

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: I
MARCH
2023

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- MANTLE AND RELATED PHENOMENON
- WEATHER PATTERN AND CONDITIONS FOR INDIAN FARMERS

GS-II

- RUSSIA'S SUSPENDS PARTICIPATION IN NEW START
- NEW E-WASTE (MANAGEMENT) RULES 2022
- POLICY FOR MENSTRUAL PAIN LEAVE IN INDIA
- SECTION 153A: USES AND MISUSES
- TRANSPARENCY IN OTT REGULATION
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- MP's Van Mitra portal and Forest rights claims
- 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme

- National Surveillance Programme on Fish Diseases scheme

- Whip in Parliament
- Fugitive economic offenders

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- RBI's coin vending machines

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- IEA's annual report 2022

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- Multilateral Exercise Desert Flag VIII
- Atacama Large Millimetre Array (ALMA) telescope

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- Siang Unying Festival
- Sant Sevalal Maharaj Jayanti
- Kalyana Karnataka Utsav
- Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC) portal
- Marconi Prize 2023
- India's first Municipal Bond Index
- Great Backyard Bird Count 2023
- India's first air-cooled condenser
- HIV-resistant mutation
- India's first DNA vaccine for Dengue
- INS SindhuKesari in Indonesia

— **Disclaimer** —

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

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

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SECTION: 'A'

(MAINS)

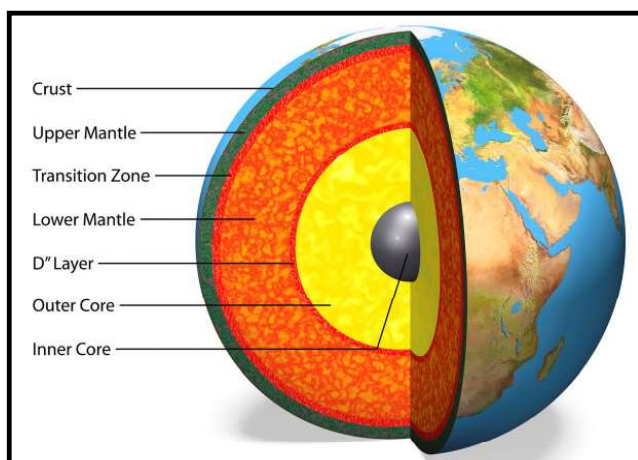
CURRENT AFFAIRS

MANTLE AND RELATED PHENOMENON

CONTEXT:

Researchers trying to uncover the secrets of Earth's geology have revealed the fifth layer of the planet.

- Seismic waves generated by earthquakes have revealed new insights about the deepest parts of Earth's inner core.



About:

- The Earth has **four layers** namely;
 - The solid crust on the outside,
 - The mantle and
 - The core — split between the outer core and the inner core.
- The crust is everything we can see and study directly.
- The thinnest layer of the Earth, the crust still measures about 40 km on average, ranging from **5–70 km (~3–44 miles)** in depth.
- But at the scale of the planet, that's less than the skin of an apple.
- There are **two types of crust: continental and oceanic crust**.

Oceanic crust can be found at the bottom of the oceans or below the **continental crust**; it is generally harder and deeper, consisting of denser rocks like basalt, while continental crust contains granite-type rocks and sediments. The continental crust is **thicker on land**.

Key highlights of the study:

- The mantle:**
 - The research has revealed that the mantle normally is a **2,900 km thick layer** of solid rock sandwiched between the Earth's upper crust and lower core — has been hiding two layers inside it.
 - One is the **"low viscosity"** zone in the upper mantle, roughly **100 kilometres** in thickness.
 - The other layer is the **'low-velocity zone'**, which is also a part of the **upper mantle**.
 - The low viscosity zone coincides with the **transition zone** between the **upper and the lower mantle**.

It was also found that mantle covers the largest area inside the earth of about 44% of the earth.

About Earthquakes:

- The study showed that the Earth kept moving months after the earthquake.
- The mantle's viscous properties govern convection and help in transfer of heat between areas of different temperatures. This enables to understand plate tectonics and related phenomenon.

Significance of the study:

- The analysis showed that the **partially molten layer** extends from **90 km to 150 kilometres**. Below this depth, the **waves resume speed** found in below the Turkey land.
- This layer sits below the **tectonic plates**, which create **new crusts and destroy** older ones.
- Plate tectonics is thought to have played an instrumental role in making the **Earth habitable**.

WEATHER PATTERN AND CONDITIONS FOR INDIAN FARMERS

CONTEXT:

The increasing Farmer distress due to abnormal climatic conditions, since last few years have continuously hurting food security and leaving farmers in a bad condition.

About:

- The three-year La Nina with El Nino makes an entry in 2023 by July.

- In the beginning of 2022, extreme rainfall and cold waves dashed that hope by damaging standing crops.
- While the world was entering into a severe food crisis as the Russia-Ukraine war started, Indian farmers had their own battles to fight.
- With the early heat hitting in the month of February has destroyed the Rabi crops, further deteriorating the condition.

During El Nino Year:	During La Nina Year:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ El Niño resulting in deficit rainfall which tends to lower the summer crops production such as rice, sugarcane, cotton and oilseeds and therefore the outcome might be seen in form of high inflation rates and lower GDP due to high contribution of agriculture sector in Indian economy. ◦ El Niño events are mostly associated with warm and dry conditions in southern and eastern inland areas of Australia, as well as Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and central Pacific islands such as Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea. ◦ Previously El Niño had a strong association with droughts in India but this relationship has been weekend in recent years. ◦ El Niño conditions mostly coincide with a period of weak monsoon and rising temperatures in India and thus the probability of drought occurrence surges during El Nino events that could be disturbing for Indian crop production and water supply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The La Nina could have negative impacts on Indian agriculture. Farmers will be at risk of losing their standing kharif crops if it rains during this period. ◦ The harvesting of the kharif crops begins from September-end or early October. ◦ La Niñas normally raises crop prices and create more fluctuations in energy markets, especially with the record-breaking prices ◦ Spring freezes are more common during La Niña, especially in the Great Lakes region, thanks in large part to cooler Great Lakes temperatures and fluctuating jet stream patterns ◦ During winter, the corn belt will have some very strong, severe storms ◦ In general, more rainfall can be expected.

Where is the safety net for farmers?

- Marginal and small farmers, as per the 2015-16 agriculture censuses, account for 86% of total farmers in India and are the most vulnerable to extreme weather events.
- **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)** has also underlined the poor performance of crop insurance.
 - In a book published recently, NABARD has argued that crop insurance is no longer a "**perfect medication**" for farmers hit by natural calamities.
- **Premium:** The prescribed premium is 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all rabi crops. In the case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium is 5%.
 - Premium cost over and above the farmer share was equally subsidized by States and GoI.
 - However, GoI shared 90% of the premium subsidy for North Eastern States to promote the uptake in the region.
- **Implementation:** By empanelled general insurance companies. The selection of the Implementing Agency (IA) is done by the concerned State Government through bidding.
- **PMFBY 2.0:** The revamped PMFBY is often called **PMFBY 2.0**, it has the following features:
 - **Completely Voluntary:** Enrolment 100% voluntary for all farmers from 2020 Kharif.
 - Earlier, it was compulsory for **loanee farmers** availing Crop Loan/Kisan Credit Card (KCC) account for notified crops.
 - **Limit to Central Subsidy:** The Centre has decided to limit the PMFBY premium rates - against which it would bear 50% of the subsidy - to a maximum of 30% in un-irrigated and 25% in irrigated areas.

Government Interventions:

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):

- Launched in 2016 and is being administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- Replaced the **National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS)** and **Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS)**.
- **Aim:** To provide a comprehensive insurance cover against the failure of the crop thus helping in stabilising the income of the farmers.
- **Scope:** All food & oilseed crops and annual commercial/horticultural crops for which past yield

data is available.

- **More Flexibility to States:** The government has given the flexibility to states/UTs to implement PMFBY and given them the option to select any number of additional risk covers/features.
- **Investing in ICE Activities:** Insurance companies have to now spend 0.5% of the total premium collected on information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme:

- Launched in 2016 and is being administered by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.
- **Aim:** To mitigate the hardship of the insured farmers against the likelihood of financial loss on account of anticipated crop loss resulting from adverse weather conditions relating to rainfall, temperature, wind, humidity etc.
- **Parameter:** WBCIS uses weather parameters as "proxy" for crop yields in compensating the cultivators for deemed crop losses.

RUSSIA'S SUSPENDS PARTICIPATION IN NEW START

CONTEXT:

Russian President has announced that Moscow was unilaterally suspending the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty with the U.S., stating that the West was trying to destroy Russia.

Background:

Overview

- **Signed:** 8 April 2010
- **Entered into Force:** 5 February 2011
- **Duration:** Ten-year duration with option to extend for no more than five years
- **Parties:** United States, Russian Federation

- The **New START treaty** was signed in 2010 by former **U.S. President Barack Obama** and **Russian President Dmitry Medvedev**.
- It was extended for **five years** when current U.S. President Joe Biden took office in 2021.

What is the New START nuclear treaty?

Under the **New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty)**, there exist the following agreements:

- **Russia and the U.S.** exchange **data twice** a year on the ballistic missiles under the treaty's purview, on bombers, test sites, nuclear bases and so on.
- The treaty also mandates the two parties to send notifications within **five days** if they change or updates something in their stockpile, like moving missiles to a new base or deploying a new warhead to the system.
- It allows each side to carry out up to **18 short-notice (32 hours)** on-site inspections of strategic nuclear weapons sites annually to ensure the other has not crossed the limits of the treaty.
- Under the Treaty, America and Russia cannot deploy more than **1,550 strategic nuclear warheads** and **more than 700 long-range missiles and bombers**.
- It also limits each country to 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers and **delivery vehicles**.

Statement of conflict between US and Russia:

- **Russia's view:** The **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** and **the U.S.** wanted to "inflict 'strategic defeat' on Russia and try to get to our nuclear facilities at the same time.
- **USA's view:** In its **New START annual implementation report 2023**, the U.S. State Department stated that Moscow was not complying with the pact as it had not let Washington carry out on-site inspections.

What are the concerns after Russia's suspends the treaty?

- **Uncontrolled use of arms and weapons:** The two largest nuclear powers could get an opportunity to other nuclear-armed countries, especially China and others like **Pakistan, Iran, Israel, and India** among others, to increase their arsenals.
- **Effect global peace:** The arms treaty was aimed to hold the global peace and no use of nuclear weapons. However, the Russia's decision to suspend it causes concerns for developing countries.

NEW E-WASTE (MANAGEMENT) RULES 2022

CONTEXT:

In November 2022, the Ministry of Environment and Forests further notified a new set of e-waste rules, which will come into force from April 1, 2023.

So, let us analyse the provisions under the new rules.

Background:

- The first set of e-waste Rules was notified in **2011** and came into effect in 2012.
- An important component of the Rules (2011) was the introduction of **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**.
- Under EPR compliance, '**producers**' are responsible for the safe disposal of electronic and electric products once the consumer discards them.
- **E-waste rules 2016**, which were amended in 2018, were comprehensive and included provisions to promote 'authorisation' and 'product stewardship'.
- Other categories of stakeholders such '**Producer Responsibility Organisations (PRO)**' were also introduced in these rules.

