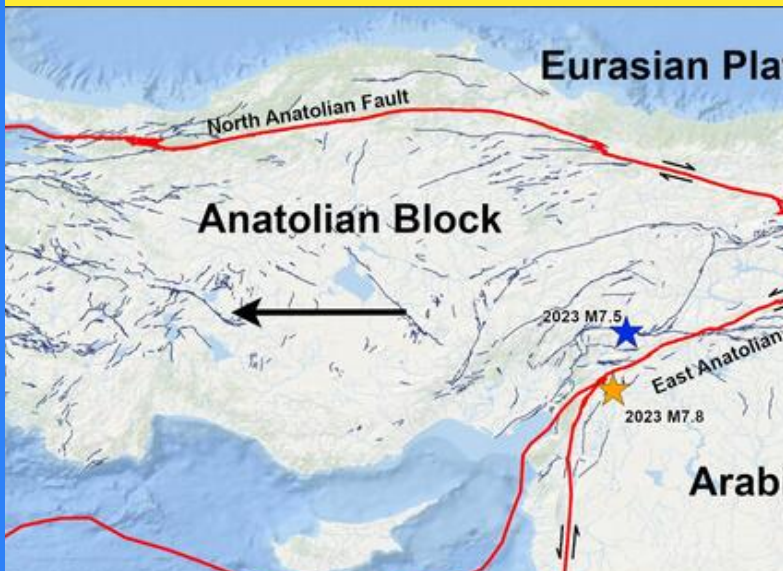


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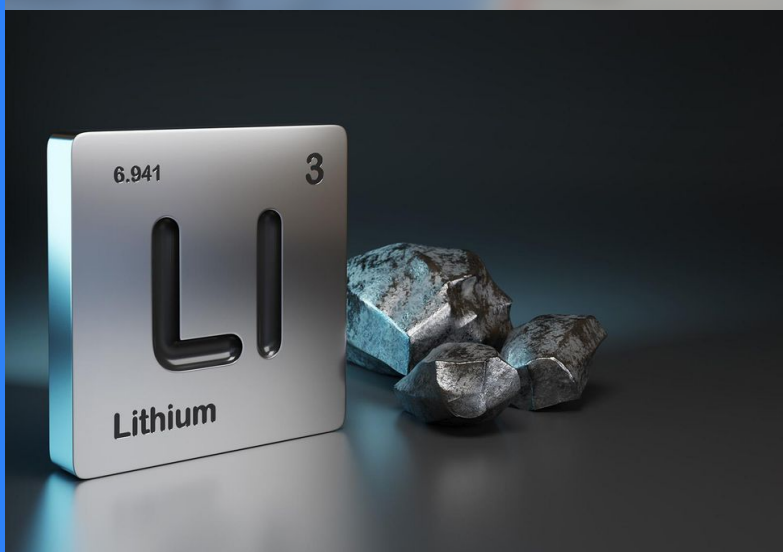
February 2023



Earthquake in Turkey & Syria



Pangolin Trafficking



Lithium Resources Discovery in J&K



Should India Have a Menstrual Leave Policy

Contents

GENERAL STUDIES 1 4

Powerful Earthquakes In Turkey And Syria Leave Over 3,800 Dead..... 4

The Sophisticated Anatomy Of Heat Wave 5

What The Ministry Of Mines’ Draft Geo-Heritage Sites And Geo-Relics Bill Says 6

Why India's Lithium Discovery Is Fraught With Social And Environmental Risks 7

Slow Progress To Creating A Safe Workplace For Women..... 8

Menstrual Leave And Its Global Standing 9

Did Poverty Cause Early Marriages 11

India To Showcase Success In Rural And Archaeological Tourism At G-20 Meeting 12

GENERAL STUDIES 2 13

The Spirit Of The Law Lies In This Dissenting Judgment..... 13

SC Upholds The Constitution Of The J&K Delimitation Commission, Extension Of Tenure Of Its Chairperson 14

Delhi Hc: Virginity Test Unconstitutional, Archaic Even On Accused..... 15

Ordinance Over The Years..... 16

Ladakh, A Fragile Region Needs Autonomy..... 18

The Demand For A Greater Tipraland By The Tipra Motha..... 19

Supreme Court Reserves Judgement On Whether A Speaker Under Notice Can Disqualify Legislator 20

Lack Of Data Updating Has Left Millions Of Poor Indians Hungry: According To An Estimate Calculated By Economists Jean Dreze, Ritika Khera And Meghana Mungikar 21

Alienation: The Separation Of Labour From The Product, Process, Humanity And Society 22

PM’s Comment On BIMARU States 24

Who Is Responsible For Healthcare In India: The Government Or The Individual? 25

Row Over Nagaland DGP: How Are State Police Chiefs Appointed? 26

On Sealed Cover Jurisprudence..... 27

No Special Assistance To Poor States Will Increase Regional Disparities.....28

Shinde-Led Faction Gets ‘Bow And Arrow’ Symbol: How Did Election Commission Decide Who Gets Party Symbol30

What Is A ‘Corrupt Act’ According To The Representation Of People Act, 1951?.....31

Children Have The Right To Protect Their Genetic Data32

Home Ministry Asks States To Relieve Ips Officers For Central Deputation.....33

Government Asks All States, Uts To Make 6 Years Minimum Age For Class 1 Admission34

India’s R&D Estimates Are An Incomplete Picture35

SC Asks Govt What It Has Done To End Manual Scavenging ...36

Survey Of India To Remain The Arbiter Of Maps That Deal With State Borders And National Boundaries.....37

India Tops List Of Global Internet Shut-Offs: Report37

Unpacking The New Set Of E-Waste Rules.....38

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS39

Indian Go West, Take Up ‘Residence By Investment’39

Us - China Diplomatic Crisis Over Balloon In Sky.....41

Russia Suspends Only Remaining Major Nuclear Treaty With Us42

One Year Of War In Ukraine43

India Bangladesh To Back Each Other For Unsc Membership .44

Exploring The Blue In The India-France Partnership45

China Must Take A Haircut On Its Loans To Poor Countries, Says India’s G20 Sherpa.....46

Locating China In The Russia-Ukraine War.....47

U.S. Will Not Sanction India For Buying Russian Oil, Say Senior American Officials48

As Asia Arms Europe.....49

A Polycrisis That Is Depleting Pakistan’s Resilience50

Japan And The Global South.....52

Japan Seeks Urgent Unsc Meeting As N Korea Test Fires Two More Missiles53

Two Years After Coup, Myanmar's Mess — And India's Headache.....	54	Lessons From Madhya Pradesh's Agriculture Model	80
Nine Guest Countries For G-20 To Bring Their Own Plans To The Summit	55	Report Alleges Conflict Of India's Fortified Food Programme .	81
The Past And Present Of Russia's War In Ukraine.....	57	Centre In Final Stages Of Notifying Emissions Trading Scheme	82
For The First Time, Iran Admits Claim Of Enriching Its Uranium To 84%	58	India, Pakistan At Risk Of Flooding From Glacial Lakes: What New Study Says	83
The New Start Treaty On Pause.....	59	Indian Blue Economy Is Thriving But Country Needs To Be Careful About Marine Litter	84
Fatf Suspends Membership Of Russia Over Ukraine Invasion	60	Can We Use Moon Dust To Slow Down Global Warming	85
China Plans Aksai Chin Railway To Connect Tibet, Xinjiang	61	India Can Become A Biodiversity Champion	86
GENERAL STUDIES 3	62	Third Patient Is Cured Of HIV: How Did This Happen And What Are Its Implications?	87
Trading More Within Asia Makes Economic Sense	62	Khalistan Supporters And Indian Diaspora Clash In Melbourne: What Is Happening?	88
India Must Avoid Growing Into A Dystopia	63	General Studies 4	89
Pricing It Right	64	Russia Ukrain War - Case Study.....	89
The Adani Story And Indian Neoliberalism.....	66	PRELIMS	91
Global Slowdown Path Still Uncertain, India To Decouple.....	66	ST Commission Functioning With Less Than 50% Of Its Approved Strength	91
Rupee Trade Mechanism: Banks Wary Of Us Sanctions	67	EX-SC Judge Among Six Governors Appointed.....	91
What's Feeding Inflation In India	68	The Significance Of The Findings In Keeladi	92
Taxing Windfall Profits Of Oil Company	69	Dickinsonia Fossil Found In Bhimbetka Turns Out To Be Decayed Beehive	93
BBC Allegedly Diverted Profits By Violating 'Transfer Pricing' Rules. What Are They?	70	Mohiniyattam Artiste Kanak Rele No More	94
Solar Energy Is Not The Best Option For India	71	SC Income Tax Order On Sikkim, And The Protests It Has Triggered	95
How Climate Change Will Increase Hydropower Generation In India	72	Constitution Does Not Allow Aldermen Write To Vote	96
Karnataka Best Equipped To Supply Renewable Energy: Report	73	US-India Initiative On Critical And Emerging Technologies Icet	97
Cites Database Reveals Red Sanders Smuggling	74	Counting The Female Labour Force Participation Rate Accurately.....	98
Warming Beyond Borders: Amazon Deforestation Heats Up Tibet, Says New Study	75	Large Bench Must Examine Subversion Of 10th Schedule.....	100
Plastic Waste Management By People Participation: Case Study Of Cooch Behar.....	76	The Missing Deputy Speaker: The Post, And What The Constitution Says.....	100
Marine Protected Areas Are Underfunded. Experts Discuss Ways To Address The Funding Gap	77	South Africa Begins Drills With China, Russia; West Alarmed	101
Himalayan Plunder: Tourist Rush Threatens Fragile Ladakh ...	78		
Deep Sea Fish Conservation Must Not Go Adrift	78		

Munich Security Conference	102	iCET - A New Chapter In Defence And Tech	123
India-Japan Army Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' Gets Under Way	103	In A First, Indian Navy Submarine Docks In Indonesia	124
Discovery Of Lithium Deposits In J&K To Cut Dependence On Imports	104	Paris Club Likely To Provide Financial Assurances To Imf On Sri Lanka Debt: What Is This Grouping?	125
Nisar (Nasa-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar): India-U.S. Space Cooperation	105	PLACES IN NEWS	126
eSANJEEVANI APP A Great Boon For People, Says Modi	106	Mollem National Park	126
MIIRA, India's Proposed Global Initiative To Promote Millets	106	River Chambal	126
A Mysterious Ring On A Dwarf Planet Is Puzzling Astronomers	107	Kaziranga National Park	126
'Organ On A Chip': A New Lab Setup That Scientists Are Using Instead Of Using Animals To Test New Drugs	108	Chenab River	126
What Are Voice Deepfakes And How Are They Used?	109	Vaigai River	127
CAR T-Cell Therapy: The Next Step Towards A Holistic Treatment Of Cancer	109	Bokang-Baling Hydroelectric Project	127
Measuring An Electron's Magnetic Moment With Extreme Accuracy	111	Rajgad Fort, Velhe Forest	127
SSLV-D2 Will Lift Off From Sriharikota On February 10.....	112	Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR)	127
Committee Report On Great Indian Bustard Proposed Power Lines To Be Rerouted Or Made Underground.....	113	Debrigarh Tiger Reserve	127
Ring Found Beyond Dwarf Planet's Roche Limit: Why This Matters	113	Gorakhpur Nuclear Power Plant	128
Over 1000 Pangolins Poached And Trafficked In India In Past Five Years.....	114	Shinku La tunnel	128
Nse Indices Launches Nifty India Municipal Bond Index.....	115	Pangong Tso	128
Global Kelp Forests Declining At 1.8% Annually; Indigenous Knowledge Can Help, Say Experts	117	Keoladeo National Park	128
RBI Lifts Loan Costs To Tame Inflation	118	Deendayal Port	129
Why A Proposed Change In Angel Tax Has Rattled Indian Start-Ups.....	119	Orang National Park	129
Vostro Accounts And How They Facilitate Trade	119	Tungabhadra River	129
What Is The Government's New Policy Of UPIs For NRIs?	120	Yaya Tso Lake	129
India, Singapore Launch UPI-Paynow Linkage.....	121	Port of Haifa	129
Start Up, Scale Up.....	121	Turkey.....	130
		The Andes Mountains	130
		Thwaites Glacier	130

GENERAL STUDIES 1

Powerful Earthquakes In Turkey And Syria Leave Over 3,800 Dead



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Hindu, Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Geography

Prepp Mains Booster: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclones Disaster and Disaster Management

Context:

- Recently, a major [earthquake](#) struck Turkey and Syria, killing more than 3,800 people and flattening thousands of buildings as rescuers dug with bare hands for survivors.
- An earthquake is an **intense shaking of the ground** caused by **movement under the earth's surface**. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), it happens when two blocks of the earth suddenly slip past one another.



What is the crisis in Turkey and Syria?

- Turkey and border regions of Syria** which are located on the **Anatolian** plate suffered an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the **Richter scale** followed by more than fifty aftershocks, two of which were severe with Richter scale ratings of 6.0 and 6.7.
- This was followed by a second quake with a magnitude of 7.5 according to the Richter scale.
- One of the worst hit by the earthquakes was **Kahramanmaraş**, a city in southern Turkey close to the Syrian border that is thought to be the birthplace of **Dondurma**.
- Thousands have been reported dead with Turkish president **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** calling it the worst disaster the country has ever suffered since the 1939 earthquake.
- The earthquake has displaced the population of the area as a result of the widespread damage to houses and establishments.
- Establishing shelters for the displaced along with making plans for rehabilitation and livelihood support are the most immediate concerns of the administration.
- The situation in **Syria** and the **Kurdish** regions had resulted in an influx of refugees and internally displaced people into the region, which has further complicated the humanitarian crisis.

- Furthermore, the rebuilding efforts will have a further negative impact on Turkey's economy, which has already been unstable and impacted by high **inflation** and **devaluation**.
- A famous mosque dating back to the 13th century partially collapsed in the province of **Maltaya**.
- The **UN cultural agency UNESCO** expressed fears over heavy damage in two cities on its heritage list -- **Aleppo in Syria and Diyarbakir in Turkey**.

What is an earthquake?

- An earthquake is an **intense shaking of the ground** caused by movement under the earth's surface.
- According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), it happens when two blocks of the earth suddenly slip past one another.
- This releases stored-up '**elastic strain**' energy in the form of **seismic waves**, which spreads through the earth and cause the shaking of the ground.
- The location below the earth's surface where the earthquake starts is called the **hypocenter**, and the location directly above it on the surface of the earth is called the **epicentre**.

Causes

- The crust (earth's outermost surface), is fragmented into **tectonic plates**.
- The edges of the plates are called **plate boundaries**, which are made up of faults.
- The tectonic plates constantly move **slowly past one another and collide with one another**.
- As the edges of the plates are quite rough, they get stuck with one another while the rest of the plate keeps moving.
- Earthquake occurs when the plate has moved far enough and the edges unstick on one of the faults.

Are earthquakes predictable?

- No. A precursory signal from deep within the ground that warns of a major quake is necessary for an accurate earthquake forecast.
- In order to prevent the signal from indicating every tiny movement beneath the earth's surface, it must only occur before to significant earthquakes.
- Even if they do exist, there is currently no equipment to find such precursors.**

What are aftershocks and why do they occur?

- According to the USGS, aftershocks are a **sequence of earthquakes that happen after a larger mainshock on a fault**.
- Aftershocks occur near the fault zone where the mainshock rupture occurred and are part of the "readjustment process" after the main slip on the fault.
- While they become less frequent with time, they can continue for days, weeks, months, or even years for a very large mainshock.
- Although aftershocks tend to be weaker than the main seismic event, they can cause significant damage.
- In Turkey, reports suggest that significant damage that has followed the original quake has been a result of aftershocks. Many buildings have collapsed as a result of aftershocks, which have already weakened structures due to the initial earthquake.

- Shallower quakes are generally felt more intense than deeper quakes due to their proximity to the surface.

How has India responded to the crisis?

- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, announced India's solidarity and immediate assistance to Syria and Turkey in coping with the tragedy.
- The situation was evaluated and plans for sending humanitarian aid were discussed at a meeting presided over by Principal Secretary P K Mishra and attended by representatives of the Ministries of External Affairs, Home, and Defense and India's relief agencies.
- India has dispatched two units of the **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)**, which included more than 50 personnel, and dog squads with rescue machinery and medical supplies to assist in the search and rescue and relief efforts.

India's other Humanitarian Missions

- India has accumulated knowledge and experience in responding to natural disasters and offering aid to the affected nations.
- India's foreign policy has evolved to include this as part of its commitment to supporting all of the nations in its immediate neighborhood in times of need.
- In addition to its own internal missions, India has dispatched rescue teams around the globe and sent humanitarian relief teams to **Fukushima, the Philippines, Aceh, Fiji**, and other impacted areas.
- This has contributed to the nation developing a reputation as a trustworthy and efficient first responder in circumstances requiring disaster relief.
- As part of its attempts to distribute critical aid to the nations of the Indian Ocean, the Indian government launched **Operation Sagar**, a COVID-19 relief mission, in May 2020. **Mission Sagar II** and **Mission Sagar III** were then launched in November and December of that same year, respectively.
- **Operation Sankat Mochan**: The mission freed 46 Indian nurses from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) grip on a Tikrit hospital in war-torn Iraq.
- **Operation Raahat**: During the 2015 Yemen Crisis, the Indian Navy and Airforce launched **Operation Raahat** to evacuate Indian citizens as well as foreign nationals from 41 nations from Yemen.
- Through these significant actions, India has established itself as the "**first responder**" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The Sophisticated Anatomy Of Heat Wave

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Heat Wave

Prepp Mains Booster: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclones, etc., geographical features and their location changes in critical geographical features; Disaster and Disaster Management

Context:

- Recently, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned that the maximum temperatures over northwest, west, and central India would be 3-5°C higher than the long-term average.

What is a heat wave?

- According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), a heat wave occurs when the ambient temperature in a region deviates by at least 4.5-6.4°C from the long-term average, or when the maximum temperature crosses 45°C (or 37°C at a hill-station).

- Heat waves have been **increasing in frequency**, intensity, and duration over the Indian subcontinent in recent years, and they are expected to continue to do so due to **global climate change**.
- In 2022, heat waves started early and **were more numerous than in previous years**.
- They also extended further south into peninsular India due to a north-south pressure pattern set up by the **La Niña weather phenomenon**, which causes a band of cool water to spread **east-west across the equatorial Pacific Ocean**.
- The last three years have been La Niña years, which may be a precursor to 2023 being an El Niño year.
- During El Niño years, heat waves tend to be confined to north and northwest India. The expected arrival of El Niño in 2023 may further exacerbate the already worsening heat wave situation in the region.
- This underscores the urgent need for effective measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to the changing weather patterns.



How do heat waves occur?

- Heat waves are formed for one of two reasons — warmer air is flowing in from elsewhere or it is being produced locally.
- It is a local phenomenon when the air is warmed by higher land surface temperature or because the air sinking down from above is compressed along the way, producing hot air near the surface.
- A study that was released on February 20, 2023, in Nature Geoscience provides some insights as to how several factors affect the development of a heat wave. (The study's findings have been adapted here to the Indian context.)

Factors

- **Warm air from West Asia:** In spring, warm air flows into India from the west-northwest, which is bad news for India due to several reasons.
- West Asia is warming faster than other regions in latitudes similarly close to the equator and serves as a source of the warm air.
- **Geography:** Air flowing in from the northwest rolls in over the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan, leading to compression and a warm air mass.
- **Warmer Arabian sea:** Although air flowing in from the oceans is expected to bring cooler air, the Arabian Sea is warming faster than most other ocean regions, resulting in warmer air flowing into India.
- **Upper atmospheric Winds:** The strong upper atmospheric westerly winds from the Atlantic Ocean control near-surface winds

in India during spring, and descending air compresses and warms up to generate some heat waves.

- **Global warming:** Additionally, global warming causes the lapse rate to decline, warming the upper atmosphere faster than the air near the surface, which means that sinking air is warmer due to global warming and produces heat waves as it **sinks and compresses**.
- **Airmass:** The age and distance traveled by the air mass are other factors that impact the formation of heat waves.
- The air masses that make up the northern heatwaves often originate between 800 and 1,600 km away and are two days old.
- On the other hand, heat waves across peninsular India originate from the nearby (by around 200–400 km) and are barely a day old. They are therefore generally less intense.

Way forward

- The various processes that contribute to the formation of heat waves, and how global warming affects them, have led to more frequent and intense heat wave events occurring once every few years, instead of once a decade.
- The expansion of the area covered by these heat waves is also influenced by the background pressure patterns of El Niño and La Niña events.
- Heat waves have a complex structure that affects their predictability, but early-warning systems can use various factors to improve warning quality and issuance time.
- Recent investments in human and computational resources have already improved India's forecasting skills.
- Despite lower mortality rates during heat waves in India compared to other regions, there is still a need for better forecasts and city-wide heat action plans to protect vulnerable populations.

What is El Niño and La Niña?

- El Niño and La Niña are climate patterns in the Pacific Ocean that can affect weather worldwide.
- El Niño is a weather phenomenon that describes the anomalous warming of surface waters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.
- It happens more often than La Niña.
- During La Niña, waters off the Pacific coast are colder and contain more nutrients than usual.
- This environment supports more marine life and attracts more cold-water species, like squid and salmon, to places like the California coast.

What The Ministry Of Mines' Draft Geo-Heritage Sites And Geo-Relics Bill Says

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Geo Heritage sites

Prepp Mains Booster: Geographical features and their location changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context:

- Recently the draft Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill, 2022 was closed for comments and suggestions.

- The Bill is aimed at providing for the **declaration, preservation, protection and maintenance of geo-heritage sites and geo-relics** of national importance, for geological studies, education, research and awareness purposes.

Key proposal regarding preservation

- **Definition:** The draft Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill defines **Geoheritage sites** as "sites containing geo-relics and phenomena, stratigraphic type sections, geological structures and geomorphic landforms including caves, natural rock-sculptures of national and international interest; and includes such portion of land adjoining the site," that may be required for their conservation or to access to such sites and it defines **Geo-relics** as any relic or material of geological significance or interest like sediments, rocks, minerals, meteorites or fossils.



- The bill authorizes the Central Government to declare a geoheritage site to be of national importance.
- **Protection:** The prohibition on construction, reconstruction, repair or renovation of any building within the geoheritage site area, except for construction for preservation and maintenance of the geoheritage site or any public work essential to the public.
- **Penalties:** The bill has provision for penalties for destruction, removal, defacement, or contravention of any direction issued by the Director General, Geological Survey of India (GSI) in the geoheritage site.
- The penalties include imprisonment for up to six months, a fine of up to Rs.5 lakh, or both, for contravention.
- If the contravention is continuing, an additional fine of up to Rs.50,000 for every day of continuing contravention may also be imposed.
- These penalties are intended to deter any activity that could damage or harm the geoheritage sites.

Why is there a need for a Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-Relics Bill?

- The GSI has declared 32 geo-heritage sites, including the Siwalik Fossil Park, Himachal Pradesh; Stromatolite Fossil Park, Jharmarkotra Rock Phosphate deposit, Udaipur district, Akal Fossil Wood Park, Jaisalmer.
- Many of these sites **are in danger of being destroyed or degraded** due to human activities such as mining, construction, and development.
- It is certainly important for **protecting and preserving** important geological sites of scientific and cultural significance.
- A geo-heritage Bill could establish a legal framework for the identification, preservation, and management of geo-heritage

sites, as well as provide guidelines for **sustainable development and ecotourism**.

- India as a signatory to the **UNESCO Convention** concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, India has a responsibility to protect and conserve its **natural and cultural heritage sites for future generations**.
- The sites can provide **valuable insights into the history and evolution** of our planet, as well as cultural and economic benefits through tourism and education.

Criticism

- **Distribution of power:** One of the main criticisms of the proposed laws is the distribution of power, with concerns raised over the authority granted to the Geological Survey of India (GSI).
- The GSI has been given broad powers to acquire any material of geological significance and sites of geological importance, which some experts feel may give them too much power over the use and management of these areas.
- There are also concerns over the potential impact of the **land acquisition** process on local communities.
- The process of acquiring land for the purpose of safeguarding geoheritage sites could result in **displacement or other negative consequences for local people**, particularly if compensation or alternative arrangements are not adequate.
- Additionally, some critics have raised concerns over the potential for the laws to be poorly enforced or subject to corruption, which could undermine their effectiveness in preserving geoheritage sites.
- Overall, while the proposed laws represent a positive step towards preserving these important sites, there are legitimate concerns that will need to be addressed in order to ensure their success.

Why India's Lithium Discovery Is Fraught With Social And Environmental Risks

Priority: High



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Lithium deposits

Prepp Mains Booster: Distribution of Key Natural Resources, Mineral & Energy Resources; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context:

- The **Geological Survey of India's discovery of "5.9 million tonnes inferred lithium resources" in the Salal-Haimana area of Reasi district, Jammu & Kashmir**, has been hailed as a game-changer in India's impending transition to a green economy.
- According to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Exploration) Act 1957, the term "inferred" refers to the "preliminary exploration stage," the second of four steps in the process.
- The discovery has significant strategic implications, but if the local population is not meaningfully engaged, the resulting tension **could spark new socio-environmental conflicts**.

About Lithium

- **Lithium (Li)**, also known as **'White gold'** due to its high demand for rechargeable batteries, is a soft, silvery-white metal.
- Depending on the deposit, lithium can be extracted in a variety of ways, including solar evaporation of large brine pools or hard-rock extraction of the ore.
- **Uses:** Lithium is an important component of electrochemical cells used in EV, laptop, and mobile batteries. It is also used in thermonuclear reactions. It is used to make alloys with aluminum

and magnesium, increasing their strength and making them lighter.

What are the geostrategic concerns?

- In the transition to net-zero carbon energy systems, critical mineral dependencies are a major geostrategic concern.
- As countries seek to avoid dependency and vulnerabilities related to critical minerals, the latter are likely to be at least as important as oil and gas in the near future.
- A high reliance on China for Lithium and other critical metals and their derivatives is also seen as a source of energy security risks.
- China currently controls 77% of global lithium-ion battery manufacturing capacity and is home to six of the world's ten manufacturing companies.
- As a result, the European Union, the United States, Canada, India, and other major economies have been attempting to leverage alternative supplies that can challenge China's geopolitical dominance in this area.
 - For example, in response to perceived national security concerns, the Canadian government has asked Chinese companies to divest from Canadian lithium-mining companies.

Geopolitical Rivalry with China

- The growing geopolitical rivalry with China makes India's security concerns more pressing, especially in light of long-standing, and recently escalating, territorial and border disputes.
- To reduce reliance on China, the Indian government and industry are pushing for a **'Rare Earths Mission'** to exploit the country's critical mineral reserves, which previously accounted for 6% of the world's rare-earth reserves prior to the discovery of Lithium in J&K.
- Given the geopolitical sensitivity of its wider location, the new discovery has greater geostrategic implications.
- Although Reasi is in the relatively more stable Jammu region, the Union territory of J&K has historically been the site of cross-border tensions between India and Pakistan, domestic insurgency, and terrorism.
- If the local population is not actively involved in the upcoming Li extraction project, the resulting tension could open up new avenues of socio-environmental conflict



Environmental Effect of Lithium Mining

- The use of Lithium in renewable energy infrastructure frequently obscures its significant environmental consequences.
- Extraction of Lithium from hard rock mines, as proposed in J&K, entails open-pit mining followed by roasting the ore with fossil fuels. According to industry estimates, this process uses 170 cubic

meters of water and emits 15 tonnes of CO₂ per tonne of Li extracted.

- Open-pit mining, refining, and waste disposal from these processes significantly degrade the environment, including depleting and contaminating waterways and groundwater, reducing biodiversity, and emitting significant air pollution.

How is mining in India different from Australia?

- The geological context of mining in J&K differs significantly from that of Australia, which has the largest Lithium stock in hard rock mines.
- Li-bearing pegmatite deposits can be found in Australia's ancient geological regions of the Pilbara and Yilgarn cratons, where continental rocks have been stable for over a billion years.
- The Himalaya, on the other hand, is the world's youngest mountain range and is far more unstable (as evidenced by the ongoing tragedy in Joshimath).
- Land sinking incidents have also been reported from a village in Doda district in Chenab valley, which extends into some parts of Reasi.
- The socio-environmental effects of mining in India's densely populated context are likely to be far worse than in Australia, and likely comparable to lithium extraction in South America.

The 'Lithium Triangle'

- India could learn from the experiences of South American countries, particularly the '**lithium triangle**' of **Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina**, which contains roughly half of the world's known Li.
- In Bolivia and Chile, Li extraction is either controlled by the state or requires mining companies to enter into a contract with state-owned companies.

Lithium Reserves in India:

- A preliminary survey revealed estimated lithium reserves of 14,100 tonnes in a small patch of land surveyed in Southern Karnataka's Mandya district.
- Mica belts in Rajasthan, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh.
- Pegmatite belts in Odisha and Chhattisgarh.
- Gujarat's Rann of Kutch.

What is the significance?

- Lithium-ion batteries are used in wind turbines, solar panels, and electric vehicles, all of which are essential in a green economy.
- The demand for critical metals such as lithium (Li) and cobalt is expected to rise by nearly 500% by 2050.
- While the global electric vehicle market is expected to reach \$823.75 billion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18.2% from 2021 to 2030, India's market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 23.76% by 2028.
- India is attempting to secure critical mineral supplies and achieve self-sufficiency in this sector.
- India currently imports all of its Li from Australia and Argentina, and 70% of its Li-ion cell requirement from China and Hong Kong, the lithium reserves in J&K could help the domestic battery manufacturing industry.
- If further exploration confirms the perceived size of mineral reserves in J&K, India could leapfrog China in terms of its Li stockpile.
- The J&K reserves will also contribute to the Indian government's ambitious plan of "30% EV penetration in private cars, 70% for

commercial vehicles, and 80% for two and three-wheelers by 2030 for the automobile industry."

- They will also help to strengthen India's National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage.

Slow Progress To Creating A Safe Workplace For Women

Priority: **Medium**



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Events of National Importance

Prepp Mains Booster: Role of women and women's organization, their problems and their remedies, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable section

Context:

- Recently, allegations of **sexual harassment** have been levelled against the President of the Wrestling Federation of India by female wrestlers which again raises questions regarding **violence** against women in both **direct and indirect** forms that have continued to exist despite legislative and judicial action to eliminate it.

What does the data on Violence say?

- Violence in the form of **sexual harassment** against women in the workplace can be both **direct and indirect**.
- **Direct forms** of violence have abated due to the efficient implementation of an enabling environment for reporting such acts in the workplace.
- However **indirect or structural** forms of violence have been poorly addressed due to how deeply embedded it is in the society and economy.
- This has been emphasized by the **gender imbalances** found in the organized and unorganized sectors.
- The numerical majority of males in the workplace has encouraged them to take undue advantage of the historically **patriarchal nature of society** and the ostracization of women from positions of power.
- The larger number of men leaves uncomfortable with raising issues as the opposite side may have a larger number of supporters and the limited number of women in power discourages subordinates from reporting incidents.
- According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey, PLFS 2020-21**, for women the **Labour Force Participation Rate** grew from 17.5% to 25.1% and the **Worker Population Rate** grew from 16.5% in 2017-18 to 24.2% in 2020-21.
- The **lack of an enabling and safe working environment** was one of the major factors behind the poor participation of women in the workforce.
- The general belief is that women do not register complaints about sexual harassment at the workplace or that the existing redressal mechanism was inefficient or ineffective.
- Generally, women are more vulnerable and exploited for job security.



How can change be attained?

- Men and women need to be encouraged to develop a **mindset of equality** from early childhood through formal education and from the home as well.
- The **nature vs nurture theory** of criminology states that both genetics and environment affect an individual's development.
- **Social conditioning, family environment and early schooling** have a greater influence on the character development of a child than the inherited characteristics.
- Unless both parents treat each other and all their children similarly and with respect, inequality will be normalized by children, which could in the long run lead to the formation of criminal tendencies in men.
- Therefore, it is critical that steps are taken to raise awareness among parents of the need for **equality and debunking of gender stereotypes** at the home.
- The employer has to be made responsible for developing a safe work environment that is women-friendly.
- A common theme in cases of sexual harassment against superiors in the workplace has been the use of litigation to stall the due process or discredit and bring the victim into disrepute instead of effecting proper inquiries under the **Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, Redressal) Act 2013**.
- It is further complicated when the allegations are against the head of the institution as was seen in the wrestler's complaint against the President of the Wrestling Federation.

Way Forward

- It is thus essential to set goals to improve the workplace for women.
- **Short-term goals:** Provision of women-friendly infrastructure, the constitution of internal complaints committees, and raising awareness about the law and grievance redressal mechanisms.
- **Medium-term goals:** Increase of female labour force participation rates, improvement of tooth-to-tail ratio, incentivisation to prevent women from having to quit such as paid maternity leave.
- **Long-term goals:** Addressing the deep-rooted structural and cultural violence which put women at a disadvantage.
- To bring about change in the status quo, society would have to work together to **reform the socio-cultural and economic structures** in order to eliminate indirect violence in its entirety.

Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, Redressal) Act, 2013:

- The Supreme Court's ruling in the **Vishakha and others v. State of Rajasthan case (1997)** forms the basis of the **Sexual**

Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013

- The Act defined workplace sexual harassment and established a procedure for handling complaints.
- **Sexual harassment** has been defined as any one or more of the following unwelcome acts committed directly or by suggestion:
 - Physical contact and advances
 - A demand or request for sexual favours
 - Sexually coloured remarks
 - Showing pornography
 - Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.
- Each office or branch with ten or more employees must have an **internal complaints committee** with the same authority to acquire evidence as civil courts.
- If the complainant requests it, the complaints committees must provide conciliation before opening an investigation.
- Employers are subject to **penalties** and increased fines and cancellation of a licence or registration to conduct business are some of the consequences faced by persistent offenders.
- The administration is responsible for mandating district officers in each district to form **Local Complaints Committee (LCC)** so that women working in the unorganised sector or small businesses can register their complaints and concerns without being subjected to sexual harassment.

Menstrual Leave And Its Global Standing

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Menstrual Leave

Prepp Mains Booster: Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Context:

- Recently, the **Supreme Court refused to hear a petition regarding menstrual leave for workers and students across the country**, citing it as a policy matter.
- It emphasized that menstruation was a biological process, **such leave could act as a "disincentive" for employers to hire female employees**.
- The concept of menstrual leave for workers and students has been debated for centuries, but such policies are uneven and divisive, even among feminist circles.

Should India have a Menstrual Leave Policy?



News Summary

- The Supreme Court ruled on February 24 that there are different "dimensions" to menstrual pain leave, which, while a biological process, may also act as a "disincentive" for employers from engaging women in their organization.
- A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud directed the petitioner to approach the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development to develop a policy.
- The court was hearing a petition seeking a directive to states to develop rules for granting menstrual pain leave to students and working women in workplaces.

What is Menstrual Leave?

- Menstrual leave or period leave is a period of leave granted where an individual may have the choice to take paid or unpaid time off from their employment if they are going through their period and are unable to report to work as a result.
- Menstrual leave has been controversial and associated with discrimination against women throughout its history. Few countries have passed menstrual leave laws and those that have done so had poor adoption rates.
- Some people see it as misogyny or a critique of women's productivity at work. Menstrual leave advocates see it as a means of advancing gender equality and liken its role to that of maternity leave.

Need for Menstrual Leave

- **Health:** In India, 20% of menstruators have PCOS, and approximately 25 million have endometriosis.
- **Disruption to profession:** Many women advocate for paid menstrual leave due to the excruciating pain and disruption to professional responsibilities that period pain causes.
- **Opportunity:** Menstrual leave may provide an opportunity for women to speak up about their menstrual cycle and receive treatment for health issues associated with it.
- It is the lack of humane working conditions that pushed labor movements to push for menstrual leave.

What efforts are being made in India?

- **Menstrual Leave Policies:** Certain companies have implemented menstrual leave policies, with Zomato, for example, announcing a 10-day paid period leave per year in 2020. According to Time, 621 employees have taken more than 2,000 days of leave since the policy was implemented. Swiggy and Byjus have also followed suit.
- **Bihar and Kerala** are the only state governments that have implemented menstrual leave for women.
- **The Bihar Government**, then led by Lalu Prasad Yadav, implemented a menstrual leave policy in 1992, allowing employees two days of paid menstrual leave each month.
- **Kerala Government:** Recently, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced that the State's Higher Education department will now grant menstrual and maternity leaves to students enrolled in universities run by the department. Female students will benefit from a reduction in the minimum attendance required to appear for exams to 73% (from the current 75%).
- A Kerala school, Labour India Public School, Kottayam, decided to implement a similar system for its students on January 24- National Girl Child Day.

Section 14 of the Maternity Benefit

- The lack of menstrual leave in certain states is a violation of Article 14, because women suffer from similar physiological

and health issues during their menstrual cycles, but they are treated differently in different states of India.

- The petition sought a directive under Section 14 of the Maternity Benefit Act, which states that the appropriate government may appoint such officers and define the local limits of jurisdiction within which they shall exercise their functions under this law.

What are the Parliamentary Measures?

- **Menstruation Benefits Bill, 2017:** In 2017, Arunachal Pradesh MP Ninong Ering introduced the 'Menstruation Benefits Bill, 2017' in Parliament. It was represented in the Lok Sabha on the first day of the Budget Session in 2022, but was ignored as an "unclean topic," according to the petition.
- **Women's Sexual, Reproductive, and Menstrual Rights Bill in 2018:** Dr. Shashi Tharoor introduced the Women's Sexual, Reproductive, and Menstrual Rights Bill in 2018, proposing that public authorities make sanitary pads freely available to women on their premises.
- **Private Member's Bill:** In the ongoing Budget session of the Parliament, Congress MP from Kerala Hibi Eden announced that he will introduce a private member's Bill seeking the right to paid leave during menstruation for working women, menstrual leave for female students, and free access to menstrual health products.
- **Right of Women to Menstrual Leave and Free Access to Menstrual Health Products Bill, 2022:** It mandates three days of paid leave for women and transwomen during menstruation. It also aims to broaden the benefit for students.

Menstrual Leave Policies Globally

- **Spain:** On February 16, Spain became the first European country to provide paid menstrual leave to employees, among other sexual health rights. Workers now have the right to three days of menstrual leave per month, which can be extended to five days. The provision will be paid for by the government. It was stated that women are not "full citizens" without such rights.
- **Japan:** In Asia, Japan made menstrual leave a part of labor law in 1947, after the idea gained popularity among labor unions in the 1920s. Employers cannot currently ask women who are going through difficult times to work during those times, according to Article 68.
 - However, many women may not avail of it; according to a 2014 government study, less than 0.9% of the surveyed women who had such a policy in place at their workplace had taken leave.
- **Indonesia:** It implemented a policy in 1948, which was amended in 2003, stating that workers experiencing menstrual pain are not required to work on the first two days of their cycle.
- **Philippines:** Workers in the Philippines are entitled to two days of menstrual leave per month.
- **Taiwan:** It has a Gender Equality in Employment Act in place. Employees have the right, under Article 14 of the Act, to request a day off as period leave every month at half their regular wage. Extra leaves are counted as sick leave.
- **South Korea:** It allows for monthly physiologic leave under Article 73 of their labor law, allowing all female workers to take a day off every month.
- **Vietnam:** Its labor law takes a different approach, requiring women to take a 30-minute break every day of their period cycle. However, in 2020, a three-day leave per month was added, and those who did not take the leave were required to be paid extra.

- **African Countries:** Zambia, among African countries, instituted one day of paid leave per month without requiring a reason or a medical certificate, dubbed Mother's Day.
- The United Kingdom, China, and Wales have menstrual leave policies.
- **Italy:** A proposal to introduce menstrual leave in Italy failed in Parliament in 2016, allaying fears that it would affect women's hiring.
- **US:** The United States does not have a formal policy in place, nor does it have a federal requirement for paid sick leave.

What is the way forward?

- The government should consider enacting policies that encourage flexible work, expand endometriosis treatment, and strengthen menstrual health services across institutions.
- Other issues in India that must be addressed include a lack of sanitation facilities in schools and workplaces, particularly in the informal sector.
- According to World Bank data, the proportion of working women fell from 26% to 19% between 2010 and 2020. To encourage more women to enter the labor force, it is critical that they have access to higher education and more opportunities.
- Girls are sometimes forced to leave school because there are no toilets. In a world that should strive to become a better place for all, it is the responsibility of society and governments to ensure that no segment is left behind.
- Many countries are experimenting with four-day work weeks to improve quality of life, while others are providing paternity leave so that parenting can be equally shared, and to ensure employers do not see hiring women as a disadvantage.
- All barriers to gender equality and equity must also be removed.

Did Poverty Cause Early Marriages

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: POSCO

Prepp Mains Booster: Women, poverty and associated issues, their problems and remedies, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

Context:

- Recently, the Assam Chief Minister announced a **zero-tolerance policy** towards child marriage with over 2,400 arrests made under the **Prevention of Child Marriages Act PCMA 2006** and the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences POSCO 2012**.
- **Criminalization of underage marriages** could lead to **falsification** and **suppression of information** related to age, encouraging concealment and making women more vulnerable while strengthening prejudices against minorities and the poor.

Under-age marriages

- Assam follows Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh in terms of the states where underage marriages are most prevalent in the country.
- According to the **National Family Health Survey, NFHS 3,4,5** reported a steady decline in instances of underage marriages in the state.
- The percentage of people married before reaching the age of 18 in the 20-24 age bracket fell from 38.6% in 2005-06 to 33.7% in 2015-16 and further to 31.8% in 2019-20.

- Pregnancies in the 15-19 age segment have consistently declined from 16.4% in 2005-06 to 11.6% in 2019-20.
- **Fertility rates** have also fallen from 2.2% in 2015-16 to 1.9% in 2019-20.
- **Underage marriages** have declined with the majority being restricted to the 15-17 age group and just 8% married before 14.
- Assam contributes around 3% of the national total of underage marriages while states like Gujarat contribute around 4.4%.
- As per **NFHS-5**, the proportion of underage marriages among Assamese Hindus was 23.5% which was close to the national average of 23.2%.
- The rate of underage marriages in Assam was 45.8% among Muslims and 23.8% among Christians which were much higher than the national averages of 26.4% and 15.2%.



What is causing child marriages?

- An analysis of data from states across the country has revealed that underage marriages are predominant among the poorer sections, especially in Assam where 42% of all underage marriages occur in families that belong to the poorest 20%.
- There was a close **relationship between poverty and minorities** as 51% of Muslims were in the poorest class, while only 31% of Hindus were among the poorest class.
- India has shown remarkable progress in its maternal mortality reduction efforts, with the **Maternal Mortality Rate** falling to 97 per lakh live births in 2018. However, Assam has been India's worst performer with an MMR of 195 in 2018-20 according to the Registrar General of India.
- Maternal mortality and anaemia are very closely related, with NFHS data showing that anaemia is influenced not by age at marriage but by poverty.

Poverty and Marriages

- Poor families marry off their daughters at an early age in order to keep costs and dowries lower while ensuring the sexual protection of girls from others.
- Even small economic improvements help delay marriages as families are willing and able to absorb the costs involved in supporting the girl while also searching for better alliances.
- Access to **nutrition** and related services are among the biggest obstacles to the improvement of the health of women and children.
- The **Criminalisation of underage marriages** and **punitive action** imposed by the government has created a climate of fear and vulnerability.

- Fear has prevented women and children from accessing the services of **Anganwadi and ASHA workers**, who have been entrusted with information gathering on underage marriages.
- Criminalisation has led to a worsening of health and malnutrition statistics, falsification of documentation, suppression of information related to age and concealment.



Way Forward

- **Empowerment** of women will lead to a drop in underage marriages but this will not be possible in the short term. Consistent investment in education, nutrition, health and employment will ensure marriages are conducted at later ages.
- Women's job opportunities have declined sharply over the last decade while the sex ratio at birth has fallen to 916 girls per 1000 boys in urban Assam, which is where the state should focus its attention on.
- Criminalisation and detainment of husbands and fathers will not empower women or stop child marriages, rather it will make them more vulnerable to social evils and prejudices.

NHFS

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare conducts the NFHS, an extensive multi-round survey, among a representative sample of Indian homes (MoHFW).
- Its main objectives are to provide vital information on health and family welfare needed for policy purposes as well as to alert readers about significant new health and welfare issues.
- The NFHS-5 survey, which was completed in 2019-20, collected information from almost 6.1 lakh homes.

India To Showcase Success In Rural And Archaeological Tourism At G-20 Meeting

Priority: Medium



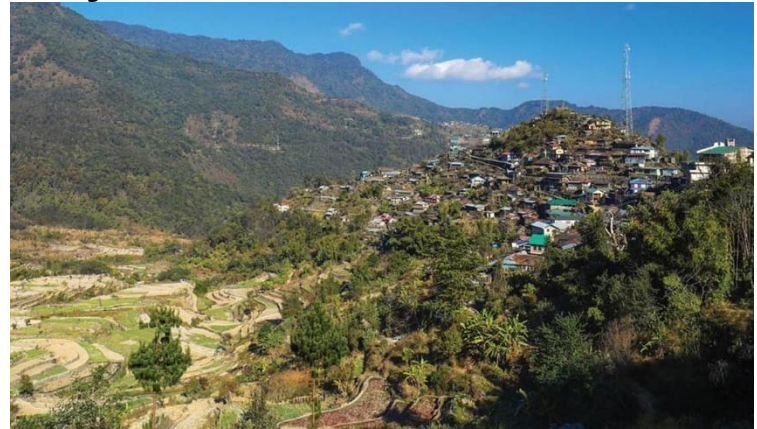
Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: G-20

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Heritage and Culture; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Growth and Development

Context:

- Recently, it has been decided that the **Madhya Pradesh village of Ladpura Khas, Nagaland's Khonoma village, and heritage sites such as Dholavira** will be highlighted as success stories of rural and archaeological tourism by India during the first tourism working group **meeting of the G-20 nations**, which will be held in the **Rann of Kutch**.
- **Rural tourism and archaeological tourism will be the topics of two side events at the G-20's first tourism ministerial meeting** from February 7 to 9, where India will highlight the most successful and innovative initiatives from across the country.
- Participants for the three-day meeting beginning February 7 include representatives from the **United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO)**.



Rural Tourism

- The UNWTO named **Madhya Pradesh's Ladpura Khas village as the Best Rural Tourism Village**. The State Government developed homestays in this village as part of the State's Responsible Tourism Mission.
- Success stories from Kevadiya, Gujarat, and some sensitive areas of Jammu and Kashmir, such as Poonch, where OYO Hotels and tribal homestays have been developed, will be shared.
- India will also present the innovative model of community-based **Astrotourism**, which involves rural homestays and community spaces that are completely run by villagers and provides travellers with an integrated experience of stargazing as well as cultural immersion in the Himalayas.
- Nagaland's Khonoma Village will present the model of **Ecotourism Management Board**, which develops Rural Tourism Products and promotes responsible travel.
- The success of developing many rural tourism products in and around Rann of Kutch will also be presented.

India's G20 Presidency

- India took over the G20 Presidency from Indonesia on December 1st, and will host the G20 Leaders' Summit for the first time in the country in 2023.
- A nation deeply committed to democracy and multilateralism, India's G20 Presidency would be a watershed moment in her history as it seeks to play an important role by finding pragmatic global solutions for the wellbeing of all, and in doing so, manifest

the true spirit of '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' or the '**World is One Family**'.

Archaeological Tourism

- India will also **showcase its success in archaeological tourism and discuss shared cultural heritage** with G-20 delegates.
- The delegates will be taken to **Dholavira, the southern center of the Harappan civilisation.**
- Dholavira, which was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2021, is thought to have been occupied between 3500 BC (pre-Harappan) and 1800 BC (late-Harappan period).
- It is the fifth largest of the eight major Harappan sites, which include Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Ganeriwala, Rakhigarhi, Kalibangan, Rupnagar, and Lothal.
- The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has improved the signage and facilities at the ancient site, and the road from Dhordo Tent City (the meeting's location) to Dholavira has been repaired.
- In addition to a guided tour, delegates will receive an audio-visual presentation about the significance of the site.
- There will also be a panel discussion on 'Discovering Shared Cultural Heritage,' with representatives from Spain, Mexico, and Indonesia taking part.

Rann of Kutch

- The Great Rann of Kutch is a salt marsh in Gujarat's Kutch District.
- It covers approximately 7500 km² (2900 sq miles) and is regarded as one of the world's largest salt deserts. The Kutchi people have lived in this area for centuries. It is an extension of the Thar Desert.

What is the significance?

- The goal is to promote rural tourism as a tool for community empowerment and poverty alleviation.
- The first tourism working group meeting in Kutch would also work on a Goa Roadmap and Action Plan for Tourism as a vehicle for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.
- The next tourism track meeting will be held in April in Siliguri/Darjeeling, with the third meeting taking place in May "in one of the north Indian hill states," and the final ministerial meeting taking place in Goa on June 19-22.
- The idea is to cover and showcase the country's geographical expanse, from Gujarat in the west to Siliguri in the north-east, and all the way up to the northernmost regions.
- The meeting will provide a vision, roadmap, and guidance for accelerated growth of the tourism sector beyond pandemic, based on the five key building blocks of Sustainability, Digitalization, Skills, MSMEs, and Destination Management in order to achieve the SDGs.

GENERAL STUDIES 2

Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

The Spirit Of The Law Lies In This Dissenting Judgment

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic

structure, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Context:

- Recently, a **Supreme Court** bench led by Justice A.S Oka has agreed to reconsider the verdict in the **1962 Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin vs State of Bombay** that considered **essential religious practices, fundamental rights** and the **rights of religious communities.**
- The verdict had held the **Prevention of Excommunication Act, 1949** unconstitutional.

What is the Syedna case?

- The **Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin vs State of Bombay** arose because of a challenge by the **Dai-ul-Mutlaq**, the head of the Dawoodi Bohra community against the **Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act 1969.**
- According to the petitioner, the law which prevented the expulsion of individuals from religious communities was anti-constitutional.
- They claimed that the power to expel members was integral to the communities' collective right to religious freedom.
- The Law in the public interest sought to prohibit the practice of excommunication as it led to the deprivation of rights and privileges of its members
- **Excommunication** was defined as the expulsion of a person from any community thereby depriving him of rights and benefits which could be attained by a civil suit.
- The **Supreme Court** had in a 4-1 judgement, with the CJI B.P Sinha dissenting, declared that the Dai's power to excommunicate members was so essential to the practice of the faith that the legislation could not reform a religion out of existence in the name of social reform.



Why has the case been reconsidered?

- A five judge bench of the Supreme Court agreed to reconsider the matter under the **Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community vs State of Maharashtra.**
- The original ruling had failed to consider the balance between the **religious rights of communities (Art 26(b))** and other fundamental rights such as the **right of individuals to dignity (Art 21).**
- The evolution of Indian jurisprudence has meant that religious excommunication has to be weighed against a standard of constitutional morality.
- The case was forwarded to the Nine-member bench that was already considering the Sabarimala verdict.

Balance between individual freedoms and religious rights of sects

- According to the former Chief justice of Canada, Justice Beverly McLachlin, there was no magic barometer to measure limits on religious freedoms.
- However, the close connections between religion and social life in countries like India has meant occasional conflicts between rights of a community, the individual and the law.
- In order to establish a balance, the Supreme Court had in the **Shirur Mutt case**, ruled that only **essential religious practices** deserved constitutional protection and the determination of what was essential would be a narrow process and depend on what members believed to be essential to their faith.
- However, the Court over time assumed theological authority to interpret religious scriptures and determine the essentiality of religious practices.
- This has led to judges determining the essential nature and protection worthiness of religious practices instead of deliberating when state intervention in religion was legitimate.
- This approach has undermined the rationale behind the **right to religious freedoms** and the ethical autonomy granted to religious communities, with the Court becoming unwilling to strike down practices that violate the rights of the individual on the basis of essentiality.
- It has become necessary to find alternate solutions as the dissenting opinion of the Just BP Sinha in the Syedna verdict showed that ex-communication had an effect that was similar to untouchability on the individual, and thus religious essentiality was immaterial.
- Expulsion from the community resulted in being outcast from the mosque, burial grounds and social and religious isolation which was ultra-vires to the provisions of **Article 17** that prohibited any form of **untouchability**.
- The logic behind the granting of rights to religious communities under the Constitution was to allow members to fulfil their collective desires. However, this should not become a tool to undermine the **rights of the individual**, who is at the heart of the guarantee of religious rights.

What is Constitutional Morality?

- **Constitutional Morality** means abiding by the moral and core principles of the Constitution, or the soul of the Constitution.
- In **Dr. Ambedkar's** opinion, it was the effective co-ordination between the conflicting interests of different people and administration's cooperation to resolve them peacefully.
- Constitutional morality is evident in constitutional provisions such as the rule of law, right to privacy and dignity, equality, social justice etc.
- The Court has invoked constitutional morality in cases such as the **Indian Young Lawyers Association vs State of Kerala** and **Government of NCT Delhi vs Union of India**.
- The Supreme Court has not defined any extent or scope of constitutional morality, rather it has been left to the discretion of individual judges.
- Critics of the provision have seen it as another example of the judiciary infringing on the powers of Parliament.

Relation between Constitutional Morality and Religious Freedoms

- **Article 26**, which guarantees the right of religious denominations is subject to public order, morality and health.
- The morality referenced here is constitutional morality which was based on the fundamental values of the Constitution including liberty, equality and fraternity.
- In the Syedna case, excommunication of an individual on the basis of religious tenets imposes civic consequences, and thus the matter must be considered in the context of justiciable constitutional rights.
- **Rights of religious autonomy** if prioritized over the rights of individual, could spread beyond the community into general society and compromise the central characteristics of the Constitution.
- Another consideration that must be made about religious exclusion was the centralizing of powers of exclusion in the hands of the community's dominant elite.
- This creates a situation of "**cultural dissent**" which has been described by Madhavi Sunder as the harmful effect favouring the view of the group or the powerful over the views of the minority (women, children, etc).
- The dissenting opinion of Just Sinha was related to this aspect of constitutional morality and should be considered by the nine judge bench.


Art 21

- No one shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law

Art 26

- Freedom to manage religious affairs subject to public order, morality and health,
 - 26(b) - every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion

SC Upholds The Constitution Of The J&K Delimitation Commission, Extension Of Tenure Of Its Chairperson

Priority: High 

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies. Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court dismissed a plea challenging the **delimitation** exercise to redraw Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time.
- A commission set up by the Central government submitted its final report for delimitation in J&K on May 5, 2022.

What is the issue?

- A petition filed by Abdul Gani Khan and Muhammad Ayub Matto challenged a notification for the **delimitation of Assembly and parliamentary constituencies** in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
- The petition was limited to a challenge of the Center's notifications establishing the Jammu and Kashmir **Delimitation Commission in**

March 2020 and in March 2021 extending its term for the purpose of conducting delimitation only for Jammu and Kashmir.

- The petition argued that after the notification of the **Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Delimitation Order, 2008, only the Election Commission of India** was authorized to undertake the exercise.
- The petition also contended that the delimitation exercise **violated the provisions of Article 170** of the Constitution, which states that constituencies shall remain frozen until the first census is conducted **after the year 2026**.
- Article 170 barred delimitation exercise on the basis of the 2011 census. It has to either happen on the basis of the 2001 census or await "the first census after the year 2026".
- **It has to either happen on the basis of the 2001 census or await "the first census after the year 2026"**.
- It has been recommended that the number of seats in the J&K Assembly should be raised from 83 to 90.
- The petition challenged the increase in seats on grounds of it being in violation of the provisions of **Articles 81, 82, 170, 330, and 332 of the Constitution**, and Section 63 of the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.



Government's Argument

- The government had countered the petition stating that there were two alternative mechanisms to carry out delimitation for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. By virtue of **Sections 60-61**, while the power to determine delimitation was conferred on Election Commission, **Section 62(2) and 62(3)** conferred powers to carry out delimitation on the **Delimitation Commission**.
- The Home Ministry and the Election Commission of India had argued that the delimitation orders already **acquired the "force of law"**.
- The ECI and the Ministry had maintained that the delimitation order had already been brought **into effect from May 20, 2022, and** once it had gained finality by publication in the gazette, the delimitation order cannot be "re-agitated" in a court

SC Verdict

- The court in its judgment said that the two union territories were created under **Articles 2 and 3** which empower the parliament to create new States and Union Territories.
- The **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019**, which established the two new Union Territories, entrusts the Delimitation Commission under the Delimitation Act of 2002 with the task of readjusting constituencies.
- The Delimitation Commission can be established through a law created under **Article 3**, which can provide for the **readjustment of constituencies** in newly established States or Union Territories.

- Therefore, a recent court ruling held that the establishment of the Delimitation Commission through an order in March 2020 was not illegal.
- **Article 2:** Admission or establishment of new States: Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions, as it thinks fit
- **Article 3:** Formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries, or names of existing States: Parliament may by law.
- The court in a recent court ruling said that once the Delimitation Commission was established, it was **not wrong for the central government to extend the period of appointment of the Chairperson** until the task of delimitation/readjustment was completed.
- The court held that the notifications issued by the government drew their power from Section 62(2) of the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019, which provided for the readjustment of constituencies to be carried out by the Delimitation Commission. The petitioners in the case had challenged the notifications.

What is Delimitation Commission?

- **Under Article 82**, Parliament is to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census. Once the Act is in force, the Union government sets up the Delimitation Commission.
- The Commission is supposed to determine the number and boundaries of constituencies in a way that the population of all seats, so far as practicable, is the same.
- The Commission is also tasked with **identifying seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**.
- The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the **President of India** and works in collaboration with the Election Commission of India.
- It is composed of the following: a retired Supreme Court judge, the Chief Election Commissioner of India and respective State Election Commissioners.
- The Delimitation Commission is to **work without any executive influence**.
- The Constitution mandates that the Commission's **orders are final** and cannot **be questioned before any court** as it would hold up an election indefinitely.
- The draft proposals of the Delimitation Commission are **published for public feedback**.
- The Commission also holds public sittings.
- After **hearing the public**, it considers objections and suggestions, and carries out changes, if any, in the draft proposal.
- The final order is **published in the Gazette of India and the State Gazette** concerned and comes into force on a date specified by the President.

Delhi Hc: Virginity Test Unconstitutional, Archaic Even On Accused

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Right to dignity

Prepp Mains Booster: Role of women, their problems and their remedies, Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context:

- Recently, the **High Court of Delhi** declared that the use of the '**Virginity Test**' on women detainees or accused was **unconstitutional, sexist** and **violative of the right to dignity**.

- The Court ordered the circulation of this information among all stakeholders through the relevant ministries.

What was the ruling of the Delhi HC?

- The **Delhi High Court** was hearing a plea by Sister Sephy, a Convict in the sister Abhaya Murder case, that challenged the conduct of the **virginity test** on her and pleaded that it be declared unconstitutional.



- She also sought punishment on the officials who conducted the test on her against her will and later leaked the results to the media.
- The single-judge bench of the court declared that the virginity test conducted on women was **archaic, unconstitutional and sexist**.
- The practice violated the **right to life with dignity** and was based on **gender bias** and the societal obsession with equating virginity with a woman's purity.
- The bench called on the evidence of numerous reports that reported short-term and long-term adverse effects of the test on women.
- According to the Court, the **fundamental rights of dignity and privacy under Article 21** could not be denied to a person because he was a convict, accused or detained.
- The Court rejected the CBI's argument that the practice was sanctioned by **CrPC Section 53**, which authorizes the examination of an accused by a medical practitioner at the request of a police officer, as Section 53 mandated the use of **modern and scientific techniques**.
- The two-finger virginity test was archaic and traditional and could not be considered modern or scientific. Therefore it could not be permitted under Section 53.
- The Court reprimanded the investigation agency for its claim that the test was necessary to uphold the law. The conduct of the test was violative of the fundamental rights and was equivalent to interference in the bodily and psychological integrity of the woman, with profound effects on her physical and mental health.
- The exam, according to the court, promoted deplorable and abhorrent ideas of **gender bias** and **social stereotypes** by demeaning and physically invading the bodies of women under detention.

What is the two-finger test?

- The two-finger test, in which two fingers are put into the vagina to gauge the flexibility of the vaginal muscles and inspect the hymen, is an intrusive, unscientific, and outdated practice that was used to determine a victim's level of sexual activity in rape cases.

Supreme Court rulings on the subject

- The **Supreme Court** in its verdict in the **2013 Lillu v State of Haryana case** had declared that two-finger tests violated the **right to dignity, integrity and privacy** of victims of sexual assault.
- In its 2020 decision in the **State of Gujarat v Rameshchandra Ramabhai Panchal**, the apex court held that the virginity test was unconstitutional.
- The Court also declared that officials who performed the test would be found guilty of misconduct as the test was unscientific and **did not prove or disprove allegations of rape**.
- The Supreme Court ordered that the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare guidelines** be strictly followed, workshops be conducted to sensitize health workers and revision of the medical curriculum

What are the steps taken by the Government to abolish it?

- The **Indian Evidence Act** was amended by the Parliament in 2013 to include **Section 53A** which stated that the question of consent or the quality of consent in the prosecution of sexual offenses must not be affected by the victim's character or her prior sexual experiences with any individual.
- The **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare** released guidelines for medico-legal care for survivors of sexual violence based on the **Justice J. S. Verma Committee Report**, which specifically forbade the two-finger test and discussed the necessity of training medical examiners to react to the needs of the survivors in a sensitive and non-discriminatory manner.


Way Forward

- The continued use of the test has indicated the need for reforms in India's **forensic medical practices** and awareness building among health workers.
- The test was based on **patriarchal notions of rape** and has been perceived by women's groups as giving women's bodies more importance than their voices.
- The government must ensure the prohibition of the abhorrent practice and adoption of an **evidence-based approach** through the efficient implementation of necessary guidelines on the basis of a review of the medical system to ensure gender justice.

Article 21

- Art 21 states that no person shall be deprived of his **right to life or personal liberty** except as per **procedure established by law**.

Ordinance Over The Years

Priority: High 

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution, Representation of People's Act; Constitutional Bodies,

Context:

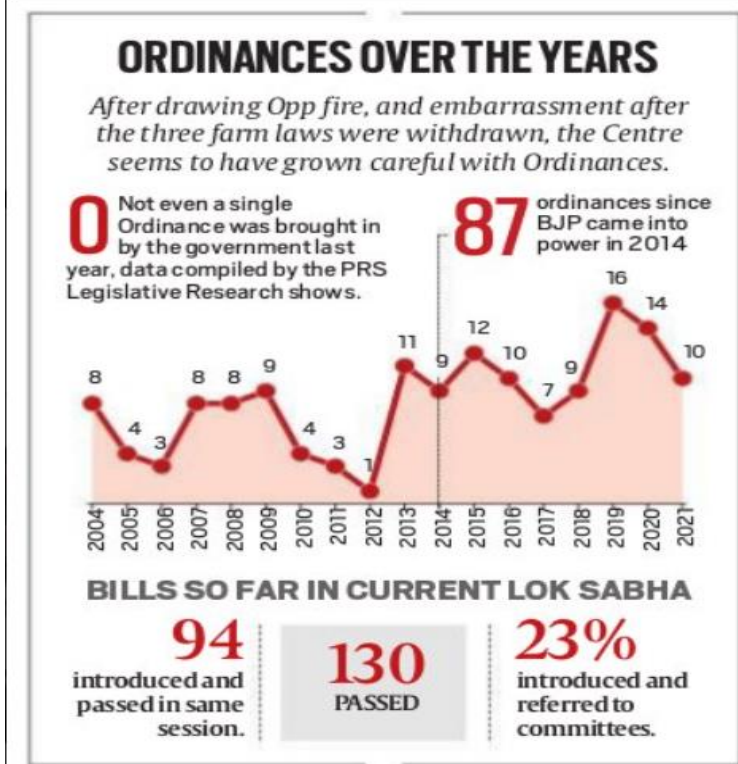
- After facing opposition and withdrawal of three farm laws, **the Centre seems to have grown careful with ordinances**.
- According to data compiled by the PRS Legislative Research, **not even a single ordinance was brought in by the government last year**.
- Ordinances are laws that are promulgated by the President of India** on the recommendation of the Union Cabinet and have the same effect as an Act of Parliament.

What are Ordinances?

- Ordinances are laws that are promulgated by the President of India on the recommendation of the Union Cabinet and have the same effect as an Act of Parliament.
- They can only be issued when Parliament is not in session. They allow the Indian government to take immediate legislative action.
- Ordinances expire if Parliament does not approve them within six weeks of reassembly, or if disapproving resolutions are passed by both Houses.
- A session of Parliament must also be held within six months.

Constitutional Provisions Regarding Ordinances

- When Parliament (or the State Legislature) is not in session, the Constitution allows the central and state governments to pass laws.
- **Article 123** of the Indian Constitution authorizes the executive to issue ordinances if certain conditions are met.
- Ordinances may be promulgated only if at least one House of Parliament is not in session.
- The president is convinced that "immediate action" is required.
- The Constitution states that the ordinance will expire six weeks after the next meeting of Parliament (or the State Legislature).
- **Article 213 includes similar provisions for state governments.**



Characteristics of Ordinances

- An ordinance can be retroactive, which means that it can be enacted prior to its approval.
- An ordinance passed while Parliament is in session is declared null and void.
- To stay a law, the Ordinance must be approved by Parliament within six weeks of its reassembly. Its existence is terminated if the parliament does not act within six weeks of its reassembly.
- Acts, laws, and events that occurred as a result of the ordinance remain in effect until it expires.
- Ordinance promulgation cannot be regarded as a substitute for the President's legislative authority.

