ENSURE IAS

March, 2023

CURRENT AFFAIRS

- Science & Tech
- Culture
- Polity & Governance
- Security
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Monthly
Current Affairs

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Week 1
CURRENT AFFAIRS

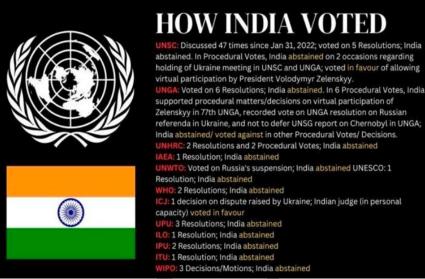## 1.1 EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S POSITION ON RUSSIA UKRAINE WAR

As the Russia-Ukraine war completes a year, the United Nations General Assembly is discussing a resolution calling for the need to reach, as soon as possible, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.
Various countries, including Ukraine, have urged India to support a UNGA resolution timed for the first anniversary of the war.

INDIA'S QUEST FOR STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

- For India, the Ukraine war has been an opportunity to practice strategic autonomy.

- Adopting a nuanced neutrality, Delhi has maintained its relationship with Moscow and worked around Western sanctions to buy oil from Russia.

- As much as 25% of India's oil purchase is now from Russia, from less than 2% before the war.

INDIA'S POTENTIAL

In a recent report, **New York Times** focussed on **India's possible role in pressing for peace between Russia and Ukraine** amidst the **visit of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's** to Moscow.
It also reported that **India is trying to refashion** India's tradition of **non-alignment** into a more commanding strategy of **"all alignment".**
The daily also highlighted that if the peacemaking efforts succeed, it can **bring a more prominent place for India in the global order** and bring it closer to the long-sought prize, a **permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).**

THE CALIBRATED RESPONSE

- **Expressed displeasure**: India has made its disapproval of Russia's action clear even if it has **refrained from voting against** it on substantive resolutions in United Nations forums, including the Security Council.

- **Limited outcry:** The **maximum extent** that India has gone to is of Indian PM openly telling Russian President Vladimir Putin in Samarkand (September 2022) that **the present age was not one of war.**

- **Peaceful resolution:** India has **advocated a return to diplomacy** and dialogue and has intervened in specific cases with Russia.

○ For example, to prevent it from endangering the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant (in Ukraine) or to allow the export of Ukraine foodgrains.

●**Minimal outcomes**: But all the above steps are far from attempts to mediate or bring the parties to the negotiating table.

INDIA ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

●As Russian President Putin and other Russian leaders made nuclear threats, India expressed concern.

●India categorically said that no side should resort to the nuclear option.

○Later, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief said PM Modi's concerns about the use of nuclear weapons have had an impact on the Russians amid Ukraine war.

●**India and the issue of food grains**

○New Delhi was approached by Ukraine and other partners to intercede when the issue of food grains being blocked by Russia was raised.

○India stepped in to convey its message to Moscow.

●**India: SCO & G-20 declaration**

○PM Modi's said to Russian President in Samarkand in September 2022 on the sidelines of the SCO: that "this is not an era of war".

○This became India's mantra, which even found its way into the G-20 declaration in Bali.

●**First virtual summit of the Voice of the Global South**

○New Delhi's position also evolved as it felt the impact of the rising energy prices and prices of commodities.

○In January 2023, India hosted the first virtual summit of the Voice of the Global South, where it raised the issue of rising prices of food, fuel and fertiliser.

○It also flagged the concerns of the developing and the less-developed world on energy and food security. This will now be the consistent theme till the G-20 summit.

●**India and the upcoming G-20 summit**

○With a year of geopolitical turmoil due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, India — as the chair of G-20 — will face the challenge of negotiating a declaration while balancing between Russia and the West.

1.2 SOCIAL STOCK EXCHANGE

SSE is a novel idea in India, and a stock exchange of this kind is intended to benefit the private and non-profit sectors by directing more capital to them.
The SSE will function as a distinct division of the current stock exchanges under the new regulations.

WHICH ENTITIES CAN BE LISTED?

●**Not-for-profit organisations** (NPOs) and for-profit social enterprises with social intent and impact as their primary goal will be eligible to participate in the SSE.

●The social enterprises will have to engage in a social activity out of 16 broad activities listed by the regulator. The eligible activities include-

●Eradicating hunger poverty, malnutrition and inequality

●Promoting healthcare, supporting education, employability and livelihoods

●Gender equality empowerment of women LGBTQIA communities.

●Supporting incubators of social enterprise.

●**Corporate foundations**, political or **religious organisations or activities**, professional or trade associations, infrastructure companies, and housing companies, except affordable housing, will not be eligible to be identified as social enterprises.

●According to Sebi's framework, a **minimum issue size of ₹1 crore** and a minimum application size for the subscription of ₹2 lakh are currently required for SSE.

1.3 JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE (JWST)

Recently, the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has discovered six extraordinarily massive **first-generation galaxies,** formed roughly 500-700 million years after the Big Bang,

ABOUT JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE (JULY)

James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) recently delivered **deepest infrared image** of universe yet.

Known as Webb's **First Deep Field image** shows the galaxy cluster **SMACS 0723** as it appeared 4.6 billion years ago.

One of the goals of JWST was to **search for first galaxies or luminous objects** formed after Big Bang along with other goals of **determining how galaxies evolved,** observing stars formation etc.

JWST, NASA's s infrared flagship observatory, is an **international collaboration** between **NASA, European Space Agency, and Canadian Space Agency**.

It is placed in Sun-Earth Lagrange Point 2 (L2).

COMPARISON BETWEEN JWST & HUBBLE

	HUBBLE	JWST
Distance from Earth	507 km	1.5 Million km
Primary Mirror Diameter	2.4 metre	6.5 metre
Searching for	Young galaxies	Young & New born galaxies
Serviceable	Yes	No
Wavelength	Visible, UV, Part of near infra red	Near & mid infrared.

1.4 THE PUNJAB TURMOIL (KHALISTAN MOVEMENT)

Accused in a kidnapping and assault case, **Lovepreet Singh alias Toofan Singh** was released from jail in Punjab's Ajnala.

Lovepreet Singh is a close aide of **self-styled Sikh preache**r and **Khalistani sympathiser Amritpal Singh.** He was released a day after hundreds of protesters stormed a police station demanding his release.

WHO IS AMRITPAL SINGH?

●Amritpal Singh, 29, is a follower of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (pro-Khalistan).

●In fact, he is being dubbed 'Bhindranwale 2.0' in Punjab these days.

●Recently, he took the reins of the **'Waris Punjab De'** organisation following the death of its founder, actor-activist Deep Sidhu.

ABOUT WARIS PUNJAB DE

●**'Waris Punjab De'**, translating to their **'heirs of Punjab'**, was floated by lawyer-actor-turned-activist Sandeep Singh alias Deep Sidhu in September 2021, ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections.

●The social organisation was originally floated as a pressure group to protect and fight for rights of Punjab and raise social issues.

●It works to help the youth of the state follow the tenets of Sikhism and establish Khalsa Raj.

●Its founder had described it as an organisation that would fight for the rights of Punjab against the Centre and raise voice whenever there will be any attack on the culture, language, social fabric and rights of Punjab.

ABOUT THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT:

The aim of this movement was to establish a buffer sovereign state of Punjab to be named Khalistan i.e. **Land of the Khalsa**. (Such a state existed in Punjab from 1709 to 1849)

The claimed state would have geographical proximity with Pakistan and J&K. Terrorism in Punjab thus had clear connections with Pakistan and the ISI.

EVOLUTION OF THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT

❖ **1947 Partition of India-** A bitter memory for the sikhs.

❖ **Punjabi Suba movement**- A fight by the sikhs for a separate state for themselves.

❖ **State Reorganisation Committees verdict:** which rejected the demand of Akali Dal.

❖ **Formation of Punjab (1966)**

❖ **Anandpur Sahib resolution:** A demand for autonomy for the state of Punjab & a separate constitution for them.

THE MOVEMENT

The Anandpur Sahib resolution inspired Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale- a religious scholar who'd been travelling across Punjab advocating a return to the Khalsa or a more orthodox form of Sikhism.

He targeted Hindus and 'modernised' Sikhs, who cut their hair and consumed alcohol in equal measure.

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, inspired by the Khalistan ideology, led the Khalistan movement as an extremist movement and turned against the Indian government.

Demands for separate nation-hood for Punjab was carried out through violent protests and killings of high profile persons in the Indian government.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MOVEMENT

From early 1980s to early 1990s, Punjab went through a phase of wide-spread terrorism, where Pakistan's ISI tried to forment the violence by providing support to extremist groups

EXTREMIST GROUPS INVOLVED: Manifold extremist groups like the Khalistan Liberation Force, Khalistan Commando Force, Babbar Khalsa, Damdami Taksal and umpteen others gained prominence and roamed around freely across Punjab.

OPERATION BLUESTAR: Operation Blue star was conducted to capture Bhindrawale in Golden Temple Complex. He, along with others, were neutralised by the Indian Army.

THE AFTERMATH OF OPERATION BLUESTAR

❖ ASSASINATION OF INDIRA GANDHI IN 1984 FOLLOWED BY DELHI SIKH RIOTS.

❖ BLOWING UP OF AN AIR INDIA FLIGHT COMING FROM CANADA (1985)

❖ ASSASINATION OF EX ARMY CHIEF **General AS Vaidya** who led the Operation Bluestar.

❖ ASSASINATION OF PUNJAB CM BEANT SINGH IN 1995.

❖ PUNJAB REFERENDUM 2020 IN LONDON.

❖   SUPPORT OF THE KHALISTANIS IN THE ANTI CAA/NRC PROTESTS AND THE FARMER PROTESTS OF 2021.

WHAT AFTER KHALISTAN?

After Punjab, **Pakistan targeted Kashmir.** The already existing separation sentiment against India, among a section of Kashmiris was in favour of Pakistan. The operations were carried out from PoK based terror groups.

1.5 G20 FINANCE MEET

First G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors under India's G20 Presidency meeting began in Bengaluru.

PM Modi addressed the meeting via video message.

THE ISSUE OF UNSUSTAINABLE DEBT

● According to a new policy brief published by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, 52 low and middle-income developing economies are either in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress.

○ This accounts for more than **40 percent of the world's poorest people**.

● 25 developing economy governments have external debt service payments higher than 20 percent of total revenue – the highest number of countries in more than 20 years.

○ **External debt** is the portion of a country's debt that is borrowed from foreign lenders, including commercial banks, governments, or international financial institutions.

○ **Debt service** refers to the money required to pay the principal and interest on an outstanding debt for a particular period of time.

● The UNDP report added that a **30 percent haircut** on their public external debt stock in 2021 could help save up to $148 billion in debt service payments over eight years.

○ Specific to **debt restructuring**, a haircut is the **reduction** of **outstanding interest** payments or a portion of a bond payable that will not be repaid.

○ In other words, a debt haircut refers to part of the debt being "written off".

○ e.g. When a bank takes a 'haircut', it means it accepts less than what was due in a particular loan account

● In December 2022, World Bank had said that the world's poorest countries owe $62 billion in annual debt service, a year-on-year increase of 35%, warning of a rising risk of defaults.

● India's neighbours Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan have sought a bailout from the IMF over the past year due to a sharp economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

STEPS TAKEN

● Debt restructuring along with inflation control and harnessing digital progress were also listed as crucial policy priorities by IMF.

● **Under the G20 Presidency**, India has been pressing for ways to tackle the aggravated debt vulnerabilities facing developing nations mainly on account of the continuing geopolitical tensions and the pandemic.

● In order to help vulnerable countries, creditors are preferring to have a haircut (**debt forgiveness).**

● On the other hand, there are group of countries, led by China, who are using **rescheduling with lower interest rates** as to tool to help these vulnerable countries.

