

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 2  
AUGUST  
2023

## MAINS

- GS-I** ▢ STRUGGLE FOR TEMPLE ENTRY IN TAMIL NADU
- GS-II** ▢ FCRA guidelines for NGOs
  - ▢ Terror Financing and Safeguarding NPOs
  - ▢ Kerala as Keralam: How and Why?
  - ▢ Delhi Services Bill
  - ▢ Committees of Parliament
  - ▢ Referendum not an option under Constitution: SC
  - ▢ Privilege Motion in Parliament
- GS-III** ▢ Mineral exploration & the involvement in private sector
  - ▢ Import Ban on laptop, PC
  - ▢ India's sugar production & impact on groundwater

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  - ▢ Bharat Mandapam
- HISTORY**
  - ▢ Archaeologists discover 'crystal quartz weighing unit'
- POLITY & GOVERNANCE**
  - ▢ Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control & Discipline) Bill-2023
  - ▢ International Day of the World's Indigenous People 2023
  - ▢ Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2023
  - ▢ Haryana plans dam at Hathnikund to curb Yamuna fury
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- ▢ Role of Small Modular Reactor (SRM) in energy transition

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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]**

- ☞ Struggle for Temple Entry in Tamil Nadu
- ☞ FCRA guidelines for NGOs
- ☞ Terror Financing and Safeguarding NPOs
- ☞ Kerala as Keralam: How and Why?
- ☞ Delhi Services Bill
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## STRUGGLE FOR TEMPLE ENTRY IN TAMIL NADU

**Context:** People from the Dalit community entered the local Mariamman temple at Chellankuppam village in Tamil Nadu's Tiruvannamalai district for the first time in more than half a century.

### Background:

- ◆ Dalits have historically been denied entry into temples as they are considered "impure" by many conservative Hindus. Even today, most temples in India do not allow Dalits to enter.
- ◆ Dalits are among India's most downtrodden citizens

because of an unforgiving **Hindu caste hierarchy** that condemns them to the bottom of the heap.

- ◆ Despite laws to protect them, discrimination remains a daily reality for the country's roughly 200 million Dalits.

### The case of Tamil Nadu

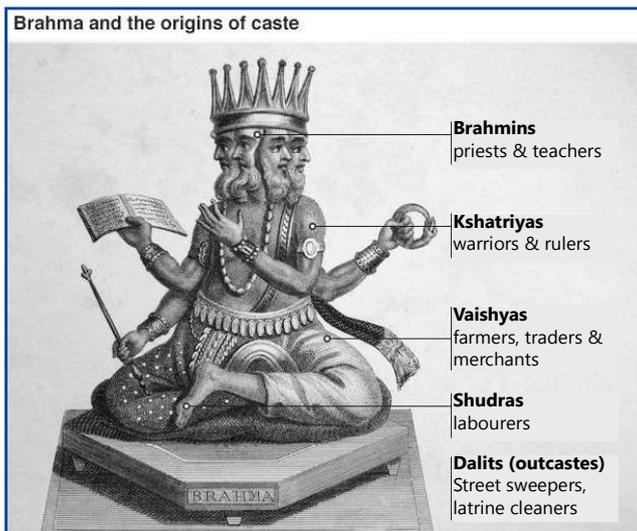
- ◆ In the case of Tamil Nadu, most of the major temples became accessible to **Scheduled Castes** around Independence, the struggle for entry into several **smaller temples** in the State continues to date.
  - ▶ The **Tamil Nadu Temple Entry Authorisation Act of 1947** allows all Hindu castes and classes to enter Hindu temples and worship.
- ◆ In a similar case, dalits of Eduthavainatham village in Kallakurichi district also entered **the Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple** for the first time in this year.

### About the Marimman Temple:

- The temple dates back to 1827, when it was known as **Mariamman Kovil or Kling Chapel**.
- Established by Indian pioneer **Naraina Pillai**, the original **wood-and-attap structure** was built by immigrants from the **Nagapatnam and Cuddalore districts** of South India.
- It is dedicated to the **goddess Mariamman**, known for her power to **cure illnesses and diseases**.
- **Mariamman temple** issue is in between the **Dalit community** and the **Vanniyar community**.



### Caste system in India:



- ◆ The Caste system which divides Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups based on their **karma (work) and dharma (the Hindi word for religion, but here it means duty)** is generally accepted to be more than 3,000 years old.

- ◆ It divides Hindus into four main categories - **Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras**. Many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation.

### Roots of Caste system in Tamil Nadu:

#### Caste population constitution in Tamil Nadu:

Vanniyars (22%), Dalit/SC/ST (21%), Mukkulathor (20%), non-Tamils (10%), Nadars (8.5%), Vellala Gounders (7%), Christians (7%), Muslims (6%), Mudaliars (5%), Muthurayars (3%), Chettiers (2%) and Brahmins (2%).

- ◆ From **200 to 100 BC**, social stratifications were evident in the **Tolkappiyam**, a treatise on Tamil grammar and classical poetry, with the following groups: **Anthanars or Parpanars (priests or Brahmins), Arasars (kings or Kshatriyan), Vanikars (merchants or Vaishyas) and Vellalars (agriculturists)**.
- ◆ Although these groups have parallels to the previously described **four-tier varna system**, the two cannot be superimposed.
- ◆ In the Tolkappiyam, these groups are associated with profession as opposed to birth.

- ◆ As the complexity of TN social fabric diversified, **Portuguese and British colonizers** arrived; solidifying caste in administrative language as better jobs opportunities were afforded to **upper castes or Christians**.

The word caste itself is derived from **casta (Portuguese)** after **Jesuit missionary Henriques** used the term in his observations of society in the 1500s.

### Struggle against caste based discrimination in Temples:

- ◆ The struggle for castes considered "**avarnas**" (**SHUDRAS**) by the **Hindu orthodoxy** to enter temples, especially the ones maintained under **Agama traditions**, can be traced even back to the **7th-8th century AD** with the tribulations faced by **Nandanar**, a Dalit, in entering **Chidambaram Natarajar Temple**, as documented in the **Bhakti literature**.
- ◆ In modern history, one of the earliest documented **temple entry struggles** in present day **Tamil Nadu** were the attempts made by the **Nadar community** in the second half of 19th century in multiple places, especially in the southern region, where they faced severe discrimination despite making economic progress.

### The Vaikom Satyagraha: (The Temple Entry Movement)

- ◆ The Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924-25 marked a significant milestone in the history of **India's struggle against caste discrimination**.
- ◆ The movement, led by **TK Madhavan, EVR Periyar, MK Gandhi, and Narayana Guru**, was launched to protest against the ban on the entry of **Scheduled Castes and backward castes** to the public roads surrounding the **Vaikom Shiva Temple in Kottayam**.
- ◆ The movement continued for almost two years, and ultimately, it led to the temple entry proclamation in **Travancore** in 1936, allowing all Hindus to enter temples irrespective of their caste.

### Where the actual work needs to be done?

- ◆ **Education:** One area where the lowered castes are underrepresented is education. Although the Indian constitution guarantees equal opportunities to all, the lowered castes have not been able to avail these opportunities.
- ◆ **Representation Question:**
  - ▶ **Higher education institutions:** The underrepresentation of SC/ST/OBC communities in faculty positions in central universities, IITs, IIMs,

and other higher education institutions is a long-standing issue in India.

- ▶ **Media:** The lowered castes are grossly underrepresented in the media industry.
- ▶ **Judiciary:** The lowered castes are also underrepresented in the higher judiciary.
- ▶ **Corporate sector:** They are underrepresented in the corporate sector.

### FCRA GUIDELINES FOR NGOS

**Context:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has withdrawn the permit under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) for U.K.-based NGO 'Save the Children (Bal Raksha Bharat)'.

### What is FCRA License?

- ◆ The FCRA registration is a **mandatory requirement** for receiving foreign funds.
- ◆ The License is granted by the Union home ministry grants FCRA licences for a five-year period.
- ◆ FCRA registration is valid for **5 years**, and **NGOs are expected to apply for renewal within six months of the date of expiry of registration**.
- ◆ The government can also **cancel the FCRA registration of any NGO if it finds that the NGO is in violation of the Act**, if it has not been engaged in any reasonable activity in its chosen field for the benefit of society for **two consecutive years, or if it has become defunct**.
- ◆ Once the registration of an NGO is cancelled, it is **not eligible for re-registration for three years**.

### What is Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)?

- ◆ FCRA was enacted during the **Emergency in 1976** amid apprehensions that foreign powers were interfering in India's affairs by pumping money into the country through independent organisations.

### What is NGO?

- A Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) is a **non-profitable charitable organisation**.
- In India, NGOs established under **Section 8 of the Companies Act** are governed by the provisions of the **Companies Act, 2013**, while the NGOs established as a trust or society are governed by the state governments.

- ◆ **Objective:** The law sought to regulate **foreign donations to individuals and associations** so that

they functioned in a manner consistent with the values of a sovereign democratic republic.

- ◆ **Criteria to seek FCRA registration:** The FCRA requires **every person or NGO** seeking to receive foreign donations to be:
  - ▶ registered under the Act
  - ▶ to open a bank account for the receipt of the foreign funds in **State Bank of India**, Delhi
  - ▶ to utilize those funds only for the purpose for which they have been received and as stipulated in the Act
  - ▶ FCRA registrations are granted to individuals or associations that have definite **cultural, economic, educational, religious, and social programmes**.
- ◆ **Exceptions:**
  - ▶ Under the FCRA, the applicant should **not be fictitious** and should not have been **prosecuted or convicted** for indulging in activities aimed at conversion through inducement or force, either directly or indirectly, from one religious faith to another.
  - ▶ The applicant should also not have been **prosecuted for or convicted** of creating communal tension or disharmony.
  - ▶ Also, should not be engaged or likely to be engaged in the **propagation of sedition**.
  - ▶ The Act prohibits the **receipt of foreign funds** by candidates for elections, journalists or newspaper and media broadcast companies, judges and government servants, members of legislature and political parties or their office-bearers, and organisations of a political nature.

#### NGO DARPAN Portal

- In India, the government has put efforts into encouraging NGO financing.
- The government created an online portal, NGO DARPAN, to promote and create a healthy partnership between NGOs and the Government of India and speed up the financing process.
- The NGO DARPAN portal serves as an interface between NGOs and other government departments.



#### TERROR FINANCING AND SAFEGUARDING NPOS

**Context:** The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is going to revise its current recommendations aimed at safeguarding non-profit organisations (NPOs) from being abused for terrorist financing.

- ◆ The FATF Recommendations are recognized as the global **anti-money laundering (AML)** and **counter-terrorist financing (CFT)** standards.

#### About the update:

- ◆ The FATF will take up proposals to revise the **FATF Standards' Recommendation 8** on non-profits, its interpretive note, and also adopt an updated **best practices paper**.
- ◆ As per the FATF's draft proposal, countries should develop an understanding of the different **degrees of terrorist-financing risk** posed to non-profit organizations and the corresponding levels of mitigating measures they require.
- ◆ **Considering negative impact on NPOs:** The revisions also seek to address the problem of over-application of preventive measures to the NPO sector in some countries.

#### FATF:

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** is an independent **inter-governmental body** that develops and promotes policies to protect the **global financial system** against money laundering, terrorist financing and the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

#### FATF's 'Special recommendation 8':

- ◆ The objective of Recommendation 8 is to ensure that NPOs are **not misused by terrorist organisations** including:
  - ▶ To pose as legitimate entities;
  - ▶ To exploit legitimate entities as conduits for terrorist financing, including for the purpose of escaping asset freezing measures; or
  - ▶ To conceal or obscure the clandestine diversion of funds intended for legitimate purposes, but diverted for terrorist purposes.
- ◆ FATF gave a variety of legal forms that NPOs can have, depending on the country, the FATF has adopted a **functional definition of NPO**.
- ◆ This definition is based on those activities and characteristics of an organisation which put it at risk of terrorist abuse, rather than on the simple fact that it is operating on a **non-profit basis**.
- ◆ **Recommendation 8** only applies to those NPOs which fall within the **FATF definition of a non-profit organisation**.
- ◆ Countries should take a targeted approach to implementing the measures called for in Recommendation 8, including oversight and regulatory mechanisms, based on an understanding

of the diversity of the NPO sector and the terrorism risks faced by **the domestic NPO sector**.

### FATF definition of a 'Non-profit organization':

- ◆ A legal person or arrangement or organisation that primarily engages in raising or disbursing funds for purposes such as **charitable, religious, cultural, educational, social or fraternal purposes**, or for the carrying out of other types of **"good works"**.
- ◆ The term **NPO** refers only to those NPOs falling within the FATF definition.

### Need of the initiative:

- ◆ **To tackle the linkage with Terror financing:** One of the ways in which terrorist organisations raise and transfer funds, are by using **non-profit organisations (NPOs)**.
  - ▶ In many important ways however, the work of NPOs deal with the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, so it is essential that in trying to address one aspect of the terrorist threat.
- ◆ **Self-regulation must be ensured:** Moreover the sector's own stake in being "clean" and being so regarded by others should be acknowledged, thus making them an indispensable partner in drawing up such policies.

### Benefits:

- ◆ **Tracking source of funding:** The ultimate objective is to enhance the transparency of the sector- the people in charge of NPOs, their sources of funds and particularly the way those funds are spent.
- ◆ **Ensures good governance:** The aim serves a much wider purpose than just countering terrorism financing and touches on many aspects of civil society good governance that the sector itself and others have been debating for a long time.

### India's Steps against Terror financing:

- ◆ **International steps:** India along with other **BRICS members** underlined their resolve to make the **international financial system** entirely hostile to terrorist financing.
  - ▶ They condemned terrorist attacks in all forms and manifestations and reaffirmed their commitment to tackle all sources, techniques and channels of terrorist financing.
  - ▶ Members urged concerted efforts and a comprehensive approach to counter terrorism under the UN auspices on a firm international legal basis.

- ◆ **Domestic steps:** Strengthening the provisions in the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967** to combat terror financing by criminalizing the production or smuggling or circulation of high quality counterfeit Indian currency as a terrorist act and enlarge the scope of proceeds of terrorism to include any property intended to be used for terrorism.
- ◆ A **Terror Funding and Fake Currency (TFFC) Cell** has been constituted in National Investigation Agency (NIA) to conduct focused investigation of terror funding and fake currency cases.
- ◆ **Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) network** is one of the channels of terror financing in India.
  - ▶ FICN Coordination Group (FCORD) has been formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs to share intelligence/information among the security agencies of the states/centre to counter the problem of circulation of fake currency notes.



### KERALA AS KERALAM: HOW AND WHY?

**Context:** Recently, the Kerala Assembly has passed a resolution urging the Centre to rename the state as "Keralam" in the Constitution and all office records.

### Key-Points in Resolution:

- ◆ The resolution presented by Kerala government mentioned that, the name of the state in Malayalam is **Keralam**.
- ◆ States were formed on the **basis of language** on November 1, 1956. That day is also observed as **Kerala formation day**.
- ◆ The demand for a united Kerala for all **Malayalam-speaking communities** has been strongly raised right from the days of the freedom struggle.
- ◆ However, the name of the state in the **first Schedule of the Constitution** has been written as Kerala.
- ◆ Thus, the Assembly unanimously requested the Union Government to take immediate steps under **Article 3 of the Constitution** to change the name of the state to **Keralam**.

### Historical Backings to the name Keralam:

- ◆ The earliest epigraphic record that **mentions Kerala** is Emperor **Asoka's Rock Edict II** of 257 BC.
- ◆ The inscription refers to the local ruler **as Keralaputra** (Sanskrit for "son of Kerala"), and also "son of Chera" referring to the **Chera dynasty**.

- ◆ About 'Keralam', scholars believe it could have originated from '**Cheram**'.

### Demands of Modern State- on the basis of language:

- ◆ It was in the 1920s that the **Aikya (unified) Kerala movement** gathered momentum and a demand for a separate **state for Malayalam-speaking people** came up.
- ◆ It aimed at the integration of **Malabar, Kochi and Travancore** into one territory.
- ◆ The Keralites who spoke the same language, shared common cultural traditions, and were unified by the same history; rituals and customs were inspired by the freedom movement to ask for unification and integration.

