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

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

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Section A [MAINS]

SHIVAJI'S NAVAL PROWESS, A BRIEF AT THE MARATHA NAVY

Context: On Navy Day December 4, PM paid tributes to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and unveiled a grand statue of the 17th century Maratha king at the coastal fort of Sindhugarh, Maharashtra.

Maratha Naval Power:

◈ The origin of naval power lay in Shivaji foresighted strategic vision. Shivaji's empire reached the west coast after 1656-57, when his dominions touched Kalyan.

◈ In the same year, he decided to establish a navy in order to protect his territory. He realised the importance of having a secure coastline and protecting the western Konkan coastline from the attacks of Siddis' [Afro-Indians allied with Deccani Sultans) fleet.

◈ Secure ports would ensure maritime trading, which brought in revenue and customs duty,

◈ His vision for establishing a naval wing of his military was based on his belief in 'Jalameva yasya, balameva tasya' i.e 'He who rules the seas is all powerful'.

◈ The Maratha Naval Power at its peak included 400-odd ships of various kinds and sizes. These included both larger battleships, and other vessels of varying shapes and purposes, such as the *gurab*, *tarande*, *galbat*, *shibad*, and *pal*.

◈ Shivaji's navy tasted its first success when he used 85 ships to attack Basuru near Kundapura in today's Karnataka — a mission which yielded a huge booty. Between 1653 and 1680, Shivaji ordered the construction of multiple naval forts, starting with the Vijaydurg in 1653, and followed by the likes of Sindhudurg and Kolaba.

◈ These forts, many of them unconquered, were used for strategic purposes, to keep a watch on enemies approaching via the seas. North Konkan's Kalyan and Bhivandi, which were part of the Bijapur territory, came under Shivaji's control by 1657.

◈ Even after Shivaji's demise, the Maratha Navy continued to be a formidable force, led by admirals such as Angre.

Admiring Maratha naval power- The valued heritage

◈ The Indian Navy has always acknowledged the sea-faring prowess of the Marathas, under Shivaji and later.

◈ It has named its training establishment in Lonavla as INS Shivaji, and the shore-based logistics and administrative hub of the Western Naval Command, Mumbai, as INS Angre — after Kanhoji Angre (1669-1729), the celebrated Maratha naval commander.

◈ The use of the octagonal design of the seal of Shivaji on the new Naval Ensign. The Indian Navy's new Ensign (flag) based on the seal of Shivaji.

Limitations of the Maratha Naval Power

◈ While Shivaji showed incredible military acumen in developing a naval force, its strategic objectives remained limited "to counter and, possibly, pre-empt the marauding Siddis [of Janjira] adept at projecting power on land from their sea bases.

◈ Though formidable but could not challenge the new naval might and power of Portuguese or later on British. Maratha never challenged the foreign power in the high seas. Even they paid Portuguese a special custom duty which was paid by merchant vessels heading towards West Asia.

Sindhugarh Fort:

◈ A historical sea fort located in Arabian Sea near the Konkan region of Maharashtra in Western India. The fort, commissioned by Chhatrapati Shivaji, was constructed between 1664 and 1667.

◈ It was constructed using locally available **laterite stone**.

◈ The fort lies off the shore of Malvan taluka of the Sindhudurg District in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, 450 kilometres (280 mi) south of Mumbai. It is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India.

◈ Main objective was to counter the rising influence of English, Dutch, French and Portuguese merchants in the Konkan coast, and to curb the rise of Siddhis of Janjira. The fort was built on a small island known as the Khurte Island.

◈ There are **three temples** on the fort namely **Jari Mari Temple, Shri Bhavani Temple and Shri Shiv Rajeshwar Temple.**

THE ENDLESS BATTLE WITH CASTE–BASED VITRIOL AND VIOLENCE

Context: A youth in Andhra Pradesh was kidnapped and assaulted driven by caste based violence.

Atrocities abound

◈ Discrimination and violence against Dalits are common with the caste hierarchy condemning them to the bottom of the social ladder.

◈ Despite laws to protect the Scheduled Castes (SC), abuse is frequently reported from across the country.

◈ In Andhra Pradesh alone, 2,014 crimes against SCs were recorded in 2021, of which 33 were murders and 49 were cases of rape of minor girls.

◈ The State recorded a conviction rate of 5.3% and 13.8% in terms of disbursal of relief within seven days.

◈ Shunned by many in society who call them 'untouchable', Dalits, particularly in villages, are discriminated against, denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions like in scavenging, and routinely abused, even killed, sometimes at the hands of the police and at times by people of upper castes.

◈ This entrenched form of societal segregation, often described as hidden apartheid, has led to the complete isolation of many villages along caste lines.

◈ The prevalence of caste-based violence in Indian society is a complex issue rooted in historical, social, and economic factors.

◈ Understanding the reasons behind such violence requires a nuanced examination of India's socio-cultural fabric:

Historical Legacy:

◈ The caste system, deeply ingrained in Indian history, has assigned social roles based on birth. This hierarchical structure has led to discrimination and oppression of certain castes.

◈ **Untouchability:** The practice of untouchability, where certain castes were considered impure and socially ostracized, has contributed to a sense of hierarchy and discrimination.

Social Inequality:

◈ **Economic Disparities:** Caste-based economic disparities have created imbalances in access to resources, education, and opportunities. Certain castes have historically been marginalized and economically disadvantaged.

◈ **Education Gap:** Limited access to quality education for marginalized castes has perpetuated social inequality, hindering upward mobility and reinforcing stereotypes.

Political Exploitation:

◈ **Vote Bank Politics:** Some politicians exploit caste identities to consolidate vote banks. This not only perpetuates divisions but also creates a political environment where caste-based issues are used for electoral gains.

◈ **Reservation Policies:** While reservation policies were introduced to address historical injustices, they have also sometimes led to tensions between different castes, as some may perceive these policies as favoring certain groups over others.

Social Norms and Customs:

◈ **Inter-Caste Marriages:** Resistance to inter-caste marriages is still prevalent in many communities. Social norms against marrying outside one's caste contribute to the persistence of caste identities.

◈ **Social Stigma:** Certain castes face social stigma, affecting their self-esteem and societal standing. This can lead to frustration and, in some cases, violence.

Lack of Awareness:

◈ **Ignorance and Stereotypes:** Lack of awareness and perpetuation of stereotypes about different castes contribute to prejudice and discrimination. Educational and awareness campaigns are essential to challenge these biases.

Legal and Judicial Challenges:

◈ **Legal Framework:** While India has laws against caste-based discrimination, the enforcement of these laws faces challenges. Cases often take a long time to be resolved, and the legal process itself can be intimidating for victims.

◈ **Caste-Based Crimes:** Crimes specifically targeting individuals based on their caste identity, known as "caste-based crimes" or "atrocities," persist. These crimes can range from verbal abuse to physical violence.

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Justice delayed and denied

◈ Failure to prosecute perpetrators of horrific caste atrocities has emboldened the perpetrators.

◈ Low conviction rates are a reflection of how cases under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act are registered and pursued.

◈ Prosecutors and judges fail to faithfully pursue complaints brought forth by Dalits, which is evidenced by the high rate of acquittals in such cases.

RE-CRIMINALISING ADULTERY AS A GENDER-NEUTRAL OFFENCE

Context: The Parliament Standing Committee on Home Affairs has suggested that the proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023 be amended to make adultery a criminal offence again— but on gender-neutral terms.

What is Adultery?

◈ Adultery can be defined as "**An intended sexual contact between two people of opposite gender who are not married to each other under** law". In other words Adultery is a physical relationship between a married man and a woman who is not his wife or between a married woman and a man who is not her spouse.

◈ Adultery is also known as infidelity, **philandery, extra marital affair or physical betrayal in marriage. Adultery is different from rape in the** sense that **adultery is voluntary** while rape is not. The consent of both the individuals for a physical relationship is a must for adultery to exist.

What is the Law of Adultery?

◈ Adultery law in India is **defined by the Indian Penal Code Section 497.**

◈ IPC Section 497 states, "**Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence** of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery."

◈ A man found guilty of adultery "shall **be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both."**

◈ In cases of adultery, the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor. Similarly, an unmarried woman cannot be prosecuted for adultery. The **offence of adultery is, according to Section 497, committed by a man against a married man.**

◈ In the event of a man committing adultery by means of sexual intercourse with a married woman or an unmarried woman, this law does not **confer any right on the man's wife prosecute the adulterous husband or the woman with whom the husband** has indulged in sexual intercourse with.

◈ The adultery law has been criticised for treating women as property owned by men. Only a man can be a victim or accused/**culprit under the existing reading of Section 497 of the IPC.**

◈ **The Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act makes an** act of adultery valid ground for divorce. Either spouse can seek divorce on the ground of adultery. It states that even a single act of voluntary sexual act by either party to the **marriage with any person other than his or her spouse constitutes a ground for divorce for the other spouse**.

Legislative History

◈ In the inception of the **Indian Penal Code, marriage among Hindus was deemed sacramental, dissuading penalties for adultery.**

◈ **Lord Macaulay**, a key drafter, **opposed criminalizing adultery**, advocating pecuniary compensation for marital issues.

◈ He acknowledged that given the sacramental **nature of marriage in India, the law was not the solution in dealing with marital infidelity.**

◈ **Distinguishing between a moral wrong and an offenc**e it was observed by him that "We cannot admit that a Penal code is by any means to be considered **as a body of ethics, that the legislature ought to punish acts merely because those acts are immoral, o**r that because an act is not punished at all it follows that the legislature considers that act as innocent.

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❖ The **Law Commission, in 1971, considered criminalization,** dissenting voices highlighting changing views on women's status.

❖ Despite recommendations **for gender-neutral provisions, procedural reforms, and acknowledging societal transformation, changes** were slow.

❖ **The 2003 Malimath Committee suggested retaining adultery as an offense, emphasizing the preservation of marital sanctity.**

Supreme Court declaring Adultery Not a Crime

❖ **A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court** in its judgment *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* (2018), held that adultery is not a crime and struck it off the IPC.

❖ It, however, clarified that adultery would continue to remain a civil wrong and a valid ground for divorce.

The inception of the proceedings

❖ **Dates back to 2017 when Joseph Shine,** a non-resident Indian, hailing from Kerala, filed PIL under Article 32 of the Constitution, challenging the **constitutional validity of the offence of adultery under Section 497 of the IPC read with Section 198(2) of the Cr.P.C.**

❖ The offence imposed culpability on a man who engaged in sexual intercourse with another man's wife and was punishable with a **maximum imprisonment of five years**. However, the wife who had consented to sexual intercourse with a man, who was not her husband, was exempted from prosecution.

❖ The provision was **also not applicable to a married man if he engaged in sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman or a widow.**

❖ Notably, Section 198(2) of the CrPC empowered only the husband (of the adulterous wife) to file a complaint for the offence of adultery.

❖ In July 2018, the Centre filed an **affidavit in the case arguing that diluting adultery in any form would weaken the institution of marriage and that the 'stability of a marriage is not an ideal to be scorned'. On September 27, 2018, the Bench pronounced** a unanimous ruling in the form of four concurring judgments.

According to the judgements-

❖ Adultery is **not a crime if the cuckolded husband connives or consents to his wife's** extra-marital affair, thereby treating a married woman as her husband's 'chattel'.

❖ Underscoring that adultery is **"absolutely a matter of privacy at its pinnacle,"**

❖ **If it is treated as a crime, there would be immense intrusion into the extreme** privacy of the matrimonial sphere. It is better to be left as a ground for divorce.

❖ Section 497 made a husband the '**licensor' of his wife's sexual choices and that this archaic law does not square with today's constitutional morality**. The offence perpetuates the gender stereotype that the 'third-party male' has seduced the woman, and she is his victim.

❖ The criminalisation of adultery **subjugated the woman to a position where the law disregarded her sexuality. He reasoned, "Marriage does not mean ceding autonomy** of one to the other.

❖ The ability to make sexual **choices is essential to human liberty.** Even within private zones, an individual should be allowed her choice."

❖ The autonomy of **an individual to make his or her choices concerning his/her sexuality in the private sphere should be protected from criminal sanction**.

❖ Adultery although a moral wrong *qua* the spouse and the family, however, does not result in any wrong against the society at large in order to bring **it within the ambit of criminal law.**

❖ **Instead highlights that adultery should remain as a ground for divorce if one** believes in a conservative framework of marriage. "It is difficult for a woman to live with a man who is cheating on her. But that's between two private parties.

Parliamentary panel's recommendations

❖ In its report, the **Committee suggested that adultery be reinstated as a criminal offence**, but **be made gender-neutral**, thereby **making both men and women equally culpable** under the law. Highlighting the need to protect the institution of marriage, the report stipulates.

❖ The Committee is of the view that the institution of marriage is considered sacred in Indian society **and there is a need to safeguard its sanctity. For the sake of protecting the institution of marriage, this section should be retained in the Sanhita (Bharatiya Nyaya** Sanhita) by making it gender neutral.

