

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 4

APRIL
2023

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 - ▣ BANGLADESH SPELLS OUT INDO-PACIFIC PRIORITIES
 - ▣ EU'S NEW CRYPTO-LEGISLATION
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 - ▣ AMBIGUITIES IN INDIA'S NUCLEAR LIABILITY LAW
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- ▣ Pushkaralu festival returns to the Ganga
- ▣ The ancient art form of Bhoota Kola
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- ▣ 1 Crore Olive Ridley Turtles Hatch On Odisha Coast

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- ▣ Kamakhya Temple corridor
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- ▣ Malaria to become a notifiable disease
- ▣ India's First Water Metro
- ▣ Hakki Pikki in Sudan Conflict
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- ▣ West Bengal adds four new biodiversity heritage sites
- ▣ Government launches SUPREME
- ▣ UAE's Hope probe uncovers secrets of Deimos

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- ▣ Supreme Court celebrates 50 years of 'basic structure doctrine'

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

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

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SECTION: 'A'
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

SUDAN CONFLICT

CONTEXT

India launched 'Operation Kaveri' to return its people from Sudan, which has been witnessing fierce fighting as a result of a power struggle between the regular army and a paramilitary team.

Where is Sudan?



- Sudan is in **north-east Africa** and is one of the largest countries on the continent, covering 1.9 million square kilometres.
- It is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with its 46 million people living on an average annual income of \$750 (£606) a head.
- The population of Sudan is predominantly Muslim and the country's official languages are Arabic and English.
- Sudan borders the **Red Sea**, the **Sahel region** and the **Horn of Africa**.
- Its strategic location and agricultural wealth have attracted regional power plays, complicating the chances of a successful transition.

Who is fighting who in Sudan?

- **What's happening?** In Sudan, powerful rival military factions are battling for control.
- **Who is fighting?** The fight is between the army and the powerful paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

- ▶ Both groups were allies. Together, they seized power in a 2021 coup.
- But tensions increased over the proposed integration of the RSF into the military.
- The key question is who is in control and who would be the military's commander-in-chief during an integration period.
- **Main players on the ground:** Since the 2021 coup, Sudan has been run by a council of generals, led by the two military men at the centre of this dispute:
 - ▶ **Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan**, the head of the armed forces and in effect the country's president
 - ▶ And his deputy and leader of the RSF, **Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo**, better known as Hemedti.
- They have disagreed on the direction the country is going in and the proposed move towards civilian rule.
- The main sticking points are plans to include the 100,000-strong RSF into the army, and who would then lead the new force.

Rapid Support Forces

- The RSF was formed in 2013 and has its origins in the notorious Janjaweed militia that brutally fought rebels in Darfur, where they were accused of ethnic cleansing.
- Since then, Gen Dagalo has built a powerful force that has intervened in conflicts in Yemen and Libya. He has also developed economic interests including controlling some of Sudan's gold mines.
- The RSF has been accused of human rights abuses, including the massacre of more than 120 protesters in June 2019.
- Such a strong force outside the army has been seen as a source of instability in the country.

What is at stake?

- **No end to conflict:** The popular uprising had raised hopes that Sudan and its population of 46 million could emerge from decades of autocracy, internal conflict and economic isolation under Bashir. The current fighting could not only destroy those hopes.
- **Destabilisation of region:** It could destabilise a volatile region bordering the **Sahel, the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa**.
- **Increasing competition among strong powers:** It could also play into competition for influence in the region between Russia and the United States, and between regional powers who have courted different actors in Sudan.

The name game (Operation Caveri)

- This mission is named on the same lines as that the PM chose to name the operation in Ukraine as **Operation Ganga**.
- Rivers reach their destination irrespective of barriers. It's like a mother who will ensure she will bring her children back to safety.
- The Kaveri is one of the major Indian rivers flowing through the southern states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- The river is sacred to the people of the region and is worshipped as the Goddess Kaveriamma (mother Kaveri).

**Major evacuation operations**

- **Operation Ganga:** In a mission to evacuate stranded Indians from war-torn Ukraine, the Indian government kicked off Operation Ganga in February 2022
- **Operation Devi Shakti:** An evacuation operation by the Indian Armed Forces (IAF) was kicked off in August 2021 to safely bring back Indian nationals from Afghanistan after the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul, the capital city of the Taliban.
- **Vande Bharat Mission:** Special flights were operated across the globe in this mission to bring back the nationals who were left stranded in foreign countries due to the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Wuhan Airlift:** In one of the most difficult evacuation flights, India airlifted its citizens safe from China's coronavirus-hit city Wuhan in January 2020.
- **Operation Maitri:** The government of India carried out this mission to safely bring the nationals from Nepal after the deadly earthquake in 2015.
- **Operation Raahat:** Hundreds of Indians and other nationals were rescued under this operation during the unrest at Yemen's capital Sana'a after the complete takeover by Houthi rebel fighters in January 2015
- **Operation Amnesty Airlift:** The mission was carried out in September 1996 to bring back the Indian nationals who did not have valid permits from the United Arab Emirates.
- **Kuwait Airlift:** In one of the massive operations in Indian history, the Indian Air Force joined hands with Air India in airlifting stranded Indian nationals in Kuwait in August 1990.

BANGLADESH SPELLS OUT INDO-PACIFIC PRIORITIES

CONTEXT

Bangladesh has decided to work with all stakeholders for peacekeeping, peace building and counter-terrorism initiatives in the region.

Key-highlights

- The announcement on Dhaka's Indo-Pacific priorities was made for the first time in a document titled "**Bangladesher Indo-Pacific Ruprekha**" (Indo-Pacific outlook).
- Bangladesh will aim for "inclusive development by strengthening free, transparent and rules-based international order.
- Along with the stakeholders concerned of the Indo-Pacific region, Bangladesh plans to make meaningful contributions to international disarmament, peacekeeping, peace building and counter-terror programmes and uphold the international values.

- This announcement is the first time that Bangladesh has spelt out its clear goals on the Indo-Pacific region and has adopted several conceptual parameters that are part of the thinking championed by **India, U.S., Japan and Australia**.
- The document also announced that Bangladesh will uphold the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** that establishes rights and responsibilities of the UN member states while using the oceans of the world.

Why Bangladesh assumes significance?

- Bangladesh's geographic location in the centre of the **Indo-Pacific** as well as its close proximity to the **Bay of Bengal's important maritime corridor** gives it a distinct competitive edge.
- As Bangladesh is a significant player in the **Indo-Pacific region** since its participation both in the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** and the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)**, geostrategic location, regional integration, social and economic development has made it important to Indo-Pacific region.

What is the message behind?

- The use of terms like “Indo-Pacific” as opposed to “Asia-Pacific” that are favoured by Beijing and Moscow indicates Bangladesh is trying to send a message to the leading western powers in the Indo-Pacific region.

What is Indo-Pacific Strategy?

- Indo-Pacific Strategy is a geographical approach; seeks to strengthen regional stability as well as economic development and security (both traditional and non-traditional) and partnerships through participation and cooperation within the Indo-Pacific region.
- The United States firstly took the initiative; introduced in November, 2017, after which other countries including **Japan, Australia, South Korea, United Kingdom (UK), Canada, ASEAN** have followed the same suit.

How different countries map the region?

- **South Korea:** It starts from the African coast of the Indian Ocean and stretches all the way to South America.
- **Japan:** For Japan, it starts from the eastern coast of Africa and expands to North America.
- **US:** For the US, it stretches from its Pacific coastline to South Asia. Australia’s strategic emphasis is from the north-eastern side of the Indian Ocean to the Southwest Pacific.
- **France:** France’s focus is on its overseas territories in this region.

Major policy frameworks

- The US introduced the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)**.
- Japan has its **Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt initiative (BIG-B)**.

**EU’S NEW
CRYPTO-LEGISLATION****CONTEXT**

The European Parliament, the legislative body of the 27-country block European Union, has approved the world’s first set of comprehensive rules to bring largely unregulated cryptocurrency markets under the ambit of regulation by government authorities.

What is in the new legislation?

- The regulation is called the Markets in Crypto Assets (MiCA). MiCA is the most comprehensive regulatory framework for digital assets to date.
- The rules will impose a number of requirements on crypto platforms, token issuers and traders around transparency, disclosure, authorization, and supervision of transactions.
 - ▶ Platforms will be required to inform consumers about the risks associated with their operations, while sales of new tokens will also come under regulation.
- **Coverage:** The MiCA legislation will apply to ‘cryptoassets’ (Bitcoin, Ethereum and stablecoins)
 - ▶ Cryptoassets can be understood as a digital representation of a value or a right that uses cryptography for security and is in the form of a coin or a token or any other digital medium which may be transferred and stored electronically, using distributed ledger technology or similar technology
- **Stablecoins:** It will apply not only to traditional cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum but also to newer ones like stablecoins. MiCA will establish new rules for three types of stablecoins-

Stablecoins are digital tokens that aim to stay pegged in value with a more stable asset — a fiat currency like the U.S. dollar or other stable cryptocurrencies.

- ▶ asset-referenced tokens, which are linked to multiple currencies, commodities or cryptocurrencies
- ▶ e-money Tokens, which are linked to a single currency
- ▶ utility tokens, which are intended to provide access to a good or service that will be supplied by the issuer of that token

Out of coverage

- MiCA’s scope will not regulate digital assets that would qualify as transferable securities and function like shares or their equivalent and other cryptoassets that already qualify as financial instruments under existing regulation.
- It will also for the most part, exclude nonfungible tokens (NFTs).
- MiCA will also not regulate central bank digital currencies issued by the European Central Bank and digital assets issued by national central banks of EU member countries when acting in their capacity as monetary authorities, along with cryptoassets-related services offered by them.

What is the need of such regulation?

- **Concentration of crypto industry:** About 22% of the global crypto industry was concentrated in central, northern and western Europe, which received \$1.3 trillion worth of cryptoassets.
- **Rise in size:** The investments and the size of the crypto industry have grown at unprecedented rates.
- **Increasing Distability:** The year 2022 saw some of the biggest failures and wipeouts in the crypto industry involving bankruptcies and fraud scandals, be it the collapse of the crypto exchange FTX and its spat with Binance or the failure of Terra LUNA cryptocurrency and its associated stablecoin.

