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History (Art, Culture and Architecture)

1. **Tribes and Festivals:**

1.1 **Yangli Festival:**

- The Tiwa tribe is a native community in Assam, India, known for their rich cultural heritage.
- They celebrate the Yangli festival, usually held in January, to mark the end of harvest and welcome spring.
- During the festival, Tiwa tribals perform traditional dances that are central to their culture.
- Bormarjong village in Assam is a significant location for the Yangli festival celebrations among the Tiwa tribe.
- The festival includes various cultural activities like **dance performances, rituals, and communal feasting.**

1.2. Gudi Padwa:

- Gudi Padwa is a significant festival celebrated primarily in the Indian states of **Maharashtra, Goa, and parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.**
- It marks the **beginning of the traditional New Year according to the lunisolar Hindu calendar**.
- The festival falls on the first day of the **Chaitra month (around March-April)** and coincides with the celebration of similar new year festivals in other parts of India (Ugadi, Cheti Chand, Navreh, etc.).

Symbolism

- **Gudi:** The Gudi is the central symbol of the festival. It's a bright cloth hoisted on a bamboo stick, adorned with mango and neem leaves, flowers, and a garland of sugar crystals (gathi). An upturned copper or silver vessel is placed on top.
- **Victory:** The Gudi symbolizes victory and prosperity. It's believed to ward off evil, bring good luck, and herald a prosperous year ahead.
- **Mythological Significance:** The festival has several associated legends, including Lord Brahma creating the universe on this day and Lord Rama's victorious return to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana.

Celebrations

- **Rangoli:** Drawing colorful patterns (rangoli) at the doorstep.
- **Traditional attire:** People dress up in festive clothes.
- **Special Foods:** Traditional Maharashtrian dishes like Puran Poli (sweet flatbread), Shrikhand (sweetened yogurt), etc., are prepared.
- **Processions:** Processions and gatherings are held in some places.

1.3. Ugadi :

- Ugadi marks **the traditional New Year for people in the Deccan region of India, primarily the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka.**
- The name "Ugadi" is derived from the Sanskrit words **"Yuga" (age) and "Adi" (beginning), signifying the start of a new era.**
- It falls on the **first day of the Chaitra month in the Hindu lunisolar calendar**, usually coinciding with March or April in the Gregorian calendar.

Symbolism

- Ugadi represents a fresh start, cleansing from the past, and embracing hope for the coming year.
- It symbolizes the cycle of creation, preservation, and change.

Celebrations: Ugadi celebrations typically involve the following:

- **Home Preparation:** Cleaning and decorating homes, drawing colourful rangoli (patterns) at the entrance.
- **Rituals:** Oil baths, wearing new clothes, special prayers, and temple visits.
- Ugadi Pachadi: A unique dish prepared with six different flavours (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, tangy, astringent), symbolizing the mixed experiences of life.
- **Panchanga Sravanam:** Reading of the new year's almanac with predictions.
- **Festive Meals:** Family gatherings and shared meals with traditional dishes.

1.4. Easter

- **C**ommemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion.
- Christians believe that Jesus' resurrection symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, and offers the promise of eternal life to those who have faith.
- **Moveable Feast:** The date of Easter varies each year. It always **falls on a Sunday between March 22 and April 25, determined by calculations based on a lunisolar calendar, similar to the Hebrew calendar.**

Easter Week (Holy Week):

- Starts Holy Week and marks Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- **Maundy Thursday:** Commemorates the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his crucifixion.
- **Good Friday:** Marks the day of Jesus' crucifixion and death.
- **Easter Sunday:** Celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus.

Easter Traditions and Symbols:

- **Sunrise Services:** Many churches hold special services at dawn, symbolizing the empty tomb discovered on Easter morning.
- **Easter Eggs:** Decorated eggs symbolize new life and rebirth. The tradition likely has roots in both Christian symbolism and pre-Christian springtime customs.
- **The Paschal Candle:** A large, decorated candle represents the light of Christ.
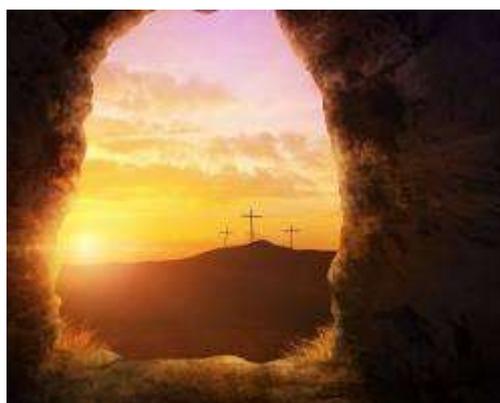
- **Easter Lilies:** White lilies, symbolizing purity and hope, often decorate churches during Easter.

2. Architecture:

2.1 Jama Masjid:

- **One of India's Largest Mosques:** The Jama Masjid is one of India's largest and most important mosques.
- **Commissioned by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan:** Its construction began in 1650 and was completed in 1656.
- **Architectural Significance:** A masterpiece of Mughal architecture, it reflects the artistic and engineering feats of the period.

Key Features:

- **Materials:** Built primarily of red sandstone and white marble.
- **Layout:** Features a vast courtyard that can accommodate around 25,000 worshippers.
- **Minarets:** Two towering minarets rise approximately 40 meters high.
- **Domes:** Three grand domes adorn the mosque.
- **Calligraphy:** Intricate carvings and Quranic verses decorate the interiors.

Significance:

- **Active place of worship:** It remains a significant place of worship and draws large congregations for prayers, especially on Fridays and during Eid.
- **Tourist Destination:** A major tourist attraction, offering insights into Mughal history, architecture, and India's Islamic heritage.
- **Symbol of Delhi:** An iconic landmark integrated into the fabric of Old Delhi and the city's history.

2.2. Rakhigarhi Findings in NCERT books; Narmada Dam references dropped:

Location:

- Rakhigarhi is an archaeological site located in the **Hisar district of Haryana**.
- It belongs to the mature phase of the Indus Valley Civilization (also known as the Harappan Civilization), dating back to around 2600-1900 BCE.

Size and Significance

- **One of the largest Harappan sites:** Rakhigarhi spans over 550 hectares, making it one of the largest known settlements of the Indus Valley Civilization.
- **Challenging Traditional Views:** The site's sheer size suggests a more complex and urbanized society than previously assumed for the Harappan Civilization.
- **Potential Capital:** Researchers hypothesize that Rakhigarhi may have been a major regional centre or even a capital city of the Indus Valley people.

Archaeological Findings

- **Planned City:** Excavations reveal evidence of a well-planned city with streets, drainage systems, and residential structures.
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- **Advanced Craftsmanship:** Artifacts like pottery, jewellery, and tools demonstrate sophisticated craftsmanship and technological skills.
- **Trade Networks:** The presence of materials from distant regions suggests extensive trade links.
- **Burials and Skeletons:** Discovered burials and human skeletal remains offer insights into the biological makeup and funerary practices of the Harappan people.

Ongoing Research

- **Excavations Continue:** Archaeological work at Rakhigarhi is ongoing, with the potential to uncover more about its layout, economy, society, and decline.
- **DNA Studies:** Analysis of ancient DNA from the skeletal remains has shed light on the genetic ancestry of the Harappan people and potential population migrations
- The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) proposed revisions to school textbooks.

- In the Class 12 history textbook, the NCERT suggests adding findings from DNA analysis of skeletal remains from the Rakhigarhi archaeological site in Haryana.
- They propose dropping references to the adverse effects of the Narmada Dam project on tribal people from the sociology textbook.
- In the sociology textbook, the NCERT **removes a sentence regarding Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes being marked by poverty, powerlessness, and social stigma.**
- A significant addition to the history textbook is a chapter on the Harappan Civilization, stating that **DNA analysis from Rakhigarhi suggests genetic roots dating back to 10,000 BC.**
- The text indicates that Harappan DNA continues in the South Asian population today, indicating no large-scale immigration by Aryans due to genetic and cultural continuity.
- The revised text suggests that research indicates people from bordering areas and distant regions were absorbed into Indian society over time.
- DNA extracted from skeletal remains at Rakhigarhi was analyzed by Deccan College Deemed University, Pune, in collaboration with the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and Harvard Medical College.

- Some interpretations suggest that **the Harappans were indigenous to the region, with unbroken continuity for 5,000 years.**
- **Facial reconstruction of Harappan people shows remarkable similarity to the modern population of Haryana.**
- **Archaeologist Mudit Trivedi argues that the DNA mixture from Rakhigarhi indicates ancient ancestry shared with Iranian populations and Andamanese or South-East Asians.**
- Media coverage emphasizes the "indigeneity" of the DNA, prompting reconsideration of the social geographies associated with the data.
- NCERT proposed revisions in Class 12 sociology textbook, altering references to projects like Sardar Sarovar and Polavaram dams.
- Sentence mentioning displacement of adivasis due to these projects was changed to reflect past tense and specify the number displaced.
- Other mentions about the Narmada project were also removed from the textbook.
- The revised text emphasizes the adverse impact of private property on tribals without specific reference to the Narmada dams.
- **NCERT also dropped references to the Babri Masjid demolition from political science textbooks and emphasized the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple movement instead.**

Geography

1. **Anticyclones,**

   Why in News - Anticyclone hanging even now over India, link warming to heat:

   The record warming of 2023 has so far not been fully explained since it was much warmer than expected just from the superposition of **El Niño** on global warming. But the impact of the **El Niño** during its pre-monsoon demise on **the IEJ** tends to produce a stronger and more persistent anticyclone and thus longer lasting and intense heat waves

   - Global warming's local manifestations underscore the need for global modelling but local predictions.
   - **The waning El Niño of 2023** brings expected warm temperatures globally, with cooler temperatures spreading from **Pakistan across India to West Bengal** in March.
   - Despite global warming, a cool band persisted across India in 2023.
   - Heat waves in India are of concern, particularly during the general elections.
   - Persistent circulation patterns contribute to heat waves, requiring improved prediction methods.
   - Anticyclonic circulations over the North Indian Ocean drove unusual rainfall over Odisha in March.
   - **Anticyclones have clockwise winds**, with sinking air creating high-pressure heat domes, explaining heat waves.
   - Anticyclonic circulation also contributed to historic **floods in Dubai on April 17.**
   - Anticyclones persist over the North Indian Ocean and the Indian subcontinent.

   Indian Easterly Jet (IEJ)

   A strong upper-level wind pattern that develops over the Indian subcontinent.

   Occurs during the pre-monsoon season, typically in April and May.

   Extends across the Arabian Sea, peninsular India, and the Bay of Bengal, around the 10 degrees North latitude.

   Characterized by strong easterly winds, blowing from **east to west.**

   Influences weather patterns, including the onset of monsoon rains and the formation of heat waves and anticyclones.

   Monitored and predicted by meteorological agencies like the India Meteorological Department (IMD) using advanced models and observational data.

What links anticyclones to heat?

- During the pre-monsoon season, the upper-level Indian Easterly Jet (IEJ) forms around 10 degrees N latitude, spanning the Arabian Sea, peninsular India, and the Bay of Bengal.
- A strong westerly jet exists further north around 30 degrees N, and when combined, they can generate an anticyclonic pattern over the Indian Ocean and the Indian subcontinent.
- Easterly jets bring strong winds from the east, while westerly jets come from the west, and these are natural seasonal features.
- The westerly jet moves north during the monsoon season, allowing the IEJ to dominate the Indian subcontinent.
- During the pre-monsoon season, a strong anticyclone can bring dry and hot weather to many parts of India, while a weak anticyclone results in milder weather.

- The key question is whether the strength of the anticyclone this year is related to global warming and the occurrence of heat waves.

How are heat waves amplified?

- The pre-monsoon season in India is synonymous with summer and the occurrence of heat waves is expected during this time.
- Accurate prediction and early warning systems for heat waves are crucial for saving lives.
- Understanding the underlying factors influencing the duration, intensity, and frequency of heat waves helps identify heat wave hotspots.
- The record warming observed in 2023 has not been fully explained yet, as it exceeded expectations based solely on the superposition of El Niño on global warming.

MERCURIAL METER

Some of the new and cross-country benchmarks are listed below. Earlier, they used to vary from state to state

HEAT WAVES
Based on departure from normal

Heat wave: 4.5°C to 6.4°C above normal maximum

Severe heat wave: More than 6.4°C above normal maximum

Based on actual maximum temperature

Heat wave: Temperature equal or greater than 45°C

Severe heat wave: Equal or greater than 47°C

Warm night: *(Will apply only when maximum temperature remains 40°C or more)* Minimum temperature departure is 4.5°C to 6.4°C

Very warm night: Minimum temperature departure is above 6.4°C

COLD WAVES
Based on departure from normal

Cold wave: 4.5°C to 6.4°C below normal minimum

Severe cold wave: Anything more than 6.4°C below normal minimum

Based on actual minimum temperature

Cold wave: Minimum temperature is 4°C or lower

Severe cold wave: Minimum temperature is 2°C or lower

Cold day: *(Applies when minimum temperature is 10°C or lower in plains and 0°C or lower in hilly regions)* Maximum temperature departure is minus 4.5°C to minus 6.4°C

Very cold day: Maximum temperature departure is greater than minus 6.4°C

- The **weakening of El Niño during the pre-monsoon season tends to strengthen the Indian Easterly Jet (IEJ), leading to a stronger and more persistent anticyclone**, resulting in longer and more intense heat waves.
- Therefore, the heat wave season this year is attributed to warmer temperatures due to El Niño and the additional impact of unexplained warming observed in 2023.
- The presence of a cool background state alongside a strong and persistent anticyclone is crucial for **accurate predictions by the India Meteorological Department**, enabling the development of effective early warning systems.

Stages of early warnings

- Accurate early-warning systems for extreme weather events utilize a three-step approach known as the 'ready-set-go' system.
- This approach is part of the **'Sub seasonal-to-Seasonal Predictions'** project initiated by the **World Climate Research Program under the World Meteorological Organization**.
- India is actively involved in this project and has made significant progress in enhancing the accuracy of predictions.
- The **'ready' step involves** providing a seasonal outlook based on background factors like global warming and El Niño, allowing disaster response systems to prepare accordingly.
- Sub seasonal predictions cover weeks two to four, contributing to **the 'set' step**, which involves resource allocation and identifying potential hotspots for disaster preparedness.

- The 'go' step utilizes short- (days 1-3) and medium- (days 3-10) range forecasts to implement disaster management measures, including rescue efforts, hydration centers, and heat shelters.

Preparedness and recovery

- India's prediction system and early warning systems have shown continuous improvement.
- The **National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA)** has integrated these advancements into its **'ready-set-go'** system effectively.
- The main challenge now is to enhance resilience for the future by accurately predicting weather trajectories at every location across India.
- Efforts to predict **weather patterns at 10-year timescales** have shown promise but require further development.
- Coordination from the national to the neighbourhood levels and the provision of early warnings spanning from days to a decade are being established.
- Training and engagement of governments, departments, and the general population are essential for ensuring sustained success.
- India's aspirations for sustained economic development hinge on the effectiveness of these efforts.

2. **Earth's Magnetic Field:**

   Why in News - Rocks with evidence of the earth's magnetic field discovered

   - **Geologists at MIT and Oxford University** discovered ancient rocks in Greenland containing the oldest remnants of Earth's early magnetic field.
   - They sampled rocks from the **Isua Supracrustal Belt in south-western Greenland,** focusing on banded iron formations, which likely formed before the rise of atmospheric oxygen **around 2.5 billion years ago**
   - The rocks are approximately 3.7 billion years old and show signs of a magnetic field with a strength of **at least 15 microtesla**. (Today, Earth's magnetic field measures around 30 microtesla).
   - Published in the **Journal of Geophysical Research**, the study provides some of the earliest evidence of Earth having a magnetic field.
   - Previous studies indicated a magnetic field on Earth at least 3.5 billion years old, but this research extends it by another 200 million years.
   - **Benjamin Weiss, from MIT's Department of Earth, Atmospheric,** and Planetary Sciences and one of the authors, suggests that if **Earth's magnetic field existed a few hundred million years** earlier, it could have played a crucial role in making the planet habitable.
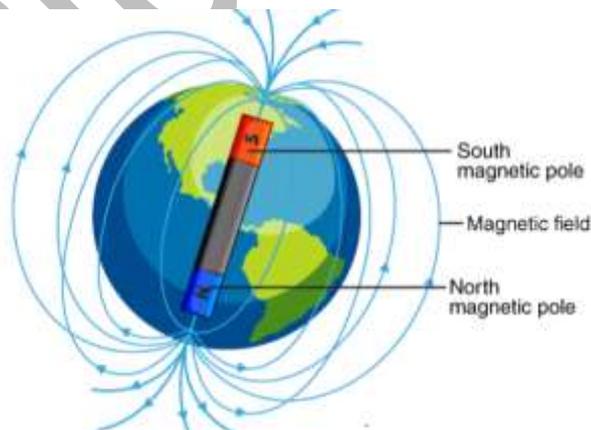
What is Earth's Magnetic Field?

- Earth's magnetic field is a region surrounding our planet. It acts like a giant protective shield, interacting with charged particles from the sun and cosmic rays
- Origin: Generated by a "geodynamo". This is the motion of swirling, molten iron in Earth's outer core, acting like a massive electric generator.

Key Features

- Resembles a bar magnet slightly tilted from the Earth's rotational axis.
- Poles: The geomagnetic north and south poles don't match the geographic ones and change positions over time.
- Strength: Not uniform and varies across the surface. Measured in units called nanoteslas (nT).
- Importance:
- Solar Wind Deflection: Prevents most harmful solar radiation from reaching the surface.
- Navigation: Used by animals for migration and by humans with compasses.
- Aurorae: Causes stunning polar light displays – the auroras.
- Changes in the Magnetic Field
- Wandering Poles: Magnetic north is shifting rapidly due to changes in the core.
- Weakening: The overall strength of the field has been decreasing slightly in recent decades.
- Reversals: Historically, magnetic north and south poles have flipped entirely, though we're not currently heading towards a reversal.
- This magnetic field likely helped retain a life-sustaining atmosphere and shielded the planet from harmful solar radiation

3. **Landforms:**
   Dooars:
   - **Location:** The Dooars (or Duars) is a fascinating region located at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas in Northeast India. It forms a gateway between India and Bhutan. The region lies largely in the Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts of West Bengal, with some parts extending into Assam.
   - **Etymology:** The word "Dooars" means "doors" in several regional languages (Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, etc.), highlighting its position as a transition zone.
   - **Geography and Climate:**
     - The Dooars are characterized by **fertile alluvial floodplains formed by rivers** like the Teesta, Torsa, Jaldhaka, Sankosh, and their tributaries.
     - It encompasses **lush forests, rolling tea gardens, and a rich variety of wildlife sanctuaries.**
     - Climate ranges from subtropical to humid, with high rainfall and temperatures averaging from cool winters to warm summers.

Importance of Dooars:

It boasts many Biodiversity Hotspot:

National Parks & Sanctuaries of West Bengal

- The Dooars is renowned for its incredible biodiversity. Major national parks and wildlife sanctuaries include:
  - **Gorumara National Park** - Gorumara National Park is situated on the bank of rivers Murti and Raidak, West Bengal
  - **Jaldapara National Park** - Eastern Himalayas in Alipurduar District of northern West Bengal
  - **Buxa Tiger Reserve** – Alipurduar sub-division of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal
  - **Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary** – Northern West Bengal
- These protected areas are home to iconic animals like the one-horned rhinoceros, Asian elephant, gaur (Indian bison), tigers, various deer species, and a remarkable array of birds.

Tea Cultivation:

- The Dooars are a major tea-growing region in India, famous for its extensive tea plantations and picturesque scenery.
- **West Bengal** is the **second largest tea growing state in India**. It accounts for **20% of the total area** under the tea and **contributes 24% in the total tea production** in India (Assam ranks First)

Tourism & Popular Destinations:

The Dooars attracts nature lovers, wildlife enthusiasts, and those seeking serene getaways. Popular spots include:

- **Jaldapara National Park**: Home to a significant one-horned rhino population
- **Gorumara National Park:** Known for elephants, leopards, and excellent bird watching
- **Suntalekhola:** A beautiful hamlet surrounded by lush greenery
- **Murti:** A picturesque river valley offering stunning views and river activities
- **Samsing:** Offers beautiful views, orange orchards, and tea gardens

Tea Production In India:

- The **soil** should be **acidic, porous, and loamy,** without calcium content.
- The optimal temperature for tea growth is a continuous **21°C for 8 months,** with the best yields observed between June and September in Northeastern India.
- Monsoon is crucial for quality.
- The northern region, particularly **Assam and West Bengal, contributes about 83%** of India's tea production, while the southern region, including **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka, contributes around 17%.**

Society (Social Justice)

1. Registration of Birth:

Why in News:

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has drafted Model Rules requiring parents to record their religion and the religion of both parents when registering the birth of a child.
- **Previously, only the family's religion was recorded in birth registers.**
- The proposed changes will expand the birth report form to include separate entries for the religion of the child, father, and mother.
- Similar changes will apply to **parents of adopted children.**
- The **Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023, mandates the maintenance of a national birth and death database.**
- This database may be used to update various official records such as the **National Population Register (NPR), electoral rolls, Aadhaar number, ration card, passport, driving license, and property registration.**

Statistical and legal information

- Birth registers now include two parts: legal information and statistical information.
- **Parents' religion will be recorded for statistical purposes only.**
- **Legal information section now includes recording of Aadhaar numbers, mobile and e-mail IDs of both parents if available.**
- **Address box in the legal information section is more detailed**, including State, district, sub-district, town or village, ward number (if applicable), locality, house number, and PIN code.
- Informant providing the information must provide their Aadhaar and mobile numbers, email address, along with name and address details as previously required.

National Database

- The 2023 amendment mandates the Registrar General of India (RGI) to maintain a national-level database of registered births and deaths.
- **Chief Registrars and Registrars appointed by State governments** must share the data of registered births and deaths with this national database.

More on Digital Records:

- A law effective from October 1 last year mandates the digital registration of all reported births and deaths in India.
- This registration process is conducted through the Centre's portal for the **Civil Registration System (crsorgi.gov.in).**
- **Digital birth certificates issued** through this system serve as a single document to verify the date of birth for various purposes, including admission to educational institutions.
- The **Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has proposed replacing existing forms related to the registration of births, deaths, stillbirths, adoptions, and the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) as per the draft rules.
- The **updated MCCD will now include the "history of illness, if any" in addition to the actual cause of death.**

- The RGI, empowered by the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, coordinates and unifies the activities of Chief Registrars.
- **Civil Registration System (CRS) functionaries are appointed up to the Panchayat level for registering births and deaths.**
- The CRS data is used to compile the annual **'Vital Statistics of India Based On The Civil Registration System'** report, which includes information on sex ratio at birth, infant mortality, stillbirths, and deaths at the national level.
- This data is crucial for socio-economic planning, evaluating the effectiveness of social sector programs, and forms the basis of the public health system.

2. <u>**Migration:**</u>

Definition - An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

Note: There is no universally accepted definition of Migration/migrant.

News Around: **Both BJP and Congress made promises to migrants in their respective manifestos before the Lok Sabha elections.**

- The BJP and Congress have expressed concern for **migrants in their manifestos for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.**
- The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns brought attention to migrants, highlighting their vulnerability and disenfranchisement.
- Many migrant workers have misconceptions about **e-Shram's benefits.**
- The second promise is to **enhance Special Train Services for migrant workers, connecting major migration corridors throughout the year.**
- The manifesto proposes **periodic review of National Floor Wages to ensure minimum living standards for workers,** but critics worry about exploitative conditions.
- **Different floor wages for regions may skew migration towards higher-paying areas.**
- Post office savings, insurance, and social security measures will be implemented using digital technologies, raising concerns about digital divide and accessibility.
- The **manifesto overlooks unique challenges faced by women, children, and young migrants**.
- **It is silent on implementing the draft National Migrant Labour Policy prepared by NITI Aayog.**
- The manifesto favours **city-centric development, potentially triggering distress migration to cities.**

More on Migration:

- Migration in the Census of India is of two types – **Migration by Birth place** and **Migration by place of last residence.**
- When a person is enumerated in Census at a place, i.e., village or town, different from her/his place of birth, she/he would be considered a **migrant by place of birth.**
- A person would be considered a **migrant by place of last residence**, if she/he had last resided at a place other than her/his place of enumeration.
- Historically, information on migration has been collected **since 1872**.
- It was confined to seeking information **only on place of birth till 1961.**
- **1971 census onwards the** information for migration by both place of birth and place of last residence is considered.

- It promises **'One Nation, One Election,'** which may disenfranchise migrant voters.

The Congress' promises

- Congress manifesto, **Nyay Patra**, **promises to enact a law regulating employment of migrant workers, ensuring their legal rights and social security.**
- **It pledges to update ration card holders, expand PDS coverage, and allocate more funds to PDS and Integrated Child Development Service.**
- However, **it remains silent on PDS portability.**
- Congress vows **to increase MGNREGA wage to ₹400 per day, crucial for rural migrants, and enforce 'Same Work, Same Wages' principle to prevent gender-based discrimination.**
- It plans to launch an urban employment scheme for the urban poor, potentially benefiting urban migrants.
- Focuses on women's welfare, **promising sufficient night shelters and hygienic public toilets for migrant women.**
- Misses addressing specific challenges faced by migrant women and **overlooks issues like informal labor market exploitation and forced labor conditions**.
- Both parties overlook critical areas like public health, education for migrating children, housing, water, sanitation, and legal aid.
- Emphasizes the need for political will to effectively improve the lives of migrants and their families.

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e-Shram Portal

- The e-Shram portal, launched by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment, aims to create a centralized national database of unorganized sector workers**.
- This database helps the government target and **deliver social security benefits** to this vast and often marginalized workforce.

Key Features

- **Registration:** Unorganized workers can register on the portal using their Aadhaar number, providing basic details about themselves and their occupation.
- **e-Shram Card:** Upon registration, workers receive a unique e-Shram card with a **12-digit Universal Account Number (UAN).**
- **Benefits:** Registered workers gain **access to various social security schemes and benefits, including accidental insurance coverage under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY).** The portal also acts as a bridge to connect workers with job opportunities and skill development programs.

Eligibility

- **Occupations:** The e-Shram portal covers unorganized workers such as agricultural laborers, construction workers, domestic workers, migrant workers, gig workers, platform workers, street vendors, and more.
- **Age:** Any unorganized worker between the **ages of 16-59 years.**
- **Other Criteria:** Workers should not be members of EPFO/ESIC or income taxpayers.

How to Register

- **Self-Registration:** Workers can register directly on the e-Shram portal **Common Service Centres (CSCs):** Workers can visit their nearest CSC for assisted registration.
- **State Seva Kendras, Post Offices:** Select locations may facilitate registration.

Significance of the e-Shram Portal

- **Database for the Unorganized Sector:** The portal creates a comprehensive, digitized record of unorganized workers, enabling better policy planning and welfare program implementation.
- **Portability of Benefits:** The UAN allows workers to access benefits across different locations as they work in diverse sectors and regions.
- **Targeting Social Security:** The database aids the government in accurately identifying beneficiaries for social welfare programs.

3. The Art of Co-living:

- **"Shamadi"** (in Tiwa) or dormitory, is a significant social institution among tribal communities in northeast India.
- It serves as a communal living space where youth learn various life skills and receive guidance from experienced individuals.
- Skills taught in the dormitory range from traditional arts and crafts to discussions on important life decisions, such as choosing a life partner.
- Participation in the dormitory fosters a sense of community and camaraderie among the youth.
- The age range of dormitory members varies among different tribal groups.
- Members of the dormitory provide assistance to those in need within the community, such as helping farmers with harvesting or assisting in house construction.
- Assistance provided by dormitory members is voluntary, and they do not expect any compensation in return.
- Despite the enduring relevance of dormitories in society and their positive impact socially, economically, and culturally, they face challenges in the modern world due to external influences, particularly from the Internet.
- Women are strictly prohibited from entering the shamadi ecosystem of hill Tiwas, indicating a gender-specific aspect of this social institution.

4. Tribal Issues:

4.1 Dongria Kondhs

- The Dongria Kondhs reside primarily within **the Niyamgiri Hills of south western Odisha**, India.
- They are a **designated Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)** by the government of India, recognizing their distinct culture and need for special protection of their rights.

- The **Dongria consider the Niyamgiri hills sacred**, calling their **primary deity Niyam Raja**. Their culture, identity, and livelihood are deeply intertwined with the hills and forests.

Socio-Cultural Life:

- Livelihood: The Dongria Kondh practice shifting cultivation as well as the collection of forest produce. Horticulture is central to their economic and cultural life.

- Social Structure: Dongria Kondh society emphasizes community living and a strong kinship structure. They are organized into geographically demarcated clans, often identified by animal names.
- Religious Beliefs: The Dongria Kondh follow their own traditional beliefs centering on nature worship and reverence for their ancestors.
- Festivals: Numerous festivals are celebrated by the Dongrias throughout the year, many of which are related to their agricultural cycles and religious practices.

Development and Conservation Challenges

- **Mining Threat:** The Dongria Kondh have famously resisted mining proposals by corporations like Vedanta Resources, which sought to extract bauxite from the Niyamgiri Hills. Their successful campaign has been a landmark case for tribal rights and environmental protection in India.
- **Development Initiatives**: The Odisha government has initiated several development programs specifically for the Dongria Kondh, with focus on education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **Balancing Development & Conservation:** There's an on-going need to create a framework for sustainable development that prioritizes the Dongria Kondh's rights, well-being, and their connection to their ancestral lands

News: Minjali Sikaka, from the Dongria Kondh tribe in Odisha's Niyamgiri hill range, was persuaded into surrendering as an alleged cadre of the banned CPI (Maoist).

- She was promised ₹2 lakh under the government's surrender-cum-rehabilitation scheme for Naxalites, in the presence of Rayagada Superintendent of Police and fellow Dongria Kondh members.

- However, she refused to surrender as it would label her as a Maoist and tarnish her family name.

- Several other villagers in Lakhpadar, including seven others from Minjali's tribe, have also faced similar allegations of ties with the outlawed CPI (Maoist) over the past 15 to 20 years.

- Many Dongria Kondh tribals have been detained and sent to jail by authorities on suspicion of Maoist affiliations.

- Last year, nine Dongria Kondh tribals and an activist from Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti were charged with sedition, but the charges were later dropped by the police.

- Frustrated by the continued branding of their community members as Naxalites, they announced a boycott of the upcoming elections.

- Minjali denied any association with the CPI (Maoist) and expressed shock at the police's claims.

- She emphasized that she has been living with her family in Lakhpadar and has visited various cities, indicating no involvement with the Maoists.

- Despite financial struggles, Minjali asserted that she would never accept ₹2 lakh to surrender to the police.

- Nilakantha Behera, inspector in-charge of Kalyansinghpur police station, acknowledged Minjali's case but clarified it was an "old matter."

- Major political parties rarely visit scattered settlements within Niyamgiri hill range due to the dispersed population, deeming it a waste of time.

- Ladda Sikaka, a community leader, expressed that boycotting elections allows them to assert their existence, despite their small numbers.

- Dongria tribes faced legal cases, many related to alleged Maoist connections, particularly after opposing bauxite mining in Niyamgiri hills.

- Odisha Mining Corporation proposed mining in Niyamgiri to supply Vedanta group's alumina refinery at Lanjigarh. The Supreme Court's 2013 ruling mandated mining clearance required consent from gram sabhas, leading to **Dongria representatives rejecting the proposal**.

- Dongria Kondhs face criminal cases due to alleged connections with CPI (Maoist), causing discontent within the community.

- Villages of Dongria Kondhs fall under Bissamkatak Assembly constituency, represented by Jagannath Saraka, the State's Tribal Development Minister. The region goes to poll on May 13.

4.2 The Battle over Adivasis Identity:

Why in news?

The BJP-led Union government is making several efforts to "reclaim" the lost stories of Adivasi resistance movements in order to build a nationalistic tribal identity. Believing that the Adivasi identity is being appropriated by the Sangh Parivar, the indigenous communities of Rajasthan and Jharkhand are attempting to counter these narratives.

- In the tribal belt of Udaipur, Banswara, and Dungarpur in Rajasthan, signboards are appearing along the dusty highways leading to settlements of the **Bhil Adivasi people.**

- These signboards, often hand-painted and featuring a drawing of the **16th-century tribal icon Rana Punja Bhil**, denote the residents as part of the "Adivasi Parivar" or Adivasi family.

- The "Adivasi Parivar" is described as a larger ideology aimed at awakening the conscience of the people in these settlements.

- The Bharat Adivasi Party, formed by MLA Rajkumar Roat in September 2023, is associated with this movement.

- Amit Kharadi, a 27-year-old worker of the Bharat Adivasi Party, mentions that the residents themselves have started putting up these signboards in recent years, indicating a grassroots involvement in the movement.

Many narratives

- The Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) emerged from the demand for a separate Bhil State for the Bhil Adivasi people.

- Senior party leader Bhanwarlal Parmar states that the party's mission is to "take control" of the narrative surrounding Adivasi identity.

- The BAP's emergence was partly in response to Adivasi communities facing attacks from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated **Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram** and its federated outfits for decades.

- Narratives on Adivasi identity created by the Sangh Parivar are now merging with efforts by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Union government to reclaim lost stories of Adivasi resistance movements to build a nationalistic Adivasi identity.

- The **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** is leading this project initiated by the Union government, **aiming to replace existing literature on Adivasi histories, communities, and resistance movements with literature created by indigenous people about their own communities.**

- The BAP views this initiative as an appropriation of their identity by the government.

- Amit Kharadi, aged 27, attributes the concept of "Adivasi Parivar" for securing 40,000 votes in the Rajasthan Assembly elections in November 2023, despite lacking resources.

- Kharadi highlights the importance of preserving the history of the Adivasi community, expressing concern that their footsteps are being erased, and their history denied.

- Signboards declaring "Adivasi Parivars" are being erected across the Bhil belt of southern Rajasthan, reflecting a grassroots movement to reclaim Adivasi identity and history.

- The BJP's campaign for tribal voters utilizes the imagery of leaders like Punja Bhil and Govind Guru to emphasize the government's efforts to recognize and honor forgotten heroes from Adivasi communities.

- Kharadi criticizes the BJP and RSS for offering superficial gestures, referring to them as "lollipops," and questions their continued use **of terms like "Vanvasi" and "Janjati" instead of "Adivasi."**

- He argues that the **Adivasi identity predates Hinduism** and expresses discontent with the portrayal of figures like Govind Guru in mainstream narratives.

A Tool for the BJP

- On November 15, which marks tribal icon Birsa Munda's birth anniversary, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh were in the midst of Assembly election campaigning.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended an event commemorating Birsa Munda's birth anniversary at Ulihatu, Jharkhand, where he inaugurated government projects and addressed the crowd.

- Modi lamented the lack of recognition given to tribal heroes in India's freedom struggle since Independence and highlighted the opportunity presented by the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative to share their stories.

- He acknowledged the contributions of "Adivasi warriors" such as **Birsa Munda, Tilka Manjhi, Rani Durgavati, and Alluri Sitarama Raju**, emphasizing their role in defending the land.

- Modi specifically mentioned the sacrifice of Govind Guru at the Mangarh massacre in 1913 in Rajasthan.

- Prior to Modi's remarks, the BJP's Scheduled Tribe Morcha posted a photo of Govind Guru on X (formerly Twitter) along with a description of his struggle, resembling information published by the National Commission of Scheduled Tribes in a book titled Contributions of Tribal Leaders in the Freedom Struggle.

- The **BJP is utilizing a book titled "Contributions of Tribal Leaders in the Freedom Struggle" to establish Adivasis as equal partners in India's polity before British rule.**

- The BJP Scheduled Tribe Morcha posted about Govind Guru, describing him as a leader of a significant movement against British rule in India.

- Govind Guru was depicted wearing a **white kurta with a rudraksh mala (divine beads) around his neck,** symbolizing his leadership role.

- The post highlighted Govind Guru's fight against British rule for 20 years and his desire to establish self-rule, noting the massacre of his Bhil followers at Mangarh during a gathering called "Sump Sabha."

- Scholarly work contradicts the post's portrayal of the Mangarh massacre's date and the reason for Govind Guru's presence at the Mangarh fort.

- According to Vijay Kumar Vashishth's research, the Ruler of the Idar kingdom attempted to arrest Govind Guru to diminish his influence among the Bhils of Banswara, Dungarpur, and Sunth States due to his preaching.

- **Govind Guru's teachings emphasized rationality, shunning superstition, monotheism, and equality with higher Hindu castes, challenging social hierarchies.**

- He advocated a religion involving worship at Dhunis (firepits), wearing rudraksh beads, and carrying iron tongs, with special worship on Sundays.

- Govind Guru encouraged his followers to consider themselves equal to higher Hindu castes, challenging the prevailing social order.

- Jitendra Meena, national spokesperson for BAP and Assistant Professor of History at Delhi University, criticizes the portrayal of Govind Guru wearing a rudraksh in government imagery.

- Meena emphasizes that Govind Guru's battle was against the caste-based social structure imposed by upper caste rulers, not just about wearing rudraksh beads.

- He argues **that Govind Guru fought to break free from social restrictions and create a new social order for the Adivasi community.**

- As an Adivasi researcher and member of academic bodies like the Indian History Congress and the Rajasthan History Congress, Meena is personally committed to countering the government's narratives on Adivasi leaders.

- He is working on analyzing and dissecting the stories promoted by the government about at least a dozen Adivasi leaders.

- Meena highlights the challenges faced by tribal reformers, including economic, social, and cultural pressures from colonizing administrations, landlords, and missionaries.

- He acknowledges that some tribal reformers may have drawn inspiration from each other, but their collective effort aimed at establishing something new for their communities.

Fighting Against Misrepresentations

- Bandhan Tigga, a Sarna thinker and spiritual leader in Jharkhand, has been opposing the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram for around a decade.

- **Tigga asserts that Sarna, the distinct religion of Adivasis, predates all other religions, and movements like Birsa Munda's aimed to create a social order exclusive to Adivasi communities.**

- He criticizes the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams for their campaigns to build Hindu temples in tribal villages, often accompanied by indoctrination.

- Handu Bhagat, a worker of the Kendriya Sarna Samiti in Jharkhand, notes the **Sangh Parivar's efforts to convince Adivasis that Hindu and Adivasi rituals are similar, distorting the stories of leaders like Birsa Munda in the process.**

- Bhagat points to villages like Sugakatta, where the Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra has built a Hanuman temple, leading to a blurring of distinctions between traditional Adivasi religion and Hinduism.

- Jharkhand-based writer and journalist Jacinta Kerketta highlights that tribal leaders are often portrayed as fighting the British and Mughals, while their struggles against Hindu landlords and moneylenders working for the British are overlooked.

- **Jacinta Kerketta highlights the historical context of Adivasi struggles against the British and Hindu landlords, emphasizing the exploitation faced by tribal people from landlords and moneylenders.**

- She cites the **Hul movement of the Santhal people, led by brothers Sido, Kanhu, Chand, and Bhairav, which originated from dissatisfaction with landlords and moneylenders' oppression.**

- The movement began with the killing of a police inspector who was holding a village head hostage, leading to a widespread uprising and subsequent British military intervention resulting in many tribal deaths.

- Ranendra Kumar criticizes the use of the National Commission of Scheduled Tribes' book for studying Adivasi rebellions, considering it introductory and insufficient for understanding the complexities of Adivasi resistance movements.

- Kumar asserts that **most Adivasi resistance movements were responses to oppression from upper caste landlords and local rulers collaborating with colonial administrations to maintain social hegemony.**

- He stresses the importance of **recognizing Adivasi resistance to caste structures and acknowledges that while resistance often targeted the British administration, it also addressed societal injustices perpetuated by landlords and rulers.**

- Kerketta emphasizes that tribal people continue to face oppression despite independence, describing them as victims of an oppressive system, regardless of the ruling government.