### Why demands for states on linguistic basis emerged in Kerala?

- ◆ The merger and integration of princely states was a major step towards the formation of the state of Kerala after Independence.
- ◆ On 1 July, 1949, the **two states of Travancore and Kochi** were integrated, heralding the birth of the Travancore-Cochin State.



- ◆ When it was decided to **reorganise states on a linguistic basis**, the **State Reorganisation Commission** of the Union Government recommended creation of the **state of Kerala**.
- ◆ The Commission under **Syed Fazl Ali** recommended the inclusion of the **district of Malabar and the taluk of Kasargod to the Malayalam-speaking people's state**.

- ◆ It also recommended the exclusion of the four Southern taluks of Travancore viz **Tovala, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilayankode** together with some parts of Shenkottai (all these taluks now part of Tamil Nadu).
- ◆ The state of Kerala came into being on November 1, 1956.
- ◆ In Malayalam, the state was referred to as **Keralam**, while in English it was **Kerala**.

### How states can be renamed in India?

- ◆ To change the name of a state, approval from the Centre's **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** is required.
- ◆ The proposal has to first come from **the state government**.
- ◆ A **Constitutional amendment** becomes necessary to affect this change.
- ◆ The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) then takes over and **gives its consent** after it receives **No Objection Certificates (NOCs)** from several agencies such as the Ministry of Railways, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Survey of India and Registrar General of India.
- ◆ If the **proposal is accepted**, the resolution, introduced as a **Bill in the Parliament**, becomes a law and the **name of the state is changed thereafter**.

### Constitutional Provisions:

- ◆ **Article 3 of the Constitution**; explicitly lays down a procedure to alter the **area, boundaries, or name of a state**.
- ◆ When the name of the State is changed or a new State is created, the Constitution of India is required to be amended by Parliament by a **Simple majority** as under **Articles 107 & 108 of Constitution**.
- ◆ The Parliament has the power to change the name of a state. The **Constitution of India** gives the parliament power to alter the name of a state under **Article 3**.

### The State reorganization Commission:

**The Fazl Ali Commission**, also known as the **States Reorganization Commission**, was formed in 1953 to address the demands of different states in India for the reconstitution of states along linguistic lines. The commission was established in response to the popular demand for the formation of states based on common language and culture, which was also sponsored by the **Indian National Congress** before independence. The commission was headed by **Justice Fazl Ali**, with **K.M. Pannikar and H.N. Kunzru** as members.

**DELHI SERVICES BILL**

**Context** The Delhi Services Bill, formally called Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill 2023 has been passed in Rajya Sabha. The Bill has been already passed in the Lok Sabha.

**What is the new bill all about?**

- ◆ **Aim:** The aim of this bill is to make a corruption-free administration in Delhi.
- ◆ The Central government will be the **rule-making authority**.
- ◆ The Delhi Services Bill states that the **inquiries and suspensions of the officials of the national capital** will be under the Centre’s control.
- ◆ **LG’s decision to be final:** The **Lieutenant Governor** will be empowered to exercise his **sole discretion** on various matters, which will include the:
  - ▶ **National Capital Civil Services Authority’s recommendations**
  - ▶ the prorogation, summoning, and dissolution of the Delhi Legislative Assembly
- ◆ **National Capital Civil Services Authority (Composition):** The Bill provides for the formation of a National Capital Civil Service Authority.
  - ▶ **The Delhi Chief Minister**- the *ex-officio* Chairperson
  - ▶ **The Chief Secretary** – an *ex-officio* member of this body
  - ▶ **The Principal Home Secretary of the Delhi government** - the *ex-officio* Member Secretary of the Authority.
    - All matters before the Authority will be decided by voting of the members.



**How is the Bill different from the Delhi Services Ordinance?**

- ◆ **Section 45D** of the Bill deals with the power to **appoint authorities, boards, commissions and statutory bodies**.
- ◆ While in the Ordinance, all such powers lay with the **President**, the Bill has added a **sub-clause (b)** to the provision to allow the **Authority (headed by the Chief Minister)** to “recommend a panel of suitable persons for constitution or appointment or nomination by the **Lieutenant Governor.**”
- ◆ Therefore, the power of the Delhi government in this arena has been **limited to only making recommendations**.

**Impact of the Bill**

- ◆ **Centre’s primacy:** The Central government is set to have primacy over appointments, transfers and postings of officers in the national capital.
- ◆ **Reversal of SC’s verdict:** Essentially, the law will reverse the effect of the Supreme Court verdict that had given the Delhi government power over administrative services in Delhi.

**SC’s Verdict**

In May this year, the Supreme Court of India took the decision in favour of the government of Delhi, giving it complete command over most services in the capital, leaving out **public order, land, and police**.

**Can Parliament enact such laws?**

- ◆ The **Indian Constitution** empowered Parliament to **enact laws for the NCT of Delhi**.
- ◆ The Supreme Court had affirmed the same in **paras 6, 95, 163(f) of its judgment** that had **restored the services to the Delhi government. (May 2023 Judgment)**
  - ▶ The relevant paras in the Supreme Court verdict refer to the difference of opinion of the judges of a Division Bench in their split verdicts on the interpretation of **Article 239AA**, which deals with special provisions pertaining to Delhi.
  - ▶ The judges had differed on whether “services” were excluded in view of **Article 239AA(3)(a)** from the legislative and executive domain of the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD)**.
    - ▶ The Supreme Court had observed that if **Parliament enacts a law granting executive power over any subject which is within the domain of NCT Delhi**, the executive power of the Lieutenant Governor shall be modified to that extent, as provided in that law.



## COMMITTEES OF PARLIAMENT

**Context:** Recently, four MPs have complained, that their names had been included in a proposed Select Committee for the Delhi Services Bill without their consent in the House.

So, let us look at the **role of committees** formed in Parliament and their structure.

### About Parliamentary Committees:

- ◆ India's Parliament has several types of committees which discharge different functions.
- ◆ There are broadly **two types of committees** in the Parliament namely;
  - ▶ There are **12 Standing Committees** that are **permanent** in nature, with their **members nominated** from time to time by **the Chairman**.
  - ▶ **Standing Committees can be classified into the following six categories:**
    - Financial Committees
    - Departmental Standing Committees
    - Committees to Enquire
    - Committees to Scrutinise and Control
    - Committees Relating to the **Day-to-Day Business** of the House
    - House-Keeping Committees or Service Committees
  - ▶ Then there are **ad hoc or temporary committees**, which are set up for a specific purpose, such as examining a particular Bill, and are dissolved once that purpose has been served.
    - They are further subdivided into **Inquiry Committees and Advisory Committees**.
    - The **principal Ad hoc Committees** are the **Select and Joint Committees** on Bills.

### Constitutional Provisions:

Parliamentary Committees draw their authority from **Article 105 and Article 118**.

- **Article 105** deals with the privileges of MPs.
- **Article 118** gives Parliament authority to make rules to regulate its procedure and conduct of business.

### What is a Select Committee?

- ◆ A **Select Committee** belongs to temporary committee. However, the procedure it requires to follow is laid down in the **Rules of Procedure**.

- ◆ Under **Rule 125** of the Rajya Sabha **Rules and Procedures**, any member may move an **amendment** that a Bill be referred to a **Select Committee**.
- ◆ According to the Rajya Sabha rules, **The Select/Joint Committees on Bills** are constituted by the House(s) on specific motion moved by the **Minister in-charge of the Bill** or any member and adopted by the House to consider and report on Bills as referred to them from time to time.
- ◆ **Functions:** The Committee's role is to go through the text of the Bill, clause by clause, in order to see that the Bill "**reflects clearly the intention behind the measure and the object proposed to be achieved is adequately brought out**".
- ◆ A Joint Committee within the select committee has members from both **Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha**.
- ◆ The motion to refer a Bill to a **Select Committee** can either be moved by the member in-charge of the Bill, or by any other MP.

### How are a Select Committee's members selected?

- ◆ According to the Rajya Sabha rules, Bills are from time to time referred to **Select Committees**, the members on which are specifically named in the motion.
- ◆ The members of the Select Committee on a Bill are **appointed by the House** when the motion that the Bill be referred to a Select Committee is made.

No member is appointed to a Select Committee if he is **not willing to serve** on the Committee.

- ◆ The mover has to ascertain whether the member proposed by him is willing to serve on the Committee.
- ◆ The **actual number of membership** of the Select Committee is not fixed; it varies from Committee to Committee.
- ◆ If it is a **Joint Committee**, the proportion of members from the **Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha is 1:2**.
- ◆ The Chairman of the Committee is appointed by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha from among the members of the Committee.
- ◆ The **member or Minister in-charge of the Bill** is generally included as a **member of the Committee**.

### Significance of Parliamentary Committees:

- ◆ **Provides Legislative Expertise:** Most MPs are not subject matter experts on the topics being discussed — they are generalists who understand the pulse of the people but rely on advice from experts and stakeholders before making decisions.

- ▶ Parliamentary committees are meant to help MPs seek expertise and give them time to think about issues in detail.
- ◆ **Acting as a Mini-Parliament:** These committees act as a mini-parliament, as they have MPs representing different parties are elected into them through a system of the single transferable vote, in roughly the same proportion as their strength in Parliament.
- ◆ **Instrument for Detailed Scrutiny:** When bills are referred to these committees, they are examined closely and inputs are sought from various external stakeholders, including the public.
- ◆ **Provides a Check on the Government:** Although committee recommendations are not binding on the government, their reports create a public record of the consultations that took place and put pressure on the government to reconsider its stand on debatable provisions.
  - ▶ By virtue of being closed-door and away from the public eye, discussions in committee meetings are also more collaborative, with MPs feeling less pressured to posture for media galleries.

### Why is the sidelining of the Parliamentary Committees an issue?

- ◆ **Weakening of Parliamentary System Government:** A parliamentary democracy works on the doctrine of fusion of powers between parliament and the executive, but the Parliament is supposed to maintain oversight of the government and keep its power in check.
  - ▶ Thus, by circumventing the Parliamentary committees in the passing of significant legislation, there is a risk of weakening democracy.
- ◆ **Enforcing Brute Majority:** In the Indian system, it is not mandatory for bills to be sent to committees. It's left to the discretion of the Chair — the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and Chairperson in the Rajya Sabha.
  - ▶ By giving discretionary power to the Chair, the system has been specially rendered weak in a Lok Sabha where the ruling party has a brute majority.



### REFERENDUM NOT AN OPTION UNDER CONSTITUTION: SC

**Context:** Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has mentioned that, seeking public opinion in a constitutional democracy like India has to be through established institutions or Democratic tools and there is 'no question of referendum' under the country's Constitution.

### What does a Referendum mean?

- ◆ A referendum is an instrument of **direct democracy** through which **people can vote directly on a particular issue.**
- ◆ It is a form of direct democracy in which citizens are allowed to vote on a specific issue or question, typically proposed by a **government or other official body.**
- ◆ The results of a referendum are then used to determine the **course of action** that will be taken by the government or other decision-making bodies.

### Scope of Referendums:

Referendums have been used to decide on a wide range of issues, including:

- ◆ Constitutional amendments
- ◆ Secessionist movements
- ◆ Major political decisions e.g. Brexit
- ◆ Controversial social issues such as same-sex marriage etc.

### Types of Referendums:

- ◆ **Mandatory Referendum:** It is a form of a referendum that must be voted on if specific criteria are satisfied.
- ◆ **Optional Referendum:** A form of referendum is held in response to demand.

### Referendum in India:

- ◆ There is **no provision for a referendum** in the Indian Constitution.
- ◆ However, the referendum is neither **unlawful nor forbidden in India.**
- ◆ **Referendums have been used in India in the past;**
  - ▶ Sikkim conducted a referendum to remove the monarchy on April 14, 1975. With **97.55 percent** of the vote, the state was declared an Indian state.
  - ▶ The Goa Opinion Poll, held on January 16, 1967, in the Indian state of Goa, determined the future of the **Union Territory of Goa, Daman, and Diu within the Indian Union.**

### Why it is difficult to include a Referendum for India?

- ◆ **Over-simplification of complex issues:** Referendums often present complex issues in a binary choice, which can lead to oversimplification of complex issues and **reduction of public debate and discussion.**
- ◆ **Manipulation:** Referendums can be manipulated by interest groups and politicians, who may use

propaganda and misinformation to influence voters and shape the outcome of the vote.

- ◆ **Turnout bias:** Referendums may suffer from turnout bias, where the outcome is determined by the segment of the population that turns out to vote, rather than by the majority of the electorate.
- ◆ **Minority rights:** Referendums may lead to the tyranny of the majority, where the majority imposes its will on minority groups, even if it violates their rights or interests.
- ◆ **Lack of deliberation:** Referendums are often decided based on a simple majority, without the kind of deliberative process that would happen in a legislative body, where representatives have the time and resources to engage in debate, compromise and negotiation.
- ◆ **Polarization:** Referendums can polarize the public and create divisions within society that can be difficult to heal after the vote.

### Other tools in Democracy:

- ◆ **Recall:** Recall procedures allow the electorate to vote in whether to end the term of office if an elected representative or official if enough signatures in support of a recall vote are collected.
  - ▶ Although the process of recall is often similar to that of citizens' initiatives, recall deals only with the question of the removal of a person from public office and the outcome is therefore always binding.
- ◆ **Plebiscite:** A plebiscite is a direct vote in which the entire electorate is asked **to either accept or reject a particular proposal or issue.**
  - ▶ It is a form of direct democracy that allows citizens to express their views on important issues.
  - ▶ Plebiscites are typically **used to decide on major political issues**, such as constitutional amendments, changes to electoral systems, or territorial disputes.

#### Referendum vs. Plebiscite:

- Key difference between plebiscites and referendums is the **level of specificity** of the question or proposal that is put to the vote.
- Plebiscites often have more general or abstract questions, while referendums usually have very specific questions that require a clear **yes or no answer.**
- In terms of their legal status, plebiscites are **not always recognized** in the same way as referendums.
- Some countries have specific **legal provisions for plebiscites**, while others do not. Referendums, on the other hand, are usually provided for in a **country's constitution or legislation.**



## PRIVILEGE MOTION IN PARLIAMENT

**Context:** Recently, **Rajya Sabha Chairman referred complaints related to the privilege of the House against Derek O'Brien and Raghav Chadha to the privileges committee.**

### What is Privilege Motion?

- ◆ Parliamentary privileges are certain rights conferred to the **Members of Parliament** for conducting the **business of the Parliament.**
- ◆ There is **no codified list** of the exact privileges, but it includes the **right of free expression** in the course of Parliamentary debates and **Members of Parliament** will not be liable for court proceedings for this.
- ◆ If there is a belief that such a privilege has been breached, a motion can be **raised by any member.**
- ◆ It can be admitted by the Chairman.
  - ▶ Then, they can then refer it to the **Privileges Committee.**

### Provisions related to Privileges:

- **Rule No 222** in Chapter 20 of the **Lok Sabha Rule Book** and correspondingly **Rule 187** in **Chapter 16** of the Rajya Sabha rulebook **govern privilege.**
- Rules say that a member may, with the consent of the **Speaker or the Chairperson**, raise a question involving a **breach of privilege** either of a member or of the House or a committee thereof.

### How Privilege committee be formed?

- ◆ The Chairman of Rajya Sabha can, from time to time, nominate such a Committee, consisting of **ten members.**
- ◆ It will also have a Chairman appointed by the **Rajya Sabha Chairman.**
- ◆ The **right to raise a question of privilege** is based on satisfying **two conditions**, namely:
  - ▶ The question shall be restricted to a **specific matter of recent occurrence**, and
  - ▶ The matter **requires the intervention of the Council.**
- ◆ The **Speaker** has the power to make such decisions.
- ◆ The **Speaker/RS chairperson** is the **first level of scrutiny** of a privilege motion.
- ◆ Therefore, the **Speaker/Chair** can decide on the

privilege motion him or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament.