- Ordinances can only be passed on subjects where the Indian Parliament has the authority to pass laws.
- Ordinances may not be used to revoke citizens' fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.
- If both houses passed a resolution opposing the ordinance, it would also be declared null and void.

Conversion of Ordinance into Act

- When the Parliament's normal proceedings resume and both houses return to session after the recess, they must vote in favor of or against the ordinance.
- If both houses vote in favor of the ordinance, it does not automatically become an act.
- It is first transformed into a bill, which is then debated and voted on in the traditional manner with three readings.
- It is only after both the houses assent to the bill that it becomes an act.

Limitations with regard to Ordinances

- **Legislature not in session:** When neither of the two Houses of Parliament is in session, the President may promulgate an Ordinance.
- **Immediate action is required:** The President cannot promulgate an Ordinance unless he is satisfied that there are circumstances that necessitate 'immediate action.'
- **Parliamentary approval:** Ordinances must be approved by Parliament within six weeks of reassembling or they will cease to function. They will also cease to operate if both Houses pass resolutions opposing the Ordinance. The most Ordinances were promulgated in 1993, and the number of Ordinances promulgated has been declining since then. However, the number of Ordinances promulgated in the past year has increased.

Issue with Promulgation of Ordinances

- **Bypassing of the legislature:** There are times when the legislature is purposefully bypassed to avoid debate and deliberation on contentious legislative proposals. This is contrary to the ethos and spirit of democracy.
- **Repromulgation of ordinances:** According to the Supreme Court, re-promulgation of ordinances is a "fraud" on the Constitution and a subversion of democratic legislative processes, especially when the government persistently avoids bringing the ordinances before the legislature.
 - For example, the Bihar Governor issued a series of ordinances between 1989 and 1992 regarding the state's takeover of private Sanskrit schools.
- **Infringement of the principle of separation of powers:** The power of the executive to issue ordinances violates the principle of separation of powers because lawmaking is the domain of the legislature.
- **The satisfaction of the President:** An ordinance can be promulgated only when the President is satisfied that the circumstances exist for the same, thereby providing the scope for misuse of power.
- **Ordinances that are frequently issued and re-issued** violate the spirit of the Constitution and result in a 'ordinance raj'.
 - The Supreme Court strongly condemned this practice in D.C. Wadhwa vs. State of Bihar 1987, calling it a constitutional fraud.

Recent Ordinance Promulgated by the President

- **The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance 2020**

- On 22 April 2020, the Government of India declared the proclamation of an Ordinance, 'The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance 2020', to amend the act, adding arrangements to punish those assaulting doctors or health labourers.
- The bill was presented by the Minister of Health and Family Affairs, Harsh Vardhan. The Rajya Sabha approved the bill on 19 September 2020 and the Lok Sabha on 21 September 2020.
- **Central farm laws, 2020**
- The Central farm laws which met with inescapable protest were at first brought through the Ordinance course.
- The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, and the Ordinance to revise The Essential Commodities Act were brought in June 2020. Every one of the three Ordinances were replaced by laws in parliament during its monsoon session last year.

Ladakh, A Fragile Region Needs Autonomy



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Ladakh

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution; Government Policies and Interventions; Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

Context:

- Recently, Ladakhi innovator and social reformist Sonam Wangchuk completed his five-day "climate fast".
- Residents of Ladakh have been **demanding for special constitutional status**, which would allow them to choose a development path that protects the region's fragile ecological and cultural heritage.
- They want a four-point agenda included in discussions, including statehood, the Sixth Schedule, job reservation, and separate parliamentary constituencies for Leh and Kargil.



What happened earlier?

- **Sonam Wangchuk, one of Ladakh's most respected educators and inventors, began a fast in the open on January 26** in sub-zero temperatures. He appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to meet this demand.
- With over 20,000 people in attendance, Leh held its largest-ever demonstration on January 31.
- Two weeks prior, the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance, two of Ladakh's most powerful religious and political

organizations, rejected a committee appointed by the Central government to investigate the status issue.

- They claimed that the committee's mandate was ambiguous and did not take into account their specific demands.
- Student and civil society organizations have also increased their demands for constitutional safeguards.

About Ladakh

- Ladakh is a region administered by India as a union territory that is part of the larger Kashmir region and has been a source of contention between India, Pakistan, and China since 1947.
- Ladakh is bounded to the east by the Tibet Autonomous Region:
 - to the south by the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh,
 - to the west by both the Indian-administered union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan, and
 - to the far north by the southwest corner of Xinjiang across the Karakoram Pass.
- It stretches from the Siachen Glacier in the Karakoram range to the main Great Himalayas in the south.
- The eastern end, which includes the uninhabited Aksai Chin plains, is claimed by the Indian government as part of Ladakh and has been under Chinese control since 1962.

Ladakh as a Union Territory

- In August 2019, India's Himalayan region of Ladakh became a union territory, a decision that was celebrated and welcomed by the majority of the region's population at the time.
- Three and a half years later, the festive mood has shifted to worry and concern. The expected development and safeguards did not materialize.
- It didn't take long for everyone in Ladakh to realize that the promises of development and jobs made were not being kept.
- A year after Ladakh became a union territory, the people of Leh and Kargil joined forces. Regardless of their socio-political affiliations, the people of Ladakh began to band together in protest, demanding statehood and safeguards for the union territory.

Why are the people of Ladakh unhappy with the region's status as a Union Territory (UT)?

- Ladakhis had been demanding UT status for many years, and when the Centre announced it in 2019, there were celebrations throughout the region.
- Since 2019, the festive spirit has waned significantly. Many Ladakhis have realized that their true need for relatively free and autonomous functioning, as well as significant local employment generation, remains a mirage.
- Ladakh was an independent kingdom for 1,000 years before it was absorbed into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
- The memory of this long history has not been erased, and it irritates that, while no longer subject to J&K, Ladakh is now ruled from New Delhi.
- In 2019, the BJP government announced that Ladakh would be granted special constitutional status, granting it autonomy.
- Before the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (AHDC)** election, the **region was promised Sixth Schedule status, similar to what is seen in some parts of north-east India**. This promise has yet to be fulfilled.
- The Home Minister has turned down senior Ladakhi politicians and activists who approached him about this.

Inclusion in 6th Schedule

- The sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution addresses "the administration of tribal areas," specifically in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.
- In Ladakh, tribal communities account for nearly 97 percent of the population. Thus, the people of Ladakh desire statehood under the terms of autonomy offered to the four states named in the sixth schedule.
- The inclusion of Ladakh in the sixth schedule would give the regional council autonomy in legislative, judicial, and financial matters.

Sensitivity of Ladakh

- The region's cold desert ecosystems are home to rare mammals such as the wild yak and the snow leopard, as well as diverse flora.
- Cultures and livelihoods have evolved to be sensitive to the fragility of ecosystems that cannot withstand heavy human activity.
- For centuries, high-altitude pastoralism, agriculture, and trade have been the backbones of Ladakhi economy and society.

Infrastructure Development

- Ladakh is already groaning under the weight of infrastructure development, a heavy military presence, and excessive tourism. Since Ladakh became a UT, there has been a greater emphasis on an exploitative 'development' path.
- **Mining, tourism, hydropower**, and other natural resources have enormous commercial interest. The UT administration has been inviting investments in the region, and some of India's largest corporations have expressed interest.
- **A new airport** is being built, and road construction, including into the relatively unexplored Zaskar region, is ramping up.
- Ladakh already has serious problems with landslides, erosion, solid waste and effluents, wildlife disturbance, and the cordoning off of common lands for development projects.
- **Mega-solar projects** are in the works in the name of a 'carbon-neutral' Ladakh.
- **The 2023 Budget** has allocated Rs.20,000 crore for solar power evacuation and grid integration from a 13GW project in the ecologically fragile Changthang region.

What is the way forward?

- There are opportunities for collaboration between Ladakh and Delhi. The Central government may support a Hill Council decision to make Ladakh agriculture fully organic.
- Using the Forest Rights Act, communities could be assisted in claiming and implementing collective rights over grasslands. Tourism could be fully oriented toward community-run, environmentally conscious tourism.
- Ladakhi civil society organizations and government departments are already implementing amazing initiatives for environmentally sensitive livelihoods, decentralized solar energy use, food and agricultural heritage preservation, entrepreneurship, and much more.
- But if the Central government and some Ladakhis maintain their current mindset, all of this will be for naught.
- A constitutional status that allows for locally determined pathways, driven by a sensitive local population, can help avoid the disastrous path that many other parts of India have taken.

The Demand For A Greater Tipraland By The Tipra Motha

Priority: **Medium**



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: TIPRA Motha

Prepp Mains Booster: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Government policies and interventions

Context:

- The **Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) Motha**, Tripura's newest political party, which was founded in 2019, has caused quite a stir with its **call for a Greater Tipraland**.
- With this core demand, the party has attracted other indigenous political parties. Its first foray into electoral politics was in the **Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)** elections in 2021, where it won 18 of the 28 seats.



About TIPRA Motha Party

- The **Tipra Motha Party (TMP)**, also known as the Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance, is a regional political party and former social organization in Tripura, India.
- TIPRA is led by Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barma.

What is Greater Tipraland?

- Greater Tipraland is the TIPRA Motha's central ideological demand.
- Recently, the party issued what it called a Vision Document, in which it stated that it was committed to seeking a permanent solution that upheld the rights of Tripura's indigenous people as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.
- The goal is to create a new state for Tripura's 19 indigenous tribes **under Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution**.
- In its current form, the new State's boundaries would extend beyond the TTAADC areas to include several other villages populated by Tiprasa (Tripura's indigenous people).
- It was stated that the Motha would also form task forces to connect with Tiprasa living in other parts of the country and the world to assist them with their linguistic, cultural, social, and economic development.
- While the new party's core ideology borders on ethnic nationalism, the Motha leadership has been careful not to project itself as a "of the tribals, by the tribals, and for the tribals only" party.

What does the Constitution say?

- **Article 2** of the Indian Constitution deals with the admission or establishment of new states.

- Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions, as it thinks fit," it states.
- **Article 3** comes into play in the case of "formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States" by the Parliament.

Formation of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)

- The demand for greater autonomy and powers for Tripura's tribal population, which feels marginalized by the majority Bengali-speaking non-tribal population, began soon after the state's formation in 1972.
- Large-scale migration of Hindus from Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) to Tripura following independence in 1947 and Bangladesh's creation in 1971 reduced the proportion of the tribal population in the state.
- As a result, the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was formed in 1979 to protect the social, economic, and cultural interests of Tripura's tribal population.

What is the genesis of this demand?

- The demand for Greater Tipraland appears to be a rehash of the Tipraland demand made by the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) in 2009, after it split from the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT).
- The earlier Tipraland demand was to carve out a separate State for Tripura's tribal population from the TTAADC areas.
- The current demand extends beyond the TTAADC areas and includes at least 36 more villages with tribal populations ranging from 20 to 36%.

Population of Tribals and Non-Tribals

- According to the 1941 Census, the tribal-non-tribal population ratio in Tripura was nearly 50:50.
- However, by the next Census, the tribal population had been reduced to slightly more than 37% due to a massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan.
- Between 1950 and 1952, nearly 1.5 lakh refugees sought shelter in Tripura.
- The influx of refugees exacerbated tensions, and conflict between tribals and non-tribals erupted into an armed insurgency in 1980.
- During this period, the demand for autonomous regions or separate statehood evolved into sovereignty and independence.
- However, after a political truce was reached between the State and the rebel groups, the demand for statehood was revived.

How did the demand originate?

- **Accessed state:** Tripura was a kingdom ruled by the Manikya dynasty from the late 13th century until the signing of the Instrument of Accession with the Indian government on October 15, 1949.
- **Demographic changes:** There is an anxiety among the indigenous communities in connection with the change in the demographics of the state due to the displacements from the erstwhile East Pakistan.
- **Existential threats:** From 63.77 per cent in 1881, the population of the tribals in Tripura was down to 31.80 per cent by 2011.
- **Ethnic conflicts:** In the intervening decades, ethnic conflict and insurgency gripped the state, which shares a nearly 860-km long boundary with Bangladesh.

How has this affected Tripura?

- It appears to have exacerbated an already strained relationship between tribals and non-tribals since the State emerged from the days of armed insurgency.
- TIPRA Motha organized a massive roadshow in November, which was hailed as the largest political mobilization of tribals in the state.

Supreme Court Reserves Judgement On Whether A Speaker Under Notice Can Disqualify Legislator

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Polity and Governance; Indian Constitution; Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Context:

- The **Supreme Court is set to rule on whether a seven-judge Bench should reconsider its 2016 decision** that a Speaker under a cloud must first clear his name before hearing disqualification petitions against legislators **under the anti-defection law**.
- A majority judgment of the Supreme Court in the **Nabam Rebia case in 2016 held that a Speaker or Deputy Speaker facing removal cannot decide disqualification proceedings against legislators**.
- In the Maharashtra political drama of 2022, Eknath Shinde and 15 rebel MLAs served the Deputy Speaker with a removal notice after he issued a disqualification notice against them, resulting in a stalemate.



News Summary

- A five-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud was hearing a series of petitions following the political crisis that rocked Maharashtra when current Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his camp of followers rebelled against then-Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and eventually brought down the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in early 2022.
- In the Nabam Rebia case, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in 2016 that a Speaker or Deputy Speaker facing removal cannot decide disqualification proceedings against legislators.

What does Nabam Rebia's decision say?

- The Nabam decision was based on an interpretation of the words "all the then members of the Assembly" in Article 179(c) of the Constitution.
- The 5-judge bench ruled that the words "passed by a majority of all the then members of the Assembly" would prevent the Speaker from proceeding with the disqualification proceedings under the

Tenth Schedule because they would negate the effect of the words "all the then members" after the disqualification of one or more MLAs from the House.

- This ruling opened the door for defecting legislators to stall or avoid the Tenth Schedule by seeking the Speaker's removal when disqualification proceedings are imminent, effectively tying the Speaker's hands.

What is the current issue?

- It was argued that the Nabam Rebia decision has an opposite side. Legislators facing disqualification under the Tenth Schedule are now issuing removal notices against Speakers and Deputy Speakers in order to stall the proceedings against them.
- The Nabam Rebia decision prohibits a Speaker from acting as a Tribunal under the Tenth Schedule the moment he receives a notice of removal.
- Legislators are now using this tactic to delay their disqualification. Meanwhile, politics takes over and the government is deposed. A new Chief Minister is appointed with the support of the rebel legislators.
- Mr. Shinde and 15 legislators were served notices in the disqualification petition filed by the Thackeray camp.

What Is Anti Defection Law?

- The anti-defection law penalizes individual Members of Parliament (MPs)/Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) for defecting from one party to another.
- In 1985, Parliament inserted it as the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution. Its objective was to promote government stability by deterring legislators from switching parties.
- The Tenth Schedule, colloquially referred to as the Anti-Defection Act, was incorporated into the Constitution by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985, and contains provisions for disqualifying elected members for defection to another political party.
- It was a response to the overthrow of various state administrations following the 1967 national elections by party-hopping MLAs.
- It does, however, permit a group of MPs/MLAs to join (i.e. combine with) another political party without incurring a defection penalty. Additionally, it exempts political parties from liability for soliciting or admitting defecting legislators.
- According to the 1985 Act, a defection of one-third of a political party's elected members was constituted a 'merger'.

Features of Anti Defection Law

Disqualification

- If a member of a house belonging to a political party voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or votes, or does not vote in the legislature, contrary to the directions of his political party.
- However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within 15 days from such voting or abstention, the member shall not be disqualified.
- If an independent candidate joins a political party after the election. If a nominated member joins a party six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.

Power to Disqualify

- The Chairman or the Speaker of the House takes the decision to disqualify a member. If a complaint is received with respect to the defection of the Chairman or Speaker, a member of the House elected by that House shall take the decision.

Judgement of the Supreme Court

- According to Chief Justice Chandrachud, the 2016 judgment raises difficult constitutional issues.
- The decision bars a Speaker or Deputy Speaker from acting as a Tribunal under the Tenth Schedule until his position is ratified by the House. Meanwhile, human capital would freely flow from one political party to the next.
- Allowing a Speaker or Deputy Speaker who is under threat of losing his position in the House to serve as a Tribunal may result in bias. It may even allow a political party's leader to retain power despite losing the support of his or her followers.
- This would facilitate a leader of a political party to hold on to the status quo though he or she has really lost his or her leadership over a group of legislators, hence both ends have very serious consequences.

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources, Effects of globalization

Lack Of Data Updating Has Left Millions Of Poor Indians Hungry: According To An Estimate Calculated By Economists Jean Dreze, Ritika Khera And Meghana Mungikar

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: PDS scheme

Prepp Mains Booster: Issues relating to poverty and hunger, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

Context:

- According to an estimate calculated by economists Jean Dreze, Ritika Khera and Meghana Mungikar, over **100 million eligible Indians have been excluded from the benefits available under the PDS scheme** due to the **non-adjustment of quotas**.
- The article titled "**Control and delete: Lack of data updating has left millions of poor Indians hungry; here is how**" published in Down To Earth has discussed the **hunger crisis** in India due to exclusion from eligibility lists and the government's steps to resolve it.

What are the reasons for the poor coverage?

- The **NFSA has mandated the coverage of 75% of rural population and 50% of urban population ie a total of 67% of the total population**. This amounted to nearly 813 million people according to Census 2011.
- However the Centre, later fixed a specific state-wise quota based on population and poverty data.
- According to data submitted by the Centre in the Supreme Court in the right to food security case, 99.5% of the total 26.42 million eligible under this list in Jharkhand have been assigned cards by 2021.
- A study by economists Jean Dreze, Ritika Khera and Meghana Mungikar has revealed that the quota has not been adjusted to account for population growth since 2011.
- As a result, nearly 100 million people have been excluded from availing PDS benefits under NFSA, of which 2 million are in Jharkhand alone.
- NGO's have reported that some old ration cards are deleted without checking if beneficiaries are eligible or not in order to accommodate new ration cards.

- The NFSA guidelines have authorized the states to identify eligible households and prepare priority guidelines. However many states have failed to meet their quota, which implies that many more poor can be included within the Act's ambit.
- Data submitted to the Supreme Court indicated that **2% of the National Quota was unfilled** with only 14 of the 36 states and UT's meeting their quotas.
- This 2% would account for around 1 million of the excluded 100 million, which means the best solution was to update the list in sync with population growth.



What exactly is the uncounted population?

- The postponement of the Census due to the pandemic has affected the food security obligations of the governments.
- Using the **WEF's** projection of India's current population of 1.41 billion, NFSA covers less than 57% of the total population as opposed to the authorized 67%.
- The Central Government, revealed that as of August 2022, only 797 out of 813 million eligible people were availing of the benefits.
- As a result, the total number left out of the ambit of the food security programme numbered around 150 million (when using WEF population estimates).

Supreme Court on Food Security

- The **Supreme Court** has recently been hearing a case on the struggles of migrant workers while accessing ration, but this has been expanded to include the food security concerns of the entire poor population of the country.
- The Supreme Court directed the Centre to update the list to reflect current levels of population but the Centre has said that only Census data can be used for making the list according to NFSA rules.
- The Central Government has stated repeatedly that the use of any other data to prepare the eligibility list would be inaccurate and counterproductive to the goals of the Act despite repeated Supreme Court directives to use available population projections.
- The delay in conducting the Census, and subsequent exclusion of millions from the food security net has been criticized by numerous economists and social service workers.

Deletion of Names

- Data presented by the government before the Supreme Court on October 10, 2022 indicates that in 2021, 2.2 million ration cards were canceled.

- Since 2013, around 47.4 million cards have been removed or revoked, with Uttar Pradesh having the largest number followed by West Bengal and Maharashtra.
- The Centre has asserted that while fresh names are being added, names are continuously being taken off the list because applicants do not meet the requirements.
- The Government has stated that the reasons for deletion are:
 - **Increase in per capita income** since 2013 by around 33.4% (NITI AAYOG data) reducing the number of households requiring subsidized rations.
 - Removal of **ineligible, duplicate or ghost beneficiaries**
- The deletion on the basis of increased per-capita income has been criticized as the benefits of income rise have been predominantly spread among the better-off sections of the population.
- This has also been mentioned in the "**State of Inequality in India Report**," commissioned and published by the NITI Aayog which shows that about 6%–7% of all income is made up of the earnings of the top 1% of earners.
- According to the Union Ministry of Labour's cyclical "**Labour Force Survey 2019-20**," a monthly salary of ₹25,000 is among the top 10% of all wages earned.
- **Consumption-expenditure based poverty figures** are a better metric to assess how many households require subsidization but the **NSSO** survey on the subject has been rejected by the Centre due to quality issues.

Way forward

- According to experts, coverage is not uniform throughout the country with poorer states getting more coverage and richer states less. Some states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha had coverage above the national average.
- This has led to the development of the state-wise quota list.
- The Union Government must utilize existing survey data like the **e-shram** portal to ensure food security to the majority of the population.

E-shram portal

- The portal was introduced by the Union Labour Ministry in August 2021 to register unorganised workers following the COVID-19-induced lockdowns.
- The portal lists 284 million unorganised employees, including domestic workers, street sellers, migrant workers, and construction labourers.
- The employees will receive an e-Shram card with a unique 12-digit number.
- If a worker who has registered with the eSHRAM portal gets in an accident, he may be eligible for compensation of Rs. 2 lakhs in the event of death or permanent disability and Rs. 1 lakh in the event of partial disability.
- It is the first-ever national database of unorganized workers and will boost the last-mile delivery of welfare schemes to unorganized laborers.

Alienation: The Separation Of Labour From The Product, Process, Humanity And Society

Priority: **Medium**



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Employment

Prepp Mains Booster: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources, Effects of globalization

Context:

- The author has discussed the concept of alienation, its forms, perspectives and criticisms in the article titled "**Alienation: the separation of labour from the product, process, humanity and society**" published in The Hindu on February 1st 2023.
- Alienation** was a concept developed by **Marx** that referred to the **feeling of separation and loss of power over one's own labour**.



What is alienation?

- Alienation** is one of the most widely discussed socio-economic concepts that was developed by Karl Marx based on the work of Friedrich Engel.
- Marx had explained the idea in **Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts** and later elaborated on it in **Capital**.
- As per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, alienation refers to the withdrawal or separation from an object or position of former attachment.
- Marx** defined alienation as a **feeling of separation from one's labour and the loss of power over it**.

What are the different forms of alienation?

- Marx** classified alienation into four different forms.
- Factory workers are required to work long hours in order to produce high-end products that they cannot afford nor have ownership or control over. The goods are produced purely for exchange value and made for the capitalist class.
- Therefore, **alienation from the product of labour** is the first type of alienation.
- Workers are unaware of the products they are involved in producing due to the highly fragmented nature of the modern manufacturing process.
- The second form is **alienation from the labour process**. Modern workers put in long hours performing monotonous activities in poor working conditions for meagre pay. The more the employees produce, the more productive power is available for ownership and control by others.
- While employment provides the workers with a means of subsistence, the majority of the labour is spent reproducing the means of production for the owners.

- The value of labour reduces with an increase in production and does not allow the labourer to develop his mental and physical energies. Thus his work becomes imposed instead of voluntary.
- According to Marx, the repetitive nature of work causes man to lose what he refers to as "**species-being**," or what distinguishes man from other species through his productive activity making him more machine than human. Workers gradually become more competitive to preserve their employment.
- This is the third form of alienation i.e **alienation from humanity**.
- Harsh working circumstances in modern industries have led to a large number of worker suicides and attempted suicides. The workplaces have changed into settings inhabited by strangers from different linguistic, cultural, geographical, and other backgrounds.
- This forms the fourth type of alienation identified by Marx — **alienation from society**.
- In this manner, the labourers are separated from the product, process, themselves and their abilities.

What are other perspectives on alienation?

- Authors, such as **Krahn** and **Lowe**, have defined **alienation in a social-psychological sense to mean social isolation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement**.
- These types of alienation have been linked to organisational structures and bureaucracy, a lack of ownership, social disarray, poor management, or technology.
- Some theories define alienation as a **loss of control, a lack of significance**, and the **challenge of expressing oneself** at work.
- Some authors have stated that assembly line workers are the most alienated, whereas those who are doctors, teachers, or other professionals are the least alienated.
- According to **Hagedorn**, organisational settings where individuals have autonomy, meaning, and opportunities for self-fulfilment in their roles, have the lowest levels of alienation.
- The **remedy for this form of alienation**, which is significantly distinct from Marx's is to **make work meaningful**. This is a more **reformist viewpoint**, whereas Marx believed that private property should be abolished in order to reform social and economic institutions.
- The term "alienation" is occasionally employed in a political context, with the disaffection with political parties or policies being explained as occurring due to the alienation of the electorate.

What are the criticisms of Alienation?

- Modern thinkers have asserted that Marx had not considered the effects of and method for eradicating alienation. So far, the recommended solution of **Communism** has not emerged and is improbable in the future.
- Since Marx first proposed his views, living and working situations have altered significantly. There are labour regulations in force today, and because of the segregation of labour, different sections of society deal with the impacts of labour in different ways.
- Marxism is also frequently criticised for focusing solely on class as **Marx only recognised the exchange of labour and private property as the source of alienation**. However, social relationships like ethnicity, race, location, caste, and gender that are not directly related to production may also cause similar emotions of alienation.
- According to **Ricoeur**, the term alienation has lost some of its analytical and scientific rigour because it is weighted with meanings and frequently used subjectively.

- The Marxist model has come under criticism from **Althusser** for its **essentialism**. Marx's earlier texts and his later texts differed epistemologically, according to Althusser who also said that Marx's concept of alienation was immature and unreliable since it disregarded social ties.
- It suffered from paternalism and assumed that there was a larger human good that may take precedence over people's individual experiences and preferences. Although alienation is no longer a popular topic in social and political philosophy, it is still discussed and criticised from a modern perspective.

PM's Comment On BIMARU States

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: BIMARU States

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation, Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context:

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi used the term "**BIMARU**" to describe the states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and draw attention to the lack of development in terms of health, education and economic growth.



What are BIMARU States?

- BIMARU** is an acronym that was used to refer to the four north Indian states of **Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh**.
- BIMARU meant **sickly** in Hindi and was used to refer to the slow rate of growth in terms of the **economy, healthcare, education and other socio-economic characteristics**.
- The term was coined by demographer **Anand Bose** when the states were not separate political entities at that point, in a paper presented to former PM of India Rajiv Gandhi.
- According to Mr Bose, the term was meant to describe the **demographic crisis** faced by the four states. He claimed that these four states displayed high population growth rates which would offset the gains made by the nation in family planning and population control.
- This would also delay the achievement of family planning goals including the **replacement level fertility rates**.
- Unfortunately, the States are still BIMARU even after 75 years of independence have passed.

BIMARU states in Population

- The BIMARU states accounted for 41% of India's population in 2001 and are projected to account for 43.5% of the population in 2026.

- The share of the BIMARU states in the absolute growth in India's population between 2001-26 will be around 50.4 per cent while the southern states will only account for 12.6 per cent.
- A report published by the **National Commission on Population** formed by the Union Ministry of Health and Welfare titled the **Report of the Technical Group on Population Projection 2020**, has estimated that the BIMARU states would comprise 49.1% of the increase in population between 2011 and 2036.
- Population determines **delimitation** and electoral requirements. However, the process has been frozen at 1971 levels to allow states to meet family planning targets.
- Southern states such as Tamil Nadu have continuously protested against the division of seats and devolution of funds on a population basis as unfair to them.
- They have claimed that the implementation of family planning strategies has only been implemented properly by the southern states but they are being punished for doing so.

Other Statistics

- Literacy:** According to the **2011 Census**, literacy rates are 63.8% in Bihar, 67.1% in Rajasthan, 70.6% in Madhya Pradesh and 71.7% in Uttar Pradesh against a national average of 74.04%.
 - According to **NFHS-5**, literacy rates are 70.9% in Bihar, 69.7% in Rajasthan, 73.7% in Madhya Pradesh and 73% in Uttar Pradesh against a national average of 77.7%.
- Sex Ratio:** These states are among the larger states with the lowest sex ratio in India.
 - According to the **2011 Census**, the sex ratio is 918 in Bihar, 928 in Rajasthan, 931 in Madhya Pradesh, and 912 in Uttar Pradesh versus the all-India average of 943 per 1,00,000.
- Birth Rate:** Birth Rate refers to the number of live births per thousand population per year.
 - Bihar had a birth rate of 26.8, Rajasthan had 24.3, Madhya Pradesh had 25.1, and Uttar Pradesh had 26.2 according to the **Census 2011**.
- Death Rate:** Death Rates refer to the number of deaths per thousand population in a year.
 - According to the **Niti Aayog**, the death rates in 2016 were 6.0 in Bihar, 6.1 in Rajasthan, 7.1 in Madhya Pradesh and 6.9 in Uttar Pradesh.
- Employment:** According to **CMIE** Data for September 2022, unemployment rates were 11.4% in Bihar, 23.8% in Rajasthan, 0.69% in Madhya Pradesh, and 4% in Uttar Pradesh.
- A 2015 study by IIM Ahmedabad on rural government hospitals in the BIMARU states identified that the **rural government hospitals per million population** in Bihar (17.83), Madhya Pradesh (7.53) and Uttar Pradesh (3.91) were below the national average (20.74). Rajasthan exceeded the national average with a score of 61.19.
- The 2019-20 **Health Index Round IV** conducted by the **Niti Aayog** ranked Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh respectively at the last four positions among India's larger states..

What are the reasons for the continued BIMARU status?

- Size:** The states are among India's largest states and involve significant administrative concerns.
- Security:** These states lie in close proximity and suffer from cross-border movement, violence and trafficking.
- Historical:** These states have witnessed discrimination over the course of history and have not benefited from most national programmes, as other states have gained.

- **Political:** Corruption and conflict between the states themselves, as well as the centre have compromised the development of the region.

Conclusion

- The BIMARU tag has been used to politically criticize the parties in government in these states.
- Governments have been working to improve the conditions in these states through funded missions like the **National Rural Health Mission**.
- Similar acronyms have been evolved to describe the collective characteristics of some states like **BIMAROU**, which describes the four BIMARU states and Odisha.

Who Is Responsible For Healthcare In India: The Government Or The Individual?

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Health

Prepp Mains Booster: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Context:

- Recently, the **CSDS-Lokniti Health Survey** results indicated that around 80% of the Indian population believed that providing **healthcare services was the government's responsibility**.
- People desired better and more government healthcare facilities as well as financial aid despite the presence of a large network of private hospitals in the country.



What is the CSDS-Lokniti Health Survey?

- The Survey was conducted by the Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in collaboration with the King's India Institute, Royal Holloway (University of London) and the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP).
- It was funded by the British Academy and polled citizens across five states, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
- The five states were chosen on account of the range of overall health outcomes, political regimes and mix of public and private health facilities.
- The Survey was conducted in a face-face manner to assess people's opinions about India's healthcare system and the goal of **universal health coverage**.

What are the major findings of the Survey?

- According to the survey results, a majority of people in India (eight in ten) believe the **government was responsible for providing healthcare services**.

- Only around one in every ten voters believed that healthcare was a private matter and best left to be handled by the individuals themselves.
- 96% of the people surveyed in Rajasthan and 93% of those surveyed in Uttar Pradesh stated that the provision of healthcare services was the government's responsibility.
- Around **35% of the respondents said the government had to improve public healthcare facilities** available at government dispensaries and hospitals while **23% said that health insurance should be provided** by the government to enable people to access treatment at private hospitals.

Exploring perceptions on responsibility for healthcare facilities in India

	Government is responsible to provide healthcare facilities	Individuals should look after themselves
Overall	80	13
Bihar	72	21
Gujarat	75	15
Rajasthan	93	2
Tamil Nadu	64	26
Uttar Pradesh	96	3
Visited government hospitals	85	10
Visited private hospitals	82	13
Never visited any hospital	70	23

Note: All figures are in percent. Rest did not give any response

- **One-third of those polled believed that the government should do both**, improve government health facilities and provide health insurance.
- On the topic of improving public health facilities, the survey found that individuals who used public health facilities (44%) were more likely to demand that government public facilities be improved than those who visited private facilities (32%).
- **43% of the respondents from urban areas demanded improvement in government healthcare facilities** while only **32% from rural areas** did so.
- On government-offered health insurance, **28% of those who visited private health facilities wanted the government to provide it compared to 18% of those who visited government health centres**.

Policy priorities	Improve government dispensaries and help people get access to treatment at private hospitals by giving them health insurance	Agree with both
	Overall	37
Bihar	38	22
Gujarat	32	25
Rajasthan	64	11
Tamil Nadu	22	47
Uttar Pradesh	32	50
Visited government hospitals	44	31
Visited private hospitals	32	35
Never visited any hospital	28	33
Rural	32	38
Urban	43	28

Note: All figures are in percent. Rest did not give any response.
Question asked: Many people argue that the Indian government should do more to improve health care. In your view, they should: a. improve government dispensaries and government hospitals or b. Help people get access to treatment at private hospitals by giving them health insurance?

- People in rural areas were found to have expressed an interest in the government providing a **combination of both (38%) versus only 32% for better facilities and 23% for insurance**.

- The Survey also indicated diversity across the states with people in Rajasthan most likely to say the government should improve healthcare facilities (64%) while people in Gujarat were most likely to ask the government to provide insurance to enable access to private facilities (39%).

Conclusion

- The survey was able to conclude that a majority of people in the country believed that healthcare services were the responsibility of the government.
- While most recognized this as the responsibility of the State governments, some believed the Central government to be responsible while a few believed that healthcare should be the **joint responsibility of all levels of government**.
- The poll's voters have expressed a desire for the government to enhance existing facilities and provide new ones while also enabling access to private healthcare through health insurance schemes.

Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability;

Row Over Nagaland DGP: How Are State Police Chiefs Appointed?

Priority: High



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Appointment of Police chief

Prepp Mains Booster: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability;

Context:

- Recently, the **Nagaland government appointed Rupin Sharma as Director General of the state police**, and relieved him of responsibility for the Home Guards and civil defense.
- On January 23, the Supreme Court ordered the Nagaland government to appoint the 1992-batch IPS officer as police chief within a week.
- The order was issued after **Nagaland challenged the Union Public Service Commission's (UPSC)** recommendation of Sharma as the sole candidate for the position.
- DGP appointments** are now made on the basis of the Supreme Court's decision according to police reforms in **Prakash Singh vs Union of India** 17 years ago.

How did this situation arise?

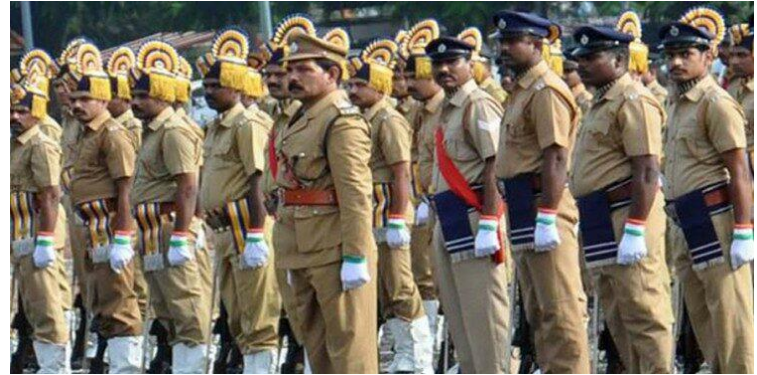
- T John Longkumer, Nagaland's previous DGP, was set to retire in August 2022, but the Union Home Ministry granted him a six-month extension, allowing him to stay in office past the date of his superannuation.
- Following a legal challenge by a student union, the Supreme Court directed the state to send a panel of qualified officers to the UPSC.
- Rupin Sharma and A Sunil Achaya, an IPS officer from the 1991 batch, were on the state list.
- However, because Achaya, an additional secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, refused to return to his parent cadre, the UPSC sent only Sharma's name to Nagaland for consideration. Sharma alone met the criterion of at least 30 years of service.

Objection

- The state objected, claiming that the Supreme Court stated in the **Prakash Singh decision (2006)** that the panel must have at least three officers — and that the UPSC must therefore reduce the

service length criterion to 25 years, so that more officers become eligible.

- However, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the UPSC, stating that this could result in a situation in which a senior officer is forced to work under an officer five years his junior.
- It also stated that the requirement of three officers on the panel was not unbreakable.



What is the Prakash Singh Judgement on police reforms?

- Prakash Singh, who served as DGP of UP Police and Assam Police, among other positions, filed a PIL in the Supreme Court after retiring in 1996, seeking police reforms.
- In a landmark decision issued in September 2006, the Supreme Court ordered all states and union territories to implement police reforms.
- The ruling outlined a series of steps that governments should take to ensure that police officers can do their jobs without fear of political interference.

What did Prakash Singh say?

- DGP appointments are now made on the basis of the Supreme Court's decision on police reforms in Prakash Singh vs Union of India 17 years ago.
- The DGP is to be appointed by the state government from among the three senior most officers who have been empanelled for promotion to that rank by the UPSC "on the basis of their length of service, very good record, and range of experience for heading the police force.
- The DGP should have a fixed tenure of two years, regardless of retirement date. Only in extraordinary circumstances can a DGP be removed.

How to select DGP

The Supreme Court has issued seven directives to be followed by the States when appointing the Director General of Police

- Proposals should be sent to the UPSC, three months before incumbent's retirement
- UPSC to prepare a panel of names as per Prakash Singh judgment. It should try and choose within the zone of consideration who have got two years of service
- States shall appoint

one of the panel's choices

- States shall not appoint DGP on an 'acting basis'
- The selected person can continue despite his date of superannuation, but the extension should



be reasonable

- Appointing persons on their retirement day is not in conformity with the Prakash Singh verdict
- State's and Centre's rules running counter to the SC directions will remain in abeyance

OLD RULE (AS PER PRAKASH SINGH JUDGMENT OF 2006)

DGP shall be selected by the State government from among three senior-most officers of the department empanelled for promotion

The promotion should be based on their length of service, very good record and range of experience for heading the police force

Once the officer is selected for the job, he or she should have a minimum tenure of at least two years irrespective of their date of superannuation

Process of Appointing State Police Chiefs

- Based on the judgment, the UPSC issued its own guidelines on the appointment of state police chiefs in 2009.

- According to these guidelines, states must compile and send to the UPSC a list of eligible officers with at least 30 years of service, as well as their service record, performance appraisal, and vigilance clearance.
- These officers must have the ADG or police chief (and one below) rank specified for that state. The list is supposed to be given to UPSC six months before the incumbent DGP retires.
- An empanelment committee headed by the UPSC chairman, and with the union home secretary, state chief secretary, state DGP, and the chief of a central police organization in it, is supposed to select a panel of three officers "based on merit".
- The committee is supposed to send two names for smaller states that may only have one DGP cadre position.

What is the case of Nagaland?

- In Nagaland, only two officers met the 30-year service requirement. Because one of these officers pulled out, the state received only one officer's name.
- While the UPSC stated that Achaya had withdrawn from the race, the Home Ministry stated in its affidavit that Achaya could not be relieved because he was carrying out an important role at the Centre.
- The consent of an officer is not required by the rules for her posting. In addition, the Centre has the authority to refuse to relieve an officer assigned to a state posting.
- The UPSC also stated that while the **30-year rule could be relaxed to 25 years in states such as Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Uttarakhand, Tripura, and Sikkim** that may not have enough officers meeting this criterion, this must be done with the approval of the Centre.
- The Supreme Court has also stipulated in two orders issued in 2018 and 2019 that the UPSC shall not appoint any officer with less than six months to retirement to the panel.

How strictly is this system observed?

- While the Supreme Court has stated that there should be no temporary or ad hoc appointments of police chiefs, at least four states currently have interim chiefs.
- **In Nagaland**, former DGP Longkumer was forced to resign midway through his extended tenure only after a petition was filed in court.
- **In Delhi**, S N Srivastava, who was appointed commissioner of police in 2020, spent almost his entire tenure in interim status and was replaced by an interim commissioner.
- The Prakash Singh judgment has been used selectively by the Centre. In 2021, it rejected the nominations of Rakesh Asthana and Y C Modi for CBI Director on the grounds that they had less than six months until retirement, but appointed Asthana as Commissioner of Delhi Police a day before his retirement.

State-Centre Friction

- **In 2022:** UP DGP Mukul Goel's departure in May 2022, just 10 months after his appointment, was the result of state-Centre friction. The state was given a list of three officers (in order of seniority), and Goel had to be chosen from it. According to sources, the state believed there were officers on the list who were more deserving. Finally, Goel was fired for "disregarding official work," much to the officer's chagrin.
- **In 2019:** The appointment of IPS officer Dinkar Gupta, who is now the chief of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), as Punjab DGP was challenged in court by those senior to him, one of whom was IPS officer Mohd Mustafa. The UPSC then

defended its decision on the grounds of "merit" over "seniority". It argued that it had prepared the panel judging the officers on five parameters of policing based on "very good service record and range of experience". The state claimed that Gupta performed the best on those indices.

- The Supreme Court rejected Mohd Mustafa's challenge, ruling that "the appellant was found to be inadequate for inclusion in the panel in the range of experience for core policing areas" despite his seniority.

Conclusion

According to police sources, UPSC had no choice in the Rupin Sharma case because only two officers were eligible; however, problems frequently arise because the UPSC has recently relied primarily on seniority to draw up the panel of officers. The Prakash Singh decision made it clear that the UPSC must prepare the panel based on seniority, service record, and range of experience. The Supreme Court has also repeatedly emphasized "merit" as the basis for appointment.

On Sealed Cover Jurisprudence

Priority: High



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary, Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Context:

- Recently, the **Supreme Court** rejected the Union Government's suggestions regarding the formation of a **committee** to enquire into the **Hindenburg Report** on the Adani Group which were offered in a **sealed cover**.
- The regular use of sealed covers has resulted in a loss of **public confidence** in the **judicial system** and the **administration of justice** due to its **opaque** nature.

What is the sealed covers jurisprudence?

- **Sealed cover jurisprudence** is a legal mechanism that refers to the act of submitting confidential or sensitive information to the judicial body, be it a court or tribunal in a sealed cover.
- The cover is meant to be opened and reviewed only by the judges presiding over the case.
- The use of sealed covers began with administrative or service cases where official service records and assessments of officers were provided in sealed covers to prevent damaging the reputation of the officer.
- The courts have made use of this mechanism to receive reports in cases of sexual assault so as to protect the privacy and dignity of the victims.
- However, the government has used the mechanism to submit information ranging from status reports, notes, alleged evidence etc.
- The procedure has been used in high-profile cases such as the Rafale case, Bhima Koregaon case, Ayodhya temple dispute, sexual harassment case against former then CJI Ranjan Gogoi etc.
- Under **Rule 7 of Order XIII, Supreme Court Rules 2013**, the CJ of the Court can through a judicial order direct that any document be kept confidential via a sealed cover if publication is not in public interest.

- **Section 123, the Evidence Act (1872)** has stated that the government must give prior permission to any person desiring to give evidence derived from unpublished official records related to any affairs of the state.
- **Section 123** also protects official unpublished documents relating to state affairs and prohibits the public from being compelled to disclose them.
- It also mentions publication impedes an ongoing investigation as an acceptable reason to seek sealed covers. Eg: Case Diaries

What has the SC said about sealed covers?

- During the hearing on the telecast ban imposed on Media One, the court orally observed that the government should claim specific privilege in one affidavit and specify the reason why the information must be kept secret from the other party.
- The Court said that the burden was on the government to prove how sharing of the information, even with redactions, would be detrimental to **national security and public order**.
- According to the Court, the use of the sealed cover jurisprudence should be limited to a small exception of cases.
- In the hearing on the formation of a committee to enquire into the report on the Adani Group prepared by Hindenburg Research, the Chief Justice of India D.Y Chandrachud had rejected the government's suggestions that were offered in a sealed envelope.



Recent Verdicts by the SC

- The principles of **natural justice** and the **fundamental right of the citizen to know** cannot be taken away by the state in a cavalier, casual or implied manner.
- In the **S.P Velumani verdict of 2022**, the Supreme Court had criticized the Madras High Court for permitting a report to remain sealed despite the state government not claiming any specific privilege.
- The Bihar Government was also recently criticized by the Court for attempting to share information about the **Muzzafarpur shelter case** in a sealed cover.
- In the **Pegasus judgement**, the Court had highlighted that the Union of India must plead and prove why the concerned information must be kept secret and how it would affect national security concerns.
- The state could not be entitled to a free pass by raising the theme of national security nor could the judiciary shy away from considering the merits of the matter.

Concerns

- **Transparency:** The Sealed Cover Jurisprudence limits the **transparency** and **accountability** of the legal process and goes against the idea of an open court which is subject to public scrutiny.
- **Access to Justice:** The lack of information available to both parties results in **inequality** as it compromises one party's ability to seek justice. Opponents are unable to counter or disprove any evidence provided in sealed covers.
- **Risk:** The mechanism can be illegitimately used to suppress information and thereby gain an unfair advantage.
- **Arbitrariness:** The arbitrary nature of the sealed cover due to it being subject to the discretion of a particular judge or bench makes the process **ad-hoc and arbitrary**.

Way forward

- The Sealed Cover Jurisprudence needs to be balanced with **principles of due process, fair trial, and open justice**.
- The use of this legal mechanism must be subject to the circumstances and requirements of the particular case and not be blindly used in an attempt to gain an advantage.
- The judiciary should ensure that parties to whom the relevant information has not been presented are allowed a **fair trial** and the opportunity to seek justice.

No Special Assistance To Poor States Will Increase Regional Disparities

Priority: High



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Inclusive Growth

Prepp Mains Booster: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein, Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Context:

- Recently, the Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the **Finance Commission** had recommended to the Union Government that no state should be accorded **special status** for **financial assistance**.
- The Finance Minister of Bihar, Vihay Kumar Choudhary, had said that the denial of special assistance by the Union to the poor states would increase **regional disparities** across the country.

What has the minister from Bihar said?

- The finance minister of Bihar recently responded to the statement of the Union Finance minister that the **Finance Commission** had recommended that no states be given **special status** for financial assistance.
- Vijay Kumar Choudhary, the Finance Minister of Bihar has claimed that the abolition of special status would harm the poorest states the most and lead to **regional disparities**.
- The Minister also claimed that Bihar was the most deserving of assistance from the Union Government as it was amongst the poorest in the country despite having higher rates of growth than the national rate.
- According to the Niti Aayog, Bihar has made significant progress over the years but required more time to catch up with other Indian states due to its poor base.

What is special status?

- The **special status scheme** was introduced in 1989 to benefit the states that were backward in terms of economy, geographical complexity and poor socio-economic characteristics.
- Assam, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Telangana are the eleven states to have been granted special status so far.
- Special category status was assigned by the Centre to assist in the development of states that faced geographical and socio-economic challenges that had stunted their growth compared to the other states.
- The **Fifth Finance Commission (1969)** had recommended the special category status for some states.
- It was implemented on the basis of the **Gadgil formula** which set the following eligibility criteria for the states to be eligible to receive special status:
 - **Hilly Terrain**
 - **Low Population Density** And/Or Sizeable Share of Tribal Population
 - **Strategic Location** along Borders
 - **Economic and Infrastructural backwardness**
 - **Poor Financial Status** and Performance of State Government
- Benefits received by the States under the Scheme include preferences in central fund distribution, excise duty concessions, 30% of the Centre's gross budget, debt-swapping and debt-relief facilities, tax breaks to attract investment as well as Centrally sponsored Schemes and external aid in a 90% grants 10% loans ratio as compared to the 30:70 for other states.

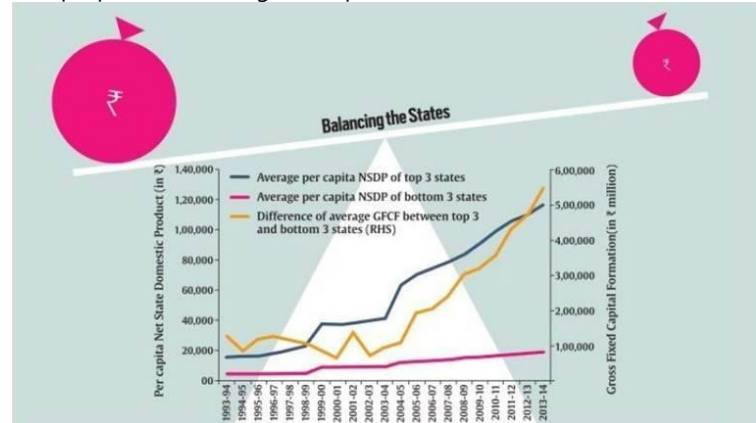


What is regional disparity?

- **Regional disparities** refer to the difference in development and economic conditions between two or more regions.
- Popular indicators of regional disparity include per-capita income, proportion of BPL population, employment percentages in various sectors and infrastructural development etc.
- Regional disparity is usually caused by:
 - **Historical Factors:** Selective development of regions under colonial rule and the absence of land reform and industrial policy immediately after Independence
 - **Geographical Factors:** The high cost of administration and implementation of developmental projects, disaster prone areas, hilly terrain, rivers and dense forests.
 - **Local Factors:** The availability of raw materials, markets, transport infrastructure, easy access to credit and maintenance of law and order.

Conclusion

- India's **geographical and socio-economic diversity** has necessitated location-specific targeted action to guarantee a minimum acceptably high level of wealth across the country.
- The **civil society** of the backward areas should be revitalized and utilized to spur growth.
- Special Status can be a useful tool in achieving socio-economic equality in the country provided the principles behind it reflect proper fiscal management policies.



Finance Commission

- The **Finance Commission** is a Constitutional body responsible for the allocation of revenue resources between the Union Government and the State Governments.
- It has all the **powers of a civil court** according to the **Civil Procedure code 1908**.
- According to the Constitution, the Finance Commission of India must be established by the President in accordance with Article 280 within two years of the beginning of the Indian Constitution and then every five years after that.
- The President may also appoint a Finance Commission before the five-year period is through if he deems it necessary.
- According to **Article 280**, the Commission is responsible for advising the President on various issues such as the allocation of the Union's and the States' respective shares of the net proceeds of taxes, the principles that should guide grants to the States to supplement their Consolidated Fund of India revenues, and any other matter the President may refer to the Commission.
- The Commission will set rules and have the authority that Parliament may grant via legislation.
- According to **Article 281**, the President must present each house of Parliament with the recommendations of the Finance Commission and an explanatory letter.
- The Commission is headed by the **Chairman**, who must have experience in public affairs, and four other members.
- **Eligibility criteria** for members:
 - Qualified to be High Court judges
 - Knowledgeable in finance or government accounts
 - experienced in financial matters and in administration
 - Possess knowledge in economics
- **Functions:** The Commission makes recommendations on:
 - Distribution of net proceeds of divisible taxes between Union and States, and between states
 - Grants in aid to states
 - Steps required to extend Consolidated Fund of a state to boost local government accounts in line with recommendations of State Financial Commission.

- Any matter referred by the President in the interest of sound finance.
- The Basis for sharing the divisible taxes among the Centre and the States.

Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Shinde-Led Faction Gets 'Bow And Arrow' Symbol: How Did Election Commission Decide Who Gets Party Symbol



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Context:

- Recently, the [Election Commission of India \(ECI\)](#) ordered that the Eknath Shinde camp of the Shiv Sena will retain the official name and the 'bow and arrow' symbol of the party.
- Meanwhile, the Uddhav Thackeray-led faction will retain the interim party name Shiv Sena UBT and the flaming torch as its poll symbol.

Background: The election symbol dispute started due to a split in the party when 46 MLAs rebelled against the party leadership. They were unhappy with the decision of the party's leader Uddhav Thackeray to form a government with NCP and also the improper allocation of resources to MLAs. These MLAs were unhappy with the government's inaction and failure to connect with the masses.

What Are Election Symbols (Reservation And Allotment) Order, 1968?

- The **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968** is a legal framework established by the Government of India that **governs the allotment of election symbols to political parties and independent candidates during elections.**
- The order is based on the provisions of the [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#), which sets out the rules and regulations governing the conduct of elections in India.
- Under the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, of 1968, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for reserving and allotting election symbols to political parties and independent candidates.
- The order establishes a framework for the allotment of symbols, taking into account the strength of the party or candidate, the number of seats contested, and other factors.
- The order also provides for the reservation of certain symbols for specific categories of political parties or candidates, such as those representing scheduled castes or scheduled tribes.
- These symbols are reserved to ensure that voters are able to easily identify parties or candidates representing these groups.



Recognition of symbols in case of split

- Para 15 of the Symbols Order, 1968 provides a mechanism for resolving disputes over the recognition and allocation of party symbols in the **event of a split within a recognized political party.**
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is empowered to make a decision on which faction should be recognized as the legitimate representative of the party and therefore entitled to the reserved symbol.
- However, in the case of registered but unrecognized parties, the ECI usually advises the factions to resolve their differences internally or to approach the court for a resolution.
- It is also worth noting that the ECI's decision under Para 15 is **binding on all factions.**
- The first case to be decided under the **1968 Order was the first split in the Indian National Congress in 1969.**
- After the party old guard led by K Kamaraj, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, S Nijalingappa, and Atulya Ghosh, known as the Syndicate, expelled Indira Gandhi from the Congress, the party split into the **"old" Congress (O) led by Nijalingappa and the "new" Congress (J) led by Indira.**
- The "old" Congress retained the party symbol of a pair of bullocks carrying a yoke; the breakaway faction was given the symbol of a cow with its calf.

Before 1968

- Before the introduction of the Symbols Order, 1968, the Election Commission of India (ECI) issued notifications and executive orders under the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to regulate the allocation of party symbols during elections.
- The most high-profile split of a political party before 1968 was that of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1964.
- After the split, a breakaway faction approached the ECI seeking recognition as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M).
- The breakaway group provided a list of MPs and MLAs from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and West Bengal who supported them.
- The ECI recognized the faction as the CPI(M) after it found that the **votes secured by the MPs and MLAs supporting the breakaway group added up to more than four percent in the three states.**
- This decision allowed the CPI(M) to contest the **1965 West Bengal assembly elections under its new name and symbol.**

- The split in the CPI had a significant impact on the political landscape of India, particularly in the states of Kerala and West Bengal, where the CPI(M) emerged as a major political force.

What happens to the group that doesn't get the parent party's symbol?

- Under the current rules, if a splinter group doesn't get the parent party's symbol, it can still register as a separate political party. However, it can only claim national or state party status on the basis of its performance in the subsequent state or central elections after registration.
- In other words, the splinter group has to start from scratch and build its own electoral base.
- It can't claim the legacy or history of the parent party or its earlier performance in elections.
- This means that the group has to work hard to establish itself as a separate political entity and gain the trust and support of voters on its own merit.

What Is A 'Corrupt Act' According To The Representation Of People Act, 1951?

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: RPA 1951

Prepp Mains Booster: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court observed that no one in India votes for a candidate based on their educational qualifications and, thus providing false information about an electoral candidate's qualifications cannot be considered a "corrupt practice" under Sections 123 (2) and Section 123 (4) of the [Representation of People's Act, 1951](#).



What is the issue?

- Anugrah Narayan Singh v. Harsh Vardhan Bajpayee case**, a petition was filed by former Congress MLA Anugrah Narayan Singh challenging the election of BJP MLA Harsh Vardhan Bajpayee as "null and void" under Section 123(2) and 123(4) of the Representation of People Act.
- The petition alleged that Bajpayee committed a "corrupt practice" by not disclosing his liabilities and correct educational qualifications in his affidavit of nomination and by publishing a false statement of fact about his character and conduct to influence the outcome of his election.

- However, the Allahabad High Court dismissed the petition, stating that the "inaccuracy or concealment regarding educational qualification of the respondent did not amount to unduly influencing the voters" and that the defect in disclosure was not of a substantial character that could have materially prejudiced the prospects of the election.
- The case was subsequently taken to the Supreme Court by Anugrah Narayan Singh, but the bench of Justices K.M. Joseph and BV Nagarathna refused to interfere with the High Court's order of dismissal.
- As a result, the election of Harsh Vardhan Bajpayee as a BJP MLA was upheld.

What are 'corrupt practices' under the RPA, 1951?

- Section 123 of the Act 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) 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.
- Moreover, convincing a candidate or an elector that they will become "an object of divine displeasure or spiritual censure" will also be considered an interference "with the free exercise of the electoral right of such candidate or elector."
- Section 123 (4) extends the ambit of "corrupt practices" to the intentional **publication of false statements** which can prejudice the outcome of the candidate's election.
- Any elected representative who is convicted of these offences, found guilty of corrupt practices, fails to declare election expenses, or has an interest in government contracts or works can be disqualified from their position.

What practices has the court held as corrupt practices in the past?

- In the case of '**Jamuna Prasad Mukhariya v. Lacchi Ram**' in 1955, the Supreme Court upheld the **constitutional validity of Section 123 (3)** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which prohibits the seeking of votes in the name of **religion, race, caste, community, or language**.
- However, in the 1994 case of '**SR Bommai v. Union of India**', the court held that religion cannot be mixed with any secular activity of the state, and the encroachment of religion into such activities is strictly prohibited, including in election campaigning.
- In the **Abhiram Singh v. C.D. Commachen**, a seven-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court held in 2017 that an election will be invalidated if votes are solicited in the name of a candidate's religion, race, caste, community, or language in **violation of Section 123 (3)**, which forbids the practice.
- However, the Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud, and Justices UU Lalit and AK Goel stated in the dissenting opinion that to hold that a person who seeks to run for office is forbidden from speaking of the legitimate concerns of citizens that the injustices faced by them on the basis of traits having an origin in religion,

race, caste, community, or language would be remedied is to reduce democracy to an abstraction.

- More recently, in 2022, the top court ordered a three-judge bench to examine requests for reconsidering its 2013 decision in **S. Subramaniam Balaji v. State of Tamil Nadu**, where the court found that freebie promises cannot be characterized as a corrupt practice. However, the matter is still yet to be decided.

Government Policies and Interventions

Children Have The Right To Protect Their Genetic Data

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Government Policies and Interventions

Context:

- Recently, the **Supreme Court ruled that children cannot be subjected to DNA tests in every case** between warring parents as a quick way to establish proof of infidelity.
- **Children have the right not to have their legitimacy called into question in court on impractical grounds.**
- This is an essential feature of the **right to privacy.**



What is the Right to Privacy?

- Right to privacy means the right of a person to be free from intrusion into matters of a personal nature.
- The right to privacy is the ability to maintain a domain around us that includes all of the things that are a part of us, such as our body, home, property, thoughts, feelings, secrets, and identity.
- The right to privacy has been recognised as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court of India, which also expanded the scope of Article 21.

What is the current issue?

- Recently, Justice Nagarathna, judge of the Supreme Court of India **drew attention to the rights to privacy, autonomy, and identity recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.**
- The Convention recognizes the power that individuals, including children, have over their own personal boundaries and the means by which they define who they are in relation to others.
- It was stated that children should not be denied the right to influence and comprehend their sense of self simply because they are children.
- The judgment stated that "a child should not be lost in its search for paternity," emphasizing that details of parentage are an attribute of a child's identity.

- The court emphasized the psychological trauma that a child would be forced to endure if his or her legitimacy was called into question through DNA tests.
- The plight of a child whose paternity, and thus his legitimacy, is called into question is a vortex of confusion that can be confounded if courts are not cautious and responsible enough to exercise discretion in the most judicious and cautious manner.
- It was observed that not knowing who one's father is causes mental trauma in a child.

Reason for the Judgement

- The decision came in response to a petition filed by a man who questioned the paternity of his second child while accusing his wife of having an adulterous relationship.
- On the facts of the case, the Supreme Court concluded that no adverse inference could be drawn from the mother's refusal to submit the child to a paternity test.

What are the concerns?

- **Privacy:** Genetic information is personal and intimate, and it reveals a person's very essence. The information goes to the very heart of who she or he is, emphasizing that "a child's genetic information is part of his fundamental right to privacy." Children have the right not to have their legitimacy called into question in court on frivolous grounds. This is an essential feature of the right to privacy.
- **Children as material objects:** Courts must therefore recognize that children should not be treated as material objects and subjected to forensic/DNA testing, especially if they are not parties to the divorce proceeding.
- **Focal Point of conflict:** It was stated that it is critical that children do not become the focal point of the conflict between spouses.
- **Dignity and reputation of mother:** Furthermore, mechanical orders allowing DNA tests would harm the mother's reputation and dignity.
- Only in extreme cases and in the interest of justice should family courts order a DNA test.

DNA Test

- Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is an organic molecule with a complex molecular structure.
- The strands of a DNA molecule are composed of a long chain of monomer nucleotides. It has a double helix structure.
- It is required for the transmission of genetic characteristics from one generation to the next.
- A genealogical DNA test is a DNA-based genetic test used in genetic genealogy that looks at specific locations of a person's genome to find or verify ancestral genealogical relationships, or to estimate ethnic mixture of an individual.
- Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) tests exist in a gray area in the pursuit of justice, vacillating between the risks of self-incrimination and invasion of individual privacy and the 'eminent need' to unearth the truth, whether as evidence in a criminal case, a claim of marital infidelity, or proving paternity.

Right to Privacy in India

- The right to privacy is safeguarded as an essential aspect of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as part of the freedoms provided by Part III of the Constitution.
- The privacy granted by Article 21 might take numerous forms. It comprises the following:
 - the right to physical autonomy

- the right to informational privacy,
- the right to privacy of choice.
- The right to privacy is fundamental to the safeguarding of human dignity and serves as the foundation of every democratic society.
- Other rights, such as freedom of expression, information, and association, are likewise supported and strengthened.
- The Right to Privacy has importance for freedom of thought and expression as well, because any unwarranted intrusion into an individual's privacy can both directly and indirectly hinder the free growth and interchange of ideas.
- To elevate human life above simply survival and existence, or animal existence, the right to privacy is fundamental, leading to the Right to Privacy being an inherent aspect of Article 21.

Way Forward

- Children should be taught about their privacy rights and how to protect their genetic data.
- Children have a fundamental right to privacy, which includes the protection of their personal data.
- As technology advances and more information is collected and shared online, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that this right is protected.
- There is a clear need for the development of appropriate legislation and policy frameworks that balance children's privacy rights.

Home Ministry Asks States To Relieve Ips Officers For Central Deputation



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Governance

Prepp Mains Booster: Government Policies and Interventions; Role of civil services in a democracy

Context:

- Recently, the **Union Home Ministry has requested that the states nominate an adequate number of Indian Police Service (IPS) officers for Central deputation.**
- The Ministry expressed concern that state governments were either withdrawing the names of selected officers or not relieving them for a position with the Central government.
- As of February 6, there were 220 vacancies for IPS officers ranging from Superintendent of Police (SP) to Director-General of Police in 17 Central organizations including the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Central Armed Police Forces, and the Intelligence Bureau.
- The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) recruits IPS officers on the Centre's behalf, and their services are assigned to various State cadres.
- According to regulations, at least **40% of senior duty posts in each State cadre are designated as Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) posts.** For Central deputation, officers must also agree.

What is the issue?

- The CDR of each IPS cadre determines the number of officers who can be deputed to the Government of India.
- It has been observed that the offer list of some States does not contain a sufficient number of names in relation to CDR utilization.
- According to the Home Ministry, while a few IPS officers had submitted their applications/nominations on the online portal for

approval of the competent authority, they were not being processed or forwarded by the cadre controlling authority or the State governments.

Central Deputation Reserve (CDR)

- The state government must prescribe the number of officers who are to be deputed to the Central Deputation Reserve.
- Every State cadre of the service has a Central deputation quota, which is used by the service to provide for trained and experienced members to serve the Centre.

Deputation of Cadre Officers

- As per the rule a cadre officer may be deputed for service under the Government, or under a company, association, or body of individuals wholly or substantially owned or controlled by the Central Government.

Amendment in IPS Tenure Policy

- The Home Ministry amended the IPS tenure policy in February 2022, removing the mandatory requirement of empanelment of IPS officers at the **Deputy Inspector-General (DIG)** level.
- Officers with at least 14 years of experience will be eligible for appointment at the level of DIG by the Centre.
- The **Central Police Establishment Board (CPEB)**, chaired by the Union Home Secretary, evaluates officers' suitability for Central deputation.
- The names of officers up to the rank of Inspector-General of Police are then forwarded to the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), which is chaired by the Prime Minister, for approval.



Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs

Why don't states relieve officers?

- States don't relieve officers because there is a significant shortage of officers in the states as well.
- During the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime, the size of IPS batches and other government staff was reduced to save money, despite the fact that significant vacancies existed at the time.
- IPS batches were reduced from 80-90 officers each to 35-40 officers (in 1999-2002, the average was 36).
- While the number of districts in some states more than doubled in a decade or so, the availability of officers was only one-third.
- There were more than 1,600 vacancies in 2009, despite a sanctioned strength of over 4,000 IPS officers.
- During the Manmohan Singh regime, the government began accepting IPS batches as large as 150.
- The government has continued to increase the size of batches, with the 2020 Civil Services Exams admitting 200 IPS officers.
- According to the MHA, there were 908 vacancies on January 1, 2020, against a sanctioned strength of 4,982.

Way Forward

- States must sponsor an adequate number of officers to fill IPS officer positions in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)/Central Police Organizations (CPOs).
- The State governments should make a concerted effort to forward the names of officers for deputation under the Government of India so that every eligible officer gets an opportunity to serve at the Centre at least once at the middle level and again at the senior level.