4.3. Murai Tribe of Chhattisgarh:

- The settlement of Chukkalapadu is home to the Muria tribe in Chhattisgarh, located within 'India's Red Corridor' near the A.P.-Chhattisgarh border affected by Naxalism.

- Despite being within a reserved forest, the Muria tribe has made Chukkalapadu their permanent abode after facing multiple fires set by the Andhra Pradesh Forest department.

- The settlement houses 34 Muria tribal families who fled from their native village in Bastar during the conflict between left-wing extremists and the State-sponsored Salwa Judum.

- **Salwa Judum, initially claimed to be a "peace mission" by the government, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in July 2011,** leading to the disbandment of the group.

- Despite the government's invitation to return to their ancestral villages, Murias settled in united Andhra Pradesh opted to stay due to an uncertain future.

- Muria settlements in Andhra Pradesh are considered as habitations of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), with a population of around 6,600.

- Murias migrated from districts like Sukma, Dantewada, and Bijapur in the Dandakaranya region of Chhattisgarh and settled in the erstwhile East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh.

- There are 54 settlements of Murias in Andhra Pradesh, according to tribal rights activist Venkatesh Jatvi, who works with Murias in the state.

Identity crisis

- **Murias have cleared forest cover within reserve forests to cultivate food crops, which has been a major issue raised by the Forest department.**

- After a decade-long legal battle, some Muria settlements have obtained a stay order, but if lifted, the Forest department can enforce Acts aimed at protecting the reserve forests, potentially leading to their eviction.

- **Despite being issued voter cards, ration cards, and NREGA cards by the Andhra Pradesh government, Murias have been denied a Scheduled Tribe certificate, making them ineligible for associated benefits.**

- **Muria is not officially recognized as a tribe in Andhra Pradesh but is on the official list in Chhattisgarh.**

- The absence of a caste certificate makes Murias ineligible for social welfare pensions, including old-age, widow, and differently-abled pensions.

- Many Muria students, including Madakam Rakesh, have been unable to pursue higher education due to the lack of a caste certificate, preventing them from enrolling in college and hostels.

- Rakesh, a farmer and cattle rearer, highlights that more than 200 Muria students who completed class 10 have halted further studies due to the mandatory requirement of a caste certificate.

Education a dream

- Ravva Suresh, 8 years old, helps care for goats and cows and assists his parents in collecting Mahua flowers from the forest.

- Suresh dropped out of school two years ago, as did his sister Irmamma after completing class 4, to assist their grandparents in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh, with Mahua flower collection.

- Many families from the Dandakaranya region, including Suresh's, maintain contact with relatives in their ancestral villages, which still face left-wing extremist activities.

- Ravva Deve, Suresh's mother, mentions that all her children, except the eldest who is married, have dropped out of school due to the **lack of functional schools.**

- The settlement, with more than 30 children aged 6-14, built a house for a school, but the government advised them to send children to a state-run school 3 kilometers away, accessible via a paramilitary camp.

- A temporary teacher once managed the settlement's school, but it does not exist according to Education department records.

- In **Chinna Edugurallapalli village**, 10 school-age children are out of the education system, and villagers express concerns about securing access to drinking water.

- Lack of schools forces children, especially girls, to work in chili fields along the Andhra-Telangana borders, while dropout youth migrate to cities for menial jobs.

- As of 2024, 23 out of 54 Muria settlements in Andhra Pradesh have no schools, and single-teacher schools cater to children aged 6-14 in the rest.

- ASR District Collector M. Vijaya Suneetha emphasizes the right to education for Muria children and pledges to address the lack of schools with a detailed study. The absence of schools also deprives Muria children of nutritional food provided by the government through the mid-day meal scheme.

Minimal healthcare

- Muria settlements are difficult to access for political leaders due to the terrain, so they often avoid campaigning there.

- Despite challenges, Murias exercise their right to vote in Andhra Pradesh to safeguard against displacement.

- Murias do not have affiliations with other native tribes like Koya and Konda Reddi, classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.

- Cattle are vital for Murias, serving as their lifeline during financial and health emergencies.

- Healthcare in the village is minimal, with occasional visits from a lone government nurse.

- Many Murias lack caste certificates, making them ineligible for social welfare pensions and educational opportunities.

- Ravva Koinde, a nursing student, highlights the struggles faced by Murias and their desire for recognition and opportunities.

- Murias have faced evictions and rebuild their homes from scratch using forest resources.

- Access to clean drinking water is a challenge for Muria settlements, with limited borewells and dry streams.

- The Jal Jeevan Mission, aimed at addressing water scarcity in rural areas, has not reached many Muria settlements.

- Murias living in reserve forests often lack basic facilities, and government support is limited due to legal restrictions on settlement in forest areas.

Muria Tribe of Chhattisgarh

- **Location:** Primarily in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, India, with some communities in neighboring Maharashtra.
- Within the Gondi people.
- **Language:** Muria, classified as a Dravidian language within the larger Gondi linguistic group.
- **Livelihood:** Traditionally a mix of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and forest-based activities.
- **Religion:** Predominantly animistic beliefs centered around nature and ancestral worship.

Social Structure and Notable Cultural Practices

- **Ghotul System:** A unique tradition where adolescents live in **mixed-sex dormitories (Ghotuls).** This system is intended for exploration of sexuality, socialization, and learning tribal customs.
  - **Important Note:** While the Ghotul system is a core part of Muria culture, it's essential to avoid oversimplification or presenting it through an exoticizing lens.
- **Vibrant Dance Forms: Gaur dance** is a prominent form of artistic expression during festivals and celebrations.
- **Strong Community Bonds:** Muria society emphasizes collective work and decision-making through village councils.

Challenges & Government Initiatives

- **Socioeconomic Issues:** The Muria, like many tribal communities, face challenges related to poverty, limited access to education, and healthcare.

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5. India's 'first Kinnar sarpanch' in Lok Sabha fray from Damoh:

- **Durga Bai Majhwar, also known as Durga Mausi**, aged 36, from Kanhwara village, Madhya Pradesh claims to be India's first sarpanch from the transgender or Kinnar community.
- She dresses up as the goddess Durga and is preparing for a performance at the Maa Sharda Temple in Maihar.
- Durga Mausi was elected sarpanch of her village in 2014, encouraged by the villagers who were facing various problems.
- She is also a sage, holding the position of mahamandaleshwar of a Kinnar Akhara.
- While Durga Mausi is not the first transgender person in Madhya Pradesh to achieve electoral success, **Shabnam Mausi became India's first Kinnar MLA in 2000 by winning the Sohagpur bypoll seat.**
- Kamla Jaan, also known as Kamla Mausi, won the mayoral election in Katni city in 1999 but had to step down in 2002 after a court ruled her election illegal due to her being registered as male in the electoral rolls at the time.

We are not a curse'

- Durga Bai Majhwar did not receive formal education due to societal discrimination against people like her in the Kinnar community.

- She considers Kamla Jaan her guru and started working with her at the age of 14.
- Despite facing societal challenges and discrimination, she asserts that people from her community are not a curse as perceived by society.
- Durga Mausi worked with her community for about 10 to 12 years before being encouraged to join politics when she was around 25 or 26 years old.
- She claims that it was the people of Damoh who urged her to contest in the Lok Sabha elections, prompting her to run from Damoh instead of her own constituency, Khajuraho.
- Durga Mausi's campaign involves support from fellow Kinnar community members and the general public, with workers and disciples joining her on bikes and Scooties during campaigning.
- Confident in her abilities, she believes she can give tough competition to candidates from major political parties.

Major religions adopt varying stance over inclusion of transgender people:

- The **Vatican released a new document** rejecting the concept of changing **one's biological sex**, disappointing transgender individuals who had hoped for a more welcoming approach from the **Catholic Church under Pope Francis**.
- This disapproving stance towards gender transition is not unique to the Catholic Church; other denominations, such as **the Southern Baptist Convention**, also assert that God's design consists of two distinct and **complementary sexes — male and female — determined by biological sex, not self-perception**.
- However, some **mainline Protestant denominations, like the Evangelical Lutheran Church** in America, welcome transgender individuals as members and clergy. In fact, they elected an **openly transgender man as a bishop in 2021.**
- **In Islam**, there isn't a single central religious authority, so policies on transgender issues can vary across different regions**. Abbas Shouman**, secretary-general of Al-Azhar's Council of Senior Scholars in Cairo, stated that sex conversion is completely rejected in their view, as it goes against God's creation.

- **In Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini** issued a fatwa decades ago, allowing for official support for gender transition surgery within the Shia theocracy's framework.

Recognised for Millennia:

- **In Hindu society in South Asia**, traditional roles are prescribed for men and women, but people of non-binary gender expression have been **recognized for millennia** and played important roles in holy texts.
- **Transgender individuals have been revered throughout South Asian history,** with many attaining significant positions of power under Hindu and Muslim rulers. A **survey in 2014 estimated that around 3 million transgender people live in India a**lone.
- Sanskrit, the ancient language of Hindu scriptures, has the vocabulary to describe three genders — masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral.
- **Some Hindus believe transgender people possess special powers** and the ability to bless or curse, leading to stereotyping that causes fear and marginalization within the community.

Many transgender individuals live in poverty without proper access to healthcare, housing, and employment.

- **In 2014, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh officially recognized transgender people** as citizens deserving of equal rights.
- The **Supreme Court of India** affirmed that it is **the right of every human being to choose their gender**, emphasizing that recognition of the group is a human rights issue, not merely a social or medical issue.
- **Reform Judaism** is accepting of transgender people and allows for the ordination of transgender rabbis.
- **Jewish traditional wisdom allows** for the exploration of gender identity and expression beyond those typically associated with the sex assigned at birth, as reflected in mystical texts like the Kabbalah.

Orthodox views

- **Orthodox Judaism is often challenging for transgender** individuals due to its emphasis on binary gender and strict separation between men and women.
- **Transgender people may face difficulties in Orthodox communities**, such as determining where to sit during worship if they have not medically transitioned.
- **Rabbi Avi Shafran of Agudath Israel** of America acknowledges the challenges faced by transgender individuals but maintains that Jewish religious law dictates living according to one's assigned gender at birth.
- In **Buddhism, traditional adherence to binary gender roles** is prevalent, especially in monastic traditions where men and women are segregated and assigned specific roles.
- The **Thai Sangha Council** attempted to ban ordinations of transgender individuals, reflecting the strong binary gender beliefs in **Theravada Buddhism**.
- However, some **Theravada traditions have eased restrictions** by ordaining gender nonconforming individuals based on their sex recorded at birth.

- **Mahayana and Vajrayana schools of Buddhism are more flexible, allowing exceptions for transgender individuals, while the Jodo Shinshu sect** is particularly inclusive in ordaining transgender monks.

- In Tibetan Buddhism, Tashi Choedup, an openly queer monk, was ordained without being asked about their gender identity, aligning with Buddhist doctrine that prioritizes spiritual qualities over gender.

- Many Buddhist denominations, especially in the West, intentionally include transgender people in their gatherings or sanghas.

6. Impact of Climate on Women:

While climate action requires 100% involvement of the population, at the same time, empowering women would mean better climate solutions

- The climate crisis affects everyone differently, with women and girls facing disproportionately high health risks due to poverty, existing roles, responsibilities, and cultural norms.

- According to the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),** women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a disaster.
- The **Supreme Court of India (in M.C. Mehta v. Union of India & Ors., 2024**) has recently recognized people's right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, acknowledging the right to a clean environment as a fundamental right under the right to life.
- **Agriculture is crucial for women's livelihoods** in India, particularly in rural areas. Climate-related crop yield reductions worsen food insecurity, particularly impacting poor households with higher nutritional deficiencies.
- In small and marginal landholding households, men may **face social stigma due to unpaid loans, leading to migration, emotional distress, and sometimes suicide**. Women, on the other hand, experience heavier domestic work burdens, worse health, and more intimate partner violence.
- **National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 data** revealed that women living in drought-prone districts were more underweight, faced more intimate partner violence, and had a higher prevalence of girl marriages compared to districts without droughts in the past decade.
- The **increasing food and nutritional insecurity**, work burdens, and income uncertainties negatively impact women's physical health, mental health, and emotional well-being.

Extreme events and Gender-based violence:

- The world is experiencing more frequent extreme weather events and climate-induced natural disasters.
- A report from the **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) found that 75% of Indian districts are vulnerable to hydromet disasters like floods, droughts, and cyclones**
- NFHS 5 data revealed that over half of women and children in these districts are at risk.

Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

- The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) is one of Asia's leading **not-for-profit policy research institutions**. It strategically addresses pressing global challenges on **access to energy, clean air, water, and land.**

Focus Areas

CEEW's research and advisory work cover a broad spectrum within the **sustainability sector:**

- **Energy:** Clean energy transitions, power markets, energy access, industrial decarbonization, renewable energy, and energy finance.
- **Environment:** Climate change adaptation and mitigation, air pollution, forests, biodiversity, and resource efficiency.
- **Water:** Water resources management, water-energy-food nexus, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene).
- **Other Areas:** Urbanization, technology innovation, sustainable finance, and strategic affairs.

How CEEW Works

- **Research:** Conducts rigorous, data-driven research to assess challenges and identify solutions.
- **Policy Influence:** Engages with policymakers at the national, state, and international levels to inform evidence-based policymaking.
- **Capacity Building: Provides training and skill development for professionals working in the sustainability sector.**

- **Outreach:** Communicates findings and engages with the public through publications, events, conferences, and partnerships.

Key Achievements

CEEW has a track record of significant contributions. Here's a small sample:

- Contributed to the design of India's National Electricity Plan.
- Played a role in shaping India's National Clean Air Program (NCAP).
- Helped conceptualize the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- Research on improving access to clean cooking fuels has influenced India's flagship Ujjwala scheme.

Designed India's first renewable energy certificate (REC) market.

- Studies show a direct link between natural disasters and gender-based violence against women.
- **Extreme weather events and changes in water cycle patterns affect access to safe drinking water, increasing women's workload and reducing time for productive work and healthcare.**
- The past decade has been the hottest ever recorded, with India likely to face unprecedented heat waves.
- Prolonged heat poses risks for pregnant women, young children, and the elderly, increasing the chances of **preterm birth and other complications.**
- **Air pollution, both indoor and outdoor, affects women's health, causing respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and affects the physical and cognitive growth of unborn children.**
- Climate change disproportionately affects certain sub-groups of women, highlighting the need for more evidence on their vulnerabilities.
- Climate action requires the participation of everyone to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C.
- **Empowering women leads to better climate solutions, as seen in increased agricultural yields when women have equal access to resources.**
- Tribal and rural women are often leaders in environmental conservation efforts.
- **Providing women and women collectives with knowledge, tools, and resources encourages local solutions to climate challenges.**
- **Adaptation measures must be tailored to different contexts,** considering variations in heat exposure, air pollution, and access to water and food between rural and urban areas.

On Heat waves and water shortage:

- Immediate action is needed to reduce the impact of **prolonged heat on vulnerable groups such as outdoor workers, pregnant women, infants, children, and the elderly**.
- Excess deaths occur during heat waves, impacting productivity and the economy.
- **Urban local bodies, municipal corporations, and district authorities in vulnerable districts should have plans and provide training and resources for implementation.**
- **Measures to minimize heat-related deaths include heat wave warnings, adjusting outdoor work and school timings, establishing cooling rooms in health facilities, providing public drinking water facilities, and immediate treatment for heatstroke.**
- **Long-term actions include urban planning to increase tree cover, reduce concrete, create green-blue spaces, and design heat-resilient housing.**
- The Mahila Housing Trust in Udaipur demonstrated **that painting low-income house roofs with reflective white paint can reduce indoor temperatures and improve quality of life.**
- Water scarcity poses a significant threat, requiring societal action.
- India historically had advanced rainwater harvesting and storage systems.

- Projects like those by the **M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Tamil Nadu use geographic information systems to map water sources, identify vulnerabilities, and develop local plans for improved water access using government schemes and resources.**

Working at the village level:

- Effective convergence of sectors and services, along with prioritization of actions, is best achieved at the village or Panchayat levels.
- **Devolution of powers and finances to Panchayat, along with capacity building for Panchayat and Self-Help Group (SHG) members, can demonstrate India's resilience-building approach in a community-led and participatory manner.**
- State-action plans on climate change should incorporate a gender lens to address the impacts on women comprehensively.
- **National and State Action Plans on Climate Change (NAPCC and SAPCC)** often depict women as victims without delving into deeper gender dynamics.
- A review of 28 SAPCCs revealed a lack of transformative approaches, with few recognizing women as agents of change.
- Recommendations for revising SAPCCs stress moving beyond stereotypes, recognizing vulnerabilities of all genders, and implementing gender-transformative strategies for comprehensive and equitable climate adaptation.
- Women should not be labelled as victims but rather empowered to lead in climate action efforts.

About UNDP

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the lead United Nations agency focused on international development. It works **to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and build resilience,** helping countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UNDP's work centers around three main pillars:

1. **Sustainable Development:** Supports countries to achieve economic growth in ways that are inclusive, protect the planet, and build resilience against future shocks.
2. **Democratic Governance and Peace building:** Helps strengthen democratic institutions, promote peace and conflict resolution, and support inclusive participation in decision-making.
3. **Climate and Disaster Resilience:** Assists countries in adapting to climate change, reducing their disaster risk, and transitioning to clean, renewable energy sources.

How the UNDP Operates

- **Global Network:** The UNDP has offices in about 170 countries and territories, providing on-the-ground support and local expertise.
- **Policy Advice:** Works with governments to develop and implement policies aligned with development goals.
- **Capacity Building: Strengthens institutions and individuals in developing countries to take ownership of their development initiatives.**
- **Partnerships: Collaborates with governments, other UN agencies, civil society, the private sector, and local communities** to achieve its mission.

Funding:

The UNDP is **funded primarily by voluntary contributions from UN member states.**

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7. Forest Rights to be the Key Issue for Elections:

- **Land Conflict Watch** analysed land-related conflicts in India.
- They found that almost **one-third of these conflicts occur in Lok Sabha constituencies** where the implementation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a significant election issue**.
- Out **of 781 conflicts analysed,** 264 were mapped to constituencies where FRA is important.
- Among these conflicts, **117 directly affect forest-dwelling communities**, involving nearly 2.1 lakh hectares of land and 6.1 lakh people.
- Around **44% of these conflicts were triggered by conservation and forestry projects**, such as plantations, involving the forest administration.
- The Forest department appears to be the main adversarial party in many of these conflicts, according to Anmol Gupta, one of the authors of the report.
- **Approximately 88% of the conflicts analysed involve the non-implementation or violation of key provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA).**
- Other major points of conflict include **the lack of legal protection over land rights**, **forced evictions, and dispossession of land**.
- Around **110 conflicts are located in constituencies reserved for Scheduled Tribes**, and 77 are in constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes.
- **Maharashtra, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh have the highest number of "core" FRA constituencies,** where more than 20% of the resident electorate are eligible to claim rights under the FRA.
- The **states with the maximum number of conflicts involving forest rights issues in FRA-critical constituencies are Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.**
- According to the latest estimates from the Centre, as of February 2024, **2.45 million titles have been accorded to tribal and forest dwellers**, while five million claims to title have been received. About 34% of claims have been rejected by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

About Forest Rights Act:

Provisions

- **Title Rights:** Forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and traditional forest dwellers have the **right to own and live on forest land for habitation or self-cultivation**. This includes individual or common occupation for livelihood.
- **Community Rights:** This includes rights like nistar used in different regimes, **access to minor forest produce traditionally collected within or outside village boundaries, and other community entitlements like fishing and grazing.**
- **Rights to Protect and Manage Forest Resources:** Communities have the right to protect, regenerate, conserve, and manage any community forest resource traditionally protected and conserved for sustainable use.
- **Rights Recognized under State Laws:** These are rights recognized under any state law or laws of any **Autonomous District Council or Autonomous Regional Council, as well as traditional or customary laws of concerned tribes**.
- **Access to Biodiversity and Traditional Knowledge:** This includes the right of access to biodiversity and community rights to intellectual property and traditional knowledge related to biodiversity and cultural diversity.
- **Other Traditional Rights**: Any other traditional rights customarily enjoyed by forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes or other traditional forest dwellers, excluding the traditional right of hunting or trapping.

Eligibility Criteria

- **Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribe (FDST)**:
  1. Must belong to a Scheduled Tribe in the area where the rights are claimed.

2. Must have primarily resided in forest or forest land before December 13, 2005.
3. Must depend on the forest or forest land for genuine livelihood needs.

-   **Other Traditional Forest Dweller (OTFD)**:
    1. Must have primarily resided in forest or forest land for three generations (75 years) before December 13, 2005.
    2. Must depend on the forest or forest land for genuine livelihood needs.
-   **Community Recognition for OTFD**:
    -   If **an Other Traditional Forest Dweller (OTFD) village proves its eligibility under the Act, every individual member doesn't need to establish eligibility separately.**

Process of Recognition of Rights

Recognition of Rights Process:

-   **Initiation**: Gram sabha (village assembly) passes a resolution recommending whose rights should be recognized.
-   **Approval Process**:
    -   Resolution is screened and approved at the sub-division (or taluka) level.
    -   Further approval is sought at the district level.
-   **Committee Composition**:
    -   **Committees include government officials (Forest, Revenue, and Tribal Welfare departments) and elected local body members.**
    -   Committees also handle appeals.

Resettlement for Wildlife Conservation:

-   **Procedure**:
    -   Scientific necessity and lack of alternatives for relocation must be demonstrated through public consultation.
    -   Local community consent is required.
    -   Resettlement must provide compensation and secure livelihood.

2022 Forest Conservation Amendment:

-   **Introduction**:
    -   Amends the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.
    -   Shifts forest rights from tribal communities to large corporations.
-   **Key Points**:
    -   District collectors can override Gram Sabha approvals and transfer forest land to private entities.
    -   Forest dwellers lose participatory rights, while corporations gain development rights.
    Rationale: Aimed at simplifying forest clearance and streamlining land transfer approvals.
-   **Concerns**:
    -   Viewed as prioritizing business interests over environmental protection and indigenous rights.
    -   Raises fears of exploitation of forest resources and harm to forest-dependent communities.
-   **Calls for Action**:
    -   Many demand repeal of the amendment and implementation of the Forest Rights Act to safeguard communities and the environment.

Misunderstanding the Act as a land distribution scheme

-   Common misunderstanding: Belief that the Act aims to distribute forest land to forest dwellers or tribals, allocating 4 hectares per family.
-   Actual purpose: Intended to recognize lands already under cultivation as of December 13, 2005, not to grant title to new lands.

Opposition:

-   Concerns from environmentalists and wildlife conservationists.
-   Some view the Act as a land distribution scheme leading to forest handover to tribals.

- Strongest opposition from wildlife conservationists fearing interference with creating "inviolate spaces" for wildlife conservation, especially concerning tiger habitats.

Interpretation Regarding Deadline Cut-off Date:

- Proposal for inclusion of a "deadline cut-off date" by M. Sai Sampath, emphasizing completion of forest rights recognition process.
- Correlation between forest land decline/encroachment and FRA 2006 implementation, with an extent of 16.21 lakh hectares of encroached forest land reported post-Act implementation.

Supporters' Perspective:

- Act not seen as a land distribution measure but as a transparent law to prevent land grabbing.
- Provides clear procedure for resettling people when necessary for wildlife protection, with safeguards against arbitrary actions.
- Provisions for community conservation believed to strengthen forest protection by granting legal rights for communities to safeguard forests.

Criticism by forest rights supporters

- Supporters endorse the principles of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) but express dissatisfaction with the final version of the law.
- Joint Parliamentary Committee's recommendations were partly rejected, with some crucial clauses being left out.
- Concerns raised about the final law making **it easier to exclude certain categories of tribal and non-tribal forest dwellers.**
- Democratic processes within the Act are believed to have been undermined.
- **Additional bureaucratic restrictions imposed on people's rights** are criticized.
- The **Campaign for Survival and Dignity characterized the final law as "both a victory and a betrayal" in their official statement.**

8. Health:

8.1 The reality of the Swachh Bharat Mission:

A scheme fully owned by the state has become a toolkit for privatisation of public health services and continues caste discrimination

- India ranked at the bottom of 180 countries in the Environment Performance Index (EPI) in 2022.
- The EPI assesses countries based on climate change performance, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality.
- It uses 40 performance indicators across 11 issue categories, including air quality and drinking water sanitation.
- The Indian government criticized the ranking, claiming the methodology is flawed and doesn't represent the Indian scenario accurately.
- Over the past decade, the Modi government launched several development campaigns, such as Swachh Bharat Mission and National Clean Air Programme.
- These campaigns aim to improve living standards by addressing issues like water, sanitation, and clean energy.
- However, despite these efforts, there has been an increase in population vulnerability due to air and water pollution.
- The discrepancy between the government's efforts and the worsening environmental conditions raises questions about the effectiveness of these initiatives.

The Swachh Bharat Mission

- The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and SBM 2.0 aim to make Indian cities free of garbage.
- However, sanitation and waste management in India are linked to the caste system, with historically marginalized castes forced to perform sanitation work.
- SBM tried to promote the idea that sanitation is everyone's responsibility but ended up perpetuating caste-based practices.
- The project is politically successful, with no objections raised by opposition parties or communities.
- While the government claims India is open defecation-free, reports indicate otherwise.
- A Comptroller and Auditor General report highlighted poor quality construction of toilets under SBM.
- Some urban areas, especially slums, still lack access to public toilets.
- Even in rural areas, toilet construction is not linked to waste treatment, leading to environmental pollution.
- SBM aimed to reduce manual involvement in waste management by using capital-intensive technologies, but these technologies have failed to deliver.
- Governments outsourced waste management to private players, who often employ marginalized communities for the work.
- The Union government is implementing technological solutions for solid and liquid waste management in cities, such as waste-to-energy plants and biological methanation.
- However, there are few success stories in these initiatives.
- City governments are urged to purchase expensive machinery like road sweeping machines and vehicles for waste transportation, funded by available funds.
- Large contractors are often employed to manage sanitation services, leading to the privatization of public health services.
- Many of the workers employed by these contractors are Dalits, perpetuating caste discrimination.
- There is a severe shortage of sanitation inspectors in municipal corporations across states like Himachal Pradesh, with some municipalities having none at all.
- Similar problems exist in other government programs, contributing to India's poor performance in the Environment Performance Index (EPI).

Development Model

- The Environment Performance Index (EPI) reveals flaws in current development processes, highlighting their unsustainability.
- This indicates a need to modify existing development models to address environmental concerns.
- A recent Supreme Court judgment recognized the connection between climate change and fundamental human rights.
- Climate scientists attribute current environmental challenges to human activities and systemic issues.
- To address these challenges effectively, policies need to be aligned with human rights principles.

- Linking policies to human rights can help tackle environmental issues more comprehensively and ethically.

8.2 Toss out the junk food, bring back the healthy food plate:

There needs to be a people's movement, backed by sincere policy interventions, to promote healthy and nutritionally diverse diets and ensure informed food choices

- India is undergoing a significant dietary shift known as "**nutrition transition**," moving away from traditional **high-fiber diets towards more processed, calorie-rich Western-style diets**.
- This transition coincides with **economic progress, urbanization, and increased consumption of packaged and processed foods, commonly referred to as "junk foods."**
- **Junk foods are low in essential nutrients like vitamins and minerals but high in calories, fats, salt, sugar, and preservatives (Examples include sorbic acid, benzoic acid, and sodium nitrite).**
- Scientific evidence links junk food consumption to **weakened immune systems, high blood pressure, elevated blood sugar levels, weight gain, and increased cancer risk.**
- Examples of junk or **high in fats, salts, and sugars (HFSS) foods** include **cookies, cakes, chips, sugary drinks, instant noodles, canned fruits, and bakery products.**
- Unhealthy diets are a major contributor to the rise of **lifestyle diseases** in India, with a significant portion of the population affected by **metabolic disorders like diabetes, hypertension, and abdominal obesity.**
- Aggressive advertising promoting **"tasty" and "affordable" comfort foods**, particularly **targeting younger consumers**, plays a significant role in shaping dietary habits.
- Studies show a high prevalence of packaged food consumption among children, with a **substantial portion consuming sweetened beverages and packaged foods daily.**
- The **ultra-processed food industry** in India has seen rapid growth, with the food processing industry projected to reach **$535 billion by 2025-26**.

Court's concern

- Supreme Court in (Subhash Kumar vs State of Bihar Case (1991), M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India & Ors. (2013), Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) vs. Union of India (UOI) & Others case (2015): Stressed that hazardous foods threaten the **right to life under Article 21** of the Constitution.
- Prioritized healthy foods and active lifestyles through programs like **Eat Right India, Fit India Movement, and Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (Poshan) 2.0 .**
- **FSSAI Regulations**: Restricted sale of HFSS foods near schools to protect children from unhealthy eating.
- **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights**: Issued notices to health drink companies for misleading advertising about product healthiness.
- Implementation Challenges: Despite policies, effective action to reduce junk food consumption remains difficult.
- Key Strategies:
    - Strengthen regulatory enforcement.
    - Implement nutrition education programs.
    - **Encourage food industry reformulation.**

- Promote community-based initiatives for healthy eating.

Formulate a Clear Definition

- Protect children from junk food:

    - FSSAI lacks clear definition of HFSS foods.
    - Define HFSS foods for better regulation implementation.
    - Ensure stricter compliance of school food regulations by **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights.**

- **Use Front-of-Pack Labelling (FOPL):**

    - Helps consumers make informed food choices.
    - Current nutrition tables on food packets often ignored.
    - Implement warning labels like "high in salt" on front for better understanding.

- Indian Nutrition Rating (INR):

    - Included in draft regulations.
    - Concerns about star ratings allowing unhealthy foods to pass.

Have Subsidies for Healthy Foods

- Positive subsidies for healthy foods:

    - Promote whole foods, millets, fruits, and vegetables.
    - Make them more available and affordable.
    - Encourage greater consumption in rural and urban areas.

- Behavioural change campaign:

    - Target children and young adults.
    - Educate about healthy eating habits.
    - Highlight the health risks of junk foods.
    - Promote local and seasonal produce.
    - Use social media influencers for awareness.

- Urgency of healthier diets:

    - Create a "Jan Andolan" or people's movement.
    - Generate public demand for healthy diets.
    - Implement policy interventions for informed food choices.

8.3. The advent of a holistic approach to 'one health':

The 'National One Health Mission' is the result of recognition that only a coordinated approach will ensure a better response to disease outbreaks

- The emergence of pandemics like COVID-19 has highlighted the **interdependence between humans, animals, and the environment.**
- Pandemics not only affect humans but also livestock, as seen with outbreaks **like**

- The cabinet's decision on the **'National One Health Mission'** is a significant milestone in addressing this interconnectedness.
- In July 2022, the **Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC)** endorsed the establishment of the mission.
- **Thirteen Ministries and Departments, along with science funding agencies, including the Department Of Science and Technology, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), came together to shape the mission.**
- **Ministries involved include Health, Animal Husbandry, Environment, Defence, and AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy).**
- The **mission takes a holistic approach to One Health and pandemic preparedness**.
- There was consensus among the leadership to establish a **National Institute for One Health.**
- **Located in Nagpur,** the **institute will serve as the anchor for coordinating national activities and as the nodal agency for international coordination.**
- The foundation stone of the institute was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 11, 2022.

More a journey

- **The 'National One Health Mission' aims to:**
  o Develop strategies for integrated disease surveillance and joint outbreak response.
  o Coordinate research and development (R&D) efforts.
  o Ensure seamless information sharing to control both routine and pandemic diseases.
  o Diseases affecting animals, like foot and mouth disease or lumpy skin disease, can impact productivity and trade.
  o Diseases such as canine distemper also affect wild animals and their conservation.
- **A coordinated approach** is essential to prepare for **diseases like avian influenza or Nipah, which could cause the next pandemic.**
- **Strong R&D efforts** are crucial for pandemic preparedness, including developing vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.
- **Departments involved include** the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and Department of Pharmaceuticals.
- **Academic centers and the private sector are also vital stakeholders in this effort.**
- **Close coordination between the Centre and States** is necessary for effective implementation.
- Working with States will help introduce the One Health approach at the ground level and refine the strategy based on implementation lessons.

A network of laboratories

- The **'National One Health Mission' has established a national network of high-risk pathogen laboratories, including Biosafety level 3 (BSL 3) and Biosafety level 4 (BSL 4) facilities.**
- **Bringing together these laboratories managed by different departments enhances disease outbreak response across human, animal, and environmental sectors.**
- This integrated approach **improves resource utilization and facilitates better coordination to tackle diseases involving multiple species, such as Nipah virus outbreaks.**
- India aims to strengthen its epidemiology and data analytic capabilities under the mission.

- Efforts include applying **artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and disease modeling to address public health challenges.**
- Capacity building in epidemiology across sectors is being coordinated.
- Emerging techniques like **genomic surveillance from wastewater, which showed promise during the COVID-19 pandemic**, will be expanded.
- **This expansion will cover various sentinel sites, including locations where animals (livestock or wildlife) gather, to monitor a wider range of diseases across human, livestock, and environmental domains.**

A Global Subject

- **During India's presidency of the G-20, the 'One Health' approach was emphasized and supported by all member countries.**
- The goal is to collaborate on building better **surveillance capacity, analytic capability, and establishing an international network of 'One Health' institutes.**
- 'One Health' extends beyond diseases to encompass broader issues like **antimicrobial resistance, food safety, plant diseases, and the impact of climate change** on these aspects.
- **Intersectoral cooperation involving governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, and citizens is crucial for addressing 'One Health' challenges effectively**.
- An actionable framework focusing on **'One Earth, One Health' and 'Health for All'** can drive progress towards achieving these goals.

8.4 Gross mismanagement: On TB drug shortages and India's national TB programme:

India is falling behind in efforts to control tuberculosis

- **India aims to "eliminate" tuberculosis (TB) by 2025**, but is facing challenges due to shortages of TB drugs, including those for drug-sensitive TB.
- The shortage of TB drugs has been ongoing, with disruptions in drug supply occurring frequently.
- In the past, there were acute shortages of critical drugs for multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), such as **Delamanid,** lasting nearly a year.
- Drug availability is essential for timely diagnosis and treatment initiation, as well as treatment success for TB patients.
- A shortage of TB drugs can lead to delays in treatment initiation and adherence issues among patients.
- Despite being close to the target date, there is still a shortage of drug-sensitive TB medicines in India, manufactured by multiple players within the country.
- Renaming the **National TB Control Programme to the National TB Elimination Programme** without addressing fundamental issues like drug availability is seen as incompetent.
- The Health Ministry's permission for states to procure drugs locally at the last minute creates challenges at the field level.
- A recent Health Ministry circular allows states to procure drugs locally for three months due to potential delays in drug supply.

- **In case district health facilities fail to provide free drugs, patients may need to purchase medicines themselves, which is challenging for those with poor socioeconomic backgrounds.**
- India's management of TB control appears inadequate, and the country **does not seem prepared to achieve its 2025 goal of TB elimination.**

8.5. Shaping India's path to Inclusive Health Care:

India's health equity issues require a comprehensive approach that go beyond improvements in health-care facilities

- **World Health Day is observed annually on April 7** to focus on health equity, which is crucial for global health and justice.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO) considers health a fundamental human right**, emphasizing the importance of ensuring access to healthcare for all.
- This year's **theme is "My Health, My Right,"** highlighting individuals' rights to access healthcare services.
- The COVID-19 pandemic, environmental crises, and widening socio-economic disparities have underscored the urgent need to address gaps in healthcare access.
- **Despite health being recognized as a constitutional right in over 140 countries, more than half of the world's population lacks complete access to essential health services.**
- The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All emphasizes the importance of promoting health equity to ensure that everyone has access to healthcare services.
- World Health Day 2024 serves as a reminder of the ongoing efforts needed to achieve health equity, offering hope for millions of people worldwide.

The Meaning of Health Equity

- **Health equity ensures everyone has an equal chance for good health, considering factors like social, economic, and environmental conditions.**
- The **World Health Organization (WHO) aims to eliminate preventable health disparities** among different social and economic groups.

> - Specialized Agency: The WHO is the leading specialized agency of the United Nations focused on directing and coordinating international public health.
> - Constitution (1948): Provides the WHO broad mandate to achieve "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health."
> - Membership: Comprise of 194 member states, participating through the World Health Assembly (WHA)

- It addresses root causes such as poverty, discrimination, limited access to education, healthy food, clean water, and housing.
- **For example, a child born into poverty lacks access to basic needs, leading to chronic health issues.**
- **Global challenges like pandemics and climate change worsen health disparities**, hitting marginalized groups hardest.
- In India, diverse populations face healthcare disparities, with **rural areas having limited access.**

- **Achieving health equity requires efforts beyond legislation, involving governments, communities, and individuals.**
- **Challenges include addressing social injustices, global health issues, and conflicts that disrupt healthcare access.**
- The **COVID-19 pandemic and climate change widen health equity gaps, affecting marginalized communities most, while conflicts hinder healthcare provision.**

India's Health Equity Challenge

- **India faces persistent challenges in achieving health equity due to differences in healthcare outcomes and access, especially in rural areas.**
- **Urban slums, comprising over 17% of metropolitan areas**, suffer from serious health disparities due to **overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited access to clean water.**
- **Infectious diseases like tuberculosis are 1.5 times more common in slums compared to non-slum areas, according to the Indian Council of Medical Research.**
- **Disparities across caste and gender are significant, with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes experiencing higher child mortality and lower immunisation rates.**
- **Women in the lowest wealth quintile have a 59% prevalence of anaemia, double that of the highest quintile, indicating the impact of caste, gender, and economic status on health outcomes.**
- **Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) contribute to over 60%** of all deaths in India, with projected economic costs exceeding **$6 trillion by 2030**, according to the Public Health Foundation of India.
- **There is a critical shortage of doctors, with only 0.8 doctors per 1,000 people, below the recommended ratio. The shortage is particularly acute in rural areas.**
- Achieving health equity requires addressing broader socioeconomic determinants of health beyond improving healthcare facilities.
- **A comprehensive approach involving collaboration between the government, civil society, healthcare providers, and communities is needed to advance universal health coverage and create a more equitable future for India.**
- **Governments play a significant role in influencing healthcare through funding, policies, and laws**, such as **India's Ayushman Bharat initiative providing free health coverage to the bottom 40% economically.**
- The **National Health Mission (NHM), including NRHM and NUHM, aims to reduce healthcare disparities between rural and urban** India by expanding access, strengthening infrastructure, and providing essential services to vulnerable populations.
- **Health literacy is crucial for achieving health equity, and integrating health education into NHM can empower people to seek equitable care and make informed health decisions.**
- Public and private healthcare sectors work together to provide services to underprivileged communities, focusing on preventive education, workforce development, and infrastructure enhancement.
- **NGOs and civic societies conduct community outreach to address regional health concerns, collaborating with international and governmental organizations to tailor culturally sensitive health initiatives.**

- International institutions like **WHO, the Global Fund, and Gavi support health initiatives in resource-limited areas and promote information and resource sharing to strengthen healthcare systems**, particularly in countries like India.
- The commercial sector and charitable organizations leverage innovation and technical advancements, especially **in digital health, to enhance accessibility, affordability, and effectiveness of healthcare.**
- **Research institutes and academic institutions play a vital role in understanding health inequalities and evaluating intervention effectiveness, contributing to evidence-based practices and policies supported by scientific studies.**

Tap These Organisations

- **Local organizations** play a crucial role in ensuring health equity by actively participating in all phases of health programs, from planning to evaluation, based on their understanding of community needs.
- **Successful collaborations for health equity rely on open communication, mutual respect, and shared goals, allowing for adaptation to changing health concerns and community needs.**
- Collaboration across various sectors, including policymakers and grassroots organizations, can greatly enhance health equity and work towards making access to high-quality healthcare a shared reality for all.

