

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 2  
JANUARY  
2023

## MAINS

GS-I

- CONDITION OF WOMEN IN REAL ESTATE, THE GENDER-EQUITY FARCE

GS-II

- AUDIT PANEL TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY IN DELIVERY OF SCHEMES
- AVOID FURTHER DELAY IN CONDUCTING THE CENSUS

GS-III

- CENTRE TO GIVE INCENTIVE FOR BANKS TO PROMOTE DIGITAL PAYMENTS
- UNION CABINET APPROVES FORMATION OF THREE NEW COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES
- MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ARE GASPING FOR FUNDS
- REMOTE WORK HELPED IN SAVING JOBS DURING COVID 19: ILO REPORT
- WORSENING NUTRIENT IMBALANCE DUE TO UREA AND DAP
- INCREASING HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

## PRELIMS

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

- Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal
- Tribes in Assam hill district seek separate autonomous council
- UGC's regulations for foreign universities in India
- After Jains, the Santhals stake claim to Parasnath Hills
- Guidelines for Technical Textiles Degree Programme in UG & PG issued

### ENVIRONMENT

- National Green Hydrogen mission

- Three new species of migratory birds in Tripura's Gomati district

### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- India's kala-azar cases declined 98.7% since 2007: Health Ministry
- Nanoplastics produce unexpected reactions when exposed to light
- Solar reactor converts both CO<sub>2</sub> and plastic waste into 'useful products'

## NEWS IN SHORTS

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- India & Japan to hold Maiden Air Exercise 'Veer Guardian 2023'
- India, U.K sign and exchange letters for Young Professionals Scheme
- India to host 'Voice of the Global South Summit'
- PM launches Aspirational Block Programme
- Prasar Bharati mulls own OTT platform
- Women in Military Regiment of Artillery
- Godavari estuary, a prime habitat for Indian Skimmer
- Rare White Tufted Royal Butterfly found in Kannur
- Prithvi-II missile successfully tested-fired
- National Science Day 2023 Theme

## SPECIAL

- Joshimath: The Sinking Land

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## — **Disclaimer** —

The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

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# **SECTION: A**

## **(MAINS)**

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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# GS FOUNDATION

**1 YEAR & 2 YEAR**  
PROGRAMME



- PREMIER- BRIDGE CLASSES
- MAINS INTEGRATED CLASSES
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## CONDITION OF WOMEN IN REAL ESTATE, THE GENDER-EQUITY FARCE

### CONTEXT:

Highlighting gender inequality, a recent report shows that informal women workers in 'Indian construction and real estate sector' earn 30-40 per cent less than male workers.

### Highlights of the report:

- **Report:** 'Pink Collar Skilling: Unleashing the Women's Power in the Real Estate Sector'.
- **Released by:** Consulting firm Primus Partners and World Trade Centre.
- **Key points:**
  - Of the total people employed in this industry **only 12 per cent** are women.
  - **Stark difference:** In the **domestic construction and real estate sector**, which employs 57 million workers, 50 million of the people employed are men, and **only 7 million are women**.
  - **Wage inequality:** The **informal women workers** engaged in construction in India **earn 30-40 per cent** less than their male counterparts.
    - In India, 47.6 per cent of **licensed architects are women**, with a gender pay gap of 15 per cent in the field.
  - **Question on dominancy:** India has only **2 per cent of women executives** in construction companies against the UK's 14 per cent and the US's 7 per cent.
    - In the real estate sector, there are a negligible number of women in managerial roles. Only 1-2 per cent of women reach **top-level management positions** in this industry.

### Issues:

- **Engagement in unskilled work:** Women are mainly employed in the lowest paying and most hazardous tasks (like lifting heavy loads), including brick kiln workers, quarry workers, slab pouring, stone shaping, load carriers, and assistants.
  - **Less paid for more risky work:** The jobs which are labour intensive, cause health hazards and are not well paying are preferred for women.
  - **More time spent on unpaid work:** As per reports, women spend almost twice as much time providing unpaid care work such as cleaning, cooking, providing care to the elderly, fetching water, childcare, etc.
- **Labour Market scarring-** It is a concept used by 'Global Gender Gap Report 2021' in which temporary limitation of in-person work has caused permanent and long-lasting effects on women's chances at decent employment in future.

### The gender pay gap in India:

- Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of inequality in the world and as a result, the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far from gender-neutral.
- As per **Inequality Report 2022**, while women represent about 50 per cent of the population, they earn only about one-third of the labour income for it.
- **WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2021** places India amongst the countries with the largest Gender Gaps in Economic participation and opportunity.
- **Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)** has declined from 27 % in 2010 to 22 % in 2020.
- Though 'women' come from varying socio-economic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, the pandemic disrupted an already skewed ratio in educational opportunities, access to finance, wage disparities, and other social constraints for them demographically.

### Challenges in bridging gender inequality:

Though there is a need to bridge gender inequality, there are several challenges that act as restraints in this direction. Some factors are deeply rooted in Indian society and many are recent challenges. These can be seen as-

#### • Social challenges-

- **Social norm of gendered differentiation of labour:** Women are trained in care activities and cooking skills whereas men are trained in economic activities. They are considered subordinate to men due to the patriarchal nature of Indian society.
- **"Double burden" of paid and unpaid labour:** The conundrum of unpaid care work is only increasing in India given the shrinking family sizes and resulting time poverty faced disproportionately by women.
- **Dependency:** Most women are socially and economically dependent on men.

#### • Economic challenges-

- **Lack of social protection:** Most women are offered work in the informal sector, which categorically provides no protection from labour laws, or social benefits like pension paid sick leave or maternity leave.
- **Other factors:** Harassment, violence and income difference

### • Political reasons-

- Lack of political intention in bridging gender inequality
- Lack of regular evaluation of laws, rules and schemes.
- Less awareness among women about government schemes and measures.

## AUDIT PANEL TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY IN DELIVERY OF SCHEMES

### CONTEXT:

The Rajasthan government has set up a Social and Performance Audit Authority (SPAA) to ensure accountability in the delivery of government schemes and programmes.

### What is Social Audit?

- Social Audit is the examination and assessment of a programme/scheme conducted with the active involvement of people and comparing official records with actual ground realities.
- It is a powerful tool for social transformation, community participation and government accountability.

### About the Social and Performance Audit Authority (SPAA):

- Administered by: The Secretary, Finance (Expenditure) in the state has made the Commissioner of the authority.
- Under SPAA, audits of government schemes will be undertaken on two counts:
  - **Social Audit:** The social audit will be undertaken along the lines of the social audit in MGNREGA. It does not necessarily require **high qualifications of the resource persons**, who will be empanelled as per requirement and paid on a per-day basis.
  - **Performance Audit:** For the performance audit, SPAA will engage personnel from Valuation Wing under the Planning Department as well as the Department of Treasuries and Accounts, with the latter reportedly having excess personnel, among others.

### What would happen after audit?

- Post the social and performance audit, the auditors will file a report online.

- The **Audit Management System (AMS)** under the Local Fund Audit Department (LFAD) will be customised for audit reports under SPAA.
- **Significance:** It will ensure transparency, public participation, public satisfaction and quality along with accountability in public welfare schemes of the state government.

### Constitutional provision regarding audit:

**Article 148** - Comptroller and Auditor-General of India

- The Comptroller and Auditor-General shall perform such duties and exercise such powers in relation to the accounts of the Union and of the States and of any other authority or body as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament.

### Article 151 - Audit Reports

- The reports of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India relating to the accounts of the Union shall be submitted to the president, who shall cause them to be laid before each House of Parliament.
- The reports of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India relating to the accounts of a State shall be submitted to the Governor of the State, who shall cause them to be laid before the Legislature of the State.

### Who can conduct a social audit?

- The **Department of Rural Development** in states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Meghalaya has set up its Society for Social Audit and Transparency which are autonomous institutions that conduct social audits of the MGNREG Scheme.
- This is in furtherance of the **Social Audit Manual of the Ministry of Rural Development** which requires every State to set up an independent Social Audit Unit consisting of resource persons from the State, District and Village as well as experts on relevant themes.
- Social audits are conducted in partnership **with civil society organisations**, with auditors emerging from among scheme beneficiaries, who are trained over a period of time on how to conduct a social audit. Since awareness generation is an important component of these audits, it becomes necessary to have conduits that can be relied upon to transfer factually correct information.

### Other related Initiatives:

**The Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017:** Meghalaya became the first state in India to operationalize a law that makes social audits of government programmes and schemes a part of government practice.



## AVOID FURTHER DELAY IN CONDUCTING THE CENSUS

### CONTEXT:

India has experienced the last census in 2011, which is going to complete about more than a decade now. The decade has seen several changes including the socio-economic, political and health needs of people.

