

World Earth Day (GS Paper III: Environment)

- Celebrated globally on April 22nd to **raise awareness about environmental protection and inspire action.**
- In 1970, a massive demonstration in the US gave birth to the modern environmental movement and the first Earth Day.
- **Global Reach:** It's observed in over 190 countries with events, campaigns, and educational initiatives.
- The 2023 theme is "**Invest In Our Planet**".
- This year, Earth Day's primary focus is on plastic pollution. The theme for **2024 is "Planet vs. Plastics."**
- It **aims to highlight the health and environmental hazards caused by plastic.**
- **Millions of tons of plastic waste are dumped into oceans and landfills annually.**
- The theme underscores the urgent need to address the issue of plastic pollution for the health of the planet.

Why World Earth Day Matters

- **Environmental Awareness:** Spotlights critical issues threatening our planet's health and well-being.
- **Inspiring Change:** Encourages individuals, communities, businesses, and governments to make sustainable choices and adopt environmentally conscious practices.
- **Collective Action:** Mobilizes people worldwide to participate in activities that promote a healthy planet, from tree planting to clean-ups.
- **Advocacy:** Puts pressure on leaders and policymakers to implement stronger environmental legislation.
- **Volunteer:** Support environmental organizations and participate in conservation efforts.
- **Simple Actions:** Reduce your carbon footprint, conserve water, recycle, and choose eco-friendly products.
- **Spread the Word:** Share information about Earth Day and ways to protect the planet on social media..

Remember: Every day can be Earth Day. The actions we take individually and collectively make a difference for our planet's future.

No data available on President returning Files for reconsideration' (23 April)

The Right to Information Act, 2005

- Passed by the Indian Parliament in 2005.
- To empower citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the government, and fight corruption.
- **Scope:** Applies to all Central, State, and local government bodies and substantially funded NGOs.

Key Provisions of the RTI Act

- **Right to Seek Information:** Any citizen of India can request information held by a public authority.

- **Process:** Citizens can file an RTI application with a designated Public Information Officer (PIO) along with a minimal fee.
- **Information Covered:** Includes but is not limited to:
 - Records, documents, and files
 - Decisions and policies of the government
 - Reasons for administrative actions
 - Utilization of public funds
- **Time Limit for Response:** PIOs must typically provide information within 30 days.
- **Exemptions:** Limited exemptions for national security, sensitive commercial information, etc. Partial disclosure is possible in some cases.
- **Appeals:** Appeals against the PIO's decision can be made to the First Appellate Authority and further to the Central/State Information Commission.

Importance of the RTI Act:

- **Powerful Tool:** The RTI Act empowers citizens to hold the government accountable and make informed choices.
- **Transparency:** Promotes transparency and deters corruption in public institutions.
- **Participatory Democracy:** Encourages citizen participation in governance.

- Rashtrapati Bhavan stated that there is no information available on President Droupadi Murmu returning any decision taken by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers for reconsideration.
- This response was given in relation to a petition filed by Raj Kapil of Tamil Nadu under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.
- The petitioner sought to know the number of times President Murmu had returned decisions made by various bodies, including the Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, Cabinet, Parliament, Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), Union Ministries, Union agencies, State, and Union Territory Legislatures.
- Shivendra Chaturvedi, Director of Rashtrapati Bhavan, replied that no such information was available regarding decisions taken by the mentioned entities being returned for reconsideration.
- The response indicates that there has been no instance of President Murmu returning decisions made by the specified authorities for reconsideration.
- The RTI application regarding State and Union Territory matters was directed to the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is the nodal Ministry and custodian of records in this regard.
- The petitioner was informed that he could file an appeal under Section 19(1) of the RTI Act within a month if he was dissatisfied with the response.
- Mr. Kapil, a criminology lecturer, expressed surprise at the response from Rashtrapati Bhavan, as it neither confirmed nor denied whether the President had returned any decision of the Prime Minister or Council of Ministers for reconsideration.
- He questioned why the President's Secretariat did not share the requested information under the RTI Act, even though the Union Home Ministry was the custodian of files and decisions related to States and Union Territories.
- Mr. Kapil criticized the response from Rashtrapati Bhavan as incomplete and misleading.
- He questioned how Rashtrapati Bhavan could lack data crucial for the constitutional functioning of the President, which is important for ensuring accountability and transparency in the system.

