 has given a significant boost to the bio-industry sector. The government has accelerated the implementation of ethanol-blended gasoline, allowing up to a 20 percent blend starting from April 2023.
- **National Biopharma Mission:** this mission intends to bring together business and academia to encourage entrepreneurship and domestic production in the biopharmaceutical industry.
- Additionally, the Bio-Agri sector, encompassing Bt Cotton, pesticides, and marine and animal biotechnology, aims to increase its contribution to the bioeconomy from USD 10.5 billion to USD

20 billion by 2025.

Conclusion:

Funding in biotechnology in India has remained static at just 0.0001% of the country's GDP. This requires a substantial increase to make a meaningful impact on the growth of bioeconomy in India. The ambitious goal of reaching \$600 billion by 2030 will demand strong financial backing and supportive policies. Additionally, the need for fostering an environment that encourages risk-taking among Indian scientists will be essential to foster innovation and drive industrial progress.

6

Anarcho-Capitalism

Why in News:

The recent victory of Javier Milei, a self-identified anarcho-capitalist in Argentina has bolstered the prominence of the ideology of Anarcho-capitalism, contributing to the ideology's increasing visibility.

What is Anarcho-Capitalism?

- Anarcho-capitalism is a political philosophy that advocates for the elimination of the state in favour of the voluntary provision of essential services like defence and law by private companies in a free marketplace.
- Anarcho-capitalists believe that citizens would immensely benefit when these services are provided in a competitive marketplace than when the state holds a legal monopoly over the use of coercion.
- This term was first coined by American libertarian economist Murray Rothbard. Belgian political economist Gustave de Molinari is considered to be the first anarcho-capitalist.
- David Friedman, Edward Stringham and Michael Huemer are a few contemporary anarcho-capitalists.

What this ideology conveys?

- Anarcho-capitalism on the lines of libertarian liberalism, promotes the principle of limited government involvement in economic and social matters. Traditionally, free market advocates have supported the private provision of most goods and services, except police and courts which, it was believed, could only be provided by the state.
- However, Anarcho-capitalism takes these tenets a notch further and advocates for a free market society and the total absence of government. It believes that private companies, driven by competition in a free market, can offer better and cheaper policing and legal services compared to state-provided ones.
- Instead of relying on government-funded

services, individuals would pay private companies for protection and dispute resolution. These companies, aiming to satisfy customers to survive, would be more accountable and efficient than the current state system. In this setup, competition among these private firms would drive quality up and prices down, allowing people to choose services based on their satisfaction.

Disagreement and Conflict:

- Critics argue that having multiple firms providing services like police and judiciary within the same region could lead to disputes and clashes between armed private entities safeguarding the interests of their paying clients, resulting in chaos.
- They point out that market-based police and legal systems might cater more to the rich, enabling them to evade justice by offering higher payments to private police or courts, leaving the poor without fair access to justice.
- Anarcho-capitalism could exacerbate socio-economic disparities, allowing the affluent to potentially manipulate the system for their benefit while leaving the economically disadvantaged without adequate recourse or protection.

Conclusion:

Anarcho-capitalists believe market competition would foster cooperation among firms, preventing conflicts and favoritism towards the wealthy, potentially improving access to justice for the poor. Critics, however, remain skeptical about potential conflicts, inequality, and the challenges of implementing a functional decentralized system. The feasibility and fairness of anarcho-capitalism in providing essential services remain contentious and subject to ongoing debate.

7 Dark Patterns

Why in News:

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) recently released the Guidelines for the Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns in 2023. This decision has come after a detailed consultation with the Department of the Consumer Affairs and Advertising Standards Council of India.

What is the Dark Pattern?

- Dark patterns are the methods or tricks used by online platforms to mislead customers and prevent them from making the right choices.
- The guidelines define dark patterns as any practices or deceptive design patterns using user interface or user experience interactions on many platforms i.e. designed to mislead or trick users into doing something, they originally did not intend or want to do.

- In turn, they benefit the company or platform employing the designs.
- Examples of dark patterns include baseless countdowns for online deals, conditions in fine print that add to costs, making cancellation options hard to see, etc.

Identified Dark Patterns:

The guidelines have listed 13 specified dark patterns-

- **False Urgency-** The platform falsely emits the shortage of any particular product or shows fake popularity of that product to mislead the user into making a hasty decision.
- **Basket Sneaking-** The inclusion of additional items (product services, charity payment) at the time of checkout from the platform or billing without the consent of the user.
- **Confirm Shaming-** Using a phrase, video or audio means to create a sense of fear, shame or ridicule in the mind of the user to nudge the user to purchase or subscribe to something.
- **Forced Action-** Forcing a user to buy any additional items, sign up for unrelated services or share personal info in order to buy any product or services originally intended by the user.
- **Subscription Trap-** Making the cancellation process of a paid subscription complex.
- **Interface interference-** Manipulation of information i.e. hiding or obscuring relevant information while highlighting specific information.
- **Bait and Switch-** Advertisement of a particular outcome but deceptively servicing alternate outcome.
- **Drip Pricing-** Not disclosing the actual cost for purchase or continuation of any service.
- **Disguised Advertisement-** Advertisements are blended into user-generated content in order to trick customers into clicking them.
- **Nagging-** Annoying the user with repetitive interactions and advertisements to effectuate a transaction.
- **Trick Questions**
- **SaaS Billing-** the process of generating and collecting payments by consumers on a recurring basis.
- **Rogue Malware-** Ransomware or scareware used to mislead users.

Way Forward:

Online platforms are using misleading and confusing tactics to boost their profits, jeopardizing the internet users' experience and leaving them susceptible to financial data exploitation by major tech companies. Therefore strict adherence to these guidelines is crucial to make the Internet a safe and viable platform.

1 Ensuring Nutritive Security with Food Security

Why in News:

Following the recent announcement by PM Narendra Modi on an extension of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013, discussions regarding the persistent nutrition gap in India have surfaced again.

Nutrition vs Addressing Hunger:

- There have been several efforts by the government to eradicate hunger and ensure food security in India. However, despite such concentrated efforts to address hunger, almost 1 in 3 children is stunted and underweight.
- Worldometer predicts India to be the largest contributor of undernourished people in the world, with around 14.37% of its population not receiving enough nutrition.
- As per National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS 5), 36% of children under the age five years are stunted, 19% are wasted, 32% are underweight and 3% are overweight.
- 67% of children below the age of 5 years are affected by anaemia. On the other hand, 57% of Indian Women suffer from anaemia when compared to Men (Under 50 years) in India.
- 19% of Women and 16% of Men under 50 are undernourished, while 24% of Women and 23% of Men are victims of obesity. Conclusively, 40% of the humongous population of 1.4 Billion is malnourished.

Bridging the Nutrition Gap:

- India's average protein consumption of 47 grams per day is lowest among Asian and developed countries. Inclusion of protein sources like pulses, legumes, dairy and lean meats, can enhance the quality of protein intake which is essential for supporting growth and overall health.
- Further, fortifying food rations with micronutrients like iron, vitamin A, and zinc can combat specific nutritional deficiencies prevalent in certain populations, especially vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and young children.

Efforts by the Government:

- The government introduced millets in the PDS, promoting organic farming of millets to enhance its production and consumption. Millets have also been integrated in the supplementary nutrition in the ICDS programme.
- Although, the implementation of the same is not uniform across States due to lack of adoption of

millets in PDS in states as they prefer rice and wheat.

- The guidelines have been developed for school (nutrition) kitchen gardens to help develop skill in children and awareness of nutritious food choices. Such gardens have been set up in government schools in Odisha, Jharkhand and Karnataka, in convergence with horticulture department. The North Eastern states also produce and consume local and indigenous foods rich in specific nutrients thus contributing to diet diversification.

Way Forward:

Ensuring nutritive security has long-term health benefits going beyond nutrition outcomes through reducing the risk of diet-related diseases and enhancing the resilience of communities to health challenges.

2 Kushana Coins

Why in News:

In Pakistan, archaeologists have unearthed an extremely rare hoard of copper coins, believed to be over 2,000 years old. The ancient artefacts were found amidst the ruins of a Buddhist shrine in Mohenjo-Daro.

About the Findings:

- The hoard of copper coins are speculated to belong to the era of the Kushana Empire, a predominantly Buddhist dynasty that governed the area from roughly the 2nd century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. They conquered the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, established in Central Asia by Alexander the Great.
- The Buddhist temple that yielded these coins is presently situated within the extensive remnants of Mohenjo Daro, a site that goes back to approximately 2600 BC in southeast Pakistan. The stupa was built on the ruins of Mohenjo Daro 1600 years after its fall.

About Kushana coins:

- Kushana coins depict images of the kings, showcasing how they intended to be perceived by their subjects.
- These coins were issued by Vima (a person who issued coins).
- Vima issued gold coins in three denominations, Double Stater/Dinar (~16 gms), Dinar (~8 gms) and Quarter Dinar (~2 gms).
- Vima also issued copper coinage, in three denominations, Tetradrachm (~17 gms) Didrachm (~8.5 gms) and Drachm (~4.2 gms).

About Stupa:

- The stupa (“Stupa” is Sanskrit word for heap) is an important form of Buddhist architecture, though it predates Buddhism. It is generally considered to be a sepulchral monument—a place of burial or a receptacle for religious objects. In Buddhism, the earliest stupas contained portions of the Buddha’s ashes, and as a result, the stupa began to be associated with the body of the Buddha. Adding the Buddha’s ashes to the mound of dirt activated it with the energy of the Buddha himself.

Conclusion:

Kushana copper coins are very rare which adds significance to their discovery, offering a valuable opportunity to delve into the nuances of Kushana coinage. These artefacts not only contribute to our understanding of the Kushana Empire but also enrich our insights into the broader historical and numismatic aspects associated with this ancient civilization.

3 Femicide on Rise Globally

Why in News:

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN Women recently published a study titled “Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide)”, in November. This report highlights that while the total number of homicides worldwide decreased in 2022, the number of femicides has increased globally.

More about the Study:

- The study shows that about 88,900 women and girls were intentionally killed worldwide on the grounds of gender-related factors in 2022. This is the highest number of such fatalities in a year, in the past 20 years.
- **Male and female share of homicide victims:** The victims of homicides worldwide tend to be men or boys, forming 80% of the total victims of homicide in 2022. Women’s share in this was 20%.
- **Share of intimate partner/family-related homicides among all female and male homicides:** A significant disparity was evident between female and male victims, with women more likely to be murdered by their partners or someone known to them. This extends from the fact that women are subjected to physical violence mostly from their immediate family members.
- Of the 88,900 female victims of homicides in 2022, 48,800 or 55% were killed by family members or intimate partners. Meanwhile, only 12% of male homicide victims were killed by persons known to them.

- **The continent-wise data on homicides among all female and male:** In Europe, among over half the female homicides the perpetrators are partners or related to the victims, whereas among men the share was only 18%. In the United States, this number was 45% among women homicides and 12% among men homicides).
- In 2022, Africa recorded approximately 20,000 female victims of homicide related to intimate partners or family, marking the highest number among continents. For the first time in 13 years, Africa surpassed Asia in femicides. In Asia, 18,400 women were killed by their families during the same period.
- **Status in India:** The report highlighted a small decline in gender-based killings in India over the past decade. However, the killing of women due to dowry-related reasons, accusations of witchcraft and other gender-related factors still persists.
- Dowry has consistently been the leading cause, while honour killings and murder related to witchcraft accusations, formed a small share too during this period.

Conclusion:

The pervasive nature of violence against women is deeply entrenched in societal structures, cultural norms, and economic frameworks. This insidious violence, perpetuated through family dynamics and often ignored by authorities, serves as a means of controlling women. Urgent and comprehensive action is imperative to address this alarming trend and protect the rights and well-being of women throughout the globe.

4 Multidimensional Poverty in India

Why in News:

Replying to a short-duration discussion in Rajya Sabha, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman informed that around 13.5 crore people have moved out of “multidimensional” poverty in the last five years.

Poverty:

- Poverty is a state or situation in which a person or a group of people don’t have enough money or the basic things they need to live. Poverty means that a person doesn’t make enough money from their job to meet their basic needs.