Government Asks All States, Uts To Make 6 Years Minimum Age For Class 1 Admission

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: NEP

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, and Human Resources.

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Ministry of Education has ordered all states and union territories to set the minimum age for admission into Class 1 as six years old.
- The foundational stage, as defined by the new National Education Policy (NEP), consists of five years of learning for all children (between the ages of 3 and 8), including three years of preschool instruction and then Classes 1 and 2.



Foundational stage

- The foundational stage, as defined by the new National Education Policy (NEP), consists of five years of learning for all children (between the ages of 3 and 8), including three years of preschool instruction and then Classes 1 and 2.
- The Centre is reminding states to bring early childhood care and education under the formal schooling system, according to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes improving foundational learning.
- Before the NEP 2020, children aged 3 to 6 years were not covered under the 10+2 structure of formal schooling.
- Under the new structure, children aged 3 to 8 years come under the foundational section, which includes three years of pre-school and two years of primary school, followed by preparatory, middle, and secondary sections in a 5+3+3+4 formula. The NEP aims to

promote better overall learning, development, and well-being through a strong base of early learning from age 3.

Reason Behind the Move

- The Department of School Education and Literacy has directed all States and Union Territories to **align their age of admission with the policy and provide admission to Grade-I at the age of 6+ years.**
- This move aims to **ensure that children receive at least three years of quality preschool education** before starting formal schooling.
- The Education Ministry has urged the States to ensure accessibility to preschool education for all children, whether they are studying in **anganwadis, government-run or aided preschools, or those operated by NGOs or private players.**
- According to a response provided by the Centre in the Lok Sabha in March 2022, there are significant variations in the age criteria followed by States, with some allowing Class 1 admission for children who have not completed six years.
- In five States and Union Territories, namely Assam, Gujarat, Puducherry, Telangana, and Ladakh, children who have turned five can get admitted to Class 1.
- In Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, and Kerala, the minimum age is five plus.
- The Education Ministry's directive seeks to bring uniformity in the age of admission across the country and **ensure that children receive quality preschool education before starting formal schooling.**

Challenges

- A uniform cut-off date should be used to calculate a child's age.
- Currently, **different states in India have different cut-off dates** to determine whether a child is old enough to be admitted to Grade-I.
- For instance, **Delhi** considers **April 1** in the year of admission as the cut-off date, while other states use January 1 or July 1.
- The **Kendriya Vidyalayas**, which are run by the Central government, also use **July 1 as their cut-off date.**
- Last academic year, the Kendriya Vidyalayas implemented the "6+" rule, which mandates that children should be at least six years old at the time of admission to Grade-I.
- However, a group of parents challenged the order in the Supreme Court, arguing that it was arbitrary and violated their rights.
- The Supreme Court dismissed their petition, stating that the decision was in line with the National Education Policy (NEP).

What is National Education Policy (NEP)?

- The National Education Policy (NEP) is a comprehensive framework that outlines the vision and policy priorities for education in India.
- The NEP was first introduced in 1968 and was last revised in 2020 after a gap of 34 years.
- The new NEP aims to transform the education system in India by focusing on several key areas, such as promoting interdisciplinary and holistic education, expanding access to quality education, and encouraging the use of technology in teaching and learning.
- The NEP 2020 includes several important policy changes, such as introducing a new 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure for school education, which replaces the existing 10+2 system.

- It also emphasizes the importance of early childhood education and vocational training, promotes the use of technology in teaching, and seeks to increase funding for education.
- The NEP 2020 is expected to have a significant impact on the education system in India and is being implemented by both the Central and State governments.

India's R&D Estimates Are An Incomplete Picture



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Budget, R&D

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

Context:

- Reji K. Joseph, an Associate Professor at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), New Delhi has written an article titled '*India's R&D estimates are an incomplete picture*' published in The Hindu on 24th February.
- He opines that the R&D ecosystem in India needs short- and medium-term measures to ensure a true picture of the ecosystem



Status of R&D expenditure in India

- The Research and Development expenditure- GDP ratio is 0.7% in India which is very low when compared to major economies and very low compared to the Global average of 1.8 %.
- The corporate sector accounts for about 2/3rd of Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) in leading economies compared to just 37% in India.
- There is evidence, however, suggesting that India's GERD data are an underestimate.
- **Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD)** includes expenditure on research and development by business enterprises, higher education institutions, as well as government and private non-profit organizations.
- A 2022 info brief of the National Science Foundation (NSF) of the United States on Foreign R&D by US-based MNCs shows a spend of \$ 9.5 billion (₹649.7 billion) on R&D in India in 2018, which increased to \$9.8 billion (₹690.2 billion) in 2019.
- There are MNCs from other leading economies also spending on R&D in India.
- However, the latest Research and Development Statistics, published by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in 2020 has provided an estimate of ₹60.9 billion in R&D spending in

2017-18 by foreign MNCs, which is only about 10% of what U.S. firms have reported having spent in India on R&D.

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What are the reasons behind Underestimation?

- The challenges in collecting data on R&D expenditure by the private corporate sector in India are primarily due to the method used for the identification of R&D-performing firms.
- The current system relies on the DSIR list of recognized R&D units and the Prowess database of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd. to identify R&D-performing firms.
- However, this method may not capture all the R&D-performing firms for two key reasons.
- **Non registration:** Firstly, firms that do not find government incentives attractive or are sensitive about sharing critical information with the DSIR may not register themselves with the DSIR.
- This could lead to an underestimation of R&D expenditure by the private corporate sector.
- A study at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development that looked at 298 firms receiving foreign investment for R&D between 2004-16 showed that only 11% had been registered with DSIR.
- On the other hand, The Prowess database covers only 3.5 % of currently active registered R&D in India.
- For example, SigTuple Technologies, which is a leading start-up in India focusing on artificial intelligence-based HealthTech and has filed 19 patents as in 2021, is unlisted in both databases.
- The National Science and Technology Management Information System (NSTMIS) survey is the **primary source of R&D statistics for India**.
- Data is gathered from secondary sources, such as **annual reports and Prowess**, for those companies that choose not to reply to the poll.
- Only if businesses reveal their R&D expenditures will this strategy be effective. This method will work only if firms disclose their R&D spending.
- **Estimation of Services:** Secondly, it may be difficult for R&D firms in services such as software and R&D services to meet the requirement of having separate infrastructure for R&D to distinguish it from their usual business.
- This could result in many of the R&D-performing enterprises in new technology areas falling under the services category, which may not be captured in the current system.

Way forward

- In order to truly reflect the R&D ecosystem short-term and medium-term measures are needed.
- **Short term:** the NSTMIS should use the patents granted data, both in India and the U.S., in addition to its current method to identify R&D-performing enterprises.
- R&D statistics shouldn't be limited to survey responses, even if surveys can gather a lot more information about innovation-related activities.
- Instead, from the **mandatory disclosures** that the firms must provide to the MCA, annual R&D estimates can be generated.

- **Technologies can be utilized to assure compliance and accurate reporting**, as in the case of updated **income-tax return forms** where multiple portions are linked to one another.
- The proper disclosure of information to regulatory bodies, including statistics on R&D expenditures, should also be made a mandatory part of the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) rating of businesses.

SC Asks Govt What It Has Done To End Manual Scavenging



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Manual Scavenging

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; Issues Related to SCs & STs

Context:

- Recently, the **Supreme Court has ordered the government to record, within six weeks, the steps it has taken to implement its nearly 10-year-old judgment to end manual scavenging** and protect future generations from the "inhuman practice."
- It has also directed **making entry into sewers without safety gear a crime** even in emergency situations.
- It was taken into judicial notice of the fact that **manual scavenging and deaths of people trapped in flooded sewer lines remain a reality.**



What is Manual Scavenging?

- The removal of human excrement from the public streets and dry latrines, as well as cleaning septic tanks, gutters, and sewers, is defined as manual scavenging.
- These sanitation workers, known as "manual scavengers," rarely wear personal protective equipment. The work is regarded as a dehumanizing practice.

News Summary

- A Bench led by Justice S. Ravindra Bhat recently took judicial notice of the fact that manual scavenging and deaths of people trapped in flooded sewer lines remain a reality, despite the fact that the practice was prohibited with the introduction of the **Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993** and the **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**.
- In its decision in **Safai Karamchari Andolan vs. Union of India**, the Supreme Court reinforced the prohibition and directed the

rehabilitation of people employed as manual scavengers, both traditionally and otherwise.

- The court ordered their rehabilitation based on the principles of justice and transformation.
- People who have been released from manual scavenging should not have to jump through hoops to receive what is their legal right.
- The Social Justice Ministry must submit its report with the information within six weeks.

Safai Karamchari Andolan vs. Union of India

- The Court issued a slew of guidelines for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers in the Safai Karamchari Andolan judgment, including cash assistance scholarship for their children, allotment of residential plots, training in livelihood skills and monthly stipends, concessional loans, etc.
- The judgment also prescribed the minimum compensation in cases of sewer deaths and directed the railways to end manual scavenging on tracks.

Causes of Manual Scavenging's Prevalence

- **Outsourcing Issues:** Local bodies many times outsource sewer cleaning tasks to private contractors. However, many of them are fly-by-night operators that do not maintain proper rolls of sanitation workers. These contractors have denied any association with the deceased in case after case of workers being asphyxiated to death.
- **Social Issues:** The practice is driven by caste, class, and income divides. It is tied to India's caste system, with so-called lower castes expected to perform this job. The employment of manual scavengers and the construction of dry latrines was banned in India in 1993 (The Employment of Manual Scavengers and the Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993), but the stigma and discrimination associated with it persist.

Government Measure to combat Manual Scavenging

- **Employment of Manual Scavengers and the Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993:** It was drafted by the Ministry of Urban Development under the Narasimha Rao government, was passed by Parliament in 1993 after six states passed resolutions requesting the Central Government to frame a law. The act punishes the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry (non-flush) latrines with up to a year in prison and/or a Rs 2,000 fine.
- **Prohibition of Manual Scavenger Employment and Rehabilitation Act, 2013:** This Act, which supersedes the 1993 Act, goes beyond prohibitions on dry latrines by outlawing all manual excrement cleaning of insanitary latrines, open drains, or pits.
- **Building and Maintenance of Insanitary Latrines Act, 2013:** It outlaws the building or maintenance of insanitary toilets, as well as the hiring of anybody for manual scavenging and the hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks. As reparation for historical injustice and indignity, it also imposes a constitutional obligation to provide alternative jobs and other assistance to manual scavenging communities.
- **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (Amendment) Bill, 2020:** It recommends completely mechanized sewer cleaning, introducing 'on-site' protection, and providing compensation to manual scavengers in the case of sewer deaths. It will be an amendment to the 2013

Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Rehabilitation Act.

- **Prevention of Atrocities Act:** It became an integrated guard for sanitation workers in 1989, with more than 90% of manual scavengers belonging to the Scheduled Caste. This constituted a significant landmark to free manual scavengers from designated traditional occupations.
- **Safai Mitra Suraksha Challenge:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched it on World Toilet Day (19th November) in 2020. The government issued this "challenge" to all states to mechanize sewer cleaning by April 2021 — if any human needs to enter a sewer line in an unavoidable emergency, proper gear and oxygen tanks must be provided.
- **'Swachhta Abhiyan App':** It was developed to identify and geotag the data about insanitary latrines and manual scavengers so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and the manual scavengers can be rehabilitated to provide them with the dignity of life. In 2014, the Supreme Court ordered the government to identify all those who died in sewage work since 1993 and compensate their families with Rs. 10 lakh each.

Survey Of India To Remain The Arbiter Of Maps That Deal With State Borders And National Boundaries



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Survey of India

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Context:

- Recently, Sunil Kumar, Surveyor General of India and Joint Secretary, of the Ministry of Science and Technology said that the Survey of India (Sol) will no longer have a monopoly on making high-resolution maps. It will remain the arbiter of maps that deal with State borders and national boundaries.
- They will also maintain and provide reference stations that are vital to cartographers to prepare higher-resolution maps.



Survey of India

National Geospatial Policy of India

- The National Geospatial Policy of India, which enables any private organisation to produce high-resolution maps, was officially released by the Center in December 2022.
- Prior to this, the Survey of India made a number of categories of maps that, while accessible for small fees, **were quite difficult to access.**

- Moreover, "civilian purposes" maps were **less comprehensive and coarser than** "defence series maps," which were solely available to the Defence Ministry.
- The Sol will keep up with the continuously operating reference stations (CORS) required to produce precise digital maps.
- A CORS consists of a GPS receiver operating continuously, and a stable antenna for continuously streaming raw data.
- Such reference stations are present all over the globe to monitor the Earth's crust to provide geodetic control, track manmade and natural structures, and facilitate accurate navigation.
- In 2021, the Indian Science Ministry released guidelines that liberalized the **making and access of geospatial services.**
- The geospatial policy sets out goals and targets such as a **high-resolution topographical survey and digital elevation model by 2030.**
- It also lays out a framework to create high-resolution maps of the ocean floor around India, and its assets, and **make "digital twins" or virtual replicas of physical structures.**

Significance

- Minister of Science and Technology said that for a long time, several **departments of the government worked in silos.**
- Digital assets created **were not being effectively used.**
- Now India has freed access and facilitated the **private sector.**
- The implications of the geospatial industry are huge and it's also a little dangerous because anything and anyone can be tracked anywhere, but India should aim to be a leader in this [geospatial] economy

Survey of India

- The survey of India is the National Survey and Mapping Organization of the country.
- It is the oldest Scientific Organisation established in India in 1767.
- It is under the department of Science and Technology.
- It is Headquartered in Dehradun.

India Tops List Of Global Internet Shut-Offs: Report



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Global Internet Shutdown

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions; Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance

Context:

- Recently, a report by Access Now and the KeptlOn Coalition revealed that **India enforced as many as 84 internet shutdowns in 2022.**
- India topped the list of countries that ordered internet shutdowns for the fifth consecutive year.
- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology** had also criticized the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) for the lack of record-keeping, inaction and enforcement of shutdowns without empirical study.

Access Now and KeptlOn Report

- The report titled "**Weapons of control, shields of impunity: Internet shutdowns in 2022**" was released by Access Now and the KeptlOn Coalition.
- The report revealed that India enforced as many as 84 internet shutdowns in 2022 on account of protests, conflicts, school exams and elections.

- India topped the list of countries with internet shutdowns for the fifth successive year according to the report.
- In 2022, Jammu and Kashmir imposed 49 internet shutdowns including 16 consecutive orders for 3-day shutdowns between January and February, the most by any state or UT in the country.
- This was followed by Rajasthan which imposed 12 different shutdowns and West Bengal which imposed shutdowns on seven occasions.
- **Since 2016, India has accounted for 58% of the total number of documented global shutdowns.**
- In its previous report, Access Now and the KeepItOn coalition stated that the authorities had imposed 107 internet shutdowns in 2021.
- 2022 was the first time since 2017 that the number of shutdowns fell below 100. However, the legal challenges against shutdowns, fewer mass protests due to the pandemic and the sustained crackdown on dissent may have increased administrative friction and reduced the incentives for governments to order internet shutdowns.



Rules for Internet shutdowns in India.

- The **Temporary Suspension of Internet Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules 2017** govern internet shutdowns in India.
- The rules framed by the DoT state that temporary suspensions can be imposed for reasons of public safety or emergencies with senior bureaucrats at the Centre and State empowered to authorize shutdowns.
- The Suspension of Internet services in the country is also covered by the **Information Technology Act, 2000, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973 and the Telegraph Act, 1885**
- The Review Committee in the respective states, chaired by the Chief Secretary was empowered to decide the legality of the shutdowns under the 2017 rules.
- Misinformation and rumours have the potential to cause a deterioration in law and order in an area. As a result, governments justify curbing the flow of information through internet shutdowns as necessary to maintain peace in times of crisis

Standing Committee Report

- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology** had expressed concern over the frequent imposition of shutdowns in the country without any empirical study.
- The Department of Telecom was criticized for not maintaining records of incidents and its inaction on the committee's recommendations.

- In its action-taken report that was presented to the Parliament, the Committee recommended that the DoT establish a **clear-cut principle of proportionality** and a procedure for the lifting of internet shutdowns in coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs in order to prevent misuse of the laws.
- The Committee suggested that a centralized database of all internet shutdowns imposed by states could be maintained by the DoT or MHA similar to the one maintained by the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** in the MHA on crimes like communal riots.
- In 2022, the Standing Committee suggested that the term Public Emergency in the Rules be clearly defined to avoid the misuse of the clause.

Supreme Court on Internet Shutdowns

- In the **Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India**, the Supreme Court ruled that Article **19 (1) (a) and 19 (1) (g)** granted constitutional protection on the rights to freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to practice any profession or carry out any trade, business or occupation over the medium of the internet.
- According to the Court, restrictions on fundamental rights should be in consonance with **Articles 19(2) and (6)** of the Constitution and the test of proportionality.

Conclusion

- Software Freedom Law Center, a legal services organization has stated that there have been around 665 internet shutdowns in the country between 2012 and 2022.
- The **United Nations Human Rights Council** had in 2016 condemned the continued imposition of internet shutdowns and reaffirmed the right of all people to protection online.
- Internet shutdowns affect the normal lives of the citizens and restrain their fundamental rights while also adversely impacting the economy with India suffering a loss of \$2.8 billion in 2020 alone due to the shutdowns.

Unpacking The New Set Of E-Waste Rules

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: E-Waste

Prepp Mains Booster: Government Policies and Interventions; Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Context:

- In this article, Manika Malhotra Jain, a Research Associate and Coordinator for the Policy Perspectives Foundation discusses the new set of e-waste rules
- The informal sector, which plays an important role in e-waste management, is not recognized under the new rules.

What is E-Waste?

- E-Waste is an abbreviation for Electronic-Waste, and it refers to old, end-of-life, or discarded electronic appliances. It includes their components, consumables, parts, and spares.
- India's first e-waste clinic for the separation, processing, and disposal of waste from households and commercial units has been established in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

Status of E-Waste in India

- India is the world's third largest generator of e-waste after China and the US, according to the UN Global E-Waste Monitor Report.
- Maharashtra generates the most e-waste among all the Indian states.

- E-waste typically does not feature in the list of municipal solid waste and therefore it is not a direct mandate for the cities to collect, transport, and manage them.
- Only 22.7 per cent of the e-waste out of the total 10,14,961.21 tonnes generated in 2019-20 in India was collected, dismantled, and recycled or disposed of.



E-Waste Rules in India

- In an era of rapid urbanization, digitalisation, and population growth, the increasing problem of e-waste management is a cross-cutting and persistent challenge.
- **The first set of e-waste Rules were announced in 2011** and went into effect in 2012.
- The introduction of **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** was a significant component of the Rules (2011).
- Under EPR compliance, 'producers' are responsible for the safe disposal of electronic and electric products after the consumer discards them.
- **E-waste rules 2016**, which were amended in 2018, were comprehensive and included provisions to promote 'authorisation' and 'product stewardship'.
- Other types of stakeholders, such as 'Producer Responsibility Organizations (PRO),' were also included in these rules.

E-Waste (Management) Rules 2022

- The Ministry of Environment and Forests notified a new set of e-waste rules in November 2022, which will go into effect on April 1, 2023.
- The first main chapter of the E-Waste (Management) Rules 2022 includes the provision of an EPR framework, with the most important requirement being the 'Registration of Stakeholders' (manufacturer, producer, refurbisher and recycler).

What are the challenges?

- The previous rules emphasized seeking authorization from stakeholders, but a lack of transparency and a weak monitoring system resulted in inadequate compliance.
- The majority of refurbishers' or repair shops in Delhi are not authorized by the Central Pollution Control Board of India.
- Many formal recyclers only perform activities up to the pre-processing or segregation stage, then channel e-waste to the informal sector, which is a clear violation of the law.
- A 'digitalized systems approach,' introduced in the new rules (2022), may now address these challenges.
- Standardizing the e-waste value chain through a common digital 'portal' may ensure transparency and is critical to reducing the frequency of 'paper trading' or 'false trail,' i.e., a practice of falsely revealing 100% collection on paper while collecting and/or weighing scrap' to meet targets.

Why is the informal sector left out?

- Two important stages of 'efficient' e-waste recycling are 'component recovery and 'residual disposal.' New rules do not clearly state the requirement for ensuring the 'recovery tangent'.
- The informal sector, which plays a crucial role in e-waste handling, draws no recognition in the new rules
- The informal sector is the 'face' of e-waste disposal in India as 95% of e-waste is channelised to the sector.
- In the hierarchical process of e-waste collection, segregation and recycling in the informal sector, it is the last stage that poses a major concern where e-waste is handed over to the informal dismantlers/recyclers.
- 'Karo Sambhav', a Delhi-based PRO, has integrated informal aggregators in its collection mechanism.
- Many producers in Delhi have still not set up collection centres and some brands have labelled their head office (located on the outskirts of Delhi) as the 'only' collection point.
- Formal companies, low in number and clustered in the metropolises, also fail to provide doorstep collection to consumers when the quantum of e-waste is not enough to meet their overhead expenses or transport.
- On the other hand, consumers lack awareness and information about the existence of any such services.

Way Forward

- It is necessary to develop a strategy for engaging with informal sector workers because doing so will not only contribute to better e-waste management practices, but will also help to protect the environment, improve laborers' health and working conditions, and provide better job opportunities to over a million people.
- There is a need for concurrent and consistent efforts to raise consumer awareness, strengthen reverse logistics, build stakeholder capacity, improve existing infrastructure, improve product design, rationalize input control and adopt green procurement practices.
- Better implementation methodologies and inclusion policies are needed that provide accommodation and validation for the informal sector to step up and help us meet our recycling targets in an environmentally responsible manner.
- There is a need to create jobs, which can be accomplished by identifying and promoting cooperatives and broadening the scope of the E-Waste (Management) Rules.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Indian Go West, Take Up 'Residence By Investment'

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Citizenship

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of countries on India's interests; Mobilization of Resources

Context:

- According to data tabled in Parliament by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) recently, **over 2.25 lakh Indians renounced their Indian citizenship in 2022, the highest number since 2011.**
- The data shows how Indians, particularly **high-net-worth individuals (HNIs)**, are **migrating westward with new passports** in search of better opportunities, healthcare, quality of life, and education, among other factors.

- High-net-worth individuals are flocking for residence-through-investment schemes in the United States, Portugal, Australia, Malta, and Greece.



What is the Citizenship by Investment Program?

- It is a program that allows individuals to obtain residence or citizenship in a country in exchange for making qualifying investments. These programs provide:
 - **Citizenship by investment**, in which the individual receives a "golden passport" or "cash-for-passports."
 - **Residence by investment**: in which a person receives a "golden visa" or
 - **Hybrid** with immediate residence followed by accelerated citizenship.
- Applicants for the Program must meet a number of qualification criteria. They can invest in a variety of ways, such as contributing to government funds, purchasing qualifying real estate, investing in qualifying businesses, or creating a specific number of jobs.

Why do people give up their Citizenship?

- People leave their countries in search of better jobs and living conditions, and some are pushed out by climate change or unfavorable political situations at home.
- High-net-worth individuals around the world who renounce citizenship acquired at birth may do so due to rising crime rates or a lack of business opportunities at home.
- Other reasons include the safety of women and children, lifestyle factors such as climate and pollution, financial concerns such as taxes, better healthcare for families and educational opportunities for children, and the desire to escape oppressive governments.

What is a golden visa?

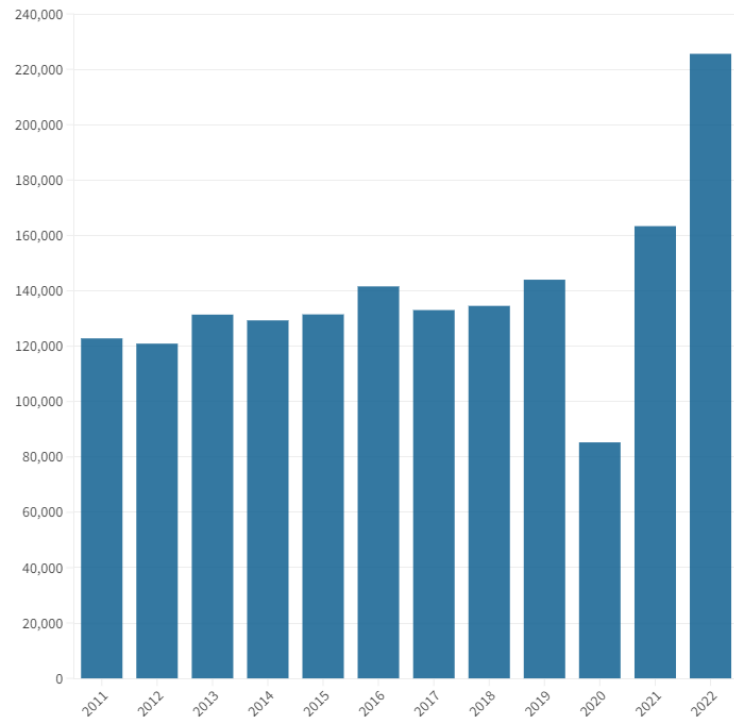
- **Residence by investment schemes, otherwise known as 'golden visas'**, give people the chance to get a residency permit for a country by purchasing a house there or making a large investment or donation.
- Golden visa program give high-net-worth-individuals (HNIs) the option of physically relocating to a favorable jurisdiction either now or upon retirement and becoming residents of the state with full legal rights, including the right to live, work study and receive the health care in that country

Who are HNIs?

- HNIs are those with a net worth of more than \$1 million or Rs.8.2 crore.
- According to the **Henley Global Citizens Report**, there were 3.47 lakh such people in India in December 2021.

- There were 1.49 lakh HNIs in just nine cities: Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai, Gurgaon, and Ahmedabad.
- According to the report, India ranked fourth in the world in terms of privately held wealth, after the United States, China, and Japan.
- According to industry representatives, there has been an increase in requests for residence-through-investment programs, particularly the US EB-5 visa, Portugal Golden Visa, Australian Global Talent Independent Visa, Malta Permanent Residency Programme, and Greece Residence by Investment Program.

Indian citizens renouncing citizenship



Source: Ministry of External Affairs • THE HINDU GRAPHICS

Indians - Going west

- India is rapidly rising in the ranks of successful applicants for the **Portugal Golden Visa, rising to fourth place in the world in 2022, from fifth place in 2021 and ninth place in 2020.**
- Individuals and families benefit from the Portuguese investor visa program, which allows them to live, work, study, and retire in Portugal and the rest of the European Union.
- Over 130 visas have been issued to Indian nationals since the program's inception.
- Among the qualifying requirements are the purchase of property worth Euro 500,000 (Rs.4.4 crore) in a high-density area and the creation of at least 10 jobs for Portuguese nationals.
- After five years of investment, the individual can obtain a Portuguese passport, allowing them to visit over 150 countries without a visa. Portugal decided to end the program.
- The United States' EB-5 visa program, which requires a minimum investment of \$800,000 (around 6.6 crore) over 5 to 7 years and the creation of 10 permanent jobs for US citizens, is also highly sought after.
- After five years, the visa makes the individual eligible for American citizenship.
- **Investment for the Children**
 - Indians received 211 EB-5 visas in 2021, the third highest number of any country.

- Ten years ago, Indians accounted for only about 2-3% of EB-5 visas issued, with 62 Indian investors receiving an EB-5 visa in fiscal year 2010.
- Indian parents were among the most common applicants for EB-5 visas, hoping to expedite their children with faster access to green cards.
- HNIs such as business owners, entrepreneurs, and professionals such as doctors and engineers are also enthusiastic applicants.

What is the EB-5 Programme?

- It is popularly known as the 'Green Card for Greenback' scheme. The EB-5 program was established in 1990 with the approval of the United States Congress — the country's highest legislative body.
- It aims to stimulate the American economy by attracting foreign investment and creating jobs for Americans. Its scope was expanded in 1992 by an Immigrant Investor Program, also known as the Regional Centre Programme.
- The program is known as EB-5 because it is the fifth preference category under the Employment-Based (EB) immigration visas.

EB-5 Programme Funds

- Funds for the EB-5 program are collected in an escrow account and disbursed as loans for development and construction projects.
- When the project is completed, the borrower refinances this loan with a long-term debt from the bank and repays it in about five years.
- Most projects, including residential development in the Bay Area (San Francisco and surrounding areas) and commercial towers in New York, have done well.
- Some people have also invested in the hospitality sector, and this trend does not necessarily indicate a flight of wealth from India; rather, it may indicate a diversification of funds.

Countries scrapping such scheme

- **EU:** In 2022, the European Commission called on EU governments to stop selling citizenship to investors as part of a crackdown on this combined multibillion-euro industry.
- **Portugal** decided to discontinue its Golden Visa program in response to outrage over the rise in house prices, which has caused many people to struggle to find adequate housing.
- **The UK government** scrapped its golden visa scheme in 2022, which allowed wealthy foreign nationals to settle in the country in exchange for bringing some of their wealth with them.
- **Ireland** closed its investor visa scheme that provided immigration rights to wealthy foreigners investing at least 1 million euros (\$1.08 million) following criticism of such scheme by the European Union
- **Australia** is also set to review its visa for people who invest at least A\$5 million (\$3.4 million) in the country.

Us - China Diplomatic Crisis Over Balloon In Sky

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Spy Balloon

Prepp Mains Booster: Regional and global groupings and agreements; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context:

- Recently, the **shooting down of a Chinese surveillance balloon by the US military has served as a stark reminder of the deep distrust** that characterizes relations between the world's two most powerful countries.

- The discovery of the balloon last week over Montana **sparked a diplomatic crisis**, prompting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to cancel a highly anticipated visit to China which was scheduled from February 6.
- It was a visit, which would have been the first by a top US diplomat since 2018, was the result of a months-long effort to reverse the deterioration of relations following the Biden-Xi meeting in November at the G-20 Bali summit.



Details

- The balloon controversy exposed the frailty of that effort, puncturing the process of restoring stability in relations marred by growing discord.
- Beijing maintains that the balloon was "civilian" (meteorology), but had deviated from its intended path. It also criticized the decision to shoot it down as excessive.
- The deployment of what it called a surveillance balloon deep into its airspace on the eve of Blinken's visit was seen by the US as a grave provocation — one that Beijing, too, would not have tolerated.

What are spy balloons?

- The devices are lightweight balloons filled with gas, usually helium, and attached to spying equipment such as a long-range camera.
- They can be launched from the ground and are sent up into the air where they can reach heights of between 60,000ft (18,000m) and 150,000ft (45,000m), above the flight paths of commercial aircraft in an area known as "near space".
- Once in the air, they travel using a combination of air currents and pressurised air pockets, which can act as a form of steering.

Why are they still useful in the satellite era?

- The main advantage of spy balloons over satellites is that they can study an area for a longer period of time.
- They have the advantage of being able to stay in one location for an extended period of time.
- Because of the way the Earth rotates, unless a satellite is over the Equator, three to five satellites must be active at the same time to track the same location.
- These balloons are also less expensive to launch than satellites.

Earlier Incidents

- Officials in the United States have acknowledged that this is not the first time a surveillance balloon has been spotted over American skies; a similar incident occurred during the Trump administration.

- Balloons were also seen over Japan in 2020 and 2021, as well as over India's Andaman Islands last year.
- All three governments did not take action to shoot down the balloons, presumably because they concluded that in an age of intelligence powered by advanced satellites, the balloons were not important enough to warrant being shot down.
- New Delhi and Tokyo may now be forced to reconsider how they handle such intrusions in the future.

Tensions between the US and China

- The US-China relationship has been strained in recent years, with issues ranging from Taiwan and the South China Sea to human rights in China's western Xinjiang region and the crackdown on democracy activists in Hong Kong.
- Taiwan, in particular, has been at the center of US-China hostility since former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited the island nation claimed by China as its own.
- In response to nearby operations by 34 Chinese military aircraft and nine warships, Taiwan scrambled fighter jets, put its navy on alert, and activated missile systems.
- These operations are part of China's ongoing effort to intimidate and unsettle Taiwan, as well as to test the West's resolve on the issue.
- Blinken's visit this weekend was intended to thaw relationships and find common ground.

Spy Balloon - An Old Military Device

- Balloons were already being used for military purposes about a decade and a half after the first human-powered hot air balloon flight.
- During the French Revolutionary Wars in the late 18th century, balloons were used to provide a bird's eye view of the battlefield, with documented evidence of their use in the Battle of Fleurus in 1794.
- Since then, balloons have been used in a variety of conflicts, from the American Civil War to World War I.
- For well over a century, before aircraft technology really took off during World War I, balloons were the primary mode of big-picture reconnaissance, providing perspective on enemy positions and movements that was simply impossible to obtain from the ground.

How relevant are high-altitude balloons today?

- While satellites and improved plane and drone technologies have reduced the importance of high-altitude balloons in the military, they still play an important role.
- Unlike satellites, which can cost millions of dollars to build and require sophisticated technology to launch, high-altitude balloons are inexpensive and simple to launch and control.
- While balloons cannot be directly steered, they can be roughly guided to a target area by changing altitudes to catch different wind currents.
- Unlike satellites, which are at much higher altitudes and moving at incredible speeds, spy balloons can hover around at lower altitudes, providing better quality images as well as more time to gather intelligence in a specific area.
- The latest incident, in which the balloon not only reached mainland US but has since been able to operate continuously, only emphasizes the balloon's continued relevance.

Russia Suspends Only Remaining Major Nuclear Treaty With Us

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: New START Treaty

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context:

- Recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Moscow was suspending its participation in the [New START treaty](#) — the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States. Mr. Putin accused the U.S. and its NATO allies of openly declaring the goal of Russia's defeat in Ukraine.
- He said Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the U.S. does so, a move that would end a global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.



Significance of the announcement

- The announcement marks a significant **increase in tensions** with Washington over the conflict in Ukraine.
- Russia and the United States have suspended mutual inspections under New START since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Last fall, Moscow refused to allow their resumption, raising uncertainty about the treaty's future. Russia also indefinitely postponed a planned round of consultations under the treaty.
- The United States State Department has expressed concern over Russia's refusal to allow inspections, stating that it "prevents the United States from exercising important rights under the treaty and threatens the viability of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control."
- It emphasized that there is nothing to prevent Russian inspectors from conducting inspections of U.S. facilities.
- In response to the U.S. claims, Putin alleged that Washington has rejected some Russian requests for visits to specific U.S. facilities, and that the U.S. is working on nuclear weapons while some are pondering plans to resume nuclear tests, which have been banned since the end of the Cold War.
- Putin warned that if the U.S. conducts tests, Russia would also do so.

Implications of suspension

- The implications of the suspension of the **New START treaty** could be significant for **global nuclear arms control**.
- It would mark the first time in decades that the United States and Russia would **not be bound by a nuclear arms control treaty**.
- The suspension of the treaty could lead to a **new arms race** between the two countries, and potentially other countries as well.
- It could also **undermine the international nuclear nonproliferation regime** and increase the risk of nuclear conflict.

What is New START Treaty?

- The New START treaty, officially known as The Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive

Arms, was signed in 2010 by then-US **President Barack Obama and then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.**

- The treaty limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers.
- It also includes sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.
- To ensure compliance, there are strict counting rules and transparency requirements, giving each side a reliable picture of the other's strategic nuclear forces.
- The 2019 collapse of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty left New START as the only major surviving US-Russia arms control agreement.
- Both Russia and the United States still have vast arsenals of nuclear weapons which are currently partially limited by the 2011 New START Treaty, which in 2021 was extended until 2026.

Conclusion

- Russia's suspension of its participation in the New START treaty, and its potential resumption of nuclear weapons testing, are serious concerns for global nuclear disarmament efforts.
- With tensions between Russia and the United States already high, this latest development will only add to the instability and uncertainty in the international arena.
- It is important for the United States and Russia to work together and ensure that the limits on nuclear weapons are in place and to maintain stability and transparency in the world's strategic relationship.

One Year Of War In Ukraine

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Current events of national and international importance

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Context:

- Recently, the **Secretary General of the UN**, Antonio Guterres, claimed in a speech to the General Assembly that the prospects for peace were diminishing in Ukraine, with the chances of further bloodshed and escalation growing.
- February 24th 2023 would mark the first anniversary of the **war in Ukraine** which has resulted in around 18,955 casualties.

What has the UN said about the war in Ukraine?

- The **Secretary General of the United Nations**, Antonio Guterres has said that the war in Ukraine was likely to worsen as the possibilities of further escalation and violence increased while opportunities for peace diminished.
- The Secretary-General predicted that the world was heading towards a wider war despite being aware of its potential ramifications.
- The **Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights** has stated that the crisis has witnessed nearly 18,955 civilian casualties between 2022 and 2023, of which 7,199 were deaths and 11,756 were injured.
- Since the war was being fought entirely in Ukraine, the civilian casualties were all Ukrainian, with over 7.5 million people being displaced as a consequence of the fighting.

- The number of military casualties has not been officially declared but the number was expected to rise into the thousands.

How are other nations involved in the War?

- Russia had begun its campaign in Ukraine with the hope of a quick campaign and regime change in Ukraine, but that was not how it ended.
- The war has extended with rising casualties and the deployment of more than 30 missiles by Russia.
- Germany, a member of the Western Alliance, was initially reluctant to reduce its dependence on Russia but has since shared billions worth of arms with Ukraine.
- The Western allies have contributed arms in the form of the US's **Patriot** missiles, **HIMARS**, Turkey's **Bayraktar** drones and tanks and missiles from Germany, UK, Canada and Australia.
- As a result of the war, the trans-atlantic partnership between Europe and North America has strengthened under US leadership. NATO has also been strengthened with over \$50 billion worth of US assistance to Ukraine.
- Russia and China have agreed a strategic partnership without limits and aimed at building a new international order that rejected American hegemony.
- Russia has termed the crisis a proxy war fought by Ukraine on behalf of the West and the USA. It has also suggested that numerous options were available to it to escalate the conflict amid risks of greater interference by NATO, nuclearisation of the conflict and possible dissent among allies.



What are the chances of peace?

- According to **NATO** chief Jans Stoltenberg, the alliance should be prepared for the conflict to extend for a long time as no efforts had been made to secure peace yet.
- Although, some reports had suggested a peace pact had been agreed in April 2022, where Ukraine would not seek NATO membership and that Russia would withdraw to its pre-February 2022 positions.
- Ukraine's international allies as well as domestic partners and opponents have been reluctant to agree to a peace deal, hoping that the economic sanctions imposed on Russia would affect its economy.
- However, the **IMF** announced that the Russian economy would grow by 0.3% in 2023, and 2.1% in 2024 through its oil exports.

India's role in the Crisis

- India has attempted to maintain a balance between not condemning Russia and maintaining important relationships with the US and Europe as an expression of its **strategic autonomy**.

- However, the USA has exerted significant pressure on India to alter this approach despite India's importance to their shared strategy of containing China.
- India has also had to face the economic decline of Russia, who India needed as an autonomous power in Eurasia to counter Chinese **geopolitical hegemony**.
- Prime Minister Modi has repeatedly asserted India's position that this was not the era of war and has also indicated a willingness to make peace in Europe, and give a voice to the Global South, through its Presidency of the G20.

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

- The UNGA has given the OHCHR the responsibility of defending and advancing universal human rights for all people everywhere.
- It is essential to maintaining the integrity of the United Nations' three interdependent pillars: human rights, peace and security, and development.
- It provides technical assistance and capacity building to support the field application of international human rights standards.
- The High Commissioner for Human Rights serves as its head, and its headquarters are located in Geneva.
- Despite the fact that both organisations aim to advance human rights, the OHCHR and UNHRC are distinct from one another.
- The Office is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from donors and member states. The remainder is financed by the UN's overall budget.

Functions:

- Preventing abuses of human rights.
- Encouraging adherence to human rights.
- Encouraging global collaboration to protect human rights.
- Coordinating, enhancing, and streamlining human rights-related actions carried out by the UN.

India Bangladesh To Back Each Other For Unsc Membership



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: India-Bangladesh

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Important International institutions

Context:

- Recently, **India and Bangladesh agreed to support each other's non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council**.
- During Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra's official visit to Dhaka, the two sides discussed **bilateral development projects, defense cooperation, and security issues** in addition to multilateral engagements.
- India issued a message of **continued commitment to the bilateral relationship**, upholding Bangladesh as the pivot of **India's 'Neighborhood First Policy' and a key partner in its 'Act East Policy'**.

UN Security Council Membership

- India's non-permanent UNSC membership in 2021-'22 ended in December, and another term is expected in 2028-'29.
- Internal discussions in Dhaka are said to be taking place about a possible non-permanent stint for Bangladesh at the UN Security Council during 2030-'31.
- The matter is still in its early stages, and Bangladesh is expected to raise it in a number of international forums in the coming months.

About United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the UN's six main organs, with responsibilities that include safeguarding international peace and security, recommending new UN members to the General Assembly and approving any UN Charter modifications.
- The UNSC consists of 15 members. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States are the permanent members of the Security Council.



India's G20 Presidency

- India took over the G20 Presidency from Indonesia on December 1st, and will host the G20 Leaders' Summit for the first time in the country in 2023.
- A nation deeply committed to democracy and multilateralism, India's G20 Presidency would be a watershed moment in her history as it seeks to play an important role by finding pragmatic global solutions for the wellbeing of all, and in doing so, manifest the true spirit of **'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' or the 'World is One Family'**.

Bangladesh as a Guest country in G-20

- Bangladesh is a "guest country" at this year's G-20 summit, which India is hosting.
- Bangladesh is expected to actively participate as a Guest Country at various events during India's G-20 presidency.
- Foreign Secretary and his counterpart in Dhaka held Foreign Office consultations and held "wide-ranging discussions covering all aspects of the relationship.
- Both parties agreed to strengthen ongoing bilateral cooperation in a variety of areas, including Government of India-funded concessional Lines of Credit, trade and investment, connectivity, power and energy, defense and security, and people-to-people ties.

International Organizations in which India and Bangladesh share membership

- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)
- Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORA)

India's Relationship with Bangladesh

- **Economic Ties:** Due to India's geographical proximity to Bangladesh, it has become one of its most important trading partners. India's sixth-largest trading partner is Bangladesh. Since 2011, India has provided duty-free and quota-free access to Bangladesh on all tariff lines except tobacco and alcohol under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).
- **Trade:** Bilateral trade between the two countries increased to USD 18.2 billion in 2021-22, up from USD 10.8 billion in 2020-21. The Indian and Bangladesh governments have approved 6 Border Haats (4 in Meghalaya and 2 in Tripura).
- **River Sharing:** India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers. The Ganga Waters Treaty was signed in 1996 to share Ganga River water during the lean season (January 1-May 31). Recently, the Kushiya Pact was signed, which will benefit people in Southern Assam and the Sylhet region of Bangladesh.
- **Connectivity:** India and Bangladesh share a 4096.7-kilometer border that runs through Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and West Bengal. A long-standing and time-tested protocol between Bangladesh and India governs inland waterway transit and trade. The Agartala-Akhaura Rail-Link will be the first rail link between Northeast India and Bangladesh.
- **Power and Energy Sector Cooperation:** Energy sector cooperation between India and Bangladesh has also made significant progress in recent years. The India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline Project, signed in 2018, will connect Siliguri in West Bengal, India, and Parbatipur in Bangladesh's Dinajpur district. India and Bangladesh have also signed the Framework of Understanding (FOU) on Hydrocarbon Sector Cooperation.
- **Defence:** An \$8 billion Line of Credit (LoC) has been extended to Bangladesh, including \$500 million for defense-related procurement. This is significant because Bangladesh's defence forces have been heavily dependent on Chinese military hardware.

Mutual Developments

- **Tin Bigha Corridor:** In September 2011, the two countries signed a major border demarcation agreement, putting an end to four decades of boundary disputes. The Tin Bigha corridor was named after this. Bangladeshi citizens were also granted 24-hour access to the Tin Bigha Corridor by India.
- **Sampriti-II:** On October 9, 2011, Indian and Bangladeshi armies took part in Sampriti-II (Unity-II), a 14-day joint military exercise in Sylhet to improve synergy between their forces.
- **Bangladesh-India Friendship pipeline:** In 2018, the leaders of both countries dedicated the 130-kilometer-long Bangladesh-India Friendship pipeline, which will supply 4 lakh tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh.
- **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA):** The 2019 CAA amended the Citizenship Act of 1955 allowing Indian citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities who fled from the neighboring Muslim majority countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 2014 due to "religious persecution or fear of religious persecution".

Exploring The Blue In The India-France Partnership

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: India-France relationship

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighbourhood- relations; Regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests;

Context:

- The celebration of **25 years of India-France strategic partnership** (January 26) provides an important opportunity for both countries to reflect on their relationships.
- The **time-tested strategic partnership, signed in 1998, has gained momentum due to shared values and aspirations of peace, stability, and strategic autonomy.** There are no significant substantive disagreements between the two countries.
- **France has emerged as India's most important trading partner,** with annual trade worth \$12.42 billion in 2021-22.
- It is the **11th largest foreign investor in India,** with a total investment of \$10.31 billion from April 2000 to June 2022, accounting for 1.70% of total foreign direct investment inflows into India.

Relation between India and France

- India and France have traditionally had close and friendly relations.
- Since the establishment of the strategic partnership in 1998, there has been significant progress in all areas of bilateral cooperation, including regular high-level exchanges at the Heads of State/Heads of Government levels, as well as growing cooperation and exchanges in strategic areas such as defense, counter-terrorism, nuclear energy, and space.
- Following the Nuclear Suppliers' Group's waiver, India was the first country to enter into an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation with France, allowing India to resume full civil nuclear cooperation with the international community.
- There is also growing and broad cooperation in other areas such as trade and investment, culture, science and technology, and education.
- France has consistently backed India's growing role in international fora, including its permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

Trade between India and France

- France has emerged as India's most important trading partner, **with annual trade worth \$12.42 billion in 2021-22.**
- It is the 11th largest foreign investor in India, with a total investment of \$10.31 billion from April 2000 to June 2022, accounting for 1.70% of total foreign direct investment inflows into India.
- The services sector receives the most FDI equity inflows (18.17%), followed by cement & gypsum products (9.43%), air transport (7.72%), miscellaneous industries (7.38%), and petroleum & natural gas (7.22%).
- From April 2000 to June 2022, these five sectors account for 49.92% of total equity inflows from France.

Military Relation

- It has emerged as an important defense partner for India, becoming the country's second largest defense supplier from 2017 to 2021.
- France has emerged as an important strategic partner for India, with critical defense deals and increased military-to-military engagement.
- A key example of this is the induction of French Scorpene conventional submarines, which are being built in India under a

2005 technology transfer agreement, and the Indian Air Force receiving 36 Rafale fighter jets.

- The Tata group has also partnered with Airbus to manufacture the C-295 tactical transport aircraft in Vadodara, Gujarat. This line is expected to be expanded into other civilian and military aircraft manufacturing in a joint venture with France.
- These ties are strengthened further by a robust network of military dialogues and regular joint exercises — **Varuna (navy), Garuda (air force), and Shakti (army)**.

Maritime Relation

- Their maritime cooperation reflects the strengthening of their strategic partnership. India and France are resident powers in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific.
- The importance of the Indian Ocean Region was evident during French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to New Delhi in 2018, when the leaders of both countries welcomed the "Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region," which presented a blueprint for strengthening ties.
- In operational terms, Franco-Indian joint patrolling in the Indian Ocean signals New Delhi's intention to work with like-minded partners to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean.

What is the significance?

- France is a willing partner for India as it develops its national industrial base for the defense industry and critical strategic defense projects.
- **Defense Partnership:** As the complexities of the international geopolitical order have emerged, both countries have worked to deepen and broaden their cooperation.
- France was one of the first countries with which India signed a civil nuclear agreement.
- Paris was also critical in limiting India's isolation in the non-proliferation order following the 1998 nuclear tests.
- In a sign of growing cooperation, France supports India's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council as well as its admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- **Climate change** is a critical issue for both countries, and India has backed France in the Paris Agreement, expressing its strong commitment to mitigating the effects of climate change. In 2015, New Delhi and Paris established the International Solar Alliance as part of their collaborative efforts to combat climate change.
- **Maritime security** has gained momentum as both countries articulated their shared vision for a free, fair, and open Indo-Pacific.
- Because both countries share a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy which seeks to provide comprehensive solutions for maritime security, regional cooperation, and climate change adaptation, India and France agreed in September 2022 to establish an Indo-Pacific Trilateral Development Cooperation Fund to support sustainable innovative solutions for countries in the region.
- **Trilateral Grouping:** The two partners have formed a trilateral grouping with the United Arab Emirates to ensure maritime domain awareness and security from the east coast of Africa to the far Pacific.

Conclusion

- The partnership between India and France is based on shared values and objectives. Both have emphasized 'importance of maintaining strategic autonomy with a shared understanding of global risks in many domains.

- A high-level India-France political dialogue on defense, maritime, counter-terrorism, and the Indo-Pacific is currently underway.
- They are now forging ahead with cooperation in areas such as digitisation, cyber, green energy, a blue economy, ocean sciences, and space'.
- India and France understand each other's interests and dependencies, whether in relation to China or Russia.
- There is much ground for future collaboration in the context of a long strategic partnership, a shared interest in enhancing strategic autonomy and improving resilience.

China Must Take A Haircut On Its Loans To Poor Countries, Says India's G20 Sherpa

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: G20, Global Sovereign Debt Round Table

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; India and its neighbourhood- relations

Context:

- **India's G20 Sherpa**, Amitabh Kant, in a rare, direct reference to the **Chinese debt** of developing nations called for China to take responsibility for its loans to poor countries and support their economic recovery by accepting a **"haircut" on their debt**.
- When a bank takes a 'haircut', it means it accepts less than what was due in a particular loan account
- This would involve reducing the amount these countries owe to China and renegotiating the terms of their loans to make them more manageable.



Significance of remarks

- While the United States has been vocal in its criticism of Chinese debt in developing nations, India has been relatively quiet on the matter.
- This statement from the G20 Sherpa suggests that India is now willing to speak out on this issue and push for action to be taken.
- The involvement of both India and the United States in this issue **could increase pressure on China** to address the issue of its loans to developing nations.
- The remarks are significant in light of an upcoming virtual meeting of the **Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable**, organized by the IMF, the World Bank, and India, which is leading the Group of 20 major economies this year.

Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable

- The Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable will take place in Bengaluru on February 25, 2023, on the sidelines of the G-20

finance track, and officials from creditor countries, including China, India, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and G7 members, are expected to participate.

- It will bring together key stakeholders to discuss issues that have been impeding a timely debt restructuring process.
- **It will be co-chaired by the IMF, the World Bank, and India.**
- **Objective:** The main purpose of the roundtable is to come up with **technical solutions to address the shortcomings** of the current debt restructuring process, by discussing processes, standards, and definitions of key issues.
- This is **not a country-specific discussion**, and it will not focus on the details of debt restructuring.
- Instead, the focus will be on identifying impediments and finding ways to address them. The roundtable will be preceded by a virtual meeting on February 17.

Srilanka's case

- Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe has announced that the country hopes to receive a \$2.9 billion package from the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** by March to help set the economy on the path to recovery following a painful financial crash last year.
- The process has been **delayed due to Sri Lanka's inability** to obtain adequate financing assurances from its creditors, which is a necessary step for the IMF program.
- **India and the Paris Club** have sent written financing assurances to the IMF, **but China, Sri Lanka's largest bilateral creditor, has yet to do so.**
- The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce has urged China to work with the IMF in order for Sri Lanka to receive its much-needed funding as a key bilateral creditor.
- **India and the Paris Club** have emphasized the need for equitable treatment of all bilateral lenders, **signaling that China must receive no concessions in the process.**
- The Paris Club is an **informal group** of official creditors whose role is to find **coordinated and sustainable solutions** to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries.
- It promotes itself as a forum where official creditors meet to solve payment difficulties faced by debtor countries.
- However, China has indicated that Sri Lanka's multilateral loans must also be subject to a haircut, and it remains to be seen if China will send written financing assurances to the IMF.

Sherpa Track

- The G20 process is led by the Sherpas of member countries, who are personal emissaries of the Leaders.
- The Sherpas, oversee negotiations over the course of the year, discussing agenda items for the Summit and coordinating the substantive work of the G20.
- The Sherpas' Track focuses on non-economic and financial issues, such as development, anti-corruption and food security.
- The Sherpas carry out important planning, negotiation and implementation tasks continuously.

Locating China In The Russia-Ukraine War

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Russia-Ukraine war

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighbourhood- relations; Regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or

affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context:

- As the Russia-Ukraine conflict approaches one year, there appear to be few signs of de-escalation.
- Western powers have begun to supply Ukraine with powerful offensive weapons, and Russia has threatened severe retaliation. Furthermore, as Western sanctions on Russia tighten, the country is becoming more reliant on China.
- While **China has been speaking in a largely neutral language**, there have recently been reports of China allegedly assisting Russia in its campaign.



About Russia-Ukraine War

- Russia has long opposed Ukraine's move toward European institutions, and it is now demanding that it never join NATO, a demand that the Western alliance has rejected.
- Russia seized a portion of southern Ukraine in 2014 and backed separatists who ignited a conflict in large areas of the east.
- Russia has long threatened military action if the West fails to meet its demands.
- The west's refusal to accept Russia's demand has now provided an excuse to invade Ukraine.

What is China's stance on the conflict?

- China's formal stance on the conflict has been along the lines of **"all countries deserve respect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity,"** and "support should be given to all efforts that are conducive to peacefully resolving the crisis," which it has consistently reiterated on the global stage.
- With an emphasis on "all countries," China appears to be demonstrating its position as being equidistant from both conflicting parties.
- Despite this articulation, **China's attitude towards the conflict has often been categorized as 'pro-Russian neutrality'.**

Russia and China Relation

- **Russia and China are involved in a "comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era,"** and despite the conflict, China has continued to strengthen its relations with Russia.
- China has painted the United States and NATO as the primary instigators of the crisis, echoing the Russian narrative in this regard.
- In the one year since the conflict began, China voted against three and abstained from four of the seven resolutions put to a vote by

the West against Russia at the UN General Assembly, Security Council, Human Rights Council, and World Health Organization.

- China had only voted in favor of one UN Security Council resolution — Russia's proposal on humanitarian aid.

China involvement in the conflict

- China's actions appear to lack such nuance, as it is intervening in the conflict in at least an indirect manner. China has benefited greatly from cheap Russian oil and gas.
- Since the start of the conflict, China has surpassed Germany as the largest purchaser of Russian oil, while Russia has surpassed Saudi Arabia as China's largest supplier of crude oil.
- The growing cooperation between the two countries is not limited to hydrocarbons, but also to materials and technology.

What is the reason behind China's new stance?

- China must keep Russia close and well-supplied because Russia is its primary ally in its larger global ambition to undermine US dominance.
- China would also like to keep its Russia card so that if the conflict devolved into peace talks, it could use it to gain concessions from the West.
- The ideal bargain that China seeks is in trade and technology, where it has recently faced significant opposition from the West. This is significant for China, especially at a time when the country desperately needs a post-**Zero COVID economic revival**.
- China cannot openly support Russia because it will harm its relations with both Ukraine and the European Union (EU). China is Russia's and Ukraine's largest trading partner.

Role of China

- **China is both Russia and Ukraine's largest trading partner; in fact, China surpassed Russia as Ukraine's largest trading partner in 2019.**
- Ukraine, not the United States, is China's largest corn supplier and third largest supplier of military equipment; China is Ukraine's largest market for defense goods.
- China's first aircraft carrier, is essentially a refurbished aircraft carrier purchased from Ukraine after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As a result, China cannot abandon all its interests in Ukraine for the sake of Russia.
- China has strong economic ties with the EU and would like the EU to strengthen its strategic autonomy so that it can act more independently of the US in geopolitical matters.

India's Neutrality in the War

- Despite its displeasure with Moscow's war, New Delhi has maintained a deliberate public neutrality toward Russia.
- It has abstained from votes in the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Human Rights Council condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine, and has thus far refused to openly blame Russia for the crisis.
- India's public neutrality toward the Russian invasion is motivated in part by its concerns about China and Pakistan, both of which are seen as immediate and long-term threats.
- Maintaining its friendship with Moscow will help to prevent Russia from deepening its ties with China and limit Russian temptations to form new strategic ties with Pakistan.
- Russia has been a staunch ally of India since 1955, when the Soviet premier declared Moscow's support for Indian claims in Jammu and Kashmir. On occasions, the Soviet Union used its veto power in the UN Security Council on India's behalf.

- Keeping Russia on board through its veto-wielding prerogatives is thus an important consideration that reinforces India's reluctance to criticize Russia. Russia is also a vital source of weapons for India.

Conclusion

- China's final efforts to encourage Russia in a limited and covert manner without raising alarms in the West appear to be intended to keep the war going.
- It is certainly in China's best interests to keep Russia and the West divided, lest they band together against China as they did in the nineteenth century.
- Furthermore, as the conflict drags on, the West will be distracted from the Indo-Pacific theater, and Russia will be left weakened to pose any threat to China's growing influence in the post-Soviet space.
- China can fill the economic void left in Russia by the withdrawal of Western investment and technology, while also engineering its own economic recovery.
- During the crisis, China can also build up its strategic reserves and capabilities in order to prepare for an inevitable hostile period of relations with the US in the post-Ukraine scenario.

U.S. Will Not Sanction India For Buying Russian Oil, Say Senior American Officials

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: International Relations

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context:

- Recently, Karen Donfried, U.S. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, made it clear that America was not looking to sanction India for its purchases of Russian oil.
- In recent months, Indian purchases of Russian oil have increased steadily with Moscow displacing traditional heavyweights like Iraq and Saudi Arabia to become India's top supplier of oil.



What are the comments of senior American officials?

- U.S. Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt stated that Western sanctions, along with the \$60 oil price cap established by the G-7 nations, have had a significant impact by reducing **Russia's ability to sell its oil** at premium prices, thereby **impacting its revenue and economic stability**.
- He said that even though **India is not a member of the price cap coalition**. It has leveraged its negotiating power to purchase Russian Ural crude oil at prices below the \$60 cap.

- This has helped the **United States achieve its dual objectives** of ensuring **adequate oil supply** and **preventing Russia** from receiving high prices for its exports.
- **EU, G7 and Australia** (the "Price Cap Coalition") came to agreement on a maximum price of \$60 per barrel for seaborne Russian-origin crude oil.
- Price cap aims to **reduce Russia's ability** to finance its war in Ukraine

Divergence-Ukraine

- In relation to Russia and Ukraine, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt, said that India and the U.S. "may not always have the same policy views," but both nations are dedicated to "upholding the international rules-based order that is built on respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty."
- The Indian government has frequently stated that it will purchase oil from "wherever" it is necessary, despite several requests to reduce its reliance on Russian oil imports.
- Indian imports of Russian Ural oil have increased by 30 times since last January, when they were just about 40,000 barrels per day (bpd), according to the most recent data for January.
- Russia, which was formerly India's 17th largest oil supplier, has just risen to the top exporter position.
- Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has increased from **just 0.2% of India's total oil imports to over 28% now**.
- When questioned, American officials rejected Oleksandr Merezhko's calls for secondary sanctions against nations like **China and India** that are "financing the Russian economy and the Russian military machine."
- Oleksandr Merezhko is a senior Ukrainian lawmaker and the chairman of the country's foreign relations committee.
- The Indian position was described as "painful" by Mr. Merezhko on a visit to Washington.
- Karen Donfried, U.S. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, responded by stating that the US was **not aiming to sanction India**, and US's engagement with India is one of its **consequential relationships**.
- The United States described **India's stance** towards Russia, notably its failure to condemn Russia's activities in Ukraine, as **"extremely disappointing"** in **March of last year**.
- However, given Russian budget deficits over the sale of Ural crude to India at about \$56 per barrel, which is more than \$30 less than the transatlantic pool of Brent crude and other world oil markets, **the U.S. officials briefing the media made it clear that Washington is now "comfortable with the approach that India has taken"**.

Conclusion

- The US's stance on India's purchase of Russian oil highlights the significance of the relationship between the two countries. Despite differences in policy approaches, the US recognizes that the two nations share a commitment to the international rules-based order.

As Asia Arms Europe

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: International relations

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests, Effect of

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

Context:

- Recently, **Asian countries** have begun to actively contribute to **Western Security concerns** with **South Korea** emerging as a new arms supplier to Europe.
- **India** has also increased its **arms exports** in recent years and has also signed an agreement with the **US** on **joint defence production and technology**.



Strategic trends in Asia

- The war in Ukraine has influenced the **geopolitics** of not just **Europe** but **Asia** as well with two major strategic trends.
- Firstly, Asia has changed from the passive theater for Western rivalry that it once was and become an active contributor to European security.
- NATO has engaged with the countries of Southeast Asia like Japan and South Korea who have not just brought NATO to Asia but have joined NATO's efforts in the European theater as well.
- Secondly, the old notion that Europe and Asia were distinct strategic theaters has begun to fall apart. The **Sino-Russian alliance without limits** and the increased NATO-Asian coordination have proven how the two continents are strategically connected.

What is the role of Asia in the European theater?

- At present South Korean arms have been sent to Ukraine via third countries or have been used to replenish the arsenals of those sending arms directly to Ukraine.
- NATO has attempted to convince South Korea to initiate direct supply but domestic opposition and warning from Russia have prevented it.
- However, Korea has expanded into the European arms market supplying arms and ammunition including tanks, howitzers, and fighter aircraft worth around \$16 billion to Poland, a Ukraine ally.
- Norway and Estonia have also purchased South Korean weapons to manage the perceived threats faced from Russia.
- Pakistan has also transferred ammunition to Ukraine in an attempt to repair its worsening relationship with the USA.
- Russia has received winter clothing and arms from North Korea while Iran has been a regular supplier of drones to Russia.
- Turkey has been a major supplier of drones to Ukraine while leading efforts for diplomatic engagement between Russia and Ukraine.

Global arms market

- The traditional belief in Asian politics has been that the **Western military-industrial complex** has manipulated developing

countries into spending their limited resources on arms to satisfy the greed of the West.

- The **post-colonial era** witnessed an increase in **power conflicts** between developing countries led to an **increase in demand for arms**, which were supplied by the West.
- The **global arms market** has today evolved beyond the traditional western military complex to include Asian powers who have emerged as producers and traders of weapons.
- After the US, Russia, and France, **China is the fourth-largest exporter** of weapons worldwide. The majority of China's military exports go to developing countries and have not yet been able to reach developed markets.
- The need for Asian weaponry has increased as more European nations implement legislation prohibiting the sale of weapons to regions experiencing armed conflict.
- South Korea's capacity to deliver high-quality weapons at low cost has made it the 8th largest arms producer as its arms exports reached nearly \$20 billion last year.
- **Japan, the third-largest economy** in the world and a strong US ally in Asia, has started to reevaluate its security strategies.
- One of the numerous effects of Japan's recent revisions of its national defence policy has been the sale of armaments to allies and partners.
- **Post-war pacifism** restrained its armaments makers, despite the fact that it had a robust arms sector of its own that had a significant impact during the Second World War.
- Japan has provided non-lethal military support to Ukraine and is preparing to increase weapons sales in the long run and more than double its defence budget over the next five years.
- In order to build fighter jets, missiles, and drones for both home and international use, Japan has partnered with large American and European arms corporations.

India's Defence Exports

- India has set an ambitious goal of a **manufacturing turnover of \$25 billion or ₹1,75,000 crore**, including exports of 35,000 crores in aerospace and defence goods and services by 2025.
- From 2016–17 to 2018–19, India's defence exports have experienced a 700% growth.
- The **Bhramos contract with the Philippines**, which was a turning point in India's manufacturing and export of armaments, has helped the country advance in defence manufacturing.
- Indian sub-assemblies are supplied for use in US military systems, which has been the largest beneficiary of Indian arms exports.
- India has struggled against South Korean firms that are more advanced and more organised in the marketplaces of the **Global South**.
- India has attempted to lower its reliance on Russian weapons while addressing the military challenge posed by China along its borders and in its neighbouring seas.
- The expanding cooperation between Europe and Asia has given India new opportunity to modernise its ageing defence industry through agreements with allies,
- In order to revolutionize India's defence manufacturing and increase its arms exports, a wider range of agreements with its European and Asian allies should follow the recent agreement between India and the US on growing cooperative defence production and technology.

NATO

- The **North Atlantic Treaty or Washington Treaty**, signed in April 1949 by the United States, Canada, and a number of Western European countries, led to the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- It is a military alliance formed with the aim of **collective security** against the Soviet Union.
- Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the United States, Greece, Turkey, Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are a part of the thirty member states.
- The organization's headquarters are in **Brussels, Belgium**.
- The permanent goal of NATO is to protect its member state's freedom and security via political and military action.
- NATO encourages the values of democracy and provides members with the opportunity to consult and work together on defence and security-related matters in order to solve disputes, foster trust, and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- NATO is dedicated to the use of peaceful measures in problem resolutions while also capable of military action if diplomatic efforts are unsuccessful.

A Polycrisis That Is Depleting Pakistan's Resilience

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: International Relations

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Context:

- Recently, Pakistan is facing multiple crises at once, including an unprecedented economic crisis and political instability.
- The current economic crisis has been made worse by misgovernance and political confrontation between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and former Prime Minister Imran Khan.