- This criticism arose after a similar response was given to a student from Chennai who sought information under the RTI Act about the number of times former President Ram Nath Kovind had returned a decision of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers.

Film trailers are not promises, only meant to create a buzz: SC (23 April)

- The Supreme Court ruled that a film trailer is not a legally enforceable promise or agreement.
- Producers cannot be held responsible for unfair trade practices if the contents of the trailer do not match those of the actual movie.
- The court observed that elements like songs, dialogues, or visuals in promotional trailers are meant to generate excitement and publicity for the film rather than provide accurate representations of its content.
- The judgment overturned a previous order from the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, which had directed Yash Raj Films to compensate a schoolteacher who was disappointed by the exclusion of a song from the movie "Fan".
- The court concluded that there was no deficiency in service, and the complainant wrongly assumed that a promotional trailer constituted a legal offer or promise.

National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC)

The **National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC)** is a **quasi-judicial body in India established under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986**. It acts as the apex consumer dispute redressal forum in the country, addressing appeals against the orders of **State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (SCDRCs)** and **District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums (DCDRFs)**.

Key Functions:

- Hears appeals from orders passed by State Commissions exceeding a specific value (as per the Act).
- **Revision:** Reviews orders passed by State Commissions on grounds like violation of principles of natural justice or being erroneous in law.
- **Transfer:** Transfers cases from one State Commission to another for convenience or in the interests of justice.
- **Supervision and Guidance:** Provides guidance and direction to State Commissions for efficient functioning of the consumer dispute redressal system.

Composition:

- Presided over by a sitting or retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India or a Chief Justice of a High Court.
- Comprises members with expertise in relevant fields like law, economics, administration, public affairs, or consumer protection.

Benefits:

- **Affordable and Accessible:** Provides a relatively inexpensive and accessible forum for consumers to seek redressal for grievances.
- **Speedy Disposal:** Aims to resolve disputes expeditiously with minimal formalities compared to regular courts.
- **Expert Handling:** Cases are heard by individuals with relevant legal and consumer protection knowledge.

Venkaiah Naidu, Mithun, Usha Uthup, honoured with Padma awards (23 April)

Padma Awards: India's Prestigious Civilian Honors

- **Instituted:** 1954
- **Purpose:** To recognize "work of distinction" and exceptional achievements across various disciplines and fields of activity.
- **Administered by:** Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India
- **Announcement:** Typically made on the eve of Republic Day (26th January) every year

Types of Padma Awards:

There are three distinct Padma Awards, presented in decreasing order of importance:

1. **Padma Vibhushan** (For exceptional and distinguished service)
2. **Padma Bhushan** (For distinguished service of high order)
3. **Padma Shri** (For distinguished service)

Disciplines Covered:

- Art (music, painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, etc.)
- Social work
- Public affairs
- Science and engineering
- Trade and industry
- Medicine
- Literature and education
- Sports
- Civil service
- Others

Selection Process:

- Individuals and institutions can submit nominations, including **self-nominations**. Online nominations are available through the Padma Awards portal.
- A committee constituted by the Prime Minister screens the nominations and submits recommendations to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.

- Former Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, actor Mithun Chakraborty, singer Usha Uthup, and tennis player Rohan Bopanna were among the recipients of Padma awards.
- M. Venkaiah Naidu and Sulabh International's founder Bindeshwar Pathak received the Padma Vibhushan.
- Bindeshwar Pathak was honored posthumously, and the award was received by his wife, Amola.
- Mithun Chakraborty, Usha Uthup, former Uttar Pradesh Governor Ram Naik, and industrialist Sitaram Jindal received the **Padma Bhushan**.
- **Gujarat-based cardiologist Tejas Madhusudan Patel, Marathi film director Dattatray Ambadas Mayaloo (Rajdutt), and physician Chandreshwar Prasad Thakur** were among the other recipients of the Padma Bhushan.
- Padma Shri awardees included **master carpet weaver Khalil Ahamad** from Uttar Pradesh, folk singer **Kaluram Bamaniya** from Madhya Pradesh, Bangladeshi singer **Rezwana Choudhury Bannya**, **Chikankari embroidery artist Naseem Bano** from Uttar Pradesh, and **Rajbongshi folk singer Gita Roy Barman** from West Bengal's Cooch Behar.

