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TEMPLE DISCOVERIES HIGHLIGHT CHALUKYA EXPANSION



GWALIOR FORT

PROJECT UNNATI

PROJECT UNNATI

Big cat count

According to the data released by the PM, the number of tigers in India increased by 200 in the past four years. A look at the tiger population

Year	Tiger population
2006	1,411
2010	1,706
2014	2,226
2018	2,967
2022	3,167

Steady rise: A tiger at Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal on Sunday. PTI

CAUSE FOR THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF TIGERS



THE UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE OF PATTADAKAL TEMPLES



ROCK ART SITES OF THE CHAMBAL VALLEY

A Monthly Magazine from
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Dear Aspirants,

India and China, two of the world's most populous and rapidly developing nations, share a long and complex history. India established diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China on April 1, 1950, making history as the first nation outside the Socialist Bloc to do so. The bilateral relationship between these Asian giants has always been multifaceted, marked by cooperation, competition, and at times, confrontation. In recent years, the dynamics between New Delhi and Beijing have evolved significantly, influenced by geopolitical shifts, economic interests, and regional security concerns.

The 1962 Sino-Indian War left a lasting impact on bilateral ties, creating deep-seated mistrust. A dispute regarding the sovereignty of the border territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin, which are geographically far apart, was the primary cause of the Indo-China war. While China claimed Aksai Chin was part of Xinjiang, India claimed it was part of Ladakh. Following the violent clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020—the largest important military confrontation between the two sides in almost 40 years—bilateral relations took a dramatic plunge.

Since 2020, India has enforced more stringent laws governing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from countries with which it shares borders, with particular emphasis on investments from China. Tensions along the Ladakh border escalated as a result of this policy change, which came into being after the COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, Chinese automakers have encountered difficulties growing their investments in India, including the massive EV manufacturer BYD. The Home Ministry turned down a joint venture that BYD had also suggested with Megha Engineering, one of the largest purchasers of electoral bonds in India. About 450 applications from Chinese enterprises have been received by the government in the four years after the rule change, and 180 of them have been rejected. About seventy applications have been accepted, some of which come from organizations deemed necessary for the development of the iPhone. About 200 proposals are still pending with the administration at the moment.

The two sides have so far held 21 rounds of Corps Commanders-level talks to resolve the border standoff. The Chinese military claims that as of right now, the two sides have agreed to withdraw from four locations: Jianan Daban (Gogra), Hot Springs, Pangong Lake, and the Galwan Valley. India is pressing the PLA to disengage from the Depsang and Demchok, vocalising that there cannot be restoration of normalcy in its relations with China as long as the state of the borders remains far from normal.

Despite ongoing military and diplomatic talks, a full resolution to the border dispute remains elusive. The continued military buildup with an estimated 50,000-60,000 troops posted on either side of the India-China border in eastern Ladakh for almost four years now along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) adds to the sense of unease.

Economic interdependence between India and China has grown in spite of the border tensions. China is one of India's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade exceeding \$100 billion annually. However, this economic relationship is characterized by a significant trade imbalance, with India importing far more from China than it exports. This imbalance has been a source of contention, prompting India to seek greater market access in China and to diversify its trade partnerships.

The strategic rivalry between India and China extends beyond their immediate borders. Both countries have been vying for influence in the Indo-Pacific region, leading to a complex geopolitical chess game. India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) alongside the United States, Japan, and Australia is seen as a counterbalance to China's assertiveness in the region. On the other hand, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has expanded its influence across Asia, Africa, and beyond, often causing concern in New Delhi about strategic encirclement.

Resolving longstanding disputes is crucial. Both countries must find common ground on border issues, trade, and investment. Confidence-building measures, diplomatic dialogues, and cultural exchanges can foster mutual understanding. Additionally, regional forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provide platforms for cooperation.

India and China share responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in Asia. Their cooperation can address global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics. As they navigate this complex relationship, pragmatic diplomacy, transparency, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence are essential.

In conclusion, the India-China relationship remains multifaceted, shaped by historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and shared aspirations. While tensions persist, opportunities for collaboration exist. As both nations evolve, finding a delicate balance between competition and cooperation will define their future interactions on the global stage.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



K Rajendra Kumar IPS (Retd)

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1. Geography

1.1 GLOBAL TIGER NUMBERS ARE RISING

Why in news :

- Countries have submitted tiger population numbers from 2010-2022 to the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) and United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) under GTRP 2.0 which aims to pave the way for tiger conservation from 2023-2034.

About :

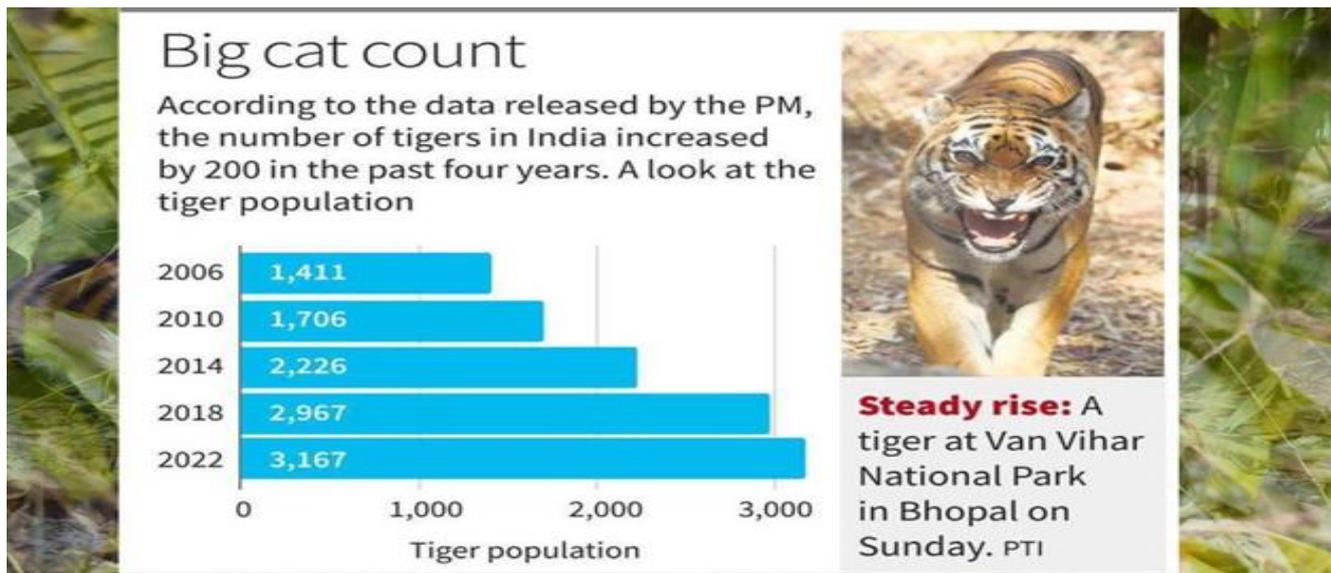
KEY FINDINGS

- Wild tiger status is good in **South Asia and Russia**, but the picture in Southeast Asia is grim
- There has been an overall increase in the tiger population by 60 percent, taking the number to 5,870.
- Countries like **Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao-PDR, and Vietnam** showed a decline in tiger populations, making the situation “grim” in the Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) of Southeast Asia.
- The success of countries in South Asia like **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal including China and Russia in North East Asia** is attributed to effective measures taken for habitat conservation and protection.
- **Nepal** has tripled the tiger population.

CAUSE FOR THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF TIGERS

- **Invasive Species:** The proliferation of invasive species like Lantana camara in Indian forests has led to habitat degradation, reducing the abundance of ungulates that tigers depend on for sustenance.
- **Man-Animal Conflict:** Sundarbans in West Bengal witnessed frequent man-tiger conflicts due to the close proximity of human settlements to tiger habitats, resulting in fatalities on both sides.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The expansion of highways through wildlife corridors in central India, like the Pench-Kanha corridor, disrupts tiger migration routes, isolating populations and hindering genetic diversity.
- **Disease:** The outbreak of the Canine distemper virus in the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan led to the death of several tigers, highlighting the vulnerability of these apex predators to diseases.

- **Poaching:** The arrest of poachers in the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha in 2020, with seized tiger bones and skins, underscores the persistent menace of poaching even in well-protected reserves.
- **Insufficient Prey:** Some tiger reserves suffer from an inadequate prey base, jeopardizing the sustainability of tiger populations. Example: The Palamau Tiger Reserve in Jharkhand faces a challenge in maintaining viable tiger populations due to a decline in prey species, emphasizing the need for ecological balance in protected areas

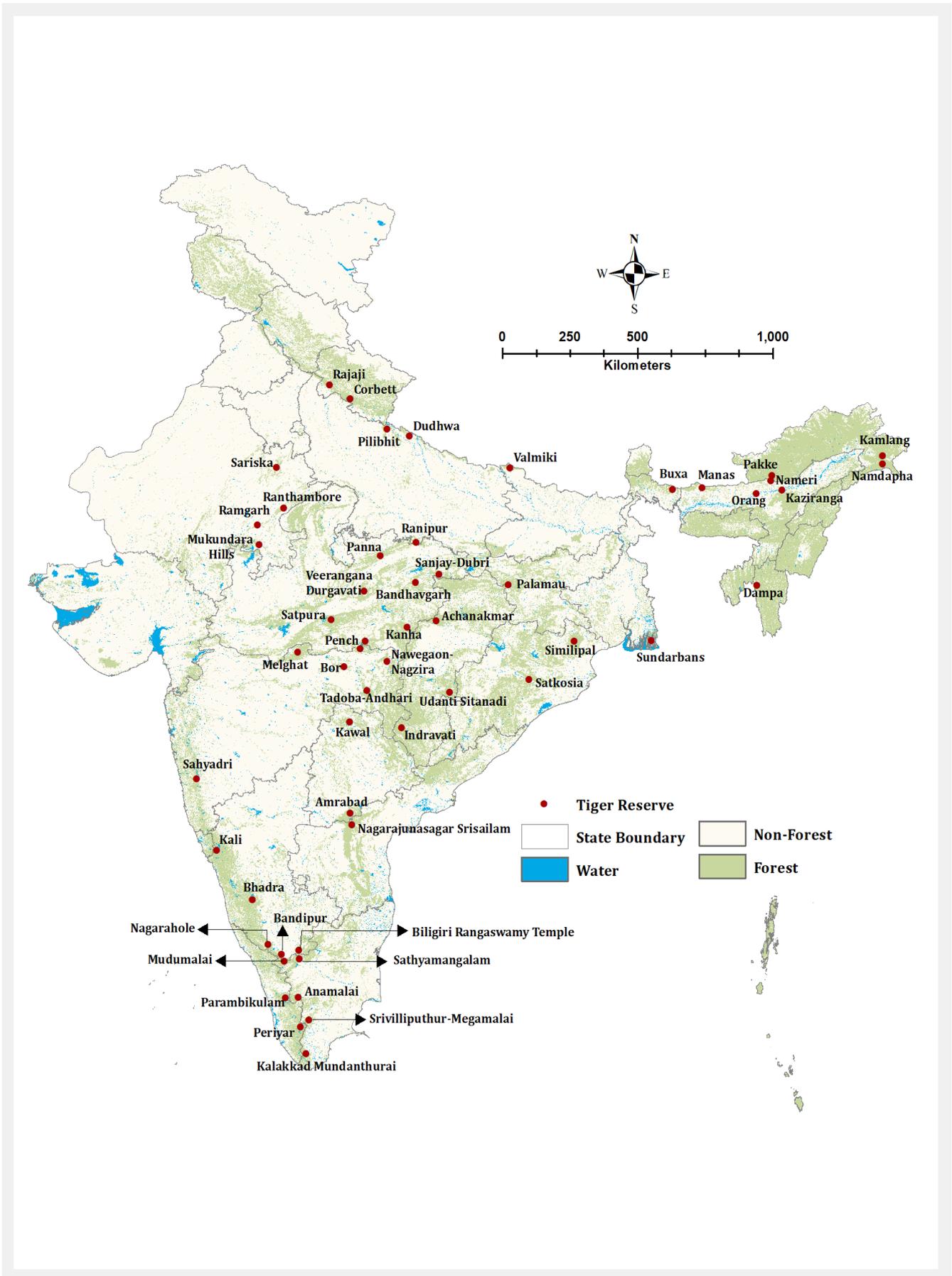


GLOBAL INITIATIVES:

- **ST. PETERSBURG DECLARATION (2010):** It brought together world leaders to endorse the **Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP)**, which aimed to double tiger populations by 2022.
- **GLOBAL TIGER INITIATIVE (2008):** It fostered collaboration among governments, NGOs, and international organizations to support tiger conservation efforts.
- **CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES (CITES):** CITES regulates the trade of tiger parts and products, aiming to eliminate illegal wildlife trade and ensure the legal and sustainable sourcing of tiger specimens.

