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DAILY NEWS AND EDITORIAL ANALYSIS COMPILATION

March 2023



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31.03.2023

- Drugs for rare diseases get customs duty relief
- Issues with the Quality Control Orders for fibers
- Ahead of tribunal's launch, SOP for GST investigations
- Disinvestment facing many challenges
- GPT-4: the shift from 'what it can do' to 'what its augurs'

Drugs for rare diseases get customs duty relief

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Finance announced a full exemption from basic customs duty for drugs and food imported for personal use for the treatment of rare diseases.
- The ministry noted that this will result in substantial cost savings and provide much-needed relief to patients.
- The annual cost of treatment for some rare diseases may vary from ₹10 lakh to over ₹1 crore annually.
- The import duty waiver will come into effect from April 1.

Customs duty on drugs

- Basic customs duty of 10% is generally charged on medicines.
- In some categories of lifesaving drugs and vaccines, it is either a concessional 5% or zero.
- Exemptions were earlier provided to specified drugs for the treatment of spinal muscular atrophy.
- After the latest government notification, basic customs duty on all drugs and food for special medical purposes imported for personal use for the treatment of rare diseases will be exempted.
- The Centre has also fully exempted pembrolizumab (Keytruda), used in the treatment of various cancers, from basic customs duty.

Procedure for availing of exemption

- In a notification, the Union finance ministry said that individual importers need to produce certificates from the Central or State Director of Health Services or District Medical Officer/Civil Surgeon of the district to avail of the exemption for the diseases listed under the National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021.

Drugs that are currently under exemptions

- Exemptions have already been provided to specified drugs for the treatment of Spinal Muscular Atrophy.
- The government has been receiving many representations seeking customs duty relief for drugs and medicines used in treatment of other rare diseases.

Issues with the Quality Control Orders for fibres

Context

- The Quality Control Orders (QCO) have been issued for fibres which include cotton, polyester, and viscose.
- These fibres constitute the basic raw materials for majority of the Indian textile and clothing industry.
- While the standards were available earlier too, these are now revised and made mandatory for a few, and yet to be finalised for others.
- International manufacturers of these fibres, who supply to India, are also mandated to get a certificate from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), which is the certifying authority for the QCOs.

Why are fibres covered under QCOs

- The main aim of the QCO is to control import of sub-quality and cheaper items and to ensure that customers get quality products.
- The imports are for different reasons — cost competitiveness, non-availability in the domestic market, or to meet a specified demand of the overseas buyer.
- The entire supply chain, from the textile manufacturers to exporters, has so far focused on quality standards prescribed by the buyers.

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Challenges under new mandate

- India imports annually 50,000 - 60,000 tonnes of viscose fibre and its variants such as Modal and Tencel LF from nearly 20 countries.
- Getting the certificate from the BIS involves a cost and hence not all are interested in getting the certificate.
- Furthermore, BIS officials must visit the manufacturing unit abroad before issuing the certificate and this process is yet to be completed for all suppliers who have applied for the BIS registration.

What next

- The textile industry is of the view that import of speciality fibres that are used as blends with other fibres should be made available without restriction.
- The Quality Control Orders (QCO) should be implemented only after the ambiguities are cleared and the anomalies set right.
- Also, any overseas applicant for the BIS certificate should get it without delay after inspection.

Ahead of the tribunal's launch, SOP for GST investigations

Context

- Recently, The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council approved the creation of a national tribunal for the redressal of GST disputes.
- In further development to this the Revenue Department is in the process of finalising a standard operating procedure (SOP) for officers undertaking intelligence and investigation work.

Policy draft

- The GST Investigation wing of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), which deals with policy issues relating to enforcement actions such as search, seizure, prosecution, and arrest, is drafting the manual.
- It will include various SOPs and instructions for field formations to abide by, and will be published shortly.

Legal challenges

- Over the past couple of years, the number of legal challenges mounted by taxpayers in various courts have also been rising, in the absence of a dedicated GST Tribunal that were envisaged since the GST regime's launch in July 2017.
- In the recent time there will be sudden rush in filing of appeals once the tribunal is set up, and hence, a careful deliberation on investigation processes and the appellate bodies' functioning, will help all stakeholders.

Cases status

- Between April 2021 and November 2022, over 21,500 cases of GST evasion were booked by the revenue authorities, entailing an amount of almost ₹1.5 lakh crore.
- Of this, about ₹46,200 crore was released and over 470 people were arrested.

About GST Appellate Tribunal

- The GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) is the second appeal forum under GST.
- For any dissatisfactory order passed by the First Appellate Authorities, an application for revision of the same can be raised to the National Appellate Tribunal.
- Section (109) of the Goods and Service Tax Act, 2017 (CGST Act) mandates the constitution of a GSTAT and its Benches.
- The Tribunal is likely to be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.

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Disinvestment facing many challenges

Context

- In the Union Budget for 2023-24, the government has set a disinvestment target of ₹51,000 crore, down nearly 21% from the budget estimate for the current year and just ₹1,000 crore more than the revised estimate.
- It is also the lowest target in seven years.

Multiple challenges in privatising

- The Finance Ministry has acknowledged the multiple challenges it is facing in privatising public sector enterprises (PSEs):
 - COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted transactions in 2020 and 2021
 - Russia - Ukraine conflict since 2022
 - Multiple court cases filed by employees' unions and other interest groups against the disinvestment policy
 - Challenges to disinvestment through minority stake sale include reduced availability of government stake over 51% for large listed central PSEs

Use of ETFs

- Between 2016-17 and 2019-20, the government had raised almost ₹99,000 crore from Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF) with underlying shares of CPSEs.
- Disinvestment receipts so far this year amount to just ₹35,282 crore, against a Budget target of ₹65,000 crore and revised estimates of ₹50,000 crore.
- The privatisation of Central Electronics and Pawan Hans had to be scrapped after being announced, owing to legal concerns about the winning bidders.

GPT-4: shift from 'what it can do' to 'what it augurs'

Context

- A U.S. company, OpenAI, has once again sent shock waves around the world, this time with GPT-4, its latest AI model.
- This large language model can understand and produce language that is creative and meaningful, and will power an advanced version of the company's sensational chatbot, ChatGPT.
- Currently, GPT-4 is available to try by premium subscription or by getting on OpenAI's waitlist.

About GPT-4

- GPT-4 is a remarkable improvement over its predecessor, GPT-3.5, which first powered ChatGPT.
- GPT-4 is more conversational and creative.
- Its biggest innovation is that it can accept text and image input simultaneously, and consider both while drafting a reply.
- For example, if given an image of ingredients and asked the question, "What can we make from these?" GPT-4 gives a list of dish suggestions and recipes.
- The model can purportedly understand human emotions, such as humorous pictures.

What GPT-4 can do

- The GPT-4 can take into context up to 25,000 words, an improvement of more than 8x.
- GPT-4 was tested in several tests that were designed for humans and performed much better than average.
- GPT-4 also sailed through advanced courses in environmental science, statistics, art history, biology, and economics.
- However, GPT-4 failed to do well in advanced English language and literature, scoring 40% in both.

Ethical questions

- GPT-4 is still prone to a lot of its flaws its predecessor has.
- Its output may not always be factually correct a trait OpenAI has called "hallucination".
- GPT-4 has been trained on data scraped from the Internet that contains several harmful biases and stereotypes.
- There is also an assumption that a large dataset is also a diverse dataset and faithfully representative of the world at large.

What next

- In essence, GPT-4 is a machine that predicts the next word in an unfinished sentence, based on probabilities it learned as it trained on large corpuses of text.
- Research has maintained that GPT-4 does understand what it is saying, and that not all intelligence is a type of next-word prediction.
- More broadly, efforts are underway worldwide to build a model with a trillion degrees of freedom.
- The advent of large language models raises the question about building models that leave out society's concerns.

30.03.2023

- **No evictions for Great Nicobar project**
- **Defence Ministry inks deal for Project Akashtee**
- **SEBI to boost disclosure norms**
- **SMART PDS scheme: A bold initiative in digitisation**
- **India's DPIs, catching the next wave**

No evictions for Great Nicobar project

Context

- Recently, NITI Aayog has prepared a 75,000-crore project for the 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Islands in Andaman and Nicobar Islands'.
- Environmentalists and biodiversity experts have raised strong objections to this project of the NITI Aayog.
- Amid the ongoing controversy over the project, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has informed the Rajya Sabha, the government will not allow the displacement of tribespeople to make way for the Great Nicobar Island project.

Government stand

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs said that the utilisation of tribal reserve area will be subject to the interests of the local tribespeople living in the area, especially the Shompen tribe, which is classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- The government said the utilisation of the tribal reserve area will be subject to the following conditions:
 - The interests of the tribal population especially Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group are not affected adversely
 - Strict implementation of the provisions of Protection of Aborigine Tribe (PAT) Regulation to protect the interest of the Shompen
 - Displacement of tribals will not be allowed; and eco-tourism will be regulated in an effective manner.
 - Further, the government said that the Lieutenant-Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands had already constituted an Empowered Committee to obtain views and consultations on the impact of the project.

Diversity in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands are one of the global hotspots for rich biodiversity with almost 86 per cent area of these islands covered with lush green rain forests.
- This archipelago also has great historical and anthropological significance.
- These islands are home to some of the aboriginal tribes that are protected under India's 1956 Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation Act because of the vulnerability of their traditional culture.

Environmental concerns

- Environmentalists and biodiversity experts have warned that this project is likely to impact turtle and megapode nesting sites and coral reefs on the islands.
- The project, being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), includes a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a greenfield township.
- In November 2022, the project received Stage 1 clearance from the Union Environment and Forest Ministry to divert 130.75 sq. km. of forest land for the purpose.

Defence Ministry inks deal for Project Akashteer

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed a deal for the procurement of **Automated Air Defence Control and Reporting System 'Project Akashteer'** for the Army and **Sarang Electronic Support Measure (ESM) systems** for the Navy.
- The ministry signed three contracts worth ₹5,400 crore:
- Two contracts with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) worth ₹2,400 crore
- One contract with ₹2,963-crore contract is with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).
- NSIL is Central Public Sector Enterprise under the Department of Space, for an advanced communication satellite.

Project Akashteer

- The Automated Air Defence Control & Reporting System 'Project Akashteer' will empower the Air Defence units of the Indian Army with an indigenous, state-of-the-art capability, to effectively operate in an integrated manner.
- The Air Defence system will enable monitoring of low-level airspace over the battle areas of the Indian Army and effectively control the Ground Based Air Defence Weapon Systems.

Sarang systems

- Sarang is an advanced Electronic Support Measure system for helicopters of the Indian navy, designed and developed indigenously by the Defence Electronics Research Laboratory, Hyderabad under the programme Samudrika.
- According to the statement from MoD, both projects will encourage the participation of Indian Electronics and associated industries, including MSMEs, who are sub-vendors of BEL.

Advanced communication satellite

- The Advanced communication satellite will considerably enhance the communication capability of the Indian army by providing mission-critical beyond-the-line-of-sight communication to troops and formations as well as weapon and airborne platforms.
- The geostationary satellite, being a first-of-its-kind in the five-tonne category, will be developed indigenously by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

SEBI to boost disclosure norms

Context

- To ensure more transparency and timely disclosure of material events by listed entities, the Securities and Exchange Board of India has decided to amend norms whereby a quantitative threshold will be introduced for determining the materiality of events.
- SEBI has decided to do away with the practice of individuals having permanent seats on boards of listed companies.
- SEBI has also now allowed Private Equity (PE) firms to own stakes in Asset Management Companies (AMCs) that operate mutual funds.

Corporate governance

- To bolster corporate governance at listed entities, the Securities and Exchange Board of India said that periodic shareholders' approval will be required for any special right granted to a shareholder of a listed entity.
- Periodic shareholders' nod will also be needed for any director serving on the board of a listed entity "to do away with the practice of permanent board seats".
- The market regulator also said that listed entities will be required to fill up the vacancy of Directors, Compliance Officer, Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Financial Officer within a period of three months from the date of such vacancy to ensure that such critical positions are not kept vacant.

Strengthening grievance redressal mechanism

- In an effort to strengthen the investor grievance redressal mechanism in the securities market, Securities and Exchange Board of India has decided to operationalise the online dispute resolution mechanism for investors across registered intermediaries and regulated entities.
- The Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) system would be extended to MII (Market Infrastructure Intermediaries) administered conciliation and arbitration mechanism to registered intermediaries, regulated entities and their investors and clients.
- Besides, the proceedings would be conducted in a hybrid mode, the dispute resolution process will be streamlined and other measures will be adopted to strengthen the enforcement of awards.

SMART PDS scheme: A bold initiative in digitisation

Context

- The Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution urged all states and union territories to implement the SMART-PDS to ensure the smooth operation of the public distribution system.
- He said transparency should be of utmost importance for free supply chain of foodgrains under Public Distribution System.
- The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), governs the country's largest beneficiary-centric programme.
- The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) provides food security to 81.35 crore persons every month.

About SMART-PDS

- SMART-PDS is a system where smart ration cards are issued to beneficiaries of the public distribution system.
- The fingerprint template of the beneficiary is recorded in these smart ration cards, which records all transactions.
- The ration is given through fair price shops on production of the smart ration card by any member of the beneficiary family.

Data Analytics

- As the Centre has begun moving towards the implementation of the Scheme for Modernisation and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution System (SMART-PDS) to prevent leakage of foodgrains, a lot of data is being generated and stored every day by states/UTs.
- Data Analytics on the TPDS ecosystem will generate critical information about the beneficiaries, their food security needs and patterns of migration.
- The lack of credible and dynamic data on consumption and mobility patterns was always a big challenge.
- The SMART-PDS initiative will go a long way in addressing this deficit.

Technology-led reforms

- Technology-led reforms are expected to overcome the state-level technological limitations of PDS operations concerning IT hardware, software, and technical manpower.
- This will also institutionalize an integrated central system for all PDS-related operations across all states/UTs.
- Today, nearly 93 per cent of the total monthly allocated foodgrains are distributed through the Aadhaar authentication mode using electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices.

Integrated Management of Public Distribution System

- To sustain the reforms brought in by the End-to-end Computerisation of TPDS Operations scheme and address challenges, the government has launched **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System** (Central Sector Scheme).
- Its main objectives are:
- Implementation of One Nation One Ration Card (nation-wide portability)
- Creation of a national-level data repository for de-duplication of beneficiary/ration cards data
- Creation of integrated data infrastructure/systems across ration card management
- Allocation, supply chain of foodgrains and FPS automation among Centre and all states.

Way forward

- In order to ensure efficient and effective food security management systems across the country, the technological advancements will play a crucial role.
- The technology upgrade in Public Distribution System will ensure transparent in delivery system and reduce corruption.
- The scope of SMART PDS is clearly beyond just ration distribution.

India's DPIs, catching the next wave

Context

- Public infrastructure has been a cornerstone of human progress.
- In the twenty-first century, technological innovation has created a tempest of ideological, geographical and economic implications that pose new challenges.
- India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) is a marvel that is shaped in a unique partnership between governments (Union and States), regulators, the private sector, selfless volunteers, startups, and academia/think tanks.

Aadhaar and the private sector

- The rebirth of Aadhaar happened in 2014 and gave it a canvas far wider and bigger than what was originally envisaged and enabled it to become the rocket ship to launch good governance on.
- The judgment of the Supreme Court of India had affirmed privacy to be sacrosanct.
- Aadhaar holders can voluntarily use their Aadhaar for private sector purposes, and private sector entities need not seek special permission for such usage.
- Also, between government departments (intra- and inter-State) Aadhaar data can be shared, but with the prior informed consent of the citizen.
- Banks and other regulated entities can store Aadhaar numbers as long as they protect it using vault and other similar means, as in Unique Identification Authority of India security regulations.

DigiYatra and DigiLocker

- Digi Yatra uses a facial recognition system (FRS) to confirm the identity of the passengers while DigiLocker aims to provide a Digital wallet to every citizen so that all lifelong documents.
- The Digi Yatra pilots have shown that about two lakh passengers have utilised this successfully.
- DigiLocker today has 150 million users, six billion stored documents.

UPI's impact

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- It most preferred and the most used payment system in India that allows users to transfer money between bank accounts instantly using their mobile phones.
- In 2021, UPI processed around 39 billion transactions totalling \$940 billion, equivalent to 31% of India's GDP.

Way forward

- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has provided a solution to improve the lives of citizens' around the world by enabling digital inclusion.
- DPI has emerged as the most feasible model due to its low cost, interoperability, and scalable design.
- There is more to be tapped in the country's digital public infrastructure (DPI), which has paved the way for greater economic freedom for citizens.

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29.03.2023

- EPFO marginally hike interest on deposits
- India to host SCO-National Security Advisors meeting
- Prices of essential medicines set to see a hike
- IRDAI permits commissions for agents and brokers
- The need for sector-specific safeguards in 'techade'

EPFO marginally hike interest on deposits

Context

- The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has recently raised the interest rate on the provident fund deposits.
- The new rate will be at 8.15 per cent for FY23.
- In March 2022, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) had lowered the interest rate on EPF for 2021-22 to a four-decade low of 8.10 per cent for its subscribers, from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21.
- The interest rate would be officially notified in the government gazette after getting the customary approval from the Finance Ministry, following which EPFO would credit the rate of interest into its subscribers' accounts.

Objective of EPF

- The objective of EPF investments has always been to increase the wealth, but since EPFO is the custodian of people's wealth, the investment is done rather conservatively. The reserve fund has increased from last year.
- Hence, it was decided to raise the interest rate, though marginally.
- EPFO is expected to distribute Rs 90,000 crore this year to its members' accounts, on a total principal amount of Rs 11 trillion.
- The expected surplus this year is likely to be about Rs 660 crore.

Investment avenues of EPFO

- EPFO being one of the largest social security organisations.
- Over the years, the organisation has been able to distribute higher income to its members, through various economic cycles with minimal credit risk.
- Considering the credit profile of the EPFO investment, the interest rate of EPFO is higher than other comparable investment avenues available for subscribers.
- EPFO has consistently followed a prudent and balanced approach towards investment, putting the highest emphasis on safety and preservation of principal with an approach of caution and growth.

India to host SCO-National Security Advisors meeting

Context

- India, the current chair of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), is set to host a meeting of National Security Advisors (NSA) on March 29, 2023.
- Last year, India had assumed the SCO chair ship for 2023.
- Pakistan and China are likely to attend the SCO-NSA meeting virtually.
- The meeting is part of the preparatory meetings for the SCO summit that will be held in India this year.

About SCO

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 2001 and it comprises eight member states, namely, India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- SCO is a major regional powerhouse that aimed at promoting economic, political, and military cooperation among its member nations.
- The eight-member countries of SCO represent around 42% of the world's total population and 25% of the global GDP.
- India became a full member of SCO on June 9 in 2017.

Prices of essential medicines set to see a hike

Context

- Amid the sharp rise in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and increased prices of almost all essential medicine raw components, the prices of medicines are set to hike by 12 percent from April 1.
- According to reports, the prices of 384 essential drugs including painkillers, anti-infection drugs, cardiac drugs, antibiotics and over 1,000 formulations are set to witness a hike.

Burden for consumer

- The price surge of almost all essential medicine will mean that consumers have to pay more for routine and essential drugs, including painkillers, anti-infection drugs, cardiac drugs, and antibiotics.
- Annual hikes in the prices of drugs listed in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are based on the WPI.

NLEM list

- The National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) is a list released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The medicines listed in the NLEM are sold below a price ceiling fixed by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA).
- Last year, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) announced a 10.7% change in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).
- In India, it was framed on the lines of the Essential Medicines List (EML) released by the WHO.

About NPPA

- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) is a government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India.
- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) was constituted in 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers as an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- The NPPA regularly publishes lists of medicines and their maximum ceiling prices.

Irda permits commissions for agents and brokers

Context

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has asked insurance companies, including life and non-life, to fix an overall cap on commission payment to agents, brokers and other intermediaries, giving more flexibility to insurers in managing their expenses.
- The IRDAI (Payment of Commission) Regulations, 2023, notified on March 26, 2023 is expected to provide more flexibility in product innovation and insurance penetration.
- The IRDAI has removed the individual ceiling of commission to be paid by insurers for the sale of their products.
- The removal of the cap on commission payments will positively impact the insurance sector.

Advantages

- The removal of the cap on commission payments will facilitate greater product innovation, development of new product distribution models and lead to more customer-centric operations.
- It will also increase insurance penetration and provide flexibility to insurers in managing their expenses. Overall, it will smoothen adherence to compliance norms.

The need for sector-specific safeguards in 'techade'

Context

- India's digital economy is set to reach a milestone of \$1 trillion by 2026.
- The citizens of the country have witness digital change from shopping and socialising to education and government services.
- But, as we include digital convenience, we are also generating massive amounts of personal data.
- Understanding how this data is handled and protected is fast becoming critical.

Digital Personal Data Protection

- To ensure data protection for the citizen, the centre has recently proposed the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill 2022.
- The draft Bill sets out the rights and duties of the citizen (Digital Nagrik) and the obligations of the Data Fiduciary to use the collected data lawfully.
- Even the Bill outlines citizens' rights over their personal data and the responsibilities of data collectors, it lacks specificity in certain clauses such as the interaction with sectoral data protection regulations.

Sectoral regulation

- The current draft of the Bill tries to tackle the issue of conflicting sectoral regulations; in Section 29.
- It states that the provisions of the Bill will complement and not create exemptions from existing regulations, but in case of conflict, the Bill will take precedence.
- Sectoral expertise offers a deep understanding of a particular sector, including its market dynamics, technologies, risks and business models.
- It also enables regulators to engage with stakeholders and industry experts in a well-informed and productive manner.
- The first part allows the Bill to fill in any regulatory gaps, but the second part raises concerns about sectoral regulations that may go beyond what the Bill provides.

Global approaches

- The global community has adopted two major approaches to regulate privacy and protect data: comprehensive legislation and sector-specific regulations.
- The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) embodies the comprehensive approach, offering the strongest and most stringent framework to date. The sectoral approach in the United States, as seen through laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in health care.
- GDPR also permits EU Member States to implement measures which go beyond the provisions given in the GDPR.

Next Course of action for India

- In India, the sectoral regulations regarding data protection such as the Reserve Bank of India's directive on storage of payment data and the National Health Authority's Health Data Management Policy.
- These are the result of extensive industry consultations and expert input.
- Neglecting these regulations and establishing a new framework would undermine the considerable effort invested in their creation.
- Any deviation from existing regulations will further require the industry to readjust their operations again at considerable cost.
- The DPDP Bill, therefore, must serve as the minimum layer of protection, with sectoral regulators having the ability to build on these protections.

Bottom line

- Data protection is a complex subject and government must create room for sectoral experts to weigh in to safeguard the interests of citizens more effectively.
- This will ensure a safer, more secure, and dynamic digital landscape in the years to come.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill must serve as a basic layer of protection, with sectoral regulators having the ability to build on this.

28.03.2023

- **NCERT to develop new syllabus and textbooks**
- **India to use G20 platform to push rupees trade**
- **Heat action plans in India fail to identify vulnerable groups**
- **SEBI set to regulate index providers**
- **A shared G20 vision for the ocean commons**

NCERT to develop new syllabus and textbooks

Context

- According to the details and confirmation from the Ministry of Education, the government will introduce the new NCERT textbooks and syllabus.
- After nearly two decades, school students at all levels will learn from updated textbooks to be introduced in the academic year 2024-25.
- The decision in Synchronization with the National Education Policy, 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) released in August 2022.

Imparting multilingual education

- The new National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks will be developed in 22 languages, in consonance with the NEP 2020 perspective of imparting multilingual education.
- The NCERT had developed material to feed into the play-way teaching method: the magic box (jaadui pitaara) would be made available to every school in the form of open education resources.
- Private publishers, including the Oxford University Press (OUP), have already published “NEP 2020 and NCF 2022 aligned” books for preschool and Class 1 and 2.

Five-step learning process

- The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in its guidelines, has emphasised that students’ learning should be planned keeping in mind Indian roots and has proposed a five-step learning process for children at the preschool or foundational level.
 - Introduction of a topic
 - Conceptual understanding
 - Practice
 - Application
 - Expansion
- Through the NCF, the Ministry aims to help students develop their cognitive and critical thinking skills, which involve problem-solving in real-life situations.

School data

- As per Ministry of Education there are 14.8 lakh schools in India, 28,000 are Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), nearly 2,000 Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), and 345 International Baccalaureate (IB) schools.
- The rest are State Board schools.

Next courses of action

- Recently the Ministry of Education convened the National Steering Committee meeting to streamline the next steps under the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) agenda.
- Currently, the government has released the NCF for preschool to Class 2, for children aged between three and eight.
- The framework for other classes is yet to be rolled out.

India to use G20 platform to push rupees trade

Context

- As an incumbent chair of G20 India will use the G20 platform to further push the cross-border trade settlement in rupee with the member countries.
- India will be focusing on those countries that are facing problems with a particular currency or a basket of currencies, and are looking to come out of that crisis.
- India is holding the G20 Presidency from December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023.

Mechanism to settle international trade in rupees

- In July, 2022 the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had put in place a mechanism to settle international trade in rupees to promote the growth of global trade with emphasis on exports from India.
- The mechanism also aims to support the increasing interest of the global trading community in the rupee.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had approved domestic and foreign AD (Authorised Dealer) banks in 60 cases for the opening of Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVAs) of correspondent banks from 18 countries.
- **Note: A Vostro account is an account a correspondent bank holds on behalf of another bank.**
- The countries include Botswana, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, and the United Kingdom.

