

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 5
AUGUST
2023

MAINS

- GS-I**
 - ZONING OF FLOOD PLAINS IN INDIA
- GS-II**
 - INDIA, GREECE UPGRADE TIES TO 'STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP'
 - INDIA'S SPACE PROWESS AND GLOBAL SOUTH
 - RAJASTHAN'S GIG AND PLATFORM WORKERS WELFARE ACT
 - SHOULD CJI BE PART OF THE COMMITTEE 'SELECTING THE CEC'?
 - SUPREME COURT IN ARTICLE 370 CASE
- GS-III**
 - INDIA AND THE NORTHERN SEA ROUTE
 - EL NIÑO AND INDIA'S ECONOMIC RISK
 - COMMITTEE TO REVIEW REAL ESTATE ISSUES
 - MSP HIKES AND ISSUES
 - STATE OF INDIA'S BIRDS' REPORT 2023
 - NEWS MEDIA VERSUS OPENAI'S CHATGPT

PRELIMS

ART & CULTURE

- Seethakali folk art

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

- Aadhaar-based wage system
- India Smart Cities Awards 2022

ENVIRONMENT

- New Global Biodiversity

Framework Fund (GBF-Fund) ratified

- Kampala Declaration on climate change
- India, ADB to set up climate change and health hub

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- 'Cleantech', for an inclusive green future in India

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- Super Blue Moon
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- 'Vote from home' in Chhattisgarh
- Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi scheme
- Womb transplantation
- Mi-17 V5 helicopters
- Japan's H-IIA rocket
- Defence Ministry inks deal with Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam
- National Space Day
- Alladi Ramakrishnan
- Echidnas (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*)
- Red sand boa (*Eryx johnii*)
- Murmansk Port
- Chabahar port
- Palau
- Gabon

SPECIALS

- Ethical use of AI

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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]

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ZONING OF FLOOD PLAINS IN INDIA

Context: Punjab has been reeling under floods, especially villages along the rivers Sutlej, Beas, Ravi and Ghaggar are facing flood crisis. This has led to the need for zoning of India's flood plains.

Flood prone region in Punjab:

- * Areas along the rivers in the districts of **Ropar, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Moga, Ferozepur, Fazilka, Patiala, Sangrur, Mansa, Patiala, Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Taran Taran, Hoshiarpur, and Nawanshahr** all come under flood plains.

Four states (**Manipur, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand**) have adopted floodplain zoning on paper but implementation is limited.

What is a floodplain?

- * A river **expands and contracts** naturally over seasons.
- * A flood plain is **an area adjacent to the river** which normally gets flooded when the river swells.

India's Model Bill for Flood Plain Zoning, 1975, defines "floodplain" to include the **"water channel, flood channel, and that area of nearby lowland susceptible to flood inundation."**

Significance of floodplains:

- * **To Balance Water table:** They are also useful for **recharging groundwater levels** and maintaining the water table.
- * **Act as Natural Defences:** Well maintained flood plains, free from wanton construction and concrete, are natural defences against flooding farther inland.

What does Zoning means?

- * Floodplain zoning is a land use planning strategy that designates specific areas along rivers and water bodies for various uses based on their susceptibility to flooding.
- * **Aim:** To regulate development in these areas to minimize the potential damage and risks associated with floods.
- * Floodplain zoning has been recognised as a **"non-structural measure"** to mitigate flood disasters as development in the floodplains reduces the **carrying**

capacity of rivers and exacerbates the effects of floods.

How Zoning is helpful?

- * Zoning involves demarcating areas around rivers likely to be affected by floods of different magnitudes and frequencies, in order to specify the types of permissible developments there.
- * This is done so that whenever floods do actually occur, the damage is minimal.
- * Well-maintained flood plains are crucial to reduce the damage caused by deluges and recharge the groundwater table.

Guidelines by Government bodies:

- * **By NDMA:** As per guidelines on floodplain zoning by the **National Disaster Management Authority**, defence installations, industries, and public utilities like hospitals, electricity installations, water supply, telephone exchanges, aerodromes, railway stations, commercial centres, etc. should be located such that they are above the levels corresponding to a 100-year frequency or the maximum observed flood levels.
- * **By NGT:** According to the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)**, there should be **no construction within 500 m** area from the central lining of a river.

Adverse Effects:

- * Lack of zoning leads to encroachment and mismanagement of flood plains.
- * Unsuitable constructions push floods further inland and delay floodwater drainage.
- * Floodplain degradation affects soil fertility and quality.

INDIA, GREECE UPGRADE TIES TO 'STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP'

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Greece, described as "historic" as he was the first Indian prime minister to visit the country after 40 years, carried a significant business agenda. Both nations upgraded their relations to a 'strategic partnership' and pledged to double their trade by 2030.

Highlights of the visit:

- * **Upgraded status:** PM Modi's visit has upended this "comfortable" status quo by upgrading Indo-Greek ties to the level of a **strategic partnership** aiming to

deepen cooperation in areas of trade, investments, security, defence, energy, migration, infrastructure, tourism, connectivity and agriculture.

- * **Trade routes:** India discussed exploring alternative export routes post-Brexit, with a focus on **Piraeus**, Greece's largest port.
 - ▶ Athens is aiming to position itself as India's "gateway to the European Union", connecting it with Europe, Asia, and Africa.
- * **Trade:** During the meeting, Modi highlighted the goal of doubling bilateral trade by 2030 and announced an agreement in the field of agricultural production.
- * From now, India and Greece will have an **institutional platform** for dialogue between their national security advisers.

- * The two sides further decided to speedily finalize a **mobility and migration partnership agreement** to facilitate **skilled migration**.

What does upgrading 'strategic ties' mean?

- * A '**strategic relationship**', as the term suggests, involves a shared understanding between the two or more states involved on the nature of threats in the environment and the place of their **collective power in helping mitigate the threats**.
- * This does not amount to an 'alliance', meaning a deeper relationship in which the states are treaty bound to come to each other's assistance in case of materialisation of a threat against any member state.

About Greece:

- Greece has the longest coastline in Europe and is the **southernmost country in Europe**.
- **Geography:** The country is divided into three geographical regions: **the mainland, the islands, and Peloponnese, the peninsula south of the mainland**.
- **History:** Greece was ruled by foreigners for over 2,000 years beginning with the **Romans conquering the Greeks in the 2nd century**.
- Then, after almost 400 years under **Turkish rule**, Greece won independence in 1832.
- **Other Facts:**
 - ▶ **Official Name:** Hellenic Republic
 - ▶ **Form of Government:** Parliamentary republic
 - ▶ **Capital:** Athens
 - ▶ **Language:** Greek
 - ▶ **Currency:** Euro



India-Greece Relations:

- * **Background:**
 - ▶ India and Greece established **diplomatic relations in May 1950**.
 - ▶ India opened its resident Embassy in **Athens in March 1978**.
- * **On International lines:**
 - ▶ In modern times, the two countries have developed a warm relationship based on a common commitment to democracy, peace and development in the world and to a social system imbued with principles of justice and equality.
 - ▶ India and Greece also share common approaches to many international issues, such as UN reforms and Cyprus.
 - ▶ Greece has consistently supported India's **core foreign policy objectives**.
 - ▶ Greece participated with India in the **Six-National**

Delhi Declaration on Nuclear Disarmament in 1985.

- * **Bilateral Trade relations:**
 - ▶ Bilateral trade will go up in 2017-18 due to projects, joint ventures and increasing trade.
 - ▶ The main items of Greece's exports to India are **cotton, scrap (mostly aluminium, ferrous, copper and lead), marble and granite, aluminium foils, calcium carbonate, kiwi fruits and greasywool**.
- * **Indian Diaspora:**
 - ▶ There are about **10,000 Indian nationals** living in Greece. Most of them are **farm, factory or construction workers or small entrepreneurs**.
 - ▶ A few Indian professionals work in multinational organizations in **banking, insurance and software sectors**.
 - ▶ Indians are a law-abiding community and enjoy cordial relations and goodwill of the native Greek community.

Why Relations with Greece is significant for India?

- * **Geopolitical Balance:** Both countries are strategically positioned at the crossroads of **Europe, Asia, and Africa**. Strengthening ties allows them to contribute to regional stability and balance in these regions.
- * **Maritime Cooperation:** India's 'Act East' policy aligns with Greece's focus on maritime connectivity through its Blue Growth strategy. Enhanced cooperation can boost **trade, investment, and connectivity along sea routes**.

Mediterranean region

- The Mediterranean region, where China maintains a strong security and economic presence, is strategically significant for energy-hungry India given its 112 trillion cubic feet of gas and 1.7 billion barrels of oil reserves.
- Greece's vital location in the **Eastern Mediterranean**, and its status as both an **EU and NATO** member, renders it a potential gateway for India into the EU, particularly for Indian companies seeking entry into Europe through the port of Piraeus—the region's largest port and a key hub for Asia-Europe connectivity.



- * **Energy Security:** Greece's role in the **EastMed Gas Forum** aligns with India's energy security interests. Collaborating in the energy sector can provide India with reliable sources of hydrocarbons.
- * **Cultural and Historical Ties:** Ancient civilizations and shared cultural heritage foster cultural exchanges, tourism, and **people-to-people** connections, strengthening diplomatic bonds.
- * **Counterterrorism and Security:** Collaboration in counterterrorism and security matters is crucial to **combat transnational threats** and ensure regional stability.
- * **Diplomatic Support:** Both countries often align in international forums, amplifying each other's voices on global issues like **climate change, multilateralism, and global governance**.
- * **Trade and Investment:** Exploring trade diversification and investment opportunities can stimulate **economic growth in both countries**.
- * **Defence Cooperation:** Military cooperation can enhance defence capabilities and exchange of

expertise in areas like **naval technology and cybersecurity**.

India's growing relationship with Greece is clear evidence that New Delhi is no longer content with playing a passive role and is seeking to expand its global influence. What are the fruits of this pursuit, however, will only be clearer in the years to come.



INDIA'S SPACE PROWESS AND GLOBAL SOUTH

Context: India's inaugural lunar South Pole exploration by its Chandrayaan-3 mission yields vital space insights, cementing its position among leading nations with significant space exploration capabilities especially influencing geo-politics in Global South.

- * Recently, the Indian government hosted an online

meeting of developing countries called the **Voice of Global South Summit**.

India's space capabilities and Global Influence:

- * **Global South Achievement:** Chandrayaan-3's lunar South Pole landing elevates India's global standing. Remarkable feat from a post-colonial nation inspires others, showcasing **Indian engineering and resilience**.
- * **Leadership and Inspiration:** India's success encourages Global South nations to overcome colonial legacies, emphasizing self-reliance.
- * **Soft Power and Research:** India's lunar research benefits developing countries, fostering international alliances. Cutting-edge studies on the **Moon advance science and technology** for broader progress.

How India's space strength will help developing nations of Global South?

- * **Technological Influence in Global Order:** Nations excelling in AI, IT, and space research shape the global landscape.
- * Chandrayaan-3's success elevates India's standing, enriching Moon data, and potential life discoveries.
- * **Enhanced Global Importance:** Chandrayaan-3 showcases India's unique role. Democratic values and cooperation **enhance soft power**, fostering deeper ISRO-NASA collaboration and potential life-related breakthroughs.

How Technology can become India's voice?

