

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 3
FEBRUARY
2024

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- AFGHANISTAN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES 'BULLDOZED FOR LOOTING'
- GS- II**
- INDIA, GREECE AGREE TO BOLSTER TIES
 - INDIA'S FINAL PUSH FOR UK FTA
 - INDIA URGES CENTRAL ASIAN NATIONS TO USE CHABAHAR PORT
 - WHO LAUNCHES GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON DIGITAL HEALTH (GIDH)
 - UNREST IN LADAKH FOR SIXTH SCHEDULE STATUS
 - CABINET APPROVES AMENDMENT IN FDI POLICY ON SPACE SECTOR
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- UK & JAPAN UNDER RECESSION
 - SEMICONDUCTOR MANUFACTURING PLANT
 - CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS (CMS COP14)

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- Sammakka-Sarakka Jatara

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- Schengen Zone

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

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

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***Section A* [MAINS]**

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AFGHANISTAN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES 'BULLDOZED FOR LOOTING'

Context: Dozens of archaeological sites in Afghanistan have been bulldozed to allow systematic looting, according to researchers at the University of Chicago.

Key-highlights of the Researchers' findings

- ◆ The analysis of satellite photos provides the first definitive photographic evidence that looting patterns that began under the previous government have continued since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.
- ◆ **Ancient settlements** dating back to the **Late Bronze Age and Iron Age** - some earlier than 1000BC - are among those they say have been damaged.
- ◆ Most of the sites identified are in northern **Afghanistan's Balkh region**, which more than two millennia ago was the **heartland of Bactria**.

Bactra (Balkh region)

- The **ancient city of Balkh** in what is now **northern Afghanistan** was one of the great trading posts of the region and served as a political and religious center for millennia.
- It was one of the richest and most populous regions of ancient Afghanistan under the **Achaemenid Empire** in the 6th Century BC.
- By 327BC, Alexander the Great had conquered the region and married a **Bactrian woman** named **Roxana**, after defeating the **Achaemenid ruler**.
- Located on a major **east-west Silk Route**, the region's central city **Bactra** - **later called Balkh** - has been a centre of both the **Zoroastrian faith and Buddhist learning**. It later became an important Islamic city.

New pattern in the Balkh region

- ◆ The researchers from the **University of Chicago's Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation** have identified more than 29,000 archaeological sites across Afghanistan, helped by satellite imagery and other tools.
- ◆ But they spotted a new pattern in the Balkh region from 2018 onwards.
- ◆ They have identified specks on the images that they are confident are **bulldozers** because of the way they appear and disappear over time, and the tracks they leave in their wake.

- ◆ These freshly bulldozed areas then appear in later images, covered with pits dug by looters, Prof Gil Stein, the centre's director explained.
- ◆ But only 97km (60 miles) away lies **Tela Tepe**, where a hoard of 2,000-year-old Bactrian gold was discovered in 1978.
- ◆ The "Hill of Gold" contained 20,000 rare items including gold jewellery, an intricate crown and coins, dubbed the **Lost Treasures of Afghanistan**.
- ◆ **Balkh**, including **northern Afghanistan's largest city Mazar-i-Sharif**, was among the first areas to fall to the Taliban before they captured the capital Kabul in August 2021.
- ◆ **Bamiyan Buddhas**: Back in 2001, the Taliban caused shock around the world when they blew up the 1,500-year-old Bamiyan Buddhas, once the largest standing Buddha statues in the world, during their first stint in power.

INDIA, GREECE AGREE TO BOLSTER TIES

Context: India and Greece agreed to bolster cooperation in areas ranging from defence manufacturing and trade to connectivity and to speedily finalise a migration and mobility pact as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with his visiting Greek counterpart Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Background

- ◆ **Strategic partnership:** Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is the first Greek premier to travel to India in 16 years, and his trip is a follow-up to Modi's visit to Athens last August, the first by an Indian premier in four decades.
 - At the time, the two sides upgraded their ties to a strategic partnership.
- ◆ The recent discussions provided the two leaders an opportunity to assess the progress made since then.

Key-takeaways of the Talk

- ◆ **Defence:** The two sides agreed to link their defence industries.
- ◆ **Range of sectors for collaboration:** The two sides identified new opportunities in **pharmaceuticals, agriculture, medical devices, technology, innovation and space** to give new energy to their cooperation.
 - They also discussed ways to boost cooperation in **shipping and connectivity**.

- ◆ India welcomed Greece's "positive role" in the Indo-Pacific and its decision to join the **India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**.

India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

- It is an **open, non-treaty based initiative** for countries to work together for cooperative and collaborative solutions to common challenges in the region.
- It extends the **"Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) initiative** initiated in 2015 by the Indian government.
- The Initiative is open to all the participating nations from the region.

- ◆ There was also agreement on cooperation in the **Eastern Mediterranean**, and Greece can become an important partner in the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** launched during India's G20 presidency last year.

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor:

- In a bid to stimulate economic development through enhanced connectivity and economic integration, India, along with **other members of the G20**, has entered into a historic memorandum of understanding (MoU) to develop an India-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**.

Why is Greece important for India?

- ◆ **Strategic location:** Greece's strategic location in the Mediterranean Sea makes it a major player in the **global shipping industry**.
 - The country's shipowners own roughly one-fifth of the world's shipping fleet and almost 60% of the European Union's fleet, according to the International Trade Administration, a US government agency.

- ◆ **Strong play in IMEC:** The country is expected to be a key player in IMEC, which will help facilitate export of Indian goods to the European markets.

India's increasing influence in the Mediterranean region

- ◆ The Mediterranean, a crucial corridor for global trade, has seen instability due to civil wars in the Middle East and maritime disputes over the past decade. India's increased defence ties with Mediterranean nations, including **Italy, Egypt, and recently Greece**, indicate a strategic move to amplify its influence in the region.



What has been decided for the likely future?

- ◆ **Migration and mobility pact:** The two sides decided to conclude the migration and mobility partnership agreement between the two countries as soon as possible. The mobility pact will be a key step towards strengthening cooperation on legal migration, fighting human trafficking and offering young Indians an opportunity to work in Greece.
- ◆ **Doubling trade:** The discussion pushed for the two sides to double their trade – currently worth about \$2 billion – before the target year of 2030.



INDIA'S FINAL PUSH FOR UK FTA

Context: The government seems to have fast-tracked its free trade talks with the UK, with the PMO having reviewed the progress recently and a delegation already in the UK to iron out differences.

What is Free Trade Agreement?

- ◆ It is a **pact between two or more nations to reduce barriers** to imports and exports among them.
- ◆ Under a free trade policy, goods and services can be bought and sold across international borders **with**

little or no government tariffs, quotas, subsidies, or prohibitions to inhibit their exchange.

- ◆ The concept of free trade is the **opposite of trade protectionism or economic isolationism**.

India-UK Trade

- **Total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports)** between the UK and India was £38.1 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2023, an increase of 8.7% or £3.0 billion in current prices from the four quarters to the end of Q3 2022. Of this £38.1 billion:
- **Total UK exports to India** amounted to £14.9 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2023 (a decrease of 4.1% or £640 million in current prices, compared to the four quarters to the end of Q3 2022);
- **Total UK imports from India** amounted to £23.2 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2023 (an increase of 18.8% or £3.7 billion in current prices, compared to the four quarters to the end of Q3 2022).
- **India was the UK's 12th largest trading partner** in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2023 accounting for 2.1% of total UK trade.

What are the challenges?

- ◆ **Anti-immigrants stance:** The political atmosphere in the UK remains heated with an increasing **anti-immigrants stance**.
- ◆ **Recession in UK:** The UK's economy dipped into a recession amid high interest rates and spending cutbacks.
- ◆ **Tariff regime:** India's tariff regime has been a concern for trade partners as India has one of the highest import tax rates in the world.
 - While the average tariff on goods imported from India into the UK is 4.2 per cent, the average tariff in India on goods imported from the UK is 14.6 per cent.

How important is this deal?

- ◆ **To compensate passed agreements:** It is crucial for India to sign the FTA as it has passed on regional

trade agreements such as the **China led-Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** and has also not decided to join the **US led-Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF's)** trade pillar.

- ◆ **To stay ahead of competitors:** Indian competitors such as **Vietnam and other South Asian countries** are inserting themselves in the **global supply chain** with multiple FTAs and regional trade deals.
- ◆ **Economic benefits:** The India-UK FTA will be the **first full-fledged FTA** with a developed country which could accrue significant benefits in the service sector and **several labour intensive sectors** such as textile and leather industry.



INDIA URGES CENTRAL ASIAN NATIONS TO USE CHABAHAH PORT

Context: At the recent Bishkek meet, India has urged countries of the Central Asian regions to use the port of Chabahaar located on the southeast coast of Iran to enhance connectivity and trade with India and other countries in the world.



About Chabahar Port

- ◆ Chabahar sits at the mouth of the **Gulf of Oman**.
- ◆ It is Iran's first deepwater port that puts the country on the global oceanic trade route map.
- ◆ The port lies to the west of Iran's border with Pakistan, about as far as Gwadar, a competing port developed by China in Pakistan, lies to the east of the border.
- ◆ **The port** will also be **part International North-South Transport Corridor network** connecting India.

International North-South Transport Corridor:

- International North-South Transport Corridor is a corridor to **increase trade between India and Russia**.
- This trade route is **7200 Km long** and the transport of freight is through a multi-mode network of **roads, ships, and railways**.
- This route connects **India and Russia through Iran and Azerbaijan**.
- The corridor is aimed at reducing the carriage cost between India and Russia by about 30 per cent and bringing down the transit time from 40 days by more than half.
- **Russia, India, and Iran are the founding member states of INSTC.**
- The agreement was signed in 2002.
- There are **13 member states** of the INSTC project – **India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Turkey, Syria and Ukraine**.
- **Bulgaria is the Observer State.** The Baltic countries like Latvia and Estonia have also expressed willingness to join the INSTC.
- India shows interest in extending INSTC membership to countries like Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.
- Establishing a land route via Kabul and Tashkent to form the INSTC's "Eastern corridor" would maximise the potential of this collaboration.
- Also, India wants to include **Chabahar port** to be included in the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.

Why Central Asia assumes significance for India?

- ◆ **Geo-strategic location:** Its geographical proximity, strategic location, and historical linkages make it an important partner for New Delhi.
- ◆ **Energy hub:** Central Asia has an abundance of oil and gas deposits. The region contains vast hydrocarbon fields both on-shore and off-shore in the **Caspian Sea** which homes around 4 percent of the world's

natural gas reserves and approximately 3 percent of oil reserves.

- **Gas** (Turkmenistan)
- **Oil, gas and uranium** (Kazakhstan)
- **Uranium and gas** (Uzbekistan)
- **Hydropower** (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan)
- ◆ **Global power hub:** Strategically, Central Asia is emerging as the next high-stakes competition ground for global powers, hence, it would behoove India to pay closer attention.
- ◆ **Leading role:** Central Asia provides India with the right platform to leverage its political, economic, and cultural connections to play a leading role in Eurasia.
- ◆ **Significant transportation hub:** The region is a major transportation hub for gas and oil pipelines and multi-modal corridors connecting China, Russia, Europe, and the IOR.