Key Statistics:

- India has registered a significant decline of 9.89% points in number of India’s multidimensional poor from 24.85% in 2015-16 to 14.96% in 2019-2021. The rural areas witnessed the fastest decline in poverty from 32.59% to 19.28%. During the same period, the urban areas saw a

reduction in poverty from 8.65% to 5.27%. UP registered the largest decline in number of poor with 3.43 crore people escaping multidimensional poverty. Fastest reduction in the proportion of multidimensional poor was observed in the States of UP, Bihar, MP, Odisha and Rajasthan.

About National Multidimensional Poverty Index:

- Nodal Agency: NITI Aayog
- It is an indigenised index for monitoring the performance of States and Union Territories (UTs) in addressing multidimensional poverty.
- The National MPI measures simultaneous deprivations across the three equally weighted dimensions of health, education, and standard of living that are represented by 12 SDG-aligned indicators.
- These indicators include nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, maternal health, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts.

SDG-1: Poverty

- Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030.
- Reduce at least by half the proportion of people living in poverty according to national definitions by 2030.
- Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures to combat poverty by 2030.
- By 2030, all men and women to have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services.

Conclusion:

Flagship programmes like the Poshan Abhiyan and Anaemia Mukta Bharat, Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), Saubhagya, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), and Samagra Shiksha have played a major role in significantly reducing multidimensional poverty in the country. All of these schemes are very helpful in reduction of multidimensional poverty in the country.

5 Hornbill Festival

Why in News:

The 10 day 24th edition of the Hornbill Festival concluded at Naga Heritage Village Kisama. This year, USA, Germany and Colombia are the partner countries and Assam is the partner state in the Hornbill Festival.

Hornbill Festival:

- The Hornbill Festival is an annual festival celebrated in the northeastern Indian state of Nagaland from 1 to 10 December.

- The festival was first organized in 2000 as a mix of cultural exhibitions. This year's celebration was its 23rd edition. The purpose of the Hornbill Festival is to introduce the Naga tribes to each other and to introduce the country and the world with the culture of the Naga society. The festival is named after the 'Hornbill' bird, which is the most revered bird for the Nagas. It is often seen in the forests of Nagaland state. The festival showcases a mix of cultural performances and aims at preserving and reviving the culture. The festivities include dance performances, crafts, parades, games, food fairs, religious ceremonies, etc.
- It also includes traditional Naga Morangs exhibition and sale of arts and crafts, herbal medicine stalls, flower show and sale, cultural medley, Naga wrestling etc.

The Great Hornbill Bird:

- Hornbills (Bucerotidae) are a family of birds found in tropical and subtropical Africa, Asia and Melanesia.
- India is home to nine species of hornbills.
- The Northeast region has the highest diversity of hornbill species within India.
- The Great Hornbill is a colorful bird found in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- They have a long, downward-curving beak that is often brightly coloured. Sometimes there is a cover on the upper jaw.
- The Great Hornbill is the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh and Kerala.

Threats:

- The Great Hornbill is threatened primarily by habitat loss due to deforestation.
- It is hunted for its meat, fat and body parts such as coverts and tail feathers, which are used as adornments.
- **Conservation status:** It is listed as a vulnerable bird in the IUCN Red List.

6 Odisha's Bali Jatra

Why in News:

The celebration of Odisha's rich maritime heritage, Bali Jatra, Asia's largest open-air annual trade fair, commenced along the banks of the Mahanadi River in Cuttack. Commemorating this ancient legacy, the festival started on the occasion of Kartik Purnima on November 27 and spanned until 5 December.

About Bali Jatra Trade Fair:

- The literal meaning of the word Balijatra means a voyage to Bali, an island in Indonesia. It is a socio-cultural event that commemorates the past association of Odisha people with Bali and transgenic voyages they undertook to South East

Asian countries.

- Bali Yatra celebrates the prowess and craftsmanship of adept sailors who played a pivotal role in establishing Kalinga, one of the most prosperous empires of its era.
- Bali's 'Masakapan ke Tukad' festival is similar to the Bali Yatra festival in Odisha where both festivals honour the memory of their maritime ancestors.
- The celebration of Bali Jatra showcases grand fairs, elaborate rides, food and dance. Indian women perform 'Boita Bandana', crafting boats of paper or banana leaf (sholapith) with lighted lamps inside and float them down the Mahanadi as a part of the celebration.

The Kalinga Empire:

- The Kalinga Empire (present-day Odisha) is known for its renowned maritime history. The empire flourished owing to its strategic geographical placement, leading to the emergence of ports as far back as the 4th and 5th centuries BC.
- Some of the famous ports of the Kalinga included Tamralipti, Manikpatna, Chelitalo, Palur, and Pithunda which allowed India to connect with other countries via the sea. They had trade links with Srilanka, Java, Borneo, Sumatra, Bali and Burma. Bali formed a part of the four islands that were collectively called the Suvarnavdipa, today known as Indonesia.
- The Kalingas built large boats named 'Boitas' for trade with the Indonesian islands. These ships, equipped with copper hulls, had the capacity to accommodate up to seven hundred individuals and animals.
- The Bay of Bengal was historically termed the Kalinga Sea due to the prevalence of these boats. The maritime influence of Kalinga is evident in Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa, where the King of Kalinga is dubbed 'The Lord of the Sea,' underscoring their dominance in those waters.

Conclusion:

In addition to its cultural and historical significance, Bali Jatra holds a crucial commercial role. It becomes a bustling hub where people can purchase a wide array of goods, ranging from automobiles and electronic gadgets to locally crafted artisanal products, often at significantly low prices. Organized by the Cuttack district administration, the Cuttack Municipal Corporation, and various government bodies, this nine-day festival draws crowds numbering in the lakhs from Cuttack and neighboring districts, that aids in enhancing the economy of the state.

7

Drones to Women Self-Help Groups

Why in News:

The Union Cabinet approved a scheme as part of PM Modi's 'lakhpati didi' initiative under which the central government will provide drones to as many as 15,000 Women's Self-Help Groups over the next four years. The scheme would have a financial outlay of Rs. 1,261 crore for two years beginning 2024-25. This is a central sector scheme.

About the scheme:

- **Empowerment and Training:** Identified clusters, conducive to drone usage, will be targeted and 15,000 women SHGs across states will be selected to receive drones. Comprehensive training programs will equip members with drone piloting skills and agricultural expertise, enabling them to provide rental services and support.
- **Financial Support:** Central Financial Assistance covers 80% of the drone cost, up to a maximum of Rs. Eight Lakh will be extended to the SHGs. The remaining amount will be raised through the National Agriculture Infra Financing Facility (AIF), with an interest subvention of 3% on the AIF loan.
- **Innovative Roles:** Members of SHGs will be trained as drone pilots and technicians, facilitating not just drone operation but also repairs and maintenance, bridging the gap between suppliers and SHGs.
- **Nano Fertilizer Adoption:** The scheme promotes the use of Nano Fertilizers like Nano Urea and Nano DAP through drone services, facilitating efficient pesticide application and fertilizer distribution.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Envisioned as a means of sustainable business and livelihood support, the scheme aims to enable 15,000 SHGs to earn an additional income of at least Rs. One lakh per annum.
- **Technological Leap in Agriculture:** With the infusion of advanced drone technology, the scheme is poised to enhance agricultural efficiency, increase crop yields, and reduce operational costs, thereby benefitting farmers at large.

Conclusion:

This scheme stands as a testament to India's commitment to leveraging technology for the betterment of agriculture while empowering women in rural communities. The scheme will help infuse advanced technology in agriculture for improved efficiency, enhanced crop yield and reduced cost of operation for the benefit of farmers.

MGNREGA: Shaping Rural Employment Landscape

About MGNREGA

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a transformative initiative launched in India to address rural unemployment and enhance livelihoods. Established on August 23, 2005, and officially implemented on February 2, 2006, MGNREGA, formerly known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), has played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's social and economic fabric.

Challenges for MGNREGA

Economic:

- Low wage rates leading to local contractor dominance.
- Inadequate budgetary allocations, with funds depleted within the initial months.

Administrative:

- Fabrication of job cards, demand-supply mismatch, and wage payment delays.
- Non-payment of unemployment allowances and ineffective local bodies.

Political:

- Asymmetry in resource flow, favoring states with better planning capabilities.
- Corruption through inflated muster rolls and middlemen.

Social:

- Behavioral implications with workers being paid for perfunctory tasks.
- Loss of skilled occupations, contributing to the erosion of distinctive skills.

Objectives

- **Livelihood Security:** Provide a legal guarantee of at least 100 days of unskilled wage employment in a financial year.
- **Asset Creation:** Create a rural asset base to boost productive employment and augment household income.

Implementation Process

- **Enrollment and Application:** Rural adults register with Gram Panchayats, obtain employment cards upon application.
- **Job Allocation:** Employment offered within a 5 km radius, with additional pay for distant work sites.

Key Features of MGNREGA

- Guarantees employment, with at least one-third of beneficiaries being women.
- Payment as per state agricultural laborers' wages or rates notified by the central government.
- Mandates a minimum 60:40 wage-material ratio for project sustainability.
- Gram Sabhas recommend and execute at least 50% of projects for local involvement.
- Proactive disclosure through wall writings, citizen boards and social audits for accountability.
- Cost-sharing between the central government and states for wages, material and administrative expenses.
- Employment within 15 days of demand with unemployment allowance if delayed.

Significance of MGNREGA

- Largest global social security scheme, empowering vulnerable sections.
- Extensive engagement of women and marginalized groups, contributing to poverty alleviation.
- Drastic reduction in distress migration and enhanced education for children in MGNREGA households.
- Altered rural labor market dynamics, providing income to households.
- Increased wage rates and purchasing power, bolstering the rural economy.
- Financial inclusion through direct transfers, reducing dependence on local money lenders.
- Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through decentralization in planning and monitoring.

National Human Rights Commission

About NHRC

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India, established on October 12, 1993, under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, plays a pivotal role in safeguarding and promoting human rights in the country.

Way Forward

A critical evaluation of NHRC reveals its instrumental role in upholding human rights, but it necessitates substantial reforms for optimal effectiveness.

Role and Key Functions

- Endowed with the powers of a civil court, NHRC ensures a judicial character in its proceedings.
- Investigates human rights grievances suo moto or through petitions.
- Empowered to intervene in judicial proceedings related to human rights violations.
- Specialized Divisions focus on Law, Investigation, Policy Research, Training and Administration.
- Investigate complaints of human rights violations or negligence in prevention by public servants.
- Make recommendations for effective implementation to the government.

NHRC Overview

- Established as an independent statutory body.
- Headquarter: New Delhi
- Functions as a watchdog for human rights, aligning with Indian constitutional guarantees and international covenants.
- Human rights, as per UN definition, are inherent to all individuals without discrimination.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 marked a milestone, prompting the need for national human rights institutions.
- The Paris Principles laid the foundation for NHRC's establishment, adhering to international standards.

Composition of NHRC

Key Members:

- Multi-member body comprising a chairperson, five full-time Members and seven deemed Members.

Chairperson Eligibility:

- A person who has served as the Chief Justice of India or a judge of the Supreme Court is eligible to become the chairman.

Appointment Process:

- The President appoints the chairman and members.
- Appointments based on the recommendations of a 6 member committee.
- Committee members:
 - » Prime Minister as the head.
 - » Speaker of the Lok Sabha.
 - » Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
 - » Leaders of the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament.
 - » Union Home Minister.

Tenure:

- Chairperson and members hold office for a term of three years or until reaching the age of 70, whichever comes earlier.

Removal Authority:

- The President has the authority to remove the chairman or any member under specific circumstances.

Removal Criteria:

- Removal can occur only on charges of proven misbehavior or incapacity.
- An inquiry conducted by a Supreme Court Judge is necessary to establish misbehavior or incapacity.

BRAIN BOOSTERS

Garba Dance

Why in Broadcast

UNESCO has officially added Gujarat's Garba Dance to its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) during its 18th session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Botswana.

Other ICH that made it to the UNESCO ICH list

- Sankirtana of Manipur in 2013.
- The traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India in 2014.
- Yoga and Navroz in 2016.
- Kumbh Mela in 2017.
- Durga Puja in 2021.

