

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: I
JANUARY
2023

MAINS

GS-I

- INDIA'S 'UNTOUCHABLE' WOMEN & DISCRIMINATION

GS-II

- REMOTE EVM READY TO HELP MIGRANTS VOTE OUTSIDE STATES: EC
- NOTIFY ULB POLLS WITHOUT OBC RESERVATION: ALLAHABAD HC
- SUPREME COURT'S DEMONETIZATION VERDICT
- NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES' POSITION ON NEW FOREST RULES
- THE VALUES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE

GS-III

- INDIA AND THE PROBLEM OF BAD LOANS
- CREDIT CHALLENGES: ON CREDIT FLOW AND ALL-AROUND CAPITAL SPENDING
- UNION CABINET APPROVES GREEN HYDROGEN MISSION
- MAPPING INDIA'S MILITARY STRENGTH IN 2022

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- How the Earth's tilt creates short and cold January days?

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- India and Austria to sign migration and mobility agreement
- Croatia becomes a fully integrated member of the EU

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

- The Bills introduced and cleared in Parliament for year 2022
- Hate speech denies right to dignity

- The case against state control of Hindu temples
- Aymanam in Kottayam to showcase women's talent
- High-Power Ladakh Committee
- Supreme Court expands Article 19 ambit

ECONOMY

- India's CAD widens to a 9-year high
- India's attempts to promote the cereals in 2023

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- Sammakka Saralamma Janjati Pujari Sammelan
- India to take over leadership of Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU)
- Centre gives nod for DPR of Kalasa Banduri Nala project
- Government launches 'Prahari' app for BSF Jawans
- XBB.1.5: New Variant
- 108th Indian Science Congress
- Ethylene glycol and the controversy behind it
- Vande Metro train
- India's oldest botanical garden
- Emperor penguins, reindeer among threatened species: WWF

SPECIAL

- Government proposed policy on 'Online Gaming'

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)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

GS FOUNDATION

**1 YEAR & 2 YEAR
PROGRAMME**



- PREMIER- BRIDGE CLASSES
- MAINS INTEGRATED CLASSES
- ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE
- WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS
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- MAINS UPDATION
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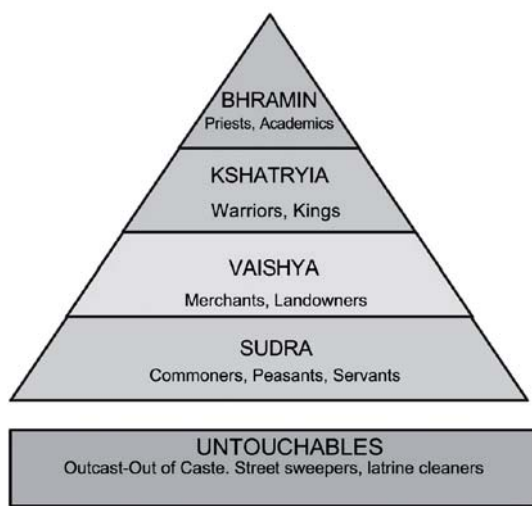


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INDIA'S 'UNTOUCHABLE' WOMEN & DISCRIMINATION

CONTEXT:

Despite outlawing caste-based discrimination in 1950, Dalits still get discriminated against when applying for programs such as microloan schemes which are actually established to help them.



Challenges faced by Dalit Women:

Plethora of issues: Dalit women continue to suffer from a high degree of poverty, gender discrimination, caste discrimination, and socioeconomic deprivation.

- **Violence:** Girls face violence at a younger age and at a higher rate than women of other castes.
- Others
 - Exploitation by dominant castes
 - Lack of justice
 - Workplace violence

How caste plays its role in occupation?

- Caste is essentially the **stratification of people** into a **rigid occupational hierarchy**.
- Dalits who are the last in the list, often called "untouchables" are excluded from all jobs except the worst paid and most degrading — on the pretext of maintaining the spiritual purity of those in higher castes.

An attempt to help

- In India, microloan programs have been embraced as a poverty-reduction policy.

- Microloans are offered by for-profit, not-for-profit and government-owned banks.
 - The Reserve Bank of India regulates the sector and acts as a guarantor of microloans given by banks under national government-sponsored poverty alleviation schemes.
 - The Reserve Bank of India underwrites incentives including interest rates about half that offered to other women.

What are the problem with microloans?

- Poor implementation of microfinance programs
- lack of outcomes for Dalit women entrepreneurs in India
- Discrimination at the branch level
- Being humiliated when applying for a microloan — of help being refused when filling in a form, of being told not to sit on the same chairs as other bank customers, and of their application being rejected for no good reason.

How caste certificates 'too' creates hurdle?

- To qualify for a program to assist Dalits, they had to prove they're a Dalit by supplying a government-issued caste certificate.

Extra information

Unsung Dalit women heroes

- **Sabari from the Ramayana:** example of acceptance, selflessness, and unconditional love
- **Sant Nirmala and Soyarabai:** From Mahar caste, questioning Hindu orthodoxy.
- **Naegeli:** Fought against the cruel "breast tax" system.
- **Kuyili:** She commanded the army of Velu Nachiyar.
- **Queen of Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu:** Dalit woman who fought against the British around 1780.
- **Jhalkaribai:** Most trusted companion and advisor of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi.
- **Uda Devil:** formed a battalion consisting of Dalit women under the leadership of Begum Hazrat Mahal.
- **Savitribai Phule:** A pioneer in education for Dalits
- **Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar** fought against the exploitative Devadasi system.
- **Dakshayani Velayudhan:** first and only Dalit woman to be elected to the constituent assembly in 1946.

Initiatives Taken to Promote Transformation

- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)
- Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood (SANKALP) Scheme
- Stand Up India Scheme
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

- But this certificate then became the means for them to be identified as Dalits and discriminated against.

REMOTE EVM READY TO HELP MIGRANTS VOTE OUTSIDE STATES: EC

CONTEXT:

The Election Commission of India says that it has developed a prototype for a Multi-Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine which would enable remote voting by migrant voters.

Why is there a Need for Remote Voting?

- **Decrease in Voting Turnout:** During the 2019 General elections, nearly **300 million citizens** out of a total of 910 million **electors didn't cast their votes**.
- **Due to Unfavorable Conditions:** Voter migration makes it difficult for them to return to their registered polling stations to cast their vote.
- **Concerns Regarding Metropolitan Areas:** Despite the fact that polling stations are set up within 2 km for any voter in urban areas, there is low voter turnout in some of the metropolitan/cities.
- **Increasing Registrations of Unorganized Workers:** There are nearly 10 million migrant workers, registered with the government's **e-SHRAM portal**. In this context, the remote voting facility will result in an increased voting percentage.
- **Health Concerns:** The health concerns of mainly the senior citizens are also a reason for low voter turnout.

The problem: migration-based disenfranchisement

- **Domestic migration:** It has been a big reason why registered voters do not end up voting.
- **Increasing numbers:** As per the 2011 census, there are nearly 45.36 crore migrants in India (both intra and interstate).
 - It amounts to approximately 37 percent of the country's population.
- **Voting denied:** For a large chunk of the population, its franchise gets denied due to exigencies of work or lack of resources to travel.
 - This goes directly against the EC's **"No voter left behind" goal**.
- The **Multi-Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM)** can handle multiple constituencies from a single remote polling booth.

What is Remote Voting?

- Remote voting may take place in person somewhere other than an assigned polling station or at another time, or votes may be sent by post or cast by an appointed proxy.
- This is where Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM), comes as a solution.

Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM)

- **Development:** The RVM was developed with the assistance of **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)** and the **Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL)**.
- **Technology:** It is based on the currently used EVM system.
 - RVMs are "stand-alone, non-networked systems".

Standalone system:

- It is an application or software that **does not need to be bundled with other software or applications**, nor does it require anything else to function.
- It's software that can "stand on its own" **without help from the Internet** or another processor computer.

- **Procedure:** RVM will be set up in remote locations outside the state under similar conditions as current polling booths.

Significance:

- **Domestic migrants don't have to travel back** to their home states to vote.
- It can lead to a **social transformation** for the migrants
- It will help to **boost voter turnout**.
- It will also help in **strengthening India's democratic process as voters will be connected with their roots**.

NOTIFY ULB POLLS WITHOUT OBC RESERVATION: ALLAHABAD HC

CONTEXT:

In a significant decision, the Allahabad High Court has directed the State Election Commission to immediately notify the Urban Local Body Polls without OBC reservation, as it held that the state government doesn't fulfil the *Triple Test Formality*.

Background:

- In 2021, the SC scrapped OBC quotas in local body polls in **Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh**, and the Odisha high court cancelled a similar move in the state because the exercise didn't pass the triple test.
- The Triple-Test Formula, laid down by the Supreme Court in 2010 and later reiterated in March 2021, required the states to appoint a commission, collect quantifiable data of the community, and allocate reservation to them in local bodies in such a manner that the total reservation in each seat does not exceed 50%.

What is Triple Test?

- In the **Vikas Kishanrao Gawali case**, the Apex Court had noted that a triple test is to be followed before provisioning reservation for the OBC category. The said triple test involves;
 - setting up a **dedicated Commission** to conduct a contemporaneous rigorous empirical inquiry into the nature and implications of the backwardness qua local bodies, within the states;
 - **Specifying the proportion of reservation required** to be provisioned local body-wise in light of recommendations of the Commission, so as not to fall foul of Overbreadth;
 - Not **exceeding an aggregate of 50 percent** of the total seats reserved in favour of SCs/STs/OBCs taken together.

What does the Court's ordered?

