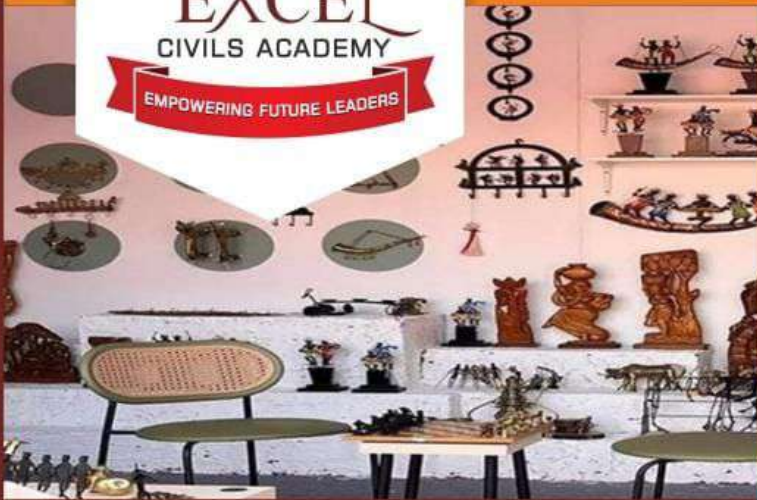




EXCEL QUEST

49, March 2024



Dhokra Shilpkala



What is the Nagoya Protocol?



BrahMos



Interim Budget 2024



Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change (MoEFCC) released the "Status of Snow Leopards in India" report



What is Generative AI?



Kalpana Chawla

Kalpana Chawla(1962-2003)



Retail Inflation

A Monthly Magazine from

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Dear Aspirants,

An interim budget is a crucial measure taken by a government in transition or nearing the end of its term, especially during the period leading up to general elections. It serves the purpose of ensuring continuity in government spending and essential services until a new administration is in place to formulate a formal budget. In the context of the financial year 2024-25, the Interim Budget lays out a clear roadmap for achieving the targets set forth by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 (FRBMA).

The recently unveiled Interim Budget by the Finance Minister reflects bold, self-assured, and prudent fiscal policies. Notably, it proposes an 11% increase in capital expenditure for the upcoming year, along with a targeted budget deficit of 5.1%, indicating a positive economic outlook. Furthermore, significant allocations have been made towards the development of three major railway corridors and green energy programs, signalling a commitment to sustainable economic growth.

Taxation policies remain stable, with continued benefits for start-ups, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, and entities in the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) extended until March 31, 2024. The extension of rules pertaining to these sectors will facilitate the government's National Monetization Program and encourage new participants to enter the market. Additionally, measures to alleviate outdated and unpaid small tax demands are expected to benefit one crore taxpayers and reduce disputes.

The government has announced ambitious plans to enhance the efficiency of passenger trains through the implementation of three major economic railway corridor programs. These initiatives aim to improve connectivity, reduce logistics costs, and enhance safety and comfort for passengers. Furthermore, upgrades to railway bogies and expansions of airports under the UDAN scheme are set to bolster transportation infrastructure.

In line with environmental objectives, the Interim Budget introduces measures to promote renewable energy sources and reduce emissions. This includes plans for wind energy generation, mandatory blending of alternative fuels, and initiatives for coal gasification and liquefaction. Additionally, schemes

such as roof-top solarization aim to provide households with free electricity, contributing to energy sustainability.

Healthcare initiatives feature prominently in the budget, with provisions for cervical cancer vaccination, immunization efforts, and the expansion of healthcare coverage under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. Furthermore, the establishment of a significant corpus for research and innovation, coupled with tax exemptions for start-ups, underscores the government's commitment to fostering growth and innovation.

Overall, the Interim Budget for FY 2024-25 represents a decisive step towards sustaining India's growth momentum amidst global uncertainties. By prioritizing key sectors such as infrastructure, renewable energy, healthcare, and innovation, the government aims to lay a strong foundation for economic prosperity and inclusive development.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



K. Rajendra Kumar IPS (Retd)

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1. NATIONAL

1.1 Interim Budget 2024

The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Interim Union Budget for 2024-2025 in Parliament.



Vote on Account

- **Article 116** of the Constitution allows the Lower House to make any grant in advance for the estimated expenditure for part of any financial year by voting and passing such a legislation. This is called vote on account.
- A simple vote on account includes presenting the Centre's fund requirements for salaries, on going projects and other expenditure for the transitional period.
- It cannot make any changes to tax rates. It is also valid only for two months and can be extended up to four months.

Interim Budget

Background: Need for an interim Budget

- As per **Article 112** of the Indian Constitution, annual financial statement is laid before both Houses of Parliament.
 - Annual financial statement is a statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of the Government of India for a specific financial year.
- The Centre seeks both Houses' approval to withdraw the necessary funds from the Consolidated Fund of India.
 - Hence, this statement has to be passed by both Houses.

- However, in an election year, the incumbent Government cannot present a full Budget as there may be a change in the executive after the polls.
- Hence, the need for an interim budget.

Constitutional provisions of interim Budget

- There is **no constitutional provision for an interim budget**.
- Hence, the Centre chooses to seek the Lower House's approval for the funds required for the transition period (April - July) till the new government presents a full Budget— via the votes on account provision.

About:

- In an interim budget, the Finance Minister presents the current state of the Indian economy, its fiscal status including India's revised estimated growth in the next year.
- She/he will also detail the government's planned and non-planned expenditure and receipts.
- While the Centre has to desist from announcing any major scheme which could influence voters or present an Economic Survey, the government is allowed to revise tax rates via an interim budget.
- The interim budget too is presented to both Houses on February 1 by the Finance Minister, put to vote and then sent for Presidential approval.
- Like the Union budget, the interim budget too is debated in the Lok Sabha before passage and is valid for the entire year though it is merely a transition arrangement.

Key highlights of the Interim Budget 2024-25

- **No change relating to taxation**
 - No change relating to taxation has been proposed in the Interim Budget.
 - The same rates for direct taxes and indirect taxes, including import duties, have been retained.
- **Withdrawal of Outstanding direct tax demands**
 - The Minister announced to improve tax payer services which is in line with the government's vision to improve ease of living and ease of doing business.
 - The Interim Budget proposes to withdraw such outstanding direct tax demands:
 - Up to Rs. 25000/- pertaining to the period up to financial year 2009-10 and
 - Up to Rs. 10,000/- for financial years 2010-11 to 2014-15.
 - This is expected to benefit about 1 crore tax payers.
- **Direct tax collections trebled**
 - Over the last 10 years the direct tax collections have more than trebled and the return filers swelled to 2.4 times.
 - The Government has reduced and rationalised the tax rates due to which under the new tax regime there is no tax liability for tax payers with income up to Rs. 7 lakh.
 - The Minister also mentioned about decrease in corporate tax rates for existing domestic companies from 30% to 22%, and for certain new manufacturing companies to 15%.
 - The Government's focus has been to improve tax-payer services.

- This has led to transformation of age-old jurisdiction-based assessment system, and filing of tax returns has been made simpler and easier.
- Average processing time of returns has been reduced from 93 days in the year 2013-14 to a mere ten days this year.
- **GST reduced compliance burden**
 - GST has reduced the compliance burden on trade and industry by unifying the highly fragmented indirect tax regime in India.
 - Mentioning about a recent survey conducted by a leading consulting firm, she said that 94% of industry leaders view the transition to GST as largely positive.
 - Tax base of GST has more than doubled and average monthly gross GST collection has almost doubled to Rs. 1.66 lakh crore this year.
 - States' SGST revenue, including compensation released to states, in the post-GST period of 2017-18 to 2022-23, has achieved a buoyancy of 1.22.
 - The biggest beneficiaries are the consumers as reduction in logistics cost and taxes have brought down prices of most goods and services.
- Number of steps taken in customs to facilitate international trade
 - The Minister said, over the last four years since 2019, the import release time declined:
 - By 47 per cent to 71 hours at Inland Container Depots,
 - By 28 per cent to 44 hours at air cargo complexes and
 - By 27 per cent to 85 hours at sea ports.
- **Laying of White Paper**
 - The Minister announced that the Government will come out with a white paper, on 'where we were then till 2014 and where we are now, only for the purpose of drawing lessons from the mismanagement of those years'.
 - A white paper is an official government document that provides detailed information, analysis, or proposals on a particular policy issue or matter of public concern.
 - White papers serve to explain complex topics, present government policies, and solicit feedback or discussion from legislators and citizens.
 - They are important tools for transparency, accountability, and policymaking in the Indian parliamentary system.
- **Capital expenditure outlay for the next year**
 - Capital expenditure outlay for the said period has been increased by 11.1 per cent to Rs 11,11,111 crore, which would be 3.4 per cent of the GDP.
 - This is in the wake of building on the massive tripling of the capital expenditure outlay in the past 4 years resulting in huge multiplier impact on economic growth and employment creation.
- **Real GDP growth rate**
 - India's Real GDP is projected to grow at 7.3 per cent in FY 2023-24.
 - Indian economy has demonstrated resilience and maintained healthy macro-economic fundamentals, despite global economic challenges.
 - As per the IMF, India is likely to become the third-largest economy in 2027(in USD at market exchange rate).

- It also estimated that India's contribution to global growth will rise by 200 basis points in 5 years.
- Moreover, various international agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, OECD and ADB project India to grow between 6.4 per cent, 6.3 per cent, 6.1 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively in 2024-25.
- **GST collection**
 - Strong growth in economic activity has imparted buoyancy to revenue collections and pointed out that GST collection stood at ₹1.65 lakh crore in December 2023.
 - This is the seventh-time that gross GST revenues have crossed ₹1.6 lakh crore benchmark.
- **Receipts and Expenditure**
 - In 2024-25, the total receipts other than borrowings and the total expenditure are estimated at Rs 30.80 and 47.66 lakh crore respectively.
 - The tax receipts are estimated at Rs 26.02 lakh crore.
 - The Revised Estimate of the total receipts other than borrowings is Rs 27.56 lakh crore, of which the tax receipts are Rs 23.24 lakh crore.
 - The Revised Estimate of the total expenditure is Rs 44.90 lakh crore.
 - The revenue receipts at Rs 30.03 lakh crore are expected to be higher than the Budget Estimate, reflecting strong growth momentum and formalization in the economy.
- **Help extended to State Governments**
 - The scheme of fifty-year interest free loan for capital expenditure to states will be continued this year with total outlay of Rs 1.3 lakh crore.
 - A provision of 75000 crore rupees as fifty-year interest free loan is proposed this year to support the milestone-linked reforms of Viksit Bharat by the State Governments.
- **Fiscal consolidation**
 - To reduce fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26, the fiscal deficit in 2024-25 is estimated to be 5.1 per cent of GDP, adhering to that path.
 - Budget 2021-22 had announced to reduce the fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.
 - Similarly, the gross and net market borrowings through dated securities during 2024-25 are estimated at Rs 14.13 and 11.75 lakh crore respectively and both will be less than that in 2023-24.
- **FDI inflow**
 - The FDI inflow during 2014-23 was USD 596 billion marking a golden era and this is twice the inflow during 2005-14.
 - For encouraging sustained foreign investment, govt is negotiating bilateral investment treaties with foreign countries, in the spirit of 'first develop India'.
- **Achievement on the developmental aspects**
 - The Government has assisted 25 crore people to get freedom from multi-dimensional poverty.
 - PM Mudra Yojana has sanctioned 43 crore loans aggregating to Rs 22.5 lakh crore for entrepreneurial aspirations.
 - Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs.

- PM Awas Yojana (Grameen) is close to achieving the target of three crore houses and two crore more houses will be taken up in the next five years to meet the requirement arising from increase in the number of families.
- Similarly, through rooftop solarization, one crore households will be enabled to obtain up to 300 units free electricity every month.
- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana has benefitted 38 lakh farmers and generated 10 lakh employment.
- Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Yojana has assisted 2.4 lakh SHGs and sixty thousand individuals with credit linkages.
- **Promoting startups**
 - For tech savvy youth, a corpus of rupees one lakh crore will be established with fifty-year interest free loan.
 - The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates.
 - This will also encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains.
- **Railways**
 - Three major economic railway corridor programmes will be implemented:
 - Energy, mineral and cement corridors,
 - Port connectivity corridors, and
 - High traffic density corridors.
 - Moreover, forty thousand normal rail bogies will be converted to the Vande Bharat standards to enhance safety, convenience and comfort of passengers.
- **Aviation**
 - The number of airports have doubled to 149 and today five hundred and seventeen new routes are carrying 1.3 crore passengers.
 - Indian carriers have pro-actively placed orders for over 1000 new aircrafts.
- **Committee to study challenges arising from fast population growth**
 - The Government will form a high-powered committee for an extensive consideration of the challenges arising from fast population growth and demographic changes.
 - The committee will be mandated to make recommendations for addressing these challenges comprehensively in relation to the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.

1.2 Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund

(PM CARES Fund)

The **Delhi High Court** recently set aside an order of the **Central Information Commission (CIC)** directing the Income Tax (IT) department to provide details regarding the tax exemption granted to the PM Cares Fund under the Right to Information Act, 2005.



PM CARES

Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund

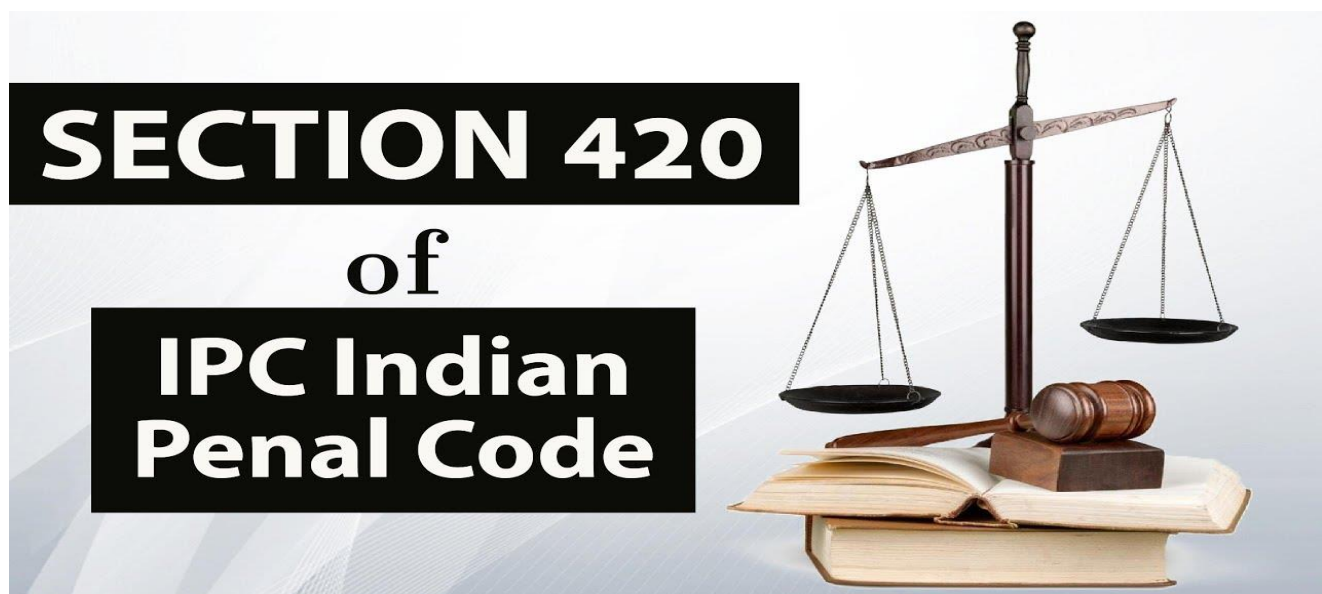
About PM CARES Fund:

- It was created on March 28, 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic in India.
- It was set up to have a **dedicated national fund to deal with any emergency and provide relief** to the distressed.
- Fund Constitution:
 - It has been registered as a Public Charitable Trust.
 - The Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund, and the Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs, and Minister of Finance of the Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.
 - The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees (Prime Minister) shall have the power to nominate three trustees to the Board of Trustees who shall be eminent persons in the fields of research, health, science, social work, law, public administration, and philanthropy.
 - Any person appointed a Trustee shall act in a pro bono capacity.
- Objectives:
 - To undertake and **support relief or assistance** of any kind relating to a **public health emergency** or any other kind of **emergency, calamity, or distress, either man-made or natural**, including the creation or upgradation of healthcare or pharmaceutical facilities, other necessary infrastructure, funding relevant research, or any other type of support.
 - To **render financial assistance, provide grants** of payments of money, or take such other steps as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees for the affected population.
 - To undertake any other activity which is not inconsistent with the above objectives.
- Fund Finance:
 - The fund consists **entirely of voluntary** contributions from individuals/organisations and **does not receive any budgetary support**.
 - Donations to PM CARES Fund would **qualify for 80G benefits for 100% exemption under the Income Tax Act, 1961**.
 - Donations to the PM CARES Fund will also **qualify to be counted as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure** under the Companies Act, 2013

- PM CARES Fund has also **got an exemption under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act(FCRA)**, and a separate account for receiving foreign donations has been opened.
 - This enables the CARES Fund to accept donations and contributions from individuals and organisations based in foreign countries.

1.3 Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

The Supreme Court recently held that while prosecuting a person for the offence of cheating under Section 420 of the IPC, it is to be seen whether the deceitful act of cheating was coupled with an inducement leading to the parting of any property by the complainant.



- Section 420 of the IPC, or IPC 420 as it is commonly known, **deals with the act of cheating and dishonestly inducing the person deceived to deliver any property** to any person, or to make, **alter, or destroy** the whole or any part of a valuable security, or anything which is signed or sealed and capable of being converted into a valuable security.
- **Section 415** of the IPC **defines the offence of cheating**. In simpler terms, cheating is a **dishonest act performed in order to gain some advantage out of it**.
- **Section 420** IPC is a **serious form of cheating** that includes inducement (to lead or move someone to happen) in terms of the delivery of property as well as valuable securities.
- This section is **also applicable to matters where the destruction of property** is caused by cheating or inducement.
- The person found guilty under this section shall be **punished with imprisonment** of either description for a term that **may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to a fine**.
- The offence is **cognizable and non-bailable**.
- The essential ingredients that go into the making of an offence under Section 420, IPC are:
 - That the **representation made by the accused was false**;
 - That the accused knew that the representation was false at the very time when he made it;

- That the accused **made the false representation with the dishonest intention of deceiving** the person to whom it was made; and
- That the **accused thereby induced that person to deliver any property** or to do or to omit to do something **which he would otherwise not have done or omitted.**

1.4 Supreme Court of India (SC)

The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Supreme Court.



➤ History:

- The Supreme Court of India is the **apex judicial body** under the Constitution of India.
- **Article 124** of the Constitution states that **“There shall be a Supreme Court of India.”**
- The Supreme Court **came into existence on January 26, 1950**, with the coming into force of the Constitution.
- **On January, 28, 1950**, two days after India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic, the Supreme Court was inaugurated.
- The Supreme Court initially functioned from the old Parliament House till it moved to the present building located on Tilak Marg, New Delhi, in 1958.
- The **first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad**, inaugurated the present building of the Supreme Court of India on August 4, 1958.

➤ Number of Judges:

- The **original Constitution** of 1950 envisaged a Supreme Court with a **Chief Justice and 7 puisne Judges**, leaving it to Parliament to increase this number.

- Considering the increase in workload, **Parliament increased the number** of Judges from 8 in 1950 to 11 in 1956, 14 in 1960, 18 in 1978, 26 in 1986, 31 in 2009, and 34 in 2019 (current strength).
- Today, the **judges sit in benches of two and three** and come together in larger benches of 5 and more (Constitution Bench) to decide any conflicting decisions between benches of the Supreme Court or any substantial questions concerning the interpretation of the Constitution.
- The proceedings of the Supreme Court are conducted in English.
- **Powers and Functions:**
 - The Supreme Court has **original, appellate, and advisory jurisdiction**.
 - It serves both as the **final court of appeals** and the **final interpreter of the Constitution**.
 - Its exclusive original jurisdiction extends to any dispute between the Government of India and one or more States or between the Government of India and any State or States on one side and one or more States on the other, or between two or more States, if and insofar as the dispute involves any question (whether of law or fact) on which the existence or extent of a legal right depends.
 - In addition, **Article 32** of the Constitution gives extensive **original jurisdiction** to the Supreme Court **for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights**.
 - It is empowered to issue directions, orders, or writs, including writs in the nature of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto, and certiorari, to enforce them.
 - The Supreme Court has been conferred **with the power to direct the transfer of any civil or criminal case from one High Court to another High Court or from a Court subordinate to another High Court**.
 - Under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, **International Commercial Arbitration** can also be initiated in the Supreme Court.
 - The **appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court** can be invoked by a certificate granted by the High Court concerned under Article 132(1), 133(1) or 134 of the Constitution **in respect of any judgement, decree, or final order of a High Court** in both civil and criminal cases, involving substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution.
 - Appeals also lie to the Supreme Court in civil matters if the High Court concerned certifies:
 - That the case involves a substantial question of law of general importance, and
 - That, in the opinion of the High Court, the said question needs to be decided by the Supreme Court.
 - In criminal cases, an appeal lies to the Supreme Court if the High Court
 - Has on appeal reversed an order of acquittal of an accused person and sentenced him to death or to imprisonment for life or for a period of not less than 10 years, or
 - Has withdrawn for trial before itself any case from any Court subordinate to its authority and has in such trial convicted the accused and sentenced him to death or to imprisonment for life or for a period of not less than 10 years, or
 - Certified that the case is a fit one for appeal to the Supreme Court.