Steps by India to safeguard ICH

- India has been elected as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee of the UNESCO 2003 convention, to safeguard ICH for the 2022-2026 cycle.
- Sangeet Natak Akademi has been made the nodal office to deal with matters relating to Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- The government has launched a Scheme for safeguarding the Intangible heritage and diverse cultural traditions of India.
- To reinvigorate and revitalise, institutions, groups, individuals, etc., for strengthening, protecting, preserving and promoting the rich intangible cultural heritage of India.

About Garba

- Garba is a Gujarati folk dance performed during the Hindu festival of Navratri, a festival that celebrates victory over evil.
- It is the 15th cultural item from India to be enlisted in the UNESCO list. In 2021, Durga puja was the last cultural item that made it to the list.
- The term Garba is derived from the Sanskrit word, Garbha, which mean womb, depicting life and creation.
- This dance celebrates womanhood and is performed around a lamp or picture of Goddess Shakti, accompanied by rhythmic music, singing and clapping.
- The dance can be performed by anyone, regardless of age, gender, or social status.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

- The term Intangible Cultural Heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills and cultural spaces that are recognized as part of the cultural heritage of a community, group or individual.
- In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), signifying a commitment to protect, promote and transmit the diverse expressions of human culture.
- The convention establishes two crucial lists for ICH:
 - » **Representative List:** Showcasing the global diversity of ICH, this list raises awareness of its significance and importance.
 - » **Urgent Safeguarding List:** Identifying threatened ICH, this list calls for immediate measures to ensure its survival.
- It is exemplified through:
 - » Languages, oral traditions, literature, and poetry.
 - » Performing arts, such as music, dance, and theatre.
 - » Social practices, rituals and festive events.
 - » Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.
 - » Traditional craftsmanship, such as

Good Governance Day

Why in Broadcast

Every year on December 25, India celebrates Good Governance Day or Sushasan Diwas. The day was established in 2014 to honour former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birthday. Under Vajpayee's visionary leadership, efforts to improve governance began to show up in the lives of the people.

- **Equity & Inclusiveness:** A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being.
- **Effectiveness & Efficiency:** Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.
- **Accountability:** Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders.

Governance

- The concept of "governance" is not new. It is as old as human civilization.
- Governance is defined as the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).
- Government is one of the actors in governance. Other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government.

Good Governance

Good governance has 8 major characteristics.

- **Participation:** Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives.
- **Rule of Law:** Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.
- **Transparency:** Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement.
- **Responsiveness:** Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.
- **Consensus Oriented:** There are several actors and as many view points in a given society. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved.

Global River Cities Alliance

Why in Broadcast

Recently, 'Global River Cities Alliance' (GRCA) inspired by India's River Cities Alliance was launched at the Indian Pavillion, Dubai on the sidelines of the ongoing COP28.

Strategic Areas of Intervention

- Nirmal Ganga (Unpolluted Flow).
- Aviral Ganga (Unrestricted Flow).
- Jan Ganga (People River Connect).
- Gyan Ganga (Research and Knowledge).
- Arth Ganga (Boosting Economy and Livelihood).

Initiative for Conservation of Rivers System

- Swachh Bharat Mission which has 100 million toilets in rural areas and 6 million toilets in urban areas.
- Namami Gange Mission which was launched in 2014 to clean and rejuvenate the sacred river Ganga, the program has now become one of the top 10 world restoration flagship scheme.
- AMRUT and Smart City projects in 2015 to improve the urban water sector.
- Formation of Jal Shakti Ministry in 2019.
- Launch of Jal Jeevan Mission in 2019.
- Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain campaign in 2021 to provide functional tap connection to every rural household.
- Initiatives like the enactment of the Dam Safety Act in 2021.

About the Alliance

- This alliance brings together countries, river-cities, international funding agencies, and knowledge management partners to enhance the existing River Cities Alliance (RCA) formed by NMCG in collaboration with the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) in 2021.
- GRCA stands out as a unique alliance covering 275+ global river-cities across 11 countries.
- **Partner Countries & River-cities:** India, Egypt, Netherlands, Denmark, Ghana, Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Japan, and river-cities like The Hague (Den Haag), Adelaide, and Szolnok.
- **International Funding Agencies:** World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and KPMG.

Objective

- The launch of GRCA marks a momentous step in global efforts toward river conservation and sustainable water management.
- This alliance is the first of its kind globally, signifying a commitment to collaborative action for the well-being of rivers and their ecosystems.
- This platform will foster shared expertise and provide opportunities for global funding agencies to engage with river cities.

About National Mission for Clean Ganga

- This mission was launched on 12th August 2011 under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 as a registered society.
- It is being implemented by the National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection and Management of River Ganga, which is now known as the National Ganga Council.
- It acted as the implementation arm of National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) which was constituted under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986.

BRAIN BOOSTERS

GPAI Summit 2023

Why in Broadcast

The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Summit 2023 took place in New Delhi, India, on 12-14 December 2023. The event brought together engaged minds and expertise from science, industry, civil society, governments, international organisations and academia to foster international cooperation on AI-related priorities.

Generative AI and Jobs

- A recent analysis by the ILO of the potential effects of Generative AI on the world of work finds that most occupations will be “augmented” by the technology, rather than automated.
- Technology may allow some tasks to be automated, potentially leaving time for more engaging work, it can also be implemented in a way that worsens job quality.

Generative AI and the Future of Work

- The transformative potential of Generative AI for the future of work is immense.
- Unlike previous AI developments, generative AI models possess the scope, versatility and economic viability to impact jobs across multiple industries and at varying skill levels.
- AI can foster prosperity in the global digital economy but it’s important to address the importance of ethical, transparent, and responsible development and deployment.
- Not addressing the impact of Generative AI, planning for a sustainable and inclusive future won’t be possible.

Theme

- The Summit offered an opportunity for GPAI Working Groups to showcase the recent developments of their work around four themes. These are:
 - » Responsible AI
 - » Data governance
 - » Future of work
 - » Innovation & Commercialization

Background of GPAI

- The Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative which aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice on AI by supporting cutting-edge research and applied activities on AI-related priorities.
- GPAI has a Council and a Steering Committee, under its Secretariat. Its Secretariat is hosted by the OECD.
- GPAI has two Centres of Expertise:
 - » International Centre of Expertise in Montreal for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, Montreal.
 - » French National Institute for Research in Digital Science and Technology, Paris.

Members

GPAI’s has 29 members. These are:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Argentina | 17. New Zealand |
| 2. Australia | 18. Poland |
| 3. Belgium | 19. The Republic of Korea |
| 4. Brazil | 20. Senegal |
| 5. Canada | 21. Serbia |
| 6. Czech Republic | 22. Singapore |
| 7. Denmark | 23. Slovenia |
| 8. France | 24. Spain |
| 9. Germany | 25. Sweden |
| 10. India | 26. Turkey |
| 11. Ireland | 27. The United Kingdom |
| 12. Israel | 28. The United States |
| 13. Italy | 29. European Union |
| 14. Japan | |
| 15. Mexico | |
| 16. The Netherlands | |

BRAIN BOOSTERS

India-Maldives Relations

Why in Broadcast

Maldives has announced that it would not renew its hydrographic survey agreement with India. The new Maldives government has opted not to renew the bilateral agreement, which expires on June 7, 2024. The agreement suggests that either country can choose not to renew the agreement six months before its expiration in June 2024.

Development Assistance

- India's development assistance to Maldives covers a wide range of areas, such as health, education, transport, skill and capacity building, waste management, and management of natural disasters.
- At present, India-assisted projects in the region include water and sewerage projects on 34 islands, reclamation projects for the Addl island, a port on Gulhifalhu, airport redevelopment at Hanimaadhoo, and a hospital and a cricket stadium in Hulhumale.

Diaspora and Culture

- Indians are the second largest expatriate community in the Maldives with approximate strength of around 22,000. Indian expatriate community consists of workers as well as professionals like doctors, teachers, accountants, managers, engineers, nurses and technicians etc., spread over several islands.

Hydrographic Survey Agreement

- The hydrographic survey agreement was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Maldives on June 8, 2019.
- The agreement allows India to perform a thorough investigation of the island nation's territorial waters, including reefs, lagoons, coastlines, ocean currents, and tidal levels.
- Hydrographic surveys are conducted by ships, which employ tools such as sonar to study the varied aspects of a body of water.
- According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), these surveys help in "map out water depth, the shape of the seafloor and coastline, the location of possible obstructions, and physical features of water bodies," to ensure the efficiency and safety of maritime traffic.

Reasons for the Withdrawal

- President Mohamed Muizzu's new government demanded that India withdraw its military soldiers stationed in the country.
- President Solih of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) was considered as more pro-India, but his successor Mohamed Muizzu of the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) is reportedly seen as more pro-China.

Areas of Cooperation

1. Political

- Bilateral relations have been nurtured and strengthened by regular contacts at all levels. Since establishment of diplomatic relations, almost all Prime Ministers of India visited the Maldives.

2. Economic:

- The Maldives has the highest per capita income among the South Asian nations. However, it does not translate in real terms because the laws, as they exist; favour the foreign investor in terms of expatriation of his earnings.

News Of National and International Importance

SUVAS

- The Supreme Court recently deployed SUVAS, a machine-assisted translation tool trained by Artificial Intelligence, in order to promote regional languages in judicial procedure.
- SUVAS has been developed with technical support from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. This tool is specially designed for the judicial domain and currently has the capacity to translate English judicial documents, orders or judgments into eleven vernacular languages.

New Delhi Declaration on Artificial Intelligence

- India, the Chair of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), successfully hosted the GPAI Summit from December 12 - 14, 2023, at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.
- After the summit, all 29 GPAI members agreed on the New Delhi declaration.
- The declaration said that a global framework for the use of AI should be rooted in democratic values and human rights; safeguarding dignity and well-being; ensuring personal data protection; protecting the applicable intellectual property rights, privacy, and security; fostering innovation; and promoting trustworthiness among people.

46th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission

- The United Nations food standards body, the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted food safety and quality standards during its 46 session held in Rome.
- Responsible for protecting consumer health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade, the Codex Alimentarius Commission is a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Guidelines:

- Guidelines for the Control of Shiga Toxin-Producing Escherichia coli (STEC) in Raw Beef, Fresh Leafy Vegetables, Raw Milk and Raw Milk Cheeses, and Sprouts
- Guidelines for the Safe Use and Reuse of Water in Food Production and Processing

India at session:

- The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has praised India's Standards on Millets and accepted its proposal for the development of global standards for millets.
- India has framed a comprehensive group standard for 15 types of millets specifying 8 quality parameters, which received resounding applause at the international meet. Codex currently has standards for Sorghum and Pearl Millet.

Auction of Critical Minerals

- The Mines Ministry has launched its first tranche auction of critical and strategic minerals.
- These important minerals are very essential for the economic development and national security of our country. These minerals have low availability or their extraction or processing is concentrated in a few countries. The future global economy will be based on technologies that are highly dependent on minerals such as lithium, graphite, cobalt, titanium and Rare Earth Elements (REEs). These minerals are important for India's commitment to achieve 50 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.
- 24 minerals were recently notified as critical and strategic minerals through an amendment to the MMDR Act on 17 August 2023. This amendment empowers the Central Government to grant mineral concessions for these minerals so that the Central Government can give priority to the auction of these minerals considering the needs of the country. State governments will also get the revenue collected from these auctions.

AML/CFT Dialogue

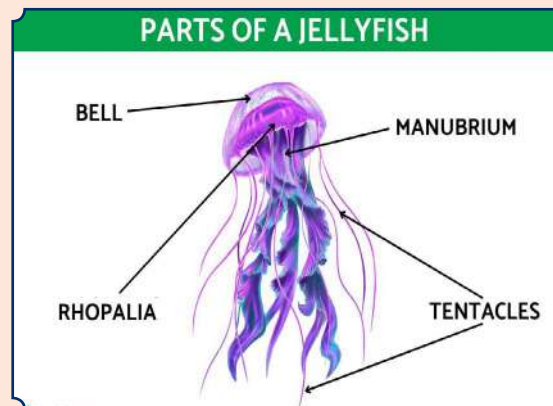
- The Government of India and the U.S. recently co-chaired the India-U.S. Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Dialogue. The Ministry of Finance hosted the dialogue in New Delhi.
- Participants discussed each country's experience with virtual assets and virtual asset service providers, given the focus area of both sides to promote responsible innovation while mitigating illicit finance risks. Both parties recognised the pressing need to accelerate global implementation of AML/CFT standards for virtual assets, in line with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendations, to effectively addressing the issue of regulatory arbitrage

Jellyfish

- Scientists have recently confirmed 'mysterious' jellyfish named *Santjordia pagesi* with 240 tentacles off Japan's coast.
- It has distinctive features like a bright red, cross-shaped stomach.