- Other notable awardees included tennis player Rohan Bopanna, spiritual figure Chitta Ranjan Debbarma from Tripura, banker Kalpana Morparia, philanthropist Kiran Nadar, social worker Gurvinder Singh from Haryana, and folk singer Urmila Srivastava from Uttar Pradesh.
- A heartwarming moment occurred when noted folk dancer Drona Bhuyan from Assam expressed gratitude through Ojapali and Deodhani dance form gestures as he walked on the red carpet to receive the Padma Shri from the President.

‘Accused in criminal cases won more seats in 17th LS (23 April)’

- An amicus curiae report in the Supreme Court revealed that candidates with criminal cases won more seats in the 17th Lok Sabha.
- This report comes during the General Elections for the 18th Lok Sabha.
- It emphasizes the need for voters to know the background of the candidates they are voting for.
- The report asserts that voters have the right to information about the criminal records of lawmakers.
- Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, the amicus curiae, stressed the importance of voters knowing about the progress and reasons for delays in criminal trials against legislators.
- The report recommends creating a dedicated tab on State High Courts’ websites to provide detailed information, district-wise, about criminal trials involving legislators.
- This tab should prominently display the progress of each trial and reasons for any delays.
- The goal is to empower voters and the general public to access information about the criminal histories of candidates.
- The amicus curiae, assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita, referred to a report by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) regarding the Lok Sabha elections of 2024 Phase I and Phase II.
- Out of a total of 2,810 candidates (1,618 in Phase I and 1,192 in Phase II), 501 candidates (18%) had criminal cases against them.
- Among these candidates, 327 (12%) had serious criminal cases, which are punishable with imprisonment of five years or more.
- Comparatively, in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, out of 7,928 candidates, 1,500 candidates (19%) had criminal cases against them, with 1,070 (13%) facing serious criminal charges.
- However, out of the 514 elected members of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024), 225 members (44%) had criminal cases against them.
- This indicates that candidates with criminal cases have won more seats than candidates without criminal cases.

‘Cases pending’

- Mr. Hansaria serves as the amicus curiae for the Supreme Court, focusing on criminal cases involving lawmakers.
- His latest report, dated April 20, 2024, highlights key statistics regarding pending criminal cases against lawmakers.

- According to the report, as of January 1, 2024, there were 4,472 pending criminal cases against lawmakers.
- In 2023, 1,746 new criminal cases were filed against legislators.
- However, 2,018 criminal cases involving lawmakers were resolved in the same year.
- Despite some cases being decided, a significant number remain pending for long periods. In a previous report, it was noted that 40% of the 5,175 pending cases as of November 2022 had been pending for more than five years.
- Mr. Hansaria expressed concern that details of cases in Special Courts designated to try MPs and MLAs were not accessible on any websites.
- He recommended that the Supreme Court consider directing the creation of a model website similar to the National Judicial Data Grid to upload real-time information on cases involving lawmakers.
- He further suggested the formation of a committee chaired by a sitting Judge of the Supreme Court to oversee this initiative.

