

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 1
FEBRUARY
2024

MAINS

GS- I ■ HC REJECTS UNMARRIED WOMAN'S PLEA TO TERMINATE 28-WEEK PREGNANCY

GS- II ■ MQ-9B DRONES DEAL
■ INDIA-CHINA BILATERAL TRADE HIT A NEW RECORD
■ INDIA-UAE BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY
■ KERALA'S FISCAL WOES
■ CENTRE'S NEW ANTI-CHEATING BILL
■ WATER (PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF POLLUTION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2024
■ UTTARAKHAND'S UNIFORM CIVIL CODE BILL
■ PM ROOFTOP SOLAR SCHEME
■ IRDAI PROPOSES REVISING COVERAGE ACROSS SECTORS TO SECURE 'INSURANCE FOR ALL'

GS- III ■ PLAN TO BOLSTER THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) ECOSYSTEM
■ RED SEA CRISIS

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- Atmospheric River

ART & CULTURE

- Assam's traditional buffalo fight-Moh-Juj
- Deepastambham (lamp post) casts light on medieval trade ties

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- France first European country to accept India's UPI
- US, Russia clash at UN

POLITY &

GOVERNANCE

- Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies (Amendment) Bill, 2024

- Delimitation exercise
- India to construct fencing along Indo-Myanmar border
- GHAR (GO Home and Re-Unite) Portal
- Prithvi Vigyan (PRITHVI) Scheme
- 'Lakhpatri Didi' scheme

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- Cervical Cancer
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- RBI's Monetary Policy committee takeaway

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- Exercise Vayushakti-2024
- Nagas & Manipur Conflict
- PVTGs of Odisha, A.P.
- RoSCTL scheme
- Electric Vehicle in Indian Army
- Zodiacal Light
- Variable rate reverse repo (VRRR)
- White Paper
- Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)
- Global Environment Facility (GEF)

SPECIALS

- Interim Budget 2024

GS SCORE

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— **Disclaimer** —

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

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

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MOCK TEST - 1: 17 MARCH, 2024

MOCK TEST - 2: 14 APRIL, 2024

MOCK TEST - 3: 05 MAY, 2024

TEST TIMING

PAPER 1: 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM

PAPER 2: 01:00 PM to 03:00 PM

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***Section A* [MAINS]**

- ❧ HC rejects unmarried woman's plea to terminate 28-week pregnancy
- ❧ MQ-9B drones deal
- ❧ India-China bilateral trade hit a new record
- ❧ India-UAE Bilateral Investment Treaty
- ❧ Kerala's Fiscal Woes
- ❧ Centre's New Anti-Cheating Bill
- ❧ Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024
- ❧ Uttarakhand's Uniform Civil Code Bill
- ❧ PM rooftop solar scheme
- ❧ IRDAI proposes revising coverage across sectors to secure 'insurance for all'
- ❧ Plan to bolster the electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem
- ❧ Red Sea Crisis

HC REJECTS UNMARRIED WOMAN'S PLEA TO TERMINATE 28-WEEK PREGNANCY

Context: The Delhi High Court refused to allow a 20-year-old unmarried woman to terminate her 28-week pregnancy.

The woman sought permission from the high court to undergo medical termination under the **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act**.

What does the Book say?

- ◆ The **Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 2021** allows all women in India (married and unmarried) to abort a foetus up to 20 weeks of pregnancy and 24 weeks for women under special conditions.
- ◆ The **MTP Act** allows for abortion after 24 weeks only **if there is a threat to the woman's life or if there is a foetal anomaly.** "Rule 3B" of Rules annexed to the **MTP Act**, which was amended in 2021, specifies seven categories of women who are eligible for termination between 20-24 weeks.
 - ▶ survivors of sexual assault or rape or incest
 - ▶ minors
 - ▶ those who have a change of marital status during the ongoing pregnancy (widowhood and divorce)
 - ▶ women with physical disabilities

- ▶ mentally ill women
 - ▶ women carrying a malformed foetus that has a substantial risk of being incompatible with life
 - ▶ and women with pregnancy in humanitarian settings or disasters or emergencies as may be declared by the government
- ◆ But several high courts and the Supreme Court in the past have used their **discretionary powers** and have given orders to terminate late-term pregnancies.

The **Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971** and its Rules of 2003 prohibit unmarried women who are between 20 weeks to 24 weeks pregnant to abort with the help of registered medical practitioners.

What are women's reproductive rights?

Based on the multiple definitions of reproductive rights, it can be said that they include some or all of the following rights:

- ◆ Right to safe and legal abortion.
- ◆ Right to control one's reproductive functions.
- ◆ Right to access in order to make reproductive choices free of coercion, discrimination and violence.
- ◆ Right to access education about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases and freedom from coerced sterilization and contraception.
- ◆ Right to protection from gender-based practices such as female genital cutting and male genital mutilation.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF ABORTION

- Abortion is deemed acceptable as the foetus is not a person.
- The mother has a right to life and it supersedes the rights of the foetus to choose whether or not it remains connected to her body.
- It may be ethical for a mother to have an abortion to defend herself from the danger to her mental or physical health than continuing with the pregnancy would cause.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ABORTION

- Abortion deprives the foetus of a potential 'future like ours'.
- It deprives one of all the experiences, enjoyments, opportunities that would make up their future personal life.
- Killing an innocent human being is a moral wrong.

MQ-9B DRONES DEAL

Context: The MQ-9B 'Predator' or Reaper drone, one of the deadliest unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in the world, will soon be in the arsenal of India's military.

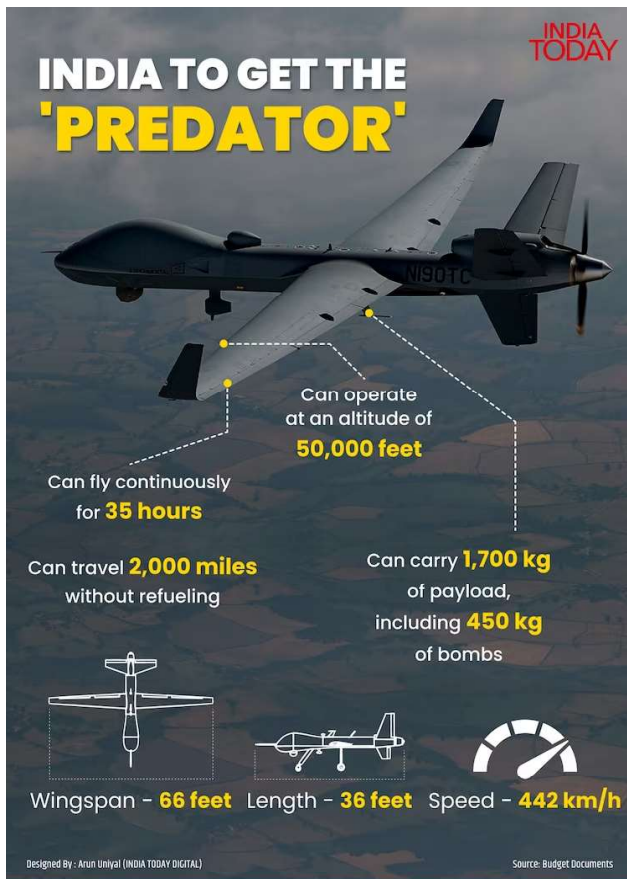
Key-highlights

- ◆ The United States approved the sale of 31 of the MQ-9B 'Predator' or Reaper drone, at an estimated cost of USD 3.99 billion

- ◆ Among the 31, the Navy will get 15 Sea Guardian drones, the naval variant of the Predator.
- ◆ The Air Force and the Army will each get eight Sky Guardian drones.
- ◆ The 31 MQ-9B drones will come with all paraphernalia, including **170 AGM-114R Hellfire missiles, 16 M36E9 Hellfire Captive Air Training Missiles, 310 GBU-39B/B Laser Small Diameter Bombs (LSDB).**

Background

- ◆ The advanced MQ-9 version replaced the RQ-1 'Predator' in 2018.



- ◆ The Predator drone, which was first flown way back in 1995, was used extensively by the United States in its war on terror after the 9/11 attacks.
- ◆ The drones were deployed to target al-Qaida hideouts in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan in the early 2000s.

MQ-9B SkyGuardian Drone

- ◆ **Developed by:** General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI).
- ◆ It is the first **hunter-killer unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)** designed for long-endurance and high-altitude surveillance.
- ◆ It has the ability to operate with pin-drop silence.

- A **Predator drone** can carry around 1,700 kg of payload, including four missiles and around 450 kg of bombs, and travel 2,000 miles without refuelling.
- The Predator drones are also used by **Australia, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom.**

- ◆ The drone can fly as close to 250 metres from the ground without the target even having an inkling it is there unless spotted.
- ◆ The drone can fly higher than a commercial aircraft, around 50,000 feet above the ground, and has a top

speed of 275 mph or 442 km/h.

- ◆ The drone can fly continuously or hover over targets for up to 35 hours.
- ◆ Apart from air-to-air missiles, the drone can also be equipped with air-to-ground missiles, making it unique.
- ◆ **Economical:** The MQ-9B can match 80 per cent of the capability of a manned patrol aircraft at about 20 per cent of its cost per hour, according to General Atomics.

Naval Variant

- ◆ The Sea Guardian, the Predator's naval variant, has a **360-degree surface-search maritime radar**, and **sonobuoy monitoring system**, enabling it to be deployed for anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions.

Importance for India:

- ◆ **Effective controlled operations:** With the drones in its arsenal, Indian forces will be able to launch remote-controlled operations on terrorist hideouts.
- ◆ **Capability enhancement:** With its long-endurance, persistent surveillance and strike capability, the MQ-9 Reapers can enhance the **Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance (ISR)** capabilities of India's Armed Forces.
- ◆ **Strengthening of power:** This increased reconnaissance will be useful as India continues to have strained relations with neighbouring countries, **Pakistan and China.**

INDIA-CHINA BILATERAL TRADE HIT A NEW RECORD

Context: As per latest details, India and China trade reached record levels in 2023 despite a slowdown mid-year.

Key-highlights of the trade details

A **trade deficit** occurs when a country's imports exceed its exports during a given time period. It is also referred to as a negative **balance of trade (BOT).**

- ◆ Bilateral trade volume reached 136.2 billion US dollars last year, with a year-on-year growth of 1.5%.
- ◆ India's exports to China also increased by 6% last year.
- ◆ The **bilateral trade deficit**, which India has been seeking to decrease could also be lower.

TRADE ITEMS

India's top exports to China	India imports from China
Diamonds, cotton yarn, iron ore, copper and organic chemicals.	Electrical machinery and equipment, fertilizer, antibiotics and organic compounds.

Why India's trade with China is important?

- ◆ **Top source of imports:** India's trade with China is important because, for the last 15 years, China has been India's top source of imports.
 - ▶ In 2007-08, China's share in India's imports was around 10.8 per cent. It gradually went up and reached 16.4 per cent in 2017-18.
 - ▶ It languished around 13.7 per cent for 2018-19 and 2019-20, but in the two post-Covid years (viz., 2020-21 and 2021-22), China's share in India's imports reached 16.53 per cent (record high) and 15.43 per cent, respectively.
- ◆ **Double share:** To put these numbers in perspective, in these two years, the second biggest source of

imports for India was the UAE, with an import share of 6.7 per cent in 2020-21 and 7.31 per cent in 2021-22. These numbers indicate that China is not only India's biggest source of imports, but its share in total Indian imports is also more than **double that of the UAE**.

- ◆ **Dominance in non-oil merchandise imports:** In total non-oil merchandise imports, China's dominance is even more pronounced. As oil imports account for 25-30 per cent of India's total imports, India's dependence on China for non-oil imports can be as high as 25 per cent or more.
- ◆ **Export Market:** China is a big market for Indian exports, as well. China has been among the top four export markets for India in the last few years. After Covid, India's exports to China have gone up.

MERCHANDISE TRADE WITH CHINA AND INDIA'S TOTAL MERCHANDISE TRADE

	Imports from China	Exports to China	Trade deficit with China	India's total trade deficit
				(\$ billion)
2014-15	60.41	11.93	-48.48	-137.66
2015-16	61.71	9.01	-52.7	-1118.72
2016-17	61.28	10.17	-51.11	-108.5
2017-18	76.38	13.33	-63.05	-162.05
2018-19	70.32	15.75	-53.57	-184
2019-20	65.26	16.51	-48.65	-161.35
2020-21	66.26	16.51	-48.65	-161.35
2021-22	94.57	21.26	-73.31	-191.05

Source: Ministry of Commerce

Improvements in Relations

- ◆ Over the past year, **China-India relations** have shown a positive momentum of improvement.
 - ▶ The two sides maintained high-level communications and interactions.
 - ▶ President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi reached important consensus on stabilizing bilateral ties.
 - ▶ China supported India's presidency of both **G20 and SCO**.

Tensions at LAC

Despite the multiple rounds, and the informal meeting between the leaders on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in South Africa last year, talks remain deadlocked on at least two friction points at **Demchok and Depsang**.

What are the other sources of contention between the two?

- ◆ **No FTA:** India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) before

signing a deal and consequently, there is no FTA between India and China right now.

- ◆ **Competing interests:** Despite growing economic cooperation, India and China have also been geopolitical rivals. Both countries are attempting to assert their global influence, and they have competing interests in a number of regions such as the **Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean**.
- ◆ **Rivalry:** India and China are rivals in the **Asia-Pacific region**.
 - ▶ **India** has sought to increase its regional influence, forming alliances with several countries in the region, including Japan and Australia.
 - ▶ **China**, on the other hand, has been attempting to assert its regional dominance by increasing its military and economic presence in the South China Sea.



