

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 4
JANUARY
2023

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- INDIA'S TIES WITH EGYPT
- SC COLLEGIUM BACKED FREE SPEECH FOR LAWYERS
- AUTONOMY AT THE PANCHAYAT LEVEL
- IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED ON SUB-STANDARD DRUGS CAUSING DEATHS: WHO
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GS-III

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- INVESTMENT IN CAPITAL MARKETS THROUGH P-NOTES DROPPED
- SEBI BAN ON AGRI COMMODITIES TRADE
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- Ahom burial sites in Assam selected for UNESCO World Heritage tag

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- Guidelines to social media influencers for promotions

- Puri's Jagannath Temple, provisions for non-Hindus and foreigners
- Need voluntary guidelines for social media during elections: Experts

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- Alien plants threatening tiger habitats
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- National Girl Child Day
- India, Egypt to hold dialogue on defence ties
- Wayanad, the first district to provide basic documents tribals
- INS Vagir
- Norovirus
- 'Shadow banning' of social media posts
- India International Science Festival in Bhopal
- Green comet' appearing close to Earth after 50,000 years

SPECIAL

- Women get command roles in the Indian Army.

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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)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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FRANCE-INDIA PARTNERSHIP, A WAY TO DIVERSIFY INDIA'S CHOICES

CONTEXT:

Asserting that France could help India to diversify its defence supplies amid a heavy dependence on Russia, the French Ambassador to New Delhi has clarified their intention to partner with India on critical projects including possible nuclear-powered submarines.

Background

- India began to import weapons from Russia in the
- The **Ilyushin Il-14 cargo transport aircraft** were the first ones to be inducted into the Indian inventory, followed by the MiG-21 fighter aircraft.
- From 1962 onwards, there has been a steady increase in India's import dependence on Russia.
- The legacy still leaves India with a sizeable number of Soviet-built platforms and in the post-Cold War period, India has made several sizeable acquisitions.

About India's defence equipment and scenario:

- India's requirements on defence are catered largely by imports.
- The opening of the **Defence sector for private sector participation** will help foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to enter into strategic partnerships with Indian companies.
- This will enable them to leverage the domestic markets as well as aim at global markets. Besides helping in building domestic capabilities, it will also bolster exports in the long term.
- Since 2014 the **Ministry of Defence** has signed more than 180 contracts with the Indian Industry, as of December 2019. These contracts were valued at over USD 25.8 billion approximately.
- Favourable government policy which promotes self-reliance, indigenisation, and technology upgradation.
- The policies also aim at achieving economies of scale, including the development of capabilities, for exports in the defence sector.
- India's extensive modernisation plans with an increased focus on homeland security and growing attractiveness as a defence sourcing hub.

Why has India remained dependent on Russia for so long?

- Russia is the **second largest arms exporter** in the world, following **only the United States**.
- In the five-year period between **2016 and 2020 America's** share in the global arms trade was 37 per cent, compared to **20 per cent of Russia's**, as per the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**, which tracks the global arms trade and military expenditure.
- For Russia, India **is the largest importer**, and for India, Russia is the largest exporter when it comes to arms transfer.
- Between 2000 and 2020, Russia accounted for 66.5 per cent of India's arms imports. Of the \$53.85 billion spent by India during the period on arms imports, \$35.82 billion went to Russia.
- During the same period, imports from the US were worth \$4.4 billion, and from Israel, it was worth US\$ 4.1 billion.

India is still in talks with Russia to lease two nuclear-ballistic submarines, **Chakra 3 and Chakra 4**, the first of which is expected to be delivered by 2025.

Why India needs an alternate?

- Heavenly dependent on Russian Imports for defence equipment:** According to a report, India's 85% of defence equipment is brought from Russia.
- Russia's expansionist policy:** Russia's war with Ukraine has shown many supply chain disruptions which led India to rethink its imports with Russia.
- Russia and China ties:** Russia's increasing closeness with China has led India to find a way to less depend on Russia.
- Expanding Indigenous defence manufacturing in India:** India is on its way to developing its indigenous defence manufacturing. Recently, India commissioned its first indigenously made Submarine INS Vikrant for Indian Navy.

How France can become an alternative?

- India is looking to diversify its suppliers and obviously, France is a great option, as France has successfully delivered **36 Rafale fighter jets** and other systems to India and wants to develop a national-level defence industrial base in India.
- France can also help India in developing **nuclear-powered and nuclear attack submarines** just like the Russians, he underlined that the country has a longstanding submarine cooperation with India.

India-Russia Defence ties:

- As per Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia is the **world's second-largest arms exporter**, with a 20% share in the global arms trade between 2016 and 2020, only behind the USA (37%).
- For India, Russia is the largest exporter. During 2000-20, **Russia accounted for 66.5%**, the US for 6.9% and Israel for 6.5% of India's arms imports.
- India accounted for 23% of Russia's arms export** followed by 18% of China.

On-going major deals:

- Five units of **S-400 Triumf Air defence system**. (First of five units been delivered in December 2021, and deployed at the Air Force base in Punjab.)
- Manufacturing of around 6 lakh **AK-203 rifles at a factory in Amethi**.

INDIA'S TIES WITH EGYPT

CONTEXT:

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, has been invited as the chief guest for the Republic Day celebrations this year for the first time.

India-Egypt Relations:

- In the past, commercial connections between Egypt and India grew along the banks of the **rivers Nile and Indus**, which is when India's interactions with Egypt first developed.
- Under Nehru's direction: **Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement in 1955**.
- Nehru stood up for Egypt during the 1956 War** to the point of threatening to expel his nation from the British Commonwealth.
- Bilateral relations and the Friendship Treaty:** The two countries grew further closer in the 1950s and signed the **Friendship Treaty in 1955**.
- The historically strong bilateral ties between the two nations have recently gotten a boost from the regular interchange of high-level meetings and contacts between the two sides.

Trade & Commerce:

- Egypt has long been among **India's top trading partners** on the continent of Africa.

- The **Most Favoured Nation** provision is the foundation of the bilateral trade agreement between Egypt and India, which has been in effect since March 1978.
- Raw cotton, made and unmanufactured fertilizers, oil and oil products, organic and inorganic chemicals, leather, and iron goods are among Egypt's main exports to India.**
- Sesame, lentils, coffee, herbs, and cotton yarn are among the top Indian exports to Egypt.**
- India also exports mineral gasoline, car components, ship, boat, and floating construction parts, frozen slices of boneless beef, and electrical machinery and components.**
- India is widely represented in practically all fields in Egypt.

Technical and scientific fields:

- In accordance with the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, Egyptian applicants visit India (ITEC)**.
- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** for cooperation in the **field of agricultural research was signed in 1998 by the ICAR** and the Agricultural Research Center of the Ministry of Agriculture & Land of Egypt.

Cultural ties:

- In 1992, **Cairo saw the establishment of the Maulana Azad Center for Indian Culture (MACIC)**.
- By implementing **the Cultural Exchange Program**, seeks to foster cultural collaboration between the two nations (CEP).
- In addition to teaching Hindi, Urdu, and yoga, displaying films, and promoting Indian culture, the Centre also hosts cultural events.
- The **"India by the Nile" festival** is a yearly cultural event in Egypt.
- In a language that combines various cultural and artistic threads, it captures the spirit of India through classical, contemporary, performing, and visual arts, gastronomy, and popular culture.
- The event is organized by M/S Teamwork Arts, a Delhi-based company, with funding provided by ICCR and the Ministry of Culture of Egypt.

The defence alliance:

- With recent events like the Indian Navy ship's trip to Egypt, a **month-long air force drill**, and the leader of the Egyptian air force's trip to India, it is being revitalized.

Establishment:

- The Non-Aligned Movement was formally founded in **Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961**, building on the tenets outlined at the Bandung Conference of 1955.

About NAM:

- 120 nations that are not formally allied with or opposed to any major power bloc make up the forum. It is the largest federation of states in the world after the United Nations.
- Nearly **two-thirds of the United Nations' members and 55% of the world's population reside in the nations that make up the Non-Aligned Movement.**

Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence:

- Zhou Enlai and Nehru outlined **the Panchsheel, or Five Principles**, as a framework for Sino-Indian relations (five restraints).
- The Non-Aligned Movement would later be founded on these ideas.

The five principles are:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Mutual non-aggression.
- Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs.
- Equality and mutual benefit.
- Peaceful co-existence.

SC COLLEGIUM BACKED FREE SPEECH FOR LAWYERS

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court collegium backed the right to free speech of an advocate recommended for Bombay High Court judgeship after the Centre objected to his critical comments on social media.

About the Case:

- Responding to the government's objection, the collegium has mentioned that there is no material to indicate that the expressions used by the candidate are suggestive of his links with any political party with strong ideological leanings.
- Also, the collegium argued that the **listed qualities required of a candidate for a judgeship**, include honesty, ability, a high order of emotional stability, serenity, legal soundness, among others and not loyalty to a political party.

Right to freedom of speech:

- India does not have a **formal legal framework** for dealing with hate speech.

- India **prohibits hate speech** through several sections of the **Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and other laws which put limitations on the freedom of expression.**
- Constitutionally, **Article 19** gives all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression but the said freedom of expression is subject to "**reasonable restrictions**" for preserving inter alia "public order, decency or morality".

The extent of free speech available to public functionaries:

- Speech must be exercised with consciousness:** Every citizen of India must consciously be restrained in speech, and exercise the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1) (a) only in the sense that it was intended by the framers of the Constitution, to be exercised.
- Freedom of speech vs. right to dignity:** The content of Article 19(1)(a) which does not vest with citizens unbridled liberty to utter statements which are vitriolic, derogatory, unwarranted, have no redeeming purpose and which, in no way amount to the communication of ideas.

Criteria to become a Judge:

- In order to be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court, a person must be;
 - A **citizen of India** and
 - For at least five years, a Judge of a High Court or of two or more such Courts in succession, or
 - An Advocate of a High Court or of two or more such Courts in succession for at least 10 years or
 - He/she must be, in the opinion of the President, a distinguished jurist.
- Provisions exist for the appointment of a Judge of a High Court as an Ad-hoc Judge of the Supreme Court and for retired Judges of the Supreme Court or High Courts to sit and act as Judges of that Court.

