

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 2

APRIL
2023

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GS-II ▢ AMENDMENTS IN IT RULES TO CHECK 'FAKE NEWS'

▢ IT MINISTRY REGULATES 'REAL MONEY GAMING' PLATFORMS

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▢ Quality Control Orders for technical textile products

▢ 6 GHz spectrum

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— **Disclaimer** —

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

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

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SECTION: 'A'
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

INDIA LIKELY TO GET 'BELOW NORMAL' MONSOON RAINS IN 2023

CONTEXT:

As per the information by private weather forecasting agency *Skymet*, India is likely to get "below normal" monsoon rains in 2023 with an increasing likelihood of El-Nino, which typically brings dry weather to Asia.

Highlights of the forecast:

- As per the agency, the likelihood of **El Nino** is increasing.
- El Nino return may affect the weather patterns and bring a **weaker monsoon in India** and parts of Asia, especially over the Indian Ocean region.

Measurement of Normal to average rainfall:

- India defines **average, or normal, rainfall as between 96% and 104%** of a 50-year average of 88 centimetres (35 inches) for the **four-month season** beginning June.
- Monsoon rains in India are expected to be **94% of the long-term average**.
- Skymet expects **northern and central parts** of the country to be at **risk of being rain deficit**.
- Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh**, are likely to observe less than normal rains during the **second half of the season**.
- The **Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)** also agreed to the news and is expected to announce its annual monsoon forecast soon.

The upcoming El Nino:

- The change in sea surface temperature associated with **El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO)** might seem marginal but is enough to **disrupt weather patterns globally**.
- It can affect even the **large-scale circulation of air** in the polar stratosphere i.e. **8km above the Earth**.
- The **US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** has reported that the equatorial Pacific Ocean will return to its neutral state between **March and May of 2023**, and it is likely that El Niño conditions will develop during the northern hemisphere's autumn and winter.

El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO):

- The combined phases of **La Nina and El Nino** are termed **El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)**.
- The phenomenon affects **rainfall patterns, global atmospheric circulation, and atmospheric pressure across the planet**.
- In the neutral state, (neither El Niño nor La Niña) trade winds blow east to west across the surface of the tropical Pacific Ocean, bringing warm moist air and warmer surface waters towards the western Pacific and keeping the central Pacific Ocean relatively cool.

Concerns for India:

- Monsoon dependency:** Nearly half of India's farmland, which has no irrigation cover, depends on **annual June-September rains** to grow crops such as **rice, corn, cane, cotton and soybeans**.
- Risk of Food Inflation:** Unseasonal rains and hailstorms have damaged ripening, winter-planted crops such as wheat in India's fertile **northern, central and western plains**, exposing thousands of farmers to losses and raising the risk of further food price inflation.

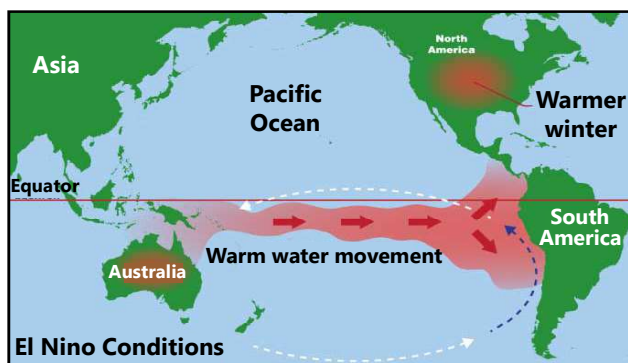
About El Nino:

- El Niño is Spanish for "**the boy child**," which is often used to refer to Jesus Christ, and the phenomenon earned this name because it typically occurs in December around Christmas.
- El Niño occurs **every 2-7 years** and can last anywhere between **nine months and two years**.
- El Niño is the warm phase of the **El Niño Southern Oscillation (commonly called ENSO)** and is associated with a band of warm ocean water that develops in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific (**between approximately the International Date Line and 120°W**), including off the Pacific coast of South America.

Conditions in the equatorial Pacific Ocean prior to the occurrence of El Niño:

- The tropical Pacific has consistent westerly moving trade winds. The trade winds push warm water on the surface of the ocean from **east to west (westerly)**.
 - This causes warm water to build upon the western side of the ocean near Asia.
- Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the ocean, near Central and South America, cold waters are pushed up towards the surface.
- Because of this, there is a difference in temperature across the equatorial Pacific, with warm water to the west and cold water to the east.

- The warm water in the west heats the air, making the warm air rise and leading to drastic weather, including rain and thunderstorms.
- The rising warm air causes a circulation between east and west in the Pacific, with the warm, moist air rising in the west, and cool, dry air descending in the east.
- All of these natural occurrences lead to a reinforcement of the easterly winds and cause a self-perpetuating motion in the air in the Pacific.



Possible Consequences globally:

- **Likely to exceed 5°C above the target of the Paris agreement:**
 - ▶ During the process of ENSO, the rise and cooling process of seawater is simultaneous, however, the rise for a prolonged period can make significant changes in the upper atmosphere.
 - ▶ El Niño adds some extra heat to the atmosphere and is estimated can exceed to the 1.5°C threshold of the Paris agreement.
- **On the Australian coast:**
 - ▶ During El Niño, scientists expect less rain, higher temperatures and increased fire risk, especially during winter and spring in the southern hemisphere.
 - ▶ As the globe heats up, some regions are warming faster than others. Australia can become 1.4°C hotter now than in the **early 20th century**.
- **In South America:**
 - ▶ South American weather is significantly disrupted every time an El Niño event occurs;
 - ▶ flooding on the west coasts of Peru and Ecuador and
 - ▶ Drought in the Amazon and northeast, where the consequences of crop failures can reverberate across the continent.
- **Disease outbreak:** During El Niño events, due to fall in precipitation and rise in temperature in Colombia, is linked to outbreaks of diseases spread **by insects, such as malaria and dengue fever**.

- ▶ Higher temperatures during El Niño boost the rates at which mosquitoes breed and bite.
- **Less carbon intake:** Later on, the **Amazon rainforest dries and vegetation growth slows** so that less CO₂ is absorbed from the atmosphere, a trend repeated in the tropical forests of **Africa, India and Australia**.
- **In Northern Europe:**
 - ▶ The balance between **high pressure over the Azores** and low pressure over Iceland determines where the rain goes in Europe during winter by pushing the jet stream.
 - ▶ During El Niño winters, both pressure centres lose strength, and the jet stream brings wetter conditions to southern Europe.

AMENDMENTS IN IT RULES TO CHECK 'FAKE NEWS'

CONTEXT:

Social media platforms and other intermediaries on the Internet are now required to make sure that “fake news” articles about the Union Government which are **not declared by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), are taken down from their platforms when they are alerted to such posts.**

What is Fake news?

- Fake news is **news, stories or hoaxes** created to deliberately **misinform or deceive** readers.
- Fake news, defined by the New York Times as “**a made-up story with an intention to deceive**”.
- Usually, these stories are created to influence people’s views, push a **political agenda or cause confusion and can often be a profitable business for online publishers.**

About the development:

- The new amendment of the **IT Rules 2021** states that media platforms will **no longer enjoy legal immunity** on content posted by their users and they can now be called ‘**as a party**’ in court proceedings.
- The changes were already being notified through the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023**, amending the IT Rules, 2021.
- Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) sources had mentioned that the ‘**fact check unit**’ would reach out to relevant government departments to get their view on whether a piece of news is ‘**fake or not**’, and take a call accordingly.

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:

- Intermediaries are entities that store or transmit data on behalf of other persons, and include **telecom and internet service providers, online marketplaces, search engines, and social media sites.**
- The **Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act)** was amended in 2008 to provide an exemption to intermediaries from liability for **any third party information.**
- Following this, the IT (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2011 were framed under the IT Act to specify the due diligence requirements for **intermediaries to claim such exemption.**
- These rules are made by amending the provisions under IT rules 2011.
- The key additions under the 2021 Rules include additional due diligence requirements for certain social media intermediaries, and a framework for regulating the **content of online publishers of news and current affairs, and curated audio-visual content.**

Press Information Bureau (PIB):

- The Press Information Bureau (PIB) is the **nodal agency of the Government of India** to disseminate information to **the print and electronic media** on government policies, programmes, initiatives and achievements.
- It functions as an **interface between the Government and the media** and also serves to provide feedback to the Government on people's reaction as **reflected in the media.**

Other Laws Governing Fake News:

- There is no specific law against fake news in India.** Free publication of news flows from **Article 19** of the Constitution guaranteeing freedom of speech.
- Press Council of India**, a regulatory body, can warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, the news agency, the editor or the journalist or disapprove the conduct of the editor or the journalist if it finds that a newspaper or a news agency has violated journalistic ethics.
- News Broadcasters Association (NBA)** represents the private television news and current affairs broadcasters. The self-regulatory body probes complaints against electronic media.
- Indian Broadcast Foundation (IBF)** also looks into the complaints against contents aired by channels.

- Broadcasting Content Complaint Council (BCCC)** admits complaints against TV broadcasters for objectionable TV content and fake news.
- Indian Penal Code (IPC) has certain sections which could curb fake news:** Section 153 and section 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class) can be invoked to guard against fake news.
- Civil or Criminal Case for Defamation** is another resort against fake news for individuals and groups hurt by the fake news.

IT MINISTRY REGULATES 'REAL MONEY GAMING' PLATFORMS

CONTEXT:

The Information and Technology (IT) Ministry has made amendment which can allow platforms that involve depositing money for winnings in games to avoid the 'betting and gambling' tag, if they are deemed permissible by a self-regulatory body.

Background:

- An **inter-ministerial task force** was set up in 2022, by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to propose contours of a **national-level legislation** to regulate online gaming.
- The task force has proposed the creation of a **central regulatory body** for the sector, clearly defining what games of **skill and chance** are, and bringing online gaming under the purview of the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002**, among other things.

The task force included the CEO of government think tank **NITI Aayog**, and **secretaries of ministries including IT, Home, Finance, Information and Broadcasting, and Consumer Affairs, among others.**

About the development:

- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has released an amendment to the IT Rules, 2021, to regulate "**online real money games**" where users have to risk money to play.
- The ministry has also issued a fresh advisory warning media entities, platforms and online intermediaries **against airing advertisements** of betting and gambling platforms.

- In the new advisory, the ministry took strong exception to the recent instances of mainstream **English and Hindi newspapers** carrying advertisements and promotional content of betting websites.
- **For Real money gaming:**
 - ▶ MeitY's **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023** require real money gaming platforms to register with a **self-regulatory body (SRB)** that will determine whether or not the game is "**permissible**".
 - ▶ Under this provision, **three SRBs** will be recognized soon.
- The government would be constrained to take **appropriate legal action** against any non-compliance.
- The advisory has been issued to all media formats, including **newspapers, television channels**, and online news publishers.

What if the games were not getting permission by regulatory bodies?

- If these games are not deemed '**permissible**', they will not get the protection of the amendment, and States may be **able to take action** against them for being betting or gambling platforms.
- As such, games that are deemed permissible will be allowed to **operate legally, even if they involve deposits against an expectation of winnings**.
- Video games where money is not involved need not to approach an SRB, putting to rest a concern the **traditional gaming industry** had around the draft version of the Rules.

Online Gaming Market in India:

- The online gaming industry in India grew at a **compounded annual growth rate (CAGR)** of 38% between 2017-2020, as opposed to **8% in China** and **10% in the US**.
- India's percentage of **new paying users (NPU)** in gaming has been the fastest growing in the world for two consecutive years, at **40% in 2020** and **50% in 2021**.
- The revenue of the **Indian mobile gaming industry** is expected to reach \$5 billion in 2025.