Central Asia:

- Central Asia is a landlocked region, which is located in the heart of Asia. It forms a part of India's extended neighbourhood.
- The region is composed of the 5 post-soviet countries:
 - Kazakhstan
 - Uzbekistan
 - Turkmenistan
 - Kyrgyzstan
 - Tajikistan
- The countries are also known as 5 "Stans" due to the same ending in their names.
- It is bounded on the north by Russia and on the south by Iran, Afghanistan, and China.



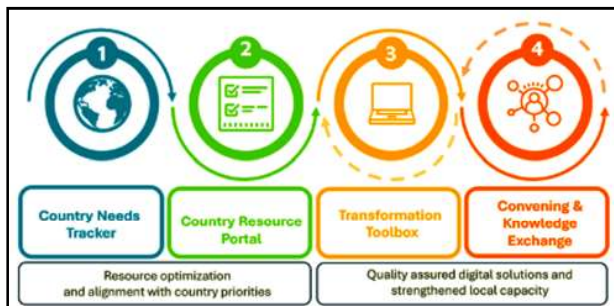
WHO LAUNCHES GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON DIGITAL HEALTH (GIDH)

Context: Achieving one of the three priority areas agreed upon during India's G20 presidency in 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH).

What is Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)?

- ◆ GIDH is a platform for sharing knowledge and digital products among countries.

- ◆ The initiative will be a network of networks with four main components —
 - ▶ country needs tracker
 - ▶ country resource portal (a map of resources available in a country)
 - ▶ transformation toolbox that will share quality-assured digital tools
 - ▶ knowledge exchange



- ◆ Through this evidence-based and comprehensive co-creation process, GIDH will ultimately aim to:
- ◆ **ALIGN** efforts to support the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025;
- ◆ **SUPPORT** quality assured technical assistance to develop and strengthen standards-based and interoperable systems aligned to global best practices, norms and standards;
- ◆ **FACILITATE** the deliberate use of quality assured digital transformation tools that enable governments to manage their digital health transformation journey.

What is the importance of Digital Health?

- ◆ Digital health has the potential to prevent disease and lower healthcare costs, while helping patients monitor and manage chronic conditions.
- ◆ It can also tailor medicine for individual patients.
- ◆ Healthcare providers also can benefit from advances in digital health.
- ◆ Digital tools give healthcare providers an extensive view of patient health by significantly increasing access to health data and giving patients greater control over their health.
- ◆ The result is increased efficiency and improved medical outcomes.

What are the challenges of digital health?

- ◆ **Data interoperability:** Due to the massive amounts of data collected from a variety of systems that store and code data differently; data interoperability is an ongoing challenge.
- ◆ **Additional challenges** relate to concerns ranging from

- ▶ digital literacy among patients
- ▶ unequal access to healthcare
- ▶ issues related to data storage, access, sharing and ownership

Significance of the initiative

- ◆ The platform will help in **democratising digital health technologies**, especially for countries of the **Global South**.
- ◆ Digital health is a proven accelerator to advance health outcomes toward achieving Universal Health Coverage and the health-related **Sustainable Development Goals by 2030**.

UNREST IN LADAKH FOR SIXTH SCHEDULE STATUS

Context: Thousands of Ladakh residents in Leh are protesting for Ladakh's full Statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule.

Background (Formation of Ladakh as a UT)

- ◆ In August 2019, the abrogation of Article 370 stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its special status. As a consequence, Ladakh was carved out as a separate Union Territory, distinct from Jammu and Kashmir.
- ◆ Unlike Jammu and Kashmir, which retained a legislature, Ladakh became a UT without one. This change left Ladakhis concerned about their identity, resources, and bureaucratic control.

The Demands

- ◆ **Full Statehood for Ladakh:** Ladakhis seek full statehood, allowing them greater autonomy and decision-making power within their region. Statehood would empower Ladakh to address its unique challenges effectively.
- ◆ **Inclusion in the Sixth Schedule:** The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution provides special provisions for tribal areas. They demand a **Bodoland-type power** arrangement that protects the rights of indigenous people over their land with legislative subjects that are exclusive to local governments without interference from Central Laws.
- ◆ **Job Reservations for Locals:** The influx of outsiders poses a threat to local employment opportunities. Ladakhis demand job reservations to protect their livelihoods.
- ◆ **Separate Parliamentary Seats for Leh and Kargil:** Ladakh comprises two distinct districts: Leh and Kargil. Each district deserves representation in the Indian

Parliament. Separate parliamentary seats would allow Ladakhis to voice their concerns effectively.

What is the ground to ask for sixth schedule status?

- ◆ This was primarily driven by concerns over the **protection of tribal rights** and the **preservation of the unique cultural identity** of the local communities.
- ◆ The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has recommended that the Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The Sixth Schedule:

- The Sixth Schedule of the **Constitution of India** consists of provisions for the administration of tribal areas in north eastern states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura**, according to **Article 244 of the Constitution**.
- Passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, the Sixth Schedule seeks to safeguard the rights of **tribal population** through the formation of **Autonomous District Councils (ADC)**.
- ADCs are bodies representing a district to which the Constitution has given varying degrees of autonomy within **the state legislature**.
- Along with protecting the tribal population, the Schedule provides autonomy to the communities through creation of **autonomous development councils (ADCs)** which are empowered to frame laws on land, public health, agriculture and others

CABINET APPROVES AMENDMENT IN FDI POLICY ON SPACE SECTOR

Context: The Union Cabinet approved the amendment in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy on space sector. Now, the satellites sub-sector has been divided into three different activities with defined limits for foreign investment in each such sector.

How Indian Space Policy 2023 focused on enhancing private partnership?

- ◆ The Indian Space Policy 2023 was notified as an overarching, composite and dynamic framework to implement the vision for unlocking India's potential in Space sector **through enhanced private participation**.

- ◆ The said policy aims to:

- ▶ augment space capabilities
- ▶ develop a flourishing commercial presence in space
- ▶ use space as a driver of technology development and derived benefits in allied areas
- ▶ pursue international relations and create an ecosystem for effective implementation of space applications among all stakeholders

What are the recent changes made in the FDI Policy?

- ◆ As per the existing FDI policy, FDI is permitted in **establishment and operation of Satellites** through the **Government approval route** only.
- ◆ In line with the vision and strategy under the **Indian Space Policy 2023**, the Union Cabinet has **eased the FDI policy on Space sector by prescribing liberalized FDI thresholds for various sub-sectors/activities**.
- ◆ Under the amended FDI policy, **100% FDI is allowed in space sector**. The liberalized entry routes under the amended policy are aimed to attract potential investors to invest in Indian companies in space.
- ◆ The entry route for the various activities under the amended policy are as follows:
 - ▶ **Upto 74% under Automatic route:** Satellites- Manufacturing & Operation, Satellite Data Products and Ground Segment & User Segment. Beyond 74% these activities are under government route.
 - ▶ **Upto 49% under Automatic route:** Launch Vehicles and associated systems or subsystems, Creation of Spaceports for launching and receiving Spacecraft. Beyond 49% these activities are under government route.
 - ▶ **Upto 100% under Automatic route:** Manufacturing of components and systems/ sub-systems for satellites, ground segment and user segment.

What are the benefits of this amendment?

- ◆ **Multiple benefits:** This increased private sector participation would help to
 - ▶ generate employment
 - ▶ enable modern technology absorption
- ◆ **Integration into global chain:** It is expected to integrate Indian companies into global value chains.
- ◆ **Self-reliant sector:** With this, companies will be able to set up their manufacturing facilities within the country duly encouraging 'Make In India (MII)' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives of the Government.



UK & JAPAN UNDER RECESSION

Context: The United Kingdom slipped into recession, with its worst gross domestic product (GDP) performance in 2023 in years. Japan lost its spot as the world's third-largest economy. Its economy is now the world's fourth-largest after it contracted in the last quarter of 2023 and fell behind Germany.

What is a Recession?

- ◆ A recession is commonly defined as **two consecutive quarters of contraction**.
- ◆ A recession is a significant decline in economic activity that lasts for months or even years.
- ◆ Experts declare a recession when a nation's economy experiences
 - ▶ negative gross domestic product (GDP)

- ▶ rising levels of unemployment
- ▶ falling retail sales
- ▶ contracting measures of income and manufacturing for an extended period of time

What causes recessions?

These phenomena are some of the main drivers of a recession:

- ◆ **A sudden economic shock:** An economic shock is a surprise problem that creates serious financial damage.
- ◆ **Excessive debt:** When individuals or businesses take on too much debt, the cost of servicing the debt can grow to the point where they can't pay their bills.
- ◆ **Asset bubbles:** When investing decisions are driven by emotion, bad economic outcomes aren't far behind.
- ◆ **Too much inflation:** Inflation is the steady, upward trend in prices over time.
- ◆ **Too much deflation:** While runaway inflation can create a recession, deflation can be even worse.

WHY UK, JAPAN FELL INTO RECESSION?

UNITED KINGDOM	JAPAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The UK economy fell into recession at the end of last year as hard-pressed households cut back on spending amid the cost of living crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A weaker Japanese yen was a key factor in the drop to fourth place, since comparisons of nominal GDP are in dollar terms. But Japan's relative weakness also reflects a decline in its population and lagging productivity and competitiveness.

How would it impact India?

- ◆ While India's GDP has been performing relatively better, no one is immune to economic problems, in the era of globalisation.
- ◆ External headwinds are poised to hurt India's economy too, as service exports are a major part of revenue generated by India's IT industry and global price rise can make India's imports expensive.
- ◆ **India & the UK:** Negotiations between India and the United Kingdom for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) are at an advanced stage, but India is keen to safeguard its interests.
- ◆ **India & Japan:** According to the MEA's October 2023 report, bilateral trade totaled US\$ 21.96 billion during FY 2022- 23. Exports from Japan to India during this

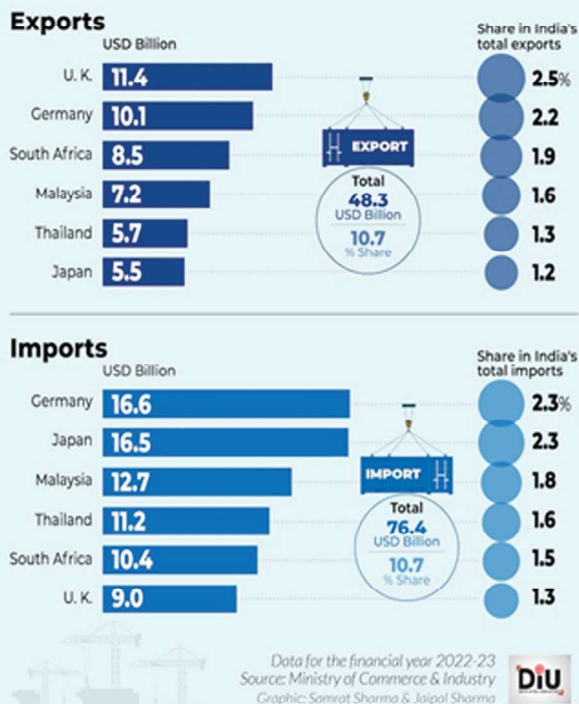
period were US\$ 16.49 billion and imports were US\$ 5.46 billion.