Process of Removal:

- A Judge of the Supreme Court cannot be removed from office except by an order of the President passed after an address in each House of Parliament supported by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of members present and voting, and presented to the President in the same Session for such removal on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.
- A person who has been a Judge of the Supreme Court is debarred from practising in any court of law or before any other authority in India.

- Supreme Court Rules, 1966 and Supreme Court Rules 2013 are framed under Article 145 of the Constitution to regulate the practice and procedure of the Supreme Court.

Who appoints the judges in the Court of law?

- The Judges of the higher judiciary are appointed only through the collegium system, and the government has a role only after names have been decided by the collegium.
- Names recommended for appointment by a High Court collegium reach the government only after approval by the CJI and the Supreme Court collegium.
- Sometimes the government delays making the appointments, especially in cases where the government is perceived to be unhappy with one or more judges recommended for appointment by the collegium.

AUTONOMY AT THE PANCHAYAT LEVEL

CONTEXT:

The failure of the State governments to release funds in time has forced the local government heads to utilise either private resources or borrow large amounts to complete Panchayat activities and meet various targets.

Rural local self-governance in India:

- Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)** is a system of rural local self-government in India.
- PRI was constitutionalized through the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992** to build democracy at the grass roots level and was entrusted with the task of rural development in the country.
- This act has added a new Part-IX to the Constitution of India. This part is entitled as 'The Panchayats' and consists of provisions from **Articles 243 to 243 O**.
- In addition, the act has also added a new **Eleventh Schedule** to the Constitution. This schedule contains 29 functional items of the Panchayats. It deals with Article 243-G.

In its present form and structure PRI has completed 30 years of existence. However, a lot remains to be done in order to further decentralization and strengthen democracy at the grass root level.

What is the basis of Local self-governance in India?

- Local self-governance is linked to the idea of subsidiarity and is typically grounded on two broad arguments.
 - First, it provides for the **efficient provision of public goods** since governments with smaller jurisdictions can provide services as per the preferences of their residents.
 - Second, it **promotes deeper democracy** since governments that are closer to the people allow citizens to engage with public affairs more easily.
- The democratic decentralization through the **73rd and 74th CAA** has entrusted the Local self-government with the main task of local governance, while the district administration plays an enabling and coordinating role.
- However, in several cases bureaucratic inertia and lack of empowerment of LSG (local self-government) have hindered the objective of decentralized local governance (enshrined in Art.40 of the DPSP), needing immediate reform in this regard.
- However, India is undergoing a **centralising shift in its politics, economy, and culture**.

What are the loopholes in the local governance structure?

- Limited autonomy and authority:** Despite the constitutional promise of **local self-governance, local governments, especially municipalities, operate with limited autonomy and authority**.
 - Limitations include the discretion given to the States regarding the devolution of powers and levying of local taxes.
 - State governments are reluctant to implement the **74th amendment** as cities are economic powerhouses and controlling urban land is important for financing State governments and political parties.
- Narrowing the scope of Municipalities:** The courts have also mostly interpreted the 74th amendment narrowly, allowing State governments to retain their control over cities.
 - The 2021 amendment transferred the powers of appointment of **Grade C and D employees** of municipalities from the **Empowered Standing Committee** of the municipality to the State government-controlled Directorate of Municipal Administration.

IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED ON SUB-STANDARD DRUGS CAUSING DEATHS: WHO

CONTEXT:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has mandated to take steps against substandard and falsified medical products, which have led to the death of at least 300 people, most of them children namely in Gambia, Uzbekistan and Indonesia.

What was the reason for death of Children? (A Case Study)

- The syrup was found by WHO to be adulterated with **diethylene glycol (DEG) and ethylene glycol**.
- These chemicals are toxic to humans, and can result in **abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, inability to pass urine, headache, and altered mental state**.
- It can also lead to acute kidney injury that can prove fatal in children.

What did the WHO say?

- The four medicines are **cough and cold syrups** produced by Maiden Pharmaceuticals Limited, in India.
- They failed the test as they have unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol as contaminants, the global health agency stated.
- All four syrups include; Promethazine Oral Solution, Kofexmalin Baby Cough Syrup, Makoff Baby Cough Syrup, and Magrip N Cold Syrup – are made by **Haryana-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals**.

What are the present Drug regulations in India?

Drug regulation in India is a complex process managed by law, mainly the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940, and by multiple ministries, including the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**. The law creates a web of regulatory authorities to govern the process at both the central and the state level.

At Centre level:

- At the central level, the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**, has created the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)**, within which the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) is the key regulatory authority, acting under the advice of the Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) and the Drug Consultative Committee (DCC).

- CDSCO operates through zonal offices spread across the country, which have designated roles in drug regulation, such as inspections, recalls, and market surveillance.
- CDSCO also has a role in overseeing the functioning of state authorities involved in drug regulation.

Central Drugs Standard Control Organization CDSCO:

- The CDSCO stands for **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO)**
- It is the national regulatory body of India, regulated the following :
 - Cosmetics
 - Pharmaceuticals
 - Medical devices
- It also executes an alike job to the:
 - European Union's European Medicines Agency
 - Japan's PMDA
 - The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
 - The United Kingdom's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency
 - China's National Medical Products Administration (NMPA)
- The Government of India has announced a proposal to have the CDSCO assess all medical devices, including implants and contraception.
- The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) regulates pharmaceuticals and medical devices under the CDSCO.
- The body works under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) and the Drug Consultative Committee (DCC) advise the DCGI.

What are the challenges associated with Indian drug regulations?

- **Non-scientific classification of offence:** The distinction between **minor and major offenses** isn't scientific in India. States do not prosecute dissolution, disintegration, or impurity failures because they deem them minor offense.
- **Liberal punishments:** lack of adequate fines and punishment has made the crime of Pharma sectors more prominent.
- **Competition between states to boost the Pharma sector:** As government of India has made pharma sector under innovation criteria for rankings among states has led it under a competition to establish drugs and pharma industry.

- **Interstate variation in the prosecution:** The variations among the States' regulation against drug control and Quality check makes it difficult to analyse the real problem.

What are the reasons behind the lack of drug regulations in India?

- **Lack of R&D:** The Indian pharma industry faces lack of research components and real time good manufacturing practices.
 - ▶ No doubt investment (as % of sales) in research & development by Indian pharma companies increased from 5.3 per cent in FY12 to 8.5 per cent in FY18 but it is still low as compared to US counterparts that invest in R & D 15–20% of their sales.
- **Compliance issues and good manufacturing practices:**
 - ▶ This has somehow always been a problem for the Indian companies. The on-going rumour is that the United States Food and Drug Administration are trying to block the growth of the companies.

DIGITAL CROP SURVEY IN INDIA

CONTEXT:

The Central Government has planned to launch a digital crop survey across 10 states from the Kharif-2023 season.

About the survey:

- **Objective:** The survey will collect information on different types of crops sown by farmers in their fields.
- The information will be collected through an automated process by using "Geo-Referenced maps" of the farmland plots and remote sensing images.
- **Implementation:**
- The **digital crop survey** will be rolled out initially as a pilot project in **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Gujarat**. Later, it will be gradually rolled out across the country.

In the patwari agency, a complete enumeration of all fields (survey numbers) called '**girdawari**' is made of a village during each crop season to compile land use, irrigation and crop area statistics.

- Once it becomes fully operational, it will add to the age-old crop area statistics collection system, which is known as the '**Patwari agency**'.

Key features:

- The proposed survey will use the **latest technological advancements** such as visual and advanced analytics, GIS-GPS Technologies and AI/ML to provide **near real-time information** about the crops sown by the farmers.
- As part of the digital agriculture initiatives, the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare plans to develop a reference application for the crop-sown survey.
- **Data used:** Satellite data from **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)**, which comes under the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has already been made available to the states.
- **Crop registry:** The crop registry will act as a single source of truth for collecting the data in a standardized manner, during the digital crop survey.
- The crop registry will have the ability to capture single or multiple crop IDs for the same farmland plot for the same season, along with the respective area of sowing and type of crops, such as intercrop, mixed crops, and single crops.
- It will add linkage to **Global Positioning Systems (GPS)** and **Geo-referenced Cadastral maps** would enable users to reach the **right farm and collect the right data and images**.
- The linkage to **remote sensing and aerial image** analysis tools can be used to cross-check data at a larger area level with the reported and derived information from the field level for enabling higher accuracy levels.
- The survey will also have a **mobile interface** that will allow **offline data capturing** in the field (farmland plot) where the crop is sown.

Initiatives for farmers:

- **Improving Productivity:** Due to stagnancy in the quantum of agricultural land, it is imperative to increase productivity over the same amount of land.
 - ▶ **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)** provides for more crops, per drop.
 - ▶ **The Soil Health Card** scheme aims at promoting soil test-based and balanced use of fertilisers to enable farmers to realise higher yields at a lower cost.
- **Improving Total Factor Productivity:** TFP is an important source of output growth which directly contributes to cost saving and thus increases income. TFP growth represents the effect of technological change, skill, infrastructure etc.

- ▶ **National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)** aims to form a unified national market for agricultural products by making a network for the markets related to the existing Agricultural Product Marketing Committee (APMC).
- ▶ **Direct Benefit Transfer:** The NITI Aayog has suggested that all subsidies for agriculture, including fertiliser, electricity, crop insurance, irrigation and interest subvention be replaced by income transfer because it eliminates the leakages of resources in the system.
- **Diversification of Crops:** When farmers go for a single crop type they are exposed to high risks in the event of unforeseen climate events, such as the emergence of pests and the sudden onset of frost or drought.
- ▶ **Crop Diversification Programme (CDP)** is being implemented which aims to diversify the area from water-guzzling crops like paddy to alternate crops like maize, pulses, oilseeds, and cotton & agro-forestry plantation.
- **Financial Assistance:** There are several initiatives taken up by the government:
 - ▶ The **Union Budget 2019-20** has made the highest-ever allocation to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Rs. 1, 30,485 crores, a 140 per cent jump over the '18-19 budget estimate of Rs 57,600 crore.
 - ▶ **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna** has been launched to provide relief to the farmers inflicted by the loss of crop damage.
 - ▶ **Kisan Credit Card Scheme** aims to provide direct benefits to farmers and ease the pressure on them.
 - ▶ **Micro Irrigation Fund** created with NABARD has been approved for encouraging public and private investments.
 - ▶ **Implementation of Swaminathan Report-** Recently, the Government has increased the MSP for all Kharif and Rabi crops and other commercial crops for the season 2018-19 with a return of at least 50 per cent over the cost of production.
 - ▶ The Government has decided to implement a **new Central Sector Scheme** for providing an old age pension of Rs.3000/- to eligible small and marginal farmers as they have minimal or no savings.
 - ▶ **PM KISAN** - This central sector scheme aims to supplement the financial needs of the SMFs in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.