### What is the role of Privilege committee?

- ◆ The mandate of the committee is to examine such cases and "make such recommendations as it may deem fit".
- ◆ It can call the relevant people as part of **its examination and look at related documents**.
- ◆ It has to then **make a report** and if the Council has not fixed any time for its presentation, the report shall be presented within **one month of the date** on which reference to the Committee was made.
- ◆ A motion has to be passed for the **consideration of the report** and **amendments** can be suggested.
- ◆ The Chairman or any member of the Committee or any other member can move that the **Council agrees, disagrees, or agrees with amendments**, with the recommendations contained in the report.

#### Parliamentary privileges:

- These are **special rights, immunities and exemptions** enjoyed by the **two Houses of Parliament**, their committees and their members.
- The Constitution also extends the parliamentary privileges to those persons who are entitled to speak and take part in the proceedings of a **House of Parliament or any of its committees**.
- These include the **Attorney General of India and Union ministers**.

### Privilege motion often rejected in Parliament:

- ◆ Most of the cases of the privilege motion passed in the Parliament in the past have been rejected. Penal actions have been recommended only in a few, so far.
- ◆ **Some significant privilege motion cases:**
  - ▶ In 1978, privilege motion was moved against **Indira Gandhi** and was expelled from the House.
  - ▶ In 1976, **BJP MP Subramanian Swamy** was expelled from **the Rajya Sabha**.



### MINERAL EXPLORATION & THE INVOLVEMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

**Context** Parliament passed a 2023 Bill allowing private sector involvement in exploring critical minerals like lithium, previously restricted to government entities.

### Key-highlights of the Mines and Minerals Bill 2023:

- ◆ The Bill amends **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957**.
- ◆ **Allowing commercial mining:** The Bill omits at least six previously mentioned atomic minerals from a list of 12 which cannot be commercially mined.
  - ▶ Being on the atomic minerals list, the exploration and mining of these six- **lithium, beryllium, niobium, titanium, tantalum, and zirconium**, was previously reserved for government entities.
- ◆ **Empowering central govt:** It empowers Central Government to exclusively auction mineral concessions for certain critical minerals.
- ◆ **Exploration licence (EL):** The Bill also proposes a new type of license to encourage reconnaissance-level and or prospective stage exploration by the private sector.
  - ▶ This license will be issued for 29 minerals specified in the **Seventh Schedule** of the amended Act, which would include **critical, strategic, and deep-seated minerals**.

### What is the share of critical and deep-seated minerals that India imports?

- ◆ **Cobalt mines:** China has majority ownership of cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where 70% of the world's cobalt is mined.
- ◆ **Rare Earth Elements (REEs):** China also has by far the largest amount of reserves of Rare Earth Elements (REEs) of any country in the world, followed by Vietnam, Brazil and Russia; it produces of 65% of the world's REEs.

#### Rare Earth Elements (REEs):

- There are **17 Rare Earth Elements (REEs)** are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- REEs are classified as light **RE elements (LREE)** and heavy **RE elements (HREE)**.
  - ▶ Some REEs are available in India — such as **Lanthanum, Cerium, Neodymium, Praseodymium and Samarium, etc.**
  - ▶ Others such as **Dysprosium, Terbium, and Europium**, which are classified as HREEs, are not available in Indian deposits in extractable quantities.

**India's position on Critical minerals:**

- ◆ **REEs:** Though India has **6% of the world's rare earth reserves**, it only **produces 1% of global output**, and meets most of its requirements of such minerals from China.
  - ▶ In 2018-19, for instance, 92% of rare earth metal imports by value and 97% by quantity were sourced from China.
- ◆ **Deep-seated minerals:** Also for deep-seated minerals like **gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, nickel, cobalt, platinum group elements (PGEs) and diamonds**, India depends largely on imports.

- **Indian Rare Earths Ltd (IREL)** which is a Government of India Undertaking, and **KMML**, a Kerala State Government Undertaking are actively engaged in mining and processing of beach sand minerals from placer deposits.
- In India, **monazite and thorium** is the principal source of rare earths.

**What India is doing to strengthen its position?**

- ◆ **30 critical minerals:** The **Ministry of Mines**, in June this year, came out with a list of 30 minerals critical to the country's economic development and national security.

- Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.

- ▶ However, India is **highly dependent** on imports for a majority of minerals on this list.
  - India is **100% import-dependent** on countries including China, Russia, Australia, South Africa, and the U.S. for the supply of critical minerals like **lithium, cobalt, nickel, niobium, beryllium, and tantalum**.
- ◆ **India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership:** India and Australia recently decided to strengthen their partnership in the field of projects and supply chains for critical minerals. Australia will commit 5.8 million dollars to the **three-year India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership**.

**Why India needs minerals?**

- ◆ **Electric Vehicles:** India has an ambitious plan to convert a large percentage of its transport to electric and this would require these minerals.

- ▶ 80 percent of the country's two- and three-wheeler fleet, 40 percent of buses, and 30 to 70 per cent of cars will be EVs by 2030.
- ◆ **Clean energy:** They are critical for developing clean energy which is the need of the hour today.
- ◆ **Industrial use:** Traditional uses like Cerium for glass polishing and lanthanum for car catalysts or optical lenses.
- ◆ **Manufacturing of magnets:** Neodymium, praseodymium and dysprosium, are crucial to the manufacture of magnets which are used in industries and also in wind turbines and Drones.

**Why is private sector participation needed in the case of India?**

- ◆ **Budget constraints:** India has explored just 10% of its **Obvious Geological Potential (OGP)**, less than 2% of which is mined and the country spends less than 1% of the global mineral exploration budget.
- ◆ **Breaking barriers:** As of now, the exploration projects are carried out by **Geological Survey of India** and other PSUs like **Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited (MECL)**, with very little private sector participation.
- ◆ **Involvement of private agencies in exploration would bring**
  - ▶ advanced technology
  - ▶ finance
- ◆ **Expertise in exploration:** The proposed exploration licence regime is foreseen to create an enabling mechanism where in the exploration agencies will bring in expertise from across the world in geological data acquisition, processing and interpretation value chain and leverage the risk-taking ability for discovery of mineral deposits through adoption of expertise and technologies.

**Learnings**

- In Australia, private mining firms engage in risk-taking by putting their expertise and limited financials into explorations to find potential mines.
- Once discovered, these private companies can sell these to bigger mining companies who then develop and run these mines.
- This helps **multiply exploration projects** and **accelerate the pace of exploration** owing to private participation.

**Recent international initiatives**

- ◆ **Mineral Security Partnership (MSP):** It aims to focus on the supply chains of minerals such as Cobalt,

Nickel, Lithium and also the 17 REEs. India is a party to MSP.

- ◆ **List:** Countries like the U.S., Australia, Japan, and the EU bloc have also created lists of critical minerals based on their specific economic needs and the supply risk of the minerals.



## IMPORT BAN ON LAPTOP, PC

**Context:** The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has delayed notification restricting imports of laptops, PCs, tablets and servers to India with immediate effect to November 1, 2023.

### Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT):

- It is responsible for **formulating and implementing the Foreign Trade Policy** with the main objective of promoting India's exports.
- The DGFT also **issues scrips/authorization to exporters** and monitors their corresponding obligations through a network of 24 regional offices.

### Key-highlights of the move:

- ◆ The Union government has **restricted imports of personal computers, laptops, palmtops, automatic data processing machines, microcomputer/processors and large/ mainframe computers** with immediate effect.
- ◆ Under this move, seven categories of **HSN Code 8471** (HSN is the **Harmonised System of Nomenclature**, a globally accepted method of naming goods) were restricted.
- ◆ **Valid license:** However their import would be allowed **against a valid licence** for restricted imports.
- ◆ **Re-imports:** Also, the licence for restricted imports shall not be required for the **repair and return of re-import** of goods repaired abroad, as per the **Foreign Trade Policy**.

### Exemptions given:

- ◆ The import of **one laptop, tablet, all-in-one personal computer or ultra-small form factor computer** including those purchased from **e-commerce portals** through post or courier, has been exempted from **licensing requirement**. It will attract payment of **duty as applicable**.

Current regulations permit companies to **import laptops without any restrictions**.

- ◆ Imports up to 20 items per consignment for R&D, testing, benchmarking, and evaluation repair and re-export, and product development purposes, have also been exempted from import licence.
- ◆ The government has also exempted laptops, tablets, all-in-one personal computers, and ultra-small form factor computers from import licensing requirements if they are essential part of capital goods.

### What is the need of the move?

- ◆ **Increase in imports:** India has seen an increase in **imports of electronic goods and laptops/computers** over the last few years.
  - ▶ During **April-June 2023**, the import of electronic goods increased with a share of **4-7 per cent** in overall imports.
- ◆ **Increasing presence of China:** Majority of these imports were coming from **China**.

### How would it benefit?

- ◆ **Promoting domestic manufacturing:** The move is aimed at promoting **domestic manufacturing**.
- ◆ **Restricting China:** It probably targets China since more than **75 per cent** of India's total imports of laptops and personal computers in 2022-23 were from the neighboring country.
- ◆ **Inviting foreign companies:** The fresh restrictions could impact companies such as **Apple, Samsung and Acer**, forcing them to step up **manufacturing and assembly** in India.

### What India is doing to boost domestic production?

- ◆ **Import Regulation:** The Government of India, from time to time, takes appropriate measures to regulate import of goods including those related to national interest.

India and China are both members of the WTO and **any trade restriction imposed** must be **WTO compliant**.

- ◆ **Atmanirbhar Bharat policy:** To **support and expand domestic capacities**, Government has implemented policies to promote domestic manufacturing like the **production linked incentive (PLI) schemes** in line with **Atmanirbhar Bharat policy**.
  - ▶ Recently, to encourage domestic production of **lithium-ion cells** for batteries used in electric vehicles (EVs), the government has removed **customs duty on the import** of capital goods and machinery used in the manufacturing of lithium-ion cells.

- The reduction in **basic customs duty** reduces input costs and it is expected to deepen value addition, promote export competitiveness and boost domestic manufacturing.

### Concerns associated:

- ◆ **Increased prices:** The move could also potentially raise **prices for consumers**, depending on how the licensing norms are implemented.
- ◆ **Increased pressure:** It will further create pressure on required resources for production.
- ◆ **Shortage:** There will be a **shortage of products** in the market, exacerbating the **supply chain issues** caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the semiconductor crisis.

### Required measures

- ◆ **Revised foreign policy:** The government urgently needs to bring out a revised foreign policy to address both historical trade imbalance.
- ◆ **Focus on credit cycle:** The government should take appropriate measures to improve the credit cycle through investment and savings and promotion of foreign investment will bring the economy from slowdown in future.



## INDIA'S SUGAR PRODUCTION & IMPACT ON GROUNDWATER

**Context:** In 2021-2022, India surpassed Brazil to become the largest sugar producer in the world, producing 359 lakh tonnes. Being a Cash Crop, excess sugarcane production has led to chronic ground water table depletion.

### Why India's Sugarcane production is so high?

- ◆ **Huge demand:** India is the world's largest **producer and consumer** of sugar. Being on the top, it is required to produce enough to meet its **huge domestic demand**.
- ◆ **Heavy Subsidies:**
  - ▶ The Central government offers a **fair and remunerative price (FRP) scheme**, which mandates a minimum price that **sugar mills** have to pay to sugarcane farmers, ensuring that farmers always get **fair profits for their crop**.
  - ▶ State governments also offer **heavy subsidies to incentivize sugarcane cultivation**.
- ◆ The resulting sugar surplus has led to **higher exports**, with a record 110 lakh tonnes exported in 2021-2022.

### Impact on India's WTO image:

**Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala** filed a complaint with the **World Trade Organization** against India for violating international trade rules by offering excessive **export subsidies** and domestic support to farmers to outcompete other countries in the **global sugar market**.

- The Organization ruled **against India** and India also **lost its appeal**.

### Steps taken to overcome problem of excess cultivation:

- ◆ **Diversion towards ethanol:** To deal with the **sugar surplus**, the Indian government considered diverting it to the production of ethanol, an organic compound made by **fermenting sugarcane molasses or sugar**.
  - ▶ Ethanol is the active ingredient in **alcoholic beverages** and is also used in the **chemicals and cosmetics** industries.
  - ▶ In the **transport sector**, the use of **ethanol-blended petrol (EBP)** significantly reduces harmful emissions, such as of **carbon monoxide and various hydrocarbons, from vehicles**.
  - ▶ The government also reduced the **Goods and Services Tax on ethanol** from **18% to 5%** in 2021.

### How does excessive sugarcane cultivation impact groundwater?

- ◆ **Sugarcane is a highly resource-intensive cash crop:** It needs a large amount of land and water for its cultivation.
  - ▶ Normally, 100 kg of sugar is produced from **one tonne of sugarcane**, which consumes around **2 lakh litres of groundwater for irrigation** alone.
- ◆ **Regional concentration:** India's top sugarcane-growing states are Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu. The first three account for **85-90%** of the sugar produced in the country.
  - ▶ The top sugarcane growing states are already **drought-prone** as well as **groundwater-stressed**.
  - ▶ Sugarcane requires around **3,000 mm** of rainfall a year to be irrigated. But these three states receive around **1,000-1,200 mm** a year.
  - ▶ The remaining water requirement is met by **groundwater**.
- ◆ **Ground water is a Limited resource:** Most of this groundwater resides in confined aquifers, i.e. the water is trapped between two impermeable layers of rock.

- ◆ It can only be extracted by drilling a borewell through the upper layer. Such groundwater can't be recharged by rainfall, so it is a **limited resource**.

In a 2022 report, the **Central Ground Water Board (CGWB)** noted that a third of all its groundwater assessment units in **Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka** were 'semi-critical', 'critical' or 'over-exploited'.

### Impact of groundwater extraction on the environment:

- ◆ **Weather in anomalies:** The shift in the Earth's axis could affect the distribution of heat around the planet, which could lead to changes in weather patterns.
- ◆ **Sea level rise:** The study's findings suggest that groundwater extraction is a significant contributor to global sea level rise. This is because when groundwater is extracted, it is replaced by seawater, which has a higher density and therefore contributes to the rising of the sea level.
- ◆ **Depletion of Aquifers:** The excessive extraction of groundwater has resulted in the depletion of aquifers, causing irreversible damage to the underground water storage. Once aquifers are depleted, it becomes challenging to replenish them, leading to long-term water scarcity. **Example:** Zero water day in Cape Town (2018).
- ◆ **Land Subsidence:** Over-extraction of groundwater can cause the land above the aquifers to sink, leading to land subsidence. This phenomenon damages infrastructure, disrupts ecosystems, and increases the vulnerability of coastal regions to flooding.
- ◆ **Contamination of Water:** As water tables decline, the concentration of contaminants in groundwater increases, leading to water quality issues. Contaminants such as fluoride, arsenic, and nitrates can have severe health implications for the population relying on groundwater for drinking water. **Example** Purulia district in West Bengal (**Uranium contamination**)
- ◆ **Agricultural Crisis:** The depletion of groundwater adversely affects agriculture, which heavily relies on irrigation. Declining water availability hampers crop yields, reduces agricultural productivity, and threatens food security in the country.

### Measures for sustainable management of groundwater resources:

- ◆ **Introducing water pricing mechanisms** to discourage over-exploitation and ensuring efficiency.
- ◆ **Promoting rainwater harvesting** by providing financial incentives and technical assistance to farmers and households. **Example:** check dams, percolation tanks, and artificial recharge structures like **Johads, Ahar pynes**.
- ◆ **Protecting groundwater resources from pollution** through preventing the disposal of industrial and agricultural waste in groundwater aquifers.
- ◆ **Promoting Sustainable agricultural practices** like sprinkler irrigation, crop rotation, and cultivation of less water-intensive crops.
  - ▶ **Example:** PM Krishi Sinchayi Yojana
- ◆ **Raising awareness** among the general public, farmers, and industries about the importance of sustainable water management and the consequences of over-extraction is crucial.
  - ▶ **Example:** Jal Shakti Abhiyan.
- ◆ **Integrated Water Resource Management:** In lines with **Mihir Shah Committee**, implement integrated water resource management strategies at the regional and national levels, considering the interconnectedness of surface water and groundwater can ensure a holistic approach to water management and sustainable utilization.



