

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 3
MARCH
2023

MAINS

GS- II

- ▣ **UK'S NEW IMMIGRATION LAW**
- ▣ **IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA DIPLOMATIC AGREEMENT**
- ▣ **AUKUS DEAL ON NUCLEAR SUBMARINE PROJECT**
- ▣ **GOVERNMENT NOTIFIES PMLA AMENDMENT RULES, 2023**
- ▣ **INCREASING AGE OF MARRIAGE FOR GIRLS**

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- ▣ **BHUTAN GRADUATED FROM THE 'LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRY' STATUS**
- ▣ **INDIA'S WHEAT OUTPUT IN 2023**
- ▣ **RBI ALLOWS BANKS OF OTHER NATIONS TO TRADE IN RUPEE**
- ▣ **THE UN HIGH SEAS TREATY DRAFTED**
- ▣ **CARBON FOOTPRINT FOR MARINE INDUSTRY**

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- ▣ **SCO Buddhist Heritage Meet**

- ▣ **Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement**

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- ▣ **Categorisation of terrorism on the basis of motivation is 'dangerous': India**

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

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

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SECTION: 'A'

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

UK'S NEW IMMIGRATION LAW

CONTEXT:

Prime Minister of United Kingdom (UK) set out details of a new law barring the entry of asylum seekers to the UK in small boats to control unauthorized migration.

Reason behind the Bill

- **Increasing migration:** The number of people arriving this way has increased in recent years, from the low hundreds before 2020 to 45,755 people in 2022.
- Tragically, more than 130 people have died or gone missing trying to cross the Channel since 2019.
- Of those who arrived safely, the vast majority (around 90%) have claimed **asylum**.

English Channel



- **English Channel**, is a narrow arm of the Atlantic Ocean separating the southern coast of England from the northern coast of France and tapering eastward to its junction with the North Sea at the **Strait of Dover**.

What is in the proposed plan?

- The new bill aims to deter people from crossing the Channel in small boats by preventing those that do so from claiming asylum in the UK, detaining and removing them from the country.
- Under the terms of the new agreement, the UK will fund a **new migrant detention center** in France and an **increased French police presence** in the **English Channel** to intercept attempted crossings via boat.
- The bill, if passed, would not only prevent asylum claims, it would shut undocumented immigrants out of the UK's modern slavery protections.

Opposition

- The proposed plan to deport to origin or remove asylum seekers arriving in the U.K. by boat to a third country has been sharply criticised by the **UN refugee agency, UNHCR**, and by **leaders of the European Union**.
- They have argued that the new U.K. policy is incompatible with **international law, specifically the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees**, and the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**.

Does the bill affect India?

- Indians are the **third-largest group of migrants** crossing into the UK over the English Channel on risky small boats so far this year, according to the UK Home Office.

Serbia is the **only country in Europe** that allowed Indians without any entry permits.

- Indians now account for about a fifth of **1,180 migrants** who have attempted the perilous crossing this year. Afghans were the most numerous, followed by Syrians.
- The arrangement of permitting Indians to enter Serbia **without a visa** ended on January 1 as part of Serbia's efforts to comply with EU visa requirements, resulting in some Indians travelling in small boats into the EU and then to the UK.
- So, definitely the new illegal immigration bill will impact the Indians who were entering to UK from sea routes, without any permits for taking asylum.

India-UK mobility agreement:

- India and UK signed a **landmark migration agreement**, which aims to benefit both countries from enhanced arrangements on migration issues.
- **Migration and mobility partnership:** It will include "covering movement of students and professionals as well as irregular migration keeping in view the UK's new skills based immigration policy".
- The agreement included a **young professionals scheme** to allow 3,000 young Indian professionals to come to the UK each year.
- The scheme was confirmed in November 2022 and India and the UK exchanged letters formalising the scheme in January 2023, with an implementation date to be announced.

Important Terms

- **Refugee:** Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection.

- ▶ The refugee definition can be found in the 1951 Convention and regional refugee instruments, as well as UNHCR's Statute.
- **Migrant:** An international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status.
- **Asylum-seeker:** An asylum-seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim.
- ▶ Seeking asylum is a human right.
- ▶ This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA DIPLOMATIC AGREEMENT

CONTEXT:

Recently, Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement to resume diplomatic relations which was brokered by China.

Tensions between Iran-Saudi Arabia:

- The feud between **Iran and Saudi Arabia** is a struggle for regional dominance and religious supremacy.
- The Middle East regional rivals, **Iran and Saudi Arabia** have had tense relationship **since 2016**.
- Over the years both countries have supported proxies across the region, including in **Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen**.
- Iran has supported **Shia Houthi** rebels in Yemen who forced out the Saudi-backed government in 2014, while Saudi Arabia has responded with **devastating air campaign** against the **Houthis** since the following year.
- In **January 2016**, Saudi Arabia cut its diplomatic ties with Iran after its embassy in Tehran was attacked by demonstrators following Riyadh's execution of a prominent Shia Muslim cleric.
- In 2019, **drones and missiles** struck major Saudi Arabian oil facilities, which were blamed on Iran causing further tense situation.
- Previously, there have been many attempts to broker a peace deal between the two countries but without any success.

Key-highlights of the Agreements:

- The agreement has been brokered by **China**.
- According to the agreement, Iran and Saudi Arabia will resume **diplomatic relations** after **7 years** and reopen embassies within two months.
- The countries will also **re-establish trade and security relations**.

Impacts on the region:	Impacts on India:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The agreement will complement the ongoing peace efforts in the region. • In September 2022, Israel, US and UAE signed Abraham Accords which paved the way for resumption of trade and diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE. • The latest agreement will lead to improved regional stability and security as well as increased cooperation among Persian Gulf nations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India has been walking tight a tight rope in balancing its ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia over the years. • Both of these countries are important for India for its trade, connectivity and energy security. • Normal trade and diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia will provide India an opportunity to increase its cooperation in the extended neighbourhood.

AUKUS DEAL ON NUCLEAR SUBMARINE PROJECT

CONTEXT:

The US, UK and Australia have unveiled details of their plan to create a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, aimed at countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Background:

- The **AUKUS pact** was signed on September 2021.
- In June 2022, US lawmakers introduced a bill called the '**Australia-US Submarine Officer Pipeline Act**' to train **Royal Australian Navy officers** in the operation of nuclear submarines.

The AUKUS pact:

- The **AUKUS — Australia, U.K., U.S.** — defense pact is a three-way cooperation program which essentially brings the former into the nuclear sub club while

extending Britain and America's reach into a **Pacific region** rapidly becoming the key global theater for the century to come.

- The **agreement** is aimed at preserving a "**free and open**" Indo Pacific.
- The core of AUKUS is a pledge by America and Britain to help Australia build at least eight nuclear-powered—but **not nuclear-armed**—attack submarines, which are known as **SSNs** (subs that carry intercontinental nuclear missiles are known as **SSBNs**, the "B" standing for "ballistic").
- **Important Pillars:**
 - **Pillar One:** The first and largest part of the agreement is the submarine contract, also known as **Pillar One**.
 - **Pillar Two:** The second AUKUS pillar will involve improving our defence capabilities with the assistance of the UK and the US in general.

Key features:

- The British work to replace their **Astute-class submarines** will be "leveraged" to continue design and development work on a brand-new submarine known as '**the SSN-AUKUS**'.
- Submarine, which will eventually be operated by the UK and Australia employing US combat systems, will be referred to as the '**AUKUS Class**'.
- **Funding mechanism:** Australia will also provide **\$3 billion** over the **next four years** to production lines in the US and the UK as part of its financial commitment, with the US receiving the majority of the funding for improvement.

What is a nuclear-powered submarine?

- A nuclear-powered submarine is powered by a nuclear reactor. But it is not a nuclear weapon.
- Every nuclear-powered submarine draws from its own miniature nuclear reactor on board, which is typically fuelled with uranium.
- For such a reactor to work, uranium has to be 'enriched' to contain 50 percent of a key isotope, uranium-235.
- Natural uranium consists of approximately 99.3 per cent of the isotope uranium-238 and only 0.7 per cent of uranium-235.
- The process of enrichment can be carried out through gaseous diffusion, gas centrifuges or laser isotope separation.
- Only six nations own and operate these submarines currently: China, France, India, Russia, the UK and the US.

Types of nuclear-powered submarines:

SSNs are the oldest type of **nuclear-powered submarines** and the first of these, the American-made Nautilus, was deployed in 1954 by the US.