2 women Navy officers return after historic transoceanic expedition (23 April)

- The Indian Naval Sailing Vessel INSV Tarini returned to its base port in Goa on April 21.
- This marked the end of a historic transoceanic expedition spanning nearly two months.
- The expedition was accomplished by two women officers of the Indian Navy, the first from India to achieve such a feat.
- The expedition was undertaken in double-handed mode by Lieutenant Commander Dilna K. and Lieutenant Commander Roopa A.
- The journey was flagged off from Goa by renowned circumnavigator and mentor Commander Abhilash Tomy (Retd) on February 28.
- After 22 days of navigating through the Indian Ocean, INSV Tarini arrived at Port Louis, Mauritius, on March 21.
- The achievement was celebrated with various events where the officers interacted with government officials from the Mauritius Coast Guard and the Indian High Commission.
- INSV Tarini also conducted a training sortie with personnel from the Mauritius Coast Guard, aiming to strengthen bilateral ties and foster goodwill between the two maritime nations.
- After completing their activities in Port Louis, Lt. Cdr. Dilna and Lt. Cdr. Roopa departed on March 30.
- During their return trip, they faced continuous challenges such as heavy winds, adverse sea states, and rough seas.
- Despite the challenges, their achievements highlight the Indian Navy's commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women in the maritime domain.
- The officers demonstrated exceptional seamanship and resilience throughout the expedition.
- They are now preparing for their next voyage, a circumnavigation of the globe named Sagar Parikrama-IV expedition, scheduled to commence in September on INSV Tarini.

- On Sunday, INSV Tarini was flagged in by the Commanding Officer, INS Mandovi, and Naval Station Commander North Goa at the boat pool of INS Mandovi in the presence of naval personnel and their families.

Recourse to hate (23 April)

Demonising redistribution and minorities is core to the BJP's politics

- Narendra Modi's political strategy often involves using right-wing rhetoric, hate speech against minorities, and dog whistles to appeal to his support base.
- Recently, Modi claimed that the Congress party would distribute the wealth of Indians among Muslims and labeled Muslims as people with a large number of children and infiltrators.
- However, these claims are not accurate. The Congress manifesto includes plans for a socio-economic caste census and the establishment of an authority to monitor land distribution among the economically weaker sections.
- Independent surveys suggest that wealth inequality has increased significantly during the BJP's tenure, with government policies favoring tax breaks for corporates and relying more on indirect taxes.
- Individual taxes make up a larger portion of the tax bucket (53.3%) compared to corporate taxes (46.5%), leading to a greater skew in wealth ownership.
- In 2006, Dr. Singh emphasized the need to prioritize plans benefiting marginalized sections like SCs, STs, OBCs, women, and minorities, including Muslims.
- Hindutva right-wing groups have twisted Dr. Singh's statement, suggesting it prioritized Muslims over others.
- However, data shows that fertility rates among Muslims are similar to Hindus, and delayed Census data could reveal a reduction in fertility rates across all sections, as shown in past Censuses and surveys like NFHS.
- The term "infiltrator" is often used as a dog whistle, implying negative connotations.
- Despite readily available facts, rabble-rousers continue to spread misinformation, contaminating India's public sphere.
- Social media and television amplify such rhetoric, making it immune to consequences even when proven false.
- Parties like the BJP may oppose social justice measures like redistribution, using demonization of "others" to distract from questions about equity, casteism, and social justice.

Restoring earth's right to 'good health' (23 April)

Recent judicial pronouncements and observations that attempt to bring the impacts of climate change within the purview of constitutional fundamental rights pave the way for legal accountability of climate action

NDCs

- **Climate Action Plans:** NDCs are national climate action plans submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement.
- **Voluntary Commitments:** Each country determines the emission reduction targets and adaptation measures it will pursue.
- **Five-Year Updates:** NDCs are reviewed and updated every five years to reflect rising ambition and evolving national circumstances.

Key Elements of NDCs

- **Mitigation:** Strategies and targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across various sectors like energy, agriculture, and industry.
- **Adaptation:** Actions to address the impacts of climate change, such as building resilience to extreme weather events and rising sea levels.
- **Transparency:** Mechanisms to monitor and report progress on achieving NDC targets.

Importance of NDCs

- **Global Goal:** NDCs collectively contribute to the Paris Agreement's long-term goal of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- **Ambition and Action:** The success of the Paris Agreement relies on countries progressively strengthening their NDCs to ensure sufficient global action on climate change.
- **International Cooperation:** NDCs pave the way for international collaboration on climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building to support developing countries in implementing their plans.