Other Initiatives:

- The Government has been promoting organic farming in the country through the schemes such as

Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).

- Coffee Board has launched a **block-chain based coffee e-marketplace**. It will help integrate the farmers with markets in a transparent manner.
- NITI Aayog launched 2016 an index to rank States and UTs based on the implementation of seven provisions proposed under the model APMC Act.
- The **Mega Food Parks scheme** aims to create a mechanism of linking agricultural production to the markets, by involving farmers, processors and retailers together in a cluster-based approach.

DECLINING INDIAN EXPORTS

CONTEXT:

For India's goods exports in December 2022 has marked the steepest fall in two years, with products worth \$34.5 billion shipped out at 12.2% lower than last year rate.

Causes of declining Indian Exports:

- Clouds of recession blowing through Europe and the U.S.
- The COVID-19 situation in China
- A reversion towards protectionism in some markets.
- The Ukraine-Russia conflict
- In general, however, a weaker domestic currency stimulates exports and makes imports more expensive.
- Conversely, a strong domestic currency hampers exports and makes imports cheaper.
- A high base effect also played a role in exaggerating the year-on-year export dip in December.

December 2021 had clocked the **second highest exports** (worth \$39.3 billion) in 2021-22, when India's goods shipments crossed a record \$422 billion. The world's trade dynamics have been altered since then.

Effect of declining export on Indian economy:

- When there are too many imports coming into a country in relation to its exports it can distort a nation's **balance of trade** and **devalue its currency**.
- When there are more exports, it means that there is a high level of output from a country's factories and industrial facilities, as well as a greater number

of people that are being employed in order to keep these factories in operation.

- When a company is **exporting a high level of goods**, this also equates to a flow of funds into the country, which stimulates consumer spending and contributes to economic growth.
- The relationship between a nation's imports and exports and its exchange rate as it acts as a constant feedback loop between international trade and the way a country's currency is valued.

What happens if exports fall in an Economy?

- A healthy economy is one where both **exports and imports** are experiencing growth.
- If exports are growing, but imports have declined significantly, it may indicate that foreign economies are in better shape than the domestic economy.
- Conversely, if exports fall sharply but imports surge, this may indicate that the domestic economy is faring better than overseas markets.

Efforts for reviving exports:

- Improving access to credit and reducing cost of credit, especially for merchant exporters.
- Interest equalization support to all agricultural exports.
- Increasing budgetary support for marketing and exports related infrastructure.
- Creating a single point interface for customs clearance of import and export goods.
- Simplifying various export incentive schemes:
 - Advance Authorisation Scheme (AAS)
 - Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG)
 - Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS)
 - Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)

INVESTMENT IN CAPITAL MARKETS THROUGH P-NOTES DROPPED

CONTEXT:

According to Sebi data, the value of P-note investments in Indian markets—equity, debt, and hybrid securities—stood at Rs.96, 292 crores at December-end, as compared to Rs.99, 315 crores at the end of November.

(See Table: 1 below)

What are Participatory Notes (P- Notes)?

P-notes are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to overseas investors who wish to be a part of the Indian stock market without registering themselves directly after going through a due diligence process.

Who issues P- Notes and what is the process?

- Participatory notes are issued by brokers and FPIs registered with SEBI. The investment is made on behalf of these foreign investors by the already registered brokers in India.
- For example, Indian-based brokerages buy India-based securities and then issue participatory notes to foreign investors. Any dividends or capital gains collected from the underlying securities go back to the investors.
- The brokers that issue these notes or trades in Indian securities have to mandatorily report their PN issuance status to SEBI for each quarter. These notes allow foreign high-net-worth individuals, hedge funds and other investors to put money in Indian markets without being registered with SEBI, thus making their participation easy and smooth.

Table 1: Equity, debt, and hybrid securities

Equity Funds	Debt Funds	Hybrid Funds
Invests in the stocks of companies.	Invests in debt securities and money market instruments.	Invests in both equity and debt instruments.
Returns are fully dependent on the performance of the market.	Returns are more stable and are not dependent on the performance of the market.	Returns are partly stable and partly dependent on the performance of the market.
These funds are very risky.	These funds carry low levels of risk.	These funds carry moderate levels of risk.

Advantages of participatory notes:

- **Anonymity:** Any entity investing in participatory notes is not required to register with SEBI, whereas all FII's have to compulsorily get registered. It enables large hedge funds to carry out their operations without disclosing their identity.
- **Ease of trading:** Trading through participatory notes is easy because they are like contract notes transferable by endorsement and delivery.
- **Tax saving:** Some of the entities route their investment through participatory notes to take advantage of the tax laws of certain preferred countries.
- P-Notes also aid in **saving time and costs** associated with direct registrations.

Disadvantages of P-notes:

- Because of the anonymous nature of the instrument, the investors could be beyond the reach of Indian regulators.
- P- Notes are being used in money laundering with wealthy Indians, like the promoters of companies, using it to bring back unaccounted funds and to manipulate their stock prices.

Why SEBI is not in favour to ban P-Notes?

- P- Notes are used globally in many markets.
- According to SEBI's and the government's views, P-Notes are legitimate instruments that are required for normal financial transactions and are prevalent in all the larger markets etc.
- In an attempt to ban, P-Notes in 2007 due to a surge in capital flows and excess liquidity, markets crashed immediately which recognised the importance of P-Notes in the Indian economy.

Capital market in India:

- The long-term financial market of an economy is known as the 'capital market'. This market makes it possible to raise long-term money for a period of a minimum of 365 days and above.
- Across the world, banks emerged as the first and foremost segment of the capital market.
- In coming times many other segments got added to it, viz., the insurance industry, mutual funds, and finally the most attractive and vibrant, the security/stock market.
- Organised development of capital market together with putting in place the right regulatory framework for it, has always been a tough task for the economies.
- It is believed today that for strong growth prospects in an economy presence of a strong and vibrant capital market is essential.

- Over time, the Indian capital market started to have the following segments:
 - Financial Institutions
 - Investment Institutions
 - Banking Industry
 - Insurance sector
 - Security market

SEBI BAN ON AGRI COMMODITIES TRADE

CONTEXT:

Amid the continued suspension of derivatives trading in seven Agri commodities, the farmers have launched agitation outside the office of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in Mumbai.

Background:

- On December 20, 2021 the capital markets regulator suspended **futures trading in seven commodities, wheat, paddy (non-basmati), moong, chana, soybean and its derivatives, mustard seed and its derivatives, and palm oil and its derivatives on the exchanges.**
- The SEBI order allowed the squaring of contracts but said **no new contract** would be allowed in these commodities.
- Of the seven commodities, **chana and mustard seed** were already banned at the time.
- The trading was initially suspended for a year, but in December 2022, the **ban was extended for another year**, until December 20, 2023.
- The ban on the **launch of futures contracts** was intended to **stop speculative trade** in these commodities.

- The Central government was worried about food inflation, and the ban was part of the efforts made to control it

How does the derivative trade in commodities work?

- Agricultural commodities like cotton, paddy, soya bean, soya oil, mustard seed, etc., are traded on the **National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX)** and the **Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).**
- Derivatives are **short-term financial contracts** that are bought and sold in the market.

- Profits are made in the **derivatives trade** by predicting the price movements of the asset that underlies the contract. The derivatives trade can be in **futures and options**.
- In a futures contract, a supplier pledges to sell a certain quantity at a fixed price at a future date.
- Also, farmers can put fixed amounts of their products, which fit the quality standards of the exchange, to be sold at a fixed price, almost like price insurance.
- Both contracts can be excited **by either the producer or the trader** by paying a margin price to the exchange.

Why are farmers protesting against the ban?

- The **future trends** provided by the exchange are an **important indicator for farmers**.
- Physical markets or mand** often follow the trend, and farmers base their offloading plans on it.
- More than individual farmers, the **Farmer's Producer Companies (FPCs)** trade on the exchanges.

The National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX):

- The National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) is a commodities exchange dealing primarily in agricultural commodities in India.
- The NCDEX is located in Mumbai but has offices across the country to facilitate trade.
- Exchanges like the NCDEX have also played a key role in improving Indian agricultural practices.
- Barley, wheat, and soybeans are some of the leading agricultural commodities traded on the NCDEX.

The Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX):

- The **Multi-Commodity Exchange of India** was established under the **Forward Markets Commission (FMC) in 2003**.
- It is an online platform that enables online trading, settlement and clearing of commodity futures transactions.
- It acts as a platform for providing risk management (hedging).

SHIFTING BANKS OF THE GANGA IN WEST BENGAL

CONTEXT:

The Continuous shifting plains of River Ganga in West Bengal is creating difficulties for locals to maintain their livelihood and is a cause of concern which needs a view to curb the menaces.

About the Ganga's regime in West Bengal:

- The mighty river enters the West Bengal plains **from Rajmahal hills of Jharkhand's Sahebganj district** after a long journey of **about 2,000 km** from the Himalayas as it begins to break away into distributaries.
- The Ganga divides into two major distributaries, **Padma and Bhagirathi-Hooghly**, at Mithipur in Murshidabad district.
- The Padma carries the bulk of the discharge, flows about 65 km along the India-Bangladesh border, and finally leaves **Indian Territory at Jalangi**.

The reason for shifting plains:

- Due to Erosion and Deposition in a Meandering River:** As Ganga reaches in its Old Stage till reaching West Bengal, it shows features of a meandering river.
- A meandering stream has a single channel those winds snakelike through its valley.
- As water flows around these curves, the outer edge of water is moving faster than the inner.
- This creates an erosional surface on the outer edge (a cut bank) and a depositional surface on the inner edge (a point bar). Where the bends of two meanders meet, they bypass the curve of river, creating an oxbow lake which may then be filled with over wash sediment.
- Due to high disposal of water:** As the region is evident for many rivers and tributaries adding water to the Ganga, it changes its course frequently to left out the load of deposits it carried way long.

Impacts:

- Loss of livelihood for locals dependent on the land and water.
- Fear of floods during monsoon season.
- Loss of biodiversity like insects, plants etc.

