

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 1
MARCH
2024

Section A: MAINS ARTICLE

GS- I

- FRANCE MAKES ABORTION A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT
- THE IDEA OF CONSENT
- THE PINK ECONOMY
- INDIA EYE CRITICAL MINERALS MINING IN SRI LANKA, AUSTRALIA

GS- II

- CROSS-VOTING & SANCTITY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS
- JUDICIAL DISCRETION AND CASE MANAGEMENT
- A PRISON MAPPED BY CASTE
- DOUBLE BURDEN OF HEALTH IN INDIA
- DAM SAFETY IN INDIA
- NO IMMUNITY TO MPS, MLAS FOR BRIBERY
- INDIA'S HEALTH CENTRES
- NEED TO REFORM BAIL LAW

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- INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDY & QUESTIONS
- BLOOMBERG TO ADD INDIAN BONDS TO EM INDEXES
- AI'S CARBON FOOTPRINT
- METHANESAT TO TRACK METHANE

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- Odisha's Rupa Tarakasi gets GI tag

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

- India launches Chakshu
- PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana scheme
- Holistic Progress Card (HPC)

- 'Article 371-like' shield for Ladakh

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- India's unemployment rate dips
- India's first-ever underwater metro route

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- INS Jatayu

Location in News

- Agalega Island
- Ariyalur's Ramsar wetland Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary

Species in News

- Eunectes akiyama: New species of green anaconda
- International Big Cat Alliance
- India's leopard population

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- India's Nuclear Power Programme

GS SCORE

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DISCLAIMER

*T*he 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 ARTICLES

- ☞ France makes abortion a constitutional right
- ☞ The idea of consent
- ☞ The Pink Economy
- ☞ India eye critical minerals mining in Sri Lanka, Australia
- ☞ Cross-voting & sanctity of the election process
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1. FRANCE MAKES ABORTION A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT

Context: France has become the first country in the world to explicitly include the right to abortion in its constitution. The constitutional change was prompted by recent developments in the US, where the right to abortion was removed by the Supreme Court in 2022. Individual states are now able to ban the procedure again, ending the right to an abortion for millions of women.

1: Dimension: Arguments in favour of Abortion

- ❖ **Mothers' rights supersedes the rights of the foetus:** A female is considered a moral person that is entitled to rights, including the **right to life**. So, abortion is deemed acceptable as the foetus is not a person. The mother, who is a person, has a right to life and it supersedes the rights of the foetus to choose whether or not it remains connected to her body.
- ❖ **Unwarranted:** Also, pregnancy is assumed to be a foreseeable consequence of heterosexual intercourse, that too when there is no intention to 'have a baby'. So, denying her the right to abort the child when she was not planning for it is unwarranted.
- ❖ **Self-defence:** It may be ethical for a mother to have an abortion to defend herself from the danger to her mental or physical health than continuing with the pregnancy would cause. Abortion is considered in relation to the 'Doctrine of double effect'.

2: Dimension: Arguments Against abortion

- ❖ **'Future like ours' argument:** Abortion is wrong because it deprives the foetus of a potential 'future like ours'. It suggests that death is a bad thing because it deprives people of all the experiences, enjoyments, opportunities that would make up their future personal life.
- ❖ **Moral conduct:** Killing an innocent human being is a moral wrong. Those who are against abortions believe that human life begins at conception,

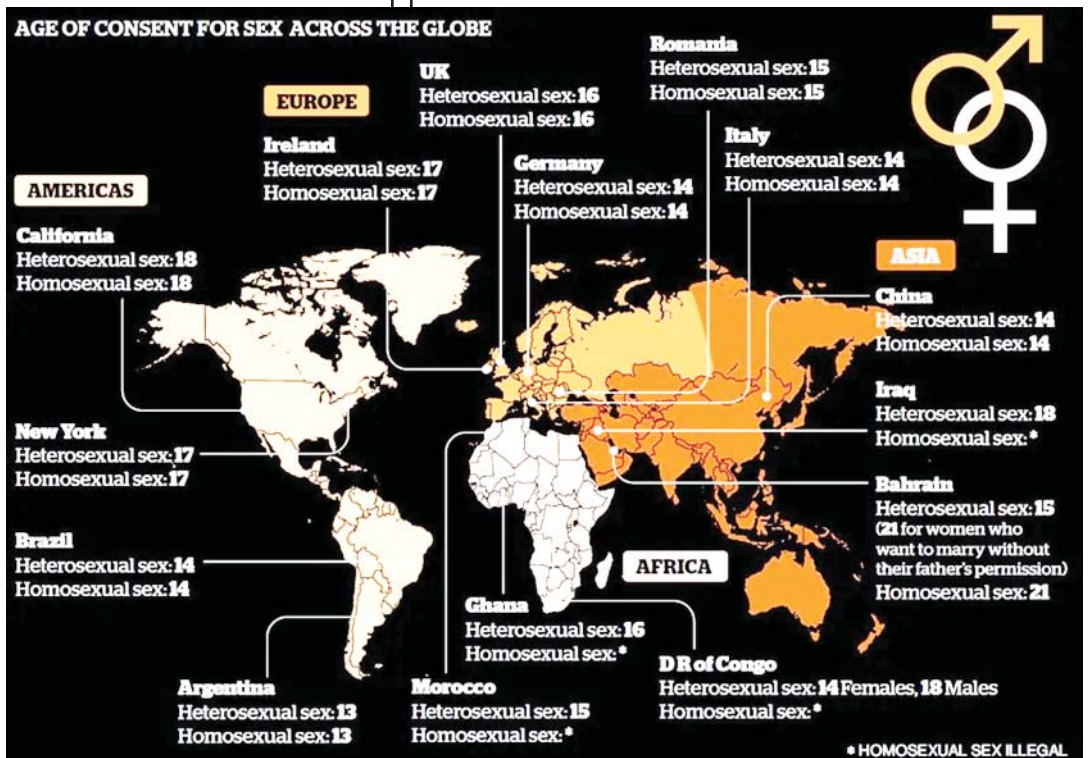
and by drawing the same analogy, the foetus is an innocent human being. So, killing the foetus is wrong and abortion is always wrong.

2. THE IDEA OF CONSENT

Context: The recent case involving a Class 12 student accused of raping his 17-year-old acquaintance, leading to his interim bail for board examinations, highlights concerns regarding **consent and sexual relationships among minors**, despite legal experts asserting that **consent is irrelevant in such cases**.

What changes are required?

- ❖ **Awareness about consequences:** While the idea of consent, along with "good touch" and "bad touch", has made children and adolescents aware, most children are unaware that sexual intimacy of any degree is punishable according to the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** and **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act**.
 - In India, consensual sex between minors is a criminal offence or consent is immaterial.
- ❖ **Amendment in POCSO:** The **POCSO Act** needs certain amendments to handle cases where there is "**tacit approval**" since such cases do not "merit to be dealt with the same severity as the cases that were ideally imagined to fall under the POCSO Act".
- ❖ **Society's intervention:** Due to adolescents' **limited understanding of the legal ramifications of sexual intimacy**, there arises a crucial need for society to step up efforts in **building awareness and establishing support systems**.



Law Commission's Recommendations

- ◆ The 22nd Law Commission of India has examined these concerns and, in 2023, published recommendations in the **283rd report Age of Consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012**.
- ◆ In its Report, the Law Commission does not advise any modification in the existing "age of consent" under Section 375 of the IPC or the POCSO Act. However, the Law Commission sought an amendment to POSCO so that "the court may, in its discretion, impose any lesser sentence on the accused than the minimum sentence prescribed..."
- ◆ **Education:** There is need for a more comprehensive life skill education on issues related to sex and sexuality.

