

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 1

APRIL
2023

MAINS

- GS-I**
 - 100 YEARS OF VAIKOM SATYAGRAHA
- GS-II**
 - BHUTAN 'DESPERATE' TO SETTLE A DISPUTE WITH CHINA
 - U.K. JOINS ASIA-PACIFIC TRADE TREATY
 - INDIA JUSTICE REPORT 2022 (IJR)
 - PAKISTAN COURT STRIKES DOWN COLONIAL-ERA 'SEDITION' LAW
 - NCLAT UPHOLDS PENALTY ON GOOGLE
- GS-III**
 - WORLD BANK LOWERS INDIA'S GROWTH FORECAST TO 6.3%
 - MARCH'S EXCESS RAIN TO 'AFFECT' WHEAT CROP
 - NATIONAL ELECTRICITY PLAN FOR 2022-27
 - 50 YEARS OF PROJECT TIGER
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 - OPEN-SOURCE SEEDS MOVEMENT
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- Centre 'appropriate' party to respond to plea on disqualified lawmakers: EC
- Exemption for Rare Diseases drugs
- Critical views on

government policies not anti-establishment: SC

- Government introduces Aquaculture Bill

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- Eravikulam National Park gets a fernarium

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- ISRO tested Reusable Launch Vehicle

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- New Quality Control Orders for fibres

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- New species of bush cricket
- Deepest-ever fish caught in Japan
- Nagri Dubraj receives GI tag

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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

100 YEARS OF VAIKOM SATYAGRAHA

CONTEXT:

The centenary celebrations of the Vaikom Satyagraha were jointly inaugurated by Kerala and Tamil Nadu state government. The centenary celebrations are going to last for 603 days.

Background (the old belief)

- Back then, the people of the oppressed classes especially the Ezhavas, were prohibited from walking on the four roads surrounding the Vaikom Mahadeva temple.



- Avarnas* — those without caste or 'untouchables' — had no right to set foot in the premises of **Vaikom Mahadeva Temple** or any other Brahmanical house of worship in Kerala, the country Parashurama claimed from the sea for the delight of the Brahmanas.

The Satyagraha:

- Vaikom Satyagraha lasted for 604 days (20 months) from March 30, 1924 to November 23, 1925.
- It was a mass **Temple entry movement** for lower caste people.
- Leaders involved:
 - **Led by:** TK Madhavan, KP Kesava Menon, K Kelapaan (Congress Leaders)
 - **Supported by:** Mahatma Gandhi, Periyar, C Rajagopalachari, Chattampi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru
- The **nonviolent movement** demanded the **right of members of lower castes to walk on the roads leading to the Vaikom Temple**, now in the district of Kottayam.

- The authorities denied their request, stating that it would lead to social unrest and disturbance.
- This denial was met with widespread protests and demonstrations, which eventually led to the involvement of Mahatma Gandhi, who arrived in Vaikom in 1925.
- Gandhi** was able to iron out a **compromise: three out of the four roads surrounding the temples were opened up** for everyone but the fourth, eastern road was kept reserved for Brahmins.
- Outcome:** The protests eventually led to the historic Temple Entry Proclamation issued by the then king Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma on November 12, 1936. It abolished the ban on 'lower castes' from entering Hindu temples in the Princely State of Travancore.

Understanding the social context of Travancore (at the dawn of the 20th century):

- Back then, the princely state of Travancore had a "**feudal, militaristic, and ruthless system of custom-ridden government**".
- In Travancore, the **idea of caste pollution** worked not only on the basis of touch but also sight.
 - This was documented by travellers such as **Portuguese Duarte Barbosa** who wrote in his memoirs, "When (upper caste Nairs) walk along a street, they shout to the low caste folk to get out of their way, this they do and if one will not, the Nairs may kill him."
- However, in the **second half of the 19th century**, a number of **social and political developments** would usher in **social change** much faster than ever before.
 - **First, Christian missionaries**, supported by the East India Company, had expanded their reach and many lower castes converted to Christianity to escape the clutches of an oppressive system that continued to bind them.
 - **Second, westernised Maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal** undertook many progressive reforms took place because of pressure from the British Resident.
 - Most important of these was the introduction of a modern education system with free primary education for all – even lower castes.
 - **Third, forces of capitalism** and these reforms created new social hierarchies – which were not always congruent with traditional ones.

BHUTAN 'DESPERATE' TO SETTLE A DISPUTE WITH CHINA

CONTEXT:

The Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lotay Tshering, has given China equal weightage among Delhi, Thimphu, and Beijing in settling the Doklam border dispute.

About Bhutan's Geography:

- Bhutan shares a **477 km-long border** with China.
- China claims certain territories from Bhutan:
 - ▶ **North** - Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys; both of these places are culturally vital for Bhutan.
 - ▶ **West** - Doklam, Dramana, and Shakhatoe, Yak Chu and Charithang Chu, and Sinchulungpa and Langmarpo valleys.
- These places are pasture-rich and strategically located in the Bhutan-India-China tri-junction, lying close to India's Siliguri Corridor.
- In 2020, China made new claims on Bhutan's East in the Sakteng sanctuary.
- Eastern Bhutan in the list of disputed territories presently.

The eastern sector of Bhutan has a **large Bhutanese population**, traditional **Dzongs** (fortified monastery) and two Bhutanese districts since time immemorial.

Background of Border issues between Bhutan and China:

- **Early Chinese territorial claims on Bhutan:** Chinese claims on Bhutanese territory were first made when **Mao Zedong** declared in the original 1939 version of the **Chinese Revolution** and the Communist Party that "the correct boundaries of China would include **Burma, Bhutan, and Nepal**".
- **The annexation of Bhutanese enclaves:** In July 1959, along with the occupation of Tibet, the Chinese People's Liberation Army occupied several Bhutanese enclaves in western Tibet which were under Bhutanese administration for more than **300 years** and had been given to Bhutan by a **Ladakhi King Singye Namgyal**.
- **Chinese map claiming territories in Bhutan:** A Chinese map published in 1961 showed China claiming territories in **Bhutan, Nepal, and the Kingdom of Sikkim**.
 - ▶ Incursions by **Chinese soldiers and Tibetan herdsmen** also provoked tensions in Bhutan.

- ▶ Imposing a cross-border trade embargo and closing the border, Bhutan established extensive military ties with India.
- **Engagement:** Until the 1970s, India represented Bhutan's concerns in talks with China over the broader Sino-Indian border conflicts.
 - ▶ Obtaining membership in the **United Nations in 1971**, Bhutan began to take a more independent course in its foreign policy.
 - ▶ In 1984, China and Bhutan began annual, direct talks over the border dispute.
 - ▶ However, China's building of roads on what Bhutan asserts to be Bhutanese territory, allegedly in violation of the 1998 agreement, has provoked tensions.

On 11 August 2016 Bhutan Foreign Minister Damcho Dorji visited Beijing, capital of China, for the **24th round of boundary** talks with Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao.

- Both sides made comments to show their readiness to strengthen co-operations in various fields and hope of settling the boundary issues.

- **Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary:** Beijing objected to the grant for **Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS)** in eastern Bhutan's Trashigang district bordering India and China, claiming that the location was disputed, during the virtual meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- **The Doklam issue:** Doklam, or Donglang in Chinese, is an area spread over less than a **100 sq. km** comprising a plateau and a valley at the **trijunction** between **India, Bhutan and China**.
 - ▶ It is surrounded by the **Chumbi Valley** of Tibet, **Bhutan's Ha Valley** and **Sikkim**.

Why Doklam is important for India?

- **Strategic location:**
 - ▶ Doklam is strategically located close to the **Siliguri Corridor**, which connects mainland India with its **north-eastern region**.
 - ▶ The corridor, also called **Chicken's Neck**, is a vulnerable point for India.
 - ▶ India views Chinese presence near Doklam as a major security concern close to the strategic Siliguri corridor.
- **Extending Chinese territory:**
 - ▶ The Chinese have a deep interest in Doklam, which would give them a commanding view of and an easy access to both the Chumbi Valley and the Siliguri Corridor.
 - ▶ The Chinese government **released a map** to accuse India of trespassing into its territory.

India-Bhutan Relations:

- Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968 with the appointment of a resident representative of **India in Thimphu**.
- The basic framework of India – Bhutan bilateral relations is the **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of 1949** between the two countries, which was updated and signed during the visit to India of Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in February 2007.
- The **King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck** recently visited **New Delhi**, where he met with Prime Minister of India.
- **Points of Discussion:**
 - ▶ India agreed to extend an **additional standby credit facility**. This would be over and above the two existing **standby credit facilities** that are operating between the two countries.

Standby credit facility (SCF) provides **financial assistance** to low-income countries (LICs) with short-term balance of payments needs.

- India is going to set up the **first Integrated Check Post (ICP)** along India-Bhutan border.
- The proposed **Kokrajhar-Gelephu rail link project** through Government of India support in consultation with Bhutan.
- In the field of hydro-power, India has agreed to an upward revision of the tariff of **the Chhukha hydro-electric project**.

What are the challenges in solving the border dispute between China and Bhutan?

- Bhutan-China border dispute is not a bilateral issue:
 - ▶ The first challenge is to see if China would be keen on discussing the tri-junction areas with India.

China aims to shift the tri-junction southward, which would make the entire **Doklam plateau legally part** of China, a move that India rejects.

- ▶ For this, China has to shun its decades-old policy of treating the Bhutan-China border dispute as a bilateral issue and involve India as well.
- **Increasing Chinese expansion in the Western disputed regions:** India has briefed and sensitised Bhutan of China's increasing inroads on multiple occasions.

- APTA aims to promote economic development of its members through the adoption of mutually beneficial trade liberalization measures that contribute to regional trade expansion and economic cooperation.
- Over time it refocused from the initial negotiation of tariff concessions on merchandise trade to at present negotiating liberalization in investment, services trade and trade facilitation.
- It is also continuously working on improving and modernizing its Rules of origin for trade in goods.
- **Member countries:**
 - ▶ Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam.
- The CPTPP was signed by **the 11 countries** on 8 March 2018 in Santiago, Chile.
- It accounts for nearly **13% of global GDP**.

U.K. JOINS ASIA-PACIFIC TRADE TREATY**CONTEXT:**

The United Kingdom (UK) has recently acceded to the **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)**.

Asia-Pacific trade treaty:

- Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) is a preferential **regional trade agreement** formerly known as the **Bangkok Agreement**.

Significance:

- **Boost to GDP:** The deal would add GDP 1.8 billion (\$2.2 billion) annually to the U.K. economy in the long run. This, however, translates to a **modest boost of 0.08% to GDP**.
- **Post Brexit Freedom:** Prime Minister Rishi Sunak describing the outcome as an example of "post-Brexit freedoms", which will help Britain's economy.
- **Gateway to Indo-pacific:** The government said the deal was a "gateway" to the Indo-Pacific region which would account for a majority (54%) of global economic growth in the future.
- **Benefits to companies:** Once Britain becomes a member of the bloc, U.K. firms will not need to

establish a local office or be resident to provide services and will be able to operate on a par with firms in host countries, the government said.

What's good about TPP?

- **New economic growth:** Those in favour say this trade deal will unleash new economic growth among countries involved.
- **Improve people's living standards:** It is being said that the TPP has high potential to improve people's living standards by facilitating the free cross-border movement of key factors of economic activity, such as goods, people, money, and information.
- Failure to bring the TPP into force would be a great loss to not only the TPP countries such as Japan and the US but also the global economy.

INDIA JUSTICE REPORT 2022 (IJR)

CONTEXT:

The India Justice Report (IJR) 2022 released recently highlights the issues in the Indian Judicial system with pendency of cases, lack of staff and Judges and overburdening of cases in courts day by day.

About the report:

- **Released by:** IJR is a collaborative effort undertaken in partnership with **DAKSH, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Common Cause, and Centre for Social Justice, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and TISS-Prayas.**
- The report is released as a measure to find the comparison between high courts and lower courts/ District courts and also amongst same level courts.

Key highlights of the report:

- **Lack of Judges:**
 - ▶ As of December 2022, against a sanctioned strength of 1,108 judges, **the High Courts** were functioning with only 778 judges.
 - ▶ The **subordinate courts** were found functioning with **19,288 judges** against a sanctioned strength of **24,631 judges.**
- **Rising pendency:**
 - ▶ Correspondingly, the number of cases pending per judge is rising in most States over **last five years** while the sanctioned strength has remained more or less the same.

- At **High Court level**, Uttar Pradesh has the **highest average pendency**; cases remain pending for an average of 11.34 years, and in West Bengal for 9.9 years.
- The **lowest average High Court pendency** is in Tripura [1 year], Sikkim [1.9 years] and Meghalaya [2.1 years].