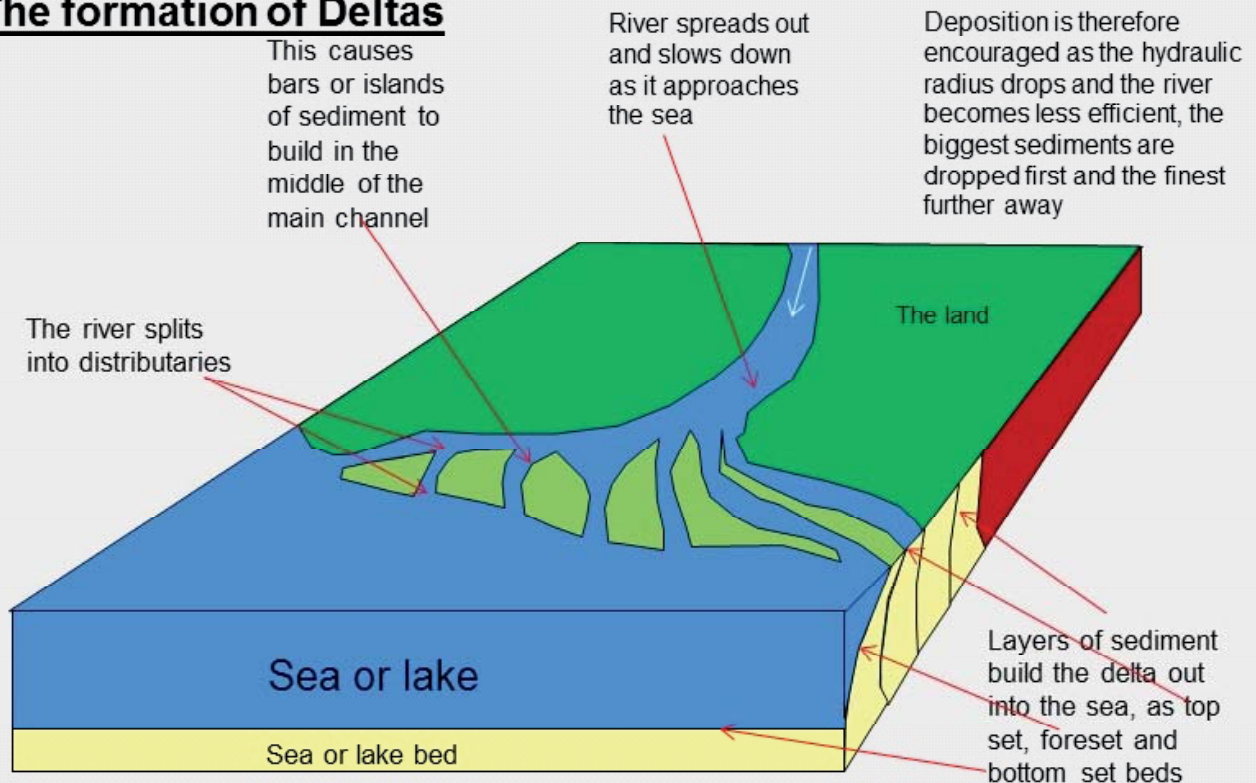
Challenges:

- Development projects like barrages, Dams etc. can affect the River regime in the region and further deteriorate the condition.
- Sand mining and Human activities is affecting the changing course of rivers and also effect biodiversity.

The River Ganga:

- The National River of India Ganga flows through India and Bangladesh.
- The river flows through the Himalayas, Gangetic plains and empties into the Bay of Bengal.
- In Indian traditions and culture, river Ganga is personified as Goddess Ganga.

The formation of Deltas



- It is a revered belief that to remit sins, one has to take a dip in river Ganga. It further channelizes the salvation, so is believed in Indian culture.
- A Siamese festival called 'Loy Krathong' of Thailand includes a tradition of floating candles into the waterways praying to Goddess Ganga.
- Hindus consider the Ganga River the holiest of all the rivers.
- Ganga is also mentioned in one of the four Vedas – Rigveda
- Various reptiles and mammals find their habitat in the Ganga river:
 - Gharial
 - National Aquatic Animal of India – Gangetic River Dolphin The river starts from the Gangotri Glacier in the name of Bhagirathi river
- **Ghagra River** is the largest tributary of river Ganga
 - Mainly the **Sediment-laden flows of Ganga with the Brahmaputra River form Ganges Delta** which is the world's largest delta.

ARMY LOOKS TO GET HI-TECH DRONES, ROBOTIC MULES TO REPLACE ANIMAL TRANSPORT

CONTEXT:

The Army has initiated the process to acquire three niche technologies to sharpen its combat edge, including 130 tethered drone systems for surveillance purposes for long duration and 100 robotic mules for logistics requirements in far-flung border areas.

About the Technology:

- A **tethered drone system** comprises drones that come with a **ground-based tether station** and can be used for surveillance of targets beyond the line of sight for a prolonged period.
- They can also be launched in an **untethered mode** for certain duration to confirm inputs.

- In a **Request for Proposal (RFP)** issued to the Army under which the tethered drone system will comprise;
 - two aerial vehicles with combined Electro Optic/ Infrared Payloads,
 - one remote video terminal and generator set,
 - one battery charger, one spare battery per drone and
 - A modular carrying case for the system.
- The systems are required to have a minimum 60 per cent indigenous content and will be procured under the '**Buy India**' category.

Key specifications of the Technology:

- Their weight should be **around 15 kg** and they should have an endurance of up to six hours in tethered mode and 45 minutes in untethered mode, and should have the capability to be **deployed in 10 minutes**.
- As per specifications mentioned in the RFP, the mission range in untethered mode should not be less than **5 km one way** and should be capable of being launched from **4,500 metres above mean sea level** and should be able to fly at a **height of 500 metres** above ground level.
- It also stated that the drones should be **able to land back home** in case of a communication failure, or tether breakage and low battery.
- The drone systems will come with a tether station, which will act as power supply cable and a data link.

Request for Proposal (RFP):

A request for proposal (RFP) is a project announcement posted publicly by an organization indicating that bids for contractors to complete the project are sought. The RFP defines the project, for the company that issues it as well as the companies that respond to it.

- RFPs are used by most government agencies and many private companies and organizations.

Benefits:

- **Extended operating duration:** These drones will have an advantage over others in the Army's inventory due to an enhanced surveillance capability over **an extended period of time**.
- Longer flight duration for constant surveillance, even for targets beyond the line of sight, with little risk of getting jammed will aid the troops on ground by arming them with the **correct intent and target acquisition**.

Drone Technologies in Armed forces:

- The Army has initiated the process of acquiring a range of indigenous drones for surveillance purposes along with **counter-drone systems** to act against enemy drones.
- This includes Switch drones, swarm drones, high-altitude logistics drones, mini remotely piloted aircraft and remotely piloted aerial vehicles, surveillance copters, Heron medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), loitering munitions, runway-independent RPAS, among around 2,000 drones.

Section: B

(SPECIALS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WOMEN GET COMMAND ROLES IN THE INDIAN ARMY

CONTEXT:

Context: For the first time, the Indian army had begun the process for selection of women officers for command postings in the rank of Colonel, which has so far been the domain of male officers.



◎ ABOUT:

- ▶ 80 women officers in the Indian Army **have been cleared for the rank of Colonel (selection grade)**, making **them eligible to command units** in their respective arms and services for the first time.
- ▶ The Women Officers were selected by the **Special No. 3 Selection Board** for promotion from the rank of **Lt Colonel to Colonel** to bring them on a **par with their male counterparts**.
- ▶ Women officers were selected from the **batch of 1992 to 2006** in **various arms and services**, including Engineers, Signals, Army Air Defence, Intelligence Corps, Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.
- ▶ The **Corps of Engineers** has the **maximum vacancy** followed by the Army Ordnance Corps and Electrical and Mechanical Engineering.

◎ WOMEN INDUCTION IN ARMY: A BATTLE LONG FOUGHT

- ▶ **1992:** Women were **first inducted into the Indian Army** as officers in **non-medical roles** while the Indian Army Medical Corps started inducting them from 1993.
- ▶ **2010:** Delhi High Court ruled that the Indian Army's **policy of not allowing women** to serve in combat

roles was **discriminatory and violative** of the Constitution.

- ▶ **2013:** Supreme Court **upheld the decision of the Indian Army to exclude women** from certain **combat roles**, stating that the Indian Army was not ready for women in combat roles due to societal attitudes and lack of infrastructure.
- ▶ **2016:** Indian Army announced that it would begin inducting women into combat roles in select military units, starting with the **Corps of Military Police**.
- ▶ **2017:** Supreme Court stated that **women should be given equal opportunities** in the Army, **including in combat roles**.
- ▶ **2020:** Indian Army announced that it **would open up all positions** to women, including those in **combat roles**
- ▶ **2021:** The Indian army starts to induct women in **short service commission as fighter pilots**.

◎ VIOLATION OF RIGHTS:

- ▶ **Right to equality (Article 14):** The exclusion of women from certain roles in the Indian Army has been seen as a violation of this right, as it discriminates against women on the basis of their gender.
- ▶ **Right to work (Article 15):** The exclusion of

women denies them the opportunity to work in certain roles based solely on their gender.

- **Right to non-discrimination (Article 16):** The exclusion of women from certain roles in the Indian Army is a violation of the right to non-discrimination, as it discriminates against women on the basis of their gender.
- **Right to life and personal liberty (Article 21):** The exclusion of women is a violation of the right to life and personal liberty, as it denies women the opportunity to serve their country and defend their rights and liberties.

- **Right to freedom of expression (Article 19):** The exclusion of women denies women the opportunity to express themselves and their capabilities through their work.

◎ WAY AHEAD:

- Although allowing women on equal footing in the army is a progressive step, the Indian Army should take steps to **create a more supportive environment** for women, such as increasing the number of **women-only barracks** and **providing childcare facilities**.