Some of the real money games in India:

Here's a list of the **Top 10 Real Cash Games in India** are:

- MPL, Ludo Empire, Zupee, Junglee Rummy, Dream 11, Winzo, Paytm First Games, GAMEE, Rummy Circle and GetMega.

Why it is difficult to regulate online gaming?

- **Lack of clarity between 'Game of Skill' vs. 'Game of Chance'**: As Gaming and Gambling are interchangeably used against each other; it becomes difficult to differentiate both the terms without any scrutiny.
- The pay-to-play model makes online gaming a chance rather than a skill based gaming platform.
- **Lack of self-regulation**: Restrictions based on time-limits and checks for choices are self-regulatory and difficult to control by an external source.
- **No streamlined process of licensing and regulations**: As online gaming is in digital form rather a physical one and has no boundaries (i.e. Accessible worldwide).

Way forward:

- **Robust Policy Framework:**
 - ▶ India's e-gaming industry needs robust policy frameworks and digital infrastructure to fulfill its potential, maximize revenue and foray toward being a global leader.
 - ▶ A government body that oversees operations, drafts progressive policies preventing societal issues, suitably classifies games of skill or chance, ensures consumer protection and combats illegality and crime is required.
- **Cooperation between Government and Gaming Companies:**
 - ▶ Gaming companies should also continue to work with the government to promote responsible gaming by educating gamers and establishing best practices like conducting **KYC checks, user authentication, etc.** to prevent illegal activities and financial dealings on their platforms.

WHAT IS THE SC'S PUBLIC INTEREST IMMUNITY CLAIM PROCEDURE?

CONTEXT:

In the recent **MediaOne** judgment, the Supreme Court has devised a '**procedure to balance the principles of justice**' with **non-disclosure of information on grounds of national security**.

Background:

- **MediaOne TV**, a channel of Madhyamam Broadcasting Limited, is owned by **Jamaat-e-Islami Hind**, which

makes it one of the few Indian news channels whose ownership lies **with an Islamic organization**.

- MediaOne TV first received its license from the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B Ministry)** in 2011, and was launched in 2013.
- In January this year, the I&B Ministry refused to renew the Kerala-based TV channel's transmission license and issued an order asking the company to halt its operations.
- The I&B Ministry claimed that this was because the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** had denied security clearance to the channel.
- In its communication to MediaOne TV, the I&B Ministry cited considerations of '**national security**' and public order in its refusal to renew the channel's license.

About the case:

- The Supreme Court has set aside the Central government's order imposing a broadcast ban on the Malayalam news channel MediaOne.
- The top court has also rejected the judgment of the **Kerala High Court** that had upheld the **I&B Ministry's order**.
 - In making its decision, the High Court had relied on material disclosed solely to it by the Home Ministry in a '**sealed cover**'.

Sealed cover jurisprudence is the **practice followed by the Supreme Court and High Court** of seeking and accepting information from **government agencies in sealed envelopes** that can only be perused by the judges.

- The SC, which has repeatedly expressed unhappiness with so-called "**sealed cover jurisprudence**" and against it has also devised a procedure for "**public interest immunity claim**" as a less restrictive alternative to sealed covers for deciding claims involving state secrets.
- According to the SC, the validity of a claim involving **national security** considerations must be based on the test of :
 - Whether there is material to conclude that the non-disclosure of information is in the interest of national security; and
 - Whether a reasonable prudent person would draw the same inference from the material on record.
- However, in the **MediaOne case**, even if one assumes that the non-disclosure was in the interests of confidentiality and national security, the means adopted by the government did not satisfy the proportionality standard.

The Public interest immunity claims:

- The court has mentioned that it assesses the **validity of public interest immunity claims**, which address the same harms as the sealed cover procedure, based on the "**structured proportionality**" standard.
- This is essentially a "**standard of review**" used by courts in public interest immunity claims — and "the lack of such a standard in sealed cover proceedings to protect procedural safeguards indicates that public interest immunity claims constitute less restrictive means".

Constitutional backing:

- Public interest immunity claims secures/supports **Article 145 of the Constitution**, which warrants that all judgments of SC to be **delivered in open court**.
- Article 145(4)** lays down that "**No judgment shall be delivered by the Supreme Court save in open Court, and no report shall be made under article 143 save in accordance with an opinion also delivered in open Court**".

Significance of the step:

- To safeguard the "claimant against a potential injury to procedural guarantees in public interest immunity proceeding", the court reiterated its power to **appoint amicus curiae**.

The amicus curiae will be **allowed to interact with the applicant and their lawyer** before the proceedings to ascertain their case, and enable them to make effective submissions on the necessity of disclosure.

- The appointment of amicus curiae will **balance concerns of confidentiality** with the need to preserve public confidence in the **objectivity of the justice delivery process**.

Supreme Court's argument against sealed cover jurisprudence:

- The court added that while public interest immunity claims also **impact the principles of natural justice**, sealed cover proceedings go a step ahead and infringe on the **principles of natural justice as well as the principles of open justice**.
- Alternatively, the court suggested that **confidential portions of the document** could be redacted, and a summary of the document's contents could be provided to fairly exclude materials after a successful public interest immunity claim.

HOW MONEY CAN INFLUENCE POWER AND POLITICS OF A DEMOCRACY?

CONTEXT:

According to study on Norway's model, found that responsiveness to economic inequality and restricting money in politics can influence a democracy.

About the Dilemma:

- One of the reasons that a democracy is held to be superior to other forms of governance is the promise it holds out that every citizen will have equal say in policy-making.
- This would indeed be the case in a perfect democracy where every individual is politically equal.
- But in the **real world**, no democracy is perfect, and what has typically been observed is that the affluent enjoy a disproportionately greater say in policy-making compared to the average citizen.

The Gilens Model:

- Martin Gilens an **American political scientist** in his **2012 study** has found that in the U.S., public policy decidedly favoured the **preferences of the affluent**, rather than of the **poor and the middle classes**.
- American democracy, however, has certain unique features, such as the **heavy reliance of political parties on private campaign donations**, which might make it far more unresponsive to the non-affluent.
- According to him, in the countries like **Germany, Netherlands and Sweden**, policy was once again found to be skewed in favour of the **preferences of the affluent**.

Comparing Gilens model for Norwegian democracy:

- Norway, too, **public policy skewed** towards the preferences of the affluent, their influence was by no means exclusive, and the **opinions of the poor and the middle classes** also found expression in government decisions.
- Secondly, the study revealed that on **economic issues**, the preferences of both the poor and the rich seemed to matter almost equally.
- Most interestingly, the opinions of the **highly educated** were found to be strongly related to policy outcomes regardless of **whether they were rich or poor**.

- Clearly, in a **social democracy like Norway**, the link between money and politics was much weaker than in the U.S and in India.

What are the outcomes of the study?

- As a result, policies favoured by the poor have a "**better chance at being maintained or even expanded by the government**" and there is often a self-reinforcing component by which new policy gains for the poor are more easily achieved over time.
- The second effect of **redistributive welfarism** is that Norway has one of the lowest levels of income inequality in the world, which essentially means less of a resource advantage for the affluent to be used (in whichever way possible) to influence politics.
- In India, for instance, we have the **exact opposite scenario**, where electoral bonds empower wealthy private entities to make astronomical donations to political parties with zero transparency in terms of who gave how much money to which party or candidate.
- Understandably, inequality and policies known to worsen inequality have been gaining ground in India in recent years.

Conclusion drawn:

- The study concludes by pointing out that although policy-making in democracies overall (including Norway), tended to skew in favour of the affluent, thereby violating the **basic democratic principle of political equality**, the Norway example demonstrated two things
 - One, in a **welfarist social democracy** with low inequality, education was a stronger predictor of responsiveness than income; and
 - Two, restricting how money can be used to **influence elections**, and strengthening countervailing forces (such as trade unions) might **change the balance of power**

GOA RESTRICTION ON TRANSFER OF AGRICULTURAL LAND BILL 2023

CONTEXT:

The Goa Legislative Assembly has passed the Goa Restriction on Transfer of Agricultural Land Bill 2023 amid the oppositions.

Provisions of the bill:

- The Bill seeks to **impose restrictions on the transfer (sale) of agricultural lands** in Goa to non-agriculturalists.
- Farmers cannot sell agricultural land to **non-agriculturalist** and **grants the permission**.
- The permission may be granted in **special circumstances**, such as when an **industrial or a commercial** undertaking needs land for agriculture in connection with its operations.
- The land can also be transferred if it is required by a **cooperative farming society**.
- If a non-agriculturist intends to take up agriculture and is capable of cultivating the land personally, the collector may consider permitting the transfer.
- If a person intending to take up agriculture acquires the land, he or she will **have to sustain farming**.
- The land shall revert to the government **three years** from the date of **abandonment or discontinuation** of the farming activity.

Significance:

- The bill would save the **state's paddy fields** from being taken over by buyers for non-agriculture purposes.
- After the **Goa Agricultural Tenancy Act**, this is the second such Bill in the last 60 years enacted by the state to safeguard the paddy fields.
- It is government to safeguard the rights of the farmers and prevent the **diversion of land**.

Why is the Bill being opposed?

- **Diversion of agricultural land:** The provisions empowering Collectors to make exceptions would pave the way for large-scale diversion of agricultural land, encouraging industrialists from outside the state to purchase swathes of agricultural land in Goa.
- **Excessive Powers to Bureaucracy:** The very fact that the Collector is given powers to transfer land to non-agriculturists like industrialists or commercial undertakings gives scope for blatant misuse of agricultural land.
- **Farmers losing Protection:** Farmers argued that it revokes protections that ensured that agricultural land remained with local farmers and tenants.

Land/Property Rights and related laws in India:**Right to Property:**

- ▶ **'Right to private property was previously a fundamental right'** under Article 31 of the Constitution.
- ▶ Property ceased to be a fundamental right with **the 44th Constitution Amendment in 1978**.

- ▶ Nevertheless, **Article 300A** required the state to follow due procedure and authority of law to deprive a person of his or her private property.

The right to property is now considered to be not only a constitutional or statutory right, **but also a human right**.

List II: State List of the 7th schedule of the Indian constitution:

- ▶ The State List of the **seventh schedule** of the Indian Constitution consists of subjects on which only the respective State Legislature has the power to make laws.
- ▶ Originally, the State list consisted **of 66 subjects**. However, in the **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1976**, five issues were transferred from the State list to the Concurrent list.

Land is a **state subject** and it is the responsibility of the concerned state/UT to look after matters related to land.

- ▶ They are, Education, Weights and measurements, Forests, Administration of justice, Protection of wild animals and birds.
- ▶ At present, there are only **61 subjects on the State list**. Matters related to regional and local importance are added to the State list.
- ▶ **Important subject matters listed under the State list:**
 - ▶ Public order, excluding the use of any naval, military, or air force or any other armed force of the Union or of any other force subject to the control of the Union.
 - ▶ Police, including the railway and village police
 - ▶ Public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries.
 - ▶ Relief of disabled people and unemployable
 - ▶ Libraries, museums, and other similar institutions are controlled or financed by the State.
 - ▶ Agriculture
 - ▶ Officers and servants of the respective High Court
 - ▶ Local government
 - ▶ Fisheries
 - ▶ Elections of State Legislature
 - ▶ The public debt of the State
 - ▶ Taxes on agricultural income
 - ▶ Taxes on lands and buildings
 - ▶ Tolls
 - ▶ Jurisdiction and powers of all courts in the respective state

POWERS OF L-G

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court (SC) has orally observed regarding the action of Lieutenant Governor (L-G) to make decision 'without aid and advice' of the Council of Ministers in nominating 10 members to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

About Supreme Court's Observation:

- The top court, which had earlier issued notice on the **plea of the Delhi government**, has granted 10 days to the office of the L-G to file the response to the petition seeking quashing of the nomination of the **10 members**.
- A Bench comprising **Chief Justice D. Y. Chandrachud and Justices P. S. Narasimha and J. B. Pardiwala** has made these observations on LG's decision of nominating the members without any consultation with the members of legislative assembly.