- The state has been directed to consider the claim of transgender for their inclusion among the Backward Class of citizens.
- A dedicated Commission is constituted for undertaking the exercise of conducting the empirical study as to the nature and implications of Backwardness for the purposes of providing reservation to the backward class of citizens in the context of elections to the urban local bodies.
- The bench quashed the draft notification issued by the Uttar Pradesh government, expressing its intent to conduct Urban Local Body Election including OBC seats reserved.

Why such order has been given by the High Court?

- The Allahabad High Court noted that the UP Government didn't constitute any dedicated Commission to conduct a contemporaneous rigorous empirical inquiry into the nature and implications of the backwardness qua local bodies and without such data being available, providing quota for OBC was not valid.

- On the Other hand the triple test formula mandated by the apex court in the context of providing reservation for OBCs in local body polls.

Why Triple test rule was mandated by the Supreme Court?

- The five-judge Constitution Bench decision in **Krishnamurthy (Dr.) v. Union of India (2010)** wherein the Supreme Court had **interpreted Article 243D (6) and Article 243T (6)**, which permit reservation by enactment of law for backward classes in Panchayats and municipal bodies respectively, to hold that barriers to political participation are not the same as that of the barriers that limit access to education and employment.
- However, for creating a level playing field, reservation may be desirable as mandated by the aforementioned Articles which provide a separate constitutional basis for reservation, as distinct from what are conceived under **Article 15 (4) and Article 16 (4) which forms the basis for reservation in education and employment.**
- Though reservation to local bodies is permissible, the top court declared that the same is subject to empirical finding of backwardness in relation to local bodies as fulfilled through the triple tests.

SUPREME COURT'S DEMONETIZATION VERDICT

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court has upheld the decision taken by the government in 2016 to demonetize the currency notes. The court also said that the decision, being the Executive's economic policy, cannot be reversed.

What is the Supreme Court's verdict on demonetization?

- In its **majority 4:1 judgment**, it was held that the Centre's notification dated November 8, 2016, was valid and satisfied the test of proportionality.
- **Procedure Followed:**
 - **RBI Approval was taken:** The central government's decision was after the RBI board's approval which shows an in-built safeguard against the center's powers.
 - **No Excessive delegation of power:** It cannot be said that there is an excessive delegation of power under the RBI Act to the Centre which is answerable to the Parliament.

What is the test of proportionality?

- Proportionality means that administrative action should not be more drastic than it ought to be for obtaining the desired result. This requires few tests,
 - State action must have a **legislative mandate**
 - The action must show that the objective of its law is founded on a **legitimate governmental aim**
 - It must be proportionate, i.e., such state action — both in its nature and extent, must be **necessary for a democratic society**. Further, such action must **have no alternative** and less intrusive measures available to achieve the same objective
 - The principle of proportionality calls for **striking down laws that are excessively harsh or disproportionate**.

Why was demonetization challenged?

- The matter primarily revolved around the procedure prescribed in **Section 26(2) of the RBI Act, 1934, which appears to have not been followed**.
- According to Section 26(2) of the RBI Act, 1934** the Parliament should have discussed the law on demonetization.
 - The process should not have been done through a gazette notification.
 - Parliament cannot be left aloof on an issue of such critical importance for the country.

Majority view	Dissenting view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Centre's decision-making process was not flawed as there was consultation between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Union government. There was a reasonable nexus to bring such a measure. The court holds that demonetization was not hit by the doctrine of proportionality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliament should have discussed the law on demonetization. The process should not have been done through a gazette notification. Parliament cannot be left aloof on an issue of such critical importance for the country.

Increasing Federal Disputes and role of SC

- India is a federal (sometimes quasi-federal) country having governance/state authorities at the federal/national, state and local levels.
- It is often the case that such federal units (such as:

federal/union and different states) have disputes and conflicts amongst each other.

- Resolution of such federal disputes (disputes arising amongst federal units) requires an independent and impartial arbiter.
- In the Indian polity and constitutional setup such a role of arbiter is **exclusively entrusted** on the Supreme Court of India ("SCI") under **Article 131** of the **Constitution of India, 1950 ("Constitution"**

How SC puts restrictions on its exclusive jurisdiction?

- The Supreme Court itself has placed certain limitations on its exclusive jurisdiction, role and duty as the federal Court to the extent of handicapping itself in the effective dispensation of justice in federal disputes.
- In **State of Madhya Pradesh v. UOI** the SCI has held that under its **Article 131** jurisdiction, as the federal Court, there can be no challenge to the constitutional validity of a law, and has implicitly ousted the power of the SCI to entertain challenges to the constitutional validity of a law under this jurisdiction.

Article 131 of the Constitution confers on the SCI exclusive original jurisdiction in any dispute amongst the states or the Government of India and state(s) (in any combination) where the dispute involves any question (whether of law or fact) on which the existence or extent of a legal right depends.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES' POSITION ON NEW FOREST RULES

CONTEXT:

In the escalating conflict between the government and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) over the Forest (Conservation) Rules (FCR) 2022, NCST Chairperson has mentioned that the position of the body, on being violative of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 "will be the same".

Recently, the **Ministry of Environment** has dismissed the allegations by NCST.

About Provisions of Forest (Conservation) Rules, 2022:

- The Forest Conservation Rules deal with the **implementation of the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980**.

- They **prescribe the procedure to be followed** for forest land to be diverted for non-forestry uses such as road construction, highway development, railway lines, and mining.
- For forest land beyond five hectares, approval for diverting land must be given by the Central government. This is via a specially constituted committee, called the **Forest Advisory Committee (FAC)**.

Forest Advisory Committee (FAC):

- It is a **regional empowered committee** at each of the integrated regional offices and a screening committee at the State/Union Territory (UT) government level.
- This **committee examines** whether the **user agency (applicants for diverting forest land)** or those who have requested forest land, have made a convincing case for the upheaval of that specific parcel of land.

What do the updated rules say?

- The new rules, **"streamline" the process of approvals**. The rules make a provision for private parties to cultivate plantations and sell them as land to companies who need to meet compensatory forestation targets.
- It will **help India increase forest cover**.
- It will also **solve the problems of the States not finding land** within their jurisdiction **for compensatory purposes**.
- The concerned update sought to **limit the necessity for consent from the gram Sabha**. Accordingly, the States will ensure the "settlement" of Forest Rights Acts applicable.

What were the allegations of NCST over the new rules?

- According to NCST, the rules were framed under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** and these rules being in violation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006** was 'not legally tenable'.
- The Minister added that the two statutory processes were parallel and not dependent on each other.
- **Citing Rule 9(6)(b)(ii)**, the government said the FCR 2022 already provides for diversion of forest land "only after fulfilment and compliance of all provisions, including settlement of rights under the Forest Rights Act" and also does not bar or infringe upon the operation of other laws mandating consent of Gram Sabhas.

How will the new rules affect tribal rights?

- **Missing elements of tribals and forest-dwelling communities:** The updated Forest Conservation

Rules don't talk about the tribals and forest-dwelling communities whose land would be hived off for developmental work.

- The new rules allow the Union government to permit the clearing of a forest for a project before the prior consent of the forest dwellers, as mandated under the 2006 Act.

- Earlier the state bodies would **forward documents to the FAC** that would also include information on the status of whether the **forest rights of locals** in the area were settled.
- Earlier such proposals would not be entertained by the FAC unless there was **approval from the State** specifying that the forest rights in the place had been "settled" and the Gram Sabha, or the governing body in villages in the area, had given their written consent to the diversion of the forest.

- The new rules will dilute the Forest Right Act, of 2006.
- **It will disempower forest tribals and may displace them:** The update will **limit the necessity for consent from the gram Sabha**. Many forestry experts say it may imply that the consent of the resident tribals and forest dwellers may not remain a deciding factor.

THE VALUES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT:

With the 30th Anniversary of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, debates on federalism should include larger discussions on how power should be divided and shared between governments at the Union, State, and local level.

Background:

- In **December 1992**, Parliament passed the **73rd and 74th constitutional amendments**, which instituted Panchayats and municipalities, respectively.
- These amendments mandated that **State governments constitute Panchayats** (at the village, block and district levels) **and municipalities** (in the form of municipal corporations, municipal councils and Nagar Panchayats) in every region.
- They sought to institute a **third-tier of governance** in the federal framework through the devolution of **functions, funds, and functionaries** to local governments.

- Since local governments seldom derive their authority directly from the Constitution, India's constitutional reforms for decentralisation are exceptional.
- But still despite these reforms, municipal governments are often seen to be ineffective in addressing even the most basic needs of citizens, such as reliable water supply and walkable footpaths. Urban residents tend to blame "corrupt" local politicians for these civic woes.

What is the basis of Local self-governance in India?

- Local self-governance is linked to the idea of subsidiarity and is typically grounded on two broad arguments.
 - First, it provides for **efficient provision of public goods** since governments with smaller jurisdictions can provide services as per the preferences of their residents.
 - Second, it **promotes deeper democracy** since governments that are closer to the people allow citizens to engage with public affairs more easily.
- The democratic decentralization through 73rd and 74th CAA, has entrusted the Local self-government with the main task of local governance, while the district administration playing an enabling and coordinating role.
- However, in several cases bureaucratic inertia and lack of empowerment of LSG (local self-government) has hindered the objective of decentralized local governance (enshrined in Art 40 of the DPSP), needing immediate reform in this regard.
- However, India is undergoing a **centralising shift in its politics, economy, and culture**.

Constitutional Provision:

- The **Constitution (73RD and 74TH Amendment) Act, 1992** provided for the establishment of urban local bodies (ULBs) (including municipal corporations) as institutions of local self-government.

Levels: The Act stipulated three levels of municipal bodies to be set up in the country:

- **Nagar Panchayat:** Nagar Panchayat for a transitional area (an area in transition from a rural area to an urban area).
- **Municipality:** It is constituted for a smaller urban area
- **Municipal Corporation:** It is constituted for a larger urban area exceeding 3 lakhs population.