Advantages of Women in Army	Challenges for Women in Army
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased diversity: Women bring a different perspective and set of skills to the military, which can enhance overall military effectiveness and decision-making. • Improved operational effectiveness: Women can be effective in combat roles as they can improve the overall operational effectiveness of the military. • Better representation of society: The Indian Army is meant to serve and protect the entire population, and by having a more representative force, it can better understand and serve the needs of the society. • Better retention and recruitment: By providing opportunities for women, the Indian Army can attract and retain a larger pool of talented individuals. • Breaking stereotypes: Induction of women challenges the societal stereotypes that women are weak and less capable. • Improved morale: Women's induction can improve morale among female soldiers and can lead to a more inclusive and supportive environment for all soldiers. • Better support for women: The Indian Army has taken steps to create a more supportive environment for women, such as increasing the number of women-only barracks and providing childcare facilities. • Cost-effective: As the number of women in the Indian Army increases, it can be cost-effective in terms of recruitment and training, as it would increase the pool of eligible candidates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal attitudes: Women in the Indian Army have faced resistance from societal attitudes that view women as less capable or less suited for roles in the military. • Physical demands: The physical demands of military service can be challenging for women, and there have been concerns about whether women can meet the same physical standards as men. • Limited opportunities: There have been limited opportunities for women in the Indian Army, particularly in combat roles, which has limited their career advancement. • Lack of support: Women in the Indian Army have reported lack of support from their male colleagues and superiors, which can make it difficult to succeed in their roles. • Harassment and discrimination: Women in the Indian Army have reported experiencing harassment and discrimination on the basis of their gender. • Limited facilities: Women in the Indian army face limited facilities in terms of women-only barracks, toilets and other amenities. • Limited representation: Women are under-represented in leadership positions in the Indian Army, and there is a lack of female role models for women to look up to.

- **Right to education (Article 21):** Exclusion from certain roles in the Indian Army is a violation of the right to education, as it denies women the opportunity to pursue education and training in certain fields.

- While there have been challenges with the induction of women into the Indian Army, there is a need to promote the overall trend as **many women have succeeded** in their roles and made **valuable contributions to the military**.

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Section: C

(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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BUDDHIST MONASTERY COMPLEX AT BHARATPUR OF BENGAL

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Recent excavations at Bharatpur in West Bengal's Paschim Bardhaman district have revealed the presence of a Buddhist monastery.

About the site:

- The last excavation at the site was taken place **about fifty years** back in the 1970s.
- At that time black and red ware pottery belonging to the **Chalcolithic Age** was recovered with a Buddhist stupa.
- The recent excavations have revealed the presence of an extended monastery complex at the site.

A **Buddhist Stupa** is a commemorative monument usually housing sacred relics associated with the Buddha or other saints or priests, whereas votive stupas have similar significance but are smaller structures originating in eight cylindrical structures.

Key findings:

- Recent excavations have revealed the presence of a Buddhist monastery.
- According to experts, the Buddhist sites in the State are the presence of a large stupa along with a monastery complex and black and red ware pottery from the Chalcolithic or Copper Age.
- In the 1970s, **five beautiful seated sculptures** of the Buddha in **Bhumisparsha Mudra**.

Bhumisparsha Mudra is the gesture of hand showing five fingers of the right hand towards the earth symbolising the Buddha's enlightenment.

- These miniature sculptures, each about 30 cm in height, were most likely used for worship in the monastery.

The site was important for two main reasons:

- It is an early village settlement on the bank of the **River Damodar** which could date to around 2000 BCE; and
- The Buddhist monastery complex found symbolises the site is secular and is an early village with Buddhist followers.

○ Religious importance –

- **Relic repository:** In the beginning stupas were built to venerate and safeguard relics and remains of Buddha.
- **Sacred place:** Along with monasteries (viharas) later, stupas were included in chaityas, which is a prayer hall.
- **Circumambulation path:** an important Buddhist ritual around the path surrounding it.
- **The object of veneration**– it is believed that relics of buddhas body were buried within the stupas

○ Philosophical–

- **Meditation:** It is an important place for meditation.
- **Commemorative:** In the Tibetan tradition, stupas were built to celebrate the life events of the Buddha.

○ Symbolic: The stupas encapsulate the teachings and ideology of Buddha

- **Dhamek stupa at Sarnath marks the spot** where the Buddha gave his first sermon after attaining enlightenment, revealing his Eightfold Path leading to nirvana.

○ Historical: Provide information about the various dynasties who ruled India. Eg :

- **Mauryas:** Bairat stupa , Sanchi stupa , Bharhut stupa etc
- **Sathavahanas:** Amaravati stupa etc.

○ Architectural –

- **Oldest stone structures:** The stupas at **Sanchi and Bharhut** are one of the oldest stone structures in India.
- **Inclusion of text in narrative panels**– at Bharhut (Queen Maya's dream)
- **Use of marble**– at Amravati stupa
- **Taxila excavations reveal stupas with Boddhisatva images**, Gandhara influence and patronage of Kanishka.

AHOM BURIAL SITES IN ASSAM SELECTED FOR UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE TAG

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The Centre has decided to nominate Assam's Charaideo Maidams, the Ahom equivalent of the ancient Egyptian pyramids for the UNESCO World Heritage list.



About Assam's Charaideo Maidams:

- They belong to the late medieval (13th-19th century CE), built under the **mound burial tradition** of the Tai Ahom community in Assam.
- Charaideo, more than **400 km east of Guwahati**, was the **first capital of the Ahom dynasty** founded by Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha in 1253.
- The country is celebrating the 400th birth anniversary of **Lachit Barphukan**, a legendary Ahom general whose battle against the Mughals in 1671.

Features of the site:

- Out of 386 Maidams or Moidams explored so far, 90 royal burials at Charaideo are the best preserved, representative of and the most complete examples of the mound burial tradition of the Ahoms.
- The Charaideo Maidams enshrine the mortal remains of the members of the Ahom royalty, who used to be buried with their paraphernalia.
- After the 18th century, the Ahom rulers adopted the **Hindu method of cremation** and began entombing the cremated bones and ashes in a Maidam at Charaideo.

The Ahom Dynasty:

- The Ahom dynasty (1228–1826) ruled the Ahom kingdom in present-day Assam, India for nearly 598 years.
- The dynasty was established by **Sukaphaa**, a Shan prince of Mong Mao who came to Assam after crossing the **Patkai Mountains**.
- The rule of this dynasty ended with the **Burmese invasion of Assam**.

- In external medieval chronicles, the kings of this dynasty were called Asam Raja, whereas the subjects of the kingdom called them Chaopha or Swargadeo.
- The Ahom rule lasted till the British annexed Assam in 1826, following the **Treaty of Yandabo**.

The famous battles of Ahoms:

Battle of Alaboi (1669):

- In 1669, Aurangzeb dispatched the Rajput Raja Ram Singh I to recapture territories won back by the Ahoms.
- The battle of Alaboi was fought between the Ahom armed force and Mughals trespassers on August 5, 1669, in the **Alaboi Hills near Dadarain** North Guwahati.

Battle of Saraighat (1671):

- The battle of Sarai Ghat was one of the most significant warfare in medieval India.
- The Battle of Saraighat was a **naval battle fought between 1671** between the Mughal Empire (led by the Kachwaha king, **Raja Ram Singh I**), and the Ahom Kingdom (led by **Lachit Borphukan**) on the Brahmaputra river at Saraighat, Guwahati, Assam.
- Although weaker, the Ahom Army defeated the Mughal Army through brilliant uses of the terrain, clever diplomatic negotiations to buy time, **guerrilla tactics**, psychological warfare, **military intelligence** and by exploiting the sole weakness of the Mughal forces (navy).

UNESCO Heritage Site:

- The list of World Heritage Sites is maintained by the international '**World Heritage Programme**' which is administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
- A World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by UNESCO for its special cultural or physical significance.
- **Criteria for inclusion in the List of UNESCO World Heritage Sites:**
- Any heritage or any historical site has to be first on the tentative list to be a part of UNESCO's World Heritage sites.
- Once it makes it to the tentative list, then the proposal is sent to UNESCO for inclusion in the final List of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, only if the site:
 - ▶ Contains significant natural habitats for the conservation of biological diversity, including threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

- The Battle of Saraighat was the last battle in the last major attempt by the Mughals to extend their empire into Assam.
- Though the Mughals managed to regain Guwahati briefly later after a Borpuhan deserted it, the Ahoms wrested control in the **Battle of Itakhuli in 1682** and maintained it till the end of their rule.
- Associates with events, living traditions, ideas, beliefs, and artistic & literary works of outstanding universal significance etc.

UAE AND INDIA SETTLING ON NON-OIL TRADE IN INDIAN CURRENCY

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** UAE and India are trying to negotiate the non-oil trade in Rupees as India is seeking for several trade agreements dealing in dollars remaining a trading contest among countries.

Need of the initiative:

- The large majority of Gulf trade is conducted in U.S. dollars but countries such as India and China are increasingly seeking to pay in **local currencies** for various reasons, including **lowering transaction costs**.

- The UAE signed a wide-ranging free trade agreement last year with India, which, along with China, is among the biggest trade partners for Gulf Arab oil and gas producers, most of whose currencies are pegged to the U.S. dollar.

Benefits of trading oil in Indian currency:

- More frequent cross-border transactions in the rupee will help in the process of internationalizing the rupee.
- It would reduce dependency on the dollar for cross-border transactions thus lowering the requirement of maintaining a huge **Forex Reserve**.
- Reducing dependence on foreign currency makes India less vulnerable to external shocks.
- It lowers the transaction cost which occurs during cross-border transactions in Dollars

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India and UAE:

- It is a Free Trade Agreement that took **effect on 1st June 2022**.
- It has a separate chapter on small and medium enterprises that recognizes the fundamental role of SMEs in maintaining dynamism and enhancing the competitiveness of the respective economies of both countries.
- From Day 1 of the agreement coming into force, 90 per cent of India's current exports to the UAE will have immediate market access at zero duty.
- Duties on an additional 9 per cent of India's exports are set to reduce to zero within the next 5 to 10 years, according to CEPA provisions.
- The CEPA is likely to benefit about \$26 billion worth of Indian shipments that are currently subjected to a 5 per cent import duty by the UAE.
- The major beneficiaries of this would be gems and jewellery, apparel, engineering products, and pharmaceutical exports.
- A separate Annex on Pharmaceuticals has been incorporated to facilitate early access of Indian pharmaceuticals to the UAE market.

Significance of the agreement:

- UAE is the **second largest source of gold** for India.
- Lowering of tariff on gold coming from UAE will boost the gems and jewellery sector in India and also disincentives smuggling of the yellow metal into India.
- The CEPA with the UAE incorporates a **permanent safeguard mechanism** that can be resorted to by either nation, in case of a sudden surge in imports.