- European Court of Human Rights found Switzerland guilty of violating rights of senior women in KlimaSeniorinnen.
- Government's actions to curb emissions deemed inadequate.
- Failure to protect women against climate change impacts.
- Highlights climate crisis as a human rights crisis.
- Supreme Court of India ruled people have right to be free from adverse impacts of climate change.
- Cited Articles 14 and 21 of Indian Constitution.
- State of the Global Climate Report by World Meteorological Organization.
- 2023 recorded as hottest year on record.
- Record levels for ocean heat, sea level rise, Antarctic sea ice loss, and glacier retreat.

A planet under stress

- UN Secretary General António Guterres emphasizes the dire situation of the planet on International Mother Earth Day 2024.
- Humanity's actions are harming nature and humanity itself.
- Urges restoring harmony with nature.
- India has achieved two of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets ahead of schedule.

- However, India remains highly vulnerable to climate change with over 80% of the population living in disaster-prone areas.
- Climate change impacts affect livelihoods, food security, and socio-economic inequalities.
- Court's observation sets a precedent by considering climate change impacts from a rights perspective.
- Recognizes climate change's impact on fundamental rights like health, life, and liberty.
- Paves the way for legal accountability of climate action.
- Offers opportunities to accelerate climate action by adopting a rights-based approach and integrating efforts between government, private sector, and civil society.
- Proposal for an overarching regulation on climate change in India to enhance state capacities and drive allocation of funds, functions, and functionaries.
- A report by the London School of Economics and Political Science highlights the effectiveness of climate change framework laws in 60 countries.
- These laws establish strategic direction for national policies beyond meeting global environmental targets.
- Examples include countries from both the Global North (Germany, Ireland, etc.) and the Global South (South Africa, Philippines, etc.).
- Climate framework laws lead to increased public sector staffing and capacity for climate action.
- India has several laws related to climate change, but a framework law can strengthen climate governance and enable more ambitious action.
- A framework law can provide stringent accountability and promote knowledge exchange.
- 18 States and Union Territories in India are moderately to highly vulnerable to climate change.
- A forum for sharing best practices can build coherence in climate policies and actions among States and Union Territories.

SDGs and localisation model

- India's localisation model for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) integrates SDGs into local-level planning.
- States and territories create their own SDG roadmaps and monitoring systems.
- Friendly competition among states spurs innovation and progress.
- Capacity building for local governments ensures effective implementation.
- Broader participation from businesses, NGOs, and citizens fosters collaboration.
- Inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral approaches are crucial for effective action.
- The One Health initiative involves 13 Ministries for disease control and pandemic preparedness.
- Private sector involvement is essential for integrating a rights-based approach to climate action.
- Circular economy approaches should engage with human rights compliant supply chains.
- This approach, including reverse logistics, can have a transformative impact.

Rights-based dialogue

- The court's observation can empower citizen groups and civil society organizations in fostering a rights-based dialogue on environment, biodiversity, and climate action.
- It can help build consensus on overcoming potential tensions between climate mitigation and action within environmental policy.
- The Supreme Court's observation addressed the balance between conservation of endangered species and renewable energy development.
- It emphasized the importance of dialogue to arrive at holistic solutions.
- International Mother Earth Day is commemorated annually on April 22.
- The concept of 'Mother' Earth is deeply ingrained in India's culture, viewing nature as a living entity.
- In 2022, the Madras High Court declared 'Mother Nature' a 'living being' with legal personhood to preserve and conserve it.
- These judgments and observations can be used to restore Mother Earth's right to good health and protect people's right to a future free from climate change impacts.

