

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 1
MAY
2023

MAINS

- GS- II**
- CHINA'S ANTI-ESPIONAGE LAW
 - CHINA 'KEEN' TO RECRUIT GURKHA SOLDIERS INTO PLA
 - INDIA HANDS OVER TWO 'MADE IN INDIA' MILITARY VESSELS TO MALDIVES
 - BOOK HATE SPEECH CASES EVEN WITHOUT COMPLAINT: SC
- GS- III**
- DE-DOLLARISATION: THE RACE TO ATTAIN THE STATUS OF GLOBAL RESERVE CURRENCY
 - REFOCUS ON GIG WORKERS
 - INDIA-UAE CEPA COMPLETES ONE YEAR
 - FOREST FIRES, A THREAT TO UTTARAKHAND'S UNIQUE BIODIVERSITY
 - INDIA'S COST OF ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE NEEDS SEEN AT \$1 TRILLION: RBI
 - EU'S ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ACT

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- Thrissur Pooram 2023

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- India-Myanmar Kaladan waterway
- Japan to train Indian engineers before transfer of bullet train tech
- ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME-2023)

POLITY &

GOVERNANCE

- India slips to 161 on World Press Freedom Index
- 1st ever OBC survey gets underway in Odisha
- Scheduled Tribe status for the Meitei community
- Centre extends Smart Cities Mission till June 2024

- WHO launches PRET to prepare world for pandemics
- Dimasa rebel group signs peace pact with Centre
- Tele Manas counsels Kashmir's distressed souls

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- Indian Army to raise cyber operations and support wings
- Toxic gas kills 11 in Ludhiana

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- Kalaingar pen monument project Cleared
- Rare melanistic tiger found dead in Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve
- Nicobar project violates tribal rights: ST panel

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- Rang ghar
- World's second deepest blue hole discovered in Mexico
- Rare Sun Halo
- Wayanad tops Swachh Bharat Mission's ODF Plus rankings
- Millet Experience Centre
- Fabry Disease
- ADB announces IF-CAP
- StarBerrySense
- INS Tarkash deployed for Operation Kaveri
- Karnataka ranks as the most 'innovative' State: NMIS
- International Leopard Day
- Painted storks nesting in two A.P. villages
- Scientists discover new Seamounts
- India to join international climate action in civil aviation from 2027

SPECIAL

- Centre plans panel to find alternative to death by hanging

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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

CHINA'S ANTI-ESPIONAGE LAW

CONTEXT

China has updated and expanded its espionage law. The amended law broadened the scope of what may be 'defined' as activities related to spying and national security.

Background

- The expanded law follows the Chinese government's increasing focus on "security" and a recent policy shift that now emphasises the dual importance of "development and security", rather than a focus **solely** on economic development.
- The recent amendments are to **China's 2014 anti-espionage law**. The latest amendments are the first changes since 2014, and will take effect on July 1, 2023.

What is China's anti-espionage law?

- **Objective:** Article 1 of the law says the idea behind the legislation is "to prevent, stop and punish espionage conduct and maintain national security."
- **Defining espionage:** The law does not define what falls under China's national security or interests. It expands the definition of espionage to include cyber-attacks against state organs or critical information infrastructure.

The revised law defines as espionage "**collaborating with spy organisations and their agents**" and "**conducting cyber-attacks against state organs, confidential-related units, or critical information infrastructure and etc.**"

- **Promoting national anti-espionage efforts:** The law encourages ordinary citizens to take part in national anti-espionage efforts by reporting to the authorities any activity deemed to be suspicious and endangering national security.
- **Protecting State secrets:** They have further broadened the law's scope, with one of the changes declaring that "all documents, data, materials, and items related to national security and interests" will be protected on par with what are deemed state secrets.
- **Extended definition of espionage:** The definition of espionage has also been expanded to include cyber-attacks.

- ▶ Essentially, the transfer of any information deemed by authorities to be in the interest of what they define to be "national security" will now be considered an act of espionage.
- The latest change "improves the regulations on cyber espionage" and "clearly defines cyberattacks, intrusions, interference, control and destruction" as espionage.

What are the areas of concern?

- **Concerns for foreign enterprises:** The broad ambit of what constitutes "national security" as well as the law's focus on involving a "whole of society" approach to **counter-espionage**, including from Chinese enterprises and organisations, evoked concerns among both rights groups and foreign enterprises in China.
- Foreign governments are especially concerned whether Chinese companies, particularly in the tech sector, would be **mandated to offer their vast amounts of data** to the authorities.
 - ▶ For instance, one article of the law mandates that "all State organs, armed forces, political parties and public groups, and all enterprises and organisations, have the obligation to prevent and stop espionage activities and maintain national security."

What are the likely impacts?

- The amended law is likely to have a chilling impact both within China and beyond.
- **Restriction on Chinese journalists:** Chinese journalists, academics and executives who frequently engage with foreign counterparts are likely to think twice before doing so, at least without explicit government sanction.
- **Toll on unrestricted engagements:** Unrestricted engagement between Chinese and foreign scholars, which has already become limited in the Xi Jinping era, is likely to become even rarer.
- **Close watch on foreigners:** Foreign enterprises are also likely to be concerned.

How Indian Companies (in China) would be impacted?

- Indian companies with a presence in China, particularly in sectors deemed to be sensitive such as **pharma and IT**, will likely need to **review their exposure to risks** under the expanded law and broadened definitions of "national security", particularly amid deteriorating relations between the neighbours.

CHINA 'KEEN' TO RECRUIT GURKHA SOLDIERS INTO PLA

CONTEXT

Communist China, which has long been intrigued by the motivation behind Nepalese youth joining the Indian Army, may seek the Communist government in Nepal to allow the Gurkhas to join the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Who are Gurkhas?

- Gurkhas are the Nepali Soldiers that form a significant part of the **Indian Army's legendary Gurkha regiment**.
- They come from four main communities of **Magar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu**.
- **Pre-Independence:** They first encountered the British in 1814, when the British East India Company fought against them during the Anglo-Nepalese War.

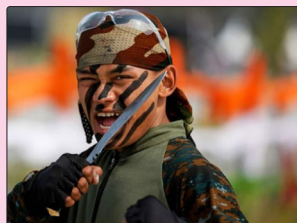
Recruitment in different countries

The Gurkha units are recruited for the-

- Nepali Army
 - Indian Army
 - British Army
 - Gurkha Contingent Singapore
 - Gurkha Reserve Unit Brunei
 - UN peacekeeping forces and in war zones around the world
- British forces admired the Gurkhas' military abilities and honourable tactics, and first recruited Gurkha troops in 1815 (**Nasiri regiment**).

Khukri, the national weapon of Nepal

- Their signature weapon of Gurkhas, Khukri, forms part of the Gurkha regimental insignia in Britain and India as well.



- The khukri is a **traditional multipurpose knife** of the Nepalese people used for regular cutting, clearing, chopping firewood, digging, slaughtering animals for food etc.

- ▶ The Nepali Gurkhas played a crucial role in the consolidation of the British Empire in India. They fought during the **Gurkha-Sikh War, Anglo-Sikh wars, and the Afghan wars**.
- **Post-Independence:** After India gained independence, a **Tripartite Agreement (Britain-India-Nepal)** was signed by which the regiments were split between the Indian armies and the British.
- ▶ Currently, Gorkha regiments make up Indian Army's 43 Battalions with soldiers from both Nepal and India in seven Gorkha regiments – 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th and the 11th.

Gorkha pullout

- Gorkhas are some of the best fighters in the world, however, the newly introduced Agnipath Scheme threatens to break this arrangement.
- Nepal urged India to suspend the recruitment of Gorkhas to the Indian Army under this new plan.

Agnipath is a tour of duty scheme introduced by India in June 2022 for recruitment of soldiers below the rank of commissioned officers into the three services of the armed forces. All recruits are to be hired for a four-year period.

INDIA HANDS OVER TWO 'MADE IN INDIA' MILITARY VESSELS TO MALDIVES

CONTEXT

In a demonstration of the nations' shared commitment to peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India's Defence Minister handed over two 'Made in India' platforms, a Fast Patrol Vessel and a Landing Craft Assault ship, to the Maldives National Defence Forces.

Defence & Security Cooperation with Maldives

- **MNDF Coast Guard Harbour:** India also laid foundation stone of MNDF Coast Guard Harbour and repair facility at **Sifavaru** in the archipelago. This is the **biggest grant-in-aid project** of India in Maldives.