INDIA-UAE BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY

Context: India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have solidified their economic ties through the signing and ratification of a bilateral investment treaty (BIT)

About

- ◆ The pact would help promote investments between the two countries.
- ◆ The treaty is expected to improve the confidence of investors, especially large investors, resulting in an increase in foreign investments and overseas direct investment (ODI) opportunities.
- ◆ This may have a positive impact on employment generation.
- ◆ **Robust Framework:** The BIT establishes a framework focusing on mutual benefit, fair treatment, national and **most-favored-nation treatment**, and protection against expropriation.
- ◆ It encompasses various forms of investment and includes provisions for dispute resolution, transparency, corporate social responsibility, environmental protection, and human rights.

Significance of UAE for India

- ◆ UAE is the third largest source of FDI into Bharat and seventh largest trade partner of India.
- ◆ UAE became the only country with which India has both CEPA and BIT. Even countries like South Korea, Japan and Singapore have a CEPA with India but no BIT.

- ◆ The UAE hosts over 3 million Indians, contributing significantly to both economies. Bilateral trade reached \$84 billion in 2023.
- ◆ **Middle-East Economic Corridor project:** India and UAE are also key partners in the Middle-East Economic Corridor project, which links **Mundra Port** in Gujarat to **Fujairah Port** in UAE by sea, then to **Saudi Arabia** and **Jordan** by railroad and there on to **Europe** via sea as the new trade route to rival Chinese new Silk Road project and North-South corridor via Iran.
- ◆ India-UAE relations have become a focal point of India's Extended Neighbourhood and Look West policies in the region. This deal will further boost the relation between the two countries.

India's Extended Neighbourhood:

- In 2004 the Indian government affirmed that "the concept" of an "extended neighbourhood for India" included the region from the **Suez Canal** to the South China Sea and includes within it **West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region**.
- **Look West Policy:** In 2005, India launched its Look West Policy which focused on India improving its relations with West Asian countries.
- The three main axes of India's Look West Policy are- **The Arab Gulf countries, Israel and Iran**.



KERALA'S FISCAL WOES

Context: The Centre has told the Supreme Court that Kerala was "one of the most financially unhealthy States" and debts run by States affect the credit rating of the whole country. The Centre said the poor financial indicators of Kerala point to a "lack of proper management of its public finances".

Background

- ◆ The state of Kerala filed a suit against the Centre for-
 - ▶ Violating the federal structure of governance
 - ▶ causing "severe damage to the economy of a small State with meagre resources"
- ◆ The State urged the court to protect the **federal system of governance** in which the **State has the exclusive power to regulate its finances through the preparation and management of its budget and borrowings**.

- ◆ Kerala said recent actions, like imposing a Net Borrowing Ceiling in an arbitrary manner, were calculated to reduce it to a **"state of penury"**.

Public Debt of the State is an item exclusively in the State List in the Seventh Schedule under **Article 246** of the Constitution.

What is Centre's response?

- ◆ In response, the Centre referred to three **Finance Commission reports** which had highlighted the **deteriorating debt situation of the State**.
- ◆ The **Reserve Bank of India** has also categorised **Kerala among the five highly stressed States** with high indebtedness requiring urgent corrective measures.
 - ▶ **Kerala, Rajasthan and West Bengal** are projected to exceed the debt-GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) ratio of 35% by 2026-27.
- ◆ The Centre said the poor financial indicators of Kerala point to a **"lack of proper management of its public finances"**.
 - ▶ "Substantial financial resources" were provided to the Kerala government from 2020-21 to 2023-24 over and above the amount recommended by the **15th Finance Commission**.
 - ▶ One of these was the payment of Rs 14,505 crore as "back-to-back loan to meet GST compensation shortfall".
 - ▶ The state has been breaching its **FRBM targets** with unhealthy levels of **Revenue Deficit-Fiscal Deficit ratio** (65% in 2018-19). This implicitly explains why the state has resorted to borrowing to finance its Revenue Deficit

A high **Revenue Deficit-Fiscal Deficit ratio** implies that the state government is borrowing not to invest in productive schemes but to meet its day to day expenses such as salaries and pensions.

How are Centre-State Financial Relations?

- ◆ In federal structure (Indian political governance system), the power to raise money as well as the power to spend is distributed across the **Union Government, State Governments and Local Governments**.
- ◆ **Articles 268 to 293 in Part XII of the Constitution** deal with **Centre-state financial relations**.
- ◆ **Finance Commission (Article 280)** recommends to the President on the distribution of net proceeds of taxes between the centre and states.

- ◆ Constitution divides the taxing powers between the Central and states in following way:

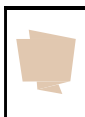
- ▶ **Parliament** has an exclusive power to levy taxes enumerated in the Union List.
- ▶ **State Legislature** has exclusive power to levy the taxes enumerated in the state list. Both the Parliament and the state legislature can levy the taxes enumerated in the Concurrent List.
- ▶ **The residuary power of taxation** (that is, the power to impose the taxes not enumerated in any of the three lists) is vested in the Parliament. Under this provision, the parliament has imposed gift tax, wealth tax and expenditure tax.

All transactions between the Centre and the state governments are carried out under the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003**.

- ◆ Parliament can provide for grants-in-aid to states by the Centre. Such sums are **charged on the Consolidated Fund of India (Article 275)**.
- ◆ The Union can make public purpose grants to states and to any institution within the states (**Article 282**).
- ◆ **Grants-in-Aid to the States** - Besides sharing of taxes between the Centre and the states, the Constitution provides for grants-in-aid to the states from the Central resources. There are two types of grants-in-aid, viz, statutory grants and discretionary grants:
 - ▶ **Statutory Grants - Article 275** empowers the Parliament to make grants to the states which are in need of financial assistance and not to every state. These sums are charged on the Consolidate Fund of India every year.
- ◆ Apart from this general provision, the Constitution also provides for specific for specific grants for promoting the welfare of the scheduled tribes in a state or for raising the level of administration of the scheduled areas in a state including the State of Assam.
- ◆ The statutory grants under **Article 275** (both general and specific) are given to the states on the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
 - ▶ **Discretionary Grants - Article 282** empowers both the Centre and the states to make any grants for any public purpose, even if it is not within their respective legislative competence. Under this provision, the Centre makes grants to the states.
 - ▶ **Other Grants** - The Constitution also provided for a third type of grants-in-aid, but for a temporary period.

◆ Borrowing by the Centre and the States

- ▶ The centre can grant loans to states and also give guarantee in respect of loans raised by them (**Article 293**).
 - ▶ The Central government can borrow either within India or outside upon the security of the **Consolidated Fund of India** or can give guarantees, but both within the limits fixed give the Parliament.
 - ▶ Similarly, a state government can borrow within India (and not abroad) upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of the State or can give guarantees, but both within the limits fixed by the legislature of that state.
 - ▶ The Central government can make loans to any state or give guarantees in respect of loans raised by any state. Any sums required for the purpose of making such loans are to be charged on the **Consolidated Fund of India**.
 - ▶ A state cannot raise any loan without the consent of the Centre, if there is still outstanding any part of a loan made to the state by the Centre or in respect of which a guarantee has been given by the Centre.
- ◆ Parliament can impose restrictions on Inter-state trade and commerce in the public interest (**Article 302**).
- ◆ The accounts of the states shall be kept in such form as prescribed by the president on the advice of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (**Article 150**).



CENTRE'S NEW ANTI-CHEATING BILL

Context: The Centre introduced the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024** in Parliament to deal with cases of exam paper leak and tampering with answer sheets - whether for school exams, college entrance tests, or applications for government jobs.

Key-highlights of the Bill

- ◆ The Bill aims to bring in **greater transparency, fairness and credibility** to the **public examination systems**, and to reassure the youths that their sincere and genuine efforts will be fairly rewarded and their futures are safe.
- ◆ Under the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill**, only those who leaked exam

papers, or tampered with answer sheets, by colluding with government officials will face up to 10 years in jail and fine of ₹ 1 crore.

- ▶ All offences under this bill shall be **cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable**, meaning police will be empowered to act on its own (and arrest suspects without a warrant), the accused will not be entitled to bail, and the alleged offences cannot be settled via compromise.

- ◆ **Committee:** The bill also proposes to set up a **High level National Technical Committee on Public Examinations**, which will look into developing protocols, fool-proof IT security system, ensuring comprehensive electronic surveillance of the examinations centres and formulating national standards and service levels for both IT and physical infrastructure to conduct an examination.

Which Exams Are Covered By New Bill?

Among other authorities, including those that may be notified/added to this list in the future, exams conducted by the below agencies will be covered under the proposed anti-cheating bill.

- ◆ **Union Public Service Commission** (i.e., for civil service entrance exams)
- ◆ **Staff Selection Commission** (i.e., for posts in union ministries and subordinate offices)
- ◆ **Railway Recruitment Boards** (i.e., for certain kinds of jobs in the Indian Railways)
- ◆ **Institute of Banking Personnel Selection** (i.e., for all public sector banks, except State Bank of India)
- ◆ **National Testing Agency** (i.e., for entrance exams for admission to higher educational institutions)

What is the need of such Bill?

- ◆ **Tampering with future:** The leaks derailed schedules of as many as **1.4 crore applicants**, applying for a little over 1.04 lakh posts.
 - ▶ The exam leak and disruption was a hot talking point as it stresses the candidates, their families, and successive batches of candidates.
- ◆ **Already shrinking opportunities:** More so as it is linked to job vacancies at a time when the **government employment pie is shrinking** across states.
- ◆ **Absence of law:** Also, there is no specific substantive law at national level to deal with unfair means adopted or offences committed by persons, organised groups, or any other agency/organisation that adversely impacts the conduct of public examinations by Central government and its agencies.

WATER (PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF POLLUTION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2024

Context: The Central government introduced the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 in Rajya Sabha.

Background

- ◆ The Water Act (**Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**), in its current form, was passed in 1974.
- ◆ There have been no major amendments recently in the Act, apart from minor revisions in Water Act rules and two minor modifications in **sections 78 and 88**.
- ◆ This is striking since the country has seen rapid changes in urbanisation and industrialisation, and resultant pollution loads, over the past few decades.
- ◆ In contrast, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) 2006 has had 67 amendments to date.

Key-highlights of the Bill

- ◆ **Applicability:** It would be applicable to **Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan**, and any other state that passes a resolution under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**.
- ◆ The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024, among other things, seeks to provide-
 - The Central Government will prescribe the **manner of nomination** of the chairman of the State Pollution Control Board
 - The Central government may exempt certain categories of industrial plants from the application

of Section 25 relating to restriction on new outlets and new discharges

- The Central government may issue guidelines on the matters relating to the grant, refusal or cancellation of consent by any State Board for establishment of any industry, operation or process or treatment and disposal system or bringing into use of new or altered outlets, etc.;
- **Rationalisation of criminal provisions:** The Bill proposes rationalising criminal provisions and ensuring that citizens, business and companies operate without fear of imprisonment for minor, technical or procedural defaults.
 - It provides for decriminalising of minor offences and replacing it with monetary penalty in case of continuation of contravention;
 - The amount of penalty imposed is to be credited to the **Environmental Protection Fund established under section 16 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.

Currently, the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974** prescribes imprisonment of up to **three months** for not informing the State Board about abstraction of water from a stream or well in a substantial volume and not providing information about construction, installation or operation of disposal system. The Bill amends it to a fine between Rs 10,000 and Rs15 lakh.

Current issues surrounding Water

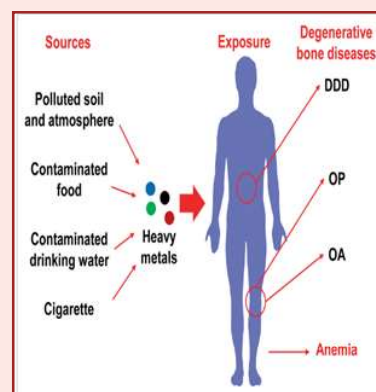
- ◆ The quality of Indian waterbodies has drastically declined due to **unfettered urbanisation and development**.
- ◆ Many waterbodies have been lost or have shrunk considerably due to **encroachment and pollution-induced eutrophication**.

What is water contamination?

- There are two categories of water pollution:
 - **Point source pollution** - occurs when harmful substances enter directly into the water from a source.
 - **Non-point source pollution**- occurs when pollutants enter indirectly through transport or environment.

Major Effluents contaminating water bodies in India:

- Water sources can get polluted because of a range of harmful contaminants. The common contaminants occurring in drinking water can be classified into:
- **Inorganic contaminants:** includes metals such as **fluoride, arsenic, lead, copper, chromium, mercury, antimony, cyanide** that can get into drinking water (surface as well as groundwater) from natural sources, industrial processes, as well as from plumbing systems.
- **Organic contaminants:** includes **pesticides, untreated domestic and industrial wastes** that can get into rivers, lakes, ponds and even groundwater.



- Contamination through organic materials can cause serious health problems like cancers, hormonal disruptions, and nervous system disorders.
- **Biological contaminants:** includes the presence of living organisms, such as **algae, bacteria, protozoa or viruses in the water**. Each of these can lead to a range of health problems among humans.
- **Radiological contaminants:** includes radioactive materials that are found naturally in the soil or rocks or generated through industrial wastes that can get mixed with drinking water (surface water as well as groundwater) at the source.

UTTARAKHAND'S UNIFORM CIVIL CODE BILL

Context: Uttarakhand become first state to clear Uniform Civil Code Bill.

What is the Uniform Civil Code?

- ◆ A Uniform Civil Code is conceptualised as a set of laws that govern personal matters, including marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, and succession, for all citizens regardless of religion.
- ◆ The UCC aims to replace the existing diverse personal laws that vary based on religious affiliations.

Key-highlights of the Uniform Civil Code Uttarakhand 2024 Bill:

Panel:

- The Uttarakhand government had formed a panel - led by retired **Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai** - to prepare a draft for the UCC in 2022.