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## ***Section B*** [SPECIALS]

### **Topic**

☞ Role of Small Modular Reactor (SRM) in Rnergy Transition



## ROLE OF SMALL MODULAR REACTOR (SRM) IN ENERGY TRANSITION

**Context:** As India race to reach net-zero emissions and stave off climate change, nuclear energy is poised to play a vital role in decarbonising electricity and hard-to-abate sectors. Small modular reactor (SRM)– a type of nuclear reactor – can be helpful to India in this regard.

### What is the need to transform the energy sector?

- ◆ The world is at a decisive moment in the fight against **climate change**.
- ◆ With greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions continuing to rise and average temperatures increasing, achieving net zero emissions by mid-century has become an urgent priority to avoid catastrophic climate impacts.
- ◆ To achieve net zero and limit **future warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels** in line with the **Paris Agreement**, nothing less than a complete transformation of the global energy system is required.

#### The scale of net zero challenge

- Under the **Paris Agreement**, over 190 countries have committed to limiting global warming to well below 2C, preferably 1.5C, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- However, the world has already warmed about 1.1C, according to **NASA**.
- To have a 50% chance of hitting the 1.5C target, the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** estimates net-zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must be reached globally around 2050, requiring deep cuts to GHG emissions of about 45% by 2030.

### Where does nuclear energy come into picture?

- ◆ While renewable energy from **solar, wind, hydropower, and biomass** will shoulder much of the burden, there is growing recognition that nuclear power also has a vital role to play.

- ◆ Nuclear Energy offers a proven, always-on source of carbon-free electricity that can balance the variable output from renewables.
- ◆ It can also help decarbonise hard-to-abate sectors like heavy industry and shipping.

#### The Evolving Nuclear Technology Landscape

- Small modular reactors (SMRs)
- High-temperature reactors
- Fast neutron reactors
- Molten salt reactors
- Microreactors
- Fusion

### How much nuclear energy need to be produced reach net zero?

- ◆ There are currently 439 nuclear reactors in operation globally, with an estimated 413GW of operating capacity in 2022, accounting for around 10% of global power production.
- ◆ Under the **International Energy Agency's (IEA) Net Zero Scenario**, the nuclear industry would need to nearly **double its capacity by 2050**.
- ◆ Specifically, to reach its net zero emissions scenario, the IEA forecasts that nuclear capacity needs to reach 812GW by 2050.
  - ▶ Under this scenario, average annual additions need to reach c25GW per year over the next three decades.

#### Why Nuclear Energy is Essential to Reaching Net Zero?

- Scalable low-carbon generation capacity
- System stability
- Low-carbon heat for industry
- Clean hydrogen production
- Compact land footprint
- Proven reliability and safety
- **Protection of national security:** Leadership in nuclear energy maintains safety and non-proliferation standards globally.
- **Employment generation**
- **Nuclear boosts international development**

#### Challenges of nuclear energy

- High upfront capital costs
- Waste management (radioactives)
- Proliferation risk
- Safety Concerns

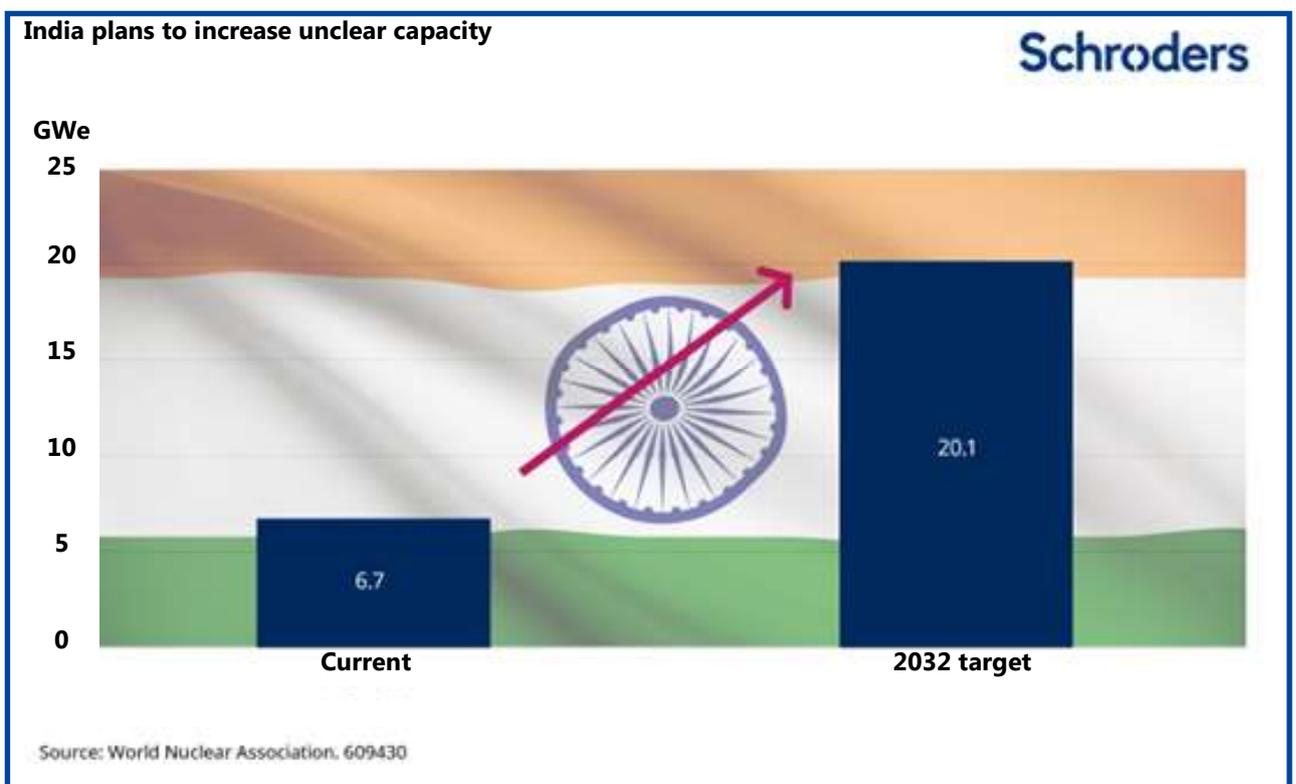
### What about other eco-friendly sources?

- ◆ **Renewable energy sources** such as **onshore and offshore wind, utility-scale and distributed solar, hydropower, geothermal, tidal, and sustainable bioenergy** have grown exponentially over the past decade and will undoubtedly deliver the bulk of future emissions reductions.
- ◆ However, despite their tremendous promise and competitiveness, renewables alone cannot achieve **full decarbonisation**.
- ◆ **Challenges:** intermittency, energy storage, transmission, and seasonal variability.

### India's nuclear energy capacity

- ◆ The subcontinent currently has 22 reactors in operation with a total net capacity of around 6780 MW and is hoping to increase this almost threefold to a total capacity of 22,480 MW by 2031.
- ◆ It is not only considering expanding its large nuclear power plants (NPPs) fleet, but also developing **small modular reactors (SMRs)**.

India does not allow foreign investment in the nuclear power.



The **Atomic Energy Act (1962)** of India is the foundational legislation that governs all regulations on the civil use of nuclear energy.

### What are Small Modular Nuclear reactors (SMRs)?

- ◆ Small modular reactors (SMRs) are advanced **nuclear reactors** that have a power capacity of up to **300 MW (e)** per unit, which is about **one-third** of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors.

Many SMR projects that have already been ordered by **European countries** till 2035.

- ◆ SMRs, which can produce a large amount of **low-carbon electricity** using:
  - ▶ **Small** – physically a fraction of the size of a conventional nuclear power reactor.
  - ▶ **Modular** – making it possible for systems and components to be factory-assembled and transported as a unit to a location for installation.
  - ▶ **Reactors** – harnessing nuclear fission to generate heat to produce energy.

### Conventional Nuclear power plants vs. Small modular reactors:

- ◆ **Nuclear Power Plants (NPPs)** are efficient users of land and their grid integration costs are lower than

those associated with variable renewable energy (VRE) sources because NPPs generate power 24x7 in all kinds of weather.

- ◆ As an alternative, several countries are developing **small modular reactors (SMRs)** – nuclear reactors with a maximum capacity of 300 MW – to complement conventional NPPs.
- ◆ SMRs can be installed in **decommissioned thermal power plant** sites by repurposing existing infrastructure, thus sparing countries from having to acquire **more land and/or displace people** beyond the existing site boundary.
- ◆ SMRs can be safely installed and operated at several brownfield sites that may not meet the more stringent zoning requirements for conventional NPPs.

### Advantages of SMRs:

- ◆ **Safer and efficient:** SMRs are designed with a smaller core damage frequency (the likelihood that an accident will damage the nuclear fuel) and **source term** (a measure of radioactive contamination) compared to conventional NPPs.
  - ▶ They also include **enhanced seismic isolation** for more safety.
- ◆ **Simpler and lower risk of radioactive release:** SMR designs are also simpler than those of conventional NPPs and include several passive safety features, resulting in a lower potential for the uncontrolled release of radioactive materials into the environment.
- ◆ **Economical:** They could provide a pathway for developing economies to promote sustainable growth with a low capital outlay.
- ◆ **Flexible:** SMRs can be integrated with Renewable Energy to fulfill the need for flexibility, producing energy services and low-carbon co-products.
- ◆ **SMRs are adaptable and scalable.**
- ◆ **Compact design** (requires less land space)

### How nuclear reactors can lead to sustainable energy generation?

- ◆ Accelerating the deployment of SMRs under appropriate international safeguards, by implementing a coal-to-nuclear transition at existing thermal power-plant sites, will take India closer to net-zero and improve energy security because uranium resources are not as concentrated as reserves of critical minerals.
- ◆ Most land-based SMR designs require **low-enriched uranium**, which can be supplied by all countries that possess **uranium mines and facilities for such enrichment** if the recipient facility is operating according to international standards.
- ◆ Further, serial manufacture of SMRs can reduce costs by simplifying plant design to facilitate more efficient regulatory approvals and experiential learning with serial manufacturing.

### How the world is supporting new nuclear power?

- ◆ The world is seeing growing support for nuclear, with political commitments over the coming decade including plans for hundreds of new reactors around the world.
- ◆ Five of the world's largest economies – the **US, India, the UK, Japan and China** – have announced targets to substantially increase nuclear capacity.

### Way forward:

- ◆ The nuclear power industry has significant potential for achieving global decarbonization goals. India, too, seeks to enhance its nuclear energy share to meet energy needs and security objectives. However, handling nuclear projects requires meticulous planning due to the unique regulatory environment, demanding careful coordination among stakeholders.



## Section C [PRELIMS]

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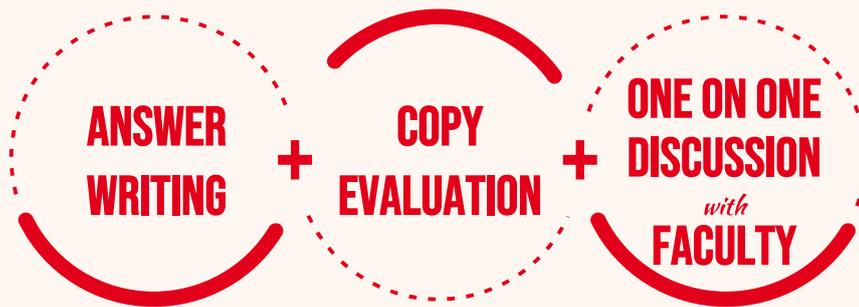
- ❧ Bharat Mandapam
- ❧ Archaeologists discover 'crystal quartz weighing unit'
- ❧ Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control & Discipline) Bill-2023
- ❧ International Day of the World's Indigenous People 2023
- ❧ Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2023
- ❧ Haryana plans dam at Hathnikund to curb Yamuna fury
- ❧ Digital Health Incentives Scheme
- ❧ Govt launches 'Study in India' portal
- ❧ Formation of 19 new districts approved in Rajasthan
- ❧ Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)
- ❧ CAG audit exposes multiple frauds in PMJAY
- ❧ Forest land diverted increased in five years: Govt.
- ❧ Himalayan vulture bred in captivity
- ❧ 5% of birds in India are endemic: Report
- ❧ Iraq eliminates Trachoma
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## BHARAT MANDAPAM

**Context:** The recently inaugurated Bharat Mandapam, which is going to host the G20 Summit in New Delhi, is a symbol of India's idea of 'the whole earth is one family'.

### About Bharat Mandapam:

- ◆ The international exhibition-cum-convention Centre (IECC) complex named Bharat Mandapam is located at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi.
- ◆ The IECC complex is India's largest MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) destination and features state-of-the-art facilities, including a convention centre, exhibition halls, and an amphitheatre.



- ◆ The architectural design of the convention centre incorporates elements from India's traditional art and culture, representing the nation's rich heritage and modern achievements.
- ◆ The term 'Bharat Mandapam' is derived from Lord Basaveshwara's concept of 'Anubhav Mantapa,' which was a significant institution in the 12th century.
- ◆ Anubhav Mantapa is considered one of the earliest parliaments in human history, where poets and socio-spiritual reformers known as Sharanas discussed and deliberated on various reforms.
- ◆ The new complex is one of India's largest and among the world's biggest convention centres.

### G20 and India's presidency:

- The G20, or Group of Twenty, is an intergovernmental forum of the world's 20 major developed and developing economies, making it the premier forum for international economic cooperation.
- With more than 12,300 delegates from over 110 nations, the in-person participation in India's G20 Presidency is the largest ever hosted by any G20 country so far.

- Throughout India's Presidency, more than 200 meetings in around 60 cities across India are still being planned, making it the widest geographical spread.
- India announced Srinagar as the venue for the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting which took place from May 22-24.
- Among the 15 institutions in the country chosen to host Youth-20 and Civil -20 events which were organized in connection with India's G-20 Presidency, the University of Kashmir (KU) was one of them.
- It is for the first time in the past 70 years that J-K hosted an international event like G-20.

## ARCHAEOLOGISTS DISCOVER 'CRYSTAL QUARTZ WEIGHING UNIT'

**Context:** Archaeologists working at Keeladi, a historic excavation site located near Madurai in Tamil Nadu, have unearthed a crystal quartz weighing unit from the Sangam era.

### Highlights of the finding:

- ◆ The quartz weighing unit, found 175 cm beneath the ground, is the first of its kind since excavations began in Keeladi in 2014.



- ◆ The quartz unit is probably from a period between 600 BC to 2nd century AD.
- ◆ The unit measures 2 cm in diameter, 1.5 cm in height and weighs a mere 8 grams.
- ◆ The researchers claim that they were used for weighing purposes.
- ◆ These weighting units were not used for paddy or vegetables but for weighing high-value items such as gold, precious and semi-precious stones.

- ◆ **Crystals or mineral materials** are used as **weighing units** because they give accurate results and do not depend on the climate.
- ◆ Archaeologists also found terracotta hopscotch, an iron nail, black and red ware, and red slipped ware.
- ◆ Archaeologists also found an **earthen snake figurine**.

### About the site:

- ◆ Keeladi is a small hamlet in south Tamil Nadu, about 12 km southeast of the **temple city of Madurai**.
- ◆ It is located along the **Vaigai River**.
- ◆ In the **eight rounds of excavations**, including the first three by the ASI, over **18,000 artefacts** have been unearthed from the site and the unique artefacts will be on display at the museum to be opened soon.
- ◆ Unearthing of heaps of pottery suggest the existence of a pottery making industry, mostly made of locally available raw materials.
- ◆ Over 120 potsherds containing **Tamil Brahmi inscriptions** have been found.
- ◆ Over a thousand inscribed potsherds, found at Keeladi and other sites clearly suggest the **long survival of the script**.
- ◆ **Other major findings till now:**
  - ▶ Gold ornaments, copper articles, semi-precious stones, shell bangles, ivory bangles and ivory combs reflect the artistic, culturally rich and prosperous lifestyle of the Keeladi people.
  - ▶ **Agate and carnelian beads** suggest import through commercial networks while terracotta and ivory dice, gamesmen and evidence of hopscotch have been unearthed revealing their pastime hobbies.