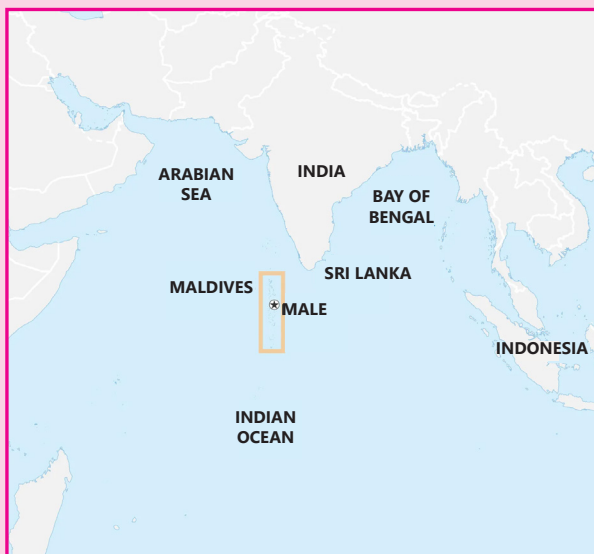
China had managed to gain a strong foothold in the **Maldivian economic system** between 2013-2018 which included deals for large infrastructure projects and also signing a free trade agreement.

- **Greater Male connectivity project:** In August last year, both countries started the India-funded Greater Male connectivity project, billed as the largest infrastructure initiative in the island nation.

- ▶ Under the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) project, a 6.74 km long bridge and causeway link will be built to connect the capital city Male with adjoining islands of
 - Villingli
 - Gulhifalhu
 - Thilafushi
- **Bilateral exercise:** The two sides already **exchange high-level visits** and there are mechanisms in place to deepen this cooperation including several bilateral exercises like — **Ekuverin; Dosti; Ekatha**.
- India is playing a very important role in training and capacity building of **Maldivian National Defence Force**.
- India has helped **Maldives with the Coastal Radar System** with ten radars and control stations and this was inaugurated back in 2019.
- **Others**
 - ▶ Neighbourhood First Policy
 - ▶ Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)

Facts about Maldives

- The Republic of the Maldives is located in the **Indian Ocean**.
- It is an archipelago comprising approximately 1,200 islands with a geographical spread over 90,000 sq.km
- Incorporating some 26 atolls, the Maldives is one of the world's most geographically dispersed countries, and is a 99 per cent water-nation.
- Maldives is the lowest-lying country on the planet. With the highest elevation being just 2.3 metres (7 feet 7 inches) above sea level, the archipelago has the **world's lowest naturally-occurring 'highest-point'**.



Significance of the Maldives for India

- **Strategic Importance:** The Maldives is geographically positioned like a '**toll gate**' between the **western Indian Ocean** chokepoints of the **Gulf of Aden** and the **Strait of Hormuz** on the one hand, and the **eastern Indian Ocean** chokepoint of the **Strait of Malacca** on the other.
- **Economic Value:** It is situated at the hub of commercial sea-lanes running through the Indian Ocean. More than 97% of India's international trade by volume and 75% by value passes through the region. It's potential to allow a third nation's naval presence in the area.
- **Political and Regional Security:**
 - ▶ Since China's naval expansion into the Indian Ocean, Maldives significance has steadily grown and now it's at the heart of international geopolitics.
 - ▶ Moreover, the Maldives is an important aspect of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy.
 - ▶ 'India First' has been a stated policy of the Government of Maldives.
 - ▶ Maldives is a member of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** and the **South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)**.
- **Indian Community in Maldives:** There is a significant Indian diaspora in the Maldives. Innumerable Indians work across the hospitality, education, and health-care sectors of the Maldives economy.

BOOK HATE SPEECH CASES EVEN WITHOUT COMPLAINT: SC

CONTEXT

Calling hate speech a serious offence that can affect the secular fabric of India, the Supreme Court directed all states to *suo moto* register cases of such offences even if there is no formal complaint.

Key-highlights of the SC Order

- Any hesitation to act will be viewed as contempt of the top court and appropriate action will be taken against the erring officers.
- All states and UTs shall ensure that immediately as and when any speech or any action takes place which attracts offences such as **Sections 153A, 153B and 295A and 505 of the IPC** etc., *suo motu* action will be taken to register cases even if no complaint is

forthcoming and proceed against the offenders in accordance with law.



What comes under hate speech?

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

Legal Provisions of Hate Speech in India:

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

Legislations around Hate speech: The Indian Penal Code, 1860 (hereinafter IPC);

- Section 124A** IPC penalises sedition
- Section 153A** IPC penalises 'promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony'.
- Section 153B** IPC penalises 'imputations, and assertions prejudicial to national integration.
- Section 295A** IPC penalises 'deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs'.
- Section 298** IPC penalises 'uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person'.
- Section 505(1) and (2)** IPC penalises the publication or circulation of any statement, rumour or report causing public mischief and enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes

DE-DOLLARISATION: THE RACE TO ATTAIN THE STATUS OF GLOBAL RESERVE CURRENCY

CONTEXT

Countries have tried to dethrone the dollar as the global reserve currency for many decades now for various reasons. But of late, attempts to de-dollarise have picked up pace in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year.

What is 'reserve currency'?

- A reserve currency** refers to any currency that is widely used in cross-border transactions and is commonly held as reserves by central banks.
 - It is the currencies of economic superpowers that have usually ended up being used as the global reserve currency.

De-dollarisation refers to the replacement of the U.S. dollar by other currencies as the global reserve currency.

What are the advantages for reserve currency?

- Power over transactions:** Since international transactions carried out in the U.S. dollar are cleared by American banks, this gives the U.S. government significant power to oversee and control these transactions.
- Privileges over others:** The global reserve currency status gives it unfair privileges over other countries.
- Irresponsible expansion of money:** When a country's fiat currency enjoys reserve currency status, it gives the country the power to purchase goods and other assets from the rest of the world by simply creating fresh currency out of thin air.

What gives the US dollar the power in international trade?

- The U.S. dollar is not forced on anyone to be accepted as a medium of exchange for cross-border transactions.
- It is widely used in **international transactions** because people actually **prefer** to use the American currency over others for various economic reasons.

- Other currencies that have tried to compete against the U.S. dollar are not as popular as the greenback for carrying out international transactions.
- The global acceptability of the U.S. dollar has primarily been attributed to the
 - popularity of U.S. assets among investors
 - high level of trust of global investors in US

Example

- India and Russia recently attempted to carry out trade between the two countries in **Indian rupees** rather than in U.S. dollars.
- However, it hit a roadblock because the **value of India's imports** from Russia far outweighs its exports to the country.
- This left Russia with excess rupees in hand which it was unwilling to spend on Indian goods or assets, and led to Russian demands for the settlement of bilateral trade in U.S. dollars.
- So, even Russia, a long-time friend of India and a long-time foe of the United States, preferred to carry out its trade with India using **U.S. dollars** since the dollar is far more widely acceptable than the Indian rupee.

Why was the call for de-dollarisation renewed?

- The profound economic disruption experienced by Iran, and more recently Russia (for invading Ukraine), after being disconnected from the international dollar-trading systems like **SWIFT**, prompted smaller countries to look for alternatives.

Who can be the next?

- Currently, the Chinese Yuan is seen as the **primary alternative** to the U.S. dollar owing to China's rising economic power.
- Many countries like Russia, Brazil, and Argentina are increasingly exploring the use of the CNY.
- Beijing is now settling most of its international trade operations using the Chinese yuan.

How would it impact (if becomes reality)?

- The positive side**
 - De-dollarization can benefit local economies in a number of ways.
 - Trading in local currencies allow exporters and importers to balance risks, have more options to invest, to have more certainty about the revenues and sales.

The negative side

- De-Dollarisation could potentially undermine the economic power of the US, but it also presents challenges and potential costs for developing countries.
- Moving away from an established currency like dollar will impact a country's networking effect and create substantial barriers.
- US dollar is the cheapest means of access to acquire nominally risk-free US Treasury instruments.

REFOCUS ON GIG WORKERS**CONTEXT**

The recent strike by Zomato-owned Blinkit delivery agents has once again brought to the forefront the issues plaguing the gig economy in the country and the reforms required to stop the exploitation of such workers.

Who is a 'gig worker'?

- Gig workers refer to workers **outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship**.
- There are two groups of gig workers—
 - Platform workers:** When gig workers use online algorithmic matching platforms or apps to connect with customers, they are called platform workers
 - Non-platform workers:** Those who work outside of these platforms are non-platform workers, including construction workers and non-technology-based temporary workers.

A **2022 report by NITI Aayog** estimates that nearly 23.5 million workers will be engaged in the gig economy by 2029.

Are gig workers 'employees' or 'independent contractors'?

- Whether gig workers should be categorised as 'employees' or as 'independent contractors' has been a frequent debate.
- However, given the unique nature of gig work, gig workers display characteristics of both employees and independent contractors and thus do not squarely fit into any rigid categorisation.
- As a result, gig workers have limited recognition under current employment laws and thus fall outside the ambit of statutory benefits.