The lone candidate: On chess, India and D. Gukesh's victory (23 April)

India must have more elite chess tournaments to build on its success

- Dommaraju Gukesh's victory at the Candidates chess tournament in Toronto is a significant achievement for India.
- He will play China's Ding Liren for the World championship, becoming the youngest challenger in history.
- In chess, the World champion defends the crown without playing, while the challenger must win the grueling Candidates tournament.
- Gukesh, a 17-year-old from Chennai, surprised by finishing ahead of favorites like Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura.
- His victory enhances India's stature in world chess.
- India had five participants in the tournament: three in the open section and two in the women's.
- R. Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi showed moments of brilliance but lacked consistency.
- In the women's event, Koneru Humpy finished second and R. Vaishali fourth, showing resilience after initial setbacks.
- Tan Zhongyi won the women's event, ensuring the World championship remains in China.
- Gukesh has a chance to prevent China from securing a double victory.
- India should celebrate Gukesh's feat and consider ways to retain momentum in chess.
- Gukesh qualified for the Candidates tournament after playing a Super Grandmaster tournament in Chennai.
- This tournament was India's first of its kind, highlighting the need for more elite tournaments in the country.

Political space for disability rights, a sliver of hope (23 April)

- During election season, manifestos often overlook discussions on the rights of persons with disabilities.
- The Congress and CPI(M) have made a promising commitment to include disability as a specific ground for discrimination under Article 15 (and Article 16) of the Constitution.
- Currently, Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on "religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them" but does not explicitly mention disability.
- This promise has generated optimism within the disability rights movement, highlighting the importance of addressing discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Amendment as demand

- There has been a longstanding demand within the disability rights movement to amend Article 15 of the Constitution to explicitly include disability as a ground for discrimination.
- This demand was reaffirmed by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2019 during its review of India's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- Despite this demand, no steps have been taken towards amending Article 15 to address this omission.
- The discourse on disability rights within the constitutional scheme has historically overlooked the concerns of the disability rights movement, dating back to the Constituent Assembly debates.
- However, significant progress has been made by the disability rights movement both in India and globally.
- The adoption of the UNCRPD in 2006 was a crucial step, recognizing that persons with disabilities are entitled to enjoy their rights "on an equal basis with others."
- India ratified the Convention in 2007 and enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016.
- While the Act prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, it only extends a restricted notion of equality to them.
- Section 3 of the Act states that no person with disabilities shall be discriminated against on grounds of disability, but it also introduces the concept of a "legitimate aim."
- The phrase "legitimate aim" is not defined in the Act, leaving scope for various actions to be classified as such, potentially undermining the rights of persons with disabilities.
- There's a proposal to rectify the current gap in disability rights by amending the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.
- However, even with such an amendment, the right against discrimination for persons with disabilities would remain a statutory right rather than a constitutional one.
- Constitutional rights hold greater importance and value in our legal system compared to statutory rights.

- The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights against the state and ensures equality and the right against discrimination among individuals.
- Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on certain grounds, which identifies social hierarchies and aims to remedy exclusionary practices.
- Including disability as a ground under Article 15 would rectify historical injustices and provide stronger protection against discrimination.
- In 2018, the Supreme Court extended the protection of Article 15 to 'sexual orientation' by treating it as analogous to other grounds mentioned in Article 15.
- Similarly, there's a possibility that the judiciary may extend the same protection to persons with disabilities by treating disability as an analogous ground.
- However, treating disability as analogous does not replace the need for a constitutional amendment specifically including disability as a ground under Article 15.
- Relying on the analogous grounds approach places a burden on litigators and overlooks the systemic marginalization faced by persons with disabilities.
- It should be the responsibility of the government, rather than the judiciary, to recognize and address this omission in disability rights.

The possibility of political will

- Manifestos of the Congress and the CPI(M) indicate a willingness to address demands of the disability rights movement.
- Disability rights organizations in India have played a significant role in advocating for these demands.
- In February 2024, the NCPEDP and the NDN launched an initiative by releasing a manifesto for persons with disabilities.
- This manifesto urged political parties to prioritize and address issues faced by the disabled community.
- It's hoped that other political parties will follow this example.
- Electoral promises in India are often not fulfilled, but these promises provide hope for change in addressing disability rights.
- The movement against political apathy towards disability rights in India is gaining momentum, indicating a potential shift in public discourse on the topic.