- **Parliament is authorised to confer** on the Supreme Court any further powers to entertain and hear appeals from any judgement, final order or sentence in a criminal proceeding of a High Court.
- The Supreme Court also has a **very wide appellate jurisdiction over all Courts and Tribunals in India** in as much as it may, in its discretion, grant special leave to appeal under Article 136 of the Constitution from any judgement, decree, determination, sentence or order in any cause or matter passed or made by any Court or Tribunal in the territory of India.
- The Supreme Court has special advisory jurisdiction in matters which may specifically be **referred to it by the President of India under Article 143 of the Constitution.**
- **Election Petitions** under Part III of the **Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952**, are also filed directly in the Supreme Court.
- Under Articles 129 and 142 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court has been vested with **power to punish for contempt of Court**, including the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- The **Supreme Court can reconsider** its final judgement or order **by way of a curative petition** on limited grounds after the dismissal of the review petition.
- As the highest court in India, the Supreme Court's judgments are binding on all other courts in the country.

1.5 C- CARES Portal

The Union Minister of Coal, Mines and Parliamentary Affairs launched a web portal of Coal Mines Provident Fund Organization (CMPFO) namely C- CARES.

- It is developed and designed by the **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).**
- The portal, will allow CMPF subscribers and coal companies to login and perform various functions tailored to their needs.
- While the subscribers can access and view their individual details and subscription status, the coal management can submit contribution details, subscribers' particulars and **claims for online settlement** and payment through the portal.
- It will also ensure paperless working, timely and accurate settlement of claims, reduction in processing time and grievance redressal.
- The **portal being a public service** platform is intended to benefit the CMPF subscribers who are working in the coal sector as well as its pensioners.

Key facts about the Coal Mines Provident Fund Organization

- It is an autonomous organization under the aegis of Ministry of Coal established in the year 1948.
- It was established for administering Provident Fund and Pension schemes for the purpose of providing social security to the coal sector workers.

1.6 Law Commission of India



सत्यमेव जयते

Law Commission of India

The **22nd Law Commission of India** led by **Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi** has recommended that the offence of criminal defamation should be retained in the new criminal laws.

About Law Commission of India:

- It is a **non-statutory body** and is constituted by a notification of the Government of India, Ministry of Law & Justice.
- It is constituted with a **definite terms of reference** to carry out research in the field of law and the Commission makes recommendations to the Government (in the form of Reports) as per its terms of reference.
- It functions to the Ministry of Law and Justice as an **advisory body**.
- History of Law Commission of India:
 - The first pre-independence law commission was established in 1834 by the British Government in India.
 - It was established by the Charter Act of 1833 and was chaired by Lord Macaulay.
 - The first Law Commission of independent India was established in 1955 under the chairmanship of the former Attorney General for India C. Setalvad.
 - This Commission was created for a period of three years and this practice has persisted ever since then, resulting in the reconstitution of Law Commissions every three years via executive orders.
- The **executive orders** that constitute the Law Commissions also **specify their scope and purpose**, and thus these fluctuate periodically.

- .Since then, twenty one more Law Commissions have been constituted, each with a three-year term and with certain terms of reference.
- The Law Commission has taken up various subjects on references made by Department of Legal Affairs, Supreme Court and High Courts.
- The **Twenty Second Law Commission** has been notified with effect from 21st February, **2020 for a term of 3 years.**

1.7 Uniform Civil Code

- A Uniform Civil Code refers to a single law for the entire country, applicable to all religious communities in their personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption etc.
- It is intended to replace the system of fragmented personal laws, which currently govern interpersonal relationships and related matters within different religious communities.

Constitution of India on UCC:

- **Article 44** of the Constitution lays down that the State shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code for the citizens throughout the territory of India.
- It is one of the **Directive Principles mentioned in Part-IV** of the Constitution.
- These, as defined in **Article 37**, are not justiciable (not enforceable by any court) but the principles laid down therein are fundamental in governance.
- These principles consist of all the ideals which the State should follow and keep in mind while formulating policies and enacting laws for the country.

Present Status of Personal Laws in India:

- Personal law subjects such as marriage, divorce, inheritance come under the **Concurrent list** of the Constitution.
 - Both, the Parliament and state legislature can make laws with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the Concurrent List.
- The **Hindu personal laws** have been codified into four parts by the Parliament in 1956:
 - The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
 - The Hindu Succession Act, 1956
 - The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956
 - The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956
- The term '**Hindu**' **also includes Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists** for the purpose of these laws.
- Muslim personal laws are not codified per se, and are **based on their religious texts**, though certain aspects of these are expressly recognised in acts such as the **Shariat Application Act, 1937** and **Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939** and **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019.**
- Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews are also governed by their own personal laws.



Exception of Goa:

- Goa is, at present, the **only state in India with a uniform civil code**.
- The Portuguese Civil Code of 1867, which continues to be implemented after India annexed the territory in 1961, applies to all Goans, irrespective of their religious or ethnic community.

What provisions can be expected?

- The draft UCC is set to focus on gender equality by introducing provisions that treat men and women equally, especially in matters pertaining to inheritance.
- Catering to demands from Muslim women in the State, it will also revoke practices governing marriage and divorce such as polygamy, Iddat (mandatory period of waiting to be observed by women following the dissolution of a Muslim marriage) and Triple Talaq.
- The Code is also likely to extend an equal property share to Muslim women against the existing 25% share accorded under Muslim personal laws.
- Other issues such as divorce, marriage registrations, adoption, and social security for ageing parents will also be covered under the law.

Need for a Uniform Civil Code in India:

- A Uniform Civil Code would provide equal status to all citizens irrespective of the community they belong to.
- Personal laws of different religions are widely divergent and there is no consistency in how issues like marriage, succession and adoption are treated for people belonging to different communities.
- This is contradictory to Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees Equality before the Law.
- Personal laws, because they derive from tradition and custom, also tend to give undue advantage to men.
- This becomes evident in examples such as Muslim men being allowed to marry multiple wives, but women being forbidden from having multiple husbands.

- Men (fathers) are also treated as ‘natural guardians’ and are given preference under the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act.
- A UCC could lead to consistency and gender equality in India.

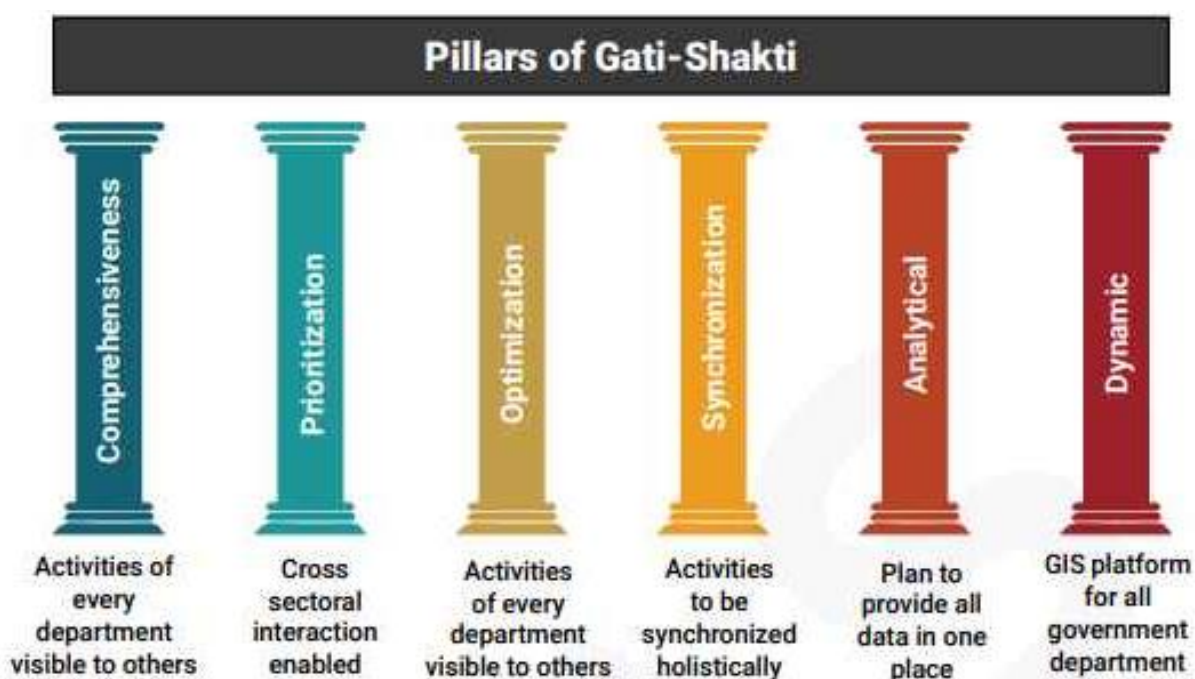
Criticism of UCC:

- Although it reinforces equality before the law, the idea of a UCC clashes with the Right to Freedom of Religion, provided under Article 25 of the Constitution.
- Separate personal laws are one of the ways in which people have exercised their right to practise their own religion, which has been particularly important for minorities.
- The UCC could become a tool to erode this right, suppress minorities and homogenise culture.

Way Forward:

- A progressive and broadminded outlook should be encouraged among the people to understand the spirit of the UCC. For this, education, awareness and sensitisation programmes must be taken up.
- Meanwhile, discriminatory personal laws should be amended/abolished accordingly.
- The Law Commission in its report titled “Reform of Family Law” (2018) had suggested that the best way forward would be to preserve the diversity of personal laws while ensuring that they do not contradict fundamental rights.
- The report suggested that by codifying different personal laws, one can arrive at certain universal principles that prioritize equity rather than blanket imposition of a Uniform Civil Code.

1.8 PM GatiShakti to be utilized for three new major railway corridors announced under Interim Budget 2024-25



About PM Gati Shakti National master plan

- Launched in **2021** for **providing multimodal connectivity infrastructure** to various economic zones.
- Provides a comprehensive database of the trunk & utility infrastructure, on going & future projects of various Infrastructure and Economic Ministries/Departments of Central Government and States/UTs.
- This data is integrated with the **GIS-enabled PM Gati Shakti platform**, thereby and monitoring of the Next Generation infrastructure projects on a single portal.
- Goal of **achieving self-reliance and a \$5 trillion economy by 2025**.
- Focuses on economic growth driven by 7 engines namely: **Railways, Roads, Ports, Waterways, Airports, Mass Transport, and Logistics Infrastructure**.
- **It incorporates various infrastructure schemes** like Bharatmala, Sagarmala, UDAN, et
- This will enable multi-modal connectivity, including
 - Energy, mineral, and cement corridors
 - Port connectivity corridors and
 - High traffic density corridors
- **Significance of the three Corridors**
 - **Increase logistics efficiency and reduction of cost of logistics** related to rail movement.
 - **Decongestion** of high density rail routes
 - **Facilitate modal shift** from road to rail and to coastal shipping
 - **Reduction of carbon footprint** in logistics.

1.9 Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendras

Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) have been allowed by the Government to operate **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendras (PMBJK)** under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana.



Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendras:

- These are set up under Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana, which was launched by the **Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers** in November 2008.
- **Objective:** To provide quality medicines at affordable prices for all, particularly the poor, so as to reduce out-of-pocket expenses in healthcare.
- These Kendra's provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy to expensive branded drugs.
- All therapeutic medicines are made available from Jan Aushadhi Stores.
- Jan Aushadhi stores also sell allied medical products commonly sold in chemist shops so as to improve the viability of running the Jan Aushadhi store.
- Pharmaceutical & Medical Devices Bureau of India (PMBI) has been established under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. of India, with the support of all the CPSUs for coordinating procurement, supply, and marketing of generic drugs through the PMBKs.

Who is eligible to open a Jan Aushadhi Kendra?

- State Governments or any organisation / reputed NGOs / Trusts / Private hospitals/ charitable institutions / Doctors / Unemployed pharmacists/ individual entrepreneurs are eligible to apply for the new Jan Aushadhi Kendra.
- The applicants shall have to employ one B Pharma / D Pharma degree holder as a Pharmacist in their proposed store.
- Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.

1.10 Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)

The Union Cabinet approved the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)**, a sub scheme under the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana**.



- It will be implemented as a **Central Sector Sub-scheme** under the Central Sector Component of the PMMSY.
- **Funding:** Implemented at an estimated outlay of Rs.6,000 crore consisting of 50% i.e. Rs.3,000 crore public finance including the World Bank and the AFD external financing, and rest 50% i.e. Rs.3,000 crore being the anticipated investment from the beneficiaries/private sector leverage.
- **Time period:** It will be implemented for 4 years from FY 2023-24 to FY 2026-27 across all the States and UTs.
- **Intended Beneficiaries:**
 - **Fishers**, Fish (Aquaculture) Farmers, Fish workers, Fish Vendors or such other persons directly engaged in fisheries value chain.
 - **Micro and Small enterprises** in the form of Proprietary Firms, Partnership Firms and Companies registered in India, Societies, **Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs)**, Cooperatives, Federations, Village Level Organizations like Self Help Groups (SHGs), Fish **Farmers Producer Organizations (FFPOs)** and Startups engaged in fisheries and aquaculture value chains.
 - FFPOs also include Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs).
 - Any other beneficiaries that may be included by the Department of Fisheries, Gol as targeted beneficiaries.
- **Aims and objectives:**
 - **Gradual Formalisation of the unorganised fisheries** sector through self-registration of fishers, fish farmers and supportive workers under a National Fisheries Sector Digital Platform including creation of work based digital identifies of fish workers for improved service delivery.
 - **Facilitating access to institutional financing** fisheries sector micro and small enterprises.
 - Providing a one-time incentive to beneficiaries for purchasing aquaculture insurance.
 - **Incentivizing fisheries and aquaculture microenterprises** through performance grants for improving fisheries sector value-chain efficiencies including creation and maintenance of jobs.
 - **Incentivizing micro and small enterprises** through performance grants for adoption and expansion of fish and fishery product safety and quality assurance systems including creation and maintenance of jobs.

1.11 Supreme Court Collegium

Why in News?

The **Supreme Court** recently quashed an **Andhra Pradesh High Court** order that voiced strong disapproval over the apex court Collegium transferring two Chief Justices and castigated the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister for his apparent attempts to undermine it.

About Supreme Court Collegium:

- It is a system under which appointments and transfers of judges are decided by a forum of the **Chief Justice of India** and the **four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court (SC)**.

- It is **not mentioned** in the Indian Constitution.
- What does the Constitution actually prescribe?
 - **Article 124** deals with the **appointment of SC judges**. It says the appointment should be **made by the President after consultation with such judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court** as the President may deem necessary. The CJI is to be consulted in all appointments, except his or her own.
 - **Article 217** deals with the **appointment of High Court judges**. It says a judge should be **appointed by the President after consultation with the CJI and the Governor of the state**. The Chief Justice of the High Court concerned too should be consulted.



Evolution of the Collegium System:

- Since the Constitution mandates consultation with the CJI is necessary for appointments to the judiciary, the collegium model evolved.
- It has its genesis in a series of three judgments that are now clubbed together as the Three Judges Cases.
- **First Judges Case (1982):**
 - The SC held that "consultation" of judges does not mean concurrence.
 - Hence, it gave primacy in the appointment of judges to the Executive.
- **Second Judges Case (1993):**
 - The court reversed its earlier ruling by changing the meaning of "consultation" to concurrence.
 - With this, the advice tendered by CJI became binding. However, the CJI would have to take into account the views of two of his senior most colleagues.
- **Third Judges Case (1998):**
 - The court gave primacy to the opinion of the CJI in the matter of the appointment of Judges.
 - However, the CJI must consult four senior-most judges of SC.
 - Opinions of all members of the collegium should be in writing.
 - In case of a difference of opinion, the majority view will prevail.
 - Even if two judges in the collegium give an adverse opinion of a person for appointment as the SC judge, the CJI should not send the recommendation to the government.

- These three cases established that the collegium headed by the Chief Justice of India would have primacy in the appointment of judges to the higher judiciary.
- This collegium makes recommendations to the government for the **appointment of judges to the SC and of Chief Justices of High Courts, and the transfers of HC judges.**
- Executive role:
 - Judges of the higher judiciary are thus appointed only through the collegium system, and the government has a role only after names have been decided by the collegiums.
 - The government's role is **limited to getting an inquiry conducted by the Intelligence Bureau (IB)** if a lawyer is to be elevated as a judge in a High Court or the Supreme Court.
 - The **government can also raise objections** and seek clarifications regarding the collegium's choices, but if **the collegium reiterates the same names, the government is bound to appoint them.**

1.12 Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare released report on Review of National Ayush Mission (NAM)

- NAM, launched in 2014, aims to provide Ayush health care services throughout the country by strengthening and improving Ayush health care services.
 - Nature: **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**
 - Nodal Ministry: **Ministry of Ayush**
 - It includes Traditional AYUSH services namely **Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy.**
- Report highlighted that number of beneficiaries availing Ayush services through Ayush Health & Wellness Centres (AHWCs) increased from 1.50 Crores (2020-21) to 8.42 Crores (2022-23).
 - AHWCs are part of Ayushman Bharat.



Challenges faced:

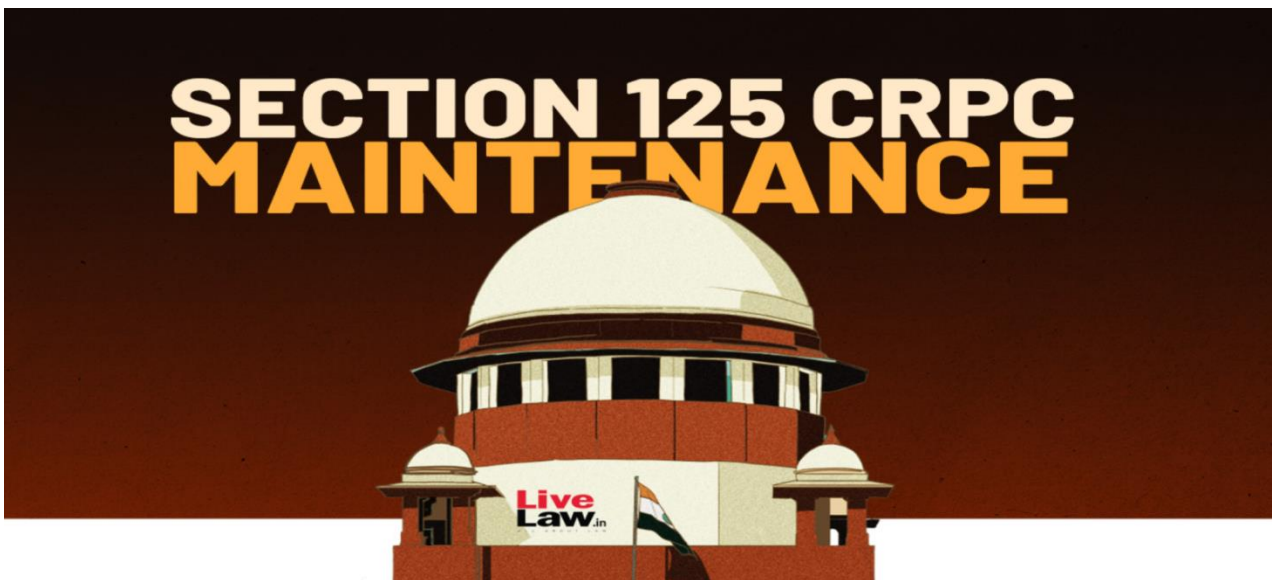
- Implementation: 69% of the integrated Ayush hospitals approved are yet to be completed.
 - Separate Department of Ayush are not opened in some states &UTs.
- Delays in approvals: Finalising the State Annual Action Plan (SAAP) and its approval process takes longer
- Multiple roles of an organisation: Same entity (NAM Directorate) performs various roles of policy formulation, regulation, financing, purchasing, and provisioning.

Key Recommendations:

- Implementing stricter **Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)** and **Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)** for Ayush products.
- Persuade **Private insurance companies** to include AYUSH treatments like Panchkarma in their list of approved treatments.
- Extend the period of the scheme beyond FY24 for at least 5 more years.

1.13 Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code

The Supreme Court recently decided to examine a plea on whether a divorced Muslim woman can seek maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

About Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC):

- It **deals with** the **maintenance** of **wives, children, and parents**.
- It is a legal provision that **allows certain categories of individuals to claim financial support** from their spouses or children, as the case may be, in the event they are unable to maintain themselves.
- Who Can Claim Maintenance?

- **Wife:** A wife **who is unable to maintain herself** can claim maintenance from her husband. The wife is entitled to maintenance if she is unable to support herself. The word "wife" refers to a woman who has been divorced or sought divorce from her spouse and has not remarried.
- **Children:** Children, whether **legitimate or illegitimate**, who are unable to maintain themselves and are **below a certain age or mentally/physically disabled** can claim maintenance from their parents.
- **Parents:** Under this, both father and mother are **entitled to be maintained equally by son and daughter**, but the court must be satisfied that the daughter has the means to support herself. Parents also include **“Adoptive father” and “Adoptive mother.”**
- To successfully claim maintenance under Section 125 CrPC, certain conditions must be met:
 - **Neglect or Refusal:** The person seeking maintenance must demonstrate that the **respondent** (the person from whom maintenance is sought) **has neglected or refused to provide financial support.**
 - **Dependency:** The claimant must establish their inability to maintain themselves and their dependency on the respondent for financial assistance.
 - **Sufficient Means:** The person from whom maintenance is claimed must have sufficient means to maintain the person claiming.
- **Quantum of Maintenance:** The **court will determine** the amount of maintenance based on various factors **like the income and financial capacity** of the person liable to pay, the needs of the claimant, and other relevant circumstances. The objective is to ensure that the claimant gets a reasonable and fair amount for their maintenance.
- **Duration: Maintenance** can be awarded on a monthly basis, and the court can specify a duration for which it should be paid. It can be a temporary or permanent arrangement, depending on the circumstances.
- **Enforcement:** If the person ordered to pay maintenance does not comply with the court's order, the person seeking maintenance can file an application for the enforcement of the order. The defaulter may face legal consequences for non-compliance.
 - The wife is not entitled to receive an allowance from her husband in three cases,
 - If she is living in adultery
 - If she refuses to live with her husband and without any sufficient cause
 - If they are living separately by mutual consent.