Issues with the Current Age of Consent

- ◆ In India, the age of sexual consent is set at 18, which means that sexual activity involving anyone under this age is considered a criminal offense, even if both parties are willing participants.
- ◆ It criminalizes consensual relationships between teenagers aged 16 or 17
- ◆ India's age of consent is significantly higher than the global average.

Arguments in Favor of Lowering the Age of Consent in India

- Lowering the age of consent to 16 in India would align the law with the biological and emotional development of teenagers.
- It would reduce the criminalization of consensual sexual activity
- Bringing India's age of consent in line with global averages would help ensure consistency with international norms and standards.

Counterarguments and Concerns

- It could potentially expose younger teenagers to exploitation, especially if there is a significant age gap between partners.
- A lower age of consent must be accompanied by comprehensive sex education which is not available right now.

3. THE PINK ECONOMY

Context: The term "pink economy" or "rainbow economy" signifies the economic influence wielded by non-heterosexual individuals. In India, where societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community are evolving, estimates suggest a substantial presence of around 135 million LGBTQ+

individuals, constituting approximately 10 percent of the population. This demographic not only holds significant production and consumption potential but also influences market dynamics, marking a noteworthy shift in the country's economic discourse.

1: Dimension: The Indian Scenario-Challenges and Opportunities

- ◆ **Significant influence on economy:** While the emergence of India's pink economy represents a sizable demographic capable of influencing the nation's economy, it is rooted in **pervasive stigma and discrimination** against the LGBTQ+ community.
- ◆ **Impact of societal attitude on economy:** This aligns with the **principles of queer economics**, indicating how societal attitudes shape economic outcomes.
- ◆ **Discrimination in education and employment:** There is discrimination across various aspects of life, including **education and employment**.
 - **High dropout rates in schools and limited access to formal education** restrict employment opportunities, contributing to a **cycle of discrimination** that hampers **human capital development and economic growth**.

2: Dimension: Economic Implications and Imperatives

- ◆ **Mapping economic loss:** The cost of homophobia in India spans from 0.1 percent to 1.7 percent of GDP, translating to significant economic losses ranging from **112 billion rupees to 1.7 trillion rupees**.
- ◆ **Plethora of economic issues:** Stigma and discrimination constrain **labor supply, reduce productivity, and lead to socio-economic setbacks** such as **elevated rates of poverty, depression, and suicide** within the LGBTQ+ community.
- ◆ Understanding the dynamics of the pink economy within the context of societal attitudes is crucial for achieving inclusive economic growth, a necessary condition for sustainable development.

3: Dimension: Corporate Inclusion and Economic Advancement

- ◆ Inclusivity and economic advancement are closely intertwined.
- ◆ Corporations are increasingly recognizing LGBTQ+ inclusion not only as a social responsibility but also as a strategic business move.
- ◆ This shift towards LGBTQ+ inclusion in the corporate realm reflects a **broader societal shift towards acceptance and recognition of diversity**, paving the way for a more inclusive and economically vibrant future.

Case Study: A Few LGBTQ+ Inclusion Initiatives

REPORT	CORPORATES	KEY CONTENTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
A Manifesto for Trans Inclusion in the Indian Workplace	Godrej	Adherence to global standards of LGBTQ+ policies is necessary for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing global competitiveness Attracting diverse talent Building brand image New market opportunities and revenue streams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Discrimination workplace policy Inclusive HR Approach Awareness programs Health insurance and related benefits
Creating Inclusive Workplaces for LGBT Employees in India - A Resource Guide for Employers	Community Business - Sponsors are Goldman Sachs, IBM, and Google	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic case for LGBTQ inclusion by unlocking the latent potential of LGBT individuals An inclusive LGBTQ space would create a dual appeal to both employees and customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti- workplace harassment policies Supportive HR practices o LGBT employee support network LGBT-specific benefits Respectful LGBT marketing Include gender identity and sexual orientation as optional data points in employee surveys in India
The Economic & Business Case	Open for Business – sponsors are Accenture, Brunswick, and Thomas Reuters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The economic argument for promoting LGBT+ inclusion is set to positively effect: Economic Performance Business Performance Individual Performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnering with LGBTQ+ groups Support existing legal redress Advocate for local policy changes in LGBTQ+ community
Deloitte Global 2023 LGBT+ Inclusion @ Work	Deloitte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGBTQ+ inclusion ensures enhanced workplace dynamics Identifies avenues for organisations to enhance the experiences of their LGBT+ workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and address the diverse experiences of LGBT+ employees, acknowledging intersectional aspects.

Conclusion: Towards Inclusive Economic Growth

The pink economy represents a significant demographic with the potential to shape India's economic landscape. Addressing the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community and promoting inclusivity in all spheres of life are imperative for unlocking their full economic potential. By fostering a culture of acceptance and implementing inclusive policies, India can harness the economic power of its LGBTQ+ population, driving sustainable development and prosperity for all.

4. INDIA EYE CRITICAL MINERALS MINING IN SRI LANKA, AUSTRALIA

Context: The Ministry of Mines hosted two meetings with industry stakeholders in January to discuss opportunities for the mining of critical minerals by Indian companies in Sri Lanka and Australia. These meetings were organised in line with the ministry's broader push to strengthen India's critical minerals supply chain through the acquisition of overseas mineral assets.

1: Dimension: Need:

- India's international commitments towards **reducing carbon emissions**, which require the country to urgently relook at its mineral requirements for **energy transition and net-zero commitments**.
- Critical Minerals forms part of multiple strategic value chains, including **clean technologies initiatives** such as **zero-emission vehicles**, wind turbines, solar panels; information and communication technologies, including semiconductors; and advanced manufacturing inputs and materials such as defence applications, permanent magnets, and ceramics.

2: Dimension: Major concerns globally and for India:

- Dependence on China:** If India is not able to explore and produce these minerals, it will have to depend on other countries, including China, to power its energy transition plans to electric vehicles.
- Lack of Expertise:** the reason India would not have found a place in the Minerals Security Partnership grouping is because the country does not bring any expertise to the table.
- Difficult to mine:** Although they are more abundant than their name implies, they are difficult and costly to mine and process cleanly.
- Monopoly of few:** Most of the reserves being present in few nations causes problems for most of the world because of the concentration of reserves in the hands of few countries.
- Supply Chain:** Forming forward and backward supply chains will create problems when the reserves are mostly limited to one country.
- Environmental Impact:** The chief concern is that the rare earth elements are bound up in mineral deposits with the low-level **radioactive element thorium**, exposure to which has been linked to an increased risk of developing lung, pancreatic, and other cancers.
- Capital-Intensive:** The mining and extraction processes are capital-intensive and consumes large amounts of energy.
- Health hazards:** The mining of these minerals releases toxic by-products which are harmful for the environment and human health.

FACT BOX

India's position on Critical minerals:

- Though India has **6% of the world's rare earth reserves**, it only produces **1% of global output**, and meets most of its requirements of such **minerals from China**.

- In 2018-19, for instance, **92% of rare earth metal imports** by value and 97% by quantity were sourced from China.
- In India, **monazite and thorium** is the principal source of rare earths.

Critical Minerals in major economies:

- The US** has declared 50 minerals critical in light of their role in national security or economic development.
- The UK** considers 18 minerals critical, the **European Union** has declared 34 minerals critical, and **Canada and Japan** 31 each.
- Australia** has 26 critical minerals.
- India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership:** India and Australia recently decided to strengthen their partnership in the field of projects and supply chains for critical minerals. Australia will commit 5.8 million dollars to the **three-year India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership**.