Benefits available to Employees and Contract Labourers

- **Employees** are entitled to a host of benefits under statutes such as the
 - Minimum Wages Act, 1948
 - Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 (EPFA)
 - Payment of Bonus Act, 1965
- **Contract labourers** are governed under the
 - Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970
 - They are also entitled to benefits such as provident funds in accordance with the EPFA

What is the proposed law for gig workers?

- In keeping with the **National Commission on Labour's** recommendation to **consolidate central labour laws**, the **Ministry of Labour and Employment** introduced the **Code on Social Security, 2020** which brings gig workers within the **ambit of labour laws** for the first time.
- **Definition:** Under **Section 2(35)** of the Code, a 'gig worker' is defined as 'a person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship'.
- **Benefits:** Although the Code recognises 'gig workers' including platform workers, it distinguishes between such workers and employees.
 - While employees have benefits such as gratuity, employee compensation, insurance, provident fund, and maternity benefits, the Code **only stipulates** that Central and State Governments **must frame suitable social security schemes for gig workers** on matters relating to health and maternity benefits, old age security, education, provident funds, accident benefits, life insurance, disability insurance among others.
- **Compulsory registration:** The Code also mandates the compulsory registration of all gig workers to avail of benefits under social security fund for gig workers.
 - **National Social Security Board:** The Code also envisages the constitution of a **National Social Security Board** by the Central government to monitor the implementation of such schemes.

What are the major concerns?

- **Exclusion from major security codes:** Out of the **four new labour codes** proposed, gig work finds reference only in the **Code on Social Security**. As a

result, gig workers remain excluded from vital benefits and protections offered by other Codes such as **minimum wages, occupational safety and health benefits, and overtime pay**.

- **Limited rights:** They **cannot create legally recognised unions** and access a **national minimum wage** that applies to all forms of employment.
- **No guarantee on minimum wages:** The proposed law does not guarantee minimum wages for gig workers.
- **No remedy for grievances:** Gig workers also remain excluded from accessing the specialised redressal mechanism under the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**, thus denying them an effective remedy for grievances against their employers.

Global Examples:

- **UK Supreme Court:** In 2021, in a landmark judgment, the UK Supreme Court classified Uber drivers as 'workers' under the **UK Employment Rights Act 1996**, thus entitling them to various benefits like paid holidays and minimum wages.
- **Dutch High Court** also handed down a similar ruling, stating that the legal relationship between Uber and the drivers meets all the characteristics of an employment contract, making them entitled to workers' rights under local labour laws.
- **The Superior Court of California** struck down a **2020 ballot measure known as Proposition 22** that excluded gig workers from labour laws by declaring them 'independent contractors'.
- **Germany's Temporary Employment Act** provides for equal pay and equal treatment of gig workers.

INDIA-UAE CEPA COMPLETES ONE YEAR

CONTEXT

The historic India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) which was signed on **February 18, 2022** and came into force on **May 1, 2022**, has completed one successful year.

What is India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)?

- The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed between India and UAE to strengthen the **trade ties** between the two nations.
- **Aim:** The agreement aimed to increase the total value of bilateral trade in goods to over US\$100 billion and

trade in services to over US\$ 15 billion within five years.

- The **historical India-UAE CEPA** is the **first bilateral trade accord** concluded by the UAE and India's first bilateral trade agreement in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region.
- **India-UAE CEPA** is a wide-ranging agreement, covering all aspects of India's economic engagement with the UAE including Trade, Investments, Healthcare, Digital Trade Government Procurement, IPR etc.

What are the impacts?

- This was the **Fastest Executed Bilateral Agreement** where imports and exports increased between India and United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- **Benefit to domestic markets:** The agreement also boosted trade which benefited the domestic market.
- **Labour-intensive sectors** also boomed as a result of this tie-up.
- **Increased exports:** India's **global export** rose by 5.3 per cent and exports to UAE increased by 11.8 per cent.
 - **Major commodities:** While the export of commodities like jewelry, car, and beauty products rose, in particular - aircrafts, spacecrafts and exports of parts increased by 4859 per cent as UAE is a transit hub between Asia and Europe and Americas.
 - **Increased imports:** Similarly, imports also increased from the UAE by 18.8 per cent. The nation's non-oil import from UAE increased by 4.1 per cent and global imports increased by 7.8 per cent.

FOREST FIRES, A THREAT TO UTTARAKHAND'S UNIQUE BIODIVERSITY

CONTEXT

Forest fires are becoming more frequent and fierce in Uttarakhand.

What's at stake?

- Uttarakhand is home to at least 102 species of mammals, 70 reptiles, 19 amphibians, and 124 species of fish. The state also boasts of **600 species of birds**.
- The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** classifies 55 of the bird species as

"threatened", of which six are critically endangered and four are endangered.

- Several mammalian fauna found in the state are also classified as endangered. The list includes the **Asian elephant, tiger, Alpine musk deer, Himalayan musk deer, leopard, snow leopard, blue sheep, Himalayan Thar, leopard cat, Himalayan black bear, sloth bear and pangolin**.
- With 7,000 species of plants, Uttarakhand contributes **31 per cent of the country's floral diversity**. As many as 119 flowering plants are endemic to the state.

How does it impact?

- **Loss and displacement of species:** The impact of recurrent forest fires in Uttarakhand is not limited to the direct loss of trees and wildlife, their displacement and subsequent colonisation of unwanted species.
- **Pushing towards extinction:** Forest fires can meddle with the life cycle of species and push many of the threatened and endemic species closer to extinction.
 - **Affecting growth:** By destroying the leaves and foliage, a forest fire can significantly reduce the photosynthetic activity of surviving trees and thereby affect their growth.
 - **Affected seedlings:** It can also damage the seed bank, both above and below the ground, and wipe out the seedlings and saplings growing on the forest floor.
- **Impact on recovery rate:** The loss of **keystone organisms** in forest ecosystems, such as **invertebrates, pollinators, and decomposers**, can significantly slow the recovery rate of the forest.
- **Serious impact of reproduction:** Forest fires can also interfere with the reproduction and propagation of certain plants and animals. Such recurrent events can be deadly to the species that are native or endemic to the region.

Suggestive measures

The below steps would not only minimise instances of forest fire but also protect biodiversity from such an event.

- **Collect fuel load in time:** Pine needle and dry leaf litter are the common fire materials that occur on the forest floor. These should be cleared by collecting them before January, when the fire season begins in Uttarakhand.
- **Fix fire line:** Creation of fire line is often delayed in Uttarakhand. This pattern needs to be changed and a timely (before February) excavation of the fire line should be ensured.
- **Install fire watch towers:** There is an urgent need for these towers in this hilly state with undulating

topography, especially in areas that have a history of a forest fire.

- **Applying management techniques:** There is also an urgent need to understand management techniques such as
 - promoting habitat-specific research to limit burning especially in biodiversity-rich and water supply areas

INDIA'S COST OF ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE NEEDS SEEN AT \$1 TRILLION: RBI

CONTEXT

India needs to spend an estimated 85.6 trillion rupees (\$1.05 trillion) by 2030 to adapt its various industries to be compliant with climate change norms, a report by the Reserve Bank of India.

The Report

- **Title:** Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Report on Currency and Finance
- **Report theme:** Towards a Greener Cleaner India
- The report is written by contributors from the **Department of Economic and Policy Research.**

Key-highlights of the Report

- India's goal of achieving the **net zero target** by 2070 would require-
 - an **accelerated reduction** in the **energy intensity of GDP** by about 5% annually
 - a significant improvement in its **energy-mix in favour of renewables** to about 80% by 2070-71
- **Financing requirement:** The green financing requirements in India could be at least **2.5% of GDP** annually to address the infrastructure gap caused by climate events.
- **Vulnerability of financial institutions:** Results of a climate stress-test reveal that public sector banks (PSBs) may be more **vulnerable** than private sector banks. Globally, however, measurement of climate-related financial risks remains a work in progress.
- **Requirement of sector-centric approach:** Different sectors of the economy have different emission intensities, it is advisable to not have a uniform climate mitigation strategy across sectors.

- Without any policy action, India's carbon dioxide emission levels may rise to 3.9 gigatonnes by 2030, from 2.7 gigatonnes in 2021.

India's Climate Finance Strategy

- Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (**LT-LEDS**): In November 2022, at COP27, India submitted its Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- **Issue:** This requires trillions of dollars of investment. Yet India currently lacks a comprehensive climate finance strategy for mobilizing the capital required to execute on the LT-LEDS.
- **Green Bonds:** India's maiden issue of green bonds, within the broader green bonds framework outlined by the government is commendable.
- **Issue:** India may issue \$3 billion of green bonds in financial year 2023–2024, but still this will amount to only 1.6 percent of its overall annual borrowing.