Ayushman Bharat

- **Flagship Health Scheme:** Ayushman Bharat, officially known as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), is the Indian government's flagship public health insurance scheme.
- **Launch:** Announced in 2018.
- **Aim:** Provide financial protection and quality health coverage to the country's economically vulnerable population.

Key Components:

1. **Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY):**
   o Provides secondary and tertiary hospitalization coverage of up to INR 5 lakhs per family per year.
   o Targets around 500 million beneficiaries from poor and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
   o Cashless and paperless access to empanelled private and public hospitals.
2. **Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs):**
   o Aims to upgrade 150,000 sub-health centers and primary health centers into HWCs to deliver comprehensive primary healthcare closer to communities.
   o Focuses on preventive care, screening, and treatment for common ailments and non-communicable diseases.

National Health Mission (NHM)

- The NHM is a flagship initiative of the Indian government launched in 2005, subsuming two earlier missions:
  o National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)
  o National Urban Health Mission (NUHM)

- Main program components include Health System Strengthening (RMNCH+A) in rural and urban areas- Reproductive-Maternal- Neonatal-Child and Adolescent Health, and Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases.
- NHM envisages achievement of universal access to equitable, affordable and quality health care services that are accountable and responsive to the needs of the people.

Key Objectives:

- **Strengthening Healthcare Infrastructure:**
  - o Upgrading rural and urban health facilities with better equipment, human resources, and services.
  - o Establishing new sub-centres, primary health centres, and community health centres.
- **Reduce Maternal and Child Mortality Rates:**
  - o Focus on improving maternal health services, including antenatal and postnatal care, institutional deliveries, and immunization programs.
  - o Addressing child health challenges like malnutrition and communicable diseases.
- **Control Communicable Diseases:**
  - o Strengthening disease surveillance systems.
  - o Implementing national programs for TB, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other communicable diseases.
- **Increased Access to Affordable Medicines:**
  - o Promoting essential drug availability and affordability at public health facilities

Global Fund

- **Multilateral Financing Organization:** The Global Fund is a global partnership established in 2002 aimed at accelerating the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria.
- **Funding Structure:** It relies on a collaboration of governments, civil society, the private sector, and people affected by the three diseases. The organization pools resources and distributes them to low- and middle-income countries with high disease burdens.
- **Impact-Driven Investments:** It emphasizes a country-led approach with a focus on results and measurable outcomes.

Key Focus Areas:

- **HIV/AIDS:** Provides funding for prevention, testing, treatment, care, and support programs.
- **Tuberculosis:** Supports TB case detection, diagnosis, treatment, and drug-resistant TB care.
- **Malaria:** Invests in insecticide-treated mosquito nets, indoor spraying, treatment, and preventive therapies.
- **Health Systems Strengthening:** Acknowledges the importance of robust healthcare infrastructure, therefore supports health systems as part of its strategy.

How it Works:

- **Resource Mobilization:** The Global Fund raises money through multi-year pledges from donor countries, the private sector, and foundations.
- **Country-Led Proposals:** Countries in need develop proposals, which the Global Fund reviews for funding approval.
- **Grant Implementation:** Countries awarded grants implement programs with technical assistance and oversight from the Global Fund.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

- **Goal:** Gavi is a **global public-private partnership established in 2000, dedicated to improving access to new and underused vaccines for children in the world's poorest countries.**

How Gavi Supports Health Initiatives

1. **Vaccine Funding:** Gavi raises funds from donor governments, philanthropic organizations, the private sector, and innovative financing mechanisms to subsidize vaccine costs for eligible countries.
2. **Procurement and Supply Chain:** Gavi pools demand for vaccines, negotiates lower prices with manufacturers, and supports reliable supply chains to ensure vaccines reach the most vulnerable communities.
3. **Immunization System Strengthening:** Gavi provides grants to countries to support health system improvements for vaccine delivery, including cold chain equipment, training of health workers, and data collection.
4. **Advocacy and Partnership:** Gavi works with governments, civil society, WHO, UNICEF, and other partners to advocate for the importance of immunization and build support for sustainable programs.

Gavi's Impact:

- **Increased Access:** Gavi has played a crucial role in increasing vaccination rates for diseases like measles, polio, diphtheria, and many others, preventing millions of child deaths.
- **Equity:** Gavi's focus on low-income countries with weak health systems helps ensure that the most vulnerable children receive life-saving vaccines.
- **Innovation:** Gavi drives innovation in vaccine development, delivery, and financing models

8.6. The ART of India's HIV/AIDS Response:

It has been 20 years since the path-breaking free Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) initiative began in India, and it has lessons for other public health programmes

- On **April 1, 2004, the Indian government launched Free Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)** for Persons living with HIV (PLHIV), marking a significant milestone in the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in India.
- This decision provided **free access to antiretroviral drugs for HIV-positive individuals**, proving to be a successful and crucial intervention in the fight against HIV/AIDS.
- In the early **1980s, HIV/AIDS was perceived as a death sentence** and was accompanied by widespread fear, stigma, and discrimination.
- **The first antiretroviral drug, AZT (zidovudine), was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) in March 1987**, followed by three more drugs in 1988, and the introduction of protease inhibitors in 1995.
- Despite these medical advancements, access to HIV/AIDS treatment remained limited for most of the world's population, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

The Evolution to free ART

- In 2000, at the UN General Assembly's Millennium Summit, world leaders established a goal to stop and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria was founded in 2002 to advocate for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services.
- In 2004, India estimated 5.1 million Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV), with a population prevalence of 0.4%. However, very few were receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART).
- Only 7,000 PLHIV were on ART by the end of 2004 due to high treatment costs and limited geographical access to treatment.

- The combination therapy known as HAART (highly active antiretroviral therapy) became available in 1996, but its cost was exorbitant at $10,000 a year.
- PLHIV faced stigma, and many lost their lives due to the unavailability and unaffordability of ARTs, leaving healthcare providers feeling helpless.
- Free ART (Antiretroviral Therapy) was made available for any adult living with HIV in a ground breaking decision.
- From November 2006, free ART was extended to children as well.
- Over two decades, the number of ART centres expanded from less than 10 to around 700, with 1,264 Link ART centres providing free ART drugs to approximately 1.8 million PLHIV.
- ART aims not only to start treatment for PLHIV but also to suppress the viral load, halting disease transmission.
- By 2023, HIV prevalence among 15-49-year-olds decreased to 0.20%, with an estimated 2.4 million PLHIV, reducing India's global share to 6.3% from around 10% two decades ago.
- As of 2023, an estimated 82% of PLHIV knew their HIV status, 72% were on ART, and 68% were virally suppressed.
- Annual new HIV infections in India declined by 48% since 2010, surpassing the global average of 31%, while AIDS-related mortalities declined by 82%, exceeding the global average of 47% since 2010.
- These achievements are noteworthy considering the challenges faced by other government-run public health programs in India.

Patient-centric approach to services

- Free ART played a significant role, but other initiatives complemented its success in halting the HIV epidemic.
- Complementary initiatives include providing free diagnostic facilities, focusing on preventing parent-to-child transmission of HIV (PPTCT) services, and managing opportunistic infections like tuberculosis (TB) and co-infections.
- The program demonstrated flexibility and adapted over time, with changes in ART eligibility criteria: from CD4 count less than 200 cells/mm3 (in 2004) to less than 500 cells/mm3 (in 2016), and finally to the 'Treat All' approach from 2017, initiating ART irrespective of CD4 count.
- The 'Treat All' approach reduced virus transmission at both individual and community levels, supplemented by free viral load testing for all PLHIV on treatment.
- A patient-centric approach was adopted, providing two to three months of medicines to stable PLHIV, reducing patient visits, travel time, and costs.
- This approach increased treatment adherence and decongested ART centers, allowing healthcare workers more time for other patients.
- India continually added newer and more potent drugs to the program, such as Dolutegravir (DTG) in 2020.
- In 2021, India implemented rapid ART initiation, starting ART within seven days of HIV diagnosis, and sometimes even on the same day.
- The fight against HIV/AIDS continues with India's National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) phase 5.
- Phase 5 aims to achieve ambitious targets by 2025:

- Reduce annual new HIV infections by 80%.
- Reduce AIDS-related mortalities by 80%.
- Eliminate vertical transmission of HIV and syphilis.

> - Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium Treponema pallidum. It can be transmitted through sexual contact with someone who has the infection, including vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
> - Syphilis can also be transmitted from a pregnant person to their unborn baby during pregnancy or childbirth.

- To accomplish these goals, NACP phase 5 aims for 95-95-95 targets by 2025:
  - 95% of all people living with HIV should know their HIV status.
  - 95% of all people diagnosed with HIV infection should receive sustained antiretroviral therapy (ART).
  - 95% of all people receiving ART should achieve viral suppression.
- These targets align with global targets set by UNAIDS, focusing on improving diagnosis, treatment, and viral suppression rates to control the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Crossing the Hurdles

- Delayed enrolment to ART facilities is a major challenge, with many patients seeking treatment only when their CD4 count is below 200.
- Patients may start feeling better on ART and then stop taking their medication, leading to missed doses and the development of resistance.
- Ensuring sustained supply and availability of ART drugs across all regions, including **remote areas,** is crucial.
- **Private sector engagement in PLHIV care** needs to be emphasized to broaden access to treatment.
- **Continuous training and capacity building for healthcare staff** are essential to keep up with evolving scientific knowledge.
- **Integration with other health programs like hepatitis, diabetes**, hypertension, and mental health is necessary as PLHIV often have other health issues.
- A focused approach to reduce preventable mortality should include systematic death reviews and access to advanced diagnostics.
- Success of India's free ART initiative attributed to:
  - Political will and consistent support from successive governments.
  - Sustained and adequate funding for the program.
  - Regular program reviews and field-based monitoring to ensure effectiveness.
  - Implementation of complementary initiatives alongside free ART.
  - Engagement and participation of communities and stakeholders.
  - People-centric modifications in service delivery to meet the needs of PLHIV.
  - Efforts to bridge policy intentions with implementation gaps.
  - Continuous expansion of services to reach more PLHIV.

- **Free ART initiative played a significant role in curbing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in India.**
  - It demonstrates the effectiveness of government-run public health programs in providing quality, free, and accessible health services to all.
  - It offers valuable insights and lessons for other public health initiatives in the country.
  - It can serves as a model for launching similar initiatives, such as nationwide free hepatitis C treatment, to accelerate progress towards disease elimination.

9. Education:

9.1 Data for Better Education, a Brighter Future for Students:

Learning outcomes data in the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 is, unarguably, cause for concern, but rather than lament, ASER, complemented by other data, must be used for corrective action.

- The **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 was released in mid-January, continuing a tradition since 2005**, except for the COVID-19 years.
- The report has garnered significant attention, as usual, for its insights into various aspects of education.
- One notable focus of the report has been on the **foundational skills of 14-18 year olds.**
- Learning outcomes data presented in the report is concerning, highlighting areas where students are struggling.
- Practitioners and policymakers are urged to delve deeper into the data to extract actionable insights.
- The goal is to use these insights to improve education and overall outcomes for India's adolescents and youth.

On Foundational Learning Trajectories

- The ASER 2023 Beyond Basics survey was conducted in 28 rural districts across 26 states of India.
- While the sample is not nationally representative, it still reflects district-level trends and gives an idea of the activities, abilities, including digital abilities, and aspirations of 14-18 year olds.
- The report reveals that overall, 26% of 14-18 year olds cannot read a standard two level text in their regional language, which is concerning.
- The situation reflects the consequences of past failures in education, as an 18-year-old in 2023 would have been a 13-year-old in 2018, likely at a standard seven or eight level.
- **In 2018, around 32% of standard seven and 27% of standard eight children could not read a standard two level text, indicating a lack of foundational skills in primary grades.**
- Foundational learning trajectories tend to be flat and become flatter in upper grades, meaning children are unlikely to acquire these skills later without focused interventions.
- **About 57% of 14-18 year olds surveyed who lack basic reading skills are enrolled in standard 10 or below, while another 28% are not enrolled in any educational institution.**
- The NSSO 75th round in 2017-18 revealed that attendance in secondary grades (standards nine and 10) in rural India was as low as 60%.

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- Among 14-18 year olds who struggle with reading fluency, even those enrolled in school may not attend regularly.
- **Focusing solely on school-based reading improvement programs may not be effective without addressing issues of school attendance and motivation to read.**
- ASER 2022 shows that many children in standard eight who struggle with reading can read a simpler level of text, indicating they need guidance and encouragement to improve.
- **Lack of access to reading materials other than school textbooks is a significant issue in rural households, hindering the development of reading habits.**
- Community libraries can play a crucial role in promoting reading habits, creativity, and critical thinking.
- However, the success of libraries depends on effective management and leadership by committed individuals who can create a supportive reading environment for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Children and Careers

- ASER 2023 sheds light on the aspirations and perspectives of 14-18 year olds regarding their future.
- **More than 60% of surveyed children aim to pursue at least a college education, with a higher percentage of girls (65%) aspiring for college compared to boys (59%).**
- **Regarding work aspirations, one in five children hadn't thought about it, while others mentioned joining the police or defence forces as prominent options for boys, and becoming a teacher or doctor for girls.**
- While developing aspirations is crucial, **youth require support, mentorship, and inspiration to evaluate and pursue their goals effectively.**
- Nearly half of surveyed 14-18 year olds with work aspirations **don't know anyone working in their desired profession, limiting their exposure to career paths.**
- Focus group discussions in Sitapur and Dhamtari revealed negative perceptions of vocational education as a fallback option for those unable to secure white-collar jobs.
- However, in **Solan, vocational courses like tourism and hotel management** introduced in schools gained aspirational value, with

ASER

- **The largest citizen-led household survey in India.** ASER provides a yearly snapshot of children's schooling and learning outcomes in rural districts across the nation.

- **Conducted by Pratham Education Foundation.** Pratham is a well-respected, non-governmental organization working in the field of education in India.

- **Focuses on children's foundational skills.** ASER assesses basic reading and arithmetic abilities of children ages 5-16.

Why is ASER important?

- **Provides reliable data on learning outcomes.** While school enrolment data is often available, ASER digs deeper into actual learning levels, highlighting areas where improvement is needed.

- **Informs policy:** ASER findings are used by governments, NGOs, and researchers to understand the state of education in rural areas and design targeted interventions.

Citizen-led model: ASER's methodology relies on volunteers, showcasing the power of community participation in assessing the educational landscape.

on-the-job training, certification, and career prospect information encouraging students to pursue related professions.

Technology Use

- ASER 2023 and the **State of Elementary Education in Rural India Report** emphasize the increasing access of youth to smartphones.
- **Teenagers primarily use smartphones for entertainment and social media rather than educational purposes.**
- **Digital technology** can be leveraged to align with youth's motivations and interests, providing them with the foundations of their desired professions and connecting them with relevant professionals.
- For instance, students aspiring to become nurses can take **online courses on nursing and related subjects or short modules like administering first aid.**
- Collaboration among educational technology agencies, industries, and professional groups is crucial for this initiative.
- Schools and colleges should take the lead in understanding and cultivating youth's aspirations, guiding them to appropriate platforms and avenues for learning.
- **Rigorously designed and collected data, including ASER data**, not only highlight problems but also provide crucial insights for action.
- Instead of lamenting over the issues, it's essential to delve deeper **into identifying where to act, how to act, and who should take action.**

9.2 Universities must budge on College Autonomy Nudge:

Universities need to address the concerns of colleges as autonomy does have a transformative effect on higher education

- The **National Education Policy 2020** aims to transform colleges into autonomous institutions, promoting innovation, self-governance, and academic freedom.
- In April 2023, the University Grants Commission (UGC) introduced new regulations to facilitate this transition.
- The response from colleges seeking autonomous status has been remarkable, with 590 applications received since the launch.
- **Granting autonomy to colleges is crucial for fostering innovation, improving academic quality, and achieving institutional excellence.**
- Autonomous colleges can **customize their curriculum to meet the changing needs of students and industries.**
- They can experiment with new teaching methods and research initiatives, advancing knowledge and contributing to societal progress.
- **Autonomy promotes accountability and responsibility among colleges, empowering them to make academic and administrative decisions independently.**
- This empowerment **enhances institutional efficiency and fosters a sense of pride and identity within colleges, motivating faculty and staff to excel.**

Rankings Prove a Point

- The NIRF 2023 rankings highlight the positive impact of autonomy on college performance in India.
- In the **'Colleges Category', 55 out of the top 100 colleges are autonomous institutions,** indicating the effectiveness of autonomy in promoting academic excellence and institutional effectiveness.
- **Among the top 10 colleges in the NIRF 2023 rankings, five are autonomous colleges,** demonstrating the success of autonomy in achieving academic excellence.
- The trend towards establishing autonomous colleges in higher education is increasing, with the number expected to soon reach **1,000 across 24 States and Union Territories.**
- States like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana have a high number of autonomous colleges, with over **80% of the total count.**
- Even in states with fewer autonomous institutions, such as Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, and West Bengal, there is a nationwide interest in exploring autonomy's potential to enhance institutional effectiveness.
- The presence of autonomous colleges across regions underscores the growing realization of the transformative effect autonomy can have on higher education in India.

Address the many post-autonomy Challenges

- While UGC promotes autonomy for colleges, some universities resist relinquishing control.
- **Universities often impose limitations on autonomy, such as caps on syllabus changes, hindering colleges' ability to innovate.**
- Colleges face delays from universities in recognizing autonomy, hampering efficiency and undermining autonomy's spirit.
- **Universities hesitate to grant full autonomy to colleges, particularly in syllabus design and introducing new courses.**
- This reluctance may stem from **traditional hierarchical governance within universities**.
- **Colleges may face arbitrary fees imposed by universities for affiliation**, undermining autonomy and raising transparency concerns.
- State Councils for Higher Education should ensure effective implementation of UGC regulations on autonomy.
- Universities must address concerns of autonomous colleges within higher education reform, streamlining decision-making processes.
- **Collaboration between universities and autonomous colleges is essential for fostering innovation and academic excellence.**
- A conducive environment for autonomy to thrive will drive innovation, excellence, and inclusivity in higher education.
- Effective implementation of autonomy requires cooperation from all stakeholders to overcome challenges and ensure a vibrant higher education ecosystem.

10. Vulnerable Section:

10.1 New insurance rules help senior citizens:

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) implemented the Insurance Products Regulations, 2024, starting from April 1.
- These regulations are part of broader reforms initiated by the IRDAI **to enhance the insurance sector.**
- The new norms address different aspects of **life insurance, general insurance, and health insurance.**
- There is significant interest in these regulations, especially regarding the anticipated **alteration in the upper age limit for obtaining a new health insurance policy**.

What do the new regulations address?

- The new Insurance Products Regulations, 2024 aim to enable insurers to respond more quickly to changing market needs.
- They also seek **to improve the ease of doing business and increase insurance penetration while protecting policyholders' interests.**
- Good governance practices are encouraged among insurers in designing and pricing their products to ensure policyholder protection.
- In health insurance, the **regulations reduce the "specific waiting period" from four years to three years.**
- This means a shorter wait time for insurance coverage for specified diseases or treatments, excluding those resulting from accidents.
- After the waiting period, diseases or treatments will be covered if the policy is renewed without any breaks.
- The definition of a pre-existing disease now includes any health condition diagnosed or treated by a physician within three years before policy commencement.
- **AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy systems) treatment coverage is emphasized in the new regulations.**
- **Insurers are mandated to provide coverage for AYUSH treatments on par with other treatment options.**
- The previous regulation allowed insurers to provide coverage for AYUSH treatments under certain conditions specified by the authority.
- **Insurers are advised not to deny renewal of health insurance policies based solely on past claims, except for specific benefit-based policies.**

What changes are relevant to senior citizens?

- The April 1 notification aims to expand insurance coverage, aligning with **IRDAI's goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047'.**
- Previously, the **Health Insurance Regulations, 2016**, stated that health insurance policies must allow entry up to at least 65 years of age.
- This means insurers couldn't refuse coverage to individuals up to the age of 65.
- Despite this regulation, some insurers already offered policies with entry ages up to 99 years.
- The new regulations require insurers to establish a separate channel for addressing health insurance claims and grievances of senior citizens.
- This move is intended to ensure better service and support for elderly policyholders.

How are insurance companies likely to respond to the new regulations?

- IRDAI's nudging towards expanding insurance coverage is prompting insurers to consider new products for individuals above 65 years old.
- Many insurers are adopting a wait-and-watch approach, while some may start developing new products tailored for this demographic.
- Industry officials anticipate insurers gradually resetting the maximum entry age for health insurance to 99 years.
- Previously, there was no explicit age restriction, but health insurance products had minimum and maximum entry ages.
- The earlier regulations required the maximum entry age to be at least 65 years, but this provision has been removed now.
- Insurers now have the flexibility to set their own minimum and maximum entry ages for health insurance policies.

How significant are the changes?

- **Affordability of health insurance premiums is crucial for senior citizens, especially when they need coverage the most.**
- **IRDAI does not interfere with the pricing of health insurance products** but has introduced new regulations **regarding premium payment and incentives**.
- **According to the new regulations, the premium shall remain unchanged for the policy term, and insurers may offer facilities like premium payment in instalments and incentives for early entry, continued renewals, and favorable claims experience.**
- Star Health & Allied Insurance is among the few companies that provide health insurance to individuals above 65 at the time of entry, emphasizing the importance of buying a policy early for comprehensive coverage.
- **Buying health insurance early provides comprehensive coverage and guarantees policy renewal without an increase in premium, even if ailments develop later.**
- Health insurance policies are becoming modular with varying features to accommodate customers' paying capacity, and buying health cover young reduces the waiting period.
- The changes in regulations provide insurers with flexibility to develop products for different demographic segments, with the ability to offer better features and affordability depending on factors **like disease incidence and medical inflation.**

10.2 An overview of the PMAY-U scheme:

- The current Union government has completed two terms.
- One of its flagship programs was **Housing For All (HfA) by 2022**.
- The program **aimed to provide housing in both urban and rural areas.**
- It was planned under the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) scheme in 2015**.

What is the PMAY scheme?

- PMAY is a centrally sponsored scheme.
- Both the Union and State governments are supposed to financially contribute to it.
- The objectives of the scheme include:

- Rehabilitation of **slum dwellers with private developers' participation.**
- Promotion of affordable housing for weaker sections **through Credit Linked Subsidy Schemes (CLSS).**
- Affordable housing in partnership with public and private sectors.
- Subsidy for Beneficiary-led Construction (BLC).

How has the scheme panned out?

- HfA (Housing for All) remains incomplete despite the supposed completion of the scheme.
- In August 2022, the PMAY-Urban (PMAY-U) was extended until December 31, 2024, to complete already sanctioned houses.
- There is estimated to be **a shortage of around 20 million houses in rural areas and three million in urban centers.**
- However, actual figures suggest a greater shortfall, **with the urban housing shortage increasing by 54% from 2012 to 2018.**
- The PMAY-U has not met expectations, with a shortfall of around 40 lakh houses from the sanctioned and completed segments.
- **The ISSR (in-situ slum redevelopment) has particularly failed, with only 2,10,552 houses sanctioned.**
- According to reports, **the PMAY-U has only addressed 25.15% of the housing shortage by delivering 80 lakh homes.**
- Even if remaining sanctioned houses are constructed by 2024, it would only address about **37% of the real need, leaving almost 2.4 crore households without a roof.**
- Despite spending over $29 billion in the last five years on low-cost housing, "Housing for All" remains an unfulfilled promise.

What Ailed the PMAY?

- The PMAY scheme **relies heavily on private sector participation** to fill the gap in public investments for social housing.
- Approximately 40% (according to the World Bank, 49%) of people in Indian urban areas live in designated or informal slums, making addressing housing in these areas crucial for PMAY's success.
- However, **some projects handing over slum spaces to private players resulted in vertical growth that created more problems for residents due to recurring costs of utilities and squeezed living spaces.**
- **Land ownership issues**, such **as land under airports, railways, or forests, made it impossible for ISSR (in-situ slum redevelopment) to address housing needs.**
- Plans for ISSR were often drawn up by consultants without community involvement.
- There's a disconnect between city master plans and PMAY-U, with **many cities favoring large capital-intensive technological solutions over social housing.**
- **The Centre's contribution to PMAY's investment expenditure is only about 25%, with the bulk of the funding coming from beneficiary households (60%) and state governments (15%).**
- PMAY's architecture doesn't effectively address the needs of the landless and the poor, with a limited government role in many verticals.

- **Slum-dwelling families eligible for rehabilitation under ISSR make up only about 2.5% of total beneficiaries.**

10.3. Ayushman Bharat:

- **Flagship Health Scheme:** Ayushman Bharat, officially known as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), is the Indian government's flagship public health insurance scheme.

- **Launch:** Announced in 2018.

- **Aim:** Provide financial protection and quality health coverage to the country's economically vulnerable population.

Key Components:

Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY):

- Provides secondary and tertiary hospitalization coverage of up to INR 5 lakhs per family per year.
- Targets around 500 million beneficiaries from poor and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Cashless and paperless access to empanelled private and public hospitals.

Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs):

- Aims to upgrade 150,000 sub-health centers and primary health centers into HWCs to deliver comprehensive primary healthcare closer to communities.
- Focuses on preventive care, screening, and treatment for common ailments and non-communicable diseases.

10.4. National Health Mission (NHM)

- The NHM is a flagship initiative of the Indian government launched in 2005, subsuming two earlier missions:

  - National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)

  - National Urban Health Mission (NUHM)

- Main program components include Health System Strengthening (RMNCH+A) in rural and urban areas- Reproductive-Maternal- Neonatal-Child and Adolescent Health, and Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases.

- NHM envisages achievement of universal access to equitable, affordable and quality health care services that are accountable and responsive to the needs of the people.

Key Objectives:

- **Strengthening Healthcare Infrastructure:**

  - Upgrading rural and urban health facilities with better equipment, human resources, and services.

  - Establishing new sub-centres, primary health centres, and community health centres.

- **Reduce Maternal and Child Mortality Rates:**

- Focus on improving maternal health services, including antenatal and postnatal care, institutional deliveries, and immunization programs.

- Addressing child health challenges like malnutrition and communicable diseases.

- **Control Communicable Diseases:**

  - Strengthening disease surveillance systems.

  - Implementing national programs for TB, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other communicable diseases.

- **Increased Access to Affordable Medicines:**

  - Promoting essential drug availability and affordability at public health facilities

POLITY

1. **Elections and Election Machinery:**
1.1 Reforms needed in the voting process:

History of Voting:

- In the **first two general elections** of India held **in 1952 and 1957**, voters had to drop a **blank ballot paper into a separate box** for each candidate along with their election symbol.
- From the third election onwards, which took place after 1957, ballot papers with names of candidates and their symbols were introduced. Voters had to put a stamp on the candidate of their choice.
- The **Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) was introduced on a trial basis in 1982** in the Assembly constituency **of Paravur in Kerala**.
- In 1989, the Election Commission (EC) developed India's indigenous Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in alliance with two central government undertakings - the Electronics Corporation of India **(ECIL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). EVMs were used for the first time in the Goa State Assembly elections of 1999.**
- EVMs **were fully deployed in all booths during the Assembly elections of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, and West Bengal in 2001.**
- The Supreme Court has upheld the validity of using EVMs in various judgments.
- **In the 2004 general elections to the Lok Sabha, EVMs were used in all 543 constituencies.**
- In the case of **Subramanian Swamy versus Election Commission of India in 2013**, the Supreme Court ruled that having a paper trail is essential for ensuring free and fair elections.
- **In the 2019 elections, EVMs were used with 100% Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** in all constituencies to enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process.

What is EVM (Electronic Voting Machine)?

- An electronic voting machine (EVM) is a portable instrument for the purpose of conducting elections to the parliament, legislature and local bodies like Panchayat and municipalities.
- The voting data recorded in EVMs can be retained for years and can be extracted if necessary.

What are the Features of EVMs?

- Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) have brought several benefits to the electoral process:
- EVMs have **minimized the risk of booth capturing** by limiting the **rate of vote casting to four votes a minute**, making it difficult to stuff false votes quickly.
- They have **eliminated invalid votes,** which were a common issue with paper ballots, streamlining the counting process.
- **EVMs are eco-friendly** as they reduce the consumption of paper, which is crucial considering the large electorate size of nearly one billion people.
- They provide **administrative convenience to polling officers**, making the polling and counting processes faster and more accurate.
- **Mechanisms are in place to ensure the integrity of EVM and VVPAT processes, including random allocation of EVMs to booths, conducting mock polls before the**

DID YOU KNOW
that despite demands for the postponement of elections owing to the reorganization of States, the ECI proceeded to complete the elections as originally scheduled?

The State Reorganisation Act led to a major reshuffle in administrative setups in various states. Despite pressure to postpone the elections, the Election Commission boldly proceeded.
The decision marked a crucial point as the second general elections were completed before the term of the first Lok Sabha expired.

actual voting, and sharing EVM serial numbers and total votes polled with candidates' agents for verification during counting.

- Despite these advantages, doubts have been raised about EVMs, mainly regarding their **susceptibility to hacking as electronic devices.**
- The **Election Commission of India (ECI) has clarified that EVMs are standalone devices with no external connectivity, making them immune to external hacking.**
- However, concerns remain about **the sample size for matching EVM counts with VVPAT slips**, which may not be scientifically adequate and could fail to detect defective EVMs during counting.
- The current process also allows for the identification of **booth-wise polling behavior, which could lead to profiling and intimidation by various parties.**

VVPAT:

- **VVPAT System:** An additional system used alongside Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in India to increase transparency and voter confidence in elections.
- **Purpose:** Provides a printed paper slip displaying the name and symbol of the candidate a voter has selected on the EVM.

How VVPAT Works

- **Voter Casts Vote on EVM:** The voter uses the EVM as usual to cast their vote.
- **VVPAT Slip Generated:** The VVPAT machine generates a printed slip showing the voter's selection (party symbol, candidate name).
- **Visible to Voter:** The slip is displayed in a transparent, sealed window for 7 seconds before automatically dropping into a sealed container.
- **Paper Trail for Verification:** These VVPAT slips serve as a physical paper record that can be used for auditing or manual counting in case of disputes.

Benefits of VVPAT

- **Transparency:** Assures voters that their vote is correctly registered by the EVM.
- **Dispute Resolution:** Provides a physical paper record for recounting or resolving potential discrepancies.
- **Increased Confidence:** Strengthens public trust in the election process.

Implementation

- **Phased Introduction:** India introduced VVPAT in a phased manner, starting with small-scale use in 2013.
- **Nationwide Implementation:** Since 2019, VVPAT is used in all polling booths across India during parliamentary and state elections.

What are international practices?

- Many western democracies, including **England, France, The Netherlands, and the U.S.,** have opted for paper ballots instead of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for their national or federal elections.

- **Some countries like Germany have declared the use of EVMs in elections as unconstitutional, as was the case in 2009.**
- Brazil is an example of a country that continues to use EVMs for their elections.
- Among India's neighbours, Pakistan does not use EVMs for its elections.
- Bangladesh experimented with EVMs in a few constituencies in 2018 but reverted to paper ballots for the general elections in 2024.

Controversies around the use of EVMs:

- Digitalisation, with the advent of EVMs, marked the transition from the primitive paper ballot systems and a long wait for results to a more reliable, safe and secure medium for conducting elections.
- However, technology and transition have their own challenges and there are certain strata of political parties and people who challenge the authenticity of EVMs and there is always an on-going debate on the same.'
- Some political parties allege that EVMs were tampered with ahead of polls and are demanding the reintroduction of the ballot paper system of voting.
- In 2009, when the Congress party was doing well in elections, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stalwart Lal Krishna Advani voiced concerns about the reliability of the machines after his party's electoral defeat.
- The Congress spoke about "apprehensions among political parties and the people" over the misuse of EVMs and urged the EC to "revert to the old practice of using ballot papers as most major democracies have done." The Aam Aadmi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party supported the move.
- The reliability of EVMs came under scrutiny yet again during the Uttar Pradesh civic polls in November 2020, following reports that several voting machines were recording votes only for the BJP, irrespective of the buttons pressed.

Recent Controversy:

- The Supreme Court discussed the microcontrollers in electronic voting machines (EVMs), referring to them as **"agnostic" because they do not recognize political parties or candidates**.
- Justice Sanjiv Khanna, leading the two-judge Bench, highlighted that **microcontrollers only identify the buttons pressed by voters on the ballot units, not the parties or candidates associated with them.**
- The interchange ability of buttons was noted, meaning that a party assigned to one button in a constituency might be assigned to a different button in another constituency, with the programming being done at the manufacturer stage.
- The case addressed concerns raised in petitions claiming that the **EVM system lacked transparency and was susceptible to rigging.**
- The court firmly stated that disclosing the EVM source code could lead to misuse and compromise integrity, emphasizing that such action would pose significant problems.
- **Justices Khanna and Dipankar Datta reserved judgment on April 18** but reconvened with additional questions for the Election Commission (EC), particularly regarding the security and functionality of EVMs **and VVPATs (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail).**
- Deputy Election Commissioner Nitesh Kumar Vyas appeared before the court to respond to the specific queries raised, which totaled five in number.

- This development occurred amidst preparations for the second phase of the Lok Sabha election scheduled for April 26.
- Mr. Vyas, responding to the first query, mentioned that all three units of an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) - the **ballot units, control units, and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) - contained their own microprocessors.**
- When asked whether these microcontrollers were reprogrammable, Mr. Vyas stated they were "**one-time programmable" during manufacturing, indicating they could not be changed or accessed physically afterwards.**
- Advocates representing the petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms, namely Prashant Bhushan, Cheryl D'Souza, and Neha Rathi, expressed doubts regarding the EC's claim about the non-reprogram ability of the microprocessors.
- They contested the assertion, suggesting that the EC's statement was questionable in terms of whether the microprocessors could indeed be reprogrammed or accessed despite the EC's assertions.

What can be the way forward?

- In a transparent democracy, citizens should be able to understand and verify the election process easily.
- The use of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) allows voters to verify that their votes are recorded correctly.
- However, additional steps are needed to ensure that votes are counted accurately as well.
- Instead of **matching every EVM count with VVPAT slips**, which would be impractical, a scientific method should be used to determine a sample size for matching.
- This **sample size could be determined** by dividing each state into large regions, as suggested by experts.
- **If even one error is found in a region, all VVPAT slips from that region should be counted fully to determine the results.**
- **Introducing "totalizer" machines at polling booths can aggregate votes from multiple EVMs before revealing the candidate-wise count, providing additional cover for voters' anonymity.**

1.2 Disclosure of Asset as per Representation of People's Act, 1951:

Why in News?

- Recent developments have highlighted disclosure norms for candidates in election law.
- One incident involves the BJP candidate in the **Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency, Rajeev Chandrasekhar**, allegedly failing to report all his assets in the mandatory affidavit.
- Another incident involves the **Supreme Court's observation (in *Lok Prahari vs. Union of India & Others* case, 2015) that candidates have a right to privacy and may not need to disclose every minor detail.**

What is the law related to disclosure?

- In 2002, a landmark Supreme Court judgment **(in Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) vs. Union of India (UOI)" (2002))** mandated that prospective candidates disclose their criminal

history, educational qualifications, and assets and liabilities, including those of their spouses and dependents.

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) issued rules in June 2002 to implement this judgment.
- However, the Central government attempted to limit these disclosures through an **ordinance amending the Representation of the People Act, 1951, in August 2002.**
- This amendment introduced **Sections 33A (related to disclosure of pending criminal cases), Section 33B (which nullified additional disclosures beyond what was prescribed in the Act), and Section 125A (imposing penalties for failure to disclose or false disclosure).**
- The ordinance and subsequent amendment were challenged in court.
- **On March 13, 2003, the Supreme Court struck down Section 33B, reinstating the disclosure requirements for assets and liabilities and educational qualifications.**
- The ECI issued revised instructions and disclosure formats based on the court's judgment.

What are the consequences of any omission?

- **Section 125A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, stipulates a penalty for candidates who fail to disclose required information or provide false information or conceal relevant details.
- The **penalty includes a six-month prison term, a fine, or both**.
- Failure **to disclose or providing false information can also lead to a legal challenge** to a candidate's election in the High Court.
- Two grounds relevant to such challenges are **outlined in Section 100 of the Act**.
- An election can **be declared void** if there **is "improper acceptance of any nomination"** or "**any non-compliance with the provisions of the Constitution or of this Act or of any rules or orders made under this Act**."
- Unsuccessful candidates can contest the acceptance of the nomination of the winning candidate based on concealment or false information and raise concerns about potential violations of statutory disclosure requirements.

What is the latest court ruling?

- **Karikho Kri won** a seat in the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly in 2019 as an independent candidate.
- His election was contested by Congress candidate Nuney Tayang.
- Tayang claimed that Kri had not fully disclosed his movable assets, specifically vehicles registered under his family members' names.
- In "**Nuney Tayang vs. Karikho Kri" (2019) case**, the High Court of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh ruled in favour of Tayang, declaring Kri's election void.
- **The Supreme Court overturned the High Court's decision, stating that the non-disclosure of assets did not substantially impact the election outcome.**
- It was found that the vehicles in question had been sold or gifted before the election, and Kri had no outstanding dues related to government accommodation.
- Kri had provided a "No Dues" certificate in 2014 when contesting a previous election, and a similar certificate was presented during the 2019 nomination process.

What is the takeaway from the verdict?

- **The Supreme Court stated that candidates are not required to disclose every detail of their life to voters.**
- **It emphasized that candidates only need to disclose significant movable property or items that reflect their lifestyle and may be of interest to voters.**
- **However, the court clarified that there is no fixed rule for what constitutes a substantial omission, and it depends on the circumstances of each case.**
- The decision highlighted that the voter's right to know has limits and does not extend to every minor detail of a candidate's life.

1.3. Postal ballot system in India:

- **Eligibility**: Certain categories of voters are eligible to cast their votes through postal ballots. These include members of the armed forces, central armed police forces, and state police personnel who are posted outside their constituencies during elections. Additionally, voters who are above the age of 80, persons with disabilities, and those employed in essential services may also be eligible for postal ballots.
- **Requesting a Postal Ballot**: Eligible voters who wish to vote via postal ballot need to apply for it to the concerned election authorities. The application process typically involves submitting a request form along with necessary documents to prove eligibility.
- **Dispatch and Receipt of Ballots**: Once the application for a postal ballot is approved, the election authorities dispatch the ballot papers to the registered address of the voter. The voter receives the ballot papers by mail at the provided address.
- **Marking and Returning Ballots**: Upon receiving the postal ballot papers, the voter marks their choices on the ballot papers in accordance with the voting instructions provided. The marked ballot papers are then sealed in the provided envelope and returned to the election authorities by mail within the specified deadline.
- **Verification and Counting**: Election officials verify the validity of returned postal ballots, ensuring that they comply with the prescribed procedures and deadlines. The counting of postal ballots typically takes place alongside the counting of votes cast in person on election day.
- **Security Measures**: Various security measures are in place to safeguard the postal ballot system in India. These may include verification of the voter's identity, authentication of the ballot papers, and secure handling of the returned ballots to prevent tampering or fraud.
- **Legislation and Regulations**: The postal ballot system in India is governed by provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961. These laws outline the eligibility criteria, application procedures, deadlines, and security protocols related to postal voting.

1.4. Electoral Bond:

Why in News?