5. CROSS-VOTING & SANCTITY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS

Context: Heavy cross-voting by Opposition lawmakers turned the biennial Rajya Sabha elections into a thrilling contest.

Challenges to the Sanctity of Rajya Sabha Elections: A Bigger picture

- Despite constitutional provisions and legal safeguards in place, such incidents underscore the need for greater vigilance and accountability in ensuring free and fair elections.
- Sanctity of the Electoral Process:** The fundamental principle of democracy relies on the sanctity of electoral processes. However, instances of cross-voting challenge this principle, raising doubts about the fairness and transparency of the elections. The need to uphold the integrity of the electoral system becomes imperative to maintain public trust in democratic institutions.
- Implementation of Anti-Defection Laws:** The Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, commonly known as the anti-defection law, aims to curb unethical practices such as defection and voting against party lines. However, the applicability of these laws to Rajya Sabha elections has been a subject of debate. While the law prohibits defection, its enforcement during Rajya Sabha polls remains ambiguous, leading to loopholes that can be exploited.
- Role of the Judiciary:** The judiciary plays a crucial role in upholding the principles of democracy and ensuring adherence to constitutional norms. While the Supreme Court has upheld the use of open ballot

for Rajya Sabha elections to promote transparency, recent incidents of cross-voting highlight the need for judicial intervention to address electoral malpractices effectively. The court's proactive stance in safeguarding democratic values is essential to maintain the sanctity of the electoral process.

- ❖ **Upholding Democratic Values:** At the core of the issue lies the imperative to uphold democratic values and principles. Cross-voting not only undermines the democratic mandate but also erodes public confidence in the electoral system. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-faceted approach, encompassing legal reforms, judicial oversight, and institutional accountability, to ensure that the electoral process remains free, fair, and transparent.

What reforms are required?

- ❖ The incidents of cross-voting in Rajya Sabha elections underscore the pressing need for comprehensive reforms to safeguard the sanctity of the electoral process.
- ❖ Upholding democratic values and principles should be a collective endeavor involving all stakeholders, including the legislature, judiciary, and civil society.
- ❖ Only through concerted efforts can India's democratic institutions uphold the integrity of elections and preserve the essence of democracy.

6. JUDICIAL DISCRETION AND CASE MANAGEMENT

Context: The recent verdict by the Supreme Court on the **automatic vacation of stay orders** in civil and criminal cases has sparked considerable debate within legal circles. The ruling, delivered by a five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, diverged from the precedent set by a 2018 judgement, highlighting the nuanced complexities surrounding judicial discretion and case management.

Balance between judicial discretion and procedural rigidity

- ❖ **Judicial Discretion and Stay Orders:** The crux of the issue lies in the balance between judicial discretion and procedural rigidity.
 - While the 2018 judgement advocated for the automatic expiration of stay orders after six months, the recent ruling emphasizes the importance of judicial discretion in evaluating the merits of each case individually.
- ❖ This approach acknowledges the diverse nature of legal proceedings and the need for flexibility in adjudicating complex matters.

- ❖ **Implications for Case Management:** The Supreme Court's decision to refrain from fixing a timeline for the disposal of cases underscores the inherent challenges in setting **rigid deadlines for judicial proceedings**.
 - By recognizing that grassroots issues are best understood by the concerned courts, the judgement acknowledges the inherent complexities involved in case management and underscores the importance of context-specific decision-making.
- ❖ **Balancing Expediency and Justice:** The ruling prompts a critical examination of the tension between expediency and justice within the legal framework.
- ❖ The Supreme Court's verdict on the automatic vacation of stay orders in civil and criminal cases underscores the complexities inherent in judicial decision-making. The judgement serves as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue on the intersection of judicial expediency and procedural integrity in the Indian legal system.

7. A PRISON MAPPED BY CASTE

Context: The Centre has asked states and Union Territories not to segregate prisoners on the basis of their caste and religion and to stop assigning duties like managing prison kitchens according to the discriminatory approach.

How caste is an "endless battle" in Indian society?

- ❖ Discrimination and violence against Dalits are common with the caste hierarchy condemning them to the bottom of the social ladder.
- ❖ Despite laws to protect the Scheduled Castes (SC), abuse is frequently reported from across the country.
 - In Andhra Pradesh alone, 2,014 crimes against SCs were recorded in 2021, of which 33 were murders and 49 were cases of rape of minor girls.
- ❖ Shunned by many in society who call them '**untouchable**', Dalits, particularly in villages, are discriminated against, denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions like in scavenging, and routinely abused, even killed, sometimes at the hands of the police and at times by people of upper castes.
- ❖ This entrenched form of societal segregation, often described as hidden apartheid, has led to the complete isolation of many villages along caste lines.
- ❖ The prevalence of caste-based violence in Indian society is a **complex issue** rooted in historical, social, and economic factors.

The in-discriminatory approach and required measures

- ❖ The jail manuals of some states provide for segregation of prisoners based on their caste and religion and they are being assigned duties in the prisons accordingly.

- **Composition:** Two-third of prisoners in Indian jails are Dalits, tribals and from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 19% are Muslims and 66% of 4.66 lakh inmates are either illiterate or have not studied beyond Class X
- **Worse for women:** Unlike the male prisoners, women are fewer in number and so are the provisions made available to them.
- ❖ **Upholding Constitutional Principles:** There is constitutional imperative to ensure equality and non-discrimination within prison facilities.
- ❖ **Compliance with Model Prison Manual:** The **Model Prison Manual, 2016** serves as a guiding framework for prison administration, explicitly prohibiting any form of caste or religion-based discrimination. States and Union Territories are urged to act as per these guidelines.

When the rules themselves are casteist?

- ❖ **Caste-based labour**, in fact, is sanctioned in the prison manuals of many states.
- ❖ The colonial texts of the late 19th century have barely seen any amendments, and caste-based labour remains an untouched part of these manuals.
- ❖ While every state has its own unique prison manual, they are mostly based on **The Prisons Act, 1894**.
- ❖ These jail manuals mention every activity in detail – from the measurement of food and space per prisoner to punishments for the “disorderly ones”.

UPSC MAINS PYQ

- Q. “Caste system is assuming new identities and associational forms. Hence caste system cannot be eradicated in India.” Comment. **(2018)**

8. DOUBLE BURDEN OF HEALTH IN INDIA

Context: India has seen a steady increase in obesity levels – not only in adults but children too – over the last 32 years. At the same time, the prevalence of undernutrition has also remained high in the country. As a result, India has become one of the countries with a high “double burden,” according to a new *Lancet* study, which examined the trends of malnutrition across the world over the last 32 years.

1: Dimension: Reason behind the double burden

- ❖ There is a **lack of access to affordable and nutritious food** for the prominence of undernutrition and obesity.

- ❖ While lack of access to food can lead to undernutrition, **increased access to processed foods high in fats, salt, and sugar** has driven up obesity.
- ❖ **Why women are prone to putting on weight:** Because most of them do not have access to or time for physical activities such as walks or gyms. They are also likely to put the nutrition of the family above theirs. They are also likely to have fewer hours of proper sleep, waking up first and going to bed last”.
- ❖ **Eating junk food is cheaper and easier.** While it is not nutritious, it is tastier. This has led to an increase in obesity even among the poor, especially in states that are better off such as Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Goa.

2: Dimension: Rural-Urban Divide

- ❖ While obesity is affecting more people, there continues to be a rural-urban divide when it comes to obesity.
- ❖ An analysis of the NFHS-5 data shows that the prevalence of obesity was 31.7% in urban women and 19% in rural women. It was 28.6% among urban men and 18.8% among rural men.
- ❖ Undernutrition persists in extremely remote and rural parts of poorer states where access to any kind of food is low in states like **Bihar, Jharkhand, or Odisha**, where people might be eating just one meal a day.