- Nuclear-powered submarines can be divided into three broad categories:
 - the nuclear-powered fast-attack submarines or SSNs
 - the nuclear-powered ballistic submarines or SSBNs
 - the nuclear-powered cruise missile submarines or SSGNs

Impacts of the deal:

- **China's Concern:** China is delayed more by AUKUS than Quad and other Indo-Pacific arrangements for the following reasons,
 - **First**, AUKUS aims to protect the strategic interests of the partner in the region across the two seas and 38 countries.
 - **Second**, it is a message to China that the US will one day do the same to other countries in the region. Sharing military and critical skills such as cyber, artificial intelligence, and computing. It is a cause for concern in China, as these are the key areas in which China currently governs.
 - **Third**, AUKUS is a security group, unlike QUAD, which is a communication group.
 - **Fourth**, the Declaration marks a new decline in Australia-China relations. China is Australia's largest trading partner, with about US \$ 200 billion trading in two ways. But the relationship has been strained over the past few years.
- For these reasons alone, China called the **new AUKUS alliance** "extremely damaging to the peace and stability of the region".

What does the AUKUS Security Alliance mean in India?

India and the nuclear submarine industry:

- The Navy currently has **15 conventional submarines**-
- **Akula class SSN Chakra**, on a decade-long lease from Russia, has been returned recently, slightly ahead of schedule.
- India has already signed a deal for the lease of another such submarine and the project is underway.
- It does not have a **nuclear-powered conventional attack submarine**.

- According to Indian Observers, the partnership is very beneficial to India. As India has been at the forefront of uniting the unity of the Indo-Pacific countries. Benefits include,
 - **Develop Indian partners in the region:** AUKUS and the future US military base on Australian soil will support India's efforts to protect the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Provide much needed time in India to build naval capabilities:** In addition, AUKUS will buy some valuable time for India to strengthen its rural military capabilities.
 - **Develop India's ambitions for international relations:** Partnerships will allow India to demand more of its foreign policy and defence strategy.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFIES PMLA AMENDMENT RULES, 2023

CONTEXT:

The Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue, and Government of India notified the 2023 Amendment to the Prevention of Money-laundering (Maintenance of Records) Rules, 2005.

Key points:

- The amendment was done in lines with the **recommendations of FATF**.

There are **40 FATF recommendations** that cover **seven areas** and provide a framework of measures to help countries tackle **illicit financial flows** through laws, regulations and operational measures to ensure authorities can take action to **detect and disrupt financial flows that fuel crime and terrorism**.

- **Disclosure of beneficial owners:** The new rules prescribe disclosures of **beneficial owners** beyond the current requirement of KYC norms through documents such as registration certificates and PAN by **reporting entities such as financial institutions, banking companies or intermediaries**.
- **Lowering the threshold for identifying beneficial owners:** In line with existing provisions of **The Income-Tax Act and The Companies Act**, the amended rules have now lowered the threshold for identifying beneficial owners by reporting entities, where the client is acting on behalf of its beneficial owner.

- Lowering of threshold for beneficial ownership has been done to bring PMLA in line with **Companies Act and Income-tax Act**.
- Reporting entities are also required to **register details** of the client if it's a **non-profit organisation** on the **DARPAN portal of NITI Aayog**.
- **Meaning of non-profit organization:** The definition of **non-profit organisation** has been amended and linked to the definition of **charitable purpose provided under Section 2(15)** of the Income Tax Act, 1961.
- **Definition of Politically Exposed Persons (PEP):** PEP is referred to as individuals who have been entrusted with prominent public functions by a foreign country.
 - They include the **heads of States or Governments, senior politicians, senior government or judicial or military officers, senior executives of state-owned corporations and important political party officials**.
 - The move to define PEPs under PMLA is to bring uniformity with a 2008 circular of the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** for **KYC norms/anti-money laundering** standards for banks and financial institutions, which had defined PEPs in line with FATF norms.

Financial Action Task force (FATF):

- The FATF is the **global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog**.
- 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.
- 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**.

Significance:

- The amendments assume significance ahead of the proposed FATF assessment of India, which is expected to be undertaken later this year.

What is the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)?

- Prevention of Money Laundering Act is a criminal law of the Parliament of India passed in 2002 to prevent

money laundering and **confiscate property** derived from the laundered money.

Money Laundering:

- "People do crimes for money, and the money created by crimes gets converted into white money, this whole process or system is called **money laundering**."
- In simpler language, money laundering is a process of converting illegally earned money into legitimate money.

- PMLA became law and came into force on July 1, 2005.

Core objectives:

- Prevention and controlling money laundering
- Confiscation and seizing of property involved in or derived from money laundering
- Providing punishment to offenders
- Appointment of adjudicating authority and appellate tribunal concerning money laundering matters
- Maintaining records and putting obligations on financial institutions, banking companies and institutions
- Dealing with every issue related to money laundering

INCREASING AGE OF MARRIAGE FOR GIRLS

CONTEXT:

Under a recent development, the increase in minimum age of marriage for women to '21 years' as provisioned in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Amendment Bill, 2021 would come into effect two years after the Bill is 'notified' following its passage in Parliament.

Background:

- The **Ministry for Women and Child Development** set up a task force to look into the correlation between the age of marriage with issues of women's nutrition, prevalence of anemia, IMR, MMR and other social indices.
- The Bill, currently with the **Parliamentary Standing Committee**, envisions making the age of marriage of women at par with men.
- After examining all aspects pertaining to child marriages, including the recommendations given by the task force, the government has proposed implementation of the amendments after two years

from the date of notification, in order to provide ample time to citizens to prepare for this momentous reform.

Jaya Jaitly committee and its recommendations:

- **Aim:** The committee was made to look at the **feasibility of increasing the age of marriage** and its implication on women and child health, as well as how to increase access to education for women.
- **Recommendations Made:**
 - **Age of marriage to be increased:** The committee has recommended the age of marriage be increased to 21 years, on the basis of feedback they received from young adults from 16 universities across the country.
 - **Increasing access to schools and colleges for girls:** The committee also asked the government to look into increasing access to schools and colleges for girls, including their transportation to these institutes from far-flung areas.
 - **Sex education:** Skill and business training has also been recommended, as has sex education in schools.
 - **An awareness campaign:** Undertaken on a massive scale on the increase in age of marriage, and to encourage social acceptance of the new legislation, which they have said would be far more effective than coercive measures.

Need for raising legal age:

- **Gender-neutrality:** The government decided to re-examine the age of marriage for women for a number of reasons which includes gender-neutrality.
- **Impacts on overall health and mental wellbeing:** An early age of marriage, and consequent early pregnancies, also have impacts on nutritional levels of mothers and their children, and their overall health and mental wellbeing.
- **Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate:** It also has an impact on Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate.
- **Empowerment of women:** It affects the empowerment of women who are cut off from access to education and livelihood after an early marriage.

Issues:

- **Based on religion:** Personal laws of various religions that deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.
 - For Hindus, **The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
 - In Islam, the **marriage of a minor** who has attained puberty is considered valid.

- **Illegal marriages:** Experts have not been in favour of increasing the age of marriage for women on the basis that such legislation would push a large portion of the population into illegal marriages.
- **Child marriages:** Even with the legal age of marriage for women being kept at 18 years, child marriages continue in India and a decrease in such marriages has not been because of the existing law but because of increase in girl's education and employment opportunities.
- **Negatively impact marginalized communities:** Law would end up being coercive, and in particular negatively impact marginalized communities, such as the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, making them law-breakers.

Prohibition of Child Marriage Amendment Bill, 2021:

- The Bill amends the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** to increase the **minimum age of marriage of females to 21 years**. Further, the Bill will override any other law, custom, or practice.
- Under the 2006 Act, a person married below the minimum age may apply for annulment within two years of attaining majority (i.e., before 20 years of age).
- The Bill increases this to five years (i.e., 23 years of age).

Supreme Court's stand:

- The Supreme Court has ruled that marriage between adults is a fundamental right.

The question is whether **prohibiting marriage** for persons between 18 and 21 years is a reasonable restriction on their '**right to marry**'.

BHUTAN GRADUATED FROM THE 'LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRY' STATUS

CONTEXT:

Bhutan is going to become the seventh nation to 'graduate' from the United Nations' (UN) list of Least Developed Countries (LDC).

What is a Least Developed Country (LDC)?

- Least developed countries are the countries listed by the UN that exhibit the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development.

- Indicators: low levels of income, human capital and economic diversification, high levels of economic vulnerability, and a population that is disproportionately reliant on agriculture, natural resources, and primary commodities.
- The concept first originated in the late 1960s and was codified under UN resolution 2768.

- Currently, the **UN lists 46 countries** that qualify as LDCs, with six graduating between 1994 and 2020.
- Of those, **33 are from Africa**, nine from **Asia**, three from the **Pacific** and one from the **Caribbean**.