HIGHLIGHT OF PM's SPEECH

● **Raised the issue of unsustainable debt levels in many countries**

○ PM Modi flagged the threat to financial viability of many countries from unsustainable debt levels.

● **Reform in multilateral institutions**

○PM Modi said trust in international financial institutions has eroded "partly because they have been slow to reform themselves".

○In this context, he called upon the custodians of the leading economies and monetary systems of the world to bring back stability, confidence and growth to the global economy.

● **Highlighted after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic**

○The Prime Minister said many countries, especially developing economies, are still coping with the after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which delivered a once-in-a-century blow to the global economy.

● **Made a reference to the rising geopolitical tensions**

○He also made a reference to the rising geopolitical tensions in different parts of the world, without naming the Russia-Ukraine war directly.

○There are disruptions in global supply chains. Many societies are suffering due to rising prices. And, food and energy security have become major concerns across the world.

● **Attention must be given to the most vulnerable citizens**

○Only by creating an inclusive agenda, will the global economic leadership win back the confidence of the world.

● **Highlighted role of technology in the world of Finance**

○In the world of finance, technology is increasingly dominant. During the pandemic, digital payments enabled contactless and seamless transactions.

○PM cited India's experience of creating a highly secure, highly trusted, and highly efficient public digital infrastructure.

○India's digital payments ecosystem has been developed as a free public good.

○This has radically transformed governance, financial inclusion, and ease-of-living in the country.

1.6 DEKHO APNA DESH

Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) will be operating the Baba Saheb Ambedkar Yatra tour package under the "Dekho Apna Desh" initiative.

WHY IN NEWS?

●The Baba Saheb Ambedkar Yatra, designed by IRCTC, aims to highlight the places and destinations associated with Ambedkar's life.

●The First Journey of the Baba Saheb Ambedkar Yatra will be from New Delhi in April 2023.

●As part of the "Dekho Apna Desh" initiative, the Ministry of Railways, in collaboration with the Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), operates Bharat Gaurav Tourist Trains on various theme-based circuits throughout India.

ABOUT

●**Nodal Ministry:** The Ministry of Tourism

●The scheme aims to **promote tourism** and encourage people to explore the rich cultural heritage and diversity of India.

●The scheme is intended to offer financial help to tourists travelling to different parts of India.

●The government has set aside a substantial budget for the implementation of this scheme, which will be used to promote travel and build out tourist infrastructure around the nation.

●**Objectives:** The scheme aims to increase domestic tourism in India and under this plan, around 50 destinations in the country will be developed and promoted to attract tourists.

1.7 HATE SPEECH

The Supreme Court granted interim bail to **Pawan Khera, under section 153A of IPC** chairman of the media and publicity department of the **All-India Congress Committee**, who had been arrested for alleged hate speech by Assam Police earlier.

WHAT IS SECTION 153A OF IPC?
Under Section 153A of IPC, '**promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc.,** and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony', is an offence punishable with three years' imprisonment.

ABOUT HATE SPEECH
Hate speech **has not been defined in any law in India.** The concept of **hate speech is not defined in international law also.**
Instead, the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** calls for the prohibition by law of the advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence
However, In the **267th Report of the Law Commission of India**, hate speech is stated as an **incitement to hatred primarily against a group of persons defined in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief and the like.**

WHAT ARE THE FORMS OF HATE SPEECH?
Hate speech can be conveyed through **any form of expression**, including **images**, **cartoons, memes, objects, gestures and symbols** and it can be disseminated offline or online.
The term hate speech **has been used invariably** to mean expression which is **abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing or which incites violence, hatred or discrimination** against groups identified by characteristics such as one's **race, religion, place of birth, residence, region, language, caste or community, sexual orientation or personal convictions** among many others.

WHAT ARE THE LAWS AROUND HATE SPEECH?

●**Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860:** Various Sections like 153A, 153B, 298 etc. of the Indian Penal Code 1860 deal with speech or words that could create mischief, outrage religious beliefs or cause imputations to national integration.

●**Representation of The People Act, 1951:**

○Section 8 disqualifies a person from contesting election if he is convicted for indulging in acts amounting to illegitimate use of freedom of speech and expression.

○Section 123(3A) and section 125 prohibits promotion of enmity on grounds of religion, race, caste, community, or language in connection with election as a corrupt electoral practice and prohibits it.

●**Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955:** Section 7 penalises incitement to, and encouragement of untouchability through words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise.

CHALLENGES IN COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

●**Clash with the freedom of speech and expression:** The anti-hate speech law is contested because of its clash with the freedom of speech and expression of an individual.

●**Curb Dissent:** Any attempt to regulate hate speech need not shrink the space for criticism and dissent, which are covered by the human right of a person to free speech and expression.

●**No proper definition:** There is no general legal definition of hate speech. It is difficult to identify or classify content as hate.

1.8 INS SINDHUKESARI
INS Sindhukesari has become the first Indian submarine to dock in **Indonesia.**
About INS Sindhukesari :

●It is a **3,000-tonne Kilo-class diesel-electric submarine**.

●It was **designed as part of Project 877** and built under a **contract between**Rosvooruzhenie**, Russia**, and the Ministry of Defence (**India**).
Features:

●It has a **displacement of 3,000 tons.**

●It has a **maximum diving depth of 300 meters**, a **speed of up to 18 knots**, and can **operate solo for 45 days with a crew of 53.**

KILO CLASS SUBMARINES

●The Kilo Class is the **NATO designation for a naval diesel-electric submarine made in Russia.**

●The **original version** of the vessels were **designated Project 877** Paltus (Halibut) in Russia.

●They are mainly **intended for anti-shipping and anti-submarine operations in** relatively **shallow waters.**

●The **first Kilo Class submarine** entered service in the **Soviet Navy in 1980**, and the vessel continues to be in service in the Russian Navy.

●These submarines are **70-74 meters long**. It can travel at a m**aximum speed of 10-12 knots when surfaced** and **17-25 knots when underwater**.

●These vessels **can carry up to eight surface-to-air missiles** and **18 torpedoes or 14 underwater mines.**

1.9 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INDEX
India ranks **42nd among 55** leading global economies on the recently released International IP Index.

WHAT IS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY?

●It refers to **creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names, and images** used in commerce.

●Intellectual property rights (IPR) refers to the legal rights given to the inventor or creator to protect his invention or creation for a certain period of time.

●There are several types of intellectual property protection like patent, copyright, trademark, etc.

ABOUT THE INDEX

●It is **released** annually **by the US Chamber of Commerce.**

●The index **evaluates IP rights in 55 global economies across 50 unique indicators.**

●The indicators include **patent and copyright policies** to **commercialization of IP assets,** and **ratification of international treaties**.

●The index **aims to help nations navigate toward a brighter economic future** marked by greater innovation, creativity, and competitiveness.

●**International IP Index 2023: The United States is ranked first**, followed by the UK and France. **India is ranked 42nd in the index.**

1.10 FATF SUSPENDS RUSSIA's MEMBERSHIP

Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recently suspended Russia's membership.
The step has been taken in wake of the ongoing Russia Ukraine war.

ABOUT FATF

❖ The FATF is an **inter-governmental body** that **sets international standards** seeking to **prevent international financial crimes** that aid terrorism.

❖ The FATF was established in **July 1989 by a G-7 Summit in Paris**, initially to examine and develop measures to **combat money laundering**.

❖ After the **9/11 attacks**, the FATF in October 2001 expanded its mandate to incorporate **efforts to combat terrorist financing.**

❖ The FATF has developed the **FATF Recommendations**, or **FATF Standards**, which ensure a co-ordinated global response to **prevent organised crime**, corruption and terrorism.

❖ FATF maintains two lists: Grey list & Black list.

GREY & BLACK LIST OF FATF

Grey List:

● Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. These are countries under increased monitoring.

● This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

● **23 countries** remain under watch.

● Among these countries are the Philippines, Syria, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Uganda, Morocco, Jamaica, Cambodia, Burkina Faso, and South Sudan, and the tax havens of Barbados, Cayman Islands, and Panama.

Black List:

● Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. Currently **Iran & North Korea** are under Black List countries.

What happens when a country is placed in Grey List?

● **IMF and World Bank** are affiliated with FATF as observers, a grey-listed country **faces complications in accessing international lending instruments.**

● It signals to the global financial and banking system about increased risks in transactions with the country in question.

● Grey listing means FATF has placed a country under **increased monitoring** to check its progress on measures against money laundering and terrorism financing.

1.11 CHIP 4 ALLIANCE

The "Chip 4" semiconductor alliance recently held its first meeting of senior officials.

WHAT IS SEMICONDUCTOR?

● **Semiconductors** are materials that **have a conductivity between conductors** (generally metals) **and non conductors or insulators** (such as most ceramics).

● They **can be pure elements**, such as silicon or germanium, **or compounds** like gallium arsenide or cadmium selenide.

- Due to their **specific electrical properties**, semiconductors **serve as a foundation for computers** and other electronic devices.

- Semiconductors **are used in many electrical circuits** because of the **ability to control the flow of electrons** in this material, for example, with a controlling current.

ABOUT CHIP 4

- The "**Chip 4**" or "**Fab 4**" alliance includes **four of the world's top producers of semiconductors: the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, and Korea.**

- It represents more than **70 percent of the value** of the **global semiconductor industry**.

- It was **first proposed by the US in March 2022** as part of wider plans aimed at enhancing the "security" and "resilience" of semiconductor supply chains, including by reducing the world's reliance on chips made in China.

- It is intended to **cooperate on policy implementation** that would **support sustainable semiconductor manufacturing** in the member states' home countries.

GOALS

- Support industry efforts to **diversify their manufacturing base** in semiconductor production.

- **Protect the Intellectual Property (IP) of companies** in member countries.

- **Develop policies** regarding the **export of the most advanced semiconductors** and equipment.

1.12 EXERCISE DESERT FLAG

Indian Air Force is participating in Exercise Desert Flag VIII 110 which is hosted by the United Arab Emirates.

About Exercise Desert Flag VIII:

- It is an annual **multinational large-force employment warfare** exercise hosted by the UAE Air Force.

- The IAF would be participating with five Light Combat Aircraft, LCA Tejas and two C-17 Globemaster III aircraft.

- **Participants:** Air Forces from UAE, France, Kuwait, Australia, the UK, Bahrain, Morocco, Spain, the Republic of Korea, and the USA would also be participating.

- The exercise is scheduled from the 27th of February to the 17th of March.

1.13 APPOINTMENT OF CEC & EC

The SC, in a landmark judgement, stated that the CEC & EC shall be appointed by a committee consisting of:

- The PM
- Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha
- Chief Justice of India

Ruling on petitions seeking an independent mechanism to appoint the CEC and ECs, a five-judge Constitution Bench presided by Justice K M Joseph said **where no Leader of Opposition is available**, the committee will include the **leader of the largest Opposition party in Lok Sabha in terms of numerical strength.**

ABOUT THE POST

- **View of Constitution:**

○ The power to appoint the CEC and the ECs lies with the **President of India** under **Article 324(2) of the Constitution**, which states that **"the President shall fix the number of ECs in a manner he sees fit, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament".**

○ Thus, **Article 324(2)** left it open for the Parliament to legislate on the issue.

- **Procedure:**

○ But, in the absence of any Parliamentary law governing the appointment issue, the **ECs are appointed by the government of the day,** without pursuing any consultation process.

○There is **no concept of collegium and no involvement of the opposition.**

TENURE & QUALIFICATION

●**Tenure:** The Commissioners are appointed for a **6-year period, or up to the age of 65 years,** whichever is earlier.

●**Qualification:** There are no prescribed qualifications for their appointment, although convention dictates that only senior (serving or retired) civil servants, of the rank of the Cabinet Secretary or Secretary to the GoI or an equivalent rank, will be appointed.