A lesson from Taiwan in quake resilience (23 April)

- Major earthquakes have occurred in various parts of the world over the last two decades, including Indonesia, Japan, China, Italy, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ecuador, Mexico, Morocco, and the Turkey-Syria border.
- On April 3, Taiwan experienced a 7.4 magnitude earthquake.
- These earthquakes are not random events but are related to tectonic activity.
- Earthquake-prone regions share tectonic similarities, and earthquakes tend to occur in specific regional bands.
- The theory of plate tectonics explains that the Earth's lithosphere is divided into plates that are constantly moving relative to each other.

- Powerful earthquakes often happen along convergent plate boundaries like the Himalayas, formed by the convergence of the Indian and Eurasian plates.
- The 2015 earthquake in Nepal caused severe damage but spared India, originating from beneath the Himalayas.
- On April 4, 2024, an earthquake with a magnitude of 5.3 struck the region around Manali in Himachal Pradesh.
- This date coincided with an earthquake that occurred 119 years ago near Kangra, close to Manali, which resulted in significant casualties and destruction in the region.

The story of two earthquakes

- Taiwan lies 160 km off the coast of China and was formed at a convergent boundary of the Philippine and Eurasian plates in the western Pacific Ocean.
- The Philippine Sea plate is moving northwest towards the Eurasian plate at a velocity of about 7.8 cm per year, resulting in strong earthquakes in Taiwan.
- The latest earthquake near Hualien on the eastern coast caused minimal damage compared to the 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake.
- The 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake of magnitude 7.7 killed over 2,430 people, wounded 11,305, and caused significant building collapses.
- The recent Hualien earthquake caused fewer casualties, with most deaths resulting from earthquake-triggered rockfalls rather than building collapses.
- Stringent building codes implemented after the 1999 earthquake contributed to minimal damage in the recent earthquake, with only a few buildings collapsing in Hualien and Taipei.
- Administrative reforms following the Chi-Chi earthquake led to improved emergency response and disaster reduction measures in Taiwan.
- Taiwan's earthquake preparedness is advanced, with an advanced earthquake-monitoring network, early warning systems, and public awareness campaigns.
- The government continually updates earthquake safety requirements and incentivizes building owners to improve quake resistance.
- Taiwan's seismic codes are tailored based on the frequency and intensity of earthquakes in each region, utilizing technologies like seismic dampers and base isolation systems.
- Iconic buildings like Taipei 101 incorporate features like tuned mass dampers to withstand seismic activity and minimize damage.

What India can do

- India is undergoing significant infrastructural expansion, especially in tectonically unstable regions like the Himalayas, often disregarding ecological norms.
- The recent earthquake in Taiwan underscores the importance of prioritizing earthquake safety in India's infrastructure projects.
- All infrastructure developments must adhere to seismic safety regulations to minimize the risk of damage during earthquakes.
- India can learn valuable lessons from the Taiwan earthquake, such as the importance of following seismic codes and constructing safer engineered structures.

- It's crucial to address inadequacies in enforcing and complying with seismic codes to ensure the safety of infrastructure.
- Seismic codes are tailored to specific regions based on local earthquake activity, building types, and construction materials.
- In India, seismic designs are specified by code IS 1893, which is based on seismic zonation maps to prevent building collapse during earthquakes.
- Traditional architectural styles in some parts of India exhibit natural earthquake resistance and should be promoted and integrated into modern construction practices.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

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| <p>Question 1: The first-ever Earth Day celebration was held in which year?</p> <p>(A) 1960 (B) 1970 (C) 1980 (D) 1990</p> | <p>Answer: (B) 1970 Explanation: The first Earth Day took place in 1970 and is considered a landmark event in the modern environmental movement.</p> |
| <p>Question 2: Which of the following is the central theme of World Earth Day 2023?</p> <p>(A) End Plastic Pollution (B) Act on Climate (C) Invest In Our Planet (D) Protect Our Species</p> | <p>Answer: (C) Invest In Our Planet Explanation: The 2023 Earth Day theme focuses on encouraging businesses, governments, and individuals to invest in a sustainable future.</p> |
| <p>Question 3: World Earth Day is associated with which of the following initiatives?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 2. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 3. Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants <p>(A) 1 only (B) 2 and 3 only (C) 1 and 3 only (D) 1, 2, and 3</p> | <p>Answer: (D) 1, 2, and 3 Explanation: While Earth Day isn't formally linked to specific treaties, it promotes broad awareness that supports goals of major environmental agreements like those listed.</p> |
| <p>Question 4: Consider the following statements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. World Earth Day is observed globally on April 22nd. 2. EARTHDAY.ORG is the primary international organization coordinating Earth Day activities. <p>Which of the above statements is/are correct?</p> <p>(A) 1 only (B) 2 only (C) Both 1 and 2 (D) Neither 1 nor 2</p> | <p>Answer: (C) Both 1 and 2 Explanation: Both statements are factually accurate.</p> |
| <p>Question 5: Which of the following awards is the highest civilian award in India?</p> <p>(A) Padma Shri</p> | <p>Answer: (D) Bharat Ratna</p> |

