



## Key Highlights

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- **INS Imphal**
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## Message



**Vinay Singh**  
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Best wishes.



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# China's Rising Indian Ocean Presence Alarms India

- China has been actively expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean, aiming to strengthen its dominance in the region by violating rules and regulations. Recently, their research vessel, Shi Yan 6, concluded a journey off the Sri Lankan coast and then made its way to Singapore, purportedly for research purposes. Now, China is seeking permission from Sri Lanka and Maldives for its second research vessel to conduct exploration activities in their ports. The nation has approached these countries, asking for cooperation in their exploration activities in the South Indian Ocean from January 5, 2024, throughout the year. This move perhaps is part of China's strategy to exert influence in India's maritime neighbourhood, potentially with a motive of impacting the regional dynamics.
- India has taken a proactive stance regarding China's intentions in the Indian Ocean and has advised Sri Lanka and Maldives to carefully consider the implications of allowing Chinese research vessels into their territories. India has made it clear to both nations that these vessels should not be permitted for potential future military operations. Currently, China's Jiang Yang Hong 03 vessel is situated near the Xiamen coast in the South China Sea and seeks entry into the South Indian Ocean via the Strait of Malacca, for which it requires permission from both Maldives and Sri Lanka.
- Previously, both Sri Lanka and Maldives were closely aligned with China, fostering China's presence in the Indian Ocean while receiving substantial economic aid and loans in return. However, both these nations observed a severe economic downturn attributing to the burden of Chinese debt. Consequently, both countries have become cautious. India's approach to these nations is based on this shift. There's a shared expectation that these countries will refrain from allowing the Indian Ocean to be dominated by China's aspirations.
- India emphasizes its SAGAR Vision (Security and Growth for All in the Region) concerning the Indian Ocean. Preserving the sovereignty of all nations in this region, particularly economic sovereignty and control over territorial waters, has become paramount. Countering China's strategic, diplomatic, and military presence disguised as research and exploration endeavours in the Indian Ocean is crucial to safeguarding these interests and ensuring China's efforts fail in their attempts to strengthen their position in the region.

## India's role in the Indian Ocean:

- A major concern for China is how Indian Ocean

nations perceive India as a net security provider. There are several initiatives that India takes which ensure development of all.

- **As Provider of Humanitarian Assistance:** India has consistently taken the lead in offering humanitarian aid during time of any disaster in the region. Moreover, India's shift towards enhancing the capacities, skill sets, defence training, and defence exports within the Indian Ocean countries has significantly alarmed China. This transformation in India's approach has notably heightened China's apprehensions regarding its own standing in the Indian Ocean.
- **As a strategic leader:** India's strategic efforts in the Indian Ocean have been evident through specialized discussions with key member countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Bangladesh. These discussions, often convened within forums like the Colombo Security Conclave, aim to address critical security issues within the region. India has proactively fostered collaboration among Sri Lanka and Maldives to combat the rising concerns of drug and arms trafficking, the influence of ideologies like ISIS in the Indian Ocean.
- Specifically, within the Colombo Security Conclave, member nations have exchanged their successful strategies in countering narco-terrorism and organized crime. The Narcotic Control Bureau of India has played a pivotal role in organizing and leading these discussions, fostering a united front against these challenges.
- **Medical diplomacy:** India's adept execution of medical diplomacy within the Indian Ocean region too has significantly bolstered its standing and garnered respect among the member nations.

## Security of the Indian Ocean is a collective responsibility:

- According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), submarines passing through a strait are mandated to surface. However, despite this regulation, Chinese submarines have been detected by the Indian Navy for not adhering to this protocol.
- While UNCLOS grants nations sovereignty over territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), it's imperative for Indian Ocean countries to recognize the collective responsibility for the region's security. The smaller island nations shouldn't be relegated to maritime subservience to a dominant power like China, nor should they become mere testing grounds for China's energy, food, and strategic ambitions.
- **China's influence on Sri Lanka:** Previously, under the governance of Sri Lanka's Ranil

Wickremesinghe, China's research vessel Shi Yen 6 was permitted entry into its Exclusive Economic Zone (Hambantota) despite India's objections. Later, the vessel received authorization and, on November 20, concluded its exploration in the Sri Lankan EEZ and South Indian Ocean, returning via the Strait of Malacca.

- Notably, a Chinese seaplane was observed around 500 nautical miles from Chennai before it arrived in Colombo on October 25, 2023. The Satish Dhawan Space Centre Sriharikota, lies approximately 1100 kilometres away. India's primary concern revolves around the close proximity between Hambantota and crucial Indian ports such as Chennai, Kochi, and Visakhapatnam, spanning only 900 to 1500 kilometres. This geographical closeness raises sensitive security implications for India.
- **China's influence on Maldives:** India's growing wariness also stems from the shifting dynamics in Maldives, now governed by a pro-China administration seemingly diverging from its 'India First Policy.'
- President Muizzu's emphasis on the withdrawal of Indian soldiers, claiming India's agreement to remove 75 troops, has fueled India's suspicions regarding China's maritime exploration in the South Indian Ocean. India fears that these Chinese research vessels might engage in espionage activities within its coastal areas and territorial waters.
- The Indian naval personnel stationed in Maldives were entrusted with crucial surveillance tasks, spanning from coastal radar monitoring to overseeing Maldives' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The decision by Maldives to relieve these soldiers from their responsibilities could potentially pave the way for China's unhindered access.
- **Other tactics by China to exert its influence on Indian Ocean:** China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been rapidly expanding its maritime capabilities, boasting a fleet comprising three aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and guided missile destroyers. Notably, China is strategically establishing a network of naval bases extending from Cambodia to Djibouti.
- China's substantial investments and acquisitions of numerous ports across countries signify its increasing foothold in the region.
- Many nations are becoming increasingly wary of China's People's Liberation Army's expansion under the guise of combating sea piracy in Africa and the Gulf of Aden. There's a rising apprehension that this trend could pave the way for Chinese Carrier Strike Forces to monitor

international waters within the Indian Ocean in future.

- Recent joint naval exercises between the Chinese Navy and the Pakistani Navy off the Makran coast showcased China's military collaboration, featuring the use of China's PLA Song class diesel hunter-killer submarine. These developments underscore China's proactive efforts to solidify its maritime influence in the region, prompting concerns about the potential implications for the security landscape in the Indian Ocean.
- **Context of Bangladesh:** China doesn't anticipate substantial cooperation from Bangladesh in this pursuit. Under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh, currently presiding over the Indian Ocean Rim Association, prioritizes developmental initiatives. The government emphasizes transforming Bangladesh into a developed economy.

### India's Maritime Security Strategy:

- India is actively amplifying its maritime capabilities to counter China's escalating presence in the Indian Ocean. This includes not only bolstering its submarine fleet but also intensifying collaborations with Southeast Asian nations. India's "Necklace of Diamond Strategy" involves re-establishing a network of naval bases across the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, ASEAN countries, and African nations.
- Through various forums such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Colombo Security Conclave, and Indian Ocean Conference, India advocates for critical aspects of Indian Ocean security, striving to foster unity among participating nations.
- In a collaboration with France's Naval Group, India plans to construct three diesel-powered submarines featuring air independent propulsion technology.
- Recognizing the necessity to safeguard not only its maritime interests but also those of its neighbours, India's government acknowledges the imperative to elevate the Navy and Coast Guard to peak proficiency. Through a "Blue Water" approach, India is steadfastly enhancing its Maritime Domain Awareness Strategy, gearing up to confront an array of challenges with an empowered naval force capable of protecting regional interests effectively.
- China's attempts to wield influence in the Indian Ocean under the guise of immediate economic aid are concerning. It's essential to prevent China from manipulating the Indian Ocean for its own agenda, safeguarding the region's integrity.

# UNFCCC COP-28: Countries Moving Towards Dealing with Climate Change

## Climate Change Advancements: Key Takeaways from UNFCCC COP-28

- The Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP) remains a pivotal moment for countries worldwide, drawing the attention of policymakers, environmentalists, and biodiversity experts. At the heart of the discussions during COP meetings lie several critical points that shape the final proclamation.
- The focus often revolves around reaching a consensus between developed and developing nations regarding efforts to combat climate change and address global warming. The question of whether crucial decisions made during these meetings will be legally binding on member countries is a pivotal aspect that garners attention.
- The most critical issue is the question of climate finance. This concern intensifies, particularly in developing, impoverished, and island nations. These countries eagerly anticipate the agreed-upon financial support from developed nations under the adaptation and reduction strategy.
- UNFCCC's COP 28 convened in Dubai from November 30 to December 13, 2023. The anticipation surrounding this meeting was palpable, with stakeholders across the globe eagerly awaiting the outcome, hoping for substantial progress on these crucial fronts.

## Key Points of COP-28:

- **Loss and Damage Fund:** A draft declaration was proposed to establish a Loss and Damage Fund aimed at supporting the most vulnerable countries affected by climate change. The World Bank is set to oversee the fund's initial phase, marking a critical step toward assisting nations facing the severest impacts.
- **1.5 Degree Limit:** There was a pivotal shift in focus toward limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This marked the first significant conversation about distancing from fossil fuels to achieve a 'Net Zero' target by 2050. This shift is crucial as many fossil fuel-dependent nations had not previously committed seriously to reducing their reliance on these energy sources.
- **Global Stocktake and Adaptation Goal:** Decisions surrounding the Global Stocktake and Global Goal on Adaptation were another crucial aspect during COP 28.
- **Renewable Energy and Emissions Reduction:** Nations collectively pledged to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030 and double energy efficiency within the same timeframe. Efforts to reduce non-carbon emissions,

particularly methane emissions by 2030, were discussed, although these efforts were not legally binding.

- **Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets:** Member countries committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030 and by 60% by 2035, relative to 2019 levels, indicating a substantial effort to mitigate emissions.
- **Nuclear Energy and NDC Revisions:** An announcement was made to triple nuclear energy capacity by 2050. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on the imperative for nations worldwide to revise and strengthen their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), ensuring more ambitious and tangible climate action targets.
- The launch of the **Global River Cities Alliance** was announced at COP-28 under the leadership of India.

## Challenges caused by Climate Change:

- Climate change changes the temperature dynamics of a region, changing the energy structure, affecting the spatial distribution of precipitation, and causing natural disasters. This environmental upheaval contributes to urban floods, vanishing wetlands, and biodiversity loss, intensifying the urgency for a comprehensive strategy to address its repercussions across agriculture, industry, and health sectors. One of the major consequences that is attributed to climate is that of Urbanisation. The rapid pace of urbanization worldwide underscores the inevitable shift toward a predominantly urban population in the near future.
- Indonesia, grappling with the looming threat of rising sea levels, exemplifies the dire consequences nations face due to climate change. The necessity for shifting capitals, like in the case of Jakarta, stands as a stark testament to the climate's disruptive influence.

## Water Conservation and Climate Change:

- Water and climate change are inextricably linked. From unpredictable rainfall patterns to shrinking ice sheets, rising sea levels, floods and droughts – most impacts of climate change come down to water. Climate change exacerbates both water scarcity and water-related hazards (such as floods and droughts), as rising temperatures disrupt precipitation patterns and the entire water cycle.
- The United Nations forecasts a staggering 4 billion people grappling with severe water scarcity by 2050, fuelling potential conflicts over water distribution. Presently, 31 nations face this crisis, a number likely to soar to 48

by 2025. To address this, the UN advocates for a unified “One Water Approach” urging global adoption. This approach champions equality among all water sources, emphasizing holistic conservation efforts without bias based on origin. It underscores the need for integrated, inclusive, and sustainable management of all water resources.

- To enact this approach, the UN calls upon communities, business leaders, policymakers, academics, and stakeholders to collaborate for effective water conservation. World Water Day, an annual UN initiative, amplifies water literacy globally, fostering awareness and support for Sustainable Development Goal 6—ensuring “Water for All by 2030” encompassing both access to safe water and sanitation.
- It is also necessary to resolve ocean disputes, build consensus for the development of a blue economy, and protect the oceans from illegal fishing, piracy, marine garbage and plastic pollution, and the impact of global warming on the oceans. Nations need to come together unconditionally to tackle endangered marine biodiversity.

#### **The global challenge of land conservation:**

- According to UN, up to 40 percent of our planet’s land has been degraded. It would directly affect half of humanity and threaten about 50 percent of global GDP (or about \$44 trillion). Therefore, global leaders have decided to accelerate efforts to restore 1 billion hectares of land by 2030.
- The release of “Drought in Numbers 2022” under UNCCD’s guidance aims to provide a comprehensive blueprint for countries to bolster their preparedness and resilience against drought. This initiative becomes especially crucial in the context of the UNCCD COP 15.
- The Abidjan Call stands as a global framework, notably highlighted by the Abidjan Declaration urging COP 15 leaders to duly acknowledge gender equality and women’s indispensable roles in the restoration of land. Furthermore, UNCCD COP 15’s issuance of the “Land, Life, and Legacy” proclamation aligns with the implementation of recommendations from the UNCCD’s flagship report, “Global Land Outlook 2.”

#### **Dealing with Climate Change:**

- For climate finance, it was said that a new collective quantitative target should be set before the year 2025, starting at a level of US\$100 billion annually. This commitment echoes the promise made during COP 21 in Paris back in 2015, where countries pledged to establish a Green Climate Fund with a \$100 billion corpus. This fund aims to extend financial aid to

developing nations, assisting them in combatting the challenges posed by climate change. Despite lengthy debates spanning multiple COP summits, concrete outcomes had been elusive.

#### **Global Climate Change Management and India’s CBDR Approach:**

- India has actively integrated the management of natural disasters into its foreign policy, envisioning a global role focused on sustainable development, bolstering the global economy’s security, and supporting both developed and developing nations in handling natural calamities. Central to this stance is India’s commitment to the principle of “equal but differentiated responsibility and respective capacity” within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- The proposition made by India in 2017 for the establishment of a global organization dedicated to handling natural disaster infrastructure has now materialized. India advocates for the application of the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Related Capacities (CBDR-RC) principle as the biggest vision of global climate justice.
- Under CBDR-RC, the responsibility for greenhouse gases and carbon emissions primarily falls on developed countries, accounting for approximately 80% of emissions over the past 150 years. This equitable approach aims to rectify historical imbalances in emissions responsibility and foster collaborative global efforts toward climate resilience and sustainability.

#### **India’s climate change management commitment:**

- Reaching 500 GW non-fossil energy capacity by 2030.
- To achieve 50% of its energy needs from renewable energy by 2030.
- Reduction of one billion tonnes of total projected carbon emissions between now and 2030.
- Reduction in carbon intensity of the economy by 45 percent from 2005 levels by 2030.
- To achieve net zero emissions by 2070.
- India has taken significant strides towards achieving its climate objectives by emphasizing the utilization of renewable energy sources. Prioritizing sustainable development initiatives, the country has focused on key projects like national energy targets, the promotion of energy efficiency, and the implementation of policies aimed at reducing emissions. These efforts underscore India’s commitment to leveraging renewable resources while concurrently addressing broader sustainability goals.



# India committed to deal with the challenge of piracy in the Arabian Sea

Maritime security is crucial for global trade and prosperity and attacks in these strategic maritime regions raise concerns about the safety of crucial sea trade routes. The recent targeting of ships by Houthi rebels and Yemeni pirates in maritime regions like the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and Bab-el-Mandab Strait have caught the global attention. India, known for its peace-loving stance, too fell victim and faced alarming incidents involving drone attacks by the Houthis. The MV KM Pluto, a merchant vessel transporting crude oil from Saudi Arabia to Mangaluru, encountered an attack in the Arabian Sea near the Indian coast. Subsequently, MV Saibaba and MV Blamenen, laden with oil, also fell victim to drone strikes in the Southern Red Sea.

- The US Central Command initially identified MV Sai Baba as an Indian-flagged oil tanker and classified MV Blamenen as a Norwegian-flagged oil tanker. However, India has clarified that MV Sai Baba is not registered under the Indian flag but is instead flagged by the African country Gabon. The question however, is not about the flags of the countries these ships adorn, the larger issue is the increasing vulnerability of crucial sea trade routes. These areas particularly the Indian Ocean, which facilitates around 80 percent of global oil trade have become targets of pirates, separatist rebels and agent countries of regional politics. Energy trading nations frequently have faced adversity in the Indian Ocean due to the influence of lawless elements in the Horn of Africa, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea region. Unfortunately, piracy has emerged as a significant concern in these areas, impacting the stability of trade routes and maritime activities.
- The Indian Ocean region stands as a pivotal area crucial for the peace, stability, and prosperity of numerous nations. Its significance lies in supporting various ocean-dependent industries, particularly shipping, across key maritime passages like the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Yemen. These waters, spanning from the expansive Arabian Sea to the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, embody the immense importance of the Indian Ocean.

## Reasons and Impact of such attacks on ships:

- **The Israel Palestine Conflict:** The complex situation in the Indian Ocean and the Middle East are intricately linked to geopolitical rivalries, particularly evident in the aftermath of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The conflict was inflicted by Hamas which garners support from

Iran, which also backs Yemen's Houthi rebels and provides financial assistance to Lebanon's Hezbollah. This alliance, formed against common adversaries like Israel, has created a ripple effect, prompting Houthi rebels in Yemen to escalate tensions by targeting energy ships in the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandab Strait.

- **Role of United States:** In the broader geopolitical context, the United States has designated Iran as an enemy, citing concerns ranging from its nuclear program to alleged support for terrorism in the Middle East, as well as its alignment with China. Meanwhile, India, while maintaining historically positive relations with Iran, has increasingly leaned towards the United States in its recent foreign policy. This shift in India's stance in a way has strained its ties with Iran, given the latter's adversarial relationship with the United States. Recognizing the importance of regional stability, it becomes imperative to engage with countries like Iran to foster peace and security in critical areas such as the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Aden, and Bab-el-Mandab.



## Case Study: Recent case of hijacking MV Rouen

- India's commitment to safeguarding the Indian Ocean under its Sagar Vision was evident in its swift response to the recent piracy incident involving the MV Rouen. The UK Maritime Trade Operations reported the MV Rouen hijacking on December 14, 2023. By December 17, 2023, the vessel was commandeered into Somalia's territorial waters near Bosaso. Responding to the incident aligning with its Sagar Vision for Indian Ocean security, India swiftly deployed the Naval Maritime Patrol Vessel on December 15 to locate the ship and communicate with the crew, confirming their safety (none were Indian). INS Kochi, engaged in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, was also redirected immediately for assistance.
- **INS Kochi's Role:** On December 16, INS Kochi attempted to intercept MV Rouen and dispatched a helicopter for an onboard assessment. The crew reported significant vessel damage and being held captive by pirates. INS Kochi refrained from direct armed intervention, focusing on ensuring the crew's fair treatment. Meanwhile, a Japanese warship arrived on December 16, followed by ESPNS Victoria. Throughout the transit to Somalia on December 16-17, INS Kochi maintained proximity to MV Rouen.

## Piracy Cases in the Indian Ocean:

- The escalation of piracy and armed robbery

incidents in the maritime sector, as reported by the Information Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), has raised significant concerns, with 161 incidents recorded in 2022 alone. This surge in piracy, armed robbery, smuggling, illegal fishing, and irregular human migration—totaling 4728 incidents in the Indian Ocean region and its adjacent areas—poses substantial challenges for the coastal countries in this region.

- **Impact on shipping sector:** The looming threat of attacks by pirates and Houthi rebels has instilled fear among some of the world's largest shipment companies. As a result, these companies, including industry giants like Maersk, Hapag Lloyd, and MSC, witnessed a substantial 35 percent decline in maritime traffic in the Red Sea. The severity of the situation prompted these companies to halt exports or opt for longer, less risky routes to ensure the safety of their shipments and its repercussions were seen global energy trade and supply chains, with increased inflationary pressures on the global economy.
- **Operation Prosperity Guardian:** In a bid to address these concerns and facilitate the resumption of trading activities in the region, companies like Maersk received assurances regarding security measures in the Red Sea through Multilateral Security Initiative, "Operation Prosperity Guardian". This operation, spearheaded by Western nations, has been initiated to bolster security in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Recognizing the pivotal role these waterways play in connecting Asia to Europe and the U.S., this multilateral initiative aims to ensure safe passage for ships navigating these critical trade routes.

### Stance of India and its institutional measures to prevent piracy:

- India, emphasizing its sea trade and business, has confronted the recent piracy issue in the Red Sea by stepping up its anti-piracy efforts. Following the hijacking of a Malta-flagged cargo ship by pirates, the Indian Navy has heightened its anti-piracy mission by deploying an additional frontline ship in the Gulf region.
- Further, there are several initiatives by Central Government to bolster maritime, notably the establishment of the Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) and the recent passing of the Anti-Piracy Bill in the Indian Parliament. Recognizing the significance of international collaboration, discussions addressing piracy

issues have been actively pursued within key regional and international forums like Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Commission, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, Colombo Security Conclave, Coast Guard meetings, and the Indian Ocean Conference.

- The Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM), involving 23 countries and territories, also stands as a significant multilateral platform. Originating in 2004 and serving as the sole forum convening all heads of Asian coast guard agencies, HACGAM has facilitated discussions on maritime security. The 18th HACGAM, hosted by the Indian Coast Guard in October 2022, witnessed the participation of 55 representatives from 18 countries and two international organizations the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia Information Sharing Center and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - Global Maritime Crime Program (UNODC-GMCP).
- Throughout the four-day event, robust discussions encompassed crucial maritime topics like marine environmental protection, maritime search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement. A joint statement was issued encapsulating the significant outcomes and consensus reached during these deliberations among the Chiefs of Asian Coast Guards and reflecting the commitment to enhancing cooperation and tackling maritime challenges collectively.

### Conclusion:

The tactics and strategy of anti-drone warfare at sea are still evolving, and some methods of targeting drones are reportedly not as effective as commonly believed. Tackling the challenges posed by the drone warfare and their usage against the maritime stability, will require improvisation, operational coordination, and interoperability between coalition partners. Incidentally, the Indian Navy is still in the process of acquiring adequate warfare systems for its warships. To counter such armed attacks, India will need to work alongside more capable partners. Better situational awareness and better tools to tackle these attacks are the need of the hour. Further, regional navies will need to change mindsets, step out of their comfort zones, and up their operational game in the littorals.

# India's Cultural Heritage: Related Issues and Conservation Measures

- Preservation of the tangible and intangible heritages of any country and their global recognition is essential from the point of view of the cultural achievements of that country. This also spreads cultural literacy in the country. India has taken necessary steps from time to time to protect its heritage, artefacts and cultural symbols. Due to which it has become a natural process for an organization like UNESCO to recognize the cultural importance of India from time to time.
- Recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO has presented awards in the Urban Revitalization and Heritage Conservation category to Rambagh Gate and Ramparts of Punjab, Church of Epiphany in Haryana and Bikaner House of Delhi. Rambagh Gate and Ramparts have been awarded the Award of Excellence and Church of the Epiphany and Bikaner House have been awarded the Award of Merit. UNESCO awards the Asia-Pacific Cultural Heritage Conservation Award for efforts to conserve and maintain buildings of heritage and cultural importance. This year the jury has selected a total of 12 projects from China, India and Nepal for these awards.
- India recently achieved a significant milestone in the realm of intangible heritage. During the 18th meeting of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kasane, Botswana, from December 5 to December 9, 2023, a momentous decision concerning India was made. UNESCO officially included the 'Garba of Gujarat' in the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This marks the 15th heritage element from India to be bestowed with this prestigious recognition. The inclusion of Garba underscores its pivotal role as a unifying force, promoting social inclusivity and gender diversity. Rooted in religious and devotional practices, Garba embraces participants from diverse backgrounds, fostering a vibrant tradition that unites communities. This achievement stands as a testament to the Ministry of Culture, Government of India's unwavering commitment and dedication to safeguarding, promoting, and conserving our invaluable intangible cultural heritage.

## Cultural archaeological heritage conservation: Challenges

- Heritage conservation faces significant challenges due to insufficient financial support, hindering the maintenance, renovation, beautification,

and pollution control of monuments and archaeological sites. Political intervention for developmental projects within these areas also impedes the efforts of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). ASI struggles with encroachments on historical buildings, lacking punitive authority or the means to remove encroachments. It relies on issuing notices and requesting assistance from entities like the Delhi Municipal Corporation and often requires police support that may not be readily available.

- Municipal corporations are generally interested in protecting the interests of encroachers, not in preserving old buildings. The result is that buildings get destroyed in no time. Even for those that remain, there is no money for their proper conservation. Due to this, the distinctive role of the Archaeological Survey of India is often disregarded and treated akin to any other governmental department. The selection of conservation contractors solely based on tender bids results in quality compromises for cost savings. Consequently, the work by the Archaeological Survey of India frequently faces criticism due to the correlation between low-cost bids and compromised quality in conservation efforts.

## Efforts made by India for heritage conservation:

- Art profoundly shapes a country's development by reflecting shared visions, values, practices, and definitive goals. Culture and creativity are included in all economic, social and other activities. India, celebrated for its vibrant diversity boasts an extensive array of cultural expressions. From songs, music, dance, drama, and folk traditions to performing arts, religious rites, rituals, painting, and writing, India's cultural wealth constitutes the 'intangible cultural heritage' of humanity. To safeguard these treasures, the Ministry of Culture has initiated diverse programs and schemes aimed at providing financial aid to individuals, groups, and cultural institutions actively involved in the realms of performing arts, philosophy and literature.

## The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958:

- It is an act passed by the Parliament of India which serves to safeguard ancient and historical monuments, along with archaeological sites and remains deemed of national significance. It encompasses the regulation of archaeological excavations and the preservation of sculptures, carvings, and similar objects of historical and cultural importance.

### Establishment of National Culture Fund:

- The Government of India has set up a fund through Public Private Partnership (PPP mode) with the objective of preserving heritage and heritage sites and holistically promoting the cultural wealth of India.
- The National Culture Fund (NCF) was established in the year 1996 as a trust under the Charitable Endowment Act, 1890 to mobilize human resources. The progress of all projects approved by National Culture Fund under Public Private Partnership is regularly monitored and reviewed by the Project Implementation Committee.
- Ratification of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: India ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in September 2005. As one of the earliest State Parties to ratify the Convention, India has shown strong commitment to matters relating to intangible heritage and has actively encouraged other State Parties to ratify it. India also ranks high on the list of intangible cultural heritage, with 15 heritage sites on the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Following the inclusion of Durga Puja in 2021, India submitted the nomination of Gujarat's Garba for consideration in 2023, which was recognized by UNESCO.
- India has served two terms as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee of this Convention. One from 2006 to 2010 and the other from 2014 to 2018. For its 2022-2026 term, India has set out a clear vision for the conservation and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The priority areas that India will focus on include promoting community participation, strengthening international cooperation through intangible heritage, promoting academic research on intangible cultural heritage and aligning the work of the Convention with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This vision was also shared with the other National Parties of the Convention before the elections.
- Preserving cultural heritage is a constitutional mandate in India, binding both the Central and State Governments. Article 49 within the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution specifically charges the State with safeguarding all monuments, sites of national significance, and objects of artistic or historical importance as declared by Parliament or under its laws. Furthermore, under the fundamental duty, Article 51A of the Indian Constitution states that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to give importance to the rich heritage of our culture and to preserve it.



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# ISRO: Reviewing Achievements

*“At a press conference soon after the Mars orbiter launch in 2013, a foreign journalist asked the question: why should India send a mission to Mars when millions are in poverty? Then ISRO Chairman K Radhakrishnan told him about the benefits of the space programme. Though space research has some very obvious benefits such as telecommunication, weather forecasting, GPS, and detecting water bodies and minerals, going to Mars or landing on the Moon is seen by many as a vanity project. Few people know that even the most obscure research by ISRO can finally land in your home, workplace or a factory in the shape of an immensely useful product or process. For example, a robotic technology developed by ISRO to operate equipment in a spacecraft might ultimately be used to make smart artificial limbs.”*

## Context:

➤ Recently, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space Dr. Jitendra Singh in an exclusive interview with DD News stated that Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched 397 foreign satellites over the last decade and has earned revenue of USD 441 million. To date, ISRO has launched 432 foreign satellites out of which 397 (91 per cent) have been launched in the last 10-year period. USA (231), UK (86) and Singapore (20) are the top three beneficiaries of India’s International cooperation in this sector.

## Evolution of ISRO:

➤ The Indian Space Research Organisation is the national space agency of India. It operates as the primary research and development arm of the Department of Space (DoS), which is directly overseen by the Prime Minister of India while the Chairman of ISRO also acts as the Secretary of DoS. ISRO is primarily responsible for performing tasks related to space-based operations, space exploration, international space cooperation and the development of related technologies.