Increasing caseload:

- ▶ The **number of cases** a judge has to deal with has also steadily increased.
- ▶ Between 2018 and 2022, the **caseload per judge increased in 22 States and Union Territories.**
- ▶ The IJR report found that High Courts are increasingly **clearing more cases** annually than subordinate courts.

The **case clearance rate (CCR)**, or the number of **cases disposed of in a year**, measured against the number filed in that year is a common metric used to determine the rate at which cases are disposed of.

- A CCR of more than **100% indicates** that the number of pending cases is reducing.
 - ▶ The High Courts of **Kerala and Odisha** have higher case clearance rates — **156% and 131%** respectively — while the High Courts of **Rajasthan [65%] and Bombay [72%]** have the lowest case clearance rates.

Judiciary in India:

- Judicial System or the court system is called the **Judiciary System.**
- The court has the power to make decisions and also enforce the law, solve disputes.
- Judiciary system consists of **Judges and other magistrates** and they form the bench or the core of the judiciary system.
- **The Supreme Court of India:**
 - ▶ Under the constitution of India, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal.
 - ▶ Unsolved or still in dispute cases are levelled up to Supreme Court to retain justice.
- **High Court of India:**
 - ▶ Under the constitution of India, every state should regard to **one high court.**

Mumbai high court is the oldest high court in India.

- ▶ Every High court has **94 judges** out of which 71 are permanent and 23 are additional judges.
- ▶ High court deals with **economic issues and legal documentation.**

- ▶ These courts also have an **additional set of legal professionals**.
- **District Court of India:**
 - ▶ Under the constitution of India, district courts or Subordinate Courts are subordinate to the high court.
 - ▶ District courts are established according to the **population distribution** of the district and state.
 - ▶ It looks after the **Civil and criminal matters of the district**.
 - ▶ A law declared by the district court is applicable to all subordinate courts. Since District court is at a higher hierarchical level.

Challenges in the system:

- **Subordinate courts perform the most critical judicial functions:** It affects the life of a common man- conducting trials, settling civil disputes, and implementing the bare bones of the law.
- **Large pendency of cases:** Of the total 3 crore cases pending at different courts, 27.8 lakh cases are piled up in subordinate courts and 4.3 lakh in 10 high courts of India. The pendency in lower courts with 22.57 lakh cases pending for more than 10 years and about 25% of cases pending for over 5 years is a matter of concern.
- **The Quality of the subordinate judiciary:** It is average and by extension at least one-third of high court judges elevated from the subordinate judiciary are also mostly average. As a result, the litigants are left to suffer.
- **Huge workload:** Judges in high courts hear between 20 and 150 cases every day, or an average of 70 hearings daily. The average time that the judges have for each hearing could be as little as 2 minutes.
- **Vulnerable population:** They suffer as more than 10% of these pending cases are filed by women and about 5% by senior citizens. Poor litigants and under trials stand to suffer the most due to judicial delay.
- **Violation of Fundamental right:** The backlog violates the spirit of Article 14 (right to equality before law) and Article 21 of the Constitution (right to life and liberty) that too by the protectors of the constitution.
- **Economic Cost:**
 - ▶ It hampers dispute resolution, contract enforcement, discourage investment, stall projects, hamper tax collection, stress tax payers and escalate legal costs.

Economic Survey said that although India jumped to **100th rank in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Report 2018**, the country continues to lag on the indicator on enforcing contracts which marginally improved to 164 from 172 in the previous report.

- ▶ This leads to poor economic activity and hence lower per capita income.
- **Social Impacts:** A slow and tardy judiciary may lead to higher expenditure for people, higher poverty rates, poor public infrastructure and higher crime rates and more industrial riots.

PAKISTAN COURT STRIKES DOWN COLONIAL-ERA 'SEDITION' LAW

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Lahore High Court (LHC) annulled **Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) dealing with sedition. The Act was enacted in 1860 which was a sign of British colonial rule.**

About India's Sedition Law:

- India's sedition law is enshrined in **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.
- **Thomas Macaulay**, who drafted the Indian Penal Code, had included the law on sedition; it was not added in the code enacted in 1860.
- Later in **1890**, sedition was included as an offence **under section 124A IPC** through the **Special Act XVII**.
- The **punishment prescribed then**, transportation "beyond the seas for the term of his or her natural life", was **amended to life imprisonment in 1955**.
- According to the **section 124A**, the charges could be put on whomever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law in India.
 - ▶ **"He/She shall be punished with imprisonment for life, to which a fine may be added; or, with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which a fine may be added; or, with fine."**

Sedition law during freedom Struggle:

- The law was used to suppress the writings and speeches of Indian nationalists and freedom fighters.
- The **first application of the law** was the trial of newspaper editor **Jogendra Chandra Bose in 1891**.
- Other prominent examples of the application of the law include the trials of **Tilak (1897)** and **Gandhi (1922)**.

- **Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and Abul Kalam Azad were also charged with sedition.**

Present scenario:

- Sedition was made a **cognizable offence** for the first time in history in India during the tenure of Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi in 1973**, that is, arrest without a warrant was now permissible.
- In 1962 the Supreme Court of India interpreted the section to apply only if there is, say, "incitement to violence" or "overthrowing a democratically elected government through violent means."
- As of **11th May 2022** this law has been put on temporary hold by **Supreme Court** of India **citing re-examination.**

Legal challenges to IPC Section 124A:

- As early as **1950**, the Supreme Court in **Romesh Thapar v State of Madras** held that "criticism of the government exciting disaffection or bad feelings towards it, is not to be regarded as a justifying ground for restricting the freedom of expression and of the press."
- Subsequently, **two high courts** — the Punjab and Haryana High Court in **Tara Singh Gopi Chand v. The State (1951)**, and the Allahabad High Court in **Ram Nandan v. State of Uttar Pradesh (1959)** — **declared that Section 124A** of the IPC was primarily a tool for colonial masters to quell discontent in the country and declared **the provision unconstitutional.**
- However, in 1962, the issue **came up before the Supreme Court in Kedarnath Singh v State of Bihar.**
- **Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar (1962):**
 - ▶ In **Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar (1962)**, the Supreme Court had made it clear that **'strong words used to express disapprobation of the measures of the Government with a view to their improvement or alteration by lawful means' did not amount to sedition.**
 - ▶ This ruling puts the onus on law enforcers to come up with indisputable evidence of incitement to violence or disturbance of public peace.
 - ▶ The court also issued seven "guidelines", underlining when critical speech cannot be qualified as sedition.

Law Commission of India on Sedition Law:

- In August 2018, the Law Commission of India published a consultation paper recommending that it is time to **re-think or repeal the Section 124A** of the Indian Penal Code that deals with sedition.

Sedition laws in other countries

- In the **United Kingdom**, the sedition law was officially repealed **under Section 73** of the **Coroners and Justice Act, 2009**, citing a chilling effect on freedom of speech and expression.
- **Australia** repealed its sedition law in 2010.
- In 2021, **Singapore** also repealed the law citing that several new legislations can sufficiently address the actual need for sedition law without its chilling effects.

NCLAT UPHOLDS PENALTY ON GOOGLE

CONTEXT:

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has upheld a penalty imposed by Competition commission of India (CCI) on Google for its anti-competitive conduct in the Android ecosystem.

Key-highlights of the ruling:

- The tribunal held that a number of Google's practices pointed to an abuse of **dominance**, which in some cases, had also **stalled scientific development.**

Abuse of dominance

- In simple terms 'dominant position' means something in a superior position as compared to others based on some factors.
- **Abuse of dominant position includes:**
 - ▶ Imposing unfair condition or price
 - ▶ Predatory pricing
 - ▶ Limiting production/market or technical development
 - ▶ Certain barrier to entry
- It held that mandating pre-installation of its entire **Google Mobile Suite (GMS)** – a family of key Google apps and services– amounted to "imposing unfair conditions on **Original equipment manufacturer (OEMs)** which is an abuse of dominant position" by the company.
- By bundling products like its search engine or the Chrome browser, Google had perpetuated its dominant position.
- NCLAT stated that the CCI in its order against Google did not violate the **principles of "natural justice"** and based it on relevant material submitted to it.

What is Android?

- Android is an open-source mobile **Operating System (OS)**, which was acquired by Google in 2005. Smartphones need an **OS** to run applications and programs. Google's Android is the **dominant mobile OS**, powering over 95 per cent of India's smartphones.
- Google operates and manages the Android OS and licenses other Google proprietary applications such as **Chrome, Gmail, Maps, YouTube, Play Store, etc.**
- **Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs)** or smartphone manufacturers use Android and through it, Google's apps on their mobile phones.

Restrictions placed by Google

- Google licences Android as well as its various applications (Play Store, Search, YouTube, Maps, Gmail, etc.) to smartphone OEMs for pre-installation in mobile devices, through various agreements viz., MADA, AFA/ ACC and RSA.
- Mobile Application Distribution Agreement (MADA)
 - ▶ OEMs are required to pre-install the entire Google Mobile Suite (GMS) covering 11 applications of Google as a bundle, and place these apps on the home screen of the device.
 - ▶ GMS is a collection of Google applications and Application Programme Interface (APIs) that help support functionality across devices.
 - ▶ GMS includes wide range of key Google apps such as Google Maps, Gmail, YouTube, etc.
- **Anti-fragmentation Agreement (AFA):** The OEMs which have chosen to pre-install Google's apps on their mobile devices are restricted from manufacturing and marketing not only smart mobile devices but also any smart device (viz. smart speakers, smart watches, smart TVs, smart navigation system, etc.), on alternative versions of Android.
- **Revenue Sharing Agreement (RSA):** Google pays share from its advertisement revenue to OEMs in exchange for exclusive installation of its search services on their smart mobile devices.

CCI's allegations on Google:

- Competition commission of India earlier found Google guilty for **undertaking anti-competitive practices**.
- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) says that Google's business was found to be driven by the "ultimate intent of increasing users on its platforms".
- **Issues cited by CCI:**
 - ▶ Google was found abusing its dominant position in multiple markets with its Android mobile operating system (OS).

- ▶ It has used its dominant position in the online search market, resulting in the denial of market access to competing apps.
- ▶ It has done the same in the Android app store market to protect its position in online general search, which violates competition law.

About Organisations**National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT):**

- National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) was constituted under **Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013** for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT), with effect from 1st June, 2016.

Competition Commission of India (CCI):

- CCI is a **statutory body** responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, of 2002.
- It was duly constituted in March 2009.
- The **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act)** was repealed and replaced by the Competition Act, 2002, on the recommendations of the **Raghavan committee**.
- **Composition:** The Commission consists of one Chairperson and six Members who shall be appointed by the Central Government.

WORLD BANK LOWERS INDIA'S GROWTH FORECAST TO 6.3%

CONTEXT:

The World Bank, in its report, has forecasted a **6.3% economic growth rate for India in the current fiscal year (FY) which ends March 31 2024, a downgrade of 0.7 percentage points since its October 2022 forecast.**

Key-highlights of the forecast:

- **Report:** 'South Asia Economic Focus: Expanding Opportunities: Toward Inclusive Growth'
- The Indian economy is expected to grow at **6.4% in FY 2024-25**, an upgrade of **0.3 percentage points** from the previous forecast.
- The **South Asia region** as whole is expected to grow at **5.6%** for the financial year **2024-25**.

- As per its report, the **primary reasons** for the forecast includes:
 - ▶ Its high borrowing costs
 - ▶ Slower income growth causing weaker consumption
 - ▶ The government tightening fiscal expenditure
- **Major concerns for India remains:**
 - ▶ Lower female labour participation rate, (dropped to below 20%)
 - ▶ Poor condition of informal sector (neither productive nor shrinking)

Female labour participation rate:

Labour force participation rate is the proportion of the population **ages 15 and older** that is economically active: all people who supply labour for the production of goods and services during a specified period.

- **Female Labour Force Participation Rate** has gone up to 25.1% in 2020-21 from 18.6% in 2018-19.
- The **services sector** and then the **construction sector** — were the fastest going industries in India. **Investment growth** remained strong and **business confidence** was also high in India.

IMF's predictions for India

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has projected India to be the **fastest-growing major economy** in FY24, retaining the **forecast at 6.8%** in its latest World Economic Outlook, citing "resilient" domestic demand despite a challenging external environment.