INDIAN INITIATIVES

- **Project Tiger**
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority**
- **Tiger Census in India**
- **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022**



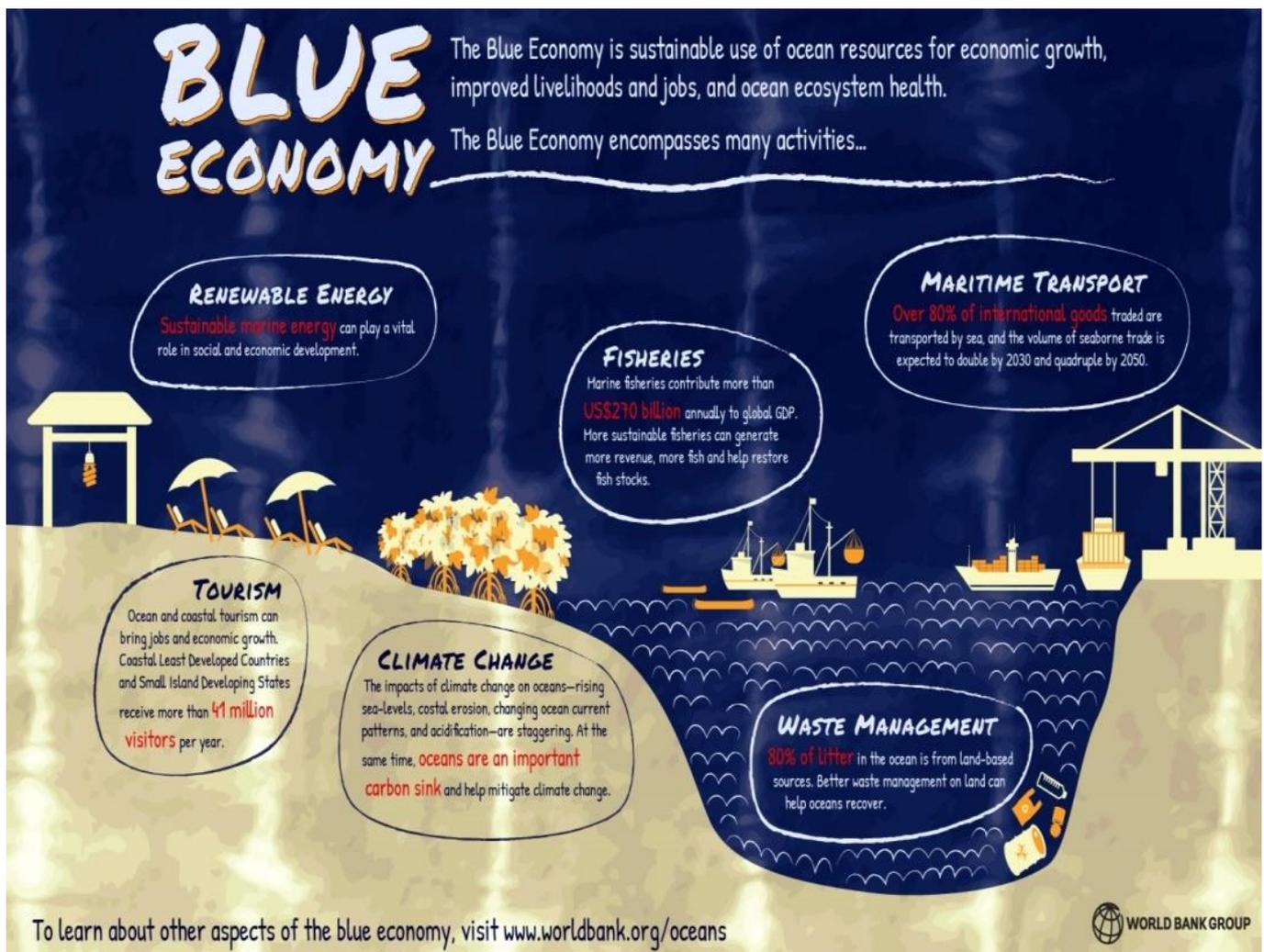
1.2 BLUE ECONOMY 2.0

Why in news :

- The recent presentation of the Interim Budget included a significant emphasis on advancing Blue Economy 2.0 through the introduction of a novel scheme focused on restoration, adaptation measures, coastal aquaculture, and mariculture, employing an integrated and multi-sectoral strategy.

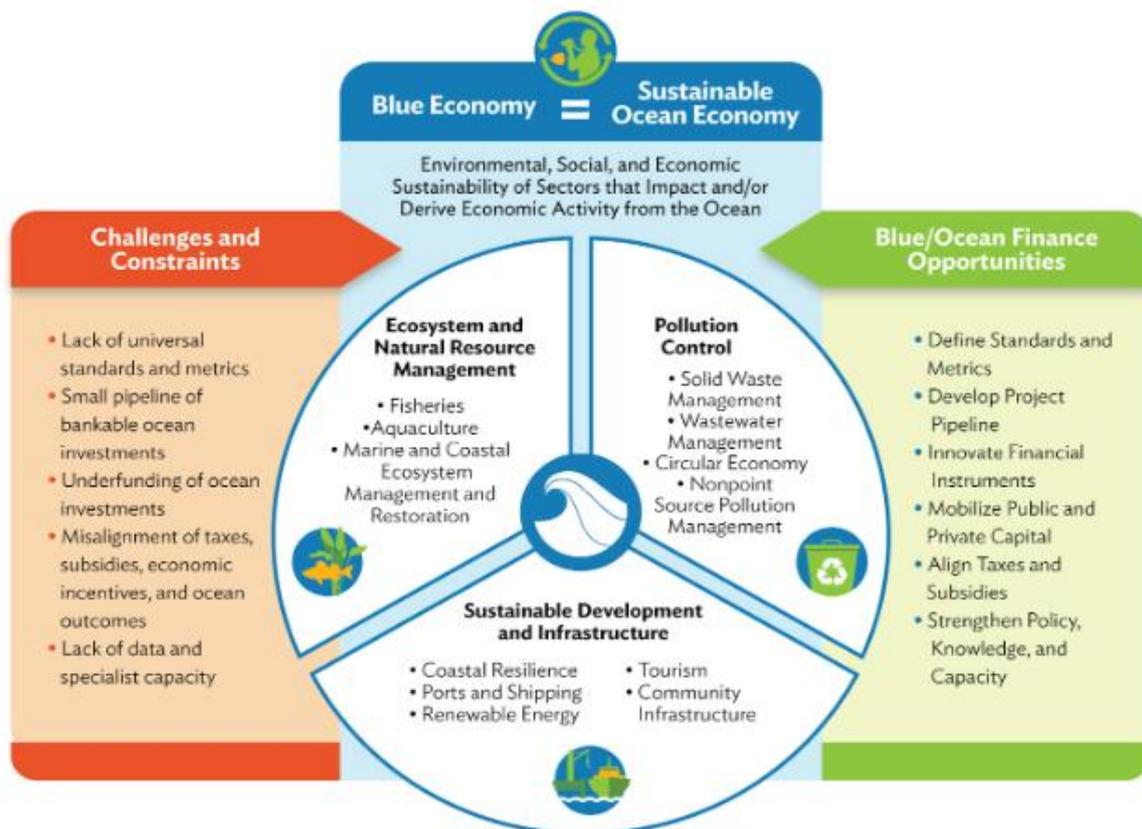
About :

- UNDP defines the blue economy as “the **sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, jobs and social and financial inclusion, with a focus on preservation and restoration** of the health of ocean ecosystems and the services they provide”. This concept recognizes the connection between the natural capital in the ocean and the economic activities and benefits derived of the ocean economy.



Global Perspective on Blue economy

- The global Blue Economy landscape encompasses a diverse range of sectors that leverage oceanic and coastal resources for economic development, while prioritizing sustainability and environmental preservation.
- **Maritime Transport:** According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), around 80% of global trade by volume and over 70% by value is carried by sea
- **Coastal Tourism :** The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) notes that coastal and marine tourism accounts for a significant portion of the global tourism industry, supporting over 6.5 million jobs worldwide.
- **Renewable Marine Energy :** The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) projects that the total installed capacity of offshore wind could reach 228 GW by 2030, up from 29 GW in 2019, showcasing the sector's rapid growth potential.
- **Marine Biotechnology :** Marine biotechnology represents a promising frontier in achieving sustainability and innovation, particularly in the realms of biofuels, bioplastics, and healthcare. For example, the development of polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHAs) from marine bacteria offers a biodegradable alternative to petroleum-based plastics.



CASE STUDY ON BLUE ECONOMY: NORWAY

Norwegian Economic Zone and the Fisheries Protection Zone around Svalbard provides a framework for the sustainable use of natural resources and goods derived from the Barents Sea-Lofoten area.

- Norway is one of the world's largest producers of farmed salmon, with the Norwegian Seafood Council reporting that the country produced over 1.3 million metric tons of salmon in 2019.
- The Norwegian government has introduced incentives for low-emission shipping, leading to the launch of the world's first fully electric car and passenger ferry, the MF Ampere, in 2015.
- Norway is investing in marine biotechnology, seafood innovation, and clean energy, aiming to reduce the economic dependence on oil and gas over time.

Significance of the Blue Economy for India's growth and development:

- The Blue Economy holds significant potential for India, offering numerous benefits across various sectors.

❖ Maritime Trade and Shipping

- **Extensive Coastline and Port Infrastructure:** With a coastline extending over 7,500 km, India hosts 12 major and over 200 minor ports, underpinning a vast maritime trade network.
- **Critical for Trade:** Maritime transportation is vital, with over 95% of India's trading volume being seaborne, contributing approximately 4% to the national GDP.
- **Industry Expansion Opportunities:** The maritime sector presents opportunities for growth in ship repair, maintenance, and other ship-based industries.

❖ Renewable Energy Development

- **Meeting Energy Demand:** The pursuit of the Blue Economy enables the development of marine renewable energy sources, including offshore wind and solar power.
- **Energy Targets:** As per the Ministry of Power, India aims for an energy capacity of over 800 GW

- by 2030, with more than 500 GW from non-fossil sources, where ocean-based energy could play a crucial role.
- ❖ **Livelihood and Employment**
- **Fisheries Sector:** India ranks as the world's second-largest fish producer, supporting over 4 million fishermen and coastal communities in 9 coastal states.
- ❖ **Economic Growth**
- **Contribution to GDP:** The Blue Economy currently contributes nearly 4% to India's GDP, with potential to significantly aid in achieving a \$10 trillion economy by 2032.
- **Pandemic Resilience:** Despite global challenges, India's Blue Economy demonstrated resilience, recording exports worth \$7.2 billion between April 2021 and February 2022.
- ❖ **Strategic Significance**
- **Geographical Advantage:** India's strategic location near key maritime routes, such as the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Hormuz, is vital for oil and gas transport, enhancing its influence in the Indian Ocean.
- ❖ **Fulfilling International Commitments**
- **Sustainable Goals:** India is committed to SDG 14, which focuses on the sustainable use of marine resources, aligning with broader goals to eradicate poverty and hunger.
- **Climate Actions:** Under the INDC targets set at the Paris Summit, India aims to increase its carbon sinks by 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ and reduce the GHG emission intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35% from 2005 levels by 2030, with sustainable energy generation from the Blue Economy contributing to these objectives.

Government initiatives and policies supporting the Blue Economy

- **Sagarmala Project:** Aims to reduce logistics costs via port modernization, new port development, and enhanced port connectivity.
- **Deep Ocean Mission:** Focuses on explo
- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana:** Aims to boost the fisheries sector under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- **NavIC:** Satellite-based navigation to support Blue Economy activities.

1.3 ATMOSPHERIC RIVERS

Why in news :

- California, US is currently grappling with an extraordinary weather phenomenon known as an Atmospheric River also called Pineapple Express Storm, which has the potential rain over the state.

About :

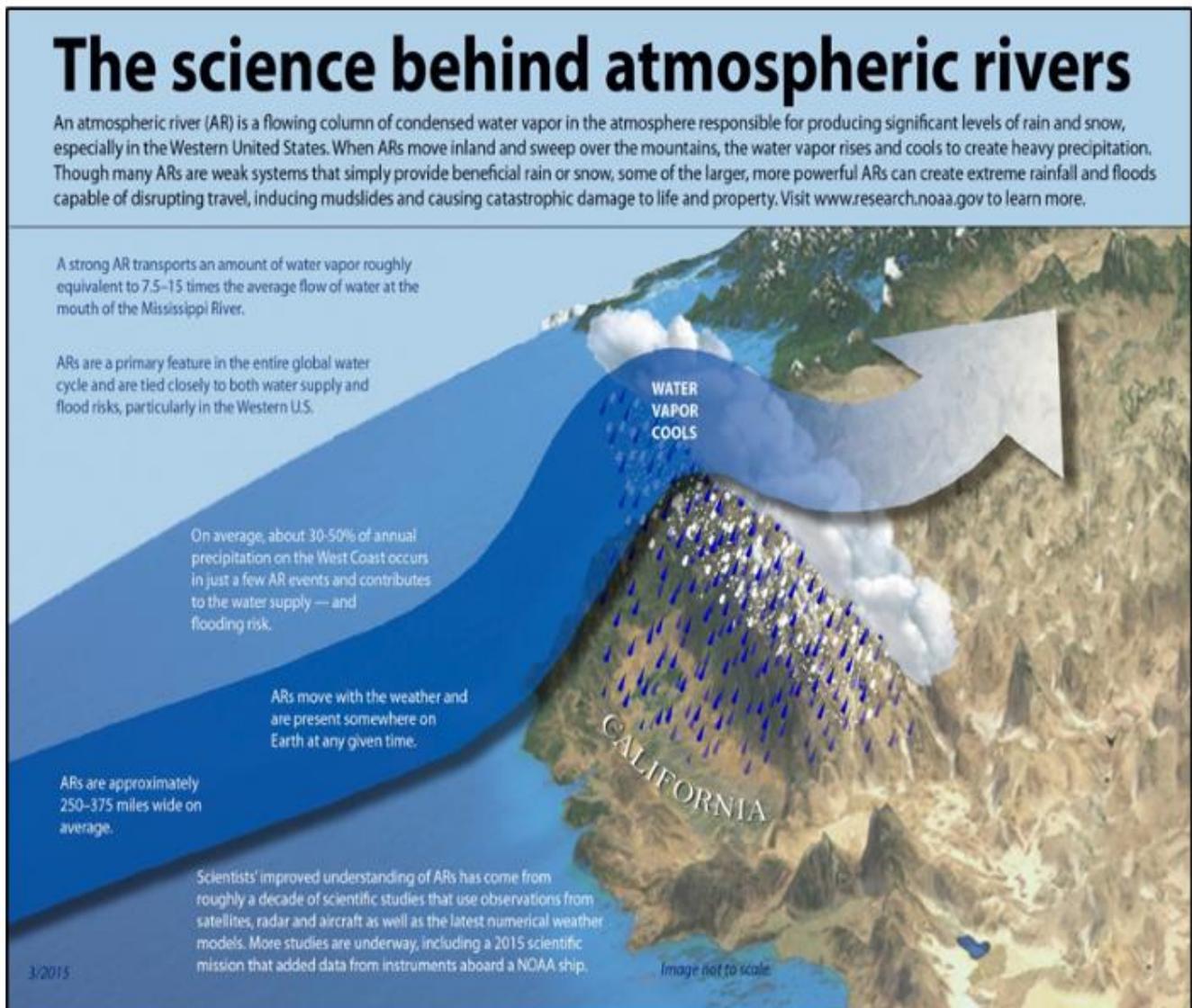
- Atmospheric rivers are extensive, slender streams of moisture-laden air that convey substantial quantities of water vapour from tropical regions toward higher latitudes.
- These meteorological phenomena are typically linked with Maritime Tropical (MT) air masses. Upon reaching land, these atmospheric rivers unload their moisture in the form of heavy precipitation, which may take the form of rain or snow depending on the local altitude and temperature conditions.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) notes that the volume of water vapour transported by these atmospheric rivers is comparable to the mean discharge of the Mississippi River at its estuary. Consequently, when they come ashore and discharge their moisture content, they can lead to severe flooding.