Need for a new set of rules:

- Most of the '**refurbishers**' or the '**repair shops**' operating was found as not authorised under the **Central Pollution Control Board of India**.
- Further, many formal recyclers undertake activities only up to the **pre-processing or segregation stage**, and thereafter channelize e-waste to the informal sector, which is a pure violation of law.

Provisions of E-waste rules 2022:

- **Application:** It will apply to every manufacturer, producer, refurbisher, dismantler and recycler involved in manufacturing, sale, transfer, purchase, refurbishing, dismantling, recycling and processing of e-waste or electrical and electronic equipment.
 - The rule is applicable to all electrical devices and radiotherapy equipment, nuclear medicine equipment and accessories, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), electric toys, air conditioners, microwaves, tablets, washing machine, refrigerator and iPad among others.
- **Restrictions:**
 - The government has restricted the use of hazardous substances in manufacturing electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) following deaths due to exposure to radioactive material.
 - It mandates the reduction of the use of lead, mercury, cadmium among others in the manufacturing of electronic equipment.
- **Reuse and recycling:**
 - Manufacturers shall use the technology or methods so as to make the end product recyclable and shall ensure that components or parts made by different manufacturers are compatible with each other so as to reduce the quantity of e-waste.

- **Strict monitoring:**

- The Central Pollution Control Board shall conduct random sampling of electrical and electronic equipment placed on the market to monitor and verify the compliance of reduction of hazardous substances provisions.
- If a product does not comply with the e-waste management rules, the manufacturer will have to withdraw all samples from the market.

- **Extended Producer Responsibility Certificates:**

- Draft rules aim to incentivise registered electronic waste recyclers by introducing **EPR or Extended Producer Responsibility** certificates (which was not part of 2016 Rules).

- **E-waste exchange facilities:**

- The EPR requires producers to set up e-waste exchange facilities to facilitate collection and recycling, and assign specific responsibility to bulk consumers of electronic products for safe disposal.

- **Imports:** Imports or placement in the market for new electrical and electronic equipment shall be permitted only for those which are compliant with provisions laid down by the government.

- **Disposal:**

- It is the responsibility of the manufacturer to collect e-waste generated during manufacture and to ensure its recycling or disposal.
- However, the rule does not apply to waste batteries, packaging plastics, micro enterprises and radio-active waste, as covered under the provisions of the law.

Concerns associated:

- **Left Unorganised sector behind:** The informal sector is the 'face' of e-waste disposal in India as 95% of e-waste is channelized to the sector.
 - Therefore, they also hold immense potential to improve the state of e-waste management.
- **Responsibility given to dismantlers for data updation:** The new notification does away with **Producer Responsibility Organisations (PRO)** and **dismantlers** and vests all the responsibility of recycling with authorised recyclers where they will have to collect a quantity of waste, recycle them and generate digital certificates through the portal.

POLICY FOR MENSTRUAL PAIN LEAVE IN INDIA

CONTEXT:

A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India answered a petition to approach the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development Ministry to frame a policy for menstrual leave.

About the petition:

- The Apex court was hearing a petition seeking a **direction to States** to frame rules for granting **menstrual pain leave** for students and working women in workplaces.
- The Supreme Court mentioned that there are different "dimensions" to menstrual pain leave, which though being a biological process, may also act as a "disincentive" for employers from engaging women in their establishments.

Laws supporting menstrual pain leave:

- **Bihar and Kerala** are the only States which allow menstrual pain leave to women.
- **Section 14 of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961:** It recognises and respect motherhood and maternity of working women.
 - ▶ Under Section 14, there is a provision for **appointment of inspectors** and says appropriate governments may appoint such officers and may define the local limits of jurisdiction within which they shall exercise their functions under this law.
 - ▶ However no government in India has created the **post of inspectors**; forget about the appointment of such inspectors.

Countries like the **United Kingdom, China, Wales, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea, Spain and Zambia** were already providing menstrual pain leave in one form or the other.

Women workforce (The Numbers):

- According to the Labour force participation Survey 2019-20, the pan-India labour force participation rate of females in the **productive age (15-59 years)** was 26.5% in 2018-19 as compared to **80.3% for males**.
- While **54.7% of urban women** were employed in the regular wage and salaried category, about 59.6% of rural females was not only self-employed but 37.9% among them were helpers in household enterprises.

The **low female LFPR** is attributed to high participation of women (15 years & above) in **domestic duties** that is 55.7% in rural areas and 59.1% in urban areas in 2018-19.

Incentives for working women in India:

• Maternity Benefits:

- ▶ The **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017**, which was passed by the Rajya Sabha in the year August 2016, has now also been approved by the Lok Sabha in the same year, March 2017.
- ▶ The paid maternity leave in India is increased from **12 weeks to 26 weeks** for working women.
- ▶ This law is eligible for only those who work in an organization with a minimum of 10 employees.
- ▶ The prenatal leave is also increased **from 6 to 8 weeks**.
- ▶ A woman who is already a mother of 2 children is eligible for 12 weeks of maternity leave from the 3rd child.
- ▶ If a woman adopts a child under the age of 3 months, then she is eligible for a leave of 12 weeks.
- **Paternity leave:** In September 2017, pursuant to the enactment of Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, the Paternity Benefit Bill, 2018 ("PB Bill") was proposed in the Lok Sabha by Maharashtra MP, Rajeev Satav.
 - ▶ The PB Bill mandated that **paternity leave of fifteen days** (extendable up to three months) be granted to new fathers.
 - ▶ The idea behind the PB Bill is to recognize that the role of a father as a contributor to child-rearing is of paramount importance, and to give new fathers the opportunity to bond with their children without compromising on their need to provide for their family.
- **Mahila Shram Yojana:** a cash benefit scheme for rewarding working women.

SECTION 153A: USES AND MISUSES

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court granted interim bail to Pawan Khera, chairman of the media and publicity department of the All India Congress Committee, who had been arrested for alleged hate speech.

- The invocation of these laws are often criticised for restricting free speech and misusing the legal processes for political purposes.

What does section 153A says?

- Section 153A of the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** penalises “promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony”.
- This is **punishable with imprisonment** up to three years, or with fine, or with both.
- The provision was enacted in 1898 and was not in the **original penal code**.
- At the time of the amendment, **promoting class hatred** was a part of the English law of sedition, but was not included in the Indian law.

In the pre-Independence **Rangila Rasool case**, the Punjab High Court had acquitted the Hindu publisher of a tract that had made disparaging remarks about the private life of the Prophet, and had been charged under Section 153A.

What is hate speech?

- There is no international legal definition of hate speech, and the notion of what constitutes “hateful” speech is debatable.
- Hate speech is defined as any **form of communication, whether spoken, written**, or physical, that criticizes or discriminates against a person or a group based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or other identity factor.

In 2020, **1,804 cases** were registered, six times higher than the 323 cases in 2014.

Legal Provisions of Hate Speech in India:

- Responsible speech is the essence of the liberty granted under **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression to all citizens of India.
- Hate speech has not been defined in any law in India. However, legal provisions in certain legislations prohibit select forms of speech as an exception to freedom of speech.

Acts defining hate speech:

The Indian Penal Code, 1860 (hereinafter IPC);

- Section 153B(1) (Making imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration);

- Section 295A (Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs);
- Section 500 (Defamation); and
- Section 504 (Intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace).

What are the safeguards against laws for hate speech?

- Sections **153A and 153B** require **prior sanction from the government** for initiating prosecution. But this is required before the trial begins, and not at the stage of preliminary investigation.
- To curb **indiscriminate arrests**, the Supreme Court laid down a set of guidelines in its 2014 ruling in **Aradesh Kumar v State of Bihar**.
 - As per the guidelines, for offences that carry a sentence of **less than seven years**, the police cannot automatically arrest an accused before investigation.
- In a 2021 ruling, the SC said that the state will have to prove intent for securing a conviction under **Section 153A**.

Concerns associated

- **Misuse of Laws:** Lower conviction rates for these provisions indicate that the process where a police officer can arrest without a warrant is often the punishment.
- **Violation of free speech:** Critics have pointed out that these laws are intended for the state to step in and restore “public order” rather than protect free speech.
- **Vague terms in the law:** The broad, vague terms in the laws are often invoked in its misuse.
- **Old-aged Laws:** Section 295A lie in the communally charged atmosphere of North India in the 1920s.

TRANSPARENCY IN OTT REGULATION

CONTEXT:

A survey of Over-The-Top regulation in different countries suggests that most of them are yet to come up with a clear statute-backed framework.

◦ For India:

- The survey highlighted that India’s OTT regulations policy needs a clarification and a more transparent framework.

- ▶ There is no specific body, to scrutinise the misdeeds and loopholes in policy.
- Other Countries like Singapore, the **Infocomm Media Development Authority** is the common regulator for different media.
- ▶ Aside from instituting a **statutory framework** and promoting industry self-regulation, its approach to media regulation emphasises on promoting media literacy through public education.

What are OTT platforms?

- The acronym OTT stands for **Over-the-Top**. This convenient term explains the **new delivery method** of film and TV content over the internet whenever we want, across many different devices, without the need for **traditional broadcast, cable or satellite pay-TV providers**.
- In simple terms, OTT streaming means paying an internet provider, like Xfinity, for internet access to watch Netflix, without paying for cable TV.

India's OTT regulations:

- In India, the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021**, through which the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B)** was given the task of regulating content on OTT and online platforms.
- India's approach can be termed as a light-touch '**co-regulation**' model where there is '**self-regulation**' at the industry level and final '**oversight mechanism**' at the Ministry level.

The Rules mandate **access control mechanisms**, including parental locks, for content classified as **U/A 13+** or higher and a reliable age verification mechanism for programmes classified as '**A**' (18+).

What are IT Rules, 2021?

- The Rules aim to empower **ordinary users of social media and OTT platforms** with a mechanism for redressal and timely resolution of their grievance with the help of a Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) who should be a resident in India.
- **Safety measures:** Special emphasis has been given on the protection of women and children from sexual offences, fake news and other misuse of the social media.
- **Source identification:** Identification of the "**first originator of the information**" would be required in

case of an offence related to sovereignty and integrity of India.

- **Appointment of Chief Compliance Officer:** A Chief Compliance Officer, a resident of India, also needs to be appointed and that person shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act and Rules.
- **Complaint monitoring:** A monthly compliance report mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints would be necessary.
- **Code of Ethics:** The OTT platforms, online news and digital media entities, on the other hand, would need to follow a Code of Ethics.
- **Self-classification:** OTT platforms would be called as '**publishers of online curated content**' under the new rules.
- They would have to self-classify the content into five categories based on age and **use parental locks for age above 13 or higher**. They also need to include age verification mechanisms for content classified as 'Adult'.
- **Redressal mechanism:** A three-level grievance redressal mechanism has been mandated.
 - ▶ This includes the appointment of a GRO, self-regulatory bodies registered with the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) to look after the **Code of Ethics** and a Charter for the self-regulating bodies formulated by MIB.