India's growth prospects for different sectors:

- India's economic survey has projected India GDP growth lie in the range of **6 % to 6.8%** depending upon the economic and political trajectory.
- The most important and the fastest growing sector of Indian economy **are services**.
 - ▶ **Trade, hotels, transport and communication;** financing, insurance, real estate and business services and community, social and personal services account for more than **60 percent of GDP**.
 - ▶ **Agriculture, forestry and fishing** constitute around 12 percent of the output, but employs more than 50 percent of the labour force.
 - ▶ **Manufacturing** accounts for **15 percent of GDP**, construction for another 8 percent and mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply for the remaining 5 percent.

5 BRICS NATIONS CONTRIBUTING MORE THAN INDUSTRIALISED G7

CONTEXT:

Data shows that, beginning 2020, the BRICS nations as a whole now contribute more towards global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than the G7 industrialised nations do, in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP).

Key-highlights of IMF's Report

- The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) GDP data across countries over time depicts that since 1992, there has been a steady decline in the share of the G7 in global GDP, and an equally steady rise in the contributions of the BRICS nations.
- By 2019, the contributions of the two groupings had become nearly equal, with the G7 contributing 31.5 per cent to global GDP, and the BRICS accounting for 30.7 per cent.
- It was in 2020, however, that the G7-BRICS dynamic flipped. That year, the BRICS (31.4 per cent) overtook the G7 (30 per cent).
- **Expansion:** The BRICS is also expanding – Bangladesh, Egypt and the UAE have **all just joined** the BRICS New Development Bank, with **numerous other countries** poised to do the same.

What factors are responsible for the growth?

- COVID-19 Pandemic
- Russia-Ukraine War
- Macroeconomic stability
 - ▶ responsible monetary policy
 - ▶ decreased sovereign debt
 - ▶ increasing international reserves



What are the likely impacts?

- The combined economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs) could emerge as a **dominant economic block** in the world.

Persistent challenges (for BRICS)

- Lack of soft power and military power (China, for example, can't challenge US naval power in their coastal waters)
- Slowing growth
- Lack of robust internal institutions

A quick comparison

BRICS	G7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BRICS countries comprise Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and represent the largest developing economies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The G7 are the largest industrialised economies and consist of the US, the UK, Germany, France, Japan, Italy, and Canada.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The G7 countries have historically been among the largest economies in the world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BRICS nations — especially China and India — have been and continue to be the most populous. The G7 nations account for about 10 per cent of the world's population. Just India and China, with 140-141 crore people each, together make up about 35 per cent. 

- The growth increases the opportunities for economic and political influence in order to:
 - strengthen and reform the multilateral system, including international economic organizations, to ensure that it is more inclusive, democratic and representative
 - to enhance participation of developing countries and states with emerging markets in the process of international decision-making

Role of BRICS

- Change the world economic system**-BRICS is actively involved in the efforts to change the world economic system by increasing the number of non-Western states in international financial institutes despite frantic opposition by the traditional distributors of world money.
- New Development Bank and Currency pool**- The BRICS countries decided to create the \$100 billion BRICS Development Bank and a reserve currency pool worth over another \$100 billion to offer an alternative to countries in the non-Western world when it comes to choosing the sources of funding for development or coping with serious economic crises.
- Alternative to West**- The current crisis in Ukraine will consolidate BRICS as the group will make further efforts to become a real alternative to the West to create a real multipolar world.

Organisational Info

About BRICS

- Founded in:** 2006
- BRICS is a group of five major emerging economies comprising **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**.
- It is pertinent to note that the countries together represent **41% of the world's population**, around **25% of global GDP** and around **20% of world trade**.
- Subsidiary:** New Development Bank
- Aim:** The BRICS mechanism aims to promote peace, security, development and cooperation.
- The five nation powerful grouping has been discussing and deliberating on **issues of common concern for all developing countries**.
- BRICS countries have regularly called for **reform of the multilateral system in order to make it more representative and inclusive**.

Group of Seven (G7)

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** that was **formed in 1975**.
- The bloc meets annually to discuss issues of common interest like **global economic governance, international security and energy policy**.
- The G7 countries are the **UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US**.

- All the G7 countries and India are a part of G20.
- The G7 does not have a formal charter or a secretariat. The presidency, which rotates among member countries each year, is in charge of setting the agenda. **Sherpas, ministers and envoys hammer out policy initiatives before the summit.**

- The more the weight accumulated from grain-filling, the more vulnerable is the crop to rain.
- These, when accompanied by high-velocity winds, make the stems prone to “lodging” or bending and even falling flat on the ground.

Understanding Western Differences of BRICS

- **Socialist Tendencies-** Brazil, which represents Latin America and has strong left socialist tendencies, disagrees with the West on social issues.
- **Abetting the old order** -The situation in South Africa where the local communists belong to the ruling coalition while the West is accused of abetting the old order.
- **Repelled by moral values-** In Russia and India, people are not so much repelled by the political as by the moral values of the West.

MARCH'S EXCESS RAIN TO 'AFFECT' WHEAT CROP

CONTEXT

While farmers in India look forward to rains every year, the ongoing unseasonal downpour across West and North India has come as a bane that has damaged crops and disrupted the harvest season.

The damaging combination (Heat+ Rain)

- **Unnaturally high temperature:** Before the downpour began in March, India had already experienced the hottest February in over a hundred years. That was critically damning to the wheat crop.
- **Heavy downpour:** The high temperature immediately preceded unseasonal downpour.
- While occasional bursts of rainfall are not that much of an issue, the continued rainfall along with high winds has damaged crops across West and North India. These rains came right after premature hot temperatures. The combination is very damaging to wheat.

How wheat gets affected by rain?

- Wheat is sensitive to both heat stress and rain/thunderstorms during the terminal grain filling and ripening period.
- This is the time when the crop's earheads are heavy with grains.

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.



Is it going to impact the food security?

- India has 15 agro-climatic zones, plus there are sub zones too. Unseasonal rainfall or other climatic disasters are limited to some of these areas.
 - ▶ An “Agro-climatic zone” is a land unit in terms of major climates, suitable for a certain range of crops and cultivars.
- Thus, the overall food security is not affected, however, the impact is limited.

India's Agro-Climatic Zones

- **Western Himalayan Region:** Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and the hill region of Uttarakhand
- **Eastern Himalayan Region:** Arunachal Pradesh, the hills of Assam, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal
- **Lower Gangetic Plain Region:** West Bengal (except the hilly areas), eastern Bihar and the Brahmaputra valley
- **Middle Gangetic Plain Region:** Parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar
- **Upper Gangetic Plains Region:** Central and western parts of Uttar Pradesh and the Hardwar and Udham Nagar districts of Uttarakhand
- **Trans-Ganga Plains Region:** Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and the Ganganagar district of Rajasthan
- **Eastern Plateau and Hills:** Chhotanagpur Plateau, extending over Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Dandakaranya
- **Central Plateau and Hills:** Bundelkhand, Baghelkhand, Bhandar Plateau, Malwa Plateau, and Vindhya hills
- **Western Plateau and Hills:** Southern part of Malwa plateau and Deccan plateau (Maharashtra)
- **Southern Plateau and Hills:** Interior Deccan and includes parts of southern Maharashtra, the greater parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu uplands from Adilabad District in the north to Madurai District in the south
- **Eastern Coastal Plains and Hills:** Coromandal and northern Circar coasts of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa
- **Western Coastal Plains and Ghats:** Malabar and Konkan coastal plains and the Sahyadris
- **Gujarat Plains and Hills:** Hills and plains of Kathiawar, and the fertile valleys of Mahi and Sabarmati rivers
- **Western Dry Region:** West of Aravalli (Rajasthan)
- **Island Region:** Andaman-Nicobar and Lakshadweep

NATIONAL ELECTRICITY PLAN FOR 2022-27

CONTEXT:

The National Electricity Plan (NEP) 2022-27 has been rolled out which marks a discernible reversal in the policy thrust from its last edition.

Need of the initiative:

- India is now amongst the fastest developing countries in the world in terms of GDP as well as the electricity consumption.
- The challenge is to meet the energy needs of **high economic growth** & electricity consumption of about 1.3 billion people.
- The development of an efficient, coordinated, economical and robust electricity system is essential for smooth flow of electricity from generating station to load centers (as per Electricity Act, 2003).
- Also, optimum utilization of resources in the country, in order to provide reliable, affordable, un-interruptible (24x7) and Quality Power for All.

Highlights of the draft:

- **The coal energy thrust:** The fresh draft, in a tacit admission of the ground realities, cites the **need for fresh coal-based capacity** ranging from 17 GW to nearly 28 GW till 2031-32.
 - ▶ This would be over and above an under-construction coal-based capacity of 25GW (1 giga watt or GW is equal to 1000 megawatts or MW).
 - ▶ An increase in the **plant load factor** (PLF) of coal fired plants from 55% up to 2026-27 to 62% in 2031-32.
- **The renewable energy thrust:** A projected battery storage requirement in 2031-32 of between 51 GW to 84GW with a daily usage rate of 5-hours.
 - ▶ Estimated to be Rs.10 crore per MW, this could translate into investments into battery storage between Rs.5 - 8 lakh crore over the next ten years as backup for renewable capacity.
- **Battery Energy Storage System:** Battery Energy Storage systems (BESS) especially based on Lithium - ion batteries are one of the storage options.
- **Hybrid generation models:** This will basically perform solar energy shifts and provide backup power.
- **Hydro-based plants:**
 - ▶ It also said that in the event of delay in achievement of **hydro-based plants**, which are in concurred/ under construction stage, there is additional requirement of coal of around 4 GW in capacity mix in 2026-27.

What are the challenges ahead?

- **The continued reliance on old, inflexible coal-fired plants for base load capacity.**
 - ▶ India's vast fleet of coal-fired thermal power plants of 200 MW series are more than 25 years old, run on old technology and do not promise robust reliability.

- **Lack of clarity** on how the renewables-dominated grid will be actually managed, despite a pronounced reliance on renewable generation for meeting capacity additions.
- **The inertia**, which imparts stability to the grid, has been declining due to poor progress of hydro power and zero inertia solar generators.
- **There is also no assessment** of ramping rate for thermal plants under various scenarios of solar generation going out.
- If battery storage is to be relied on, the total fund requirement for the period 2022-27 is estimated to be **14.30 lakh crore**.
 - ▶ However, the CEA report has given a budget of 8 lakhs crore for BESS for a 10 year period.

50 YEARS OF PROJECT TIGER

CONTEXT:

India marked 50 years of Project Tiger on April 1, 2023.

About Project Tiger:

- Project Tiger is a **tiger conservation programme** launched in April **1973** by the Government of India during Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's tenure.
- **Aim:**
 - ▶ The project aims at ensuring a viable population of Bengal tigers in their natural habitats, protecting them from extinction, and preserving areas of biological importance as a natural heritage forever represented as close as possible the diversity of ecosystems across the distribution of tigers in the country.
- 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)**.
- While it initially covered nine **Tiger Reserves (Manas, Palamau, Simlipal, Corbett, Ranthambhore, Kanha, Melghat, Bandipur and Sundarban)** spread over 18,278 sq km, India now has 54 such reserves covering more than 75,000 sq km (approximately 2.4% of the country's geographical area).

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):

- NTCA was established in December 2005 following a recommendation of the **Tiger Task Force**.

- Administration of the tiger reserves will be in accordance with guidelines of NTCA.
- Tiger reserves in India are administered by field directors as mandated by NTCA.
- **No alteration in the boundaries** of a tiger reserve shall be made except on a recommendation of the NTCA and the approval of the National Board for Wild Life.
- No State Government shall de-notify a tiger reserve, except in public interest with the approval of the NTCA and the approval of the National Board for Wild Life.

Facts related to Tigers in India:

- There are **54 tiger reserves** in India that are governed by Project Tiger.
- India is home to **80 percent of tigers** in the world.
 - ▶ In 2006, there were 1,411 tigers which increased to 1,706 in 2010, 2,226 in 2014 and **2967 in 2018**.

- **Largest Tiger Reserve in India**– Ranipur Wildlife Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh), Nagarjunsagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana)
- **Smallest Tiger Reserve in India**– Bor Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)

- Every **4 years** the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) conducts a tiger census across India.
- The **Bengal tiger (Panthera tigris tigris)**, also called the Indian tiger or the Royal Bengal tiger is native to the Indian subcontinent.
- They are currently found in **India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan**.
- **Protection status:**
 - ▶ It is listed as **Endangered** in Nepal, India, and Bhutan, While Bangladesh and China list it as **Critically Endangered**.
- The species found are namely,
 - ▶ White Tiger, Bengal Tiger and Indochinese Tiger.