The technological prowess as well as economic scale is key to accelerate India's rise relative to its Western counterparts by using;

- * **Economic Strength:** Technological innovation drives economic growth. Countries with strong technological sectors attract investments, enhance productivity, and gain economic influence, which in turn affects their geopolitical standing.
- * **Regional Stability:** Technology can address regional issues, such as water scarcity or disaster management. Providing technological solutions fosters goodwill and diplomatic influence.
- * **Diplomacy and Alliances:** Technological cooperation can strengthen diplomatic ties. Shared technological goals encourage alliances and partnerships between countries.
- * **Soft Power:** Technological achievements enhance a nation's soft power, improving its global image and fostering international collaboration.
- * **Global Governance:** Emerging technologies like AI and biotechnology raise ethical, legal, and regulatory

questions. Nations participating in setting global norms and regulations gain influence over future governance frameworks.

- * **Space and Communication:** Space technologies influence communication, surveillance, navigation, and scientific exploration. Countries with advanced space capabilities gain advantages in communication and intelligence.

RAJASTHAN'S GIG AND PLATFORM WORKERS WELFARE ACT

Context: The Rajasthan Gig and Platform Workers (registration and welfare) Act has been recently passed by the state legislation which aims to recognize gig/platform workers by ensuring that every worker on any platform has a unique ID that would anchor all future benefits.

Rajasthan's Gig and Platform Workers Welfare Act:

- * The **Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act** acknowledges the significant contributions of **gig workers to the economy** and aims to provide them with essential protection and support.
- * **Objective:** The primary objective is to extend social security and welfare benefits to gig workers operating in the state.
- * The Rajasthan government has launched this act **on Hamal model**.

The Hamal model:

- **Hamal Panchayat:** Over 60 years ago, Maharashtra's hamals formed the "Hamal Panchayat" union to address the challenges faced by **unorganized sector workers**, leading to the establishment of "Mathadi board" law.
- The law mandated registration of workers and merchants using hamals' labor, requiring shopkeepers to deposit workers' wages and a levy for social security schemes with the board, providing benefits like gratuity, health, and education benefits.
- The successful implementation of this law enabled hamals to secure social security.

Key Features of the Act:

- * **Registration of Gig Workers:** The act mandates the registration of all gig workers with the state government to bring them under the ambit of labor regulations.

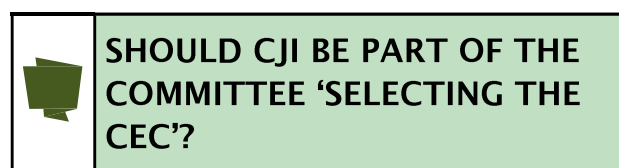
- ▶ The state government will maintain a comprehensive database of all gig workers operating in Rajasthan.
- ▶ Each gig worker will be assigned a **unique ID**, which will facilitate tracking their employment history and entitlements.
- ✳ **Access to Social Security Schemes:**
 - ▶ Gig workers will be granted access to a range of social security schemes.
 - ▶ These schemes may include **health insurance, accident coverage, and other welfare measures** to provide financial support during emergencies.
- ✳ **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:**
 - ▶ The Act ensures that gig workers have the **right to be heard** and address any grievances they may have.
 - ▶ This provision seeks to protect the **rights of gig workers** and provide them with a platform to resolve work-related issues.
- ✳ **Establishment of Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Board:**
 - ▶ The board will be responsible for overseeing the welfare and rights of gig workers in the state.
 - ▶ **Welfare Board** — comprising State officials, five representatives each from gig workers and aggregators, and two others (“one from Civil Society and another who evince interest in any other field”).
 - ▶ At least **one-third of the nominated members** should be women.
 - ▶ This representation aims to ensure that the **interests of both parties** are considered when making decisions related to welfare and regulation.
- ✳ **Platform-Based Gig Workers Fund and Welfare Fee:**
 - ▶ The act introduces a “**Platform-Based Gig Workers Fund and Welfare Fee**” to finance the social security measures for gig workers.
 - ▶ The fund will be utilized to provide financial support and welfare benefits to gig workers during challenging times.
- ✳ **Fee Levied on Aggregators:**
 - ▶ Aggregators will be required to **pay a fee** for each transaction involving a platform-based gig worker.
 - ▶ The specific percentage of the fee will be determined by the state government to contribute to the welfare fund.
- ✳ **Penalties for Non-Compliance:**
 - ▶ The act includes provisions for penalties in case of non-compliance by aggregators.
- ▶ Aggregators failing to pay the welfare fee on time will be charged an **interest rate of 12% per annum from the due date.**
- ✳ The state government can impose fines of up to Rs.5 lakh for the first contravention and up to Rs 50 lakh for subsequent violations of the Act by aggregators.

Who are Gig Workers?

- ✳ A ‘**gig worker**’ is currently defined as someone who “**earns from such activities outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship and who works on a contract**” for various platforms or aggregators, such as **Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, Urban Company**, etc.
- ✳ Gig workers are different from **regular employees**, as they have flexible work hours and multiple sources of income.
 - ▶ They are paid on the basis of the **tasks or services** they complete, rather than on a **monthly or hourly basis.**
- ✳ Gig workers provide various services, such as food delivery, ride-hailing, home services, e-commerce, content creation, graphic design, web development, etc.

Significance:

- ✳ **Increasing Numbers:** Gig workers are estimated to be around **15 million in India**, according to a report by Boston Consulting Group and Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. They are expected to grow to 90 million by 2028.
- ✳ **Contribution in Economy:** A Gig economy is a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements.



Context: Recently, the Union government introduced a Bill in the Rajya Sabha that proposed that the selection panel for appointing the Members of Election Commission (EC) will include a Cabinet Minister rather than Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Background

- ✳ The government recently tabled the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Bill, 2023.**

- * The Bill proposes to not include the judiciary from the Election Commission selection panel.
- * The Bill seeks to establish a **committee** for selecting members of the Election Commission of India (ECI).
 - ▶ **Prime Minister**
 - ▶ **Union Cabinet Minister** to be nominated by the Prime Minister
 - ▶ **Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.** Though the LoP has not been recognised as such, the leader of the single largest opposition party shall be deemed to be the LoP.
- * **Current Procedure:** Currently, the **Law Minister** suggests a pool of **suitable candidates** to the **Prime Minister** for consideration.
 - ▶ The **President** makes the appointment on the **advice of the PM.**
- * It raises the question "Should the CJI be part of the committee nominating the CEC?"

What is ECI?

- * The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a **constitutional body** responsible for administering elections in India according to the rules and regulations mentioned in the Constitution of India.
- * Its aim is to define and control the process for elections conducted at various levels: Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice President of India.
- * The ECI implements norms **and the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to ensure free and fair elections in the country.**

Process of selection of Members of EC:

- * The **President of India** appoints the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and **Election Commissioners (ECs).**
- * They have tenure of **six years**, or up to the **age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- * They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to **Judges of the Supreme Court of India.**

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 324:** Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission.
- **Article 325:** No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special electoral roll on the ground of religion, race, caste or sex.
- **Article 326:** Elections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage.

- **Article 327:** Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to legislature.
- **Article 328:** Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.
- **Article 329:** Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.

Can SC intervene in the selection process?

- * The Supreme Court can intervene in the selection process of members of the election commission under certain circumstances.
- * In India, the Election Commission is an **autonomous body** responsible for conducting elections and ensuring their fairness.
- * While the process of appointing Election Commissioners is largely done by the executive branch of the government, the Supreme Court can intervene if there are **concerns about the fairness or legality of the process.**
- * **The cases under which SC can intervene are:**
 - ▶ **Violation of Constitutional Provisions:** If the appointment process violates constitutional provisions or principles, such as those related to transparency, impartiality, or non-discrimination, the Supreme Court can intervene to ensure that the process is carried out in accordance with the Constitution.
 - ▶ **Malafide Actions:** If there are allegations of malafide or political interference in the selection process, and these allegations are supported by evidence, the Supreme Court can step in to investigate and possibly rectify the situation.
 - ▶ **Public Interest Litigation (PIL):** Citizens, civil society organizations, or other concerned parties can file PILs in the Supreme Court if they believe that the selection process was not conducted properly or fairly.
 - ▶ **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** If the selection process violates fundamental rights of citizens, such as the right to information or the right to equality, the Supreme Court can step in to protect these rights.

Concerns associated:

- * **Hindering Separation of Powers:** As the constitution places the power to make any law on appointment of ECI in the **hands of Parliament**, SC ruling on this issue poses a question of Separation of Power.
 - ▶ However, SC has stated that this ruling will be subject to any law made by parliament, **which means parliament can bring a law to undo it.**
- * Another view is that since there is no law made by parliament on this issue, the Court must step in to fill the "**constitutional vacuum.**"

SUPREME COURT IN ARTICLE 370 CASE

Context: The recent hearings by the Supreme Court (SC) on arguments by petitioners challenging the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, is ended and now the government will have to answer those allegations and prove their ground.

What are the allegations against abrogation of Article 370?

- * **Validity of Constitutional Order (CO) 272:**
 - ▶ Petitioners claimed Article 370's permanence, suggests that it is **not terminable by President**.
 - ▶ **Constituent Assembly's Role:** It was also argued that there is temporary reference of Article 370 related to Constituent Assembly's power for changes.
 - ▶ **J&K Constitution Impact:** Article 147 grants permanence after Constituent Assembly's dissolution, barring changes to Indian Constitution application.
 - ▶ **Limitations of Article 367:** Petitioners claimed CO 272 used **Article 367** interpretatively, exceeding its amendment scope defined by Article 368.
 - ▶ **No Abrogation via order 272:** Argued neither **J&K Assembly nor Parliament** could undo Article 370 using Constitutional order 272.
- * **Validity of Order 273:**
 - ▶ President's proclamation confirmed **Article 370 abrogation**, linked to Governor's move.
 - ▶ Petitioners contended that Rajya Sabha couldn't assume Governor's powers under **Article 356 without Assembly authority**.
 - ▶ **Governor's Role under President's Rule:** Petitioners criticized 2018 events, where Governor dissolved Assembly **unlawfully without cabinet's aid and advice**.
 - ▶ The improper basis for Governor's actions, leads to **unlawful President's Rule proclamation** without government in place.
- * **On Governor's Rule:**
 - ▶ While not disputing Governor's Rule or President's Rule, the argument was made to show Rajya Sabha's powers assumption during President's Rule as unlawful.

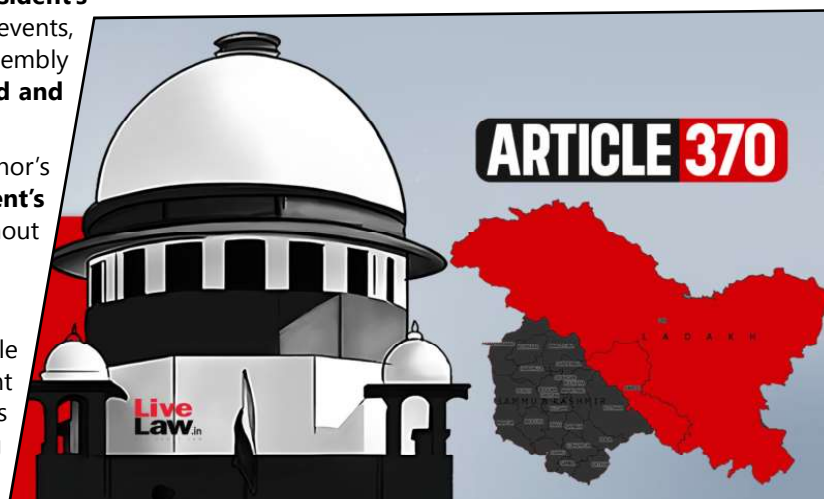
- ▶ Petitioners' claimed it amounted to a "**fraud on the Constitution**," as Article 370 safeguards couldn't be erased by **Article 356's imposition of President's Rule**.

What is government's stand to remove Article 370?