### Significance of site excavations:

- ◆ The excavations here from 2015 prove that an **urban civilization existed in Tamil Nadu in the Sangam age** on the banks of the Vaigai River.
- ◆ Ongoing archaeological excavations in Keeladi and a few other sites in Tamil Nadu have extended the timeline of the **Sangam Era from 300 BCE to 600 BCE**.
- ◆ **Potential Linkages with Indus Valley:** The unearthed Keeladi artefacts have led academics to describe the site as part of the Vaigai Valley Civilization.
  - ▶ The findings have also invited comparisons with the Indus Valley Civilization while acknowledging the cultural gap of 1,000 years between the two places.

- ▶ The gap is filled with Iron Age material in south India, which serves as residual links.

### The Sangam Age:

- The word 'Sangam' is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word 'Sangha' which means a group of persons or an association.
- The **Tamil Sangam** was an **academy of poets** who flourished in three different periods and in different places under the **patronage of the Pandyan kings**.
- The **Sangam literature** which was largely consolidated from the **third Sangam**, throws information on **conditions of life of people around the beginning of the Christian era**.
- It deals with the **secular matter** relating to the public and social activities like **government, war charity, trade, worship, agriculture, etc.**
- Sangam literature consists of the **earliest Tamil works** (such as the Tolkappiyam), the ten poems (Pattupattu), the eight anthologies (Ettutogai) and the eighteen minor works (Padinenkilkanakku), and the three epics.

### INTER-SERVICES

### ORGANISATION (COMMAND, CONTROL & DISCIPLINE) BILL-2023

**Context:** Recently, the **Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control & Discipline) Bill-2023** was passed by the **Rajya Sabha**.

### About the Bill:

- ◆ The Inter-services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill, 2023, was introduced in Lok Sabha on March 15, 2023.
- ◆ The Bill seeks to empower the **commander-in-chief or the officer-in-command** of inter-services organisations in respect of service personnel who are subject to;
  - ▶ The Air Force Act, 1950
  - ▶ The Army Act, 1950
  - ▶ The Navy Act, 1957, and are serving under or attached to his command for the maintenance of discipline and proper discharge of their duties.

### Need of such a Bill:

- ◆ Currently, the commander-in-chief or the officer-in-command of inter-services organisations is not

empowered to exercise disciplinary or administrative powers over personnel belonging to other services.

- ◆ Only officers of the **respective services** are empowered to exercise disciplinary powers over the service personnel under their respective **Service Acts**.

### Highlights of the Bill:

- ◆ **Inter-services Organisation:** Existing Inter-services Organisations will be deemed to have been constituted under the Bill. These include the **Andaman and Nicobar Command, the Defence Space Agency, and the National Defence Academy**.
  - ▶ The central government may constitute an Inter-services Organisation which has personnel belonging to **at least two of the three services:** the army, the navy, and the air force.
  - ▶ These may be placed under the command of an Officer-in-Command.
  - ▶ These organisations may also include a **Joint Services Command**, which may be placed under the command of a Commander-in-Chief.
- ◆ **Control of Inter-services Organisations:** The Bill empowers the Commander-in-Chief or the Officer-in-Command of an Inter-services Organisation to exercise command and control over the personnel serving in or attached to it.
  - ▶ He would be responsible for **maintaining discipline and ensuring proper discharge** of duties by the service personnel.
- ◆ The **superintendence of an Inter-services Organisation** will be vested in the **central government**.
  - ▶ The government may also issue directions to such organisations on grounds of national security, general administration, or public interest.
- ◆ **Other forces under central government:** The central government may notify any force raised and maintained in India to which the Bill will apply. This would be in addition to **army, navy, and air force personnel**.

### Significance of the Bill:

- ◆ The Bill would pave the way for much **greater integration and jointness** among the three services and lay a strong foundation for creation of joint structures in times to come and further improve the functioning of the armed forces.
- ◆ The Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill is part of a series of steps being taken by the government to **strengthen the armed forces**.

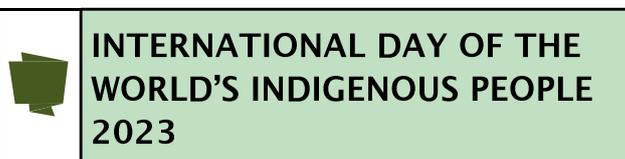
### Who are eligible to get appointed as chief of Inter-services?

#### Commander-in-Chief:

- ◆ The officers eligible to be appointed as the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command are:
  - ▶ A General Officer of the regular Army (above the rank of Brigadier)
  - ▶ A Flag Officer of the Navy (rank of Admiral of the Fleet, Admiral, Vice-Admiral, or Rear-Admiral)
  - ▶ An Air Officer of the Air Force (above the rank of group captain)
- ◆ He will be empowered to exercise all disciplinary and administrative powers vested in:
  - ▶ General Officer Commanding the Army
  - ▶ Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of a Naval Command
  - ▶ Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of an Air Command
  - ▶ Any other officer/authority specified in the service Acts, and (v) any other officer/authority notified by the government

#### Commanding Officer:

- ◆ The Bill provides for a Commanding Officer who will be in command of a unit, ship, or establishment. The officer will also perform duties assigned by the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command of the Inter-services Organisation.
- ◆ The Commanding Officer will be empowered to initiate all disciplinary or administrative actions over the personnel appointed, deputed, posted, or attached to that Inter-services Organisation.



**Context:** The International Day of the World's Indigenous People is observed on **August 9** every year to raise awareness and protect the rights of the world's indigenous population.

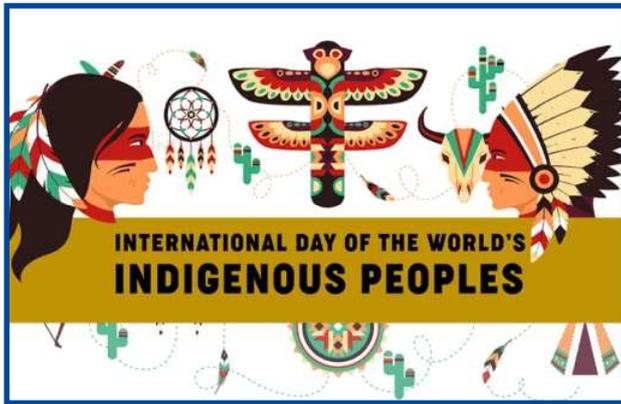
#### Background:

- ◆ Through a resolution, the **United Nations General Assembly** decided on December 23, 1994, that every year **August 9** will be celebrated as the **International Day of the World's Indigenous People**.

◆ This date was chosen as on the same day back in 1982 the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations convened its first meeting.

### About the Day:

◆ It is also known as **World Tribal Day**.



- ◆ The day recognizes the achievements and contributions that Indigenous people make to improve world issues such as environmental protection.
- ◆ **Theme for International Day of World's Indigenous People 2023:** "Indigenous Youth as Agents of Change for Self-determination."

On 9th August 2018, the first **National Report on the State of India's Tribal People's Health** was submitted to the Government of India by the **Expert Committee on Tribal Health**.

### Tribal Communities in India:

- ◆ Tribal people are concentrated in 809 blocks in India.
- ◆ Such areas are designated as the **Scheduled Areas**.
- ◆ Around 50% of India's tribal population (around 5.5 crore) live outside the Scheduled Areas, as a scattered and marginalised minority.

### Why Tribes need special recognition?

#### Government initiatives for Tribal Welfare

- Anamaya
- 1000 Springs Initiative
- Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna (PMAAGY)
- TRIFED
- Digital Transformation of Tribal Schools
- Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups
- Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana
- Eklavya Model Residential Schools

- ◆ Tribal people heavily depend on government-run public health care institutions, such as **primary health centres and hospitals**.
- ◆ There is a **27% to 40% deficit** in the number of such facilities, and 33% to 84% deficit in medical doctors in tribal areas.
- ◆ Government health care for the tribal people is **starved of funds** as well as of human resources.

### REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023

**Context** Parliament passed the **Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2023**.

### Key-highlights of the Bill

- ◆ The Bill seeks to amend the **Registration of Births and Deaths Act, of 1969** which provides for the regulation and registration of births and deaths.
- ◆ **Registrar General:** The Act provides for the appointment of a **Registrar-General, India** who may issue directions for registration of births and deaths.
  - ▶ The Registrar General will maintain a national database of registered births and deaths.
- ◆ **Applicability:** The Bill allows the use of a **birth certificate** as a single document for
  - ▶ admission to an educational institution
  - ▶ issuance of a driving licence, preparation of voter list, Aadhaar number
  - ▶ registration of marriage
  - ▶ appointment to a government job
- ◆ The Birth and Death certificates can be received within seven days.

### Significance of the legislation:

- ◆ **National and state-level database:** The legislation will help create a national and state-level database of registered births and deaths.
- ◆ **Transparency:** It will eventually would ensure efficient and transparent delivery of public services and social benefits and digital registration.
- ◆ **Better schemes and their delivery:** The data received will help in making social schemes for the benefit of the people.

## HARYANA PLANS DAM AT HATHNIKUND TO CURB YAMUNA FURY

**Context** To prevent a repeat of the July floods caused by the Yamuna in Delhi and in adjoining areas of the river in Haryana, the Haryana government is planning to build a dam at a cost of Rs 6,134 crore.

### What is the plan?

- ◆ The dam will have a 14-km-long reservoir and will be built 4.5 km upstream from the **Hathnikund Barrage in Yamunanagar district**.
- ◆ Nine villages will be displaced for its construction, besides shifting an 11-km stretch of NH-73.
- ◆ It will also submerge a large chunk of forest land, including areas in **Kalesar National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary**.
- ◆ The dam area also shares borders with Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Its reservoir will have a capacity of 10.82 lakh cusecs.



### About Hathnikund barrage

- ◆ Built on the **Yamuna river**, the Hathnikund barrage is located on the border of Haryana's Yamuna Nagar and Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

- ◆ Yamuna water is allocated to **Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan** as per an MoU dated May 12, 1994.
- ◆ Water from the Hathnikund barrage is released in three directions:
  - ▶ **Eastern Yamuna Canal:** diverted towards UP for irrigation purposes.
  - ▶ **Western Yamuna Canal:** diverts water to different parts of Haryana for irrigation purposes.
  - ▶ **Yamuna river:** After sending water to both the canals, there is a part that is left in the main river.
- ◆ The WYC takes Yamuna water to Haryana for irrigation and to Delhi for drinking. Its capacity is 20,000 cubic feet per second (CFS).

### Why can't the Haryana government store water at the HKB?

- ◆ Haryana have a barrage at Hathnikund and not a dam.
  - ▶ **A barrage** is a man-made structure built on water courses or rivers to facilitate and control diversion of water into canals for navigation or irrigation.
  - ▶ **A dam** collects water, especially to make a reservoir.
- ◆ The HKB's main function is to **divert Yamuna's water to the canals**.

### Benefits

- ◆ **Economic Significance:** Once the project is completed, the state will get a financial advantage of Rs 497 crore through availability of additional irrigation water, groundwater recharge and aquaculture, apart from generation of 250 MW electricity.
- ◆ **Improving intensity of irrigation water:** The water stored in the reservoir will improve intensity of irrigation water in the existing canals of **Western Yamuna Canal (WJC)**.
- ◆ **Flood-proofing:** After the execution of the project, flood water will be stored in the reservoir. It will not only save Delhi and Yamuna's adjoining areas in Haryana from floods.

## DIGITAL HEALTH INCENTIVES SCHEME

**Context:** The National Health Authority (NHA) has announced extension of its Digital Health Incentives Scheme (DHIS) under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) till December 31, 2023.

## What is Digital Health Incentives Scheme (DHIS)?

- ◆ The DHIS was launched on **January 1, 2023** and was operational from **April 2023**.
- ◆ The scheme is a part of the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)**.
  - ▶ While ABDM aims to make digital health services available and accessible to all citizens of our country, it intends to **incentivise healthcare facilities** to promote and support this adoption through the **Digital Health Incentive Scheme**.
- ◆ **Incentives:** Under the DHIS, incentives are provided to **hospitals and diagnostic labs** and to the providers of digital health solutions such as **Hospital/ Health Management Information System (HMIS)** and **Laboratory Management Information System (LMIS)** for adopting and enabling transformative digitization under the ABDM.

### Who all are eligible?

- All Health facilities like Clinics, Nursing Homes & Hospitals
  - Laboratory/Radiology diagnostics centres
  - **Digital Solution Companies** (Entities providing ABDM enabled digital solutions)
- ◆ Under the DHIS, the eligible health facilities and digital solutions companies shall be able to earn financial incentives of up to **Rs.4 crore** based on the number of **digital health records** created and linked to **ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account)** numbers of the patients.
  - ◆ It is anticipated that the DHIS advantages offered to the DSCs will contribute to cost reduction or will be transmitted further to the relevant healthcare facilities to pay their **digitisation costs**, etc.
  - ◆ **Digital Solution Companies (DSCs)** will be given an **incentive of 25%** of the incentive amount received by the eligible health facilities using their digital solutions.
  - ◆ For the ABHA linked transactions done by facilities **not eligible for direct incentives** (Clinics/ Small Hospitals/ Health Lockers/ Teleconsultation Platforms etc.), an incentive would be provided to Digital Solution Companies.

### Benefits of the scheme:

- ◆ **Earn incentives for Digitization:** Reimburse the expenses incurred for digitization to all the participating healthcare facilities, Digital Solution Companies.

- ◆ **Efficiency in Healthcare Delivery:** Seamless access to patient's longitudinal health records; Removes hassles in the healthcare process (registration, appointment, consultation, IPD admission, discharge, etc.)
- ◆ **Building a Robust Digital Health Ecosystem:** Building a robust digital health ecosystem across different levels of healthcare facilities.
- ◆ **Improved Quality of Care:** Evidence based, accessible, and good quality care. Patient's ease of access to digitized health records and improved healthcare delivery.



## GOVT LAUNCHES 'STUDY IN INDIA' PORTAL

**Context:** The Ministry of Education has launched the 'Study In India (SII)' portal to offer a one-stop solution for student registrations and visa applications, in line with vision of establishing India as a global education hub.

### About the Portal:

- ◆ **Study in India Portal** is a **one-stop platform** that will simplify international students' academic journey in India.
- ◆ It is a dedicated website that will provide comprehensive information about **the Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**.
- ◆ **Information:** The portal will provide comprehensive information about:
  - ▶ Indian Higher Education Institutions
  - ▶ academic facilities, research support, and related information
- ◆ It will also provide an **integrated one-stop solution** for the student registration and visa application processes.
- ◆ The new website will now have the provision for students to apply in **more than one institute/course of their choice**.
- ◆ **Courses:** Undergraduate (UG), postgraduate (PG), doctoral-level programmes, courses in Indian Knowledge systems like Yoga, Ayurveda, classical arts, etc.
- ◆ The portal is guided by the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.



- ▶ The **NEP 2020** envisages global institutions to be promoted through special efforts, research collaboration and student exchanges between Indian institutions.

The **UGC (Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Educational Institution to offer Twinning Joint Degree, and Dual Degree Programmes) Regulations, 2022** clearly brings forth various arrangements between Indian institutions and foreign institutions for academic collaboration.