Background

- Pakistan is no stranger to crises. Pakistan's history will reveal that the refugee crisis entered the picture immediately after Partition and Independence in 1947.
- As many as 14 million people crossed the West Pakistan/India border, leaving Pakistan with no infrastructure to deal with this development.
- Leaders in both independent countries were concerned that Pakistan would 'not survive,' and that it might even return to the fold.
- Nonetheless, despite an extraordinary and turbulent first few years, Pakistan has continued to exist and survive.
- Pakistan has experienced a number of crises and near-collapses since 1947, ranging from multiple political and constitutional crises to those involving terrorism.

What is Polycrisis?

- The term polycrisis was coined in the 1990s by French complexity theorist Edgar Morin.
- When multiple crises in multiple global systems become causally entangled in ways that severely harm humanity's prospects. These interacting crises cause more harm than the sum of the crises' individual effects if their host systems were not so intricately linked.
- Polycrisis is more than just having multiple crises. It is a situation in which the whole is more dangerous than the sum of the parts.
- A global polycrisis occurs when crises in multiple global systems become causally entangled in ways that significantly harm humanity's prospects. These interacting crises cause more harm than the sum of the crises' individual effects, if their host systems were not so intricately linked.

The Crisis and Resilience in Pakistan

- Apart from a few good years, Pakistan's economy has been in a state of a perpetual crisis, dependent on the largesse and beneficence of donors, international financial institutions and charity from so-called 'friendly countries'.
- It has become a cliché that Pakistan is always in crisis, and that it is the people's supposed "resilience" that gets them and the country through.
- However, less than a month into the new year, multiple crises have occurred at the same time.
- Pakistan is experiencing an economic crisis, albeit one that is unprecedented in recent history. Pakistan is "on the verge" of default and financial disaster, with a Sri Lanka-style situation looming.

Economic Crisis

- Inflation is at 28%, the highest level in nearly five decades, and the Pakistani rupee has lost 17% of its value in seven days, approaching PKR 300 for one US dollar.
- Foreign exchange reserves are nearing \$3 billion, not even enough for a month's imports, and are declining every few weeks. There does not appear to be an easy or quick way to reverse this trend.
- With severe import restrictions and constraints, as well as the inability to pay in foreign currency, economists have already declared Pakistan to be in 'partial default'.

Economic Crisis in the past

- While there have been many economic situations and crises in the past, such as during Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, the macroeconomy has never looked this precarious, even during the 2008 global financial crisis, or in the last five decades.
- When 9/11 occurred (2001), Pakistan's economy had to be rescued and bailed out, receiving massive amounts of aid and rent for its ostensibly premium geopolitical location next to Afghanistan as a base for American designs and military ambitions in the region.
- Pakistan was ruled by a military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, at the time, and there appeared to be political stability' with the military in complete control.

Political Crisis

- Constant political chaos, may undermine a coherent and timely policy response. Notably, no Pakistani prime minister has served the full five-year term. To keep the record straight, Shehbaz Sharif took over, deposing Imran Khan in 2022.
- Since then, the latter has been working tirelessly to destabilize the Sharif regime. Even though Imran Khan is no longer Prime

Minister, he remains very popular, which has fueled speculation about a split in the Pakistan Army.

- Political instability also poses a future challenge.

Reasons for Crisis

- This major economic setback is pushing millions of people into poverty and starvation and preventing the country from importing basic and essential items.
- The country's foreign exchange reserves are rapidly depleting. It now has only USD 3.67 billion, the lowest since 2014, and can only cover its imports for three weeks.
- Pakistan's crisis worsened as a result of a number of factors, including slowing GDP growth, a global economic slowdown, rising global inflation as a result of the Ukraine war, a plunging Pakistani rupee, which made imports more expensive, and a catastrophic flood that killed over 33 million people.
- While the economic crisis has been exacerbated by mismanagement and ineptitude cloaked in arrogance over the last four years, there was a sense of political stability until a few months ago.
- There is now open political conflict between the multi-party coalition led by Shehbaz Sharif, the Pakistan Democratic Movement, and the deposed and belligerent former Prime Minister, Imran Khan.

Remittance from IMF

- With bankruptcy looming, Pakistan is seeking a \$7 billion bailout package from the IMF to prevent the state from collapsing.
- While the IMF delegation is in Pakistan, Pakistan will face difficult times. According to the report, in order to secure this loan, Pakistan will have to implement extremely unpopular austerity measures such as drastically reducing subsidies and instituting market reforms.

Return of Terrorism

- After many years of apparent peace, Pakistan is witnessing the return of terrorism.
- On January 30, a suicide bomber killed over a hundred worshippers in a mosque in Peshawar, in one of the most serious incidents on a single day in more than two decades of terrorism.
- The fact that it is unclear which faction of the Taliban was behind this makes matters far worse.
- In the past, such acts have been met with a decisive response, but with the Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Muneer, leaving for a five-day tour to the United Kingdom (on defense-related issues, between February 5 and 9) soon after the blast, questions have been raised about Pakistan's resolve and response to end terrorism.

Pakistan's Relations with India

- Pakistan's strained ties with India continue to deprive the former of a potentially transformative trading and investment partner.
- In 2020-2021, total bilateral trade between India and Pakistan was \$329 million. According to the Ministry of Commerce, this has increased to \$514 million in 2021-2022, with Indian exports outnumbering imports from Pakistan.
- Terrorism "emanating from territories under Pakistan's control" remains a major source of concern in bilateral relations.

What is the way forward?

- It is not good for India if its neighbors are weak and stumbling. The volatile situation is bound to cast many challenges on the country, hurting the economy to that extent, from a sharp drop in

export-import to an influx of refugees leading to law and order issues.

- As a result, it is preferable if befuddled Pakistan recovers and returns to a near-normal position as soon as possible. But the chances of a quick, early revival are dwindling by the day.
- The "weakest economy in South Asia" requires a visionary and a strong force to get it back on track.
- Pakistan requires a leader who can push a future agenda through the impulsive, narrow-minded fragments who want to exploit the worsening situation for petty political gain.
- So, for the time being, only external aid can save the country to some extent.

Conclusion

Pakistan has devolved into a dysfunctional state in which its elites have demonstrated their incompetence and arrogance by failing to address fundamental and day-to-day public issues. They continue to rule, whether under the guise of democracy or through extended periods of military dictatorship, amassing wealth through privilege and being unresponsive to the needs of the citizens. Pakistan's biggest crisis is the lack of any sort of political opposition or alternative, particularly in the form of progressive political parties and groups, or even spontaneous civic action expressing anger. The label of 'resilient' is fading.

Japan And The Global South

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Global South

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighborhood- relations, Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests, Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interest

Context:

- C. Raja Mohan, Senior Fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute in Delhi and a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express has written an article titled '**Japan And The Global South**' published in the Indian Express on 15th February 2023.
- Under Prime Minister **Fumio Kishida**, **Japan** has been pushing the **G7** to engage developing nations while casting aside preconceptions and recognising their historical and cultural backgrounds.

What is the Global South?

- Fumio Kishida, the Prime Minister of Japan has initiated a process of raising the global profile of the nations of the **Global South**, which referred to the developing nations of the "**Third world**".
- The term "Global South" was developed by India in the run-up to its Presidency of the **G-20**.
- It includes nations from Latin America, Oceania, Asia and Africa and is characterised by low-income, dense populations, poor infrastructure and political and cultural marginalization.
- Critics have claimed that term was now irrelevant as there was a huge difference in the economic development of the developing countries and the third world countries.
- Others criticized India's move as a return to the **Cold War mindset** of the South vs the North.

The Realist model of diplomacy

- As a result of the Ukraine crisis, Japan has evolved from a **pacifist model** to a **realist diplomacy** which is at the heart of Japan's new approach.

- It refers to a pragmatic model where diplomacy is backed by defence capabilities and the reinforced defence capabilities will lead to persuasiveness in enforcing diplomatic efforts.
- PM Kishido has claimed that the world was not moving towards a converged system of values as proposed by **globalisation** and contradicted the Western belief that they were the protectors of democracy.
- He recommended that the G7 countries engage with the Global South by setting aside preconceptions and understanding the history and culture of the regions instead of attempting to impose their views.
- Developing countries have been unwilling to join the Western condemnation of Russia's actions despite the importance they have attached to the ideas of **territorial sovereignty and non-intervention**.
- Historically, the West has been reluctant to engage with the Global South, with China and Russia taking up a larger role in the region in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse.

India and Japan Coordination

- India and Japan have developed strong defense ties with regional groupings like the **QUAD** and exercises like **Dharma Guardian and Malabar**.
- Japan and India are among the world's largest economies and have increased trade ties with each other progressively. In 2020, Japan was India's 12th largest trading partner.
- However, the **ASEAN trade pact RCEP** which included Japan was a point of divergence as India pulled out over concerns about the adverse impacts on domestic producers.
- India and Japan have coordinated in developing nuclear reactors and high-speed rails similar to the **Shinkansen** system.
- India and Japan also have strong disaster management coordination and technology-sharing initiatives.
- India and Japan share a common interest in defending themselves from China's predatory actions in the Indo-Pacific and a shared engagement with the smaller states of the region.



Way forward

- Japan has proposed that the West and the Global South reconnect in a more fundamental manner with greater cooperation in addressing global challenges.
- The Japanese focus on the Global South is a welcome move for India, as it has helped shatter the misconception that Asia was **Sino-centric** and help overcome traditional prejudices between the East and West.

Ex. Dharma Guardian

- It is a joint military exercise between India and Japan that was last conducted in 2022 in Belgavi, Karnataka. The exercise is aimed at enhancing the level of cooperation between the defence forces of the two countries.

Ex Malabar

- The exercise is an annual quadrilateral naval exercise involving the United States, Japan, Australia and India as permanent partners. It originally began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between India and the US. Japan joined in 2015 and Australia rejoined in 2020. The 26th edition was held in Yokosuka, Japan in 2022.

QUAD

- QUAD** or the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue** is a coalition of four democracies: **India, Australia, the United States, and Japan**.
- Former Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe originally suggested the proposal in 2007 but it could not proceed since Australia withdrew under Chinese pressure.
- India, Australia, the US, and Japan finally formed this "quadrilateral" partnership in 2017.
- It was established on the principles of the nations' shared democratic ideals and their shared interest in the secure and open marine trade.
- It seeks to guarantee and maintain a **free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific**.

Japan Seeks Urgent Unsc Meeting As N Korea Test Fires Two More Missiles



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: International relations

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora, Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate

Context:

- Recently, **North Korea** launched two **short-range ballistic missiles** into the sea off the country's eastern coast.
- The escalated threat had prompted **Japan** to request an emergency meeting of the **UN Security Council**.

What is act of North Korea exactly?

- North Korea** launched two **short-range ballistic missiles** as part of a tit-for-tat exchange with **Japan** and **South Korea**.
- In the previous year, North Korea had launched 70 missiles, the most the country has ever fired.
- The country has also escalated its nuclear threat and threatened unprecedentedly strong responses to the military drills conducted between the USA and South Korea.
- Pyongyang** has repeatedly described these drills as preparation for an invasion of North Korea.

What could be the reason behind the launch?

- According to Kim Yo Jong, sister of NK leader Kim Jong Un, the last launches as well as future launches depended on US strategic movements in the **Pacific** and around the **Korean Peninsula**.

- The launches could be seen as North Korea's response to the passing of the **USA's B- 1 B long range supersonic bombers** over the Korean peninsula on 19th February.
- The US bomber flight was part of separate training exercises with Japan and South Korea that were conducted as a response to North Korea's **ICBM** test.

How have the other nations responded?

- The South Korean military said that it had detected two missiles launched from the Western coast of North Korea on the morning of 21st February 2023.
- Japan reported that the two missiles landed outside of the country's **Exclusive Economic Zone** and had not caused any damage to aircrafts or vessels.
- However the distance covered by the missile has indicated that most of South Korea could be within its firing range.
- South Korea and Japan have condemned the launches as threats to international peace and security as well as violations of **UNSC** resolutions that bar North Korea from any form of ballistic activities.



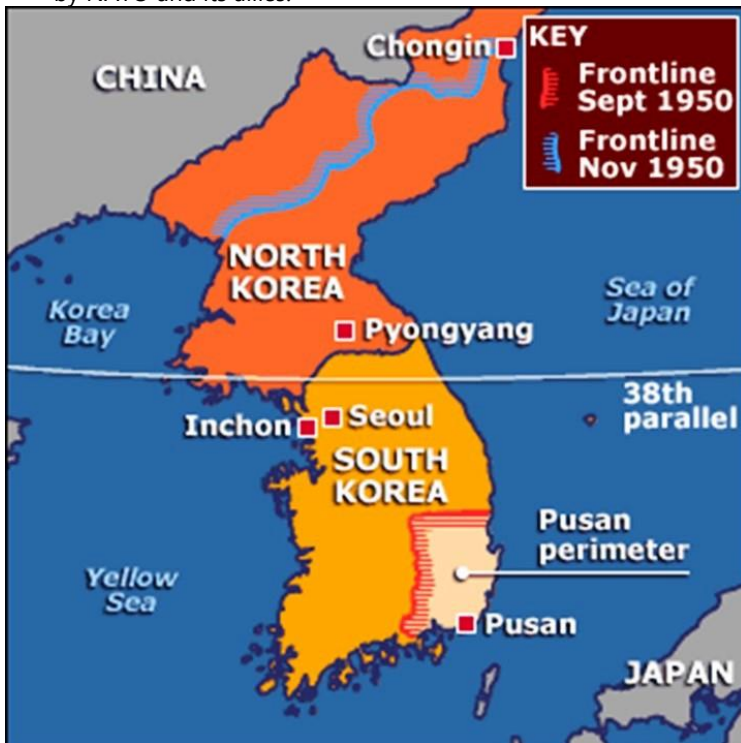
UN Response

- The Prime Minister of Japan, Fumio Kishida has requested an emergency meeting of the **UN Security Council** to respond to the missile launches by North Korea.
- The Assistant Secretary-General for political affairs Khaled Khiri was scheduled to address a briefing of the Security Council as an initial response.
- However, the likelihood of further action by the Security Council against North Korea was unlikely due to the **veto powers** of North Korean allies China and Russia that had already vetoed US led sanctions against North Korea in 2022.

Korean Conflict

- The origin of the Korean conflict can be traced to the Japanese occupation of Korea between 1910 and 1945.
- At the **Yalta Conference** held in 1945 after Japan's defeat in World War II, the Allied Forces set up a **four-power-trusteeship** over Korea.
- Subsequently, the USSR invaded and seized control over the North while the South remained under the USA and its allies.
- In 1948, the two regions became official countries, North Korea and South Korea which were divided along the **38th parallel**.
- Territorial and ideological conflicts between the two nations led to war after the North attacked in 1950.

- The United Nations forces led by the USA responded which led to China entering the conflict in support of the North.
- Peace talks began in 1951 and the **Indian resolution on Korea** was adopted by the UN in 1952.
- The **Korean Armistice Agreement** was signed between the UN Command, Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army on 27th July 1953. However, **South Korea refused to sign the agreement.**
- The Agreement led to an **official ceasefire without a peace treaty** and the establishment of the **Korean Demilitarized Zone** between the two states.
- A pact was signed in 1991 between the two countries wherein both parties agreed to refrain from aggression.
- North Korea withdrew from the **Non-Proliferation Treaty** in 2003 and increased nuclear testing.
- South Korea has seen this as threatening due to the history of conflict. The USA has criticized the move as well and offered it's guarantee of support to the South in case of a nuclear attack.
- The increased presence of American military and strategic assets as well as military cooperation with South Korea and Japan have irked North Korea whose aggressive arms testing, nuclear arsenal and alliance with Russia and China are viewed as a security threat by NATO and its allies.



United Nations Security Council

- In 1945, the Security Council was created as one of the United Nations' six main bodies through the **UN Charter**.
- The body's major responsibility is to contribute to the preservation of world peace and security.
- The council is headquartered in New York and has ten non-permanent members chosen for two-year terms and five permanent members.
- The United States, the Russian Federation, France, China, and the United Kingdom are the five permanent members.
- Five non-permanent members are chosen by the General Assembly each year to serve two year term.

- The ten non-permanent seats are allocated on a regional basis, while the 15 members of the council alternate holding the presidency each month.
- Each Security Council member has one vote and decisions are made by majority vote of nine members, including the permanent members who concur with the decision.
 - The resolution cannot be passed if one of the five permanent members votes "no." This is the veto power of the permanent members.
- Any UN member who is not a member of the Security Council is permitted to take part in discussions without having a vote whenever the Security Council determines that the member's interests are particularly impacted.

Two Years After Coup, Myanmar's Mess — And India's Headache

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Myanmar

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighborhood- relations, Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora ; Security challenges and their management in border areas

Context:

- The article titled "**Two Years After Coup, Myanmar's Mess — And India's Headache**" published in the Indian Express on 4th February 2023 has discussed **India's foreign policy and security concerns with Myanmar.**
- **India** and **Myanmar** share a **1,600 Km long border** spread across four Northeastern states and the **maritime boundary** in the **Bay of Bengal.**



Myanmar Coup

- On February 1st 2021, the army of Myanmar seized power in a **military coup** overthrowing the popularly elected National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi on the inaugural day of the Parliament Session.
- The coup was justified by claims of poll rigging and the military's fears over a possible rewriting of the Constitution that would diminish the army's importance.

What was the aftermath of the Coup?

- Even though the military coup was successful and a **junta** regime called the **State Administration Council** headed by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was formed, it failed to control the growing resentment against it.

- Hundreds of armed pro-democracy civilian groups or **People's Defence Forces** have been fighting the junta with the support of **Ethnic Armed Organizations** that were fighting the state against its discriminatory policies.
- The Junta have responded with force but have been unsuccessful in crushing the uprising, resulting in a violent deadlock.
- A **National Unity Government** has been formed in exile comprising former Parliamentarians that has been lobbying foreign powers for democratic recognition.

What is India's Myanmar Policy?

- The failure of the state and civilian unrest in Myanmar is a concern for India given its 1,600 km long boundary along the country's northeast and the maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.
- Over the last three decades India has followed a **dual track policy** in Myanmar. It has co-operated with the junta while sympathizing with the pro-democracy forces.
- Co-operation with the military regime began in the mid 1990's as a **quid-pro-quo for Myanmar's help in counter-insurgency in the border areas**.
- The emergence of China as an opponent for influence in Myanmar has led India to adopt a close approach with the Junta to protect its **national interests i.e border security and limiting Chinese influence**.
- However, the prolonged coup has highlighted the limits of the dual-track policy.



What are India's major concerns?

- Pro-Democracy Forces control large parts of **Sagaing** where the **trilateral highway** passes through and has as a result complicated the free movement of goods across the border.
- The nearly completed **Sittiwe port** on the mouth of the **Kaladan river** was planned as an alternative route to access the landlocked northeastern states of India. However this project has also been affected by the area being controlled by rebels.
- **Cross border spillover** of the conflict is also a concern for India especially as India has been hosting thousands of Myanmarese refugees from **Chin state**.

- The recent report by the **UN Office on Drugs and Crime** on Myanmar indicated a **sharp rise in poppy cultivation** particularly in Chin, which borders India.
- The **recruitment and training of Indian insurgent outfits** like the People's Liberation Army by the junta to fight pro-democracy forces has been noted as a present and future security threat for India.
- The **Rohingya crisis** has become a humanitarian crisis that has deeply affected the politics, regions, and culture of the bordering Indian states. The military has not been able to provide an effective solution despite international pressure to do so.
- India has promised to project the **voice of the global south** during its term as the **President of the G-20** and has considered itself the **mother of democracy**. In this background, continued support for an oppressive anti-democratic regime has led to questions about India's commitment to global democracy.

Way Forward

- According to experts, India can adopt a number of steps to help stabilize the volatile situation in Myanmar.
 - Open Channels with some ethnic groups and the pro-democracy forces
 - Increase cooperation with **ASEAN**
 - Provide a connection between the junta's military and the Indian military
 - Increase **people-to-people communication**
 - Provide scholarships to students in Myanmar similar to the policy for Afghan students
- The junta have recently changed the **first-past-the-post system to proportional representation** and is considering holding elections in 2023 in the hope of earning international acceptance.
- However, it appears that an election would worsen the conditions in Myanmar, especially with the country's most popular leader, Nobel winning 77-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi, still detained by a military court.

UN Office on Drugs and Crime

- The **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** was founded to combat the hazards of drug abuse and related crimes.
- The UNODC also seeks to enhance crime prevention and support reform of the criminal justice system.
- In order to help the United Nations handle the problems of **illegal drug trafficking, drug misuse, crime prevention, criminal justice, political corruption, and global terrorism** in a coordinated and all-encompassing way, the **UNODC** was set up as the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.
- It is the principal UN organization in charge of providing legal and technical help to fight terrorism.
- Every year, the UNODC publishes the **World Drug Report**, which includes information on drug usage in various countries as well as trends in the manufacturing and consumption of illegal drugs.

Nine Guest Countries For G-20 To Bring Their Own Plans To The Summit

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: G20

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighbourhood- relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context:

- **Under India's Presidency**, nine countries — **Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates** have been invited to be "guest countries" in a year when the G20 is struggling to strike a balance between the agendas of the Western Countries and the Global South.
- **The "nine guest countries" to the G20 summit** and ministerial meetings are expected to bring their own plans to the events, but they will ultimately be **guided by the G20's "continuity."**



About G20

- The G20 is an informal group of 19 countries and the European Union, as well as representatives from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- The G20 Presidency is rotated annually, according to a system that ensures regional balance over time.
- The presidency is chosen by dividing the 19 countries into five groups of no more than four countries each.
- The presidency is rotated between each group.
- Every year, the G20 elects a country from another group to serve as president.
- India is in Group 2, which also includes Russia, South Africa, and Turkey.
- The G20 does not have a permanent secretariat or headquarters.

India's G20 Presidency

- India took over the G20 Presidency from Indonesia on December 1st, and will host the G20 Leaders' Summit for the first time in the country in 2023.
- A nation deeply committed to democracy and multilateralism, India's G20 Presidency would be a watershed moment in her history as it seeks to play an important role by finding pragmatic global solutions for the wellbeing of all, and in doing so, manifest the true spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' or the 'World is One Family'.

Which are the nine guest countries?

- Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates have been invited to be "guest countries"

Opportunities for Invitee Countries

- The invitee countries are the same as any other G20 participant. This is an opportunity for these countries to participate as equal partners in the G20 process.

- It was stated that the G20 has continuity because the summit represents a continuous process that has run through many Presidencies, emphasizing that the G20 lays the seeds for actionable policy, and thus the "invitee countries" are also expected to play an important role in the summit without derailing it in any way.
- The agenda of this year's G20 summit is in the early stage and the ideas are being "socialized".
- The obvious apprehension about the ideas is fueled in part by the intense differences that have arisen as a result of the division among the group's leading members as a result of the Ukraine crisis.

Plans of the Guest Countries

- **Diplomatic Activities:** Ahead of the summit, countries such as the UAE, Egypt, and Bangladesh have increased diplomatic activities, indicating that they intend to use the gathering in India to further their respective foreign policy objectives.
- **Member of UNSC:** During a visit to Dhaka last week, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra was informed of Dhaka's interest in becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to take this idea to Dhaka's numerous foreign partners in the coming months.
- **Bilateral animosity with Egypt:** Similarly, continued Israeli actions against Palestinians in recent weeks have increased bilateral irritability with Egypt.
- **Ukraine Issue:** The Netherlands is expected to raise the Ukraine issue forcefully.
- These angles have drawn the attention of G20 observers to what the "guest countries" will bring to the table on their own.

What are the issues?

- The G20 agenda has remained a strongly contested issue, with two opposing groups demanding that different topics be highlighted.
- While the western bloc in the G20, led by the United States and the United Kingdom, is expected to be focused on cornering Russia, the other side is determined not to let the event devolve into an anti-Russia meeting.
- The broad approach that is emerging across a majority of members is that the governance issues that are not being addressed in the United Nations and other multilateral forums should be taken up at the New Delhi G20.
- Commodities crisis, price rise, energy price rise, debt restructuring issues that have intensified in the backdrop of the Ukraine war since February 2022 are likely to occupy the majority of members' attention.
- A good test of this evolving agenda-forming discussion will be evident in Bengaluru, where the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors will meet recently, followed by the foreign ministers' meeting in March (1-2), which will be the outfit's biggest diplomatic event before the summit of heads of state and governments in September.

Meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG)

- The meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG), which will be chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das, on February 24, the first anniversary of Russia's attack on Ukraine.
- The FMCBG meeting is likely to foreshadow the foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi on March 1-2, but it is

observed that the coming summit aims to strike a balance in which all compelling issues are addressed without overshadowing the economic issues that pose a difficult challenge to the countries of the Global South. Issues closer to the Global South will not be overshadowed by the West's insistence on a specific European issue.

India's Interest of the Global South

- To address issues of underdevelopment, poverty, and the challenges posed by climate change, the global south primarily requires capital, technology, and capacity building.
- The G-20 presidency provides an excellent opportunity for India to push for faster action and reforms in critical areas such as climate finance, energy transition to green energy, digital divide, democratization of the global financial system and institutions of global governance to make them more representative and responsive to the needs of the global South;
- food security, which cuts across North and South, exacerbated in particular by disruptions in supply chains caused by Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Opportunities for India

- India has an opportunity to campaign against the imposition of food or fertilizer restrictions while keeping supply chains open.
- India can also make a case for encouraging more synergies in agriculture, food technology, and biotechnology in order to improve food and nutrition security.
- Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are intended to benefit the poorest of the poor.
- At the G-20, India will have the opportunity to re-emphasize the private sector's role in accelerating SDGs by proactively increasing financial flows to it and further investments for low- and middle-income countries through innovative financing sources and instruments.

Conclusion

India's role as G20 chair is being viewed as a genuine opportunity for it to share the experiences of the global South with the rest of the world. From December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023, India assumed the Presidency of the G20, or Group of 20, an intergovernmental forum of the world's major developed and developing economies. In an era of geopolitical uncertainty and strong interdependence, more effective global governance is required.

The Past And Present Of Russia's War In Ukraine

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Russia-Ukraine War

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context:

- On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine from the north, east, and south. A year after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, there are signs of escalation everywhere.
- The war in Ukraine, which began a year ago, has killed thousands, forced millions to flee their homes, reduced entire cities to rubble, and fueled fears that the conflict could escalate into an open conflict between Russia and NATO.

Ukraine invasion – day 362



What is the Russia-Ukraine War?

- The Russo-Ukrainian War is an ongoing international conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in February 2014.
- Following Ukraine's Dignity Revolution, Russia annexed Crimea and supported pro-Russian separatists fighting the Ukrainian military in the Donbas War.
- During the first eight years of the conflict, there were also naval incidents, cyberwarfare, and heightened political tensions.
- The conflict reached a tipping point in February 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Background

- A year after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, there are signs of escalation everywhere.
- The West has recently announced the supply of more advanced weapons to Ukraine, deepening its involvement in the conflict.
- In response, Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has already reinforced Russian positions along the 1,000-kilometer-long frontline in Ukraine with hundreds of thousands of troops, announced the suspension of his country's participation in the **New Start treaty**, which could spark a nuclear arms race.
- Ukraine, with the free flow of weapons from the West, hopes to halt Russian advances and launch its own offensive to reclaim lost territory.
- As the war drags on, the chances of a direct confrontation between Russia and the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, both nuclear powers, rise.

Current Status of the War

- Russia is expected to launch a new offensive in the coming days. Currently, some flashpoints along the frontline are seeing intense fighting.
- For more than seven months, PMC Wagner, a private Russian security force with close ties to the Kremlin, has been fighting to take Bakhmut, a city at the crossroads of several key arteries in

Donetsk, one of the four Ukrainian regions annexed by Mr. Putin in September.

- Wagner took Soledar, a salt mine town on the outskirts of Bakhmut, and several settlements around the city later that month.
- Russians currently control all major highways into Bakhmut, with the exception of one (Chasiv Yar), which Ukrainian troops are using for reinforcement and resupply.
- The Russians have opened two new fronts, one in Izium, northwest of Bakhmut in Kharkiv Oblast, and one in Vuhledar, south of Bakhmut in Donetsk.
- They are also pushing the frontline in Zaporizhzhia, and positional fighting is still going on in Kherson.
- Ukraine is attempting to hold onto the territories until more weapons and trained fighters arrive from the West.
- It would be a few weeks before the main battle tanks pledged by Western countries, including the Leopard 2 (German), M1 Abrams (American), and Challenger 2 (British), arrived on the battlefield.

How is the West helping Ukraine?

- **Western assistance** has been critical in Ukraine's resistance and counter-offensive.
- **The United States** is Ukraine's largest aid provider, with over \$70 billion in military and financial aid pledged.
- **The EU** has pledged \$37 billion, with the United Kingdom and Germany topping the list.
- **New Weapons:** After a string of setbacks in Mariupol, Severodonetsk, and Lysychansk last year, the US promised to deliver mid-range rocket systems such as HIMARS. The new weapons assisted Ukraine in regaining momentum, but Ukrainian gains stalled in December.
- As Russia prepares for another offensive, the West is once again rushing to Ukraine's aid, this time with more advanced weapons such as missile defense systems, armored vehicles, tank killers, battle tanks, and precision bombs.
- While arming Ukraine has been effective in halting Russian advances, hurting Russia economically has been a double-edged sword.

Russian Economy

- Sanctions against Russia, one of the world's largest producers of oil and gas, have had a significant impact on the global economy, exacerbating an inflationary crisis in the West, particularly in Europe.
- Russia was also hit, but it found new markets for its energy exports in Asia, reshaping the global energy export landscape.
- Despite sanctions, Russia increased oil output by 2% last year and increased oil export earnings by 20%, to \$218 billion.
- Russia also earned \$138 billion from natural gas, an increase of nearly 80% over 2021 despite European pressure to reduce Russian gas imports.
- The Russian economy was expected to contract by 2% in 2022, but the IMF predicts it will grow by 0.3% this year and 2.1% next year.
- In comparison, Germany, Europe's largest economy, is expected to grow 0.1% this year, while the United Kingdom, Ukraine's second largest supporter, is expected to contract by 0.6%.

Impact of war on Global Economy

- **Poverty and hunger:** According to the World Bank's baseline projection, Ukraine's poverty rate will rise from 1.8% in 2021 to 19.8% in 2022, based on a \$5.50 per day threshold rate.

- **Energy trade:** Russia and Ukraine are major commodity producers, and disruptions there have resulted in soaring global prices, particularly for oil and natural gas.
- **Commodity trade:** According to the IMF, wider supply-chain disruptions, in addition to rising fuel prices, may be consequential. Disruptions, sanctions, and higher commodity prices all have the potential to disrupt global value chains.
- **Services and travel:** The World Bank highlighted the global impact on services trade as outbound travel was disrupted by airspace closures, travel restrictions, sanctions, and higher fuel prices.
- **Investment and finance:** According to the OECD, inflation is lowering living standards and reducing consumer spending around the world, and businesses are becoming less optimistic about future output. Crucially, the loss of confidence is discouraging investment, which threatens to harm supply for years to come.

India's Stand on Russia-Ukraine War

- **Neutral player:** India has gained credibility on both sides as a mediator.
- **Earlier diplomatic involvement** was successful in preventing an attack on the nuclear power station in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. Discussions to intervene with Russia took place during the Black Sea grain shipment.
- **Leader of the Global South:** Mexico suggested that the Prime Minister of India, Pope Francis, and the UN Secretary-General mediate the Russia-Ukraine crisis.
- **Good relations with Moscow and the West:** India can use this unique leverage to put pressure on Russia to end its war in Ukraine.
- **Geopolitical ambitions:** Peacekeeping could help India gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.
- **India-Russia Friendship:** Russia is still India's largest and most reliable supplier of military hardware. Russia is an important partner for India in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

For The First Time, Iran Admits Claim Of Enriching Its Uranium To 84%

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Iran nuclear Program

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora; Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Context:

- Recently, Iran directly acknowledged for the first time an accusation made by independent inspectors that it had **enriched its uranium to 84% purity**, putting it closer to achieving weapons-grade nuclear material.
- Iran's nuclear programme had been contained by the **2015 nuclear deal** from which the USA unilaterally withdrew in 2018.

Nuclear activities in Iran

- Iran has for the first time acknowledged the claim that it has enriched its **uranium to 84% purity** which is the closest the country has come to **weapons-grade uranium (90%)**.

- The acknowledgement was by Nour News, a website that has been linked to the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, a body overseen by **Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**.
- However, there has not been any clarity on where the enrichment took place although the IAEA has said that it had found two cascades of advanced IR-6 centrifuges at Iran's underground **Fordo facility**.
- These cascades were interconnected in a manner wholly different from what was declared to the agency by Iran.
- Iran has been enriching uranium at Fordo to around 60% purity which non-proliferation experts have claimed was beyond necessary thresholds for civilian use.
- Iran also enriched uranium at its **Natanz** nuclear site.
- According to the Director General of IAEA, Iran has sufficient uranium to produce several bombs but it would take months for a weapon to be developed and armed.



How have other countries reacted?

- Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel has threatened to launch military action against Iran similar to its previous bombing of Iraqi and Syrian nuclear program facilities.
- The USA has stated that it has seen reports and that discussions were ongoing with the IAEA and European partners.
- Iran has recently become more isolated from the West, with tensions mounting with Israel.

JCPOA

- Iran's nuclear programme had been limited by the 2015 agreement between **Iran and China, France, Russia, the UK, the USA and Germany (P5+1)**.
- The Iran Nuclear deal was also called the **Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA)**.
- As part of the agreement, Iran had to **cut down its stocks of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy water** which were all components used to make nuclear weapons.
- Iran also agreed to allow IAEA inspectors access to its nuclear sites.
- The West had agreed to lift **sanctions related to the nuclear programme while sanctions concerned with human rights violations and the ballistic missile system would remain** in place.
- Although the US agreed to lift oil export sanctions, financial restrictions were continued which limited Iran's trade opportunities.

- In 2018, the US unilaterally withdrew from the deal and reimposed banking and oil sanctions which prompted Iran to restart its nuclear programme.
- The other members of the JCPOA have criticized the USA's unilateral withdrawal and sanctions.
- An alternate barter system called **INSTEX or the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges** was launched by France, Germany and the UK to enable **non-SWIFT and non-dollar trade** with Iran, but it only covered food and medicines which were already exempt from US sanctions.

IAEA

- The **IAEA or International Atomic Energy Agency** is a UN body responsible for global cooperation in the nuclear field.
- It was established in 1957 over the fears of nuclear war and the dangers associated with the spread of nuclear weapons.
- Headquartered in Vienna, the Agency works with partner nations to promote the safe, peaceful and secure use of nuclear technology.
- It is an independent international organization that reports annually to the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council when necessary.

The New Start Treaty On Pause

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: New START treaty

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Context:

- Recently, **Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Moscow was unilaterally suspending the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty with the United States**, stating that the West was trying to destroy Russia.
- The New Start treaty is the last remaining nuclear arms treaty between Moscow and Washington, and it was extended for five years in 2021.

Background

- About a half-decade before the Cold War ended, the then-leaders of the United States and the former Soviet Union, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, declared in a historic statement that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."
- While both Moscow and Washington were aggressive in their one-upmanship in expanding nuclear arsenals in the early Cold War decades, they have since engaged in bilateral talks, albeit rocky ones, and signed multiple treaties to shrink and keep checks on each other's nuclear arsenals.
- The first formal dialogue, the **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)**, began between the two countries in 1969, during the administration of former President Richard Nixon.
- The Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Systems Treaty, which provided for the shooting down of incoming missiles, was signed in 1972, but the George W. Bush administration unilaterally pulled out of the pact in 2002.
- Notably, the **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I)**, signed in 1991, expired in late 2009, and another treaty, the **Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT or Moscow Treaty)**, was signed in 2002

- The New START treaty, which replaced the 2002 pact, was the last remaining nuclear weapons control agreement between the two powers, who together hold 90% of the world's nuclear arsenal.



What is the New START Treaty?

- The New START treaty is formally known as the Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.
- It is the last remaining arms control treaty between the world's two major nuclear powers, the United States and Russia.
- The treaty was signed in 2010 by former US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, and it entered into force in February 2011.
- It was extended for five years when current US President Joe Biden took office in 2021.

Limits Imposed on the two countries

- The Treaty forbids America and Russia from deploying more than 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads and more than 700 long-range missiles and bombers.
- It also limits each country to 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers and delivery vehicles.
- It allows each side to conduct up to 18 short-notice (32-hour) on-site inspections of strategic nuclear weapons sites per year to ensure that the other has not exceeded the treaty's limits.
- According to the agreement, Russia and the United States exchange data twice a year on ballistic missiles covered by the treaty, as well as bombers, test sites, and nuclear bases.
- The treaty also requires the two parties to send notifications within five days if they change or update something in their stockpile, such as moving missiles to a new base or deploying a new warhead to the system.

How is compliance with the treaty ensured?

- The treaty terms include detailed procedures for the implementation and verification of the central limits, as well as all treaty obligations.
- The treaty calls for 18 on-site inspections per year by US and Russian inspection teams.
- Type One inspections focus on sites with both deployed and non-deployed strategic systems (up to ten per year), while Type Two inspections focus solely on non-deployed strategic systems (up to 8 per year).
- Since the New START Treaty's entry into force on February 1, 2023, the two parties have conducted 328 on-site inspections, exchanged 25,311 notifications, held 19 meetings of the Bilateral Consultative Commission, and exchanged 42 biannual data exchanges on strategic offensive arms subject to the treaty.

Why did Putin Suspend the treaty?

- **Strategic Defeat:** It was stated that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States wished to inflict strategic defeat on Russia while also trying to get nuclear facilities at the same time.
- **Drone Attacks:** Putin contended that, while the US pushed for the resumption of inspections of Russian nuclear facilities under the treaty, NATO allies were assisting Ukraine in mounting drone attacks on Russian air bases hosting nuclear-capable strategic bombers.
 - The Russian military said in December that it shot down the drones that attacked two bomber bases deep inside the country.
- **Rejection of Requests:** The Russian President also accused the US of turning down some Russian requests for visits to specific US facilities. Meanwhile, the United States State Department stated in its New START annual implementation report 2023 that Moscow was not complying with the pact because it refused to allow Washington to conduct on-site inspections.

What does the suspension mean for global arms control?

- The move not only disrupts the fragile calculus of nuclear arms controls between the two largest nuclear powers, but it may also provide an opportunity for other nuclear-armed countries, particularly China and others such as Pakistan, Iran, Israel, and India, among others, to increase their arsenals.
- The move may jeopardize US-China arms control cooperation.
- This will only make China even less interested in pursuing cooperative nuclear security with the US. Even this last example of arms control cooperation is now seriously under threat.

Fatf Suspends Membership Of Russia Over Ukraine Invasion

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: FATF

Prepp Mains Booster: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Context:

- Recently, the **Financial Action Task Force** announced that it had suspended Russia's membership as a consequence of the **Russian invasion of Ukraine**.
- The FATF helps around 200 countries and jurisdictions to set standards and aids authorities in countering crimes such as human trafficking, drug smuggling and terrorism.

What is the FATF?

- The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was set up in 1987 by the G-7 nations** as the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.
- Initially it was focused on combating money laundering but post the 9-11 attacks **countering terrorist financing** was added to its mandate while **countering the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction** was added in 2012.
- The **FATF plenary** is the apex decision-making body of the FATF which meets three times a year and is headed by a President selected from among the officials of the member countries for a two-year term.
- The body's Secretariat is located in the OECD headquarters in Paris.

- The body comprises 39 members including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, the UK, and the US as well as the European Union and the Gulf Co-operation Council.
- The tri-annual plenary session assesses Mutual Evaluation Reports (MER) and based on the concerns expressed countries are placed on the grey list or black list.
- The FATF is supported in its activities by the **9 FATF-Style Regional Bodies (FSRB)** in ensuring that its policies are in place globally. **India is a member of the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) and Eurasian Group (EAG).**

- Grey list** countries are those considered safe havens for supporting terror and money laundering. Nigeria and South Africa were added while Morocco and Cambodia were removed from the Grey List.
- Black List** countries are those that support terror funding and money laundering and are included in the **List of Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCT)**. Iran, Myanmar and North Korea are on the Black List.

FATF on Russia

- The FATF has announced that Russia's membership in the body was suspended on the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine.
- This was the first instance of the FATF revoking a country's membership.
- According to FATF, Russia's actions in Ukraine were violative of the **body's foundational principles of promoting the safety, security and integrity of the global financial system as well as the ideas of international cooperation and mutual respect.**
- FATF has identified Russia's involvement in the arms trade and malicious cyber-activities, as well as evasion activities as violative of the body's principles.
- As a result of the suspension, Russia would no longer be legible to attend the physical or virtual meetings of the body or access its documents but would remain accountable for implementing FATF standards in money laundering.
- However, Russia would be liable for membership dues if it intended to reapply for membership.
- The body had sidelined Russia by restricting it from holding any positions of authority or participating in discussions related to standards setting, peer review, governance and membership since June 2022.
- FATF has also called upon all other jurisdictions to remain vigilant to threats arising from Russia's actions in Ukraine.
- Observers have said that the suspension has **restrained Russia's ability to affect FATF decisions while also adversely impacting its business climate.**
- Subsequently, there may be a higher level of risk associated with financial transactions involving Russian entities which may affect the country's economic interests.

Russia's Response

- Rosfinmonitoring, the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service has described the FATF move as unfounded, excessive and beyond its mandate.

- Russia stated that the decision was counterproductive to FATF's goal of preventing money laundering, the proliferation of WMDs and terror financing. However, this would not affect Russia's financial system and anti-money-laundering activities would continue according to the government.



Ukraine Response

- Ukraine had initially demanded the inclusion of Russia in the FATF black list for its exposure to terror funding and money laundering alongside Iran, Myanmar and North Korea.
- Ukraine also stated that the suspension was a clear signal to all other members of the need for extreme caution when interacting with Russia.

Conclusion

- The FATF move to suspend Russia's membership for its actions in Ukraine is another step in the **collective response against what is viewed as Russian expansionism and unilateral revision of boundaries.**
- Although Russia has claimed that the move will not adversely affect its economy, global financial and corporate stakeholders will be reluctant to partner with a nation that has been accused of money laundering and terror funding.

China Plans Aksai Chin Railway To Connect Tibet, Xinjiang

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Aksai chin

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighbourhood relations, Security challenges and their management in border areas,

Context:

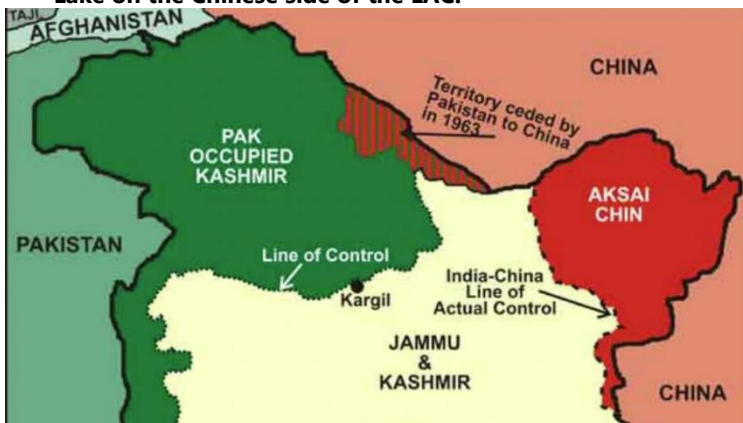
- According to a new railway plan released by the **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)** government, China will soon begin construction on an ambitious new railway line connecting Xinjiang and Tibet that will run close to the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** and through the disputed **Aksai Chin region.**
- The "medium to long term railway plan" for Tibet, envisages expanding the TAR rail network to reach 4,000 km by 2025 up from the current 1,400 km, including new routes that will **run up to China's borders with India and Nepal.**

China's plan for Aksai Chin

- The Xinjiang-Tibet railway project will roughly follow the G219 national highway's route.
- The construction of the **Xinjiang-Tibet highway** through the Aksai Chin region was a **major contributing factor** to the

tensions between India and China in the lead-up to the **1962 Sino-Indian War**.

- The highway was viewed by India as a **threat to its territorial integrity**, as the Aksai Chin region is claimed by both China and India.
- The construction of the highway was seen by India as an attempt by China to **assert control over the disputed territory** and led to a military confrontation between the two countries.
- The war ended with a **victory of China**, and the Aksai Chin region remains under Chinese control to this day.
- The proposed railway will start in Shigatse in Tibet, and run northwest along the **Nepal border**, before cutting north through **Aksai Chin** and ending in Hotan in Xinjiang.
- The planned route will pass through Rutog and around **Pangong Lake on the Chinese side of the LAC**.



- The first section, from Shigatse to Pakhuktso, will be completed by 2025, while the remainder, up to Hotan, is anticipated to be finished by 2035.
- According to the plan, which was made public by the TAR Development and Reform Commission, "by 2025, the construction of several railway projects, including the Ya'an-Nyingchi section of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway, the Shigatse-Pakhuktso section of the Xinjiang-Tibet Railway, and the Bomi-Ra'uk section of the Yunnan-Tibet Railway, will all see major progress."
- The report stated that "improvements to the **regional railway network** will be of major relevance in fostering socioeconomic development and **preserving national security**."
- There are now just **three rail lines operating in Tibet**: the 2006-opened Qinghai-Tibet link, the 2014-opened Lhasa-Shigatse rail, and the 2021-opened Lhasa-Nyingchi line.
- Construction of the railway is thought to accomplish two goals for China: first, improving border security by enabling China to more closely integrate border regions and mobilize rapidly to the boundary when needed; and second, hastening Tibet's economic integration with the hinterland.
- Although Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu are three additional nearby provinces and Qinghai has a rail connection to Tibet, the proposal will now provide new rail connections to all four of these provinces.

Impact

- Aksai Chin is a disputed territory between China and India, and the construction of a railway in the region could change the balance of power in the region.
- **Security**: The railway would give China easier access to its border with India, potentially increasing its ability to quickly move troops and resources in the event of a conflict.

- This could pose a threat to India's security and could potentially change the **dynamics of the border dispute** between the two countries.
- From a geopolitical perspective, the railway could also give the Chinese greater **economic and political influence in the region**, which could challenge India's own interests and ambitions in the area.
- India has been increasing its focus on its own infrastructure development in its northeast region, and the railway in Aksai Chin could **disrupt its plans** and undermine its efforts to build a strong presence in the region.
- Additionally, the railway could also have an impact on the stability and security of other neighboring countries in South Asia, as China's growing influence in the region could potentially disrupt **existing power dynamics and lead to increased tensions**.

Conclusion

- Overall, the construction of the Aksai Chin railway is likely to have significant strategic implications for India and the region as a whole, and India will need to closely monitor developments in the region and take steps to protect its own interests.

GENERAL STUDIES 3

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources; Growth and Development

Trading More Within Asia Makes Economic Sense

Priority: Medium



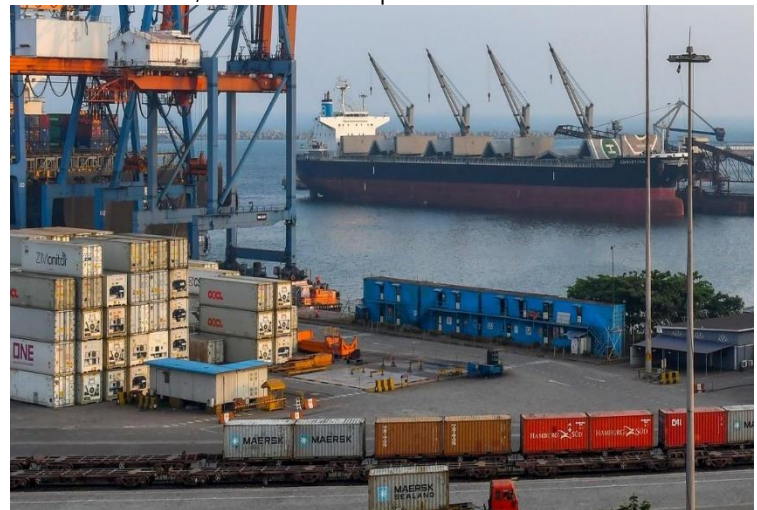
Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources; Growth and Development

Context:

- After the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned recently that **global trade would slow from 5.4% in 2022 to 2.4% in 2023**, South Asia should reconsider regional trade across Asia.
- With polycrisis risks such as an escalating Russia-Ukraine war, a decoupling from global supply chains, and dealing with COVID-19 virus variants, this forecast is optimistic.



Key Highlights

- It was stated that a strong foundation exists for South Asia to trade more with dynamic East Asia: since the 1990s, South Asia-East Asia trade has increased, which is linked to India's trade re-

alignment towards East Asia through its 'Look East' and 'Act East' policies, South Asia adopting reforms, and China offshoring global supply chains to Asia.

- Total merchandise trade between South Asia and East Asia increased at a 10% annual rate between 1990 and 2018, reaching \$332 billion in 2018, and could reach \$500 billion in the future.
- The number of **free trade agreements (FTAs)** linking South Asian and East Asian economies could increase to 30 by 2030.
- Furthermore, regional trade in Asia is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created opportunities for South Asia to participate in global value chains and services trade.

Global growth will bottom out in 2023

- According to the IMF's October 2022 WEO, **global growth will slow from 3.4% in 2022 to 2.7% in 2023.**
- The IMF painted a grim picture that more than a third of the global economy will contract this year or next, while the three largest economies—the United States, the European Union, and China—will continue to stall.
- The IMF effectively rules out a global recession: Negative growth in global GDP or global GDP per capita, which frequently occurs during a global recession is not expected.
- Instead, it expects global growth to slow in 2023 before picking up in 2024.
- Global growth is expected to fall to 2.9 percent in 2023 before rising to 3.1 percent in 2024, from 3.4 percent in 2022.

What needs to be done?

South Asia's Trade Opening

- Regional trade integration across Asia can be encouraged by gradually lowering trade barriers for goods and services.
- Import tariffs and murky non-tariff measures have risen in several South Asian economies since the 2008 global financial crisis — and have never been reversed.
- To move beyond this, South Asia's trade opening should be coordinated with tax reforms, as trade taxes account for a significant portion of government revenue in some economies.
- Adjustment financing to losing sectors to reallocate factors of production and re-training of workers is also required to promote trade gains and reduce income inequality.

Performance of special economic zones

- It should improve the performance of special economic zones (SEZs) and invest in services SEZs to facilitate industrial clustering and exports.
- South Asia has over 600 SEZs in operation, including those in Kochi (India), Gwadar (Pakistan), Mirsarai (Bangladesh), and Hambantota (Tanzania) (Sri Lanka).
- These SEZs have a mixed record in terms of exports, jobs, and fostering domestic linkages.
- Competitive fiscal incentives only matter on the margin in multinationals' locational decisions, and long tax holidays deprive economies of vital tax revenue.
- Improving SEZ processes and outcomes in South Asia necessitates ensuring macroeconomic and political stability, implementing best practices regulatory policies toward investors, providing reliable electricity and 5G broadband cellular technology, and upgrading worker skills.

Pursue comprehensive FTAs

- Pursue comprehensive FTAs that eventually lead to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to provide for regional rules-based trade to protect against rising protectionism.

- While South Asia is a latecomer to FTAs in comparison to East Asia, it has made a start with the Japan-India FTA, the Sri Lanka-Singapore FTA, and the Pakistan-Indonesia FTA.

Reinventing BIMSTEC

- A reimagined trade-focused **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** can facilitate stronger trade ties and support the interests of smaller members.
- Due to inactivity in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India is focusing on BIMSTEC to foster South Asian and Southeast Asian cooperation.
- Reinventing BIMSTEC requires better funding for its Secretariat, the completion of the long-running BIMSTEC FTA, the development of trade capacity in smaller economies, and the introduction of dialogue partner status to encourage open regionalism in Asia.

Way Forward

- While broad South Asia-East Asia trade is desirable, the advent of increasingly complex geopolitics may rule this out for some time.
- As a result, a narrower geographical coverage between South Asia and Southeast Asia may serve as a foundation for future trade integration across Asia.
- To avoid a backlash against regionalisation, the larger economies should make trade gains available to the smaller economies.
- With global trade slowing, it makes economic sense to trade more within Asia.
- Having the political will to implement pro-trade policies can improve the lives of Asians.
- India is the largest economy in South Asia, and its G-20 presidency can serve as a good springboard for these changes.

India Must Avoid Growing Into A Dystopia

Priority: **Medium**



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it; Government Budgeting

Context:

- In the article, written by Pulapre Balakrishnan it is discussed how India must avoid getting into a society that has great suffering or injustice.
- The recently presented Budget has received almost universal praise and those who praise it believe that the economic future is bright.
- Budget is seen as pro-growth, and their forecast is plausible.
- Data presented recently show that private investment plans for the first nine months of this year are more than 50% higher than they were a year ago.
- In terms of economic growth, India appears to be on a successful period.

Expectations regarding India's Economy

- The Indian economy in 2023 is expected to be both hopeful and challenging. The World Bank predicts 6.6% economic growth in FY24. As a result, India's march to become the third-largest economy by 2047 appears to be on track.
- According to the 2023 Economic Survey, the economy is expected to grow by 7% in real terms in 2022-23.

- Merchandise exports totaled US\$ 332.8 billion from April to December 2022. This represented a 16% increase from 2021.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the focus on the size of India's economy. Upon re-election in 2019, he proposed a \$5 trillion target for India's economy in five years (2024-25).
- As the deadline approaches, it becomes clear that the goal is unlikely to be met. This hasn't stopped the enthusiastic cheerleaders. The recent news that India had surpassed the United Kingdom to become the world's fifth largest economy appears to have only boosted their spirits.
- As 2022 came to a close, it was predicted that India's economy would reach \$10 trillion by 2035 and become the world's third largest by 2037.

The West's Self-interest in India

- The rise of India on the global stage has piqued the interest of the West.
- There is a sense of wonder that a country that was once synonymous with famine has finally shed the deadweight of two centuries of colonial exploitation.
- India is not only a relatively rare democracy in the east, but it is also the largest in terms of population.
- Because all Western countries are democracies, western elites see a possible alliance of interests.
- India has warmed to this, and it makes strategic sense. However, economics are not far behind. India's increasing economic size has made it more appealing than it was previously.
- This is not a market for goods, however, because the West's manufactured goods are no longer appealing to Indians. However, its rapid growth presents an investment opportunity for the West's surplus savings.
- As a rapidly growing economy, investing in India is likely to yield the highest returns worldwide.
- As a result, the West's constant buzz about India's growth reflects a deep self-interest.

Implication Regarding Employment

- Unemployment was barely mentioned in the Finance Minister's Budget speech. According to government data, urban male unemployment was significantly higher in mid-2022 than it was a decade ago.
- Data from the private sector show that the number of people employed in December 2022 was lower than it was in 2016. The expansion of the national economy has not resulted in an equal expansion of employment.
- For the majority of the unemployed, who are concentrated in agriculture, employment opportunities will arise only when there is a demand for goods in the production of which they can participate.

Implication Regarding Ecology

- The environmental impact of economic growth includes increased consumption of nonrenewable resources, increased pollution, global warming, and the potential loss of environmental habitats.
- Natural habitats are being destroyed at an alarming rate, primarily as a result of mining and infrastructure development, as well as the continued expansion and intensification of agriculture and animal husbandry.
- Economic development-related deforestation degrades soil and makes areas more susceptible to drought.

- Unrestrained consumption has disrupted nature and increased contact between wildlife, livestock, pathogens, and people, laying the groundwork for pandemics to take hold of our lives.
- Overcrowding and uncontrolled construction, particularly in Himalayan states, have resulted in sewage and solid waste disposal issues, as well as increased energy consumption.

Regarding Infrastructure

- The frenetic construction of new elevated national highways, carried out by riding roughshod over local communities, frequently cuts a swath through the countryside, destroying agricultural land and jeopardizing livelihoods.
- State governments have not been far behind in encouraging disastrous geoengineering projects.
- Plans for religious tourism infrastructure have found support from parties as disparate as the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttarakhand and the CPI(M) in Kerala.
- These are states that have recently experienced landslides and flooding, causing significant hardship for their citizens.
- Across India, political parties appear to be pursuing growth in order to improve their electoral prospects, with little regard for potential negative consequences.

What is the way forward?

- India requires growth because it has a backlog of poverty. However, the growth that is frequently seen does not do enough to improve the lives of the poorest, such as by creating jobs, and is environmentally harmful. Size is valuable only when it improves the well-being of the population.
- For the majority of the unemployed, who are concentrated in agriculture, employment opportunities will arise only when there is a demand for goods in the production of which they can participate.
- Currently, neither the Centre nor the States have an employment policy. A concerted policy focus can create the conditions for job creation in India.
- Policymakers must prioritize the distribution of wealth across the population, particularly through the formalization of employment.
- Governments must develop policies to ensure that economic growth generates the social and physical infrastructure required for a good life.

Pricing It Right

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions; Indian Economy; Growth and Development; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it

Context:

- India's farm produce exports are expected to reach a new high in 2022-23, surpassing the \$50.2 billion recorded in the previous fiscal year.
- However, imports are growing at nearly twice the rate of exports during April-December 2022 compared to April-December 2021.
- As a result, the overall agri-trade surplus is expected to fall further from the \$20.2 billion and \$17.8 billion levels of 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively.
- Export and import policies must respond dynamically to price movements.

- Tariffs, rather than quantitative restrictions, are appropriate trade policy instruments.

INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL TRADE IN MILLION US DOLLARS

YEAR	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	TRADE SURPLUS
2012-13	41726.33	18978.33	22748.00
2013-14	43251.66	15528.94	27722.72
2014-15	39080.43	21151.77	17928.66
2015-16	32808.64	22578.60	10230.04
2016-17	33696.83	25643.40	8053.43
2017-18	38897.21	24890.90	14006.31
2018-19	39203.53	20920.34	18283.19
2019-20	35600.47	21859.99	13740.48
2020-21	41895.68	21652.05	20243.63
2021-22	50240.21	32422.30	17817.91
Apr-Dec 21	36155.42	24071.55	12083.87
Apr-Dec 22	38997.92	27770.64	11227.28

Surplus in Agriculture Trade

- The agricultural trade surplus is significant because it is one of the few sectors in which India has a comparative advantage, along with software services.
- The slowing of exports and the faster rise of imports are largely due to global commodity prices.
- These had peaked in the March-June period following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but have since fallen: the benchmark FAO Food Price Index reading for January was at a 16-month low.

Drivers of Exports

- **Rice:** In 2021-22, India exported an all-time high of 21.21 million tonnes (mt) of rice valued at \$9.66 billion. This included 17.26 million tons of non-basmati rice (worth \$6.12 billion) and 3.95 million tons of basmati rice (worth \$3.54 billion).
- Basmati rice has driven growth in the current fiscal year. Its exports have increased by 40.3% in value (from \$2.38 billion in April-December 2021 to \$3.34 billion in April-December 2022) and 16.6% in quantity (2.74 mt to 3.20 mt).
- Non-basmati exports increased by 3.3% in value (\$4.51 billion to \$4.66 billion) and 4.6% in quantity (12.60 mt to 13.17 mt).
- **Sugar:** Sugar exports reached a record \$4.60 billion in 2021-22, up from \$2.79 billion, \$1.97 billion, \$1.36 billion, and \$810.90 million in the previous four fiscal years. This fiscal year has seen a 43.6% increase, from \$2.78 billion in April-December 2021 to \$3.99 billion in April-December 2022.
- **Marine product** exports are also expected to exceed last year's peak of \$7.77 billion, having increased by 2.7% from \$6.12 billion in April-December 2021 to \$6.29 billion in April-December 2022.
- **Meat:** The value of buffalo meat shipments fell 5.1% from \$2.51 billion in April-December 2021 to \$2.39 billion in April-December 2022.
- **Spices** fell 6.7% from \$2.95 billion to \$2.75 billion.
- **Wheat exports** increased by 3.9% from \$1.45 billion to \$1.51 billion, they are unlikely to sustain or even reach the full-fiscal level of 7.23 million tonnes (\$2.12 billion) in 2021-22 due to a poor crop and a shipping ban imposed in May 2022.

Pricing of Imports

- **Vegetable Oils:** Imports increased from \$11.09 billion in 2020-21 to \$18.99 billion in 2021-22, and even more during the first nine months of 2022-23 compared to the same period last fiscal year — from \$14.04 billion to \$16.10 billion, or 14.7%. Imports now

account for more than 60% of the country's estimated 22.5-23 mt annual oil consumption.

- **Cotton:** In 2011-12, India's cotton exports reached an all-time high of \$4.33 billion. It remained relatively high until 2013-14 (\$3.64 billion), before plummeting to \$1.62 billion in 2016-17 and \$1.06 billion in 2019-20. Following that, the economy recovered to \$1.90 billion in 2020-21 and \$2.82 billion in 2021-22. However, not only have exports fallen to \$512.04 million in April-December (from \$1.97 billion in April-December 2021), but imports have also risen from \$414.59 million to \$1.32 billion in the same period. **India has shifted from a net exporter to a net importer of cotton.**
- **Cashew:** Imports increased 64.6% to \$1.64 billion from \$996.49 million in April-December 2021, while exports of cashew products fell from \$344.61 million to \$259.71 million in the same period. Spice exports fell (from \$2.95 billion to \$2.75 billion) while imports increased (from \$955.75 million to \$1.03 billion).

The Policy Implications

- The UN **Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Food Price Index**, which has a base value of 100 for the 2014-16 period, averaged 122.5 points in 2012-13 and 119.1 points in 2013-14.
- Those were the years when India's agri-exports totaled \$42-43 billion. Exports fell to \$33-34 billion as the index dropped to 90-95 points in 2015-16 and 2016-17.
- The export recovery in 2020-21 and 2021-22 occurred alongside — rather, as a result of rising global prices, with the FAO index averaging 102.5 points and 133 points in the two years.
- The FAO index peaked at 159.7 points in March 2022, just after Russia invaded Ukraine. Since then, it has fallen every month, with the most recent reading of 131.2 points in January 2023 being the lowest since September 2021's 129.2 points.

INDIA'S FARM EXPORTS VS WORLD FOOD PRICES



What is the way forward?

- Policymakers in India should not ignore the aforementioned international price movements.
- The bans or restrictions imposed on wheat, sugar, and rice exports over the last year, combined with duty-free imports of crude edible oils, were imposed in response to high domestic and global food inflation.
- While prices remain high and stocks remain volatile, bumper crops have the potential to change the situation.
- For the time being, the prospects for wheat, mustard, chickpea, and red lentil appear promising. Both export and import policies must respond dynamically to the event.
- The Narendra Modi government has previously imposed stocking limits on the pulses, oilseeds, and edible oil trade, going against the grain of its own now-abandoned farm reform laws.
- Such clearly anti-producer measures are also not in the best interests of consumers in the long run. Tariffs, rather than quantitative restrictions, are the appropriate trade policy instruments.

The Adani Story And Indian Neoliberalism



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Effects of liberalization on the economy, Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment

Context:

- Recently, the report released by **Hindenburg Research** led to a crash in the stock values of the Adani group which had grown under the enabling environment created by **neoliberalism**.



Significance

- The quick growth of the share value of the listed companies was accompanied by a rise in physical assets, which displaced the traditional dominant business groups of the country.
- The Adani group's investments were mainly concerned with **capital-intensive infrastructure** such as power, ports, airports, roads, mining, and metals.
- These sectors were traditionally dominated by the public sector, even during a significant period of the **Neoliberal** era.
- Private investment in these areas lagged even in the absence of policy restrictions as it involved large investments, long gestation periods, and higher risks.
- The profits that could be acquired in these sectors were also much less than what could be acquired in other sectors due to the restrictive pricing policies of the government and PSUs.
- The Adani Group invested heavily in the infrastructural space and also invested in **greenfield projects** to build large diverse asset portfolios.
- The mobilisation of such resources by the group was remarkable as the sector was not as profitable as the offshore software sector and had larger risks with lower potential for profit.

What is Neoliberalism?

- Neoliberalism** is an ideology that emphasizes on the importance of free market competition and is closely related to the **laissez-faire** doctrine.
- It evolved as a result of the failures of socialism and communism which left the states with enormous debt burdens.
- It advocated limited state interference and the market's ability to self-regulate.
- Neoliberalism's characteristics include **privatisation, expanded consumer choice, and free movement of labour and capital**.

How did Indian Neoliberalism help corporations?

- The growth of the Adani group was aided by the features of India's neo-liberal regime.

- Liberalisation** of the Indian economy attracted large amounts of foreign capital into the bond and equity markets, which consequently led to increased domestic liquidity and a credit boom through increased bank deposits.
- Banks adopted aggressive lending strategies, especially in new areas like infrastructure which had higher associated risks.
- The government lent support to private growth by building infrastructure while also incentivizing the private sector with tax concessions and strategies of **fiscal conservatism** such as abjured-debt financed expenditure.
- This required lowered public spending, so the state attempted to attract private sector investment, especially in infrastructure and promised support in the mobilisation of resources as well as de-risking and profitability building in the form of **subsidies, viability gap funding, and flexible pricing**.
- Public banking enterprises with high liquidities were encouraged to provide credit to private firms investing in infrastructure.

What has the Hindenburg report said?