- * The Government of India's stand on the abrogation of Article 370 is that it was a necessary step for the **integration and development** of the region of Jammu and Kashmir.
- * The government asserts that the **special provisions under Article 370** were hindering the region's progress and preventing the extension of various central laws and benefits to the people of Jammu and Kashmir.
- * The abrogation of Article 370 and the **reorganization of the state** into two union territories, **Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh**, are aimed at promoting socio-economic development, ensuring better governance, and addressing security concerns.
- * The government believes that the move will lead to greater investment, job opportunities, and overall growth in the region.

Constitutional backing for government's move:

- * **Under Article 370(3):** The constitutional basis for the Indian government to remove Article 370 was provided by **Article 370(3) itself**, which allowed the **President of India** to modify or cease the operation of Article 370 by a public notification, with the concurrence of the **Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir**.
- * However, since the Constituent Assembly had already dissolved in 1957, the government argued that the provision was rendered inoperative, and the President's Order of **August 5, 2019**, effectively abrogated Article 370 and related provisions.



- * This decision was supported by the Parliament's approval and the reorganization of the state into two union territories through the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019**.



INDIA AND THE NORTHERN SEA ROUTE

Context: As per recent information, Murmansk port, popularly called the capital of the Arctic region and the beginning point of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), is witnessing the rising trend of Indian involvement in cargo traffic. India has been showing greater interest regarding the NSR for a variety of reasons.

Background:

- * India's Arctic involvement traces back to the **1920 Svalbard Treaty**.
- * Through the **Himadri station** and multiple studies, India contributes to Arctic research, spanning atmosphere, biology, oceans, hydrology, and glaciers.
- * India, becoming an **Arctic Council observer** in 2013, enhances its global role.
- * Collaborative research and station establishment reflect India's commitment to understanding and addressing Arctic changes.

Why India is showing interest in Arctic Ocean?

- * **Economic Security:** Arctic changes impact trade routes, affecting trade costs and hydrocarbon markets, indirectly influencing **India's economic stability**.
- * **Water Security:** Melting Arctic ice contributes to rising sea levels, **risking coastal areas** and freshwater sources, impacting **agriculture and industries** crucial for India.
- * **Sustainability:** Arctic shifts disrupt ecosystems, posing global ecological threats. India's Arctic Policy prioritizes **UN Goals**, highlighting its commitment to balanced **development and environmental** health.

What is Northern Sea Route (NSR)?

- * The Northern Sea Route (NSR) is the **shortest shipping route for freight transportation** between **Europe and countries of the Asia-Pacific region**.
- * It straddles **four seas of the Arctic Ocean**.
- * Running to 5,600 km, the Route begins at the

boundary **between the Barents and the Kara seas** (Kara Strait) and ends in the **Bering Strait**.

Why NSR is most preferred?

- * As per researches the distance savings along the NSR can be as **high as 50%** compared to the currently used shipping lanes via **Suez or Panama**.
- * The 2021 **blockage of the Suez Canal**, which forms part of the widely-used **maritime route** involving Europe and Asia, has led to greater attention on the NSR.

Russia influence in NSR navigation:

- * As the seas of the Arctic Ocean remain **icebound** during most of the year, the icebreaking assistance is organised to ensure safe navigation along the NSR.
- * Russia is the only country in the world with a **nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet**.

In December 1959, the **world's first nuclear icebreaker, "Lenin,"** was put into operation, unveiling the new chapter in the NSR development. It was **decommissioned 30 years later**.

- * Today, **FSUE Atomflot**, a subsidiary of Rosatom, acts as the **fleet operator of nuclear-powered icebreakers**. The fleet comprises **seven nuclear-powered icebreakers**, apart from one nuclear container ship.

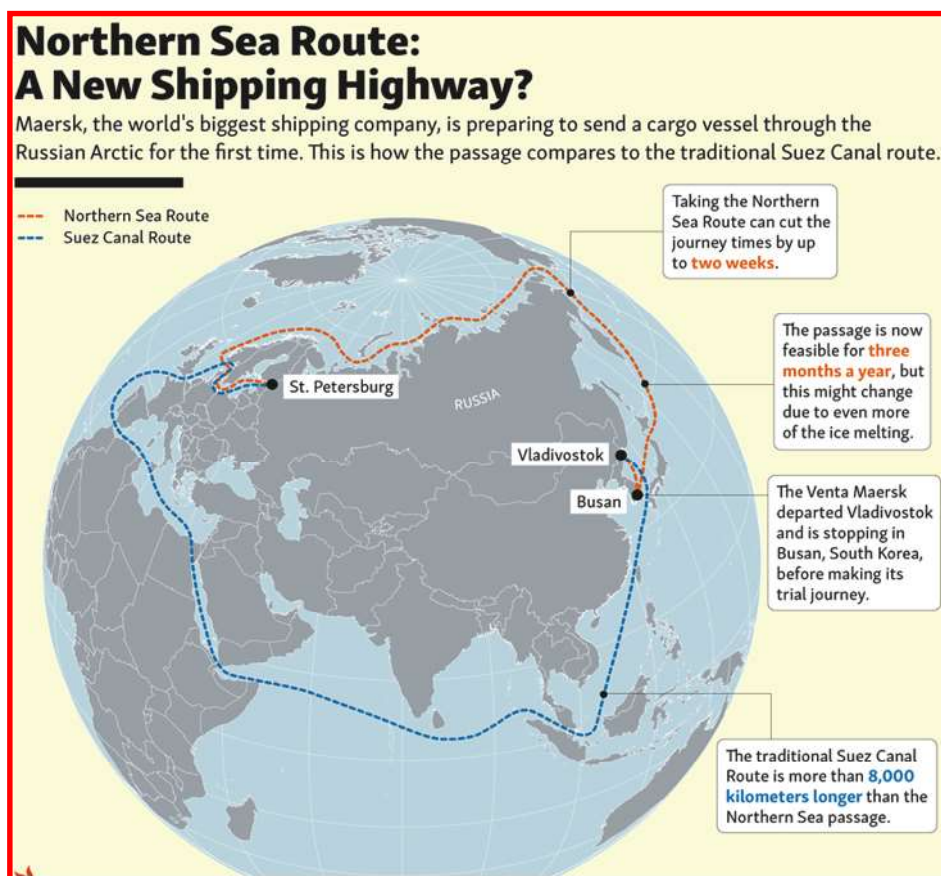
Driving factors for India towards NSR:

- * **NSR Cargo Growth:** Northern Sea Route (NSR) sees robust cargo traffic growth, benefitting India's energy imports from Russia, driven by its reliability and **safety as a transport route**.
- * **Strategic Transit Route:** Given India's sea-trade dependence, NSR's transit role gains significance, aligning with India's geographical position and trade patterns, enhancing connectivity options.
- * **Development of Chennai-Vladivostok Corridor:** Proposed corridor through NSR, part of **India-Russia collaboration**, shortens transport time significantly, facilitating efficient trade of **coking coal, crude oil, LNG, and fertilizers between the nations**.

Benefits:

- * **Cost effective:** Fuel savings due to reduced distance
- * **Lesser distance:** The shorter distance reduces the **cost of staff labor** and chartering vessels
- * The Northern Sea Route does not charge payments for the passage (unlike, for example, the Suez Canal)
- * **Less cargo traffic:** There are no queues (unlike, for example, the Suez Canal)

Suez Canal vs. Northern Sea Route:



Way forward for India:

- * **NSR Cargo Targets:** Russian government's NSR development plan aims for substantial growth, targeting 80 million tonnes by 2024 and 150 million tonnes by 2030, amidst Western sanctions.
- * **Russian-Indian Collaboration:** Russia engages with **Indian business community**, offering key components and seeking Indian company involvement in NSR projects, reflecting mutual interest in Arctic trade.

EL NIÑO AND INDIA'S ECONOMIC RISK

Context: This year's August remained the driest ever, which indicates strengthening El Niño and its related serious food inflation challenge.

About the El Nino menace:

- * As a result of El Nino the **Crop growth** has turned into a cumulative **7.6% deficit** in August 2023.
- * The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** anticipates no significant monsoon revival during the

next five days, while surpassing the record of **1965 and 1920**.

El Nino and Impact on India:

- * El Niño is characterized by the **warming of sea surface temperatures** in the **central and eastern Pacific Ocean**.
- * El Niño tends to **weaken the Indian monsoon**, which is crucial for **India's agriculture and water supply**.
- * During El Niño events, the normally **moisture-laden winds** that bring the monsoon rains to India are weakened, leading to **reduced rainfall** and sometimes drought conditions in various parts of the country.
- * This can lead to **heatwaves, water shortages, crop failures**, and impacts **on water resources for both agriculture and daily consumption**.
- * Crop yields can be affected, leading to **food price inflation** and economic losses for farmers.

Its counterpart, **La Niña**, involves cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures and can have opposite effects, potentially leading to increased rainfall and flooding in certain regions of India. Additionally, other local and regional climate drivers can interact with El Niño, further shaping the overall climate outcomes in the country.

Why such intense effects are seen this year?

- * The **Oceanic Niño Index (ONI)** – which measures the **average sea surface temperature** deviation from the normal in the **east-central equatorial Pacific region** – touched **1 degree Celsius**.
- * This was twice the **El Niño threshold of 0.5 degrees**.
- * The **US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** have predicted a 66% probability of the ONI exceeding **1.5 degrees Celsius** during **October-December** and a 75% chance of it remaining **above 1 degree** in January-March 2024.
- * El Niño is, thus, projected to not only persist, but strengthen through the 2023-24 winter.

What are the implications?

- * **Lack of Monsoon rains leads to kharif crop losses:** The southwest monsoon rain is crucial for not just the kharif season crops, mostly sown in June-July and harvested over September-October.
- * **Shortage of Crops:** As the rice and wheat stocks in government warehouses at **65.5 million tonnes (mt)**, a six-year-low.
- * **Increasing Retail inflation:** The retail food inflation in July at 11.5% year-on-year, which is a cause for worry.
- * **Rising prices of commodities:** Due to shortage of supplies, there is an automated rise in prices for Tomatoes, Onion and Rice too.
- * **Hindering Exports:** The recent export ban on basmati rice by India seems to be one of the effects of increasing food prices and shortage.

Other Global factors aggravating situation:

- * There were four major supply-side shock drivers of the great global food inflation from around October 2020: **weather, pandemic, war, and export controls**.
 - ▶ **Weather:** The weather-related shocks included **droughts in Ukraine (2020-21)** and **South America (2021-22)**, which especially impacted sunflower and soybean supplies, and the **March-April 2022 heat wave** that devastated India's wheat crop.
 - ▶ **Pandemic:** The pandemic's **supply-side impact** was felt the most in **Malaysia's oil palm plantations**
- * During the pandemic many migrant labours flew back, they were engaged in the harvesting of fresh fruit bunches, and no new work permits were issued, resulting in low output, translating into a decline in exports.

- ▶ **War:** The **Russo-Ukrainian War** led to **supply disruptions** from the two countries that, in 2019-20 (a non-war, non-drought year), accounted for **28.5% of the world's wheat, 18.8% of corn**, 34.4% of barley, and 78.1% of sunflower oil exports.
- ▶ **Export Controls:** Export controls were first imposed by Russia in December 2020, prompted by domestic food inflation fears arising from record hot temperatures.



COMMITTEE TO REVIEW REAL ESTATE ISSUES

Context: As per the information, the **Amitabh Kant committee**, which was tasked by the **Government with suggesting ways to revive stalled real estate projects, acknowledged the financial stress of real estate developers but recommended no direct support.**

Background:

- * The government has formed a committee on **March 31**, to look into **stalled real estate projects** and suggest ways to complete them.
- * The decision to form a committee had been taken by the **Central Advisory Council (CAC)** formed under the **Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 (RERA)** on April 12 last year.