### What is Study in India Programme?

- ◆ Study in India is a **flagship program** of the Government of India, under the aegis of the **Ministry of Education (MoE)**.
- ◆ **Overall Objectives:**
  - ▶ To increase the number of international students in India.
  - ▶ To promote India as the preferred study destination, providing affordable and quality education comparable with global standards
  - ▶ To contribute to improving the overall quality improvement in higher education
- ◆ The Study in India programme seeks to facilitate international students' access to these courses and showcase the country's academic excellence.
- ◆ **Partnership with Premier Education Institutes:** The Study in India programme involves partnership with educational institutes **fulfilling one of the following criteria:**
  - ▶ National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) ranking ( $\leq 100$ )
  - ▶ National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) accreditation score ( $> 3.01$ )
  - ▶ Institutes of National Importance (INI)

### Significance of the Portal:

- ◆ **Simplifying procedure of admission:** From **registration to visa approval** and selecting desired courses or institutions, the portal will simplify the entire journey of the international students wishing to study in India.
- ◆ **Exploring cultural exchanges:** The presence of international students will also benefit the domestic students by connecting them more closely to globalizing world and prepare them better from the global workplace.
- ◆ **Promoting Indian education system:** Implementation of NEP2020 has already initiated entrance of foreign universities in India and opening of international campuses of our premier institutions.



## FORMATION OF 19 NEW DISTRICTS APPROVED IN RAJASTHAN

**Context:** The Rajasthan government has approved a decision taken earlier for the formation of 19 new districts and three new divisions, taking the total number of districts in the country's largest State to 50.

### Key-highlights

- ◆ Earlier, Rajasthan has **31 Districts** which has now been **increased to 50**.
- ◆ These districts are categorized under **7 different divisions** of **Ajmer, Kota, Jaipur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, and Udaipur**.
- ◆ The districts of Rajasthan are segregated under separate divisions for ease of administration.
- ◆ As per new District List in Rajasthan, **new additions** are Anupgarh, Balotra, Beawar, Deeg Didwana, Kuchaman City, Dudu, Gangapur City, Jaipur North, Jaipur South, Jodhpur West, Kekdi, Kotputli, Khairthal, Neemkathana, Phalodi, Salumbar, Sanchore, Shahpura & Bhilwara.
- ◆ The last district added to the state of Rajasthan was **Pratapgarh** in 2008.

### Ram Lubhaya Committee

The State Cabinet approved the proposal of the high-level **Ram Lubhaya Committee** (constituted in 2019) for the creation of new districts and divisions.

### What is the Procedure to form a new District?

- ◆ The power to create **new districts or alter or abolish existing districts** rests with the **State government**.
- ◆ This can either be done through an **executive order or by passing a law** in the State Assembly.
- ◆ The Centre has **no role to play** in the alteration of districts or the creation of new ones. States are free to decide on this matter.
- ◆ **Name change:** If the state government wants to change the name of a district or a railway station, then the Home Ministry comes into the picture and must follow the following procedure;
  - ▶ The State government will propose a new name to a district and forward the proposal to the Home ministry.

- ▶ The Home Ministry will forward the proposal to other departments.
- ▶ After that, the departments such as the **Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences, and the Railway Ministry,** provide their clearance to the proposal of the state government.
- ▶ After examination of their replies, the state government receives a **no-objection certificate**. Then the name of the district changes.

Advantages of forming new districts	Associated challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better administration</li> <li>• Smaller district ensures better governance</li> <li>• Serve a large population</li> <li>• Bring administration closer to the people</li> <li>• New districts attract more district-specific schemes</li> <li>• Increase employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in expenditure and resources</li> <li>• Substitute for genuine decentralization</li> <li>• Increases cost of living in new districts</li> <li>• A Political move</li> <li>• Underutilization of administration</li> </ul>



## AMRIT BHARAT STATION SCHEME (ABSS)

**Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone virtually to revamp the 508 railway stations across the country with an investment of Rs.25, 000 crore under the Amrit Bharat Station scheme. Out of 508, 13 stations are listed in Karnataka.

### About the Scheme:

- ◆ The 'Amrit Bharat Station Scheme' is a new policy launched by the **Ministry of Railways**.
- ◆ The scheme envisages development of stations with a long term vision.
- ◆ The policy is based on **Master Planning** for long term and implementation of the same as per needs and demand of the station to station.
- ◆ This is in line with the government's vision of '**Naya Bharat**'.
- ◆ **Objectives:**
  - ▶ Transform the railway stations
  - ▶ Modernise the infrastructure with latest technologies, amenities and others from time to time
  - ▶ Enhancing the facilities beyond the Minimum Essential Amenities
  - ▶ Construction of Roof Plazas and City Centres at the station
  - ▶ Introduction of new amenities as well as upgradation and replacement of existing amenities
- ◆ The project will provide modern passenger amenities along with ensuring well-designed traffic circulation,

inter-modal integration and signage for the guidance of passengers.

- ◆ The design of the station buildings will be inspired by **local culture, heritage and architecture**.
- ◆ Amrit Bharat Station Scheme embodies a commitment to progress, convenience, and a brighter future for passengers.

### Key features of the scheme:

- ◆ **Elegant Station Building:** A new station building will redefine Station's architectural landscape, reflecting a modern and inviting design.
- ◆ **Focus on Swachh Bharat:** Keeping in step with the **Swachh Bharat mission**, the station will introduce a modular Sewage Treatment Plant, ensuring efficient sewage treatment and a cleaner environment.
- ◆ **Guidance and Information:** Modernized train indication boards and passenger-friendly signages will facilitate seamless navigation within the station premises.
- ◆ **Inclusivity:** All improvements will be designed to be divyangjan (specially-abled) friendly, ensuring equal access and convenience for all.

### Significance of the scheme:

- ◆ The modernization of so many stations will create a new atmosphere for development in the country as they will create a good first impression among the visitors.
- ◆ Upgraded stations will not only increase tourism but will also give a push to economic activities in the nearby areas.
- ◆ Also, '**One Station One Product**' scheme will help the artisans and will help in the branding of the district.
- ◆ Railways play a crucial role in giving momentum to the **economic growth of the country**.



## CAG AUDIT EXPOSES MULTIPLE FRAUDS IN PMJAY

**Context:** As per the audit findings released by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), multiple cases of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) has been found providing treatment for patients who had already been declared dead, as well as for thousands of people using the same Aadhaar number or invalid mobile phone number.

### Findings from the Audit:

- Due to the absence of adequate validation controls, errors were noticed in beneficiary databases, such as **invalid names, unrealistic date of birth, duplicate PMJAY IDs, and unrealistic size of family members in a household.**
- Patients earlier shown as '**dead**' continued to avail treatment under the scheme.
- The maximum number of such cases was in **Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jharkhand, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.**
- The minimum number of such cases was observed in the **Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Assam, Chandigarh, Manipur and Sikkim.**
- Penalties amounting to Rs.12.32 crore from 100 hospitals were pending in nine States.
- In **Andhra Pradesh and Punjab**, private hospitals were performing procedures reserved for public hospitals.

### About Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):

- PM-JAY is the world's largest health insurance/assurance scheme fully financed by the government.
- Launched in February 2018, it offers a sum insured of **Rs.5 lakh per family for secondary care** (which doesn't involve a super specialist) as well as **tertiary care (which involves a super specialist).**
- Under PMJAY, **cashless and paperless access** to services is provided to the beneficiaries at the point of service, that is, hospital.
- Health Benefit Packages** covers surgery, medical and day care treatments, cost of medicines and diagnostics.
- Packaged rates (Rates that include everything so that each product or service is not charged for separately).

### Nodal Agency:

- The **National Health Authority (NHA)** has been constituted as an autonomous entity under the Society Registration Act, 1860 for effective implementation of PM-JAY in alliance with state governments.
- The **State Health Agency (SHA)** is the apex body of the State Government responsible for the implementation of AB PM-JAY in the State.

- Funding pattern:** The funding for the scheme is shared – 60:40 for all states and UTs with their own legislature, 90:10 in Northeast states and Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal and Uttarakhand and 100% Central funding for UTs without legislature.

### Identification of beneficiaries

- AB-PMJAY identifies the beneficiary through **Aadhaar identification** wherein the beneficiary undergoes the process of mandatory **Aadhaar based e-KYC.**
- The details fetched from the Aadhaar database are matched with the source database and accordingly, the request for **Ayushman card** is approved or rejected based on the beneficiary details.
- The scheme only used **mobile numbers** to reach out to the beneficiaries in case of any need and for collecting feedback regarding the treatment, rather than for any verification purposes.



## FOREST LAND DIVERTED INCREASED IN FIVE YEARS: GOVT.

**Context:** According to the 'State of Forest Report 2021' of the Forest Survey of India, the India's forest cover is 71.37 million ha.

- The proportion of area diverted in five years may seem minuscule compared to India's total forest cover, mainly because of the ambiguous definition of forests used by the **Forest Survey of India (FSI).**

### Statics released for Forest cover:

- The **FSI's 'India State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2021'** which shows that 'forests' and 'trees outside recorded forest areas', put together, reported an increase of 2,261 sq. km (0.3%) last year compared to the previous assessment in 2019.
- The estimates were under the forest definition including 'forest' **as tea gardens, coconut plantations, urban built-up areas, native grasslands wrecked by invasive trees, and even sub-urbs desert shrubs.**

**About the information:**

- ◆ The diversion of around **90,000 hectares of forest land** for development projects was approved between January 2018 and April 2023.
- ◆ **State-wise data:**
  - ▶ The most was from Madhya Pradesh- 19730.36 ha
  - ▶ Odisha- 13304.79 ha
  - ▶ Arunachal Pradesh- 7448.34 ha
  - ▶ Gujarat- 8064.76 ha
  - ▶ Smaller states and Union Territories also such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Manipur recorded diversion of 100 ha and 603.75 ha respectively.
- ◆ **Concerns associated:** The large-scale diversion of notified forests is worrying.
- ◆ The proposals for diversion of forest land for **non-forestry purposes** are considered under the provisions of **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** on a case-to-case basis as per the rules and guidelines made thereunder.

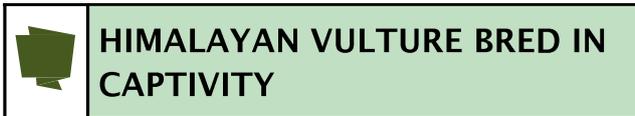
**Classification of Forest by FSI:**

- **Very Dense Forest:** Land with 70% or more canopy density.
- **Dense Forests:** All land areas with tree canopy density of 40% and above
- **Open Forests:** All land areas with tree canopy density between 10-40%
- **Tree Cover:** Isolated or small patches of trees less than 1 hectare and not counted as forest are counted as tree cover by putting together the crowns of individual patches and trees.

**What are the Issues With current Forest cover Data?**

- ◆ **Inclusion of Plantations in Forest Data:** Loss of natural forests remains invisible due to inclusion of plantations, orchards, urban housings as dense forests.
  - ▶ The SFR 2021, for example, reports 12.37% dense forest by including random green patches.
  - ▶ Plantation forests have trees of the same age, are more susceptible to fire, pests and epidemics, and often act as a barrier to natural forest regeneration.
  - ▶ Natural forests are old and therefore stock a lot more carbon in their body and in the soil and support more biodiversity.
  - ▶ Plantations can grow a lot more and faster than old natural forests which mean plantations can achieve additional carbon targets faster.

- ▶ But compared to natural forests, plantations are often harvested more readily, defeating carbon goals in the long term.
- ◆ **Compensatory Afforestation:** The applicants for diverting forest land in a hilly or mountainous state with green cover covering more than two-thirds of its geographical area, or in a state/UT with forest cover covering more than one-third of its geographical area, will be able to take up compensatory afforestation in other states/UTs where the cover is less than 20%.
- ◆ **Allows Private Plantations:** The rules make a provision for private parties to cultivate plantations and sell them as land to companies who need to meet compensatory afforestation targets.
  - ▶ Prior to the updated rules, state bodies would forward documents to the FAC that would also include information on the status of whether the forest rights of locals in the area were settled.
- ◆ **Allows building in Forests:** Right to construct structures for bonafide purposes including forest protection measures and residential units (up to an area of 250 sq. meters as one-time relaxation).



**Context:** Researchers have recorded the first instance of captive breeding of the Himalayan vulture in India at the Assam State Zoo, Guwahati.

**About Himalayan Vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*):**

- ◆ The Himalayan vulture is a **common winter migrant** to the Indian plains, and a resident of the high Himalayas.
- ◆ **IUCN Status:** Near Threatened
- ◆ They are one of the **two largest Old World vultures and true raptors**.
- ◆ The **Himalayan vulture** mostly lives the **Himalayas on the Tibetan plateau** (India, Nepal and Bhutan, central China and Mongolia) and is also found in the **Central Asian mountains** (from Kazakhstan and Afghanistan in the west to western China and Mongolia in the east).

**Global Vulture Status and Conservation:**

- ◆ Vulture numbers saw a decline as much as 90% in some species in India since the 1990s in one of the most drastic declines in bird populations in the world.

◆ Between the 1990s and 2007, numbers of three presently critically-endangered species, the Oriental white-backed, long-billed and slender-billed vultures decreased massively with 99% of the species having been wiped out.

◆ The number of red-headed vultures, also critically-endangered now, declined by 91% while the Egyptian vultures by 80%.

<b>VULTURES IN INDIA</b>			
India shelters about nine species of vultures, but most of them face the danger of extinction.			
<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Name of of Vulture Species</b>	<b>IUCN Status</b>	<b>Pictorial Representation</b>
1.	Oriental White-backed Vulture (Gyps Bengalensis)	Critically Endangered	
2.	Slender-billed Vulture (Gyps Tenuirostris)	Critically Endangered	
3.	Long-billed Vulture (Gyps Indicus)	Critically Endangered	
4.	Egyptian Vulture (Neophron Perenopterus)	Endangered	
5.	Red-Headed Vulture (Sarcogyps Calvus)	Critically Endangered	
6.	Indian Griffon Vulture (Gyps Fulvus)	Least Concerned	

7.	Himalayan Griffon ( <i>Gyps Himalayensis</i> )	Near Threatened	
8.	Cinereous Vulture ( <i>Aegypius Monachus</i> )	Near Threatened	
9.	Bearded Vulture or Lammergeier ( <i>Gypactus Barbatus</i> )	Near Threatened	

### Why vultures matter?

- ◆ **Nature's cleanup:** Vultures feeding on dead animals help areas getting rid of carcasses.
- ◆ **Healthy environment:** Vultures also play a valuable role in keeping wildlife diseases in check.
- ◆ **Keystone species:** Contribution in Detritus food chain and acts as a keystone species.

### Important Terms

- **Keystone species:** A keystone species is an organism that helps define an entire ecosystem. Without its keystone species, the ecosystem would be dramatically different or cease to exist altogether. Keystone species have low functional redundancy.
- **Detritus Food chain:** It is the type of food chain that starts with dead organic materials. The dead organic substances are decomposed by microorganisms.
  - ▶ The organisms that feed on dead organic matter or detritus are known as **detritivores or decomposers.**

### Threats to Vulture population:

- ◆ **Diclofenac Contamination:** Vultures feed on carcasses of dead farm animals and get exposed to the non-steroid anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), diclofenac which causes kidney failure and death.
- ◆ 99% of the mortality of Oriental.

- ◆ White-backed, slender-billed and long-billed vultures are due to diclofenac.
- ◆ **Habitat Loss:** Vultures populations are declining due to habitat loss, food unavailability, and electrocution.
- ◆ Degradation of nesting sites due to cutting down of trees for agriculture, urbanization, and firewood, fire and grazing is a threat to vultures.
- ◆ **Low Food Availability:** Dead animals are the primary source of food for vultures, but the practice of throwing carcasses in the open has almost vanished, leading to a decrease in available food.
- ◆ **Bioaccumulation:** means an increase in the concentration of a chemical in a biological organism over time, compared to the chemical's concentration in the environment.

### Conservation efforts:

- ◆ Four **Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre** has been established by **Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)** at Pinjore in Haryana, Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, Rani in Assam, and Rajabhatkhawa in West Bengal are involved in conservation breeding of the
  - ▶ White-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)
  - ▶ Slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*)
  - ▶ Indian vulture (*Gyps indicus*)

- ◆ **Vulture Conservation 2020-2025:** A Vulture Care Centre (VCC) was set up at Pinjore, Haryana in 2001 to study the cause of deaths of vultures in India.
- ◆ **The Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre** in Pinjore is the world's largest facility within the state's Bir Shikargah Wildlife Sanctuary for the breeding and conservation of Indian vulture species.
- ◆ **SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction):** The consortium of like-minded, regional and international organizations, created to oversee and coordinate conservation, campaigning and fundraising activities to help the plight of south Asia's vultures.
- ◆ **Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary:** The vulture sanctuary was officially set up in 2012, but the long-billed, Egyptian and white-backed vultures have been roosting in the hills of Ramanagara for several decades. These are the three species found in Ramanagara out of the nine found in India.

