

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY



MAINS ARTICLE

GS-I

- URBAN FLOODING IN BENGALURU
- CYCLONES AND CLIMATE CHANGE
- MARULAYYA'S 1539 FAMINE RELIEF INSCRIPTION FOUND

GS-II

- SHIFT IN US POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA
- INDIA'S NORTHEAST, BANGLADESH & NEIGHBOURS
- INDIA'S STAND ON PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR POSTURE
- INDIA-BANGLADESH TRADE RELATIONS
- CAN NEW CALEDONIA GAIN INDEPENDENCE FROM FRANCE?
- INDIA-PAKISTAN CEASEFIRE AND US INVOLVEMENT
- INDIA'S GLOBAL OUTREACH ON OPERATION SINDOOR BEGINS
- INSTITUTIONAL RESPECT AND CONSTITUTIONAL SUPREMACY CRUCIAL IN A DEMOCRACY
- PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE TO THE SUPREME COURT (ARTICLE 143)

- SC RESTORES RULE MANDATING 3-YEAR LAW PRACTICE FOR JUDICIAL SERVICE

- DOES ARTICLE 21 INCLUDE RIGHT TO DIGITAL ACCESS?

- SHOULD NOTA BE INCLUDED IN ALL ELECTIONS COMPULSORILY

GS-III

- STRATEGIC SHIFT IN INDIA'S PORT POLICY
- OIL MARKET CRISIS
- UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN INDIA
- ACCOUNT AGGREGATORS & CONSENT MANAGERS UNDER THE DPDP ACT
- INDIA'S TRADE RELATIONS WITH TURKEY AND AZERBAIJAN
- THE 'CORE' OF INFLATION, AND RBI'S RATE CUTTING DECISIONS
- POVERTY DECLINE IN INDIA AFTER 2011-12
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ART & CULTURE

- Saraswati Pushkaralu
- International Booker Prize

GEOGRAPHY

- Mahadayi (Mhadei) River
- Brooklyn Bridge

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- Renaming by China
- Colombia joins China's BRI
- India to give intel on Pak camps to FATF
- WHO Pandemic Agreement

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

- Dr. Ajay Kumar Assumes Charge as UPSC Chairman
- Kaleshwaram Inquiry Commission
- 50 years of Sikkim's Statehood
- Jyoti Rani Espionage Case
- 52nd Chief Justice of India
- Lok Adalat
- Advanced Multi Agency Centre to combat terrorism
- India Soura Giri Vikasam
- e-Zero FIR initiative

- Mismatch between MGNREGS coverage, delivery: Report
- Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) Case
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- Birth Rates in India
- Gaza on the Brink of Famine: WHO

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- Futures & Options
- SIP Cancellation
- RBI's Surplus

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- Mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles
- Asiatic Lions

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- Himalayan Leap for Yak Genomic Science
- Akash Missile System
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- ISRO's EOS-09 Satellite Mission Fail
- Axiom-4 mission
- Indian Astrophysicist who challenged Big Bang Theory
- How Stars Die: White Dwarfs, Neutron Stars, and Supernovae

GS SCORE

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DISCLAIMER

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

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

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SECTION -A

MAINS ISSUES

URBAN FLOODING IN BENGALURU

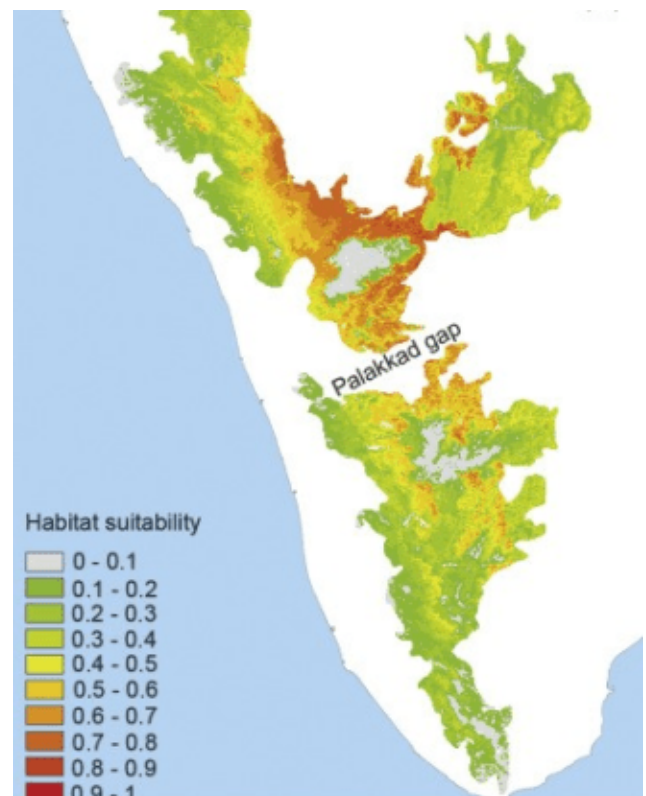
Context:

Bengaluru witnessed unprecedented rainfall, leading to severe waterlogging and floods in several parts of the city. The heavy rainfall, or climatic pattern, known as the **pre-monsoon or 'mango showers'**, is reportedly caused by a mix of weather conditions, mainly due to a **cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal** and a **weather line running from Maharashtra to Kerala**, passing through Karnataka. These combined factors led to widespread downpour across the region.

What are Mango Showers?

- These rains are called **mango showers** because they usually occur in **April and May**, just before the southwest monsoon sets in, and help ripen the mango crop.
- They are common across southern India, particularly in **Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu**.
- Geographical Trigger (The Western Ghats):** Bengaluru lies on the **leeward side of the Western Ghats**, which typically **blocks moist winds** from reaching the **Deccan Plateau**. However, a **natural break** called the **Palakkad Gap** (a 40-km-wide valley in Kerala) acts like a **wind tunnel**, allowing the moisture-laden winds from the Arabian Sea to flow inland towards Bengaluru.
- Urban Heat & Orographic Lift:** During the summer months, Bengaluru's land surface heats up significantly. This causes **convection**, where warm air rises. When this rising air meets the cooler, moist

winds funneled through the **Palakkad Gap**, clouds quickly form and result in **sudden rainfall**, often in the late afternoon or evening.



Geographic features of Hyderabad

- Hyderabad is situated on the **Mysore Plateau**, Bengaluru stands at a high elevation (greater than 97% of Indian cities).

- It is technically qualifies as a hill station.
- It is located partly in the **Cauvery watershed**, but at an altitude that demands energy-intensive water pumping.
- It is home to numerous valleys, which have been built over due to unregulated urban expansion.

Why are these showers causing flooding now?

- **Unabated urbanisation:** Now referred to as the Silicon Valley of India, Bangalore was once also known as the 'City of Lakes'. However, increased urbanisation seems to have changed the local landscape of the city.
- The Master Plan of 2015 claimed that Bangalore once had 400 lakes. But with the passage of time, government data claims that it reduced to 260 by the 1940s and has now come down to 65.
- **Encroachment of lakes, tanks and drains:** Bangalore, owing to its undulating terrain, is home to a plethora of lakes that are interconnected by a system of **canals/drain**s called **kaluve**, which ensures the transfer of excess water from one lake to another. Although the city lacks a perennial river, tributary rivers like the **Arkavathi, Pinakini/Pennar and Shimsha** help to drain the excess water from the city and into the **Kaveri river**. However, the encroachment of lakes lead to interference in the city drainage system.
- **Uncontrolled and unregulated construction activity:** The high-rise structures has led to a 30 to 40-foot deep concrete layer under the city, preventing rainwater from percolating underground and contributing to flooding in various parts of the city.
- **Climate Change: Pre-monsoon rains have become more intense and unpredictable.** Warmer ocean temperatures in the Arabian Sea and changing wind patterns have amplified moisture content, making even pre-monsoon showers more powerful.
- **Other reasons:**
 - Large-scale loss of green cover
 - Lack of attention towards conserving and regulating floodplains of water bodies

Government Measures for Urban Flooding

- **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 Scheme:** It provides for rainwater harvesting through storm water drains into water body (which is not receiving sewage/effluent) & creation/ strengthening of storm water drains around water body.
- **Other measures:**
 - Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA)

- Amrit Sarovar Mission
- Atal Bhujal Yojana
- Model Building Bye Laws (MBBL), 2016

Mains PYQ:

- Q: The interlinking of rivers can provide viable solutions to the multi-dimensional inter-related problems of droughts, floods, and interrupted navigation. Critically examine. (2020)**
- Q: Account for the huge flooding of million cities in India including the smart ones like Hyderabad and Pune. Suggest lasting remedial measures. (2020)**

CYCLONES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Context::

A recent study published by researchers at **ETH Zurich, Switzerland**, revealed that **tropical cyclones are expected to intensify and expand their geographical reach** due to **climate change**, particularly under the **SSP5-8.5 scenario**. The findings highlight increasing risks to **ecosystems such as mangroves** and **regions previously unaffected by cyclones**, making it a significant concern in climate risk assessment and conservation planning.

Findings from ETH Zurich Studies:

■ Cyclones and Ecoregions:

- Used the **CLIMADA risk modeling tool** and datasets like **STORM-B/C** to simulate cyclone risk for **1980–2017** and **2015–2050**.
- **Ecoregions were classified** into:
 - ◆ **Resilient:** Regularly exposed, recover quickly.
 - ◆ **Dependent:** Ecosystems shaped by frequent cyclones.
 - ◆ **Vulnerable:** Rarely disturbed, poor recovery.
- Projected **decline in recovery periods:**
 - ◆ E.g., from 19 years to 12 years between high-intensity storms in resilient regions.
- **New vulnerable regions** predicted: East Asia, Central America, parts of Oceania.

Impact on Mangroves:

- Assessed **global mangrove risk** due to **tropical cyclones and sea-level rise**.
- Key risks modelled:
 - **Hazard** (intensity/frequency of cyclones)
 - **Vulnerability** (adaptive capacity of mangroves)
 - **Exposure** (mangrove overlap with high-risk zones)

- Under **SSP5-8.5**:
 - **56%** of mangrove areas at **high to severe risk by 2100**.
 - **Southeast Asia** could lose **52–78%** of its mangroves.

Importance of Mangroves

- **Carbon sequestration**: Store 4–5x more carbon than terrestrial forests.
- **Storm protection**: Natural barriers reducing cyclone impact.
- **Fish nurseries**: Enhance coastal biodiversity and livelihoods.
- **Soil conservation**: Prevent erosion and saltwater intrusion.

Implications

- **Ecological tipping points**: Cyclone-hit areas may not recover, transforming ecosystems permanently.
- **New cyclone belts**: Likely to shift poleward, threatening **non-tropical regions**.
- **Biodiversity loss**: Threatens both terrestrial and marine species.
- **Disaster preparedness**: Demands climate-resilient planning and early-warning systems.

Key Concepts & Terminologies

- **Tropical Cyclones**
 - Low-pressure systems that form over warm tropical waters.
 - Characterized by high wind speeds and heavy rainfall.
 - Regions like the **Bay of Bengal, Caribbean, and Western Pacific** are cyclone-prone.
- **SSPs – Shared Socioeconomic Pathways**:
 - These are scenario frameworks used in climate modeling to study future global developments.
 - **SSP2-4.5**: Intermediate scenario (moderate efforts to curb emissions).
 - **SSP3-7.0**: Fragmented world, minimal environmental concern.
 - **SSP5-8.5**: Fossil-fuel-intensive development with high greenhouse gas emissions.
 - **SSP5-8.5** is often considered a “*worst-case scenario*” where radiative forcing reaches **8.5 W/m²** by 2100, leading to **extreme global warming**.
- **Radiative Forcing**
 - A measure of the difference between incoming solar radiation and outgoing heat.
 - Pre-industrial value: Baseline set in 1750.
 - Current value: ~2.7 W/m² above baseline.
 - Paris Agreement goal: Limit radiative forcing to ~2.6 W/m² to restrict global warming below 2°C.

Mains PYQ:

Q: “Tropical cyclones are largely confined to South China Sea, Bay of Bengal and Gulf of Mexico. Examine the climatic conditions responsible for the formation of tropical cyclones in these regions.” (2021)

MARULAYYA'S 1539 FAMINE RELIEF INSCRIPTION FOUND

Context::

A rare 16th-century sculpture and inscription discovered near Chandrashekhara Temple in **Guttal village, Haveri district (Karnataka)** has brought to light the extraordinary humanitarian story of **Marulayya**, a man who **performed last rites for over 6,000 unclaimed bodies** during a **devastating famine and epidemic in 1539**.

Unique Discovery and its Context:

- **Historical Context::**
 - ◆ The inscription dates to **Bhadrapada Shukla Panchami, Vikari Samvatsara** (August 18, 1539 CE) — during the reign of **Achyutaraya**, ruler of the **Vijayanagara Empire**. This period witnessed a **severe famine and probable outbreak of epidemic** in the Haveri region.
- **Location and Identification:** It is found near **Chandrashekhara Temple in Guttal village, Haveri district**, the stone had been long overlooked despite being noted in **academic theses and the Dharwad Gazetteer**.
- **Sculptural Representation:** The **stone sculpture** portrays **Marulayya** in a solemn yet powerful pose:
 - ◆ **Bearded** and with **sacred ash** on his forehead
 - ◆ Holding a **bamboo basket (jalle)** with **two corpses**, one in each hand
 - ◆ Carrying a **chaamara (ceremonial fan)** in one hand
 - ◆ A **Shiva Linga** is carved next to him, sanctifying the act

The Story of Marulayya: A Forgotten Hero

- **Act of Compassion and Service:** Marulayya **carried and performed final rites for 6,307 unclaimed bodies** — an act unprecedented in documented global history, especially captured in such **sculptural and epigraphic detail**.
- **Nature of the Deed:** The inscription does not portray Marulayya's act as boastful. Instead, it is recorded as an act of **punya (meritorious service)** dedicated to his **overlord Pattada Timmaswamy** — suggesting a deeply rooted cultural and spiritual sense of duty.
- **Inscription Details:** The stone carries **33 lines in old Kannada script**:

- 20 lines on the right side
- 13 lines on the left side
- These lines provide **precise historical details** including date, event, and individuals involved.
- **Cultural and Ethical Legacy:** The site is now being viewed as a **monument to selfless service**, breaking from conventional themes of heroism based on war or power and highlighting **ordinary human virtue in extreme adversity**.

Historical Significance and Future Preservation

- **Rare Combination of Inscription and Sculpture:** It is **unparalleled globally** to find an instance where such a **large-scale humanitarian act** — not political or royal in nature — is immortalised with **both inscription and sculpture**.
- **Academic and Cultural Impact:** The discovery is expected to **reframe local and regional histories**, offering insight into the **socio-cultural values of the Vijayanagara period**, where even the actions of non-royal individuals were deemed worthy of preservation.

SHIFT IN US POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA

Context:

US President Donald Trump visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, where he announced the lifting of 46-year-old US sanctions on Syria. This marked a dramatic policy shift, especially since Syria's new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, is a former al-Qaeda affiliate once targeted by the US.

Brief Background

- The US imposed sanctions on Syria in **1979** after it was designated a **State Sponsor of Terrorism**, especially for supporting **Palestinian and Lebanese armed groups**.
- These sanctions intensified over the years:
 - **2004:** Added economic and defense restrictions.
 - **2011–2019:** After Syria's civil war began, sanctions became comprehensive, targeting oil, finance, and state-linked individuals (like Assad) under the **Caesar Act**.
- Now, Trump plans to revoke most of these, starting with those under executive orders.

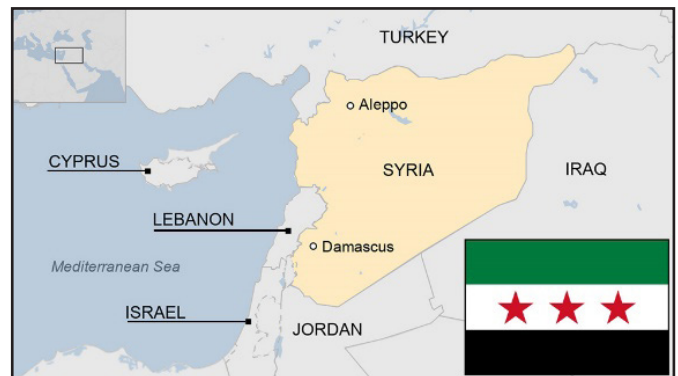
Why the US is Changing Course on Syria?

- **Change of Leadership Justifies Policy Shift:** The primary reason Trump could justify lifting sanctions is that Bashar al-Assad has been removed. Since US sanctions were tied to Assad's regime—due to human rights abuses, war crimes, and support to terrorist groups—the exit of Assad provides a technical and symbolic opening.
 - Al-Sharaa, who led a coalition that ousted Assad, now heads a **"transitional administration"**.

- Though his **past links with al-Qaeda are serious**, Trump has decided to **ignore this history**, focusing instead on realpolitik and "regional ownership" of stability.
- **Moderation & Stability in Syria:** Al-Sharaa's government is being presented as **more moderate and pragmatic**:
 - He has **unified sectarian militias**, integrated them into the national military, and avoided overt ideological posturing.
 - He is also open to **international cooperation**, including potentially **recognizing Israel** through the Abraham Accords and working to suppress ISIS.
- This makes it easier for the US and allies to engage Syria—**sanctions have done their job** in pushing out Assad and creating space for a relatively stable government.

What is US's Middle East Vision?

- **Shift from Military to Economic Engagement:** Trump's approach in the Middle East is less about democracy promotion or military intervention, and more about economic deals. He emphasized **"regionally-owned" conflict resolution**, signaling US disengagement from ground conflicts like Syria and Iraq. Instead of promising aid or military presence, he wants:
 - Syria to handle its own reconstruction (with help from Gulf states).
 - Al-Sharaa to assist in containing ISIS and policing extremist groups.



- **Massive Trade Deals with Gulf States:** Trump's visit produced USD 1 trillion in combined deals:
 - USD 600 billion with Saudi Arabia, including a record USD 142 billion arms deal.
 - USD 243.5 billion with Qatar.
 - USD 200 billion with the UAE.
- In return, the Gulf states are:
 - **Investing in the US economy.**
 - **Offering Trump personal favors** (e.g., Qatar gifting a custom Air Force One jet, real estate deals).
 - **Engaging with key Trump allies**, like Elon Musk, who is helping Saudi Arabia integrate Starlink for digital expansion.

- **Emerging Minilateralism:** Trump continues to push for groupings like the **I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA)** which emphasise economic and technological collaboration rather than military alignment.
 - His call for Syria to join the **Abraham Accords** may be part of a larger effort to reshape regional alliances into more transactional, economically-driven platforms.

What about Israel?

- **Israel's Discomfort:** Israel, under Prime Minister Netanyahu, opposes lifting sanctions on Syria, viewing it as empowering a potential threat near its border. It also worries about US re-engagement with Turkey and Iran.
 - **Turkey** is being allowed back into the **F-35 fighter jet program** (after being removed for buying Russian weapons).
 - The US recently approved a **USD 304 million missile deal** with Ankara.
- **Talks with Iran:** Most controversially, Trump said the US and Iran are close to a new nuclear deal. Iran appears ready to trade its enriched uranium stockpile in exchange for sanctions relief. The **Houthis**, an Iran-backed militia in Yemen, have also gained leverage. The US halted airstrikes in exchange for reduced attacks on American shipping.
 - Israel, however, remains skeptical and has stated it will **defend itself alone** if needed, especially against continued Houthi attacks.

Implications for India

- **Opportunities in Connectivity and Investment:** India can benefit from the renewed **US-Gulf engagement** by participating in projects like:
 - **IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor)** — this could boost India's trade, energy access, and regional connectivity.
 - Collaborative projects in **defence technology, logistics, and infrastructure**.
- **Reinforcement of India-Gulf Ties:** Gulf nations like UAE and Saudi Arabia are becoming more important to India — not just as energy suppliers and labour markets, but also as **strategic partners**. Trump's push for Gulf diversification aligns well with India's **"Act West" policy**.
- **Caution Required on Third-Party Mediation:** Trump claimed credit for "defusing India-Pakistan tensions" through trade diplomacy — a statement that India finds uncomfortable, given its **long-standing opposition to external mediation on Kashmir**.
 - Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's occasional offers to mediate between India and Pakistan may become more prominent under this new West Asia dynamic, which India will need to **handle delicately**.
- **Navigating Ethical Grey Zones:** Trump's blending of political office with private business could lead to **unpredictable policy shifts**. India must be cautious while entering any trilateral or multilateral economic deals where **personal interests might influence American diplomacy**.

India-Syria Relations:

- India and Syria have had contacts dating back to ancient times, primarily through **Silk Road trade** and cultural exchanges.
- **Post-Independence Ties:**
 - India recognized Syria soon after its independence from France in 1946.
 - Diplomatic relations were established in **1947**, making India among the first non-Arab countries to establish ties with Syria.
- India has consistently called for a **peaceful, Syrian-led political solution** under UN Resolution 2254.
- India has **not closed its embassy in Damascus**, unlike many Western nations during the civil war—signaling continued diplomatic presence.
- India has extended **Lines of Credit** and offered capacity-building assistance:
 - ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) scholarships.
 - Training Syrian diplomats and professionals.
- India also offered **humanitarian aid** during the conflict:
- Syria is a key part of **India's extended neighbourhood policy in West Asia**. Its location near the Eastern Mediterranean and in proximity to Israel, Iran, and Turkey makes it geopolitically significant.
- Maintaining relations with Syria gives India **diplomatic leverage** in West Asian multilateral platforms like:
 - **India-Arab League Dialogue**
 - **India-West Asia Quad (India-Israel-UAE-USA)**
 - **BRICS+ engagements** (as Syria may express interest post-conflict)
- **India's Balancing Act:** India balances multiple actors in the region:
 - **Israel** (strategic defence partner)
 - **Iran** (energy & Chabahar port)
 - **Gulf States** (labour, energy, investments)
 - And **Russia**, which has major military presence in Syria.
- India's neutral but principled approach helps it **engage all actors** in the region without alienating any bloc.