What are the benefits of such framework?

- **Harmonising the industry:** Having a comprehensive framework like MiCA for 27 countries in Europe would harmonise the crypto industry.
- **Competitive edge:** It would also give the EU a competitive edge in its growth compared to the U.S. or the U.K. which lack regulatory clarity.
- **Stability:** The governance practices in crypto firms would ensure stability and financial sector-like rout and contagion. The law would protect consumers against deception and fraud,

Regulation of cryptocurrency in India

- India is yet to have a comprehensive regulatory framework for cryptoassets. A draft legislation on the same is reportedly in the works.
- However, the Indian government has taken certain steps to bring cryptocurrencies under the ambit of specific authorities and taxation.
 - ▶ In Budget 2022, the Finance Ministry said that cryptocurrency trading in India has seen a "phenomenal increase" and imposed a 30% tax on income from the "transfer of any virtual digital asset."
 - ▶ In March 2023, the government placed all transactions involving virtual digital assets under the purview of the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**.

UNION CABINET APPROVES NATIONAL MEDICAL DEVICES POLICY

CONTEXT

The Union Cabinet approved the National Medical Devices Policy, 2023.

Current state of medical device sector in India

- The medical devices sector in India is a sunrise sector which is growing at a fast pace.
- The market size of the medical devices sector in India is estimated to be \$11 billion (approximately, ₹ 90,000 Cr) in 2020 and its share in the global medical device market is estimated to be 1.5%.

What is the National Devices Policy, 2023?

- The National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 is expected to facilitate an orderly growth of the medical device sector to meet the public health objectives of access, affordability, quality and innovation.
- **Salient Features of National Medical Devices Policy, 2023:**
 - ▶ **Vision:** Accelerated growth path with a patient-centric approach and to emerge as the global leader in the manufacturing and innovation of medical devices by achieving 10-12% share in the expanding global market over the next 25 years. Policy is expected to help the Medical Devices Sector grow from present \$11 Bn to \$50 Bn by 2030.
 - ▶ **Mission:** Policy lays down a roadmap for accelerated growth of the medical devices sector to achieve the following missions viz, Access & Universality, Affordability, Quality, Patient Centred & Quality Care, Preventive & Promotive Health, Security, Research and Innovation and Skilled manpower.

Strategies to Promote Medical Device Sector:

Medical devices sector will be facilitated and guided through a set of strategies that will be cover six broad areas of policy interventions:

- **Regulatory Streamlining:** In order to enhance ease of doing research and business and further to balance patient safety with product innovation measures such as creation of a Single Window Clearance System' for Licensing of Medical Devices coopting all the stakeholder departments / organizations such as **AERB, MeitY, DAHD, etc**, enhancing the Role of Indian Standards like BIS and designing a coherent pricing regulation, will be followed.
- **Enabling Infrastructure:** The establishment and strengthening of large medical device parks, clusters equipped with world class common infrastructure facilities in proximity to economic zones with requisite logistics connectivity as envisioned under the **National Industrial Corridor Program and the proposed National Logistics Policy 2021** under the ambit of **PM Gati Shakti**, would be pursued with the State Governments and Industry for better convergence and backward integration with medical device Industry.

- **Facilitating R&D and Innovation:** The policy envisages to promote Research & Development in India and complement the Department's proposed National Policy on R&D and Innovation in the Pharma-MedTech Sector in India. It also aims at establishing **Centres of Excellence in academic and research institutions, innovation hubs, 'plug and play' infrastructures and support to start-ups.**
- **Attracting Investments in the Sector:** Along with recent schemes and interventions like **Make in India, Ayushman Bharat program, Heal-in-India, Start-up mission, the policy encourages private investments,** series of funding from **Venture Capitalists,** and also **Public-Private Partnership (PPP).**
- **Human Resources Development:** The scheme aims to have a steady supply of skilled work force across the value chain such as scientists, regulators, health experts, managers, technicians, etc.
- **Brand Positioning and Awareness Creation:** The policy envisages the creation of a dedicated **Export Promotion Council** for the sector under the Department which will be an enabler to deal with various market access issues.

Significance of the policy

Government schemes & interventions

- **PLI Scheme:** In 2020, the Centre launched the Production Linked-Incentive, or PLI, scheme to boost the domestic production of medical equipment and reduce imports.
- **Strengthening the industry:** The policy is expected to provide the required support and directions to strengthen the medical devices industry into a competitive, self-reliant, resilient and innovative industry that caters to the healthcare needs of not only India but also of the world.
- **Patient-centric approach:** The National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 aims to place the medical devices sector on an accelerated path of growth with a patient-centric approach to meet the evolving healthcare needs of patients.

AMBIGUITIES IN INDIA'S NUCLEAR LIABILITY LAW

CONTEXT

The issues regarding India's nuclear liability law continue to hold up the more than a decade-old plan to build six nuclear power reactors in **Maharashtra's Jaitapur, the world's biggest nuclear power generation site** under consideration at present.

What is the law governing nuclear liability in India?

- **Compensation for nuclear disaster:** Laws on **civil nuclear liability** ensure that compensation is available to the victims **for nuclear damage** caused by a nuclear incident or disaster and set out who will be liable for those damages.
- **International nuclear liability regime:** The **international nuclear liability regime** consists of multiple treaties and was strengthened after the **1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident.**
- **Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC):** The umbrella Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC) was adopted in 1997 with the aim of establishing a minimum national compensation amount.
 - ▶ The amount can further be increased through public funds, (to be made available by the contracting parties), should the national amount be insufficient to compensate the damage caused by a nuclear incident.
 - ▶ Even though India was a signatory to the CSC, **Parliament ratified the convention only in 2016.**
- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA):** To keep in line with the international convention, India enacted the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) in 2010, to put in place a speedy compensation mechanism for victims of a nuclear accident.
 - ▶ The CLNDA provides for strict and no-fault liability on the operator of the nuclear plant, where it will be held liable for damage regardless of any fault on its part.
 - ▶ It also specifies the amount the operator will have to shell out in case of damage caused by an accident at ₹1,500 crore and requires the operator to cover liability through insurance or other financial security.
 - ▶ In case the damage claims exceed ₹1,500 crore, the CLNDA expects the government to step in and has limited the government liability amount to the rupee equivalent of 300 million Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) or about ₹2,100 to ₹2,300 crore.
 - ▶ The Act also specifies the limitations on the amount and time when action for compensation can be brought against the operator.

India currently has 22 nuclear reactors with over a dozen more projects planned. All the existing reactors are operated by the state-owned **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**.

What does the CLNDA say on supplier liability?

- The **international legal framework on civil nuclear liability**, including the annex of the CSC is based on the **central principle of exclusive liability of the operator** of a nuclear installation and no other person.
- **Making supplier responsible would hinder growth:** In the initial stages of the nuclear industry's development, it was agreed that excessive liability claims against suppliers of nuclear equipment would make their business unviable and hinder the growth of nuclear energy.
- **Shifting responsibility to operator:** It became an accepted practice for national laws of countries to channel nuclear liability to the operators of the plant with only some exceptions.
- **Section 10** of the annex of the CSC lays down "only" two conditions under which the national law of a country may provide the operator with the "right of recourse", where they can extract liability from the supplier —
 - ▶ if it is expressly agreed upon in the contract
 - ▶ if the nuclear incident "results from an act or omission done with intent to cause damage"

Who introduced the concept of supplier liability (for the first time)?

- However, India, going beyond these two conditions, for the first time introduced the **concept of supplier liability** over and above that of the operator's in its civil nuclear liability law, the CLNDA.
- The architects of the law recognised that defective parts were partly responsible for historical incidents such as the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984 and added the clause on supplier liability.

Why is the supplier liability clause an issue in nuclear deals?

- Foreign suppliers of nuclear equipment from countries as well as domestic suppliers have been wary of operationalising nuclear deals with India as it has the only law where suppliers can be asked to pay damages.
- **Sticking point for suppliers:** Concerns about potentially getting **exposed to unlimited liability** under the CLNDA and ambiguity over **how much insurance to set aside in case of** damage claims have been sticking points for suppliers.

VIBRANT VILLAGES PROGRAMME

CONTEXT

Centre's ambitious **Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP)** which aims to develop infrastructure and open up villages to tourists along the China border will be integrated with the Prime Minister Gati Shakti mega project.

What is 'Vibrant Villages Programme'?

- The Vibrant Village Program aims to-
 - ▶ raise the standard of living of the residents in the border communities
 - ▶ encouraging them residents to remain there, reversing migration from villages
 - ▶ enhancing border security
- **Focus area:** As per the programme, the focus areas would be improving road connectivity, providing drinking water, electricity, mobile and internet connectivity, building tourist centres, multi-purpose centres, healthcare infrastructure, and wellness centres.
- **Coverage:** The programme aims to cover 2,967 villages in 46 border blocks of 19 districts in four States and one Union Territory - Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Ladakh along the China border.
 - ▶ Out of these, 662 villages will be prioritised for coverage.
- **Fund allocation:** The scheme has been allocated ₹4,800 crore for the financial years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26. The amount allocated for road construction is ₹2,500 crore.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Home Affairs

PM Gati Shakti:

- The Pradhan Mantri Gati Shakti National Master Plan is a central government project, aimed to revolutionise infrastructure in India.
- The digital platform of Gati Shakti brings 16 Ministries including Railways and Roadways together for integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure connectivity projects and allows government departments to break operational silos.

Why Kibithoo is significant?

- Kibithoo, located in Arunachal Pradesh, is the first village to be part of the **Centre's Vibrant Villages programme**.
- Kibithoo in Anjaw district is in the easternmost administrative circle in India.
- Housing dozens of villages within the 10 km range of the McMohan line, the villagers are fluent in Hindi because of their regular interaction with the security forces but do not have proper connectivity with the mainland.

Concerns:

- Depopulation is a case of concern in the border villages in all areas of India.
- Backwardness, illiteracy, and lack of basic facilities and infrastructure are also concerning.