 **5% OF BIRDS IN INDIA ARE ENDEMIC: REPORT**

**Context:** A publication, titled '75 Endemic Birds of India', which was released on the 108th foundation day of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), points out that about 5% of birds found in the country are endemic and are not reported in other parts of the world.

**India's bird species:**

- ◆ India is home to **1,353 bird species**, which represents approximately **12.40%** of global bird diversity.
- ◆ Of these **1,353 bird species**, **78 species**, which is around 5%, are endemic to the country.

**About the Publication:**

- ◆ The publication highlights the importance of **endemic bird species** in the country.
- ◆ The details of endemic bird species contained in the publication include **etymology (meanings of scientific names)** and their **historical relevance** along with vital facts such as **subspecies' differences, distinguishing traits, preferred habitats, breeding habits, and food preferences.**
- ◆ **Objective:** The publication is aimed at making information about endemic birds of the country available to everyone, and highlighting the **efforts to conserve species** that are found only in restricted areas.

As, endemic species are **restrictive in nature**, it is important that their habitats need to be conserved.

**Highlights from the Publication:**

- ◆ Around 75 bird species belong to **11 different orders, 31 families, and 55 genera, and exhibit remarkable distribution patterns** across various regions in India.
- ◆ The highest number of endemic species has been recorded in the **Western Ghats**, with 28 bird species.
- ◆ Some of the rare species recorded in the country's **bio-geographic hotspot** are;

<p><b>The Malabar Grey Hornbill (<i>Ocyrocus griseus</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This hornbill is endemic to India, and found in the Western Ghats of south-west India.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Malabar Parakeet (<i>Psittacula columboides</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is restricted to the forests of India's Western Ghats.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Ashambu Laughing Thrush (<i>Montecincla meridionalis</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a species of bird in the family Leiothrichidae. It is found in the Western Ghats in southern Kerala and southern Tamil Nadu.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>The White-bellied Sholakili (<i>Sholicola albiventris</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is endemic to the Shola forests of the higher hills of southern India.</li> </ul>	

- ◆ Amongst them **25 bird species** are endemic to the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**. Bird species which are only found in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are:
  - ▶ Nicobar Megapode (*Megapodius nicobariensis*)
  - ▶ Nicobar Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis klossi*)
  - ▶ Andaman Crane (*Rallina canningi*)
  - ▶ Andaman Barn Owl (*Tyto deroepstorffi*)

- ◆ Four species of birds are endemic to the **Eastern Himalayas**, and one each to the **Southern Deccan plateau and central Indian forest**.
- ◆ Of the 78 endemic species, 25 are classified as **'Threatened'** by the IUCN.
  - ▶ Three species are listed as **'Critically Endangered'**.
  - ▶ Five of the endemic birds in India are categorised as **'Endangered'**, and
  - ▶ 17 as **'Vulnerable'**,
  - ▶ While 11 are categorised as **'Near Threatened'** on the IUCN Red List.

### BIRD SANCTUARIES IN NEWS

Bird Sanctuaries	State	Description
• <b>Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary (Keoladeo National Park)</b>	Rajasthan	• It is one of the most important bird sanctuaries in India and a <b>UNESCO World Heritage Site</b> , known for its migratory bird species and being a critical breeding ground for several bird species.
• <b>Sultanpur National Park</b>	Haryana	• It is a popular bird watching destination near Delhi and is important for the conservation of bird species like the <b>Siberian Crane</b> .
• <b>Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary</b>	Goa	• Named after India's most famous ornithologist, it is a biodiversity hotspot for several endemic bird species and a <b>crucial habitat for migratory birds</b> .
• <b>Chilika Lake Bird Sanctuary</b>	Odisha	• It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and a vital habitat for a variety of migratory and resident bird species, including the <b>endangered Irrawaddy dolphin</b> .
• <b>Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary</b>	Gujarat	• It is a wetland sanctuary that supports a variety of migratory and resident bird species and is an important stopover for birds on the <b>Central Asian Flyway</b> .



### IRAQ ELIMINATES TRACHOMA

**Context:** Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that, Iraq has now joined the league of 17 other countries that have eliminated 'trachoma', which is world's leading infectious cause of blindness.

The 17 other countries that have eliminated trachoma are: **Benin, Cambodia, China, Gambia, Ghana, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Togo and Vanuatu.**

#### About Trachoma:

- ◆ It is a **neglected tropical disease (NTD)**.
- ◆ It starts as a **bacterial infection** caused by **Chlamydia trachomatis** and can be easily treated.
- ◆ Over time, it causes the eyelashes to be pushed inward into the eye. So with every blink, they brush against the eyeball.
- ◆ The advanced form of trachoma is **called trichiasis**. Over time, if it is not treated, trichiasis can lead to **blindness**.

- ◆ **Cause of occurrence:** The disease thrives where there are **water shortages, poor sanitation and infestations of flies**, which are considered **physical vectors of the disease**.
- ◆ The disease is still known to be endemic in six countries of the **WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region**, but there has been substantial progress in the number of people in the region requiring antibiotic treatment for **trachoma elimination purposes**, which has fallen from 39 million in 2013 to 6.9 million in April 2023.

#### What is Neglected Tropical Disease?

- ◆ NTDs are a group of infections that are most common among marginalized communities in the developing regions of **Africa, Asia and the Americas**.
- ◆ They are caused by a variety of pathogens such as **viruses, bacteria, protozoa and parasitic worms**.
- ◆ NTDs are especially common in tropical areas where people do not have access to clean water or safe ways to dispose of human waste.
- ◆ **Examples of NTDs are:** snakebite envenomation, scabies, yaws, trachoma, Leishmaniasis and Chagas disease etc.
- ◆ These diseases generally receive less funding for **research and treatment than malaises like tuberculosis, HIV-AIDS and malaria**.

### NTD burden in India:

- India has the world's largest absolute burden of at least **10 major NTDs**, including hookworm, dengue, lymphatic filariasis, leprosy, visceral leishmaniasis or kala-azar and rabies.
- Of the **12-13 NTDs** existing in India only dengue, rabies, snakebite and leprosy are notifiable.
- **The most common NTDs in India:** Lymphatic Filariasis, Visceral Leishmaniasis, Rabies, Leptospirosis, Dengue and Soil-Transmitted Helminth Infections (STH).

### How Iraq achieved it?

- ◆ Iraq established its **national trachoma programme in 2012** to coordinate the final domestic push against the disease.
- ◆ A **trachoma surveillance system** was developed to detect and manage cases within secondary and tertiary eye care facilities, as well as through school pre-enrollment and school eye screening programmes conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

### WHO's strategy to eliminate Trachoma:

- ◆ To eliminate trachoma as a public health problem, WHO recommends **the SAFE strategy**, a comprehensive approach to reduce transmission of the causative organism, clear existing infections and deal with their effects
- ◆ **The SAFE strategy includes:**
  - ▶ Surgery to treat the blinding stage (trachomatous trichiasis)
  - ▶ Antibiotics to clear the infection, particularly the antibiotic azithromycin
  - ▶ Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvement, particularly improving access to water and sanitation



## HAVANA SYNDROME

**Context** The Central government has told the Karnataka High Court that it will look into the matter of the 'Havana Syndrome' in India, in response to a Bengaluru resident's recent petition.

### What is Havana Syndrome?

- ◆ Havana Syndrome refers to a **set of mental health symptoms** that are said to be experienced by **United States intelligence and embassy officials** in various countries.
- ◆ It is worth noting that in general, the word 'syndrome' simply means a set of symptoms.
- ◆ It **does not mean a unique medical condition**, but rather a set of symptoms that are usually experienced together whose origins may be difficult to confirm.
- ◆ **Involved symptoms:** hearing certain sounds without any outside noise, nausea, vertigo and headaches, memory loss and balance issues.
- ◆ The syndrome **traces its roots to Cuba in late 2016**.

### What are the causes of Havana Syndrome?

- ◆ No one is entirely sure.
- ◆ But initially during the Cuban experience, being in a country that had been hostile to the US for over five decades, the suspicion was on Cuban intelligence or a section within the Cuban establishment that did not want US-Cuba relations to normalise.
- ◆ **Sonic attack:** It was then speculated to be a "**sonic attack**".

### About Sonic attack

- Sonic attacks are created by "**long-range acoustic devices**" that are often used over the open water, where they can be unleashed across greater distances without losing volume.
- They can result in hearing loss or brain damage.

- ◆ **Microwaves Weapon:** However, further study by scientists in the US and medical examination of the victims began to suggest that they may have been subjected to **high-powered microwaves** that either damaged or interfered with the **nervous system**.

### Microwaves Weapon

- **Greater exposure to high-powered microwaves** is said not only to interfere with the body's sense of balance but also to impact memory and cause permanent brain damage.
- **Low levels of microwaves** are also emitted from mobile phones but they are not targeted.

- ◆ However, there are no conclusive evidence.



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## Section D [QUIK BYTES]

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- ☞ Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951)
- ☞ Balladeer Gaddar (1997-2023)

## Tamil Manuscripts found in Northern Italy



Recently, **Palm manuscripts** from the **18th Century** titled '**Gnanamuyarchi**' have been discovered in an **Armenian monastery** in Northern Italy.

### Key-highlights:

- The monastery had categorised the manuscripts as '**Indian Papyrus Lamulic Language–XIII Century**', and the authorities were not aware that it had been **written in Tamil**.
- Those in charge of the monastery are of the opinion that the **Armenians in Chennai could have brought the manuscripts to Italy**.
- This is a prose text from the early 18th Century (likely the 1720s) and has been printed several times in the 19th Century by the **Mission Press** in Puducherry.

### When Armenian's came to India?

- According to literary evidence, Indian settlements in Armenia existed as early as **149 BC**.
- Thomas Cana is said to be the **first Armenian** to have landed on the **Malabar coast in 780 AD**.
- Long before the **Dutch and the English** appeared in India, a few Armenian traders had **come to Agra** during the Mughal Empire.
- In the **16th Century**, while fleeing persecution by the **Ottoman Turks**, Armenian community of merchants found its way **into Madras**, trading in **spices and silks**.
- The **oldest tombstone** of an Armenian found in Madras is dated 1663.
- Many were employed at the **East India Company**, which later granted land to the community to build a church.
- Around the 1950s, many Armenians started moving to other countries and only a few stayed.
- Those that remain in the city today are Armenians who have moved to Chennai, married into families here, and stay on because of strong ties with the city.

## Malabar exercise

Australia to host latest edition of 10-day Malabar exercise for first time.

### Key-highlights

- **Edition:** 31<sup>st</sup>
- **Participants:** India, Australia, Japan and the U.S
- Australia was included as a permanent member of Ex. Malabar in 2020 amid the stand-off with China in Eastern Ladakh.
- **Location:** The exercise will take place in a large designated area, the **East Australian exercise area**, and will have a **harbour and sea phase**.
- Exercise Malabar will be followed by **AUSINDEX**, the India-Australia bilateral naval exercise.
- Fielding



- **Australia:** HMAS Choules and HMAS Brisbane
- **Indian Navy:** INS Kolkata and INS Sahyadri
- **The US and Japan** are sending in a warship each

**Link between Malabar and Quad**

- Malabar and the Quad (India, the United States, Japan, and Australia) are different and the latter was not a military grouping.
- However, **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** has emerged as a key focus area for the Quad with the four countries announcing an **Indo-Pacific MDA** to assist countries in the region.

**About Malabar Exercise**

- It began as a **bilateral exercise** between India and the U.S. in 1992.
- Now, it is a **multilateral war-gaming naval exercise**.
- It gained further prominence with joining of the navies of **Australia and Japan**.

**INTERPOL Global Academy Network**



The **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** Academy of India took a significant step towards enhancing international cooperation and bolstering law enforcement efforts by officially joining the **INTERPOL Global Academy Network**.

**INTERPOL Global Academy Network:**

- INTERPOL Global Academy Network was launched in 2019.
- This is led by **INTERPOL's Capacity Building and Training Directorate** and aims to lead a global approach to **law enforcement training**.
- By assisting INTERPOL in delivering specialized training on its policing capabilities, offering programmes of continuing education, jointly developing and delivering new training programmes, and collaborating on joint research projects, Network members support INTERPOL in expanding up skilling opportunities for law enforcement around the globe.

**About INTERPOL:**

- The International Police Organization is commonly known as **Interpol**.
- It is an **international organization** facilitating international police cooperation against cross-border terrorism, trafficking, and other crime.
- INTERPOL has **194 member countries**, making us the world's largest police organization.
- All decisions regarding the activities of INTERPOL are made by the **General Assembly** which is the supreme governing body which meets annually.
- It is an **independent international organization**.
- **Headquartered:** Lyon in France.

- It was founded in 1923.
- Each country hosts an INTERPOL National Central Bureau (NCB), which links national police with global network. In India, CBI is the NCB.

### Assam Rifles



Recently, the Assam Rifles were removed from key checkpoint in Manipur.

#### About:

- Assam Rifles is one of the **six central armed police forces (CAPFs)** under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- While its administrative control is with the MHA, its operational control is with the Indian Army which comes under **the Ministry of Defence (MoD)**, making Rifles the only paramilitary force with a dual control structure.
  - ▶ The other forces being the **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)**, the **Border Security Force (BSF)**, the **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)**, the **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)** and the **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)**.
- It is tasked with the maintenance of law and order in the North East along with the Indian Army and also guards the **Indo-Myanmar border** in the region.

### Godhan Nyay Yojana



Recently, the **Chhattisgarh government** has transferred more than **Rs.15 crore** to cattle-rearers, women SHGs and '**gauthan**' committees as a part of his government's flagship **Godhan Nyay Yojna (GNY)** in online mode.

#### About the scheme:

- The **Godhan Nyay Yojna (GNY)** was launched in 2020 under which cow dung is procured at **Rs.2 per kilogram** at gauthans and is used to prepare vermicompost.
- A total of Rs.541.66 crore has been given so far to the beneficiaries under the GNY.
- The state government also started procuring cow urine at **Rs.4 per kilogram**.
- **Goal of Godhan Nyaya Yojana:** Increase in the income of animal herders, restriction on livestock movement & open grazing, promotion of use of organic fertilizers & reducing the use of chemical fertilizers, availability of organic fertilizers at the local level, strengthening of local self-help groups/employment opportunities for unemployed youths/gaushalas, help in increasing the fertility of the land and availability of chemical fertilizers.

### G20 EMPOWER summit

The G20 EMPOWER Summit has begun in Gandhinagar to draw **attention to women-led development**.



**About:**

- In the summit Union Minister for Women and Child Development and Minority Affairs, addressed the **importance of TechEquity**, a Digital Inclusion platform under India's G20 Presidency.
- She stressed its role in empowering women globally, especially in education and STEM careers.
- The summit introduced **the Playbook**, focusing on grassroots achievements by women—stories that may have otherwise remained hidden.
- The summit launched a platform to **promote digital literacy, financial literacy, and technical skills for women**.
- Available in 120 languages, the platform aims to reach one million users worldwide.
- The private sector was urged to take an active role, beyond finance, in mentoring and enabling growth.
- The alliance also revealed a mentorship platform to enhance collaboration.

**Flash flood in Uttarakhand**



Recently, Twelve people have gone missing after a **flash flood** occurred near Gaurikund on the **Kedarnath yatra route**.

**What are Flash Floods?**

- Flash Floods can be caused by a number of things, but is most often due to **extremely heavy rainfall** from thunderstorms.
- Flash Floods can occur due to **Dam or Levee Breaks, and/or Mudslides (Debris Flow)**.

**Reasons of occurrence:**

- Urban Areas are also prone to flooding in **short time-spans** and, sometimes, rainfall (from the same storm) over an urban area will cause flooding faster and more-severe than **in the suburbs or countryside**.
- The impervious surfaces in the urban areas do not allow water to infiltrate the ground, and the water runs off to the low spots very quickly.