G20 Trade and Investment Working Group

- The G20 Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting will engage in deliberations to accelerate global trade and investments.
- Trade finance supports economic growth, and it is integral for maintaining international trade flows, for mitigating risks emerging from tight liquidity.
- Global trade finance involves a number of parties, including banks, trade finance companies, export credit agencies, insurers, importers and exporters.
- The G20 members represent around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population.

Heat action plans in India fail to identify vulnerable groups

Context

- According to the Study by Centre for Policy Research, the Action plans prepared by the state and city governments to address the grave challenges posed by heat waves are weak and inefficient as they lack structural support like funding and fail to protect the vulnerable communities.

About Heat action plans

- Heat action plans (HAPs) are the primary policy response to economically damaging and life-threatening heat waves.
- They prescribe several activities, disaster responses and post-heatwave response measures to reduce the impact of heat waves.

Review of heat action plans

- A review of 37 heat action plans in India shows most of them do not explicitly carry out vulnerability assessments, leaving the authorities with little data on where to direct their scarce resources.
- The Centre For Policy Research (CPR), which conducted the “first critical review” of heat action plans at the city (nine), district (13) and state (15) levels across 18 states, said it was unclear to what extent actions prescribed in the HAPs were being implemented.
- Though the exact number of HAPs in India is unknown, some estimates claim the existence of well over 100 HAPs nationwide.

Changing weather pattern

- According to the India Meteorological Department, India logged its hottest February in 2023 since record-keeping began in 1901.
- March 2022 was the warmest ever and the third driest in 121 years.
- The year also saw the country's third warmest April, eleventh warmest August and eighth warmest September since 1901.
- Studies show India is one of the most exposed and vulnerable countries to heat. Between 1951 and 2016.

Representative Concentration Pathway

- Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs) are used to understand how our climate may change in future.
- RCPs capture assumptions about the economic, social and physical changes to the environment that will influence climate change within a set of scenarios.
- The conditions of each scenario are used to model possible future climate evolution.
- The increased heat is already leading to more heat-related deaths, heat stress, unbearable working conditions and the wider spread of vector-borne diseases.

Other important findings

- By 2050, as many as 24 urban centres are projected to breach average summertime highs of at least 35 degrees Celsius, disproportionately impacting economically weaker sections.

- The International Labour Organisation estimates that working hours lost due to heat stress would increase to 5.8 per cent of working hours by 2030, or an equivalent of 34 million jobs.

SEBI set to regulate index providers

Context

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India has moved to regulate the practices of market index amid concerns about the safety of passive investors' savings parked in funds linked to indices that have added or retained several Adani group stocks, despite their meltdown following the release of the Hindenburg Research report.
- The Parliament has entrusted SEBI with protecting investor interests, so it must do whatever it takes to meet that mandate and is moving to regulate index providers.

Need for greater oversight

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India's upcoming meeting will discuss the need for greater oversight of currently unregulated index providers like NSE Indices (a National Stock Exchange subsidiary) and the Asia Index Pvt. Ltd. (a BSE joint venture with Dow Jones), citing their growing dominance due to the "proliferation" of index funds.
- A draft regulatory framework for index providers mooted by SEBI in December had raised concerns about possible conflicts of interest that could arise in their governance.

About SEBI

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is a statutory body established under the SEBI act of 1992.
- It was formed in response to prevent malpractices in the capital markets that were negatively impacting people's confidence in the market.
- Its primary objective is to protect the interest of the investors, prevent malpractices, and ensure the proper and fair functioning of the markets.

A shared G20 vision for the ocean commons

Context

- The oceans hold limitless opportunities for the prosperity of our planet.
- Most prosperous cities and countries are endowed with a coast.
- The G20 countries together account for around 45% of the world's coastlines and over 21% of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

Blue Economy

- The term 'blue economy' includes not only ocean-dependent economic development, but also inclusive social development and environmental and ecological security. Recognising the contribution of the ocean economy for sustainable development, the Prime Minister of India said, "To me, the blue chakra in India's flag represents the potential of the ocean economy."

Government Initiatives

- The Government of India has launched bold initiatives to promote the development of a blue economy.
- The **Sagarmala initiative** promotes port-led development.
- The **Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy** encourages domestic ship-building.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana** is actively engendering a 'blue revolution' through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector.
- The **Sagar Manthan dashboard** tracks vessels in real-time.
- The **Deep Ocean Mission** explores deep-sea resources in the **EEZ and continental shelf** as well as development of technology for harnessing them.

Coastal Regulation Zone

- India adopted the Coastal Regulation Zone notification to classify and better manage coastal regions and conserve ecologically sensitive coastal and marine areas including ecosystems.
- As the host of the World Environment Day in 2018, the prime minister of India gave a clarion call to eliminate single-use plastic.

Addressing plastic pollution

- In 2022, the global community rallied together for a multilateral treaty on addressing plastic pollution.
- In this regard, India introduced an amendment to the Plastic Waste Management Rules banning select single-use plastic items.
- India also introduced policies for extended producer responsibility in waste management in order to combat plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

India's G20 opportunity

- As the current chair to G20 Presidency, India's Blue economy roadmap is well articulated as a key priority area under the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group.
- The aim is to promote adoption of high-level principles that guide sustainable and equitable economic development through the ocean and its resources.

G20 forum and ocean-related Initiative

- Over the last decade, the G20 forum has discussed some specific ocean-related issues.
- These include:
 - G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter
 - Osaka Blue Ocean Vision
 - Coral Research and Development Accelerator Platform
- In 2022, holistic discussions on blue economy were initiated at the Ocean 20 launch in Bali.

Way Forward

- India's G20 presidency would play an important role in promoting individual and collective actions to facilitate the transition towards a sustainable blue economy.
- The G20 forum presents an excellent opportunity to build effective communication with all stakeholders to share best practices, foster collaborations for advancements in science and technology, promote public-private partnerships, and create novel blue finance mechanisms.
- The spirit of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' must unite the global community for the well-being of ocean commons.



27.03.2023

- Understanding IMF bailouts
- AUKUS focus is on submarine tech
- IMF chief warns risks to financial stability
- EPFO board of trustees to discuss interest rates and pension
- Making sense of the disqualification of a Lok Sabha MP

Understanding IMF bailouts

Context

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recently approved a \$3 billion bailout plan for Sri Lanka's struggling economy.
- IMF is also in negotiations with Pakistan for a \$1.1 billion bailout plan as the country faces a severe economic crisis marked by a falling currency and price rise.

Why do nations seek an IMF bailout

- Countries seek help from the IMF usually when their economies face a major macroeconomic risk, mostly in the form of a currency crisis.
- For instance, in the case of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, both countries have witnessed domestic prices rise rapidly and the exchange value of their currencies drop steeply against the U.S. dollar.
- Such currency crises are generally the result of gross mismanagement of the nation's currency by its central bank.
- A rapid, unpredictable fall in the value of a currency can destroy confidence in said currency and affect economic activity as people may turn hesitant to accept the currency in exchange for goods and services.

Lending via special drawing rights

- The IMF basically lends money, often in the form of special drawing rights (SDRs), to troubled economies that seek the lender's assistance.
- SDRs simply represent a basket of five currencies, namely the U.S. dollar, the euro, the Chinese yuan, the Japanese yen, and the British pound.
- The IMF carries out its lending to troubled economies through several lending programs such as the extended credit facility, the flexible credit line, the stand-by agreement, etc.
- Countries receiving the bailout can use the SDRs for various purposes depending on their individual circumstances.

About International Monetary Fund

- The IMF was set up in 1945 out of the Bretton Woods conference.
- The primary goal of the IMF back then was to bring about international economic coordination to prevent competing currency devaluation by countries trying to promote their own exports.
- Eventually, the IMF evolved to be a lender of last resort to governments of countries that had to deal with severe currency crises.

Prerequisite for IMF bailout

- The IMF usually imposes conditions on countries before it lends any money to them. For example, a country may have to agree to implement certain structural reforms as a condition to receive IMF loans.
- The IMF may demand a country affected by high price inflation to ensure the independence of its central bank.
- The IMF's conditional lending has been controversial as many believe that these reforms are too tough on the public.

AUKUS focus is on submarine tech

Context

- The leaders of AUKUS grouping have categorically noted that the primary focus of the AUKUS arrangement between Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. is submarine technology development.
- Making its stand clear it said that within AUKUS there is no room for a fourth country.

- the second pillar call for broader technology cooperation where there is room for cooperation with other countries, including India.

About AUKUS

- It is a trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS).
- The AUKUS partnership, unveiled in 2021.
- The military grouping designed to deter China, most noted for its cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines.

Two pillars of AUKUS partnership

- The AUKUS partnership, which focuses on transferring and jointly developing vital defence and emerging technologies, has two pillars.
- The first aims to transfer highly sensitive nuclear submarine technology from the US and UK to Australia.
- The other focuses on advanced capabilities like emerging defence technologies, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.
- The exploratory conversations have focused on India-AUKUS cooperation under Pillar 2.

Australia and SSN class nuclear attack submarines

- Recently, the three AUKUS partners announced their implementation plan to equip Australia with SSN class nuclear attack submarines.
- Under this, Australia will receive at least three second-hand SSNs from the U.S. in the 2030s as an interim measure, and five new SSNs to be designed and developed by the U.K. from the early 2040s to the late 2050s.

Quad summit 2023

- In May, Australia will host the Quad leaders' summit involving India, Australia, Japan and the U.S., where the recent implementation roadmap is expected to come up during discussions.
- On the possible conversation between the AUKUS and the Quad, diplomatic sources said the former has no implications for the latter.

India's SSN programme

- India has its own indigenous programme for the design and development of SSNs, which will give the Indian Navy unlimited endurance underwater.
- India is currently looking at procuring six advanced conventional submarines to arrest its depleting submarine strength, and also speeding up its SSN programme.

IMF chief warns risks to financial stability

Context

- Recently while addressing Press conference, the International Monetary Fund warned that the risks to financial stability have increased and stressed the "need for vigilance". This comes after the recent banking turmoil, however, she also noted that the decisive actions by advanced economies have calmed market stress.

World economy performance

- The IMF noted that the world economy would expand by just 3% in this year as rising borrowing costs, combined with the war in Ukraine and scarring from the Covid-19 pandemic, would suffocate growth.
- Global growth which is slowing down to below three per cent due to the aspects, despite the better outlook for the upcoming year will remain well below the historic average of 3.8 per cent.

IMF forecast

- The IMF in January estimated global growth would slow from an estimated 3.4 per cent last year to 2.9 per cent in 2023, then rise to 3.1 per cent in 2024.
- Even with a better outlook for 2024, global growth will remain below last decade's average of 3.8 per cent.
- The most positive development in the world economy this year was the expected strong economic rebound in China after it relaxed its strict Covid controls at the end of 2022.
- The IMF forecasts growth of 5.2 per cent in China in 2023 compared with 3 per cent a year earlier.
- IMF projects Indian economy to grow at 6.1% in 2023.

EPFO board of trustees to discuss interest rates and pension

Context

- The upcoming 233rd meeting of the Central Board of Trustees will discuss the gamut of issues which includes:
 - Interest rate for the financial year 2022-23
 - Higher pension option linked to actual salaries
 - Annual financial estimates for the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)
- This is the first CBT meeting where a status note on pension is expected to be discussed after the EPFO allowed a window till May 3 for the subscribers of the Employees' Pension Scheme to opt for the higher pension linked to actual salaries.

Interest rate

- In March 2022, the CBT had recommended a four-decade low interest rate of 8.1 per cent for over 6 crore active subscribers of the EPFO for the financial year 2021-22, leaving it with an estimated surplus of Rs 450 crore.
- In June 2022, the finance ministry had then ratified the interest rate.
- FY22 is the first financial year when the Centre's proposal to tax interest on higher contributions to the EPF will come into effect.
- The interest rate for FY23 is unlikely to go below 8 per cent level amid a rising interest rate scenario.
- Several subscribers had reported delays in crediting of interest rate for FY22.

Supreme Court direction on pension

- The upcoming 233rd meeting of the Central Board of Trustees will have detailed discussion on the higher pension issue following the directives of the Supreme Court.
- The Kerala High Court has also issued interim order saying those who are receiving higher PF pension over its verdict should not be affected by Supreme Court's verdict dated November 4, 2022.

Making sense of the disqualification of a Lok Sabha MP

Context

- Recently senior congress leader was disqualified as a Member of Parliament (MP) of the Lok Sabha following his conviction by a Gujarat court in a defamation case filed against him.
- The legal community is mystified by the harshness of the sentence, which is unprecedented in a defamation case.
- The issue will anyway be dealt with by the appellate courts.
- But the issues relating to the disqualification need to be examined carefully.

Representation of the People Act, 1951

- **Section 8** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act) specifies the various offences, conviction for which entail the disqualification of a member of the legislature. Clause (3) of this section says that a person convicted of any offence other than those mentioned in the other two clauses, and sentenced to not less than two years shall be disqualified from the date of conviction.
- However, clause (4) has exempted sitting members from instant disqualification for three months to enable them to appeal against the conviction.

Lily Thomas v. Union of India 2013

- The clause (4) of Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was struck down as ultra vires the Constitution by a two judge Bench of the Supreme Court on the ground that Parliament has no power to enact such an exemption for sitting members of the legislature (Lily Thomas vs Union of India, 2013).
- The effect of this judgment is that there is an instant disqualification of a sitting legislator as soon as he is convicted. However, the Court made it clear that in the event of the appellate Court staying the conviction and sentence, the disqualification will be lifted and the membership will be restored to him.

The role of the President

- Section 8(3) of the RP Act which provides for disqualification on conviction has been subjected to judicial interpretation in a number of cases.
- But a closer reading will reveal that the words "shall be disqualified" used therein cannot mean instant disqualification.
- Article 103 shows that the President of India is that authority who decides that a sitting member has become subject to disqualification in all cases which come under Article 102(1).

- Sub Clause (e) of this Article relates to all cases of disqualification under the RP Act 1951 which include disqualification on conviction and sentence under Section 8(3) of the Act.
- In cases where adjudication is not required, the President can simply declare that the sitting Member has become subject to disqualification.

An issue to reflect on

- The law on criminal defamation needs an urgent review.
- Many countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have scrapped it. India's neighbor Sri Lanka too has done away with it.
- In 1965, the Supreme Court had drawn the attention of the judicial system to the need for a liberal approach to rhetorical, hyperbolic or metaphoric words used by politicians in election speeches.

Way forward

- India possess a multi-party democracy, every political party is a potential ruling party. So, every political leader is exposed to the danger of being hauled up for defamation and put out of the electoral process for long years.
- The law on criminal defamation needs review as every elected political person faces the danger of being put out of the electoral process for years.

25.03.2023

- ICMR releases ethical guidelines for AI usage in healthcare
- Centre forms panel to relook at pension system
- India signs pact with Cambodia on tiger translocation
- Second G20 Framework Working Group meeting
- A chilling remark and the 'price to pay'

ICMR releases ethical guidelines for AI usage in healthcare

Context

- Recently, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) issued a country first ever guiding document- "The Ethical Guidelines for Application of AI in Biomedical Research and Health care".
- The document, prepared by the Department of Health Research and the ICMR Artificial Intelligence Cell, Delhi, will be updated as and when the need arises.
- The document notes that the regulation of AI technologies in healthcare is still in its nascent stage even in developed countries.

Key patient-centric ethical principles

- The guideline by the ICMR outlined 10 key patient-centric ethical principles for AI application in the health sector for all stakeholders involved.
- These include:
 - Accountability and liability
 - Autonomy
 - Data privacy
 - Collaboration
 - Risk minimisation and safety
 - Accessibility and equity
 - Optimisation of data quality
 - Non-discrimination and fairness
 - Validity
 - Trustworthiness

Applications of AI in healthcare

- Some of the recognized applications of AI in healthcare are in the areas of: Surgery-assisting robots
 - Diagnosis
 - Finding new links between genetic codes
 - Medical imaging

- Therapeutics
- Clinical decision-making
- Public health surveillance
- Data analysis
- Prediction of pandemics
- Health management systems

Advantages

- The guideline documents will make AI-assisted platforms available for the benefit of the largest section of common people with safety and highest precision possible.
- It will also address emerging ethical challenges when it comes to Artificial Intelligence in biomedical research and healthcare delivery.
- It aims at creating an ethics framework for development, deployment, and adoption of solutions in AI space.

Centre forms panel to relook at pension system

Context

- The finance minister recently announced the formation of a committee to look into improving the system of pension for government employees and evolve an approach to address the need of employees while maintaining fiscal prudence.
- The decision comes in the backdrop of after several states in india has adopted the Old Pension Scheme.

States that revert to OPS

- The state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have informed the Centre about their decision to revert to the Old Pension Scheme and have requested a refund of corpus accumulated under the NPS.
- Under the OPS, retired government employees received 50 per cent of their last drawn salary as monthly pensions.
- The amount keeps increasing with hike in the DA rates.

About the committee

- The committee, which will be headed by Finance Secretary T V Somanathan, will work on an approach that will strike a balance between employees' needs and fiscal prudence, with any changes proposed to be adopted by both Central and state governments.

About National Pension Scheme

- NPS has been implemented for all government employees except those in armed forces joining central government on or after 1st of January 2004.
- Most of the state/ Union Territory governments have also notified the NPS for their new employees.
- According to the PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority), 26 state governments, with the exception of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, have notified and implemented NPS for their employees.
- NPS has been made available to every Indian citizen from May 1, 2009 on a voluntary basis.

India signs pact with Cambodia on tiger translocation

Context

- Recently, India signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with Cambodia, which is seeking our support for tiger reintroduction.
- The country has lost all its tigers due to poaching, habitat loss and other issues.
- India is considering sending tigers to Cambodia to help it reintroduce the big cat to its forests.
- India recently signed a pact with Cambodia for the world's first transnational tiger reintroduction programme in 2022.

Ground reality

- According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), conservationists in Cambodia declared tigers "functionally extinct" in 2016.
- Cambodia's last tiger was seen on a camera trap in the eastern province of Mondulkiri in 2007.

- In September 2017, the Cambodian government announced plans to reintroduce tigers in the country with the help of the WWF.
- Both India and Cambodia would follow all protocols of the International Union for Conservation of Nature for the tiger reintroduction programme.

Tiger reserves in India

- At present, India has 53 tiger reserves covering more than 75,000 sq km (approximately 2.4 per cent of the country's geographical area).
- With a population of about 3,000 tigers, India is home to more than 70 per cent of the global wild tiger population and their number is increasing at six per cent per annum.
- Countries with tiger populations – India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

50th year of 'Project Tiger'

- 'Project Tiger', which began in 1973 at the Corbett national park, completes 50 years on April 1 this year.
- The last tiger spotted on a camera trap in Cambodia was in 2007.
- India, following the success of the first-of-its-kind transcontinental translocation of the African Cheetahs last September, signed a memorandum of understanding with Cambodia in November to assist it with "all technical details and knowledge" regarding the reintroduction of tiger in the country.

Second G20 Framework Working Group meeting

Context

- In the recent Second G20 Framework Working Group meeting, most G20 countries see inflation as being sticky and easing more slowly than they would like.
- Participants do not envisage current banking turmoil leading to a systemic crisis; prefer to tackle financial stability risks separately, do not view them as a constraint to rate increases
- Most member countries are also of the view that financial stability risks can be handled separately and need not constrain further interest rate increases if required.

Current banking situation

- On the current banking turmoil in the western world, India CEA said the prevailing sentiment expressed by members was that it need not lead to a systemic crisis and that policy makers have things under control and are responding to developments as warranted.

A chilling remark and the 'price to pay'

Context

- On various occasions the tussle between Judiciary and executive is clearly evident.
- In a recent statement, India's Union Law Minister describes retired judges in a rather harsh manner, it is something that cannot be taken lightly.
- For the Minister to label retired judges who question "state policies" as being "anti-India" elements is not just a case of a flawed understanding of concepts but also a matter of grave concern for citizens.
- To a larger extent, minister's assumption that certain judges are working against India and "will have to pay the price," was not only intimidatory in its tone but also portends grave danger for the future.

A right to free speech

- Judges who demit judicial office do not cease to be citizens of this country.
- They have possess the fundamental rights as per the constitution.
- They have a right to free speech and expression and a duty to speak up when they find the legislature, the executive or even the judiciary to be transgressing their limits.
- The act of questioning the state is not a case of being "anti-national".
- It is a case of being a "concerned patriot".
- In turn, the response of the state has to be to either justify the measures it has adopted, or take the advice offered and course correct.

Indispensable freedoms

- In her address to the Supreme Court of India in November 2022, the President of India, raised the issue of the plight of undertrials in the prisons of India, despite getting bail. The President narrated her experience of meeting undertrial prisoners when she was a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Odisha, and later as the Governor of Jharkhand. It was a speech that moved the Court, which directed jail authorities to submit the details of such prisoners to the State governments concerned which in turn were to forward the documents to the National Legal Services Authority within 15 days.
- Had the President kept quiet, for fear that she may have to “pay the price”, things would never have moved.

Looking ahead

- At this juncture when India is celebrating, 75 year of Independence and Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the strong coordination between executive and Judiciary in must.
- Supreme Court is not only the Guardian of the Constitution but also thrust of millions of citizen in the country.

24.03.2023

- **India's push for semiconductors**
- **GST appellate tribunal may be headed by a former SC judge**
- **India rejects J&J's attempt to extend the patent on TB drug**
- **India's Roadmap to eliminate TB by 2025**
- **A climate change survival guide to act on**

India's push for semiconductors

Context

- To Make India self-reliance and boost the production of electronics manufacturers, the Centre has disbursed around ₹1,645 crores in performance-linked incentives (PLI) for electronics manufacturers.
- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes are a cornerstone of the Government's push for accomplishing the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Why government is encouraging semiconductor manufacturing

- Semiconductor fabrication units or fabs, to turn raw elements such as silicon into integrated circuits that are fit to be a part of practically all electronic hardware in the world.
- Fabs are highly capital-intensive undertakings, costing billions of dollars for large facilities.
- According to a report by the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA).
- China pulled ahead of Taiwan last year, in terms of share of global sales from fabs.
- It's not just India that is wary of this dominance.
- The U.S. passed the CHIPS Act last August, providing upwards of \$280 billion in subsidies and investments to manufacturers opening fabs and making semiconductors in the U.S.
- This has been combined with restrictions on the Chinese semiconductor industry.

Are fabs opening in India

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that the first semiconductor manufacturing Semiconductor fabrication units or fabs would be announced in the coming weeks.
- The government's Invest India agency estimates that electronics manufacturing as a whole will be worth \$300 billion by the financial year 2025-26.
- While facilities for assembling finished products have been steadily growing in number, Semiconductor fabrication units, or fabs for making chipsets and displays, which are crucial parts of the manufacturing process for many electronics, are rarer.

Advantages for India

- A large part of semiconductor manufacturing involves the design and intellectual labour.
- India possess a large portion of semiconductor design engineers globally is either Indian or Indian origin.
- This is an advantage as China is losing control in the face of sanctions and ageing population.

Enabling programs

- The opening of display and Semiconductor fabrication units, or fabs is one of strategic and economic goals of India's electronics manufacturing incentive programmes.
- The government appears to be developing the parts of the ecosystem that have promise for sustainable growth and fiscal feasibility.

GST appellate tribunal may be headed by a former SC judge

Context

- Recently, the GST Council in its 49th meeting assented to the Group of Ministers (GoM) recommendations on the long pending constitution of the GST Appellate Tribunal in the country with some modifications.
- The GoM on Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunals (GSTATs) was set up in July last year under the chairmanship of the Haryana deputy chief minister.

About GST Appellate Tribunal

- The GST Appellate Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body proposed to be established to resolve disputes related to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India.
- Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal is the form of the second appeal in GST laws and the first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and States.
- As per the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, the GST Appellate Tribunal holds the same powers as the court and is deemed Civil Court for trying a case.

Composition of Tribunal

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Appellate Tribunal is likely to be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court and its framework may permit the resolution of disputes involving dues or fines of less than ₹50 lakhs by a single-member bench.
- Amendments to the GST laws to enable the tribunal's constitution, are expected to be introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Bench of the Tribunal

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Appellate Tribunal will be one principal bench of the Appellate Tribunal in New Delhi and several State benches.
- Tax experts said the delay in setting up the Appellate Tribunal has led to a pile-up of unresolved legal matters over the tax.

Advantages of the Tribunal

- The Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) is expected to help resolve these matters faster.
- The establishment of tribunal is expected to bring relief to businesses that have long awaited a quick and efficient process for resolving GST disputes.

India rejects J&J's attempt to extend the patent on TB drug

Context

- Recently, the Indian Patent Office rejected US pharmaceutical firm Johnson & Johnson's (J&J) attempt to extend its monopoly in India on the TB drug bedaquiline beyond the primary patent's expiry this July.
- J&J currently has a monopoly through its primary patent on the bedaquiline compound that will expire in July 2023.
- Section 3(d) of the Patents Act states that salt forms and derivatives of known substances are not patentable.

About Bedaquiline

- Bedaquiline fumarate is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use as part of a combination therapy in adults with pulmonary multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB).
- Currently, Bedaquiline tablets are priced at \$400 per six-month treatment course.

Merits of decision

- The ruling by Indian Patent Office paved the way for the entry of generic versions of the tuberculosis (TB) drug that are likely to be 80% cheaper for a six-month course for patients suffering from drug-resistant TB.
- Since 2020, bedaquiline has become the backbone for all drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) regimens.