India's response to China

- The VVP is India's response to the **628 model 'xiaokang' (moderately well-off) villages** built by China along the LAC in **China-occupied Tibet (CoT)**.
- China started building these villages, which have a dual civilian-military use, in 2017 and completed them in 2021 at a whopping cost of Rs 3.76 lakh crore.
- These villages are close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), opposite Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Claim game

- Beijing claims about 90,000 sq km of areas in Arunachal Pradesh of India to be a part of the territory of China.
- The Chinese call Arunachal Pradesh as "**Zangnan" or south Tibet**.
- While China may stake claim to the entire state, one area is of particular significance to Beijing — **Tawang**.
 - ▶ Tawang houses **Tawang Ganden Namgyal Lhatse or Tawang Monastery** – the second largest monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in the world. China cites historical ties between the Tawang monastery and Tibet's Lhasa monastery to bolster its claims over Arunachal Pradesh.
- Arunachal Pradesh shares international borders with Tibet to the north, and northwest, Bhutan towards the west and Myanmar to the east.

ASSAM-ARUNACHAL PRADESH END BORDER DISPUTE

CONTEXT

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh chief ministers signed an agreement to settle the decades-old inter-state boundary dispute between the two states.

What was the dispute about?

- Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, which was earlier a part of **undivided Assam**, share an 804 km long boundary.
- While there were no tensions reported initially, frequent issues eventually came up.
- During British rule, there was a law which involved setting boundaries between plains and hills. This was later known as **North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT)**.
- However, after independence, the Assam government was in control of the NEFT. This, in 1954, became the **North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)** and in 1972 became Arunachal Pradesh.
- It is essential to note that Arunachal Pradesh was a Union Territory in 1972 and gained statehood only in 1987.
- However, a 1951 report claimed that over 3,000 sq km of the area from Arunachal Pradesh had been transferred to Assam.
- While Arunachal Pradesh has constantly held that this area was transferred without the consent of its people, Assam has maintained that the transfer was legally carried out.

What is in the pact?

- The pact will bring settlement to 123 villages located along areas the two north-eastern states share.
- Under the pact, both the state governments have agreed that it will be final with regards to these 123 disputed villages and neither of the states will make any new claim related to any area or village in future.

- **Removal AFSPA:** The government has withdrawn the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from most of places in Assam, 15 police stations in 6 districts in Manipur, all but 3 districts in Arunachal Pradesh, 7 districts in Nagaland, and entire Tripura and Meghalaya.

Who has the power to resolve Inter-state disputes?

Article 131 is the main provision in the constitution regarding centre-state / inter-state disputes

- The Parliament has the sole responsibility to take decision for altering any region of any state.

- However, the consultation of states is to be taken, which is not binding on the Parliament.
- The decision of parliament is also not binding on the states.
- To solve inter-state disputes, the Supreme Court has the sole power to make decision.

List of major Inter-state border disputes in India:

- **Karnataka- Maharashtra:** The Belgaum district (came under Karnataka in 1956) is arguably part of one of the biggest inter-state border disputes in India.
- **Assam-Mizoram:** The border dispute between Assam and Mizoram is a legacy of two British-era notifications of 1875 and 1933, when Mizoram was called Lushai Hills, a district in Assam.
 - ▶ The 1875 notification differentiated Lushai Hills from the plains of Cachar and the other demarcated boundary between Lushai Hills and Manipur.
 - ▶ While Mizoram became a state only in 1987 following years of insurgency, it still insists on the boundary decided in 1875.
 - ▶ Assam, on the other hand, wants the boundary demarcated in 1986 (based on the 1933 notification).
 - ▶ Mizoram says the 1986 agreement is not acceptable as the Mizo civil society was not consulted at that time.
- **Assam-Nagaland:** The Nagaland State Act of 1962 had defined the state's borders according to a 1925 notification when **Naga Hills and Tuensang Area (NHTA)** were integrated into a new administrative unit. Nagaland, however, does not accept the boundary delineation and has demanded that the new state should also have all Naga-dominated areas in **North Cachar and Nagaon districts**.
- **Haryana-Himachal Pradesh:** The Parwanoo region (next to the Panchkula district of Haryana) has had the spotlight over the border dispute between the two states.
- **Himachal Pradesh-Ladakh:** Himachal and Ladakh lay claim to Sarchu, an area on the route between Leh and Manali.
- **Meghalaya-Assam:** The problem between Assam and Meghalaya started when the latter challenged the Assam Reorganisation Act of 1971, which gave Blocks I and II of the Mikir Hills or present-day Karbi Anglong district to Assam.

GENOME SEQUENCING AND THE GENOME INDIA PROJECT

CONTEXT

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) recently said that the exercise to sequence 10,000 Indian human genomes and create a database under the Centre-backed Genome India Project is about two-thirds complete.

What is the human genome?

- The human genome is the entire set of **deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)** residing in the nucleus of every cell of each human body.
- It carries the complete genetic information responsible for the development and functioning of the organism.
- **Base:** The DNA consists of a double-stranded molecule built up by four bases –
 - ▶ adenine (A)
 - ▶ cytosine (C)

- ▶ guanine (G)
- ▶ thymine (T)

- Every base on one strand pairs with a complementary base on the other strand (A with T and C with G).
- In all, the genome is made up of approximately 3.05 billion such base pairs.

What is genome sequencing?

- While the sequence or order of base pairs is identical in all humans, there are differences in the genome of every human being that makes them unique.
- The process of deciphering the order of base pairs, to decode the genetic fingerprint of a human is called genome sequencing.

Application of genome sequencing

- Genome sequencing has been used to evaluate rare disorders, preconditions for disorders, even cancer from the viewpoint of genetics, rather than as diseases of certain organs.
- Nearly 10,000 diseases — including **cystic fibrosis and thalassemia** — are known to be the result of a single gene malfunctioning.

Important Projects

- **Human Genome Project:** In 1990, a group of scientists began to work on determining the whole sequence of the human genome under the **Human Genome Project**.
 - ▶ The first results of the complete human genome sequence were given in 2003. However, some percentage of repetitive parts were yet to be sequenced.
 - ▶ The Human Genome Project released the latest version of the complete human genome in 2023, with a 0.3% error margin.
- **Genome India project:** Genome India Project is a research initiative to gather samples, compile data, conduct research, and create a 'Indian reference genome' grid
 - ▶ India's 1.3 billion-strong population consists of over 4,600 population groups, many of which are endogamous. Thus, the Indian population harbours distinct variations, with disease-causing mutations often amplified within some of these groups.
 - ▶ Creating a database of Indian genomes allows researchers to learn about genetic variants unique to India's population groups and use that to customise drugs and therapies.

INDIAN SPACE POLICY – 2023

CONTEXT

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) formally published Indian Space Policy, 2023.

Key-highlights of the Policy

- The Indian Space Policy 2023 is a comprehensive set of guidelines that outlines the roles and responsibilities of different entities in the Indian space sector.
- **Research & Development:** The policy aims to keep India at the cutting edge of space research and development. ISRO, the Indian Space Research Organisation, has been tasked with focusing on applied research, technology development, and human spaceflight capabilities.
- **Efficient collaboration between public and private sector:** The policy outlines a strong emphasis on sharing technologies, products, processes, and best practices with New Generation Entities (NGEs) and Government companies.
- **Privatising:** The policy permits non-government entities to undertake end-to-end activities in the

space sector through the establishment and operation of space objects, ground based assets and related services such as communication, remote sensing and navigation.

- **Democratizing Data for All:** Data with a Ground Sample Distance (GSD) of 5 meters and higher will be made freely accessible on a timely basis.
 - ▶ This initiative promises to empower researchers, industries, and the general public with valuable information for various applications. In contrast, data with a GSD of less than 5 meters will be available for free to Government entities and at fair pricing for NGEs.
- **Focus on human spaceflight capabilities:** ISRO will work on developing the necessary technologies, infrastructure, and ecosystem for sustained human presence in space. This ambitious goal promises to propel India into the ranks of spacefaring nations. Additionally, the policy emphasizes the development of a collaborative framework for scientific research in multidisciplinary domains related to human space activities.
- **Celestial Prospecting and In-situ Resource Utilization:** ISRO is set to undertake studies and missions focused on in-situ resource utilization, celestial prospecting, and other aspects of extra-terrestrial habitability. This forward-looking approach will help India pave the way for future space exploration and utilization of resources beyond Earth.
- **Applicability:** This policy is applicable to any space activity to or from Indian territory or within the jurisdiction of India, including the area to the limit of its exclusive economic zone.

Roles and responsibilities of organisations

- **NewSpace India Limited:** The **Public Sector Undertaking**, NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), has been assigned responsibilities for commercializing space technologies and platforms, as well as servicing space-based needs of users, whether Government entities or NGEs.
 - ▶ By manufacturing, leasing, or procuring space components and assets, NSIL will operate on sound commercial principles, furthering the growth of India's space industry.
- **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe):** IN-SPACe will serve as the interface between ISRO and non-governmental entities.
- **Department of Space:** The Department of Space (DOS) will oversee the implementation of the **Indian Space Policy-2023**, ensuring that stakeholders are suitably empowered to carry out their respective functions.
 - ▶ From international cooperation to sustainable space operations, DOS will play a pivotal role in the successful execution of the policy.

India's space sector (in-brief)

- India's space sector is globally recognized for cost-effective satellite building, and it advocates for peaceful and civilian use of outer space.
- ISRO has an exceptional success rate and is the **6th largest space agency globally**.
- India has over **400 private space companies** and **ranks fifth globally** in terms of the number of space companies.
- **Recent developments** include
 - ▶ setting up the Defence Space Agency (DSA)
 - ▶ expanding satellite manufacturing capabilities, which are expected to reach USD 3.2 billion by 2025
 - ▶ ISRO launched **SAMVAD**, a student outreach program to encourage space research among young minds
- **Challenges:** However, the space sector faces major challenges as well including
 - ▶ lack of regulations on commercialisation which could lead to monopolisation
 - ▶ rising space debris from increasing expeditions
 - ▶ China's rapid growth in the space industry and potential weaponization
 - ▶ increasing global trust deficit creating an environment of suspicion and potential conflict
- **Global space industry:** The global space industry is currently valued at more than \$400 billion and has the potential to become a \$1 trillion industry by 2040.

What are the expected benefits of the new policy?