What is India's future prospective?

- ◆ **Shrinking gap:** The gap between developed countries and emerging nations is shrinking, with India likely to overtake Japan in nominal GDP in a few years.
 - ▶ India is likely to overtake Japan to become the world's third-largest economy with a GDP of USD 7.3 trillion by 2030, S&P Global Market Intelligence said in its issue of PMI in October 2023.
- ◆ **Beneficial diversification:** India is benefiting from growing interest from multinationals, which see the country as a key alternative manufacturing base in the context of developed economies' supply chain diversification strategies.

Why Countries Facing Recession Risks May Impact India

Six major countries facing recession risks account for over 10% of India's total trade



What India can do to sidestep the recessionary trend?

- India is currently the world's fifth-largest economy, placed behind the US, China, Japan and Germany.
- For India, it's crucial to continue focusing on-
 - strengthening domestic demand
 - enhancing productivity
 - promoting sectors with high growth potential
 - diversifying trade partners
 - reducing dependency on a single market for exports and imports

SEMICONDUCTOR MANUFACTURING PLANT

Context: The resurgence of proposals for semiconductor fabrication facilities in India, with applications from the Tata Group and Tower Semiconductor, has reignited interest and hope in the country's semiconductor manufacturing sector.

Basics of Semiconductor industry

- The semiconductor industry has four main segments—

China has a monopoly in raw materials and packaging, whereas the US leads in fab-less jobs and Taiwan leads in foundry technology.

- raw materials
- foundry
- fabless design
- packaging
- To be totally self-dependent in the semiconductor supply chain, India needs to master all four segments.
- One of the most important aspects of manufacturing advanced semiconductor chips is packaging and testing, also known as **Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test** — an area currently dominated by China and Taiwan.
- ATMP (Assembly, Test, Mark, and Pack) and OSAT** are good starting points for India.

"THE Chip"

- The **high-end semiconductor chips**, which are nowadays normally of the size of **20-30 microns**, are now being produced in the **smallest 7-micron size**.
 - Micron size** can be compared to the size of thousands times less than the width of a human hair.
- These tiny electronic components power devices ranging from **smartphones, computers, and televisions to medical equipment and automobiles**.
- The production of these invisible chips requires a supply of uninterrupted electricity and water in its purest form.

Challenges for India

- Capital requirement:** The semiconductor industry is **extremely labour, technical and capital-intensive**, requiring several billions of dollars.

China produces 80 per cent of the world's Gallium and 60 per cent of Germanium

- Critical dependency on China:** Being a **Quad member**, India is engaged in talks with the **US, Japan and Australia** for together working in the field of semiconductor chips production and if leading advanced semiconductor countries wants to adopt India under its **China plus One strategy**, India needs to be in the **Chinese good books** also

to get a regular uninterrupted supply of Gallium and Germanium.

- ◆ **Alternatives:** To avoid **Chinese imports** for these critical raw materials supply, India and partner countries need to find alternate sources of Gallium and Germanium. Until then, India and other partner countries will be critically dependent on China.
- ◆ **Late Entry:** India missed early opportunities to establish itself in the semiconductor industry. This delay has made it challenging to catch up with countries that started developing their semiconductor industries decades ago, such as Taiwan.



How India is attracting companies to establish semiconductor fabs?

- ◆ **Incentives:** India is offering an array of **financial and other incentives**, including infrastructure development and streamlined regulations, to attract global companies to establish semiconductor fabs in the country.
- ◆ **Financial support (50%):** India will extend financial support equal to 50% of a fab construction project cost "to applicants who are found eligible and have the technology as well as capacity to execute such highly capital and resource intensive projects.
- ◆ **Notable initiatives in this endeavor include the:**
 - ▶ National Policy on Electronics (NPE) 2019
 - ▶ Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing
 - ▶ Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPecs)
 - ▶ Semicon India Programme

Significance of the move

- ◆ By promoting local manufacturing, India can reduce its dependence on imports and increase its ability to withstand global supply chain disruptions.

- ▶ The pandemic caused chip supply disruptions, which led to a global semiconductor shortage and a hike in prices.
- ◆ This can also generate employment opportunities and promote economic growth.
- ◆ **The Industrial Revolution 5.0** would not be here without the semiconductor chips.



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS (CMS COP14)

Context: The 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP14) concluded in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

What is the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals?

- ◆ Also known as the **Bonn Convention**, it is an **environmental treaty** under the aegis of the **United Nations Environment Programme**.
- ◆ It was signed in Bonn, Germany, on 23 June 1979.
- ◆ It provides a **global platform** for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats.
- **CMS has two Appendices.**
 - ▶ **Appendix I:** It lists endangered migratory species and includes prohibitions regarding the take of these species.
 - ▶ **Appendix II:** It lists species that have an 'unfavourable conservation status' (as per the conditions set out in the Convention) and encourages range states to draft range-wide agreements for conservation and management of these species.
- ◆ **CMS COP14:** It was the first major intergovernmental biodiversity meeting since the adoption of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)** by the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** in 2022.
 - ▶ The theme of this conference is "**Wildlife Knows No Borders.**"

Key-Takeaways of the Conference

- ◆ **CMS Appendices:** The parties agreed to adopt listing proposals for 14 migratory species and several other resolutions for global wildlife.

- The 14 species are **Eurasian lynx, Peruvian pelican, Pallas's cat, guanaco, Laulao catfish, Balkan lynx, Lahille's bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise, Magellanic plover, bearded vulture, Blackchin guitarfish, Bull ray, Lusitanian cownose ray and Gilded catfish.**
- ◆ The *State of Migratory Species Report 2024* identified 399 species that could be listed in either the **Appendices of the CMS-listed species.**
- ◆ The Parties also extended ongoing efforts to safeguard species already included in concerted actions, such as the **giraffe, antipodean albatross, Atlantic humpback dolphin** and others.
- ◆ Central Asian Flyway for migratory birds: After two decades of efforts, the COP14 played a key role in giving recognition to the Central Asian Flyway for migratory birds that stretches from Siberia all the way to the Maldives.

Central Asian Flyway

- A flyway is a geographical region within which a number of migratory bird species complete their annual cycle.
 - **Countries:** The Central Asian Flyway is a **major migratory route for birds**, covering 30 countries from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian Ocean.
 - Of these 30 countries, 11 have come on-board for coordinated efforts to save migratory birds within the Central Asian flyway.
 - These eleven countries are **India, Armenia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Mongolia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.**
 - Other than these eleven countries, more nations must also come on-board for the formalisation of complete Central Asian Flyway within one single mechanism.
- ◆ **Insects:** Observing the insect decline and its potential threats to migratory insectivorous animals, the COP14 also endorsed a new scientific report on the same.
 - ◆ **Samarkand Strategic Plan:** A new, science-based Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species for the period 2024-2032. The SPMS Vision Statement sets out Six Goals: **improvement of the conservation status of migratory species; maintaining and restoring the habitats and ranges of migratory species; and eliminating or "significantly" reducing threats affecting migratory species.**
 - ◆ **Bycatch and illegal taking of meat:** The meeting of the Parties also saw the strengthening of the

mandate to take bycatch and aquatic wild meat. The bycatch and illegal taking of meat is a major concern for small cetaceans such as dolphins, sharks, marine turtles and seabirds.

- ◆ **Action plan for aquatic species:** The COP also introduced three action plans for aquatic species, such as **Hawksbill turtle, Angelshark, Atlantic humpback dolphin** were also adopted.
- ◆ **Terrestrial species:** In case of terrestrial species, new species specific ranges were table such as the transboundary jaguar initiative and the **Sahelo-Saharan megafauna**, based on the successful initiatives under the CMS Central Asian Mammals Initiative. Action Plans for critically endangered migratory species such as **dama gazelle** and **addax** were also included.
- ◆ **Cheetah introduction:** Uzbekistan also announced plans to introduce cheetahs in the country.
- ◆ **Zoonotic disease:** To address the concerns about zoonotic diseases — diseases transmissible to humans from animal contact — from the COP14, under the leadership of International Union for Conservation of Nature, saw the launch of One Health Central Asia project.
- ◆ **Light pollution:** The CMS COP14 also saw new guidelines presented for mitigating the impacts of light pollution on migratory species. It also strengthened measures for illegal and unsustainable killing of migratory species and resolutions and endorsements on climate change and its effects on migratory wildlife.
- ◆ **Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity:** To address the destruction, degradation and fragmentation of natural habitats among wild life, the COP14 took an initiative — Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity (GPEC) — to "protect and connect natural areas" to ensure that key areas of migratory species are identified, protected and connected.

Champion Plus

- The **Government of India has been awarded Champion Plus** for its contribution to the conservation of migratory birds in the Central Asian Flyway.
- The Central Asian Flyway encompasses at least 279 populations of 182 migratory waterbird species, including 29 globally threatened and near-threatened species, which breed, migrate, and winter within the region.



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Section B [SPECIALS]

Topic

⌘ Electoral Bonds and Political Funding



ELECTORAL BONDS AND POLITICAL FUNDING

Context: Supreme Court in *Association of Democratic Reforms and Anr. vs Union of India & Ors.* held that the Electoral Bonds Scheme was unconstitutional for violating the right to information of voters.

Framework of Political Funding before Introduction of Electoral bonds

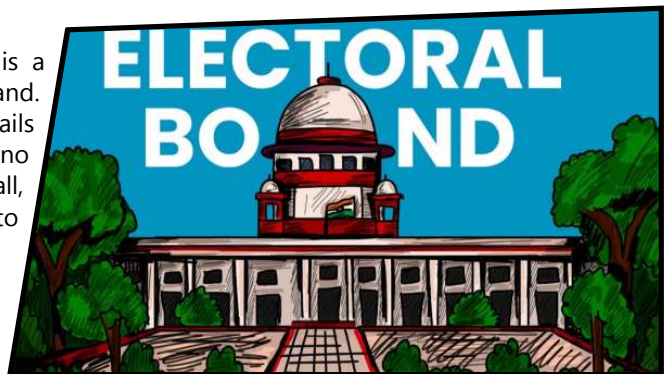
- ❖ **Companies Act, 2013:** Section 182 empowers Indian companies to contribute to political parties, subject to board authorization and disclosure requirements. However no corporate entity could donate more than **7.5% of its total profit** or **10% of its revenue** to any political party.
- ❖ **Income Tax Act, 1961:** Contributions to recognized parties or electoral trusts are eligible for tax deductions under the Income Tax Act.
- ❖ **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (POCA):** POCA addresses concerns of bribery by requiring a tangible nexus between contributions and undue favors from public servants.
- ❖ **Foreign Contributions:** Amendments to the Representation of People Act, 1951, and the Foreign Contributions (Regulations) Act, 2010, permit political contributions by Indian companies with foreign investment within prescribed limits.
- ❖ **Donor Anonymity:** While Companies Act provisions do not mandate disclosing recipient parties, political parties must annually submit contribution details to the Election Commission of India (ECI), making donor information public. Electoral trusts allow for anonymity, but aggregate donation amounts to each party must be disclosed.
- ❖ **Public Disclosure:** Political parties were required to publicly disclose all donations above **₹20,000**. This transparency measure aimed to ensure that citizens knew who was funding political parties.