➤ ISRO was previously known as the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR), set up under Jawaharlal Nehru on the suggestions of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai in 1962 recognising the need for space research. INCOSPAR grew and became ISRO in 1969, within the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). In 1972, the government of India set up a Space Commission and the Department of Space, bringing ISRO under it. It is headquartered at Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Sreedhara Somanath is the Chairman of ISRO

➤ Over the span of nearly six decades, India’s space programme has seen the country evolve from a nation relying on foreign launch vehicles to becoming fully self-reliant with its indigenous launch capabilities. Notably, India has not only developed the capacity to launch its own satellites but has also extended its services to launch satellites for other countries

## Achievements of ISRO:

- ISRO is one of the six government space agencies in the world that possesses full launch capabilities, can deploy cryogenic engines, can launch extra-terrestrial missions and operate a large fleet of artificial satellites. ISRO built India’s first satellite, Aryabhata, which was launched by the Soviet space agency Interkosmos in 1975. In 1980, ISRO launched satellite RS-1 onboard SLV-3, making India the seventh country to be capable of undertaking orbital launches. SLV-3 was followed by ASLV, which was subsequently succeeded by the development of many medium-lift launch vehicles, rocket engines, satellite systems and networks enabling the agency to launch hundreds of domestic and foreign satellites and various deep space missions for space exploration.
- ISRO has the world’s largest constellation of remote-sensing satellites and operates the GAGAN and IRNSS (NavIC) satellite navigation systems.
- **ASTROSAT:** India’s first multi wavelength observatory capable of simultaneously viewing the Universe in the visible, Ultra-Violet and X-ray regions of the electromagnetic spectrum, with its 5 payloads, was successfully launched into its planned orbit.
- **Mars Orbiter Mission:** Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM), India’s first interplanetary mission to planet Mars was launched on board PSLV-C25 on November 05, 2013. ISRO has become the fourth space agency to successfully send a spacecraft to Mars orbit.
- In its thirty ninth flight (PSLV-C37), ISRO’s Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle successfully launched the 714 kg Cartosat-2 Series Satellite along with 103 co-passenger satellites on February 15, 2017 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR, Sriharikota.
- ISRO has demonstrated the reliability of indigenous cryogenic technology with the four consecutive successful flights of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) with indigenous Cryogenic engine & stage.
- The first experimental flight of GSLV MKIII (LVM3-X) was successfully launched on December 18, 2014. The first developmental

flight was successfully launched, in which a 3136 kg communication satellite (GSAT19) was injected into the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit on June 05, 2017. GSAT-19 is the heaviest satellite launched with Indian launch vehicle.

- Seven satellites of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) constellation were successfully launched on 1st July 2013. The constellation is renamed as 'NavIC', and dedicated to the nation by Honorable Prime Minister on 28th April 2016. IRNSS-1I is the eighth member to join the constellation, was launched successfully onboard PSLV-C41 on April 12, 2018.
- In June 2018, India announced a capacity building training programme UNNATI (UNISpace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training by ISRO) on Nanosatellites development through a combination of theoretical coursework and hands-on training on Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT).
- India's second mission to Moon, Chandrayaan-2 was successfully launched on July 22, 2019 onboard GSLV Mk III-M1.
- The launch of PSLV-C48/ RISAT-2BR1 in December 2019 marked the 50th launch of PSLV, the workhorse launch vehicle.
- In 2019, ISRO launched an annual special programme called "Young Scientist Programme" or the "YUva Vigyani KARYakram" (YUVIKA), in line with the Government's vision "Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan".
- On March 7th, 2023, controlled re-entry experiment for the decommissioned Megha-Tropiques-1 (MT-1) satellite was carried out successfully, with final impact in the Pacific Ocean, demonstrating the nation's continued efforts towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.
- LVM3 M3/OneWeb India-2 Mission was successfully accomplished on 26th March, 2023, placing 36 OneWeb satellites into their intended orbit. With this, NSIL successfully executed its contract to launch 72 satellites of OneWeb to Low Earth Orbit.
- LVM3-M4 successfully launched the Chandrayaan-3 Spacecraft on 14th July, 2023.
- The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C57) successfully launched the Aditya-L1 spacecraft on September 2, 2023. It is the first space-based observatory class Indian solar mission to study the Sun.

### Commercialisation of Space and ISRO:

- In 2019, the NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) got incorporated, as a wholly owned Government of India undertaking, under the administrative

control of Department of Space (DOS).

- On June 26, 2020, the Government of India announced Space Sector Reforms. A major transformation of Indian Space Sector with enhanced participation of private players in Indian space programme and playing key roles to boost India's market share in Global Space Economy. Setting up of Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACE) and enhancing the role NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) are the two major thrust areas in the Reform.
- The establishment of IN-SPACE was announced in June 2020 by Government of India, as an autonomous agency under Department of Space, to create eco-system of industry, academia and start-ups and to attract major share in the global space economy, by authorizing and regulating activities of NGEs in space sector through detailed guidelines and procedures. IN-SPACE Headquarters at Ahmedabad was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister in June 2022.

### Importance of ISRO in India's growth:

- India is the fifth amongst spacefaring nations having end-to-end capabilities in space research and development, including the capability to launch from our own land and operate programs of earth observation, satellite communication, meteorology, space science & navigation and ground infrastructure.
- ISRO's project for sustained human presence in space will yield a large number of spinoff technologies which will improve our everyday life. Advancements in space technology has created a positive impact in society, especially in sectors like health care, education, communication, broadcasting, disaster management, safety & security and land and water resource management.

### Way Forward:

From the inception of our space programme, we have consistently pushed the boundaries of space exploration and our achievements in this domain. These have catapulted the nation onto the global center-stage. From Chandrayaan missions to the Moon, Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan) and Aditya L1's solar exploration, India has shown that the sky is not the limit; it's just the beginning. Having diligently attended to our country's developmental needs through our space endeavours from enhancing communication infrastructure to enabling remote sensing and weather forecasting, it is only natural that we now decisively turn our focus towards the uncharted realms of planetary exploration and deep space missions.

# Maternity Benefits and Associated Women's Benefits: Government Policies & Issues

- In a country like India, the pivotal concern regarding women's rights often centres on maternity benefits. The core principle underpinning this issue is the recognition that the well-being of both mothers and children are fundamental for the nation's development. Consequently, initiatives in this direction serve as a compass directing efforts towards social justice, gender equality, and the protection of children's rights. However, ongoing debates periodically surface, prompting discussions around establishing limitations on maternity benefits and other related women-centric benefits.
- Recently, a significant case came into light in Delhi involving the termination of a woman's employment while she was on maternity leave. In response, the Delhi High Court delivered a crucial ruling, deeming the denial of maternity benefits as both inhumane and contrary to the principles of social justice. The court labeled the decision of Delhi University to dismiss a female contractual employee during her maternity leave as arbitrary. Justice Chandra Dhari Singh criticized the institution's action, highlighting that terminating the services of the woman without notice was unjustifiable, regardless of her contractual status. The High Court, acknowledging the woman's legal challenge against the termination, emphasized that the denial of maternity benefits solely due to her contractual appointment was unacceptable. The judge deemed the termination as illegal and directed the authorities to reinstate her, along with paying her a compensation sum of Rs 50,000.
- The petitioner held the position of a lady attendant at a Delhi University hostel on an ad-hoc basis since 2018. The High Court was told by the petitioner that her maternity leave was sanctioned by the authorities but she did not receive her salary during the leave period and on returning to work again, she was told that her services had been terminated. The Delhi High Court highlighted the university's notification, emphasizing the entitlement of women employed on contract or ad-hoc basis to receive 26 weeks of 'paid maternity leave.'

## Issue of 'Paid Menstrual Leave':

- An MP from Bihar's regional party RJD raised the question regarding what has been done to provide mandatory paid leave to women during menstruation to India's Women and

Child Development Minister. In this context, in response to the query in the Rajya Sabha, the Union Women and Child Development Minister dismissed the necessity of granting leave during menstruation. She expressed the view that menstruation should be regarded as a natural aspect of a woman's life, emphasizing that it shouldn't be classified as a disability warranting specific policies for leave entitlement.

- There has been a long-standing demand that women should be given mandatory leave during menstruation. However, this idea is also opposed saying that it will make employers reluctant to hire women and mandatory leave will go against the interests of women.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 amends the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 to provide the following

<b>26 weeks</b> maternity leave for the first two children	<b>12 weeks</b> leave for mothers adopting a child below the age of three months
<b>12 weeks</b> maternity leave for children beyond the first two	



The Act makes it mandatory for employers in establishment with 30 women or 50 employees, whichever is less, to provide creche facilities either in office or in any place within 500-meters.

**Working mothers** will be permitted to make four visits

during working hours to the creche

**The employer** may permit a woman to work from home if it is possible to do so

**Every establishment** will have to make these benefits available from the time of appointment

## Parliamentary Standing Committee's Recommendation on Paid Menstrual Leave:

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice previously recommended that the Personnel Ministry, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, devise a 'menstrual leave' policy to accommodate women experiencing difficulties during menstruation. The committee highlighted concerns in their report, noting that many women encounter weakness during menstruation, impacting their work capacity. The Ministry of Personnel however stated that the matter of 'menstrual leave' falls under the domain of health issues and the Health Ministry will be better positioned to deliberate and address this concern, particularly concerning women government employees.

## Countries promoting menstrual leave:

- Various nations like Spain, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Zambia, and Vietnam have incorporated provisions for paid menstrual leave. Spain is the first European country to offer paid menstrual leave to female employees, which includes leave entitlements of three days per month, which can be increased to five days. Indonesia allows two days of paid leave per month without notice, while Taiwan grants three days of menstrual leave annually, separate from the allocated 30 days of sick leave. Zambia introduced a regulation in 2015, allowing women to take a day off during menstruation without requiring a doctor's note or prior notification.
- The demand for paid period leave has been gaining traction in India, mirroring policies implemented in several countries globally. In response to a petition, the Supreme Court, on February 24, 2023, categorized this issue as a policy matter, directing the petitioner to present their request through a memorandum to the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

### :- Prelims Insights :-

- **Bhagwan Birsa Munda Jodaraste Scheme:** With the objective to facilitate smooth institutional deliveries in tribal areas, this scheme of Maharashtra aims to connect tribal villages to main roads, benefiting 17 tribal districts.
- **Lek Ladki Scheme:** Under this scheme, Maharashtra will provide a financial aid of one lakh rupees for a girl child of poor family.

### Actions on Menstrual Leave Policy in India:

- While governmental progress in India regarding menstrual leave remains limited, certain Indian companies have taken strides in this direction. Notably, Zomato led the way in 2020 by announcing a policy granting 10 days of paid period leave annually, followed by similar initiatives from companies like Swiggy and Byju's. Among Indian states, Bihar and Kerala are the only Indian states to have introduced menstrual leave policies for women. Bihar initiated its policy in 1992, offering women employees two days of menstrual leave monthly. Kerala, on the other hand, expanded its scope by providing menstrual and maternity leave to girl students in state's higher education departments. Moreover, a school in Kerala has also introduced a comparable system,

furthering the provision of menstrual leave within educational institutions.

### Steps taken for maternity benefits:

- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:** Launched on 1st January 2017 and revised and incorporated as a component of Mission Shakti from 1st April 2022 as PMMVY 2.0. The basic objective of this scheme is to provide cash incentive for partial compensation of the wage loss during pregnancy so that women can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the child; and to improve health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers (PW&LM). The PMMVY portal and mobile app is committed to providing technical excellence while giving priority to a citizen-friendly experience that ensures smooth fund transfer through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- Recently the national event relating to Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) was organized in Mumbai. A detailed user manual was issued for various stakeholders. Also, the new PMMVY portal was launched in this program. On the occasion of PMMVY 'A Salutation to Motherhood', a total direct benefit cash transfer of Rs 173.8 crore was released to 5.68 lakh first-child beneficiaries. For the first time, a total benefit of Rs 147.8 crore was issued to 2.46 lakh mothers of second girl child. A total direct cash transfer of Rs 321.57 crore was released to 8,14,612 beneficiaries on the occasion. Since inception, financial assistance has been provided to more than 3.19 crore beneficiaries with a total disbursement of more than Rs 14,424.57 crore.
- The Maternity Benefit Act- 1961, as amended by the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, inter alia provides for paid maternity leave and crèche facilities to female workers in respect of establishments employing 50 or more employees. Under this, the government has increased the paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. This leave shall not exceed eight weeks before the date of expected delivery. Further, depending on the nature of work assigned to a woman, the Act provides for work from home for such period and on such terms and conditions as the employer and the woman may mutually agree upon.



# Sovereign Credit Rating Agencies: Assessment and need for overhauling

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high ... Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake”.- Rabindranath Tagore*

- The above quotation marks the beginning of Economic Survey 2020-21, Chapter 3 which reflects upon how India’s Sovereign Credit ratings do not reflect upon the nation’s fundamentals.
- Credit rating agencies are now integral in finance, evaluating the credit risk for entities seeking loans or issuing bonds. These private firms are so crucial that potential borrowers often need their rating before raising funds in capital markets. These ratings offer lenders insight into a borrower’s creditworthiness, impacting the interest rates they will be offered for financing.
- Sovereign credit ratings, notably from major agencies like Fitch, Moody’s, and Standard & Poor’s, hold significant importance for countries seeking financial resources from domestic and international markets. About 120 countries are presently rated by these prominent agencies, showcasing the growing reliance of nations on debt markets to fulfil their development financing needs. The rise in countries with credit ratings signifies the increasing dependency on these agencies as a credible measure of a sovereign’s credit risk. However, analysing the methodologies employed by Credit Rating Agencies (CRAs) reveals various issues.
- In this context, the Finance Ministry unveiled a document titled “Re-examining Narratives: A Collection of Essays.” Some of these essays delve into the “opaque methodologies” employed by credit rating agencies when determining sovereign ratings.

## About Credit Rating Agencies (CRAs):

- A credit rating is an assessment of the creditworthiness of a borrower in general terms or with respect to a particular debt or financial obligation. A credit rating can be assigned to any entity that seeks to borrow money an individual, corporation, state or provincial authority, or sovereign government.
- Credit Rating Agency (CRA), on the other hand is a company that assigns credit ratings, which rate a debtor’s ability to pay back debt by making timely principal and interest payments and the likelihood of default.
- Sovereign credit ratings predate the Bretton Woods institutions, i.e., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. There are three main globally recognised credit rating agencies: Moody’s, Standard & Poor’s and Fitch.
- Moody’s is the oldest; it was established in 1900

and issued its first sovereign ratings just before World War I. In the 1920s, Poor’s Publishing and Standard Statistics, the predecessor of S&P, started rating government bonds.

## Methodologies used by Major International Credit Rating Agencies:

- Although, Standard & Poor’s (S&P), Moody’s, and Fitch have different rating scales, they match up in a way that makes it easy to compare. They use letters and symbols to rate from ‘highest quality’ to ‘lowest rated/default’.
- For non-investment grade loans, they look closely at things that might make it safer (like assets or agreements) or riskier (like no security or weak agreements) if things go wrong and a company can’t pay back the money.

## Issues with the Methodologies:

- Typically, rating agencies use various parameters to rate a sovereign and over half the credit ratings are determined by the qualitative component. These include growth rate, inflation, government debt, short-term external debt as a percentage of GDP, and political stability.
- Sovereign ratings, unlike corporate ratings, put more emphasis on sovereign’s governance and institutional quality than its capacity to pay (macroeconomic performance). This emphasis stems from the difficulty rating agencies face with the procurement of reliable data from low-income countries. The reputational costs associated with wrongly predicting the probability of default, puts greater emphasis on the qualitative evaluation of institutional strength and the rule of law than they otherwise might. However these factors create challenges, such as:
  - » **Opaqueness:** Credit rating agencies use methods that can be hard to understand and seem to put developing countries at a disadvantage. For instance, the guidelines of big agencies like Fitch favour countries where a lot of foreign investors own banks. They are not as trusting of banks owned by the government, saying politics might influence them.
  - » **Non transparency in selecting experts:** The experts generally consulted for the rating assessments are selected in a non-transparent manner, adding another layer of opaqueness to an already difficult-to-interpret methodology.
  - » **No assigned weights for parameters:** These agencies don’t clearly explain how important each factor is in deciding a rating. While Fitch provides some numbers to show how

much weight each factor might have, they also mention that these numbers are just examples, not exact values.

### Implications of such Opaqueness:

- Over 95 percent of all credit rating downgrades have hit developing countries, even though their economic contractions were less severe compared to their advanced economy counterparts. This pattern fuels the belief that the rating decisions unfairly lean against developing nations, raising doubts about the fairness of these assessments.
- Between 2020 and 2022, more than half of the African countries rated by the big three agencies were downgraded. In contrast, only 9 percent of European nations faced downgrades during the same period.
  - » A brief mention of recent collapsed Silicon Valley Bank of America needs to be made here. In S&P's global bank outlook for 2023, which considered U.S. banking sector in good shape Moody's annual outlook, published in early December, forecasted similar predictions.
  - » Further, overoptimistic ratings for some mortgage securities helped fuel the global financial crisis of 2008. Lehman Brothers itself carried solid ratings until days before its bankruptcy filing. S&P later said that Wall Street's rapid loss of trust in Lehman would have been difficult to anticipate.
- The downgrades in credit ratings for developing countries have created hurdles in their ability to get affordable, long-term funding from global financial markets. The rating process often involves using non-transparent aspects like perceptions, opinions of a limited number of experts, and surveys with vague methods when rating a country's ability to pay back debt.
- Initially, quantitative measurements based on a country's economic fundamentals are used to estimate a base rating. However, these solid measurements are often overruled by subjective opinions during the final rating process. This means that the final published ratings for developing nations can remain almost unchanged, even when there are significant improvements in their actual economic conditions.

### The context of India:

- The rating of India remained static at BBB- during the last 15 years, despite it climbing the ladders from the 12th largest economy in the world in 2008 to the 5th largest in 2023, with the second highest growth rate recorded during the period among all the comparator economies.
- In the run-up to India's balance-of-payments

crisis in 1991, the agencies swiftly downgraded the sovereign rating, thus reducing the country's ability to raise money abroad through public sector oil companies or banks for short periods to buy oil or to pay for imports. In 1998, when India announced that it had carried out nuclear tests in Pokhran, the ratings agencies were quick to react again, impacting borrowings.

- Impact of such ratings on India: Many countries tap the global debt or credit markets to raise money. Global banks or their investment banks often claim that it is important to diversify their investor base, be it companies or governments, to lower the risk of a narrow set buying into such borrowing programmes and posing a risk of selling or pulling out.
- India has been an outlier on this count. It has not issued a bond or raised money directly in the international market so far, which means that to a good extent, a downgrade has limited impact. Rather, the impact is felt almost fully by private firms or state-owned companies which raise foreign currency funds.

### Way Forward:

- **Balancing Qualitative Dominance:** Credit ratings are heavily influenced by subjective factors, often side-lining improvements in a nation's economic fundamentals, creating obstacles for developing countries to access affordable borrowing on global platforms.
- **Historical Repayment Record:** Evaluating a country's commitment to debt repayment can be better gauged through its history of external debt repayment. A consistent record of never defaulting despite economic fluctuations showcases a robust 'willingness to pay,' providing a stronger basis for assessing various debt defaults and reasons behind them.
- **Data-Driven Approach:** Collecting comprehensive data on a nation's debt history, defaults, restructuring instances, and surrounding circumstances can significantly bolster the credibility of credit ratings. This shift could reduce the reliance on subjective qualitative assessments.
- **Governance Indicators:** When considering governance indicators, clear, measurable principles should guide the evaluation, avoiding subjective opinions prone to biases like echo chambers, bandwagon effects, and confirmation biases, which limit objectivity.
- **Increasing Transparency:** Rating agencies need to enhance transparency on factors influencing ratings to guide necessary reforms.

## 1 The Telecommunications Bill, 2023

### Why in News:

The Indian Parliament recently passed the Telecommunications Bill, 2023. This bill enforces rules for spectrum allocation, introduces a non-auction process for satellite-based communication services, and imposes strict measures against fraud, such as phone number spoofing and SIM misuse.

### Key Points of the bill:

- The Bill seeks to replace the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933.
- Authorisation will be required from the central government to:
  - » Establish and operate telecommunications networks,
  - » Provide telecommunications services,
  - » Possess radio equipment.
- Spectrum will be allocated through auction, except for specified entities and purposes for which it will be assigned administratively.
- Telecommunication may be intercepted on specified grounds including security of the state, public order, or prevention of offences. Telecom services may be suspended on similar grounds.
- The Bill provides a mechanism to exercise the right of way for laying telecom infrastructure in public as well as private property.
- The central government may provide for measures to protect users such as requiring prior consent to receive specified messages, and the creation of a do not disturb register.

### On the Table

Govt to frame rules to provide measures for user protection

- 1 Prior consent to be taken for receiving certain specified messages
- 2 DND register to be prepared
- 3 Online mechanism to enable users to report malware, complaints

**FIRST OFFENSE**  
Civil penalty up to **₹50k**

**EACH SUBSEQUENT OFFENSE**  
Civil penalty up to **₹2 lakh** or suspension of service or both

### Significance of the Bill:

- The bill replaces the colonial-era laws (Indian Telegraph Act 1885, Wireless Telegraphy Act 1933, Telegraph Wires Unlawful Possession Act

1950) recognizing need of the evolving telecom sector.

- It further brings clarity to satellite broadband services, aligning with global norms, fostering innovation, and creating opportunities for start-ups.
- It limits spectrum assignment to auctions or administrative processes, and reduces executive discretion.
- It introduces technology-based governance solutions like online dispute resolution for smoother grievance redressal.
- It simplifies bureaucratic procedures for telecom operators through digitization.

### Telecom Sector in India:

- India's telecom sector ranks second globally with a massive subscriber base of 1.179 billion (combining wireless and wireline users) as of August 2023.
- It stands as the fourth-largest recipient of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), contributing 6% to the total FDI inflow. With an overall tele-density of 84.69%, indicating the number of telephones per 100 people, India showcases significant telecom penetration.
- Furthermore, the average monthly data consumption per wireless data user has surged to 17.36 GB in March 2023 from a mere 61.66 MB in March 2014.

## 2 Project PRAYAS

### Why in News:

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has recently initiated Project PRAYAS, i.e. Promoting Regular and Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals, in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration of Indian workers and students.

### About Project PRAYAS:

- PRAYAS aims to consolidate state-level initiatives, develop a roadmap for improved coordination, and strengthen international migration governance through policy recommendations and awareness initiatives.
- In collaboration with MEA, NITI Aayog and State Governments, it seeks to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration of aspiring Indian migrant workers and students through:
  - » **Strengthening Collaboration:** It seeks to

improve collaboration between state and central governments to better regulate international migration practices.

- » **Understanding Migration Patterns:** It will conduct studies to identify migration trends, comprehend migrant needs and aspirations, and assess initiatives by governments at various levels.
- » **Awareness Programs:** It will launch campaigns to educate potential migrants about secure and structured migration processes, providing information on available opportunities.
- » **Exchange of Successful Strategies:** It will promote the exchange of effective strategies among states and facilitate interactions between state governments and the Ministry of External Affairs on international migration matters.

### The Indian Diaspora:

- As per December 2021 data, India has a large diaspora with over 32 million people spread across the globe. Additionally, India is the world's largest recipient of remittances.
- There are several challenges faced by the Indian Diaspora worldwide, such as wage insecurity, casual work arrangements, lack of social protection and skill gaps.
- Furthermore, often these people are faced with poor working conditions with almost absence of proper grievance redress mechanisms and access to a transparent judicial system etc.

### Initiatives for Indian Diaspora:

- **MADAD Portal:** This is a platform for addressing grievances faced by distressed Indians abroad.
- **Know India programme:** for introducing young Indian diaspora to contemporary India.
- **India Community Welfare Fund:** for supporting distressed overseas Indians.
- **Pre-departure Orientation Training:** Training provided to migrating workers before departure.

### Conclusion:

The PRAYAS initiative aligns with India's migration priorities and echoes Goal 10.7 of the 2030 SDGs, emphasizing safe, orderly, and responsible migration. Additionally, it resonates with the objectives outlined in both the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF).

## 3 Overhauling the Criminal Justice System

### Why in News:

The Lok Sabha recently approved three significant Bills aiming to reform the criminal justice system. Union Home Minister Amit Shah while introducing the Bills, emphasized that the priority lies in ensuring prompt justice rather than solely emphasizing punishment.

### About the Bills:

- The three Bills comprised Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which will replace the Indian Penal Code, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, which will replace the Code of Criminal Procedure, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, which will replace the Indian Evidence Act.



### Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita:

- **Definitions:** The law now defines a child and incorporates transgender individuals within the definition of 'gender.' Additionally, it broadens the definition of a document to include electronic and digital records.
- **New Chapters:** Two new chapters are introduced, one focusing on offenses against women and children, and another dedicated to 'inchoate offenses' like attempts, abetment, and conspiracy.
- **Introduction of New Offenses:** The law introduces several new offenses, such as organized crime, terrorist acts, petty organized crime, hit and run, mob lynching, employing children to commit offenses, sexual exploitation of women through deceitful means, snatching, abetment outside India, acts threatening India's sovereignty, integrity, and unity, and the dissemination of false or fake news.
- **Offenses Removed:** Attempting to commit suicide is no longer considered an offense under this law.
- **Revised Punishments:** For thefts under Rs 5,000, community service is now stipulated as a

punishment.

### **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita:**

- **Expanded Scope of Proclaimed Offenders:** Previously, only 19 offenses were included, excluding rape cases. Now, all offenses with a punishment of 10 years or more are covered.
- **Arrest Protocols:** Offenses carrying less than a 3-year penalty require prior approval from senior police officers for arrest.
- **Custodial Provisions:** For the initial 40/60 days of detention, 15 days of police custody are permissible without affecting the right to bail.
- **Procedural Changes:** In-absentia trials, electronic FIRs, and preliminary inquiries for offenses punishable from 3 to less than 7 years are introduced.
- **Bail:** The meaning of bail has been simplified throughout the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, providing early release on bail for first-time undertrials, especially in acquittal cases.
- **Plea Bargaining:** First-time offenders are eligible for relaxed punishment (one-fourth to one-sixth of the prescribed punishment) through plea bargaining.
- **Timebound Processes:** Timelines are prescribed for various procedures, ensuring a structured and efficient legal process.
- **Utilization of Technology:** Audio-video electronic means are incorporated into many legal processes, including recording witness evidence, police officer depositions, accused statements, and judgment pronouncements, aiming to enhance transparency, accountability, and expedite justice.
- **Witness Protection and Victim Rights:** A witness protection scheme is introduced, and the definition of 'victim' is expanded, mandating police officers to keep victims/informants informed about investigation progress.
- **Adjournment Limits:** A provision limits adjournments to not more than twice.

### **The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam:**

- **Definitions:** The law now includes electronic records within the definition of 'document' and statements received electronically within the scope of 'evidence.'
- **Standards for Electronic Records:** More stringent standards are introduced for considering electronic and digital records as primary evidence. Emphasis is placed on their proper custody, storage, transmission, and broadcast.
- **Expanded Secondary Evidence:** Additional forms of secondary evidence, such as oral and written admissions, along with the testimony of a skilled

person to examine complex documents, are now admissible in court.

- **Legitimizing Electronic Records:** The legislation establishes the legal admissibility, validity, and enforceability of electronic or digital records as evidence in legal proceedings.
- **Witness Competency:** Husband/wife are now considered competent witnesses in criminal proceedings against their spouse, broadening the pool of admissible testimony.
- **Accomplice Testimony:** Convictions based on corroborated testimony from an accomplice are now considered legally permissible.
- **Electronic Evidence Certificate:** A comprehensive certificate for submitting electronic evidence is added to the schedule, ensuring a structured process for presenting electronic evidence in court proceedings.

## 4

### **Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023**

#### **Why in News:**

The Lok Sabha passed the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023, which abolished the outdated Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867.

#### **Key Provisions of the Bill:**

##### **Title Allotment and Registration Process:**

- The online mechanism streamlines title verification and registration by the Press Registrar General.
- Eliminates the need for declarations before local authorities, reducing the overall process to 60 days.
- Individuals convicted for offences related to terrorism or unlawful activities are barred from publishing a periodical.
- Facsimile editions of foreign periodicals can be printed in India with Central Government approval and registration with the Press Registrar General.

##### **Printing Presses:**

- Printers only need to provide online intimation to the Press Registrar General and local authorities, removing the declaration requirement.

##### **Role of District Magistrate/Local Authority:**

- District Magistrates will have a minimal role in the registration process.
- Their comments/NOC to the Press Registrar General are expected within 60 days; registration decisions can proceed even without their response.
- Publishers no longer need to file declarations

before District Magistrates.

### Differences from the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867:

- Books are excluded from the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, administered by the Ministry of HRD.
- Printing presses only need online intimation, not declarations before District Magistrates.
- Publishers simultaneously apply for title allotment and registration, decided by the Press Registrar General.
- The new statute significantly decriminalises violations, replacing severe penalties with financial fines.
- Jail sentences (up to six months) are now reserved for extreme cases where a periodical lacks registration, and the publisher disregards directives from the Press Registrar General.
- Empowerment of the Press Registrar General to suspend/cancel Registration Certificates, contrasting the 1867 Act where only District Magistrates had such authority.

### Significance of the Bill:

- It aims to bring transparency and ease of doing business by providing a simple process that will help small and medium publishers.
- It brings digital news media under its purview, which is expected to weed out apps, websites and social media accounts spreading fake news.
- At present, while traditional print and electronic media are governed by various laws, digital news platforms are not covered by any registration process. To fix this, the government introduced the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, which made it mandatory for digital news platforms to register themselves with the government.