Who is a Lieutenant Governor (L-G)?

- The full form of **LG is Lieutenant Governor**. In India, LG is in charge of a '**Union Territory (U.T)**'.
- However, the rank of Lieutenant Governor is only available in the 3 U.T of India, i.e. **the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi and Puducherry**.

Role of LG:

- L-G is a representative of the President and acts on the aid and recommendation of the Council of Ministers.
- The **Section 41 of the GNCT (Government of national capital territory) of Delhi Act, 1991** states that the L-G shall act in his discretion during a matter that falls outside the range of the powers conferred on the Legislative Assembly.
- In respect of matters related to Police, Public order and Land, L-G exercises his authority to the extent delegated to him by the President.

Discretionary Powers of L-G: If in the Legislative assembly elections no single party seeks a majority, L-G is sovereign to act on his own and ask the leaders of the single largest party or the chosen leader of two or more parties to form the government.

- Under the President's rule, L-G behaves as executive head of the government and has the power to appoint a group of advisors who act as the council of ministers.

Eligibility criteria to become Lieutenant Governor:

- The candidate should be an Indian citizen
 - Candidate should be at least 35 years old
 - Shouldn't be a part of parliament house or state legislature house
 - Should not keep other profitable offices.
- Before a Minister enters upon his office, the Lt. Governor shall administer to him the oaths of office and of secrecy according to the forms set out for the purpose in the schedule.

Constitutional Backing:

- **Articles 239 and 239AA** of the Constitution, as well as the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, clearly underline that the role of Centre is more prominent in the **UT of Delhi**, where the L-G is the eyes and ears of the Centre.
- Under the constitution, the Delhi Assembly has the **power to legislate** on all subjects except **law & order and land**.

Complexity in administration of Delhi:

- The very nature of the administrative set up in Delhi seems to give rise to a dispute between the CM (and the Council of Ministers) and the LG.
- **Article 239AA** clearly states that the Council of Ministers and the CM shall aid and advice the LG in his executive functions while the legislative assembly is to handle the law making process.
- It also says that in case of a difference between the LG and any minister (particularly with regard to the Chief Minister), the President's decision shall be sought by the LG.
- If this is unavailable and the matter is an urgent one, the LG may use his discretion to take a decision and initiate action in the matter as he deems fit.
- Over the past few years, the **power tussle between the Delhi government and the office of the Lieutenant-Governor** has been based on the interpretation of this article.
- The government claims that the LG is bound by **the advice of the Council of Ministers**, meaning that the governance of Delhi is the responsibility of the state government while the LG's office claims that the ministers remain in an **advisory capacity** and the ultimate decision should be the LG's.

'ONLINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION' SYSTEM FOR EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

CONTEXT:

At the Delhi Arbitration Weekend celebrations held on February 2023, Union Law Minister has emphasised the need for institutional arbitration to enhance the ease of doing business.

About the situation:

- India has shown tremendous improvement in the **World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report**, rising from the 142nd rank among **190 countries in 2014 to 63rd in 2019**.
- However, India is ranked 163rd, in '**Enforcing Contracts**', which is a marginal improvement from its previous ranking.
- The report says it takes almost four years and **31% of the cost of the claim to enforce a contract in India**; in contrast, it takes just over **two years** and costs **22% of the claim value in Brazil**.
- India opened up its economy in the 1990s, which was the decade of **growth for international arbitration**.
- As more countries entered into **bilateral investment treaties**, institutional arbitration became the preferred choice of resolution.
- But India is yet not a preferred arbitration destination, even for **disputes between Indian businesses**.

Online Dispute Resolution: (As a solution)

- ODR is a mechanism of resolving disputes in a virtual environment.
- It can reduce the **burden on the courts**, save time and costs, and **provide effective resolutions**.
- ODR involves more than just **audio/video conferencing**.
- It encompasses the integration of tools such as multi-channel communication, case management systems, automated case flows, digital signatures and stamping, and even the application of advanced technologies such as blockchain, natural language processing, artificial intelligence, and machine learning.
- Private platforms** in India are already resolving lakhs of disputes through ODR.
- Many corporates have migrated to ODR to resolve small-value disputes.

The **Reserve Bank of India, the National Payments Corporation of India, and the Open Network for Digital Commerce** have also led the way by incorporating ODR mechanisms into several of their initiatives.

Some Government initiatives:

- Project eCourts:**
 - It aims to enhance judicial productivity, both qualitatively & quantitatively and to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost-effective, predictable, reliable and transparent.
 - It also provides efficient & time-bound citizen-centric services delivery as detailed in e-Court Project Litigant's Charter.
- Integrated Case Management System (ICMS):**
 - It was launched In 2017 for integrating the Supreme Court and the High Courts of the country and enabling e-filing throughout the country.
 - Presently, several High Courts in the country including those at Delhi, Punjab, Bombay, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Allahabad have enabled e-filing and presentation of evidence on electronic platforms in their commercial divisions.
- Budgetary allocation:**
 - The Finance Minister has announced to allocate ₹7,000 crore for the third phase of the e-Courts project in the Union Budget 2023 (aimed at digitising the justice system), a dedicated fund must be set up for furthering ODR.

Suggestive measures:

- To incentivise use of ODR:** It can be achieved by way of legislative measures such as setting ODR as a default dispute resolution tool for categories of disputes arising out of **online transactions, fast-tracking enforcement of ODR outcomes, and exempting or reducing stamp duty and court fees**.
- To solve infrastructural challenges:** Means that to curb the digital divide, and catalyse ODR's growth by optimising existing setups such as **Aadhaar kendras** to also function as **ODR kiosks**.
- The government departments should explore ODR as a grievance redress mechanism:** Proactive use of ODR by government entities will not only increase trust in the process but also ensure that citizens have access to a convenient and cost-effective means of resolving disputes with the government.

BEHIND RBI'S REPO RATE PAUSE

CONTEXT:

The pause in the rate hike cycle by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is now being seen as a favourable step to make the growth-inflation trade-off lean more in favour of the growth, especially in the backdrop of emerging concerns over slowing consumption.

About the move:

- The recent pause in the rate hike is necessary as a **high base effect** during March-October was expected to ease pressure on the **headline retail inflation rate**.
- The moderation in inflation rate forecast for **FY24 to 5.2 per cent** from 5.3 per cent earlier has imparted some breathing space to the RBI to pause its rate hike cycle.
- The move is seen significant, as there are lingering concerns over the entrenched and **high core inflation – the non-food, non-fuel component of inflation**.
- The RBI also outlined risks from **protracted geopolitical tensions**, tight global financial conditions and global financial market volatility to its monetary policy outlook.
- Global **financial market volatility** has surged, with potential upsides for imported inflation risks.

What is Repo rate?

- Repo stands for "**Re Purchase Option**". Repo Rate is the rate at which the central bank (Reserve Bank of India) lends to **other banks by buying the securities** with an agreement that the bank will buy back on a certain date.

- Repo lending is a short-term lending option to meet the liquidity requirements of commercial banks.
- Repo rate is the rate at which the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends to other banks**.
- It is a part of the **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF)** of the RBI.

Components of Repo Rate:

- **Preventing "squeeze" in the economy** - The central bank adjusts the Repo rate in response to inflation. As a result, it seeks to govern the economy by keeping inflation under control.
- **Hedging and Leverage** - The RBI tries to hedge and leverage by purchasing securities and bonds from banks and providing cash in exchange for collateral deposited.
- **Short-Term Borrowing** — The RBI lends money for a **short length of time**, up to an overnight period, after which banks purchase back their deposited securities at a predetermined price.
- **Collateral and Securities** — The RBI takes gold, bonds, and other forms of collateral.
- **Cash Reserve or Liquidity**: Banks borrow money from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to preserve liquidity or cash reserves as a precautionary measure.

Impacts of repo rate:

- The increased repo rate will **discourage banks to borrow** from the RBI and lending to the customers.
- This in turn will **reduce the liquidity** and demand in the market.
- It is part of the **contractionary monetary policy**.
- On the other hand, **decreased repo rate** will encourage banks to borrow and lend to customers increasing the liquidity and demand in the market. This is a part of the **Expansionary Monetary Policy**.

Bank rate Vs. Repo rate:

Parameter	Bank Rate	Repo Rate
Meaning	The Bank Rate is applied to loans made by the central bank to commercial banks.	Repo Rate is applied to the central bank's repurchase of securities sold by commercial banks.
Collateral	No collateral is required	Securities, bonds and agreements are given as collateral
Impact	Directly impact customers as it impacts long term lending.	The Repo rate is handled by the banks and doesn't impact the customers directly.
Rate	Higher than Repo due to no collateral and long term nature.	Lower than Bank Rate as there is a collateral and repurchase obligation.
Duration of loan	Bank rate caters to long term requirements of commercial banks.	Repo Rate focuses on short term financial lending.

LIVESTOCK INSURANCE SCHEME

CONTEXT:

According to information by a Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) regarding zero insurance coverage of livestock in 2022-23, Centre is considering a comprehensive livestock insurance scheme modelling the Prime Minister's Fasal Bima Yojana.

The Livestock Numbers:

India has rich Livestock resources which can be seen in following manner:

- World's **highest livestock owner** at about 535.78 million
- First in the **total buffalo population** in the world - 109.85 million buffaloes
- Second in the **population of goats** - 148.88 million goats
- Second largest poultry market in the world
- Second largest producer of fish and also second largest aquaculture nation in the world
- Third in the population of sheep (74.26 millions)
- Fifth in the population of ducks and chicken (851.81 million)
- Tenth in camel population in the world - 2.5 lakhs

Findings of the Parliamentary panel:

- At present, less than **1% of the country's cattle**

Component	Pattern of assistance
Premium rates for Normal areas	Normal areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premium rates for one year policy - 4.5% Premium rates for two year policy - 8% Premium rates for three year policy - 11% 	Central share 25%, State share 25% and Beneficiary share 50% for APL, and Central sharer 40%, State share 30%, and Beneficiary share 30% for BPL, SC/St
Premium rate for NER/Himalayan States	NER/Himalayan States
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premium rates for one year policy - 5.5% Premium rates for two year policy - 9% Premium rates for three year policy - 11.5% 	Central share 35%, State share 25% and Beneficiary share 40% for AP<, and Central share 50%, State share 30% and Beneficiary share 20% for BPL/SC/ST

Other related Initiatives:

- Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM):** To undertake breed improvement programme for indigenous breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock.

population is insured and the average yearly premium is 4.5% of the insured amount.

- The report also highlighted that not even a single livestock was insured during 2022-23, whereas during 2021-22, 1, 74,061 animals were insured.
- The Committee asked **Department of Animal Husbandry** to explore the possibility of developing an **App-based Livestock Insurance facility for livestock owners**.
- Committee noted that **high policy premium rate** and general economic conditions of farmers are reasons for lower enrolment in such schemes.