### Need of the census:

- The **rural-urban distribution of population** has been rapidly changing over the years.
- There is **high population growth** in the urban areas. Some cities have been growing faster than others through in-migration.
- The **rural-urban distribution of population** has been rapidly changing over the years. There is high population growth in the urban areas.
- Some cities have been **growing faster than** others through in-migration.
  - ▶ **For example**, areas under the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike grew by 49.3% during 2001-11, while the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (11.9%), the Delhi Municipal Corporation (11.7%), and Greater Chennai Corporation (7.0%) had much lower growth rates.
- **Kolkata Municipal Corporation recorded a fall in population during the same period.**
- **Pandemic chaos:**
  - ▶ The pandemic resulted in deaths among adults and the aged relatively more than children.
  - ▶ Its impact on age distribution in severely affected areas would be of interest as it would give indirect estimates of the number of deaths.

### NPR and Census:

- The decision to collect data for the **National Population Register** by piggybacking on the Census operations was the most debated issue before the Census was postponed. Such controversies negatively impact the Census, which is the largest administrative exercise for collecting data.

### Implications of the delay:

- **Lack of reliable data:** Sample surveys can provide reliable data on social and demographic indicators only at higher geographic levels.

- **Distribution of resources:** Apart from the population count, the Census has also been providing data on population characteristics, housing and amenities.
- **Delay in implementation of schemes:** The improvement in literacy and educational levels, economic activity, migration, etc., or the impact of programmes like **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, one must depend on sample surveys.
- **Irregularity in public representation in parliament:** The Census data are used to determine the number of seats to be reserved for SCs and STs in Parliament, State legislatures, local bodies, and government services.
- **Confusion in delimitation exercise:** Delimitation of parliamentary and Assembly constituencies would continue to be based on 2001 Census till data from a Census after 2026 are published.

### About Digital census 2021:

- As all previous censuses in India have been paper-based. A mobile app will be used in Census 2021. It will be a transformation from paper census to digital census.
- The 2021 census is the 16th Indian census.
- The government was set to spend Rs.12, 000 crore on the 2021 Census as well as for the preparation of the National Population Register (NPR).
- This mammoth nationwide exercise will be carried out in 16 languages.
- The census will have its reference date as March 1, 2021, but for snow-bound Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand it will be October 1, 2020.

### Advantages of a Digital Census/paperless census:

- A paperless census will drastically reduce the storage space for physical files.
- As all data will be stored electronically, the government will save up on substantial amount of physical storage space.
- Digital census will reduce the environmental burden by saving the trees required for paper manufacturing industries.
- The use of technology in census will also help pave the way for other technologies, such as artificial intelligence and Internet of Things, to take root in India.
- It will also help cut the project cost of census.
- As the records mentioned on pages could easily be tempered now going digitally, any tampering with the data will invite punishment under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

## CENTRE TO GIVE INCENTIVE FOR BANKS TO PROMOTE DIGITAL PAYMENTS

### CONTEXT:

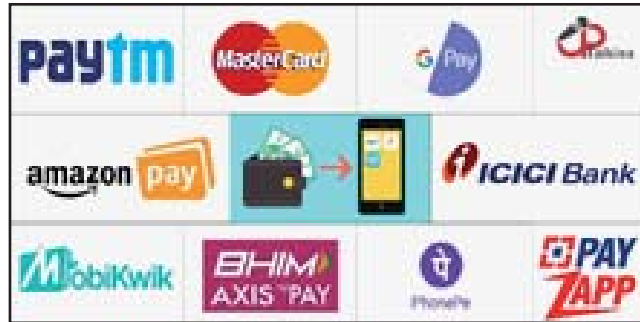
The Union Cabinet approved an outlay of Rs. 2,600 crore to promote payments using RuPay cards and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

### ◎ BACKGROUND:

- ▶ The total digital payments transactions have registered a year-on-year growth of **59%, rising** from Rs.5, 554 crore in FY2020-21 to Rs.8, 840 crore in FY2021-22.
- ▶ The Government of India is taking various initiatives for promotion of digital payments across the country.
- ▶ Over past years, digital payment transactions have witnessed tremendous growth.
- ▶ During the Covid-19 crisis, digital payments facilitated functioning of businesses, including small merchants, and helped in maintaining social distancing.
- ▶ UPI has achieved a record of 782.9 crore digital payment transactions with a value of ₹ 12.82 lakh crore in the month of December 2022.

### About the initiative:

- Banks will be provided this incentive money to promote such digital payments, the Cabinet said in a press release.
- The fund will be paid to banks in view of the lack of a **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)**, a commission on digital transactions — for **UPI and RuPay** transactions.
- This regime has led to complaints from the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and banks**, which have been worried about the sustainability of building digital payments infrastructure in the absence of payments needed to scale and maintain them.
- The scheme will also promote **UPI Lite and UPI 123PAY** as economical and user-friendly digital payments solutions and enable further deepening of digital payments in the country.
- This incentive scheme will facilitate building of a robust digital payment ecosystem and promoting RuPay Debit Card and BHIM-UPI digital transactions.



The **National Payments Corporation of India** was recently introduced to reduce the load on banking networks for small transactions, and to allow payments over older feature phones, respectively.

### What is digital payment system?

- Digital payment system is a way of payment which is made through digital modes- completely online. No hard cash is involved in digital payments.
- In this system, payer and payee both use digital modes to send and receive money.
- It is also called electronic payment.
- Example- Internet Banking, Debit Cards, Credit Cards, e-Wallets.

### Different digital payment modes in India:

- **Cards:** Banking cards offer consumers more security, convenience, and control than any other payment method.
- **Internet Banking:** It is an electronic payment system that enables customers of a bank or other financial institution to conduct a range of financial transactions through the financial institution's website.
  - ▶ Different types of online financial transactions are: National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT), Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS), and Immediate Payment Service (IMPS).
- **Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD):** This service allows mobile banking transactions using basic feature mobile phone (dialling \*99#), there is no need to have mobile internet data facility for using USSD based mobile banking.
- **Mobile Banking:** It is a service provided by a bank that allows its customers to conduct different types of financial transactions remotely using a mobile device.
- **Unified Payments Interface (UPI):** It is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
- **Mobile Wallets:** It is a way to carry cash in digital format. Instead of using physical plastic card to make

purchases, we can pay with our smartphone, tablet, or smart watch.

- **Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS):** AEPS is a bank led model which allows online interoperable financial transaction at PoS (Point of Sale / Micro ATM) through the Business Correspondent or Bank Mitra of any bank using the Aadhaar authentication.

## UNION CABINET APPROVES FORMATION OF THREE NEW COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES

### CONTEXT:

As per the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) headed by Prime Minister, the Union Cabinet has approved the formation of three new cooperative societies to focus on seed availability to farmers, organic farming and exports, benefiting farmers.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- **Need of the initiative:** Cooperatives that are associated with farmers, farmers' income and agriculture production are an important part of rural India.
- The Cabinet approved the establishment of the;
  - National Export Society,
  - National Cooperative Society for Organic Products and
  - National Level Multi-state Seed Cooperative Society
- **Significance:** These cooperative societies will help realise the vision of "**Sahakar Se Samriddhi**" (prosperity through cooperatives), and boost rural growth and farmers' income.

### What are Multi-state Cooperative societies?

- They are societies that have operations in more than one State, for instance, a farmer producers Organisation that procures grains from farmers from multiple states.
- At present, India has more than 1,500 multi-State cooperative societies, with the highest number being in Maharashtra.

- The **MSCS Act 2002** was passed to govern such cooperatives whose members and areas of operation are spread across more than one state.

### The Cooperative societies Act, 1950:

- It states that the **state government** is entitled to appoint a registrar to look after a cooperative society's workings and appoint people to assist the registrar.
- Any society that decides to work for its members with a common vested interest must be registered under this act.
- A society will be registered under this act only if it has a member count of more than ten persons who has attained the age of 18 years.
- The objective of the society is to create funds for its members. The word limited must be in use with the name of such cooperative societies.
- Any questions regarding the membership, such as whether the society has been created for agriculture or non-agricultural purposes, whether the residence of a member will be a town or village etc., will be taken by the registrar and deemed as final.

### Related Constitutional Provisions:

- The 97<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 2011
- The right to form cooperative societies is a fundamental right (Article 19).
- New Directive Principle of State Policy on the Promotion of Cooperative Societies (Article 43-B).
- A new **Part IX-B** to the Constitution is titled "The Co-operative Societies" (Articles 243-ZH to 243-ZT).
- Creation of a new Ministry of Cooperation– which gave more acknowledgment to cooperative societies.

### Ministry of Cooperation:

- The Union Ministry of Cooperation was formed in 2021; its mandate was looked after by the Ministry of Agriculture before.
- **Objectives of creation of the new ministry:**
  - To realize the vision of "**Sahakar se Samriddhi**" (prosperity through cooperation).
  - To streamline processes for "Ease of doing business" for co-operatives and enable the development of **Multi-State Co-operatives (MSCS)**
  - To provide a separate administrative, legal, and policy framework for strengthening the cooperative movements in the country.
  - To deepen the cooperative as a true people-based movement reaching up to the grassroots level.