Other Tiger Conservation Measures:

- **National Tiger Conservation Authority:** 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.
- **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

- **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
- **Global Tiger Forum:** It is an Inter-Governmental international body working exclusively for the conservation of Tigers. Established in 1994, the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) has its headquarters in New Delhi
- **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
- **MSTripES:** MSTripES program uses Global Positioning System (GPS), General Packet Radio Services (GPRS), and remote sensing, to collect information from the field, create a database using modern Information Technology (IT) based tools, analyses the information using GIS and statistical tools to provide inferences that allow tiger reserve managers to better manage their wildlife resources.

Other important conservation Projects for Wildlife in India

Project Elephant: Project Elephant was launched in 1992 and is a centrally sponsored scheme. The project aims at assisting the management and protection of elephants in the States which have free-ranging populations of wild elephants.

Project Snow Leopard: Project Snow Leopard launched in 2009, aims to promote inclusivity and participatory approach for the conservation of the species. The species of Snow Leopard inhabits the Himalayan landscape as well as states such as Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Himachal Pradesh.

Project Hangul: In the 1970s, the Jammu and Kashmir Government in association with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) designed a project for the protection and conservation of the Kashmir Red Stag and its habitat. This project came to be known as Project Hangul.

Project Crocodile: Project Crocodile was introduced in 1975. The primary focus was on breeding and rearing in captivity.

RISING ANTARCTIC ICE MELT TO DRAMATICALLY SLOW GLOBAL OCEAN FLOWS

CONTEXT:

Research found that rapidly melting Antarctic ice is dramatically slowing down the flow of water through the world's oceans.

Key-highlights of the study:

- Rapidly melting Antarctic ice is slowing down the flow of water through the world's oceans.
 - ▶ It could have a disastrous impact on global climate, the marine food chain and even the stability of ice shelves.
- As temperatures rise, freshwater from Antarctica's melting ice enters the ocean, reducing the **salinity and density** of the surface water and diminishing that downward flow to the sea's bottom.
- The study found that **deep-water circulation** in the Antarctic could weaken at twice the rate of decline in the North Atlantic.
- **Disruption the base of food chain:** Ocean overturning allows nutrients to rise up from the bottom, with the Southern Ocean supporting about **three-quarters** of global phytoplankton production, the base of the food chain.
- **Leaving more CO₂ in the atmosphere:** Study suggest that the ocean would not be able to absorb as much carbon dioxide as its upper layers become more stratified, leaving more CO₂ in the atmosphere.

What is Global Ocean Circulation?

- Earth's oceans have a worldwide circulation system that moves ocean water in an endless loop around the planet (that could take a thousand years to complete). The global ocean circulation pattern is sometimes referred to as a **conveyor belt**.
- The "overturning circulation" of the oceans is driven by the movement of denser water towards the sea floor.
- **Significance:**
 - ▶ **Heat distribution:** The patterns of global ocean circulation distribute heat around the planet.
 - ▶ **Bringing stability:** The Ocean and the atmosphere are closely connected and are responsible for maintaining Earth's relatively stable climate, providing a hospitable environment for life.

- ▶ **Key regulator of climate:** Ocean circulation is a key regulator of climate by storing and transporting heat, carbon, oxygen, nutrients and freshwater all around the world.

Ocean circulation in Antarctica

- Ocean circulation plays a large role in **Antarctica's complex climate system** with the **Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC)** being the most important.
- The ACC is part of the **thermohaline conveyor** and is a complex system of interacting currents from surrounding oceans.
- The ACC helps maintain the cold climate of Antarctica by **limiting the amount of meridional heat** transport to the continent.

What factors are responsible for climate change?

- **CO₂ emission on rise:** According to the **Global Carbon Project**, CO₂ emissions are on **rise by 0.6%** in 2019 (2.1% in 2018). The reductions are not enough to stop global warming.
 - ▶ Despite a significant decline in coal consumption in **US and Europe**, the higher global emissions are attributed to growth in natural gas and oil usage.
- **Industrial heat:** Manufacturing industrial products (essential to construction, infrastructure and manufacturing) requires a lot of heat that emits more carbon dioxide than all the world's cars and planes.
- **Land degradation:** Land degradation, mainly due to human activities like deforestation, mining/quarrying, construction, roads, other infrastructure for economic development, human settlements for increasing population, etc., is a contributing factor to climate change.
- **Meat consumption:** IPCC report 'Climate Change and Land' emphasises the **ever-increasing global meat consumption** and the resulting distorted land-use pattern to meet this requirement, as a cause contributing to climate change.
- **Disregard for ocean health:** Overfishing, plastic pollution, micro-plastics, flow of fertilisers and chemicals etc. is suffocating fish and damaging ocean health.
 - ▶ More than 1 billion people depend on the oceans. Ocean health is vital to biodiversity, healthy fisheries and to regulate the climate.

New-age measures adopted/suggestions to control climate damage:

- **Carbon markets:** Creation of 'carbon markets' under the Paris Agreement allows countries, or industries,

to earn carbon credits for emission reductions they make in excess of what is required of them.

- **Climate- Neutral Europe:** In a 'Green Deal', Europe has vowed to become the first 'climate-neutral' continent by 2050, as it aims to eliminate its net discharges of greenhouse gases.
 - ▶ This will be done through creating single set of definitions, to determine what economic activities are sustainable and should count as green, in areas ranging from finance to design of cities.
- **Carbon capture:** Carbon capture, use and storage (CCUS) is essential to reducing carbon emissions from heavy industry, especially cement and steel production. It is more affordable than most other option—far cheaper and more readily available than electrical heating or burning biomass.
- **New Climate Economy:** Studies suggest that shifting to a low-carbon economy represents USD 26 trillion growth opportunity that could create 65 million new jobs by 2030.

OPEN-SOURCE SEEDS MOVEMENT

CONTEXT:

As public sector breeding declined and the private sector began to dominate the seed sector, the need for alternatives became keenly felt to safeguard the plant varieties and indigenous seeds.

About:

- Farmers have **innovated and shared seeds** without any **intellectual property rights (IPR)** claims for centuries.
- Farmers also haven't sought **exclusive rights over seeds and germplasm** to prevent others from innovating on the seeds.

How is IPR protected in agriculture?

- Presently there are two forms of IPR protection in agriculture: **Plant-breeders' rights and patents**.
- They restrict farmers' rights and the freedom to develop new varieties using germplasm from IP-protected varieties.
- They have thus further consolidated the **seed sector** and increased the number of plant varieties covered by IPRs.
- In 1999, a Canadian plant-breeder named **T.E. Michaels** suggested an approach to **seeds based on the principles of open source software**.

- **Seed movement** is required to provide **proper rights** to the plant breeders.

What are 'open source seeds'?

- In 2002, **Boru Douthwaite** proposed an open-source model for **seeds and plant varieties**.
- The **open seed Agrecol's model of Europe** is based on a **contracts approach** in which the user agrees inter alia to not patent seeds bought under the **open-source licence (OSSI)**.
- The OSSI simply asks for a pledge, that an individual won't "**restrict others**" use of these seeds or their derivatives by patents or other means, and to include this pledge with **any transfer of these seeds or their derivatives**.

What are plant-breeders' rights (PBRs)?

- In some countries, the PBR regulations allow rights-holders to restrict the **unauthorised use of seeds to develop new varieties**.
- In 1994, the establishment of the **World Trade Organisation** and then the **Trade-Related IPR Agreement** cast a global IPR regime over plant varieties.
- TRIPS required countries to provide at least one form of **IP protection** while consolidation in the seeds **sector raised concerns** about the freedom to innovate.
- The Green Revolution was spearheaded by **public-sector breeding institutions** and seeds were available as '**open pollinated varieties**', or as reasonably priced hybrids with no restrictions on farmers to cultivate, reuse and share.
- But the **genetic revolution in agriculture** was led by the private sector, with seeds mostly made available as hybrids and/or protected by strong IPRs.

Are there such initiatives in India?

- In India, the Hyderabad-based **Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA)**, part of the **Apna Beej Network**, developed a model incorporated into an agreement between CSA and the recipient of the seed/germplasm.
- CSA's Open Source Seeds Initiative is trying to use this approach through **three farmer producer organisations (FPOs)**.
- This is similar to Agrecol's strategy, using an agreement to 'shrinkwrap' a licence with contractual obligations.
- Under the **Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFR) 2001**, farmers can register varieties as 'farmer varieties' if they meet certain conditions, and have the right to reuse, replant, and exchange seeds.
- However, they can't **breed and trade** in varieties protected under the Act for commercial purposes.

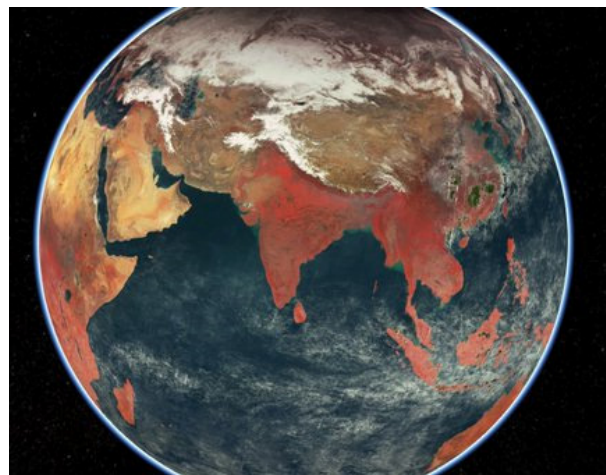
ISRO RELEASES IMAGES OF EARTH CAPTURED BY ITS EOS-06 SATELLITE

CONTEXT:

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has released images of Earth captured by the EOS-06 satellite in 13 distinct wavelengths to provide information about global vegetation cover on Land and Ocean Biota for global oceans.

About:

- The images are a mosaic generated by the ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC).
- NRSC/ISRO has generated a **global False Colour Composite (FCC) mosaic** from the images captured by the Ocean Colour Monitor (OCM) payload on board EOS-06.



About EOS-06 satellite:

- EOS-06, also called **OceanSat-3**, is a **nanosatellite** which was launched by **ISRO**, as part of the **PSLV-C54 mission** in 2022.
- EOS-06 provides continued services of **Oceansat-2** with enhanced payload capability and carries four payloads **OCM-, Sea Surface Temperature Monitor, Ku-Band Scatterometer, and ARGOS**.
- The EOS-06 is envisaged to observe ocean colour data, sea surface temperature and wind vector data to use in Oceanography, climatic and meteorological applications.
- The satellite also supports value added products such as **potential fishing zone** using **chlorophyll, SST and wind speed** and land based geophysical parameters.

What is an Earth Observation satellite?

- Earth Observation (EO) satellites are designed for earth observation from space, which includes **military use** like spying and **civilian use** like, meteorology and cartography.
- These satellites make essential information available on a vast number of areas, including; **ocean salinity, ice thickness, crop health, and air quality.**
- The data from these satellites are used for several applications like **agriculture, urban planning, rural development, mineral prospecting, environment, forestry, ocean resources and disaster management.**

Needs Earth Observation Satellites:

- **To counter China:** The foremost reason to have them is that the **People Republic of China (PRC)** has many of these EOS. In 2020 the troops' movement by the People Republic of China (PRC) in the Ladakh region went largely undetected because of the lack of a sufficient number of EOS. They have Gaofen series of EO satellites.

Gaofen is a series of **Chinese high-resolution Earth-imaging satellites** for the state-sponsored program **China High-resolution Earth Observation System (CHEOS)**. The first satellite in the Gaofen, Gaofen 1 was launched in 2013.

- ▶ The Gaofen series is also associated with its military reconnaissance missions. This

is certainly a threat and we need to have a robust surveillance system in place. India has to respond to the capabilities of China with which we frequently experience border clashes.

- **Surveillance in the Indian Ocean Region:** In addition to the threat on its Himalayan borders with China, there is also a significant increase in its influence in Indian Ocean Region has been reported. This need to be taken care of by the use of advanced surveillance systems.
- **To overcome limitations of drones and UAVs:** Using UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) and drones has its demerits as they can be shot down if the reconnaissance mission needs to be carried out over the military installations of the adversary.
 - ▶ Whereas, the satellite imagery will have the capability to zoom into the most remote corners, which can help our security forces to take timely action and track suspicious movements.
- **Use of satellites for Border management:** India also needs to beef up its anti-infiltration grid along the Pakistan and Bangladesh border, as infiltration and smuggling along the line of control have always been a threat to national security.
- **Post-attack assessment:** This is crucial for post-attack damage assessment and will enable us to create opportunities to refine our attacks against enemy targets in the future.

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FOREIGN TRADE POLICY 2023-2028

CONTEXT:

- The Commerce and Industry Ministry unveiled the new Foreign Trade Policy 2023-2028.