Criteria for LDC designation:

A country is classified as Least Developed if it meets three criteria:

- **Poverty:** is an adjustable criterion based on GNP per capita averaged over three years. As of 2018, a country's GNP per capita must be less than \$1,025 to be included on the list and more than \$1,230 to graduate from it.
- **Human resource shortage:** based on indicators of nutrition, health, education and adult literacy.
- **Financial vulnerability:** based on instability of agricultural production, instability of exports of goods and services, the economic importance of non-traditional activities, merchandise export concentration, a handicap of economic smallness, and the percentage of the population displaced by natural disasters.

How does a country get off the LDC list?

- **Bangladesh, Laos, and Nepal** were suggested for deletion from the list at the UN's triennial review of LDC nations in 2021.
- For a country to be removed from the **status of least developed country**, it must **meet 3 criteria**:
 - A nation must have a GNI per capita of at least USD 1,242 for two consecutive triennial reviews
 - Improved its human capital, by using measures like education, health, and nutrition, in order to achieve the human assets requirement.
 - Improved its ability to **withstand external economic shocks** like natural catastrophes or shifts in commodity prices in order to pass the economic vulnerability test.
- For these, country has to make concerted efforts to implement combination of policies, including promoting economic growth through investment in infrastructure, improving governance etc.

- **Global example:** For example, Botswana achieved graduation in 1994 primarily due to its strong economic performance driven by its diamond mining industry and investments in **education and infrastructure**.

How did Bhutan get off the LDC list?

- **Socio-economic development:** Bhutan has made remarkable progress on a variety of socio-economic metrics.
- **Increased national income:** Bhutan's economy increased more than eight times in the **last 20 years**. It has average annual growth rate of more than 7 per cent.
- **Reduced poverty:** percentage of people living in poverty decreased from 17.8 per cent in 2003 to 1.5 per cent in 2017.
- Percentage of people living below the national poverty line decreased from 23.2 per cent in 2007 to 8.2 per cent in 2017.
- **Higher exports:** Bhutan has mostly accomplished this by increasing exports of hydropower to India, which now accounts for 20 per cent of its economy.
- The nation also established **Brand Bhutan** in an effort to diversify exports while acknowledging the modest size of its local market.

Advantages of being an LDC:

- **Markets of developed countries:** LDCs also enjoy duty-free and quota-free (DFQF) access to the markets of developed countries. Thus, LDCs are not restricted by trade restrictions or tariffs when exporting their goods to wealthier nations
- **Credit on Special terms:** LDCs are also eligible for loans with special terms for development, which include loans with a lower interest rate and a longer repayment time than those given to other nations.

INDIA'S WHEAT OUTPUT IN 2023

CONTEXT:

Recently, the wheat crop were sown in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, during the first half of November 2022, which is in the initial stages already get affected by several ups and downs, has estimated an unpredictable situation due to increase in temperature.

Factors affecting the wheat production:

- **A matter of temperatures:** The maximum temperature for grain –filling shouldn't cross **37 degrees** before March-end.
- The crop is ready for harvest once the grains have ripened and moisture levels reduced to 12-13% by rising temperatures.
 - ▶ Last year, maximum temperatures breached the **35-degrees mark** in the northern plains by mid-March and 40 degrees before the month-end, which impacted the yields
- **Government procurement:** Government procurement was one of the reason behind the marginal dip in country's wheat output (from 109.59 MT in 2020-21 to 107mt in 2021-22)
- **Global price relief:** FAO food price index hit a historic high of 159.7 points in March 2022 during the Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
 - ▶ **However**, since then, FAO index has fallen every month to touch 129.8 points in February 2023.

Wheat cultivation in India:

- **Type of Crop:** Wheat is a Rabi Crop.
- **Temperature requirements:** Between **10-15°C** (Sowing time) and **21-26°C** (Ripening & Harvesting) with bright sunlight.
- **Rainfall or water requirement:** Around 75-100 cm.
- **Soil type:** Well-drained fertile loamy and clayey loamy.
- **Major producers:** Uttar Pradesh > Punjab > Madhya Pradesh > Haryana > Rajasthan.

How does it impact the farmers and consumers?

- The expected procurement would be able to meet the requirements of the public distribution system, midday meals and other regular welfare schemes, whose annual wheat requirement is around 26 MT.
- However, it will fall short in meeting the commitments of special schemes like the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) scheme**.
- Second, the government will not be able to **supply wheat to flour millers** and other bulk consumers to moderate open market prices during the lean months after October.
- Third, the **price of wheat** may rise further due to lower production and huge export demand. This may enhance food inflation in the country and also increase the **food subsidy bill** of the government that is likely to cross INR 2.8 lakh crore this fiscal.

RBI ALLOWS BANKS OF OTHER NATIONS TO TRADE IN RUPEE

CONTEXT:

Banks from 18 countries have been permitted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to open Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs) for settling payments in Indian rupees.

Background:

- The process of SVRAs began in **July 2022** when the RBI announced to put in place an additional arrangement for **invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports/imports in INR**.
- India has been supporting the **idea of trade in local currency** mainly to **boost exports**.

What are Special Vostro accounts?

- A **vostro account** is an account that domestic banks hold for foreign banks in the former's domestic currency.
- Domestic banks use it to provide international banking services to their clients who have global banking needs.
- It is an integral offshoot of correspondent banking that entails a bank (or an intermediary) to facilitate wire transfer, conduct business transactions, accept deposits and gather documents on behalf of the other bank.
- It helps domestic banks gain wider access to foreign financial markets and serve international clients without having to be physically present abroad.
- The SRVA is an additional arrangement to the existing system that uses freely convertible currencies and works as a complimentary system.

Significance:

- **To Facilitate Trade:** Indian exporters could get advance payments in INR from overseas clients and in the long-term promote INR as an international currency once the rupee settlement mechanism gains traction.

About the initiative:

- SVRAs could be set up by **banks of partner countries** by approaching **Authorised Dealer (AD)** banks in India that may get permission from the RBI after the due procedure.

- The RBI had granted approval to **domestic and foreign AD Banks** in 60 cases for opening SVRAs of banks from 18 nations.
- The countries includes **Botswana, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom**.
- Procedures for trade in INR have been **delineated by RBI** in the Circular (No 10 RBI/2022-2023/90 dated on 'International Trade Settlement in Indian rupees'.
- RBI has clarified matters related to operationalization of SVRAs **through FAQs**, which are available to banks, importers and exporters etc.

What is the eligibility criterion of banks?

- Authorised banks can **open multiple SRV accounts** for different banks from the same country.
- Further, **balances in the account** can be repatriated in **freely convertible currency and/or currency of the beneficiary partner country** depending on the **underlying transaction**, that is, for which the account was credited.
- **Domestic banks** must also put forth for perusal, financial parameters pertaining to the corresponding bank.

THE UN HIGH SEAS TREATY DRAFTED

CONTEXT:

Recently a draft international agreement referred to as the 'UN High Seas Treaty' was finalised to govern the conduct of governments in 'open seas'.

Background:

- The **UN general assembly** had decided to convene an **Intergovernmental Conference (IGC)** in December 2017 to elaborate on the text of the **legal instrument** for protecting biodiversity in areas **beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)**.
- The IGC held **four formal sessions** in September 2018, March 2019, August 2019 and March 2022.
- The ambition of the treaty is to reverse the current downward trend in biodiversity and protect marine life, while also guaranteeing safe access to international waters.
- The treaty will help conserve biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) that lie outside countries' 322-kilometre exclusive economic zones.

Need of a universal Law:

- The draft treaty was negotiated under the **United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS)** of 1982 which governs the **rights of countries regarding marine resources**.
- Till now, there was **no treaty** for conserving the open earth's oceans.
- The proposed treaty concerns the ocean existing

beyond the **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)** that lie from the coast of a country to about 200 nautical miles (or 370 km into the sea).

- Waters beyond that are known as '**open seas** 'or '**high seas**'.

Currently, it is estimated that **high or open seas** constitute **two-thirds of the world's oceans**, and only **one per cent** of them are **legally protected**.

**About the draft treaty:**

- The **54-page draft**, when it is **ratified by countries** (requiring them to also pass it in their own Parliaments), it will become **legally binding**.
- Also referred to as the '**Paris Agreement for the Ocean**', the treaty to deal with Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction.
- **Objective:** To ensure the **conservation and sustainable use** of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction through the Convention and to further **international cooperation**.
- Agreements on the **actions of parties** are to be taken **based on consensus**.

30 by 30 goals:

- This round of treaty negotiations comes on the heels of the adoption, by the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, of a target to protect 30% of Earth's land and coastal and marine areas by 2030.
- This agreement, known as 30 by 30, is intended to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to help put nature on a path to recovery.
- The new high seas treaty would enable protections that would contribute greatly to the 30 by 30 goal.

- The draft often mentions a **clearing-house mechanism** that will be a centralised platform to **enable parties to access, provide and give information on** activities taking place in relation to the agreement.