❖ Pointed out that the revoked Section 497 of the IPC "only penalised the married man, and reduced the **married woman to be a property of her husband". The proposed change also seeks to address this deficiency.**

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◈ The Committee reasoned that **adultery be criminalised in a gender-neutral manner on the ground that it is crucial to safeguard the sanctity** of the **institution of marriage.**

Dissent Note

◈ Opposition MPs have **however refuted the claim by underscoring that it is "outdated to raise marriage to the level of a sacrament" and that the State has no business to enter into the private lives of couples and punish the alleged wrongdoer.**

◈ Adultery should not be a crime. It is an offence against marriage which is a compact between two persons; if the compact is broken, the aggrieved spouse may sue for divorce or civil damages. To raise marriage to the level of a **sacrament is outdated.** In any event, a marriage **concerns only two persons and not society at large.**

Can Parliament make Adultery a crime again? -Legislative overruling of judicial pronouncements

◈ A ruling of the Supreme Court establishes a precedent and binds the lower courts to follow its dictat. However, the Parliament is well within its scope to overrule judicial rulings, but **such legislative action will be considered valid only if the legal basis of the judgment is altered.**

◈ The **Supreme Court in *Madras Bar Association v. Union of India* (2021) held that "the test for determining the validity of validating legislation is that the judgment pointing out the** defect would not have been passed if the altered position as sought to be brought in by the validating statute existed before the Court at **the time of rendering its judgment.**

◈ **In other words, the defect pointed out should have been cured such that the basis of the** judgment pointing out the defect is removed.

The Supreme Court declares as unconstitutional the Penal Provision on Adultery

Section 497 of the 158-year-old IPC says
Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery

A five-judge Constitution bench was unanimous in holding Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as unconstitutional and struck down the penal provision

The offence entailed a maximum punishment of 5 years, or with fine, or both

It was manifestly arbitrary and dents the individuality of women

Sec 497 is clear violation of fundamental rights granted in the Constitution and there is no justification for continuation of the provision

Any provision treating women with inequality is not constitutional and it's time to say that **husband is not the master of woman**

PTI GRAPHICS

◈ In September this year, a division bench of the Supreme **Court in *NHPC Ltd. v. State of Himachal Pradesh Secretary* reiterated that the legislature is permitted to remove a defect i**n an earlier legislation, as pointed out by a constitutional court, and that laws to this effect can be passed both prospectively and retrospectively.

◈ However, where a legislature merely seeks to validate the acts carried out under a previous legislation which has been struck down or **rendered inoperative by a Court**, by a subsequent legislation without curing the defects in such legislation, the subsequent legislation would also be ultra-vires.

EMPOWERING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN INDIA

Context: The idea of empowerment and inclusion regarding Disability needs an orientation shift to provide more fruitful. From 'For' to 'By'.

'For' and 'By':

◈ **"For"** is often used when a person is receiving

something and **"By"** is to "identify the agent performing an action".

◈ This difference is crucial when it comes to **disability inclusion**, as the approach is completely different if it is **"by" persons with disabilities being a part of the process and not "for" them**, without them in the process.

Why?

◈ Ensuring **inclusive opportunities and employment in rural areas** is imperative, considering the majority of persons with disabilities reside in these regions.

Disability as a Multifaceted Challenge:

◈ **Disability**, as a complex amalgamation of **social, economic, and gender vulnerabilities**, demands nuanced approaches for equitable solutions.

◈ Globally, 1.3 billion people grapple with disabilities, with **80% residing in developing countries and 70% in rural areas**.

◈ The existing **systems often perpetuate exclusion**, leading to heightened instances of poverty, limited educational access, and social and economic discrimination.

The Significance of 'By' in Disability Inclusion:

◈ Understanding the linguistic nuances, the term **'by' in disability inclusion signifies the active participation** of persons with disabilities in the process, a departure from the passive 'for' them approach.

◈ This distinction is pivotal for **fostering genuine inclusion.**

The Economic Imperative of Inclusion:

◈ The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** underscores that integrating persons with disabilities into the economy can contribute to a global GDP boost of 3% to 7%.

◈ Despite the ideal of equal opportunities, **the current employment landscape falls short**, reinforcing stereotypes and hindering access to the job market.

◈ The current employment scenario **is limited, providing fewer jobs for persons with disabilities** and perpetuating stereotypes that create further barriers for people with disabilities to access the labour market.

◈ It is also in direct **contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which advocates changing attitudes and perceptions towards persons with disabilities

and viewing inclusion from a social development dimension.

◈ **Disability inclusion** is rooted in **assuring the rights of persons with disabilities** and recognising the economic benefits of inclusion.

Challenges Amplified in Rural Areas:

◈ **In India,** governmental initiatives, such as the **Unique ID for Persons with Disabilities (UDID) card, exist**.

◈ However, **awareness and last-mile connectivity** remain crucial, especially in rural areas where challenges are exacerbated.

◈ Persons with **disabilities in rural settings often face limited educational and employment opportunities** and are viewed through a charitable lens, undermining their agency.

The Role of the Private Sector:

◈ Acknowledging the pivotal role of the private sector, **a robust legal framework alone is insufficient.**

◈ **Engaging companies and building their confidence** in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities is essential.

◈ **Collaboration with employers' federations and trade unions** further enhances the potential for promoting disability inclusion.

The SPARK Project:

◈ The collaboration between **ILO, IFAD, and the Women's Development Corporation in Maharashtra** manifests in the SPARK project.

◈ This initiative empowers persons with disabilities by training them as **Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs)**, fostering awareness, and breaking down barriers.

◈ The **project has successfully instigated a positive shift** in attitudes at societal and administrative levels.

Towards Social Justice:

◈ The **goal of social justice** necessitates the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all facets of development, starting with rural areas.

◈ Evidence underscores the **bidirectional link between disability, poverty, nutrition, and hunger**, emphasizing the need for inclusive opportunities and employment in rural regions.

◈ Amid **historical marginalization** and a setback in achieving **Sustainable Development Goals,** a profound commitment to prioritizing the voices and needs of persons with disabilities is paramount in global development agendas.

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GOVERNOR CANNOT REFER RE-ENACTED BILLS TO PRESIDENT: SC

Context: The Tamil Nadu government in the Supreme Court has criticised Governor R.N. Ravi for exhibiting "constitutional obstinacy" by referring ten key Bills re-enacted by the State Assembly to the President for consideration.

What's the issue?

◈ Recent instances of Governor who is an unelected Head of state is withholding some bills in states like **Punjab and Tamil Nadu.**

◈ This action was opposed and dissented by respective state legislature. The main contention pertains to the Constitutionality of the action.

◈ The action also defeats the spirit of the constitution by holding assent indefinitely on a bill/law passed by duly elected State legislature.

◈ The action of governor contravenes the popular mandate and values of democracy.

Recent Supreme Court's Views:

◈ A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India said that the Governor, having withheld his assent to the Bills in the first instance and cannot now refer the Bills, re-passed by the Tamil Nadu legislature, to the President.

◈ As mentioned by SC, **Article 200 of the Constitution** gives the Governor **three choices** –

  ➤ Grant assents to the Bills or withhold assent or reserve them for the consideration of the President.

  ➤ In this case, the Governor withheld assent.

  ➤ Once he has withheld assent, there is no question of him referring them to the President.

◈ The CJI has said that the Governor withholds assent, he **cannot stultify** the Bills.

What is the observation of Supreme Court?

◈ It Laid down the law that a Governor, in case he withholds assent, should send back a Bill forwarded to him by a State Legislature "**as soon as possible**" with a message to reconsider the proposed law.

◈ The expression "as soon as possible" conveyed a "constitutional imperative of expedition".

◈ In case, the State Assembly reiterates the Bill "with or without amendments", the Governor has no choice or discretion, and has to give his assent to it.

◈ Message of the Governor does not bind the legislature is evident from the use of the expression 'if the Bill is passed again ...with or without amendments.

◈ A Governor who chooses to withhold a Bill without doing anything further would be acting in contravention of the Constitution. Because such a course of action would be contrary to fundamental principles of a constitutional democracy based on a Parliamentary pattern.

◈ The verdict is also a significant boost to Tamil Nadu's case. The Tamil Nadu Assembly had returned 10 crucial Bills to Governor R.N. Ravi without any amendments. The Governor had withheld assent to the Bills in the first instance.

The role of the Governor in legislature

◈ **Article 200 of the Constitution** lays down that when a Bill, passed by a State Legislature, is presented to the Governor for their assent, they have four alternatives:

  ➤ He may give assent to the Bill; may withhold assent to the Bill, that is, reject the Bill in which case the Bill fails to become law; may return the Bill (if it is not a Money Bill) for reconsideration of the State Legislature; or may reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President.

◈ As held by the Supreme Court in various cases including the **Shamsher Singh case (1974)**, the Governor does not exercise their discretionary powers while withholding assent or returning a Bill to the State Legislature.

◈ They are required to act as per the advice of the Council of Ministers. The situation of 'withholding assent' may arise in case of a **Private Members' Bill (any Member of State Legislature other than a Minister)** passed by the State Legislature, which the council of ministers do not want to be enacted into a law. In such an instance, they would advise the Governor to 'withhold assent'.

◈ However, this is an unlikely scenario as the council of ministers who enjoys a majority in the Legislative Assembly would not allow the passage of such a Bill.

◈ Secondly, if the incumbent government whose Bill has been passed by the legislature falls or resigns before it is assented to by the Governor, the new council may advise the Governor to 'withhold assent'.

◈ The Governor must reserve certain Bills, like those which reduce the powers of the High Court, for the consideration of the President. They may also reserve Bills on concurrent list that are repugnant to a Union law based on ministerial advice.

◈ It is only under rare circumstances that the Governor may exercise their discretion, where they feel that the provisions of the Bill will contravene the provisions of the Constitution and therefore, should be reserved for the consideration of the President.

◈ It must however be noted that the Constitution does not lay down any time limit within which the Governor is required to make a decision.

GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTION AND REGULATION OF DARK PATTERNS

Context: Recently, the government has banned 13 "dark pattern" sites on e-commerce platforms under guidelines by CCPA.

About the Guidelines:

◈ These patterns **deceive or manipulate** customers.

◈ They include false urgency, basket sneaking, and forced action.

◈ The guidelines ensure clarity for **buyers, sellers, marketplace and regulators, defining what are unacceptable as unfair trading practices.**

◈ The guidelines are applicable to all platforms offering goods and services in India, and even advertisers and sellers.

◈ Resorting to dark patterns will amount to misleading advertisement or unfair trade practice or violation of consumer rights.

What do the guidelines say?

◈ The penalty will be imposed as per the provisions of the **Consumer Protection Act**.

◈ The ministry has defined **13 deceptive practices** that will be treated as **'dark patterns'** and these include;

➤ Creating **false urgency** by creating an artificial sense of scarcity,

➤ **basket sneaking**, where the inclusion of additional items such that the total amount payable by the user is more than the amount payable for the product as well as subscription trap.

➤ **Forced Action:** Manipulating users into sharing more personal information than intended.

What are dark patterns and its types?

◈ Dark patterns, also known as deceptive patterns, refer to strategies employed by websites and apps to make users perform actions they did not intend to or discourage behaviors that are not advantageous for the companies.

◈ The term was coined by **Harry Brignull**, a user experience (UX) designer, in 2010.

◈ These patterns often exploit cognitive biases and employ tactics such as false urgency, forced actions, hidden costs etc.

◈ They can range from overtly noticeable tricks to more subtle methods that users may not immediately recognize.

Types of Dark Patterns:

◈ The Consumer Affairs Ministry has identified nine types of dark patterns being used by e-commerce companies:

◈ **False Urgency**: Creates a sense of urgency or scarcity to pressure consumers into making a purchase or taking an action;

◈ **Basket Sneaking**: Dark patterns are used to add additional products or services to the shopping cart without the user's consent;

◈ **Confirm Shaming**: Uses guilt to make consumers adhere; criticises or attacks consumers for not conforming to a particular belief or viewpoint;

◈ **Forced Action**: Pushes consumers into taking an action they may not want to take, such as signing up for a service in order to access content;

◈ **Nagging:** Persistent criticism, complaints, and requests for action;

◈ Subscription traps: Easy to sign up for a service but difficult to quit or cancel; option is hidden or requires multiple steps;

◈ **Bait & Switch**: Advertising a certain product/ service but delivering another, often of lower quality;

◈ **Hidden costs**: Hiding additional costs until consumers are already committed to making a purchase;

◈ **Disguised ads**: Designed to look like content, such as news articles or user-generated content.

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POST OFFICE BILL 2023

Context: The Rajya Sabha has recent passed Post Office Bill 2023. Raising concerns about privacy.

Background

◈ The Rajya Sabha recently approved **the Post Office Bill, 2023**, a significant legislative move to replace **the archaic Indian Post Office Act of 1898.**

◈ The new bill, introduced in August 2023, **aims to modernize and revamp the postal services** in India, shifting the focus **from a traditional mail delivery system to a comprehensive service delivery model.**

Provisions of the New Bill

◈ The **central theme** of the new legislation **is to transform post offices into multifunctional institutions**, **integrating services beyond mail delivery, including banking facilities**.