What is Foreign Trade Policy?

- Foreign trade policy are a set of guidelines and instructions which are established by **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** related to import and export of goods in India. This is announced after every 5 years.
- It creates various expectations for exporters, traders and manufacturers.
- India's foreign trade policy is guided by the **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992**, which was adopted when the economic policy reforms were initiated.
- **Foreign Trade Policy (2023)** is based on continuity of time-tested schemes facilitating exports as well as a document which is nimble and responsive to the requirements of trade.
 - ▶ It is based on principles of 'trust' and 'partnership' with exporters.
- It replaced the extant policy ". The new FTP comes into effect from April 1, 2023.

Features of New Foreign Trade Policy 2023:

- **Motto:** Long term excellence and productivity.
- **Aim:** New policy aims to almost triple India's goods and services exports **to 2 trillion dollars** by 2030, from an estimated **760 billion dollars** in 2022-23.
- **Internationalisation of the rupee trade:** The major highlight of this policy was the internationalisation of the rupee trade.
- **No Sunset date:**
 - ▶ The new policy will have **no sunset date** and will be tweaked based on the emerging world trade scenario and industry feedback.
 - ▶ While the policy will be open-ended, the schemes sanctioned under it will be time bound.

SALIENT FEATURES

- Target \$2 trillion exports by 2030
- Continuous and responsive framework with no end date.
- Making rupee a global currency
- Making India a trade hub
- Digitisation and faster processing of applications

- Amnesty scheme for shortfall in exporting obligations
- Restructuring of Department of Commerce
- Over 50% reduction in threshold for recognition of star trade houses.

- **One time Amnesty:** The new FTP is introducing a one-time Amnesty Scheme for exporters to close the old pending authorizations and start afresh.
- **New growth areas:** Opening up a new area of potential exports, the policy has included "merchandise trade" within its ambit.
 - ▶ Exporters in India can **source goods** from another country and send them to a third country without touching Indian shores.
 - ▶ This will also enable exports of restricted goods.
- **Advance authorization Scheme:**
 - ▶ A **Special advance authorisation scheme** is being launched for the clothing and apparel sector so that they can react to market demands and fashion trends faster.
 - ▶ Other mechanisms like **star ratings to recognise exporters** will be rejigged to lower qualification thresholds.
- **Towns of Export Excellence:**
 - ▶ Four towns in Uttar Pradesh — **Faridabad, Moradabad, Mirzapur and Varanasi** — were announced as **centres of export excellence** for their performance in the apparel, handicrafts, handmade carpets and handlooms, respectively.
 - ▶ The new trade policy will make all the **PM Mitra textile parks** eligible to get benefits as common services providers.
- **Recognition of Exporters:** Exporter firms recognized with 'status' based on export performance will now be partners in capacity-building initiatives on a best-endeavor basis.
- **Others:**
 - ▶ PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel Parks additional scheme to claim benefits under CSP.
 - ▶ The dairy sector gets benefits and will be exempted from maintaining the average export obligation.

- ▶ Battery electric vehicles, vertical farming equipment are added to the green technology product.
- ▶ Wastewater treatment and recycling, rainwater harvesting system added to green technology products.
- ▶ Rainwater filters and green hydrogen added to green technology products.
- ▶ Green technology products eligible for reduced export obligation requirement under the EPCG scheme.

New approach to Trade transit Facilities for adjacent countries

- The **New Foreign Trade Policy (FTP)** has introduced an additional consideration in providing such **trade transit facilities** for adjacent countries.
- **Empowering Neighbourhood first policy:** The changed language and subtle shift in the stance on trade with neighbouring countries in the new policy **could unnerve some land-locked countries around India such as Nepal and Bhutan** that rely on goods' transit through India.
- **In line India's commitment to WTO:** Freedom of transit to landlocked countries is guaranteed under **Article V** of the **WTO's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade**.

Issues/Gaps in the policy

- **Ineffective at the present juncture:** India's foreign trade policy continues to be largely structured on the earlier policy documents, and draws its legal basis from the three-decade-old Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, its incongruence with the needs of present times is obviously huge.
- Lack of utilisation of FTAs: The government was unable to use the rules of the multilateral trading system as

well as a majority of the 13 free trade agreements (FTA) that India has signed thus far.

- ▶ In most of these agreements, India's trade deficit has ballooned and this is simply because the exporters have been unable to take advantage of the preferential market access that have been offered by the trade partners.
- **Lack of preparedness related to regulatory standards:** There is current pressure with India to devise **Indian-specific standards**, which is creating barriers to trade in a range of industry sectors. India frequently fails to notify the WTO of new standards and often does not allow time for discussion with its trading partners prior to implementation.

In 2021, the Indian government launched the "One Nation, One Standard" scheme with the aim of synergizing standards adopted by various Standard Development Organizations in India.

Significance:

- **Better partnership:** The Foreign Trade Policy 2023 will achieve better export promotion by fostering partnerships between exporters, states, districts, and Indian Missions.
- **Ease of doing business:** The policy will prioritize enhancing the ease of doing business and targets emerging sectors, such as e-commerce and export hubs.
- **New boost to the Indian foreign trade:** India's exports were \$435 billion in 2015-16 when the previous policy was introduced and have grown nearly 75% to an estimated \$760 billion in 2022-23. New policy will give new boost to this export growth.

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J & K'S BASOHLI PAINTINGS GET GI TAG

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Basholi (Basoli) paintings received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag following approval of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Jammu.

About:

- Basholi painting is a reputed school of **miniature paintings**.
- The Basohli painting of Kathua is the **first independent GI-tagged product** from Jammu region.



- Basohli painting, school of **Pahari miniature painting** that flourished in the **Indian hill states** during the late 17th and the 18th centuries, known for its bold vitality of colour and line.

Basholi is a town in **Kathua district** in the state of **Jammu and Kashmir**, India.

Key features:

- ▶ These paintings known for its vivid, evocative colors, bold lines, and deep-set facial patterns.
- ▶ It was founded by **Raja Bhupat Pal** in the 16th century.
- ▶ Basholi paintings are considered as the **first school of Pahari paintings**, many of which have evolved into the much more detailed and widespread **style of Kangra painting school**.

Geographical Indication (GI) tag:

- The GI is a form of **intellectual property right** that identifies goods originating from a specific geographical location and having distinct nature, quality and characteristics.
- The Geographical Indication is recognised by the **World Trade Organization**.
- India became a signatory to this convention, when, as a member of WTO, it enacted the Geographical Indications (Registration and Protection) Act, of 1999, which came into effect on September 15, 2003.

Paintings in India:

Principles of Indian Paintings:

- Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism were three new religions that emerged in India, and they all provided important sources of inspiration for artists.
- The development of Indian Paintings has been significantly influenced by various factors, including India's deep-rooted history and culture.
- In the famous paintings of India, spiritual themes, noble ideals, and common beliefs are depicted.
- In the **third century AD**, Vatsyayana wrote about the **six main shadanga or principles of Indian painting** in his work Kamasutra. These were:
 - ▶ Various Forms: Rupabheda
 - ▶ Emotional immersion: Lavanyayoganam
 - ▶ Combining colours to simulate modelling effects: Varnikabhanga
 - ▶ The proportion of the object or subject: Pramanam
 - ▶ The portrayal of the subject's likelihood: Sadrisyan
 - ▶ The use of colour to create lustre and gleam: Bhava

Miniature Indian Paintings:

- When India first came into contact with the Islamic civilization, miniature painting finally reached its full potential.
- Indian painting underwent a new stage of development during the Mughal Empire when the workshops were created at the Imperial court.
- From there, artworks like illustrated manuscripts, book miniatures, portraiture, celebratory or genre scenes, and many others spread throughout India.
- **Key features of miniature paintings:**
 - ▶ Miniature Indian paintings are characterized by small and detailed paintings.
 - ▶ Human figures are mostly seen in side profiles, bulging eyes, slim waists, pointed noses, etc.
 - ▶ Different colours were used for different characters, and various bases were used.

Some famous miniature paintings include:

- Ragamala (1680 AD)
 - Bhairavi Ragini Painting
 - **Bani Thani** (Monalisa of India) by Nihâl Chand and Radha and Krishna of Kishangarh
 - Gita Govind, Palm Leaf Painting
- Often painted on paper, clothes, palm leaves, etc.
- The characteristics of Miniature painting varied in different regions of the country.

INDIA ELECTED TO UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONTEXT:

India was elected by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as a member of the UN Statistical Commission, returning to the world organisation's highest statistical body after a gap of two decades.

Significance of India's membership:

- India was a member of the Statistical Commission last in 2004 and the country is returning to the UN agency after a gap of two decades.
- The experience of India in the field of **official statistics** especially with regard to its diversity and demography is immense and will be a valuable addition to the functioning of the **UN Statistical Commission**.

Austria, Armenia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States were elected for the term of 4 years in office by secret ballot.

UN Statistical Commission:

- The UN Statistical Commission, **established in 1947**, is the highest body of the global statistical system bringing together the **Chief Statisticians** from member states from around the world.
- It is the highest decision-making body for international statistical activities, responsible for setting statistical standards and the development of **concepts and methods**, including their implementation at the **national and international levels**.
- The Commission consists of **24 member countries** of the United Nations elected by the United Nations Economic and Social Council on the basis of equitable geographical distribution.
- **Regional representation:**
 - Five members are from African States

- four from Eastern European States
 - four from Latin American and Caribbean States
 - Seven members from Western European and other States.
- The current members from the **Asia-Pacific States** are **Japan (2024), Samoa (2024) as well as Kuwait and South Korea**, whose terms are ending this year.

LOKPAL DISPOSES OFF 68% CORRUPTION COMPLAINTS: REPORT

CONTEXT:

Around 68% corruption complaints against public functionaries that landed with the *Lokpal of India* were "disposed off" without any action in the past four years, according to information provided by the parliamentary panel report.

About:

- On January 5 2023, the **Lokpal of India** has issued an order that complaints received by the office of the Lokpal of India that were not in the prescribed form would **not be entertained** at any level.
- The Lokpal of India, the country's **first anti-corruption body** instituted **four years ago** to investigate complaints against public functionaries, including the Prime Minister, submitted to a parliamentary panel that it has **not prosecuted even a single person** accused of graft till date.

Findings of the report:

- Nearly **90% complaints** were **not in the prescribed format**.
- The parliamentary panel report was based on information of **the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)**, since 2019-20.
- The **anti-corruption body** received **8,703 complaints**, out of which **5,981 complaints** were disposed of.
- As many as **6,775 complaints** were rejected for not being in the correct format.
- The office informed that only **three complaints** were fully investigated, and 36 complaints were at a preliminary stage.
- In **2022-23**, as many as **2,760 complaints** were received, out of which **only 242** were in the prescribed format.

- The Committee infers from the data provided by Lokpal that a large number of complaints are being disposed of on the ground that the complaint is not in the prescribed format.

Office of Lokpal:

- **Background:**
 - ▶ The term "Lokpal" was coined by **Dr. L.M.Singhvi in 1963**.
 - ▶ The concept of a **constitutional ombudsman** was first proposed in parliament by Law Minister Ashoke Kumar Sen in the early 1960s.
 - ▶ The **first Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)** recommended the enacting of the Office of a Lokpal.
 - ▶ **Forty five years** after its first introduction and after ten failed attempts, the Lokpal Bill was finally enacted in India on 18 December 2013.
- The Act was passed in 2013.
- The country's first Lokpal, Justice **Pinaki Chandra Ghosh**, was appointed on March 19, 2019 along with eight other members.

Justice Ghosh moved out of office in **May 2022** after attaining 70 years of age and since then, **Pradip Kumar Mohanty** has been acting as the Chairperson of Lokpal.

PM SVANIDHI SCHEME

CONTEXT:

A total of **42.7 lakh loans** had been disbursed to street vendors under the PM SVANidhi scheme, as per the government's latest data.

Key-highlights of the development

- The 42.7 lakh loans amounted to ₹5,152.37 crore. Out of this 3.98 lakh or 9.3% were to **hawkers** from the **minority communities**.
- State-wise disbursement of loans seemed to be aligned with its population, with Uttar Pradesh disbursing the maximum number of loans at 11,22,397, while Sikkim gave out just one loan.
- **Concerning area:** There was a **decline in the share of loans to street vendors of minority communities** with 10.23% in 2020-21, 9.25% in 2021-22 and an all-time low of 7.76% in 2022-23.

- ▶ In 2020-21, 2,10,457 loans were disbursed to minorities while it was 98,973 loans in 2021-22 and 88,609 in 2022-23.