- ◆ The UCC Uttarakhand 2024 Bill includes recommendations such as a complete ban on polygamy and child marriage.
- ◆ It also includes equal property rights for sons and daughters, elimination of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, equal property rights after death, and inclusion of adopted and biological children.
- ◆ **Marriage:** As it sets out common provisions, the Bill effectively **bans polygamy and halala** - without naming them -- practiced among a section of Muslims. Marriages can be solemnised through separate rituals, like **saptapadi, nikah and anand karaj**, followed by different communities.
- ◆ **Live-in Relationships:** Live-in partners in Uttarakhand will have to register themselves with district officials or face imprisonment under the state's Uniform Civil Code bill, once it becomes a law.

The age for marriage will be 18 for women and 21 for men across all communities.

- **Children born of such relationships** will be considered legitimate and deserted women will be entitled to maintenance from their partners.
- Like marriages, live-in relationships must be registered.
- Live-in partners must not be under 18. But if any one of them is under 21, the registrar is bound to inform their parents or guardians.
- ◆ **Applicability:** The Code applies to residents of the state, but only to those who identify within the binary genders of male and female who are in heterosexual relationships, thus leaving most LGBT persons outside its ambit.



- ◆ **Exemption:** The hill state's small tribal community is exempted from the proposed law, which also mandates registration of live-in relationships.

Tribals in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand have 5 major tribes identified by the Government of India. These are **Tharu, Jaunsari, Buksa, Bhotia, and Raji**. As of 2011 India census, Uttarakhand has a tribal population of 2,91,903, with Tharu being the largest tribe, followed by Jaunsari and Buksa.

Where does the Code fail?

- ◆ The Code fails to **address the discrimination** faced by mothers under guardianship laws that treat only fathers as legal guardians of the child, thus vesting in them the power to take decisions in relation to the child, and mothers as custodians of the child, thereby reducing them to caretakers.

- It leaves out most **LGBT persons from its ambit**. It is a missed opportunity to follow through on the **Supreme Court's decision in the marriage equality matter**, wherein it had clarified that state legislatures are competent to ensure **marriage equality for all**.



PM ROOFTOP SOLAR SCHEME

Context: The government is all set to increase the subsidy provided to consumers under the newly announced rooftop solar scheme, **Suryodaya Yojana**, to **60% against the current 40% provided for installation of rooftop solar projects up to 3 kW capacity. This subsidy for the northeast and hilly states will be 70%.**

What is Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana?

- Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana is a **central government scheme** which aims to provide electricity to low and middle-income individuals through solar rooftop installations, along with offering additional income for surplus electricity generation
- Aim:** It aims to benefit around 10 million (one crore) households by allowing them to sell their **surplus electricity** (to DISCOMS).
- Nodal Agency:** The state-run Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) Limited is the designated nodal agency for the project.
- The new scheme will focus on consumers whose consumption of electricity is less than or equal to 300 units per month.
- This scheme to make India self-reliant in the energy sector will include citizens who belong to the **BPL or poor people** with very minimal investment.

- These **rooftop solar panels** are **photovoltaic panels** connected to the main power supply unit.
- Thus, it reduces the consumption of **grid-connected electricity** and saves electricity costs for the consumer.
- Surplus solar power units generated from the rooftop solar plant can be exported to the grid as per the metering provisions.
- The consumer can receive monetary benefits for the surplus exported power as per the prevailing regulations

to achieve a cumulative installed capacity of 40,000 megawatts (MW) or 40 gigawatts (GW) by 2022.

- However, this target could not be achieved. As a result, the government extended the deadline from 2022 to 2026.

Other Government Initiatives for Solar Energy

- Solar Park Scheme
- Atal Jyoti Yojana (AJAY)
- National Solar Mission
- SRISTI Scheme
- International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- Financial assistance:** Currently, the government provides financial assistance for residential solar rooftop projects. To make it more attractive, the union ministry for new & renewable energy has recently revised the **Central Financial Assistance for residential solar rooftop projects**.

- New beneficiaries can get additional financial assistance of ₹10,000 to ₹22,000 under the subsidy scheme through the national solar rooftop portal.

India's Solar Capacity

- Against a target of 40 GW to be achieved by the end of 2022, only 5.87 GW of rooftop solar projects was installed, which is less than 15% of the target (Data from parliamentary standing committee on energy).
- Total rooftop solar installed capacity** is around 11.08 GW as of December 2023.
 - Gujarat** tops the list with 2.8 GW, followed by Maharashtra by 1.7 GW.
- Only 20% of rooftop solar capacity installations** are in the residential sector, with the majority in commercial and industrial sectors (report by Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW))
- Total Installed Capacity:** According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy solar power installed capacity in India has reached around 73.31 GW as of December 2023.
 - In terms of total solar capacity, **Rajasthan** is at the top with 18.7 GW. Gujarat is at the second position with 10.5 GW.

Significance of the initiative

- Self-sufficiency:** This scheme not only addresses the immediate needs of millions but is also expected to propel nation towards energy self-sufficiency.
- Growth:** The impact of the scheme resonates across the **entire solar supply chain**, which may lead to creation of demand right from the level of panel glass to aluminium to solar modules, and various components associated with them.

Related Government Initiatives:

- Rooftop Solar Programme:** In 2014, the government launched the Rooftop Solar Programme that aimed

- ◆ **Employment generation:** This, in turn, will not only aid the growth of the industry but also serve as a catalyst for employment generation.
- ◆ With India already at a local manufacturing capacity of 62.85 GW for solar PV, complemented by the upcoming 39.6 GW under the PLI scheme, the nation is prepared to meet the demands of this project.



IRDAI PROPOSES REVISING COVERAGE ACROSS SECTORS TO SECURE 'INSURANCE FOR ALL'

Context: The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has proposed raising mandatory coverage under Rural, Social Sector and Motor Third Party Obligations' norms in an effort to achieve the objective of "insurance for all".

Snapshot of Indian Insurance market

- ◆ The Indian Insurance market is expected to reach \$200 BN by 2027.
- ◆ India is **9th largest Life Insurance Market** globally.
- ◆ **Insurance density in India** has increased from \$ 11.1 in 2001 to \$ 91 in 2021 (Life insurance- \$69, Non-life insurance – \$22)
- ◆ **Insurance penetration in India** has been steadily increasing (from 2.7% in 2000 to 4.2% in 2021)
- ◆ **Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY** is the largest health assurance scheme in the world and is funded by the Government.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority or IRDA

- **Founded:** 1999
- IRDA is an **autonomous body** that is responsible for managing the insurance industry of India, which covers both life insurance and general insurance companies.

Key-highlights of the Draft (Rural, Social Sector and Motor Third Party Obligations Regulations, 2024)

- ◆ A **new strategy and fresh approach** have been devised to boost insurance penetration in the country.
- ◆ **Panchayat:** The minimum number of lives to be

covered by all life insurers in **all gram panchayats** in the country should be 30 per cent in each **gram panchayat** subject to a minimum of 25,000 gram panchayats as driven by lead insurer in the first year.

- ▶ This increases to 40 per cent lives subject to a minimum 50,000 gram panchayats and 50 per cent lives subject to a minimum of 75,000 gram panchayats in year 2 and 3 respectively.
- ◆ **Dwellings:** The same formula will be applicable in the case of **dwellings** under fire insurance, motor (comprehensive and third party) and lives under health and personal accident insurance.
 - ▶ Over 40 crore people still don't have health insurance coverage in India.
 - ▶ On motor third party insurance, the obligations are specified for goods carrying and passenger carrying vehicles as nearly 50 per cent of the vehicles in these 2 categories are uninsured.
 - ▶ These vehicles are important segments of the motor insurance business and widely exposed to third party claims.
 - ▶ Every general insurer is therefore required to underwrite at least 20 per cent increase over total number of goods carrying and passenger carrying vehicles as compared to what was covered in the last financial year or 20,000 vehicles under these categories or 10,000 vehicles in each category, whichever is higher.
- ◆ **Government social security schemes**
 - ▶ Insurance business pertaining to **Government social security schemes** such as **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJY)** where total or partial premium is paid by the government, with or without any contribution from the members/beneficiaries covered should be considered for rural and social sector obligations.
 - ▶ **BPL cardholders, MNREGA cardholders, eShram cardholders, DBT beneficiaries, Ayushman Bharat cardholders, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana beneficiaries, Jan Dhan account holders, beneficiaries of PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana and PM Viswakarma Yojana** would qualify for Social Sector Obligation.

Significance of the move

- ◆ The aim is to "enhance the ease of doing business and also reduce compliance burden for stakeholders while also ensuring that interests of policyholders continue to be protected".
- ◆ It was viewed that a new strategy is necessary to achieve the objective of '**Insurance For All**'.



PLAN TO BOLSTER THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) ECOSYSTEM

Context: During the presentation of the Interim Budget 2024-25, the government announced plans to expand the electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem. The government set aside ₹2,671 crore for the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India) scheme.

Background

The number game

- 72,930 new **electric four-wheelers** were registered in the country in 2023 (two-fold increase from 2022).
- Electric two-wheelers (mopeds, e-rickshaws) and other three-wheelers, constituted 56% and 38% of the total EV sales for the year.

- In 2023, EV captured a 6.3% market share, a rise from pre-pandemic levels that lingered just below 1%.

- In Budget 2023-2024, the government allocated ₹5,172 crore for **FAME II scheme**, and further, extended the scheme by a year to incentivise the purchase of electric vehicles.

What is Electric Vehicle (EV)?

- An electric vehicle (EV) is a mode of transport which is powered by electricity.
- Unlike **conventional vehicles** that use a gasoline (petrol) or diesel-powered engine, EV uses an electric motor powered by electricity from batteries or a fuel cell.
- Because it **runs on electricity**, the vehicle **emits no exhaust from a tailpipe** and does not contain the typical liquid fuel components, such as a **fuel pump, fuel line, or fuel tank**.

Types of EV

Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV)	Fully powered by electricity
Hybrid Electric Vehicle	Uses both the internal combustion (usually petrol) engine and the battery-powered motor powertrain.
Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV)	Uses both an internal combustion engine and a battery charged from an external socket (they have a plug).
Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV)	Electric energy is produced from chemical energy.

What are the challenges to transitioning to electric mobility?

- Lack of charging infrastructure:** The key barrier on the path of adoption of EV or Hybrid Vehicles is the lack of public charging infrastructure in India. The highest number of EV charging stations was in Delhi (1845) and then in Maharashtra (660) followed by Uttar Pradesh (406).
- Expensive affair:** EV often cost 15 – 20% more than their conventional counterparts, making affordability a major roadblock for individuals and communities with limited financial resources.
- Higher power requirement for heavy vehicles:** Fast-charging means power levels of **50-350 kW for cars** and up to 1,000 kW for heavy-duty vehicles.
- Anxiety over the distance** that can be travelled per battery charge is a cause for concern.

Government Interventions:

- The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme II**, which provides incentives for EV manufacturers and buyers. These incentives include subsidies, tax rebates, preferential financing, and exemptions from road tax and registration fees.
- The National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP)**, which sets out the target to achieve 6-7 million sales of hybrid and electric vehicles year on year from 2020 onwards by providing fiscal incentives.
- The National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage**, which seeks to create a comprehensive ecosystem for the adoption of EVs and support the establishment of Giga-scale battery manufacturing plants in India.
- The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme**, which provides incentives for the manufacturing of electric vehicles and components.
- The Vehicle Scrappage Policy**, which provides incentives for the scrapping of old vehicles and the purchase of new electric vehicles.

The **global electric vehicle (EV) sector** is booming with an anticipated annual growth rate of 15.9% up to 2035 when sales are expected to reach 51.6 million units.

- ◆ **Go Electric campaign** aims to create awareness on the benefits of **EVs and EV charging infrastructure**.
- ◆ In the **2023-24 Union Budget**, a budget allocation of INR 35,000 crore was announced for crucial capital investments aimed at achieving energy transition and **net-zero targets by 2070**.



RED SEA CRISIS

Context: With militant attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea getting more frequent, the Indian shipping is all set to bleed as its vessels now circumnavigate Africa through the Cape of Good Hope to reach the country.

Background of the Crisis

- ◆ The crisis stems from **Houthi rebel attacks** in the Red Sea following the **Israeli-Palestinian war**, which disrupted global supply chains.
- ◆ **Impact of the disruption:**
 - ▶ These on commercial vessels passing through the Red Sea have forced shippers to avoid one of the world's most crucial trade routes.

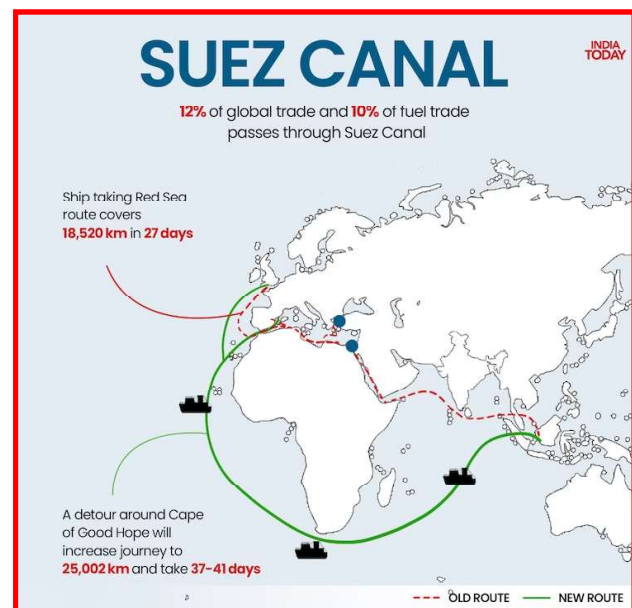
- The **Cape of Good Hope** used to be the **primary shipping route** before 1869.
- It lost its prominence after the **Suez Canal** was opened jointly by the French and the Ottoman Empire, which reduced travel time between Asia and Europe.

- ▶ The alternative longer route around the **Cape of Good Hope** on the **southern tip of Africa** has added more than 3,500 nautical miles (6,500km) to the journey and close to a half-month of sailing time to each trip, significantly increasing shipping costs.
- ▶ The transit time between northwest Europe to Asia has increased from 16 days to 32 days, incurring an additional cost of around \$1 million per voyage.

Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG)- US's response

- The United States had assembled a coalition of countries who had agreed to carry out patrols in the southern Red Sea to try to safeguard vessels against attacks.
- The coalition, called **Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG)**, includes the **UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain**, but the leading regional Arab powers – Egypt and Saudi Arabia – are absent.

What is the significance of the Red Sea trade route?



- ◆ The Red Sea, one of the world's most densely packed shipping channels, lies south of the **Suez canal**, the most significant waterway connecting Europe to Asia and east Africa.
- ◆ At its southern end is a narrow strait of water – about 20 miles wide – between **Djibouti and Yemen**: the **Bab el-Mandeb strait**, the area that the Houthi rebels in Yemen have been targeting.
- ◆ About **12% of global trade passes through the Red Sea**, including 30% of global container traffic.
- ◆ Billions of dollars of traded goods and supplies pass through the Red Sea every year.

Impact on India

- ◆ India is heavily reliant on the Red Sea route through the **Suez Canal** for its trade with **Europe, North America, North Africa and the Middle East**.
- ◆ These regions accounted for about 50 percent of India's exports.
- ◆ To avoid risk, the shipping industry has temporarily suspended **Suez Canal transit**.

Panama Canal

- Another important shipping route through the Panama Canal, which connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, is also facing a **blockage due to drought-like conditions**.
- Panama Canal connects the **Atlantic and Pacific oceans** through the narrow **Isthmus of Panama**.



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Section B [SPECIALS]

Topic	
⌘	Interim Budget 2024

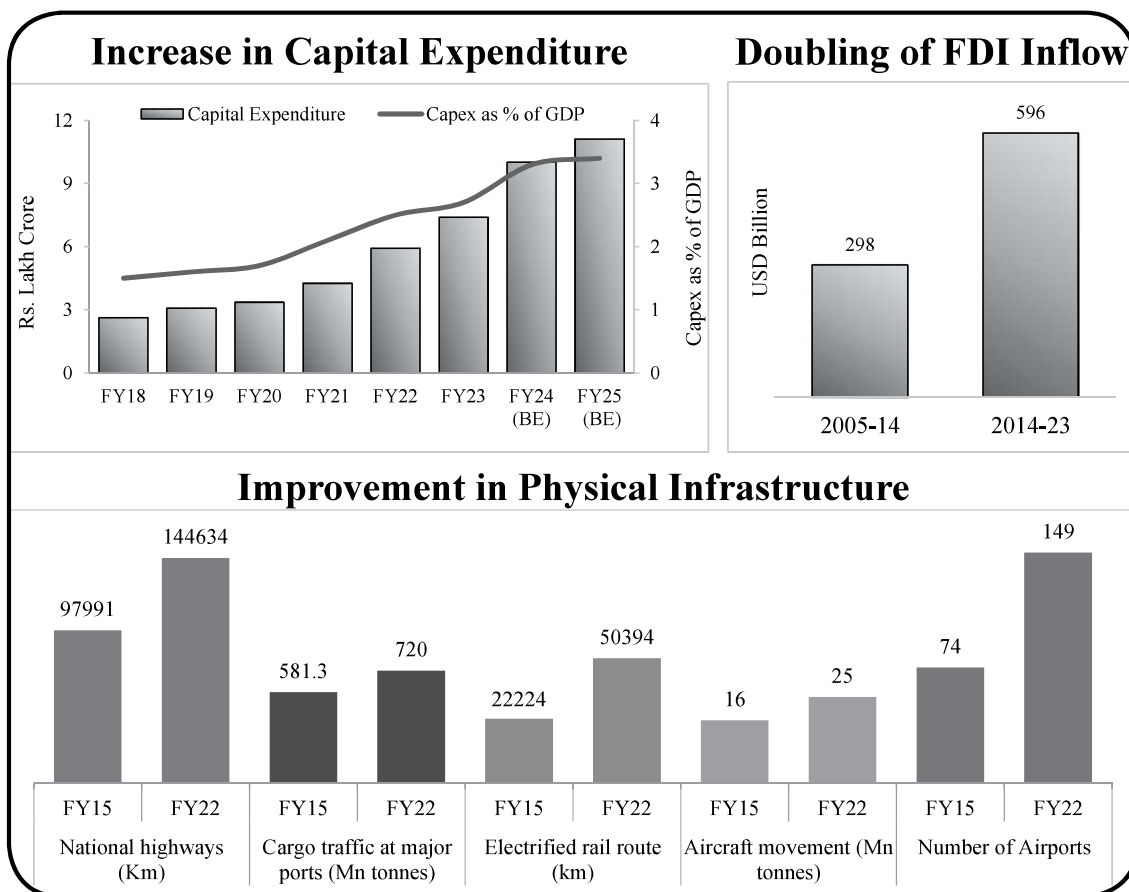
INTERIM BUDGET 2024

India's Finance Ministry presented the country's **interim budget for 2024** at a time when the overall economic landscape appears stable, backed by strong macroeconomic data. . The budget outlines a multi-pronged economic management strategy, including infrastructure development, digital public infrastructure, and tax reforms. Given that 2024 is an election year, the Vote on Account or Interim Budget would merely be an interim approval to spend money, without any major tax or policy changes expected. Noting that India's economy will see an "unprecedented" development, four major areas of focus for the government have been highlighted:

- ◆ Poverty
- ◆ Youth
- ◆ Women
- ◆ Farmers

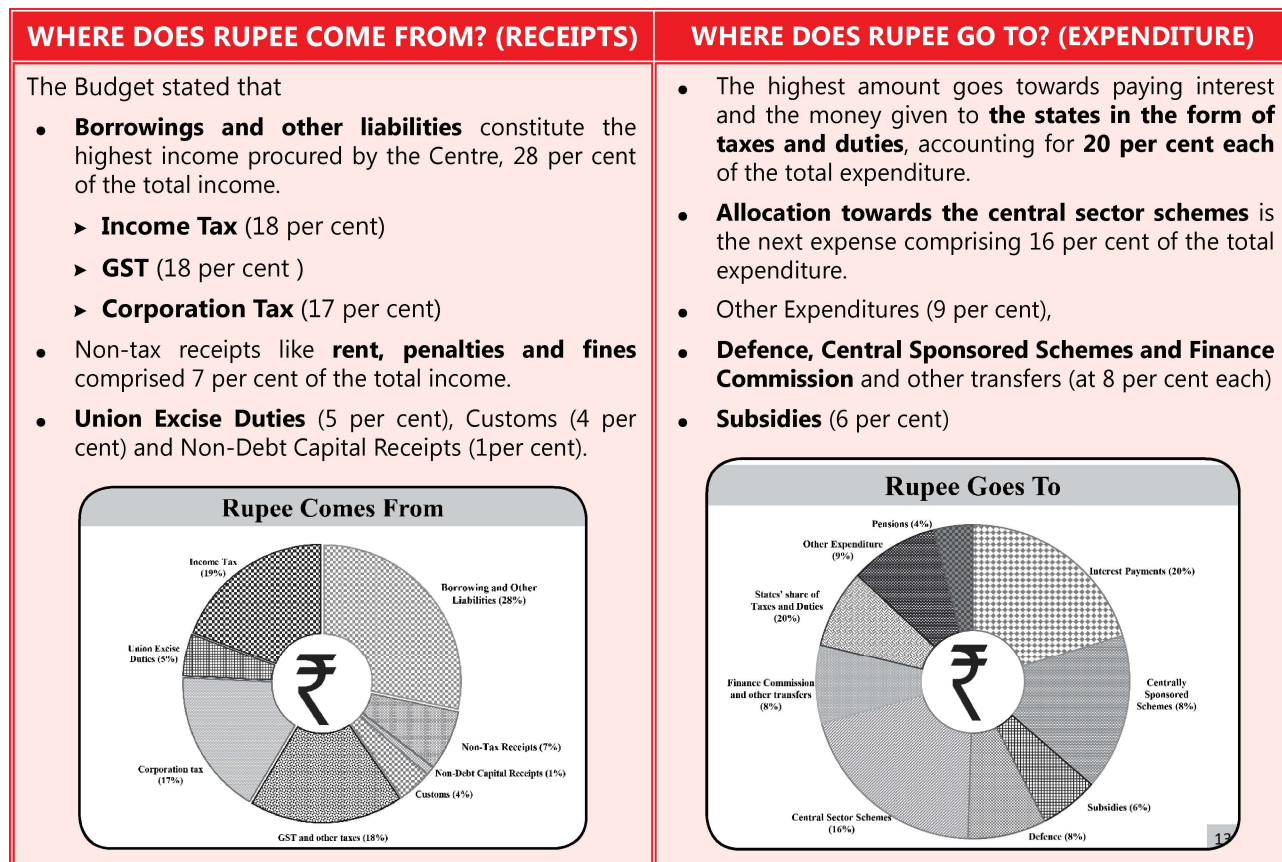
Important Estimation (key numbers):

- ◆ **Fiscal Consolidation:** FY24 fiscal deficit is estimated at 5.8% of GDP, below the budgeted 5.9%. The government pegged the FY25 target at 5.1%, with an aim to reduce it to 4.5% by FY26.



- ◆ **Capital expenditure:** It will rise by 11.1% to 11.11 trillion rupees (\$133.9 billion) in fiscal year 2025, while tax revenue for the year would be 38.31 trillion rupees (\$461.7 billion).
- ◆ **Borrowings:** The administration aims to borrow ₹14.13 trillion (\$170 billion) in the fiscal year starting April 1.
- ◆ **Revenue Receipts:** The revenue receipts for the current fiscal at ₹30.03 lakh crore are expected to be higher than the Budget Estimate, reflecting strong growth momentum and formalisation in the economy.
- ◆ **Infrastructure:** The outlay for infrastructure has been increased by 17% to Rs 11.11 lakh crore, or 3.4% of GDP, over the revised estimate of Rs 9.5 lakh crore in FY24.

Below is the breakup of where the government gets its money and from where it spends it-



The Interim Budget 2024 unveiled a series of transformative initiatives aimed at bolstering India's growth, development, and global standing. Here's a comprehensive look at the key highlights:

Key-Takeaways

Taxes:

Direct Tax Collections more than trebled in last 10 years



Number of return filers swelled to 2.4 times



Faster refunds: Reduction in average processing time of returns from 93 days (2013-14) to 10 days (2023-24)



Average monthly Gross GST collections doubled to ₹1.66 lakh crore in FY24



Increase in tax buoyancy of State revenue from 0.72 (2012-16) to 1.22 in the post-GST period (2017-23)



Benefit to consumers:
Reduction in logistics cost and prices of most goods and services

- ◆ No changes in tax slabs in keeping with convention; FY25 tax receipts seen at Rs 26.02 lakh crore.
- ◆ In a major announcement, the government has decided to withdraw outstanding direct tax demands up to Rs 25,000 for the period up to financial year 2009-10 and up to Rs 10,000 for financial years 2010-11 to 2014-15.
- ◆ The only major change to taxation was tabled with respect to startups and investments made by **sovereign wealth or pension funds**, alongside tax exemption on certain income of some **IFSC units** – which are expiring on March 31.

Railways

- ◆ In a bid to improve operations of passenger trains, the government announced three major economic railway corridor programmes to improve logistics efficiency and reduce cost —
 - ▶ energy, mineral and cement corridors
 - ▶ port connectivity corridors
 - ▶ high traffic density corridors
- ◆ **Enhancing Passenger Safety and Comfort** The government is set to convert a staggering 40,000 standard rail bogies into state-of-the-art **Vande Bharat coaches**, elevating the safety, convenience, and comfort of passengers across the nation.

The **Union Budget 2023** proposed a record budgetary allocation of ₹2.40 lakh crore for the Indian Railways.

Impact:

- The development of commodity-specific economic rail corridors can de-congest existing lines, mostly in the eastern part of the country.
- This is supportive of faster freight movement and turnaround times and should help reduce the logistics cost for India from 12 percent of GDP, improving competitiveness, especially manufacturing, against peers.

State of Indian Railways:

- India is projected to account for 40% of the total global share of rail activity by 2050. In 2023-24, traffic revenue is estimated to be Rs 2,64,600 crore, comprising 99.8% of the total revenue.
- Government has allowed 100% FDI in the railway sector.
- Indian Railways is developing and creating technology in areas such as signaling and telecommunication with 15,000 kms being converted into automatic signaling and 37,000 kms to be fitted with '**KAVACH**', the **domestically developed Train Collision Avoidance System**.

Energy

- ◆ **Rooftop Solarisation:** Rooftop solar project to give 1 crore households 300 units of free electricity per month.
- ◆ **Coal gasification and liquefaction** of 100 million tonne to be set up by 2030. New scheme of bio manufacturing, biofoundry to be launched.

- **Impact:** This will help save up to ₹15,000-18,000 annually for households from free solar electricity and selling the surplus to the distribution companies

- ◆ The government will expand the **electric vehicle ecosystem** to support charging infra, and e-buses for public transport networks will be encouraged.
- ◆ The blending of compressed biogas into compressed natural gas for transport and piped natural gas will be mandatory.
- ◆ **Bio-manufacturing and bio foundry scheme** will be launched to provide environment-friendly alternatives for bio-degradable production
- ◆ **Green Energy:** Towards meeting the commitment to 'net zero' by 2070, the following measures were announced.
 - ▶ **Viability gap funding** will be provided for harnessing offshore wind energy potential for the initial capacity of one giga-watt.
 - ▶ **Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity** of 100 MT will be set up by 2030. This will also help in reducing imports of **natural gas, methanol, and ammonia**.