Advantages of a cooperative society:	Disadvantages of a Cooperative Society:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly association with the producers themselves</li> <li>• Excludes the chance of people working in the middle and thus provides maximum profit to the producers and consumers; hence goods are sold at cheap rates here.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As these organisations work with the economically weaker and backward sections of society, the chances of raising monetary capital are quite low.</li> <li>• Instances of mismanagement and chaos</li> </ul>

## MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ARE GASPING FOR FUNDS

### CONTEXT:

As per the Study titled 'Report on Municipal finances', the combined budget of Municipal corporations of India is much less than the Central and State government, released by RBI for Urban local bodies in the country.

### Details of the Report:

- **About:** The Report compiles and analyses the budgetary data for **201 municipal corporations (MCs)** across all States.
- **Key highlights:**
  - It stated that how municipal corporations are dependent on fund transfers from Central and state governments and their earnings are limited.
  - The allocation of its revenue goes into the department's salaries, pension and emoluments.
  - 70% of the revenue generated goes for such expenditures and capital expenditures.
  - The tax revenue of the municipal bodies is less and expenditure is more.
  - Government transfers to these bodies have increased and thus limited their autonomy.
- **The fund crunches:**
  - As estimated by RBI, the revenue of the Municipal body was about 0.61% of the GDP for the year 2019-20.
  - The estimates were done considering tax revenue, non-tax revenue and transfers.

### Issues identified:

- Dependence on Property tax
- Increasing population density and Urbanisation

### Global comparisons:

- Property tax exploitation in India due to devaluation remains very less; the collection of taxes is also less than in OECD countries.
- The GDP for Urban local bodies is about 7% for Brazil and 6% for South Africa.

### Need for an alternate mode of finance:

- Many of the civic bodies are financially weak and suffering from a resource crunch.
- There is also the need to ramp up infrastructure in cities.
- Local bodies in India are among the weakest globally, as they don't have enough autonomy to:
  - levy taxes
  - grant exemptions
  - borrow funds
- It makes them dependent on **bank loans** or **federal and state governments** for resources.
- Municipal revenues are dominated by **property tax collections and the devolution of taxes**.

### About Municipal Bonds:

- A municipal bond (muni) is a debt security issued by a state, municipality, or county to finance its capital expenditures, including the construction of highways, bridges, or schools.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)'s detailed guidelines for the issue and listing of municipal bonds in March 2015.
- **Uses:** Through muni bonds, a municipal corporation raises money from individuals or institutions and promises to pay a specified amount of interest, and returns the principal amount on a specific maturity date.

### Suggestions by the Central Bank:

- Levying a tax on residents to pay bondholders
- Backing the bonds, by earnings from particular projects
- Working out a hybrid mechanism where revenues are used to service the debt.
- **Pool Financing:** Common bond is issued by several municipal bodies to keep costs in check.



## REMOTE WORK HELPED IN SAVING JOBS DURING COVID 19: ILO REPORT

### CONTEXT:

A report titled 'Working Time and Work-Life Balance around the World' has been recently released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

- ❑ This first-ever ILO global report on working time focuses on the actual number of hours of work, working-time arrangements and their implications for work-life balance.

### Highlights of the report:

#### Nature of work during the COVID-19 crisis:

- **Flexible working hours.**
- **Short-time work** and work-sharing measures.
- **Increased working hours** in the healthcare or pharmaceutical industries.
- **Teleworking** contributed to the pandemic response by **reducing social contact**.
- **Great resignation phenomenon:** It is an ongoing economic trend (beginning in early 2021) in which employees (most likely in hospitality, healthcare, and education sectors) have voluntarily resigned from their jobs in mass, in the wake of the pandemic.
  - **The most cited reasons are** work-life imbalances, wage stagnation amid the rising

cost of living, limited opportunities for career advancement, hostile work environments, etc.

**Impact:** Inclusive short-time work schemes with the highest possible allowances:-

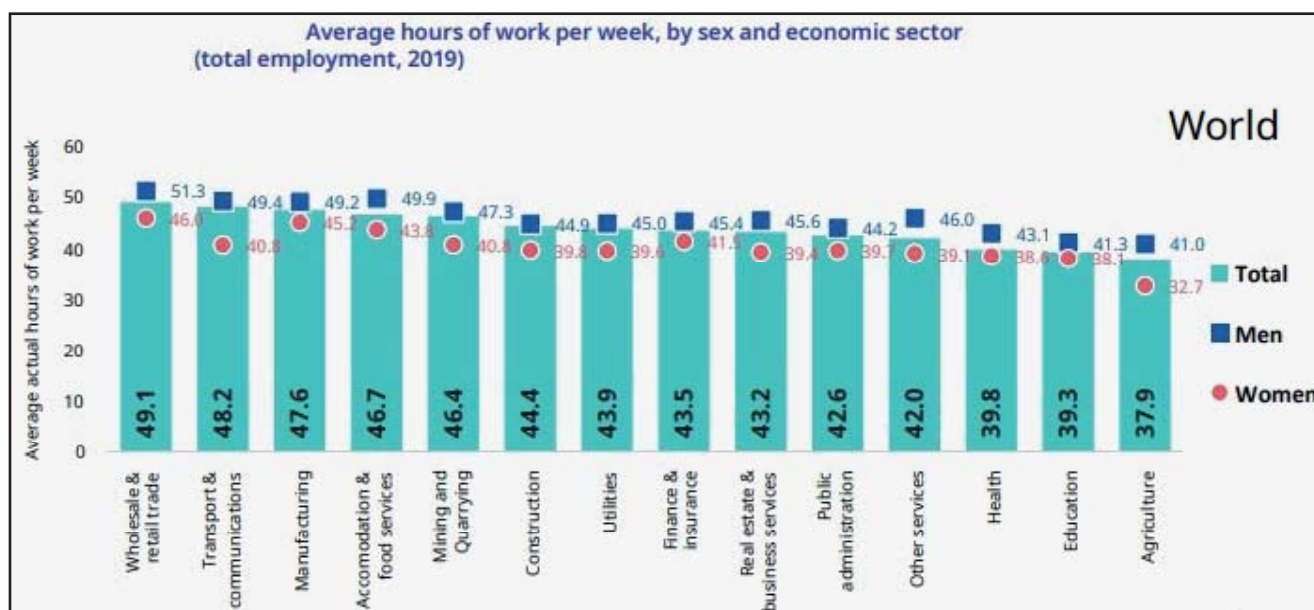
- Enabled individuals as well as companies, enterprises and industries to **collectively reduce the hours or volume of work**.
- Sustained purchasing power and created the possibility of cushioning the effects of economic crises.
- Laid the ground for a **better and healthier work-life balance**.
- **Teleworking** helped in maintaining organisational operations and **preserving jobs**.

### Suggestions by the ILO:

- ILO member countries need to **prescribe policies** necessary to remedy the weaknesses of working-time instruments that became apparent during the pandemic.
- **Large-scale implementation of telework** nearly everywhere in the world **to change the nature of employment** in the near future.

### CONCLUSION:

- The 'Great Resignation' phenomenon has placed **work-life balance at the forefront of social and labour market issues** in the post-pandemic world.
- There is a substantial amount of evidence that work-life balance policies provide significant benefits to enterprises, and such policies are a '**win-win**' for both employers and employees.



## WORSENING NUTRIENT IMBALANCE DUE TO UREA AND DAP

### CONTEXT:

The easing of global prices has boosted fertiliser availability and cut the subsidy bill. However, asymmetry in the pricing structure has led to a worsening nutrient imbalance due to the over-application of urea and DAP.