INDIA'S NORTHEAST, BANGLADESH & NEIGHBOURS

Context:

Recently, Muhammad Yunus proposed a comprehensive economic integration plan involving Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and India's Seven Northeastern States (commonly called the 'Seven Sisters'). His remarks have triggered strategic and policy interest in India because:

- He linked India's internal geography (i.e., the landlocked nature of Northeast India) to foreign powers like China.

How India's existing structure counter the 'closed' perception of Northeast?

- India's Northeast is Landlocked — But Connected:** Yes, the Northeastern region of India is landlocked, surrounded by international borders on almost all sides: **China, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh.**
 - But India has built and secured alternative access through the **Chicken's Neck (Siliguri Corridor)** and India-Bangladesh agreements on transit and trade.
- Bangladesh's Role as a Transit Partner:** India already uses Bangladeshi ports like Chattogram and Mongla for transporting goods to its Northeast. **India-Bangladesh Protocol Routes**, like the **Ashuganj-Akhaura corridor** and waterways on the **Brahmaputra-Barak system**, allow movement of goods and even energy.
- Hydropower and Energy Integration:** A **Tripartite Power Agreement** between **India, Nepal, and Bangladesh** allows Bangladesh to import 40 MW of electricity from Nepal via India's grid. Bhutan is already a major hydropower partner of India. Regional pooling of energy could reduce costs and increase energy security.

Strategic Concerns for India

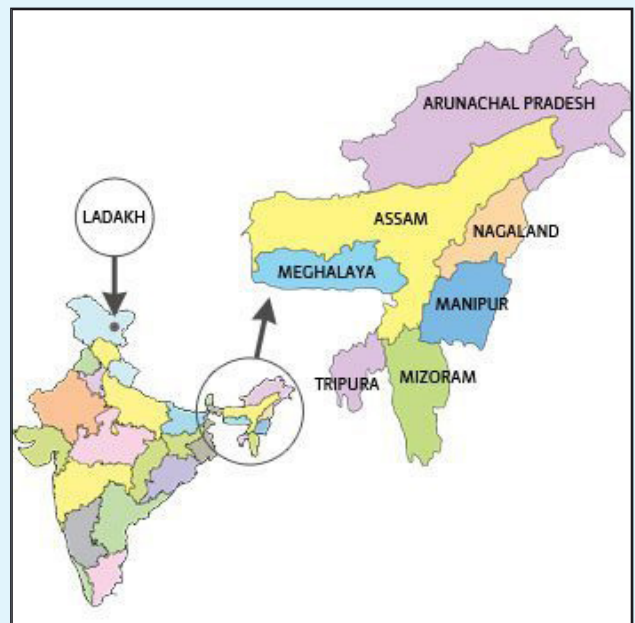
- Bangladesh:** Yunus's pitch in Beijing suggested Bangladesh could be the 'guardian of the ocean' for India's Northeast and an economic bridge to China. This raises eyebrows in Indian policy circles because:
 - It internationalizes India's internal regions.
 - It implies dependence on Bangladesh for maritime access — undermining India's own connectivity efforts.
 - It indirectly invites China into India's strategic backyard, which is highly sensitive given border tensions and BRI's spread.
- China's Interest in Northeast via Bangladesh:** China has shown interest in projects in **Chittagong, Mongla, and the BCIM Corridor (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar)**. A framework that brings in India's Northeast into Chinese-linked projects raises national security and sovereignty issues.
 - India has been cautious of letting China access **Silk Road-like routes** through Northeast India due to potential military and surveillance threats.



FACT BOX

India's Northeast

- The northeast (eight northeastern States: **Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim**) is blessed with vast natural resources.
- Its strategic location, sharing borders with **Nepal, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh and Myanmar**, is an asset.
- The region is connected to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor- **Siliguri Corridor**, also known as the "**Chicken's Neck**".
- The region contributes **2.8 percent** of India's GDP.



- It is also resource-rich, with supplies of limestone, coal, natural oil and gas, uranium, copper, rare herbs.
- Challenges:** The region has faced **long-standing separatist insurgencies**, leading to both **internal security problems** and **cross-border tensions**. These insurgencies have made the region volatile and have led to a sense of **insecurity** among locals.
- Myanmar Border:** India shares a long border with **Myanmar**, which is **porous** and prone to **cross-border terrorism** and **refugee flows**.
- Four northeastern states - **Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Manipur (398 km), Nagaland (215 km) and Mizoram (510 km)** - share 1,643-km unfenced border with Myanmar.

Key Policy Initiatives

- **India's Act East Policy**, announced in 2014, envisions connecting the Northeast with India's eastern neighbours – Myanmar and Bangladesh – and further with Southeast and East Asia.
- **Vibrant Village Scheme**: The 'vibrant village' scheme of the Centre is intended to develop border villages in **Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh**.
- **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)**: KMTTP connects Kolkata to Sittwe port, which is further linked to Paletwa in Myanmar through a waterway route along the river Kaladan.

INDIA'S STAND ON PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR POSTURE

Context:

India's Defence Minister expressed strong concerns about Pakistan's repeated threats of using nuclear weapons in response to India's actions. He questioned whether such weapons were safe in the hands of what he called a "rogue and irresponsible" state. He further stated that: "Pakistan's nuclear weapons should be placed under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)."

What is the IAEA and why is it relevant here?

- **Created in**: 1957
- **Headquartered at**: Vienna, Austria (UN Office)
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is a UN-affiliated body based in Vienna.
- Widely known as the world's **"Atoms for Peace and Development" organization** within the United Nations family, the IAEA is the international centre for cooperation in the nuclear field.
- India is a **founding member of IAEA**.
- IAEA reports to both the UNGA and the UNSC.
- It supervises **civilian nuclear programs** to ensure they are **not diverted for military purposes**.
- IAEA is **not normally involved** in monitoring a nation's **military nuclear arsenal** unless that nation voluntarily allows it.
- So, **placing nuclear weapons under IAEA control**, would mean:
 - Pakistan should allow **external inspection or control** over its nuclear weapons.
 - This would be a major **loss of strategic autonomy** for any nuclear-armed state.
 - India is using this demand more as a **moral and diplomatic argument** than a legally enforceable action.

Why is this statement important now?

- **Repeated Nuclear Threats by Pakistan**: Pakistan (leaders or media) have **often invoked nuclear weapons** as a deterrent whenever India conducts military operations. This has been labeled by Indian leadership as **"nuclear blackmail."**
- **Recent Signals from Pakistan**: After India's Operation Sindoor, **Pakistan's military reportedly signaled that its National Command Authority (NCA)** — the body overseeing its nuclear arsenal — might convene.
- **India's Strategic Messaging**: By questioning the **safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons**, India is:
 - Highlighting global concerns about proliferation risks.
 - **Countering Pakistan's nuclear bluff** with bold diplomatic statements.
 - Attempting to **shift the burden** of escalation onto Pakistan.
- It is part of a wider strategic communication from India:
 - To discredit Pakistan's nuclear threats.
 - To garner international sympathy and isolate Pakistan diplomatically.
 - To legitimize India's military responses as justified and restrained in the face of provocation.

Prelims PYQ

Q: In India, why are some nuclear reactors kept under "IAEA safeguards" while others are not? (2020)

- Some use uranium and others use thorium
- Some use imported uranium and others use domestic supplies
- Some are operated by foreign enterprises and others are operated by domestic enterprises
- Some are State-owned and others are privately owned

Solution: (b)

Q: In the Indian context, what is the implication of ratifying the 'Additional Protocol' with the 'International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'? (2018)

- The civilian nuclear reactors come under IAEA safeguards.
- The military nuclear installations come under the inspection of IAEA.
- The country will have the privilege to buy uranium from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- The country automatically becomes a member of the NSG.

Solution: (a)

INDIA-BANGLADESH TRADE RELATIONS

Context:

India has imposed new port restrictions on imports from Bangladesh—especially on ready-made garments—following Bangladesh's move to block Indian yarn exports via land ports. This marks a significant escalation in trade tensions between the two neighbours.

What has Triggered Recent Trade Friction?

- **Restrictions on Garments from Bangladesh:** India restricted imports of Bangladeshi garments to protect its domestic textile industry and attract labour-intensive manufacturing jobs to its own economy. Indian manufacturers have long complained that Bangladesh enjoys unfair price advantages, due to:

Indian Seaports Allowed for Certain Bangladesh Exports:

- **Kolkata Port** – West Bengal
- **Nhava Sheva Port (Jawaharlal Nehru Port)** – Maharashtra
 - Duty-free fabric imports from China
 - Export subsidies by the Bangladeshi government
 - No GST on imported inputs (compared to India's 5% GST on fabric)
- **Termination of Transshipment Facility:** India ended a five-year-old transshipment arrangement that allowed Bangladesh to use Indian ports and land routes to export goods to third countries. This was a key logistics channel for Bangladesh's trade with the West, especially the EU and UK.
- **Bangladesh's Port Restrictions:** Bangladesh has restricted India's yarn exports via land ports, now allowing only seaport-based exports. Yarn is vital for Bangladesh's garments industry, and land ports offer quicker, cheaper access.

Concerns for India

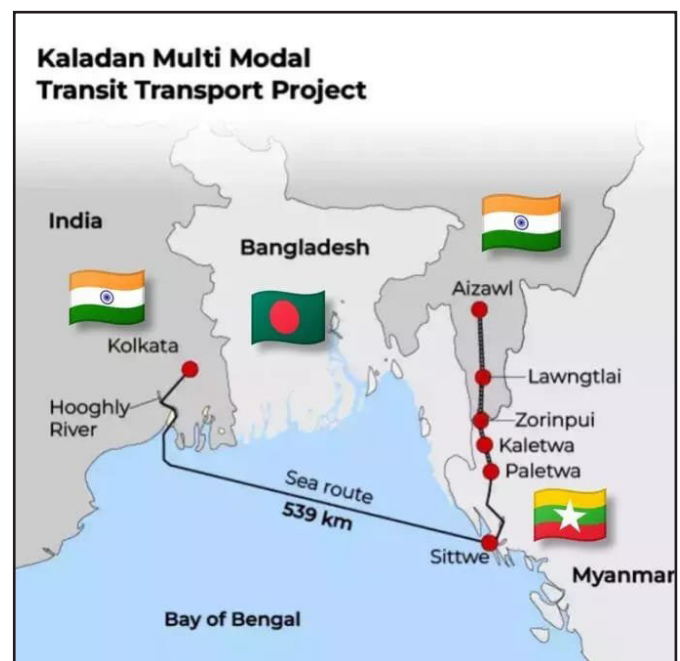
- **Regional imbalance:** This deterioration is not just about trade; it's also about strategic influence and regional balance. India sees Bangladesh as a key buffer and partner in the Northeast. Any shift in Dhaka's foreign alignment directly affects India's security, connectivity projects, and regional diplomacy.
- **Loss of Influence in a Key Neighbour:** Bangladesh's pivot to China could undermine India's leadership role in the region. It may impact India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies.
- **China Involvement:** China has given duty-free access to 97% of Bangladeshi exports since 2020. It has invested heavily in infrastructure (roads, ports, bridges) and is also Bangladesh's main military supplier. A USD

2.1 billion deal signed in March 2025 further cemented this strategic realignment. Chinese involvement in sensitive projects like the **Teesta River** development adds to India's concern

- **Regional Trade Competition:** China's support helps Bangladesh stay competitive in garments, even as India tries to boost its own exports under new FTAs. India could lose out on labour-intensive FDI if it doesn't become more cost-effective.

Benefits for India

- **Protecting Domestic Industry:** By limiting cheap imports from Bangladesh, India aims to:
 - Boost its own textile manufacturing
 - Attract labour-intensive jobs
 - Ensure a level playing field for Indian manufacturers
- **Reviving Northeast India's Industry:** Bangladeshi imports through land ports in the Northeast stifle local industry and limit trade to basic agricultural produce. By restricting imports via these routes, the government aims to promote **self-reliance** (*Atmanirbhar Bharat*) and encourage industrial development in the region.
- **Rebalancing the Trade Relationship:** Bangladesh cannot "cherry-pick" trade benefits while restricting Indian exports. The withdrawal of the **transshipment facility**, which allowed Bangladesh to export to third countries through Indian ports and airports, is also part of this rebalancing effort.
- **Access to key markets:** India is signing FTAs with the **UK, EU, and EFTA** to build alternative garment export routes. This also explains why it is less dependent on Bangladeshi textile imports now.



- **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project:** This shift has forced India to revive and fast-track alternate routes, particularly through Myanmar, via the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP).

KMMTTP, launched in 2008 as part of India's **Look East/Act East Policy**, this project is a multi-modal connectivity initiative that links:

- **Kolkata (India) to Sittwe Port (Myanmar)** by sea (539 km)
- From **Sittwe to Paletwa** via the **Kaladan river** (158 km)
- Then by **road to Zorinpui (Mizoram)** through a 108 km highway
- Finally, it connects to **Aizwal and Shillong** via existing and planned roads
 - ◆ **Zorinpui** is the India-Myanmar border point in Mizoram.
 - ◆ This route bypasses Bangladesh entirely and can **cut travel time by 3–4 days** and reduce **distance by 1,000 km** compared to traditional routes through Siliguri.

India-Bangladesh Relations

- India and Bangladesh maintain strong defence cooperation through regular joint military exercises. The two countries conduct **Exercise Sampriti**, which focuses on army-level collaboration, and **Exercise Bongosagar**, a naval exercise designed to improve interoperability and maritime cooperation. They also carry out **Coordinated Patrols (CORPAT)** in the Bay of Bengal to enhance maritime domain awareness and security. These initiatives reflect mutual trust and a shared commitment to regional peace and security.
- **Trade Engagement:** Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia, while India is Bangladesh's second-largest trading partner in the Asian region.
 - During the financial year 2023–24, the total bilateral trade between the two countries stood at approximately USD 12.9 billion.
 - ◆ Indian exports to Bangladesh include **cotton, petroleum products, engineering goods, and chemicals**.
 - ◆ India imports **apparel, textiles, jute goods, and aerospace** parts from Bangladesh.
- **Major connectivity projects:** Akhaura–Agartala rail link, Khulna–Mongla Port rail line, Maitri Setu (Friendship Bridge)
- Energy Cooperation and Connectivity Projects
 - **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline** is the first cross-border energy pipeline between the two countries.
 - **Connectivity projects:** Akhaura–Agartala rail link, the Khulna–Mongla Port rail line, and the **Maitri Setu**, a bridge that connects Tripura in India with Bangladesh's Chittagong division.

- These initiatives are aimed at promoting regional integration and facilitating economic growth.
- **Multilateral and Regional Cooperation:** India and Bangladesh are part of regional cooperative frameworks like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BBIN, and IORA

CAN NEW CALEDONIA GAIN INDEPENDENCE FROM FRANCE?

Context:

New Caledonia is a French territory in the South Pacific with a long-standing independence movement led by its Indigenous Kanak population. Tensions have resurfaced in 2024 after failed negotiations over its political future and voting rights reforms.

Where and what is New Caledonia?

- New Caledonia is a **small group of islands** in the **southwest Pacific Ocean**, around 1,200 km east of Australia.
- It is a **French overseas territory** with a population of about 271,000.
- While geographically part of **Melanesia**, it has been under French rule since 1853.



- Even today, it remains politically tied to France, but the question of whether it should remain a part of France or become independent has been a deeply emotional and political issue — especially for the **Indigenous Kanak people**, who have long demanded sovereignty.
- Roots of the Conflict
 - France colonised the islands as a **penal colony**. The **Kanak people** were dispossessed of their land, culture, and political autonomy.

- Over time, especially during the 20th century, the Kanak movement for self-rule gained strength. It took a violent turn in the 1980s when civil conflict broke out between Kanak pro-independence groups and loyalists (those who wanted to stay with France).
- This tension led to the **1988 Matignon Accords** and later to the **1998 Nouméa Accord** — a turning point in the political journey of New Caledonia.

What was the Nouméa Accord (1998)?

- The Nouméa Accord recognised the **colonial trauma of the Kanak people** and aimed to provide them with greater autonomy.
- It created a **unique political arrangement** — a “sui generis” status:
 - **A local Congress** with legislative powers
 - **Restricted voting rights** to long-term residents (to protect Kanak political strength)
 - **Own citizenship status** (New Caledonian)
- Most importantly, it agreed on **three referendums** on independence, to be held from 2018 to 2021.
- **Results of the Referendums:**
 - **2018** – Independence rejected (57% No)
 - **2020** – Rejected again (53% No)
 - **2021** – Overwhelming rejection (96% No) — BUT this was **boycotted by the Kanak leaders**, who were mourning during the COVID pandemic and asked for postponement, which was denied by France.
- So, although all three technically rejected independence, **the legitimacy of the third vote is heavily disputed.**

Why is independence still demanded?

- The *Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS)* and other pro-independence groups believe:
 - The political and economic system remains **unequal**, dominated by French settlers and loyalists.
 - Kanaks face **higher unemployment, poorer education and health indicators.**
 - Despite autonomy, key functions like **defence, foreign policy, judiciary and currency** are still under Paris’ control.
 - The **cultural identity** of Kanaks, their land rights, and future as a people feel insecure within the French system.
- Thus, for many Kanaks, independence is not just a political goal but a way to reclaim identity, dignity, and full self-governance.
- **Recent political crisis in 2024?** After the disputed 2021 referendum, **no clear political roadmap** was agreed upon. Tensions simmered. In 2024, France proposed to **“unfreeze” the electoral rolls** — meaning more recent French migrants to the islands would be allowed to vote in future provincial elections.

- In this charged atmosphere, **France** tried to mediate a new “middle path” — known as **“sovereignty in partnership.”**

What is “Sovereignty in Partnership” and Why Did Talks Fail?

- The French proposal offered:
 - **Broad internal autonomy** for New Caledonia
 - Control over local governance, judicial matters, and international representation
 - BUT with key powers **delegated back to France** under mutual agreement
- This was meant to offer symbolic sovereignty without total separation — a model used in places like the **Cook Islands (with New Zealand)** or the **Faroe Islands (with Denmark).**
- But the plan **collapsed** due to **rejection by hardline loyalist factions.**
- In contrast, some loyalists proposed **partitioning New Caledonia**, with:
 - The **Kanak-dominated North and Loyalty Islands** becoming autonomous
 - The **wealthier, French-dominated South** staying with France
- This was **rejected by the French government** (which wants New Caledonia to remain united) and **outright condemned by the Kanak side** as an idea “akin to apartheid.”

INDIA–PAKISTAN CEASEFIRE AND US INVOLVEMENT

Context:

Following heightened tensions after the Pahalgam terror attack and India’s military response under Operation Sindoor, questions arose over US President Trump’s claims of brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan, prompting clarifications from the Indian government. In this backdrop, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri appeared before a Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs to clarify India’s official position and strategic posture.

Key Takeaways

- **Ceasefire Was Bilateral, Not Mediated:** The **Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs)** of both countries agreed to halt hostilities through direct communication. The **Foreign Secretary confirmed that there was no third-party (including US) mediation** in this process. India maintained routine diplomatic conversations with the US but **did not involve it as a mediator.**
- **Significance:** This highlights **India’s consistent position against third-party mediation in bilateral issues**, especially Kashmir, which aligns with India’s long-standing policy of **strategic autonomy.**

- **Operation Sindoor and Conventional Deterrence:** India launched **Operation Sindoor** as a punitive response to terror attacks. Indian Air Force targeted Pakistani military infrastructure and terror camps. The conflict **remained within conventional limits**—there was **no nuclear posturing by Pakistan**.
 - **Significance:** It reflects India's doctrine of "**limited but effective conventional retaliation**" in response to terrorism, without escalating to nuclear thresholds.
 - ◆ This is aligned with **India's No First Use (NFU)** nuclear policy and demonstrates the **importance of credible conventional deterrence**.
- **Rebutting Nuclear War Narrative:** Trump's claims about preventing a nuclear war were politically significant but lacked ground evidence. **No indicators of nuclear signaling** (like alerting of assets, rhetoric, or movement) were observed on Pakistan's part.
 - **Significance:** This shows the role of **strategic stability** in South Asia and how narratives around nuclear escalation can sometimes be exaggerated by external powers. It also reflects on **India's mature handling of nuclear diplomacy**.
- **Diplomatic Balancing: IMF and Turkey:** The IMF recently approved a **USD 1 billion bailout** to Pakistan, which has economic and geopolitical implications. Turkey's open criticism of Operation Sindoor and support for Pakistan led to **strained India-Turkey ties**.
 - **Significance:** Economic tools like **IMF bailouts** are increasingly part of **geopolitical bargaining**. India must balance its **economic diplomacy with multilateral financial institutions** and its **bilateral ties with nations like Turkey**, especially when they involve **Islamabad and Kashmir**.
- **Parliamentary Oversight in Foreign Policy:** The Standing Committee included members from across political lines. The discussion indicates how India's foreign policy is increasingly being **scrutinized by democratic institutions**, which is essential for transparency and accountability.
 - **Significance:** It demonstrates how **parliamentary committees** play a key role in shaping and reviewing India's external engagement strategies. It adds to the understanding of **checks and balances** in India's foreign policy architecture.

INDIA'S GLOBAL OUTREACH ON OPERATION SINDOOR BEGINS

Context::

India has launched an international diplomatic outreach effort, post-**Operation Sindoor**, to counter global narratives about cross-border terrorism and reinforce its stance on national security. This is being done through multi-party parliamentary delegations visiting several countries.

What are the objectives of the Delegation?