1.14 National Council for Transgender Persons

The National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP) convened its pivotal meeting under the Chairmanship of Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

- It is a **statutory body** constituted under the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019** to safeguard the rights of transgender persons in India.
- It is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and making recommendations to the government on measures to promote and protect the rights of transgender persons.



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TRANSGENDER PERSONS

Aims:

- To focus on livelihood issues as well as to raise awareness about the trans community for achieving the goal of social justice so that transpersons are accepted within families and in the larger society.
- To ensure to set up of transgender welfare boards in all states and also ensure that essential needs of the transgender community, like housing, food, healthcare, and education are met.

Composition

- The **Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment** is the Chairperson (ex-officio).
- The Union Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment is the Vice-Chairperson (ex-officio) of the council.
- The other members of the Council include representatives of various Ministries/Departments
- **Five representatives of the transgender community.**
- Representatives of the National Human Rights Commission (**NHRC**) and the National Commission for Women (**NCW**), representatives of State Governments and UTs, and experts representing NGOs.

Functions:

- It **advises the Central Government** on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons.
- It **Monitors and evaluates the impact of policies and programmes** designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons.
- It **reviews and coordinates the activities** of all the departments of Government and other Governmental and non-Governmental Organisations which are dealing with matters relating to transgender persons.
- It **redresses the grievances** of transgender persons.
- **Performs such other functions** as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

1.15 Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985

In a significant legal development, the Supreme Court recently overturned an order granting anticipatory bail to a respondent accused under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act)



- The NDPS Act prohibits any individual from engaging in any activity consisting of the production, cultivation, sale, purchase, transport, storage, and/or consumption of any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.
- Objectives:
 - To take measures for preventing, combating, and regulating operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
 - To provide for the forfeiture of property derived from or used in, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
 - To implement the provisions of the international conventions on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and for all relevant matters.
 - To add or omit the list of psychotropic substances.

What are Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances?

- “Narcotic Drug” means coca leaf, cannabis (hemp), opium, poppy straw, and includes all manufactured drugs.
- “Psychotropic substance” means any substance, natural or synthetic, or any natural material or any salt or preparation of such substance or material included in the list of psychotropic substances specified in the Schedule.

- Applicability: The NDPS Act prohibits a person from manufacture/production/cultivation/possession/sale/purchase / transport / store / consume any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance without due permission from the appropriate authorities.
- Punishment under the NDPS Act:
 - The Act follows a graded system of punishment, with the punishment varying and the quantum of punishment being dependent upon whether the offence pertains to small, commercial, and intermediate quantities of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
 - For offences involving commercial quantities of drugs, a minimum penalty of ten years of rigorous imprisonment is prescribed, which may extend to twenty years.
 - Repeat offences attract one and a half times the penalty and, in a few cases, even the death penalty.
 - By amendment to the Act in 1989, due to the serious nature of the offence, the sentence awarded under the NDPS Act became non-commutable except for the sentence awarded for the consumption of drugs.
- Alongside these stringent provisions, the Act has procedural safeguards as follows:
 - Personal search: Any person being searched has a right to be searched before a Gazetted Officer or a Magistrate (Section 50).
 - Searches: Gazetted Officers of the empowered Departments can authorise Such authorization has to be based on information taken down in writing.
 - Searches can be made under certain circumstances without a warrant (from a magistrate) or authorization (from a Gazetted Officer).
 - Arrests: The person who is arrested should be informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds of his arrest [Section 52(1)].
 - If the arrest or seizure is based on a warrant issued by a magistrate, the person or the seized article should be forwarded to that magistrate.
 - The officer who arrests a person has to make a full report to his official superior within 48 hours.
- Immunities:
 - Officers: Officers acting in the discharge of their duties in good faith under the Act are immune from suits, prosecution, and other legal proceedings.
 - Addicts: Addicts charged with the consumption of drugs or with offences involving small quantities will be immune from prosecution if they volunteer for de-addiction. This immunity may be withdrawn if the addict does not undergo complete treatment.
 - Offenders: Central or state governments can tender immunity to an offender in order to obtain his evidence in the case. This immunity is granted by the government and not by the court.
 - Juvenile offenders: Juvenile offenders (below 18 years of age) will be governed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.
 - Immunities to diplomats as applicable.

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1 The International Court of Justice (ICJ)



- The ICJ, also known as the **World Court**, is the **principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN)**.
- It was **established in June 1945 by the Charter** of the UN and began work in April 1946.
- The seat of the Court **is at the Peace Palace in The Hague** (Netherlands).
- The hearings of the ICJ are always public.
- Official Languages: **French and English**
- Powers and Functions: The Court may entertain two types of cases:
 - First, it can **act as a dispute settlement body between two member States** in what are called “**contentious cases.**” Such disputes may concern, in particular, land frontiers, maritime boundaries, territorial sovereignty, the non-use of force, violation of international humanitarian law, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and diplomatic relations.
 - Second, it can accept requests to issue an **advisory opinion on a legal question referred to it by a UN body** or specialised agency. These opinions can clarify the ways in which such organisations may lawfully function or strengthen their authority in relation to their member States.
 - The court's **judgments in contentious cases are final and binding** on the parties to a case, and **without appeal**.
 - Unlike the Court’s judgments, **advisory opinions are not binding**.

- The ICJ **decides disputes in accordance with international law** as reflected in international conventions, international custom, general principles of law recognized by civilised nations, judicial decisions, and the writings of the most highly qualified experts on international law.
- Composition:
 - It consists of **15 judges, all from different countries**, who are **elected to nine-year terms** by majority votes in the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.
 - The judges, **one-third** of whom are **elected every three years**.
 - Once elected, a member of the Court **is a delegate neither of the government** of his own country nor of any other State.
 - In addition, the ICJ Statute **allows a state party** to a case before it **which does not have a judge** of its nationality on the bench **to appoint a person** to sit **as judge ad hoc** in that specific case.
 - The Court is assisted by a Registry, its permanent administrative secretariat, which is independent of the United Nations Secretariat.

2.2 Exercise -Sada Tanseeq



In a major boost of ties, the militaries of **India** and **Saudi Arabia** are conducting their **first Joint Military Exercise** named as **Sada Tanseeq**.

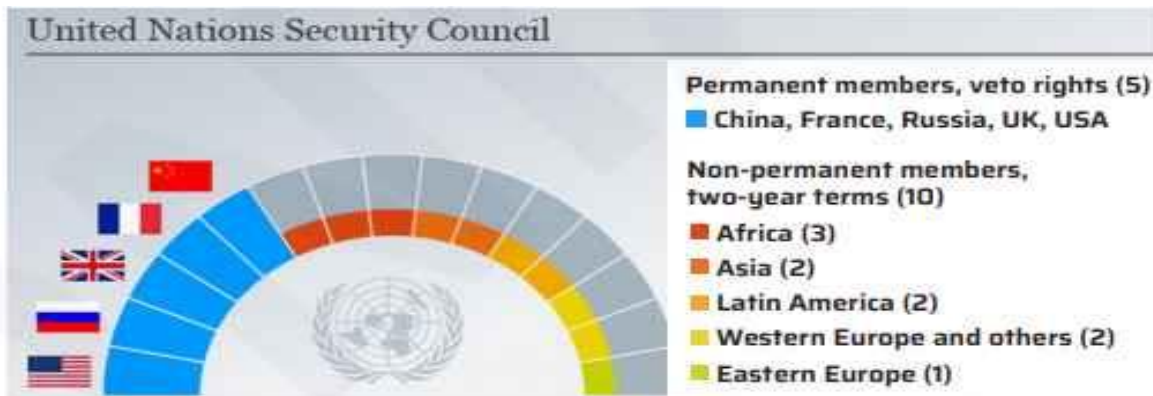
About Exercise Sada Tanseeq:

- It is the inaugural edition of India-Saudi Arabia joint military exercise ‘SADA TANSEEQ’ commenced at Mahajan, **Rajasthan**.
- The Exercise is scheduled to be conducted from 29th January to 10th February 2024.
- Aim of the Exercise is to train troops of both sides for Joint Operations in Semi Desert terrain under **Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter**.
- The Exercise will enable both the sides to share their best practices in the tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting operations in sub-conventional domains.
- It will facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops from both the sides.

- The Exercise will involve Establishment of Mobile Vehicle Check Post, Cordon & Search Operation, House Intervention Drill, Reflex Shooting, Slithering and Sniper Firing.
- The Exercise will provide an opportunity to both the contingents to strengthen their bond.

2.3 France reiterated its support for India's permanent membership of United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- UNSC, established by UN Charter in 1945, is one of the six principal organs of UN with a primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.
 - UNSC is composed of **15 members: 5 permanent** and **10 non-permanent** members.
 - Each Member has one vote.
 - Under UN Charter, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions.
 - Security Council has **power to make binding decisions on member states.**



- **Need for UNSC Reforms**
 - Security Council **retains same five permanent members** since its creation in 1945 and does not reflect contemporary reality.
 - Council paralysis driven by **geopolitical rivalry amongst permanent members** and misuse of Veto power. Example: Russia has **vetoed UNSC resolutions on Ukraine.**
 - **Inadequate regional representation** highlighted by lack of permanent members from either Africa or Latin America.
 - UNSC decisions (resolutions) are binding on all member states **encroaching sovereignty of states.**
- India's key demand on reforms
 - **Abolition of veto.**
 - **Equitable geographical representation** of every region.
 - **Expansion** in both permanent and non-permanent memberships.
 - **Permanent membership to G4 members** (Germany, Brazil, Japan and India).

2.4 Exercise Vayu Shakti-24

The **Indian Air Force** will be conducting Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 on **17 February 2024** at the Pokhran Air to Ground Range, near **Jaisalmer**.



- The Indian Air Force is slated to carry out three large scale war games on February 17, namely, **Vayu Shakti, Gagan Shakti and Tarang Shakti**.
- It will be a riveting demonstration of the **offensive and defensive capabilities** of the IAF, spanning across day and night.
- The exercise will also showcase **joint operations with the Indian Army**.
- **Exercise Vayu Shakti**
 - The IAF will first undertake the major "Vayu Shakti" firepower demonstration, which is held once **every three years**, with 135 fighters, aircraft, helicopters and drones at the Pokhran field firing ranges.
- **Gagan Shakti'**
 - The second mega exercise will be 'Gagan Shakti'.
 - In this, almost the entire air fleet race would be activated from north to south, and from west to east to test integrated war fighting strategies and tactics with the other two forces and other stakeholders.
 - All the potent weapon systems like the Rafale fighter aircraft and the S-400 air defense systems would be participating in the 'Gagan Shakti' exercise.
 - The exercise, which is held **once in five years**, is also going to be the biggest ever of the series with active participation from other two services.
- **Tarang Shakti**
 - The third major exercise, Tarang Shakti, would be the first ever **multinational exercise** to be held in the country.
 - This will see aircraft from friendly air forces like the US, Germany, France, Australia and neighbouring and other friendly countries taking part in it.

2.5 Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs

The 7th session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH) was held from 29th January 2024 to 2nd February 2024 at Kochi.



- It was established as one of the Commodity Committees under the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) in 2013.
- India hosts this prestigious Committee since the beginning and Spices Board India serves as the secretariat organization which organizes the Committee's sessions.
- In CCSCH 7th session quality standards for 5 spices, namely small cardamom, turmeric, juniper berry, allspice and star anise were finalised.

Codex Alimentarius Commission :

- It was jointly established by **FAO and WHO**.
- It is an **international, intergovernmental** body which is based in **Rome**.
- Members: It consists of **189 member countries**.
- Membership of the Commission is open to all Member Nations and Associate Members of FAO and WHO which are interested in international food standards.
- The Commission meets in regular sessions once a year, alternating between Geneva and Rome.
- Funding: The programme of work of the Commission is **funded through the regular budgets of WHO and FAO**, with all work subject to the approval of the two governing bodies of the parent organisations.
- The Commission works in the **six official languages** of the UN.

- The standards of CAC are recognized by the WTO as international reference points for the resolution of trade disputes concerning food safety and consumer protection.
- The standards developed by the Committees under the CAC, including the CCSCH, are **voluntary in nature**, which the member countries of the CAC adopt and use as reference standards to align their national standards.
- The works of CAC contribute to **harmonization of food standards across the globe, facilitate fair global trade in food, and enhance food safety to safeguard the health of global consumers.**

2.6 Action Taken Report on 'India's Neighbourhood First Policy' presented to

Lok Sabha



- **Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP):** Aims to forge strong neighbourhood relations based on a consultative, **non-reciprocal, and outcome-oriented approach**.
 - Focuses on delivering benefits like **greater connectivity, improved infrastructure, stronger development cooperation** in various sectors, security and broader people-to-people contacts.
 - 5S Principle of neighbourhood engagement: **Samman** (Respect), **Samvad** (Dialogue), **Shanti** (Peace), **Samridhi** (Prosperity), and **Sanskriti** (Culture).
- Significance of NFP
 - For India: **Regional stability and improved security, economic growth** through improved trade and connectivity, countering external influence in the region such as China, enhanced Soft Power, etc.

- For Region: **Shared prosperity, peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes, strengthened multilateralism** through regional/ sub-regional organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, etc.
- Key recommendations
 - Ministry of External Affairs should establish a cell to bring convergence with different ministries on NFP.
 - Periodic review of bilateral and multilateral/regional relationship framework.
 - Strengthen Joint Project Monitoring Committees and Oversight Mechanisms.
 - Terrorism and illegal migration: Monitor demographic changes caused by illegal migration in border areas in coordination with Union Home Ministry.
 - Synergy between NFP and Act East Policy to improve connectivity, development, and security in India's North East.

2.7 U.S.-India Defense Accelerator Ecosystem (INDUS-X)



U.S.-India Defense Accelerator Ecosystem (INDUS-X):

- It was **launched in June 2023** during the state visit of the Prime Minister of India to the US.
- Objective: **To expand strategic technology partnerships and defence industrial cooperation** between governments, businesses, and academic institutions in India and the US.
- INDUS X will be a defence innovation bridge, which will inter-alia, **include Joint Challenges, Joint Innovation Fund, Academia engagement, Industry-startup connect, investment** by private entities in defence projects, mentoring by experts and niche technology projects etc.
- It will focus on advancing high-tech cooperation and fostering joint research, development, and production opportunities in the defence sector.
- The initiative aims to explore possibilities for co-producing jet engines, long-range artillery, and infantry vehicles.
- **India's Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX)** and the **Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD)**, US, are leading **INDUS-X** activities.

What is Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX)?

- It is the flagship scheme of the **Ministry of Defence**, Government of India, launched in 2018.
- The objective of the scheme is to **cultivate an innovation ecosystem in the Defence and Aerospace sector by collaborating with startups, innovators, MSMEs, incubators, and academia.**
- iDEX offers grants and support for R&D with significant potential for future adoption in Indian defence and aerospace.
- It is currently engaged with around **400+ Startups and MSMEs.**
- It is recognized as a game-changer in the defence ecosystem, **iDEX has received the PM Award for Innovation in the defence sector.**
- **Funding:** It will be funded and managed by a '**Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)**' which has been formed as a 'not for profit' company as per the Companies Act 2013 for this purpose, by the two founder members i.e., Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs): HAL and BEL.
- iDEX will function as the **executive arm of DIO**, carrying out all the required activities, while DIO will provide high level policy guidance to iDEX.

2.8 What is the Munich Security Conference (MSC)?

World leaders gather for the **sixtieth Munich Security Conference** with growing concerns about a continued war in Ukraine and threats to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) cohesion.



- It is the **world's leading forum for debating international security policy.**
- **Objective:** **To build trust and contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts by sustaining a continuous, curated, and informal dialogue within the international security community.**
- It has been held in Munich, Bavaria, Germany, since 1963.
- The conference is **held annually in February.**
- It brings together security experts, politicians, military leaders, and the defence industry from around the world.

- MSC regularly convenes high-profile events on particular topics and regions and publishes the Munich Security Report, an annual digest of relevant figures, maps, and research on crucial security challenges.

Key Facts about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):

- It is a **transatlantic security alliance of 31 like-minded North American and European countries**.
- It was established by the North Atlantic Treaty(also called the Washington Treaty) on April 4, 1949.
- **Aim:** To protect peace and to guarantee the territorial integrity, political independence, and security of the member states.
- **Article Five of the treaty:** If an armed attack occurs against one of the member states, it should be considered an attack against all members, and other members shall assist the attacked member, with armed forces if necessary.
- This article forms the core of the Alliance, a promise of collective defence.
- **Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium.**

2.9 Raisina Dialogue

The **ninth edition** of the Raisina Dialogue will be held from February 21 to 23rd in **New Delhi**.



- It is an annual conference on **geopolitics** and **geo-economics**, which aims to address the most challenging issues faced by the world.
- It is held **annually since 2016** in New Delhi.
- The conference is attended by people from political, business, media, and civil society backgrounds.

- The Dialogue is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, who are joined by thought leaders from the private sector, media and academia.
- It is organised by the **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)** in partnership with the **Ministry of External Affairs**, Government of India.
- The theme of the 2024 edition is “**Chaturanga: Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create,**”
- During the three-day conference, the participants will engage with each other over **six “thematic pillars”**. These include:
 - Tech Frontiers: Regulations & Realities
 - Peace with the Planet: Invest & Innovate
 - War & Peace: Armouries & Asymmetries
 - Decolonising Multilateralism: Institutions & Inclusion
 - The Post 2030 Agenda: People & Progress
 - Defending Democracy: Society & Sovereignty.

3. ECONOMY

3.1 What is Market Access Initiative (MAI) Scheme?

Ahead of the interim Budget 2024, exporters have urged the government to allocate funds worth \$3.88 billion for the Market Access Initiative (MAI) scheme.



About Market Access Initiative (MAI) Scheme:

- It is an **export promotion scheme** envisaged to act as a catalyst to promote India's exports on a sustained basis.
- The scheme is **formulated on focus product-focus country approach to evolve** specific markets and **specific products through market studies and surveys**.
- **Assistance would be provided** to Export Promotion Organizations/Trade Promotion Organizations/National Level Institutions/ Research Institutions/Universities/Laboratories, Exporters etc., for the enhancement of exports through accessing new markets or through increasing their share in the existing markets.
- Under the Scheme, the **level of assistance for each eligible activities has been fixed**.
- The following activities will be eligible for financial assistance under the Scheme:
 - **Marketing Projects Abroad**
 - Capacity Building
 - Support for Statutory Compliances
 - Studies
 - Project Development
 - Developing Foreign Trade Facilitation web Portal
 - To support Cottage and handicrafts units

- **Eligible Agencies: Departments of Central Government** and Organisation of Central/State Governments including
 - **Indian Missions abroad**
 - **Export Promotion Councils**
 - Registered **trade promotion Organisation**
 - **Commodity Boards**
 - Apex **Trade Bodies** recognized under Foreign Trade Policy of Govt of India
 - Recognized Industrial & Artisan Clusters
 - **Individual Exporters** (only for statutory compliance etc.)
 - **National Level Institutions** (e.g. Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), National Institute of design (NIDs), NIFT etc.)/ Research Institutions/Universities/ Recognized laboratories, etc.
- The **funding for each project** will be on **cost-sharing basis** with the **sharing pattern ranging from 65% to 50% at the minimum.**
- It is **administered by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, Government of India, **through the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).**

3.2 Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI)

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officers developed an intelligence and intercepted seven consignments which had arrived from Hong Kong at the Foreign Post Office in New Delhi.



About Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI):

- It is the **premier intelligence and enforcement agency** of the Government of India on **anti-smuggling matters**.
- It works under the **Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, Ministry of Finance**, Government of India.
- It came into existence on **December 4, 1957**.
- Functions:
 - **Collection of intelligence** about smuggling of contraband goods, narcotics, under-invoicing, etc. through sources in India and abroad, including secret sources.
 - **Analysis and dissemination** of such intelligence to the field formations for action and working on such intelligence, where necessary.
 - **Keeping watch over important seizures** and investigation cases. Associating with or taking over the investigations which warrant specialised handling by the Directorate.
 - **Guiding important investigation/prosecution cases**. Keeping liaison with foreign countries, Indian Missions, and Enforcement agencies abroad on anti-smuggling matters.
 - **To keep in liaison with C.B.I.** and through them with the To refer cases registered under the Customs Act to the Income Tax Department for action under the Income Tax Act.
 - **To keep statistics of seizures**, and prices/rates etc. for watching trends of smuggling and supply required material to the Ministry of Finance and other Ministries.
 - **To study and suggest remedies** for loopholes in law and procedures to combat smuggling.
- The DRI, with its **Headquarters in New Delhi**, has **12 zonal units, 35 regional units, and 15 sub-regional units**.