- Both countries have also prepared separate **exclusion lists, detailing the products** that they want to keep out of the ambit of the FTA, owing to sensitivities.
- To protect domestic industry, India has decided to keep a range of Agri-products outside the deal.
- This includes **dairy, tea, coffee, rubber, spices, sugar and tobacco products**.
- Manufactured items such as pharmaceuticals, certain chemicals including **azo dyes, aluminium and copper scrap, and certain categories of steel, helicopters and aeroplanes** have also been kept out.

COURTS HAVE NO POWER TO REDUCE MINIMUM SENTENCE PRESCRIBED IN POCSO ACT

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The Karnataka High Court has enhanced the sentence of five years imposed by the special court on an accused convicted under the Protection of Children From Sexual Offences (POCSO), Act, observing that when the Special Judge did not have any power whatsoever to reduce the minimum sentence to five years.

About the Case:

- A single-judge bench of Justice V. Srishananda upheld the conviction handed down to Shaikh Rouf under **Section 4** of the Act and **Section 376** of the Indian Penal Code and enhanced the sentence of the trial court.

Section (4) says that "Any person who contravenes the provisions of **sub-section (1) or sub-section (2)** shall be liable to be punished with imprisonment of either description for a period which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to one year or with fine or with both".

- However, the statute has prescribed a **minimum sentence of seven years** for the offence punishable under the POCSO Act.

What was the High Court's say on it?

- The approach of the trial Court in sentencing the respondent/accused for a period of five years for the offence under Section 4 of the POCSO Act is illegal as the minimum sentence that is prescribed under the provisions of Section 4 of the POCSO Act is seven

years and there is no discretion vested in the learned Special judge to reduce the minimum sentence of seven years to five years.

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012:

- ◎ **Definition:** "Children" according to the Act are individuals aged **below 18 years**. The Act is **gender-neutral**.
- ◎ **Types:** Different forms of sexual abuse including but not limited to **sexual harassment, pornography, penetrative & non-penetrative assault** are defined in the Act.
- ◎ **Child-friendly process:** The investigation process should be child-friendly and the case should be disposed of within one year from the date of reporting.
- ◎ **Special Court:** The Act provides for the establishment of **Special Courts** for the trial of such offences and matters related to them.
- ◎ **Implementing Agency:** The **National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)** and **State Commissions for the Protection of Child Rights (SCPCRs)** monitor the Act's implementation.
- ◎ Both are **statutory bodies**.

Recent amendments under the Act:

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences, or POCSO, (Amendment) Bill, 2019, seeks to provide for stringent punishment to those engaging in sexual crimes against children, death penalty in cases of aggravated sexual assault, besides levying fines and imprisonment, to curb child pornography.
- The POCSO Bill proposes to protect the interest of vulnerable children in times of distress and ensure their safety and dignity.
- The Bill has been approved by Parliament — the Rajya Sabha on July 29, 2019, and the Lok Sabha passed it on August 1, 2019.

Challenges:

- A large part of the investigation of offences under the Act is still guided by the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).
- The investigation of penetrative sexual assault cases generally involves recording the statement of the prosecutrix, a medical and forensic science laboratory (FSL) examination, and a determination of the child's age.
- The POCSO Act provides for recording the statement of the affected child by a woman sub-inspector at the child's residence or place of choice.
- But it is practically impossible to comply with this provision when the number of women in the police

force **is just 10%**, and many police stations hardly have women staff.

- Similarly, despite funds being provided by the Centre to strengthen Mahila desks, many police stations still does not have even a single woman staff.

Government Interventions:

- In 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) introduced a scheme to create an Investigation Unit on Crime against Women (IUCAW) which was to be made up of 15 police officers (with at least one-third comprising women officers and headed by an additional superintendent of police) in each district.
- Its aim was to ensure quality investigation of crimes against women on a 50:50 expenditure-sharing basis; the response by States to the scheme has been half-hearted.

GUIDELINES TO SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS FOR PROMOTIONS

- **CONTEXT:** The Centre has released the endorsement guidelines for celebrities and social media influencers that mandate compulsory disclosure of monetary or material benefits of a product or a brand they are promoting through their social media platforms.

About the guidelines issues:

- The regulation aims to ensure that individuals do not **mislead their audiences** when endorsing products or services and that they are in compliance with the **Consumer Protection Act** and any associated rules or guidelines.
- **Objective:** The main underlining principle of **the law is prevention of unfair trade practice.**
- **Need:**
 - Due to an increased risk of consumers being misled by advertisements.
 - The size of the social media influencer market in India in 2022 and it is likely to rise to ? 2,800 crore.
- **Key points:**
 - The guidelines specify that disclosures must be prominently and clearly displayed in the

endorsement, making them '**extremely hard to miss**' by the audiences.

- **Benefits and incentives**, and monetary or other compensation, trips or hotel stay, media barter, coverage and awards, free products with or without conditions, discounts, gifts and any family or personal or employment relationship come under material benefits according to the guidelines.
- Endorsements must be made in simple, clear language and terms such as '**advertisement, sponsored, or paid promotion**' can be used.
- They should not endorse any product or service in which due diligence has been done by them or that they have not **personally used or experienced.**
- **Stakeholders' involved:**
 - Individuals/groups who have access to an audience and the power to affect their audiences' purchasing decisions or opinions about a **product, service, brand or experience**, because of the influencer's/celebrity's authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience will have to disclose.
 - The disclosure should happen when there is a **material connection between an advertiser and celebrity/influencer** that may affect the **weight or credibility of the representation** made by the celebrity/influence.
- **Rules for disclosures:**
 - The disclosures should be placed in the endorsement message in such a manner that they are clear, prominent and extremely hard to miss.
 - Disclosures should not be mixed with a group of hashtags or links.
 - Disclosures should be superimposed over the image enough for viewers to notice.
 - In video, disclosures should be placed in the video and not just in the description and they should be made in **both audio and video format.**
 - In the case of **live stream**, disclosures should be displayed **continuously and prominently** during the entire stream.
- **Penalties and Punishments:**
 - The penalty prescribed for misleading advertisements under the **Consumer Protection Act 2019** will be applicable.
 - The **Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)** can impose a penalty of up to ? **10 lakh** on manufacturers, advertisers and endorsers and for repeated offences, a penalty of up to ? **50 lakh** can be imposed.
 - With this, the CCPA can also **prohibit the endorser** of a misleading advertisement from making any endorsement **for up to one year** and for subsequent **contravention, prohibition can extend up to three years.**

PURI'S JAGANNATH TEMPLE, PROVISIONS FOR NON- HINDUS AND FOREIGNERS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Recently, Odisha's Governor backed the entry of foreign nationals inside the Jagannath Temple in Puri, which converted into a debate and has triggered controversy.

About Jagannath Temple:

- The Jagannath Temple of Puri is an important Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath (a form of Vishnu), located on the eastern coast of India, in the state of Odisha.
- It is believed to have been constructed in the **12th century by King Anatavarman Chodaganga Deva** of the **Eastern Ganga Dynasty**.
- Anantavarma Chodagangadeva is also known for building the **Sun temple of Konark** and Puri is considered the cultural capital of Odisha.
- Jagannath Puri temple is called '**Yamanika Tirtha**' where, according to Hindu beliefs, the power of 'Yama', the god of death, has been nullified due to the presence of Lord Jagannath.
- This temple was called the "**White Pagoda**" and is a part of **Char Dham pilgrimages**.
 - Badrinath
 - Dwaraka

- Puri
- Rameswaram
- **There are four gates to the temple-**
 - Eastern 'Singhdwara' which is the main gate with two crouching lions
 - Southern 'Ashwadwara'
 - Western 'Vyaghra Dwara'
 - Northern 'Hastidwara'
 - There is a carving of each form at each gate.
 - In front of the entrance stands the Aruna stambha or sun pillar, which was originally at the Sun Temple in Konark.

About Annual Rath Yatra:

The temple is famous for its **annual Rath Yatra, or chariot festival**.

- Images of all three deities **Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Lordess Subhadra** are ceremoniously brought out of the inner sanctum (Garbhagriha) from the chief temple in Jagannath Puri.
- They are placed in a chariot which is then pulled by volunteers from Jagannath Puri temple to Gundicha Temple.
- For this festival, special chariots are built each year.

Provisions for Temple Entry:

- Only Hindus are allowed inside the shrine to offer prayers to the temple deities in the sanctum sanctorum.



- It has been the practice for centuries even though there is no clearly articulated reason for it.
- Some historians believe that multiple attacks on the Temple by Muslim rulers might have led the servitors to impose restrictions on the entry of non-Hindus.
- Others have said that this was the practice from the time the Temple was built.

When Non-Hindus can visit Lord Jagannath?

- **Patitapaban darshan:**
- Lord Jagannath is also known as Patitabapan which literally means "saviour of the downtrodden".
- So all those who are barred from entering the Temple because of religious reasons get the privilege of a darshan of the Lord in the **form of Patitapaban** at the Lion's Gate.
- **When the Lord emerges**
- Jagannath comes to Bada Danda (the Grand Road) along with his siblings during the nine-day Rath Yatra (car festival) in June-July every year.
- This is an occasion when non-Hindus can have His darshan.
- As the deities go on a sojourn to the Gundicha temple, their birthplace, devotees from around the world throng Puri for a glimpse of the Lord.

Recent controversy:

- In 2011, a proposal by **Pyari Mohan Mohapatra**, then adviser to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, supported the entry of non-Hindus into the Temple to **boost Odisha's tourism potential**, triggering a major controversy. Mohapatra had to withdraw his statement.

Arguments in favour of Non-Hindus and Foreigners entering Temple:

- To promote Tourism in the state.
- To promote equality
- To promote India's rich heritage in other countries

Constitutional backings:

Article 25(2) grants power to the State to enact the law on two distinct aspects.

- **Article 25(2)(a)** empowers the state to regulate "economic, financial, political or other secular activities which may be associated with religious practice".
- **Article 25(2)(b)** enables the state to enact a law to prohibit the exclusion of 'classes and sections' of Hindu society to enter into Hindu temples of a public character and also make laws for social welfare and reform.

- Thus, the control of secular aspects associated with religion and the power to throw open Hindu temples to all classes and sections of society are distinct.
- The Constitution does not permit the state to assume ownership of properties belonging to religious institutions.