About Livestock Insurance scheme:

- The Livestock Insurance Scheme, a centrally sponsored scheme was implemented on a pilot basis during **2005-06 and 2006-07**.
- The scheme was later implemented on a regular basis from 2008-09 in 100 newly selected districts of the country.
- The scheme was later subsumed under the Submission on '**Innovation and Extension: on livestock development of National Livestock Mission**'.
- Coverage:** The scheme is implemented in all the districts of the Country from 21.05.2014.
- Animals covered:**
 - The indigenous / crossbred milch animals, pack animals (Horses, Donkey, Mules, Camels, Ponies and Cattle/ Buffalo Male), and Other Livestock (**Goat, Sheep, Pigs, Rabbit, Yak and Mithun etc.**) are covered under the purview of this component.

(FMD) and Brucellosis with a total outlay of Rs.13, 343 crore to ensure 100% vaccination of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat and pig population.

- **National Livestock Mission:** IT is for intensive development of livestock, especially small livestock along with adequate availability of quality feed and fodder.
- **Livestock Health & Disease Control Scheme:** Assistance is provided for prevention and control of animal diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) etc.
- **Disease Protection of Livestock:** For livestock protection, the diagnostic kits against Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Bluetongue (BT) diseases and Subviral Particle based Infectious Bursal Disease Vaccine were developed.

PRADHAN MANTRI MUDRA YOJANA

CONTEXT:

Recently, Banks and financial institutions have sanctioned ₹23.2 lakh crore to more than 40.82 crore beneficiaries under the Mudra Yojana.

About the news:

- **Banks and financial institutions** have sanctioned ₹23.2 lakh crore to unfunded beneficiaries.

About **68% of accounts** under the scheme belong to **women entrepreneurs**, and 51% of accounts belong to entrepreneurs of **SC/ST and OBC categories**.

About the PM Mudra Yojana:

- It was launched in April, 2015.
- **Aim: To refinance collateral-free loans given by the lenders to small borrowers.**
- **Banks and MFIs can draw refinance under the MUDRA Scheme after becoming member-lending institutions of MUDRA.**
- Mudra Loans are **available for non-agricultural activities up to Rs.10 lakh and activities allied to agriculture such as Dairy, Poultry, Bee Keeping etc., are also covered.**
- Mudra's unique features **include a Mudra Card which permits access to Working Capital through ATMs and Card Machines.**

- **There are three types of loans under PMMY:**
 - ▶ **Shishu (up to Rs.50, 000).**
 - ▶ **Kishore (from Rs.50, 001 to Rs.5 lakh).**
 - ▶ **Tarun (from Rs.500, 001 to Rs.10, 00,000).**
- **Objectives of the scheme:**
 - ▶ **Fund the unfunded:** Those who have a business plan to generate income from a non-farm activity like manufacturing, processing, trading or service sector but don't have enough capital to invest can take loans up to Rs.10 lakh.
 - ▶ **Integration of Informal economy into Formal sector:** It will help India also grow its tax base as incomes from the informal sector are non-taxed.
 - ▶ **Micro finance institutions (MFI) monitoring and regulation:** With the help of MUDRA bank, the network of microfinance institutions will be monitored.
 - ▶ **Promote financial inclusion:** With the aim to reach Last mile credit delivery to micro businesses taking help of technology solutions, it further adds to the vision of financial inclusion.
 - ▶ **Reduce jobless economic growth:** Providing micro enterprises with credit facility will help generate employment sources and an overall increase in GDP.
- **Eligibility:**
 - ▶ Any Indian Citizen who has a **business plan for a non-farm sector** income generating activity such as manufacturing, processing, trading or service sector and whose credit need is less than Rs.10 lakh can approach either a **Bank, MFI, or NBFC** for availing of **Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd. (MUDRA) loans** under **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY).**

Performance of the MUDRA Loans:

- MUDRA was introduced by keeping **financial inclusion** at the core of the scheme. The scheme aimed at prioritizing marginalized sections of the society such as **women, STs and SCs.**
- Out of the 12 crore beneficiaries, 28 per cent or 3.25 crore are first-time entrepreneurs. About 74 per cent or 9 crore, borrowers are women and 55 per cent belong to the SC/ST and OBC category.
- **Disbursement to STs and SCs remained low:** The general category entrepreneurs across the States dominate the loan chart, receiving 45 per cent of loans followed by Other Backward Castes (23 per cent), Schedule Caste (18 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes (5 per cent).

- **Smaller States has not received any major boost:** The growth of entrepreneurship in the non-corporate small business sector (NCSB) in **smaller States** has not received any major boost under the scheme.
 - ▶ Data shows that States that already have **higher Credit-Deposit (C-D) ratios** are the ones reaping the benefit of the scheme.
- **Less disbursement to NE states:** While six large States led by Tamil Nadu have received over **50 per cent** of the Rs.6.82-lakh crore **MUDRA loans** disbursed, a majority of **North-East States and Union Territories** have not received even 1 per cent of the total MUDRA loans.

About **60 per cent of the total loan sanction** comes from these top six States.

- **Pool of proxies:** The Mudra scheme is designed such as to give preference to women entrepreneurs. This has led to creation of a pool of proxies, who claim to turn entrepreneurs.

Way forward:

- **Alternative channels:** MUDRA should enhance the role of alternative channels such as **microfinance institutions (MFIs)** and other intermediary organisations in reaching out to end-users by leveraging additional funds.
 - ▶ The small ticket size loans of less than **Rs.10 lakh** require a very different expertise in terms of managing the loans as well as making it a success.
- **New institutional infrastructure:** Similarly, the RBI has created a new institutional infrastructure in the form of Small Finance Banks, which specialise in small ticket size loans.
 - ▶ In fact, the entire organisation is groomed to handle and manage small borrowers. The cooperative banks are also best suited to operate in small loan segment.
- **Formalization of micro units:** The policy makers should widen the **MUDRA** net and incentivize further formalization of micro units. The revamping of the scheme should allow the participation of digital lenders with small unsecured loans to new-to-credit MSMEs.
- **Popularise digital payments:** Efforts should be made to popularise digital payments like **BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money)** and **JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-mobile) trinity** to promote cashless transactions for using the MUDRA loans.

MEDICAL DEVICES AND CYBER-ATTACK THREATS

CONTEXT:

After ransomware attacks at major hospitals expose the risk to medical records, experts warn that personal medical devices with software components are also hazards that can leak health data.

What is Ransomware?

- Ransomware is a form of malware designed to encrypt files on a device, rendering any files and the systems that rely on them unusable.
- Malicious actors then demand ransom in **exchange for decryption**.

About:

- Common medical devices such as **oximeters, hearing aids, glucometers, and pacemakers** can be turned into spyware and malware, warning that such devices can even leak your medical data if not layered with adequate cyber protection.
- Industry experts are now seeking urgent Central government intervention to recognise this threat and immediately put in place measures to plug any possible drain.
- Currently, there are **no guidelines** on the regulation of **software as medical device (SaMD)** and **software in medical devices (SiMD)**.
- Therefore, we suggest that the government should consult with industry experts to identify the challenges that could pose a risk to national security.

Need for regulations:

- The Indian population is growing at a rate of 1.6% per year and has an **elderly population** of over 100 million.
- Rapid economic growth, **rising middle class incomes** and the increased market penetration of medical devices has left the population vulnerable.

India and medical device market:

- India has one of the world's top 20 markets for medical devices and the **fourth-largest in Asia**.
- The medical devices sector in India is projected to reach \$50 billion by 2025, according to the India Brand Equity Foundation.
- According to statistics from the Commerce Ministry analysed by the **Association of Indian Medical**

Device Industry (AiMeD), medical device imports rose by a record 41% to ₹63,200 crore (\$ 7.91 billion) in 2021-22 from ₹44,708 crore (\$5.59 billion) in 2020-21.

Concerns for India:

- India currently lacks any **centralised data collection mechanism** which gives an exact cost of data corruption for the healthcare industry.
- As pharmaceutical companies continue to **embrace digital transformation**, their highly sensitive, valuable information becomes even more at risk for cyber-attacks.
- Pharma companies face their IT environment being landed with **legacy hardware and software**.
- In particular, **operational technology devices**, networks and systems that support business did not have IT security in mind when built.
- These networks and systems need to connect with **IT networks**, which expose them to an organisation's entire threat landscape and create **new opportunities for cyber criminals**.

National Medical Devices Policy 2022:

- Regulatory streamlining** in order to optimize regulatory processes and multiplicity of agencies for enhanced **ease of doing business**, along with **harmonization with global standards** to ensure standardization (ensuring **safety of devices**).
- Building Competitiveness** through fiscal and financial support for stimulating the development of the local manufacturing ecosystem with private sector investments.
- Infrastructure Development** to provide best-in-class physical foundation, including **medical devices parks** with common facilities such as testing centres, to improve cost competitiveness and enhance attraction of domestic manufacturers.
- Facilitating R&D and Innovation** with a focus on enhanced collaboration in innovation and R&D projects, global partnerships, and joint ventures among key stakeholders to bridge the gap between academic curriculum and industry requirements.
- Human Resource Development** to ensure relevant curriculum at higher education level, skilling of various stakeholders, creation of future-ready HR with required skill sets across the innovation value chain.
- Awareness Creation and Brand Positioning** in creating awareness and positioning India as a hub for manufacturing of medical devices as part of the **"Make in India, Make for the World"** initiative.

EMERGING HAZARDS OF RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION

CONTEXT:

As per the latest data, radioactive materials or contaminated devices are entering into the booming scraps recycling chain, posing a grave health hazard.

About the data:

- Released by:** The annual data on **illicit trafficking of nuclear and other radioactive material** released by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.
- For this database, participating members report **three groups of incidents**.
- According to IAEA,**
 - Group I** includes incidents that are, or are likely to be, connected with trafficking or malicious use;
 - Group II** covers incidents of undetermined intent; and
 - Group III** accounts for incidents that are not, or are unlikely to be, connected with **trafficking or malicious use**.
- The most common source of such contamination is the **feed material (in most cases, metal)** from which the product had been manufactured.

Radioactive waste and Pollution:

- Water and air contamination caused by radioactive elements is known as **radioactive pollution**. It can produce dangerous pollution if radioactive waste is not disposed of properly.
- Radioactive elements are naturally found in the earth's crust.
- Uranium, thorium and actinium** are three NORM (Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials) series that contaminate water resources.
- A small amount of radiation is found in all types of water but the extended amount of radiation is harmful to human health.

Note: Radioactivity in drinking water can be determined by a **gross alpha test**.

- Radioactivity is measured in **Becquerel (SI unit) or in Curie**. The unit Sievert measures the quantity of radiation absorbed by human tissues.

Sources of Radioactive waste generation:

- **Atmospheric Deposition of Cosmogenic Radionuclides:**
 - ▶ Atmospheric deposition (both dry and wet) of **cosmogenic radionuclides** adds radioactive nuclei in the surface water.
 - ▶ Cosmogenic radionuclides are radioactive isotopes which are produced by natural processes and distributed within the Earth system.
- **Nuclear Reactors and Warheads:**
 - ▶ **Nuclear reactors and nuclear warhead** experiments are the key sources of human-induced radionuclides discharge.
 - ▶ Nuclear reactors produce **radioisotopes (Cobalt-60, Iridium-192, etc.)** that hand out as sources of gamma radiation in radiotherapy and numerous industrial appliances.
 - ▶ Nuclear power plants placed at the coastal regions add to the radiological contaminants in the marine water by releasing atomic wastes.
- **Dumping of Radioactive Waste:**
 - ▶ The application of radioactive elements in **nuclear weapons, X-rays, MRI and other medical equipment causes their exposure to human beings**. Dumping of these radioactive wastes in surface water bodies causes water pollution.
- **Mining:**
 - ▶ Mining activities of radioactive elements like uranium and thorium also pollute surface and groundwater.