- The State Bank of India was compelled by the Supreme Court of India to reveal information on donations via electoral bonds to political parties.

- Investigation results, including those from The Hindu, disclosed that **33 companies with over ₹1 lakh crore in aggregate losses from 2016-17 to 2022-23 donated close to ₹582 crore, with 75% going to the ruling BJP.**
- **Concerns arise as loss-making companies donated significant sums**, profit-making firms surpassed their aggregate profits in donations, and some donor firms didn't report data on net profits or direct taxes**.**
- **Newly incorporated firms made donations before the stipulated three-year period, raising suspicions of rule-breaking and questionable funding sources.**
- Questions linger about whether these loss-making firms were fronts **for money laundering, whether firms not reporting profits/losses were shell companies, and whether profitable donor firms evaded taxes.**
- **Reserve Bank of India and Election Commission of India officials voiced concerns about the bonds scheme being used for money laundering and tax evasion, despite which the Union Finance Ministry proceeded with it.**
- Over five and a half years, political parties cashed in thousands of crores via electoral bonds, with the BJP receiving the majority.
- While the Supreme Court's decision to end the opaque scheme is commendable, significant donations from dubious sources before each election highlight issues with campaign financing.
- **It is crucial for Parliament and regulatory institutions to conduct thorough investigations into donations and potential law-breaking by donors and recipients post-election.**
- The **judiciary should urge these institutions to act, and a cleanup of campaign and electoral financing is necessary for a healthy democracy.**

What are Electoral Bonds?

- Electoral Bonds are money instruments like promissory notes, which can be bought by companies and individuals in India from the State Bank of India (SBI) and donated to a political party, which can then encashed these bonds.
- **Eligibility:** Only the political parties registered under Section 29A of the **Representation of Peoples' Act (RPA, 1951)** which secured at least 1% of votes polled in the last General Election to the

Money Laundering

- Money laundering is the process of concealing the illegal origins of money (profits from crime, corruption, etc.) and making it appear as though it came from legitimate sources.

- It involves a series of transactions to disguise the money trail and obscure its true ownership.

Key Stages of Money Laundering:

1. **Placement:** Illicit money is introduced into the financial system (e.g., deposited into a bank account or used to purchase assets).

2. **Layering:** The funds are moved through complex transactions (often across borders) to distance them from their illegal origins. This can involve multiple accounts, shell companies, and financial instruments.

3. **Integration:** The laundered funds are re-introduced into the legitimate economy, appearing as though they came from a legal source (e.g., invested in real estate or businesses).

Lok Sabha or the State Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive Electoral Bonds.

Shell Companies

- Shell companies are corporations or other business entities that exist on paper but have no real office space, significant assets, or active business operations.
- They are often created in secrecy jurisdictions with lax regulations and oversight.

How Shell Companies Facilitate Money Laundering

- **Obscuring Ownership:** Shell companies hide the identity of the true owners (beneficial owners) of illicit funds.
- **Disguising Transactions:** They are used to create a complex web of transactions that makes it difficult to trace the origin of the funds.
- **International Transfers:** Shell companies in different countries can move money across borders, making it even harder to track.

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2. Judiciary:

2.1 Curative Petition:

- **Why in News? -** The Supreme Court overturned an arbitral tribunal award that required the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) to pay ₹7,687 crores to Delhi Airport Metro Express Private Limited. This award was challenged by DMRC through a curative petition.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud, leading the three-judge Bench, stated that DMRC faced a "grave miscarriage of justice" from the 2017 arbitral award.
- The Supreme Court also reversed its own 2021 judgment, which upheld the arbitral award, disagreeing with a Division Bench of the Delhi High Court.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud criticized the court's interference in 2021, stating that it reinstated an illegal award burdening a public utility with excessive liability.
- DMRC's argument highlighted that the tribunal disregarded crucial evidence from the Commissioner Metro Rail Safety (CMRS) certification while assessing the termination of the agreement.
- The Bench agreed with DMRC's stance, noting the misinterpretation of the CMRS certificate's relevance in previous judgments.
- Consequently, the Supreme Court ordered the halt of execution proceedings for enforcing the arbitral award and mandated the refund of any amount deposited by DMRC following the 2021 judgment.

What is Curative Petition?

- The concept of a curative petition is not explicitly mentioned in any specific article of the Indian Constitution. Instead, it has been established by the Indian judiciary through judicial pronouncements, particularly by the Supreme Court of India.
- The Supreme Court recognized the concept of a curative petition in the landmark case of **Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra & Anr (2002).**
- It is an extraordinary legal remedy available to correct gross miscarriages of justice or to address the fundamental principle of natural justice.

- The legal basis for the curative petition primarily lies in the Supreme Court's inherent powers under **Article 142** of the Indian Constitution, which empowers the court to pass such orders as may be necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it.

Review Petition:	Curative Petition:
• **Article associated: Article 137** of the Constitution of India. • A review petition is a legal remedy available to parties aggrieved by a judgment or **order of the Supreme Court of India or a High Court**. • The purpose of a review petition is to **seek a re-examination** of the final judgment or order passed by the court, based on the **discovery of new and important evidence** or an error apparent on the face of the record. • A review petition can **only be filed by parties to the original case**, and it must be based on grounds such as an error of law or fact, miscarriage of justice, or violation of principles of natural justice. • The review petition is **usually heard by the same bench of judges** that delivered the original judgment, **and it is discretionary for the court to either accept or reject the petition after considering its merits.**	• **Article associated:** Not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, but the concept of curative petition was evolved by the Supreme Court in the case of **Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra & Another (2002).** • A curative petition is **a legal remedy available in exceptional cases to address gross miscarriages of justice** and prevent abuse of the judicial process. • Unlike a review petition, a curative **petition can be filed after the dismissal of a review petition,** and it is the last resort available to correct a manifest error resulting in the violation of fundamental rights or the principles of natural justice. • A curative petition is **heard by a bench of the three senior-most judges** of the Supreme Court, along with the judges who delivered the original judgment. • The petitioner must demonstrate that the matter **raises issues of constitutional importance** and that there was a **failure of natural justice** in the proceedings leading to the final judgment. • The **court has the discretion to admit or reject a curative petition**, and if admitted, it may review the judgment to prevent a grave miscarriage of justice.

2.2 Revisit these sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita:

The sections on reporting of a fatal accident, petty organised crime, theft and human trafficking have flaws

- New criminal laws **effective from July 1, 2024**.
- **Section 106(2) of BNS**, involving **10-year imprisonment for not reporting fatal accidents**, currently on hold.
- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) paused implementation due to truck driver protests.
- MHA to consult All India Motor Transport Congress before deciding on Section 106(2).
- Other **BNS provisions** under review:
    - "Petty Organised Crime" (Section 112).
    - "Theft" (Section 303(2)).
    - Human Trafficking (Section 143).

Reporting of a fatal accident, petty crime

- **Reconsideration of Section 106(2):**

- **Increasing imprisonment from 5 to 10 years for fleeing accidents without reporting** seems unfair.
  - No other law imposes such severe punishment for this offense.
  - **Doesn't prioritize aiding injured victims; applies only to accidents causing death.**
  - Possible benefit: helps with motor accident claims if vehicle details are known.
  - **May conflict with Article 20(3) of the Indian Constitution, which protects against self-incrimination.**
- Supreme Court's interpretation in **Nandini Satpathy vs P.L. Dani** suggests compelled testimony goes beyond evidence procured not merely by physical threats or violence but by psychic torture, overbearing and intimidatory methods and the like.
- Introduction of "**Petty Organised Crime**":
  - New offense in **Section 112 of BNS**.
  - Involves committing various crimes as part of a group or gang.
  - Crimes include theft, snatching, cheating, unauthorized selling of tickets, gambling, selling public examination question papers, or similar acts.
  - Aimed at addressing organized crime by broadening legal coverage to include group activities.
- Offenses like **"unauthorized selling of tickets" and "selling of public examination question papers" aren't defined in the BNS and aren't linked to any special Act.**
- The phrase **'any other similar criminal acts' in the section is vague and open-ended**, leaving interpretation uncertain.
- Theft and snatching can lead to imprisonment for up to three years (Section 303 of the BNS), while theft in a dwelling house or means of transportation can result in up to seven years (Section 305 of the BNS).
- Theft after preparation for causing harm can lead to up to 10 years' imprisonment (Section 307 of the BNS).
- Cheating can result in imprisonment ranging from three to seven years (Section 318 of the BNS).
- **The range of 'any other similar criminal acts' is unspecified, potentially including offenses like criminal breach of trust, misappropriation of property, or receiving stolen property.**
- **However, sentences for these offenses vary from two to 10 years, making it unclear what falls under 'petty organized crime' which has a maximum sentence of seven years.**
- Without a specific maximum sentence, this provision may not withstand scrutiny from the Supreme Court, similar to **Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which was struck down by Supreme Court in Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2015) as it found the expression "grossly offensive" used in the Section to be open-ended, undefined and vague.**

Property theft, a specific value

- The offense of theft, as stated in the proviso to **Sub-section (2) of Section 303 of the BNS**, requires reconsideration.
- According to the proviso, if the value of stolen property is less than five thousand rupees and it's the person's first conviction, they'll be punished with community service upon returning or restoring the stolen property.
- This offense is categorized as a non-cognizable offense in the First Schedule to the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

- First Schedule to the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) categorises the offence under this category as a non-cognisable offence.
- Making theft of property valued under ₹5,000 a non-cognizable offense could ease police workload but raises legal and practical concerns.
- While ₹5,000 might not affect affluent individuals much, it's significant for low-income earners; a stolen bicycle could be a big loss.
- For instance, a student's stolen bicycle might not prompt police action if it's non-cognizable, leaving them feeling helpless.
- Bicycles are often provided to students by governments to support education, making such thefts impactful.
- Not registering property offenses under ₹5,000 could remove offenders from police surveillance until they commit another offense.
- Legal issues may arise regarding returning stolen property if recovered with other stolen goods.
- If stolen property under ₹5,000 isn't returned by the convict, the court's only option may be imprisonment for up to three years.
- This contrasts with higher-value thefts, categorized as cognizable offenses, where alternative punishments are possible.
- Tweaking definitions and providing alternate punishments could clarify the law and address practical and legal concerns.
- Making theft of property of any value a cognizable offense would require minor changes in the First Schedule to the BNSS and resolve various issues.

No discretion to judiciary:

- Section 303 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) regarding punishment for murder by a life-convict was declared void and unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in **Mithu vs State of Punjab (1983).**

> - **Section 303** of the Indian Penal Code dealt with the punishment for "murder committed by someone who was already serving a life sentence for a previous crime".
> - If a person who was already in prison for life committed murder while serving their sentence, Section 303 mandated the death penalty for anyone found guilty under this provision.
> - If a life convict committed murder, they would automatically be sentenced to death.

- The **Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional because it didn't allow judicial discretion, violating Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.**
- Section 303 of the IPC has been re-introduced as Section 104 of the BNS, now offering either death penalty or life imprisonment (meaning the remainder of one's natural life).
- However, **Sub-sections (6) and (7) of Section 143 of the BNS**, punishing child trafficking on multiple occasions and trafficking by public servants or police officers, also lack judicial discretion, potentially facing the same legality issues.
- These sections of the BNS, including sub-section (2) of Section 106, Section 112, sub-section (2) of Section 303, and sub-sections (6) and (7) of Section 143, need to be revisited before being implemented due to their legal, constitutional, and practical implications.

2.3. Courting Action: On FMCG Marketing, Advertising:

- **Why in news? -** Justice Hima Kohli, **leading a Supreme Court bench, criticized the government's inaction against Patanjali Ayurved for advertising untested COVID-19 cures and other pseudoscientific remedies.**
- The **court expanded its inquiry to include all fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies publishing misleading advertisements.**
- India is experiencing a rise in non-communicable diseases due to the availability of ultra-processed foods and sedentary lifestyles.
- **Manufacturers sometimes add vitamins to their products to evade scrutiny**, despite their products still being considered unhealthy.
- The **apex court** has previously sought public apologies from **Patanjali Ayurved** for misleading advertisements, with uncertainty surrounding the acceptance of the latest apology.
- The court's expectation that it must intervene due to ineffective regulation mechanisms, including the complaints-led system and dysfunctional regulatory bodies, raises concerns.
- The **Advertising Standards Council of India** lacks authority to enforce compliance, and the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India** is hesitant to penalize errant manufacturers due to understaffing and lack of resources
- **Civil society members,** including influencers and medical practitioners, often call out unscientific claims, but they face legal risks without adequate protection.
- Prompt enforcement and timely action against FMCG marketing violations are necessary to address the proliferation of misleading claims and disconnect between India's concerns about **non-communicable diseases** and available food options.
- The judiciary's role should focus on reviewing legislation rather than leading it, emphasizing quick and exemplary action against violators rather than overreaching into legislative and executive domains

3. <u>**Constitutional/Fundamental/Legal Rights:**</u>
3.1 <u>**Rights Against Climate Change are Fundamental Rights**</u>
- The Supreme Court has acknowledged a previously less-articulated right against the adverse effects of climate change as a distinct fundamental right in the Constitution.
- The **Court observed that while the right to a clean environment has been recognized, the right against the adverse effects of climate change is equally important and interconnected**.
- The **recognition of this right is based on Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (right to life) of the Indian Constitution.**
- The judgment came in a case related to the survival of the endangered Great Indian Bustard species, which faces threats due to power transmission lines intersecting its natural habitat and flight routes.
- An expert committee was constituted to examine the challenges faced by the species, with the case scheduled for further hearing in August.
- However, the Court unexpectedly released a judgment during the weekend, addressing climate change and its adversities, linking the right against climate change to **Articles 21 and 14.**

- Chief Justice Chandrachud emphasized that the rights to life and equality cannot be fully realized without a clean and stable environment.
- The **Supreme Court emphasized that the right to health, which is a part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution**, is impacted by various factors related to climate change.
- These factors include air pollution, changes in diseases spread by vectors (such as mosquitoes), increasing temperatures, droughts, crop failures leading to food shortages, storms, and floods.
- The inability of disadvantaged communities to adapt to or deal with the effects of climate change violates their rights to life and equality.
- Poorer communities are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation, particularly when it leads to food and water shortages.
- The judgment highlighted the interconnectedness between climate change and several human rights, including the right to health, indigenous rights, gender equality, and the right to development.
- It emphasized that the right to a healthy environment, free from the adverse effects of climate change, is considered a fundamental human right.

3.2 Right to Information:

- **Why in News?** - 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.

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:
    o Records, documents, and files
    o Decisions and policies of the government
    o Reasons for administrative actions
    o 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.

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4. Constitutional, Non-Constitutional Bodies and Regulatory Bodies:

4.1 National Commission for Women (NCW)

- **Statutory Body:** Established in 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990, the NCW is a statutory body of the Indian government. It works as the apex national body to protect and promote the rights of women in the country.

Mandate

The NCW has a broad mandate that includes:

- **Review of Laws:** Examine existing constitutional and legal safeguards for women, recommend amendments, and suggest new legislation.
- **Complaint and Investigation:** Address cases of rights violation and atrocities against women, conduct inquiries and facilitate redressal processes.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Advise the government on policy matters affecting women.
- **Awareness and Sensitization:** Promote social awareness about women's rights through workshops, seminars, training programs, and campaigns.

Composition

- **Chairperson:** A woman of standing, committed to the welfare of women, appointed by the Central Government.
- **Members:** Nominated by the Central Government, including experts on women's issues from various fields, as well as representatives from social welfare organizations.
- **Member Secretary:** An officer who heads the administrative functions of the Commission.

Key Focus Areas

- **Legal Reforms**

- **Violence Against Women**

- **Economic Empowerment**

- **Political Participation**

- **Education and Training**

- **Health and Nutrition**

How to Approach the NCW

- **Complaints:** Women facing rights violations can file complaints directly with the NCW via post, email, or online form on the NCW website.
- **Research and Resources:** The NCW website provides information on various laws, schemes, and reports related to women's issues.

4.2 Election Commission:

- The Election Commission of India is an **independent body established by the Constitution** of India.
- **Primary Mandate**: Responsible for conducting free and fair elections in India at all levels:

- Lok Sabha (Parliament's lower house), State Legislative Assemblies, Offices of the President and Vice President

Structure:

- Chief Election Commissioner
- Other Election Commissioners (currently two)

Key Functions of the ECI:

- **Delimitation:** Defining constituencies for elections based on population figures.
- **Voter Registration:** Preparing and revising electoral rolls, registering eligible voters.
- **Election Schedule:** Announcing election dates and schedules.
- **Model Code of Conduct:** Issuing and enforcing a code of conduct for political parties to ensure fairness during campaigns
- **Polling and Counting:** Overseeing secure polling processes, using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and accurately counting votes.
- **Electoral Dispute Resolution:** Addressing petitions and complaints regarding electoral processes.

Ensuring Free and Fair Elections

- **Impartiality:** ECI maintains strict neutrality and independence
- **Electoral Reforms:** ECI drives reforms such as Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) integration for increased transparency.
- **Technology:** Employs technology like EVMs and voter registration software to improve election efficiency.
- **Voter Education:** Conducts outreach and awareness campaigns to promote informed participation

4.3. Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDAI):

- **Statutory Body:** Established by the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999, IRDAI** is the autonomous regulatory agency responsible for the insurance and re-insurance industry in India.
- **Headquarters:** Hyderabad, Telangana, India
- **Composition:** IRDAI is a 10-member body including a Chairperson, five full-time members, and four part-time members appointed by the Government of India.

Mandate and Objectives

- **Protection of Policyholders:** Ensuring fair treatment of policyholders and their interests are protected.

- **Regulating the Industry:** Overseeing the insurance sector through licensing, regulation setting, and supervision.

- **Promoting Growth:** Creating an environment for the orderly growth and development of the insurance market.

- **Competition:** Ensuring fair competition to enhance customer choice and provide fair premiums

Key Functions

- **Issuing Regulations:** IRDAI frames regulations for different aspects of the insurance sector, covering insurers, intermediaries, product design, and more**.**
- Grants licenses to insurers and registers intermediaries like agents and brokers.
- Ensures insurers comply with regulations, have sound financial health, and conduct business with integrity.
- Addresses grievances of policyholders and develops mechanisms to resolve complaints.
- **Investigating Violations:** Investigating and taking action against insurers or intermediaries that violate regulations.
- **Market Development:** Conducts research, collects data, and promotes insurance awareness and financial inclusion.

4.4 Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI):

- **Purpose:** ASCI is a self-regulatory, non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring responsible and ethical advertising practices within India.
- **Founded:** 1985
- **Headquarters:** Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
- **Chairman: Subhash Kamath (as of 2023)**

ASCI's Mission

- ASCI aims to protect consumer interests by maintaining and enhancing public confidence in advertising.
- It does this by enforcing the ASCI Code, guidelines, and regulations.

ASCI Code

- The foundation of ASCI's work is its code for self-regulation, ensuring advertisements are:
- No misleading claims or deceptive practices.
- Adhering to Indian laws and regulations.
- Not offensive or harmful to public sentiment.
- Especially focused on protecting children.
- Fair in Competition: Respectful of other businesses.

ASCI's Process

- Consumers, competitors, or other parties can file complaints about advertisements they believe violate the ASCI Code.
- The CCC, composed of members from diverse backgrounds, assesses the validity of complaints.
- If an ad is found in violation, ASCI can request the advertiser to modify or withdraw it. They may also use public advisories to make consumers aware.
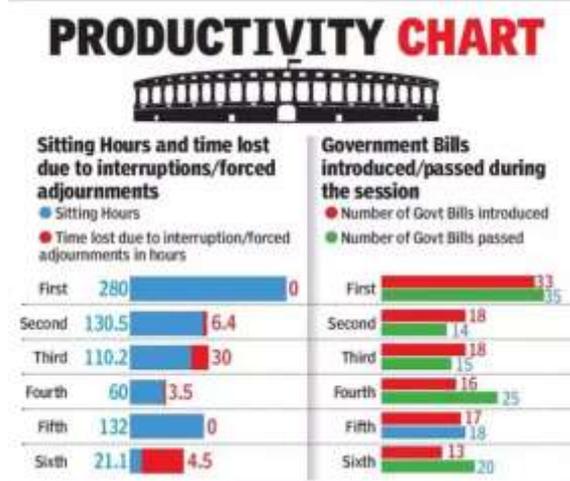
5. Parliament:

5.1 Performance of Parliament:

- The **17th Lok Sabha**, which operated from 2019 to 2024, departed from its typical five-day working schedule by concluding its proceedings on a Saturday.
- This **departure marked the end of a journey characterized by unexpected twists** and turns.
- As citizens of India, it **prompts us to reflect on the performance of our Parliament** in recent years as we await the arrival of the **18th Lok Sabha**.

How Ministries fared?

- The legislative activity in recent times indicates that the nation's political landscape is undergoing significant changes.
- The **Office of the Prime Minister faced a surge in queries from Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Rajya Sabha, with 1,146 questions, but only 28 were addressed.**
- Interestingly, **there was a decline in the number of notices directed at the Prime Minister's Office in both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, indicating reduced interest in seeking answers from the top executive office**.
- **There has been a noticeable shift in parliamentary focus, with the Ministries of Health and Family and Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare taking centre stage.**
- **These two portfolios have seen a rise in attention, becoming the top two Ministries with the highest number of questions, suggesting increased scrutiny by elected representatives.**
- The scrutiny of the country's healthcare system preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating consistent monitoring by MPs.
- Despite being the most questioned ministries, there has been **a slight decline in the number of queries in the Lok Sabha, suggesting a marginal decrease in parliamentary engagement on these issues.**
- **There is a declining interest in matters of national security and internal affairs, particularly reflected in the reduced attention given to the Ministry of Home Affairs.**
- The **Ministry of Finance**, responsible for steering the nation's fiscal destiny, has also **experienced a gradual decline in parliamentary interes**t, despite being crucial for economic resurgence.
- **However, there is a positive trend in the increasing rate of questions being admitted for deliberation within the Ministry of Finance, indicating a renewed commitment to transparency and accountability in financial matters.**

PRODUCTIVITY CHART

Sitting Hours and time lost due to interruptions/forced adjournments
- Sitting Hours
- Time lost due to interruption/forced adjournments in hours

	Sitting Hours	Time lost
First	280	0
Second	130.5	6.4
Third	110.2	30
Fourth	60	3.5
Fifth	132	0
Sixth	21.1	4.5

Government Bills introduced/passed during the session
- Number of Govt Bills introduced
- Number of Govt Bills passed

	Introduced	Passed
First	33	35
Second	18	14
Third	18	15
Fourth	16	25
Fifth	17	18
Sixth	13	20

- Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, education remains a significant topic in parliamentary discourse, with the **Ministry of Education consistently among the top five Ministries subject to rigorous questioning.**
- However, there has **been a rise in the number of disallowed questions in the education sector, raising concerns about oversight effectiveness in this vital area.**
- **In the Lok Sabha, there has been a downward trajectory in the percentage of disallowed questions across successive sessions.**
- **Conversely, the Upper House has seen a consistent increase in the percentage of disallowed questions, indicating systemic challenges in parliamentary oversight.**
- Ministries such as Health and Family Welfare, Home Affairs, Defence, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, and Finance accounted for a significant portion of all disallowed questions, highlighting the need to address these challenges in parliamentary oversight.

5.2. Parliamentary Proceedings:

Zero Hour

- It is an informal **session in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha,** roughly between **12 noon and 1 pm.** Called "Zero Hour" because it doesn't fall within the official agenda of parliamentary business.
- Members can raise matters of urgent public importance without prior notice, highlighting pressing issues.

Inherent Limitations

Lack of Structure and Order:

- As Zero Hour isn't formally scheduled, there can be disruptions leading to chaotic scenes.
- The Speaker or Chairperson has discretion over who speaks and for how long, potentially leading to imbalances and some members not being heard.
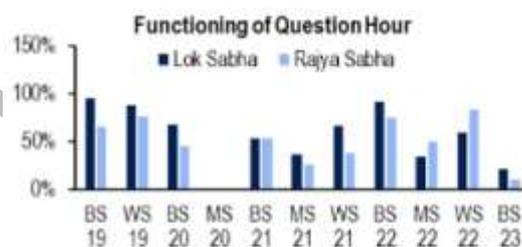
Note: Question Hour was cancelled in the Monsoon Session of 2020; BS – Budget Session; MS – Monsoon Session; WS – Winter Session.

Limited Time:

- Since Zero Hour is about an hour in length, the number of issues that can be thoroughly addressed is limited.
- Many issues raised might only receive brief attention or may not be taken up at all.

No Binding on the Government:

- **Ministers are not obligated to respond in detail during Zero Hour.** While they might provide short clarifications, the government is not bound to take immediate action**.**

Potential for Misuse:

- **Some argue that Zero Hour can be used for political** purposes or to raise issues just for publicity, rather than genuinely focusing on critical matters of public importance.

Other Parliamentary Proceedings:

1. Half-an-Hour Discussions

- **What it is:** A discussion on a matter of urgent public importance that has been the subject of recent questions in Parliament.
- **How it works:** A member of Parliament can raise this discussion after a question has been answered. There's further discussion (lasting about 30 minutes), and the concerned Minister is expected to clarify and provide details on the matter.
- **Why it's important:** Allows for in-depth focus on specific issues even after the Question Hour.

2. Short Notice Questions

- **What it is:** A question related to a matter of urgent public importance that can be asked with short notice.
- **How it works:** A member has to give a notice to the Speaker before 10 am, and the question is answered orally by the concerned Minister.
- **Why it's important:** Allows Parliament to address a pressing matter even when not listed in the regular agenda.

3. Calling Attention

- **What it is:** A method by which a member can call the attention of a Minister to a specific, urgent matter of public importance.
- **How it works:** The member selects the issue, and the Speaker decides if it can be raised. Then, the Minister makes a brief statement on the matter.
- **Why it's important:** Brings critical matters to the immediate notice of the government.

4. Short Duration Discussions

- **What it is:** A discussion for which the House sets aside no more than two hours on a matter of significant public interest.
- **How it works:** A member requests the Speaker for this discussion, and with approval, the date and time for the discussion are fixed.
- **Why it's important:** Allows for deeper debate on issues than what Question Hour or Calling Attention permit.

5. Special Mentions

- **What it is:** A procedure for members of the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) to raise matters of public importance but of insufficient urgency for the other discussions.
- **How it works:** A member obtains the permission of the Chairman to raise the issue, and then makes a brief statement.
- **Why it's important:** Creates a platform to raise crucial issues that might not otherwise receive attention.

International Relations

1. ## Sino-India Relations:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments regarding tensions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are considered highly significant by Indian foreign affairs experts.

- China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) reacted to Modi's remarks, calling for India to work with China to improve bilateral relations.
- In an interview with Newsweek, Modi broke his silence on India's ties with China and the standoff at the LAC since April 2020.
- Modi emphasized the need for urgent resolution of the border situation and constructive engagement between the two countries at diplomatic and military levels.
- Chinese MFA spokesperson Mao Ning acknowledged Modi's comments, stating that sound and stable China-India relations are in the common interest of both countries.

1.2. India's nuanced approach in the South China Sea:

- In March 2024, **India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar**, expressed full support for the Philippines in defending its national sovereignty during his visit to Manila.
- The statement comes amid the ongoing dispute over the **South China or West Philippine Sea between Manila and Beijing**, which experienced heightened tensions and diplomatic friction in 2023.
- In 2023, a **joint statement between New Delhi and Manila also urged China to adhere to the rules-based maritime order and respect the International Court of Justice ruling favouring Manila in 2016.**
- These statements indicate a shift from India's previous cautious and neutral stance on the South China Sea issue.
- India's evolving approach reflects a departure from its earlier position and aligns more closely with supporting international maritime law, sovereignty, and sovereign rights in the South China Sea.
- This shift in India's stance on the South China Sea reflects its broader strategic and economic aspirations on the global stage.


UNCLOS

- Often called the "Constitution for the Oceans," UNCLOS is a comprehensive international agreement establishing a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities.
- The Convention was opened for signature in 1982 and entered into force in 1994.
- **Wide Participation:** Currently, 168 parties (167 states plus the European Union) have ratified the Convention.

Key Provisions of UNCLOS

- **Maritime Zones:** Defines various zones extending from a nation's coastline and establishes rights and duties within each zone:
    - Territorial Sea (up to 12 nautical miles): Sovereignty of the coastal state.
    - Contiguous Zone (up to 24 nautical miles): Limited jurisdiction for enforcement of customs, immigration, and other laws
    - Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (up to 200 nautical miles): Rights to explore, exploit, and manage natural resources

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WORLD'S EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES
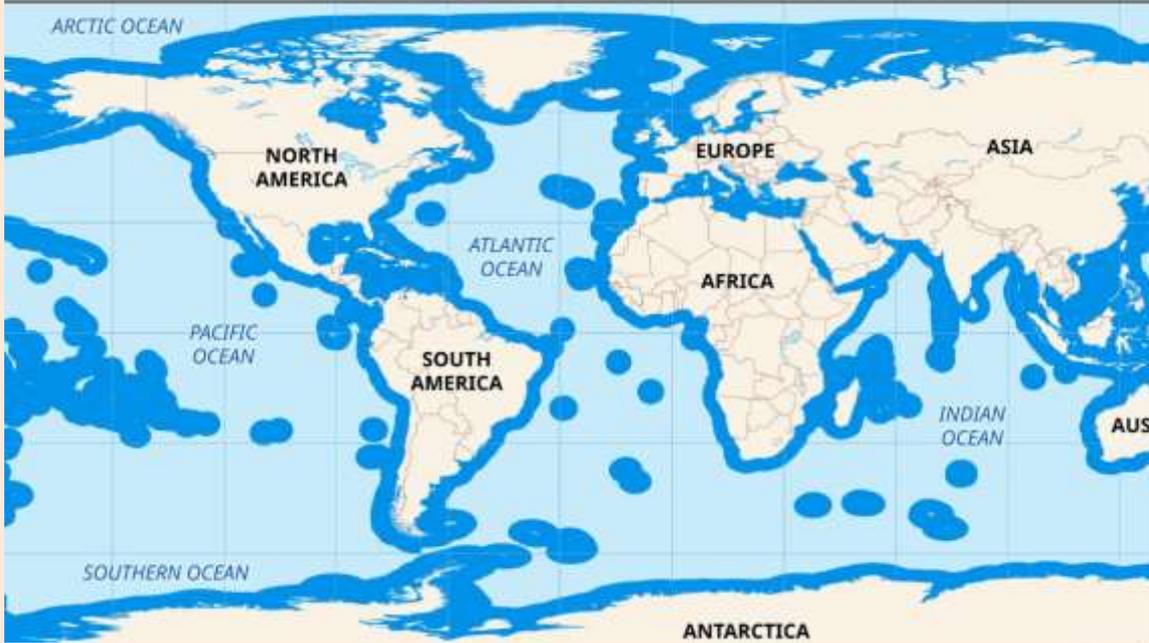
- o Continental Shelf: Rights over the seabed and subsoil resources, even beyond the EEZ if certain criteria are met.
  - o High Seas: Open to all states, with freedoms of navigation, overflight, fishing, etc.
  - o The Area (deep seabed): Declares it and its resources "the common heritage of mankind."
- **Environmental Protection:** Includes obligations to protect and preserve the marine environment.
- **Marine Scientific Research:** Establishes regulations and promotes marine research cooperation.

Dispute Settlement: Provides mechanisms for peaceful resolution of disputes, including a dedicated **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).**

A policy Evolution

- **Initially, New Delhi's engagement with the region was primarily economic, driven by its Look East Policy.**
- The Look East Policy **aimed to enhance economic integration with Southeast Asia and secure energy resources to fuel India's growing economy.**
- Indian state-owned enterprises, such as **ONGC Videsh, participated in oil and gas exploration projects in Vietnam's exclusive economic zones,** signaling India's economic stakes in the region.
- India supported the **principle of freedom of exploration and exploitation of maritime resources within the bounds of international law**, particularly UNCLOS.
- Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, India's policy orientation shifted from **Look East to Act East**, marking a **more strategic and active engagement** with the Indo-Pacific region.

- The Act East Policy emphasizes **not only economic integration but also strategic partnerships and expanded security cooperation** with countries in the Indo-Pacific, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.
- India has strengthened its own capacities through measures like **forward positioning, mission-based deployments, reinforced maritime domain awareness, and the development of deep-water maritime facilities.**

India's complex ties with China

- Geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea have increased due to **China's assertive territorial claims and militarization efforts.**
- India's stance on the South China Sea issue has become more nuanced and less cautious over time.
- India's position is influenced by its **complex relationship with China, which has a history of border disputes and territorial incursions.**
- Tensions intensified after the **Galwan Valley incident in 2020, which led to India demonstrating its military capabilities by sending a frontline warship to the South China Sea.**
- China's assertive posture and territorial claims in the South China Sea and along India's land border have disruptive implications for regional stability.
- **India has responded by engaging in strategic partnerships, including regular naval exercises and military cooperation with Southeast Asian nations.**
- These engagements serve two purposes: they **demonstrate India's commitment to regional security and act as a counter to China's unlawful assertions in the region.**

The ASEAN Factor

- New Delhi's strategic shift is driven by recognizing the critical importance of the South China Sea to regional security and the global maritime order.
- Disputes in the South China Sea involve China and ASEAN countries, **affecting freedom of navigation and oversight, crucial for India's trade and energy transportation routes and global countries.**
- India, as a responsible Indo-Pacific stakeholder, must take clear positions on such critical matters, as its periphery extends beyond the Indian Ocean to the wider maritime domain challenged by China's rise.
- **Upholding ASEAN centrality is essential in India's Indo-Pacific strategy**, despite internal differences within the regional grouping posing challenges.
- India advocates for a rules-based international maritime order, emphasizing UNCLOS, **opposing unilateral actions threatening regional stability.**
- India's stance **indirectly challenges China's expansive territorial claims** and activities in the South China Sea, positioning India as a responsible stakeholder committed to regional stability.
- India's nuanced approach in the South China Sea aligns with its broader strategy to **safeguard its interests while contributing to peace, stability, and respect for international law in the Indo-Pacific region.**

ASEAN

- **Regional Organization:** Founded in 1967 with the Bangkok Declaration, ASEAN is a political and economic organization aimed at promoting stability, peace, and prosperity in Southeast Asia.
- **Headquarters:** Jakarta, Indonesia.
- **Current Membership:** 10 Southeast Asian Nations:
    o Brunei Darussalam
    o Cambodia
    o Indonesia
    o Lao PDR
    o Malaysia
    o Myanmar
    o Philippines
    o Singapore
    o Thailand
    o Vietnam

Core Objectives

- **Regional Peace and Stability:** Build trust and cooperation to prevent conflict and promote peaceful settlement of disputes.
- **Economic Prosperity:** Create a single market and production base through free trade, investment, and economic integration.
- **Socio-cultural Development:** Promote human development, social justice, and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

Key Mechanisms

- **ASEAN Summits:** Heads of state meet twice annually to set broad directions.
- **Sectoral Bodies:** Various ministerial and technical bodies responsible for cooperation in areas like trade, security, environment, and more.
- **ASEAN Community:** Established in 2015, it comprises three pillars:
    o Economic pillar (AEC)
    o Security pillar (APSC)
    o Socio-cultural pillar (ASCC)

Recent Focus Areas

- **Indo-Pacific Outlook:** Promoting ASEAN centrality in the region amidst rising geopolitical tensions.
- **Sustainable Development:** Addressing climate change, environmental concerns, and disaster resilience.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Harnessing digital technologies for economic growth and inclusivity.
- **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):** Massive free trade agreement including ASEAN members and other Asia-Pacific nations.

1.3. Pakistan Factor:

- **Why in News? - Hangor-class advanced submarines built for Pakistan**
- **China has initiated** the construction of the first of **eight Hangor-class submarines for Pakistan**, a move that enhances bilateral military cooperation between the two countries.
- The launch ceremony took place at **Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Group's (WSIG) Shuangliu Base** and was attended by Pakistan Navy chief Admiral Naveed Ashraf.
- This initiative is part of **an agreement between Islamabad and Beijing**, wherein China agreed to provide Pakistan with eight advanced submarines.

- Four submarines will be constructed by WSIG, while the remaining **four will be built at KS&EW (Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works) under a Transfer of Technology (ToT)** agreement.
- The submarines will feature advanced stealth capabilities and will be equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors to operate effectively in multi-threat environments and engage targets at long ranges.
- Admiral Ashraf highlighted the significance of maritime security in the current geo-strategic context and reaffirmed the Navy's commitment to ensuring regional peace and stability.
- He also emphasized that **the Hangor-class S/M Project will strengthen the enduring friendship between Pakistan and China**, showcasing robust military cooperation between the two nations.
- This launch ceremony follows Pakistan's commencement of manufacturing the 6th Hangor-class submarine at KS&EW in February earlier this year.

2. <u>**India-Sri Lanka Relations:**</u>

Why in news? - **Katchatheevu demands thinking outside the box**

- **What is the issue?** – The core problem: the **rights of Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen to fish in their waters.**
- The root cause of the issue from Tamil Nadu's perspective is a conflict of interests between the governments unwilling to reopen the Katchatheevu matter and Indian fishermen reluctant to give up their livelihood.
- Unilaterally scrapping bilateral agreements can strain India-Sri Lanka relations and relations with other neighboring countries, as such agreements hold significance and cannot be arbitrarily nullified.
- The Centre should prioritize ensuring **the livelihoods of fishermen on both sides of the Palk Strait instead of creating barriers**, as India and Sri Lanka's well-being are intertwined.

What was the dispute?

- The **dispute over ownership of Katchatheevu began in 1921 between the British colonial governments of Madras and Ceylon.**
- Negotiations between the two sides lasted for five decades until they were settled in 1974 and 1976.
-
- Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi of India and Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka signed bilateral agreements during this time.
- These agreements declared Katchatheevu as part of Sri Lanka's territory.
- They also **established a maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and Bay of Bengal to define**
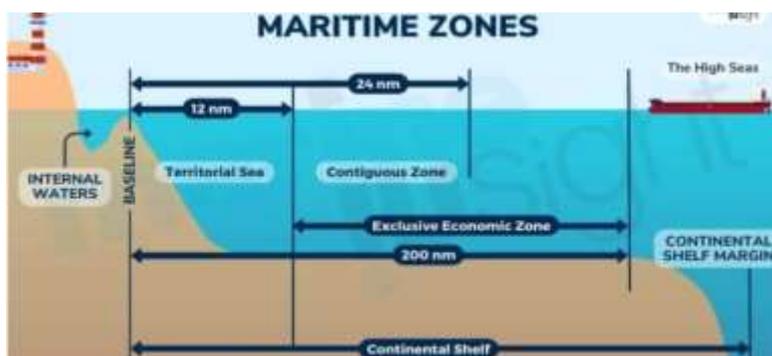
exclusive economic zones for both countries.

- Under the agreements, India and Sri Lanka have sovereign rights over resources in their respective exclusive economic zones.
- Despite the territorial dispute, Tamil Nadu fishermen visit Katchatheevu annually in March for the St. Anthony's festival.
- The **1974 agreement permits Indian fishermen to access the island for rest, drying of nets, and the festival, but fishing activity is prohibited.**

What did India get?

- In the past, New Delhi was perceived as benefiting diplomatically by maintaining close ties with Sri Lanka.
- This diplomatic relationship was crucial as Sri Lanka was leaning towards China during that time.
- **After the liberation of Bangladesh, India aimed to strengthen ties with Sri Lanka, especially considering the issue of citizenship for stateless Indian-origin Tamils in Sri Lanka.**
- As part of the diplomatic negotiations, New Delhi gained sovereign rights over Wadge Bank, a location rich in marine resources near Kanyakumari.
- Recently, the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas invited offers for oil and gas exploration in India, including around Wadge Bank.
- However, this move faced criticism from local residents of Kanyakumari and environmentalists due to concerns about potential negative impacts on the marine ecosystem.