THE CEC & EC

●The Election Commission has been functioning as a **multi-member body** consisting of **three election commissioners.**

●The **Chief Election Commissioner** and the **two other Election Commissioners** have equal powers and receive equal salary, allowances and other perquisites, which are similar to those of a judge of the Supreme Court.

●In case of **difference of opinion** amongst the **Chief Election Commissioner** and/or two other Election commissioners, the **matter is decided by the Commission by majority.**

●They hold office for a **term of six years** or until they attain the age of **65 years,** whichever is earlier and can resign at any time or can also be removed before the expiry of their term.

1.14 GERMANY CHANCELLOR'S VISIT

The Chancellor of Germany, **Mr. Olaf Scholz**, is on a two-day State visit to India.
This is the **Chancellor Scholz's first visit to India** in his current role.
This is also the first standalone visit of a German Chancellor to India since the biennial **Intergovernmental Consultation (IGC)** mechanism commenced in 2011.
WHAT IS IGC?
IGC is a whole-of-government framework under which Ministers from both countries hold discussions in their respective areas of responsibility and report on the outcome of discussions to the Prime Minister and Chancellor.

BACKGROUND

●Germany is one of India's most important partners in Europe, owing to the strength of bilateral relations, as also Germany's key role in the EU.

●India and Germany have a 'Strategic Partnership' since May 2000.

●This has been further strengthened with the launch of Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC) in 2011 at the level of Heads of Government.

●On March 7, 2021, India and Germany marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

○As part of the celebrations, commemorative stamps were issued by both countries.

ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL RELATIONS

●Germany is India's largest trading partner in Europe and has consistently been among India's top (10-12) global partners.

○Germany was the 11th largest trading partner in FY 2021-22 (12th during FY 2022-23 up to August 2022).

●Bilateral trade in 2021-22 was USD 24.85 billion registering an increase of 14.2% over FY 2020-21.

○Indian exports during this period increased by 21.6% reaching USD 9.88 billion and Indian imports increased by 9.7% to USD 14.97 billion.

●Germany is the 9th largest FDI source for India. The total FDI from Germany to India from April 2000-June 2022 is over USD 13 billion.

○Indian investments in Germany continue to grow, having surpassed the figure of USD 7 billion.

Development Cooperation

●Germany has committed a total volume of new funding of USD 1,368.02 million for 2021 for Financial & Technical Cooperation.

●Energy, sustainable economic and urban development, environment & management of natural resources are priority areas.

Security & Defence

●The MoU on Security Cooperation signed at the 3rd IGC held in Delhi in 2015 defines collaboration in this field.

●There are dialogue mechanisms on various aspects of security, including:

○Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism;

○Cyber Consultations;

○Joint Steering Group on Disaster Management in Berlin (2016).

Science & Technology

●Bilateral Science and Technology cooperation is implemented under an **Inter-Governmental Agreement on 'Cooperation in Scientific Research and Technological Development'.**

●The jointly funded Indo-German Science and Technology Centre (IGSTC) was set up in Gurgaon in September 2008.

Sister State/City Arrangements:

●The States of Karnataka and Bavaria, Maharashtra and Baden Wuerttemberg, and the cities of Mumbai and Stuttgart have twinning arrangements. Twin city relations between Coimbatore and Esslingen were established in 2016.

KEY OUTCOMES

●**India-Germany agreed on a vision statement to Enhance Cooperation in Innovation & Technology**

○Under the framework of the Inter-Governmental Agreement on 'Cooperation in Scientific Research and Technological Development', the two countries share a long history of cooperation in science and technology, research and innovation.

■ This agreement was signed in May 1974.

●**Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP)**

○The leaders discussed progress on GSDP - an umbrella partnership that provides political guidance and steer to robust ties in climate action and SDGs.

○Under this, Germany will also place €10 billion in new and additional commitments under their development cooperation portfolio in India.

●**Cooperation in Green Hydrogen**

○The Indo-German Green Hydrogen Task Force was constituted in September 2022 and an Action Plan is close to finalisation.

●**Triangular Development Cooperation**

○India and Germany agreed to work on development projects in third countries.

○ The four projects, announced in May 2022, are now in different stages of implementation:

- ■ **Cameroon**: Potato Seed Production through Rooted Apical Cuttings (RAC) Technology.

- ■ **Malawi:** Agri Business Incubator Models for Women in Agriculture & Food Systems

- ■ **Ghana**: Developing Bamboo-Based Enterprises for Sustainable Livelihood and Income Generation

- ■ **Peru:** Development of a geospatial portal prototype for planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion of Peru (MIDIS) interventions and social programs.

● **Other agreements**

○ Both sides concluded agreements on "Digital Transformation, FinTech, IT, Telecom and Supply chains' diversification".

Week 2
CURRENT AFFAIRS

2.1 STATE VISIT OF ITALIAN PM

Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, Giorgia Meloni, paid a State visit to India.
This was the first bilateral VVIP visit from Italy to India after 5 years; the last Prime Ministerial visit from Italy to India took place in October 2018.
PM Meloni was also the **Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker** at the **8th Raisina Dialogue, 2023.**
Raisina Dialogue is India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geostrategy.
It is organized by the **Ministry of External Affairs** in collaboration with **Observer Research Foundation.**
The theme of the 2023 Edition of Dialogue is **Provocation, Uncertainty, Turbulence: Lighthouse in the Tempest.**

POLITICAL RELATIONS (INDIA-ITALY)

- Political relations between India and Italy were established in 1947. India and Italy are celebrating 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations this year.

- PM Modi and then PM Conte co-chaired a Virtual Summit between India and Italy in November 2020.
  - During the visit, 2020-2025 Action Plan was adopted that set an ambitious agenda for an enhanced Partnership between the countries.

- PM Modi paid his first official visit to Italy in October 2021 to attend the G20 Summit.
  - During this visit, PM Modi held bilateral meeting with then PM Draghi.
  - A Joint Statement announcing a **Strategic Partnership on Energy Transition** was issued and a Statement of Intent on Textiles cooperation was released.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

- Bilateral trade between the countries has reached USD 13.229 bn in 2021-22, with the balance in India's favour. It has reached an all-time high of $15bn in calendar year2022.
  - India's primary exports to Italy comprise metals such as iron and steel, leather, chemicals, gems, and jewellery.
  - Certain Indian exports like steel are increasing against the backdrop of Russia-Ukraine war.
    - Ukrainian steel industries were Europe's main steel exporters.
  - Machinery equipment comprise 36 percent of total Italian exports to India, and both economies are structured around SMEs.

- Italy is **India's 4th largest trading partner** in EU, after Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

- **India ranks 15th as country of origin of Italian imports**, accounting for 1.5% of Italian imports.

- **Italy ranks 17th in FDI inflows in India** during April 2000 to June 2022 with FDI inflow of US $ 3.20 bn during this period.

- India's "Make in India" initiative and modernisation drive can be complemented by Italian expertise in areas like manufacturing, green tech and defence.

- India also intends to focus more on **food processing and sustainable farming,** sectors where Italy has substantial knowhow.

Defence

- Then Chief of Army Staff, General M.M. Naravane, visited Italy in July 2021. The visit of COAS took place after 14 years.

- India and Italy are also exploring joint productions in defence and aerospace sectors as well as technology transfers.

- India and Italy also have a Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism.

Energy cooperation

- In 2021, the two countries inked a Strategic Partnership on Energy Transition to advance collaboration on areas like green hydrogen and bio fuels.

Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

- So far, Italy's commitment to ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region is through the framework of the common EU strategy that was released in 2021.

- In 2021, the India-Italy-Japan trilateral partnership was launched. However, it has not been operationalised yet.

OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

- **Elevation of India-Italy bilateral ties to "Strategic Partnership".**
- **Italy joining the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)** under Science, Technology and Academics cooperation pillar.
    - In November 2019, while participating in 14th EAS, PM Modi launched the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
    - IPOI seeks to ensure security and stability of the regional maritime domain.
    - It is an open, non-treaty-based initiative for countries to work together for cooperative and collaborative solutions to common challenges in the region.
    - It draws on existing regional architecture and mechanisms to focus on seven pillars:
        - Maritime Security
        - Maritime Ecology
        - Maritime Resources
        - Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
        - Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
        - Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation
        - Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport

2.2 SAUDI ARABIA - IRAN PEACE DEAL

Saudi Arabia and Iran, two of West Asia's major powers that have been at odds with each other for decades, agreed to restore diplomatic relations recently in an agreement brokered by China.
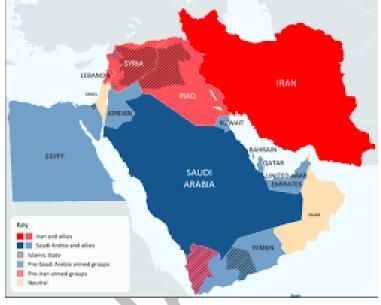**SIGNIFICANCE:**

- The agreement addresses the **most serious regional confrontation**.
- It will pave way to reduce regional tensions and establish the **foundation for further dialogue** on improving relations and engaging on contentious issues.
- The deal could also have far-reaching implications **on regional geopolitics**, from peace in Yemen to stability in Lebanon.

ABOUT THE DEAL

- Saudi Arabia and Iran, represented by their national security advisers, signed agreement in Beijing, China, to re-establish diplomatic ties, **respect** each other's **sovereignty** and maintain **non-interference** in the other's **domestic affairs**.

- This agreement **ends seven years of diplomatic estrangement** between the two Gulf neighbours.

- The deal has been necessitated by **mutual interests** of both nations.

  - For instance, Saudi Arabia, which is undergoing rapid changes, wants peace in its neighbourhood.

  - Also, Iran, which is under the U.S.-imposed sanctions, wants more diplomatic and economic openings.

Towards a new dawn

Two of West Asia's major powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, have agreed to restore diplomatic relations in an agreement brokered by China. This map shows the range of influence each power has in the region through their allies or proxies

For stability: Saudi Minister of State and National Security Adviser Musaad bin Mohammed, meets the Iranian Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, in Beijing, China on March 10. REUTERS

- Iran has direct influence in Iraq (through political parties and Shia militias), Syria (through the regime of Bashar Assad), Lebanon (Hezbollah), Yemen (Houthis) and Gaza (Islamic Jihhad)

- Saudi Arabia has direct influence in Yemen (through the government of Hadi Mansour) and Lebanon (through the Sunni parties). Saudi Arabia used to support some rebel factions in Syria during the Civil War, but it's not active any more. They are trying to reach out to different Shia factions in Iraq but are not very successful

WHY WERE THE RELATIONS ESTRANGED?

- The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran dates back to **pre-revolution Iran (1979)** when they competed with each other for **regional dominance.**

- After the 1979 revolution, which brought down the Iranian monarchy and turned the country into a Shia theocratic republic, **sectarian and ideological flavours** were added to the mix.

- Formal ties between the two collapsed in **2016** after the Saudi embassy in Tehran was overrun by protesters following Riyadh's execution of a revered Shia cleric.

- In recent times, it had turned into a cold war with both sides confronting each other in **proxy wars** in Syria and Yemen, carried out **media campaigns** of extraordinary mutual hostility, often on sectarian basis.

- The two have on occasion come close to **direct conflict**, particularly in 2019 when suspected **Iranian agents attacked Saudi oil facilities**.

CHINA'S NEW AVATAR

- China has been involved in multilateral peace talks such as the **2015 Iran nuclear deal** (from which the U.S. unilaterally withdrew in 2018).

- But this is the **first time Beijing is using its leverage** directly to bring conflicting parties to reconciliation.

- Also, unlike the U.S., which has hostile ties with Iran, **Beijing enjoys good ties with Tehran** and **Riyadh**, as a leading oil buyer and trading partner, respectively.
    - This has hence put China in a **unique position** to bring two of the region's most significant powers closer.