EU'S ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ACT

CONTEXT

Members of the European Parliament reached a preliminary deal on a new draft of the European Union's ambitious Artificial Intelligence Act, first drafted two years ago, paving the way for the world's first set of comprehensive laws governing the technology.

Background

- The legislation was drafted in 2021 with the aim of bringing transparency, trust, and accountability to AI and creating a framework to mitigate risks to the safety, health, fundamental rights, and democratic values of the EU.

It is similar to how the **EU's 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** made it an industry leader in the global data protection regime.

- The **Artificial Intelligence Act** aims to "strengthen Europe's position as a global hub of excellence in AI from the lab to the market, ensure that AI in Europe respects our values and rules, and harness the potential of AI for industrial use."

What is the need to regulate AI?

- **Omnipresence:** Artificial intelligence technologies have become omnipresent and their algorithms more advanced.
- **Associated risks:** They are capable of performing a wide variety of tasks including voice assistance, recommending music, driving cars, detecting cancer, and even deciding chances of getting shortlisted for a job—the risks and uncertainties associated with them have also ballooned.
- **Complex and unexplainable AI tools:** Many AI tools are essentially black boxes, meaning even those who design them cannot explain what goes on inside them to generate a particular output.

What is in the Act?

- **Definition:** The Act broadly defines AI as “software that is developed with one or more of the techniques that can, for a given set of **human-defined objectives**, generate outputs such as **content, predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing the environments** they interact with”.
 - Under the definition, it identifies AI tools based on machine learning and deep learning, knowledge and logic-based approaches and statistical approaches.
- **Classification (on risk basis):** The Act’s central approach is the **classification of AI tech** based on

the **level of risk** they pose to the “health and safety or fundamental rights” of a person.

- **Risk category:** There are four risk categories in the Act—unacceptable, high, limited and minimal.
- **Unacceptable:** The Act prohibits using technologies in the **unacceptable risk category** with little **exception**.

Companies deploying generative AI tools, such as **ChatGPT** or image generator Midjourney, will have to disclose whether **copyrighted material** was used to develop their systems.

- **High risk:** The Act lays substantial focus on AI in the high-risk category, prescribing a number of **pre- and post-market requirements** for developers and users of such systems. The Act envisages establishing an EU-wide database of high-risk AI systems and setting parameters so that future technologies or those under development can be included if they meet the high-risk criteria.
- **Limited and minimal risks:** AI systems in the limited and minimal risk category such as spam filters or video games can be used with a few requirements like transparency obligations.
- **Non-compliance penalties:** The Act proposes steep non-compliance penalties. For companies, fines can reach up to €30 million or 6% of global income. Submitting false or misleading documentation to regulators can result in fines, too.

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CENTRE PLANS PANEL TO FIND ALTERNATIVE TO DEATH BY HANGING

CONTEXT:

- ❑ The Union Government told the Supreme Court that it is considering appointing an expert committee to examine if there can be a method less painful than hanging by neck for execution in death penalty cases in the country.

Background

- In 2017, a PIL was filed seeking to abolish the present practice of executing a death row convict by hanging and replace it with less painful methods such as "intravenous lethal injection, shooting, electrocution or gas chamber".

What is the death penalty in India?

- **Hanging and shooting** are the two methods of the death penalty in India.
 - According to the **Criminal Procedure Code**, hanging is the method of execution in the civilian court system.
 - The **Army Act, of 1950**, however, lists hanging and shooting as official methods of execution in the military court-martial system.
- Under the **provisions of criminal procedure**, the death penalty must be awarded as an **alternative punishment to life imprisonment** which the offenders may be sentenced to in '**rarest of rare cases**'.

Rarest of rare cases (*Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab*)

- The year 1980 marked a crucial point in the debate around the death penalty. That year, a trial court in the state of Punjab sentenced to death a man named **Bachan Singh** for the murder of three men.
- Singh approached the **Supreme Court of India**, asking it to examine the **constitutionality of capital punishment in a case that led to a landmark ruling**.
- The Bachan Singh case led to the establishment of the "**rarest of rare**" doctrine, meaning that courts should only impose the death penalty in exceptional cases.
- **Rarest rare cases** can be described as those when the murder is committed in an extremely brutal, ridiculous, diabolical, revolting, or reprehensible manner so as to awaken the intense and extreme indignation in the community. When total depravity and cruelty are the motives behind a murder.

Gaps in the current sentencing framework

- **Law Commission:** In 2015, a **Law Commission report** called for its **abolition**, except for in terrorism-related cases.
- **Supreme Court:** In 2022, for the first time in 42 years, the **Supreme Court acknowledged the gaps in the current sentencing framework** and put together another constitutional bench to resolve them.
 - But as the Supreme Court seeks ways to reform death penalty sentencing, trial courts across India continue to hand down capital punishment.

Increasing death penalty

- **Released by:** 'Project 39A', a criminal reforms advocacy group with the National Law University, Delhi.
- **Key highlights:**
 - According to NCRB data, **165 death penalties** were awarded by **trial courts since 2000**.
 - The corresponding figure for the last five years was;
 - **146 in 2021, 78 in 2020, 104 in 2019, 163 in 2018, and 110 in 2017.**
- **Sole decision taken by trial courts:** The report notes that **3% of the death penalty** cases were decided by trial courts "without any materials on mitigating circumstances of the accused and without any state-led evidence on the question of reform."

Why capital punishment should be abolished?

- **Violation of human rights:** In 2015, a **Law Commission report** argued that the death penalty is unconstitutional and an infringement of **Article 14 (right to equality before law)** and **Article 21 (right to life)** of the Indian constitution.
- **Endless suffering:** The appeals procedure for death sentences is lengthy. Due to this, persons sentenced to death are sometimes brutally made to suffer extended periods of uncertainty about their fate.
- **Economic burden:** Abolishing the death penalty will ease, not enhance, the tax-payer's burden. The annual cost of maintaining a prisoner is about Rs 30,000.

Global Practice

Since 1976, more than 90 nations have abolished the death penalty for all crimes.

- Apart from India, many countries including **US, Japan, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq** continue to impose capital punishment.
- **Australia, Congo, France, Italy, Norway, Portugal, and U.K** have completely abolished the Capital Punishment due to inconsistent with the human rights requirement.

Conclusion

The capital sentencing framework as it stands today raises concerns about our commitment to the rule of law and poses a serious threat to the right to fair trial of the accused. Any attempts to repair the broken nature of capital sentencing in India must necessarily involve addressing the glaring normative, substantive and procedural deficiencies.

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THRISSUR POORAM 2023

CONTEXT

Kerala celebrated the 36-hour-long Thrissur Pooram temple festival, known as the mother of all poorams.

About

- Thrissur Pooram is an important temple festival in Kerala that dates back over 200 years.

Prior to Thrissur Pooram, Arattupuzha Pooram was the most significant temple festival in Kerala.

- The festival was founded by **Shakthan Thampuran**, the ruler of the **Kingdom of Cochin** from 1790 to 1805.
- It is an impressive exhibition of cultural customs and traditions, featuring adorned elephants, colourful umbrellas, and percussion music.
- The festival is a splendid blend of Kerala's spiritual and cultural heritage and is held in the **Thekkinkadu Maidanam** in Thrissur during the Malayalam month of **medam**, which falls in April-May.

Historical Belief

- The festival's origin dates back to 1796, when a group of temples was prohibited from attending the **Arattupuzha Pooram festival** due to heavy rainfall.
- Upon hearing their grievances, **Shakthan Thampuran** decided to organise his own festival, which eventually became the **Thrissur Pooram** celebrated on the same day in May.

INDIA-MYANMAR KALADAN WATERWAY

CONTEXT

Fifteen years after it was approved, the waterway component of the **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport project (KMTTP)** is set to become operational.

About

- The **deep-water port** at **Sittwe** is part of the Rs 3,200 crore **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)**.

The KMTTP Route:

- KMTTP connects **Kolkata to Sittwe** port, which is further linked to **Paletwa** in Myanmar through a waterway route along the river **Kaladan**.
- Both the port at Sittwe and the inland water terminal at Paletwa.
- From Paletwa, a 110 km road is being built to connect to Zorinpui at Mizoram on the Indo-Myanmar border.
- Zorinpui is further connected to Lawngtlai through a 100 km road.
- From Lawngtlai, an existing highway connects it to Aizawl, which in turn is linked to other northeastern cities including Guwahati.



Sittwe, which was one of the busiest rice-exporting ports in the late 19th century, is located at the mouth of the Kaladan in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

- Piloted by the **Ministry of External Affairs** and first approved in 2008, the project is aimed at boosting trade and commerce between **India and Myanmar** and easing access to other **South Asian countries**.
- Once ready, it will also provide a strategic alternate link connecting the landlocked **northeastern states**

to the rest of India and easing the pressure on the existing narrow **Siliguri corridor**.