Evergreening attempts

- Since 2007, J&J had indulged in 'evergreening' – a strategy to extend the life of patents about to expire in order to retain revenues from them by making multiple claims in its applications for patent extensions.
- When the firm filed for evergreening of its patent on fumarate salt (a formulation salt of Bedaquiline), the practice was challenged by TB survivors and other stakeholders.

Access of Drug

- According to the latest available estimates, in 2019, over 55,000 patients who had developed multi-drug resistant TB could have benefited from access to Bedaquiline.
- As of March 2020, only a little over 10,000 of these patients had accessed the drug.

India's Roadmap to eliminate TB by 2025

Context

- In 2018, the Prime Minister of India had envisioned ending TB in India by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 2030.
- India set the target of eliminating tuberculosis by 2025, five years ahead of the global target.

TB cases in India

- India continues to be the largest contributor to global TB cases.
- But in recent years there has been a decline in the number of cases in 2021.
- There were 21.3 lakh cases detected in 2021 as compared to 18.05 lakh cases in 2020.
- According to the Global TB Report 2022, India accounts for 28% of all TB cases in the world.
- The incidence of TB – new cases detected throughout the year reduced by 18% in 2021 over the 2015 baseline, dropping to 210 cases per lakh population as compared to 256 cases per lakh population.
- The incidence of drug-resistant TB also went down by 20% during the period from 1.49 lakh cases in 2015 to 1.19 lakh cases in 2021.

TB elimination target

- Although the elimination of Tuberculosis is one of the sustainable development targets to be achieved by 2030 by the world, India has set a target of 2025.
- The national strategic plan 2017-2025 sets the target of India reporting no more than 44 new TB cases or 65 total cases per lakh population by 2025.
- Achieving this target is a big task as the plan had envisaged an incidence of only 77 cases per lakh population by 2023.
- The goals are in line with the World Health Organization's End TB strategy that calls for 80% reduction in the number of new cases, 90% reduction in mortality, and zero catastrophic cost by 2030.

Measures and Initiatives by India

- To achieve the TB elimination target of 2025, the government has taken several steps including looking for cases actively among vulnerable and co-morbid populations, screening for it at the health and wellness centers, and calling on the private sector to notify all TB cases.
- An online Ni-kshay portal has been set up to track the notified TB cases.
- At present, there are 4,760 molecular diagnostic machines available, covering all districts of the country.
- In addition, 79-line probe assay laboratories and 96 liquid culture testing laboratories have been set up for the diagnosis of multi and extremely drug-resistant TB.

Status of treatment protocols

- Newer drugs such as Bedaquiline and Delamanid for the treatment of drug resistant TB have been included in the government's basket of drugs provided free TB patients. These oral drugs can replace the injectable kanamycin that was associated with serious side effects like kidney problems and deafness.
- These new drugs have also been included in the new National List of Essential Medicines that gives the government power to regulate their market price as well.
- For a newer version of the Drug, trials are underway to test the effectiveness of a vaccine called Immuvac, which was initially developed to prevent leprosy, in preventing TB.

- The vaccine developed using mycobacterium indicus pranii has antigens – the portions of a pathogen against which antibodies are developed like those of leprosy and TB bacteria.

A climate change survival guide to act on

Context

- Recently the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the synthesis report of its Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) cycle, drawing together key findings from its six most recent reports.
- The United Nations Secretary-General has called it a 'survival guide for humanity'.
- The report can shape our collective response in this critical decade, which may be make-or-break for humanity, and is likely to be the last IPCC report for a few years.

Some takeaways

- **Human activity:** The report confirms that human activity is ‘unequivocally’ driving global temperature rise, which has reached approximately 1.1° C above pre-industrial levels.
- While the rate of emissions growth has slowed in the past decade, humanity is estimated to be on a 2.8° C (2.1°-3.4° C range) trajectory by 2100.
- **Carbon budget:** The amount of carbon that the world can cumulatively emit before reaching key temperature limits, i.e., the world’s ‘carbon budget’, is far lower for the 1.5° C than the 2° C target.
- The IPCC report points out that humanity had already consumed 4/5ths of its total carbon budget for 1.5° C by 2019, with developed economies consuming the maximum share.
- **CO2 emissions:** The report notes that the projected CO2 emissions over the lifetime of existing fossil fuel infrastructure without additional abatement already exceed the remaining carbon budget for 1.5° C.

Need for climate adaptation

- The Sixth Assessment Report called for recognition of greater risks at lower temperatures points to the necessity of early climate adaptation.
- The report highlights that adaptation itself has limits, which implies that some losses and damages of climate change are inevitable.
- It reports noted that at higher levels of warming, climate change could lead to cascading risks such as food insecurity and migration, which are intensely challenging to manage.
- The report calls for developmental model that integrates both adaptation and mitigation to advance sustainable development for all.

Sustainable technologies

- The Sixth Assessment Report assesses the plethora of technologies and design options, such as solar energy or electric vehicles which can help countries reduce emissions.
- The report strikes a particularly upbeat note on the co-benefits of climate action for air quality.
- A cost-benefit analysis suggests that the air quality and health benefits of mitigation outweigh its costs.
- Prioritizing and addressing equity and social justice in transition processes are shown to be key to climate-resilient development.

Way forward

- The climate-resilient development pathway is the journey, the destination is net zero emissions at the global level.
- Amid the current situation, high upfront investments in clean infrastructure are imperative.
- The IPCC AR6 synthesis report is a landmark as it offers a blueprint for sustainable development, while presenting a sobering account of present and future damages to ecosystems and the most vulnerable amongst us.

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23.03.2023

- Centre attempt to open corridor to Sharda Peeth in PoK
- High Seas Treaty: Key provisions and challenges
- PM Holds High-Level Review Meeting On Covid
- SC to hear petitions seeking to criminalise marital rape
- The old pension scheme as a burden on the poor

Centre attempt to open corridor to Sharda Peeth in PoK

Context

- Recently the union Home minister said the government would move forward to open a corridor to the Sharda Peeth in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) on the lines of the Kartarpur corridor.
- The corridor links two important Sikh shrines:
 - Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district of Punjab
 - Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, Pakistan
- Both sites allow pilgrims to travel visa-free.

About Sharda peeth

- The Sharda Peeth is an abandoned holy site for the Hindu community.
- It is located in the Neelum Valley in PoK across Teetwal village along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The shrine was once regarded as a major centre of higher learning of Vedic works, scriptures and commentaries.
- The temple has been completely deserted since Partition in 1947.

Significance

- The reconstruction of Maa Sharda's temple in Kupwara is a necessary and important step in the direction of the discovery of Sharda-civilisation and promotion of Sharda-script.
- Sharda script is the original script of Kashmir.

Restoration work

- The Centre has planned a systematic restoration and repair work was going on at 123 places, including many temples and Sufi places.
- In the first phase, 35 places were being renovated at the cost of ₹65 crore.
- The government also organised 31 mega cultural programmes were organised by identifying 75 religious places and Sufi shrines.

High Seas Treaty: Key provisions and challenges

Context

- In a breakthrough, for the first time, United Nations (UN) members have agreed on a manage conservation through a draft international agreement referred to as the UN High Seas Treaty
- The High Seas Treaty will work as an implementation agreement under the UNCLOS, much like the Paris Agreement works under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Key provisions of Treaty

- The High Seas Treaty has four main objectives:
 - Demarcation of marine protected areas (MPAs), rather like there are protected forests or wildlife areas
 - Sustainable use of marine genetic resources and equitable sharing of benefits arising from them
 - Initiation of the practice of environmental impact assessments for all major activities in the oceans
 - Capacity building and technology transfer

Legally binding

- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas is a legally binding agreement to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of ocean biodiversity.
- The treaty calls for the Comprehensive protection of endangered species and habitats is now finally possible on more than 40% of the Earth's surface.
- The treaty also establishes ground rules for conducting environmental impact assessments for ocean commercial activities.

New body for managing conservation

- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity on the high seas will create a new body to manage the conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas on the high seas.
- It is critical to achieving the UN Biodiversity Conference's pledge to protect 30% of the planet's waters and its land for conservation.

What are high seas

- The high seas are defined by international law as all parts of the ocean that aren't included in the exclusive economic zone, the territorial sea, the internal waters of a country, or in the archipelagic waters of an archipelagic country. This means that the high seas and associated resources are not directly owned or regulated by any country.
- The high seas comprise 64 per cent of the ocean surface, and about 43 per cent of the Earth.
- These areas are home to about 2.2 million marine species and up to a trillion different kinds of microorganisms.

How vital is High Seas Treaty for marine life

- The key measure is put the world's international waters into protected areas (MPAs) - which will help achieve the global goal of protecting 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, which was agreed at the 2022 UN biodiversity conference.
- This could mean limiting fishing activities, shipping routes and exploration activities like deep-sea mining.
- Environmental groups are seriously concerned about the possible effects of mining, such as disturbing sediments, creating noise pollution and damaging breeding grounds.








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PM Holds High-Level Review Meeting On Covid

Context

- Amid rising Covid cases in the country, a high-level meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, came against the backdrop of a spike in influenza as well as Covid-19 cases in the past two weeks.
- Prime Minister directed officials to conduct regular mock drills at hospitals, enhance whole genome sequencing in positive samples, and ensure Covid-appropriate behaviour.
- The PM stressed that the pandemic was far from over and there was a need to monitor the status across the country on a regular basis.

Recent Covid-19 cases

- According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Covid-19 cases have risen to their highest level in around four months.
- 1,134: New cases recorded in the country on March 21
- 7,026: Total active caseload
- 1.09%: Daily positivity rate
- India's active caseload currently stands at 7,026.

Preventive measure

- During the high level meeting the Prime Minister emphasised Covid-appropriate behaviour, including wearing masks on hospital premises by all concerned patients, health professionals, and health workers.
- He also said wearing masks was advisable when senior citizens and those with co-morbidities visited crowded areas.
- He asked officials to ensure necessary drugs, beds, logistics, and human resources were available in health facilities.
- The government is monitoring the availability and prices of 20 main Covid drugs, 12 other drugs, eight buffer medicines, and one influenza drug.

Five-fold strategy

- The Prime Minister advised to continue focusing on:
- Five-fold strategy of Test-Track-Treat-Vaccination & Covid Appropriate Behaviour
- Enhance Lab Surveillance
- Testing of all Severe Acute Respiratory Illness

SC to hear petitions seeking to criminalise marital rape

Context

- Responding to the batch of petitions to criminalisation of marital rape, the Supreme Court fixed May 9 for a detailed hearing the petitions.
- The top court on January 16 had sought a response of the Centre on a batch of petitions pertaining to criminalisation of marital rape.

High Court orders

- The Karnataka High Court had earlier held that a husband was liable to be charged for rape under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) if he has forcible Sexual intercourse with his wife.
- A Division Bench of the Delhi High Court had in May 2022 delivered a split verdict in a separate case on the identical issue. The two-judge Bench, struck down as unconstitutional the Exception two to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code.

Exception

- In 2017, the top court interfered with Exception 2 of Section 375, but only to the extent that it protected husbands from prosecution under the rape charge if the wife was not below 15 years.
- The Supreme Court read down the exception clause to hold that a wife must not be below 18 for the immunity to operate.

JS Verma committee

- The justice JS Verma committee, which was set up to propose amendments in criminal laws in the wake of the gang-rape of a paramedical student in December 2012, made a contrary recommendation.
- The committee recommended the criminalisation of marital rape since the state of being married does not generate automatic consent.

The old pension scheme as a burden on the poor

Context

- The demand for the old pension scheme (OPS) is growing especially after a few States announced that they would be reverting to it.
- Old Pension Scheme (OPS) is a retirement scheme approved by the central government which provides a monthly pension to the beneficiaries till the end of their life service.
- Under this, the amount of monthly pension is equal to half of the last salary drawn by an individual.

About National Pension System

- New Pension Scheme (NPS) is the latest retirement scheme in which the beneficiaries will be able to withdraw 60% of the amount invested after retirement.
- It was introduced by the central government in December 2003.
- It was made mandatory for all new recruits to the Government service (except armed forces) with effect from January 1, 2004, and has also been rolled out for all citizens with effect from May 1, 2009, on a voluntary basis.
- In consonance with the spirit of the National Pension System (NPS), the Sixth Pay Commission had substantially increased the basic salary of government employees to cover pension contributions and promote savings for post-retirement expenses.

Rising pension liabilities

- The pension liabilities of the government increased due to a substantial hike under the Sixth pay matrix as it was politically tricky to withdraw the OPS for existing employees when the NPS was introduced.
- As a result, pension liabilities substantially increased to 9% of total States expenditure, and are expected to increase in the future.
- The pension liabilities of States account for 1.2% of GDP as on 2021-22.
- From 2004 to 2019, the pension expenditure of States registered an average annual growth of 16%, whereas total expenditure growth stood at 12.8%.

Burden falls on those at the base

- Many State governments have yet to implement the Seventh pay norms, whereas some States have reportedly not paid arrears of the Sixth pay.
- Currently, the bottom 50% of the population bears the burden of indirect taxation six times more than their income.
- Public provision of education and health care is indispensable to harness the demographic dividend.
- The OPS facilitates a further monopolisation of future labour markets in the private sector by this proprietary class.

Way ahead

- To protect employees from the vagaries of the market, the government can tweak the NPS to provide a guaranteed monthly return.
- Administrative reforms are required to address unequal pay among various ranks of employees.
- A participatory pension for government employees will provide a more egalitarian outcome in an economy with acute income inequality.

22.03.2023

- **Rajasthan passes Right to Health Bill**
- **Panel pulls up Railways for excess expenditure**
- **Panel to moot ways to bring home Indian start-ups**
- **Indian economy likely to keep pace of expansion**

- **A grave mistake in Great Nicobar**

Rajasthan passes Right to Health Bill

Context

- The Rajasthan legislative assembly recently passed the Rajasthan Right to Health (RTH) Bill 2022.
- Rajasthan became the first state in the country to pass the Right to Health Bill.
- The Bill provides the right to health and access to healthcare for people in the state.
- The state is becoming a model state in the field of health and 7% of the budget is being spent on the health sector.

Provision under the Bill

- Rajasthan Right to Health (RTH) Bill 2022 includes free health care services at any clinical establishment to residents of the state
- The Bill sets certain obligations on the state government to ensure the right to health and maintain public health.
- No healthcare provider shall delay treatment merely on the grounds of receiving police clearance or a police report.

Treatment Facilities

- According to the bill, the patient during emergency treatment such as accidents, snake or animal bites and any other emergency decided by the state health authority will be treated without prepayment of requisite fee by public health institutions, health care establishments and designated health care centres, qualified to provide such care or treatment accordantly to their level of health care.

Constitutional provision

- According to the government, the Bill intends “to provide protection and fulfilment of rights and equity in health and well-being under
 - Article 47: Under the Directive Principles, the state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health) of the Constitution of India.
 - Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty (Right to Health as per the expanded definition of Article 21)

Agitation by private doctors

- The passage of the Rajasthan Right to Health (RTH) Bill 2022 had Commented on the agitation by private doctors.
- Doctors are agitating despite the fact that their suggestions have been accepted.

Panel pulls up Railways for excess expenditure

Context

- A parliamentary panel has slammed the ministry of railways, saying excess expenditure over the original allocations has become a recurring phenomenon.
- A drastic fall in the net revenue of the Indian Railways has left the Parliamentary Standing Committee upset.

Performance record

- In FY2021-22, the Railways recorded a negative net revenue or loss of ₹15,024.58 crore.
- In the Demands for Grants Report, the committee has observed that the Railways’ net revenues are witnessing a downward trend, except in 2014-15 when it witnessed an increase of 8.20%.

Ministry of railway stand

- The Railways noted that it recorded a loss due to a sharp rise in staff cost following the implementation of the 7th Central Pay Commission in 2016-17 and 2017-18, and the adverse impact of the pandemic from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

Recommendation

- The committee has recommended that Railways should institute remedial measures to plug leakages and reverse trend.
- The Railways has planned to reverse this and set a net revenue target of ₹2,393 crore for FY23.
- The committee has stressed that Railways should explore other non-fare revenues like advertisements or hoardings, monetisation of surplus railway land, and setting up ATMs at stations.

Panel to moot ways to bring home Indian start-ups

Context

- The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has formed a committee to design a road map to attract Indian start-ups to set up base in GIFT City and not have their domicile in other nations.
- The expert committee headed by former Reserve Bank of India executive director G Padmanabhan to identify their concerns.

Start-ups in India

- India has the world's third-largest startup ecosystem with 115 unicorns (firms with billion-dollar valuations).
- It is further estimated that Indian startups raised \$44 billion in 2021.
- Indian startups raised \$44 billion in 2021, with over \$33 billion going towards deals worth more than \$5 million.

Finding solutions

- IFSCA has constituted an expert committee to formulate a roadmap to onshore the Indian innovation to GIFT IFSC.
- The committee, which is expected to submit its recommendations within three months, includes representatives from leading venture capital funds, startups, fintechs, law firms, and tax firms as well as other domain experts.

Indian economy likely to keep pace of expansion

Context

- RBI in its latest bulletin has said that unlike the global economy which is risk of recession, India would not slow down and maintain the pace of expansion achieved in 2022-23,
- RBI noted that, India has emerged from the pandemic years stronger than initially thought, with a steady gathering of momentum since the second quarter of the current financial year.

GDP growth and other forecast

- Currently available forecasts of India's real GDP growth for 2023-24, including those of the RBI, settle between 6.0 and 6.5 per cent.
- The article also observes fresh geopolitical risks after Russia suspended its participation from the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) dented positive sentiment in the Indian equity market during the second half of February 2023.

Global banking system

- The failure of the global banking system has raised concerns over macroeconomic stability across the markets.
- The report said bank collapses in the US in the first half of March 2023 are rippling through the global financial markets.

A grave mistake in Great Nicobar

Context

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has granted clearance for the diversion of forest land for the development project of the Great Nicobar Island.

The project, at an estimated cost of Rs 72,000 crore, has already received the environmental clearance and the development activities are proposed to commence in the current financial year.

NITI Aayog is piloting the project and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation is the project proponent.

Aim

- The 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island' project aims to develop:
 - International transshipment port of 14.2 m Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit (TEU) cargo capacity at Galathea Bay along the island's south-eastern coast.
- Note: TEU is a unit of cargo capacity.
- International airport to support 4,000 passengers during peak hours
 - 450 MVA gas and solar-based power plant
 - Ecotourism and residential township of about 160 sq km

- The government hopes to establish the offices of multinational corporations by clearing about a million trees in the tropical rainforest and destroying large parts of coral reefs.

Quick clearances

- The process towards implementation of this free trade zone and transshipment facility in Great Nicobar, located about 1,650 km from Chennai and 40 nautical miles from the international shipping route, started in September 2020 when the NITI Aayog issued a request for proposals for preparing the master plan for the project.
- The MoEFCC's Expert Appraisal Committee initiated the process of environmental clearance in April, and the project proponent contracted the Hyderabad-based Vimta Labs to prepare the environmental impact assessment (EIA) report.
- In December 2021, the Ministry placed the draft EIA report in the public domain for comments and discussion.
- The quick approvals, clearances, exemptions and de-notifications show that the Union government is keen to implement this project.

Concern's

- The Great Nicobar Island has a population of about 8,000.
- Once completed, the project is expected to attract more than 3 lakh people, which is equal to the current population of the entire 1,000-km-long island chain.
- The ecological and environmental cost of this urbanisation project in an area known for its marine and terrestrial biodiversity appears to have been set aside without any serious consideration.

Environmental threat

- The island, which is spread over 900 sq km, was declared a biosphere reserve in 1989 and included in the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme in 2013.
- More than three-fourth of it is designated as a tribal reserve under The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Amendment Regulation.
- The developmental project will end up destroying vast stretches of coral reefs.

Tectonic instability

- The Great Nicobar Island is located close to the epicentre of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake which displaced the sea floor by 10-20m vertically as well as trillions of tonnes of undersea rock.
- The EIA report itself admits that "Great Nicobar lies in close proximity to the Ring of Fire and the Tsunami of 26 December 2004 is a clear demonstration of how prone it is to severe natural disasters"
- The repeated up and down movement of land in response to such earthquakes makes the Great Nicobar Island unsuitable to be developed as an urban port city.

Bottom line

- India as a country highlights its role in championing conservation, sustainability, and green development models.
- But our optimism is dampened by unsustainable developmental projects such as the one being formulated for Great Nicobar — projects which dilute environmental laws to ease execution.
- The ecological and environmental cost of the project in an area known for its marine and terrestrial biodiversity appears to have been set aside.

21.03.2023

- **IPCC calls for rapid action to tackle climate crisis**
- **Panel suggests prepaid cards for power to save groundwater**
- **SC sets new timeline for OROP arrears payment**
- **Panel suggests modifying PMAY-U to cover all deserving**
- **The wide disparities in human development**

IPCC calls for rapid action to tackle climate crisis

Context

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its latest report has said that world was not doing enough to rein in global temperatures from breaching the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold.

- The report noted that average temperatures had already touched 1.1 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial times, and the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold was “more likely than not” to be reached in the “near term” itself.

About IPCC

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for advancing knowledge on human-induced climate change.
- It provides policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.
- It was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Monday's Synthesis Report

- Monday's Synthesis Report, a summary of the five earlier reports released between 2018 and 2022, marks the culmination of IPCC's sixth assessment cycle that began in 2015.
- These include three parts of the main sixth assessment report:
 - one special report on the feasibility of keeping temperature rise within 1.5 degrees Celsius
 - Another one on the connections between oceans and cryosphere.

More about synthesis report

- The synthesis report says that by 2030 there is a 50 per cent chance that global surface temperature in any single year could exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- The modelling shows that it is theoretically possible to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, but the current scale, scope and pace of global action, pledged until 2030, is not enough.
- The Synthesis Report also highlighted the fact that climate impacts were “unequally distributed” with the poor and disadvantaged being the most vulnerable.
- The report said that while adaptation planning and implementation had progressed across all sectors and regions, large gaps existed.

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Barriers to effective climate action

- The IPCC report said noted that there were some key barriers to effective climate action which include:
 - Limited resources
 - Insufficient finance
 - Low sense of urgency
 - Lack of political commitment

Suggestions

- Monday's Synthesis Report by IPCC suggested that in order to have a 50 per cent chance of keeping warming below 1.5 degree Celsius, the world must not emit more than 500 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent after 2020.
- Incidentally, current annual emissions in 2019 amounted to 59 billion tonnes.
- That means that the 500 billion tonnes carbon budget would be exhausted in less than ten years.

Panel suggests prepaid cards for power to save groundwater

Context

- In order to save groundwater, the Parliamentary Standing Committee in its report, “Groundwater: A Valuable but Diminishing Resource”, has said that use of electric pumps needs to be further discouraged by introducing measures such pre-paid cards for power supply and restricting power supply to few hours a day.

Reason for exploitation of groundwater

- The primary reason for excessive exploitation of groundwater is wide cultivation of water guzzler paddy and sugarcane crops, which are “heavily incentivized”.
- States like Punjab, Haryana, Telangana and Tamil Nadu offer completely free power, while other states have provision for collection of token charges.

States with over-extraction of groundwater

- The Committee notice that over-extraction of groundwater for meeting irrigation needs is prevalent mainly in northern states, particularly in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, which are extracting 97%, 90% and 86% of groundwater.
- Other states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh are also significant users of groundwater for irrigation as they are using approximately 89%, 92% and 90%, respectively.
- The Committee are of the view that use of electric pumps needs to be further discouraged.

Recommendation

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee recommend the Ministry of Jal Shakti to work out a policy to ensure judicious water use not only to reduce dependence on groundwater but to reduce its footprint in agriculture.
- The committee has recommended that the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation under Jal Shakti Ministry should take the initiative by urging both the Power Ministry and Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare along with state governments to take measures on the suggested lines.

SC sets new timeline for OROP arrears payment

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court headed by CJI directed the Centre to clear all One Rank One Pension (OROP) arrears totaling Rs 28,000 crore for ex-servicemen by February 28 2024.
- The apex court said that the government is duty-bound to comply with its 2022 judgement on the matter.
- The Ministry of Defence was seeking extension of the deadline for clearing the OROP dues.

Promoting transparency

- The SC bench at the outset refused to accept the sealed cover report submitted by Attorney General of India and asked him to read the report as pertained to compliance of the court's judgement.
- The bench said there cannot be anything secret about the report which cannot be reveal to the ex-service personnel seeking payment of OROP arrears.
- The bench directed that the six lakh family pensioners and gallantry award winners shall be paid their OROP dues by April 30, 2023.

About OROP scheme

- Under the One Rank One Pension scheme or OROP scheme, uniform pension is to be paid to armed forces personnel retiring at the same rank with the same length of service, regardless of when they completed their service or retired.
- OROP bridges the gap between the rates of pension of current and past pensioners at periodic intervals.
- The scheme was implemented with retrospective effect from July 1st, 2014 with 2013 as the base year.
- The armed forces personnel who retired by June 30, 2014, are covered under the scheme.
- In 2014, the Centre passed the order of implementation of the OROP scheme.

Panel suggests modifying PMAY-U to cover all deserving

Context

- A parliamentary Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs has recommended to the government conduct an impact assessment study of its urban housing scheme.
- The panel also explore the feasibility of extending it with modifications or formulating another similar one to benefit the urban poor at large to achieve the objective of 'Housing for All'.