Challenges in existing policy:

- The Rules require disclosure of **grievance details** by publishers and self-regulating bodies, the reporting formats only capture the number of complaints received and decided.
 - ▶ Instead, the full **description of complaints** received by OTT providers and self-regulatory bodies and decisions given thereon may be published in the public domain.
- **OTT providers and appellate/self-regulatory bodies** should be made to upload the details of grievances and redressal decisions, which will be visible for the public and government authorities.
- The current Rules provide for the **third/final tier** as the **Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC)** comprising officer-nominees from various ministries of **Central government, and domain experts**.
- There is no provision for the **disclosure or publication** of an apology/warning/censure on the platform or website.

REGULATING ONLINE SALE OF DRUGS

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Ministry of Health has asked the pharma giants to ban the sale of online drugs/medicines, after the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD), threatened to launch a country-wide agitation against the government.

About the e-pharmacy culture in India:

- In the past eight years, the market penetration of e-pharmacies has seen single digit growth from **3% to 5%**.
- The concept of e-pharmacy has boomed during the COVID times, when the medicines were needed at doorsteps.

After, these **e-pharmacies** giving competition to **retail and physical stores**, the Ministry of Health in early February 2023 has pulled up at least **twenty companies** including **Tata-1mg, Flipkart, Apollo, PharmEasy, Amazon and Reliance Netmeds**, by issuing them a show cause notice, for selling medicines online.

Benefits to consumers:

- **Increased Convenience:** E-pharmacy enables consumers to order medicines in a convenient manner, from their mobile or computer.
- **Increased Access:** Online platforms can aggregate supplies, making otherwise hard to find medicines available to consumers across India. Further, e-Pharmacies also enable access to rural areas where there is limited presence of retail pharmacy.
- **Improved drug information and patient Awareness:** E-pharmacies have the technology infrastructure to provide value added information to consumers, such as drug interactions, side effects, medicine reminders, and information on cheaper substitutes
- **Affordability:** E-pharmacy model reduces working capital, overhead costs, and trade margins to the pharmacists. This finally translates into a cost advantage to consumers.

Issues with E-pharmacies in India:

- **Regulatory issues:** Medicines come under the purview of the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**. However, the current **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** doesn't explicitly deal with e-pharmacies.

➤ Thus, there is no clear-cut guidelines to regulate, control and monitor e-pharmacies in India.

- **Promotion of self-medication:** There are concerns that e-pharmacies will encourage self-medication or irrational use of medicines which is already a common practice in India
- **Misuse:**
 - Prescriptions submitted to e-pharmacies may be fake, and it could be difficult to verify their authenticity.
 - There are concerns that scheduled drugs can be re-ordered and misused by the consumers leading to drug abuse and other criminal activities.
- **Fake/Illegal sites and substandard medicines:** There are concerns over fake or illegal sites coming up thus undermining consumer interest. Further, there are concerns over substandard and counterfeit drugs being sold.
- **Effect on retail sellers:** The growth of e-pharmacies has given rise to concerns among the retail sellers that their business would be adversely affected as they would not be able to compete with the discounted pricing provided by online platforms.
- **Privacy issues:** There medical privacy concerns associated with online transaction of drugs as the patient medical history could be leaked.

Draft rules for E-pharmacy 2018:

- **Definition of E-pharmacy:** "business of distribution or sale, stock, exhibit or offer for sale of drugs through a web portal or any other electronic mode"
- **Mandatory Registration:** The draft rules make it mandatory for e-pharmacy businesses to register with the Central Licensing Authority
- **Data Localization:** It mandates e-pharmacy portals to be established in India through which they are conducting their business and the data generated has to be kept localised.
- **Privacy:** It states that the details of patient should be kept confidential and not to be disclosed to any third party except the central government or the state government concerned.

Note: Schedule X drugs includes narcotics and psychotropic substances.

- **Prescriptions:** For carrying out sale of prescription drugs (i.e. drugs listed under **Schedule H, H1 of the Drugs and Cosmetic Rules**) a prescription by a **Registered Medical Practitioner** has to be uploaded by the customer.

- **Prohibition on sale of certain drugs:** Sale of drugs covered by the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985**, tranquilizers and drugs listed under **Schedule X** has been prohibited.
- **Prohibition on Advertisement:** Advertisement of drugs is prohibited on any media for any purpose by an e-pharmacy.
- **Compliance with IT Act:** E-pharmacies have to comply with the provisions of the **Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) and Rules.**
- **24*7 helpline:** The rules state that complete information on the medicines will have to be provided by the e-pharmacy holders and a 24/7 helpline should be made available.

CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF NCST

CONTEXT:

Amidst the conflict between the new Forest Conservation Rules (2022) diluting the old Forest Rights Act, 2006, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has now secured FRA implementation reports of all States and Union Territories by invoking its Constitutional powers to directly approach the Supreme Court of India.

Background:

- The NCST had written to the **Environment Ministry** in September 2022, asking that they be put on hold on **Forest conservation rules of 2022**, because it will invariably violate provisions of the FRA, which ensures that **ownership of forest land** remains with tribes people and **other traditional forest dwellers (OTFD)**, who live off the forest and its resources.
- Amidst this, the **ST Commission** wrote to the Supreme Court Registrar, invoking powers under **Clause 8d of Article 338A**, to seek all materials filed before the court in connection with a batch of petitions challenging the constitutionality of the FRA.

What does Section 338A say?

According to **Article 338 A**, there shall be a **Commission (National Commission for the Scheduled Tribes)** for the Scheduled Tribes to be known as the **National Commission for the Scheduled Tribes**. It shall be the duty of the Commission to:

- Investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Tribes under this Constitution or under any other law for the time

being in force or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards;

- Inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Tribes;
- Participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and any State;
- Present to the President, annually and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards;
- Discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes as the President may, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, by rule specify.

The Forest Conservation Rules, 2022:

- These rules, "streamline" the process of approvals.
- The rules make a provision for private parties to cultivate plantations and sell them as land to companies who need to meet compensatory forestation targets.
- It will help India increase **forest cover**.
- It will also solve the problems of the States of not finding land within their jurisdiction for compensatory purposes.
- The concerned update sought to limit the necessity for consent from the gram Sabha. Accordingly, the States will ensure "settlement" of Forest Rights Acts applicable.

How will the new rules affect tribal rights?

- **Missing elements of tribals and forest-dwelling communities:** The updated Forest Conservation Rules don't talk about the tribals and forest-dwelling communities whose land would be hived off for developmental work.
- The new rules allow the Union government to permit the clearing of a forest for a project before prior consent of the forest dwellers, as mandated under the 2006 Act.
- Earlier the state bodies would **forward documents to the FAC** that would also include information on the status of whether the forest rights of locals in the area were settled.
- Earlier such proposals would not be entertained by the FAC unless there was approval from the State specifying that the forest rights in the place had been "settled" and the Gram Sabha, or the governing body in villages in the area, had given their written consent to the diversion of the forest.

- The new rules will dilute the **Forest Right Act, of 2006**.
 - It will disempower forest tribals and may displace them: The update will limit the necessity for consent from the gram Sabha.

FRIENDSHORING STRATEGY

CONTEXT:

In a meeting of US and Indian tech business leaders, the United States shown interest to strengthen US-India ties in the technology sector and said that India is an important part of a US business strategy of “friend shoring” where supply chains to the US are being made resilient.

What is Friend shoring strategy?

- Friend-shoring means encouraging companies to shift manufacturing away from authoritarian states and toward allies.
- **Objective:** The idea of ‘friend-shoring’ supply chains is gaining purchase among economic policymakers concerned about relying on **geopolitical competitors** for accessing critical materials and technologies.
- **Benefits:**
 - Friend-shoring is about **deepening relationships** and **diversifying our supply chains** with a greater number of trusted **trading partners to lower risks** for our economy and theirs.
 - It will also encourage domestic production, which could **substitute for imports**.

India-US trade relations:

- The US is India's **biggest trading partner**.
- In 2021, our **bilateral trade** was over \$150 billion.

Upcoming Agreements:

- **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment**, or PGII:
 - Under PGII, the United States has announced **investments in Agri-tech** to enable climate-smart agricultural production and in digital payments systems for micro entrepreneurs.
 - The US aims to mobilize **\$200 billion** through 2027 for PGII and will look at India as a partner to invest in for its future.

Impacts for ‘Freindshoring’:

- This would reduce overdependence on countries which could pose a security risk and are a single source of critical inputs and raw materials.
- However, limiting the trade of key inputs to trusted countries could reverse the gains of globalization.

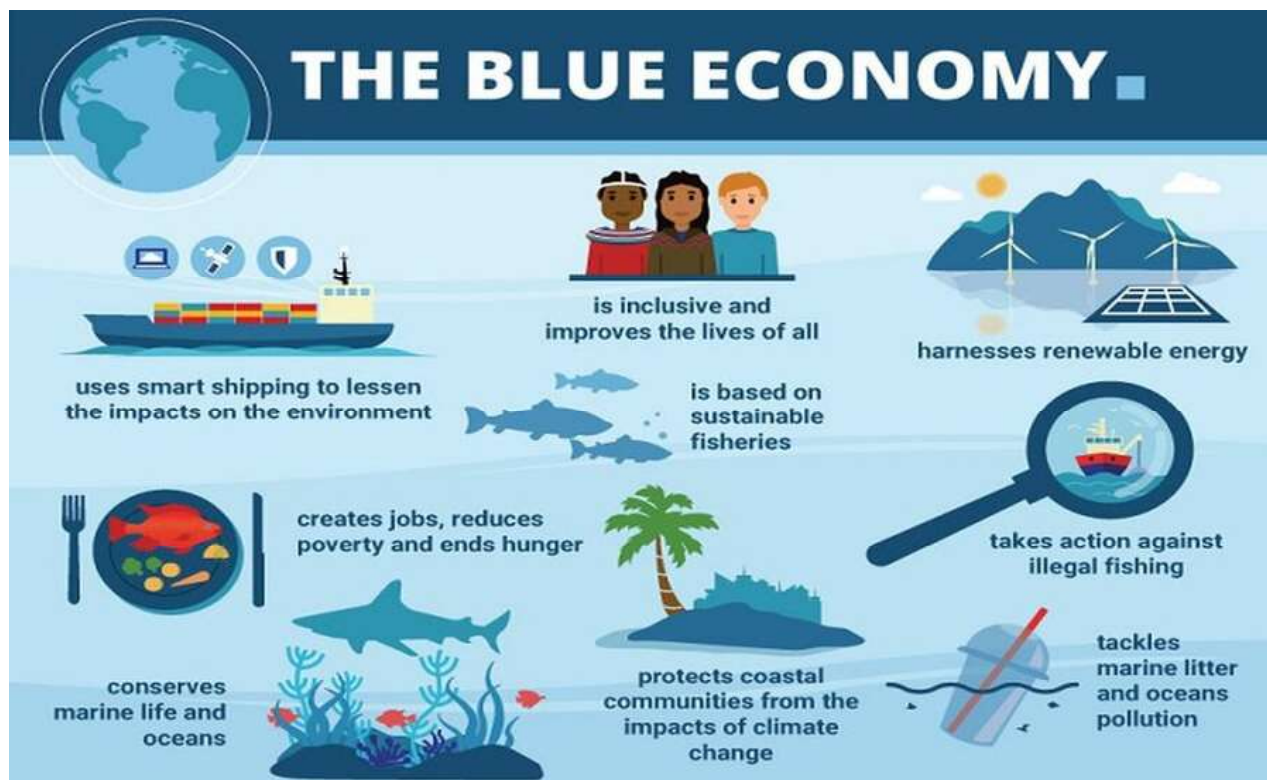
BLUE FOOD ECONOMY

CONTEXT:

A new study suggests that blue food sourced from aquatic environments can help reduce nutritional deficiencies and contribute to employment and export revenue in India.