### Conclusion:

The bill simplifies title allotment and registration of periodicals through an online system, eliminating physical interface requirements. Publishers, especially small and medium ones, will benefit from a faster process without the need for declarations with District Magistrates or local authorities.

5

## Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2023

### Why in News:

The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was passed by parliament. The Bill amends the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963. The Act provides for establishing Legislative Assemblies and constitution of Councils of Ministers for certain

Union Territories.

### Key Features of the Bill:

- **Reservation for Women:** The Bill reserves one-third of all elected seats in the Puducherry Legislative Assembly for women. This will also apply to the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Assembly.
- **Commencement of Reservation:** The reservation will be effective once the census conducted after the commencement of this Bill has been published. Based on the census, delimitation will be undertaken to reserve seats for women. The reservation will be provided for 15 years. However, it will continue till such date as determined by a law made by Parliament.
- **Rotation of seats:** Seats reserved for women will be rotated after each delimitation, as determined by a law made by Parliament.

### About the UT:

- The concept of Union Territories was not in the original version of the Constitution but was added by the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1956. Articles 239 to 241 in Part VIII of the Constitution deal with the Union Territories and there is no uniformity in their administrative system. Article 239AA on the Indian Constitution was added by the Constitution 69th Amendment Act, 1991 which provides special provisions for the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- The executive power of the Union (i.e. the union of States only) rests with the President of India. The President of India is also the chief administrator of Union Territories as per Article 239.
- India currently has 8 Union Territories (UTs) – Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, and Puducherry.

### Conclusion:

This bill can bring about a vast improvement in the status and position of women in Indian society. It will give women from different castes, classes and sections of society a chance to gain power and use it for the betterment of Indian society.

6

## Local Resident of Jharkhand Bill

### Why in News:

The Jharkhand Assembly recently ratified the Local Resident of Jharkhand Bill, which had been returned twice since November 2022, without any making any changes, after Governor C P Radhakrishnan sent the bill for reconsideration, citing constitutional violations.

### New Domicile Policy of Jharkhand:

- Under the new domicile policy of Jharkhand, 1932 land records will be accepted as proof to demarcate the local inhabitants of the state.
- The residents whose ancestral lands had been registered in the Land Survey of 1932 will be considered 'Jharkhandi'.
- However, both the landless persons and the families whose names are not included in 'Khata' may approach the Gram Sabha for their inclusion.
- Based on this, they will be entitled to third and fourth-class government jobs in the state.

### The Judicial Scrutiny:

- In 2002, Jharkhand Government had brought a similar bill, but it was struck down by the courts.
- The Jharkhand cabinet, therefore, now gives a clear indication that this Act will not come into force until it is included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to avoid judicial scrutiny. The state government will send the Act to the Centre and request its incorporation in the Ninth Schedule.
- The Ninth Schedule of the Constitution contains a list of central and state laws which cannot be challenged in courts. However, the courts have pointed out that these laws may come under judicial scrutiny if they violate the fundamental rights or the basic structure of the Constitution.
- Following consultation with the Attorney General of India, Governor Radhakrishnan reiterated that the exclusion of individuals beyond local residents from applying to Class 3 and 4 positions within the State Government does not align with the constitutional framework of India.

### Conclusion:

In Jharkhand, there has been a longstanding demand to recognize the Khatiyani of 1932 as the cornerstone of local identity since the state's inception. Indigenous tribes and local residents consistently assert that migrants to Jharkhand have infringed upon their rights and exploited them. Consequently, there's a fervent call for local policies to be structured around the principles outlined in the Khatiyani of 1932.

## 7 52nd Report of PSC on Elimination of Child Labor

### Why in News:

According to the 52nd report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles And Skill Development Committee tabled in the parliament, the panel found ambiguity in definition of child under various legislations.

### Key Points of the Report:

- According to the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (CALPRA) child means a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age or such age as may be specified in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, whichever is more. The amendment made to the Act in 2016 defines the child falling in the age group of (14-18) years.
- Under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, a child means a male or female aged six to fourteen years.
- As per the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 vide its amendment in 1986, a child is defined as a person who has not completed their fourteenth year of age.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 defines a child as a person who has not completed eighteen years of age.
- The Committee further noted that the employment of children in contravention of the CALPRA Act is a cognizable offence whereas under the Juvenile Justice Act 2015 it is a non-cognizable offence.

### Key Suggestions by the Committee:

- Removal of the hazardous occupations from the positive list of approved jobs and processes for adolescents.
- Incorporation of stricter forms of punishments, such as license cancellation and property attachment in addition to the increase in fines.
- Establishment of a district-level fund as well for immediate relief and rehabilitation for child laborers.
- Incorporating provisions for taking action against the police for not registering FIRs in the CALPRA Act similar to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012. Further there should be establishment of child friendly police stations and courts.
- Steps should be taken in regard to establishment of a national level child tracking mechanism through coordinated efforts

### Way Forward:

The ambiguity within various legislations concerning the definition of a child, emphasize inconsistencies in both age criteria and offenses pertaining to child labor. This reiterates the necessity for a comprehensive re-evaluation of these definitions and criteria. Additionally, a detailed Standard Operating Procedure through collaborative consultations involving all relevant stakeholders must be drafted to facilitate prevention, tracing, tracking, rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of the rescued children.



# International Issue



## 1 14<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment by USA

### Why in News:

In an unprecedented move, the Colorado Supreme Court has recently excluded former President Donald Trump from the state's 2024 ballot. The decision rested on the interpretation of the 14th Amendment's insurrectionist ban, deeming him ineligible as a presidential candidate.

### Historical Background:

- The 14th Amendment, ratified following the American Civil War, included Section 3 to prevent secessionists from reclaiming previous government positions after Southern states rejoined the Union.
- This section found historical application against figures like Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Vice President Alexander Stephens, who had previously held roles in Congress. Yet, its usage has been infrequent since those times.

### Section 3 of the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution:

- **Bar on holding office:** It states that if any person previously elected to any government office took part in an insurrection or rebellion, they could not hold office again. But Congress may, by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

### Underlying Principle:

- It states that if any person previously elected to any government office took part in an insurrection or rebellion, they could not hold office again. But Congress may, by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

### Key Highlights of the Decision:

- Colorado state law allows voters to challenge Trump's eligibility under the federal constitution's "insurrectionist ban."
- Colorado courts can enforce the ban without any action from Congress.
- The insurrectionist ban applies to the presidency.
- The January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol was an insurrection.
- Trump's speech inciting the crowd on January 6 was not protected by the First Amendment.

### Way Forward:

Donald Trump has pledged to appeal to the Supreme Court, which currently holds a supermajority of six justices originating from the conservative legal movement. This movement prioritizes methods of interpretation known as "Textualism and Originalism." According to these principles, judges are expected to interpret the Constitution by focusing

on its text and the publicly understood meaning at the time of adoption. This approach prioritizes these aspects over considerations such as evolving social values, political implications, or assessments of the provision's intended purpose.

## 2 Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023

### Why in News:

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes has released its report named, 'Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023: Cultivation, Productions and Implications' assessing the status of opium cultivation in Southeast Asia. The report projected steady growth in the Opium Economy in 2023.

### Key Points of the Report:

- Leaving Afghanistan behind, Myanmar is now the world's top opium source. The report further noticed opium production near the Myanmar-India border.
- The 95 per cent decline in opium cultivation in Afghanistan after a drug ban by the Taliban in 2022 has seen global supply shift to Myanmar, where political, social and economic instability brought about by a 2021 coup drove many to poppy farming.
- Further, the unstable social, economic, and political climate in Myanmar has significantly fuelled the surge in opium cultivation.

### About Golden Triangle:

- Golden Triangle comprises regions where illicit opium production takes place. This includes countries like Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. There is another similar term called Golden Crescent which is used to denote the areas of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the opium is produced illicitly.

### Effect on Internal security of India:

- A recent targeted assessment also uncovered significant opium cultivation in Sagaing along Myanmar's border with India. The surge in the opium economy in Myanmar is attributed to growing dissatisfaction with the ruling Junta rule. This also poses a substantial risk to India's national and internal security, potentially escalating cross-border smuggling, leading to increased violence and transnational crimes.
- Disturbances in northeastern states like Manipur and Nagaland may intensify as funds from this illicit trade could fuel extremist and separatist movements.
- Furthermore, local communities might suffer as their access to better healthcare might get hindered. The drug abuse will further strain the healthcare system.



## About United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC):

UNDOC is a UN agency established in 1997 to address the issues related to drugs, transnational organised crimes, corruption and terrorism on a global scale. It assists in implementation of UNTOC (United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime) and UNCAC (United Nations Convention Against Corruption).

### 3 Crisis in Suez Canal

#### Why in News:

The United States has recently initiated a multinational force dedicated to safeguarding trade in the Red Sea, following attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels that led to the suspension of operations for about a dozen shipping lines. Countries such as Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Seychelles, and the United Kingdom have joined this collaborative effort, forming a 10-nation coalition for the "multinational security initiative."

#### What is Combined Task Force 153:

➤ Combined Task Force 153 (CTF 153) is a task force that focuses on maritime security and capacity building in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb, and Gulf of Aden. It was established on April 17, 2022, and is one of five task forces operated by the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF).

#### Houthi Rebels' Stance:

➤ Houthi rebels claim that the goal of the US-led coalition is to protect Israel in the Israel-Gaza war and to militarize the sea.

➤ These rebels declared their intention to persist with attacks on Red Sea shipping and have targeted vessels in key shipping lanes and launched attacks towards Israel.

#### Implications of such Attack:

➤ Revenue from the Suez Canal is a major source of income for Egypt, which is already in the midst of a financial crisis.

➤ A prolonged closure of the Suez route would raise the costs of trade as shipping is rerouted around Africa, taking more time and rise in insurance premiums.

➤ Short term Supply chain threats could also result from wide scale rerouting of trade.

#### India's Stance:

➤ India is a major stakeholder in this entire development and thus, it cannot remain a silent spectator.

➤ India has the capability to be the first responder in the area and it has done so in the past, demonstrating it on multiple occasions from the time of Operation Cactus. Therefore India must take some assertive steps in this direction.

## Way Forward:

The United States and its allies are ramping up naval activity in the Middle East, and may even attack the Houthis, in order to re-establish free passage. Such an attack is going to have an impact on the world economy and the cost is likely to fall on consumers. This can have serious devastating effects on the entire dynamics of the supply chain.

### 4 Hydrographic Surveys

#### Why in News:

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

#### About Hydrographic Surveys:

➤ Hydrographic surveys are carried out by ships, which use methods such as sonar to understand the various features of a water body.

➤ According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), these surveys help "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 transportation.

➤ Prime Minister Modi's 2019 visit to the Maldives led to cooperation agreements, including joint hydrographic surveys. Three surveys (2021, 2022, 2023) aided by Indian naval ships updated navigational charts in key areas, benefiting tourism, fisheries, and more. India gifted hydrographic equipment, trained MNDF personnel, and identified 52 new natural structures in the sea during the last survey in 2023.

#### India's water survey pacts with other countries:

➤ In 40 years, INS Sandhayak the oldest Hydrographic ship of India, completed 200+ surveys in India and neighbouring countries. UN data highlights limited hydrographic capabilities globally, emphasizing the need for international cooperation, especially in Asia and Africa where significant water areas remain unsurveyed. India has aided multiple nations in hydrographic surveys, including Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Maldives, Oman, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania.

#### India-Maldives Relations:

➤ India was first to recognise Maldives as a country after its independence in 1965, establishing diplomatic relations with the country.

➤ India and Maldives signed a trade agreement in 1981 providing export for essential commodities. In 2021, India emerged as the third largest trade partner with Maldives. In addition to this, the

- great Male project of Maldives is funded by India.
- India provides training opportunities to Maldivian National Defence Force, along with cooperating on defense sectors such as Joint exercises, Maritime domain awareness, infrastructure development etc.
- Further, India's humanitarian support to Maldives has been pivotal during critical times. Be it India's extended assistance during the devastating tsunami in 2004 or its aid during the Male water crisis in 2014 under Operation Neer.
- In January 2020, India supplied Maldives with 30,000 doses of measles vaccines and during pandemic as well India provided essential support to Maldives.

### Conclusion:

The recent change in leadership in the Maldives from President Solih to Mohamed Muizzu has sparked concerns about a potential shift in alliances from India towards China. This change comes amidst China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean through investments in infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative. Muizzu's stance on reviewing agreements with foreign countries, including India's assistance in military operations and hydrographic surveys, hints at a possible re-evaluation of existing partnerships.

## 5 Republic Day Chief Guest: President Emmanuel Macron

### Why in News:

India's Ministry of External Affairs has notified that French President Emmanuel Macron will visit India as the chief guest of the 75th Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2024. Earlier, India had invited US President Joe Biden as the chief guest but he had expressed his inability to come in January.

### Process of Choosing the Republic Day Chief Guest:

- Being invited as the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations is the highest honour given by a country in terms of protocol. He is given a ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan followed by a reception by the President of India in the evening.
- This process starts about six months before the event. India's former Indian Foreign Service officer Manbir Singh said that the Ministry of External Affairs takes into account all types of considerations before extending the invitation. The most central idea in this is based on the nature of relations between India and the country concerned.
- An invitation to be the chief guest of the Republic Day Parade is a strong gesture of friendship between India and the country of the invitee. India's political, commercial, military and

economic interests are important drivers of the decision.

### For the sixth time a French leader will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations:

- This is the sixth time that a French leader will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in Delhi. Before Emmanuel Macron, former French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac was the chief guest at India's Republic Day celebrations in 1976 and 1998. Former presidents Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande were chief guests in 1980, 2008 and 2016 respectively. It is noteworthy that in the year 1950, the first chief guest of the parade was Indonesian President Sukarno, who was one of the five founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

### Way Forward:

France has been supporting India's membership in the UN Security Council and NSG. France was one of the few countries in the world that supported India's nuclear test in 1998. The strong relationship between India and France in the current global politics shows that both countries have immense potential to work together. Apart from the diplomatic level, both countries also have a similar vision of defence, technology and democratic values.

## 6 New Constitution in Chad

### Why in News:

Chad's new constitution was approved by 86% percent of voters in a referendum. The critics say this referendum could help consolidate the power of military leader Mahamat Idriss Deby.

### Background:

- The Chad army had suspended the constitution after Marshal Deby's death and dissolved the parliament. Deby's son, Mahamat Idriss Deby, was then installed by the military as interim president at the helm of a Transitional Military Council.
- Deby was a major French ally in the fight against Islamic extremism in Africa, hosting the base for the French military Operation Barkhane and supplying critical troops to the peacekeeping effort in northern Mali.

### Supporters view for the new constitution:

- The country's military rulers have promoted the new constitution as a key step in the path back to civilian rule, but it had been denounced by opposition politicians, with some calling for a boycott.
- The supporters insist that the new constitution will maintain a unitary state, which Chad has had since independence, while establishing

autonomous communities with local assemblies and councils of traditional chiefdoms among other changes.

- Further, they insist that the new constitution offers more independence as it allows Chadians to choose their local representatives and collect local taxes for the first time.

### -: Prelims Insights :-

- ✓ **Sahel Region:** *The Sahel is a semi-arid stretch in West and North-Central Africa, running from Senegal to Sudan. It acts as a transition between the dry Sahara to the north and the lush savannas to the south.*
- ✓ *It includes many geographical and agro-ecosystems, 12 countries and is home to 400 million people. The political region of the Sahel, as defined by the United Nations Strategy (UNISS), covers 10 countries (Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria).*

#### About Chad:

- Chad derives its name from Lake Chad, the second-largest lake in Africa, whose basin spans regions of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Belonging to Sahel region, roughly one-third of Chad is covered by the Sahara Desert, while the southern part boasts extensive wooded savannas and woodlands.
- Chad is part of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), an initiative jointly formed by India and France.

#### Conclusion:

Since gaining independence in 1960, Chad has faced persistent instability, greatly hindering the country's development. Situated in north-central Africa, Chad is a landlocked state facing considerable challenges due to this prolonged instability. Approximately 40 percent of its 16 million inhabitants rely on humanitarian aid.

7

## France's New Immigration Policy

#### Why in News:

The French parliament recently approved a revised bill aimed at tightening France's immigration policies. This amended legislation garnered support from both President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Renaissance party and Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN).

#### About the New Immigration Law:

- France seeks to extend the duration of stay

in France for migrants to be eligible to access welfare benefits.

- Further, unemployed non-EU migrants will face a delay of five years in accessing housing benefits.
- The government has also introduced migration quotas which will make it more difficult for immigrants' children to become French citizen.
- While migrants employed in labor-scarce sectors will find it easier to obtain a residency permit, there will also be a streamlined process for expelling irregular migrants.

#### Schengen Area:

- It means a zone where 26 European countries abolished their internal border for the free and unrestricted movement of people, in harmony with common rules for controlling external borders and fighting criminality by strengthening the common judicial system and police cooperation. It covers most of the European Union nations, excluding Ireland

#### Impact on India:

- According to Schengen Visa Statistics 2022, the five most popular and sought-after destinations for Indian travellers include France (138,000 visa applications), Switzerland (106,000), Spain (80,098) Germany (76,352), and The Netherlands (52,616).
- In context of students, from 2017 to 2018, there was a hike of over 54.5% in the number of visas issued to Indian students headed for France.
- In the field of higher education, over 8, 000 Indian students and scientists chose France in 2018.
- Although, France remained top destination but it was also the country that rejected max number of visas. This law further might impact the priority of Indian Travellers.

#### Threat to Global Talent:

- The legislation requires international students to pay a security deposit of up to €3,070, prompting outrage among university administrations.
- The presidents of around 20 major public universities spoke out against measures "contrary to the spirit of the Enlightenment," arguing they would seriously undermine France's strategy for attracting global talent.

#### Conclusion:

Immigration has been a contentious topic in the French political discourse for decades. The leftist argues the bill is too restrictive, the rightist argues it's not restrictive enough, and the result is a months-long deadlock.

# Environmental Issue

## 1 Coal 2023: Analysis & Forecast to 2026

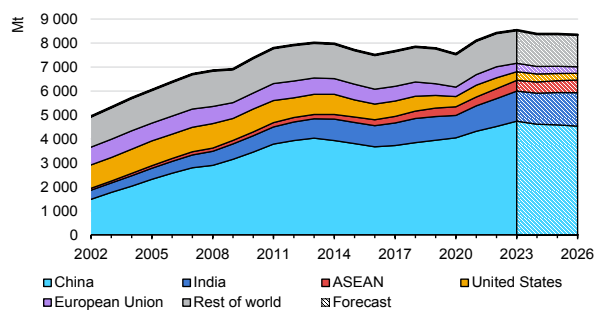
### Why in News:

IEA's report, 'Coal 2023: Analysis and Forecast to 2026' projected an increase in coal demand in India and China. Meanwhile, the recent CoP28 ended with phrase of 'Transitioning Away From Fossil Fuels' instead of 'Phasing Out the Fossil Fuels'. These two situations somewhat depict India's stand on balancing the need for planet without jeopardising its own development needs.

### Importance of Coal for India's Energy Security:

- India, despite aiming to boost renewable energy, currently relies significantly on fossil fuels, with only 22% of its energy coming from renewables while coal supplies 75% of power.
- As the world's second-largest coal producer, India's coal demand surged from 778 million tons to 893 million tons between 2021-2023, targeting 1.31 billion tons by 2024-25 and 1.5 billion tons by 2030.
- The Coal Ministry plans to triple underground coal output by 2028, to meet the escalating energy demand in the world's most populous country and fastest-growing large economy.
- This shift toward coal also addresses the essential need for baseload capacity, ensuring a minimum level of demand fulfilment over 24 hours.
- Additionally, the coal sector directly creates around 7.25 lakh jobs, underscoring its significance within India's energy landscape.

Global coal consumption, 2002-2026



### Why the instant transition to renewable energy is challenging?

- **Intermittency:** Energy sources like solar and wind are variable which is not always in sync with the demand cycle. To ensure a steady

supply, India has to heavily invest in battery storage which is expensive due to supply chain disruptions.

- **Issues with nuclear power plants:** India's plans for nuclear energy have not taken off that well. In 2021-22, nuclear plants only contributed 3.15% of India's total electricity generation.
- **Struggling DISCOMS:** State-owned distribution companies (discoms) rely on thermal or nuclear generation to meet base load demand despite renewable sources. Urgent energy storage is crucial to counter renewable variability. These companies may struggle more if burdened with solar and wind-based generation.
- **Environmental challenges:** Renewable energy projects such as hydropower projects face criticism for causing ecological damage, and raising water resource conflicts. A recent example could be seen in the case of Joshimath. These projects also need advanced infrastructure.

### Conclusion:

India is actively enhancing coal efficiency through various measures like mandating supercritical technology for Ultra Mega Power Projects, promoting coal gasification, modernizing old thermal power plants, and installing electrostatic precipitators. Renewables' expansion highlights the need for storage to bridge capacity gaps. Although thermal energy particularly coal and nuclear, remains crucial until renewable capacity grows, coal serves as an essential base load due to constraints in expanding nuclear capacity.

## 2 Peninsular Rivers more Prone to Flood: Study

### Why in News:

According to a new study published in the American Meteorological Society's Journal of Hydrometeorology, river basins in peninsular India face a higher probability of widespread flooding compared to the Ganga and Brahmaputra.

### Key Points of the study:

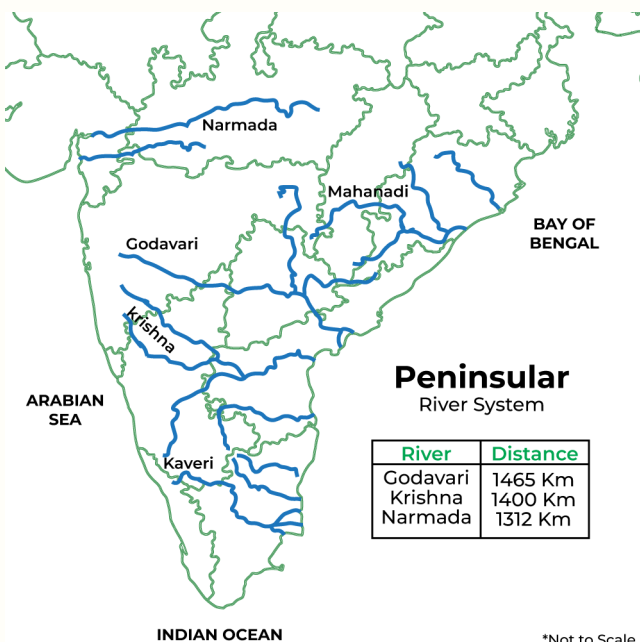
- The team scrutinized widespread floods in seven major river basins spanning over six decades (1959-2020). These rivers included Ganga, Brahmaputra, Godavari, Krishna, Mahanadi, Narmada, and Cauvery.
- The analysis highlighted the Mahanadi and Narmada river basins as the most flood-prone, experiencing 40 events during the period.
- Meanwhile, Krishna and Godavari basins

witnessed over 20 widespread floods. In contrast, Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Cauvery basins saw fewer than 15 events in the same timeframe.

- Narmada basin has the highest probability (59 per cent) of widespread flooding, followed by Mahanadi (50 per cent), Godavari (42 per cent), Krishna (38 per cent) and Cauvery (19 per cent).
- As for trans boundary river basins, Ganga and Brahmaputra have a probability of 21 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively.

### Drivers of Widespread Floods:

- **Seasonal trends:** During the summer monsoon season, all seven river basins, except Cauvery, experienced widespread flooding in August. Cauvery on the other hand experienced flooding from October-December.



- **Regional Rainfall variances:** India receives around 80 per cent of the total annual precipitation during the summer monsoon season from June-September.
- River basins like Godavari, Mahanadi, and Narmada, situated in the core monsoon belt, receive substantial rainfall from July to September.
- In contrast, the Cauvery experiences flooding during October-December due to northeast monsoon rainfall. The Brahmaputra basin witnesses floods in June-July, owing to early northeast rainfall.
- Godavari, Mahanadi, and Narmada basins lie in the core monsoon region and receive more rainy days in July to September.

- **Atmospheric rivers and circulations:** Notable flood events, including the 2018 Kerala floods, 2022 Pakistan floods, and lower Mississippi river floods, were linked to atmospheric rivers transporting moisture from tropics to extratropics.
- Atmospheric rivers are large sections of the Earth's atmosphere carrying water vapour through the sky.
- Widespread floods in India are associated with large atmospheric circulations that cause precipitation in the river basin. atmospheric circulations significantly influence precipitation and flooding in river basins.

### Conclusion:

Understanding the dynamics behind widespread floods across these river basins is pivotal in devising robust strategies for mitigation, adaptation, and disaster management in the face of evolving climatic conditions and human interventions. With expectations of a warming climate, the drivers of widespread floods are likely to undergo alterations, affecting their timing, occurrence, and probability. This suggests the need for proactive measures to adapt to changing flood patterns.

## 3 Red Tide

### Why in News:

A team of three members appointed by the principal Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) examined the Kuruchikuppam drain and beach to investigate the reason behind the recent occurrence of the sea turning red in Puducherry.

### About Red Tide:

- Red tide is a colloquial term used to refer to one of a variety of natural phenomena known as harmful algal blooms (HABs), which are caused by certain species of phytoplankton containing photosynthetic pigments that vary in colour from green to brown to red.
- It is a marine environmental event where protists, including algae and dinoflagellates, go through a tremendous growth period, called a bloom, or an algal bloom. In a 2- to 3-week period, it is possible for each algal cell to produce 1 million daughter cells.
- The protists may produce toxins or consume dissolved oxygen, leading to detrimental effects on various organisms like humans, fish, shellfish, marine mammals, and birds.
- Freshwater bodies like lakes and reservoirs witness these kinds of blooms primarily due to

blue-green algae, also termed cyanobacteria. These blooms are directly linked to agricultural and urban runoff, wherein nutrient pollution serves as a catalyst for the growth of cyanobacteria.

#### Reasons for such blooms:

- **Eutrophication:** Nutrient enrichment or eutrophication is a key factor that promotes algal growth. It supports the proliferation of both algae and Cyanobacteria, contributing significantly to red tide occurrences.
- **Temperature:** Red tides tend to occur more frequently during summer, although they can potentially emerge throughout the year, influenced by varying temperature conditions.
- **Turbidity:** turbidity is a measurement of how cloudy the water is in any water body like a lake or sea. Elevated levels of suspended particles and organic matter in the water column affect turbidity. Lower turbidity allows greater penetration of light into the water, creating optimal conditions conducive to the growth of algae.

#### Impact of Red Tide:

- **Bio-magnification:** Often the algae and the shellfish that consume them are unaffected. However, further up the food chain, these toxins can be fatal. Man, dolphins, manatees, and reptiles are potentially exposed to aerosolized toxins.
- **Health and economic concerns:** Complaints of respiratory distress and other associated conditions among humans have been associated with red tide occurrences.
- This impact isn't solely limited to health concerns; it extends to aquaculture, where the cultivation of marine life faces significant disruptions. It also leads to spiked treatment costs for safe drinking water. Industries dependent on clean water sources bear the brunt, intensifying the economic fallout of these blooms.
- **Dead zones:** These blooms, by blocking sunlight and depleting oxygen levels, create adverse conditions for aquatic life, giving rise to 'dead zones,' or hypoxic areas affecting a diverse range of species beneath the water surface.

## 4

### New Bat Species

#### Why in News:

Researchers in France have recently discovered a new species of bat, considered to be "very rare" and

endangered on the French island of Corsica.

#### About the species:

- After conducting DNA analysis on tissue samples, scientists determined that the bat discovered in Corsica belongs to a previously unknown species within the genus *Myotis*, which boasts more than 120 species across six continents.
- The new found species has been named 'nustrale' in the Corsican dialect, meaning "ours."
- The researchers noted that this bat may have been genetically isolated for a significant period.
- This bat is grey in colour, and has long ears and a hairy face. The researchers said that it is distinguished by a "conspicuous" dark spot on its lower lip, which is absent on other members of the genus.
- This bat was found fluttering around the mountainous Mediterranean island, which is located about 250 miles southeast of Marseille



#### Ecological Significance and Habitat:

- The medium-sized bat, approximately 1.5 inches long, forages in the dense evergreen forests of the island and nests in cliffs and rocky outcroppings. Researchers stumbled upon a colony of about 60 individuals residing in an artificial tunnel, revealing insights into the bat's habitat. The existence of bats in the wild is crucial for the ecosystem, contributing to essential services such as seed dispersal, pollination, and insect control.

#### Vulnerability:

- However, the 'nustrale' is under threat. Due to its restricted distribution, small population size, and limited connectivity between populations, the bat is considered very rare and highly susceptible to climate change.

#### Conclusion:

The researchers involved in the study suggest classifying the species as endangered, emphasizing the urgency of conservation efforts to protect this unique species. The discovery of the 'nustrale' is a significant stride in biodiversity studies and conservation efforts, particularly on the island of Corsica.