Health Impacts and concerns:

- **Radiation Syndrome:**
 - ▶ Human tissues absorb radiation through polluted water and foodstuff, which can cause serious health risks. High doses of radiation can cause acute radiation syndrome or dermal radiation injury.
- **Disorders in Human Physiology:**
 - ▶ Exposure to radiation causes various disorders in human physiology, including cancer, leukaemia, genetic mutations, cataracts, etc.

Mutation and Structural Alteration:

- ▶ Genetic effects ionizing **radiation induces mutations in germ cells** (male sperm cells and female egg cells), resulting in **structural alteration in germ cell DNA** that are passed on to offsprings.
- ▶ Hereditary disorders can lead to **premature death and severe mental illness**.

The Atomic Energy Act, 1962:

- The Act articulates India's resolve to pursue the development, control and use of atomic energy¹ for the welfare of the people of India and for other peaceful purposes and for matters connected therewith.
- This Act confers on the Government of India, the powers and responsibilities for **framing of Rules and issuance of notifications for implementing the provisions of the Act**.
- **The powers and responsibilities include those for:**
 - ▶ Production, development, use and disposal of atomic energy / radioactive substances;
 - ▶ Control over radioactive substances or radiation generating plants in order to prevent radiation hazards, secure public safety and safety of persons handling radioactive substances or radiation generating plant and ensure safe disposal of radioactive wastes.

In accordance with these mandates, the **Central Government has promulgated** the;

- Atomic Energy (Radiation Protection) Rules, 2004,
- the Atomic Energy (Working of the Mines Minerals and Handling of the Prescribed Substances) Rules, 1984,
- the Atomic Energy (Safe Disposal of Radioactive Wastes) Rules, 1987,
- the Atomic Energy (Factories) Rules, 1996 and the Atomic Energy (Radiation Processing of Food and Allied Products) Rules, 2012.

These laws formulate the policy and regulatory framework for **control of activities and for ensuring safety** in the activities relating to use of atomic energy.

SECTION: 'B'
(SPECIALS)

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TIGER CENSUS 2022

CONTEXT:

- The tiger population numbers were made public by Prime Minister, at an event to mark the International Big Cat Alliance conference as well as the 50th anniversary of Project Tiger.

Key Findings of Tiger Census, 2022:

- According to the recent findings, India has at least **3,167 tigers in total**.
- This is ostensibly an increase since the last census of 2018.
- There were **2,967 tigers recorded in 2018**, and 2,226 in 2014.
- **Regional upgradation:**
 - ▶ The tiger population has grown the most in

the **Shivalik hills and Gangetic flood plains**, followed by central India, the north eastern hills, the Brahmaputra flood plains, and the Sundarbans.

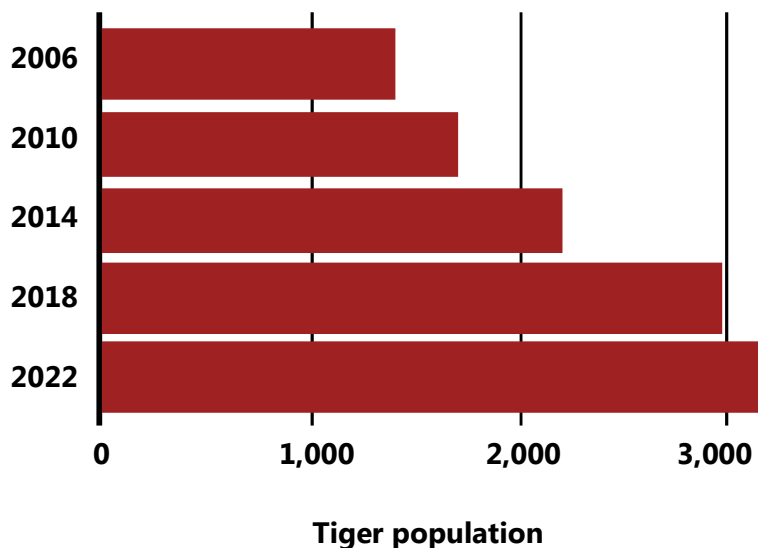
- ▶ There was a decline in the **Western Ghats numbers**.

Fourth Tiger Census 2018: (The last census)

- The 2018 tiger census uses more technology including a mobile app named **"MSTRIPES"** for the very first time to store information of the counting.

BIH CAT COUNT

According to the data released by the PM, the number of tigers in India increased by 200 in the past four years. A look at the tiger population



Steady rise: A tiger at Van Bihar National Park in Bhopal on Sunday. PTI

Another primary focus of the **Tiger census 2018** is to cover the **northeast India** that was not included in the previous census.

- For the very first time three neighbouring countries

Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh are helping in counting the number of tigers all across India, especially in the region with mutual borders.

- Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers, closely followed by **Karnataka and Uttarakhand**.

- **Chhattisgarh and Mizoram** saw a decline in tiger population and all other States saw a "positive" increase.
- Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh **recorded the highest number of tigers**; Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu registered the **maximum improvement**.

International Big Cat Alliance conference (IBCA):

- Tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar, and cheetah are the **seven main big cats** that IBCA will aim to protect and conserve.
- 97 "range" countries, which house these large cats' native habitat, as well as other interested countries, international organisations, etc., are able to join the alliance.
- **Aim:**
 - ▶ To dissemination of information on benchmarked practises, capacity building, resources repository, research and development, awareness creation, etc., on the preservation and conservation of big cats.
- **Functions:**
 - ▶ Advocacy, partnership, knowledge e-portal, capacity building, eco-tourism, partnerships amongst specialist groups, and fund tapping.

Need for Tiger Conservation:

- **Barometers of Ecological health:** Tigers are indicators of the ecological wellness of planet earth. Being the dominant predators of the ecosystem, they ensure that the numbers of herbivore like deer are kept balanced
- **Umbrella species:** Tiger is an umbrella species whose conservation eventually leads to the conservation of many other species such as the ungulates, pollinators and other small animals.
- **Carbon storage value:** Poaching or killing of large bodied vertebrates such as tigers results in increase of herbivore population, which in turn results in forests getting decimated
- **Decline in the tiger population:** There is a tremendous decline in the tiger population as compared to the past 100 years and to prevent the deteriorating condition of tigers, it's important to conserve them.

Facts:

29th July is observed as **International Tiger Day (ITD)** to promote the conservation of the striped cat as well as to advocate a global system for protecting its natural habitats.

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.

What has enabled this rise in the tiger population?

- Political commitment by the Indian Government during the 1970s wherein several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries were created across India.
- Tiger hunting was banned in the country in 1970.
- In 1973, a national tiger conservation program called Project Tiger was launched in the country.
- Objectives and plan:
- Various tiger reserves were created in the country based on the 'core-buffer' strategy.

- Voluntary relocation of local communities from core/critical tiger habitat was undertaken in order to provide safe space for tiger population to regenerate.
- The **Wildlife Protection Act of 1972** was amended in 2006.
- This constituted the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), responsible for implementation of the Project Tiger plan to protect the endangered tigers.
- **M-STrIPES**, short for Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status, a software-based monitoring system was launched across Indian tiger reserves in 2010. Its objective is to strengthen patrolling and surveillance of the endangered Bengal tiger.
- India's 2018 tiger census has made a world record of being the largest ever camera trap wildlife survey.
- Since 2010, it has been classified as an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

What are the dangers confronting the tiger population in India?

- **Illegal poaching** – A large number of people across the world take pride in possessing skin, claws, nails, teeth and trophies of the tiger. Every part of the tiger has great market value leading thus promoting hunting by professional poachers, local hunters, trappers, pirates and villagers.
- **Man-animal conflict**– When tigers come in contact with human settlements local antagonism against tigers often erupts into a serious problem.
- **Encroachment**– human encroachment of tiger habitats for livestock grazing, infrastructure expansion and farming is a cause of concern.
- **Peak carrying capacity**– many reserves are approaching the peak of their capacity at sustaining their populations. Depletion of prey in tiger zones is a cause of concern.
- **Small core habitats**– The core habitats of the tigers in the country are very small. It is only with the addition of buffer zones that protection has become possible. Fragmentation of tiger habitats is a major cause of decreasing tiger population by reducing opportunities for these animals to inbreed. Few tiger reserves don't have any tigers left. In the northeast parts of the country their population has fallen significantly.
- **Infrastructural development**– Linear development such as railways and roadways are a serious threat to the tiger habitats.
- **Climate change**– Due to the global rise in temperatures the tigers along with other species are shifting their belts and migrating upwards towards colder regions.

Suggestive measures:

- Creating tiger corridors where the gene pool exchange would to take place is necessary.
- Corridors have to be built between the existing tiger reserves so that their population can freely move.
- Social upliftment of the communities living in and around the forests must be ensured so that their economic dependence on forest resources becomes lesser.
- Pench Kanha tiger reserve is a good example of development with conservation, where elevated national highway passes through the national park, without disturbing the wildlife.
- Involving the local communities into conservation efforts and sensitizing them about the importance of ecological conservation is the key.
- The tiger conservation approach has to be more dynamic and futuristic by mitigating the effects of climate change on wildlife.

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125TH ANNIVERSARY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH

CONTEXT:

The Prime Minister has participated in the 125th Anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna Math at Vivekananda House in Chennai.

About the Ramakrishna Mission:

- **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886), a 19th-century saint, was the founder of the Ramakrishna Order of monks and is regarded as the '**spiritual founder**' of the **Ramakrishna Movement**.
- Ramakrishna was a priest in the **Dakshineswar Kali Temple** and attracted several monastic and householder disciples.
- **Narendra Nath Datta (1863-1902)** later known as **Swami Vivekananda** was the most devoted pupil of Ramakrishna Paramahansa who carried the message of his Guru Ramakrishna all over the world, especially in America and Europe.
- Later, Vivekananda became the **first spiritual leader** who thought beyond religious reforms.
- He felt that **Indian masses** required secular as well as spiritual knowledge to empower them to believe in themselves.
- Vivekananda established the **Ramakrishna mission** after the name of his **guru Ramakrishna Paramahansa**.
- Through his speeches and writings, he brought out the essence of Hindu culture and religion.



- He believed in the spirit of Vedanta and the essential unity and equality of all religions.

In 1893, he participated in the **All World Religious Conference (Parliament of Religions)** at Chicago in the United States of America. He argued that Vedanta was the religion of all and not of the Hindus alone.

Ramakrishna Math:

- The **Ramakrishna Math** is headquartered at **Belur math** on the bank of river Ganga in West Bengal.
- After the death of Ramakrishna in 1886, the monastic disciples formed the **first Math (monastery)** at Baranagore.
- Ramakrishna Math is an **Order of sannyasins** having **Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)**, regarded as the **prophet of the modern age**, as the ideal.
- Ramakrishna Math is a **registered society** engaged in the service of mankind in the spirit of 'service of God in man'.
- Ramakrishna Math was registered as a **Trust in 1901 by Swami Vivekananda himself**.

Teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa:

- Ramakrishna Paramahansa highlighted the essential unity of religions and the need to lead a spiritual life.
- He believed that the different religions of the world are only different ways to reach the same god.
- He believed that there were many roads to God and the service of man was the service of God, because the man was the embodiment of God.
- Hence, sectarianism had no place in his teachings.
- He realised the divinity in humanity and looked upon the service of mankind as a means to salvation.

ZOJILA TUNNEL AND CONNECTIVITY TO LADAKH

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Union Road Transport and Highways Minister had inspected the under-construction Zojila tunnel, which will establish all-weather connectivity between the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.