Key highlights of the Treaty:

- **The polluter-pays principle;** which is an important concept in environmental laws. It means those causing pollution in a particular region are responsible for its reduction, such as a factory owner having to compensate for air pollution.
- **Building ecosystems'** resilience against adverse effects of climate change and ocean acidification, and also maintaining and restoring ecosystem integrity.
- **Parties should take legislative, administrative or policy measures** with the aim of ensuring that traditional knowledge associated with marine genetic resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction held by Indigenous Peoples and local communities shall only be accessed with their free, prior and informed consent.
- **Full recognition of the special circumstances of Small Island** developing States and of least developed countries; Acknowledgement of the special interests and needs of landlocked developing countries.

- Parties are to promote **international cooperation in marine scientific research** and in the development and transfer of marine technology.

Who governs the High seas currently?

- At present, every country has the **right to access open seas**, resulting in large-scale drilling and trawling operations for catching fish and other animals for commercial purposes.
- A High Ambition Coalition, which now has more than **100 countries including India**, the US, and the UK, came about and put the focus on '**30×30**' goals – protecting **30 per cent** of the ocean by 2030.

CARBON FOOTPRINT FOR MARINE INDUSTRY

CONTEXT:

According to a research by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's (ICAR) Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), the carbon footprint of the marine fisheries sector in India is much lower than the global figure.

About the study:

- Objective:** This is the assessment of the **greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** from total activities in the sector, from pre-harvesting to marketing, by converting it into CO₂ equivalent.
- The study was presented at a review meeting of the fisheries component of the network research project **National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA)** of the ICAR held in Kochi.

Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI):

- CMFRI is the **largest marine fisheries research institute** in India.
- Established in:** 1947
- Headquarter:** Kochi, Kerala.
- Parent Body:** Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- CMFRI has developed a unique method for estimation of fishery catch called the "Stratified Multistage Random Sampling Method". With this methodology the Institute is maintaining the National Marine Fisheries Data Centre (NMFDC).

Key features:

- The study was conducted at **selected fishing centres** at all maritime states of the country,

dividing the fishing-related activities into three phases — **pre-harvesting, harvesting and post-harvesting**.

- The **NICRA research project** was aimed at studying the impact of climate change on agriculture including crops, livestock, horticulture and fisheries and to develop and promote climate resilient technologies, thereby addressing vulnerable areas of the country.
- Findings:**
 - At **1.32 tonnes of CO₂** (carbon dioxide) produced **per tonne of fish** in India.
 - India's carbon footprint is much lower than the global figure of more than **2 tonnes of carbon emission per tonne of fish**.
 - The CMFRI identified **cyclone proneness, flood proneness, shoreline changes, heat waves and sea level rise as major hazards** that could affect coastal lives.
 - Works on a **Coastal Climate Risk Atlas** that marks **areas of risk**, including **hazards and vulnerabilities** in all coastal districts in India, are in progress.

India's Marine sector:

- The importance and the role of the fisheries sector were officially recognized in India, through the enactment of the '**Indian Fisheries Act**' in **1897**.
- The **first Five-year plan** (1951—56) of the Government of India, drew the canvas of the Fisheries sector (both Marine and Inland Fisheries sector).
- It was followed by the creation of an independent Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying in 2019.

Highlights of the Fisheries Sector:

- The **culture of Pangassius and mono-sex Tilapia**, native catfishes, and freshwater prawns are picking up due to culture-based production being adopted at a faster pace.
- Three Major Carp (IMC) species**- Catla, Rohu, and Mrigal together contribute to the fish share in production.
- In the **shrimp segment**, most of the production comes from vannamei.
- Rainbow trout culture and rehabilitation of **native Mahaseer** in cold waters of the Himalayan corridor are promising ventures.

Government Policies:

- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY):**
 - PMMSY is a flagship scheme for focused and sustainable development of the fisheries sector in the country as a part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

- Under PMMSY, over a span of five years (FY 2020-25), an investment worth Rs 20,050 crore has been envisaged for the fisheries sector.
- PMMSY puts special emphasis on employment generation for SC, ST communities, and women.
- **Livelihood and nutritional support:**
 - It has been provided for 13.99 lakh (FY 2020 to
 - date) **socio-economically backward active traditional fishers' families** during the seasonal fishing ban/lean period.
 - For safety net, 31.89 lakh fishers have been insured under the Group Accidental Insurance Scheme (GAIS).
 - The insurance premium under GAIS is 100 percent borne by central and state governments.

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SECTION: 'B'

(SPECIALS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

CATEGORISATION OF TERRORISM ON THE BASIS OF MOTIVATION IS 'DANGEROUS': INDIA

CONTEXT:

- India has said that the tendency to categorise terrorism on the basis of motivations behind terrorist acts is "dangerous".
- India also asserted that all kinds of terror attacks, whether motivated by Islamophobia, anti-Sikh, anti-Buddhist or anti-Hindu prejudices, are condemnable.

About terrorism:

- Terrorism, by definition, is always a **crime**, but it can also be a **strategy in a war**. In the international community (including UN), terrorism has no legally binding, criminal law definition.
- For the sake of discussion, it can be described as; **according to the FBI**: "Terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

Challenges in Combating Terrorism:

- Terror Financing**: IMF and the World Bank estimate that criminals launder up to four trillion dollars annually, which is used to finance terrorism. Terrorists have also used charities and auxiliary remittance methods to conceal their financial movements.
- Use of Emerging Technology by Terrorists**: New advancements in computing and communications, such as widespread internet access, end-to-end encryption, and virtual private network (VPN), have allowed more radicalised people around the world to carry out new kinds of operations, raising the threat.
- Politicization of Terrorism Countermeasures**: To varying degrees, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5) have used their veto power to block efforts to identify terrorists.
- Terrorism through social networking**: Terrorist networks and their "ideological fellow-travelers" now have powerful tools at their disposal in the form of social media platforms.

Framework for Combating Terrorism in India:

- India recently hosted a special meeting of the UNSC's

Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC), with theme of 'Countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes'.

- India also hosted the meeting of "**No Money For Terror**", which was initiative of the **French government**, to specifically focus on **cooperation between countries to choke terror funding**.
- In August 2019, the **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967** was revised to include the ability to label individuals as terrorists.
- National Investigation Agency** is the lead law enforcement investigative agency to combat terrorism.
 - The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act of 2008 has been **amended** by the Indian Parliament to give NIA the ability to investigate terrorism cases overseas.

Way Forward:

- Re-energizing the Global Counter-Terrorism Agenda**: It is essential to re-energize the global counter-terrorism agenda by highlighting the necessity of cooperation and limiting the P5's veto power over the identification of terrorists globally.
- Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)**: In 1986, India proposed a draft document on Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN. However, it is yet to be adopted by the UNGA. It should be implemented in letter and spirit.
- Curbing Terror Funding**: Strengthened laws that mandate due diligence on clients and the reporting of suspicious transactions are needed to stop the funding of terrorism.

SECTION: 'C'

(PRELIMS)

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SCO BUDDHIST HERITAGE MEET

CONTEXT:

India hosted the SCO Tourism Ministers' meeting in Varanasi, designated as the first cultural capital of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

About the event:

- The event is a first of its kind, under India's leadership of SCO (for a period of one-year, from 17 September 2022 until September 2023).
- It brought together **Central Asian, East Asian, South Asian and Arab countries** on a common platform to discuss "Shared Buddhist Heritage".
- **Organized by:** Ministry of Culture, Ministry of External Affairs, and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC-as a grantee body of the Ministry of Culture).
- **Aim:** to re-establish trans-cultural links, seek out commonalities, between Buddhist art of Central Asia, art styles, archaeological sites and antiquity in various museums' collections of the SCO countries.

About Buddhism

- Buddhism is a **non-theistic religion** (no belief in a creator god), also considered a philosophy and a moral discipline, originating in India in the **6th and 5th centuries BCE**.
- It was founded by the sage **Siddhartha Gautama** (the Buddha I. c. 563 - c. 483 BCE) who had been a Hindu prince.
- It remained a relatively minor school until the reign of **Ashoka the Great (268-232 BCE) of the Mauryan Empire (322-185 BCE)** who embraced and spread the belief, not only throughout India, but through Central and Southeast Asia.

Connection of SCO and Buddhism:

- Several member states of SCO, such as **India, China, Central Asian Republics** and even **Russia** have Buddhist heritage.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO):

- The SCO comprises **China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan** as member-states.
- It has **observer-states** namely as **Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia**.

- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Nepal are **SCO dialogue partners**. Of these, Buddhism is among the dominant philosophies in countries such as **China, Mongolia, Nepal and Cambodia**.

- Buddhist heritage can still be found in countries such as **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan**, where **ancient ruins, art, and artefacts bear witness** to the religion's former prominence.