Agriculture and food processing

Welfare of Farmers-Annadata

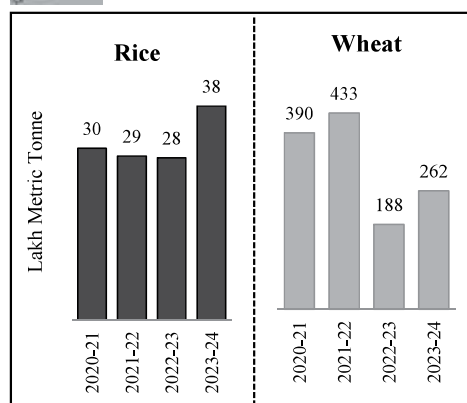
Direct financial assistance to 11.8 crore farmers under PM-KISAN

Crop Insurance to 4 crore farmers under PM Fasal Bima Yojana

Integration 1,361 mandis under e-NAM, supporting trading volume of ₹ 3 lakh crore



Increasing Procurement of Wheat and Rice



- ◆ The government announced that the efforts for value addition in the agricultural sector and boosting farmers' income will be stepped up.
- ◆ **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana** has benefitted 38 lakh farmers and generated 10 lakh employment.
- ◆ **Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Yojana** has assisted 2.4 lakh SHGs and sixty thousand individuals with credit linkages.
- ◆ **Promotion of post-harvest activities:** Other schemes are complementing the efforts for reducing postharvest losses and improving productivity and incomes.
- ◆ **Expansion of Nano DAP application:** Following the success of nano urea, Nano DAP application on various crops will be expanded across all **agro-climatic zones**.

DAP usage in India

- India is among the world's largest buyers of fertiliser, besides China, Brazil, and the US.
- **India imports four types of fertilisers:**
 - Urea
 - diammonium phosphate (DAP)
 - muriate of potash (MOP)
 - nitrogen-phosphorous-potassium (NPK)
- India, the top importer of urea, imports about 30% of its average 35 million tonnes of annual consumption of the crop nutrient.
- India imports urea from a number of countries, including Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
- **Aatma Nirbhar Oilseeds Abhiyan:** Strategy formulation to achieve self-reliance in oilseeds through research, adoption of modern farming techniques, market linkages, and crop insurance.
- **Matsya Sampada:** Promotion of investments in fisheries to generate employment opportunities, with a separate department set up for fisheries under the government's initiative.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

Introduced by the Department of Fisheries, Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), the aim of the scheme is to bring about Blue Revolution through the sustainable development of the fisheries sector over a period of five years (2020-2025)

Defense

- ◆ **Defense Outlay:** A substantial 11.1% increase in the Defence outlay, amounting to Rs 11,11,111 crore, demonstrates the government's dedication to national security.
 - ▶ **Strengthening Deep Tech in Defence:** The government is set to launch a comprehensive plan to strengthen deep tech capabilities in the Defence sector, ensuring India's security and technological prowess.

The Central government aims to take India's defence exports up to US\$ 5 Bn by 2024-25.

Housing

- ◆ The government plans to launch a scheme for **deserving sections of middle class** living in **rented houses or slums** to build their own houses. Details are awaited.
- ◆ The government also aims to make 2 crore houses in the next five years under the **PM Awas Yojana-Grameen** and is close to achieving the 3 crore target.
- ◆ **Housing for the middle class** - The Government will launch a scheme to help deserving sections of the middle class, living in rented houses or slums, or chawls and unauthorized colonies, to buy or build their own houses. This is likely to free encroachment areas like slums for easier redevelopment.
 - ▶ The Finance Minister also announced 2 crore more houses under the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G)**.

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana is a flagship program of the Central Government in its mission to provide affordable housing for all.

Women

- ◆ **Empowering Women (Triple Talaq Ban and Legislative Representation):** The government's commitment to women's empowerment is highlighted by making Triple Talaq illegal and reserving one-third of legislative seats for women.
- ◆ **Health Sector:** The interim Budget announced the government's plans to focus on vaccination against **cervical cancer** for girls aged 9 to 14.
- ◆ **Other health-related schemes in her speech, including:**
 - ▶ The **U-WIN platform** for managing immunisations will be rolled out in the country.
 - ▶ **Extension of Ayushman Bharat coverage:** The government will extend Ayushman Bharat cover to all Asha workers and Anganwadi workers and helpers.
 - ▶ **Expansion of medical colleges:** The government will focus on setting up more medical colleges by utilising existing hospital infrastructure in the country.
 - ▶ **Umbrella scheme:** Schemes under maternal and child health care will be brought under one comprehensive programme.
 - ▶ An upgradation has also been announced of Anganwadi centres and expedited nutrition delivery and other steps for early childhood care.
- ◆ **'Lakhpati Didi' Scheme:** The government announced **that eighty-three lakh SHGs (self-help groups) with 9 crore women** are transforming the rural socio-economic landscape with empowerment and self-reliance. Their success has assisted nearly one crore women to become **'Lakhpati Didi' already**. Buoyed by the success, it has been decided to enhance the target for 'Lakhpati Didi' from 2 crore to 3 crore.

Cervical cancer, which develops in a woman's cervix, is the second-most common cancer among women in India. It is caused by persistent infection by the human papillomavirus (HPV). India accounts for nearly a quarter of all cervical cancer deaths in the world.

The term 'Lakhpati Didis' refers to women members of **Self Help Groups (SHGs)** who harness their entrepreneurial skills and earn a sustainable income of at least Rs 1 lakh per year per household.

Impact:

- The Lakhpati Didi Scheme, aiming to empower two crore women in villages, has achieved notable success by reaching 83 lakh self-help groups and benefiting 9 crore women.
- With a financial injection of **₹1 lakh per household** for one crore beneficiaries, this initiative is poised to significantly uplift the economic status of rural women.

- This empowerment will:
 - ▶ stimulate the rural economy
 - ▶ enhance credit demand for micro-financiers, particularly from women and self-help groups
 - ▶ reduce stress on asset quality issues

30 crore Mudra Yojana loans disbursed to women entrepreneurs

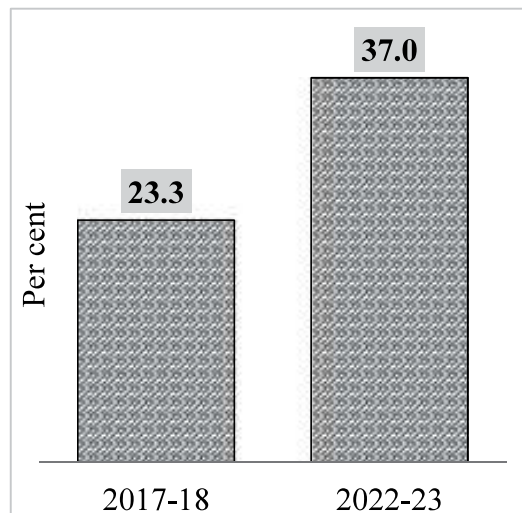
Increased female enrolment in higher education by 28 per cent in 10 years

43 per cent of female enrolment in STEM courses

1 crore women assisted by 83 lakh SHGs to become Lakhpati Didis



Rise in Female Labour Force Participation Rate



Investment

- ◆ The **FDI inflow** during 2014-23 was \$596 billion marking a golden era. That is twice the inflow during 2005-14.
- ◆ For encouraging sustained foreign investment, the government is negotiating **bilateral investment treaties** with foreign partners, in the spirit of '**first develop India**'.

Tourism:

- ◆ **Interest free loans:** Long-term interest free loans would be given to various states to develop tourist centers, while highlighting that spiritual tourism saw a boost last year.
 - ▶ As much as **750 billion rupees at a 50-year interest free loan** will be set aside for states to boost tourism.
- ◆ **Rating system:** A rating system based on the quality of facilities and services will be established.
- ◆ **Lakshadweep Plan:** Projects for port connectivity, tourism infrastructure, and amenities will be taken up on islands, including Lakshadweep. This will help in generating employment as well.

- **Travel and tourism** are two of the largest industries in India, with a total contribution of about US\$ 178 billion to the country's GDP.
- **Schemes:** PRASHAD, Swadesh Darshan, SAATHI, Dekho Apna Desh and NIDHI,

New Innovation Fund (Technology)

- ◆ New-age technologies is enabling new economic opportunities and facilitating the provision of high-quality services at affordable prices for all, including those at the 'bottom of the pyramid'.
- ◆ The government plans to set up a Rs 1 lakh crore corpus to back innovation. This includes 50-year interest-free loan, **long-term financing or refinancing** with long tenures with low or nil interest rates. The move is aimed at encouraging the private sector to scale up research and innovations "**significantly in sunrise domains**".

Impact: This will encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains.

Other Important Announcements

- ◆ **Aqua Parks and Economic Corridor:** Five integrated Aqua Parks are slated to be established, promising recreational spaces for communities. Additionally, the recently announced India **Middle East Europe Economic Corridor** is expected to be a game-changer for India's economic landscape.

Middle East Europe Economic Corridor

- The project is a part of the **Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII)** — a West-led initiative for **funding infrastructure projects** across the world.
- **Objective:** The corridor aims to provide a reliable and cost-effective **ship-to-rail transit network** between **Asia, Middle East and Europe**.
- **Proposals:** The corridor will comprise of **two separate corridors**,
 - **The Eastern corridor** - will connect India to the Arabian Gulf.
 - **The Northern corridor** - will connect the Arabian Gulf to Europe.
- **Member Nations:** Apart from India, the other participants will include **Saudi Arabia, UAE, France, Germany, Italy, USA and the European Union**.
- **Components of the project:**
 - The arrangement will include a **railway route** that, upon completion, will provide a **reliable and cost-effective cross-border ship-to-rail transit network** to supplement **existing maritime and road transport routes**.
 - This will enable **goods and services** to transit to, from, and between **India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe**.
 - Along the railway track, the members want to lay a **cable for clean hydrogen export**.

- ◆ **Bond sale program:** The government announced a lower-than-expected bond sales program for the next fiscal year, as the nation prepares for big foreign inflows on **global index inclusion**.

Government Bond Index-Emerging Markets index

- In 2023, **JPMorgan** announced that Indian government bonds will be included in its **Government Bond Index-Emerging Markets index** suite starting June 2024.
- The **JP Morgan GBI-EM** is a widely followed and influential benchmark index that tracks the performance of **local-currency-denominated Sovereign Bonds** issued by emerging market countries.

- ◆ **FDI Focus:** The government is set to push for bilateral treaties with foreign partners under the mantra of 'First Develop India' promoting foreign direct investment.

How India is handling the Global Situation?

- ◆ The global situation is becoming more complex and challenging due to wars and conflicts in different parts of the world.
- ◆ **Disruption of global supply chain (impacted trade):** Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Hamas war.
- ◆ However, India has successfully navigated the global challenges in fuel and fertiliser price spike.
- ◆ India successfully navigated complex global affairs post-Covid, assuming the G20 summit leadership, being the "**Vishwaguru**" during challenging times.

Success Stories

The FM made some announcements that will go on to benefit the sector both directly and indirectly:

- ◆ **Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas: A Decade of Poverty Alleviation** Over the past decade, the government's commitment to "Sabka Saath" has resulted in 250 million people breaking free from multidimensional poverty, symbolizing inclusive development.
- ◆ **PM KISAN Yojana Success:** 118 million farmers have received financial assistance under the PM KISAN Yojana, marking a crucial step towards rural prosperity.

- ◆ **PM Awas Yojana (Gramin)** - Despite all the challenges, the implementation of this scheme continued, achieving the target of close to 3 crore houses and now aims for 2 crore more houses to be taken up in the next five years.
- ◆ **PM Mudra Yojana** has sanctioned 43 crore loans amounting to Rs. 22.5 lakh crore, fostering entrepreneurial aspirations. Additionally, Startup India and Startup Credit Guarantee Schemes are assisting the youth.
- ◆ **PM-SVANidhi** has provided credit assistance to 78 lakh street vendors.
- ◆ **Direct Transfer Impact:** Savings and Credit Assistance Direct transfers of ₹34 lakh crore through **PM Jan-Dhan** have led to significant government savings.
- ◆ **GST Success and Skill India Mission:** Over the last decade, the Indian economy has witnessed positive transformation, with moderate inflation and the successful implementation of GST. The **Skill India Mission** has trained and upskilled millions, establishing numerous educational institutions.
- ◆ **India's G20 Presidency Success:** Building Global Consensus India's successful **G20 presidency** showcased a forward-looking approach, building consensus on global solutions to challenges faced by the world.
- ◆ **Scaling new heights in sports:** The highest ever medal tally in **Asian Games and Asian Para Games in 2023** reflects a high confidence level. **Chess prodigy** and our **Number-One ranked player Praggnanandhaa** put up a stiff fight against the reigning **World Champion Magnus Carlsson** in 2023. Today, India has over 80 chess grandmasters compared to little over 20 in 2010

At glance

- The government has brought **250 million people out of poverty** in 10 years
- **Crop insurance scheme** benefits will reach 40 million farmers.
- **Inflation has moderated** and economic growth has picked up.
- Tax reforms have widened the tax base and **increased tax collections**
- **Average real income** of people increased by 50%.