PINEAPPLE EXPRESS

- The "**Pineapple Express**" is a notable instance of atmospheric river events that deliver substantial rainfall to the Western United States, especially California.
- The term "**Pineapple Express**" derives from these storms' tendency to pull moisture from the tropical regions near the Hawaiian Islands, akin to a rapid moisture "express" service originating near Hawaii, a location commonly linked with pineapples.
- Propelled by a vigorous southern segment of the polar jet stream, this atmospheric river moves moist, **warm Maritime Tropical (mT) air** from the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Atmospheric rivers are vital for the replenishment of water reserves, especially in areas such as the western United States, where their substantial rainfall plays a significant role in boosting reservoir levels, mitigating drought effects, and securing water for farming, industry, and household needs.
- Recognizing the significance of atmospheric rivers is critical for the effective management and planning of water resources. This involves strategies for conserving water, managing floods, and distributing water to satisfy diverse needs.
- By transferring vast quantities of water vapor from the tropics to higher latitudes, atmospheric rivers are instrumental in sustaining the hydrological cycle's equilibrium.
- They facilitate the movement of moisture to various regions, thereby nurturing ecosystems and enhancing agricultural yields.



HOW COMMON ARE ATMOSPHERIC RIVERS AND WHERE DO THEY OCCUR ?

- Their occurrence is not confined to the US West Coast; atmospheric rivers have a global presence. These elongated moisture streams can extend for thousands of miles, impacting areas including the UK, Ireland, Norway, and China.
- In China, atmospheric rivers intensify the rainy season, also referred to as the Mei-Yu season.
- Although they constitute only 17% of the US West Coast's storms, atmospheric rivers play a crucial role in California's rainfall, snowpack accumulation, and significant flooding events. Their predictability allows for their forecasting up to a week before they happen.

Impact in India

- India has also seen its impact during 1985 and 2020.
- During this period, India's 70% flooding was due to atmospheric rivers.
- Weather events like 2013 Uttarakhand flood and Kerala flood in 2018 were also triggered by this.
- The southern region of western ghats and eastern ghats of India face major issues like heavy rainfall and precipitation.

Reasons For Rise in Atmospheric Rivers In India

- In India, its formation is largely caused by sea surface temperature in the south-central Indian ocean.
- Evaporation has increased in the Indian ocean due to higher Vapour Pressure Deficit (VPD).
- VPD is a measurement unit that measures the pressure needed to turn liquid into vapor.

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1 Cyber Attacks: A Major Force in International Relations and Security

What are cyber attacks?

- Cyber attacks denote deliberate and malevolent actions undertaken by individuals, groups, or nation-states with the intent to disrupt, impair, or illicitly access computer systems, networks, or data repositories. These assaults manifest in diverse forms and are directed towards a broad spectrum of digital assets, encompassing personal computing devices, corporate networks, governmental infrastructures, and critical societal utilities.

Typical manifestations of cyber attacks include:

- **Malware:** Sophisticated software engineered to infiltrate and compromise computing systems, either through inflicting damage or surreptitiously exfiltrating sensitive information. Examples encompass viruses, worms, Trojans, ransomware, and spyware.
- **Phishing:** The implementation of deceptive electronic communications, such as emails, messages, or websites, designed to dupe individuals into divulging confidential data, including passwords, financial particulars, or login credentials.
- **Denial-of-Service (DoS) and Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) Attacks:** These assaults entail inundating a targeted system or network with an overwhelming volume of traffic, resulting in its incapacitation and rendering it inaccessible to legitimate users.
- **Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) Attacks:** Intrusions characterized by intercepting and modifying communication channels between two parties, enabling attackers to eavesdrop on sensitive exchanges or surreptitiously inject malevolent content.
- **SQL Injection:** Exploitation of vulnerabilities inherent in web applications to gain illicit access to underlying databases or execute nefarious SQL commands, thereby compromising data integrity and confidentiality.
- **Social Engineering:** Psychological manipulation tactics employed to exploit human vulnerabilities, thereby facilitating unauthorized access to confidential information or sensitive systems.
- **Zero-Day Exploits:** Tactics that exploit previously undiscovered vulnerabilities in software or hardware, capitalizing on the absence of available patches or remediation measures.
- The ramifications of cyber attacks are profound, spanning from financial losses and data breaches to reputational harm and disruptions to essential services. These assaults pose substantial threats to

individuals, enterprises, governmental entities, and the overarching global security paradigm, underscoring the critical imperative for the implementation of robust cybersecurity frameworks and pre-emptive defence strategies.

Significance of cyber attacks

- ✓ In the increasingly interconnected world of international politics, the specter of cyber attacks looms large, posing multifaceted dangers that extend beyond mere digital disruptions. From compromising national security to influencing elections and exacerbating conflicts, cyber attacks have emerged as a potent tool in the geopolitical arena. Here's a closer look at why they're considered a significant threat:
- ✓ **Threat to National Security:** Cyber intrusions targeting military and government systems can lead to the theft of classified information, disruption of military operations, and the compromise of critical infrastructure such as power grids and communication networks.
- ✓ **Political Interference:** Nation-states often deploy cyber attacks to manipulate political processes in other countries, whether by spreading disinformation or influencing elections through social media platforms. Such interference can undermine the democratic fabric of nations and sow discord among their citizens.
- ✓ **Making Conflicts Worse:** Cyber attacks, perceived as acts of aggression, have the potential to escalate tensions between countries and exacerbate existing conflicts. The ambiguity surrounding their origin and intent can fuel mistrust and precipitate retaliatory measures, heightening the risk of conventional or even military confrontation.
- ✓ **Hurting the Economy:** Attacks on businesses, financial institutions, or government agencies can result in substantial economic losses, disrupt global trade, and undermine investor confidence. The ripple effects of such disruptions can reverberate across national economies, exacerbating instability on a global scale.
- ✓ **Breaking Important Infrastructure:** Critical infrastructure systems, including power grids, transportation networks, and healthcare facilities, are increasingly interconnected and vulnerable to cyber attacks. Breaches in these systems can have dire consequences for public safety and national security, underscoring the urgent need for robust cybersecurity measures.
- ✓ **Attribution Challenges:** Determining the perpetrators of cyber attacks is often a daunting task, characterized by challenges in attribution and accountability. The lack of definitive evidence can complicate diplomatic efforts to address and mitigate the fallout from such incidents, hampering effective response mechanisms.

- ✓ In conclusion, cyber attacks represent a pressing global concern that demands concerted action and collaboration among nations. As we navigate the complexities of an interconnected world, it is imperative to bolster cybersecurity capabilities, enhance information sharing mechanisms, and foster international cooperation to safeguard against this evolving threat landscape. Only through collective vigilance and proactive measures can we effectively mitigate the risks posed by cyber attacks and preserve the stability of the international order.

Several significant cyber attacks targeting government, military and other sensitive institutional networks have been recorded in April. Below is a list of a few:

- Ukraine's military intelligence agency launched a cyber assault against Russia's ruling United Russia party coinciding with Russia's Victory Dictation event. The attack involved a barrage of DDoS attacks targeting United Russia's servers, websites, and domains, rendering them inaccessible. United Russia acknowledged the impact of a "massive" DDoS attack publicly.
- Belarusian pro-democracy hackers, identified as the Belarusian Cyber-Partisans, incapacitated the website of Belarus' primary security service agency for over two months. Additionally, the hackers disclosed a list of website administrators, along with its database and server logs, on their Telegram channel, marking the latest in a series of assaults against the Belarusian government by the group.
- British police commenced investigations into a series of "honey trap" attacks targeting British MPs. Perpetrators sent explicit messages via WhatsApp to their targets, purportedly of themselves, in an attempt to procure compromising images. The identities of the attackers remain unknown.
- Germany unveiled plans to establish a cyber military division as part of its military reorganization. Germany's defense minister, Boris Pistorius, announced the formation of the new Cyber and Information Domain Service (CIR) to counter escalating cyber aggression from Russia directed at Germany and its NATO allies.
- Hackers targeted El Salvador's national cryptocurrency wallet Chivo in April 2024, exposing over 144 GB of sensitive personal data belonging to millions of Salvadorians. Additionally, the hackers publicly disclosed Chivo's source code. As of now, the Salvadorian government has not issued an official statement regarding the attack.

2.2 India Rejects China's Renaming of Indian Areas, Defends Sovereignty

Why in the news?

- China's decision to rename certain locales within Arunachal Pradesh has generated significant attention, drawing strong opposition from India.
- India has steadfastly reiterated that the act of assigning "invented" names does not alter the fundamental reality that Arunachal Pradesh has been and will continue to be an integral part of India's territory.
- The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs unveiled the fourth installment of standardized geographical names under the designation of Zangnan, pertaining to Arunachal Pradesh, a region Beijing claims as part of South Tibet. This development echoes a similar action taken in April 2023, when China released a third list of standardized names for 11 locales within Arunachal Pradesh, prompting a sharp rebuke from India.

Border Dispute

- The border dispute between India and China revolves around protracted and intricate territorial disagreements spanning their shared border, which extends over 3,488 kilometers. The principal areas of contention include Aksai Chin, situated in the western sector, and Arunachal Pradesh, located in the eastern sector. Aksai Chin.
- China exercises administrative authority over Aksai Chin within its Xinjiang region, while India asserts its jurisdiction over the region as part of its Union Territory of Ladakh. Aksai Chin holds strategic importance due to its proximity to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its potential as a conduit for military activities.
- Arunachal Pradesh: China lays claim to the entirety of Arunachal Pradesh, branding it as "South Tibet". In contrast, India governs Arunachal Pradesh as a northeastern state and regards it as an integral component of its sovereign territory.

India's Strategy

- India actively engages in global strategic alliances as part of its diplomatic strategy to counterbalance China's influence in the Indian Ocean Region. Among these alliances is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia. Built on shared democratic values, QUAD members collaborate to enhance maritime trade and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

- Another significant partnership is the I2U2 grouping, which includes India, Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. This coalition elevates India's geopolitical standing by fostering alliances with key regional players, contributing to stability and security in the area.
- Additionally, India has initiated initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). IMEC serves as an alternative trade and connectivity route to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to strengthen India's presence in the Arabian Sea and the Middle East while promoting economic cooperation with Europe.
- Moreover, India collaborates with Iran and Russia in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), spanning 7,200 kilometers and linking the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Caspian Sea. Leveraging the strategic Chabahar Port, INSTC offers an alternative pathway to counter China's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by providing connectivity and trade opportunities while bypassing Gwadar port. These partnerships and initiatives underscore India's proactive approach to shaping regional dynamics and advancing its strategic interests on the global stage.

2.3 Who Believes their Country is moving in right direction?

The following data is taken from an IPSOS survey published in April.

- In April 2024, approximately 73% of urban Indians expressed the belief that India is moving in the right direction, marking a 4% decrease compared to the previous month. Despite this slight decline, India maintains its position among the top three most optimistic markets globally, largely influenced by countries in the global south.

Here's a breakdown of the statistics:

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE BELIEVING COUNTRY IS ON RIGHT TRACK
SINGAPORE	77%
INDONESIA	75%
INDIA	73%

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE BELIEVING COUNTRY IS ON RIGHT TRACK
THAILAND	64%
ARGENTINA	62%

- In sharp contrast, only 38% of global citizens across various countries share the sentiment that their country is moving in the right direction.

Countries with the lowest percentages are as follows:

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE BELIEVING COUNTRY IS ON RIGHT TRACK
PERU	13%
HUNGARY	17%
FRANCE	20%
SOUTH AFRICA	20%

Main worries on global scale

- On a global scale, the primary worries among citizens were inflation, with 34% expressing concern, followed closely by poverty and social inequality at 30%. Crime and violence, unemployment, and financial and political corruption were also significant concerns, cited by 30%, 27%, and 26% of global citizens, respectively.

Main worries of Indians

- The top concerns among urban Indians encompassed various socio-economic and political issues. The leading concerns included inflation, with 41% of respondents expressing worry, followed

closely by unemployment at 37%. Education ranked third, with 25% of respondents expressing concern, while crime and violence and financial and political corruption were cited by 23% and 21% of respondents, respectively.

- An interesting observation is that 19% of urban Indians expressed worry about taxes, highlighting a specific concern not as prominently mentioned by global citizens.