What is Blue Food?

- Blue food is food derived from aquatic animals, plants or algae that are caught or cultivated in freshwater and marine environments.
- **Significance:**
 - **Key Source of Nutrient:**
 - **Blue foods** are important for the **economies, livelihoods, nutritional security, and cultures of people in many countries**.
 - They supply protein to over **3.2 billion people**, are a key source of nutrients in many **coastal, rural and indigenous communities**, and support the livelihoods of over **800 million people**, the majority of whom work in **small-scale systems**.
 - **Low Emission and Tackle Deficiencies:**
 - They generate lower emissions compared to terrestrial meat.
 - **Aquatic foods** can also be used to address **B12 and omega-3 deficiencies in India**.
 - Over **91% of countries with vitamin B12 deficiencies** also show high levels of omega-3 deficiency
 - **Reduce Cardiovascular Diseases:**
 - Promoting blue foods over red meat overconsumption could address health and environmental concerns for about 82% of the **22 countries** suffering from a high **cardiovascular disease** risk.
 - **Revenue Potential for Global South:**
 - Blue foods can help **improve nutrition, livelihoods or national revenue** for the **global south and indigenous communities** in the global north.



Issues Associated with Blue Food:

- **Bycatch:** This refers to the **accidental capture of non-target species** in fishing nets, which can lead to the death of these animals.
- **Pollution:** The presence of pollutants such as heavy metals, PCBs and **microplastics** in the **ocean can affect the quality and safety of seafood**.
- **Mislabelling and Fraud:** There have been instances of mislabelling of seafood products, where a **cheaper fish is sold as a more expensive one**.
 - This can lead to consumer deception and potential health risks.
 - **Overexploitation:** Almost 90% of global marine fish stocks **are now fully exploited or overfished according to the World Bank**, which is an issue with **overfishing, illegal fishing, and other unsustainable aquatic food production**.

Way Forward

- **Increasing Awareness:** Governments, NGOs, and the private sector should work together to increase awareness about the **benefits of blue food and its potential to address malnutrition, poverty, and environmental degradation**.
- **Promoting Sustainable Fishing Practices:** Fishing practices that are unsustainable, such as **overfishing, destructive fishing methods, and bycatch**, need to be addressed to ensure that fish stocks are not depleted and the marine ecosystem is protected.

- **Encouraging Aquaculture:** Aquaculture can be a sustainable way of producing blue food if it is done in an environmentally responsible manner.
 - Governments can promote the development of **sustainable aquaculture practices by providing technical assistance, training, and incentives**.

INDIA'S CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT

CONTEXT:

India's merchandise trade deficit dipped to 12-month low in January 2023, while services trade surplus rose.

- The combination of shrinking **merchandise trade deficit** and robust **services trade surplus** will help in moderating the **current account deficit** for the present financial year. Let us understand how?

What is Merchandise Trade deficit?

- Merchandise trade statistics record **all goods which add to, or subtract from**, the stock of material resources of a country by entering (as imports) or leaving (as exports) its economic territory.
- The merchandise trade balance measures the **difference between imports and exports of goods**.

- A **Merchandise trade deficit** is an amount by which the cost of a **country's imports exceeds its exports**.

What is Services trade surplus?

- A trade surplus is an economic measure of a positive **balance of trade**, where a country's exports exceed its imports.
- It is the opposite of a **trade deficit**.
- A trade surplus can create employment and economic growth, but may also lead to **higher prices and interest rates** within an economy as well as a more expensive currency.

A **country's trade balance** can also influence the value of its currency in the global markets, as it allows a country to have control of the majority of its currency through trade.

The Current account deficit (CAD):

- The **current account records** exports and imports in goods and services and transfer payments.
- It represents a country's transactions with the rest of the world and, like the capital account, is a component of a **country's Balance of Payments (BOP)**.
- There is a deficit in Current Account if the value of the goods and services imported exceeds the value of those exported.
- **Major components are:**
 - Goods,
 - Services, and
 - Net earnings on overseas investments (such as interests and dividend) and net transfer of payments over a period of time, **such as remittances**.

What are the factors affecting Current Account deficit?

- **Overvalued Exchange Rate:** If the currency is overvalued, imports will be cheaper, and therefore there will be a **higher quantity of imports**.
 - Exports will become uncompetitive, and therefore there will be a fall in the quantity of exports.
- **Economic Growth:** If there is an increase in national income, people will tend to have more disposable income to consume goods. If domestic producers cannot meet the domestic demand, consumers will have to import goods from abroad.
 - Therefore if there is **fast economic growth** there tends to be a significant increase in the quantity of imports and deterioration in the current account.

Decline in Competitiveness/Export Sector:

- There might be a decline in the **competitiveness/export sector** in a country because it has to struggle to compete with the other developing countries. This has led to a persistent deficit in the balance of trade.
- **Higher Inflation:** If India's inflation rises faster than our main competitors then it will make India's exports less competitive and imports more competitive.
 - This will lead to deterioration in the **current account**.
 - However, inflation may also lead to depreciation in the currency to offset this decline in competitiveness.
- **Recession in other countries:** If India's main trading partners experience negative economic growth, and then they will buy less of our exports, worsening the India's current account.
- **Borrowing Money:** If countries are borrowing money to invest e.g. third world countries, then this will lead to deterioration in current account position.
- **Financial Flows to Finance Current Account Deficit:** If a country can attract more financial flows (either short-term portfolio investment or long-term direct investment), then these flows on the financial account will enable the country to run a larger current account deficit.
 - For example, the India has run a **persistent current account deficit** since 2005; this reflects the fact the India has attracted capital flows to finance this current account deficit. Without financial flows, the currency would depreciate until equilibrium is restored.

Effects of Current account deficit (CAD):

- **Economic growth:** In the short-run, a current account deficit is helpful to the debtor nation. Foreigners are willing to pump capital into it. That drives economic growth beyond what then country could manage on its own.
- **Weakening of demand:** In the long run, a current account deficit saps economic vitality. Foreign investors question whether economic growth will provide enough return on their investment. Demand weakens for the country's assets, including the country's government bonds.
- **Rise in bond yields:** As foreign investors withdraw funds, bond yields rise. The national currency loses value relative to other currencies. That lowers the value of the assets in the foreign investors' strengthening currency. It further depresses investor demand for the country's assets. This can lead to a tipping point where investors will dump the assets at any price.

- **Rise in value of foreign assets:** The only saving grace is that the country's holdings of foreign assets are denominated in foreign currency. As the value of its currency declines, the value of the foreign assets rises. That further reduces the current account deficit.
- **Setting in of Inflation:** In addition, a lower currency value increases exports as they become more competitively priced. The demand for imports falls once prices rise as inflation sets in. These trends stabilize any current account deficit.
- **Lower Standard of Living:** Regardless of whether the current account deficit unwound via a disastrous currency crash or a slow, controlled decline, the consequences would be the same. That's a lower standard of living for the country's residents.

TIGER DEATHS AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

CONTEXT:

Nearly after two-months of this year, India has already recorded 30 tiger deaths.

Tiger deaths have so far been reported from **Kanha, Panna, Ranthambore, Pench, Corbett, Satpura, Orang, Kaziranga and Sathyamangalam reserves.**

- Of the 30 deaths, 16 have been reported outside the reserves.

The Tiger Count in India:

- **Every 4 years** the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) conducts a tiger census across. The first was conducted in 2006.
- The Census (2014) reported **2,226 tigers** in the country, up from 1,706 in 2010.
- The fourth cycle of **All-India Tiger Estimation** was released in 2019 according to which the Tiger count remained at 2,967.
- Officials said the **33% rise in tiger numbers** from the last estimation (an estimation is carried out every four years) was the highest-ever recorded between cycles, which stood at 21% between 2006 and 2010 and 30% between 2010 and 2014.

Declining Tiger numbers:

- The official said that the **tiger population** in the country has been growing at a rate of 6% annually.
- In the last 10 years (2012-22), January has seen the highest number of tiger deaths in the country at 128,

followed by 123 deaths in March, according to NTCA figures.

- There were 121 tiger deaths in 2022 — 34 in Madhya Pradesh, 28 in Maharashtra and 19 in Karnataka. In 2021, 127 tiger deaths were recorded across the country, according to NTCA data.
- **State-wise tolls:**
 - ▶ **Madhya Pradesh** has recorded the highest number of tiger deaths — 270 in total — in the last 10 years (2012-2022), followed by **Maharashtra at 184 and Karnataka at 150.**
 - ▶ **Jharkhand, Haryana, Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh** have seen the lowest tiger deaths — one each.
- **Reasons for deaths:**
 - ▶ The highest number of deaths has occurred due to natural causes, while poaching has been cited as the second biggest reason.
 - ▶ There were seven cases of poaching in 2020, 17 in 2019 and 34 in 2018.

Conservation Efforts:

PROJECT TIGER:

- Project Tiger was launched in 1973 for conserving our national animal
- It is a Centrally sponsored scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and climate change
- The project is administered by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

National Tiger Conservation Authority:

- It is a **statutory body.**
- Established in 2005 following the recommendations of the Tiger Task.
- It was established in 2005, following the recommendations of the Tiger Task.
- It was given statutory status by the 2006 amendment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it.
- Functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change

Tiger Relocation Projects:

- The tiger relocation project was initiated in 2018 wherein **two big cats**, a male (Mahavir) from Kanha Tiger Reserve and a **female (Sundari) from Bandhavgarh from Madhya Pradesh** were relocated to Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha, to shore up the tiger population in the reserve.

- **The relocation was meant to serve two purposes:**
 - Reducing the tiger population in areas with excess tigers majorly reduces territorial
 - To reintroduce tigers in areas where the population has considerably reduced due to various reasons.

Tiger Special Protection Force:

- It will be effective in checking illegal human intrusion into the reserve through villages located on its fringes and serve as a second layer of protection for tigers
- The decision is in line with Central Government's guidelines for providing three-tier protection to tigers at reserves
- Three-tier protection for tigers at reserves:
 - **1st layer of protection:** It is provided in the inner range by beat-level forest guards through regular patrols.
 - **2nd layer of protection:** It is provided by STPF.
 - **3rd layer of protection:** it comes from intelligence-gathering mechanisms in which forest, police and central intelligence agency personnel work together to prevent crimes like the poaching of tigers.