- It also empowered state governments to devolve certain functions, authority, and power to collect revenue to these bodies, and made periodic elections for them compulsory.
- Urban governance and Panchayats are part of the **state list** under the Constitution.
- Thus, the administrative framework and regulation of ULBs varies across states.

What do they mandate?

- The 73rd and 74th amendments require States **to vest Panchayats and municipalities** with the authority to enable them to function as institutions of self-government, including the powers to prepare and implement plans and schemes for economic development and social justice.
- They also mandate the **regular conduct of local elections**, provide for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women in local councils, and institute participative forums like gram sabhas in Panchayats and ward committees in municipal corporations.
- Hence, the core values that the amendments sought to entrench are that of **deepening local democracy** and devolving functions for meeting the ends of economic development and social justice.

What are the loopholes in the local governance structure?

- **Limited autonomy and authority:** Despite the constitutional promise of local self-governance, local governments, especially municipalities, operate with limited autonomy and authority.
 - Limitations include the discretion given to the States regarding devolution of powers and levying of local taxes.
 - State governments are reluctant to implement the 74th amendment as cities are economic powerhouses and controlling urban land is important for financing State governments and political parties.
- **Narrowing the scope of Municipalities:** The courts have also mostly interpreted the 74th amendment narrowly, allowing **State governments** to retain their control over cities.
 - The 2021 amendment had transferred the powers of appointment of **Grade C and D employees** of municipalities from the **Empowered Standing Committee** of the municipality to the State government-controlled Directorate of Municipal Administration.

INDIA AND THE PROBLEM OF BAD LOANS

CONTEXT:

In December 2022, Finance Minister has informed the Parliament that bank had bad loans worth Rs 10,09,511 crore during the last five financial years.

What are Bad Loans?

- A bad loan is one that has not been 'serviced' for a certain period.
- Servicing a loan is paying back the interest and a small part of the principal — depending on the agreement between bank and borrower; to begin with so that over time, you pay back the principal as well as the interest accrued in the duration.

- In 2009, the RBI brought out norms that set out categories of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and what banks must do as these bad loans age.
- According to RBI, Bad loans are a problem, for, with time, there is less and less certainty that the loan would be paid back in full.

Types of NPA:

- **Standard Assets:** It is a kind of performing asset which creates continuous income and repayments as and when they become due. These assets carry a normal risk and are not NPA in the real sense of the word. Hence, no special provisions are required for standard assets.
- **Sub-Standard Assets:** Loans and advances which are non-performing assets for a period of 12 months fall under the category of Sub-Standard Assets.
- **Doubtful Assets:** The Assets considered as non-performing for a period of more than 12 months are known as Doubtful Assets.
- **Loss Assets:** All those assets which cannot be recovered by the lending institutions are known as Loss Assets.

What is a Non-Performing Asset?

- They are loans or advances that are in default or in arrears.
- In other words, these are those kinds of loans wherein principal or interest amounts are late or have not been paid.

When a loan is classified as NPA?

- Non-Performing Assets are basically Non-Performing Loans.
- In India, the timeline given for classifying the asset as NPA is 180 days. As against 45 to 90 days of international norms.

Why is there a need to recognise NPAs?

- In the banking system, the government and regulatory authorities need to have a good view of how healthy the financial system is.
- India became more aggressive in recognising loans as 'bad' in the 2014 to 2015 period.
- The periodic asset quality review was introduced. Further, the regulator stepped in to prevent ever-greening of loans (i.e., lending more to an already stressed asset in the hope that it could be brought back to its feet).

What process does a bank undertake to recover NPA?

- The banks employ the Lok Adalats for settling the NPA loans. The Lok Adalats help in settling the NPA between the banks and defaulters.

A **National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd. (NARCL)** was announced in the Union Budget for 2021-2022 to resolve stressed loans amounting to about **Rs 2 lakh crore** in phases.

Impact of NPAs on Financial Operations

- This reduces the profits of the banks.
- This reduces a bank or financial institution's capital adequacy.
- The banks have become averse to giving loans and taking risks of zero per cent. Thus, the creation of fresh credit is debarred.
- The banks start concentrating on the management of credit risk instead of the bank becoming profitable.
- The funds happen to cost due to NPA.

CREDIT CHALLENGES: ON CREDIT FLOW AND ALL-AROUND CAPITAL SPENDING

CONTEXT:

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the Report on 'Trends and Progress of Banking in India 2021-22'.

About the Report:

- This report is statutory compliance in accordance with the Banking Regulation Act 1949.

- This Report presents the performance of the banking sector, including co-operative banks and non-banking financial institutions, during 2021-22.
- It has highlighted the gradual strengthening of the growth momentum in the Indian banking sector.

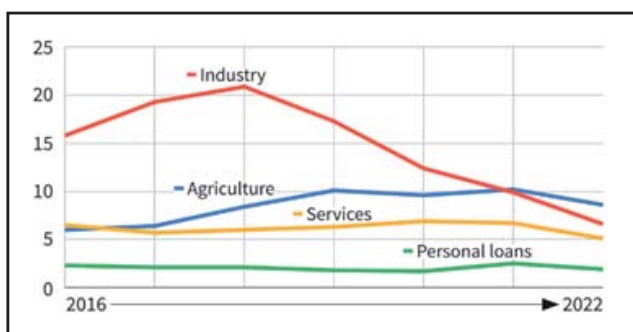
Key Highlights:

Gross non-performing assets (GNPA):

- The GNPA's are bad loans which the borrower is not in a position to repay at the moment.
- A loan turns bad or becomes an NPA if they are overdue for over 90 days.
- **Double Digit Growth:** Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) have registered double-digit growth in 2021-22.
- **Strengthening of capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR)** of SCBs
- **Decline in gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio** of SCBs.
 - **Reasons for decline in GNPA's:** Banks have given write-offs or upgradation; greater scrutiny and monitoring of loans; greater recovery of loans after the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Act 2016.
- **Improvement in the financial performance of urban co-operative banks (UCBs)**

Areas of concern:

- **Retail loans may become a source of Systemic risk:** There is evidence of a building up of **concentration in retail loans**.
 - Retail loans are generally unsecured, meaning they **do not require any collateral**. These are generally taken for personal use.
- **Indian banks are showing "Herding Behaviour":** The banks were found diverting ***lending away from the industrial sector*** towards retail loans.



What is the reason behind the drastic shift in the sectors that the banks funded?

- **Bad loans in the industry sector:** There has been a very high share of bad loans in the industry sector till 2018. **It can be seen in the figure provided.**

- But it has been **brought down by recovery mechanisms** such as insolvency and bankruptcy code and also by issuing fewer fresh loans to the industries.
- On the other hand, **bad loans are barely there in the retail sector.**

Bank Credit in India:

- Bank credit in India refers to credit lending by various **scheduled commercial banks (SCBs)** to various sectors of the economy.
- The **RBI follows the practice of classifying the credit-related data** under the **food and non-food credit (NFC) categories**.
 - The food credit indicates the lending made by banks to the **Food Corporation of India (FCI)** mainly for procuring food grains. It is a small share of the total bank credit.
 - The major portion of the bank credit is **non-food credit** which comprises credit to various sectors of the economy (**Agriculture, Industry, and Services**) and also in the form of **personal loans**.

Three challenges in Indian financial services

To enable India's journey towards a USD 5 trillion economy the financial services industry needs to work with the stakeholder ecosystem to address three key issues:

- **Bridging the credit gap:**
 - To enhance the credit-to-GDP ratio the policymakers need to **open up alternative capital sources for public sector banks** and **address the credit gap faced by MSMEs**.
- **Digital innovation across the financial sectors:**
 - Given that 70% of the market share belongs to public sector banks, these banks need to be **incentivized to aggressively drive the digital agenda**.
- **Focus on building ESG into the financial system:**
 - The other key challenge for India is to drive sustainable growth around **environmental, climate and social paradigms**.
 - Financial service providers will need to work to bring their economic objectives into harmony with the new ESG rules and regulations and change their business models.

ESG fund/investment

- ESG is a combination of three words i.e., environment, social and **governance**.
- It is a **kind of mutual fund**. Its investing is used **synonymously with sustainable investing or socially responsible investing**.
- The fund is regulated by the **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**.

UNION CABINET APPROVES GREEN HYDROGEN MISSION

CONTEXT:

The government has formally approved the National Green Hydrogen Mission with an aim of making India a global hub for the production of green hydrogen.

Background:

- While hydrogen's potential as a clean fuel source has a history of nearly 150 years, it was only after the oil price shocks of the 1970s that the possibility of **hydrogen replacing fossil fuels** came to be considered seriously.
- Later on, **Japan's Honda and Toyota, and South Korea's Hyundai** have since moved decisively to commercialise this technology.

About the National Green Hydrogen mission:

- Objective:** It aimed at;
 - The creation of export opportunities for green hydrogen and its derivatives;
 - Decarbonisation of the energy sector and use in mobility applications in a bid to lower the dependence on imported fossil fuels; and
 - The development of indigenous manufacturing capacities.
- Significance:** It will help to fuel key sectors of the economy using hydrogen that is made by splitting water through an electrical process called electrolysis, using a device called electrolyser that is powered entirely by renewable energy.
- The draft Mission is likely to propose support for production and deployment of green hydrogen, alongside a major push for hydrogen in the auto sector.
- It will also promote R&D for fuel cell development and pilot projects for fuel cell vehicles.

Hydrogen as a fuel:

- Hydrogen, the most common element in nature, exists only in combination with other elements, and has to be extracted from naturally occurring compounds like water.
- Hydrogen is a **clean molecule**, but the process of extracting it is energy intensive.