Are fishermen arrests related to the island?

- **Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu face frequent arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy for fishing illegally in Sri Lanka's territorial waters.**
- **These arrests often occur beyond Katchatheevu, close to Sri Lanka's northern shores.**
- Northern Sri Lankan fishermen, also Tamil-speaking, have been demanding their fishing rights since the end of the civil war in 2009.
- They **oppose the bottom-trawling fishing method used by Indian fishermen,** which depletes marine resources and hampers post-war recovery efforts.
- **India has promoted mechanized trawler fishing, leading to resource depletion** along Tamil Nadu's coast and pushing Indian fishermen towards Sri Lankan waters.
- Despite a 2016 agreement between the two governments to phase out bottom trawling, Indian fishermen continue the practice.
- The **conflict between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen is primarily about fishing methods and territorial rights, not about Katchatheevu.**
- Retrieving Katchatheevu is not a solution to this ongoing conflict.

What has been the response?

- Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, criticized PM Modi's remarks about Katchatheevu, citing the government's stance in 2015 that previous agreements didn't involve territorial acquisition or cession.
- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin questioned PM Modi's silence on Katchatheevu during his tenure as Prime Minister.
- **Former Indian diplomats warned that challenging past agreements could harm India's credibility and strain relations with Sri Lanka.**
- **Former National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon** cautioned against reopening the 50-year-old agreement, **calling it a potential "self-goal."**
- Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry stated that there's no need to revisit the issue resolved five decades ago.
- Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda accused India of acting in self-interest to limit Sri Lankan fishermen's access around Katchatheevu.
- Fishermen from both countries expressed concern over the remarks and emphasized the urgent need to address the ongoing fisheries conflict, which threatens marine ecosystems and livelihoods.

Where is Katchatheevu?

- Katchatheevu is a small, uninhabited island.
- It covers an area of approximately 285 acres.
- The island is situated in the Palk Strait.
- It lies **about 14.5 km south of Delft Island.**
- Katchatheevu is located approximately 16 km northeast of Rameswaram.
- The island is barren and lacks drinking water or infrastructure.
- The **only structure** on the island is a **Catholic shrine dedicated to St. Anthony.**

The need for Bold Decisions:

- The challenges in the Palk Bay region present opportunities for innovative solutions.
- **Instead of viewing the Palk Bay as a barrier, it should be seen as a bridge between India and Sri Lanka.**
- **Proposal to convert the Palk Bay into a common heritage area, allowing equitable access to marine resources for both Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen.**
- Government of India should ban fishing equipment banned in Sri Lanka to promote fair fishing practices.

- **Proposed formula: Sri Lankan fishermen fish for three days, Indian fishermen for three days, with one day as a holiday.**
- **Encouragement of Tamil fishermen from both countries to form cooperative societies and engage in deep-sea fishing ventures together.**
- Modification of trawlers into vessels to assist a mother ship, fostering joint ventures and repairing damage to the livelihoods of Tamil fishermen caused by Indian counterparts.
- Emphasis on bold initiatives for a win-win outcome in the region.

3. <u>India-Maldives Relations:</u>
- The **People's National Congress (PNC),** led by Maldives President Mohammad Muizzu, secured a "super-majority" in the parliamentary elections, easing the path for passing laws and making constitutional amendments.
- The opposition, led by the former ruling **Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP),** won only 12 seats, while parties associated **with former Presidents Abdullah Yameen and Mohammad Nasheed failed to win any seats.**
- President Muizzu's leadership will be scrutinized as he holds near-absolute power in a country with a history of authoritarian rule.
- The election results reflect widespread approval of President Muizzu's decisions since taking office in November 2023**, including strengthening ties with China and distancing from India.**
- Concerns have been raised in India over derogatory comments about Prime Minister Narendra Modi by Maldivian Ministers, along with a drop in Indian tourist figures.
- The results provide an opportunity for New Delhi and Male to improve their strained ties, which have oscillated with changes in each government over the past decade.
- President Muizzu has stated his intention to pursue a "pro-Maldives" policy, which should be tested against actions that do not jeopardize India's security or regional peace.
- Maldives faces economic challenges, climate change issues, and strategic interest from the U.S. and China, making stronger ties with India and its sustainable financing policies increasingly important.
- A successful "Neighbourhood first" policy requires voluntary cooperation based on mutual trust and interests between India and Maldives.

4. <u>Israel – Iran Crisis:</u>

4.1. Why in news? - **For years, Iran has shown strategic patience in its shadow war with Israel, but Tel Aviv's bombing in Damascus seems to have altered Tehran's thinking**

- Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister, **identified Iran as the greatest threat to Israel in a March 2018 interview.**
- Netanyahu has been vocal about his opposition to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal brokered by the Obama administration.
- **Iran launched a significant attack on Israel on April 14 during Netanyahu's tenure, marking the first such attack by a state actor in over three decades.**
- The attack challenged Israel's deterrence and highlighted its dependence on the United States for security.
- Despite the attack, the United States restrained Israel's response, leading to criticism of Israel's perceived feeble reaction.

- The incident underscores Iran's growing risk appetite and the complex dynamics in the volatile West Asia region.

The Biden Doctrine

- The Biden administration aimed to prevent the Israel-Hamas conflict from escalating into a larger regional war.
- **President Biden supported Israel's military operation in Gaza but also worked diplomatically to ease tensions between Israel and its neighbours.**
- Challenges arose as the U.S. had limited influence over Iran, and Israel was combating both Hamas in Gaza and Iranian influence in the region.
- The bombing of the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus by Israel heightened the risk of an Israel-Iran confrontation.
- The U.S. anticipated Iranian retaliation and took steps to intercept Iranian projectiles to prevent escalation.
- **President Biden informed Prime Minister Netanyahu that the U.S. would not participate in any Israeli retaliation against Iran, signaling a desire to de-escalate tensions.**

Netanyahu's Dilemma

- Israel and Iran have been engaged **in a shadow war** for years, with Israel conducting numerous air strikes targeting Iranian interests.
- **Israel has also carried out operations inside Iran, including the assassination of a senior nuclear scientist in November 2020.**
- These actions by Israel have been relatively unchallenged by Iran, which has emboldened Israel to continue its operations.
- Following an escalation on October 7, Israel intensified its shadow war by targeting senior Iranian figures in Syria, prompting a muted response from Iran.

- Despite calls for forceful retaliation against Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu faced limitations due to the lack of U.S. support for Israeli retaliation.
- Netanyahu opted for a symbolic strike inside Iran, targeting a radar system, which was seen as a weak response from an Israeli perspective but avoided further escalation with Iran.
- The Biden administration's stance of not joining Israel's retaliation efforts helped prevent a regional war but was perceived as a constraint by Israel.

The Ayatollah's calculus

- **Iran-Israel Shadow War**:

  - Iran and Israel have been engaged in a shadow war for years, marked by covert operations and airstrikes targeting each other's interests.
  - Israel has conducted over 400 airstrikes in Syria targeting Iranian assets, including operations inside Iran.
  - Despite losing senior officers and scientists, Iran's influence in the region and its nuclear program remain largely intact.

- **Change in Iran's Strategy**:

  - Israel's bombing of the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus seems to have prompted a shift in Iran's strategy.
  - Iran has decided to impose a cost on Israel for its continued strikes on Iranian officials.

- **Factors Influencing Iran's Strategy Change**:

  - **Improved strategic ties with Russia and China, with Iran supplying drones to Russia for the conflict in Ukraine.**
  - Assessment that the U.S. has a low appetite for prolonged wars in the Middle East, especially amidst challenges from China and Russia.

- **Impact of Israel's Gaza Offensive:**

  - Israel's offensive against Hamas in Gaza, lasting six months, has failed to meet its objectives.

  - The offensive triggered international condemnation and accusations of genocide against Israel.

- **Iran's Calculated Risk**:

  - Iran's decision to openly attack Israel reflects its assessment of the changing regional dynamics and weakened Israeli position.
  - Despite collective defense efforts by the U.S., UK, France, Jordan and Israel, some Iranian missiles still hit Israel, highlighting Iran's growing boldness.

- **Pattern of Iranian Attacks**:

  - Iran has previously targeted Saudi oil facilities and American military bases in Iraq, facing minimal consequences.

- The recent attack on Israel further demonstrates Iran's willingness to escalate tensions without significant repercussions.

- **Implications for West Asia**:

  - Iran's actions signal a shift in the strategic landscape of the region, with potential implications for regional stability and security.

History of the Conflict - The Conflict, from Nebuchadnezzar to Netanyahu

- The recent direct projectile exchanges between Iran and Israel echo historic animosity dating back to ancient times.
- Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar, who lived from 642 to 562 BC, played a significant role in this animosity.
- In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first Jewish temple and sacked the Jewish kingdom of Judea.
- He also took citizens of Judea captive to Babylonia, contributing to the longstanding conflict between the Jewish people and their neighbours.
- Nebuchadnezzar is described in Jewish scripture as the "Destroyer of Nations," highlighting the impact of his actions on history.

A long Enmity

- **Historical Roots**: The enmity between Israel and Iran traces back to ancient times, dating to the era of the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed the Jewish temple in 586 BC.
- **Long-standing Conflict**: This hostility has persisted for over 26 centuries, with brief periods of alliance during the Pahlavi era in Iran in the last century.
- **Islamic Revolution's Impact**: The establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 restored the historical animosity, with Iran consistently denouncing Israel as the "smaller Satan" and advocating for its destruction.
- **Pursuit of Weapons**: Iran has pursued weapons of mass destruction, including drones, missiles, and nuclear weapons, while Israel views Iran as an existential threat and vows to prevent it from acquiring nuclear capabilities.
- **Proxy Conflicts**: Both countries have engaged in proxy conflicts through non-state actors like Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Hamas, with Iran supporting them against Israel while Israel retaliates with military campaigns.
- **Strategic Dynamics**: Until recently, the conflict remained mostly covert, with Israel targeting Iranian and Hezbollah presence in Syria, and Iran backing proxies against Israel. However, recent direct confrontations indicate a shift in this dynamic.
- **Recent Escalation**: The recent escalation began with an airstrike in Damascus, suspected to be carried out by Israel, followed by Iran's retaliation with drones and missiles on Israeli targets. Israel then responded with an airstrike on an Iranian airbase in Isfahan.
- **New Normal**: This escalation has set a new precedent, marking the first direct confrontation between the two enemies and potentially signaling a dangerous escalation in the conflict.
- **Historical Factors**: Historical, religious, and geopolitical factors, including the Zionist movement and the Balfour Declaration, have further fuelled tensions between Israel and Iran.
- **Migration and Conflict**: The migration of Jews, particularly Sephardim, to Palestine, along with terrorist activities by Jewish gangs, exacerbated tensions with local Arabs.

The Plans by Iran and Israel

- Iran seeks to rally global Muslim support by championing the Palestine Cause and positioning itself as the defender of Palestinian rights.
- Tehran aims to drive a wedge between Muslim populations sympathetic to Palestine and moderate Arab governments seeking diplomatic solutions.
- Moderate Arab states resent Iran's assertiveness and support for non-state actors, viewing it as disruptive.
- The US has tried to form an anti-Iran alliance, including some moderate Arab states and Israel, known as the "**Abraham Accord**."
- Some speculate that a Hamas attack in October aimed to thwart Saudi Arabia's potential entry into this alliance.
- **Iran, lacking a nuclear weapon capability**, seeks to delay by engaging Israel in wars through proxies while avoiding direct conflict.
- Israel, with superior military technology, aims for swift, decisive actions to maintain regional dominance.
- **Israel has territorial claims on areas like the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights** but professes no further ambitions.
- Recent events have **raised concerns among Arab and Muslim regimes** about regional stability, potential oil disruptions, and security.
- Efforts are underway to secure alliances and mitigate risks, such as Saudi Arabia's engagement with Pakistan for security and Iran's diplomatic outreach to Pakistan.
- A conflict between Israel and Iran could impact India's interests, including economic ties, expatriate communities in the Middle East, and regional stability.
- Such a conflict could disrupt India's "act west" policy and multilateral initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

4.2. Permanent Status to Palestine:

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) considered a resolution to grant Palestine full-member status at the UN.
- This resolution was proposed by **Algeria.**
- It aimed to fulfil the **promise made in 1947 when the UN General Assembly partitioned Palestine into two states: one Jewish and one Arab.**
- Only Israel became a full member of the UN in 1949.
- Palestine has been seeking full membership for years, having received permanent observer status in 2012.
- The resolution was supported by 12 out of 15 UNSC members.
- However, the **United States vetoed the resolution.**
- The U.S. argued that Palestine's membership should be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties.
- The **Israeli Ambassador** criticized the resolution, especially following recent terror attacks by Hamas, stating it would reward crimes.
- The recent events involving Israel's military actions against Palestinians highlight the urgency of recognizing Palestine's rights.

- Despite a UN ceasefire resolution, Israel continued military operations, indicating the need for Palestine to have a stronger voice on the global stage.
- **The US's unwavering support for Israel should be reconsidered**, as it hampers progress towards a fair resolution.
- The argument that Palestine can only achieve statehood through dialogue is flawed, as Israeli leadership has rejected the idea of a Palestinian state.
- **UN membership for Palestine would hold it to the same standards as other nations, promoting accountability and peace.**
- It's unfair to equate all Palestinians with terrorist acts, disregarding the suffering of innocent civilians.
- As a global leader, the US should prioritize building consensus rather than favouring one country, in line with the UN's principle of sovereign equality.

4.3 The Gaza war needs a smart exit Strategy:

- On March 25, 2024, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during Ramadan and the unconditional release of all hostages.
- This resolution marked the first successful ceasefire resolution since the conflict in Gaza began following a terror attack by Hamas in southern Israel the previous October.
- Previous attempts at ceasefire resolutions had failed due to the United States exercising its veto power in the UNSC. However, this time, the U.S. abstained from voting, allowing the resolution to pass.
- **Israel reacted strongly to the resolution, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accusing the U.S. of abandoning its policy and harming the war effort. Israel canceled a planned ministerial delegation visit to Washington in response.**
- **Under Israeli pressure, the U.S. later stated that the UN Resolution was non-binding, effectively allowing Israel to continue its actions in Gaza despite the ceasefire call.**
- Initially welcoming the ceasefire resolution, **Hamas later reiterated its demand for a permanent ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.**
- The **initial optimism for a ceasefire quickly faded as both sides maintained their positions, leading to a return to the status quo.**

The war grinds on

- Despite uncertainty around the ceasefire, **Egypt and Qatar are working towards** facilitating one.
- Israel escalated its actions by attacking the **Al Shifa hospital in Gaza** again, leading to civilian casualties.
- Airstrikes and bombings in Rafah, Gaza, have intensified recently.
- Reports suggest **Israel also targeted Southern Lebanon**, resulting in civilian casualties.
- **In response, Hezbollah increased missile strikes into Northern Israel**, causing damage to military assets and loss of lives.
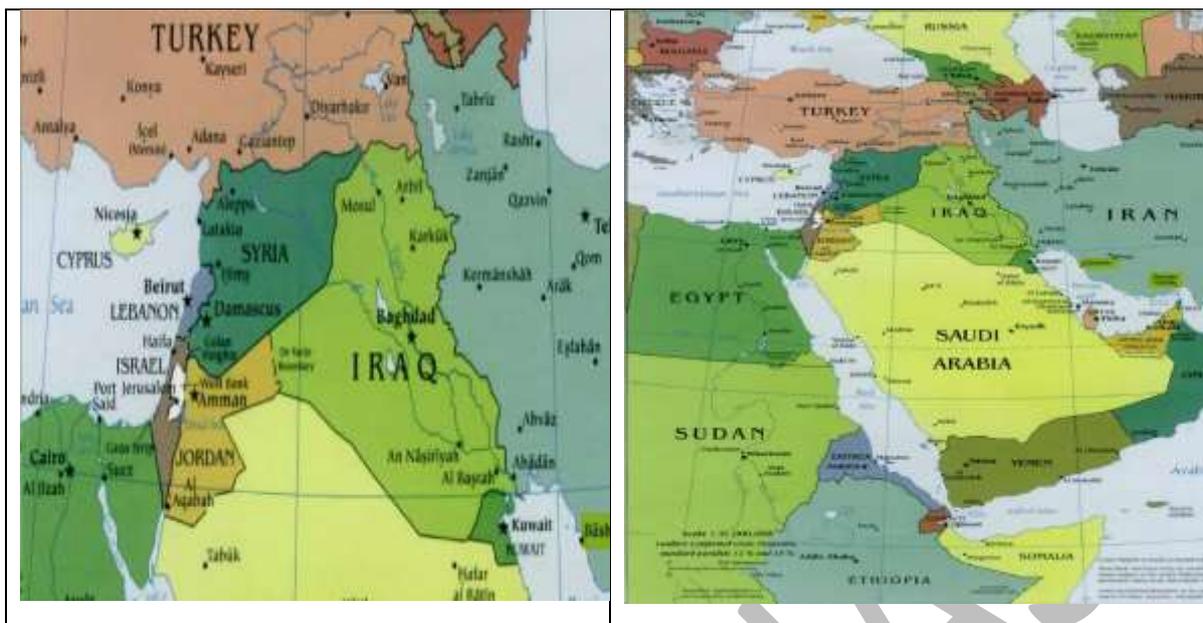
- **Houthis in the south are disrupting and blocking Israeli, U.S., and British ships in the Red Sea**, causing economic losses.
- The war in Gaza has led to over 32,000 lives lost, according to recent estimates.
- **An Israeli strike in Syria targeted the Iranian Consulate in Damascus**, killing a senior Al Quds leader on April 1, heightening the risk of a broader conflict.

War objectives, their status

1. **Israel launched a counter-offensive into Gaza on October 7 with three aims:**

   - Flatten Gaza.
   - Eliminate Hamas.
   - Retrieve all its hostages.

2. **Review of Israel's aims:**

   - Gaza has been severely damaged, making it nearly uninhabitable for years.
   - Israel has flattened a kilometer-wide stretch along the Gaza border.
   - Estimates suggest only 30% of Hamas fighters have been eliminated.
   - **Hamas's fighting potential remains, and its supply of rockets hasn't dried up.**
   - Hamas **leader Yahya Sinwar** has evaded Israeli forces.
   - Israel has **not successfully rescued its hostages**, with some reported killed in crossfire.

3. **Hamas's objectives:**

   - **Remind the world of the Palestinian state cause amid talks of normalization** between Israel and Arab states.
   - **Expose the perceived invincibility of the Israeli military** to its support base.
   - **Hamas succeeded in achieving both objectives** through the conflict.

4. **Starting a war is easy, but ending it is challenging:**

- **Ceasefires often result from stalemates or international pressure** rather than achieving military or political goals.
- Examples include the **prolonged U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,** and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- **Lack of clearly defined exit strategies** can prolong conflicts despite initial military victories.

Impact on Israel

- Israel is facing significant challenges due to the prolonged conflict in Gaza
- The Israeli Army has suffered losses and injuries
- **The economy is shrinking rapidly, with estimates showing a decline of almost 20%**
- **Prime Minister Netanyahu is facing difficulties holding onto his position both domestically and internationally**
- The U.S., Israel's ally, has indicated that Israel needs to show restraint in its actions in Gaza.
- Israel needs to reconsider its war strategy and objectives for a clear and achievable end state.
- **While Gaza has been militarily defeated, Hamas is unlikely to be completely eliminated.**
- The most viable option for Israel could be to **pursue an early ceasefire** in the conflict with Gaza.
- **Israel could withdraw its forces from the Gaza Strip and establish a surveillance cum buffer zone along the Gaza border, using the recently flattened one-kilometer strip**.
- This buffer zone, under constant surveillance, could help prevent another escalation like the one that occurred on October 7th.
- **Regarding hostages, Hamas might agree to an exchange once Israel agrees to the proposed ceasefire and buffer zone.**
- Looking to the future and a potential **two-state solution**, all parties involved will need to revisit their positions and negotiate a time-bound and acceptable solution.
- Both Israel and Palestine share a geographical and destined connection, and **a peaceful future will likely require significant compromises from both sides.**
- If agreed upon, these measures could lead to a face-saving and smart exit from the current unwinnable war in Gaza.

4.4 India abstains from UNHRC vote that called upon Israel for immediate ceasefire in Gaza:

- India abstained from voting on a resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) regarding the conflict in Gaza.
- The resolution called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for member states to implement an arms embargo.
- India's abstention is believed to be consistent with its past votes on HRC resolutions that call for "accountability."
- However, India did vote in favour of three other resolutions criticizing Israel for human rights violations against Palestinians and Israel's occupation of Syrian Golan.
- These resolutions also called for the Palestinian right to self-determination.

- The **resolutions were introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation.**
- India's Ministry of External Affairs did not provide an explanation for the vote, but it aligns with previous abstentions on similar resolutions.
- The decision is also in line with India's vote at the UNGA in October 2023, as the HRC resolution did not condemn Hamas but criticized Israel's actions in Gaza.
- The **United States, Germany, and four other countries voted against a resolution titled "Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice."**
- India, along with France and Japan, abstained from voting on this resolution.
- However, **28 members**, including Bangladesh, China, Maldives, the UAE, and Indonesia, voted in favour of the resolution.
- India voted in favour of three other resolutions:
    1. "Right of the Palestinian people to self-determination"
    2. "Human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan"
    3. "Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan"

5. **India-Pakistan Relations:**

Why in News – 40 years to Operation Meghdoot
- The **Siachen Glacier is located at a high altitude of 15,632 feet** and experiences extreme weather conditions.
- The conflict on the glacier involves India and Pakistan, with India pre-emptively occupying the glacier on the **Saltoro ridge overlooking the Nubra valley in the Karakoram ranges.**
- April 13, 2024, marks forty years since the Indian Army's pre-emptive action.
- Extreme weather poses the biggest challenge on the glacier, leading to the loss of around 1,150 soldiers' lives, with most casualties attributed to the harsh conditions.

Conflicting claims

- **"Siachen" comes from the Balti language**, meaning "**land of roses,**" with "Sia" representing a rose species and "Chen" meaning "in abundance."
- Despite its floral name, Siachen is infamous as the **world's highest and coldest battlefield.**
- It holds strategic significance, situated between Pakistan on the left and China on the right.
- Siachen's origins trace back to the Partition between India and Pakistan.
- While **the Line of Control (LoC)** was agreed upon up to **NJ-9842 in the 1972 Simla agreement, Siachen remained unmarked.**
- India bases its claim on agreements from 1947 and 1949, defining the cease-fire line as extending "Northwards to the glaciers."

- Pakistan interprets the agreements differently, claiming the area "North-Eastwards" beyond the Saltoro Ridge and Siachen.
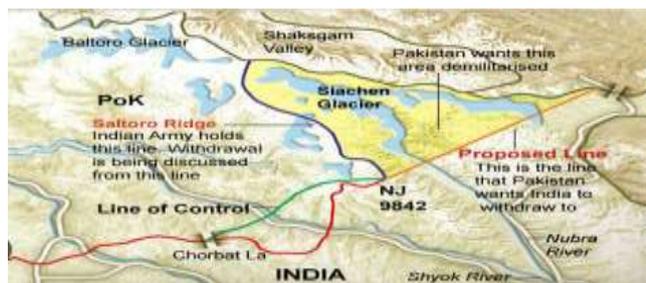
- Pakistan's claim could provide direct connectivity to China and strategic oversight over Ladakh and the Leh-Srinagar highway, posing a threat to India.

The Genesis of Operation Meghdoot

- In the **1970s and 1980s, Pakistan allowed foreign mountaineering expeditions in Siachen to support its territorial claims.**
- India received intelligence of Pakistan's impending military action in 1984 and decided to act pre-emptively.
- Col. Narinder 'Bull' Kumar's mountaineering expeditions in the early 1980s aided in the planning of Operation Meghdoot.
- Operation Meghdoot was launched on April 13, 1984, to capture the 76.4 km-long Siachen glacier.
- The Indian flag was planted at **Bilafond La at an altitude of 18,000 feet by a platoon of 4 Kumaon led by Captain Sanjay Kulkarni.**
- The Ladakh Scouts were deployed via Cheetah helicopters by the Indian Air Force (IAF) during the operation.
- IAF helicopters had been operating in the glacier since October 1978, and strategic airlifters transported troops and supplies.
- About 300 troops were positioned on key peaks and passes of the glacier.
- In June 1987, Indian troops captured **Quaid post at 21,153 feet under Operation Rajiv**, later renamed Bana top in honor of Naib Subedar Bana Singh.
- Regular firing exchanges between both sides occurred from 1984 to 2003.
- The guns fell silent in 2003 following a ceasefire agreement along the LoC and the **Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) in Siachen.**
- Operation Meghdoot continues to this day, making it the longest continuing operation globally.

A Test of Endurance

- **Army posts on the Siachen glacier are situated at heights of 18,000 feet and above,** with Bana post being the highest and Indira Col the highest point.
- Between 18,000 and 19,000 feet, Indian and Pakistani posts face each other, but beyond 20,000 feet, only India maintains positions.
- Operations on Siachen test human endurance and skills due to extreme conditions, especially in the early days of Operation Meghdoot.
- Initially, Indian Air Force (IAF) operations relied on helicopters and transport aircraft, with fighters joining later.
- In September 1984, a detachment of Hunter aircraft from No. 27 squadron began operations from the high altitude airfield at Leh.
- Over the next years, Hunters conducted over 700 sorties from Leh, including fighter sweeps and simulated strikes.
- Live armament sorties were later conducted at the high altitude firing range at Kar Tso, south of Leh.
- The IAF introduced Cheetal helicopters to the glacier in 2009, featuring re-engineered engines for improved reliability and load carrying capacity at high altitude.

Recent Developments on the Glacier

- Over the last four decades, significant advancements have occurred in technology, facilities, and logistical support on the Siachen glacier.
- Major improvements have been made in habitat, communications, mobility, logistics, medical support, and green initiatives.
- Climate change is impacting the glacier, with the **snout receding by over a kilometers** from its original position in 1984.
- Introduction of VSAT technology has revolutionized communication, providing troops with data and internet connectivity, enhancing situational awareness and telemedicine capabilities.
- All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and ATV bridges, along with Chinook heavy-lift helicopters and logistic drones, have improved mobility and supply of essential provisions to remote posts, even during harsh winters.
- New logistics chains ensure fresh rations and vegetables for forward posts, along with special clothing, mountaineering equipment, and advanced rations to withstand extreme temperatures.
- Various aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF), including Rafale, Su-30MKI, Chinook, Apache, and others, support Operation Meghdoot, with helicopters serving as a lifeline for troops in remote areas.
- Medical facilities in Partapur and Base Camp include telemedicine nodes, high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPO) chambers, oxygen generation plants, and life support systems, staffed with top medical specialists in the country.

What Next?

- **Siachen and Sir Creek have been considered as relatively easier issues to resolve** compared to the complex Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan.
- Dialogues on Siachen have occurred at the level of **Defence Secretaries between India and Pakistan**.
- India has expressed willingness for **demilitarization of the glacier but insists on authenticating the 110 km Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) as the first step, which Pakistan has rejected.**
- Former **Army Chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Narvane emphasized the strategic importance of Siachen due to the collusive threat from China and Pakistan, underscoring the need to maintain control over the area.**
- Siachen overlooks the Shaksgam valley, which Pakistan ceded to China in 1963, complicating the situation further.
- Recent tensions between India and China in Eastern Ladakh and along the Line of Actual Control have added complexities to any potential settlement of the Siachen issue.
- Consequently, Siachen is no longer seen as an easy or "low-hanging fruit" in the context of resolving India-Pakistan conflicts.

6. <u>International Organizations/Bodies/Institutions:</u>

6.1. <u>International Monetary Fund (IMF)</u>

- **Founded:** 1944 (Began operations in 1945)

- **Purpose:** The IMF works to foster global monetary cooperation, ensure financial stability, promote international trade, facilitate high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.

- **Membership:** 190 member countries

- **Headquarters:** Washington D.C., United States

- **Key Functions**

    o **Surveillance:** The IMF monitors the economic and financial health of its member countries and the global economy, highlighting potential risks and advising on policies.

    o **Lending:** Provides financial assistance to member countries facing balance-of-payments problems, helping them restore stability and economic growth.

    o **Capacity Development:** Offers training, technical assistance, and policy advice to member countries to strengthen their institutional capacity and economic management.

- **Key Functions:**

    o **Negotiating Trade Agreements:** Serves as a forum for WTO members to negotiate and establish multilateral trade rules and agreements.

    o **Settling Trade Disputes:** Provides a dispute settlement mechanism to help member countries resolve trade conflicts in a fair and transparent manner.

    o **Monitoring Trade Policies:** Reviews member countries' trade policies to ensure they adhere to WTO rules and principles.

    o **Capacity Building:** Assists developing and least-developed countries in strengthening their ability to participate in the global trading system.

6.2. World Economic Forum

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) is an international non-governmental organization that facilitates dialogue between top figures in government, business, and civil society. Its mission is to improve the world through public-private cooperation.

- **Founded:** 1971 in Cologny, Switzerland, by Klaus Schwab

- **Headquarters:** Cologny, Switzerland

- **Leadership:**

    o Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman

    o Borge Brende, President

Key Activities

- **Annual Meeting in Davos:** The high-profile annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, is the organization's flagship event. It's a gathering of world leaders in politics, business, academia, and civil society to discuss pressing global issues.

- **Regional and Industry Meetings:** The WEF organizes numerous events throughout the year focused on specific regions or industries.

- **Initiatives and Platforms:** The Forum launches and manages various initiatives and platforms focused on issues like:

    o Climate change

    o The Fourth Industrial Revolution (technologies like AI)

    o Global health

    o Economic development

How it Works

- **Membership Model:** Companies become members of the WEF, providing the primary source of funding for its activities.

- **Partnerships:** The WEF actively collaborates with governments, other international organizations, and civil society groups.

- **The "Spirit of Davos":** The Forum emphasizes a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach they term the "Spirit of Davos," where diverse actors work together to find solutions

6.3. G7

- **The Group of Seven:** An intergovernmental forum of the world's seven largest advanced economies. These are **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.**

- **The European Union** also participates as a "non-enumerated member".

- **Purpose:** The G7 nations meet annually to discuss major economic, political, security, and global development challenges and to coordinate policies where appropriate.

- **Origins:** The G7 was formed in the 1970s in response to the economic turmoil of the time, including the oil crisis and the collapse of fixed exchange rates.

Key Areas of Focus

- **Economic Cooperation:** Promoting global economic growth, trade, financial stability, and working on common challenges.

- **Global Health:** Addressing public health crises and strengthening health systems worldwide.

- **Climate and Environment:** Tackling climate change, protecting biodiversity, transitioning to green energy, and promoting sustainable policies.

- **Foreign Policy & Security:** Collaborating on peace, security, and addressing threats like terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

- **Democracy & Human Rights:** Upholding democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law globally.

6.4. UNSC

- Charged with maintaining international peace and security, making it a central organ of the **United Nations.**

- **Power of Authorization:** The UNSC can authorize **peacekeeping missions, impose sanctions, and even authorize the use of military force** to address threats to peace.

Composition:

- **15 Members:**

  - Five permanent members:

    - China

    - France

    - Russia

    - The United Kingdom

    - The United States

  - **Ten non-permanent members:** Elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms, based on regional representation.

Key Functions

- **Investigating Disputes:** Examines situations that could lead to international unrest.

- **Peacekeeping Missions:** Establishes and oversees peacekeeping operations to help maintain or restore peace in conflict zones.

- **Sanctions:** Can impose economic, diplomatic, or military sanctions to enforce its resolutions.

- **Use of Force:** Authorizes the use of force by UN member states to confront aggression or threats to peace.

- **Security Council Reform:** Ongoing discussions about reforming the Council's membership structure and decision-making procedures.

Decision-Making

- **Resolutions:** Decisions on substantive matters require nine affirmative votes.

The Veto Power: Each permanent member holds veto power, meaning a single "no" vote can block a resolution on substantive matters, even if it has majority support.

7. Miscellaneous:

7.1 Nuclear Disarmament:

Seventy years ago, with a speech in the Lok Sabha, Nehru cemented India's claim to leadership, gave impetus to calls that eventually yielded the Partial Test Ban Treaty, and arguably limited horizontal nuclear proliferation

- On April 2, 1954, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru delivered a significant speech in the Lok Sabha.

- The speech was prompted by the US's 'Castle Bravo' thermonuclear test in the previous month.
- **'Castle Bravo' was an extremely powerful test** that overwhelmed measuring instruments.
- Nehru called for **a "standstill agreement" on nuclear testing in response to 'Castle Bravo'.**
- Despite India's status as a newly decolonized nation facing nation-building challenges and lacking traditional markers of power, Nehru asserted India's global standing.
- Nehru's speech demonstrated pragmatism, vision, and self-assurance.
- He consistently advocated for the moratorium on nuclear testing in various international forums.
- **Nehru's leadership contributed to the eventual creation of the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT).**
- The **PTBT aimed to limit horizontal nuclear proliferation by categorizing nuclear weapons as unacceptable.**

The Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT)

- It is also known as the **1963 Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water, stopped countries from testing nuclear weapons in the air, underwater, or in space.**
- It **allowed testing to continue underground because it was harder to detect and caused less environmental damage.**
- Even though it didn't completely stop countries from making nuclear weapons or testing them, the treaty did lead to a decrease in the amount of dangerous radiation in the air.

Participation in the Partial Test Ban Treaty
- Signed and ratified
- Only signed
- Acceded or succeeded
- Non-signatory

- The **PTBT was first signed by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States in 1963**, and it went into effect later that year.
- Over time, **123 other countries joined the treaty**, agreeing not to test nuclear weapons in the air, underwater, or in space.
- However, there are still some countries that have signed the treaty but haven't officially agreed to follow it yet.

The standstill agreement

- Nehru's standstill agreement proposed an incremental approach to nuclear disarmament during the Cold War.
- The proposal had four main elements:
1. **Immediate moratorium** on nuclear testing.
2. Urging the **United Nations Disarmament Commission** to address both short-term and long-term goals of disarmament.
3. Advocating **for greater disclosure on the effects of nuclear weapons** to build public pressure on nuclear states.
4. **Calling on all nations to recognize the global threat posed by nuclear weapons.**
- Nehru's initiative aimed to **make disarmament a global issue** rather than confining it to the UN Disarmament Commission.

- India's proposal effectively put nuclear-armed states on notice, urging them to acknowledge the peril posed by their tests and calling for transparency.
- India continued its efforts at the UN, including drafting a resolution in 1955 for a testing halt and progress reports to **the Disarmament Commission**.
- **Nehru also organized a conference of scientists in 1954 to study atomic energy and nuclear explosion effects.**
- Plans for **the first Pugwash meeting** were underway in Delhi in 1956, but geopolitical events like the **Suez Crisis** and the Hungarian Revolution intervened.

Moral Force:

- In 1954, India, despite being poor and weak, played an active role in nuclear disarmament.
- India lacked support from non-aligned nations as the **Bandung Conference** had not yet occurred.
- Nehru emphasized India's moral force in global affairs, highlighting its significance despite its military limitations.
- India's stance on disarmament was driven by the need to prioritize development over an arms race.
- **The Atomic Energy Act of 1948** allowed for the sequestration of India's nuclear program, providing a Plan B for potential weapons development.
- While Nehru did not outright support nuclear weapons development, he didn't discourage it either, as evidenced by Homi Bhabha's involvement.
- Nehru's speech in the Lok Sabha laid the groundwork for **India's role in the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), signed by India in 1963.**
- India's call for greater information on nuclear radiation effects and mobilization against atomic weapons contributed to global norms against nuclear use.
- The speech elevated India's global standing as a voice of reason and morality, aligning with Nehru's vision to be a "power for peace and for the good of the world."

7.2 IRGC | Guardians of the Revolution:

Iran's elite military wing, which has helped the Islamic Republic spread its influence across West Asia through a network of militias, is under pressure as several of its top commanders were killed by purported Israeli air strikes in Syria in recent months

- Gen. Mohammed Reza Zahedi was a high-ranking commander of the **Quds Force, a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) focused on operations outside Iran.**
- He was experienced in military affairs, having served in the Iran-Iraq war, and was close to Qassem Soleimani, the former chief of the Quds Force who was killed by the U.S. in Baghdad in January 2020.
- Gen. Zahedi oversaw IRGC operations in Lebanon and Syria, where Iran has significant influence through support to Shia militias.

- On April 1, Gen. Zahedi and other IRGC figures were meeting with members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad at Iran's embassy annex in Damascus, Syria.
- **Their movements were tracked by Israel, leading to an airstrike on the embassy compound that killed Gen. Zahedi and his colleagues.**
- Both Iran and Syria blamed Israel for the attack, although Israel neither confirmed nor denied its involvement.
- Gen. Zahedi's death was a significant loss for Iran, marking the highest-ranking military figure killed by enemy fire since Gen. Soleimani's assassination.
- Several other IRGC commanders have been killed in Israeli strikes in Syria recently, increasing tensions between Iran and Israel.
- Despite Iran's retaliatory missile strikes targeting alleged Mossad bases, Israel continued to target IRGC commanders, putting pressure on Iran to respond.
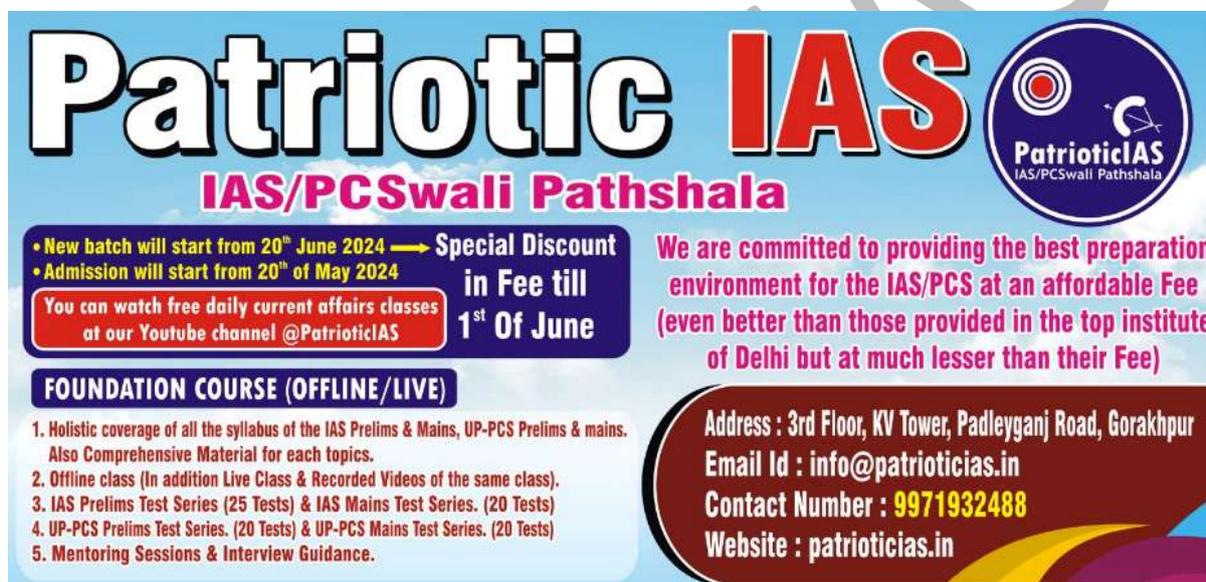
The Rise

- **The IRGC, or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was established in Iran after the 1979 revolution.**
- **Its main goal was to protect the revolutionary regime and its theocratic-constitutional system led by Ayatollah Khomeini.**
- Initially created due to concerns about loyalty from Iran's regular Army, the IRGC later became a formidable force during the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988.
- Khomeini referred to the IRGC as "the soldiers of Islam," highlighting their allegiance to the clergy and the revolution.
- Alongside Iran's regular military, the IRGC operates to safeguard the revolutionary regime and influence foreign and security policies.
- Directly commanded by the Supreme Leader, the **IRGC consists of a military wing, an overseas operational unit called the Quds Force, and a civilian voluntary organization known as Basij.**
- The IRGC, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, commands around 190,000 trained soldiers, about half the size of Iran's regular forces.
- It comprises an Army, air force, and navy, with the navy considered particularly potent due to its control over Iran's maritime borders, including the vital **Strait of Hormuz.**
- In March 2007, the IRGC Navy's actions led to a diplomatic crisis between Iran and the U.K. when they detained 15 British sailors.
- The Quds Force focuses on liberating Muslim holy sites from occupation and building networks of Shia influence in West Asia.
- Hezbollah, Iran's powerful ally in the region, originated from an Islamic Resistance group formed in Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, with support from the IRGC.