- It highlights India's **stance on terrorism**, particularly **cross-border terrorism**.
- To counter **Pakistan's global narrative** by providing evidence-backed details of terror sponsorship.
- To present India's **security and peace strategy** post-Operation Sindoor.
- To reiterate India's identity as a **peace-loving but assertive nation** in matters of sovereignty.
- **Engage with influential countries** in decision-making bodies like the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, **European Union (EU)**, **African Union (AU)** and **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**.
- **Multi-party Delegations: 7 delegations** comprising **51 political leaders**, including both **NDA and non-NDA members**. The seven delegations are traveling to 33 countries and regions, strategically selected based on:
 - UNSC Membership (both permanent and non-permanent)
 - Geo-political relevance
 - Strong diplomatic and strategic ties
 - Presence of international institutions
 - Significant Indian diaspora or cultural linkage

Region-wise breakdown of the key destinations:

- **East and Southeast Asia:** This region hosts major economic powers and forums like **ASEAN** and **East Asia Summit**, where India can shape the regional narrative around terrorism and security cooperation.
 - **Japan** (Quad member, strategic partner)
 - **South Korea** (UNSC non-permanent member)
 - **Indonesia** (ASEAN heavyweight, growing India ties)
 - **Malaysia** (ASEAN chair, host of East Asia Summit)
 - **Singapore** (key partner in trade, defence, diaspora ties)
- **West Asia & Gulf:** India has **deep energy, economic, and diaspora ties** with Gulf countries. The region also holds sway in global Islamic diplomacy. Engaging these nations helps counter false narratives from Pakistan in the Islamic world.
 - **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**
 - **Saudi Arabia**
 - **Qatar**
 - **Kuwait**
 - **Bahrain**
- **Africa:** Africa is becoming a crucial geopolitical battleground. India's growing presence through embassies, peacekeeping, and investment creates leverage. Some countries like Sierra Leone and Algeria also sit on the **UNSC** currently.

- **Egypt** (key AU member)
- **Ethiopia** (AU headquarters)
- **South Africa** (BRICS member)
- **Algeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** (some are UNSC non-permanent members)
- **Europe:** European countries are influential in global decision-making, and their support is key to raising issues at forums like the **UNSC, EU, and UN Human Rights Council**. Russia, though a close ally of Pakistan, remains important due to its UNSC veto power.
 - **France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Greece, Slovenia, Spain, Latvia**
 - **Russia** (UNSC permanent member)
 - **Brussels** (EU headquarters)
- **Americas:** The US is a global opinion-shaper and military power. Latin American outreach shows India's intent to build support in the **Global South**, where Pakistan tries to find sympathizers.
 - **United States** (UNSC permanent member, strategic partner)
 - **Panama, Guyana, Colombia, Brazil** (UNSC members, strong diaspora links)
- **Multilateral Institutions and Forums**
 - **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** – India aims to directly interact with **12 of the 15 members**, excluding China, Pakistan, and Somalia.
 - **European Union (EU)** – For coordinated diplomacy and policy dialogue.
 - **African Union (AU)** – To strengthen pan-African cooperation against terrorism.

What is the **strategic and diplomatic significance**?

- **India's Assertive Diplomacy:** India shift from passive diplomatic protest to **proactive narrative-setting**. It aligns with India's "**new normal**" of military and diplomatic retaliation post-terror attacks (e.g., Balakot airstrike).
- **United Political Front:** Unique in showcasing **bipartisan consensus** on national security. It strengthens India's diplomatic credibility by transcending domestic politics.
- **Strengthening Soft Power:** The outreach includes engaging with **global civil society and Indian diaspora**. It provides opportunity to shape global perceptions in India's favour.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPECT AND CONSTITUTIONAL SUPREMACY CRUCIAL IN A DEMOCRACY

Context:

The newly sworn-in Chief Justice of India (CJI), Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, made a significant remark that not the

judiciary, nor the executive, but the Constitution of India is supreme. It raises deeper constitutional and democratic concerns about the relationship between the three organs of the state and the importance of mutual respect in a healthy democracy.

What is Separation of Powers?

- The Constitution outlines a clear **separation of powers**:
 - **Legislature:** Makes laws
 - **Executive:** Implements laws and manages administration
 - **Judiciary:** Interprets laws and protects rights
- However, these functions inevitably **overlap in practice**, requiring each organ to **cooperate without encroaching on the other's space**.
- This is where **institutional discipline and mutual understanding** become critical.
- No branch can claim superiority—but all must act in a way that upholds the **supremacy of the Constitution**.

Why Institutional Respect Matters?

- **Foundation of Constitutional Governance:** Respect between organs of the state is not about individual positions—it's about the **dignity of constitutional offices**. When one branch fails to acknowledge the role or presence of another, it sends a signal that **collaboration and mutual accountability may be weakening**.
- **Symbolism and Legitimacy:** The way institutions treat each other is symbolic of how **constitutional values are lived out** in practice. Disregard for established conventions (like welcoming constitutional dignitaries) undermines the **moral legitimacy** of the institutions involved.
- **Preventing Institutional Friction:** Indian democracy has witnessed instances where **friction between executive and judiciary**—or between Centre and States—has created confusion or even constitutional crises. Proactive institutional courtesy helps **build confidence and prevent escalation**.
- **Constitutional Morality vs. Procedural Formality:** True constitutional governance isn't just about laws and orders—it's also about **constitutional morality**: the unwritten norms of respect, restraint, and recognition. These moral values are **essential for the long-term health of democratic institutions**.

Constitutional Supremacy: What It Means in Practice?

- **The Constitution is the highest authority** in India—not the Parliament, not the Prime Minister, not the Chief Justice.
- All laws, decisions, and actions by any branch of government must **align with constitutional principles** such as equality, rule of law, federalism, and justice.

- Even the Supreme Court's powers under Article 142, while broad, must be used within the constitutional framework and not beyond it.
- Similarly, **executive authority is subject to judicial review**, and the legislature's actions are limited by **constitutional amendments and checks**.

In other words, **each institution derives its legitimacy from the Constitution—and none can act as if it exists above it.**



FACT BOX

Basic features of Constitutional Supremacy are as follows:

- Written and rigid constitution.
- The distinction between constitutional law and ordinary law
- Parliament itself was created and functioning with regard to the constitution.
- There must be some constitutional body to look after the legality or illegality of the act of the parliament.
- There should be an express or implied provision in the constitution which supports the supremacy of the constitution.

Constitutional Provisions Supporting Supremacy of Constitution:

- Article 14 of the Indian Constitution** provides for equality before the law and the equal protection of laws. The term "Equality before the Law" is adopted from English common law, which means everyone is equal in the eyes of law and no one is above the law.
- Article 124(1) of the Indian Constitution** provides the establishment for the establishment of a Supreme Court of India.

PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE TO THE SUPREME COURT (ARTICLE 143)

Context:

President Droupadi Murmu has invoked Article 143 of the Constitution to seek the Supreme Court's advisory opinion on 14 constitutional questions. This move follows a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court that imposed timelines on the President and Governors for deciding on state bills—a ruling that has triggered significant constitutional debate.

Brief Background:

- In recent years, several state governments have accused Governors of delaying or obstructing the assent to bills passed by their legislatures. One prominent instance involved the Tamil Nadu Governor withholding assent to 10 bills passed by the state assembly.

- In April 2024, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that Governors and the President must act within **defined timelines** when dealing with bills:
 - A Governor must give assent, withhold assent, or reserve the bill for the President's consideration **within three months**.
 - If a state re-enacts an identical bill, the Governor must act **within a month**.
 - The **President must decide within three months** on a bill reserved by the Governor.
- The Court also held that in certain cases, assent would be deemed to have been given—a concept **not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution**.
- This prompted the President to seek clarity from the Supreme Court through a **Presidential reference**, as the judgment raised concerns about its alignment with constitutional provisions.

What is a Presidential Reference (Article 143)?

- Article 143 empowers the **President to refer questions of law or fact** to the Supreme Court for its advisory opinion.
- This is **not a judicial proceeding** but a **constitutional consultation**.
- The President may seek advice:
 - If it is of **public importance** or involves **substantial questions of law**, especially on constitutional interpretation.
 - After the enactment of any law, to understand its constitutional validity.
- The Supreme Court's opinion under Article 143 is **not binding** on the President, but it holds persuasive value and is considered with great respect.
- The President has raised 14 important constitutional questions, indicating that the SC judgment has raised legal uncertainties, particularly because:
 - The Constitution does not mention specific timelines for Governors or the President to act on bills.
 - The SC's direction to "deem assent" is being questioned as it may curtail constitutional discretion.
 - There's ambiguity over judicial review of decisions made by the President and Governors, who enjoy constitutional protections.
 - Federal balance, judicial activism, and constitutional interpretation are under scrutiny.

Key-Constitutional Provisions Involved

Article	Subject
Article 200	Powers of the Governor on state bills: assent, withhold, return, or reserve for the President

Article 201	When a Governor reserves a bill, the President can either assent or withhold.
Article 143	President can seek advisory opinion of the Supreme Court.
Article 142	Supreme Court's power to pass any order necessary to do complete justice.
Article 361	Immunity for President and Governor from legal proceedings.
Article 131	Supreme Court's exclusive jurisdiction over Centre-State disputes.
Article 145(3)	Requires a five-judge bench for cases involving substantial questions of constitutional interpretation.

Judiciary and Executive

- At the heart of this controversy lies the **balance of power between the judiciary and the executive** in interpreting and exercising constitutional discretion—particularly the role of the **President and Governors** in the legislative process.
- The key issues include:**
 - Whether timelines for granting assent can be judicially imposed when the Constitution does not explicitly mention them.
 - Whether the concept of “deemed assent”, introduced by the Court, is constitutionally valid.
 - The scope of judicial review over the discretionary powers of constitutional authorities like the President and Governors under **Articles 200 and 201**.
 - The limits of judicial intervention under **Article 142**, which gives the Supreme Court power to do “complete justice”.
 - The proper forum and bench size (minimum five judges) for deciding such substantive constitutional questions.

Constitutional Discretion VS Judicial Review

Constitutional Discretion

- Articles **200** and **201** grant the **Governor** and **President** discretion when dealing with state legislation:
 - The **Governor** can:
 - Grant assent
 - Withhold assent
 - Reserve the bill for the President (under Article 200)
 - The **President**, when a bill is reserved, may:
 - Give assent
 - Withhold assent
 - Direct the Governor to return the bill

- These actions have traditionally been seen as **discretionary**, and in some views, **non-justiciable**, especially protected by **Article 361**, which **grants immunity** to the President and Governors for their official actions.

Judicial Review

- The Supreme Court has long held that **no constitutional authority is above the Constitution**.
- In some past cases, the Court has upheld its right to **review the legality and constitutionality** of actions taken by Governors, especially when they appear **arbitrary, mala fide, or unconstitutional**.
- In the April 8 judgment, the Court:
 - Set timelines** for decision-making.
 - Deemed certain bills to have received assent** when delay appeared unjustified.
 - Asserted its powers under **Article 142** to ensure “complete justice”.
- This raises the question: **Can courts dictate how constitutional discretion should be exercised, especially when timelines are not mentioned in the Constitution?**
- The presidential reference** argues that this **judicial activism** may erode the discretion granted by the Constitution and disrupt the federal balance.
- On the other hand, the **judiciary** views inordinate delays in giving assent as subverting democratic processes and harming the will of the elected legislature.

SC RESTORES RULE MANDATING 3-YEAR LAW PRACTICE FOR JUDICIAL SERVICE

Context::

The **Supreme Court of India**, in a recent judgment, has **restored the mandatory requirement of 3 years of law practice** for candidates applying to the **Civil Judge (Junior Division)** posts across India.

Background of the Issue:

- Pre-2002:** The Supreme Court had mandated **3 years of law practice** for entry into judicial services.
- 2002 Order:** This condition was **removed** to attract bright young law graduates and make judicial service more appealing.
 - This decision was based on the recommendations of the **Shetty Commission (1996)**, which aimed to improve service conditions for the judiciary.

Key Takeaways from the SC Judgment

- Petitioner:** **All India Judges Association** approached SC to restore the earlier practice.

- **Bench:** Headed by **CJI Bhushan R Gavai**, with Justices A G Masih and K Vinod Chandran.
- **SC Observation:** Recruitment of fresh law graduates “has not been successful” — they lack:
 - Practical knowledge of courts,
 - Understanding of litigation,
 - Sensitivity to human problems.
- **Order Highlights:**
 - Only a **practicing lawyer** can understand the “intricacies of litigation” and **justice delivery**.
 - **States & High Courts directed to amend recruitment rules** within 3 months.
 - **Recruitment already notified will not be affected.** The new rule applies to **future recruitments** only.

Experience Certification Mechanism:

- Candidates must produce:
 - Certificate from a **lawyer with at least 10 years of Bar practice**.
 - The certificate must be **endorsed by a Principal Judicial Officer**.
- **High Court/Supreme Court practitioners** need a certificate endorsed by a **judge-attested senior lawyer**.
- Experience counted **from provisional registration**, formal only after **All India Bar Examination** clearance.

DOES ARTICLE 21 INCLUDE RIGHT TO DIGITAL ACCESS?

Context:

India’s digital infrastructure, especially for identity verification like KYC, has become essential for accessing financial and government services. However, it remains largely inaccessible to **persons with disabilities (PwDs)**, prompting the Supreme Court to reinterpret **Article 21 to include the ‘right to digital access’**.

What is Article 21?

- **Article 21** says: “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”
- Over the decades, courts have expanded this to include rights such as:
 - Right to dignity
 - Right to education
 - Right to shelter
 - Right to health
- Now, the Supreme Court has added a new dimension—**right to digital access**—recognising that exclusion from the digital world can seriously affect a person’s right to live with dignity.

Legal Framework Supporting PwD Rights

- India has both **constitutional** and **statutory protections** for persons with disabilities:
 - **Constitutional Mandate:** The **Preamble, Fundamental Rights (especially Articles 14, 15, 21), and Directive Principles** guide the state to promote justice, equality, and dignity.
 - **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016:** It aligns India with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**.
 - ◆ It moves away from a purely medical model and adopts a **social-barrier approach**—disability is not just a bodily impairment, but also the result of barriers in society.
 - ◆ **Section 42** specifically mandates that **electronic and print media be made accessible**, with features like:
 - ◆ Audio description
 - ◆ Captions
 - ◆ Sign language
 - ◆ Universal design principles in electronic devices

Why KYC is a Barrier for PwDs?

- KYC (Know Your Customer) norms are legal requirements that every bank, telecom provider, insurance company, etc., must follow to verify identities. It’s meant to stop fraud and money laundering.
- However, the **current digital KYC methods exclude many PwDs**, especially the visually impaired and acid attack survivors:
 - **Facial Recognition & Selfies:** Visually impaired persons or those with disfigurements cannot easily align their face for a selfie or complete facial verification.
 - **Visual Tests:** Blinking, reading on-screen codes, or clicking on-screen prompts are not accessible.
 - **No Audio or Screen-Reader Support:** KYC apps rarely support screen readers or provide voice-guided cues.
 - **Document Uploads:** Users can’t distinguish document sides or check if their PAN/Aadhaar has uploaded correctly.
 - **No Valid Signature Alternatives:** Thumb impressions, often used by visually impaired individuals, are not accepted. PAN cards can’t be issued with thumb impressions.
 - **OTP and Real-Time Verification:** Expecting users to respond in 30 seconds with perfect camera positioning leaves out many disabled users.
- Despite **ICT Accessibility Standards (2021, 2022)** issued by the **Ministry of Electronics and IT**, most service providers have **not complied**.

Supreme Court Ruling

- In *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India* (2024) and the April 2025 KYC case, the Supreme Court:
 - Declared **digital accessibility a constitutional requirement**, not a matter of policy choice.
 - Anchored its decision in **Articles 14 (equality), 15 (non-discrimination), 21 (life and liberty), and 38 (justice and welfare)**.
 - Reaffirmed that digital exclusion is a form of **digital discrimination** that violates the dignity and equality of PwDs.
 - Directed institutions like the RBI, SEBI, and DoT to **revise digital KYC norms** and ensure universal accessibility in all digital services.
- SC rightly pointed out that in a digital-first society, **the denial of digital access is a denial of dignity, freedom, and opportunity**.

Why this Judgment is a milestone?

- **Recognition of Digital Exclusion as a Rights Violation:** Digital platforms are the new gatekeepers to essential services. Excluding PwDs from them effectively means denying them participation in society.
- **Article 21 (A Living, Evolving Right):** This ruling builds upon earlier SC decisions where:
 - Right to privacy (**Puttaswamy case**)
 - Right to die with dignity (**Common Cause case**)
 - Right to access COVID vaccines digitally (during pandemic)
 - ◆ were read into Article 21. The right to digital access continues this progressive trend.
- **Future Reforms:** This case sets a precedent for:
 - Inclusive digital governance
 - Accessible fintech, edtech, and health platforms
 - Private sector compliance with accessibility norms

Required Measures

- **Enforceable Guidelines:** RBI, SEBI, and DoT must revise their frameworks and **issue binding directions** to regulated entities.
- **Universal Accessibility Audits:** KYC apps, websites, and customer service platforms should be audited by accessibility experts.
- **Inclusive Tech Design:** Future fintech and government platforms must be **designed with accessibility in mind from the start**, not added later as an afterthought.
- **Training and Awareness:** Institutions must train staff and developers on accessibility laws and user needs.

SHOULD NOTA BE INCLUDED IN ALL ELECTIONS COMPULSORILY

Context:

A recent PIL has reignited the debate on whether **NOTA (None of the Above)** should be made a compulsory option

in all elections, including those with only one candidate. This brings into focus deeper questions about voter choice, electoral legitimacy, and democratic accountability.

What is NOTA and when was it introduced in India?

- NOTA — 'None of the Above' — is an option on the **Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)** that allows a voter to **formally reject all contesting candidates**.
- It was introduced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in **2013**, following a Supreme Court ruling in a PIL filed by the **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)**.
- The court held that the **right to vote includes the right not to vote**, and that voters should be able to express disapproval of all candidates without compromising the secrecy of their ballot.
- However, while NOTA allows symbolic rejection, **it currently carries no legal consequence** — the candidate with the highest votes still wins, even if NOTA secures the most votes.

Why is there a demand to make NOTA compulsory in all elections?

- There are demands to make NOTA compulsory in all elections, including uncontested ones.
- In cases where **only one candidate is contesting**, voters are currently left with no real choice. If such an election proceeds without a NOTA option, voters cannot express dissatisfaction — effectively **denying the spirit of electoral choice**.
- **Proponents argue that:**
 - It maintains democratic integrity by allowing **dissent against uncontested candidates**.
 - It ensures that **elections are more than a procedural formality**.
 - Even in rare cases, **symbolic participation matters** — especially in strengthening a culture of accountability.
- Thus, the PIL seeks to mandate **NOTA in all elections**, including single-candidate or uncontested elections.

What is Election Commission's stance?

- The Election Commission (EC) opposes the idea of making NOTA mandatory in every election, especially in uncontested ones, for several reasons:
 - **Rare Occurrence:** EC says that uncontested elections are extremely rare — only 9 instances since 1952, and 6 in Lok Sabha elections since 1971. So, this issue is more symbolic than practical.
 - **Lack of Statutory Backing:** Making NOTA mandatory would need amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, which only the Parliament can do, not the EC or courts.

- **Limited Impact of NOTA:** According to the EC, NOTA has not brought significant change in voter behaviour or candidate accountability — less than 1-2% of voters choose NOTA in most elections.

Is NOTA really insignificant?

- While NOTA may seem symbolically weak due to its lack of legal consequence, its **democratic value is substantial**, especially in the following ways:
 - **Expression of Dissent:** NOTA gives space to express dissatisfaction without boycotting the election altogether.
 - **Silent Protest:** It can be used by voters to protest against poor candidate quality, criminal backgrounds, or lack of choice.
 - **Data Point:** NOTA votes can provide useful **data on public dissatisfaction** that political parties may begin to take seriously over time.
- And while only **around 1% of voters** opt for NOTA nationally, this still translates to **lakhs of voters** — a significant number in absolute terms. In some State elections (e.g., Bihar 2015: 2.48%, Gujarat 2017: 1.8%), NOTA has drawn even more attention.
- Moreover, in a large constituency with 20–25 lakh voters, even a 1% NOTA vote means 20,000–25,000 people actively rejected all candidates — this is **not politically negligible**.

Issues with the current NOTA framework

- The biggest concern is that **NOTA has no real effect**. Even if the majority of votes go to NOTA, the next highest candidate is still declared the winner.
- This creates a paradox — voters reject all candidates, but **still end up being represented by someone they rejected**. This weakens the **accountability and representative nature** of democracy.
- Also, the lack of impact means political parties don't take NOTA votes seriously — it **doesn't incentivize cleaner candidates** or better manifestos.
- Required reforms to strengthen the NOTA mechanism
- To make NOTA meaningful, institutional reforms are needed:
- **Legal Validity to NOTA Votes:** If NOTA gets the highest number of votes, the election could be declared void and a re-election held with new candidates. This model exists in countries like **Colombia, Ukraine, and Pakistan**, where a majority for 'Reopen Nominations' or 'None of the Above' leads to re-election.
- **Minimum Vote Benchmark for Candidates:** A candidate must receive a minimum percentage of votes to be declared elected. If they fail, re-election is triggered or fresh nominations are invited. This can enhance legitimacy and participation.
- **Mandatory Inclusion in All Elections:** Including NOTA in every constituency, even with just one candidate,

would preserve voter agency and democratic symbolism. The cost of such elections is minimal compared to the democratic value it generates.

STRATEGIC SHIFT IN INDIA'S PORT POLICY

Context:

India's maritime strategy is shifting from a domestic focus to establishing a global presence in port development, beginning with Chabahar Port in Iran and expanding to Africa (Tanzania) and neighbouring countries like Myanmar and Sri Lanka. This marks a strategic move to enhance trade access, regional influence, and global connectivity.