The Introduction of Electoral Bonds

- ❖ In 2016 and 2017, the Indian government introduced the **Electoral Bond Scheme** via amendments to four key acts: the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA), the Companies Act, 2013, the Income Tax Act, 1961, and the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, 2010 (FCRA).

What is an Electoral Bond?

- ❖ An electoral bond is like a promissory note. It is a bearer instrument payable to the bearer on demand. Unlike a promissory note, which contains the details of the payer and payee, an electoral bond has no information on the parties in the transaction at all, providing complete anonymity and confidentiality to the parties.



Features of Electoral Bond

- ❖ **Bearer Bonds:** Electoral bonds are **interest-free bearer bonds** or monetary instruments. They can be purchased by both **companies** and **individuals** from authorized branches of the **State Bank of India (SBI)**.
- ❖ **Denominations:** These bonds are available in multiples of **₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore**.
- ❖ **Anonymity:** The unique feature of electoral bonds is their anonymity. The name and other details of the donor are **not entered on the instrument**. This makes electoral bonds a discreet way to contribute to political parties.
- ❖ **Donation Mechanism:** To make donations, one needs a **KYC-compliant account**. The political parties must encash the bonds within a stipulated time.
- ❖ **No Cap on Purchases:** There is **no limit** on the number of electoral bonds that a person or company can purchase.
- ❖ **Verified Accounts:** Political parties that secured at least **1% of the votes polled** in recent Lok Sabha or State Assembly elections and are registered under the RPA can receive funding via electoral bonds. The bond amounts are deposited in verified accounts with the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.

- ◆ **Availability:** Electoral bonds are not available for purchase at all times. They are open for a period of **10 days** in a gap of four months (January, April, July, and October). Additionally, they are open for **30 days** during Lok Sabha election years.

Challenges to the Amendments

- ◆ Two Non-Governmental Organisations—**Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)** and **Common Cause**—and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) filed petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the amendments. At the outset, the petitions argued that the **Finance Acts were wrongfully passed as money bills** to prevent higher scrutiny by the Rajya Sabha. This challenge is tagged with the larger challenge to the use of money bills under Article 110. Petitioners also argued that the **scheme allowed “non-transparency in political funding” and legitimized electoral corruption at a “huge scale.”**

Key Issues of the case

- ◆ Is the electoral bond scheme constitutional?
- ◆ Does the electoral bond scheme violate the voters’ right to information?
- ◆ Can the Scheme allow anonymity with the view to protect donors’ right to privacy?
- ◆ Does the electoral bond scheme threaten the democratic process, and free and fair elections?

Election Commission's View

- ◆ **ECI's Opposition:**
 - ▶ The ECI claimed that the scheme undermines **transparency** in political finance.
 - ▶ They warned against the **repercussions** on transparency due to exempting political parties from sharing contribution details.
 - ▶ The affidavit highlighted concerns about **unchecked foreign funding** influencing Indian policies.
- ◆ **Union Government's Rejoinder:**
 - ▶ They viewed it as a **pioneering step** in electoral reforms.
 - ▶ The scheme aims to ensure **transparency and accountability** in political funding.
 - ▶ By limiting issuance to the **State Bank of India** and requiring KYC details, they address concerns about unregulated cash donations and black money.

Supreme Court's Verdict

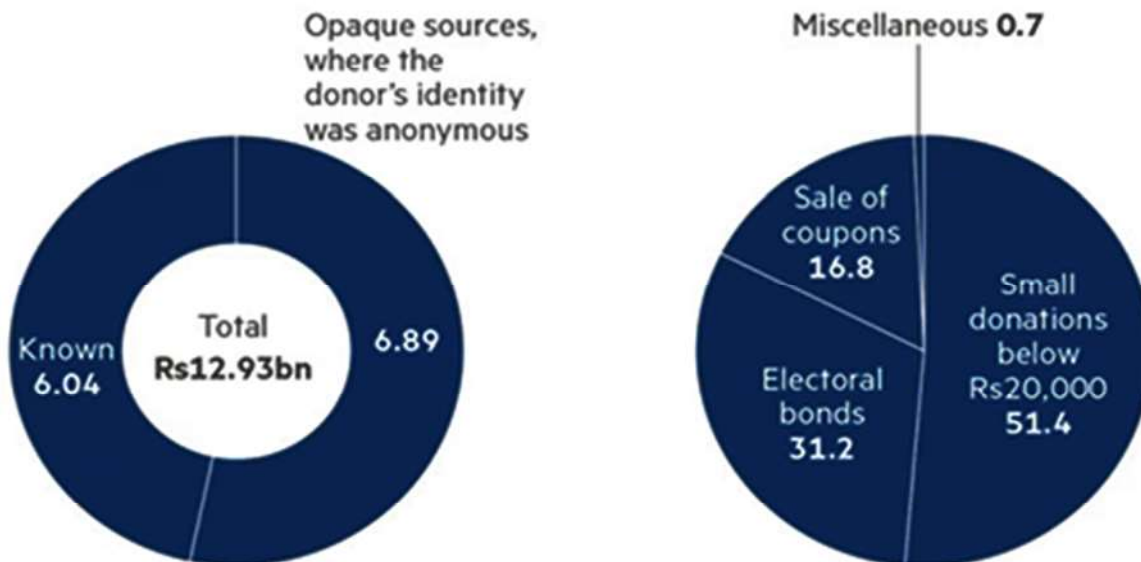
On **February 15, 2024**, the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bonds scheme, declaring it **“unconstitutional”**. Here are the key points from the ruling:

- ◆ **Majority Beneficiaries:**
 - ▶ The court observed that a **majority of contributions** through electoral bonds had gone to political parties that were **ruling parties** at both the **Centre** and the **State** levels.
 - ▶ Audit reports revealed this trend from 2017-18 to 2022-23.
- ◆ **Corporate Influence:**
 - ▶ **94%** of the value of donations came from electoral bonds of **₹1 crore**, indicating significant **corporate funding**.
 - ▶ This raised concerns about the quantum of corporate influence
- ◆ **Unknown Sources Income:**
 - ▶ The share of income from **unknown sources** for national parties increased from **66%** (2014-15 to 2016-17) to **72%** (2018-19 to 2021-22).
 - ▶ Electoral bond income accounted for 81% of the total unknown income of national parties (2019-20 to 2021-22)

Little transparency in Indian political funding

Total declared income to six major political parties in India in the 2017-18 financial year

Source of opaque funding (%)



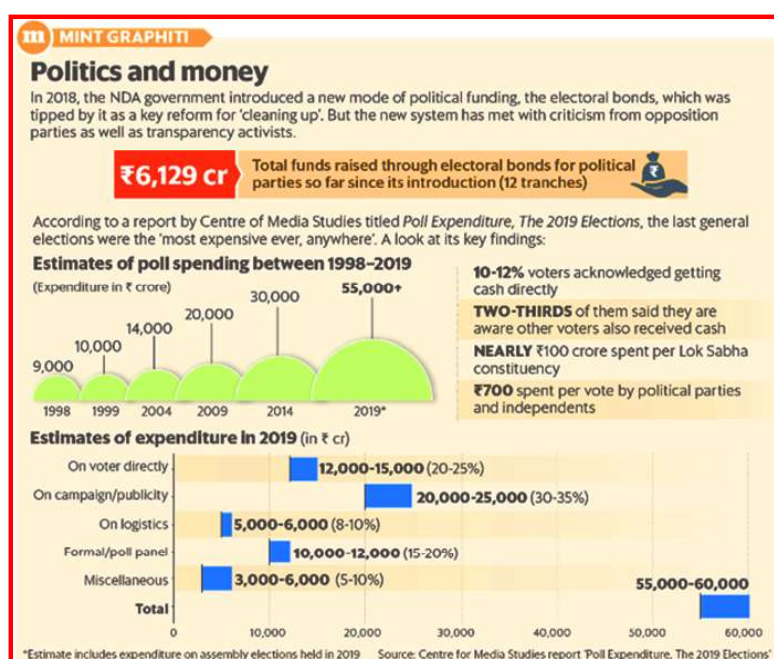
Source: Association for Democratic Rights
© FT

Immediate Action:

- ▶ The Supreme Court invalidated the scheme and directed the **State Bank of India (SBI)** to **cease issuing electoral bonds** immediately.
- ▶ SBI must provide the Election Commission of India (ECI) with detailed records of all electoral bond contributions received by political parties since the scheme's interim order in 2019.

Political Funding Reforms

- ◆ In political landscapes worldwide, the regulation of campaign finance plays a pivotal role in ensuring fair and transparent elections.
- ◆ While the United States emphasizes individual candidate campaigns, parliamentary systems like India prioritize party-centric politics.
- ◆ Thus, the primary focus of the campaign finance framework in India needs to be parties, not individual candidates.
- ◆ A fruitful party funding framework must give attention to at least four key aspects — regulation of donations, expenditure limits, public financing, and disclosure requirements.



Regulating Donations

- ◆ **Scope of Regulation:** Different jurisdictions impose varying restrictions on donors, including bans on foreign contributions and limits on individual or corporate donations.
- ◆ **Contributions vs. Expenditure Limits:** While some countries, like the US, enforce contribution limits, others, such as the UK, rely on expenditure limits to curb the influence of money in politics.

Expenditure Limits

- ◆ **Limit on Corporate Donations:** While electoral bonds allow corporate donations, there should be a **reasonable cap** on the percentage of profit or revenue that a corporation can contribute.
- ◆ **Individual Contribution Limits:** Set **individual contribution limits** to prevent undue influence by wealthy donors.
- ◆ **Mitigating Financial Arms Races:** Expenditure limits alleviate the pressure on parties to engage in excessive fundraising, ensuring a more level playing field.
- ◆ **Legal Challenges:** The US faces obstacles in implementing expenditure limits due to constitutional interpretations safeguarding freedom of expression.

Public Financing

- ◆ **Methods of Allocation:** Various countries adopt diverse approaches to public funding, including criteria-based distribution and innovative initiatives like democracy vouchers.
- ◆ **Challenges and Criticisms:** Concerns arise regarding the potential for public funding to inadvertently support extremist candidates and the inability to fully address private money in politics.