3: Dimension: Impact

- ❖ An increase in obesity, especially in children, is likely to lead to an increase in diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart attacks, and strokes.
- ❖ Undernutrition is likely to increase the burden of non-communicable diseases.

4: Dimension: Required Measures

- ❖ Obesity and underweight should not be considered in isolation because the underweight-obesity transition can occur rapidly, leaving their combined burden unchanged or higher.
- ❖ The government need to focus on programmes that enhance healthy nutrition, such as targeted cash transfers, food assistance as subsidies or vouchers for healthy foods, free healthy school meals, and primary care-based nutritional interventions.

DATA BOX

Obesity

- **Obesity in women** has spiked in the past three decades — it increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022, according to the study.
 - There were 44 million women living with obesity in 2022.

- **Obesity in men** increased by 4.9 percentage points during the same period, with 26 million men living with obesity in 2022.
- **Childhood obesity** has also recorded a significant increase. There has been a spike of 3 percentage points in girls and 3.7 percentage points in boys over the 32 years that the study examined.
 - ▶ In other words, while 0.2 million boys and 0.2 million girls were obese in 1990, 7.3 million boys and 5.2 million girls were obese in 2022.

Underweight and thinness

- Despite a significant decline, the prevalence of underweight and thinness continues to be high across genders and age groups.
 - ▶ The study found that 13.7% of women and 12.5% of men were underweight.
- Thinness — a measure of being underweight in children — in Indian girls was found to be the highest in the world, with a prevalence of 20.3%.
- And, it was the second highest in Indian boys, with a prevalence of 21.7%.

9. DAM SAFETY IN INDIA

Context: The **National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA)** has formed a six-member panel to examine the three barrages of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)- **Annaram, Medigadda and Sundilla barrages**. The committee would investigate the reason behind the sinking of **Medigadda barrage** pillars and any potential damage in the two upstream barrages, **Annaram and Sundilla**.

1: Dimension: Indian dams, more vulnerable to deterioration

- ◆ Over 75% of the country's dams are over 25 years old and about 164 dams are more than 100 years old. With the increasing number of dams becoming older and older, dam failures are more expected now.
- ◆ **Earthen-built structure:** India's dams are more vulnerable to deterioration because a large proportion of them are earthen--built by compacting successive layers of earth, and not concrete--and are hence more prone to ageing.
- ◆ **Concentrated rainfall:** Secondly, the country gets concentrated rainfall every year for a designated time period as opposed to distributed rainfall, which contributes to the dams' vulnerability.
- ◆ **Siltation:** Siltation leads to a reduction in the storage capacity of the dams.

- ◆ **Flood disasters in downstream areas:** The downstream areas are often exposed to flood disasters even without a dam breach, in which water creates an opening in a dam due to rapid erosion of a section of the embankment.

2: Dimension: Older dams, a threat

Ageing dams could be associated with a number of deleterious and long-term consequences:

- ◆ **Safety risks:** Older dams pose greater safety risks, cost higher in terms of maintenance and have declining functionality due to sedimentation.
- ◆ **Loss of life and property:** Unsafe dams are a hazard and dam break may cause disasters, leading to huge loss of life and property.
- ◆ **Impact on Food Security:** When soil replaces the water in reservoirs, supply gets choked. Consequently, the cropped area may begin receiving less and less water as time progresses. As a result, the net sown water area either shrinks in size or depends on rains and groundwater (which ultimately gets over-exploited).
- ◆ **Increased Flooding:** The flawed siltation rates reinforce the argument that the designed flood cushion within several reservoirs across many river basins may have already depleted substantially, due to which floods have become more frequent downstream of dams.

10. NO IMMUNITY TO MPS, MLAS FOR BRIBERY

Context: The Supreme Court overruled its 1998 verdict in **PV Narasimha Rao-JMM Bribery case** and ruled that MPs and MLAs **do not enjoy immunity from prosecution for taking bribes** to vote or make speech in the Parliament or State legislature. The court said that there is a grave danger of this Court allowing an error to be perpetuated if the decision in PV Narasimha Rao case were not reconsidered.

1: Dimension: Background and Narasimha Rao Verdict:

- ◆ In the **PV Narasimha Rao-JMM bribery case of 1998**, allegations of bribery arose during a **no-confidence motion** against the Congress government, implicating MPs who voted against it.
- ◆ The Supreme Court considered whether MPs enjoy immunity from prosecution for bribery under **Article 105 of the Constitution** and the scope of the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**.
- ◆ The 5-judge bench ruled 3:2, granting **immunity to MPs** for acts associated with voting but not to those abstaining, stating that parliamentary privilege does not extend to criminal prosecution for bribery.

2: Dimension: Reasons for Overturning Narasimha Rao Verdict:

- ◆ **Immunity Not Essential for Legislative Duties:** The court ruled that immunity from prosecution for bribery is not essential for MPs and MLAs to discharge their legislative duties effectively.
- ◆ **Bribery Undermines Legislative Integrity:** Bribery undermines the integrity of legislative processes and contradicts the intent behind granting privileges to MPs and MLAs.
- ◆ **Corruption Not Protected by Legislative Privilege:** The court clarified that bribery is not shielded under Article 105(2) and Article 194(2) as it constitutes a criminal offense unrelated to the essential functions of voting or speech.
- ◆ **Distinct Jurisdiction of Courts and Legislature:** The jurisdiction of courts to prosecute criminal offenses and the authority of the House to discipline members for breaching legislative norms are separate domains.
- ◆ **Narasimha Rao Verdict's Paradoxical Outcome:** This interpretation contradicts the purpose and text of Articles 105 and 194, as it shields legislators from prosecution even after accepting bribes.

11. INDIA'S HEALTH CENTRES

Context: The deteriorating condition of public health centres in India, often described as emblematic of the country's failing healthcare system, has garnered attention due to a recent paper challenging this narrative. The paper highlights the ongoing struggles faced by these centres while also acknowledging signs of improvement and potential for redemption.

1: Dimension- Role of Health Centres in India's Healthcare System:

- **Backbone:** Health centres form the backbone of India's public healthcare system, providing **essential** primary care services across the country.
- **Accessible and affordable healthcare:** Comprising sub-centres, public health centres (PHCs), and community health centres (CHCs), these facilities aim to offer accessible and affordable healthcare, particularly in rural areas.

2: Dimension- Challenges Faced and Implications for Healthcare Equity:

- ◆ **Ineffectiveness:** Despite their vast number, reports indicate that less than 20% of these centres operate effectively, leading many underserved communities to rely on costly private healthcare services.

- ◆ **Burden on patients:** The prevalence of inadequate health centres contributes to significant health and financial burdens on patients, with nearly half of health expenditures in India still borne by individuals.

Study Overview and Scope:

Researchers examined 241 health centres across - Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan, with Himachal Pradesh noted as a longstanding leader in healthcare provision.

- ◆ **Positive improvements:** Contrary to common perceptions, the study found evidence of functionality across public health centres, indicating consistent operational hours, patient treatment, basic facilities, and largely free healthcare services, particularly notable in states other than Bihar.
- ◆ **The flip side:** The study highlights modest improvements in health centres, with ongoing challenges such as **staff absenteeism, limited services, and poor-quality care**, particularly evident in Bihar.
 - Neglected issues include **insufficient staff, funding irregularities, inadequate facilities, and social discrimination based on caste, class, gender, and religion.**
 - Investment in healthcare increased, but the "improvements are patchy" and allocations prioritise material development in tertiary healthcare.