Here's a summary of the top concerns among urban Indians and global citizens:

CONCERN	URBAN INDIANS (%)	GLOBAL CITIZENS (%)
INFLATION	41	34
UNEMPLOYMENT	37	27
EDUCATION	25	N/A
CRIME AND VIOLENCE	23	30
FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL CORRUPTION	21	26
POVERTY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY	N/A	30
TAXES	19	N/A

2.4 24 April: International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy

- The International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, commemorated annually on April 24th, serves as a poignant reminder of the pivotal role that multilateralism plays in the realm of international relations and diplomacy. This occasion underscores the intrinsic value of multilateral approaches as indispensable tools for fostering peace, cooperation, and sustainable development on a global scale. Rooted in the fundamental principles enshrined within the United

Nations Charter, the observance emphasizes the shared responsibility of nations in confronting complex and interrelated challenges through constructive dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration.

- Central to the significance of this day is the recognition of multilateralism as a cornerstone of effective governance in addressing multifaceted global issues, ranging from climate change and poverty alleviation to conflict resolution and the protection of human rights. By promoting awareness of the enduring importance of multilateralism, the observance seeks to bolster efforts aimed at nurturing peace and stability across diverse regions and communities.
- Furthermore, the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace reaffirms the collective commitment of the international community to upholding the principles of diplomacy, dialogue, and mutual respect in the pursuit of peaceful coexistence among nations. Through a myriad of commemorative events, discussions, and initiatives convened on this occasion, governments, organizations, and individuals converge to renew their dedication to the principles of multilateralism and diplomacy as indispensable instruments for fostering a more equitable, just, and harmonious world order.

Significance of Multilateralism

- Multilateralism, often contrasted with bilateral and unilateral approaches, signifies a collaborative framework involving three or more states. Yet, its essence transcends mere numerical metrics, embodying a shared political ethos grounded in common norms and values. Key principles such as consultation, inclusivity, and solidarity form the bedrock of this paradigm, fostering a collective commitment to collaborative endeavours.
- Fundamentally, multilateralism entails adherence to jointly established regulations governing sustainable and efficient inter-state cooperation. These regulations ensure equitable rights and responsibilities for all participants, applied consistently across various issues rather than selectively. Consequently, multilateralism functions not only as a methodological approach but also as a structural framework shaping the international landscape.
- By nurturing a culture of partnership and mutual regard, multilateralism serves as a cornerstone for addressing global challenges and advancing shared interests. It facilitates dialogue and cooperation among nations, offering a pathway towards collective solutions to complex global issues on the world stage.
- Multilateralism has yielded tangible achievements, including the eradication of diseases like smallpox and the negotiation of crucial agreements on arms control and human rights. International

cooperation within the UN framework continues to save lives daily, underscoring the enduring significance and efficacy of multilateral diplomacy.

Multilateralism and the United Nations

- Multilateralism, deeply embedded in the United Nations' essence, stands as a guiding principle shaping global collaboration. The UN Charter not only delineates the organization's framework and purpose but also positions it as a central pillar of the international order. Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized in 2018 that the Charter serves as a moral beacon, advocating for peace, human dignity, prosperity, and adherence to the rule of law.
- The UN facilitates collective decision-making among its member states, fostering unity in pursuit of shared objectives. It endeavours to avert threats to peace, nurture equitable relations grounded in self-determination, and foster international cooperation. Furthermore, the UN addresses a spectrum of issues spanning economics, social welfare, culture, and humanitarian concerns, all while safeguarding the rights and freedoms of individuals worldwide.
- Throughout its 75-year journey, the UN has experienced significant expansion in its membership and involvement. Starting with 51 founding members in 1945, the organization has since grown to encompass 193 nations, expanding both in breadth and depth. This growth has welcomed diverse new actors, including NGOs, private entities, and international organizations, with over 1,000 holding observer status at the UN.

2.5 Middle East Crisis: Counting the Costs

- Tensions are escalating in West Asia, a region heavily reliant on militarization and accounting for 30% of global arms imports. Despite being a major supplier of extractive resources for global energy consumption, West Asia faces increasing instability due to various conflicts.
- The Israel-Gaza conflict, hostilities between Iran and Israel, and ongoing attacks involving Iran-backed militias from Lebanon and Yemen are exacerbating tensions.
- According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, West Asia is among the most heavily militarized regions globally, with four of the top 10 arms importers located there. The United States is the primary arms supplier to the region. This militarization has turned West Asia into a potential powder keg.

What are the Reasons behind Recent West Asia Turmoil?

- Israel launched its war on Gaza, Hezbollah (the Lebanese Shia group) that Iran backs, fired rockets at Israeli forces in the Shebaa Farms, an Israeli-controlled territory that Lebanon claims as its own, in solidarity with the Palestinians.
- Arab countries, too, were upset with Israel's indiscriminate bombing and stuck to the path of diplomacy to put pressure on the Jewish state.
- Iran-backed militias also opened new fronts against Israel.
- Houthis, the Shia militias of Yemen, started attacking commercial vessels in the Red Sea in mid-November in "solidarity with the Palestinians."
- They forced several shipping giants to suspend operations in the Red Sea, which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Arabian Sea (and the Indian Ocean) through the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
- Israel has carried out multiple strikes inside Syria and Lebanon, killing Hamas, Hezbollah and Iranian commanders.
- Iran carried out strikes on January 16 in Iraq's Kurdistan, Syria and Pakistan, claiming to have hit a Mossad operational centre and Sunni Islamist militants.
- West Asia's military expenditure as a share of GDP remains high, with countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, and Israel consistently allocating significant portions of their GDP to defence. Additionally, the region has the highest proportion of its labour force employed in the military compared to other regions.

2.6 Historical Background of West Asian Conflict

- West Asia, historically influenced by the Ottoman Empire until the early 20th century, underwent significant geopolitical changes post-World War I. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire led to the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916, dividing Ottoman territories between British and French spheres of influence, which sparked resentment among local Arab populations. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, setting the stage for later conflicts.
- The creation of Israel in 1948 after the United Nations partition plan and subsequent Arab-Israeli wars further entrenched regional tensions. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran shifted the regional dynamics, with Iran emerging as a significant player opposing Israeli and Western interests. This era saw a shadow war characterized by proxy conflicts and strategic maneuvering between Israel and Iran through militant groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

- Recent developments continue to highlight the volatile nature of the region, with ongoing conflicts involving multiple stakeholders, including the Yemeni civil war, Lebanese political crises, Syrian civil war, and broader regional power struggles.

Key Players and Their Objectives

- **Israel:** Focuses on security, dismantling Hamas, and countering threats to its sovereignty through military actions and defensive strategies.
- **Hamas:** Seeks to challenge Israeli policies in Gaza and the West Bank, representing Palestinian interests through both political and militant means.
- **Iran:** Supports anti-Israel groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas while aiming to extend its regional influence and counter U.S. and Israeli presence.
- **Hezbollah and other militias:** Backed by Iran, they oppose Israeli actions and support Palestinian causes through military and political means.
- **United States:** Supports Israel's security, maintains regional stability, safeguards American interests and assets, and upholds the U.S.-led regional order through military and diplomatic engagement.
- This complex geopolitical landscape underscores ongoing challenges and interests that shape the West Asian conflict dynamics.
- India's Engagement with West Asia: Impacts and Strategic Approaches

Impacts on India

- **Energy Security:** India's heavy reliance on oil imports from West Asia renders it vulnerable to price fluctuations and supply disruptions. Over 40% of India's oil is sourced from this region, making any instability a critical concern that could elevate energy costs and intensify resource competition.
- **Indian Diaspora:** The substantial Indian diaspora in West Asia faces potential disruptions in their wages and livelihoods due to regional instability, impacting remittance inflows. Non-resident Indians (NRIs) contribute significantly to India's economy, with remittances accounting for over 55% of the total, predominantly from countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.
- **Trade and Investment:** West Asia, encompassing Iran and GCC states, holds substantial importance in India's bilateral trade. Economic engagement spans diverse sectors, particularly hydrocarbons, highlighting India's strategic interests and ongoing efforts to diversify trade and enhance investment opportunities.

2.7 India's Approach towards West Asia

- **Middle East Quad (I2U2) Initiative:** India collaborates with Israel, the U.S., and the UAE under the I2U2 framework to bolster economic, technological, and diplomatic ties. This initiative aims to foster stability and cooperation in the region amidst complex geopolitical dynamics.
- **Medical and Tech Diplomacy:** India's "Vaccine Maitri" initiative exemplifies its commitment to public health in West Asia by providing COVID-19 vaccines. Technological initiatives, such as launching the RuPay card in Abu Dhabi, strengthen digital connectivity and financial cooperation, enhancing bilateral relations.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** India actively encourages West Asian countries to invest in its hydrocarbon sector through downstream projects, aiming to bolster energy security and deepen economic ties. Collaborative agreements, like the strategic oil storage pact with Abu Dhabi, signify mutual efforts to build resilience and strategic depth.
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** India promotes soft power through cultural exchanges, including the inauguration of Dubai's first Hindu temple and the widespread popularity of yoga, Bollywood, and music. These initiatives foster stronger people-to-people connections and amplify India's cultural influence across the region.
- India's comprehensive engagement with West Asia underscores its strategic imperative to uphold stability, strengthen economic cooperation, and fortify diplomatic relations amidst on going regional challenges.

WTO Controversy: India's sugarcane subsidy under cloud

- Recently, the United States and Australia have raised concerns about India's adherence to AoA rules, specifically regarding subsidies provided to its sugarcane farmers. These subsidies allegedly exceed the limits agreed upon in the AoA, potentially distorting global trade in sugar and related products.
- The AoA stands as a critical framework within the WTO aimed at fostering fair and equitable trade practices in agriculture globally. It sets guidelines for member countries to progressively reduce subsidies, open markets, and curb export subsidies, thereby promoting a level playing field for agricultural producers worldwide.
- The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) is a pivotal international treaty governed by the World Trade Organization (WTO). It originated from negotiations during the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and officially came into effect alongside the establishment of the WTO on January 1, 1995.

Objectives

- The primary objective of the AoA is to dismantle trade barriers in the agricultural sector and facilitate transparent market access, thereby promoting the integration of global agricultural markets. It seeks to establish a fair and market-oriented trading system for agricultural products worldwide.
- This current dispute follows earlier actions in 2019 when Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala initiated proceedings against India regarding its sugar subsidies. A WTO panel in 2021 upheld the claims against India, asserting that its domestic support measures for sugarcane, specifically the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) and State Advised Price (SAP), exceeded permissible limits under the AoA. India subsequently appealed this ruling, preventing its adoption by the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body.

Allegations Against India

- The US and Australia contend that India's Market Price Support (MPS) for sugarcane consistently exceeded 90% of the value of production from 2018 to 2022, far surpassing the WTO's allowed limit of 10%. Moreover, they argue that India failed to report its support measures adequately, specifically omitting notifications regarding sugarcane and its derivatives since the marketing year 1995-96. This omission, they claim, has hindered the WTO's ability to accurately assess India's compliance with global trade regulations.

India's Defense and Appeal

- India, in its defense, has challenged the WTO panel's findings, disputing the classification of its FRP and SAP as MPS under the AoA. India asserts that the calculation methodology used by the US and Australia does not accurately reflect the actual support provided, as it includes all sugarcane production regardless of whether it is delivered to sugar mills for processing, as regulated by the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966. This regulatory framework governs various aspects of sugarcane production, pricing, and trade in India.

Current Status and Implications

- As of now, the WTO's Appellate Body remains inactive due to a lack of appointed members, delaying the resolution of India's appeal against the panel's findings. Until the Appellate Body resumes its functions, any decision on India's dispute with the US and Australia will remain pending, affecting the clarity and enforcement of WTO rules in agricultural subsidies.

2.8 Key Components: The 3 Pillars of AoA

Domestic Support

- The AoA mandates a reduction in domestic subsidies that distort free trade and create unfair pricing advantages.
- Developed countries are required to reduce their Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) by 20% over six years, while developing countries have a longer period of 10 years to achieve a 13% reduction.
- **Subsidies are classified into three categories:** Blue Box, Green Box, and Amber Box subsidies, each with specific criteria and limitations aimed at differentiating between allowable and trade-distorting supports.

Market Access

- Market access under the AoA refers to the conditions, both tariff and non-tariff, agreed upon by WTO members for the entry of agricultural goods into their respective markets.
- WTO members commit to progressively reducing tariffs to facilitate freer trade in agricultural products. Non-tariff barriers are also targeted for conversion into tariff equivalents or outright elimination to ensure fair competition.

Export Subsidies

- Export subsidies involve financial support provided to agricultural producers to lower the costs of exporting goods, thereby making them more competitive in international markets.
- Such subsidies can lead to dumping—where surplus heavily subsidized products are sold abroad at lower prices than in domestic markets—thus potentially harming the agriculture sectors of importing countries.
- **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP):** The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) is a price set by the government to establish the minimum amount that sugar mills must pay to farmers for their sugarcane. This price is designed to ensure that farmers receive a fair and equitable compensation for their agricultural produce. It serves as a safeguard against exploitation and ensures that farmers receive adequate returns for their efforts in cultivating sugarcane.
- **State-Advised Prices (SAPs):** In certain states of India, farmers may receive additional payments above the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) through a mechanism known as State-Advised Prices (SAPs). These state-specific prices are advised or recommended by the respective state governments to supplement the income of sugarcane farmers. SAPs are typically aimed at

incentivizing improved production efficiency or addressing local agricultural challenges. Sugar mills operating in these states may also provide additional payments to farmers under the SAP framework, reflecting regional variations in support for the agricultural sector.

- **Purpose and Implementation:** Both FRP and SAPs are crucial components of India's regulatory framework governing sugarcane pricing. They aim to stabilize farmer incomes, encourage sustainable agricultural practices, and support rural livelihoods. By ensuring minimum guaranteed prices and supplementary payments where applicable, these measures contribute to the economic well-being of sugarcane farmers while also maintaining stability in the sugar industry supply chain.
- **Conclusion:** FRP and SAPs play integral roles in India's efforts to protect the interests of sugarcane farmers and promote agricultural sustainability. These pricing mechanisms not only address market uncertainties but also uphold fairness in agricultural trade, contributing to India's broader goals of food security and rural development.