Minority Community

Minorities constitute about 19%-20% population of the country. As of now, six communities - Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains - come under the minority section in India.

About PM SVANidHI:

- PM SVANidHI is a **special micro-credit facility plan** to provide affordable loan of up to Rs. 10,000 to more than 50 lakh street vendors.
- The scheme is a **Central Sector Scheme** i.e. fully funded by **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**.
- **Eligibility:** The Scheme is available to all street vendors engaged in vending in urban areas as on or before March 24, 2020.
- It was **announced aims to enable street vendors to resume their livelihoods**, which have been hit hard due to the national lockdown.
- **Implementing agency:** **Small Industries Development Bank of India** is the **technical partner** for implementation of this scheme. It manages the credit guarantee to the lending institutions through **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises**.
- **Salient features:**
 - ▶ Vendors can **avail working capital loan of up to Rs 10,000**, which is repayable in monthly instalments within one year.
 - ▶ On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy of 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries
 - ▶ Monthly cash back incentive on digital transactions
 - ▶ There will be **no penalty on early repayment of loan**.

Other related schemes

- **SVANidhi se Samridhhi:** The Ministry has initiated 'SVANidhi se Samridhhi' in 125 Urban Local Bodies, selected for saturation in the first phase. In Phase 1, approximately 35 Lakh Street vendors and their families were covered.
- **The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014:** It was enacted to **regulate street vendors** in public areas and protect their rights.
- **National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI):** NASVI is an organization working for the **protection of the livelihood rights of thousands of street vendors** across the country.

CENTRE 'APPROPRIATE' PARTY TO RESPOND TO PLEA ON DISQUALIFIED LAWMAKERS: EC

CONTEXT:

The Election Commission of India (ECI) said it would be "appropriate" to have the Union government deal with the disqualification issue.

About the news

- The Election Commission in the Supreme Court has chosen to maintain a distance on the question **whether a disqualified lawmaker should be banned from contesting elections for five years.**
- The commission said it would be "appropriate" to have the Union government deal with the issue.
- Election commission stated that the issue involved in this matter pertains to the interpretation of **Article 191(1)(e) of the Constitution.**

Article 191(1)(e)

- Article 191(1)(e) gives the various grounds of disqualification "for being chosen as, and for being a member of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State".
 - They include
 - ▶ holding an office of profit
 - ▶ being of unsound mind or undischarged solvent
 - ▶ being a non-citizen or voluntarily acquiring the citizenship of a foreign state
 - ▶ being under any acknowledgment of allegiance or adherence to a foreign state
- It relates to matters that do not have a nexus with the conduct of elections in terms of the remit of the Commission under **Article 324.**
 - Therefore Union government is the appropriate party for the adjudication of the prayers made in the petition

About Election Commission

- The Election Commission is a body established under **Article 324** of the Constitution.
- It is vested with the authority of superintendence, direction, and control of elections for the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures and the offices of the President and the Vice-President.

Powers of EC for disqualification

- Under the Constitution, the **Commission has advisory jurisdiction** in the matter of **post-election disqualification** of sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures.
- The opinion of the Commission in all such matters is binding on the President or, as the case may be, the Governor to whom such opinion is tendered.
- Further, the **cases of persons found guilty of corrupt practices at elections which come before the SC and High Courts are also referred to the Commission for its opinion** on the question as to whether such person shall be **disqualified** and, if so, for what period.
- The Commission has the power to disqualify a candidate who has **failed to lodge an account of his election expenses** within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.

- In **Mohinder Singh Gill & Anr vs The Chief Election Commissioner and Others (December 2, 1977)**, the Supreme Court ruled that "Article 324, on the face of it, vests vast functions in the Commission, which may be powers or duties, essentially administrative, and marginally, even judicative or legislative".
- This means the ECI mainly has administrative functions in the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections.

EXEMPTION FOR RARE DISEASES DRUGS

CONTEXT:

The Central Government has given full exemption from basic customs duty on all Rare Diseases drugs.

Key-highlights of the development:

- The Central Government has given full exemption from basic customs duty **on all drugs and food for special medical purposes** imported for personal use for treatment of all Rare Diseases listed under the **National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021.**
- Drugs/Medicines generally attract basic customs duty **of 10%**, while some categories of lifesaving drugs/vaccines attract concessional **rate of 5% or Nil.**

What are 'rare diseases'?

- Rare diseases are diseases which affect a small number of people compared to the general population.
- These are serious, often chronic and progressive, diseases.

Easing health costs

The government has announced policy changes in import duties to ease the healthcare costs of rare diseases. A lowdown:

■ Full exemption from basic customs duty on imported drugs and special medical foods for personal use in treating rare diseases

■ Certificate from health authorities required for individuals to get the exemption

■ Previously, drugs/medicines

attracted customs duty of 10%, with some lifesaving drugs having concessional rates

■ Pembrolizumab, used in cancer treatment, also fully exempted from basic customs duty

Annual treatment costs for rare diseases can range from ₹10 lakh to over ₹1 crore per year



About National Policy of Rare Diseases (NPRD):

- The National Policy of Rare Diseases (NPRD) was notified in **March 2021**.
- **Aim:**
 - ▶ To increase focus on indigenous research and local production of medicines.
 - ▶ To lower the cost of treatment of rare diseases.
 - ▶ To screen and detect rare diseases early at early stages, which will in turn help in their prevention.
- **Categorization: The policy has categorized rare diseases into three groups:**
 - ▶ **Group 1:** Disorders amenable to one-time curative treatment.
 - ▶ **Group 2:** Those requiring long-term or lifelong treatment.
 - ▶ **Group 3:** Diseases for which definitive treatment is available but challenges are to make an optimal patient selection for benefit, very high cost, and lifelong therapy.
- **Financial Support:**
 - ▶ Provision for financial support of up to Rs.50 lakhs to the patients suffering from any category of Rare Diseases and for treatment in any of the Centre of Excellence (CoE) mentioned in NPRD-2021, outside the Umbrella Scheme of **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi**.

Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi: The Scheme provides **financial assistance to patients, living below the poverty line (BPL)** and who are suffering from major life-threatening diseases, **to receive medical treatment at any of the super speciality Government hospitals/institutes.**

- While nearly all genetic diseases are rare diseases, not all rare diseases are genetic diseases.
- There may be as many as 7,000 rare diseases, individual diseases may be rare, and the total number of people with a rare disease is large.
 - ▶ **Examples:** Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSD), Gaucher disease, Pompe disease, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, haemophilia, MPS 1 and 2, and Fabry disease etc.

WHO defines a rare disease as "an often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder with a prevalence of **1 or less, per 1000 population**".

Drug Regulatory System in India:

- The **Drug Regulatory Authority (DRA)** is the institution in charge of developing and enforcing the majority of pharmaceutical legislation and regulations.
- Its main responsibility is to assure drug quality, safety, and efficacy, as well as product information accuracy.
- This is accomplished through enacting regulations that ensure the **manufacture, procurement,**

import, export, distribution, supply, and sale of medications, as well as product promotion and advertising and clinical studies, are carried out following established the Central drugs standard control organisation (CDSCO), guidelines.

About CDSCO:

- The **National Regulatory Authority (NRA)** of India is the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)**, which is part of the **Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.
- CDSCO is responsible for approving drugs, conducting clinical trials, establishing drug standards, monitoring the quality of drugs imported into the country, and coordinating the activities of State Drug Control Organisations by providing expert advice to achieve uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

CRITICAL VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT POLICIES NOT ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT: SC

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court of India has observed that the Central government's frequent reliance on sealed covers to validate its actions in courts has reduced constitutional rights and procedural guarantees of a fair hearing.

About the case:

- The Apex Court was deciding on Malayalam news channel **MediaOne's plea** against the telecast ban imposed on it by the Central government.
- The Supreme Court showed anger to the government for silencing voices in the media who "**speak truth to power**" by branding them as "**anti-establishment**".

Anti-establishment:

It means used for individual or Organisation who Opposed or hostile to the **social, economic, and political principles of a ruling class (as of a nation)**.

- Government targets media which are **against their ideologies**.
- Supreme Court has also said on state's "**unguided and ad hoc**" use of sealed covers in courts to outsmart citizens' rights to **personal liberty, life and profession**.

Supreme courts' stand:

- The press has a duty to **speak truth and present citizens** with hard facts, enabling them to make choices that prepare democracy in the right direction.
- The restriction on the freedom of the press compels citizens to think along the same tangent.
- A **homogenized view on** issues that range from socioeconomic polity to political ideologies would pose danger to democracy.

Press Freedom in India:**Grounds of restriction against press:**

A law could impose only those restrictions on the exercise of this right; it faces certain restrictions under article 19(2), which is as follows:

- Sovereignty and integrity of India,
- Security of the State,
- Friendly relations with foreign States,
- Public order, decency or morality or in
- Contempt of court,
- Defamation
- Incitement to an offence.

- **Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras, 1950:** The Supreme Court in Romesh Thappar v. the State of Madras observed that freedom of the **press lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations**.
- **Fundamental Right under Article 19:** The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression under **Article 19**, which deals with 'Protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech, etc.
- **Implicit Right:** Freedom of the press is not expressly protected by the Indian legal system but it is impliedly protected **under Article 19(1) (a)** of the constitution.
- However, Freedom of the press is **also not absolute**.

GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES AQUACULTURE BILL

CONTEXT:

The Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Bill 2023 was introduced in the Lok Sabha, which seeks to amend the Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act 2005.

Highlights of the Bill:

- **Introduced by:** Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying **Parshotaam Rupala**.

- The Bill seeks to **decriminalise the offences** under the Act for promoting ease of doing business and to fine-tune the operational procedures of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority.
- It also aimed at **promoting newer forms of environment-friendly coastal aquaculture** including cage culture, seaweed culture, marine ornamental fish culture and pearl oyster culture which has the potential for creating additional employment opportunities.
- The Bill also has a provision to **prevent the use of antibiotics** and pharmacologically active substances which are harmful to human health in coastal aquaculture.

Significance of the Bill:

- The Bill has potential for creating **additional employment opportunities**.
- It also has a provision to prevent the use of antibiotics and pharmacologically active substances which are harmful to human health in coastal aquaculture.

Coastal Aquaculture Authority:

- CAA was established under the provisions of the **Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act, 2005**
- **Objective:** To regulate the activities connected with coastal aquaculture in coastal areas.

Other Government Interventions:

- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY):**
 - ▶ The Government has launched the PMMSY for the development of marine & inland fisheries.
 - ▶ Rs.11,000 crore for activities in Marine, Inland fisheries, & Aquaculture & Rs. 9000 crores for Infrastructure – Fishing Harbours, Cold chain, Markets etc shall be provided.
 - ▶ There are provisions of Ban Period Support to fishermen (during the period fishing is not permitted).
 - ▶ The focus will be on Islands, Himalayan States, and North-east & Aspirational Districts.
- **National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB):**
 - ▶ NFDB works for development of Fisheries in the country from Intensive Aquaculture in Ponds & tanks to Coastal Aquaculture.
 - ▶ **It also focuses on:** –
 - ▶ Human Resources development programs in fisheries sectors,
 - ▶ Deep sea fishing & tuna processing,
 - ▶ Ornamental Fisheries,
 - ▶ Innovative Projects Quality seed dissemination program,
 - ▶ Cage & pen culture in open water bodies etc.

ERAVIKULAM NATIONAL PARK GETS A FERNARIUM

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Eravikulam National Park (ENP) has got a new attraction i.e. a Fernarium set up inside the park.

A **fernery or Fernarium** is a specialized garden for the cultivation and display of ferns.

About the move:

- About **52 varieties of ferns** have already been planted in the **new Fernarium**.
- As per data, ENP has **104 varieties of ferns**.
 - ▶ Government has planned to **increase the number of ferns** inside the park to cover all 104 varieties soon.
- This is the **first time such a fern collection** has been established in the hill station.

What are ferns?

- Ferns are part of the **Epiphytic family**.
- They grow naturally in a **soilless condition**.
- The plants obtain water and nutrients through leaching from trees. A large number of ferns are on the trees inside the park
- They **reproduce via spores and have neither seeds nor flowers**.
- Ferns are the **ecological indicator** of healthy forests.