Why Chabahar Port matters?

Chabahar port in **southeastern Iran**, developed and operated by India, is a strategic asset for multiple reasons:

- **Gateway to Central Asia and Afghanistan:** It provides India an alternative route to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan, and opens up trade corridors to Central Asia through the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
- **Geopolitical leverage:** It strengthens India's presence in the western Indian Ocean, countering China's influence through Gwadar Port (Pakistan).
- **Trade hub in the making:** Operated by IPGL at the **Shahid Beheshti Terminal**, container traffic at Chabahar jumped from just **9,126 TEUs in FY23 to 64,245 TEUs by January FY25**, and is projected to reach **75,000 TEUs** by the end of FY25, with **full capacity of 100,000 TEUs by FY26**.

India's expanding focus areas:

- **Tanzania:** After Chabahar, India is now eyeing Africa's east coast, especially Tanzania, for port-related ventures. The aim is to support Indian trade, improve connectivity, and balance China's deep influence in African infrastructure.
 - Tanzania's main ports — **Dar es Salaam, Mtwara, Tanga**, along with minor ports in **Zanzibar and Pemba islands** — are strategically located on the Indian Ocean.
- **Myanmar – Sittwe Port:** **Indian Ports Global Ltd (IPGL)** is operating the Sittwe port, developed under the **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project**. It connects India's Northeast to Myanmar and the Bay of Bengal, and will eventually link to **Thailand and ASEAN trade routes**. It helps India counterbalance China's activities in the region and supports **Act East Policy**.
- **Sri Lanka – Kankesanthurai Port:** **Indian Ports Global Ltd (IPGL)** is helping to develop and operate **Kankesanthurai (KKS) port** in northern Sri Lanka. A **Nagapattinam-KKS ferry service** is also planned to boost people-to-people ties and revive old maritime links.

Significance of India's port expansion

India's port expansion is not just about logistics — it serves a deeper strategic vision:

- **Countering China's Maritime Silk Road:** Through projects like **Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka)**, and multiple African ports, China is increasing its footprint. India is presenting a non-coercive, development-driven alternative.
- **Regional connectivity and soft power:** Through joint ventures and MoUs, India promotes a collaborative approach to infrastructure.
- **Economic diplomacy:** Ports are being used to unlock trade potential with regions like Africa, Central Asia, and ASEAN.

OIL MARKET CRISIS

Context:

Global oil markets are witnessing major shifts due to slowing demand growth, rising geopolitical competition among producers, and the growing push toward clean energy. Amid this, a fresh conflict has emerged—not with weapons, but with oil barrels—as key oil-producing nations engage in a strategic price war that could have significant global and domestic consequences.

Why is OPEC+ increasing production now?

- **Supply-Demand Imbalance Post-COVID:** After the pandemic, the world hoped for a quick economic rebound. However, what actually happened was a **K-shaped recovery** — where only certain sectors and countries bounced back strongly, while others struggled.
 - As a result, global oil demand grew sluggishly, and producers — especially those with smaller economies — began pushing their own output to earn revenues, leading to oversupply.
- **Saudi Arabia's Changing Strategy:** As the largest producer in OPEC+, Saudi Arabia had cut production deeply (by 3 million barrels/day in 2023-24) to support prices. But when other OPEC+ countries like **Iraq, UAE, Nigeria, and Kazakhstan** failed to stick to their promised cuts, Saudi Arabia lost patience.
 - Riyadh has now chosen to flood the market with oil again — a tactic it has used in the past (1986, 1998, 2014, 2020) to discipline overproducers and retain market share. This may lead to another **oil price war**, a situation where prices are pushed lower intentionally to squeeze out less efficient producers.

Why Are Oil Prices Still Falling Despite These Moves?

Despite Saudi Arabia's efforts, prices fell sharply — Brent crude went as low as USD 60/barrel, its lowest since the pandemic — before stabilizing near USD 65. This is due to several structural changes in the global oil landscape:

- **Peak Oil Demand:** The **International Energy Agency (IEA)** now predicts oil demand will grow by just 0.73% in 2025 — extremely slow by historical standards. This brings credibility to the "**Peak Demand**" theory — the idea that global oil use will plateau or decline before 2030. **Key reasons:**
 - EV revolution, especially in China
 - Climate commitments and net-zero goals in Europe and elsewhere
 - Shift to renewables and hydrogen
 - Slowing global economic and trade growth (post-Trump's tariff policies and post-pandemic fatigue)
- **Fragmented Oil Supply:** Today's oil market is more fragmented than before:
 - **Shale oil** from the U.S.
 - New producers like **Brazil, Guyana**, etc.
 - **Heavy investments** in offshore and deep-sea fields that are now operational.
 - ◆ Even at **lower prices**, these producers keep pumping oil to recover investments — worsening the **supply glut**.
- **Geopolitical Calculations and U.S. Influence:** Saudi Arabia's latest moves may also be **politically motivated**:
 - It is a show of alignment with **President Trump**, who is pressing for **lower oil prices** to tame U.S. inflation.
 - The move coincides with an expected **U.S.-Saudi arms deal and defence agreement** (USD 100 billion)
 - There's also anticipation of **sanctions easing** on **Russia, Iran, and Venezuela**, which could add more oil to the market — so Saudi wants to **pre-position** itself at a competitive level.

India: Caught in the Crossfire

- India is the **third-largest oil importer** globally and is deeply impacted by such fluctuations. In 2024–25, India spent **USD 137 billion** on crude imports.

Short-Term Benefits:	Long-Term Risks:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Lower Import Bill: Every USD 1 drop in oil price saves India nearly USD 1.5 billion annually. ◦ Control Inflation: Lower fuel prices ease transport and input costs, reducing inflationary pressures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Remittance Shock: Over 9 million Indian expatriates live in Gulf nations. A slowdown in their economies could lead to job losses and lower remittances (India gets USD 50 billion annually from the Gulf).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Current Account Balance: A reduced oil bill improves trade balance and lowers current account deficit (CAD). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Exports Impacted: India exports refined petroleum products to oil-producing nations. Lower oil prices hurt these revenues and refinery profit margins. ◦ Tax Revenue Dip: As oil prices fall, government earnings from fuel taxes may decline, affecting public finances. ◦ Reduced Investments: Oil-rich Gulf countries are major investors in Indian infrastructure and real estate. Weakening of their economies could hit FDI and project exports.
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India's Measures to Reduce Oil Imports

- **FDI in Oil and Gas PSUs:** In 2021, the government allowed 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in oil and gas Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) under the automatic route, encouraging private and foreign investment in India's energy sector.
- **Coal Bed Methane (CBM):** India is exploring Coal Bed Methane as an alternative energy source to reduce its dependence on crude oil. CBM is a natural gas extracted from coal beds, which is seen as a cleaner alternative.
- **Underground Coal Gasification (UCG):** The government is using UCG to convert coal into synthetic gas, which can be used for electricity generation and industrial processes. This helps in reducing dependence on imported oil and gas.
- **National Gas Hydrate Programme (NGHP):** India is also exploring gas hydrates (frozen methane deposits found under the ocean floor) as a potential energy source. NGHP aims to map these resources and explore their commercial viability.
- **Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP):** Under the OALP, India has opened up oil and gas exploration to private and foreign companies, allowing them to bid for exploration blocks in unlicensed areas. This aims to boost domestic oil and gas production.

Working of Crude Oil Market

- Crude oil, made from compressed hydrocarbons, is a **non-renewable energy source** with **global reserves** found in various regions, notably the **Middle East, Russia, Venezuela and the United States**.
- **Crude oil or petroleum** is made up of a variety of elements like **carbon, hydrogen and sulfur**, and **originates** from the remains of animals and plants that existed millions of years ago, hence termed "**fossil fuel**."

- Geopolitical factors and organizations (OPEC) influence the oil market. Changes can affect supply and prices globally, as seen with the **1970s oil crisis**. The global oil market is influenced by:
 - Supply and demand
 - Geopolitics, economic interests
 - Energy transition trends
- Oil is traded on global commodity markets, mainly via futures contracts on exchanges like: **NYMEX (New York) and ICE (London)**.

OPEC+

- The **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** was established in **1960** by five founding countries: **Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia**, and **Venezuela**. Since its inception, OPEC has grown to include **13 member countries** that together control a significant portion of the world's oil reserves and production capacity.
- However, in **2016**, in response to **falling oil prices** caused by rising **Shale oil production**, OPEC expanded its reach by partnering with additional oil-producing nations that were not part of the original OPEC group. This broader coalition is known as **OPEC+**, which includes key non-OPEC oil producers like **Russia, Mexico, Kazakhstan**, and **Oman**.
- **OPEC+ Members**
 - **OPEC Members:** Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Venezuela.
 - **Non-OPEC Members in OPEC+:** Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Bahrain, Brunei, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, South Sudan, and Sudan.
- OPEC+ collectively accounts for a significant portion of global oil production and plays a crucial role in determining **oil prices** worldwide through **production cuts or increases**.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN INDIA

Context:

As of April 2025, India's unemployment rate stands at 5.1% for individuals aged 15 years and above, according to the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**. This figure emerges from India's first-ever monthly **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**, marking a significant shift from the previous practice of releasing employment data quarterly or annually.

New Monthly Labour Data

- The introduction of monthly labour data aims to provide more timely and granular insights into the employment landscape across the country.
- This change is expected to enhance policy responsiveness and economic planning by offering up-to-date information on employment trends.

- Key Labour Market Indicators
 - **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):** In April 2025, the LFPR for individuals aged 15 years and above was 55.6%. This rate was higher in rural areas (58.0%) compared to urban areas (50.7%).
- **Worker Population Ratio (WPR):** The WPR, indicating the proportion of the working-age population that is employed, stood at 52.8% nationally. Rural areas had a higher WPR (55.4%) than urban areas (47.4%).
- **Gender Disparities in Employment:** The data reveals notable gender disparities in employment indicators:
 - **Unemployment Rate:** Among males, the unemployment rate was slightly higher at 5.2%, compared to 5.0% for females.
- **Labour Force Participation Rate:** Male LFPR was significantly higher at 77.7%, while female LFPR was 34.2%.
- **Worker Population Ratio:** The WPR for males was 73.7%, whereas for females, it was 32.5%.
- **Youth Unemployment:** Youth unemployment (ages 15-29) remains a concern, with an overall rate of 13.8%. Urban youth face higher unemployment rates (17.2%) compared to their rural counterparts (12.3%).
- It's important to note that the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)**, an independent think tank, reported a higher unemployment rate of 7.73% for April 2025. The discrepancy arises due to differences in survey methodologies and data collection approaches between **CMIE and MoSPI**.
- **Implications for Policy and Planning:**
 - The shift to monthly labour data reporting is a significant development for India's economic planning. It allows for more responsive and targeted policy interventions to address employment challenges. The data highlights the need for focused strategies to improve urban employment opportunities, address gender disparities, and tackle youth unemployment.
- By providing more frequent and detailed labour market information, policymakers can better understand the dynamics of employment across different regions and demographics, leading to more effective and inclusive economic policies.

ACCOUNT AGGREGATORS & CONSENT MANAGERS UNDER THE DPDP ACT

Context:

The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 has been passed, and the Draft DPDP Rules, 2025 have been released, introducing a framework for Consent Managers (CMs). This has sparked discussions on leveraging the

existing Account Aggregator (AA) model as a blueprint for rolling out consent-based data governance across sectors beyond finance.

Background (India's Data Governance Landscape)

- India is moving towards a more structured, privacy-respecting, and user-empowering data ecosystem. This effort is driven by:
 - **The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** India's landmark privacy law which gives individuals (called *Data Principals*) greater control over their personal data.
 - **The Account Aggregator (AA) framework:** A practical model already working in India's financial sector that enables individuals to share their financial data securely, based on *explicit consent*.
- As India rolls out the DPDP Act, **Consent Managers (CMs)** are being proposed as key players to ensure that people have full control over who uses their personal data and for what purpose. The **AA model is seen as a blueprint** for this broader regime.

What are Account Aggregators (AAs)?

- Account Aggregators are **digital platforms licensed by the RBI** that allow individuals to:
 - View, manage, and share their financial data (like bank statements, insurance, tax info) from multiple sources.
 - Share this data securely with other institutions like lenders or investment platforms – *only if they give consent*.
 - Revoke consent any time they want.
- This system **does not store data** – it simply acts as a secure bridge between the data holder (like your bank) and the data receiver (like a loan provider), **based on user consent**.
- Significance:
 - It breaks data silos across banks, mutual funds, and insurers.
 - It makes financial services faster and more tailored.
 - Most importantly, **you remain in charge of your data**.

What is the DPDP Act, and what are Consent Managers?

- The **DPDP Act, 2023** aims to create a **rights-based framework** where:
 - Data can be collected or processed *only after the user consents*.
 - Consent must be free, informed, specific, and revocable.
 - Users must be able to manage and withdraw this consent easily.

- This is where **Consent Managers** come in.
- **Under the DPDP regime:**
 - A **Consent Manager** is an **intermediary** who helps individuals give, manage, and withdraw consent from multiple organisations (called *Data Fiduciaries*).
 - They act as **user-friendly dashboards** that work across sectors – not just finance, but also healthcare, education, employment, e-commerce, etc.
- This mirrors the AA model but on a **wider, all-sector scale**.

Why the AA Model is the Blueprint?

- The **AA framework already works at scale** in finance and has:
 - A strong legal foundation (via RBI's Master Directions).
 - Real-time, machine-readable, API-based consent flows.
 - A focus on user control, privacy, and data minimisation.
- Given this experience, it makes sense to use it as the **base model** for **Consent Managers under the DPDP Act**. This would help India avoid starting from scratch and create **one interoperable, unified framework** for all personal data.

Key Proposals & Needed Reforms

- **Mandatory Registration with the Data Protection Board (DPB):** All Consent Managers should be officially registered to ensure accountability and legal compliance.
 - Allow Sector-Specific Consent Managers
 - Let different sectors (health, education, etc.) have their own consent managers, as long as they follow common technical standards.
- **Enable Commercial Sustainability:** Consent Managers should be allowed to form legitimate business arrangements with Data Fiduciaries (like banks, hospitals, etc.), provided they don't compromise user rights.

Wider Significance and Challenges

Benefits:	Challenges:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Builds trust in digital services. ◦ Gives citizens more control over their data. ◦ Prevents data misuse or unauthorized sharing. ◦ Promotes data portability, leading to better competition and innovation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ensuring data security during transfers. ◦ Preventing dark patterns or manipulation in consent seeking. ◦ Educating citizens about how and when to give or deny consent. ◦ Avoiding fragmentation between sectoral consent systems (finance, health, etc.).

INDIA'S TRADE RELATIONS WITH

TURKEY AND AZERBAIJAN

Context:

India's trade relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan have come under renewed strain after both countries criticised India's recent military strikes on terror camps located in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), as part of Operation Sindoor. Their public support for Pakistan in this conflict has led to strong reactions in India, including calls for boycott of goods and advisories against travel to these countries.

Trade Ties between India and These Countries

- Though not major trading partners, both Turkey and Azerbaijan engage in moderate trade with India. **India enjoys a trade surplus** with both nations.
- India–Turkey Trade
 - **Exports (Apr–Feb 2024–25):** USD 5.2 billion (**Top items:** mineral fuels, electrical equipment, chemicals, vehicles, textiles, pharma)
 - **Imports:** USD 2.84 billion (**Key imports:** marble, apples, gold, mineral oil, chemicals, steel)
 - India exports **almost double** the amount it imports from Turkey, giving it a favourable balance.
- India–Azerbaijan Trade
 - **Exports:** USD 86 million (**Key items:** tobacco, tea, chemicals, rubber, ceramic products)
 - **Imports:** USD 1.52 million (**Limited to:** animal fodder, essential oils, skins, leather)
 - Trade volume with Azerbaijan is **very limited**, and mostly symbolic from a macroeconomic view.
- **Strategic and People-to-People Dimensions**
- **Bilateral Agreements:** India and Turkey signed a **trade agreement in 1973**, and created a **Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation in 1983**. However, political trust has been eroding in recent years.
- **People Presence:**
 - Turkey: 3,000 Indian nationals (including ~200 students)
 - Azerbaijan: 1,500 Indians, mainly professionals and businesspersons
- **Tourism:**
 - 3 lakh Indians visited Turkey in 2023
 - 2 lakh visited Azerbaijan

Underlying Tensions (Beyond Trade)

- **Turkey's Ideological Posture:** Turkey has been increasingly vocal on issues involving **Muslim solidarity**, and has often raised the Kashmir issue at international forums like the UN. It also has **defence and diplomatic ties with Pakistan**, which complicates India's bilateral engagement.
- **Azerbaijan's Alignment with Turkey:** Azerbaijan's political and military closeness with Turkey (its "one

nation, two states" principle) often reflects in its foreign policy. This alignment affects how Azerbaijan responds to South Asian conflicts, especially those involving Pakistan.

- **India's Diplomatic Balancing:** While India has **growing energy and infrastructure interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus**, these tensions show the fragility of diplomatic relations when **defence ties and ideological positions intersect with regional rivalries**.

THE 'CORE' OF INFLATION, AND RBI'S RATE CUTTING DECISIONS

Context::

Between 2023 and 2025, India witnessed significant fluctuations in inflation trends driven by global events (war, El Niño), volatile food and fuel prices, and external sector pressures. In response, the RBI adopted a cautious monetary stance, despite calls to cut interest rates, sparking a wider debate on the effectiveness of monetary policy in addressing supply-driven inflation. As inflation moderates in early 2025, the policy landscape shows signs of change.

Recent Trends in Inflation (2023–2025):

Period	CFPI Inflation	CPI (Headline)	Core Inflation
Avg (Feb 2023–Jan 2025)	7.6%	5.2%	4.1%
April 2025	1.8%	3.2%	4.2%

- **Trend Reversal:** In early 2025, food inflation fell below both headline and core inflation for the first time since mid-2023.

Why Did Food Inflation Dominate (Earlier)?

- **Supply-side shocks:**
 - *Russia-Ukraine War (2022):* Disrupted global agri-commodity supplies.
 - *El Niño (2023–2024):* Weakened Indian monsoon, reduced crop yields, led to high domestic food prices.
- **Volatility:** Food and fuel prices react to **weather, geopolitics, and global trade conditions**—not easily controlled by monetary policy.

Why is Core Inflation Rising Now?

- **Economic stability factors:**
 - Slight recovery in demand.
 - Currency stabilization (rupee rebounding from record lows).
 - Supply pressures easing from food and fuel but underlying services and manufacturing inflation remains.
- **External Influences:**

- **Trump's Reciprocal Tariffs (2025):** Reduced exports from China/Vietnam may flood Indian markets with cheap imports—lowering prices but raising protectionist pressures (anti-dumping duties imposed).
- **Rupee recovery:** From 87.99/USD in Feb to 85.5 in May helped curb imported inflation.

Policy Dilemma for RBI:

- **Earlier Argument:** Since core inflation was low, repo rates should have been cut earlier. Delays hurt credit-driven growth.
- **Now:** Core inflation (April 2025: 4.2%) is above the RBI's target (4%), reducing the scope for aggressive rate cuts. Headline inflation, though low (3.2%), is no longer a true reflection of broader inflationary pressures.
- **Outlook Ahead:** Favourable Conditions for Rate Cuts:
 - **Good Monsoon Forecast (2025):** Expected to ease food inflation further.
 - **La Niña effect:** Likely to improve agricultural output.
 - **Stable Oil Prices:** Brent crude at \$65 vs \$83 in 2024.
 - **Soft FAO Global Food Index:** At 128.3 (April), well below the 2022 peak of 160.2.
- **Risks to Monitor:**
 - Persistently sticky **core inflation**.
 - Rising import competition from diverted Chinese goods.
 - Global economic uncertainties, especially U.S. policies under Trump.

Key-Concepts

- **Headline Inflation:** It is the overall inflation in the economy measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which includes all items like food and fuel.
- **Core Inflation:** Inflation that excludes food and fuel components from CPI to eliminate volatility caused by external factors. It is seen as a better indicator of underlying price trends.
- **Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI):** It tracks changes in retail prices of food items separately from the overall CPI.
- **Repo Rate:** It is the rate at which RBI lends short-term money to commercial banks. It is used as a tool to control inflation and stimulate growth.
- **RBI's Monetary Policy:** **Monetary policy** refers to the policy actions taken by a country's central bank (in India, the **RBI**) to control **money supply, interest rates, and credit availability** in the economy. The primary goal is to ensure **price stability, economic growth, and financial stability**.

- **Monetary policy stance:** There are various stances:
 - **Accommodative Stance**, which means the central bank is prepared to expand the money supply to boost economic growth.
 - **Neutral stance** suggests that the central bank can either cut rate or increase rate. This stance is typically adopted when the policy priority is equal on both inflation and growth.
 - **Hawkish stance** indicates that the central bank's top priority is to keep the inflation low. During such a phase, the central bank is willing to hike interest rates to curb money supply and thus reduce the demand.
 - **Calibrated tightening** means during the current rate cycle, a cut in the repo rate is off the table.

POVERTY DECLINE IN INDIA AFTER 2011–12

Context::

India has not released official poverty estimates since the 2011–12 **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)**. In this vacuum, multiple unofficial and often contradictory estimates have emerged. A latest paper employs an alternative methodology—**survey-to-survey imputation**—to evaluate poverty trends in India from 2011–12 to 2022–23 and offers evidence of **significant deceleration in poverty reduction** during this period.

Key Findings of the Study

- Between **2004–05** and **2011–12**, poverty declined substantially from **37% to 22%**.
- From **2011–12** to **2022–23**, the decline was marginal—from **22% to approximately 18%**.
- In absolute terms, the number of poor decreased only slightly from **250 million to 225 million** in the past decade.