About Jellyfish:

- It is a planktonic marine member of the class Scyphozoa (phylum Cnidaria), a group of invertebrate animals.
- Jellyfish can be divided into two types, those that are free-swimming medusae and those that are sessile (animals that are attached to seaweed and other objects by a stalk).
- Most of them live for only a few weeks, but some are known to survive a year or longer.
- They can be bioluminescent, too, which means they produce their own light.



Barracuda

- India's fastest solar-electric boat, was ceremoniously launched at the Navgathi Panavally Yard in Alappuzha. Named after the swift long fish, Barracuda was designed by Navalt and can be deployed even in the rough seas as a workboat to ferry up to 12 passengers and cargo.
- The 14-metre-long, 4.4-metre-wide vessel can attain a top speed of 12.5 knots (23 kmph) and has a range of seven hours on a single charge. It has twin 50 kW electric motors, a marine-grade LFP battery, and 6 kW solar power, epitomising efficient and clean energy usage, says a release issued by Navalt.

Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) Society

- The first meeting of the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) Society, which held under the chairmanship of do Jitendra Singh, emphasized the need to define a "Bio-vision" for India.
- BRIC brings together 14 top science autonomous institutions under a unified platform to maximize the impact of biotech
- The BRIC Society aims to engage in public-private research partnerships, receive endowments from non-governmental resources, and maintain distinct research mandates for each of the 14 subsumed institutions under a common governing body.
- The Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) is an apex autonomous society operating under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology, in India.
- It was established with the aim of centralizing and unifying biotech governance across the country.

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)

- In a significant stride towards sustainable practices, India has ascended to the 7th position in this year's Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), showcasing a commendable improvement from its previous ranking. The report underscores the pivotal role of renewable energy in influencing emissions
- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) tracks countries' efforts to combat climate change. As an independent monitoring tool, it aims to enhance transparency in international climate politics and enables comparison of climate protection efforts and progress made by individual countries. Germanwatch, the NewClimate Institute and the Climate Action Network has published the index annually since 2005.

Delta Ranking for Aspirational Blocks Programme

- NITI Aayog released the first delta ranking of the Aspirational Block Programme.
- Tiriyani Block of Kumuram Bheem Asifabad district in Telangana has emerged as the frontrunner in the first delta ranking. The second position was secured by Kaushambi Block in Kaushambi District, Uttar Pradesh.
- The program's strategy revolves around consolidating existing schemes, defining outcomes, and vigilantly monitoring progress. Collaborating with multiple stakeholders, the initiative has identified 40 key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge project advancement. These KPIs, categorized into five themes, formed the basis for calculating the first delta rank based on the progress made during the initial quarter.

Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award

- Renowned Hollywood actor and producer Michael Douglas was honoured with the prestigious Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Cinema at the 54th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa.

About the award:

- The IFFI Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award (formerly IFFI Lifetime Achievement Award) is an international honour instituted by the International Film Festival of India. The recipient is honoured for their "outstanding contribution to the growth and development of World cinema. The award was first instituted in the year 1999 from the 30th IFFI.

Booker Prize

- Irish author Paul Lynch secured this year's prestigious Booker Prize for his fifth novel, 'Prophet Song,' in a glamorous ceremony held at Old Billingsgate. The dystopian narrative unfolds in Ireland, depicting the challenges faced by protagonist Eilish Stack as the nation inches toward totalitarianism.

About Booker Prize:

- Booker Prize, prestigious British award given annually to a full-length novel in English.
- Booker McConnell, a multinational company, established the Booker Prize in 1968. Initially, only English-language writers from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and the Commonwealth countries were eligible. In 2013, however, it was announced that the prize would be open to English-language writers worldwide from 2014.

TABLE-TOP EXERCISE (TTX)

- The Indian Army recently conducted a Table-Top Exercise (TTX) for the Women Officers of Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.
- A Table top Exercise (TTX) is a type of simulation or interactive discussion-based exercise conducted to assess and enhance preparedness for potential emergency or crisis situations.

- It is a scenario-driven exercise that involves key stakeholders, decision-makers, and subject matter experts gathering around a table to discuss, analyse, and respond to a hypothetical scenario or set of scenarios.
- The Exercise is part of ongoing efforts of the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) to strengthen international cooperation and capacity-building in peacekeeping missions, with a specific focus on empowering women in the field.

Henry Kissinger

- Henry Kissinger recently died at the age of 100. He was known for his diplomatic calibre and for shaping Cold War history.
- Kissinger led a policy of detente with the Soviet Union, planned to open relations with China, engaged in “shuttle diplomacy” in the Middle East to end the Yom Kippur War, and negotiated the Paris Peace Accords which ended American involvement in Vietnam.

Welcome to Paradise

- Recently, the renowned actress and author Twinkle Khanna celebrated the launch of her fourth book, “Welcome to Paradise,” at Taj Lands End, Mumbai. The book, a collection of short stories, delves into the complex lives of women navigating love, marriage and loneliness.

Pranab, My Father: A Daughter Remembers

- Recently, The book, titled ‘Pranab, My Father: A Daughter Remembers’ authored by Sharmishtha Mukherjee was released. The book is also a mirror of the father-daughter relationship between Pranab Mukherjee and Sharmishtha. Book also mention the relationship between Pranab Mukherjee and Gandhi family.

Kanchan Devi

- 1991-batch Indian Forest Service Officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre Kanchan Devi has been appointed as the Director General (DG) of the Indian Council of Forestry Research Education.
- ICFRE is the largest organisation responsible for forestry research in India. ICFRE was created in 1986, under the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests (India), to direct and manage research and education in the forestry sector in India. ICFRE is headed by a Director General with headquarters at Dehradun. ICFRE became an autonomous council under the Ministry in 1991.

Parama Sen

- Recently, Parama Sen, Additional Secretary in the Department of Expenditure at the Finance Ministry, has been appointed as a part-time member of the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).

About Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA):

- It is a statutory regulatory body set up under PFRDA Act enacted in 2014.
- Its objective is to promote old age income security by establishing, developing, and regulating pension funds and to protect the interests of subscribers to schemes of pension funds and related matters.
- It comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.
- Headquarters: New Delhi
- Composition: It consists of a Chairperson and not more than six members, of whom at least three shall be Whole-Time Members, to be appointed by the Central Government.

Current Affairs at a Glance

1. Indian Navy commissioned INS Tarmugli, a Fast Attack Craft (FAC), at the Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam. INS Tarmugli is a patrol vessel of the Car Nicobar-class of Indian Navy and the first ship in the series of 4 Water Jet Fast Attack Craft.
2. State Bank of India will sign 70 million euro (about Rs. 630 crore) Line of Credit (LoC) with German Development Bank for promoting solar project in the country.
3. Rijul Maini, a medical student and aspiring surgeon, clinched the prestigious title of Miss India USA 2023.
4. Antim Panghal has been named United World Wrestling (UWW) Rising Star of the Year 2023 in women's section.
5. Bharat Electronics Limited, Pune and the Ministry of Defence inked a historic deal, to provide the Indian Army with Electronic Fuzes for 10 years, at a total cost of Rs. 5,336.25 crore.
6. A statue dedicated to Thiruvalluvar, a cultural icon revered among Tamilians, was unveiled in the French city of Cergy.
7. KK Birla Foundation will give noted Vyas Samman to Pushpa Bharti's 2016 memoir, 'Yaadein, Yaadein aur Yaadein' for year 2023.
8. Kabir Bedi was awarded the "Order of Merit of the Italian Republic" (Merito della Repubblica Italiana), the country's highest honour awarded to civilians.
9. Arunachal Pradesh CM Pema Khandu attended the annual Shar Amartala Torgya Festival at the Thegtse Sangye Choi Long monastery at Balem, a small hamlet at the trijunction of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bhutan in West Kameng district.
10. Parliament of Poland has elected Donald Tusk as Prime Minister of the country.
11. India and Vietnam conducted joint military exercise VINBAX-2023 in Hanoi.
12. According to IQAir report Lahore in Pakistan is at the top in the Global Pollution Ranking with poor air quality.
13. Google's parent company Alphabet has launched its advanced AI model Gemini AI against Open AI's ChatGPT.
14. World Soil Day is celebrated on 5 December and its aim is to spread awareness about the importance of soil.
15. India bags 3 gold, 5 silver and 1 bronze medals in IBA Junior World Boxing Championship.
16. 24th edition of Hornbill Festival 2023 was held at Naga Heritage Village Kisama.
17. India International Trade Fair (IITF-2023) was organized in New Delhi. Odisha Pavilion has won the Gold Medal for Excellence in Display in the State Pavilion category. The theme of the festival is "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam".
18. Punjab's hockey team won the title of Senior Men's National Hockey Championship by defeating defending champion Haryana.
19. The world's first portable hospital indigenously built 'Arogya Maitri cube' was inaugurated in Gurugram, Haryana.
20. Indian Navy Day was celebrated on 4 December across the country to honor the role and achievements of the Indian Navy. This day reminds of 'Operation Trident' during the India-Pakistan war of 1971.
21. According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Myanmar has become the world's largest opium producer, surpassing Afghanistan.
22. Captain Fatima Wasim from the Indian Army's has created history by becoming the first woman medical officer to be deployed on an operational post at the challenging Siachen Glacier.
23. Researchers at Berhampur University, Odisha have unveiled a new species of marine amphipod, named Demaorchestia alanensis, in Chilika Lake, contributing to global marine biodiversity.

Places in News

Kra Isthmus

- “Kra, a little-known isthmus in Thailand, has recently gained attention due to its relevance to China’s Indo-Pacific strategy.

About Kra Isthmus:

- The Isthmus of Kra is a land bridge in Thailand that connects the Malay Peninsula to the rest of continental Southeast Asia.
- It’s located between the Andaman Sea to the west and the Gulf of Thailand to the east.
- The Kra Isthmus is sometimes called “Devil’s Neck” because it creates a barrier for ships traveling to and from the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea.
- The Kra Canal, also known as the Thai Canal or Kra Isthmus Canal, is a proposed canal project that would connect the Gulf of Thailand with the Andaman Sea.



Seychelles

- Capital: Victoria
- Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar and about 1,600 km east of Kenya.
- It is located at the eastern edge of the Somali Sea.
- **Boundaries:** Seychelles shares maritime borders with island nations like Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius.

Geographical features:

- The highest point in Seychelles is Morne Seychellois.
- Aldabra holds immense ecological importance, hosting a diverse range of flora and fauna, notably housing rare species such as giant tortoises.
- It encompasses both coral islands and rocky landmasses, featuring narrow coastlines along its diverse archipelago.
- It experiences a wet tropical climate characterized by consistent humidity, high temperatures and abundant rainfall throughout the year.



MCQs Based on Current Affairs

1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Lok Sabha ethics committee may recommend expulsion of an MP for alleged unethical conduct.

2. Expulsion of members is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

2. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, Rajya Sabha has cleared the CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023.

2. Bill repeals the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991.

3. The bill provide for the appointment process and conditions of services for the chief election commissioner (CEC) and two election commissioners (ECs).

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

3. Consider the following statements:

1. Recently, Supreme Court has deployed SUVAS, a machine-assisted translation tool trained by Artificial Intelligence, in order to promote regional languages in judicial procedure.

2. SUVAS has been developed with technical support from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

4. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted food safety and quality standards during its 46th session held in Rome.

2. Codex Alimentarius Commission is a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

5. With reference to jellyfish, consider the following statements:

1. Scientists have recently confirmed 'mysterious' jellyfish named Santjordia pagesi with 240 tentacles off Japan's coast.