3.3 Anti-Profiteering provisions under the Goods and Services Tax (GST)

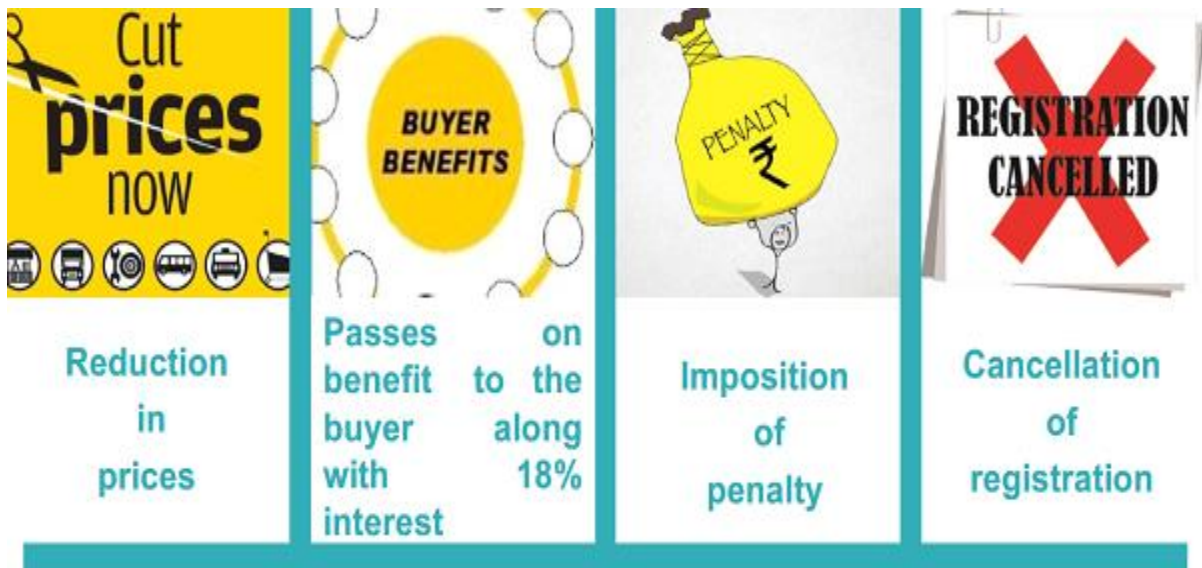
The Delhi High Court recently upheld the constitutional validity of anti-profiteering provisions in the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

What is the meaning of anti-profiteering under GST?

- **Any reduction in the GST rate or benefit of input tax credit should be passed on to the end consumer** and not retained by the business. This is the basis of the anti-profiteering provisions under GST.
- Under anti-profiteering provisions, it's illegal for a business to not pass on the benefits of the GST rate benefits to the end consumer, and thereby indulging in illegal profiteering.
- Who regulates anti-profiteering under the GST?

- The **Anti-Profiteering Rules, 2017** (defined under **Section 171 of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act 2017**), prevents entities from making excessive profits due to the lowering of GST.
- The Government has **created the National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA)** to find and take action against taxable registered persons indulging in illegal profiteering.
- NAA has the **power to determine the methodology and procedure** for determining whether a taxable person is engaging in illegal profiteering.
- **Reporting to the Anti-Profiteering Authority:**
 - **Any interested party** who has information to believe a taxable person is engaging in illegal profiteering from GST **can refer the matter to the local screening committee.**
 - **The State level Screening Committee** shall examine the matter constituted by the State Governments **consisting of officers of the State Government.**
 - **If the screening committee determines that the information contains merit**, the committee shall forward it with recommendations to the Standing Committee on Anti-Profiteering, which consists of **officers of both the State Government and Central Government.**
 - If the Standing Committee contains enough proof to show that the taxable person engaged in illegal profiteering, then the committee shall refer to the **Director General of Safeguards for a detailed investigation.**
- **Investigation by the Director General of Safeguards:**
 - All matters referred by the Standing Committee will be investigated by the Director General of Safeguards.
 - The Director General of Safeguards will **collect evidence, conduct an investigation, and issue** notices to the interested parties. The notice must contain the following details:
 - The description of the goods or services in respect of which the proceedings have been initiated.
 - Summary of the statement of facts on which the allegations are based.
 - The time limit allowed to the interested parties and other persons who may have information related to the proceedings for furnishing their reply.
 - Once all the information and hearings are complete, the Director General of Safeguards will provide a report of findings.
 - A report of findings **must be submitted** by the Director General of Safeguards, normally **within 3 months** or within 6 months if an extension is provided.
- **Order under Anti-Profiteering Provisions:** Once all the proceedings are completed and a report is obtained from the Director General of Safeguards, the Members of Committee will pass an order. An order from the Authority could mandate:
 - **Reduction in prices.**
 - **Return to the recipient, an amount equivalent** to the amount not passed on by way of a commensurate reduction in prices **along with interest.**

- Imposition of penalty as specified under the Act.
- **Cancellation of GST registration.**



3.4 A report titled ‘The Indian Economy: A Review’ released by the Department of Economic Affairs (Ministry of Finance)

- **This review takes stock of state of the Indian economy** and its journey in last ten years and offers a brief sketch of outlook for the economy in coming years.
 - In **10 years**, India has moved from **10th largest economy** of the world to **5th largest economy of the world**
- **Factors Making Indian Economy Resilient**
 - **Domestic Economy:**
 - ◆ Economy is **projected to grow over 7%** and become **third-largest globally** in next three years, reaching a GDP of \$5 trillion.
 - ◆ India's robust **Digital Public Infrastructure** has transformed authentication ecosystem, **reducing the cost of conducting e-KYC from ₹1,000 to ₹5.**
 - **Macroeconomic stability :**
 - ◆ **Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) set up in 2014-15** has been effective in tackling price volatility.
 - **Human Resources:**
 - ◆ **13.5 crore Indians** escaped **multidimensional poverty** between 2015-16 and 2019-21.
 - ◆ Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37% in 2022-23.

- **India's External Sector:**

- ◆ **India is the largest recipient of worker remittances** in the world, receiving USD 125 billion in the year 2023.
- ◆ **External debt as a ratio to GDP fell to 18.6%** at the end of September 2023 from 22.4% in 2013.

Challenges Confronting the Indian Economy

- **Increased geoeconomic fragmentation and the slowdown of hyper-globalisation.**
- **Trade-off between energy security and economic growth** versus energy transition.
- **Domestically, ensuring the availability of a talented and appropriately skilled workforce to industry, age-appropriate learning outcomes** in schools at all levels.
- **Advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI).**
 - **Recently an IMF paper estimated that 40 % of global employment is exposed to AI**

3.5 What is a Payments Bank?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently imposed restrictions on **Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL)**, following a system audit report and subsequent compliance validation report of external auditors.



- A payments bank is like any other bank but **operates on a smaller scale without involving any credit risk.**
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the **Nachiket Mor Committee.**
- **Objective: To advance financial inclusion** by offering banking and financial services to the unbanked and underbanked areas, helping the migrant labour force, low-income households, small entrepreneurs, etc.
- It is registered as a public limited company under the **Companies Act 2013** and licensed under **Section 22 of the Banking Regulation Act 1949.**
- It is governed by a host of legislation, such as the Banking Regulation Act, 1949; RBI Act, 1934; Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, etc.

Features:

- They are differentiated and not universal banks.
- These operate on a smaller scale.
- The minimum paid-up equity capital for payments banks shall be **100 crores.**
- The minimum initial contribution of the promoter to the Payment Bank to the paid-up equity capital shall be at least 40% for the first five years from the commencement of its business.

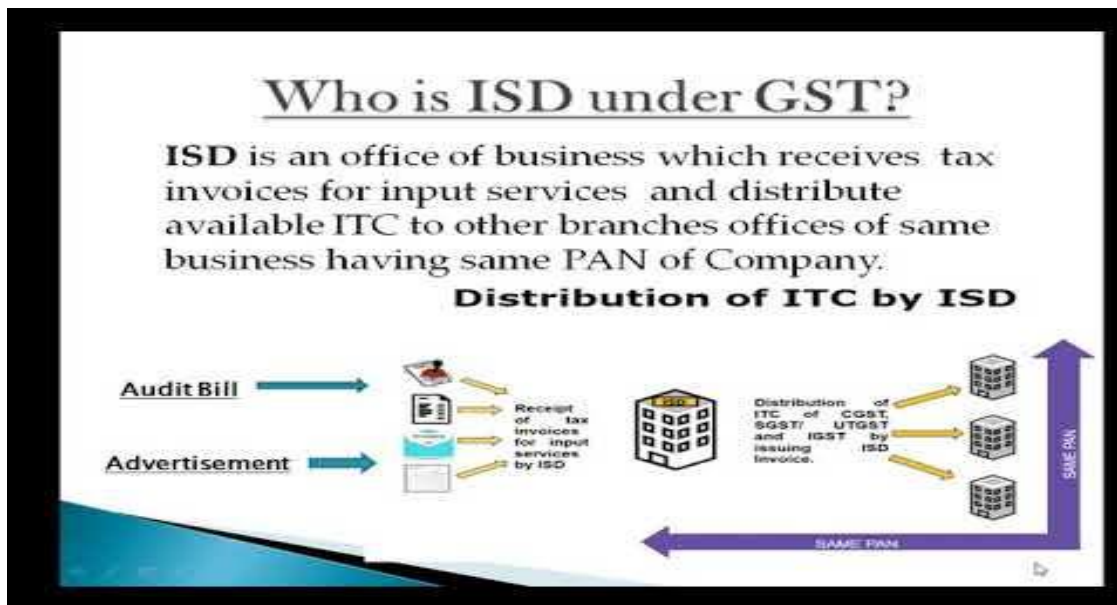
Activities that can be performed:

- It can take deposits up to Rs. 2,00,000. It can accept demand deposits in the form of savings and current accounts.
- The money received as deposits can be invested in secure government securities only in the form of a Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR). This must amount to 75% of the demand deposit balance.
- The remaining 25% is to be placed as time deposits with other scheduled commercial banks.
- It can offer remittance services, mobile payments/transfers/purchases, and other banking services like ATM/debit cards, net banking, and third-party fund transfers.
- It can become a banking correspondent (BC) of another bank for credit and other services which it cannot offer.

Activities that cannot be performed:

- It cannot issue **loans and credit cards.**
- It cannot accept **time deposits** or **NRI deposits.**
- It cannot **set up subsidiaries** to undertake **non-banking financial activities.**

3.6 What is an Input Service Distributor (ISD) under Goods and Services Tax (GST)?



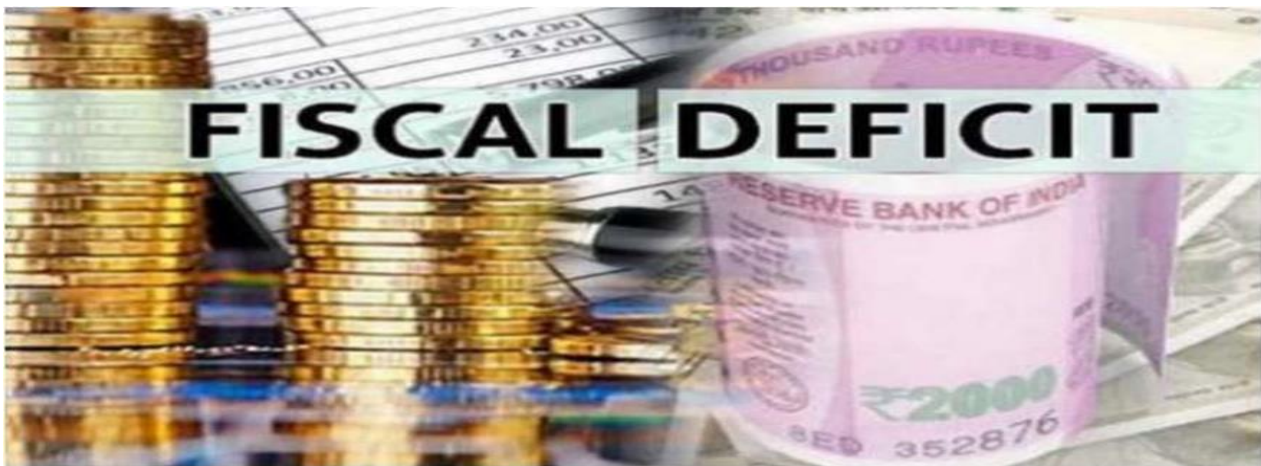
- ISD means an **office of the supplier of goods or services or both** which receives tax invoices towards receipt of input services and issues a prescribed document for the purposes of **distributing the credit** of central tax (CGST), State tax (SGST)/ Union territory tax (UTGST), or integrated tax (IGST) **paid on the said services to a supplier** of taxable goods or services or both having the same Permanent Account Number (PAN) as that of the ISD.
- Hence, ISD is a **business which receives invoices for services used by its branches.**
- **It distributes the tax paid** to such branches on a proportional basis by issuing an ISD invoice.
- The branches can have different GST Identification Numbers (GSTINs) but must have the same PAN as that of ISD.
- Registration under GST:
 - An ISD is required to obtain a **separate registration.**
 - Registration is **mandatory** and there is **no threshold limit for registration for an ISD.**
- Relevance of ISD:
 - It is relevant **for businesses having multiple branches** operating within India.
 - These businesses are required to obtain **GSTIN for each branch** from where taxable supplies are made.
 - Based on the purchases of the head office or branch, ITC (**Input Tax Credit**) in the form of SGST, CGST, or IGST **would accrue to the business.**
 - **To ensure that the ITC is properly distributed** amongst the various branches of the business, the ISD concept has been introduced by the Government.

- ISD is made available to businesses having a large share of common expenditures, and billing/payment is done from a centralised location.
- Where ISD doesn't apply?
 - ISD mechanism is meant **only for distributing credit** on common invoices **pertaining to input services**.
 - It is **not applicable when input or capital goods are involved**.

3.7 The Importance of Fiscal Consolidation

Why in news?

- **Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman** announced during her Budget speech that the Centre would reduce its fiscal deficit to 5.1% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024-25.
- She further added that the fiscal deficit would be pared to below 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.



Fiscal deficit

- Fiscal deficit refers to the shortfall in a government's revenue when compared to its expenditure.
- When a government's expenditure exceeds its revenues, the government will have to borrow money or sell assets to fund the deficit.
- Statistics for 2024-25
 - In 2024-25, the government's tax receipts are expected to be ₹26.02 lakh crore while its total revenue is estimated to be ₹30.8 lakh crore.
 - Taxes are the most important source of revenue for any government.
 - The Union government's total expenditure, on the other hand, is estimated to be ₹47.66 lakh crore.
- Focus on keeping the fiscal deficit under control rather than on generating a fiscal surplus

- When a government runs a fiscal surplus, on the other hand, its revenues exceed expenditure. It is, however, quite rare for governments to run a surplus.
- Most governments today focus on keeping the fiscal deficit under control rather than on generating a fiscal surplus or on balancing the budget.
 - This is because a controlled deficit policy is said to be expansionary.
 - In such policy the government spends more on budget items such as infrastructure.
 - Such policies are typically used to boost productivity and the economy.
- Fiscal deficit is not national debt
 - The national debt is the total amount of money that the government of a country owes its lenders at a particular point in time.
 - The national debt is usually the amount of debt that a government has accumulated over many years of running fiscal deficits and borrowing to bridge the deficits.

How does government fund its fiscal deficit?

- Money from bond market
 - In order to fund its fiscal deficit, the government mainly borrows money from the bond market.
 - In this market, lenders compete to lend to the government by purchasing bonds issued by the government.
 - In 2024-25, the Centre is expected to borrow a gross amount of ₹14.13 lakh crore from the market, which is lower than its borrowing goal for 2023-24.
- Role of RBI
 - Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is also a major player in the credit market, although it may not always directly purchase government bonds.
 - The RBI may still purchase government bonds in the secondary market, from private lenders who have already purchased bonds from the government.
 - So, when a government borrows from the bond market, it not only borrows from private lenders but also indirectly from the central bank.
 - The RBI purchases these bonds through what are called ‘open market operations’ by creating fresh money.
 - This in turn can lead to higher money supply and also higher prices in the wider economy over time.

Challenges in raising the funds through bonds

- Rate of borrowing
 - Government bonds are generally considered to be risk-free as the government can — under the worst-case scenario — get help from the central bank, which can create fresh currency to pay off the lenders.
 - So, governments generally do not find it hard to borrow money from the market.
 - The bigger problem is the rate at which they are able to borrow the money.
 - As a government’s finances worsen, demand for the government’s bonds begins to drop forcing the government to offer to pay a higher interest rate to lenders, and leading to higher borrowing costs for the government.

- Role of monetary policy
 - Monetary policy also plays a crucial role in how much it costs governments to borrow money from the market.
 - Central bank lending rates which were near zero in many countries before the pandemic have risen sharply in the aftermath of the pandemic.
 - This makes it more expensive for governments to borrow money and could be one reason why the Centre is keen to bring down its fiscal deficit.

Why does the fiscal deficit matter?

- Relationship between fiscal deficit and inflation
 - There is a strong direct relationship between the government's fiscal deficit and inflation in the country.
 - When a country's government runs a persistently high fiscal deficit, this can eventually lead to higher inflation as the government will be forced to use fresh money issued by the central bank to fund its fiscal deficit.
 - The fiscal deficit recently reached a high of 9.17% of GDP during the pandemic and has since improved significantly and is projected to drop to 5.8% now.
- Indicator of fiscal discipline maintained by the government
 - The fiscal deficit also signals to the market the degree of fiscal discipline maintained by the government.
 - A lower fiscal deficit may thus help improve the ratings assigned to the Indian government's bonds.
 - When the government is able to fund more of its spending through tax revenues and borrow less, this gives more confidence to lenders and drives down the government's borrowing cost.
- Ability of the government to manage its overall public debt
 - A high fiscal deficit can also adversely affect the ability of the government to manage its overall public debt.
 - In December, the International Monetary Fund warned that India's public debt could rise to more than 100% of GDP in the medium term due to risks.
 - Although, the Centre disagreed with the assessment.
 - It is also worth noting that the Centre has been keen on tapping the international bond market.
 - A lower fiscal deficit may help the government to more easily sell its bonds overseas and access cheaper credit.

What lies ahead?

- The Centre plans to bring down its fiscal deficit in 2024-25 to 5.1% of GDP despite having plans to boost capital expenditure and to spend on other programmes.
- So, most of the revenue to fund such spending will have to come from tax collections.
 - The Centre expects tax collections to rise by 11.5% in 2024-25.
 - It has also projected a cut in expenditure on fertilizer subsidy, from ₹1.88 lakh crore in 2023-24 to ₹1.64 lakh crore in 2024-25.

- The amount spent on food subsidy is also projected to drop from ₹2.12 lakh crore in 2023-24, to ₹2.05 lakh crore in 2024-25.

3.8 DigiReady Certification

The **Quality Council of India (QCI)** and **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** announced the launch of the **DigiReady Certification (DRC) portal**.



- In this initiative, QCI, in conjunction with ONDC, aims to **assess and certify digital readiness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** entities.
- By leveraging this online self-assessment tool, MSMEs can evaluate their preparedness to seamlessly on board as sellers on the ONDC platform, thereby expanding their digital capabilities and business potential.
- The portal is meticulously designed to facilitate a streamlined seller journey, ensuring that MSMEs and small retailers can integrate seamlessly into existing digitised workflows.
- The certification process evaluates various **aspects of digital readiness**, including the presence of necessary documentation for online operations, proficiency in using software and technology, integration with existing digitised workflows, and efficient management of orders and catalogue offerings.
- **Significance:** This initiative presents additional business prospects for sellers, allowing them to become integral to the digital ecosystem.

Key points about Quality Council of India

- It was established in **1997** jointly by the **Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT)**, the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry**, and the **Indian industry**.
- It is registered as a non-profit organisation under the **Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860**.
- It is operated through the constituent Boards of QCI, primarily the National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB), and the National Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories (NABL),
- Composition: It is governed by a Council of 38 members with equal representations of government, industry and consumers.

The Chairman of QCI is appointed by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the industry to the government.

3.9 What is the build-operate-transfer (BOT) Model?

The **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** has come up with a list of high-traffic density corridors for private developers to build and operate under the **build-operate-transfer (BOT) model**.



- It is a type of agreement often used in infrastructure projects, particularly in the construction and operation of public facilities or utilities.
- It is a conventional **public-private partnership (PPP) model** in which a private entity (usually a company or consortium) is **granted the rights and responsibilities** to design, finance, construct, operate, and maintain a specific project or facility for a defined period of time.
- The private entity, known as the "concessionaire" or "developer," **bears the financial and operational risks** associated with the project during the contract period.
- The typical lifecycle of a BOT contract involves three phases:

- **Build:** The concessionaire is responsible for financing, designing, and constructing the infrastructure project. This phase usually includes obtaining the necessary permits and approvals.
- **Operate:** After the construction is completed, the concessionaire operates and maintains the facility for a specified duration. This can involve providing services, managing operations, and generating revenue from the facility (e.g., tolls, fees, or user charges).
- **Transfer:** At the end of the contract period, the ownership and control of the facility are transferred back to the government or public authority, which may have been the original owner. The transfer is often accompanied by a predetermined valuation or compensation mechanism.
- The private company gains revenue during the concession period, while the government benefits from infrastructure development without upfront investment.
- However, the specifics of the financial arrangements and incentives vary depending on the individual BOT contract.
- BOT is particularly well-suited for greenfield projects (new projects without prior work) and large-scale, capital-intensive projects.