- **Enhancing Indian space economy:** The Policy is expected to have a significant impact on the Indian space economy. It aims to increase India's share in the global space economy from less than 2% to 10%.
- **Making India a global space leader:** Through a combination of research and development, collaboration, and innovation, the nation is poised to reach for the stars and solidify its position as a global space leader.

PROTESTS IN HASDEO ARANYA

CONTEXT

For more than a year now, locals, largely from the Gond tribe, in Hariharpur, Ghatbarra, and Fattepur villages, have been holding a sit-in at the entrance to Hariharpur against mining.

Background

- Protests against mining in the Hasdeo Aranya region have been going on since the area was first granted clearance for this purpose by the Chhattisgarh government in 2010. However, there are no positive results.
- In March 2022, the Chhattisgarh government had granted expansion approval for the project to open the Parsa Coal Block, which would dig under Hariharpur.

- Here, about 2 lakh trees have been marked for felling. The mines will expand into Fattepur and Ghatbarra.
- Mining will lead to the loss of about 8 lakh trees of the Sal forests in Hasdeo Aranya, which will end up affecting the catchment of the Hasdeo river.

Issues faced by the local people (with no voice)

- When the mining began, the blasting was a few acres away. Slowly, from 2018 onwards, it started coming closer. Today, the mine is less than 100 metres away from their backyard.
- Cattle have less to graze on, groundwater level has gone down
- The blasting has loosened the earth around borewells and tube wells people had been using for minor farming.
- The nearby stream which was used to have water and fish throughout the year has turned into a muddy rivulet since the digging has affected the catchment area.

About the Hasdeo Aranya forests region

- The Hasdeo Aranya forests are called the **lungs of Chhattisgarh**.
- The Hasdeo Aranya (Aranya means forest) lies in the catchment area of the Hasdeo river and is spread across 1,878 sq km in North-Central Chhattisgarh.
- The **Hasdeo river** is a tributary of the **Mahanadi river** which originates in Chhattisgarh and flows through Odisha into the Bay of Bengal.
- **Home to vulnerable population:** Hasdeo Arand region is **home to a large and vulnerable population**,

most of them being Adivasis and other traditional forest dwellers. **Over 90% of the residents are dependent on agriculture cultivation and forest produce for their livelihoods.**

- ▶ The implementation of **Forest Rights Act** has remained extremely poor till date leaving the population extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Coalfield

- Underneath the Hasdeo Aranya is a coalfield that comprises of 22 coal blocks. In 2010, the Centre categorised Hasdeo Aranya to be a “no-go” zone for mining. It ruled out mining in any of these blocks.
- However, only a year later, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) granted clearance for the mining for one coal block.
- At present, of the 22 blocks, seven blocks have been allotted to different companies, says the resolution.

How significant is this region?

- **Forest land:** Around 80% of this is covered by **good quality forest** (approximately 1176 sq km has a canopy cover of over 40% while an additional 116 sq km has a canopy cover of over 70%).
- **Biodiversity:** Besides, the forests are ecologically sensitive due to the rich biodiversity. It is also **part of a large elephant corridor** stretching from supporting the migration of wild elephants from Gumla district in Jharkhand to Korba district of Chhattisgarh.
- **Hasdeo Bango reservoir:** It is also the **watershed of the Hasdeo Bango reservoir** on the Hasdeo River, which is a tributary of the **Mahanadi River** and one of the most important rivers of Chhattisgarh. The **Hasdeo Bango Dam built** across the Hasdeo river irrigates six lakh acres of land, crucial to a State with paddy as its main crop.

IN A FIRST, FLY ASH PARTICLES FOUND IN ANTARCTIC ICE

CONTEXT

Spheroidal carbonaceous particles (SCP), a component of fly ash, have been identified for the first time in an Antarctic ice core, according to a new study.

What is fly ash?

- Fly ash is a residue generated in combustion and

comprises the fine particles that rise with the flue gases.

- Fly ash is a heterogeneous material. The main chemical components present in fly ash are:
 - ▶ Silicon dioxide
 - ▶ Aluminum oxide
 - ▶ Ferric oxide
 - ▶ Calcium oxide (occasionally)
- **Source:** Coal-fired power plants are the biggest sources of fly ash, which contains toxic chemicals such as **arsenic, barium, cadmium, nickel and lead**, among others.
- **Impact:** Without proper management, fly ash can pollute the waterways, ground water, drinking water, and air, posing a risk to humans, wildlife, and the environment.

What are the applications?

- ▶ In the commercial and industrial sectors, fly ash has a wide variety of applications and uses, though it is primarily known for improving the durability and workability of concrete mixes.
- ▶ Fly ash is also a filler in paints, adhesives, and metal and plastic composites.
- ▶ It's commonly used as structural fill for road construction and fly ash can be used to make bricks, ceramic tiles, plaster, Portland cement, and ready-mix cement.

INDOOR AIR POLLUTION CAN SLOW DOWN BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: STUDY

CONTEXT

India's poor indoor air quality can impair cognitive development in children under two years — when brain growth is at its peak, according to a study.

What is indoor air pollution? Which air pollutants exist indoor?

- It refers to the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of air in the indoor environment within a home, building, or an institution or commercial facility.

- A number of air pollutants have been recognised to exist indoors, including NO_x, SO₂, ozone (O₃), CO, volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds (VOCs), PM, radon and microorganisms.
- Some of these pollutants (NO_x, SO₂, O₃, and PM) are common to both indoor and outdoor environments and some of them may originate from outdoors.
- These air pollutants can be inorganic, organic, biological or even radioactive.

What factors affect indoor air quality?

- Indoor air quality is affected by many factors, including:
 - Type and running conditions of indoor pollution sources
 - **Ventilation conditions:** Air pollutants may accumulate in the indoor environment if the indoor air is not well ventilated, which seriously affects the health of the inhabitants.
 - Indoor activities (cooking with dirty fuel): According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around three billion people, mostly women in the villages of India and in other parts of the world still cook and heat their homes using dirty solid fuels.
 - These include waste wood, charcoal, coal, dung and abundantly available crop wastes. These are burnt on open fireplaces, cooking stoves etc.
 - This generates a large amount of air pollutants such as
 - ▶ sulphur dioxide (SO₂)
 - ▶ nitrous oxides (NO_x)
 - ▶ carbon monoxide (CO)
 - ▶ particulate matter (PM)

Effects of indoor air pollution

The effect of these air pollutants on humans depends on their toxicity, concentration and exposure time and may vary from person to person.

- **Sick building syndrome (SBS):** The most common effect is called sick building syndrome (SBS), in which people experience uncomfortable or acute health effects such as irritation of nose, eyes and throat, skin ailments, allergies and so on.
- **Premature deaths:** The WHO fact sheet on household air pollution due to indoor pollutants states that 3.8 million premature deaths occur annually.
 - ▶ These include stroke, ischaemic heart diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and lung cancer, all of which are attributed to exposure to household air pollution.

Important findings

- More than 116,000 infants in India died within a month of birth in 2019 due to air pollution, outdoor and indoor, according to the **State of Global Air 2020 report** released October 21, 2020.
- Another study published in **Environmental Research in February 2021** found that air pollution and higher particulate matter 2.5 concentrations in ambient air originating from fossil fuel combustion caused 2.5 million premature deaths in India in 2018.

POONCH ATTACK

CONTEXT

There has been a terrorist attack on an army vehicle in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch, in which the country has lost 5 of its brave soldiers in this terrorist attack.

Who is responsible for the attack?

- The attack was carried out by the People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), a terror organisation supported by the Jaish.

What is the People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF)?

- The People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF) is a military group engaged in the current conflict in Jammu and Kashmir between Kashmiri separatists and Indian security forces.
- India asserts that it's a division of the Lashkra-e-taiba.
- PAFF organisation was discussed for the first time when Article 370 was removed in J&K in 2019.

Increasing terrorism in India

- India ranks **13th** on **The Global Terrorism Index (GTI)**. The GTI report is produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), a think tank, using data from Terrorism Tracker and other sources.

Framework for Combating Terrorism in India:

- India recently hosted a special meeting of the UNSC's **Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC)**, with theme of 'Countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes'.
- India also hosted the meeting of "**No Money For Terror**", which was initiative of the **French government**, to specifically focus on **cooperation between countries to choke terror funding**.
- In August 2019, the **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967** was revised to include the ability to label individuals as terrorists.

- **National Investigation Agency** is the lead law enforcement investigative agency to combat terrorism.
 - ▶ The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act of 2008 has been amended by the Indian Parliament to give NIA the ability to investigate terrorism cases overseas.

Why erasing terror is becoming a challenge?

- **Increased freelancers:** Radicalised individuals, also

called 'lone wolves', 'DIY' or 'freelancer' terrorists are now committing random acts of terrorist violence.

- **Dark net:** Terrorist have expanded the use of The Onion Router (TOR)-enabled darknet for propaganda, and recruitment on encrypted chat forums and platforms beyond the gaze of the security agencies.
- **Evolving tech, evolving terror:** Advancing and emerging technologies like autonomous systems, 3D printing and deep fake potentially offer the terrorists prospects for weaponisation.

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SUPREME COURT CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF 'BASIC STRUCTURE DOCTRINE'

CONTEXT:

- April 24th marks the 50th anniversary of the **Kesavananda Bharati** judgment which expounded the basic structure doctrine. It is the most celebrated constitutional case of the country.

Who was Kesvananda Bharti?

- He was a monk from Adi Shankaracharya's tradition born in 1940.
- Kesavananda Bharati took sanyas at the **age of 19** and headed to the Edneer Mutt, a Hindu monastery in Kasargod, Kerala.
- In 1961, still only 21, he was appointed as the head of the Mutt, a position he held till his death in 2020.

The Edneer Mutt is believed to have been established by **Totakacharya**, one of four original disciples of **Adi Shankaracharya** (credited to have synthesised the non-dualistic philosophy of **Advaita Vedanta**.)

- He fought against the **Kerala government's land reforms** and aims when he took the Kerala government to court in February 1970.
- Rather, he was challenging the 1969 Land Reforms enacted by the communist C. Achuta Menon government which had affected his Mutt. Under the reforms, Edneer Mutt lost a large chunk of its property, which contributed to its financial woes.
- Filing a writ petition in the Supreme Court, Kesavananda Bharati argued, that this action violated his fundamental rights – in particular, his fundamental **right to religion (Article 25), freedom of religious denomination (Article 26), and right to property (Article 31)**.