- ◆ **What changed between 2002 and 2022?** The share of health expenditure in the Union Budget increased drastically, coupled with the introduction of the National Rural Health Mission. India's flagship Ayushman Bharat programme, launched with the vision of achieving universal health coverage, in 2018 introduced a health insurance component (PMJAY) and a public provision component through health and wellness centres (HWCs).

- ◆ Expanding and enhancing the functionality of health centres could serve as a pivotal solution to address social and health disparities, offering localized and more effective healthcare delivery compared to larger hospitals or private facilities.

12. NEED TO REFORM BAIL LAW

Context: The Supreme Court of India recently acknowledged the **ineffectiveness of India's bail system** and its contribution to crisis. Despite repeated guidelines on bail law (such as timelines, separate legislation), things have not changed much on the ground.

1: Dimension: Crisis in India's criminal justice system

- ◆ **Large number of undertrials:** Over 75% of India's prison population are undertrials while overcrowding in Indian prisons stands at 118%.

- ❖ **Marginalised persons bear the brunt:** The foundations of the current bail law ensure that it is anti-poor and disproportionately burdens those from marginalised backgrounds.
 - Data from the Fair Trial Programme (FTP) in Yerwada and Nagpur central prisons can be instructive here. Of the undertrials (2,313), 18.50% were migrants, 93.48% did not own any assets, 62.22% did not have any contact with family, and 10% had a history of previous incarceration.
- ❖ **Bail rejections with no clear rationale:** The power to grant bail rests on court discretion, guided by principles emphasizing release but allowing denial or imposing stringent conditions based on offense severity, accused character, and flight risk, yet often lacking clear rationale for rejection.
- ❖ **Incompliance:** Lack of means to arrange for money/property and local sureties are the most significant reasons accounting for an undertrial's inability to comply with bail conditions.
- ❖ **Flawed assumptions:** The current bail system operates on flawed assumptions of wealth and social connections, undermining the principle of "**bail not jail**" for many undertrial individuals, necessitating urgent reform grounded in empirical understanding.

2: Dimension: Required measures

- ❖ **Presumption of innocence:** Crowding jails with undertrial prisoners ignored the principle of '**presumption of innocence**' and that '**bail not jail**' should be the norm. However, there is still a need to reflect on why these established principles are honoured more in their breach than observance.
- ❖ **Effective bail law:** An effective bail law must be based on the correlation of these answers with variables such as the demographics of undertrials, category of offences and timelines for bail, and also address socio-economic and structural barriers.
- ❖ **Enforcement of safeguards** against arbitrary arrest would eliminate the need to seek bail from courts.

13. INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDY & QUESTIONS

Context: Thailand's replacement of its **WTO Ambassador** follows **India's objection to her remarks on India's PSH (Public Stockholding) programme**, which sparked diplomatic friction amid concerns over India's rice export restrictions. Thai Ambassador had targeted India's rice procurement programme saying its Public Distribution System (PDS), is **not for the people but for "capturing" the export market**.

1: Dimension: Thailand's Issues

- ❖ Thailand is a member of the **20-nation Cairns Group**, which has time and again questioned India's PSH programme at WTO.

- ❖ It has argued that the programme is "highly subsidised" and India's farm support is "distorting" **global food prices** and "hurting" the **food security of other countries**.
- ❖ The **Cairns group** is trying to get India to dismantle or reduce the scope of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme.

2: Dimension: WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)

- ❖ Under the provisions of the **WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)**, the aggregate value of the product-specific support should not exceed 5% of the total value of production of the agricultural product in question.
- ❖ In the case of developing countries such as India, the de minimis ceiling is 10%.
- ❖ **Thailand's stand:** India has breached the **de minimis** limit in the case of rice.
- ❖ **India's stand:** India informed the WTO that the value of its rice production in 2019-20 was \$46.07 billion while it gave subsidies worth \$6.31 billion or 13.7%, as against the permitted 10%.
 - However, India has questioned the way subsidies are calculated at the WTO, saying it is calculated at a fixed and outdated 1986-88 price, which overestimates the subsidy. India is seeking to change it at the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

3: Dimension: India's demands

- ❖ India and a group of developing nations are seeking a **permanent solution for public stockholding for food grains** that will give India better flexibility in providing farm support.
- ❖ India has been arguing that the subsidy that it provides is far less than what the US and EU give.
- ❖ Since WTO norms restrict the government's ability to provide higher farm support, **farmers** have demanded the agriculture sector be taken out of the WTO agreement.
- ❖ Calling the WTO policies "anti-farmer", the farmers also demanded legal guarantees for MSP, debt waiver, the implementation of **Swaminathan Commission recommendations** on issues related to agriculture, and pensions for farmers.

Cairns group

The Cairns group comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, Uruguay, and Vietnam. It has been lobbying for agricultural trade liberalisation.

14. BLOOMBERG TO ADD INDIAN BONDS TO EM INDEXES

Context: Bloomberg announced including Indian government securities called "Fully Accessible Route (FAR) bonds" in the Bloomberg Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices, to be phased in over a ten-month period, starting January 31, 2025.

1: Dimension- Impact of index inclusion

- ◆ The weighting of FAR bonds will be increased in increments of 10 per cent of their full market value every month over the 10-month period ending in October 2025, when they will be weighted at their full market value in the indices.
- ◆ Within the **market cap weighted version** of the index, India is expected to be the largest country after **China and South Korea**.
- ◆ The inclusion could attract billions of dollars of foreign investment in the **Indian government securities (G-Sec) market**.
- ◆ Bloomberg Indices will create an **ex-India version of the EM Local Currency Government Index** and other standard and custom versions of the index.
- ◆ This is an **important marker in the development of India's financial markets** and a reflection of India's growing importance to the global economy.

2: Dimension- Scope for inclusion

- ◆ **Indices in scope for inclusion** include the:
 - ▶ Bloomberg EM Local Currency Government Index
 - ▶ Bloomberg EM Local Currency Government Index
 - ▶ 10 per cent Country Capped Index
 - ▶ all related sub-indices
- ◆ India will continue to be excluded from the **Bloomberg Global Aggregate and related indices**.
- ◆ FAR is a separate channel introduced by the RBI, in consultation with the Government, for non-resident investment in G-Secs with effect from April 1, 2020.
- ◆ The eligible investors can invest in specified Government securities without any investment ceilings.

This is the second major global index that will be including Indian bonds. JP Morgan had announced index inclusion from June 2024.

15. AI'S CARBON FOOTPRINT

Context: The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in addressing the climate crisis poses a paradox: while AI holds

promise for solving environmental challenges, the energy demands of AI models contribute to carbon emissions, particularly through the infrastructure supporting data centers.

1: Dimension: Scope of the problem

- ◆ **Source of emission:** The emissions come from the infrastructure associated with AI, such as building and running the data centres that handle the large amounts of information required to sustain these systems.
 - ▶ To put things in perspective, training GPT-3 (the precursor AI system to the current ChatGPT) generated 502 metric tonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to driving 112 petrol powered cars for a year.
 - ▶ GPT-3 further emits 8.4 tonnes of CO₂ annually due to inference.

2: Dimension- Technological approach to reduce emission

- ◆ Different technological approaches to build AI systems could help reduce its carbon footprint. Two technologies in particular hold promise for doing this: spiking neural networks and lifelong learning.
- ◆ **Spiking neural networks (SNNs) and lifelong learning (L2)**, have the potential to lower AI's ever-increasing carbon footprint, with SNNs acting as an **energy-efficient alternative to Artificial neural networks (ANN)**.
 - ▶ **Artificial neural networks (ANNs)**, which learn patterns from data to make predictions, require significant computing power due to their reliance on decimal numbers, leading to increased energy consumption as networks grow larger and more complex, mirroring the brain's structure with billions of interconnected neurons.
- ◆ **L2** is a set of algorithms aimed at minimizing forgetting in sequentially trained artificial neural networks (ANNs), allowing models to learn new tasks without losing previous knowledge, thereby reducing the need for energy-intensive retraining from scratch.
- ◆ **Advances in quantum computing** could revolutionize training and inference processes in ANNs and SNNs, potentially offering energy-efficient solutions for AI on a much larger scale

16. METHANESAT TO TRACK METHANE

Context: MethaneSAT — a satellite to track and measure methane emissions at a global scale — was launched aboard a SpaceX Falcon9 rocket.