Legal provisions related to entry at religious places:

- In the **Indian Young Lawyers Association v State of Kerala**, the word morality used in **Article 26(b)** means constitutional morality.
- It is rooted in the fundamental postulates of human liberty, equality, fraternity, and dignity.
- Thus, as a consequence, the freedom of religion and, likewise, the freedom to manage the affairs of a religious denomination are subject to fundamental notions of constitutional morality, effectively opening the door for the application of Article 15(2) and Article 17, given the conditions enumerated within the clauses are satisfied.
- The anti-exclusion principle, i.e., **Article 15(2)** raises questions about the lack of explicit mention of places of worship within the text of the provision.

NEED VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA DURING ELECTIONS: EXPERTS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Addressing Election Commission of India (ECI)'s international conference on 'the use of technology election integrity', the President of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has highlighted that there is a need for working out voluntary guidelines for social media companies.

About International foundation for Electoral systems (IFES):

- The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) promotes democratic stability by providing technical assistance and applying field-based research to the electoral cycle in countries around the world to enhance citizen participation and strengthen civil societies, governance and transparency.

- IFES views disenfranchisement and exclusion of persons with disabilities as a human rights issue. IFES promotes the electoral and political rights of persons with disabilities and ensures that a disability perspective is incorporated into the design and implementation of all international programs and DC-based organizational practices.
- IFES has implemented disability programming in more than 30 countries around the world.
- IFES has led a series of initiatives to promote the electoral and political enfranchisement of persons with disabilities in several different arenas, including securing full participation of persons with disabilities as voters and candidates.
- Country-specific projects that are successful are replicated in other regions where IFES works. Even if donors do not explicitly require a disability component, IFES aims to include electoral access elements in each project.
- Fund mechanism: IFES is funded by the US Department of State, Canada, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Australian Aid, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, among others.

NATIONAL EXPORT CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY TO EXPORT FARM, NON-FARMING PRODUCTS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The Nano fertilizers produced by IFFCO and dairy products from Amul are going to be among the first few products to be exported by the National Export Co-operative Society.

The National Export Cooperative society

- The National Export Cooperative Society is set up under the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, of 2002**.
- **Objective:**
- To provide thrust to exports from the cooperative sector by acting as an **umbrella organisation for carrying out and promoting exports**.
- To help cooperatives in getting benefits of various export-related schemes and policies of different ministries of the Government of India in a focussed manner through the **'Whole of Government Approach'**.

Significance:

- Higher exports through the proposed society will increase the production of goods and services by the cooperatives at various levels thus leading to more employment in the cooperative sector.
- Processing of goods and enhancing the services to match international standards will also generate additional employment.
- Increased export of cooperative products would, in turn, also promote "Make in India" thus leading to Atmanirbhar Bharat.

About:

- The National Export Cooperative Society will have **five promoters** that will invest Rs 100 crore each —
- Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) also known as Amul;
- National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED);
- National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC);
- Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO); and
- Krishak Bharati Co-operative Limited (KRIBHCO).
- Though Amul and IFFCO currently export products to countries such as **Brazil, the Philippines, Kenya and Canada**, the proposed Society is expected to enhance the scale and volume of exports.

What are Cooperative societies?

- They are autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspiration through jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprises.

Cooperatives in India:

- Cooperatives in India have a presence in almost all sectors, for example, agriculture (food grains, pulses, oilseeds, etc.), horticulture (fruits, vegetables, flowers, aromatic products, etc.), dairy, poultry, livestock, fisheries, sugar, spices, organic products, fertilizer, handloom, handicraft, textile, tea/coffee, minor forest produce, ayurvedic/herbal medicines, processed food and leather, among others.
 - They contribute 28.80% in fertilizer production, 35% in fertilizer distribution, 30.60% in sugar production and 17.50% in the procurement of marketable surplus of milk in the national economy but their contribution to exports is negligible.
- Cooperative societies are service enterprises aiming at rendering service to their members. In one sentence the philosophy of cooperation can be summed up as "each for all and all for each". IMF confirms receipt of India's financing assurances for Sri Lanka

IMF CONFIRMS RECEIPT OF INDIA'S FINANCING ASSURANCES FOR SRI LANKA

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has confirmed receiving India's written financing assurance in support of Sri Lanka's economic revival, while Sri Lanka has expressed hope of completing talks on debt restructuring in six months' time.

About India-Sri Lanka relations:

- India and Sri Lanka have a long history of cultural, religious, and trade ties dating back to ancient times.
- There are strong cultural ties between the two countries, with many Sri Lankans tracing their heritage to India. Buddhism, which originated in India, is also an important religion in Sri Lanka.
- Economic ties:** India is Sri Lanka's third largest export destination, after the US and UK. More than 60% of Sri Lanka's exports enjoy the benefits of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement. India is also a major investor in Sri Lanka.
- Defence:** India and Sri Lanka conduct **joint Military (Mitra Shakti)** and **Naval exercise (SLINEX)**.

Issues:

- Killing of Fishermen:** Killing of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is a lingering issue between these two nations.
- Influence of China:** China's rapidly growing economic footprint (and political clout as a corollary) in Sri Lanka is straining India-Sri Lanka relations.
 - China is already the largest investor in Sri Lanka, accounting for 23.6% of the total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) during 2010-2019 as against 10.4% from India.
- 13th Amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution: It envisages devolution of necessary powers to the provincial councils to address the just demand of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace, and respect within a united Sri Lanka.
 - India supports its implementation but the Sri Lankan government is yet to "fully implement" the 13th Amendment.

About International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- The IMF was set up along with the World Bank after the Second World War to assist in the reconstruction of war-ravaged countries.

- The two organizations agreed to be set up at a conference in Bretton Woods in the US. Hence, they are known as the Bretton Woods twins.
- The IMF is governed by and accountable to the 190 countries that make up its near-global membership.
 - India joined on 27th December 1945.
- The IMF's primary purpose is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system — the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries (and their citizens) to transact with each other.
- The Fund's mandate was updated in 2012 to include all macroeconomic and financial sector issues that bear on global stability.
- Reports by IMF:**
 - Global Financial Stability Report
 - World Economic Outlook

SPECIES IN NEWS

Alien plants threatening tiger habitats



Several **alien invasive plants** growing together can have a detrimental effect to the biodiversities in tiger habitats, a new study has found.

About the study:

- It highlighted that there are many negative impacts of multiple co-occurring alien plants on biodiversity.
- The study is the first of its kind in India and was published in journal **Forest Ecology and Management** by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).
- The plants can put pressure on **native forage plants** and drive away **wild herbivores**, the food source for the big cats.
- The invasive alien varieties include **Lantana camara**, **Parthenium hysterophorus**, **Prosopis juliflora**, etc, introduced during British colonisation.

- *Lantana* alone has pervasively invaded 44 per cent of India's forests.
- The study was conducted in **Kanha Tiger Reserve**, comparing un-invaded native forests with old-growth invasions of single and multiple alien plants.
- The researchers evaluated the differences in soil parameters, native grasses, herbs, shrubs, tree regeneration, habitat use by mammals, herbivory, bird occurrence, etc.

Olive Ridley Turtle



The Olive Ridley turtles were seen dead in delta of Godavari In Andhra Pradesh.

About:

Olive Ridley Turtle occurs in the tropical and hot waters of Pacific and Indian Oceans.

- It is also known as the Pacific Ridley sea turtle.
- Olive Ridley turtles are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in mass numbers, termed arribadas.
- The coast of Odisha in India is the largest mass nesting site for the olive ridley, followed by the coasts of Mexico and Costa Rica
- The olive ridley is predominantly carnivorous, common prey items include jellyfish, bryozoans, snails, shrimp, crabs, rock lobsters, and worms.
- Most of these are found in shallow waters, around 15 Kms from the mainland.
- It has been observed that a number of Olive Ridley Sea turtles are nesting around the islands of East Godavari district. Initially the seashores in Odisha were the most sought sites, but now they are arriving at the Hope Island, Sacramento Island, Yellaiahpetta and Surasani Yanam.

Major threats:

- This incredible nesting event is threatened by a multitude of dangers, including:
 - by catch in mechanised shrimp trawlers off the coast in the nesting season

- unregulated development of the coast
- beach erosion
- predation of the eggs by dogs and foxes

DARK SKY

CONTEXT:

Recently, the district administration of Ladakh designated six hamlets within the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary as a 'dark-sky reserve'.

About the Dark-sky reserve:

- A dark-sky Reserve (DSR) is an area, usually surrounding a park or observatory that restricts artificial light pollution.
- The **International Dark-Sky Association (IDA)** is associated with the International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR) and International Dark Sky Park (IDSP).
- An International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) was founded in 1988 to reserve public or private land for an exquisite outlook of nocturnal territories and starry night skies.
- In 1993, Michigan became the first state in the United States to designate a tract of land as a "Dark Sky Reserve" at the Lake Hudson State Recreation Area.
- It is generally understood that a dark-sky reserve, should be sufficiently dark to promote astronomy.
- However, this is not always the case. The lighting protocol for a dark-sky reserve is based on the sensitivity of wildlife to artificial light at night.

Sky-glow and causes:

- Sky glow would be familiar to most people as that **light dome that appears over populated areas that become visible, especially when you go outside of that populated area and look back towards it.**
- That dome that you see is an amalgamation of all the light sources that have been exposed to the exterior environment.
- **Causes:**
 - Skyglow, also known as light pollution, is the brightening of the night sky as the result of excessive and inappropriate artificial lighting.
 - Light pollution is an increasing problem threatening astronomical facilities, ecologically sensitive habitats, wildlife, and energy use.

What is the objective of these reserves?

- The purpose of the dark-sky movement is generally to promote astronomy.
- However, astronomy is certainly not the only objective of conserving a dark sky.
- A dark night sky is associated with so many facets of history, philosophy, religion, societal development, poetry, song, mathematics, and science.
- The preservation of a DSR is necessary to understand our environmental history.

Significance:

- The designation meant that the reserve had a responsibility to keep the skies dark, particularly for the astronomical observatories located in the area.
- While authorities safeguard telescopes' access to dark skies by actively lowering light pollution around their sites, the night is actually becoming brighter in almost the rest of the world.