What does the Basic Structure mean?

- The Constitution of India defines its 'basic structure' in terms of **federalism, secularism, fundamental rights and democracy**.
- The Constitution of India provides for '**judicial review**' to safeguard the citizens' liberties and to preserve the ideals on which the Constitution is based.

Evolution of Kesvananda Bharti case:

- Parliament's authority to amend the Constitution, particularly the chapter on the fundamental rights of citizens, was challenged as early as 1951.
- After independence, several laws were enacted in the states with the aim of reforming land ownership and

tenancy structures.

- This was in keeping with the implementation of the socialistic goals of the Constitution [contained in **Article 39(b)** and (c) of the **Directive Principles of State Policy**] that required **equitable distribution of resources of production among all citizens and prevention of concentration of wealth in the hands of a few**.
- Parliament added the **Ninth Schedule** to the Constitution through the very first amendment in 1951 as a means of immunising certain laws against judicial review.
- Under the provisions of Article 31, which themselves were amended several times later, laws placed in the Ninth Schedule -- pertaining to the acquisition of private property and compensation payable for such acquisition -- cannot be challenged in a court of law on the ground that they violated the fundamental rights of citizens.
- The Ninth Schedule was created with the primary objective of **preventing the judiciary** - which upheld the citizens' right to property on several occasions - from derailing the Congress party-led government's agenda for a social revolution.

Article 13 (2) provides for the protection of the fundamental rights of the citizen.

- Parliament and the state legislatures are clearly prohibited from making laws that may take away or abridge the fundamental rights guaranteed to the citizen.
- They argued that any amendment to the Constitution had the status of the law as understood by **Article 13 (2)**.

What does the case exactly say?

- Constituent power is superior to ordinary legislative power:**
 - Unlike the British Parliament which is a **sovereign body** (in the absence of a written constitution), the powers and functions of the **Indian Parliament and State legislatures** are subject to limitations laid down in the Constitution.
 - The Constitution does not contain all the laws

that govern the country. Parliament and the state legislatures make laws from time to time on various subjects, within their respective jurisdictions.

- ▶ The general framework for making these laws is **provided by the Constitution**.
- ▶ Parliament alone is given the **power to make changes** to this framework under **Article 368**.
- ▶ Unlike ordinary laws, amendments to constitutional provisions require a **special majority vote in Parliament**.
- **The difference between Parliament's constituent power and law-making powers:**
 - ▶ According to **Article 21** of the Constitution, **no person in the country may be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to a procedure established by law**.
 - ▶ Parliament and the state legislatures make the necessary laws identifying offensive activities for

which a person may be imprisoned or sentenced to death.

- ▶ Changes to these laws may be incorporated by a simple majority vote in the concerned state legislature.
- ▶ There is no need to amend the Constitution in order to incorporate changes to these laws.
- ▶ However, if there is a demand to convert **Article 21** into the fundamental right to life by abolishing the death penalty, the Constitution may have to be suitably amended by Parliament using its constituent power.
- **Declared that Parliament's constituent power was subject to inherent limitations:**
 - ▶ The Parliament could not use its amending powers under **Article 368** to '**damage**', '**emasculate**', '**destroy**', '**abrogate**', '**change**' or '**alter**' the '**basic structure**' or framework of the Constitution.

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KERALA'S THIRUNELLY TEMPLE'S STRUCTURES NEED PROTECTION

CONTEXT

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has urged the government to conserve the historically significant structures, including the 600-year-old 'Vilakkumadom', an exquisite granite structure, at the Sree Mahavishnu Temple at Thirunelly in Wayanad district during the on-going renovation of the temple.

About the temple

- Thirunelli Temple is an **ancient temple** dedicated to **Lord Maha Vishnu** on the side of **Brahmagiri hill** in Kerala.
 - East:** The Tirunelli temple faces east where the sun rises over the Udayagiri range.
 - North:** At the north is the formidable Brahmagiri Range which appears so close to the temple.
 - West and South:** At the west and south are Karimala and Narinirangimala respectively.
- Style:** The **15th century structure** is built in the typical Kerala style, with tiled roofs.
 - A local ruler began building a stone structure, but he was interrupted by a war, and a few pillars stand in solitude in memory of the attempt.
 - An impressive structure from that period is an aqueduct, bringing water from the hill streams to the temple.
- Thirunelli Temple is the only temple in the world where the devotees can perform all the rituals related to one's life, starting from birth to death and life after death. Panchatheertham is the temple holy pond.
 - Kashi of the South:** It is believed that here the prathishta of Lord Vishnu was performed by Lord Brahma. It is also known as "Sahyamala Kshetram" and "Kashi of the South".

Vilakkumadom

The Vilakkumadom at Thirunelly temple, an exquisite granite structure, is incomplete and its incompleteness is a part of history. It is said that the work was initiated by the King of Coorg without the knowledge of the temple's custodian, the Kottayam Raja. The Kottayam Raja later stopped the works and the structure remained untouched afterwards.

PUSHKARALU FESTIVAL RETURNS TO THE GANGA

CONTEXT

The 12-day **Pushkaralu festival** of Telugu-speaking people commenced recently in **Varanasi**.

About the festival

- The festival is being organised in Kashi this year after a gap of 12 years due to a special combination of planetary transits.
- Godavari Pushkaralu is celebrated once in every 12 years when Brihaspati enters Simha Raasi.
- In this festival, pilgrims worship their ancestors and the river Ganga.

It is the second event of the recent past to be organised in Varanasi, after the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam.

The story behind

- As per the legend, after severe penance, the devotee Pushkara was blessed by Lord Shiva with the ability to live in water, and purify holy rivers.
- On a request from Brhaspati (Jupiter), Pushkara decided to enter one of the 12 sacred rivers — Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri, Bhima, Tapti, Narmada, Saraswati, Tungbhadra, Sindhu, and Pranhita.
- Each river has its zodiac sign.
- The river for each year's festival is decided in accordance with Brihaspati travel from one zodiac sign to another.

Pushakaram of these rivers is celebrated when Jupiter / Brihaspati transits from one Raasi (zodiac sign) to the other:

- The cycle of **Pushkaraulu** begins with River Ganga when Brihaspati enters Mesha Raasi (Aries). It is celebrated as **Ganga Pushkaram**.
- Narmada Pushkaram** when Jupiter enters Vrishabha Raasi (Taurus).
- Saraswati Pushkaram** when Brihaspati enters Mithuna Raasi (Gemini).
- Yamuna Pushkaram** is celebrated when Jupiter enters Karkataka Raasi (Cancer).
- Godavari Pushkaram** when Brihaspati enters Simha Raasi (Leo).

- **Krishna Pushkaram** when Jupiter enters Kanya Raasi (Virgo).
- **Kaveri Pushkaram** when Brihaspati enters Thula Raasi (Libra).
- **Bheema Pushkaram** when Jupiter enters Thula Raasi (Libra).
- **Pushkara Vahini** when Brihaspati enters Dhanur Raasi (Sagittarius).
- **Tungabhadra Pushkaram** when Jupiter enters Makara Raasi (Capricorn).
- **Sindhu Pushkaram** when Brihaspati enters Kumbha Raasi (Aquarius).
- And when Jupiter enters Meena Raasi (Pisces), **Pranahita Pushkaram** is celebrated.

THE ANCIENT ART FORM OF BHOOTA KOLA

CONTEXT

The ancient art form of Bhoota Kola, which gained mainstream popularity after the film *Kantara*, inspires anticipation and hope in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Kasaragod.

About the culture

- The trained **Bhoota Kola performer**, in a possessed state, provides the answers to the community and is revered as the manifestation of God himself.



- The ritual performance that starts in the night goes on into the early hours of the morning.
- **Different forms:** Performed in the open air, the Bhoota Kola comes in the forms of **Panchuruli, Kallurutti, Koragajja** and so on.

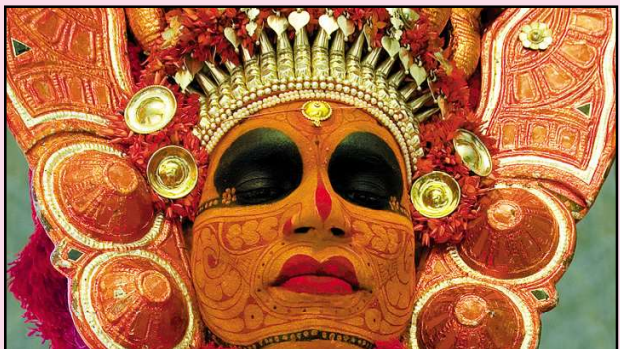
- **Objective:** The Tuluvas, the people who speak the Tulu language, believe in animism and the Bhoota Kola is performed to invoke these spirits of Nature.
- **Tribe:** The traditional right to perform the kola belong to the **Nalike and Parava tribes** of the region.
- A typical **Bhoota Kola** season starts in January and extends to May.

How is different from Theyyam?

- Originally from **Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of Karnataka** and the northern parts of **Kasaragod district**, the Bhoota Kola has striking similarities with Kerala's Theyyam, but have subtle differences too.
- **Costume:** The costumes of the Bhoota Kola are not as strikingly colourful as those of the Theyyam. The Bhoota Kola performer is bedecked in an attire entirely made of intricately woven palm leaves.
- **Face painting:** The elaborate face painting, however, is similar to Theyyam. The incantations the performer utters are in Tulu. The nema or kola (as the performance is called) usually involves a fierce dance accompanied by drums, music and other rituals.

Theyyam

Theyyam, also known as Kaliyattam, is a ritual dance popular in north Kerala. It encompasses dance, mime and music.



- It exalts the beliefs of the ancient tribals who gave a lot of importance to the worship of heroes and the spirits of their ancestors.
- The ceremonious dance is accompanied by the chorus of such musical instruments as Chenda, Elathalam, Kurumkuzal and Veekkuchenda.
- There are over 400 separate Theyyams, each with their own music, style and choreography.
- The most prominent among these are **Raktha Chamundi, Kari Chamundi, Muchilottu Bhagavathi, Wayanadu Kulaven, Gulikan and Pottan**.