Methodological Approaches to Estimate Post-2011 Poverty

- **NSSO-Based Estimates using UMPCE**
 - Utilises **Usual Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (UMPCE)** derived from a single survey question.
 - Adopted in **NSSO surveys (71st round onwards)** and **Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS)**.
 - Lacks compatibility with older, detailed multi-question surveys (like HCES 2011–12).
 - **Estimated poverty: 26–30% in 2019–20.**
 - **Limitation:** Oversimplification due to single-question data collection.
- **National Accounts-Based Approach (Surjit Bhalla et al., 2022)**

- Uses **Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE)** data from **National Accounts Statistics**.
- Applies PFCE growth to scale 2011–12 HCES data to post-2011 years.
- **Limitation:** Assumes uniform consumption growth, potentially overlooking distributional changes and inequality.
- **Survey-to-Survey Imputation (Used by the Authors)**
 - Combines data from related surveys to estimate missing information.
 - Specifically uses the **Employment-Unemployment Survey (EUS, 2011–12)** and **PLFS (post-2017)**, due to similar sampling and methodology.
 - Incorporates **Tendulkar Committee poverty lines**, as opposed to the **World Bank poverty thresholds**.
 - Estimates calculated at the **state level or using state-fixed effects** for improved granularity.
 - **Conclusion:** Poverty declined only marginally post-2011–12 despite earlier rapid decline.

State-Level Trends

- **Significant progress** in poverty reduction noted in **Uttar Pradesh**.
- **Limited or negligible progress** in traditionally poor states like **Jharkhand and Bihar**.
- **Stagnation** in poverty reduction in large states such as **Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh**.

Corroborating Evidence for Slower Poverty Reduction

- **GDP growth rate** slowed from **6.9% (2004–05 to 2011–12)** to **5.7% (2011–12 to 2022–23)**.
- **Real rural wage growth** decelerated from **4.13% annually (2004–05 to 2011–12)** to **2.3% (2011–12 to 2022–23)**.
- **Structural shift reversal:** After decades of decline in agricultural employment, **68 million workers re-entered agriculture** post-2017–18, suggesting distress-driven employment patterns.
- **Agricultural productivity** slowed in recent years due to workforce re-concentration, thereby limiting income growth and poverty reduction.

Significance and Policy Implications

- The study underlines the **urgency of releasing official poverty data** using updated and consistent methodology.
- It suggests that while **economic growth** remains a key factor in poverty reduction, it must be **inclusive and accompanied by sectoral employment and wage gains**.
- It calls for a **renewed focus on rural development**, wage growth, and social sector investments.

- The lack of robust and regular data hampers **evidence-based policymaking** in poverty alleviation.

Government Programmes for Poverty Alleviation in India:

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005:** It provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households willing to do unskilled manual work. It ensures livelihood security and rural asset creation.
- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM):** It aims to organize rural poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs) and enable them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):** It offers financial assistance for construction of pucca houses to rural and urban poor under PMAY-G (Gramin) and PMAY-U (Urban), with the goal of “Housing for All”.
- **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** It provides subsidized food grains to around 67% of India's population. Major components include Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** It is launched during COVID-19 to distribute free food grains to the poor under NFSA. It ensured food security for the most vulnerable sections.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):** A financial inclusion scheme that ensures access to banking, credit, insurance, and pension for the unbanked poor.
- **Ayushman Bharat – PM Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY):** It provides health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization for poor and vulnerable families.
- **Skill India Mission (including PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana - PMKVY):** It enhances employability by offering market-relevant skill training to the youth, especially those from economically weaker sections.

Mains PYQ:

- Q: “Poverty Alleviation Programmes in India remain mere showpieces until they are backed by political will.” Discuss with reference to the performance of the major poverty alleviation programmes in India. (2017)**
- Q: “Despite consistent experience of high growth, India still goes with the lowest indicators of human development.” Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive. (2019)**
- Q: “Explain intra-generational and inter-generational issues of equity from the perspective of inclusive growth and sustainable development.” (2020)**

GENOME-EDITED RICE

Context:

India recently became the first country in the world to develop rice varieties (DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala), Pusa DST Rice 1) using genome editing technology. This breakthrough is significant because it promises to address critical challenges such as climate change, pest resistance, and water scarcity, while increasing crop yield and nutritional quality.

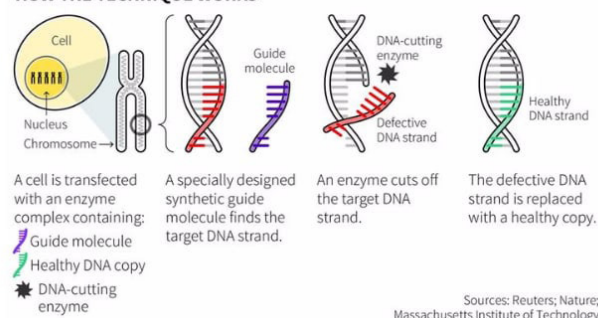
What is Genome Editing and How is it Different from Genetic Modification?

- Genome editing is a modern **biotechnological technique** that allows scientists to make precise changes to an **organism's DNA**. It involves **editing specific parts of the genome** without introducing genes from other species.

DNA editing

A DNA editing technique, called CRISPR/Cas9, works like a biological version of a word-processing programme's “find and replace” function.

HOW THE TECHNIQUE WORKS



- There are different types of genome editing techniques, often categorized as **Site-Directed Nuclease (SDN)** methods:
 - **SDN-1:** The DNA is cut at a specific location, and the cell repairs the break naturally, causing small mutations that could also occur naturally.
 - **SDN-2:** The DNA is cut and a small piece of DNA is introduced to guide the repair process, making precise changes.
 - **SDN-3:** Foreign DNA is inserted into the genome, which is considered **traditional genetic modification (GM)**.
- The two rice varieties developed in India use **SDN-1 and SDN-2** techniques, meaning they do not contain any foreign genes and thus are **not classified as genetically modified (GM) crops** under many regulatory frameworks.

The Two New Genome-Edited Rice Varieties

India launched two genome-edited rice varieties developed by researchers under the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**:

- **DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala):** Developed from the popular high-yielding Samba Mahsuri rice, Kamala is superior in several aspects:

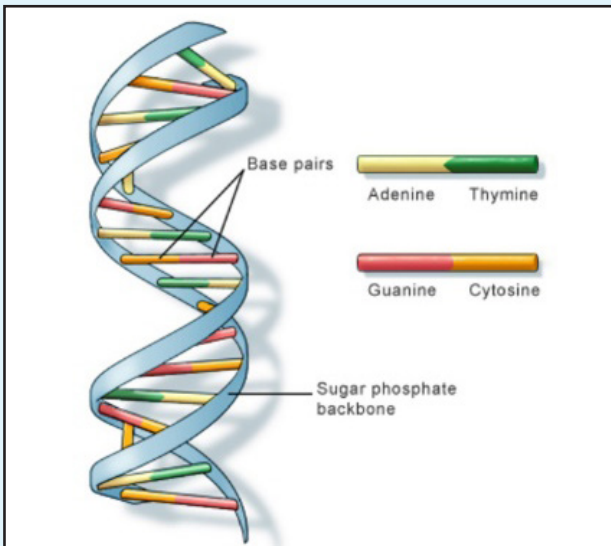
- ▶ **Higher yield:** 5.37 tonnes per hectare compared to 4.5 tonnes of Samba Mahsuri.
- ▶ **Drought tolerance** and better **nitrogen use efficiency**.
- ▶ **Earlier maturity:** About 20 days earlier than its parent variety, which saves water, fertilizer, and reduces methane emissions. This combination of traits makes it a climate-resilient, resource-efficient rice variety.
- **Pusa DST Rice 1:** Developed from the MTU1010 variety, this rice performs better under stress conditions like:
 - ▶ **Inland salinity stress:** 9.66% higher yield than MTU1010.
 - ▶ **Alkalinity and coastal salinity:** Shows 14.66% and 30.4% yield advantage, respectively. This makes Pusa DST Rice 1 valuable for cultivation in salt-affected areas.

Scientific Process Behind Development

- Scientists used advanced genome editing tools (SDN-1 and SDN-2) to create these rice varieties. This process involved:
 - ▶ Precisely editing native genes within the rice plants without adding any foreign DNA.
 - ▶ Extensive field trials across multiple locations and seasons to ensure consistent performance.
 - ▶ Peer-reviewed research, with Pusa DST Rice 1's research paper published in 2020 and widely cited, validating the scientific community's recognition.
- The technology allows for **precision breeding**, which is faster and more targeted compared to traditional breeding or genetic modification.

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA):

- Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is the **hereditary material** in humans and almost all other organisms. Nearly every cell in a person's body has the same DNA.



- Most DNA is located in the **cell nucleus** (where it is called nuclear DNA), but a small amount of DNA can also be found in the mitochondria (where it is called **mitochondrial DNA or mtDNA**).
- Mitochondria are structures within cells that convert the energy from food into a form that cells can use.
- The information in DNA is stored as a code made up of four chemical bases:
 - ▶ adenine (A)
 - ▶ guanine (G)
 - ▶ cytosine (C)
 - ▶ thymine (T)
- DNA bases pair up with each other, **A with T and C with G**, to form units called base pairs. Each base is also attached to a sugar molecule and a phosphate molecule.
- Together, a base, sugar, and phosphate are called a **Nucleotides** are arranged in two long strands that form a spiral called a double helix.
- The structure of the double helix is somewhat like a ladder, with the base pairs forming the ladder's rungs and the sugar and phosphate molecules forming the vertical sidepieces of the ladder.
- An important property of DNA is that it can replicate, or make copies of itself.
- **Each strand of DNA** in the **double helix** can serve as a pattern for duplicating the sequence of bases.
- This is critical when cells divide because each new cell needs to have an exact copy of the DNA present in the old cell.

SC STRIKES DOWN RETROSPECTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCES

Context:

The Supreme Court of India invalidated government-issued notifications and office memorandums that allowed retrospective or ex-post facto environmental clearances to industrial, mining, and infrastructure projects that had commenced operations without prior mandatory environmental approvals.

Key Highlights of the Judgment:

- The Supreme Court ruled that projects which began without obtaining **prior Environmental Clearance (EC)** cannot be retrospectively regularised.
- The Court struck down the:
 - ▶ **2017 Notification:** The 2017 notification allowed retrospective ECs. It introduced as a "one-time opportunity" for six months allowing post-facto clearance.

- **2021 Office Memorandum (OM)** and the subsequent 2022 memorandum: These expanded the framework, effectively institutionalising a system of regularisation for violators.
- The memorandums violated the fundamental requirement of *prior* clearance — a term emphasised 34 times in the 2006 Notification — and weakened environmental protections. The Court declared these instruments “**illegal**” and directed that **no similar provisions should be issued in the future**.
- All future retrospective clearances are prohibited.
- **Court’s Observations:**
 - There are no equities in favour of those who committed gross illegalities without obtaining prior environmental clearances.
 - The violators were **not unaware or uninformed**; rather, they included companies, real estate developers, mining firms, and public sector undertakings.
 - The **2021 OM** was held to be a “**craftily drafted**” attempt to create a **retrospective legal regime** for environmental compliance, which the Court found **arbitrary and illegal**.
 - The Court strongly emphasized that **development cannot come at the cost of environmental degradation**, stating:

“Conservation of environment and its improvement is an essential part of the concept of development.”

Legal and Constitutional Basis:

- The Court invoked **Article 21 of the Constitution**, which guarantees the right to life, noting that environmental protection is an integral component of this right.
- Under Article 21 of the Constitution, the **right to live in a pollution free environment** is guaranteed. In fact, the **1986 Act** has been enacted to give effect to this fundamental right. Therefore, even the Central Government has a duty to protect and improve the natural environment.
- It relied on previous landmark judgments:
 - **Common Cause (2017)**
 - **Alembic Pharmaceuticals (2020)**
- Key-Supreme Court Observations (importance of the EIA process)
 - In **TN Godavarman Thirumulpad v Union of India** (1997), the Court recognized the right to a clean environment and the need for EIA before starting projects in forest areas.
 - In **MC Mehta v Union of India** (1996), the Court stressed the necessity of EIAs for projects affecting water bodies.
 - In **Centre for Environmental Law v Union of India** (2018), the Court reiterated the importance of EIA procedures and public consultations.

Retrospective Environmental Clearances

- Retrospective Environmental Clearances (also called *ex-post facto* clearances) refer to granting approval for a project after it has already started construction or operations, without having obtained the mandatory prior environmental clearance.
- Under **India’s Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework**:
 - Projects (like industries, real estate, mining, infrastructure) must first get environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment before starting work.
- In some cases, projects started without getting prior environmental approval.
- To deal with this, the government issued a **2017 notification**, later reinforced by 2021 and 2022 office memorandums, allowing such violators to:
 - Apply for post-facto environmental clearances.
 - Continue operations by paying fines and going through a belated compliance process.

Government Initiatives

- **ENVIS (Environmental Information System)**: Established in 1982 to collect and disseminate environmental information, aiding decision-making.
- **PARIVESH**: A single-window platform launched for efficient environmental clearance processes and compliance monitoring.

URBAN FIRES AND STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITY

Context::

The recent fire tragedy in Hyderabad’s Gulzar Houz area that claimed 17 lives has once again highlighted systemic gaps in urban disaster preparedness, especially in the context of structural vulnerabilities, non-compliance with safety norms, and inefficient response infrastructure.

Structural Vulnerabilities in Urban Buildings

- **Narrow Entrances and Staircases**: The affected building had a single, tunnel-like staircase. In case of fire, such structural layouts act as chokepoints, hindering evacuation and rescue efforts.
- **Lack of Setbacks**: Absence of legally mandated side and rear spaces restricted access for fire tenders and limited ventilation.
- **Combustible Materials**: Heavy use of wood and lack of fire-retardant materials accelerated smoke accumulation and fire spread.
- **Fire Safety Non-Compliance**

- No functional fire alarms, extinguishers, or sprinkler systems were installed.
- Absence of fire exits and emergency lighting created chaos during evacuation.
- Deviations from approved building plans indicated systemic regulatory failure.
- ◉ **National Building Code (NBC)** mandates fire safety features in commercial and residential buildings.

NAXAL-FREE INDIA

Context:

In a historic anti-Naxal operation at Karreguttalu Hill on the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border, security forces eliminated 31 Naxalites in the largest such operation to date, marking a major step towards the government's goal of making India Naxal-free by March 31, 2026.

What is Naxalism?

- ◉ **Naxalism** refers to the **violent armed struggle** led by **communist extremist groups**, inspired by **Maoist ideology**, to overthrow the Indian state through **people's war**.
- ◉ It originated in **1967** from a peasant uprising in **Naxalbari village** in West Bengal — hence the name "Naxalism."
- ◉ These groups, often called **Left-Wing Extremists (LWE)**, claim to represent the marginalized, especially **tribals, Dalits, and landless peasants**, and aim to establish a **communist state through armed revolution**.
- ◉ **Factors Responsible for the Rise of Naxalism**
 - Economic and Social Deprivation
 - Land and Forest Rights Issues
 - Weak Governance and Security Vacuum
 - Political Neglect and Corruption
 - Ideological Indoctrination
- ◉ **Key Areas Affected:** Naxalism is concentrated in the "**Red Corridor**", spanning central and eastern India:
 - Chhattisgarh (especially Bastar, Sukma, Bijapur, Narayanpur), Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra

(Gadchiroli), Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal (Junglemahal area)

- ◉ At its peak, **over 200 districts** were considered Naxal-affected. By 2025, this has reduced to **18 districts**.

Government's Initiatives to End Naxalism

- ◉ Security Measures
 - **Joint Operations:** Operation Prahar (2017), Operation Green Hunt, Operation Hill Vijay, Operation Samadhan-Prahar, and Operation Thunder
 - **SAMADHAN Doctrine:** It is a strategy combining Security, Development, and Confidence-building.
 - **Establishment of Security Camps:** In inaccessible areas.
 - **Modernization of Police Forces:** Better arms, communication, and intelligence.
- ◉ Developmental Interventions
 - **Aspirational Districts Programme:** Focused development in backward regions.
 - **Infrastructure Projects:** Roads, telecom, schools, health centers.
 - **Skill Development & Employment:** Particularly for tribal youth.
- ◉ Administrative & Legal Measures
 - **Unified Command Structures** for joint planning.
 - **National Policy and Action Plan (2015)** to combat LWE holistically.
 - Creation of **Fortified Police Stations** and **Night-landing helipads**.

PYQ

Q: Naxalism is a social, economic and development issues manifesting as a violent internal security threat. In this context, discuss the emerging issues and suggest a multilayered strategy to tackle the menace of Naxalism. (2022)



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SECTION -B

QUICK BYTES

SARASWATI PUSHKARALU

Context:

The 12-day **Saraswati Pushkaralu**, a once-in-12-year mega religious festival dedicated to the **mythical Saraswati river**, began at **Kaleshwaram** in Telangana. This is the **first time** the event is being officially organized by the Telangana government since the state's formation in 2014.

About Saraswati Pushkaralu

- **Saraswati Pushkaralu** is a **once-in-12-years Hindu religious festival** dedicated to the **mythical Saraswati river**, believed to be a **subterranean (underground) river** in Indian tradition.
- It is a river festival similar to the **Kumbh Mela**, observed when **Jupiter (Guru)** enters the zodiac sign associated with the river—in this case, **Gemini (Mithuna Rasi)** for Saraswati.
- The festival lasts for **12 days** from the time of Jupiter's entry into the specific zodiac sign.
- It is celebrated mainly at **Triveni Sangamam** in **Kaleshwaram**, Telangana, where the **Godavari, Pranahita, and Saraswati rivers** are believed to converge.
- **Belief:** Taking a **holy dip** during this period is believed to **purify sins** and bestow spiritual merit.
- **Cultural Importance:** Saraswati Pushkaralu blends **astronomical belief**, ritual purity, and river worship, underscoring the deep reverence for rivers in Indian civilization.

INTERNATIONAL BOOKER PRIZE

Context:

Indian writer, lawyer and activist **Banu Mushtaq** has made history by becoming the **first author writing in the Kannada language** to win the **International Booker prize** with her short story anthology, **Heart Lamp**.

About Heart Lamp

- Featuring **12 short stories** written by Mushtaq between 1990 and 2023, **Heart Lamp** poignantly captures the hardships of Muslim women living in southern India.
- In **Heart Lamp**, her female characters mirror this spirit of resistance and resilience.
- The stories were selected and translated into English from Kannada (a language of south India spoken by between 50 and 80 million people), which is spoken in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, by Deepa Bhashti.
- It is the first short story collection to win the prestigious prize. The award was a significant win for regional literature.

International Booker Prize:

- The **International Booker Prize** is awarded annually for a book translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland.
- It recognizes both the **author and the translator**, with the £50,000 prize split equally between them.
- It is established in **2005**, it promotes global literature and cultural exchange.

- It differs from the **Booker Prize**, which is awarded to English-language originals only.

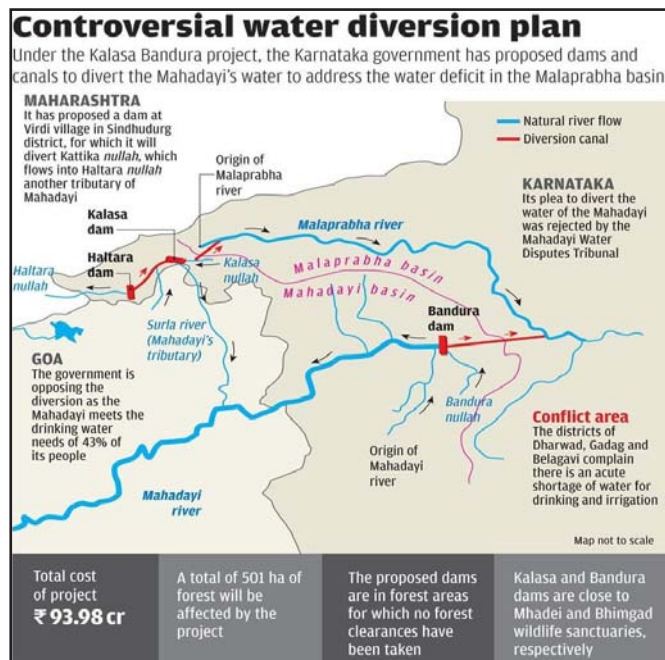
MAHADAYI (MHADEI) RIVER

Context:

A new study by the National Institute of Oceanography found that Karnataka's plan to divert water from the **Mahadayi river** will have minimal impact on **Goa's Mandovi estuary**. This has brought the long-standing water dispute between Karnataka and Goa back into focus.

About the Mahadayi (Mhadei) River

- River Mahadayi is spread across the Districts of **Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra**.



- Origin:** The Mahadayi River originates in the Western Ghats in Karnataka's Belagavi district (Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary).
- Length:** Approximately 111 km long.
- Drainage Basin:** It covers around **2032 sq. km**, with **52 km in Karnataka, 9 km in Maharashtra**, and the remaining 50 km in Goa.
- Flow:** It flows westward and drains into the Arabian Sea at **Panaji (Goa)**, where it is known as the **Mandovi River**.
- Tributaries:** Kalasa Nala, Surla Nala, Haltar Nala, Poti Nala, Mahadayi Nala, Pansheer Nala, Bail Nala, Andher Nala
- Importance:**
 - For Goa:** It is lifeline for drinking water, agriculture, navigation, and ecological sustainability. The river supports the **Mandovi estuary**, which is crucial for Goa's economy.

- For Karnataka:** It is seen as a potential source to augment water supply to **Malaprabha basin**, which caters to **drought-prone districts like Dharwad, Gadag, and Belagavi**.