LANDSLIDE ATLAS OF INDIA

CONTEXT:

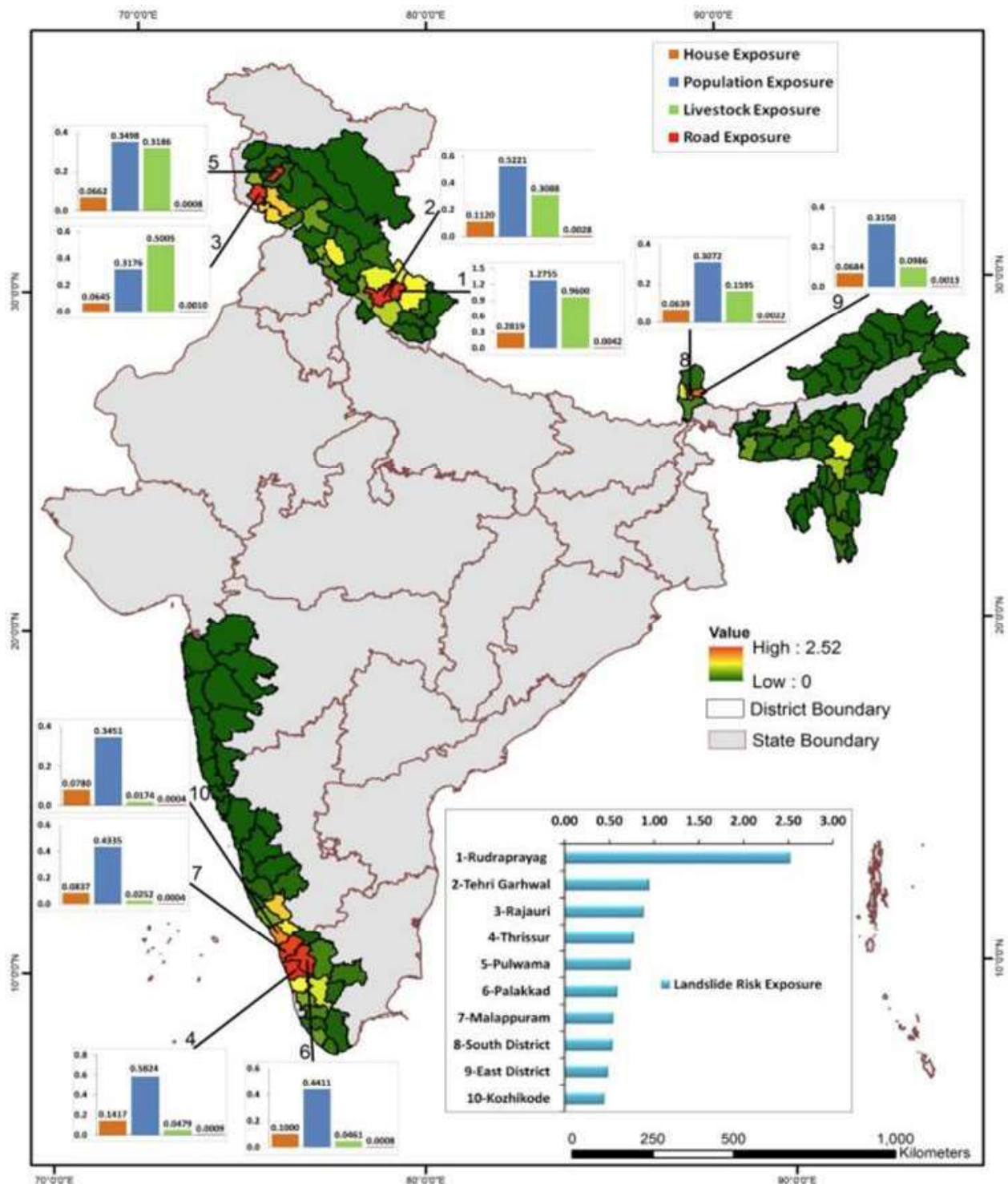
According to the India Meteorological Department's Statement of Climate of India 2022, heavy rain, floods and landslides claimed 835 lives in the country in the year 2022.

About Landslides:

- Landslides are natural disasters occurring mainly in mountainous terrains where there are conducive conditions of **soil, rock, geology and slope**.
- A sudden movement of rock, boulders, earth or debris down a slope is termed as a landslide.
- **Classification:** Landslides are broadly classified based on the;
 - type of materials involved (rock, debris, soil, loose mud)
 - type of movement of the material (fall, topple, slide, rotational slide or translational slide)
 - type of flow of the material
- Another category is of landslides that spread laterally. Landslides mapped in the ISRO atlas are mainly event-based and season-based.

What causes landslides?

- **Natural factors:** heavy rainfall, earthquakes, snow melting and undercutting of slopes due to flooding.
- **Anthropogenic factors:** excavation, cutting of hills and trees, excessive infrastructure development, and overgrazing by cattle.
- **Other influential factors:** Some of the main factors that influence landslides are lithology, geological structures like faults, hill slopes, drainage, geomorphology, land use and land cover, soil texture and depth, and weathering of rocks.



Proneness of India to landslides:

- India is considered among the **top five landslide-prone countries globally**. In India, at least one death per **100 sq. km** is reported in a year due to a landslide event.
 - Himalayas and the Western Ghats** remaining highly vulnerable because rainfall variability pattern is the single biggest cause for landslides.
 - North-Eastern states:** Nearly half of the country's landslide-prone area (0.18 sq.km) is located in the states of **Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland**.

SHIFTING CAPITAL FROM JAKARTA TO BORNEO

CONTEXT:

Recently, Indonesian government authorities unveiled the site of the country's new capital, from Jakarta to Borneo.

Key-highlights:

- The proposed location—near the regional cities of **Balikpapan and Samarinda**—is an area at "minimal" risk of natural disasters.

- Borneo is a large island in Southeast Asia that is divided among three countries: **Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei**.
- Borneo is the third largest island in the world, after **Greenland and New Guinea**.

About Jakarta (the Indonesian Island):

- Jakarta is the **largest city** and **capital of Indonesia**.
- The city lies on the **northwest coast of Java** at the mouth of the **Ciliwung (Liwung River)**, on Jakarta Bay (an embayment of the Java Sea).
- It is coextensive with the metropolitan district of **Greater Jakarta** (Jakarta Raya).
- Jakarta is home to about **10 million people** and three times that number in the greater metropolitan area.



Problems surrounding the city:

- Jakarta lies on a **low, flat alluvial plain** with historically extensive swampy areas.
- It is easily flooded during the **rainy season**.
- The **draining of swamps** for building purposes and the continuous decrease of upland forest vegetation has increased the **danger of floods**.
- With such an excess of water in the soil, Jakarta has a shortage of clean drinking water, for which there is increasing demand.

The area is **quite fertile** for fruit and other horticulture, as most of the soil is of **old volcanic origin**.

Why is government planning to the change the capital?

- **Sinking land:** Jakarta is congested, polluted, prone to earthquakes, and rapidly sinking into the **Java Sea**.
 - It has been described as the **world's most rapidly sinking city** and it is estimated that **one-third** of the city could be **submerged by 2050**.
- **Causes:** The main cause is **uncontrolled ground water extraction**, but it has been exacerbated by the rising Java Sea due to climate change.

INDIA, US INK PACT IN SEMICONDUCTOR SECTOR

CONTEXT:

India and the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to create a semiconductor sub-committee under the Commercial Dialogue between the U.S. Department of Commerce and India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Ministry of Commerce.

Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET):

- **Launched in:** 2022
- The **Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)** is an inter-governmental initiative between the United States and India.
- **Objective:** to elevate and expand strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between the country's governments, businesses and academic institutions.

About the semiconductor sub-committee:

- The semiconductor **sub-committee** would be led by the;
 - **Department of Commerce** for the **US side**
 - **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** and **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** for the **Indian side**
- The committee will convene its first engagement in mid-year to review recommendations from the joint industry-led task force launched in connection with the **iCET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies)**.

Need of the move:

- **Objective:** Its objective is to reduce their dependency on **China and Taiwan**.

China-Taiwan's dominance & tussle:

- Taiwan is home to some of the world's **leading semiconductor manufacturers**.
- China, as the world's **largest market for semiconductor products**.
- According to reports, China has sanctioned USD 140 billion to boost domestic chip manufacturing to overcome the US export restrictions.
- However, the **China-Taiwan semiconductor war** has started which has significant implications for the global tech industry.

- China claims Taiwan to be part of its territory and has been looking for "reunification". The relations between the two countries appear to have deteriorated sharply.