## 5 Namdapha Flying Squirrel

### Why in News:

The Namdapha flying squirrel has resurfaced in Arunachal Pradesh after being missing for 42 years.

### About Namdapha Flying Squirrel:

- The Namdapha flying squirrel (*Biswamoyopterus biswasi*) is a rare nocturnal flying squirrel which was last described in 1981 based on a single individual found in the 1,985 sq. km. Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district.



- Scientists believe that this species occurs in the dry deciduous montane forests along the streams, and may be restricted to areas of a single valley within Namdapha National Park.
- The prominent tuft of hair on the ears of the Namdapha flying squirrel makes it distinctive

from other similar species of flying squirrels, like Red Giant Flying Squirrel.

- The Namdapha flying squirrel is threatened due to habitat loss and degradation caused by human activities like clearing forests for settlements, shifting agriculture, and harvesting the leaves of the *Zalacca secunda* (rattan palm) for roofing materials.

### Protection Status:

- IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered
- Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022: Schedule I

### About Namdapha Tiger Reserve:

- The Namdapha Tiger reserve derives its name from the Namdapha River, originating from Daphabum (where "Dapha" refers to a hill and "Bum" means peak of the hill), merging with the Noa-Dehing river.
- It was established in 1983 as the 15th Tiger Project in India. Initially declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1972, it gained National Park status in 1983 and was designated a Tiger Reserve under the Project Tiger initiative the same year.
- Situated in Arunachal Pradesh, the park spans between the Dapha bum range of the Mishmi Hills and the Patkai range.

## 6 Polar Stratospheric Clouds

### Why in News:

The weather watchers have recently photographed rare Polar Stratospheric Clouds (PSC) over Scotland, northern England and the West Midlands.

### About Polar Stratospheric Cloud:

- The Polar stratospheric clouds, also known as nacreous clouds, are among the rarest and most stunning atmospheric phenomena.
- The Earth's stratosphere is typically devoid of moisture, making it an unlikely place for cloud formation. However, under the extreme conditions of the Arctic winter, when temperatures plummet to around  $-85^{\circ}\text{C}$ , sparse water vapour can condense into ice particles.
- These particles scatter high-altitude sunlight, producing a brilliant display of iridescent colours that can be seen even when the sun is below the horizon.
- PSCs typically make their first appearance in January, but this year's early onset in December suggests an atypical Arctic winter. The frequency of these clouds is often a harbinger of ozone depletion, as they play a crucial role in

stratospheric chemistry.

### Impacts of this Cloud:

- PSCs provide a surface for chemical reactions where benign forms of chlorine are converted into reactive, ozone-destroying forms. They also remove nitrogen compounds that would otherwise moderate the destructive impact of chlorine on the ozone layer.
- The occurrence of PSCs is not only a spectacle for skywatchers but also a subject of concern for scientists who monitor the health of our planet's atmosphere. As these clouds become more frequent in the Arctic, they signal changes in the stratosphere that could have long-term implications for the ozone layer and climate.

### Conclusion:

Polar stratospheric clouds (PSCs), although a captivating phenomenon, are also a concern for scientists due to their link with atmospheric changes. These clouds contain substances that, when combined with chlorofluorocarbons, generate chlorine atoms, posing a threat to the ozone layer. To mitigate this risk, reducing chlorofluorocarbon emissions is crucial so that Earth's atmosphere and safeguarding the planet's health can be preserved.

7

## Extension Recommended for FAME II Scheme

### Why in News:

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry recommended a three-year extension for the Faster Adoption & Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) II Scheme deadline.

### FAME II Scheme Overview:

- **Deadline:** March 31, 2024, with a budget of Rs 10,000 crore.
- Aims to provide upfront incentives for electric and hybrid vehicle purchases and expand charging infrastructure.

### Subsidy Reduction and Impact:

- In May, FAME-II subsidy on electric two-wheelers was reduced from 40% to 15% on ex-factory price.
- Demand incentive for electric two-wheelers decreased from Rs 15,000/kWh to Rs 10,000/kWh.
- Subsequent negative impact on electric two-wheeler sales was noted by the committee.

### Recommendations for Scheme Extension:

- Parliamentary committee recommended a three-year extension of FAME-II Scheme.
- It urged the Ministry to consult with industry stakeholders for inclusivity and to support the

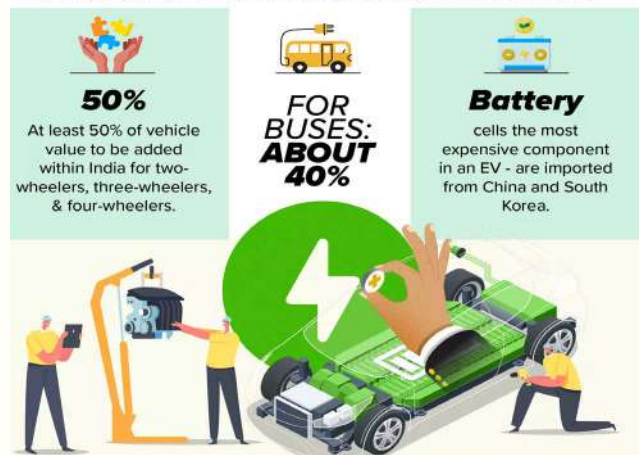
transition to electric mobility.

- Highlighted the need to restore subsidies on electric two-wheelers to maintain momentum and meet 2030 targets.

### FAME I and II Progress:

- FAME I approved in March 2015 with an extension until March 31, 2019 at an outlay of Rs 895 crore.
- FAME II focuses on technology development, demand creation, pilot projects, and charging infrastructure.

### FAME-II domestic value addition norms



### Four-Wheelers Inclusion and EV Support:

- Recommended increasing support for four-wheelers and incorporating private electric four-wheelers in FAME II.
- Suggested setting caps based on vehicle cost and battery capacity.

### Infrastructure Development:

- It emphasises the importance of consistent government frameworks at all levels for EV development.
- It recommended establishing dedicated manufacturing hubs for batteries, cells, and EV components.

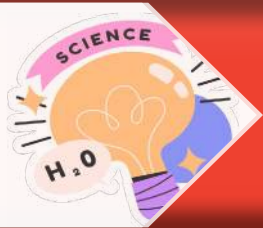
### Charging Stations and BHEL's Role:

- Advocates allocating more funds to BHEL for EV charging stations.
- Encourages public sector participation in installing charging stations and proposes support for women self-help groups and cooperative societies.

### Policy Stability and Market Certainty:

- Highlights the negative impact of frequent policy changes on the EV market.
- Urges the government to formulate a consistent and stable national policy for electric mobility to foster sustainable transportation.





# Science-Tech



## 1 Biosimilars

### Why in News:

USV, a drug firm and Biogenomics, a biotech company have recently launched, India's first Biosimilar Insulin Aspart, called INSUQUICK to improve access for people with diabetes. InsuQuick is a 'Make in India' product manufactured and developed using 100% indigenous technology.

### What are Biosimilars?

- A biosimilar is a 'biological photocopy' of already approved biological medicine (the reference medicine). They are highly similar to other already approved biological medicine. They are approved according to the same standard of pharmaceutical quality, safety and efficacy that apply to all biological medicines i.e. in terms of structure, biological activity and efficacy, safety and immunological profile.
- A biosimilar is not regarded as a generic of biological medicine because of its natural variability. Further, more complex manufacturing of biological medicines does not allow an exact replication of the molecular micro-heterogeneity.

not only halts cancer cell growth but also aids in destroying the cells.

- **Improved Access and affordability:** Biosimilars offer a more affordable option compared to costly biologics, expanding access to treatment and providing more options to the patients they can choose from.
- **Global presence:** Growing market demand for biosimilars in cancer (like monoclonal antibodies) and autoimmune diseases presents global opportunities.

### Challenges of Biosimilars:

- The development process is expensive and time-consuming.
- Biosimilars' sensitivity to temperature requires a maintained cold chain network for distribution and preservation.
- Production costs for biosimilars significantly differ from generics due to investments in machinery, buildings, and assets.

### Way Forward:

Biosimilar availability is crucial, but safety must be prioritized alongside development. Striking a balance ensures both accessibility and the imperative of ensuring patient safety. Since compromising on quality will pose risks to patient health and industry credibility. To strike a balance, subsidizing manufacturing costs and investing in advanced technology can drive affordability without sacrificing safety. The government must enforce a stringent yet streamlined approval process, ensuring thorough quality checks while expediting approvals to maintain both efficacy and accessibility of biosimilars.

Biologic	Biosimilar
A new treatment	Nearly identical to FDA-approved biologic
Made from a living source	Made from a living source
15 years to develop	8–10 years to develop
\$1.2 billion to develop	\$100–\$200 million to develop
Patentable	Non-patentable

### Application in Indian Healthcare:

- **Better healthcare:** Development and encouragement of biosimilars can positively impact treating non-communicable diseases like cancer, asthma, and arthritis. The first biosimilar version of trastuzumab emtansine

## 2 WHO's Neglected Tropical Disease: Noma

### Why in News:

The World Health Organization (WHO) on December 15, 2023 added one of the world's most under recognised health challenges, Noma, to its official list of neglected tropical diseases (NTD).

### About Noma:

- Noma, also called cancrum oris or gangrenous stomatitis, is a severe form of gangrene affecting the mouth and face, resulting in a mortality rate of around 90%. It is linked to severe poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate access to sanitation and oral care.
- The name of the disease comes from the Greek word "nomē", meaning "to devour", as noma

eats away facial tissue and bones if not treated early.

- While the disease is not contagious, it prefers to attack when the body's defences are weak. The disease begins with gum inflammation and is thought to be caused by bacteria found in the mouth.

### Importance of being Recognised as NTD:

- The illness's 'hidden' or neglected nature is most likely due to the fact that it affects the world's most marginalised children. It affects children aged 2-6 years old and is found most commonly among those living in poor communities.
- There is an extreme lack of awareness regarding the disease. There are no reliable numbers of cases, the WHO website lists the 'latest' estimates 140,000 cases per year and a prevalence of 770,000 cases. However, the data dates back to 1998.
- Noma is also called the 'face of poverty', as effective drugs like sulfonamides and penicillin and adequate surgical treatment for the effects remain inaccessible for many due to extreme poverty.
- The recognition of noma as an NTD aims to amplify global awareness, catalyse research, stimulate funding, and boost efforts to control the disease through multisectoral and multi-pronged approaches.
- Given its high mortality rate, early detection becomes crucial as treatment is most effective in the initial stages. Furthermore, simple practices like basic hygiene, antibiotics, and nutritional rehabilitation can significantly slow its spread.

### Conclusion:

Acknowledging noma as an NTD, will heighten global awareness, prompt research, secure funding, and strengthen control measures using multi-faceted approaches. Addressing this devastating illness not only will align with achieving universal health coverage but will also target underserved populations specifically.

## 3 New Treatment for Nicotine Addiction

### Why in News:

A team of researchers from the Faculty of Pharmacy at Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (SRIHER) has identified a new approach to tackle nicotine addiction and its associated health issues. The study throws light on the efficacy of ascorbic acid in a specific dose (vitamin C) in converting cotinine back into nicotine

within smokers' plasma.

### How does it work?

- Nicotine is metabolised and forms an oxidative metabolite called cotinine, a substance linked to fatal consequences, including cancer. Cotinine can persist in the body for several weeks. The researchers identified an issue with conventional nicotine replacement therapy, which inadvertently increases the accumulation of cotinine.
- The smoker should place the dissolvable film of ascorbic acid on the tongue whenever tempted to smoke. It aims to reverse cotinine back into nicotine using a reducing agent, specifically ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Cotinine is abundantly present in smokers' plasma, and its quantity depends on an individual's tobacco consumption.
- Generally, 80% of nicotine accumulates as cotinine in the body, while the remaining 20% is eliminated through urine. The converted nicotine again forms 80% cotinine, and then 20% will be eliminated. Continuing this cycle may lead to 0% cotinine in the body after several cycles. The number of cycles required for the complete removal of nicotine deposits depends on the previous consumption of nicotine by individuals.

### About Cotinine:

- Cotinine is a product formed after the chemical nicotine enters the body. Nicotine is a chemical found in tobacco products, including cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Measuring cotinine in people's blood is the most reliable way to determine exposure to nicotine for both smokers and non-smokers exposed to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). Measuring cotinine is preferred to measuring nicotine because cotinine remains in the body longer.

### Conclusion:

To tackle nicotine addiction and its adverse effects, Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), such as nicotine patches or lozenges, are being used currently that rely on supplementing the body with additional nicotine. However, researchers are exploring a novel approach by utilizing nicotine's oxidative metabolite, cotinine. They employ ascorbic acid as a potential reducing agent to convert cotinine in smokers' plasma back into nicotine. This innovative method targets both nicotine addiction and detoxification concurrently, showing promise for more effective treatment strategies.

## 4 R21/Matrix-M Malaria Vaccine

### Why in News:

Recently the World Health Organization (WHO) added the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine to its list of prequalified vaccines. It has been developed by Oxford University and manufactured by Serum Institute of India. This is the second malaria vaccine recommended by the WHO after the RTS, S/AS01 vaccine.

### About R21/Matrix-M:

- The R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine is a readily available vaccine that can be manufactured on a large scale at a modest cost.
- The Matrix-M component is owned by Novavax, which is licensed by the Serum Institute for use in endemic countries.
- This malaria vaccine has been licensed for use in three countries in Ghana, Nigeria and Burkina Faso.
- The Phase III clinical trial of the vaccine was conducted including on 4,800 children in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, and Tanzania.

### What is Malaria?

- Malaria is a fever caused by a parasite called Plasmodium. It is spread by the female Anopheles mosquito.
- The disease is found in tropical and subtropical regions around the equator, including sub-Saharan Africa and much of Asia.
- Of the total five species of Plasmodium parasite, two species, *P. falciparum*, and *P. vivax*, are considered the most dangerous.

### Symptoms of malaria:

- The initial symptoms of malaria include fever, headache, sweating, chills, vomiting, etc.
- In severe cases, it can even cause organ failure, coma, and death.

### Malaria cases and eradication efforts:

- In 2020, 29 of the 85 malaria-endemic countries accounted for 96 percent of malaria cases. Globally, India contributes 1.7 percent of malaria cases and 1.2 percent of deaths.
- According to WHO, about 15 million malaria cases are reported annually in India, with approximately 19,500–20,000 deaths.
- An increase in cases and deaths has been reported in all high-burden to high-impact (HBHI) countries except India between 2019 and 2020.
- Malaria cases are estimated to be 241 million globally in 85 endemic countries in 2022, compared to 227 million in 2019. Most of the

cases came from African countries, which accounted for 95 percent of the cases.

- A target has been set to reduce malaria cases and death rates by 90% by 2030.

### Way Forward:

Malaria is a global public health problem that affects the majority of the population. The Joint Action Plan of Tribal and Health Ministries and the implementation of the HIP-Malaria portal will help in curbing the spread of malaria and improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease.

## 5 India's First International Space Station

### Why in News:

Recently, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) unveiled its plans to launch India's maiden international space station by 2028.

### Key Points:

- India is poised to establish its very own 'Bharat Space Station' during the Amrit Kal, for which there is need of development of Next Generation Launch Vehicle.
- A space station is a spacecraft capable of supporting a human crew in orbit for an extended period of time and is therefore a type of space habitat. It lacks major propulsion or landing systems. An orbital station or an orbital space station is an artificial satellite.

### About Next Generation Launch Vehicle:

- The Next Generation Launch Vehicle or NGLV (previously referred to as Unified Launch Vehicle or ULV) is a three-stage partially reusable rocket, currently under development by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). This vehicle is designed to replace currently operational systems like PSLV, GSLV and LVM3.
- This family of three launchers was previously being designed for replacing the different core propulsion modules of PSLV, GSLV, and LVM3 respectively with a common semi-cryogenic engine and hence it was named as Unified Launch Vehicle (ULV). Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) launchers will be having partial reusability.

### Important Future Mission of ISRO:

- **INSAT 3DS:** It is a part of the Indian National Satellite System (INSAT) series developed by ISRO. The mission will tentatively be launched in January 2024. The aim of the satellite is the monitor and gain more knowledge about

weather system, disaster management and important meteorological forecasts.

- **Gaganyaan 1:** It is jointly prepared by ISRO and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), set to take off in January or February 2024. Gaganyaan 1 will be a test flight to prepare for India's manned space mission, set to carry three crew members.
- **NISAR:** It is a joint project between NASA and ISRO, where the two space agencies have partnered to launch a Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite. It will be launched in the January 2024, and will be the first dual band radar imaging satellite.
- **X-ray Polarimeter Satellite:** It will be launched into the orbit in 2024 to study the polarisation of cosmic x-rays, and will stay put for at least 5 years. It will be used to observe pulsars, black hole x ray binaries, active galactic nuclei, and non-thermal supernova remnants.
- **Venus Orbiter Mission:** In this Mission, ISRO plans to launch a spacecraft to orbit the planet Venus for the first time in the history of the country by 2025. The spacecraft will orbit Venus for five years to study the atmosphere of the planet.

### Conclusion:

India's new space station will offer an unparalleled vantage point to study Earth and the solar system. This venture will not only foster technological advancements enhancing our daily lives but will also serve as a beacon, igniting inspiration among a fresh wave of engineers and scientists poised to shape our future.

## 6 XPoSat

### Why in News:

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is going to launch its first polarimetry mission, XPoSat, on January 1, 2024. This venture marks India's foray into polarimetry, a novel approach to studying celestial events beyond conventional imaging.

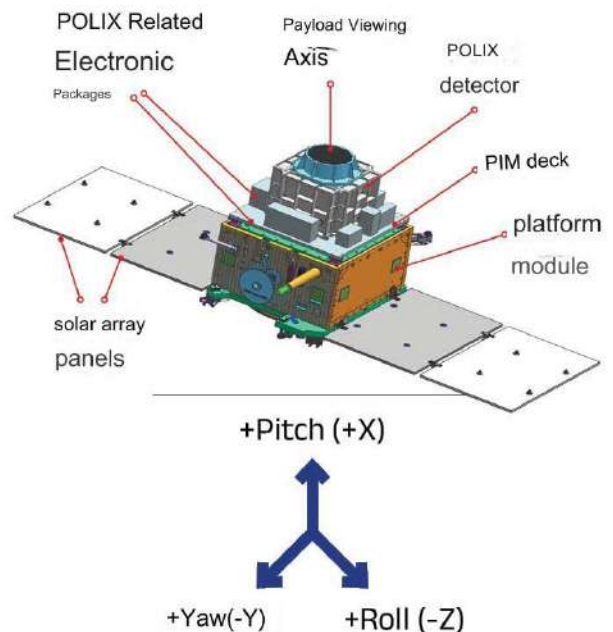
### About XPoSat:

- XPoSat, short for X-ray Polarimeter Satellite, is India's first dedicated polarimetry mission designed to investigate the complex dynamics of bright astronomical X-ray sources under extreme conditions. Launched into a low earth orbit, the spacecraft is equipped with two scientific payloads Polix and Xspect.
- **Polix (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays):** POLIX serves as the primary payload and is responsible for measuring polarimetry parameters,

specifically the degree and angle of polarization, in the medium X-ray energy range of 8-30 keV. Developed by the Ramam Research Institute (RRI) in collaboration with U R Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), POLIX employs a collimator, a scatterer, and four X-ray proportional counter detectors to facilitate precise observations.

- **Xspect (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing):** XSPECT is the secondary payload designed to offer spectroscopic information in the energy range of 0.8-15 keV. It complements the polarimetric observations of POLIX by providing fast timing and high spectroscopic resolution in soft X-rays. XSPECT features an array of Swept Charge Devices (SCDs) to achieve an effective area greater than 30 cm<sup>2</sup> at 6 keV with an impressive energy resolution of less than 200 eV at 6 keV. The payload is equipped with passive collimators to narrow the field of view, reducing background noise.

### Mission Objective



### ISRO's Scientific Renaissance:

- The XPoSat mission stands as a testament to ISRO's commitment to scientific exploration, especially since the opening of the Indian space sector to private entities. Building on the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission's historic South Pole landing and other recent achievements, ISRO continues to expand its scientific portfolio, demonstrating prowess in both lunar and solar

exploration, navigation satellite deployment, and commercial missions.

### Way Forward:

As XPoSat embarks on its mission to unravel the secrets of polarisation in space, it symbolizes India's aspirations for scientific excellence and international collaboration. The Indian space sector's dynamic evolution promises a future where ISRO's ingenuity propels humanity into new frontiers of understanding the universe.

## 7 Lumpy Skin Disease

### Why in News:

Recently, the Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairy told in the Lok Sabha that due to the outbreak of lumpy skin disease in cattle, there has been a reduction in milk production in the country in 2022-23. However, the parliamentary committee has questioned the accuracy of the Union Animal Husbandry Ministry's data on the death of more than two lakh cattle and buffaloes due to lumpy skin disease in 2022 and 2023.

### About Lumpy Skin Disease:

- The Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) is caused by a virus called the Capripoxvirus and this is an emerging threat to livestock worldwide.
- It is genetically associated to the goatpox and sheeppox virus family.
- It infects cattle and water buffalo through vectors such as blood-feeding insects.

### Symptoms:

- Major symptoms include the appearance of circular, firm nodes on the animal's hide or skin that look similar to lumps.
- Infected animals immediately start losing weight, will have reduced milk yield and also can have fever and lesions in the mouth.
- Excessive nasal and salivary secretion are other symptoms.
- Pregnant cows and buffaloes may suffer miscarriage due to this disease and can die.

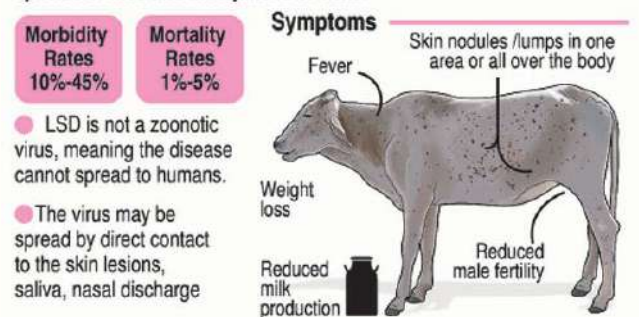
### History of Outbreaks:

- The disease has been endemic to most African countries. Since 2012 the outbreak has been more rapidly in the Middle East, Southeast Europe and West and Central Asia.
- Since 2019, several outbreaks of LSD have been reported in Asia. In May this year, Pakistan's Punjab also reported the deaths of over 300 cows due to LSD.
- In September 2020, a strain of the virus was discovered in Maharashtra. Gujarat too has reported cases over the last few years sporadically.

- The point of concern is the number of deaths being reported, and whether vaccination catches up to the rate at which the disease is spreading.
- According to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), of which India is a member, mortality rates of 1 to 5 percent are considered as normal.

### Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD)

Lumpy skin disease is a viral disease that affects cattle. It is transmitted by blood-feeding insects, such as certain species of flies and mosquitoes or ticks.



### Risk to Humans:

- The disease is not zoonotic i.e. it does not spread from animals to humans, and humans cannot get infected with it.
- The milk produced by an infected animal will be fit for human consumption after boiling or pasteurisation as these processes will kill the viruses, if any, in the milk.

### Challenges:

- The disposal of the dead animals is a major issue as improper handling of the carcasses can cause health and sanitation issues.
- Proper disposal of the carcasses can include incineration or burning of the bodies at high temperatures, along with disinfection of premises.

### Preventing the Spread:

- Successful control and eradication of LSD relies on early detection, followed by a rapid and widespread vaccination campaign.
- The cattle-sheds should be sanitized by eliminating vectors through application of insecticides and spraying disinfectant chemicals.
- The infected cattle should be immediately isolated from the healthy stock and the nearest veterinarian should be contacted for treatment of the infected animal.
- The outbreak to the state government so that the rest of the healthy herd can be vaccinated using goat pox vaccine.



# Economic Issues



## 1 Public Accounts Committee Report on Agricultural Insurance

### Why in News:

Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has recently released its report focusing on various Agricultural Schemes like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Restructured Weather Based Crop insurance scheme. The matter actually pertains to a C&AG Report (No. 7) of 2017 on "Agriculture Crop Insurance Schemes" relating to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

### Key Findings of the Report:

- The report highlighted several key areas of concern within the agricultural insurance schemes. It pointed out delays in the release of funds by state governments for the premium subsidy and in issuing notifications regarding crops, areas, and involved insurance companies. Settlement claims were also delayed due to various reasons such as delayed transmission of yield data and NEFT-related issues.
- Additionally, the report noted a disparity i.e., the number of farmers covered under the schemes was significantly lower compared to the figures assessed by the Census 2011. Particularly, coverage among non-loanee farmers was almost negligible.
- To address these issues, the report suggests establishing mechanisms for the timely release of funds by state governments and proposes integrating databases like Kisan cards and soil health cards to streamline the delivery mechanism.
- It also emphasizes the need for stronger monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability. Moreover, the report recommends adopting and replicating best practices from crop cutting experiments nationwide to ensure accurate crop yield data.

### About Public Accounts Committee:

- Public Accounts Committee is one of the three Financial parliamentary committees. Estimates Committee and Committee on Public Undertakings are the other two financial committees.
- This committee was first established in 1921, in wake of Montague-Chelmsford reforms also known as the Government of India Act, 1919. It is the oldest committee among the three committees.
- There are 22 members in the committee, among

which 15 members are elected from the Lok Sabha and 7 members are elected from Rajya Sabha. It has term for one year.

- The chairperson of the committee is appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha.

### Conclusion:

Sources said there have been several changes made since 2017 and PAC should not have recommended something based on C&AG's earlier observations. For instance, PAC said that coverage of non-loanee farmers was negligible, whereas their share was 34 per cent (pan India) in Kharif 2023 applications. Even share of non-loanee in states like Maharashtra is higher than loanee farmers' applications for enrolment, the sources said.

## 2 LEADS 2023 Report

### Why in News:

Recently, LEADS [Logistics Ease Across Different States] 2023 report was released by the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I). The 5th edition of the LEADS annual exercise - LEADS 2023 report, provides insights into improvement of logistics performance at State/UT level.

Groups / Categories	Achievers	Fast Movers	Aspirers
Coastal	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu	Kerala, Maharashtra	Goa, Odisha, West Bengal
Landlocked	Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand	Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand
North-East	Assam, Sikkim, Tripura	Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland	Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram
Union Territories	Chandigarh, Delhi	Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Puducherry	Daman & Diu/ Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh

**LEADS 2023**

### Performance Highlights from LEADS 2023:

#### Coastal Group:

- **Achievers:** Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
- **Fast Movers:** Kerala, Maharashtra
- **Aspirers:** Goa, Odisha, West Bengal

#### Landlocked Group:

- **Achievers:** Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh
- **Fast Movers:** Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand
- **Aspirers:** Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand

### North-East Group:

- **Achievers:** Assam, Sikkim, Tripura
- **Fast Movers:** Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland
- **Aspirers:** Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram

### Union Territories:

- **Achievers:** Chandigarh, Delhi
- **Fast Movers:** Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Puducherry
- **Aspirers:** Daman & Diu/ Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh

### About the LEADS:

- LEADS was conceived on the lines of the Logistics Performance Index of World Bank in 2018 by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), MoC&I.
- While the LPI relies entirely on perception-based surveys, LEADS incorporates both perception as well as objectivity thereby enhancing the robustness and comprehensiveness of this exercise. Its key pillars include:
  - » Logistics Infrastructure,
  - » Logistics Services and
  - » Operating and Regulatory Environment

### About Logistic Sector:

- Logistics is the process of planning and executing the efficient transportation and storage of goods from the point of origin to the point of consumption. Its goal is to meet customer requirements in a timely, cost-effective manner.
- The worth of Indian logistics market is estimated at over USD 200 billion. The sector provides livelihood to more than 22 million people.

### National Logistics Policy:

- The National Logistics Policy, launched in September 2022, aims to streamline India's goods movement, fostering an integrated logistics ecosystem.
- With the implementation of National Logistics Policy, there will be further boost to the development in an integrated logistics ecosystem, reduction in time, wastage & cost, and ensuring sustainability.

### Measures to Improve Logistics:

- The government introduced the PM GATI Shakti Master Plan in 2021, under which, a digital platform is created to bring 16 Ministries including Railways and Roadways together for integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure connectivity projects.
- The government has also approved the development of 35 New Multi-Modal logistics Parks under Bharat Mala Pariyojana to reduce logistics costs.

- For promoting export, 40 air cargo terminals have been constructed. 30 airports have been provided cold-storage facilities.

### Conclusion:

The report serves as a catalyst in fostering healthy competition among States/Union Territories, thereby elevating logistics performance. Its impact extends towards fortifying the overall competitiveness of the Indian logistics ecosystem, bolstering its global positioning.

## 3 IMF's Concerns Regarding Sustainability of India's Debt

### Why in News:

The IMF released the annual Article IV country report for India, detailing its views on various macroeconomic issues and discussions with Indian officials on economic development and policies.