◈ Communications Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw emphasized the **remarkable transformation of postal services over the past nine-and-a-half years.**

◈ During this period, post offices evolved into **service delivery hubs**, with around 5,000 new offices opened between 2014 and 2023.

Controversy/Concerns

◈ **Clause 9 of the bill**, however, stirred controversy as it grants the central government the authority to appoint **officers to intercept, open, or detain items** in the interest of **national security, public order, emergency, or public safety**.

◈ This provision **sparked concerns** about potential **violations of privacy and increased surveillance**.

◈ Objections to Section 9: the **broad language and lack of specification** regarding the level of the officer could lead to misuse.

◈ The Opposition's primary concern revolved around **safeguarding the fundamental right to privacy.**

◈ The bill **lacked clear procedures** for intercepting or opening letters and packages.

◈ Potential infringement of **Articles 19 and 21.**

◈ Doubts about the legislative intent- concerns about the bill turning India into a highly **surveilled nation**.

◈ **Lack of clarity on materials prohibited** from postal transmission and **potential immunity shields for officers engaging in corrupt practices.**

Government's Clarifications

◈ That interception is essential for national security in a complex and diverse society.

◈ Emphasis on the government's right to monitor the transportation of illegal substances, such as narcotics, through postal networks.

◈ Govt. dismissed concerns about the privatization of post offices, stating that the bill aims to expand services, including banking and direct benefit transfers, within the public sector.

◈ However, the bill remains silent on defining materials prohibited from postal transmission, raising questions about potential ambiguities.

◈ The new bill introduces the appointment of a director general to regulate and define services through the post office, including the supply and sale of postage stamps and postal stationery.

◈ The director general holds the authority to establish charges and terms for these services.

◈ The Post Office Bill signifies a paradigm shift in India's postal services, but concerns linger regarding privacy, surveillance, and the need for clearer definitions and safeguards. The government's clarifications address some apprehensions, but the nuances of implementation and potential consequences will require vigilant monitoring.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR REORGANISATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023, AND THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR RESERVATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023

Context: The Lok Sabha recently passed two significant bills related to Jammu and Kashmir, namely the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023, and the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

Aims

These bills aim to reshape the political landscape of the region and address long-standing issues, including the representation of displaced communities in the legislative assembly.

Background

◈ In **August 2019**, the Special Status of Jammu and Kashmir under **Article 370 was revoked**, leading to the reorganisation of the state into **two Union Territories - Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.**

◈ The recent bills build upon this transformation, further **amending the existing legislation for better governance and representation.**

◈ Earlier there were 37 seats in Jammu which have now become 43, earlier there were 46 seats in Kashmir which have now become 47, and 24 seats have been kept reserved for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

◈ The legislative assembly **initially had 100 members including 24 for PoK, up to 1988 when the seats were increased to 111.**

◈ The **24 seats** are however **not taken into consideration during the quorum** calculation, which is why the total contestable seats were 87 including four for Ladakh.

◈ **After delimitation in 2020, the total number of seats rose to 114, which included the seats for PoK.**

◈ Now there will be 114 seats, earlier there were two nominated members in the assembly, now there will be five

Provisions of the New Bills:

◈ **The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023**, seeks to increase the total number of seats in the J&K Assembly **from 107 to 114.**

◈ This includes the **reservation of nine seats for Scheduled Tribes**, a historic move based on the **recommendations of the Delimitation Commission**.

◈ Additionally, the **Lieutenant-Governor is empowered** to nominate **three members** in the Assembly, representing **the Kashmiri migrant community, including one woman,** and individuals from PoK who sought refuge in India after wars with Pakistan.

◈ **The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023, amends the J&K Reservation Act, 2004.**

◈ It replaces the term **"weak and underprivileged classes (social castes)"** with **"other backward classes"** as declared by the Union Territory**.

◈ This change **aims to enhance reservation in appointments and admissions in professional institutions for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and other socially and educationally backward** classes.

Opposition's Concerns:

◈ During the parliamentary debate, concerns were raised by the Opposition regarding the **government's control from Delhi**, reservations for specific communities, and the **exclusion of certain groups.**

◈ Some members **criticized the emphasis on Pandits and the Pahadia community**, arguing that the criteria of population were not adequately considered during the delimitation exercise.

◈ The Opposition also questioned the **government's claims of bringing lasting peace to the region**, pointing to incidents of terrorism in the Jammu region.

◈ There were **objections to the nomination of members by the Governor,** raising apprehensions about a potential imbalance in the representation of the Muslim-majority Valley.

Government's Clarifications:

◈ The bills aim to provide justice to those deprived of their rights for the past 70 years.

◈ Highlighted the importance of reservation for displaced people, ensuring their voices are heard in the legislative process.

◈ Rejected the notion that the amendments were connected to the abrogation of Article 370 and clarified that the government's focus is on eliminating separatist ideology, leading to a decline in terrorism.

◈ Dismissed claims that the bills couldn't be amended due to a legal challenge, asserting that there is a "status quo" as the Supreme Court has not stayed the implementation of the principal Act.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY COMMITTEES

Context: Member of Parliament (MP) Mahua Moitra is currently facing an inquiry by the ethics committee of the Lok Sabha.

Background: Investigation into TMC MP Mahua Moitra's Conduct

◈ The committee is reported to have recommended her **expulsion** from the Lok Sabha, citing reasons such as **"unethical conduct," "breach of privileges," and "contempt of the House."**

◈ The allegations stem from accusations that Moitra targeted a business house at the behest of a businessman in **exchange for monetary benefits** and shared her login credentials with the said businessman.

Ethics Committee's Mandate

◈ **Established in 2000**, the ethics committee of the Lok Sabha is tasked with **overseeing the moral and ethical conduct of its members.**

◈ The **committee examines cases of 'unethical conduct**,' which can be brought to its attention through complaints filed by members of the House, outsiders through a member, or those referred by the Speaker.

◈ The committee **conducts a preliminary inquiry** to determine if a complaint is valid and presents its findings to the Speaker for consideration.

◈ Notably, the term **'unethical' is not explicitly defined**, leaving it to the committee's discretion.

Privileges Committees

◈ Another vital component of parliamentary oversight is the **privileges committee or special inquiry committee,** which addresses more severe accusations against a member.

◈ In cases where a member is found guilty of actions such as promoting personal business interests through parliamentary activities, these **committees recommend punitive measures**.

◈ For instance, **a special committee in 1951 found a member guilty of promoting business** interests by posing questions in exchange for financial benefits.

◈ Similarly, the 'cash **for query' scam in 2005 led to the recommendation of expulsion for 10 MPs** by a special committee.

Constitutionality of Expulsion

◈ While the Constitution **under Article 101** outlines grounds for the vacation of a seat by an MP, including resignation, disqualification, and prolonged absence, expulsion is not explicitly mentioned.

◈ The Supreme Court has presented conflicting judgments on the matter. **In Raja Ram Pal versus Hon'ble Speaker (2007), the Court upheld Parliament's power to expel** members for breaching privilege, interpreting Article 101 accordingly.

◈ However, **in Amarinder Singh versus Special committee, Punjab Vidhan Sabha (2010), the Court deemed expulsion by the State Assembly unconstitutional**, citing concerns about undermining parliamentary democracy.

Balancing House Privileges and Democratic Representation

◈ In cases like Mahua Moitra's, where serious allegations **of 'cash for query' are at play**, the question arises: **is expulsion a proportionate punishment?**

◈ The **delicate balance between upholding the dignity and privilege of the House and ensuring democratic representation** must be maintained.

◈ To address such concerns, the **establishment of fast-track courts** with a time-bound trial period could be considered.

◈ This approach would ensure a **fair and efficient resolution of cases within 60 days**, safeguarding the interests of both the House and democratic representation.

◈ **If convicted,** MPs could face disqualification under **the Representation of the People Act, 1951,** while maintaining continuous representation for the constituents in the absence of conviction.

INDIA'S 250 MILLION DOLLARS 'LINE OF CREDIT' TO KENYA

Context: India has declared a $250 million line of credit to Kenya for the modernization of its agricultural sector. Need to look at outline of India Kenya relationship.

Line of Credit and diverse multi-dimensional cooperation

◈ A $250 million line of credit to Kenya for modernisation

of its agricultural sector during the visit Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto in New Delhi.

◈ Besides this there were talks on to strengthen bilateral ties in the field of defence, trade, energy, digital public infrastructure and healthcare.

◈ Signing of five pacts providing for cooperation in a range of areas including sports, education and digital solution, and unveiled a joint vision document to scale up maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean region.

◈ Kenyan side offered land for farming to Indian companies under a cooperative model besides showing interest in India's payment system, UPI (Unified Payments Interface).

◈ Both the nations are unanimous in their that terrorism is the most serious challenge facing humanity and both sides have decided to increase counter-terror cooperation.

◈ Both sides also deliberated on defence cooperation and emphasised on military exercises, capacity building as well as linking the defence industries of both the countries.

◈ There is also an opportunity for Indian companies to take advantage of the conducive and attractive environment to invest in Kenya, especially in agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceutical, health, green energy and green mobility sectors.

The Analytical perspective on relations:

◈ The commitment of a substantial line of credit for agricultural modernization underlines India's strategic intent to collaborate on critical sectors for Kenya's development.

◈ The emphasis on defense, counter-terrorism, and maritime engagement positions the relationship as strategic, considering shared geopolitical concerns. India's role in sharing technological expertise, especially in digital infrastructure, reflects its commitment to capacity-building and South-South cooperation.

◈ The invitation for Indian investments aligns with the broader economic diplomacy objectives of both nations, marking a holistic approach to bilateral relations.

India-Kenya Bilateral Relations

◈ India and Kenya are maritime neighbours with robust and multi-faceted partnership, marked by regular high-level visits, increasing trade and investment and extensive people to people contacts.

◈ India established the office of Commissioner for British East Africa resident in Nairobi in 1948.

Following Kenyan independence in December 1963, a High Commission was established.

Trade

◈ An India-Kenya Trade Agreement was signed in 1981, under which both countries accorded Most Favoured Nation status to each other.

◈ Main Indian exports to Kenya include petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, steel products, machinery, yarn, vehicles and power transmission equipment. Main Kenyan exports to India include soda ash, vegetables, tea, leather and metal scrap.

◈ According to the Kenya Investment Authority (KenInvest), India is the second largest investor in Kenya. Over 60 major Indian companies have invested in various sectors including manufacturing, real estate, pharmaceuticals, telecom, IT & ITES, banking and agro-based industries. Indian investments have resulted in creation of thousands of direct jobs to Kenyans. Indian pharmaceutical companies have a substantial presence in Kenya. A bilateral Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) was signed in 1989. Revised DTAA was signed in July 2016 and came into force on 30 August 2017.

Development

◈ India offers development assistance to Kenya in the form of loans and credit. Recently India given LOC of $250 million.

◈ Recently two sides signed five pacts providing for cooperation in a range of areas including sports, education and digital solution, and unveiled a joint vision document to scale up maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean region.

◈ India is the third largest source (other than neighbours) of inbound tourists to Kenya.

◈ Indian Community and Diaspora in Kenya

◈ Indians were trading with the Swahili coast since early historical times as evidenced by ancient works. With the region coming under Omani rule particularly Mogadishu, Mombasa and Zanzibar, Indian presence remained part of Swahili kaleidoscope.

◈ With the advent of Portuguese and finally British, Indian involvement became deeper. Prominent figures of the Kenyan Indian community in Kenya's pre-independence period included the labour leader Makhan Singh. M. A. Desai and Pio Gama Pinto participated actively in Kenya's independence struggle.

◈ A vibrant community of persons of Indian origin presently numbered around 80,000 including an estimated 20,000 Indian citizens.

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Geographical Location of Kenya:

- Kenya is located in **East Africa**. Its terrain rises from a low coastal plain on the Indian Ocean to mountains and plateaus at its center. Most Kenyans live in the highlands, where Nairobi, the capital, sits at an altitude of 5,500 feet

- West of Nairobi the land descends to the Great Rift Valley, a 4,000-mile (6,400-kilometer) tear in the Earth's crust. Within this valley in the deserts of northern Kenya are the jade-green waters of famous Lake Turkana.

- Kenya is bordered by South Sudan to the northwest, Ethiopia to the north, Somalia to the east, Uganda to the west, Tanzania to the south, and the Indian Ocean to the southeast. Kenya's geography, climate and population vary widely, ranging from cold snow-capped mountaintops (Batian, Nelion and Point Lenana on Mount Kenya) with vast surrounding forests, wildlife and fertile agricultural regions to temperate climates in western and rift valley counties and further on to dry less fertile arid and semi-arid areas and absolute deserts (Chalbi Desert and Nyiri Desert).

- Kenya's capital and **largest city is Nairobi**.

INDIA AND AI: TO AVOID THE MISTAKES FROM THE NUCLEAR ERA

Context: India while going for nuclear weapons, committed some missteps. The same should be avoided as India goes big on AI.

Background

◈ Reflecting **on India's historical missteps in nuclear weapons** development during the 1970s, it is evident that a **similar miscalculation in the realm of Artificial Intelligence (AI)** could prove detrimental to the nation.