Benefits:

- It is a clean burning molecule that can decarbonise a range of sectors including iron and steel, chemicals, and transportation.
- Renewable energy that cannot be stored or used by the grid can be channelled to produce hydrogen.

Green hydrogen is not commercially viable at present.

What is Green Hydrogen?

- The sources and processes by which hydrogen is derived are categorised by colour tabs. Hydrogen produced from fossil fuels is called grey hydrogen, which constitutes the bulk of the hydrogen generated today.
- Hydrogen generated from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage options is called blue hydrogen, while hydrogen generated using electrolyzers powered by renewable power sources is called **green hydrogen**.

What India's Green hydrogen mission aspires?

The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy** is in the process of formulating guidelines for the scheme that seeks to promote the development of **green hydrogen production capacity** of at least 5 million metric tonnes (MMT) per annum with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 gigawatts (GW) by 2030.

- Making it viable for all:** The current cost in India is around Rs.350-400 per kg which is likely to become viable only at a production cost of under Rs.100/ kg.
- Providing Subsidy support:** With implicit subsidy support and a government-backed R&D push, the plan is to target **lower costs of renewable power generation** and to bring down the costs of electrolyzers to make the production of green hydrogen cost-competitive.
- Replace fossil fuels:** Green hydrogen could eventually potentially replace fossil fuels and fossil fuel-based feedstock in fertiliser production, petroleum refining, steel production, and transport applications.

Where this Green hydrogen energy be used?

- Inclusion of renewable sources of energy:** The electricity generation capacity addition over the last 10 years by way of renewable energy sources such as **solar and wind**, this can be diverted for green hydrogen production during non-peak hours.

For steel sector:

- ▶ The steel sector has been made a stakeholder, and it has been proposed to set up pilot plants with part funding from the government.
- ▶ It will aim to explore the feasibility of using green hydrogen in **Direct Reduced Iron (DRI)** production by partly replacing natural gas with hydrogen in gas-based DRI plants.
- ▶ Based on the success of the pilot projects, the **gas-based DRI units** are to be encouraged for large-scale adoption of the process.

Recent Government Interventions:

US-based 'Ohmium International' has commissioned India's first green-hydrogen factory in Karnataka.

- **Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition Programme:** A major part of this is a proposed Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition Programme (SIGHT), under which two financial incentive mechanisms are to be provided.
- Also it is targeting **domestic manufacturing of electrolyzers** and the production of green hydrogen promoted to achieve a reduction in fossil fuel imports and abatement of annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.
- Kerala has set up a **high-level working group** for its own Hydrogen Economy Mission to devise a strategic roadmap, policy formulations, and implementation plans for facilitating investments in green hydrogen and making the state "a green hydrogen hub".
- Companies such as **Reliance Industries Ltd, Adani Enterprises, JSW Energy, and Acme Solar** have plans to tap the green hydrogen opportunity.

MAPPING INDIA'S MILITARY STRENGTH IN 2022

CONTEXT:

India embarked on a major overdrive in 2022 to significantly bolster its overall military prowess and focused on its strategic goals. Let us assess the technological and strategic and other developments of military/forces in India.

About India's military strength:

As per the '**Global Firepower (GFP) annual defence review**', India's performance in 2022 is as follows:

- With strength of **45 lakhs of active military** manpower, India is ranked **fourth for the year 2022** as per the report.
- A total of **140 countries** were considered.
- Each country is evaluated on a multitude of factors related to a prolonged offensive or defensive military campaign and the GFP list was compiled on the basis of the '**PwrIndx rating**'.
- India holds a power index **score of 0.0979**.

The country's total aircraft strength is 2,182, which includes both fixed-wing and rotorcraft platforms from all branches of services. India has 12,000 armoured vehicles and 4,614 tanks.

The developments in 2022:



The military has maintained an assertive approach in sync with the broader national security doctrine and procured a variety of military platforms and weapons to enhance their combat capabilities.

- **In the 16th round of military talks**, two sides (India and China) carried out disengagement from Patrolling Point 15 in the **Gogra-Hot spring area** of eastern Ladakh in September 2022, taking forward similar exercises in other friction points last year.

- However, the Military forces lingered on in **Demchok and Depsang regions**.
- India expanded military cooperation with almost all friendly countries in South Asia in the face of China's consistent attempts to increase its influence in the region.
- The year also saw India ramping up overall defence cooperation with a number of leading countries including the **US, France, the UK, Germany and Japan**.

Technological Progress:

- The armed forces started procurement of a significant number of military platforms and weapons including **light tanks, anti-ship missiles, long-range guided bombs, futuristic infantry combat vehicles, mounted gun systems and different types of drones**.
- India tested a ballistic missile fired from its first indigenous nuclear-powered submarine, **INS Arihant** which was seen as a major milestone to further boost the country's strategic strike capabilities.
- India has become only the **sixth country**, alongside the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, China and France, to have **nuclear-powered submarines** armed with ballistic missiles.
- In December, India successfully test-fired the nuclear-capable ballistic missile **Agni-5** which can strike targets at ranges up to 5,000 km.
 - **The Agni-5 project** is aimed at boosting India's nuclear deterrence against China which is known to have missiles like Dongfeng-41 having ranges between 12,000-15,000 km.
 - **Agni-V** can bring almost the entire Asia including the northernmost part of China as well as some regions in Europe under its striking range.
 - India also carried out a test firing of the extended-range version of the **Brahmos missile**, the Prithvi-

II missile, the Agni-4, Agni-3 and Helina missiles.

- In September, Prime Minister Narendra Modi commissioned India's first indigenously-built aircraft carrier **INS Vikrant (IAC I)** that made the country part of an elite group of nations capable of manufacturing aircraft carriers above the 40,000 tonnes category.
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) inducted the **first fleet of indigenously-built Light Combat Helicopter (LCH), 'Prachand'**, 23 years after the need for such a lethal platform for mountain warfare was felt following the Kargil conflict with Pakistan.

Infrastructural progress:

- From the construction of **roads, bridges and ammunition depots** to bolstering its surveillance apparatus, the Army is ramping up military infrastructure at a rapid pace for quicker mobilisation of troops.
- In 2022, the defence ministry also unveiled a slew of reform initiatives to make India a hub of **manufacturing** defence equipment and platforms.

Policy Interventions:

- The defence ministry also rolled out the **'Agnipath' recruitment scheme** with an aim to bring down the age profile of the armed forces and make them more agile.
- **Gen Anil Chauhan** became India's new Chief of Defence Staff with a mandate to implement the ambitious **catheterisation plan** that aims to ensure **tri-services synergy** and prepare the armed forces for future security challenges facing the nation.
- In a boost to India's focus on defence indigenisation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone in Vadodara for the production of **European C-295 military transport aircraft** on October 30.

Section: B

(SPECIALS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

GOVERNMENT PROPOSED POLICY ON 'ONLINE GAMING'

CONTEXT

Recently, the Central government has proposed several policy measures for regulating the Online gaming industry, with a self-regulatory body, grievance redressal mechanism, and mandatory know-your-customer norms for verification are among the key proposals in the draft rules.

- ❑ The proposal has been introduced as an amendment to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

◎ KEY POINTS FROM THE PROPOSAL:

- Online games will have to register with a self-regulatory body.
- Only games that are cleared by the body will be allowed to legally operate in India.
- Online gaming companies will not be allowed to engage in betting on the outcome of games.

Nodal Ministries:

- **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** would be the nodal ministry to regulate online gaming, except for the e-sports category on which the Department of Sports can take the lead.
- Certain other aspects of online gaming such as advertisements, code of ethics relating to content classifications, etc. could be regulated by the **Information and Broadcasting Ministry**.
- The **Consumer Affairs Ministry** can regulate the sector for unfair trade practices.

About Self-Regulatory Body:

- It will have a board of directors with five members from diverse fields including online gaming, public policy, IT, psychology, and medicine.
- There could be more than one self-regulatory body.
- It must ensure that the registered games don't have anything:
 - which is not in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India
 - defense of India
 - security of the state

- friendly relations with foreign states
- public order
- Incites the commission of any cognizable offence relating to the aforesaid.

◎ ONLINE GAMING MARKET IN INDIA:

- **Current state:** India's gaming market is currently estimated at \$2.6 billion and is expected to be worth \$8.6 billion by 2027.
- **Market growth:** The online gaming industry in India grew at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 38% between 2017-2020, as opposed to 8% in China and 10% in the US.
- **New user base:** India's percentage of new paying users (NPU) in gaming has been the fastest growing in the world for two consecutive years, at 40% in 2020 and 50% in 2021.
- **Revenue generation:** The revenue of the Indian mobile gaming industry is expected to reach \$5 billion in 2025.

◎ BANNING OF ONLINE GAMING:

- Many social activists, government officials, and those in law enforcement believe that online games like rummy and poker are **addictive in nature**, and when **played with monetary stakes lead to depression, mounting debts, and suicides**.
- Earlier, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had announced a plan to include "**gaming disorder**" as a mental health condition.

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Section: C

(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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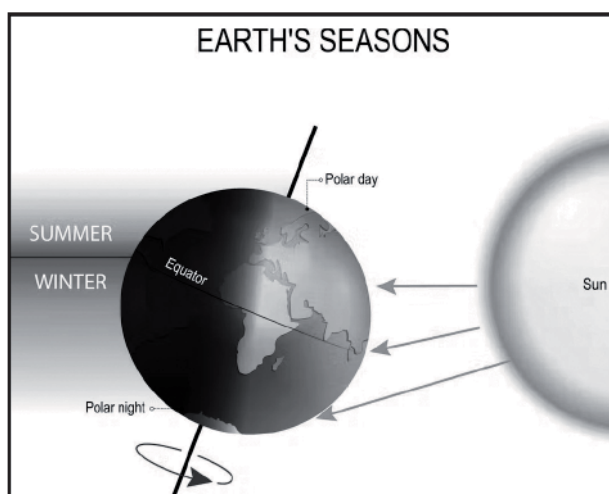
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HOW THE EARTH'S TILT CREATES SHORT AND COLD JANUARY DAYS?