Axis of Resistance

- The Quds Force, led by Gen. Qassem Soleimani until his death in 2020, gained prominence for its role in supporting Shia resistance in Iraq against U.S. troops after the 2003 invasion.
- During the Syrian civil war, the Quds Force intervened to protect Shia holy sites and later fought alongside Syrian regime forces, along with Russia and Hezbollah, to bolster President Assad's regime.

- **Iran supports various Islamist militia groups in the region, forming what's known as the "axis of resistance," including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Houthis, Hezbollah, and Shia mobilisation brigades in Iraq and Syria.**
- Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami currently leads the Quds Force, which operates under the command of the IRGC, designated as a terrorist entity by the U.S.
- Israel views Iran's regional influence as a security threat and seeks to counter it, leading to escalating tensions and shadow wars between the two countries.
- **The IRGC sees itself surrounded by rivals, including Sunni monarchies in the Gulf, Israel, and the U.S., which it refers to as the "Great Satan."**
- To protect Iran's revolution and overcome security challenges, the IRGC engages in asymmetric warfare through proxy battles, which have heightened tensions with Israel and brought the region close to open conflict.

ECONOMY

1. <u>Taxation:</u>

1.1 Buoyant GST revenues create a chance to prioritise its overhaul

- **Net direct tax collections for the financial year 2023-24 rose by 19.9% by mid-March, reaching 97% of the revised Budget targets**.
- Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections amounted to **₹20.18 lakh crore, with gross GST revenues in March exceeding ₹1.78 lakh crore**.
- March's GST collection was the **second highest since the tax was introduced six and a half years ago, surpassed only by April 2023.**
- The average monthly GST collections for 2023-24 grew by 11.6% to over ₹1.68 lakh crore, indicating a new revenue norm.

- Central GST collections for 2023-24 exceeded revised estimates, prompting the need for a revision in the 2024-25 targets.
- **Increased collections may partly result from past tax demands and efforts to curb evasion through measures like fake invoices.**
- Growth in net GST revenues and domestic transaction collections suggests busy economic activity in the last quarter of 2023-24.
- A slight decline in GST on goods imports in March may indicate **reduced discretionary spending.**
- Overall, the **GST trajectory provides confidence for the government to focus on tax reforms, including rationalizing multiple tax rates and reducing levies on essential products.**
- The **GST Compensation Cess, used to repay pandemic-era borrowings**, could potentially be phased out earlier than the current deadline of March 2026.
- However, **any new levies should be limited to truly harmful goods, such as tobacco, to avoid hindering India's green goals and economic growth.**

1.2. This election season, MSMEs pursue candidates with GST reform demands

- MSMEs, representing a significant portion of India's economy with around seven crore units across various sectors, are demanding a reduction in Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates.
- Reduction in GST rates is a primary demand from MSME representatives as the country prepares for the Lok Sabha election.
- Sudhir Jha, national convener of the All India Manufacturers Organisation and vice-president of the MSME Development Forum, highlights the importance of MSMEs, as approximately 12 crore people are dependent on them.
- Many MSMEs have been adversely affected by the complexity of GST slabs, which have paralyzed their operations over the years.
- Most MSMEs lack the resources and understanding of GST due to their small-scale operations, leading to challenges in compliance.
- Micro and small-scale units, although technically exempt from GST due to low turnover, are indirectly affected as suppliers to larger GST-registered industries, resulting in the loss of business opportunities if unable to meet documentation requirements.
- MSME clusters in Coimbatore and Ludhiana have submitted their demands to election candidates.
- In Coimbatore, the main demand is the reduction of GST on labor charges undertaken by micro and small-scale units from the current 12% to either 5% or nil.
- In Ludhiana, auto component units are burdened with a 28% tax on some components, highlighting the need for GST rate reduction in specific sectors.

2. Banking Sector:

2.1. RBI orders Kotak Bank to stop adding customers online.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed Kotak Mahindra Bank **to stop on boarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels.**
- The directive also **prohibits Kotak Bank from issuing fresh credit cards.**

- Existing customers of Kotak Bank, including credit card holders, can still avail services as usual.
- The RBI's action is based on significant concerns arising from its IT examination of the bank for the years 2022 and 2023.
- The central bank highlights Kotak Bank's failure to address these concerns comprehensively and promptly.
- **Serious deficiencies and non-compliances were observed in various areas including IT inventory management, user access management, data security, and business continuity and disaster recovery measures.**
- The RBI found Kotak Mahindra Bank deficient in IT risk and information security governance for two consecutive years.
- **Kotak Bank was significantly non-compliant with corrective action plans issued by the RBI for 2022 and 2023.**
- Frequent and significant outages were observed in Kotak Bank's Core Banking System (CBS) and digital banking channels over the last two years.
- **A service disruption occurred on April 15, 2024, causing serious inconvenience to customers.**
- The bank lacked necessary operational resilience due to its failure to build IT systems and controls in line with its growth.
- Despite continuous engagement with the RBI to address concerns, the outcomes were unsatisfactory.
- Rapid growth in digital transactions, including credit card transactions, added strain to Kotak Bank's IT systems.
- The RBI imposed restrictions on Kotak Bank to prevent prolonged outages.
- Kotak Bank stated it is adopting new technologies to strengthen its IT systems and will work with the RBI to resolve issues promptly.
- The bank assured existing customers of uninterrupted services, including credit card, mobile, and net banking.

## 2.2 RBI keeps repo rate on hold as food prices remain high

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is concerned about the rise in food prices despite a moderation in overall inflation.
- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to **keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50%,** marking the **seventh consecutive time rates have been held steady**.
- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das stated that while progress has been made in reducing inflation, the task is not yet complete.
- The MPC aims to withdraw accommodation gradually to bring inflation in line with the target while supporting economic growth.

Repo Rate

- The repo rate is **the interest rate at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends money to commercial banks for short-term** needs. When banks need liquidity, they can borrow from the RBI by **selling government securities**, with **an agreement to repurchase them later at a slightly higher price**.
- **Policy Tool:** The repo rate is a primary tool used by the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to manage inflation, economic growth, and liquidity in the banking system.

How the Repo Rate Works

- **Increase in Repo Rate:**
  - Makes borrowing more expensive for commercial banks.
  - Discourages banks from taking loans from the RBI.
  - Can lead to higher interest rates on loans for consumers and businesses.
  - Helps control inflation by reducing the money supply in the economy.
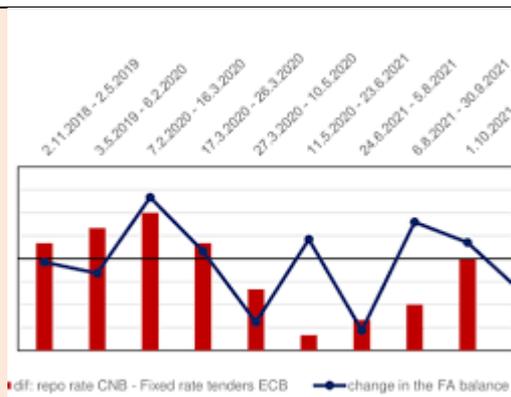
3. Infrastructure and Manufacturing Sector:

3.1 A critical examination of a persistent Indian view on manufacturing sector

- For over 77 years, India's political, economic, and business elite have emphasized manufacturing as the country's top priority.
- Reasons include expectations of greater productivity, job creation, and rapid GDP growth.
- Economic models like the Lewis two-sector model suggest that surplus labor from agriculture should move to the manufacturing sector for more productive work.
- The modern sector is characterized by capital-intensive technologies and high levels of capital investment.
- Advocates for manufacturing growth in India argue that the agricultural sector is under-productive, labor mobility between sectors is feasible, and India has a comparative advantage in manufacturing.
- Some voices suggest easing regulations on worker rights and land acquisition to facilitate manufacturing growth.
- However, a critical examination of these claims is necessary to validate their accuracy.
- The first claim regarding agricultural productivity is complex and requires specialized examination.
- From 2012 to 2022, cereal yields per hectare increased by more than 20%.
- Despite this, the total number of individuals employed in agriculture rose by over 10 million during the same period, despite their decreasing share of the labor force.

Value Added Rises

- The value added per worker in India's agriculture, forestry, and fishing segment increased significantly from $1,557 to $2,400 between 2012 and 2022, indicating increased productivity despite absorbing more labor.
- Claims that the agricultural sector is entirely underproductive might be inaccurate as it has shown improved output per worker.

- Constraints on productivity also stem from capital and technological limitations, not just a surplus of workers.
- The ease of labour mobility between sectors has been contested, with some economists, including former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, noting that Indian manufacturing workers may not be as qualified as their global counterparts.
- **The Ricardian theory of comparative advantage** suggests that for successful specialization in exports, a country must lower the opportunity cost of producing the good compared to other countries.
- Under **the "Make in India" initiative**, the government has made efforts to attract foreign enterprises by improving the Ease of Doing Business index rankings and offering schemes and subsidies like **the Production Linked Incentive scheme**.
- Despite these efforts, **manufacturing's contribution to GDP has remained stagnant, standing at 13% in 2022 compared to 13-16% in the 1960s** and peaking at 18% in 1979.
- **Manufacturing in India faces challenges** such as poor infrastructure, a lack of skilled workers, and minimal research and development, which may hinder its comparative advantage.
- The focus on deregulation and removing supply-side constraints in manufacturing must consider the lack of demand for manufactured goods in India.
- In contrast, India's services sector has seen significant growth, with services value added as a percentage of **GDP increasing from 38% in the 1960s to over 48% in 2022**.
- India has shown competitiveness in services, especially due to its educated population.
- Economists like Dr. Rajan argue that allocating a significant portion of the budget for higher education to establish a single chip factory may not be the best use of resources.
- Instead, there should be a focus on promoting human capital through initiatives like raising the literacy rate and improving healthcare.
- Much of the value addition in manufacturing, such as in mobile phones, comes from proprietary design technology, which is often owned by foreign firms.
- It might be more beneficial to concentrate on capturing a higher share of value addition through design rather than assembly.
- India's share of design in products like chips is increasing rapidly, indicating a comparative advantage in design.
- Redirecting investments from manufacturing to enhancing human capital in services and education could offer more significant economic benefits than initially envisioned with a manufacturing push.

3.2 This election season, MSMEs pursue candidates with GST reform demands

- MSMEs, representing a significant portion of India's economy with **around seven crore units** across various sectors, are **demanding a reduction in Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates**.
- **Reduction in GST rates is a primary demand from MSME** representatives as the country prepares for the Lok Sabha election.
- Sudhir Jha, national convener of the **All India Manufacturers Organisation** and vice-president of the MSME Development Forum, highlights the importance of MSMEs, as **approximately 12 crore people are dependent on them**.

- Many MSMEs have been **adversely affected by the complexity of GST slabs**, which have paralyzed their operations over the years.
- Most MSMEs **lack the resources and understanding of GST** due to their small-scale operations, leading to challenges in compliance.
- Micro and small-scale units, although technically exempt from GST due to low turnover, are indirectly **affected as suppliers to larger GST-registered industries**, resulting in the loss of business opportunities if unable to meet documentation requirements.
- MSME clusters in Coimbatore and Ludhiana have submitted their demands to election candidates.
- In Coimbatore, the main demand is the reduction of GST on labor charges undertaken by micro and small-scale units **from the current 12% to either 5% or nil.**
- In Ludhiana, auto component units are burdened with a 28% tax on some components, highlighting the need for GST rate reduction in specific sectors.

3.3 Will New Solar Power Rules Boost Production?

What is the Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules Order?

- The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) in India has introduced a new executive order.**
- The order is called "**The Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules (Requirements for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2019**."
- It came into effect from April 1.
- The purpose of this order is to **encourage and support India's solar module manufacturing industry.**
- The **order aims to regulate the production and sale of solar photovoltaic modules.**
- It **mandates compulsory registration for manufacturers producing these modules.**
- This registration requirement is **intended to ensure quality control and adherence to standards.**
- By implementing this order, the **government aims to promote domestic manufacturing and reduce reliance on imports in the solar energy sector.**

What is the context of the executive order?

- The MNRE issued the order in 2019.
- It mandates solar module makers to undergo **inspections by** the **National Institute of Solar Energy.**
- Approval from this inspection certifies a company as a genuine manufacturer of solar panels.
- **This is to distinguish between true manufacturers and mere importers or assemblers.**
- India's solar industry heavily relies on imports from China despite claims of indigenous production.
- **Solar modules are crucial components, made up of multiple solar panels.**
- **Solar panels, in turn, are assemblies of solar cells.**
- India aims to significantly increase solar installations by 2030.
- However, local production of solar cells and modules falls short of demand.

- **India also lacks the capacity to produce raw materials like ingots and wafers, relying on imports for these components.**

Why is India reliant on imports?

- India aims to **reduce reliance on fossil fuels by sourcing 500 GW of electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030.**
- This plan includes generating at least **280 GW from solar power alone**.
- To achieve this, approximately 40 GW of solar capacity needs to be added annually until 2030.
- However, over the last five years, India has **only managed to add around 13 GW of solar capacity.**
- The COVID-19 pandemic is cited as a factor affecting the progress towards these targets.
- India's solar industry faces challenges in meeting the demand for solar panels and component cells domestically.
- **China** dominates the global supply of solar components, **controlling nearly 80% of the market.**
- The creation of a list of approved solar module manufacturers aims to regulate imports and boost domestic production.
- **Tensions between India and China** have also influenced the decision to reduce reliance on Chinese imports.
- Meeting solar energy targets remains a significant challenge for India due to limited domestic production capacity.

If the list is voluntary why pay to be on it?

- Being on the Approved Models and Manufacturers (AMM) list allows companies **to compete for government tenders in solar energy programs.**
- These tenders include flagship programs like the **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana**, aimed at subsidizing rooftop solar installations for around one crore households.
- Eligibility for the **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana and other schemes requires certification as a domestic manufacturer on the AMM list.**
- Another scheme, **PM KUSUM**, focuses on providing solar pump sets and rural electrification, with eligibility for manufacturers tied to being certified as genuine local manufacturers.
- The **Production Linked Incentive Scheme, worth ₹24,000 crore, aims to incentivize domestic manufacturing of solar panels and components.**
- To qualify for incentives under this scheme, companies must be recognized as genuine local manufacturers.
- Currently, 14 major companies have become eligible for incentives to manufacture solar modules totalling 48 GW.
- However, these restrictions apply only to new projects, and facilities commissioned before March 2024 can still use imported modules.

Is India's manufacturing capacity adequate?

- Last year was advantageous for Indian solar businesses due to reduced orders from the U.S. and Europe to China, a major supplier of solar components globally.
- **China faced restrictions due to allegations of using "forced labor" by Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang**, prompting reduced imports from Europe and the U.S.
- **India benefited, exporting nearly $1 billion worth of solar modules in the first six months of 2023-24.**
- However, there are concerns that the U.S. might lift duties on China, potentially affecting Indian exports negatively in the future.
- **About half of India's solar modules are imported from China, leading to a demand-supply gap.**
- The government aims to increase domestic manufacturing capacity, but challenges persist.
- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) lists 82 certified solar module manufacturers, but **there's no equivalent list for solar cell manufacturers.**
- India still has a long way to go to achieve self-reliance in solar manufacturing.

4.   Inequality and Unemployment:

4.1 What is the outlook on women's employment?

The story so far:

- The **India Employment Report, 2024, was released by the Institute for Human Development and the International Labour Organization.**
- According to the report, key labor market indicators have shown improvement in recent years.
- The **indicators include the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Workforce Participation Rate (WPR), and Unemployment Rate (UR).**
- Between **2000 and 2019, these indicators showed a long-term deterioration.**
- However, they improved thereafter, which coincided with periods of economic distress, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The improvement was observed except for two peak pandemic quarters.

What about women's participation?

- The female Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India is significantly lower than that of males.
- In 2023, the **male LFPR was 78.5, while the female LFPR was only 37.**
- Globally, the **average female LFPR is 49 according to World Bank data**.
- The **female LFPR had been declining steadily since 2000, reaching 24.5 in 2019, before slightly increasing, especially in rural areas.**
- **Despite these modest improvements, employment conditions for women remain poor.**
- Amit Basole, an Economics professor at Azim Premji University, suggests that **the increase in female LFPR is mostly in rural areas and self-employment, often involving unpaid work.**
- **He explains that this trend likely stems from economic slowdowns before COVID-19 and the pandemic itself, leading to more women entering the labor force.**

- Some hypotheses suggest improvements in measuring women's work and increased non-farm employment for men, leading women to substitute for men in agriculture.
- However, conclusive evidence regarding the causes is still lacking.

Where are women employed?

- The **India Employment Report highlights that women are primarily responsible for the rise in self-employment and unpaid family work.**
- **Nearly two-thirds of the additional employment created after 2019 consists of self-employed individuals, with women predominantly working as unpaid family workers.**
- The proportion of regular employment, which had been steadily increasing since 2000, started declining after 2018.
- Globally, South Asia, including India, has the highest rate of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET), averaging 29.2% between 2010 and 2019.
- India specifically has a significant portion of young people classified as NEET, with a higher rate among women compared to me

What are some of the reasons for low women's participation in the labour force?

- Economists and women's rights experts identify multiple barriers hindering women's careers or job opportunities.
- These barriers include **a lack of job availability, women being burdened with caregiving responsibilities, low wages, patriarchal attitudes, and safety concerns.**
- Jayati Ghosh, in her book "The Making of a Catastrophe," notes a significant decline in women's labor force participation rates between 2004 and 2018.
- Ghosh attributes part of this decline to **increased participation in education among women aged 15 to 19 but highlights a broader trend of women being pushed out of employment due to a scarcity of paid work.**
- Amit Basole suggests both supply and demand side factors contribute to the decline in women's LFPR.
- **India's growth pattern, which lacks job-intensive sectors, combined with social norms restricting women's mobility and caregiving roles**, limits their ability to seek employment opportunities.
- **Concerns about public safety and transportation** further constrain women's job options, as noted by Ghosh.
- Claudia Goldin's research, recognized with the 2023 Economics Nobel Prize, highlights various factors affecting the supply and demand for female labor.
- These factors include opportunities for balancing work and family, decisions regarding education and child-rearing, technological advancements, legal frameworks, the structural transformation of the economy and societal norms.
- Goldin emphasizes that women's choices are often constrained by **marriage and domestic responsibilities**, a phenomenon observed not only in the U.S. but also in countries like India.

What needs to change?

- Economists emphasize the necessity of interventions in both the demand and supply sides **of the labor market to address women's employment** challenges.

- On the demand side, policies promoting labor-intensive sectors in manufacturing and higher productivity services are crucial.
- Public investment in safety and transportation infrastructure is essential to create conducive environments for women to work outside the home.
- Additionally, public investment in **affordable child and elderly care facilities is vital to support women in balancing caregiving responsibilities with employment.**
- These interventions aim to enable women to access better-paying job opportunities and participate more actively in the labor force.

4.2. Inequality can no longer be Ignored:

Addressing inequality is also about questioning the nature of growth itself — which is now unequal — and ensuring that jobs are generated

- The Congress party's election manifesto, Nyay Patra, has sparked a debate on inequality and wealth concentration.
- The Prime Minister's comments on the manifesto have also stirred discussions on wealth redistribution.
- World Inequality database found that inequality in India has been on the rise, with evidence showing that **22.6% of the national income went to the top 1% in 2022-23, the highest since 1922.**
- **Wealth inequality is even more pronounced, with the top 1% holding 40.1% of the country's wealth.**
- It's evident that inequality can no longer be ignored or justified as a byproduct of economic growth.
- The cost of such unequal growth needs to be examined and addressed.

As an Election issue is Welcome

- **There's growing awareness of the unfairness where some individuals and corporations thrive while most of the population struggles for decent employment.**
- The idea of supporting 'wealth creators' to stimulate job creation and prosperity has repeatedly failed, not just in India but worldwide.
- Relying solely on economic growth, even if it exacerbates inequality, to improve people's lives is being questioned globally.
- The emergence of this issue as an election topic in India is noteworthy regardless of the election outcome in 2024.
- Public discourse, especially on social media, has largely focused on direct redistribution measures **like taxing the rich and subsidizing the poor**, which are relevant in India.
- **India has a low tax-GDP ratio compared to other middle-income countries, with indirect taxes contributing the majority of tax revenue.**
- Even direct taxes in India are not very progressive, with companies earning over ₹500 crore profit before taxes facing a lower effective tax rate compared to smaller companies.

Welfare spending is low

- **Public spending on welfare and social sectors in India is significantly low compared to other countries.**
- For example, **spending on health remains around 1.3% of GDP, falling short of the National Health Policy target of 2.5% of GDP by 2025.**
- Despite the impact of COVID-19, there haven't been significant increases in health expenditures, making it unlikely to achieve the NHP target.
- **Other major budget allocations, like for MGNREGA and education, show a decline as a proportion of total expenditure or GDP.**
- There's a **need to improve revenue mobilization progressively while increasing spending on areas directly impacting the lives of the poor.**
- Addressing inequality also involves questioning the nature of growth, particularly its ability to generate jobs.
- Recent growth in India has been accompanied by joblessness, **declining employment elasticity, rising profit shares, and stagnant real wages.**
- The **focus should be on generating decent employment opportunities with adequate remuneration, rather than just promoting self-employment.**
- Equitable growth, where people's purchasing power increases, can be achieved through government spending on programs like NREGA and the Public Distribution System.
- Cash transfer schemes like the Mahalakshmi scheme proposed in the Congress manifesto can also contribute to equitable growth.

Job creation

- **Governments can create jobs by filling existing vacancies and expanding public services in health, education, nutrition, and social security.**
- **Improving the quality of jobs for frontline workers like anganwadi workers and health activists is essential, including better wages and working conditions.**
- Direct job creation efforts can enhance employment opportunities, especially for women, and improve human development outcomes.
- **Investing in public services can reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women and enable them to pursue other employment opportunities.**
- **Addressing inequality in opportunities and intergenerational inequality** requires equitable access to services like pre-school education and nutrition during childhood.
- **An employment-centered growth strategy should support labor-intensive small and medium enterprises and promote skill training and human capital development.**
- **Measures like maternity entitlements, childcare support, transportation, and affordable housing can facilitate women's participation in the labor market.**
- Addressing the employment issue is crucial for tackling inequality, as long as growth prioritizes profits for a few, employment challenges are likely to persist.

5. <u>**Miscellaneous:**</u>

5.1 The paradox of thrift: does a rise in savings cause a fall in investment?

- The paradox of savings suggests that while increasing individual savings may seem beneficial, it can actually lead to negative consequences for the overall economy.

- Contrary to common belief, a rise in individual savings rates may cause a decrease rather than an increase in the total savings of an economy.
- This concept challenges the notion that higher personal savings translate directly into greater overall savings for the economy.
- It is associated with under-consumption theories of the business cycle, which suggest that economic downturns result from low consumer spending and excessive savings.
- In essence, the paradox of savings highlights the complex relationship between individual financial behaviour and broader economic outcomes.

Origins of the theory

- The paradox of savings was popularized by British economist John Maynard Keynes in his 1936 book "The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money."
- Before Keynes, economists William T. Foster and Waddill Catchings discussed similar ideas in works such as "Business without a Buyer" and "The Dilemma of Thrift."
- Keynesian economists argue that higher savings can be detrimental to the economy because it reduces consumer spending.
- They believe that consumer spending drives economic growth by encouraging investment and production.
- According to Keynesian theory, if consumers save more and spend less, it can lead to reduced profits for businesses and discourage further investment.
- This reduction in consumer spending can result in a decrease in overall savings and investment in the economy.
- Keynesian economists recommend government intervention, such as increasing government spending, to stimulate consumer demand during economic downturns.
- They believe that fluctuations in consumer spending are a primary driver of the business cycle, and government policies should aim to stabilize and stimulate consumer spending to support economic growth.

Criticisms of the idea

- Critics of the paradox of savings argue that saving more is not detrimental to the economy.
- They contend that a decrease in consumer spending doesn't necessarily lead to a decrease in investment.
- According to critics, money not spent on consumer goods is typically saved and then invested, leading to an increase in investment.
- Higher savings can increase demand from capitalists for factors of production, offsetting any decrease in consumer demand.
- Critics suggest that lower consumer spending prompts capitalists to invest more in longer-term projects that were previously deemed unviable.
- This reallocation of savings towards future-oriented investments can lead to higher economic output in the long run.
- In a free economy, capitalists adjust investment decisions based on consumer preferences for goods in the distant future.
- Critics argue that the paradox of savings overlooks the dynamic nature of investment allocation in response to changes in consumer behaviour.

5.2 Traders rue under priced onion exports to the UAE

- The **Indian government imposed an extended ban on exporting onions** due to concerns about a potential domestic shortage.
- Despite the ban, the government allowed some shipments to markets like the UAE in response to diplomatic requests.
- Indian farmers and traders are concerned because some of these allowed shipments were sold at much higher prices in UAE stores.
- Farmers in India are reportedly being **paid very low prices, around ₹12 to ₹15 per kg for onions** intended for export.
- However, these same onions are being sold in UAE stores for over ₹120 per kg, yielding significant profits for selected importers.
- **The Indian government permitted the export of 14,400 tonnes of onions to the UAE**, with a quarterly cap of 3,600 tonnes. Additional exports were approved beyond this quota.
- Global onion prices have risen sharply due to **export bans imposed by countries like India, Pakistan, and Egypt**. Prices in major markets like the UAE reached as high as $1500 per tonne.
- These **exports are managed exclusively through the National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), a government-owned body under the Ministry of Cooperation**.
- Exporters were informed that the exports are conducted on a government-to-government basis, with the importing country allocating quotas to nominated importers. Procurements are done through e-tendering on the Agribazaar portal.
- On the UAE side, private traders and supermarket chains, not government agencies, are reportedly receiving these shipments.
- Typically, in trade deals, suppliers bid for the lowest price, and buyers are chosen based on the highest offered price. However, exporters claim this is not the case here.
- The Horticulture Produce Exporters' Association has raised concerns about the export process and pricing, noting that onion prices sold abroad are lower than international prices, which were around $1,450 a tonne at the time.
- Queries regarding the export price determination process and the identification of exporters and importers have gone unanswered by the Ministries of Commerce, Consumer Affairs, and Cooperation.
- The **Agriculture Ministry stated its focus is solely on providing crop estimates and is not involved in determining export prices** or identifying exporters and importers

ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>Climate Change and Its Impact:</u>

1.1 <u>G-7 Ministers agree to phase out coal-red power plants by 2030s</u>

- G-7 Energy Ministers have agreed on a timeline to phase out coal-fired power plants.
- This agreement comes after the world pledged to transition away from coal, oil, and gas at the UN's COP-28 climate summit in December.
- The agreement was reached during the Group of Seven meeting in Turin.
- According to British Nuclear and Renewables Minister Andrew Bowie, there is an agreement to phase out coal in the first half of the 2030s.
- A European source confirmed that the G-7 is likely to commit to closing the plants by the first half of the 2030s.
- The latest G-7 draft commits to phasing out existing unabated coal power generation during the first half of the 2030s or in a timeline consistent with keeping a limit of 1.5°C temperature rise within reach.
- Italian Environment and Energy Security Minister Gilberto Pichetto Fratin described the timeline as a hypothesis, indicating ongoing political discussions.
- A French political source stated that there is movement towards an ambitious agreement, particularly on the effective phase-out of coal.
- UN climate chief Simon Stiell urged highly industrialized countries to leverage their political clout, wealth, and technologies to end fossil fuel use.
- Stiell criticized the notion that the G-7 cannot lead bolder climate actions, emphasizing the importance of their leadership in addressing climate change.

1.2. How do Extreme Climate Events Impact Asia?

What does the 2023 'State of the Climate in Asia' report say? What does it mean for India?

- The **World Meteorological Organization's 2023 report, 'State of the Climate in Asia',** highlighted that Asia has experienced faster warming compared to the global average since 1960.
- 2023 was identified as the warmest year on record worldwide.
- The report emphasized an **"alarming gap" between climate projections and the capacity of Asian countries to adapt to and address climate change and its consequences.**

What toll did Heat Exact on Asia?

- In 2023, **more than 2,000 people lost their lives due to extreme climate events in Asia**, while over nine million individuals were affected.
- Over 80% of these events were attributed **to storms and floods**.
- The report also highlighted severe heat waves in various regions, leading to numerous fatalities.
- India experienced severe heat waves in April and June, resulting in approximately 110 deaths.
- A prolonged heat wave affected large parts of South and South-East Asia in April and May, impacting areas from Bangladesh and eastern India to southern China.

How did floods and storms affect Asia?

- **Tropical cyclone Mocha struck Myanmar and Bangladesh in May 2023**.
- It was identified as the **strongest cyclone in the Bay of Bengal in the past decade**.

- Following the cyclone, **floods, landslides, and lightning incidents occurred in India, Pakistan, and Nepal in June and July 2023.**
- Approximately 600 people lost their lives due to these events.
- In August 2023, floods and landslides in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, India, resulted in at least 25 deaths.
- **Lightning strikes caused approximately 1,200 fatalities across India throughout the year.**

How well can Asia spot a coming disaster?

- An **early-warning system** is a comprehensive process that **monitors, predicts, and forecasts hazards**.
- It encompasses activities related **to risk assessment, communication, and preparedness.**
- These systems allow individuals, communities, governments, and businesses to take timely action to mitigate risks.
- For example, authorities in Bangladesh had a day's notice to prepare for cyclone Mocha, enabling them to take anticipatory **action in Cox's Bazar** and improving survival rates among local communities.
- Twenty-one Asian countries reported the status of their early warning systems to the UN.
- According to the **UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction:**
    - The average composite score for the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems in Asia was **0.46 out of 1**.
    - Preparedness to respond scored **0.58 on average**.
    - Observation and forecasting scored **0.50 on average**.
- In comparison, the world scored **0.35, 0.78, and 0.33**, respectively, on these counts.
- Warning and dissemination emerged as the strongest area under the framework for Asia, while risk knowledge was the weakest.
- The report highlights that **fewer than half of all Asian countries have the necessary tools to mitigate** the impact of climate change.

What do these findings mean for India?

- Extreme climate events are increasing globally, including in India, but improved preparedness can minimize damage.
- **Early warnings were used effectively during cyclone Mocha**, one of the strongest cyclones in the Bay of Bengal.
- India's early preparedness for cyclones is strong but there is the need for better management of deaths and destruction caused by lightning.
- He highlighted challenges in responding to lightning strikes, particularly for marginalized communities.
- Some groups, like farmers working in fields, may not receive alerts in time due to being away from sources of information.
- There is inadequacy of India's preparedness for climate change challenges.
- Emerging threats such as **unprecedented heatwaves, glacier retreat, and rising sea levels, requiring urgent attention and policy overhaul.**
- Singh stressed the importance of empowering communities with resources and policies to effectively combat climatic adversities.

1.3. Restoring Earth's Right to 'Good Health':

- European Court of Human Rights found Switzerland guilty of violating rights of senior women in Klima Seniorinnen.
- 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.

1.4. A Battle to Save Ladakh, and all of Humanity:

Sonam Wangchuk climate fast has highlighted the larger issue of the fragility of the Himalayan ecosystem

- Sonam Wangchuk, a climate activist and winner of the **Ramon Magsaysay award in 2018**, spoke to a crowd of 30,000 people in Leh, Ladakh on March 6, 2024.

- He announced a 21-day climate fast during his address.
- Ladakh, located between Pakistan and China, is situated at an altitude of 11,500 feet and is **inhabited by 97% indigenous tribes.**
- The region relies heavily on **farming and animal rearing for livelihood**.
- **Ladakh faces various challenges due to climate change, including floods, droughts, landslides, greenhouse gases, and other pollutants.**
- The **Himalayan region, where Ladakh is located, is home to about 15,000 glaciers, often referred to as the Third Pole.**
- **These glaciers play a crucial role in the hydrological cycle by releasing meltwater to major rivers like the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra during spring and summer.**
- However, Himalayan glaciers are at risk of melting due to global warming and climate change, which will impact both the mountain region's residents and downstream communities.

Infrastructure Boom

- In 2008, the Indian government launched **eight Missions as part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).**
- One of these missions, the **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)**, falls under the Ministry of Science and Technology.
- The **main objective of NMSHE is to scientifically assess the vulnerability of the Himalayan region to climate change and monitor the health status of the ecosystem.**
- However, despite its mandate, NMSHE appears to have neglected its role in protecting the Himalayan region.
- Following the establishment of Ladakh as a Union Territory, several large-scale infrastructure projects were initiated rapidly.

National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) is a key initiative of the Government of India to combat climate change.

Origin and Vision:

- Launched in 2008 by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change (PMCCC).

- Aims to promote sustainable development strategies that address both climate mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (preparing for the impacts of climate change).

Eight National Missions:

The NAPCC comprises eight National Missions, each focusing on specific sectors and goals:

1. **National Solar Mission (NSM):** Promotes large-scale adoption of solar energy.

2. **National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE):** Aims to improve energy efficiency across various sectors.

3. **National Mission on Sustainable Habitat (NMSH):** Focuses on promoting sustainable practices in urban development.

4. **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA):** Aims to enhance agricultural productivity while adapting to climate change.

5. **National Mission on Green India (GIM):** Large-scale afforestation program to increase forest cover.

6. **National Mission for Sustainable Water Management (NMSWM):** Encourages water conservation and efficient water use practices.

7. **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE):** Focuses on protecting the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change (NMSKCC): Supports research and capacity building on climate change issues.

- **These projects include the construction of bridges, road widening, tunnels, railway lines, solar projects, and a new airport terminal, aimed at boosting tourism.**
- Notable projects include the **Zojila tunnel, Kargil-Zanskar National Highway, and a massive solar energy project covering thousands of acres in the Changthang region.**
- The **Ladakh (UT) Industrial Land Allotment Policy of 2023** aims to attract investment to the region.
- The **Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL)** are leading many of these infrastructure projects.
- The NHIDCL's vision includes fast-tracking highway construction in strategic areas like Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, and Andaman & Nicobar islands, all of which are vulnerable to climate change-related disasters.

A Region that has seen Disasters

- Despite past disasters in the Himalayan region, government bodies are sanctioning and executing infrastructure projects at a rapid pace without heeding warnings.
- Since 2010, there have been several disasters in the Himalayas resulting in loss of lives and livelihoods.
- **In 2013, a cloudburst at Kedarnath led to flash floods**, claiming thousands of lives.
- **In January 2023, water gushed down a mountain slope in Joshimath**, submerging parts of the town.
- In **November 2023, 41 workers were rescued from a collapsed tunnel project** in the Himalayas, drawing international attention.
- **Uttarakhand, where many tragedies occurred, has witnessed numerous infrastructure projects despite warnings from experts.**
- A **Supreme Court-appointed expert committee recommended limiting pilgrim numbers visiting the Char Dham shrines to protect the ecosystem**, but pilgrim numbers continue to rise.
- Some experts suggest **avoiding hydroelectric projects in the para-glacial zone to prevent further environmental damage.**
- When disasters occur, migrant workers and residents, tourists, and pilgrims bear the human cost, while government bodies and developers avoid accountability.

Scant Review

- **Climate change activists are frustrated because their recommendations are not being implemented, despite approaching courts and forming expert committees.**
- Mega projects in the mountains lack due diligence, including risk assessment, safety measures, and geological and seismic analysis.
- **Development should not come at the expense of upsetting the fragile balance in the Himalayan ecosystem and its biodiversity.**
- It is the responsibility of everyone to ensure the protection of the Himalayas and the people living in the region.
- Sonam Wangchuk's battle for environmental protection extends beyond Ladakh; it is a battle for the future of humanity and its generations to come.

Flash Floods

- **Rapid Flooding:** Flash floods occur when a sudden volume of water overwhelms an area in a very short amount of time (usually within 6 hours, often much sooner).
- **Causes:**
    - Intense rainfall from thunderstorms or tropical cyclones.
    - Dam or levee failures.
    - Sudden release of water from a glacial lake outburst or ice jam.
- **High-Risk Areas:**
    - Urban environments with poor drainage.
    - Mountainous regions and canyons.
    - Areas downstream from dams.
    - Burn scars and deforested areas (lack of vegetation to absorb water).

Why are Flash Floods Dangerous?

- **Speed and Force:** They occur quickly, with minimal warning time. The water can carry debris and reach high speeds, causing devastating impacts.
- **Unpredictability:** Flash floods can occur even without visible heavy rainfall in the immediate area, especially downstream from high-intensity storms occurring elsewhere.

Safety During Flash Floods

- **Heed warnings:** Pay attention to weather alerts and evacuate if advised by authorities.
- **Move to higher ground:** Don't wait, seek higher ground immediately.
- **Avoid driving or walking through floodwaters:** Just a few inches of moving water can be dangerous and sweep vehicles away.
- **Turn around, don't drown:** If you encounter a flooded road, don't attempt to cross it.

1.5. Poll Campaigns in India must reflect Climate Issues:

- The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO) released the State of the Global Climate report.**
- The report indicates that **2023 was the hottest year on record globally.**
- The **average temperature rise from pre-industrial levels is 1.45 °C, close to the agreed limit of 1.5 °C.**
- This temperature rise, termed global warming, is a cause for concern.
- 2023 saw records being broken for various climate indicators, including **ocean temperatures, glacier retreat, and Antarctic ice cover reduction.**
- **Sea levels are rising globally, and extreme weather events like heatwaves, heavy rainfall, and tropical cyclones are becoming more frequent**.
- These extreme weather events have **disrupted various activities, including agriculture, and are impacting socio-economic developments worldwide.**
- The report emphasizes the **urgent need for collective public action similar to responses seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Progress and Mitigatory Steps

- Industrial progress since the mid-18th century has **significantly improved the quality of life.**
- Mechanisation and technological innovations have been the primary drivers of this progress.

- However, this progress has led to **increased exploitation of natural resources,** impacting the environment negatively.
- **Dependence on fossil fuels for energy has resulted in significant greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to global temperature rise.**
- The **Paris Agreement, entered into force on November 4, 2016**, aims to limit the global temperature rise to well below 2 °C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C.
- Many nations, including India, have taken steps to **limit carbon emissions and transition to renewable energy sources.**
- India has initiatives like the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the National Solar Mission** to address climate change.
- Despite these efforts, the latest World Meteorological Organization (WMO) report raises questions about the **effectiveness of global action.**

Election season as an Opportunity

- Election season in India brings festivities, passionate debates, and hope for change.
- The **State of the Global Climate report coinciding with the election season prompts discussions across the political spectrum.**
- The report should serve as a **wake-up call for all political parties** to address climate change.
- **Parties should commit to enhancing public awareness about climate change and outline steps to reduce global warming.**
- Political differences may exist, but addressing climate change is in the larger public interest.
- Parties **should articulate measures to mitigate the impact of global warming on India.**
- **India's leadership on climate change actions is crucial for its global standing.**
- Addressing climate change should be **integral to agendas for economic prosperity and people's well-being.**

2. Conservation Efforts:

2.1 Forest (Conservation) Act Amendment (FCAA) 2023

- In February 19, 2024, the Supreme Court issued an order.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) complied with this order.
- **The order required the MoEFCC to upload various State Expert Committee (SEC) reports on its website**.
- This action was taken in April, following the Supreme Court's directive.
- The order was related to a public interest litigation challenging the constitutionality of the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act (FCAA) 2023.
- One of the main concerns raised in the petition was regarding the **status of unclassed forests.**
- The **SEC reports were expected to identify these unclassed forests**, but there were doubts regarding whether they had been identified or not.