Need for progress report

- The Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs also sought to know the number of slums de-notified since the implementation of the In-Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR) vertical of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U).
- The Committee recommended that the ministry conduct an impact assessment of the scheme to understand the benefits and gaps.
- The report stated that the Union Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA) Ministry has accepted that it had not conducted any independent urban housing need assessment study of the PMAY-U.

Houses sanctioned

- The committee said that out of the total 122.69 lakh houses sanctioned under the four verticals of the PMAY-U, 73.45 lakhs (around 60 per cent) houses have been sanctioned under the Beneficiary-led Construction (BLC) vertical itself.
- The panel noted that there was a gap of 67 lakh houses in between the initial assessment and the sanctioned houses.

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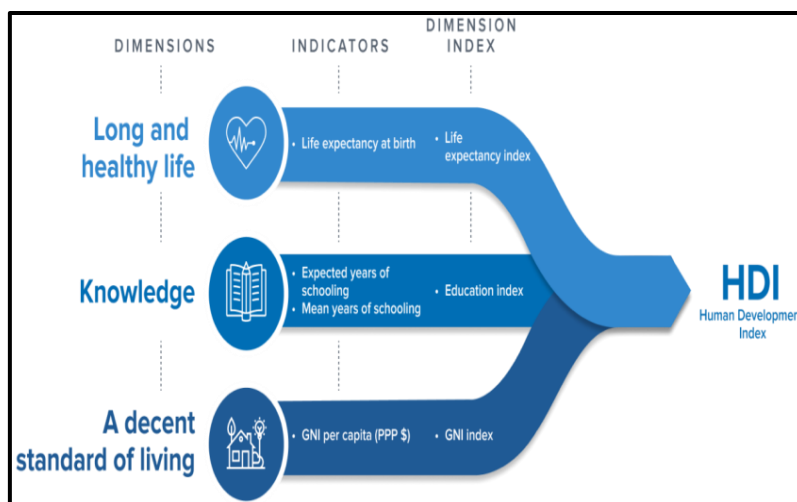
The wide disparities in human development

Context

- Human development is defined as the process of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities and improving their well-being.
- The human development concept was developed by economist Mahbub ul Haq.
- India is now one of the fastest-growing economies globally, however, this growth has not resulted in a corresponding increase in its Human Development Index (HDI).

About Human Development Index

- The HDI is a composite statistical measure created by the United Nations Development Programme to evaluate and compare the level of human development in different regions around the world.
- It was introduced in 1990 as an alternative to conventional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which do not consider the broader aspects of human development.
- According to the Human Development Report of 2021-22, India ranks 132 out of 191 countries, behind Bangladesh (129) and Sri Lanka (73).
- Given India's size and large population, it is critical to address the subnational or State-wise disparities in human development.



- Doing so will help India realize its demographic dividend. For this purpose, I have developed a new index using the methodology suggested by the UNDP and the National Statistical Office (NSO) which measures human development on a subnational level for 2019-20.

HDI Indicators

- The HDI is calculated using four indicators:
 - Life expectancy at birth
 - Mean years of schooling
 - Expected years of schooling
 - Gross National Income (GNI) per capita
- Life expectancy estimates are taken from the Sample Registration System and mean and expected years of schooling are extracted from National Family Health Survey-5.
- HDI scores range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher levels of human development.

States report

1. Top Performing States

- The five States with the highest HDI scores are Delhi, Goa, Kerala, Sikkim, and Chandigarh.
- Delhi and Goa have HDI scores above 0.799, which makes them equivalent to countries in Eastern Europe with a very high level of human development.
- Nineteen States, including Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, have scores ranging between 0.7 and 0.799 and are classified as high human development States.

2. Worst Performing States

- The bottom five States are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Assam, with medium levels of human development.
- This category also includes States such as Odisha, Rajasthan, and West Bengal, which have HDI scores below the national average.
- The scores of these low-performing States resemble those of African countries such as Congo, Kenya, Ghana, and Namibia.

Reasons for discrepancies

- One of the main reasons for this discrepancy is that economic growth has been unevenly distributed.
- The top 10% of the Indian population holds over 77% of the wealth.
- This has resulted in significant disparities in access to basic amenities, healthcare, and education.
- Another reason is that while India has made significant progress in reducing poverty and increasing access to healthcare and education, the quality of such services remains a concern.

Way Forward

- Governments must prioritize human development alongside economic growth to ensure that the benefits of growth are more evenly distributed.
- This requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses:
 - Income inequality and gender inequality
 - Improves access to quality social services
 - Addresses environmental challenges
- There is need to provides for greater investment in social infrastructure.
- Governments must prioritize human development alongside economic growth to ensure that the benefits of growth are more evenly distributed.

20.03.2023

- India-Japan to strengthen bilateral ties
- No antibiotics, plasma therapy to treat adult COVID patients
- Difficult to allocate public funds to art and culture
- FY23 fiscal deficit target within reach

- **Moving forward with a newer concept of UHC**

India-Japan to strengthen bilateral ties

Context

- The Japanese Prime Minister is set to arrive in India for a two-day.
- The visit is seen as a great opportunity to review the bilateral ties between the two countries.
- Since the last Summit meeting held in March 2022 between India and Japan, now is a significant time to engage on a bilateral level as both India and Japan are holding the Presidencies of the G20 and G7, respectively.

Focus area

- The partnership between both countries ranges in multiple areas like defence and security, trade and investment, S&T, Education, healthcare, and critical and emerging technologies.
- Sources said that defence, security, economic ties, skill development and clean energy partnership are among the top issues on the agenda.

Defence and security

- The area of defence and security cooperation have emerged as one of the most important pillars of the India-Japan partnership and an important factor in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The successful conduct of the first fighter jet exercise 'Veer Guardian' in Japan in January 2023 between our two countries was a significant milestone.
- Recently the fourth 'Dharma Guardian' Army exercise, was conducted for the first time in Japan.
- India took part in the International Fleet Review in Japan and the Malabar exercise off the coast of Japan.
- This was preceded by the JIMEX (Japan India Maritime Exercise) in September 2022.

Commercial and economic ties

- The bilateral trade between India and Japan stood at USD 20.75 billion last year, which was the largest ever.
- Both countries have had a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) since 2011.
- The agreement covers not only trade in goods but also services, movement of natural persons, investments, intellectual property rights, custom procedures and other trade-related issues.

Clean energy partnership

- India and Japan was launched on the occasion of the 14th India-Japan Annual Summit Clean Energy Partnership (CEP) for cooperation in March 2022.
- The partnership is aimed towards achieving sustainable economic growth, addressing climate change and ensuring energy security.
- The partnership will lead to clean growth by boosting job creation, innovation and investments.
- It also aims at ensuring energy security, carbon neutrality and economic growth
- It will also demonstrate to the world that India and Japan are at the forefront in delivering on the ambitious climate and sustainable development goals.

No antibiotics, plasma therapy to treat adult COVID patients

Context

- The COVID-19 National Task Force of the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry on recently issued revised clinical guidelines for the management of adult COVID-19 patients.

About new guidelines

- As per the new guidelines, convalescent plasma therapy and drugs, including lopinavir-ritonavir, molnupiravir, favipiravir, azithromycin and doxycycline, are not to be used for treatment.
- The guideline suggested that the antibiotics should not be used unless there is clinical suspicion of bacterial infection.
- The possibility of co-infection of COVID-19 with other endemic infections must be considered.
- Systemic corticosteroids are not indicated in mild disease.

About convalescent-plasma therapy

- When a pathogen like novel coronavirus infects, the human immune systems produce antibodies.

- The antibodies span out to identify and mark the invading virus.
- White blood cells attach the identified intruders, and the body gets rid of the infection. The therapy, like blood transfusion, harvests the antibody from a recovered patient and ingest into a sick person.
- Helped by the antibody, the immune system mounts robust combat on the virus.

What are antibodies

- Antibodies are one of the front-line immune responses to an infection by a microbe.
- They are a particular type of proteins secreted by immune cells called B lymphocytes when they encounter an invader, such as a novel coronavirus.
- The immune system designs antibodies that are highly specific to each invading pathogen.
- A particular antibody and its partner virus are made for each other.

Difficult to allocate public funds to art and culture

Context

- While responding to the queries made by a parliamentary committee, the Ministry of Culture said that it might not be “tenable” for a developing nation like India to allocate a considerable proportion of its public fund to the promotion of art.
- The ministry noted that the centre is more focused towards improving elementary rural infrastructure such as health, education and transportation.

Budgetary location

- the allocation of the Ministry of Culture was just 0.075% of the total Budget for the year 2023-24.
- The Union Budget for 2023-24 has allocated ₹3,399.65 crores under revenue and ₹285.4 crores under capital heads to the Ministry of Culture for prioritised programmes.
- It which was in sharp contrast to countries such as China, the U.K., the U.S., and Australia, which spend roughly 2%-5% of their Budget on the promotion of art and culture.

Fund from non-government sources

- The officials of the Ministry of Culture said that most of the amount spent on art and culture in the countries mentioned above are sourced from non-government sources, which is not the case in India.
- The Ministry was also trying and evolving innovative methods to maximise non-government organisations' participation in the promotion and conservation of art and culture.

FY23 fiscal deficit target within reach

Context

- The economic affairs secretary in a statement said that the Centre will rein in the fiscal deficit at the targeted 6.4% of the gross domestic product in the current financial year.
- He also noted that the target will be achieved despite some likely variations in revenues and expenditures from the respective revised estimates.
- The Economic Survey provides for a range of 6-6.8%, but next year around 6.5% appears to be reasonable.

Growth targets

- The economic affairs secretary said that a 6.5% economic growth next year appears to be likely and ‘reasonable’ and any adverse impact of the banking crisis in the advanced economies on India by way of capital outflows would be manageable, thanks to strong forex reserves.
- The centre bats for higher millet output, and inclusion in the public distribution system.
- The revised capex target of Rs 7.3 trillion would, however, be met in FY23.

Expenditure targets

- The Centre’s expenditure was increased by Rs 2.42 trillion or 6.14% to Rs 41.87 trillion in the RE from the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 39.44 trillion, to cater to higher revenue expenditure on subsidies, including that on food and fertilisers.
- In FY23RE, the net tax revenue target was raised by 8% to Rs 20.87 trillion, 81% of which was achieved till January.

- The Centre had released Rs 3.1 trillion to states, or about 70% of the centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) outlay for FY23. Of the Rs 3.1 trillion released, Rs 1.75 trillion or more than 56% was still lying with the Single Nodal Agencies (SNAs) of states.

Second Supplementary Demands for Grants

- The Second Supplementary Demands for Grants for FY23 was placed before Parliament on March 13, seeking nod to spend an additional Rs 1.48 trillion on a net basis, analysts suggested a modest deviation may be there in fiscal deficit from the RE level of Rs 17.55 trillion.

Favorable situation for India

- Few favorable things are happening at the global level has helped Indian economy for example, crude oil prices are coming down and that is good for the economy.
- The Brent crude fell 2.1% to \$73.11 a barrel recently.
- Being a major importer of crude, natural gas and fertiliser, India could benefit from lower global commodity prices on multiple fronts such as in inflation management, lower subsidy bills and reduced cost for industry.

Moving forward with a newer concept of UHC

Context

- Do we believe in health as a basic human right, which India's Constitution guarantees under the right to life?
- In contrast, we believe in the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health: a certain totality of health to the realms of mental and social well-being and happiness beyond physical fitness, and an absence of disease and disability.

Health for All policy

- We all subscribed to the slogan "Health for All by 2000" that was proposed by Halfdan Mahler and endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 1977.
- This slogan had an inherent implication, i.e., "for All", which means universalization. Thus, nobody is denied this and everybody is eligible without being discriminated against based on financial status, gender, race, place of residence, affordability to pay or any other factors.
- Universal Health Care/coverage (UHC) was implied as early as 1977.
- India, through its National Health Policy 1983, committed itself to the 'Health for All' goal by 2000.

Focus on primary care

- The International Conference on Primary Health Care, at Alma Ata, 1978, listed eight components of minimum care for all citizens.
- It mandated all health promotion activities, and the prevention of diseases including vaccinations and treatment of minor illnesses and accidents to be free for all using government resources, especially for the poor.
- Any non-communicable disease, chronic disease including mental illnesses, and its investigations and treatment were almost excluded from primary health care.

Astana declaration of 2018

- The Astana declaration of 2018 calls for "partnership" with the private sector, though alcohol, tobacco, ultra-processed foods, and industrial and automobile pollution contributed by the commercial private sector are well established.
- Also, poorer countries miserably fail or are unwilling for "private sector regulation".
- It never addressed poverty, unemployment, and poor livelihood.

Challenges

- In India secondary and tertiary care was left to the individual to either seek it from a limited number of public hospitals or from the private sector by paying from their own pockets.
- There were not enough government-run institutions for the poor.
- The states is showing reluctance towards its responsibility, i.e., to provide secondary or tertiary care by the state, ensured the dominant, unregulated, profit-making private sector and also the health insurance sector was kept happy and thriving.
- This created a dichotomy between peripheral primary and institutional-referred specialist care at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Primary Health Care Version 2

- Primary Health Care (PHC) Version 2 or Comprehensive PHC was defined which that fact that even the poor do contract chronic illnesses and non-communicable diseases such as cardiac, neural, mental, and metabolic disorders, and also require investigations and management at peripheral primary health institutions.
- It was operationalized through the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in India from 2013.
- The second half of the last decade saw the operationalization of the Health and Wellness Centre as a model of implementation of Comprehensive Primary Health Care.

Way forward

- The Universal Health Coverage slogan must be avoided as it is deceptive.
- This is because it is neither universal in its implementation nor comprehensive in its coverage of services and never assures accessibility or affordability as its financing is conditional to insurance premiums paid either by the individual or state.
- The National Health Mission with concurrent intersectoral thrusts on Poshan Abhiyan, National Food Security, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, water sanitation, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, etc. is a better model of fully tax-funded Universal Health Care, but the Ayushman Bharat Jan Arogya Bhima Yojana damages that approach.



18.03.2023

- PM MITRA mega textile parks to be set up in seven states
- India-Africa Chiefs Conclave
- IIA researchers develop low-cost star sensor
- ICC issues arrest warrant against Putin over Ukraine
- A history of poor Choices

PM MITRA mega textile parks to be set up in seven states

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister announced that "PM MITRA mega textile parks" will be set up in seven states.
- The states include Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

About PM MITRA Parks

- PM MITRA is inspired by the 5F vision Prime Minister of India.
- The '5F' Formula encompasses - Farm to fibre; fibre to factory; factory to fashion; fashion to foreign.
- This integrated vision will help furthering the growth of textile sector in the economy.
- The scheme is to develop integrated large scale and modern industrial infrastructure facility for entire value-chain of the textile industry.
- PM MITRA Parks represent a unique model where the Centre and State governments will work together to make India a global hub for textile manufacturing and exports.

Significance

- PM MITRA Parks will help in creating world-class industrial infrastructure that would attract large scale investment including foreign direct investment (FDI) and encourage innovation and job creation within the sector.
- Centre expects the parks to attract investments worth ₹70,000 crore, generate jobs for 20 lakh people and create an integrated value chain for the sector.
- The parks will offer an excellent infrastructure, plug and play facilities as well as training and research facilities for the industry.

Facilities to state government

- For the establishment of mega textile parks, state governments will provide contiguous and encumbrance-free land parcel of at least 1000 acres of land.
- Other facilities that be made available to the states will include:
 - Provision of all utilities
 - Reliable Power Supply
 - Water availability
 - Waste Water Disposal system
 - Effective single window clearance
 - Conducive and stable industrial/textile policy

Funding via Special Purpose Vehicle

- An Special Purpose Vehicle owned by Centre and State Government will be set up for each park which will oversee the implementation of the project.
- The Ministry of Textiles will provide financial support in the form of Development Capital Support up to ₹500 crore per park to the park SPV.

India-Africa Chiefs Conclave

Context

- The Indian Army will hold a nine-day mega military exercise with militaries of over 20 African countries from March 21, 2023 in Pune, Maharashtra.
- The mega military exercise aims to significantly boost overall cooperation, amid China's persistent efforts to expand its strategic influence in the continent.
- The military exercise involving the countries in the African continent will be the second such military game being hosted by India.
- The first Africa-India field training exercise was held in Pune in March 2019.

Two sessions of the Conclave

- The India-Africa Chiefs Conclave will take place over two sessions.
- The first session will explore the key pillars of India-Africa defence partnership.
- The second session will focus on the Indian defence industry's Outreach to Africa.

Significance of Conclave

- The first India-Africa Chiefs Conclave will be a landmark event and it will provide a fillip to the cooperation between the Indian Army and the armies of African nations.
- India has also decided to increase the number of courses for African nations to 450 from the current year which would be almost double compared to last year.
- The courses include various skill-building modules and tailor-made capsules decided according to requirement.
- India has been focusing on ramping up overall defence and strategic ties with the African continent.

Participating countries

- Army chiefs of 10 African countries have confirmed their participation at the conclave while military heads of 12 nations will send their representatives for the India-Africa Chiefs Conclave.
- The army chiefs of Congo, Niger, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda, Seychelles, Gambia, Tanzania and Kenya are attending the conclave.
- The countries which are sending their personnel are Ethiopia (5), Ghana (10), Kenya (5), Lesotho (10), Niger (12), Seychelles (10), Tanzania (6), Uganda (10) and Zambia (10)

IIA researchers develop low-cost star sensor

Context

In a breakthrough, the researchers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) have developed a **low-cost star sensor for astronomy** and **small CubeSat class satellite missions**.

Star sensor: Starberry-Sense

The star sensor named Starberry-Sense can help small CubeSat class satellite missions find their orientation in space. According to Department of Science and Technology, the Starberry-Sense is ready for launch on the PS4-Orbital Platform by ISRO and can be used for CubeSats and other small satellite missions in the future. Based on commercial/off-the-shelf components, the star sensor costs less than 10% of those available in the market. The brain of the instrument is a single-board Linux computer called Raspberry Pi, which is widely used among electronics hobby enthusiasts.

Importance of Starberry-Sense

It is a low-cost star sensor (Starberry-Sense) developed “from off-the-shelf components.” It can help small CubeSat class satellites orient themselves in space.

India has also developed and launched CubeSat satellites for various purposes, such as remote sensing, atmospheric and oceanographic studies, and technology demonstrations. This small device is a huge success for India and its increasing space abilities.

ICC issues arrest warrant against Putin over Ukraine

Context

- Recently, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of war crimes for his alleged involvement in the abduction of children from Ukraine.
- The Court said that the crimes were committed in Ukraine from 24 February 2022 - when Russia launched its full-scale invasion.
- It was the first time the global court has issued a warrant against a leader of one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Russia's Stand

- Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that the ICC arrest warrants "have no meaning for our country, including from a legal point of view".
- Russia is not a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty underpinning the world's permanent war crimes tribunal.
- The Rome Statute gives the ICC jurisdiction on four international crimes that are genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression.

Risk of arrest

- While it is unlikely that Russian President will end up in court any time soon, the warrant means that he could be arrested and sent to The Hague if travelling to any ICC member states.
- Vladimir Putin is the third serving president to be the target of an ICC arrest warrant, after Sudan's Omar al-Bashir and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

Ukraine response

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called the ICC's arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin a "historic decision, from which historical responsibility will begin".
- Ukrainians accuse Russia of attempting genocide against them and seeking to destroy their identity partly through deporting children to Russia.
- More than 16,000 Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia since the February 24, 2022 invasion.

About the ICC

- The International Criminal Court is an independent, permanent judicial body.
- It was established in accordance with the Rome Statute, signed on 17 July 1998 at a conference in the capital of Italy.
- Its competence extends to all the most serious international crimes committed after 1 July 2002, the date the Rome Statute came into force.

- The court's jurisdiction is limited to crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and the crime of aggression.

A history of poor Choices

Context

- Monument is a type of structure that was explicitly created to commemorate a person or event, or which has become important to a social group.
- Monuments are important and their presence can have lasting impact within the societies they are constructed.
- The present government at centre is emphasizing on the contribution of important personality in Indian history that include **sagas of King Suheldev, Rani Durgavati and Lachit Barphukan.**

Economic Advisory Council report on Monuments

- The report titled 'Monuments of National Importance: The Urgent Need for Rationalization' drawn up by the EAC states that the existing list of MNI has not been reviewed since Independence, and has become "unwieldy" due to the inclusion of minor colonial structures or monuments that are not of national significance
- A report by the Economic Advisory Council (EAC) to the Prime Minister has found the country's list of centrally protected monuments to be bloated and in urgent need of streamlining.
- India currently has 3,693 monuments of national importance (MNI), and their protection and upkeep is the responsibility of the Archaeological Survey of India, under the Ministry of Culture.

Monuments details

- As per the report, over 60% (2238 out of 3695) of them are located in just five states: Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- By way of illustration, while the city of Delhi alone has 173 MNIs, a large state like Telangana has only eight.
- Culturally and historically significant states like Bihar (70), Odisha (80), Chhattisgarh (46) and Kerala (29) have disproportionately fewer MNI.

Click the link: <https://www.aptiplus.in/product/daily-news-editorial-analysis-compilation>

About National Monuments Authority

- National Monuments Authority (NMA) under the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India has been setup as per provisions of The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010 which was enacted in March, 2010.
- Several functions have been assigned to the NMA for the protection and preservation of monuments and sites through management of the prohibited and regulated area around the centrally protected monuments.
- The Director General of Archaeological Survey of India is the ex-officio chairperson of the NMA.

Recommendation by EAC

- EAC-PM in its report recommended that Archaeological Survey of India to come up with substantive criteria and a detailed procedure for declaring monuments to be of national importance.
- It also called on the Centre to denotify untraceable monuments and hand over the preservation of monuments of local importance to states.
- Standalone antiquities should be removed from the list of monuments of national importance.
- Wherever possible, they may be shifted to museums for better upkeep.
- The report suggested that the Allocation of funds for the preservation of MNI should be increased, while ASI should retain the proceeds generated from revenue streams like tickets, events, fees and other sources.

17.03.2023

- EC proposal of e-postal ballot for overseas voters under review
- NIOT to set up green desalination plant in Lakshadweep
- More than one lakh people opted for higher PF pension
- DAC clears Defence acquisition proposals

- Tested but tired, this force could be in distress

EC proposal of e-postal ballot for overseas voters under review

Context

- Recently Union Minister of Law and Justice has informed the parliament that an Election Commission proposal to facilitate electronically-transmitted postal ballot system for overseas Indian voters is under discussions with the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The total number of overseas electors as on January 1 2023 stands at over 1.15 lakh.

Proposal to amend the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961

- The Election Commission of India has taken up a proposal to amend the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 to facilitate an electronically-transmitted postal ballot system for overseas electors.
- The matter is under discussion with the Ministry of External Affairs to iron out the logistical challenges involved in the implementation of the proposal.

Issued of photo identity card

- According to the EC website, as of now an overseas voter is not issued a photo identity card they are allowed to vote in person at the polling station by producing their original passport.
- The EC has maintained that overseas voters find it difficult to fly down to India to cast vote.

NIOT to set up green desalination plant in Lakshadweep

Context

- The National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) is stepping up from its ongoing initiative of providing potable water on six islands of Lakshadweep using low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technology.
- Currently, the desalination plants, each of which provides at least 1,00,000 litres of potable water every day, are powered by diesel generator sets – there being no other source of power on the islands.

About LTTD

- The low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technology is a process under which the warm surface seawater is flash evaporated at low pressure and the vapour is condensed with cold deep seawater.
- The LTTD technology does not require any chemical pre and post-treatment of seawater and thus the pollution problems are minimal and suitable for island territories.
- The LTTD technology is completely indigenous, robust and environmentally friendly.

Desalination plants in operation

- Currently, there are five desalination plants in operation on the Lakshadweep islands. Four more were expected to be functioning in the coming months.
- The proposed self-sustaining plant the 10th plant is expected to be ready later this year.

National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)

- NIOT is an autonomous institute under the aegis of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) established in 1993.
- The chief objective of the institute is to develop reliable indigenous technologies to solve the various engineering problems associated with the harvesting of non-living and living resources in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is about two-thirds of the land area of India.
- The institute engages in developing technologies for the sustainable utilization of ocean resources.

More than one lakh people opted for higher PF pension

Context

- The Centre has informed the Rajya Sabha that 1,20,279 employees have submitted joint options on the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) portal for higher pension.
- In November 2022, the Supreme Court had asked the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) to give four months' time to subscribers as well as pensioners to contribute on their actual salaries towards EPS-95.
- The total number of beneficiaries in accordance with the directions given in the Supreme Court judgment will depend upon the employees exercising the joint option and the number of such employees who are eligible.

- The Ministry said there is no option under the Employees' Pension Scheme to allow employees to contribute towards the scheme on their own.

About Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 1995

- The Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 originally did not provide for any pension scheme.
- In 1995, through an amendment, a scheme was formulated for employees' pension, wherein the pension fund was to comprise a deposit of 8.33 per cent of the employers' contribution to be made towards provident fund corpus.
- The EPS, which is administered by the EPFO, aims to provide employees with pension after the age of 58.
- Both the employee and the employer contribute 12 per cent of the employee's basic salary and dearness allowance to the EPF.
- The employee's entire part goes to EPF, while the 12 per cent contribution made by the employer is split as 3.67 per cent contribution to EPF and 8.33 per cent contribution to EPS.
- Apart from this, the Government of India contributes 1.16 per cent as well for an employee's pension.
- Employees do not contribute to the pension scheme.