State Funding of Elections

Committees:

- Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections (1998)
- Law Commission Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws (1999)
- National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001)
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008)

The **Indrajit Gupta Committee** (1998) endorsed state funding of elections, seeing “full justification constitutional, legal as well as on ground of public interest” in order to establish a fair playing field for parties with less money. The Committee recommended two limitations to state funding. Firstly, that state funds should be given only to national and state parties allotted a symbol and not to independent candidates. Secondly, that in the short-term state funding should **only be given in kind**, in the form of **certain facilities to the recognised political parties and their candidates**.

The **1999 Law Commission of India report** concluded **that total state funding of elections is “desirable”** so long as **political parties are prohibited from taking funds from other sources**. The Commission concurred with the Indrajit Gupta Committee that only partial state funding was possible given the economic conditions of the country at that time. Additionally, it strongly recommended that the **appropriate regulatory framework be put in place** with regard to political parties (**provisions ensuring internal democracy, internal structures and maintenance of accounts, their auditing and submission to Election Commission**) before state funding of elections is attempted.

“**Ethics in Governance**”, a report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008) also recommended partial state funding of elections for the purpose of reducing “illegitimate and unnecessary funding” of elections expenses. The **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, 2001, did not endorse state funding of elections** but concurred with the 1999 Law Commission report that the appropriate framework for regulation of political parties would need to be implemented before state funding is considered.

Disclosure Requirements

- ◆ **Balancing Transparency and Anonymity:** Disclosure mandates aim to deter quid pro quo arrangements, but concerns persist regarding donor protection and the need for a balanced approach.
- ◆ **International Models:** Examples from jurisdictions like the UK and Germany highlight strategies to balance transparency with donor anonymity, often based on thresholds for reporting.
- ◆ **Real-Time Reporting:** Implement a system for real-time reporting of donations on a publicly accessible platform. Citizens should be able to track contributions instantly.

Lessons from Chile

Anonymity Experiment: Chile's "reserved contributions" system aimed for complete donor anonymity, but challenges emerged due to informal coordination between donors and political parties.



Section C [PRELIMS]

To Attempt

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- ❧ Buddha's relics
- ❧ Sammakka-Sarakka Jatara
- ❧ Schengen Zone
- ❧ Blue Aadhaar card
- ❧ Centre's MSP Proposal
- ❧ Maharashtra clears 10% Maratha quota bill
- ❧ Indian Army To Set Up New Corps
- ❧ Compulsory Registration of NRI Marriages in India
- ❧ Hybrid mutual fund schemes
- ❧ Panama Canal suffering major disruption
- ❧ Bubonic Plague
- ❧ INSAT-3DS: ISRO's meteorological satellite
- ❧ Astronomers Find What May Be the Universe's Brightest Object
- ❧ Google unveils 'Gemma'



BUDDHA'S RELICS

Context: Four of the 20 relics of Lord Buddha preserved at the National Museum are being taken to Thailand for a month-long exposition.

About (Kapilvastu Relics)

- ◆ The relics at the National Museum are known as the '**Kapilvastu Relics**' as they were recovered in 1898 from a site in Bihar believed to be the **ancient city of Kapilvastu**.
- ◆ It was an **inscribed casket** found at the stupa site in **Piprahwa (near Siddharthnagar in Uttar Pradesh)** that helped identify Kapilvastu.
- ◆ The casket contained the **relics of Buddha and Sakya**, his community.
- ◆ The relics fall under the 'AA' (rare) category of antiquities and art treasures.

Can they be lent for exhibitions?

- ◆ They are not meant to be lent for exhibitions, within India or in foreign nations.
- ◆ But the exposition in Thailand was being held upon a "special request" by the Thai Government

What are Buddha relics?

- ◆ Simply put, they are the Buddha's cremated remains.
- ◆ As per the Buddhist belief, at the age of 80 (486-483 BC), lord Buddha obtained salvation **in Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh)**.
- ◆ Lord Buddha was cremated as a universal king by the **Mallas of Kushinagar**.
- ◆ His **funeral relics** were collected and divided into eight shares to be distributed among them
 - ▶ Ajathsatrus of Magadha
 - ▶ Vaishali's Licchavis
 - ▶ the Sakyas of Kapilavastu
 - ▶ Housing in Kushinagar
 - ▶ Alakappa Bullies
 - ▶ Mallas of Pava
 - ▶ the Colossians of Ramagrama once
 - ▶ Brahmana of Vethadipa
- ◆ The purpose was to **place stupas on sacred relics**.
- ◆ Other stupas appeared, one on top of the pipe where the remains were collected and the other on the coals.

- ◆ The remains were later excavated by **Ashoka** - ruler of the **Maurya Dynasty**, who ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from c. 268 to 232 B.C.
- ◆ He dispersed the remains and built stupas over them throughout his district.
- ◆ According to **Ashokavadana**, Ashoka had relics of Buddha placed on 84,000 stupas made up of Yakshas (usually gentle natural spirits).

Buddhism in India:

- ◆ Siddhartha Gautam, born in 563 BC, was part of the Sakya royal family that ruled from Kapilvastu, Lumbini. At the age of 29, Gautama left home and led a life of self-denial.
- ◆ After 49 days of meditation, Gautama received enlightenment under a pipal tree at Bodhgaya in Bihar.
- ◆ Buddha made his first sermon in the village of Sarnath, near the town of Benares in the UP. The event is known as the Dharma-Chakra-Pravartana (legal wheel revolution).
- ◆ He died at the age of 80 in Kushinagara, a city in the UP. The event is known as Mahaparinibban.



SAMMAKKA-SARAKKA JATARA

Context: Sammakka-Sarakka Jatara, Asia's biggest biennial tribal festival, is scheduled from February 21 to 24.

About

- ◆ **Type:** Tribal Festival (State Festival of Telangana)
- ◆ **Conducted in:** Medaram village by the committee of tribal priests.



- ◆ Sammakka Saralamma Jathara or Medaram Jathara is a **tribal festival** of honouring the goddesses celebrated in the southern state of Telangana.

Medaram is a remote place in the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, a part of Dandakaranya, the largest surviving forest belt in the Mulugu

- It commemorates the fight of a mother and daughter, **Sammakka and Saralamma**, with the reigning rulers against an unjust law.
- It is celebrated by the **second-largest Tribal Community of Telangana- the Koya tribe**.

Koya Tribe

- Koya** is a tribal group found in southern India, especially **Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh**.
- Koyas are commonly referred to as Koi, Koyalu, Koyollu, KoyaDoralu, Doralu Sattam, etc.
- Koyas call themselves "Koitur" in their dialect.
- Koyas speak Koya language, also known as Koya Basha, and is a member of the **Dravidian language family**.
- The Koya are mainly settled cultivators and artisans, expertise in making bamboo furniture including mats for fencing, dustpans, and baskets.
- They grow Jowar, Ragi, Bajra and other millets.

- People offer bangaram/gold (jaggery) of a quantity equal to their weight to the goddesses and take holy bath in Jampanna Vagu (stream).
- It is a festival with **no vedic or brahmanic influence**.
- This fair is said to be the **largest repeating congregation of tribal communities** in the world.
- It is held every two years (biennially).

Jampanna vagu

- Jampanna vagu is a tributary to River Godavari. According to the history, Jampanna is the tribal warrior and the son of Tribal Goddess Sammakka.
- The Jampanna vagu took his name as he died in a battle fighting against **Kakatiyan Army** in that stream.
- The Jampanna vagu is still red in colour marked with the blood of Jampanna (Scientifically the red colour of the water is attributed to the soil composition).
- Tribals believe that taking a holy dip in the red water of Jampanna Vagu reminds them the sacrifice of their gods who save them and also induces courage into their souls.



SCHENGEN ZONE

Context: Kosovo recently secured visa-free access to the Schengen zone in Europe, world's largest zone of free movement, becoming the last western Balkan non-European Union nation to be waived visa requirements.

What is Schengen Agreement?

- It started in 1985 as an **intergovernmental project** between five **EU countries– France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg** – and has gradually expanded to become the largest free travel area in the world.
- Schengen zone in Europe is the world's largest zone of free movement, which provides visa free travel to signatory countries citizens.

Schengen is the name of a small village in **Luxembourg**, on the border with Germany and France, where the **Schengen Agreement** and the **Schengen Convention** were signed in 1985 and in 1990 respectively.

Which countries are part of Schengen?



- Today, the Schengen area covers over 4 million square kilometres with a population of almost **420 million people**, and includes 27 countries:
 - 23 of the 27 EU member states
 - all members of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland)

Kosovo's Visa-Free Access

- The new regime enables Kosovars into the passport-free Schengen zone without a visa for periods of up to 90 days in any 180-day period.
- The reform is perceived in Pristina as another step towards full recognition and a boost for the ambition of the country that proclaimed independence in 2008 to join the European Union.



BLUE AADHAAR CARD

Context: The Aadhaar card has become a crucial document in India, and children are no exception. For kids below 5 years old, a special blue-colored Aadhaar card, called **Baal Aadhaar**, is issued.

What is Aadhaar?

- ◆ Aadhaar is one of the most vital KYC documents in the country for availing of government subsidies and benefits of various **government-run welfare schemes**.
- ◆ It is considered to be an important identity proof document across sectors as it includes important details of citizens like full name, permanent address, and date of birth, linked to a **unique 12-digit number** issued by the **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)**.



What is Baal Aadhaar (Blue Aadhaar card)?

- ◆ In 2018, the UIDAI introduced the concept of the 'Baal Aadhaar' card specifically tailored for children under the age of five.
- ◆ The Baal Aadhaar card is blue in colour, unlike the regular white Aadhaar card for adults.
- ◆ This card also contains a 12-digit unique identification number for a child below 5 years.
- ◆ **Features of Blue Aadhaar card:**
 - Unlike adults, no biometric data of the child is required for issuing the card.
- ◆ His/her UID is processed based on the demographic information and facial photograph linked with the UID of their parents.
- ◆ But the child needs to update his/her biometric data of ten fingers, iris and facial photographs, when he/she turns five and again at the age of 15, otherwise the card will become invalid.

- ◆ The biometric data update for the teen Aadhaar cardholders is free.

What is the significance of Blue Aadhaar card?

- ◆ **Government schemes:** The card opens doors to a plethora of government assistance programmes.
- ◆ **Scholarship:** It also facilitates the provision of EWS scholarships while aiding the government in distinguishing between fraudulent and legitimate students.
 - **Mandatory requirement:** Moreover, many schools are now mandating the presentation of Blue Aadhaar cards during the admission process.



CENTRE'S MSP PROPOSAL

Context: The Centre had proposed to buy three pulses, maize and cotton from farmers at the minimum support price for five years. However, the farmers' groups reject Centre's MSP proposal.

What was the proposal?

- ◆ The Centre had offered that cooperative societies such as the **National Cooperative Consumers Federation** and the **National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India** will buy **pulses** – arhar, tur and urad – and **maize** from the farmers at a minimum support price for the next five years.



- ◆ It also proposed that the **Cotton Corporation of India** will buy cotton crops at minimum support price.