Union Minister for Urban Affairs heads the CAC.

About the Committee:

- * It was a **14-member committee**, and chaired by former **NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant**.
- * **Objective:** According to the order, the panel is supposed to deliberate on the **issues of legacy** of the **stalled projects** and recommend ways to complete their **hand over to homebuyers** in a time-bound manner.
- * It submitted its report to **Housing and Urban Affairs Minister**.

Key observations of the committee:

- * It **cited the IBA's estimation that;**
 - ▶ 4.12 lakh dwelling units of Rs.4.08 lakh crore **were stressed**
 - About **2.40 lakh (44%)** of these were in the National Capital Region
 - Another **21% of the units** were in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region

- * The report has essentially suggested that all stakeholders — **developers, financiers and land authorities** have to make the **stalled projects financially viable**.
- * The report provides a **generalised framework**.

What are the recommendations of the committee?

- * **Mandatory registration-** All projects with the following criteria must be registered with State Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA).
 - ▶ Where the land is over 500 square meters or
 - ▶ The number of apartments to be constructed are more than 8
- * **De-link registration-** The committee advocated to de-link the grant of registration or sub-lease by the land authorities to the homebuyers from the recovery of dues from developers.
 - ▶ This would benefit about 1 lakh homebuyers for the immediate registration and execution of subleases in favour of homebuyers.
- * **Granting certificates-** RERAs should identify projects where no-objection and completion certificates have not been issued.
 - ▶ It should accelerate the process to **grant certificates**, irrespective of the developers paying their dues to the authorities.
- * **Rehabilitation package-** It is the role of the State governments to set up a rehabilitation package to get the stalled projects run again.
- * **Conditions;**
 - ▶ The developers should commit to complete the projects in 3 years.
 - ▶ It includes Zero Period for 2 years starting with the onset of COVID pandemic.
 - ▶ Developers would be allowed to get a co-developer on board to complete the work.
- * **Partial surrender policy-** The developers can give back some of the unused lands to the authority in exchange for a waiver on the dues for that land.
- * **Outstanding payments-** The RERA can directly collect these outstanding payments from homebuyers, bypassing the builders.
- * **Occupancy-** It suggests that occupancy or possession of substantially completed projects should be granted within the **next 30 days**.
- * **Financial support-**
 - ▶ Bring stalled projects under the purview of priority sector financing.
 - ▶ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should formulate a scheme.
 - ▶ The government should consider offering

subsidized interest rates or a guarantee scheme similar to those available in the MSME sector.

- ▶ Improve the Internal Rate of Return of the projects in order to attract funding.
- * **Last resort-** Judicial interventions, like the use of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, should be the last resort.
- * **Project viability-** All the stakeholders (developers, financiers, land authorities etc.,) would have to take a haircut or accept less than what is due to them.

Real Estate Regulatory Authority Act, 2016:

- **Aim-** To protect the interests of homebuyers & boost investment in the real estate sector.
- To bring transparency & efficiency in sale/purchase of real estate by establishing RERA in each state to regulate real estate sector.
 - ▶ Establishment of bodies
 - ▶ Regulatory Authorities
 - ▶ Adjudicating Officers and Appellate Tribunals
- **Registration of Real Estate Agents-** All agents dealing in real estate projects need to register with respective State RERAs.
- **Separate Bank Account for each project-** 70% of the amount collected from homebuyers for a project must be maintained in a separate bank account.
 - ▶ It should be used only for construction of that project and land cost.
- **Online Information -** Through the online portal, the homebuyers are empowered to take the informed decision to buy their dream homes as well.
- **Penal Provisions-** It provides strict penal provisions of imprisonment in addition to provisions for refund, interest and penalty in case of non-compliance by developers, allottees and agent.



MSP HIKES AND ISSUES

Context: Recently, as on meeting WTO obligations and suggestions to address labour shortages and rising wages, key Central government ministries and departments had conveyed apprehensions to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare on its proposal to hike the minimum support price (MSP) for kharif crops in the 2023-24 season.

About:

- * In June 2023, the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister approved the increase in MSP ranging from **6 per cent to 10 per cent**.

* The recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Cost & Prices (CACP)**, the Department of Expenditure in the **Ministry of Finance**, the **NITI Aayog**, and the **Department of Commerce** has opposed this move saying an increase in MSP would make it difficult to keep **inflation in check**.

What is Minimum Support price (MSP)?

* The MSP is the rate at which the government purchases crops from farmers, and is based on a calculation of at least one-and-a-half times the cost of production incurred by the farmers.

* MSP is a "minimum price" for any crop that the government considers as remunerative for farmers and hence deserving of "support".

Objectives of MSP:

* **Agricultural Price Stabilization:** MSP acts as a floor price, preventing extreme price fluctuations and providing stability to farmers' income.

* **Crop Diversity:** It encourages farmers to cultivate a diverse range of crops by assuring fair prices for various produce.

Crops under MSP:

* The **Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP)** recommends MSPs for **22 mandated crops** and **fair and remunerative price (FRP)** for sugarcane.

* CACP is an attached office of the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.

* The mandated crops include 14 crops of the kharif season, 6 Rabi crops and 2 other commercial crops.

* In addition, the MSPs of **toria and de-husked coconut** are fixed on the basis of the MSPs of rapeseed/mustard and copra, respectively.

MSP and effects on Economy:

* **Farmers' Income and Livelihood:** MSP provides a safety net for farmers, ensuring a reasonable income even during market downturns.

* **Income Redistribution:** Increased income for farmers can lead to improved rural purchasing power and reduced income inequality.

* **Food Security:** MSP ensures a steady supply of essential commodities, contributing to food security and stability in prices for consumers.

* **Inflationary Pressure:** Higher MSP can contribute to inflation, as increased procurement costs may lead to higher consumer prices.

* **Fiscal Burden:** Government procurement at MSP requires substantial financial resources, affecting fiscal deficit targets.

* **Trade Balance and Exports:** Higher MSP might increase domestic prices, affecting export competitiveness and trade balances.

* **Distorted Crop Choice:** Farmers might prioritize crops with MSP, leading to overproduction of certain crops and neglecting others.

* **Supply Chain Efficiency:** MSP-led procurement can strain storage and distribution systems, leading to wastage and inefficiencies.

* **Market Distortions:** High reliance on MSP could discourage private investment in agriculture due to market uncertainties.

* **Policies and Regulations:** MSP necessitates government intervention, potentially impacting free market dynamics.

* **Rural-Urban Linkages:** MSP's impact on rural income affects rural-urban migration patterns and urban development.

Commission for Agricultural Cost & Prices (CACP):

- It is a **statutory panel** under the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare**, Government of India.
- The CACP is an expert body that recommends the MSPs of the notified Kharif and Rabi crops to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).
- **The objective of the Commission:** The Commission was established to recommend Minimum Support Prices (MSPs), to motivate cultivators and farmers to adopt the latest technology in order to optimize the use of resources and increase productivity.
- However, its suggestions are **not binding on the Government**.



STATE OF INDIA'S BIRDS' REPORT 2023

Context: The State of India's Birds (SoIB) 2023, released recently finds that while a few bird species like the Indian peafowl are thriving in India, many are in decline.

About the Report:

* The report is based on **30 million observations** contributed by **30,000 birdwatchers** across the country.

* It lists **178 bird species** in the country as being of "High Priority" for immediate conservation action.

* **Developed by:** There are about **13 institutions** in India (six government institutions including the

Wildlife Institute of India and seven conservation NGOs) and independent professionals came together to analyse data on bird distribution and population trends of **942 bird species** in the country.

- * The data is taken as updated on **eBird**, an online database of bird observations.

Key-highlights of the Report:

- * **SoIB 2023 Report Overview:** Survey categorizes **942 bird species**; 178 High Priority, 323 Moderate Priority, and 441 Low Priority.

- * **Data Enrichment:** SoIB 2023 widens scope with more data, expanded species coverage, providing comprehensive insights into bird population shifts.



- * **Long-Term Decline:** 60% of 338 species analyzed showed long-term declines, with 204 species declining, 98 rapidly.

- * **Current Annual Trends:** 40% of 359 species declining; 142 species, including **raptors and vultures**, in rapid decline.

- * **Habitat Specialists:** Grassland, wetland birds in decline; some generalists like **Indian peafowl thriving; Ashy Prinia, Rock pigeon, Asian koel increasing.**

- * **Biodiversity Hotspots:** Western Ghats, Sri Lanka hotspot rapidly declining for which reasons remain unclear, impacting overall bird populations.



- * **High Priority Species:** Includes **Ruddy shelduck, Indian courser, Narcondam hornbill, and Nicobar megapode; some globally Least Concern.**

- * **Recommendations for Change:** Report suggests 17 species qualify for different IUCN threat status nationally, like **Indian Roller and Northern shoveler.**

- * **Continued Decline:** Trends align with 2020 report as around **74 of 101 High Concern birds** persist, **104 new High Priority listings.**

Who is the most threatened?

- * While raptors, migratory shorebirds, and ducks have declined the most, birds living in habitats like **open ecosystems, rivers, and coasts** are among the worst affected.

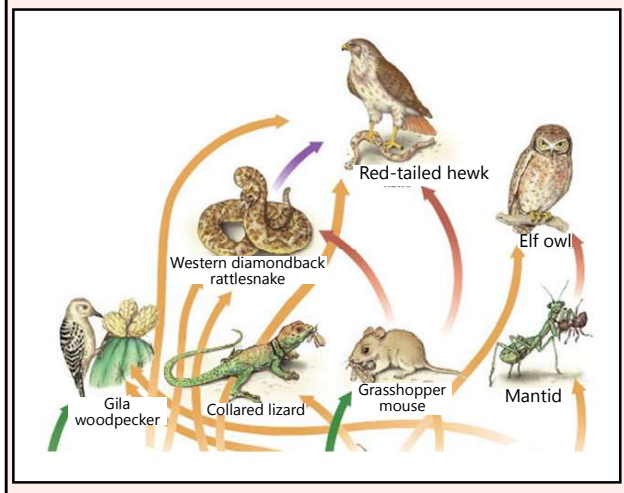
- * **Key factors responsible for the decline:** urbanisation, infrastructural development, environmental pollutants, **loss of habitat, pesticide accumulation**, targeted killing and climate change.

* Significance of Raptors:

- ▶ Raptors are at the **top of the food web** and are therefore highly vulnerable to changes in the environment such as declines in insects, mammals, small birds, fishes, and increases in contaminants and other environmental conditions.
- ▶ Changes in the **health of raptor populations** can indicate **changes in the environment.**

Who are Raptors?

- A raptor is a special type of bird which captures live prey.
- The word "raptor" means "to seize or grasp" in Latin.
- Raptors use their **powerful, sharp talons** to capture their prey and to defend themselves.
- Several bird species are considered raptors are **Eagles, hawks, kites, falcons, and owls.**



Status of Bird in India:

- * India is home to more than **1,350 bird species.**
- * **Some are endemic:** they're restricted to specific areas such as **biodiversity hotspots**, and are found nowhere else in the world.
- * Such as the **White-bellied blue flycatcher**, a small songbird that you can spot only in the Western Ghats of south India.
- * **Some are habitat specialists:** they are found only in some habitats in the country.

Great Indian bustards, for instance, are ground-dwellers and are restricted to open habitats such as grasslands that are broadly known as **open natural ecosystems or ONEs.**

What are the major threats to birds in India?