- Developed by the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** — an autonomous organisation under the Union shipping ministry — the construction of the **Sittwe port** was completed way back in 2018.
- But it could not be operationalised because of several obstacles, including delays in getting approvals and licenses because of the political turmoil in Myanmar and intense conflict in the **Chin and Rakhine state**.

JAPAN TO TRAIN INDIAN ENGINEERS BEFORE TRANSFER OF BULLET TRAIN TECH

CONTEXT

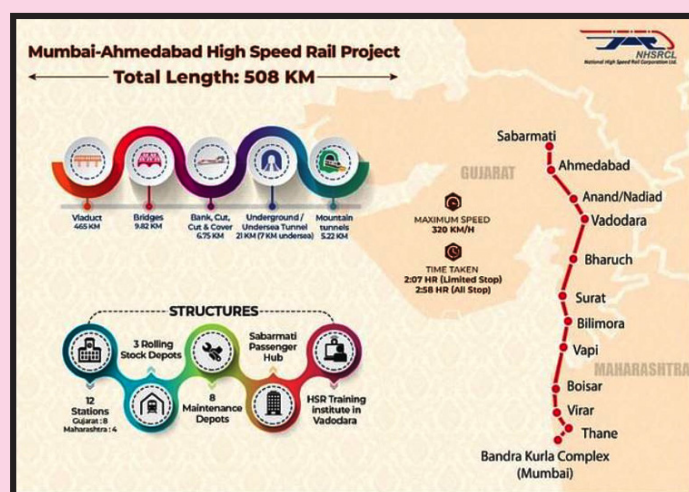
Japanese experts will train 1,000 Indian engineers for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail corridor before starting work on the track system.

Key-highlights

- The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train will use the **ballast-less Slab Track system** (popularly known as the **J Slab track system**), which is used in **Japan's Shinkansen high-speed railways**.
- Slab Track consists of **precast Reinforced Concrete (RC) slab**, over which fastening devices and rails are fitted.
- The Japanese track system is **unparalleled globally**, and its installation requires technicians with exceptional proficiency.
- **Training:**
 - 20 Japanese experts will certify the skills of Indian engineers, supervisors and technicians through intensive training, paving the way for the transfer of technology of the Japanese HSR track system.
 - **JARTS**, a Japanese non-profit, nominated by **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**, will provide training for the MAHSR project.

India's First Bullet Train Project

- Presently, **Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail corridor (MAHSR)** is the only sanctioned high-speed rail project in the country.
- The High-Speed Rail operating at **320 kmph** will traverse along west India's landscape, covering a **508.17 km** distance between **Mumbai and Ahmedabad** in just about **two hours**.
- It will cover the following distance with 12 stations *en route*-
 - 155.76 km in **Maharashtra**
 - 4.3 km in the **Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli**
 - 348.04 km in **Gujarat**
- The government is yet to determine a final deadline for the entire project.



ASEAN-INDIA MARITIME EXERCISE (AIME-2023)

CONTEXT

Two frontline warships of the Indian Navy (INS Satpura and INS Delhi) reached in Singapore to participate in the inaugural edition of the ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise.

Key-highlights:

- The **ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME-2023)** aims to provide an opportunity to the Indian Navy and **ASEAN navies** to work closely with each other and conduct seamless operations in the maritime domain.



- The harbour phase of the exercise is scheduled to be held at the Changi Naval Base from, while the sea phase will be conducted in the **South China Sea**.
 - The South China Sea has been witnessing major military assertiveness by China in the last few years.
- New Delhi's move to increase its maritime security cooperation with the ASEAN region comes amidst China's growing belligerence not only on land in **eastern Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control** but also in the **Indian Ocean, South China Sea, east China sea, Taiwan Strait** and elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific Region.
- With AIME-2023 India becomes the 4th ASEAN dialogue partner, after **Russia, China and the US** to hold the ASEAN+1 maritime exercise in which navies of the **Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Brunei**.

- INS Delhi** is India's first indigenously-built guided missile destroyer.
- INS Satpura** is an indigenously-built guided missile stealth frigate.
- Both the ships are part of the **navy's Eastern Fleet** based in **Visakhapatnam**. The ships are fitted with **state-of-the-art weapons and sensors**.

INDIA SLIPS TO 161 ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

CONTEXT

India's ranking has fallen to 161 in the World Press Freedom Index-2023 in the list 180 countries. In 2021, India's ranking was 150, down from a ranking of 142 on the press freedom index.

Key-findings of the Report

How India, neighbours fare in press freedom

Country	Ranking	Indian media landscape has more than
Nepal	95	100,000
Pakistan	150	newspapers, including
Sri Lanka	135	36,000
India	161	weeklies and
Myanmar	173	380 TV channels.

Source : World Press Freedom Index

Mukesh Ambani owns more than **70 media outlets** that are followed by at least **800 million Indians**



- Toppers:** Norway, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Lithuania, Estonia, Portugal and Timor-Leste occupy the top 10 ranks in the World Press Freedom Index 2023.
- India's neighbours:** The relative rankings of some countries -- Pakistan rose up seven ranks, and was placed at 150th, and Afghanistan was ranked 152nd.
- The World Press Freedom Index revealed that press freedom in 31 is in a "very serious situation".
 - Two years ago, the number was 21 countries.

About the Report

- The **World Press Freedom Index Report** is an **annual report**.
- It is published by **Reporters Without Borders**, a non-governmental organization that advocates for freedom of the press worldwide.

RSF is an international NGO whose self-proclaimed aim is to defend and promote media freedom. Headquartered in Paris, it has consultative status with the United Nations.

- The report ranks 180 countries based on their level of press freedom, taking into account factors such as censorship, media independence, and the safety of journalists.
- The **World Press Freedom Index** is based on five different factors that are used to calculate scores and rank countries. These five sub-indicators include the:
 - Political indicator
 - Economic indicator
 - Legislative indicator
 - Social indicator
 - Security indicator

1ST EVER OBC SURVEY GETS UNDERWAY IN ODISHA

CONTEXT

The Odisha government began its first-ever survey of social and educational conditions of people belonging to 208 backward castes.

About Population Census

- Population census is a **Union subject**.
- The Government of India has been conducting a decennial census continuously since 1951 as per the provisions of the **Census Act, 1948**.
- India's decennial census was supposed to be conducted in 2021, however, it has been inordinately delayed.
- Due to this delay, states like Bihar and Odisha have stepped forward to carry out their own census exercises.

What is the Exact Population of the OBCs?

- When the **Mandal Commission** wrote its report in 1979-80, it relied on the 1931 census data to estimate the OBC population and came up with the number of 52%.
- That report itself is now more than four decades old but the magic number of 52%, which was a guesstimate based on the 1931 census, gets thrown around whenever the OBC population is discussed.

SCHEDULED TRIBE STATUS FOR THE MEITEI COMMUNITY

CONTEXT

Members of the Meitei community in Manipur, which has been seeking Scheduled Tribe status for decades, have now said that they intend to file contempt proceedings against the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, which recently passed a resolution opposing their inclusion.

What is the issue?

- The Manipur High Court recently directed the state government to consider a demand to include the **Meitei community** in the **Scheduled Tribes list**.
- The order revived old anxieties and further widened ethnic fault lines in the state.

Hill Areas Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly

- The HAC was set up through a 1972 order and comprises legislators of all constituencies that fall partly or wholly within the State's hilly areas.
- The **tribal hill districts of Manipur** enjoy special protections under **Article 371C** of the Constitution, which says that all laws affecting the districts must be vetted by the **hill areas committee** of the **Manipur Legislative Assembly**.

Major tribes of Manipur

- **Naga and Kuki:** Manipur's two major tribal communities – **Naga and Kuki** – live in the hill districts, which account for about 90% of the state's area.
 - But these 10 districts send only 20 legislators to the 60-member legislative assembly since they are more sparsely populated than the Valley.
- **Meiteis:** The Meiteis, who account for 60% of the state's population, are largely concentrated in the **Imphal Valley**.

Points made by Meitei Community

- The community, through the **Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee, Manipur**, has been demanding **ST status** for decades now.
- They argue that they had been listed as one of the tribes of Manipur before it merged with India in 1949

but that they lost this tag when the **Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950** was drafted.

- Claiming that they had thus been left out of the ST list, they had persisted with their demands.

Analyzing protection given to Meitei Community

- The Meitei community, a majority of whom follow Hinduism, is already protected under the Constitution.
- Most of them are categorised either as **Other Backward Classes or Scheduled Castes**.
- The upper castes among them are also entitled to reservation under the **economically weaker section (EWS) quota**.

CENTRE EXTENDS SMART CITIES MISSION TILL JUNE 2024

CONTEXT

The Centre has decided to extend the Smart Cities Mission deadline by one year, from June 2023 to June 2024.