◈ **Unlike the disarmament idealism** that influenced India's nuclear stance, **the challenges posed by AI demand a more nuanced and strategic approach**.

AI and Nuclear Parallels

◈ While **nuclear and AI** technologies differ significantly, parallels can be drawn in their **potential global impact.**

◈ The nuclear revolution, triggered by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, prompted **efforts to manage threats to humanity**.

◈ Similarly, **the AI revolution**, with its potential to **reshape economies, societies, and politics**, necessitates international collaboration to establish norms and institutions.

Current Geopolitical Landscape

◈ The **dynamics of AI governance** today **mirror challenges** faced in the **nuclear age**.

◈ The race for **AI dominance between major powers**, especially the U.S. and China, echoes the **Cold War competition** in nuclear capabilities.

◈ Efforts **to regulate military AI uses** and calls for **arms control agreements** are reminiscent of past attempts to manage nuclear weapons.

Lessons from India's Nuclear History

◈ Drawing from **India's nuclear journey**, three lessons emerge.

◈ Firstly, the era of **disarmament idealism** should be left behind.

◈ India's historical rhetoric on the **"time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons"** hindered pragmatic thinking.

◈ In the AI domain, **India cannot afford complacency** and must proactively engage in shaping its future.

Building Partnerships

◈ The importance of building on current **momentum in partnerships, particularly with the U.S.,** is underscored.

◈ **India's historical reluctance,** as seen in missed opportunities post the 2005 civil nuclear deal, should not be repeated.

◈ **Collaborations with the U.S. and the West** on critical technologies, including AI, must be prioritized for India's global positioning.

Avoiding Exceptionalism

◈ The temptation to pursue **an "Indian way"** in technological development should be resisted.

◈ Embracing **India's exceptionalism in AI may impede international cooperation**.

◈ **The private sector's role is pivotal,** as seen in the West's leadership in AI research and development.

◈ India's recent initiatives to **open up the science and technology sector are positive steps**, but urgent and extensive reforms are required.

◈ In conclusion, India stands at a **critical juncture** in shaping its AI trajectory. Learning from the mistakes of the past, especially in nuclear pursuits, is imperative.

Pragmatic policies, strategic partnerships, and a proactive role for the private sector will be instrumental in ensuring India's success in the global AI landscape.

SRI LANKA REACHES AGREEMENT WITH INDIA, PARIS CLUB ON DEBT TREATMENT

Context : The consortium of lenders to Sri Lanka expresses an anticipation of transparency from "other bilateral creditors," with an implicit reference to China.

Sri Lanka's Debt Default and IMF Recovery Package

◈ In response to last year's economic crisis, Sri Lanka defaulted on its nearly $51 billion foreign debt.

◈ A comprehensive debt restructuring plan became imperative to kickstart an economic recovery program backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Key Agreements with Official Creditors

◈ Sri Lanka has reached an "agreement in principle" with India, Japan, and the Paris Club group of creditors, setting the stage for a debt treatment plan.

◈ The Official Creditor Committee (OCC), co-chaired by India, Japan, and France, played a pivotal role in formulating the agreement.

◈ The OCC and Sri Lanka aligned the debt treatment parameters with those of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement between Sri Lanka and the IMF.

Next Steps and Transparency Expectations

◈ The OCC anticipates formalizing the agreement in the coming weeks through a Memorandum of Understanding with Sri Lanka.

◈ Japan and India, major lenders, emphasize the importance of creditor parity and transparency, expecting other bilateral creditors to share necessary information transparently.

◈ Sri Lanka is urged to continue engagement with private creditors to secure favorable terms, aligning with the OCC's conditions.

IMF's Stance and Contingencies

◈ The IMF, after reaching a staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka, views securing an agreement with official creditors as the critical next step for the next tranche of the IMF package.

◈ China, Sri Lanka's largest bilateral creditor, has assured cooperation in the debt restructuring process, with specifics of the plan eagerly awaited.

Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis and Its Background –

Reasons for Balance of Payments crisis surfaced in Sri Lanka in 2022-

◈ Sri Lanka's economy and its foreign currency revenue to large extend depends on tourism, which has received a severe beating in the recent times.

◈ The 2019 serial blast in Sri Lanka had caused decline in the arrival of foreign tourist in the country.

◈ Global pandemic of Corona has further decimated the tourism industry.

◈ The pandemic also did not allow Sri Lankan labourer to travel outside the country were they are employed (mostly gulf countries), thus impacting the foreign currency earned by Sri Lanka through the way of remittances.

What did the Government of Sri Lanka did to overcome the crisis-

◈ China had promised loan of **1 billion dollars** and a credit line of **1.5 billion dollars.**

◈ Sri Lanka succeeded in receiving line of credit worth **1 billion dollars** from the Indian Government.

◈ The **Central Bank of Sri Lanka** received aid from the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** as its assistance with conditionality.

Line of Credit: It is a credit facility extended by a bank or other financial institution or a government to another government, business or individual that enables the it to draw on the facility and use the funds when needed.

Sri Lanka and its Strategic significance:

◈ **Strategic Location**: Sri Lanka occupies a geo-

strategically important position as about two-thirds of the world's oil and half of the world's container transportation passes through the south of Sri Lanka.

➤ Therefore, Sri Lanka, which is strategically located, stands out in terms of the security of maritime communication and trade lines in the Indian Ocean.

◈ **Positioned as an Island Nation**: On the other hand, Sri Lanka is home to ports that have the potential to become important maritime hubs in the Indian Ocean.

◈ **Economic Crisis**: The crisis that is hampering Sri Lanka's economic and political stability could have serious repercussions on India.

➤ Because Sri Lanka's economic and therefore political dependence on China has led to an increase in Chinese influence in the country.

India's stance with Sri Lanka:

◈ Sri Lanka has an important place in both India's **'Neighbourhood First' policy** and **'SAGAR' vision.**

◈ India wants to expand the scope of digital payments between both the countries, bringing the use of UPI and similar tools to the forefront.

'Neighbourhood First' policy:

● Neighbourhood First Policy of India is a core component of **India's foreign policy.**

● It focuses on peaceful relations and collaborative synergetic co-development with its South Asian neighbors of the Indian subcontinent.

● This policy creates new avenues as well as leverages existing regional cooperation initiatives, such as **SAARC, SASEC, BBIN, and BIMSTEC.**

● It compliments India's Look East policy focused on **Southeast Asia and Look West Policy** focused on Middle East.

'SAGAR' vision:

● SAGAR stands for "**Security and Growth for All in the Region**" is India's policy or doctrine of maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.

● The policy was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015.

SC APPROVAL FOR EXTENSION: DYNAMICS OF GOVERNMENTS RETAINING PREFERRED BUREAUCRATS

Context: The recent Supreme Court approval for

the extension of the Chief Secretary of Delhi sparks a discussion on the trend of governments retaining bureaucrats beyond their usual tenures.

Why Governments Prefer Familiar Faces:

◈ Governments, **both at the central and state levels**, often opt for extending the services of known bureaucrats.

◈ The **comfort factor** associated with officials familiar with the government's priorities, capable of **troubleshooting without causing disruptions, and adept at maintaining the status quo**.

Legal Perspectives on Extensions:

◈ Formal setup of the All-India Services, where **extensions are not the norm** but exceptions are allowed.

◈ The Supreme Court's stance on the **six-month extension to the Chief Secretary of Delhi** is scrutinized, emphasizing that it doesn't violate any existing rules.

Exigencies of Work and Justifications:

◈ Extensions are envisioned for exigencies of work, providing a specific context for Delhi, where impending general elections and legal considerations surrounding the NCT Act play a role.

◈ The Lieutenant Governor's authority over services, pending the Supreme Court's verdict, is a pivotal factor.

New Argument: Functions of the Chief Secretary

◈ A new argument is **introduced by the Solicitor General of India**, suggesting that the **Chief Secretary of Delhi, in specific domains, reports only to the central government**, justifying its **authority to extend** the incumbent's services.

Challenges and Controversies:

◈ Challenges to the extension process, **especially when allegations of corruption surface**, as seen in the case of Naresh Kumar.

◈ The **public scrutiny and legal petitions add complexity to what has traditionally been an administrative matter.**

Recommendations:

Retirement Age and Performance Benchmarks:

◈ Revisiting the practice of extensions and reflects on

the need to reconsider the retirement age, advocating for aligning it with global standards.

◈ Implementing provisions like FR 56(j) to assess performance and retire officials transparently based on clear benchmarks.

Recognizing Excellent Officers:

◈ **The broader question** of whether **extensions are the sole means of recognizing exemplary service is raised**, urging a more thoughtful approach and improved optics in acknowledging the contributions of outstanding officers.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE BENEFITS OF POPULATION–LEVEL GENOME SEQUENCING

Context: The UK has announced the completion of half a million whole-genome sequences, almost 0.7% of its population.

Background:

◈ **Revolutionary transformation:** Over the last decade, genomics has experienced a **revolutionary transformation**, marked by **technological advancements** that have enhanced throughput and reduced the **cost of whole-genome sequencing.**

◈ **Population-scale genome-sequencing:** This breakthrough has led to the **emergence of population-scale genome-sequencing programs**, providing unprecedented insights into human diversity.

◈ **Whole-genome sequencing in UK:** Recently, the UK celebrated the completion of **half a million whole-genome sequences**, a monumental achievement representing approximately 0.7% of its population.

DeCODE Initiative and the Pioneering Role of Iceland

Genesis of Large-Scale Population Genetic Studies:

◈ **deCODE initiative: The deCODE initiative, launched in Iceland in 1996**, was an early and influential effort in large-scale population genetic studies.

◈ **Genetic studies in Iceland:** Over a decade, a **significant portion of the Icelandic population enrolled for genetic studies**, setting the stage for leveraging genomic data for precision medicine and public health.

◈ **Understanding genetic diseases:** This initiative

not only improved our **understanding of genetic diseases** but also played a crucial role in shaping global discussions on bioethics and standards for handling large-scale genomic data.

Infrastructure Development and Integration:

◈ **Integration:** The deCODE's success laid the foundation for inte**grating medical records and genealogies**, leading to the development of new drugs and therapeutics.

◈ **Contribution:** It significantly contributed to advancing methods, infrastructure, and standards for handling large-scale genomic data.

Global Expansion of Population-Scale Genomic Initiatives

Evolution from Hundreds to Lakhs of Genomes:

◈ **Numerous population-scale genome initiatives:** Inspired by deCODE's success and the democratization of sequencing technologies, numerous population-scale genome initiatives have emerged worldwide.

➤ Initially involving hundreds to thousands of genomes, recent endeavors have leaped to lakhs of genomes.

◈ **Genome Sequencing:** Countries like the UK, the U.S., and the European Union have launched ambitious programs aiming to sequence millions of genomes.

Diverse Objectives of Population-Scale Efforts:

◈ **Diverse objectives:** These initiatives have **diverse objectives**, ranging from understanding **disease prevalence and biomarkers** for diseases to informing the discovery of novel therapeutic targets.

◈ **Public-health initiatives:** Some programs focus on **building scalable public-health initiatives** where genomic data guides decision-making and medical care.

Challenges and Considerations in Population-Scale Genomics

Ethical Considerations and Regulatory Frameworks:

◈ **Ethical challenges:** While population-scale genomic programs open new doors for scientific discovery, they also present ethical challenges.

◈ **Ethical Issues**: Issues related to equitable representation, access, and potential misuse of genetic data require careful consideration.

◈ **Regulatory frameworks:** Countries like the U.S. have proactively established regulatory frameworks to prevent discrimination based on genetic information.

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Genomes from India: Contribution to Population-Level Sequencing

GenomeAsia and GenomeIndia Initiatives:

◈ **GenomeAsia initiative**: Asia, including India, is actively participating in population-level sequencing. The GenomeAsia project, involving multiple partners across the continent, plans to sequence a lakh whole genomes.

◈ **GenomeIndia initiative:** The GenomeIndia initiative is set to sequence 10,000 whole genomes from diverse population groups in the country.

IndiGen Pilot Program and Early Insights:

◈ **IndiGen pilot program:** India's **IndiGen pilot program** provided an early glimpse into the **genomic landscape of cosmopolitan areas**, offering insights into treatable genetic diseases, drug efficacy, and the prevalence of rare disorders.

Long-Term Impact and Future Prospects of Population-Scale Genomics

Beyond Individual Health:

◈ **Population-scale genomics: Population-scale genomics** extends beyond individual health, contributing to our understanding of human evolution, migration patterns, and adaptation to diverse environments.

Genomic Revolution: Shaping Healthcare and Evolutionary Understanding:

◈ **Genomic revolution:** In essence, population-scale genomics stands at the **forefront of a genomic revolution.** It has the **potential to revolutionize** healthcare, illuminate our evolutionary history, and usher in a future where precise, personalized approaches influence medical and biological understanding.

Towards a Genomic Future

Access to Genomic Information:

◈ **Own genome sequence:** As large-scale sequencing projects progress, the day when **individuals can access and understand their own genome sequence** is on the horizon.