EPS amendment in 2014

- The EPS amendment of August 22, 2014 had raised the pensionable salary cap to Rs 15,000 a month from Rs 6,500 a month, and allowed members along with their employers to contribute 8.33 per cent on their actual salaries (if it exceeded the cap) towards the EPS.
- It gave all EPS members, as on September 1, 2014, six months to opt for the amended scheme.
- This was extendable by another six months at the discretion of the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner.

DAC clears Defence acquisition proposals

Context

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), under the chairmanship of Defence Minister, accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition amounting to over Rs 70,500 crore under the Buy Indian IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)" category.
- Some of the projects are long-gestation projects involving indigenous design and development including the development of marine diesel engine.

Procurement Proposals

- **Indian Navy:** The Navy proposals includes indigenous BrahMos cruise missiles, Shakti Electronic Warfare (EW) systems, Utility Helicopters-Maritime among others.

An AoN is the beginning of the long winding procurement process.

- **Indian Air Force (IAF):** Long Range Stand-Off Weapon (LRSOW) to be designed and developed indigenously Integrated on SU-30 MKI fighters and the indigenous 155mm/52-Caliber Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) along with High Mobility Vehicles (HMTVs) and Gun Towing Vehicles (GTVs) for the Army.

About Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

- The Defence Acquisition Council is the highest decision-making body.
- It worked under the Defence Minister and was constituted for overall guidance of the defence procurement planning process.
- The objective of the Defence Acquisition Council is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces.

Tested but tired, this force could be in distress

Context

- In order to enhance security and restructuring the force deployment, the Centre has granted approval for the construction and upgradation of temporary camps of CISF and CRPF in Jammu and Kashmir.

A warning signs

- The internal security scenario in the country has been showing marginal improvement especially in insurgency-affected northeast India.
- But there has been 'insignificant improvement' in left-wing extremism areas and also terrorist-affected Kashmir.

- It is here that the point about deployment levels is of relevance.
- The introduction of the Indian Army has taken place, with the void filled mainly by the CRPF.

Concerns

- The central government has been compelled to entrust a number of assignments that are becoming riskier by the day to these forces — especially to the CRPF because of the force's versatility and flexible operational procedures.
- The personnel of these forces continue to be tasked with carrying out hard duties and are overstretched without any rest or respite.
- As a consequence, training becomes compromised.
- The need to enhance tactical skills and cannot be overlooked.

Need for parity

- What makes the observance of Pulwama day different from previous years is that former personnel and their families turned up in large numbers in different parts of the country to demand the old pension scheme to serving members of the fraternity.
- The old pension scheme was stopped for personnel joining service after December 31, 2003.
- They cited the Delhi High Court order of December 2022 that reiterated their status as a force (CRPF) under the category of 'Armed Forces of the union'.
- The fraternity is grieved that despite facing a war-like situation on a daily basis a point that is recognised by the public and the judiciary.
- The government is reluctant to grant the paramilitary these benefits.

Conclusion

- The most important goal in observing Pulwama day should be to avoid a repeat of that dark day in 2019.
- The morale of security personnel needs to be kept high.
- The genuine grievances of India's paramilitary forces need to be addressed.

16.03.2023

- **BCI Permits Foreign Lawyers & Firms To Practice**
- **House panel questions huge cut in outlay for MGNREGS**
- **Eurasian otter raises hope for J&K stream**
- **India's revised foreign trade policy be announced soon**
- **The Village by the border**

BCI Permits Foreign Lawyers & Firms To Practice

Context

- In a move that could transform the legal landscape, The Bar Council of India (BCI) has opened up a law practice in India to foreign lawyers and law firms.
- This comes 5 years after the Supreme Court permitted the entry of foreign lawyers and firms on a temporary basis, but left it to the BCI to frame appropriate rules.
- The areas of practice of law by a foreign lawyer or Foreign Law Firm shall be laid down by the Bar Council of India.

About Bar Council of India

- The Bar Council of India (BCI) is an apex disciplinary and regulatory body for legal education and profession in India.
- It is a statutory body created by Parliament under the Advocates Act, 1961 to regulate and represent the Indian bar.
- It also sets standards for legal education and grants recognition to Universities whose degree in law will serve as qualification for enrolment as an advocate.
- In addition, it performs certain representative functions by protecting the rights, privileges and interests of advocates and through the creation of funds for providing financial assistance to organise welfare schemes for them.

Only advisory roles

- As per latest rule by Bar Council of India (BCI), foreign lawyers and firms can only play as advisory roles to their clients in India to making renewal of registration mandatory every 5 years,
- The rules are framed in such a way that it does not jeopardize the prospects of Indian lawyers.
- The foreign lawyers and firms are allowed to practice on transactional work/corporate work such as **joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, intellectual property matters, drafting of contracts and other related matters on reciprocal basis.**

Restrictions

- The rules restrict such advocates and firms from appearing before a judicial forum including tribunals and other statutory or regulatory authorities.
- The rules also clarify that such lawyers shall not be involved to do any work pertaining to property-linked matters.

House panel questions huge cut in outlay for MGNREGS

Context

- The latest Union Budget 2023-24 sharply cut the budget for the rural employment scheme.
- Only about ₹60,000 crore has been allocated to MNREGA this year, about 33% below the revised budget estimates for the scheme in this fiscal.
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme provides 'Right to Work' to such deprived sections of the rural populace who are willing to work.

Parliamentary standing committee concerns

- The Standing Committee on Rural Development, which submitted its report in the Rajya Sabha said the budget estimates for MGNREGS have been reduced by Rs 29,400 crore for 2023-24 when compared to the revised estimates of 2022-23.
- The ministry, in its response, stated that the scheme is demand-driven and whenever needed, the allocation has been increased.
- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development seeks rationale behind reduction in allocation considering the key role the scheme plays for the distressed populace of the country.
- The panel also expressed distress over the delay in wage payments and material fund release to the State governments.

Problem with digital capturing of attendance

- Reacting to complaints from the ground against digital capturing of attendance of the workers through the National Mobile Monitoring System, a mobile based application, the committee said that while it understood the reason for bringing in this innovation, the government should also be aware of the problems faced by the workers.

Eurasian otter raises hope for J&K stream

Context

- Recently, a group of scientists from the University of Jammu have reported about the presence of Eurasian otter in Jammu and Kashmir.
- They were caught in the infrared camera along the Neeru stream (tributary of the Chenab River) of the Chenab catchment in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The first photographic record of otter has indicated that not all is lost for a Jammu and Kashmir stream.

About Otters

- Otters are members of the mammalian family and are carnivorous.
- It is regarded as a flagship species and indicator of high-quality aquatic habitats.
- Otters are found the world over, except in Australia, New Zealand, Madagascar, and other oceanic islands.
- It is found in very few places in the south and south-east Asia.
- India is home to 3 of the 13 species of otters found worldwide.

Protection Status

- IUCN Red List: Near Threatened
- CITES: Appendix I
- Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule II

India's revised foreign trade policy be announced soon

Context

- The much-delayed reboot of India's Foreign Trade Policy is expected to be finally announced by the end of this month.
- It has been unchanged since 2015 and its revision has been due for three years.
- The Commerce Ministry had planned to announce a new trade policy last September but instead extended the 'Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20' by six more months till March 31.

Reasons for extension of FTP 2015-20

- The main reason cited by government for the extension of the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 include the global headwinds, such as **tighter monetary conditions, currency volatility, and Russia-Ukraine conflict.**

Roadmap of the policy

- India's upcoming foreign trade policy will seek to:
 - Handhold MSMEs to build their financial capabilities
 - Set up special zones for ecommerce exports
 - Develop new mechanisms to support services related to artificial intelligence and Internet of Things.
- The policy will provide guidelines for enhancing exports to push economic growth and create jobs and incentives under different schemes such as Duty Free Import Authorisation (DFIA) and Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG).

The Village by the border

Context

Recently, the Centre has approved Centrally Sponsored Scheme- "Vibrant Villages Programme" (VVP) for the Financial Years 2022-23 to 2025-26 with financial allocation of Rs. 4800 Crore.

The Programme calls for comprehensive development of villages of blocks on northern border thus improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.

In 2018, the Parliamentary Standing Committee pointed towards illiteracy, backwardness, and lack of basic facilities in our border areas.

Aim of VVP

- **Strengthen basic infrastructure:** The Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) aims to strengthen and enhance basic infrastructure in the villages along the LAC so that migration can be stemmed.
- The scheme will provide funds for the development of essential infrastructure and creation of livelihood opportunities in 19 Districts and 46 Border blocks in 4 states and 1 UT along the northern land border of the country which will help in achieving inclusive growth and retaining the population in the border areas.
- In the first phase 663 Villages will be taken up in the programme.
- **Reversing the outmigration:** The VVP will help in encouraging people to stay in their native locations in border areas and reversing the outmigration from these villages adding to improved security of the border.
- **Basic amenities:** Border villages are being provided with all basic amenities including modern housing and good roads; water and electricity supply; good education, health and communication facilities; access to Doordarshan channels, etc.
- **Skill development and social entrepreneurship:** The scheme will also develop growth centres on the "hub-and-spoke model" through the promotion of social entrepreneurship, empowerment of youth and women through skill development and entrepreneurship and leverage the tourism potential through the promotion of local culture and traditional knowledge.
- It will also develop sustainable eco-agribusinesses through the "One Village-One product" concept.

Roadmap

- The Union is planning to incorporate the concept of Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) to border villages neighbouring China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, and address the problem of migration.
- A total of 2,962 border villages in five states will be developed under this scheme.

Way Forward

- The Vibrant Villages Programme rolled out the centre specifically for border areas will witness a social and economic transformation.
- This will also aid India's borders by making them more safe and secure.
- It will also bring remote and border villages into the national mainstream, and make them more vibrant, developed and self-sufficient.
- This will be a milestone in the development of border villages and the progress of the Himalayan states.

15.03.2023

- **RBI has permitted other country banks to trade in rupee**
- **Centre calls for indigenous acquisitions for the military**
- **India plans new security testing for smartphones**
- **A case for a better electricity public hearing**
- **India and Italy: Friends in a turbulent world**

RBI has permitted other country banks to trade in rupee

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has granted approvals to foreign banks in 18 countries to open Vostro accounts to settle international trade in rupees.
- The Minister of State for Finance while responding a question in parliament said the central bank had granted 60 approvals in total so far to domestic and authorised foreign banks to open so-called 'Special Rupee Vostro Accounts' of correspondent banks from 18 countries, including those from major nations such as the United Kingdom and Germany.

Background

- The process of special vostro rupee accounts (SVRA) began in July 2022 when the RBI announced to put in place an additional arrangement for invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports/imports in Indian rupees.
- The announcement came against the backdrop of the commodities crisis triggered by the Western sanctions against Russia after President of Russia launched the "special military operation" against Ukraine in February 2022.

About Vostro account

- A Vostro account is an account that a domestic bank holds for a foreign bank in the domestic bank's currency, which, in the case of India, is the rupee.
- The owners and beneficiaries of this money will be the exporters and importers in both countries.

Countries allowed to open Vostro accounts

- The RBI has allowed Botswana, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, and the United Kingdom to open Vostro accounts as of now.

Merits of Trade in local currencies

- Trade in local currencies have been mooted as a solution to avoid the current wave of wartime international sanctions that are hampering supply chains and global trade flows.
- In the past one year, India has finalised trade pacts with partner countries such as the UAE and Australia and begun negotiation with others such as the U.K. and the EU while making inroads for the national currency in bilateral and global trade.

Centre calls for indigenous acquisitions for the military

Context

- With the financial year drawing to a close and no progress on clearing outstanding Rouble payments for weapons purchased from Russia, the government of India is set to go in for a series indigenous acquisition for the military.
- Several new acquisitions are under consideration and orders are likely to be placed this month once they get the final nod from the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

Approved Acquisitions and procurement plan

Indian Navy

1. Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels

- In 2018, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) had accorded approval for the procurement of six Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPVs), fitted with state-of-the-art sensor suite, for the Navy.
- These platforms are aimed at strengthening maritime security by undertaking a multitude of operational roles.

2. Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries:

- In 2019, the DAC had accorded approval for procurement of the Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries (NGMMCBs) for deployment along the coast.
- The NGMMCBs are fitted with BrahMos surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missiles.
- They have been developed and made in India by BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited, an India-Russia joint venture company.

Indian Air Force

1. Radars system: For the IAF, procurement of indigenously-developed medium power radars and high-power radars for detection and tracking of aerial targets including fighter aircraft and slow-moving objects and close-in weapon systems is also on cards.

2. Dornier-228 aircraft: The Ministry of Defence signed a contract with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to procure six Dornier-228 aircraft for the IAF at a cost of Rs 667 crore.

- The aircraft will be used for transport and communication duties.
- Earlier this month, the CCS approved the procurement of 70 HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft from HAL for the IAF.

Indian Army

1. Project Himshakti: For the Army, contracts for Project Himshakti, a DRDO-developed integrated electronic warfare system for mountains, a dedicated communications satellite for the Army, and an indigenous air defence control and reporting system are in the pipeline.

2. GSAT 7B: In 2022, the DAC had accorded approval for the procurement of GSAT 7B for the Army.

India plans new security testing for smartphones

Context

- Under proposed new security rules, India plans to force smartphone makers to allow removal of pre-installed apps and mandate screening of major operating system updates.
- The new rules could extend introduction timelines in the world's number two smartphone market and lead to losses in business from pre-installed applications for players including Samsung, Xiaomi, Vivo, and Apple.

Concerns about spying

- The IT Ministry is considering these new rules amid concerns about spying and abuse of user data.
- Pre-installed apps can be a weak security point.
- India has ramped up scrutiny of Chinese businesses since a 2020 border clash between the neighbours, banning more than 300 Chinese apps, including TikTok.
- As per experts some pre-installed apps like the camera are critical to user experience and the government must make a distinction between these and non-essential ones when imposing screening rules.

India's smartphone market

- India's fast-growing smartphone market is dominated by Chinese players.
- The brand Xiaomi and BBK Electronics' Vivo and Oppo account for 47% of total sales, Counterpoint data shows.
- South Korea's Samsung has a 20% share and Apple has 3%.

A case for a better electricity public hearing

Context

- The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) recently issued a public notice where it announced that hearings of public grievances will resume through in-person mode.
- It is natural that decisions on the planning and the operation of the power sector have a significant impact on the public.
- The scale of operations of electricity distribution companies is clear from the fact that their annual revenue requirement is 20% of the Union Budget.

About CERC

- Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) is a key regulator of power sector in India.
- It is a statutory body functioning with quasi-judicial status under section 76 of the Electricity Act 2003.
- CERC was instituted primarily to regulate the tariff of Power Generating companies owned or controlled by the government of India, and any other generating company which has a composite scheme for power generation and interstate transmission of energy, including tariffs of generating companies.

States that reverted to in-person hearings

- The ERCs in Tamil Nadu and Telangana have also reverted to in-person hearings. However, several State ERCs, including those in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, recently held public hearings entirely online.
- Many State ERCs, including those in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, have tried to increase access and diversify participation by organising tariff revision public hearings at different locations.

Important and popular public hearing

- The in-person by Electricity Regulatory Commissions provide a platform for citizens to voice their views to the ERC.
- They facilitate meaningful interactions and cross-learning between various sector actors, help to build consumer networks, and enable collective action.
- In-person process paves the way for consensus building and also lends enhanced credibility to decisions on complex matters.
- In addition to cost savings, a consumer's concerns with the quality of supply also get discussed and corrective measures evolve.

Pros and cons of online hearings challenges

- Online hearings were the only option during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- These hearings proved to be a welcome step, as they circumvented transport and logistics issues while enabling wider attendance from remote locations, and allowed for quick convening and multiple meetings, which could have aided the consultative process.
- Technological access and know-how are not uniform across the country, making it difficult for some to participate.
- Issues such as poor Internet connections, technical mishaps, and the use of complex platforms and applications by ERCs hinder participation.
- The ERC also has greater control of the platform in online hearings.

Way forward

- Public hearings must be conducted in hybrid mode, with the choice of mode being left to the citizen, are best suited to improving access.
- Public hearing is a major platform of social action, and participants by enabling discourse and community building and ensuring transparency and accountability in operations, besides improving access to these public proceedings are the steps needed.
- In the crucial electricity sector, an online with in-person hearing mode would only boost public participation.

India and Italy: Friends in a turbulent world

Context

- The year 2023 mark the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations between India and Italy
- India and Italy have decided to elevate their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership, opening a new chapter on defence cooperation.
- The Prime minister of Italy also announced that it will be joining the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

Moving towards strategic partnership

- The elevation of bilateral relations to a strategic partnership has been established for the first time.
- The strategic partnership that will also focus on sectors such as defence, cybersecurity, space and energy.
- In recent years, Italy and India have already intensified their collaboration, bringing bilateral trade to a record figure of around 15 billion euros in 2022, doubling the figure recorded in 2020.

Five-year action plan

- India and Italy in 2020 adopted a five-year action plan with a well-defined range of priorities which include:
 - Energy transition
 - Food processing
 - Advanced manufacturing
 - Creative industry
 - Infrastructure of various kinds

Italy joined multilateral initiatives

- In recent years, Italy has joined all the multilateral initiatives promoted by India, from the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to the Coalition for Disaster Relief Infrastructure (CDRI), to the International Solar Alliance.
- Italy and India have also further enhanced collaboration in the cultural field, on the heritage front as well as in the creative industry – fashion, design, cinema, etc.

Health sector collaboration

- In the health sector, during the pandemic, our two countries have collaborated since the beginning with the exchange of experiences and practices, with humanitarian initiatives, and we have also promoted joint research projects.

Way forward

- The link between the two areas will become increasingly substantiated in the fields of maritime and digital connectivity and security.
- Italy intends to offer full support to the Indian Presidency of the G20.
- India and Italy have also expressed their commitment to enhancing the European-Indian strategic partnership and their support for the ongoing negotiations for Free Trade Agreements and agreements on investment protection and geographical indication protection.

The advertisement for APTI PLUS UPSC CSE MAINS TEST SERIES 2023 features a yellow and green background. On the left, there is a circular inset image showing a hand writing on a piece of paper with a pen. The text 'APTI PLUS Academy for Civil Services Pvt. Ltd.' is at the top left. The main title 'UPSC CSE MAINS TEST SERIES 2023' is prominently displayed in the center. Below the title, three yellow circles contain the numbers 8, 4, and 3, corresponding to 'SECTIONAL TESTS', 'FULL LENGTH TESTS', and 'ESSAY TESTS' respectively. The IASGYAN logo is at the bottom right.

14.03.2023

- India remains world's largest importer of arms
- Synchronised Vulture Survey in Karnataka, TN, Kerala
- Panel pulls up Labour Ministry for underutilisation of funds
- India treasure trove sitting in US museum
- A chance for India to shape a data governance regime

India remains world's largest importer of arms

Context

- According to the latest report released by defence think-tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India remained the world's top arms importer.
- But the imports segment declined by 11 per cent between 2013-17 and 2018-22.
- The decline was linked to a complex procurement process, efforts to diversify arms suppliers and attempts to replace imports with local designs.

About SIPRI

- SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
- Established in 1966 in Stockholm, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

World's largest arm Importer and Exporter

- As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report five largest arms importers in the world during 2018-22 were **India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia and China.**
- The five largest arms exporters were the United States, Russia, France, China and Germany.
- The report said India received 30 per cent of France's arms exports during 2018-22 and France displaced the US as the second-largest supplier of arms to India after Russia.

Other countries

- The imports by Pakistan, the world's eighth-largest arms importer during 2018-22, increased by 14 per cent, with China as its main supplier.
- It said France's arms exports increased by 44 per cent between 2013-17 and 2018-22 and most of these exports were to countries in Asia and Oceania and the Middle East.

Russia's share falls

- The report compared two five-year periods and noted that between 2013-17 and 2018-22, Russian arms supplies to India are declining
- Russia's share of total Indian arms imports fell from 64 per cent to 45 per cent; this is because of strong competition from other supplier states and increased Indian arms production
- It said the United States share of global arms exports increased from 33 to 40 per cent, while Russia's fell from 22 to 16 per cent.

Reason for high arms imports

- India's tensions with Pakistan and China largely drive its demand for arms imports. With an 11% share of total global arms imports, India was the world's biggest importer of major arms from 2018 to 2022.
- It retained this position even though its arms imports dropped by 11% between 2013 to 2017 and from 2018 to 2022.

Synchronised Vulture Survey In Karnataka, TN, Kerala

Context

The first-ever synchronised survey conducted along the borders of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka (February 25 and 26, 2023) has spotted as many as 246 vultures.

More about Survey

- The two-day Synchronised Vulture Survey held in:
 1. **Karnataka**
 - Bandipur Tiger Reserves - 73 vultures
 - Nagarhole Tiger Reserves - 23 vultures
 2. **Tamil Nadu**
 - Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) - 98 vultures
 - Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) - 02 vultures
 - Nilgiris
 3. **Kerala**
 - Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary covering the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve - 52 vultures

Vulture spotted in Survey

- During the survey, volunteers sighted:
 - White-rumped vultures (183)
 - Long-billed vultures (30)
 - Red-headed vultures (28)
 - Egyptian vultures (3)
 - Himalayan Griffon
 - Cinereous vulture (1)

Reason for declining vultures' population

- The major reason behind the vulture population is the use of Diclofenac drug.
- The drug was commonly used to treat inflammation in cattle.
- It is mostly found in the carcass of cattle on which the vultures feed.
- The government of India has banned the use of Diclofenac drug for veterinary purposes in 2008.
- Diclofenac is dangerously fatal for Vultures.

Panel pulls up Labour Ministry for underutilization of funds

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, has pulled up the Union Labour Ministry for underutilization of the allocations meant for the Ministry's schemes.
- The panel has asked the Ministry to assess and work out the likely financial implication of implementing the Supreme Court judgment on higher provident fund pension and approach the Ministry of Finance for additional funds to enable timely payment of amounts that may become due.

Budget allocation and utilization

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in its report on the demands for grants tabled in both Houses of Parliament noted that ₹16,893.68 crores were allocated as Budget estimates for 2022-23, which was decreased to ₹16,117.65 crore at revised estimates stage.
- The actual expenditure incurred as on February 21, 2023, was ₹ 13,092.99 crore, which amounts to 81.23% of the revised estimates (RE) amount.
- The panel has asked the Ministry to approach the Ministry of Finance for additional funds

Scheme-wise fund utilisation

- The scheme-wise analysis of utilisation of funds for the fiscal 2022-23 up to February 13, 2023 reveals that the Employee's Pension Scheme (EPS) and National Career Services (NCS) are the only schemes which recorded expenditure up to 90% vis-à-vis RE provisioning whereas for most other schemes, the percentage utilisation has been substantially low.
 - The Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan - 26.66%
 - National Database of Unorganised Workers - 30.02%
 - Labour Welfare Schemes - 30.63%
 - Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour - 48.30%

Negative Impact

- The panel observed that gross underutilization of the funds has impacted the performance of certain schemes thereby defeating the laudable intent of these schemes in benefiting the targeted groups.

India treasure trove sitting in US museum

Context

- An investigation by The Indian Express, in association with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and UK-based Finance Uncovered, has found that the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York catalogue includes at least 77 antiquities spanning centuries, including 59 paintings.

Important antiquities

- From an ivory sculpture of "Moon God Chandra" traced to the 2nd-1st century BCE.
- Eighth-century stone sculpture of "Kamadeva, the God of Love"
- An ink-and-watercolor painting of "Mahishasura Mardini" in 1760 to another in "red ochre Wash on paper" from 1775-80 depicting "Rama and Lakshmana".

A chance for India to shape a data governance regime

Context

- India has witnessed rapid digital growth in a short time span.
- This has resulted in technological advances and new governance regimes.
- In recent years, India has made great strides in its digital strategies and data governance.
- India has embraced technology and digitalisation to drive economic growth and to improve the lives of its citizens.

India's G-20 presidency and opportunity

- India's G-20 presidency has provided an opportunity for the country to showcase its advancements in the digital arena, particularly with regards to data infrastructures and data governance.
- As the world becomes increasingly digital, the G-20 has recognized the need for international cooperation and collaboration in addressing the challenges, opportunities and risks posed by the rapid growth of data and digital technologies.
- Significant progress has been made in the use of digital technologies to provide access to bank accounts and in the promotion of digital transactions through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and other options.

Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture

- Recently, the NITI Aayog has released draft Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA) which aims to promote greater user control on data sharing.
- The launch of India's Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), a consent management tool, has generated both excitement and concern among stakeholders.
- DEPA has the potential to improve data protection and privacy for citizens by giving them greater control over the use and sharing of their personal information.
- DEPA could help to build trust in digital technologies and data governance.

DEPA and concerns

- There are risks associated with Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), particularly in terms of security and privacy.
- If the consent management tool is not properly implemented or managed, there is a risk that personal information could be misused or misappropriated.
- Additionally, there are concerns that the implementation of DEPA may be inconsistent across different sectors and jurisdictions, which could undermine its effectiveness and create confusion among citizens.
- In order to realise the potential benefits of DEPA and minimize the risks, it is important that the tool is implemented in a transparent, consistent, and secure manner.
- Another issue is that of ownership and governance of data generated and collected in health and agriculture.
- These concerns must be addressed through strong and robust data protection regulations, the development of ethical and responsible data governance practices, as well as effective and accountable oversight mechanisms.

Issue of data sovereignty

- The term "data sovereignty" refers to the principle that a country has the right to control the collection, storage, and use of data within its borders and also to the informational self-determination of citizens over their data.