- According to the report published by **Hindenburg**, the Adani group enjoyed disproportionate benefits from these policies of the neoliberal state.
- The group had borrowed heavily from public sector banks and also attracted large investments from public finance institutions like LIC, while also receiving other benefits such as easy clearances and permissions, access to land and policies which led to the group's incredible growth.
- The report also questioned whether the neoliberal state had favoured one particular entity in the name of incentivizing the public sector.
- The Report has also accused Adani Group of using related shell companies to park finance in **tax havens** and then using that money to buy shares of Adani firms.
- This helped raise the values of the corporate's shares but despite concerns being expressed by numerous sources, the regulatory ecosystem in India has not scrutinised the firm or any banks or entities investing in the group.
- The rising share values helped the group mobilize large volumes of credit from domestic and foreign firms by using the shares as collateral.

Conclusion

- The Adani Group has refuted the allegations and claimed it was an attempt to malign the success story of the Indian Economy.
- Creditors and investors have not been convinced, which has led to the fall in value of the Group's shares.
- The example of the Adani group has displayed how neoliberalism is a tool for **income generation** and **wealth redistribution** rather than **market competition** and **transparency**.

Global Slowdown Path Still Uncertain, India To Decouple



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Economic Growth

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Context:

- Recently, the RBI predicted that even though the global slowdown in 2023 may be milder than previously anticipated, the trajectory still remains unpredictable.
- It was stated that **India's economy would likely decouple from the rest of the world.**
- Domestic consumption and investment will benefit from improved agricultural and related activity prospects, increased business and consumer confidence, and rapid credit growth.

Raising India's Growth

- In India, domestic consumption and investment would benefit from improved agricultural and allied activity prospects.
- Increased business and consumer confidence, and rapid credit growth would also be beneficial.
- Supply responses and cost conditions are poised to improve even though inflation witnessed a rebound in January.
- The **Union Budget 2023-24's emphasis on capital expenditure** is expected to attract private investment, strengthen job creation and demand, and raise India's potential growth.
- India would decouple from both current-year macroeconomic projections and the rest of the world.
- **The instrument of decoupling will be the Union Budget** by raising India's growth prospects over the period 2023-27; and raising India's potential growth.
- The tax changes proposed in the Budget would put at least Rs.35,000 crore in the hands of households, with the savings on taxes boosting household consumption spending.

Effective Capital Expenditure

- The Centre's direct capital investment is supplemented by the provision for the creation of capital assets through Grants-in-Aid to States.
- The Centre's "Effective Capital Expenditure" is budgeted at 13.7 lakh crore, or 4.5 percent of GDP.



What are the growth aspects?

- **Saving on taxes:** Tax savings will increase household consumption spending. With India's marginal propensity to consume estimated at 0.54, the tax multiplier works out to be 1.16. Thus, tax cuts alone would boost India's real GDP growth by 15 basis points in 2023-24.
- **Increase in capital expenditure** allocation amounts to 3.2 trillion in 2023-24, and this increased capital spending will generate an additional output of 10.3 trillion in 2023-27.
- **Fiscal consolidation:** It can free up productive resources for the private sector while also contributing to lower capital costs. Total expenditure in the Union Budget is expected to fall by 0.41% of GDP (GDP). This will free up resources for private investment. In

conjunction with the expenditure multiplier, this can raise the economy's growth rate by 10 basis points in 2023-24.

Coupling vs. Decoupling:

- In a globalized world, what happens in one part of the world affects countries all over the world. So, in essence, all economies are linked. This is referred to as 'coupling'.
- **Coupled economies:** When one economy fails, global economic growth suffers. 'Coupled economies' refer to world markets that are overly interconnected.
- **Decoupled economies:** However, some countries are immune to this effect. These economies do not grow or slow in tandem with the rest of the world. They are known as 'decoupled' economies.

India's potential

- India's potential growth rate is expected to rise from 6% (estimated by the International Monetary Fund for 2022-23) to 6.8%.
- **The Union budget** will increase the economy's productive capacity by focusing on capex; utilizing new technologies such as digitization and greening the economy; and seizing the demographic dividend, all of which can expand the Indian economy's production capability frontier.
- Along with the continued emphasis on capex, other measures announced could cause "a positive productivity shock," resulting in an increase in total factor productivity that can raise potential growth by 10 basis points per year.
- **Green Investment:** Schemes under the green growth priority could attract Rs 1.7 lakh crore of private investment, bringing total green investment to Rs 2.6 lakh crore and an increase in GDP of Rs 3.3 lakh crore, or around 100 basis points, of potential output up to 2030.
- Taking advantage of the demographic dividend by training youth and teachers and establishing physical and digital libraries could boost potential GDP growth by 5 to 15 basis points per year.
- **The environment of macroeconomic stability** created by fiscal consolidation and thus debt reduction is expected to bring down inflation in the medium run, with a consequent reduction in macro volatility and country risk premium, ushering in "a virtuous cycle."

Rupee Trade Mechanism: Banks Wary Of Us Sanctions

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and Relating Issues

Why in the news?

- Recently, it was stated that there is a lack of clarity among banks about the **International Trade Settlement mechanism in rupees (INR)**, and those with exposure to the US are wary of sanctions.
- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** established the International Trade Settlement mechanism in rupees early last year in order to facilitate trade with sanctioned countries such as Russia.

What are the recent concerns?

- The rupee trade settlement mechanism has yet to be fully operational.
- Banks, particularly those with offices or dealings with the United States, are fearful of sanctions, according to the Union Ministry of Commerce.

- This is why they are not issuing electronic Bank Realization Certificates (BRC), which are required to complete the export transaction.



About Indian Rupee Trade Settlement Mechanism

- The RBI had announced the establishment of this mechanism to facilitate international trade in Indian rupees.
- The Indian rupee trade settlement mechanism allows the Indian rupee to be used in place of dollars and other major currencies in all international transactions.
- Special vostro rupee accounts, or SVRAs, have been opened by Indian banks with banks in Mauritius, Russia, and Sri Lanka.

How is this trade facilitated?

- **Importers in India:** Importers in India using the mechanism will be required to make payments in rupees, which must be credited into the Vostro account of the partner country's correspondent bank, against invoices for the supply of goods or services from the overseas seller or supplier.
- **Exporters of India:** Similarly, Indian exporters of goods and services using this mechanism must be paid in Indian currency from the balance in a designated Vostro account of the partner country's correspondent bank.

Vostro and Nostro Account:

- A vostro account is a record of money held by a bank or owed to a bank by a third party (an individual, company or bank).
- The nostro account keeps track of how much of the bank's money is held by the other bank.

Why was the mechanism required?

- In the midst of the Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions against Russia, the Reserve Bank of India launched the rupee settlement mechanism in July last year to buy cheap Russian oil, reduce India's reliance on foreign currencies, and reduce India's vulnerability to external shocks.
- However, efforts to promote rupee trade have been fraught with difficulty. Some exporters have received payments in rupees, though such transactions are rare.
- Government officials admit that the mechanism is still in its early stages and that there are "teething problems" with the exchange rate and money repatriation.

Significance of the Mechanism

- **Exports and imports in Indian currency:** The mechanism will allow all exports and imports to be denominated and invoiced in Indian currency. The market will settle the exchange rate between trading partners.

- **Promote Growth:** It will support the growing interest in INR among the global trading community.
- **Market disruptions:** As a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, countries are looking for alternative modes of payment, and the rupee trade settlement mechanism is the most effective way out for India.
- **Forex Fluctuation:** The move would also reduce the risk of forex fluctuation, particularly when considering the Euro-Rupee parity. In the midst of ongoing rupee weakness, this mechanism aims to reduce demand for foreign exchange by promoting rupee settlement of trade flows.

Way Forward

- To make the rupee trade mechanism seamless, the RBI and the banks must reach an agreement.
- It was emphasized that it was critical, especially given that engineering goods exports to the CIS region had dropped by 34% during the current fiscal year due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis.
- Russia is the largest market in the region. It was stated that trade will increase once rupee settlement becomes seamless.
- It was also requested that the Indian government implement the rupee settlement mechanism with other countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and other nations that are subject to US sanctions or have issues with forex payment in hard currency.

What's Feeding Inflation In India

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: CPI

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Context:

- The author, Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, has discussed the inflation trends in India and its characteristics in the article titled "What's Feeding Inflation in India" published in the Indian Express on 24th February 2023.

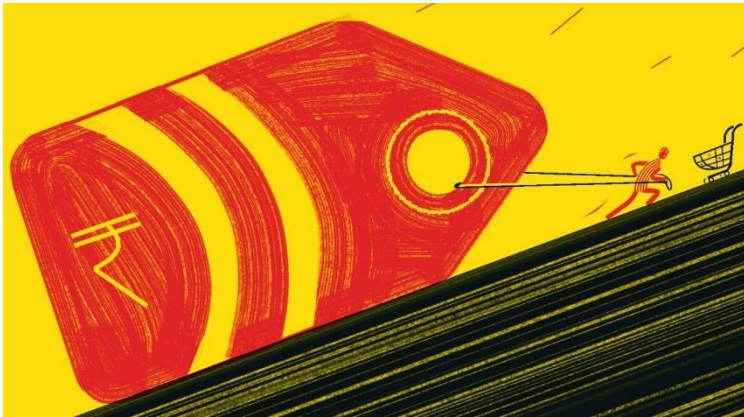
Inflation trends

- Conventionally, the **softening of input prices and demand would lead to a drop in goods inflation.**
- This was the case in global goods inflation but **in India, goods inflation has risen.**
- Globally, **service inflation has remained inflated due to the pent-up demand for high-touch services while in India, it has fallen.**

What caused the changes in inflation?

- In late 2021, consumer spending in rural India began to weaken and in 2022 inflation accelerated as a result of a heatwave in March, erratic monsoon and poor harvest.
- Rural incomes declined heavily which was reflected in weakened sales of two-wheelers and consumer non-durables.
- In the same period, urban demand improved post the pandemic with labour returning to urban areas and subsequently new employment opportunities were generated.
- The **rural-to-urban migration resulted in an increase in wages by around 2.5 times and increased urban consumption.**
- In the last few months of 2022, rural India began to experience favourable weather with reservoirs filling up and winter sowing increasing.

- The subsequent demand for agricultural labour led to an increase in agricultural wages which when adjusted for inflation were found to be higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- Increased incomes led to increased consumer non-durable production and a reduction in urban migration.**
- As a result of the drop in migration and the growth stimulus fuelled by it, economic indicators such as consumer durables weakened slightly in urban areas and increased slightly in rural areas.



Informal Sector

- The **informal sector has employed about 80% of the country's workforce** who are spread out equally across the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.
- Informal sectors faced consecutive economic shocks as a result of the pandemic - lockdowns and commodity price hikes - which led to small firms underperforming, losing market share and profits which translated into lower wages for employees.
- Since the unlocking of the economy, the prospects of small firms have improved due to the lower input costs and as a result, wages have improved.
- The rise in informal incomes was shown in the increasing demand and production of consumer non-durables.

How has demand evolved in the rural and informal sectors?

- It has to be noted that the **informal and rural sectors are closely connected** in an economic sense:
 - Around **75% of the country's informal sector workers live in rural India.**
 - The majority of **commodities consumed by rural Indians are produced in the informal sector.**
- Around 20% of rural households are landed, i.e they own more than one hectare of land, and a major portion of their income came from agriculture while the incomes of the landless 80% were predominantly from wages.
- Of the 80% of landless households, roughly 40% were agricultural wage labourers while the others were non-agricultural wage labourers.
- Although both the landless and landed were struggling post the pandemic, non-agricultural labourers have seen improvements in their economic conditions while the landowners could experience higher incomes if the winter crop is sold at higher-than-MSP rates.
- Rural and Informal sector consumption has been skewed towards goods rather than services and among goods, they have prioritized consumer non-durables over durables.
- This rise in rural demand for goods has as a result outpaced the demand for services, resulting in higher goods inflation.

- Manufacturers have been able to earn profits again after sharp losses due to the steady demand.
- As a result, retail inflation has not dropped as much as wholesale inflation and manufacturers have been able to secure better margins than service providers.

Conclusion

- Increased rural demand could limit disinflation** even if the winter crop is good, as manufacturers attempt to rebuild margins and pressure core inflation.
- A weak winter crop, due to rising temperatures and other weather disruptions could lead to **higher food inflation** even if rural incomes and core inflation drop.
- Inflation is broadly expected to rise beyond present estimates for FY24 which could impact the RBI's rates policy alongside the impact of Fed rates, global inflation and pressure on the rupee.

Inflation

- Inflation refers to the rate of **increase in prices of goods and services** in the economy.
- It can arise out of increased demand as well as increased cost of production.

Core inflation

- Core inflation refers to the difference between the total inflation in the country and inflation in the food and energy sectors.

- Core inflation = Headline inflation - volatile inflation**

Retail inflation

- It refers to the rise in prices of commodities from the perspective of the consumer.
- In India, retail inflation is tracked by the **Consumer Price Index.**

Taxing Windfall Profits Of Oil Company

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Windfall tax

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development

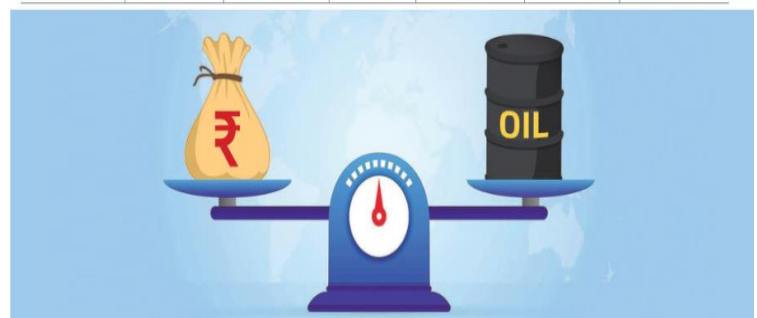
Context:

- Recently, the **Union Government increased the windfall profit tax** levied on domestically produced crude oil as well as the **export of diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF).**
- Just three days prior, it was stated that crude oil prices were on the rise again and that **"for the time being, windfall tax will continue."**

The oil charge

This table shows the details of recent revisions made in the Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on domestic crude oil production

The time period	November 17 to December 1, 2022	December 2 to December 15, 2022	December 16 to January 2, 2023	January 3 to January 16, 2023	January 17 to February 3, 2023	February 4, 2023 till date
Petroleum crude (rupee per tonne)	₹10,200	₹4,900	₹1,700	₹2,100	₹1,900	₹5,050



What is a Windfall Tax?

- Windfall taxes are designed to tax the profits a company derives from an external, sometimes unprecedented event — for instance, the energy price-rise as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- These are profits that cannot be attributed to something the firm actively did, like an investment strategy or an expansion of business.
- The US Congressional Research Service (CRS) defines a windfall as an “unearned, unanticipated gain in income through no additional effort or expense”.
- One area where such taxes have routinely been discussed is oil markets, where price fluctuation leads to volatile or erratic profits for the industry.

Why has the government imposed this tax?

- The levies came as refiners made major gains by boosting fuel exports to countries that were in a deficit like Europe, which has now boycotted oil imports from Russia.
- The government wants to keep a check on the constant supply of crude oil in the domestic market since many refiners prefer to export crude oil instead of selling it within the country.
- The government has mandated oil exporters to fulfill the Indian domestic oil demand first and has levied windfall taxes on exports to indirectly make exporting oil more expensive

Why should windfall profits be taxed?

- Windfall profits are unanticipated increases in an entity's earnings caused by an exogenous event rather than a business decision.
- According to the **B.K. Chaturvedi** committee's report on the Financial Position of Oil Companies (2008), taxing these windfall gains has been seen as a prerogative of governments, in part to meet fiscal needs and in part to pursue redistributive justice. The central idea here is for sovereigns to capitalize on the entities' lofty profits and use them for specific domestic purposes.
- The collection of **Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED)** from crude oil production, export of petrol, diesel, and ATF for the current fiscal year is estimated to be Rs.25,000 crore.
- Windfall taxes are reviewed every two weeks and are affected by factors such as international oil prices, the exchange rate, and the quantity of exports.
- India first imposed SAED in July 2022.

What caused the windfall gains?

- **Russia-Ukraine War:** Russia's actions in Ukraine were central to the volatility seen in the oil market in the previous calendar year.
- **Global Market:** Russia, along with Saudi Arabia and the United States, was a major player in the global oil market and one of the largest producers. In response to Russia's actions, several Western countries moved to halt or reduce their energy imports from Russia.
- This resulted in sharp increases in fossil fuel prices as sovereigns sought alternative suppliers for their energy needs, resulting in large profits for oil companies. This was a complete 180-degree turnaround from the start of the pandemic, when oil was struggling to break even.
- **Big Companies:** The combined profits of all 'Big Oil' companies including BP, Chevron, Equinor, ExxonMobil, Shell, and Total Energies will more than double to \$219 billion in 2022. Chevron initiated a \$75 billion share repurchase program, as well as a 6% increase in its quarterly dividend, demonstrating its financial strength.

ONGC Tax

In India, ONGC's profit after tax (PAT) until September 30 in the current fiscal year was Rs.28,032 crore, compared to Rs.40,306 crore in the full fiscal ending March 31, 2022. Because of this, oil companies are prioritizing investments in conventional sources to ensure energy security over transitioning to cleaner energy to meet energy needs. Participants in the industry have particularly argued about the need for investments to facilitate decarbonization.

Why are countries levying windfall taxes?

- **Increase in prices:** Oil, gas, and coal prices have risen sharply since last year and in the first two quarters of this year, though they have recently fallen.
- **Pandemic recovery and supply issues** resulting from the Russia-Ukraine conflict boosted energy demand, driving up global prices.
- Rising prices meant huge and record profits for energy companies while resulting in high gas and electricity bills for households in major and minor economies.

What lies ahead?

- According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), global oil markets are trading in relative calm.
- Oil prices have returned to pre-war levels, with the exception of diesel, which has also fallen significantly below last summer's historical highs.
- World oil supply appears set to exceed demand through the first half of 2023, but the balance could quickly shift to deficit as demand recovers and some Russian output is shut in.
- Despite the sanctions, Russian oil production and exports have remained relatively stable. It has been able to reroute crude shipments to Asia, and the G7 crude price cap appears to be helping to keep the barrels flowing.
- According to the IEA, global oil demand will rise by 2 million barrels per day in 2023 to 101.9 million barrels per day.
- The Asia-Pacific region, led by China, which has resumed economic activity after a prolonged period of lockdown, dominates the outlook. In January, supply remained relatively stable at around 100.8 mb/d.

BBC Allegedly Diverted Profits By Violating 'Transfer Pricing' Rules. What Are They?

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Transfer pricing

Prepp Mains Booster: Effects of liberalization on the economy

Context:

- Recently, the Income-Tax Department conducted surveys at the premises of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in Delhi and Mumbai in view of the BBC's “deliberate non-compliance with the [transfer pricing](#) rules” and its “vast diversion of profits”.
- Transfer pricing is the practice of determining the value of goods or services that are being transferred between two related entities, such as a parent company and its subsidiary, located in different tax jurisdictions.
- The goal of transfer pricing is to ensure that the price of the goods or services being transferred is fair and reasonable and that it reflects the market value of those goods or services.

Impact of Transfer pricing

- The impact of transfer pricing can be significant, both for businesses and tax authorities. For businesses, transfer pricing can

affect their tax liability, profitability, and competitiveness in the marketplace.

- If transfer pricing is not done properly, a company **may end up paying too much or too little tax** or may be subject to penalties or legal challenges.
- For tax authorities, transfer pricing is an important issue because it can be used as a means of **tax avoidance**.
- By artificially **inflating or deflating** the prices of goods or services being transferred between related entities, a company can shift profits to lower-tax jurisdictions and reduce its overall tax liability.
- This can have a negative impact on the **tax base of the country** where the company is headquartered and can lead to lost revenue for the government.



Transfer Pricing

What is the "arm's length arrangement" that the BBC has allegedly violated?

- An "arm's length arrangement" is a term used in business and finance to describe a transaction or relationship between two parties that is conducted on **the basis of fairness and without any conflict of interest**.
- In an arm's length arrangement, the parties are considered to be operating independently of each other, and the terms of the transaction are designed to reflect the market value of the goods or services being exchanged.
- Section 92F(ii) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 defines arm's length price as "a price which is applied or proposed to be applied in a transaction between persons other than associated enterprises, in uncontrolled conditions".
- Section 92C(1) says arm's length shall be determined by the "most appropriate" among the following methods:
 - comparable uncontrolled price method;
 - resale price method;
 - cost plus method;
 - profit split method;
 - transactional net margin method;
 - such other method as may be prescribed by the Board".

Conclusion

- By ensuring that transfer pricing is done properly and fairly, companies can avoid legal challenges and reputational damage, while tax authorities can ensure that they receive the appropriate amount of tax revenue from businesses operating within their jurisdictions.

Infrastructure - Energy; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Solar Energy Is Not The Best Option For India

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Solar Energy

Prepp Mains Booster: Infrastructure - Energy; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Context:

- V. Ranganathan, an energy economist has written an article titled '*Solar Energy Is Not The Best Option For India*' published in The Hindu on 1st February.
- In this article, he said that solar energy is not the best option for India and that India is better off just relying on large hydro and coal.
- The author has criticized countries bubbling enthusiasm for the climate change agenda regarding solar energy.



Why Solar Energy Is Not The Best Option For India?

- One argument put forth in favor of solar power is that the levelised cost of power is coming down and is close to that of coal.
- There are two flaws here:
 - The first is that solar power and coal electricity are incorrectly compared in the load center rather than at the pithead, which costs about half that of the load center.
 - "Pithead" refers to the point at which electricity is generated and ready for distribution to the load center, which is the location where electricity is needed. While **coal power is continuous, solar power is intermittent**.
 - The second flaw is Solar Energy is made financially viable by misleading the public by **omitting the expense of storage batteries, impeding it with front-loaded government subsidies and concessions**, and imposing it on businesses and hapless discoms by state policy.
- **Solar waste:** India currently considers solar waste a part of electronic waste and does not account for it separately.
- India does **not yet have a firm policy** on managing waste that results from used solar panels or from the manufacturing process
- **Import Dependence:** Despite its ambitious expansion plans, much of India's solar PV manufacturing uses imported components with parts mostly sourced from China.

Why will coal continue to occupy the centre-stage of India's energy scenario?

- Coal is an abundant fossil fuel in India. It accounts for 55% of the country's energy needs.

- The **current per capita** commercial primary energy consumption in India is about 350 kgoe/year which is **well below that of developed countries**.
- Driven by the rising population, expanding economy and a quest for improved quality of life, energy usage in India is expected to rise.
- Considering the limited reserve potentiality of petroleum & natural gas, eco-conservation restriction on hydel project and geo-political perception of nuclear power, coal will continue to occupy centre-stage of India 's energy scenario.

Pros and Cons of Solar Energy

Advantages of Solar Energy	Disadvantages of Solar Energy
Decreases use of non-renewable resources	High upfront costs
Reduces power bill	Sunlight dependent
Energy independence	Space constraints
Long-term savings	Environmental impact of manufacturing
Low-maintenance	Difficulty with relocation
Benefits the community	Scarcity of materials
Diverse Uses	Disposal/recycling options may be limited
Power prices are rising	
Tech is improving and prices are decreasing	

Suggested Alternative- Hydropower

- Large hydropower is the **least expensive and most carbon-efficient form** of renewable energy that we can use.
- While the U.S. and Europe have used 90% and 98% of their respective hydro potentials, respectively.
- India has only utilized roughly 15% of its hydro potential.
- The utilization of hydropower appears to be a measure of civilizational growth and development.
- China uses renewable energy but places more of an emphasis on coal and hydro. For example, the three Gorges project on the Yangtze is the world's biggest hydroelectric project.
- In India environmental activism has led to stopping large hydro projects.

Conclusion

- While solar energy has the potential to be a clean and renewable source of energy, it may not be the best option for India.
- Therefore, India needs to diversify sources of energy to meet its energy needs until challenges in terms of cost, infrastructure, and energy storage are addressed.

How Climate Change Will Increase Hydropower Generation In India

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Hydropower

Prepp Mains Booster: Infrastructure – Energy, Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Infrastructure: Energy

Context:

- Recently, researchers from IIT Gandhinagar studied the **hydroclimatic changes** in the catchment areas and their implications for **hydropower** generation in 46 major dams located in north, central, and south India.
- The team looked at the **increase in rainfall in the catchment areas** and the resultant inflow into all the 46 major reservoirs in the near (2021–2040), mid (2041–2060), and far (2081–2100)

periods against the reference period (1995–2014) for two **shared socioeconomic pathway scenarios** — SSP1-2.6 and SSP5-8.5.

- Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) were developed over the last years to provide a toolkit for the **climate change research community** to carry out integrated, multi-disciplinary analysis.



Projections

- According to the study due to a **warmer climate, hydropower production would increase** across the country due to a **substantial increase in rainfall** leading to increased inflow to the reservoirs.
- The estimated increase in hydropower potential in India is 10–23% based on specific hydroelectric dams.
- A warmer and wetter climate is projected to bring about **5%-33% increased rainfall**.
- As a result, hydropower generation is very likely to increase by 9%-36% for most dams and this will come from increased inflow (7-70%) into the dams.
- Compared to the dams in the north and south of India, **the central Indian dams have significantly increased**.
- But most of the increased inflow into the dams will come from **extreme rainfall**. And herein lies the **risks to water storage in the dams**.
- North India is expected to face greater warming in the future than central and southern India.
- The rise in precipitation is expected to be greater in north and central India than in south India.
- The study found that inflow to a few dams in Ganga, Mahanadi, Brahmani, and west-coast river basins is projected to **decline in the future**.
- This reduction in inflow is due to **an increase** in atmospheric water demands in response to the considerable warming compared to **an increase in precipitation**.
- Researchers claim that over the long term, the potential hydropower generation at the Tehri, Ramganga, Kadana, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, and Sriramsagar dams will increase by more than 50%.
- In the case of south India, it is anticipated that the hydroelectric potential of eight out of eleven dams will decrease.
- It is anticipated that **central Indian dams will generate more hydropower** than those in the north.

Impact

- The majority of dams will experience **simultaneous increase in severe inflow** and high reservoir storage due to global warming.
- The study emphasizes the strong potential of enhanced hydropower production, but the risk comes from very high and

sudden input owing to extremely heavy rainfall, especially when the reservoirs are already full.

- Reservoirs can aid in the prevention of floods, but if the inflow is high and the reservoirs are already full, the dams' abrupt water release can **mimic a flood**.
- Due to excessive inflow into already full reservoirs, Chennai in 2015 and numerous locations in Kerala in 2018 both experienced significant floods.
- The study predicts that **north India** would experience the **most warming** (approximately 5 degrees C), while central and southern India will experience warming of roughly 3 to 4 degrees C.
- Similar to significant warming, higher precipitation is predicted to occur in most **reservoir catchments as a result of global warming**.
- The increased precipitation will alter the inflow to the dams more in the north and central India than in south India and also hydropower generation.
- The far period is expected to have the greatest shift in hydropower potential (-5 to 62.8%), while the near period will see the least change (-6.2% to 39%).

Concerns

- Significant warming projected for north India may result in **less snow and glacier storage**, lowering the long-term contribution of snowmelt water.
- However, a significant rise in rainfall is more likely to make up for the decrease in snowmelt in north India.
- Future **higher evapotranspiration rates than precipitation** can be blamed for the anticipated loss in hydropower for a few dams even with increased precipitation.
- Evapotranspiration is the sum of all processes by which water moves from the land surface to the atmosphere via evaporation and transpiration.

Way forward

- The findings give important new information about how hydroclimate and hydropower for India's key dams are anticipated to alter.
- To maintain storage that can support high input owing to heavy rainfall, reservoir operations should be reinforced through accurate meteorological and inflow forecasts.
- To avoid flood-like circumstances caused by the unexpected release of water from reservoirs, India may need to revise the reservoir rule curves on how much storage should be authorized at different times during the monsoon season.

Renewable energy

- India has pledged to generate half of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources and reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45% by 2030.
- Achieving these targets requires states to adapt their electricity infrastructure to efficiently integrate inputs from multiple power sources, including solar, wind, hydro, and fossil fuels.
- To support this transition, the Indian government has approved the **Intra-State Transmission System – Green Energy Corridor Phase-II**.
- The Green Energy Corridor Phase-II initiative will develop infrastructure to connect renewable energy sources with the power grid in seven states.
- The Green Energy Corridor Project aims at synchronizing electricity produced from renewable sources, such as solar and wind, with conventional power stations in the grid.



- The project is being implemented in these states by the respective State Transmission Utilities (STUs).
- The scheme will help in achieving the target of 450 GW installed RE capacity by 2030.
- The scheme will also contribute to long term energy security of the country and promote ecologically sustainable growth by reducing carbon footprint.
- It will generate large direct & indirect employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled personnel in power and other related sectors.
- The total cost of the project is estimated at ₹12,000 crores, and the central government will provide 33% financial assistance or ₹3,970 crore.
- The analysis prepared a scoring system for 16 States in India, which account for **90% of the country's electricity production**, based on four broad parameters:
 - decarbonization,
 - performance of the power system,
 - readiness of the power ecosystem, and
 - policies and political commitments.
- The 'readiness of the power ecosystem' parameter was further broken down into sub-components such as the quality of power supply, feeder segregation, smart metering, and electricity intensity of GDP.

Performance of States

- Karnataka has performed well in meeting its power requirements and achieving its targets for feeder segregation and smart meter installation.
- Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat were also noted as strong performers in the transition to clean electricity.

Karnataka Best Equipped To Supply Renewable Energy: Report



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Renewable energy

Prepp Mains Booster: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Context:

- According to an analysis by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) and Ember, Karnataka is currently the State with the best-equipped power systems to transition its electricity system from being fossil-powered to renewable energy sources, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

- On the other hand, Bihar, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh scored poorly on these parameters, and Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal were identified as needing to do the most work to transition their systems.

Way forward

- The analysis emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the Central and State governments in achieving India's revised NDC targets for transitioning to clean electricity.
- States will need to redouble their efforts and track progress towards these targets, while both levels of government will need to take corrective measures as needed.



INDIA'S CLIMATE TARGETS: EXISTING AND NEW

Target (for 2030)	Existing: First NDC (2015)	New: Updated NDC (2022)	Progress
Emission intensity reduction	33-35 per cent from 2005 levels	45 per cent from 2005 levels	24 per cent reduction achieved in 2016 itself. Estimated to have reached 30 per cent
Share of non-fossil fuels in installed electricity capacity	40 per cent	50 per cent	41.5 per cent achieved by the end of June this year
Carbon sink	Creation of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of additional sink through afforestation	Same as earlier	Not clear.

Important International institutions; Environmental Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Cites Database Reveals Red Sanders Smuggling

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: CITES

Prepp Mains Booster: Important International institutions; Conservation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Context:

- Recently, the **CITES trade database has recorded 28 incidents of red sanders** confiscation, seizure and specimens from the wild being exported from India, fact sheet **prepared by TRAFFIC**.
- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)** is an international agreement between governments whose goal is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not endanger the survival of the species.

About Red Sanders

- The species, *Pterocarpus santalinus*, is an Indian endemic tree species, with a
- restricted geographical range in the Eastern Ghats.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recently classified the Red Sanders (or Red Sandalwood) as 'endangered' on its Red List.

- It was designated as 'near threatened' in 2018.
- Its rich color and therapeutic properties account for its high demand in Asia, particularly China, for use in cosmetics, medicinal products, and high-end furniture/woodcraft.
- According to the Foreign Trade Policy, the export of Red Sanders from India is prohibited.

Distribution of Red Sanders

- They typically grow in rocky, degraded, and fallow lands with Red Soil and a hot, dry climate.
- It is an Indian endemic tree with a limited geographical range in the Eastern Ghats.
- The species is limited to a small area of forest in Andhra Pradesh.



What is the Protection Status?

- IUCN Red List: Endangered.
- CITES: Appendix II
- Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule IV

Use of Red Sanders

- Red Sanders is under pressure from illegal logging and harvesting.
- Its heartwood is in high demand in both domestic and international markets and is used to make furniture and handicrafts, while the red dye obtained from the wood is used as a coloring agent in textiles and medicines.
- Illegal logging is rampant across its range state.

Import and Export

- India reported an export of over 19,049 tonnes of logs.** In comparison, importing countries reported approximately 4,610 tonnes of logs, 127 tonnes of sawn wood, 20 tonnes of transformed wood, and 980 kg of wood products, clearly indicating a discrepancy in Red Sander trade reporting.
- China remains the largest importer** with over 13,618 tonnes of the products, followed by Hong Kong (5,215 tonnes) and Singapore (216 tonnes).

What is TRAFFIC?

- TRAFFIC is an acronym for **Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce**.
- TRAFFIC is a collaborative conservation initiative of WWF and IUCN.
- The Species Survival Commission of IUCN created TRAFFIC in 1976, mostly in response to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora entering into force the previous year.
- TRAFFIC has expanded to become the largest wildlife trade monitoring program in the world and a leading authority on issues related to wildlife trade.

- This non-governmental organization works closely with governments and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat to carry out its activities.

Operation Rakht Chandan

- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) recovered 14.63 MT of Red Sanders, valued at Rs 11.70 crore in the international market, from a consignment that was stuffed at ICD Sabarmati and was to be exported to Sharjah, UAE, as part of its commitment to preserving the country's natural heritage.
- DRI learned that red sanders logs had been hidden in an export consignment labeled "assorted toiletries" and smuggled out of the country.
- As a result, Operation Rakht Chandan was launched, and the suspect export consignment was under constant surveillance.

Warming Beyond Borders: Amazon Deforestation Heats Up Tibet, Says New Study

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Amazon Deforestation

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment, Disaster and disaster management

Context:

- Recently, a study published in **Nature** magazine discovered that **deforestation** in the **Amazon rainforest** could lead to **temperature and climate changes in Tibet**, which is more than 15,000 Km away from the tropical rainforest.
- The study has stated that climate change is not an isolated concern and requires **global cooperation** in order to find a lasting solution.

What are the findings of the report?

- The "Teleconnections among tipping elements in the Earth system" study indicated that **climatic tipping points** were co-related and that there were no borders in the fight against climate change.
- The study warned that **international co-operation and objective action** were the only way forward to combat the ill effects of climate change.
- According to the findings of the researchers from Beijing University, deforestation in the Amazon rainforest had numerous potential long-term ramifications for the planet with close climatic relationships discovered between the Amazon rainforest, Tibetan plateau and the West Antarctic ice sheet.
- The research document provided detailed evidence on the relationship between tipping elements.
- A propagation pathway lasting about two weeks was identified from the Amazon through South Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula to Tibet.
- In addition to the **positive temperature co-relation** between Tibet and the Amazon, the study also simulated long-term climate changes as a result of anthropogenic activities.

What is a tipping point?

- Tipping points**, have been defined as limits that, if crossed, could cause significant irreversible changes in the earth's system or in a specific region.

- The **Amazon rainforest** is one such tipping point where even modest changes could result in massive, abrupt and permanent changes to the planet.
- Another tipping point is the global climate with even a 1-2°C leading to irreversible consequences which has led to the **Paris Agreement's** call to limit warming to below 2°C and below 1.5°C in the long term.
- Another definition of tipping points is as systems that change rapidly once a threshold is crossed.
- The Earth has 16 essential climate systems which are tagged as '**tipping elements**' and have certain temperature thresholds, or tipping points, beyond which even a slight change may lead to irreparable and catastrophic consequences on our planet.



What are the consequences?

- Logging, road construction and warming** are some of the major stress factors on the Amazon biome.
- Once deforestation reaches the critical stage, the rainforest would be permanently altered even if all tree-cutting was to cease and **reforestation** initiatives undertaken.
- The gradual reduction in the area and organic components of the rainforest might affect even distant regions across the globe according to evidence from global climate data between 1979 and 2019.
- While ice sheets, ocean currents and permafrost regions have already degraded irreversibly, crucial climate systems like the Amazon might be lost forever if global emissions continue at present rates.
- Evidence from the study suggested that heavy rain in the Amazon coincided with lower precipitation in Tibet and the West Antarctic ice sheet.
- Harsher temperatures in the Amazon rainforest were also accompanied by warmer temperatures in Tibet and West Antarctica, leading to increased snow melt.

Paris Agreement

- It is a binding international agreement on climate change that was approved by 196 nations at the **Conference of the Parties COP 21** in Paris in December 2015.
- Its objective is to keep global warming substantially below **2 °C**, and ideally below **1.5 °C**, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- Countries want to reach the global greenhouse gas emissions peak as soon as feasible in order to build a **climate-neutral world** by the middle of the century in order to meet the long-term temperature goal.

- India's NDCs:
 - **lower emissions intensity of its GDP by 45%** from its 2005 level by 2030
 - **Non-fossil fuel-based energy sources** should account for around **50% of total installed electric power capacity**.
 - **Additional carbon sinks of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes by afforestation**

Plastic Waste Management By People Participation: Case Study Of Cooch Behar



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Plastic Waste Management

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment. Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors;

Context:

- Recently, the District Magistrate of **Cooch Behar** in West Bengal was awarded the Excellence in Governance award by the Indian Express to honour the achievements of the district in **solid waste management**.
- Cooch Behar had become the first district to achieve the **open-defecation-free (ODF)** status in north Bengal in 2017.

Mission Nirmal Cooch Behar

- In 2017, **Cooch Behar** obtained the distinction of being north Bengal's first **Open Defecation Free district** and was awarded the **Swachh Bharat Mission National Award (Grameen)** in 2020.
- The district administration launched the **Nirmal Cooch Behar Mission** in 2020 to sustain the progress made in waste management and ensure ODF behaviour among the residents of the district.
- The Mission aimed to build on **ODF status** and develop **solid and liquid waste management infrastructure for safe disposal in villages**.
- The mission has now moved on to the second phase according to District Magistrate Pawan Kadyan, who was awarded the Indian Express **Excellence in Governance Awards 2020 and 2021** in the **Swachhata** category.



Phase II

- The focus of the second phase of the mission has been to improve **solid waste management**, start **plastic waste management** in rural areas, and **liquid waste greywater management**.
- More than 1000 Community Sanitary Complexes have been constructed in the district since 2022.

- All marketplaces, public places, gram panchayats and rural areas have been covered under the Mission.
- **Biodegradable sanitary napkins** made by local SHGs under the brand name **Bandhabi** have been provided to school students as part of the Mission's efforts on menstrual health management.
- Sixteen **Solid Waste Management (SWM)** units have been set up while 18 are under execution.
- The district was the first to set up a **plastic waste management unit** with another under construction and three more PWMs being planned.
- The collected waste is segregated into degradable and non-biodegradable categories.
- The degradable waste is used to make **vermicompost and organic fertilisers** that are sold at Rs 10 to 12 per kg, making it a cheaper alternative for local farmers as well as being eco-friendly.
- Women from various self-help groups (SHGs) have been employed as community facilitators to create awareness regarding waste management.

Liquid Waste Management

- Soak pits and covered drains have been constructed across the district on the basis of requirement assessments.
- Concrete platforms have been constructed for all tube wells along with soak pits.
- Grants from the Fifteenth Finance Commission and MNREGS have been utilized to develop greywater management facilities in the district.

Swachh Bharat Mission

- The Government of India launched the **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** in 2014 with the goal of eradicating open defecation and enhancing solid waste management across the nation.
- It is an updated version of the 2009-launched **Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan**.
- The Swachh Bharat Mission's first phase ended in October 2019, and its second phase will be executed between 2020-21 and 2024-25.
- The mission's goal was to build enough toilets to make India "open-defecation free" (ODF) by 2 October 2019, the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth.
- **Phase 1 objectives:**
 - Elimination of **manual scavenging**
 - Create awareness of sanitation techniques and promote behavioural change.
 - Strengthening local capacity
- The second phase of the mission seeks to maintain the absence of open defecation, enhance solid and liquid waste management, and enhance the conditions of sanitation workers.
- The government has offered grants for building toilets, waste disposal facilities, and awareness campaigns to modify behavior.
- The scheme has been implemented through the joint funding of the Union and state governments.
- There are two halves to the mission: rural and urban.
- The **Ministry of Jal Shakti** oversees and finances "**SBM - Gramin**" in rural areas while the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** is in charge of "**SBM - urban**" in urban areas.
- Two new categories of **ODF+ and ODF++** were launched in 2018 under the **SBM-U** to scale up and sustain the efforts of cities that had already achieved ODF status in Phase 1.

Cooch Behar



- Cooch Behar is a heritage city located in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas in North Bengal.
- During colonial rule, it was the capital of the Koch kingdom.
- The district is home to the **Jaldapura National Park** and hosts the **Ras Mela** fair annually during Ras Purnima.

Marine Protected Areas Are Underfunded. Experts Discuss Ways To Address The Funding Gap

Priority: High



Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Marine protected Areas

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment, Important International institutions

Context:

- Recently, experts at the fifth International **Marine Protected Areas** Congress in Canada discussed the problem of underfunding of MPAs.
- The funding gap posed challenges to the long-term **conservation** benefits offered by the **Marine Protected Areas**.



What are marine Protected Areas?

- A **Marine Protected Area** or **MPA** is a marine area that offers full or partial protection for the natural resources it contains.
- In order to achieve particular **conservation**, **habitat protection**, **ecosystem monitoring**, or **fisheries management** objectives, some activities are restricted or outright prohibited within an MPA.
- Fishing, research, and other human activities are not always prohibited under MPAs; in fact, many MPAs can also be multi-functional.

What is the major challenge faced by MPAs ?

- According to experts at the fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress, MPAs face a major challenge of **underfunding**

which according to experts could potentially limit the long-term benefits that MPAs provide in terms of ecosystem conservation.

- A well-managed and self-sufficiently funded MPA has the potential to restore the health of vulnerable ecosystems, but nearly **70% of MPAs are underfunded**.
- The 15th **Conference of Parties** to the **Convention on Biological Diversity** had agreed to protect **30% of the world's oceans and lands by 2030**, a goal which has been threatened by the lack of funding for MPAs.

What is the model proposed by Blue Finance?

- **Blue Finance**, a social enterprise has partnered with local entities to build and manage four '**bankable**' MPAs and helped preserve 350,000 ha of biodiversity-rich coral reefs.
- The four MPAs managed by Blue Finance include the **Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve in Belize**, **Mindoro Network in the Philippines**, **North Pemba in Zanzibar** and **Banggai in Indonesia**.
- The project was implemented through a **partnership between governments and non-government organizations** with the government controlling ownership while the NGO was responsible for managing the functioning of the MPA.
- The four MPAs have shown that it was possible for MPAs to be self-sustaining through various business models such as **tourism**, **blue carbon credits**, **seaweed farming**, **sustainable coastal fisheries and other blue economy activities**.



- These models can provide tangible returns for investors, sustainability and independence of MPAs.
- 15 MPAs covering 15,000 square kilometres across **Morocco**, **Tunisia**, **Croatia**, **Montenegro**, **Albania**, **Turkey**, and **Lebanon** have been developed through these models by 2023.
- The management of MPAs involves active governance, regulation monitoring and enforcement, frequent scientific monitoring, environmental education, human resources and training, as well as operating expenses and minor equipment, which are all handled by non-governmental partners.
- **Blended financing**, in which money is raised from both public and private sources is the optimal solution for these MPAs as it helps them remain sustainable and independent from outside control.

What are blue credits?

- **Blue credits** allow organizations to reach net-zero emissions by purchasing carbon credits equivalent to their emissions.

- The removal of **one tonne of carbon dioxide** from the atmosphere generates one credit.
- The preservation of blue carbon ecosystems like mangroves, seagrass, and salt marshes, which are known as **carbon sinks**, will result in the accumulation of credits.
- This will further help the efforts of poor and developing countries to control the effects of their emissions.

Himalayan Plunder: Tourist Rush Threatens Fragile Ladakh



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Ladakh

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment, Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features

Context:

- Recently, the **Ministry of Tourism** announced that between June and July 2022 around 2,50,000 tourists visited Ladakh which has a population of 2,74,000.
- The influx of tourists has resulted in construction and development, leading to **ecological consequences** and **climate concerns**.



Climate Crises in Ladakh

- Ladakh has been more prone to flash floods in recent years with the 2010 disaster resulting in the deaths of 200 people and the loss of 1000 houses.
- The village of Gya, suffered a glacial lake outburst flood caused by the melting of an ice-cored moraine.
- In 2015, Ladakh was affected by flash floods as the region received rainfall nearly two times in excess of the average, resulting in losses of ₹87.79 crores in Leh and ₹80 crores in Kargil.
- Rapid climate change was a global concern, especially in Ladakh due to the erratic nature of the climate in Ladakh.
- The average rainfall in Ladakh has increased more than three times from 30 mm in 2009 to 140 mm in 2019, while average rainy days have increased from 8 to 20.
- Rapid glacier melt and shifting have resulted in environmental and anthropological concerns in the Union Territory.

How has tourism affected Ladakh?

- Unregulated tourism has provided a boost to the economic development of the region but has caused the most environmental damage.
- During the months of June and July, tourists in the region outnumber the 2,50,000 inhabitants which has led to a construction boom in the region.
- The number of hotels grew to more than 800 from 219 and has become a significant burden on the groundwater reserves of Ladakh.
- Locals have expressed concerns about the water shortage as most hotels have been constructed on agricultural lands which have been compressed into small gardens.
- Mountains that were earlier snow covered are now bare, highlighting the climate crisis and the water and subsequent food crises that could emerge.
- Tourism in Ladakh has been criticized as being commercial and environmentally damaging as it is focused on the ecologically fragile areas of Nubra, Leh and Pangong.
- Development of the region has led to the region losing its uniqueness, especially in the case of trails and paths.
- Ancient trails are best suited to hikes, expeditions and biking and can thus be a major source of revenue for small villages that are excluded from the present tourism model.
- The influx of tourists and vehicles has threatened the fragile ecosystem and the endemic species of flora and fauna. Tourists and locals need to be educated about the importance of these species to the ecosystem.
- The increased waste generated as a result of tourism was another burden on the region's environment.
- Smoke generated from processing plants has resulted in rapid erosion of glaciers.

Recommendations for improvement

- Diversification of tourism from the major sites to include small villages that reflect the essence and charm of Ladakh would reduce the burden on ecologically fragile areas while providing revenue to assist in socio-economic development.
- Development of soil waste management plants to handle the additional waste generated by tourism.
- Awareness building and conservation efforts regarding the endemic and rare species of flora and fauna in the region and their role in the ecosystem.

Way forward

- Infrastructural development in the region is still in its infancy stage and has had a limited effect on the environment although it has been increasing.
- The Sustainable Mountain Summit at Leh in 2022 with the theme "Harnessing tourism for development" had raised similar concerns and warned about the impending climate catastrophe.
- Although Ladakh has not faced any immediate threat from infrastructure development, the role of tourism in the climate crisis must be recognized and acted upon by all stakeholders including the government, citizens and private interests.

Deep Sea Fish Conservation Must Not Go Adrift

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Purse seine fishing

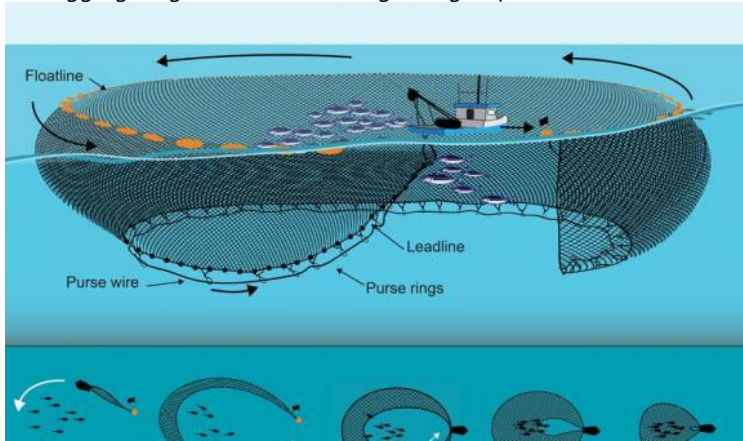
Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation, Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court permitted fishermen to use **purse seine** gear beyond **territorial waters** and within the **Exclusive Economic Zone** of **Tamil Nadu** in response to a 2022 order of the Tamil Nadu Government that banned the practice.
- The Court has sought to regulate the fishing sector with **administrative efficiency** and **transparency**.

What is purse seine fishing?

- A **purse seine** is made from a long wall of netting framed with floating and leadlines. It has purse rings hanging from the lower end of the equipment through which a steel line or rope to allow pursing is passed.
- It is pursued in open waters and is considered efficient because of the low levels of **by-catch** and minimal contact with the seabed.
- It is used to catch fish schools congregating around fish aggregating devices and to target single species fish.



Why has Tamil Nadu banned purse seine fishing?

- In 2022, the Government of Tamil Nadu banned the use of purse seine equipment as per the **Tamil Nadu Fishing Regulation Act, 1983**.
- The use of purse seine gear was harmful to marine life and was the reason for clashes between fishers from different communities.
- Experts have linked the decreasing stocks of certain species of fish like sardines and mackerel to the use of purse seine gear.
- Purse seine gear is non-targetted and can be detrimental to fish stocks because of the **overfishing** and trapping of **juvenile fish**.
- Kerala, Puducherry, Odisha, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, and the Andaman and Nicobar are the other States and UTs to ban purse seine fishing.

What has the Supreme Court ordered?

- The **Supreme Court** permitted fishermen to use purse seine gear beyond the territorial waters of 12 Kms and within the **EEZ** (200 Kms) of Tamil Nadu but with certain restrictions.
- The order has prioritized **administrative and transparency efficiency** over the conservation obligations owed by a coastal state under its **UNCLOS** obligations.
- The court order has restricted purse seine fishing to two days a week.

- The **Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairy** had earlier recommended the lifting of the ban as it had not resulted in serious resource depletion as per available evidence.

International covenants related to fishing

- The Court order could have consulted the various conventions and conservation measures that aim to regulate overfishing and protect endangered species to arrive at the fairest conclusion for all parties.
- Under **Articles 56.1(a) and 56.1(b)(iii)** of the **United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea**, coastal states have the sovereign right to ensure the use, conservation and management of living and non-living resources in the EEZ.
- Access to the EEZ by foreign fleets is subject to the state's discretion and its rules and regulations.
- The states are also empowered to determine the **total allowable catch (TAC)** in the EEZ on the basis of scientific evidence under **Article 61(1) and (2) of the UNCLOS**.
- The **Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, 1993** could also have served as a reference for the apex court, as it was based on the TAC and scientific distribution to ensure maximum sustainable yield.
- Merely regulating the number of days of purse seine fishing to two a week would not provide results, unless methods of fishing are regulated as well.
- Internationally, the use of **large-scale pelagic nets** has been limited or banned because it deprives the traditional fisherman of sufficient catches and revenue according to the **Tararua Declaration**.
- The **1989 Convention for the Prohibition of Fishing with Long Drift Nets in the South Pacific** has restricted drift net fishing vessels from accessing ports.
- The United Nations General Assembly passed **Resolutions 44/225 (1989)** and **46/215 (1991)** that called for a moratorium on all large-scale pelagic drift net fishing in the oceans.
- UN General Assembly resolutions and conventions are applicable to the state parties on the high seas and in the conservation of fishery management in the EEZ.
- Consequently, the non-selective methods used by purse seiners have resulted in the by-catch of other species, including endangered ones, which could potentially lead to a trade embargo.
- Under Article XX (b), states can take measures to protect human, animal or plant life if it involves the conservation of exhaustible natural resources and such measures are in association with restrictions on domestic production or consumption.

Conclusion

- The limitless nature of the sea posed challenges to countries in preserving a common resource such as fish despite the presence of numerous regulations and conventions.
- The government and civil society organizations have to work towards raising awareness about the challenges posed by purse-seine fishing and the need for the adoption of relevant conservation methods.

UNCLOS

- The **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** is an agreement that lays out guidelines for the management and utilization of marine assets.

- The UNCLOS was adopted in 1982 and replaced the four **Geneva Conventions of April 1958**, which covered the high seas, the continental shelf, the territorial sea and contiguous zone, fisheries, and the preservation of its living resources.
- It lays out a comprehensive system of law and order on the planet's oceans and seas, including regulations for managing marine resources.
- The Convention has led to the creation of three new international organisations:
 - The **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**,
 - The **International Seabed Authority**
 - The **Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf**.
- The UNCLOS grants nations full monetary privileges over a 200-mile coastal zone.
- A nation's **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** is the ocean and marine bed that extends to the above area, with each permitted to make economic use of these waters and its resources.
- To accomplish common objectives, the UNCLOS collaborates with other international marine organisations as the **International Maritime Organization, International Seabed Authority, and International Whaling Commission**.

Agriculture, Cropping Pattern, Food Security

Lessons From Madhya Pradesh's Agriculture Model

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Madhya Pradesh agriculture model

Prepp Mains Booster: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; inclusive growth and issues arising from it; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Context:

- Ashok Gulati, Distinguished Professor, and Ritika Juneja, a Research Fellow at Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) in an article titled '*Lessons From Madhya Pradesh's Agriculture Model*' published in Indian Express on 20th February.
- The article discusses India's growth as an economy and the need for the **growth to be inclusive and sustainable**.
- It looks at the GDP growth of major Indian states over a period of time, and the agricultural sector that employs the **largest share of the workforce in the country**.



India's growth

- India's current economy is valued at \$3.5 trillion and is projected to reach \$5.4 trillion by 2027 based on IMF forecasts.
- The Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict may delay India's goal of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2025, but it is still considered achievable.
- India has made significant progress in the past decade, as it took almost 59 years for India to become a \$0.95 trillion economy after Independence, but then added \$1.35 trillion in 10 years and \$1.2 trillion in just six years to reach the current \$3.5 trillion economy.
- There are two important issues to consider when assessing India's economic growth: inclusiveness and sustainability.

Inclusiveness

- The authors say that **Inclusiveness should be measured by the progress made by the "laggard states"** in India, particularly the BIMARU states, and the performance of the agricultural sector.
- The majority of India's workforce is engaged in agriculture, but with development, workers tend to move to higher-productivity jobs in urban areas.
- Therefore, to ensure inclusive growth, the focus should be on infrastructure construction, including in rural areas, and skilling the working population for higher productivity jobs.
- The Union budget of 2023-24 has taken steps to address these issues.

Performance of GDP at the state level over the period 2005-06 to 2021-22

- The country averaged a GDP growth of 6.7 percent per annum in this period and its agri GDP growth stood at 3.8 percent per annum.
- Gujarat topped the list in overall GDP growth at 8.9 percent closely followed by Uttarakhand (8.7 percent), Telangana (8.6 percent), and Haryana (8 percent).
- At the bottom of this list were Jammu and Kashmir (5.2 per cent), Assam (5.4 per cent), West Bengal (5.5 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (5.6 per cent) and Jharkhand (5.7 per cent).
- **Madhya Pradesh:** Madhya Pradesh stands out as a top performer, with its agriculture GDP growth rate of 7.3%, which is above the all-India agri-GDP growth rate.
- The state has followed a well-diversified portfolio in agriculture, with a focus on pulses, oilseeds, wheat, and milk production.
- This approach has helped the state double irrigation coverage and increase agriculture's contribution to overall GDP to 40%.
- It is a great example of **inclusive and sustainable growth**.
- **Other BIMARU states:** The states such as Rajasthan, UP, and Bihar, have also performed well in agriculture, with annual average growth rates ranging from 4.4% to 5.7%.
- Jharkhand, a relatively new state, has also done exceptionally well in agriculture, recording an annual average growth rate of 6.4% per annum, largely driven by **diversification towards horticulture and livestock**.
- **Punjab:** Punjab, which was once known as the champion of the Green Revolution, has recorded a **meagre agri-GDP growth rate of 2% per annum over the last two decades**. This shows that even states with a strong agricultural history need to adapt to changing times and adopt new technologies and practices to remain competitive.
- While Punjab has been a pioneer in the Green Revolution and has achieved high levels of productivity in wheat and rice, it is important to note that continued reliance on these crops may not

be sustainable in the long run, especially given the state's limited water resources.

Way forward

- **Diversifying horticulture and other crops like pulses and oilseeds** could not only lead to higher agricultural growth but also reduce the strain on groundwater resources and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.
- It is important for policymakers to consider a more sustainable and diversified approach to agriculture in Punjab.
- Madhya Pradesh is a shining example of doubling the contribution of horticulture in its value of agriculture and allied sector.

Report Alleges Conflict Of India's Fortified Food Programme

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Fortification of food

Prepp Mains Booster: Food Security; Food processing and related industries in India

Context:

- Recently, the public food fortification program run by **India's food safety regulator (FSSAI)** has come under examination after the **Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA)**, an umbrella organization of scientists, intellectuals, and non-governmental organizations, have alleged that **Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC)** members profit financially from the program.
- The Food Fortification Resource Centre is part of the food regulation Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

What is Food Fortification?

- It is defined as the practice of adding vitamins and minerals to commonly consumed foods during processing in order to increase their nutritional value.
- It can be carried out by food manufacturers or by governments as a public health policy.
- The Copenhagen Consensus identified food fortification as one of the most cost-effective development priorities.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agricultural Organizations of the United Nations (FAO) have identified it as the global strategy for reducing the incidence of nutrient deficiencies at the global level.

What are the issues claimed by ASHA?

- It was claimed that **members of the Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC) and others associated with the center stand to profit financially from the expanded food fortification program.**
- It was pointed out that the center is housed in the premises of the FSSAI, a statutory regulatory body whose mission is to protect citizens' health.
- Such individuals co-implement fortification programs, provide funding and advisory services, sell proprietary technologies to state programs, and conduct ostensibly 'independent' government evaluation studies.
- The Union Government has implemented a nationwide program that requires the distribution of fortified food grains in all of its programs, including the public distribution system and the **PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana**.

- ASHA cited violations of statutory guidelines in implementing fortified food inclusion in such schemes.



About ASHA

- The Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture, or ASHA-Kisan Swaraj network, is a volunteer-driven large informal network of organizations and individuals that first came together in 2010 to organize a Kisan Swaraj Yatra, a nationwide mobilization to draw attention to issues pertaining to our food, farmers and freedom.
- ASHA works with a mission to strengthen sustainable agricultural livelihoods and food diversity/safety/nutrition by reorienting policies, practices, and public consciousness toward a holistic vision of social, environmental, and economic justice.

India's Scenario

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2022 ranked India 107th out of 121 nations, with an undernourished population being one of the primary reasons for the country's poor performance.
- The FSSAI established standards for the fortification of rice, wheat flour, edible oil, double-fortified salt, and milk in 2016, accelerating the momentum of food fortification.
- Fortified foods are now being included in public food schemes such as PDS, ICDS, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, and Mid-Day Meal Scheme/Poshan, assisting in the fight against malnutrition.

Further Measures

- The presence of FFRC within FSSAI deserves further investigation and intervention to avoid a conflict of interest.
- The mandates of FSSAI and FFRC are diametrically opposed — FSSAI is supposed to be guided by food safety principles such as risk assessment in an independent manner, transparent public consultation, consumer choice and interest protection, and so on.
- FFRC serves a promotional role that is sponsored. In light of such concerns, this report emphasized the structural problem of private interests within a regulatory body such as the FSSAI and urges that their sphere of influence in matters of public health and food safety be examined in accordance with Indian laws.

Conclusion

The report raised serious concerns about the FFRC's role within the FSSAI. Apart from the significant issue of potential conflict of interest, there is also a one-sided portrayal of fortification as a cure-all with no other significant scientific perspective and evidence on fortification.

The decision-making body (FFRC) and the regulatory body (FSSAI) should push for fortification in a transparent manner.

Science and Technology

Centre In Final Stages Of Notifying Emissions Trading Scheme



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Energy Trading Scheme

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context:

- Recently, after the passing of the [Energy Conservation \(Amendment\) Bill](#) last December, now the Centre is in the final stages of notifying an **Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS)** that would require polluting industries to achieve certain standards of energy efficiency and permit them to 'trade' these improvements.
- An Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is a market-based policy mechanism designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- The scheme sets a cap on the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions that can be produced by regulated industries or sectors, such as power generation, transportation, and manufacturing.



Emissions Trading Scheme

- The scheme's nodal coordinator would be the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)**, a division of the Electricity Ministry.
- Sectors (such as those in the aluminium, cement, and fertiliser industries) would be given energy efficiency targets, and the businesses that were able to meet these criteria would receive "credits" or certificates that they could bank or sell to businesses that didn't reach the targets.
- Emissions trading schemes are deployed in the European Union and Korea.
- Emission Trading Scheme:** An Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is a **market-based policy mechanism** designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- The scheme **sets a cap on the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions** that can be produced by regulated industries or sectors, such as power generation, transportation, and manufacturing.
- Companies within these sectors are then **allocated permits**, which represent the right to emit a certain amount of greenhouse gases.
- If a company emits less than its allocated permits, **it can sell the extra permits to other companies that have exceeded their allocations.**

- This creates a financial incentive for companies to reduce their emissions and helps to achieve overall emissions reduction targets.
- The ETS is a widely used policy tool, currently deployed in the **European Union, Korea, and several other countries.**
- The cap is then gradually **lowered over time to encourage emissions reductions.** Companies are required to hold enough permits to cover their emissions.
- If a company exceeds its emissions cap, it can purchase additional permits from the market, while companies that emit less than their cap can sell the excess permits.
- The trading of emissions permits **creates a market price for emissions, providing a financial incentive** for companies to reduce their emissions.

Significance

- ETS is considered a **flexible, cost-effective, and market-driven mechanism** for achieving emissions reductions.
- It allows companies to reduce their emissions in the most cost-effective way, while also **providing flexibility** to adjust to changing economic and environmental conditions.
- However, the success of the ETS depends on the design of the scheme, including the level of the emissions cap, the allocation of permits, and the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

How will it be different from the European Union's Emission Trading Scheme (ETS)?

- One of the main differences is that companies in **India will not be required to cut carbon emissions in absolute terms**, unlike in the EU where such reductions are mandatory under the provisions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Instead, India has committed to reducing the emissions intensity (emissions per unit of GDP) of its GDP by 45% (of 2005 levels) by 2030.
- This means that companies in India could potentially emit more carbon as they increase production, as long as they become more efficient and reduce their emissions intensity.
- However, the forthcoming emissions trading scheme in India would likely set higher bars for emission reductions and require companies to invest substantially more in deploying alternate, cleaner sources of energy to meet efficiency norms.
- India's commitment to install 500 GW of electricity from nonfossil fuels by 2030 will cost at least ₹2.4 trillion, according to an estimate from the Central Electricity Authority.
- Therefore, India should have its own emissions trading scheme structure and ensure that we accommodate our specific needs.
- As a precursor to the Indian carbon markets, the Environment Ministry on February 17 listed a range of activities, **called greenhouse gas mitigation activities, that would be eligible for trading carbon credits.**
- These include solar thermal power, offshore wind, green hydrogen, compressed biogas, and stored renewable energy.

How is it different from traditional carbon credits?

- While the older scheme of traditional carbon credits allowed Indian industries to generate power from renewable energy sources and sell the resulting credits to exchanges in the European Union, the establishment of an Indian ETS would create a **more structured and regulated system for carbon trading.**
- The **ETS would incentivize companies to reduce** their carbon footprint and promote the adoption of clean energy technologies and practices.

- It would also allow for the creation of a domestic carbon market that can drive **investments in low-carbon infrastructure** and support India's climate change mitigation efforts.
- By adopting a domestic approach to carbon trading, India can establish a more robust carbon market that is tailored to its unique needs and circumstances, and that can support the country's transition to a low-carbon economy.

What is the Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme?

- Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme is a flagship program of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE).
- PAT scheme aims at reducing Specific Energy Consumption (SEC) i.e. energy use per unit of production for Designated Consumers (DCs) in energy intensive sectors, with an associated market mechanism to enhance the cost effectiveness through certification of excess energy saving which can be traded.
- The excess energy savings are converted into tradable instruments called Energy Saving Certificates (ESCs) that are traded at the Power Exchanges.
- Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) is the market regulator for trading of ESCs and Power System Operation Corporation Limited (POSOCO) is entrusted with the responsibility of the Registry.

India, Pakistan At Risk Of Flooding From Glacial Lakes: What New Study Says

Priority: Medium



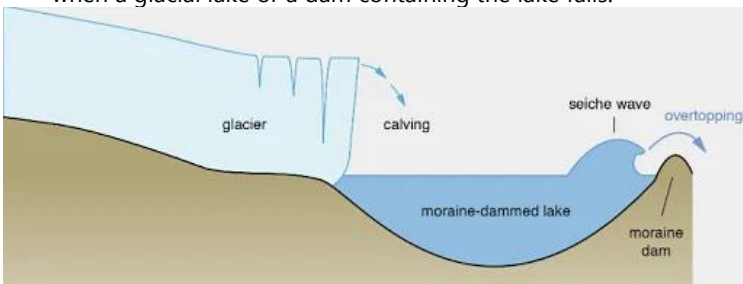
Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Glacial Lake Outburst floods

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Disaster and Disaster Management

Context:

- According to a new study, [Glacial lake outburst floods](#) threaten millions globally' published in the journal Nature, around 15 million people across the world face the risk of sudden and deadly flooding from glacial lakes, which are expanding and rising in numbers due to global warming.
- More than half of those who could be impacted live in four countries: India, Pakistan, Peru, and China.
- Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) are a type of flood that occurs when a glacial lake or a dam containing the lake fails.



What are Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) ?

- Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) are a type of flood that occurs when a glacial lake or a dam containing the lake fails.
- Glacial lakes are formed by the melting of glaciers, and are held in place by ice, moraines, or other natural dams.