Global Conservation Initiatives:

- **Petersburg Declaration:**
 - It aimed at promoting a global system to protect the natural habitat of tigers and raise awareness among people on white tiger conservation

- This resolution was adopted In November 2010, by the leaders of **13 tiger range countries (TRCs)** assembled at an **International Tiger Forum** in Petersburg, Russia
- The resolution's implementation mechanism is called the **Global Tiger Recovery Program** whose overarching goal was to double the number of wild tigers from about 3,200 to more than 7,000 by
- **13 Tiger range countries** are **Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.**
- **Global Tiger Initiative:**
 - **Global Tiger Initiative (GTI)** was launched in 2008 as a global alliance of governments, international organizations, civil society, conservation, and scientific communities, and the private sector, with the aim of working together to save wild tigers.
 - In 2013, the scope was broadened to include Snow
 - The GTI's founding partners included the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Smithsonian Institution, the Save the Tiger Fund, and International Tiger Coalition (representing more than 40 non-government organizations).
 - The initiative is led by the 13 tiger range countries (TRCs).

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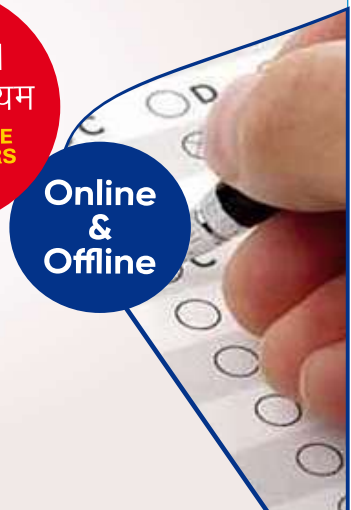
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SECTION: 'B'

(SPECIALS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

ONE YEAR OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

CONTEXT:

- ❑ A year after start of Russia-Ukraine conflict, there are still signs of escalation everywhere, further escalating difficulties across world.

What is the origin of Ukrainian crisis?

- The Ukrainian crisis is a power struggle between the various political factions in the Ukraine.
 - Chief among these factions are the ones who seek to cultivate closer ties with the European Union while the other seeks better relations with Russia.
- Ukraine was one of the founding states of the Soviet Union, its farmlands contributing immensely to the Union's economic output from 1920 to 1991.
- The crisis reached a boiling point when on November 21, 2013, Victor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian President, suspended an agreement with the European Union. It led to a series of protests from those who supported the agreement with the European Union.
- This in turn led to a series of unrest in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, whose denizens were more supportive of Yanukovich and his pro-Russian policies.
- Soon a political crisis plunged Ukraine into chaos, with the Pro-European Union and Pro-Russian factions fighting it out against each other for control of Ukraine.
- It was against this backdrop that Russia sent its army to annex the Crimean region of Ukraine in March 2014. Russia's casus belli (an act or situation that provokes or justifies a war) was that it was protecting its port access on the Black Sea in case the political crisis in Ukraine caused disruption in its trade in the region.
- Russia's invasion further bolstered the pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, turning the simmering unrest into a full-blown war against the post-revolutionary Ukrainian government.
- Between **2014–2020**, the military conflict between Ukrainian soldiers and Russian-backed separatists continued in eastern Ukraine. More than 10,000 people were killed.

Why Russia invaded Ukraine?

To understand the reason for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is crucial to look back to the time of **the Cold War**.

- During the reign of Josef Stalin, the Soviet Union sent ethnic Russians to the eastern portion of Ukraine. This was to solidify Soviet control in Ukraine and seriously undermine any prospects of an indigenous freedom

movement if they ever took place.

- As a consequence, Russia's President got the reason he needed to send his army to the Ukraine, because he was sure he would find support for his actions in the country.
- The pro-Russian faction was bolstered by this incursion, which also allowed **Yanukovich to return to Kiev**.
- Ukraine's desire to open its markets to the EU and to collude with U.S. companies to develop its natural gas reserves were perceived by Russia as huge threats to its economy.
- Since then, relations between the United States and Russia have continued to deteriorate with the on-going Ukraine conflict. Efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement have failed.

The conflict is still on going with regular clashes between the **two Ukrainian factions** as well as Russian armed forces.

What are the current tensions?

- Increased tensions between Ukraine and Russia can be viewed as a continuation of the unresolved conflict of 2014.
- Since then, the **'illegal annexation of Crimea'** has been an issue.
- Russia has been criticised for its involvement in the **Donetsk and Luhansk** regions in eastern Ukraine.
- There, Russian-backed separatists have been fighting with Ukrainian troops.
- Recently, Moscow has allegedly deployed thousands of troops as well as tanks and artillery near Ukraine's eastern border.
- It has also mobilised troops in the annexed **Black Sea region of Crimea**.
- This has sent shock waves in Ukraine, forcing it to appeal to the U.S. and NATO for an intervention, if needed.

What are the effects of Ukrainian Crisis?

- The events in Ukraine had both domestic and international consequences. As per the estimate by the World Bank in October 2014, the economy of

Ukraine contracted by 8% the same year.

- In turn, a slew of sanctions imposed by the United States and the EU crippled the Russian Rouble, resulting in the Russian financial crisis.
- The war in the region had caused a shortage in coal for Ukrainian power stations, leading to blackouts in many parts of the country in December 2014.
- Before the Euromaidan protest and the subsequent crisis, corruption had plagued the Ukrainian government from time to time. Post-revolution, however, the paces of reforms are slow.
- Internationally, the relations between the United States and Russia have continued on a downward spiral ever since the beginning of the crisis.
- Geopolitical experts believe that the ever-increasing rivalry between the two nations is the foundation of a new Cold War.
- Recently, the 2020 **Ukrainian local elections** took place on Sunday 25 October 2020. In the election deputies of oblast and municipality councils were elected and elections for city and town mayors were held.
- However, no elections were held in the currently occupied territories of Ukraine.

Why is the current conflict more aggressive than the earlier ones?

- There were similar scenes earlier this year but after U.S. diplomatic intervention, Moscow pulled back.
- This time, the Russian moves appear to be part of a larger strategy of force-projection across Russia's western perimeter, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

- Russia views Ukraine as a Western aircraft carrier parked just across southern Russia because of the U.S. influence on Ukraine.
- Russia's aggressiveness could have partly been driven by the assessment that the U.S. has strategically weakened after its Afghan withdrawal and its preoccupation with China's rise.
- Ukraine says an estimated 90,000 Russian troops have massed near the border which could be a prelude to another Russian invasion.

What is Russia's possible rationale?

- From the Russian perspective, the current 'military build-up' can be viewed as another round of display of a powerful and capable Russia.
- Russian President possesses enough diplomatic (and pragmatic) skills not to indulge in yet another geopolitical endeavour.
- Thus, this might entail serious repercussions from the international community.

Way forward

- Both countries do need support from the global community, but not in a military form.
- The only way forward is to seek a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. All the stakeholders in the on-going crisis should focus on establishing a constructive dialogue among them.
- There is thus a need for a platform (similarly to the **Minsk Agreements**). This should facilitate negotiation, mutual consensus and possible compromises, as well as engagement with mediators.

SECTION: 'C'

(PRELIMS)

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BUDDHIST STUPA IN ODISHA

CONTEXT:

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has identified a 1,300-year-old stupa, in the middle of a mining site in Odisha's Jajpur district from where Khondalite stones were supplied for the beautification project around the 12th Century Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri.

About:

- The stupa could be **4.5-metre tall** and initial assessment showed it may belong to **the 7th or 8th century**.
- The stupa found is said to be part of **Lalitgiri Buddhist site**.
- The ASI has asked to stop the mining activity in the area for excavation of **Khondalite stones**.

Khondalite stones were widely used in **ancient temple complexes**. The State government had come up with an ambitious plan to spend ₹3,208 crore under the **Augmentation of Basic Amenities and Development of Heritage and Architecture (ABADHA) scheme** in three years to transform Puri into a world heritage city using these stones.

Lalitgiri Buddhist site:

- Lalitgiri is one of the earliest Buddhist sites of Orissa shows the cultural continuity right from the post Mauryan period to 13th century A.D without any break.
- The Lalitgiri site had its continuation from **2nd century B.C to 14th century A.D.**
- The development of Buddhism in Lalitgiri could be known from the existing cave monuments such as three numbers of well-built monasteries, **Mahastupa, Chaitya, and a plethora of small stupas**.
- The ancient Mahastupa yielded bone Relic Caskets, wrapped in golden foil and one sealing revealed the name Chandraditya Mahavihara.
- It also encompasses Mahachaitya like Nagarjunkonda of Andhrapradesh and a series of well-built monasteries for the monks.
- Besides, sculptures, inscriptions of the **Kushana Empire, Gupta and Post-Gupta periods** indicate its patronage. The site has a continuous history of **1500 years**.
- The sculptures talk about the phases of Buddhism i.e **Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana**

Augmentation of Basic Amenities and Development of Heritage and Architecture (ABADHA) scheme:

- The project will include Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) building redevelopment, a 600-capacity Srimandir reception centre, Jagannath cultural centre, Badadanda heritage streetscape, beachfront development, Puri lake, Musa river revival plan, etc.

AURANGABAD TO SAMBHAJI NAGAR

CONTEXT:

Recently, Aurangabad, has rechristened Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar in view to break the Mughal Legacy and promote the Kings from India highlighting their brave deeds.

History of Aurangabad:

- The city, originally known as **Khadki**, was founded by **Malik Ambar ('Anbar)** in 1610.
- After the fall of the **Nizam Shāhī dynasty** in 1633, the city came under **Mughal rule**.
- It was later **renamed Aurangabad** after it became the headquarters of Aurangzeb during his viceroyalty over the Deccan.
- Aurangabad remained the headquarters of the independent **Nizams (rulers)**, but it declined when the capital was moved to Hyderabad in Hyderabad princely state.
- With the dissolution of the **princely state in 1948**, Aurangabad was included in Hyderabad state in newly independent India.
- It later became part of **Bombay state (1956–60)** before that state was divided into **Maharashtra and Gujarat**.

The Location:

- Aurangabad lies in the **state of Maharashtra**.
- Aurangabad District is located mainly in Godavari Basin and its some part towards North West of Tapi River Basin.
- This District's general down level is towards South and East and North West part comes in **Purna-Godavari river basin**.

Highlights of the City:

- Aurangabad is known for **its artistic silk fabrics**, particularly shawls.
- The seat of **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University (1958)**, it is a prominent educational centre, and several branch colleges are located there.
- The city is also a popular **tourist destination**, mainly the result of its proximity to the **Ellora and Ajanta cave temples**, both of which were designated **UNESCO World Heritage sites in 1983**.

Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj:

- Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj is a Maratha warrior king who was the son of the iconic ruler Shivaji Maharaj
- The Maratha kingdom had raised from scratch, built brick by brick by the sons of the Indian soil who wished to overthrow the powers that swore allegiance to descendants of **Turkish, Persian and Mongol aggressors**.
- Sambhaji Maharaj ruled for a short span of 9-10 years before his death at the hands of Aurangzeb but the Maratha subjects never forgot his sacrifice.
- Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj was the eldest son of **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** - the great Maratha warrior king.
- Shivaji Maharaj belonged to the **Bhonsle clan** and was born on **19th February 1627**.
- Shivaji Maharaj built the **Hindawi Swaraj** - the Self-rule of Indians as against that of the Mughals who identified themselves as descendants from Tamerlane of Mongolia and also of Turkic - Central Asian (Chagtai) bloodline.

Aurangzeb and links to the city:

- Aurangzeb was the third son of the emperor **Shah Jahān and Mumtaz Mahal**.