- India's establishment of an India Data Management Office (IDMO) is a step forward in the country's journey towards data sharing and data governance.
- The IDMO is expected to oversee and coordinate the implementation of India's digital strategies and data governance framework, and to ensure that these efforts are aligned with the country's values and priorities.

Way forward

- It is important for India to navigate a middle way between restrictive data sovereignty and limitless data flow, and define which data, for which purposes, can be shared and used by whom.
- The government must respect and protect the fundamental right to privacy with a robust data protection law, and balance the interests of all stakeholders.
- This requires the development of clear, transparent and accountable data governance policies and regulations as well as investment in the necessary digital infrastructure.
- The crafting of the country's data governance must enable a secure, more egalitarian, and trustworthy digital future for all.

13.03.2023

- **New norms to achieve net-zero waste for building**
- **India, Australia for early conclusion of pact on market access**
- **The rise of the ESG regulations**
- **US to reboot India's chip ambitions**
- **Adultery as misconduct and judicial musings**

New norms to achieve net-zero waste for building

Context

- The Union government in a plan to bring in new norms for all upcoming housing and commercial complexes to mandatorily ensure net-zero waste.
- The mechanized sewage system, coupled with the mandatory zero net waste clause for housing and commercial complexes, will be an crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The United Nations SDG 6.3 aims at "halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increase recycling and safe reuse globally" by 2030. India currently generates 72,368 million liters of urban wastewater a day, of which only 28% is treated, show the Ministry data from 2023.

Direction to sates

- The centre will direct the states government to incorporate the requirement in building bylaws as part of efforts to end manual scavenging; mechanized sewerage important for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) will send a directive to all State governments to incorporate the net-zero requirement in the building bylaws and ensure implementation.

Plan of action

- As part of the Union government's push for reforming and modernizing the sewage disposal system, all upcoming housing societies and commercial complexes in the country will soon have to mandatorily ensure net-zero waste and have their liquid discharge treated,
- Achieving net-zero waste means reducing, reusing and recovering waste streams (sludge) to convert them to valuable resources so that zero solid waste is sent to landfills.

Eradication of manual scavenging

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is also planning at integrating septic tank design into the bylaws and adherence to standard specifications, geo-tagging all septic tanks and manholes for proper tracking and reducing GST on mechanized cleaning vehicles.
- The directives are part of the government's effort to implement the manhole to machine-hole scheme to eradicate manual scavenging.
- In her Budget speech for 2023-24, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that all cities and towns would be enabled for 100% transition of sewers and septic tanks from manhole to machine-hole mode.

Other guidelines

- **Commercial use of processed sludge:** The urban local bodies such as municipalities to explore the potential of commercial use of processed sludge as fertilizer and empaneling all agencies providing sanitation services in both the organised and unorganized sectors.
- **Tariff rates for de-sludging:** The central government will review the Indian standards for mechanized cleaning equipment and consider differential tariff rates for residential and commercial de-sludging.
- **Low-cost technological solutions:** A “Make in India” start-up for promoting low-cost technological solutions such as mechanized spades and sensor sticks for gas detection is being considered.

India, Australia for early conclusion of pact on market access

Context

- The recent India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission discussed negotiations for a full-scale free trade pact and steps to spur investment flows into both countries.
- The meeting made the progress in resolving various bilateral technical market access issues and “look forward to concluding” the India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) soon.
- Both countries also discussed engagements in the G-20, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Merits of Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement

- The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement will create new employment opportunities, raise living standards, and improve the general welfare in both countries.
- The CECA will include discussions on deeper market access and outcomes in new areas, including digital trade, government procurement, and cooperation.
- India and Australia look forward to an early conclusion of an ambitious CECA, which will build on the foundation laid by the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement including new areas of trade, investment and cooperation.
- India-Australia would continue to work together on areas of mutual interest, including the clean economy and resilient supply chains.

Strengthening bilateral trade

- After the implementing of interim trade deal i.e., Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) in December, India and Australia now aim to conclude negotiations for a comprehensive trade pact by the end of this year.
- Both countries are also looking at achieving \$100 billion in bilateral trade.
- ECTA was the first stage of our economic engagement.
- When the ECTA was signed last year, it was decided that the larger idea would be to use the foundation of the interim deal to resume negotiations on the more ambitious trade deal or comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA).

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The rise of the ESG regulations

Context

- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals are a set of standards for a company's operations that force companies to follow better governance, ethical practices, environment-friendly measures, and social responsibility.
- Over the last decade, regulators and corporations around the world have embraced the idea that businesses should be measured not just on traditional economic metrics such as shareholder return, but also by their environmental impact, commitment to social issues and the soundness of their corporate governance and protection of shareholder rights.
- The evolution of ESG laws and regulations is, however, still at a nascent stage in India.

How ESG differs from CSR

- India has a robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy that mandates that corporations engage in initiatives that contribute to the welfare of society.
- This mandate was codified into law with the passage of the 2014 and 2021 amendments to the Companies Act of 2013.
- The amendments require companies with a net worth of ₹500 crore or a minimum turnover of ₹1,000 crore or a net profit of ₹5 crore in any given financial year spend at least 2% of their net profit over the preceding three years on CSR activities.
- ESG regulations, on the other hand, differ in process and impact.
- The U.K. Modern Slavery Act, for example, requires companies with business in the U.K. and with annual sales of more than £36 million to publish the efforts they have taken to identify and analyse the risks of human trafficking, child labour and debt bondage in their supply chain; establish internal accountability procedures; evaluate supplier compliance and to train supply chain managers regarding these issues.

Relevance of ESG in India

- India has number of laws and bodies regarding environmental, social and governance issues, including the Environment Protection Act of 1986, quasi-judicial organisations such as the National Green Tribunal, a range of labour codes and laws governing employee engagement and corporate governance practices.
- The penalty for violations can be substantial.
- While these laws and bodies provide important environmental and social safeguards, new initiatives in India go further, establishing guidelines that emphasize monitoring, quantification and disclosure, akin to ESG requirements found in other parts of the world.
- Further legislation regarding ESG are likely, given the increased emphasis by the Indian government on ESG issues, which can be seen in India's more active role in global climate forums as well as in specific policy developments.

SEBI Stand

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), responding to the increase in environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing and the demand by investors for information on ESG risks, substantially revised the annual Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) required by the 1,000 largest listed companies in India.

US to reboot India's chip ambitions

Context

- The recent semiconductor manufacturing incentives rolled out by the government of India offer an opportunity for U.S. companies to expand their capacities in India.
- It also allows American companies to leverage the skilled workforce in India to build capacity and invest in catalyzing R&D in the semiconductor and related industries.
- From a domestic industry perspective, the collaboration between India and U.S. could also prompt a potential realignment of India's current policy approach on chip manufacturing.
- According to industry estimates by the Indian Cellular and Electronics Association, Taiwan account for over 70 per cent of the chips that mobile devices made in India utilize,
- India expects its semiconductor market will reach \$63 billion by 2026, compared with \$15 billion in 2020.
- A small beginning, with the country's first semiconductor chip manufacturer Polymatech starting production of its Opto-semiconductors and memory modules at Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu.

Main upsides from India's perspective

- The deal between India and the United States on fostering private-sector cooperation in semiconductor manufacturing could have three main upsides from India's perspective.
- The possibility of India getting aligned into a more central role in the global electronics supply chain is among the most important, especially the possibility of finding potential convergence in the chip manufacturing incentive scheme launched by the country and those by other governments across the world.
- There is a commitment to mainstream India's \$10 billion in incentives by dovetailing component manufacturing projects from established foreign chip firms and industry leaders such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) and Intel Corp, as opposed to just marginal players that have shown interest in India's incentive scheme so far.
- There is also the possibility of India benefiting from a further realignment of the regional collaborative effort being fostered by the US in a pivotal role, as U.S. tries to diversify the sourcing supply base for semiconductor chips and avoid duplication of efforts.

Chip 4 alliance initiative

- The U.S.-led "Fab 4" or 'Chip 4' semiconductor alliance of Taiwan, the United States, Japan and South Korea.
- The US is already pursuing the "Chip 4" alliance initiative with three other top semiconductor makers – Taiwan, Japan and South Korea.
- India, Japan and Australia had announced plans in September 2021 to establish a semiconductor supply chain initiative "to secure access to semiconductors and their components".

Adultery as misconduct and judicial musings

Context

- In 2018 the Supreme Court of India decriminalized adultery in its landmark judgment, Joseph Shine versus Union of India (September 2018).
- It held Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code (on adultery) along with Section 198 of the Criminal Procedure Code to be unconstitutional on the premise that these provisions were violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

Issue concerning the Armed Forces

- The Union of India sought clarification from the Court saying that any adulterous acts should be allowed to be governed by the relevant sections of the Army Act, the Air Force Act and the Navy Act being special legislations by the virtue of Article 33 of the Constitution.
- On January 31st, 2023 a 5-Judge Constitution Bench led by Justice K.M. Joseph passed the final order clarified that while passing the Judgment in 2018, the Court was not concerned with the laws of the Armed Forces and therefore did not stand in their way.

Article 33 of Indian constitution

- Article 33 of Indian constitution empowers the Parliament to restrict or abrogate the fundamental rights of the 'Members of the Armed Forces', paramilitary forces, police forces, intelligence agencies and analogous forces.
- The objective of this provision is to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and the maintenance of discipline among them.
- The power to make laws under Article 33 is conferred only on Parliament and not on state legislatures.

Issue of discharge of duties

- The debatable (moot) question is whether these observations by the Court give an impression that the armed forces may go ahead with disciplinary action for the misconduct of adulterous acts.

Way forward

- Though Article 33 of the Constitution empowers Parliament to restrict the fundamental rights of the members of the armed forces, the caveat of 'so as to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and the maintenance of discipline among them' cannot be overlooked.
- The same principle will also apply to members of the forces charged with the maintenance of public order.

- The legislative intent of Article 33 of the Constitution is also similar. Therefore, the sacrosanct right to privacy available to the members of the armed forces cannot be taken away under the guise of the special legislations unless it has some nexus with their duties.

11.03.2023

- 3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Production and promotion of organic and bio fertilisers
- India, U.S. to launch a semiconductor sub-committee
- India's factory output rises in January
- A moment of reckoning for AUKUS and Australia

3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Context

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the 3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR).
- Prime Minister pitched for a "proactive rather than reactive" approach to handle natural disasters and minimise damage.
- India is one of the most disaster-affected countries in the world.
- Over 50 per cent of the country's population is affected due to earthquakes, flood, cyclones, droughts, and tsunamis.
- After the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, the world has recognized and appreciated the role of India's disaster management efforts"

Theme

- The main theme of the 3rd session of this platform is "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate".
- The session was jointly organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM).

10-Point Agenda



Prime Minister's 10-point agenda on DRR

1. All development sectors must imbibe the principles of disaster risk management.
2. Work towards risk coverage for all-starting from poor households to SMEs to multi-national corporations to nation states.
3. Encourage greater involvement and leadership of women in disaster risk management.
4. Invest in risk mapping globally. For mapping risks related to hazards like earthquakes we have accepted standards and parameters.
5. Leverage technology to enhance the efficiency of our disaster risk management efforts.
6. Develop a network of universities to work on disaster issues.
7. Utilise the opportunities provided by social media and mobile technologies.
8. Build on local capacity and initiative.
9. Opportunity to learn from a disaster must not be wasted. After every disaster there are papers on lessons that are rarely applied.
10. Bring about greater cohesion in international response to disasters.

Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar award 2023

- During the programme, the PM felicitated awardees of the Subhas Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar for 2023 – Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) and the Lunglei Fire Station, Mizoram.

About NPDRR

- NPDRR is a multi-stakeholder platform constituted by the Government of India to facilitate dialogue, sharing experiences, views, ideas, action-oriented research and explore opportunities in the area of Disaster Risk Reduction.

Laws and institutional setup for disaster management

- The aftermath of the 2001 earthquake in Kutch, Gujarat was the first state to come up with a disaster management Act.
- Based on this Act, the Centre enacted the National Disaster Management Act in 2005.
- Subsequently, the National Disaster Management Authority was set up.

Use of technology

- The Prime Minister while addressing the 3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) stressed exploring the use of artificial intelligence, 5G along with the Internet of Things (IoT) to make the ambulance network future-ready.
- He also asked the stakeholders to investigate the use of drones, gadgets for alerting, and personal gadgets that can help in locating people buried under debris.

Production and promotion of organic and bio fertilisers

Context

- Recently the NITI Aayog released a report Titled “Production and promotion of organic and biofertilizers with special focus on improving the economic viability of gaushalas”,
- According to the latest report by the NITI Aayog, Gaushalas (cow shelters) can become major suppliers of inputs for natural farming in the country.
- Achieving the targets would require concerted efforts of the government, private players and entrepreneurs says a report prepared by the NITI Aayog.

Promoting natural farming and organic farming

- In the recent time, realization has been growing to reduce or replace agro chemicals, serving as plant nutrients and plant protection, for economic, health, environment and sustainability reasons.
- Accordingly, there is a trend towards natural farming and organic farming where inorganic fertilizer and agro chemicals are replaced by livestock manure, plant-based products, bio inputs, and products made from cow urine and cow dung.
- The task force felt that gaushalas can be of great help in promoting natural farming and organic farming.

Advantages of cow shelters

- The Task force report by NITI Aayog suggested that cow shelters could address the problem of stray cattle that damaged crops in many parts of the country.
- It said the number of stray and abandoned cattle had risen to a level beyond the resources available.
- According to the report, the population of stray cattle is estimated at 53 lakhs.

Adherence to Article 48

- The report said cow dung-based organic fertilizers would have a huge impact in fulfilling the constitutional mandate under Article 48.
- Article 48 of the Constitution of India is one of the Directive Principles which directs the state to make efforts for banning animal slaughtering of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle. It further states to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines.

India, U.S. to launch a semiconductor sub-committee

Context

- Recently, India and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that will pave the way for creating a semiconductor sub-committee under the Commercial Dialogue between the U.S. Department of Commerce and India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Ministry of Commerce.
- The first engagement of the sub-committee is expected to take place before the end of 2023.

Key theme of the dialogue

- The key theme of the dialogue focused on:
 - Resilient and secure supply chains
 - Facilitating climate and clean technology cooperation
 - Inclusive digital growth
 - Talent development, including skilling
 - Focus on cooperation on quality standards.
 - Post-pandemic economic recovery, especially for MSMEs and start-ups

Advantages

- The Commercial Dialogue aims to enhance public and private efforts to promote industry cooperation in the semiconductor sector.
- These efforts will identify opportunities for growth and challenges to address in order to ensure that US and Indian semiconductor industries develop stronger connections, complementary ecosystems, and a more diverse supply chain for semiconductors.
- Both countries also expressed interest in working together in developing next-generation standards in telecommunications, including 6G.

India-U.S. trade value

- The US is India's largest exporter and trading partner while India is the ninth-largest trading partner for the US.
- Bilateral merchandise trade during April-January stood at \$108.43 billion.
- Both nations aim to achieve bilateral trade of \$500 billion by 2025.
- The US is also the third-biggest source of foreign direct investment for India, and is one of the top five investment destinations for India.

India's factory output rises in January

Context

- According to the latest data by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, India's industrial output grew 5.2 per cent in January.
- It was a 4.7 per cent rise in December 2022.

Sector performance

- A double-digit surge in electricity generation for the third successive month was one of the factors that bolstered the increase.
- Consumer durables output contracted for the second month in a row, declining 7.5 per cent in January.
- December saw an 11 per cent drop in consumer durables output.
- Manufacturing growth at 3.7% struggled for traction despite a low-base of just 1.9% growth in January 2022, with textiles and electronics pulling the month's output measure down.
- The Indices of Industrial Production for the Mining, Manufacturing and Electricity sectors for the month of January 2023 stand at 135.9, 144.3 and 186.6 respectively.

Primary goods' output

- In January, primary goods' output grew 9.6 per cent, capital goods' output grew 11 per cent, intermediate goods output was up 0.1 per cent, construction goods grew 8.1 per cent while durables' output grew 6.2 per cent.

A moment of reckoning for AUKUS and Australia

Context

- AUKUS is new trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the U.K. and the U.S.
- The week ahead is likely to be crucial for Australia.
- Under the AUKUS deal, Australia would obtain eight state-of-the-art, nuclear-powered but conventionally armed submarines capable of stealthy, long-range missions.

Concern for Australia

- The main issue for Australia is that many of its regional partners oppose the Royal Australian Navy operating nuclear attack submarines.

- Some, such as Indonesia, have been open about their reservations.
- Others, such as India, despite being politically supportive of AUKUS, appear conflicted about the prospect of officials hope will be the chosen pathway, is for the U.S. to build nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) for Australia.
- Two top U.S. Senators wrote to U.S. President in January this year, urging him not to sell nuclear submarines to Australia, warning that it would jeopardize U.S. national security given the vessels' scarcity.
- The second option is for the U.K. to expand its Astute-class programme to Australia. The U.K. is constructing its Dreadnought-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) programme while designing the Astute-class replacement in a sequential build process.
- The third and most likely option is a trilateral effort to develop a new nuclear submarine design.
- Australia could announce a modified version of the yet-to-be-launched U.S. Next-Generation Attack Submarine or U.K. Submersible Ship Nuclear Replacement (SSNR) programmes, or even a completely new AUKUS-class design to be acquired by all three countries.

N-technology transfer is complicated

- The nuclear technology is difficult under the international system.
- For Australia to operate nuclear-powered submarines with high-enriched uranium (HEU) fueled reactors, it will have to exploit a loophole that allows non-nuclear weapon countries to withdraw the fissile material required for submarine reactors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)-monitored stockpile.

India's concern

- Acquiring nuclear propulsion technology is likely to be also complicated for India, which is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- The complexities involved in the transfer of technology for HEU-fuelled reactors in nuclear attack submarines from the U.S. and U.K., leave India with only one practical option: buying a high-power reactor from France.
- India, which has never been in the same league of U.S. partners as Australia, acquiring critical technology from the U.S. remains a more daunting prospect.

Bottom line

- India will need to work with the transnational institutional arrangements in place, roping in like-minded nations into symbiotic partnerships, and calibrate future alliance plans.
- The soon-to-be announced 'optimal pathway' for AUKUS has implications that go beyond Australia and its near neighborhood.



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10.03.2023

- India-Australia security partnership
- Centre formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023
- India, US to ink MoU on semiconductor
- The ideal track to run India's logistics system
- Making of a Destination

India-Australia security partnership

Context

- Recently, the Australian Prime Minister visited the Indian Navy's indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant at Mumbai and termed relations between the two countries as "a partnership that is of increasing strategic importance."
- India will step up its participation in joint military exercises with Australia after being elevated to a "top-tier security partner".

Defence exercise and engagement

Malabar naval exercises

- Australia will host the 2023 Operation Malabar naval exercises with the US, India and Japan.
- The Indian Ocean is central to both countries' security and prosperity.
- The Malabar exercise began as an annual bilateral naval exercise between India and the US in 1992 but has increased in scope and complexity over the years.

Talisman Sabre exercises

- India will join Australia in the biennial Talisman Sabre war games exercises for the first time.
- It is a biennial, multinational military exercise led by Australia and the United States.
- The other countries include Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and U.K.

Economic And Trade Relationship

- India is the 5th largest trade partner of Australia with trade in goods and services at \$ 29 billion representing 3.6% share of the total Australian trade in 2017-18, with export at \$ 8 billion and import at \$ 21 billion.
- The two countries are also discussing a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).
- India-Australia CEO Forum is a mechanism for business from both nations to engage directly on ways to build the bilateral trade and investment relationship

Centre formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023

Context

- Recently, the Union government formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023, which is a broad overhaul of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- Policy advocates and legal experts on the broad principles of the Digital India Act (DIA), with the definition of internet intermediaries and their safe harbors among the top subjects of discussion.
- The government will have multiple rounds of consultations before the new Act is brought to Parliament.

Key aspects of Digital India Act

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Deepfakes
- Cybercrime
- Competition issues among Internet platforms
- Data protection

Goal of Digital India Act

- New law should evolve through rules that can be updated, and address the tenets of Digital India such as:
 - Open internet

- Online safety and trust
- Accountability
- Quality of service
- Adjudicatory mechanism
- New technologies

Safe Harbor Principle

- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act 2000 introduced the safe harbour immunity clause that protected an intermediary from being held liable for third-party content on its platform - provided that the intermediary observed 'due diligence' as prescribed by the Central Government.
- The government is reconsidering a key aspect of cyberspace 'safe harbour', which is the principle that the so-called 'intermediaries' on the Internet are not responsible for what third parties post on their website.
- This is the principle that allows social media platforms to avoid liability for posts made by users.

Reform in digital law

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has been working on a draft Digital India Bill to replace the primary digital law, IT Act, 2000, and address challenges posed by the internet today.

Grievance Appellate Committees

- Recently, the union government established three Grievance Appellate Committees based on the recently amended Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 ("IT Rules 2021").
- The Grievance Appellate Committees as envisaged under Rule 3A of the IT Rules 2021.
- Three Grievance Appellate Committees have now been established to take up content complaints by social media users.

India, US to ink MoU on semiconductor

Context

- India and U.S. will sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in semiconductors.
- The move will help India to play a greater role in diversified supply chains and identify opportunities for joint ventures or technology partnerships.
- Jointly mapping the supply chain will help the two countries to figure out where there might be opportunities for joint ventures or technology partnerships, job training, and research and development partnerships.

India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue

- India and U.S. recently launched a new initiative called the India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue that will focus on aligning the export control regimes of both countries for critical technologies.

Policy measure

- India has launched a production-linked incentive scheme for chips and the US recently unveiled its CHIPS and Science Act to help rebuild its manufacturing and supply chains. Both initiatives have come at a time when India and the US are working to end their dependence on China for chips.

India's semiconductor industry

- The current value of the semiconductor industry in India is of worth \$27.2 billion in 2021.
- India's semiconductor industry is projected to grow to \$64 billion by 2026, representing a compound annual growth rate of 19 percent.

The ideal track to run India's logistics system

Context

- The Union Budget 2023 has doubled the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan to States from ₹5,000 crore to ₹10,000 crore, and has announced an outlay of ₹2.4 lakh crore for the Indian Railways.
- The plan is a "transformative approach for economic growth and sustainable development dependent on the engines of roads, railways, airports, ports, mass transport, waterways and logistics infrastructure".

PM Gati Shakti mission

- The Railways offer an efficient and economic mode of logistics movement given their pan-India network.
- PM Gati Shakti mission aims for increasing the share of the railways in freight movement from 27% to 45% by 2030.
- The mission provides the right platform to address the infrastructural challenges that have hampered the movement of freight by rail.
- It can play an important role in enabling a coordinated and integrated logistics system.

Freight movement

- Currently, the modal mix in terms of freight movement is skewed by a considerable extent towards road transport, with 65% of freight movement by road.
- The effect is an increased burden on roads, and, therefore, significant congestion, increased pollution, and resultant logistics cost escalations.
- The increased adoption of the railways as a mode for cargo movement is crucial to improve India's logistics competitiveness.
- A look at the comparable costs of different forms of transportation suggests that freight movement cost is the highest in the road sector — nearly twice the rail cost.

Major Items of freight movement

- In 2020-21, coal constituted 44% of the total freight movement of 1.2 billion tonnes, followed by iron ore (13%), cement (10%), food grains (5%), fertilizers (4%), iron and steel (4%), etc.
- Transportation of non-bulk commodities accounts for a very small share in the rail freight movement.

Rise in container traffic

- The convenience of moving non-bulk commodities in containers has led to an increase in containerized traffic over the last decade.
- From 7.6 million in 2018, Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit (TEU)s is 16.2 million in 2020.
- TEU is a unit of cargo capacity.

Challenges

- Infrastructural: Lack of necessary terminal infrastructure, maintenance of good sheds and warehouses.
- Operational: High network congestion, lower service levels, and increased transit time.
- Connectivity: Absence of integrated first and last-mile connectivity by rail increases the chances of damage due to multiple handling and also increases the inventory holding cost.

Way forward

- The upcoming Dedicated Freight Corridors along India's eastern and western corridors and multimodal logistics parks will ease the oversaturated line capacity constraints and improve the timing of trains.
- An integrated logistics infrastructure with first and last-mile connectivity is essential to make rail movement competitive with roads, and facilitate exports by rail to neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh.
- Increased adoption of the railways for cargo movement is crucial to improve the country's logistics competitiveness.

Making of a Destination

Context

- As one of the fastest-emerging tourist destinations in the world, India's travel and tourism sector will be the key axis of development in the coming years.
- Prime Minister reiteration of the importance of tourism in driving growth.
- The Union Budget 2023, has outlined the path to developing tourism in mission mode.
- India's G20 presidency together with government's vision to develop 50 destinations across the country has provided the right fillip to the tourism sector and is certain to dramatically improve India's global ranking on the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index.

Call for collaborative efforts

- The collective action by industry stakeholders and the government could shape the future for the Tourism sector.
- The development of tourism accounting for 10 per cent of the total employment directly, and providing 8 per cent of the overall GDP.
- The Union budget has listed six themes for the development of the sector:
 - Convergence
 - Public-private participation
 - Creativity
 - Innovation
 - Digitization
 - Development of destinations.
- The power of collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities in developing and promoting tourism has long term positive impact.

Some recent projects

- The Prime Minister gave the examples of Kashi, Kedarnath, the Statue of Unity and Pavagadh, to show how a unified approach put the wind in the sails of these regions. The Kashi Vishwanath Dham temple is a significant one.
- The newly-developed site around the Statue of Unity.
- Renovation at Mahakaleshwar Jyotirling Temple in Ujjain.