What does the FCAA stipulate?

- The Forest (Conservation) Amendment (FCAA) Act was enacted.

- Unclassed forests, previously protected under the **T.N. Godavarman Thirumalpad case (1996),** would lose their protection under the FCAA.
- This loss of protection could lead to the diversion of these forests for other purposes.
- State Expert Committee (SEC) reports were required to be prepared as per a Supreme Court order.
- **These reports aimed to identify forests according to their dictionary meaning, regardless of ownership or notification status.**
- **All categories of forests, including unclassed or deemed forests, would fall under the ambit of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.**
- If a project proponent wanted to use unclassed forests for non-forest purposes, they would need approval from the Central government.
- Unclassed forests could belong to various entities, including government bodies, communities, or private owners, but they were not formally notified as forests.

Have these Forests been identified?

- The status of the State Expert Committee (SEC) reports regarding unclassed forests was unclear from 1996 until they gained attention again.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) informed a Joint Parliamentary Committee that the SECs had identified unclassed forests, which had been recorded.
- This response came amidst concerns that the proposed Forest (Conservation) Act Amendment could undermine the Godavarman judgment and exclude unclassed forest land from its scope.
- The MoEFCC assured the Committee that the amended Act would apply to the SEC-identified unclassed forests.
- However, in response to an RTI application filed on January 17, the MoEFCC stated that it did not have the required reports.
- The MoEFCC has now uploaded the SEC reports on its website, revealing that no State has provided verifiable data on the identification, status, and location of unclassed forests.
- **Seven States and Union Territories, including Goa, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal, appear not to have constituted the SEC at all.**
- Among the States that have shared their reports, only 17 are in line with the Court's directives.
- **Many States cited the short duration provided by the Supreme Court and the voluminous nature of the work as reasons for not conducting physical cadastral surveys or demarcation of unclassed forest lands.**

What do the Reports say?

- Only nine States have provided information on the extent of unclassed forests, while most states and Union Territories (UTs) shared data on different types of forest areas specified in the order.
- **Geographic locations of forests were generally not specified by States or UTs in their SEC reports. When geographical information was provided, it was often limited to reserve or protected forests, which is redundant as this information is already available with Forest Departments.**

- **The SEC reports question the accuracy of data provided by the Forest Survey of India, the sole government agency responsible for surveying and assessing forests. For instance, Gujarat's SEC report indicates a much smaller area of unclassed forests compared to the Survey's reported figure.**
- The lack of on-ground verification by SECs may have led to significant deforestation, as forests that should have been identified, demarcated, and protected 27 years ago remain at risk.
- **Without baseline data from 1996-1997, it is impossible to determine the extent of loss of unclassed forests over the years.** For instance, Kerala's SEC did not include the Pallivasal unreserve, an ecologically fragile area in Munnar, which was also affected during the 2018 floods.

What would be the effects of FCAA?

- The loss of unclassed forests is likely widespread across all States and warrants investigation.
- The **SEC reports appear hastily compiled, relying on incomplete and unverified data from readily available records to fulfill their obligations to the Supreme Court.**
- The failure to implement the Godavarman order of the Supreme Court is a missed opportunity to achieve the targets set by the **Indian Forest Policy, which aims for 33.3% forest cover in plains and 66.6% in hills.**
- **The enactment of the FCAA without proper examination of the SEC reports reflects a lack of diligence on the part of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and could have adverse consequences for India's ecosystems and ecological security.**
- Those responsible for the incomplete SEC reports need to be held accountable, and the national government should take corrective action to re-identify, retrieve, and protect forest areas in line with the 1996 judgment.

2.2. A dead stream springs back to life after 30 years:

- A stream in a tribal settlement in Marayur sandal division, Idukki district, Kerala, has reappeared after 30 years.
- This transformation is **attributed to an eco-restoration initiative led by the Forest department in the area from 2021 to 2024.**
- The stream, called Kammalamkudy Thodu, had disappeared due to the introduction of exotic species.
- Prior to 1990, the hills in the forest division of Kammalamkudy had grasslands and active water streams.
- The Forest department initiated an eco-restoration project in 2021-22, supported by the **United Nations Development Programme and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.**
- **Exotic species** were removed systematically as part of the eco-restoration initiative.
- Natural grasses were allowed to flourish in the area.
- As a result, the stream has been rejuvenated and now releases **6.5 liters of water per minute,** even during hot temperatures.
- A **brushwood check-dam was erected along the stream to attract various wildlife species for hydration.**
- The area has seen an influx of diverse wildlife since the conversion of hills into grassland

2.3. Centre tweaks Green Credit Programme norms; to focus on Restoration of Ecosystem:

- The Green Credit Programme (GCP) encourages investment in afforestation projects in degraded forest lands for green credits.
- The Union Environment Ministry clarified that the focus should be on restoring ecosystems rather than just tree planting for financial gains.
- **Forest departments of 13 states have offered 387 land parcels of degraded forest land, totaling nearly 10,983 hectares.**
- **Individuals and companies can apply to the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to pay for the restoration of these forests**.
- The actual afforestation will be carried out by state forest departments.
- **After two years, each planted tree will be evaluated by the ICFRE,** and if successful, it will be worth one 'green credit'.
- These green credits can be used by financing organizations in two ways:

1. To comply with forest laws requiring organizations to compensate for forest land diversion by providing an equivalent amount of land elsewhere.
2. To report under environmental, social, and governance norms or to fulfill corporate social responsibility (CSR) requirements.

2.4. States offer up thousands of hectares of 'degraded' forest land for green credits:

Chhattisgarh, M.P. account for 40% of the 3,853 hectares of degraded forest land identified by ten States for green credit programme; credits can be used to offset compensatory afforestation obligations

- The Union Environment Ministry introduced the **Green Credit Programme (GCP)** with specific rules.
- Ten states have identified degraded forest land totalling approximately 3,853 hectares for the GCP.
- **Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh contribute significantly, accounting for about 40% of the available forest land.**
- **Under the GCP, registered entities can finance afforestation projects in degraded forest areas.**
- State forest departments will conduct the actual afforestation work.
- **After two years, each planted tree may be worth one 'green credit' following evaluation by the International Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE).**
- **These green credits can be utilized by companies that have utilized forest land for non-forest purposes to fulfill compensatory afforestation obligations.**

Compensatory Afforestation

- **Laws mandate industries or institutions granted permission to clear forest land for non-forest purposes to provide equivalent non-forest land to forest authorities.**
- They must also pay for afforestation on the provided land.
- The non-forest land should ideally be close to the razed forest tracts; otherwise, degraded forest land may be used.

- **Companies must compensate for the lost value of the forest ecosystem, known as the 'net present value.'**
- Obtaining contiguous non-forest land for compensatory afforestation is challenging, especially in states like Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.
- These states historically diverted large tracts of forest land for mining, making it difficult to find suitable non-forest land nearby.
- The **Compensatory Afforestation Fund, funded by environmental compensation paid by companies, remains largely unspent due to the unavailability of suitable land for afforestation.**

Creating new land banks

- **Green credits incentivize private investments in tree plantation, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's calls for sustainable lifestyles.**
- However, assigning a monetary value to green credits poses challenges, according to experts.
- Linking green credits to compensatory afforestation activities is even more complex.
- **The program can inadvertently create land banks, which may be diverted to commercial entities, potentially increasing forest land diversion.**
- **Compensatory afforestation laws aim to discourage forest land appropriation for commercial purposes, but the green credit scheme may counteract this goal.**

'Does not absolve responsibility'

- Bhanudas Pingale, leading the program at ICFRE, stated that the scheme is in its pilot stage, with State and Central government entities as the current applicants.
- The **green credit scheme does not exempt institutions from their obligation to provide suitable land for compensation, according to Pingale.**
- The scheme aims to encourage corporate social responsibility actions and regeneration, not just compensatory afforestation.
- There may be revisions to provisions such as the two-year timeframe to approve land as credit-generating, as the program progresses.

2.5.   Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

Purpose:

- Provides a robust framework for the protection of wild animals, birds, and plants.
- Helps achieve ecological and environmental security for India.
- Implements India's obligations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Key Features:

- **Schedules of Protected Species:** The Act lists species in different schedules (I to VI) based on their threat level, offering varying degrees of protection:

  - **Schedule I: Absolute protection (e.g., tigers, lions, elephants, rhinoceros)**

  - **Schedule V: Vermin (can be hunted)**

  - **Schedule VI: Protection of specified plants**

- **Hunting Prohibitions:** Strict prohibitions on hunting of listed species except under specific, well-defined circumstances.

- **Protected Areas:** Facilitates the creation of various protected areas:

  - National Parks: Areas with high ecological value, off-limits to most human activities.

  - Wildlife Sanctuaries: Areas with important wildlife, some human activity may be permitted.

  - Conservation Reserves & Community Reserves: Focus on conservation along with sustainable use and community participation.

- **Regulation of Trade:** Controls trade and commerce in wild animals, animal articles, and trophies.

- **Penalties:** Prescribes penalties for violations, including imprisonment and fines.

- **Key Authorities:** Establishes authorities like the National Board for Wildlife, State Boards for Wildlife, and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

Recent Amendments (e.g., 2022):

- Focus on better implementation of CITES

- Increased penalties for offenses

- Management of invasive alien species

- More clarity on species ownership certificates

List of national parks in India

Total: 106 national parks
Coverage: 1.23% of country
Largest: Hemis, Ladakh 3,350km2
Oldest: Corbett
Maximum: 11 in Madhya Pradesh

Goa — Mollem
Jharkhand — Betla
Ladakh — Hemis
Manipur — Keibul-Lamjao, Shiroi
Mizoram — Murlen, Phawngpui (Blue Mountain)
Nagaland — Intanki
Uttar Pradesh — Dudhwa
Arunachal Pradesh — Mouling, Namdapha
Meghalaya — Balphakram, Nokrek Ridge
Bihar — Valmiki
Sikkim — Khangchendzonga
Haryana — Kalesar, Sultanpur
Orissa — Bhitarkanika, Simlipal

Uttarakhand — Corbett, Gangotri, Govind, Nanda Devi, Rajaji, Valley of Flowers
Gujarat — Blackbuck (Velavadar), Gir, Marine (Gulf of Kachchh), Vansda
Tripura — Clouded Leopard, Bison (Rajbari)
Jammu & Kashmir — City Forest (Salim Ali), Dachigam, Kazinag, Kishtwar High Altitude

Karnataka — Anshi, Bandipur, Bannerghatta, Kudremukh, Nagarahole (Rajiv Gandhi)
Andaman & Nicobar Islands — Campbell Bay, Galathea Bay, Mahatama Gandhi Marine (Wandoor), Mount Harriett, Rani Jhansi Marine, Saddle Peak
Madhya Pradesh — Bandhavgarh, Dinosaur Fossils, Fossil, Pench, Kanha, Kuno, Madhav, Panna, Sanjay, Satpura, Van Vihar
West Bengal — Buxa, Gorumara, Jaldapara, Neora Valley, Singalila, Sunderban

Chattisgarh — Guru Ghasidas (Sanjay), Indravati (Kutru), Kanger Valley
Telangana — Kasu Brahmananda Reddy, Mahaveer Harina Vanasthali, Mrugavani
Kerala — Anamudi Shola, Eravikulam, Mathikettan Shola, Pambadum Shola, Periyar, Silent Valley
Maharashtra — Chandoli, Gugamal, Nawegaon, Pench (Jawaharlal Nehru), Sanjay Gandhi (Borivilli), Tadoba
Rajasthan — Desert, Keoladeo Ghana, Mukundra Hills, Ranthambhore, Sariska
Tamil Nadu — Guindy, Gulf of Mannar Marine, Indira Gandhi (Annamalai), Mudumalai, Mukurthi
Andhra Pradesh — Papikonda, Rajiv Gandhi (Rameswaram), Sri Venkateswara
Himachal Pradesh — Great Himalayan, Inderkilla, Khirganga, Pin Valley, Col. Sherjung Simbalbara
Assam — Dibru-Saikhowa, Dihing Patkai, Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Rajiv Gandhi (Orang), Raimona

Source: National Wildlife Database Centre, Wildlife Institute of India
Design: Angshuman Maity

2.6. Project Tiger

- **Wildlife Conservation Initiative:** One of the most successful wildlife conservation initiatives in the world.
- **Launch:** Initiated in 1973 by the Government of India with an initial focus on saving the Bengal Tiger.

Objectives:

- Maintain viable tiger populations in their natural habitats.
- Protect tigers from poaching and habitat loss.
- Address human-tiger conflict.

Key Features

- **Tiger Reserves:** A network of dedicated Tiger Reserves now covers a significant area across India.
- These reserves are managed with stricter protection, habitat restoration, and community engagement.
- **Scientific Monitoring:** Population estimation using camera traps and other scientific methods allows for regular monitoring.

- **Funding and Management:** The **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** provides funding and oversight.
- **Relocation Programs:** Repopulating areas with reduced tiger densities through translocation programs.
- **Community Involvement:** Awareness campaigns and initiatives to reduce human-tiger conflict near reserves.

Achievements:

- **Tiger Population Recovery:** India accounts for almost 75% of the world's wild tiger population. The population has increased significantly since the project's inception.
- **Holistic Conservation:** Benefits biodiversity by protecting diverse ecosystems within the reserves

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National Tiger Conservation Authority

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was founded in December 2005 in India.
- Its establishment followed a recommendation made by the Tiger Task Force.
- The Prime Minister of India set up the NTCA with the aim of restructuring the management of Project Tiger and numerous Tiger Reserves across the country.
- The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was amended in 2006 to establish the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for implementing Project Tiger, aimed at protecting endangered tigers.
- The NTCA is chaired by the Minister for Environment and Forests and comprises eight wildlife conservation and welfare experts, along with three Members of Parliament.
- The Inspector General of Forests, in charge of Project Tiger, serves as the ex-officio Member Secretary.
- It prepares an Annual Report, presented to Parliament along with the Audit Report.
- State-level Steering Committees, chaired by Chief Ministers, ensure coordination, monitoring, and protection of tigers.
- States are required to prepare Tiger Conservation Plans, focusing on staff development, protection of tiger reserves, compatible forestry operations, and safeguarding local interests.
- Tiger Conservation Foundations can be established by states based on good practices from some reserves, fostering eco-tourism, eco-development, and local involvement through fund generation.

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3. Species in News:

3.1 The Nilgiri Tahr (Nilgiritragus hylocrius)

- **State Animal of Tamil Nadu:** The Nilgiri Tahr is an endemic mountain ungulate, meaning it's found exclusively in a specific geographic region.

- **Habitat:** Its natural habitat is the montane shola-grassland ecosystem of the South Western Ghats in India. They are typically found in high-altitude, rugged terrain.

Appearance:

- Stocky build with short, coarse fur
- A prominent mane in males.

- Both males and females have short, curved horns.
- **Conservation Status:** The Nilgiri tahr is classified as **"Endangered" on the IUCN Red List** due to its limited range and threats to its habitat.
- **Threats:** Habitat loss and fragmentation, Poaching, Competition from livestock, Invasive species
- **Conservation Efforts:** Protected areas: Establishment of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks like Mukurthi National Park and Eravikulam National Park.

3.2 Olive Ridley Turtle:

- **Olive ridley sea turtle** (Lepidochelys olivacea) belongs to **the family Cheloniidae**.
- It is also known as the **Pacific Ridley sea turtle**.
- The species is the **second-smallest** and most abundant among all sea turtles worldwide.
- **Kemp's ridley sea turtle** (Lepidochelys kempii) **is the smallest** among all sea turtles worldwide.
- **Found primarily in warm and tropical waters** of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and occasionally in the Atlantic Ocean.
- Known for **unique synchronised mass nestings called arribadas**.
- During **arribadas**, thousands of females gather on the same beach to lay eggs.

3.3 The Great Indian Bustard:
- The **Great Indian Bustard** (*Ardeotis nigriceps)*, the **State bird of Rajasthan**, is considered India's most **critically endangered bird.**
- It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.
- Its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- GIBs are a slow-reproducing species. They lay a few eggs and have almost a year-long parental care of chicks. The GIB achieves maturity in around 3-4 years.

Protection Status:
- IUCN Red List: **Critically Endangered**
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix 1
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): Appendix I
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. GI Tags:

Asharikandi Terracotta Craft:	Pani Meteka Craft:	Sarthebari Metal Craft:

Description: Distinctive terracotta pottery, often with unique animal shapes, plaques, and tiles with folk motifs.

Description: Decorative figures made from a special clay mixed with rice paste. Notice the intricate details and vibrant colors

Description: Look for traditional "Xorai" (tray with a stand) and "Bota" (a type of bowl).

Bodo Thorkha (Musical Instrument): Description: Small, cylindrical bamboo instrument, like a short flute, blown vertically.

Mishing Handloom Products:

Description: Vibrant textiles with geometric patterns and nature motifs.

Bodo Jwmgra (Traditional Scarf):

Description: Rectangular scarf with colorful patterns, often used with the Dokhona.

Bihu Dhol: Description: Two-sided, cylindrical drum made of wood and goatskin, played during the Bihu festival.

Bodo Eri Silk (Fabric of Peace):

Description: Warm, textured silk compared to smoother mulberry silk. Look for shawls, stoles, and fabric lengths.

Jaapi (Bamboo Headgear): Description: Iconic conical hat with beautiful patterns. You'll find everyday and ornamental versions.

Banaras Tabla Description: A pair of hand drums central to Hindustani classical music traditions. Banaras is a

Banaras Shehnai Description: A double-reed woodwind instrument, essential to Indian weddings

Banaras Lal Bharwamirch Description: A specific variety of red chili pepper cultivated in the Banaras (Varanasi) region.

renowned center for crafting high-quality tablas known for their tonal quality.	and auspicious occasions. Banaras shehnais are prized for their craftsmanship and resonant sound.	It's known for its moderate heat, vibrant red color, and unique flavor profile.

- **Tripura secured two GI tags:** one for **Pachra-Rignai**, a traditional dress worn on special occasions, and the other for **Matabari Peda**, a sweet preparation.
- **Meghalaya also secured GI tags** for several products including **Garo Textile weaving, Lyrnai Pottery, and Chubitchi,** all of which are linked to socio-cultural and religious rituals in the region.

2. Energy:

2.1. How is India planning to boost EV production?
- On March 15, the Union government approved a policy aimed at promoting India as a manufacturing hub for Electric Vehicles (EVs).
- The policy includes a minimum investment requirement of ₹4,150 crore for companies interested in manufacturing EVs in India.

What does the policy stipulate?

- The Union government's new policy aims to encourage global Electric Vehicle (EV) makers like Tesla and BYD to enter the Indian market.
- The main goal of the policy is to facilitate the shift towards local production of EVs in a financially feasible way, aligning with local market conditions and demand.
- A significant provision of the policy is the reduction of import duty on EVs imported as Completely Built Units (CBUs) with a minimum cost, insurance, and freight (CIF) value of $35,000, from the current 70%-100% to 15% for a five-year period, contingent upon the establishment of a manufacturing unit within three years.
- The policy also outlines that a total duty waiver of ₹6,484 crore or a proportional amount based on the investment made—whichever is lower—will be granted on the total number of imported EVs, with a maximum import limit of 40,000 EVs over five years.
- To qualify for the scheme, manufacturers must invest a minimum of $800 million and adhere to localization targets.
- Manufacturers have three years to establish their manufacturing facilities in India and are expected to achieve 25% localization by the third year and 50% by the fifth year.
- Failure to meet localization targets or the minimum investment criteria outlined in the scheme may result in the revocation of manufacturers' bank guarantees.

What about domestic players?

- **Tata Motors opposed the Tesla** proposal to lower import duties, stating that it would negatively impact the domestic industry and harm the investment climate.
- According to Rajat Mahajan, a Partner at Deloitte India, most Indian players currently dominate the **segments below ₹29 lakh in the EV market**.
- The policy's benefits, particularly the reduction of import **duty to 15%, are expected to primarily favor Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs)** targeting consumers in the higher-end market segment.
- Mahajan noted that the policy creates an attractive opportunity for global EV players and Indian joint ventures (JVs) with such players to increase sales and manufacturing activities in India.

How does it cater to Indian markets?

- I.V. Rao, a Distinguished Fellow at TERI, emphasizes the importance of considering local conditions such as the environment, roads, and usage patterns for global players entering the Indian market.
- Rajat Mahajan from Deloitte notes that while the penetration of EVs in the two and three-wheeler segment has been significant, **passenger vehicles have only contributed 2.2%** so far due to challenges like inadequate charging infrastructure, range anxiety, and limited affordable product options.
- The **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) suggests** that India may need around **13 lakh charging stations by 2030** to support the aggressive uptake of EVs.
- Focusing on domestic demand to guide product and system designs, with exports following suit, and stresses the importance of appropriate designs to leverage **the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme**.

2.2 Best case scenario for India's economic development rests on nuclear power:

India must prioritise investment in this energy sector and expand related infrastructure if it is to be on track to become developed nation by 2047 and achieve net zero by 2070, says IIM-A study

- A study by academics at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, funded by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India, suggests prioritizing investments in nuclear energy and related infrastructure for India to achieve developed status by 2047 and net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2070.
- Currently, nuclear energy comprises only 1.6% of India's energy mix.
- The study explores various scenarios, including high, medium, and low economic growth, and different focuses on energy sources: nuclear energy, fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage, renewable energy (solar, wind), and a combination of all these.
- Mathematical models were used to estimate the energy mix required by 2030 and 2050 to achieve net zero emissions by 2070, considering factors like India's population achieving a human development index comparable to Western European countries and the decreasing cost of energy access.
- The most favorable scenario projects emissions reaching net zero by 2070, with nuclear power increasing five-fold from current levels to 30 GW by 2030 and 265 GW by 2050.

- In this scenario, **nuclear power's contribution to India's total energy is projected to rise from 4% in 2030 to 30% by 2050, while the share of solar power decreases from 42% in 2030 to 30% in 2050.**

Uranium Availability

- **Solar energy currently represents 16% of India's installed generation capacity, while coal accounts for 49%.**
- Achieving the idealistic figures proposed for nuclear energy would **require a doubling of investments and the availability of uranium, a critical fuel restricted by international embargo**, in necessary quantities.
- According to Amit Garg, Professor at IIM Ahmedabad and lead author of the study, there is no single solution ("silver bullet") to achieve net zero emissions, emphasizing the need for a variety of technologies in India's energy mix.
- **Coal is expected to remain a significant component ("backbone") of India's energy system.** If the country aims to phase down coal within the next three decades, it would need to invest in alternative sources like nuclear power, alongside flexible grid infrastructure and storage to support renewable energy integration.
- The **transition towards achieving net zero emissions would require an estimated investment of ₹150-200 lakh crore between 2020-2070, as per the report's findings.**

2.3 Solar Surge: Moving away from Omported Solar Panels:
India's solar industry must grow without compromising on quality

- The **Indian government has implemented a policy to discourage reliance on imported solar panels at the beginning of the new financial year.**
- The policy, called the **Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules (Requirement for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2019**, mandates module makers to undergo inspection by the **National Institute of Solar Energy** to be listed as 'approved' manufacturers.
- Being on the approved list certifies companies as legitimately manufacturing solar panels within their premises, making them eligible to compete for government tenders, including the **PM solar rooftop scheme**.
- The creation of this list **aims to restrict imports from China**, which controls nearly 80% of the global supply, amid strained diplomatic relations.
- India aims to source about 500 GW, nearly half its electricity requirement, from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, with at least 280 GW from solar power.
- However, **the country's solar capacity addition has been slow, with only about 13 GW added in the last five years due to factors like the COVID-19 pandemic**.
- **To meet targets, India requires more panels and component cells than its domestic industry can supply, leading to significant reliance on imports**.
- Domestic panel manufacturers, who pay the government for certification, lose out to cheaper Chinese panels.
- The government has postponed the implementation of the approved list but has now decreed it will take effect from April 1.

- Success will be measured by India meeting its 2030 commitments while ensuring solar power remains affordable.
- **Domestic manufacturers should undergo stringent quality checks and not compromise on cost and quality solely for nationalistic reasons**.
- While the Indian solar industry should grow and gain a reputation for quality, there are no easy shortcuts in this endeavour.

3. Information Communication and Technology (ITC):

3.1 People are losing control over phones:
Apps are not the way users should have chosen to access Internet services. The "immersive" experience was drowning the users earlier and is now drowning the businesses

- The Internet was designed to allow individual machines to connect and communicate with each other without central control.
- Each connected machine had the power to decide whom to communicate with for desired services.
- **There were minimal gatekeepers in the network layer, mainly for functions like allocating IP addresses and managing root servers for domain names like .com and .org.**
- This decentralized design led to rapid growth of the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s.
- Various services such as **email, websites, and chats emerged, enabling information sharing and e-commerce.**
- Accessing websites became easy with web browsers, thanks to standardized protocols and languages.
- Initially, **Yahoo provided a directory of websites categorized by topic.**
- With the increase in websites, **Google introduced a search engine to quickly find relevant web pages based on user queries.**

Ceding Control

- With the introduction of mobile devices like the iPhone, websites began to adapt for viewing on small screens.
- Apple encouraged developers to create web applications (apps) for its Safari browser on mobile devices.
- Developers wanted more control and the ability to create native apps for these devices, leading Apple to open the App Store for third-party native code in 2008.
- **Apps are software programs that run directly on mobile phones, posing security risks as they can exploit vulnerabilities and gain control over devices.**
- **Google's security team developed a sandbox called Native Client in 2009 to mitigate these risks, but widespread adoption did not occur, and app stores continued to allow apps as usual.**
- **Web standards evolved to accept JavaScript as a safe language for client-side computing, supported by browsers, providing a secure sandbox for running untrusted software.**
- JavaScript matured over time, offering a safer way to run untrusted code on users' machines, enabling browsing of untrusted websites with reduced risk.

- Businesses favoured apps as they could run native code on millions of devices without restrictions.
- **Users were encouraged to install apps for a more immersive experience, but this required giving up control over SMS, photos, videos, and location, and losing browser features like ad blocking.**
- **App stores, acting as gatekeepers, assured users of app safety, but incidents of malware, fraud, and data theft raised concerns.**
- Developers could publish apps on app stores, labeled as safe, leading to instances of unscrupulous apps exploiting users.
- Despite security concerns raised a decade ago, the popularity of apps persisted due to user and business preference, with app stores benefiting from an app tax ranging from 15% to 30%.
- **Businesses, initially attracted to apps for user control, now oppose revenue sharing, leading to antitrust cases against companies like Google.**
- **Epic Games won lawsuits against Apple, but faced repercussions like removal from the App Store, while Google faced fines for abusing its dominant position but introduced alternative billing methods like User Choice Billing.**

A Raging Battle

- The **conflict between businesses and app stores continues, with app stores reluctant to relinquish the revenue generated from the app tax.**
- **Businesses are advocating for app stores without any app tax or even proposing the establishment of national app stores, such as an Indian app store.**
- Regardless of the outcome of this battle involving app stores, businesses, and courts, users should recognize that accessing internet services through apps may not be the ideal choice.
- The **allure of the "immersive" app experience has proven detrimental to both users and businesses, with control ultimately resting in the hands of app store giants like Apple and Google.**

3.2. AI in elections, the good, the bad and the ugly:

The widespread application of Artificial Intelligence is likely to cause a paradigm shift in almost every aspect of an election

- The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) aims to expand Prime Minister Narendra Modi's audience by translating his speeches into eight different languages.
- This effort is part of preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, possibly considered India's "first AI election."
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being used for this task, highlighting its potential to revolutionize the electoral process.
- AI technology allows for efficient translation of speeches, enabling Modi's message to reach a broader linguistic audience.
- The widespread application of AI in elections is expected to bring about a significant change, marking a paradigm shift in electoral campaigning.
- This initiative reflects the BJP's strategy to leverage technology for effective communication and outreach during the elections.

Social media and campaigns

- India's electoral strategy has evolved over the past three decades due to integration with emerging technologies.
- The use of phone calls became widespread in the 1990s, followed by the first "mass mobile phone" elections in Uttar Pradesh in 2007.
- Holograms were utilized in the 2014 elections, marking a significant technological advancement.
- The current era is characterized by the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into electoral campaigns.
- Social media platforms played a crucial role in the 2014 elections, earning them the title of **"social media elections" or "Facebook elections."**
- The BJP capitalized on social media to connect with India's youth population, leading to significant digital spending.
- **Research published in the Asian Journal of Political Science showed a positive correlation between Facebook likes and election outcomes in 2014.**
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi gained significant social media following, ranking among the top global leaders on platforms like **Twitter and Facebook**.
- The **2019 general election was labeled the "first WhatsApp election" in India**, highlighting the platform's role in spreading political messages.
- WhatsApp has been used in elections globally, including in Nigeria, Brazil, and several Indian states, **to disseminate information and organize party workers.**
- WhatsApp's effectiveness lies in its ability to deliver targeted information to voters and mobilize party workers, as explained in Shivam Shankar Singh's book, "How to Win an Indian Election" (2019).

Global elections, AI, the dangers

- The global elections of 2024 are dubbed as "AI elections" due to the widespread use of Artificial Intelligence.
- In January**, voters in New Hampshire received robocalls impersonating U.S. President Joe Biden, aimed at dissuading Democratic voters from going to polling stations.**
- Similarly, **in Slovakia's parliamentary elections in September 2023, a fake recording of a conversation was shared on Facebook, allegedly discussing election manipulation methods.**
- The use of **AI-generated content, such as deepfakes, was observed in Argentina's elections** in October-November 2023.
- **Deepfakes were also employed in Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana**, where doctored clips of the game show "Kaun Banega Crorepati" and fake videos of leaders were circulated.
- Fake accounts powered by AI bots are used to **amplify specific messages and generate artificial trends on social media platforms**.
- This manipulation creates **a false impression of widespread support for particular politicians or subjects, impacting public opinion.**
- AI technology is now deeply integrated with social media, transforming it into a powerful instrument for political influence in elections.

The political landscape is changing

- **AI's role in elections extends beyond disseminating disinformation to encompass various campaign strategies.**
- It aids in voter identification, content development, delivery, and real-time analytics on campaign performances.
- AI's data-driven and micro-targeting strategy is revolutionizing political campaigns.
- The **emergence of GenAI technology presents both potential and challenges for the 2024 elections**.
- The US government has banned AI-generated robocalls in response to incidents like the Biden robocall.
- Tech giants like **Microsoft, Google, OpenAI, and Meta are committed to combating AI content aimed at deceiving voters**.
- Concerns exist regarding AI-generated content shaping last-minute attempts to deter voters or manipulate candidate portrayals.
- An **AI-created image of Donald Trump's arrest recently went viral,** highlighting the potential impact of AI manipulation on elections.
- AI is expected to become more efficient by 2029, but uncertainties remain about its deceptive effects and the world's preparedness to combat them.

3.3. Workers, not tech, should be State's Priority:

The objective of MGNREGS is not to offer a playing field for technological interventions, but to provide deprived households a sense of work security, facilitated by digital technology

- The **Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS)** is receiving significant attention due to various issues associated with it.
- The ABPS is particularly crucial because it is **linked to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, which provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households.
- Despite increased budgetary allocation to MGNREGS, challenges persist in linking rural employment guarantees to digitized identification systems.
- **Challenges include:**
    1. Internet connectivity issues.
    2. Problems with fingerprint recognition.
    3. Difficulties faced by disabled individuals.
    4. Unrecorded working days.
    5. Name duplication and discrepancies.
    6. Lack of awareness among beneficiaries.
    7. Errors in linking, authentication, and elimination of names.
    8. Seeding issues, especially where workers are not at fault.
- Research indicates that over **26 crore workers are registered with MGNREGS, with 5.2 crore workers deleted from the database in 2022-23**.
- A significant portion (34.8%) of job card holders remain ineligible for ABPS.
- Critics highlight numerous faults in the payment system, making it challenging for enrolled individuals to receive payments smoothly.

Side-lining the Beneficiaries

- Workers in schemes like MGNREGS are heavily **reliant on technology**, which contradicts the idea of technology benefiting them.
- Employment **security takes a backseat**, with workers being treated more as components of a technological system rather than beneficiaries.
- The **design and implementation of the Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS) prioritize technology over the welfare of workers.**
- The focus on technology has led to complexity and sluggishness in government processes, now in a digital context.
- There's a concern that the state prioritizes technology for its own sake rather than empowering workers.
- The primary goal of employment guarantee schemes like MGNREGS should be to provide socio-economic security to disadvantaged households, facilitated by digital technology.
- **These schemes aim to promote inclusion, reduce inequality, and alleviate socio-economic distress, recognized internationally as contributors to a productive and equitable society.**
- Technological solutions should not overshadow the core objectives of these schemes, which have demonstrated benefits such **as improved nutrition, gender equality, social insurance, and political transparency.**
- Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the risks of relying too heavily on technology for deprived communities.

Potential of Technology

- Technology has historically shown potential to support progressive principles and is central to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Rural employment guarantee schemes in India, like MGNREGS, contribute directly and indirectly to SDGs**.
- The significant budget allocated to MGNREGS should be utilized through a technology-free system to address existing technological issues.
- **Both technological and non-technological solutions** have been analyzed to rectify issues, but fundamental changes in the state's technological approach are also needed.
- The state should prioritize the worker as an active participant in development goals and address country-specific concerns alongside technological advancements.
- While technology can be beneficial, especially in addressing socioeconomic challenges, it should not be **favoured over the welfare and security of workers.**
- The primary focus should always be on ensuring livelihood security for workers amidst increasing inequality, work precarity, and rural distress.

4. Space Technology:

4.1. India among countries mulling telescopes on, around the moon:
- Astronomers are excited about the possibility of **deploying high-resolution telescopes on the moon** and in orbit around it to explore the universe.
- One such proposal is **PRATUSH, initiated by India**.

- **Optical telescopes on Earth collect visible light but face challenges due to atmospheric interference, including pollution obscuring the skies.**
- **Radio telescopes, which detect radio waves, also encounter difficulties such as interference from radio and TV signals, as well as electromagnetic 'hiss' from radar systems, aircraft, and satellites.**
- Additionally, **Earth's ionosphere blocks radio waves from outer space**, further complicating observations.

A Pristine Desolation

- Scientists faced challenges with radio telescopes in Earth orbit due to increased radio noise from the entire planet.
- **Placing telescopes on the far side of the moon, away from Earth, is being seriously considered.**
- **The moon's far side offers pristine, airless conditions, providing crystal-clear seeing conditions for optical telescopes during its two-week-long lunar night.**
- Radio telescopes on the lunar far side would be shielded from Earth's radio transmissions and electrically charged plasma winds from the Sun by the moon itself.
- In the past, high costs deterred setting up lunar telescopes, but renewed interest in lunar exploration promises to make it feasible.
- This move could provide astronomers with access to "the most radio-quiet location in the solar system," as stated by The Royal Society.

The Oldest Light in the Universe

- Cosmologists believe the universe began as an infinitesimally small, dense blob that exploded in a Big Bang.
- After the Big Bang, the **universe cooled and expanded, with its blinding light fading into darkness.**
- For about **300,000 to half a billion years after the Big Bang, the universe was in a state of darkness, with only traces of hydrogen and helium.**
- This dark period makes it challenging to directly observe this crucial phase in cosmic history.
- The **darkness ended when the first stars ignited, emitting light and continuing the expansion of the cosmos.**
- The **cosmic microwave background (CMB),** the oldest light in the universe, is a faint glow resulting from this expansion, detectable by radio telescopes.
- **Following the CMB scattering, the universe entered a "quiet" period known as the Dark Ages**, lasting tens of millions of years.
- **During the Dark Ages, gravity began to form the first stars and galaxies.**
- **Neutral hydrogen** in the cosmos during the **Dark Ages** absorbed some CMB radiation, causing a slight dip in the frequency of spreading radio waves.

China may be the First, Again

- Instruments on Earth can't detect a very slight drop in frequency, so scientists are using instruments on the moon instead.

- These moon-based instruments are crucial for detecting signals from the **"Dark Ages" of the universe, when there were no stars, as they are free from interference from starlight.**
- The **Lunar Surface Electromagnetic Experiment (LuSEE Night) is a joint project between NASA and Berkeley Lab, set to launch in December 2025**. **It will land on the far side of the moon near the equator, opposite from Earth, to minimize radio frequency noise.**
- Other moon-bound instruments are also being planned by space agencies like NASA and ESA.
- NASA's Long-Baseline Optical Imaging Interferometer will study magnetic activity on stars and galaxies from the moon's far side.
- **ESA plans** to launch a radio telescope aboard its lunar lander **'Argonaut' by 2030.**
- European projects include detectors for gravitational waves and an infrared telescope in a shadowed crater near the lunar south pole.
- China is also involved with a moon-orbiting radio telescope scheduled for launch in 2026.
- **China's Queqiao-2 satellite**, which includes a 4.2-meter antenna, was likely placed in orbit around the moon on March 24, serving as a communications relay and radio telescope.

PRATUSH Radio Telescope

- Deploying instruments on the moon's surface is difficult, so scientists are considering orbiting satellites around the moon instead.
- Dr. Suzuki suggests this alternative approach to orbit the moon and study data when the satellite is behind it.
- Indian scientists plan to use this method with the radio **telescope PRATUSH (Probing ReionizATion of the Universe using Signal from Hydrogen)** to study the universe from the moon's far side.
- **PRATUSH is being built by the Raman Research Institute (RRI) in Bengaluru with collaboration from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).**
- Initially, ISRO will place PRATUSH into orbit around the Earth before launching it towards the moon.
- Operating in Earth's orbit will have radio frequency interference (RFI), but it offers advantages over ground-based experiments, such as operating in free space and less impact from the ionosphere.
- Once in lunar orbit, PRATUSH will experience ideal observing conditions with minimal RFI and no ionosphere.
- PRATUSH will carry specialized equipment including a wideband antenna, self-calibrating analog receiver, and digital correlator to study radio signals from the Dark Ages.
- As astronomers explore the universe from the moon, they hope to uncover new discoveries about dark energy, primordial black holes, and the fundamental nature of the cosmos.

5. Diseases:
5.1 Tuberculosis (TB)

- TB is a serious infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It primarily affects the lungs, but can also infect other parts of the body.
- **Transmission:** TB spreads through the air when a person with active TB disease coughs, sneezes, or talks, releasing tiny droplets containing the bacteria.

Symptoms of TB Disease:

- Persistent cough (lasting 3 weeks or more)
- Coughing up blood or sputum
- Chest pain
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Night sweats

Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB)

- MDR-TB is a form of TB resistant to at least two of the most powerful first-line anti-TB drugs**: isoniazid and rifampicin.**
- It develops due to improper or incomplete treatment of regular TB, or when a person becomes infected with a strain that is already resistant to drugs.
- MDR-TB is much more difficult and expensive to treat, requiring longer regimens with second-line drugs that can have more severe side effects.