G7 CALLS FOR EXTENSION OF BLACK SEA GRAIN DEAL

CONTEXT

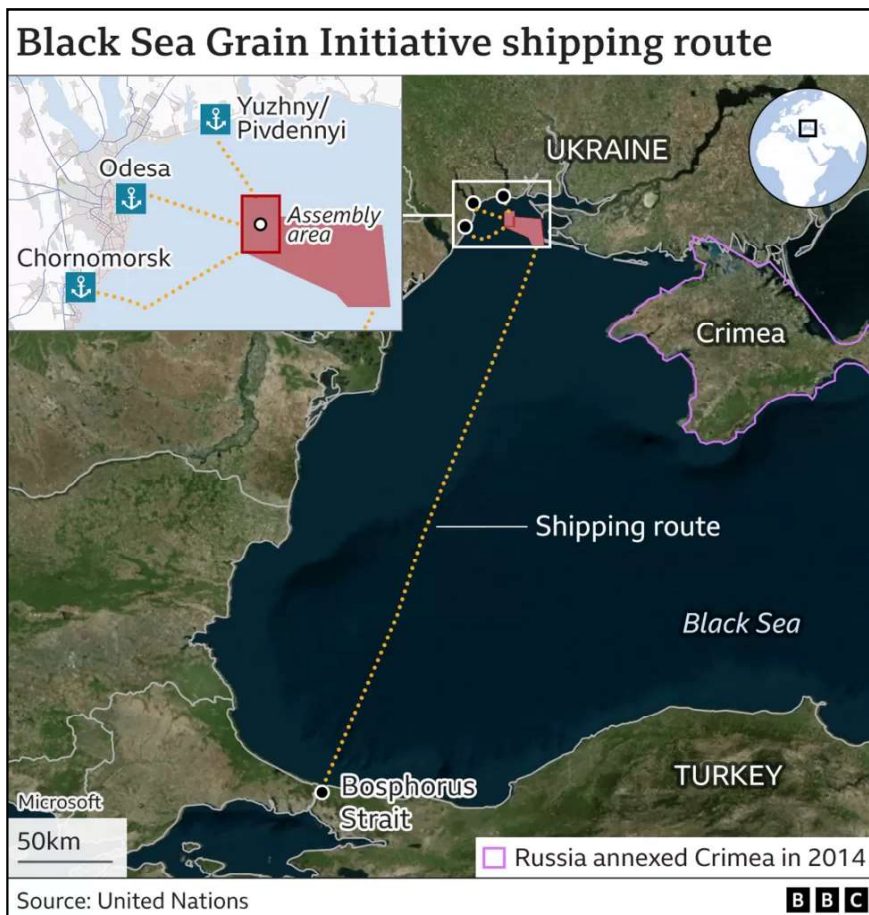
The Group of Seven (G7) economic powers have called for the “extension, full implementation and expansion” of a critical deal to export Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea.

Need of the deal

- Ukraine is a major global exporter of sunflower, maize, wheat and barley.
- When Russia invaded in February 2022, its naval vessels blockaded Ukraine's ports, trapping some 20 million tonnes of grain.

What is in the deal?

- Brokered by the United Nations and Turkey, the deal was signed in Istanbul last July, allowing Ukraine to export more than 27 million tonnes of grain from several of its Black Sea ports.
- The deal allowed exports from Ukraine of grain, other foodstuffs, and fertilizer, including ammonia, to resume through a safe maritime humanitarian corridor from three key **Ukrainian ports** to the rest of the world:
 - Chornomorsk
 - Odesa
 - Yuzhny/Pivdennyi



INDIA, IRAN AND ARMENIA FORM TRILATERAL GROUPING

CONTEXT

In a move aimed at strengthening regional co-operation, India, Iran and Armenia have formed a trilateral grouping.

About the grouping

- This trilateral grouping is expected to open up opportunities in different areas for cooperation including energy, transportation, trade, investment and transportation.

Key-highlights of the first-ever meeting

- The first ever meeting focused on connectivity especially the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
- INSTC was initially signed by Iran, Russia and India in 2002 and has since then expanded, and a freight corridor connecting which is expected to connect three countries — India, Iran and Russia.
- The main aim of this corridor is to reduce time and costs in the movement of goods from Mumbai to Moscow.
- The focus of the three sides during the meeting was on **economic issues and regional communication channels**.
- They also talked about trilateral cooperation in various fields as well as further deepening of people to people and cultural contacts.

Iran and Armenia

- Iran and Armenia, which share a border, also have robust ties.
- Last year, Iran opened a consulate in Armenia's Kapan.
- The two countries have also been working together to enhance trade and economic cooperation.

India and Iran

- India and Iran also have historic ties, with the two countries sharing a common cultural heritage.
- The **Chabahar port** in Iran has been key to connectivity between the two sides. India has provided equipment worth \$25 million to aid in the development of the port, including six mobile harbour cranes.
 - ▶ The port has the potential to serve as a gateway for India to access **Central Asia and Afghanistan**, while also providing Iran with an alternative trade route to the **Persian Gulf**.

Iran and Armenia

- Iran and Armenia, which share a border, also have robust ties. Last year, Iran opened a consulate in Armenia's Kapan.
- The two countries have also been working together to enhance trade and economic cooperation with Armenia serving as a transit route for Iran to access the Eurasian Economic Union.

- The trilateral grouping between India, Iran, and Armenia is expected to pave the way for greater cooperation in a range of areas, including trade, investment, energy, and transportation.

26 STATES AND UTS ADOPTS BHU-AADHAR: DOLR

CONTEXT

The Department of Land Records (DoLR) has informed that at least 26 States and UTs have adopted the Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) or Bhu-Aadhaar and seven more States are conducting a pilot test of the project.

What is Bhu-Aadhaar?

- The Bhu-Aadhaar or ULPIN is a "14-digit alphanumeric number generated based on the latitude longitude of the vertices of each land parcel".
- It is designated to be the "single, authoritative source of truth of information on any parcel of land or property to provide integrated land services to the citizens as well as all stakeholders".

Other important initiatives for land records

Bhu-Naksha initiative

- The Bhu-Naksha project introduced in 2022 is another project under the Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme implemented in 2016.
- The Bhu-Naksha initiative provisions for mapping boundaries and conducting spatial measurement of land to computerize land records and produce digitized maps of a region with parcels of demarcated land.
 - ▶ These maps are editable based on the results of property divisions in G2G (govt to govt) and G2C (govt to citizen) domains.
 - ▶ These parcels of land are then identified by a Bhu-Aadhaar number.

National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS)

- As many as 28 States and Union Territories (UTs) in the country have adopted the National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS).
- NGDRS is a digital portal for maintaining land records.
- The NGDRS is an application developed for allowing people to buy land online via electronic registration of property and documents. The project was initiated by the Department of Land Resources under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development.

What is India aiming for?

- The Indian government is aiming to digitize **100 percent of land records by 2024**.
- The initiative to create a unified database for land and property records comes alongside other government projects to digitize health and education records

through a similar foundational plan which involves creating separate registries for stakeholder entities, a unique ID (in this case the Bhu-Aadhaar) linked to common national IDs like Aadhaar and integration of these databases via APIs which allow for interoperability of services like registrations, managing certifications, transfer of land ownership, etc.

What is the need?

- Land disputes account for 66 percent of civil cases in the country.
- These disputes mainly arise out of issues related to land ownership and whether or not the state has the power to redistribute land, which may have historically been inhabited by various indigenous communities of that region.

What are the challenges?

- As the government speeds up the process to digitize land records, concerns related to
- accuracy in mapping the areas as per physical demarcations
- lack of documentation
- manipulation of digital records
- uncertainties about mechanisms to challenge digital records on the basis of existing rules

GOVERNORS SHOULD CLEAR BILLS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE: SC

CONTEXT

The Supreme Court observed that bills sent to the governor for assent must be returned “as soon as possible” and not sit over them, making state Legislative Assemblies wait indefinitely.

Key-highlights

- Citing **proviso 1 of Article 200 of the Constitution**, the bench said the expression ‘as soon as possible’ has significant constitutional intent and must be borne in mind by constitutional authorities.

Article 200 of the Constitution of India

- Article 200** of the Constitution provides that after a Bill has been passed by the **Legislative Assembly** of a state, the same shall be presented to the governor for his assent.
 - The governor may either declare that he assents to the Bill or may withhold his assent or reserve it for consideration by the President.
- According to **Article 200**, “Assent to Bills when a Bill has been passed by the Legislative Assembly of a State or, in the case of a State having a Legislative Council, has been passed by both Houses of the Legislature

of the State, it shall be presented to the Governor and the Governor shall declare either that he assents to the Bill or that he withholds assent therefrom or that he reserves the Bill for the consideration of the President.”

- The governor is an important constitutional figure in India, serving as the representative of the President of India in each state and union territory.

INDIA RAISES ITS LOGISTICS GAME, RISES SIX SPOTS ON WORLD BANK INDEX TO 38

CONTEXT

India has improved its ranking in the World Bank’s **Logistic Performance Index 2023** by six places, owing to significant investments in both soft and hard infrastructure as well as technology, which has led to an improvement in the country’s port performance.

Key-highlights of the Report

- Singapore and Finland are the most efficient and highest ranked LPI countries.
- India’s ranking: According to the report, India’s rank in the index of 139 countries has risen to 38 from 44 in 2018.
 - International shipments:** In 2023, India’s ranking for international shipments improved significantly, moving up from 44 in 2018 to 22.
 - Logistics competence and equality:** The country also climbed four places to rank 48 in logistics competence and equality.
 - Timeline:** In terms of timelines, India saw a significant improvement, moving up 17 places in the rankings.
 - Tracking and tracing:** Additionally, India improved three places in tracking and tracing, now ranking at 38.

What is Logistic Performance Index 2023?

- The LPI is an interactive benchmarking tool created to help countries identify the challenges and opportunities they face in their performance on trade logistics and what they can do to improve their performance.
- The LPI 2023 allows for comparisons across 139 countries.
- The 2023 LPI for the first time measures the speed of trade with indicators derived from big datasets tracking shipments.