- He grew up as a serious-minded and devout youth, wedded to the Muslim orthodoxy of the day and free from the royal Mughal traits of sensuality and drunkenness.
- From **1636 Aurangzeb** held a number of important appointments, in all of which he distinguished himself.
- He commanded troops against the **Uzbeks and the Persians** with distinction (1646–47) and, as viceroy of the Deccan provinces in two terms (1636–44, 1654–58), reduced the two Muslim Deccan kingdoms to near-subjection.
- The first overt sign of change was the **reimposition of the jizya**, or poll tax, on **non-Muslims in 1679 (a tax that had been abolished by Akbar)**.
- This in turn was followed by a **Rajput revolt in 1680–81**, supported by Aurangzeb's third son, Akbar. Hindus still served the empire, but no longer with enthusiasm.
- The Deccan kingdoms of **Bijapur and Golconda** were conquered in 1686–87, but the insecurity that followed precipitated a long-incipient economic crisis, which in turn was deepened by warfare with the Marathas.

INDIA-BRITAIN EXCHANGE SCHEME

CONTEXT:

Ahead of the G-20 foreign ministers' meet in New Delhi, the external affairs minister announced **UK-India 2030 Roadmap for Young Professional scheme** and to also bolster the two countries' ties in defence, security, trade and investment.

Britain has also announced UK's **first Tech Envoy** to the Indo-Pacific region, who will boost ties with India as a priority.

The Young Professionals Scheme:

- Under the scheme, the U.K will offer about **3,000 degree-holding Indians** in the **18–30-year age** group places to work in the U.K. **for up to two years**.
- The scheme will commence in early 2023. Both India and UK will allow young professionals in their Countries to hold degree programs.
- India is the **first country** to benefit from such a scheme, highlighting the strength of the **UK-India Migration and Mobility Partnership** agreed upon last year.

- **Objective:** The Young Professionals Programme is a recruitment initiative aiming to improve geographical representation, and promote gender parity in the Organization at the international level.

India-UK ties on Skill development:

Education: Education is an important plank of the India-UK bilateral relationship. Over the last 10 years, the relationship has grown substantially with the introduction of bilateral mechanisms such as the India-UK Education Forum UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI).

Indian Students: UK has traditionally been a favourite destination for international students.

At present, there are approximately **20,000 Indian students** pursuing Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses in the UK.

Other Government Initiatives to attract International students:

- **HEFA (Higher Education Finance Agency)** is a welcome step in providing finance to premier educational institutions for the creation of high-quality infrastructure and innovation ecosystems.
- **Student Insurance Schemes:** Contrary to popular opinion, a considerable chunk of students who study abroad is not from wealthy families; they take expensive loans to finance their education.
 - The aspiration to secure better exposure and the future can render them prone to difficulties.
 - A mandatory student insurance scheme as well as responsibility for the welfare of students in the foreign country should be incorporated into agreements to secure the interests of students who also spend considerably in the host country.

FATF SUSPENDS RUSSIA'S MEMBERSHIP

CONTEXT:

Global financial crime watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) suspended Russia's membership for Ukraine war and violation of the organisation's principles.

About:

- FATF mentioned that Russia has done a gross **violation of the commitment** to international cooperation and mutual respect.

What are the Black List and Grey List?

Those are **two types** of lists that FATF maintains;

- **A blacklist** is given to the countries that FATF considers uncooperative tax havens. These countries are known as **Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs)**.
- **A Grey list** is a warning given to the country that it might come on the Black list.
 - But even when a country comes under a grey list it faces many problems like problems in getting loans Economic sanctions Reduction in trade.

- The FATF added South Africa to its "**grey list**" of countries under special scrutiny to implement standards to prevent money laundering and terrorism financing.
- It also took Morocco out of the grey list.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

- FATF members include **39 countries**, including the United States, India, China, Saudi Arabia as well as European countries such as **Britain, Germany and France and the EU** as such.
- **Ukraine** is not a member.
- It was established in July 1989 by a **Group of Seven (G-7) Summit** in Paris, initially to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
- Since its inception, the FATF has operated under a fixed life span, requiring a specific decision by its Ministers to continue.
- Its secretariat is housed administratively at the OECD.

Criteria for FATF membership:

- The **FATF-Style regional Bodies (FSRB)** should be a regional group consisting of at minimum **5 – 6 member jurisdictions**.
- The FSRB should be able to consider **membership and observership applications** of FATF members and observers, of other FSRBs, and of other FSRB members and observers that are active in its region and that otherwise meet the FSRBs membership or observership criteria.
- The members of the body should agree to implement the FATF Recommendations within a reasonable timeframe.

'FAB 4' CHIP GROUP

CONTEXT:

The U.S.-led "Fab 4" semiconductor alliance of Taiwan, the United States, Japan and South Korea held its first video meeting of senior officials to focus on supply chain resilience.

Background:

- The United States last September convened the first meeting of the working group, colloquially called "Fab 4" or "Chip 4", to discuss how to strengthen the semiconductor supply chain, after a global chip crunch caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

About:

- The meeting discussed setting up an early warning system to ensure a steady chip supply.
- The Taiwan representatives suggested that the Fab 4 should exchange information on different parts of the supply chain as early as possible.
- Taiwan and South Korea** are going to handle manufacturing issues, Japan will report on materials issues and the US will concentrate on market issues.

What is Fab 4 chip group?

- It is a **semiconductor alliance** of Taiwan, the United States, Japan and South Korea.
- The "Fab" in the name refers to a **shorthand industry expression** for the fabrication plants where chips, used in everything from **fridges and smartphones** to fighter jets, are made.
- The group's members are home to the **world's largest contract chip** maker **Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (2330.TW)**, South Korean memory chip giants.
- Samsung Electronics Co Ltd (005930.KS)** and **SK Hynix (000660.KS)**, and key Japanese suppliers of semiconductor materials and equipment.

Significance:

As important members of the **Indo-Pacific region**, the countries also play a key role in the global semiconductor industry, and have deep economic and trade relations with countries in the region.

Why is semiconductor industry important?

- A semiconductor is a substance that has specific electrical properties that enable it to serve as a

foundation for computers and other electronic devices.

Semiconductor Chips: Semiconductors are materials which have conductivity between conductors and insulators. They can be pure elements, **silicon or germanium or compounds; gallium, arsenide or cadmium selenide.**

Government Initiatives in India:

- India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** "will be set up Scheme for setting up of **Compound Semiconductors facilities.**
- Vedanta and Taiwanese chipmaker Foxconn** will set up a ₹1, 54,000 crore semiconductor plant in Gujarat.

NEUTRAL CITATION SYSTEM

CONTEXT:

The Chief Justice of India (CJI) has announced that the Supreme Court will adopt a "neutral citation system" for its judgments.

What is a "citation"?

- A case citation is essentially an identification tag for a judgment. Typically, it would contain a **reference number**, the **year of the decision**, the **name of the court** that delivered that judgment, and **shorthand for the journal publishing** the judgment.

What is a neutral citation?

- A neutral citation is a form of citation where courts assign a unique sequential number to each decision.
- This would **assign its own citation** — distinct from those given by traditional Law Reporters.
- Law Reporters are **periodicals or annual digests** that publish judgments, often with an editorial note to make it accessible for lawyers to refer to precedents.

Why is a neutral system excellent or necessary?

- Judgments mention citations while referring to precedents and often use citations from different Law Reporters.
- With **artificial intelligence (AI) enabling the translation of judgments and transcribing of court proceedings**, a uniform citation is necessary.
- Several High Courts** including Delhi High Court have started a neutral citation format.

MP'S VAN MITRA PORTAL AND FOREST RIGHTS CLAIMS

CONTEXT:

An activist working for the rights of the tribals with *JagritAdivasi Dalit Sangathan (JADS)* in Burhanpur Madhya Pradesh, during a field visit has highlighted the misuse of the Van Mitra portal — which was created to facilitate the review of rejected claims, has now become a tool to fraudulently reject claims of Tribals.

About the scenario:

- On February 13, 2019, in a matter pertaining to the constitutionality of the **Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA)**, the Supreme Court of India (SC) directed the states to **evict those FRA claimants** whose **Individual Forest Rights (IFR)** claims were rejected.
- The apex court had ordered the eviction of 1,191,273 tribals across 20 states of the country.

Van-Mitra Portal:

It is an online portal launched by Madhya Pradesh government in 2015.

Concerns highlighted:

- The individuals who file the claims through the **Van Mitra portal** are generally illiterate or have little formal schooling with no familiarity with the world of the internet.
- They approach the **MP Online kiosk operators** to help them fill up the application. These kiosk operators charge **200-Rs 500** to fill up their forms when the state government already pays them Rs.60 just to fill up the form to help the ST and OTFDs file the claims.
- Secondly, they **upload documents without properly** reading them, often mixing up different individuals' documents and printing out the receipt.

Role of Forest Rights Committee (FRC):

- The FRC is supposed to verify the claim and then ask for Gram Sabha's recommendation before forwarding it to the sub divisional level committee (SDLC).
- But what is happening on the ground is far from the set guidelines.

'ADOPT A HERITAGE' SCHEME

CONTEXT:

In a view to conserve the cultural heritage in the country, the government aims to include 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) for business in India.

Background:

- The President of India launched the **Adopt a Heritage Scheme** on World Tourism Day i.e., 27th September 2017.
- The scheme will allow **private and public sector corporations** to adopt most of India's top heritage sites and improve tourism in such sites.
- It is clarified that 'The Adopt a Heritage' is essentially a non-revenue generating project.

About the scheme:

- Private firms, companies, and public sector units** can enter into agreements with the Union Ministry of Culture to adopt and maintain **State-owned archaeological sites or monuments**.
- Businesses that enter such agreements are going to be known as **Monument Mitras**.
- The scheme can lead to the adoption of **500 protected sites** by August 15 2023, and the adoption of another 500 sites shortly thereafter.
- Fund allocation:** Businesses may use their Corporate Social Responsibility funds at select sites to construct and maintain ticket offices, restaurants, museums, interpretation centres, toilets, and walkways.
- The **Ministry of Tourism** has the power of termination of MoU of Monument Mitras in case of noncompliance of guidelines and expression of interest (EoI), or any other reason of non-performance.

NATIONAL SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME ON FISH DISEASES SCHEME

CONTEXT:

The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has launched schemes for Genetic improvement, diseases surveillance, Aquaculture and increasing fish species.

The Numbers:

- The West Coast produces 59% while the East Coast generates 41% of total marine fish.
- Gujarat, with 19% of the total marine fish production, is the leading marine fish producing State followed by Andhra Pradesh (16.4%) and Tamil Nadu (13.5%).
 - ▶ Andhra Pradesh (27.4%) and West Bengal (13.8%) combined produce nearly 41% of the country's total fish production.

About:

- The **three programmes** launched includes;
 - ▶ Genetic Improvement Programme of **Indian White Shrimp (Penaeus indicus)**,
 - ▶ National Surveillance Programme on Fish Diseases, launching of aquaculture insurance product and,
 - ▶ A Genetic Improvement Facility.
- **Need of the initiative:**
 - ▶ To strengthen the **farmer-based disease surveillance system**,
 - ▶ Disease cases in fishes can be reported easily,
 - ▶ For investigated and scientific support is provided to the farmers.