Important Schemes announced in Budget 2023

- **PM Vishwa Karma Kaushal Samman:** PM Vishwa Karma Kaushal Samman-package of assistance for traditional artisans and craftspeople has been conceptualised, will enable them to improve quality, scale & reach of their products, integrating with MSME value chain.
- **Free food scheme to continue till 2024:** From January 1, 2023, a scheme to supply free food grain to all **Antyodaya** and **priority households** for one year under **PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana** is underway.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana:** The Budget 2023-24 allocated Rs 79,000 crore for the Pradhan Mantri AwasYojana (PMAY), giving a further boost to the government's programme to provide housing to the urban poor.
- **MISHTI scheme:** The government will take up mangrove plantations along the coastline under the new MISHTI scheme. The Mishti scheme is aimed at preserving mangroves.
- **Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Programme:** The Rs 2,200 crore programme to improve the availability of disease-free, quality planting material for high-value horticultural crops will raise their cultivation area from a low 15%.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal VikasYojana 4.0:** The government will launch Pradhan Mantri Kaushal VikasYojana 4.0.
- **PM Azad Yojana:** The outlay for PM Azad Yojana is being increased by 66% to over Rs 79,000 crore.
- **Amrit Dharohar:** The scheme aims to encourage optimal use of wetlands, and enhance bio-diversity, carbon stock, eco-tourism opportunities and income generation for local communities.
- **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme:** To provide stipend support to 47 lakh youth in three years, Direct Benefit Transfer under a pan-India National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme will be rolled out.
- **National Financial Information Registry:** It will be set up to serve as the **central repository of financial and ancillary information**. This will facilitate efficient flow of credit, promote financial inclusion, and foster financial stability.
- **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav Mahila Samman Bachat Patra:** For commemorating Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, a one-time new small savings scheme, Mahila Samman Savings Certificate, will be made available for a two-year period up to March 2025.
- **PM Vishwakarma KAushal Samman (PM VIKAS):** It is a package of assistance for traditional artisans and craftspeople. This will greatly benefit the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, women and people belonging to the weaker sections.

Quick Analysis

- ◆ **Tax:** The budget focused on **fiscal consolidation, infra, agri, green growth, and railways**. However, no changes were made in the tax rates, which was a disappointment to salaried individuals.

- ◆ **Industry status:** The industry has been requesting industry status for years, believing it would unlock benefits like easier access to credit, tax breaks, and infrastructure development. This wasn't explicitly addressed in the interim budget.
- ◆ **Tax benefits:** Tax incentives for homebuyers, such as increasing the deduction limit on home loan interest under Section 24, were expected. The interim budget remained silent on this as well.
- ◆ **Affordable housing:** Boosting allocations for schemes like PMAY (Urban) to improve affordability and encourage new projects in this segment was a key expectation. No major announcements appeared in the interim budget regarding this either.
- ◆ While the interim budget didn't directly address the real estate sector's key demands, the upcoming Union Budget might hold more concrete measures addressing industry concerns and potentially impacting market trends.

The interim budget is seen as a stop-gap financial plan during an election year, aimed at meeting immediate financial needs before a new government is formed. The full-fledged union budget will only be released after the elections. The Budget has been touted as a roadmap to "vikshit Bharat", or developed India, by 2047.



Section C [PRELIMS]

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- ❧ Atmospheric River
- ❧ Assam's traditional buffalo fight-Moh-Juj
- ❧ Deepastambham (lamp post) casts light on medieval trade ties
- ❧ France first European country to accept India's UPI
- ❧ US, Russia clash at UN
- ❧ Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies (Amendment) Bill, 2024
- ❧ Delimitation exercise
- ❧ India to construct fencing along Indo-Myanmar border
- ❧ GHAR (GO Home and Re-Unite) Portal
- ❧ Prithvi Vigyan (PRITHVI) Scheme
- ❧ 'Lakhpati Didi' scheme
- ❧ Cervical Cancer
- ❧ India's tax-to-GDP ratio
- ❧ RBI's Monetary Policy committee takeaway

ATMOSPHERIC RIVER

Context: Parts of Los Angeles received a storm powered by an atmospheric river hit the state. Known as a 'river in the sky', the weather phenomenon can produce torrential amounts of rain.

What are Atmospheric Rivers?

- Atmospheric rivers are **relatively long, narrow regions in the atmosphere** – like rivers in the sky – that transport most of the water vapour outside of the tropics.
- Size:** Atmospheric rivers can be between 400 and 600 kilometres wide. They can be over 1,600 kilometres long.

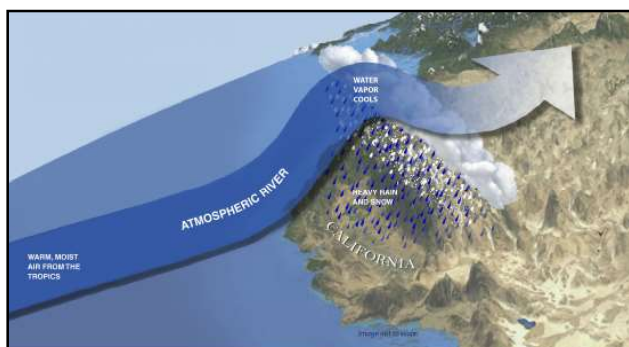
According to the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**, atmospheric rivers can carry up to 15 times the volume of the **Mississippi River** – which is the 15th largest river in the world.

Atmospheric River Formation:

- Atmospheric rivers usually begin over **tropical regions**. Warm temperatures cause ocean water to evaporate and rise into the atmosphere. Strong winds help to carry the water vapour through the atmosphere.
- As atmospheric rivers move over land, the water vapour rises up farther into the atmosphere. It then cools into water droplets, which fall as precipitation.

Impacts:

- Heavy rainfall associated with ARs can cause flooding, landslides and mudslides.
- They can also lead to water supply disruption, and develop drought-like conditions.



ASSAM'S TRADITIONAL BUFFALO FIGHT-MOH-JUJ

Context: The Gauhati High Court has temporarily halted any future buffalo fight, known as *moh-juj* in Assamese, in response to a plea by PETA.

What is Moh-Juj?

- The traditional buffalo fight (*Moh-Juj*) is an integral Bihu celebration of Assam.
- Buffalo or bulbul or nightingale fights have been traditionally organised as part of the Bhogali Bihu celebrations.
- It is held during the Magh Bihu celebrations in mid-January every year.

Jallikattu

- The Supreme Court outlawed **Jallikattu** and bullock cart races in **Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra** respectively in 2014, and later stayed a central government order in 2016 to permit them.
 - Jallikattu is a 2,000 years old competitive bull taming sport in which contestants attempt to tame a bull for a prize, wherein if they fail, the bull owner wins the prize.
 - Jallikattu belt:** It is revered across the **Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Pudukkottai and Dindigul** districts of Tamil Nadu.
- In May 2023, a five-judge constitution bench, however, upheld the validity of laws passed by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka to allow the bull-taming sport Jallikattu, bullock-cart races and buffalo racing sport Kambala in their respective region.
 - Kambala** is an annual buffalo race held in the southwestern Indian state of **Karnataka**.

PETA's Petition

- The petition by the animal rights organisation highlighted **multiple infringements of central laws** during these events, including instances of severe cruelty inflicted on buffaloes.
- Investigation has revealed **distressing practices** such as **physical abuse to incite fights, including slapping, pushing and jabbing the animals with sticks**.
- Buffaloes sustained bloody injuries during the confrontations, enduring further agony from being dragged by ropes threaded through their nostrils.

- ◆ PETA India said buffalo fights violate not only central laws but also core Indian values of compassion and non-violence.
- ◆ The organisation underscored the inherent cruelty of such spectacles and called for their prohibition to safeguard both animal welfare and human rights advancements.

Animal rights and safety:

- ◆ **None of the guarantees contained in Part III of the Constitution**, which deals with fundamental rights, are **explicitly conferred on animals**.
- ◆ Therefore, when efforts to legislate on animal welfare were first made, it came from a more **elementary ethical precept** that it was morally wrong to inflict unnecessary pain and suffering on animals.
- ◆ It was with this vision in mind that Parliament enacted the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA Act)**, in 1960.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA Act), 1960:

- It discusses **different forms of cruelty, exceptions, and killing of a suffering animal** in case any cruelty has been committed against it, so as to relieve it from further suffering.
- This Act provides **punishment for causing unnecessary cruelty and suffering to animals**. The Act defines animals and different forms of animals.

DEEPASTAMBHAM (LAMP POST) CASTS LIGHT ON MEDIEVAL TRADE TIES

Context: A newly-discovered **Deepastambham** (lamp post) on the edge of River Krishna in Nalgonda district casts a fresh light on trade ties in the region in early medieval times.

What has been found?

- ◆ Archaeologists have found the **20-foot tall pillar** with **hollows for lamps** and a **multi-lingual inscription** in **Mudimanikyam village** of Nalgonda in Telangana.
- ◆ The **pillar** is on a slope from the village leading to the river bank.
- ◆ While Dhvajastambam (flag poles) are part of **temple architecture**, lamp posts are rare in the

Deccan while they are common in temples in the west coast including Goa.

- ◆ **Age:** Based on the inscription engraved on the lamp post, the pillar can be dated to June 1635.
- ◆ **Inscription:** It is written in **Telugu mixed with Tamil language**.
- ◆ It is dedicated to **Kasi Viswanatha** and because of its height, it would have served as a lighthouse on the riverine trade route.
- ◆ The site is around 210 kilometres from Golconda Fort, where **Qutub Shahis** ruled Golconda.

Deepastambham is the traditional lamp post (holds many layers of oil-based lamps) that can still be found in temples of India.

FRANCE FIRST EUROPEAN COUNTRY TO ACCEPT INDIA'S UPI

Context: NIPL in partnership with Lyra, a French leader in securing e-commerce and proximity payments, has announced the acceptance of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payment mechanism in France starting with the iconic Eiffel Tower.

What is UPI?

- ◆ The UPI is India's **mobile-based payment system**.
- ◆ It is an **instant payment system** that allows people to make **round-the-clock payments** through a virtual payment address created by the customer.
- ◆ It was developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** in 2016 and is regulated by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.

UPI's Adoption

- With over 380 Million users, UPI as a payment method has significantly marked its presence in India, evidenced by its recent milestones.
- In January 2024 alone, UPI recorded over 12.2 billion transactions, emphasizing its widespread adoption.

Which nations have adopted UPI?

- ◆ Non-resident Indians (NRIs) from 10 countries can use UPI to send and receive money if their domestic bank accounts are linked to their phone numbers abroad.

- ◆ The list of countries included **Singapore, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Oman, Qatar, US, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.**

About NIPL

- NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) is a wholly owned subsidiary of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- NIPL is devoted for deployment of RuPay (domestic card scheme) and UPI (mobile payment solution) outside of India.

US, RUSSIA CLASH AT UN

Context: At a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine, the United States accused Russia of firing at least nine North Korean-supplied missiles at Ukraine, while Moscow labelled Washington a “direct accomplice” in the downing of a Russian military transport plane last month.

US's claim:

- ◆ Russia has launched **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)**-supplied ballistic missiles against Ukraine on at least nine occasions.
- ◆ Their actions undermine long-standing obligations under **UN Security Council** resolution.
- ◆ Russia has stepped up ties with North Korea and other countries hostile to the United States such as Iran since the start of the war with Ukraine – relations that are a source of concern to the West.

Russia's claim:

- ◆ A **Russian Air Force Il-76** fell from the skies in January this year. All 74 people on board, including 65 captured Ukrainian soldiers en route to be swapped for Russian prisoners of war, were killed, and blamed Kyiv for downing the plane.
- ◆ A **Patriot surface-to-air missile** was used to carry out the strike, which leaves no doubt the Washington is a direct accomplice in this crime as well

Patriot Missile

- The Patriot, which stands for **Phased Array Tracking Radar for Intercept on Target**, is a **theater-wide surface-to-air missile defense system**.
- It is considered one of the most advanced air defense systems in the U.S. arsenal.

- The system was first used in combat during the 1991 Gulf War, with batteries protecting Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Israel, and later used during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- It is a mobile system that usually includes powerful radar, a control station, a power generator, launch stations and other support vehicles.
- The system has different capabilities depending on the type of interceptor used.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR LOCAL BODIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

Context: The Lok Sabha passed Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to provide reservation to other backward classes in local bodies in Jammu and Kashmir, with the government reiterating that the repeal of Article 370 in 2019 has brought important changes in the Union territory and the opposition demanding that statehood be restored and assembly elections held at the earliest.

Key-highlights of the Bill

Nationally, OBCs have been accorded 27% reservation; however, there is no reservation for OBCs in J&K and most OBC communities have been listed under SEBC.



- ◆ **Reservation for OBCs:** The bill seeks to provide reservation to OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu and Kashmir and bring consistency in the local body laws of the Union territory with the provisions of the Constitution.
 - With the new amendment, the Centre proposes to replace the term ‘weak and under-privileged classes (social castes)’ with ‘other backward classes’ (OBC) in the Act.

- ◆ **Reservation for Valmiki:** This bill targets yet another community – the Valmikis. The constitutional amendment seeks to add the Valmiki community to J&K's Scheduled Castes list, opening up the 8% reservation.

Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2023

- Lok Sabha also passed the **Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2023**, granting scheduled tribe status to the Pahari people and other communities in Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory.
- The Bill aims at empowering the following by providing **Scheduled Tribe status**.
 - Pahari Ethnic Group
 - Padari Tribes
 - Koli
 - Gadda Brahmin by providing Scheduled Tribe status.

Reservation Policy in J&K

- ◆ Currently, reservation stands at
- 8% for SC
 - 10% for STs
 - 4% for social castes
 - 4% for residents along line of actual control/ international border
 - 10% for residents in backward areas
 - 4% for Paharis
 - 10% for EWS
 - 6% horizontal reservation for ex-servicemen
 - 4% for physically challenged people

Important Castes and their inclusion in reservation list

- While there are **no Scheduled Castes** listed in the Kashmir Valley, the following groups are listed as Scheduled Tribes — **Balti, Bedah, Bot, Boto, Borkpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shin, Changpa, Garza, Mon, Pugapa, Gujjar, Bakerwal, Gaddi and Sippi**. Currently these classes are eligible for reservation in J&K.
- In 2020, the Union territory (UT) government further amended the reservation policy to accord **4% quota to the Pahari community**.
- The government also included 15 new classes under social castes — **Waghey (Chopan), Ghirath/ Bhati/ Chang, Jat, Saini, Markabans/PonyWalas, Sochi, Christian Biradari (converted from Hindu Valmiki), Sunar/Swarankar Teeli, Perna/Kouro, Bojru/Decount/ Dubdabay Brahmin Gorkans, Gorkhas, West Pakistani refugees and Acharyas** — taking the total to 42 social castes, availing 4% reservation



DELIMITATION EXERCISE

Context: The delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the first Census after 2026.