**Factors affecting flash floods:**

- The intensity of the rainfall, the location and distribution of the rainfall, the land use and topography, vegetation types and growth/density, soil type, and soil water-content.

**Consequences:**

- Flash Flooding occurs so quickly that people are caught off-guard.
- Their situation may become dangerous if they encounter high, fast-moving water while traveling.

## National Handloom Day



National Handloom Day is commemorated annually on **7 August**.

### About

- It is the day when the nation comes together to celebrate its **35 lakh handloom workers**.
- Women play an important role in the handloom sector as over **70% of all weavers and allied workers being women**.
- The date connects with the independence struggle when **Mahatma Gandhi** launched the **Swadeshi Movement** in 1905 to encourage indigenous industries and in particular handloom weavers.
- **e-portal of 'Bhartiya Vastra evam Shilp Kosh'**: It is a recently launched **Repository of Textiles and Crafts** that has been developed by the **National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT)**.

### Swadeshi Movement

- The Swadeshi Movement, now known as 'Make in India' campaign was officially proclaimed on August 7, 1905 in Bengal.
- Boycott movement was also launched along with the Swadeshi movement.
- The movements included using goods produced in India and burning British-made goods.
- **Bal Gandadhar Tilak** encouraged **Swadeshi and Boycott movement** after the British government decided the partition of Bengal.

## Russia to launch first moon lander Luna-25



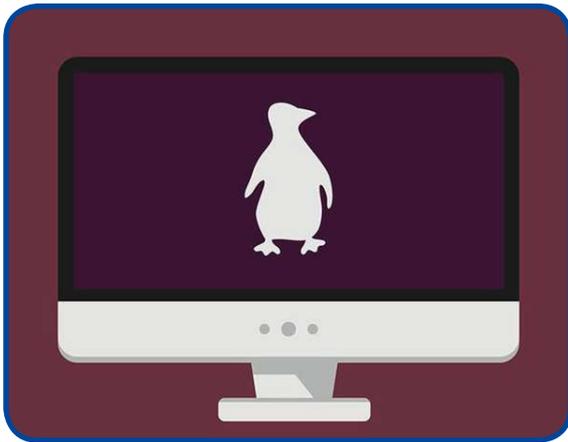
Russia is set to launch its **first lunar landing spacecraft** on August 11, 2023.

- It might be on track to either match or narrowly surpass **Chandrayaan-3's** anticipated lunar landing.

### About Luna-25 mission:

- The Luna-25 spacecraft, weighing **1.8 tons and carrying 31 kg** of scientific equipment, will spend five to seven days in lunar orbit.
- The Luna-25 mission, which will take off from the **Vostochny cosmodrome**.
- The primary objective of the lunar lander is to reach the Moon's southern polar area, where it will conduct research on the polar regolith's composition, as well as study the plasma and dust elements present in the lunar polar exosphere.
- The emergence of Luna-25 marks a notable shift in **Russia's lunar aspirations**, as the country seeks to **collaborate with China** in the intensified global competition to conquer the Moon's terrain.

## OS Maya



In the face of increasing cyber and malware attacks on defence as well as critical infrastructure across the country, the **Defence Ministry** has decided to replace the **Microsoft Operating System (OS)** in all computers connected to the Internet with a new **OS, Maya**, based on **open-source Ubuntu** developed locally.

### About OS Maya:

- Maya has the interface and all functionality like Windows and users will not feel much difference as they transition to it.
- The direction has been given to **install Maya** on all computers connected to the Internet.
- Currently, Maya is being installed only in **Defence Ministry** systems and not on computers connected to the networks of the three Services.
- Maya was developed by government development agencies within six months.
- Maya would prevent malware attacks and other cyberattacks.

### Ubuntu

- Ubuntu is a **Linux distro based on Debian**.
- It is suitable for **cloud computing, servers, desktops, and internet of things (IoT) devices**.
- The main difference between **Linux and Ubuntu** is that the former is an operating system family based on Unix, while Ubuntu is a Linux distribution.

## Voyager mission



More than a week after the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** lost communication with Earth's longest-running space probe, **Voyager 2**, has detected 'a signal' from the spacecraft.

### About Voyager 2 mission:

- Voyager 2 is the second spacecraft to enter interstellar space — the region that lies outside the impact of our Sun's constant flow of material and magnetic field.
- The first was Voyager 1, sent to space.
- **Voyager 1 and Voyager 2** are identical spacecraft. Each of them is equipped with instruments to carry out **10 different experiments**.
- The instruments include **television cameras** — to take images of planets and other celestial bodies — infrared and ultraviolet sensors, magnetometers, plasma detectors, and cosmic-ray and charged-particle sensors.
- Fifteen months after its launch, **Voyager 1** reached **its first target planet, Jupiter**.
- Voyager 2 arrived at Uranus in 1986, becoming the first human-made object to fly past the aquamarine planet.
- After the Neptune encounter, Voyager 2, like Voyager 1, was put on the path to head out of the solar system.

## Lunar Codex Programme



The **Lunar Codex programme** is an ambitious initiative that seeks to fetch human creativity into the very fabric of the moon.

- It was spearheaded by **Samuel Peralta**.

### About:

- Lunar Codex is stored on **memory cards or laser etched** on **NanoFiche**, a 21st-century update on **film-based microfiche**.
- These will ensure that the art forms reach **the lunar surface safely**.
- This initiative is a **message to future generations** to remind them that **war, pandemics and economic crises** did not stop people from creating works of art.
- The collection of art is gathered **from 30,000 artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians from 157 countries**.
- **Capsules:** The art forms include images, magazines, books, podcasts, movies and music, which are divided into **four capsules**.
  - ▶ The first such capsule is known as the **Orion collection**, which has already flown around the moon when it launched on the Orion spacecraft as part of **NASA's Artemis 1 mission last year**.
- A series of lunar landers will take the **Lunar Codex capsules** to various destinations in craters at the **moon's South Pole** and a lunar plain called **Sinus Viscositatis**.

## Finger Minutiae Record – Finger Image Record (FMR-FIR) modality



**UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India)** is employing artificial intelligence-based technology to address fraud in the **Aadhaar-enabled Payment System (AePS)**.

- The technology is called **Finger Minutiae Record–Finger Image Record (FMR-FIR) modality**.

### What is FMR-FIR?

- FMR-FIR modality is an **Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning technology** used by **UIDAI** to prevent fraud in **Aadhaar-enabled Payment System (AePS)**.

### How does it work?

- It verifies the authenticity of fingerprints during authentication by combining finger minutiae (distinct ridge characteristics) and finger images.
- This technology helps detect cloned fingerprints, ensuring that only real fingerprints are used for verification, thus enhancing security and preventing fraud.

### Need:

- In FY2023, the total number of fraud cases in the banking system was 13,530.
- Of this, almost 49 per cent or 6,659 cases were in the digital payment – card/internet – category.

### Maggot Infection



Ninth Cheetah (Dhatri, the female cheetah) in **Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park** died due to Maggot Infection.

#### About Maggots

- Maggots are the **larvae of flies** and are typically found in **decaying organic matter**.
- They are **small and worm-like with pointed heads and no limbs**.
- Although they are typically no longer than 1 inch, as maggots feed and grow, they can become quite large.
- At first, they are soft and white in color, but as they mature, they turn gray or black and their bodies harden.

### AUV Neerakshi



An **autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV)** designed to detect mines and a **first of its kind** in the country was launched recently.

#### About

- Neerakshi is an **autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV)** designed to detect mines and a first of its kind in the country.
- The AUV named 'Neerakshi' is a collaboration of **Kolkata-based warshipmaker Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) Ltd and MSME entity AEPL**.
- It is the **2.1-metre long cylindrical unmanned vehicle** about a foot in diameter and weighing around 45 kg.

## SPECIES IN NEWS

### Ancient Peruvian whale



Researchers have identified a gigantic species named, **Perucetus colossus** bigger than the **extinct whale** from bones excavated more than a decade ago.

#### About:

- Perucetus colossus was an early whale from **Peru** that lived about 38-40 million years ago.
- It was a marine mammal built somewhat like a manatee that may have exceeded the mass of the blue whale.
- Perucetus is believed to have been around 20 meters (66 feet) long and to have weighed up to 340 metric tons.
  - ▶ In comparison, the heaviest blue whale ever recorded weighed 180 metric tons, according to **Guinness World Records**.
- **Main feature:** extreme weight, heavy skeleton, slow swimmer

### Indian eagle-owl

The Indian eagle-owl was classified as a species only in recent years, thus distinguishing it from the **Eurasian eagle-owl**. The Indian species is an imposing bird.

**About the Species:**

- The Bengal eagle-owl (*Bubo bengalensis*), also widely known as the Indian eagle-owl or rock eagle-owl, is a large horned owl species native to hilly and rocky scrub forests in the Indian Subcontinent.
- It is a nocturnal species, bigger in size and does not have a dependency on forests.
- They eat rats, bandicoots, and doves living in open scrubland and agricultural tracts.
- Nearby rocky perches and crags provide ideal settings for its nests.
- Conservation status:
  - ▶ **IUCN Red list:** Least Concern
- **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora):** Appendix II

**Yellow-Bellied Snake**

A rare yellow belly snake was seen on the coast of **Digha Bay of Bengal** amid huge tides recently.

**About the species:**

- **Scientific name:** *Pelamis platurus*
- The rare yellow belly snake is mainly found in the **Arabian Sea**.
- The side of the tail is like the paddle of a boat and the lower abdomen is yellow making it different from other reptile species.
- It is very poisonous and even **antivenom** does not work for snake bites.
- The intensity of the poison is so high that the person can die due to the snake bite.
  - ▶ In West Bengal, four species of venomous snakes are found i.e., **Kalach, Keute, Gokhro and Chandrabora**.
- Experts believe that once a **yellow-belly snake bites**, the human body becomes completely paralyzed.
- **IUCN Red List: Least Concern**

**Sea Snakes in India**

- There are 24 types of **sea snakes in India** and the yellow belly found in Digha is the most poisonous.

**LOCATION IN NEWS****Manas Tiger Reserve**

The **All India Tiger Estimation 2022** published in July has indicated that **western Assam's Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve** is moving from a **low- to high-tiger-density area**, but has found with almost 63% short of staff.



**About the reserve:**

- The Reserve is located in the Himalayan foothills in Assam.
- It is contiguous with the **Royal Manas National Park** in Bhutan.
- **River:** The Manas River flows through the west of the park.

**Other Tiger Reserves in Assam**

- Kaziranga
- Nameri
- Orang

- ▶ Manas is a major tributary of **Brahmaputra River**.
- It is a **UNESCO natural world heritage site**.
- **Significance:** The Park is known for its rare and endangered endemic wildlife such as the **Assam roofed turtle, hispid hare, golden langur and pygmy hog**. It is also famous for its population of wild water buffalo.
- **Species found:** The Greater One-Horned Rhino, Swamp Deer, Pygmy Hog and Hispid Hare, Golden Langur, Endangered Bengal Florican, and other unique and endangered species depend on the Manas National Park for vital and sustainable habitats.

**Red Sea**



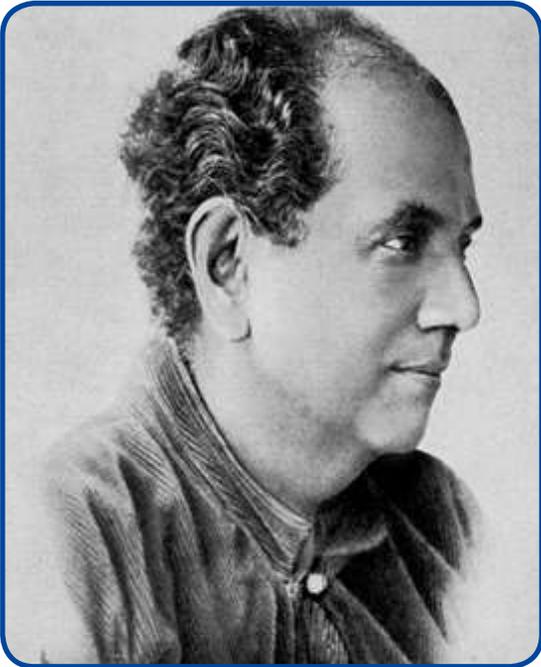
US deploys thousands of troops in **Red Sea** as tensions with Iran intensify.

**About Red Sea**

- It is the **world's northernmost tropical sea** and is also one of the most heavily travelled waterways.
- It is a part of the **Great Rift Valley**.
- It is a semi-enclosed, inlet (or extension) of the Indian Ocean between the continents of **Africa from Asia**.
- It is connected to the Arabian Sea and the **Indian Ocean** to the south through the **Gulf of Aden** and the narrow strait of **Bab el Mandeb**.
- The northern portion of the **Red Sea** is bifurcated by the **Sinai Peninsula** into the **Gulf of Aqaba** and the **Gulf of Suez**, where it is connected to the **Mediterranean Sea** via the **Suez Canal**.
- A total of 6 countries of Asia and Africa, border the Red Sea.
  - ▶ **East:** Yemen and Saudi Arabia
  - ▶ **North and West:** Egypt
  - ▶ **West:** Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti
  - ▶ The **Gulf of Aqaba** is bordered by Egypt along with Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.
- Besides these 6 countries, some other areas including **Somalia** are also often recognized as **Red Sea Territories**.

## PERSONALITY IN NEWS

## Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951)



152nd birth anniversary of Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) was celebrated recently.

**About**

- Abanindranath Tagore was born in **Jorasanko, Calcutta** on 7 August 1871.
- He was a **revolutionary artist** who played an instrumental role in establishing the **Bengal School of Art** which aimed at reviving traditional Indian art forms.
- It was Abanindranath who ushered in the **modern art movement in Bengal**.
- He was a supporter of **Swadeshi values** in India.
- He created first created the '**Indian Society of Oriental Art**' and later went on to establish the **Bengal school of Art**.
  - ▶ The **Indian Society of Oriental Art** was established to promote the **Abanindranath-style** on the national plane.
- **Famous Paintings:** *Passing of Shah Jahan, Bharat Mata, Radha Krishna, and Omar Khayyam.*
- **Major Publications:**
  - ▶ Some of his books like '**BudoAngla**', '**KhirerPutul**' and '**Rajkahini**' are **best examples of Bengali children's literature**.
  - ▶ His other books on art include **Banglar Brata, Bharatshilpe Murti, Bharatshilpa and Bharatshilper Sadanga** - all bearing the imprint of his great depth, profundity and simplicity.
- Victoria Memorial Hall is the custodian of the Rabindra Bharati Society collection, the single-largest collection of works by the artist.

## Balladeer Gaddar (1997-2023)

Balladeer and poet Gaddar, a prominent face of the **Telangana statehood movement** and an activist for the **rights of Dalits and marginalised people**, passed away recently in Hyderabad.

**About**

- Gaddar was born to a **Dalit couple** at **Toopran of Medak** in 1949.
- His real name was **Gummadi Vittal Rao**. He went on to become popular as 'Gaddar'.
- Gaddar was the most **famous social-cultural face** of the **Telangana statehood movement**, infusing it with his soulful songs and music.

Telangana was created as **India's 29th state** on 2nd June 2014.

- He took part in '**revolutionary politics**.' He went underground in the 1980s and became a member of the **CPI-ML (People's War)**.



- He was the founder of the **Jana Natya Mandali**, the cultural outfit of the People's War Group (PWG) of Naxalites, which later transformed into the **Communist Party of India (Maoist)**.
- He was a former Maoist ideologue.
- He was described in Telugu as '**praja yuddha nouka**' (warship of people's agitations).
- Gaddar rose to be renowned as the people's singer, highlighting people's issues in his songs. He also acted in a few movies, including '**Maa Bhoomi**' and '**Rangula Kala**'.
- Famous Songs
  - Bandenaka bandi katti
  - Podustunna Poddu Meeda Nadustunna Kaalama Poru Telanganama



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