2. It is a planktonic marine member of the class Scyphozoa (phylum Cnidaria), a group of invertebrate animals.

3. Jellyfish can be divided into two types, those that are free-swimming medusae and those that are sessile (animals that are attached to seaweed and other objects by a stalk).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only
D. 1, 2 and 3

6. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, India's fastest solar-electric boat was ceremoniously launched at the Navgathi Panavally Yard in Alappuzha.

2. Barracuda was designed by Navalt and ferry up to 12 passengers and cargo.

3. It is 14-metre-long, 4.4-metre-wide and can attain a top speed of 12.5 knots .

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

7. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, first meeting of the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) Society was held which emphasized the need to define a "Bio-vision" for India.

2. BRIC brings together 14 top science autonomous institutions under a unified platform to maximize the impact of biotech

3. The Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) is an apex autonomous society operating under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology, in India.

4. It was established with the aim of centralizing and unifying biotech governance across the country.

How many of the above statement/s is/are correctly matched?

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

8. Consider the following statements:

1. Recently India has ranked 7th position in

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).

2. Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) tracks countries' efforts to combat climate change.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

9. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, NITI Aayog released first delta ranking of aspirational block programme.
2. Tiriyani Block of Kumuram Bheem Asifabad district in Telangana has emerged as the frontrunner in the first delta ranking.
3. The second position was secured by Kaushambi Block in Kaushambi District, Uttar Pradesh.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

10. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme:

1. The scheme offers voluntary third-party certification to promote sustainable forest management and agroforestry in the country.
2. It provides market incentives to entities that adhere to responsible forest management and agroforestry practices.
3. Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal will be responsible for overall management of the scheme.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

11. Consider the following statements and choose the correct statement:

- A. On 1 January 2022, Kiribati became the 10th Pacific island country to join the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing's international infrastructure and connectivity initiative.
- B. FIPIC is a multinational group developed for cooperation between India and 18 PICs.
- C. At the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Indian Prime Minister announced a line of credit of \$150 million to the group of Pacific Island countries for projects.
- D. None of These Above.

12. The S&P 500 is related to?

- A. Supercomputer.
- B. A new technique in e-business.
- C. A new technique in bridge building.
- D. An index of stocks of large companies.

13. Consider the following statements:

1. Recently, Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat unveiled the Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment Report for the entire country for the year 2023.
2. The total annual groundwater recharge as per the report reached 449.08 billion cubic meters (BCM), showing a significant increase of 11.48 BCM compared to the previous year (2022).
3. The report attributes the increase in groundwater recharge to various factors, including increase in seepage from canals, return flow of irrigation water and recharge from water bodies, tanks and water conservation structures.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

14. Consider the following Statements:

1. Renowned Hollywood actor and producer Michael Douglas was honoured Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award.
2. The IFFI Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award is an international honor instituted by the International Film Festival of India.
3. The award was first instituted in the year 1999 from the 30th IFFI.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

15. Consider the following statements

1. Recently, The Indian Army conducted a Table-Top Exercise (TTX) for the Women Officers of Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.
2. A Table top Exercise (TTX) is a type of interactive discussion-based exercise conducted to assess and enhance preparedness for potential emergency or crisis situations.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

16. Consider the following statement:

1. Recently, Kanchan Devi has been appointed as the Director General (DG) of the Indian Council of Forestry Research Education.
2. ICFRE is the largest organisation responsible for forestry research in India.
3. ICFRE was created in 1986, under the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests (India), to direct and manage research and education in forestry sector in India.
4. ICFRE is headed by a Director General with headquarters at Dehradun.

How many of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

17. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, the Reserve Bank of India in its monetary policy has raised the GDP growth forecast for the current financial year 2023-24 to 7% as against 6.5% earlier.
2. The Monetary Policy Committee kept the key repo rate unchanged for the 5th time to 6.5%.
3. The MPC also maintained the policy stance of 'withdrawal of accommodation' by the majority of 5 out of 6 members.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

18. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, India Infrastructure Report (IIR) 2023 is released that covers various aspects of infrastructure
2. It is published by Infrastructure Development Corporation (Karnataka) Limited (iDeCK) and National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).
3. iDeCK is a joint venture between the Government of Karnataka, IDFC Foundation and HDFC to work on sustainable infrastructure projects.

How many of the statement/s given above is/

are correct?

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

19. Consider the following statements:

1. Recently, the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was concluded in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
2. At COP28, member countries reached an agreement to operationalize the Loss and Damage (L&D) fund to compensating countries grappling with climate change impacts.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

20. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released a on Food Security and Nutrition static trends in Asia Pacific.
2. According to the report, 74.1% of Indians could not afford a balanced diet in 2021. This percentage was 76.2% in 2020.
3. At the same time, 82.2% of people in Pakistan and 66.1% of people in Bangladesh reported having trouble obtaining healthy food.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

21. Consider the following Statements:

1. Recently, Global River Cities Alliance' (GRCA) was launched at Dubai on the sidelines of the ongoing COP28.
2. This alliance brings together countries, river-cities, international funding agencies, and knowledge management partners.
3. GRCA is a unique alliance covering 275+ global river-cities across 11 countries.

How many of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

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

Answer

- | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 4. C | 7. D | 10. C | 13. C | 16. D | 19. C |
| 2. C | 5. D | 8. C | 11. C | 14. C | 17. C | 20. C |
| 3. C | 6. C | 9. C | 12. D | 15. C | 18. C | 21. C |



Polity & Governance-01

Index

Preamble

- ✓ Preamble row in New Parliament Building
- ✓ Constitutionalism
- ✓ Rule of law

Territories and Citizenship

- ✓ Border Disputes Between States
- ✓ OCI Card
- ✓ PIL for Automatic Termination of Indian Citizenship

Fundamental Rights

- ✓ Fundamental Rights under Article 19, 21 against private person
- ✓ Accused's Right to Silence
- ✓ Passive Euthanasia: In India, debate on 'Living Will'
- ✓ 50 years of Basic Structure Doctrine
- ✓ Jallikattu and Kambala
- ✓ Total Eradication of Manual Scavenging in India

- ✓ Multi-State Co-operative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002
- ✓ Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023
- ✓ Digital Personal Data Protection Bill (DPDP), 2023
- ✓ Under Trial Prisoner
- ✓ Notification of Minorities
- ✓ Limited Internet Shutdown & Its Impact
- ✓ Law Against Hate Speech
- ✓ Preventive Detention
- ✓ Aadhaar

DPSP

- ✓ Labour Reform in India-New Labour Rules in India
- ✓ Law Commission Report on Uniform Civil Code
- ✓ Equilibrium between Articles 25-28 and 44: The Imperative for a Uniform Civil Code
- ✓ Reforms in India's Criminal Laws-3 New Codes
- ✓ Project 39A
- ✓ Chargesheet: Not A Public Document



PREAMBLE



Preamble Row in New Parliament Building

Why in News:

The absence of the words “socialist and secular” from the English copies of the Constitution distributed to MPs has provoked a massive controversy in parliament’s new building.

Key Points About Preamble

- It indicates the source from which the constitution derives its authority.
- It also states the objects which the constitution seeks to establish and promote.
- The very first sentence of the preamble declares India to be a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic and Republic.
- Here sovereign means free will about external Affair, socialist means welfare state concept, secularism means positive secularism where state equally promote all religion, republican means head of state will be elected, democratic means a form of government where people enjoy equal political right.
- The terms socialist and secular were added to the preamble by 42nd amendment in 1976.
- The Supreme Court of India in (Keshavananda Bharati v. Union of India, 1973 SC 1461) held that Preamble does form part of the Constitution.

Key words in the Preamble

- **WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA:** It indicates the ultimate sovereignty of the people of India. Sovereignty means the independent authority of the State, not being subject to the control of any other State or external power.
- **Sovereign:** The term means that India has its own independent authority and it is not a dominion of any other external power. In the country, the legislature has the power to make laws which are subject to certain limitations.
- **Socialist:** The term means the achievement of socialist ends through democratic means. It holds faith in a mixed economy where both private and public sectors co-exist side by side. It was added in the Preamble by 42nd Amendment, 1976.
- **Secular:** The term means that all the religions in India get equal respect, protection and support from the state. It was incorporated in the Preamble by 42nd Constitutional Amendment act, 1976.
- **Democratic:** The term implies that the Constitution of India has an established form of

Constitution which gets its authority from the will of the people expressed in an election.

- **Republic:** The term indicates that the head of the state is elected by the people. In India, the President of India is the elected head of the state.

Constitutionalism:

- The concept of constitutionalism is a mechanism that provides legitimacy to a democratic government.
- Constitutionalism envisages checks and balances and putting the powers of legislature and executive under some restraints and not making them uncontrolled and arbitrary. Unlimited powers jeopardize freedom of the people.
- If the Constitution confers unrestrained power on either the legislature or the executive, it might lead to an authoritarian, oppressive government. Therefore, in order to preserve the basic freedoms of the individual, and to maintain his personality and dignity, the Constitution needs to be permeated with ‘constitutionalism’; it should have some in-built restrictions on the powers conferred by it on governmental organs.

Rule of law

Why in News:

‘Engaged citizenry can protect the rule of law even as authoritarian regimes try to weaponise it’, Todd W. Eddins, Judge, Supreme Court of Hawaii said during a conference in India.

- The rule of law does not have a fixed or clear meaning; Indian courts have been referring to this phrase from time to time. The emphasis is on absence of any centre of arbitrary or unlimited power in the country on proper structuring and control of power, absence of arbitrariness in the government.

Pillar of Rule of Law: Dicey view

- **Absence of arbitrary authority-** No one is penalised until he violates the law
- **Equality before the law-** All citizens (rich or poor, high or low, official or unofficial) is equal before ordinary court of law
- **Individual rights-** Which means that the constitution is the consequence of individual rights as established and enforced by courts of law, rather than the constitution being the source of individual rights. Although this principle is not applicable in India.



Citizenship & Territory

Border Disputes Between States

Why in News:

The central government informed the Lok Sabha that there are boundary disputes arising out of the demarcation of boundaries and claims and counterclaims over territories between 14 states and Union Territories (UTs).

Assam and Meghalaya Dispute:

- A major point of contention between Assam and Meghalaya is the district of Langpih in West Garo Hills bordering the Kamrup district of Assam.

Arunachal Pradesh-Assam Dispute:

- Arunachal's grievance is that the re-organisation of North Eastern states unilaterally transferred several forested tracts in the plains that had traditionally belonged to hill tribal chiefs and communities to Assam.

Assam-Nagaland Dispute:

- This dispute is over Naga Hills and all Naga-dominated area in North Cachar and Nagaon districts, which were part of Naga territory under 1866 notification from British.

Assam-Mizoram Dispute:

- This dispute is over boundaries in southern Assam's Barak Valley and the Lushai Hills, based on two British-era notifications of 1875 and 1933 with Mizoram demand on boundary as decided in 1875.

Himachal Pradesh-Ladakh:

- Himachal and Ladakh lay claim to Sarchu, an area on the route between Leh and Manali.

Haryana-Himachal Pradesh:

- The Parwanoo region has had the spotlight over the border dispute between the two states.
- It is next to the Panchkula district of Haryana and the state has claimed parts of the land in Himachal Pradesh as its own.

Karnataka-Maharashtra:

- The Belgaum district is arguably part of one of the biggest inter-state border disputes in India.
- The district has a large Marathi and Kannada-speaking populations.
- The area came under Karnataka in 1956 when states were reorganised and till then it was under the Bombay presidency.

Other border disputes which are at dormant stage now:

- Haryana-Punjab over Chandigarh.
- Karnataka-Kerala over Kasaragod, part of Kerala with many Kannada-speaking people.

- Odisha-West Bengal over Kanika Sands Island in the Bay of Bengal.
- Gujarat-Rajasthan over Mangadh Hill.

OCI Card

Why in News:

Amid the ongoing India-Canada row, India is in the process of cancelling the registration of Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card holders for carrying out pro-Khalistan activities and anti-India propaganda.

About OCI:

- The Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) is given to overseas Indians. It provides long term visa free travel and stay in India and gives the cardholders a host of privileges normally not given to a foreign national.

Process of Cancellation:

- The Central Government can cancel OCI registration if "the foreign national of India has shown dissatisfaction with the Constitution of India established by law," and if "it is necessary so to do in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of India, friendly relations of India with any foreign country, or in the general public interest."