- * **Climate change:**
 - ▶ The average global temperature has risen by **over 1 degree Celsius** since pre-industrial times, resulting in catastrophic consequences other living beings, like birds.
 - ▶ It affects bird **reproduction and survival through** the disruption of species interactions by phenological mismatches.
- * **Urbanisation:**
 - ▶ Urbanisation results in loss of natural habitat for birds and it expose them to more air pollution and high temperatures.
 - ▶ Lack of food supplies in urban areas leads to the **homogenisation of bird communities** as only behaviourally dominant species such as **House Crows and feral Rock Pigeons** are able to survive.
- * **Monocultures:**
 - ▶ In India, commercial monoculture plantations of rubber, coffee, and tea have been rapidly expanding in recent years.
 - ▶ Such plantations are detrimental to the well-being of birds.
- * **Energy infrastructure:**
 - ▶ Countries have started to generate power using renewable resources instead of depending on conventional methods like coal-fired power plants.
 - ▶ It has led to an increase of wind turbines in a country like India, where they have been installed in a wide range of landscapes including **coastal areas, Western Ghats mountaintops, open arid lands, agricultural lands, and grasslands.**
 - ▶ **The major impacts of wind turbines on birds include:**
 - Direct collision of birds with the rotating wind turbine blades
 - Displacement (loss of habitat) of birds from the turbine area due to disturbance
 - Barrier effects within habitats (obstacle to migration, or to other regular movements across feeding and roosting areas and breeding colonies)

The report mentioned the transmission lines have led to the death of **many large-bodies species** because of collision and numerous small-bodies species have been electrocuted.

- * **Exposure to toxic chemicals** during reproductive stages can affect fertility, egg formation, and eggshell thickness. Hence, can lead to impaired incubation and chick-rearing behaviours.
 - ▶ All of this decreases hatching success and fledgling survival and increases the possibility of reproductive failure.
- * **Increasing avian diseases:** The avian influenza outbreaks in 2020-2021 swept through many Indian States, causing mass mortality of wild birds.



NEWS MEDIA VERSUS OPENAI'S CHATGPT

Context: Recently, prominent media outlets like **New York Times, Reuters, CNN, and ABC** blocked OpenAI due to copyright concerns and potential legal actions.

What does OpenAI do?

- * The company is best known for creating 'ChatGPT', which is an **AI conversational chatbot**.
- * Users can ask questions on just about anything, and ChatGPT will respond pretty accurately with answers, stories and essays.
- * It can even help programmers write **software code**.

What started the face-off between news outlets and OpenAI?

The reason given by media against OpenAI was;

- * **Basis of LLMs:** Large language models (LLMs) like **ChatGPT** require **extensive training data** to comprehend human language patterns effectively.
- * **Data Collection:** Tech giants such as **Google, Meta, and OpenAI** rely on web-crawlers to gather data from online sources like **social media, news articles, and e-books**.
- * **Privacy and Usage Concerns:** News outlets, including The New York Times, reacted against OpenAI's data collection via web-crawlers, blocking access to **their content**.
- * **Training Material:** News organizations objected to their published content being used to **train AI chat bots without consent**.
- * **Ethical Implications:** The standoff highlights debates on **data scraping, copyright, and ethical considerations** in AI model training.

Reason for opposing OpenAI by media:

- * **No monetary benefits:** Search engines like **Google or Bing** use **web crawlers** to index websites and present relevant results when users search for topics.

- ▶ The only difference is that search engines represent a mutually beneficial relationship. OpenAI, on the other hand, provides **no benefit, monetary or otherwise**, to news companies.
- ▶ It simply collects publicly available data and uses it for the company's own purposes.

What are concerns associated with 'OpenAI'?

- * **Data Usage Rights:** The use of data to train AI models raises questions about whether unauthorized usage constitutes a **violation of data owner's rights**.
- * **Financial Feasibility:** The financial sustainability of AI endeavors, like OpenAI, hinges on the compensation required for data usage, with a balance to avoid becoming financially unviable.
- * **Value of Online Content:** The argument arises that while AI models can function without specific sources, an aggregate of diverse content enhances quality.
- * **Quality Impact:** Widespread denial of data access from media sources could potentially lower the quality of AI-generated content like ChatGPT.
- * **Licensing Arrangements:** OpenAI's licensing deal with The Associated Press exemplifies the willingness to compensate for data usage, while legal battles with other content creators underscore complexities.
- * **Legal Implications:** Legal battles over copyright infringement will influence journalism, intellectual property rights, and shape the future of AI development.

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Section B [SPECIALS]

Topic

☞ Ethical use of AI

ETHICAL USE OF AI

Context: Recently, addressing the B20 summit, the Prime Minister called for a global framework to ensure the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) as he flagged concerns over algorithmic bias and its disruptive impact on society.

So, let us see the dimension around the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

About:

- * The rapid rise in **artificial intelligence (AI)** has created many opportunities globally, from facilitating healthcare diagnoses to enabling human connections through social media and creating labour efficiencies through automated tasks.
- * However, these **rapid changes** also raise profound ethical concerns. These arise from the potential AI systems have to embed biases, **contribute to climate degradation**, threaten human rights and more.
- * Such risks associated with AI have already begun to compound on **top of existing inequalities**, resulting in further harm to already marginalised groups.

Why are AI ethics important?

- * AI is a technology designed by humans to **replicate, augment or replace** human intelligence.
- * These tools typically rely on large volumes of various **types of data to develop insights**.
- * Poorly designed projects built on data that is faulty, inadequate or biased can have unintended, potentially harmful, consequences.
- * Moreover, the rapid advancement in **algorithmic systems** means that in some cases it is not clear to us how the AI reached its conclusions, so we are essentially relying on systems **it can't explain to make decisions that could affect society**.
- * An AI ethics framework is important because it shines a light on the risks and benefits of AI tools and establishes guidelines for its responsible use.
- * Coming up with a system of moral tenets and techniques for using AI responsibly requires the industry and interested parties to examine major social issues and ultimately the question of what makes us human.

Can AI be ethical and moral?

Yes, AI can be ethical and moral. Here are some examples in these terms;

- * **Classification of Machine Agents:** Moore's 2006 classification categorizes machine agents based on their ethical involvement, ranging from those with

ethical consequences to those capable of ethical judgments.

- * **Ethical Impact Agents:** Machines like robot jockeys may not make ethical decisions but raise ethical considerations due to their impact on **activities like sports**.
- * **Implicit Ethical Agents:** Machines with embedded guidelines, such as **airplane autopilots**, adhere to pre-set ethical rules for safety but lack the ability to **actively evaluate ethics**.
- * **Explicit Ethical Agents:** Some machines go beyond preset rules, using methods to estimate ethical values of choices, as seen in systems balancing investments with social responsibility.
- * **Challenges and Bounded Ethicality:**
 - ▶ Creating advanced **Artificial Moral Agents (AMAs)** is challenging, especially for **complex or unpredictable ethical scenarios**.
 - ▶ Additionally, machines might exhibit bounded ethicality, potentially engaging in unethical behavior due to how ethical principles are framed, similar to human moral disengagement.

Perspectives for Ethical use of AI:

- Immanuel Kant's ethical philosophy emphasises **autonomy, rationality, and the moral duty** of individuals.
- Applying **Kantian ethics** to the use of AI in decision-making within governance could lead to serious concerns.
- If decisions that were once the **purview of humans are delegated to algorithms**, it could threaten the capacity for **moral reasoning**.



Points of concerns related to AI:

Ethical issues with AI span a **wide range of dimensions**, reflecting concerns about the potential impact of AI technologies on various aspects of society, individuals, and human values. Below are some key dimensions to consider:

- * **Bias and Fairness:** AI systems can inherit biases present in their training data, leading to discriminatory outcomes in areas such as criminal justice, hiring, and lending.
- * **Privacy:** AI can process and analyse massive amounts of data, raising concerns about the privacy and security of individuals. Striking a balance between **data utilization and individual privacy rights** is a challenge.
- * **Transparency:** Lack of transparency in AI decision-making processes, especially in complex systems like deep neural networks, can lead to a loss of accountability and trust.
- * **Accountability:** Determining who is responsible for AI-related decisions and actions is challenging.
- * **Job Disruption:** Automation powered by AI could lead to job displacement, potentially causing economic and social disruption. Preparing for the workforce's transition and creating new job opportunities becomes crucial.
- * **Safety:** In contexts where AI systems interact with the physical world, safety is paramount. Ensuring that AI systems do not cause harm to humans or the environment is an ethical imperative.
- * **Dual-Use:** AI technologies developed for beneficial purposes could potentially be misused for malicious intent, such as deepfakes or autonomous weapons. Addressing the dual-use nature of AI requires ethical considerations.
- * **Inequality:** AI development and access to its benefits could exacerbate existing inequalities, both globally and within societies. Ensuring equitable distribution and access to AI's benefits is important.
- * **Long-Term Implications:** Speculation about the long-term impact of advanced AI, including super-intelligent AI, raises concerns about **control, ethics, and humanity's role** in a world where machines may surpass human capabilities.

- * **Manipulation and Disinformation:** AI can be used to generate highly convincing fake content, leading to concerns about its potential to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion.
- * **Human Dignity and Autonomy:** Deploying AI in areas such as **healthcare and decision-making** could raise questions about preserving human dignity and autonomy, especially when crucial decisions are delegated to machines.
- * **Cultural and Social Impact:** AI's impact on culture, creativity, and social interactions can be both positive and negative. Balancing technological advancement with cultural preservation is an ethical challenge.
- * **Environmental Impact:** The energy consumption and **carbon footprint of AI technologies**, especially resource-intensive training processes, raise ethical concerns in an era of climate change.
- * **Legal and Regulatory Challenges:** Rapid advancements in AI often outpace the development of appropriate laws and regulations. Ethical considerations include establishing effective legal frameworks that govern AI development and usage.

Conclusion:

Hence, the pursuit of ethical AI usage is a multifaceted journey marked by evolving technological capabilities and complex philosophical considerations. While there is growing potential for AI systems to serve as ethical agents, capable of assessing and making ethical decisions, the road to achieving this is far from straightforward. Different categories of machine agents, from those with ethical impacts to those capable of justifying ethical judgments, illustrate the spectrum of AI's ethical involvement. However, challenges persist, including the intricacies of handling ambiguous situations and the risk of bounded ethicality, where AI may inadvertently engage in unethical behaviors due to framing or context. Striking the right balance between technological advancement and ethical accountability remains a central challenge, emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between technology, philosophy, and society to ensure AI's responsible and ethical integration into our lives.

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Section C [PRELIMS]

To Attempt

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- ☞ Seethakali folk art
- ☞ Aadhaar-based wage system
- ☞ India Smart Cities Awards 2022
- ☞ New Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBF-Fund) ratified
- ☞ Kampala Declaration on climate change
- ☞ India, ADB to set up climate change and health hub
- ☞ 'Cleantech', for an inclusive green future in India

SEETHAKALI FOLK ART

Context: The 20-member group is going to perform Seethakali folk art, outside Kerala for the first time as to revive one of the fading dance forms of Kerala.

About:

- * In the early times, Seethakali was performed as part of the **harvest festival Onam**.
- * From **Atham star** till the 28th day after Onam, the performers who belong to the **subaltern communities** go from one house to another performing this art.