3.10 Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

Why in news?

India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services will be rolled out in **Sri Lanka** and **Mauritius** at a virtual ceremony.



- The UPI is a digital and real-time payment system developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** and regulated by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.

- It was launched on **April 11, 2016**.
- It is designed to enable **peer-to-peer inter-bank transfers** through a single two-click factor authentication process.

Features:

- Unlike traditional methods, UPI **simplifies transfers using the recipient's UPI ID**, be it a mobile number, QR code, or Virtual Payment Address, **eliminating account numbers**.
- It **eliminates the need to enter bank details** or other sensitive information each time a customer initiates a transaction.
- A **consistent UPI transaction PIN across apps** enhances cross-operability, enabling 24/7 transactions.
- UPI operates as a **digital public infrastructure**, allowing seamless interactions for all players, including merchants and customers, without transaction costs.
- UPI uses **technologies like the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS)** and the **Aadhaar-Enabled Payment System (AEPS)** to ensure that payments between accounts go smoothly.
- It **facilitates push (pay) and pull (receive)** transactions and even works for over-the-counter or barcode payments, as well as for **multiple recurring payments** such as utility bills, school fees, and other subscriptions.
- It also works with "**Peer-to-Peer**" requests, which can be scheduled and paid for based on need and convenience.

3.11 Fund of Funds Scheme

According to a Crisil assessment called Prabhaav, the **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)** scheme has enabled investments to the tune of around 4x of the amount drawn with Rs 17,534 crore invested in 938 start ups.



- The Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) Scheme was approved and established in 2016 with a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore,
- Funding to startups: Under FFS, the **Scheme does not directly invest in startups**, instead provides **capital to SEBI-registered AIFs**, known as daughter funds, who in turn invest money in growing Indian startups through equity and equity-linked instruments.
- **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)** has been given the mandate of **operating this Fund** through selection of suitable daughter funds and overseeing the disbursement of committed capital.
- AIFs supported under FFS are required to invest at least 2 times of the amount committed under FFS in startups.

Key facts about the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)

- It was established under an **Act of Parliament in 1990**.
- It is the Principal Financial Institution engaged in the **promotion, financing & development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector** and the coordination of the functions of the various institutions engaged in similar activities.
- Objective: To offer loans (both direct and indirect) to MSMEs to help in addressing the development and financial gaps in the ecosystem of MSMEs.
- It helps MSMEs in acquiring the funds they require to grow the market, develop and commercialise their technologies and innovative products.
- It was made responsible for administering the Small Industries Development Fund and National Equity Fund.

3.12 Retail Inflation

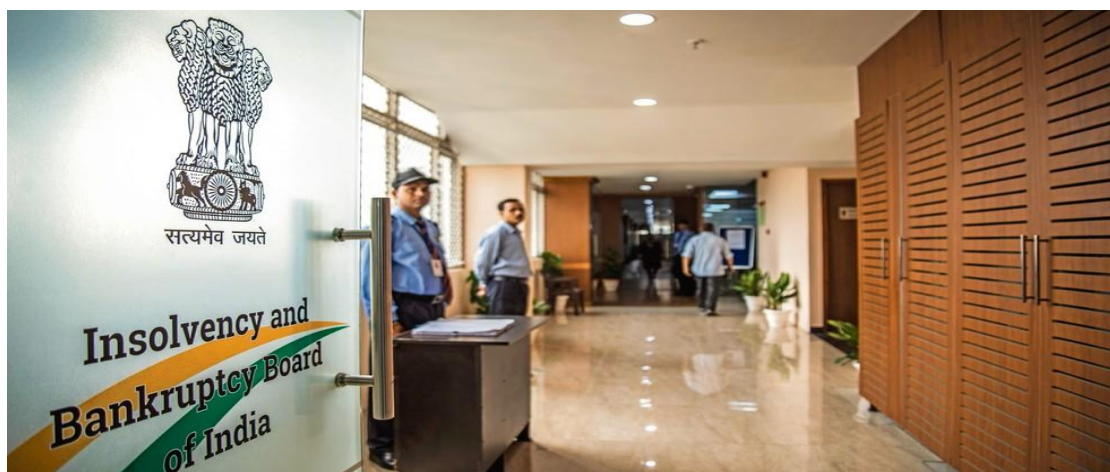
India's retail inflation eased to a three-month low of 5.1% recently



- Retail inflation, also known as **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** inflation, **tracks the change in retail prices of goods and services** which households purchase for **their daily consumption**.
- CPI is calculated for a **fixed basket of goods and services** that may or may not be altered by the government from time to time.
- The change in the price index over a period of time is referred to as CPI-based inflation or retail inflation.
- **What Does the CPI tell?** Following are a few things that the CPI index interprets:
 - **Cost of living**
 - **The purchasing power of consumers**
 - The **expensiveness of different articles** that consumers buy and services that are availed
 - **Value of the Indian rupee**
- **How is CPI calculated?**
 - **CPI is calculated as a percentage.** It is a comparison of the general price level in the markets in a particular time period from a time frame in the past. This is known as the base year.
 - CPI, therefore, is calculated by referring to a base year, which is a benchmark. **Currently, the base year is 2012.**
 - The **National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** compiles All India as well as state-wise CPI for Rural, Urban, and Combined sectors and releases the CPI numbers every month.
- How is the Consumer Price Index (CPI) Used?
 - It is used as a macroeconomic indicator of inflation, as a tool by the central bank and government for **inflation targeting** and for **inspecting price stability**, and as a **deflator in the national accounts**.
 - CPI also **helps understand the real value of salaries, wages, and pensions**, the purchasing power of the nation's currency, and regulating rates.

3.13 Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has now mandated that Resolution Professionals (RPs) provide a copy of its report to both creditors and debtors in all cases.

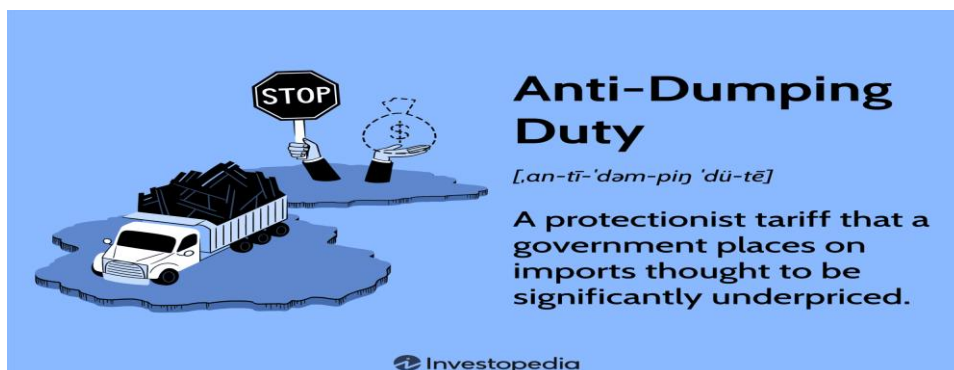


- The IBBI was established on October 1, 2016, in accordance with the provisions of the ‘Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016’.
- It is responsible for the implementation of the IBC. The IBC amends and consolidates the laws relating to the insolvency resolution of individuals, partnership firms, and corporate persons in a time-bound manner.
 - The IBBI **regulates professionals as well as processes.**
 - It has **regulatory oversight over insolvency professional agencies, insolvency professional entities**, insolvency professionals, and information utilities.
 - It **enforces rules for processes** of corporate insolvency resolution, individual insolvency resolution, corporate liquidation, and individual bankruptcy under the IBC.
- It has also been **designated as the ‘Authority’** under the Companies (Registered Valuers and Valuation Rules), 2017 **for the regulation and development of the profession of valuers** in the country.
- Constitution of the Board: The Board consists of the following members who are appointed by the Central Government:
 - A **Chairperson.**
 - **Three members** from among the officers of the **Central Government** equivalent or not below the rank of a Joint Secretary. Out of the three members, each will represent the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, and the Ministry of Law, ex-officio.
 - **One member nominated by the RBI** (Reserve Bank of India), ex-officio.
 - **Five other members are nominated by the Central Government**, out of which at least three should be whole-time members.
 - **The term** of office of the Chairperson and members (other than ex-officio members) is five years or until they attain sixty-five years, whichever is earlier, and they are eligible for re-appointment.

3.14 Anti-Dumping Duty

Why in NEWS?

India has initiated an anti-dumping probe into imports of certain solar glass from China and Vietnam, following a complaint by domestic players.



- Anti-dumping duty is a **tariff imposed on imports manufactured in foreign countries that are priced below the fair market value of similar goods in the domestic market.**
- The government imposes anti-dumping duty on foreign imports when it believes that the goods are being “dumped” – through low pricing – in the domestic market.
- Anti-dumping duty is **imposed to protect local businesses and markets from unfair competition by foreign imports.**
- Thus, the **purpose of anti-dumping duty is to rectify the trade distortive effect of dumping and re-establish fair trade.**
- The use of anti-dumping measures as an instrument of fair competition is permitted by the World Trade Organization (WTO).
 - The WTO allows the government of the affected country to take legal action against the dumping country as long as there is evidence of genuine material injury to industries in the domestic market.
 - The government must show that dumping took place, the extent of the dumping in terms of costs, and the injury or threat to cause injury to the domestic market.
- While the intention of anti-dumping duties is to protect local businesses and markets, these tariffs can also lead to higher prices for domestic consumers.

What is countervailing duty (CVD)?

- It is a specific form of duty that the government imposes to protect domestic producers by countering the negative impact of import subsidies.
- CVD is thus an import tax by the importing country on imported products.
- Why is CVD imposed?
 - Foreign governments sometimes provide subsidies to their producers to make their products cheaper and boost their demand in other countries.
 - To avoid flooding the market in the importing country with these goods, the government of the importing country imposes CVD, charging a specific amount on the import of such goods.
 - The duty nullifies and eliminates the price advantage enjoyed by an imported product.
 - The WTO permits the imposition of CVD by its member countries.

Countervailing duty v/s Anti-dumping duty:

- Anti-dumping duty is imposed to prevent low-priced foreign goods from damaging the local market. On the other hand, CVD will apply to foreign products that have enjoyed government subsidies, which eventually leads to very low prices.
- While the Anti-dumping duty amount depends on the margin of dumping, the CVD amount will completely depend on the subsidy value of the foreign goods.

4. ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

4.1 Laughing Gull

Recently, a laughing gull, a migratory bird from North America, has been sighted for the first time in the country at the **Chittari estuary** in **Kasaragod district**.



- The bird is known for its **unique laughter-like calls which resemble human laughter**.
- **Habitat:** These are a coastal species and are only occasionally seen very far inland.
- **Distribution:** These birds are mainly found on the Atlantic coast of North America, the Caribbean, and northern South America.
- **Diet:** They are opportunistic carnivores and scavengers. They eat mainly fish, shellfish, crabs, molluscs, insects, bird eggs, and young birds.
- **Features:**
 - These are medium-sized gulls with fairly long wings and long legs that impart a graceful look when they are flying or walking. They have stout, fairly long bills.
 - They take 2-3 years to gain adult plumage.
 - Conservation Status
 - IUCN: Least Concern

What is an estuary?

- An estuary is an area where a **freshwater river or stream meets the ocean**.
- When freshwater and seawater combine, the water becomes brackish, or slightly salty.
- Types of Estuaries
 - **Coastal plain estuaries:** These are created when sea levels rise and fill in an existing river valley.
 - **Tectonic estuaries:** It is formed due to the shifting together and rifting apart of the Earth's crust.

- **Bar-built estuaries:** When a lagoon or bay is protected from the ocean by a sandbar or barrier island, it is called a bar-built estuary.
- **Fjord estuaries:** These are a type of estuary created by glaciers. Fjord estuaries occur when glaciers carve out a deep, steep valley.

4.2 Green Roofs

According to recent research, green roofs treated with **Mycorrhizal fungi** foster a more diverse soil community that is more likely to support long-term green roof sustainability.



- Green roofs, also known as ‘**vegetated roofs**’ or ‘**living roofs**’ — are ballasted roofs consisting of a waterproofing membrane, growing medium (soil), and vegetation (plants) overlying a traditional roof.
- The layers of green roof systems must, like any roof, accommodate drainage, and storm water management, and protect the building from the elements with a waterproof membrane.
- But they also must create a growing area and potentially provide support, irrigation, and root protection barriers while staying as light as possible.
- Two types of green roofs exist: intensive and extensive.
- **Intensive green roofs** are essentially elevated parks. They can sustain shrubs, trees, walkways and benches with their complex structural support, irrigation, drainage, and root protection layers.
- **Extensive green roofs** are relatively light. They support hearty native ground cover that requires little maintenance. Extensive green roofs usually exist solely for their environmental benefits and don’t function as accessible rooftop gardens.

Benefits:

- Green roofs last longer than conventional roofs, reduce energy costs with natural insulation, create peaceful retreats for people and animals, and absorb storm water, potentially lessening the need for complex and expensive drainage systems.

- On a wider scale, green roofs improve air quality and help reduce the Urban Heat Island Effect, a condition in which city and suburban developments absorb and trap heat.

4.3 Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change (MoEFCC) released the “Status of Snow Leopards in India” report

- The Report is result of **Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)** programme, which carried out **first-ever scientific** exercise estimating snow leopard population.
 - SPAI was launched by MoEFCC in 2019 as part of **PAWS (Population Assessment of World’s Snow Leopard) Program** under **Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP)**.
 - Endorsed in **2013 Bishkek Declaration**, GSLEP is an alliance of all **12 snow leopard range countries and non-governmental partners**.



- Key Highlights of report
 - Estimated Snow leopard population in India stands at 718, with most in Ladakh (477).
 - 70% of land used by snow leopards is still unprotected.
 - Proposed establishing dedicated Snow Leopard Cell at WII and adoption of landscape-level management planning.
- About Snow Leopard (Panthera Uncia)
 - Often termed as Ghost of Mountain, it is an apex predator in Himalayan ecosystem.
 - Feature: White-gray coat spotted with large black rosettes.
 - Habitat: 12 snow leopard range countries
 - (Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).
 - Conservation Status: **Vulnerable** (IUCN), Appendix I of CITES and Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

- Declared **State animal of Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh.**
- Conservation Measures:
 - Three significant landscapes under GSLEP - Hemis-Spiti, Nanda Devi-Gangotri, and Kanchenjunga Tawang.
 - Project Snow Leopard
 - SECURE Himalaya project
- **Khelo India Winter Games 2024** has adopted snow leopard as its mascot and named it ‘**Sheen-e She**’
- **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** is National Coordinator for this SPAI exercise, supported by all snow leopard range states and UTs across trans-Himalayan region.
 - **Established in 1982 in Dehradun**, it is an autonomous institution of MoEFCC.
 - It aims at building **scientific knowledge on wildlife resources, collaborate on wildlife research and advise on specific wildlife management plans.**



4.4 What is Nano DAP?



- It is a **unique liquid fertilizer** product that contains nanoparticles of Di ammonium Phosphate (DAP).
- It is a **source of nitrogen and phosphorus** – 2 key primary nutrient essential for the growth of crops.
- It is containing 8% Nitrogen and 16% Phosphorus by volume.
- Unlike conventional DAP, which comes in granular form, IFFCO’s **Nano DAP is in liquid form.**

- It has an advantage in terms of surface area to volume, as its particle size is less than 100 Nanometre (nm).
- Advantages of NANO DAP
 - **Higher Crop Yield:** Due to small size and more surface area to volume ratio; seed treatment and foliar application of Nano DAP at critical growth stages enhances nutrient availability to crops. Hence, Crop yield increases due to increase in leaf chlorophyll, photosynthesis, root biomass, number of effective tillers and branches.
 - **Quality Food:** Nutritional quality of harvested food produce was found to be better in terms of protein and nutrient content.
 - **Reduction in Chemical Fertilizer Usage:** Enhanced use efficiency of one bottle (500 ml) of Nano DAP can potentially replace the phosphorus requirement met by conventional DAP by 50%.
 - **Environment Friendly:** Production of Nano DAP is energy and resource friendly. Precision and targeted application of this to crops therefore leads to agriculture sustainability and safety of the environment by reducing soil, air and water pollution.
 - It is more pocket-friendly than its conventional counterpart. A 500 ml bottle of Nano DAP, equivalent to a 50-kg bag of conventional DAP
 - It is set to significantly **reduce this import burden.**

What is DAP?

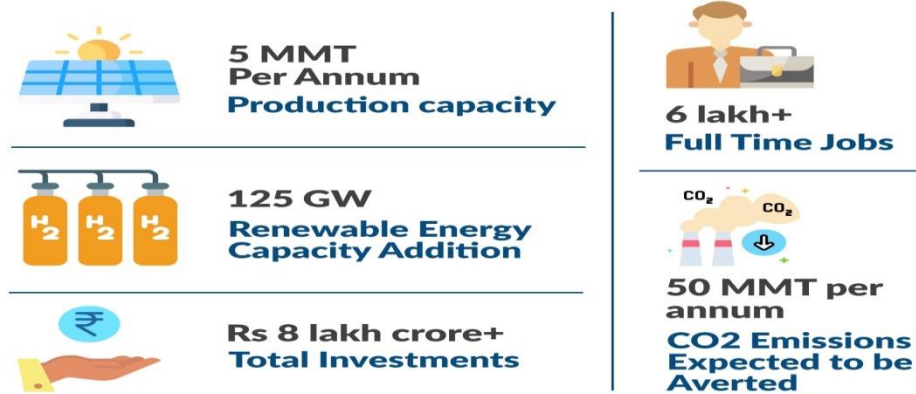
- DAP, or **di-ammonium phosphate**, is the second most commonly used fertiliser in India after urea.
- It is high in phosphorus (P) that stimulates root establishment and development — without which plants cannot grow to their normal size, or will take too long to mature.

4.5 Government issues Guidelines for Pilot Projects for utilizing Green

Hydrogen in the Shipping and Steel Sector

- Guidelines have been issued by the **Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE)** under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM)**.
 - Guidelines call for **retrofitting existing ships** to run on Green Hydrogen and developing bunkering and refuelling facilities on ports for Green Hydrogen fuels.
 - While also providing for the **use of hydrogen in blast furnaces and the substitution of fossil fuels with Hydrogen** in the Steel sector.
- Significance: Both sectors has potential for
 - **Decarbonisation of economy.**
 - **Reduced dependence on fuel imports** through the use of Green Hydrogen or its derivatives (Green Ammonia / Green Methanol) as fuel.

Expected outcomes of the National Green Hydrogen Mission by 2030



Source : Ministry of New and Renewable Energy
Infographic By Graphic Design Team, Polstrat

- Green hydrogen is defined as hydrogen produced by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen using renewable electricity.
- About NGHM:
 - Mission was launched in 2023, to **facilitate demand creation, production, utilization, and export of Green Hydrogen.**
 - Sub-schemes of Mission include:
 - ◆ **Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition Programme (SIGHT):** Supports domestic manufacturing of electrolyzers and offers incentives for the production of green hydrogen.
 - ◆ **Green Hydrogen Hubs:** Identify regions/areas capable of supporting large-scale production or utilization of Hydrogen as Green Hydrogen Hubs.

4.6 What is the Nagoya Protocol?



- The Nagoya Protocol on **Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits** Arising from their Utilisation (the Protocol) is a **legally binding global agreement** that **implements the access and benefit-sharing** obligations of the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**.
- It was adopted by the CBD in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010 and entered into force on October 12, 2014, 90 days after the deposit of the fiftieth instrument of ratification.
- It provides a transparent legal framework for the effective implementation of one of the three objectives of the CBD: the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.
- What are the benefits?
 - It establishes a framework that **helps researchers access genetic resources** for biotechnology research, development, and other activities, in return for a fair share of any benefits from their use.
 - This provides the research and development sector with the certainty they need to invest in biodiversity-based research.
 - **Indigenous and local communities may receive benefits** through a legal framework that respects the value of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources.
- **What does the Nagoya Protocol cover?**
 - It applies to **genetic resources that are covered by the CBD**, and to the benefits arising from their utilisation.
 - It also **covers traditional knowledge (TK)** associated with genetic resources that are covered by the CBD and the benefits arising from their utilisation.

Key Facts about the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):

- CBD, with 196 contracting parties, is the **most comprehensive binding international agreement in the field of nature conservation** and the **sustainable use of natural resources**.
- It was opened for signing at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
- It has three overarching objectives:
 - The conservation of biological diversity (genetic diversity, species diversity, and habitat diversity).
 - The **sustainable use of biological diversity**.
 - The **fair and equitable sharing of the benefits** arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.
- It **covers biodiversity at all levels**: ecosystems, species, and genetic resources.
- The **Conference of the Parties (COP)** is the **highest political decision-making body** of the Convention.
- The **Secretariat** is based in **Montreal, Canada**.
- **To support the implementation** of the CBD objectives, **two internationally binding agreements** were adopted within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

- The Cartagena Protocol, which was adopted in 2000 and entered into force in 2003, **regulates the trans boundary movement of living modified organisms (LMOs)**.
- The **Nagoya Protocol**, adopted in 2010, establishes a legally binding framework for access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their use.

4.7 Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA)

IREDA in partnership with its knowledge partner Boston Consulting Group (BCG) recently convened a Strategic Meeting focusing on key aspects of business expansion and initiatives aimed at cost reduction in fund utilization.



Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA):

- It is a **Mini Ratna (Category-I) non-banking financial institution** under the administrative control of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- It is a **Public Limited Government** Company established as a Non-Banking Financial Institution (NBFC) in 1987.
- IREDA has been notified as a “Public Financial Institution” under Section 4 ‘A’ of the Companies Act, 1956, and registered as **NBFC with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.
- IREDA is primarily engaged in promoting, developing and extending financial assistance for setting up projects relating to new and renewable sources of energy and energy efficiency/conservation.
- IREDA is the **single largest "Green Financier"** in the country. It caters to all technologies in the renewable energy sector and predominantly provides financing for the sector.
- Motto: ENERGY FOR EVER
- Objectives:
 - To give **financial support to specific projects** and schemes **for generating electricity** and/ or energy through new and renewable sources and conserving energy through energy efficiency.

- To maintain its position as a leading organization to provide efficient and effective financing in renewable energy and energy efficiency/ conservation projects.
- To **increase IREDA's share in the renewable energy sector** by way of innovative financing.
- Improvement in the efficiency of services provided to customers through continual improvement of systems, processes, and resources.
- To strive to be a competitive institution through customer satisfaction.
- **Funding:** IREDA generates its revenue through **the interest and principal repayments from the projects it finances**, as well as by **raising funds from the market and through borrowings**.

4.8 GROW Portal

The GROW report and portal was launched by a Member of NITI Aayog.



About GROW Portal:

- The "**Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)-Suitability Mapping**" portal allows universal access to state and district-level data.
- It is hosted on the **Bhuvan website**.
- The GROW initiative aligns with national commitments, aiming to **restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030** and create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.
- The initiative, led by NITI Aayog, involved a collaborative effort from multiple institutions and employed advanced technologies such as **remote sensing and GIS to assess agroforestry suitability** across all districts in India.
- Utilising thematic datasets, the project resulted in the creation of an Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI). This index enables national-level prioritisation for greening and restoration projects.

- This project on prioritisation of wasteland areas suitable for greening is based on the analysis of five remote sensing derived thematic layers land use, wasteland, slope, water proximity and soil organic content.
- These parameters were selected as a result of expert consultations and considered to be the most critical layers in identifying areas that are amenable to interventions with agroforestry. Highest weightage was given to wastelands.
- The developed system provides information on areas suitable for agroforestry across India.
- The areas available in the system are classified as highly suitable, moderately suitable, and less suitable for agroforestry.
- The key features of the system:
 - Generates district-level information on wasteland areas suitable for agroforestry
 - Generates area prioritisation regime i.e. highly suitable area, moderate and less suitable for agroforestry
 - Generates live maps
 - Generates area analysis-statistic report
 - Offer an interactive mode/tool that provides flexibility in handling the weights as per local conditions/need

4.9 International Single Species Action Plan

The **14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP14)** adopted the Single Species Action Plan for the conservation of the Hawksbill Turtle.



About the International Single Species Action Plan:

- It is the key instrument developed under the Agreement on the Conservation of **African-Eurasian Migratory Water birds (AEWA)**.

- **Purpose:** It is for the purpose of implementing coordinated measures to restore migratory waterbird species to a favourable conservation status.
- International cooperation among the species' range states is essential for the implementation of these action plans.

What is the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Water birds (AEWA)?

- It is an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory water birds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Greenland and the Canadian Archipelago.
- It is developed under the framework of the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)** and administered by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- It brings together countries and the wider international conservation community in an effort to establish coordinated conservation and management of migratory water birds throughout their entire migratory range.
- It covers **255 species of migratory water birds** that are ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle.
- The Agreement area stretches from the northern reaches of Canada and the Russian Federation to the southernmost tip of Africa, covering 119 Range States from Africa, Europe, the Middle East and parts of Asia and Canada

The Agreement has three main bodies:

- Meeting of the Parties (MOP), the governing body of AEWA;
- Standing Committee (StC), responsible for steering the operations between sessions of the MOP;
- Technical Committee (TC), responsible for providing scientific and technical advice.
- The Agreement's Secretariat (UNEP/AEWA Secretariat) based in Bonn, Germany, supports the Parties and services the bodies of the Agreement.

5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

5.1 BrahMos

India is all set to begin the export of ground systems for the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines.

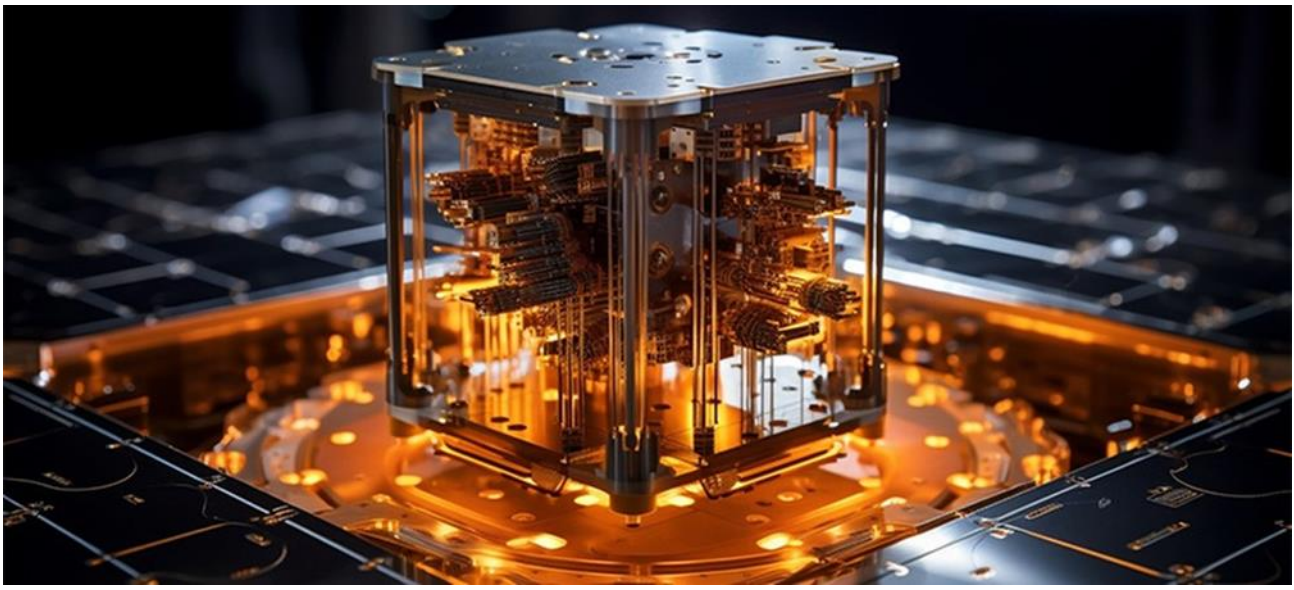


About BrahMos:

- It is a **supersonic cruise missile** that can be launched from land, sea, and air.
- It has been **developed by Brahmos Aerospace, a joint venture of India and Russia.**
- It is named after the rivers Brahmaputra (India) and Moskva (Russia).
- Features:
 - It is a **two-stage missile** with a **solid propellant** booster engine as its **first stage**, which **brings it to supersonic speed** and then gets separated. The **liquid ramjet, or second stage** then takes the missile closer to 3 Mach speed in the cruise phase.
 - It is one of the fastest cruise missiles currently operationally deployed, with a **speed of Mach 2.8**, which is nearly three times more than the speed of sound.
 - It has a launch **weight of 2,200-3,000 kg.**
 - The extended-range variant of the missile can strike land and sea targets at a **maximum range of 400 to 500 kilometers** with supersonic speed all throughout the flight.
 - It operates on the "**Fire and Forgets**" **principle**, adopting varieties of flights on its way to the target.
 - Its cruising altitude could be up to 15 km, and its **terminal altitude is as low as 10 meters.**

- It carries a conventional warhead weighing 200 to 300 kg.
- It is equipped with **stealth technology** designed to make it less visible to radar and other detection methods.
- It has an **inertial navigation system (INS)** for use against ship targets, and an INS/Global Positioning System for use against land targets.

5.2 Quantum Computing



- It is an **area of computer science** focused on the development of technologies **based on the principles of quantum theory**.
- **Quantum theory** explains the **behaviour of energy and material at the atomic and subatomic levels**.
- It is based on the **principles of the superposition** of matter **and quantum entanglement** and uses a different computation method from the traditional one.
- Quantum computers have the capability to sift through huge numbers of possibilities and extract potential solutions to complex problems and challenges.

How does it work?

- Where classical computers store information as bits with either 0s or 1s, quantum computers use qubits.
- While classical bits always represent either one or zero, a qubit can be in a superposition of one and zero simultaneously until its state is measured.
- In addition, the states of multiple qubits can be entangled, meaning that they are linked quantum mechanically to each other.

- Qubits can be made by manipulating atoms, electrically charged atoms called ions, or electrons, or by nanoengineering so-called artificial atoms, such as circuits of superconducting qubits, using a printing method called lithography.

What is Superposition and Entanglement?

- They are two features of quantum physics on which quantum computing is based.
- They empower quantum computers to handle operations at speeds exponentially higher than conventional computers and with much less energy consumption.
- **Superposition:**
 - A **qubit places the quantum information** that it contains **into a state of superposition.**
 - This **refers to a combination of all possible configurations of the qubit.**
 - Groups of qubits in superposition can **create complex, multidimensional computational spaces.**
 - Complex problems can be represented in new ways in these spaces.
- **Entanglement:**
 - Pairs of qubits can be made to become entangled.
 - This **means that the two qubits then exist in a single state.**
 - In such a state, **changing one qubit directly affects the other** in a manner that's predictable.
 - **Quantum algorithms** are **designed to take advantage of this relationship** to solve complex problems.
 - While doubling the number of bits in a classical computer doubles its processing power, **adding qubits results in an exponential upswing in computing power** and ability.

5.3 What is Generative AI?



- Generative AI, or generative artificial intelligence, is a form of artificial intelligence (AI) in which **algorithms automatically produce content in the form of text, images, audio, and video.**
- Unlike traditional AI systems that are designed to recognize patterns and make predictions, generative AI creates new content.
- Generative AI is **powered by foundation models (large AI models) that can multi-task** and perform out-of-the-box tasks, including summarization, Q&A, classification, and more.
- These systems have been **trained on massive amounts of data.**
- **It works by using a Machine Learning (ML) model to learn the patterns** and relationships in a dataset of human-created content. It then uses the learned patterns to generate new content.
- Typically, it starts with a simple text input, called a prompt, in which the user describes the output they want. Then, **various algorithms generate new content according to what the prompt is asking for.**
- Popular Generative AI Tools:
 - **ChatGPT:** It is an **AI-powered chatbot developed by OpenAI**, with a unique ability to not only generate written content but also converse with users fluently.
 - **Bard:** It is a generative **AI chatbot created by Google**, based on LaMDA language model technology. It can answer questions asked by users or create new content from text or image prompts.

What is Machine Learning (ML)?

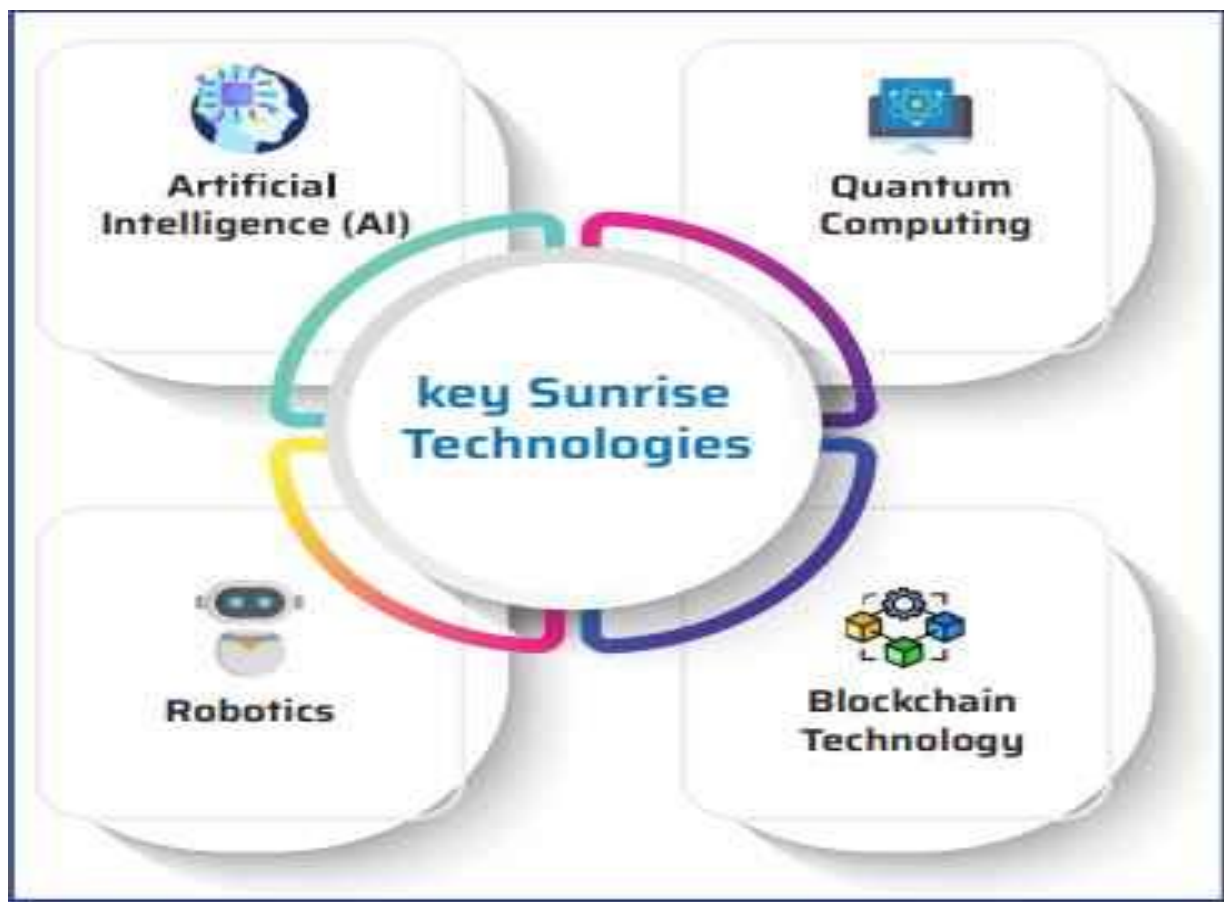
- It is defined as a **discipline of artificial intelligence (AI) that provides machines with the ability to automatically learn from data and past experiences to identify patterns** and make predictions with minimal human intervention.
- Machine learning methods **enable computers to operate autonomously** without explicit programming.
- **ML applications are fed with new data** and they can **independently learn, grow, develop, and adapt.**
- ML algorithms **use computation methods to learn directly from data** instead of relying on any predetermined equation that may serve as a model.

5.4 Interim Budget 2024-25 proposes a corpus of 1 Lakh Crore to boost Sunrise

Technologies

- Corpus will be established with a **fifty-year interest-free loan.**
 - It will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors.
 - It will encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation.
 - ◆ India's **R&D spending as a percentage of GDP (0.7%)** is lower than countries like South Korea, Israel, etc.
 - Also, it will help in enabling high-quality services at affordable prices for all.

- **Sunrise technologies** includes emerging technologies which are currently in their nascent stage of development but have immense potential to offer in future.
- **Opportunities of Sunrise Technologies**
 - **Healthcare:** Early disease detection, personalized medicine using AI, etc.
 - **Agriculture:** Precision agriculture using drones and sensors, datadriven crop management, etc.
 - **Finance:** Data protection using Blockchain-based solutions.
 - **Manufacturing:** Robotics and automation can enhance efficiency and productivity.
 - **Other:** Logistic Efficiency, Drone-based mapping, telemedicine, e-governance, etc.
- **Major Steps Undertaken by Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MEITY)**
 - India AI, implemented with the help of **National Program on Artificial Intelligence**.
 - **National Blockchain Strategy (2021)**
 - Centre of Excellence on Internet of Things and Blockchain Technology, etc.
- Also, a new scheme has been announced for **strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes** and expediting Atmanirbharta.



5.5 Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)

The **Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy** recently informed about the installation of Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) equipment in **thermal power plants**.

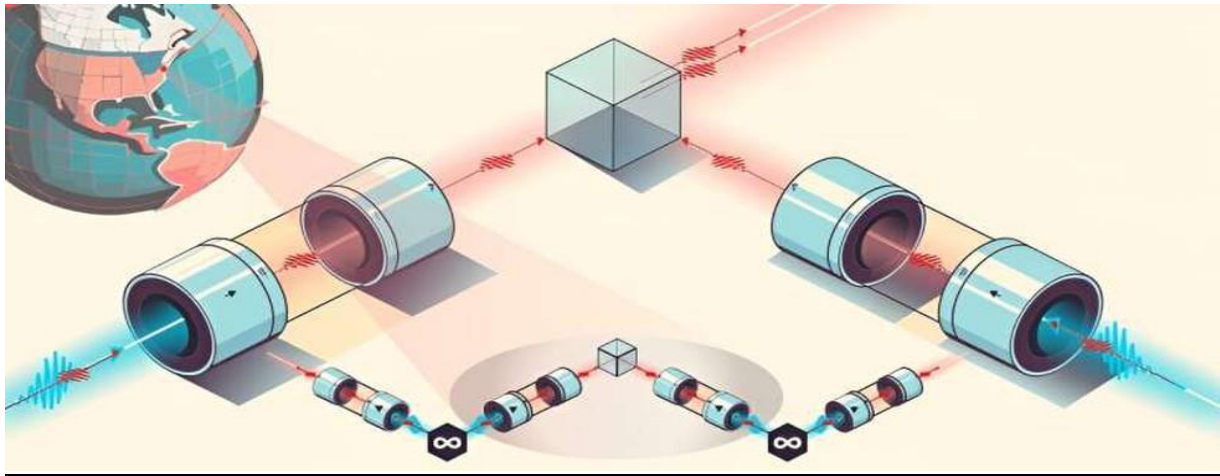
Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD):

- It is a technology to **eliminate sulphur dioxide (SO₂) from exhaust emissions.**
- Where does Sulphur Dioxide come from?
 - **Fossil fuels** such as coal and oil often **contain high amounts of sulphur**, and when these fuels are burned, around 95% or more of the sulphur is converted to sulphur dioxide (SO₂), which is emitted as flue gas.
 - **Sulphur dioxide in itself is a major air pollutant** which impacts all life. It is also a precursor of acid rain, which has significant adverse impacts on forests, freshwaters, and soils, in turn killing insect and aquatic life forms, causing paint to peel, corrosion of steel structures such as bridges, and weathering of stone buildings and statues.
 - The removal of sulphur dioxide is critical to establishing a safe and clean environment where toxic emissions are kept to a safe level.



- FGD Process:
 - FGD is done through the **addition of absorbents**, which can remove up to 95% of the sulphur dioxide from the flue gas.
 - Substances such as **ammonia or sodium sulphite** are used as absorbents; however, the use of lime or limestone slurry (wet limestone scrubbing) is also widespread.
 - The **un-cleaned flue gas is sprayed in a scrubber tower** (absorber tower) with a mixture of water and limestone (scrubbing slurry), whereby most of the sulphur dioxide is bonded by chemical reaction.

5.6 Quantum Internet



- It is a theorised and much sought-after **network of interconnected quantum computers** that will allow people to send, compute, and receive information using **quantum technology**.
- A quantum internet would be a network of quantum computers, sensors, and communication devices that will create, process, and transmit quantum states and entanglement.
- It is anticipated to enhance society's internet system and provide certain services and securities that the current internet does not have.
- The purpose of the quantum internet is not to replace the internet we know today, but to instead **create a co-existent network that can be used to solve specific types of problems**.