Global Impact of TB

- TB remains one of the world's deadliest infectious diseases.
- In 2021, an estimated 10.6 million people fell ill with TB, and 1.6 million died from the disease (WHO).
- MDR-TB is a significant public health threat, with around 450,000 new cases globally in 2021 (WHO).

Diagnosis of TB

- Skin test (Tuberculin Skin Test - TST) or blood test (Interferon-Gamma Release Assay- IGRA) to detect immune response to TB bacteria.
- Sputum tests to examine samples for the presence of TB bacteria.
- Chest X-ray to check for abnormalities in the lungs.
- Drug susceptibility testing (DST) to determine resistance to specific antibiotics.

Treatment of TB

- Standard TB treatment involves a 6-month course of a combination of four antibiotics.

MDR-TB requires treatment with second-line drugs for a longer duration (up to 20 months or more). Newer, shorter regimens are available in some cases

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5.2 Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD)?

- FMD is a highly contagious viral disease primarily affecting cloven-hoofed animals, including cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and other livestock.
- It spreads rapidly and can cause significant economic losses to the livestock industry.
- While rarely fatal in adult animals, it can lead to severe illness and high mortality in young animals.

Clinical Signs of FMD:

- High fever
- Blister-like sores in the mouth, on the tongue, teats, and hooves
- Excessive salivation and drooling
- Lameness and reluctance to move
- Reduced milk production
- Weight loss

Transmission:

- Direct contact with infected animals through bodily fluids (saliva, nasal discharge, milk).
- Indirect contact with contaminated objects and surfaces (farming equipment, vehicles, etc.).

Blisters / Mouth ulcers (sores)

- Airborne transmission over short distances is possible.

Impact of FMD:

- Economic losses due to trade restrictions, decreased production, and animal culling.
- Disruption of the livestock industry and food supply chain.

Prevention and Control:

- **Vaccination:** Effective vaccines are available and play a crucial role in controlling FMD.
- **Biosecurity measures:** Strict quarantine procedures, movement restrictions, and disinfection protocols.

5.3 Nipah Virus (NiV)

- Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus, meaning it can spread from animals to humans. Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are its natural reservoir.
- NiV causes severe illness in both animals and humans, with a high fatality rate (case fatality rates estimated between 40-75%).
- Symptoms range from asymptomatic (no symptoms) to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).

Nipah Virus Transmission and Mortality

History of Outbreaks

- **First Outbreak:** The disease was first identified in 1999 among pig farmers in Malaysia and Singapore.
- **Subsequent Outbreaks:** Since then, outbreaks have occurred almost annually in parts of South Asia, primarily Bangladesh and India.

Recent Outbreaks (India and Bangladesh)

- **Kerala, India (2018, 2021, 2023):** Several cases and deaths in the state of Kerala were recorded in these years.
- **Bangladesh:** Bangladesh experiences near-annual outbreaks, with cases reported with alarming frequency.

Transmission

- **Animal-to-Human:** Contact with infected animals (pigs, bats) or their bodily fluids. Consumption of date palm sap contaminated by bat excretions has been a major route in Bangladesh.
- **Human-to-Human:** Transmission can occur through close contact with bodily fluids of an infected person.

Prevention

- **No Specific Vaccine:** Currently, no specific vaccines or treatments exist for NiV infection in humans. Prevention relies heavily on:
  - Avoiding contact with sick animals in endemic areas.
  - Practicing good hygiene and washing fruits thoroughly, especially date palm sap.

Early detection and isolation of infected individuals to prevent onward transmission.
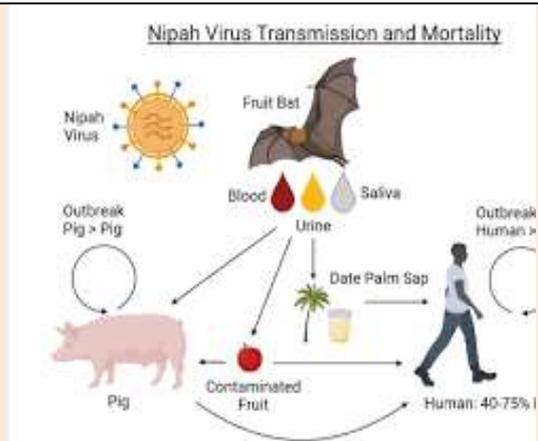
5.4 Lumpy Skin Disease

- Lumpy skin disease (LSD) is a viral disease affecting primarily cattle.
- It's caused by the lumpy skin disease virus (LSDV), a poxvirus of the capripoxvirus genus.

- The disease is characterized by the development of multiple nodules on the skin and other parts of the body (skin, internal organs, and mucous membranes).

Symptoms of LSD:

- High fever
- Enlarged superficial lymph nodes
- Multiple nodules (2-5 cm) on the skin and mucous membranes
- Lameness due to swelling in the limbs
- Reduced milk production
- Weight loss
- In severe cases, death (especially in unvaccinated animals or those with low immunity)

Transmission of LSD:

- Lumpy skin disease can be transmitted by:
  - Blood-sucking insects like flies, mosquitoes, and ticks
  - Direct contact between infected and healthy animals
  - Contaminated fomites (objects or materials that can carry infectious agents)
  - Inhalation of infected aerosols
  - Placental transmission from mother to offspring

Prevention and Control:

- Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent LSD.
- Quarantine measures and movement restrictions for cattle in affected areas can help control the spread.

Controlling insect populations that can transmit the virus is also important.

5.5. Why is there a WHO alert on viral Hepatitis?

- Global Hepatitis Burden: **India ranked second in viral hepatitis disease burden after China.**

- **WHO Report:** World Health Organization released the **Global Hepatitis Report 2024.**

- India's Share: Accounted for **11.6% of the total global burden of viral hepatitis diseases.**

- Key Countries: India, along with Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, and Vietnam, carry around **two-thirds of hepatitis B and C burden.**

- It highlights the significant impact of viral hepatitis in India and other key countries on a global scale.

What does the report highlight?

- Viral hepatitis is the **second leading infectious cause of death worldwide, with 1.3 million deaths annually, equating to tuberculosis.**

- **Increase in Deaths:** From 2019 to 2022, the estimated number of deaths from viral hepatitis rose from 1.1 million to 1.3 million.

- **Main Causes:** 83% of deaths were due to hepatitis B, and 17% due to hepatitis C.
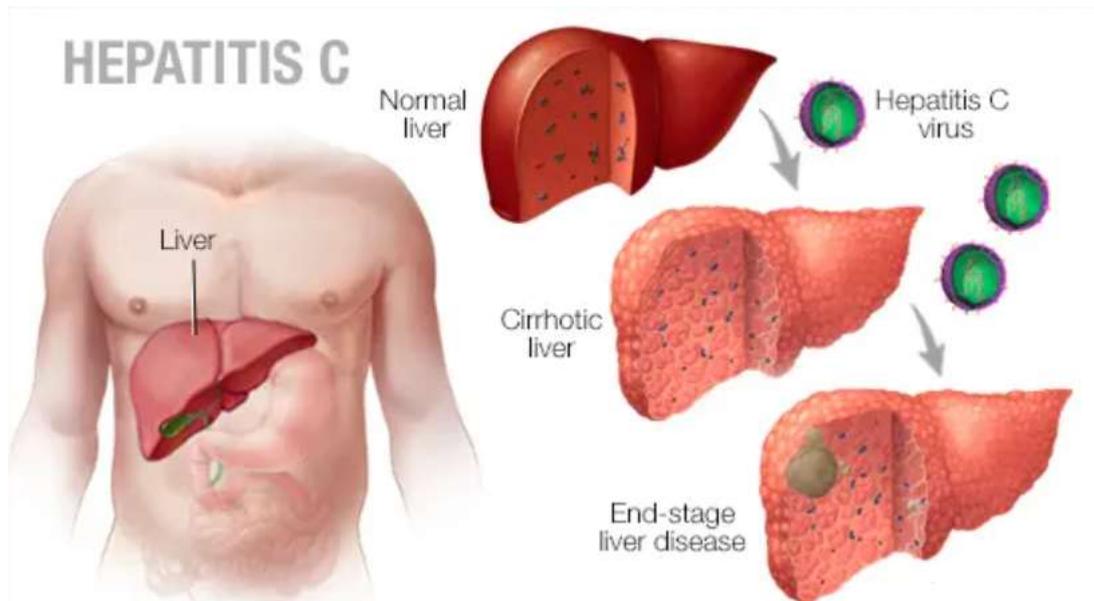
- **Daily Deaths:** Approximately 3,500 people die daily worldwide from hepatitis B and C infections.
- **Age Distribution**: Half of the burden is among individuals aged 30-54, with 12% among children under 18.
- Gender Disparity: Men account for 58% of all hepatitis cases.

What is hepatitis?

- It is inflammation of the liver caused by infectious viruses and non-infectious agents.
- **Types:** There are five main strains: A, B, C, D, and E, **each differing in transmission, severity, and distribution.**
- **Chronic Disease:** Types B and C can lead to chronic illness, liver cirrhosis, liver cancer, and viral hepatitis-related deaths.
- An estimated **354 million people worldwide live with hepatitis B or C**, with treatment often inaccessible.

Why is India vulnerable?

- Reasons for high number of hepatitis cases:

  - High population density
  - Lack of awareness about symptoms, screening, and treatment
  - Limited access to good hygiene practices

- **High prevalence of chronic viral hepatitis B and C infections:**

  - Often asymptomatic for decades
  - Lack of widespread screening and awareness leads to undiagnosed cases
  - Undiagnosed cases perpetuate transmission, increasing disease burden

- **Rising non-viral forms of hepatitis:**

  - Alcoholic Liver Disease (ALD) and Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) increasing

- High alcohol consumption in urban areas contributes to ALD cases
- Obesity, metabolic disorders, sedentary lifestyles, and dietary changes fuel NAFLD epidemic

- **Gender disparity:**

  - Men report a larger number of cases due to high-risk behaviors
  - High-risk behaviors include IV drug use, sharing injections, multiple sex partners, and male-to-male sex

How can it be prevented?

- Hepatitis B can be prevented with vaccination.
- Hepatitis C is curable with medication.
- India produces generic drugs, reducing treatment costs.
- Government offers vaccines to high-risk adults.
- Treatment for hepatitis B and C is available under the National Viral Hepatitis Control Program (NVHCP). It was launched by the Government of India on July 28, 2018.
- NVHCP aims to provide free diagnostic and treatment services to patients, raise awareness about viral hepatitis.
- Hepatitis B vaccine rollout began in 2002-2003.
- Chronic Hepatitis B vaccine included in childhood immunization program in 2011-12.

Why is the report significant?

- The report is the first comprehensive WHO report on viral hepatitis.
- It includes **data from 187 countries** on disease burden and service coverage.
- **Only 13% of people with chronic hepatitis B were diagnosed globally**.
- Approximately **3% (7 million) received antiviral therapy for hepatitis B by 2022.**
- For hepatitis C, 36% were diagnosed, and 20% (12.5 million) received curative treatment.
- These figures are far below the global targets for 2030, which aim to treat **80% of hepatitis B and C cases.**
- However, there has been slight improvement in diagnosis and treatment coverage since 2019.

What is the way forward?

- **Mother to child transmission** is a major cause of new hepatitis infections.
- Eliminating hepatitis B in India requires **comprehensive treatment, immunization of newborns, and ending discrimination against patients.**
- **Many countries fail to procure affordable generic hepatitis medicines.**
- **Pricing disparities** exist both across and within WHO regions.
- Service delivery for hepatitis remains centralized and vertical, leading to out-of-pocket expenses for patients.
- The report outlines actions to advance public health approaches to hepatitis and accelerate progress towards ending the epidemic by 2030.

- These actions include expanding access to testing and diagnostics, implementing policies for equitable treatment, strengthening prevention efforts, and improving funding at global and national levels.

6. Defence:

6.1 INS Vikrant (IAC-1)

- **India's First Indigenous Aircraft Carrier**

Motto: "Jayema Sam Yudhi Sprdhah" (Sanskrit: I defeat those who fight against me).

- **INS Vikrant: Indigenously designed and constructed**
- Commissioning: September 2022
- Operationalization: INS Vikrant fully integrated into operations
- Accompaniment: Fleet of frontline warships and aircraft joined the carriers

What does INS Vikrant signify?

- Design work on the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC)-I, later named Vikrant, started in 1999.
- Crucial years for the carrier and India's warship building were 2005-2006.
- Decision made to develop warship-grade steel in India, called **DMR-249 steel**.
- Collaborative effort involving Steel Authority of India, DRDO, and Indian Navy for steel development.
- DMR-249 steel now used for constructing all warships in India.
- Introduction of 3-D modeling in 2002 for the first time in India.
- Joint team of 200 personnel from Navy's Warship Design Bureau and CSL began work.
- Keel of Vikrant laid in 2009, launched into water in 2013.
- Extensive user acceptance trials conducted from August 2021 to July 2022.
- Vikrant was eventually commissioned into service.

What is the composition of INS Vikrant?

- Vikrant is an engineering marvel with a total area exceeding 12,450 m2, equivalent to about two and a half hockey fields.
- It measures 262m long and 62m wide, powered by four General Electric LM2500 engines generating 88 MW of power.
- **Vikrant has a maximum speed of 28 Knots and an endurance of 7,500 nautical miles.**
- Constructed at a cost of approximately ₹20,000 crore with 76% indigenous content.
- The ship has around 2,200 compartments and accommodates a crew of around 1,600, including specialized cabins for women officers and sailors.
- Vikrant houses two galleys that prepare up to 4,500-5,000 meals daily, equipped with automatic chapati making machines, large cooking boilers, combi-steamers, dosa machine, and ovens.
- Shipbuilding has one of the highest employment multipliers (6.48), with Vikrant engaging approximately 500 MSMEs, 12,000 employees from ancillary industries, and 2,000 CSL employees.

What are its capabilities?

- **Vikrant can operate an air wing of 30 aircraft, including MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31 helicopters, MH-60R multi-role helicopters, Advanced Light Helicopters, and Light Combat Aircraft (Navy).**
- It uses the STOBAR (Short Take-Off but Arrested Recovery) method for launching and recovering aircraft, equipped with a ski-jump for launching and three 'arrester wires' for recovery.
- Around 200 personnel prepare the flight deck for flying operations, cleaning debris and briefing pilots.
- The flight deck has an independent lighting system for bad weather and night operations.
- Aircraft are safely vectored back to the ship for precision landing, with fighters stopping within 90m in 2-3 seconds using arresting gear wires.
- Vikrant has larger deck space and hallways compared to previous carriers like Vikramaditya.
- India is negotiating with France for the purchase of **26 Rafale-M carrier jets due to short supply of MiG-29Ks**, while an indigenous twin engine deck-based fighter is under development.
- Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar expects the indigenous fighter to be received by 2034.
- **Vikrant is India's first domestically built carrier, following the purchase of carriers like Vikrant (1961) and INS Viraat (1987), and the procurement of INS Vikramaditya (2013).**

After Vikrant, what next?

- Aircraft carriers are crucial for commanding, controlling, and coordinating operations at sea and projecting combat power.
- India's fragile maritime security situation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) necessitates a strong Navy with robust capabilities.
- Two Carrier Battle Groups enable credible presence and preparedness on both Western and Eastern seaboards.
- **A proposal for a second Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-II), similar to Vikrant, has been cleared by the Defence Procurement Board.**
- IAC-II, displacing 45,000 tonnes, will integrate newer technologies and modifications compared to Vikrant.
- It will take around eight to 10 years to build IAC-II, manufactured by CSL.
- Plans for a larger 65,000-tonne carrier have been shelved due to technological complexities, cost, and timelines.
- IAC-II is not India's third aircraft carrier but serves as a replacement for INS Vikramaditya.
- For the foreseeable future, the Indian Navy will operate with two aircraft carriers while envisioning a force structure around three carriers.
- Delay in decision-making risks India's expertise in carrier building and operations, akin to the submarine debacle of the 1980s.
- Global interest in aircraft carriers is increasing, with countries like the US, UK, France, Russia, Japan, and China expanding their carrier capabilities.
- The global trajectory suggests a bright future for carrier aviation, despite advancements in targeting missiles and drones.

INTERNAL SECURITY

1. **Ladakh:**
All-weather road gives a strategic fillip to Ladakh:

The Nimmu-Padam-Darcha road allows surface movement from Leh to Lahaul-Spiti through the world's highest tunnel at Shinku La Pass at 16,580 feet, which is currently under construction

- The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) achieved a significant milestone in Ladakh by connecting Himachal Pradesh and Leh through the **Nimmu-Padam-Darcha road.**
- This accomplishment is crucial for **bolstering the security forces stationed in the region and enhancing India's strategic depth along the border with China and Pakistan.**
- The newly constructed road **opens up the remote Zanskar Valley, providing a secure ordnance depot** away from potential adversaries.
- The road facilitates surface movement from **Leh to Lahaul-Spiti via the Shinku La Pass tunnel, currently under construction at an altitude of 16,580 feet.**
- **Once completed, the tunnel will be the world's highest** and ensure all-weather connectivity to Ladakh, addressing logistical challenges during harsh winters.
- **Security forces currently stockpile ration and ammunition in advance due to the lack of all-weather roads**, unlike China, which has developed such infrastructure near the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- The **Nimmu-Padam-Darcha road, located 298 km from Manali, Himachal Pradesh, offers the shortest compared with** the currently operational Manali-Leh road (428 km) and Srinagar-Leh road (439 km).

Suru-zanskar valley (location and extent extracted from survey of India toposheets).
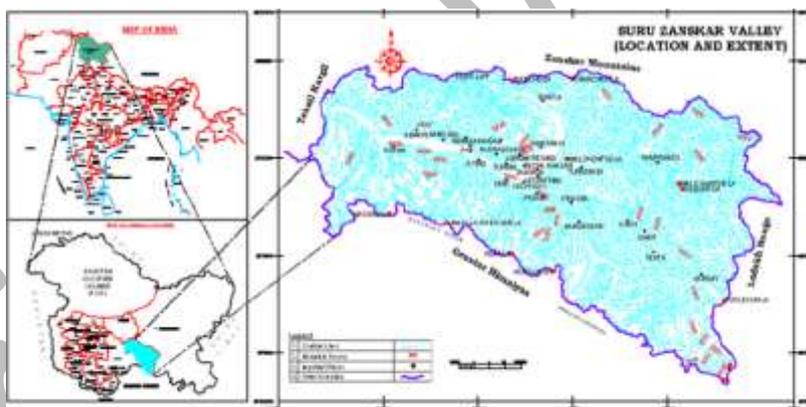
- The completion of the Shinkula tunnel in Ladakh's Zanskar Valley will enable faster and safer mobilization of troops to the region compared to existing routes near the Pakistan and China borders.
- **Some locals express concerns about the project's impact on the landscape and cultural heritage of Zanskar.**
- Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk acknowledges the strategic importance of the road but expresses worries about its potential impact on Zanskar's rich culture and heritage.
- Social activist Mustafa Haji questions the necessity of constructing four lanes on the Kargil-Zanskar section and highlights concerns about tree cutting in the Suru Valley.
- The Zanskar Range in Kargil separates the Zanskar Valley from the Indus Valley and is home to a unique indigenous culture.
- The **Suru River, originating from the Zanskar Range, flows through Kargil.**

2. **War of Attrition:**
- The conflict against the **Maoist insurgency**, which peaked in the early to mid-2000s, has settled into a pattern.
- Recent attacks by paramilitary and police forces have dealt blows to the insurgents, including the killing of at least 29 Maoists in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh.

- The Maoists are largely **confined to the jungles of central India and areas with sparse tribal presence, where the developmental and welfare state is weaker.**
- While the Maoists have lost political-ideological influence, they still pose a threat to security forces, as seen in recent attacks on paramilitary personnel.
- Security forces are using unconventional military tactics and new routes to target Maoist cadres.
- However, these attacks alone cannot completely eradicate the Maoist threat, **as they operate in difficult terrain and have support from some discontented tribal sections affected by the civil war.**
- The Indian state has been fighting the Maoists for two decades, particularly after two Naxalite parties merged into the CPI (Maoist).
- Initially, strategies like arming tribals through campaigns like Salwa Judum backfired, leading to a change in approach.
- The focus shifted to **expanding the reach of the welfare state and bureaucracy into previously inaccessible areas, countering Maoist propaganda.**
- This expansion of welfare measures helped win over some tribal support and led to desertions from the Maoist ranks in other states.
- However, in Chhattisgarh, constant warfare has allowed the Maoists to tap into some discontent among tribals.
- **Civil society and peace activists have tried to initiate ceasefire talks between the Maoists and security forces and encouraged the insurgents to pursue tribal causes through democratic means.**
- Despite setbacks, the **Maoists have refused to give up their ideology and continue the war of attrition, unwilling to accept that many poor tribals seek better engagement and outcomes from the welfare and electoral system rather than violent overthrow.**

3. The PMLA — a law that has lost its way

The most serious aspect of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act is the inclusion of offences which have nothing to do with the original motive — namely, to combat the laundering of drug money

- The **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002** was created with a specific goal in mind.
- It aimed to address the significant issue of **black money generated from international drug trafficking.**
- This black money posed a serious threat to the economy of various countries.
- There was a growing understanding that **black money from the drug trade, when mixed with legitimate economy, could harm the stability of the global economy.**
- Additionally, it was recognized that **this situation could jeopardize the integrity and sovereignty of nations.**

The background to the Law:

- The United Nations addressed the issue of money laundering stemming from drug trafficking by convening the **United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 1988.**
- In response, seven major industrial nations formed the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 1989** to combat money laundering.
- The **UN General Assembly adopted the Political Declaration and Global Programme of Action in 1990, urging member countries to enact legislation to prevent money laundering.**
- India used FATF recommendations to formulate its own legislation, resulting in the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in 2002.**
- The PMLA primarily targeted the laundering of drug money, reflecting the focus of UN resolutions and FATF recommendations.
- The **Act contained offenses outlined in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.**
- The **PMLA evolved over time through amendments, deviating from its original focus on drug money laundering.**
- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) targets the laundering of "crime proceeds," which includes funds derived from criminal activities.
- Individuals involved directly in the crime, as well as those who participate in the laundering process later on, can be held accountable under this law.
- However, the **PMLA now includes a wide range of offenses in its schedule that go beyond its original purpose, extending to crimes unrelated to drug money laundering.**
- Despite its expanded scope, the fundamental objective of the PMLA remains rooted in addressing the significant threat posed by the laundering of illicit funds from the international drug trade, which has the potential to destabilize the global economy and compromise national sovereignty.

The PMLA's enactment

- The **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) was enacted by India's Parliament under Article 253, which allows laws to implement international conventions.**
- **Article 253 restricts such laws to the subject matter of the international decision, as specified in Item 13 of the Union list of the Constitution.**
- Originally, the PMLA focused on combating money laundering related to drug trafficking, as per the UN resolution.
- However, amendments to the PMLA expanded its scope, including offenses beyond drug-related crimes, such as those listed in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or covered by special laws.
- For example, the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, aimed at addressing corruption among public servants, was added to the PMLA's schedule in 2009.**
- **Under the PMLA, accused individuals are presumed guilty until proven innocent, contrary to the fundamental principle of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence.**
- **Bail provisions in the PMLA make it difficult for accused individuals to obtain bail, as judges can only grant bail if they are convinced of the accused's innocence, leading to prolonged detention without trial.**

The Bail Provision

- The bail provision of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Act, Section 45, has significant political implications in present-day India.
- **It was initially deemed unconstitutional by a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in Nikesh Tarachand Shah vs Union of India (2018) for violating Article 14 and Article 21.**
- **However, Parliament swiftly reinstated this provision with amendments, which was later upheld by a three-judge Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar in Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India (2022).**
- The Supreme Court ruled that this provision is reasonable and aligns with the objectives of the PMLA Act, which aims to combat money laundering and safeguard the economy from destabilization.
- Despite the Act's original purpose, it includes less serious offenses in its schedule, a decision considered within the legislative policy domain.
- The current judicial approach to bail in PMLA cases is seen as technical, with a departure from the perspective laid out **by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer in 1978.**
- Justice Iyer emphasized the importance of personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution and urged a cautious and judicial exercise of curial power concerning bail decisions.
- The evolution of the Supreme Court's stance on bail from Justice Iyer to Justice Khanwilkar reflects a significant journey.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Earthquake:
A lesson from Taiwan in quake resilience

- 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.

2. <u>**Water Crisis:**</u>

Is the urban water system breaking (Bengaluru case)?

- Bengaluru, known for its greenery, IT hub status, and pleasant climate, is facing a severe water crisis in 2023.
- The drought of 2023 has exacerbated the water shortage in Bengaluru, impacting other urban and rural areas as well.
- According to **the Central Water Commission's** weekly bulletin, major reservoirs in southern states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana are filled to only 25% capacity or less, despite peak summer approaching.
- The water crisis raises concerns about the urban water system's sustainability and potential breakdown.
- **T.V. Ramachandra and S. Vishwanath** discuss this issue in a conversation moderated by K.C. Deepika.
- The excerpts of their conversation shed light on the challenges and implications of the water crisis in Bengaluru and other regions.

This is not the first time that a major city in India has been hit by a water crisis. What does it say about the water infrastructure in our cities?

- Water crises in cities are **often due to mismanagement of water resources** across the country.
- Bengaluru's water issues stem **from unplanned urbanization, with drastic changes in the city landscape** over time.
- **In 1800, Bengaluru had 1,452 interconnected water bodies and 80% green cover within a 740 square kilometer area.**
- Today, **86% of the city is covered by paved surfaces**, and the green cover has dwindled to less than **3%.**
- Over 40% of Bengaluru's water needs are met by groundwater sources, which should ideally be replenished through porous city landscapes.
- The **city relies on the Cauvery river for about 55-60% of its water supply**, but the **Cauvery watershed has seen a loss of 45% of its forest cover over the past four decades.**
- Currently, the **Cauvery catchment has only 18% forest cover, with 75% dedicated to agriculture.**
- **Climate change** exacerbates these challenges, further impacting water resources and availability in Bengaluru and beyond.

- In the 20th century, water provision institutions were designed as water supply boards.
- There's a need to shift governance paradigms towards water management boards, **encompassing various water sources like piped water, rainwater, groundwater, surface water, lakes, rivers, and wastewater.**
- Governance should start from river basin institutions, overseeing landscape preservation, deforestation, sand mining, pollution, and agricultural practices.
- It's crucial to prevent irreversible alterations to the landscape that could disrupt river flow or lead to heavy pollution.
- At the city level, institutions must **understand and manage all forms of water as ecological resources.**
- Lessons from Bengaluru and other urban areas highlight the importance of holistic water management approaches in India.

The irony that many are pointing out is that these are the same cities that are inundated during rains. Where are we going wrong?

- Water management institutions in Bengaluru operate independently, leading to siloed governance.
- Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board manages piped water supply.
- Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, along with Karnataka Tank Conservation and Development Authority, oversees surface water bodies.
- Groundwater management falls under the Groundwater Authority.
- Wastewater management lacks clear ownership, contributing to floods when it flows into drains or lakes.
- The fragmented approach to water management results from poor planning and design of the landscape
- Concretization and poor road construction are significant issues.
- **Roads hinder hydrological flows, acting as dams and barriers.**
- This impedes the natural movement of water, leading to drainage problems and increased risk of flooding.
- Inadequate road design exacerbates water-related issues in urban areas like Bengaluru.
- **Addressing road construction and concretization practices** is crucial to improving water management and mitigating flood risks.
- **Fragmented governance due to numerous agencies is a primary issue.**
- Many state agencies lack competent leadership, hindering effective water management.
- **Rainwater harvesting presents a solution**, as Bengaluru receives 700-850 mm of rainfall annually, providing ample water resources.
- Approximately **70% of Bengaluru's water needs** can be met through rainwater harvesting.
- Rainwater can be harvested through rooftop systems and by rejuvenating lakes to retain rainwater.
- Re-establishing interconnectivity among lakes can prevent flooding by allowing water to move freely.
- Government responses to flooding often involve remodelling stormwater drains, but this can exacerbate issues by concretizing and narrowing the drains, contrary to hydrological principles.

There are two arguments regarding the Bengaluru situation. One is to depopulate the city by creating new centres of livelihood. The other is to create better water infrastructure. Where do you stand on this?

- Urbanization in Bengaluru became inevitable after the 1991 economic reforms.
- Bengaluru attracted people due to its climate and economic opportunities.
- Proper planning and infrastructure development can accommodate future population growth.
- The city's failure lies in **its inability to anticipate and manage growth**, especially in the outskirts.
- Optimism lies in **effective resource management, including lakes, aquifers, rainwater, and wastewater treatment, to support the growing population**.
- Bengaluru has exceeded its carrying capacity, evident from a **1055% increase in concrete area, 18% loss in vegetation, and 79% loss in water bodies over five decades.**
- Lack of effective management has led to this situation, highlighting a significant oversight.
- **Cluster-based development is proposed as a solution to alleviate pressure on Bengaluru.**
- **The goal is to reverse migration by shifting industries to taluk headquarters,** fostering development in other regions.
- Concentrating all resources and opportunities in Bengaluru makes it increasingly unlivable and unsustainable.

Much of the focus is on urban centres. There is not enough attention being paid to regions along the river basins. Isn't it high time that governments start respecting ecosystems away from the cities that ultimately help these cities thrive?

- The governance framework needs to focus on protecting the environment at the river basin scale.
- Reports like the **Gadgil and Kasturirangan Committee Reports** aimed at this, but faced rejection due to various reasons.
- Bengaluru's existence is dependent on the health of the Cauvery river; its degradation will adversely affect the city.
- **Citizens should prioritize discussions about ensuring the Cauvery's pristine condition and ample water flow.**
- Environmental destruction is the root cause of issues like water scarcity, overshadowing concerns like piped water or tanker prices.
- Establishing effective institutions and seeking expertise are crucial steps towards managing systems and resources efficiently.

Every time there is a crisis, we see knee-jerk reactions. What should governments do to secure the future of our cities?

- Institutions need to possess comprehensive understanding of the problem at hand.
- They should **be capable of accurately defining the issue.**
- Their focus should be on devising **long-term and sustainable solutions.**
- These solutions should address the root causes of the problem rather than providing temporary fixes.
- **Institutions should have the capacity to adapt and evolve** in response to changing circumstances and new challenges.

- **Accountability within the system is essential** to ensure that institutions operate effectively.
- **Corruption undermines planning efforts and leads to inefficient use of resources.**
- Projects should be implemented based on genuine need and not just to utilize funds.
- **Electing capable and ethical leaders is crucial for promoting transparency and accountability in governance.**
- Addressing corruption and promoting accountability are key aspects of improving the effectiveness of planning and implementation processes.

Central Water Commission (CWC)

- **Apex Technical Organization:** CWC is India's premier technical body in the field of water resources.
- **Functioning:** It operates under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation.
- **Mandate:** To provide technical guidance, support, and coordination for the overall development and management of India's water resources.

Data and Services Provided by CWC

1. **Hydrological Observation Network**
   - **Extensive Network:** CWC maintains a vast network of hydrological observation stations across the country to collect data on:
     - River water levels
     - River flows/discharge
     - Groundwater levels
     - Water quality (at select locations)
     - Sedimentation of reservoirs
2. **Flood Forecasting:**
   - **Issuing Warnings:** CWC analyses the data to issue flood forecasts and warnings for major river basins in India, aiding in disaster preparedness.
3. **Water Resource Assessments**
   - **Availability and Utilization:** CWC conducts studies and estimations on the availability of surface water and groundwater and their current utilization patterns across various sectors.
4. **Data Dissemination**
   - **Water Information Systems:** CWC makes a vast amount of the collected data freely available to the public, researchers, and policymakers through various platforms including:
   - **Water Year Books:** Comprehensive compilations of hydrological data.
   - **Online Portals and Databases:** Easier access to specific datasets.

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3. Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs):

Many glacial lakes expanding, show ISRO images of catchments of Indian Himalayan river basins

Changes in Glacial Lakes:

- Long-term satellite imagery by ISRO covering Indian Himalayan river basins from 1984 to 2023 shows significant changes in glacial lakes.
- Out of 2,431 lakes larger than 10 hectares identified during 2016-17, 676 glacial lakes have notably expanded since 1984.
- Specifically, 130 of these lakes are situated within India, with 65 in the Indus, 7 in the Ganga, and 58 in the Brahmaputra River basins.
- Among the expanding lakes, the majority are Moraine-dammed (307), followed by Erosion (265), other (96), and Ice-dammed (8) glacial lakes, respectively.

- Satellite-derived long-term change analyses provide valuable insights for understanding glacial lake dynamics, essential for assessing environmental impacts and developing strategies for Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) risk management and climate change adaptation.

<u>Glacial Lake Outburst Flood:</u>

- **What it is** - A GLOF is created when water dammed by a glacier or a moraine is released suddenly.

Factors contributing Glacial Hazards –

- (a) large lake volume;
- (b) narrow and high moraine dam;
- (c) stagnant glacier ice within the dam; and
- (d) limited freeboard between the lake level and the crest of the moraine ridge.

What are the NDMA's Guidelines to Tackle Glacial Burst?

- **<u>Identifying Potentially Dangerous Lakes:</u>** Potentially dangerous lakes can be identified based on field observations, records of past events, geomorphologic and geotechnical characteristics of the lake/dam and surroundings, and other physical conditions.
- **<u>Use of Technology:</u>** Promoting use of Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery (a form of radar that is used to create two-dimensional images) to automatically detect changes in water bodies, including new lake formations, during the monsoon months.
- **<u>Channeling Potential Floods:</u>** Reducing the volume of water with methods such as controlled breaching, pumping or siphoning out water, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.
- **<u>Uniform Codes for Construction Activity</u>**: Developing a broad framework for infrastructure development, construction and excavation in vulnerable zones.
- There is a need to accept procedures for land use planning in the GLOF prone areas.
- **<u>Enhancing Early Warning Systems (EWS):</u>** The number of implemented and operational GLOF EWS is very small, even at the global scale.
- In the Himalayan region, there are at least three reported instances (two in Nepal and one in China) of implementation of sensor- and monitoring-based technical systems for GLOF early warning.
- **<u>Training Local Manpower:</u>** Apart from pressing specialised forces such as National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), ITBP and the Army, NDMA has emphasised the need for trained local manpower.
- It has been observed that over 80% of search and rescue is carried out by the local community before the intervention of the state machinery and specialised search and rescue teams.
- **<u>Comprehensive Alarm Systems:</u>** Besides classical alarm infrastructure consisting of acoustic alarms by sirens, modern communication technology using cell and smartphones can complement or even replace traditional alarming infrastructure.

ETHICS

1. **A.P. Tribal Woman gives birth on Road:**
   - A 28-year-old woman named Killo Vasantha from a tribal hamlet in Andhra Pradesh gave birth to a baby on the roadside early on Monday.

- Vasantha, belonging to a tribal community in Cheedivalasa village, experienced labor pains around 4 a.m.
- Her family members called the emergency ambulance service (108) for assistance.
- Although the ambulance reached the nearest point, approximately one kilometer away from the village, it couldn't proceed further due to the absence of a motorable road leading to the village.
- Vasantha's husband, Bhaskara Rao, and some women from the village carried her along a dirt pathway toward the ambulance.
- Before reaching the ambulance, Vasantha gave birth to a baby girl on the roadside.
- She experienced heavy bleeding, prompting the ambulance staff to come on foot to provide medical assistance.
- The ambulance staff also assisted the villagers in moving Vasantha to the ambulance, after which she was transported to the Health Centre at Hukumpeta for further treatment.

'Funds siphoned off'

- CPI(M) district secretariat member K. Govinda Rao alleges that roads were not constructed in tribal hamlets despite drawing funds amounting to crores of rupees from schemes like MGNREGS.
- Funds have allegedly been siphoned off by unscrupulous contractors over the years.
- Rao criticizes politicians for making promises to lay roads before every general election but failing to fulfill them.
- Deputy Sarpanch Killo Nageswara Rao and villagers claim that a road was sanctioned in 2017 under MGNREGS, but work was halted midway despite funds being allocated.
- Earthmovers were brought in and work started but stopped before completion.
- Villagers demand the immediate completion of the road to ensure timely medical assistance for pregnant women and sick individuals.

2. Don't Compare Yourself with Others:
Focus on your talents and potential to find true happiness

- The narrator struggled academically, especially in math, but managed to reach the fifth grade.
- After a math test where many classmates also failed, the narrator showed the results to their father.
- The father questioned the narrator's habit of comparing scores with classmates.
- He explained that comparing oneself to others doesn't lead to personal improvement.
- Instead, he encouraged the narrator to **focus on their own growth and potential.**
- The mother supported this idea, emphasizing the importance of **self-comparison for personal happiness.**
- Both parents advised against comparing oneself with others and suggested self-assessment and improvement as a better approach.
- They stressed that the only person to compare oneself with is one's own past performance.
- The narrator stopped comparing their life with others and focused on their own potential.
- **They chose a career in research while their friends pursued different paths.**
- **Despite challenges in their research work, they found fulfillment and contentment.**

- The narrator realized the importance of **accepting differences in desires and aspirations.**
- **Social media exacerbates the tendency to compare oneself with others**.
- Excessive comparison on social media leads to **low self-esteem and insecurities.**
- Instead of comparing, people should accept themselves and focus on developing their talents.
- **Acceptance and self-improvement lead to genuine happiness and fulfilment**.

UPPSC SPECIAL

1. <u>Sports:</u>

1.1 Badminton

- The ongoing Thomas & Uber Cup in Chengdu, China, is a significant badminton tournament leading up to the Olympics.
- The Thomas Cup is considered the 'World Cup' of badminton.
- Indian men's team won their maiden Thomas Cup crown in 2022, boosting their confidence.

- The strong Indian team, including players like H.S. Prannoy, Lakshya Sen, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, and Chirag Shetty, sees this as an opportunity to test their skills before the Paris Olympics.

1.2 Chess
- **Wide open: On the Candidates chess tournament in Toronto**
- **R. Praggnanandhaa, D. Gukesh, and Vidit Gujrathi** are competing in the open tournament
- **Koneru Humpy and R. Vaishali are** participating in the women's tournament
- **Only Viswanathan Anand has** represented India in this prestigious event before, being a five-time world champion.

2. <u>Awards:</u>
2.1 Prof. Jodhka to get Malcom Adiseshiah Award
- Surinder S. Jodhka, a professor at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, has been selected for the Malcom Adiseshiah Award 2024.
- Vikas Kumar, an associate professor at the School of Development, Azim Premji University, will be honored with the Elizabeth Adiseshiah Citation-2024.
- These awards are given annually to recognize outstanding social scientists.
- The recipients are chosen based on their contributions and achievements in the field of social sciences.

Adiseshiah Award

- **Prestigious Indian Award:** Recognizes outstanding contributions to **Development Studies**.
- **Instituted by:** The **Malcolm & Elizabeth Adiseshiah Trust**.
- **Types of Awards:**
  - Malcom S. Adiseshiah Award for Distinguished Contributions to Development Studies.
  - Elizabeth Adiseshiah Award (introduced in 2018), presented to young scholars below the age of 45.

Focus of the Award:

- Honors significant and original contributions to the field of social sciences through research, teaching, publications, advocacy, and policymaking.

Nomination and Selection:

- **Nominations:** Invited from distinguished experts in the academic and development sector.
- **Independent Jury:** A national-level jury of eminent persons recommends the awardees.

Award Presentation:

- Awarded annually, typically in November.
- Includes a cash prize, a citation, and the opportunity to deliver the Malcolm Adiseshiah Memorial Lecture.

About Dr. Malcolm S. Adiseshiah:

- Renowned Indian economist and educator.
- Former Deputy Director-General of UNESCO.
- Founded Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS).

2.2 Padma Awards:

- 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.

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.