Key Features of Seethakali:



- * **Folk Dance Drama:** Seethakali is a traditional folk dance drama that was once performed during the festival days in erstwhile **Desinganad (Kollam, Kerala)**, primarily during the Onam festivities.
- * **Dalit Artists:** The performance was carried out by Dalit artists belonging to the **Veda and Pulaya communities**, focusing on presenting episodes from the **Ramayana from Sita's perspective**.
- * **Vanayatra to Andardhanam:** Seethakali portrays the journey from "vanayatra" (exile to the forest) to "andardhanam" (descend into the earth) of Sita, featuring a blend of songs, storytelling, and fast movements.
- * **Instruments:** The dance drama is accompanied by instruments such as **ganjira, manikatta, chiratta, and kaimani**.
- * **Narrative through Songs:** Seethakali's story is conveyed through songs, with **28 collected** over three years, featuring a folk style influenced by Vallappaattu, Kuthirappaattu, and Rakshasappaattu.
- * **Oral Tradition:** Seethakali songs were orally transmitted from one generation to the next, which led to a pause in the tradition.

- * **Basic Movements:** The dance involves basic steps, striving to preserve the original essence of the art form.
- * **Character Ensemble:** The performance includes key characters such as **Sita, Ram, Lakshman, Ravan, and Hanuman**.

Revival Efforts:

- **Documentary:** A documentary was created titled **Seethakali – Desinganadinte Dalit Ramayanam**, tracing the evolution, popularity, and relevance of the art form.
- Currently, in Kerala, there is only one registered Seethakali performing group – **Perinad Seethakali Sangham**.

AADHAAR-BASED WAGE SYSTEM

Context: Fourth extension for mandatory payments through Aadhaar-based wage system (ABPS) for MGNREGA workers is going to end. As per a NGO, around 1.2 crore people in top five States are not be paid wages via this method because their accounts are not enabled for the new system.

About the stance for payment to MGNREGA workers:

- * Between the top **five States** in terms of active MNREGA workers - **U.P., Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan** - 1.2 crore will no longer be eligible for payments because they do not have ABPS-enabled accounts.
- * In Assam which has more than 63 lakh workers, 61.2% are not eligible and in Nagaland with 6 lakh beneficiaries, nearly 80% lack an ABPS account.

Aadhaar-based wage system (ABPS):

- * ABPS uses the worker's unique **12-digit Aadhaar number** as their financial address.
- * APBS is a gateway created by **National Payments Corporation of India** to enable departments and agencies administering government schemes to transfer funds to Aadhaar-enabled bank accounts of beneficiaries.
- * **Objective:** The basic idea of the APBS to act on the principle that a person's Aadhaar number becomes their financial address.
 - ▶ Instead of providing multiple account details to **receive a bank transfer**, one only has to provide their Aadhaar number which significantly eases out the entire process.

- * For ABPS, a worker's **Aadhaar details** must be seeded with their **job card and bank account**.
- * Aadhaar details should also be mapped with the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** database.
- * Finally, the bank's **institutional identification number (IIN)** must itself be mapped with the NPCI database.

Institutional Challenges

- * **Diverted Payments and Rejections:** Issues beyond diverted payments in Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS), like rejected payments, affecting DBT recipients.
- * **Consent Challenge:** Forcing APBS on poor without consent raises ethical concerns, especially for underprivileged beneficiaries.
- * **Selective Induction Guidelines:** NCPI and UIDAI recommend **Aadhaar-seeded account induction** based on explicit customer request, protecting educated middle-class.
- * **Coercive Imposition on Poor:** Lack of consent, improper mapping, and symbolic consent lead to APBS issues, misdirecting subsidies and pensions.



Context: Recently, India Smart Cities Awards (ISAC) has been announced for the year 2022.

About the Award:

- * Smart Cities Awards India is an initiative that highlights and honours the cities with the finest practices and city models.
- * **Objective:** The motto of the award is to encourage cities to practise approaches to making cities habitable, ecological, and financially feasible.
- * **Organized by:** The **Smart Cities Mission**, by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**.
- * This is the **fourth edition** of the ISAC awards.
- * In the past, the ISAC witnessed **three editions in 2018, 2019 and 2020**.
- * The 2022 edition was launched in April last year during the '**Smart Cities-Smart Urbanization**' event in Surat.

India Smart Cities Award Contest (ISAC), 2022:

- * **For Cities:**
 - Indore has adjudged the **best Smart City** for

exemplary performance in the **Smart Cities Mission**.

- **Surat and Agra** are the **second and third-place** winners among cities,

* States-wise:

- Madhya Pradesh has been chosen as the top State.
- Tamil Nadu is the second in the State category
- Followed by Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

- * **For UTs:** The award for the best Union Territory has gone to **Chandigarh**.

A total of **845 nominations** were received for ISAC 2022 out of which **66 final winners** have been identified in various categories.

Criteria for selection of cities:

- * The ISAC recognises and rewards cities, projects and innovative ideas that are promoting sustainable development across the **100 smart cities**, as well as stimulating inclusive, equitable, safe, healthy and collaborative cities leading to a better quality of life for all.
- * The ISAC 2022 award had a **two-stage submission process** consisting of;
 - '**Qualifying Stage**', which involved overall assessment of the city's performance, and
 - The '**Proposal Stage**' which required the smart cities to submit their nominations for six award categories.

Significance:

- * The **Smart Cities Award India** takes this platform as an opportunity to honour recognise and encourage people, legislators, businesses, townships, government organisations, and associations for their efforts in both the urban and rural sectors.

Smart Cities Mission:

- * The Smart Cities Mission is an initiative of the **Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry**.
- * **Launched in:** 2015
- * The projects were supposed to be completed within five years of the selection of the city, but in 2021 the Ministry changed the deadline for all cities to June 2023.
- * **Objective:**
 - The main objective of the Mission is to promote cities that provide core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment and give a decent quality of life to their citizens through the application of 'smart solutions'.

- ▶ The Mission aims to drive economic growth and improve quality of life through comprehensive work on social, economic, physical and institutional pillars of the city.

NEW GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK FUND (GBF-FUND) RATIFIED

Context: The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) was ratified and launched at the Seventh Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Vancouver, Canada.

The Global Environment Facility:

- The GEF is a **family of funds** dedicated to confronting biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, and strains on land and ocean health.
- Its grants, blended financing, and policy support helps developing countries address their biggest environmental priorities and adhere to international environmental conventions.
- Over the past three decades, the GEF has provided more than 23 billion dollars.

Background:

- * The **Seventh Global Environment Facility (GEF) Assembly** established a Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBF-Fund).
- * GBF-Fund is a **special trust fund** under the GEF, to support the implementation of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** agreed at COP15 last year.

About the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBF-Fund):

- * As part of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** agreement, the GEF was requested to establish the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, a special trust fund to support the implementation of the Agreement.
- * **Significance:** The creation of this fund and its commitment to supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities is an important and clear recognition of the fundamental role they have had for generations protecting biodiversity.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework:

- * The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity

Framework (GBF) was adopted during the **fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15)** following a four year consultation and negotiation process.

- * This historic Framework, which supports the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals** and builds on the Convention's previous Strategic Plans, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.
- * Among the Framework's key elements are **4 goals for 2050** and **23 targets for 2030**.
- * The implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework will be guided and supported through a comprehensive package of decisions also adopted at COP 15.
- * This package includes a **monitoring framework** for the GBF, an **enhanced mechanism for planning**, monitoring, reporting and reviewing implementation, the necessary financial resources for implementation, strategic frameworks for capacity development and technical and scientific cooperation, as well as an agreement on digital sequence information on genetic resources.

KAMPALA DECLARATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Context: A total of 48 African countries have now agreed to adopt the **Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (KDMECC)** to address the nexus of human mobility and climate change in the continent.

About the Declaration:

- * **Background:** KDMECC was originally signed and agreed upon by **15 African states** in Kampala, Uganda in July 2022.
- * The Declaration is the first comprehensive, **action-oriented framework** led by Member States to address climate-induced mobility in a practical and effective manner.
- * The **KDMECC-AFRICA** is expected to be signed by Member States during the **Africa Climate Summit** in Nairobi on September 4, 2023.
- * **Need:**
 - ▶ Africa is one of the **world's most vulnerable continents** to the impacts of climate change.
 - ▶ Climate change, which leads to an **increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events**, has a direct impact on migration.

* **Significance:**

- ▶ The **Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change** gives us the unprecedented opportunity to support **Member State priorities** in addressing the challenges while also leveraging migration for sustainable development.
- ▶ It will ensure that all voices, including those of **youth, women and persons in vulnerable situations** are the priority of the expanded declaration.

Linkage between Climate change and Human Rights:

- * Climate change has indisputable long-term consequences on the environment, which, in turn, seriously undermine the enjoyment of human rights.
- * The **African continent** is projected to be one of the hardest hit by the negative effects of climate change.
- * The consequences of climate change are not only disproportionately felt by the most vulnerable and poorest populations; there are also disparities along gender lines.
- * The connections between **climate change, gender equality, and women's rights** are complicated and multidimensional.
- * In contrast, most existing studies on gender and climate change action offer a narrow conception of what gender equality and women's rights mean in the context of climate change action.

Other similar declarations:

- * **The Maputo Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources:** This Convention shall apply;
 - ▶ To all areas which are within the **limits of national jurisdiction of any Party**; and
 - ▶ To the activities carried out **under the jurisdiction or control of any Party** within the area of its national jurisdiction or beyond the **limits of its national jurisdiction**.
- * The Parties shall adopt and implement all measures necessary to achieve the objectives of this Convention, in particular through preventive measures and the application of the precautionary principle, and with due regard

to ethical and traditional values as well as scientific knowledge in the interest of present and future generations.

**INDIA, ADB TO SET UP CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH HUB**

Context: Having bagged the first WHO Centre for Global Traditional Medicine, to be set up in Gujarat, India is now all set to open a climate change and health hub in New Delhi in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

What is this new hub?

- * The new hub for **climate change and health** will facilitate **knowledge sharing, promote partnerships and innovations**, and also help countries beyond the G-20, especially **developing countries**.
- * In its recently released G-20 outcome document, India also noted that climate change will continue to drive **health emergencies, including the emergence and re-emergence of infectious diseases**, and by increasing the severity and frequency of natural disasters, thereby threatening to overwhelm health systems' ability to deliver essential services.
- * **The outcome document committed to:**
 - ▶ prioritize climate-resilient health systems development,
 - ▶ build sustainable and low-carbon/low greenhouse gas (GHG) emission health systems and healthcare supply chains that deliver high-quality healthcare,



- ▶ mobilize resources for resilient, low-carbon sustainable health systems, and
- ▶ Facilitate collaboration, including initiatives such as the WHO-led Alliance for **Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACh)**.
- * The new Climate Change and Health Hub in New Delhi will help countries all over the world to address to identify new drivers and address the existing drivers using a science and risk-based approach, and to strengthen existing infectious disease surveillance systems.

Significance:

- * Climate change affects all and this centre will give an opportunity to have different partners discussing this important issue and learning from each other.
- * In its recently released G-20 outcome document, India noted that climate change will continue to drive health emergencies, including the emergence and re-emergence of infectious diseases.
- * It will also increase the severity and frequency of natural disasters, thereby threatening health systems' ability to deliver essential services.
- * Against this backdrop, there is need to enhance the resilience of health systems against the impact of climate change.

Asian Development Bank (ADB):

- ADB (founded in 1966) is an international development finance institution.
- Its mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people.
- Headquartered in Manila, ADB is owned and financed by its 68 members, of which **49 are from the region and 19 are from other parts of the globe**.
- The two largest shareholders of the Asian Development Bank are the **United States and Japan**.
- ADB is an official United Nations Observer.
- Voting rights in ADB are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.

'CLEANTECH', FOR AN INCLUSIVE GREEN FUTURE IN INDIA

Context: In his address to the nation on Independence Day 2023, Prime Minister talked about India showing the world how to combat climate change. For this, Cleantech can deliver on development and climate action in the country's rural areas.

What is Cleantech?