Overview of Logistics Industry in India

- **Meaning:** Broadly, logistics is the time, resources, and money invested in storing and transporting a commodity from its origin to destination.
- The logistics industry in India is growing rapidly, with the country's economy expanding at a rapid pace.
- India's logistics sector is estimated to account for about 14.4% of GDP. The unorganised sector amounts to over 90% of the logistics sector.
 - ▶ The average logistics cost per GDP among BRICS countries was 11%. However, in the case of India, the cost share per GDP was 14%.
- The sector is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.5% between FY2019 and FY2024.
- The sector employs around 22 million people and is expected to create another 1.2 million jobs by 2025.

Government Scheme to improve India's logistics sector

- **National Logistics Policy:** It is a comprehensive effort to address issues of high cost and inefficiency by laying down an overarching interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-jurisdictional framework for the development of the entire logistics ecosystem.
- **PM GatiShakti – National Master Plan for multi-modal connectivity:** It aims to give further boost and complementarity with the launch of the National Logistics Policy.
- **Other Related Initiatives to Logistics:**
 - ▶ Multi-Modal Logistics Parks
 - ▶ Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) Report
 - ▶ Dedicated Freight Corridor
 - ▶ Sagarmala Projects
 - ▶ Bharatmala Project
 - ▶ Multimodal Transportation of Goods Act, 1993

LOCKBIT RANSOMWARE

CONTEXT

Cybercriminals have developed new ransomware encryptors designed to target macOS devices, making this the first major ransomware operation to specifically target Apple computers.

What is LockBit ransomware?

- First reported in September 2019 and dubbed the "abcd" virus, due to the file extension used when

encrypting victim's files, the LockBit ransomware is designed to infiltrate victims' systems and encrypt important files.

- The virus is categorised as a "crypto virus" due to its requests for payment in cryptocurrency to decrypt the files on the victim's device.
- The ransomware is therefore typically deployed against victims who feel hindered enough by the disruption to pay heavy sums in exchange for access and can afford to do so.

LockBit ransomware gang

- The group behind this is known as the LockBit gang. It is considered the most prolific ransomware group ever.
- It operates on the ransomware-as-a-service (Raas) model and comes from a line of extortion cyberattacks.

- **Target:** Historically, ransomware has targeted Windows, Linux, and VMware ESXi servers. However, the LockBit is now working to create encryptors targeting Macs for the first time.
- It works as a self-spreading malware, not requiring additional instructions once it has successfully infiltrated a single device with access to an organisational intranet.
- **Protection:** While there are no fool-proof ways of protecting against ransomware attacks, organisations and individuals can take certain steps to increase resilience against such cyber threats.

DRDO, INDIAN NAVY CONDUCTS SUCCESSFUL TRIAL OF INTERCEPTOR MISSILE

CONTEXT

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Navy successfully conducted a maiden flight trial of a sea-based endo-atmospheric interceptor missile off the coast of Odisha in the Bay of Bengal.

Key-highlights

- The purpose of the trial was to engage and neutralize a hostile ballistic missile threat thereby elevating India into the elite club of Nations having Naval Ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability.

- Endo-atmospheric interception means the missile fired by Indian testing agencies had destroyed the incoming enemy ballistic missile within the Earth's atmosphere.
- Exo-atmospheric interception, on the other hand, is for destroying incoming enemy ballistic missiles outside of the Earth's atmosphere at a higher altitude.
 - ▶ AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) and other hostile aircraft, as well as approaching long-range nuclear missiles, can be intercepted by BMDs.
- Prior to this, DRDO successfully demonstrated land-based BMD system with the capability to neutralize ballistic missile threats, emerging from adversaries.

Endo-atmospheric missiles

- Endo-atmospheric interception means the missile fired by Indian testing agencies had destroyed the incoming enemy ballistic missile within the Earth's atmosphere.
 - ▶ The endo-atmospheric missiles are those that function within the earth's atmosphere and have a range of less than 100 kilometres.
- Exo-atmospheric interception, on the other hand, is for destroying incoming enemy ballistic missiles outside of the Earth's atmosphere at a higher altitude.
 - ▶ The exo-atmospheric missiles are capable of completing missions in the uppermost part of the earth's atmosphere.
- India's phase-II ballistic missile defence interceptor AD-1, which can engage a wide variety of targets, successfully completed its first flight test in November.
- Long-range ballistic missiles and planes can be intercepted by the AD-1 long-range interceptor missile in both "low exo-atmospheric" and "endo-atmospheric" settings.

WATERBODY COUNT

STATES WITH MOST WATERBODIES

State	No. of waterbodies
West Bengal	7,47,480
Uttar Pradesh	2,45,087
Andhra Pradesh	1,90,777
Odisha	1,81,837
Assam	1,72,492
Jharkhand	1,07,598
Tamil Nadu	1,06,957

STATES/UTs WITH LEAST WATERBODIES

Sikkim	134
Chandigarh	188
Delhi	893
Arunachal Pradesh	993

WATERBODIES LOST TO ENCROACHMENTS

Uttar Pradesh	15,301
Tamil Nadu	8,366
Andhra Pradesh	3,920



- The report states, "24,24,540 waterbodies have been enumerated in the country, out of which 97.1% (23,55,055) are in rural areas and only 2.9% (69,485) in urban areas."
- As per the report,
 - ▶ 59.5 per cent (14,42,993) of waterbodies are ponds
 - ▶ tanks (15.7 per cent i.e. 3,81,805)
 - ▶ reservoirs (12.1 per cent i.e. 2,92,280)
 - ▶ water conservation schemes/percolation tanks/check dams (9.3% i.e. 2,26,217)
 - ▶ lakes (0.9% i.e. 22,361)
 - ▶ others (2.5% i.e. 58,884)

FIRST-EVER WATERBODY CENSUS

CONTEXT

The Ministry of Jal Shakti has released the report of the first census of waterbodies.

Key-highlights of the Census

- India has 24.24 lakh waterbodies like ponds, tanks and lakes, with West Bengal accounting for the most (7.47 lakh) and Sikkim the least (134).

What is water body?

- The census defines a waterbody as "all natural or man-made units bounded on all sides with some or no masonry work used for storing water for irrigation or other purposes (example industrial, pisciculture, domestic/drinking, recreation, religious, ground water recharge etc)".
- Waterbodies are usually of various types known by different names like tank, reservoirs, ponds and bundhies etc.
- A structure where water from ice-melt, streams, springs, rain or drainage of water from residential or other areas is accumulated or water is stored by diversion from a stream, nala or river will also be treated as waterbody.

1 CRORE OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES HATCH ON ODISHA COAST

CONTEXT

At least 1 crore baby Olive Ridley turtles hatched on Odisha coast in last few days. It is expected that around 2 crore more baby turtles will hatch on Odisha coast before the culmination of this year's breeding season.

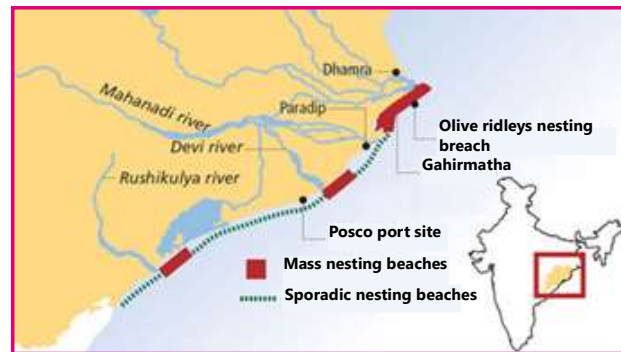
About Olive Ridley Turtles:

- They are the **smallest** and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- **Major nesting sites in India:** Rushikulya rookery coast (Odisha), Gahirmatha beach (Bhitarkanika National park) and mouth of the Debi River.
- **Scientific name:** *Lepidochelys olivacea*; also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle.
- **Presence:** Found in **warm waters** of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - ▶ IUCN Red List: **Vulnerable**
 - ▶ **Schedule I** of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
 - ▶ CITES Appendix I
- **Features:**
 - ▶ Known for their unique mass nesting called

Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.

- ▶ These are carnivores and feed mainly on jellyfish, shrimp
- ▶ The eggs hatch in 45 to 60 days, depending on the temperature of the sand and atmosphere during the incubation period.

Breeding Season



- Lakhs of Olive Ridley sea turtles usually congregate in the coastal sea of Odisha for breeding purposes every year.
- It is believed that around 50 per cent of the Olive Ridley turtles in the world visit Odisha coast to lay eggs.
- The breeding season of Olive Ridley turtles begins in November every year and concludes in May.
- The turtles usually lay eggs on Odisha coast in between November and second week of March. The baby turtles hatch in the months of April and May.

SECTION: 'D'
(SHORT NEWS)

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Ramanujacharya Jayanti



Prime Minister Narendra Modi remembered **Ramanujacharya (1017-1037)** on his birth anniversary.

- Born in 1017, Ramanujacharya also known as **Ilaiya Perumal** was born to Kanthimathi and Asuri Kesava Somayaji in Sriperumbadur, Chennai.
- He is known for his influential thinking towards **devotional Hinduism**.
- The great poet-saint Ramanuja was an eminent teacher and the founder of **Vishishtadwaita**.
- He is an expert in Vedic scriptures.
- A community of Vaishnavites has been following his path called **Vedanta**.
- Sri Ramanujacharya was also known for his social reforms.
- He had a vision towards **Lord Vishnu** and his consort Shri and instituted a daily worship ritual for them. He later moved to Kanchipuram.
- Shri Ramanujacharya wrote nine scriptures called **Navaratnas** and composed numerous commentaries on **Vedic scriptures**.

Adi Shankaracharya Jayanti



Adi Shankaracharya Jayanti has been recently observed on April 25.