◈ **Paradigm shift**: This marks a **paradigm shift** towards **empowering individuals** with insights into their genetic makeup.

Way Forward:

◈ The last decade has witnessed a **genomic revolution,** with **population-scale sequencing programs** shaping the future of healthcare, biology, and our understanding of human diversity.

◈ As nations globally embark on ambitious sequencing initiatives, the **ethical considerations** and **equitable representation** in genomic data will remain critical.

◈ The genomic era holds the promise of a **more personalized and precise approach to medicine,** underscoring the potential for transformative advancements in the biological sciences.

ISRO'S CHANDRAYAN MISSION GAINS MOMENTUM WITH SUCCESSFUL TESTING OF PROPULSION MODULE IN EARTH ORBIT

Context: **ISRO achieves a crucial milestone as the Chandrayan propulsion module demonstrates stellar performance during testing in Earth's orbit.**

◈ **Exceptional Performance in Earth's Orbit Testing:** In a groundbreaking development, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) achieves a significant milestone in its Chandrayaan mission.

◈ **Dedication and Expertise on Display:** The propulsion module, a critical component, demonstrates exceptional performance, showcasing the dedication and expertise of ISRO's scientists and engineers.

◈ **Reliability and Functionality Proven:** Rigorous testing in Earth's orbit confirms the propulsion module's reliability and functionality, marking a crucial step in India's lunar exploration journey.

◈ **Global Attention on Chandrayaan Mission:** The ambitious Chandrayaan mission, focused on lunar surface exploration and scientific experiments, garners global attention for India's space endeavors.

◈ **Promising Indicator of Overall Mission Success:** The flawless performance of the propulsion module becomes a promising indicator of the Chandrayaan mission's overall success, emphasizing ISRO's meticulous planning and technological capabilities.

◈ **India's Prowess in Lunar Exploration:** ISRO's achievement positions India as a frontrunner in lunar exploration, enhancing the country's standing in the global space community.

◈ **Key Milestone for Chandrayaan's Progress:** The successful testing of the propulsion module is a key milestone propelling the Chandrayaan mission forward, unraveling the mysteries of the Moon.

◈ **Contribution to Global Scientific Knowledge:** ISRO's achievements contribute valuable insights to the global scientific community, showcasing India's commitment to advancing scientific knowledge in space exploration.

◈ **Boost to ISRO's Reputation:** The successful testing enhances ISRO's reputation for delivering precise and reliable space missions, showcasing the agency's ability to navigate the complexities of space exploration.

◈ **Anticipation Grows as Chandrayaan Progresses:** As Chandrayaan progresses, anticipation and excitement surrounding the mission continue to grow, reinforcing India's role in the international space arena.

◈ **Commitment to Advancing Scientific Knowledge:** ISRO's dedication to pushing the boundaries of space exploration is evident, emphasizing India's commitment to advancing scientific knowledge on a global scale.

◈ **Propulsion Module's Success Sets the Stage:** The propulsion module's success in Earth's orbit sets the stage for the next chapters in lunar exploration, promising a future filled with scientific discoveries and technological milestones.

THE STATUS OF THE UN TREATY TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION

Context: Members of a committee met in Nairobi in November to develop an international treaty to end plastic pollution.

International Efforts and the Role of INC:

◈ The **Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC),** operating under the **United Nations Environment Programme,** convened in **Nairobi** from November 13-19 2023 for its third round of negotiations aimed at crafting a global treaty to eradicate plastic pollution by 2025.

Key Milestone:

◈ Under **UNEA Resolution 5/14**, INC's mandate is pivotal in formulating a binding international instrument to combat the pervasive issue of plastic pollution globally.

◈ The recent INC-3 gathering was crucial, marking a turning point in the negotiations.

Evaluation of the 'Zero Draft':

◈ The **'zero draft**,' meticulously prepared by the Committee's Secretariat, initially presented robust options for a binding treaty.

◈ However, during negotiations, significant dilutions occurred, particularly in core obligations related to **primary polymer production**, **chemicals of concern**, and **problematic plastics**.

Contentious Issues and Divergent Perspectives:

◈ Contentions emerged over the **treaty's objective and scope**, with a group of nations, including **Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, Iran, and some members of the Gulf Cooperation Council**, **advocating for economic considerations** by appending a clause on sustainable development.

Industry Influence and Opposition to Production Reduction:

◈ Industry influence was evident, with a **notable 36% increase in lobbyists** from the fo**ssil fuels and chemicals sector.** Resistance to discussing a reduction in plastic production **underscored the challenge of aligning economic interests with environmental goals**.

Financial Mechanism Debate:

◈ The zero draft proposed **financial mechanisms**, such as a **plastic-pollution fee**, contested by nations **advocating for their deletion.**

◈ The implications of these provisions **extend to potential shifts in fossil-fuel subsidies** and investments in environmentally adverse technologies.

◈ *Trade Restrictions and Misinterpretation of WTO Rules:*

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◈ **A bloc of countries opposed trade restrictions** on polymers, chemicals, and plastics, citing sovereignty concerns.

◈ However, analysis by the Centre for International Environmental Law revealed a **misinterpretation of WTO rules**, suggesting ample scope for such restrictions when vital for health and environmental protection.

INC-3 Outcomes and Stalling Tactics:

◈ INC-3 faced challenges in **adopting a mandate** for developing the first draft of the treaty.

◈ Stalling tactics, primarily by like-minded countries, led to a **lack of consensus on key provisions**, hindering progress.

Implications for Future Negotiations:

◈ The inability to reach a consensus on inter-sessional work before INC-4 is a setback, impeding the **refinement of definitions, targets, and timelines**.

◈ The influence of industry and the resistance of certain member states to a robust, binding treaty were laid bare during INC-3.

Way Forward:

◈ INC-3 exposed the **intricate dynamics** in negotiating a **global treaty on plastic pollution**, emphasizing the **need for a delicate balance between environmental imperatives and economic considerations.**

◈ The journey towards an **effective and comprehensive treaty continues**, navigating challenges and striving for a **collective commitment to combat plastic pollution.**

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF WHAT WE EAT?

Context: What is more fair: accounting for the impact at the point of production or where it is eventually consumed?

The Global Agricultural Trade Dilemma:

◈ The relentless **demand for agricultural products** is causing **far-reaching social and environmental consequences** worldwide, with international trade exacerbating the impact.

◈ India, as a **global agricultural anchor**, plays a pivotal role in this intricate web of trade and its associated challenges.

Measuring Impacts and Allocating Responsibility

◈ The conventional method relies on **production-based accounting**, **measuring impacts** at the **place of origin**.

◈ However, **concerns arise regarding its limitations**, accountability issues, and the need for equity among producers and consumers.

Defining Consumption-Based Accounting

◈ Consumption-based accounting attributes **all social and environmental impacts** during production and trade to the final products and consumers.

◈ This approach urges consumers, whether individuals or nations, to **acknowledge responsibility for the embodied impacts of the products** they consume.

Linking Consumption to Consequences

◈ From a **demand perspective**, the approach asserts that developed economies, as major consumers, bear responsibility for the pressure on natural and human resources.

◈ This aligns with **arguments of equity**, acknowledging the historical responsibility of developed nations in global emissions.

Incentivizing Cleaner Production

◈ Proponents argue that **consumption-based accounting** can drive cleaner production practices by encouraging producer countries to lower the environmental footprint of their exports.

◈ It addresses **'leaks' in production systems**, promoting adherence to higher production standards.

Policy Initiatives and Environmental Action

◈ Recent initiatives, such as the **European Commission's steps to prevent deforestation-linked products,** showcase the potential of consumption-based accounting in policymaking.

◈ This approach can significantly **reduce carbon emissions** and **biodiversity loss** tied to global trade.

India's Dual Role

◈ India finds itself uniquely positioned, **contributing to the environmental footprint** of major developed economies through agricultural exports.

◈ Simultaneously, its own **deforestation footprint** abroad is increasing, necessitating a nuanced approach to shared responsibility.

Facilitating Global Environmental Action

◈ **Consumption-based accounting** holds the potential to foster a fair agreement on global environmental action, with both producers and consumers sharing responsibilities.

◈ It provides a basis for **addressing historical roles** in climate, pollution, and biodiversity loss crises.

Challenges and Opportunities: Implementing Consumption-Based Accounting

◈ While **implementation poses challenges** related to liability, monitoring, and compliance, consumption-based accounting serves as a valuable tool for diagnosing impact-intensive consumption patterns.

◈ It also **encourages individual and collective changes** in consumption behavior.

Way Forward: A Path to Sustainable Agricultural Trade

◈ In navigating the **complexities of global agricultural trade**, consumption-based accounting emerges as a crucial tool for promoting sustainability.

◈ As the world grapples with the **environmental implications** of its consumption patterns, a shift toward shared responsibility may pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable future.

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Section *B* [SPECIALS]

Topic
☞ **COP 28: Dubai, UAE**

LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND: COP–28 SUMMIT

Context: Fund, meant to compensate countries dealing with effects of climate change, gets commitments of atleast $450 million; all developing countries are eligible to apply for the Fund.

About COP 28:

◈ COP 28 is held in Dubai, UAE

◈ It is an important convention organized under the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

Loss and Damage Fund:

◈ Member countries agreed to make **operational a Loss and Damage (L&D) fund** that is meant to **compensate countries already dealing with climate change**.

◈ To be **based at the World Bank** but **managed by an independent secretariat**, commitments worth **atleast $450 million** have already been made by countries though billions of dollars are still needed to meet its purpose.

◈ The L&D fund was **first announced at the conclusion of COP-27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt**, last year, but it has taken five separate meetings since then, via 'transitional committees,' to get to a position where countries could unanimously agree on a text.

Positive start

◈ Contributions by Developed Countries: Financial commitments have been made by

➤ The United Arab Emirates $100 million – the host country

➤ Germany $100 million

➤ The United States $17 million

➤ The United Kingdom $50.6 million (approx.)

➤ Japan $10 million as part of the L&D.

➤ The European Union also committed to $145 million, over and above the German contribution.

◈ The World Bank will be the "**interim host**" of the fund for a period of four years. It is expected to operate in accordance with the **principles of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.**

◈ **All developing countries** are **eligible to apply** for and every country has been "**invited**" to contribute **to the fund.**

◈ **Payments are voluntary** and a certain percentage has been set apart for a category of countries **called Least Developed Countries and Small island developing states**.

$1.5 trillion bill

◈ Loss and damage from climate change cost about $1.5 trillion ($1,500 billion) in 2022, according to a study.

◈ Several developing countries and some of **the poorest lost an average of about 8.3% of GDP** due to climate change.

◈ The fund, as it stands now, doesn't specify how often it will be replenished.

ALTERRA: UAE COMMITS $30BN TO CLIMATE–FOCUSED INVESTMENT VEHICLE

Context: The UAE announced a US$30 billion commitment to the newly launched catalytic climate vehicle, ALTÉRRA.

About ALTÉRRA:

◈ With this US$30 billion commitment**, ALTÉRRA** becomes the **world's largest private investment vehicle** for climate change action and will **aim** to **mobilize US$250 billion globally by 2030**.

◈ It aims **to steer private markets** towards **climate investments** and focus on transforming emerging markets and developing economies, where traditional investment has been lacking due to the higher perceived risks across those geographies.

◈ ALTÉRRA has been **established by Lunate**, an **independent global investment manager**, and is domiciled in the Abu Dhabi Global Market.

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Need of ALTERRA:

◈ By 2030, emerging markets and developing economies will **require US$2.4 trillion every year** to **address climate change.**

◈ That is why **COP28** made **fixing climate finance** a **key pillar of its Action Agenda** and has worked to deliver ambitious solutions, including mobilising private markets at scale.

Benefits of ALTERRA:

◈ ALTÉRRA provides a **transformational solution** for attracting private capital.

◈ Its **scale and structure** will create a **multiplier effect** in climate focused investment, making it a vehicle like no other.

◈ Its launch reflects the COP Presidency's Action Agenda and the **UAE's efforts to make climate finance available, accessible and affordable.**

◈ ALTÉRRA is one of a **range of finance-led initiatives** launched during COP28 to accelerate the **global transition to a low-carbon economy** and build climate resilience.

Structure of ALTERRA:

◈ ALTÉRRA will have an **innovative two-part structure** to spur

  ➤ new ideas, incentivize policy and regulatory frameworks

  ➤ identify solutions to rapidly deploy capital across the entire value chain of the new climate economy.

◈ It has a dedicated investment focus on supporting four key priorities that underpin COP28's Action Agenda, namely:

  ➤ Energy Transition

  ➤ Industrial Decarbonization

  ➤ Sustainable Living

  ➤ Climate Technologies.

ALTERRA and Climate Change:

◈ In-line with COP28's message of full inclusivity, ALTÉRRA TRANSFORMATION will also **create opportunities to leverage concessional finance** to further attract climate investment to **Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).**

◈ The ALTERRA vehicle will add to the UAE's leading change as a trusted facilitator at the global crossroads between North, South, East and West.

◈ ALTÉRRA, in collaboration with **BlackRock, Brookfield and TPG** as inaugural launch partners, has committed **US$6.5 billion** to **climate-dedicated funds** for global investments, including the Global South.