The Dispute

- States Involved:** Goa (downstream), Karnataka (upstream), and Maharashtra (minor stakeholder).
- Issue:** Karnataka wants to **divert water from two Mahadayi tributaries** — Kalasa and Bhandura (Bandura) — to the **east-flowing Malaprabha River**, a tributary of the Krishna.
- Goa's Opposition:**
 - Goa claims this diversion will **reduce river flow**, particularly in **dry seasons**, and threaten its **drinking water needs, Mandovi estuary ecosystem**, and the **Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary**.
 - Also raises concerns of **ecological degradation** and **violation of inter-state water sharing principles**.

Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT)

- Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT) was set up in 2010.
- Tribunal's 2018 Verdict:** The tribunal allocated 13.42 TMC (Thousand Million Cubic Feet) of water to Karnataka.
 - 1.72 TMC from **Kalasa**
 - TMC from **Bhandura**
 - Remaining for in-basin use and hydro projects
- Goa and Karnataka both challenged the verdict in the Supreme Court, where the matter is *sub judice*.

BROOKLYN BRIDGE

Context:

A Mexican navy tall sailing ship Cuauhtemoc reportedly hit the New York City's Brooklyn Bridge.

About

- The Brooklyn Bridge is a large-scale steel and stone cable-stayed suspension bridge with a central span of 1,595 feet (486m) and a total length of 5,989 Feet (1,25m).
- It was completed in 1883.
- It spans the East River to connect the New York City boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn.
- It is one of NYC's most iconic landmarks.
- It carries over 100,000 vehicles and 32,000 pedestrians daily, and its central walkway is a major tourist draw.



About Cuauhtémoc

- The Cuauhtémoc is a 297-foot-long, 40-foot-wide barque launched in 1982.
- It serves as a training vessel for naval cadets and is known as the “Ambassador and Knight of the Seas.”

RENAMING BY CHINA

Context:

China has repeatedly tried to assert its claim over Arunachal Pradesh by renaming locations and calling it “Zangnan” (South Tibet), but India has firmly rejected these moves, affirming the state as an integral part of its territory.

What is China doing?

- China has followed a pattern of issuing “**standardised names**” for places in Arunachal Pradesh, claiming them as part of its territory. This is not new, but has gained momentum in recent years:
 - 1st List (2017): 6 locations renamed

Key-locations	
Chinese Name	Likely Indian Location (District)
Wo'gyainling	Tawang
Mila Ri	Kra Daadi
Qoidengarbo Ri	West Siang
Mainquka	Siang (Mechuka/Menchuka)
Bumo La	Anjaw
Namkapub Ri	Subansiri

- 2nd List (2021): 15 locations renamed
- 3rd List (2023): 11 locations renamed
- 4th List (2024): 30 locations renamed

- These names are published under the “**regulations on geographical names**” by the Chinese government and are meant to build a formal narrative in official documents, maps, and international communication.
- Key-locations being renamed by China
 - The places renamed generally include **mountain peaks, rivers, residential areas, and passes** across **Tawang, Upper Subansiri, Siang**, and other sensitive districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - These areas are not random — they are mostly close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC)
 - ♦ **Strategically important**, especially near **Tawang**, which China considers particularly sensitive
 - ♦ Locations linked with **local cultural, historical, or religious value** to India (e.g., Tawang is associated with Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama’s journey)
- These renamings span **across Arunachal Pradesh**, from **Tawang in the west to Anjaw in the east**, covering key districts like **Siang, West Siang, Subansiri, and Kra Daadi**.
- The Chinese government has standardised the names of some parts of Zangnan. This is within China’s sovereign rights. Zangnan is the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh. China claims some 90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh as its territory.

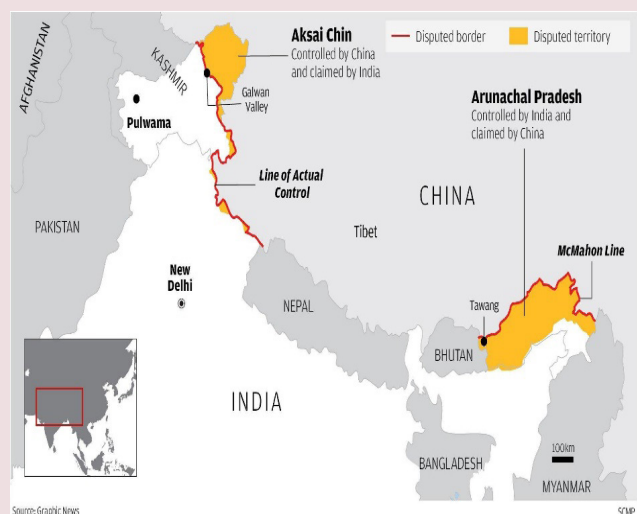
Significance of Arunachal Pradesh

- **Strategic Geography:** Arunachal borders Tibet (China), Bhutan, and Myanmar — making it crucial for India’s eastern defence.
- **Tawang and Buddhism:** Tawang, the westernmost part of Arunachal Pradesh, is bounded by Tibet (China) to the north, Bhutan to the southwest and Sela ranges separated from West Kameng district in the east.
 - The inhabitants of this district are all of the Monpa tribe. The Monpa belongs to the Mongoloid stock.
 - Tawang is spiritually significant as the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama and was part of historical Tibetan trade routes. China considers it symbolically important, fearing any future developments involving the Dalai Lama’s succession.
- **Buffer Zone:** Like **Aksai Chin** in Ladakh, China views border regions as buffers for security. Arunachal, from Beijing’s point of view, would be a flank if tensions rise in Tibet.

India-China border:

- The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout.
- Along certain stretches of its **3,488 km** length, there is no mutually agreed **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
- India, following Independence, believed it had inherited firm boundaries from the British, but this was contrary to China’s view.

- China felt the British had left behind a disputed legacy on the boundary between the two newly formed republics.



- 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 **McMahon Line**.

COLOMBIA JOINS CHINA'S BRI

Context:

China and Colombia signed a joint cooperation plan under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

What is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?

- Launched in:** 2013
- The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's flagship global infrastructure and economic development project.
- It aims to enhance connectivity and economic integration across **Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America** by:
 - Building roads, railways, ports, pipelines, and power plants.
 - Boosting trade and investment flows.
 - Encouraging people-to-people ties and tourism.
 - Creating global supply chain links centered on China.
- The idea is inspired by the **ancient Silk Road trade routes**, hence the name.

Participation:

- As of now, over 150 countries and 30+ international organizations have signed cooperation agreements under BRI. These include both developing and developed nations across continents.
- After Colombia's entry, the number of **Latin American and Caribbean countries** participating in BRI has risen to over 20.
- India's stand on the initiative:** India is one of the countries who has concerns about the Belt and Road Initiative. This is especially in the context of the **disputed borders** it shares with China and the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** which runs through **Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK)**.

INDIA TO GIVE INTEL ON PAK CAMPS TO FATF

Context:

The Indian authorities are planning to apprise the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** of the latest evidence related to the terror bases in Pakistan that were destroyed by the defence forces during the precision attacks as part of **Operation Sindoor**, in the aftermath of the **Pahalgam terror attack**.

What is FATF?

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an **intergovernmental policy-making body** established in **1989** to fight money laundering, terrorist financing, and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- Headquarters:** Paris, France
- FATF works by setting **global standards** and monitoring compliance through peer reviews.
- Membership:** It is a 40-member body. India became a member of FATF in 2010.
- When a country fails to meet these standards, it may be placed either on the:
 - Black List:** It is given to the countries that FATF considers uncooperative tax havens. These countries are known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs).
 - Grey List:** It is a warning given to the country that it might come on the Black list.
- Grey List countries face increased financial scrutiny, reputational damage, and often economic consequences like reduced foreign investment or stricter IMF lending conditions.
- Pakistan's FATF History:**
 - 2008:** Pakistan was grey-listed for the first time.
 - 2009:** It was removed after commitments to reform.
 - 2012–2015:** Again grey-listed for failing to act against terror networks.

- **2018–2022:** Grey-listed due to failure to prosecute UN-designated terror groups like JeM and LeT.
- **October 2022:** Removed after showing “significant progress,” but FATF urged Pakistan to keep cooperating with the **Asia Pacific Group (APG)** for reforms in its **AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism)** regime.

WHO PANDEMIC AGREEMENT

Context:

In response to the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) have adopted a landmark **WHO Pandemic Agreement** at the **78th World Health Assembly** in Geneva. This legally binding resolution aims to strengthen global pandemic preparedness, ensure equitable access to medical resources, and prevent future health emergencies.

About the WHO Pandemic Agreement

- **The WHO Pandemic Agreement** aims to prevent and respond effectively to future pandemics by strengthening international cooperation, ensuring equitable access to health tools, and creating a fairer global health security framework.
- The pandemic treaty, which has been adopted without the United States, is the **only the second legally binding accord** (under **Article 19 of the WHO Constitution**) in the WHO’s 75-year history, the first being the **2003 tobacco control treaty**.
- There is **no binding enforcement** mechanism to ensure compliance.
- **Key Provisions of the Treaty:**
 - **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) System:** Pharmaceutical companies involved in this system will provide **20% of their real-time production** (vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics) to WHO to ensure equitable and timely distribution during a pandemic.
 - **Equity in Access:** It emphasizes on **public health need-based distribution**, especially prioritizing **developing countries**.
 - **Implementation Mechanism:** A dedicated **Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG)** will draft and negotiate the detailed PABS framework. The final plan will be reviewed in the next World Health Assembly.
 - **Commitment to Multilateralism:** It recognizes that safeguarding public health, science, and economies requires **global cooperation** and **shared accountability**.
- **Significance:**
 - A proactive and structured response framework to avoid repeat global disruptions as seen during COVID-19.

- Strengthens WHO’s leadership in coordinating international health emergencies.
- Establishes a precedent for future pandemic preparedness agreements based on science, equity, and collaboration.

Major Initiatives of WHO

- **International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005:** Legal framework for pandemic response.
- **COVAX** (part of ACT Accelerator): Equitable vaccine access.
- **Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI).**
- **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), 2003.**
- **WHO Pandemic Agreement (2024):** New treaty for global pandemic preparedness.

DR. AJAY KUMAR ASSUMES CHARGE AS UPSC CHAIRMAN

Context:

The government appointed **former defence secretary Dr Ajay Kumar** as the **chairman of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)**, filling the vacancy caused by former chairperson **Preeti Sudan’s retirement**.

About

The UPSC is responsible for conducting civil services exams, which are used to select officers for top services like the IAS (Indian Administrative Service), IFS (Indian Foreign Service), and IPS (Indian Police Service). The commission is headed by a chairman and can have up to 10 members.

- The Constitution of India provides for four watchdogs to keep a check on different functions of the State.
 - **The Supreme Court:** SC keeps a check on the judicial functions of the state.
 - **The Election Commission of India:** ECI ensures free and fair elections.
 - **The Comptroller and Auditor General of India:** The Comptroller and Auditor General keep in check the finances of the country.
 - **The Union Public Service Commission:** UPSC is a watchdog to ensure fair recruitment on the basis of merit.
- The Constitution visualises the UPSC to be the **‘watch-dog of merit system’** in India.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** Article 315 to 323 of Part XIV of the Indian Constitution deals with provisions relating to the Union Public Service Commission as well as the State Public Service Commission.

UPSC Chairman

- ▶ The Chairman of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) is appointed by the President of India.
- ▶ The term of appointment is regulated in accordance with the provisions of **Article 316(2)** of the Constitution of India, and the conditions of service will be governed by **UPSC (Members) Regulations, 1969**, as amended from time to time.
- ▶ **Tenure:** He/she holds office for a term of six years or until attaining the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- ▶ **Re-appointment:** A person who has once held office as a member (including Chairman) of a Public Service Commission is not eligible for reappointment to that office.
- ▶ **Resignation:** The Chairman may resign by writing to the President of India.
- ▶ **Removal and Suspension:** The Chairman can be removed from office by the President only in specific conditions as provided under the Constitution. The President may suspend the Chairman while a reference is made to the Supreme Court regarding the grounds of removal.
- ▶ **Grounds for removal include:**
 - ◆ Insolvency (bankruptcy).
 - ◆ Engaging in paid employment outside the duties of the office.
 - ◆ Being physically or mentally unfit, as determined by the President.
- ▶ **Conditions of Service:** The President determines the conditions of service of the Chairman and other members at the time of appointment. Conditions cannot be altered to their disadvantage after the appointment.
- ▶ **Remuneration and Expenses:** The salary, allowances, and pension of the Chairman are paid from the Consolidated Fund of India.

KALESHWARAM INQUIRY COMMISSION

Context:

The **Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)** is under scrutiny for alleged irregularities and structural issues, leading to the formation of a Judicial Inquiry Commission.

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP):

- **Location:** It is constructed on the **Godavari River** in **Kaleshwaram**, Bhupalpally district, Telangana.



- **Purpose:** Multi-purpose project designed for **irrigation, municipal water supply, and drinking water** needs in **20 of the 31 districts** in Telangana, including Hyderabad and Secunderabad.
- **Scale:**
 - ▶ World's **largest multi-stage lift irrigation project**.
 - ▶ Covers **~45 lakh acres** of farmland.
 - ▶ Water lifted across various stages using massive pump houses and pipelines.

Technical and Geographical Features:

- **Source River:** Begins at the **confluence of the Pranahita and Godavari Rivers**.
- **Pranahita Sub-Basin:** Formed by tributaries like **Wardha, Painganga, and Wainganga**, contributing to the **7th largest drainage basin** in the Indian subcontinent.
- **Infrastructure Details:**
 - ▶ Comprises **7 major links** and **28 project packages**.
 - ▶ Spans approximately **500 km across 13 districts**.
 - ▶ Associated **canal network exceeds 1,800 km**, enabling extensive water distribution.

Water Allocation and Usage:

- **Total Water Capacity:** Aims to lift and utilize **240 TMC (Thousand Million Cubic Feet)** of water.
- **Usage Breakdown:**
 - ▶ **Irrigation** for agriculture.
 - ▶ **Drinking water** for villages.
 - ▶ **Municipal supply** for Hyderabad.
 - ▶ **Industrial use** in the region.

Kaleshwaram Inquiry Commission

- **Objective:** To examine cost escalations, procedural violations, and structural damages in the multi-crore Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project, which was touted as the world's largest such irrigation project.
- **Headed by:** Former Supreme Court Judge **Justice P.C. Ghose**.

50 YEARS OF SIKKIM'S STATEHOOD

Context:

Sikkim is **celebrating the golden jubilee (50 years)** of its **statehood**, which began on **May 16, 1975**, when it officially became the **22nd state of the Indian Union**.

About

- Sikkim, before becoming a state of India, was an **independent kingdom ruled by the Chogyal (monarch)**. Although it had close ties with India, especially after 1947, Sikkim was not an Indian state immediately after independence.
- It functioned as a **protectorate of India** under the 1950 Indo-Sikkim Treaty. Under this arrangement:
 - India controlled Sikkim's **defense, external affairs, and communication**.
 - Sikkim retained autonomy in **internal administration**.
- Events Leading to Statehood (1973–1975)
 - In the early 1970s, there was increasing **political unrest** in Sikkim, particularly due to **allegations of undemocratic rule** by the Chogyal and **demands for more democracy** by local political parties.
 - The situation escalated in **1973**, leading to **mass protests**.
 - A **tripartite agreement** was signed between the Chogyal, Indian government, and Sikkimese political parties, leading to constitutional reforms and an **elected government**.
 - In **1974**, the elected Sikkim Assembly passed a resolution seeking **association with India**.
 - Finally, in **May 1975**, following a **referendum where over 97% voted in favor**, the Indian Parliament passed the **36th Constitutional Amendment**, making **Sikkim the 22nd state of India**.

JYOTI RANI ESPIONAGE CASE

Context:

Jyoti Rani, a Haryana-based YouTuber with a large following, was arrested for allegedly spying for Pakistan's intelligence agency (believed to be ISI) under Operation Sindoor. She has been booked under:

- Section 3 & Section 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923
- Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)

Official Secrets Act (OSA), 1923:

- It is a colonial-era legislation meant to protect State secrets, especially related to defence, intelligence, and national security.
- **Section 3: Penalties for Spying.** This section targets any individual who:
 - Gains access to or observes **prohibited areas**
 - Prepares or shares any material (plans, models, documents, etc.) that could **benefit an enemy**
 - Collects or communicates any **classified information**

- **Punishment:** Up to **14 years' imprisonment** for offences relating to defence establishments. Up to **3 years** in other cases
- Section 5: Wrongful Communication of Information
 - Even **unauthorised disclosure**—whether deliberate or careless—of official secrets is punishable.
 - Includes both the **giver and receiver** of information.
- **Punishment:** Up to **3 years imprisonment**, or **fine**, or both.

Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023

- This section criminalizes any act that:
 - **Encourages separatism**
 - **Incites rebellion or subversive activities**
 - **Endangers India's sovereignty or unity**
- It applies not just to physical acts, but also **speech, writing, social media posts, financial aid**, etc.
- **Punishment:** **Life imprisonment**, or Imprisonment up to **7 years**, and fine

52ND CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

Context:

Justice Bhushan Ramakrishna Gavai was sworn in as the Chief Justice of India (CJI). CJI Gavai succeeds Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, who demitted office on May 13, and will hold office till November 23, 2025. He is the 52nd Chief Justice of India.

Who is a CJI?

- The Chief Justice of India (CJI) is appointed by the President of India.
- The process of appointment involves consultation between the President and the current Chief Justice of India, as well as other key officials.
- The procedure is outlined in **Article 124 of the Indian Constitution**.
- **Appointment Consultation:** The President of India, while appointing the Chief Justice of India, is required to consult with the following individuals:
 - The Chief Justice of India
 - The Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts as the President deems necessary.
- **Recommendation by the Outgoing CJI:** Typically, the outgoing Chief Justice of India recommends the name of the most senior judge of the Supreme Court as the next Chief Justice. The seniority is determined based on the length of service as a judge.

- **President's Decision:** After consultations and considering the recommendations, the President makes the final decision on the appointment of the Chief Justice of India.
- **Oath of Office:** Once appointed, the new Chief Justice of India takes the oath of office before the President. It's important to note that the appointment of the Chief Justice of India is based on the principle of seniority, and the most senior judge of the Supreme Court is typically appointed to the position.
- However, the President is **not bound by the principle of seniority** and has the discretion to appoint any judge of the Supreme Court as the Chief Justice.
- The Chief Justice of India holds office until the age of 65 years or until retirement, whichever is earlier.
- If a Chief Justice demits office, the President appoints the next senior-most judge of the Supreme Court as the new Chief Justice.
- The process is designed to ensure the independence of the judiciary and the continuity of leadership within the Supreme Court.
- Lok Adalats are **voluntary and consensus-based**, and promote a **non-adversarial model of justice**.
- **Types of Lok Adalats**
 - Permanent Lok Adalat (PLA)
 - National Lok Adalat
 - State Lok Adalat
 - District Lok Adalat
 - Taluk (Tehsil) Lok Adalat
 - Mobile Lok Adalat
 - Mega Lok Adalat

LOK ADALAT

Context:

The Rajasthan High Court has initiated a *suo motu* case over non-functioning of at least 16 permanent Lok Adalats in the state.

What are Lok Adalats?

- **Lok Adalat**, meaning "People's Court," is an **alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism** in India.
- It aims to resolve disputes **amicably, quickly, and without the formalities of courts**.
- They are a part of India's effort to make "**access to justice**" **affordable, informal, and participatory**, especially for the poor or those unable to navigate complex legal systems.
- It functions under the auspices of the **Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 (providing a statutory status)**.
 - The Act empowers the creation of Lok Adalats by the Legal Services Authorities at national, state, district, and taluka levels.
- Lok Adalats derive their authority from **Article 39A of the Constitution of India**, which mandates the state to ensure that the legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity.
- Lok Adalats can:
 - Hear civil cases, including **family disputes**, money recovery, accident claims, etc.
 - Also deal with **compoundable criminal cases**.
 - **Decisions are binding and final**; no appeal lies against them (though a dissatisfied party may approach a regular court through a fresh suit).

ADVANCED MULTI AGENCY CENTRE TO COMBAT TERRORISM

Context:

The government launched a revamped **Multi Agency Centre (MAC)** enhanced with **AI/ML capabilities** to improve data analytics and integration across intelligence agencies.

About MAC

- The upgrade aims to combat terrorism, organized crime, and cyberattacks by providing a seamless platform for security forces nationwide, following **operation Sindoor**.
- The new MAC will provide a seamless and integrated platform for synergising the efforts of all the agencies in addressing the complex and interconnected national security challenges being faced in today's environment.
- It incorporates futuristic capabilities such as embedded **AI/ML techniques** to harness the potential of the vast database with **MAC and GIS services**.
- It is housed with the **Intelligence Bureau**.
- It has connected all the **intelligence, security, law enforcement and investigative agencies**.

Multi Agency Centre (MAC)

- The Multi Agency Centre (MAC) is India's foremost intelligence fusion centre.
- It has been in existence since **2001**.
- **National Security Advisor Ajit Doval** was the first head of MAC.

INDIA SOURA GIRI VIKASAM

Context:

To improve the livelihoods of tribal farmers with forest land rights, the Telangana government has launched a major solar irrigation initiative under the new scheme **Indira Soura Giri Vikasam**, focusing on sustainable agriculture and tribal welfare.

About the Scheme: Indira Saura Giri Vikasam

- The Scheme aims to promote solar-powered irrigation and support tribal farmers holding land under the **Forest Rights Act (RoFR), 2006**.
- **Key Features:**
 - **100% subsidy:** Each beneficiary receives a solar pump set worth ₹6 lakh completely free of cost.
 - **Duration:** Implemented over five years.
 - **Coverage:** Aims to provide irrigation support to **6 lakh acres** of farmland.
 - **Target Beneficiaries:** Approximately **2.1 lakh tribal farmers** holding RoFR titles. The focus is on those practicing agriculture in **forest fringe areas** with limited access to conventional power and irrigation.
- The state government has recognised and vested rights over forest for 2,30,735 Scheduled Tribes covering an extent of 6.69 lakh acres under the **RoFR Act, 2006**.