A **minimum support price** is the rate at which the government buys farm produce and is based on a calculation of at least one and a half times the cost of production incurred by the farmers.

What farmers are seeking?

- ◆ They are primarily seeking a **law** guaranteeing a **minimum support price** for agricultural commodities and the implementation of the **MS Swaminathan Commission Report's** wider recommendations on farming in India.



MAHARASHTRA CLEARS 10% MARATHA QUOTA BILL

Context: The Maharashtra Legislature unanimously passed a bill reserving 10% of the seats in educational institutions and the same proportion of government jobs for people from the Maratha community.

Background

- ◆ This is the third such attempt by the state government to carve out a quota for the once-dominant agrarian community, after similar laws enacted in 2014 and 2019 were struck down by the courts.
 - ▶ The **2014 Maratha reservation law** provided a **16% quota in jobs and education**, but it was quashed by the Bombay high court.
 - ▶ The **2018 Maratha reservation** provided a similar quantum of reservation, which the Bombay HC brought down to 12% and 13% respectively. The quota was **quashed by the Supreme Court in May 2021**.

What is the Bill?

- ◆ **Bill:** Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act 2024
- ◆ In the bill passed by both houses of the state legislature, the Maharashtra government cited the findings of a report submitted by the **Maharashtra State Commission for Backward Classes (MSCBC)** as the basis for the reservation.
- ◆ **Key-findings of the Report:**
 - ▶ Marathas account for 28% of Maharashtra's population, and are in an "exceptional circumstances and extraordinary condition" of backwardness, making it a fit case for reservation over the 50% ceiling mandated by the Supreme Court.
 - ▶ The 10% quota is over and above the existing 62% reservation in the state, which includes 10% for those belonging to economically weaker sections (EWS) and remaining 52% caste based quota

Reservation Cap

The **current percentage of reserved categories** in the state stands as follows (totaling 62 per cent):

- SC – 13 per cent
- ST – 7 per cent
- OBC – 19 per cent
- SBC – 2 per cent
- VJ (A) – 3
- Vimukta Castes, NT (B) – 2.5
- Nomadic caste, NT (C) – 3.5
- Nomadic tribes (Dhangars etc), NT (D) – 2
- Nomadic tribes (second category)
- EWS – 10 per cent

The enactment of the **10 per cent Maratha quota through this reservation bill will constitute 72 per cent of the total reservation**, exceeding the **50 per cent cap in the state**.

- ◆ Based on these findings, the commission recommended that the **Maratha community** be notified as a **socially and educationally backward class** under **Article 342(C) and Article 366(26C)** of the constitution, indicating the need for a **separate social component** with different and independent percentages from the existing reserved castes.
- ◆ **Article 342-C** of the Constitution empowers the state to list the backward communities as per the provisions of **Articles 15(4) and 16(4)**.
- ◆ The Bill outlines the provision of a 10-year review period after the implementation of the proposed reservation.



INDIAN ARMY TO SET UP NEW CORPS

Context: The Army is converting its Headquarters Uttar Bharat (HQ UB) area into a full-fledged operational corps — a move that will shift its focus towards operations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) from its current responsibility of peacetime duties.

What is a corps?

- ◆ A corps is a **military structure** that includes elements of **all arms and services**, equipped with sufficient reserves for operations within its area of responsibility.
- ◆ Typically, a corps is organised to manage three divisions, though this can vary based on operational

needs, with each division consisting of 15,000 to 18,000 soldiers.

Line of Actual Control (LAC)

- The **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** is the effective border between India and China.
- LAC was supposed to **divide areas under Indian and Chinese** control since the end of the Sino-Indian War of 1962.
- Unlike the LoC (between India and Pakistan), the LAC was **not mutually agreed upon**. This was because the war ended with a **unilateral ceasefire by China**.

About HQ UB

- ◆ Based in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly, the **HQ UB** oversees peacetime activities and training facilities in Uttarakhand and western Uttar Pradesh, as well as the LAC sections adjacent to Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, known as the **central theatre**.
- ◆ Previously, the UB area had a single brigade and several scout battalions for patrolling key border regions.
- ◆ However, in response to recurring confrontations with Chinese forces at certain points along the LAC and a strategic emphasis on dominating the border, the formation was gradually upgraded and its combat capability increased by putting three independent brigades and an infantry division based in Uttarakhand under it.
- ◆ The formation is currently referred to as **Combatised UB Area**.
 - While a combatised area HQ has fighting elements, a traditional corps has additional artillery brigades, engineering brigades and other logistics components.

Impact of the move

- ◆ It will enhance its operational capabilities along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
- ◆ The newly reconstituted corps will have all the troops and equipment from other arms and services such as artillery, engineers and aviation, among others, under its direct command to successfully conduct operations in the central theatre.
- ◆ The establishment of this corps is expected to strengthen border infrastructure development, combat logistics, and serve as a centralised agency for addressing security challenges in the region.

New naval base in Lakshadweep

- ◆ With strategic priorities changing, India will soon

have two new military formations as the Indian Navy is slated to open a new base, INS Jatayu, in Lakshadweep

- ◆ The new naval base will allow the Indian Navy to deploy some of its assets in the **Arabian Sea** islands, keeping a close watch on the traffic passing through the **nine-degree channel**, a crucial maritime route through which billions of dollars' worth of commercial trade transits.



COMPULSORY REGISTRATION OF NRI MARRIAGES IN INDIA

Context: In response to the growing concern over deceptive marriages involving **Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)** and **Indian citizens**, the **Law Commission of India** has put forth a set of **recommendations**, in its report' aimed at **safeguarding the interests of Indian spouses** and **preventing fraudulent unions**.

Key-highlights of the Report:

- ◆ **Report:** *Law on Matrimonial Issues Relating to Non-Resident Indians and Overseas Citizens of India*
- ◆ The Law Commission has **proposed mandatory registration** of all marriages between **NRIs/OCIs and Indian citizens in India**.
- ◆ The envisioned central legislation should cover divorce, maintenance of spouses, custody and maintenance of children, as well as mechanisms for serving summons, warrants, or judicial documents on NRIs and OCIs.
- ◆ **Amendment:** In addition, the commission suggested introducing amendments to the Passports Act, 1967. These amendments would require declaring marital status, linking spouses' passports, and indicating the marriage registration number on both spouses' passports.

Challenges Faced by Indian Spouses

- ◆ **Fraudulent marriages** involving NRIs often unfold under false assurances, misrepresentations, and other deceptive practices.
- ◆ These unions can lead to **distress for the Indian partner**, especially when pursuing legal remedies becomes difficult due to complex legal aspects across multiple jurisdictions.
- ◆ **Financial exploitation and abandonment** further exacerbate the challenges faced by Indian spouses.

Who is an NRI?

- An NRI refers to an Indian citizen who is **ordinarily residing outside India** and holds an Indian passport.
- Indian citizen residing outside India for **at least 182 days** in the previous year or been in India for 60 days or more in the previous financial year in addition to having lived there for 365 days or more in the preceding 4 years. He/ She can invest in India and hold NRI accounts.
- **PIO (Person of Indian Origin):** Foreign citizen with Indian ancestry or former Indian citizenship. Eligible for OCI card and can hold foreign passports.

HYBRID MUTUAL FUND SCHEMES

Context: Hybrid mutual fund schemes have been gaining popularity among investors, attracting Rs 20,634 crore in January, marking a 37 per cent surge from the previous month, largely due to their appeal as an alternative investment option post-change in taxation laws for debt funds.

What are Hybrid Funds?

- ◆ Hybrid funds are a combination of equity and debt features into a **single fund**.
- ◆ Hybrid funds are **mutual fund schemes** that typically invest in a combination of equity and debt securities and sometimes in other asset categories such as **gold**.
- ◆ A hybrid fund tries to give the investor the best of both worlds - it is neither too risky, nor it is too low on returns

Different types of hybrid funds

- Aggressive Hybrid
- Balanced Hybrid
- Conservative Hybrid
- Equity Savings Funds
- Arbitrage Funds
- Multi Asset Allocation
- Balanced advantage funds (dynamic allocation)

Why they are an attractive option?

- ◆ Hybrid funds appeal more to investors with a moderate or low-risk profile.
- ◆ These funds are good investment options as they reduce the volatility associated when participating in equity markets while simultaneously providing stability in the fixed-income market.

**PANAMA CANAL SUFFERING MAJOR DISRUPTION**

Context: Drought conditions in the Panama Canal are challenging supply chains that rely on this important waterway to rethink their strategies to move product as shallower-than-usual waters have reduced the number of vessels allowed to traverse the canal per day and restricted maximum ship weights.

What is Panama Canal?

- ◆ The Panama Canal was among the defining engineering achievements of the 20th century.
- ◆ **Completed in:** 1914
- ◆ **Length:** 82-kilometre long
- ◆ **Connecting Points:** The Canal connects the **Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean** via one of the narrowest isthmi in the world.
- ◆ **Physical features:** The Canal's principal physical features are
 - **Gatun Lake**, and the **central man-made lake** stretching nearly all the way across the **Isthmus**;
 - **Gaillard Cut**, the eight-mile-long excavation through the Continental Divide that extends Gatun Lake to Pedro Miguel Locks
 - the locks on both sides of the Isthmus that raise ships between sea level and the lake (Gatun Locks on the Atlantic and Pedro Miguel and Miraflores Locks on the Pacific)
 - the ports of **Balboa on the Pacific and Cristobal** on the Atlantic

Mapping the Traffic

- ◆ Since its completion, it has served as one of the **world's most important shipping routes**, providing the fastest way to sail between the **Pacific and Atlantic oceans**.
- ◆ More than 14,000 ships crossed the canal in 2022. Container ships are the most common users of the Panama Canal and transport more than 40% of consumer goods traded between Northeast Asia and the U.S. East Coast.
- ◆ The global waterway handles an estimated 5% of world trade. If the situation remains the same, there will be expensive freight costs.

Why is it facing issue?

- ◆ **Low rainfall:** there has been 30 percent below average this year, causing water levels to plunge in the lakes that feed the canal and its mighty locks.
- ◆ **El Niño:** The immediate cause is the El Niño climate phenomenon, which initially causes hotter and drier weather in Panama.
- ◆ **Climate change:** Climate change may also be prolonging dry spells and raising temperatures in the region.

**BUBONIC PLAGUE**

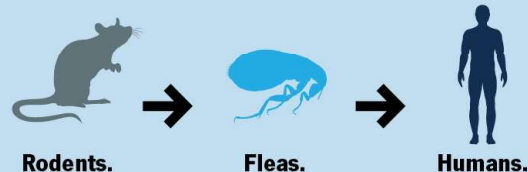
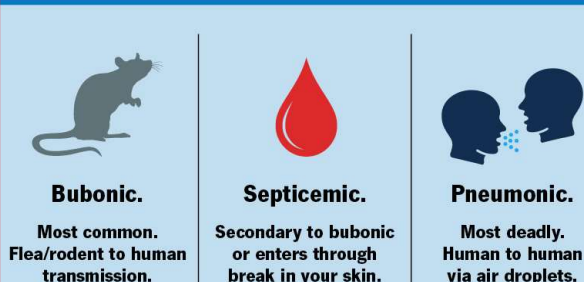
Context: In a recent incident, health officials in Oregon, US confirmed the first case of bubonic plague in the state since 2005.