CONTEXT:

Above the equator, winter officially begins in December, but in many areas, January is when it really takes hold which is mainly due to the earth's tilt and it seems to be different for different locations on earth.



About the earth's axial tilt:

- Earth's axial tilt (also known as the **obliquity of the ecliptic**) is about **5 degrees**.
- Due to this axial tilt, the sun shines on different latitudes at different angles throughout the year.
- The earth's spin axis is tilted with respect to its orbital plane.
- This is what causes the seasons. When the earth's axis points towards the sun, it is summer for that hemisphere. When the earth's axis points away, winter can be expected.

How does the Earth's orbit influence our daylight and temperatures?

- As the Earth orbits the sun, it spins around an axis from the **North Pole to the South Pole**.
- During the **24 hours** that it takes for the Earth to rotate once around its axis, every point on its surface faces toward the Sun for part of the time and away from it for part of the time. This is what causes daily changes in sunlight and temperature.

- There are **two other important factors**:
 - First, the **Earth is round**, although it's not a perfect sphere.
 - Second, its **axis is tilted about 23.5 degrees** relative to its path around the Sun.
- As a result, light falls **directly on its equator** but strikes the **North and South poles at angles**.
- When one of the poles points more toward the Sun than the other pole, that half of the planet gets more sunlight than the other half, and it's summer in that hemisphere.
- When that pole tilts away from the Sun, that half of the Earth gets less sunlight and it's winter there.

Impact on earth due to the tilt

- Existence of seasons:** As the Earth orbits the Sun, sunlight strikes the surface at varying angles because of the planet's tilt. This creates seasons.

- The four seasons can be determined by the **solstices (the point of maximum axial tilt toward or away from the Sun)** and the **equinoxes (when the direction of tilt and the Sun are perpendicular)**.
- In the **northern hemisphere**, the winter solstice occurs around **December 21st**, the summer solstice around **June 21st**, the spring equinox around **March 20th**, and the autumnal equinox on or about **September 22nd or 23rd**.
- In the **southern hemisphere**, the situation is reversed, with the summer and winter solstices exchanged and the spring and autumnal equinox dates swapped.

- Changes in Wind directions:** As the Earth rotates; air circulates around it in the atmosphere. Mostly, in the northern hemisphere, the air comes from the Arctic region which is comparably cold.
- Distribution of Sunlight:**
 - At Poles:** Seasonal changes are the most dramatic at the poles, where the changes in light are the most extreme. During the summer, a pole receives 24 hours of sunlight and the Sun never sets. In the winter, the Sun never rises at all.
 - At the Equator:** At the equator, which gets consistent direct sunlight, there's very little change in day length or temperature year-round. People, who live in high and middle latitudes, closer to the poles, can have very different ideas about seasons from those who live in the tropics.

INDIA & AUSTRIA SIGNED MIGRATION AND MOBILITY AGREEMENT

CONTEXT:

India signed the “Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement” (MMPA) with Austria. Along similar lines, India has also signed agreements with other European countries namely, France, the United Kingdom, Germany & Finland.

About MMPA:

- **Objective:** It aims at the facilitation of mobility of students, academics, and researchers, migration for professional and economic reasons, and abiding by equal treatment of nationals of both Parties in a similar situation.
 - The provisions of this Agreement will be without prejudice to the application of national laws on the stay of foreigners on all the points that are not dealt with in this Agreement.

Significance:

- **To curb illegal migration:** India is keen to finalise these agreements with European countries as a stepping stone to resolving issues over the long-pending **India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement** and facilitating Indian professionals working in these countries, the European countries also see them as a way to curb illegal immigration from India.
- **Skill development:** The agreement will regulate multiple entry visas for professionals and student exchange programmes, and will be reviewed regularly by a Joint Working Group (JWG).

Recent developments:

- **India-Germany mobility agreement:** India-Germany agreement on Migration and Mobility partnership to foster the exchange of skills, and talents.

CROATIA BECOMES A FULLY INTEGRATED MEMBER OF THE EU

CONTEXT:

Croatia has switched to the euro and entered Europe's passport-free zone – two important milestones for the country after joining the European Union (EU) nearly a decade ago.

About

- The **Balkan nation** bid farewell to its **kuna currency** and became the 20th member of the **eurozone**.
- It is now the 27th nation in the **Schengen zone**, the **world's largest passport-free travel area**, which enables more than 400 million people to move freely around its members.
- Croatia, a former **Yugoslav republic** of 3.9 million people that fought a war of independence in the 1990s, joined the **EU** in 2013.

THE BILLS INTRODUCED AND CLEARED IN PARLIAMENT FOR YEAR 2022

CONTEXT:

According to the data collated by non-profit organisation *PRS Legislative Research* shows that the overall Parliament recorded 56 sittings in 2022, across the Budget, Monsoon, and winter sessions, the number of Parliament sittings has been declining over the last 50 years and has halved since the 1950s and 1960s.

So, let us assess the bill that passed this year in Parliament.

About the Bills:

- **The Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Amendment Bill, 2022:**
 - The Bill amends the 2005 version of the Act, which prohibits the unlawful manufacture, transport, or transfer of **weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**, including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and their means of delivery.
 - It includes the **prohibition of financing any activity related to WMD** and their delivery systems and gives the central government the power to crack down on financial sources suspected of catering to the same.

The Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022:

- The Bill aims to regulate **visits and activities to Antarctica** as well as potential disputes that may arise among those present on the continent.
- It prohibits private **tours and expeditions to Antarctica** without a permit or written authorisation from a member country and includes provisions for penalising defaulters.

- The Bill also includes a structure for government officials to inspect a **vessel and conduct checks of research facilities and calls for creating a fund to protect the continent's environment.**
- **The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022:**
 - This Bill replaces the **Identification of Prisoners Act, of 1920.**
 - It allows the police and prison authorities to collect store and analyse physical and biological samples including the retina and iris scans of convicted, arrested and detained persons.

The National Crime Records Bureau of India (NCRB), under the Union Home Ministry, is allowed to preserve records for at least 75 years.

- **The Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2022:**
 - This amendment Bill was introduced when Delhi was gearing up for Municipal Corporation elections, which were then halted.
 - This Bill amended the **Delhi Municipal Corporation Act of 1957**, which was in turn amended by the Delhi Legislative Assembly in 2011, to divide the Municipal Corporation of Delhi into **three bodies—North, South, and East.**
 - The new amendment merged all three bodies into one.
- **The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bills, 2022:** This bill includes;
 - The Bill amends the ST order to include the **Deshwari, Ganjhu, Dautalbandi (Dwalbandi), Patbandi, Raut, Maajhia, Khairi (Kheri), Tamaria (Tamadia), and Puran** communities of Jharkhand in the ST list and recategorises the Bhogta community in the State as ST from SC.
 - It also excludes the Gond community from the SC list in four districts of Uttar Pradesh – **Sant Kabir Nagar, Sant Ravidas Nagar, Kushinagar, and Chandauli**, and adds it to the ST list in these four districts.
 - The Bill amends the ST order to make the **Darlong community** of Tripura a sub-tribe of the Kuki tribe.
 - It includes the **Narikoravan and Kurivikkaran** communities in the Tamil Nadu ST list.
 - It includes **Betta-Kuruba** as a synonym for the **Kadu Kuruba community** in the Karnataka ST list.
- **The Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2022:**
 - This Bill seeks to convert the **National Rail and Transportation Institute (NRTU)** into the '**Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya**', an autonomous central university.

- It also expands the scope of the university from just the **railways to cover** the entire transport sector and supports growth and modernisation in the field.
- **The Family Courts (Amendment) Bill, 2022:**
 - This Bill pertained only to **Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland.**
 - It amends the **Family Courts Act, 1984**, and extends the application of the Act to the mentioned States.
 - Governments in both **Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh** had already set up family courts under the 1984 Act before it was applicable there.
- **The New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (Amendment) Bill, 2022:**
 - This Bill renames the **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre** as the India International Arbitration Centre.
- **The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022:**
 - This Bill facilitates the promotion of **green Hydrogen** as an alternative to fossil fuels used by industries and incentivises **efforts to use clean energy.**

HATE SPEECH DENIES RIGHT TO DIGNITY

CONTEXT:

The Public functionaries and other persons of influence, and celebrities, having regard to their reach, real or apparent and the authority and impact they wield on the public, owe a duty to the citizenry at large to be more responsible and restrained in their speech.

About the freedom of speech:

- India does not have a formal legal framework for dealing with hate speech.
- India prohibits hate speech through several sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and other laws which put limitations on the freedom of expression.
- Constitutionally, **Article 19** gives all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression but the said freedom of expression is subject to "**reasonable restrictions**" for preserving inter alia "public order, decency or morality".

The extent of free speech available to public functionaries:

- **Speech must be exercised with consciousness:** Every citizen of India must consciously be restrained in speech, and exercise the right to freedom of speech and expression under **Article 19(1) (a)** only in the sense that it was intended by the framers of the Constitution, to be exercised.
- **Freedom of speech vs. right to dignity:** The content of **Article 19(1)(a)** which does not vest with citizens unbridled liberty to utter statements which are vitriolic, derogatory, unwarranted, have no redeeming purpose and which, in no way amount to the communication of ideas.

What comes under hate speech?