Technology and tourism

- Technology and tourism will go together.
- Travel experiences are becoming more personalised, immersive, and interactive.
- AR/VR can help travellers explore destinations before they even arrive, providing virtual tours and simulations of famous landmarks, historical sites, and cultural experiences. AI-powered chatbots and digital assistants can help travellers plan their trips, recommend personalised activities, and offer real-time assistance while travelling.

Way Ahead

- Unlocking India's immense tourism potential requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses the six key pillars of planning, place, people, policy, process, and promotion. The Budget Session addressed all these "6Ps" effectively by covering:
 - Destination planning and management
 - Infrastructure development
 - Sustainability and safety
 - Development of human capital
 - Policy
 - Process interventions

07.03.2023

- Railways ties up with ISRO for train tracking
- India to launch global alliance for big cats
- Centre authorised States to authenticate Aadhaar of prisoners
- Rushikulya sands teem with Olive Ridleys
- How to become a green hydrogen superpower

Railways ties up with ISRO for train tracking

Context

- According to the Ministry of Railways, Indian Railways is installing a Real-Time Train Information System (RTIS), developed in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- The Indian Railways is harnessing the power of data analytics for integrated transportation.

Enabling real-time tracking

- Indian Railways has commenced a project which will now enable real-time tracking of train movements with the assistance of satellite imagery under the Real Time Train Information System (RTIS) project.

Indigenous navigation satellite system

- ISRO has developed its own regional navigation satellite system called Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) and Bhuvan, a web-based utility which allows users to explore a set of map-based content being deployed for tracking.
- Indian Railways have taken bandwidth from ISRO and integrated Railways systems with NavIC and Bhuvan. Every locomotive is fitted with a device and a SIM, which communicates the train's real position to the satellite and feedback is received.
- The movement is updated every three seconds.

Advantages of Real-time tracking

- Real-time tracking of trains is also useful during accidents, floods and landslips when there is a need to pin down the train's exact location for rendering help.
- A total of 4,000 locomotives have been fitted with the technology, and new locomotives come with tracking devices.
- Even the Ministry of Railways emphasized the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum tech for the Indian Railways.
- The Railways is tapping into data analytics to improve passenger experience, help chart out empty seats, and enable more passengers to receive confirmed tickets.

India to launch global alliance for big cats

Context

- Recently, India has proposed to launch a mega global alliance named International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) under its leadership to protect big cats.
- Also, there will be assured support over five years with guaranteed funding of \$100 million (over Rs 800 crore).

International Big Cat Alliance

- The proposed International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) will work towards the protection and conservation of the seven major big cats.
- These include tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar and cheetah. Membership to the alliance will be open to 97 "range" countries, which contain the natural habitat of these big cats, as well as other interested nations, international organisations, etc.
- According to a proposed timeline, the alliance is expected to be launched next month in a "suitable office complex" in India.

The objective of IBCA

- To provide a platform for the "dissemination of information on benchmarked practices, capacity building, resources repository, research and development, awareness creation", etc., on the protection and conservation of big cats.
- Its major activities will include "advocacy, partnership, knowledge e-portal, capacity building, eco-tourism, partnerships between expert groups and finance tapping".

Composition of IBCA

- The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) governance structure will comprise a General Assembly consisting of all member countries.
- A council of at least seven but not more than 15 member countries elected by the General Assembly for a term of 5 years.
- A Secretariat.
- Upon the recommendation of the Council, the General Assembly will appoint the IBCA Secretary General for a specific term.

Project Cheetah

- Recently, Prime Minister released 8 cheetahs at the Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh.
- These were brought in the country from Namibia, as part of the programme Project Cheetah to reintroduce the species in India, 7 decades after it was declared extinct in the country.

- Twelve cheetahs (seven males and five females) from South Africa arrived, as scheduled in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park (KNP) on February 18, 2023.

Centre authorised States to authenticate Aadhaar of prisoners

Context

- The Union Home Ministry has authorised state governments to carry out Aadhaar authentication of prison inmates on a voluntary basis.
- The authentication process will aid them to get health care, skilling, vocational training, interview with relatives and legal aid, among other services.
- The Ministry said the exercise was voluntary as Prison is a listed under State subject.

Rule 5 of the Aadhaar

- The decision by the centre has been taken after it was authorised under Rule 5 of the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2020, for the targeted delivery of financial and other subsidies, benefits and services.

Process of authentication

- The Aadhaar authentication will be carried out on the prison inmates on a voluntary basis using Yes/No authentication facility for delivery of various benefits or facilities to which they are entitled, such as correctional reform measures, health, skilling, vocational training, interview with relatives, legal aid, etc.
- The prison authorities of the states and Union Territory administrations shall adhere to the guidelines with respect to the use of Aadhaar authentication as laid down by the central government.

Rushikulya sands teem with Olive Ridleys

Context

- The Rushikulya river mouth in Odisha's Ganjam district has emerged as a major rookery for the endangered Olive Ridley turtles, as a record number of over 6.37 lakh turtles laid eggs on the beach during the eight-day mass nesting.
- The Odisha forest department said that the beaches remained unaffected as there were no extreme weather events such as cyclone and heavy rain and the turtles ascended the perfectly sloped beaches at the Rushikulya river mouth.

About Olive Ridleys

- The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world, inhabiting warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- The Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is known as the world's largest rookery (colony of breeding animals) of sea turtles.

Protection Status:

- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule 1
- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
- CITES: Appendix I

Preventive measures

- All necessary measures have been taken to protect the eggs in the rookery.
- Adequate number of personnel, including local people, has been engaged to keep watch on the eggs from predators.
- As the female turtles go back to the sea after laying eggs, predators like jackals, wild dogs, wild boars, and birds will be on the prowl to eat the eggs.

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How to become a green hydrogen superpower

Context

- The 2023-24 Union Budget has allocated ₹19,700 crore for the National Green Hydrogen Mission.
- This endeavour by the government will set in motion a programme that can position India as a green hydrogen (super)power.

Benefits of the mission

- Creation of export opportunities for Green Hydrogen and its derivatives
- Decarbonisation of industrial, mobility and energy sectors
- Reduction in dependence on imported fossil fuels and feedstock
- Development of indigenous manufacturing capabilities
- Creation of employment opportunities
- Development of cutting-edge technologies.

India's Green Hydrogen production capacity

- India's Green Hydrogen production capacity is likely to reach at least 5 MMT per annum, with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 GW.
- The targets by 2030 are likely to bring in over Rs. 8 lakh crore investments and create over 6 lakh jobs.
- Nearly 50 MMT per annum of CO2 emissions are expected to be averted by 2030.

India commitments and challenges

- India has committed to 50% electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.
- But an energy transition in industry is needed at the same time.
- Most industrial greenhouse gas emissions in India come from steel, cement, fertilizers, and petrochemicals.
- Green hydrogen holds the promise of fueling industrial growth while simultaneously reducing industrial emissions.

Five priorities of India

1. Domestic demand

- First, domestic demand is critical which means that If India is not a big player domestically, then we cannot be a major player in the international market.
- The mission introduces a Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) fund for five years, with ₹13,000 crores as direct support to consume green hydrogen.
- This will encourage heavy industries to increase demand, offering economies of scale by which suppliers can reduce prices.

2. Investment

- Second, India can be an attractive destination for domestic and foreign investment. Green hydrogen production projects announced/ underway in India are far fewer compared to others.
- Green hydrogen is difficult and expensive to transport. The mission envisions green hydrogen hubs to consolidate production, end use and exports.
- A mission secretariat can ensure project clearance is streamlined and reduce financial risks.

3. Electrolyser manufacturing

- Third, the SIGHT fund offers ₹4,500 crores to support electrolyser manufacturing under the performance-linked incentive scheme.
- Currently, manufacturers are importing stacks and assembling them.
- India must become more competitive with targeted public funding in manufacturing the most critical and high-value components of electrolyser in India.
- Electrolyser technology must be improved to achieve higher efficiency goals, specific application requirements, be able to use non-freshwater, and substitute critical minerals.

4. Bilateral partnerships

- Fourth, establish bilateral partnerships to develop resilient supply chains.
- Globally, about 63 bilateral partnerships have emerged; Germany, South Korea and Japan have the most.
- Using yen- or euro-denominated loans for sales to Japan or to the EU, respectively, could reduce the cost of capital and help us become export competitive.

5. Global coordination

- Fifth, India must coordinate with major economies to develop rules for a global green hydrogen economy.
- In the absence of common global frameworks, attempts for rules and standards are being driven by collectives of private corporations rather than through structured intergovernmental processes.
- There are already signs of conflicting regulations and protectionist measures in major markets.

Way forward

- India's G20 presidency is an opportunity to craft rules for a global green hydrogen economy.
- These rules must address operational threats, industrial competitiveness, and strategic threats.
- India should promote a global network on green hydrogen via which companies could collaborate.
- Green hydrogen will be a critical industrial fuel of the 21st century. India is well-positioned to show leadership.

06.03.2023

- India holds a conference of global intelligence chiefs
- Nations secure pact to protect marine life in the high seas
- Rajasthan power lines installation threatens bustard
- China defence budget up for 8th consecutive year
- The hardships of a career in Ayurvedic practice

India holds a conference of global intelligence chiefs

Context

- Recently, India held the second conference of intelligence on March 1, 2023, which saw participation from over 26 countries.
- The conference witnessed the participation of security chiefs and top officials from around the world.
- While the U.S. was absent, intelligence chiefs from the U.K., France, Japan and Bahrain attended the conference.

Focus area

- The focus of the second conference of intelligence includes:
 - Global security
 - Counterterrorism, radicalization
 - Drugs trafficking
 - Illegal arms smuggling

Rationale of the conference

- Through the conference of global intelligence chiefs, India is trying to make its presence felt by bringing together global intelligence agencies for exchanges on issues of common concern.

About the security conference

- The security conference is organised by the country's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) that reports to the National security advisor.
- The conference was held for the first time in April 2022, a day before the start of Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on "geopolitics and geo-strategy" organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with Observer Research Foundation (ORF).
- The conference comes a year after the war in Ukraine that is still ongoing and the global attention fixed on it, while India has been flagging other global issues including Afghanistan.

Nations secure pact to protect marine life in the high seas

Context

- In a breakthrough, for the first time, United Nations (UN) members have agreed on a manage conservation
- It was a long-awaited step that environmental groups say will help reverse marine biodiversity losses and ensure sustainable development.

Background

- An updated framework to protect marine life in the regions outside national boundary waters, known as the high seas, had been in discussions for more than 20 years, but previous efforts to reach an agreement had repeatedly stalled.

Legally binding

- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas is a legally binding agreement to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of ocean biodiversity.
- The treaty calls for the Comprehensive protection of endangered species and habitats is now finally possible on more than 40% of the Earth's surface.
- The treaty also establishes ground rules for conducting environmental impact assessments for commercial activities in the oceans.

New body for managing conservation

- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity on the high seas will create a new body to manage the conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas on the high seas.
- It is critical to achieving the UN Biodiversity Conference's pledge to protect 30% of the planet's waters, as well as its land, for conservation.

Rajasthan power lines installation threatens bustard

Context

- In order to explore ways to protect endangered Great Indian Bustards and to continue the solar power projects in Rajasthan, the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has proposed that only power lines below 33kV need to go underground and the rest be fitted with bird-diverters.
- The draft Central Electricity Authority (Construction of Electric Lines in Great Indian Bustard Area) Regulations, 2023 was released by CEA.

- The Conservationists have objected CEA move and said that it could lead to the “extinction” of the bird.
- The proposal was part of draft regulations issued on February 1 and open to public comment until March 3.

Concerns






- High-tension power lines in Rajasthan and Gujarat from solar plants often lie on the flight path of the birds especially the GIB resulting in electrocution of Birds.
- The matter is of particular concern to the future of the bustard as fewer than 150 of them remain, and existing conservation methods fall short of replenishing their numbers.
- With poor vision and high body mass, GIBs are very vulnerable to collisions with power lines.
- A significant population dies each year from such accidents.

Supreme Court’s direction

- In 2019, environmentalists approached the Supreme Court, which in 2021 directed all ‘low-voltage’ power lines, in areas demarcated as “priority and potential habitats of the Great Indian Bustard” in Thar and Kutch deserts, be pushed underground.
- A majority of the power lines from Rajasthan’s solar projects have a rating above 33kV and several such proposed ones are expected to pass through the ‘priority’ areas.
- The court order would have required several existing and proposed lines to move underground, hiking the cost of supplying solar power.

About great Indian bustard

- The great Indian bustard, (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) is large bird of the bustard family (Otididae).
- It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world.
- The great Indian bustard inhabits dry grasslands and scrublands on the Indian subcontinent.
- Its largest populations are found in the Indian state of Rajasthan.

Key Facts	
A	Common Name Great Indian bustard
Aa	Scientific Name <i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i>
	Population 200 individuals worldwide
	Height 100 cms or 1 metre
	Length Wingspan of 210-250 cm
	Weight: 15-18 kg
	Status Listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in the CMS Convention and in Appendix I of CITES, as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and the National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016). It has also been identified as one of the species for the recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

China defence budget up for 8th consecutive year

Context

- Recently, China hiked its defence budget by 7.2 per cent, marginally higher than last year, to 1.55 trillion yuan (about USD 224 billion).
- This is the eighth consecutive year that China has announced a single-digit percentage point increase in its military budget.

Strengthening Army

- China’s armed forces, with a focus on the goals for the centenary of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in 2027.
- The armed forces would also intensify military training and preparedness across the board, develop new military strategic guidance, devote greater energy to training under combat conditions, and make well-coordinated efforts to strengthen military work in all directions and domains.
- China is the second biggest spender on defence next to the US whose defence budget for 2023 totaled USD 816 billion.

India’s defence budget

- The Union Budget 2023-24 has enhanced the allocation to India’s defence budget by 13 per cent to INR 5.94 lakh crore, up from INR 5.25 lakh crore in fiscal 2022-23.
- Of this, INR 1.62 lakh crore has been allocated towards capital expenditure, including the purchase of new weapons, aircraft, warships, and other military equipment.
- This constitutes an increase of 7 per cent over the current fiscal’s INR 1.52 lakh crore but is almost unchanged in absolute terms given an average inflation rate of around 6 percent over the current fiscal year.

- From India's point of view, however, China's defence budget continued to be over three times higher.

Roadmap

- The Chinese military has embarked on a massive military modernisation with a goal to be on par with the US armed forces in the next few years.
- China has been ramping up its defence expenditure as it vied with the US for global influence.
- The Chinese Navy, the fast-expanding arm of the Chinese military, has now three aircraft carriers while its Air Force continued to be modernized with a vast variety of military jets including stealth jet fighters.

The hardships of a career in Ayurvedic practice

Context

- Ayurveda is a holistic and natural treatment that has been practiced all over India since ancient times.
- For most Ayurveda graduates, practice does not seem to be a feasible career option.
- Despite the publicity campaigns to promote Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), the fact is that there is a trust-deficit in these systems.
- Even the Prime Minister during a speech at the sixth World Ayurveda Congress noted Ayurveda practitioners do not seem to trust it fully trusted by people

Reason for the scepticism

- There is widespread scepticism in the public mind about the soundness of Ayurvedic theories and the fruitfulness of its practices.
- The Ayurveda establishment has failed to keep pace with the intellectual and scientific advances of the times.
- Archaic theories that are apt to arouse suspicion in the minds of educated patients are peddled as sophisticated dogmas.
- Thus, a major reason for the trust-deficit in Ayurveda is its diminished evidence-based quality.

Methodology of treatment

- Ayurvedic science of medicine is based on the principle that prevention is better than cure.
- Ayurveda's thrust is on patient benefit and not merely on patient gratification.
- Sustainability of treatments requires a gradual transition from illness to wellness. Sudden relief is deemed superficial and temporary in Ayurveda.
- The popular view that Ayurvedic treatments are slow to heal is thus a half-truth.
- It can be corrected by appropriate patient education.

A practitioner's ordeal

- A novice who enters the field of Ayurvedic practice would be greeted with these difficult realities of public perception.
- Given that Ayurveda does not have a vibrant ecosystem of science and research.
- Ayurveda can be used safely and efficaciously only in about 60%-70% of primary-care illnesses.
- For the rest, patient interest would necessitate complementing Ayurveda with modern medicine.
- Most States prohibit the practice of modern medicine by Ayurveda graduates and, consequently, the practitioner finds himself crippled again.

Focus on primary care

- There is a dire need for appropriate policy-making to solve a lot of these problems that well-meaning Ayurveda practitioners face.
- Primary-care doctors are becoming an endangered species in India's healthcare system.
- Rejuvenating primary care is an absolutely necessary if a country is to secure the health of its citizens.
- Ayurveda graduates can contribute enormously towards this rejuvenation if trained properly.
- Appropriate policy-making can solve many of the problems a well-meaning Ayurveda practitioner faces.

04.03.2023

- **Select Central staff can opt for Old Pension Scheme**

- World Bank to support India's health sector
- World Bank report on freedom at the workplace
- U.S. blames Indian firm for cough syrup deaths
- Clean-tech as the next big thing in rural India

Select Central staff can opt for Old Pension Scheme

Context

- In a major move, the government has recently decided to give a one-time option to select Central government employees to migrate to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS).
- According to the latest notification by the Ministry of Personnel, the employees who joined the central government services against posts advertised or notified before December 22, 2003, are eligible to join the old pension scheme under the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 1972 (now 2021).
- The National Pension System (NPS) was notified in 2003.
- The option is available to the Central government employees enrolled under the NPS as they joined service on or after January 1, 2004.

Who are eligible for Old Pension Scheme

- According to central government order, it will be applicable to employees of central government services.
- This will also be applicable to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel.
- This option may be exercised by the government servants concerned latest by August 31, 2023.
- The move came following various references and court decisions in this regard.
- Those government servants who are eligible to exercise option, "but who do not exercise this option by the stipulated date", shall continue to be covered by the National Pension System.

Stakeholder's Response

- The National Movement for Old Pension Scheme (NMOPS), an umbrella body of more than 14 lakh central and state government employees, has welcomed the government decision.
- The Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (DPPW) held extensive consultations with the Ministries of Finance and Law and Departments of Expenditure and Personnel and reached a consensus to allow the employees the option to switch to the OPS.

Total employee under NPS

- Till January 31, 2023 a total of 23,65,693 Central employees and 60,32,768 State government employees have enrolled under the NPS.
- Except West Bengal, all States had implemented the NPS.

World Bank to support India's health sector

Context

- Recently, the World Bank and India signed two complementary loans of USD 500 million each to support and enhance the country's healthcare infrastructure.
- The combined financing of USD 1 billion (about ₹8,200 crore), the bank will support India's flagship Pradhan Mantri-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM), launched in October 2021, to improve the public healthcare infrastructure across the country.

Roadmap

- In addition to the national-level interventions, one of the loans will prioritize health service delivery in seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.
- The \$500-million Public Health Systems for Pandemic Preparedness Programme (PHSPP) will support the government's efforts to prepare India's surveillance system to detect and report epidemics of potential international concern.
- Another \$500-million Enhanced Health Service Delivery Programme (EHSPP) will support government's efforts to strengthen service delivery through a redesigned primary healthcare model, which includes;
 - Improved household access to primary healthcare facilities
 - Stronger links between each household and its primary care facility through regular household visits
 - Risk assessment of non-communicable diseases.

India's performance in health

- India's performance in health has improved over time.
- According to the World Bank estimates, India's life expectancy at 69.8 in 2020, up from 58 in 1990 is higher than the average for the country's income level.
- The under-five mortality rate (36 per 1,000 live births)
- Infant mortality rate (30 per 1,000 live births)
- Maternal mortality ratio (103 per 100,000 live births) is all close to the average for India's income level.

World Bank report on freedom at the workplace

Context

- According to a new report by the World Bank on freedom at the workplace highlighted that the Indian laws made little progress in removing possible gender inequities.
- India scores 74.4 in World Bank index on working women out of a possible 100.
- For India, the Index used data on laws applicable in Mumbai, viewed as the country's main business city.

More about the report

- Globally, women have 77.1% of the legal rights that men have, up just half a percentage point from the 2021 score.
- India scored higher than the 63.7 average for the South Asian region, though lower than Nepal which had the region's highest score of 80.6.
- Of the 190 economies covered in the Index, only 14 scored a perfect 100: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

Concern for India

- World Bank on freedom at the workplace noted that India lags when it comes to laws affecting women's pay, pension and work after having children, constraints on women starting and running a business, gender differences in property and inheritance.

U.S. blames Indian firm for cough syrup deaths

Context

- According to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States and the Gambian health authorities, there is a strong link between the death of several children in Gambia and cough syrups made in India that are allegedly contaminated.
- The syrup was manufactured by India-based company Maiden Pharmaceuticals.
- In October last year, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued an alert stating that the four cough syrups supplied by India-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd to Gambia were of substandard quality and alleged that they were linked to the death of many children in Gambia.

Finding of CDC report

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its report said, medications contaminated with Diethylene Glycol [DEG] or Ethylene Glycol [EG] imported into The Gambia led to this Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) cluster among children."
- Patients with DEG (Diethylene glycol) poisoning can experience a range of signs and symptoms, including altered mental status, headache, and gastrointestinal symptoms.
- The report also said that in past Diethylene glycol (DEG) outbreaks, manufacturers have been suspected of substituting DEG in place of more expensive, pharmaceutical-grade solvents.
- The CDC report is the third such evidence to link cough syrups manufactured in India to the deaths.
- Earlier, the World Health Organization had stated that it had found DEG and EG, two industrial chemicals, in tested samples in the range of 1% to 21.3%.

Government of India's Stand

- The Indian government, however, maintains that when it collected control samples from the pharma company of the same batch that was exported to Gambia and found no contamination.
- The Union Minister of State for Health in a reply to the Lok Sabha recently said that after testing, the samples of the cough syrups have been declared to be of standard quality.
- The samples were found to be negative for both Diethylene Glycol (DEG) and Ethylene Glycol (EG), Pawar had said in a written reply to a question.

Clean tech as the next big thing in rural India

Context

- Clean energy solutions are transforming women's livelihoods at the grassroots level.
- From solar refrigerators to silk-reeling machines and biomass-based cold storage to bulk milk chillers, distributed renewable energy (DRE) is transforming women's livelihoods at the grassroots.
- The women from rural India have adopted clean energy-based livelihood technologies to catalyze their businesses.

Distributed renewable energy

- Distributed renewable energy (DRE) systems are power, cooking, heating and cooling systems that generate and distribute services independently of any centralized systems.
- Distributed renewable energy (DRE) powered technologies provide an additional advantage to women farmers and microentrepreneurs by enhancing income opportunities through mechanization.
- They also free women from several gender-assigned manual activities that are laborious.
- A recent Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) study has shown that out of the 13,000 early adopters of clean tech livelihood appliances, more than 80% are women.

Potential of Distributed renewable energy

- By 2030, India is expected to see 30 million women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) employing around 150 million people.
- Distributed renewable energy (DRE) livelihood technologies are a \$50 billion market opportunity in India alone and have the potential to transform rural livelihoods, with women at the core of this transition.

Required interventions

- To achieve the potential outcome from distributed renewable energy, there are key that needs to be followed from reaching rural women as part of the Powering Livelihoods initiative.
- **First**, leverage the experience of early women adopters. Because of their novelty and high starting price, DRE appliances are perceived as high-risk purchases, especially by women users with a relatively lower risk appetite due to socio-economic reasons.
- To overcome the challenge, technology providers must leverage early users to share their experiences with potential customers, becoming demo champions/sales agents to market these products, based on their first-hand product experience and local credibility.
- **Second**, organise hyperlocal events and demos. People want to touch and see a high-tech, high-ticket-size product before believing in its ability and promised benefits.
- **Third**, enable easy finance to purchase products. Limited avenues to avail financing for these clean technology products remain a bottleneck.
- Financiers supporting women farmers and microentrepreneurs should consider the technologies themselves as collaterals while easing the loan application process.
- **Fourth**, support backwards and forward market linkages.
- Many rural products have larger market potential. Thus, finding and connecting producers to consumption hubs in urban areas are equally important to generate higher incomes.
- **Fifth**, is to enable policy convergence. No private sector entity has the kind of reach and scale government institutions have, so leveraging their reach is imperative to exponentially scale up.
- Multiple Ministries are working towards promoting livelihoods for women – from State rural livelihood missions, horticulture and agriculture departments, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, to the Ministry of Textiles.
- They should embrace clean energy solutions to further their respective programmes and outcomes.

03.03.2023

- India-Italy ties elevated to Strategic Partnership
- GDP growth may be at 7% current financial year
- India, China discusses LAC situation

- **SC forms an expert committee to probe Adani allegations**
- **More independent Commission**

India-Italy ties elevated to Strategic Partnership

Context

- India and Italy have decided to elevate their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership, opening a new chapter on defence cooperation.
- The announcement was made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi after holding comprehensive talks with his Italian counterpart.
- The Prime minister of Italy is on a two-day state to India as chief guest of the eighth Raisina Dialogue.

8th Raisina Dialogue

- The Prime minister of Italy while delivering the inaugural address of the 8th Raisina Dialogue said global interconnection has enabled our economies to grow and flourish but it comes at a cost, especially in times of turbulence in the international community.
- On the war in Ukraine, she said it is a violation of the fundamental principle of the global order that enables the international community to thrive.
- Raisina Dialogue is organised by Observer Research Foundation jointly with the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The conference is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving a variety of global policymakers including heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials.