What is the bubonic plague?

- ◆ Bubonic plague specifically refers to cases where bacteria gets into the **lymph nodes**.
- ◆ **Caused by:** *Yersinia pestis*, a zoonotic bacteria, i.e. bacteria that can spread between animals and people. *Y. pestis* is usually found in small animals and their fleas.

Between 1346 and 1353, the bubonic plague killed as many as 50 million in Europe in what is known as the **Black Death**.

- ◆ **Transmission:** Humans can be infected in one of three ways —
 - ▶ the bite of infected vector fleas
 - ▶ unprotected contact with infectious bodily fluids or contaminated materials
 - ▶ inhalation of respiratory droplets/small particles from a patient with pneumonic plague
- ◆ **Symptoms:** It can cause fever, headache, weakness and painful, swollen lymph nodes, and usually happens from the bite of an infected flea.

How Plague is Transmitted**Types of Plague****OTHER TYPES OF PLAGUE****Septicemic plague**

- Septicemic plague happens if the **bacteria enters the bloodstream**.
- This often follows **untreated bubonic plague**, and causes additional, more serious symptoms.
 - ▶ These include abdominal pain, shock, bleeding into the skin, and blackening of appendages, most often fingers, toes or the nose.
- **Source:** This form comes either from **flea bites or from handling an infected animal**.

Pneumonic plague

- It happens when **the bacteria enters the lungs**, and adds rapidly developing pneumonia to the list of symptoms.
- It is the only form of plague that **can be spread from person to person** by inhaling infectious droplets — also making it the most contagious.
- Pneumonic plague is the most dangerous, and according to the WHO, “almost always fatal” if untreated.

**INSAT-3DS: ISRO'S METEOROLOGICAL SATELLITE**

Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the INSAT-3DS meteorological satellite onboard a Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle (GSLV).

About INSAT-3DS Satellite

- ◆ INSAT-3DS Satellite is a **follow-on mission of Third Generation Meteorological Satellite** from **geostationary orbit**.
- ◆ It is designed for enhanced meteorological

A **geostationary orbit** is a high earth orbit that permits satellites to match Earth's rotation

observations and monitoring of land and ocean surfaces for weather forecasting and disaster warning.

- ◆ The satellite would serve various departments under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** including the **Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)**.
- ◆ The satellite will augment the meteorological services along with the presently operational **INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR satellites**.

Objectives of the mission:

The primary objectives of the mission are:

- ◆ To monitor Earth's surface, carry out oceanic observations and its environment in various spectral channels of meteorological importance.
- ◆ To provide the vertical profile of various meteorological parameters of the atmosphere.
- ◆ To provide the data collection and data dissemination capabilities from the data collection platforms (DCPs).
- ◆ To provide satellite aided search and rescue services.

About GSLV

- GSLV is a **three-stage 51.7 m long launch vehicle** with a liftoff mass of 420 tonnes.
- **First stage (GS1)** comprises a solid propellant (S139) motor having a 139-tonne propellant and four earth-storable propellant stages (L40) strap-ons, each carrying 40 tonnes of liquid propellant.
- **Second stage (GS2)** is also an earth-storable propellant stage loaded with 40-ton propellant.
- **Third stage (GS3)** is a cryogenic stage with a 15-ton propellant loading of liquid oxygen (LOX) and liquid hydrogen (LH2).
- During the atmospheric regime, the satellite is protected by Ogive payload fairing.
- GSLV can be used to launch a variety of spacecraft capable of performing communications, navigation, earth resource surveys, and any other proprietary mission.

ASTRONOMERS FIND WHAT MAY BE THE UNIVERSE'S BRIGHTEST OBJECT

Context: Astronomers have discovered what may be the brightest object in the universe, a quasar with a black hole at its heart growing so fast that it swallows the equivalent of a sun a day.



Key-highlights of the findings:

- ◆ Scientists have **spotted a quasar** powered by the **fastest growing black hole** ever discovered.
 - The black hole powering this distant quasar is more than 17 billion times more immense than sun.
- ◆ The light from the celestial object travelled for more than **12bn years** to reach Earth.
- ◆ The record-breaking quasar shines 500 trillion times brighter than sun.
- ◆ Though the quasar resembles a **mere dot** in images.
- ◆ The **rotating disk** around the **quasar's black hole**—the luminous swirling gas and other matter from gobbled-up stars—is like a **cosmic hurricane**.

J0529-4351

- The European Southern Observatory spotted the object, J0529-4351, during a 1980 sky survey, but it was thought to be a star.
- It was not identified as a quasar — the extremely active and luminous core of a galaxy — until last year.
- The quasar is 12 billion light-years away and has been around since the early days of the universe. A light-year is 5.8 trillion miles.

Important space terms

- ◆ **Black Hole:** A black hole is formed when **stars collapse**, leading to a space in the universe with an escape velocity — the speed at which an object must travel to override a planet or an object's gravitational force. The light cannot go out because the **gravity inside a black hole is very strong** as a result of a lot of matter being squeezed into a small space.
- ◆ **Quasars:** Quasars are **tremendously active supermassive black holes** millions to billions of times more massive than Sun, usually residing at centers of galaxies. They devour matter drawn to them by their immense **gravitational pull** and unleash torrents of radiation including **jets of high-energy particles**, while a glowing disk of matter spins around them.



GOOGLE UNVEILS 'GEMMA'

Context: Google has unveiled Gemma, a new series of open models designed to support developers and researchers in responsibly building AI systems.

What is Gemma?

- ◆ The name "Gemma" is derived from the Latin word for "precious stone".
- ◆ It is a set of **lightweight models** inspired by Google's Gemini models, developed by Google **DeepMind** and other teams across the company.
- ◆ **Performance and Responsible Design:** Gemma models, despite their lightweight design, offer top-tier performance compared to larger

models. They can run directly on developer devices and surpass larger models on key benchmarks while ensuring safe and responsible outputs.

Key Features of Gemma

- ◆ **Two Sizes:** Gemma 2B and Gemma 7B come with pre-trained and instruction-tuned variants.
- ◆ **Responsible AI Toolkit:** Google offers tools supporting safer AI applications with Gemma.
- ◆ **Framework Support:** Inference and supervised fine-tuning (SFT) toolchains are provided for major frameworks like JAX, PyTorch, and TensorFlow.
- ◆ **Easy Deployment:** Gemma models can run on various platforms and integrate seamlessly with tools like Colab and Kaggle.
- ◆ **Commercial Usage:** Gemma permits responsible commercial usage and distribution for all organizations.



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

- ❧ Gulbadan Begum
- ❧ Avdiivka
- ❧ India-China's fresh round of military talks
- ❧ Alexei Navalny (1976-2024)
- ❧ Fali Nariman (1929-2024)
- ❧ Ameen Sayani (1932-2024)
- ❧ Satyendra Nath Bose (1894-1974)
- ❧ SC invokes Article 142
- ❧ European Remote Sensing 2 (ERS-2)
- ❧ OpenAI's latest offering Sora
- ❧ iOncology AI for cancer detection
- ❧ Protein Structure
- ❧ Cooling Inflation
- ❧ Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane

Gulbadan Begum



In the annals of history, where the exploits of men are often heralded above all, the story of Gulbadan Begum, a Mughal princess of unparalleled courage and the first female historian of the empire, emerges as a beacon of inspiration.

About

- In 1576, Gulbadan Begum defied societal norms and undertook a **daring six-year voyage to Mecca**.
- This journey was not merely a pilgrimage to Mecca but a daring adventure that challenged the norms of her time and showcased her profound bravery, kindness, and **desire for freedom**.
- Her memoir, **Humayun nama**, offers rare insights into the Mughal empire from a female **perspective**, **challenging male-dominated historical narratives**.

Avdiivka



The Russian military has taken full control of the Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant.

About

- Avdiivka, which had a pre-war population of around 32,000.
- It was briefly taken in 2014 by Moscow-backed separatists who seized a swathe of eastern Ukraine but was recaptured by Ukrainian troops who built extensive fortifications.
- It is called Avdeyevka by Russians.
- Avdiivka has strategic and logistical value for Moscow.
- Avdiivka sits in the industrial Donbas region, 15 km (9 miles) north of the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk. Before the war, the Soviet-era coke plant was one of Europe's biggest.
- The fall of Avdiivka is Russia's biggest gain since it captured the city of Bakhmut in May 2023.

India-China's fresh round of military talks



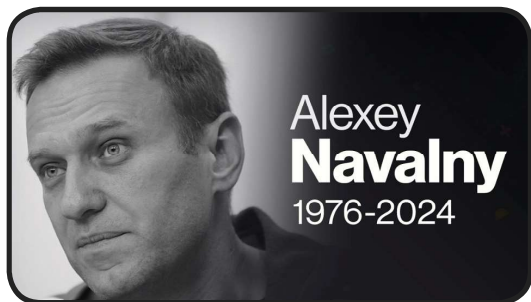
India and China failed to make much headway in **21st round of India-China corps commander level meeting** to resolve border issues in eastern Ladakh since the **Galwan face-off in 2020**.

India-China Border and dispute

The India-China border is divided into three sectors

- **Western:** The boundary dispute in the Western Sector pertains to the Johnson Line proposed by the British in the 1860s that extended up to the Kunlun Mountains and put Aksai Chin in the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Middle:** In the Middle Sector, the dispute is a minor one. It is the only one where India and China have exchanged maps on which they broadly agree.
- **Eastern:** The disputed boundary in the Eastern Sector of the India-China border is over the MacMahon Line.

Alexei Navalny (1976-2024)



Alexei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition leader, died recently after collapsing and losing consciousness at the penal colony north of the Arctic Circle where he was serving a long jail term.

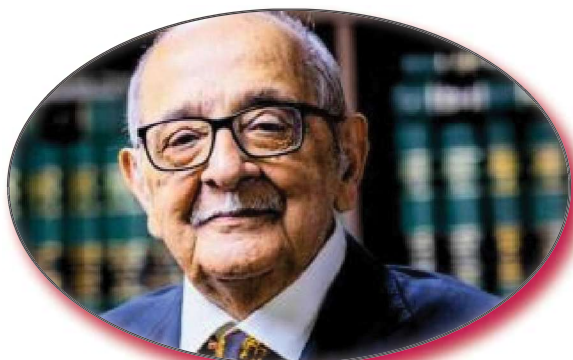
Who was Navalny?