### ◎ BACKGROUND:

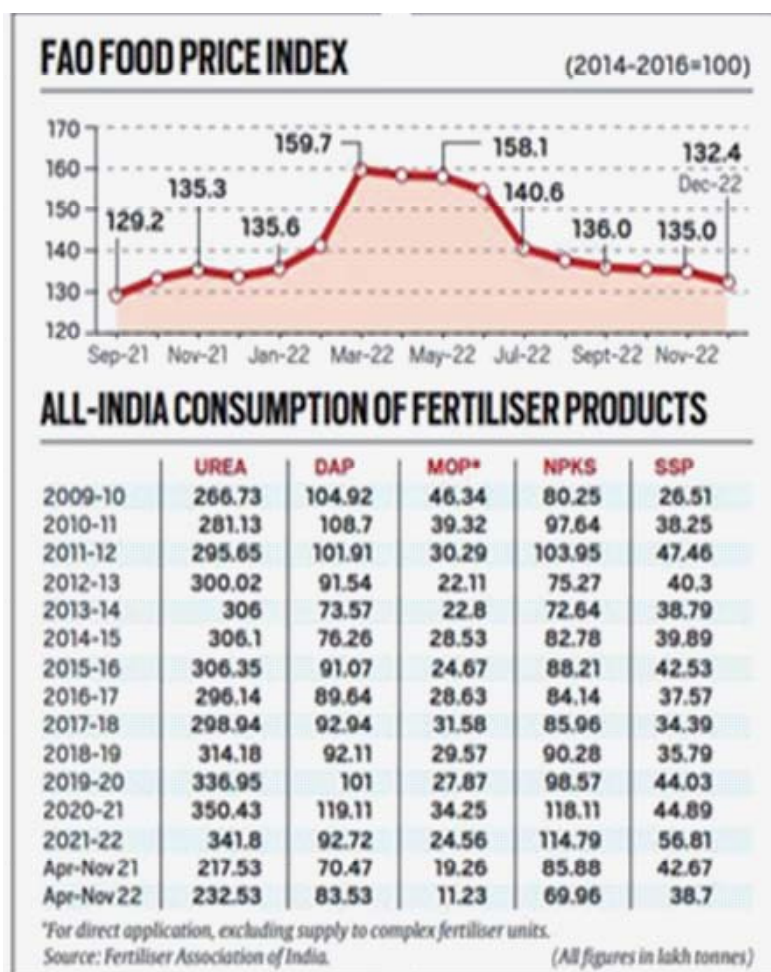
- The year 2022 saw global prices of fertilisers go high due to the post-Russia **invasion of Ukraine** in February.
- Landed prices of urea imported into India (cost plus freight) are ruling at around \$550 per tonne, as against \$900-1,000 average in November-January 2021-22, when global demand for food and plant nutrients surged with the lifting of Covid lockdowns by most countries.
- The United Nations **Food and Agriculture Organisation's Food Price Index** hit 159.7 points in March 2022.
  - From that all-time high, the index — which is a weighted average of global prices of a representative basket of food commodities over a base period value, taken at 100 for 2014-2016 — has fallen for nine consecutive months.
- However, till December 2022 a number of 132.4 points was below even the year-ago value of 133.7 points and the lowest since the 129.2 points of September 2021.

### India's Fertiliser consumption:

- (see figure below)

### About Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP):

- It is a very popular fertilizer because of its excellent physical properties and nutrient content.
- It is free-flowing, dust-free and does not normally give any storage problems.
- DAP is almost water-soluble and ultimately leaves an acid effect on soils because of the ammonia (NH<sub>4</sub>) it contains.



- DAP on incorporation into soil reacts with water and gets **converted into HPO<sub>4</sub> and NH<sub>4</sub>**.
  - Ammonium (NH<sub>4</sub>) follows the same routes as in the case of urea.
  - Phosphorus in DAP is present in the best available form (HPO<sub>4</sub>).
- **Depending upon the soil reaction (pH)**, phosphorus exists in 3 forms which can be absorbed by plant roots.
- These are HPO<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> and PO<sub>4</sub>. Phosphorus, which is immobile in the soil, is not subjected to leaching losses.

### Reasons behind increased consumption of urea and DAP:

- **High subsidy on urea:** The government has fixed the maximum retail price (MRP) of urea at Rs.5,628 per tonne, while the MRPs of other fertilisers are technically decontrolled.
- **DAP – a cheaper substitute:** Companies have been told not to charge more than Rs.27,000/tonne for DAP (Rs.29,000-31,000/ tonne for NPKS complexes), which has 46% P and 18% N.
- Thus, the choice of fertilisers is primarily a function of prices and not of NPKS complexes or other macro and micronutrients in the fertilisers.

### What are the impacts of global ease on the prices of fertilisers?

- It significantly improves overall availability. No major shortage of any fertiliser, except MOP, has been reported during the on-going Rabi cropping season.
- Reduction in fertiliser subsidy of the government.

### Challenges emerged:

- **Over-use of fertilisers:** India's fertiliser sector has been riddled with distortions from excessive use of urea. The diammonium phosphate or DAP is seeing a similar phenomenon of over-application due to under-pricing. The effects of overconsumption of urea and DAP:
  - The current NPK ratio of 13:5:1, as against the ideal 4:2:1, would adversely affect crop yields
  - It will adversely affect the health of plants and humans, due to the unavailability of a balanced nutrient mix.
- **Increase in Urea consumption:** Urea has 46% nitrogen (N), while DAP contains 46% phosphorus (P) plus 18% N and MOP has 60% potassium (K).
- Neem oil supposedly also acted as a mild nitrification inhibitor, allowing a **more gradual release of nitrogen**. Increased nitrogen use efficiency would, in turn, bring down the number of urea bags required per acre.

- **Worsening of nutrition imbalances:** The consumption of both urea and DAP has shot up, with their sales for the year ending March 2023 likely to top 350 lt and 120 lt respectively.

### Suggestive measures:

- **To restrict DAP used to rice and wheat.**
  - The danger is of even this well-accepted fertiliser loses out to DAP because of flawed pricing.
- **To raise SSP's acceptance by permitting sale only in granular, not powdered, form.**
  - SSP powder is prone to adulteration with gypsum or clay.
  - Farmers can be assured of quality through granules, which will also promote a slower release of P without drift during application.

## INCREASING HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

### CONTEXT:

In the latest information came of wild elephant attacks in Kerala, a daily worker, was attacked by a rouge elephant at Sulthan Bathery town adjacent to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

- This has caught the attention of increasing instances of Human-wildlife conflicts, especially near forests.

### ◎ ABOUT

- Around the world, human-wildlife conflict (HWC) challenges people and wildlife, leading to a decrease in people's tolerance for conservation efforts and contributing to multiple factors that drive species to extinction
- HWC is a significant threat to conservation, livelihoods, and myriad other concerns and should be addressed at a scale equal to its importance.
- By allocating adequate resources and forming wide-ranging partnerships, we can move towards long-term coexistence that benefits both people and wildlife.

### Data on human-elephant conflict:

- In India, data from the **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** indicates that over 500 elephants were killed between 2014-2015 and 2018-2019, mostly due to human-elephant conflict.
- During the same period, 2,361 people were killed as a result of conflict with elephants.

### What drives Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC)?

- HWC results from a variety of ecological and anthropogenic drivers that exert pressures on landscapes where humans and wildlife share space.
- **Ecological drivers** include seasonal changes, natural calamities, and animals' life cycles, as well as the movement patterns of animals
- **Anthropogenic drivers**, such as habitat loss, changes in land use, livestock management, expansion of agricultural practices, climate change, resource extraction, infrastructure development, and urbanisation
- Each negative impact emerges from a complex web of interactions between drivers, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to view the effect of one driver in isolation
- For instance, if forests are cleared for settlements or agriculture, or roads are cut into previously inaccessible areas, habitat loss and fragmentation result, forcing wildlife and people into closer proximity to each other.

#### The IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict Task Force (HWCTF):

- It is a global advisory group and think tank.
- **Aim:** To foster connections between policymakers, scientists, and communities and to assimilate knowledge and capacity for HWC management across IUCN members and the wider conservation community.

### Elements of Human-Wildlife conflict management:

- **Understanding the conflict:** Research all aspects of the conflict profile to understand the context for conflict in any given situation (hotspot mapping, community attitudes, spatial and temporal characteristics, etc.)
- **Mitigation:** Reducing the impacts of HWC after it occurs (compensation, insurance, alternative livelihoods, etc.)
- **Response:** Addressing an on-going HWC incident (response teams, reporting mechanisms, standard operating procedures, etc.)
- **Prevention:** Stopping or preventing HWC before it occurs (fences, early detection tools, safe working environments, etc.)
- **Policy:** Enabling HWC management through protocols, principles, provisions, and measures stipulated in the legislation and undertaken by authorities (international and national law, national and local HWC management plans, spatial plans, etc.)
- **Monitoring:** Measuring the performance and effectiveness of HWC management interventions over time (data collection, information sharing, adaptive management, etc.)

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# **Section: B**

## **(SPECIALS)**

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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## JOSHIMATH: THE SINKING LAND

### CONTEXT

- Joshimath, the ancient Uttarakhand town has become a cause of concern. Though the town of Joshimath has been witnessing cracks emerging for the past two decades, things have escalated over a few days when the area was declared a disaster prone region.



- The town is also a gateway to noted sites such as;
  - The pilgrimage – **Badrinath for Hindus** and **Hemkund Sahib for Sikhs**;
  - The **international skiing site of Auli**; and
  - The **Valley of Flowers**, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Today, Joshimath is overly burdened with structures built without any regard for the land's load-bearing capacity.
- The signs of sinking first appeared in October 2021, when cracks continued to appear around town and residents resorted to repairs.
- The situation became particularly alarming towards the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, when large parts of the town experienced sudden land-sinking and several houses developed major cracks as well.