About Smart Cities Mission

- The flagship mission was launched on June 25, 2015
- It involves the development of 100 cities into smart cities.
- The project aims to improve the quality of life for people living in India and drive economic growth.
- **Implementation of the Scheme**
 - The **Union Ministry of Urban Development** is responsible for implementing the mission.
 - Also, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) in each state is created, headed by the CEO; they look after the implementation of the mission.

Mapping the urban population

- Almost 31% of the population of India lives in cities, and they contribute 63% of GDP, as per the data collected in Census 2011.
- It is believed that by 2030 around 40% of India's will be living in cities and contribute 75% to the GDP.

WHO LAUNCHES PRET TO PREPARE WORLD FOR PANDEMICS

CONTEXT

The World Health Organization (WHO) launched 'PRET', a new initiative to be better prepared for future outbreaks of a similar scale and devastation as the COVID-19 pandemic.



About

- **PRET** stands for **Preparedness and Resilience for Emerging Threats**.

Key terminology

- **An epidemic** is an outbreak of a disease in a particular location.
 - **A pandemic** is an outbreak of a disease which spreads to and occurs in many different geographic areas at the same time.
 - **Endemic diseases** are established and circulating regularly in populations. Some endemic diseases such as influenza can have surges in transmission or have epidemics at certain times.
 - **A pathogen** is an organism which causes a disease to its host, including but not limited to viruses.
- **Aim:** The Initiative is aimed at providing "guidance on integrated planning for responding to any respiratory pathogen such as influenza or coronaviruses".
 - **Focus on first module:** While the current focus of PRET will be on respiratory viruses — in the backdrop

of the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak, possible threat of an **avian influenza outbreak** — work is already underway to assess what should be the **next group of pathogens** to be mitigated under this initiative.

- PRET incorporates the latest tools and approaches for shared learning and collective action established during the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent public health emergencies.

DIMASA REBEL GROUP SIGNS PEACE PACT WITH CENTRE

CONTEXT

In a latest development, Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA)/Dimasa People's Supreme Council (DPSC), an Assam-based insurgent group, signed a peace agreement with the State Government and the Centre.

What is in the agreement?

Who are Dimasa?

- The Dimasa was a major, late medieval, or an early modern kingdom in Assam-ruled by Dimasa kings, also called **Timisa in the Ahom Buranjis**.
- They now live in **Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Cachar, Hojai and Nagaon** districts of central and southern Assam, as well as parts of Nagaland.
- **Surrender and no violence:** Under the agreement, the DNLA representatives have agreed to give up violence, surrender including the surrender of arms and ammunition, disband their armed organisation, vacate all camps occupied by DNLA cadres and join the mainstream.
 - ▶ As a result of this agreement, more than 168 armed cadres of DNLA surrendered with their weapons and joined the mainstream.
- **Setting of Dimasa Welfare Council:** Dimasa Welfare Council will be set up by the Government of Assam to protect, preserve and promote a social, cultural, and linguistic identity to meet political, economic and educational aspirations.
 - ▶ It will ensure speedy and focused development of the Dimasa people residing outside the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Council.
- It also provides for the appointment of a Commission under the **Sixth Schedule** to the Constitution of India to examine the demand for the inclusion of additional

villages contiguous to the **North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC)** with the Council.

Significance of the agreement

- **End to insurgency:** The agreement will bring a complete end to the insurgency in the Dima Hasao district of Assam.

Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA)

- The DNLA was established in 2019 seeking a sovereign territory for the **Dimasa tribals** and launched an armed insurgency to achieve its goal.
- **Area of operation:** Dima Hasao district

TELE MANAS COUNSELS KASHMIR'S DISTRESSED SOULS

CONTEXT

Over the past six months, the Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (IMHANS) in Srinagar has received 10,500 calls from people in distress across Jammu and Kashmir's toll free numbers 14416 and 1800-891-4416.

About

- The Tele-MANAS cell at IMHANS was launched in November 2022 with the support of the **National Health Mission**, Jammu and Kashmir.
- It aims to provide mental health support, early screening, first-aid, distress management, mental well-being, suicide prevention, and psychological crisis management in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The center operates through a toll free-number—11416/1-800-891-4416.
- The crisis counsellors or the first-time responders are the first point of contact for callers at the 24*7 helpline

What is Tele-MANAS?

- It was launched on **World Mental Health Day (10 October)**.
- The Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States (Tele-MANAS) initiative is a comprehensive mental health care service.
- Tele-MANAS aims to provide free tele-mental health services all over the country round the clock, particularly catering to people in remote or under-served areas.

- The Tele-MANAS programme consists of a network of 23 tele-mental health centres of excellence, with NIMHANS as the nodal centre.
- Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bengaluru and National Health Systems Resource Centre (NHRSC) have been roped in for technical support.
- The Tele-MANAS service can be accessed by calling the helpline numbers 14416 and 1-800-891-4416.

India's mental health crisis

- **Lancet Report:** As per a Lancet study published in 2012, India saw a 35 per cent rise in clinically significant depression and anxiety disorders due to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.
- **2021 State of the World's Children Report:** One in seven youths in India, between 15 to 24 years, reported 'feeling depressed' during the pandemic.
- **NCRB Data:** In another concerning report, there was an increase of 7.2 per cent in reported suicides in the country in 2021 as compared to the year before.
- **Top causes of suicides:** Family problems, illness, drug abuse/ alcoholic addiction, marriage-related issues, love affairs, unemployment, professional/ career problem.
- **Challenges:**
 - **Alarming shortage of human resources:** The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that India has 0.3 psychiatrists, 0.12 nurses and 0.07 psychologists and 0.07 health workers for 1,00,000 population.
 - **Lack of investment to address the issue**
 - **Unawareness**
 - **Shame**

INDIAN ARMY TO RAISE CYBER OPERATIONS AND SUPPORT WINGS

CONTEXT

With cyber warfare a key focus, especially with, the Army has decided to raise Command Cyber Operations and Support Wings (CCOSW) to help the forces counter enemy capabilities.

About Command Cyber Operations and Support Wings (CCOSW)

- The CCOSW will assist formations to undertake **mandated cyber security functions** to strengthen the Army's cyber security posture.

- **Aim:** To safeguard the networks and increase the preparedness levels in this niche domain.
- This is a part of an overall approach to absorb niche technologies and modernise its online networks.

What is the need?

- **Increasing competition from neighbour:** China and Pakistan are investing heavily in it.
- **Moving towards net centricity:** The army is a rapidly migrating towards net centricity, which entails an increased reliance on modern communication systems.
- **Widening cyberspace:** Cyberspace has emerged as an important component of the military domain, both in grey zone warfare as well as conventional operations.
- **Inclusion of tech-enabled equipment:** A large number and variety of niche tech-enabled equipment are being inducted into the Indian Army. These include a variety of tactical/mini/micro/logistics drones or UAVs, drone swarms, loitering weapons systems, and electronic warfare and anti-drone equipment, among others.

TOXIC GAS KILLS 11 IN LUDHIANA

CONTEXT

At least 11 people have died following a gas leak in Ludhiana, Punjab. The death is due to inhalation of neurotoxic gas.

What is Neurotoxicity?

- Neuro-toxicity occurs when the **exposure to natural or manmade toxic substances (neurotoxicants)** alters the normal activity of the nervous system that includes brain, spinal cord, and nerves.
- Nerve cells, or neurons, communicate with each other through a series of electrical and chemical signals and are at the greatest risk of damage from neurotoxins because of their high metabolic rate.
- **Neuro-toxic substances** can damage nerve cell function by modifying the structure of the cell membrane, which controls the passage of ions into and out of the neuron.
- As a result, the electrical activity of the neuron may change.
- Furthermore, neurotoxins can prevent neurotransmitters from being released or taken up by

other neurons, thereby preventing their production or release.

- Neurotransmitters are responsible for **signal transmission** between neurons.

Industrial gas leaks in India

- Industrial gas leaks are **not rare** in India.
- Three years ago a gas leak at a chemical plant killed at least 12 people in the city of **Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh**.
- In 1984 a chemical leak in a pesticide plant at the central city of **Bhopal** killed thousands of people, in what is acknowledged to be the world's worst industrial disaster.

KALAINAR PEN MONUMENT PROJECT CLEARED

CONTEXT

The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has recommended the proposal to construct Muthamizh Arignar Dr. Kalaigar pen monument in the Bay of Bengal, off the Marina beach, for coastal zone clearance with nearly 15 conditions.

Muthamizh Arignar Dr. Kalaigar (1924-2018)

- Born on June 3, 1924 in Thirukkuvalai village, M Karunanidhi had many achievements registered under his name.
- Beginning his political career as a 14-year-old activist in the anti-Hindi agitation of the late 1930s, he quickly became the voice of the surging Dravidian movement.
- In 1953, His involvement in the Kallakudi agitation in Kallakudi made him gain ground in Tamil politics. Karunanidhi has contested 12 Assembly elections and not even lost once.