Who get OCI Card:

- The person must have either previously been a citizen of India, or his/her mother or father must have been an Indian citizen. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan and Iran are some of the countries where people of Indian origin cannot get this facility.

Benefit of OCI Card:

- OCI gives the facility to live, work and do all types of economic transactions in India for livelihood, also the OCI holder can come to India whenever he wants without a visa. OCI card is valid for life.
- According to the website of the Indian Home Ministry, OCI card holders have all the rights like Indian citizens but they cannot do four things--1. Cannot contest elections. 2. Cannot vote. 3. Cannot hold government job or constitutional post. 4. Cannot buy agricultural land.
- People coming from abroad have to register with the police if they stay in India for more than 90 days, but OCI card holders are exempted from this. OCI cards have been issued to about 4 million people so far.

Right and Restrictions of OCI:

- OCI cardholders will be entitled to get multiple entry lifelong visas for visiting India for any purpose.
- OCI cards would need prior permission for a set of activities that include research, journalism, mountaineering, missionary or Tablighi work, and visits to restricted areas.
- They have parity with Indian nationals in the matter of domestic air fares, entry fees to monuments and public places.
- OCIs can appear for all-India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or such other tests to make them eligible for admission only against any NRI seat or any supernumerary seat.
- The OCI cardholder shall not be eligible for admission against any seat reserved exclusively for Indian citizens.
- In respect of all other economic, financial and educational fields not specified in the latest notification or the rights and privileges not covered by the notifications made by the Reserve Bank of India under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, the OCI cardholder shall have the same rights and privileges as a foreigner.

- The Indian Supreme Court issued a notice to the Central Government in response to a petition. The petition challenges the automatic termination of Indian citizenship upon acquiring another citizenship, asserting that such a provision is unconstitutional. In the petition, Section 9(1), the second proviso to Section 4(1), and Section 4(1A) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 was challenged. His contention is that these provisions lead to the involuntary and automatic termination of Indian citizenship upon the acquisition of another citizenship.

About Citizenship Act, 1955:

- The Citizenship Act, 1955 provides for the acquisition and loss of citizenship after the commencement of the Constitution. Originally, the Act 1955 also provided for Commonwealth Citizenship. But, this provision was repealed by the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003.
- The Constitution deals with citizenship from Articles 5 to 11 under Part II. However, it contains neither any permanent nor any elaborate provisions in this regard. It only identifies the persons who became citizens of India at its commencement (i.e., on January 26, 1950).
- It does not deal with the problem of acquisition or loss of citizenship subsequent to its commencement.
- It empowers the Parliament to enact a law to provide for such matters and any other matter relating to citizenship. Accordingly, the Parliament has enacted the Citizenship Act (1955), which has been amended from time to time.

PIL for Automatic Termination of Indian Citizenship



Fundamental Rights

Fundamental Rights under Article 19, 21 against Private Person

Why in News:

Supreme Court has ruled that a fundamental right under Article 19/21 can be enforced even against persons other than the State or its instrumentalities.

The court said that right of free speech and expression guaranteed under the Article 19(1)(a) cannot be curbed by any additional grounds other than those already laid down in Article 19(2).

What is the Reference for this SC's Ruling?

Enforcing Rights against Private Entities:

- The court held that the application of fundamental

rights, in instances such as the right to life, has expanded “in several areas such as health, environment, transportation, education and prisoner’s life”.

- It concluded, given the changing nature of the role of the government, that rights under Articles 19 and 21 “can be enforced even against persons other than the State or its instrumentalities”.
- This interpretation brings an obligation on the state to ensure that private entities also abide by Constitutional norms.
- It opens up a range of possibilities in Constitutional law, potentially allowing for the enforcement of privacy rights against a private doctor or the right to free speech against a private social media entity.

About Article 19:

- Article 19 of the Constitution of India guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, and invoked against the state.
- However state can impose reasonable restrictions in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
- Some fundamental rights, such as those prohibiting untouchability, trafficking, and bonded labor, are explicitly against both the state and other individuals.

Article 21:

- Protection of life and personal liberty- No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.
- The Court gave a list of rights that Article 21 covers based on earlier judgments. Some of them are:
 - » Right to privacy
 - » Right to go abroad
 - » Right to shelter
 - » Right against solitary confinement
 - » Right to social justice and economic empowerment
 - » Right against handcuffing
 - » Right against custodial death
 - » Right against delayed execution
 - » Doctors’ assistance
 - » Right against public hanging
 - » Protection of cultural heritage
 - » Right to pollution-free water and air
 - » Right of every child to a full development
 - » Right to health and medical aid
 - » Right to education
 - » Protection of under-trials

Accused’s Right to Silence

Why in News:

All accused have a right to silence and investigators cannot force them to speak up or admit guilt, the Supreme Court said, emphasising that the Constitution accords every person a right against self-incrimination.

Right Against Self-Incrimination:

- Article 20 grants protection against arbitrary and excessive punishment to an accused person, whether citizen or foreigner or legal person like a company or a corporation. It contains three provisions in that direction:
 - » It contains provisions related to No ex-post-facto law, No double jeopardy, No self-incrimination.
 - » No self-incrimination: No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.
 - » The protection against self-incrimination extends to both oral evidence and documentary evidence.
- However, it does not extend to
 - » Compulsory production of material objects,
 - » Compulsion to give thumb impression, specimen signature, blood specimens, and
 - » Compulsory exhibition of the body.
- Further, it extends only to criminal proceedings and not to civil proceedings or proceedings which are not of criminal nature.

Passive Euthanasia: In India, Debate on ‘Living Will’

Why in News:

The Supreme Court in India has made changes to the rules for passive euthanasia with the primary objective to make the process less difficult and less time-consuming.

Major Changes:

- The Supreme Court tweaked the previous judgement to do away with the necessity of a judicial magistrate to attest or countersign a living will.
- SC held that an attestation by a notary or a gazetted officer would be sufficient for a person to make a valid living will.
- Instead of the living will being in the custody of the district court concerned as directed by the court in 2018 the bench said that the document will be a part of the national health digital record which can be accessed by hospitals and doctors from any part of the country.
- If the hospital’s medical board denies permission

to withdraw medical treatment, the family members of the patient can approach the relevant high court, which forms a fresh board of medical experts to enable the court to take a final call.

About Passive Euthanasia:

- Passive euthanasia is the act of withholding or withdrawing medical treatment, such as withholding or withdrawing life support, with the intention of allowing a person to die.
- This is in contrast to active euthanasia, which involves an active intervention to end a person's life with substances or external force, such as administering a lethal injection.

50 years of Basic Structure Doctrine

Why in News:

The Supreme Court launched a special web page to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its historic 1973 judgment in the Kesavananda Bharati Case that evolved the doctrine of basic structure, laying down that Parliament can amend any part of the Constitution but cannot tinker with its basic structure – a check on the executive and the legislative powers of the government.

About Kesavananda Bharati Case (1973):

- In this case, the court upheld the validity of the 24th Amendment Act and stated that Parliament is empowered to abridge or take away any of the Fundamental Rights.
- At the same time, it laid down a new doctrine of the 'basic structure of the Constitution.'
- It ruled that the constituent power of Parliament under Article 368 does not enable it to alter the 'basic structure' of the Constitution.
- This means that the Parliament cannot abridge or take away a Fundamental Right that forms a part of the 'basic structure' of the Constitution.

Doctrine of Basic Structure:

- Court did not define the term 'basic structure', and only listed a few principles federalism, secularism, democracy as being its part.
- The 'basic structure' doctrine has since been interpreted to include -
 - » The supremacy of the Constitution,
 - » The rule of law,
 - » Independence of the judiciary,
 - » Doctrine of separation of powers,
 - » Sovereign democratic republic,
 - » The parliamentary system of government,
 - » The principle of free and fair elections
 - » Welfare state.

Why in News:

Recently, the Supreme Court upheld amendments made by Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, to allow the traditional bull-taming sports of Jallikattu and Kambala, and bullock-cart racing.

About Jallikattu:

- Jallikattu is a traditional sport that is popular in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
- The sport involves releasing a wild bull into a crowd of people, and the participants attempt to grab the bull's hump and ride it for as long as possible, or attempt to bring it under control.
- It is celebrated in the month of January, during the Tamil harvest festival, Pongal.

About Kambala:

- Kambala is a traditional buffalo race in paddy fields filled with slush and mud which generally takes place in coastal Karnataka (Udupi and Dakshina Kannada) from November to March.
- Traditionally, it is sponsored by local Tuluva landlords and households in the coastal districts. Tuluva people are an ethnic group native to Southern India. They are native speakers of the Tulu language.
- During the race, the racers try to bring the buffaloes under control by holding their reins tight and whipping them.

About the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:

- This Act provides for punishment for causing unnecessary cruelty and suffering to animals. The Act defines animals and different forms of animals.
- Discusses different forms of cruelty, exceptions, and killing of a suffering animal in case any cruelty has been committed against it, so as to relieve it from further suffering.
- Provides the guidelines relating to experimentation on animals for scientific purposes.
- The Act enshrines the provisions relating to the exhibition of the performing animals, and offences committed against the performing animals.
- This Act provides for the limitation period of 3 months beyond which no prosecution shall lie for any offences under this Act.
- The Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) was established in 1962 under Section 4 of the Act.

Total Eradication of Manual Scavenging in India

Why in News:

Jallikattu & Kambala

Expressing profound concern over the rising number of deaths during manual cleaning of sewers, Supreme Court directed the Central and State Governments to eradicate the practice of manual scavenging entirely

About Manual Scavenging:

- Manual scavenging is defined as “the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers”.
- India banned the practice under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (PEMSR).
- The Act bans the use of any individual manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of or otherwise handling in any manner human excreta till its disposal.
- The Act recognizes manual scavenging as a “dehumanizing practice”.

Constitutional Protection of Manual Scavenging:

- **Article 14:** Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.
- **Article 17:** Abolition of untouchability and prohibition of its practice in any form.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty.
- **Article 23:** Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour.

Legal Provisions:

- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 is the main legislation that aims to prohibit and eliminate manual scavenging in India. It prohibits the employment or engagement of anyone as a manual scavenger and also prohibits anyone from constructing or maintaining insanitary latrines.

International Provisions:

- India is bound by a multitude of international agreements and treaties, in addition to its Constitution, that firmly prohibit the practice of manual scavenging. These agreements include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention 111 and 161 of the International Labour Organisation respectively.

Multi-State Co-operative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002

Recently the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill 2022 was passed by the Parliament. The bill aims to bring about transparency, accountability, and ease of doing business in

the cooperative sector, with provisions including the establishment of a Cooperative Election Authority, creation of a Cooperative Rehabilitation Reconstruction and Development Fund, appointment of cooperative ombudsman and information officers, and representation of women and SC/ST members in cooperative society boards.

97th Constitutional Amendment Act 2011:

- It established the right to form cooperative societies as a fundamental right under Article 19.
- It included a new Directive Principle of State Policy on the Promotion of Cooperative Societies - Article 43-B.
- It added a new Part IX-B to the Constitution titled “The Co-operative Societies” (Articles 243-ZH to 243-ZT).
- It authorizes the Parliament to establish relevant laws in the case of multi-state cooperative societies (MSCS) and state legislatures in the case of other cooperative societies.
- The Union Ministry of Cooperation was formed in 2021, its mandate was looked after by the Ministry of Agriculture before.
- The Multi-State Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022 passed by parliament in 2023 for better regulation of Multi-State Co-operative Societies.

Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023

Why in News:

The Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023 was passed by the Parliament. The bill aims to curb the menace of piracy with provisions including three months’ imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 3 lakh, which can be extended up to three years imprisonment and a fine up to 5% of the audited gross production cost.

- Moreover, the Bill attempts to improve the procedure for certification of films for public exhibition by the Central Board of Film Certification, as well as improve categorisations for the same. It has introduced age-based categories of certification by further sub-dividing the existing UA category into three age-based categories--seven years (UA 7+), 13 years (UA 13+), and 16 years (UA 16+), instead of only 12 years. These age-based markers would be only recommendatory, meant for the parents or guardians to consider whether their children should view such a film.
- Further, revisional powers of the central government with respect to films have been omitted. Provisions in the Act that allowed validity of certificates of Central Board of Film

Certification (CBFC) to remain for 10 years, have now been modified for perpetuity.