- When the volume of water in the lake exceeds the holding capacity of the dam, the dam can burst, causing a flood downstream.

Concern

- Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) can be **extremely dangerous**, as they can cause significant destruction to **infrastructure, property, and agricultural land, and can also result in the loss of lives**.
- These floods often arrive with little warning and can be triggered by events such **as landslides or ice avalanches**.
- As global temperatures continue to rise, glaciers will retreat, forming larger and more numerous lakes that may be more susceptible to such triggers.
- The number and total area of glacial lakes worldwide have increased by about 50 percent since 1990, according to a 2020 study.
- This means that lakes that were not previously a concern may become a concern in the future, and new and potentially dangerous lakes may form.

What are the findings of the new study?

- The researchers used existing satellite-derived data on different locations and sizes of glacial lakes, **as well as global population models and population metrics**, to identify the areas and communities most in danger from glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs).
- They estimated that around 15 million people live within the **50 km danger zone of glacial lakes**, with populations in High Mountains Asia (HMA) being the most exposed.
- India and Pakistan make up one-third of the total number of people globally exposed to GLOFs, with around three million people in India and around two million people in Pakistan.
- The study also found that the glacial flood risks depend not only on the size and number of glacial lakes in an area, but also on the number of people living in the area, their proximity to the danger zone, and levels of social vulnerability.
- Areas like Greenland and Canada, which have a large number of glacial lakes, have very few people who are vulnerable to GLOFs due to their low population and corruption levels.

Uttarakhand 2013 floods

- Glacial lakes are often located in steep, mountainous regions, which makes them vulnerable to natural hazards like landslides and ice avalanches.
- If such events cause the lake to overflow, it can result in a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), which can be very destructive and deadly.
- One such event occurred in 2013 in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, where flash floods caused by heavy rainfall and a GLOF caused by the Chorabari Tal glacial lake devastated the region, killing thousands of people and causing extensive damage to infrastructure and property.
- This event highlighted the need to better understand and manage the risks associated with glacial lakes and other climate-related hazards, particularly in regions where vulnerable communities are located in close proximity to these lakes.

Mitigation

- **Construction limits:** One of the simplest and most cost-effective strategies is to limit construction in GLOF-prone areas. This can

help to reduce the risk of infrastructure and property damage, and protect human lives.

- **Relocation:** In some cases, it may be necessary to relocate existing infrastructure and human populations from high-risk areas. This can be a challenging and complex process, but it may be the best way to protect people from the impacts of GLOFs.
- **Land use planning:** Adequate land use planning is critical in GLOF-prone areas. This can help to identify and avoid high-risk areas, and ensure that new development is located in safer areas.
- **Training:** It's important to train local inhabitants in search and rescue operations, as they will often be the first responders in a crisis before trained rescuers arrive. This can help to ensure that people are prepared to respond effectively to GLOF events and help to reduce the risk of loss of life.

Way forward

- Limiting climate change and keeping global warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius is a critical step in reducing the risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).
- It's important to find effective measures to address the risks associated with GLOFs, and this requires working with national and regional governments, as well as local communities.
- This includes identifying appropriate measures for threatened populations and developing effective strategies to mitigate the risks associated with GLOFs.

Indian Blue Economy Is Thriving But Country Needs To Be Careful About Marine Litter

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Blue Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Environment; Biodiversity and Conservation; Environmental pollution and Degradation

Context:

- **India has been at the forefront of the blue economy discourse, with its geographical and geostrategic position,** focusing more on the Indian Ocean region.
- It is the world's third largest body of water, covering 70 million square kilometers and boasting rich mineral resources and connectivity to global cities.
- **The Indian blue economy is thriving, but the country must be mindful of marine litter.** Abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear poses a serious threat all over the world.

India's Coastline

- India has a 7,517-kilometer-long coastline and 1,382 offshore islands that provide abundant resources and opportunities.
- The majority of India's coastal regions are densely populated and low-lying, with approximately 250 million people working within a 50-kilometer radius of the coast.
- According to 2011 Census data, the Indian coast has 486 census towns. 36 of them are Class I towns with populations greater than 100,000 people.
- The Indian coast has twelve major ports and 239 minor ports. Every year, more than 100,000 ships are estimated to pass close to Indian coasts.



What is the Blue Economy?

- The term "blue economy" refers to a wide range of economic activities related to the sustainable development of resources and possessions in the oceans, connecting rivers, water bodies, and coastal regions, and with a focus on equity, inclusion, innovation, and modern technology.
- A blue economy will contribute to food security, poverty alleviation, climate change mitigation and resilience, increased trade and investment, increased maritime connectivity, increased diversification, job creation, and socioeconomic growth.
- Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this sector expanded and exported \$7.2 billion from April 2021 to February 2022.

Important aspect of Indian Blue Economy

- The Indian coastal economy supports over four million fishermen and coastal towns. With a fleet of 250,000 fishing boats, India is the world's second-largest producer of fish.
- Shipbuilding and shipping are also important aspects of India's blue economy.
- Coastal shipping has the potential to grow from 6% to 33% by 2035.

Blue Revolution in India

- The Indian Ocean's blue economy has become a global economic corridor because **India is strategically located between two important plug points known as the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca,** through which the majority of trade in commercial shipping moves in the Indian Ocean.
- Oceanic traffic is expected to increase further as a result of the emphasis on promoting the blue economy, port-led development plans, growth in coastal shipping, trade protocol routes, cruise tourism, and the '**Sagarmala Project**' for port-led development.
- The Government of India launched the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** in May 2020 with a budgetary outlay of Rs 20,050 crore to bring about a "blue revolution" in the country's fisheries sector through sustainable and responsible development.
- **The Union Budget 2023-24** allocated Rs 6,000 crore to launch a sub-scheme under PMMSY to further enable fishermen's activities.

What are the threats?

- Due to a lack of data, abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) poses a serious threat around the world.
- A large amount of fishing net and gear is lost as a result of fishing or fishing accidents, as well as bad weather, and ends up in the ocean as waste (ghost net). They continue to slaughter marine species throughout their lives.

- According to the United Nations Environment Programme, ALDFG accounts for roughly 20% of all plastic debris in the oceans.
- Each year, approximately 640,000 tonnes of waste are discarded in the oceans around the world.
- There are 174,000 units of fishing gear in use in India, of which 154,008 are gillnets/driftnets, 7,285 are traps, and the rest are fishing lines.
- India loses 15,276 tonnes of gillnets per year.

Steps taken by Government

- **Swachh Sagar Surakshit Sagar campaign:** To protect life below and above water from the harmful effects of marine litter, the Union Ministry of Earth and Sciences launched a coastal clean-up campaign in 2022 under the "Swachh Sagar Surakshit Sagar" campaign.
- **International Coastal Clean-up Day:** Every year, India actively participates in International Coastal Clean-up Day and conducts public awareness programs with the assistance of local bodies located near coastlines.
- **National Marine Litter Policy:** India is already on the way to formulate the "National Marine Litter Policy". It is also involved in blue beach development for tourism, preferring clean blue beaches with 'zero waste' approaches.
- The National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) of the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), as well as the National Institute of Oceanography, are conducting extensive research and expeditions to reduce marine litter; manage coastlines with the goal of long-term growth of India's blue economy.

Can We Use Moon Dust To Slow Down Global Warming



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Environment

Prepp Mains Booster: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life, Awareness in the field of Space, Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Context:

- Recently a paper published in the **PLoS Climate journal** has proposed that dust should be launched from the moon to a point in space where the **gravitational fields** of the earth and Sun cancel each other out.
- The dust parked at this point should cast a shadow on the earth, thereby dimming sunlight and offsetting **carbon emissions**.

What is the proposal?

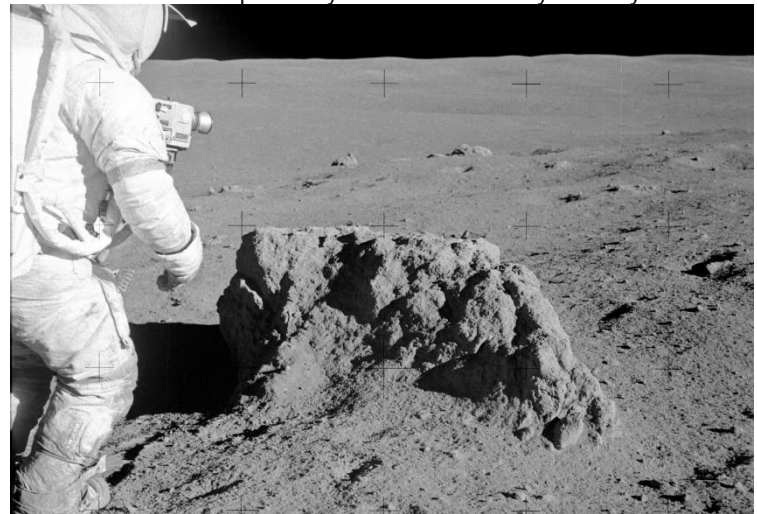
- According to a paper published in the **PLoS Climate journal**, US researchers have proposed an alternate solution to the threat of **global warming**.
- As per the proposal, millions of tonnes of moon dust will be launched to a point in space where the **Earth's and the Sun's gravitational fields** cancel out each other.
- The dust that will remain 'parked' there will cast a shadow on the earth.
- As a result, the incoming insolation will be dimmed which will help offset carbon emissions.

Has anything similar ever happened before?

- In 1816, the explosion of **Mt Tambora** resulted in the '**summerless year**.'
- The volcanic eruption that took place on an island in the **Dutch East Indies** spewed a large number of sulfates and other aerosols into the stratosphere causing the cooling of air.
- This phenomenon of reduction in global temperature caused by the obscuring of the Sun by volcanic ash, sulfuric acid and water droplets and the increase of the **Earth's albedo** following a volcanic eruption is called a **volcanic winter**.
- The aerosols formed in the atmosphere **reflect insolation** and **absorb terrestrial radiation** thus cooling the earth and warming the stratosphere.

Are there any adverse consequences?

- Although the presence of aerosols in the stratosphere such as sulfates does have a **cooling effect** on the earth, there are a few concerns associated with it as well.
- The cool summer following the **volcanic winter of 1816** resulted in diminished global crop yields leading to starvation and death.
- Numerous climatic models have predicted similar conditions as a result of artificial dimming through the use of aerosols.
- However, some studies have suggested that this **solar radiation management** (SRM) model will not lead to very harmful droughts and that it could positively affect the economy of many nations.



What is Solar Radiation Management and what are the concerns associated with it?

- **Solar Radiation Management** is a type of climate engineering where solar radiation or sunlight is reflected back to space in order to limit or reverse the effects of anthropological climate change.
- SRM cannot be treated as a substitute for emissions reduction, rather it should be viewed as a temporary measure to limit the effects while steps are taken to reduce emissions.
- It must be noted that even the best models are simulations and are best suited for continental rather than regional scales, which are ideal to analyze heatwaves and droughts.
- Climate models are still inadequate at estimating precipitation response to solar radiation perturbation at any scale while projections of related rainfall variations will be highly **uncertain**.
- As a result, it would not be ideal to assume low drought and crop losses based on this model.

- Social and Natural scientists have expressed concern over the science and governance of SRM, especially relating to monitoring, unintended consequences, cross-border responsibility and liability.
- The **loss and damages** concept of the **UNFCCC** has been complicated in its implementation but the compensation for **SRM** will make it even more so.

Recommendations

- The **Oxford University** and the **Asilomar Conference** have proposed that the following be accepted as guiding principles in **geoengineering** the climate.
- Those involved in the process must clearly and explicitly report the science and technology behind the approach as well as the possible consequences.
- Deployment and Monitoring, Verification and Reporting mechanisms should be **inclusive and democratic**.
- Stakeholders are required to pre-emptively codify and agree on compensation mechanisms.
- Finally, emissions must be reduced while the **temporary cooling effect** lasts as once spraying ends, the aerosols will be gradually wiped out leading to a new period of warming.

India Can Become A Biodiversity Champion

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Environment

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment, Distribution of key natural resources across the world, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Union Budget 2023 mentioned “**green growth**” as one of the seven priorities or **Saptarishis** in order to protect the country’s biological wealth amid the degradation of natural assets such as land, soil, air and water.
- **India hosts 17% of the world’s biodiversity hotspots** and requires modern scientific measures alongside the integration of local and traditional knowledge to improve its biodiversity.



Green Growth

- In the Union Budget 2023, the Finance Minister announced that “**Green Growth**” would be one of the Budget’s seven priorities.
- The Seven priorities would act as **Saptarishis guiding India towards Amrit Kaal**.

- Green Growth was based on the **Prime Minister’s vision of LiFE or Lifestyle For the Environment** which aimed to develop a culture of environmentally conscious living that would help transition India into a green industry and economy.

Government initiatives

- The Green Growth push has been welcomed as it comes amid a concerning loss of India’s biological wealth including land, air, soil and water.
- **National Mission on a Green India**: It aims to increase forest cover on degraded lands and protect existing forests.
- **Green Credit Programme**: It was developed with the aim of incentivizing environmentally sustainable and responsive actions by enterprises, communities and individuals.
- **MISHTI**: The Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes was aimed at highlighting the concerns faced by mangroves and their usefulness in mitigating the harshest effects of climate change.
- **PR-PRANAM**: The Prime Minister Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment and Ameliorization of Mother Earth targets sustainable agriculture by reducing the input of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
- **Amrit Dharohar**: This scheme directly mentions biological wealth and aims to encourage optimal use of wetlands, enhance biodiversity, carbon stock, eco-tourism and income generation for locals.
- The sustainable push through Amrit Dharohar will benefit aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem services by balancing the needs for development and conservation.
- The intervention by the MoEFCC to stop the draining of **Haiderpur, a Ramsar wetland** in UP as part of efforts to safeguard migratory waterfowl was part of the government’s focus on environmental conservation.

How can science-based policies help?

- All interventions and policies for the conservation of the country’s biodiversity should employ **evidence-based scientific measures**.
- The use of scientific and inclusive monitoring would enable easy replication of results locally, nationally and globally.
- **Modern concepts of sustainability and ecosystem valuation based on the ecological, sociological and cultural characteristics** of the country’s biological assets should be the framework for any conservation methods.
- The economic foundation of clear system boundaries, prioritization of benefits to resource persons, and fund services has the potential to generate value for multiple sustainable biomes.
- The future of the country’s water resources depended on the reduction of water usage in key sectors such as agriculture by shifting to **less water-intensive crops like millet and adopting water recycling** through **grey and blue-green infrastructure**.
- Implementation of the **Green India Mission** should focus on ecological restoration rather than plantation.
- Sites should be chosen in such a way that they can contribute to ecological connectivity, especially in urban areas where landscapes are fractured.
- The choice of species and density should be based on available knowledge and evidence of resilience under climate change and the potential benefits and costs with respect to water availability.

- Site selection under MISHTI should consider mangrove species diversity and the integrity of coastal mud flats and salt pans due to their value to biodiversity.

Role of local communities

- All practices and conservation **projects must be inclusive of the local and other nomadic communities** in the region.
- Traditional techniques and knowledge passed down by these communities could be valuable in efforts to protect endemic species.
- Most forest resources are treated as sacred by the indigenous communities and protected with reverence. Involving them in conservation will boost ecological outcomes while also providing locals with some form of regular employment.

Way Forward

- If implemented on the basis of the latest scientific and ecological knowledge, the Green Growth push could vastly improve the state of the country's biodiversity.
- The government should provide **sustained funding as well as enable research and educational activities** in the sector to allow for a holistic model to be developed.
- The **National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing** has great multi-disciplinary potential to green the economy and restore and enrich the natural potential of the country which has already been approved by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) would be able to launch India as a leader in applied biodiversity science.

Third Patient Is Cured Of HIV: How Did This Happen And What Are Its Implications?

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Science and technology

Prepp Mains Booster: Awareness in the field of Biotechnology

Context:

- Recently, a 53-year-old man from Germany, referred to as the Dusseldorf patient, has become at least the third person to have been "cured of HIV" with the virus not being detectable in his body even four years after stopping the medicine.
- This was achieved with a bone-marrow transplant from people carrying a specific HIV-resistant genetic mutation.



Who are the people who have become HIV-free?

- Timothy Ray Brown, also known as the "Berlin patient," received two stem cell transplants to treat his blood cancer in 2007 and 2008.

- His doctors intentionally chose a donor who carried two copies of the **CCR5-delta 32 mutation, which makes cells resistant to HIV infection.**
- After the transplant, Brown's HIV was undetectable, and he remained HIV-free until his death in 2020 from a recurrence of his blood cancer.
- Brown's case was significant because it was the **first time that someone had been cured of HIV**, and it paved the way for further research into potential HIV cures.
- The cases of the Berlin patient, the London patient, the Dusseldorf patient, the City of Hope patient, and the New York patient represent significant advances in HIV treatment.

Challenges

- **Stem cell transplants** offer a potential cure for HIV, but the procedure is risky and only suitable for a small number of people with HIV.
- The **CCR5-delta 32 mutation found** in these patients is an **essential factor** in their HIV remission, as it blocks the HIV virus from entering cells.
- However, it is crucial to note that this mutation is **rare and not present in most people, particularly in non-European populations.**
- **Finding a matching donor** with the CCR5-delta 32 mutation can be challenging, particularly for individuals from countries with a high burden of HIV where the mutation is less common.
- Even if a matching donor is found, bone marrow transplantation is a major medical procedure associated with significant risks, **including the possibility of rejection, infection, and complications** associated with the conditioning therapy used to prepare the recipient's body for the transplant.
- The use of dual stem cell therapy in the New York patient is a promising development that could make stem cell transplants more accessible to a wider population.
- This approach allows for less restrictive HLA matching, making it more likely to find a suitable donor.

What is CCR5 mutation and how does it fight off HIV?

- HIV attacks and damages CD4 immune cells in the body, reducing a person's ability to fight off secondary infections.
- The CCR5 receptors on the surface of the CD4 immune cells act as an entry point for the HIV virus to enter and infect the cells.
- The **CCR5-delta 32 mutation prevents the formation of these receptors, effectively blocking the entry of the virus into the cells.**
- Only a small percentage of the global population has two copies of the CCR5-delta 32 mutation, and they are primarily of European descent.
- People who carry one copy of the mutation have a reduced risk of contracting HIV and are less likely to experience disease progression if they become infected.
- However, it's important to note that having the CCR5-delta 32 mutation does not guarantee complete immunity to HIV, as some cases of HIV infection have been reported in people with the mutation.

Why did the Chinese researcher who edited this gene out face backlash?

- In an effort to make twins Lulu and Nana immune to HIV, a Chinese researcher by the name of He Jiankui modified the twins' genomes in 2018.

- Their father was living with HIV.
- He declared that he has produced the **first genetic modified children** a month after the first kids were born in October 2018.
- The scientific community criticised him, and he was also sued.
- As the editing methods are not very accurate and the long-term effects of such editing are unclear, germ-line editing, which alters a genome that can be transferred from one generation to the next, is prohibited by the rules for genetic editing.
- Antiretroviral therapy also had the potential to stop HIV from being passed from mother to kid.

Present treatment

- Despite the fact that there are currently no treatments for the infection, antiretroviral therapy can be used to control the infection.
- These drugs prevent the virus from replicating within the body, allowing the number of CD4 immune cells to increase once more.
- Although the government's program used to solely provide the medications to people with low CD4 counts, it now supports anyone who has been diagnosed with HIV.
- Because the virus is still present in the body's reservoirs, the medications must be taken for the rest of one's life.
- The virus can once more begin multiplying and spreading if the medications are stopped.
- It is less likely for someone to spread the virus when viral levels are low.
- If the virus is not treated, the immune system is destroyed, and the person enters the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) stage, where they develop a number of fatal opportunistic infections.
- Although there is no vaccine for HIV, those who are at a high risk of getting the illness can take Pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP) medications.
- **PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99 percent.**

What is Stem Cell Therapy?

- Stem cell therapy, also known as regenerative medicine, is a type of medical treatment that uses stem cells to repair, replace or regenerate damaged or diseased cells, tissues or organs in the body.
- The stem cells can be harvested from a variety of sources, such as bone marrow, adipose tissue, or umbilical cord blood.
- The idea behind stem cell therapy is that stem cells have the ability to differentiate into various cell types in the body and can potentially replace or regenerate damaged cells, tissues or organs.
- This therapy has shown potential in treating a variety of medical conditions, including certain types of cancers, blood disorders, autoimmune diseases, and degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease.

Challenges to internal security

Khalistan Supporters And Indian Diaspora Clash In Melbourne: What Is Happening?

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Diaspora

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian diaspora; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

Context:

- Recently, a minor clash broke out on January 29 between members of the Indian diaspora and Sikhs sympathetic to the Khalistani cause in Melbourne, Australia.
- This was after thousands gathered in the city during a 'referendum' demanding a separate Sikh state, reported Australian media.
- The US-based group **Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)** is behind the referendum.
- SFJ seeks a separate homeland for Sikhs — a "Khalistan" in Punjab — and claims to be "an international advocacy and human rights group"

What is Indian Diaspora?

- **Indian Diaspora** is a generic term used for addressing people who have migrated from the territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India.
- It constitutes **NRI (Non-resident Indians) and PIOs (Persons of Indian origins)**.
- The Indian Diaspora is estimated to be over 30 million.

Background

- The incident occurred when a pro-Indian group came to Federation Square, where the referendum was being held, carrying Indian flags.
- According to The Age, a daily newspaper in Melbourne, they got into a fight with Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), the pro-Khalistan organisation that was organising the referendum.
- **Attack on Hindu Temples:** In recent days, a temple in Melbourne's Albert Park has been vandalized with graffiti reading "Khalistan Zindabad", marking the third attack on Hindu temples in the city.
- This follows the previous incidents of vandalism at the Shri Shiva Vishnu Temple in Carrum Downs and the BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Mill Park, which took place earlier in January.

What is Referendum 2020?

- The unofficial "referendum" is a **voting exercise organised across several countries** by the US-based Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) organisation.
- It seeks to forge an **agreement among Sikh communities** to establish Khalistan, a separate homeland within India.
- It is generally proposed that this be accomplished by **carving out the Indian state of Punjab**, the country's only Sikh-majority state.
- The campaign group says it would then approach the UN and various other international human rights bodies with the demand to re-establish "Punjab as a nation state".

India

- The **High Commission of India in Australia** issued a statement on January 26 denouncing these incidents and calling them **acts of vandalism**.
- It said that the frequency and impunity with which the vandals appear to be acting, as well as the graffiti that glorifies anti-Indian terrorists, are worrisome.
- The peaceful, multi-faith and multi-cultural Indian-Australian community has been the target of evident attempts to spread hatred and division.

- The High Commission accused the **SFJ members of assisting pro-Khalistan** elements in carrying out incendiary activities in addition to requesting that the Australian authorities bring the offenders to justice.

Sikhs for Justice

- The **US-based organization SFJ**, which was banned in India in 2019 under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act UAPA**, has long called for Khalistan.
- A **secessionist campaign** called "**Referendum 2020**" that attempted to "**liberate Punjab from Indian control**" was led by the SFJ, which was outlawed in 2019 for its separatist actions.
- According to The Age, the most recent referendum asked voters if Punjab, which is controlled by India, should become an independent nation.
- Incorporated in 2007, SFJ calls itself "**an international advocacy and human rights group**" and **advocates for a "Khalistan" in Punjab as a separate homeland for Sikhs**.
- Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a lawyer in the US who has offices in both the US and Canada, is credited with co-founding the organisation.
- A few months prior to this, Gurgaon police allegedly arrested him on sedition-related charges after he allegedly published a video calling for people to hoist the Khalistan flag at the deputy commissioner's and superintendent of police's offices in Haryana.

Khalistan movement

- The Khalistan movement is a Sikh separatist movement that seeks to establish a sovereign state in modern-day Punjab in order to provide Sikhs a homeland (both in India and Pakistan).
- In the 1980s, when the insurgency in the state of Punjab reached its height, demand for the state increased.
- The movement has largely continued among the Sikh diaspora outside of India since the 1990s when normalcy was restored in the North Indian state.
- Indian authorities have charged Pakistan with aiding and funding Khalistani rebels to undermine India throughout the years.
- Current status:** The Khalistan movement has long become moribund with the neutralisation of the threat and the ending of the Punjab insurgency in the early 1990s.
- The movement has lost support from the Sikh community in India

Concerns

- It sometimes can put a strain on **India's diplomatic relationships**.
- If it is left unchecked it may have an effect on the **Unity and diversity** of India.
- Disrupt the **peace & harmony** of the country with these activities.
- It can hamper the **safety and security of members** of the Indian community.

Conclusion

- Although the Khalistan movement has no resonance within India, groups in the diaspora, especially in North America and Europe, continue attempting to resuscitate the movement.
- The vandalism of Hindu temples and the current clash raise concerns about the potential for further incidents and the need for authorities to take action to prevent any escalation of violence.

General Studies 4

Russia Ukraine War - Case Study

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Open source

Prepp Mains Booster: International Ethics

Why In the News?

- Russia's full-scale invasion of neighbouring Ukraine has been the biggest story in global affairs since the late days of February 2022.
- Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has given rise to unprecedented challenges for businesses and organizations in the public, private and non-profit sectors worldwide and caused substantial disruptions to economies, business operations and livelihoods around the globe along with humanitarian crises.

What Ethical Issues Involved in the Russia Ukraine war?

Violation of Ethics of Politics and Ukraine's Political Sovereignty

- The ethics of war should be viewed as political ethics. Definition of politics as the means by which sizable populations arrange themselves into societies with rules that must be followed, with leaders who have authority, and with systems for the transfer of power from one leader to another. The Russian invasion's specific goal of denying the Ukrainian people the ability to build their own political community is the outrage of the war—the indignation that inspires all of its other outrages.
- In order to choose Ukraine's political future for itself, Russia pushed tanks across the border, violating both Ukraine's right to territorial integrity and its political sovereignty.
- As a result, the natural law implies that every human being (or at least every innocent human being) has a right not to be killed. If our very lives could be stolen from us by others as they saw fit, we could not pursue any good or complete any obligation at all.
- Because of this, we have the right to condemn an occupying force that uses its weapons to kill innocent civilians while shelling civilian sites.

Is it Ethical For Ukraine to Fight War?

- There must also be a realistic chance of victory for war to be morally justifiable. Even though you have the legal right to self-defense, it would be wiser to refrain from engaging in combat if going to war means you'll probably lose badly and murder many people. This will prevent needless casualties.
- The more fundamental right of a people to political self-determination is expected to be protected by the rights to "territorial integrity" and "political sovereignty," according to just war theory.
- The traditional moral rationale for war is self-defense: you are attacked, and you have the right to defend yourself by employing force to uphold political justice.
- Does that imply causing enough harm to obtain more favourable conditions at the negotiation table? Or is there an intangible but potent success attained by the guts and respect for oneself that come from standing up for noble principles despite all odds?
- The willingness of Ukrainians to sacrifice their lives for such ideals has changed the world. Putin has made the decision to murder civilians in Ukraine in order to destroy these principles. We are unable to fully comprehend what is happening right now and how the war might finish unless we recognise its moral dimension.

Self Defence as Justification by Russia

- Russia has argued that its use of force against Ukraine is lawful under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which preserves the rights of UN member states to defend themselves against "an armed attack" and to engage in "collective self-defense."

- Specifically, Russia has claimed that it may use force against Ukraine in order to defend the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, which Russia recognizes as independent states.
- Bellinger and Dworkin argued that Russia cannot rely on a self-defense justification because Ukraine has not threatened or attacked any other nation.
- All four scholars also suggested that even if Ukraine had been planning an attack against Donetsk or Luhansk, Russia could not invoke Article 51's collective self-defense provision because these regions are not recognized as separate states under international law.

Ethical Sanctions On Russia

- While Western governments have imposed sanctions on Russian citizens and organizations, many Western businesses have chosen to self-sanction, frequently for moral reasons.
- Many well-known companies, including McDonald's and Apple, didn't waste much time in stopping their operations in Russia. Coca-Cola has also stopped selling beverages in Russia, where it began doing so after the conclusion of the Cold War for both commercial and diplomatic reasons. According to the Yale School of Management, more than 450 companies have announced their withdrawal from Russia's economy since Putin launched the war in February, despite in some cases the significant commercial impact this will have.
- The people of Ukraine continue to show fortitude and bravery in the face of injustice and misfortune, and they have the right to their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-defense. The world must vehemently oppose the normalisation of the atrocities and injustice of Russia's attack on Ukraine. We must exert every effort to stop Russia's aggression and bring about a fair and lasting peace because we owe it to everyone who has suffered thus far and to everyone whose lives have already been lost.
- The ongoing dangers that nuclear weapons pose to international peace have also been brought to light by Russia's conflict in Ukraine. The Elders are still extremely concerned about President Putin's nuclear escalation threats made during the early phases of the Russian invasion.

Refugee Crisis

- The worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II has been brought on by the more than eight million people who have fled the nation. While tens of billions of dollars in relief have been donated by international organizations, nearby countries have taken in millions of displaced individuals. But analysts are concerned that host countries are growing weary as the conflict enters its second year with no conclusion in sight.
- Over thirteen million people, or roughly a third of Ukraine's pre-war population, have reportedly been displaced since the invasion, according to the UN refugee agency.
- The true numbers are probably much higher; these are just the confirmed casualties. Their concentration has been in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk areas
- U.S. officials say Russian forces have forcibly transferred up to 1.6 million Ukrainian refugees to Russian territory as of September 2022.
- Rights groups say many were coerced into renouncing their Ukrainian nationality. Forcible transfers are a war crime under international law; Russia characterizes its actions as humanitarian evacuations.

- Health officials also remain concerned about the spread of infectious diseases given the deterioration in health-care infrastructure. They warn that COVID-19 transmission remains high, with only 38 percent of Ukrainians fully vaccinated against the disease.
- In the Russia-occupied city of Mariupol, officials imposed a quarantine over fears of cholera and dysentery, while the UN human rights mission in Ukraine expressed concern regarding reports that Ukrainian prisoners of war have contracted diseases including hepatitis A and tuberculosis.
- Russia has used its veto to block UN Security Council action, but the broader UN General Assembly has expressed widespread opposition to the invasion of Ukraine. The body has passed several resolutions by large majorities, including ones that called on Russia to pay war reparations and urged countries not to recognize Putin's annexation of four eastern Ukrainian regions.
- Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court continues to investigate claims that Russian forces have committed war crimes, of which Ukrainian officials say they have documented more than sixty-six thousand incidents. Ukrainian courts have already indicted nearly ninety members of the Russian military.

The Ethics of India Buying Russian Oil

- Russia now serves as India's second-largest oil source, following Iraq. India is partially incentivized to buy Russia's Ural crude oil because it offers large discounts of up to \$35 of the global average oil price.
- India argues that as a developing country, it does not have the luxury to ignore the opportunity to buy discounted energy.
- As an ethical justification, this argument somewhat holds up considering the United States and powerful Western European countries cannot expect India to have the same ability to shoulder higher global oil prices.
- India can refine the highly discounted crude oil it imports, and export the products worldwide with double profits. For example, India is currently exporting 685,000 barrels of diesel per day compared to pre-invasion figures of 580,000 per day.
- Meanwhile, member nations of the European Union, the longtime primary market for Moscow's oil exports, agreed to stop most oil purchases by the end of 2022.
- The United States claims that India's increased Urals imports open New Delhi up to a "great risk" as Western countries enforce ever more sanctions on Moscow.


Way Forward

- The Russian invasion is a moral outrage that has no justification in the ethics of war. Despite humans having traveled a great distance from the era of wars and conquests, ingrained human tendencies towards violence and conquest have not been able to be separated from human nature.
- The concepts of global peace and security are currently being advocated in international fora, but the reality often diverges from what is being spoken in these meetings and conferences of the international community. The most recent invasion of Ukraine may be the strongest indicator of the current propensity for armed conflict.

- Finding peaceful alternatives is advised in order to safeguard the desirable and avoid the negative effects of conflict, invasion, and conquest.
- The world community has to understand that wars are manifestations of powerful desires to subjugate the weak, eroding regional stability, inflaming animosity, and upsetting global trade, all of which have detrimental economic effects.
- The mentality of people who draw their masculinity, power, and glory from wars, territorial conquests, and attacks urgently needs reform.

PRELIMS

ST Commission Functioning With Less Than 50% Of Its Approved Strength

Priority: Medium 

Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: NCST

Prepp Mains Booster: Constitutional Bodies

Context:

- Recently, the data presented by the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA)** in Lok Sabha revealed that the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) is currently operating with less than half of its sanctioned strength.**
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to carry out its functions without the necessary staffers.

Composition of Current ST Panel

- According to Commission data, the ST panel consists of one Chairperson, one Vice-Chairperson, and three Members (two among V-C and Members must be from ST community).
- **It currently has only one Chairperson (Harsh Chouhan) and one Member (Ananta Nayak),** with all other positions, including the mandatory ST Member, vacant for the last three years.

What are the concerns?

- In response to a question in the Lok Sabha, it was stated that "as of 31.1.2023, against the total sanctioned posts of 124, 54 posts were filled and 70 were vacant."
- While the Ministry fills Group A positions in the NCST, the NCST fills Groups B and C positions.
- The panel approved one Superintendent of Police, one Law Officer, and one Accounts Officer (all Group A positions), none of which had been filled since 2004.
- The Ministry has yet to develop recruitment guidelines for them, which is a serious oversight.

About National Commission for Scheduled Tribes

- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes is a constitutional body.
- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes was established on February 19, 2004, by revising Article 338 and introducing a new article 338A into the Constitution as part of the 89th Constitution Amendment Act, 2003.
- **Article 338A** empowers the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes to monitor the execution of various protections afforded to STs by the Constitution or any other legislation in force at the time, or under any other order to the Government, and to review the effectiveness of such safeguards.
- **Role of NCST:** To safeguard the interests of the scheduled tribes or under any other order to the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards.

- The Commission and its officers participate in formulation of policies and in the developmental programmes for Scheduled Tribes including Tribal Sub-Plan.

Composition of NCST

- The Commission shall consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and other members so appointed shall be such as the President may by rule determine.
- They are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.
- The Chairman shall be appointed from amongst eminent social, political workers belonging to Scheduled Tribes who inspire confidence amongst the Scheduled tribes by their vary personality and record of selfless service.
- The Vice-Chairman and all other Members out of whom at least two shall be appointed from amongst persons belonging to the Scheduled Tribes.
- At least one other member shall be appointed from amongst women.

What is the tenure?

- The Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the other Members shall hold office for 3 years from the date on which he/she assumes such office.
- The members are not eligible for appointment for more than two terms.


About Scheduled Tribes

- Article 366(25) refers to scheduled tribes as those communities who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution.
- According to Article 342 of the Constitution, the Scheduled Tribes are the tribes or the Tribal communities or part of or groups within these tribes and tribal communities which have been declared as such by the President through a public notification.
- As per 2011 census the Scheduled Tribes represents 8.6 percent of the country's population. Over 700 tribes have been notified.

Conclusion

For NCST to function as per its Constitutional mandate, key positions such as Research Officers, Investigators, and Directors must be filled. Several positions in the Commission Secretariat are also vacant, but the top priority should be to appoint all sanctioned Members and the Vice-Chairperson in accordance with the mandate.

EX-SC Judge Among Six Governors Appointed

Priority: High 

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Polity

Prepp Mains Booster: Parliament and State legislatures; Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Context:

- Recently, the Centre appointed six new governors, including retired Supreme Court judge Justice S Abdul Nazeer, who was part of the historic 2019 Ayodhya verdict .
- The Union government also appointed four BJP leaders to various Raj Bhavans and reshuffled governorships in seven states.

- In the latest gubernatorial reshuffle, the President also accepted the resignations of Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari and Ladakh Lieutenant Governor R.K. Mathur.

Recent Appointment of Governors

- Arunachal Pradesh:** Lieutenant General Kaiwalya Trivikram Parnaik.
- Sikkim:** Lakshman Prasad Acharya.
- Jharkhand:** C P Radhakrishnan.
- Himachal Pradesh:** Shiv Pratap Shukla.
- Assam:** Gulab Chand Kataria.
- Andhra Pradesh:** Justice S Abdul Nazeer.

Reshuffle of Governors

- Murmu has reshuffled seven governors, in addition to making new appointments.
- Andhra Pradesh Governor** Biswa Bhusan Harichandan has been appointed as Governor of Chhattisgarh;
- Chhattisgarh Governor** Sushri Anusuiya Uikye has been shifted as Governor of Manipur;
- Manipur Governor** La Ganesan has been appointed as Governor of Nagaland;
- Bihar Governor** Phagu Chauhan has been shifted as Governor of Meghalaya;
- Himachal Pradesh Governor** Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar has been appointed as the Governor of Bihar,
- Jharkhand Governor** Ramesh Bais has been appointed as the Governor of Maharashtra, and
- Arunachal Pradesh Governor** Brigadier B D Mishra (retired) has been appointed as the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh.



Appointment of Governors in India

- Governors in India are appointed by the President of India, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Governor is the constitutional head of the state government and represents the President in the state.
- Term:** Governors are appointed for a term of five years and can be re-appointed for a second term.
- Governors are appointed from among distinguished persons with a good reputation and a track record of public service or distinguished individuals who have held high office in the country.
- The Prime Minister recommends the name of the person to be appointed as Governor to the President. The President has the discretion to accept or reject the recommendation of the Prime Minister.
- The appointment of Governors is a political process and the ruling party at the Centre often appoints individuals who are considered loyal to the party or its ideology.

- Governors play a crucial role in maintaining the constitutional balance between the state and the Centre, and they act as a link between the two.
- Governors have significant powers, including the power to appoint the Chief Minister, dissolve the state legislative assembly, and recommend the imposition of President's rule in the state in exceptional circumstances.


Appointment of The Governor – Constitutional Provisions

- Article 153** mentions that each state has to have a Governor and can be appointed for two or more states.
- Article 154** mentions that the executive power of the state is vested in the Governor who shall exercise it directly or through his subordinates.
- Article 155** states that the President appoints the Governor under the warrant under his hand and seal.
- Article 156** gives information regarding the term of the governor where the Governor holds office at the pleasure of the President and can hold office for 5 years. He can resign by writing to the President.
- Article 157** mentions that the Governor candidate must be a citizen of India and at least 35 years of age.
- Article 158** talks regarding certain conditions for the office of the Governor such as he/she should not hold the office of profit etc.
- Article 159** provides for the oath to be subscribed in front of the Chief Justice of the High court exercising jurisdiction of the state.

What is the relationship between the Governor and State Government?

- The Governor is envisioned as an apolitical figure who must follow the advice of the state's Council of Ministers.
- The Governor has certain powers under the Constitution, such as giving or withholding assent to a Bill passed by the state legislature;
 - determining the time required for a party to prove its majority in the state Assembly; or,
 - in cases such as a hung verdict in an election, which party must be called first to prove its majority, which makes his position very significant.
- Governors have been accused by state governments, particularly those in opposition, of acting as "agents of the Centre" over the years, and have been seen as acting at the behest of the central government in power at the time.
- There are no provisions in the Constitution governing how the Governor and the state must engage in public debate when they disagree. This has traditionally been guided by respect for each other's boundaries.

The Significance Of The Findings In Keeladi

Priority: Medium 

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Sangam age

Prepp Mains Booster: Salient aspects of Art Forms, literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

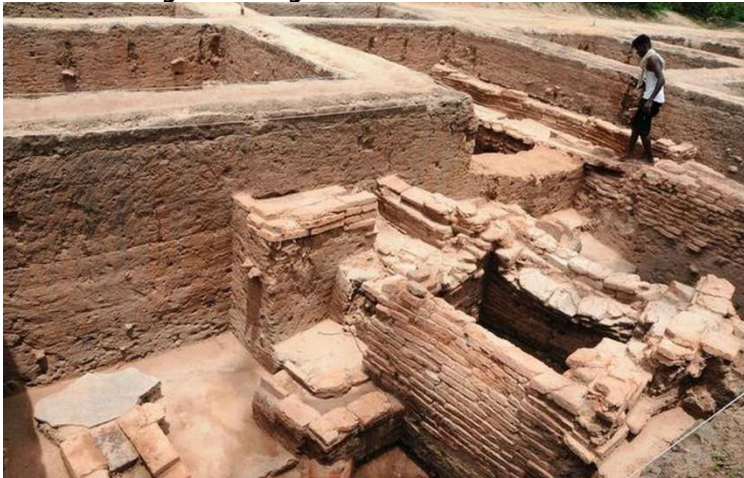
Why in the news?

- Recently, the discovery of ancient arte facts in the small village of Keeladi in Tamil Nadu, India, has caused a stir in the archaeological community. The findings, which date back over 2,500 years, have shed new light on the history of the region and its role in shaping Indian civilization.

- Keeladi is a tiny hamlet in the Sivaganga district in south Tamil Nadu. It is located along the Vaigai river.
- The excavations here from 2015 prove that an urban civilization existed in Tamil Nadu in the [Sangam age](#) on the banks of the Vaigai river.

How is Keeladi linked to Sangam age?

- The Sangam age is a period of history in ancient Tamil Nadu which was believed to be from the third century BCE to the third century CE (The name is derived from the renowned Sangam poets of Madurai from that time).
- The Excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department (TNSDA) have pushed the Sangam age further back to the sixth and first centuries BCE in 2019.
- One of the six samples, taken at a depth of 353 cm and were sent to the United States for carbon analysis. Those were dated back to 580 BCE.
- A recent ASI report by the Superintendent Archaeologist, K. Amarnath Ramakrishna, who discovered Keeladi in 2015, has pushed the Sangam age to **800 BCE based on these archaeological findings.**



Significance:

- It could also provide crucial evidence for understanding the missing links of the Iron Age (12th century BCE to sixth century BCE) to the Early Historic Period (sixth century BCE to fourth century BCE) and subsequent cultural developments.
- **Indus valley civilization:** The recent excavations at Keeladi have sparked new discussions and debates among archaeologists and historians, particularly regarding the possible **links between the Vaigai Valley Civilisation and the Indus Valley Civilisation.**
- While acknowledging the cultural gap of 1,000 years between the two places, the similarities found in the symbols and signs found at Keeladi and those found in the Indus Valley have raised questions about the **possibility of cultural exchange between these ancient civilizations.**
- The discovery of Keeladi has brought to light the significance of the Iron Age material in south India, which has served as residual links between the two civilisations.
- **Use of Bricks and Urban Settlement:** TNSDA affirms that Keeladi has **all the characteristics of an urban civilization, with brick structures, luxury items** and proof of internal and external trade.
- It comes across as an **industrious and advanced civilisation** and has given evidence of **urban life and settlements in Tamil Nadu** during the Early Historic Period.

- Keeladi has also added to the **credibility of Sangam Literature.**
- However, it is important to note that more research and excavation is required to establish the links between the two civilizations.
- Keeladi could also provide crucial evidence for understanding the missing links of the Iron Age (12th century BCE to sixth century BCE) to the Early Historic Period (sixth century BCE to fourth century BCE) and subsequent cultural developments.

Discoveries

- **Pottery:** The discovery of heaps of pottery suggests the existence of a pottery-making industry, mostly made of locally available raw materials.
- **Tamil Brahmi Script:** More than 120 potsherds containing Tamil Brahmi inscriptions have been found.
- The presence of over a thousand inscribed potsherds at Keeladi and other Tamil Nadu sites indicate the long survival of the Tamil Brahmi script.
- **Weaving Industry:** Spindle whorls, copper needles, terracotta seal, hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres, and earthen vessels to hold liquid suggest various stages of the weaving industry.
- There also existed a **dyeing industry** and a **glass bead industry.**
- **Ornaments:** Gold ornaments, copper articles, semi-precious stones, shell bangles, ivory bangles, and ivory combs reflect the artistic, culturally rich, and prosperous lifestyle of the Keeladi people.
- **Trade:** The presence of Agate and carnelian beads suggest import through commercial networks while terracotta and ivory dice, gamesmen, and evidence of hopscotch have been unearthed revealing their pastime hobbies.

Controversy

- There were reports of **delays in the start of the third round of excavations** by the ASI, and allegations that Superintending Archaeologist Amarnath Ramakrishna was transferred to Assam in an attempt to downplay the findings.
- The **lack of "significant findings"** in the third round also led to criticism that the excavation had been **deliberately restricted to a limited area.**
- Tamil Nadu politicians accused the BJP-led Union Government of attempting to suppress information about an ancient Tamil civilization that had flourished on the banks of the Vaigai river.
- However, on the intervention of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, the ASI permitted the TNSDA to take up further excavations on its own.

Dickinsonia Fossil Found In Bhimbetka Turns Out To Be Decayed Beehive

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Art and Culture

Prepp Mains Booster: Art and Culture

Context:

- **Fossils of an extinct animal that scientists reported in a sensational discovery in India's Bhimbetka Rock Shelters** in 2021 were discovered **to be a false alarm.**
- The discovery that was reported in February 2021 stated that they were planning to correct their paper after a closer look **revealed the apparent fossil to be wax smeared on a rock by a bee hive.**

About Dickinsonia

- Dickinsonia is an **extinct primitive animal that lived in seabeds** around what is now Australia, China, Russia, and Ukraine 600-500 million years ago **during the Ediacaran period**.
- It was classified as an animal after the discovery of cholesterol molecules in fossils. It is thought to be one of the first animals to have existed on Earth.
- This was also around the time that the paleo landmass known as Gondwanaland was thought to have formed.
- At the time, India, Australia, South America, Africa, and Antarctica had merged to form a single landmass. However, these Dickinsonia fossils have not been reported anywhere else in the world.
- All discovered fossils were only imprints in sandstone shaped like ribbed ovals, symmetric across a vertical axis. These fossils form when these animals are covered in sand, which solidifies before the animal decomposes.

Discovery

- **In September 2018**, an international team of researchers claimed to have discovered the world's oldest Dickinsonia fossil, which first appeared around 571 million to 541 million years ago.
- **In February 2021**, researchers discovered three fossils of the 550-million-year-old 'Dickinsonia' on the roof of the Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, about 40 kilometers from Bhopal.
- Fossils of an extinct animal that scientists reported in a sensational discovery in India's Bhimbetka Rock Shelters in 2021 were discovered to be a false alarm.

Beehive Mistaken for Dickinsonia Fossil

- **Flora and Fauna of the Ediacaran period:** The paleobiologists generally agree that the flora and fauna of the Ediacaran period, which lasted 635-530 million years ago, represented early animals and macroscopic eukaryotes living in a marine setting. The strata at Bhimbetka happen to be a coastal terrestrial deposit.
- When the team discovered the 'fossil' impression, which looked like Dickinsonia, the sedimentologic context fit the ideas about where Dickinsonia should be found.
- **Member of the Ediacaran period:** Dickinsonia is considered an iconic member of the Ediacaran period having lived between 555 and 545 million years ago.
- Reporting its discovery would have carried "the prestige of a 'first report' from India," as well as solving the puzzle of the Upper Vindhyan rocks' age.
- When the fossil was thought to be genuine, it suggested that the Vindhyan Basin's youngest Upper Vindhyan sediments were 540 million years old. This is where the rock shelters are located.
- **Timing:** The beehive had to have been degraded just enough to be mistaken for a fossil. Anything more or less, and the resemblance vanishes, as it has in the two years since the report. This ephemeral state may be one of the reasons why others hadn't noticed it elsewhere.

Bhimbetka Rock Shelter Caves

- **It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site** with evidence of human habitation dating back approximately 1,00,000 years. It includes the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Historic periods. It displays the earliest traces of human life in India as well as evidence of the Stone Age beginning at the site in Acheulian times.

- **Location:** It is located south of Bhopal in Vidhyan ranges of Madhya Pradesh with rock shelters having more than 500 rock paintings.
- The caves of Bhimbetka were discovered in 1957-58 by V. S. Wakankar.
- It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003.

Paintings of Bhimbetka

- Some of the Bhimbetka rock shelters have prehistoric cave paintings, the oldest of which are around 10,000 years old (c. 8,000 BCE), corresponding to the Indian Mesolithic.
- The majority of these are done in red and white on the cave walls.
- This type of rock art depicted scenes such as singing, dancing, hunting, and other common activities of the people who lived there.
- The oldest cave paintings in Bhimbetka are thought to be around 12,000 years old.



Mohiniyattam Artiste Kanak Rele No More

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Art and culture

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Dance Forms

Context:

- Recently, **Kanak Rele, a legendary classical dancer, died on February 22, 2023**.
- She was the **Mohiniyattam exponent** and was awarded the first Guru Gopinath National Puraskaram of the Government of Kerala.
- **Mohiniyattam is one of two classical dance forms that originated in Kerala, the other being Kathakali.**

About Mohiniyattam

- Mohiniyattam, or the Dance of an Enchantress ('Mohini' means beautiful woman and 'attam' means dance), is a solo dance performance by women that was further refined by Vadivelu in the 19th century and rose to prominence under the monarchs of Travancore in what is now Kerala.
- Swathi Thirunal, the Travancore ruler in the nineteenth century, was a renowned patron.
- After it had faded into obscurity, it was resurrected by the famed Malayali poet V. N. Menon and Kalyani Amma.
- At the 11th century Vishnu temple at Thrikodithanam, Kottayam, there are statues of female dancers in positions similar to those seen in Mohiniyattam.

- Mohiniyattam is mentioned in the Vyavahara Mala written by Mazha mangalam Narayanan Namboodi.

Features of Mohiniyattam

- Bharatnatyam's grace and elegance are combined with Kathakali's vigour in Mohiniyattam. There is a distinct lack of thumping footsteps, and the footwork is soft.
- In general, Mohiniyattam tells the story of Vishnu's feminine dance.
- Like other classical dances, it has its own **Nritta and Nritya aspects**.
- In a Mohiniyattam recital, the **Lasya (beauty, elegance)** part of the dance is paramount. As a result, it is predominantly performed by female dancers.

Costume and Expressions

- Mohiniyattam's costume is particularly important, with white and off-white being the predominant colors and gold brocade motifs.
- There is no extensive make-up on her face. On her ankles, the dancer wears a leather strap with bells (Ghungroo).
- Acting is emphasised in Mohiniyattam. The dancer identifies with the characters and emotions present in compositions such as the Padams and Pada Varnams, which allow for a wide range of facial expressions.
- The hand movements, which number 24 in total, are mostly taken from Hastha Lakshana Deepika, a Kathakali literature. A few are taken from Natya Shastra, Abhinaya Darpana, and Balarama Bharatham.
- The facial expressions and gestures are more natural (gramya) and realistic (lokadharmi) than theatrical or rigidly conventional (natyadharmi).



Style of Music and Instruments

- A Mohiniyattam performance is used to represent the element of air.
- The collection of forty basic dance movements is known as 'Atavakul or Atavus'.
- The Carnatic style of music is used to accompany this dancing form.
- Manipravalam (a macaronic language based on Sanskrit and Tamil/Malayalam) is used for the lyrics.

- Flute, veena, and percussion instruments such as Mridangam, Maddalam, Idakka, and Kuzhitalam are employed.
- The majority of the songs are in the Sopana style.

SC Income Tax Order On Sikkim, And The Protests It Has Triggered

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Sikkim

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Separation of powers between various organs disputes redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Context:

- Recently, Sikkim's Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang announced on Twitter that a **review petition** has been filed in the Supreme Court for rectification of the court's observation on **Sikkimese Nepalis**.
 - Review petition means a petition filed before a court of law requesting it to review an order or judgment that it has already issued.
- Recently, on January 13th the Supreme Court held that the benefit of **tax exemption provided in Section 10 (26AAA)** shall be extended to all Sikkimese people. Therefore, **there was no difference made out between the original inhabitants of Sikkim**, namely, the Bhutia-Lepchas, and the persons of foreign origin settled in Sikkim like the Nepalis or persons of Indian origin who had settled down in Sikkim generations back."
- Review petition means a petition filed before a court of law requesting it to review an order or judgement that it has already issued.

What is the issue?

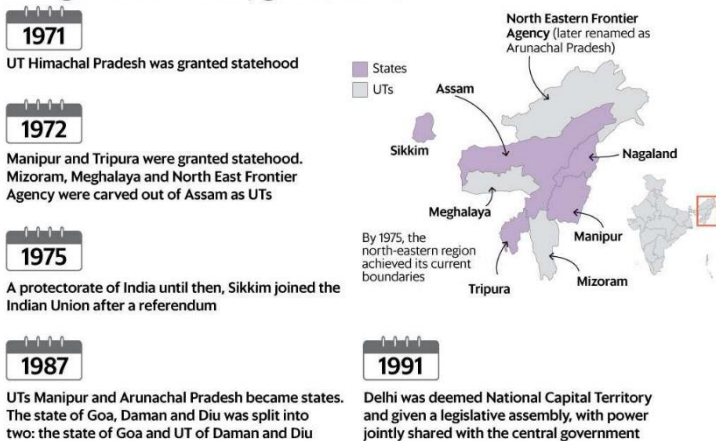
- Political parties in Sikkim, including the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), have been protesting against the court's observation.
- The Supreme court, while deciding on a petition relating to tax exemptions for residents of Sikkim, referred to **Sikkimese Nepalis as individuals who were of "foreign origin" who had "migrated to and settled in Sikkim"**.
- At the same time, it described ethnic Sikkimese communities **such as the Bhutias and the Lepchas as "original inhabitants of Sikkim"**.
- This has sparked off a deep-rooted **identity conflict** in Sikkim regarding the ethnicity of three of its main groups: Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis.

SC Judgement

- According to the **Sikkim Income Tax Manual, 1948**, "all persons engaged in business were subject to tax regardless of their origin," the supreme court stated in its ruling issued on January 13.
- As a result, there was **no distinction established between Sikkim's original inhabitants**, the Bhutia-Lepchas, and people of other nationalities who had moved there in the past, **such as Nepalis or people of Indian descent**.
- The judgment also recorded the petitioner's claim that migrants from other countries or former kingdoms like "Nepalese migrants", who "migrated to and settled in Sikkim at the same time or even after migrants/settlers of Indian origin", were benefiting from **Section 10(26AAA) of the IT Act, 1961**, "while arbitrarily excluding settlers of Indian origin such as the petitioners herein"

- The Supreme Court ruled that **all Sikkimese people should be eligible for the tax exemption benefit stipulated in Section 10 (26AAA). (Union of India v. Association of Old Settlers of Sikkim).**
- Before this ruling, even if their names were listed in the register kept in accordance with the Sikkim Subjects Regulations, 1961, read with the Sikkim Subject Rules, 1961 (also known as the "Register of Sikkim Subjects"), the tax exemption did not apply to "old Indian settlers" who had permanently emigrated to Sikkim before the state's merger with the Indian union on April 26, 1975.
- Justices M. R. Shah and B. V. Nagarathna's bench ordered the state to add a phrase extending the exemption from payment of income tax to all Indian citizens residing in Sikkim on or before April 26, 1975 to the Explanation to Section 10 (26AAA).
- The provision to Section 10 (26AAA), which barred **Sikkimese women who had married non-Sikkimese males after April 1, 2008, from the advantage of tax exemption, was overturned by the court because it violated Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution.**
- When the Explanation refers to an "individual," it includes both Sikkimese men and women, in fact, all genders; it cannot have a restrictive or myopic reference to only Sikkimese men and exclude those Sikkimese women covered by the proviso, Justice Nagarathna wrote in the judgment.
- A provision cannot be superseded by a proviso.

Chart 3

Fixing the North-East jigsaw (1971-1991)**Section 10 (26AAA)**

- Section 10 (26AAA) explains "exempted income," or income that is excluded from total income calculations for determining an individual's tax.
- This section describes the income that does not form a part of the total income while calculating the tax for an individual, also known as "**exempted income**".
- The petitioners challenged the proviso (applicable to married Sikkimese women) and Explanation to Section 10 (26AAA), which elaborated on the type of income falling under the category, along with a **definition of 'Sikkimese'**.
- Under the Explanation to Section 10 (26AAA), the definition of 'Sikkimese' is confined to:
 - Individuals "whose name is **recorded in the register maintained under the Sikkim Subjects Regulation, 1961** read with the Sikkim Subject Rules, 1961, immediately before the 26th day of April 1975;

- The 73,000-odd individuals whose names were included in the Register of Sikkim Subjects by virtue of Government of India Orders of August 1990 and April 1991; and
- "Any individual whose name does not appear in the Register of Sikkim Subjects, but it is established beyond doubt that the name of such individual's father or husband or paternal grandfather or brother from the same father has been recorded in that register".
- The Finance Act of 2008 added Section 10 (26AAA) to the IT Act of 1961 with retrospective effect beginning on April 1, 1990, the date the IT Act became applicable in Sikkim.
- The Sikkim Income Tax Manual (SITM), issued in 1948 by the Chogyi or Ruler of Sikkim, was in effect prior to 1990.
- This suggested that Sikkimese women who had previously benefited from the exemption were no longer eligible for it as of April 1, 2008, and that there had not been any prejudice between April 1, 1990, and April 1, 2008.
- The definition of "Sikkimese" in Section 10 (26AAA) was contested by the Association of the Old Settlers of Sikkim as being unconstitutional because it excluded Indians who had lived in Sikkim before April 26, 1975, the date on which Parliament authorised the merger of Sikkim with India.
- The SC ruling expanded the categories of Sikkimese described in the Explanation to Section 10 to receive the benefit of income tax exemption (26AAA).

Constitution Does Not Allow Aldermen Write To Vote

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster:

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court said that the Constitution does not allow nominated members of a municipality the **right to vote in meetings** while issuing notice to the **Lieutenant Governor** and the **pro tem presiding officer** of the **Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)** in a petition filed by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleging deliberate stalling of mayoral elections for the third time in a row.



Background

- The Aam Aadmi Party mayoral candidate, Shelly Oberoi, had moved the Supreme Court seeking swift and timely conduct of the mayoral polls after the House was stalled twice – January 6 and 24.
- She later withdrew the petition while seeking permission to move the court again in case the aldermen were allowed to vote.
- The petition argued that **Article 243U of the Constitution** mandates that elections to constitute a municipality should be completed well in time.
- The Aam Aadmi Party gained up to 134 seats out of a total of 250 in the Delhi municipal elections, which were held on December 4 and the results of which were made public on December 7.

What is the issue?

- The **Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) Act, 1957** stipulates that the mayor and deputy mayor must be chosen during the **very first House session** following the municipal elections. However, **two months have passed** since the municipal elections, and **Delhi still lacks a mayor**.
- In defense of Ms. Oberoi, senior advocate A.M. Singhvi argued that **Article 243U** of the Constitution mandates that elections to constitute a municipality should be **completed well in time**.
- Mr. Singhvi highlighted that succeeding elections for the positions of mayor, deputy mayor, and members of the standing committees have been **postponed three times**.
- He claimed that the **pro tem presiding officer** had directly violated Article **243R(2)(iv)** of the Constitution by allowing **nominated members to vote**.
- As per Article 243 R of the Constitution of India and as given in the Proviso to Section 3 (b)(i) of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957, the **nominated members (Alderman) are not entitled to vote in the above-mentioned elections**.
- Mr. Singhvi stated that Satya Sharma, the BJP's **pro tem presiding officer** is in fact "illegal" because she is not the senior-most member.
- He argued that her order regarding all three elections of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Members of the Standing Committees to be held simultaneously, is against the terms of **Section 76 of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act of 1957**.

- Section 76 of DMC Act states that the mayor and deputy mayor have to preside over all meetings. Thus, the simultaneous holding of elections for three posts (mayor, deputy mayor and Standing Committee members) is contrary to the DMC Act.

US-India Initiative On Critical And Emerging Technologies Icet

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: iCET

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Bilateral groupings and agreements involving India

Context:

- Recently, the **US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies iCET** was unveiled to catalyze and renew the **Indo-US relationship**.
- The author, Arun Prakash, a former Chief of the Indian Navy, discussed the partnership's prospects and implications in the article titled "**The Pact's Fine Print**" published in the Indian Express on 9 February 2023.

What is the iCET?

- The **iCET** or **US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies** was launched by the two countries in 2022 and has been managed by the **National Security Councils** of both countries.
- Under the initiative, 6 areas of cooperation have been identified:
 - Scientific research and development
 - Quantum Computing
 - Artificial intelligence
 - Defence innovation
 - Space
 - Advanced Telecom
- iCET is aimed at enabling enhanced knowledge and technology sharing between the two countries while developing closer ties between academia and industry.
- The project has further aimed at expanding production and development cooperation to the **QUAD, NATO, Europe** and the rest of the world.



What are the expected outcomes of the agreement?

- An alignment in the strategic, scientific and commercial aspects of technology between the two countries, as envisioned by iCET, will help bring greater global stability.
- The iCET has the potential to increase the transfer of knowledge and technology from the USA through the lifting of export

restrictions and encouraging **country-country cooperation** among the private sectors of both countries.

- The transfer of technology that has taken place till now between India and other countries through the Defence PSUs has only focussed on the 'know-how' of building and assembling equipment without transferring knowledge on the why and what.
- This has resulted in India becoming one of the largest importers of arms in the world.
- iCET has offered an opportunity to transform the defence manufacturing framework in India.

What are India's concerns?

- Although Ownership of defence technology in the US belonged to the private sector enterprises responsible for its development, the **US Arms Export Control Act** has imposed numerous requirements on the **Transfer of Technology (ToT)** such as clearances from the Department of State and Defence, as well as restraints on the importing countries.
- The iCET is part of India's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russia as the quality of Russian weapons has not matched that of the Western nations while the Ukraine crisis has reduced defence trade ties.
- The agreement can be considered a way for India to regain its **strategic autonomy** from **Russian influence**.
- The USA's focus has been on trade while India has focused on technology. This conflict of opinion will require India to leverage its healthy trade relations in nuclear, civil aviation, energy and other sectors to extract the desired ToT.
- Another concern expressed about the partnership has been the adverse impact on the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** policy by shifting to arms and technology procurement from the USA, instead of domestic development and manufacture.

Other Defence Agreements with the USA


- **Defence Framework Agreement (1995)**: The Framework which was first signed in 1995, and later renewed in 2005 and 2015 formed the basis of all defence cooperation between India and the USA.
- **Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (2004)**: The Partnership, signed in 2004, aimed at increasing cooperation in civil nuclear activities, civilian space programs, high technology trade, and missile defence. The Partnership was successfully concluded in 2022.
- **Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008)**: The Agreement granted India a waiver from the **Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG)** and restrained India from the transfer of enriching and reprocessing technologies to countries that lack them.
- **Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (2012)**: This strategy aimed to facilitate the development of defence technology through collaboration, sustained leadership, and reduction of bureaucratic regulations and legal requirements.
- **Major Defence Partner (2017)**: India was designated a Major Defence Partner of the USA in 2017, which put it on par with the USA's closest allies.
- **2+2 talks (2018)**: A discussion platform between the heads of the Defence and Foreign ministries of the two countries.
- The **four foundational agreements** between the USA and India are aimed at building groundwork and interoperability between the two militaries and the transfer of technology:
- **General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)**;

- **Logistic Support Agreement (LSA)**;
- **Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA)**
- **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA)**

NSC

- The **National Security Council of India** is a three-tiered institution that manages strategic political, economic, energy, and security concerns of the country.
- The **National Security Advisor (NSA)** is the head of the NSC and the Prime Minister's primary advisor.
- The National Security Council (NSC) is composed of the **Strategic Policy Group (SPG)**, the **National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)**, and the **National Security Council Secretariat**.
- It acts as a liaison between the executive and the intelligence services, offering leadership advice on intelligence and security-related matters.

Counting The Female Labour Force Participation Rate Accurately

Priority: Medium 

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Female Labour Participation

Prepp Mains Booster: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Human Resources, Employment

Context:

- The author, Bibek Debroy, **Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the PM** has discussed the methods and concerns related to the calculation of the **Female Labour Force Participation Rate** in the article titled "**Counting her work**" published in the Indian Express on 9th February 2023.

What is the Female Labour Force Participation Rate?

- According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey, Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)** is defined as the proportion (in percentage) of people in the labour force among the population.
- It refers to the percentage of the population that is either employed, seeking employment or available for work but is unemployed.
- Female Labour Force Participation is a subset of the labour force participation metric that refers to the level of employment of women among the population.
- Female LFPR in India has traditionally been low and is still lower than that of the developed states and the developing nations of South East Asia.
- In India, the **FLFPR** decreased from 31.2% in 2012 to 23.3% in 2017-18 and fell by more than 11% in rural areas.
- The female labour force participation rate increased from 18.6% in 2018-19 to 25.1% in 2020-21 while the **Rural FLFPR** has increased significantly, rising from 19.7% in 2018-19 to 27.7% in 2020-21.



Why is calculation of female LFPR difficult?

- India has a large proportion of its population employed in the **informal economy** where employer-employee relations are not fixed or assessable.
- Enterprise surveys are not sufficient either due to a large amount of **self-employment** (50%) and **informal contracts** despite government efforts to formalize the economy.
- This has resulted in the use of household surveys which has affected the calculation of the true LFPR.
- **Overly broad categorization**, limited nature of the **definition of work** and reliance on a single question to categorize labour force status have raised concerns about the accuracy of the collected data.
- The overly broad categories have clubbed productive work with domestic work which as a result leaves out a large section of women who are actually part of the labour force.
- Domestic duties and free collection of goods such as vegetables, roots, firewood, cattle feed, etc and activities like sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. for household use have been classified as unemployment by the **NSSO in Activity Code 93**.
- The lack of recovery questions, which are used to check the veracity of survey results has also affected the calculation of the LFPR.