3. ECONOMY

3.1 Deciphering the India-Mauritius Tax Treaty: A Multifaceted Analysis

- The India-Mauritius Tax Treaty has long been a focal point in international taxation, shaping bilateral relations and investment flows between the two nations. Exploring its historical evolution, controversies, amendments, and multifaceted implications unveils a nuanced understanding of tax policy, economic dynamics, and diplomatic intricacies.

Historical Evolution:

- Established in 1982, the treaty aimed to foster economic cooperation by mitigating double taxation and encouraging cross-border investments. Notably, it provided exemptions from capital gains tax, fuelling substantial foreign investment inflows through Mauritius into India's burgeoning economy.

Controversies and Amendments:

- As the treaty aged, concerns emerged regarding its exploitation for tax evasion and illicit financial activities. The phenomenon of round-tripping, where funds were routed through Mauritius to exploit tax loopholes, prompted both nations to reassess the treaty's efficacy.
- The pivotal amendment in 2016 marked a watershed moment, terminating the capital gains tax exemption for investments made on or after April 1, 2017. This amendment aimed to address revenue loss concerns for India and combat tax evasion, signalling India's commitment to bolstering transparency in international tax matters.

Implications for Investors and Bilateral Relations:

- The amendment reshaped investment strategies and tax planning for investors leveraging Mauritius as a tax-efficient route. It prompted a revaluation of risk assessments and investment portfolios, underscoring the interplay between tax policies and investment decisions.
- Beyond its economic ramifications, the renegotiation of the treaty showcased the evolving dynamics of bilateral relations. It reflected India's growing assertiveness in international tax matters and its determination to safeguard its tax base while nurturing collaborative partnerships with Mauritius.

Legal and Regulatory Framework:

- Examining the legal and regulatory framework underpinning the treaty elucidates the complexities of international tax law and treaty negotiations. Insights into legal provisions, enforcement mechanisms, and dispute resolution mechanisms enrich the understanding of cross-border taxation dynamics.

Global Implications and Future Prospects:

- The India-Mauritius Tax Treaty serves as a microcosm of broader global tax reform efforts and the evolving landscape of international taxation. Its renegotiation resonates with ongoing discussions on base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) and efforts to foster greater tax transparency and cooperation globally.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, the India-Mauritius Tax Treaty represents a nexus of economic, legal, and diplomatic dimensions. Analyzing its evolution, controversies, and implications offers a multifaceted perspective on tax policy, bilateral relations, and the intricate interplay between nations in the global economic arena. As the treaty continues to evolve, its significance reverberates far beyond the shores of India and Mauritius, shaping the contours of international tax regimes and economic partnerships.

3.2 Unveiling the Revival of Wealth Tax in India: Evaluating Pros and Cons

- Wealth tax, once an integral part of India's tax regime, has resurfaced in national discussions, reigniting debates on its viability, benefits, and drawbacks. As aspirants traversing the intricate terrain of tax policy and economic reforms, comprehending the multifaceted dimensions of this resurgence offers valuable insights into contemporary fiscal paradigms and their broader ramifications.

Historical Context:

- Wealth tax made its debut in India in 1957 with the aim of redistributing wealth and bridging socioeconomic disparities. However, the tax faced criticism over time for its narrow tax base, administrative complexities, and limited revenue generation. In 2015, the government opted to abolish wealth tax, citing its inefficacy in achieving its intended objectives.

Revival of Wealth Tax:

- Recent advocacy for the reinstatement of wealth tax has gained momentum amidst mounting concerns over escalating economic inequality and the imperative for progressive taxation. Advocates contend that wealth tax can serve as a pivotal instrument for redistributive justice, ensuring that the onus of taxation aligns proportionately with the wealth holdings of individuals.

International Comparisons:

- Analyzing wealth tax regimes in other countries offers valuable insights into its implementation, effectiveness, and impact on economic outcomes. Countries like France, Norway, and Switzerland have retained wealth taxes, albeit with varying degrees of success and controversy.

Potential Reforms and Alternatives:

- In exploring the revival of wealth tax, policymakers may consider alternative approaches such as inheritance tax, property tax reforms, or progressive income taxation. These alternatives offer potential avenues for addressing wealth inequality while mitigating some of the drawbacks associated with wealth tax.

Pros of Implementing Wealth Tax in India:

- **Redistributive Justice:** Wealth tax fosters a more equitable distribution of wealth by levying taxes on individuals with substantial assets, thereby mitigating socioeconomic disparities.
- **Revenue Generation:** A well-designed wealth tax regime has the potential to augment government revenue, providing resources for funding social welfare programs and infrastructure development.
- **Progressive Taxation:** Wealth tax embodies the principle of progressive taxation, wherein tax burdens increase with an individual's wealth, contributing to a fairer tax system.
- **Deterrent to Wealth Concentration:** By taxing accumulated wealth, wealth tax acts as a deterrent to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, promoting broader wealth ownership and economic participation.

Cons of Implementing Wealth Tax in India:

- **Administrative Challenges:** Wealth tax enforcement entails complex valuation processes, leading to administrative burdens and compliance challenges for taxpayers and tax authorities.
- **Capital Flight Risk:** Wealth tax may incentivize capital flight as affluent individuals seek to evade taxation by relocating assets or capital to jurisdictions with lenient tax regimes.

- **Investment Disincentive:** Wealth tax has the potential to discourage investment and capital formation, particularly in asset-heavy sectors, hindering economic growth and job creation.
- **Tax Avoidance:** Wealth tax may incentivize tax avoidance strategies, including asset concealment, restructuring, and offshore investments, undermining its effectiveness as a revenue-raising measure.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, the revival of wealth tax in India epitomizes a contentious discourse teeming with divergent perspectives and policy quandaries. Aspirants grappling with this issue navigate a landscape characterized by nuanced trade-offs, policy dilemmas, and international precedents. By critically evaluating the pros and cons of wealth tax implementation, aspirants deepen their understanding of fiscal policy dynamics and their implications for inclusive and sustainable development in India.

3.3 Empowering Communities through Cluster Development: Unveiling the

Suraksha Program

- Cluster development programs have emerged as potent instruments for fostering economic growth, enhancing competitiveness, and promoting inclusive development at the grassroots level. Among these initiatives, the Suraksha Program stands out as a beacon of empowerment, aiming to fortify communities, bolster resilience, and catalyze socioeconomic progress. Delving into the realm of economic policy and grassroots initiatives reveals the Suraksha Program as a compelling case study of bottom-up development and community resilience.

Introduction to the Suraksha Program:

- The Suraksha Program, launched with the vision of nurturing clusters of economic activity, derives its name from the Hindi word for "protection" or "safety." Rooted in the ethos of community-centric development, the program seeks to harness the collective strength of local enterprises, artisans, and stakeholders to create self-sustaining ecosystems of growth and prosperity.

Key Objectives:

At its core, the Suraksha Program endeavors to achieve the following objectives:

- **Promoting Economic Clusters:** By fostering the aggregation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within specific geographic areas, the program aims to stimulate synergies, facilitate

knowledge sharing, and unlock economies of scale.

- **Enhancing Competitiveness:** Through targeted interventions in skill development, technology adoption, and market access, the program endeavours to enhance the competitiveness of cluster-based industries, enabling them to thrive in dynamic market environments.
- **Facilitating Access to Finance:** Recognizing the pivotal role of finance in catalyzing entrepreneurial ventures, the Suraksha Program strives to improve access to credit, capital, and financial services for enterprises operating within the clusters.
- **Ensuring Social Inclusion:** By prioritizing the participation of marginalized communities, women entrepreneurs, and disadvantaged groups, the program aims to foster inclusive growth and equitable distribution of benefits across society.

Implementation Framework:

- The Suraksha Program adopts a multi-dimensional approach to cluster development, encompassing the following key components:
- **Diagnostic Assessment:** A comprehensive diagnostic assessment of existing clusters is conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, thereby informing targeted intervention strategies.
- **Capacity Building:** Capacity building initiatives are rolled out to equip cluster stakeholders with requisite skills, knowledge, and capabilities to enhance productivity, innovation, and market linkages.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Critical infrastructure, including common facilities, logistics networks, and utilities, is developed or upgraded to create an enabling environment for cluster-based enterprises.
- **Policy Support:** Advocacy and policy support measures are undertaken to address regulatory bottlenecks, streamline administrative procedures, and create an enabling policy environment conducive to cluster development.

Impact and Way Forward:

- The Suraksha Program has already begun to yield tangible results, empowering communities, fostering entrepreneurship, and driving socioeconomic progress in targeted clusters. As it continues to evolve, the program holds the promise of catalyzing transformative change, unlocking the latent potential of grassroots economies, and paving the way for a more inclusive and resilient future.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, the Suraksha Program exemplifies the transformative power of cluster development in driving grassroots-led economic growth and fostering community resilience. Exploring the intersection of economic policy, community development, and inclusive growth reveals the Suraksha Program as a compelling case study of bottom-up empowerment and collective action. By delving into its objectives, implementation framework, and impact, stakeholders gain valuable insights into the dynamics of inclusive development and the role of clusters in shaping India's socioeconomic landscape.

4. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

4.1 Unlocking the Potential of Network as a Service (NaaS) in the Digital Era

- In the digital age, the evolution of technology continues to reshape the landscape of connectivity and communication. Among the transformative innovations, Network as a Service (NaaS) emerges as a paradigm-shifting concept, revolutionizing the way networks are deployed, managed, and utilized. Exploring the nuances of NaaS is essential to grasp its implications for governance, economy, and society.

Introduction to Network as a Service (NaaS):

- Network as a Service (NaaS) represents a cloud-based networking model wherein network resources, such as bandwidth, virtual routers, and switches, are provisioned and managed remotely by third-party providers. NaaS enables organizations to access scalable and flexible network infrastructure on-demand, paying only for the services consumed, akin to other cloud computing models like Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) and Software as a Service (SaaS).

Key Components of NaaS:

NaaS encompasses several key components, including:

- **Virtualization:** NaaS leverages virtualization technologies to abstract and pool network resources, enabling dynamic allocation and optimization based on demand.
- **Software-Defined Networking (SDN):** SDN plays a pivotal role in NaaS by decoupling network control functions from the underlying hardware, allowing for centralized management, programmability, and automation.
- **Service Orchestration:** Service orchestration frameworks automate the provisioning, configuration, and management of network services, streamlining deployment and ensuring scalability.
- **Security and Compliance:** NaaS providers implement robust security measures and compliance frameworks to safeguard data and ensure regulatory adherence in multi-tenant environments.

Implications of NaaS for Governance:

- The adoption of NaaS holds profound implications for governance and public service delivery:
- **Enhanced Connectivity:** NaaS facilitates ubiquitous connectivity, enabling governments to extend digital services to remote and underserved areas, fostering inclusivity and accessibility.

- **Agility and Flexibility:** NaaS empowers governments to dynamically scale network infrastructure based on fluctuating demand, optimizing resource utilization and reducing operational overheads.
- **Resilience and Disaster Recovery:** NaaS offers built-in redundancy and failover mechanisms, enhancing network resilience and ensuring continuity of critical services during natural disasters or cyber-attacks.
- **Data Security and Privacy:** Robust security features embedded in NaaS platforms bolster data protection and privacy, safeguarding sensitive information and fostering trust in digital governance initiatives.

Economic Implications of NaaS:

From an economic standpoint, NaaS catalyzes innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth:

- **Cost Efficiency:** NaaS eliminates the need for upfront investments in hardware infrastructure, lowering barriers to entry for startups and small businesses, and fostering a vibrant ecosystem of digital innovation.
- **Scalability:** The pay-as-you-go model of NaaS enables businesses to scale operations seamlessly, aligning costs with revenue growth and maximizing operational efficiency.
- **Global Market Access:** NaaS empowers businesses to transcend geographical barriers and access global markets, leveraging scalable and resilient network infrastructure to expand their reach and customer base.
- **Economic Resilience:** The agility and flexibility offered by NaaS enable businesses to adapt rapidly to changing market dynamics, enhancing economic resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly digital world.

Social Implications of NaaS:

NaaS has far-reaching social implications, shaping digital inclusion, education, and healthcare:

- **Digital Inclusion:** NaaS bridges the digital divide by providing affordable and accessible connectivity to underserved communities, empowering them with access to information, education, and employment opportunities.
- **Remote Education and Healthcare:** NaaS enables the delivery of remote education and telehealth services, facilitating virtual classrooms, telemedicine consultations, and remote patient monitoring, particularly in rural and remote areas.

- **Community Empowerment:** By fostering community networks and collaborative platforms, NaaS empowers citizens to participate in decision-making processes, civic engagement, and community-driven initiatives, strengthening social cohesion and inclusivity.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, Network as a Service (NaaS) emerges as a transformative force with profound implications for governance, economy, and society. Understanding the nuances of NaaS is imperative to comprehend its potential for driving inclusive and sustainable development. By delving into its key components, governance implications, and socioeconomic ramifications, stakeholders gain valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of digital transformation and its impact on governance paradigms in the 21st century.

4.2 Antihistamines: Navigating Advances in Treatment and Regulatory

Landscape

- Antihistamines, vital components in managing allergic reactions and related conditions, are undergoing a transformative phase in both treatment modalities and regulatory scrutiny. In this article, we delve into the recent advancements, regulatory developments, and emerging trends shaping the realm of antihistamines.

Recent Advances in Antihistamine Therapy:

- **Next-Generation Formulations:** Pharmaceutical companies are pioneering next-generation formulations of antihistamines, including long-acting tablets, rapid-dissolve formulations, and intranasal sprays. These innovations aim to enhance efficacy, duration of action, and patient compliance.
- **Combination Therapies:** Combining antihistamines with other agents, such as decongestants or corticosteroids, is gaining traction for synergistic management of allergic symptoms. These combination therapies offer comprehensive relief and address multiple facets of allergic reactions.
- **Precision Medicine Approaches:** The advent of pharmacogenomics is revolutionizing antihistamine therapy by enabling personalized treatment regimens. Genetic testing allows clinicians to tailor antihistamine prescriptions based on individual genetic profiles, optimizing efficacy and minimizing adverse effects.