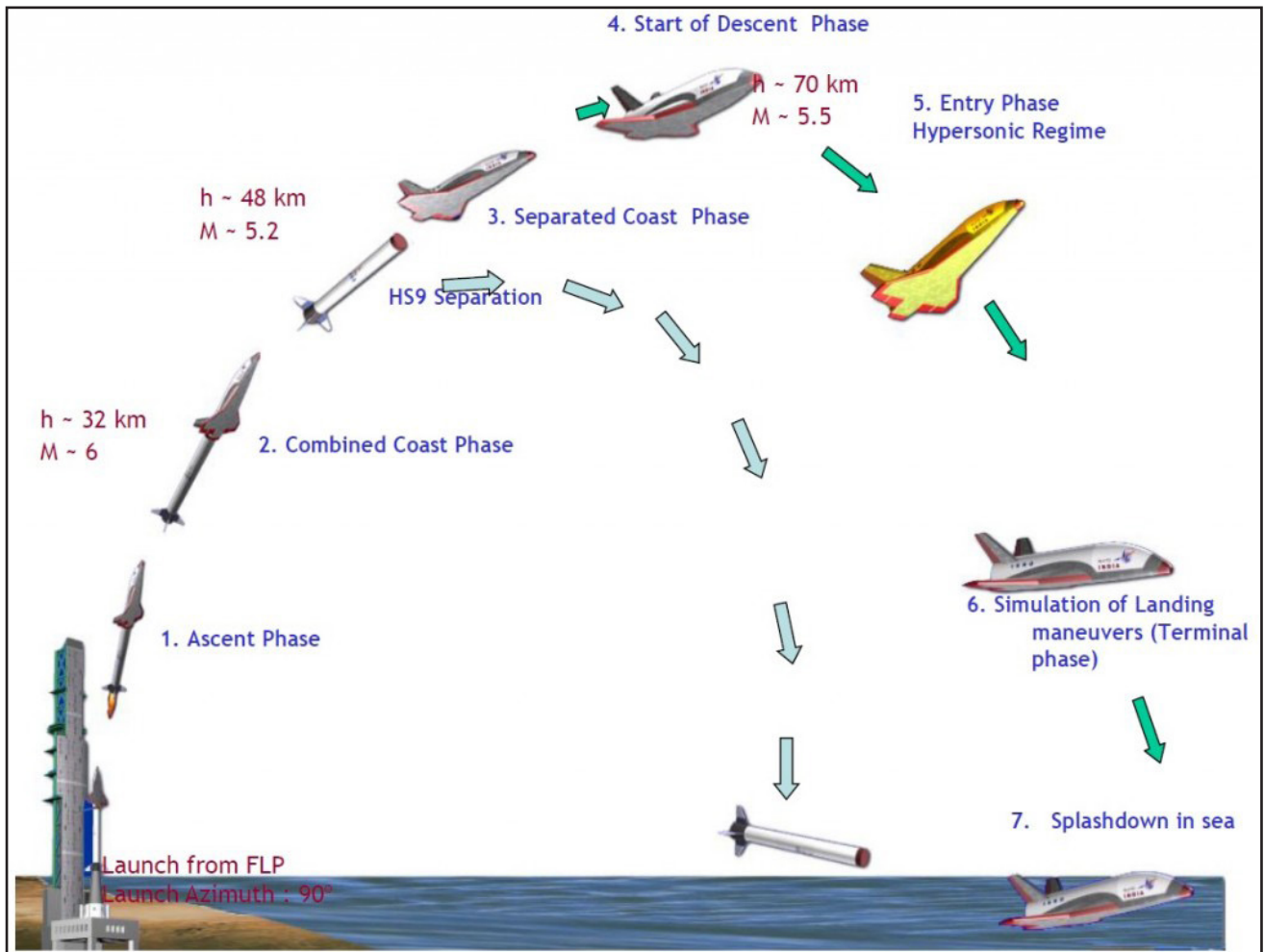
About Eravikulam National Park (ENP):

- This is also the **land of "Neelakurinji"**, the flower that blooms once in twelve years.
- The **highest peak south of the Himalayas – The Anamudi** (2695 meters) is situated in this park.
- **Topography:** The major part of the park is covered with **rolling grasslands**, but several patches of **shola forests are also found** in the upper part of the valley.

ISRO TESTED REUSABLE LAUNCH VEHICLE

CONTEXT:

ISRO successfully carried out the landing experiment of the **Reusable Launch Vehicle-Technology Demonstration (RLV-TD)** programme at the **Aeronautical Test Range in Chitradurga, Karnataka**.



About Reusable Launch Vehicle-Technology Demonstration (RLV-TD):

- The configuration of RLV-TD is similar to that of an aircraft and **combines the complexity** of both **launch vehicles and aircraft**.
- The winged RLV-TD has been configured to **act as a flying test bed to evaluate various technologies**, namely, hypersonic flight, autonomous landing and powered cruise flight.
- **Components:**
 - ▶ RLV-TD consists of a fuselage (body), a **nose cap, double delta wings and twin vertical tails**.
 - ▶ It also features symmetrically placed active control surfaces called **Elevons and Rudder**.
- This technology demonstrator was boosted to **Mach no: 5** by a conventional solid booster (HS9) designed for low burn rate.

Objectives of RLV-TD:

- Hypersonic aero thermodynamic characterisation of wing body
- Evaluation of autonomous Navigation, Guidance and Control (NGC) schemes

- Integrated flight management
- Thermal Protection System Evaluation

Significance:

- In a first in the world, a winged body has been carried to an altitude of 4.5 km by helicopter and released for carrying an autonomous landing on a runway.

Aeronautical Test Range (ATR) Facility:

- **Aeronautical Test Range (ATR)** is out-door testing and evaluation facility set up by DRDO exclusively for unmanned and manned aircraft.
- The ATR is under the command of the Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE).
- ATR is located at Varavoo Kaval in Challakere Taluk of Chitradurga district
- ATR, Chitradurga has a Range Control Centre (RCC) with **air traffic display system**. It is equipped with a mission **video distribution and display system**. It has a **Radar Centre** which houses primary and secondary surveillance radars.

NEW QUALITY CONTROL ORDERS FOR FIBRES

CONTEXT:

Recently, the new Quality control orders (QCO) have been issued for fibres and have been made mandatory for a few.

About the Orders:

- Quality Control Orders (QCO) have been issued for fibres — **cotton, polyester and viscose**.
 - These fibres constitute the **basic raw materials** for majority of the Indian textile and clothing industry.

India's textile sector

- India's textile sector is one of the critical sectors of the Indian economy, accounting for more than two per cent of the total GDP and more than 12 per cent of the manufacturing sector **gross domestic product (GDP)**.
 - The sector is also the second largest provider of employment in India, after agriculture.
 - It provides employment to an estimated 45 million people directly and to another 60 million indirectly through allied activities.
- While the standards were available earlier too, these are now **revised and made mandatory** for a few, and yet to be finalised for others.
 - International manufacturers of these fibres, who supply to India, are also mandated to get **a certificate** from the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**, which is the certifying authority for the QCOs.

Why are fibres covered under QCOs?

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

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS):

- BIS, the **national standard body of India**, was established under the **BIS Act, 2016**.
- It is responsible for the harmonious development of activities of **standardisation, marking and quality certification of goods**.
- The following schemes of certification are covered under BIS:
 - Product Certification Scheme**– Applicable for tangible products; with some products classified under compulsory certification.
 - System Certification Scheme**– Applicable for systems/ process
 - Foreign Manufacturers Certification Scheme** - Applicable for foreign manufacturers who are engaged in the sale of their products in India.
 - Hallmarking** – Applicable for articles made from precious metals like gold and silver
 - ECO Mark Scheme** – Applicable for products affecting or related to the environment

SECTION: 'D'
(SHORT NEWS)

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Idu Mishmis



Announcement to declare **Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary** in Arunachal Pradesh as a tiger reserve has caused disquiet among the area's **Idu Mishmi people**, who feel that a **tiger reserve** would "hinder their access" to the forest.

Who are Idu Mishmis?

- The Idu Mishmi is a sub-tribe of the **larger Mishmi group** (the other two Mishmi groups are Digaru and Miju) in Arunachal Pradesh and neighbouring Tibet.
- Known for their weaving and craftsmanship skills, the Idu Mishmis primarily live in Mishmi Hills, bordering Tibet.
- The tribe is estimated to comprise **around 12,000 people** (as per census 2011), and their language (**also called Idu Mishmi**) is considered endangered by UNESCO.

Significance of Forests for Mishmi tribe:

- Traditionally animists, the tribe has strong ties with the **region's rich flora and fauna**.
- Tigers are especially important to the Idu Mishmis — according to Idu mythology, they were born to the **same mother, and thus, tigers are their "elder brothers"**.

Yangli festival



Tiwa tribesmen celebrated **Yangli festival** in **Karbi Anglong** district of Assam in every **three years**.

The Festival:

- Yangli is one of the important festivals of the Tiwas as it is related with **agriculture** which is the mainstay of their economy.
- In this festival, the Tiwas worship for a **bountiful harvest** and to protect their crops from pest and other natural calamities.
- **Sowing of paddy** starts immediately after celebrating this festival.

About Tiwa Tribe:

- Tiwa is one of the **major tribe of Assam** that centres itself on a traditional form of agriculture.
- Also known as **Lalung**, the indigenous community is recognized as a **Scheduled Tribe (ST)** within the state of Assam.

Thira Dance Form

Recently, '**Nagaraja Thira**' was celebrated at the Sree Muchilottu temple at Kuthiravattom in **Kozhikode, Kerala**.

About:

- Thirra or Theyyam thira is a ritual dance performed in "Kaavu" (**grove**) & **temples** of the Malabar region in Kerala.



- This art form is performed by the **artists of malaya** (the artist who recognised for performing the art form called as a “perumalayan”) community.
- This art is performed **during Utsavam** (annual temple festival).

Key features:

- Clan deities (**Bhagavathi, Shiva**) are worshipped in these forms.
- Theyyam thira is main sub division of **Theyyam**.

Theyyam are Hindu Shamanic ritualistic dance forms practiced in northern Kerala and some parts of Karnataka.

- Thira brings the **gods to life**.
- Performers dress up with ceremonial facial paint and loud clothing and dance in front of the deity, the bhagavathi.
- The objective clearly is to **bring a sense of awe** to the proceedings.
- Each performer represents a **particular deity** and is sponsored by devotees as a prayer offering.
- These dancers are viewed as **being possessed by the gods** when they are in their act, with devotees queuing up to meet them to **share woes and wishes**.
- The performers belong to the “**Peruvannan**” caste of, who are given prime importance in Thira.
- Therefore in Kerala, both **upper caste Brahmins**, and lower caste tribals have an important place in worship.

Pattanam ancient site



Pattanam, the **iron-age and post-iron-age archaeological site** was recently mentioned in news for emerging as an example of a space and time with no caste or institutionalised creed, but with a close connect to nature

About:

- Pattanam is the only **multi-cultural archaeological site** on the south-western coast of the Indian-subcontinent.
- The site is often referred to as the ‘**first emporium**’ of the Indian Ocean.
- It is an example of the **Greco-Roman classical age** coming into direct contact with an **ancient South Indian civilisation**.
- The site belongs to **iron-age and post-iron-age** which was also contains sophisticated weaponry.
- The Pattanam excavations have unearthed **over 45 lakh sherds (ceramic fragments)**; these include **approximately 1.4 lakh** belonging to the littoral regions of the Mediterranean, the **River Nile, the Red Sea**, the western and eastern Indian Oceans, and the South China Sea.

- Pattanam is an ancient town in Kerala located 30 kms north of Cochin in Ernakulam district.
- It was an early historic urban settlement and an important maritime trading hub.

Avalanche hits Sikkim's Nathu La



A major avalanche hit northeastern state **Sikkim's Nathu La** border region.

Nathu La pass:

- Nathu La, one of the most important **Himalayan passes** in the country which is situated on the **border with China**.
- It is a major tourist destination because of its scenic beauty.
- It is over **55 kilometres** from Gangtok.
- Nathu La, situated on the international border **14,450 feet above sea level**, is one of the **open trading border posts** between India and China.

World's highest Frozen Lake marathon



In Ladakh, country's **first ever Frozen Lake Marathon** on **Pangong Tso** has been officially registered in the **Guinness Book of World Records** as the **world's highest Frozen Lake marathon**.

The Pangong Tso Lake:

- Pangong Lake, situated at a height of almost 4,350m, is the world's highest saltwater lake.
- Pangong Lake, one of the most famous lakes in Leh Ladakh, derives its name from the Tibetan word, "Pangong Tso", which means "high grassland lake".
- **One-third** of the nearly **160 kilometres-long lake** lie in India, other **two-thirds in China**.

'Cope India' Exercise



The Air Forces of India and the U.S. are set to conduct the Cope India exercise from at the Kalaikunda airbase in West Bengal, with Japan as an observer.