- Also known as Adi Shankara, he is one of the most important figures in Hindu philosophy who played a major role in the revival of Hinduism.
- He attained the knowledge of all the Vedas at the age of 8.
- Later on, he travelled across the country and established four peeths in four directions;
 - **Jagannath Puri temple** in the East
 - **Shringeri Peeth** in Rameshwaram in the South
 - **Sharda Math** in the West
 - **Jyotirmath or the Badrinath Dham** in the North
- A perfect example of his teachings is "**Brahma Satyam Jagan Mithya Jivo Brahmaiva Na Aparah**" This translates to Brahman (the Absolute) is alone real; this world is unreal; and the Jiva or the individual soul is non-different from Brahman."
- He preached his **Advaita philosophy**. He preached that the supreme Brahman is Nirguna (without any Guna), Nirakara (formless), Nirvishesha (without any attribute), and Akarta (without any agent).
- **Upadesa Sahasri**: A Thousand Teachings, written by Adi Shankaracharya is a book of his teachings

Kamakhya Temple corridor



Assam is planning to construct a corridor at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati on the lines of the **Kashi-Vishwanath Temple Corridor** in Varanasi.

- Located on **Nilachal Hill** in Guwahati, Kamakhya Temple is considered **most sacred and oldest of the 51 Shakti Peethas on earth**.
- It is the centrepiece of widely practiced, powerful Tantrik Shaktism cult in India.
- The presiding deity in the temple is **Goddess Kamakhya** and her other forms as the **Tripura Sundari, Kamala and Matangi**.
- The mighty **Brahmaputra river** flows through the northern banks of the temple.
- The Kamakhya temple dates back to the first millennium during the time of Kamarupa. The Allahabad rock inscriptions of Samudragupta mention the existence of the temple.
- **Ambubachi Mela:** The annual festival of Ambubachi Mela celebrates the menstruation of the Goddess. The three-day mela is when the temple is closed off, as a period of rest for the Goddess.

Exercise INIOCHOS-23



Exercise INIOCHOS-23 is a multi-national air exercise hosted by the Hellenic Air Force (Greece).

About 2023 Exercise

- The exercise will be conducted at the Andravida Air Base in Greece from April 24, 2023, until May 4, 2023.
- The aim of the exercise is to enhance international cooperation, synergy and interoperability among the participating Air Forces.

India's participation

- The Indian Air Force will participate with four Su-30 MKI and two C-17 aircraft.
 - ▶ The Sukhoi Su-30MKI is a twinjet multirole air superiority fighter developed by Russia's Sukhoi and built under license by India's Hindustan Aeronautics.
 - ▶ C-17 Globemaster III is a strategic transport aircraft, able to airlift cargo close to a battle area.
- Other nations are also expected to take part. It will include
 - ▶ Cyprus with an AW139 Helicopter
 - ▶ France with Rafales
 - ▶ Italy with Tornados
 - ▶ Jordan with F-16s
 - ▶ Saudi Arabia with F-15s
 - ▶ Slovenia with PC-9s
 - ▶ Spain with EF-18s
 - ▶ The USA with F-16s and MQ-9s

Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM)



External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar co-chaired the 4th India-CARICOM Ministerial Meeting with his Jamaican counterpart Kamina J Smith at the CARICOM Secretariat in Guyana.

- The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) is a regional group of nations that encourage common policy and economic goals.
- The CARICOM was formed in 1973 and consists of 20 nations, including 15 full-time members and five associate members.
- The CARICOM was formed after the founders had enacted the **Treaty of Chaguaramas**.
- It was established to replace the **Caribbean Free Trade Area**, which had failed in its mission to develop policies in the region pertaining to labor and capital.
- The treaty was revised in 2002 to allow for the eventual establishment of a single market and a single economy.

The single market and economy is known as the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), which is meant to integrate all of the member states of CARICOM.

Malaria to become a notifiable disease



Malaria is all set to become a **notifiable disease** across India, with Bihar, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Meghalaya too in the process of putting this vector-borne disease in the category.

- Currently malaria is a notifiable disease in 33 States and Union Territories in India.
- Malaria is a potentially life-threatening disease caused by parasites (**plasmodium vivax, plasmodium falciparum, plasmodium malariae** and **plasmodium ovale**) that are transmitted through the bite of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.
- This is part of India's vision to be **malaria-free by 2027 and to eliminate the disease by 2030**.

"India was the only high-burden, high-impact country in the South- East Asia region to report a decline in malaria cases in 2020 as compared to 2019. India witnessed 85.1% decline in malaria cases and 83.36% decline in deaths during 2015-2022."

India's First Water Metro



India's first water metro has been unveiled in Kochi, Kerala.

- It connects 10 islands around Kochi through battery-operated electric hybrid boats for seamless connectivity with the city.
- The train will cover 11 districts namely **Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Pathanamthitta, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargod**.

Hakki Pikki in Sudan Conflict



More than 181 members of the Hakki Pikki tribal community from Karnataka are stuck in violence-hit Sudan.

Who are the Hakki Pikki?

- The Hakki Pikki is a tribe that lives in several states in west and south India, especially near forest areas.
- Hakki Pikkis (Hakki in Kannada means 'bird' and Pikki means 'catchers') are a semi-nomadic tribe, traditionally of bird catchers and hunters.
- In different regions, they are known by different names, such as Mel-Shikari in northern Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- They are divided into four clans, called Gujaratia, Panwar, Kaliwala and Mewaras.

Sangathan Se Samridhhi campaign



The government launched the '**Sangathan Se Samridhhi**' campaign.

About

- The campaigns aim to empower marginalized rural households by bringing all eligible rural women into the fold of **Self Help Groups (SHGs)**.

What are SHGs?

- Self-help groups are **informal groups** of people who come together to address their common problems.
- India has around 12 million SHGs, 88 per cent of which have only women members, according to the **Economic Survey 2022-23**.

West Bengal adds four new biodiversity heritage sites



Bengal has added four new biodiversity heritage sites (BHS) in West Bengal, taking the total tally to eight.

The new sites

- **Char Balidanga** comprises two islands on the **Hooghly** with **tropical riverine vegetation** of tall grasses and swampy flat lands that are periodically inundated with tidal ebbs.
- State Horticulture Research and Development Station campus in Deypara, in Nadia
- **Namthing Pokhari** is a Himalayan natural wetland
- **The Amkhoi Fossil Park** has unique geological and paleo-botanical features. It is the **first wood fossil park** in West Bengal.
- As per **Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act**, the State Governments are empowered to notify areas of biodiversity importance as **Biodiversity Heritage Sites**.
- BHS are areas that are unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems having rich biodiversity comprising of any one or more of the components such as;

- ▶ species richness
- ▶ high endemism
- ▶ presence of rare, endemic and threatened species
- ▶ keystone species
- ▶ species of evolutionary significance
- ▶ wild ancestors of domestic/cultivated species or land races or their varieties
- ▶ past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds and having cultural or aesthetic values

Government launches SUPREME



The government launched an initiative to provide financial support for the upgradation and maintenance of analytical instrumentation facilities (AIFs) created under the ministry's support.

About

- The Support for Up-gradation Preventive Repair and Maintenance of Equipment (SUPREME), a first-of-its-kind programme by the government, extends financial support for repair, upgradation, maintenance, retrofitting, or acquiring additional attachments to increase functional capabilities of existing analytical instrumentation facilities.
- Such facilities at institutions recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) are eligible to apply for grants under SUPREME.

UAE's Hope probe uncovers secrets of Deimos



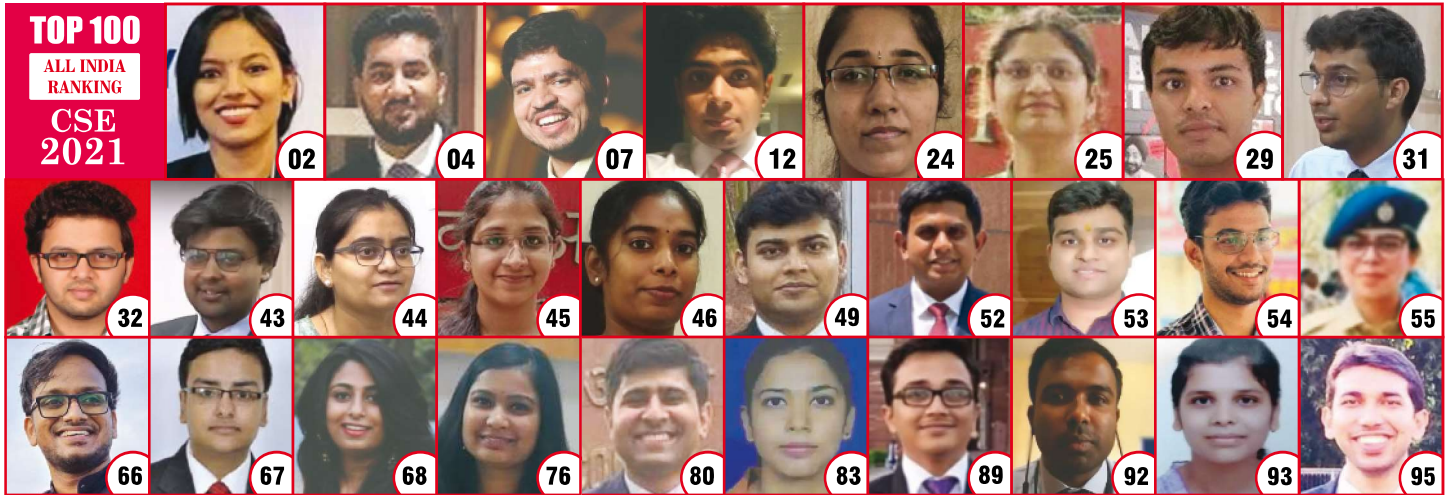
The **UAE's Hope probe** has revealed striking details of **Mars's tiny moon Deimos**, helping to indicate that the celestial body may not actually be a captured asteroid as previously thought.

Key-highlights of the finding

- The spacecraft flew as close as 100km to the moon's surface, capturing data of its composition that challenges a long-standing theory that Mars' moons are captured asteroids — space rocks trapped in a planet's orbit.
- Findings point to a planetary origin, meaning that the rock may have come from Mars itself.

What is Hope?

- The **Hope Mars Mission**, also called the **Emirates Mars Mission**, is **the first uncrewed, interplanetary satellite** spearheaded by the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**.
- In fact, the Hope satellite is the first planetary science mission led by an Arab-Islamic country.
- The Hope spacecraft was launched to space in July 2020 and entered the orbit of Mars in February 2021.
- Since then, it has been sending back crucial data on the planet's upper atmospheric conditions and space weather.



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