Important Strategic Partnership

1. Defence cooperation

- India has invited Italian defence companies to actively participate in the Make in India initiative.
- Both India and Italy have also decided to hold joint exercises and training courses between the armed forces of the two countries on a regular basis.
- The two sides also agreed to work to counter irregular migration and human trafficking.

2. Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative

- The Prime minister of Italy also announced that it will be joining the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative as the two nations celebrate the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations.

3. Money laundering and financing terrorism

- The two leaders agreed to assess and address potential risks associated with virtual assets and new financial technologies that may be abused for the purpose of money laundering and financing terrorism.
- Both India and Italy also agreed to take steps to ensure that such virtual assets are subject to Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing for Terrorism (AML/CFT) regulations.

4. Space cooperation

- India and Italy have agreed to expand cooperation in the field of space and welcomed bilateral exchanges and took stock of the wide potential of possible joint research projects in areas such as:
 - Remote sensing
 - Satellite communication
 - Lunar exploration
 - Gravitational wave detection
 - Practical applications of space technology between ISRO and ASI Italy

5. Declaration of Intent on migration and mobility

- India and Italy also signed a Declaration of Intent on migration and mobility, announced the establishment of a Start-up Bridge to tap, and inked a memorandum of understanding between Rabindra Bharti University, Kolkata and Italian Consulate General; and Morarji Desai Institute of Yoga and Sarva Yoga International, Italy.

GDP growth may be at 7% current financial year

Context

- Recently, the Chief Economic Advisor has expressed hope that the GDP growth for the current financial year will exceed the projected 7 per cent in view of the expected revision of high frequency data.

- The latest second advance estimate released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) maintained the growth projection of 7 per cent as was projected in the first advance estimate which was released in January.

More about NSO report

- Real GDP or GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the year 2022-23 is estimated at Rs 159.71 trillion as against the first revised estimate of GDP for the year 2021-22 of Rs 149.26 trillion.
- According to NSO, the growth in real GDP during 2022-23 is estimated at 7 per cent as compared to 9.1 per cent in 2021-22.
- The growth slowed to 4.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, mainly due to a contraction in the manufacturing sector.

Interest rates

- According to Chief Economic Advisor (CEA), the rising interest rates need not necessarily be a cause of lower growth but simply reflects the fact that there is healthy underlying demand for credit.
- On the economic benefit of digitization, he said that digital transactions enable increase in formalisation.
- About rural inflation remaining high, the CEA said it did not consider the fact that bulk of the population may be getting food grains at zero cost.

India, China discusses LAC situation

Context

- Recently, the External Affairs Minister of India held a talk with his Chinese counterpart. The meeting focused on addressing current challenges to the bilateral ties, especially peace and tranquillity in the border areas.
- The discussions on the sidelines of the G20 foreign ministers' meeting came amid the over 34-month-long border row in eastern Ladakh.

India's stand on bilateral relations

- India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.
- The talks came nearly eight months after The External Affairs Minister of India held a meeting with the then-Chinese foreign minister in Bali on the sidelines of a G20 meeting.
- India on its stand has categorically said that the relationship between the two countries should be based on "three mutuals" (3M)
 - Mutual respect
 - Mutual sensitivity
 - Mutual interests.

Process of disengagement

- In line with a decision taken at the 16th round of military talks, the two sides carried out disengagement from Patrolling Point 15 in the Gogra-Hotsprings area in September last year.
- But the face-off between the two of the planet's biggest military forces lingered on in Demchok and Depsang regions though the Indian side pressed for completion of the disengagement in remaining friction points at the earliest.
- The meeting took place under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC).

SC forms an expert committee to probe Adani allegations

Context

- Recently, The Supreme Court has constituted an expert committee under the supervision of former SC court judge, Justice A.M. Sapre, to review the market regulatory mechanism in the light of the Adani-Hindenburg controversy.
- The apex court also fixed a two-month deadline for the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to complete its probe into the allegations made in a report by the American investment research firm.
- The court noted the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) was already investigating the allegations of Hindenburg Research.

Supreme Court's directions

- Expert committee to assess factors leading to volatility in the securities market

- To investigate regulatory failure, if any, in dealing with allegations against Adani group and others
- Suggest measures to strengthen the statutory and/or regulatory framework
- Sebi to probe violation of its rules
- And whether there was a failure to disclose transactions with related parties

Rule 19A of Securities Contracts

- Rule 19A of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957, talks about the maintenance of minimum public shareholding and its attainment within a specified period.

More independent Commission

Context

- Recently, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has ordered that Election Commissioners will be appointed by the President of India on the advice of a Committee consisting of:
 - Prime Minister
 - Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or leader of largest opposition party)
 - Chief Justice of India
- This is a very significant judgment that seeks to change the way in which India's top election officials are appointed, and can potentially have far-reaching implications.
- The judgment revives the era of judicial activism.

Constitutional provision

- There are just five Articles (324-329) in Part XV (Elections) of the Constitution. Article 324 of the Constitution vests the "superintendence, direction and control of elections" in an Election Commission consisting "of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners.
- The Constitution does not lay down a specific legislative process for the appointment of the CEC and ECs.
- The President makes the appointment on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister.

Bone of contention

- The bone of contention of the petitioners was that as per Article 324(2) of the Constitution, the appointment of the CEC and ECs, though to be made by the President, should be done based on a law to be promulgated.
- Yet, no law was enacted by Parliament in this regard.
- Therefore, the petitioners pleaded for an independent body to appoint the CEC and the ECs to ensure functional autonomy for the panel.

Concern and challenges

- According to the proviso to Article 324(5), a special protection against removal is given to the CEC while not extending the said immunity to the other ECs.
- The proviso says that "the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court". This practically means that the only way to remove the CEC is to get him impeached by Parliament which is difficult, but not impossible.
- The same provision also says that the conditions of service of the CEC "shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment".
- This immunity granted to the CEC loses its purpose when the selection is vitiated by arbitrariness or favoritism.

Way forward

- The Election commission of India is an important body which must be free from any kind of political interference to prevent any kind of manipulation in the selection process.
- The commission need more power and transparency to continuously reinvent its powers given as Indian Constitution for better functioning.
- The recent judgment by the Supreme court finds an activist judiciary after a long time.

02.03.2023

- PM address webinar on Urban Planning, Development and Sanitation
- Two Australian universities to set up campuses in Gujarat

- India asks G-20 to extradite economic offenders fast
- S-400 regiments expected to be delivered by early 2024
- G-20: India's platform for global leadership

PM address webinar on Urban Planning, Development and Sanitation

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister addressed a Post Budget Webinar on the subject of 'Urban Development and Sanitation' with focus on planning'.
- It is the sixth of a series of 12 post-budget webinars organized by the government to seek ideas and suggestions for the effective implementation of the initiatives announced in the Union Budget 2023.
- Prime Minister noted that well-planned cities will determine the fate of the country, asserting that India's position in the world would have been completely different if 75 planned cities had been developed since Independence.

Roadmap

- Urban planning will determine the fate of Indian cities in 'Amrit Kaal'.
- It is only well-planned cities that will determine the fate of India.
- Prime Minister said that when planning is better, cities will become climate resilient and water secure.

Focus area

- Prime Minister while addressing had urged the participants of the webinar to focus on three main questions about:
 - how to strengthen the urban planning ecosystem in the states,
 - how to properly use the expertise available in the private sector in urban planning and how to develop a centre of excellence that will take urban planning to a new level.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT 2.0)

- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 scheme, was launched in October, 2021 for a period of 05 years.
- It is designed to provide universal coverage of water supply through functional taps to all households in all the statutory towns in the country and coverage of sewerage/septage management in 500 cities covered in the first phase of the AMRUT scheme.
- AMRUT 2.0 aims to promote the circular economy of water through the development of the City Water Balance Plan (CWBP) for each city focusing on recycling/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation.

Government initiative on Urban Development

- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)
- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) – Housing for all (Urban)
- Smart Cities Mission (SCM)
- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)
- Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)
- Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM)

Two Australian universities to set up campuses in Gujarat

Context

- Recently the education minister has announced that Two Australian universities -- Deakin University and University of Wollongong will soon establish campuses in Gujarat's 'GIFT CITY'
- This will be the first foreign education institutions to set up campuses in GIFT City, Gujarat.
- The two varsities will sign an agreement on setting up their campuses next week during Australian Prime Minister visit to India.

Education and skilling roadmap

- Australian Minister for Education is on a five-day visit to India to foster ties in education sector.
- The two countries are scheduled to enter 10 MoUs and an agreement on mutual recognition of educational qualifications.

- The Australian minister also announced that noted former cricketer Adam Gilchrist, the global brand ambassador of Wollongong University, will help in setting up the university campus in India.
- One of the key strategies of Australia is education knowledge and skill development and vocational training.
- India, being a young nation, wanted to collaborate with Australia.

Indian students studying in Australia

- There are about 70,000 Indian students studying in Australia.
- In the past 17 years, more than 1.5 million students have studied in Australia and more than 1,700 lecturers have an Indian ancestry.

India asks G-20 to extradite economic offenders fast

Context

- Recently during the meeting of the anti-corruption working group of G20, Union Minister of State for Personnel said that G20 nations will deliberate on ways to trace and extradite fugitive economic offenders.
- India called upon G-20 countries to adopt multilateral action for faster extradition of fugitive economic offenders and recovery of assets, both domestically and abroad.

Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018

- India has put in place specialised legislation in this regard, in the form of Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, the term wherein 'fugitive economic offender' [FEO] is defined as an individual against whom a warrant of arrest in relation to scheduled offence has been issued by any court in India and who has left the country to avoid criminal prosecution; or the FEO abroad refuses to return to face criminal prosecution.
- The Enforcement Directorate had transferred assets worth about \$180 billion to public sector banks that suffered losses of around \$272 billion from frauds committed by high-net-worth individuals.

India's G20 presidency

- India's G20 presidency aims to strengthen international cooperation for action against corruption and economic crimes, and recovery of stolen assets.
- India's chairpersonship will support G20 countries in prioritizing recovery and return of stolen assets in their broad strategy against corruption.

Key focus areas

- Enhancing the effectiveness of asset-tracing
- Identification mechanisms
- Developing mechanisms for rapid restraint of illicit assets
- Promoting effective use of open-source information
- Asset recovery networks

Use of technology fighting corruption

- India will utilize its experience from implementing citizen-centric governance model to demonstrate the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in preventing, detecting and fighting corruption by creating common ICT platforms for higher transparency and best practices.
- The inception in 2010, G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group has been at the forefront of guiding the anti-corruption initiatives of the member countries.

S-400 regiments expected to be delivered by early 2024

Context

- According to official sources, Russia will soon complete the delivery of the third regiment of S-400 Air Defence System.
- Deliveries of five regiments of S-400 air defence systems under a \$5.43-billion deal with Russia are expected to be completed by year-end or early 2024.
- India has contracted five S-400 regiments under a \$5.43 billion or ₹40,291 crore deal as per a conversation rate of ₹74.2 against the dollar at the time, signed in October 2018.

Roadblock

- The issues of delayed payments as well as insurance and reinsurance remain major stumbling blocks delaying deals.
- Officials had acknowledged that transportation and finding cargo carriers outside the purview of sanctions and their insurance has been a major issue.
- In July 2019, the Union government said in a written reply in Parliament that S-400 deliveries were “likely to be made by April 2023”.

Threat of U.S. sanctions

- With the looming threat of U.S. sanctions under CAATSA (Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), the two sides had worked out payments through the rupee-rouble exchange.
- The payments troubles compounded after Russia was shut out of the global SWIFT system for money transfers.
- India and Russia have agreed to conduct payments through the rupee-rouble arrangement after trying payments in euros as well.

G-20: India’s platform for global leadership

Context

- The Group of Twenty (G20) is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 countries and the European Union.
- The G20 was founded in 1999 after the Asian financial crisis as a forum for the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to discuss global economic and financial issues. It was upgraded to the level of Heads of State/Government in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis of 2007, and, in 2009, was designated the “premier forum for international economic cooperation”.

Difficult road for India

- Recently, the G-20 Finance Ministers meet first time ever, the group could not agree on an outcome document, India found itself in the uneasy situation of having to explain whether it supported its own Chair’s summary, which noted that the majority of states condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and rejected the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons.
- India’s Finance Minister would not confirm whether India was part of this majority.
- In several occasion India, and 31 others, including China and Pakistan, abstained on a call for Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine and cease hostilities.

Call for upholding UN Charter

- To a larger extent, India condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is not about supporting the United States or encouraging NATO expansion.
- It is about upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity enshrined in the UN Charter.
- These are also the same principles that India has relied on for international support in the four wars that it has fought since independence.

Global concern

- Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is global and not just a European problem.
- The war has affected oil and gas prices, exacerbated inflation and disrupted global food supplies and prices.
- It had further added to the precarity of life for millions in parts of Africa and Asia.

- Further, it has escalated nuclear risks, not just in the form of threats of the use of nuclear weapons, but threats to Ukraine's nuclear power plants, all five of which have come under direct shelling this past year.

Renewing commitments

- India has recently denied Ukraine's Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko an invitation to address the gathering in Bengaluru, Japan, as chair of the G7, invited him to a meeting on the sidelines at which the G7 renewed their financial commitments to Ukraine and discussed further sanctions on Russia.
- India has, thus, found itself in the odd position of hosting a group but staying away from the main party where all the action is taking place.

Way Forward

- The G20 platform would help India to showcase its development and propose its models to the world as potential solutions.
- India has found itself in the odd position of hosting a group but staying away from the main party where all the action is taking place.

01.03.2023

- **RBI's new pilot project on coin vending machines**
- **ISRO successful in key test for Chandrayaan-3**
- **Proton beam therapy out of reach for many with cancer**
- **UK to launch India-Britain exchange scheme**
- **States progress in transition to clean electricity**
- **International courts and climate change**

RBI's new pilot project on coin vending machines

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India's Governor has announced that it will launch a pilot project on QR code-based coin vending machine (QCVM).
- The pilot project will roll out in 19 locations in 12 cities across the country.

About the project

- Under the QR code-based coin vending machine (QCVM), vending machines will dispense coins against debit to the customer's account using Unified Payments Interface (UPI) instead of physical tendering of banknotes.
- Customers would be endowed with the option of withdrawing coins in required quantities and denominations.
- The proposed mechanism for coin dispensation would be a departure from the conventional machines which relied on banknotes for facilitating coin exchanges.
- The machines are intended to be installed at public places such as railway stations, shopping malls and marketplaces.

Advantages

- QR code-based coin vending machines (QCVM) will enhance the ease of accessibility to coins.
- It will improve the distribution of coins among the public.
- The guidelines will be issued to banks to promote the distribution of coins using these machines.

Are coins significant in our ecosystem

- As per the latest RBI bulletin, the total value of circulation of rupee coins stood at ₹28,857 crore as on December 2022.
- The figure is an increase of 7.2% from the year-ago period.
- Circulation of small coins remained unchanged at ₹743 crores.
- The number is inclusive of mobile banking, internet banking, IMPS, BHIM-UPI and NEFT, among others.

ISRO successful in key test for Chandrayaan-3

Context

- In a milestone achievement, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully conducted the flight acceptance hot test of the CE-20 cryogenic engine that will power the Cryogenic Upper Stage of the LVM3 launch vehicle for the Chandrayaan-3 mission.
- As per ISRO test was conducted at the ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri in Tamil Nadu.
- All the propulsion parameters during the test were found satisfactory and closely matched with predictions.

Successfully EMI-EMC TEST

- Chandrayaan-3 lander successfully completed the crucial EMI-EMC (Electromagnetic Interference/ Electromagnetic Compatibility) test at the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru.
- The EMI-EMC test is conducted for satellite missions to ensure the functionality of the satellite subsystems in the space environment and their compatibility with the expected electromagnetic levels.
- This test is a major milestone in the realization of the satellites.

About Chandrayaan-3

- Chandrayaan 3 is an upcoming lunar exploration mission by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). It is the third mission in the Chandrayaan series, following Chandrayaan 1 and Chandrayaan 2.
- The primary objective of Chandrayaan 3 is to land a rover on the lunar surface and conduct scientific experiments to study the composition of the moon's surface and sub-surface.
- The mission is also aimed at demonstrating India's technological capabilities in lunar exploration.

Major modules of Chandrayaan-3

- Chandrayaan-3 interplanetary mission has three major modules:
 - Propulsion module
 - Lander module
 - Rover.
- The mission's complexity calls for establishing radio-frequency (RF) communication links between the modules.

Proton beam therapy out of reach for many with cancer

Context

- According to reports the cancer patients in India face twin challenges when it comes to accessing proton beam therapy (PBT).
- The foremost problem is about enough facilities across the country.
- Another bottleneck is that the proton beam therapy (PBT) Treatment and cost in lakhs which it unaffordable for many people.
- The PBT is considered a viable alternative to radiation for treating solid tumours, especially head and neck cancers.

About Proton therapy

- Proton therapy, also called proton beam therapy, is a type of radiation therapy.
- It uses protons rather than x-rays to treat cancer.
- Proton beams can be used to treat tumors composed of different types of cells.
- A proton is a positively charged particle.
- Unlike radiation which uses X-rays, the PBT uses protons to tackle cancer.
- At high energy, protons can destroy cancer cells.

Working of Proton Therapy

- Proton beam therapy works by disrupting the tumor's DNA and destroying tumor cells.
- The radiation from protons damages the DNA of the tumor, making the tumor unable to repair itself or grow new cells.
- This means a tumor stops growing and starts shrinking.
- The effects of proton radiation vary depending on the size of the tumor, its location, and other factors.

Proton therapy and disease

- While proton therapy is most often used to treat cancer, it can also be used to treat noncancerous (benign) tumors in children and adults.

- some examples include:
 - Brain tumors, including those in the base of the skull
 - Spinal cord tumors
 - Head and neck cancer
 - Breast cancer
 - Lung cancer
 - Liver cancer
 - Pancreatic cancer
 - Rectal cancer
 - Prostate cancer

Proton Cancer Centre treatment in India

- According to privately-run Apollo Hospital, it has treated up to 900 patients in its Chennai-based Proton Cancer Centre, and 47% of those cases are brain tumours. Patients with cancers of the prostate, ovaries, breast, lungs, bones and soft tissues have also seen promising results in terms of recovery through the Proton therapy.
- Currently there are 42 PBT machine installations in the U.S., followed by Europe (35), Japan (26), China (seven), Taiwan (three) and South Korea (two), while India has only one.

UK to Launch India-Britain exchange scheme

Context

- India and the U.K. will launch the Young Professionals Scheme next month that will allow degree-holding Indian nationals in the age group 18-30 years to live and work in Britain for up to two years.
- The official conformation was made by U.K Foreign Secretary who in a visit to India to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' meeting.
- India and U.K. will focus on the progress of the UK-India 2030 Roadmap, which aims to bolster the two countries ties in defence and security, trade and investment.

Young Professionals Scheme

- U.K Foreign Secretary will mark the opening of the Young Professionals Scheme at IIT Delhi.
- The partnership between the UK and India which allows up 3,000 Britons and 3,000 Indians each year the right to live and work in the other country for up to two years.

Tech Envoy to the Indo-Pacific region

- The United Kingdom government has announced for the creation of the UK's first Tech Envoy to the Indo-Pacific region, who will boost ties with India as a priority.
- This envoy is the second of its kind to be announced by the UK (after the appointment of a Tech Envoy to the US in late 2020).

India-U.K. free trade agreement

- U.K. is commitment to conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) with India during an India-Europe business event in Delhi.
- According to official UK government data, the UK-India trading relationship was worth GBP 34 billion in 2022 growing by GBP 10 billion in one year.
- India has the world's third highest number of tech unicorns and start-ups, with 108 start-ups gaining the unicorn status of a private company valued at more than \$1 billion.

States progress in transition to clean electricity

Context

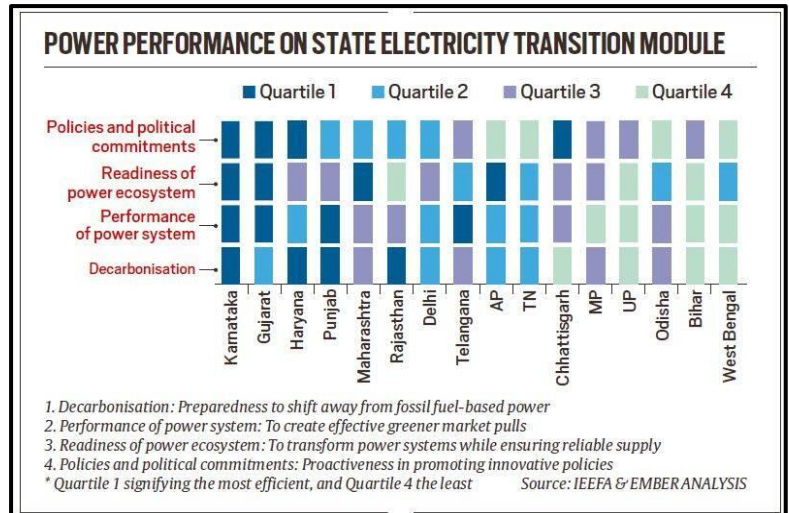
- Recently, the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis has released a report on Indian States' Energy Transition.
- According to the report, Karnataka and Gujarat are among the major states making the most progress in the transition to clean electricity.
- The report was jointly prepared by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) along with EMBER.

More about the report

- The report on Indian States' Energy Transition released on Monday has analyzed 16 states, which together account for 90% of India's annual power requirement.
- The analysis has tracked four dimensions. (figure)

State's performance

- Karnataka is the only state among the 16 analyzed that scored well across all four dimensions of clean electricity transition identified in this study.
- It also has conducive policies and political commitments for a smoother transition.
- The analysis found that Karnataka currently is one of the few states overachieving its Renewable Purchase Obligations targets.
- The state still has a large amount of untapped renewable energy potential, having installed just 11% of its total potential.
- Rajasthan is second only to Karnataka, with renewables supplying 29% of the state's power mix.
- Gujarat was a little behind Karnataka in terms of decarbonizing its electricity sector. Haryana and Punjab have shown promising preparations and implementations for electricity transition.
- Haryana has the lowest installed capacity of older, more polluting coal power plants.
- Maharashtra, with the highest power demand in India, was found to be mid-table, mainly due to slow renewable energy uptake in the state and the inability to shut down older polluting coal power plants. Its renewable energy share (11%) is lower than most other states.
- Bihar, UP and West Bengal have work to do to strengthen their clean electricity transition performances.



International courts and climate change

Context

- Recently, group of 16 countries has launched a gallant effort to fight the problem of climate change an existential threat to human civilization at the United Nations (UN) led by Vanuatu (an island country in the South Pacific Ocean)
- The group seeks an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the issue of climate change.

Jurisdiction of International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- The ICJ has two types of jurisdictions: contentious and advisory.
- The Contentious jurisdiction refers to resolving legal disputes between consenting states.
- Under advisory jurisdiction, the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Security Council (SC) and other specialised bodies of the organisation can request the ICJ for an opinion on a legal question.
- Unlike decisions given under the contentious jurisdiction, the ICJ's advisory opinions are non-binding.
- ICJ's advisory opinion on climate change will also be handy in climate-related litigation at the national level.

Vanuatu's initiative

- The Republic of Vanuatu is leading a coalition of States seeking an Advisory Opinion on Climate Change from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- Small Island Developing (SID) states such as Vanuatu are most vulnerable to rising temperatures and sea levels.
- Accordingly, in September 2021, Vanuatu launched an initiative, through the UNGA, to seek an advisory opinion from the ICJ to "clarify the legal obligations of all countries to prevent and redress the adverse effects of climate change".
- Since then, the initiative has gathered momentum with more than 100 countries backing the idea.

Concerns

- The international legal instruments on climate change such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, has not delivered the concrete solutions to the problem of climate change.
- The recently concluded 27th UN Climate Change Conference (COP-27) where countries failed to narrow their differences on critical issues such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions perfectly exemplifies the failure.

Legal questions

- The draft resolution piloted by Vanuatu seeks answers to the following questions from the ICJ.
- First, what are the international law obligations of countries toward the protection of the climate system from anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases for the present and future generations?
- Second, given these international legal obligations, what are the legal consequences for states that have caused significant harm to the climate system.
- This question seeks to determine the price that states should pay for not honoring their international legal obligations on climate change.
- Third, as part of climate justice, there is a long-standing demand for climate reparations, that is, the rich countries that have historically caused maximum greenhouse gas emissions should compensate developing countries bearing a disproportionate brunt of climate change.
- At COP-27, while it was agreed to establish a “loss and damage” fund to assist vulnerable developing countries financially, but there is little clarity on which countries will provide the funding.

Role of International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea

- It is not just the ICJ whose advisory opinion is being sought.
- The Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law, comprising countries like Antigua and Barbuda and Tuvalu, has sought the advisory opinion of the Hamburg-based International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). ITLOS has been requested to determine the specific obligations of the countries under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea about preventing, controlling, and reducing pollution of the marine environment.
- The challenges of ocean warming, sea level rise and ocean acidification are all linked to the marine environment.

Conclusion

- These advisory opinions by ICJ are not a panacea.
- Nonetheless, as part of a multi-pronged approach to saving our planet, one should welcome the role of international courts.
- Developed countries and groupings like the G-20 should support these laudable initiatives of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- Environment and climate sustainability are important themes of G-20.
- India, as the president of the G-20, should take a lead given its relentless emphasis on LiFE (developing environment-friendly lifestyle) campaign.

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