1: Dimension- Methane's role in global warming

- ◆ Methane is an invisible but **strong greenhouse gas**, and the **second largest contributor to global warming** after **carbon dioxide**, responsible for **30 per cent of global heating** since the Industrial Revolution. Over a period of 20 years, methane is **80 times more potent** at warming than carbon dioxide.
- ◆ The gas also contributes to the formation of **ground-level ozone** — a colourless and highly irritating gas that forms just above the Earth's surface.
 - ▶ According to a 2022 report, exposure to ground-level ozone could be contributing to one million premature deaths every year.
- ◆ Therefore, it is crucial to cut methane emissions. And the main culprit: **fossil fuel operations**, which account for about 40 per cent of all **human-caused methane emissions**. The objective of MethaneSAT is to help achieve this goal.

2: Dimension- Role of MethaneSAT is filling critical data gaps

- ◆ Essentially, MethaneSAT will orbit the Earth 15 times a day, monitoring the oil and gas sector.
- ◆ It will create a large amount of data, which will tell "how much methane is coming from where, who's responsible, and are those emissions going up or down over time".

- ◆ The data is to be available public for free in near real-time to allow stakeholders and regulators to take action to reduce methane emissions.
- ◆ Equipped with a **high-resolution infrared sensor** and a **spectrometer**, MethaneSAT will fill critical data gaps.
- ◆ It can track differences in methane concentrations as small as three parts per billion in the atmosphere, which enables it to pick up smaller emissions sources than the previous satellites.
- ◆ MethaneSAT also has a wide-camera view — of about 200 km by 200 km — allowing it to identify larger emitters so-called "**super emitters**".

3: Dimension- Why is MethaneSAT significant?

- ◆ The launch of MethaneSAT has come at a moment when the world is implementing more stringent methane management policies.
- ◆ More than 150 countries signed the **Global Methane Pledge in 2021**, to cut their collective methane emissions by at least 30 per cent from 2020 levels by 2030.
- ◆ At last year's COP, more than 50 companies committed to **virtually eliminating methane emissions and routine flaring**. MethaneSAT will help them meet these targets.



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B

SPECIALS

☞ India's Nuclear Power Programme

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INDIA'S NUCLEAR POWER PROGRAMME

Context: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the start of fuel loading at the **500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor** at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu. **Fast breeder reactors** form the second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme.

1: Dimension: India's three-stage programmes & Goals

- ◆ India has adopted a three-stage nuclear power programme, with the long-term goal of deploying a **thorium-based closed nuclear fuel cycle**.
 - The **first stage** involves the use of pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs), fuelled by natural uranium, and light water reactors.
 - The **second stage** involves reprocessing used fuel from the first stage to recover the plutonium to fuel FBRs.
 - In **stage 3**, Advanced Heavy Water Reactors (AHWRs) will burn thorium-plutonium fuels and breed fissile uranium-233.
- ◆ The PFBR will initially use a core of **uranium-plutonium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel**, surrounded by a **uranium-238 'blanket'**, with plans to use a blanket of uranium and thorium to "breed" plutonium and **U-233** for use as driver fuels for AHWRs.

2: Dimension: Significance

- ◆ The growth of the Indian nuclear power program is imperative to meet the twin goals of **energy security and sustainable development**.
- ◆ As a **responsible nuclear power with advanced technology**, India remains committed to expand peaceful applications of nuclear technology, both in power and non-power sector, while ensuring the security of nuclear and radiological materials.
- ◆ Once commissioned, India will be the second country after Russia to have a commercially operating fast breeder reactor. Many countries, including the US, Japan and France, have tried developing fast breeder reactors and have given up due to repeated failure to safely handle liquid sodium.

Fact Box: About PFBR

- The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) is a machine that produces more nuclear fuel than it consumes.
- The operationalisation of the PFBR marks the start of stage II of India's three-stage nuclear power programme.
- The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) has been developed by **BHAVINI (Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited)**, a government enterprise under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) which was set up in 2003 to focus on fast breeder reactors.
- Construction of the PFBR began in 2004, with an original expected completion date of 2010.
- In the first, India used pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs) and natural uranium-238 (U-238), which contains minuscule amounts of U-235, as the fissile material.





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- ❧ 'Article 371-like' shield for Ladakh
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1. ODISHA'S RUPA TARAKASI GETS GI TAG

Context: The famous silver filigree (Rupa Tarakasi) of the millennium Cuttack city in Odisha has received the geographical indication (GI) tag from the Chennai-based Geographical Indications Registry.

About

- It is a centuries-old sophisticated craft practiced in the silver city of Cuttack.
- Rupa Tarakasi is one of the most exquisite silver crafts. In this work of craft, silver bricks are transformed into thin fine wires (tara) or foils, from which silver filigree is made with all designs (kasi).

2. INDIA LAUNCHES CHAKSHU

Context: The Department of Telecommunications launched the **Digital Intelligence Platform** and **Chakshu** as part of the **Sanchar Saathi portal**, which was unveiled in May last year.

Chakshu

- Chakshu can be used by citizens to **report suspected fraudulent communication**, wherein users can report numbers, messages and phishing attempts.
- Users can log on to the Chakshu window inbuilt on the **Sanchar Saathi portal** and fill out a form with details pertaining to the medium of the fraud communication, such as SMS, call or WhatsApp.
- Users are then required to define what category the communication fits in, such as sextortion, fake consumer helpline, fake KYC, and impersonation, among others.
- This is followed by screenshots of the communication and any other details to be added.

Digital Intelligence Platform

- The Digital Intelligence Platform is an inter-agency effort to enable the sharing of cybercriminal data between banks, social media platforms, and wallet operators, among other stakeholders.

Sanchar Saathi platform

- Launched in:** 2023
- Introduced by:** Department of Telecommunications
- The Sanchar Saathi Portal is an innovative initiative aimed at empowering mobile subscribers and enhancing their security while increasing awareness of government initiatives.

3. PM SURYA GHAR: MUFT BIJLI YOJANA SCHEME

Context: The Union Cabinet approved a rooftop solar scheme as '**PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana**' to install rooftop solar panels across 10 million households with a total outlay of Rs 75,021 crore.

Key-details of the Scheme

- PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana** is a government scheme that aims to provide free electricity to households in India.
- Financial assistance:** The scheme provides a **Central Financial Assistance** of 60 percent of system cost for 2 kW systems and 40 percent of additional system cost for systems between 2 to 3 kW capacity.
- Beneficiaries of scheme** will get free electricity of up to 300 units per month. It could result in savings of Rs 15,000-18,000 annually for households that install rooftop solar systems.
- National Portal:** Households will apply for subsidy through the National Portal and will be able to select a suitable vendor for installing rooftop solar.
- Model village:** Under the scheme, 'A Model Solar Village' will be developed in each district of the country to act as a role model for adoption of rooftop solar in rural areas.

Rooftop Solar Programme

- A residential rooftop solar scheme was already in place.
- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) had launched the old 'Rooftop Solar Programme Phase-II' in 2019, with the objective of achieving 4,000 MW of rooftop solar capacity in the residential sector by providing subsidy or central financial assistance.
- As of November 2023, the capacity installed under Phase-II of the scheme was 2,651.10 MW.