What are the reasons for the low female LFPR?

- **Lack of Opportunities:** As income-generating opportunities have vanished, women in rural areas have been most negatively impacted. With the decline in the availability of farm work and non-farm employment, and increasing mechanization rural women have faced a severe lack of adequate career opportunities.
- **Education:** According to NSO data, there is a U-shaped relationship between education and employment. Primary and Secondary educated women lack real opportunities while the employment options for college-educated women in India have been limited by excessively long hours, and poor work security.
- **Unpaid labour:** One of the key factors of the LFPR is the amount of time spent by women on unpaid economic tasks at the family and community levels, such as care and chores, which has limited women's participation-n.
- **Gender Bias:** Casteist and patriarchal ideas of purity and contamination have prevented women from obtaining professions, particularly in the food processing, sericulture, and clothing industries, coupled with other barriers including household income, social background, and location.

- **Changing nature of Families:** The burden of unpaid labour has been disproportionately borne by women as a result of declining family sizes and the out-migration of rural males, which has hindered women's capacity to develop employable skills creating a vicious cycle where women are excluded from labour.
- **Other Reasons:** A lack of sanitation, sexual harassment, unsafe transport, and absence of childcare facilities and care homes for the elderly are some of the reasons for the low female presence in the labour force.

NO COUNTRY FOR WOMEN

	1990	2019
Nepal	81.38	81.52
Vietnam	72.89	72.73
Ghana	72.08	63.86
China	73.24	60.57
United Kingdom	52.02	58.09
United States	56.20	56.76
Germany	45.21	55.64
Indonesia	49.90	53.81
Japan	50.11	53.56
United Arab Emirates	28.11	52.05
Malaysia	45.54	51.33
South Africa	41.43	49.59
Bangladesh	24.65	36.37
Turkey	34.04	34.27
Sri Lanka	45.51	33.55
Saudi Arabia	14.57	22.09
Afghanistan	15.32	21.76
Pakistan	13.95	21.67
INDIA	30.27	20.79
Egypt	21.28	18.46
Iran	9.83	17.61

Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)
Source: World Bank indicators

Economic Survey Recommendations

- According to the survey, there is a need to **expand the scope of measuring work**, which includes **all forms of productive activity** outside of employment.
- The **ILO** claims that confining productive work to labour force participation is limited and only assesses work as a market product, leaving out the value of women's unpaid domestic work, which substantially raises the standard of living of the household.
- It also suggested that in order to fully quantify "work," it may be necessary to reform survey questionnaires and work to eliminate **gender-based biases** that prevent women from freely choosing to enter the workforce.
- **Ecosystem services**, such as reasonably priced daycare facilities, career guidance and support, lodging and transportation, etc., can further aid in leveraging the gender dividend for inclusive and broad-based prosperity.

Way Forward

- Recomputation of the definition of female LFPR by adding the proportion of women engaged in activities under Activity Code 93 to the official LFPR would result in an augmented LFPR of 46.2% of women above the age of 15 for FY21.
- This was much higher than the 35.2% female LFPR that was estimated by the Survey through the conventional approach.
- Political empowerment, reservation of jobs and upskilling are some of the options available to the governments to drive up female labour participation and gender equality which according to the McKinsey Global Institute could add \$700 Billion to the Indian GDP in 2025 and raise GDP growth by 1.4%
- A research paper published by the **International Labour Organization** in 2014 has estimated a female LFPR of 56.4% for India in 2012 as compared to the official statistic of 31.2%.
- The large difference between the data provided by the two models has underlined the need for reform in the Indian statistics sector through the **Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MOSPI)**.

Large Bench Must Examine Subversion Of 10th Schedule



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: 10th Schedule

Prepp Mains Booster: Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Context:

- Recently, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray argued in the Supreme Court that the "artful" dodges used by legislators to circumvent the **Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law)** in order to overthrow governments in crucial States and the "sweeping discretion" granted to Speakers in cases involving the disqualification of legislators require a relook by a larger Bench of seven judges.
- The **Constitution Bench** was hearing a series of petitions related to the **political crisis that occurred in Maharashtra in 2022** when the current Chief Minister and his supporters rebelled against Mr. Thackeray and brought down the Maha Vikas Aghadi government.

What is the issue?

- Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing Mr. Thackeray, has stated that legislators are **using the anti-defection law to serve their own political interests**, which goes against the principles of **political morality**.
- The petitioner said that legislators facing disqualification under the **Tenth Schedule** are now issuing notices of removal against the Speaker/Deputy Speaker.
- When such a notice is issued to the Speaker or Deputy Speaker for his removal, he cannot act as a Tribunal under the Tenth Schedule. This is currently a tactic used by legislators who are facing disqualification to delay being removed from office.
- In the meantime, politics takes over and the government falls.
- A new Chief Minister is appointed with the support of the rebel legislators.
- A new Speaker is installed and the disqualification proceedings are in limbo.

- He said legislators were taking shelter under the 2016 judgment by a **five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in the Nabam Rebia case**.
- The Nabam Rebia judgment held that a Speaker or a Deputy Speaker facing a notice of removal cannot decide disqualification proceedings against legislators.

Suggestions

- He stated that when the House was in session, the notice of removal against a Speaker or Deputy Speaker should be moved and **presented to a vote within seven days**. This would end the malpractice.
- Second, he contended that, contrary to what a majority of the Supreme Court's five judges decided in the 1992 Kihoto Hollohan case, Speakers cannot be relied upon to operate as an **"impartial body"** under the **Tenth Schedule**.
- The senior lawyer stated that he more strongly agreed with the **Kihoto Hollohan** judgment's minority opinion that the position of Speaker did not meet the standard of an "independent adjudicatory authority" since it was dependent on the continued support of the majority of the house for his tenure.
- In the **Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillu** and others Case of 1992, the Supreme Court held that **judicial review** cannot be available at a stage prior to the making of a decision by the Speaker/Chairman.
- Nor would interference be permissible at an interlocutory stage of the proceedings carried by the Speaker/Chairman.
- However, before this case the decision of the Speaker/Chairman was considered final and was not subject to judicial review. This provision was rendered unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

What is anti-defection law?

- Anti-defection law was created to guarantee that a **party member does not violate the party's objective**, and if he does, he will lose his House membership.
- The anti-defection statute was enacted in 1985 as part of the **52nd Amendment Act**. It was included in the **Tenth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution and is commonly referred to as the Anti-Defection law.
- It basically lays forth the circumstances for a Member Legislative Assembly or Member Parliament to lose his powers as an Elected Representative of a party and so be excluded from the party.
- However, if **two-thirds or more of a political party's legislators** depart, the anti-defection law is **not applicable**.

Power To Disqualify

- The decision on disqualification questions on the ground of defection is referred to the **Speaker or the Chairman of the House**, whose decision is final.
- If a complaint is received regarding the defection of the Chairman or the Speaker, a member of the House who must be elected within the House, shall take the decision.
- All proceedings in relation to disqualification under this Schedule are considered to be proceedings in Parliament or the Legislature of a state as is the case.

The Missing Deputy Speaker: The Post, And What The Constitution Says

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Deputy Speaker

Prepp Mains Booster: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court issued notices to the Centre and five states — Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand — over the failure to elect a [Deputy Speaker](#).
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud sought responses on a PIL that contends that not electing a Deputy Speaker to the 17th (present) Lok Sabha, which was constituted on June 19, 2019, is **“against the letter and spirit of the Constitution”**.

Constitution on the Deputy Speaker

- Article 93 of the Constitution** of India deals with the election of the **Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha**, while **Article 178** deals with the Speaker and **Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of a state**.
- As per Article 93, "The House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members from among its members to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof." The article further states that the House shall choose another member to fill the vacancy if the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker becomes vacant.
- Similarly, Article 178 states that "The Legislative Assembly of the State shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the Assembly to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof."
- Constitutional experts point out that the use of the **word "shall"** in both **Articles 93 and 178** indicates that the election of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker is **mandatory under the Constitution**.
- Therefore, it is essential to have a Deputy Speaker in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly of a state, and the absence of a Deputy Speaker could be a violation of the constitutional provisions.

Election of Deputy Speaker

- Articles 93 and 178** mention **“As soon as may be”**, however, they do not lay down a specific time frame.
- Generally, both the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies elect the Speaker on the third day of the first (typically brief) session of the new House, following the oath-taking and affirmations on the first two days.
- In the absence of actual and unavoidable impediments, the election of the Deputy Speaker often occurs in the second session and is typically not further postponed.
- The election of the Deputy Speaker** "must be held on such a day as the **Speaker may fix**," according to Rule 8 of The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha.
- The Deputy Speaker is elected once a motion proposing his name is carried in the House.

Removal

- The Deputy Speaker once elected continues in office for the entire duration of the House.
- Under Article 94 (Article 179 for state legislatures), the Speaker or Deputy Speaker "shall vacate his office if he ceases to be a member of the House...".
- They may also resign to each other, or "may be removed from...office by a resolution of the House of the People passed by a majority of all the then members of the House".
- The House is informed of the resignation of the Speaker by the Deputy Speaker and if the office of the Deputy Speaker is vacant,

by the Secretary-General who receives the letter of resignation in that House.

- The resignation is notified in the Gazette and the Bulletin," say the Rules for Presiding Officers of Lok Sabha.

Power

- According to **Article 95(1)**, the Deputy Speaker shall carry out the responsibilities of the Speaker's office while it is vacant.
- In general, the Deputy Speaker has the **same powers as the Speaker** when presiding over a sitting of the House.
- All references to the Speaker in the Rules are deemed to be references to the Deputy Speaker when he presides.
- It has been repeatedly held that no appeal lies to the Speaker against a ruling given by the Deputy Speaker or any person presiding over the House in the absence of the Speaker.

Can the courts intervene in cases of a delay in electing the Deputy Speaker?

- The courts generally avoid interfering in the internal affairs of the legislative bodies and are hesitant to question the procedural decisions of Parliament as **Article 122(1) of the Constitution** provides that the validity of any proceedings in Parliament shall not be called into question on the ground of any alleged **irregularity of procedure**.
- However, this does not mean that the courts are completely barred from examining any issue related to the functioning of Parliament.
- Experts note that since the Constitution does provide for an election to take place "as soon as may be," the courts do have the authority to at least look into why there hasn't been one for the position of Deputy Speaker.

South Africa Begins Drills With China, Russia; West Alarmed

Priority: **Medium**



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: MOSI-II

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora

Context:

- Recently, **South Africa** announced a routine **naval exercise MOSI-II** with **China** and **Russia** that was due to launch on 17th February 2023 as part of its routine maritime exercises.
- This has deepened global tensions as African nations have tried to remain **neutral** in global crises such as the **Ukraine crisis** and **Chinese aggression** in South East Asia.

What is the MOSI-II exercise?

- Russia and China have joined South Africa in a multinational maritime exercise, **Mosi-II**, that they have described as a routine security exercise.
- Russia has announced that its frigate, the **Admiral Gorshkov**, armed with a new generation of **hypersonic missiles** named **Zircon** will participate in the exercise to be held off of South Africa's Indian Ocean Coast.
- The 10-day maritime exercises will be staged from the ports of Durban and Richards Bay, in the **KwaZulu-Natal province**.

- According to the South African military, other vessels participating in the exercise will include a Russian oil tanker, a South African frigate and three Chinese vessels.
- The **MOSI-I exercise** was held off the coast of Capetown in 2019.
- The USA, EU and their allies have criticized the Exercise which would take place around the same time as the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

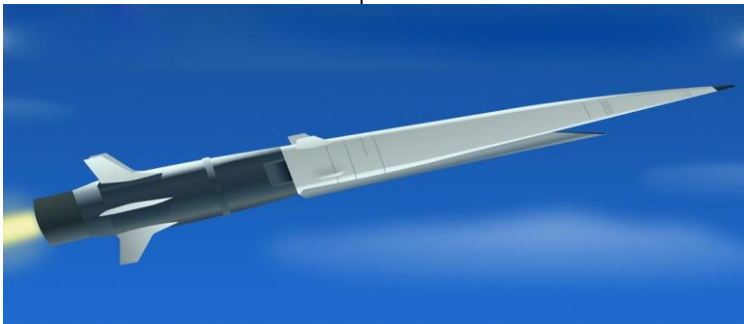


African countries' reaction to global conflicts

- African countries have largely stayed neutral while seeking to gain benefits from both sides.
- South Africa has maintained a neutral stance on Ukraine and had also abstained from voting on the topic at the UN.
- However, there have been protests in the country against complicity with Russia. South Africa-based diplomats from some EU or NATO countries have criticized South Africa's participation alongside some of the political stakeholders of the country.

Zircon Missiles

- The **Zircon missile system** was Russia's latest missile technology capable of **hypersonic speeds**.
- Russia has said that the weapon could penetrate any missile defense systems and strike targets on land and water.
- The weapon capable of moving at 5 times the speed of sound has been described by President Putin as unstoppable.
- According to a Russian news outlet, the Zircon missile would be test fired for the first time as part of the MOSI II exercise.



South Africa's Global Presence

- The USA and Russia have both courted South Africa's support indicating the country's diplomatic profile among the other countries of the Continent.
- The African National Congress that rules South Africa has long-standing ties to Russia from its struggle against **apartheid** when many Western states supported the colonial government.

- Russia's and China's position as anti-colonial allies and cooperation in building new international coalitions has provided Africa with an alternative to American and European **hegemony**.
- South Africa has been an active member of the **BRICS** bloc alongside Russia, China, India and Brazil, and has expressed support for Beijing's plans to expand the group's membership and increase the organization's clout.
- Concerns have been expressed about South Africa's foreign policy aims undermining its economic interests with corporates being hesitant to invest.
- Africa's top bilateral trading partner was China but the EU is its largest market for exports.
- India and South Africa share good historical ties and strong economic relations.
- In 1997, the Red Fort declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa was signed to help achieve the strategic objectives of both states.
- Bilateral trade with the EU amounted to around \$53 billion in 2022 compared to around \$750 million with Russia.

BRICS

- **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)** is an alliance of the world's five largest emerging economies. accounts for over 16% of global trade, 24% of the global GDP, and 41% of the world's population, according to the World Bank.
- In a study on the prospects for the economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, economist Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs first coined the abbreviation BRICS.
- The **Fortaleza Agreement** established the **New Development Bank** to raise funds for infrastructure and sustainable development initiatives in poor nations, BRICS economies, and other emerging markets.
- The foundational principles of the grouping are respect for **sovereign equality** and **pluralism in global governance**.

Discussions are held between the countries on anti-terrorism, trade, health, traditional medicine, environment, science, technology, and innovation, agriculture, and technical and vocational education and training at the Summits.

Munich Security Conference

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Munich Security Conference

Prepp Mains Booster: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate

Context:

- The 59th Munich Security Conference (MSC) is taking place from February 17 to 19, 2023, at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich.
- Munich Security Conference (MSC) is an **annual conference on global security** issues, was founded by a German official and publisher Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist at the peak of the Cold War.

What is Munich Security Conference?

- It is an annual conference on global security issues and was founded by a German official and publisher Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist at the peak of the Cold War (1947-1991)
- It is one of the most important forums for **political, military and security leaders** to discuss current and future challenges to global security.

- The conference typically attracts a wide range of participants, including heads of state and government, ministers, military officials, diplomats, experts, and representatives from international organizations and the private sector.
- Over the years, the conference has served as a platform for discussing a wide range of global security issues, including arms control, terrorism, cybersecurity, regional conflicts, and nuclear proliferation, among others.



Significance

- **President Putin's 2007** speech was indeed a landmark moment, where he expressed Russia's concerns about the expansion of **NATO and the deployment of missile defense systems in Eastern Europe**.
- The speech also highlighted the growing tensions between Russia and the West at that time.
- Similarly, the Munich Security Conference in 2022 was notable for its timing, as it came just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- The **conference provided a platform for world leaders to discuss** the growing tensions between Russia and Ukraine, and to call for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.
- Unfortunately, these calls went unheeded, and the situation in Ukraine escalated into a full-scale conflict.
- The summit may also provide a forum for reducing tensions between the United States and China, particularly in light of the former's earlier this month shooting down of a suspected Chinese spy balloon in international airspace.
- The Financial Times reports that organizers anticipate that conversations between US counterpart Antony Blinken and Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi will strengthen relations between the two countries.
- Focusing on various viewpoints from the Global South, which includes some of the world's poorest and least industrialized nations, is another issue on the agenda.
- Notably, for the first time in 20 years, Russia hasn't been invited to the event, a response to its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, which started in February last year.
- Iranian leaders have also been disinvited due to the brutal suppression of protests by women in Iranian cities.

Conclusion

- The Munich Security Conference remains an important forum for global leaders to discuss pressing security issues and explore ways to prevent conflicts and promote cooperation.
- The conference's focus on multilateralism and dialogue is more important than ever in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

India-Japan Army Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' Gets Under Way

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Ex Dharma Guardian

Prepp Mains Booster: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Context:

- Recently, **the fourth edition of the India-Japan bilateral Army exercise 'Dharma Guardian' began** at Camp Imazu in Shiga province, Japan, and will last until March 2.
- The **two Air Forces held the maiden exercise, 'Veer Guardian,' last month**.
- Military-to-military cooperation and integration between the two has increased significantly in recent years.

What is Dharma Guardian?

- It is the fourth joint military exercise between India and Japan since 2018.
- The scope of this exercise includes platoon-level joint training on operations in jungle, semi-urban, or urban terrain.
- The exercise includes troops from the Indian Army's Garhwal Rifles Regiment and an Infantry Regiment from Japan's Ground Self Defense Force's Middle Army.
- This joint exercise will allow the two armies to share best practices in tactics, techniques, and procedures for conducting tactical operations under a UN mandate.

Significance of the exercise

- The scope of this exercise includes platoon-level joint training in jungle and semi-urban/urban terrain operations.
- The joint exercise will allow the two armies to share best practices in tactics, techniques, and procedures for conducting tactical operations under a UN mandate, as well as develop interoperability, bonhomie, camaraderie, and friendship between the two armies.
- The training will primarily emphasize physical fitness and the sharing of tactical drills.
- During the exercise, participants will take part in a variety of missions involving joint planning, joint tactical drills, and the fundamentals of establishing integrated surveillance grids, including the use of aerial assets.



Other Military Exercises Between India and Japan

- **Malabar:** India, Japan, the United States, and Australia take part in the Malabar naval wargame.

- **JIMEX:** Bilateral naval exercise
- **SHINYU Maitri:** Air Force exercise

Relation between India and Japan

- **Defense:** The India-Japan defense and security partnership has evolved over the years through bilateral and multilateral exercises such as Dharma Guardian and Malabar. And welcoming Japan's participation in Exercise MILAN for the first time.
- Tri-Service Exchanges between Japan and India have been formalized, completing the triad. Since 2006, Coast Guards have had annual exchanges. Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership - working together for Indo-Pacific and global peace and prosperity.
- **Economic Ties:** In 1991, Japan was one of the few countries that bailed India out of a balance-of-payments crisis. Japan and India's economic relationship has steadily grown and deepened in recent years. The volume of trade between the two countries has increased. Japan was India's 12th largest trading partner in 2020.
- In addition, direct investment from Japan into India has increased, and Japan was the fourth largest investor in India in FY2020.
- **Diplomatic:** Several high-level exchanges occurred in the first decade after diplomatic ties were established, including the Japanese Prime Minister's visit to India in 1957. Japan was one of the few countries that bailed India out of a balance-of-payments crisis in 1991.
- The Act East Forum, established in 2017, aims to provide a platform for India-Japan collaboration under the rubric of India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision".
- **Healthcare:** Both India's AYUSHMAN Bharat Programme and Japan's ASHWIN had been consulting with each other to identify projects to build the AHWIN narrative for AYUSHMAN Bharat.

GARHWAL Rifle Regiment

- It was established in 1887. During British rule, it was known as the Royal Garhwal Rifle Regiment. The regiment has over 25,000 soldiers.

Conclusion

In the series of military training exercises conducted by India with various countries, 'Exercise Dharma Guardian,' an annual training event with Japan, is critical and significant in terms of the security challenges confronting both nations in the context of the current global situation. It will strengthen defense cooperation between the Indian Army and the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Forces, thereby strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries.

Discovery Of Lithium Deposits In J&K To Cut Dependence On Imports

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Lithium Deposits

Prepp Mains Booster: Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent)

Context:

- Recently, the **Geological Survey of India (GSI)** has established "inferred" **lithium** resources of 5.9 million tonnes in **Salal-Haimana area of Reasi District of Jammu and Kashmir**.
- Lithium is a **non-ferrous metal** and is one of the key components in EV batteries



Discovery of lithium deposits

- The finds in this case are learnt to include bauxite (the ore for aluminium) and rare earth elements, alongside lithium.
- These resources have been established as part of the "Reasi Sersandu-Kherikot-Rahotkot-Darabi" mineral block, where **prospecting** has been ongoing since 2021-22.
- It is categorized under the **United Nations Framework for Classification for Reserves and Resources of Solid Fuels and Mineral Commodities** (UNFC 1997).
- The United Nations International Framework Classification for Reserves/Resources – Solid Fuels and Mineral Commodities of 1997 (UNFC) is a system used to categorize and report the reserves and resources of solid fuels and mineral commodities.
- It was developed by the **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)** in collaboration with other international organizations to provide a uniform, internationally accepted system for reporting mineral resources and reserves.

Significance

- It would **reduce the need for imports** and improve **employment** opportunities
- The finding was a major **boost to the manufacture** of rechargeable batteries for smartphones, laptops and electric cars.
- The push for domestic exploration of lithium in India is a strategic move to reduce the **country's dependence on imports**, particularly from China.
- With the rise of electric vehicles (EVs) and the prediction that 2023 will be an inflection point for battery technology, India aims to **secure its position** in the **lithium value chain** and benefit from the potential improvements in Li-ion technology.
- The government is exploring multiple sources for lithium, including **brine pools** in **Rajasthan and Gujarat**, and mica belts in Odisha and Chhattisgarh.
- By sourcing lithium domestically, India aims to **not only reduce its dependence** on imports but also support the **growth of its domestic EV industry**.
- This move can be seen as part of India's larger **economic offensive against China** and a step towards reducing its trade deficit with the country.

Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)

- The US and 10 partners — Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the European Commission — have come together to form the MSP.

- The new grouping is aimed at catalyzing investment from governments and the private sector to **develop strategic opportunities**.
- India is not part of the grouping.

Lithium Extraction in India

- Lithium extraction methods depend on the type of deposit, and India has potential to recover lithium from **both brine and hard-rock sources**.
- Brine extraction involves **solar evaporation of large brine pools**, such as the ones found in Sambhar and **Pachpadra in Rajasthan and the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat**.
- Hard-rock extraction involves mining the ore from mineral deposits, such as the **major mica belts located** in Rajasthan, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh, and the **pegmatite belts in** Odisha and Chhattisgarh, as well as the **rock mining** being undertaken at Mandya in Karnataka.
- The Department of Atomic Energy's **Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD)** had previously conducted preliminary surveys that had indicated the presence of lithium resources totaling 1,600 tonnes in the igneous rocks of the Marlagalla-Allapatna region of Karnataka's Mandya district.
- The AMD has been conducting exploration to increase the lithium resources in the possible geological areas of the nation. This exploration has included some subsurface and surface exploration.
- The government has been taking several measures to secure minerals, including lithium, from Australia and Argentina to strengthen the [critical mineral supply chain](#) for emerging technologies.

Nisar (Nasa-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar): India-U.S. Space Cooperation

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: NISAR

Prepp Mains Booster: Awareness in the field of Space; Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context:

- Recently, **NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar)**, got a send-off ceremony at the American space agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Southern California.
- **NISAR**, an **Earth-observation satellite**, is being jointly developed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**).
- The SUV-size satellite will be shipped to India in a special cargo container flight later this month.



India- US Space Cooperation

- Under the '**initiative on critical and emerging technology (iCET)** umbrella, India and the United States agreed to advance space collaboration in several areas including human **space exploration and commercial space partnership**.
- President Biden and Prime Minister Modi announced the **U.S.- India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)** in **May 2022** to elevate and expand strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between the governments, businesses, and academic institutions of the two countries.
- The two countries can cooperate on areas that complement each other's strengths, such as India's expertise in **low-cost space missions** and the **U.S.'s advanced space technologies**.
- **Collaboration** in areas such as satellite launches, **lunar exploration, and scientific missions** would be mutually beneficial and help advance the two countries' space capabilities.

Challenges

- **Different areas of focus:** While the U.S. has committed to returning to the **moon** — and establishing long-term capabilities. (In this regard, the Artemis Program, the Artemis Accords, and the Biden administration's National Cislunar Science & Technology Strategy constitute the foundation for American ambitions **beyond earth orbits**) whereas, India's scientific community focuses on **building the nation's capability** in and **under the earth orbits**.
- India's **top priority** is to **substantially increase its satellite** and launch capabilities in earth orbits and catch up with other spacefaring nations such as China.
- **Capabilities:** The asymmetry in capabilities is the second structural factor limiting India-U.S. space cooperation.
- The U.S. has the highest number of registered satellites in space and has a range of launch vehicles serving both commercial and national security needs.
- The greatest challenge for India here is the **lack of capacity**. The country has just **over 60 satellites in orbit and cannot undertake double-digit launches annually**.
- **Private sector:** For instance, the private company SpaceX accomplished a record 61 launches in 2022, significantly more than any other commercial organization or nation did. The problem of replacing the International Space Station by 2030 with numerous smaller stations has also been taken up by the American private sector.
- Only in 2020 did the Indian government allow the private sector access to the space business. The United States has few technological incentives to collaborate with India because it already has a large network of allies for space cooperation.
- **Disagreements** on how best to **govern space activities on the moon** and other celestial bodies are compounding these problems

NISAR

- NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar, NISAR has been built by space agencies of the US and India under a **partnership agreement signed in 2014**.
- The 2,800 kilograms satellite consists of both **L-band and S-band** synthetic aperture radar (SAR) instruments.
- While ISRO provided the S-band radar, the GSLV launch vehicle, and the spacecraft, NASA provided the L-band radar, GPS, a high-capacity solid-state recorder to retain data, and a payload data subsystem.

- It will be launched in 2024 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh. The satellite will operate for a minimum of three years.

Significance

- It has the ability to capture high-resolution images of the Earth's surface using synthetic aperture radar (SAR) technology, which can penetrate clouds and collect data in all weather conditions, **both day and night**.
- NISAR will be used for a wide range of applications, including monitoring **natural disasters** such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and landslides, measuring groundwater levels, tracking the flow rates of glaciers and ice sheets, and monitoring the planet's forest and agricultural regions.
- This information will be extremely useful for researchers in better understanding the causes and consequences of various **Earth phenomena** and in improving our **understanding of carbon exchange**.
- Additionally, NISAR will be used for **agricultural mapping and monitoring changes in the coastline**, which will be of great importance for countries like India, where agriculture is a major contributor to the economy.
- The satellite's **high-resolution imaging capabilities** will be particularly useful in monitoring the Himalayan glaciers, which are rapidly melting due to climate change and pose a threat to millions of people living in the region.

- The first vertical, **eSanjeevaniAB-HWC**, focuses on bridging the **rural-urban digital health divide** by providing teleconsultations and ensuring that **Ayushman Bharat Scheme e-beneficiaries** can access the benefits they require.
 - Ayushman Bharat, a flagship scheme of Government of India, was launched as recommended by the National Health Policy 2017, to achieve the vision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
 - This initiative has been designed to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its underlining commitment, which is to "leave no one behind."
- eSanjeevani was **developed indigenously** by the **Health Informatics Group, Centre for Development and Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Mohali**. It is an example of the 'Make in India' initiative.
- The **eSanjeevaniAB-HWC** vertical operates on a **Hub-and-Spoke model** wherein the '**Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centers**' (HWCs) are set up at the state level which is connected with the hub (comprising MBBS/ Specialty/Super-Specialty doctors) at the zonal level.
- Providing **quality health services** to a patient residing in rural areas is the **objective of this model**.
- 'eSanjeevaniAB-HWC' was implemented with a vision to provide quality health services to maximum number of citizens by **leveraging potential of Information Technology** bypassing hindrances of geography, accessibility, cost and distance.
- The model helps in reducing the burden on existing healthcare facilities by providing remote consultations and medical advice to patients.
- Overall, eSanjeevaniAB-HWC has proven to be an effective solution to improve access to healthcare services in remote and rural areas of India.
- eSanjeevaniOPD**: It is a patient-to-doctor telemedicine service to enable people to get **outpatient services in the confines of their homes**.
- 'eSanjeevaniOPD' has also been speedily and widely adopted by citizens in all parts of the country.
- It is available as a mobile app for both Android and iOS based smart phones.
- eSanjeevani is accessible to both urban and rural population.

eSANJEEVANI APP A Great Boon For People, Says Modi



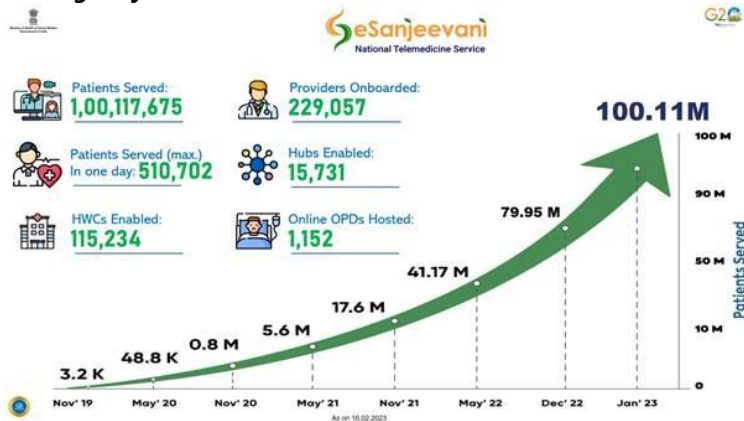
Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: eSanjeevani

Context:

- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in the 98th episode of his customary radio address Mann Ki Baat, said experiments such as eSanjeevani application had ensured medical services to people living in **far-flung areas of the country**.
- eSanjeevani, an e-health initiative started by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, **aims to serve health care services digitally**.



What is eSanjeevani?

- eSanjeevani is a national telemedicine service that provides an alternative to conventional physical consultations via a **digital platform**.

Way forward

- eSanjeevani has been able to increase the accessibility of healthcare facilities to people located in far-flung areas.
- The platform has played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing remote consultation services to patients and reducing the burden on healthcare facilities.
- It has been a game-changer in the Indian healthcare system and has demonstrated the potential of telemedicine in transforming healthcare delivery

MIIRA, India's Proposed Global Initiative To Promote Millets



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: MIIRA

Prepp Mains Booster: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, - different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; Government policies and interventions for

development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation;

Context:

- Recently, India has introduced a draft to launch a global initiative to encourage the consumption and production of millet.
- The draft of the proposed initiative, "MIIRA" or Millet International Initiative for Research and Awareness was placed during the first Agriculture Deputies Meeting under the Agriculture Working Group (AWG), G20 at Indore, Madhya Pradesh.
- It will be aimed at **coordinating millet research programs** at the international level. It is in line with the UN declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets and the Centre's plan to make India a global hub for millets.

Objective

- MIIRA (Millet Research Alliance) aims to connect millet research organizations globally, support research on these crops, and promote their consumption to address issues of **food security and nutrition during India's G20 Presidency**.
- The plan includes setting up a web platform, hosting international research conferences, and raising awareness.
- **Funding:** India will contribute seed money, and each G20 member will later have to **contribute to its budget through a membership fee**.
- The MIIRA secretariat will be located in Delhi, and India's investment in the millet industry and research bodies will help fund MIIRA's activities.

What are millets?

- Millets are small-grained cereals that require much less water than rice and wheat, and are mainly grown in rainfed areas.
- **Examples:** sorghum (jowar), pearl millet (bajra), foxtail millet (kangni/ Italian millet), little millet (kutki), kodo millet, finger millet (ragi/ mandua), proso millet (cheena/ common millet), barnyard millet (sawa/ sanwa/ jhangora), and brown top millet (korale).
- Millets are the traditional food for more than half a billion people in Asia and Africa, and are now grown in over 130 countries.
- Globally, Jowar is the most widely grown millet crop; its major producers are the US, China, Australia, India, Argentina, Nigeria, and Sudan, while Bajra is mainly grown in some African countries and India, where millets are mainly a Kharif crop.
- According to the Ministry of Agriculture, in 2018-19, bajra (3.67%), jowar (2.13%), and ragi (0.48%) accounted for about seven percent of the gross cropped area in India.

Significance of millets

- **Health:** Millets have high nutritional value and are rich in fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals. They are also gluten-free and have a low glycemic index, which makes them a suitable option for people with gluten intolerance or diabetes.
- **Adaptability:** The significance of millets lies in their ability to provide a sustainable and resilient source of **food and nutrition in a changing climate**. They are also adapted to different agro-ecological regions and can grow in areas where other crops may not thrive.
- **Drought resistant:** Millets are drought-resistant, require less water and fertilizer compared to other crops, and can grow in poor soils.
- **Food security:** The promotion of millets is also significant in terms of improving food security and livelihoods of smallholder farmers. Millet cultivation can provide an additional source of income for

smallholder farmers, especially in areas where other crops are not viable.

- **Crop diversification:** By diversifying their cropping systems, farmers can also reduce their dependence on a single crop, which can be vulnerable to climate change and market fluctuations.



A Mysterious Ring On A Dwarf Planet Is Puzzling Astronomers

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Science and technology

Prepp Mains Booster: Science and Technology, Awareness in the field of Space

Context:

- Recently, astronomers have discovered **unusual rings** around **Quaoar**, a **dwarf planet** located beyond Neptune.
- According to the research study published in Nature magazine, Quaoar's rings are located further away from it than on any other ring-possessing planet.



What is the recent discovery about Quaoar?

- Recently, a **ring system** or a clumpy disc of ice particles was observed around Quaoar, at a distance of 4,100 Km from its centre.
- **Quaoar** is a dwarf planet, about half the size of Pluto, located in the **Kuiper belt**, which is a region of icy **planetesimals** beyond Neptune.

- The planet was discovered in 2002 and has been defined as a minor planet, as the International Astronomical Union has yet to formally classify it as a dwarf planet.

How was the ring discovered?

- In research conducted between 2018 and 2021, the European Space Agency's orbiting space telescope, **Cheops** and ground-based telescopes including the **Gran Telescopio Canarias** in Spain discovered a ring around Quaoar.
- A dip in brightness was observed as Quaoar blocked light from a background star. Additionally, two dips were found on either side of the minor planet, which indicated the presence of a **ring system**.
- Researchers estimated the distance of the rings from the planet from the time difference between the two dips and the main dip.

Why is the discovery puzzling?

- Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune** and the minor planets of **Chariklo** and **Haumea** are also known to have rings around them composed of small pieces of ice and other space debris.
- However, Quaoar's rings differ from the others because they are **much further distant from the planet** than the rings of the other planets.
- Quaoars' rings are located at a distance of over **seven planetary radii** ie. distance from the ring to the planet's centre, while Saturn's rings are at a distance of three planetary radii.
- According to researchers, the ring system of Quaoar lies outside the **Roche limit** which was the outer limit of where ring systems were expected to be able to survive.
- The rings of other planets lie within the Roche limit where **tidal forces** prevent the rings from aggregating into natural satellites.
- Researchers have stated that it was still unclear why the rings around Quaoar had not collided and formed a satellite, although one possible reason could be the **icy nature of the ring particles that could have resulted in elastic collisions**.

Gran Telescopio Canarias

- The 10.4 m reflecting **Gran Telescopio Canarias**, also known as the Great Canary Telescope, is situated at the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory atop a volcanic summit on the Spanish island of La Palma in the Canaries.
- The project was a collaboration between the University of Florida and universities in Spain and Mexico.
- It is at present the **largest single-aperture optical telescope** in the world.

CHEOPS

- The **European Space Agency** launched **CHEOPS**, or the **Characterizing Exoplanet Satellite**, to monitor bright stars near the Solar system which were capable of hosting exoplanets.
- It was launched in 2019 and is capable of making accurate observations of a planet's size as it travels past its host star.

Dwarf Planet	Minor Planet
According to the IAU, a dwarf planet is a celestial object orbiting the sun with a nearly round shape that has not cleared its immediate neighbourhood and is not a moon.	The IAU has defined a minor planet as an astronomical object directly orbiting the sun but is not exclusively classified as a planet or a comet.

'Organ On A Chip': A New Lab Setup That Scientists Are Using Instead Of Using Animals To Test New Drugs

Priority: Medium



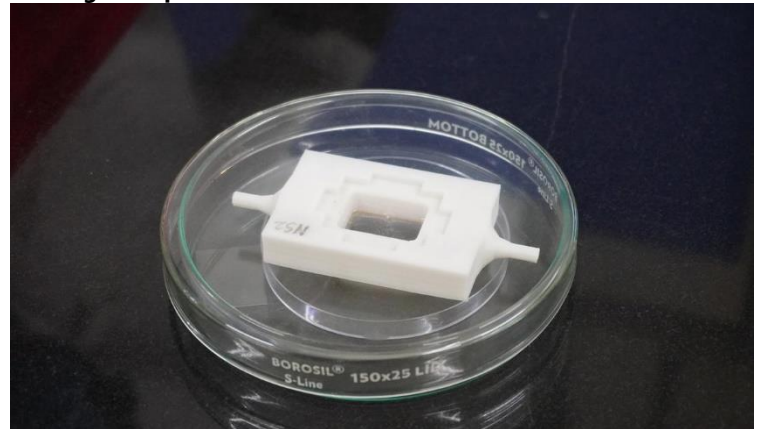
Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Organ Chips

Prepp Mains Booster: Health; Government Policies and Interventions; Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Context:

- The **US Government passed the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act 2.0**.
- By passing the Act, the US government approved computer-based and experimental alternatives to animal testing for new drugs.
- The **move is expected to boost research and development of organ chips**.



What are Organ Chips?

- Organ Chips are small devices containing human cells that are used to mimic the environment in human organs, including blood flow and breathing movements, and serve as synthetic environments in which to test new drugs.
- It simulates the activities, mechanics, and physiological response of an entire organ or organ system.
- These are translucent which helps provide a window for researchers to look into the inner workings of the organs being studied.

What are the issues?

- If the drug fails to gain approval based on its performance in the tests, the entire investment in trials and R&D is lost.
- According to reports, less than 10% of new drugs complete preclinical trials, and less than 50% of these drugs successfully complete clinical trials.
- Experts and researchers blame the high failure rate on the use of animal models in preclinical trials, as animals can only accurately mimic a subset of human diseases.
- As a result, in some cases, drug-related side effects are only discovered during the clinical trial phase.

Organ Chips in India


- Several Indian research groups have also been involved in the development of new organ-on-chip models.
- Skin-on-chip model** has been developed by researchers and experts at the Institute of Chemical Technology, Mumbai, in collaboration with a team of chemical engineers from IIT Bombay.

- This model is being used to research skin irritation and toxicity. This group of experts has also created a retina-on-chip model.
- **Placenta-on-chip model:** Researchers in India are also working on a placenta-on-chip model.
- **Infection-on-a-chip model:** Aside from organs, researchers are also attempting to mimic various diseases using organ chips.
- A team of experts at Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) created an infection-on-a-chip model to simulate a human skin wound infection state.
- The goal is to simulate an infection that does not heal despite repeated antibiotic treatment.
- The Centre for Predictive Human Model Systems in Hyderabad is compiling a database of researchers working on alternatives to animal models, including organ chips.

Significance of Organ Chips

- It can help predict how specific organs respond to the exposure of a potential chemical hazard found in foods, cosmetics, and/or dietary supplements with greater precision than other methods currently in use, such as cell-culture or animal-based tests.
- The model is seen as an alternative to animal-based clinical trials, which are widely condemned as unethical and scientifically deficient.
- Organ chips could help save the lives of thousands of laboratory animals.
- The technology can be used to identify, develop, and test novel drugs to treat a variety of diseases in a reliable manner, and it can predict treatment outcomes better than conventional systems.
- Organ chips created by isolating cells from a patient to create biomimetic tissues that mimic a specific disease can be used to extend personalized therapies for individual patients.

What Are Voice Deepfakes And How Are They Used?

Priority: High 
Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Deepfakes

Prepp Mains Booster: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Awareness in the field of IT, Computers

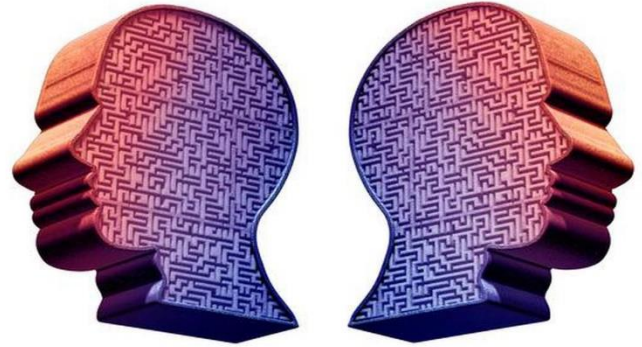
Context:

- Recently, several users of the **social media platform 4chan**, used **“speech synthesis” and “voice cloning” service provider**, ElevenLabs, to make voice deep fakes of celebrities like Emma Watson, Joe Rogan, and Ben Shapiro.
- Those deep fake audios made racist, abusive, and violent comments.
- A voice deep fake is one that closely **mimics a real person’s voice**.

What are voice deepfakes?

- A deep fake voice is one that closely **resembles the voice of an actual person**.
- The voice can accurately reproduce the target person's accent, cadence, tone, and other distinctive features.
- Such voice clones or synthetic voices are created using **Artificial intelligence (AI) and powerful computational power**.
- According to Speechify, a text-to-speech conversion tool, it can often take weeks to create such voices.
- **High-end Computers** with robust graphics cards that make use of cloud computing are required to create deep fakes.


- Rendering might take **hours, days, or even weeks**, depending on the procedure; it can be sped up by using powerful processing resources.
- In addition to specialized equipment and software, training data must be provided to AI models in order to produce deep fakes.
- Original recordings of the target person's voice frequently make up this data.
- **AI** can use this data to **render an authentic-sounding voice**, which can then be used to say anything.
- **Tools:** Some tools for voice cloning include OpenAI's Vall-e, My Own Voice, Resemble, Descript, ReSpeecher, and iSpeech. Lucasfilm employed ReSpeecher to create Luke Skywalker's voice in The Mandalorian.



Concerns

- Attackers are exploiting this technology to **trick consumers, steal their identities, and carry out numerous other unlawful actions** like using phone scams and publishing fake videos on social media.
- In 2020, a manager from a bank in the United Arab Emirates, according to a post on Speechify's blog, received a call from a person he thought was a corporate director.
- The manager recognised the voice and gave the go-ahead for a \$35 million transfer.
- The manager was unaware that the voice of the corporate director was a clone.
- In a different incident, **scammers impersonating a business owner** utilised AI to order the CEO of a UK-based energy firm to transfer about \$243,000 right away to the bank account of a Hungarian supplier of the company.
- The **Wall Street Journal** stated in 2019 that the voice belonged to a fraudster who impersonated the CEO.
- The usage of voice deep fakes in movies has also brought up **ethical questions** about the technology.
- Morgan Neville's documentary film on the well-known late chef Anthony Bourdain used voice-cloning software to make Bourdain say words he never spoke. This raised objections.
- It is becoming **simpler to obtain high-quality recordings of people's voices** through recorders, online interviews, and press conferences.
- The accuracy of the data fed to AI models and the creation of more convincing deepfake voices are both benefited by advancements in voice capture technology.

CAR T-Cell Therapy: The Next Step Towards A Holistic Treatment Of Cancer

Priority: High 

Primary Source: Hindu**Prepp Prelims Booster:** CAR T-Cell Therapy

Prepp Mains Booster: Awareness in the field of bio-technology; Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Context:

- Dr. Narayana Subramaniam, head of the department of Head and Neck Oncology, Sri Shankara Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Bengaluru has written an article 'CAR T-cell Therapy: The Next Step Towards A Holistic Treatment Of Cancer' published in The Hindu on 8th February.
- In this article he talks about the use of **Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy** in the treatment of cancer and its challenges.
- **Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy** is a type of treatment in which a patient's T cells (a type of white blood cell) are changed in the laboratory so they will bind to cancer cells and kill them.

Evolution

- **Chemotherapy** was the first type of systemic therapy; when administered, it acts **primarily on cancer** cells due to their accelerated, uncontrolled proliferation and suboptimal repair capabilities.
- Chemotherapeutic medications influence a wide variety of cell types in the body, which results in **moderate response rates and considerable side effects**.
- Targeted drugs, commonly referred to as **immunotherapy**, represented the next stage in its development.
- Here, the medications **bind to particular sites on the cancer or to immune cells** that support the growth or spread of the tumour.
- Due to its **minimal impact on cells other than tumour cells**, this approach frequently produces **fewer adverse effects**.
- However, it is effective **only against tumours** that express these targets.

How CAR T-cell Therapy is different?

- The sophistication of cancer treatment has advanced dramatically thanks to chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell treatments.
- CAR T-cell therapies use a **patient's own cells**, unlike chemotherapy and immunotherapy, which rely on mass-produced injectables or oral medications.
- They are modified in the laboratory to activate T-cells, a component of immune cells, to attack tumors.
- These altered cells are then conditioned to multiply more efficiently before being put back into the **patient's bloodstream**.
- The cells directly trigger the patient's immune system against cancer, making the treatment more **clinically successful** and **even more specific than** targeted drugs. That is why they are referred to as "living drugs."

What is CAR T-cell Therapy?

- Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy is a way to get immune cells called **T cells (a type of white blood cell)** to fight **cancer** by **changing them** in the lab so they can find and destroy cancer cells.
- In CAR T-cell therapy, the patient's blood is drawn to harvest T-cells which are immune cells that play a major role in destroying tumor cells.

- These cells are modified in the laboratory so that they **express specific proteins on their surface, known as chimeric antigen receptors (CAR)**.
- They have an **affinity for proteins** on the surface of tumor cells.
- This alteration in the cellular structure allows **CAR T-cells to effectively bind** to the tumor and destroy it.
- The final step in the tumor's destruction involves its **clearance by the patient's immune system**.

Use

- CAR T-cell therapy has been approved for **leukemias** (cancers arising from the cells that produce white blood cells) and **lymphomas** (arising from the lymphatic system).
- These malignancies develop when a single cell clone reproduces uncontrollably; after a cell type undergoes malignant transformation, it multiplies into millions of identical clones.
- As a result, the target for CAR T-cells **is consistent and reliable**.
- Patients who have tumors that have reappeared following an initial successful treatment or that **haven't responded to prior chemotherapy or immunotherapy** combinations can also benefit from CAR T-cell therapy.
- Advancements in the field could pave the way for a wide range of **cell therapies**, which are brand-new treatments that are in the works.
- They consist of treatments using tumour **infiltrating lymphocytes** (where white blood cells that attack the tumour are extracted, modified, and reintroduced into the patient) **and customised anti-cancer vaccinations**.
- Cellular therapy (CT) is the transplantation of human cells to replace or repair damaged tissue and/or cells.

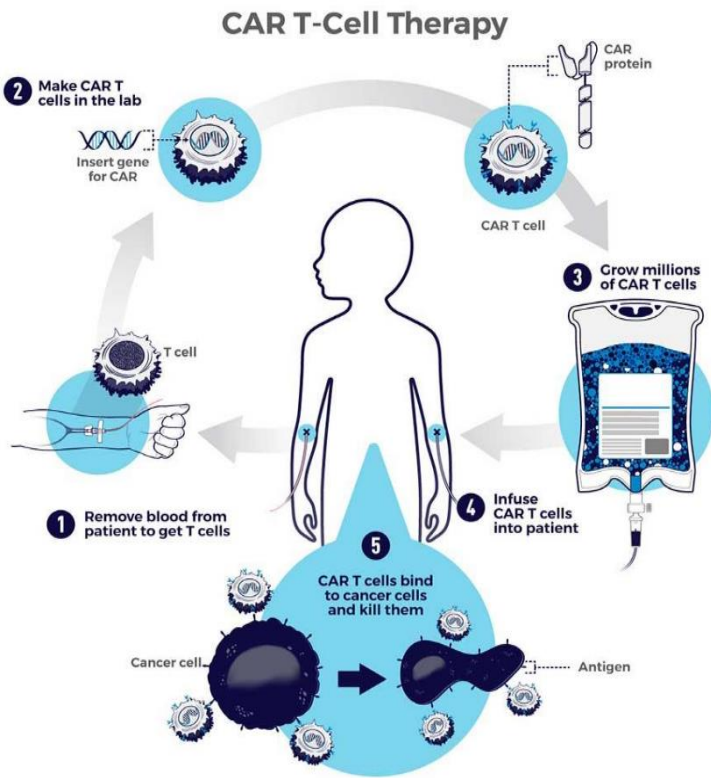
Concerns

- It **responds at varying** rates. The efficacy can reach 90% in some leukaemias and lymphomas, although it is much lower in other malignancies.
- The possible **negative effects** are potentially significant, linked to **neurological symptoms** (severe confusion, seizures, and speech impairment) and **cytokine release syndrome** (widespread immune system activity and collateral harm to healthy cells in the body)
- A significant obstacle to the utilization of CAR T-cells has been the **complexity of their preparation**.
- This therapy also requires a **significant amount of technical and human resources**.
- Treatments in the U.S. cost **more than a million dollars**.
- The challenge with harnessing these techniques for solid **tumours remains significant**. These are highly heterogeneous cancers that lack a consistent target with which CAR T-cells can bind.

India

- The first indigenously developed therapy in India was successfully performed only in 2022.
- Trials are already being conducted in **India by businesses trying** to produce CAR T-cells locally for a much lower price. The initial findings are favorable.
- Any novel therapy introduced in India must overcome the **twin obstacles of cost and benefit**.
- Critics claim that building facilities in India may be unnecessary or inappropriate because, even when it becomes more accessible, **most Indians will not be able to afford CAR T-cell therapy**.

- Wealthy patients who need the therapy are already getting it elsewhere.



CAR T-cell therapy is a type of treatment in which a patient's T cells are genetically engineered in the laboratory so they will bind to specific proteins (antigens) on cancer cells and kill them. (1) A patient's T cells are removed from their blood. Then, (2) the gene for a special receptor called a chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) is inserted into the T cells in the laboratory. The gene encodes the engineered CAR protein that is expressed on the surface of the patient's T cells, creating a CAR T cell. (3) Millions of CAR T cells are grown in the laboratory. (4) They are then given to the patient by intravenous infusion. (5) The CAR T cells bind to antigens on the cancer cells and kill them.

cancer.gov

Way forward

- Every patient has the right to get care that meets a high level of practise; the way forward would be to find ways to make it more affordable.
- The objective behind investments in the development of these technologies in India is that, like other originally pricey medical procedures like robotic surgery, we would be able to offer economies of scale.
- In India, the sheer number of patients has the potential to lower treatment costs.
- Cancer constantly evolves to evade treatment, therefore we need to keep developing more sophisticated therapies with as few-side effects as possible.
- Cell therapies hold this promise and will also help us understand this dreaded disease and its complexities better.

Measuring An Electron's Magnetic Moment With Extreme Accuracy

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

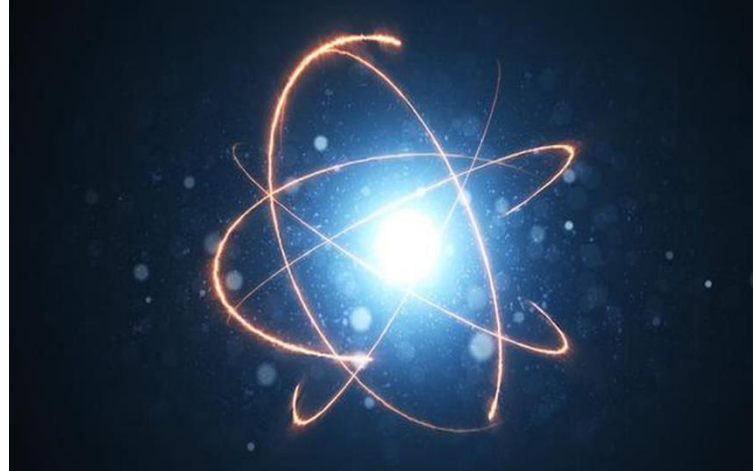
Prepp Prelims Booster: Science and Technology

Prepp Mains Booster: Science and Technology

Context:

- Physicists recently reported measuring the **electron's magnetic moment with a precision of 0.13 parts per trillion (ppt)** in an astounding feat of metrology.

- The **resulting measurement is 2.2 times more precise than the previous best measurement**, which was taken 14 years ago.



What is an electron's magnetic moment?

- The electron magnetic moment, or more specifically the electron magnetic dipole moment, is the magnetic moment of an electron resulting from its intrinsic spin and electric charge properties in atomic physics.

What is the Standard Model?

- The Standard Model (SM) is the theory that describes the properties of all subatomic particles, classifies them into different groups, and determines how they are affected by three of nature's four fundamental forces: strong nuclear force, weak nuclear force, and electromagnetic force.
- In the 1960s, physicists used SM to predict the existence of a particle known as the Higgs boson, which was eventually discovered in 2012.
- Similarly, the SM has allowed physicists to successfully predict the existence and properties of dozens of particles and is regarded as one of the most successful theories in the history of physics.
- It still can't explain why the universe has more matter than antimatter, what dark matter is, or what dark energy is.

About Higgs Boson

- The Higgs boson, also known as the Higgs particle, is an elementary particle in the Standard Model of particle physics produced by the quantum excitation of the Higgs field, one of the fields in particle physics theory.
- According to the Standard Model, the Higgs particle is a massive scalar boson with zero spin, even (positive) parity, no electric charge, and no color charge that couples to (interacts with) mass.
- It is also very unstable, decaying almost instantly into other particles.

How does the electron's magnetic moment matter?

- The magnetic moment of an electron is the most precise prediction made by the Standard Model (SM).
- The magnetic moment describes how eager an electron is to align itself in the direction of a magnetic field.
- Mathematically, it equals $-\mu/\mu_B$. Here, μ is the magnetic moment of an electron (measured in amperes squared), and μ_B is a physical constant known as the Bohr magneton. Together, μ/μ_B is a dimensionless number.

What is the new derivative?

- In the new study, researchers in the United States suspended a single electron in a magnetic field at an ultra-low temperature

inside a vacuum chamber and measured currents induced in nearby electrodes by the electron's movement. They calculated the value of μ/μ_B to be 1.00115965218059 within 0.13 ppt.

- They achieved such a precise result by closely controlling the electric fields that hold the electron in place, stabilizing the magnetic field, and finely adjusting the physical properties of the hardware, removing the sources of uncertainty that can affect the data.

What are the implications of the result?

- The electron and the muon are very similar particles, but the muon is approximately 207 times heavier.
- Multiple measurements until 2021 have revealed that the muon's magnetic moment differs from the SM prediction by about 0.0000000251.
- If this is the result of beyond-SM forces acting on the particle, their effects on the electron's magnetic moment should be visible as well. However, because the electron is lighter, the effects will be 40,000 times weaker.
- The new result suggests that the physicists were unable to find these signs because they were able to achieve such a highly precise result.
- A series of mathematical calculations connect the data that physicists record in an experiment to the value of the electron's magnetic moment. One of these calculations involves the fine structure constant (α), a universal constant that specifies the strength with which electrons couple to the electromagnetic field.
- Two studies published in 2018 and 2020 measured the value of α and came up with two distinct answers that differed by 0.00000016. Because α is a constant, they should have arrived at the same conclusion. If this discrepancy is resolved, the physicists' measurement can test the SM prediction with 10-fold greater precision.

SSLV-D2 Will Lift Off From Sriharikota On February 10

Priority: High



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Science and technology

Prepp Mains Booster: Awareness in the fields of Space ; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology and development of new technology.

Context:

- The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** will undertake the **second development flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)** from Satish Dhawan Space Centre-SHAR, Sriharikota.
- The vehicle is intended to inject ISRO's (Earth Observation Satellite) EOS-07, U.S.-based firm Antaris' Janus-1 and Chennai-based space start-up Space Kidz's AzaadiSAT-2 satellites into a 450-km circular orbit.

Background

- The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) D1/EOS-2 mission was carrying two satellites — the Earth Observation Satellite-2 (EOS-2) and AzadiSAT on August 2022. However, the **mission failed to place the satellites** in their required orbits, and the satellites, as they were already detached from the launch vehicle, were lost.
- The satellites were placed in an **elliptical orbit, rather than a circular orbit** due to the malfunctioning of a sensor

- **Satellites that orbit** the Earth are mostly placed in circular orbits. One reason is that if the satellite is used for imaging the Earth, it is easier if it has a fixed distance from the Earth.
- If the distance keeps changing as in an elliptical orbit, keeping the cameras focussed can become **complicated**.



EOS-07

- EOS-07 is a 156.3 kg satellite **designed, developed, and realized** by ISRO.
- Its mission goal is to design and develop payload instruments **compatible with novel technologies** that are required for **future operational satellites**.
- It would also design and develop a microsatellite accommodating new technology payloads in a quick turn-around time.
- New experiments include mm-Wave Humidity Sounder and Spectrum Monitoring Payload.
- The 10.2-kilogram Janus-1 smart satellite mission is a technology demonstrator built on the Antaris software platform.
- AzaadiSAT-2, an 8.7-kg satellite, was created by 750 female students from all over India under the direction of Space Kidz India, Chennai.

What is a Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)?

- A small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is a **3 stage Launch Vehicle** configured with three **Solid Propulsion Stages** and **liquid propulsion-based** Velocity Trimming Module (VTM) as a terminal stage.
- SSLV is 2m in diameter and 34m in length with lift off weight of ~120 tonnes.
- SSLV is capable of launching **~500kg satellite in 500km planar orbit** from SDSC/SHAR.

Features

- Low cost, with low turn-around time,
- Flexibility in accommodating multiple satellites.
- Launch on-demand feasibility,
- Minimal launch infrastructure requirements, etc.

Objectives of Mission

- **Demonstration** of designed **Payload capability** of SSLV in LEO.
- **Injection** of EOS-07 satellite and **two passenger satellites** Janus-1 & AzaadiSAT-2 into 450 km circular orbit.

Why do we need to develop an SSLV when we have successfully used PSLV and GSLV?

- Both the PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) and GSLV (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle), are quite powerful and capable of lifting heavy loads.
- One does not require such powerful launch vehicles to launch an **Earth-orbiting satellite into a low Earth orbit**.

- **Small to medium weights** from 10 kg to 500 kg can be carried with ease by the SSLV.
- It is **less expensive**.
- Another benefit is that the three stages are fueled by solid fuel. Solid Fuel is easier to handle when compared to liquid fuels used in PSLV and GSLV.

Committee Report On Great Indian Bustard Proposed Power Lines To Be Rerouted Or Made Underground

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Great Indian Bustard

Prepp Mains Booster: Conservation; Biodiversity

Context:

- Recently, a Supreme Court-appointed committee has recommended that, in order to protect the **Great Indian Bustard**, close to 800 km, or about 10% of the length of proposed **power lines in Rajasthan and Gujarat's Thar and Kutch deserts, be rerouted or made to go underground**.
- Despite a Supreme Court order requiring low-voltage power lines to be underground, no significant steps appear to have been taken by power companies or State Governments to comply with them.



About Great Indian Bustards

- It is the **State bird of Rajasthan**
- Its population of about 150 in Rajasthan accounts for 95% of its total world population.
- The great Indian bustard was historically found in 11 states of Western India and specific areas of Pakistan.
- The Thar desert in the northwest and the Deccan plateau of the peninsula were formerly their strongholds.
- Today, Gujarat and Rajasthan are home to the majority of its population. Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh have small populations.
- **Protection status:**
 - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - IUCN status- Critically Endangered

News Summary

- The deaths of these birds, as well as the **dangers posed by power lines and renewable energy projects**, prompted environmentalists to file a petition in the Supreme Court in 2019, requesting that all overhead lines, existing and proposed, be made underground.

- Private and public power companies, backed by the Centre's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), argued that burying all overhead lines would be costly and inefficient, increasing the cost of solar power and undermining India's commitment to green growth.
- So far, the Centre has approved the development of solar projects with a combined capacity of nearly 39,000 MW, but only a fourth has been completed.
- In April 2021, the court ordered that all low-voltage power lines in areas designated as "priority and potential habitats of the Great Indian Bustard" in the Thar and Kutch deserts be buried.
- **Priority zones** are areas where the birds are known to live, while **Potential Regions** are those where conservation programs, such as captive breeding, are ongoing.

What is endangering the birds?

- Highlighting Great Indian Bustard (GIB) deaths caused by power transmission lines, an apex court special bench led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud directed the Chief Secretaries of Gujarat and Rajasthan to conduct and complete a comprehensive exercise within four weeks to determine the total length of transmission lines in question and the number of bird diverters required.
- This is not the first time the Supreme Court has weighed in on the GIB's preservation.
- In an earlier order issued in April 2021, the Supreme Court directed that the overhead cables be converted into underground power lines within a year, and that diverters be hung from existing power lines until that time.

Other Threats to GIB

- The GIBs are slow breeders who build their nests on the ground. In the past, the species was also subjected to hunting and egg collection.
- There has also been a decrease in prevailing habitat loss as dry grasslands have been diverted for other purposes.
- Experts also warn of pesticide contamination and an increase in populations of free-roaming dogs and pigs, as well as native predators (fox, mongoose, and cat), putting pressure on nests and chicks.
- While the majority of the species' population is confined to the Jaisalmer Desert National Park (DNP), wildlife enthusiasts believe that more areas outside the protected area must be made suitable for the species.
- A conservation effort like 'Project Tiger' may not work for a large bird of an arid region that can always fly out of the protected area.
- Experts are urging community-based conservation of the critically endangered species.

What is the population?

- According to the earliest estimates, the population was around 1,260 in 1969, but it has declined by 75% in the last 30 years.
- Historically, the GIB population was spread across 11 western Indian states, but it is now mostly concentrated in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Small populations can be found in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. The GIB population in India totals 150 birds, with approximately 128 birds in Rajasthan.

Ring Found Beyond Dwarf Planet's Roche Limit: Why This Matters

Priority: Medium



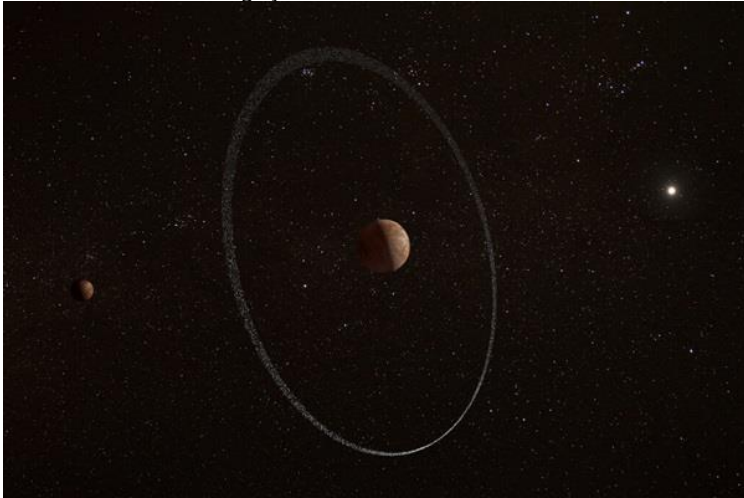
Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Science and Technology

Prepp Mains Booster: Awareness in the field of Space

Context:

- Recently, Astronomers discovered a ring system around the **dwarf planet Quaoar**, which is located in the **Kuiper belt** at the edge of the solar system.
- According to a study conducted by researchers, the ring system is unique because it is located outside the **Roche limit**, further than usual for other ring systems.



What is Quaoar?

- Quaoar** is a dwarf planet located in the **Kuiper belt**, which is an area beyond Neptune consisting of icy planetesimals.
- It has an estimated radius of around 555 Km and is approximately half the size of Pluto and has a natural moon named **Weywot**.
- Its unique ring system is located at 7 planetary radii which was beyond the **Roche limit**, but had not integrated into a satellite.

How was the ring system identified?

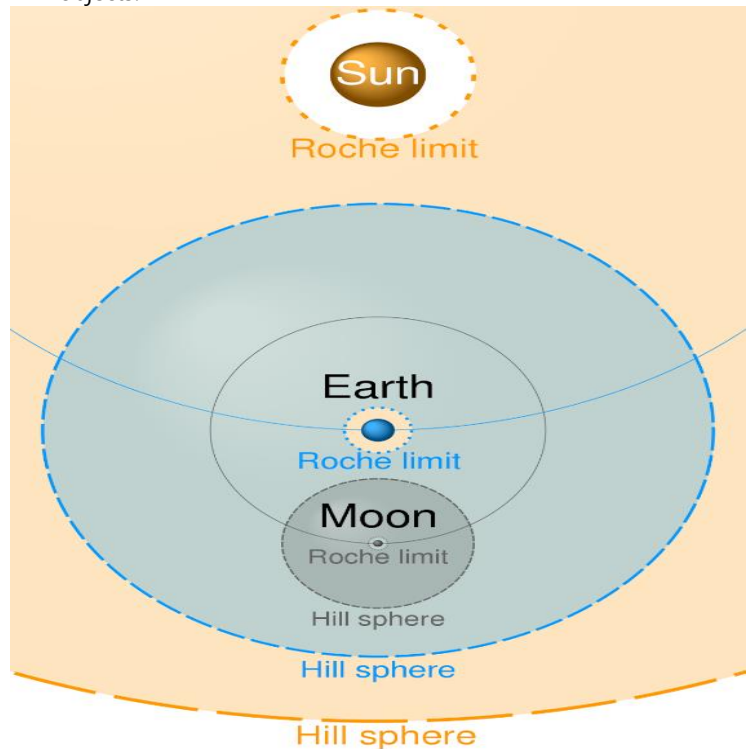
- Quaoar was too small and distant to be observed directly so researchers detected the ring through a phenomenon called **stellar occultation**.
- A stellar occultation occurs when a bright star passes behind the planet, which allows astronomers on Earth to observe the planet sharply and clearly for a brief duration.
- The phenomenon, although rare, has been used to identify ring systems around planets as in the case of the Uranian ring system in 1977.
- The study around the ring system of Quaoar took place between 2018 and 2021 using data provided by the **Cheops** satellite of the European Space Agency and ground-based telescopes like the **Gran Telescopio Canarias** in Spain.
- In this three-year period, Quaoar passed in front of four stars which allowed researchers to observe the shadow of the eclipses.
- Researchers observed a dimming of the shadow on either side of the planet, which indicated the presence of a ring system.