- It claims to be **Asia's longest tunnel** and will prove significant for regions' development.

About:

- Currently, the commute between **Srinagar and Leh**, takes over **10 hours** on a good day and passes through extremely inhospitable terrain.

- The **Zojila Pass** is a high mountain pass through which one has to travel in order to make the journey.
- **During harsh winters**, this route is closed due to fears of avalanches, landslides and slippery roads, with areas beyond the pass cut off from the rest of the country for at least five months.
- With the Zojila pass shut, **air connectivity is the only option**, and airfares can skyrocket to over Rs.40, 000 during peak winter months.

Zojila Tunnel Construction:

- The Zojila tunnel will be **India's longest road tunnel**, and is expected to be Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel, boasting a **length of 14.15 km**.
- A connecting tunnel from **Z-Morh on NH1** to the

Zojila tunnel will be built in the Zojila Ghats between **Sonmarg and Kargil**.

- This involves the development and expansion of the 18.475-km highway between Z-Morh to Zojila.
- A **3-km stretch** will be expanded; the rest will be newly developed.
- The highway will have two **twin-tube tunnels**, five bridges, and two snow galleries.
- The work on the entire 33-km span is spread between two union territories – Jammu and Kashmir; and Ladakh.
- The tunnel is being built at a cost of more than **Rs.4, 600 crore**. It is expected to be completed by December 2023.

The Zojila Pass:

- Zojila Pass connects **Srinagar and Leh**.
- Located in the **Kargil district of Ladakh**, it connects the **Union Territories of Ladakh and Kashmir**.
- Also known as the "**Mountain Pass of Blizzards**", it runs at an altitude of **3,528 meters**.
- It lies in the **Zaskar range** of Greater Himalayas.
- The pass connects the **Kashmir Valley to its west** with the **Dras and Suru valleys to its northeast** and the Indus valley further east.



Significance:

- The upcoming Zojila tunnel will provide **perennial connectivity between Ladakh** and the rest of the country.
- The pass is critical for the **Indian Armed Forces'** operational preparedness in the region especially amid China's border disputes.

study and deal with various matters that cannot be directly handled by the legislature due to their volume.

- They also **monitor the functioning** of the executive branch.

Why they are formed?

- It is not feasible to take up all issues on the **floor of the House of Parliament** for discussion and thus, Parliamentary committees/ panels were made up of **Members of Parliament (MPs)** which are constituted to deal with such situations and take up **sector-specific concerns**.
- The Parliamentary Committees are formed to deal with the various types of matters for which the parliament and play a vital role not merely in law-making, but also in the **day-to-day business of the House**.

About the role of parliamentary Committees:

- The Job profile and the structure of a parliamentary standing committee and the Parliament is the same.
- It is same to the effect that the committees are sometimes referred to as '**the mini Parliament**'.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

CONTEXT:

It has been observed in recent times that the role of parliamentary committees has rested in formation of Bills, which was not as earlier and they have much more to do with.

- So, let us understand the role of Parliamentary committees in a democracy.

What is a Parliamentary Committee?

- The Parliamentary committees are established to

- In a parliamentary democracy, Parliament has **broadly two functions**:
 - ▶ Law making
 - ▶ Oversight of the executive branch of the government.
- Parliament is the embodiment of the people's will. **Committees are an instrument of Parliament for its own effective functioning.**

Who constitute these committees?

- Members from both Houses across party lines are represented in most of these committees.
- These members are to be nominated by the **Speaker of Lok Sabha** or the **Chairman of Rajya Sabha** respectively.
- The term of office of these committees **does not exceed one year.**

Constitutional backing:

- Parliamentary committees draw their authority from **two articles**:
 - ▶ **Article 105** (on privileges of Parliament members)
 - ▶ **Article 118** (on Parliament's authority to make rules for regulating its procedure and conduct of business).

Significance:

- Committee reports are **exhaustive and provide authentic information** on matters related to governance.
- Bills that are referred to committees are returned to the **House with significant value addition.**

"Parliament is not bound by the recommendations of committees."

Types of Parliamentary Committee:

- The **Standing Committees (DRSC)**, aligned with specific ministries examines their performance and budgets apart from bills or subjects related to their respective ministries.
- **The Financial Committees** are primarily responsible for scrutinizing the expenditure priorities of the government; suggest measures to improve efficiency in spending and performance of Public Sector Undertakings.
 - ▶ The three financial committees are the **Public Accounts Committee, the Estimates Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings.**
- **The Select Committee** is formed for analysing a

specific legislation/policy and is disbanded after submission of its reports.

- **The Administrative Committees** are primarily responsible for ensuring day-to-day activities of the legislature are planned in consultation with the members.

Financial control is a critical tool for Parliament's authority over the executive; hence finance committees are considered to be particularly powerful.

- **Business Advisory Committee** which prepares the entire schedule of both Houses when Parliament is in session.

Do you Know?

The **Estimates Committee** is the **largest committee of the parliament**. It consists of 30 members, all are appointed from the Lok Sabha.

INDIAN SPACE POLICY, 2023

CONTEXT:

The government has approved the **Indian Space Policy 2023** that seeks to institutionalise the private sector participation in the space sector.

About the Policy:

- The Space Policy would focus on increasing the participation of the private players.
- ISRO focusing on **research and development** of advanced space technologies.
- It also delineated the **roles and responsibilities of ISRO**, space sector PSU **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL)** and **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe)**.

The INSPACE, created recently, will be the **interface between Indian Space Research Organisation and non-governmental entities.**

Key features:

- The policy will allow the **private sector** to take part in end-to-end space activities that include building satellites, rockets and launch vehicles, data collection and dissemination.
- Now, the **strategic activities** related to the space sector will be carried out by NSIL, under the **Department of Space**, which will work in a demand-driven mode.

- The policy also spells out the framework for **the private sector to use ISRO facilities** for a small charge and encourages them to invest in creating new infrastructure for the sector.

India's Space sector:

- The Indian Space Sector has been globally recognised for **building cost-effective satellites**, and now India is even taking foreign satellites to space.
- ISRO is the **6th largest space agency** in the world and holds an exceptional success rate.
- With over **400 private space companies**, India ranks **fifth** globally in no. of space companies.

Recent Developments in India's Space Sector:

- **Defence Space Agency:** India has recently set up its Defence Space Agency (DSA) supported by the **Defence Space Research Organisation (DSRO)** that has the mandate to create weapons to "degrade, disrupt, destroy or deceive an adversary's space capability".
- Also, the Indian Prime Minister launched the Defence Space Mission at the **Defence Expo 2022, Gandhinagar**.
- **Expanding Satellite Manufacturing Capabilities:** India's satellite-manufacturing opportunity will reach USD 3.2 billion by the year 2025 (in 2020 it was USD 2.1 billion)
- **SAMVAD Program:** To encourage and nurture space research among young minds, ISRO launched its Student Outreach Program called SAMVAD at its Bengaluru facility.

MISSION TO MAP RURAL INDIA'S CULTURAL ASSETS

CONTEXT:

In a bid to harness the unique cultural heritage of rural India, the government has identified and documented distinctive features of more than one lakh villages across the country under the '*Mera Gaon meri Dharovar*' programme.

About the development:

- In this initiative of **cultural asset mapping**, villages have been broadly divided into **seven-eight categories** based on;
 - ▶ Whether they are important **ecologically, developmentally and scholastically,**

- ▶ If they produce a **famous textile or product**, and
- ▶ If they are connected to **some historical or mythological events** such as the Independence struggle or epics like the Mahabharata.

- **For example:**

- ▶ The ecological category includes the **Bishnoi village** near Jodhpur in Rajasthan, which is a case study for living in harmony with nature, and **Uttarakhand's Raini village**, which is famous for the **Chipko movement**.
- ▶ There are also villages which have developmental importance like **Modhera in Gujarat**, which is the first solar-powered village in India.

- The NMCM aims to develop a **comprehensive database of art forms, artists and other resources** across the country.
- Though launched by the **Culture Ministry in 2017**, the programme got off to a slow start and was handed over to the **Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA)** in 2021.

- ▶ The villages under the **historical category** include Kandel in Madhya Pradesh, the site of the famous '**Jal Satyagraha**', and the **villages of Hanol** in Uttarakhand and **Vidurashwathar of Karnataka**, which are linked to the Mahabharata.

- The entire exercise has been carried out the **National Mission for Cultural Mapping (NMCM)**.

Mera Gaon meri Dharovar programme:

- **Launched by:** Our PM launched **on July 25, 2015**, in Patna.
- **Implemented by:**
 - ▶ The **Ministry of Culture** has partnered with the **Common Services Centres (CSC)**, under the **Ministry of Electronics & IT (MEITY)**.
- **Aim:** The survey seeks to document the cultural identity at the village level by involving citizens to share what makes their **village, block, or district unique**.
- **Data collection:**
 - ▶ Under the survey, a **CSC Village Level Entrepreneur** called VLEs will conduct meetings with citizens at the villages and then upload interesting facts about their **village, its places of interest, customs and traditions, famous personalities, festivals and beliefs, art and culture, etc.**, on to the application.

- ▶ **Village level Cultural asset mapping** shall be undertaken through Field Surveys involving Respondents.
- ▶ **CSC Village level Entrepreneurs (VLE)** shall be deployed for the same across all villages in the country.

Other related government schemes:

- Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojana,
- Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and
- Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

PANEL TO REVIEW PPP MODE OF SCHOOLS

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Government of Gujarat has announced for a 10-member panel to resolve 'differences' over proposed PPP mode of schools.

About:

- **Aim:** The State government has formed the panel to resolve the concerns of various school management and teachers' bodies against the **four new schemes of schools** announced by the education department on **public private partnership (PPP)** mode.
- The move came after a representation of around **40 members of various state-level associations** of schools, teachers and principals met to voice their concerns for the proposal of inclusion of private player's collaboration.

The PPP proposal:

- The education department of the State has proposed **four different types of schools** from Class 6 onwards in the upcoming **academic session of 2023-24:**
 - ▶ Gyan Setu Day Schools,
 - ▶ Gyan Setu Residential School,
 - ▶ Gyan Shakti Residential Schools and
 - ▶ Raksha Shakti Residential Schools
- **Land grants:**
 - ▶ Land may be procured by the private entity on its own. However, the State Government will be requested to assist the private entity in securing the required land.

- ▶ The state governments will also be requested by the Central Government to make available required land on lease basis to private entity wherever possible subject to the condition that the lease period should be for a minimum period of 25 years.

• Affiliation to the Board:

- ▶ The schools will be affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).
- ▶ In exceptional circumstances, affiliation by other national Boards may also be considered.

• Role of State Government:

- ▶ The State Government would facilitate availability of land for the school.
- ▶ It may also consider providing financial support beyond the initial 10 year period which is committed by the Central Government.
- ▶ It would also be requested to provide uniforms, textbooks and mid-day meals as applicable in government schools.
- ▶ The State Government may also consider providing transport subsidy or free transport for students to come from different parts of the blocks to the school and back.

Need for such a move:

- These schools will provide coaching for competitive entrance exams such as JEE, NEET and NDA.
- They will be in multiple mediums and will use the latest education techniques and technology.

Estimated Benefits:

Some of the reasons for adopting the PPP approach for setting up model schools are as follows:

- Possibility of setting up much larger number of schools than what the public outlay can support, through contribution to capital expenditure from private partners;
- Functional efficiency of private entities enabling early delivery of quality education;
- Risk of project completion and delivery of agreed outputs will be borne by the private entity;
- Public funds would be expended only upon delivery of agreed outcomes; and
- Private sector efficiency in the context of a long-term agreement is expected to optimize on life-cycle costs and improve on quality of education, including the school infrastructure.