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| <p>(B) Padma Bhushan (C) Padma Vibhushan (D) Bharat Ratna</p> | <p>Explanation: While Padma awards are highly prestigious, the Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian honor in India.</p> |
| <p>Question 6: Padma Awards are conferred by the: (A) Ministry of Home Affairs (B) Ministry of Culture (C) Prime Minister's Office (D) President of India</p> | <p>Answer: (D) President of India Explanation: The President of India confers Padma awards based on recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee constituted by the Prime Minister.</p> |
| <p>Question 7: The Padma Awards are given in which of the following fields? 1. Art 2. Science and Engineering 3. Public Affairs 4. Sports (A) 1 and 2 only (B) 2 and 4 only (C) 1, 3, and 4 only (D) 1, 2, 3, and 4</p> | <p>Answer: (D) 1, 2, 3, and 4 Explanation: Padma Awards recognize contributions in a wide range of fields, including arts, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade, industry, medicine, literature, education, sports, civil service, etc.</p> |
| <p>Question 8: Consider the following statements about Padma Awards: 1. They are announced on the eve of Republic Day every year. 2. The awards are conferred in three categories – Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan. 3. They are given for distinguished and exceptional service to the nation. Which of the above statements are correct? (A) 1 and 2 only (B) 2 and 3 only (C) 1 and 3 only (D) 1, 2, and 3</p> | <p>Answer: (D) 1, 2, and 3 Explanation: All three statements about the Padma awards are accurate.</p> |
| <p>Question 9: INSV Tarini is known for which of the following achievements? (A) First Indian sailboat to circumnavigate the globe with an all-women crew (B) First Indian warship to visit all continents in a single voyage (C) Winning a medal in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race (D) Carrying out a scientific expedition to the Arctic Circle</p> | <p>Answer: (A) First Indian sailboat to circumnavigate the globe with an all-women crew Explanation: INSV Tarini stands out for this historic feat titled 'Navika Sagar Parikrama.'</p> |
| <p>Question 10: INSV Tarini is a: (A) Nuclear-powered submarine (B) Guided missile destroyer (C) Sailboat (D) Aircraft carrier</p> | <p>Answer: (C) Sailboat Explanation: INSV Tarini is a 56-foot sailing vessel used primarily for ocean sailing by the Indian Navy.</p> |
| <p>Question 11: Which of the following organizations is the owner and operator of INSV Tarini? (A) Coast Guard</p> | <p>Answer: (B) Indian Navy</p> |

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| <p>(B) Indian Navy (C) Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) (D) Shipping Corporation of India</p> | <p>Explanation: INSV Tarini is part of the Indian Navy's fleet and serves both adventure and training purposes.</p> |
| <p>Question 12: Consider the following statements about INSV Tarini:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is the first Indian vessel to circumnavigate the globe with an all-female crew.2. It has been used to promote women's empowerment in India. <p>Which of the above statements is/are correct?</p> <p>(A) 1 only (B) 2 only (C) Both 1 and 2 (D) Neither 1 nor 2</p> | <p>Answer: (C) Both 1 and 2</p> <p>Explanation: Both statements are accurate. The historic voyage of INSV Tarini had a strong focus on promoting women's empowerment.</p> |

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