About Exercise Cope India:

- It is a **bilateral joint exercise** between **Indian Air Force (IAF)** and the **United States Air Force (USAF)**.
- Cope India **began in 2004** as a fighter training exercise.
- The exercise has **evolved to incorporate subject matter expert exchanges, air mobility training**, airdrop training and large-force exercises, in addition to fighter-training exercises.

Turkey approves Finland NATO membership bid

Finland became the **31st member of NATO** after Turkey's parliament voted to approve its application.

Background:

- Turkey had delayed **Finland's** bid to join the West's defensive alliance for months - complaining the Nordic nation was supporting "**terrorists**".



- Any **NATO expansion** needs the **support of all its members**.

About:

- Finland will now be formally admitted into NATO at its next summit, taking place in **July in Lithuania**.

Significance:

- Finland, a country with a **1,340km (832 mile)** border with Russia and one of the most **powerful arsenals of artillery pieces** in Western Europe, is ditching its neutrality and joining the alliance in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

10th edition of SLINEX-23 in Colombo



India and Sri Lanka are going to hold the **10th edition of SLINEX-23**, the bilateral maritime exercise, in Colombo.

Background:

- India-Sri Lanka maritime exercise SLINEX is an annual maritime exercise.
- The exercise aims to enhance interoperability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best practices and procedures in multi-faceted Maritime operations between both Navies.
- Interaction between the navies of the two countries has also grown significantly in recent years, in consonance with India's policy of 'Neighbourhood First' and the vision of '**Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR)**'.

Swachhotsav



In the run up to the **Women's Day**, Union Minister Shri Hardeep Singh Puri launched **Swachhotsav, 3-week women-led swachhata campaign**, under the Swachh Bharat Mission Urban 2.0.

About:

- Campaign aims to **recognize and celebrate** the transition from women in sanitation to women-led sanitation.
- Series of events and activities will be organized across cities to celebrate women from all walks of life.
- **First edition of Women Icons leading Sanitation & Waste Management (WINS) Challenge-2023** announced during the event.
- **WINS Challenge-2023** to recognize high-impact women entrepreneurs or women-led enterprises working to achieve urban swachhata.

Lynx-U2 fire control systems

The defence ministry has signed a contract with **Bharat Electronics Limited** for the procurement of **13 'Lynx-U2' fire control systems** for the Navy.

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**About the technology:**

- The Lynx-U2 system is a **naval gun fire control system** designed and developed indigenously.
- It is capable of accurately tracking and engaging targets amid sea clutter as well as air or surface targets.
- The ministry signed a contract with BEL, Bengaluru for "procurement of 13 Lynx-U2 fire control systems for the Indian Navy at a total cost of over Rs 1,700 crore under Buy Indian – **IDMM (Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured) category**.
- The fourth generation, completely indigenous systems, will be installed on **New Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels** to be built indigenously at **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers and Goa Shipyard Limited**.

Marburg virus outbreak

Equatorial Guinea and Tanzania has reported outbreaks of **Marburg virus disease (MVD)**, the first-ever outbreak of the disease in these countries.

Background:

- The Marburg virus was first identified in 1967 during outbreaks in **Germany and Serbia** and is known to cause **severe and fatal viral** haemorrhagic fevers in humans.
- The virus is closely related to another deadly virus, Ebola and is rated as a high-risk pathogen by the WHO.

About the Virus:

- Marburg virus is transmitted to **humans through contact** with infected animals such as **fruit bats**, and further human-to-human transmission.
- It can occur through direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected patient or contaminated surfaces resulting in outbreaks.

India registers first case of plant fungus

The first case of a plant fungus infecting human beings has been reported from Kolkata.

About

- The fungus, **Chondrostereum purpureum**, is known to cause Silver leaf disease in plants.
- However, a 61-year-old man is infected by the fungal species *Chondrostereum purpureum*.
- Of the hundreds of millions of fungal species, only a few cause infections in humans.
- Plant fungus is adapting to invade human cells by evading the process of 'phagocytosis'.
- 'Phagocytosis or 'cell eating', happens when a cell uses its plasma membrane to recognise and ingest particles larger than 0.5 μm to clean and defend itself.

NASA's Artemis II mission to Moon



NASA announced the **four astronauts** who will make up the **crew of Artemis II**, which is scheduled to launch in late 2024.

About the mission:

- The Artemis II mission will send these four astronauts on a 10-day mission that culminates in a flyby of the Moon.
- The flyby will take the **Orion capsule** in one pass around the far side of the Moon.
- This mission will test the **technology and equipment** that's necessary for future lunar landings and is a significant step on NASA's planned journey back to the surface of the Moon.

Amogha-III Missile System

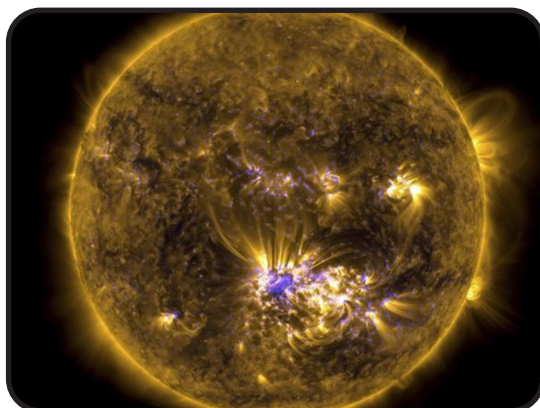


Bharat Dynamics (BDL) has successfully conducted a field firing test of its latest 3rd generation man-portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM), Amogha-III.

About:

- Developed by BDL's Research and Development Division, the missile features a dual-mode IIR Seeker with a range of 200 to 2500 meters.
- Amogha-III showcases a tandem warhead, consisting of two separate explosive charges that are detonated in sequence.
- The use of a tandem warhead significantly enhances the missile's ability to defeat heavily armoured targets.
- Moreover, the missile is capable of top and direct attack modes, adding to its versatile nature.
- The missile can be fired in lock-on-before launch (LOBL) mode and its anti-armour tandem warhead can penetrate in excess of 650 mm beyond Explosive Reactive Armour (ERA).

NASA's new computer model 'DAGGER'



NASA's new **Deep Learning Geomagnetic Perturbation (DAGGER) model** aims to forecast **geomagnetic disturbances** and provide a warning for solar storms.

About:

- NASA said that a new computer model that combines **artificial intelligence and agency satellite data** could help prepare for dangerous space weather.
- The model, called DAGGER (Deep Learning Geomagnetic Perturbation), uses the technical tool to analyze spacecraft measurements of the solar wind and forecast where an impending solar storm will strike on Earth – **with 30 minutes of advance warning.**

What are Solar storms?

- Solar storms are a large explosion in the Sun's atmosphere caused by tangling, crossing or reorganizing of magnetic field lines.
- **Coronal mass ejection (CME)** is a massive burst of plasma from the Sun, sometimes associated with solar flares.

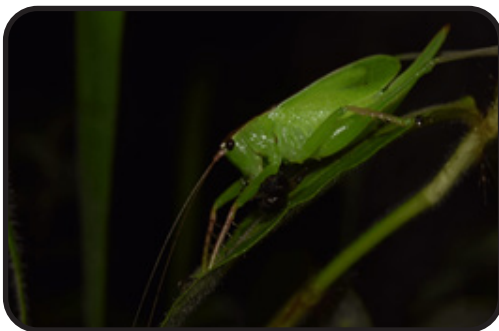
Mark 54 anti-submarine torpedoes



India is going to sign a weapons deal with the United States soon to buy American weapons, including the Mark 54 anti-submarine torpedoes.

- The MK 54 lightweight torpedo is the primary anti-submarine warfare weapon used by the U.S. Navy surface ships, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.
- Designed to operate in shallow waters and in the presence of countermeasures, it can track, classify and attack underwater targets.

New species of bush cricket



The three new species of Bush crickets, were found in two study locations namely in Shillong, Meghalaya, and in the forested area around of Sonipat, Haryana.

About the species:

- The two new species found in Haryana and were named **Hexacentrus tiddae** — borrowing heavily from the local dialect where bush crickets are referred to as tiddaes — and **Hexacentrus ashoka**, respectively.
- The third species found in Meghalaya was named **Hexacentrus khasiensis** — after the **Khasi hills** where it was discovered.

- Hexacentrus is a genus of predatory katydids.
- In India, the genus Hexacentrus is represented by seven species of which six are morphologically characterized while one is only acoustically characterized.

Deepest-ever fish caught in Japan



The deepest living fish (snailfish, of the **Pseudoliparis belyaevi species**) ever recorded have been caught, miles beneath the surface of the north Pacific Ocean.

The snail fish species:

- Pseudoliparis belyaevi is a species of snailfish found in **hadal zone** of the Northwest Pacific Ocean, particularly the Japan Trench.
- This species reaches a length of 10.8 cm.
- The species is a marine and bathymersal fish that lives at depths exceeding 6,000m deep.
- It is also **harmless to humans**.

Gaj Utsav 2023



The Union Ministry of Environment and Forest is going to celebrate Gaj Utsav 2023 at **Assam's Kaziranga National Park**.

About the event:

- This is to be celebrated on the successful completion of 30 years of Project Elephant, and to provide the much needed boost to conservation efforts.
- **Objective:** to promote elephant conservation, prevent human-elephant conflict, and protect their corridors and habitat.
- This event is significant as **Kaziranga is also a UNESCO World Heritage site**, and also serves as home to the highest density of tigers in the world.
- Assam has the second largest wild elephant population in the country, and also has a large number of elephants that are under human care.
- Thus, the state was deemed perfect to celebrate Gaj Utsav 2023.

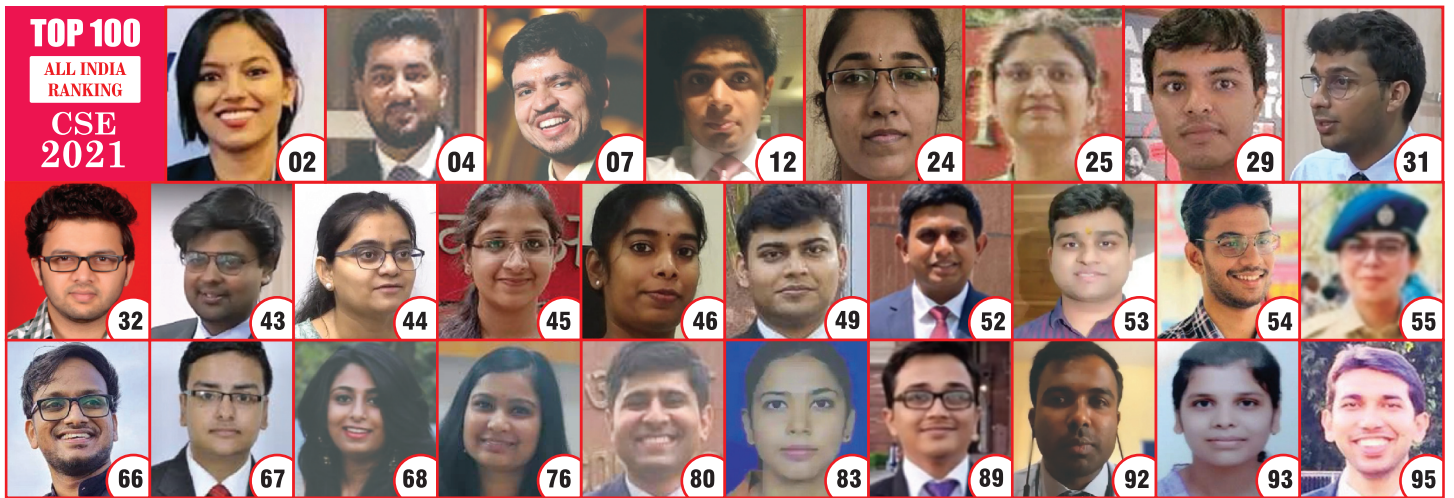
Nagri Dubraj receives GI tag



Chhattisgarh's special variety aromatic rice **Nagri Dubraj** has received the **Geographical Indications (GI) tag**.

- The GI tag is given for Nagri Dubraj to the women's self-help group '**Maa Durga Swyam Sahayata Group**' which is involved in the production of this variety of rice.
- Nagri Dubraj rice, popularly known as Basmati of Chhattisgarh, is the traditional, fragrant rice variety of the state, which has a lot of fame and demand outside Chhattisgarh as well.
- Shringi Rishi Ashram area of Sihawa is considered to be the place of origin of the Nagri Dubraj.

- GI tag is an intellectual property right in which the quality and importance of any product is determined by the geographical environment of that particular place.
- Thus, the place of origin of that product is recognized.



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