What is the Roche limit?

- Quaoar's ring system, located outside the Roche limit, which is farther from the planet than ring systems around other planets, is its unique characteristic.
- The ring is located 2500 miles away from the planet, and around 1400 miles outside of the Roche limit.
- Named after the French astronomer **Édouard Roche** who discovered it in 1848, it is the minimum limit at which the **tidal**

force of the planet overcomes the gravitational force of a satellite causing it to disintegrate into a ring system.

- Outside the Roche limit, the gravitational force exceeds the tidal force of the planet causing debris to consolidate as moons.
- The Roche limit is visible between many celestial systems such as Saturn's ring system and between the Earth and the moon.
- In 1992, the **Shoemaker-Levy9** comet came too close to Jupiter and disintegrated under the tidal force. Two years later, parts of the disintegrated comet collided with the planet, creating the first observation of the extra-terrestrial collision of solar system objects.



What do astronomers think is the reason for the unique ring system?

- Astronomers have not yet obtained clarity on why Quaoar's ring system was stable despite being located beyond the Roche limit.
- One possible conclusion was that the dwarf planet's moon Weywot or some other hidden celestial object was contributing gravity to stabilize the ring system.
- Another suggestion was that the particles of the ring system were colliding elastically due to their icy nature, which prevented them from coming together to form a moon.
- Astronomers have claimed that the discovery of Quaoar's ring system has opened new possibilities of discovering rings around smaller planets and furthering our understanding of celestial rings.

Over 1000 Pangolins Poached And Trafficked In India In Past Five Years

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Pangolin

Prepp Mains Booster: Environment; Biodiversity and Conservation

Context:

- On the eve of **World Pangolin Day**, observed on **February 18**, a non-profit organization working on the international trade of

animals and plants released a fact sheet reporting that **1,203 pangolins were found in illegal wildlife trade in India from 2018 to 2022.**

- Pangolins and their derivatives were confiscated in up to 24 states and one union territory.
- According to the international non-profit organization **TRAFFIC**, 50% of the seizures involved live pangolins and 40% involved pangolin scales, which are used as an ingredient in traditional Chinese and Southeast Asian medicine.

About Pangolins

- Pangolins are the only mammals with scales. The scales are made of keratin, the same material as human fingernails. There are eight species of pangolins, four in Africa and four in Asia.
- Pangolins are solitary and nocturnal animals, meaning they are active at night. Their primary defense mechanism is to curl into a ball, making themselves almost impenetrable to predators.
- Pangolins are insectivores, feeding primarily on ants and termites. Their long, sticky tongues can extend up to 40cm (16 inches) to reach into ant and termite nests.
- Pangolins are sometimes called scaly anteaters, because of their similar long tongues and diet.
- Pangolins have poor eyesight, but their sense of smell is highly developed. They use their sense of smell to locate food and identify predators.
- Pangolins have a low body temperature, ranging from 30-35°C (86- 95°F), which makes them susceptible to illnesses like pneumonia and hypothermia.
- All eight species of pangolins are currently listed as threatened with extinction, primarily due to habitat loss and poaching for their scales, which are believed to have medicinal properties in some cultures.



Pangolins in India

- Pangolins are among the most heavily trafficked wild mammals in the world.
- India is home to two species:
 - **the Indian Pangolin**, which is found throughout the subcontinent, and
 - **the Chinese Pangolin**, which is found throughout south Asia.
- Both are found in Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam.

Protection Status

- Both species are listed in India's Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, which could result in jail time for those who hunt the animals listed here.
- **CITES**: They are also listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), indicating that they are most endangered.
- **IUCN**: The Indian Pangolin has been designated as 'Endangered,' while the Chinese Pangolin has been designated as 'Critically Endangered' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

Recent Incidents of Pangolins

- **Odisha** had the most incidents, with 154 pangolins seized in 74 seizures.
- **Maharashtra**, which had 135 pangolins seized in 47 seizures.
- The publication, titled 'India's Pangolins Buried in Illegal Wildlife Trade,' tracked 342 total incidents during this time period. In addition, eight instances of online trading were documented.
- According to the organization's fact sheet, up to **50% of seizures involved live pangolins and 40% involved pangolin scales.**
- India reports a significant number of pangolin trafficking incidents, as evidenced by seizures across the country.
- They are primarily poached for international markets in China and Southeast Asia for their scales, which are used as an ingredient in traditional medicines. Pangolin meat is also considered a delicacy and is consumed for its alleged medicinal properties.

About TRAFFIC

- TRAFFIC is an acronym for Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce. TRAFFIC is a collaborative conservation initiative of WWF and IUCN.
- The Species Survival Commission of IUCN created TRAFFIC in 1976, mostly in response to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora entering into force the previous year.
- With offices on five continents, TRAFFIC International, a global network, is centered in
- Cambridge, United Kingdom.
- Since its inception, TRAFFIC has expanded to become the largest wildlife trade monitoring program in the world and a leading authority on issues related to wildlife trade.
- This non-governmental organization works closely with governments and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat to carry out its activities.

Nse Indices Launches Nifty India Municipal Bond Index

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Municipal Bonds

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment; Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges

Context:

- Recently, NSE Indices Ltd., an arm of the National Stock Exchange released India's first **municipal bond index** at a SEBI in Bengaluru.

- The **Nifty India Municipal Bond Index** will track the performance of all municipal bonds issued by Indian municipal corporations.



What are Municipal Bonds?

- A **municipal bond or muni bond** is a security issued by local governments in India or their associated bodies.
- The intention behind issuing these bonds was to raise money to finance projects such as bridges, schools, hospitals, and the provision of household amenities that aim to **achieve socio-economic development**.
- The **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urbanization Transformation (AMRUT)** and the **Smart Cities Mission** are two projects which have been funded by muni bonds.
- Muni bonds are of two types
 - **General Obligation Bonds:** These are issued for general purposes and repayment plus interest are generated from the revenue obtained from various projects.
 - **Revenue Bonds:** These bonds have been utilized to fund specific projects and revenue generated from the declared projects is used to pay back the investment and interest.
- Municipal bonds were first issued in India in 1997 following the **74th Constitutional Amendment** which decentralized urban local bodies, granted them autonomy; made them accountable, and enabled them to access capital markets and financial institutions, thus transforming their finances.
- The proceeds from municipal bonds can be used to **fund the expansion of municipal services through growth-driven infrastructure projects** and thereby contribute to **bridging India's urban infrastructure financing gap**.

What is the new Municipal Bond Index?

- The **Nifty India Municipal Bond Index** which was launched by NSE Indices Ltd. was aimed at tracking the performance of all municipal bonds issued in the country across maturities and investment-grade credit ratings.
- The Index comprised of 28 municipal bonds from 10 different issuers, all of which were in the AA credit rating category.
- The outstanding amount of each constituent bond was used to calculate the weight assigned to each.
- The index was calculated using the total return methodology including price return and coupon return. The base date of the index was set as January 1, 2021, and a base value of 1,000 was assigned with reviews scheduled on a quarterly basis.

What are the advantages of Municipal bonds?

- **Transparency:** Muni bonds were rated by **credit rating agencies** like CRISIL before their public issue which generates public confidence and transparency about invested funds.

- **Tax exemptions:** Indian municipal bonds have been exempted from taxation, subject to certain conditions, in order to help achieve the goal of socio-economic development at the grass root level. Interest rates generated on muni bonds are also free from taxation.
- **Risk:** These bonds are issued by government entities, i.e. local bodies. Therefore, there was very little risk associated with them, making them an attractive investment option.
- **Local Development:** Municipal Bonds are an ideal source of funding for urban local bodies and help in maintaining their **financial independence**.

What are the concerns associated with Municipal Bonds?

- Concerns have been raised by experts over the **ability of the bonds to beat inflation as they are generally low-yielding**.
- These bonds lose value as the interest rate increases and may thus have to be traded at **below-face value**.
- State guarantees are required for the bonds which can be complicated due to political or administrative reasons.

Conclusion

- **SEBI's Issue and Listing of Municipal Debt Securities Regulations, 2015** helped transform the municipal bond sector and reemphasized its benefits to policymakers.
- Raising capital from corporate sources has allowed municipal bodies to fund new projects and improve public infrastructure.
- This model of funding has allowed local bodies to become **financially independent and disciplined while also being governance oriented**.

SEBI

- SEBI was established on April 12, 1992, in accordance with the provisions of the **Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992 as a statutory body**.
- Prior to the establishment of SEBI, the **Controller of Capital Issues** was the regulatory authority of the securities market which derived authority from the Capital Issues (Control) Act, of 1947.
- SEBI is the regulator of the securities and commodity market in India and aims to protect the interests of investors and promote the development and regulation of the securities market.
- SEBI is a **quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative body** that has been empowered to conduct inquiries, pass rulings, impose penalties and draft regulations.
- The body was meant to protect the rights of investors, issuers and intermediaries.
- SEBI is headed by a Chairman and other regular and part-time members with its headquarters in Mumbai.

Mission AMRUT

- The **Atul Mission for Rejuvenation and Urbanization Transformation** was launched by the Government of India in 2015 as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
- The Mission's major aims include:
 - Ensure every household has **access to a tap with an assured supply of water and a sewerage connection**.
 - Develop greenery and other open spaces for recreation in urban areas
 - Popularize the **adoption of public transport and non-motorized forms** of transport like cycling and walking.

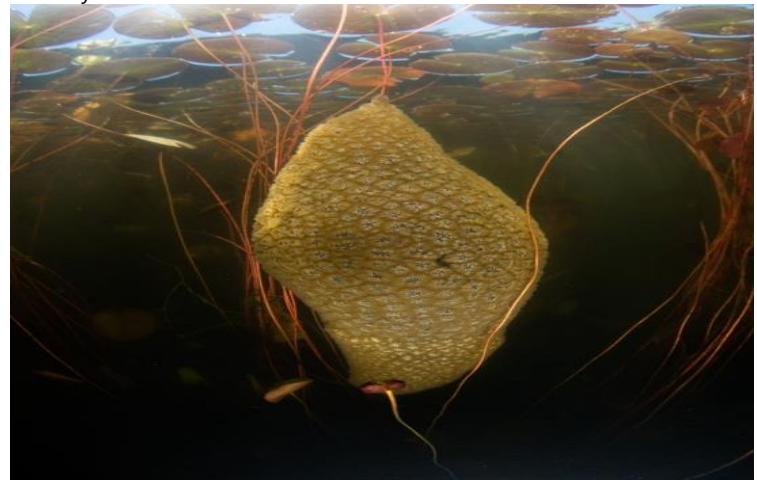
Smart Cities Mission

- The Smart Cities Mission was launched by the Union Government to **boost economic growth and enhance the quality of life of citizens through local development and harnessing of technology.**
- The mission's goal is to support cities that **offer basic infrastructure, a respectable standard of living for their residents, a clean, sustainable environment, and the implementation of "Smart" Solutions.**
- The goal is to examine compact areas and design a repeatable model that will serve as a lighthouse for other cities, with an emphasis on sustainable and inclusive development.
- The Smart Cities Mission aims to provide models that can be used to create similar Smart Cities in different locations and portions of the country.
- A "**smart city**" is one that has the fundamental infrastructure necessary to provide a respectable standard of living and a healthy, sustainable environment.
- It has the basic infrastructure such as a reliable supply of water and power, solid waste management, effective urban transportation, affordable housing, and strong IT connectivity that contribute to a sustainable lifestyle.

- Kelp forests cover a quarter of the world's coastlines and are home to a number of marine species such as invertebrates, fish, algae etc and are among the most diverse ocean ecosystems in the world.
- Scientists have claimed that kelp forests also contribute to **carbon sequestration** and **erosion control.**

What are the threats faced by Kelp forests?

- Climate Scientists have reported that the size and number of large underwater kelp forests were **declining by 1.8% every year.**
- The major threats faced by kelp forests are **climate change, eutrophication and human activity** such as increased construction on shorelines (pipelines) and uncontrolled fishing.
- **Bryozoa**, which is a species of moss animals that grow as mats on kelp forests are another significant threat as they force the seaweeds to sink and disintegrate.
- Researchers have discovered that high temperature and kelp density facilitated bryozoan growth while high wave exposure limited its growth.
- **Climate change** has contributed to ocean warming while eutrophication has resulted in a surplus of nutrients, thereby making more ocean areas suitable for bryozoa.
- The 2015 bryozoan outbreak which was linked to a marine heat wave in the Pacific Ocean has shown that dense kelp beds in warmer sites with less wave exposure were more susceptible to bryozoan outbreaks.



Bryozoa

What is the role of indigenous communities?

- Researchers have cited the lack of information on how local conditions have impacted the response of kelp to various stress factors.
- Collaborative research driven by the requirements and priorities of the indigenous communities has been suggested as the ideal way to preserve marine resources.
- **The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB)** recognized indigenous people as the most effective guardians of biodiversity at the 15th COP to the **Convention on Biodiversity.**
- Implementation of traditional knowledge and practices while respecting the principles of free, prior and informed consent would help leverage a partnership with local communities who see themselves as the guardians of biodiversity.
- The traditional knowledge of the indigenous communities on local conditions and their effects on the natural environment would also help researchers better understand the relationship between kelp, bryozoan, temperature and water flow.

What are the uses of seaweed?

Global Kelp Forests Declining At 1.8% Annually; Indigenous Knowledge Can Help, Say Experts

Priority: Medium



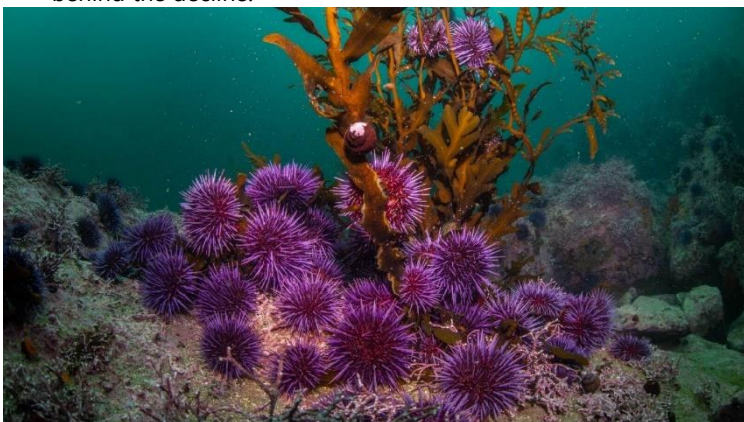
Primary Source: Down to Earth

Prepp Prelims Booster: Kelp Forest

Prepp Mains Booster: Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes, Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context:

- Recently, **underwater kelp forests**, which are an integral part of the **blue economy** have declined by 1.8% annually.
- **Climate change, eutrophication, shoreline development and anthropogenically induced stress** are some of the major factors behind the decline.



What are kelp forests?

- Kelps are large brown algae seaweeds that are mostly found in temperate and polar oceans all across the world.
- They form underwater ecosystems in shallow waters between 20 and 80 feet which are called **kelp forests.**

- Seaweeds are a good source of nutrients like vitamins A, C, E and iron, which have made them a part of the diets of coastal communities in non-tropical regions.
- Seaweeds are a source of **biostimulants** that can be extracted and used to positively influence plant growth and yield.
- Seaweeds have been considered to be helpful in long-term carbon sequestration and the regeneration of ocean water habitats.
- Seaweeds are believed to be an efficient tool in fighting the climate crisis as they store around 175 million tonnes of carbon annually, although a 2022 study has placed doubt on the CO₂ emissions mitigating capacity of seaweeds.
- According to the **World Bank**, seaweeds play an important role in the Blue Economy through their ability to sustain ocean habitats and preserve the health of the ocean ecosystem.

Blue Economy

- According to the World Bank, the Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and improved livelihoods while preserving the environment.
- Oceans cover the majority of the planet's surface and are thus an opportunity for development and environment conservation.
- The concept of a blue economy stresses the **integration of development** with social inclusion, and sustainability.

RBI Lifts Loan Costs To Tame Inflation

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Indian Economy

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy, Growth and Development

Context:

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India's **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** raised the benchmark lending rate by **25 basis points (bps) to 6.5%**, aiming to combat persistently high core or underlying inflation, which it sees as a risk to the economy's improving outlook.

About Monetary Policy Committee

- The Monetary Policy Committee is in charge of setting India's benchmark interest rate.
- The Monetary Policy Committee meets at least four times a year (specifically, once a quarter), and its decisions are published following each meeting.
- The committee has six members: three Reserve Bank of India officials and three government-nominated external members.
- For "utmost confidentiality," they must observe a "silent period" of seven days before and after the rate decision.
- The committee's ex-officio chairperson is the governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

Highlights of Recent Monetary Policy Committee

- The **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** raised the repo rate, or the key rate at which the RBI lends short-term funds to commercial banks, to **6.50 percent from 6.25 percent**.
- Since May, the panel has raised the key rate by 250 (225+25) basis points. The panel also decided to keep its focus on the withdrawal of the accommodative stance.
- The MPC believes that further calibrated monetary policy action is required to anchor inflation expectations, break the persistence of

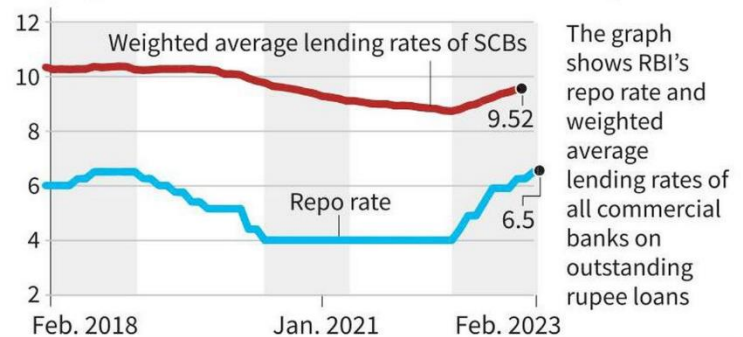
core inflation, and thus strengthen medium-term growth prospects.

Projection of Inflation

- India's central bank cut its inflation forecast for this fiscal year today, even as the governor expressed concern about the stickiness of core inflation.
- Inflation is expected to be 5.3 percent in fiscal year 2023-2024, with Q1 at 5%, Q2 at 5.4%, Q3 at 5.4%, and Q4 at 5.6%.
- The MPC will continue to maintain strong vigil on the evolving inflation outlook so as to ensure that it remains within the tolerance band and progressively aligns with the target.

Trending upwards

The 25 basis points rate increase by the RBI may soon push the lending rates of scheduled commercial banks even higher



What is the outcome?

- The Indian banking system, including the NBFC sector, remains resilient and strong. The RBI's large exposure guidelines have been strictly followed by all banks.
- The Indian banking system's strength, size, and resilience are now much larger and more resilient to being affected by a single incident or case.
- The Indian economy has remained resilient, having weathered a series of global shocks over the last three years.
- Noting that inflation had begun to moderate and that the "worst is behind us," the RBI stated that it could not afford to turn its attention away from inflation.
- The real policy rate had risen into positive territory, and the banking system had successfully exited the 'chakravayuh' of excess liquidity. Monetary policy transmission was also increasing.
- The reduction in the size of the rate increase to 25 basis points gave the RBI more leeway in weighing all incoming data and forecasts in order to determine appropriate actions and policy stances in the future.

Convention on Biological Diversity

- The **Biodiversity Convention** or **CBD** is a multilateral treaty which has its secretariat in **Montreal, Canada**.
- The United States is the only UN member state that has not ratified the convention, which has been ratified by 196 countries.
- **Supplementary Agreements:**
 - The **Cartagena Protocol** on Biosafety of Living Modified Organisms
 - The **Nagoya Protocol** on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits arising from their Utilization.
- **Goals:**

- Conservation of Biodiversity
- Sustainable use of biodiversity
- Equitable distribution of benefits from genetic resources
- The Convention is **legally binding** on all signatories
- The Ultimate Governing Body of the CBD is the **Conference of Parties** which meets every two years and is made up of all the governments that have ratified the agreement.
- **India is a party to the Convention and ratified it in 1994.**

Why A Proposed Change In Angel Tax Has Rattled Indian Start-Ups

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Angel tax

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Constitution, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; Indian Economy, Effects of liberalization on the economy

Context:

- Recently, the **Finance Bill 2023** had proposed to levy an **angel tax** on investments in **start-ups** and **new-age firms** by **non-resident investors**.
- Start-ups have been suffering from a **funding winter** since 2022.



What is the new proposal?

- The **Finance Bill, 2023** has proposed an amendment of **Section 56(2)VII B of the Income Tax Act, 1961**.
- The Government has proposed to include **foreign investors** under the ambit of the Section, according to which funding from a foreign investor for a startup will be counted as income and be taxable.
- If the share of a startup has a fair market value of ₹10 per share and is sold to an investor for ₹20 during a subsequent funding round, the difference of ₹10 will be taxed as income.

What is angel tax?

- The angel tax is a **30% tax** on any excess funds raised by an unlisted firm through the issuance of shares over and above the shares' fair market value.
- It typically impacts start-ups and their 'angel' investors and is taxed because it is viewed as corporate income.
- To prevent **money laundering** because bribes and commissions could have been passed off as angel investments to save money on taxes, the angel tax was implemented in 2012 under section 56(2)VII B of the Income Tax Act, 1961.
- **Section 56(2)VII B** states that when an unlisted company, such as a start-up, receives equity investment from a resident investor for the issuance of shares at a price exceeding its face value, it will be

considered income for the start-up and be subject to income tax under the head "**Income from Other Sources**" for the relevant financial year.

What are the concerns associated with the proposal?

- According to a report released by PwC India, funding to Indian startups dropped to \$24 billion in 2022, a 33% drop compared to the previous year as the country's startup ecosystem went through a **funding winter**.
- Foreign investors who have been a key source of funding for Indian startups and have been key players in developing their valuations are the most affected by the move.
- Consider the case of Tiger Capital, one of India's largest foreign investors has a stake in over one-third of India's **unicorns** with a valuation of more than \$1 Billion.
- The inclusion of foreign investment under the scope of the IT Act could result in **flipping** which is the shifting of companies overseas as foreign investors will be reluctant to deal with the **additional tax liability** that could arise out of their investment.
- Although the stated objective of the government is to enable **reverse flipping** ie shifting their domicile back to India, the proposed move will in reality speed up the process of flipping.
- The fair market worth of a startup cannot be established with any certainty as investors pay a premium for the concept and future profitability of the business during the angel investing stage. At this point, additional tax obligations could adversely impact funding for India's new-age sector and the country's economic expansion.
- Concerns over the **bureaucratic red tape** involved in securing government approvals and the arbitrary nature of operation have also affected investment in India leading to the drop in value.

Vostro Accounts And How They Facilitate Trade

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: Vostro Accounts

Prepp Mains Booster: Indian Economy; Effects of liberalization on the economy

Context:

- Recently, the government announced that 20 Russian banks including Rosbank, Tinkoff Bank, Centro Credit Bank, and Credit Bank of Moscow had opened **Special Vostro Rupee Accounts** in partnership with Indian banks.
- Vostro accounts will help facilitate **global trade** and reduce the **demand for foreign currencies** like the US dollar to help settle **current account-related trade flows**.

What is a Vostro Account?

- A **Vostro Account** is an account held by domestic banks for partner foreign banks in the **domestic currency**.
- Vostro is a Latin word that means "**yours**".
- They are used by domestic banks to gain wider access to financial markets and provide international banking services to clients without being physically present.
- It is an integral component of correspondent banking, which involves a bank or intermediary conducting transactions, facilitating wire transfers, accepting deposits and gathering documents on behalf of the other bank.
- A similar type of account is the **Nostro account**, where the account is maintained in foreign currency. Nostro means "**ours**" in Latin.



What is the SRVA arrangement and how does it work?

- The **Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA)** arrangement has been added to complement the existing system in the use of **freely convertible currency** which has strong market demand.
- It was expected that the SRVA arrangement would help the existing system in maintaining the balances and positions of such currencies.
- The SRVA framework is comprised of three major components,
 - **Invoicing:** All imports and exports are to be denominated and invoiced in Indian Rupees (₹).
 - **Exchange rate:** Market determination of exchange rates between currencies of trading partners.
 - **Settlement:** Final Settlement of the transactions takes place in Indian Rupees (₹).
- Domestic dealer banks who have been authorised to deal in foreign currencies can open SVRA accounts for correspondent banks from the trading partner country.
- Importers are required to make payments into the SVRA account of the correspondent bank in Indian Rupees against the invoice for goods and services bought from the foreign supplier.
- Domestic exporters are paid in Indian Rupees from the designated account of the correspondent bank of the partner trader country.
- Domestic Banks have been made responsible for according the highest priority to meeting existing payment obligations due to completed or progressing orders from the available funds.
- Cross-border transactions have to be reported in accordance with the rules and regulations prescribed by the Foreign Exchange Management Act, FEMA 1999.

What are the SVRA accounts used for?

- The **2022-23 Economic Survey** had argued that the SVRA arrangement could help reduce the net demand for foreign exchange, especially the US Dollar, for the settlement of current account-related trade flows.
- The framework would also reduce the need to hold foreign exchange reserves and the dependence on foreign currencies, thus protecting the country from external shocks.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing US and EU sanctions had put the Indian rupee under significant pressure.
- The RBI devised the mechanism as a means of transacting in foreign exchange that would encourage the expansion of global trade while focusing on Indian exports.

- According to the **Bureau for International Settlement (BIS) Triennial Central Bank Survey 2022**, the **US Dollar accounted for 88% of all trades** while the **Indian Rupee** in comparison accounted for **just 1.6%**.
- Indian exporters could get advance payments in Indian Rupees from overseas clients and promote the Rupee as an international currency over the long term after the rupee settlement mechanism gained popularity.

How are they helpful?

- Indian exporters would find it easier to secure advance payments from foreign clients in Indian rupees.
- Even if a Vostro account is not pre-funded, importers from other nations would have to purchase rupees and thus boost export and import transactions.
- The demand for dollars would fall while the extra-exchange-related costs would also reduce over time.
- Long-term trade between India and its neighbouring nations may increase as a result of the cooperation between their banking sectors.
- The settlement processes will encourage the use of the rupee as a base currency for trade diversification.
- It can become a tool for political coordination as South Asian States have expressed interest in joining similar efforts by **BRICS** nations to settle payments in non-dollar currencies.

What are the associated concerns?

- Rupee trade agreements between India and a nation that has a **trade deficit** with India are not viable in the long term.
- **Trade imbalance** can lead to an excessive amount of rupees sitting idle in the Vostro accounts due to excessive imports and diminished exports. Consider Indo-Russian trade between April and September 2022, India's imports were worth \$21.35 billion while exports were worth around \$ 1 billion.

What Is The Government's New Policy Of UPIs For NRIs?

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: UPI, NPCI

Prepp Mains Booster: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; Indian diaspora

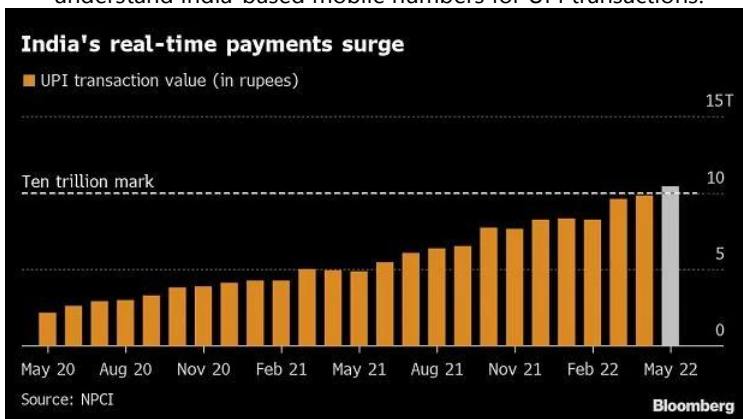
Context:

- Recently, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) paved the way for international (phone) numbers to be able to transact using [Unified Payments Interface \(UPI\)](#).
- Subsequently, the Union Cabinet approved an incentive scheme for the promotion of RuPay debit Cards and low-value BHIM-UPI transactions (person-to-merchant) in FY 2022-23. The scheme has an outlay of ₹2,600 crore.

Highlights

- The non-resident accounts with international numbers, such as non-resident external accounts (NRE) and non-resident ordinary accounts (NRO), **will now be permitted to use the UPI payment system**.
- In October 2018, the NPCI started allowing UPI transactions to and from NRO/NRE accounts connected to Indian phones.

- **NRE accounts** are those used by **non-residents to transfer earnings** from foreign soil to India while NRO accounts are used to manage income earned in India by non-residents.
- These incomes could be rent, interest, pension, among other things.
- At present, users from **ten countries** will be able to avail the facility—Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Oman, Qatar, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Singapore, UAE, and the U.K.
- **Significance:** The innovation will enable NRIs to use the payment method to pay for goods and services via e-commerce or online platforms, as well as to make payments to physical merchants who support UPI QR based payments when they visit India.
- Addressing the infrastructural and technological changes required to support such payments. At present, all the internal systems as well as ecosystem players such as banks, NPCI, etc only understand India-based mobile numbers for UPI transactions.



Non-Resident Indian (NRI): Non-Resident Indian (NRI) is a residential status granted to an Indian citizen with an Indian passport who resides in a foreign country for work/business or education.

India, Singapore Launch UPI-Paynow Linkage

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: UPI

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora ; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context:

- Recently, India's real-time retail payment system Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and its equivalent network in Singapore called PayNow, were integrated to enable faster remittances between the two countries at a competitive rate.
- Singapore has now become the **first country** with which cross-border Person to Person (P2P) payment facilities have been launched.

What is Unified Payments Interface (UPI)?

- It is India's mobile-based fast payment system.
- It facilitates customers to make round-the-clock payments instantly, using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA) created by the customer.
- It eliminates the risk of sharing bank account details by the remitter.

- UPI supports both Person-to-Person (P2P) and Person-to-Merchant (P2M) payments and it also enables a user to send or receive money.

What is PayNow?

- PayNow is a fast payment system in Singapore.
- It enables peer-to-peer funds transfer service, available to retail customers through participating banks and Non-Bank Financial Institutions (NFI) in Singapore.
- It allows users to send and receive instant funds from one bank or e-wallet account to another in Singapore by using just their mobile number, Singapore National Registration Identity Card (NRIC)/Foreign Identification Number (FIN), or VPA.



What is UPI-PayNow linkage?

- The UPI-PayNow linkage allows users of the UPI and PayNow payment systems to make instant, low-cost transfers between India and Singapore without having to use the other payment system.
- It is a significant development for cross-border payments between the two countries, as it will enable Indian students and visitors in Singapore to initiate instant and **low-cost transfers from Singapore to India using UPI**.
- Similarly, Singaporeans in India will be able to make instant payments and transfers back to Singapore using **PayNow**.
- The project was initiated in September 2021 to facilitate cross-border transactions related to **trade, travel, and remittances, and it aligns** with the G20's financial inclusion priorities of **driving faster, cheaper, and more transparent cross-border payments**.
- Cross-border retail payments can be **more expensive and less transparent than** domestic transactions due to factors such as exchange rate fluctuations, high fees, and longer processing times.
- The UPI-PayNow linkage is a significant development that aims to address these **challenges and provide faster, more efficient, and transparent cross-border transactions between India and Singapore**.

Recently, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) allowed Non-resident account types like NRE/NRO that have international mobile numbers allowed to transact with UPI. Transactions from mobile numbers of ten countries will be enabled to begin with — Singapore, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Oman, Qatar, the United States of America, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

Start Up, Scale Up

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: G20

Prepp Mains Booster: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Context:

- Recently, the **G20 countries** agreed to India's proposal to set up a new group, the **Startup20 Engagement Group**, which will focus on policy issues related to the **global startup ecosystem** and associated linkages.
- The new Group has transformed the G20 into an **ambidextrous organization** which has balanced the roles of large corporations and startups in driving the economy forward.

What is the Startup20 Engagement Group?

- Startup20** is an official engagement group, established under **India's Presidency of the G20 in 2023**.
- It was established as a dialogue forum for the stakeholders of the global startup ecosystem to raise the macroeconomic concerns and challenges faced by entrepreneurs with G20 leaders.
- It functions similarly to any other G20 engagement group, supported by the **G20 India Sherpa** and the Startup20 secretariat.
- Startup20** will work towards discussing and formulating recommendations to the G20 Presidency in each priority area through a consensus-based approach.



What is ambidexterity?

- Ambidexterity** is the ability to use both limbs to their best capabilities.
- In governance and business, ambidexterity refers to an organization's ability to achieve two seemingly incompatible goals of improving current performance standards while finding new opportunities for expansion despite limited resources.
- Ancient Greeks prized ambidexterity in their warriors and even included it in their **Boustrophedon** language, where the script is read alternately from right to left and left to right on alternate lines.
- India's epic, the Mahabharata also mentions ambidexterity through the term **Savyasachi** to describe Arjuna and his ability as an archer with both arms.

Theory of Ambidexterity in governance

- The formation of the **Startup20 group** has raised the theory of ambidexterity to the level of nations or the whole world.
- According to the theory:
 - Most problems faced today require a solution that varies from the solution paradigm in place today.

- Transitioning to new paradigms requires innovative solutions and sustainable scaling.
- The ideal route to solutions is to delegate innovation to startups and scaling to corporates.

Ambidexterity in Health

- The healthcare sector requires a solution paradigm that is much more **inclusive, efficient, and affordable** than the present model.
- According to Our World in Data, a website operated by Oxford University, 69.4% of the world has received at least one vaccine dosage while it was only 26.4% in low-income countries.
- Vaccination rates are not uniformly low for all low and middle-income countries. Countries like Burundi, Haiti, and Madagascar have vaccination rates of less than 10% of their population while Vietnam, Samoa and Bangladesh have rates in excess of 80%.
- India has a vaccination rate of over 70%, similar to the rates in smaller and wealthier European nations, which was achieved through innovation and scaling up.
- The data is similar in the case of treatment for other diseases, indicating the need for a reform of the health sector.
- During the pandemic, innovation in the health sector scaled up as the Covid vaccine was developed in a year compared to the ten-year period for other vaccines.
- Vaccine development was led worldwide by firms that followed the startup model regardless of the financial backing they enjoyed.
- Bharat BioTech developed Covaxin while Moderna, and Oxford University formulated other popular vaccines. Innovations were scaled up globally by innovators collaborating with large corporations like AstraZeneca.
- In this way, ambidexterity was leveraged successfully during the pandemic to produce effective and meaningful healthcare solutions.

Conclusion

- Similar developments have occurred in various sectors such as the communications sector where **startups** provided cutting-edge innovations while large corporations enabled their provision on a larger scale.
- Ambidexterity was evident as a market-led progression and can be used to similarly meet challenges such as global warming, and food and energy security which need innovation at scale.

G20

- The **G20**, also known as the **Group of Twenty**, is an intergovernmental organization made up of 19 nations and the European Union (EU), which has one of the largest economies in the world and accounts for about 90% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), 75-80% of its trade, two-thirds of its population, and roughly half of its land area.
- The **G20** was created in 1999 in response to various world economic crises and has gathered at least once a year since 2008.
- The head of state or government, the finance minister, the foreign minister, and other senior representatives attend the summits.
- There is no permanent secretariat or staff at the G20.
- Members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the EU.

Presidency

- All members, excluding the European Union, are assigned to one of five different groupings in order to determine the next President.
- When it is the group's turn, all nations within that group are eligible to assume the G20 Presidency.
- As a result, states within the relevant group engage in self-negotiation to choose the next G20 President.
- India's group consisted of India, Russia, Turkey and South Africa.
- The Theme of India's Presidency from December 2022 to November 2023 is **Vasudaiva Kutumbakam**.

iCET - A New Chapter In Defence And Tech



Priority: Medium

Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: iCET

Prepp Mains Booster: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Bilateral groupings and agreements involving India

Context:

- Recently, **India** and the **USA** inaugurated the **initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)** which could potentially transform the defence and technological cooperation between the two countries.
- The initiative centres around **six focus areas** and has set the target of converting intentions and ideas into deliverables.

What is the iCET?

- The **initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies or iCET** was developed and managed by the National Security Councils of the USA and India.
- The initiative has identified 6 major areas of cooperation:
 - Scientific research and development
 - Quantum computing
 - Space
 - Artificial intelligence
 - Advanced Telecommunications
 - Defense Innovation
- Strengthening innovation ecosystems and talent development between the two countries while developing synchronization between the academia and industry of the two nations are among the initiative's major goals.
- The transfer of technology and know-how through the lifting of export restrictions and increased cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries was expected to contribute to global stability.
- Cooperation between India and the USA has become all the more necessary given the risks to the global order as a consequence of the Ukraine crisis, Chinese aggression, terror and climate risks.

Initial phase of Indo-American co-operation

- The USA has been a significant partner in India's development and technological advancements since the 1950s although the scope of the cooperation was enhanced by the Cold War.
- During the initial period post Independence, the **Soviet Union** was India's major ally contributing to fields such as steel, heavy electricals, petroleum and mining.
- The USA however focussed on cooperation in the areas of agricultural innovation, science and technology, and engineering and management education.

- A significant area of cooperation was in the **nuclear sphere**, where the USA assisted India in building its first reactors that were to be used for power generation and research purposes while Indian nuclear scientists were trained in the USA
- The USA had provided large amounts of aid in order to develop engineering and management education which should have led to a prosperous industrial sector but the stalling of the Indian economy in the 1960s resulted in "brain drain".
- As a result of the immigration of qualified professionals, the US economy ended up gaining more than India did.
- American S&T helped initiate the **Green Revolution** which produced lasting effects across the country as a solution to the perennial problem of food shortages.



How were ties affected by non-proliferation?

- The **1971 War in Bangladesh** and the **nuclear tests of 1974** were a flashpoint in the relations between the two countries.
- This led to a thirty-year-long estrangement and a period of technological non-cooperation under the guise of non-proliferation.
- There was a brief respite in the frosty relations as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Gandhi-Reagan Science and Technology initiative led to the **1984 MoU on sensitive technologies, commodities and information** between the two countries.
- In 1987, the USA agreed to assist with **India's Light Combat Aircraft (Tejas)** Project and permitted the sale of the GE 404 engine.
- However the USA's insistence on non-proliferation limited further cooperation.

Present Stage of the India-US relationship

- In the aftermath of the **Soviet Union's collapse**, the US began to pressure countries to sign a **Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty** and agree to an unlimited extension of the **Non-proliferation Agreement**. As a result, India was sanctioned following the 1998 nuclear tests.
- At this time, the emergence of China as a major threat to the USA's superpower status forced the USA to agree to a compromise on nuclear proliferation.
- This formed the basis of the modern Indo-American partnership which was heralded by the signing of the **India-US nuclear deal of 2008**.
- Despite this growing proximity, the **Defense and Technology Trade Initiative** has fallen short of deliverables in technological development and co-production.

- India has steadily raised the level of cooperation with the USA and purchased billions of dollars-worth of weapons and systems.
- The relationship has progressed to that of a **Major Defense Partner** a designation that has served a greater purpose than the **Major Non-NATO Ally** status enjoyed by Pakistan.
- However, the evolution of the partnership has not always been smooth as evidenced by the CAATSA threat faced by India on account of its oil trade with Russia.

How does the iCET aim to develop Indo-US ties?

- The iCET initiative has set a number of goals that are politically and aspirationally important for India.
- The alignment between the two countries in strategic, scientific and commercial technology will contribute to global stability which would benefit both economies.
- Greater private-sector cooperation could lead to employment generation and attract new investment opportunities.
- The agreement offers an opportunity to reform the defense manufacturing sector in India and thereby reduce its dependence on exports.
- The iCET is best positioned to achieve Indo-US technological cooperation as India has now developed its technological and managerial capacities while emerging as a major economic power.

In A First, Indian Navy Submarine Docks In Indonesia

Priority: Medium



Primary Source: The Hindu

Prepp Prelims Booster: INS Sindhukesari

Prepp Mains Booster: India and its neighborhood- relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features

Context:

- Recently, **INS Sindhukesari**, a Kilo-class conventional submarine of the Indian Navy docked at **Jakarta, Indonesia** between 22nd and 24th February 2023.
- The visit was part of India's efforts to **expand military cooperation with South East Asian nations** in order to meet the goal of a **free and open Indo-Pacific**.

INS Sindhukesari

- **INS Sindhukesari** is a **Kilo-class diesel-electric submarine** of the Indian navy that weighs around 3000 tonnes.
- The vessel was built under a contract between Rosvooruzhenie, Russia, and the Indian Ministry of Defence as part of Project 877.
- It was inducted into the Indian Navy in 1989 and underwent an MRLC programme to enhance its lifecycle in 2018.
- The submarine was capable of a diving depth of 300 metres, a speed of 18 knots and a 45-day solo operating period with a 53-member crew.

Why has it docked in Jakarta?

- INS Sindhukesari has docked in Jakarta as part of India's increased cooperation with countries in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
- This was the first time ever that an Indian vessel had docked at the Indonesian port.
- The submarine which had been operationally deployed in the region travelled through the **Sunda Strait** before docking for its Operational Turnaround (OTR).
- The OTR in Jakarta, 2000 miles away from the vessel's home port of Vishakapatnam has extended the operational reach of the submarine arm of the Indian Navy to the **Malacca Strait**.

- Previously, Indian Navy vessels had docked at Sabang port in Indonesia for OTR.
- India has made efforts to improve its military coordination with the Indo-Pacific states to counter the **threat of increasing Chinese expansionism and aggressiveness in the South China Sea**.
- India has also signed **logistics support agreements** with other nations in order to enhance the reach and operability of its military assets when deployed on the high seas and other distant offshore regions.



How is the Strait of Malacca important?

- The **Strait of Malacca** which was about 800 Km in length connects the **Andaman Sea to the South China Sea**.
- It is bordered by Sumatra on the west and Malaysia and South Thailand on the east.
- As one of the longest straits in the world, it is a critical shipping route for the movement of goods, people, and cultures between the sub-continent and East Asia.
- The strait has been named after the ancient trading port of **Melaka** which was situated on the Malay coast.
- It serves as the **shortest route between the Middle East and East Asia** which has helped reduce the time and cost of transportation between Asia and Europe.
- The strait accounts for nearly **60% of the world's maritime trade** as well as being the major route of oil transported to Japan and China.

India's submarine fleet

- The Indian Navy possesses 17 conventional submarines, seven Russian Kilo-class, four German-origin HDW submarines and five French Scoepene class submarines.
- The HDW and Kilo submarines have been included in the **Medium Refit cum Life Certification (MRLC) programme** to increase their life.
- India had originally procured 10 Kilo-class submarines from Russia but **INS Sindhurakshak** was lost in an accident while **INS Sindhuvir** was transferred to Myanmar.
- **INS Sindhudhvaj** was decommissioned in July 2022 after 30 years of service and **INS Sindhukirti** was subjected to a Normal Refit procedure.
- The Navy's **INS Sindhuratna** had completed its MRLC in Russia but has been left stuck by the lack of transportation facilities due to the war in Ukraine.



India's Military exports

- In **2021-22**, India exported **₹13,000 crores worth of defence equipment**. However, this was still far from the **2025 export target of \$5 billion**.
- India has attempted to sell its military hardware recently with the **Philippines purchasing the Brahmos Supersonic cruise missile as part of a \$375 million deal** that also involved training Philippine military personnel
- Indonesia and Thailand are also negotiating a deal with the government for the Brahmos missile while Indonesia has also expressed an interest in the Indian Government's Light Combat Aircraft.
- India has exported arms and equipment such as personal protective items, defence electronics and engineering mechanical equipment, offshore patrol vessels, advanced light helicopters, avionics suits, and radio and radar systems to Italy, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Russia, France, Nepal, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Israel, Egypt, UAE, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, Poland, Spain and Chile through private defence establishments.
- However, India's defence exports have still remained below par. According to the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**, India was **23rd on the list of major arms exporters between 2015-2019** and **accounted for only 0.17% of global arms exports**.

Sunda Strait

- The Sunda Strait lies **between Java and Sumatra and links the Indian Ocean and the Java Sea**.
- It serves as a passage between the Indian Ocean and East Asia.
- The strait is **shallow and has strong tides, sandbanks and man-made obstructions** such as oil banks which make it unsuitable for the movement of large ships.
- As a result, most of the larger trade vessels use the Malacca Strait to reach East Asia.



Paris Club Likely To Provide Financial Assurances To Imf On Sri Lanka Debt: What Is This Grouping?

Priority: High

Primary Source: Indian Express

Prepp Prelims Booster: Paris Club

Prepp Mains Booster: Important International institutions, agencies, and fora- their structure, mandate; India and its neighborhood-relations.

Context:

- Recently, the Paris Club nations have agreed to provide financial assurances to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** regarding Sri Lanka's debt, according to sources cited by the news agency Reuters.
- This Financial aid (\$2.9 billion bailout package from the IMF) is aimed at helping the country recover from an economic crisis.
- The Paris Club countries aim is to find **sustainable debt-relief solutions** for countries that are unable to repay their bilateral loans.

What is the Paris Club?

- The Paris Club is an **informal group of official creditors** whose role is to find coordinated and sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries.
- It promotes itself as a forum where official creditors meet to **solve payment difficulties faced by debtor countries**.
- It gradually grew from 1956, when the first negotiation between Argentina and its public creditors took place in Paris.
- Most of the member countries are members of the group called **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**.
- **Members:** Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Since its founding, the Paris Club has reportedly signed 478 agreements with 102 different debtor countries, according to the information on its website.
- The debt that has been handled within the parameters of Paris Club agreements since 1956 totals \$ 614 billion.



Role

- It functions according to the **consensus and solidarity tenets**.
- All of the debtor country's Paris Club creditors will be covered by any arrangement negotiated with the debtor nation.
- After entering into an arrangement with its Paris Club creditors, a **debtor nation shall not accept from its bilateral and non-Paris Club commercial creditors debt treatment conditions that are**

less favorable to the debtor than those negotiated with the Paris Club.

- **Current Status:** In the previous century, the Paris Group nations dominated bilateral lending; however, in the recent 20 years or so, China has overtaken them as the largest bilateral lender in the world.

Srilanka

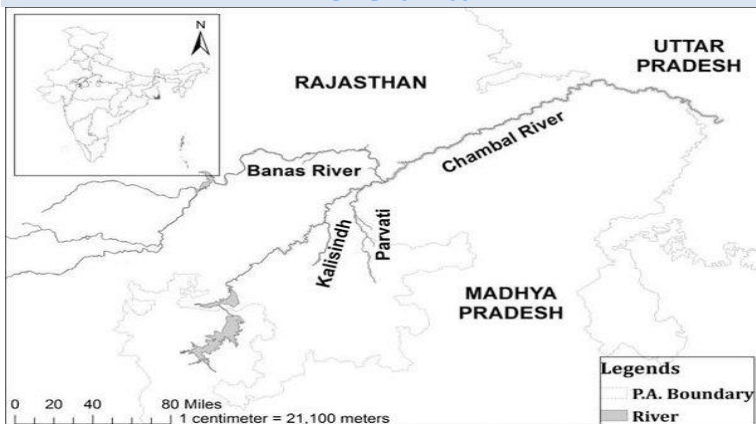
- For Sri Lanka, the three biggest bilateral creditors are **China, Japan, and India**. 52% of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt is owed to China, followed by 19.5 % to Japan, and 12 % to India. Sri Lanka required guarantees from China and India as well, especially with Japan being a member of the Paris Club.
- The Paris Club had attempted to bring both nations together for a coordinated effort, but **India began its own bilateral talks with Colombo**.
- When visiting Colombo last month, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that India has written to the IMF with the requisite financial pledges and expressed the hope that other countries would do the same.
- In light of this, the Paris Club's alleged readiness is noteworthy. The last remaining country is China, whose Exim Bank announced a two-year lending freeze shortly after the Indian announcement.
- This has been deemed to be insufficient. The US undersecretary of state Victoria Nuland, who is visiting Sri Lanka, said the Chinese offer was "not enough."
- **The Chinese promise has not been addressed by the IMF, but the IMF has praised the Indian response as a "positive development."**

PLACES IN NEWS

Mollem National Park

The latest "Checklist of Indian Amphibians (2023)," published by the Zoological Survey of India, lists three infrastructure projects that pose a threat to the Malabar tree toad, which was discovered in Mollem National Park. **Mollem National Park** is located in Sanguem taluk in Goa near to the border with Karnataka. It is home to several important temples dating back to the Kadambas of Goa, as well as waterfalls such as Dudhsagar Falls and Tambdi Falls. The parkland is also home to the Dhangar, a nomadic community of buffalo herders. It was designated a wildlife sanctuary in 1969 and renamed Bhagwan Mahaveer Sanctuary. Since then, the national park has been known as the Bhagwan Mahaveer Sanctuary and Mollem National Park.

River Chambal

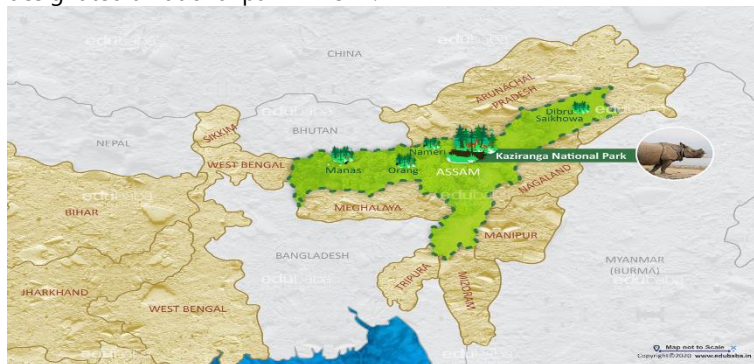


The state government of Madhya Pradesh recently asked the Supreme Court to halt the execution of the Eastern River Canal Project. The Eastern River Canal Project aims to collect extra water that is available during the rainy season in southern Rajasthan rivers like Chambal and its tributaries.

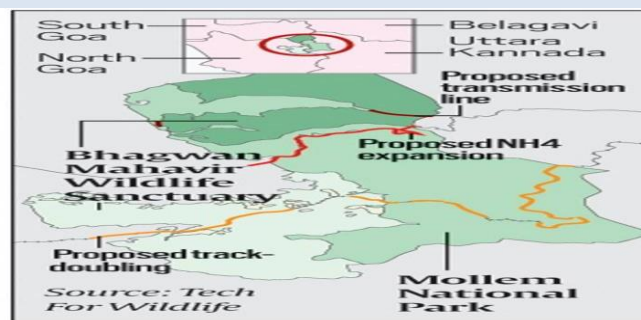
- **River Chambal:** The Chambal River is a tributary of the Yamuna River in Central and Northern India, and thus contributes to the Ganges drainage system.
- The river flows north-northeast through Madhya Pradesh, then through Rajasthan, forming the border between the two states before turning southeast to join the Yamuna in Uttar Pradesh.

Kaziranga National Park

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change recently requested a "factual report" on the rhino population enumeration conducted in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve in March 2022. Kaziranga National Park is located in Assam's Golaghat and Nagaon districts. It is the largest undisturbed and the most representative area in the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain. It was designated a national park in 1974.



Chenab River



Track laying on the Chenab railway bridge has recently begun. The Chenab Rail Bridge, also known as the Chenab Arch Bridge, is a concrete arch bridge being built over the Chenab River in Jammu and

Kashmir's Reasi district. The Chenab is the largest tributary of the Indus, flowing for over 1180 kilometres before entering Pakistan. Baralacha Pass is the starting point (Himachal Pradesh). It is produced by two streams, the Chandra and the Bhaga, which merge near Keylong in Himachal Pradesh at Tandi. It is sometimes referred to as Chandrabhaga.

Vaigai River

- Excavations in the Keeladi region since 2015 show that an urban civilisation existed in Tamil Nadu during the Sangam period. The Keeladi excavation site is a Sangam period settlement being excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department.
- The village is located on the banks of the Vaigai River. **The Vaigai** is a river in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu that flows through the towns of Theni, Dindigul, and Madurai.
- The Vaigai was a river that ran through Madurai, the capital of the ancient and prosperous Pandya kingdom in southern Tamil Nadu.
- The river is also mentioned in Sangam literature dating back to 300 BCE (BCE). The story of Vaigai is told in Thiruvilayadal Puranam.
- The river originates in the Varusanadu Hills and the Periyar Plateau of the Western Ghats range. The river eventually empties into the Palk Strait near the Pamban Bridge in Ramanathapuram district.



Bokang-Baling Hydroelectric Project

Residents of Pithoragarh district's Dharchula town recently protested the proposed Bokang-Baling Hydroelectric Project. The Bokang-Baling Hydroelectric Project is a proposed hydroelectric project on Dhauliganga in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district.



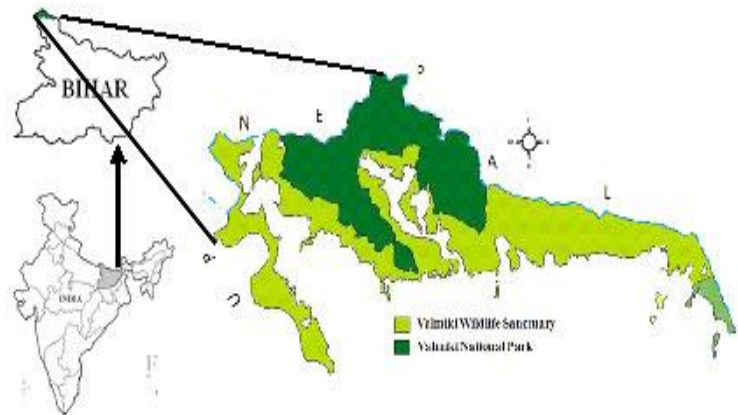
Rajgad Fort, Velhe Forest



A 14-month faunal survey revealed the presence of 496 unique species in Velhe Forest, located in the foothills of the Rajgad Fort. Rajgad Fort, also known as the Ruling Fort, served as the capital of the Maratha Empire for nearly 26 years under the rule of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj before being relocated to the Raigad Fort. It is a hill fort in Maharashtra's Pune district.

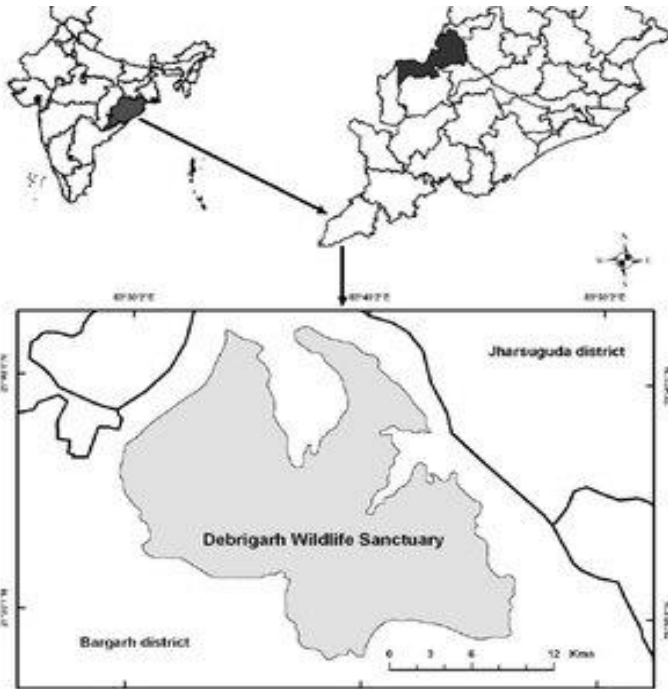
Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR)

Reason to be in news: The Bihar state government recently decided to increase rhino-bearing areas in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) in the West Champaran district by 5% over the next two years. Valmiki Tiger Reserve is the only tiger reserve in Bihar and is located in the country's Gangetic Plains bio-geographic zone. This Tiger Reserve's vegetation is a blend of Bhabar and Terai regions, and it is located in the Gangetic plains bio-geographic region.



Debrigarh Tiger Reserve

Reason to be in news: The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) recently approved Odisha's proposal to make Debrigarh a Tiger Reserve. **Debrigarh Tiger Reserve:** The Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary, located near the Hirakud dam in Sambalpur and covering an area of 347 square kilometres, is a popular tourist destination in western Odisha. After Similipal and Satkosia, it will be Odisha's third tiger reserve.



Gorakhpur Nuclear Power Plant

Reason to be in news: The government plans to build the first nuclear power plant in north India in Haryana. **Gorakhpur Nuclear Power Plants:** It is located in Gorakhpur village of Fatehabad district in Haryana, about 150 kilometres north of the national capital. **NPP Operating and Under Construction in India**

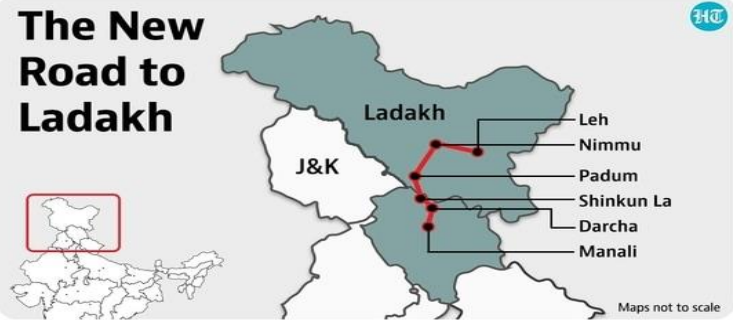


Shinku La tunnel

The Union Cabinet recently approved the construction of the Shinku La tunnel to provide all-weather connectivity to Ladakh's border areas. **Shinku La tunnel:** It will be built at an elevation of over 16,500 feet on the Nimu-Padam-Darcha road link on the border between Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. The tunnel will be 4.1 km long.

Pangong Tso

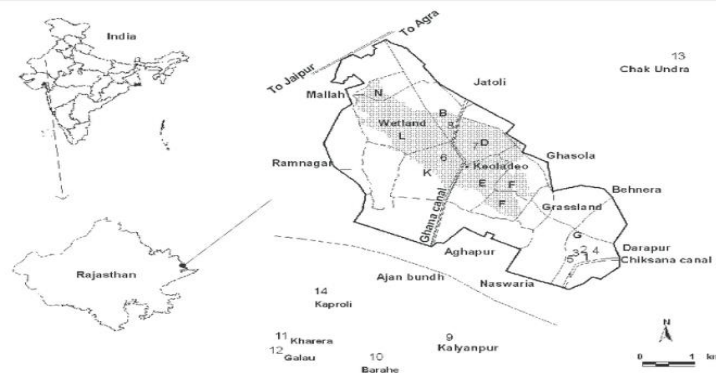
The New Road to Ladakh



Reason to be in news: The first frozen lake marathon in India was held in Ladakh's Pangong Tso. **Pangong Lake, also known as Pangong Tso,** is a long, narrow, endorheic (landlocked) lake in the Ladakh Himalayas. The lake is 5 kilometres wide and 134 kilometres long, with one-third of it in India and the other two-thirds in China. It is the world's highest saltwater lake.

Keoladeo National Park

- The Rajasthan state Forest Department recently proposed building a zoo within Keoladeo National Park.
- **The Keoladeo National Park,** formerly known as the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, is home to thousands of birds, particularly during the winter season.
- It is situated in the eastern part of Rajasthan.
- It attracts a variety of migratory birds that make the area their breeding and wintering grounds.
- It is strategically located in the middle of the Central Asian migratory flyway.
- The Siberian crane is a rare species that was spotted here until around the turn of the century.
- Sambar, Nilgai, wild cats, hyenas, wild boar, birds, including raptors and waterfowl, and jackals are among the fauna.
- It is a Ramsar site as well as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Deendayal Port



DP World recently announced that it has won a major contract to develop, operate, and maintain a mega-container terminal at Gujarat's Deendayal Port through a public-private partnership.

- **Deendayal Port (previously known as Kandla Port)** is located in Kandla Creek, 90 kilometres from the mouth of the Gulf of Kachch in Gujarat.
- It's a safe natural harbour.
- It is recognised as one of India's major ports.
- It was built in the 1950s as the main seaport serving western India following the partition of India from Pakistan, which left the port of Karachi in Pakistan.

Orang National Park

- A Royal Bengal tiger was recently discovered dead in Assam's Orang National Park due to age-related problems.
- **Orang National Park** is located in Assam on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River.
- It was designated a sanctuary in 1985 and a national park on April 13, 1999.
- It is also known as the "Mini Kaziranga National Park" (IUCN site) because the two parks share a similar landscape of marshes, streams, and grasslands and are home to the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros.
- It is also a Tiger Reserve in the country, having been designated in 2016.
- **Fauna:** Rhinoceros, Tiger, Elephants, Hog Deer, Wild Pig, Civet Cat, and One-Horned Rhinoceros are among the fauna.

Tungabhadra River

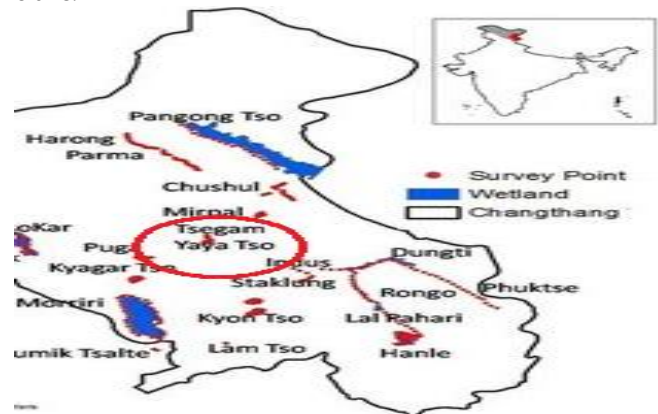


The Finance Minister recently announced a grant of 5300 crore for the Upper Bhadra Irrigation Project. It is a major lift irrigation scheme being implemented in Karnataka's central region. It intends to lift up to 17.40

TMC of water from the Tunga River to the existing Bhadra reservoir in the first stage. **The Tungabhadra River** is a sacred river in southern India that flows through the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Pampa was the river's ancient name. It is formed by the confluence of two rivers, the Tunga River and the Bhadra River. Both the Tunga and Bhadra rivers originate on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats. The Tungabhadra River flows eastward, joining the Krishna River before draining into the Bay of Bengal.

Yaya Tso Lake

- The Biological Diversity Act recently designated Yaya Tso Lake as Ladakh's first biodiversity heritage site.
- Lake Yaya Tso, located in Ladakh at an elevation of 4,820 metres, is known as a bird's paradise.
- It is a nesting site for many birds and animals, including the bar-headed goose, black-necked crane, and brahmny duck.
- It is also one of India's highest breeding sites for the black-necked crane.



Port of Haifa

- Adani Group recently paid USD 1.2 billion for the strategic Israeli port of Haifa.
- **About Haifa Port:** It is located in northern Israel, adjacent to the city of Haifa on the Mediterranean Sea.
- It is also on the busy Suez Canal shipping route.
- The Haifa port is one of Israel's two largest commercial ports.
- The British built the Port of Haifa in 1933. It has been rebuilt and developed by the Israeli government since 1948.



Turkey



A major earthquake struck Turkey and Syria, killing more than 3,800 people and flattening thousands of buildings as rescuers dug with bare hands for survivors.

- Turkey, also known as Turkiye, is situated in both Asia and Europe.
- It is bounded on three sides by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Aegean Sea.
- The Anatolian peninsula, also known as Asia Minor, is the westernmost part of the Turkish state.

The Andes Mountains

- The United Nations refugee agency recently reported that seven Haitian migrants died in Peru's Andean highlands as anti-government protests prevented them from crossing into Bolivia.
- **The Andes Mountains** are the world's longest above-water mountain range.
- The Andes Mountains, often known as Andean States, span seven countries: Argentina (Mount Aconcagua), Bolivia (Huayna Potosi), Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.
- It is approximately 5,500 miles (8,900 km) long and ranks second only to the Himalayas in average elevation.
- It is made up of a series of parallel and transverse mountain ranges, or cordilleras, with intervening plateaus and depressions.
- Mount Aconcagua in Argentina has the highest elevation in the Andes at 22,841 feet (6,962 m) above sea level.



Thwaites Glacier

Reason to be in news: Warm water is seeping into the weak spots of Antarctica's Thwaites Glacier, causing melting caused by rising temperatures, according to scientists studying it. **Thwaites glacier**, also known as the "Doomsday glacier," is a fast-moving glacier in West Antarctica. It encompasses an area roughly the size of the United Kingdom.