4. HOLISTIC PROGRESS CARD (HPC)

Context: The **National Council for Educational and Research Training (NCERT)** has introduced a new "holistic" report card that incorporates feedback from parents, classmates, and even self-evaluation by students to track their overall progress regularly.

About Holistic Progress Card (HPC)

- PARAKH**, a standard-setting body under the NCERT, has devised the **Holistic Progress Card (HPC)** for

foundational stage (Classes 1 and 2), preparatory stage (Classes 3 to 5) and middle stage (Classes 6 to 8) and is currently working on developing one for the secondary stage.

- ◆ The HPC is aligned with the recommendations of the **National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE)**.
- ◆ This attempt aims to move away from **traditional evaluation methods** that rely on marks and grades awarded by school teachers

5. 'ARTICLE 371-LIKE' SHIELD FOR LADAKH

Context: In the backdrop of **protests across Ladakh**, the Centre is mulling granting Article 371-like protection to the Union Territory.

What is Article 371?

- ◆ Articles 371, 371A, 371B, 371C, 371D, 371E, 371F, 371G, 371H, and 371J define special provisions with regard to another state (or states).
 - ▶ Article 371, Maharashtra and Gujarat
 - ▶ Article 371A (13th Amendment Act, 1962), Nagaland
 - ▶ Article 371B (22nd Amendment Act, 1969), Assam
 - ▶ Article 371C (27th Amendment Act, 1971), Manipur
 - ▶ Article 371D (32nd Amendment Act, 1973; substituted by The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
 - ▶ Article 371E
 - ▶ Article 371F (36th Amendment Act, 1975), Sikkim
 - ▶ Article 371G (53rd Amendment Act, 1986), Mizoram
 - ▶ Article 371H (55th Amendment Act, 1986), Arunachal Pradesh
 - ▶ Article 371J (98th Amendment Act, 2012), Karnataka

Role of Special status

- ◆ The main objectives behind the Article 371 granting special provisions to some states are to meet the unique needs of the backward regions of these states, protect the economic and cultural interests of these regions, combat the local challenges and protect the customary laws in these regions.

Articles 369 through 392 (including some that have been removed) appear in Part XXI of the Constitution, titled 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions'.

6. INDIA'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DIPS

Context: India's unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years or above declined to 3.1 per cent in 2023, the lowest in the last three years, as per a report by the National Sample Survey Organisation under the statistics ministry. The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** for the calendar year 2023 indicates a positive trend, showcasing a decline from 3.6% in 2022 and 4.2% in 2021.

Key-highlights of the Data

- ◆ The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** for the calendar year 2023 shows the unemployment rate came down to 3.1 per cent in 2023 from 3.6 per cent in 2022 and 4.2 per cent in 2021.
- ◆ The employment situation is improving after the Covid pandemic hit the country.
- ◆ **Gender-wise data:**
 - ▶ **For females**, the **unemployment rate** declined to 3 per cent in 2023 from 3.3 per cent in 2022 and 3.4 per cent in 2021.
 - ▶ **For males**, it came down to 3.2 per cent in 2023 from 3.7 per cent in 2022 and 4.5 per cent in 2021.
- ◆ **Region-wise data**
 - ▶ **In Urban areas:** The overall rate of unemployment also declined to 5.2 per cent in 2023 from 5.7 per cent in 2022 and 6.5 per cent 2021.
 - ▶ **In rural areas:** It came down to 2.4 per cent in 2023 from 2.8 per cent in 2022 and 3.3 per cent in 2021.
- ◆ **Labour force participation rate (LFPR)** in Current Weekly Status (CWS) in urban areas for people aged 15 years and above increased to 56.2 per cent in 2023 from 52.8 per cent in 2022 and 51.8 per cent in 2021.

7. INDIA'S FIRST-EVER UNDERWATER METRO ROUTE

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated **India's first-ever underwater metro route** in Kolkata, a landmark project showcasing the nation's stride towards infrastructure development.

About

- ◆ The underwater service is part of the **Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section of Kolkata Metro's East-West corridor**, which will cover a distance of 16.6 km under the Hooghly river.

- ◆ The metro service will connect **Howrah and Salt Lake** -- the West Bengal state capital's twin cities. Three out of six stations will be underground.
- ◆ It is expected to zoom through a 520-meter stretch under the **Hooghly** in just 45 seconds.

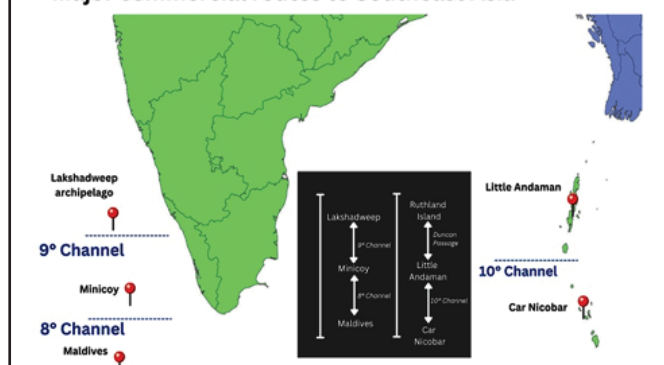
8. INS JATAYU

Context: The Indian Navy commissioned a new naval base, **INS Jatayu**, in the **Minicoy Islands of Lakshadweep**.

About

- ◆ INS Jatayu is India's forward operating naval base in the Arabian Sea, acting as India's sentinel and a primary responder to the escalating threats.
- ◆ INS Jatayu is **India's second naval base** in Lakshadweep after **INS Dweep** in **Kavaratti**.
- ◆ Other key forward-operating bases and radar stations in Lakshadweep include INS Androth, INS Bitra, and INS Minicoy.
 - **Minicoy Islands** is the southernmost island of Lakshadweep, about 215 nautical miles southwest of Kochi, which straddles the vital Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs).

Major commercial routes to Southeast Asia



Fact Box: The Lakshadweep Islands

- Lakshadweep is an archipelago of 36 islands located between 220 km and 440 km from Kochi.
- The islands, only 11 of which are inhabited, have a total area of only 32 sq km.
- The Lakshadweep are part of a **chain of coralline islands** in the Indian Ocean that includes **Maldives** to the south, and the **Chagos archipelago** farther beyond, to the south of the **equator**.

9. AGALEGA ISLAND

Context: India and Mauritius inaugurated a strategic **airstrip and jetty** in the country's outer **Agaléga Island**.

Details

- ◆ The new airstrip and St. James Jetty in the country's outer **Agaléga Island**, located 650 km away from the main Mauritius island.
- ◆ The airstrip was extended from 1,300 metres to 3,000 metres to accommodate larger aircraft, while St James Jetty was expanded from 80 metres to 255 metres.

The island

- The Agalega is a group of two small islands-
 - the North island which is the main island
 - the South Island, located in the Indian Ocean, 1122 Km (697 miles) north of Mauritius
- Both islands are part of the territories and dependencies of the Republic of Mauritius.

10. ARIYALUR'S RAMSAR WETLAND KARAIVETTI BIRD SANCTUARY

Context: Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary in Ariyalur district, which was recently recognised as a Ramsar site hosts over 20,000 feathered visitors from all over the world.