Important missions in India & US to promote semiconductor industry

- **US's CHIPS and Science Act:** The **CHIPS and Science Act** was signed by President Joe Biden in 2022 to boost funding for the American semiconductor industry.
- **India's Semiconductor Mission:** The programme aims to provide financial support to companies investing in semiconductors, display manufacturing and design ecosystem.
- Indian government has also approved an Rs.76,000 crore-scheme to boost semiconductor and display manufacturing in the country in a bid to position India as a global hub for hi-tech production and attract large chip makers.
 - Incentives have been lined up for companies engaged in silicon semiconductor fabs, display fabs, compound semiconductors, silicon photonics, sensor fabs, and semiconductor packaging and semiconductor design.

Budget 2023:

The semiconductor development programme of the government has been given a budget estimate of Rs 3,000 crore from the Rs.200 crore in the revised estimate last year. PLI scheme for large scale electronic manufacturing also received a whopping over Rs.4,000 crore estimates.

LAWS FOR ANTIQUITIES IN INDIA

CONTEXT:

In an investigation by International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and Finance, it has been found that the catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, includes at least 77 items with links to Subhash Kapoor, who is serving a 10-year jail term in Tamil Nadu for smuggling antiquities.

What is an antiquity?

- The **Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972** defined "antiquity" as "**any coin, sculpture, painting, epigraph or other work of art or craftsmanship**; any article, object or thing detached from a **building or**

cave; any article, object or thing illustrative of **science, art, crafts, literature, religion, customs, morals or politics** in bygone ages; any article, object or thing of **historical interest** that has been in existence for not less than **'one hundred years'**.

For **manuscript, record or other document** which is of **scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value**, this duration is not less than **'seventy-five years'**.

What do Indian laws say?

- In India, **Item-67** of the Union List, **Item-12** of the State List, and **Item-40** of the Concurrent List of the Constitution deal with **the country's heritage**.

Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 (AATA):

- **The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 (AATA)** was implemented from April 1, 1976.
- **The Act states**, "It shall not be lawful for any person, other than the Central Government or any authority or agency authorised by the Central Government in this behalf, to export any antiquity or art treasure."
- No person shall, himself or by any other person on his behalf, carry on the business of selling or offering to sell any antiquity except under and in accordance with the **terms and conditions of a licence**.
- This licence is granted by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**.

What is 'provenance' of an antiquity?

"Provenance includes the **list of all owners** from the time the object **left its maker's possession** to the time it was acquired by the current owner."

Can India bring back antiquities?

- There are **three categories** to take note of:
 - Antiquities taken out of **India pre-independence**;
 - Those which were taken out since independence **until March 1976**, i.e. before the implementation of AATA; and
 - Antiquities taken out of the country **since April 1976**.
- For items in the first two categories, requests have to be raised **bilaterally or on international fora**.
 - For instance, the **Maharashtra government** on November 10, 2022 announced it was working to bring back the sword of **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** from London.
 - This sword was given to Edward, the **Prince of Wales** (the later King Edward VII) by **Shivaji IV in 1875-76**.

- Several antiquities, from **Vagdevi of Dhar (MP)**, to the Kohinoor diamond, to Amaravati marbles to the Sultanganj Buddha to antiquities related to Rani Laxmibai and Tipu Sultan, are currently abroad.
- Antiquities in the **second and third categories** can be retrieved easily by **raising an issue bilaterally** with **proof of ownership** and with the help of the **UNESCO convention**.

UNESCO Convention:

- The **UNESCO 1970 Convention** is based on **"the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property defined "cultural property" as the property designated by countries having "importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science."**
- The Declaration further said that "the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property is one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the **cultural heritage of the countries** of origin of such property and that **international co-operation constitutes** one of the most efficient means of protecting each **country's cultural property**."

SUSPENSION OF OPERATIONS (SoO) AGREEMENT

CONTEXT:

The State government of Manipur has decided to **withdraw from the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement** with two hill-based tribal militant groups (**Kuki and Zoumi**), alleging they were **"influencing agitation among forest encroachers"**.

Background

- The steps were taken in view of the violent incidents that happened in **Kangpokpi district** during a **protest rally** organised against **Section 144**. Many civilians and police personnel were injured in the ding dong running battles at several places.

Section 144:

- **Section 144** of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973 authorises the **Executive Magistrate** of any state or territory to **issue an order to prohibit** the assembly of **four or more people** in an area.
- According to the law, every member of such **'unlawful assembly'** can be booked for engaging in rioting.

- The **protest rally** was influenced by the two groups, **Kuki National Army (KNA)** and **Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)**.

What is the matter?

- The recent protests were against the expulsion of residents that some groups claim are "illegal immigrants from Myanmar, Nepal, and Bangladesh".
- The crisis has been fuelled by long-standing tensions between the ethnic Meitei or non-tribals in Imphal valley and Kuki tribal communities living in the hills, as well as growing numbers of refugees fleeing counterinsurgency operations conducted by the junta in Myanmar.
- Many of these refugees belong to the same ethnic group, the **Kuki-Chin-Zomi-Mizo tribe** that live in the hills of Manipur.
- The districts of **Kangpokpi, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, Chandel, Ukhrul and Senapati** are notified as "hill districts" in Manipur.
 - The ethnic Kuki population in Manipur is about 30 per cent of the 28.5 lakh population, according to the 2011 Census.
- Leaders of the hills communities have alleged the eviction drive is targeting legitimate residents of the state.

What is the Suspension of Operations pact?

- The **SoO pact** was signed on **August 22, 2008**.
- **Objective:** For initiating political dialogue with the militant groups.
- **Reason:** The **Kuki outfits** who were initially demanding a **separate Kuki state** have come down to a '**Kukiland territorial council**', which would have financial and administrative powers independent of the Manipur Assembly and government.

There are nearly **30 Kuki insurgent groups** in Manipur, of which 25 are under **tripartite Suspension of Operations (SoO)** with the Government of India and the state.

- **Time-period:** The duration of the **Suspension of Operation agreement** is one year, it is extendable according to the progress of its implementation.
- **Implementation:** To oversee the effective implementation of the SoO pact, a committee called the **Joint Monitoring Group (JMG)**, with representatives from all the signatories, has been formed.
- **Signatories of the agreement:**
 - The signatories of UPF and KNO shall abide by the Constitution of India, the laws of the land and the territorial integrity of Manipur.

- They are prohibited from committing all kinds of atrocities, extortion, among others.

◦ Provisions of the agreement:

- The **militant cadres** are to be confined in designated camps identified by the Government.
- Arms are deposited in a safe room under a double-locking system.
- The groups are given arms **only to guard** their camps and protect their leaders.
- As a rehabilitation package, the UG cadres living in the designated camps are given a monthly stipend of Rs.5000.
- Financial assistance is also being provided to maintain the designated camps.

INDIA'S INCREASE IN PETROLEUM PRODUCT EXPORTS TO EU

CONTEXT:

India's petroleum product exports to the European Union (EU) have grown notably over the past few months as the region is suffering from no supplies of refined products from Russia, due to the war in Ukraine.

About:

- India's petroleum product exports to the **EU rose 20.4 per cent year** on year in April-January to 11.6 million tonnes.
- The trend is significant as the global oil markets affected from Russia ban on supplies; countries like India are helping maintain a demand-supply balance, while preventing extreme price shocks.
- The EU does not want to buy crude as well as refined fuels and products from Russia.
- Countries like India, which is a major oil refiner, are playing their part in bridging the gap by buying Russian oil on one hand, and increasing the supply of refined products to the EU on the other.

The term does **not include naphtha-type jet fuel, kerosene-type jet fuel, or a petroleum product destined for use in chemical manufacturing or feedstock of that manufacturing or fuel sold** to vessels engaged in interstate or foreign commerce.

What are petroleum products?

- Petroleum product means products that are obtained from **distilling and processing crude oil** and that is capable of being used as a fuel for the propulsion of a **motor vehicle or aircraft**, including motor gasoline, gasohol, other **alcohol-blended fuels**, **aviation gasoline**, **kerosene**, **distillate fuel oil** and **number 1 and number 2 diesels**.

India Petroleum products industry:

- India is a major refiner with an **annual refining capacity** of about **250 million tonnes**.
- While it is also one of the **top consumers of crude oil**, India's refining capacity is higher than its domestic demand, making the country a net **exporter of petroleum products**.
- Indian refiners, particularly **export-oriented private sector** players **Reliance Industries and Nayara Energy**, stand to gain from the West's punitive action against the Russian oil and gas sector.

H3N2 INFLUENZA VIRUS

CONTEXT:

The H3N2 virus has recently been gaining traction as the number of people contracting the seasonal flu-like virus has increased in India.

What is H3N2 Virus?