About

- The pen monument is to honour **DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi**.
- The 42-metre-tall pen monument is proposed to be constructed 360 metres from the shoreline with a bridge linking the monument and the beach at Rs 80 crore.

- The proposed site falls under **CRZ-1A, CRZ-II and CRZ-IVA areas** and green signal has been given by the State level authorities.

What are Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ)?

- Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ) are the areas along the 7,500 km-long coastal stretch of India.
- The coastal land up to 500m from the High Tide Line (HTL) and a stage of 100m along banks of creeks, estuaries, backwater and rivers subject to tidal fluctuations, is called the **Coastal Regulation Zone**.
- The development of buildings, tourism infrastructure and other facilities is regulated in these areas by the Government of India.
- Coastal areas are of four categories as CRZ-1, CRZ-2, CRZ-3 and CRZ-4.
 - CRZ-1:** These are ecologically sensitive areas which are essential in maintaining the ecosystem of the coasts. These include national parks/marine parks, sanctuaries, reserve forests, wildlife habitats, mangroves and corals/coral reefs.
 - CRZ-2:** The areas that have already developed up till the shoreline of the coast are included in this zone. Construction of unauthorised structures is prohibited in this zone.
 - CRZ-3:** Rural and urban localities that are relatively undisturbed and do not belong to the first two categories are included under CRZ-3. Only specific activities related to agriculture or some public facilities are allowed in this zone.
 - CRZ-4:** These areas include the coastal stretches in **Lakshadweep, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands** and some other small islands, except those termed as CRZ-I, CRZ-II, or CRZ-III. These areas reside in the aquatic region up to the territorial limits.

RARE MELANISTIC TIGER FOUND DEAD IN ODISHA'S SIMILIPAL TIGER RESERVE

CONTEXT

A rare melanistic tiger was found dead in Odisha's Simlipal National Park (STR) in Mayurbhanj district.

About Simlipal Tiger Reserve

- Simlipal Tiger Reserve is the only place in the world to house the **rare black tigers**.

- STR was declared one of the nine Tiger Reserves of India in 1973, it is the second-largest biosphere reserve in Asia and is listed under the **UNESCO network of biosphere reserves**.
- **Tigers:**
 - The Similipal reserve had three adult melanistic tigers, according to the 2016 all-India tiger survey.
 - Similipal tigers are part of a distinct lineage of central Indian tigers that occasionally includes melanistic tigers. These melanistic tigers have no other home in the world.
 - Tigers are pseudo-melanistic, because they have black and yellow stripes on their bodies.

NICOBAR PROJECT VIOLATES TRIBAL RIGHTS: ST PANEL

CONTEXT

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has now flagged alleged discrepancies with respect to the forest clearance granted for the ₹72,000-crore Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Project.

What are the issues?

- **No recognition of rights of tribals:** Months after the project was granted forest clearance, implementation reports prepared by the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**

show that the island administration **neither recognised nor granted ownership** of any forest land to local tribespeople as per **FRA**, a requisite step under the **Forest Conservation Rules, 2017, before Stage-I clearance is granted**.

- The Stage-1 clearance for the project was granted in October 2022, two years after the application was received.

The project

- The Rs 72,000-crore project titled '**Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman and Nicobar Islands**' is being implemented by the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO)**.
- The project has four components –
 - an International Transshipment Port (ITP)
 - Greenfield International Airport
 - a power plant
 - a new township that could constitute a Special Economic Zone
- These four interlinked projects form the core of the new city and the holistic master plan.

Claims made by the government

- The government has said that the project intends to use about 7.114 sq. km of tribal reserve forest land, where the **Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), and the Nicobarese reside**.
- It insisted that locals will not be displaced for the project.

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SECTION: 'D'

(SHORT NEWS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Rang ghar



A laser show as part of the celebration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **100th Man Ki Baat episode** at the **Ahom era amphitheatre Rang Ghar in Assam's Sivasagar district** has drawn criticism after "religious symbols" were shown in projections.

About Rang ghar

- Rang ghar is known as **first Ampitheatre or first Pavilion of Asia**.
- **Built by: Swargadeo Promotta Singha** in the year 1744 A.D.
- Its shape is octagonal at base. The building has two storeys.
 - At the roof of the structure is shaped like an inverted royal Ahom long boat where there are the projecting heads of two small **MAKARAS or JALAHASTIS** facing reverse towards north and south.
- The Rang Ghar was built specially for enjoyment of recreational/sports activities by the royal families and public of the Ahom dynasty.

Sukhrungphaa also known as **Swargadeo Rudra Singha, (c. 1665- 27 August 1714)** was a **Tungkhungia Ahom king and 30th king of the Ahom kingdom** who reigned from 1696 to 1714.

World's second deepest blue hole discovered in Mexico



As per the latest development, scientists have uncovered a **massive sinkhole** off the coast of the **Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico**.

About

- The giant blue hole which is around 900 ft deep, has been dubbed as the **second deepest blue hole** found on the planet.
 - The world's deepest known deep hole was discovered in the **South China Sea** in 2016, and is known as the **Dragon Hole**.
 - As per the records, it's more than 980 ft deep.
- The **Mexico blue hole** has been named '**Taam Ja**', which means 'deep water' in Mayan.

A **blue hole** is actually a massive underwater sinkhole, which is hundreds of metres long and spans across areas that are bigger than cities and stands at a height of several skyscrapers.

Rare Sun Halo



In a rare celestial event, a mysterious ring was seen around the Sun in the skies in some parts of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India.

About Sun Halo

- A sun halo is an **optical phenomenon** that occurs when **sunlight interacts with ice crystals** in the atmosphere.
- It appears as a **bright ring or halo** around the sun, typically with a radius of approximately 22 degrees.
- The ring is formed by **unique hexagonal ice crystals** present in the atmosphere.
- These icy crystals are found in **cirrus clouds**, which are thin and wispy clouds.
- When sunlight enters these ice crystals, it is **refracted, or bent, by the crystal's surfaces**.
- This bending of light causes the sun's rays to separate into their component colors, creating a **spectrum of colors** that are visible as the **halo**.

Wayanad tops Swachh Bharat Mission's ODF Plus rankings



Wayanad, Kerala has become the **first district** in the country to be declared **ODF (open defecation-free) Plus**.

ODF+ and ODF++

- India has been running the Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 scheme, an extension of the first phase launched in 2014, since February 2020.
- ODF+ and ODF++ are aimed at proper maintenance of toilet facilities and safe collection, conveyance, treatment, or disposal of faecal sludge and sewage.
 - **ODF+** focuses on toilets with water, maintenance and hygiene
- **ODF++** focuses on toilets with sludge and septage management

Other important Schemes

- **GOBARDhan Scheme:** The scheme aims to support villages in safely managing their cattle waste, agriculture waste and organic waste.
- **Jal Jeevan mission:** It a program that seeks to connect all rural households with clean tap water by 2024, has been in force since August 15, 2019.

Millets Experience Centre

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India in collaboration with the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW)** established the **Millets Experience Centre** with an aim to raise awareness on Millets and encourage their adoption among the general public.



About MEC

- The setting up of the MEC is a step in becoming a **'Global Hub' for Millets.**
- The ministry-led initiative of establishing a consumer-oriented 'Millets Experience Centre' would not only **promote the dietary benefits of the ancient grain** but also **popularize millets or Shree Anna as a nutritional powerhouse.**

International Year of Millets (IYM 2023)

- Acting upon India's proposal supported by 72 countries, the United Nations General Assembly declared the year 2023 as the **International Year of Millets (IYM 2023).**
- The declaration positioned India at the forefront of the celebrations and the Government of India has been working on 'mission mode' to champion millets as a crop good for farmers, the environment, and consumers.

Fabry Disease



Despite the availability of financial support for treatment of all rare disease patients, none of the six patients with Fabry Disease, have been given the treatment.

About Fabry disease

- Fabry Disease is a **rare yet treatable disease.**
- April was observed as **Fabry Disease Awareness Month.**
- The disease is a rare disease classified under the **National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021.**
- It is caused by enzyme deficiencies, affecting the functioning of the heart and kidneys.

ADB announces IF-CAP



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced the Innovative Finance Facility for Climate in Asia and the Pacific (IF-CAP).