### Reasons for Vulnerability of region:

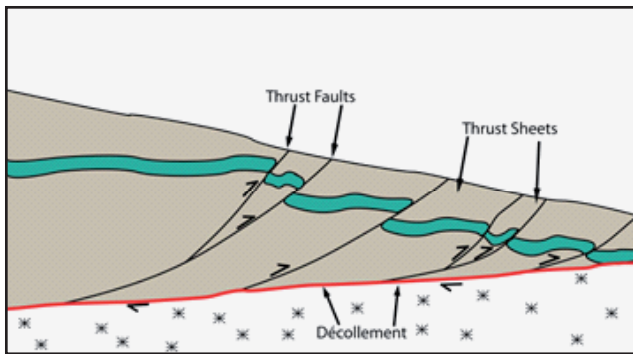
- Joshimath is built on the deposits of an **old landslide**, which means the slopes can be destabilised even by slight triggers.
- The town is also in **Zone V**, denoting highest risk, in India's seismic zonation scheme.
- It lies between two thrusts, the **Main Central Thrust (MCT)** and the **Vaikrita Thrust (VT)**, and thus occupies a seismically active terrain.

### Journey of Joshimath Town's development:

- Joshimath is a busy town in **Chamoli district**.
- The region is the part of the Himalayan ecosystem.
- Despite a population of only about 23,000, it has been heavily built-on, with hotels, resorts, and a bustling market that caters mainly to tourists, pilgrims, trekkers and personnel of the army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- After the **1962 India-China war**, Joshimath emerged as a place of strategic importance.
- It leads to villages along the **India-China border** and is also en route to Barahoti, a disputed territory along the border.

### Main Central Thrust (MCT) line:

- In simplest terms, the MCT is a crack or geological fault in Himalayas.
- It is formed due to the collusion of Indo-Australian plate and Eurasian plate.
- The area underneath the MCT is particularly very fragile due to frequent tectonic activities.
- And, therefore, seismic activities are very common in MCT areas.
- The MCT extends for over 2200 km across the Himalayas in northwest-southeast direction. Joshimath is located above the MCT.



The M.C. Mishra **committee's report of 1976** warned against heavy and unscientific construction in the town mentioning that, "Joshimath is a deposit of sand and stone, hence was not a suitable place for the coming up of a township. Vibrations produced by blasting and heavy traffic will also lead disequilibrium in natural factors."

### Contributing factors for disasters in the region:

- **Role of NTPC:** Locals have blamed the **NTPC's 520-MW Tapovan Vishnugad hydropower project**, under construction in the area, for exacerbating the Joshimath land subsidence.
  - Recently, NTPC has punctured a tunnel to connect Auli, near Joshimath for supply of water.
- **Char Dham project:** The 6-km **Helang-Marwari bypass**, being built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), is also under scrutiny for weakening slopes and further destabilising the local topography.
  - The bypass is part of the 825-km Char Dham highway expansion project in Uttarakhand, which experts have already questioned for unscientific slope-cutting, which resulted in several landslides.

- **Inadequate drainage and wastewater disposal:** The 2022 USDMA report pointed to a lack of drainage and wastewater disposal systems as being part of the subsidence problem.

- About **85% of buildings** in the town, including those owned by the army aren't connected to a sewerage system and have soak pits instead.

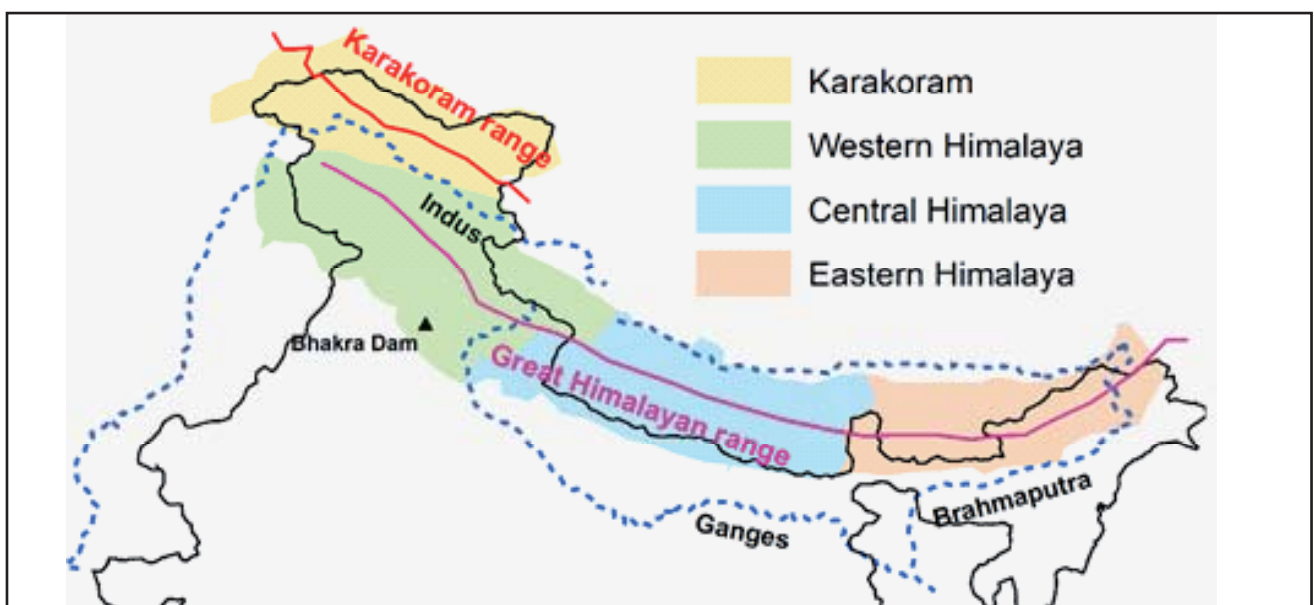
### The Himalayan ecosystem:

- The Himalayas are ecologically **fragile and economically** underdeveloped, with geo-environmental constraints imposing severe limitations on the level of resource productivity.
- Consequently, subsistence agriculture constitutes the main source of livelihood in the region.
- The rapid growth of tourists in the region has brought about extensive land-use changes in the region, mainly through the extension of cultivation and large-scale deforestation.
- This irrational land transformation process has not only disrupted the ecological balance of the Himalayan watersheds through reduced groundwater recharge, increased run-off and soil erosion, but has also adversely affected the ecology and economy of the adjoining Indo-Gangetic plains by recurrent floods and decreased irrigation potential.

### Why Himalayan region is susceptible to disasters?

The Hindu Kush Himalayan region is prone to numerous types of disasters because of its

- Steep terrain
- fragile geology
- intense and variable precipitation



- Common incidents of floods and landslides
- neo-tectonic mountain-building process, like earthquakes, landslides, floods, etc
- **Other factors:**
  - **Overexploitation of the ecosystem** (tourism, increased consumerism)
  - **Exploitative development projects:** The indiscriminate exploitation of the fragile Himalayan region in the name of development projects has extracted a heavy price in terms of environmental damage.
  - **Fragmentation of natural resources:** String of hydroelectric and road projects in the Himalayan States have already resulted in the fragmentation of natural systems.

### Sustainable tourism in Himalayas: Recommendations

- **Regulated tourism practice:** There is need to establish regulated tourism practices with promotion of sustainable agendas for the Indian Himalayan region (IHR).
- Also, there is need of maintenance of proper tourist capacity in every tourist place.
- **Vigilance and patrolling:** Protected areas require vigilance and regular patrolling to reduce unwanted wildlife-tourist interaction as well as habitat destruction due to off-road driving and encroachment.
- **Early Warning System:** It is important to have early warning and better weather forecast systems in order to forecast the disaster and alert the local population and tourists.
- **Regional Cooperation:** There is a need for a trans-boundary coalition of Himalayan countries to share and disseminate knowledge about the mountains and preservation of the ecology there.
- **Area Specific Sustainable Plan:** What is most critical is to review the area's present status and draw up a sustainable plan that respects the specific requirements of this fragile region and the impact of the climate crisis.
- **Promote Ecotourism:** Initiating a dialogue on adverse impacts of commercial tourism and promoting ecotourism.