- **OTC Availability:** The over-the-counter availability of certain antihistamines raises questions about accessibility, safety, and appropriate usage. Regulatory bodies closely monitor OTC antihistamines to ensure adherence to safety standards and provide clear labeling and dosage guidance for consumers.

Regulatory Developments and Safety Concerns:

- **Labeling Revisions:** Regulatory agencies periodically review antihistamine safety data and update labeling requirements accordingly. Recent revisions include warnings about potential side effects, contraindications, and precautions to mitigate risks associated with prolonged use.
- **Drug Interactions:** Monitoring for drug interactions remains crucial in antihistamine therapy, particularly with medications metabolized by the cytochrome P450 system or those that potentiate central nervous system depression. Regulatory agencies prioritize assessing and mitigating potential drug interactions to safeguard patient safety.
- **Global Harmonization Efforts:** International collaborations aim to harmonize regulatory standards for antihistamines, streamlining approval processes and facilitating global access to safe and effective medications.
- Harmonization initiatives enhance post-marketing surveillance and promote consistent regulatory oversight across jurisdictions.

Emerging Trends and Future Directions:

- **Biological Therapies:** The emergence of biological therapies targeting specific immune pathways presents a promising frontier in allergic disease management. Biologics offer targeted treatment options for refractory cases and may complement traditional antihistamine therapy.
- **Digital Health Solutions:** Digital health technologies, such as telemedicine platforms and smartphone applications, are enhancing patient education, adherence, and monitoring in antihistamine therapy. These innovations improve patient engagement and enable remote management of allergic conditions.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, the landscape of antihistamine therapy is evolving rapidly, driven by advances in treatment modalities, regulatory oversight, and emerging trends. While innovations offer promising avenues for optimizing allergic disease management, ongoing vigilance is essential to address safety concerns and ensure responsible use of antihistamines. By staying abreast of recent developments and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, we can navigate the dynamic

landscape of antihistamine therapy and improve outcomes for individuals affected by allergic conditions.

5. ART AND CULTURE

5.1 Temple Discoveries Highlight Chalukya Expansion

Why in News?

- Archaeologists from the Public Research Institute of History, Archaeology, and Heritage (PRIHAH) have unearthed two ancient temples dating back to the Badami Chalukyan period, along with a rare inscription, in Mudimanikyam village of Nalgonda district, Telangana.

What are the Major Highlights of the Recent Excavation?

- Archaeologists from the Public Research Institute of History, Archaeology, and Heritage (PRIHAH) have recently uncovered two ancient temples and a rare inscription in Mudimanikyam village, Nalgonda district, Telangana. Here are the major highlights of this excavation:
 - ✓ **Temples:** Situated at the outskirts of the village, these temples belong to the Badami Chalukyan period, dating between 543 AD and 750 AD. They exhibit a distinctive architectural blend of Badami Chalukyan and Kadamba Nagara styles, characterized by the Rekha nagara format. Notably, one temple houses a panavattam (Shiva lingam base) in its sanctum sanctorum, while the other contains a recovered Vishnu idol.
 - ✓ **Inscription:** Among the findings is an inscription named 'Gandaloranru', originating from the 8th or 9th Century AD.

Significance:

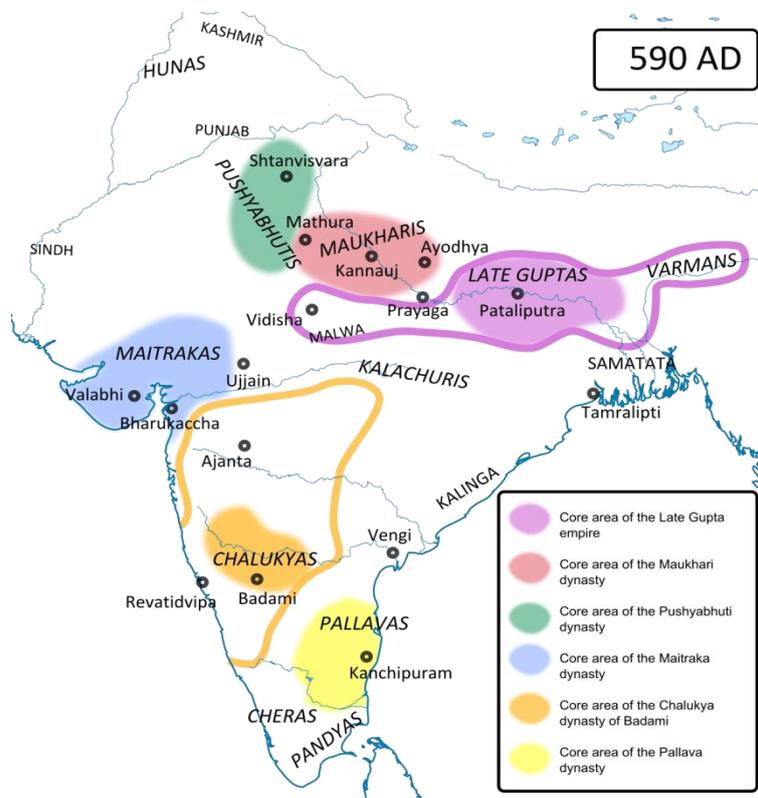
- Previously, the influence of the Badami Chalukyas was believed to extend only to sites like the Jogulamba temples in Alampur and submerged sites at Yeleswaram. However, this discovery at Mudimanikyam village marks a significant expansion of the known boundaries of the Chalukya kingdom, shedding new light on their historical reach and cultural influence.

What are the Key features related to the Chalukya Dynasty?

- The Chalukya dynasty wielded significant influence across southern and central India from the 6th to the 12th centuries, characterized by three prominent branches: the Chalukyas of Badami, the Eastern Chalukyas, and the Western Chalukyas.



5.2 Chalukyas of Badami:



- Originating from Vatapi (modern Badami in Karnataka), they governed from the early 6th century until the mid-8th century, achieving their pinnacle under Pulakeshin II.
- Following his reign, the Eastern Chalukyas established their independent kingdom centred around Vengi (present-day Andhra Pradesh) until the 11th century.
- The rise of the Rashtrakutas in the 8th century overshadowed the Badami Chalukyas, but their legacy was revived by the Western Chalukyas, who ruled from Kalyani (modern Basavakalyan in Karnataka) until the late 12th century.

Foundation:

- Pulakeshin I (c. 535-566 CE) fortified a hill near Badami, laying the groundwork for the ascendancy of the Chalukya dynasty. Kirtivarman (566-597) formally established the city of Badami as the nucleus of Chalukya power and culture.

Polity and Administration:

- The Chalukyas instituted a structured administrative system, dividing their domain into Vishayam, Rastram, Nadu, and Grama, ensuring effective governance.

Religious Patronage:

- They were renowned patrons of Saivism and Vaishnavism, and also supported heterodox sects such as Jainism and Buddhism, reflecting their commitment to religious diversity. Ravikirti, the Jain scholar and poet-laureate of Pulakeshin II, exemplified this cultural breadth. According to Hiuen Tsang, numerous Buddhist centers thrived in Chalukya territory during this period.

Architecture:

- In temple construction, the Chalukyas introduced the use of soft sandstones in the Deccan region. Their architectural contributions include both excavated cave temples (notably at Badami) and structural temples (prominently found at Pattadakal and Aihole).





(The unique architecture of Pattadakal temples) (The famous Durga temple of Aihole)

5.3 Literary and Cultural Contributions:

- Chalukya rulers utilized Sanskrit for official inscriptions, underscoring their support for classical literature. They also acknowledged the importance of regional languages like Kannada, recognizing them as vehicles of local expression.

Painting:

- In art, the Chalukyas adopted the Vakataka style, evidenced in paintings found within cave temples dedicated to Vishnu in Badami.
- The Chalukya dynasty's enduring legacy lies in their administrative innovations, religious tolerance, architectural marvels, and cultural patronage, shaping the socio-political and cultural landscape of medieval India.

Society

- The Hindu caste system appeared and the government recognized prostitution.
- Sati may have been absent as widows like Vinayavathi and Vijayanka are mentioned in records.
- Women enjoyed political power in administration. Queens Vijayanka, a noted Sanskrit poetess; Kumkumadevi, the younger sister of Vijayaditya; and Lokamahadevi, queen of Vikramaditya II who fought wars, stand as three examples.

Religion

- They initially followed Vedic Hinduism, as seen in the various temples dedicated to many popular Hindu deities.
- Later, from the time of Vikramaditya I, the people took an inclination towards Shaivism and sects like Pashupata, Kapalikas and Kalamukhas existed.
- They actively encouraged Jainism, attested to by one of the Badami cave temples and other Jain temples in the Aihole complex. Buddhism had begun a decline.

Army

- The army consisted of infantry, cavalry, elephant corps and a powerful navy.

Coinage

- The coins had Nagari and Kannada legends. They minted coins with symbols of temples, lion or boar facing right, and the lotus.
- The coins weighed four grams, called **HONNU** in old Kannada and had fractions such as fana and the quarter fana, whose modern-day equivalent being hana (literally means, money).

AIHOLE INSCRIPTION OF PULIKESIN II:

Located within the Megudi temple at Aihole, Karnataka, the Aihole inscription stands as a crucial artifact shedding light on the history and accomplishments of the Chalukya dynasty.

- Cradle of Indian Temple Architecture: Aihole is revered as the birthplace of Indian temple architecture.
- Authorship and Content: Crafted by the esteemed poet Ravikriti, the inscription serves as a poetic homage to the Chalukya dynasty, with a particular focus on King Pulakesin II, celebrated as the epitome of truth (Sathyasraya).
- Historical Narratives: The inscription chronicles significant events of the Chalukya dynasty, highlighting their victories over formidable opponents, including the notable triumph over Harshavardhana.

The Aihole inscription not only commemorates the military achievements of the Chalukyas but also reflects their cultural and political prowess during their zenith. It remains a pivotal source for understanding the dynamics of medieval Indian history and the Chalukya legacy.

Six new Sites from MP Listed on UNESCO's Tentative World Heritage Sites List

About News:

- Recently, 6 new sites from Madhya Pradesh have found a place in the Tentative UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites (WHS).

The sites included in the new list included

- Gwalior Fort
- The Historic Ensembles of Dhamnar
- The Bhojeshwar Mahadev Temple, Bhojpur
- Rock Art Sites of the Chambal Valley (Serial Nomination)
- Khooni Bhandara, Bhuranpur
- Gond Monument of Ramnagar, Mandla

Here are the key features of the sites recently added to the tentative UNESCO World Heritage

Sites list:

- **Gwalior Fort:** Situated atop a hill, Gwalior Fort is renowned for its imposing walls and offers sweeping views of the city below.



- **Historical Significance:** According to legend, the fort's foundations date back to the 6th century AD, laid by Rajput warrior Suraj Sen. He was healed of leprosy by the hermit-saint Gwalipa, after whom the city of Gwalior is named.

- **Historical Timeline:** Over the centuries, Gwalior Fort witnessed numerous invasions and reconstructions. Notably, under the Tomar ruler Maan Singh in 1398, significant monuments were added to its complex.
- **Changing Rulers:** After Maan Singh Tomar, the fort came under the rule of Ibrahim Lodi and then the Mughal Sultanate, until Akbar re-established Mughal control in 1550 CE. Subsequently, it passed into the hands of the Marathas, led by the Scindias.
- **British Era and Beyond:** During the British period, Gwalior Fort briefly fell under General White during the second Maratha War but returned to Scindia control in 1805 CE, remaining under their rule until 1886 CE when it was exchanged for Jhansi and returned to the Scindias.
- **Architectural Marvels:** The fort houses several ancient temples, such as the Teli ka Mandir dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and Matrikas. The Chaturbhuj temple is notable for its mathematical significance, containing one of the earliest known references to zero in mathematics.
- Gwalior Fort's rich history, architectural splendor, and strategic location make it a significant candidate for UNESCO World Heritage recognition, reflecting its cultural and historical importance in India.
- **Sas Bahu Temples:** These twin temples, with the larger one dedicated to Vishnu, date back to 1150 CE and are renowned for their intricate inscriptions.



- **Gurdwara Data Bandi Chhor:** This site commemorates Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Sikh guru. Its strategic location on basalt rock hills is historically referred to as Gopachala or Gopagiri in ancient Sanskrit inscriptions.



- **Historical Group of Dhamnar:** Comprising 51 rock-cut caves, stupas, chaityas, and dwellings dating from the 7th century AD. Notable features include a colossal statue of Gautam Buddha in the nirvana pose. Prominent caves like Bari Kacheri and Bhima Bazar on the northern bank are renowned for their historical and architectural significance.



- **Etymology of Dhamnar:** While the name 'Dhamnar' lacks historical or literary evidence, scholars propose it may be derived from the Shaivite term 'Dharmanatha,' linked to the Linga in the medieval Vaishnava temple.: Dedicated to Lord Shiva and commissioned by Raja Bhoj in the 11th

century, this temple houses a massive Linga carved from a single stone. Raja Bhoj, a prominent ruler of the Paramara dynasty, was renowned for his architectural treatise, the Samaranganasutradhara.