### What are the viewpoints of IMF:

- This year's report highlights two crucial areas that deserve in-depth scrutiny: India's currency regime and the level of general government debt.
- IMF has cautioned that general government debt is likely to exceed 100 percent of India's gross domestic product (GDP) in the near future.
- It reclassified India's exchange rate regime, terming it a "stabilised arrangement" instead of "floating".

### :- Prelims Insights :-

- ☑ A floating exchange rate is a regime where the currency price of a nation is set by the forex market based on supply and demand relative to other currencies. This is in contrast to a fixed exchange rate, in which the government entirely or predominantly determines the rate.
- ☑ They became popular after the failure of the gold standard and the Bretton Woods agreement.
- ☑ The IMF classifies an exchange rate regime as a stabilized arrangement when it determines that the exchange rate has not moved beyond a 2% band in 6 months and that this stability has resulted from market.

- Acknowledging India's inflation control amidst global price hikes, maintaining a positive growth outlook, it revised India's medium-term

- potential growth rate up to 6.3% from 6%.
- It further emphasised the probability of long-term risks because to achieve India's climate targets, substantial investment is vital.
  - This necessitates new concessional financing, amplified private sector engagement, and the implementation of carbon pricing or similar mechanisms to bolster resilience and mitigate climate risks and natural disasters.

### India's Response:

- India opposed the IMF's changes to its exchange regime, deeming it "unjustified" and based on "subjective selection," defending exchange rate flexibility as crucial for absorbing external shocks.
- Concerning rising government debt warnings, India emphasized limited sovereign debt risks due to its domestic currency dominance.
- Further, India argued that the IMF fails to grasp domestic complexities, emphasizing the impact of imported inflation on 1.4 billion people, prompting active rupee volatility management by the central bank.

### Conclusion:

On the exchange rate regime, there have been periods when the rupee has fallen less compared to other currencies as its decline has been cushioned by forex interventions. However, a flexible exchange rate, as the IMF also notes, would help absorb external shocks. And on the issue of debt, while both central and state governments have brought down their debt and deficit levels from levels seen during the pandemic, they must continue on the path of consolidation.

## 4 Card-on-File Tokenisation

### Why in News:

RBI will introduce the facility for creation of card-on-file tokenisation at the issuer bank level to enhance convenience for cardholders in getting tokens created and linking them to their existing accounts with e-commerce applications.

### More about the News:

- The central bank had introduced Card-on-File Tokenisation (CoFT) in September 2021 and began implementation from October 1, 2022.
- Currently, Card-on-File (CoF) tokens can only be created through merchant applications or on the webpage of the e-commerce website.
- Tokenisation has improved the transaction security and approval rate. Over 56 crore tokens have been created, on which transactions valued

at over Rs 5 lakh crore have been undertaken.

### :- Prelims Insights :-

- ☑ **Card-on-File Tokenisation:** *Tokenisation is a process where the cardholder's original card number, one which is written on the card and is extensively used for transactions and card identification, is replaced with a surrogate term called 'token.'*
- ☑ **Merchant Discount Rate:** *The merchant discount rate (MDR) is a fee charged to a business by the company that processes its debit and credit card transactions. Before they can accept debit and credit cards, merchants must set up this service and agree to the rate.*

### Card Payment Status in India:

- India has traditionally been a cash-driven economy, the usage of cash for payments is on the decline. Government measures such as reducing merchant discount rates and providing subsidies to merchants for installing point of sale (PoS) terminals are some of the key factors behind card payment market growth in the country.

### Statistics:

- GlobalData's 'Payment Card Analytics' shows card payments value in India registered a growth of 26.2% in 2022.
- According to a whitepaper released by Visa and Worldline in June 2022, the share of contactless card payments in total face-to-face card transactions in India grew by more than 6x from less than 2.5% in December 2018 to 16% in December 2021.
- According to the RBI's Digital Payments Index, which captures the extent of digitisation of payments across the country, digital payments across the country grew 13.24% on a year-on-year basis as of March 2023. The index for March 2023 stands at 395.57 vs 377.46 for September 2022.

### Conclusion:

The proposal to introduce card-on-file tokenization directly at the bank level is a game-changer for both cardholders and the financial industry as a whole. It enhances convenience and security, reducing the friction associated with digital transactions. This forward-looking initiative reflects the RBI's commitment to fostering a robust and secure



payments landscape in India.

## 5 Evergreening of Loans

### Why in News:

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opted for strict norms for all regulated banking and financial entities to prevent the Evergreening of loans which indirectly and adversely affects the interests of investors.

### About Evergreening of Loans:

- This practice involves providing new loans to help a delinquent borrower repay the loans.
- An Evergreening loan is a loan that does not require the payment of the principal amount during the life of the loan and the borrower is required to make only interest payments. It leaves the borrower with available funds for credit purchases. It is also known as standing or revolving loans.

### Concerns related to the Evergreening of Loans:

- The RBI stated that certain transactions of REs into Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) had raised regulatory concerns.
- RBI has prohibited lenders from following this practice without any reasonable ground. However, all Regulated Entities (RE) like All India Financial Institutions and Non-Banking Financial Companies (including Housing Finance Companies) have figured out an alternate route for this process via investments in Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).
- AIFs are a special investment category and it is a privately pooled fund. In general RE institutions and High Net Worth Individuals (HNI) invest in AIFs. It is adhered to the SEBI (Alternative Investment Funds) Regulations 2012.
- The Evergreening of loans via AIF entails the substitution of direct loan exposure of REs to borrowers with indirect exposure through investments in units of AIFs. Thereby RBI has advised that REs shall not make any investments in any scheme of AIFs which is further investing directly or indirectly in a debtor company of the RE.
- If any RE is already an investor in such an AIF scheme then they have to liquidate its investment in the scheme within 30 days. In any case, if REs are not able to liquidate their investments within the above prescribed limits then, they have to make 100% provisions on such investments.

### Way Forward:

The Evergreening of loans is crucial for maintaining the line of credit fully functional but they should also be subject to market conditions and financial credibility of the regulated entities.

## 6 New Amendments to GSTAT and Custom/Excise Duties

### Why in News:

The Lok Sabha has passed two bills in Winter Session- 2023, one seeking to cap the age limit for the President of GST appellate tribunals (GSTAT) and another introducing the change in the customs and excise duties announced in the Budget 2023.

### The Central Goods and Services Tax (second amendment) Bill-2023:

- It seeks to cap the age for the president and members of the HST appellate tribunals (GSTAT) at 70 years and 67 years respectively. The Bill also aligns the provisions of the Central GST Act in line with the Tribunal Reforms Act- 2021.

### Eligibility for President and Members:

- An advocate with 10 years of 'substantial experience' in litigation in matters relating to indirect taxes in the Appellate Tribunal would be eligible to be appointed as a judicial member of the GSTAT.

### GSTAT (Goods and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal):

- It is a statutory body and its national bench will be based in New Delhi. The national Bench will be presided over by the President and will consist of one Technical Member (Centre) and one Technical Member (State). It will have as many benches or boards in states as decided by each state, subject to the approval of the council.
- It is a specialized authority for resolving disputes under the GST laws.
- The Finance Ministry has notified 31 benches of the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) for all 28 states and 8 UTs.

### The Provisions Collection of Taxes Bill –2023 :

- It will give immediate effect to the changes in customs and excise duties announced in the Budget. The bill seeks to obtain the authority from Parliament to provisionally levy and collect the newly imposed or increased duties of customs and excise for 75 days.
- This bill proposes to replace the erstwhile Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, of 1931.
- The provisions of the bill empower collection provisionally, during the period between the

introduction and enactment of the bill the increased customs or central excise duty where such duty rate is increased beyond the statutory rate approved by the Parliament or where such duty is newly imposed.

### Way Forward:

The new step will ensure the functioning of GSTAT and also reduce the burden of the judiciary with respect to tax-related cases. The tribunal will ensure the speedy settlement of cases.

## 7 Greenwashing

### Why in News:

The UK recently banned ads by Air France, Lufthansa, and Etihad for 'greenwashing,' accusing them of misleading customers by exaggerating their environmental efforts.

### About Greenwashing:

- Greenwashing is when an organization spends more time and money on marketing itself as environmentally friendly than on actually minimizing its environmental impact.
- It is a deceitful marketing gimmick used by companies to exaggerate their environment friendly actions.
- The term greenwashing was first used in 1986 by Jay Westerveld, who was an American environmentalist and researcher.

### Issues Posed by Greenwashing:

- While greenwashing helps in boosting the image of the entity, they do nothing in the fight against climate change.
- It uses various methods such as vagueness, i.e. processes and materials are not specified, and fibbing, making false claims of green, net-zero, environmentally friendly etc.
- Several multinational corporations, including oil giants, FMCG companies have faced accusations of greenwashing.

### ASCI's Draft Guidelines for Greenwashing:

- Absolute claims such as 'environment-friendly', 'eco-friendly' 'sustainable', and 'planet-friendly' must be supported by a 'high level of substantiation.
- Further, the advertisers must specify whether the environmental claim refers to the entire product, packaging or service.
- For claims regarding the product being compostable, biodegradable, recyclable, non-toxic, free-of, advertisers should qualify the aspects to which such claims are being attributed.

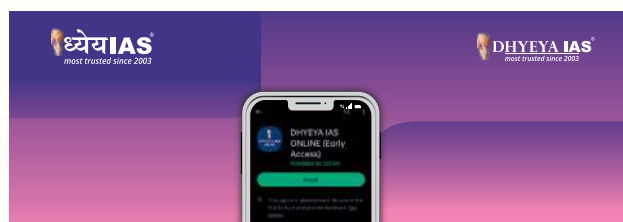
- These claims should be backed by "reliable scientific evidence" to indicate if the product will break down within a reasonably short period of time after disposal.
- The advertisers must also specify whether the product is free of elements that can lead to environmental hazards.

### Initiatives Related to Greenwashing:

- International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB)'s uniform sustainability and climate standards for companies to follow worldwide from 2024.
- Financial Stability Board (FSB)'s Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) to improve the reporting of climate-related financial information.
- FSB is an international body (India is a member) that monitors and makes recommendations about the global financial system.
- SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) norms and do's and don'ts regarding greenwashing.
- RBI's decision to join Global Financial Innovation Network (GFIN)'s Greenwashing Techspirit.

### Conclusion:

Greenwashing gives a false impression of progress achieved in combatting climate change, driving the planet Earth towards more calamities while simultaneously encouraging reckless behaviour that escapes accountability. With sustainable investing becoming increasingly popular, the financial sector must respond effectively to the demand for products that endeavour to introduce positive changes into the economy and avert greenwashing.



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## 1 Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023

### Why in News:

WHO has recently released its, 'Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023' indicating an increase in total number of Road Fatalities in India.

### Key Points of the report:

- The report acknowledged that road accidents fell by 5% to 1.19 million fatalities annually worldwide between 2010 and 2021 with almost 108 UN member nations reporting a drop.
- Ten countries succeeded in reducing road traffic deaths by over 50%. These are Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Denmark, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela.
- As of 2019, road traffic crashes have been the leading killer of children and youth aged 5 to 29 years, and are the 12th leading cause of death when all ages are considered. Two-thirds of deaths occur among people of a working age.
- The report shows that 28% of global road traffic deaths occurred in the WHO's Southeast Asia Region, 25% in the Western Pacific Region, 19% in the African Region, 12% in the Region of the Americas, 11% in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and 5% in the European Region.
- Globally, four-wheel vehicle occupants represent 30% of fatalities; followed by pedestrians, who make up 23% of fatalities; and powered two- and three-wheeler users, who make up 21% of fatalities. Cyclists accounted for 6% of the fatalities, while 3% of deaths were among users of micro-mobility devices, including e-scooters.

### Measures to Road Safety:

- **Speed detection devices** like Radar guns and cameras enhance monitoring. Cities like Chandigarh and New Delhi have successfully installed these devices for traffic control.
- **Infrastructural tweaking** like speed humps, raised platforms, Roundabouts, and optical markings further aid in enhancing the road safety.
- Traffic violations can also be decreased by enforcing stricter rules and heavier fines, especially for driving under the influence. In this context, the implementation of E-challans will further reduce corruption in traffic fine collections.
- **Mandating vehicle safety features** like electronic stability control and advanced braking systems is crucial.

- **Post-crash care:** Bystanders play a significant role in post-crash care by activating emergency systems and providing initial aid. Organizing training courses in this regard builds capacity in road safety audits and engineering.

### Conclusion:

Road safety requires a comprehensive approach that integrates technology, strict enforcement, improved infrastructure, vehicle safety standards and community involvement. Integrating these will collectively ensure road safety, reducing accidents and traffic violations while emphasizing prevention, intervention, and post-crash care.

## 2 Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) – 2023

### Why in News:

The 8th edition of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs (CoC) was hosted by the Royal Thai Navy in Bangkok, Thailand from 19 – 22 Dec 23.

### Highlights of the Meeting:

- Thailand chaired the meeting and India co-chaired the meeting. Further, India assumed the co-Chair position for IONS Working Groups on Maritime Security and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) for the upcoming cycle.
- India is poised to assume the Chair of IONS for the term 2025-27 during the 9th CoC, scheduled to take place in India at the end of 2025. This transition signals India's commitment to the shared goals of the IONS community, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts for a secure and sustainable maritime future in the Indian Ocean Region.
- The flag designed by India was chosen as the official IONS Flag.
- The Republic of Korea Navy was added as the latest observer.

### About the IONS:

- The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is a series of biennial meetings between the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region. It provides a forum to increase maritime security cooperation, discuss regional maritime issues, and promote friendly relationships among the member states
- IONS, conceived by the Indian Navy in 2008, serves as a platform to foster maritime cooperation among the Navies of the littoral states in the Indian Ocean Region. This inclusive forum encourages open discussions on regionally

relevant maritime issues, aiming to establish a common understanding for the future.

- The inaugural edition of IONS took place in February 2008 in New Delhi, with the Indian Navy serving as the Chair for the first two years (2008-2010).
- IONS have 25 members and 9 observer states.

#### Conclusion:

- The IONS is a much-needed initiative which is in line with India's three-fold objectives in the Indian Ocean region. These objectives are:
  - » Enhancing India's relationships with the coastal states in the Indian Ocean region.
  - » Establishing the leadership potential of the Indian Navy and aiming to become a net security provider.
  - » Fulfilling India's ambition of a rules-based and stable maritime border in the Indian Ocean region.
- In addition, the IONS can assist India in strengthening its influence from the Straits of Malacca to Hormuz. India aims to use the IONS as a counterbalance to China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.

## 3 Kolattam Dance

#### Why in News:

Recently, Kolattam dance was performed during the children's festival Balotsavam in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

#### About the Dance:

- Kolattam is a folk dance of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It is part of a religious offering where female dancers pay homage to the temple goddess in many areas of Andhra Pradesh.
- This is a stick dance and a viral dance in Andhra Pradesh. The dance form originated in the Seventh century. This dance form has various names in various regions of India. In Andhra Pradesh, this dance is called KolKollannalu, Kolattam and Kolannalu.
- In the early days, the dance was performed by women only; gradually, changes occurred in this dance, and now the dance is performed by both males and females. Generally, this art form is completed during village festivals. Dance is a combination of rhythmic movements, songs, and music.

#### The prominent theme of Kolattam Dance:

- A large number of Kolattam dancers prefer to perform the Ganga Gouri Samvadam. The theme is based on the fight between Lord Shiva's two wives, Goddess Ganga and Goddess Parvathi.

#### Style of the Kolattam Dance:

- Kolattam dance is an art form, intricately composed of various movements like body tilting, intricate footsteps, and expressive body gestures which are all vital to the dancer's performance. As the music starts, the dancers synchronize their movements to the vocals and music, captivating the audience.
- Each segment of Kolattam holds significance: the creation phase known as Ethugadu, the dynamic shift denoted as Usi altering the dance's pace, and finally, the conclusion termed Muktayimpu.

### -: Prelims Insights :-

#### Famous Folk Dances in Andhra Pradesh:

- ☑ **Kuchipudi Dance:** *The Kuchipudi dance has its origins in Andhra Pradesh. The dance form comprises dance along with fine gestures, song and speech. One needs to be conversant with acting, singing, language and theoretical knowledge to perform this dance well.*
- ☑ **Lambadi:** *This can be called the dance of the nomads. The Lambadi tribe in Andhra Pradesh performs this dance form to celebrate the sowing season and a good harvest.*
- ☑ **Butta Bommalu:** *This is a folk dance which is very famous in Tanuku region of West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh.*

#### Conclusion:

Kolattam dance carries great cultural importance, showcasing how communities unite to honour different events. It is a way to preserve customs, tales, and cultural beliefs for future generations. Moreover, it creates a strong sense of togetherness and connection among participants, regardless of age, making it an inclusive and joyful experience.

## 4 Global Study on Homicide Report 2023

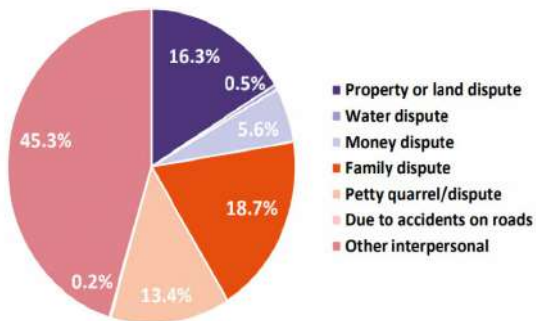
#### Why in News:

Recently, the 4th edition of the Global Study on Homicide Report was released.

#### Key Findings of the Report:

- An average of around 440,000 deaths annually occurred due to homicide between 2019 and 2021.
- 2021 was exceptionally lethal, witnessing 458,000 homicides. Economic repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic and a surge in organized crime, gang-related, and socio-political violence contributed to this increase.

- Despite a more than 95% surge in conflict deaths between 2021 and 2022, available data shows that the global homicide burden in 2022 was twice that of conflict deaths.
- Organized Crime accounted for 22% of global homicides, reaching 50% in the Americas. Competition among organized crime groups and gangs can escalate intentional homicides significantly.
- Factors like climate change, demographic shifts, inequality, urbanization, and technological changes influence homicide rates differently across regions.
- Men constituted 81% of homicide victims and 90% of suspects, while women were more likely to be killed by family members or intimate partners.
- 15% of homicide victims in 2021 were children, amounting to 71,600 boys and girls.
- The global homicide rate is projected to decrease to 4.7 in 2030, though this falls short of the Sustainable Development Goals target.



### India-Specific Findings:

- Nearly 16.8% of murder cases recorded in India between 2019 and 2021 were linked to disputes over property, land, or access to water.
- About 0.5% (300 cases) of recorded murders in India between 2019 and 2021 were specifically attributed to water-related conflicts, highlighting the emergence of this issue as a significant driver of homicides.

### About Global Study on Homicide Report 2023:

- The report emphasizes regional and sub-regional patterns, demographics, age, and gender characteristics of victims, taking into account the effects of major trends such as climate change and even the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Published by:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- **Objective:** To reveal the facts behind the violence, to try and identify notable trends and to inform policies and solutions.
- **3 Categories:** Criminal activities, interpersonal homicides, socio-politically motivated homicides.

### About the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):

- It stands as a prominent global figure in combatting illegal drugs and international crime, while also overseeing the execution of the primary United Nations initiative on counterterrorism.
- **Establishment:** In 1997.
- **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria

### Conclusion:

The UN report cited population growth, economic expansion and climate change as the primary reasons for water security in many regions of the world, which in combination with other societal and political factors, has led to increased violence associated with water disputes in recent years.

5

## Kashi Tamil Sangamam 2.0

### Why in News:

PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kashi Tamil Sangamam 2.0, emphasizing the historical and civilizational connections between North and South India. The event aims to celebrate these connections, shedding light on the deep-rooted link between Kashi and Tamilakam.

### Legendary Connection:

- **King Parakrama Pandya's Quest:** In the 15th century, King Parakrama Pandya, ruling the Madurai region, embarked on a journey to Kashi to procure a lingam for a grand Shiva temple.
- **Divine Intervention:** During the return journey, the cow carrying the lingam refused to move, prompting the king to install the lingam at the spot, known today as Sivakasi.
- **Kasi Viswanathar Temple:** To facilitate worship for those who couldn't travel to Kashi, the Pandyas built the Kasi Viswanathar Temple in Tenkasi, Tamil Nadu.

### Background:

- **Adhivir Ram Pandyan:** In the 19th century, king named Adhivir Ram Pandyan, inspired by a pilgrimage to Kashi, constructed another Shiva temple in Tenkasi.
- **Sant Kumara Gurupara's Contributions:** Sant Kumara Gurupara negotiated with Kashi for the consecration of Kedarghat and Vishvesvaralingam in Varanasi, composing the Kashi Kalambagam, a collection of grammar poems on Kashi.

### Kashi Tamil Sangamam 2.0:

- **Cultural Exchange:** Around 1,400 dignitaries from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry attended the event, engaging in cultural exchanges, exhibitions, and showcasing art, music, handloom, handicrafts, cuisines, and distinctive

products from both regions.

- **Educational Objective:** The Ministry of Education organized the event with the objective of bringing the knowledge and cultural traditions of the North and South closer, fostering a deeper understanding of shared heritage and strengthening people-to-people bonds.

**Historical Significance in Education:**

- **Visit to Kashi:** Historically, higher education in Southern India was considered incomplete without scholars' visit to Kashi.
- **Centers of Knowledge:** The connection between Kashi and Kanchi is evident in similar literary themes, and the prevalence of the name Kashi in every village in Tamil Nadu. "Kashinath" is a popular name in the region.

**Legacy in Temples:**

- **Kasi-Named Temples:** Besides the Kasi Viswanathar temple in Tenkasi, numerous Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu carry the name of Kashi. There are approximately 18 such temples in the vicinity of Chennai alone.

**Conclusion:**

The Kashi Tamil Sangamam 2.0 not only celebrates the historical connect between Kashi and Tamilakam but also serves as a platform for cultural exchange, fostering a deeper understanding of shared heritage between the northern and southern regions of India. The event symbolizes the enduring ties that have transcended centuries and continue to enrich the cultural tapestry of the nation.

**6 INS Imphal Commissioned**

**Why in News:**

Recently Vishakhapatnam Class INS Imphal has been commissioned into the Indian Navy.

**About INS Imphal:**

- The Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL) undertook the construction of the Visakhapatnam Class guided missile destroyers as part of Project 15B, initiated in January 2011.
- The lead ship, INS Visakhapatnam, was commissioned in November 2021.
- The second ship, INS Mormugao, was commissioned in December 2022.
- The fourth ship, to be commissioned as INS Surat (D69), was launched in May.

**Design and Development:**

- The design, conceptualized by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau, focused on incorporating advanced capabilities.
- Project 15B aimed at building destroyers with

similar tonnage, usage, and weaponry.

**Technical Characteristics:**

- The Visakhapatnam Class destroyers have a length of 163 meters, a width of 17.4 meters, and a displacement of 7,400 tonnes.
- The propulsion system features a Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) configuration with four gas turbines.
- The ships can achieve a maximum speed of 30 knots and have a range of 4000 nautical miles.
- Operated by a crew of approximately 350, including 50 officers and 250 sailors, these destroyers provide superior ergonomics and habitability compared to their predecessor classes.

**Navy's arsenal bulked up**  
INS Imphal will bolster the country's presence in the Indo-Pacific and its capabilities to respond to a host of regional contingencies, including emerging maritime challenges in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea. By Rahul Singh

**7,500 tonnes** Displacement  
**30 knots** Max speed  
**75%** Indigenous content  
**7 yrs** Construction time

**164m** Length  
**4,050 nautical miles** Range of the destroyer  
**2 Multi-role helicopters** The Imphal can house 2 multi-role helicopters at any given time. Another time will begin shortly.

**360** Total crew  
**20** Women crew

**INS Imphal**  
Start of construction: July 2016  
Keel laying: May 2017  
Launch: April 2019  
Maiden sea sortie: April 2021  
Delivery to navy: October 2023  
BrahMos firing: November 2023  
Commissioning: December 2023

**EQUIPMENT ON BOARD**

- BrahMos: Supersonic surface-to-air missile
- SHAKTI: EM wave
- AK630: Close-range gun
- RAWL 02 MK-II A: Air search radar
- NAVACH: Chaff system
- SRGC: Force protection gun
- NIDHAM: Medium-range surface-to-air missile complex
- SIR: Surface surveillance radar
- SRGC: Force protection gun
- ITTL: Indigenous twin-tube torpedo launcher
- NIDHAM: Medium-range surface-to-air missile
- NAVACH: Communications intercept system
- EOG: Electro optical device

**Project 15B**  
Overall cost of the project: **₹35,000 cr**

**3 ships commissioned**

- November 2021: INS Visakhapatnam (D68)
- December 2022: INS Mormugao (D67)
- December 2023: **INS IMPHAL (D68)**
- INS Surat to be commissioned in 2024

**Survivability and Control Systems:**

- Elaborate battle damage control systems contribute to improved survivability.
- The Total Atmospheric Control System (TACS) safeguards against chemical, biological, and nuclear threats.

**Combat Management and Arsenal:**

- Equipped with a state-of-the-art combat management system for tactical evaluation.

- The arsenal includes BrahMos surface-to-surface cruise missiles and Barak-8 surface-to-air missiles.
- Features comprise a 127 mm main gun, AK-630 30mm guns, torpedo launchers, and anti-submarine rocket launchers.

### -: Prelims Insights :-

- ✓ *Four major ceremonial events mark a ship's life: keel laying, launching, commissioning and decommissioning.*
- ✓ **Project 15B:** *It is successor of Project 15 (1997-2001, comprising INS Delhi, INS Mysore, and INS Mumbai) and Project 15A (2014-16 called Kolkata class comprising INS Kolkata, INS Kochi and INS Chennai). It consists of four ships.*
- ✓ **Looking East:** *The commissioning of INS Imphal marks a significant milestone as the largest and most advanced destroyer named after a North-eastern city. This tribute honors Manipur's pivotal role in India's freedom struggle, from the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891 to Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's historic INA flag hoisting in 1944 at Moirang. Notably, the Battle of Imphal, between British and Imperial Japanese forces involving Indians on both sides, decisively impacted the Burma campaign during WWII, shaping the new global order.*

### Conclusion:

Guided missile destroyers play a pivotal role in protecting fleets and carrier battle groups. In this context, the Visakhapatnam class enhances operational efficiency with modern sensors and communication facilities. Its high-indigenous component provides a strategic edge to the destroyers in terms of reliability and control.

# 7

## Karnikara Mandapam of Kunnamangalam Bhagawati Temple

### Why in News:

Recently, Six-hundred-year-old Kunnamangalam Bhagawati temple's 'karnikara mandapam' has been selected for UNESCO's Asia Pacific Award for cultural heritage conservation.

### About the Temple:

- The Kunnamangalam Bhagawati Temple, situated in Naduvannur in northern Kozhikode, got special recognition for sustainable development for its transformative heritage practices for following a sustainable method for restoring the 'karnikara mandapam' in front of

the temple.

- The Kunnamangalam Bhagawati Temple's semi-open hall is known as Karnikara Mandapam. This marks the third temple in Kerala to receive this recognition.
- Constructed 400 years ago, Karnikara Mandapam is characterised by its 16 pillars, in accordance with the principles of Tatvashastra. It took two and a half months to reconstruct the mandapam. A group of young architects and volunteers have carried out renovation work of the temple under the Archival and Research Project (ARPO).
- As per UNESCO, the award winners were selected according to their demonstration of success among various conservation criteria, such as their articulation of the spirit of place, their technical achievement, their appropriate use or adaptation, their engagement with the local community and their contribution towards enhancing the sustainability of the surrounding environment and beyond.

### Significance of UNESCO Awards:

The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation play a crucial role in the following:

- It raises awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage and inspire others to undertake similar initiatives.
- By acknowledging successful conservation projects, the awards incentivize individuals and organizations to strive for excellence in heritage preservation.
- The award platform facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices in heritage conservation, contributing to sustainable and effective preservation strategies.

### About the Award:

- The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation are prestigious honors that recognize outstanding contributions to the preservation of cultural heritage in the region. They play a vital role in promoting awareness, recognizing efforts and sharing best practices in heritage conservation.
- Four Indian projects were recognized by UNESCO for their outstanding contributions to cultural heritage conservation in the Asia-Pacific region.

### Conclusion

Heritage conservation projects related to urban revitalization of Rambagh Gate and Ramparts in Punjab, Church of the Epiphany in Haryana and Bikaner House in Delhi have won UNESCO awards. These awards recognize India's efforts to preserve its heritage.

## Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

### Climate Change

#### 1. Green Credit Programme (GCP)

- Green Credit Initiative was launched on the side-lines of COP 28.
- It is an initiative within the government's Lifestyle for Environment or LIFE movement.
- The Green Credit Rules, 2023, has been notified on 12th October 2023 under the Environment Protection Act 1986.
- In its initial phase, voluntary tree plantation is envisaged on degraded land, waste land, watershed area etc. under the control and management of Forest departments.
- The generation of Green Credit under Green Credit Rules, 2023 is independent of the carbon credit under Carbon Credit Trading Scheme 2023.