- This new approach of China was signaled by its academics two years ago.
    - They indicated that China was looking at greater political involvement in the region on the basis of "**quasi-mediation diplomacy**".
    - It was to **promote China's broad commercial, diplomatic and political interests** rather than its hard security concerns.

THE INTERESTS
China as an Attractive Partner for West Asia

- China has substantial energy, trade, investment and technology-related ties with West Asia.

- It is the region's largest buyer of crude oil, a major trade and investment partner.

- It is also rapidly expanding its role as a technology-provider in most countries.

China's Interests in West Asia

- Stability in West Asia, a **major energy source**, is essential for China, which is the world's largest oil importer.

- West Asia is also crucial for the realisation of China's **Belt and Road Initiative** (BRI).

- The Gulf states are important for China's logistical connectivity, investment, consultancy and contracting partnerships.

WHAT SHOULD BE INDIA'S STAND?

- China affirmation that its role in West Asian affairs is likely to get more active and substantial may **pose challenges for Indian diplomacy**.

- However, India should keep the **management of its ties with China as its diplomatic priority**.

- India will also need to engage with China in West Asia, as **both nations have a broad gamut of shared interests** in energy security, free and open sea lanes, logistical connectivity, and above all regional stability.

- Hence both can work together to further mutual and regional interests.

2.3 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC)
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is meeting in Switzerland this week to finalise the last report, known as **Synthesis Report**, of its **sixth assessment cycle**.

The sixth assessment cycle is expected to set up the tempo for a string of climate change-focused discussions over the next fortnight.

ABOUT IPCC

- The IPCC is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.
- The IPCC was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).
- Its main activity is to **prepare Assessment Reports**, special reports, and methodology reports assessing the state of knowledge of climate change.
  - The IPCC does not itself engage in scientific research.
  - Instead, it asks scientists from around the world to go through all the relevant scientific literature related to climate change and draw up the logical conclusions.

THE 6TH AR (SO FAR)

- As part of the sixth assessment cycle, the IPCC published **3 comprehensive reports**:
  - One on scientific evidence for climate change, the other on impacts and vulnerabilities, and the third exploring mitigation options available.
  - Besides these, special reports on the feasibility of keeping global temperature rise within the 1.5degree Celsius limit, and the connections between land, ocean and cryosphere, were also released.
- Together, these form the most comprehensive understanding of the earth's climate system, the changes it is undergoing, the repercussions of these changes.
- It also gives the idea about the actions that should to be taken to avoid the worst impacts.

2.4 AUKUS

The **United States, Australia and Britain** unveiled details of a plan to provide Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines from the early 2030s to counter China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. This agreement was finalised under the **2021 AUKUS partnership.**

ABOUT AUKUS

- Signed in September 2021, the new enhanced trilateral security partnership between **Australia, United Kingdom, and United State**s is named as **"AUKUS"**.
  - This is a trilateral defence deal for Indo-Pacific.
- The **first major initiative** of AUKUS would be to deliver a "**nuclear-powered**" submarine fleet for Australia.
- These countries, however, made it clear that their **aim is not to arm the new submarines with nuclear weapons**.
  - This is because Australia is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) which bans it from acquiring or deploying nuclear weapons.

SIGNIFICANCE

- **For Indo-Pacific Region**
  - Under this partnership, technology, scientists, industries and defence forces of these three countries will work together to deliver a safer and more secure region.
  - Some analysts feel that this partnership will lead to intensified arms race in the region.
- **For Australia**

- Australia never had nuclear-powered submarines.
- Hence, this step will give Australia naval heft in the Pacific, where China has been particularly aggressive.
- Critics, on the other hand, claim that this **deal would antagonise Beijing** which will not be good for Australia.
- Australia is now set to join **an elite group of only six countries** – India, US, UK, France, Russia and China – that operate nuclear-powered submarines.
  - It will also be the only country to have such submarines without having a civilian nuclear power industry.

- **For India**
  - The new pact will add to the global efforts to balance China in the region.
  - It should be noted that Australia and India are close strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region.
  - Australia is also a member of **QUAD group**. A stronger Australia would lead to further strengthening of QUAD.

- **For France**
  - France is not happy with the deal and has termed this deal a "stab in the back".
  - Australia had signed a contract to buy 12 Attack-class submarines from France in 2016. The first submarine was expected to be operational around 2034.
  - As a result of the current deal, Australia ditched the contract.

THE CHINA ANGLE
- China denounced a new Indo-Pacific security alliance saying **such partnerships should not target third countries.**
- It claims that the current cooperation would **gravely undermine regional peace and stability, aggravate arms race and hurt the international non-proliferation efforts.**
- China claimed that western powers are using **nuclear exports for geopolitical gaming tools**.

2.5 IMPACT OF SILICON VALLEY BANK CRISIS ON INDIA & GOVERNMENT'S INTERVENTION

To address the liquidity issues of Indian start-ups impacted by the fallout of the events at Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is likely to devise a plan.

ABOUT SVB
- **The California-based SVB, a cornerstone of the US technology and startup industries, recently failed, making it the biggest bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis.**
- **SVB worked with companies that traditional banks normally avoid due to the perceived danger of failure, and it lent to start-ups when it was difficult to find other sources of funding.**

The 1983-founded California-based SVB focusses on serving Silicon Valley startups

"IT PROVIDES MULTIPLE SERVICES TO VENTURE CAPITAL, PRIVATE EQUITY FIRMS IN ADDITION TO OFFERING PRIVATE BANKING SERVICES FOR HIGH NET-WORTH INDIVIDUALS"

SVB has business with nearly half of all the US venture-backed startups, and 44% of the US venture-backed tech, healthcare firms that went public last year
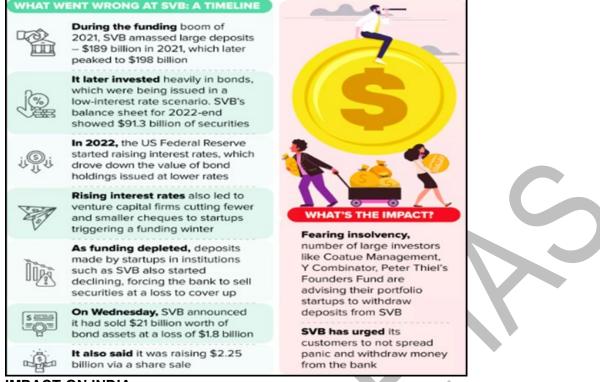
As of December 31, SVB had $212 billion in assets

The bank's clients includes household names like Shopify, Pinterest, etc

IMPACT ON INDIA

- **A large number of Indian start-ups, especially in the SaaS** (software as a service) sector that services US clients, had accounts at the bank.

- SVB had also been **an important lender to several Indian start-ups** when the sector in India was starting to take shape around 2010-11.

- Among its most notable fundings was an investment of **a total of $1.7 million in One97 Communications**, the parent company of **Paytm**.

- **Deposits up to $250,000** are insured by the Federal government and anything above this is likely to be released in a phased manner.

- Many founders said that **not being able to take out more than $250,000** from their accounts will hit them hard, as they used their SVB deposits for **payroll and other operational functions and** could lead to layoffs.

- Amid a **funding winter**, where availability of funds for start-ups is dwindling, this could also prove to be **a major roadblock, especially to young businesses.**

2.6 LANDFILL FIRES

The Kochi landfill site around Brahmapuram that caught fire earlier this month is a stark reminder that Indian cities need to be prepared for more such incidents as summer approaches.

HOW DO LANDFILLS CATCH FIRE?

- India's Municipalities have been collecting more than 95% of the waste generated in cities but the efficiency of waste-processing is hardly 30-40%.

- Municipal **solid waste consists of about 60% biodegradable material, 25% non-biodegradable material and 15% inert materials**, like silt and stone.

- Municipalities are expected to process the wet and dry waste separately and to have the recovered by-products recycled.

- Unfortunately, the rate of processing in India's cities is far lower than the rate of waste generation. Hence, unprocessed waste remains in open landfills for long periods of time.

- This **openly disposed waste includes flammable material like low-quality plastics, which have a relatively higher calorific value of about 2,5003,000 kcal/kg, and rags and clothes**.

- In summer, the biodegradable fraction composts much faster, increasing the temperature of the heap to beyond 7080°C.

- **A higher temperature coupled with flammable materials is the perfect situation for a landfill to catch fire**. Some fires go on for months.

SOLUTION

- There are two possible permanent solutions to manage landfill fires.
  - The **first solution is to completely cap the material using soil, and close landfills in a scientific manner**.
  - This solution is unsuitable in the Indian context, as the land can't be used again for other purposes.
  - Closed landfills have specific standard operating procedures, including managing the methane emissions.
  - The **second solution is to clear the piles of waste through bioremediation**.
    - Bioremediation is the use of either naturally occurring or deliberately introduced **microorganisms** to consume and break down environmental pollutants, in order to clean a polluted site.
  - However, **implementing a bioremediation project usually takes up to two or three years**, necessitating a short-term solution for summertime landfill fires.

IMMEDIATE MEASURES

- Landfill sites span 2030 acres and have different kinds of waste.

- The first immediate action is to **divide a site into blocks depending on the nature of the waste**.

- At each site, blocks with fresh waste should be separated from blocks with flammable material.
  - Blocks that have been capped using soil are less likely to catch fire, so portions like these should also be separated out.
  - The **different blocks should ideally be separated using a drain or soil bund and a layer of soil should cap each block**.
  - This reduces the chance of fires spreading across blocks within the same landfill.

- Next, the most vulnerable part of the landfill — the portion with lots of plastics and cloth — should be capped with soil.
  - The fresh waste block shouldn't be capped but enough moisture should be provided by sprinkling water which will help cool the waste heap.

- Once a site has been divided into blocks, the landfill operator should classify incoming waste on arrival to the site, and dispose them in designated blocks rather than dumping mixed fractions.
- Already segregated non recyclable and non biodegradable waste should be sent to cement kilns instead of being allowed to accumulate.
  - Dry grass material and dry trees from the site should also be cleared immediately.

2.7 EXERCISE BOLD KURUKSHETRA

Recently, the **Singapore Army** and **Indian Army** participated in **Exercise Bold Kurukshetra** which was held at Jodhpur Military Station, India.

HISTORY:

- **First conducted in 2005**, this exercise underscores the strong and long-standing bilateral defence relationship between both countries and enhances cooperation between the two armies.
- Both defence establishments also interact regularly through high-level visits, policy dialogues, courses and other professional exchanges.

ABOUT BOLD KURUKSHETRA

- It was the **13th edition** of Exercise Bold Kurukshetra, a bilateral military exercise between India and the Singapore army.
- For the first time in the exercise series, both armies participated in **a command post Exercise,** which involved Battalion and Brigade level planning elements and computer wargaming.
- Hosted by the Indian Army, the exercise involved soldiers from the 42nd Battalion, Singapore Armoured Regiment and an Armoured Brigade of the Indian Army.
- It involved an understanding of mechanised warfare in emerging threats and evolving technologies, developing inter-operability through **a computer simulation-based Wargame** using joint operational and tactical procedures controlled through a joint command post.

2.8 ATL SARTHI

NITI Aayog recently launched ATL Sarthi, a comprehensive self-monitoring framework to strengthen the ever-growing ecosystem of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL).