- **Architectural Style:** The Bhojeshwar Mahadev Temple features Bhumija style architecture characterized by its towering shikhara and elaborate carvings. Elements of the Dravidian style are also evident in its main body and shikhara.
- These sites represent significant cultural and historical treasures, reflecting India's rich architectural heritage and religious diversity, deserving recognition on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

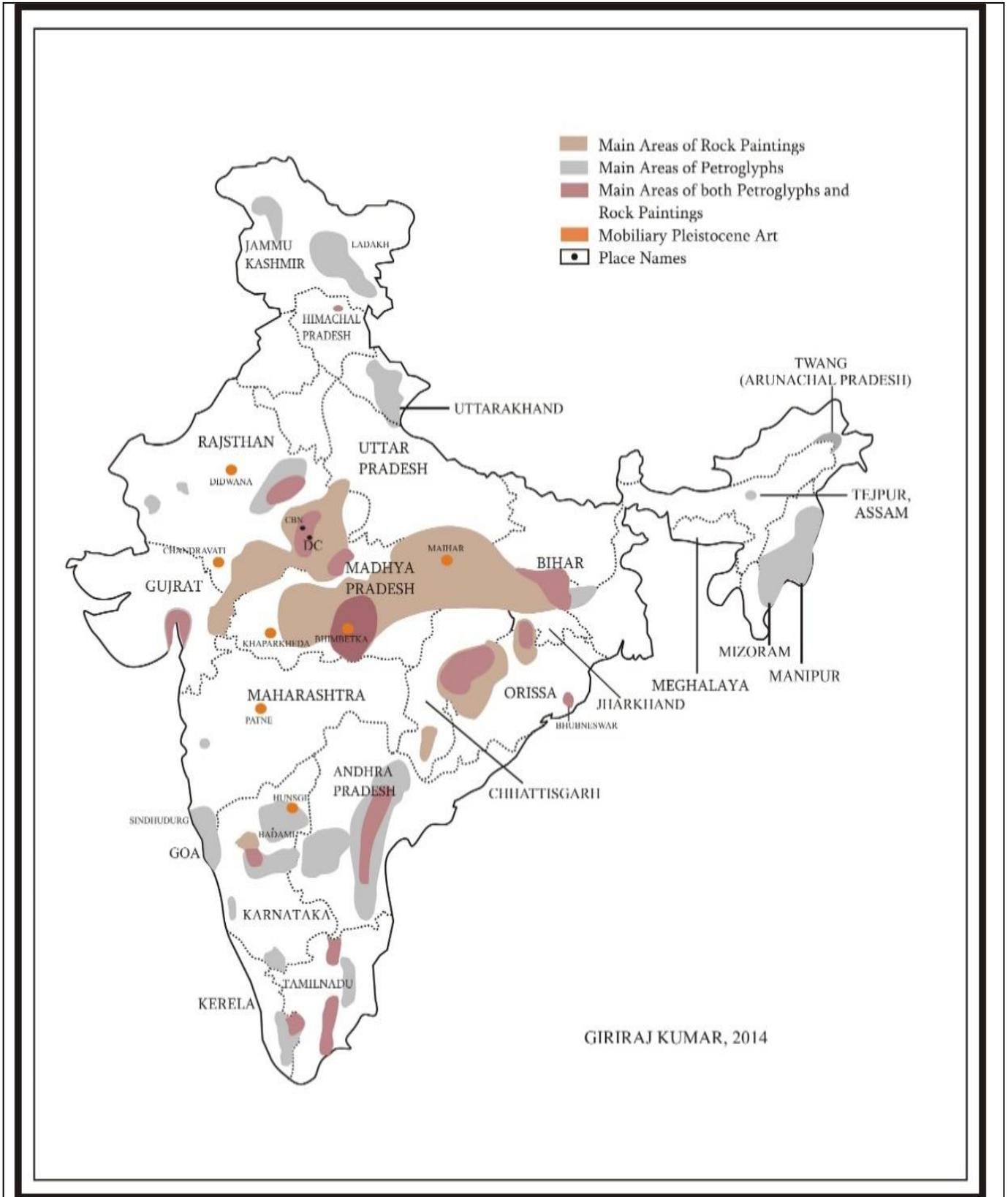
5.4 Rock Art Sites of the Chambal Valley:

- This region hosts the world's largest rock art sites, depicting scenes from various historical periods and civilizations.



- **Geographical Spread:** Spanning across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, these sites offer invaluable insights into ancient human life and cultural evolution.
- **Artistic Depictions:** The rock art includes depictions of hunting and gathering scenes by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, as well as art from the Protohistoric and later periods. These artworks flourish in the hilly regions of Vindhyan, Satpura, and Kaimur ranges, characterized by parallel ridges and dense vegetation.

- Prominent Sites:** Major rock art sites in the Chambal Basin include Bhimlat Mahadev, Chaturbhuj Nath Nala, Garadia Mahadev, Bukki Mata, Chattaneshwar, and Kanyadeh.





Khooni Bhandara of Burhanpur:

- Located in Burhanpur, this underground water management system comprises eight waterworks constructed by Abdurrahim Khankhana.
- **Technological Heritage:** Built using the Persian qanat approach, it was designed by Persian geologist Tabkutul Arz during the Mughal era. This technology, imported from Iran and Iraq, served as essential public utilities.
- **Historical Significance:** Originally excavated and traced in the early 1900s, six sets of these underground conduits remain intact to this day. The name "khooni" (bloody) derives from the hint of red color in the mineral-rich water.
- These sites represent significant cultural and historical landmarks, reflecting India's rich heritage and technological advancements through the ages. Their inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list underscores their global importance and preservation efforts.

6. SCHEMES IN NEWS

6.1 MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT

GUARANTEE SCHEMES (MGNREGS)

About News:

- Recently, the Centre has notified new wage rates (3-10 % hike, varying from state to state) for unskilled manual workers under MGNREGA, 2005 for the financial year 2024-2025.

Objectives

- To provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- Creation of durable assets

Salient features:

Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development.

Fund sharing pattern	
 By Centre	 By State
 100% funding for unskilled labour cost.	 25% for the material cost.
 75% for the material cost.	 Cost of unemployment allowance payable under the Scheme.

Salient Features of MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme)

- Ministry:** Administered by the Ministry of Rural Development
- Launch Year:** 2005

- **Type:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme
- **Beneficiaries:** All household members aged over 18 years residing in rural areas
- **Coverage:** Nationwide, excluding districts with 100% urban populations

Wage Rates

- **Determination:** Wages under MGNREGA are adjusted based on the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Laborers (CPIAL), which reflects rural inflation. Wage rates differ across states.

Rights and Benefits

- **Work Demand and Supply:** Beneficiaries have the right to demand and receive work within 15 days.
- During drought or natural calamity, and for certain Scheduled Tribe households, an additional 50 days of unskilled wage employment is provided annually.
- Right to an unemployment allowance, payable within 15 days.
- **Worksite Facilities:** Includes provisions for medical aid, drinking water, and shade.

Asset Geotagging

- **Geotagging:** Conducted through GeoMGNREGA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development, the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), ISRO, and the National Informatics Centre.

Key Procedural Features

- **Wage to Material Ratio:** Maintained at 60:40 at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level.
- **Contractor Engagement:** The scheme prohibits the engagement of contractors for project implementation.
- **Women Participation:** At least one-third of beneficiaries must be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.

Additional Features

- **Social Audit:** The Gram Sabha is responsible for conducting regular social audits of all projects undertaken within the Gram Panchayat under the scheme.
- **Janmanrega:** A feedback tool for assessing MGNREGA projects.

- **Project 'UNNATI'**: Aims to skill MGNREGS beneficiaries, enabling them to transition from partial to full-time employment.



6.2 PRADHAN MANTRI ANUSUCHIT JAATI ABHYUDAY YOJNA

Why in the News?

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for several residential hostels across various states and central institutes under PM-AJAY. Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojna (PM-AJAY)

Objectives and Features of the Scheme for the Scheduled Caste Community



Objectives

- **Poverty Reduction:** To alleviate poverty among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities by generating employment opportunities.
- **Socioeconomic Development:** To enhance socioeconomic development indicators within the SC community.
- **Educational Advancement:** To increase literacy rates and encourage the enrollment of SC individuals in schools and higher education institutions.

Ministry and Launch Year

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- **Launch Year:** 2021-22

Beneficiaries

- **Target Group:** Scheduled Caste Community
- **Background:** PM-AJAY (Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Jan Andolan Yojana) is a merged scheme consolidating three Centrally Sponsored Schemes: Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY), Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCA to SCSP), and Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana (BJRCY) for better convergence of public funds and optimal resource utilization.

6.3 Scheme's Sub-Components

Adarsh Gram Development:

- Development of SC-dominated villages into "Adarsh Gram" as per the erstwhile PMAGY.
- **Eligibility:** Villages with more than 40% SC population and a total population of at least 500. Subsequently, villages with 40% or fewer SC populations but with a high number of SC individuals will also be considered.
- **Indicators:** 50 socioeconomic developmental indicators identified across 10 domains, including education and health.

Grants-in-Aid for District/State-Level Projects:

- **Purpose:** Socio-economic development of SC communities through asset creation for beneficiaries/households, skill development, and infrastructure.

- **Eligibility:** No fixed income limits for beneficiaries, but priority is given to families with an annual income not exceeding Rs. 2.50 lakh. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with a majority of SC members are also eligible.

Special Provisions:

- **For SC Women and Disabled:** Up to 15% of total grants for income-generating schemes/programs for SC women. At least 30% participation of women candidates in skill development programs. At least 10% of total funds for skill development.
- **For North Eastern States:** 2% of the total budget allocation is earmarked.
- **Educational Tutoring:** Projects for special tutoring of children in classes 9th to 12th.

Construction/Repair of Educational Hostels for SC Students:

- **Objective:** To promote quality education and reduce dropout rates among SC students, particularly girls.
- **Eligibility:** Top-ranked higher educational institutions and schools funded by the Centre/State/UT Governments and recommended by the Ministry of Education.
- **Funding Pattern:** 100% funding by the Central Government, with the option for States/UTs to provide additional funds.
- **Implementing Agencies:** District/State Governments, Union Territory Administrations, and Central/State Universities/Institutions. Proposals to be submitted online through the PMAJAY portal.

Key Procedural Features

- **Wage to Material Ratio:** Maintained at 60:40 at the Gram Panchayat level.
- **Contractor Engagement:** Contractors are not engaged for project implementation.
- **Women Participation:** At least one-third of the beneficiaries must be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.

Additional Features

- **Social Audit:** Regular social audits by the Gram Sabha for all projects within the Gram Panchayat.
- **Janmanrega:** A feedback tool for assessing MGNREGA projects.

- **Project 'UNNATI'**: Aims to skill MGNREGS beneficiaries, enabling their transition from partial to full-time employment.

7. POLITY

7.1 Custodial Deaths: Need for Stricter Scrutiny

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Supreme Court has highlighted the importance of adopting a "more rigorous approach" when evaluating bail applications from police officers accused in cases involving custodial deaths.

What are custodial deaths?

- Custodial death refers to the death of an individual that occurs while they are in the custody of law enforcement officials or within a correctional facility. This type of death can result from various causes, including the use of excessive force, neglect, abuse by authorities, or incidental factors related to the conditions of confinement.

Types of Custodial Death:

- **Death in Police Custody:** This occurs when a person dies while in the custody of police officers. Causes may include excessive force during interrogation, torture, denial of medical treatment, or other forms of mistreatment.
- **Death in Judicial Custody:** When a person dies while under judicial custody, it may be due to reasons such as overcrowding in jails, inadequate hygiene and medical facilities, inmate violence, or suicide.
- **Death in Custody of Army or Paramilitary Forces:** This type of death can occur under military or paramilitary custody through methods such as torture or extrajudicial killings.
- Custodial deaths are a significant concern because they involve the responsibility of authorities to safeguard the lives and rights of individuals in their custody. Instances of custodial deaths often require thorough investigation and scrutiny to ensure accountability and prevent such occurrences in the future.

7.2 Issues Related to Custodial Deaths

Basic Rights Violation:

- It contravenes individuals' fundamental right to fair treatment under the law.

- India's commitment to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) prohibits inhuman treatment of individuals in police and judicial custody.

Extradition Challenges:

- Due to lax regulations on custodial violence, India faces difficulties in extraditing fugitives who evade judicial proceedings abroad, exemplified by cases like Vijay Mallya.

Impact on Mental Health:

- Custodial violence, including cruel behavior and sexual abuse, can severely impact the mental health of detainees.
- The Mathura custodial rape case of 1972 highlights the grave consequences of such abuses.

7.3 Constitutional and Legal Framework Related to Custodial Death

Constitutional Safeguards:

- **Article 21:** Guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, protecting individuals from torture or degrading treatment.
- **Article 20:** Protects against arbitrary punishment and self-incrimination, ensuring fair treatment for all.

Legal Protections:

- **Section 24 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872:** Renders confessions obtained under duress inadmissible in court.
- **Sections 330 and 331 of the IPC:** Criminalize the use of force to extract confessions.
- **Section 41 of the CrPC:** Amended in 2009 to ensure transparent arrests and detentions with documented procedures and legal protections.

7.4 International Conventions Against Custodial Torture

International Human Rights Standards:

- **United Nations Charter:** Upholds the dignity and rights of prisoners as outlined in various human rights declarations and covenants.

- **United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)**: Aims to prevent torture and inhumane treatment globally.

The Nelson Mandela Rules, 2015:

- Sets standards for the humane treatment of prisoners and prohibits torture and ill-treatment.

Measures to Combat Custodial Torture

Strengthening Legal Systems:

- Enacting legislation specifically criminalizing custodial torture, as directed by Supreme Court directives.
- Implementing reforms such as separating investigative and law enforcement functions and establishing oversight bodies like State Security Commissions (SSC) and National Security Commissions.

Police Reforms and Sensitization:

- Enhancing police training programs to prioritize human rights and professionalism.
- Promoting accountability and empathy within law enforcement agencies.

Empowering Civil Society and Human Rights Organizations:

- Supporting civil society initiatives to advocate for victims of custodial abuse.
- Expanding the jurisdiction of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to investigate human rights violations comprehensively.

Collaboration with International Bodies:

- Engaging with international human rights organizations to seek justice and redress for victims of custodial torture.
- These measures aim to uphold constitutional rights, adhere to international standards, and ensure accountability in law enforcement, thereby mitigating custodial deaths and promoting a fair and just legal system.