- * Cleantech or clean tech is generally defined as **knowledge-based products** or services that improve operational **performance, productivity or efficiency** while reducing **costs, inputs, energy consumption, waste or pollution**.
- * Cleantech is differentiated from **green technology** since it generally refers to the emerging financial industry (as opposed to the actual technology in which the industry invests).
- * **Cleantech spans many industry verticals and is defined by the following eleven segments:**
 - ▶ Energy Generation, Energy Storage, Energy Infrastructure, Energy Efficiency, Transportation, Water & Wastewater, Air & Environment, Materials, Manufacturing/Industrial, Agriculture, Recycling & Waste.

Need for Cleantech:

- * The critical need for sustainable technologies that preserve **our resources and environment** cannot be overstated, in the drive to support a greener planet.
- * Cleantech also extends to process improvement. For example, in manufacturing, logistics, agriculture, and large-scale industrial operations, as these enterprises seek the benefits of process automation.

What are the objectives of Cleantech?

- * **Clean water:** Water is essential to human life, but clean water is not universally available.
 - ▶ As the global population grows, industries are looking for ways to clean and reuse water so that new sources are not needed.
 - ▶ An example of new technology is the **portable filters from Innovative Water Technologies** that use solar and wind power to clean water from any location.
- * **Air quality and pollution:** The quality of air directly affects health, wildlife and nature.
 - ▶ Tracking air quality and pollution can help determine areas people should avoid at times and determine what will affect the air quality.
- * **Recycling and waste:** Dumping waste into the ocean or on the ground presents a problem because space will run out.
 - ▶ Recycling programs are working to address the problem, but plastics can be hard to recycle when mixed with other chemicals and materials during production.
 - ▶ Companies are looking at ways to reduce the use of plastic for more recyclable materials, such as bio-based plastics.

* **Clean energy:** This technology creates energy from renewable energy sources and zero-emission sources.

- ▶ Examples of popular clean energy include solar panels, wind farms and floating solar panels.
- ▶ There are several green energy sources offering competitive rates and growth, including renewable hydrogen and hydropower.

Applications:

- * In agriculture, clean tech solutions enable farmers to **optimize water usage** and maximize crop yields by monitoring **soil moisture, wells, valves and weather stations**, and precisely targeting irrigation as needed.
- * **Fish and livestock farms** can improve feeding processes and **production yield with automation**, and reduce **driving time and fossil fuel consumption**.
- * Water districts can identify and correct **water waste with real-time water** monitoring across their infrastructure.
- * Innovative companies today are **deploying drones** to perform inspections at **industrial sites, utilities and water towers** to quickly identify issues, while reducing environmental impact and cost.

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Section D [QUICK BYTES]

- ☞ Mylara cult
 - ☞ Super Blue Moon
 - ☞ Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP)
 - ☞ China releases new official map
 - ☞ 'Vote from home' in Chhattisgarh
 - ☞ Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi scheme
 - ☞ Womb transplantation
 - ☞ Mi-17 V5 helicopters
 - ☞ Japan's H-IIA rocket
 - ☞ Defence Ministry inks deal with Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam
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 - ☞ Gabon

Mylara cult



The recent discovery of **two sculptures**, which resembles one belonging to **15th century A.D.** and another to **17th century A.D.**, at Basrur, near Kundapura, in Udupi district has proved that the **Ancient Mylara cult** existed in the coastal region.

About:

- Mylara is a **folk deity** identified as a **manifestation of Lord Shiva**.
- This deity, commonly known as **Mailara in Karnataka** and as **Khandoba in Maharashtra**, has a plethora of other names as well, such as **Khanderao and Khandnatha**.
- This cult is prevalent in the **southern part of India**, including Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

- **Mylara Lingeshwara Temple** is a Hindu temple dedicated to the god (Mailara dynasty), a form of the **god Shiva in Mylara**.
- Mylara is the main deity of this temple, who is an **incarnation of Lord Shiva**.

Super Blue Moon



On **30th August 2023**, the Earth observed both a "blue moon" and a "super moon" and therefore, a **"Super Blue Moon"**, a rare trifecta of astronomical events.

About full moon:

- The orbit of the moon around the earth is not circular; it is elliptical, that is, an elongated or stretched-out circle.
- It takes the moon **27.3 days to orbit the earth**.
- The point closest to earth in the moon's elliptical orbit is called **perigee**, and the point that is **farthest is called apogee**.
- A super moon happens when the moon is passing through or is close to its perigee, and is also a full moon.
- A full moon occurs when the **moon is directly opposite the sun** (as seen from earth), and therefore, has its entire day side lit up.
- The full moon appears as a **brilliant circle** in the sky that rises around sunset and sets around sunrise.

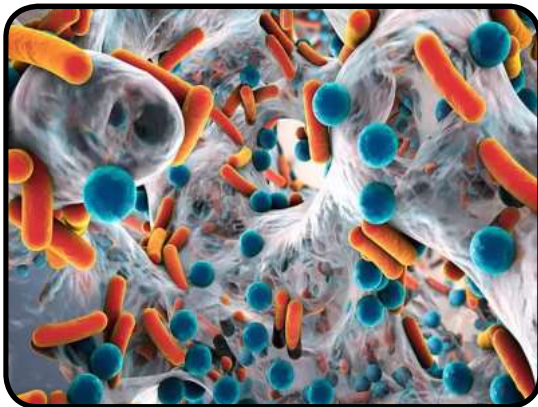
What is a blue moon?

- Though the expression "once in a blue moon" implies a rare or unusual occurrence, a blue moon is described the situation when a **full moon is seen twice** in a single month.
- Because the **new moon to new moon cycle lasts 29.5 days**, a time comes when the full moon occurs at the beginning of a month, and there are days left still for another full cycle to be completed.
- Such a month, in which the full moon is seen on **the 1st or 2nd**, will have a second full moon on the **30th or 31st**.

According to NASA, a **full moon at perigee (super moon)** is about 14% bigger and 30% brighter than a full moon at **apogee (called a "micro moon")**.

- According to NASA, this happens every **two or three years**.

Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP)



Bugworks Research, a biopharmaceutical company, entered into a partnership with the **Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP)** based out of Switzerland.

What is GARDP?

- It is a **not-for-profit organization** developing new treatments for **drug-resistant infections** that pose the greatest threat to health.
- Established by the **WHO** and the **Drugs for Neglected Disease initiative (DNDi)** in 2016, GARDP is a core element of WHO's Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance.
- GARDP accelerates the development and **access of treatments for drug-resistant infections**.
- Together with **private, public and non-profit partners**, GARDP works to preserve the **power of antibiotics** for generations to come.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

- AMR is the ability of **microorganisms** to persist or grow in the presence of drugs designed to inhibit or kill them.
- These drugs, called antimicrobials, are used to treat infectious diseases caused by microorganisms such as **bacteria, fungi, viruses and protozoan parasites**.

China releases new official map



China's government has released the "**2023 edition of the standard map of China**", which continues to show the entire **State of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region within China's borders**.

About the new map:

- The **2023 map** was released by the **Ministry of Natural Resources**.
- The territorial claims on China's western borders, as also the **nine-dash line covering the entire South China Sea**, are shown on the map as in previous editions.
- Also as in previous maps, a "**tenth dash**" is placed **east of Taiwan**, underlining Beijing's claims over the island.
- It would "standardise" the names of **11 places in Arunachal Pradesh**, including a town close to the **Arunachal Pradesh capital of Itanagar**.

This year marks the **30-year anniversary** of the **Law of Surveying and Mapping of the People's Republic of China**.

- This was the third such list "**renaming**" places in **Arunachal Pradesh** by China.

'Vote from home' in Chhattisgarh



In the coming assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, people **aged above 80** and **persons with disability (PwD)** with 40 or more disabilities **can vote from their homes**.

About the initiative:

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has announced that it will provide a **postal ballot facility** at home for citizens above 80 years of age and those with more than 40 per cent disability during the upcoming Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh.
- There are over **2, 00,000 voters** in Chhattisgarh, who are above 80 years old.
- To avail of this service, they need to complete **'form 12D'** within five days of the election notification.
- Also, a campaign has been initiated to register citizens previously not included in the electoral rolls. This will particularly focus on **five Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** during the ongoing **Special Summary Revision (SSR)-2**.
- To ensure fair elections, administrative and law enforcement agencies will operate **105 check posts** throughout the state, all equipped with **Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV)**.

Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi scheme

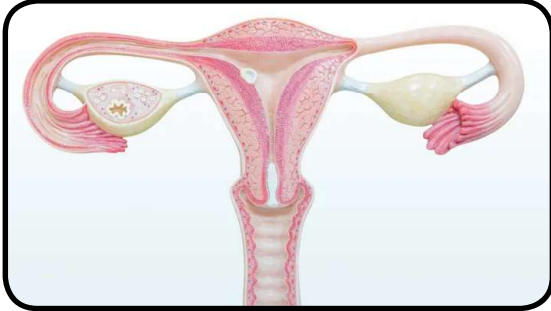


Context: Karnataka government has launched **Gruha Lakshmi**, a guarantee scheme providing financial aid of **Rs.2, 000 to women head of families** in the State.

About the Scheme:

- Based on government data, nearly **1.10 crore women** have registered for the scheme in the state.
- The Karnataka government has earmarked Rs.17, 500 crore for **'Gruha Lakshmi'** programme in the current financial year.
- The registration for the Gruha Lakshmi scheme has started on July 19.
- **Eligibility:**
 - ▶ Women listed as family heads on Antyodaya, Below Poverty Line (BPL), and **Above Poverty Line (APL)** ration cards are eligible for the **Gruha Lakshmi Scheme**.
 - ▶ Only **one woman in a family** will be the beneficiary of this scheme.
 - ▶ Women **government employees, taxpayers and families** whose husbands pay **income tax** or file GST returns are not eligible for the scheme.
- The government has also introduced a **WhatsApp chatbot service** for registration in order to reduce congestion at the **KarnatakaOne and BangaloreOne centres**.

Womb transplantation



Recently, the first **successful UK womb transplant** has been performed at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford.

About:

- Womb transplantation is an **intricate procedure** in which one team of surgeons removes the **womb from the donor** and a second team **transplants it into the recipient**.
- Both stages of the procedure are **serious operations** lasting many hours, and the patients remain in hospital for days afterwards.
- Donor and recipient undergo **extensive counselling** before the transplant to ensure psychological suitability, and the **recipient must take drugs** that suppress the immune system afterwards to prevent **her body from rejecting the new organ**.

How safe is it?

- The procedure is claimed to be medically **safe for donor and recipient**.

Mi-17 V5 helicopters



The **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** accorded **Acceptance of Necessity (AoN)** for capital acquisition proposals worth approximately Rs. 7,800 crore, including **Electronic Warfare (EW) Suite** for the **IAF's Mi-17 V5 helicopters**.

About:

- AoN is the first step in the **long defence procurement process**.
- Grant of an AoN does **not necessarily lead to a final order**.
- The DAC is the **highest decision-making body** in the Defence Ministry for deciding on new policies and capital acquisitions for the three services (Army, Navy and Air Force) and the Indian Coast Guard.

Mi-17 V5 helicopters:

- Mi-17V5 is part of the **Russian Mi-17 series**, which can fly at high altitudes in complex weather conditions, be it in tropical and maritime climates or even in desert conditions.
- They are medium **twin-turbine choppers** useful in search and rescue operations, and can be equipped with weapons.
- Mi-17s can travel at a maximum speed of 250 km/h, have up to eight fire posts for small weapons and can transport cargo up to 4,000 kg.
- The Mi-17V5 is produced and **manufactured in Kazan**, a city in southwest Russia.
- It is a modern military transport helicopter used by **the Indian Air Force**.