### Recent disasters in the region:

- In last ten years, two major earthquakes have occurred in Uttarakhand namely the Uttarkashi earthquake (1991) and the Chamoli earthquake (1999).
- 380 people were killed when massive landslides washed away the whole village Malpa, Uttarakhand (then Uttar Pradesh) in 1998.
- In 1999, forest-fires in the hills of Uttarakhand destroyed more than 3, 75,000 hectares of forest. The same year, more than 450 cases of forest fire were reported in Himachal Pradesh and by May 1999, more than 80,000 hectares of forests were turned to ashes.
- The Kedarnath floods in 2013, had took lives of several innocent people and disaster in the region

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# **Section: C**

## **(PRELIMS)**

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### **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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**To Attempt**

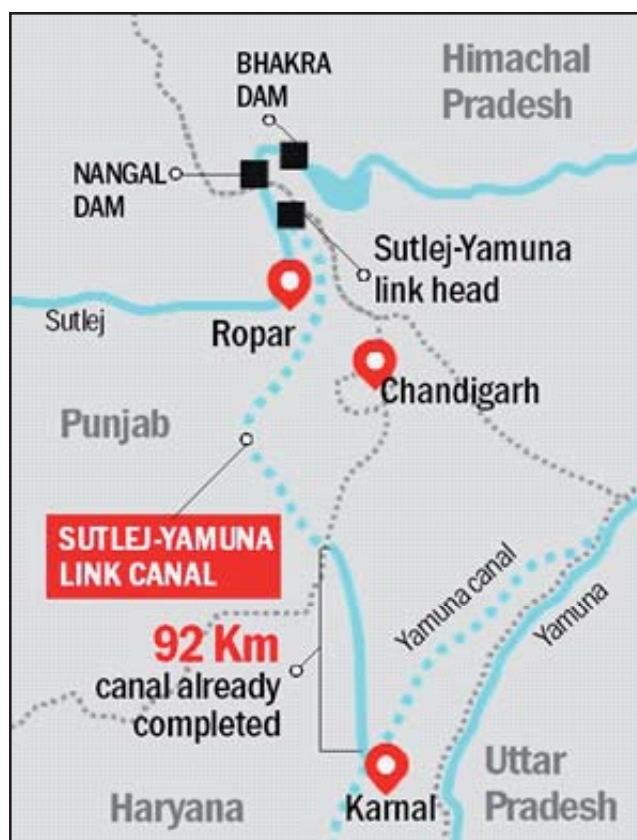
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## SUTLEJ-YAMUNA LINK CANAL

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The stand-off between Haryana and Punjab continues to haunt the proposed Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) as the chief ministers of the two states failed to reach an amicable solution at a meeting hosted by the Union Jal Shakti ministry.



### What is Sutlej-Yamuna Link?

- The Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) is a proposed 211-kilometre canal.
- It would connect the Sutlej River in Punjab with the Yamuna River in Haryana, providing Haryana with a share of the water from the Ravi and Beas rivers that flow through Punjab.

### ◎ **BACKGROUND**

- The SYL canal project was proposed following the **Indus Water Treaty in 1960** between India and Pakistan, which granted India 'free and unrestricted use' of the **Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej rivers**.

- The canal was also intended to address the dry conditions in the present-day Punjab-Haryana region.
- The **Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal** was planned in 1966 when Haryana was separated from Punjab.
- In 1976, the Government of India approved the construction of the canal.

### What are the developments so far?

- While a 121 km stretch of the canal was to be built in Punjab, another 90 km was to be constructed in Haryana.
- Haryana completed its portion of the project by June 1980, but work on the portion in Punjab, which was launched by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, near the Kapoori village in Patiala district, was stalled.

### Controversy around SYL

- Water rights and allocation of water
- Potential impact on the environment and local communities (water levels and flows of both rivers, potentially leading to water shortages and environmental degradation)
- Potential impact on local farmers and communities (displacement of people and loss of agricultural land)

## TRIBES IN ASSAM HILL DISTRICT SEEK SEPARATE AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** A forum of ethnic communities excluding the Dimas, the largest, has iterated its demand for carving a separate autonomous district out of the erstwhile North Cachar Hills district of Assam.

### ◎ **BACKGROUND:**

- The North Cachar Hills District Council in Assam was set up on April 29, 1952, under **Article 244(2)** of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.
  - ▶ It was later recognised as an **autonomous council**.
- The demand was first raised after the **North Cachar Hills district** was renamed **Dima Hasao** on March 30, 2010, to allegedly stamp the authority of the **Dimas people**.

- The resentment among the other communities intensified after the **North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council** passed a resolution to rename itself the **Dima Hasao Autonomous Council** with effect from April 26, 2022.

There are 13 tribes constitute about **71% of the district's total** population in the district.

- The major tribal groups in descending order of population are **Dimasa, Kuki, Zeme, Hmar and Karbi**.

### Need of a separate forum:

The **Dima Hasao district** currently has **one Assembly** seat.

- The Indigenous People's Forum representing the condition of non-Dimasa communities justified its demand for a separate autonomous district.
- The forum has also been demanding a separate Assembly constituency for the indigenous groups.

### About the Dimasa Community:

- The Dimasa society is tradition bound and guided by customs.
- Important feature: existence of male and female clan. The male clan is called **Sengphong** and the female clan is known as **Jadi**
- There are forty male clan and forty-two female clan.
- Whether in marriage, religious practices, or in rituals connected with the death, the clans have a significant role to play.
- Affiliation to one's own respective clan is quite strong among the Dimasa.



### What is the Sixth Schedule?

- According to **Article 244** of the Indian Constitution, the Sixth Schedule consists of provisions for the administration of tribal areas in-

- Assam
- Meghalaya
- Tripura
- Mizoram

- Passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, it seeks to safeguard the rights of tribal population through the formation of **Autonomous District Councils (ADC)**.

- ADCs are bodies representing a district to which the Constitution has given varying degrees of autonomy within the state legislature.

### Autonomous districts and regional councils:

- Along with ADCs, the Sixth Schedule also provides for **separate Regional Councils** for each area constituted as an autonomous region.
- In all, there are 10 areas in the Northeast that are registered as autonomous districts –
  - three in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram
  - one in Tripura
- These regions are named as district council of (name of district) and regional council of (name of region).
- Each autonomous district and regional council consists of not more than 30 members, of which four are nominated by the governor and the rest via elections. All of them remain in power for a term of five years.

### The current governing structure:

- Fifth Schedule: The Frontier State bordering Bhutan, China and Myanmar is under the Fifth Schedule that "does not provide special rights for the indigenous communities" unlike the Sixth Schedule.
- Sixth Schedule: The Sixth Schedule currently includes 10 autonomous district councils in four north-eastern States — Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.
- Article 371 (A): Nagaland, on the other hand, is governed by Article 371 (A), which says that no Act of Parliament shall apply in the State in several areas unless the Nagaland Assembly so decides by a resolution.
  - These include administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law and ownership and transfer of land and its resources.



## UGC'S REGULATIONS FOR FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

◎ **CONTEXT:** Amid the several European universities have shown keen interest to open campuses in India, the higher education regulator University Grants Commission (UGC) released draft regulations to allow foreign universities to enter India.

### About the guidelines:

#### ■ Criteria for Foreign universities:

- Only the universities that are placed at the **top 500** either in the overall or the subject-wise category, in global rankings such as QS, can apply to enter India.
- Universities that do not participate in such rankings must be "reputed" in their countries to be able to apply.
- The draft regulations do not specify a metric to judge the 'reputation' of the university.

#### ■ Key provisions:

- They have been granted free will to decide the fee structure and admission criteria for students.
- The universities have the autonomy to their professors and faculty from India or abroad.
- They can repatriate funds from their home jurisdiction.
- They are not abiding to offer courses that are in favour of India's national interest.

#### ■ Provisions in favour of India:

- The draft states that the UGC will have the right to inspect the campuses at any time.
- The draft says the UGC shall impose a **penalty and/ or suspend/ withdraw** its approval at any time if the university's activities or academic programmes are against the interest of India.
- It also requires the foreign universities to **submit audit reports** and **annual reports** to the UGC certifying that operations in India are in compliance with **Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999(FEMA)** and other relevant government policies.

#### ■ Significance of the initiative:

- **In line with National Education Policy 2020:**
- The top universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India, and a legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will be given special dispensation regarding regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India.
- In a way, the draft regulations released seek to institutionalise the NEP's vision.

#### Recent developments:

**King's College London** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the **government of Telangana** regarding collaborative research projects, staff and student exchanges, as well as curriculum development and upskilling in Telangana Pharma City.

#### Were previous attempts in India failed?

- **Due to Non-compliance with funds or repatriation:** In 2016, the NITI Aayog strongly pitched for foreign education providers to be allowed into India.

#### Similar Government Interventions:

- **Young Professionals Scheme:** Under the scheme, the U.K. will offer about 3,000 degree-holding Indians in the 18–30-year age group places to work in the U.K. for up to two years.

The scheme will commence in early 2023. Both India and UK will allow young professionals in their Countries to hold degree programs.

India is the first country to benefit from such a scheme, highlighting the strength of the **UK-India Migration and Mobility Partnership** agreed upon last year.