Status of fishing industry in India:

- India is the **third largest fish producing country** with a fish production of 14.73 million metric tonnes.
- India is **one of the largest exporters of farmed shrimps** which is around 7 lakh tonnes.

National Surveillance Programme for Aquatic Animal Diseases (NSPAAD):

- Government of India is implementing the **NSPAAD since 2013**.
- **Aim:** Scheme focuses on improving the farmer-based disease surveillance system. Thus the disease cases are reported immediately.
- Consequently, disease gets **investigated and scientific support** is provided to the farmers.
- **Department of Fisheries sanctioned the NSPAAD:** Phase-II under the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana** programme to continue the efforts with more intensity.
 - ▶ The phase-II will be implemented at **pan-India**.
- The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the **State Fisheries Departments** are anticipated to play a significant role in this **crucial national surveillance programme**.

The Genetic improvement program of Penaeus indicus (Indian white shrimp):

- Under the **Make in India flagship programme**, **ICAR-CIBA** has taken on the **genetic enhancement of P. indicus, the Indian white shrimp**, as a national priority.

The **shrimp farming sector** mostly depends on one exotic **Specific Pathogen Free stock** of Pacific white shrimp (*Penaeus vannamei*) species.

- Using indigenous feed, **Indicus Plus (35% Protein)**, CIBA has successfully **optimized breeding protocol** and showed cultural potential across various geographic locations in coastal states.
- Phase-I of the program is launched under the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** under the **Central sector scheme** to establish a National Genetic Improvement Facility for shrimp breeding.

The Genetic Improvement Facility:

- Genetic improvement of **aquaculture species** will provide promise in improving production.
- Strains of several species that grow faster, exhibit greater disease resistance, and have other more favourable characteristics for aquaculture have been produced through selective breeding.

WHIP IN PARLIAMENT**CONTEXT:**

Members of a house are bound by the 'whip', and must follow the whip as observed by the Supreme Court.

About Whip:

- In parliamentary jargon, a whip is a written directive **requiring party members to be present for crucial votes or to vote a certain way only**.
- The phrase comes from the traditional British method of "whipping in" legislators to toe the party line.
- To issue whips, parties designate a senior member from among their Parliamentary delegations. This member is called a chief whip, and he/ she is assisted by additional whips.
- In India, all parties can **issue whips to their members**.

Role of a whip:

- They try to ensure that their fellow political party

legislators attend voting sessions and vote according to their party's official policy.

Limitations of whip:

- There are some cases such as **Presidential elections** where whips cannot direct a Member of Parliament (MP) or Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) to vote in a particular fashion.

Violations of whips:

- The consequence for ignoring a whip differs depending on the nation. In the UK, an MP who disobeys the whip can be expelled from the party but still retain their House seat as an Independent.
- IN case of India, The anti-defection law allows the Speaker/ Chairperson to **disqualify such a member** who has gone against the whip.
 - The sole **exception** is when a directive is **opposed by more than a third of lawmakers**, essentially dividing the party.

FUGITIVE ECONOMIC OFFENDERS

CONTEXT:

India has called upon G20 countries to adopt multilateral action for faster extradition of 'fugitive economic offenders'.

About:

- India has urged for action against fugitive offenders during the first **Anti-corruption working group meeting** held in Gurugram.
- Economic offences have been a problem faced by many, especially when the offenders flee from the jurisdiction of the country.
- India has put in place **specialised legislation** in this regard, in the form of Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

Who are 'fugitive economic offender' (FEO)?

- FEO is defined as an individual against whom a **warrant of arrest** in relation to scheduled offence has been issued by any court in India and the **value of the offence is at least Rs. 100 crore**.
- The offender has **left the country** so as to avoid criminal prosecution; and refuses to return to face criminal prosecution.

Fugitive economic offenders act, 2018

- About:** It aims to seize the property of economic offenders who have fled the nation to avoid being prosecuted or who refuse to come back to face charges.
- Declaration of FEO:** A **special court** (established under the **PMLA, 2002**) may designate someone as a fugitive economic offender after hearing the application.
 - It has the authority to **seize any property**, whether it is located in India or outside, including **Benami properties** and **proceeds of crime**.
 - Upon confiscation, the **central government** will become the sole owner of the property and have all rights and titles (such as any charges on the property).
- Bar on Filing or Defending Civil Claims:** The Act allows any **civil court or tribunal to prohibit a declared fugitive economic offender** from **filing or defending any civil claim**.

RBI'S COIN VENDING MACHINES

CONTEXT:

RBI Governor stated that it would be launching a pilot project to assess the functioning of a QR-code based coin vending machine.

Key features:

- The central theme of the project is to **ease the accessibility to coins**.
- Instead of physically presenting banknotes, vending machines would **dispense coins** with the necessary amount being deducted from the customer's account through the **United Payments Interface (UPI)**.
- Customers would have the choice to withdraw coins in the necessary numbers and denominations.
- Implemented in:** The pilot is initially planned to be rolled out at **19 locations in 12 cities** across the country.

The machines are intended to be installed at public places such as **railway stations, shopping mall and marketplaces**.

Need of the initiative:

- It was observed that the currency being fed into the

machines (for coin exchange) were often found to be fake and could not be checked right at that point of time.

Significance:

- The proposed mechanism for coin dispensation would be a departure from the conventional machines which relied on banknotes for facilitating coin exchanges.
- It will eliminate the need for **physical tendering of banknotes** and their authentication.

Process of currency circulation India:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is India's **largest monetary institution**.
- RBI also prints new notes and circulates them across the country with the help of **Currency Chest** which further redistributes these notes in the economy through **ATMs and commercial banks**.
- In India, the RBI does the **job of printing all the notes** except notes of one rupee, but the responsibility of minting the coins of all denomination comes under the purview of Finance Ministry.
- Here it is worth to mention that Finance Ministry does not **distributes the coins** and one rupee notes in the economy. It is done by the RBI only.
- The most important work of the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** is to circulate new and old currency in the country.
- RBI collects the **old currency** through commercial banks and receives the **accumulated cash** from all the commercial banks.

IEA'S ANNUAL REPORT 2022

CONTEXT:

Recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has released its report for the year 2022, setting alarm for global carbon emitters.

Key findings of the report:

- Around 40% of all average human activity-related **methane emissions** come from the energy industry.
- The greenhouse gas is also released throughout the **drilling, extraction, and transportation** processes through leaks from valves and other equipment.
- By applying well-known procedures like **leak detection and repair programmes** and updating

leaky equipment, emissions in the oil and gas sector can be reduced by over 75%.

- Ultimately reducing 75 per cent of the **wastage of natural gas** could lower global temperature rise by nearly 0.1 degree Celsius by mid-century.
- **For industries:** The 80 per cent of the available options to curb the release of methane could be implemented by the fossil fuel industry at net zero cost.

About Methane:

- With only one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms, methane remains the most basic **hydrocarbon (CH₄)**. It is **flammable**, and is used as a **fuel** worldwide.
- As per UNEP For its first 20 years in the atmosphere, methane has a warming effect that is more than **80 times greater** than that of carbon dioxide.
- **Agricultural practises, coal mining, oil and gas systems, natural gas networks, and wastes** are some of the common sources of methane.
- Methane has a significant short-term impact on the rate of climate change because it is approximately 25 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere.

Initiatives to tackle Methane emissions:

- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** The NAPCC was established in 2008 with the goal of raising awareness of the threat posed by climate change and the means to counter it
- **'Harit Dhara' (HD):** The **Harit Dhara (HD)** anti-methanogenic feed supplement was created by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). It can increase milk output while reducing the methane emissions from cattle by 17 to 20%.
- **India Greenhouse Gas Program:** The India GHG Program is an industry-led voluntary framework to quantify and manage greenhouse gas emissions.
 - ▶ It is run by the non-profit organisation WRI India, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).
- **Bharat Stage-VI:** India changed its emission standards from **Bharat Stage-IV (BS-IV)** to Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI).
- **Global Methane pledge:** About 100 nations had joined forces in a voluntary pledge to reduce methane emissions by at least **30% from the levels in 2020 by 2030** at the Glasgow climate conference (UNFCCC COP 26) in 2021.

MULTILATERAL EXERCISE DESERT FLAG VIII

CONTEXT:

Five indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) along with a contingent of 110 Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel arrived at Al Dahfra airbase of United Arab Emirates (UAE) for participating in the multilateral Exercise Desert Flag VIII.

Background:

- In 2021, the defence ministry awarded a ₹48,000-crore contract to **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited** for 83 LCA Mk-1A jets for the IAF.
- The **first Mk-1A** aircraft will be delivered in February 2024, with the rest slated to join the combat fleet by 2029.
- The government gave its nod for developing the **LCA Mk-2**, a platform that will form an important element of future air combat.

About the exercise:

- Exercise **Desert Flag** is a multilateral air exercise in which Air Forces from **UAE, France, Kuwait, Australia, UK, Bahrain, Morocco, Spain, Republic of Korea, and USA** would also be participating.
- The exercise is scheduled from **February 27 to March 17**.
- **Aim:** To participate in **diverse fighter engagements** and learn from the best practices of various Air Forces.

This is the first occasion for **the LCA Tejas** to participate in an international flying exercise outside India

Light Combat Aircraft:

- The **Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)** programme was started by the **Government of India in 1984** when they established the **Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA)** to manage the LCA programme.
- It replaced the ageing **Mig 21 fighter planes**.
- **Designed by:**
 - Aeronautical Development Agency under the Department of Defence Research and Development.
- **Manufactured by:** State-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- Features:

- The lightest, smallest and tailless multi-role supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.
- Designed to carry a range of air-to-air, air-to-surface, precision-guided, weapons.
- Air to air refuelling capability.
- Maximum payload capacity of 4000 kg.
- It can attain the maximum speed of Mach 1.8.
- The range of the aircraft is 3,000km

Variants of Tejas:

- **Tejas Trainer:** 2-seater operational conversion trainer for training air force pilots.
- **LCA Navy:** Twin- and single-seat carrier-capable for the Indian Navy.
- **LCA Tejas Navy MK2:** This is phase 2 of the LCA Navy variant.
- **LCA Tejas Mk-1A:** This is an improvement over the **LCA Tejas Mk1** with a higher thrust engine.

ATACAMA LARGE MILLIMETRE ARRAY (ALMA) TELESCOPE

CONTEXT:

According to a science journal, the Atacama Large Millimetre/sub millimetre Array (ALMA) is set to get software and hardware upgrades that will help it collect much more data and produce sharper images than ever before.

Background:

- ALMA is fully functional since 2013.
- The radio telescope was **designed, planned and constructed** by the US's National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO), the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan (NAOJ) and the European Southern Observatory (ESO).
- It has helped astronomers make ground-breaking discoveries, including that of starburst galaxies and the dust formation inside **supernova 1987A**.

About ALMA:

- ALMA is a state-of-the-art telescope that studies celestial objects at millimetre and submillimetre wavelengths — they can penetrate through dust clouds and help astronomers examine dim and distant galaxies and stars out there.