What is delimitation?

Article 82 and 170 of the Constitution provide that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative assemblies as well as its division into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted after each Census.



- ◆ Delimitation means the **process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies** in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
- It also includes determining the seats to be **reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in these houses**.
- ◆ **Performed by:** Delimitation Commission. Such an exercise was carried out after the 1951, 1961 and 1971 Census.

Delimitation Commission:

- The **Delimitation Commission or Boundary Commission of India** is a commission established by the Government of India under the provisions of the **Delimitation Commission Act**.
- **Composition:**
 - Retired Supreme Court judge
 - Chief Election Commissioner
 - Respective State Election Commissioners
- The Commission's orders cannot be challenged in any court of law.

Need of such an exercise:

- ◆ To provide equal representation to equal segments of a population.
- ◆ To provide a fair division of geographical areas so that one political party doesn't have an advantage over others in an election.
- ◆ To follow the principle of **"One Vote One Value"**.



Context: The Centre has decided to construct a fence along the entire 1,643-kilometer-long Indo-Myanmar border.

The Plan

- ◆ Target: to construct a fence along the entire 1,643-kilometer-long Indo-Myanmar border.
- ◆ **Aim:** to enhance surveillance capabilities and

establish a patrol track along the border for effective monitoring.

The Bordering States

- ▶ **Manipur** shares a 398-kilometer border with Myanmar.
- ▶ Out of the total border length, a 10 km stretch in Moreh, Manipur, has already been fenced.
- ▶ **Arunachal Pradesh** shares a 520-kilometer border
- ▶ **Nagaland's** border with Myanmar spans 215 kilometers.

India & its neighbourhood

- ◆ India has the **third-largest international border** in the world. It also serves as the most sensitive border of the world.
- ◆ 9 countries in total share the international borders with India out of which 7 countries share land borders whereas 2 countries share sea borders.
- ◆ The length of the **land border is 15,106.7 km** and the **coastline border is 7,516.6 km**

COUNTRIES	BORDER LENGTH	BOUNDARIES
Afghanistan	The border length is 106 km.	The Indian state which shares its border with this country is Ladakh (PoK).
Bangladesh	The border length is 4096.7 km	There are many states which share its border with this country. The states are – West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Assam.
Bhutan	The border length is 699 km.	The states which share the border with this country are – West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Assam.
China	The border length is 3488 km. The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the borderline shared by India and China.	The regions which share the border with this country are – Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim.
Myanmar	The border length is – 1643 km.	The regions which share the Myanmar border are – Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland
Nepal	The border length is 1751 km.	The regions which share the Nepal-India border are – West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh.
Pakistan	The border length is 3323 km. The Line of Control (LoC) is shared between Pakistan and India.	The regions which share the Indo-Pak border are – Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Ladakh
Sri Lanka		This country also shares a sea-line border with India. It lies in the South-West part of the Indian Ocean below the Lakshadweep Island



GHAR (GO HOME AND RE-UNITE) PORTAL

Context: As informed by National Commission For Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), a total 5175 children have been registered on the Go Home and Re-Unite (GHAR) Portal for repatriation.

About the Portal

- ◆ NCPCR has developed and launched portal namely **GHAR - GO Home and Re-Unite (Portal for Restoration and Repatriation of Child)**.
- ◆ The GHAR portal has been developed to digitally monitor and track the restoration and repatriation of children as per the protocols under the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** and Rules thereof.
- ◆ **Salient features of the portal:**
 - **Digital tracking and monitoring** of children who are in the Juvenile Justice system and have to be repatriated to another Country/State/District.
 - **Digital transfer of cases of children** to the concerned Juvenile Justice Board/Child Welfare Committee of the State for speedy repatriation of children.
 - Where there is a requirement of a translator/interpreter/expert, request to be made to the concerned State Government.
 - Child Welfare Committees and District Child Protection Officers can ensure proper restoration and rehabilitation of children by digitally monitoring the progress of the case of the child.
 - **A checklist format** will be provided in the forms so that the children who are hard to repatriate or children who are not getting their entitled compensation or other monetary benefits can be identified.
 - **List of Government implemented schemes** are provided, so that at the time of restoration the Child Welfare Committees can link the child with the schemes to strengthen the family and ensure that child remains with his/her family.
- ◆ As informed by NCPCR, a total 5175 children have been registered on the Go Home and Re-Unite (GHAR) Portal for repatriation.

Track Child Portal

- The "Track Child Portal" enables tracking of the missing and found children in all States/UTs including **Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, North Eastern States and Jharkhand**.

- The TrackChild portal is also integrated with the **CCTNS or Crime and Criminal Tracking & Network Systems** of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which allows interoperability in terms of matching of F.I.Rs of missing children with database of TrackChild to trace and match missing children by the concerned State/UT police
- One component of TrackChild Portal has "**Khoya-Paya**" where any citizen can report for any missing or sighted children.
- **Developed by:** Ministry of Women and Child Development
- **Stakeholders:** Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Railways, State Governments/ UT Administrations, Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards, National Legal Services Authority, etc.

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

- NCPCR is a **statutory body** established in 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
- The commission's mandate is to ensure that all laws, policies, programs and administrative systems conform to the vision of the rights of the child as enunciated in the **Constitution of India** as well as the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**.
- A child is defined as a person falling in the age group of **0 to 18 years**.



PRITHVI VIGYAN (PRITHVI) SCHEME

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 4,797 crore research scheme to boost and maintain research momentum in the fields of ocean, atmospheric and polar sciences.

What is PRITHvi VIGyan (PRITHVI) Scheme?

- ◆ The PRITHvi Vigyan (PRITHVI) will be an **umbrella scheme** to help continue many of the ongoing research projects and efforts in the areas of **atmosphere, hydrosphere, cryosphere, geosphere and biosphere** (five components of the Earth system) till 2026.
- ◆ **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)
- ◆ It will open doors for Indian scientists to join hands with international experts.

- ◆ This initiative, with a budget of **Rs 4,797 crore over a five-year period (2021-26)**, aims to streamline and enhance the research efforts of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- ◆ Some of the ongoing research that will now come under PRITHVI include:
 - ▶ Atmosphere and Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems and Services (ACROSS),
 - ▶ Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology (O-SMART)
 - ▶ Polar Science and Cryosphere Research (PACER)
 - ▶ Seismology and Geosciences (SAGE)
 - ▶ Research, Education, Training and Outreach (REACHOUT)
- ◆ **Need of the scheme:** With climate change and its adverse impacts affecting globally, the need for improving understanding the roles of atmosphere-ocean-poles has become increasingly necessary.



'LAKHPATI DIDI' SCHEME

Context: In the interim budget, the government has announced to enhance the target of 'Lakhpati Didi' Scheme.

What is 'Lakhpati Didi' initiative?

- ◆ In 2023, the government announced the 'Lakhpati Didi' scheme to provide skill development training to 20 million women in villages across the country.



The term 'Lakhpati Didis' refers to women members of **Self Help Groups (SHGs)** who harness their entrepreneurial skills and earn a sustainable income of at least Rs 1 lakh per year per household.

- ◆ Under this scheme, the women would be trained in skills like plumbing, LED bulb making and operating and repairing drones.

Assessing the success

- ◆ The Lakhpati Didi Scheme, aiming to empower two crore women in villages, has achieved notable success by reaching 83 lakh self-help groups and benefiting 9 crore women.

According to the **World Bank**, only 20.5% of women in India participated in the labor force in 2019, compared to 76.1% of men. Moreover, the gender gap in literacy rate was 14.4% in 2018, with 74.4% of men and 60% of women being literate.

- ◆ With a financial injection of **₹1 lakh per household** for one crore beneficiaries, this initiative is poised to significantly uplift the economic status of rural women.
- ◆ This empowerment will:
 - ▶ stimulate the rural economy
 - ▶ enhance credit demand for micro-financiers, particularly from women and self-help groups
 - ▶ reduce stress on asset quality issues

Other announcements in the Budget

- **Empowering Women (Triple Talaq Ban and Legislative Representation):** The government's commitment to women's empowerment is highlighted by making Triple Talaq illegal and reserving one-third of legislative seats for women.
- **Health Sector:** The interim Budget announced the government's plans to focus on vaccination against **cervical cancer** for girls aged 9 to 14.
- **Other health-related schemes in her speech, including:**
 - ▶ The **U-WIN platform** for managing immunisations will be rolled out in the country.
 - ▶ Extension of Ayushman Bharat coverage: The government will extend Ayushman Bharat cover to all Asha workers and Anganwadi workers and helpers.
 - ▶ **Expansion of medical colleges:** The government will focus on setting up more medical colleges by utilising existing hospital infrastructure in the country.
 - ▶ **Umbrella scheme:** Schemes under maternal and child health care will be brought under one comprehensive programme.
 - ▶ An upgradation has also been announced of Anganwadi centres and expedited nutrition delivery and other steps for early childhood care.



CERVICAL CANCER

Context: Cervical cancer, the second most common type of cancer diagnosed in women in India, received a push in the Budget 2024 (increased vaccination).

What is Cervical Cancer?

- ◆ Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the **cervix**- the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.
- ◆ **Caused by:** The primary cause is the Human Papillomavirus (HPV), a dangerous virus. The majority of cases of cervical cancer (99%) are associated with HPV infection.
 - ▶ **Other risk factors:** Multiple sexual partners, starting the journey into sexual activity at a young age heightens vulnerability, infections like **chlamydia**, **gonorrhea**, **syphilis**, and **HIV/AIDS** can increase the risk, and smoking can also elevated risk of cervical cancer.

HPV

- HPV is an extremely common virus transmitted through sexual contact.
- It is complicated by the fact that it can last for years, causing changes in cervical cells over time and ultimately opening the door for cancer.
- **HPV Vaccine:** The HPV vaccine can prevent most cases of cervical cancer if the vaccine is given before girls or women are exposed to the virus.
 - ▶ **Quadrivalent vaccine (Gardasil):** It protects against four types of HPV (HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11). The latter two strains cause genital warts.
 - ▶ **Bivalent vaccine (Cervarix):** It protects against HPV 16 and 18 only.
 - ▶ **Non-valent vaccine (Gardasil 9):** It protects against nine strains of HPV.

India-made vaccine

- **Cervavac (quadrivalent):** This is India's first indigenous HPV vaccine, launched in January 2023, It has been developed and manufactured by Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII). It targets the same four HPV types as Gardasil.
- ◆ **Symptoms:** Although most infections with HPV resolve spontaneously and cause no symptoms, persistent infection can cause cervical cancer in women.
- ◆ **Prevention:** **Effective primary (HPV vaccination) and secondary prevention approaches** (screening for, and treating precancerous lesions) will prevent most cervical cancer cases.

According to the **Indian Council of Medical Research's National Cancer Registry Programme (ICMR-NCRP)**, the estimated number of cervical cancer cases in the country in 2023 was more than 3.4 lakh

Cervical Cancer Types

- ◆ **Squamous cell carcinoma:** This forms in the lining of your cervix. It's found in up to 90% of cases.
- ◆ **Adenocarcinoma:** This forms in the cells that produce mucus.
- ◆ **Mixed carcinoma:** This has features of the two other types.



INDIA'S TAX-TO-GDP RATIO

Context: There has been predictions that India's tax-to-GDP ratio is expected to hit a record high of 11.7% of GDP in 2024-25, led by an uptick in the more 'equitable' direct taxes.

What is the tax-to-GDP ratio?

- ◆ The tax-to-GDP ratio represents a country's tax kitty relative to its GDP, indicating the government's ability to finance its expenditure.
- ◆ Simply put, it is the share of taxes in the overall output generated in the country.
- ◆ A higher ratio denotes a wider fiscal net and reduced dependence on borrowings.
- ◆ **Impact of lower ratio:** A lower ratio poses challenges for the government's spending on critical infrastructure and investments. It also strains fiscal deficit targets and constrains expenditure despite robust economic growth.
- ◆ **What measures can potentially boost the ratio (to increase revenue)?**



RBI'S MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE TAKEAWAY

Context: The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), is likely to keep the repo rate – its key policy rate – unchanged for the sixth consecutive time at 6.5 per cent to meet the 4 per cent consumer price-based inflation (CPI) target.

What is Repo rate?

- ◆ Repo stands for "**Re Purchase Option**". Repo Rate is the rate at which the central bank (Reserve Bank

of India) lends to **other banks by buying the securities** with an agreement that the bank will buy back on a certain date.

- ◆ Repo lending is a short-term lending option to meet the liquidity requirements of commercial banks.
- ◆ Repo rate is the rate at which the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends to other banks.**
- ◆ It is a part of the **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF)** of the RBI.

Other important rates

- **Reverse repo rate:** The interest rate that the RBI pays commercial banks when they park their excess cash with the central bank is called the reverse repo rate
- **Bank rate:** It is the rate charged by the central bank for lending funds to commercial banks.
- **Statutory Liquid Ratio:** A commercial bank must retain a percentage of liquid cash, gold or other securities as deposits. This is known as Statutory Liquid Ratio or SLR.
- **Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR):** It is a percentage of deposits required by commercial banks to be maintained in the form of liquid cash with the RBI as reserves.
- **Marginal Standing Facility Rate (MSF):** It is a facility extended to commercial banks by the RBI in the event of an emergency to obtain liquidity overnight.

Components of Repo Rate:

- ◆ **Preventing "squeeze" in the economy** - The central bank adjusts the Repo rate in response to inflation. As a result, it seeks to govern the economy by keeping inflation under control.
- ◆ **Hedging and Leverage** - The RBI tries to hedge and leverage by purchasing securities and bonds from banks and providing cash in exchange for collateral deposited.
- ◆ **Short-Term Borrowing** — The RBI lends money for a **short length of time**, up to an overnight period, after which banks purchase back their deposited securities at a predetermined price.
- ◆ **Collateral and Securities** — The RBI takes gold, bonds, and other forms of collateral.
- ◆ **Cash Reserve or Liquidity:** Banks borrow money from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to preserve liquidity or cash reserves as a precautionary measure.