- Influenza is a **viral disease**. It is caused by **Orthomyxovirus (influenza virus) pathogen**.
- The four types of influenza viruses that cause the contagious illness known as the **flu are A, B, C, and D**.
- H3N2 is a subtype of virus in the **classification 'A'**.
- The virus causes **respiratory infection** and can infect **birds and mammals**.
- According to the **United States' Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**, H3N2 caused the 1968 flu pandemic that led to the death of around one million people globally.
- Symptoms:** Cough, runny or congested nose, sore throat, headache, body aches and pains, fever, chills, fatigue, diarrhoea, vomiting
- Vaccine:** flu vaccine reduces the risk of flu illness in the general population **by between 40 and 60 percent**.
- Prevention:** Washing hands before eating or touching your **face, nose or mouth, carrying pocket sanitiser**, and avoiding people already infected with the virus or any other seasonal flu are some of the steps to prevent from infectious disease.

MAIA MISSION

CONTEXT:

NASA and the Italian Space Agency are partnering on the MAIA mission which will use data from an Earth observation satellite to help scientists find correlations between air pollution and health problems in major cities across the world including New Delhi.

About:

- MAIA stands for the **Multi-Angle Imager for Aerosols missions**.
- Aim:** The joint mission between the **two national space agencies** will investigate the health impacts of air pollution in the world's most populated cities.
- Significance:**
 - MAIA is the first mission by the agency whose primary goal is to benefit societal health. Epidemiologists and public health researchers will be directly working on the development of a satellite mission.

Key features:

- The MAIA observatory, which is set to launch before the **end of 2024** will consist of the **PLATiNO-2 satellite**, which will be provided by ASI, and a science instrument that will be built at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL).
- The MAIA mission will **collect and analyse data** from the observatory, sensors on the **ground and atmospheric models**.

GPT-4 VS CHATGPT

CONTEXT:

GPT-4 is a large multimodal model created by OpenAI and announced on March 14, 2023.

What is GPT-4?

- GPT-4 is "multimodal" created by OpenAI, which means it can generate content from both image and text prompts.
- Multimodal models can encompass more than just text and also accepts **images as input**.
- Meanwhile, **GPT-3 and GPT-3.5** only operated in one modality, text, meaning users could only ask questions by typing them out.

- GPT-4 is also capable of handling over **25,000 words of text**, opening up a greater number of use cases that now also include long-form content creation, document search and analysis, and extended conversations.

ChatGPT:

- ChatGPT is a '**conversational**' AI and will answer queries just like a human would.
- It can answer follow-up questions.
- It can also "**admit its mistakes**"
- It can challenge incorrect premises and reject inappropriate requests.
- It is being seen as a replacement for much of the daily mundane writing, from an email to even college-style essays.

- **Developed by:** OpenAI, a research, and development firm was founded as a non-profit in 2015.
- **Language Used:** It has used the GPT 3.5 series of language learning models (LLM).
- GPT stands for **Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3**.
- It relies on deep learning techniques to produce human-like text based on inputs.

Issues:

- ChatGPT's GPT-3.5 was limited to textual input and output, meaning they could only read and write.
- ChatGPT could process 8,000 words at a time.
- ChatGPT's GPT-3.5 model could handle 4,096 tokens.

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(SHORT NEWS)

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Doha Political Declaration

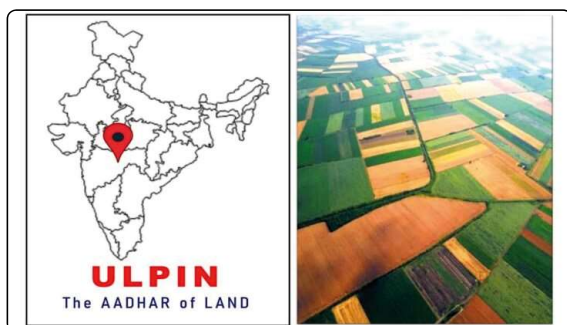


The **Fifth United Nations Conference** on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) concluded with adoption of the '**Doha Political Declaration**' by the world leaders.

About:

- **Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)** is a 10-year plan to put the world's 46 most vulnerable countries back on track to achieving the UN-mandated **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**.
- The declaration made by the head of the states is a key outcome of the second part of LDC5 conference held under the theme "From Potential to Prosperity" **at Qatar from March 5-9, 2023**.
- It was adopted a year after the text of DPoA for the Decade (2022-2031) was agreed upon during the **first part of the LDC5** conference on March 17, 2022 in New York.
- DPoA (2022-2031) consisted of six key focus areas including:
 - Eradicating poverty,
 - Leveraging the potential of science and technology to fight against multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the SDGs,
 - Addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovering from COVID-19 pandemic and
 - Building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development.

Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) or Bhu-Aadhar



Department of Land Resources organized the National Conference - **Bhumi Samvaad IV** on implementation of Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) or **Bhu-Aadhaar**.

About the conference:

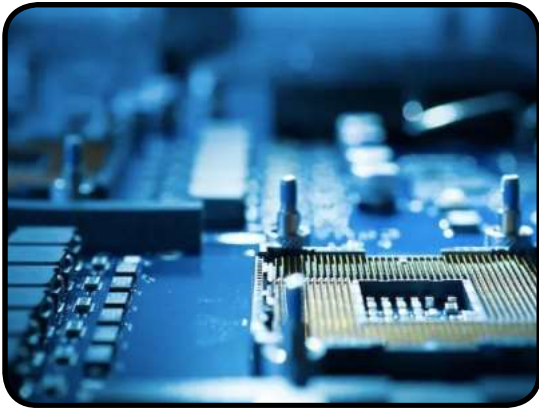
- **The theme of the National Conference is** - "Digitizing and Geo-Referencing INDIA with Bhu-Aadhaar (ULPIN)".
- This conference is being organized under **Bhumi-Samvaad series** of Dialogues and Deliberations of Land Administration and Governance in the country.
- It is the **4th such conference** with States/ UTs, Ministries and Departments, other stakeholders like Geospatial community, startups, academia.

The ULPIN:

The Bhu-Aadhaar or ULPIN is a **14-digit alpha-numeric number** generated based on the **latitude-longitude** of the vertices of each land parcel.

- It is a single, authoritative source of truth of information on any **parcel of land or property** to provide integrated land services to the citizens as well as all stakeholders.

First semiconductor fab

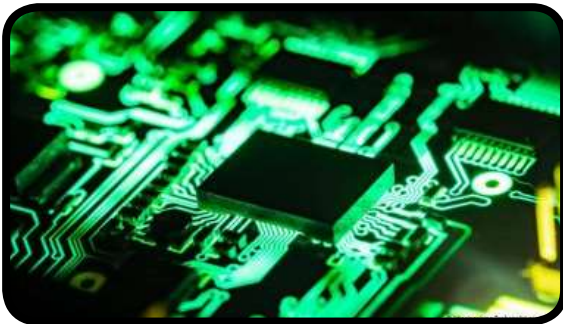


The **first semiconductor fab** is going to unveil and India is poised for a vibrant chip industry in the **next 3-4 years** on the back of enabling policies and the government's firm commitment towards growing the manufacturing ecosystem.

About:

- A semiconductor fab is a **manufacturing plant** in which raw silicon wafers are turned into integrated circuits.
- A fab lab features a clean room where the environment is controlled to eliminate dust and vibration and keep the temperature and humidity within a narrow range.
- In the clean room, the **integrated circuits** are etched onto wafers through photolithography, a process that involves photographing the circuit pattern on a photosensitive substrate and chemically etching away the background.

World's largest chip centre



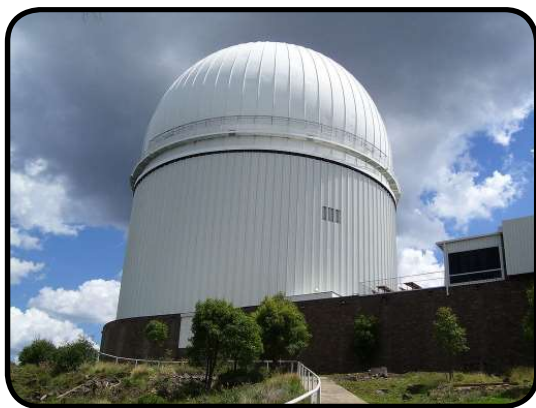
South Korea is going to build an enormous facility to **make computer chips** in the greater Seoul area, with about **\$230 billion in investment** from memory chip giant Samsung Electronics.

About:

- The chip cluster would be located in **Gyeonggi province**, which is part of the **Seoul Metropolitan area**.
- The plan is part of the South Korean government's drive to invest heavily in **six key technologies**, including chips, displays and batteries, all areas where the country's tech giants are well-established already.

The vast majority of the world's most advanced microchips are made by just two companies: **Samsung and Taiwan's TSMC**.

Kodaikanal Solar Observatory



The **Kodaikanal Solar Observatory (KoSO)** has been observing the Sun, capturing images of sunspots, and recording changes in its behaviour since last 100 years now.