## AFTER JAINS, THE SANTHALS STAKE CLAIM TO PARASNATH HILLS

◎ **CONTEXT:** After the Central government assured members of the Jain community that the sanctity of their holy place, Sammed Shikharji on Parasnath hills in

**Jharkhand would conserve, the members of the Santhal tribe in the State have staked claim to the hill as their *Marang Buru* (hill deity).**

### ◎ BACKGROUND

- Recently, the **Jharkhand government** has decided to cover the Parasnath hills under Tourist spots of the state.
- After this decision, the Jain community across the country has shown discontent as the site belongs as a holy place to them.
- At last, the government took back its decision.

### About Sammed Shikharji

- Shikharji also known as Sammed Shikharji is a pilgrimage site in Giridih district, Jharkhand, India.
- It is located on Parasnath hill, the highest mountain in the state of Jharkhand.
- It is the most important **Jain Tirtha (pilgrimage site)** by both Digambara and Shwetambara, for it is the place where twenty of the twenty-four Jain Tirthankaras along with many other monks attained Moksha.
- It is located on Parasnath hill, the **highest mountain** in the state of Jharkhand.



**Parasnath Hills** are a range of hills located in the Giridih district of Jharkhand. The highest peak is 1350 metres. It is one of the most important pilgrimage centres for Jains.

- They call it Sammed Sikhar. The hill is named after Parasnath, the 23rd Tirthankara. Twenty Jain Tirthankaras attained salvation on this hill.

- For each of them, there is a shrine (gumti or tuk) on the hill.
- Some of the temples on the hill are believed to be more than 2,000 years old. However, although the place is habited from ancient times, the temples may be of more recent origin.

### Santhal's stakes

Santhal tribe is the **largest tribal community** in Jharkhand and has a sizeable population in other States **like Bihar, Odisha, Assam and West Bengal**.

- The Santhals call **Parasnath Hills as Marang Buru**, the hill of the deity. They celebrate a hunting festival on the **full moon day in Baisakh** (mid-April).
- The Parasnath hills are actually called *Marang Buru* and have clearly been mentioned in the Gazetteer of **undivided Bihar's Hazaribagh** district in 1932, much before it became part of separate Giridih district.

## GUIDELINES FOR TECHNICAL TEXTILES DEGREE PROGRAMME IN UG & PG ISSUED

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The *Ministry of Textiles* has given clearance to two guidelines, namely, 'General Guidelines for Enabling of Academic Institutes in Technical Textiles- for Private & Public Institutes' and 'General Guidelines for Grant for Internship Support in Technical Textiles (GIST)', under the Flagship Programme of National Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM).

**Technical textiles** are textiles materials and products manufactured primarily for **technical performance and functional properties** rather than aesthetic characteristics.

### About the National Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM):

- Aim:** With a view to positioning the country as a **global leader in Technical Textiles**, the National

Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM) has been approved with a **four-year implementation period** from FY 2020-21 to 2023-24.

- **Need of the initiative:**

- Technical Textiles are a futuristic and niche segment of textiles, which are used for various applications ranging from **agriculture, roads, railway tracks, sportswear, and health on one end to bulletproof jackets, fireproof jackets, high altitude combat gear and space applications** on another end of the spectrum.

**Details of the guidelines:**

- The '**General Guidelines for Enabling of Academic Institutes in Technical Textiles- For Private & Public Institutes**':
  - It will enable the New **Technical Textiles Degree Programme (UG & PG)** and update existing conventional degree programmes with new papers on Technical Textiles.
  - **Objective:** To develop an eco-system in technical textiles not only in the textile field but other disciplines of Engineering like **Civil, Mechanical, Electronics etc., Agriculture institutes, Medical Colleges, and Fashion institutes.**
  - The Guidelines cover the funding of **up-gradation/enhancement of laboratory equipment**, training of lab personnel and specialized training of Faculty members of the relevant department/specialization in the University/Institute, with respect to the undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate (PG) degree programmes.
  - This will cover **Public funded institutions** and also **private institutions** having NIRF ranking.
  - The assistance for introducing a full course in technical textiles and is up to **20 crores PG course** and up to **10 Crores at UG level.**

At the UG level introducing one mandatory subject and a few electives, grants up to 7.5 crores may be given.

## NATIONAL GREEN HYDROGEN MISSION

- **CONTEXT:** The Union Cabinet approved a Rs.19,744 crore National Green Hydrogen mission that aims to make India a 'global hub' for using, producing and exporting green hydrogen.

- **BACKGROUND**

- The National Hydrogen Mission was launched on Independence Day in 2021.
- The Union Cabinet has now approved the mission with a total initial outlay of Rs 19,744 crore.

**What is green hydrogen?**

- **Produced through electrolysis-** Green hydrogen is when hydrogen is produced via electrolysis, the splitting of water into hydrogen and oxygen with electricity generated from renewable energy sources such as solar or wind.
- **Usage-** Hydrogen is a key industrial fuel that has a variety of applications including the production of ammonia (a key fertilizer), steel, refineries and electricity.

**Why Green Hydrogen?**

- Green hydrogen is one of the cleanest sources of energy with close to zero emission.
- It can be used in fuel cells for cars or in energy-guzzling industries like fertilizers and steel manufacturing.

**What is the National Green Hydrogen Mission?**

- The intent of the mission is to incentivize the commercial production of green hydrogen and make India a net exporter of the fuel.
- **Target:** The Mission states that India will develop green hydrogen production capacity of at least 5 million tonnes (MT) per annum with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 gigawatts (GW) in the country by 2030.

**Impacts**

- **Employment generation:** This will entail over Rs 8 lakh crore of total investments and is expected to generate six lakh jobs.
- **Toll on imports and GHG:** It will also lead to a cumulative reduction in fossil fuel imports by over Rs 1 lakh crore and an abatement of nearly 50 MT of annual greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Others:** decarbonisation of the industrial, mobility and energy sectors; developing indigenous manufacturing capabilities; and developing new technologies such as efficient fuel cells.

## THREE NEW SPECIES OF MIGRATORY BIRDS IN TRIPURA'S GOMATI DISTRICT

New species of migratory birds from Siberia and Europe were sighted at Sukhsagar Lake in Tripura's Gomati district.



### About the species:

- The birds sighted are
  - **ruff**, found in Europe
  - **oriental pratincole**, and **common crane** from Siberia in Russia
- The migratory birds visit **Sipahijala wildlife sanctuary, Gomati reservoir, Gomati wildlife sanctuary, College Tilla Lake in Agartala, Rudrasagar Lake in Sipahijala district, Trishna wildlife sanctuary, and NIT College water body.**
- Every year more than **100 species of migratory birds** visit Tripura from European, African and North American countries.

## INDIA'S KALA-AZAR CASES DECLINED 98.7% SINCE 2007: HEALTH MINISTRY

Recently, informed by the Ministry of Health that the Kala-azar cases in India fell to 834 in 2022 from 44,533 in 2007 — a **98.7 percent decline**.

### About the disease:

- Kala-azar or black fever is a **chronic** and potentially fatal **parasitic disease** of the internal organs, particularly the **liver, spleen, bone marrow and lymph nodes**.
- **Caused by:** It is caused by bites from **female phlebotomine sandflies** – the vector (or transmitter) of the **leishmania parasite**.
- **Transmission: Leishmania donovani** is transmitted by sandfly bites in parts of Asia (primarily India), Africa (primarily Sudan), South America (primarily Brazil), Europe (primarily in the Mediterranean region) and in North America.
- According to WHO, if the disease is not treated, the fatality rate in developing countries can be as high as **100% within 2 years**.

### Symptoms of Kala azar:

- Fever, loss of appetite (anorexia), fatigue, enlargement of the liver, spleen and nodes and suppression of the bone marrow.

### Diagnosing Kala azar:

- The first oral drug found to be effective for treating kala-azar is **miltefosine**.



## NANOPLASTICS PRODUCE UNEXPECTED REACTIONS WHEN EXPOSED TO LIGHT

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** A team of researchers has analysed how light breaks down polystyrene, a non-biodegradable plastic from which packing peanuts, DVD cases and disposable utensils are made.

### Findings

- When exposed to light, the nanoplastics derived from **polystyrene** unexpectedly facilitated the **oxidation of aqueous manganese ions**.
- The formation of manganese oxide solids that can affect the fate and transport of organic contaminants in natural and engineering water systems.
- It showed how the photochemical reaction of nanoplastics through light absorption **generates peroxy and superoxide radicals** on nanoplastic surfaces, and initiates oxidation of manganese into **manganese oxide solids**.

Nanoplastics are particles unintentionally produced (i.e. from the degradation and the manufacturing of the plastic objects), within the size range from 1 to 1000 nm.

### Concern associated:

- There are concerns over the physical presence of nanoplastics rather than their active roles as reactants.
- The small plastic particles that can more easily interact with neighbouring substances, such as heavy metals and organic contaminants, and can be more reactive.
- The smaller particle size of the **polystyrene Nano-plastics** may more easily decompose and release organic matter because of their larger surface area.
- This dissolved organic matter may quickly produce reactive oxygen species in light and facilitate manganese oxidation.