ABOUT ATL SARTHI

- ATL Sarthi will enable the Atal Tinkering Labs to **be efficient and effective.**
- The initiative has **four pillars** ensuring the performance enhancement of ATLs through regular process improvements like
  - **MyATL Dashboard:** It is a self-reporting dashboard.
  - **Compliance SOPs:** For schools to ensure financial and non-financial compliance
  - **Cluster-based Approach:** On-ground enablement of ATLs in collaboration with relevant local authorities.
  - **Performance-Enablement (PE) Matrix:** It provides ownership to schools to analyze their performance

ABOUT ATAL INNOVATION MISSION (AIM)

- It was set up by the Central Government **in 2016.**
- **Objectives:**
    - To promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
    - To provide a platform for and establish collaboration opportunities for various stakeholders.
    - To act as an umbrella structure, encompassing and overseeing the entire innovation ecosystem of the country.
- **Implementing Agency: NITI Aayog**

ATAL TINKERING LABS (ATL)

- It is an initiative to promote **creativity and innovation** in the minds of school children.
- Under this initiative Children as **young as 12 years of age gain access** to technological innovation.
- The concepts of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths are taught through various tools and equipment of the like.
- **Financial aid of Rs. 20 lakh** is given to each school.
- This includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and the operation cost of Rs. 10 lakh over a period of five years.

2.9 INDIAN POST PAYMENT BANK (IPPB)

MD and CEO of India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) recently said that IPPB wants to convert itself to a universal bank.

ABOUT IPPB:

- IPPB has been **established under the Department of Posts**, Ministry of Communication, with **100% equity owned by the Government of India**.
- IPPB was **launched on** September 1, **2018**.
- **Vision**: To build the most **accessible, affordable, and trusted bank for the common man** in India.
- **Mandate**: To **remove barriers for the unbanked and under-banked** and reach the last mile **leveraging** a network comprising **160,000 post offices** (145,000 in rural areas) and **400,000 postal employees.**
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi

FUNCTIONS

- It will **accept deposits upto Rs 2 lakh, beyond which** the account will be automatically **converted into a post office savings account**.
- The products and services of the bank will be made available through various mediums such as **counter services, micro ATMs, mobile banking apps**, messages, and interactive voice response.
- The IPPB will **use Aadhaar to open accounts,** and a **QR card and biometrics** will be used **for authentication**, transactions, and payments.

WHAT ARE PAYMENT BANKS?

- A payments bank is like any other bank but **operates on a smaller scale without** involving **any credit risk.**

- It was set up on the **recommendations of the Nachiket Mor Committee**.

- **Objective**: **Widen the spread of payment and financial services to small businesses**, **low-income households,** and migrant labor workforce in a secured technology-driven environment.

- They are **registered under the Companies Act 2013** but are **governed** by a host of legislations such as the **Banking Regulation Act**, 1949; **RBI A**ct, 1934; **Foreign Exchange Management Act**, 1999, etc.

- It needs to have a **minimum paid-up capital of Rs. 100,00,00,000.**

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 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.

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.

2.10 INDIA BHUTAN SATELLITE
The ground station of the India-Bhutan Satellite, which has been built in Thimpu, was recently inaugurated.

ABOUT THE SATELLITE

- It is also known as the **ISRO Nano Satellite 2 for Bhutan (INS-2B).**

- It was **launched** as a payload **on ISRO's PSLV C54 rocket** on November 26, 2022.

- It has been jointly **developed by scientists from both countries**.

- The satellite **contains two payloads:**

  - **NanoMx multispectral optical imager:** It is **developed by India's Space Applications Centre (SAC**). It will **provide high-resolution images** to Bhutan **for its natural resources management**.

  - **Automatic Packet Reporting System (APRS) repeater:** It is **jointly developed by** Department of Information Technology and Telecom **(DITT) Bhutan** and **ISRO's UR Rao Satellite Centre (URSC)** to serve the amateur radio community, **relaying realtime information about the region.**

2.11 DATA EMPOWERMENT & PROTECTION ARCHITECTURE (DEPA)

India must ensure that its digital strategies and data governance are **inclusive and conducive for sustainable development** as the nation evolves to embrace technology and digitalisation to drive economic growth.

In this regard, the launch of India's **Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA)**, a consent management tool, has generated both excitement and concern among stakeholders.

ABOUT DEPA

- It is a **joint public-private effort** (launched by NITI Aayog in 2020) for an improved data governance approach that **creates a digital framework** allowing users to share their data on their own terms.
    - The data is shared through a third-party entity, namely the **Consent Mangers (CMs)** that individuals provide consent as per an innovative digital standard for every granular piece of data shared securely.
- DEPA enables consented sharing of consumer data from **Data Providers** (entities which collect or generate consumer data) to **Data Consumers** (other entities which wish to provide a service or a product based on the data) via Consent Managers.

NEED FOR DEPA

- Currently**, data is in control of the giant companies** who have captured most of the marketplace all over the world and make profits more than the GDP of a few countries.
- This has **affected small scale enterprises** to survive in such a tech-savvy marketplace.
- Hence, to sustain competition in the market, NITI Aayog came up DEPA framework **to enable SMEs to utilise the existing data that is available in silos.**
    - That is with the existing players from the industry such as fintech, e-commerce, healthcare or insurance bringing out new products and services in the market.

SIGNIFICANCE

- **It empowers users** by giving them control over their data, allowing them seamless sharing while ensuring privacy and therefore could help to **build trust** in digital technologies and data governance.
- It also **replaces costly and cumbersome data access and sharing** practices that disempower individuals, such as physical submission, username/password sharing, and terms and conditions forms providing blanket consent.
- DEPA will also **induce competition** and **enable new services**.
    - For instance, with DEPA, individuals and small businesses will be able to use their digital records to access affordable loans, insurance, savings, and better financial management products.
- With DEPA, individuals can **seamlessly share their financial data** for the first time across banks, insurers, investors, tax collectors, and pension funds in a safe, secure, and consented manner.
    - This has the power to transform the availability and affordability of financial products.
    - Beyond the financial sector, DEPA also presents opportunities in health, jobs, and urban data.
- The innovation models like DEPA can be important **alternatives to proprietary solutions** that are governed by **big tech companies**.

RISKS ASSOCIATED

- **Security concerns:** If the consent management tool is not properly implemented or managed, there is a risk that personal information could be **misused or misappropriated**.
    - **For example**, in the health sector, there is a risk that sensitive medical information could be misused or exploited for commercial purposes.
    - Also, in agriculture, there is a risk that market information could be manipulated for the benefit of certain actors.

- **Inconsistent application**: Concerns are being raised that DEPA implementation may be inconsistent across different sectors and jurisdictions, which could undermine its effectiveness and create confusion among citizens.

- **Operational issues**: There are also concerns related to issues of infrastructure, connectivity and the availability of **a skilled human workforce** for the DEPA framework.

- **Issue related to ownership and governance of data**: The questions related to rights of data providers and the responsibilities towards them also remain unaddressed.

2.12 INDIA'S ARMS IMPORTS

According to the SIPRI, India remained the world's largest arms importer for the five-year period between 2018-22 even though its arms imports dropped by 11% between 2013–17 and 2018–22.
WHAT IS STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SIPRI)?

- SIPRI is an **independent** international institute **dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament**.

- Established in **1966** and based in Stockholm (Sweden), SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, to **policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public**.

- It is regularly ranked among the most respected **think tanks**

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

- ❖ **India as the world's top importer of arms:**
- **India** continues to be the **world's largest arms importer** (a position it has held for the period 1993–2022) followed by Saudi Arabia**.** India accounted for **11%** of the total global imports in 2018-2022.

- **Russia** was the largest supplier of arms to India in both 2013–17 and 2018–22, but its share of total Indian arms imports fell from 64% to 45% while **France** (29%) and the **US** (11%) emerged as the 2nd and 3rd largest supplier between 2018-22.
    - However, Russia's position is under pressure due to strong competition, increased Indian arms production and constraints on Russia's arms exports due to **invasion of Ukraine.**

- Among the top 10 arms exporters for the period 2018-22, **India was the biggest arms export market to three countries** - Russia, France and Israel and the second largest export market to South Korea.

- India was also the third largest market for **South Africa** which was ranked 21 in the list of arms exporters.

India's arms imports from France:

- Increased by **489%** between 2013–17 and 2018–22, India's arms imports from France included 62 combat aircraft and four submarines.

- France therefore **displaced the USA** to become the second largest supplier to India in 2018–22.

India's imports dropped by 11% between 2013–17 and 2018–22: The decrease can be attributed to several factors including -

- India's slow and complex arms procurement process,
- Efforts to diversify its arms suppliers, and
- Attempts to replace imports with major arms that are designed and produced domestically.

What drives India's Demand for Arms? India's tensions with Pakistan and China largely drive its demand for arms imports.

India as an arms exporter: India was the third largest arms supplier to Myanmar after Russia and China accounting for 14% of its imports.

Overall: The U.S. share of global arms exports increased from 33% to 40% while Russia's fell from 22% to 16%.

CHALLENGES

- India continues to languish in the **strategically-vulnerable as well as embarrassing position** of being the world's largest arms importer, despite the government's thrust on "**Make in India**" in defence production.
- **Russian exports to India decreased** by 37% between the two periods. In contrast, exports to China (+39%) and Pakistan (14%) increased between 2013–17 and 2018–22.
- China supplied 77% of Pakistan's arms imports in 2018–22.
- While the global level of international arms transfers decreased by 5.1%, **imports of major arms by European states increased** by 47% between 2013–17 and 2018–22 in the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.
- **Strategic competition also continues elsewhere** - arms imports to East Asia have increased and those to the Middle East remain at a high level.
- All the above are a clear indication of the '**security dilemma**' fueling arm race in different regions of the world and threatening **world peace**.

2.13 BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

Russia recently agreed to extend the Black Sea grain deal following talks with the United Nations for an additional 60 days.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

- It was set up to **resume vital food and fertilizer exports from Ukraine** to the rest of the world.
- It was **brokered between Russia and Ukraine by the United Nations and Turkey**.
- The Initiative allowed **exports of grain, other foodstuffs, and fertilizer**, including ammonia, to resume **through a safe maritime humanitarian corridor** from three key **Ukrainian ports: Chornomorsk, Odesa, and Yuzhny/Pivdennyi**, to the rest of the world.

- **Joint Coordination Centre (JCC):**
  - A JCC was established **to monitor the implementation of the Initiative**.
  - JCC Centre is **hosted in Istanbul** and includes **representatives from Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the United Nations.**

- ○ The **UN acts as the Secretariat for the Centre**.

- ● **Procedure:**
  - ○ **Vessels wishing to participate** in the Initiative will **undergo inspection off Istanbul** to ensure they are empty of cargo.
  - ○ **They then sail** through the maritime humanitarian corridor **to Ukrainian ports to load.**
  - ○ The corridor is **monitored 24/7** to ensure the safe passage of vessels.
  - ○ **Vessels on the return journey will also be inspected** at the inspection area off Istanbul.

ABOUT BLACK SEA
- ● **It is an inland sea between Eastern Europe and Western Asia.**
- ● **It is bound by Ukraine to the north and northwest, Russia and Georgia to the east, Turkey to the south, and Bulgaria and Romania to the west.**
- ● **It links to the Sea of Marmara through the Strait of Bosphorus and then to the Aegean through the Strait of Dardanelles.**

RUSSIA UKRAINE GRAIN EXPORT DEAL
Ukraine and Russia have signed an **UN-backed deal** to allow the export of millions of tonnes of grain from blockaded Black Sea ports. A signing ceremony at Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul was attended by UN secretary general António Guterres, who had played a key role during months of tense negotiations.

% of wheat imports sourced from Ukraine

Moldova	92%
Lebanon	81%
Qatar	64%
Tunisia	49%
Libya	48%
Pakistan	48%
Indonesia	29%
Malaysia	26%
Egypt	26%
Bangladesh	25%

Source: UN Food and Agriculture Organization, data for 2020　BBC

What is the grain export deal?
The deal makes provisions for the safe passage of ships. It foresees the establishment of a control center in Istanbul, to be staffed by U.N., Turkish, Russian and Ukrainian officials, to run and coordinate the process.
Ships would undergo inspections to ensure they are not carrying weapons.
No Russian ship would escort vessels and that there would be no Russian representative present at Ukrainian ports.