ANNUAL MEET ON COTTON CROP

CONTEXT:

The two-day Annual Group Meeting 2022-23 of All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on cotton crop commenced at Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana.

All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP):

- The All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP), a landmark in the **history of agricultural research** was extended to fruit crops during **Fourth Five Year Plan**.
- In this system, both **central research institutes and State Agricultural Universities (SAUs)** work as a team to find solutions to various problems.

About the meet:

- There is a need to speed-up the process of **varietal development**, especially, the hybridisation programme of cotton by placing focus on **Bt gene**, large boll size, resistance towards diseases and mechanical harvesting.
- Delegates from various state agricultural universities and ICAR institutes and agricultural experts from PAU attended the inaugural session.
- Cotton is a **cash as well as commercial crop** combating the pressing challenge of climate crisis.
- Concern over the challenge of **Pink Bollworm management** in the central, north and south zones and urged the experts to step up the efforts in this regard.
- The problem of **monsoon deficit** was also highlighted.
- Pointing out the issue of **low cotton production and productivity**, all assured of releasing a few varieties for the **High Density Planting System (HDPS)**.

India, Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan were the largest consumers of cotton.

India also produces various cotton varieties and hybrids, and the area under this crop in **Punjab, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, etc.**

Cotton farming patterns:

- It is a **Kharif crop** that comes from the natural fibres of cotton plants, which are native to **tropical and subtropical regions**.

- Being **renewable and biodegradable**, cotton is the most environmentally friendly raw material for the textile industry as compared to its synthetic alternatives.
- Cotton plants have a large growing period which can **extend up to 200 days**.
- Growing cotton starts between **December and March**.
- These plants require a relatively **high temperature (21-30°C)** over a long growing season.
- Cotton is a **less water-intensive crop** as it is a xerophyte, which can grow in dry, arid environments.

Varieties of cotton:

- India is the country to grow all four species of cultivated cotton;
 - ▶ arboreum
 - ▶ Herbaceum (Asian cotton)
 - ▶ barbadense (Egyptian cotton)
 - ▶ hirsutum (American Upland cotton).



- Hirsutum represents **94% of the hybrid cotton production** in India and all the current **Bt cotton hybrids are G. hirsutum**.
- India is the only country that grows cotton as hybrids and the first to develop hybrid cotton back in 1970.

About Bt-Cotton:

- Bt Crops are transgenic crops that produce the same toxin as the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* in the plant cell, thereby, protecting the crops from pests.
- The bacterium secretes specific proteins known as **"cry proteins"** that are toxic to insects.
- The Bt cotton variety is **genetically transformed** with the Bt gene to protect the plants from bollworm, a major pest of cotton.
- The worms present on the leaves of Bt cotton become **lethargic and sleepy** and thus, cause less damage to the plants.

Bacillus thuringiensis:

- Bacillus thuringiensis is a gram-positive, **spore-forming bacterium** which is mainly found in the soil.
 - As stated above, it produces proteins that are toxic to insects.
 - Organic farmers use this bacterium in a solution and spray it on the plants to protect them from pests.
- When the worms consume the plant, the toxic proteins produced by the crops are ingested, thereby, killing them.

Government Interventions:

- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme:** Government of India has adopted **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** as cardinal principle and main plank of plant protection in the overall Crop Production Programme since 1985.
 - ▶ IPM is an **eco-friendly approach** which encompasses **cultural, mechanical, biological and need based chemical control measures**.
- **National Policy on IPM:** The indiscriminate and unilateral use of pesticides was the only plant protection tool during sixties and seventies for sustaining of agricultural production potential of the high yielding varieties under the intensive cropping systems.
 - ▶ This has led to **several ill-effects like human and animal health hazards**, ecological imbalance, development of resistance in the pests to pesticides, pests' resurgence and environmental pollution as well as destruction of natural enemies (bio-control agents) of pests and increased level of pesticides residues in soil, water, food with the increased use of pesticides.
 - ▶ **Activities:-** The **31 Central Integrated Pest Management Centres (CIPMCs)** located in **28 States** and **one Union Territory** undertakes the programme with following activities:
 - ▶ Surveillance & Monitoring of insect-pest & diseases.
 - ▶ Augmentation and Conservation of Natural enemies.
 - ▶ Production and release of bio-control agents
 - ▶ **Human Resource Development (HRD)** through **Farmers' Field Schools (FFSs)** Season-long training programmes, orientation training programme and refresher courses.

**CORE INFLATION
CALCULATION****CONTEXT:**

RBI former secretary has highlighted that country's Core Inflation calculation excludes food price (as they are volatile), which needs a particular observation due to increasing significance in recent times.

S&P Global Ratings recently said core inflation in India has been declining sequentially, and an elevated 6.25 percent policy rate limits the need for further rate hikes.

What is Core Inflation?

- Core inflation is the change in the **costs of goods and services** but does not include those from the **food and energy sectors**.
- Food and energy prices are exempt from this calculation because their prices can be too volatile or fluctuate wildly.

Why is it important?

- Core inflation is used to determine the **impact of rising prices** on consumer income.
- If the increase in the price index is due to temporary shocks that could soon reverse themselves, it may not require any monetary policy action.
- To deal with such situations, many central banks use measures of core inflation that are designed to filter the transitory price movements.
- Core inflation by eliminating the volatile components from the headline helps in identifying the underlying trend in headline inflation and is believed to predict future inflation better.
- Core inflation is a convenient guide to help the central bank achieve its objective of controlling total inflation.

What is Headline Inflation?

- It is the raw inflation figure reported through the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- The CPI determines inflation by calculating the prices of a fixed basket of goods.
- Core inflation removes the CPI components that can exhibit large amounts of volatility from month to month.

Why is it important to consider Food inflation?

- In India, food prices have only risen, and in recent years their rate of inflation has been very high.
- For all the 'reforms' since 1991, the real price of food, i.e., its price relative to the general price level, has risen considerably.
- In the context, to **measure inflation** without considering the price of food is to exclude what matters most to the public, as opposed to central bankers. India's inflation control strategy is currently restricted to using the interest rate to dampen aggregate demand.

NASA LAUNCHES DEVICE TO MONITOR AIR POLLUTION FROM SPACE

CONTEXT:

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket successfully launched from Florida carrying a new NASA device that can track air pollution over North America.

About the technology:

- The **Tropospheric Emissions Monitoring of Pollution (TEMPO)** instrument will allow scientists to monitor air pollutants and their emission sources from space more comprehensively than ever before, down to the neighbourhood level.
- NASA's TEMPO project manager, the instrument will measure pollution and air quality across **greater North America** on an hourly basis during the daytime.
- A unique feature of TEMPO, which is **about the size of a washing machine** and has been described as a chemistry laboratory in space, is that it will be hosted on an **Intelsat communications satellite in geostationary orbit**.

How it is different?

- TEMPO will be able to measure atmospheric pollution down to a spatial resolution of **4 square miles (10 square kilometers), or neighborhood level**.
- Existing pollution-monitoring satellites are in low Earth orbit, which means they can only provide observations once a day at a fixed time.

Significance:

- By monitoring the effects of everything from **rush-hour traffic to pollution from forest fires and volcanoes**, NASA data will help improve air quality across North America and protect our planet.

NEW DETAILED MAP OF DARK MATTER

CONTEXT:

Researchers have created a detailed map of the 'hidden' dark matter that makes up 85 per cent of the universe and mentioned that it agrees with Einstein's theory of gravity.

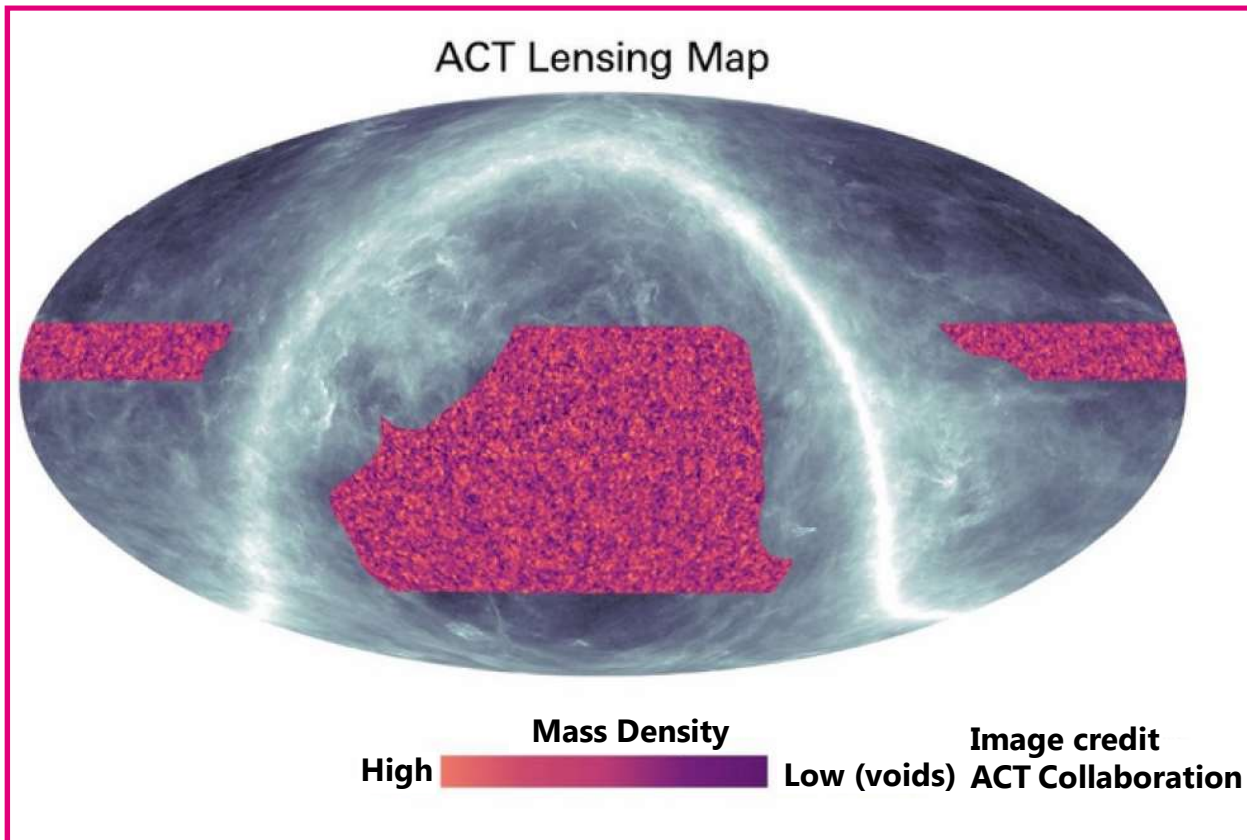
What is dark matter?

- It is a hypothetical form of matter thought to account for approximately 85% of the matter in the universe.
- It forms the skeleton on which **galaxies form, evolve, and merge**.
- Dark matter is made up of particles that do not have a charge.
- So, these particles are "dark", namely because they do not emit light, which is an electromagnetic phenomenon, and "matter" because they possess mass like normal matter and interact through gravity.

Evidence for dark matter: It comes from calculations showing that many galaxies would fly apart, that they would not have formed, or that they would not move as they do if they did not contain a large amount of unseen matter.

About the map:

- **Published by:**
 - This research was presented at the **Future Science with CMB x LSS**, a conference being held from at the Yukawa Institute for Theoretical Physics, Kyoto University.
- Researchers from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom used a ground-based telescope, **Atacama Cosmology Telescope (ACT)**.
- The **"baby picture of the universe"** has been projected which consists of a **cosmic microwave background (CMB) radiation** or **fossil radiation has left over after the Big Bang**.