Related Schemes:

- **PM-KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan) Scheme:** It is launched by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) in 2019 for setting up subsidized solar pumps and distributed solar power plants across the country.
- **Saur Sujala Yojana (Chhattisgarh):** It was launched to provide **solar-powered irrigation pumps** to small/marginal/tribal farmers.
- **Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL):** It aims to promote off-grid solar irrigation
- **Mukhyamantri Saur Krushi Pump Yojana (Maharashtra):** It aims to provide **solar-powered pumps** to farmers for irrigation

- **No jurisdiction barrier:** Victims can report crimes from anywhere; FIR will be registered instantly and electronically, enabled by **Section 173 (1)(ii) of the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**.
- **Threshold Limit:** It is applicable for complaints involving Rs 10 lakh or more
- **Real-time action:** It enables quicker blocking of fraudulent transactions/accounts.
- **Integrated platform:** It links banks, law enforcement, telecom companies, and CERT-In for swift response.
- It is part of I4C's broader efforts to implement the **National Cybercrime Ecosystem**, enhancing tech-based policing.
- **Associated Schemes & Institutions:**
 - **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)** is the nodal body under Ministry of Home Affairs to fight cybercrime in a coordinated manner.
 - **CERT-In** handles cybersecurity threats.
 - **Digital Police Portal** maintains criminal and FIR databases.

Fact Box: Zero FIR

- A Zero FIR allows individuals to file a **First Information Report (FIR)** at any police station, irrespective of where the crime occurred.
- This provision is particularly useful in urgent situations where immediate police intervention is crucial.
- A complainant may approach any police station irrespective of territorial jurisdiction (**Section 173 (1) of the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**).

E-ZERO FIR INITIATIVE

Context:

To tackle rising cases of cyber financial frauds and speed up investigations, the Ministry of Home Affairs has launched the **e-Zero FIR initiative** under the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), initially as a **pilot in Delhi**.

What is the e-Zero FIR initiative?

- **e-Zero FIR** is a digital mechanism to automatically register FIRs for **cyber financial crimes** (like online fraud, UPI scams, phishing) reported through:
 - **Cyber helpline number 1930**
- National Cybercrime Reporting Portal** cybercrime.gov.in
- **Key Features:**
 - **Auto-FIR Generation:** It converts verified complaints into **First Information Reports** automatically—without visiting a police station.

MISMATCH BETWEEN MGNREGS COVERAGE, DELIVERY: REPORT

Context:

Despite a rise in registrations, the actual delivery of promised employment under MGNREGS has **declined**, exposing gaps in the scheme's implementation, as per a recent report.

Major Issues Identified in the Report

- **Fall in Person Days Generated:** States like Odisha (−34.8%), Tamil Nadu (−25.1%), and Rajasthan (−15.9%) saw significant drops in person-days. Only a few like Maharashtra (+39.7%) and Bihar (+13.3%) registered increases. Regional disparity in employment generation continues to be a major issue.
- **Inadequate Budget Allocation:** Policy advocates recommended Rs 2.64 lakh crore in 2022–23. But allocation for FY 2024–25 was only Rs 86,000 crore, with no mid-year revisions, despite inflation and rising demand. This mismatch severely limits job provision.

- **Delayed Wage Payments:** Across many states, **extraordinary delays in wage disbursement** have demotivated workers. This affects trust in the system and discourages participation.
 - Payment delays **violate the MGNREGA Act itself**, which mandates wage payment within 15 days.
- **Deletions of Job Cards:** Between 2022–24 7.8 crore job cards deleted, but only 1.92 crore added. FY 2024–25 shows some improvement, 99 lakh deletions, but 2.22 crore new additions — first time additions exceeded deletions.

About MGNREGS

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is one of India's most significant welfare programmes.
- It **legally guarantees 100 days of wage employment** per year to every rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work.
- It is a demand driven wage employment Scheme.
- **Beneficiary:** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, requires that priority be given to women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries be women.
- **Funding:** The central government provides 100 percent funding for wages for the unskilled manual work, and covers 75 percent of the material cost. Twenty-five percent of the material cost is borne by state governments.
- It has served as a **social safety net**, especially during economic shocks like droughts, pandemics, or job losses in the informal sector.

ADJUSTED GROSS REVENUE (AGR) CASE

Context:

The Supreme Court dismissed fresh pleas by telecom companies seeking relief in the payment of **Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues**, reaffirming its earlier judgments and stating that no reassessment of dues would be allowed.

What is AGR?

- **Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR)** is the **base of revenue** on which telecom companies pay license fees (8%) and spectrum usage charges (3-5%) to the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**.
- As per DoT, AGR includes **all revenues** (core + non-core like handset sales, interest income).
- Telecom operators argued AGR should only include **core telecom revenue**.
- In 2019, the Supreme Court **expanded the definition of AGR** and included all revenues earned by telecom

companies, including **non-core income** like **rent from infrastructure and interest**, which massively increased the dues for companies in the sector like Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel.

- Following this move, the total dues that were expected to be paid by the telecom industry to DoT were reported at over Rs 1.47 lakh crore. The court set a repayment timeline of 10 years and rejected telecom companies' requests for longer periods or reductions in the amount paid.

MULLAPERIYAR DAM DISPUTE

Context:

The Supreme Court stepped in to facilitate cooperation between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, focusing on urgent repair and safety works around the dam.

What is the Mullaperiyar Dam dispute?

- The **Mullaperiyar Dam**, built in **1895** on the **Periyar River** in Kerala's Idukki district, is **owned, operated, and maintained by Tamil Nadu** based on a **lease agreement signed in 1886** between the then Travancore kingdom and the Madras Presidency (British rule).
- While the **dam is located in Kerala**, it **serves Tamil Nadu** by providing **irrigation and drinking water**, especially to the southern districts like Theni, Dindigul, and Madurai.
- Kerala has for long **raised safety concerns** about the 125-year-old dam, especially because it's in a seismically sensitive area.
- Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, maintains that the dam is **structurally safe** and wants to **carry out essential repairs and maintenance**, but Kerala has sometimes **restricted access** or raised environmental objections.
- This has led to a **long-standing inter-state dispute**, involving multiple cases in the Supreme Court over decades.

BIRTH RATES IN INDIA

Context:

The **Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2021**, released recently by the **Registrar General of India**, reveals that **birth rates in several Indian states — especially Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and Kerala — are declining much faster than the national average**.

Key Findings from SRS 2021

- Crude Birth Rate (CBR) Trends
 - **National CBR (2021):** 19.3 births per 1,000 population.
 - **National rate of decline (2016–2021):** 1.12% per year.

- States declining faster than national average:
 - **Tamil Nadu:** -2.35% per year
 - **Delhi:** -2.23% per year
 - **Kerala:** -2.05% per year
- States with Slowest Decline:
 - **Rajasthan:** -0.48%
 - **Bihar:** -0.86%
 - **Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand:** -0.98%
 - **Uttar Pradesh:** -1.09%
 - **Uttarakhand:** Only state with an *increase* in birth rate.
- Other Southern and Developed States with Declining CBR:
 - Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu – all showed **declines faster than national average**.
 - Also includes Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir.

■ Fertility and Reproduction Indicators

- Total Fertility Rate (TFR) – 2021:
 - **India:** 2.0 (replacement level)
 - **Above national average:**
 - ◆ Bihar: 3.0
 - ◆ Uttar Pradesh: 2.7
 - ◆ Madhya Pradesh: 2.6
 - ◆ Rajasthan: 2.4
- **Lowest TFR among large states: West Bengal (1.4)**

■ Gross Reproduction Rate (GRR)

- **India:** 1.0 (each woman gives birth to one surviving daughter)
- Higher GRR:
 - Bihar: 1.4
 - Rajasthan, MP: 1.2
 - UP: 1.3
- **West Bengal:** GRR = 0.7 (lowest among large states)

■ Civil Registration System (CRS) 2021 Insights

- **Increase in registered births:** Bihar, Rajasthan, UP, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, J&K, Ladakh, and NE states like Mizoram, Arunachal, Nagaland.
- **Decline in registered births** since 2012: Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala.
- **Telangana** saw a sharp rise after 2019, followed by a steep decline after 2020.



FACT BOX

- **Crude Birth Rate (CBR):** It is the number of **live births per 1,000 people** in a year. It indicates the overall **fertility level** in a population.
- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** It refers to average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime.
 - A TFR of **2.1 is considered replacement-level fertility** (no increase or decrease in population over time).
- **Gross Reproduction Rate (GRR):** It is the number of **daughters a woman is expected to have** during her lifetime, assuming no mortality.
 - GRR of 1 means **each woman is replacing herself with one daughter**.
- **Sample Registration System (SRS):** It is conducted by the Registrar General of India. It is India's largest demographic survey, providing annual estimates of fertility and mortality using a dual-record system.
- **Civil Registration System (CRS):** It records births and deaths in real-time. It is a legal database that supports planning and policy-making.

GAZA ON THE BRINK OF FAMINE: WHO

Context:

Gaza is facing what the World Health Organization (WHO) now calls one of the *worst hunger crises in the world*. With a population of 2.1 million under blockade, food and essential aid are nearly impossible to access. The situation is so severe that **almost half a million people are in "catastrophic" conditions**, where hunger, malnutrition, disease, and death are interlinked.

What is famine and when is it reached?

- Famine is the worst level of hunger, where people face **severe food shortages, widespread malnutrition, and high levels of death** due to starvation.
- According to the UN's criteria, famine is declared when:
 - At least **20 percent (one-fifth) of households face extreme food shortages**
 - More than **30 percent of children suffer from acute malnutrition**
 - At least two out of every 10,000 people or four out of every 10,000 children die each day from **starvation or hunger-related causes**.
- Famine is not just about hunger; it is the worst humanitarian emergency, indicating a complete collapse of access to food, water and the systems necessary for survival.



- Starvation is when the human body is deprived of food for so long that it suffers and often dies. The body can last up to three weeks without food, but the length of time varies between individuals. Starvation occurs over three stages.
 - The first begins as early as when a meal is skipped
 - The second occurs with a prolonged period of fasting where the body uses stored fat for energy.
 - The third, and often fatal, stage is when all stored fats have been depleted and the body turns to bone and muscle as sources of energy.

FUTURES & OPTIONS

Context:

The explosive growth of **Futures & Options (F&O)** trading in India has triggered concern among top financial authorities over the high number of **retail investors entering the derivatives market without proper knowledge**, despite **90% of them incurring losses**, according to SEBI's internal data.

What Are Derivatives?

- A **derivative** is a **financial contract** whose value is based on (or "derived" from) the price of something else — called the **underlying asset**.
- These underlying assets could be:
 - Stocks (like Reliance shares)
 - Stock market indices (like Nifty 50)

- Commodities (like gold, silver, crude oil)
- Currencies
- Interest rates
- Example:** If you have a contract that depends on the future price of crude oil, the price of that contract will move up or down depending on how crude oil prices move in the market.
- Derivatives do **not involve actual ownership** of the underlying asset. They are more like **bets** on where the price of an asset will go. This makes them tools for **hedging risk, speculation, or leveraged trading**.
- Among the most commonly traded derivatives are **Futures** and **Options**.
 - Futures:** It is a **contract obligating the buyer to purchase (and the seller to sell) an asset at a predetermined price on a future date**.
 - Both parties are obligated **to execute the contract at expiry unless closed earlier**.
 - Types:** One type – long (buy) or short (sell) futures contracts.
 - It requires a margin deposit (a small % of the contract value).
 - It is primarily used for hedging by producers/consumers or speculating by traders.
 - Profit & Loss:** Gains/losses are unlimited and realized daily (**marked to market**).
 - Example:** A trader agrees to buy crude oil at USD 80/barrel in 2 months. If prices rise to USD 90, the trader gains USD 10/barrel.
 - Options:** It is a **contract giving the buyer the right (but not obligation) to buy or sell an asset at a specific price before or at expiry**.
 - Only the seller (writer) is obligated; **the buyer can choose whether or not to exercise the option**.
 - Types:** Two types – Call options (**right to buy**) and Put options (**right to sell**).
 - Buyer pays a premium (non-refundable cost of the option)**.
 - It is used for hedging, speculation, or income generation (**by writing options**).
 - Profit & Loss:** Buyers have limited risk (**premium paid**) and unlimited gain (**for calls**). Sellers (writers) take more risk **depending on the option type**.
 - Example:** A trader buys a call option to buy crude at USD 80. If prices rise to USD 90, the trader can exercise and gain USD 10 – premium paid.

SIP CANCELLATION

Context:

The number of SIP (Systematic Investment Plan) cancellations in mutual funds more than tripled in April 2025 compared to the previous month. The cancellation was mainly due

to SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) norms implemented to clean up invalid and inactive SIP accounts, rather than a panic reaction by investors.

SEBI Norms

- SEBI issued a circular in January 2024, to improve transparency and accuracy in reporting SIP data.
- According to the circular:
 - SIPs with **more than three consecutive failed payment attempts** (for daily, weekly, monthly, fortnightly SIPs) are considered **invalid**.
 - For **quarterly and bimonthly SIPs**, SIPs are invalid if payments are missed for **two consecutive periods**.
- Asset Management Companies (AMCs)** must process SIP cancellations within **10 days** from the investor's request.
- Before these rules, data on SIP cancellations included many inactive SIP accounts, which inflated cancellation numbers.
- The **Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) and AMCs** were given until April 1, 2024, to comply with these norms and clean up invalid SIP accounts.
- The actual clean-up of legacy SIP accounts started around December 2024/January 2025 and continued through April 2025, causing a spike in cancellations.

What is SIP?

- Systematic Investment Plan (SIP)** is a method of investing a fixed amount regularly (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) in mutual funds.
- It helps investors build wealth gradually through disciplined investing and rupee-cost averaging.
- Investors authorize their bank to auto-debit a fixed amount periodically, which is invested in selected mutual fund schemes.

RBI'S SURPLUS

Context:

The central board of directors of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reviewed the **Economic Capital Framework (ECF)**. It is estimated that for the accounting year 2024-25, the RBI may transfer a record sum ranging between Rs 2.5 lakh crore and Rs 3 lakh crore as surplus to the government. In 2023-24, the RBI had transferred the highest-ever surplus of Rs 2.11 lakh crore.

What is the RBI's Surplus?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), as the **nation's central bank**, is **owned by the Government of India**.
- Unlike commercial banks or public sector companies, it **does not declare a "dividend" in the traditional corporate sense**.
- Instead, under **Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934**, the central bank is mandated to transfer its **surplus profits** to the Central Government after making necessary provisions.

- The **RBI's surplus** is the **excess of its income over expenditure** after accounting for provisions such as:
 - Bad and doubtful debts
 - Depreciation of assets
 - Staff welfare funds and pension liabilities
 - Contingency and asset development reserves
- This surplus is **transferred to the Central Government** under **Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934**.
- The RBI is **exempt from income tax** under **Section 48 of the RBI Act, 1934**.
- How Does the RBI Earn Profits?** The RBI earns income mainly from:

Source of Income	Description
Foreign assets	Earnings from foreign securities, treasury bills, and deposits with other central banks
Domestic government securities	Interest from rupee-denominated bonds
Lending to banks	Through mechanisms like LAF (Liquidity Adjustment Facility), MSF, etc.
Commission	For managing borrowings of the central and state governments
Other receipts	Miscellaneous income, e.g., penalty payments by banks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenditures include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printing of currency notes Staff salaries and pensions Commission to banks and dealers 	

Formal policy on surplus distribution

- Although there is no law mandating a fixed surplus transfer formula, an important framework governs this process.
- The **Economic Capital Framework (ECF)**, introduced after the **Bimal Jalan Committee recommendations in 2019**, determines the size of contingency reserves and the share of realised surplus to be transferred.
- The framework aims to balance two objectives:
 - Maintaining the RBI's financial strength and independence through adequate reserves
 - Ensuring reasonable surplus transfer to the government
- Before this, the **Malegam Committee (2013)** had recommended higher transfers, which led to the RBI transferring nearly 99.99% of its surplus in some years.

- ◉ **Global practices:** Like in India, central banks in both the UK and the US decide after consultations with the government. But in Japan, it is the government that decides.
 - By and large, with a few exceptions, the quantum of surplus transfer averages around **0.5% of the GDP**.

MASS NESTING OF OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES

Context:

In March 2025, a record-breaking arribada (mass nesting event) of over seven lakh Olive Ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) was observed at Rushikulya beach, Odisha.

About Olive Ridley Turtles:

- ◉ **Scientific Name:** *Lepidochelys olivacea*
- ◉ **Conservation Status:** Vulnerable (IUCN Red List)
- ◉ **Global Distribution:** They are found in warm tropical and subtropical waters, with primary nesting sites along the Pacific coasts of Mexico and Central America.
- ◉ **Indian Context:** Odisha is a critical nesting site, with three major rookeries: **Gahirmatha, Devi, and Rushikulya**.
- ◉ **Nesting Behavior and Ecology:**
 - **Arribada:** A unique mass nesting phenomenon where thousands of female turtles come ashore simultaneously to lay eggs.
 - **Philopatry:** Turtles return to the beaches where they hatched, guided by the Earth's geomagnetic field.
 - **Environmental Triggers:** Nesting site selection is influenced by factors such as cold-core eddies (nutrient-rich water currents), beach slope, salinity, rainfall, and predation risk.
 - **Sex Determination:** Temperature-dependent; higher sand temperatures result in a higher proportion of female hatchlings.
- ◉ **Key Nesting Sites in Odisha:**
 - **Gahirmatha Beach:** It is located between the Brahmani and Baitarani river mouths.
 - **Devi River Mouth** – It is approximately 100 km south of Gahirmatha.
 - **Rushikulya River Mouth** – Around 320 km south of Gahirmatha.

PRELIMS PYQ:

Q: Consider the following statements: (2019)

- (1) Some species of turtles are herbivores.
- (2) Some species of fish are herbivores.
- (3) Some species of marine mammals are herbivores.
- (4) Some species of snakes are viviparous.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q: In India, if a species of tortoise is declared protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, what does it imply? (2021)

- (a) It enjoys the same level of protection as the tiger.
- (b) It no longer exists in the wild, a few individuals are under captive protection; and now it is impossible to prevent its extinction.
- (c) It is endemic to a particular region of India.
- (d) Both (b) and (c) stated above are correct in this context.

ASIATIC LIONS

Context:

The Union government announced a significant rise in the **Asiatic lion population in India**, which has increased from **674 in 2020 to 891 in 2025**. This 32% growth is being hailed as a major milestone in India's wildlife conservation efforts, attributed to the proactive implementation of **Project Lion** and coordinated conservation strategies led by the Government of India.

Asiatic Lions:

- ◉ The **Asiatic lion** (*Panthera leo persica*), also known as the **Persian lion** or **Indian lion**, is a subspecies of lion that is found **exclusively in India**. Its natural habitat is confined to the **Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary**, located in the state of **Gujarat**.
- ◉ Historically, Asiatic lions were distributed across **West Asia and the Middle East**. However, due to widespread hunting and habitat destruction, they have become extinct in these regions, making **India the last remaining refuge** for this species.

Current Population and Distribution:

- ◉ According to the **2020 lion census** conducted by the **Gujarat Forest Department**, the population of Asiatic

lions stood at **674 individuals**, dispersed across an area of approximately **30,000 square kilometres**, spanning **nine districts** and **53 talukas** of the **Saurashtra region**.

- As a result of sustained conservation efforts, the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, in 2025, **downlisted** the status of the Asiatic lion from "**Endangered**" (2008) to "**Vulnerable**" on its **Red List of Threatened Species**.

Asiatic Lion vs African Lion: Comparative Features

Feature	Asiatic Lion (<i>Panthera leo persica</i>)	African Lion (<i>Panthera leo melanochaita</i>)
Size	Slightly smaller	Generally larger
Mane	Shorter and less developed	Fuller and denser
Social Behaviour	Males typically remain with the pride	Males often leave the pride except for mating or hunting
Habitat	Dry deciduous forests (India only)	Savannas, shrublands, deserts
Distribution	Restricted to Gir, Gujarat	Widespread across Sub-Saharan Africa
IUCN Status	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
CITES Listing	Appendix I	Appendix II
Legal Protection in India	Schedule I, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972	Not applicable
Major Threats	Inbreeding, diseases, habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict	Hunting, habitat loss, conflict

Major Conservation areas:

■ Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary:

- Established:** 1965
- Area:** Core area of **1,412 sq. km**, with a **buffer zone of 470 sq. km**, amounting to a total protected area of **1,882 sq. km**.
- Significance:** The only natural habitat of the Asiatic lion in the world.

■ Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary:

- Established:** 2008
- Location:** Junagadh district, Gujarat; situated in the **Girnar Hills** of the Saurashtra region.
- Habitat Type:** Dry deciduous forests comprising teak, dhak, acacia, among others.
- Faunal Diversity:** Home to **Asiatic lions, leopards, chinkara, chousingha**, and over **300 species of birds**.
- Role:** Acts as an **extension habitat** for lions beyond the boundaries of Gir National Park.

PRELIMS PYQ:

Q: Consider the following statements: (2019)

- Asiatic lion is naturally found in India only.
- Double-humped camel is naturally found in India only.
- One-horned rhinoceros is naturally found in India only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

HIMALAYAN LEAP FOR YAK GENOMIC SCIENCE

Context:

For the first time ever, scientists in India have successfully assembled the complete **chromosome-level genome** of the Indian yak (*Bos grunniens*). This significant achievement was led by specialists from four **institutions under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**.

About Indian Yak (*Bos grunniens*)

- The Indian yak, often called the "**ship of the Himalayas**," is a large herbivore ungulate species.
- It inhabits remote areas of high-elevation alpine tundra, grasslands and cold desert of the Tibetan plateau.
- The native populations of wild yak in **Bhutan and Nepal** are believed to be extinct and their range is confined to **China and India**.
- It is a vital animal for people living in the high-altitude Himalayan regions such as **Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Sikkim, and Himachal Pradesh**.