Japan's H-IIA rocket



Japan's space agency has recently suspended the scheduled rocket launch, which was intended to carry the **nation's first spacecraft to land on the moon.**

About H-IIA rocket:

- The H-IIA rocket being Japan's primary launch vehicle with an impressive 98 per cent success rate, unfavorable wind conditions in the upper atmosphere led to the decision to halt the launch.
- H-IIA, jointly developed by JAXA and MHI, has been Japan's flagship space launch vehicle, with 45 successful launches in 46 tries since 2001.
- The rocket is carrying **JAXA's Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM)**, which would be the **first Japanese spacecraft** to land on the moon.
- The rocket is also carrying an **X-Ray Imaging and Spectroscopy Mission (XRISM) satellite**, a joint project of **JAXA, NASA and the European Space Agency.**

Defence Ministry inks deal with Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam



The **Defence Ministry** has signed a contract with Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam, to acquire **five Fleet Support Ships (FSS)** at an overall cost of Rs 19,000 crore.

About the deal:

- **Expected weight:** 44,000 tonnes
- The ships will be the **first-of-a-kind ships** made in India by an Indian shipyard (Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL)).
- The FSSs will be used for replenishing ships at sea with fuel, water, ammunition and stores, enabling the Indian naval fleet to operate for prolonged periods without returning to harbour.
- These ships would enhance the strategic reach and mobility of the fleet.
- The induction of these ships will significantly enhance the blue water capability of the Indian Navy.
- The ships can also be deployed for evacuation of people and human assistance and disaster relief operations.

National Space Day



India has decided to celebrate **August 23** as '**National Space Day**' to mark the successful touchdown of **Chandrayaan-3 mission's lander** on the lunar surface.

About:

- The primary goal behind "**National space day in India**" is to inspire the youth.
- By celebrating the achievements, the younger generation would be motivated to dream big and consider careers in science and technology.

The name game:

- PM Modi also named the landing spot of the Vikram lander as 'Shiv Shakti'.
- He also christened the location where Chandrayaan-2 had left its mark in 2019 as '**Tiranga Point**'.

Who names sites on the Moon?

- The **International Astronomical Union (IAU)** determines some other rules for **Space activities**.
- The IAU's **Working Groups handle** the process of naming lunar spots, though its **decisions and recommendations** are not enforceable by any international law.
- India is among its **92 members**.
- The IAU has been the arbiter of **planetary and satellite nomenclature since its inception in 1919**.
- Many countries have been giving **informal names** to the spots on moon during lunar missions.
- The United States gave informal names to lunar sites during Apollo missions.

PERSONALITY IN NEWS

Alladi Ramakrishnan



The **Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSc)** will pay homage to its visionary founder-director **Alladi Ramakrishnan** in his **birth centenary year** falling on 2023, by hosting a conference in his honour at its campus in Taramani, Chennai.

About:

- He was born on August 9, 1923.
- His father was the lawyer **Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer**, who, as a member of the Constituent Assembly, was instrumental in **drafting the Constitution of India** with other prominent members.
- He had his early education in P. S. High School, Madras. He graduated from Presidency College, Madras, with B.Sc. (Hons) degree in physics.
- As a student of the college he had wanted to work under Sir C. V. Raman.
- **Major contributions:** He made contributions to stochastic process, particle physics, algebra of matrices, special theory of relativity and quantum mechanics.

SPECIES IN NEWS

Echidnas (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*)

According to a recent update, Scientists believe echidnas began as platypuses who left the water and evolved spines.

About the species:

- The Short-beaked Echidna is the only species of echidna in Australia.



- They are **nocturnal species**.
- The Short-beaked Echidna is easily recognised by its sharp spines, short legs and long snout.
- They live in forests and woodlands, heath, grasslands and arid environments.
- They are found throughout Australia, including Tasmania.
- The Short-beaked Echidna breaks into ant and termite nests and catches its prey by flicking its long sticky tongue in and out.

Red sand boa (*Eryx johnii*)



A report by the **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)-India** has pointed out around **172 incidents of seizures of red sand boa (*Eryx johnii*)** between the years 2016-2021.

About:

- It is a rare **non-poisonous snake** that is used for making certain **medicines, cosmetics and in black magic**, and is in huge demand in the international market.
- It is found in whole of India excluding **North-east states** after North-Bengal.
- Among layman it is famous as "**Two-headed Snake**" due to the presence of very thick tail having rounded end.
- The trade and possession of the red sand boa is an offence under the **Wildlife Protection Act 1972**.
- **Protection status:**
 - ▶ The species is listed under Schedule 4 of the Act. Also, it is listed in CITES Appendix II.
- The **Red sand boa** is classified as '**Near Threatened**' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

LOCATION IN NEWS

Murmansk Port

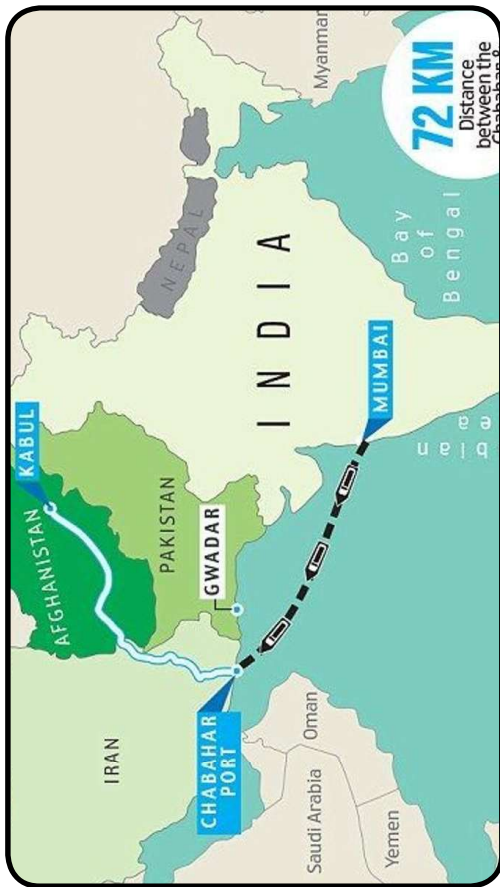


India's engagement with **Russia's Arctic region** has been strengthening with India-bound goods constituting the **maximum share of cargo** handled this year by '**Murmansk Port**'.

About the location:

- The **seaport of Murmansk** is one of the largest ice-free ports in Russia.
- It is located on the Kola Peninsula at the **coast of Barents Sea**.
- It is about 2,000 km **northwest of Moscow**.
- The port is navigated all year round.
- The main port capabilities are located on the **western coast of Kola Bay**, among them the mooring berths of the commercial port (including passenger area), fishing port, ship-repair yard, shipyard, oil terminal, and FSUE Atomflot premises.
- On the **eastern coast of Kola Bay** there is a number of small fish and fleet maintenance terminals.

Chabahar port



Under the new move to pursue arbitration, **India and Iran** has drafted a **foreign arbitration clause** under rules framed by the **UN Commission on International Trade Law** which will help firm up longer-term agreement on Chabahar.

About Chabahar Port:

- The Chabahar Port is a **key pillar of India's India-Pacific vision** to connect Eurasia with the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Located in Iran**, it is the commercial transit center for the region and especially Central Asia.
- **The port will also be part International North-South Transport Corridor network** connecting India.
- Notably, the **first rail transit cargo from Russia to India** entered Iran recently through the Sarakhs border crossing, marking the official launch of the eastern section of the **North-South railway corridor**.

International North-South Transport Corridor:

- INSTC trade route is **7200 Km long** and the transport of freight is through a multi-mode network of **roads, ships, and railways**.
- This route connects **India and Russia through Iran and Azerbaijan**.
- **Russia, India, and Iran are the founding member states of INSTC**.
- The agreement was signed in 2002.
- There are **13 member states** of the INSTC project – **India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Turkey, Syria and Ukraine**.
- **Bulgaria is the Observer State**. The Baltic countries like Latvia and Estonia have also expressed willingness to join the INSTC.

Palau



The **U.S. Coast Guard** will have an expanded right to board vessels in Palau's waters under a **new maritime law enforcement agreement** that comes after incursions by Chinese ships into the Pacific island country's exclusive economic zone.

About Palau Island:

- Palau is a country in the **western Pacific Ocean** that consists of coral and volcanic islands surrounded by single barrier reef.
- Palau lies in the **southwest corner of Micronesia** (country spread across the western Pacific Ocean comprising more than 600 islands), with New Guinea to the south, and the **Philippines to the west**.

Palau became the **76th country** to sign the **International Solar Alliance framework agreement**.

- Its major populated islands are **Babelthiap (Babeldaob), Koror, Malakal, Arakabesan, and Peleliu**.
- There is concern that the **low-lying islands** could be badly affected by rising sea levels possibly due to climate change.

Gabon



Recently, **Military officers in Gabon** have seized power, placing President Ali Bongo under house arrest after he was declared the winner of a disputed election.

About the location:

- Gabon is a **Central African country**, is rich in natural resources.
- Located on the **Atlantic Ocean**, it borders Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and the Republic of Congo.
- It is sparsely populated, with a population of **2.3 million (2021)** and forests covering **85% of its territory**.
- Gabon, the **fourth largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa**, posted strong economic growth over the past decade, driven mainly by oil and manganese production.

Key Facts:

- India is now the **second-largest destination** for Gabonese exports.
- Over **50 Indian companies** have set up manufacturing units in the Gabon Special Economic Zone.

IAS 2024

GS ANALYST

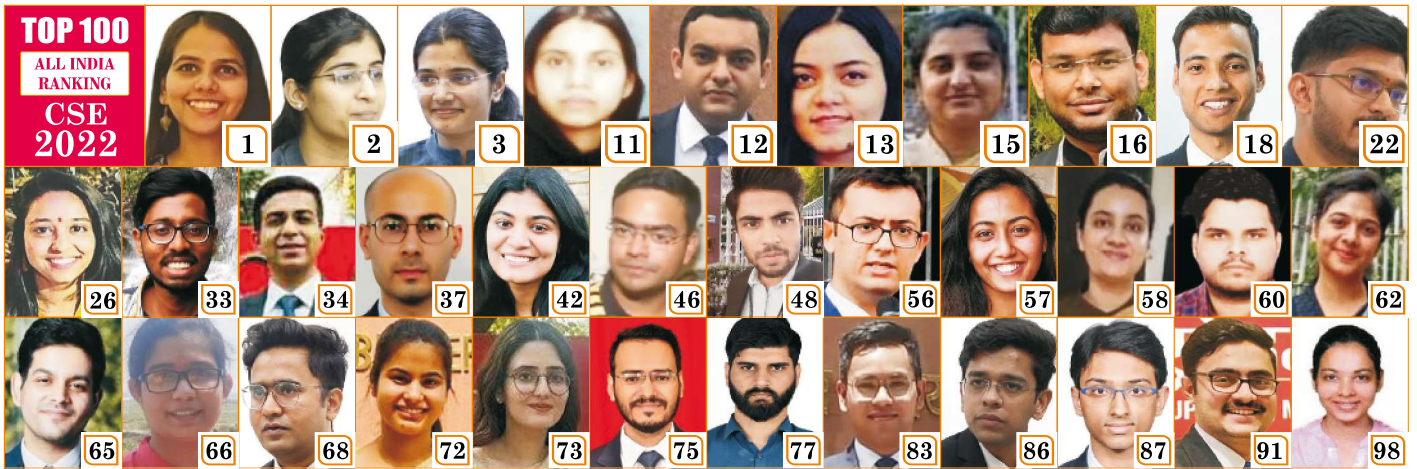
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