ALTERRA and India:

◈ From the vehicle's initial commitment, immediate capital investment has been earmarked for the development of **over 6.0 GW of new clean energy capacity in India.**

◈ This includes the **construction of 1,200 MW of wind and solar projects** that will begin producing **clean power by 2025.**

COP 28: 22 COUNTRIES PLEDGE TO TRIPLE NUCLEAR POWER CAPACITY

Context: In a landmark move, the United States, along with 21 other nations, declared its intention to triple the global generation capacity of nuclear power by 2050.

COP 28 and Triple Nuclear Power Capacity

◈ The announcement, made at the **United Nations' COP28 climate summit in Dubai**, underscores a growing consensus among governments worldwide that **increased use of nuclear power** is **essential to combat climate change** and reduce carbon emissions.

Key Countries Leading the Pledge:

◈ **U.S. and Allies:** The **United States spearheads the initiative**, joined by countries such as Canada, the UK, France, South Korea, and the UAE. This collaborative effort emphasizes the global recognition of nuclear

TRIPLING NUCLEAR ENERGY BY 2050
United Arab Emirates, December 2023

power as a vital component of sustainable energy solutions.

◈ **European Perspective:** European nations, including France, **aim to reduce dependence on oil and gas from Russia** by boosting nuclear power. While acknowledging the need for substantial investment, the move aligns with a broader strategy to enhance energy security and combat climate change.

Challenges from Past Experiences:

◈ **Delays and Cost Overruns:** Nuclear power projects, as seen in the expansion of the **Vogtle nuclear power plant in Georgia**, have faced delays and cost overruns. The two-unit expansion at Vogtle, featuring Westinghouse AP1000 reactors, experienced significant delays, with Unit 3 finally coming online seven years later than initially expected.

◈ **Financial Considerations:** The cost to build the Vogtle units **surpassed $34 billion**, more than double the original estimates. This highlights the financial challenges associated with large-scale nuclear projects.

Global Nuclear Generation Capacity:

◈ **Current Status:** As of the end of 2022, **the International Atomic Energy Agency reported** global **nuclear power generation capacity** at approximately **371 GW**, with **411 reactors in operation**.

◈ **The Pledge's Ambitious Goal:** The commitment to triple nuclear energy production by 2050 aims to **address climate change** by harnessing the **carbon-free nature of nuclear power**.

Industry Responses:

◈ **American Nuclear Society (ANS):** Craig Piercy, the executive director of ANS, commended the commitment, calling it "**real, tangible climate action**." Piercy emphasized the role of nuclear energy in meeting clean energy needs, halting rising temperatures, and lifting millions out of poverty.

◈ **Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI):** Maria Korsnick, president and CEO of NEI, highlighted bipartisan support in Congress for nuclear power, emphasizing its vital role in achieving a clean-energy grid and securing economic prosperity.

◈ **Nuclear Innovation Alliance (NIA):** Judi Greenwald, executive director of NIA, welcomed the global goal of tripling nuclear energy capacity, noting its alignment with NIA's call for a doubling of nuclear energy in the U.S. by 2050.

Way Forward:

◈ The **pledge to triple global nuclear power**

generation signifies a paradigm shift in the approach to climate strategies.

◈ As nations commit to ambitious targets, the focus on nuclear energy as a reliable, low-carbon source underscores its importance in achieving a sustainable and resilient future.

◈ While challenges persist, the **collaboration among 22 countries** signals a collective determination to harness the potential of nuclear power on a global scale.

COP28 CLIMATE MEET | INDIA NOT AMONG 118 NATIONS THAT PLEDGED TO TRIPLE GREEN ENERGY

COP 28: The Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge

◈ The ongoing COP28 climate summit in Dubai has witnessed a significant development **with 118 nations signing the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge**.

◈ This commitment aims to **triple the worldwide installed renewable energy generation capacity** to at **least 11,000 GW** and **double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency** improvements to **over 4% by 2030**.

◈ However, notable **exclusions from the list of signatories are India and China**, the latter being the world's leader in installed renewable energy capacity.

Background and Genesis of the Pledge

◈ The idea of substantially increasing renewable energy capacity and energy efficiency was first proposed by **European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen** in April 2023.

◈ It gained more traction when it was articulated as a concrete proposal in the **New Delhi G20 declaration** in September 2023.

India's Notable Absence and Reasons Behind It

◈ Despite being part of the **G20 declaration**, **India chose not to sign the pledge**.

◈ The reasons behind this decision remain unclear, with some sources pointing to "**problematic" language in the text**.

India's Existing Commitments and Capacity

◈ **Nationally determined contributions (NDCs):**

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India, as part of its **nationally determined contributions (NDCs),** has already committed to **installing 500 GW of electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030**.

◈ As of March 2023, **India has close to 170 GW of installed capacity**, raising questions about the necessity of tripling this capacity to align with the pledge.

Legal Sanctity and Inclusion in Main Negotiating Texts

◈ **Lacks legal sanctity:** The pledge, as it stands, **lacks legal sanctity** and is yet to be included in the main negotiating texts.

➤ There is ongoing global disagreement about whether large dams, considered as renewable sources by India, truly fall under this category.

Global Signatories and Noteworthy Exceptions

◈ The **United States and Brazil, with the second and third-largest installed renewable energy capacity**, have signed the pledge.

◈ However, **China, the global leader** in installed renewable energy capacity, is also conspicuously absent.

The G-20 Text and India's Association with the Commitment

◈ **G-20 Goals:** The G-20 text in September 2023 **did not explicitly mention energy efficiency goals** but indicated that signatory countries would "**pursue and encourage efforts to triple renewable capacity**."

Disappointment and Hope for India's Future Role

◈ **Net-zero commitments:** Some experts find India's non-participation disheartening, emphasizing the need for phasing down fossil fuels to meet **net-zero commitments**.

◈ Despite this, there is hope that India, with its existing ambitious targets, will champion renewable energy and energy efficiency commitments at COP-28.

Way Forward:

◈ The absence of India from the list of nations signing the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge **raises questions about the country's approach to global commitments** and the **nuances of aligning national targets with international pledges**.

◈ As **COP28 unfolds**, the hope is that discussions **will not only shed light on India's decision** but

also **pave the way for collaborative efforts** in combating climate change on a global scale.

COP28: GLOBAL STOCKTAKE ASSESSMENT

Context: At COP28, countries will examine how much progress they have made in curbing global warming — a process called the Global Stocktake, which is happening for the first time — since the Paris Agreement in 2015.

COP 28 and Global Warming

◈ The **COP28 climate summit** in Dubai has brought together representatives from nearly 200 nations, along with business leaders, climate scientists, Indigenous Peoples, journalists, and various experts.

◈ Against the backdrop of 2023 set to be the **warmest year ever recorded**, the summit holds significant importance for assessing global progress in curbing climate change.

Global Stocktake: Evaluating Progress Since Paris Agreement

◈ **Global Stocktake:** The COP28 marks the initiation of the **Global Stocktake**, a crucial evaluation of the progress made by nations since the Paris Agreement in 2015.

◈ **Comprehensive assessment:** This **comprehensive assessment** involves governments examining their efforts in curbing global warming, setting the stage for future actions.

Stakes at Hand:

◈ **Stringent national policies:** Countries will need to consider making more **stringent national policies**, setting ambitious goals, and financially supporting less affluent nations in transitioning to clean, green energy.

The United Nations Climate Change's Perspective: UNCC's Call to Action:

◈ **United Nations Climate Change (UNCC):** The **United Nations Climate Change (UNCC)** emphasizes the significance of this moment, describing it as a time to "take a long, hard look at the state of our planet and chart a better course for the future."

◈ **Global collaboration:** The UNCC positions COP28 as a **critical juncture for global collaboration** and decisive climate action.

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Five-Year Plan: Evolution from COP21 to COP28

The Paris Agreement's Inception:

◈ **COP21 in Paris:** In 2015, **COP21 in Paris** marked a landmark shift in global climate efforts.

◈ **Kyoto Protocol:** Unlike the **previous Kyoto Protocol**, the Paris Agreement included all countries in the **fight against the climate crisis**, making it mandatory for each nation to set emissions-reduction targets, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Mandate of the Paris Agreement:

◈ **2 degrees Celsius:** The Paris Agreement set the goal of **limiting global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius** from the pre-industrial era, with a more ambitious target of **staying under 1.5 degrees Celsius** to minimize severe climate change impacts.

◈ **Periodic assessments:** This mandate necessitated **periodic assessments**, with the **first scheduled Global Stocktake occurring in 2023** and subsequently every five years.

The Initial Global Stocktake Report and Its Implications

UN's Assessment:

◈ **Technical report:** The UN published a **technical report in September 2023** based on the first Global Stocktake.

◈ **Global community's actions:** The findings indicated some progress, but the **global community's actions fell short**.

◈ **Need for accelerated approach:** The report stressed the need for accelerated implementation, an all-encompassing societal approach, and increased ambition to align with the Paris Agreement goals.

Unveiling Opportunities and Challenges:

◈ **Good practices and proposals:** The emphasis on **good practices and proposals** to accelerate implementation showcases the ongoing effort to bridge existing gaps and move towards the goals outlined in the Paris Agreement.

Rising Global Temperatures: A Call to Urgent Action

Alarming Temperature Increase:

◈ **1.2 degrees Celsius:** Amidst these evaluations and reports, the stark reality remains that the **average global temperature has surged by almost 1.2 degrees Celsius** since pre-industrial times.

◈ **Urgency for nations:** This underscores the **urgency for nations** to collectively address climate change and implement measures that align with the goals set in the Paris Agreement.

Way Forward:

◈ As governments, experts, and stakeholders convene at COP28, the **urgency of the climate crisis is undeniable.**

◈ The **Global Stocktake**, a mechanism designed to **hold nations accountable**, is not just an assessment of progress but a **call for collective action**.

◈ The decisions made at this summit will **reverberate in the trajectory of global efforts** to combat climate change and shape the planet's future for generations to come.

COP28 CLIMATE MEETING: THE FOSSIL FUEL QUESTION

Context: Oil, gas, coal, and their derivatives account for at least 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, COPs over the years have not even acknowledged the role of fossil fuels in global warming.

COP 28 and Fossil Fuel:

The annual climate change conferences have historically sidestepped the crucial issue of fossil fuels' role in global warming. However, the ongoing COP28 in Dubai is witnessing a potential shift, sparked by controversial remarks from Sultan Al Jaber, the conference's presiding figure.

The Furore in COP 28:

◈ **Fossil Fuel controversy:** Al Jaber's comments

during an online event, where he downplayed the necessity of eliminating fossil fuels to achieve the 1.5-degree Celsius target, have triggered a significant controversy.

◈ **Conflict of Interest:** As the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, the world's 12th largest oil company, Al Jaber's role as COP28 president has drawn criticism for potential conflicts of interest.

The Fossil Fuel Debate:

◈ **GHG emissions:** Fossil fuels, responsible for at least 80% of greenhouse gas emissions, have been a contentious topic in climate negotiations.

◈ **Core Issues:** Despite their significant contribution to climate change, influential countries have attempted to reduce emissions without addressing the core issue of fossil fuel usage.

The Indian Initiative:

◈ **Phase-out of fossil fuels:** India took a bold step during COP27, calling for a phase-out of fossil fuels in the final conference outcome.

◈ **Phase-down of coal:** While the mention was vague, urging the acceleration of a "phase-down" of unabated coal, it marked the first official acknowledgment of any fossil fuel in COP decisions.
  ➤ The terms "phase-out" and "phase-down" remain subject to negotiation and contention.

The Sensitive Players:

◈ **Avoiding Discussions:** Powerful nations like the US, EU, China, India, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which are major producers or consumers of fossil fuels, have traditionally avoided explicit discussions on phasing out these resources.

◈ **Broader Perspectives:** They preferred framing climate objectives in broader terms like emission reductions and temperature targets.

COP28's Turning Point:

◈ **Fossil fuel phase-out:** Sultan Al Jaber's invitation for countries to submit **proposals on fossil fuel phase-out** suggests a potential breakthrough at COP28.

◈ **Intense negotiations:** While the conference's final decisions may include a mention of the need to phase down fossil fuels—a groundbreaking development after three decades—the specifics and schedules are likely to face intense negotiations.

Way Forward:

◈ The unfolding events at COP28 indicate a **paradigm shift in climate negotiations**, with fossil fuels finally entering the spotlight.

◈ The pressure to address this **long-ignored elephant** in the room is mounting, driven by the urgent need to meet 2030 targets.

◈ As discussions progress, the world waits to see whether **COP28 will pave the way for concrete actions towards reducing dependence on fossil fuels** and combating climate change.

PM MODI TO LAUNCH GREEN CREDITS INITIATIVE AT COP28

Context: **The program, which will initially focus on water conservation and afforestation, envisions issuing green credits for plantations on waste and degraded lands, and river catchment areas.**

World Climate Action Summit: COP 28

◈ Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to launch a green credits initiative, aimed at encouraging the establishment of plantations, during his two-day visit to the United Nations climate conference being held in the United Arab Emirates.