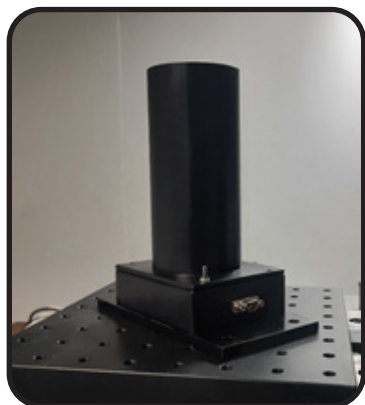
About IF-CAP

- It is a landmark programme which could significantly ramp up support for the region in the battle against climate change.
- IF-CAP's initial partners are **Denmark, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.**
- IF-CAP financing will contribute to ADB's ambition for \$100 billion from its resources for combating climate change for 2019–2030.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

- ADB is committed to achieving inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate **extreme poverty.**
- Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

StarBerrySense



The **Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** launched a **low-cost star sensor** called **StarBerrySense** on board its **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) C-55 rocket** recently.

About

- **Developed by:** Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA).
- **Objective:** StarBerrySense's primary objective is to image the field of view, identify stars, and calculate the spacecraft's pointing direction.
- The StarBerrySense sensor calculates the pointing direction by identifying the stars in its field of view.
- The sensor captures images of the stars and uses them to determine the spacecraft's attitude and orientation.
- This information is crucial for controlling the spacecraft's movement and keeping it on the right path.

INS Tarkash deployed for Operation Kaveri



India has deployed its third warship INS Tarkash under the ongoing **Operation Kaveri** to evacuate all the Indians stuck in war ravaged **Sudan**.

About INS Tarkash

- INS Tarkash is a **state-of-the-art stealth frigate** of the Indian Navy equipped with a versatile range of weapons.
- It has a **weapon-sensor fit** that enables her **address threats in all dimensions**.
- The ship is part of the **Indian Navy's Western Fleet**.

Karnataka ranks as the most 'innovative' State: NMIS



A survey on the **degree of innovation** among manufacturing firms found that **Karnataka**, overall, is the most "innovative" State, followed by **Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu (DNH&DD), Telangana, and Tamil Nadu**.

Key-highlights

- **Highest and lowest share:** **Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu** had the highest share of innovative firms at 46.18%, 39.10% and 31.90%, respectively, with **Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand** reporting the lowest share of such firms at 12.78%, 13.47% and 13.71%, respectively.
- **No innovation:** Nearly three-fourth of the 8,000-odd firms surveyed, most of them **micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME)**, neither made any innovative product nor business process innovation during the survey period of financial years 2017-2020.

The findings are part of the National Manufacturing Innovation Survey (NMIS) 2021-22, a joint study by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** and the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**, to evaluate the innovation performance of manufacturing firms in the India.

International Leopard Day

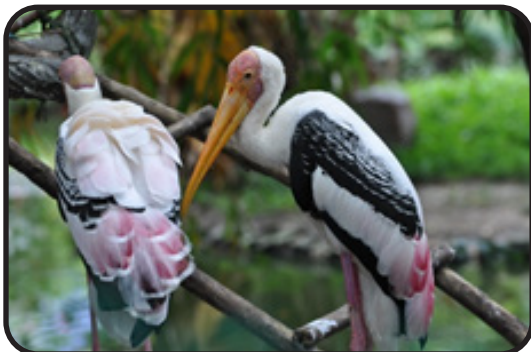


May 3 is observed as the **International Leopard Day** to make people aware of the nocturnal big cat.

About

- The leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is one of the five extant species in the **genus Panthera**, a member of the cat family, **Felidae**.
- The leopard is distinguished by its well-camouflaged fur, opportunistic hunting behavior, broad diet, strength, and its ability to adapt to a variety of habitats ranging from rainforest to steppe, including arid and montane areas.
- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
- **Distribution:** Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Russia, and the Indian subcontinent.
- It can run at speeds of up to 58 km/h (36 mph).

Painted storks nesting in two A.P. villages



One of the largest flock of painted storks, approximately 4,000 birds, have made tall trees in Veepapuram and Venkatapuram villages in Chilamathur mandal of Sri Sathya Sai district their breeding ground.

- **Scientific name:** *Mycteria leucocephala*
- The painted stork belongs to the family, **Ciconiidae**.
- The painted stork is a large wading bird of stork family.
- **Distribution:** They are found in **Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam**.
- **Breeding:** They mostly inhabit wetlands in the plains breed closer to undisturbed/protected trees
- **IUCN Status:** International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) had categorized and evaluated these stork species and had listed them as '**Near Threatened**'.
 - The population in India is considered secure, however the species is near threatened in other countries due to poaching.

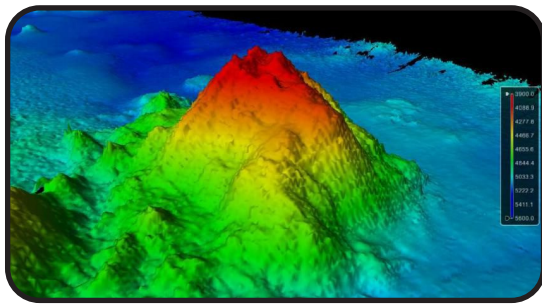
Kokrebellur village in Mandya district of Karnataka is the largest breeding ground for these birds.

Scientists discover new Seamounts

In an astonishing discovery, scientists have reported finding 19,325 new seamounts after poring through new high-resolution data.

About Seamount

- A seamount is an **underwater mountain**.
- They are formed through **volcanic activity** and scientists recognise them as hotspots for marine life.



- Like volcanoes on land, seamounts can be **active, extinct or dormant volcanoes**.
- Most seamounts are formed near **mid-ocean ridges**, where the earth's tectonic plates are moving apart, allowing molten rock to rise to the seafloor.
- The planet's two most-studied **mid-ocean ridges** are the **Mid-Atlantic Ridge** and the **East Pacific Rise**.
- Some seamounts have also been found near **intraplate hotspots** – regions of heavy volcanic activity within a plate – and **oceanic island chains** with volcanic and seismic activity called **island arcs**.

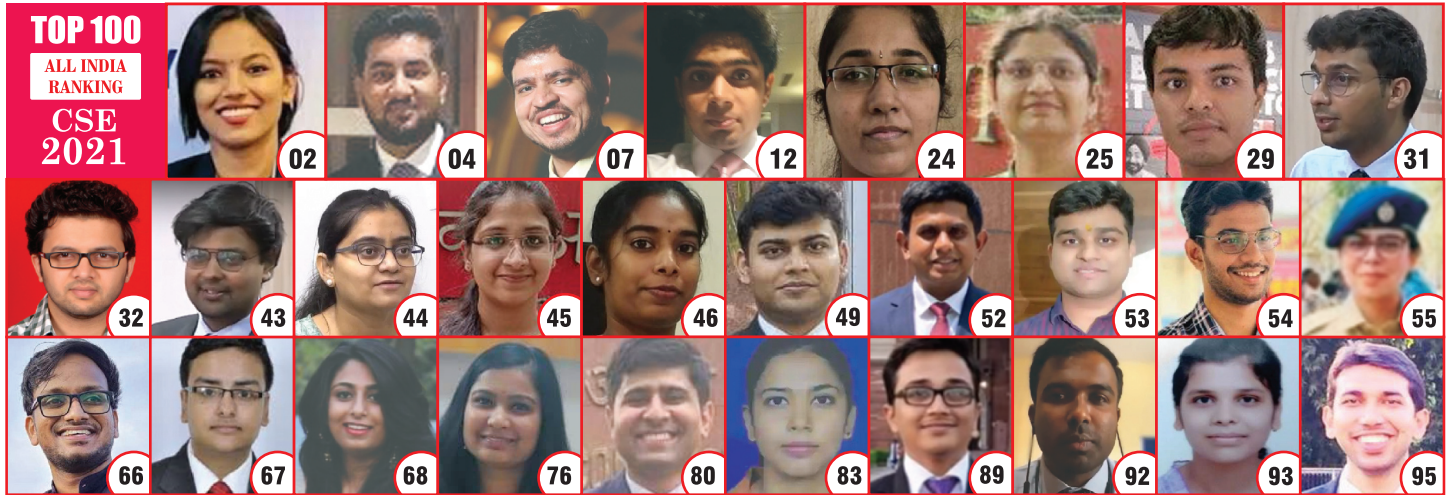
India to join international climate action in civil aviation from 2027



India will start participating in the **International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO) Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA)** and the **Long-Term Aspirational Goals (LTAG)** from 2027.

About CORSIA

- The **Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA)** is a **global scheme** to address emissions from international air travel.
- Agreed on in 2016 by the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)**, it obliges airlines to monitor and report their emissions from 2019 and to purchase emission reduction units generated by projects in other sectors, to cover any growth in **CO₂** emissions above 2020 levels from 2021.
- CORSIA is implemented in three phases:
 - a pilot phase (2021-2023)
 - a first phase (2024-2026)
 - a second phase (2027-2035)
- For the first two phases (2021-2026), participation is voluntary.
- As of 1 January 2023, 115 States had announced their intention to participate in **CORSIA**.



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