- These animals provide essential resources including **meat, milk, and serve as pack animals** for transport in difficult mountainous terrain.
- Yaks are uniquely adapted to survive in **extreme conditions** — freezing cold, low oxygen, and rugged terrain — which makes them indispensable for the livelihoods of Himalayan communities.
- However, yaks face growing threats from shrinking grazing areas, climate change, diseases, and loss of genetic diversity.
- Understanding the yak's genome—the complete set of its DNA—helps scientists learn how these animals thrive in such harsh environments and how to protect and improve their populations.
- Conservation status:**
 - IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
 - CITES:** Appendix I
 - Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule II

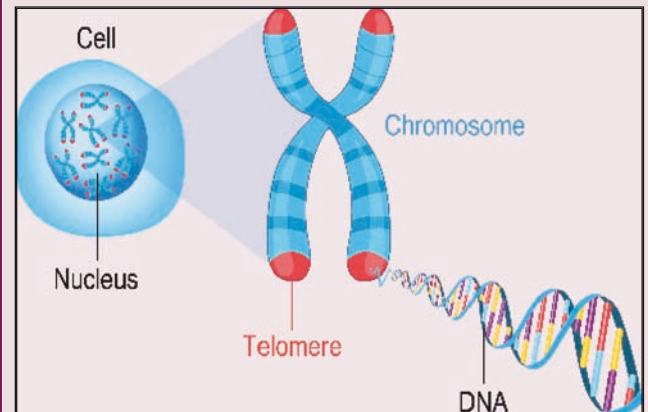
Chromosome-level genome assembly

- Genome assembly is the process of mapping out an organism's **complete DNA sequence**.
- A **chromosome-level genome assembly** means that the DNA sequence is organized precisely along each **chromosome**, providing a detailed and accurate genetic blueprint of the species.
- To create this genome, scientists used advanced technologies such as **long-read sequencing**, which reads long stretches of DNA with high accuracy, and powerful computer analysis (**bioinformatics**) to organize this information into a complete, structured form.

Chromosomes:

- Chromosomes are **thread-like structures** located inside the **nucleus of animal and plant cells**.
- Each chromosome is made of **protein** and a single molecule of **deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)**.

- Passed from parents to offspring, DNA contains the **specific instructions** that make each type of living creature unique.
- Function:**
 - The unique structure of chromosomes keeps DNA tightly wrapped around **spool-like proteins**, called **histones**.
 - For an organism to grow and function properly, cells must constantly divide to produce new cells to replace old, **worn-out cells**.



- During cell division, it is essential that DNA remains **intact and evenly distributed** among cells.

AKASH MISSILE SYSTEM

Context:

The **Akash missile system** played a key role in thwarting Pakistan's aerial attacks during **Operation Sindoor**, highlighting its operational effectiveness and indigenisation success.

About Akash Missile System:

- Akash is a mobile **short-to-medium-range Surface-to-Air Missile system (SAM)**.
- It was developed as part of the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)** started in the **1980s**.
- Developer:** DRDO, under the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)**.
- Users:** It is currently in service with the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Army.
 - Induction:** IAF (2014), Army (2015).
- It is designed to provide air defence cover to the vulnerable areas and critical installations.
- The system can simultaneously engage multiple aerial targets such as enemy aircraft, missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).
- Key Features of Akash:**
 - The missile can **intercept and destroy multiple aerial targets** at the same time.

INDIA'S 'AKASH' TO COUNTER DRAGON FIRE

Mission »
To track & destroy
hostile aircraft,
helicopters,
drones & sub-sonic
cruise missiles

Surface-to-Air missile (SAM) system was one of the five core missile systems of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme launched by India in 1983. After long delays due to technical glitches, Akash now finally being deployed by IAF & army

IAF »

Inducting eight squadrons, each with 2 'flights' of 4 launchers

Cost | ₹6,200 cr

Army »

Inducting 2 Akash regiments, with six firing batteries & hundreds of missiles each

Cost | ₹14,180 cr

MISSILE CHARACTERISTICS

5.6 metre in length;

integrated two-stage Ramjet rocket propulsion technology; powered by an air-breathing engine; can carry warhead of **60kg**

25-km interception range

Low reaction, all-weather capability

96% indigenous

Can handle multiple aerial threats from several directions simultaneously

88% kill probability within a specified kill zone



- ▶ It has an operational **range of around 27 to 30 km** and can fly at **twice the speed of sound (Mach 2.5)**.
- ▶ It can reach up to **18 km in altitude**, making it suitable for high-flying targets.
- ▶ The system is mounted on vehicles, which means it can be **quickly moved, deployed, or redeployed** as needed.
- ▶ **Indigenous Content:** ~96%, produced by over 250 Indian industries (BEL, BDL, etc.).
- Once near the target, an **onboard seeker** helps the missile precisely strike, even if the target is moving.
- Even without a direct hit, the missile's **proximity fuse** can cause damage using its **55 kg warhead**, which explodes when close to the target.

Working of the Missile System

- A **3D Central Acquisition Radar** first scans the sky and detects potential threats within a **120 km radius**.
- The **Rajendra Radar**, which is the fire control radar, then tracks the threat and provides data to the command centre.
- Based on this data, the **command and control centre** calculates the best path to intercept the target.
- A missile is launched from a **mobile launcher**, which can carry three missiles.

New and Improved Variants:

▣ Akash Prime

- ▶ It is developed to perform better in **low temperatures and high-altitude areas** like border regions.
- ▶ It comes with an **indigenous radio-frequency seeker** for more accurate target detection.
- ▶ It was first tested in **September 2021**.

▣ Akash-NG (New Generation)

- ▶ **Akash-NG** is designed for intercepting **modern, high-speed, and stealthy aerial threats**.

- ▶ It has an extended range of **up to 70 km**.
- ▶ The missile is **canisterised**, which means it is stored in special containers that improve its shelf life and make transportation and deployment easier.
- ▶ Smaller, lighter, and has a **reduced ground system footprint**, making it ideal for fast deployment by the IAF.

GOLDEN DOME

Context:

US President Donald Trump announced a new USD 175-billion **missile defence initiative** called the '**Golden Dome**'. The system is inspired by Israel's **Iron Dome**, but seeks to be far more expansive — deploying space-based **interceptors and satellites** to counter missile threats, especially **ICBMs** from adversaries like China and Russia.

Features of the Golden Dome:

- **Space-Based Interceptors:**
 - ▶ Unlike existing systems, the Golden Dome proposes to deploy **space-based weapons**, capable of intercepting **enemy missiles moments after launch**.
 - ▶ Thousands of small satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO) would form an active, defensive "shield".
- **Technological Leap:**
 - ▶ This would mark a major shift from reconnaissance-based space systems to **combat-capable orbital platforms**.
 - ▶ The move revives Cold War-era concepts like **Star Wars (Strategic Defense Initiative)** proposed by Reagan.
- **Integration Across Domains:**
 - ▶ Designed as a multi-domain system:
 - ◆ **Land-based radar & launchers**
 - ◆ **Sea-based platforms**
 - ◆ **Space-based detection** and interception

Comparison with Israel's Iron Dome:

Feature	Iron Dome (Israel)	Golden Dome (USA)
Range	Short-range (70 km approx.)	Intercontinental (against ICBMs)
Platform	Ground-based (radar + Tamir interceptors)	Multi-domain (ground + sea + space)
Threat Type	Rockets, artillery shells, drones	ICBMs, hypersonic missiles

Guidance System	Radar-based	Radar + Satellite-based AI tracking
Scale	Suited to a small country like Israel	Meant for global projection and homeland defence

BRAHMOS-NG

Context:

The **BrahMos missile system**, a key component of India's precision-strike arsenal, is being upgraded. Two parallel developments are ongoing which includes **BrahMos-NG (Next Generation)**: A lighter, compact air-launched version and **Extended-range BrahMos**: Range increased from 290 km to 450 km, with work in progress to achieve 800 km.

Key Features of BrahMos-NG (Next Generation)

- **Development Status:** It is currently under **advanced stages of development**; flight testing expected within one to two years.
- **Weight and Dimensions:**
 - ▶ It is significantly **lighter** than the existing air-launched BrahMos.
 - ▶ It is expected to weigh **approximately half** as much as the current version.
- **Compatibility:**
 - ▶ It is designed for integration with a **wider range of fighter aircraft**, including **LCA Tejas, Rafale, and MiG-29**.
 - ▶ Intended to be **carrier-friendly** due to its compact size.
- **Enhanced Capabilities:** It will retain supersonic speed while offering better **maneuverability, ease of deployment**, and **reduced radar signature**.
- **Strategic Implication:**
 - ▶ It will enable **wider deployment across fighter fleets**, even on **smaller aircraft** like the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA).
 - ▶ It enhances **air strike capability** without compromising speed or precision.

BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile: Key Features

- **Type of Missile:** Supersonic cruise missile capable of precision strikes on land and sea-based targets.
- **Development:** Jointly developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya under the joint venture *BrahMos Aerospace*.

- **Etymology:** The name "BrahMos" is derived from two rivers — the **Brahmaputra** of India and the **Moskva** of Russia.
- **Speed:** Travels at a speed of **Mach 2.8 to Mach 3.0**, making it one of the fastest cruise missiles in operational deployment.
- **Range:**
 - Initially limited to **290 km** due to India's commitment to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
 - Post India's entry into the MTCR in 2016, the range has been extended to **450 km**.
- **Launch Platforms:**
 - **Land-based** mobile autonomous launchers
 - **Naval ships** (vertical launch systems)
 - **Submarines** (underwater launch capabilities tested)
 - **Aircraft** (e.g., Su-30MKI fighter jets of the Indian Air Force)
- **Warhead Type:** Capable of carrying conventional warheads weighing approximately **300 kg**.
- **Guidance System:** Uses **inertial navigation systems (INS)** integrated with **satellite-based navigation** (e.g., GPS, GLONASS).
- **Operational Status:** Fully inducted into the Indian Armed Forces and actively deployed by the **Army, Navy, and Air Force**.

INSV KAUNDINYA

Context:

The **Indian Navy** formally **inducted INSV Kaundinya**, a **reconstructed stitched sail ship** based on ancient Indian maritime traditions, at a ceremonial event at **Naval Base, Karwar**. The vessel is a replica of a **5th-century ship** depicted in **Ajanta Cave paintings** and is part of a tripartite cultural-military initiative to **revive and showcase India's shipbuilding heritage**.

About INSV Kaundinya:

- **INSV Kaundinya** is a **stitched sail ship**, an ancient method of ship construction where wooden planks are **stitched together using coir rope, coconut fibre, and natural resin**, without nails or modern fasteners.
- The name "Kaundinya" honours the **legendary Indian mariner** believed to have sailed to Southeast Asia, symbolising India's maritime legacy.
- **Historical and Cultural Roots:**
 - The vessel is a **recreation of a ship depicted in Ajanta cave murals**, dating back to the 5th century CE.
 - The Ajanta caves, located in Maharashtra, are a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** known for their elaborate frescoes depicting scenes from the Jataka tales and ancient Indian life, including maritime trade.

Project Collaboration and Execution:

- The ship was built through a **tripartite agreement** signed in **July 2023** between:
 - Union Ministry of Culture
 - Indian Navy
 - Hodi Innovations (a maritime heritage organisation)
- The construction was funded by the **Ministry of Culture** as part of efforts to **revive traditional technologies**.
- **Master shipwright Babu Sankaran** from Kerala led the traditional craftsmanship team

ISRO'S EOS-09 SATELLITE MISSION FAIL

Context:

The 101st launch of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) failed mid-flight during its third stage due to a **technical anomaly in the third stage of the PSLV-C61 rocket**.

Key Reasons for the Failure:

- **Normal Performance of First Two Stages:** The launch began successfully. The **first and second stages** of the four-stage **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)** functioned as expected.
- **Issue in the Third Stage:** During the operation of the **third stage**, a **drop in chamber pressure** of the solid rocket motor was observed. This fall in pressure compromised the thrust generation required to propel the vehicle further into the intended Sun Synchronous Polar Orbit (SSPO), leading to **mission failure**.
- Due to this anomaly, the satellite **EOS-09** could not be placed in its intended orbit.

About the EOS-09 Mission:

- EOS-09 is a remote sensing Earth observation satellite, similar to **EOS-04**, intended to provide frequent imaging for operational applications **like agriculture, forestry, soil moisture, disaster management, and flood monitoring**.
- It was equipped with **Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)**, capable of capturing high-resolution images regardless of weather or light conditions.
- **Intended Orbit:** A **Sun Synchronous Polar Orbit (SSPO)** — crucial for consistent lighting conditions in Earth observation.
- PSLV-C61 was **ISRO's 101st launch**, reinforcing the importance and frequency of PSLV in India's space program.
- The PS4 stage was also designed with **Orbit Change Thrusters (OCT)** and passivation mechanisms to minimize space debris post-satellite deployment — had the mission succeeded.

AXIOM-4 MISSION

Context:

The Falcon-9 rocket is set to launch **Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla** to the **International Space Station (ISS)** on the **Ax-4 mission**. This marks India's first crewed mission to the ISS and involves extensive international collaboration.

What is Ax-4 Mission?

- Ax-4 is a crewed space mission to the ISS using a **SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket** and **Dragon spacecraft**.
- The Ax-4 mission is a joint effort between **NASA, ISRO, and Axiom Space**.
- It will make Shukla the **first Indian to travel to the ISS** as part of a commercial crew, marking a significant milestone for India's space program.
- The crew consists of:
 - **Pilot:** Group Captain Subanshu Shukla (India)
 - **Commander:** Peggy Whitson (USA)
 - **Mission Specialists:** Sławosz Uznański-Wiśniewski (Poland) and Tibor Kapu (Hungary).
- The Ax-4 crew will spend around 14 days on the ISS, performing over 60 science and outreach activities. These experiments and activities are contributions from as many as 31 countries.
- Science Goals:
 - The science goals include **Microgravity Studies on Microalgae, Seeds, and Tardigrades. Besides that the muscle regeneration, cognitive impacts, and Microbial adaptation.**
 - Four new experiments have also been added potentially in space farming and microbial resilience.
 - There are five human research projects, in partnership with NASA, focusing on space medicine, human physiology, and space psychology.
- These experiments will support **Gaganyaan, space medicine, and India's 2035 goal of setting up the Bharatiya Antariksh Station.**

INDIAN ASTROPHYSICIST WHO CHALLENGED BIG BANG THEORY

Context:

India lost one of its most distinguished astrophysicists, **Jayant Vishnu Narlikar** (1938-2025), a luminary of cosmology. Narlikar was renowned for his groundbreaking work in **cosmology**, especially for developing an **alternative theory of gravitation** with **British scientist Fred Hoyle**.

Key Contributions and Significance

- **Alternative to Big Bang Theory:** He developed the **Hoyle–Narlikar Theory of Gravitation**, an alternative

to the Big Bang model, which introduced concepts like "continuous creation" and challenged prevailing cosmological beliefs. This brought global attention to Indian contributions in astrophysics.

- **Founder of IUCAA (1988):** He established the **Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA)** in Pune, which became a hub for advanced astronomical research in India.
- **Scientific Communication:** Narlikar was a prolific **science communicator**, writing books, essays, and science fiction in English and Marathi.
 - He believed that science belonged to everyone, not just academics — he popularized complex physics for lay audiences.
- **Education and Collaboration:** He got educated at **Cambridge University**, where he collaborated with Fred Hoyle. Their work challenged orthodox scientific views and expanded the boundaries of cosmological inquiry.

Big Bang Theory:

The **Big Bang Theory** is the leading explanation about how the universe began. It proposes that the universe originated from an **extremely hot and dense singularity** around **13.8 billion years ago**, and has been **expanding ever since**.

Key Points

- **Singularity:** The universe began as a single point (singularity) with infinite temperature and density.
- **Expansion:** Space itself has been expanding, not objects moving **through** space.
- **Not an explosion:** It's a rapid expansion of space-time, not a traditional explosion.

Supporting Evidence

- **Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMB):** Discovered by Penzias and Wilson in 1965; thermal radiation leftover from the early universe.
- **Redshift of Galaxies:** Edwin Hubble observed that galaxies are moving away, implying expansion.
- **Abundance of Light Elements:** Predictable ratios of hydrogen, helium, and lithium in the early universe match observations.

HOW STARS DIE: WHITE DWARFS, NEUTRON STARS, AND SUPERNOVAE

Context:

The life and death of stars are crucial for understanding the evolution of the universe. Stars produce the elements essential for life through nuclear fusion and distribute them during their deaths. Depending on their mass, stars

may end as **white dwarfs**, **neutron stars**, or undergo **supernovae**, contributing to cosmic chemical enrichment and the formation of new stars and planets.

Stellar Lifespan:

- Stars, though seemingly eternal, have finite lifespans determined primarily by their mass.
- Their lifecycle is governed by the balance between:
 - **Gravitational collapse (inward force)**
 - **Pressure from nuclear fusion (outward force)**

Nuclear Fusion: The Source of Stellar Energy:

- In the stellar core, **hydrogen nuclei fuse into helium** under extreme temperature and pressure.
- This process releases tremendous energy that supports the star against gravitational collapse.
- In 1938, **Hans Bethe** formulated the fusion mechanisms powering stars, earning the **Nobel Prize in Physics**.

Death of Low to Medium Mass Stars (Like the Sun)

- When hydrogen in the core is exhausted:
 - Fusion slows down, and the core contracts under gravity.
 - If core temperature exceeds ~100 million Kelvin, **helium fusion** begins, producing **carbon and oxygen**.
- Once helium is also exhausted:
 - The outer layers are ejected gently, forming a **planetary nebula**.
 - The remaining core becomes a **white dwarf**:
 - ◆ Extremely dense and hot.
 - ◆ Roughly Earth-sized.

- ◆ Composed primarily of carbon and oxygen.
- Nearly **95% of stars** in a typical galaxy end their lives as white dwarfs.

PRELIMS PYQ

Q: With reference to the 'Proxima Centauri', consider the following statements:

- (1) It is a red dwarf star.
- (2) It is the closest star to the Sun.
- (3) It was discovered by the Kepler Space Telescope.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) None

Q: Which of the following is/are cited by the scientists as evidence(s) for the continued expansion of the universe?

- (1) Detection of microwaves in space
- (2) Observation of redshift phenomenon in space
- (3) Movement of asteroids in space

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) None of the above can be cited as evidence

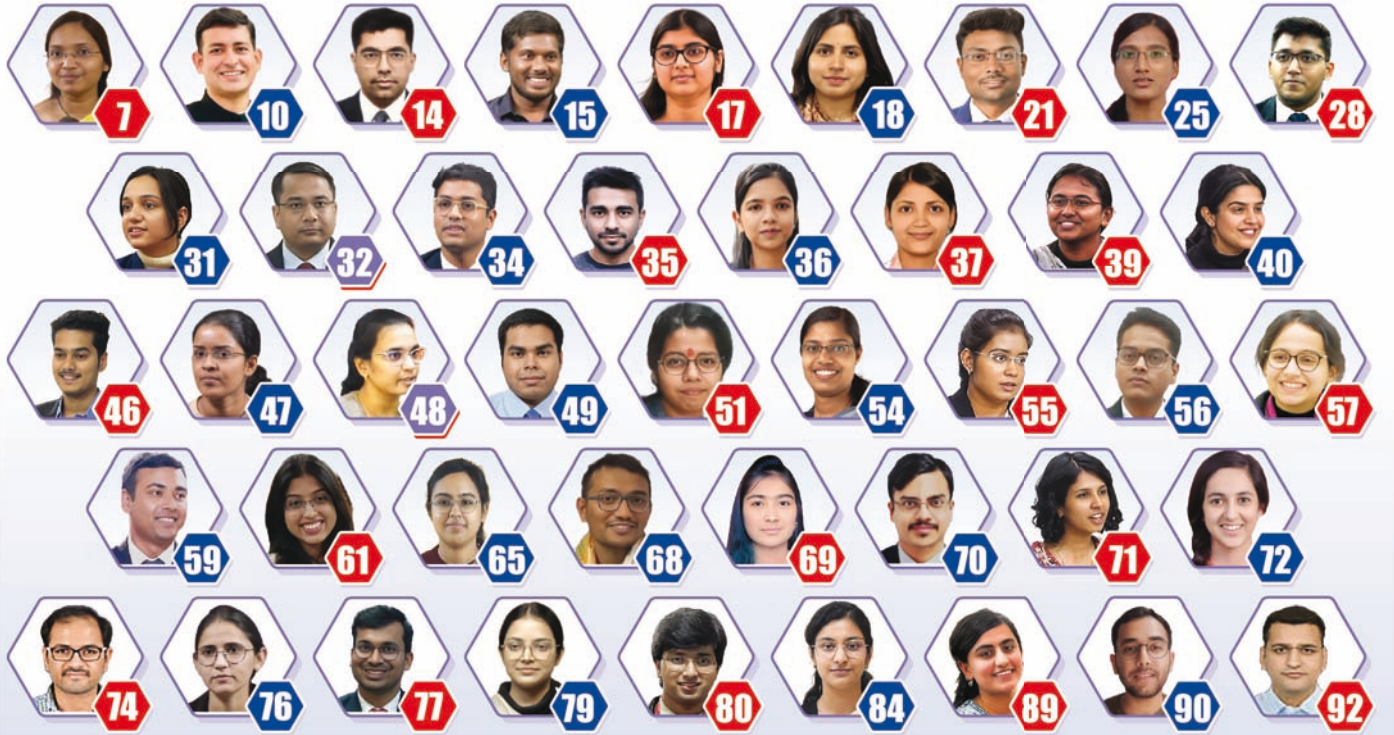


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