7.5 The Youth in Indian Elections

Why in the news?

- As India prepares for the 18th Lok Sabha elections, a worrying trend unfolds: the reluctance among the country's youngest eligible voters to participate.

Trends

- **Low Registration Rates:** Less than 40% of eligible voters aged 18 to 19 have registered for the 2024 elections, highlighting concerns over youth engagement in the electoral process.
- **Regional Disparities:** States like Delhi, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh report the lowest enrollment rates despite their youthful populations.
- **Social Media Influence:** Despite exposure to political discourse on social media, many young people exhibit hesitancy in actively participating in voting.
- **Educational Deficiencies:** The education system's inadequacy in preparing students to comprehend political processes and civic duties has been widely acknowledged.
- **Lack of Youth-Centric Agendas:** Political parties often fail to advocate issues that resonate with the younger demographic, such as employment opportunities and affordable education.
- **Under representation:** Despite comprising a substantial portion of the population, youth are often underrepresented in political decision-making bodies.
- **Barriers to Engagement:** Limited avenues for meaningful participation in politics contribute to disillusionment among young voters.
- **Social Pressures and Misinformation:** Negative perceptions and stereotypes, coupled with misinformation on social media, deter youth from engaging meaningfully in politics.
- **Disconnect from Issues:** Many young voters feel disconnected from political issues that directly impact their lives, undermining their motivation to participate in the electoral process.

Implications of Voter Disinterest on Democracy

- **Disenfranchisement:** Legal and social barriers disenfranchise citizens, impeding their ability to exercise voting rights and participate in democratic processes.
- **Undermining Democratic Principles:** Voter disinterest challenges the fundamental principle of democracy, which hinges on active citizen participation and collective decision-making.
- **Perpetuating Exclusion:** Disengagement allows a minority to influence governance, perpetuating exclusion and marginalization of under represented communities.
- **Questioning Legitimacy:** Low voter turnout raises concerns about the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, diminishing public trust in democratic institutions and elected representatives.

- These challenges underscore the critical need for initiatives to enhance political education, promote youth-centric agendas, and facilitate inclusive participation in democratic governance.

Looking Ahead

- **Promote Appealing Political Agendas:** Advocate for political platforms that resonate with the concerns and aspirations of young voters, such as employment opportunities, affordable education, and environmental sustainability.
- **Increase Youth Representation:** Push for greater representation of youth in political decision-making bodies to ensure their voices are heard and priorities addressed effectively.
- **Amplify Young Voices:** Create inclusive platforms where young people can actively participate in societal and political discussions, ensuring their perspectives are valued and integrated into policy-making processes.
- **Recognize Voting Power:** Emphasize the significance of every vote in breaking the cycle of disenfranchisement and shaping the future of democracy.
- **Encourage Active Participation:** Foster a culture of active civic engagement among youth to uphold democratic principles and promote inclusive governance.
- **Focus on Youth-Centric Issues:** Prioritize states with large youth populations during political campaigns, addressing issues relevant to young adults and dispelling misconceptions about their social awareness and engagement.
- **Empower Through Education:** Educate and empower India's youth on the impact of their decisions, sensitizing them to local and national issues, and highlighting the consequences of apathy towards the democratic process.
- **Harness Digital Connectivity:** Leverage the potential of digitally connected youth by encouraging activism, social responsibility, and empowerment through digital platforms.
- **Explore Secure Online Voting:** Consider implementing secure online voting mechanisms to accommodate the digital generation, enhancing accessibility and convenience in electoral participation.
- These strategies aim to galvanize youth involvement in politics, ensuring their active participation in shaping a more inclusive and responsive democratic society.

7.6 Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail: Controversy Rages Amid Elections

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has announced its intention to address petitions regarding the 100% verification of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips, coinciding with the upcoming first phase of voting scheduled for 19th April 2024.

What is VVPAT?

- The Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machine is an adjunct to the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) ballot unit, providing voters with visual confirmation of their vote by printing a paper slip displaying their chosen candidate's details. This printed slip is briefly shown behind a glass window for 7 seconds before being deposited into a secure compartment below. Voters cannot take the VVPAT slip home; instead, it serves to verify votes in five randomly selected polling booths.
- The introduction of VVPAT machines aims to bolster trust in the electoral process by allowing physical verification of electronically cast votes, ensuring transparency for both voters and political parties.
- Originating from a proposal in 2010 during consultations between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and political parties, VVPAT underwent prototype development and field trials in various locations like Ladakh, Thiruvananthapuram, Cherrapunjee, East Delhi, and Jaisalmer in July 2011. Following successful trials, an expert committee of the ECI approved VVPAT in February 2013.
- Legally, amendments to the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 in 2013 facilitated the attachment of a printer with a drop box to the EVM, enabling the deployment of VVPATs. Its initial implementation across all 21 polling stations in the Noksen Assembly constituency of Nagaland in 2013 paved the way for phased adoption nationwide, reaching 100% coverage by June 2017 as mandated by the ECI.
- The Supreme Court's stance on VVPAT was underscored in the case of Subramanian Swamy vs Election Commission of India in 2013, where it mandated the use of VVPATs to ensure transparent elections, necessitating government funding for their integration.
- In 2019, a petition to the Supreme Court sought the counting of a minimum of 50% of randomised VVPAT slips. However, the ECI expressed concerns over logistical challenges, such as potential delays of 5-6 days in declaring election results and infrastructural limitations including manpower availability.

- Initially, the Election Commission of India (ECI) adopted a policy of matching VVPAT paper slips from 4,125 electronic voting machines (EVMs) based on the "one EVM per assembly segment" rule. This approach aimed to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the electoral process by cross-verifying electronic votes with physical paper records.
- In 2018, the ECI requested the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) to determine a statistically robust and practically feasible sample size for conducting internal audits of VVPAT slips alongside EVM results. The ISI's calculations indicated that counting slips from 479 randomly selected VVPATs across the country would yield a confidence level of over 99% accuracy.
- However, in a significant development, the Supreme Court of India ruled in 2019 that VVPAT slips from five EVMs in every constituency should be counted instead of just one EVM per assembly segment. This decision aimed to enhance the accuracy and confidence in the electoral process, ensuring greater transparency and addressing concerns about electoral integrity.
- Under the Supreme Court's directive, the ECI is now mandated to count VVPAT slips from 20,625 electronic voting machines across the country. These machines are selected through a random draw conducted by the Returning Officer in the presence of candidates or their authorized agents.
- The Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) is a renowned institution in India, established in 1932 by Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis in Kolkata. It is recognized as an Institute of National Importance under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. ISI engages in extensive research across various disciplines and collaborates closely with governmental and industrial entities to advance statistical and analytical methodologies.

CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQ'S FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2024

1. Consider the following statements regarding the retreating monsoon:

- 1) The phenomenon is marked by absence of tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal.
- 2) The October heat phenomenon is observed during this time period.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

2. With the reference to tropical cyclones consider the following statements:

- 1) Tropical cyclones are violent storms that originate over oceans in tropical areas.
- 2) A mature tropical cyclone is characterised by the strong spirally circulating wind around the centre, called the eye.
- 3) Tropical cyclones are less destructive in nature than extra-tropical cyclones.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

3. Which of the following statements best describes the term 'Edge computing'?

- a) It is a framework for computation derived from recurrent neural network theory that maps input signals into higher dimensional computational spaces through the dynamics of a fixed, non-linear system.
- b) It is a form of ubiquitous computing which uses sensors to perceive its environment and react accordingly
- c) It is a concept in software engineering and computer science where computing is made to appear anytime and everywhere.
- d) It is a distributed computing paradigm that brings computation and data storage closer to the location where it is needed, to improve response times and save bandwidth.

4. With reference to Quantum computing, consider the following statements:

- 1) Quantum computer is based on laws that govern the behaviour of atoms and subatomic particle.
- 2) Quantum bits can be only either 0 or 1 at a time.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

5. Consider the following statements with reference to 'Chief Minister' of a State:

- 1) The Chief Minister of a State acts as Chairman of the concerned zonal council by rotation.
- 2) The Chief Minister is the chairman of the State Planning Board
- 3) The Chief Minister is a chairman of the Inter-State Council in rotation.

How many statements given above are correct?

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

6. With reference to the Chief Secretary of a state, consider the following statements:

- 1) Chief Secretary is appointed by the Governor of the state for a fixed tenure of two years.
- 2) The Central government has the power to approve extension of service of Chief Secretary for a period not exceeding six months.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

7. Climate Smart Cities Assessment framework has been launched by:

- a) C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group
- b) NITI Aayog

- c) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- d) UN-Habitat

8. With reference to National Clean Air Programme, consider the following statements:

- 1) It has target of reducing the PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 20% to 30% by 2024.
- 2) It is implemented by Central Pollution Control Board.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

9. Which of the following statements is/are incorrect about hydrogen energy?

- 1) Hydrogen gas is extracted from water using the technique of electrolysis.
- 2) The efficiency of a hydrogen cell is less than that of an internal combustion engine.
- 3) Hydrogen energy does not emits any greenhouse gas into the environment.
- 4) Hydrogen fuel only produces electrical energy which can be used as an energy source.

Select the answer using the code given below:

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

10. With reference to wind energy in India consider the following statements:

- 1) 1. Wind is an intermittent and site-specific resource of energy.
- 2) 2. Tamil Nadu has the highest wind energy potential in country.
- 3. Offshore wind power plants can be built only till the limit of 12 nautical miles from the shore.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

11. With reference to the Constitution of India, consider the following statements:

- 1) No High Court shall have the jurisdiction to declare any central law to be constitutionally invalid.
- 2) An amendment to the Constitution of India cannot be called into question by the Supreme Court of India.

Which of the statements given above is / are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

12. Consider the following statements regarding Supreme Court of India.

- 1) Seat of the Supreme Court can be set up anywhere in India.
- 2) No constitutional amendment is required for the purpose of setting up of cassation benches of Supreme Court in various regions of India.
- 3) At least five judges need to hear cases that involve a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution.

How many statements given above are correct?

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

13. Arrange the following types of coal in India in an ascending order based on the carbon content in them:

- 1) Lignite
- 2) Peat
- 3) Anthracite
- 4) Bituminous

Which one of the following options correctly describes the order?

- a) 1-2-3-4
- b) 2-1-3-4
- c) 1-2-4-3
- d) 2-1-4-3

14. Consider the following statements with reference to distribution of minerals resources in India:

- 1) Most of the metallic minerals in India occur in the peninsular plateau region in the old crystalline rocks.
 - 2) Most of the coal reserves of India occur in the valleys of Narmada.
 - 3) Petroleum reserves are located in the sedimentary basins of Assam, Gujarat and Mumbai High.
- How many of the above statements are correct?

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

15. With reference to Inequality, select the most appropriate statement:

- a) Natural inequalities are result of different characteristics and abilities of people and can be altered easily.
- b) Social inequalities largely represent the important values of society in which we live.
- c) Political equality by itself is sufficient to build a just and egalitarian society.
- d) Economic inequality though harmful in short term can be useful in creating balance society in long run.

16. Which of the following are the indicators used for measuring the Human Development Index?

- 1) Life expectancy at birth
- 2) Expected years of schooling
- 3) Per capita Gross Domestic Product
- 4) Child Mortality Rate
- 5) Per capita Gross National Income

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2 and 5 only
- d) 2, 3 and 5 only

17. Consider the following regarding Quasars

1) These are formed by the energy emitted by materials spiraling around a black hole right before being sucked into it.

2) Most quasars are larger than our solar system.

3) They are located in supermassive black holes.

How many of the above statements are correct?

a) Only one

b) Only two

c) All three

d) None

18. Which of the following statements best describes the reason why satellites are usually launched from the eastern coast of a country?

a) To minimise the impact of pollution caused by rocket propulsion.

b) The area near eastern coast is less affected by the stratospheric winds.

c) It provides an initial boost to rockets due to rotational velocity of the Earth.

d) Due to less density of population in the Eastern coasts of a country.

19. Consider the following statements about deficit financing, in the context of Budgeting in India:

1) Deficit financing may increase income inequalities in the economy.

2) Sustained deficit financing by the central government may lead to situation of inflation in the country.

3) State governments can finance their deficits by issuing the treasury bills.

How many of the above given statements are correct?

a) Only one

b) Only two

c) All three

d) None

20. In the context of budgetary deficits, which of the following statements is correct with reference to Primary Deficit?

a) It is the total government borrowings available to utilize after interest payments.

b) It is excess of total government expenditure over total its receipts excluding borrowings during a fiscal year.

- c) It is the difference between total expenditure and revenue receipts including non-debt creating capital receipts.
- d) It is the difference between Fiscal deficit and external grants received.

KEYS

1. B	2. B	3. D	4. A	5. C
6. B	7. C	8. C	9. C	10. A
11. D	12. C	13. D	14. B	15. B
16. C	17. C	18. C	19. B	20. A

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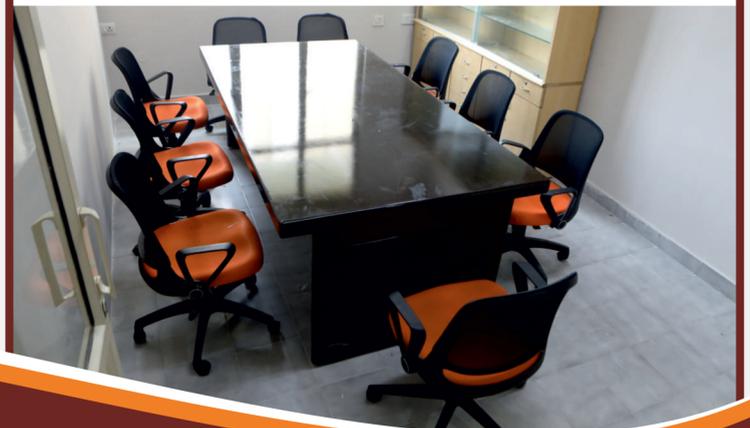


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