About

- ◆ Covering 453.7 hectares, Karaivetti is home to over **500 species of flora and fauna**.
- ◆ Its geographical location on the **Central Asian Flyway** makes it an important breeding and foraging ground for birds.
- ◆ It is surrounded by paddy fields and so far has been free from the human wildlife conflict. More than 20,000 migratory birds visits the wetland regularly.
- ◆ The **heronry of Karavetti Birds Sanctuary** has more than 10,000 individuals of colonial nesting water birds.
- ◆ **Near-threatened bird species** like **Spot-billed Pelican, Black-headed Ibis and Oriental Darter** nest in the trees of the wetland.
- ◆ The **Indian Flap-shelled Turtle** can be found nesting in the swampy regions here.
- ◆ The sanctuary, one of the largest inland wetlands of Tamil Nadu, was recently declared a **Ramsar site**, along with the **Longwood Shola reserve forest** in **The Nilgiris**.

11. EUNECTES AKIYAMA: NEW SPECIES OF GREEN ANACONDA

Context: Researchers studying the genetic makeup of various types of anacondas in the Amazon rainforest have discovered that there are two genetically distinct types of green anaconda — a species previously categorized as a single animal.

About

- ◆ It was thought that there was only one species of green anaconda in the wild, the *Eunectes murinus* (southern green anaconda), but the recent research revealed that the new “northern green anaconda” belongs to a different, new species, *Eunectes akiyama* (northern green anaconda).
 - ▶ **The southern green anaconda** can be found in **Peru, Bolivia, French Guiana and Brazil.**
 - ▶ **The northern green anaconda** in **Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana.**
- ◆ The two species split from each other almost 10 million years ago.

12. INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT ALLIANCE

Context: India's initiatives to conserve big cats, including the establishment of the International Big Cat Alliance, have drawn global attention and recognition. The Union Cabinet recently gave a go-ahead to establishing the **International Big Cat Alliance**.

What are the 7 big cats?

- ◆ The seven big cats are Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Puma, Jaguar and the Cheetah.
- ◆ Out of these, Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard and Cheetah are the only big cats found in India.

IBC Alliance

- ◆ It is one of the most significant steps to bring range and non-range countries on a common platform.
- ◆ International organisations and IBCA: Nine international organisations have given consent; they are IUCN, Science and Conservation International Snow Leopard Trust, Global Tiger Forum, FAO; HE Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General of UNWTO; The Amur Tiger Centre;

WWF International; World Customs Organization, Midori Paxtor; Director Nature Hub Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP.

- ◆ IBC Alliance Headquarters: The International Big Cat Alliance's headquarters will be in India.

13. INDIA'S LEOPARD POPULATION

Context: India's leopard population has reached 13,874, with 1.08 percent per year growth between 2018 and 2022, as per a report released by the Environment Ministry.

Key-highlights of the Report

- ◆ The report is based on the **fifth cycle of the leopard population estimation**, conducted in 2022.
- ◆ **Madhya Pradesh** houses the largest population of leopards in the country: 3907 (2018: 3421), followed by **Maharashtra (1985), Karnataka (1,879) and Tamil Nadu (1,070).**
- ◆ **Tiger Reserves or sites with the highest leopard population** are, Nagarajunasagar Srisailam (Andhra Pradesh), followed by Panna (Madhya Pradesh), and Satpura (Madhya Pradesh).
- ◆ **Central India** shows a stable or slightly growing population of leopards (2018: 8071, 2022: 8820), Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains experienced a decline (2018: 1253, 2022: 1109).
 - ▶ **Growth:** The largest growth rate was in Central India and the Eastern Ghats at 1.5 percent.
 - ▶ **Decline:** However, there is a 3.4 percent decline per year in the population growth of leopards in the Shivalik Hills and the Gangetic Plains.

About Leopard

- **Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)** is one of the five big cat species of the genus *Panthera*.
- They are the smallest of the large cats, which includes lions, tigers, and jaguars.
- **Habitat:** Leopard habitats include forests, subtropical and tropical regions, savannas, grasslands, deserts, and rocky and mountainous regions. They can live in both warm and cold climates. Of all the big cat species, leopards are the only known species that live in both desert and rainforest habitats.
- **Geography:** Their range covers a large stretch of **Africa, parts of the Middle East, and Asia, including China, India, and eastern Russia.**



SECTION D**TERMS OF THE WEEK**

S.NO.	TERM	ABOUT
1	Aadhaar Mitra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aadhaar Mitra is a chatbot launched by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to assist individuals with their Aadhaar-related queries. It's essentially a virtual assistant readily available on the UIDAI website to answer your questions and offer various Aadhaar services.
2	Critical Mineral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Mines of India defines critical minerals as those minerals that are essential for economic development and national security. These minerals are Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.
3	Decarbonisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decarbonisation is the term used for removal or reduction of carbon dioxide output into the atmosphere.
4	No-Confidence Motion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A no-confidence motion is a parliamentary process that allows the opposition to challenge the government's majority and ability to govern.
5	Parliamentary privileges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliamentary privileges can be divided into two broad categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Individual Privileges refers to the privileges enjoyed by the members individually ► Collective Privileges refer to those which are enjoyed by the house as a collective body.
6	Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) is a nuclear reactor designed to generate electricity by using fast neutrons to convert uranium-238 into plutonium-239, which then undergoes fission to release energy. It is a type of breeder reactor, it generates more power than it consumes and uses the nuclear waste -- Uranium-238. India has been running a Fast Breeder Test Reactor experimental facility since 1985
7	Middle-income countries (MICs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the World Bank, middle-income countries (MICs) are defined as economies with a gross national income (GNI) per capita between \$1,136 and \$13,845 as of 2024. MICs consist of lower-middle-income countries and upper-middle-income countries,
8	Improvised Explosive Device (IED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An IED is basically a home-made bomb. IEDs can be deployed using a vehicle, carried, placed, or thrown by a person, delivered in a package, or concealed on the roadside. IEDs are not simply used to kill and injure — they have often, especially in active war zones, been used as distractions
9	Gross Value Added (GVA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gross Value Added (GVA) is the value that producers have added to the goods and services they have bought.
10	Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of any nation represents the sum total of gross value added (GVA) in all the sectors of that economy during the said year after adjusting for taxes and subsidies. $\text{GDP} = \text{GVA} + \text{taxes} - \text{subsidies}$
11	Body mass index (BMI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BMI is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
12	Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), obesity is an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat that poses health risks.
13	Underweight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underweight is one of the four broad sub-forms of undernutrition. An adult is considered underweight if their BMI is less than 18 kg/m². School-aged children and adolescents are considered underweight if their BMI is two standard deviations below the mean.

14	Trade distortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trade distortion is a situation where prices and production are higher or lower than levels that would usually exist in a competitive market. As per WTO, nearly all domestic support measures are considered to distort such trade, but they are permitted to a certain limit called the 'de minimis' limit.
15	Ramsar Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Ramsar site is a wetland designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, an international environmental treaty signed on February 2, 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, under the auspices of UNESCO.
16	Central Asian Flyway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Asian Flyway is a major migratory route for birds, covering 30 countries from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. A flyway is a geographical region within which a number of migratory bird species complete their annual cycle. The annual cycle includes breeding, moulting, staging and non-breeding.
17	Gender Disparity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another.
18	Labour Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour force refers to the part of the population which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and, therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons.
19	Government Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government securities are essential instruments in the financial market, serving as a means for the government to borrow funds and meet its fiscal requirements.
20	Fully accessible route (FAR) bonds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAR bonds are debt instruments that allow foreign investors to invest in specified government of India dated securities.
21	Bloomberg EM Local Currency Liquid Government Bond Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a country-constrained index designed to provide a broad measure of the performance of liquid local currency emerging markets debt. It limits country exposure to a maximum of 10% and redistributes the excess market value index-wide on a pro-rata basis.
22	Carbon footprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon footprint, amount of carbon dioxide emissions associated with all the activities of a person or other entity.
23	Naval detachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A naval detachment has administrative, logistics, and medical facilities.





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