Impacts of repo rate:

- ◆ The increased repo rate will **discourage banks to borrow** from the RBI and lending to the customers.
- ◆ This in turn will **reduce the liquidity** and demand in the market.
- ◆ It is part of the **contractionary monetary policy.**
- ◆ On the other hand, **decreased repo rate** will encourage banks to borrow and lend to customers increasing the liquidity and demand in the market. This is a part of the **Expansionary Monetary Policy.**



***Section D* [QUIK BYTES]**

- ❧ Volcano in Iceland
- ❧ India Art Fair
- ❧ Somalia-Ethiopia Conflict
- ❧ Quad Summit
- ❧ Phased replacement of Indian Troops in Maldives
- ❧ Exercise Vayushakti-2024
- ❧ Nagas & Manipur Conflict
- ❧ PVTGs of Odisha, A.P.
- ❧ RoSCTL scheme
- ❧ Electric Vehicle in Indian Army
- ❧ Zodiacal Light
- ❧ Variable rate reverse repo (VRRR)
- ❧ White Paper
- ❧ Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)
- ❧ Global Environment Facility (GEF)

Volcano in Iceland



A volcano erupted recently in southwest **Iceland** for the second time this year, making it the **sixth outbreak** on the **Reykjanes peninsula** since 2021.

Why is Iceland a volcanic hotspot?

- Iceland's status as a volcanic hotspot is attributed to its location on the **Mid-Atlantic Ridge**—a vast underwater mountain range created by the interaction of the **Eurasian and North American tectonic plates**.
- The constant divergence of these plates enables **magma from the Earth's mantle to emerge**, contributing to the formation and elevation of the Icelandic mountains.
- Iceland stands out for its seismic activity not just because it's situated on a tectonic ridge, but also due to the presence of a mantle plume beneath it.
- Unlike other locations with mantle plumes, such as **Hawaii**, Iceland uniquely experiences volcanic activity at the **intersection of both a mantle plume and a tectonic boundary**.

A volcano is an opening in the earth's crust through which lava, volcanic ash, and gases escape.

India Art Fair



India Art Fair opens in Delhi.

About:

- First held in 2008, it is India's largest art fair.
- It was previously known as **India Art Summit**.
- It is an **annual Indian modern and contemporary art fair** held in New Delhi, India.
- The fair includes paintings, **sculptures, photography, mixed media, prints, drawings and video art**.
- The art fair includes several pavilions of exhibits by galleries and solo projects by several artists.
- It focuses on key issues related with the art production, art market and its reception in India.

Somalia-Ethiopia Conflict



Somali President has warned **Ethiopia** against taking steps to implement a **controversial port deal** it brokered with the breakaway region of Somaliland.

What is this controversial port deal?

- Under a recent MOU, Somaliland (**which Somalia sees as part of its territory**) leased landlocked Ethiopia 20km (12 miles) of its coastland around the port of **Berbera**, on the **Gulf of Aden**, for 50 years for military and commercial purposes.

- Somaliland, a former **British protectorate**, declared itself **independent from Somalia in 1991**.
- But its independence has not been recognised by any country.

Quad Summit



Leaders of the **Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Quad** will meet for a summit in India after the U.S. elections in November 2024.

What is Quad?

- Known as the '**Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD)**', the Quad comprises four nations, namely -- **United States of America (USA), India, Australia and Japan.**
- It is an **informal group** that hold semi-regular meetings, joint military drills, and discussions about regional, economic and development assistance.
- The framework was established in 2007, but it took on a new level of importance in 2019 with a discussion among foreign ministers amid China's increasing influence.

Phased replacement of Indian Troops in Maldives



India and the Maldives have agreed to send back the first group of Indian troops deployed in the island before March 10.

About

- India has 87 troops (along with Dornier 228 maritime patrol aircraft and two HAL Dhruv helicopters) in the island nation to provide humanitarian aid and medical evacuation.
- Currently, Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft that have carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions.

- Maldives is an independent island country in the north-central Indian Ocean.
- It consists of a chain of about 1,200 small coral islands and sandbanks (some 200 of which are inhabited), grouped in clusters, or atolls.
- It is strategically located at the crossroads of several important trade routes that run through the Indian Ocean.
- 50% of India's external trade and 80% of India's energy imports transit through the Sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in the vicinity of the Maldives.

Exercise Vayushakti-2024

The Indian Air Force is all set to conduct **Exercise Vayu Shakti-24** at the Pokhran Air to Ground Range, near Jaisalmer.

About

- **Last Edition:** 2019



- The exercise, following the last edition in 2019, will involve an impressive participation of 121 aircraft.
- Noteworthy inclusions are indigenous aircraft such as Tejas, Prachand, and Dhruv, along with other prominent models like Rafale, Mirage-2000, Sukhoi-30 MKI, Jaguar, Hawk, C-130J, Chinook, Apache, and Mi-17.
- Indigenous Surface to Air Weapon systems Akash and Samar will exhibit their prowess in tracking and neutralizing intruding aircraft.
- Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 aims to showcase the IAF's capability to deliver weapons with long-range precision and devastating effect, operating efficiently from multiple air bases.

Nagas & Manipur Conflict



An apex organisation of Nagas in Manipur has asked the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities to keep the Nagas out of their war.

Communities in Manipur

- **Meiteis, Nagas, and Kuki-Zos** are the principal communities of Manipur.
 - Meitei are the largest community in Manipur.
 - According to the last census of 2011, they are 64.6 per cent of the state population but occupy only about 10 per cent of the landmass of Manipur.
 - **Other tribes:** On the other hand, there are the tribals known as the Nagas and Kukis, who account for nearly 40 per cent of the population but reside across 90 per cent of Manipur's land.

Manipur Conflict

The conflict stems from decades of contestation over land and natural resources, fuelling deep-seated resentment among both the Meiteis and Kukis.

PVTGs of Odisha, A.P.



The Rajya Sabha passed two bills which seek to modify the list of **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. The Upper House cleared the:

- Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, and
- Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024

The three Ethnic Groups (Andhra Pradesh)

- The Bill attempts to add three more ethnic groups of AP to the list of scheduled tribes in the state.
 - Bonda Porja
 - Khond Porja
 - Parangiperja

New Entries in ST List (Odisha)

- There will be two new entries in the list of 62 ST communities of the state increasing it to 64.
- The new entries in the ST list are
 - Muka Dora
 - Nuka Dora
- Besides, **Konda Reddy, Konda Reddi** will also be included.
- Similarly, two communities listed as SCs - **Tamadia and Tamudia** - will be removed from the SC list and included in the ST list under **Bhumij category**.
- **PVTGs**: In addition to this, four PVTGs will be added to the ST list of Odisha. They are **Pauri Bhuyan, Paudi Bhuyan as synonyms of Bhuiya, Bhuyan; Chuktia Bhunjia** as synonym of Bhunjia; Bondo as sub-entry under ST's Bondo Poraja, Bonda Paroja, Banda Paroja; and Mankidia as synonym of ST Mankirdia.

PVTGs

- There are 75 Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) from Andaman Island to the mainland.
- The government has launched schemes such as PM-JANMAN to improve the socio economic conditions of the PVTGs.

RoSCTL scheme



The Union Cabinet approved the continuation of **Scheme for Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL)** for export of Apparel/Garments and Made ups.

Scheme Features and Benefits:

- Covers apparel/garments and made-ups
- Provides rebate on various state and central taxes and levies, improving competitiveness.
- Benefits transferred through duty credit scrips for customs duty payment or transfer to other importers/exporters.
- Adopts the principle of zero-rated export, ensuring a level playing field in the international market.
- **Tax Components Covered:** Includes VAT on fuel, captive power, farm sector, mandi tax, duty of electricity, stamp duty, embedded SGST and CGST on inputs, central excise duty on fuel, and compensation cess on coal.

After the introduction of GST in 2017, the RoSL (Rebate of State Levies) scheme was replaced by a new scheme – Rebate of State and Central Taxes Levies (RoSCTL) in March 2019.

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Electric Vehicle in Indian Army



Indian Army has proposed to introduce phased induction of a limited number of Electric Vehicles in 'Peace Stations' across the country.

Key-highlights

- **Objective:** to adapt to latest technological advancements, give impetus to green energy and reduce dependency on fossil fuels.
- The Indian Army is inducting the following Electric Vehicles at peace stations:
 - Light Vehicles (Electric)
 - Buses (Electric)
 - Motor Cycles (Electric)

What are Electric Vehicles?

- An EV is a type of vehicle that can be powered by an electric motor that draws electricity from a battery and is capable of being charged from an external source.
- An EV includes both:
 - **all-electric vehicle:** a vehicle that can only be powered by an electric motor that draws electricity from a battery
 - **plug-in hybrid electric vehicle:** a vehicle that can be powered by an electric motor that draws electricity from a battery and by an internal combustion engine

Zodiacal Light



Zodiacal light is sunlight scattered by interplanetary dust, but where this dust originates has been an open question in astronomy.

What is Zodiacal Light?

- It is sunlight scattered by **interplanetary dust**.
- From the earth, it is visible as a faint, diffuse glow on completely dark nights.
- Zodiacal light is present across the entire path of the ecliptic, which is the path along which the Sun moves in the sky over the course of a year.

Variable rate reverse repo (VRRR)



In a surprise move, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conducted two one-day **variable rate reverse repo (VRRR) auctions** to drain out liquidity from the banking system and re-anchor overnight money market rates at a higher level.

What is VRRR?

- VRRR is the rate at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) borrows money from banks for a variable period of time, usually ranging from 14 days to 56 days.
- It is one of the tools used by the RBI to manage liquidity in the banking system and to influence shortterm interest rates.

White Paper



The government is all set to present a white paper on the state of the economy in Parliament soon.

What is white paper?

- A white paper is an informational document issued by the government agency that discusses issues and other details related to the progress of the economy.
- It is an **authoritative guide**.
- The term, "white paper", came about after the government color-coded reports to indicate who could access them, with the color white referring to **public access**.
- Governments usually bring a white paper on a particular subject to discuss issues, suggest action, or draw a conclusion.
- The white paper will provide details of the progress of the economy before 2014 when the present government came to power, and after.

Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)



India's first-ever snow leopard estimated a population of 718 in **Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh**.

About Snow Leopard

- **Snow leopards (*Panthera uncia*)** are considered **medium-sized cats**, standing about 24 inches at the shoulder and weighing around 30-55kg.
- **Habitat:** Snow leopards can be found throughout high mountain ranges, including the Himalayas and the **southern Siberian Mountains in Russia**.
 - They can also be found in the **Tibetan Plateau** and across a range that stretches from China to the mountains of Central Asia.
- In India, their geographical range encompasses a large part of the **western Himalayas** including the **states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh** in the **eastern Himalayas**.

Protection Status:

- The snow leopard is listed as Vulnerable on the **IUCN-World Conservation Union's Red List of Threatened Species**.
- In addition, it is also listed in **Appendix I** of the **Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES)**.
 - Making trading of animal body parts (i.e., fur, bones and meat) illegal in signatory countries.
- It is listed in **Schedule I** of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.
- It is also listed in the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)**, affording the highest conservation status to the species, both globally and in India.

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

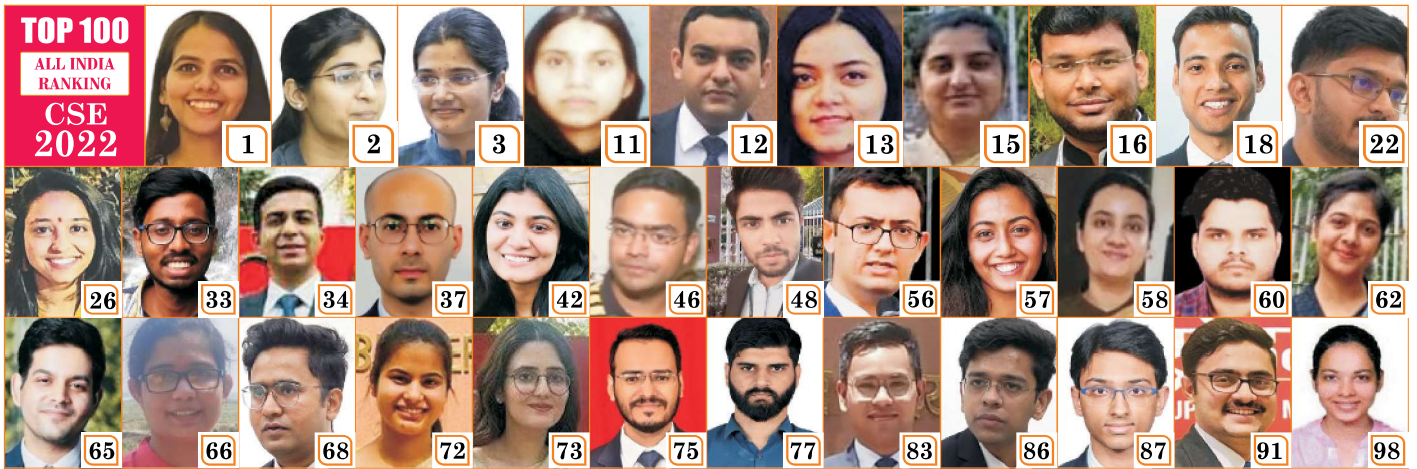


The Global Environment Facility's 186 member governments allocated \$916 million for international action on biodiversity, climate change, nature renewal, and pollution control, and advanced five Integrated Programs designed to tackle complex challenges in their entirety.

What is GEF?

- The **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.
- The GEF is **A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP** of 18 agencies — including United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, national entities and international NGOs — working with 183 countries to address the world's most challenging environmental issues.
- It is a **FINANCIAL MECHANISM** for five major international environmental conventions:
 - Minamata Convention on Mercury
 - Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)
 - United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD)
 - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
 - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).





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