Why was the grain export deal signed?
The agreement potentially averted the threat of a catastrophic global food crisis.
Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil, but Russia's invasion of the country and naval blockade of its ports have halted shipments.
Some grain is being transported through Europe by rail, road and river, but the prices of vital commodities like wheat and barley have soared during the nearly five-month war.

2.14 ENVIRONMENT, SOCIAL & GOVERNANCE (ESG)

- ● ESG is an acronym for **Environmental**, **Social**, and **Governance**.
- ● ESG takes the holistic view that **sustainability extends beyond just environmental issues**.
- ● ESG can be best explained as a framework that helps the stakeholders understand how an organization is managing risks and opportunities related to environmental, social, and governance criteria.

- In a simple manner, the **main objective of ESG norms is basically to ensure that businesses are conducted in a more responsible manner**.

SIGNIFICANCE

- **Environmental** –
  - The first pillar of ESG focuses on the effects on the physical, natural environment.
  - Across the globe, how we produce, consume and discard has a significant adverse impact on the natural world.
  - **Environmental considerations include** –
    - Potential climate risk
    - Extraction and use of raw materials
    - Effects of human activity on biodiversity

- **Social** –
  - It's not only nature that is needed to be considered. How employees and local communities are affected also must also be taken into account.
  - **Social considerations include** –
    - Are human rights respected?
    - Is the end consumer protected from unsafe products or practices?
    - How is the personal data of individuals protected?

- **Governance** –
  - Governance is to do with making sure there are systems in place to ensure accountability within a corporation.
  - **Governance considerations include** –
    - Transparency of processes and procedures
    - Clear anti-bribery and corruption policies
    - Ensuring boards are composed of independent members

RELEVANCE

- ESG disclosures are highly relevant for all stakeholders involved in a business process.
- **Investors** –
  - ESG disclosures are highly consequential for investors for the following reasons:
    - Including climate-related considerations in asset valuation and finance allocation processes;
    - Determining the environmental and social impact of a company's business processes;
    - Assessing how climate change could affect a company's financial stability in the future.

- **Businesses** –
  - ESG disclosures allow companies to **identify potential transition risks, self-assess its ability to sustain in the future, and undertake necessary steps to adapt to the likely future changes**.
  - At the same time, ESG disclosures help companies in identifying certain opportunities for innovation that might yield high results in the future.

- **Consumers** –
  - ESG disclosures aid consumers in identifying responsible businesses, which not only concentrate on maximizing profits, but also on growing in a responsible manner.
  - Businesses could also use their disclosures as a part of their marketing strategy to attract more consumers.

ESG REGULATIONS IN INDIA
- India has long had a number of laws and bodies regarding environmental, social and governance issues. These include –
  - Environment Protection Act of 1986, quasi-judicial organisations such as the National Green Tribunal, a range of labour codes and laws governing employee engagement and corporate governance practices.
- While these laws and bodies provide important environmental and social safeguards, new initiatives in India go further.
- For example, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) substantially revised the annual Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) required by the 1,000 largest listed companies in India.
  - BRSR report demands sustainability reporting by listed entities with the intent towards having quantitative, qualitative and standardized disclosures on ESG parameters.
- Beyond the above disclosures, **ESG reporting largely remains voluntary in India**, depending on the initiative of a business (except for the top 1,000 listed entities).

Further legislation regarding ESG is likely to take place sooner than later, given the increased emphasis by the Indian government on ESG issues

Week 3
CURRENT AFFAIRS

3.1 POSHAN PAKHWADA

The Ministry of Women and Child Development will celebrate the fifth **Poshan Pakhwada** from **20th March 2022 to 3rd April 2023** with various activities nationwide.

ABOUT POSHAN PAKHWADA

- The Poshan Pakhwada aims to raise awareness about the importance of nutrition and promote healthy eating habits through Jan Andolan and Jan Bhagidari.

- The **theme** of this year's Poshan Pakhwada 2023 is **"Nutrition for All: Together Towards a Healthy India".**

- With the declaration of 2023 as the International Year of Millets, this year the focus of Poshan Pakhwada will be to **popularise 'Shree Anna'-** the mother of all grains, as a valuable asset to address malnutrition.

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Women and Child Development

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

The activities during the Poshan Pakhwada will focus, inter alia, on the following key themes:

- **Promotion and popularization of Shree Anna / Millets for nutritional**- well-being through the organization of drives to link Millet-based foods with supplementary nutrition, Home visits, Diet consultation camps, etc

- **Celebration of Swasth Balak Spardha:** Celebrate and recognize the 'Swasth Balak' or Healthy Child as per defined criteria by generating a healthy spirit of competition for good nutrition good health and well being

- **Popularize Saksham Anganwadis:** Campaigns will be organized to increase awareness and popularise Saksham Anganwadis with upgraded infrastructure and facilities as centres of improved nutrition delivery and early childhood care and education.

WHAT IS POSHAN ABHIYAN?

- Poshan Abhiyan, launched by the Prime Minister of India on 8th March 2018, has been instrumental in ensuring people's participation and bringing the discourse on **nutrition to the forefront.**

- Poshan Abhiyan was launched to improve nutritional outcomes holistically.

- Behavioural change at the individual and community levels is an important component to achieve the **desired goals of a Kuposhan-mukt Bharat.**
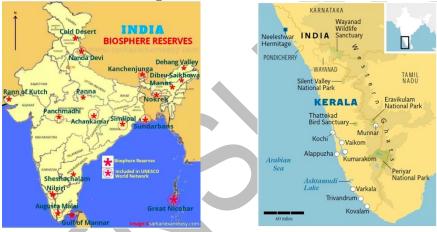
3.2 WAYANAD WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Recently, a female leopard died in a suspected road kill in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS).

ABOUT WAYANAD:

- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is **located in Kerala** and is an integral part of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.**

- This Sanctuary is **contiguous to the tiger reserves of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka and Madhumalai of Tamil Nadu.**

- **Kabini river** which is a tributary of the Kaveri River flows through the sanctuary.

- **Flora:** It includes moist deciduous forests, West coast semi-evergreen forests and plantations of teak, eucalyptus and Grewelia.

- **Fauna:** Elephant, Gaur, Tiger, Panther, Sambar, Spotted deer**, Barking deer**, Wild boar, Sloth bear, Nilgiri langur etc.

ABOUT NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE

- It harbours a wide spectrum of ecosystem types such as tropical evergreen forests, Montane sholas and grasslands, semi-evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests and thorn forests.

- The major part of the **core areas spread** over **Kerala and Tamil Nadu States**.

- **Tribal Population:**Tribal groups like the **Todas,** Kotas, **Irullas**, Kurumbas, Paniyas, Adiyans, Edanadan Chettis, Cholanaickens, Allar, Malayan, etc., are native to the reserve.

- **Protected Areas within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve are**

  o The **Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary**, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, **Mukurthi National** Park and Silent Valley.

3.3 VENUS

Recently, NASA's **Magellan spacecraft** captured images of **Venus' surface from different orbits.** A few locations, including those suspected to have **volcanic activity**, were observed two or three times over two years.

ABOUT VENUS:

- Venus the second planet from the sun, is the **hottest and brightest planet** in the solar system.

- Venus is **highly visible from Earth** due to its reflective clouds.

- Venus and Earth are often called **twins** because they are similar in size, mass, density, composition and gravity.

- With respect to other **planets, Venus and Uranus spin backwards**which means for these two planets, the sun rises in the west and sets in the east.

KEY FINDINGS

- A 2.2 square kilometre volcanic vent on Venus changed shape in eight months, indicating volcanic activity.

- It showed signs of drained lava, hinting at activity and eight months later, radar images indicated that the same vent had doubled in size and the lava lake seemed to have reached the rim.

- The vent is associated with **Maat Mons,** Venus's second-highest volcano.

- It sits in the **Atla Regio**, a vast highland region near **Venus' equator.** These changes were likely due to lava flow escaping the vent, hinting at a possible volcanic activity.

3.4 NET NEUTRALITY

Since November 2022, the **Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI),** which represents major telecom operators in India, has been demanding that platforms such as **YouTube and WhatsApp pay a share of revenue** to make up for the network costs.

In an immediate response to this demand, the **Broadband India Forum (BIF),** which represents Internet firms such as Meta and Google, wrote a letter to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) rebutting the COAI's demands.

This has reignited the debate around **Net Neutrality.**

DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

- To understand the concept of net neutrality, it is important to note the four different kinds of stakeholders in the internet space that may be affected by the issue.

- They are –
  - **Consumers** of any internet service,
  - **Telecom Service Providers** (TSPs) or Internet Service Providers (ISPs),
  - **Over-the-top (OTT) service providers** (those who provide internet access services such as websites and applications), and
  - **Government**, who may regulate and define relationships between these players.

- **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India** (TRAI) is an independent regulator in the telecom sector, which mainly regulates TSPs and their licensing conditions, etc.

WHAT IS NET NEUTRALITY?

- The principle of net neutrality states that **internet users should be able to access all content on the internet without being discriminated by TSPs.**

- This means that –
  - All websites or applications should be treated equally by TSPs,
  - All applications should be allowed to be accessed at the same internet speed, and
  - All applications should be accessible for the same cost.

- Net neutrality argues that the **internet should be accessible to everyone and requires all ISPs to provide the same level of data access and speed to all traffic**.
  - Traffic to one service or website cannot be blocked or degraded.

IN CASE OF ABSENCE OF NET NEUTRALITY

- If there no net neutrality, **ISPs will have the power** (and inclination) to shape internet traffic so that they can derive extra benefit from it.
  - For example, several ISPs believe that they should be allowed to charge companies for services like YouTube and Netflix because these services consume more bandwidth compared to a normal website.

- ○ Basically, these ISPs want a share in the money that YouTube or Netflix make.
- Without net neutrality, the internet as we know it will not exist. **Instead of free access, there could be package plans for consumers.**
  - ○ For example, if you pay Rs 500, **you will only be able to access websites based in India.** To access international websites, you may have to pay a more.
  - ○ Or maybe **there can be different connection speed for different type of content,** depending on how much you are paying for the service and what add-on package you have bought.
- Instead of an open and free internet, without net neutrality, we are likely to get a web that has silos in it and to enter each silo, you will have to pay some "tax" to ISPs.

REGULATION OF NET NEUTRALITY

- Until now, **net neutrality has not directly been regulated in India by any law or policy framework**. Earlier, in 2016, the TRAI had ruled in favour of net neutrality.
- However, **despite lack of formal rules, ISPs in India mostly adhere to the principal of net neutrality**.
- There have been some incidents where Indian ISPs have ignored net neutrality but these are few and far between.
- Internationally, countries like the USA, Japan, Brazil, Chile, Norway, etc. have some form of law, order or regulatory framework in place that affects net neutrality.
- The US Federal Communications Commission (telecom regulator in the USA) released new internet rules in March 2015, which mainly disallow blocking, throttling or slowing down, and paid prioritisation of certain applications over others.
- While the UK does not allow blocking or throttling of OTT services, it allows price discrimination.

SUSTAINABILITY OF NET NEUTRALITY

- **Net neutrality is sort of gentlemen's agreement**. It has survived so far because few people realized the potential of internet when it took off around 30 years ago.
- But now when the internet is an integral part of the society and incredibly important, ISPs across the world are trying to get the power to shape and control the traffic.
- However, there are ways to keep net neutrality alive –
  - ○ Consumers should demand that ISPs continue their hands-off approach from the internet traffic.
  - ○ If consumers see a violation of net neutrality, they ought to take a proactive approach and register their displeasure with the ISP.
  - ○ They should also reward ISPs that uphold the net neutrality.
  - ○ Meanwhile, TRAI needs to establish a set of clear and precise rules that protect the net neutrality.