- Navalny, 47, became the leading figure among Russia's splintered opposition.
- Supporters cast him as a Russian version of South Africa's Nelson Mandela who would one day be freed from jail to lead the country.
- **Rose to prominence:** A former lawyer, Navalny rose to prominence with blogs which exposed what he said was vast corruption across the Russian elite, describing Russia as ruled by "crooks and thieves".
- The US can announce a major package of sanctions against Russia over the death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and the two-year Ukraine war.

What is India's stand?

- India is standing by its close relationship with Russia.
- As a nation, Russia has supported India and India, in turn, has supported Russia. India has also been very clear vocal in the G20 declaration and before that at every summit.
- **India is "on the side of peace".**

Fali Nariman (1929-2024)



Fali Nariman passed away at the age of 95, leaving behind a legacy of remarkable achievements and a profound impact on the **country's judicial system**.

About

- Fali Nariman (Fali as everybody called him) began his practice in the Bombay High Court and soon became a leading lawyer.
- When **Emergency was declared in 1975**, he put in his resignation.
 - Given the times, it was brave of him but clearly, his conscience did not permit him to represent an authoritarian regime.
- He made significant contributions to the evolution of law and fought for human rights in India, England, and America.
- He was part of historic judicial proceedings like the **Golaknath case and Kesavananda Bharati case**.
- Nariman's contribution to the Indian judiciary is majorly embodied in the **three cases** that established and upheld the **Collegium system** of appointing judges.
- He served as the **Additional Solicitor General of India** from 1972 to 1975.

- He was awarded the **Padma Bhushan in 1991 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2007.**
- He also served as the
 - President of the Bar Association of India
 - Vice-Chairman of the Internal Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce
 - honorary member of the International Commission of Jurists from
 - member of the **London Court of International Arbitration**

Ameen Sayani (1932-2024)



Ameen Sayani, a pioneering radio presenter who drew in generations of listeners in India with his melodic voice on a radio show that became a national phenomenon, died in Mumbai.

About

- Mr. Sayani was one of the most recognizable voices in Indian radio as the host of one of the first radio shows in the country.
- He showcased songs featured in Hindi movies for more than 42 years, helping establish a place for film music in India's popular culture.
- He hosted the program on Radio Ceylon, one of the oldest radio stations in the world, based in what is now Sri Lanka.

Satyendra Nath Bose (1894-1974)



The centennial anniversary of **Satyendra Nath Bose's groundbreaking discovery in physics**, which laid the foundation for **quantum theory**, is being celebrated, highlighting the pivotal contribution of an often-overlooked Indian scientist in reshaping the field of physics.

Satyendra Nath Bose:

- Satyendra Nath Bose was an outstanding Indian physicist specialising in quantum mechanics.
- He is of course most remembered for his excellent role played in the class of particles '**bosons**', which were named after him by **Paul Dirac** to commemorate his work in the field.
- He is known for his work in **Quantum Physics**.
- He is famous for "**Bose-Einstein Theory**" and a kind of particle in an atom has been named after his name Boson.
- Bose adapted a lecture at the **University of Dhaka** on the theory of radiation and the ultraviolet catastrophe into a short article called "**Planck's Law and the Hypothesis of Light Quanta**" and sent it to Albert Einstein.

- Einstein agreed with him, translated Bose's paper "**Planck's Law and Hypothesis of Light Quanta**" into German, and had it published in **Zeitschrift für Physik** under Bose's name, in 1924.
- This formed the basis of the **Bose-Einstein Statistics**.
- His theoretical paper became one of the most important findings in quantum theory.

Recognition:

- In 1937, Rabindranath Tagore dedicated his only book on science, **Visva-Parichay**, to Satyendra Nath Bose.
- For his tremendous contribution to physics, Bose was honoured with the second-highest civilian award in the country, the **Padma Vibhushan** in 1954.
- He was also appointed as **National Professor**, the highest honour in India for scholars.
- Bose went on to serve as president of many scientific institutions, including the Indian Physical Society, National Institute of Science, Indian Science Congress and the Indian Statistical Institute.
- He was also an adviser to the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, and later became a Fellow of the Royal Society.
- In honor of Bose's legacy, **any particle that conforms with his statistics today** is known as a Many scientific breakthroughs have come from his work including the discovery of the particle accelerator and the **God particle**.

SC invokes Article 142



The Supreme Court, using **Article 142**, declared Aam Aadmi (AAP) party councillor as elected to the post of Chandigarh mayor, upon finding that the presiding officer deliberately defaced eight votes cast in his favour.

What is Article 142?

- Article 142 of the Indian constitution is a provision that empowers the Supreme Court to pass any decree or order necessary for doing complete justice in any case or matter pending before it.
- It also makes such decree or order enforceable throughout the territory of India.
- Article 142 is supported by several other provisions, including
 - **Article 32** (which ensures the right to constitutional remedies)
 - **Article 141** (mandating that all courts within India must abide by the Supreme Court's decisions)
 - **Article 136** (which allows for the Special Leave Petition)
 - This collective framework is known by the term "**judicial activism**".

European Remote Sensing 2 (ERS-2)



After 16 years of operation, a defunct satellite, **ERS-2 spacecraft**, burnt up in the atmosphere over the Pacific.

About

- European Remote Sensing 2 (ERS-2) was launched in 1995, retired in 2011, and has been gradually making its way back to Earth since then.
- Over its 16-year life, the ERS-2 collected information on climate change and the Earth's atmosphere.

Space Junk

- Orbital debris, also known as space junk, can range from defunct satellites or small fragments of rockets or satellites.
- Since the dawn of the space age in the 1950s, humankind has launched almost 50,000 tons of material into space.
- About 10,000 tons remains in orbit

OpenAI's latest offering Sora



OpenAI's Sora is its newest AI innovation that generates realistic videos from simple text descriptions.

What is Sora?

- Sora is a **text-to-video diffusion model**, capable of generating videos based on textual descriptions.
- Users can input text prompts, and Sora will create corresponding video content.
- Other models:
 - ▶ Meta has a tool for creating short video clips.
 - ▶ Google is working on its text-to-video model.

iOncology AI for cancer detection



To exploit the power of AI in healthcare, AIIMS, New Delhi, in collaboration with the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), Pune, has launched an AI platform, iOncology.ai, for facilitating **early detection of Cancer**.

About

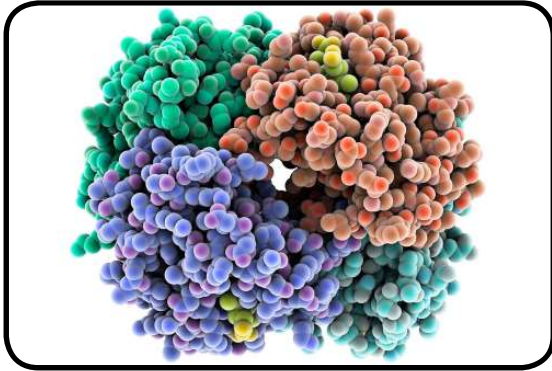
- The AI system runs on deep learning models capable of analysing complex medical data with "**unprecedented accuracy and efficiency**".
- It was trained using a data set of 500,000 radiological and histopathological images from 1,500 cases of **breast and ovarian cancers**, the two most common types of cancer.

Cancer

- Cancer is globally estimated to be the most fatal disease than those from **cardiovascular** (Lancet, 2019) in **high-income countries (HICs)**, and **middle-income countries (MICs)**.

- According to the **Global Cancer Observatory (GLOBOCAN)** estimates, there were 19.3 million incident cancer cases worldwide for the year 2020.
- India ranked third after China and the United States of America.

Protein Structure



John Jumper, Breakthrough Prize laureate, has been developing novel methods to apply artificial intelligence and machine learning to **protein biology**.

What are protein structure?

- Proteins are the end products of the decoding process that starts with the information in **cellular DNA**.
- The building blocks of proteins are amino acids, which are small organic molecules that consist of an **alpha (central) carbon atom** linked to an **amino group**, a **carboxyl group**, a **hydrogen atom**, and a **variable component** called a side chain.
- **Protein structure** is the **three-dimensional arrangement** of atoms in an amino acid-chain molecule.

Cooling Inflation



Inflation has cooled significantly in recent months, yet many people are still paying more for a lot of things.

What is Cooling Inflation?

- Cooling or easing inflation doesn't actually mean prices are falling.
- It just means prices are rising more slowly.

Inflation is a **decrease in the purchasing power of money**, reflected in a general increase in the prices of goods and services in an economy.

Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane



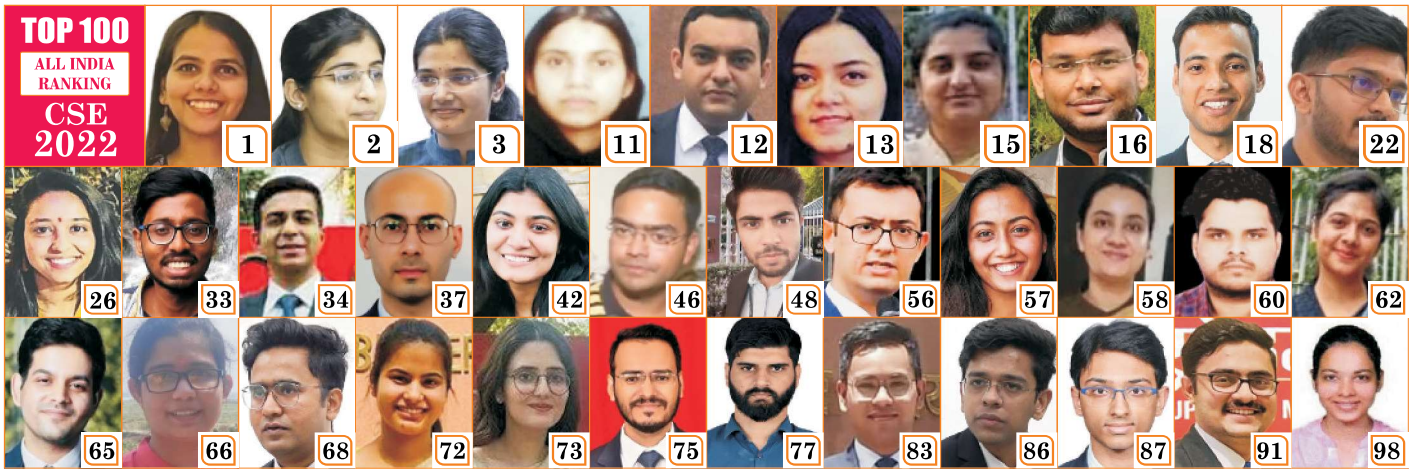
The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane** for Sugar Season 2024-25 at ₹ 340/quintal at sugar recovery rate of 10.25%.

Sugar Production in India

- India is the world's largest **producer and consumer** of sugar. Being on the top, it is required to produce enough to meet its **huge domestic demand**.
- The country's sugar production dipped 2.48 per cent to 22.36 million tonnes till February 15 of the ongoing 2023-24 marketing year.

Fair and remunerative price (FRP) scheme, which mandates a minimum price that **sugar mills** have to pay to sugarcane farmers, ensuring that farmers always get **fair profits for their crop**.





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