- There is no international legal definition of hate speech, and the notion of what constitutes "hateful" speech is debatable.
- Hate speech is defined as any form of communication, whether spoken, written, or physical, that criticizes or discriminates against a person or a group based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factors.

Legal Provisions of Hate Speech in India:

- Responsible speech is the essence of the liberty granted under **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression to all citizens of India.

Legislations around Hate speech: The Indian Penal Code, 1860 (hereinafter IPC);

- **Section 124A** IPC penalises seditious
- **Section 153A** IPC penalises 'promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony'.
- **Section 153B** IPC penalises 'imputations, and assertions prejudicial to national integration.
- **Section 295A** IPC penalises 'deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs'.
- **Section 298** IPC penalises 'uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person'.
- **Section 505(1) and (2)** IPC penalises the publication or circulation of any statement, rumour or report causing public mischief and enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes

- Hate speech has not been defined in any law in India. However, legal provisions in certain legislations prohibit select forms of speech as an exception to freedom of speech.

Concerns associated:

- **Misuse of Laws:** Lower conviction rates for these provisions indicate that the process where a police officer can arrest without a warrant is often the punishment.
- **Violation of free speech:** Critics have pointed out that these laws are intended for the state to step in and restore "public order" rather than protect free speech.
- **Vague terms in the law:** The broad, vague terms in the laws are often invoked in their misuse.
- **Old-aged Laws:** Section 295A lies in the communally charged atmosphere of North India in the 1920s.

Way forward:

- **Section 295A** was passed in a different societal paradigm but as society has changed the law needs to change as well. If the law still reflects the ghosts of the past then there is no need for that law.
- **Section 295A** needs to change to accommodate both religious sentiments and freedom of expression in a harmonious manner.
- Rights of the individual need to be given the same importance as the right of the community.

THE CASE AGAINST STATE CONTROL OF HINDU TEMPLES

CONTEXT:

It's high time that we need to provide adequate community representation in the management of their places of worship. Regulation of secular activities associated with religious practice requires more attention.

◎ ABOUT

Why the government control over temples needs to be replaced?

- States' control over temples has become a more controversial issue due to:

- **Gross mismanagement** of financial resources
- **Increasing Corruption**
- **Disregarding temple maintenance** leads to the loss and destruction of temple antiquities.
- **Against the principle of Secularism**

State interference in religion:

- The most fundamental criticism against the release of Hindu temples from government control to society is:
 - To whom will the temples be handed over?
 - Will it not perpetuate class hierarchies?
- Sovereign control of temples is justified on the grounds that Hindu temples were supervised and managed by kings.
- On the contrary, there are inscriptions, cast in stone that attest that temples were managed wholly and entirely by local communities.

Hindu temples under state shackles:

- The proponents of state management of temples argue that courts have accorded approval to this practice. Hence, it becomes pertinent to read the **Shirur Mutt judgment (1954)** of the Supreme Court.
- **Shirur Mutt judgment (1954):**
 - The court held that the term "religion" will cover all rituals and practices "integral" to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion.
 - Supreme Court obliterated the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Act, 1951.

Constitutional Provisions:

Article 25(2) grants power to the State to enact the law on two distinct aspects.

- **Article 25(2)(a)** empowers the state to regulate "economic, financial, political or other secular activities which may be associated with religious practice".
- **Article 25(2)(b)** enables the state to enact a law to prohibit the exclusion of 'classes and sections' of Hindu society to enter into Hindu temples of a public character and also make laws for social welfare and reform.
- Thus, the control of secular aspects associated with religion and the power to throw open Hindu temples to all classes and sections of society are distinct.
- **The Constitution does not permit** the state to assume ownership of properties belonging to religious institutions.

The effect of temple control legislation:

- **The state cannot mix with religion:** A long line of judicial precedents, post the 42nd Amendment, emphasize that secularism means the state cannot mix with religion.
- **State official involvement is not desired:** Nothing justifies a state official dictating to a religious function how worship is to be conducted.
- The purpose of the legislation, if any must be to involve the community, which has been excluded by the state.

British legacy: When the British government realized that a **secular government** should take no part in the management of religious institutions, it enacted the **Religious Endowments Act (Act XX of 1863)** **repealing** the pre-existing **Bengal and Madras Regulations**.

- Interestingly, in **handing over the religious institutions** to the society, it created committees in every district to exercise control over temples (**the British govt. follows negative secularism, whereas India practices a positive form of secularism**)

AYMANAM IN KOTTAYAM TO SHOWCASE WOMEN'S TALENT

CONTEXT:

In line with the Kerala government's plan to create a women-friendly tourism network in the State, authorities have **embarked on a plan** to redress the gender balance in the tourism **enterprise** of 'Aymanam' by showcasing women's talent.

About the plan:

- The plan envisages turning the village into a hub of women-friendly destinations in Kottayam, which extends across a vast area from **Kumarakom to Maravanthuruthu**.
- A **model Responsible Tourism (RT)** village in Kottayam is set to include women across the state of Kerala to become part of it.
- **Objective:** The establishment of women-friendly networks that give women an equal voice in tourism is one of the key benchmarks for achieving the status of a model RT destination.
- **Significance:** The programme also helps empower women at the grassroots level.

The village has also been included in the **Agri Street project** in the State.

- **Other developments:** Recently, the Aymanam Fest highlighted the tourism, agricultural and cultural potential of the village.

Potential benefits:

- Increase women's income
- Promote gender equality
- Increase GDP of state and country
- Make a women-friendly environment for Tourists

The promotion of equality and women's empowerment became one of the agendas in the **Third Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** which was proclaimed by the **United Nations in 2000** based on the results of joint agreement with 189 heads of UN member states including Indonesia.

HIGH-POWER LADAKH COMMITTEE

CONTEXT:

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) constituted a high-powered committee for the Union Territory of Ladakh in order to conserve the region's unique culture and language.

Background:

- In 2020, the **Peoples Movement for Constitutional safeguard under the sixth schedule** or the Apex Body, Leh was formed.
- **Separation from J&K:** On August 5, 2019, the former State of Jammu & Kashmir was bifurcated into two Union Territories — **Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh**, the latter without a Legislative Assembly.
- **Demand of UT:** Buddhist-dominated Leh district had long demanded UT status because it felt neglected by the erstwhile state government, which was dominated by politicians from Kashmir and Jammu.
- **Demand for inclusion in Sixth Schedule:** Since then, the civil society and political groups in Ladakh have been demanding inclusion under the sixth schedule of the Constitution to protect the land, employment, and cultural identity of Ladakh.

Details of the committee:

- **Chaired by:** Minister of State for Home, **Nityanand Rai**.
- It is a **17-member committee** that includes Ladakh Lieutenant Governor.
- **Objective:** The committee will discuss;
 - Measures to protect the **region's unique culture and language** taking into consideration its geographical location and strategic importance;
 - Ensure protection **of land and employment** for the people of Ladakh;
 - Strategize **inclusive development** and discuss issues related to the **empowerment of the Ladakh** Autonomous Hill District Councils of Leh and Kargil.

Why was the committee formed?

- Civil society groups in Ladakh have been demanding protection of land, resources and employment for the past three years after the special status of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir under **Article 370** of the Constitution.
- The fear of big businesses and conglomerates taking away land and jobs from the local people has contributed to this demand.

What is the sixth schedule?

- The sixth schedule under **Article 244** of the Constitution protects the autonomy of tribal populations through creation of autonomous development councils which can frame laws on land, public health and agriculture.
- As of now ten autonomous councils exist in **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**.

As per the 2011 Census, the total population of Ladakh was 2, 74,289, and nearly 80% of them are tribals.

What is the government's stand?

- Government is against the call to give any special status to Ladakh, as the MHA informed a **parliamentary standing committee** recently that the objective for inclusion of tribal population under the sixth schedule is to ensure their overall socio-economic development, which, the UT administration has already been taking care of and that sufficient funds are being provided to Ladakh to meet its overall developmental requirements.
- A report tabled in Rajya Sabha on December 13, 2022, quoted MHA officials, that the Ladakh administration recently increased the reservation for the **Scheduled Tribes** in direct recruitment from **10% to 45%** which will significantly help the tribal population in their development.

Difficulty behind Ladakh's Inclusion:

- Ladakh's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule would be difficult. The Constitution is very clear; the Sixth Schedule is for the Northeast.
- For tribal areas in the rest of the country, there is the Fifth Schedule.
- Notably, no region outside the Northeast has been included in the Sixth Schedule.
- In fact, even in Manipur, which has predominantly tribal populations in some places, the autonomous councils are not included in the Sixth Schedule.
- Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, which are totally tribal, are also not in the Sixth Schedule.
- However, it remains the prerogative of the government; it can, if it so decides, bring a Bill to amend the Constitution for this purpose.

SUPREME COURT EXPANDS ARTICLE 19 AMBIT

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court has supported a case on question of whether “a fundamental right under Article 19 or 21 of the Constitution of India be claimed other than against the ‘State’ or its ‘instrumentalities’”.

About the Judgement:

- The court ruled that a citizen can seek enforcement of the fundamental rights to **freedom of speech** not just **against the state** but extended the ground for seeking these rights **against other citizens**.
- As said under the **4-1 majority** ruled by the Constitution Bench:
 - ▶ A fundamental right under **Article 19 and Art.21** can be enforced even against persons other than the **State or its instrumentalities**.
 - ▶ The case of heard in view that the right of free speech and expression guaranteed under the Article 19(1)(a) cannot be curbed by any **additional grounds** other than those already laid down in Article 19(2).

Constitutional Backing:

- **Article 19** which guarantees freedom of speech and expression is a right invoked against the state.
- Some fundamental rights such as those prohibiting untouchability, trafficking and bonded labour are explicitly against **both the state and other individuals**.