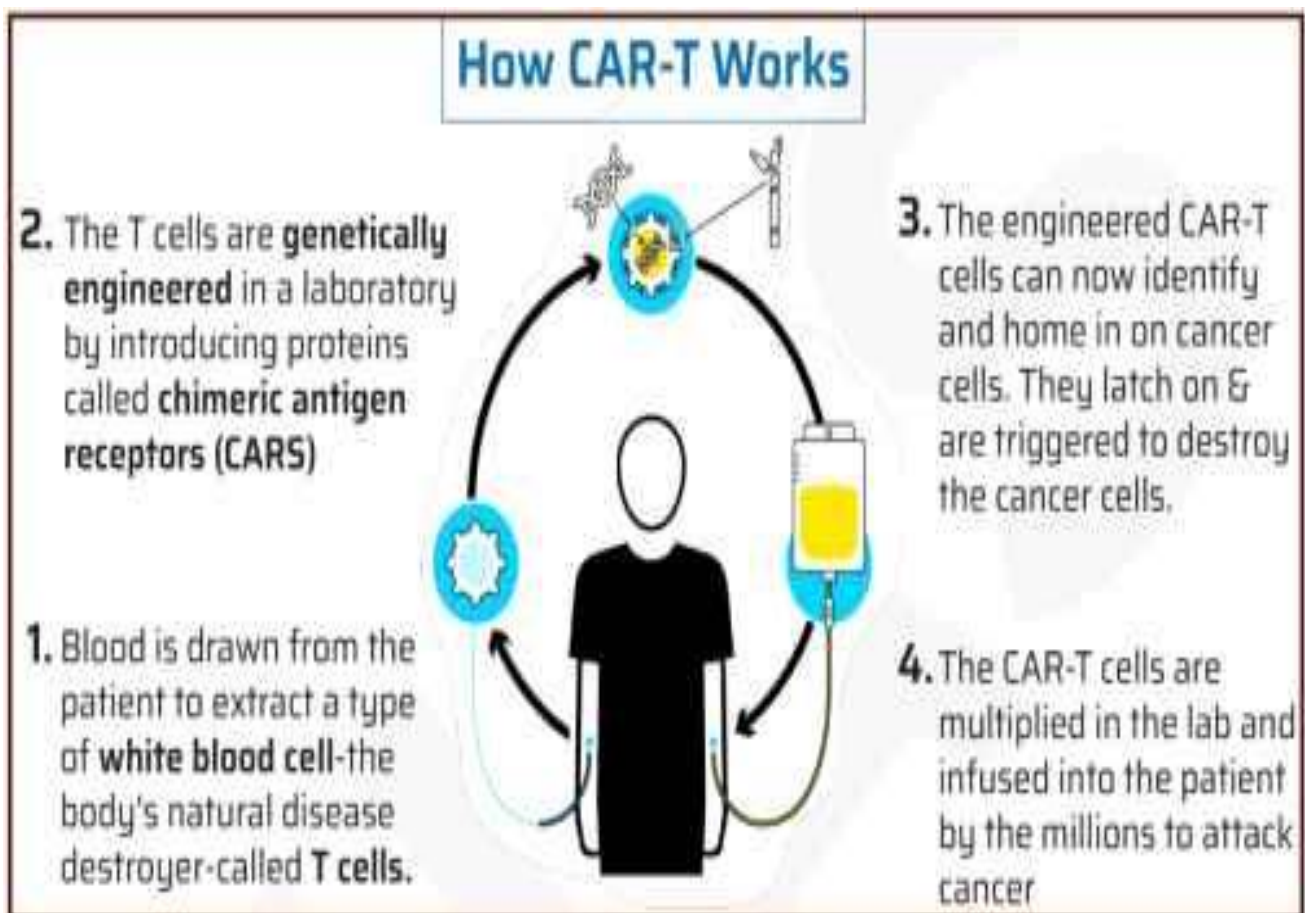
Working:

- Quantum computers use fundamental units of information similar to the bits used in classical computing. These are called “qubits.”
- However, unlike conventional computer bits—which convey information as a 0 or 1—qubits convey information through a combination of quantum states, which are unique conditions found only on the subatomic scale.
- Qubits are not either 0 or 1, but rather both and neither, in a quantum phenomenon called superposition.

5.7 Cancer remission achieved after commercial use of NexCAR19, India’s first indigenous CAR-T cell therapy

- NexCAR19 has been developed by **ImmunoAct**, a company incubated under **IIT Bombay**, and **Tata Memorial Hospital**.
 - NexCAR19 was granted market authorization by **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)** in 2023.

- CAR-T cell therapy is a **new approach in immunotherapy**, where the patient's **immune system is strengthened** to attack cancer cells.
 - It restores the **ability of the T-cells** to recognise the cancer cells and kill them.
 - T-cells are **white blood cells** that recognize and fight infections and cancerous growths.
 - In advanced stages, cancer cells can **inactivate T-cells** or modify themselves so that T-cells cannot detect them.
 - Therapy involves **genetic engineering of T-cells** by introducing **Chimeric Antigen Receptors (CARs)**, to produce **CAR T-cells**.
 - CARs are proteins that **assist T-cells to recognise** and attach to a specific protein, or antigen, present on cancer cells.



- Significance of CAR-T cell therapy:
 - Very effective against some types of cancer e.g. **Leukemia, Lymphoma**.
 - **Short treatment time** and **more rapid recovery** as unlike chemotherapy, it is administered only once to a patient.
 - Useful for cancers **not responding to combinations of chemotherapy** or other immunotherapy approaches.
 - CAR T-cells are known as **living drugs** as T-cells persist in the body for long-term and can benefit for many years.

5.8 Open Radio Access Network



The **Ministry of Science and Technology** announced the development of a new technological solution tailored for **Open Radio Access Network (ORAN)** based stations.

Open Radio Access Network:

- It is a key part of a mobile network system that uses cellular radio connections to link individual devices to other parts of a network.
- It comprises **antennae**, which transmits and receives signals to and from our smartphones or other compatible devices.
- The signal is then digitised in the RAN-base station and connected to the network.
- **ORAN base station**
 - ORAN base station solutions represent a pivotal element in the evolution of telecommunications infrastructure.
 - This innovation aims to **deliver high-speed and dependable connectivity** at a feasible cost, particularly targeting underserved and remote regions, as per a recent press release.
 - Its focus lies in creating **efficient wireless communication technology** for 5G and 5G-advanced radio networks, ensuring spectral and energy efficiency.

Significance:

- A new niche technological solution for Open Radio Access Network (ORAN) base stations will help to **facilitate high-speed and reliable connectivity** at a cost that is viable for unconnected and far-flung areas.
- It provides access to different components of the network infrastructure making it easier, efficient and more economically viable to provide internet in remote areas.

- The breaking down of the Radio Access Network (RAN) functions help in **bringing down network cost and complexity**.
- Open RAN removes vendor lock-in and can facilitate smooth interoperability between cellular network equipment provided by different vendors.
- COMET, one of the 25 **Technology Innovation Hubs (TIH)** set up under the **National Mission for Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)**, of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) for enhancing the nation's capabilities in Advanced Communication Systems.
- The ORAN base station radio unit developed at **IIT Hyderabad (IITH)** introduced a revolutionary ORAN technology harnessing a multitude of antennas on cell towers.

5.9 National Science Day 2024

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology recently released the theme for the "National Science Day 2024", titled "Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat".



- It is celebrated **every year on February 28** to mark the contributions of scientists towards the development of the country.
- On this day, in 1928, **Indian Physicist Sir CV Raman** made an important discovery in the field of spectroscopy, which was later named after him: the Raman Effect.
- For this discovery, he was also awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930.

History:

- The National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), in 1986, asked the Government of India to announce **February 28 as National Science Day**.
- The government accepted and declared the day National Science Day.
- The first National Science Day was celebrated on February 28, 1987.

What is the Raman Effect?

- The Raman effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules.
- When a beam of light traverses a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound, a small fraction of the light emerges in directions other than those of the incident (incoming) beam.
- Most of this scattered light is of an unchanged wavelength. A small part, however, has wavelengths different from that of the incident light; its presence is a result of the Raman Effect.

6. SOCIAL ISSUES

6.1 All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022

- The AISHE report has been published by the **Ministry of Education** since 2011.
- **Aim: To portray the status of higher education in the country.**
- The survey **covers all the institutions** in the country **engaged in imparting higher education.**
- Data is being collected on **several parameters**, such as teachers, student enrolment, programmes, examination results, education finance, and infrastructure.
- Indicators of educational development such as Institution Density, Gross Enrolment Ratio, Pupil-teacher ratio, Gender Parity Index, Per Student Expenditure will also be calculated from the data collected through AISHE.
- For the purpose of this survey, **Higher Education is defined as education that is obtained after completing 12 years of schooling or equivalent.**
- **Initiated in 2011**, AISHE is the main **source of comprehensive statistics on the Higher Education scenario in India.**
 - For the first time all the major Stakeholders in Higher Education participated in data collection exercise through **electronic mode.**
 - It utilized online data collection platform through the Web Data Capture Format (Web DCF) format.
 - Web DCF has been developed by the Department of Higher Education and the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

Parameters	2021-2022	Trend with respect to 2014-15
Total Student Enrolment: Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan are top 6 states	4.33 crore	26.5% increase
Female Enrolment	2.07 crore	32% increase
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): Percentage of students in 18-23 age group enrolled in higher education.	28.4	Increase from 23.7
Female GER	28.5	Increase from 22.9
Gender Parity Index (GPI): Ratio of female GER to male GER	1.01	Above 1 since 2017-18 indicating more female GER compared to male GER since 2017-18
Female per 100 male faculty	77	Increase from 75 in 2020-21

Highlights of AISHE 2021-22:

- In 2021-22, the **overall gross enrolment ratio (GER)** in higher education for the age group 18-23 years increased to 28.4%, from 27.3% in 2020-21 and 23.7% in 2014-15, the base year.
- **Female GER increased** to 28.5% (2.07 crore) in 2021-22 from 27.9 (2.01 crore) in 2020-21 and 22.9 percent in 2014-15.
- **The GER of Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) students** has also **increased** by around 2%. In 2020-21, the GER of SC students was 25.6% and ST was 23.4%, while in 2021-22 it increased to 27.2% and 25.8% respectively.
- The **enrolment of OBC students has also increased** to 1.63 crore in 2021-22 from 1.13 crore in 2014-15.
- About **78.9 per cent** of the total students are enrolled in **undergraduate level** courses and 12.1 per cent are enrolled in postgraduate level courses.
- Among disciplines at the undergraduate-level in AISHE 2021-22, enrolment is **highest in Arts (34.2%)**, followed by **science (14.8%)**, Commerce (13.3%), and Engineering and Technology (11.8%).
- Among streams at **postgraduate-level** in AISHE 2021-22, maximum students are enrolled in **Social Science (21.1%)**, followed by science (14.7%).
- **Government Universities constituting 58.6%** of total Universities, contribute 73.7% of total enrolment, and Private Universities account for 26.3% of total enrolment.
- The total number of Universities / University level institutions registered is 1,168, Colleges 45,473 and Standalone Institutions 12,002.
- As per the survey, the total number of faculty/teachers in 2021-22 is 15.98 lakh, of which about 56.6% are male and 43.4% are female.

6.2 World Health Organisation (WHO) awards countries for progress in eliminating industrially produced trans fats for first time.

- WHO has awarded **first-ever validation certificates** to **Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand** in eliminating industrially-produced trans-fatty acids (iTFA).
 - Total of **53 countries have now best practice policies in effect for tackling iTFA in food**, improving food environment for 46% of world's population.
- **To be validated for trans-fat elimination**, countries should demonstrate:
 - **A best-practice for iTFA elimination policy is in effect** in country; and
 - Applicant country has **adequate monitoring and enforcement systems in place**.
- **WHO criteria for Best practices in iTFA elimination policies**
 - **Mandatory national limit of 2 grams of iTFA per 100 grams of total fat in all foods;**
 - **Mandatory national ban on production or use of Partially Hydrogenated Oils (PHO-** major source of trans-fat) as an ingredient in all foods.
 - **Combination of PHO ban and iTFA 2% limit.**
- Trans-fats are unsaturated fats produced from vegetable oils.

- There are **two forms of trans-fat i.e. Naturally-occurring trans-fats** (dairy and meat products), Industrially produced transfat (packaged foods, cooking oils etc.).
- They are source of non-communicable disease and associated with increased risk of heart attacks.

Steps taken to regulate TFA

• India

- Eat Right India Movement by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).
- FSSAI made mandatory to declare TFA content on nutrition label.

• Global

- REPLACE initiative by WHO.
 - ◆ REview dietary sources of industrially produced trans-fat.
 - ◆ Promote replacement of industrially produced trans-fat.
 - ◆ Legislate to eliminate industrially produced trans-fat.
 - ◆ Assess trans-fat content in food supply.
 - ◆ Create awareness of negative health impact.
 - ◆ Enforce compliance with policies

6.3 One Stop Centre Scheme

The Union Minister for Women and Child Development said that One Stop Centres to help women who have faced violence have been established in **over 700 districts across the country.**



One Stop Centre scheme:

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme formulated under the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).

Objectives:

- To **provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence**, both in private and public spaces under one roof.
- To **facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services** including medical, legal, psychological and counselling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.

Target group:

- It supports **all women including girls below 18 years** of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.
- For girls below 18 years of age, institutions and authorities established under the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000** and the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012** linked with the OSC.

Funding:

- The Scheme will be funded through the Nirbhaya Fund. The Central Government will provide **100% financial assistance** under the Scheme.

Administration:

- The day-to-day implementation and administrative matters would be the responsibility of the **District Collector/District Magistrate**.
- The OSC will facilitate access to- Emergency Response and Rescue Services, Medical assistance, assistance to women in lodging FIR/ NCR/DIR, psycho-social support/counselling, legal aid and counselling, shelter and a **Video Conferencing Facility**.

6.4 Aadi Mahotsav

The **President of India** will inaugurate the Aadi Mahotsav 2024, an **annual national tribal festival**, at **Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium** in **New Delhi** on February 10.

- It is organised by **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED)** under the aegis of **the Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, and will showcase the rich diversity of India's tribal heritage.
- It is not only a platform to exhibit the extraordinary talent and craftsmanship of **tribal artisans** but also an **opportunity to interact, learn, and contribute to the empowerment of tribal communities**.

- The festival will feature an expanded showcase with over 300 stalls, offering varied display of Tribal art, handicrafts, natural produce, and delectable tribal cuisine.

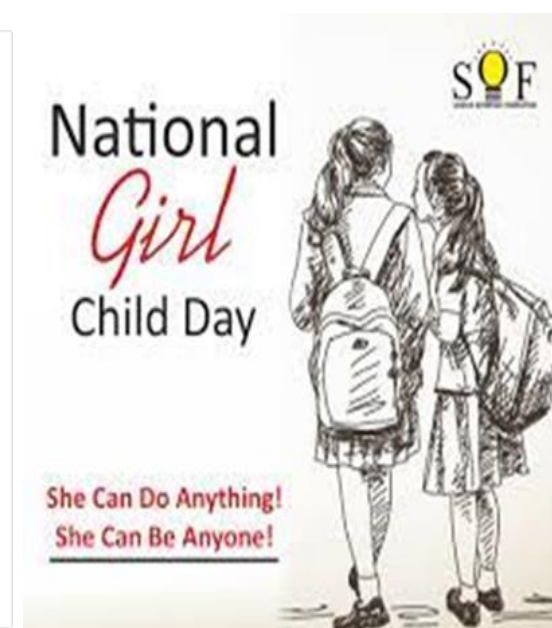


What is TRIFED?

- It is a **national-level organisation** under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- It is primarily engaged in the **development and marketing of tribal handicrafts and natural products**.
- It came into existence in 1987 and got registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 1984 (now the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002**).
- **Mandate: Capability enhancement** for Tribals, promotion of tribal products, and **creation of marketing opportunities** for the Tribals with a view to ensuring remunerative prices for their products and augmenting their income on a sustainable basis.
- It has been entrusted by the Government of India to implement its proposed **Minimum Support Price Scheme for Minor Forest Produce**.
- **Head Office:** New Delhi

6.5 National Girl Child Day

- Since 2008, **January 24** is celebrated as **National Girl Child Day** for promoting **equal opportunities** for girl child while **raising awareness of the injustices that girls face**.
 - On January 24 1966 Smt. Indira Gandhi took her oath as the **first woman Prime Minister of India**.
 - Now it also commemorates anniversary of **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** Scheme which was launched on January 22, 2015.
 - ◆ BBBP aims to improve the **child sex ratio** and **empower girls and women** throughout their lives.



6.6 What is GHAR (GO Home and Re-Unite) Portal?

GHAR - GO Home and Re-Unite Portal have been developed and launched by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).



- It is a portal to **digitally monitor and track** the **restoration and repatriation of children** according to the protocols under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and Rules thereof.
- It has been developed and launched by the **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)**.
- The following are the salient features of the portal:
 - **Digital tracking and monitoring** of children who are in the Juvenile Justice system and have to be repatriated to another Country/State/District.
 - **Digital transfer of cases** of children to the concerned **Juvenile Justice Board/Child Welfare Committee of the State**. It will help in the speedy repatriation of children.
 - Where there is a requirement of a translator/interpreter/expert, request will be made to the concerned State Government.
 - Child Welfare Committees and District Child Protection Officers can ensure proper restoration and rehabilitation of children by **digitally monitoring the progress of the case**.
 - A checklist format will be provided in the forms so that the children who are being hard to repatriate or children who are not getting their entitled compensation or other monetary benefits can be identified.
 - List of Government implemented schemes will be provided, so that at the time of restoration, the Child Welfare Committees can link the child with the schemes to strengthen the family and ensure that the child remains with his/her family.

Key Facts about NCPCR:

- It has been **constituted by the Government** of India under the **Commission for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005**, and is mandated to function for the protection and promotion of child rights.
- It has the following functions:

- **Examine and review existing safeguards** for the protection of child rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation.
- **Report annually** and at other intervals to the central government on the effectiveness of these safeguards.
- **Investigate violations of child rights and recommend legal proceedings** in appropriate cases.
- **Review existing policies, programs, and activities related to child rights** and make recommendations for their improvement.
- **Promote research** in the field of child rights.
- **Raise awareness of child rights** and available safeguards through various means, such as publications, media, and seminars.
- **Inspect institutions** where children are detained or reside, including juvenile homes, and recommend remedial action if necessary.
- **Investigate complaints** and take suo motu notice of issues related to the deprivation and violation of child rights and the non-implementation of laws protecting and developing children.
- The Commission, while investigating, shall **have all the powers of a civil court**.
- The Commission is further mandated to monitor the proper and effective implementation of
 - Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.
 - Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.
 - Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

6.7 National Creators Award

The **Prime Minister Of India** hailed the initiative of the **National Creators Award**, saying it was a great opportunity for the creator community, putting the spotlight on the extraordinary talent across India.



- It is the **first-of-its-kind** award that will be targeted at "**Gen Z**", a reference to the young generation hooked to the internet and social media.
- The award aims to achieve:
 - **Spotlight on Change makers:** Putting change-makers on centre stage – recognizing and boosting digital creators that are making an impact

- **Amplify Diverse Voices:** It wants to elevate the influence of digital media on social impact, creating a buzz that can't be ignored
- **Connect and Collaborate:** It brings a community of creators, leaders & government on one platform to spur a social revolution, a national movement during 'Amrit Kaal'
- **Empower the Next Wave:** It's a launchpad for using creativity to drive positive change.
- Eligibility Criteria:
 - Age Requirement: Participants must be **18 years of age** or above at the time of nomination.
 - Nationality and Residency: **19 categories** are open **exclusively to** individuals of **Indian** nationality. **One category is dedicated to international digital creators.**
 - Platforms: Content must be published on **one or more** of the following digital platforms: Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook.
 - Language: Content submission can be in **English or any other Indian language.**
 - Nomination Limits: Creators can **self-nominate** in a maximum of **three categories.** Those **nominating others can nominate in all 20 categories.**

7. ART & CULTURE

7.1 National Flag

Unfurling' and 'hoisting' of National Flag

- On **January 26**, flag is folded or rolled-up, and attached to the top of a pole.
- ◆ It is then unveiled (**'unfurled'**) by the **President**, who does so without pulling it up at **Kartavya Path, New Delhi**.
- On **August 15**, the flag, positioned at the bottom of the pole, is raised (**'hoisted'**) by **Prime Minister**, from



About National Flag

- Designed by **Pingali Venkayya in 1921**.
- It was adopted on **22 July 1947**.
- Ratio of length to the height (width) of the Flag shall be **3:2**.
- Horizontal tricolor of **deep saffron (kesari)** at the top, **white in the middle** and **dark green at the bottom** in equal proportion.
- The saffron colour signifies the **strength and courage** of the country, while the white colour represents **peace and truth**. Whereas the green colour indicates **fertility, growth and auspiciousness of the land**.

7.2 Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia Dargah

- It is located in **Delhi's** Nizamuddin West area.
- It is the **mausoleum** of the famous **Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Auliya** (1238-1325 CE).
- It was built in the **14th** Century C.E.



Features:

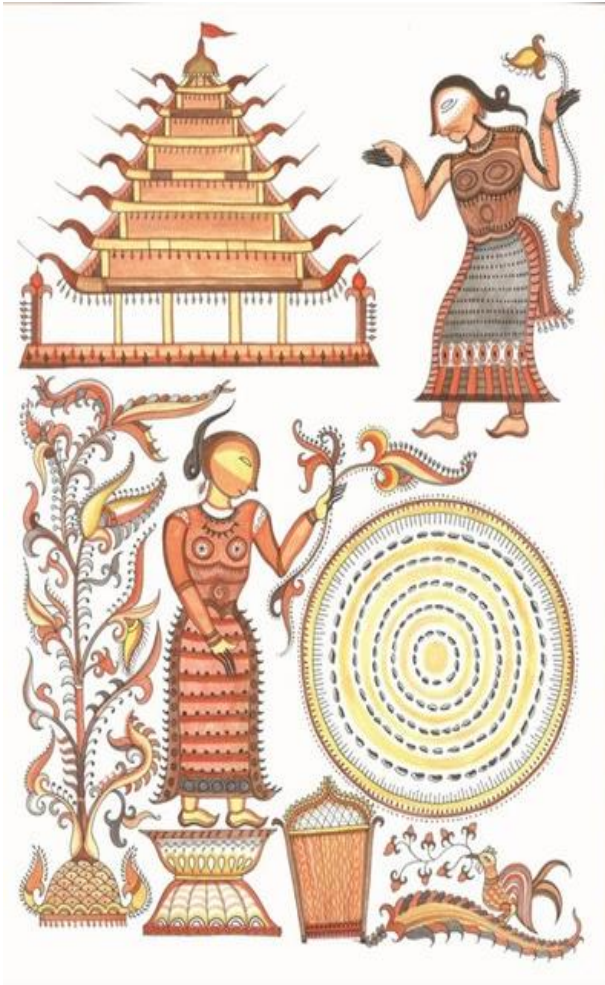
- It consists of a **square chamber surrounded by verandas**, which are pierced by arched openings.
- The **dome is ornamented by vertical stripes of black marble** and is crowned by a lotus-crested.
- Inside the dargah complex, one can find the **tombs of Nizamuddin Auliya's saints: Jahanara Begum, Shah Jahan's favourite daughter, and poet Amir Khusru.**
- Towards the north side of Dargah, there is a stepwell.
- On the north-eastern side, there is a **16th-century tomb of Atgah Khan**, who was a powerful minister in Emperor Akbar's court.
- The site is also known for its **evening qawwali devotional music sessions.**

Who was Nizamuddin Auliya?