3.5 AFINDEX
The Indian Army is set to host the second edition of the **Africa-India field training exercise (AFINDEX-23)** from **March 21 to 30** and **African Chiefs Conclave on March 28 in Pune.**
ABOUT AFINDEX:

- The **first Africa-India Field** Training Exercise was held **in Pune in March 2019**. It saw participation from 20 African nations.

- The first India-Africa Defence Ministers Conclave was held on the sidelines of the DEFEXPO, 2020 in Lucknow.
- The exercise is **divided into four phases** in which trainers would be initially trained. This would be followed by a humanitarian mine action and a peace-keeping operations phase.
- **Maximum use of indigenous equipment** is being made during the exercise and new-generation equipment manufactured in India would be showcased during the exercise.

OBJECTIVES

- To continue **building upon initiatives** taken to strengthen India-Africa relations, with a focus on **enhancing peace and security**, and creating opportunities to exchange ideas and perspectives.
- Learning from the African experience in cooperative security, management of security crises and conflicts, and promoting a collaborative approach in capacity enhancement of African armies

3.6 REACHOUT SCHEME

Recently, the Union Minister of Earth Sciences said that an umbrella scheme **Research, Education and Training Outreach (REACHOUT)** is being implemented by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences for capacity building.**

Discussion on REACHOUT Scheme of Ministry of Earth Sciences

ABOUT THE SCHEME

- The Research, Education and Training Outreach (REACHOUT) scheme consists of
    - R&D in Earth System Science (**RDESS**)
    - International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography (**ITCOocean**)
    - Program for Development of Skilled manpower in Earth System Sciences (**DESK**)
- This scheme is being implemented for the entire country and not State/UT-wise.
- The main objectives of the above sub-schemes are
    - **Supporting various R &D activities** in the thrust areas of different components of Earth System Sciences that are theme and need-based and that would help in attaining the National goals set up for MoES.
    - **Develop useful collaborations with international organizations** for the mutual transfer of advanced knowledge in science and technology in Earth Sciences and to provide services to developing countries.
    - **Develop skilled and trained manpower in Earth Sciences** with the support of academic institutions in the country and abroad.

3.7 SAME SEX MARRIAGE

Recently, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India **D.Y. Chandrachud** referred petitions to **legally recognise same-sex marriages** to a Constitution Bench of five judges of the Supreme Court.
WHAT IS LGBTQIA+?
'LGBTIQA+' is an evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual. Many other terms (such as non-binary and pansexual) that people use to describe their experiences of their gender, sexuality and physiological sex characteristics.

THE CASE

- The Court has been hearing multiple petitioners' requests for legal recognition of same-sex marriages under a special law.
- SC took up the case as petitioners claimed that the non-recognition of same-sex marriage amounted to discrimination that strikes at the root of dignity and self-fulfilment of LGBTQIA+ couples.
- The petitioners cited the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and appealed to the Court to extend the right to the LGBTQIA+ community, by making the **marriage between any two persons gender neutral.**
  - Special Marriage Act, 1954 provides a civil marriage for couples who cannot marry under their personal law.

WHY THIS RIGHT IS DEMANDED?

- Even if **LGBTQIA+** couples may live together, legally, they are on a slippery slope.
  - In Navtej Singh Johar case (2018) homosexuality was decriminalised.
- They do not enjoy the rights married couples do.
  - For example, LGBTQIA+ couples cannot adopt children or have a child by surrogacy;
  - They do not have automatic rights to inheritance, maintenance and tax benefits;
  - After a partner passes away, they cannot avail of benefits like pension or compensation.
- Most of all, since marriage is a social institution - **that is created by and highly regulated by law** - without this social sanction, same-sex couples struggle to make a life together.

CENTER'S STAND

At depositions in courts and outside, the **Centre has opposed same-sex marriage.**
It said that the judicial interference will cause complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws.
While filing a counter-affidavit during this hearing, the government said that **decriminalisation of Section 377 IPC does not give rise to a claim to seek recognition for same-sex marriage**.

ARGUMENTS BY THE GOVERNMENT

- **Notion of marriage**
  - The notion of marriage itself necessarily and inevitably presupposes a union between two persons of the opposite sex.
  - This definition is socially, culturally and legally ingrained into the very idea and concept of marriage and ought not to be disturbed or diluted by judicial interpretation.
- **Marriage laws governed by the personal laws/codified laws**
  - Parliament has designed and framed the marriage laws in the country to recognise only the union of a man and a woman to be capable of legal sanction, and thereby claim legal and statutory rights and consequences.
    - Marriage laws in India are mostly governed by the personal laws/codified laws relatable to customs of various religious communities.
  - Any interference with the same would cause a complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws and in accepted societal values.
- **Reasonable restriction**
  - Even if such a right is claimed under Article 21, the right can be curtailed by competent legislature on permissible constitutional grounds including legitimate state interest.

3.8 FAKE NEWS

A number of social media posts claiming that **"Bihari migrant labourers"** were attacked in Tamil Nadu recently created panic in both the States.

The video clips of **migrant workers leaving Tamil Nadu for Holi holidays and festivities began to be shared to say that there was an exodus from the State because of incidents of violence.**

To nurture this narrative, stray news stories about the death of a migrant worker were seeded online in order to build a wider campaign that there was targeted violence in Tamil Nadu against North Indians.

The disinformation campaigns could be used to manipulate social and political outcomes, as a false narrative about the safety of migrant workers in TN shows.

WHAT IS FAKE NEWS?

- **About**: It is referred to as those news stories that are false, fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes.
  - It is intentionally written in order to gain financially or politically through sensationalist, exaggerated, or false headlines for capturing the attention of the people.
- **Types**: Satire or parody (no intention to cause harm), misleading content, imposter content, fabricated/false/manipulated content, etc.

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

- The disinformation campaigns have the potential to **unfairly manipulate** social and political outcomes.
- It could also **incite communal disharmony** between the groups belonging to different caste, creed, religion or regions.
- It also serves as an attempt to **sway votes** during elections, when voters rely on information through social media more than any other source.

GLOBAL MEASURES

- The European Union (EU) has put out the **Code of Practice on Disinformation 2022**. Few strengthened initiatives of the EU Code are as follows:
  - Transparency in political advertising, empowerment of fact-checkers and researchers, tools to flag disinformation, and measures to reduce manipulative behaviour.
- The United Kingdom has proposed enacting an **Online Safety Bill** which will expect social media platforms (intermediaries) to actively monitor problematic content.
  - Though the U.K. Bill is under review by a committee in the House of Lords, there are already calls from companies, including WhatsApp and Signal, to scrap the legislation in the interest of **privacy**.
  - During the progress of the U.K. Bill, the provisions to monitor **"legal but harmful" content** have already been replaced with greater onus on social media platforms to enforce their terms and conditions in accordance with their policies.

INDIA'S EFFORTS

- There has been **little discussion** on the menace and the extent of disinformation in India.
- The Union of India has only employed knee-jerk measures such as **Internet shutdowns** across jurisdictions.
  - This approach **disregards the doctrine of proportionality** and seems over-simplistic, non-transparent and autocratic.

- The Union government has also granted itself greater powers to strike down any content that is found to be unpalatable.
  - For instance, under **Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000**, the Union Government can block access to any information online that it considers necessary in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the state or public order.
- The **Broadcasting Content Complaint Council** (BCCC) also admits complaints against TV broadcasters for objectionable TV content and fake news.

- More recently, the Union brought out the **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** to regulate content by online publishers, news and social media intermediaries.
  - The intermediaries are required **to publish privacy policy** and terms of use of their platform and remove any unlawful content.
  - The recent draft amendments to these IT Rules, 2021, empower the Press Information Bureau (PIB), **to flag inaccurate and fake news related to government bodies on social media platforms**.
  - The amendments are being criticised as measure to curb criticism against the Union Government than about blocking fake news as such.
- A **Fact Check Unit** under the **Press Information Bureau** is also being set up to curb the dissemination of wrong information through social media platforms.
  - It also takes cognizance of fake news both suo motu and by way of queries sent by citizens on its portal or through e-mail and Whatsapp.
- The MeitY's **Information Security Education and Awareness (ISEA)** program creates awareness among users highlighting the importance of following the ethics while using internet and advising them not to share rumours/fake news.

LEGISLATIONS IN THIS REGARD

- **The IT Act, 2008**: The offence related to electronic communication shall be punished under section 66 D of IT Act.
- **The Disaster Management Act, 2005**: Whoever makes/circulates a false alarm/warning as to disaster/its severity/magnitude, leading to panic shall be punished under the DM Act.
- **The Indian Penal Code, 1860**: Fake news creating false alarm in public, fake news creating riots and information causing defamation shall be punished under different sections of the IPC.

JUDGEMENTS (SC)

- **Alakh Alok Srivastava vs Union of India (2020)**: The SC in this case dealt with a PIL on the plight of migrant workers walking back home during first lockdown.
  - Such instances illustrate the real dangers to public order as a result of the dissemination of fake news.
- **Tehseen S. Poonawalla vs Union of India (2018)**: The apex court in this case held that it is the duty of the Union and State governments to take steps to curb dissemination of "irresponsible and explosive messages having content which is likely to incite mob violence and lynching of any kind.

WHAT STEPS WERE TAKEN BY TN GOVT. IN THIS EPISODE?

- The TN police put out a specific clarification that the video clips being circulated were both false and mischievous.

- The TN CM also assured the CM of Bihar that there was adequate protection for migrant workers in TN.

- **Helplines** were also set up by the TN government at the district level, particularly in the areas with a concentration of migrant workers.

- Higher TN officials also interacted with migrant workers, reassuring them about their safety.

- A high-level government delegation from Bihar also visited TN and confirmed first hand that there was no truth to the rumours about migrant workers being targeted in the State.

3.9 PM MITRA

The Government of India recently announced the sites for setting up of 7 PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks for the Textile industry.

- **Seven sites were chosen out of 18 proposals for PM MITRA parks which were received from 13 States.**
- **The Parks will come up in Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.**

PM MITRA A LANDMARK DECISION TO EMPOWER TEXTILES SECTOR

Approves 7 Mega Integrated Textile Region & Apparel (MITRA) Parks

- 7 MITRA Parks with a total outlay of ₹4,445 Crores in a period of 5 years

- World-class Industrial infrastructure to attract investment

- Generation of 7 lakh direct and 14 lakh of indirect employment

ABOUT PM MITRA

- It will offer the opportunity to **create an Integrated Textiles Value Chain** right from spinning, weaving, processing/dyeing and printing to garment manufacturing etc. at one location and will reduce the logistics cost of the Industry.

- A **Special Purpose Vehicle** owned by the Centre and State Government will be set up for each park which will oversee **the implementation of the project.**

- **Funding**
  - The Ministry of Textiles will provide financial support in the form of **Development Capital Support up to Rs. 500 crores** per park to the Park SPV.
  - A Competitive Incentive Support (CIS) of up to Rs 300 crore per park to the units in PM MITRA Park shall also be provided to incentivise speedy implementation.
  - State governments will provide a **contiguous and encumbrance-free land** parcel of at least 1000 acres of land.

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Textiles

- The Scheme has a budget outlay of **4445 Crore** including administrative expenses of Rs 30 crore over 7-year period up to 2027-28.

- The scheme will develop **an integrated large scale and modern industrial infrastructure facility (parks)** for total value-chain (spinning, weaving, processing, printing, etc) of the textile industry.

- **These parks** are envisaged to be **located at sites which have inherent strengths** for the textile industry to flourish and have necessary linkages to succeed.

- The scheme envisages to leverage the **Public Private Partnership (PPP) model** for fast paced implementation in a time-bound manner.

- PM MITRA mega textile parks will boost the textiles sector in line with **5F** (Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign) vision.