Significance:

- The court, extending free speech against **private citizens**, opens up a range of possibilities in Constitutional law.
- This interpretation could also bring an **obligation on the state to ensure private entities** also abide by Constitutional norms.

These questions could hypothetically range from seeking enforcement of privacy rights against a **private doctor** to seeking the right to free speech against a **private social media entity**.

Basis of the judgement:

- The Court relied on the **2017 verdict in Puttaswamy** where a nine-judge bench unanimously upheld privacy as a fundamental right.
 - ▶ One of the key arguments by the government was that privacy is a right enforceable against other citizens and, therefore, **cannot be elevated to the status of a fundamental right against the state**.
- The Court also referred to several foreign jurisdictions, contrasting the American approach with the European Courts.
 - ▶ Referring to the **landmark New York Times vs. Sullivan**, in which the US Supreme Court found that defamation law, as applied by the state against The New York Times, was inconsistent with the Constitutional guarantee of the freedom of speech and expression, the SC noted a shift in US law from a “purely vertical approach” to a “horizontal approach”.

For example, a horizontal application of the right to life would enable a citizen to bring a case against a private entity for causing pollution, which would be a violation of the right to a clean environment.

INDIA'S CAD WIDENS TO A 9-YEAR HIGH

CONTEXT:

India's current account deficit (CAD) surged to an all-time high of \$36.4 billion in July-September, as per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- For 2021-22 as a whole, the CAD was \$38.77 billion.

What is a Current Account Deficit (CAD)?

- The current account balance is the difference between the value of exports of goods and services and the value of imports of goods and services, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- A deficit means that India is importing more goods and services than it is exporting.

Balance of Payment (BoP):

- That notebook, or slate or ledger, is called the Balance of Payment, or BoP. The BoP has two parts.
 - Capital account: This includes all types of trading in the capital. In other words, all investments inside and outside the country are recorded here.
 - Current Account: Here, all the trade in goods and services is noted down. It has two specific sub-parts:
 - **Import and Export of goods-** "trade account"
 - **Import and export of services-** "invisible account"

Causes:

- **Dis-balance between the import and export values**
- **Higher currency value, cheaper imports:** As the domestic currency value is higher, importing products is inexpensive, so the nations prefer buying from other economies.
- **Higher national income:** In such a situation, consumers spend more and if the domestic products do not satisfy their requirements, they would demand goods from overseas, leading to increased imports.
- **Inflation:** During inflation, people refrain from buying them from their own nation.
- **Deteriorating dominance of the export sector:** When a country's manufacturing sector cannot beat the developing nations, it disturbs the balance of trade, causing CAD.

What are the effects of such an economic phenomenon?

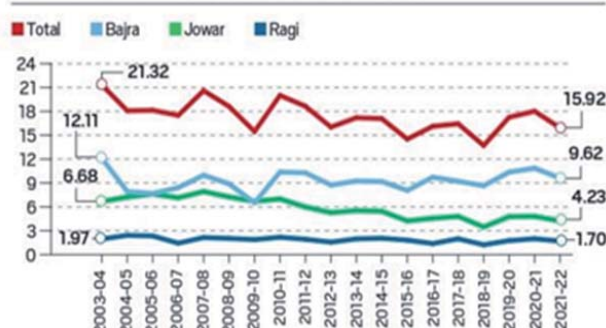
Good impact	Bad impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nation works in retaining their economic stability • It helps the domestic economy to build business and infrastructure • Reduction in domestic currency value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of confidence in domestic assets • Lack of demand • Affects the standard of living of residents • Reduces the expenditure from the public, thereby hampering the global economy

INDIA'S ATTEMPTS TO PROMOTE THE CEREALS IN 2023

CONTEXT:

The United Nations has declared 2023 as the **International Year of Millets**. Despite it having a lot to offer to consumers and farmers, millets aren't the first choice.

PRODUCTION OF MILLETS (in million tonnes)



What is Millet?

- Millet is a **collective term referring to a number of small-seeded annual grasses** that are cultivated as grain crops, primarily on **marginal lands in dry areas in temperate, subtropical, and tropical regions**.
- **Examples:** jowar (sorghum), ragi (finger millet), Kodo (Kodo millet), kutki (little millet), kakun (foxtail millet), Sanwa (barnyard millet), cheena (proso millet), kuttu (buckwheat) and chaulai (amaranth).

Positives of millets:

- **Nutritionally superior traits:** Millet's score over rice and wheat in terms of minerals, vitamins, and dietary fibre content, as well as amino acid profile.
- **For example, Bajra** (pearl millet) has iron, zinc, and protein levels comparable to that of wheat, but it's gluten-free and has more fibre.

It can address the **problem of "hidden hunger"** arising from the consumption of energy-dense but micronutrients-deficient foods.

- **The rotis from bajra make one feel fuller for longer**, as they take more time to digest and **do not raise blood sugar levels too fast**.

Advantages as a crop:

- Millets are **hardy** and **drought-resistant crops**.
- This has to do with their **short duration** (70-100 days, against 115-150 days for rice and wheat)
- **lower water requirement** (350-500 mm versus 600-1,250 mm) and
- **Ability to grow even on poor soils** and in hilly terrain.

Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) contribution:

- **Hybrid varieties:** Pusa-1201, a hybrid bajra that gives an average grain yield of over 2.8 tonnes and a potential of 4.5 tonnes per hectare.
- **Characteristics:** It matures in 78-80 days.
- It is **resistant to downy mildew and blasts**, both deadly fungal diseases.

Possible Government Intervention:

- The Centre has two existing schemes:
 - Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman and
 - Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0 — with a combined budget of Rs 30,496.82 crore in 2022-23.

- These can be better **leveraged by making them more millets-focused**.

- **MSP procurement of millets** should be part of a decentralized nutritional programme specifically targeting tomorrow's citizens.
- Centre could **fund any state willing to procure millets** specific to their region exclusively for distribution through schools and anganwadis.

Role of Schools:

- Every schoolchild and Anganwadi beneficiary **can be served one daily hot meal** based on locally-sourced bajra, jowar, ragi, Kodo, or kutki.
- It will help **combat hidden hunger**, besides giving a boost to crop diversification by creating demand for millions of small millets, dairy and poultry farmers.

State Initiatives:

- **Odisha already has a dedicated millets mission** that undertook procurement of 32,302 tonnes worth Rs 109.08 crore, mainly of ragi, in 2021-22.
- Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and **Haryana might want to do the same in bajra**, just as **Maharashtra may for jowar**, **Karnataka for ragi**, and **Madhya Pradesh for Kodo/ kutki**.

SPECIES IN NEWS**Chocolate albatross (Appias lycida)**

- The chocolate albatross is found in India, China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Indochina, Taiwan, and possibly South China.
- In India, this butterfly ranges across south India, Nicobar Islands, Sikkim to Assam, and onto Myanmar.
- In South India the chocolate albatross is to be found along the foot of the Western Ghats. It is found throughout the year in the Nilgiris where it is locally common.
- In the northern parts of peninsular India it extends into Orissa and north up to Lucknow.

**Flying Fox (Pteropus)**

- It belongs to a genus of megabats which are among the largest bats in the world.
- They are commonly known as '**fruit bats**' or '**flying foxes**', among other colloquial names.
- They live in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, East Africa, and some oceanic islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- There are about **65 bat species** found on tropical islands from Madagascar to Australia and Indonesia and in mainland Asia. Most species are **primarily nocturnal**.



TN Launches Project To Protect Nilgiri Tahr

In India's first-of-its-kind initiative, Tamil Nadu launched the '**Nilgiri Tahr project**' to restore the state animal's original habitat and stabilising its population.

- **Duration:** Five-year
- The initiative was devised in line with **Project Tiger** and **Project Elephant**.

About the Species:

- Nilgiri Tahr is an **endangered wild goat** species.
- **Local name:** Varaiaadu
- **Habitat:** The species was earlier found along the entire stretch of the Western Ghats, but they now remain restricted to small fragmented pockets in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.- WWF data (2015)
- The Eravikulam National Park in Anamalai hills, Kerala, is home to the largest population of the Nilgiri Tahr.

Protection Status: They are protected under Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972 and considered endangered by the IUCN.



No rhinos poached in Assam in 2022

The Chief Minister of Assam has informed that no rhinos were poached in the state in 2022.

About Indian Rhinos :

- The **Indian rhinoceros (Rhinoceros unicornis)** is found only in the Brahmaputra valley, parts of North Bengal, and parts of southern Nepal.
- It has a **single black horn** that can grow up to 60 cm, and a tough, grey-brown hide with skin folds, which gives the animal its characteristic **armour-plated look**.
- **Protection status:**
 - **IUCN Red list:** The Indian rhino is listed as '**vulnerable**' (it was earlier placed in the endangered category).
- The WWF says the recovery of the greater one-horned rhino is among the greatest conservation success stories in Asia.

Why they are poached?

- Rhino horn is used in **traditional Chinese medicine** to cure a range of ailments.
- It also used to **treat cancer**.
- In Vietnam, a rhino horn is considered a **status symbol**.

Conservation efforts:

- In 2019, the Assam government constituted a **Special Rhino Protection Force** to keep a check on rhino poaching and related activities at **Kaziranga National Park (KNP)**.
- On every September 22, **World Rhino Day** is celebrated.

IAF TEST-FIRES EXTENDED-RANGE BRAHMOS

CONTEXT:

For the second time this year, the Indian Air Force (IAF) fired the “extended-range” version of the BrahMos air-launched missile from a Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter aircraft.