- Syed Muhammad Nizamuddin Auliya was one of the most famous **Sufi saints** from the Indian subcontinent region.
- Also known as **Hazrat Nizamuddin** and Mahbub-e-Ilahi (Beloved of God), he was a **Sunni Muslim scholar and Sufi saint of the Chishti Order.**
- Like most of the Chishti Sufi saints, Nizamuddin Auliya **stressed love as a means of realising God.** He believed the love of God implied a love of humanity.
- Some of the famous disciples of Nizamuddin include **Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag Delhavi, Amir Khusro**, and the royal poet of the Delhi Sultanate.

7.3 Subika Painting

Manipur boasts a rich cultural heritage but some of its invaluable art forms like Subika Paintings are on the brink of extinction due to neglect.



- It is a style of painting which is intricately linked to the **Meitei community's** cultural history.
- It is surviving through its six manuscripts — **Subika, Subika Achouba, Subika Laishaba, Subika Choudit, Subika Cheithil and Thengrakhel Subika.**
- Although the royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba, doesn't mention a specific founder, there is a possibility that this art form existed when the writing tradition was introduced in the state.
- Experts estimate the use of Subika paintings since the **18th or 19th century.**

Key points about Subika Laishaba:

- The painting of Subika Laishaba is a composition of **cultural motifs** made by pre-existing features and other influences stimulated by their cultural worldviews.
- Among the six manuscripts, **Subika Laishaba** represents a direct and authentic continuation of the Meitei cultural tradition depicted through visual images.
- The illustrations of Subika Laishaba have visual language from the elements such as **lines, shapes, forms, colours, and patterns.**
- These visual images become Meitei's cultural motif, and structure to create visual effects as well as express cultural significance, meaning and values.
- The visual images found in this manuscript are **painted on handmade paper.**
- It is also found that the materials of manuscripts are prepared indigenously either **handmade paper or barks of trees.**

7.4 Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar programme



- It is a pan-India initiative of the **Ministry of Culture** under the **National Mission on Cultural Mapping** and was launched on **27th July 2023**.
- It seeks to compile **comprehensive information detailing the life, history, and ethos of Indian villages and to make the same available to virtual and real-time visitors.**
- Under the MGMD, information is collected under seven broad categories as given below-
 - Arts and Crafts Village
 - Ecologically Oriented Village
 - Scholastic Village Linked with Textual and Scriptural Traditions of India
 - Epic Village linked with Ramayana, Mahabharata and/or Puranic legends and oral epics
 - Historical Village linked with Local and National History
 - Architectural Heritage Village
 - Any other characteristic that may need highlighting such as fishing village, horticulture village, shepherding village etc.
- **Objective:** The main objective of the project is to **culturally map India's 6.5 lakh villages, spanning 29 States and 7 Union Territories, on a comprehensive virtual platform.**
- Through MGMD, people will get an opportunity to immerse themselves in the diverse and vibrant cultural heritage of India.
- The core idea behind this project is to encourage appreciation for India's culture and traditions, paving the way for economic growth, social harmony, and artistic development in rural communities.
- The financial outlay of Rs.353.46 Crore is approved under the scheme of **Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture** consisting of 08 scheme components namely;
 - Financial Assistance to Cultural organisations with National Presence
 - Cultural Function & Production Grant (CFPG)
 - Financial Assistance for the Preservation & Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas
 - Financial Assistance for the Preservation & Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Organization
 - Financial Assistance for Building Grants including Studio Theatres
 - Financial Assistance For Allied Cultural Activities

- Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage

7.5 Dhokra Shilpkala



- **Chhattisgarh's** Ocher Studio is helping to preserve India's 4,000-year-old craft- Dhokra Shilpkala
- The word "Dhokra" is believed to be derived from the **Dhokra Damar tribes**, who are the traditional metal smiths of **Central India**.
- The origins of Dhokra Shilpkala can be traced back to the tribal communities residing in the regions of **Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha**, where it evolved as an integral part of their cultural and religious practices.
- Technique and Process: What sets Dhokra Shilpkala apart is its remarkable technique of **metal casting**, which involves using the **lost wax casting method**, also known as **cire perdue**.
- Artistry and Designs:
 - Its design has rustic charm and the organic nature of its designs.
 - Artisans draw inspiration from nature, mythology, and everyday life, incorporating motifs such as animals, birds, deities, and tribal symbols into their creations.
 - From miniature figurines and jewellery to larger-than-life sculptures and functional objects, Dhokra Shilpkala encompasses a wide range of artistic expressions.
- Issues: The rapid pace of urbanisation, coupled with the rise of mechanised **production techniques**, has threatened the livelihoods of traditional artisans and endangered this ancient craft.

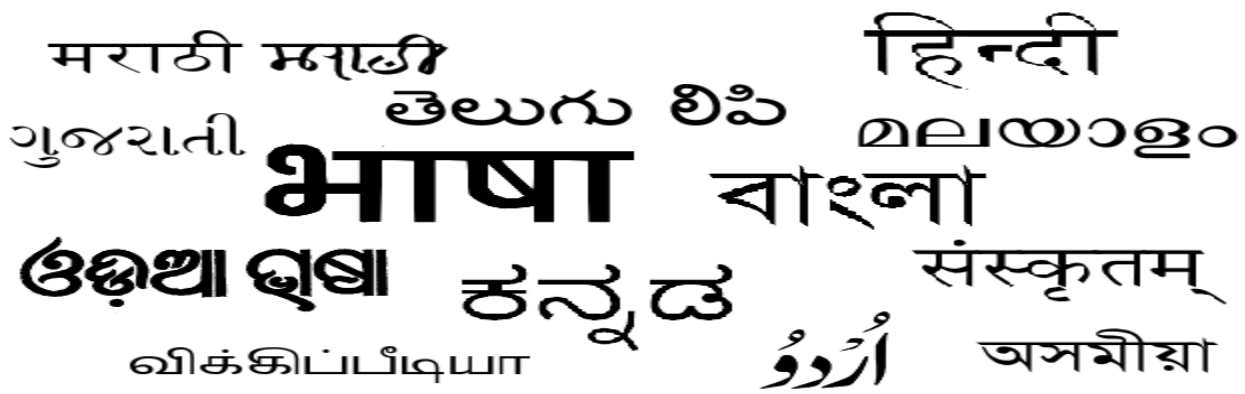
What is the Lost wax method?

- The process begins with the creation of a **clay core**, which serves as the base for the final metal sculpture.
- Artisans then coat this clay core with a layer of **beeswax**, meticulously sculpting the intricate designs and patterns by hand.
- Once the wax model is complete, it is covered with layers of clay, forming a mould around the wax pattern.

- The entire structure is then heated, **allowing the wax to melt and drain out**, leaving behind a cavity in the shape of the original sculpture.
- Molten metal, typically a combination of brass and bronze, is poured into this cavity, filling the space left by the melted wax.
- After cooling and solidifying, the clay mould is broken away, revealing the final metal casting.

7.6 Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti

The **Chairman of Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti** advocated for the promotion of Indian languages in education and stated that textbooks will soon be available in Indian languages **on digital platforms**.



Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti:

- It is a **High-Powered Committee** for the Promotion of Indian Languages.
- It has been constituted by the **Ministry of Education**, Government of India in 2021.
- **Mandate:** The mandate of this committee would be to explore and recommend pathways for the holistic and multidisciplinary growth of Indian languages as envisaged in the National Education Policy 2020.
- It has also been entrusted to advise the Ministry on all matters pertaining to the revitalization of existing language teaching and research and its extension in various institutions in the country.
- To perform the tasks assigned to it, the High-Powered Committee may appoint sub-committees/study groups.
- The committee may organise seminars, workshops, conferences, and webinars to highlight the need for the promotion of Indian languages.
- It may also interact and coordinate with any institution of the Central/State Government dealing with teaching, research, and extension/promotion of languages.
- **Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University (SLBSNSU)**, New Delhi would provide **secretarial assistance** and space to house the High-Powered Committee and meet the related expenditure as per the Government of India rules, regulations and instructions from time to time.

- The SLBSNSU has been also entrusted to appoint consultants and experts/scholars/officials/young professionals on a short-term basis and to conduct seminars, workshops, webinars, etc. as per the recommendations of the Committee.
- Necessary finance towards the same would be provided by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to the University under relevant budget heads.

8. PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

8.1 Rohan Bopanna

- Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna became the oldest world number 1 in men's doubles tennis.
- He is also the oldest tennis player to reach the Grand Slam final.
- He has a Grand Slam title and five ATP Masters 1000 titles.
- Contributions:
 - Represented India at the 2012 and 2016 editions of the Olympics.
 - Member of India's Davis Cup team since 2002.



8.2 Homi Jehangir Bhabha (1909-1966)



- He was remembered on his death anniversary, 25 January 2024.
- Contributions
 - Considered to be **father of India's nuclear program**.
 - Devised India's **three-stage nuclear power program in 1954**.
 - Established two great research institutions namely **Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)** and **Atomic Energy Establishment** at Trombay.
 - Known for **Bhabha scattering**.
 - Published a string of widely-accepted papers on his theories regarding cosmic ray showers.
 - To become Chairman of **Atomic Energy Commission** of India. First person

8.3 Field Marshal Kodandera Madappa Cariappa or KM Cariappa (28 January 1899 - 15 May 1993)



- 125th birth anniversary of K.M. Cariappa was celebrated.
- Contributions:
 - Served as **First Indian Commander-in-Chief of Indian Army** from 1949- 1953.
 - He was instrumental in
 - ◆ Integration of troops and turning an imperial army into a national army.
 - ◆ Raised the Brigade of the Guards and Parachute Regiments on an all-India caste composition.
- Awards:
 - ◆ Order of the Chief Commander of the Legion Merit in 1949 by US President.
 - ◆ Order of the British Empire for his role in Second World War.

8.4 Kalpana Chawla(1962-2003)



- Kalpana was an Indian-born American astronaut and **the first Indian-born woman to fly in space.**
- Life as an Astronaut
 - She flew on STS-87 (1997) and STS-107 (2003), logging 30 days, 14 hours and 54 minutes in space.
 - She and her crew lost their lives during Space Shuttle Columbia's re-entry into the atmosphere in 2003.
- Honour and recognition
 - The **first exclusive meteorological satellite built** by ISRO was named Kalpana.
 - **Kalpana Chawla award** for acts of bravery by women by the Tamil nadu government.
 - A **lunar crater Chawla** is named after her.
- Values: Courage, Passion for Science, determination, Perseverance.

8.5 Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati (1824 - 1883)

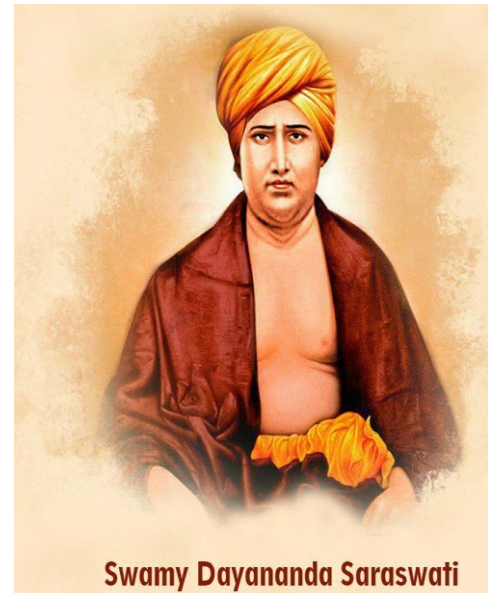
PM addresses Programme on 200th Birth Anniversary of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati

About Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati:

- Born at Morvi in Kathiawar (Gujarat) was a philosopher and a social reformer.
- Original name: Mula Shankar.
- Was a disciple of Swami Virajananda.
- **Founder of Arya Samaj.**

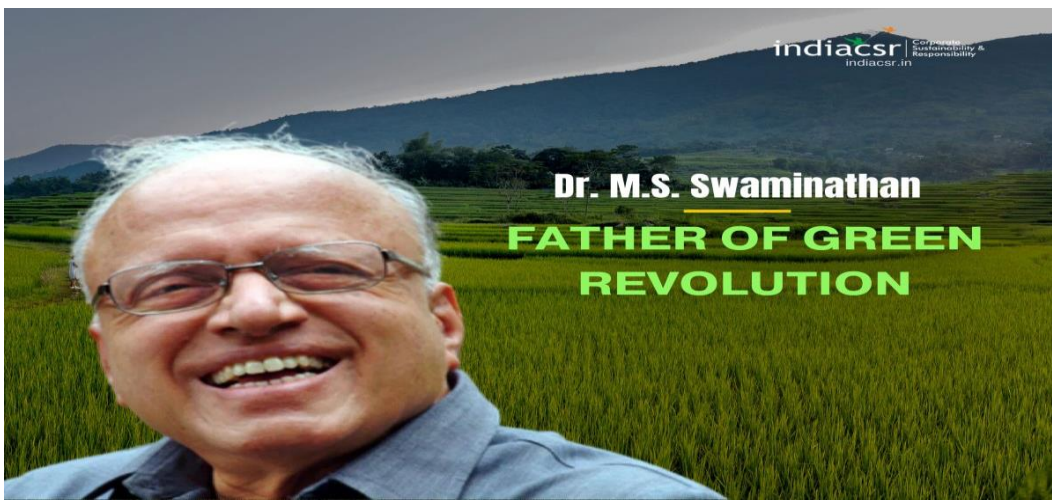
Key Contributions:

- **Religious reforms:** Denounced idolatry and ritualistic worship, preached respect and reverence for other human beings.
 - **Believed in infallible authority of Vedas** and gave slogan of 'Back to Vedas'.
- **Social reforms:** Claimed caste is not supposed to be hereditary but rather on the basis of individual's talents and disposition.
 - Was against practice of untouchability and advocated Vedic education for all castes.
 - **Opposed child marriage and forced widowhood and campaigned for women's education.**



- Political: Gave call for '**Swarajya**' as '**India for Indians**' in 1876 and favoured political system based on enlightened monarchy.
- Literary works: **Satyartha Prakash, Veda Bhasya Bhumika, Veda Bhasya**, etc.
- Contemporary relevance of Dayananda Saraswati
 - **Value-based education**: Emphasis on universal truths, humanism, work for common welfare, etc.
 - **Scientific temper and rational thinking**: He led crusade against superstitions and orthodoxy.
 - **Social justice**: Eradication of discrimination based on caste, creed, sect, etc.

8.6 Dr. M S Swaminathan (1925 - 2023)



Dr. Swaminathan has been **conferred with Bharat Ratna**.

Key contributions:

- Architect of **India's Green Revolution during 1960s**.
- Along with Norman Borlaug, developed **high-yielding varieties** of wheat.
- Promoted knowledge, skill, and technological empowerment of women in agriculture.
- As head of National Commission on Farmers (2004-06), recommended Minimum Support Price for farmers based on Comprehensive cost of Production.

Rewards and recognitions: First World Food Prize Laureate (1987), S.S. Bhatnagar Award (1961), etc.

Values: Leadership, Scientism, Compassion, Dedication to Public Service, etc.

8.7 Lord Mahavira

- He was the **twenty-fourth** and the **last Tirthankara of the Jain religion**.

- Mahavir was born in 599 B.C. as a prince in Bihar. At the age of 30, he left his family and royal household, gave up his worldly possessions, including clothing, and became a monk.
- He followed an extreme ascetic life, attaining kaivalya, the stage of omniscience or highest perception.
- Mahavira advocated nonviolence (ahimsa) in all circumstances and the acceptance of the mahavratas, the five “great vows” of renunciation.



- At the heart of right conduct for Jains lie the five great vows:
 - **Nonviolence (Ahimsa):** not to cause harm to any living beings
 - **Truthfulness (Satya):** to speak the harmless truth only
 - **Non-stealing (Asteya):** not to take anything not properly given
 - **Chastity (Brahmacharya):** not to indulge in sensual pleasure
 - **Non-possession/Non-attachment (Aparigraha):** complete detachment from people, places, and material things.

Mahavir’s Teachings:

- He **organised his followers into a fourfold order**, namely **monk (Sadhu)**, **nun (Sadhvi)**, **layman (Shravak)**, and **laywoman (Shravika)**. Later on, they are known as Jains.
- The ultimate objective of his teaching is how **one can attain total freedom from the cycle of birth**, life, pain, misery, and death, and achieve the permanent blissful state of one's self. This is also known as liberation, nirvana, absolute freedom, or Moksha.
- He preached that **right faith (Samyak-darshan)**, **right knowledge (Samyak-jnana)**, and **right conduct (Samyak-charitra)** together will help attain the liberation of one's self.
- Mahavir's message of nonviolence (Ahimsa), truth (Satya), non-stealing (Achaurya), celibacy (Brahma charya), and non-possession (Aparigraha) is full of universal compassion.
- Mahavir rejected the concept of God as a creator, a protector, and a destroyer of the universe. He also denounced the worshipping of gods and goddesses as a means of material gains and personal benefits.

CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQ'S FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2024

1. Ratle Hydro Electric Project is a run-of-river hydroelectric project being built on:
 - a) Kaveri
 - b) Sutlej
 - c) Chenab
 - d) Brahmaputra

2. The 'INS Sumitra', seen in the news recently, is a:
 - a) Nuclear-powered aircraft carrier
 - b) Diesel-electric attack submarine
 - c) Stealth destroyer
 - d) Patrol vessel

3. How does Generative AI differ from traditional AI systems?
 - a) It produces new content rather than making predictions.
 - b) It is designed only for specific, narrow tasks.
 - c) It focuses only on recognizing patterns in data
 - d) It relies only on human input for decision-making.

4. What is the primary source of Mitochondrial coxiella effector F (MceF) protein?
 - a) Plants
 - b) Bacteria
 - c) Animals
 - d) Fungi

5. Consider the following statements regarding Anti-Profiteering provisions under the Goods and Services Tax (GST):
 - 1) Under these provisions, it's illegal for a business to not pass on the benefits of the GST rate benefits to the end consumer.
 - 2) The GST Council has the power to determine the methodology for determining whether a taxable person is engaging in illegal profiteering.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

6. Consider the following statements regarding Laughing gull:

- 1) It is mainly found on the Atlantic coast of North America.
- 2) It is a completely herbivore animal.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

7. Consider the following statements regarding the Economic Community of West African States:

- 1) It was established through the Lagos Treaty in 1975.
- 2) It aims to create a borderless region that is governed on the principles of democracy.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

8. With reference to E Ink display, consider the following statements:

- 1) It is a special type of screen technology.
- 2) It works using tiny microcapsules filled with charged particles.
- 3) Unlike LCD and LED displays, it requires a backlight.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

9. Exercise Sada Tanseeq is conducted between India and:

- a) Australia
- b) Bhutan
- c) Iran
- d) Saudi Arabia

10. Consider the following statements regarding Sloth bear:

- 1) They live in a variety of dry and moist forest habitats.
- 2) They are endemic to India only.

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

11. Consider the following statements regarding Halwa Ceremony, recently seen in the news:

- 1) It is a tradition performed every year to celebrate a successful budget presentation.
- 2) It takes place every year in the Lok Sabha.

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. With reference to the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA), consider the following statements:

- 1) It is a statutory body constituted under the Companies Act, 2013.
- 2) It regulates the auditing profession and accounting standards in India.
- 3) Its members are appointed by an industry led consortium from private sector.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

13. The Grantha script, once used to write Sanskrit, was mainly from:

- a) Western Himalayas
- b) Northeast India
- c) South East Asia and Tamil Nadu
- d) Middle East Asia

14. Consider the following statements regarding Default Bail:

- 1) It is given when the police fail to complete the investigation within the time frame stipulated under the law.
- 2) It is liable to be cancelled upon submission of the charge sheet.

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

15. Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) primarily deals with:

- a) Assault and murder
- b) Theft and burglary
- c) Cheating and dishonest inducement
- d) Corruption in public sector

16. Consider the following statements regarding Smart rings:

- 1) It is equipped with advanced sensors that can track stress levels.
- 2) It can be used for contactless payment.

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

17. Consider the following statements regarding the National Voters' Day:

- 1) It is celebrated on 25th January every year to create electoral awareness amongst citizens.

2) It is celebrated to mark the foundation day of the Election Commission 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

18. Consider the following statements regarding the Wandering albatrosses:

- 1) It is the world's largest flying bird found exclusively in the in the Southern Hemisphere.
- 2) It is listed as critically endangered species under the IUCN Red List.

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

19. With reference to Soda Lake, consider the following statements:

- 1) It occurs naturally in both arid and semi-arid areas.
- 2) Africa and Asia have the highest number of soda lakes.
- 3) It is a less productive ecosystem as compared to the freshwater lakes.

How many of the statements given above are incorrect?

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

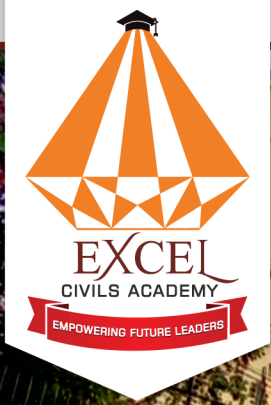
20. 'Disease X', recently seen in news, is a:

- a) Genetic disease
- b) Neglected tropical disease
- c) Plant disease
- d) Hypothetical pathogen for future pandemic

KEYS

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

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