- The Bill also allows for recertification of edited films for television broadcast, as only Unrestricted Public Exhibition category films can be shown on television.

Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP), 2023

Why in News:

Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023 was passed by Rajya Sabha. The Bill seeks to provide for the protection of personal data and the privacy of individuals.

Key Points of the bill:

- The Bill will apply to the processing of digital personal data within India. It will also apply to the processing of personal data outside India, if it is for offering goods or services or profiling individuals in India.
- Personal data may be processed only for a lawful purpose for which an individual has given consent. A notice must be given before seeking consent. For individuals below 18 years of age, consent will be provided by the legal guardian.
- An individual, whose data is being processed (data principal), will have the right to obtain information about processing, seek correction and erasure of personal data, nominate another person to exercise rights in the event of death or incapacity
- The central government will notify countries where a data fiduciary may transfer personal data.

Exemptions:

- Rights of the data principal and obligations of data fiduciaries (except data security) will not apply in specified cases. These include prevention and investigation of offences.
- Enforcement of legal rights or claims.
- The central government may, by notification, exempt certain activities from the application of the Bill. The central government will establish the Data Protection Board of India.
- The schedule to the Bill specifies penalties for various offences such as up to Rs 200 crore for non-fulfilment of obligations for children, and Rs 250 crore for failure to take security measures to prevent data breaches.

Under Trial Prisoner

Why in News:

Parliamentary Panel on Home Affairs has

made recommendations to address the issue of overcrowding in India's prisons.

Recommendations:

- The Parliamentary Committee on Home Affairs has proposed the use of ankle trackers or bracelets as a practical solution to alleviate overcrowding in prisons. These tracking devices would be designed to be cost-effective and would be worn by prisoners who have been granted bail and are temporarily released from prison.
- This proposal arises from the understanding that bail is often denied for three primary reasons: the concern that undertrial prisoners may tamper with witnesses, attempt to leave the country, or commit additional crimes while out on bail.
- The report underlines the importance of respecting human rights and ethical considerations. To avoid any potential human rights violations, the panel recommends that the use of ankle trackers should be entirely voluntary and based on the informed consent of the inmates.
- The committee acknowledges the severe problem of overcrowding in Indian prisons, which has resulted in delayed justice for both prisoners and the overall criminal justice system. To address this, the report suggests that prisoners from overcrowded facilities should be transferred to other jails that have available cells, either within the same state or to jails in different states.

Notification of Minorities

Why in News:

The Supreme Court has expressed displeasure over six states and UTs not yet giving their comments to the Centre on the issue of identification of minorities at the state level.

Constitutional Safeguards provided to Minorities in India:

- The Constitution uses the term 'minority' without defining it.
- It refers to Minorities as those 'based on religion or language'.
- **Article 14:** People's right to 'equality before the law' and 'equal protection of the laws'.
- **Article 15 (1) & (2):** Prohibition of discrimination against citizens on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- **Article 15 (4):** Authority of State to make 'any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens' (besides the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes).
- **Article 16(1)&(2):** Citizens' right to 'equality of opportunity' in matters relating to employment

or appointment to any office under the State –and prohibition in this regard of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

- **Article 16(4):** Authority of State to make ‘any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- **Article 25(1):** People’s freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion –subject to public order, morality and other Fundamental Rights.
- **Article 26:** Right of ‘every religious denomination or any section thereof –subject to public order, morality and health –to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, ‘manage its own affairs in matters of religion’, and own and acquire movable immovable property and administer it ‘in accordance with law.
- **Article 27:** Prohibition against compelling any person to pay taxes for promotion of any particular religion.
- **Article 28:** People’s ‘freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in educational institutions’ wholly maintained, recognized, or aided by the State.
- **Article 29(1):** Right of ‘any section of the citizens’ to ‘conserve’ its ‘distinct language, script or culture’.
- **Article 29(2):** Restriction on denial of admission to any citizen, to any educational institution maintained or aided by the State, ‘on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them’.
- **Article 30(1):** Right of all Religious and Linguistic Minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Article 30(2):** Freedom of Minority-managed educational institutions from discrimination in the matter of receiving aid from the State.
- **Article 38 (2):** Obligation of the State ‘to endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities’ amongst individuals and groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.
- **Article 46:** Obligation of State ‘to promote with special care’ the educational and economic interests of ‘the weaker sections of the people’ (besides Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes).
- **Article 347:** Special provision relating to the language spoken by a section of the population of any State.

- **Article 350 A:** Provision for facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage.
- **Article 350 B:** Provision for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities and his duties.

Minorities in India:

- The basic ground for a community to be nominated as a religious minority is the numerical strength of the community.
- Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zoroastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.
- As per the Census 2011, the percentage of minorities in the country is about 20% of the total population of the country.
- The population of Muslims are 14.2%; Christians 2.3%; Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, Jain 0.4% and Parsis 0.006%.

About National Commission for Minorities:

- The Union Government set up the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.
- Initially, five religious communities, viz., Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis) were notified as minority communities by the Union Government.
- Further, in 2014, Jains were also notified as another minority community.
- On the lines of NCM, State governments also set up State Minorities Commissions in their respective State Capitals.

Functions of the Commission:

- It safeguard and protect the interests of minorities.
- Aggrieved persons belonging to the minority communities may approach the concerned State Minorities Commissions for redressal of their grievances.
- Moreover, they may also send their representations to the National Commission for Minorities, after exhausting all other official mechanism of remedies available to them.

Limited Internet Shutdown & It's Impact

Why in News:

Frequent use of limited internet shutdowns is gaining traction as a way to control riots and security threats while allowing beneficial use of the internet.

About Limited Internet Shutdowns:

- It refers to the intentional restriction or blocking of access to the internet, often specific websites or online services, within a defined geographic area or for a specified period of time. This is done

as a response to security threats, social unrest, or public emergencies, with the aim of controlling the flow of information and communication.

- g., this has been applied in Manipur violence and recent Nuh (Haryana) communal violence.

Status of India on Internet shutdown:

- According to a report by Access Now and the KeepItOn coalition, India enforced as many as 84 internet shutdowns in 2022 and was on top of the list for the fifth year in a row.
- In 2022, the Internet was shut down 49 times in Jammu and Kashmir, the highest of any state in the country.

Constitutional Articles & Internet Shutdown:

- Internet-related rights are protected by Articles 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression) and 19(1)(g) (freedom of trade and commerce).
- **Exceptions:** Restrictions on these rights should follow the guidelines of Articles 19(2) and (6) and adhere to the principle of proportionality.

Legal Provisions:

- Internet shutdown orders are regulated by the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017, which fall under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885. These rules allow for the temporary suspension of telecom services in a specific area during public emergencies.
- Senior officials from the Home Ministry at both central and state levels are authorized to issue shutdown orders.

Law Against Hate Speech

Why in News:

Recently, Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW) reveals that a total of 107 Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs in India have hate speech cases against them.

About Hate Speech:

- hate speech is stated as an incitement to hatred primarily against a group of persons defined in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief and the like.
- The context of speech is crucial in determining whether it constitutes hate speech or not.

Legal Position of Hate Speech in India:

- **Sections 153A and 153B of the IPC:** Punish acts that cause enmity and hatred between groups.
- **Section 295A of the IPC:** Deals with punishing acts which deliberately or with malicious intention outrage the religious feelings of a class of persons.
- **Sections 505(1) and 505(2):** Make the publication

and circulation of content that may cause ill will or hatred between different groups an offence.

- **Section 8 of the RPA, 1951:** Prevents a person convicted of the illegal use of the freedom of speech from contesting an election.
- **Sections 123(3A) and 125 of the RPA:** Bars the promotion of feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of citizens of India on the grounds of race, religion, community, caste, or language in reference to elections and include it under corrupt electoral practices.
- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:** Prevents hate speech targeting Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe in any place within public view.
- **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955:** Penalises incitement to, and encouragement of untouchability through words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise.

Preventive Detention

Why in News:

In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court of India provided important clarifications regarding the application of the three-month limit under Article 22(4)(a) of the Constitution in cases of preventive detention.

About Court Clarification:

- The Supreme Court emphasized that Article 22(4)(a) is applicable at the initial stage of passing the order of detention by the State Government or an officer, and not at the stage subsequent to the report of the Advisory Board. It clarified that the period of three months mentioned in Article 22(4)(a) relates to the initial period of detention until the receipt of the Advisory Board's report, and does not influence the duration of detention after the confirmatory order is passed by the State Government.

Aadhaar

Why in News:

Recently, In the midst of India's extensive digital infrastructure development, Moody's report "Decentralized Finance and Digital Assets" has underscored that the world's largest digital identification program frequently denies services to users.

Key Points of the Moody's Report:

- Aadhaar leads to the concentration of sensitive information with specific entities and increases

the risks of data breaches.

- Government's adoption of Aadhaar for routing Direct Benefit Transfers to beneficiaries of welfare schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) etc, which is hindering their effective Implementation.
- Aadhaar biometric faces hurdles, including the burden of establishing authorization and concerns about biometric reliability.
- Aadhaar system enables access to public and private services, with verification via fingerprint or iris scans and alternatives like One-Time Passcodes (OTPs).

About Aadhaar:

- Aadhaar is a 12-digit individual identification

number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India on behalf of the Government of India. The number serves as proof of identity and address, anywhere in India.

- The Aadhaar number is unique for each individual and will remain valid for life time.
- Aadhaar number will help the residents to avail various services provided by banking, mobile phone connections and other Govt and Non-Govt services in due course.
- Establishes identity of individuals on the basis of demographic and biometric information.
- It is a voluntary service that every resident can avail irrespective of present documentation.



Labour Reform in India-New Labour Rules in India

Why in News:

Four labor codes passed by Parliament between 2019 and 2020 have still not been implemented.

About Code on Wages, 2019:

- **Regulation of Wage and Bonus Payments:** The code aims to regulate the payment of wages and bonuses in all industries, businesses, and manufacturing activities.
- **Floor Wage and Minimum Wage:** The central government determines a floor wage based on the living standards of workers. The minimum wage set by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage. It should be revised every five years.
- **Overtime Wages:** Employees who work more than the normal working hours are entitled to overtime wages. This must be at least twice the normal rate.
- **Wage Deductions:** The code restricts wage

deductions to a maximum of 50% of an employee's total wage, with certain grounds such as fines or absence from duty.

- **Bonus Determination:** Employees whose wages do not exceed a specified monthly amount are entitled to an annual bonus of at least 8.33% of their wages or Rs 100, whichever is higher. The maximum bonus allowed is 20% of their annual wages.
- **Prohibition of Gender Discrimination:** The code prohibits gender discrimination in matters related to wages and the recruitment of employees for the same or similar work.

About Code on Industrial Relations, 2020:

- **Definition of Worker:** The code defines a worker as someone who works for hire or reward, excluding those in managerial or administrative roles whose pay exceeds Rs 18,000.
- **Standing Orders:** Industrial establishments with 300 or more workers must prepare standing orders. This should cover aspects such as worker classification, work hours, holidays, wages, and

grievance redressal.

- **Prior Permission for Closure or Retrenchment:** Establishments with at least 300 workers must seek prior permission from the government for closure, lay-off, or retrenchment. The central government can increase the threshold through notification.
- **Negotiation Union and Council:** The trade union with more than 51% of workers as members is recognized as the sole negotiation union. If no union qualifies, a negotiation council is formed. This will have representatives from unions having at least 20% of the workers as members.
- **Tribunals for Dispute Settlement:** Industrial disputes are settled by industrial tribunals. The tribunal will consist of a judicial member and an administrative member.
- **Fixed-Term Employment:** Fixed-term employment refers to hiring workers for a fixed duration based on a contract. It provides flexibility to employers and certain benefits to temporary workers.

About Code on Social Security, 2020:

- **Replaced Laws:** The code replaces nine existing laws related to social security. This includes the Employees Provident Fund Act, Maternity Benefit Act, and Unorganized Workers Social Security Act.
- **Applicability:** The code applies to establishments based on a size threshold determined by the central government.
- **Social Security Fund:** The central government establishes a fund for unorganized, gig, and platform workers. Separate social security funds are administered to organized workers.
- **Registration:** Unorganized workers, gig workers, and platform workers must be registered under the code.
- **National Social Security Board:** A board is set up to ensure the welfare of workers. It recommends and monitors schemes for different categories of workers.
- **Contributions and Definitions:** Funding for schemes benefiting gig workers and platform workers may come from contributions by the government and aggregators. The code expands definitions to include various categories of workers.

About Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020:

- **Consolidation of Acts:** The code consolidates 13 existing acts related to health, safety, and working conditions. This includes the Factory Act and the Mines Act.
- **Coverage Threshold:** The code sets thresholds for coverage based on the number of workers in

establishments and hazardous activities.

- **Work Hours and Employment Conditions:** The maximum daily work limit is set at 8 hours. Women are entitled to work in all establishments, with adequate safeguards in hazardous operations.
- **Interstate Migrant Workers:** The code defines and provides benefits for interstate migrant workers. This includes access to public distribution systems, construction worker funds, and insurance and provident fund benefits.
- **Database and Social Security Fund:** Details of inter-state migrant workers are recorded in a portal. The penalties collected under the code are credited to a social security fund for the welfare of unorganized workers. Other sources may also contribute to the fund.

Law Commission Report on UCC

Why in News:

The Law Commission of India has asked for views and proposals from the public regarding the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The UCC has been a highly debated and politically charged issue in India. The Law Commission's previous stance on the UCC was that it was neither necessary nor desirable. UCC is a proposal to replace the personal laws of various religious communities with a common set of laws for all citizens.

About Uniform Civil Code:

- The Uniform Civil Code is mentioned in Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, which is part of the Directive Principles of State Policy.
- These principles are not legally enforceable but are meant to guide the state in making policies.
- It has been supported by some as a way to promote national integration and gender justice, but opposed by others as a threat to religious freedom and diversity.
- The only state in India that has a UCC is Goa, which retained its common family law known as the Goa Civil Code after it was liberated from Portuguese rule in 1961.
- The rest of India follows different personal laws based on their religious or community identity.

Personal Laws in India:

- Currently, not only Muslims but also Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews are governed by their own personal laws.
- Personal laws are determined based on religious identity.
- The reformed Hindu Personal Law still incorporates certain traditional practices.
- Differences arise when Hindus and Muslims

marry under the Special Marriage Act, where Hindus continue to be governed by Hindu Personal Law, but Muslims are not.

Important Cases Related to UCC:

Shah Bano Begum v. Mohammad Ahmed Khan (1985):

- The Supreme Court upheld the right of a Muslim woman to claim maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, even after the expiry of the Iddat period.
- It also observed that a UCC would help in removing contradictions based on ideologies.

Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India (1995):

- The Supreme Court held that a Hindu husband cannot convert to Islam and marry another woman without dissolving his first marriage.
- It also stated that a UCC would prevent such fraudulent conversions and bigamous marriages.

Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017):

- The Supreme Court declared the practice of triple talaq as unconstitutional and violative of the dignity and equality of Muslim women.
- It also recommended that the Parliament should enact a law to regulate Muslim marriages and divorces.

Reforms in India's Criminal Laws- 3 New Codes

Why in News:

Recently the Union Home Minister introduced three new Bills in the Lok Sabha that propose a complete overhaul of the country's criminal justice system. The three Bills are:

- The Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita Bill, 2023, which will replace the IPC, 1860.
- The Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023, which will replace the CrPC, 1898.
- The Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023, which will replace the Evidence Act, 1872.

Main Features of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita Bill, 2023:

- The bill defines terrorism and offenses such as separatism, armed rebellion against the government, challenging the sovereignty of the country. It repeals the offense of sedition, which was widely criticized as a colonial relic that curbed free speech and dissent.
- It prescribes capital punishment as the maximum sentence for mob lynching. It proposes 10 years imprisonment for sexual intercourse with women on false promise of marriage, which is a common form of deception and exploitation.
- The bill recognises community service as a form of punishment for specific crimes, which can help in reforming offenders and reducing

overcrowding in prisons.

- The bill fixes a maximum limit of 180 days to file a charge sheet, which can speed up the trial process and prevent indefinite delays.

Main Features of the Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023:

- The bill promotes the use of technology for trials, appeals, and recording depositions, allowing video-conferencing for proceedings. The bill makes video-recording of statement of survivors of sexual violence compulsory, which can help in preserving evidence and preventing coercion or manipulation.
- The bill mandates that police must inform about the status of a complaint in 90 days, which can enhance accountability and transparency.
- The bill requires that police consult the victim before withdrawing a case punishable by seven years or more, which can ensure that justice, is not compromised or denied.
- It allows absconding criminals to be tried in-absentia by court and sentenced too, which can deter fugitives from escaping justice.
- Section 41A of the CrPC will be renumbered as Section 35. This change includes an added safeguard, stipulating that no arrest can be made without prior approval from an officer at least at the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), especially for offences punishable by less than 3 years or for individuals above 60 years.
- It empowers magistrates to take cognizance of offenses based on electronic records such as emails, SMSs, WhatsApp messages etc., which can facilitate evidence collection and verification.
- Mercy petitions in death sentence cases to be filed within 30 days to the Governor and within 60 days to the President. No appeal shall lie against the President's decision in any court.

Main Features of Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023:

- The bill makes electronic or digital records admissible as evidence, thereby they will have the same legal effect as paper documents.
- It repeals five existing provisions of the Evidence Act, modifies 23 provisions, and adds one new provision.
- Also, the bill proposes amendments to 23 Sections and contains 170 Sections in total.
- In the bill, the scope of expansion for secondary evidence to include copies made from the original by mechanical processes, counterparts of documents, and oral accounts of document contents has been done.
- Through the bill, the government is aiming to introduce precise and uniform rules for dealing with evidence during the trial of cases.

History:

- Indian Penal Code (IPC) is the official criminal code of India drafted in 1860 in the wake of the first law commission established in 1834 under the Charter Act of 1833.
- Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provides procedures for administering criminal law in India. It was enacted in 1973 and became effective on 1 April 1974.
- The Indian Evidence Act, originally passed in India by the Imperial Legislative Council in 1872, during the British Raj, contains a set of rules and allied issues governing admissibility of evidence in the Indian courts of law.

Project 39A

Why in News:

Annual Death Penalty Report, 2022 was released by Project 39A. Project 39A is inspired by Article 39-A of the Indian Constitution, a provision that furthers the intertwined values of equal justice and equal opportunity by removing economic and social barriers.

About Project 39A:

- It is a criminal reforms advocacy group with the National Law University, Delhi.
- It is inspired by Article 39-A of the Indian Constitution, a provision that furthers the intertwined values of equal justice and equal opportunity by removing economic and social barriers.
- Project 39A aims to trigger new conversations on legal aid, torture, forensics, mental health in prisons, and the death penalty, using empirical research to re-examine practices and policies in the criminal justice system.
- The dismal state and sometimes the absence of record-keeping in the police, prisons and courts along with multiple barriers to accessing records/ data complicates criminal justice research in India.

Chargesheet: Not A Public Document

Why in News:

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that chargesheets are not 'public documents' and enabling their free public access violates the provisions of the Criminal Code of Procedure (CrPC) as it compromises the rights of the accused, victim, and the investigation agencies.

Why is a Chargesheet not a Public Document?

- According to the Court, a chargesheet cannot be made publicly available as it's not a 'public

document' under Sections 74 and 76 of the Evidence Act, 1872.

- **Section 74:** It defines public documents as those which form the acts or records of sovereign authority, official bodies, tribunals, and of public offices either legislative, judicial or executive in any part of India, Commonwealth or a foreign country. It also includes public records "kept in any State of private documents".
- Documents mentioned in this section are only public documents, and certified copies of them must be provided by the public authority having custody of them.
- Copy of chargesheets along with necessary public documents cannot be said to be public documents under this section.
- **Section 76:** Any public officer having custody of such documents must provide a copy upon demand and payment of a legal fee, along with a certificate of attestation that states the date, seal, name, and designation of the officer.
- As per Section 75 of the Evidence Act, all documents other than those listed under Section 74 are private documents.

About Chargesheet:

- A chargesheet, as defined under Section 173 CrPC, is the final report prepared by a police officer or investigative agency after completing their investigation of a case.
- In the K Veeraswami vs Union of India & Others (1991) case, the SC ruled that the chargesheet is a final report of the police officer under section 173(2) of the CrPC.
- A chargesheet must be filed against the accused within a prescribed period of 60-90 days, otherwise, the arrest is illegal, and the accused is entitled to bail.

Chargesheet Should Contain:

- Details of names, the nature of the information, and offences. Whether the accused is under arrest, in custody, or has been released, whether any action was taken against him, these are all important questions answered in the chargesheet.
- After preparing the chargesheet, the officer-in-charge of the police station forwards it to a Magistrate, who is empowered to take notice of the offences mentioned in it so that the charges can be framed.

How is a Chargesheet Different from an FIR

- The term, 'chargesheet' is defined under Section 173 of the CrPC but First Information Report (FIR), has not been defined in either the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or the CrPC. Instead, it finds a place under the police regulations/ rules under Section 154 of CrPC, which deals with

Information in Cognizable Cases’.

- While the chargesheet is the final report filed towards the end of an investigation, an FIR is filed at the ‘first’ instance’ that the police are informed of a cognizable offense (offence for which one can be arrested without a warrant; such as rape, murder, kidnapping).
- After filing an FIR, the investigation takes place. Under Section 169 of the CrPC, the police can only forward the case to the Magistrate if they have sufficient evidence, otherwise, the accused is released from custody.
- According to Section 154 (3) of the CrPC, if any

person is aggrieved by the refusal of authorities to file an FIR, they can send the complaint to the Superintendent of Police, who will either investigate himself or direct it to their subordinate.

- A chargesheet is filed by the police or law-enforcement/ investigative agency only after they have gathered sufficient evidence against the accused in respect of the offenses mentioned in the FIR, otherwise, a ‘cancellation report’ or ‘untraced report’ can be filed when due to lack of evidence.

Important Days

- ☑ **December 1:** World AIDS Day **Theme:** Let Communities Lead.
- ☑ **December 2:** National Pollution Control Day **Theme:** Sustainable Development for a Clean and Healthy Planet.
- ☑ **December 2 :** International Day for the Abolition of Slavery **Theme:** Fighting Slavery’s Legacy of Racism through Transformative Education.
- ☑ **December 3:** World Day of the Handicapped or International Day of Persons with Disabilities **Theme:** United in action to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with and by persons with disabilities.
- ☑ **December 4:** Indian Navy Day. **Theme:** Operational Efficiency, Readiness, and Mission Accomplishment in the Maritime Domain.
- ☑ **December 5:** International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development. Established by the UN in 1985. **Theme:** Volunteers Build Resilient Communities.
- ☑ **December 5 :** World Soil Day. Established by the UN in 2013. **Theme:** Soil and Water: A Source of Life.
- ☑ **December 7:** Armed Forces Flag Day. Marks the Armed Forces Flag Day in India, honoring the sacrifices of armed forces personnel. Initiated in 1949.
- ☑ **December 9:** International Anti-Corruption Day. Established in 2003 alongside the UNAC adoption, it calls for unity in promoting transparency, accountability and ethics. **Theme:** UNCAC at 20: Uniting the World Against Corruption.
- ☑ **December 10:** Human Rights Day. **Theme:** Freedom, Equality and Justice for All December 10 marks Human Rights Day, commemorating the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.
- ☑ **December 16:** Vijay Diwas **Theme:** Run For Soldiers, Run With Soldiers. December 16 marks the Vijay Diwas in India, celebrating the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War Victory and the liberation of Bangladesh.
- ☑ **December 18:** International Migrants Day. **Theme:** Promoting Safe Migration.
- ☑ **December 22:** National Mathematics Day. This day celebrates the birth anniversary of renowned mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. It was declared in 2012. **Theme:** Mathematics for Everyone.
- ☑ **December 23 :** National Farmer’s Day **Theme:** Delivering Smart Solutions for Sustainable Food Security and Resilience
- ☑ **December 24 :** National Consumer Rights Day. It commemorates the Consumer Protection Act, of 1986, promoting awareness and activism.
- ☑ **December 25:** Good Governance Day Established in 2014. It honors Former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s leadership and promotes good governance practices.

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