About:

- KoSO is one of the **world's oldest observatories** studying the Sun.
- **Owned and operated by:** Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)
- The idea of taking pictures of the Sun using a **20-inch telescope** was first proposed by the **astronomer Norman Pogson**, who was appointed Government Astronomer of the **Madras Observatory in 1861**.
- The **Madras Observatory** was set up as the private effort of an official of the **British East India Company in 1786**, and came to be managed subsequently by the company.

- KoSO is the **only observatory** which provides high-resolution digitised images for such a long period (with coverage of more than 75 per cent).

How sun's images have been taken?

- **White light images** of the Sun (similar to viewing it with the naked eye using solar filters) have been captured every day, using a 6-inch telescope.
- Visible light images are taken because they **reveal sunspots** on the surface of the Sun.
- **Solar magnetic plages** (a bright region on the Sun's chromosphere) are best captured in the strong chromosphere absorption lines, like **the Ca II (called Ca II K)**.
- **H-alpha observations and prominences**, also recorded since 1911, taken on photographic films and plates, are available.
- A new telescope mounted with **CCD cameras** has taken over and, since 2017, continued **to observe the Sun**.

Exercise TROPEX



The Indian Navy's **major Operational level exercise TROPEX** for the year 2023, culminated in the Arabian Sea.

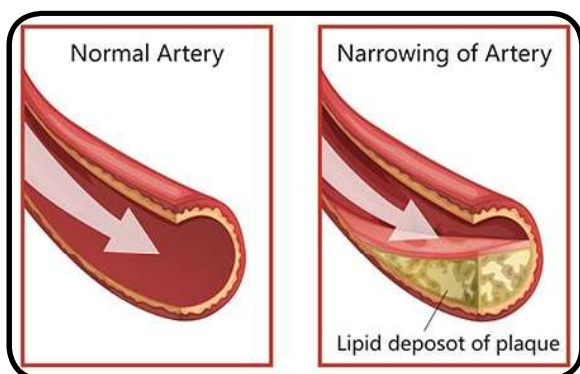
Key-highlights:

- It was conducted across the expanse of the Indian Ocean, over duration of **four months** from **November 2022 to March 2023**.
- The exercise took place in **Indian Ocean including the Arabian Sea** and the **Bay of Bengal**.

About the exercise

- TROPEX (theatre-level combat readiness exercise) is the largest exercise of the Indian Navy.
- It sees the participation of all naval combat units, including ships, submarines, aircraft, and units of the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard.

Coronary artery disease (CAD)



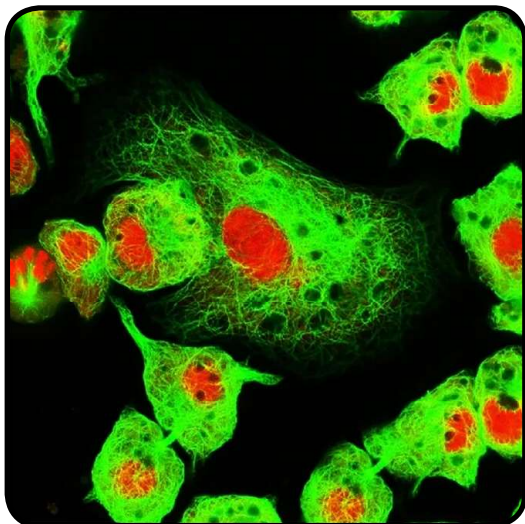
In a recent study published in JAMA, researchers investigated whether **treat-to-target (TTT) low-density lipoprotein-cholesterol (LDL-C) therapy** was useful to treat **coronary artery disease (CAD) patients**.

About the disease:

- Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease. It is sometimes called **coronary heart disease or ischemic heart disease**.
- CAD is caused by **plaque buildup** in the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the heart (called coronary arteries) and other parts of the body.
- Plaque is made up of deposits of cholesterol and other substances in the artery.
 - Plaque build-up causes the inside of the arteries to narrow over time, which can partially or totally block the blood flow. This process is called **atherosclerosis**.

- **Symptoms:** Angina, or chest pain and discomfort. Angina can happen when too much plaque builds up inside arteries, causing them to narrow.
- **Factors:** Overweight, physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, and smoking tobacco are risk factors for CAD.

Fluorescence microscopy



Researchers at **Winona State University, Minnesota**, have created a design for a '**glowscope**', a device that could democratise access to fluorescence microscopy – at least partly so.

About:

- Fluorescent microscopy is often used to image specific features of small specimens such as microbes.
- It is also used to visually enhance **3-D features** at small scales.
- An **optical microscope** views an object by studying how it absorbs, reflects or scatters visible light.
- A **fluorescence microscope** views an object by studying how it reemits light that it has absorbed, i.e. **how it fluoresces**.
 - The object is illuminated with **light of a specific wavelength**.
 - Particles in the object absorb this light and reemit it at a **higher wavelength (i.e. different colour)**.
 - These particles are **called fluorophores**; the object is infused with them before being placed under the microscope.
- A fluorescent microscope can **track the microorganisms** as they move inside the object, revealing the **object's internal shape and other characteristics**.

VSHORADS missile



The **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** conducted **two consecutive** successful flight tests of **Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)** missiles.

About:

- VSHORADS is a **Man Portable Air Defence System (MANPAD)** meant for neutralising low altitude aerial threats at short ranges.
- **Designed and developed by:** ISRO's Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad
- The missile incorporates many novel technologies including Dual-band IIR Seeker, **miniaturized Reaction Control System (RCS)** and integrated avionics.
- The propulsion is provided by a **dual thrust solid motor**.

MANPADS

- They are **short-range, lightweight, and portable surface-to-air missiles** which can be fired to destroy aircraft or helicopters at short range.
- These missiles help protect troops from aerial attacks as they are most effective in targeting low-flying aircraft.

Most polluted cities in India



The fifth **World Air Quality Report** prepared by **IQAir** has been released.

Key highlights:

- A total of **39 Indian cities**, including the national capital 'Delhi' are on the list of **50 of the world's most polluted cities** based on the annual average level of pollutant PM2.5 in air.
- Bhiwadi in Rajasthan with **PM levels of 92.7** was found to be the most polluted city in India and third most polluted city in the world.
- Meanwhile, Delhi emerged to be the **most polluted metropolitan city** with **PM levels of 92.6** which is almost 20 times the safe limit.
- Out of **131 countries**, India **ranked eighth** with a population weighted average PM2.5 level of 53.3 µg/m³ in 2022.
- It was preceded by **Chad, Iraq, Pakistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Kuwait** on this list.

The annual average PM2.5 level, as per the **World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines**, should be **5 µg/m³ or less**

The Report

- The **annual world air quality report** was published by Swiss air quality technology company **IQAir**.

Moth *Mimeusemia ceylonica*

Two researchers from Tamil Nadu have spotted a **rare moth species** for the first time in India in the buffer zone of **Kalakkad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR)** after it was last sighted 127 years ago.

About the species:

- **Mimeusemia ceylonica** is a **moth species** belonging to the subfamily Agaristinae and family Noctuidae.
- It was first illustrated and described by English entomologist **George Hampson in 1893**.
- The species has been photographed for the **first time**, before that only illustration of the species was available in the literature.
- This is the **first record of the species** from Tamil Nadu, India.
- The species was rediscovered during a **moth survey conducted** on October 11, 2020 at the **Agasthyamalai Community-based Conservation Centre (ACCC)** situated in the buffer zone of KMTR, Tirunelveli district.

Severe scrub typhus



A team of Indian scientists has identified a significantly more effective treatment for severe scrub typhus.

Effective treatment:

Combination of intravenous antibiotics doxycycline and azithromycin is more effective than the current monotherapy of using either drug alone.

About Scrub typhus:

- Scrub typhus is a life-threatening bacterial infection that kills thousands of people every year.
- Also known as bush typhus, it is a disease caused by bacteria called ***Orientia tsutsugamushi***.
- **Scrub typhus** is spread to people through bites of infected chiggers (larval mites).
- The most common symptoms of **scrub typhus include fever, headache, body aches, and sometimes rash.**

Oscars 2023



Indian Cinema witnessed one of its biggest moments of glory on a global stage of Oscar 2023 organised in Los Angeles (LA).

Key highlights:

- The Elephant Whisperers won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short and;
- RRR's song 'Naatu Naatu' won for Best Original Song.
- Significance of the event:
 - Never before has India had three productions nominated at the Academy Awards — besides an Indian celebrity presenter, actor 'Deepika Padukone' — in the same year

About the award:

- The Academy Awards, better known as the Oscars, are awards for artistic and technical merit for the global film industry.
- The awards are regarded as the most prestigious, significant awards in the entertainment industry in the United States.
- It was founded in 1927, but the presentation was first started in 1929, and winners since then receive a gold-plated statuette commonly called Oscar.