◈ The 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28), held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is being held in Dubai.

Green Credits Program

◈ The environment ministry in October 2023 announced a **green credits program**–defining it as a **market-based mechanism** designed to **incentivize voluntary environmental actions** across diverse sectors by various stakeholders like individuals, communities, private sector industries, and companies, according to the ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

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◈ In its initial phase, it will focus on **water conservation and afforestation.**

◈ **Green credit program:** The green credits initiative is based on the **green credit program** and basically envisions the issue of green credits for plantations on waste and degraded lands, and river catchment areas in order to restore their vitality.

LeadIT 2.0

◈ The Prime Minister will launch another initiative called LeadIT 2.0 i.e. '**Leadership Group for Industry Transition'**, at an event co-hosted by India and Sweden.

◈ **Joint initiative:** LeadIT 2.0 is a joint initiative launched by **India and Sweden in 2019** at the **UN Climate Action Summit** in New York.

◈ It is aimed at **fostering collaboration among decision-makers**, as well as bringing together **public and private sector companies** to aid in **the acceleration** of industry transition to **net-zero emissions.**

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Section C [PRELIMS]

- RBI, Bank of England sign MoU for cooperation in CCIL issue
- GIAN scheme
- The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill- Issues and Concerns
- ALTERRA: UAE Commits $30bn to Climate-Focused Investment Vehicle
- World Malaria Report
- India set to launch its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite: ISRO
- Henry Kissinger

RBI, BANK OF ENGLAND SIGN MOU FOR COOPERATION IN CCIL ISSUE

Context: Memorandum of understanding on cooperation and exchange of information related to Clearing Corporation of India Ltd (CCIL) has been signed

Background

◈ The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** and the **Bank of England (BoE)** recently inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) centered on **cooperation and information exchange** concerning the **Clearing Corporation of India Ltd (CCIL).**

CCIL's Role:

● CCIL is a **central counterparty** (CCP), is crucial for clearing and settlement in transactions related to government securities, foreign exchange, and money markets in India.

● The **regulatory oversight** for CCIL falls under the purview of the **RBI.**

Framework for Cooperation

◈ The signed MoU establishes a framework wherein the **BoE relies on the RBI's regulatory and supervisory activities** while ensuring the stability of the UK's financial system.

◈ The agreement underscores the **importance of cross-border collaboration** for international clearing activities.

◈ **CCIL's Recognition Process:**

➤ In January, CCIL applied to the Bank of England for recognition as a third-country Central Counterparty (TC-CCP).

➤ The MoU facilitates the BoE's assessment of CCIL's application, a prerequisite for UK-based banks to engage in transactions through CCIL.

Implications for UK-Based Lenders:

◈ The agreement **brings relief** to **UK-based lenders**, including Barclays and Standard Chartered, allowing them to continue providing clearing and settlement services to clients in India.

GIAN SCHEME

Context: After brief discontinuation during the COVID period, the Ministry of Education to restart the fourth phase of the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN)-to rope in eminent scholars from across the world to teach at Indian universities.

Global Initiative for Academic Networks (GIAN):

◈ The GIAN initiative aimed at tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs internationally to encourage their engagement with the institutes of Higher Education in India.

◈ To augment the country's existing academic resources, accelerate the pace of quality reform, and elevate India's scientific and technological capacity to global excellence.

GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR ACADEMIC NETWORKS

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India

National Coordinating Institute
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY KHARAGPUR   www.gian.iitkgp.ac.in

TECHNOLOGY, URBAN SPACE AND CULTURE: EMERGING PARADIGMS FOR GLOBAL INDIA

Objectives:

◈ To enhance the presence of esteemed international faculty in Indian academic institutions. Offer opportunities for our faculty to acquire and exchange knowledge and advanced teaching skills.

◈ Enable our students to access expertise and insights from distinguished international faculty.

◈ Establish pathways for potential collaborative research ventures with international scholars. Create top-notch course materials in specialized domains, available in both video and print formats, for broader use by students and educators.

❖ Document and cultivate innovative pedagogical approaches in emerging subjects of national and global significance.

THE BROADCASTING SERVICES (REGULATION) BILL– ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Context: There are numerous apprehensions that arise from the Broadcasting Bill's manifest scope as well as its noteworthy silences. Issues and concerns regarding protect press freedom and diversity.

The Evolving Landscape of Broadcasting Regulation in India: A Critical Analysis

❖ The **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)** recently unveiled the **Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill**, marking another significant attempt to **regulate broadcasting comprehensively**.

❖ This move follows a series of initiatives dating back to the 1997 Broadcasting Bill, with the latest iteration spurred by a pre-consultation paper on 'National Broadcasting Policy' from the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).**

❖ The last initiative to take on this ambitious task was back in 2007, in the form of the **Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill**.

❖ When cable and satellite broadcasting was in its infancy, the **Broadcasting Bill of 1997 scripted the first effort** to visualise an integrated regulatory framework for this sector.

Key Propositions and Concerns

1. Recording Subscriber Data and Audience Measurement

❖ The current Bill proposes three noteworthy measures.

❖ Firstly, it mandates broadcasting operators to maintain subscriber data records, aligning with international norms.

❖ Secondly, it aims to establish a methodology for audience measurement and the sale of ratings data to enhance transparency.

❖ However, concerns arise regarding the lack of privacy safeguards for subscribers.

❖ Thirdly, the provision allowing private actors in terrestrial broadcasting may foster competition, but potential impacts on supplier diversity need careful consideration.

2. Inclusion of OTT Content Suppliers

❖ A major concern stems from the Bill's **inclusion of Over-the-Top (OTT)** content suppliers in the **definition of broadcasting services**.

❖ It creates **jurisdictional conflicts** with the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITy)** discussions on OTT player licensing.

3. Self-Regulation Challenges

❖ The Bill introduces a **'Content Evaluation Committee'** for self-certification of news programming, raising questions about feasibility, cost, and desirability.

❖ It may **impact smaller news outlets, limiting their ability to continue professional pursuits.**

Silences in the Bill

1. Ownership Issues

❖ Crucially, the Bill remains silent on issues of ownership, failing to address cross-media and vertical ownership concerns that can impact supplier diversity and viewpoints in the news marketplace.

2. Lack of Independent Broadcast Regulator

❖ While TRAI's paper hinted at the need for an independent broadcast regulator, the Bill proposes a **'Broadcast Advisory Council'**.

❖ It raises concerns about **its capacity, autonomy, and the government's ultimate decision-making** power.

3. Government Empowerment and Lack of Definitions

❖ The Bill grants the government **considerable powers,** including unannounced inspections, equipment impoundment, and the ability to curtail broadcasting in **"public interest," a term left undefined**, raising concerns about external pressure on news suppliers.

❖ As the latest effort in a series to establish a **comprehensive regulatory framework for broadcasting** in India, the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill faces the challenge of addressing

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omissions, refining provisions, and balancing potential positives with concerns. **It must prioritize press freedom, diversity, and protection against external pressures** to fulfill its intended purpose effectively.

ALTERRA: UAE COMMITS $30BN TO CLIMATE-FOCUSED INVESTMENT VEHICLE

Context: The UAE announced a US$30 billion commitment to the newly launched catalytic climate vehicle, ALTÉRRA.

About ALTÉRRA:

◈ With this US$30 billion commitment, **ALTÉRRA** becomes the **world's largest private investment vehicle** for climate change action and will **aim to mobilize US$250 billion globally by 2030**.

◈ It aims **to steer private markets** towards **climate investments** and focus on transforming emerging markets and developing economies, where traditional investment has been lacking due to the higher perceived risks across those geographies.

◈ ALTÉRRA has been **established by Lunate**, an **independent global investment manager**, and is domiciled in the Abu Dhabi Global Market.

Need of ALTERRA:

◈ By 2030, emerging markets and developing economies will **require US$2.4 trillion every year** to **address climate change.**

◈ That is why **COP28** made **fixing climate finance** a **key pillar of its Action Agenda** and has worked to deliver ambitious solutions, including mobilising private markets at scale.

Benefits of ALTERRA:

◈ ALTÉRRA provides a **transformational solution** for attracting private capital.

◈ Its **scale and structure** will create a **multiplier effect** in climate focused investment, making it a vehicle like no other.

◈ Its launch reflects the COP Presidency's Action Agenda and the **UAE's efforts to make climate finance available, accessible and affordable.**

◈ ALTÉRRA is one of a **range of finance-led initiatives** launched during COP28 to accelerate the **global transition to a low-carbon economy** and build climate resilience.

Structure of ALTERRA:

◈ ALTÉRRA will have an **innovative two-part structure** to spur

➤ new ideas, incentivize policy and regulatory frameworks

➤ Identify solutions to rapidly deploy capital across the entire value chain of the new climate economy.

◈ It has a dedicated investment focus on supporting four key priorities that underpin COP28's Action Agenda, namely:

➤ Energy Transition

➤ Industrial Decarbonization

➤ Sustainable Living

➤ Climate Technologies.

ALTERRA and Climate Change:

◈ In-line with COP28's message of full inclusivity, ALTÉRRA TRANSFORMATION will also **create opportunities to leverage concessional finance** to further attract climate investment to **Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).**

◈ The ALTERRA vehicle will add to the UAE's leading change as a trusted facilitator at the global crossroads between North, South, East and West.

◈ ALTÉRRA, in collaboration with **BlackRock, Brookfield and TPG** as inaugural launch partners, has committed **US$6.5 billion** to **climate-dedicated funds** for global investments, including the Global South.

ALTERRA and India:

◈ From the vehicle's initial commitment, immediate capital investment has been earmarked for the development of **over 6.0 GW of new clean energy capacity in India**.

◈ This includes the **construction of 1,200 MW of wind and solar projects** that will begin producing **clean power by 2025.**

WORLD MALARIA REPORT

Context: The recently released World Malaria Report shows that the number of cases and deaths due to the mosquito-borne infection India have continued to decline.

Key Highlights of the Report:

◈ **Data shown**: India saw a **30% decline** in malaria cases

and **34% decline** in deaths in 2022 as compared to the previous year.

➤ Globally there were **5 million** additional malaria cases in 2022 as compared to the previous year, totalling to 249 million.

➤ Of the **5 million** additional cases, the highest **2.1 million** was from Pakistan that had a flood in 2022.

➤ India accounted for **1.4% of total malaria cases** in the world.

◆ Factors responsible to increase Malaria:

➤ **Climate Change Boosts Malaria Risks:** Rising temperatures due to climate change expand areas suitable for malaria transmission, especially in the Himalayan belt.

➤ **Extreme Weather Impacts**: Extreme weather events, like heavy rainfall**,** can indirectly worsen malaria by hindering healthcare access; better planning is crucial.

◆ **Challenges for India:**

➤ **Vivax Malaria Predicament**: Vivax malaria, constituting over **40% of cases in India**, poses a challenge due to its recurring nature hiding in the liver.

➤ **Incomplete Treatment Issue**: Treating vivax malaria requires a **14-day therapy**, but many stop medication once symptoms alleviate, hindering complete recovery.

◆ Recommendations:

➤ To achieve the **malaria elimination target of 2030**, there has to be emphasis on strengthening of surveillance as well as tailoring of malaria interventions at sub-national level which should be data driven.

➤ In addition updating policies and adopting new tools as per **national and subnational** need in line with WHO's guidance is critical.

The Statistical data (India-specific):

● With an estimated **33.8 lakh cases** and **5,511 deaths**, India saw a decline of **30 per cent** in malaria incidence and **34 per cent** in mortality in 2022, compared to the previous year.

● The number of malaria cases had dropped from **243 million to 233 million** globally between **2000 and 2019**. However, there was an increase of **11 million cases** in 2020.

● They remained stable in 2021, before seeing another increase of 5 million in 2022 to **249 million**.

● The number of **malaria deaths** also remained higher than the pre-pandemic levels. There were **608,000** deaths reported in 2022 as compared to **576,000 cases in 2019**.

INDIA SET TO LAUNCH ITS FIRST X–RAY POLARIMETER SATELLITE: ISRO

Context: **XPoSat will be launched by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota.**

X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) Mission:

◆ Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced that India is set to launch its **first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat)**, aiming to **investigate the polarisation of intense X-Ray sources.**

◆ **Space-based X-Ray astronomy:** It has been established in India, focusing predominantly on imaging, time-domain studies, and spectroscopy, the upcoming XPoSat mission marks a major value addition.

◆ **Observation:** The XPoSat spacecraft is designated for **observation from Low Earth Orbit** (non-sun synchronous orbit of ~650 km altitude, low inclination of approximately six degree), carrying two scientific payloads.

◆ **Spatial and Temporal Studies:** With these two payloads, the XPoSat mission is capable of simultaneous studies of temporal, spectral, and polarization features of the bright X-Ray sources.

◆ **Mission Objective:** The mission objectives include measurement of X-Ray polarization in the energy band of 8-30 keV emanated from X-Ray sources, long-term spectral and temporal studies of cosmic X-Ray sources in the energy band of 0.8-15 keV.