## SOLAR REACTOR CONVERTS BOTH CO<sub>2</sub> AND PLASTIC WASTE INTO 'USEFUL PRODUCTS'

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Researchers from Cambridge university has found a way to turn PET plastic bottles and carbon dioxide into sustainable fuels like CO, syngas or formate other valuable products, using just the energy from the sun.

### About the Solar reactor

- Compartments:** The device is made up of two separate compartments – one for plastic and one for CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Energy absorption:** There is a unit in each compartment that absorbs energy from light and uses it to trigger a catalyst that converts the feedstock into something more useful.
  - The light absorber is **perovskite**, which is emerging as a promising material for solar cells, while the catalyst can be changed depending on the desired final product.

### End products:

#### In tests:

- CO<sub>2</sub> was converted into **syngas**, a key building block for sustainable liquid fuels
- Plastic bottles were converted into **glycolic acid**, which is widely used in the cosmetics industry
- Tests of the reactor under normal temperature and pressure conditions showed the reactor could efficiently convert polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic bottles and CO<sub>2</sub> into different carbon-based fuels such as **CO, syngas or formate**, in addition to **glycolic acid**.
- The reactor produced these products at a rate that is also much higher than **conventional photo-catalytic CO<sub>2</sub> reduction processes**.

### What is the need?

- Greenhouse gases and plastic waste are two of the biggest environmental problems the world faces today.
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide is at its highest levels in millennia, leading to devastating climate consequences.
- Reliance on plastic is causing a huge buildup of the stuff in rivers, oceans and everywhere from pole to pole.

# **Section: D**

## **(SHORT NEWS)**

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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### Sagol Kangjei: The ancient polo of Manipur



A 122-foot-tall statue of a polo player astride a Manipur Pony has been inaugurated in Imphal to conserve the game.

#### About:

- Sagol Kangjei is the **modern-day Polo game** originated in Manipur.
- The sport indigenous to Manipur, in which players ride horses, specifically the Manipur Ponies, which are referenced in records dating back to the **14th century**.
- The Manipur Pony is one of **five recognised equine breeds of India**.
- A pony is a type of small horse that is under an approximate or exact height at the withers, or a small horse with a specific conformation and temperament. Compared to a larger horse.

### India & Japan to hold Maiden Air Exercise 'Veer Guardian 2023'



India and Japan are set to hold their **maiden air exercise** from January 12-26.

#### About

- This is the first time that the Indian Air Force and Japanese Air Self Defense Forces will be exercising together.
- **Location:** Hyakuri Air Base, Japan.
- **IAF:** During the exercise, the participating IAF contingent will include four Su-30 MKI, two C-17 & one IL-78 aircraft.
- **Japanese Air Self Defense Forces:** The JASDF contingent will consist of four F-2 & four F-15 aircraft.

### India, U.K sign and exchange letters for Young Professionals Scheme



The governments of India and the U.K. marked **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas** on January 9, 2023, and signed the **Young Professionals Scheme**.

#### About the scheme:

- It is a recruitment initiative aiming to:
  - improve geographical representation
  - promote gender parity in the Organization at the international level
- The agreement will permit up to 3,000 of their degree-holding citizens aged between 18 and 30 to live and work in each other's countries for a period of two years.

## India to host 'Voice of the Global South Summit'



India hosted 'The Voice of Global South' Summit on January 12-13.

**About the event:**

- **Theme:** *Unity of Voice and Unity of purpose.*
- **Ten to 20 countries** will be part of one session and two lead sessions will be hosted by Prime Minister.
- We will be hosting a **special virtual summit** on 12th and 13th January 2023.
- This summit will be called the **Voice of Global South Summit.**

**Significance:**

It essentially envisages bringing together countries of the global south and sharing their perspective and priorities on a common platform across a whole range of issue.

## PM launches Aspirational Block Programme



The Aspirational Block Programme (ABP) has been launched to improve the performance of blocks lagging on various development parameters.

**About the Aspirational Block programme:**

- The aspirational district model is to be taken up to the block level in the form of the Aspirational Block Programme.
- **Objective:** To enable holistic development in those areas that requires added assistance. The focus area will also be more specific thus ensuring greater attention to detail.
- The programme will cover 500 districts across 31 states and Union Territories initially.

The programme is on the lines of the **Aspirational District Programme** that was launched in 2018 and covers 112 districts across the country.

## Prasar Bharati mulls own OTT platform



Prasar Bharati is coming up with an **over-the-top (OTT) platform.**

**About the move:**

- The Centre had recently approved the **Broadcast Infrastructure Network Development (BIND) scheme** for Prasar Bharati, for the upgrade and expansion of broadcasting infrastructure till 2025-2026.
- The public broadcaster had signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** with 'Yupp TV', an OTT platform.
- Owing to the platform, DD India is now accessible in the **United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, the Middle East, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.**



### Women in Military Regiment of Artillery



The channel is currently available in more than **190 countries via multiple platforms.**

The Indian Army decided to begin the induction of women into combat arms in the near future beginning with the Regiment of Artillery.

#### Background:

- The **Indian Air Force** pioneered in inducting the women into combat roles beginning with three women officers commissioned as the Fighter pilots in June 2016.
  - IAF has commissioned **15 women fighter pilots** till date.

#### Military Regiment of Artillery

- The Regiment of Artillery is said to be the second largest arm of the Indian Army, after the infantry.
- Artillery with its missiles, guns, mortars, rocket launchers and unmanned aerial vehicles is also described as an 'Arm of Decision'.
- This signment has about 300 regiments (each with 18 guns) and about 5,000 officers.

As of now the women officers have not been granted **permanent commission into Infantry, Armoured, Artillery and Mechanised Infantry.**

### Godavari estuary, a prime habitat for Indian Skimmer



As per the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), **the Godavari estuary** in Andhra Pradesh has become a prime and safe habitat for the **Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*)**.

#### About Indian Skimmers:

- The Indian skimmer grows to a length of **40-43 cm.**
- **Features:**
  - It has **black upper parts**, white forehead, collar and lower parts, long, thick, deep orange bill with a yellow tip and longer lower mandible.
  - In flight, it has a white trailing-edge to wing and a short forked tail with blackish central feathers.
- It breeds **colonially on large, exposed sand-bars and islands.**
- Colonies of mating pairs can be observed **nesting on sandy islands or open sand banks.**

#### The Godavari Estuary:

- It is a prime habitat for Indian Skimmer.

### Rare White Tufted Royal Butterfly found in Kannur



- It is **situated at the place where the 1330 km long Godavari meets the Bay of Bengal on the east coast of India in the state of Andhra Pradesh.**

River Godavari divides at Dowlaiswaram into two principal distributaries viz., the Vasishta and the Gautami which enclose a wide delta between them.

A team of butterfly observers and researchers have found White Tufted Royal Butterfly, a rare butterfly species at Kalliyad in Kannur.

#### About the species:

- They are rare species having a wingspan of just **32-40 mm.**
- Its larvae feed on ***Scurrula parasitica***, a plant belonging to the ***Loranthaceae* family.**
  - Scurrula parasitica***, is a parasitic shrub, 0.5-1 m tall, with branches erect, woolly.
- There exists eight species of the butterfly.

#### Protection status:

- The butterfly is protected under **Schedule 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act.**

The species had been spotted in Agasthyakoodam in 2017 and the Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary in 2018.

### Prithvi-II missile successfully tested-fired

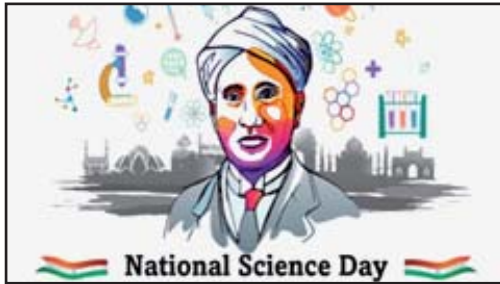


A successful training launch of a **short-range ballistic missile**, Prithvi-II, was carried out on January 10 from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

#### About:

- Prithvi-II missile** has been an integral part of India's nuclear deterrence.
- The missile struck its target with high accuracy.
- The missile is powered by **light propulsion twin engines**, has a range of around 350 km and can carry 500-1,000 kg of warheads.
- It uses an advanced **inertial navigation system** to strike the set target.
- The Prithvi-II was earlier successfully test-fired during night hours in 2018 and in 2019.

Prithvi was developed by the DRDO under the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.**



At the launch of the theme event of **National Science Day 2023**, science and Technology minister has mentioned that India has a global role and rising visibility in the international arena of science.

**About the event:**

- National Science Day is celebrated every year on February 28 to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect'.
- **Theme:** 'Global Science for Global Wellbeing'.

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