#### 2. India's Achievements Against the NDC Targets

- As per India's first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted in the year 2015, India had the target of:
  - » Reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35 % by 2030 from 2005 level.
  - » Achieving about 40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030.
- These two targets have been achieved well ahead of the time.
  - » As on 31st October, 2023; the cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources is 43.81% of the total cumulative electric power installed capacity.
  - » The emission intensity of its GDP has been reduced by 33% between 2005 and 2019.
- In August 2022, India updated its NDC to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP has been enhanced to 45 percent by 2030 from 2005 level, and the target on cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources has been enhanced to 50% by 2030.

### Forest Conservation

#### 1. Remarkable Increase in the Number of Ramsar Sites of the Country

- Since 2014, 49 new wetlands across the country have been designated as Ramsar (Wetlands of International Importance) sites taking the total number to 75.
- Currently, India has the second largest network of Ramsar Sites in Asia.
- **Amrit Dharohar Yojana** has been launched for conservation of Ramsar sites through community participation on the environment day 2023.

#### 2. Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023

To achieve the country's national as well as international commitments of NDCs, carbon neutrality, eliminate the ambiguities and bring clarity about the applicability of the Act in various lands, promoting the plantation in non-forest land, enhancing the productivity of the forests, amendment in the existing Act has been made by promulgating the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023.



### 3. Increase in the Number of Protected Areas

- The number of Protected Areas in the country, which stood at 745 in the year 2014 have risen to 998.
- This accounts for 5.28% of the country's total geographic area.

### 4. Increase in Forest and Tree Cover

- As per India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021, the total forest and tree cover in India is 80.9 million hectares, which is 24.62% of the geographical area of the country.

### 5. Blue Flag Beaches

- Government of India initiated the beach development work and 08 beaches conferred blue flag certification in 2020.
- In 2022, total 12 beaches had blue flag certification.

## PARIVESH

- PARIVESH is a web based, role based workflow application which has been developed for online submission and monitoring of the proposals submitted by the proponents for seeking Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ Clearances from Central, State and district level authorities.
- It automates the entire tracking of proposals which includes online submission of a new proposal, editing/updating the details of proposals and displays status of the proposals at each stage of the workflow.

## Air Quality/ Pollution

Under **Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan** more than 100 cities are monitored for air quality with an intent and plan to improve the air quality through holistic approach.

## Circular Economy

### Mission Circular Economy:

- 11 Committees constituted for development of Circular Economy (CE) and Action Plans for 10 waste categories.
- The following amendments were made to Promote mission of circular economy:
  - » Plastic Waste Management Rule.
  - » Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Used Oil.
  - » E-Waste (Management) Rules.
  - » Battery Waste Management Rules.
  - » Waste Tyre, 2022.

## Wildlife

### Transcontinental Relocation of Cheetah:

- 8 cheetahs from Namibia and 12 cheetahs from South Africa have been translocated to Kuno National Park in Sept'22 and Feb, 2023 respectively.
- Cheetah had become extinct in the country in the late 1940/early 1950s.

### 50 years of Project Tiger:

- As per the latest Tiger Census report India is home to more than 75% tiger population of the world.

- Tiger Estimation (2022) shows an increase from 2226 in 2014 to 3682 in 2023 with 12 tiger reserves with Outstanding category.
- International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) has been launched by India on 9th April 2023 for conserving global big cats including tiger.

### Digitization of Flora, Fauna and Herbarium Records:

- The BSI and ZSI has carried out the digitization of 16500 specimens with 45000 images of the Type and Non-Type of Indian Faunal specimens.

# BRAIN BOOSTERS- Year-End Review 2023

## Ministry of Heavy Industries

### 1. FAME-II Scheme

- The Government is committed to provide clean and green public transport and is implementing the Phase-II of the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) scheme with the aim to reduce dependence on fossil fuel and to address the issue of vehicular emissions.
- This phase mainly focuses on supporting electrification of public & shared transportation, and aims to support through demand incentive e-vehicles including e-buses.

### 2. Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

- A total of 148 EV Public Charging Stations (PCS) have been commissioned.
- MHI had announced under FAME II the PSU Oil Marketing Companies - Indian Oil (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum (HPCL) will set up 7432 public fast charging stations across the country.

### 3. PLI Scheme for Automobile and Auto Components

- With the aim to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities and exports in the automobile and the automobile components sector, government approved a 'Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme' for this sector.
  - The PLI Scheme proposes financial incentives to boost domestic manufacturing of 'Advanced Automotive Technology' (AAT) products and attract investments in the automotive manufacturing value chain.
- Objectives:**
- Overcoming cost disabilities, creating economies of scale and building a robust supply chain in areas of Advanced Automotive Technology products.

### 4. PLI Scheme for Advance Chemistry Cell, Battery Storage in India

To enhance India's manufacturing capabilities and exports for the manufacture of Advance Chemistry Cell (ACC) in India, Government approved a PLI Scheme for setting up manufacturing facilities for ACC, Battery Storage in India.

### 5. Scheme on Enhancement of Competitiveness in the Indian Capital Goods Sector- Phase-II

- This scheme has been notified for providing assistance to Common Technology Development and Services Infrastructure.
- There are six components namely:
  - » Identification of Technologies through Technology Innovation Portals.
  - » Setting up of four New Advanced Centres of Excellence and augmentation of Existing Centres of Excellence.
  - » Promotion of skilling in Capital Goods
- Sector-creation of Qualification packages for skill levels 6 and above.
- » Setting up of four Common Engineering Facility Centres (CEFCs) and augmentation of existing CEFCs.
- » Augmentation of Existing Testing and Certification Centres.
- » Setting up of ten Industry Accelerators for Technology Development.

# BRAIN BOOSTERS- Year-End Review 2023



## Ministry of Civil Aviation

### 1. RCS-UDAN

- RCS-UDAN was launched in 2016 to enable air operations on unserved/underserved routes connecting different regions, promote balanced regional growth and make flying affordable for masses.
- RCS-UDAN is a self-financing scheme, with a nominal levy for each departure on main (trunk) routes to cross subsidize the operations of UDAN flights.

### 2. Digi Yatra

- Digi yatra is a project conceived to achieve contactless, seamless processing of passengers at Airports based on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT).
- The project basically envisages that any traveller may pass through various check points at the airport through paperless and contactless processing using facial features to establish the identity.
- Passenger can enroll on the platform from the comfort of their home.
- Digi Yatra has been launched at following 13 airports:
  - » Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Hyderabad, Pune, Kolkata, Vijayawada, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Cochin, Guwahati, Jaipur and Lucknow.
- Since its launch, more than 91 lakh passengers have availed the facility of Digi Yatra.
- Eventually, all the airports will be covered with Digi Yatra in a phased manner.

### 3. Greenfield Airports

- Government of India has formulated a Greenfield Airports Policy, 2008 which provides guidelines, procedure and conditions for establishment of new Greenfield Airports in the country.
- Government of India has so far accorded 'in-principle' approval for setting up of following 21 Greenfield Airports across the country,
  - » Mopa in Goa
  - » Navi Mumbai, Shirdi and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra
  - » Kalaburagi, Vijayapura, Hassan and Shivamogga in Karnataka
  - » Dabra (Gwalior) in Madhya Pradesh
  - » Kushinagar and Noida (Jewar) in Uttar Pradesh
  - » Dholera and Rajkot in Gujarat
  - » Karaikal in Puducherry
  - » Dagadarthi, Bhogapuram and Oravakal (kurnool) in Andhra Pradesh
  - » Durgapur in West Bengal
  - » Pakyong in Sikkim
  - » Kannur in Kerala
  - » Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh
- Out of these, 12 Greenfield airports have been operationalized.
- During 2023, three Greenfield airports, namely, Mopa, Shivammogga and Rajkot have been operationalized.

### 4. India's Domestic Passenger Traffic Touches Record High

- On November 19 this year, airlines in India flew 4,56,910 domestic passengers.
- This was highest single-day air traffic since the pandemic hit, marking a remarkable 7.4% surge above pre-COVID averages-a clear sign of recovery and resilience.

### 5. Airports Run on 100% Green Energy

- Use of conventional sources of energy is the prime source of carbon emission at airports and thus replacing with green energy helps in reducing the carbon footprint of the airport.
- Presently, 66 airports across the country are running with 100% Green Energy.

# BRAIN BOOSTERS- Year-End Review 2023

## Ministry of Textiles

### 1. PM MITRA

- The Government has launched PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks Scheme to develop world class infrastructure.
- PM MITRA Parks Scheme are inspired by the **5F vision:**
  - » **Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign.**
- Parks will offer an opportunity to create an integrated textiles value chain right from spinning, weaving, processing/dyeing and printing to garment manufacturing at a single location.
- World-class industrial infrastructure would attract cutting edge technology and boost FDI and local investment in the sector.
- Centre and States to form SPVs for setting up PM MITRA Parks. These parks will be developed in PPP mode.

### 2. PLI Scheme

- The Government has approved the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Textiles over a five year period to promote production of MMF Apparel, MMF Fabrics and products of Technical Textiles in the country to enable Textile sector to achieve size and scale and to become competitive.
- The incentive will be provided to the companies under the scheme on achieving the threshold investment and threshold turnover and thereafter incremental turnover.

### 3. Kasturi Cotton Bharat

- The programme is a first of its kind branding, traceability and certification exercise carried out jointly by the Government of India, Trade Bodies and Industry to promote Indian Cotton.
- Stakeholders across the supply chain will be involved in a collaborative effort to promote and enhance the value of Indian Cotton across the domestic and overseas markets.

### 4. National Technical Textile Mission (NTTM)

- Key pillars of NTTM include:
  - » Research Innovation & Development
  - » Promotion and Market Development
  - » Education, Training and Skilling
  - » Export Promotion
- The focus of the Mission is for developing usage of technical textiles in various flagship missions, programmes of the country including strategic sectors.
- The Ministry has issued Quality Control Order (QCOs) for the following:
  - » 19 items of Geo-tech Textiles.
  - » 12 items of Protective Textiles items.
  - » 20 items of Agro Textiles.
  - » 06 items of Meditech Textiles.
- More than 100 BIS standards have been developed since inception of NTTM.

### 5. SAMARTH

To enhance the skills of the workforce in the textile sector, Government has formulated Samarth Scheme under a broad skilling policy framework with the objective of providing opportunity for sustainable livelihood.

### 6. Cotton Sector

- 81st Plenary Meeting of the International Cotton Advisory Committee was hosted.

#### Theme:

- Cotton Value Chain: Local Innovations for Global prosperity.

# BRAIN BOOSTERS- Year-End Review 2023

## Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region

### 1. Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East (PM-DevINE)

- Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE), was announced as a new Central Sector scheme, with 100% Central funding, in the Union Budget 2022-23.
  - It was approved by the Union Cabinet on 12 October, 2022 with a total outlay of Rs. 6,600 crore for the 4-year period from 2022-23 to 2025-26.
- Objectives:**
- Fund infrastructure convergently, in the spirit of PM Gati Shakti.
  - Support social development projects based on felt needs of the NER.
  - Enable livelihood activities for youth and women.
  - Fill the development gaps in various sectors.

### 2. North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (Roads)-NESIDS (Roads)

- The North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) was approved during 2017-18 and was implemented till 31.03.2022.
- During the process of extension of the NESIDS w.e.f. 01.04.2022, the erstwhile NESIDS has been restructured into two components:
  - » NESIDS (Roads)
  - » NESIDS (Other than Road Infrastructure)

### 3. Schemes of NEC

- A Central Sector scheme named "Schemes of North Eastern Council (NEC), fully funded by the Government of India, was under implementation since 10th Finance Commission period.
  - It was continued till 31.03.2022 to fill up gaps in overall development of the Region.
- Objectives:**
- Schemes of NEC (2022-26) continued unaltered with critical gap interventions in multiple sectors for speedy and holistic development of NER.
  - The Scheme will cover all the eight states of the North Eastern Region.

### 4. Expenditure under 10% Gross Budgetary Support for NE Region

As per the extant policy of the Government, all non-exempted Central Ministries / Departments (currently 54) are mandated to spend at least 10% of their Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) of Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes for North Eastern Region (NER).

### 5. MDoNER Data Analytics Dashboard

- The Ministry has launched Data Analytics Dashboard on 12.10.2023 which has the data of 112 schemes across 55 Departments and Ministries. This Dashboard will help MDoNER in
  - » Data driven decision making.
  - » Ease of operations.
  - » Centralized monitoring.
  - » Policy level decision tool.
  - » Information integration.

## 6. Inauguration of Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link Project

- The Akhaura Agartala New Rail Line Project has been inaugurated by PMs of India and Bangladesh on 01/11/2023.
- An important objective for the Project is that Maitree Express that is running between Kolkata to Dhaka could be extended upto Agartala, reducing the time for travel from 38 hours to 16 hours.

## 7. 5G Use Cases

- On the front of cutting edge technology, MDoNER has been instrumental in launching 5G applications in NER States in collaboration with AMTRON, with hub at Guwahati.
- The project is focused on
  - » Healthcare
  - » Agriculture
  - » edge computing
  - » 5G labs.
- All the applications are based on Industry 4.0 employing AI, IOT, cloud, internet and made available to the citizens through hand-held smart phones.
- The 5G health use cases include applications like
  - » Mobile / cloud based ECG solution.
  - » AI based cataract analysis using smart phones.
  - » AI based medical image analysis over cloud for better clinical decision making.
  - » AI technology for respiratory health through audiometric analysis of cough sounds.
  - » Imaging device combining AI to detect and classify bacteria on wounds.

## 8. Improved Startup Ecosystem

- MDoNER and North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) collaborated to establish the North East Venture Fund (NEVF), a dedicated venture fund for the North East Region, endowed with a corpus of Rs.100 crore.
- Since its inception in April 2017, NEVF has extended investment support to 67 startups amounting to Rs. 98.17 crore.

## 9. Task Force for Development of Tourism in North Eastern Region

- Task Force has been constituted on 20th October, 2023 under the oversight of MDoNER with representatives from concerned Ministries, State Governments and other stakeholders.
- The Task Force shall build strategies along with an action plan for the comprehensive and sustainable development of tourism in the NER.
- It shall study national and global best practices including digital technologies and recommend their adoption in the NER.

## 10. Advancing North East Portal

- The “Advancing North East” is a digital platform and web-based initiative developed by NEC through North Eastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFi) which provides knowledge and guidance for the youth of NER.
- The content of the portal is segregated in:
  - » Education.
  - » Employment.
  - » Entrepreneurship.

## 11. Design Labs for Livelihood Generation

- Digital Design Labs for Livelihood Generation was sanctioned by NEC in the FY 2022-23 at a total cost of Rs. 4.99 Crore.
- **Objective:** To train local youth in the identified areas to acquire the required Digital Skills to get gainful employment in the knowledge economy/digital economy.

# News Of National and International Importance

## AS-24 Killjoy

Recently, in the ongoing aerial offensive against Ukraine, Russia utilized its AS-24 Killjoy hypersonic missile.

### About AS-24 Killjoy:

- The AS-24 Killjoy is a hypersonic missile that Russia recently used in an aerial strike on Ukraine.
- It is a nuclear-capable missile that can travel at speeds of up to Mach 10 and has a range of 1,500–2,000 km.
- In March 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the Kinzhal as one of six “next generation” weapons.
- The missile is reportedly a ballistic missile that was used on December 14, 2023 to target a military airfield in central Ukraine.
- Hypersonic missiles can travel through the atmosphere and maneuver while in flight, making them difficult to detect and intercept.
- Hypersonic missiles fly at least five times the speed of sound, which is Mach 5.

## ‘MedTech Mitra’

Recently, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare and Chemicals & Fertilizers virtually launched ‘MedTech Mitra’.

### About MedTech Mitra:

- MedTech Mitra is a platform that supports and nurtures medical technology (MedTech) innovators in India.
- The initiative provides guidance, resources and assistance in shaping research and obtaining regulatory approvals.
- It is a collaborative alliance between NITI Aayog, ICMR and CDSCO.
- Aligned with ‘Viksit Bharat,’ it seeks to transform India’s healthcare by 2047 through indigenous innovation.
- It will have a crucial role in hand holding the innovators for clinical evaluation and regulatory compliance, empowering emerging start-ups and ensuring ease of innovation.

## NASAMS

The Russian Military has reportedly struck Norwegian NASAMS and French Crotale-NG AD system at the Starokonstantinov airfield in the Khmelnytsky region.

### About NASAMS:

- NASAMS (National/Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System) is a ground-based and medium-range air defense system designed to protect against aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles and drones.
- It has been designed by a collaboration between Raytheon (United States) and Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace (Norway).
- It is operated by 13 nations, including the U.S., Norway, Finland, Spain, Netherlands, Oman, Lithuania, Indonesia, Australia, Qatar, Hungary, Ukraine and one undisclosed country.
- It is the world’s first networked system that seamlessly integrates with other defense systems.
- It is equipped with an X-Band, 360-degree phased array radar with a 75-kilometer range for target identification.

## Paat Mitro

The Ministry of Textiles has launched the ‘Paat-Mitro’ app aiming to empower jute farmers by providing them with a technological platform.

### About Paat Mitro:

- Paat-Mitro is a mobile application developed by the Jute Corporation of India Limited (JCI).
- The app is designed to support jute farmers by providing information about agronomy, Minimum Support Prices and the latest agricultural practices.

- The app is available in six languages and all functionalities are free of cost. It also allows farmers to track the status of their payments for the raw jute sold to JCI under MSP Operation.
- The app highlights key features such as jute grading details, farmer-focused schemes for eye care, weather forecasts, JCI purchase centers' locations and a chatbot for farmers' inquiries.

## Punaura Dham Temple

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has recently launched a Rs 72-crore development plan for Goddess Sita's birthplace at Punaura Dham in Sitamarhi.

### About Punaura Dham Temple:

- Punaura Dham is a Hindu pilgrimage temple in the Sitamarhi district of Bihar.
- The temple is believed to be the birthplace of Mata Sita.
- The shrine compound includes a Ram Janki temple, a pond called Sita Kund and a hall.
- The recent research spanning nearly a decade found it was built about 200 years ago by a sage who claimed it was based on a dream.
- The claim of Panaura (Punaura) being Sita's birthplace was made in Sir William Wilson Hunter's A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume 13, dating back to 1877.

## Mullaperiyar Dam

The water level at Mullaperiyar dam hit 138.05 feet, prompting the decision to open its spillway shutters.

### Mullaperiyar Dam:

- Mullaperiyar dam is a gravity dam located on the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers in Idukki district of Kerala.
- It was built in 1895 by the British administration and is the first dam in Kerala.
- However, the dam is operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu to meet the requirements of five (Theni, Madurai, Sivaganga, Dindigul and Ramnad) of its southern districts.
- The dam is entirely in Kerala but was given on lease to Tamil Nadu on October 29, 1886 for 999 years.
- According to a 999-year lease agreement made during the British rule the operational rights were handed over to Tamil Nadu.

## JN.1 Variant

Recently, the Union Health Ministry issued an advisory to States in view of detection of the new JN.1 variant in India.

### About JN.1 Variant:

- JN.1 is derived from the BA.2.86 (Pirola) variant and was first identified in the United States in September.
- It possesses one additional mutation on the spike protein compared to Pirola, which is critical for viral cell entry.
- Both Pirola and JN.1 were effectively neutralized by serum from previously infected or vaccinated individuals, as per WHO assessments.
- Symptoms associated with JN.1 are similar to those caused by previous strains of the virus, including fever, runny nose, sore throat, headache and mild gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain and diarrhoea.

## Yogmaya Temple

Recently, the Yogmaya Temple in Mehrauli, once believed to date back to the Mahabharata era, has undergone a transformation from a Mughal-sponsored structure to a mere modern concrete building.

### About Yogmaya Temple:

- The Yogmaya Temple, also known as the Jogmaya Temple is a monument in Mehrauli which is believed to have ancient roots tracing back to the Mahabharata era.
- It was built between 1806 and 1837 by Lala Sidhu Mal, a noble in the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar II.



- This temple held cultural significance, fostering Hindu-Muslim unity through traditions like Phool Walon ki Sair.
- Literary sources like the Bhagawat and historical texts allude to the temple's connection to the Mahabharata era, with tales of Yudhishtir and Lord Krishna associated with its creation.
- Accounts by historians like Thomas Metcalfe in the 19th century mentioned the construction of the Yogmaya shrine during Akbar II's reign, adding to its historical documentation.

## Surat Diamond Bourse

Recently, the Prime Minister of India inaugurated Surat Diamond Bourse in Gujarat.

### About Surat Diamond Bourse:

- The Surat Diamond Bourse (SDB) is a large-scale project in Surat, Gujarat, India.
- It is the world's largest corporate office hub, with over 67 lakh square feet of floor area.
- It is also a global center for trading rough and polished diamonds and jewelry.
- It is spread across 35.54 acres and has 4,500 offices for national and international traders.
- It also includes a customs clearance house for import and export, a jewelry mall and facilities for international banking and safe vaults.
- It was built to expand and consolidate the diamond trading business from Mumbai to Surat.
- The overall structure of the complex was completed in May 2022, and the overall construction was finished on July 26, 2023.
- On August 22, 2023, Guinness World Records officially declared it the world's largest office building, surpassing The Pentagon.
- It received the prestigious platinum rating from the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) for its environmentally sustainable practices and design.

## E-cigarettes

Recently, the World Health Organization has emphasized an urgent need to control use of e-cigarette.

### About e-cigarettes:

- An electronic cigarette or e-cigarette, is a battery-powered device that emits a vaporized solution for inhalation.
- Its liquid contains nicotine, propylene glycol, glycerin, flavorings and other chemicals.
- E-cigarettes produce a number of dangerous chemicals including acetaldehyde, acrolein, and formaldehyde.

## Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award

- Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy will receive the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2023. It will be awarded to him in January 2024. Both are badminton players.
- Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award (formerly Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna) is the highest sporting award given in India.
- It is awarded annually by the Ministry of Sports and Youth. The recipients are selected by a committee constituted by the Ministry and are awarded for their brilliant and most outstanding performance in the field of sports over a period of last four years at the international level.
- In this award, a medal, a citation and cash amount are given to the awardee.

## ICAI unveils new CA India logo

- Recently, the CA Institute, which is the world's largest professional body of Chartered Accountants, has unveiled a new logo.
- The logo epitomises the institute's connection to the India-first approach and as a trusted partner in nation-building.
- The logo consists of the letters 'CA' in blue with a tricolour tick mark (upside down) on a white background.

## Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23

- The report is published by RBI.
- The report highlighted a significant rise in fraud cases within the banking sector during the initial half of the preceding financial year.
- The report emphasized the critical need to safeguard the banking and payments systems from the growing threats of fraud and data breaches stemming from cyber threats.
- As many as 14,483 frauds involving an amount of Rs. 2,642 crore were reported in the first half of the current financial year, as compared to 5,396 cases (Rs.17,685 crore) in the same period a year ago.
- Out of the total number of frauds, the card and internet segment surged to 12,069 cases, amounting to Rs. 630 crore during H1FY24, compared to 2,321 cases totaling Rs. 87 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

## Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy

- An ex-post facto approval has been given to the Ministry of External Affairs' proposal to sign and ratify the Migration and Mobility Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the Italian Republic.
- This will enhance people-to-people contacts, foster mobility of students, and skilled workers, and strengthen bilateral ties on issues related to irregular migration between the two sides.

## OSIRIS-APEX

- NASA recently relaunched a mission to study the 'God of Chaos' asteroid as it has started coming closer to the orbit of Earth.
- NASA's spacecraft OSIRIS-REx which has been renamed as OSIRIS-APEX was sent off to study the extremely close flyby of asteroid Apophis, which in 2029 might scratch the earth.
- The asteroid Apophis which is also called as the 'God of Chaos' is likely to fly close to Earth on April 13, 2029 and will be located only 20,000 miles away which is closer in comparison to a few man made satellites and also will be visible from the Eastern Hemisphere.

## Ferussina

- Scientists have recently discovered a new species of an extinct land snail called Ferussina.
- The specimen was found in Hateg Basin, Romania and is believed to have lived about 72 million years ago during the Maastrichtian age of the Late Cretaceous epoch.
- The newly-described species, Ferussina petofiana, belonged to a small genus of land snails that existed during the Paleogene period and is currently classified in its own family, Ferussinidae, in the superfamily Cyclophoroidea.

## Zombie Deer Disease

- Recently, scientists warn that humans may get infected by 'Zombie Deer Disease'.
- Zombie Deer Disease also known as Chronic wasting disease (CWD), is a contagious and fatal illness that affects cervids, a group of animals that includes deer, elk, caribou, reindeer, and moose.
- It is caused by a malformed protein (prion) which accumulates in the brain and other tissues causing physiological and behavioral changes, emaciation, and ultimately death.
- It is transmitted by direct animal-to-animal contact or indirectly through contact with infectious particles persisting in the environment such as feces, soil, or vegetation.
- Animals can also become infected if their feed or pasture is contaminated with the prions carrying it.

# Current Affairs at a Glance

1. PM Narendra Modi has become the first world leader to reach 20 million subscribers on his YouTube channel. He is at the first position in terms of both subscribers and video views. Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is in second position with about 64 lakh subscribers.
2. India made its first payment to UAE for crude oil purchase in rupees. In this regard, India and UAE had signed an agreement in July for the settlement in rupees.
3. Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) Terminal 2 has been recognized as one of the 'World's Most Beautiful Airports' by UNESCO's Prix Versailles. It has been awarded the 'World Special Prize for Interiors 2023' by UNESCO's Prix Versailles. It becomes the only Indian airport to receive such recognition from UNESCO.
4. The United Kingdom government has decided to introduce a carbon border tax on iron, steel, aluminium, ceramics and cement from 2027.
5. President Draupadi Murmu presented the National Energy Conservation Award 2023 to Crompton Greaves Consumer Electricals Ltd. (CGCEL). Crompton received this achievement in the category of 'Most Energy Efficient Appliances of the Year 2023' for its storage water heater.
6. Sukrita Paul Kumar won the 6th Rabindranath Tagore Literary Award for her book 'Salt and Pepper: Selected Poems'. The Rabindranath Tagore Literary Award was launched in 2018 by US-based publisher Peter Bundalo. The award is a forum for world peace, literature, art, education and human rights.
7. Angola, Africa's second largest oil producer, announced leaving OPEC. It has taken this decision after disagreement over production targets. This decision of Angola is a setback for the oil cartel headed by Saudi Arabia.
8. Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, an Indian national and WHO Regional Director (South-East Asia), has been awarded the National Order of Merit Gold Medal of Bhutan.
9. Recently, in the IPL 2024 auction in Dubai, Australian fast bowler Mitchell Starc has been contracted by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 24.75 crore. Mitchell Starc became the most expensive player in IPL history.
10. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has won the election of Egypt's President by securing 89.6% of the votes. His tenure as President of Egypt will be six years.
11. Haryana won over Rajasthan by 30 runs in the final of Vijay Hazare Trophy, also known as Ranji One-Day Trophy.
12. In the 2023 ACC Under-19 Asia Cup, Bangladesh won the Under-19 Asia Cup title by defeating UAE in the final. The tournament was played in the United Arab Emirates from 8 to 17 December 2023. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, UAE, Japan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in the tournament.
13. According to the World Bank's latest Migration and Development report, India remains the largest recipient of remittances in the world in 2023 with \$125 billion remittances followed by Mexico (\$67 billion), China (\$50 billion), Philippines (\$40 billion), and Egypt (\$24 billion) are among the world's top five remittance receiving countries.
14. Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah became the new Emir of Kuwait, following the death of Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the age of 86.
15. General MM Naravane unveiled his autobiography **Four Stars of Destiny**. This book narrates the important events that happened during the Ladakh standoff in 2020.
16. SEBI announced the appointment of Pramod Aggarwal as the Chairman of Bombay Stock Exchange. His appointment will be effective from January 17, 2024. Pramod Agarwal has served as the former chief of Coal India.
17. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved the reappointment of Sandeep Batra to the post of Executive Director (ED) in ICICI Bank.

# Places in News

## Bab el-Mandeb

Recently, the Houthi attacks on tankers passing through the narrow Strait has disrupted one of the busiest global shipping lanes, dragging the U.S. deeper into the conflict.

### About Bab el-Mandeb Strait:

- The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait is a strategic choke point that connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.
- It is located between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula, Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa.
- The strait's name translates to "Gate of Tears" in Arabic.
- The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait is a crucial trade route that connects the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.



## Sierra Leone

- Recently, Sierra Leone faced a November 26 coup attempt, stemming from political turmoil after President Bio's disputed re-election and economic hardships marked by high living costs and widespread poverty.
- Sierra Leone (Capital: Freetown)
- **Location:** Sierra Leone is a tropical country, located on the southwest coast of West Africa.
- **Boundaries:** Sierra Leone shares its border with Guinea (North and Northeast), Liberia (southeast) and the Atlantic Ocean (southwest).

### Physical Features:

- Mount Bintumani is the highest peak in Sierra Leone and the Loma mountains.
- The Loma Mountains are a mountain range in Sierra Leone that extends in a north-south direction.
- The main rivers include the Rokel and the Moa, which provide essential water resources and support agricultural activities.
- Sierra Leone is known for its rich mineral resources, including, diamonds, rutile, bauxite and gold, which contribute to the country's economy.