◆ **Observe the X-Ray sources:** The payloads onboard XPoSat will **observe the X-Ray sources** during the spacecraft's transit through the Earth's shadow, i.e., during the eclipse period.

◆ **Primary Payloads:** The primary payload of **XPoSat, POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays),** is designed **to measure polarimetry parameters** — specifically the **degree and angle of polarization** — in the **medium X-ray energy range of 8-30 keV photons** originating from astronomical sources.

➤ The **POLIX payload** was developed by the Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bengaluru, with support from various ISRO centres.

◆ **Secondary payload:** The secondary payload is the **XSPECT (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing)** payload, which will provide spectroscopic information within the energy range of 0.8-15 keV.

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- The XSPECT payload was developed by the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), ISRO.

◈ The **XPoSat** will be launched by the **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)**, from the **Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota.**

HENRY KISSINGER

Context: Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford, dies at 100.

◈ Kissinger with then Indian PM Indira Gandhi. He played a crucial role from the US and Shaping US stance favoring Pakistan against India in 1971 war. He was also pivotal also in the thaw between US and China.

An Influential Statesman

◈ Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a **prominent figure in U.S. foreign policy** under Presidents **Nixon and Ford**, passed away at the age of 100.

◈ His life, marked by **distinctive achievements and controversies**, left an indelible mark on global affairs.

A Polarizing Figure with Uncommon Influence

◈ Kissinger's impact on global affairs during the Nixon and Ford administrations was unparalleled.

◈ Despite receiving both vilification and the Nobel Peace Prize, his gruff demeanor and behind-the-scenes maneuvering shaped

crucial moments in history.

◈ His influence peaked during the tumult of Watergate, where he assumed a quasi-co-presidential role.

◈ For his actions negotiating a ceasefire in the Vietnam War, Kissinger received the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize under controversial circumstances.

Foreign Policy Architect

◈ Kissinger conducted the first "shuttle diplomacy" for Middle East peace.

◈ Facilitated ties with China.

◈ Initiated negotiations that led to a "decent interval" for the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

◈ His pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union marked a significant step towards easing Cold War tensions.

Legacy and Criticisms

◈ While he cultivated the image of a respected statesman in his later years, criticisms persisted over his policies in Southeast Asia and support for repressive regimes in Latin America.

◈ Revelations from Nixon-era documents and tapes fueled ongoing discussions about his role in historical events.

A Practitioner of Realpolitik

◈ Kissinger's approach, characterized by realpolitik—pragmatic diplomacy to achieve practical objectives—earned both supporters and critics.

◈ Authorizing wiretaps and facing backlash for the bombing of Cambodia, he navigated the challenges of a Machiavellian reputation in the pursuit of U.S. interests.

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Section D [QUIK BYTES]

- ❧ Garba of Gujarat in UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list
- ❧ Mahaparinirvan Diwas
- ❧ Kisan e-Mitra
- ❧ Seed Cooperative Society
- ❧ International Methane Emissions Observatory 2023 Report
- ❧ National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)
- ❧ 'Bhashini' ,an AI-led language translation system
- ❧ "Contact binary" satellite – 'Selam'
- ❧ Air pollution causes over 2 million deaths annually in India: BMJ study

[SPECIES IN NEWS]

- ❧ Santjordia pagesi, a new jelly fish discovered

Garba of Gujarat in UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list

Gujarat's traditional dance form 'Garba' was on December 6 included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

About –

- The popular **dance form is the 15th cultural item from India** to make it to the UNESCO list.
- The inclusion made under the provisions of the **2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.**
- Garba is **celebrated for nine days during the festival of Navaratri.**
- **Described the 'Garba' as a ritualistic and devotional dance** performed throughout the State of Gujarat and across India.
- **The list** for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage currently **has** some **704 elements** corresponding to **5 regions and 143 countries.**
- It includes forms of expression that testify to the diversity of intangible heritage and raises awareness of its importance.
- **Apart from 'Garba of Gujarat,'** some of the new inscriptions include **Rickshaws and Rickshaw painting in Dhaka** from Bangladesh, **Songkran in Thailand**, traditional Thai New Year festival from Thailand; **Hiragasy, a performing art of** the Central Highlands of **Madagascar; Junkanoo from the Bahamas,** and the Procession **and celebrations of** Prophet **Mohammed's birthday in Sudan**.

Mahaparinirvan Diwas

December 6 is observed as the Mahaparinirvan Diwas, or the death anniversary, of Dr B R Ambedkar, the Father of the Indian Constitution.

About:

- Baba Saheb, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, he was the 14th and last child of his parents.
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the son of Subedar Ramji Maloji Sakpal. He was Subedar in British Army.
- Babasaheb's father was a follower of Sant Kabir and was also a well-read person.
- Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was conferred with the title of "Bodhisattva" by the Buddhist monks at "Jagatik Buddhism Council" in 1954 in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- The special thing is that Dr Ambedkar was conferred with the title of Bodhisattva while he was alive.
- He also contributed to India's Independence struggle and in its reforms post-independence.
- Apart from this, Babasaheb played a significant role in the formation of the Reserve Bank of India.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's death anniversary is observed as Mahaparinirvan Diwas across the country.

Kisan e-Mitra

Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Kailash Choudhary launches PM KISAN AI-Chatbot (Kisan e-Mitra) in New Delhi.

About:

- The introduction of the AI chatbot in the PM-KISAN grievance management system is aimed at empowering farmers with a user-friendly and accessible platform.
- Currently, the Chatbot is available in English, Hindi, Bengali, Odia, and Tamil.
- In a short period, it will be available in all 22 languages of the country.
- The AI Chatbot acts as a comprehensive guide for the beneficiaries, providing them with timely and accurate responses to their queries related to the scheme.
- This is the first AI Chatbot integrated with a major flagship scheme of the Union government.
- **It has been developed and improved with the support of the EKstep Foundation and Bhashini.**

Seed Cooperative Society

Ministry of Cooperation has set up Bhartiya Beej Sahkari Samiti Limited under the Multi- State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002.

- The BBSSL will undertake production, procurement & distribution of quality seeds under single brand through cooperative network to improve crop yield and develop a system for preservation and promotion of indigenous natural seeds.
- The following shall be eligible to become ordinary member of the BBSSL:-
  - ➤ Any multi-State co-operative society or any co-operative society;
  - ➤ The National Co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC) established under the National Co-operative Development Corporation Act, 1962 (26 of 1962);
  - ➤ Any other corporation owned or controlled by the Government;
- Such class or classes of persons or associations of persons as may be permitted by the Central Registrar having regard to the nature and activities of the Society.

International Methane Emissions Observatory 2023 Report

Context: Recently, a report named "An Eye on Methane", on Methane emission has been released by the International Methane Emissions Observatory.

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About the Report:

- The International Methane Emissions Observatory's third annual report provides decision makers a framework of action to track and monitor methane emissions to plan targeted and ambitious action for their mitigation.

- **Key Highlights:**
  - ➤ 20 IMEO-funded and coordinated peer-reviewed studies have been published and 7 studies submitted or under review.
  - ➤ 114 oil and gas companies – covering 37% of production – joined UNEP's measurement, reporting and verification programme OGMP 2.0 September 2023 cut-off.
  - ➤ Methane Alert and Response System (MARS), launched at COP27, has issued alerts on 127 plumes to the responsible authorities.
  - ➤ Methane data platform is under design.

- Funding is secured for baseline studies that will provide an empirical and actionable assessment of emissions across methane-emitting sectors for selected countries.

National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)

National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) has met to review preparedness of State governments and Central Ministries/ Departments for impending Cyclone 'Michaung' in Bay of Bengal.

- The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has made five teams available for Tamil Nadu and three teams for Puducherry.
- The NCMC reviewed the preparedness of central ministries, agencies, and state and Union Territory governments for the possible cyclonic storm over the Bay of Bengal.
- Teams are also being kept on standby for Andhra Pradesh and they will be activated as and when the state government asks for them.

About NCMC:

- The NCMC has been constituted under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary.
- The other members of this Committee include the secretary to the Prime Minister, secretaries of the ministries of home affairs, defence, agriculture and cooperation, RAW and director of Intelligence Bureau.
- The NCMC gives direction to the Crisis Management Group (CMG) as deemed necessary.

Crisis Management Group (CMG):

- This is a group under the chairmanship of the **Relief Commissioner comprising the senior officers** from the various ministries and other concerned departments.
- The CMG will meet **at least twice in a year** in the months of December/January and May/June and as often as may be required by the Relief Commissioner in Krishi Bhavan, New Delhi.

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'Bhashini' ,an AI-led language translation system

For a few weeks this year, villagers in the Southwestern Indian state of Karnataka read out dozens of sentences in their native Kannada language into an app as part of a project to build the country's first AI-based chatbot for Tuberculosis.

About:

- The Indian government, which aims to deliver more services digitally, is also building language datasets through Bhashini, an AI-led language translation system that is creating open source datasets in local languages for creating AI tools.

- The platform includes a crowdsourcing initiative for people to contribute sentences in various languages, validate audio or text transcribed by others, translate texts and label images.

Similar efforts:

- Google-funded Project Vaani, or voice, is collecting speech data of about 1 million Indians and open-sourcing it for use in automatic speech recognition and speech-to-speech translation.

- Bengaluru-based EkStep Foundation's AI-based translation tools are used at the Supreme Court in India and Bangladesh.

- **While the government-backed AI4Bharat centre has launched Jugalbandi, an AI-based chatbot that can answer questions on welfare schemes in several Indian languages.**

"Contact binary" satellite – 'Selam'

The first asteroid target of NASA's Lucy mission hosts an unexpected "contact binary" satellite. Scientists have named it "Selam."

About:

- This first asteroid encounter for the Lucy mission really surprised everyone.

- Not only was there the surprise of the previously hidden contact binary, but the surprisingly high-resolution images revealed boulder-strewn surface on both small worlds.

- Up close, 790 meter-wide Dinkinesh looks a lot like 101955 Bennu, visited by OSIRIS-REx.

- NASA says that we can expect to see more images of the flyby with additional processing soon, saying that the team has completed downlinking the data from Lucy's first asteroid encounter and is continuing to process it.

The **fossil Selam** was discovered in 2000 in Dikika, Ethiopia, and belonged to a 3-year-old girl of the same species as Lucy.

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Air pollution causes over 2 million deaths annually in India: BMJ study

According to a modelling study published in The BMJ, outdoor air pollution from all sources accounts for 2.18 million deaths per year in India, second only to China.

About the report:

- Fossil Fuel-Related Air Pollution:
  - ➤ Fossil fuel use in industry, power generation, and transportation causes **5.1 million extra deaths annually**.
  - ➤ This accounts for 61% of the estimated 8.3 million deaths from outdoor air pollution in 2019.
- Potential Health Benefits of Phasing Out Fossil Fuels:
  - ➤ Replacing fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy could prevent a substantial number of deaths worldwide.
  - ➤ Estimates indicate larger impacts on mortality than previously thought, emphasizing the health benefits of clean energy adoption.
- Public Health and Climate Co-Benefits:
  - ➤ The study emphasizes the urgent need for transitioning to renewable energy for public health and climate benefits.
  - ➤ COP28 climate change negotiations provide an opportunity to prioritize fossil fuel phase-out for substantial health gains.

SPECIES IN NEWS

Santjordia pagesi, a new jelly fish discovered

In 2002, scientists aboard a research vessel discovered a **peculiar jellyfish** near a volcanic crater off Japan. Spotting the same creature again in 2020, scientists have now confirmed that it is a new species named *Santjordia pagesi*.

About the Species:

- The species noted at 4 inches wide and 3 inches tall, boasts a circular body with around 240 tentacles.

- Its most distinctive feature is a bright red, cross-shaped stomach. Photos show its transparent body, resembling a cushion, with a thick white ring and vein-like structures.

- The jellyfish, found at depths of 2,700 to 2,800 feet in the Sumisu Caldera near the **Ogasawara Islands**, has been observed pulsing its body, propelling it forward by opening and contracting the outer white ring.

- DNA analysis revealed enough genetic distinction to classify it into a new subfamily, bring to the fore its rarity and significance in marine biology.

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CSE RESULTS

TOP 100 ALL INDIA RANKING CSE 2022

1 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 18 | 22
26 | 33 | 34 | 37 | 42 | 46 | 48 | 56 | 57 | 58 | 60 | 62
65 | 66 | 68 | 72 | 73 | 75 | 77 | 83 | 86 | 87 | 91 | 98

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TOP 100 ALL INDIA RANKING CSE 2021

02 | 04 | 07 | 12 | 24 | 25 | 29 | 31
32 | 43 | 44 | 45 | 46 | 49 | 52 | 53 | 54
66 | 67 | 68 | 80 | 83 | 89 | 92 | 93 | 95

TOP 100 ALL INDIA RANKING CSE 2020

8 | 9 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 16 | 17 | 19 | 20
24 | 26 | 28 | 30 | 31 | 36 | 38 | 41 | 45 | 50
51 | 52 | 55 | 56 | 58 | 59 | 67 | 68 | 70 | 71 | 73
74 | 76 | 78 | 83 | 84 | 85 | 86 | 89 | 93 | 98 | 100