- It also has **extraordinary sensitivity**, which allows it to detect even extremely faint radio signals.
- **Key features:**
 - ALMA is a radio telescope comprising **66 antennas** located in the **Atacama Desert of northern Chile**.
 - The most significant modernisation made to ALMA will be the **replacement of its correlator**, a supercomputer that combines the input from individual antennas and allows astronomers to produce highly detailed images of celestial objects.
 - ALMA is operated under a partnership among the United States, **16 countries in Europe, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Chile**.

Why is ALMA located in Chile's Atacama Desert?

- ALMA is situated at an **altitude of 16,570 feet** (5,050 metres) above sea level on the Chajnantor

plateau in Chile's Atacama Desert as the millimetre and submillimetre waves observed by it are very susceptible to atmospheric water vapour absorption on Earth.

- Moreover, the desert is the **driest place in the world**, meaning most of the nights here are clear of clouds and **free of light-distorting moisture** — making it a perfect location for examining the universe.

Recent discoveries:

- In 2013 it discovered **starburst galaxies** earlier in the universe's history than they were previously thought to have existed.
- ALMA provided detailed images of the **protoplanetary disc** surrounding **HL Tauri** — a very young T Tauri star in the constellation Taurus, approximately 450 light years from Earth.
- In 2015, the telescope helped scientists observe a phenomenon known as the **Einstein ring**, which occurs when light from a galaxy or star passes by a massive object en route to the Earth, in extraordinary detail.
- As part of the **Event Horizon Telescope project**, a large telescope array consisting of a **global network of radio telescopes**, it provided the first image of the **supermassive black hole** at the centre of our own Milky Way galaxy.

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Siang Uying Festival



Context: Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush attended the colourful Siang Uying Festival.

About:

- The colourful **Siang Uying Festival** – which is an important festival of the Adi community at **Boleng, Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The festival of Uying is celebrated to herald the season of cultivation, beginning of the Adi community's New Year, arrival of spring seasons as well as a great way to strengthen the bond among the community.
- In this festival, it is customary for all male members of a family to go on a hunting spree (open season) and stay in the jungles for one week.
- When they return home they come back with various kills such as **deers, birds, squirrels, fish etc.**
- The children perform "Yakjong" (house to house) wearing colorful traditional attire and bless the house where they perform.

Sant Sevalal Maharaj Jayanti



Context: The Union government has marked celebrations to commemorate the **284th birth anniversary** of **Santh Sevalal Maharaj** for the first time.

About:

- He was a spiritual and religious leader of the **Banjara community**, a nomadic community that has been declared a **Scheduled Tribe (ST)** in a few States of India.
- The **Samadhi Sthal** of Sant Sevalal Ji is situated in **Manora Taluka** of Washim District of Maharashtra at Pohradevi which is also known as '**Banjara Kashi**'.
- The jayanti was declared by **Ministry of Culture**.

Events organised:

- The events consist of cultural and dance programmes, performed along with an exhibition of **Banjara art** for two days from February 26 and 27.
- The celebrations are being organised under the aegis of the government's **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav** campaign to celebrate 75 years of India's independence.

The Banjara community:

- The Banjara community have been declared as ST in **five States** (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand),
- **Scheduled Caste** in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, and Other Backward Class (OBC) in Chhattisgarh, Daman and Diu, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand.

Kalyana Karnataka Utsav



Context: Kalaburagi city is all set to host a three-day *Kalyana Karnataka Utsav*.

About:

- Kalyana Karnataka Utsav, the first of its kind, began as a low-key affair in Kalaburagi with multiple cultural events.

Details of the event:

- The utsav is being organised by the **Kalyana Karnataka Region Development Board (KKRDB)**.
- It is a **three-day festival** with more than 10,000 people is expected to visit.
- Local artists from six **districts of Kalyana Karnataka** region and Bollywood and Sandalwood singers will perform in the cultural events.

Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC) portal



Context: The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** launched the **Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC) portal** under the IT Rules, 2021.

Background:

- The **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** were amended to require social media companies to respect all the rights accorded to the citizens under the Constitution, including in the **articles 14, 19 and 21**.
- It aims that **social media platforms** may now have to allow speech that is not allowed on their platforms, but are otherwise **legal to express in public**.

About:

- This portal will allow people who are dissatisfied with complaints to social media companies on content takedown requests, to be heard by one of **three Committees** constituted by the government.
- The website of the GACs is now accepting appeals from the public orders.

Marconi Prize 2023

Context: MIT professor **Hari Balakrishnan** wins 2023 Marconi Prize.

About:

- Dr. Balakrishnan is a professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**.
- He has been cited "for fundamental contributions to wired and wireless networking, mobile sensing, and distributed systems".



The Prize:

- The Marconi Prize is a top honour for computer scientists and is awarded by the **U.S.-based Marconi Foundation**.
- It is given to those who have made a significant contribution to increasing digital inclusivity through advanced information and communications technology.

Other awards:

- Dr. Balakrishnan has previously won the **Infosys Prize (2020)** and the **IEEE Koji Kobayashi Computers and Communications Award (2021)**.

India's first Municipal Bond Index



Context: The **NSE Indices Limited** has launched India's first ever **Municipal Bond Index**.

- Nifty India Municipal Bond Index was launched at a SEBI workshop on **Municipal Debt Securities** at Bengaluru.

About the Index:

- The **Nifty India Municipal Bond Index** tracks the performance of municipal bonds issued by Indian municipal corporations across maturities and having investment grade credit rating.
- The index includes **municipal bonds** issued as per the **Securities Exchange Board of India Issue and Listing of Municipal Debt Securities Regulations, 2015**.
- The index is computed using the **total return methodology** including price return and coupon return.
- The index has a base date of January 01, 2021, and a base value of 1000, which will be reviewed quarterly.
- It is expected to act as a benchmark for asset managers and be a reference index tracked by passive funds in the form of **Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs), index funds and structured products**.
- Presently, the index has **28 municipal bonds** issued by 10 issuers all having credit rating in the AA rating category.

Great Backyard Bird Count 2023

Context: The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) 2023 has been conducted across **35 States and Union Territories** from February 17-20.

About the event:

- India was among **190 countries** that participated in GBBC 2023, an annual event that brings bird enthusiasts, students and nature enthusiasts together for counting birds they see around the places where they live, work or study.

Great Backyard Bird Count

26th Annual • Feb 17–20, 2023

Count birds in your backyard, local park, or wherever you spot a bird, and submit your observations online.
birdcount.org



- Birdwatchers across 35 States and Union Territories uploaded more than 46,000 bird lists, making India take the second spot after the United States of America.

Key findings:

Bird Count India (BCI):

BCI is an informal partnership of organisations and groups working together to increase collective knowledge about bird distributions and populations.

- The preliminary report released more than **46,000 checklists** and a total of 1,067 avian species were uploaded on **e-Bird**, an online platform to record bird observations.
- West Bengal** reported the highest number of species with **489 species** followed by Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Karnataka followed with 426, 407, 397 and 371 species respectively.
- Tamil Nadu and Kerala took the **eighth and ninth spots** with 349 and 325 species.

India's first air-cooled condenser



Context: NTPC has commissioned **India's first air-cooled condenser** at **North Karanpura super critical thermal plant** in Jharkhand.

What is an Air cool condenser?

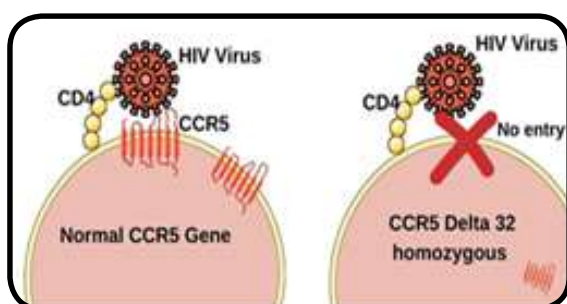
- An air cooled condenser (ACC) is a **direct dry cooling system** where steam is condensed inside air-cooled finned tubes.
- The cool ambient air flow outside the finned tubes is what removes heat and defines the functionality of an ACC.
- In air-cooled condensers, **condenser heat** is rejected directly to the ambient air.
- Thus, the condensing temperature is a function of the **ambient air dry-bulb** temperature.
- The obvious advantage of air-cooled condensers relative to water-cooled condensers is that **cooling water is not needed**.

About the Project:

- This project has been envisaged with **Air Cooled Condenser (ACC)** which has almost **1/3rd water footprint** as compared to a **conventional Water Cooled Condenser (WCC)**.
- This will help in water conservation.
- NTPC will further imbibe the **3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle)** for water **conservation and management** while carrying out its core business activity of power generation, it stated, adding that the company is a signatory to the prestigious **UN Global Compact's CEO Water Mandate**.

- The **North Karanpura plant** will have a total capacity of **1,980 MW**, 3 units of 660 MW each.
- This plant is based on one of the **most efficient supercritical technologies** and being a pit head plant (10 kilometres from coal source) will supply economic power to **Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, and Odisha**.

HIV-resistant mutation



Context: Recently a Dusseldorf patient has become have been "cured of HIV" achieved with a bone-marrow transplant from people carrying a specific HIV-resistant genetic mutation.

About:

- HIV (**Human Immunodeficiency Virus**) mainly attacks the CD4 immune cells in the human body, thereby reducing a person's ability to fight off secondary infections.
- The **CCR5 receptors** on the surface of the **CD4 immune cells** act as a doorway for the HIV virus.
- However, the **CCR5-delta 32 mutation** prevents these receptors used by the HIV virus from forming on the surface, effectively removing the doorway.
- Only 1 per cent of the people in the world carry two copies of the **CCR5-delta 32 mutation** – meaning they got it from both their parents – and another 20 per cent carry one copy of the mutation, mainly those of European descent.

India's first DNA vaccine for Dengue



Context: In a significant development in DNA vaccination research, **India's first** and only **DNA vaccine candidate for dengue** has shown promising results.

About:

- The world's first DNA vaccine—**ZyCoV-D**, developed by Ahmedabad-based pharmaceutical firm Zydus Cadila—was approved in 2021 for emergency use against COVID-19.
- Globally, DNA vaccines are being developed for diseases like tuberculosis and chikungunya.
- Some **19 DNA dengue vaccines** are being evaluated, but yet to reach final clinical trials.

How a DNA vaccine works?

- **DNA and RNA** vaccines use **genetic material** to deliver information to human cells and elicit an immune response.
- DNA vaccines are **safe, easy, affordable to produce**, and, unlike RNA vaccines, are stable at room temperature.
- These attributes make them more promising for rapidly **immunizing populations**, especially in resource-limited settings

INS Sindhukesari in Indonesia



Context: In line with the expanding **military cooperation with Southeast Asian nations**, an Indian Navy Kilo class conventional submarine, **INS Sindhukesari**, docked in **Jakarta, Indonesia**, for the first time from February 22 to 24, 2023.

- It travelled through the **Sunda Strait** and undertook the maiden docking in **Indonesia for Operational Turnaround (OTR)**.

What is INS Sindhukesari?

- **INS Sindhukesari** is part of the Russian-made **Sindhughosh-class submarines**.
 - The submarine was first commissioned to the **Indian Navy** in 1989 before being refitted in 2018.
- **Sindhughosh class submarines are the Kilo class diesel-electric submarines**. The submarines have a displacement of 3,000 tonnes.

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