# MCQs Based on Current Affairs

## 1. Consider the following statements:

1. INSAT 3DS is a part of the Indian National Satellite System (INSAT) series developed by ISRO.
2. The mission will be tentatively launched in January 2024.
3. The purpose of the satellite is to monitor and obtain further information on weather systems, disaster management and critical meteorological forecasts.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
B. Only 2  
C. All 3  
D. None

## 2. Consider the following statements

1. Recently, CA Institute, the world's largest professional body of Chartered Accountants, has unveiled a new logo.
2. The logo consists of the letters 'CA' in blue with a tricolor tick mark (inverted) on a white background.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

## 3. Consider the following statements:

1. Recently scientists have warned that humans can get infected with 'zombie deer disease'.
2. 'Zombie deer disease' is an infectious and fatal disease that affects the cervix
3. It is caused by a distorted protein (prion) that accumulates in the brain and other tissues causing physical and behavioral changes, emaciation, and ultimately death.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
B. Only 2  
C. All 3  
D. None

## 4. Consider the following statements

1. Scientists have recently discovered a new species of extinct land snail called Ferrusina.
2. The extinct land snail species lived during the Maastrichtian period of the Late Cretaceous period, about 72 million years ago.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

## 5. Consider the following statements

1. Recently the Lok Sabha passed the Press and Periodicals Registration Bill, 2023, which replaces the old Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867.

2. This Bill provides for title verification and registration by the Press Registrar General through online medium.

3. Facsimile editions of foreign magazines can be printed in India with the approval of the Central Government and registration with the Press Registrar General.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
B. Only 2  
C. All 3  
D. None

## 6. Consider the following statements with reference to electronic cigarettes:

1. An electronic cigarette, or e-cigarette, is a battery-powered device that emits a vaporized solution for inhalation.

2. Its liquid contains nicotine, propylene glycol, glycerin, flavor and other chemicals.

3. E-cigarettes produce many dangerous chemicals, including acetaldehyde, acrolein, and formaldehyde.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

## 7. Consider the following statements:

1. Recently, researchers in France have discovered a new bat creature, considered "very rare" and endangered, on the French island of Corsica.

2. The bat discovered in Corsica belongs to the genus Myotis, a previously unknown species that has more than 120 species across six continents.

3. This bat is brown in colour and has long ears and facial hair.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
B. Only 2  
C. All 3  
D. None

## 8. Consider the following statements

1. Recently the fourth edition of the Global Study on Homicide report was released.

2. According to the report, about 16.8% of murder cases recorded in India between 2019

and 2021 were related to disputes over access to property, land or water.

3. About 0.5% (300 cases) of the murders recorded in India between 2019 and 2021 were exclusively attributed to water-related conflicts. How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**9. Consider the following statements:**

1. Kolattam dance was performed during the children's festival Balotsavam in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh recently.

2. Kolattam is a folk dance of the state of Andhra Pradesh. This dance style originated in the seventh century.

3. In Andhra Pradesh this dance is called Kolkolannalu, Kolattam and Kolannalu.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**10. Consider the following statements regarding Logistics Ease 2023 Report**

1. Recently, LEADS [Ease of Logistics in Various States] 2023 report was released by the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I).

2. The 5th edition of the LEADS annual exercise – LEADS 2023 report provides information on improvements in logistics performance at the State/UT level.

3. In this, the states have been divided into three rankings – Achievers, Fast Movers and Aspirers. How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**11. Consider the following statements:**

1. Recently, the Union Territory Governments (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was passed by the Parliament.

2. The Bill amends the Union Territory Government Act, 1963.

3. The Bill reserves one-third of all elected seats in the Puducherry Legislative Assembly for women.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**12. Consider the following statements:**

1. Recently the 8th edition of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs (COC) was held by the Royal Thai Navy from 19 to 22 Dec 23 at Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Thailand chaired the meeting and India co-chaired the meeting.

3. The flag designed by Thailand was chosen as the official IONS flag.

4. India assumed the position of Co-Chair for the IONS Working Groups on Maritime Security and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) for the upcoming cycle.

5. Republic of Korea Navy was added as the latest observer.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only three  
 B. Only four  
 C. All  
 D. None

**13. Consider the following statements regarding Joint Task Force 153?**

1. Saudi Arabia and Egypt, two of the most influential countries in the region, are part of the group.

2. It was established on April 17, 2023 and is one of the five task forces operated by the Combined Maritime Forces.

3. It focuses on maritime security and capacity building in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**14. Consider the following statements:**

1. According to a new study recently published in the American Meteorological Society's Journal of Hydrometeorology, river valleys in peninsular India are more prone to widespread flooding than those of the Ganges and Brahmaputra.

2. The team examined widespread flooding in seven major river basins over six decades (1959-2020). These rivers include Ganga, Brahmaputra, Godavari, Krishna, Mahanadi, Narmada and Kaveri.

3. The analysis highlighted the Mahanadi and Narmada river basins as the most flood-prone.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2

C. All 3

D. None

**15. Consider the following statements:**

1. Recently the Jharkhand Assembly approved the 'Jharkhand Local Residents Bill' which was returned by Governor CP Radhakrishnan.
  2. Under this Bill, land records of 1932 will be accepted as proof for demarcation of local residents of the state.
  3. Residents whose ancestral land was recorded in the land survey of 1932 will be considered as Jharkhandi.
  4. Only Jharkhandi people will be entitled to class III and IV government jobs.
- How many of the statements given above are correct?
- A. Only one  
 B. Only two  
 C. Only three  
 D. All

**16. What are Conventions 138 and 182 of the International Labor Organization related to?**

- A. To achieve the target set in SDG 5.7 to eliminate all forms of child labor by 2030 in accordance with the ILO Convention.
- B. Child labour.
- C. Regulation of food prices and food security.
- D. Gender equality at workplace.

**17. Consider the following statements:**

1. The Government of Maldives has decided not to renew the hydrographic survey agreement with India that allowed India to conduct hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters.
  2. Hydrographic surveys are conducted by ships, which use methods such as sonar to understand various characteristics of the water body.
  3. These surveys help to "determine the depth of water, the shape of the seabed and coastline, the location of potential obstructions and the physical characteristics of water bodies" to ensure efficiency and safety.
- How many of the statements given above are correct?
- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**18. Which of the following credit instruments is not in line with the process of evergreening of loans?**

- A. Credit card facility
- B. Overdraft Credit Line
- C. Fixed-payment loan
- D. No one

**19. Which of the following statements is not correct regarding the GST Appellate Tribunal?**

- A. It is a statutory body under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.
- B. It will ensure that there is uniformity in the resolution of disputes arising under GST and implementation of GST across the country.
- C. It is the second appeal forum in GST laws and the first common forum for dispute resolution between the Center and the states.
- D. There the members are recommended by the Central Government and appointed by the Chief Justice of India.

**20. Which of the following statements is not correct regarding the GST Appellate Tribunal?**

- A. It is a statutory body under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.
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- C. It is the second appeal forum in GST laws and the first common forum for dispute resolution between the Center and the states.
- D. There the members are recommended by the Central Government and appointed by the Chief Justice of India.

**21. Consider the following statements:**

1. OPEC+ consists only of oil-producing countries.
  2. OPEC+ is primarily focused on fixing oil prices through production adjustments.
  3. Russia is a key member of OPEC+.
- How many of the statements given above are correct?
- A. Only 1  
 B. Only 2  
 C. All 3  
 D. None

**Answer**

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

# Polity & Governance-02

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- ✓ MTP Act
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# Parliament & State Legislature

## AAP: National Political Party

The Election Commission has elevated Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to national party status, while downgrading Nationalist Congress Party and Trinamool Congress. EC made its decision after examining the poll results of the parties in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and also election results of 21 legislative assemblies since 2014.

**According to the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) order, 1968-**

### For Recognition of National Party Status:

- It is 'recognised' in four or more states; or
- If its candidates have secured at least 6% of total valid votes in at least 4 states (in latest Lok Sabha or Assembly elections) and the party has at least 4 MPs in the last LS polls; or
- If it has won at least 2% of the total seats in the LS from at least 3 states.

### For Recognition of State Party Status:

A party is recognised as a state party in a state if any of the following conditions is fulfilled:

- If it secures 6% of the valid votes polled in the state at a general election to the respective state legislative assembly (state LA) and also, it wins 2 seats in the same state LA.
- If it secures 6% of the total valid votes in the state at a general election to the LS; and also, it wins 1 seat in the LS from the same state.
- If it wins 3% of seats in the LA at a general election to the legislative assembly of the state concerned or 3 seats in the assembly (whichever is more).
- If it wins 1 seat in the LS for every 25 seats or any fraction thereof allotted to the state at a general election to the LS from the state concerned.
- If it secures 8% of the total valid votes polled in the state at a General Election to the LS from the state or to the State LA.

### Benefits:

- When a national party status is achieved, a party possesses number of advantages such as common party symbol across states, free airtime during elections on public broadcasters, space for a party office in New Delhi, etc. A recognised national party can contest on all Lok Sabha and assembly seats on its symbol. It also gets to field more star campaigners for electioneering.

## Limit for Governor to Clearing the Bill

Supreme court in recent ruling said that governor can not withhold the bill to indefinite period of time and if it is done by governor then it is against the constitution.

### About the Issue:

- Article 200 of the Indian constitution empowers the governor to either give the assent of the bill to withhold the bill or reserve for the president when it comes from state legislature.
- Court has noted that under the article 200 of the Indian constitution, governor either gave the consent on bill or withholds the bill but if it is withheld by governor then it should be communicated to state legislature as soon as possible. Court noted that it is very imperative and constitutional duty.

## Repromulgation of Ordinance

Recently, central government has promulgated an ordinance which has given lieutenant governor of Delhi authority over civil services. The ordinance also established National Capital Civil Service Authority consisting chief minister of Delhi and two senior IAS officers, the decision will be taken by majority votes.

### About the Ordinance:

- The meaning of ordinance is to make temporary law for a country or a particular region. Under the constitutional provisions, it is mentioned in the article 123 for the president powers and under 213 for the state governors' powers. The duration of ordinance as per the constitutional provision can be maximum six months and 6 weeks. It works same as the law that is passed by either parliament or state legislatures. It can only be issued at the time when the session of parliament or state assemblies are not in working mode.

### Judicial Pronouncements on Ordinances:

#### R.C. Cooper v. Union of India (1970):

- The Supreme Court held that the President's satisfaction regarding the necessity of an ordinance is not immune from judicial review and can be challenged.
- The Court also held that an ordinance is subject to the same constitutional limitations as an Act of Parliament and cannot violate any fundamental

rights or other provisions of the Constitution.

#### **A.K. Roy v. Union of India (1982):**

- The Supreme Court upheld the validity of the ordinance but laid down some safeguards for its operation, such as periodic review by an advisory board, communication of grounds of detention to the detenu, and opportunity for representation against detention.
- The Court also observed that an ordinance should not be used as a substitute for parliamentary legislation and should be resorted to only in cases of extreme urgency or unforeseen emergency.

#### **D.C. Wadhwa v. State of Bihar (1987):**

- This case challenged a series of ordinances issued by the Governor of Bihar between 1967 and 1981 on various subjects, some of which were promulgated several times without being placed before the state legislature.
- The Supreme Court struck down all the ordinances as unconstitutional and held that re-promulgation of ordinances is a fraud on the Constitution and a subversion of the democratic legislative process.
- The Court also held that an ordinance lapses automatically if it is not approved by the legislature within six weeks of its reassembly and cannot be continued by repromulgation.

and Tamil Nadu began in 1974 when Karnataka started diverting water without Tamil Nadu's consent.

- After several years, the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) was established in 1990 to resolve the issue. It took 17 years for the CWDT to reach a final order in 2007, which outlined the sharing of Cauvery water among the four riparian states. In distress years, water would be shared on a pro-rata basis.
- CWDT issued its final award in February 2007, specifying water allocations among the four states in the Cauvery basin, considering the total availability of 740 TMC in a normal year.
- The allocation of water among the four states is as follows: Tamil Nadu - 404.25 TMC, Karnataka - 284.75 TMC, Kerala - 30 TMC, and Puducherry - 7 TMC.
- In 2018, the Supreme Court declared the Cauvery a national asset and largely upheld the water-sharing arrangements determined by the CWDT.
- It also directed the Centre to notify the Cauvery Management Scheme.
- The central government notified the 'Cauvery Water Management Scheme' in June 2018, constituting the 'Cauvery Water Management Authority' and the 'Cauvery Water Regulation Committee'.

## Water Dispute Between Karnataka and Tamilnadu

Recently, Tamil Nadu took its case to the Supreme Court, asking Karnataka to release 24,000 cubic feet per second (cusecs) of Cauvery water daily to support their standing crops. Tamil Nadu also urged the Court to direct Karnataka to ensure the release of 36.76 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) stipulated for September 2023 as per the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)'s final award of February 2007 that was modified by the SC in 2018.

### About the Dispute:

- As the river originates in Karnataka, flows through Tamil Nadu with major tributaries coming from Kerala and drains into the Bay of Bengal through Pondicherry, the dispute therefore involves 3 states and one Union Territory.
- The genesis of the dispute is 150 years old and dates back to the two agreements of arbitration in 1892 and 1924 between the then Madras presidency and Mysore.
- It entailed the principle that the upper riparian state must obtain consent of lower riparian state for any construction activity viz. reservoir on the river Cauvery.
- The Cauvery water dispute between Karnataka

## New Parliament of India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the new Parliament building, showcasing its exquisite artwork and featuring a ceremonial sceptre called 'Sengol' among its many highlights.

### About Parliament:

- Articles 79 to 122 in the fifth part of the Indian Constitution deal with the organisation, composition, duration, officers, privileges, and power of the Parliament.
- The Parliament of India is the supreme legislative body of the Republic of India. It is a bicameral legislature composed of the Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and the Lok Sabha (House of the People). The President of India, in their role as head of the legislature, has full powers to summon and prorogue either house of Parliament or to dissolve the Lok Sabha, but they can exercise these powers only upon the advice of the Prime Minister and their Union Council of Ministers.
- The quorum to constitute a sitting of the House is one-tenth of the total number of Members of the House as mentioned under article 100(3) of the Constitution.

- The highest number of members in Rajya Sabha is from Uttar Pradesh- 31, Maharashtra- 19, Tamil Nadu- 18 West Bengal- 16.
- Special powers of Rajya Sabha empower Parliament to make laws in respect of any matter enumerated in the State List in the national interest by adopting a resolution to this effect (article 249), creation of All India Services (article 312) and approving Proclamations (issued under article 352 or article 356 or article 360) if the Lok Sabha stands dissolved or the dissolution of the Lok Sabha takes place within the period allowed for the approval of the Proclamation by Parliament.
- The Speaker continues in office till immediately before the first meeting of Lok Sabha after dissolution of the one to which he/she was elected, unless he/she ceases to be a Member by any of the reasons specified in articles 94, 101 and 102 of the Constitution.
- When the offices of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker become vacant, the duties of the office of the Speaker shall be performed by such member of the Lok Sabha as the President may appoint for the purpose. The person appointed is known as the Speaker Pro Tem.
- Speaker shall nominate from amongst the Members a Panel of not more than ten Chairpersons, any one of whom may preside over the House in the absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.
- To become a member of the Lok Sabha, a person should be a citizen of India, not less than 25 years of age and possess such other qualifications as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament [Art. 84]
- A Money Bill can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha. In case any question arises as to whether a Bill is a Money Bill or not, the decision of the Speaker, Lok Sabha, thereon, is final.
- Adjournment is a postponement of the sitting or proceedings of the House from one time to another specified for the reassembling of the House
- **Prorogation** means the termination of a Session of the House by an order made by the President under article 85(2)(a) of the Constitution.
- **Dissolution** of the House means the end of the life of the Lok Sabha either by an order made by the President under article 85 (2) (b) of the Constitution or on the expiration of the period of five years from the date appointed for its first meeting.
- Rule-32 of the “Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha” provides that unless the Speaker otherwise directs, the first hour of every sitting of the House shall be available for the asking and answering of Questions and shall be called question hour.
- Admissibility of questions is governed by Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, Directions by the Speaker as also the past precedents
- **Starred Question:** A Member who desires an oral answer to his question is required to distinguish it by an asterix. Minimum of 15 clear days notice is required for tabling Starred Questions.
- **Unstarred Question:** These questions do not carry the asterix mark and are meant for obtaining written reply. Minimum 15 clear days notice is required for tabling Unstarred Questions.
- **Short Notice Question:** A question can also be asked on a matter of urgent public importance at a notice of less than ten clear days.
- **Calling Attention:** Under this procedural device, a Member may, with the prior permission of the Speaker, call the attention of a Minister to any matter of urgent public importance and the Minister may make a brief statement thereon. Only those matters which are primarily the concern of the Union Government can be raised through a Calling Attention notice. The Calling Attention procedure is an Indian innovation which combines asking a question with supplementaries and making brief comment. The Calling Attention matter is not subject to the vote of the House.
- Motion’ in parliamentary parlance means any formal proposal made to the House by a Member for the purpose of eliciting a decision of the House.
- Motions may be classified into three broad categories, namely, substantive motions, substitute motions and subsidiary motions.
- A substantive motion is a self-contained, independent proposal made in reference to a subject which the mover wishes to bring forward. All Resolutions, Motions for election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and Motion of Thanks on the Address by the President, etc are examples of substantive motions.
- A substitute motion, as its name suggests, is moved in substitution of the original motion for taking into consideration a policy or situation or statement or any other matter. Amendments to substitute motions are not permissible.
- Subsidiary motions depend upon or relate to other motions or follow up on some proceedings in the House.
- Adjournment Motion is the procedure for

adjournment of the business of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, which can be moved with the consent of the Speaker. Its adoption is regarded as a sort of censure of the Government.

- Rule 198 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha lays down the procedure for moving a Motion of No-Confidence in the Council of Ministers. A Motion of No-confidence need not set out any grounds on which it is based.
- If the Speaker admits notice of a motion and no date is fixed for its discussion, it is called a 'No-Day-yet-Named Motion'.
- Short Duration Discussion- Under this Rule, Members can raise discussion for short durations without a formal motion or vote thereon.
- A Point of Order relates to the interpretation or enforcement of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the House or convention or such Articles of the Constitution as regulate the business of the House and raises a question which is within the cognizance of the Speaker.
- Parliamentary privilege refers to certain rights and immunities enjoyed by each House of Parliament and Committees of each House collectively, and by Members of each House individually, without which they cannot discharge their functions efficiently and effectively- (article 105.)
- No law so far has been enacted by Parliament (and State Legislatures) to define the powers, privileges, and immunities available to each House, its Members, and the Committees thereof.
- There had three occasions when both Houses of Parliament held a joint sitting to resolve deadlock on Bills between them, last time 26 March 2002 on the Prevention of Terrorism Bill, 2002 when joint setting held.
- Standing Committees are permanent Committees whose members are either elected by the House or nominated by the Chairman every year or from time to time.
- Department Related Standing Committees were set up in 1993 to scrutinize the functioning of the various Ministries/ Departments of the Union Government assigned to them in order to further strengthen the accountability of the Government to Parliament. Twenty-four DRSCs have been constituted consisting of not more than thirty-one members, out of which twenty-one members are nominated by the Speaker, Lok Sabha and ten members are nominated by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha.

## Tamil Nadu Withdrew General Consent of CBI

The Tamil Nadu government has withdrawn the general consent of CBI hour after ED registered a case against a minister.

### About the general consent of CBI:

- The CBI is governed by The Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act of 1946, which requires the investigative agency to obtain the consent of state governments before it can investigate a crime in a particular state.
- In other words, without a state government's consent, the CBI cannot exercise its power within that state's borders.
- The CBI's position is in this respect different from that of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which is governed by The NIA Act, 2008, and has jurisdiction all over the country.
- Consent given by a state government to the CBI can come in two forms, either case-specific, or 'general'.
- General consent, as the name indicates, allows the CBI to operate seamlessly within states.
- When a state gives a general consent to the CBI for probing a case, the agency is not required to seek fresh permission every time it enters that state in connection with investigation or for every case.
- Withdrawal of general consent also means that the CBI will not be able to register any fresh case involving central government officials or private persons in a particular state without prior permission of that state government.
- The CBI can continue to investigate cases in a state registered prior to the withdrawal of general consent.

## No Confidence Motion

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla accepted a no confidence motion moved by the Opposition against the government on the situation in Manipur from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

### About No Confidence Motion:

- The procedure is specified under Rule 198 of the Lok Sabha. The Constitution of India does not mention either a Confidence or a No Confidence Motion.
- But, Article 75 does specify that the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.
- A motion of No Confidence can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha and by the opposition. It can be admitted when a minimum of 50 members

support the motion in the house.

- According to Rule 198(3), if leave is granted the Speaker may allot a day/part of a day/days for discussion of the motion. This is done after considering the state of business in the house.
- According to Rule 198(4): The Speaker shall put every question necessary to determine the decision of the house on the motion at the appointed hour on the allotted day.
- According to Rule 198(5): The Speaker may prescribe a time limit for speeches.
- If the motion is passed in the House, the Government is bound to vacate the office.

## Rule 267

Recently, Rajya Sabha witnessed noisy scenes after the Opposition demanded that all other business be suspended for the day to take up the Manipur issue, while the government had agreed for a “Short Duration Discussion”. The Opposition’s demand had come under Rule 267 which allows for suspension of day’s business to debate the issue suggested by a Member.

## Money Bill and Financial Bill

Amid rumours that the Digital Data Protection Bill being categorised as a money bill, the government of India has issued a statement, clarifying that it will be introduced as a non-money, non-finance, regular bill and will be discussed properly in the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha.

### About the Money Bill:

- Covered under article 110 of Indian constitution.
- Only introduced in Lok Sabha.
- Prior permission of president is required.
- Only Lok Sabha speaker can certify whether bill is money bill or not.
- Only Lok Sabha can amend or change the bill and Rajya Sabha has only recommend the amendment.

### About Financial Bill (1):

- Cover under article 117(1) of Indian constitution.
- Introduced only in Lok Sabha.
- Consider as a normal bill regarding the passing of bill.

### About Financial Bill(2):

- Cover under article 117(3) of Indian constitution.
- Can be introduced in both houses.
- Consider as a normal bill regarding the passing of bill.

## Disqualification of Law Makers

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has recently been disqualified from the Lok Sabha, a day after he was convicted in a defamation case by a Surat court. Although Supreme Court has cancelled his disqualification.

### About the Disqualification of Members of Parliament:

- Article 102 of Indian Constitution defines about the Disqualification of Members in Parliament. According to this article:
  - A person can be disqualified from being a Member of Parliament of either House of Parliament:
    - » The person holds any office of profit under the government of India or under the government of any state.
    - » If the person is of unsound mind.
    - » If the person is charged with insolvency.
    - » If he is not a citizen of India.
    - » If he is disqualified by or under any law made by Parliament.
  - A person shall be disqualified from membership in either house of Parliament if he is so disqualified under the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
  - Disqualification of Membership under the Representation of the People Act, 1951:
    - » Section 8 of the 1951 Representation of the People Act deals with disqualification for conviction of certain offences.
    - » Section 8(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, includes specific offences such as promoting enmity between two groups, bribery, and undue influence.
    - » Section 8(2) of the Representation of People Act, 1951, lists the offences that deal with hoarding, adulteration of food or drugs, and an offence under the provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
    - » Section 8(3) of the 1951 Representation of the People Act disqualifies a convicted person who has been sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years. Rahul Gandhi was disqualified under this provision.
    - » Office of profit nowhere defined, speaker decision on anti defection law is not immune from judicial review.



# Rule and Regulation

## 22nd Law Commission in its 279th Report on Law of Sedition

The 279th report of the Law Commission of India recommending the retention of the sedition law, has brought the 153-year-old colonial law to the centre stage yet again.

### About Section 124A of IPC:

- Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) incorporated in 1870, describes the Law of Sedition.
- It seeks to punish speech or writing that brings or tries to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or tries to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law.

## OTT Regulation

Recently, Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) has ruled that Over The Top (OTT) platforms like Hotstar are not in the jurisdiction of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and are governed by the Information Technology Rules, 2021, notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

### Mediation Bill 2023:

- Recently, Mediation bill which was passed by parliament received the assent of the President on September 14, 2023. The Mediation Act of 2023 (“Act”), extending to the whole of India. However, the Act will come into force on a date that the Central Government may notify.

### About the act:

- The Act is to promote and facilitate mediation, especially institutional mediation. The Act also addresses dispute resolution through online and community mediation in a cost-effective and time-bound manner. Furthermore, the Act provides for the enforcement of mediated settlement agreements and the establishment of a Mediation Council of India.
- Section 3(h) of the Act defines mediation as the process whereby parties attempt to reach an amicable settlement of their dispute with the assistance of a third person referred to as a mediator, who does not have the authority to impose a settlement upon the parties to the dispute. The said section includes and refers to pre-litigation mediation, online mediation, community mediation, conciliation, or an expression of similar import.

### About the Mediation:

- Mediation, in basic terms, is the process of intervention by a third party between two contesting parties with the aim of reconciling them or persuading them to settle their dispute without going into litigation.
- Mediation is not a new process and is even mentioned in Section 89(1) of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, which was introduced by the Civil Procedure Code (Amendment) Act of 1999 and provides for the courts to refer parties to arbitration, conciliation, judicial settlement, or mediation for dispute resolution.

## Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act, 1867

Rajya Sabha passed the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023 was passed by a voice vote. The bill replaces the existing Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act, 1867.

### Key Points of the Bill:

- The new law seeks to do away with two provisions that required the publishers and printers to file a declaration before the district magistrate.
- It do away with the penal provisions of the PRB Act which made improper declaration of information a punishable offence with a prison term of up to six months.
- The new bill also provides for an appellate authority.
- Currently, a person wanting to start a newspaper has to submit an application with the district collector, who sends it to the Registrar of Newspapers in India (RNI) to check for title availability.
- The new bill seeks to move this process of checking title availability online, thereby reducing the time required for registration of newspapers and periodicals significantly.

## Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023

Recently, The Advocates Amendment Bill, 2023, successfully passed 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.

## 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.

## Model Prison Act

Recently, Centre has finalised a comprehensive 'Model Prisons Act, 2023' to replace the pre-independence era 'Prisons Act, 1894' which mainly focused on keeping criminals in custody and enforcing discipline and order in prison. The current 'Prisons Act, 1894' is almost 130 years old and mainly focuses on keeping criminals in custody and enforcing discipline and order in prisons, with no provision for reform and rehabilitation.

### About the Act:

- The Model Prisons Act, 2023 aims to address the gaps in the existing Prisons Act by providing guidance on the use of technology in prison management, making provisions for parole, furlough, and remission to prisoners to encourage good conduct, special provisions for women and transgender inmates, and a focus on the reformation and rehabilitation of inmates.
- Some salient features of the new Model Prisons Act include a provision for security assessment and segregation of prisoners, individual sentence planning, grievance redressal, the establishment of a prison development board, and a focus on the physical and mental well-being of prisoners.
- The Act also includes provisions for the use of technology in prison administration, such as video conferencing with courts and scientific and technological interventions in prisons. It

also includes provisions for the punishment of prisoners and jail staff for using prohibited items like mobile phones in jails.

## Justice Rohini Panel

The Justice G. Rohini-headed Commission for the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBC) caste groups submitted its long-awaited report to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment after nearly six years of work.

- The details of the recommendations have not been made public yet, and the government is expected to deliberate on the report before any implementation.

### About Rohini Commission

- The commission was set up on 2nd October, 2017 under Article 340 of the Constitution (President's power to appoint a Commission to investigate the conditions of the backward classes).

### Terms of Reference:

- Examine the inequitable distribution of benefits among OBCs listed in the Central List.
- Propose a scientific approach and parameters for sub-categorisation within OBCs.
- Identify and classify the respective castes or communities into their respective sub-categories.
- Study the entries in the Central List of OBCs and recommend corrections for repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies, and errors in spelling or transcription.

## Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam

Recently, parliament passed Women's Reservation Bill 2023 (128th Constitutional Amendment Bill) or Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam.

- The bill reserves one-third of the seats in Lok Sabha, State legislative assemblies and the Delhi assembly. This will also apply to the seats reserved for SCs (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes) in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures.

### Key Features of the Bill:

- The Bill provided for inserting Article 330A to the constitution.
- The Bill provided that reserved seats for women may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in states or Union Territories.
- In the seats reserved for SCs/STs, the Bill sought to provide one-third of the seats to be reserved for women on rotational basis.

### Reservation for Women in State Legislative Assemblies:

- The Bill introduces Article 332A, which

mandates the reservation of seats for women in every state Legislative Assembly. Additionally, one-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs must be allocated for women, and one-third of

the total seats filled through direct elections to the Legislative Assemblies shall also be reserved for women.



# Supreme Court and High Court

## Constitutional Bench Throughout the Year

Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, 49th Chief Justice of India (CJI), assured there will be at least one Constitution Bench functioning throughout the year in the Supreme Court.

### About Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court:

- A Constitutional Bench is a bench of the Supreme Court having five or more judges on it.