Key findings:

- It proved that the Gravitational field generated by these **massive objects** bends and distorts light that passes through them.
- Unlike normal matter that constitutes all stars and galaxies; dark matter does not absorb, reflect or emit light.
- Dark matter only seems to **interact with gravity**, making it challenging to detect.
- Being invisible, researchers observe how dark matter interacts with the gravity of massive objects such as galaxy clusters and lumps of dark matter.
- The clumps of dark matter magnify the appearance of objects that lie behind.
- The researchers look for this characteristic magnification in the **CMB image to map the dark matter**.
- The new findings agree with the **standard model of cosmology** based on Einstein's theory of gravity.

Einstein's theory of gravity:

- According to the theory, he proved that a mass can prod space plenty. It can warp it, bend it, push it, or pull it.
- Gravity was just a natural outcome of a mass's existence in space.

- According to relativity, anything that can happen inside of a box picking up speed — i.e., accelerating — also happens in the presence of gravity.
- For example, a horizontal laser inside an elevator that's accelerating upward. As the light travels sideways, the elevator rises, causing the beam to strike a spot on the wall slightly lower than where it started.
- If the elevator accelerates quickly enough, the beam visibly bends toward the floor.
- Einstein showed the same thing happens to a beam inside a stationary elevator within a powerful gravitational field; the gravity bends the light.
- Similarly, he expected a **beam of starlight** should bend when passing through the sun's gravity.

Theory of Einstein vs. Newton:

- Isaac Newton described **gravity as a force**, an invisible rubber band that pulls together objects with mass. Newton's math did a good job at predicting how everything from projectiles to planets moved — but it kept **gravity separate from acceleration**.
- This link was established by Einstein in his theory.
- Einstein argued that gravity isn't a force at all.
- He described it **as a curvature of time and space** caused by mass and energy.

SECTION: 'D'
(SHORT NEWS)

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India's first 3D-printed post office



India's **first 3D-printed post office** is coming up in Bengaluru.

About:

- The project is being implemented by **Larsen & Toubro**, which has experience in **constructing 3D-printed buildings**.
- The construction cost of this post office is about **30 to 40 per cent** lower than constructing a conventional building and is expected to be completed in 30 days.
- The 3D-printed post office will be about 1100 sq. ft. and the cost of construction is Rs.23 lakh.

Significance:

- This will enhance the technology inclusion and a public welfare policy.

Election Commission grants national party status to AAP



The Arvind Kejriwal-led **Aam Aadmi Party** has got the status of '**National Party**' as announced by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

About:

- In the event, the removal of **NCP, CPI, and TMC** was also announced.
- There are now only **six national parties in the country** – BJP, Congress, National People's Party, CPM, Bahujan Samaj Party and the latest addition AAP.

What is a National Party?

- A party that secures **at least six per cent** of the total votes in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in four States and wins **at least four seats in the Lok Sabha** is recognised as a national party.

A Recognised party:

- A **recognised political party** enjoys privileges like;
 - a reserved party symbol, free broadcast time on state-run television and radio, consultation in the setting of election dates, and giving input in setting electoral rules and regulations.

Criteria for National party status:

- According to Election Commission rules, a party gets **national status** if it is recognized as a state party in four states. For recognition as a state party, it has to secure at least six percent of the valid votes polled and two seats each in Assembly or Lok Sabha polls.
- The AAP got the status of a national party as it secured nearly **13 percent** of the vote share **and five seats in the Gujarat Assembly** polls earlier this year making it the state party in four states— **Delhi, Goa, Punjab and Gujarat**

Schools for children with special needs by 2025



Andhra Pradesh government's Samagra Siksha, Kerala-based NGO Chakshumathi and Anantapur-based Rural Development Trust (RDT) have come together to make all the **46,000 government schools** in the State inclusive pedagogy-ready by March 2025.

About the plan:

- As part of the masterplan, **Chakshumathi and RDT** have so far trained 400 government teachers in digital inclusive pedagogy.
- This programme will be launched across in the State of Andhra Pradesh.
- The spadework for the programme was done by **RDT-run Inclusive High School in Anantapur**, where digital inclusive pedagogy has been doing wonders for the **first batch of six visually impaired girls** who are attending their Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations without any scribe.
- The State government made all arrangements at **Rapthadu Zilla Parishad High School (examination centre)** in the district to enable these Children with Special Needs (CwSN) to get a digitally converted question paper that supports screen-reading software.

Rajasthan's first Vande Bharat Express flagged off



Rajasthan's **first Vande Bharat Express** train has made its inaugural journey between **Jaipur and Delhi Cantt railway stations**.

About:

- **Objective:**
 - ▶ Aimed at improving **connectivity between the tourist spots** in Rajasthan, the Vande Bharat Express is going to operate between Ajmer and Delhi Cantt, with stops at **Jaipur, Alwar and Gurgaon**.
 - ▶ It will connect **Delhi to Pushkar** and **Ajmer Sharif Dargah**, among other major tourist destinations.
- The train will complete the **Ajmer-Delhi Cantt journey in five hours and 15 minutes**, an hour lesser than the time taken by the fastest train on the route currently.
- The **Shatabdi Express** plying between Delhi Cantt and Ajmer takes 6 hours and 15 minutes.

India set to grow by 5.9% this fiscal: IMF

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has projected that India's economy will grow by 5.9% for the current fiscal year April 2023 - March 2024.

About the forecast:

- The IMF estimated a **6.3% economic growth rate for India** for the next fiscal year, a downward revision of **0.5 percentage points** from the last forecast.



- The IMF maintained **an optimistic outlook on India**, explaining the down revision as an adjustment for historical numbers that were better than expected.
- **Global output growth** is projected by the IMF to **slow to 2.8%** in 2023 (calendar year), picking up to 3% in 2024.

Reasons for slow recovery:

- The global economy's gradual recovery from both the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains on track".
- Adding with the China's reopened economy was strongly rebounding and supply chain disruptions were unwinding, and negative impacts of the war on food and energy prices were receding.

Quality Control Orders for technical textile products



The **Ministry of Textiles** has introduced **two Quality Control Orders (QCOs)** for **31 technical textile items**, including **19 geo textile** and **12 protective textile products**.

About:

- These are the **first technical regulation** in the country for technical textile products.
- The 19 geo textile items include;
 - ▶ Laminated High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) woven geo membrane for waterproof lining,
 - ▶ PVC geo membranes and needle punched non-woven geo-bags.
- **The protective textile products** include;
 - ▶ Curtains and drapes,
 - ▶ Upholstered composites used for non-domestic furniture,
 - ▶ Bullet resistant jackets, and
 - ▶ Protective clothing for fire-fighters.
- Mandatory **BIS marking** for these products will come into **effect 180 days** immediately after the **date of the publication** of the orders in the gazette and both, domestic manufacturers and those abroad who export to India, will have to meet the standards.

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS):

- It is the National Standard Body of India.
- Bureau of Indian Standards has been operating Management Systems Certification Scheme since 1991.
- Initially, BIS started the scheme with **Quality Management System Certification (IS/ISO 9001)** and over the years it has gradually expanded its activities to various **other Management Systems**.

6 GHz spectrum



The **telcos and broadband providers** are attracting towards the new 6GHz Spectrum against fixed line **Internet Service Providers (ISPs)**, as they are keen to lay claim on a band of spectrum that could enable the next generation of 5G, or WiFi.

Note: 1 Megahertz (MHz) is equal to one million hertz 10^6 Hz)

About:

- The Spectrum ranges from **5,925 to 7,125 megahertz (MHz)**.
- Newer WiFi routers in India largely use spectrum on two bands, sometimes simultaneously: **2.4GHz and 5GHz**.
- As frequency increases, **the range of the signal drops**, but the bandwidth goes up significantly.
- The **WiFi 6E standard**, launched in 2020, uses 6 GHz, enabling speeds upwards of 9.6 gigabits per second (Gbps).
- No home internet provider currently offers those speeds in India, but 6GHz spectrum supports multiple devices on a wireless network more harmoniously than in the 5GHz band, even on slower connections, enticing telecom providers and ISPs.
- **Meta Platforms** (which owns Facebook and WhatsApp), Microsoft Corporation, and Google in 2020 urged the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** that it is critical that regulators enable all parts of the broadband ecosystem to advance in capabilities, and even more critical in the case of **license-exempt technologies** given their important role in supporting broadband requirements.

Joint Military Exercise 'Ex KAVACH'




Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) conducted a large-scale Joint Military Exercise '**Ex KAVACH**' involving the assets of the **Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard**.

About:

- The exercise was begun on February 23, 2023, concluded on April 07, 2023.
- The exercise was aimed at fine-tuning joint warfare capabilities & Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and enhancing interoperability and operational synergy between the forces.
- Elements of the '**Shatrujeet Brigade**' of the Army, Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD), Special Forces of the Navy and Amphibious troops of the ANC has participated in the multi-domain exercise.

	<p>Key features of the event:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exercise KAVACH' demonstrated the capabilities and preparedness of the Armed Forces to safeguard India's maritime interests and ensure the security of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.• The exercise effectively showcased the professionalism and synergy amongst the different components of ANC while conducting successful joint operations in a complex and dynamic environment
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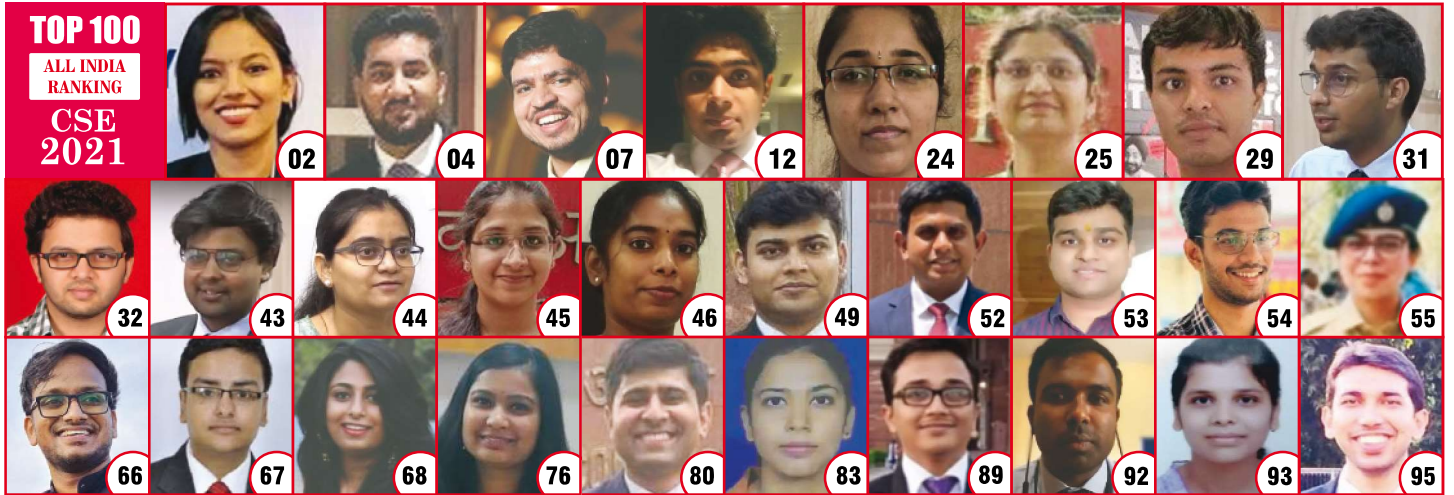
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