India's first site for dark reserve:

- A part of **Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary** at Hanle in Ladakh is all set to become India's first Dark Sky Reserve.
- The site will also promote **astronomy tourism**, giving a boost to local tourism through science.
- The reason for selecting a site for the programme:

- Ladakh holds great potential for undertaking uninterrupted astronomical observations.
- At a height of 4,500 metres, Hanle is already home to optical, gamma ray and infrared telescopes for Space exploration.
- It is pristine for the dry weather for most months of the year, remains cloudless during nights and offers dark skies, making it a perfect natural setup for sky gazing.

Environmental Consequences of light pollution:

- According to a 2003 report, light overnight on beaches **deters sea turtles** from coming ashore to nest.
- A 2006 review found that skyglow keeps trees from **sensing seasonal variations**.
- A 2017 study found that **young burrow-nesting seabirds** don't take flight unless the nesting site becomes dark.
- A 2019 study reported that **clownfish eggs don't hatch** when exposed to artificial light at night, killing the offspring.
- A 2020 study noted that skyglow interferes with multiple aspects of insect life and allows insect predators to hunt for longer.

Section: D

(QUICK BYTES)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

PARAKRAM DIWAS 2023

CONTEXT:

The Parakram Diwas is celebrated on January 23, to commemorate the birth anniversary of freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose.

About:

- This year marks the **126th birth anniversary** of Bose, fondly known as 'Netaji'.
- To mark the occasion, 21 unnamed islands of Andaman and Nicobar will be named after **Param Veer Chakra** awardees.
- A model of the National Memorial dedicated to Netaji which will be built on **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep** will also be unveiled.



Who was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose?

- Born in 1897 in **Cuttack**, Bose was an Indian nationalist in the era of British colonialism.
- After completing his education in India, Bose left for London to prepare for the Indian Civil Services exam and cleared it.

Role in India's freedom struggle:

- In 1938, he became the **president of the Indian National Congress**. But resigned a year later despite defeating his rival in re-election.
- On October 21, 1943, Bose formed '**Azad Hind Fauj**' and later started Azad Hind radio station in Germany
- He went missing on August 18, 1945, after a **plane crash in Taiwan**.

NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY

CONTEXT:

India celebrates National Girl Child Day every year on 24th January.

About:

- The National Girl Child Day was first initiated in 2008 by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**.
- The main focus is on **changing society's attitude towards girls, decrease female feticide** and create awareness about the **decreasing sex ratio**.

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar-2022:

- Twenty-nine children were given the award on the occasion for their exceptional achievements in innovation, social science, education, sports, arts and culture and for demonstrating bravery.
- They were given digital certificates using blockchain technology and a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh at an event held online.

INDIA, EGYPT TO HOLD DIALOGUE ON DEFENCE TIES

CONTEXT:

In the view of the visit of the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, as the chief guest of Republic day celebration, India and Egypt are likely to seal around half a dozen agreements and focus on strengthening ties.

Details of the event:

- The expected dialogues can be on defence, security and new energy initiatives.
- The Egypt has shown a pragmatic diplomacy in arenas such as the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation** where Cairo has increasingly maintained a cautious position while responding to **Pakistan's aggressive campaign on Kashmir**.
- As a symbol of closer military ties, the Republic Day parade is on track to have a contingent of **180 personnel** from the Egyptian armed forces this year.

During the state visit of Mr. El Sisi, a **postage stamp** will be released, portraying the multifaceted partnership between the two countries over the last 75 years.

WAYANAD, THE FIRST DISTRICT TO PROVIDE BASIC DOCUMENTS TRIBALS

Wayanad becomes the first district in the country to provide basic documents and facilities to all tribes' people.

Details:

- The district administration has attained this achievement by providing 1, 42,563 services to as many as 64,670 tribal beneficiaries as part of the **Akshaya Big Campaign for Document Digitisation (ABCD)** campaign.
- There are 26 campaigns across the district so far with the support of the **Revenue and Tribal Development departments**.
- The basic documents include **Aadhaar cards, ration cards, birth/death certificates, election ID cards, bank accounts and health insurance**.
- The campaign is aimed at ensuring basic documents to all citizens belonging to the Scheduled Tribes communities and these documents are **digitalised and saved in DigiLocker** accounts opened for them.
- Other services such as **income certificates, ownership certificates, age certificates, and applications for new pensions** are also provided at the camps organised under the programme.

INS VAGIR

CONTEXT:

Fifth Scorpene-class submarine INS Vagir commissioned into the Indian Navy.



About INS Vagir:

- INS Vagir, the fifth submarine of the Kalvari Class submarines, is a lethal platform with a formidable weapon package.

- **Built by:** Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited
- **Technology transfer from:** France
- **Type of mission:** anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying, area surveillance etc.
- The submarine is designed to operate in all theatres of operation.
- These submarines have a **state of the art SONAR** and sensor suite permitting outstanding operational capabilities. They also have an advanced **Permanent Magnetic Synchronous motor (PERMASYN)** as its propulsion motor.

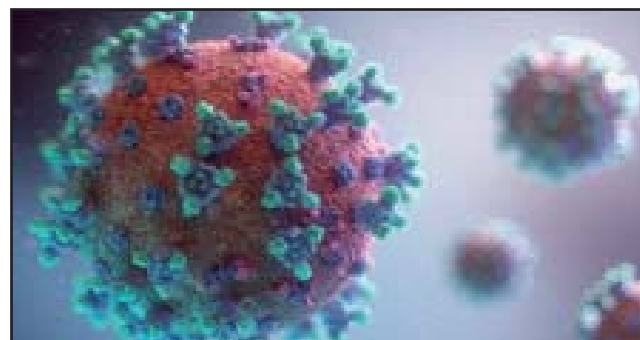
Project 75:

- Vagir was launched in 2020, under **Project 75 (P75)**.
- Four Submarines of the ongoing **Project-75** Scorpene programme at MDL, Along with **Vagir, Kalvari, Khanderi, Karanj and Vela** have been commissioned into the Indian Navy.
- Whilst the sixth and last submarine '**Vagsheer**' will also undergo sea trials after launching.

NOROVIRUS

CONTEXT:

Norovirus has been conformed in Ernakulam



What is norovirus?

- Noro is a group of viruses that causes illness related to stomach.
- **Type:** highly contagious virus
- **Symptoms:** severe vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever, headache and body aches
- Although norovirus is usually mild in healthy people, it can be serious if it infects young children, elderly, and people with other medical conditions.
- **Spread:** The disease spreads through sewage, food and contact with infected people.

'SHADOW BANNING' OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

CONTEXT:

The term is related to the fact that social media companies are taking stealth actions to limit a post's visibility.

What does shadow banning mean?

The term was coined by **Jonathan Zittrain**, a professor of computer science and law at Harvard University.

- A shadow ban refers to partially blocking or blacklisting a user's profile to reduce visibility without their knowledge.
- It may lead to less engagement with the account and low visibility of posts instead of an outright ban.
- In other words, followers cannot see your posts on a social media platform.
- It refers to a situation that our online activity can be manipulated by a platform without our knowledge.

When it takes place?

Platforms such as **Instagram, Facebook and Twitter** generally deny performing shadow bans, but typically do so by referring to the original 2001 understanding of it.

- Shadow banning occurs when your posts or activity aren't viewable to other users, but you haven't received an official ban or notification.
- In most cases, the user can still see their own content and have no idea no one else can see their posts.

Is shadow banning by companies legal?

- Private companies are allowed to make their own rules about content moderation, but for advertisers, users and free speech champions, true shadow bans are problematic because they enforce unarticulated rules secretly.
- They allow a company to avoid taking responsibility for moderating content while quietly manipulating its flow.
- And those who are silenced have no process for emerging from the shadows.

How one can identify shadow banning?

- When shadowbanning has been reported, platforms have explained this away by citing technical glitches, users' failure to create engaging content, or as a matter of chance through black-box algorithms.

INDIA INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FESTIVAL IN BHOPAL

CONTEXT:

The 8th edition of the India International Science Festival (IISF) was inaugurated at the Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology (MANIT), Bhopal, on January 21, 2023.

About the event:

- **Theme:** *Marching towards Amrit Kaal with Science, Technology, and Innovation.*
- It is a four-day festival, also aligned with the G20 vision, which is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* or "**One Earth· One Family · One Future.**"



• IISF will feature 14 thematic events:

- ▶ Students Science Village
- ▶ Face to face with New Frontiers of Science & Technology
- ▶ Science through Games & Toys
- ▶ Students Innovation Festival
- ▶ Vaigyanika (Literature)
 - International Science Film Festival
- ▶ Guinness World Records attempts
- ▶ Artisan's Technology Village-Vocal for Local
- ▶ Young Scientist Conclave
- ▶ New Age Technology Show
- ▶ National Social Organisations and Institutions Meet (NSOIM)
- ▶ STEM @ 2022-Mega Science and Technology Exhibition
- ▶ Start-up Meet
- ▶ Science and Technology Council Conclave.

- More than **2,500 school students** from across India have been invited to attend the festival.

Additionally, the festival will feature **Biotech and Agri-tech start-ups**.

GREEN COMET' APPEARING CLOSE TO EARTH AFTER 50,000 YEARS

CONTEXT:

A comet is estimated to come closest to Earth around February 2 termed the 'C/2022 E3 (ZTF)'.

About the Comet:

- The comet was named to refer to those who first spotted it – astronomers using the wide-field survey camera at the **Zwicky Transient Facility (ZTF)** in the US, in **March 2022**.
- NASA mentioned that the comet could be visible with telescopes and binoculars, and might even be visible to the naked eye under a clear night sky.

What are Green Comets?

- The orbit indicates it comes from the edge of our solar system, a distant reservoir of comets we call the **Oort cloud**.

- The **Oort cloud** is thought to be a big, spherical region of outer space enveloping our sun, consisting of innumerable small objects, such as comets and asteroids.
- It has been reported that the green comet could be at a distance of **2.5 light minutes** from Earth, which means a mere **27 million miles**.

Why is it green in colour?

- Comets are **frozen rocky or gas-filled objects** that are remnants of the formation of the solar system.
- Due to their composition, characteristics and the path they move in, they tend to leave a light behind them.
- Here, the comet itself is green (called the head of the comet) and emits a whitish light behind it (often called the tail of the comet).





SUCCESS IS A PRACTICE WE DO!