### Circumstances for Constitutional Bench to Exist:

- **Article 145(3):** Article 145(3) provides, "The minimum number of Judges who are to sit for the purpose of deciding any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of this Constitution or for the purpose of hearing any reference under Article 143 shall be five."
- **Article 143:** When the President seeks the Supreme Court's opinion under law under Article 143 of the Constitution
- **Article 226 and 355 of the Indian Constitution:** A High Court, under Article 226 (its writ jurisdiction) of the Constitution, does not have the power to issue a direction to the Centre to invoke Article 355 which enjoins upon the Centre a duty to protect States against external aggression and internal disturbance besides ensuring that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the constitutional provisions.
- **Article 226:** Article 226 (1) clearly states that every High Court shall have the powers throughout the territories in relation to which it exercised jurisdiction to issue writ or orders to any person or authority.
- **Article 355:** It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this

Constitution.

## Collegium System

Recently, the Union minister of Law and Justice criticized the Supreme Court Collegium system for appointment of judges. Articles 124(2) and 217 of the Indian Constitution deal with the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts .

### About Collegium System:

- It is the system of appointment and transfer of judges that has evolved through judgments of the SC, and not by an Act of Parliament or by a provision of the Constitution.

### Evolution of the System:

#### First Judges Case (1981):

- It was held that "consultation" did not include "concurrence", and further, that the power of appointment of Judges under Article 124, was vested with the President, and also, that the President could override the views of the consultees.
- It declared that the primacy of Chief Justice of India recommendation on judicial appointments and transfers can be refused for cogent reasons.

#### Second Judges Case (1993):

- SC introduced the Collegium system, holding that consultation" really meant "concurrence."

#### Third Judges Case (1998):

- SC on the President's reference (Article 143) expanded the Collegium to a five-member body, comprising the CJI and four of his senior-most colleagues.

### About Collegium System:

- The SC collegium is headed by the CJI (Chief Justice of India) and comprises four other senior most judges of the court.
- A High Court collegium is led by the incumbent Chief Justice and two other senior most judges



of that court.

- Judges of the higher judiciary are appointed only through the collegium system and the government has a role only after names have been decided by the collegium.

## India Justice Report

Recently, India Justice Report was published in which Karnataka got the first position.

### About the Report:

- The Report (initiated by Tata Trusts in 2019) is a first-of-its-kind national periodic report that ranks the capacity of states to deliver justice.
- It assesses the capacity of 4 core pillars of the justice system:
  - » Police
  - » Prisons
  - » Judiciary
  - » Legal aid across all 36 states and UTs

### Key findings:

- Overall ranking of the 18 mid-sized and large States (population over 1 crore): first (Karnataka), last (UP).
- Overall ranking of the 7 Small States (population less than 1 crore): first (Sikkim), last (Goa).
- As of December 2022, against a sanctioned strength of 1,108 judges, the High Courts were functioning with only 778 judges.
- The subordinate courts were found functioning with 19,288 judges against a sanctioned strength of 24,631 judges.
- The number of cases pending per judge is rising in most States over the last five years.
- At HC level, UP has the highest average pendency, where cases remain pending for an average of 11.34 years.
- The lowest average HC pendency is in Tripura [1 year], Sikkim [1.9 years] and Meghalaya [2.1 years].
- The number of cases a judge has to deal with has also steadily increased. Between 2018 and 2022, the caseload per judge increased in 22 States and Union Territories.
- The number of cases disposed of in a year, measured against the number filed in that year, of more than 100% indicates that the number of pending cases is reducing.
- The HCs are increasingly clearing more cases annually than subordinate courts.
- The HCs of Kerala and Odisha have higher case clearance rates (156% and 131% respectively), while the HCs of Rajasthan [65%] and Bombay [72%] have the lowest case clearance rates.
- Tripura is the only State where the CCR in

district courts remained above 100%.

## Constitutional Bench Verdict on Shivsena Case

Supreme Court has passed a unanimous judgement on the various issues related to the split in Shiv Sena in June 2022.

- While passing the judgement, the apex court made strong observations about the role of the then Governor of Maharashtra and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.
- The court, however, refrained from interfering with the proceedings related to disqualifying 16 MLAs, including Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

## Divorce Under Article 142

A five-judge or constitution bench of the Supreme Court held that a court can directly grant divorce under Article 142 of the Constitution, in cases where the marriage has irretrievably broken down, without referring the parties to a family court first, where they must wait for 6-18 months for a decree of divorce by mutual consent.

### About 142 of the Constitution

- Article 142 provides a unique power to the Supreme Court, to do “complete justice” between the parties, where, at times, the law or statute may not provide a remedy. In those situations, the Court can extend itself to put an end to a dispute in a manner that would fit the facts of the case.

## Fast Track Special Courts

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of Fast Track Special Court (FTSCs) for three more years till 2026. Initially commenced in October 2019 for one year, the scheme was extended for an additional two years until March 2023.

### About Fast Track Special Court (FTSCs):

- FTSCs are specialized courts established in India with the primary aim of expediting the trial process for cases related to sexual offenses, particularly those involving rape and violations under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act).
- The establishment of FTSCs was prompted by the government’s recognition of the alarming frequency of Sexual Offences and the prolonged duration of trials in regular courts, which resulted in delayed justice for victims.



# Panchayat

## Panchayat Development Index (PDI)

The Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj mentioned in Lok Sabha that the Panchayat Development Index (PDI) is a comprehensive tool to assess and monitor the development progress of Panchayats across the country.

### About Panchayat Development Index (PDI)

- The PDI is a comprehensive assessment tool developed by the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- The Index aimed at evaluating and measuring the progress made by grassroots-level institutions, specifically Panchayats, in achieving localized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aligned with the broader UN Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030.

### Assessment Framework:

- The PDI evaluates progress across themes, likely covering areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, etc.
- It uses 577 local indicators and 144 local targets to gauge development progress.
- 642 unique data points are utilized to monitor progress towards achieving these localized goals.

## Quota on Local Body

Recently, Supreme Court gave a green signal to conducting urban local body elections in Uttar Pradesh with Other Backward Classes quota. The apex court has allowed the State Election Commission to issue a notification in this regard.

### Constitutional Provision:

- The 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 provides for the reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in every panchayat/municipality (i.e., at all three levels) in the proportion of their population to the total population in the panchayat area/municipal area.

### Reservation for offices of chairperson:

- Further, the state legislature shall provide for the reservation for offices of chairperson in the panchayat/municipality at any other level for the SCs and STs.

### Reservations for women:

- The act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging the SCs and STs).
- Further, not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the panchayats/municipality at each level shall be reserved for women.

### Reservations for Backward Classes:

- The act also authorises the legislature of a state to make any provision for reservation of seats in any panchayat/municipality or offices of chairperson in the panchayat/municipalities at any level in favour of backward classes.

## 30 Years of Democratic Decentralisation

About 30 years has been completed of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment.

### Constitutional Provision:

- Local government, including panchayats, is a state subject in the Constitution, and consequently, the devolution of power and authority to panchayats has been left to the discretion of states.
- The Constitution mandates that panchayats and municipalities shall be elected every five years and enjoins States to devolve functions and responsibilities to them through law.
- The 73rd and 74th Amendments, by constitutionally establishing Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India, mandated the establishment of panchayats and municipalities as elected local governments.
- These amendments added two new parts to the Constitution, namely, Part IX titled “The Panchayats” (added by 73rd Amendment) and Part IXA titled “The Municipalities” (added by 74th Amendment).
- The 11th Schedule contains the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats.
- The 12th Schedule contains the powers, authority and responsibilities of Municipalities.
- Article 40: Organization of a village panchayat.

# Appointment

## Extension given to the Director of Enforcement Directorate

The two tenures granted to the Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) beyond the fixed cut-off dates have been declared invalid by the Supreme Court (SC). The director was allowed by the Court to continue in office till 31st July 2023 to initiate a smooth transition.

### Enforcement Directorate (ED):

- Enforcement Directorate is a specialized financial investigation agency under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
- On 1st May 1956, an Enforcement Unit was formed, in the Department of Economic Affairs, for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947.
- The ED Director is appointed under Section 25 of

the CVC Act, 2003.

- The Central Government appoints a Director of ED on the recommendation of a selection committee which consists of the CVC Chairperson, Vigilance Commissioners, Secretaries to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of Finance in the Central Government.

### Delhi Special Police Establishment (DPSE) Act, 1946:

- An Act to make provision for the constitution of a special police force in Delhi for the investigation of certain offences in the Union territories for the superintendence and administration of the said force and for the extension to other areas of the powers and jurisdiction of members of the said force.

### Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003 (CVC)

- Established in 1964, CVC is an apex Indian governmental body.



# Political Party

## Electoral Bond

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has referred petitions challenging the 2018 Electoral Bonds Scheme to a five-judge Constitution Bench.

### About Electoral Bond:

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

### Features:

- State Bank of India (SBI) issues the bonds in denominations of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore.
- Payable to the bearer on demand and interest-free.

- Purchased by Indian citizens or entities established in India.
- Can be bought individually or jointly with other individuals.
- Valid for 15 calendar days from the date of issue.

### Authorized Issuer:

- SBI is the authorized issuer.
- Electoral Bonds are issued through designated SBI branches.

### Eligibility of Political Parties:

- Only the political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and have secured not less than 1% of the votes polled in the last general election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly, are eligible to receive electoral bonds.

### Purchase and Encashment:

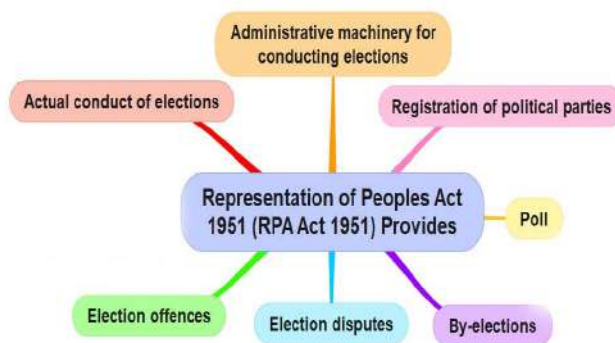
- Electoral Bonds can be purchased digitally or through cheques.
- Encashment only through an authorized bank account of the political party.

### Transparency and Accountability:

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

## Section 123 of RPA

The Supreme Court was told that the promise of pre-election freebies by political parties is a corrupt practice and bribe under the Representation of the People Act.



### About Section 123 of RPA:

- **Section 123 of the Act:** It defines 'corrupt practices' to include bribery, undue influence, false information, and promotion or attempted promotion of "feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of the citizens of India on grounds of religion, race, caste, community, or language" by a candidate for the furtherance of his prospects in the election.
- **Section 123 (2):** It deals with 'undue influence' which it defines as "any direct or indirect interference or attempt to interfere on the part of the candidate or his agent, or of any other person, with the consent of the candidate or his election agent, with the free exercise of any electoral right." This could also include threats of injury, social ostracism and expulsion from any caste or community.
- **Section 123 (4):** It extends the ambit of "corrupt practices" to the intentional publication of false statements which can prejudice the outcome of

the candidate's election. Under the provisions of the Act, an elected representative can be disqualified if convicted of certain offences; on grounds of corrupt practices; for failing to declare election expenses; and for interests in government contracts or works.

## De-recognition of Political Parties over Freebies

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to seize the election symbol or de-register a political party that promises irrational freebies from public funds before elections.

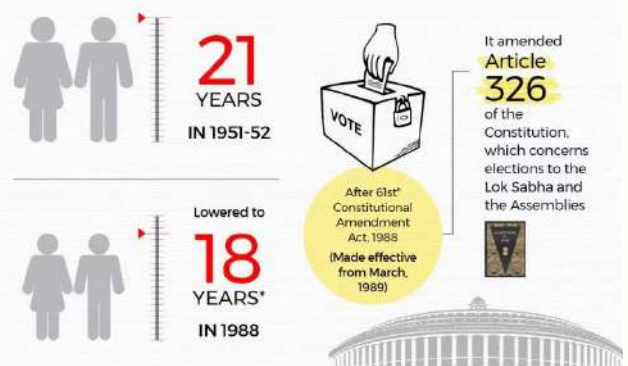
### About Registration of Political Parties:

- Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Election Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Commission of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

## Lowering the Minimum age for Contesting Elections

A Parliamentary panel recommended lowering the minimum age for contesting an Assembly election from 25 years to 18 years, saying it would widen the viewpoints in policy debates, thereby improving the credibility of the political process.

### Minimum Age to Vote



### Criteria for contesting election in assembly election:

- The person should be a citizen of India. Not less than 25 years of age to be a member of the Legislative Assembly and not less than 30 years (as per Article 173 of Indian Constitution) to be a member of the Legislative Council.

## Lily Thomas Case and Section 8(4) of Representation of People Act

Rahul Gandhi of the Congress party was disqualified on being convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment in a 2019 defamation case.

**Grounds for disqualification**

Why the Supreme Court did not introduce a new template for disqualifying/banning candidates/sitting MPs/MLAs against whom a trial court has framed charges of heinous crimes

The Legislature, in the Representation of the People Act of 1951, is "absolutely specific" on the grounds to disqualify. These grounds are:

**SECTION 8:** Conviction for certain offences

**SECTION 9:** Dismissal for corruption or disloyalty

**SECTION 9A:** When there is subsisting contract between the person and the government

**SECTION 10:** Disqualification for office under government company

**SECTION 10A:** Failure to lodge account of election expenses

**Apart from these disqualifications, there are no other disqualifications and, as is noticeable, there can be no other ground**

— CALDIPAK MISRA

### About the Disqualification:

- The disqualification was instant because of the Supreme Court of India's judgment in Lily Thomas vs Union of India (2013). Through this judgment, the Court invalidated Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act 1951, which had allowed a three-month period within which to appeal. Disqualification was not to take effect during this period; when the appeal is admitted, disqualification would depend on the final outcome of the appeal.
- Thus, under the legal provision cited, there was no instant disqualification of sitting members of the legislature. But after the Court struck down this provision of the Representation of People Act 1951, according to the opinion of some experts, a sitting legislator is disqualified the moment the court orders conviction and sentence under Section 8(3) of the Representation of People Act.

## Simultaneous Election

Recently, the Central government set up a panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the feasibility of the 'one nation, one election' (ONOE) plan.

### Constitutional Provisions:

- According to The Law Commission report 2018 appropriate amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is required.
- Example: Amendments required in five Articles of the Constitution, namely Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356.
- The no-confidence motion can be replaced with a constructive vote of no-confidence through amendments in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha rules of business.
- Anti-Defection law may be rightfully diluted to prevent stalemate in case of a hung Assembly or Parliament.
- Statutory limit of six months for issuance of notification of general elections can be extended for securing flexibility as a one-time measure.

## Group Defection

A public interest litigation has been filed in the Bombay high court seeking a declaration that legislators defecting from their party should not be allowed to participate in the proceedings of the House or hold Constitutional posts until their disqualification is decided.

### Constitutional provisions of defection:

- The anti-defection law punishes individual Members of Parliament (MPs)/MLAs for leaving one party for another.
- Parliament added it to the Constitution as the Tenth Schedule in 1985. The Tenth Schedule - popularly known as the Anti-Defection Act - was included in the Constitution via the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985 and sets the provisions for disqualification of elected members on the grounds of defection to another political party.
- As per the 1985 Act, a 'defection' by one-third of the elected members of a political party was considered a 'merger'.
- But the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003, changed this and now at least two-thirds of the members of a party have to be in favour of a "merger" for it to have validity in the eyes of the law.
- However merger of political party is not disqualified under protection of law.



# Constitutional & Statutory Body

## National Commission for Women

The National Commission for Women was set up as a statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act to:

- Review the Constitutional and Legal safeguards for women.
- Recommend remedial legislative measures.
- Facilitate redressal of grievances.
- Advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women.
- In keeping with its mandate, the Commission initiated various steps to improve the status of women and worked for their economic empowerment during the year under report.
- The Commission completed its visits to all the States/UTs except Lakshadweep and prepared Gender Profiles to assess the status of women and their empowerment.
- It took up the issue of child marriage, sponsored legal awareness programs, Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats, and reviewed laws such as Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, PNDT Act 1994, Indian Penal Code 1860, and the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to make them more stringent and effective.
- It organized workshops/consultations, constituted expert committees on the economic empowerment of women, conducted workshops/seminars for gender awareness, and took up publicity campaigns against female foeticide, violence against women, etc. to generate awareness in society against these social evils.

## Election Commission Appointment Bill

Recently, 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).

### Key Features of the Bill:

- Chief election commission and other election commission 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 commission and other election commission 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.

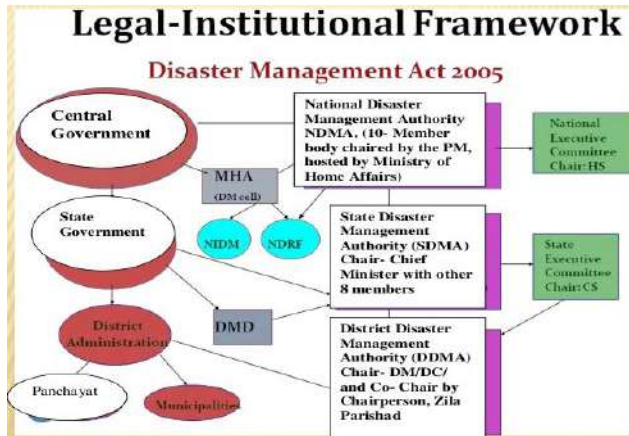
### About the Election Commission:

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a constitutional body. It was established by the Constitution of India to conduct and regulate elections in the country. Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the power of superintendence, direction, and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of the president of India, and the office of vice-president of India shall be vested in the election commission.
- The Election Commission shall consist of 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 shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President.

# Important Acts

## Disaster Management Act, 2005

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare Cyclone Michaung as 'National Calamity' under disaster management act. According to the Disaster Management Act, 2005, a 'disaster' means a catastrophe, calamity or mishap whose magnitude is high and which can be natural or caused by human beings.



### About the Act:

- The Act calls for the establishment of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) with the Prime Minister of India as its chairman.
- The NDMA cannot have more than nine members, including a vice-chairman. The members of the NDMA have a term of five years.
- The NDMA is responsible for "laying down policies, plans, and guidelines for disaster management" and ensuring "timely and effective response to the disaster". Under section 6 of the Act, it is also responsible for laying down "guidelines to be followed by the State Authorities in preparing State Plans".

### Other Bodies Established Under the Act:

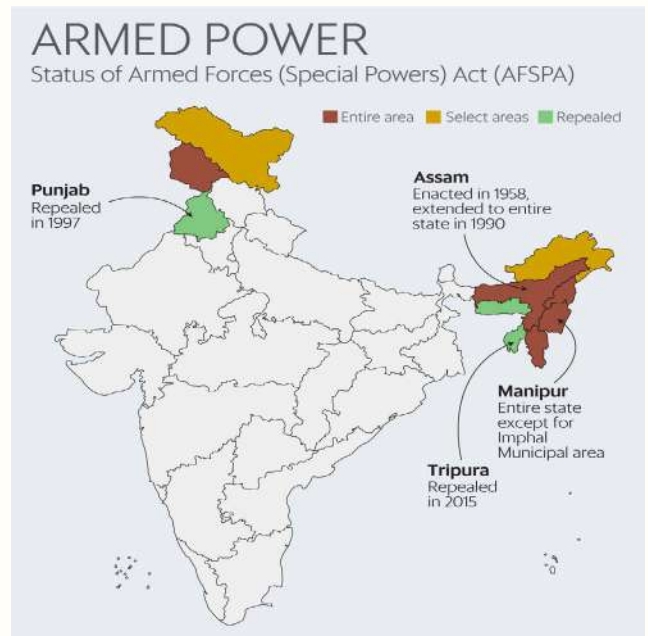
- **National Executive Committee:** To assist NDMA.
- **State Disaster Management Authority:** The SDMA under Section 14 consists of the Chief Minister of the State, who is the Chairman, and not more than eight members appointed by the Chief Minister. It is responsible for disaster management within the boundary of a state.
- **District Disaster Management Authority:** The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA)

will be headed by the Collector or District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner of the district. The elected representative of the area is a member of the DDMA as ex-officio co-chairman

- **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF):** Sections 44-45 of the Act provide for the constitution of a National Disaster Response Force under a Director General to be appointed by the Central Government "for the purpose of an expert response to a threatening disaster situation or the disaster".

## The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA, has been extended by another six months, starting October 1, in parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.



### About the Act:

- The act gives unfettered powers to the armed forces and the Central armed police forces, deployed in the disturbed areas, to kill anyone who is acting in contravention of law and arrest and search any premises without a warrant and

with protection from prosecution and legal suits.

- The Act was amended in 1972 and the powers to declare an area as disturbed were conferred concurrently upon the Central government along with the States.
- Currently, the act is in force in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh.

## The National Investigation Agency Act, 2008

The Supreme Court dismissed a plea filed by the West Bengal government challenging National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe into six instances of arson and violence during the Ram Navami procession in West Bengal. Under the NIA Act of 2008, the Centre can direct NIA to probe a scheduled offence for which it does not require a report from the respective state government.

### About the Act:

- The Act constitutes a National Investigation Agency (NIA) at the national level to investigate and prosecute offences affecting the sovereignty, security, and integrity of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, and offences under Acts enacted to implement international treaties, agreements, conventions and resolutions of the United Nations, its agencies and other international organisations and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- The 2019 amendment allowed the central government to designate Sessions Courts as Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences under the Act. The central government is required to consult the Chief Justice of the High Court under which the Sessions Court is functioning, before designating it as a Special Court.
- It expands the ambit of the list of crimes that the agency can investigate, including human trafficking, counterfeit currency, manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, cyber-terrorism, and offences under the Explosive Substances Act.
- It extends the NIA's jurisdiction outside India, subject however to international treaties and domestic laws of the concerned foreign nation.

## Representation of the People Act, 1951

- The Representation of the People Act, 1951 is an Act of the Parliament of India to provide for the conduct of elections to the Houses of Parliament and the House or Houses of the Legislature of

each State, qualifications and disqualifications for the membership of those Houses, corrupt practices at or in connection with such elections and other offences and the decision of doubts and disputes arising out of or in connection with such elections.

- The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act of 1966 abolished election tribunals and transferred election petitions to high courts whose orders lay in appeal to the Supreme Court. However, electoral disputes relating to the election of the President and Vice President are directly heard by the Supreme Court.

### Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950:

- The Act lays down procedures for the delimitation of the constituencies.
- It provides for the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies and Legislative Councils of the States.
- Prescribes the procedure for the preparation of electoral rolls and the manner in which seats are to be filled.
- Determines the qualifications of voters
- The President of India has been empowered to amend the orders delimiting constituencies only after consulting the Election Commission.

## The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996

Tribals from different districts of Odisha staged a demonstration demanding effective implementation of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act 1996.

### About PESA:

- PESA is legislation that extends the provisions of Panchayats to the Fifth Schedule Areas. This Act is called The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. A total of ten States are covered under PESA.
- These states are Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Telangana.
- All posts of Chairpersons of PRIs in the areas covered under PESA are reserved for the tribal community and only persons belonging to the tribal community can contest for these posts.

### Gram Sabha has been given the following powers under PESA:

- Consultation before the land acquisition, stopping land transfer, power to enforce prohibition, prior approval of all developmental



projects and control over tribal sub-plan, Power to issue utilization certificate for developmental expenditure, selection of beneficiaries of poverty alleviation and other schemes of personal benefit, control over institutions and functionaries of social sectors, collective settlement of disputes on the basis of customs, traditional laws and religious beliefs of tribal areas, local control over water resources, maintenance of tribal community ownership on common land, minor forest produce, minor minerals etc.

## Gram Nyayalaya Act 2008

The State Cabinet of Karnataka approved the setting up of 100 Grama Nyayalayas in the limits of gram panchayats or clusters of gram panchayats for delivery of justice on the doorstep of people in rural areas.

### About the Act:

- The Act provides for establishment of GN at the Panchayat level to settle criminal, and civil claims and disputes.
- GNs will be headed by 'Nyadhikaari' (to be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the High Court).
- It shall be guided by the principles of natural justice (and is not bound by the rules of evidence provided in the Indian Evidence Act, 1872).

## The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

New Forest (Conservation) Rules, 2022 and the apprehension of these rules violating the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

### About the Act:

- The act recognizes the rights of the forest-dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest-dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities were dependent for a variety of needs, including livelihood, habitation, and other socio-cultural needs.

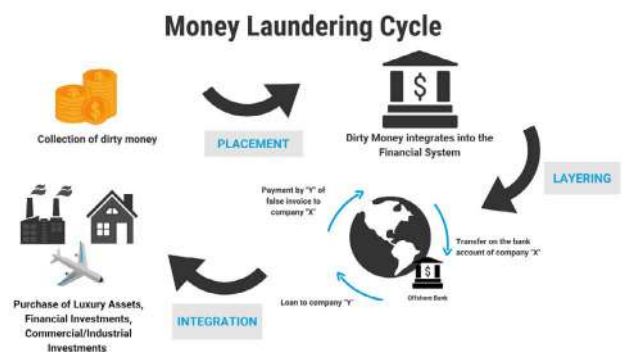
### Objectives:

- To undo the historical injustice occurred to the forest-dwelling communities.
- To ensure land tenure, livelihood, and food security of the forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest-dwellers.
- To strengthen the conservation regime of the forests by including the responsibilities and authority on Forest Rights holders for sustainable use, conservation of biodiversity, and maintenance of ecological balance.

## Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

### About PLMA:

- PMLA was enacted in 2002 and it came into force in 2005 as a response to India's global commitment (including the Vienna Convention) to curb the menace of money laundering (the process of converting black money into white)
- To provide for confiscation and seizure of property derived from money laundering.
- To deal with any other issue connected with money laundering in India.



### PMLA (Amendment) Act, 2019:

- It provided extensive power to Enforcement Directorate (ED) for summons, arrests, and raids, and makes bail provisions difficult while shifting the burden of proof of innocence onto the accused rather than the prosecution.

## The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985

### About the Act:

- NDPS Act 1985 deals with drugs and their trafficking.
- The NDPS Act defines cannabis (hemp) as a narcotic drug which is Charas, Ganja and any other mixture. Only Bhang, which is made with the leaves of the plant, is not mentioned in the NDPS Act.
- The Act prohibits the production, sale, purchase, transport, and consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, except for medical and scientific purposes.
- The act extends to the whole of India and also to aircraft and ships that are registered in India.
- The Act states that the government may allow the cultivation of any cannabis plant for industrial purposes only of obtaining fibre or seed or for the horticultural purposes.

## FCRA Act, 2010

### About the Act:

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect the internal security.
- The FCRA requires every person or NGO wishing to receive foreign donations to be registered under the Act.
- For the receipt of foreign funds, it is mandatory to open a bank account in the State Bank of India, Delhi.
- These funds can be utilised only for the purpose for which they have been received, and as stipulated in the Act.
- The receivers of foreign funds are also required to file annual returns, and they must not transfer the funds to another NGO.
- Implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

## POCSO Act

### About the Act:

- The Act was designed to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography offences, as well as to provide for the establishment of Special Courts for the trial of such offences.
- The Act was amended in 2019 for enhancing the punishments for specific offences in order to deter abusers and ensure a dignified childhood.

### Features of the Act:

- Gender neutral law.
- Not reporting abuse is an offence.
- No time limit for FIR.
- Privacy of victim identity.

## Essential Commodities Act, 1955

- Under the EC Act of 1955, if the Central Government is of the opinion that it is necessary to maintain or increase the supply of any essential commodity or to make it available at a reasonable price, it may regulate or restrict the production, supply, distribution and sale of that commodity.
- The Centre has the power to add or remove any item from this list of essential commodities in the public interest.

### Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020:

- It aims to address the fears of private investors of excessive regulatory interference in their business operations.

- The bill allows the central government to regulate the supply of certain food items only under extraordinary circumstances (such as war and famine). Stock limits may be imposed on agricultural produce only if there is a steep price rise.

## About MTP Act

### About the Act:

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 ("MTP Act") was passed with regard to safe abortion of women.
- The new Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 expands access to safe and legal abortion services on medical, anogenital, humanitarian, and social grounds to ensure universal access to comprehensive care.

### Key Provisions:

- Under the Act, a pregnancy up to 20 weeks can be terminated by a married woman in case of failure of a contraceptive method or device. It also allows unmarried women to terminate pregnancy for this reason.
- Opinion of a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) is required for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of the gestation period and two RMPs for termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks. The opinion of a state-level medical board is necessary for the termination of pregnancy after 24 weeks in case of substantial foetal abnormalities.
- Increases the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women, including rape survivors, victims of incest, and other vulnerable women (differently abled women, minors, others).
- The name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be disclosed, except to a person authorized in any law for the time

## Family Court Act 1984

### About:

- The Family Courts Act of 1984 was enacted to establish Family Courts to promote reconciliation and ensure the speedy resolution of disputes relating to marriage and family matters.
- The State Government may, with the concurrence of the High Court, appoint one or more persons to be a Judge or Judges of the Family Court.

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