About

- The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile has a two-stage solid propellant booster engine as its first stage which takes it to supersonic speed.
 - The second stage is the liquid ramjet engine which takes it closer to Mach 3 (3 times the speed of sound) speed in the cruise phase.
 - The BrahMos missile is universal for multiple platforms and can be launched from air, land, and sea platforms.
 - The missile works on the ‘Fire and Forget principle’, meaning it doesn’t require further guidance after launch, and it maintains a high supersonic throughout the flight.
 - The missile is said to have a low radar signature.
- “Extended-Range” version:**
- The “extended-range” version means the missile can travel more than 300 km.
 - Before India joined the **MTCR**, the Russian technology of the BrahMos was restricted as the MTCR limits the export of missile technology which can travel beyond 300 km.
 - The missile cap of 300 km range on India was lifted after it was inducted into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) six years ago.

Section: D

(SHORT NEWS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

'Sammed Shikharji': The Jain pilgrimage site in Jharkhand



Members of the **Jain community have been protesting** in many parts of the country amid the step of Jharkhand government notifying the pilgrimage site is a tourist destination.

About:

- Shikharji also known as Sammed Shikharji is a pilgrimage site in Giridih district, Jharkhand, India.
- It is located on Parasnath hill, the highest mountain in the state of Jharkhand.
- It is the most important Jain Tirtha (pilgrimage site) by both Digambara and Śvētāmbara, for it is the place where twenty of the twenty-four Jain tirthankaras along with many other monks attained Moksha.

Significance:

- The reason that Sammed Shikharji is so important to the community, as it is considered to be the biggest pilgrimage site by both the **Digambaras and the Svetambaras**.
- It is believed that it is the place where **20 of the 24 Jain tirthankaras**, who are Jain spiritual leaders, along with many other monks attained '**moksha**' or **salvation** after meditating.

Sammakka Saralamma Janjati Pujari Sammelan



The President attended the Sammakka Saralamma Janjati Pujari Sammelan, organised by the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad, Telangana.

About

- Sammakka Saralamma Jatara also known as Medaram Jatara is a biennial tribal festival celebrated in the memory and honour of goddesses Sammakka and Saralamma in the State of Telangana, India.
- The Jatara begins at Medaram in Tadvai Mandal in Mulugu District.
- It commemorates the valiant fight of the mother and daughter duo i.e. Sammakka and Saralamma against the then Kakatiya dynasty rulers protesting exaction of land tribute even at the time of severe drought.
- After Kumbha Mela, the **Medaram jatara is said to attract the largest number of devotees in the country**.

India to take over leadership of Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU)



India will take over the leadership of the APPU having its Headquarters in Bangkok.

About:

- **Vinaya Prakash Singh**, erstwhile Member (Personnel), Postal Services Board, will take over the charge of Secretary General of the Union for tenure of **four years**.
- The elections held during the **13th APPU Congress** held in Bangkok during August-September 2022.
- **Role:** The Secretary General leads the activities of the Union and is also the **Director of the Asian Pacific Postal College (APPC)** which is the largest intergovernmental postal training institute in the region.

The Asian Pacific Postal Union:

- Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU) is an intergovernmental organisation of **32-member countries** of the Asian-Pacific region.
- APPU is the only **Restricted Union of the Universal Postal Union (UPU)** in the region, which is a specialised agency of the United Nations.
- **Objective:** The goal of APPU is to extend, facilitate and improve postal relations between member countries and promote cooperation in the field of postal services.

Centre gives nod for DPR of Kalasa Banduri Nala project



The Center has given its nod for the Detailed Project Report (DPR) of the Kalasa Banduri Nala Project.

About

- The project proposes to divert water from two tributaries of the Mahadayi river (also known as Mandovi) – Kalasa and Banduri – to the Malaprabha river, providing much needed drinking water to regions in Dharwad, Belagavi, Bagalkote and Gadag among others.
- These areas together make up the country's second most arid region after Rajasthan.
- The approval would help Karnataka to get 1.5 tmc ft for drinking and irrigation purposes and can divert 2.18 tmc ft to Bhandura and 1.72 tmc ft to Kalasa dams.

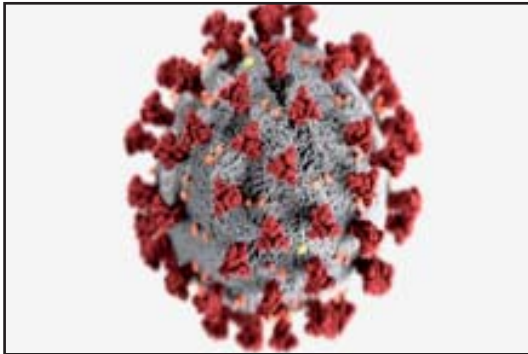
Government launches 'Prahari' app for BSF Jawans



The government launched the Border Security Force (BSF) mobile app 'Prahari'. This app is a great example of proactive governance.

About

- With the app, BSF soldiers can get personal and service related information, housing, Ayushman-CAPF and leave related information on their mobiles.
- Soldiers can also get information on various welfare schemes through this app.

XBB.1.5: New Variant

India's first case of the '**XBB.1.5**' sub-variant of **Omicron** was confirmed in Gujarat by the national genome sequencing consortium.

About:

- XBB.1.5 is a **recombinant**, which means its genome is the product of the genomes of two different strains spliced together.
- This can happen when **two strains infect a person** at the same time; a recombinant variant is produced as they replicate together.
- **Recombinant strains** also arise when existing recombinant strains mutate.
- The recombinants include **XD (Delta + Omicron)**, **XE (BA.1 + BA.2)**, and **XBB (BA.2.10.1 + BA.2.75)**.
- The XBB strain is descended from **BA.2.10.1.1** and **BA.2.75.3.1.1.1**.
- It mutated further and became **XBB.1.5**. **XBB.1**.
- The defining mutation of **XBB.1.5** is '**F486P**'.
- F486 is a part of the **virus's receptor-binding domain** (the part of the spike protein that attaches the virus to a cell) and an important site that antibodies against the Omicron variant target.

108th Indian Science Congress

The Prime Minister addressed the 108th Indian Science Congress (ISC) via video conferencing.

About:

- **Theme:** "Science and Technology for Sustainable Development with Women Empowerment"
- **Aim:** The event will witness discussions on issues of sustainable development, women empowerment and the role of science & technology in achieving this.

Points discussed:



- Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister highlighted the role of India's scientific strength in India's story of development over the next 25 years.
- The Prime Minister mentioned the importance of gathering data and analysing results.
- He highlighted the abundant availability of data and technology in 21st-century India and said that it has the potential to take Indian Science to new heights.
- He also emphasised the need to strengthen the scientific processes by applying various techniques of research-led development.


Ethylene glycol and the controversy behind it

The **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)** initiated a probe into the claims of Uzbekistan that at least 18 children died after consuming cough syrup manufactured by an Indian firm.

What is Ethylene glycol?

- Ethylene glycol is an **organic compound** with the formula **(CH₂OH)₂**.
- It is an **odourless, colourless, flammable, viscous** liquid. It is mainly used for two purposes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ as a raw material in the manufacture of polyester fibres ▶ for antifreeze formulations ◉ In addition to its use in antifreeze, ethylene glycol is used as an ingredient in hydraulic fluids, printing inks, and paint solvents. ◉ It is also used as a reagent in making polyesters, explosives, alkyd resins, and synthetic waxes. <p>Toxicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◉ According to the WHO, diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol are toxic to humans and can be fatal if consumed.
<p>Vande Metro train</p> 	<p>India will be getting its first-ever domestically constructed hydrogen-powered train by December 2023.</p> <p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◉ The hydrogen-powered train in India will be known as the "Vande Metro" ◉ Germany was the first country to introduce hydrogen-powered trains ◉ These trains emit no pollution and produce little noise, emitting just steam and evaporated water.
<p>India's oldest botanical garden</p> 	<p>A West Bengal-based environmentalist has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and urged him to take immediate action for saving the <i>Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Botanic Garden</i> in Howrah.</p> <p>What is Botanical Garden?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◉ A botanical garden or botanic garden is a garden with a documented collection of living plants for the purpose of scientific research, conservation, display, and education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Typically, plants are labelled with their botanical names. <p>Acharya Jagadish Chandra (AJC) Bose Indian Botanic Garden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◉ It is India's largest botanical garden and is spread over 270 acres. ◉ The gardens were founded in 1787 by Colonel Robert Kyd, an army officer of the East India Company. ◉ It has about 12,000 specimens of as many as 1,000 species. ◉ It is considered the 'largest man-made plant kingdom'. ◉ The garden is under the jurisdiction of the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Kolkata Port Trust (KPT) has the jurisdictional command over the length of the river from Farakka to Ganga Sagar.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Some of its Plant collections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 'Great Banyan Tree', a living wonder in the plant kingdom; ▶ Branching palm (Hyphane thebaica) was introduced in Egypt; ▶ Giant Water Lily (Victoria amazonica) brought from the Amazon river ▶ Mountain rose or Venezuelan rose.
<p>Emperor penguins, reindeer among threatened species: WWF</p> 	<p>Emperor penguins and reindeer were among the species highlighted in a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report as severely threatened by the cascading impacts of climate change.</p> <p>Emperor penguins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Scientific name: <i>Aptenodytes forsteri</i> ◦ Emperor penguins spend their entire lives on Antarctic ice and in its waters. They survive—breeding, raising young, and eating—by relying on a number of clever adaptations. <p>Reindeer (Caribou)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Scientific name: <i>Rangifer tarandus</i> ◦ They are built for staying warm in freezing temperatures. ◦ They originally inhabited the tundra and forests of Scandinavia and northern Russia, and were then introduced into Iceland, Greenland, Alaska, and Canada. ◦ They are covered in hair from their nose to the bottom of their feet.

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