All-in-one parks

The PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) scheme was announced in October 2021

- The parks will come up by 2026-27
- The total outlay for the project is ₹4,445 crore, though the initial allocation in the 2023-24 Budget is only ₹200 crore
- States have offered to provide at least 1,000 acres, says Minister Goyal

- Spinning, weaving, processing/dyeing, printing and garment manufacturing will be done at one location

- Effort is to reduce logistics cost of textile industry and make it globally competitive

3.10 HORSESHOE CRABS

Scientists have recently urged the **Odisha government** to immediately come up with a robust protection mechanism before the **Horseshoe crabs** (living fossil) becomes extinct due to destructive fishing practices.

ABOUT HORSESHOE CRAB

- The horseshoe crab is a **marine chelicerate arthropod** living in shallow coastal waters on **soft sandy or muddy bottoms** and spawns mostly on intertidal beaches at summer-spring high tides.

- The Chelicerata is a division within the Arthropoda, containing animals such as spiders, scorpions, harvestmen, mites and ticks. Like all arthropods, they have a **segmented body** and **segmented limbs and a thick chitinous cuticle** called an exoskeleton.

- It is known as a marine **'living fossil'.**

- There are **four extant horsesho**e crab species:
    - The American horseshoe crab (Limulus polyphemus) along **the eastern coast of the USA and in the Gulf of Mexico,**
    - The tri-spine horseshoe crab (Tachypleus tridentatus),
    - The coastal horseshoe crab (Tachypleus gigas)
    - The mangrove horseshoe crab (Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda)

- The last three are **Indo-Pacific species** found mainly in the coastal waters **of India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan.**

- **Odisha** is the largest habitat of horseshoe crabs in India.

- **Conservation status in India**
    - **Wildlife Protection Act 1972: Schedule IV**

- **IUCN Status**
    - **American horseshoe crab: Vulnerable**
    - **Tri-spine horseshoe crab: Endangered**
    - The two other species are not listed yet

3.11 MATUA COMMUNITY

Recently, the Prime Minister of India has urged people to visit **Matua Maha Mela** in large numbers which is being celebrated by the Matua community and also paid tribute to **Shri Harichand Thakur.**

ABOUT MATUA COMMUNITY

- Matuas trace their ancestry to East Bengal, and many of them entered **West Bengal** after Partition and after the formation of Bangladesh.

- Today, Matuas constitute the second largest SC population of West Bengal.

- The Matua community has members on either side of the Bengal border.

- The **Matua Mahasangha, a religious reform movement** and a sect was formed by **Harichand Thakur** in East Bengal in the mid-1800s.

- It is a **Hindu reform movement** which has a considerable number of adherents in West Bengal as well as in Bangladesh.

3.12 INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT ISSUES WARRANT AGAINST VLADIMIR PUTIN

The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** has issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Putin for war crimes because of his **alleged involvement in abductions of children from Ukraine.**
The arrest warrant for Mr. Putin, a sitting head of state of a U.N. Security Council member, is an unprecedented step for the ICC.

ABOUT ICC

- **About**
  - It is a permanent court to prosecute serious international crimes committed by individuals.
  - It tries crimes such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression.
  - The court was established to fight global impunity and bring to justice criminals under international law, regardless of their rank or stature.
    - It is different from the United Nations' International Court of Justice, also at The Hague.
- **HQ**
  - The Hague, The Netherlands
- Statute
  - Before the ICC became functional in 2002, its founding treaty was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1998 in Rome, Italy, thereby making it the Rome Statute.

MEMBERSHIP

- To become a member of the ICC or State party to the Rome Statute, countries have to sign the statute and ratify it under their respective legislatures.

- 123 countries are currently members of the ICC, with African countries making up the largest bloc.

- Notably, countries including **India, China, Iraq, North Korea and Turkey never signed the Rome Statute.**
- Others including the US, Russia, Israel and Syria signed, but never ratified it.

HOW DOES ICC FUNCTION?

- **Judges & Prosecutors**
  - The court carries out its investigations through the Office of the Prosecutor and has 18 judges.
  - Both the judges and prosecutors hold non-renewable nine-year terms.
- **Process**
  - There are pre-trial, trial, and appellate benches in the ICC.
  - The prosecutor conducts a preliminary examination in a matter, before seeking permission from pre-trial judges to open a full investigation.
    - The initial examination must conclude that the crimes in question are of sufficient gravity.

WAYS TO OPEN INVESTIGATION

- The prosecutor can open an investigation in **three ways**:
  - when a case is referred by a member country in its own territory;
  - when a case is referred by the UN Security Council; and
  - when the prosecutor takes up a case on his own (proprio motu).

- **Non-member states** can also be investigated in **three ways**:
  - if alleged crimes were perpetrated by non-members in member states,
  - if the non-members accept the court's jurisdiction, or
  - when the Security Council authorises it.

3.13 XI-PUTIN MEETING

China's President Xi Jinping is on an enormously significant **three-day visit to Russia.**
He landed in Moscow days after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued warrants for the arrest of President Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes.
Chinese President Xi Jinping has embarked on his **first trip to Russia since the country invaded Ukraine last year.**
His trip to Russia offers a symbolic shot in the arm (stimulus) to his increasingly isolated Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin.
It also highlights Xi's determination to push back against American power in the world.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP (FOR CHINA)

- **From security point of view**
  - From the point of view of security, it is imperative for Beijing to maintain both outreach and cordial relations with Moscow.
  - Despite the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia is still China's largest neighbour, a major source of military technology.
  - Russia continues to exercise influence in the former Soviet states that border China's troubled west.

- **Economic and energy security**
    - Russia is now a <u>major source of hydrocarbon energy</u> as well as a market for China's manufacturing and technology.

- **Strategic**
    - China sees in Russia an ally in the opposition to Western liberal ideas and a US-led global order.
    - The Chinese under Xi declared a <u>partnership with no limits</u> during Putin's visit to Beijing in early February 2022 on the eve of his invasion of Ukraine.
    - To the Chinese, Western sanctions against Russia are an example of what a new Chinese document on their Global Security Initiative calls "<u>abusing unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction</u>".

- **Message to non-western world**
    - Xi sees value in showing the non-Western world that there is an alternative to American power and ideas of how the world should be run.

TAKEAWAYS FOR CHINA FROM THE WAR

- Experts believe Beijing is unlikely to want an end to the Russian war in Ukraine for several reasons.

- **Weak Russia and opportunity for China**
    - Being tied down in Ukraine has the effect of weakening Russia militarily, economically, and politically.
    - This is a vacuum that China can step into, especially in Eurasia.
        - E.g., In September last year, China offered security guarantees to Kazakhstan during Xi's visit there, and made Belarus its second "all-weather strategic partner" after Pakistan.

- **Diversion of the United States' attention and resources**
    - A prolonged conflict in Ukraine means that the West's, and in particular the United States', attention and resources are diverted.
    - From Beijing's point of view, it weakens the focus on and reduces the resources for any potential Western intervention on China's eastern seaboard, particularly in the scenario of a crisis over Taiwan.

- **Rising Chinese role**
    - A continuing crisis in Ukraine offers opportunities for international messaging about the relative rise in Chinese power in comparison to both the Russians and Americans.

There is, therefore, little reason for Xi to try and persuade Putin to stop the war.

    - China's political support at forums such as the United Nations and elsewhere has been crucial to Russia building a case for the legitimacy of the war.

3.14 INDO PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

Recently, an Inter-Ministerial delegation from India led by the Department of Commerce participated in the second Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) negotiating round in Bali, Indonesia from March 13-19, 2023.

ABOUT INDO PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK (IPEF)

India agreed to be a part of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), a U.S.-led economic grouping comprising 14 countries.

WHAT IS IPEF?

IPEF is a U.S.-led framework for participating countries to **solidify their relationships and engage in crucial economic and trade matters** that concern the region, such as building resilient supply chains battered by the pandemic.

It is not a free trade agreement.

Basics of IPEF

❖ The economic framework broadly rests on four pillars.

- fair and resilient trade,
- supply chain resilience,
- infrastructure and decarbonization, and
- tax and anticorruption.

❖ Countries are free to join (or not join) initiatives under any of the stipulated pillars but are expected to adhere to all commitments once they enroll. (India has not joined the trade pillar)

❖ IPEF is more about standard setting and facilitating trade (administrative) and will not involve more market access for its members nor will it negotiate lower tariffs.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCERNS FOR INDIA

The forum brings an opportunity to **strengthen its economic footprint** in the region along with **making its supply chain resilient**, building new partnerships and strengthening the existing ones for **Green Economy** and **streamlining its issues wrt taxation.**

But there are eminent concerns for India too. These can be:

- Dominance of USA.
- It can be a blow to India's digital economy as India will be asked to dilute its Data Localisation norms. (which India has avoided)
- India can be pressurised on its Labour laws too.
- India's IPR regime is not in line with the IPR regime of USA

INDIA'S PM ON IPEF

3Ts—Trust, Transparency, and Timeliness—mentioned by the Indian Prime Minister during the launch ceremony are very important for the success of this initiative.

Trust and transparency will be built only if members, particularly the US, accommodate each other's interests.

If achieved, both will lead to timely delivery of the intended outcome. If the US is not accommodative and driven by its own interests, the IPEF may not be a success

3.15 KASHMIRI STAG

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In a recent census conducted at Kashmir's **Dachigam National Park,** it was found that the population of **Hangul or Kashmir Stag** has gradually increased over time at the national park.

ABOUT KASHMIRI STAG

- The Kashmir stag also called hangul is a subspecies of Central Asian red deer **endemic to Kashmir** and surrounding areas.

- It is found in dense riverine forests in the high valleys and mountains of Jammu and Kashmir and northern Himachal Pradesh.

- In Kashmir, it is found primarily in **the Dachigam National Park** where it receives protection.

- A small population has also been witnessed **in Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary in south Kashmir.**

- **Conservation status**
  - **IUCN: Critically Endangered**
  - **CITES : Appendix I**

ABOUT DACHIGAM NATIONAL PARK

- The actual beauty of the park lies in the **deep valleys, rocky outcrops**, steep wooded slopes and rolling alpine pastures.

- Being located in a mountainous area, Dachigam National Park faces a huge variation in altitude that ranges from 1600 m to 4200 m above sea level.

- This variation in altitude categorises Dachigam National Park into two regions- the upper region and the lower region.

- **Flora:** It is extremely rich in Wild Cherry, Pear, Plum, Peach, Apple, Apricot, Walnut, Chestnut, Oak, Willow, Poplar, Chinar, Birch, Pine and Elm.

- **Fauna:** Hangul (Kashmir Stag), **Musk deer**, Brown Bear, Leopards, Jungle Cats, Himalayan black bear, and a few species of wild goats like the **markhor and ibex.**

3.16 WASTE TO ENERGY

The Kerala government recently announced the State's first waste-to-energy project in Kozhikode. The planned facility is expected to be built in two years and generate about 6 MW of power.

WHICH TYPE OF WASTE IS USED TO PRODUCE ENERGY?

- Waste-to-energy projects use non-recyclable dry waste to generate electricity.

- The process increases the State's power generation capacity and eases the Solid Waste Management (SWM) burden.

- Generally, **solid waste in India is 55-60% biodegradable organic waste**, which can be converted into organic compost or biogas; 25-30% non-biodegradable dry waste; and around 15% silt, stones, and drain waste.

- Of the non-biodegradable dry waste, only 2-3% – including hard plastics, metals, and e-waste – is recyclable.
  - The remainder consists of low-grade plastic, rags, and cloth that can't be recycled.

- This **fraction of the non-recyclable dry waste is the most challenging portion of the present SWM system; the presence of these materials also reduces the efficiency of recycling other dry and wet waste**.
- Waste-to-energy plants use this portion to generate power. The waste is combusted to generate heat, which is converted into electricity.
- Waste-to-energy plants in major cities could also consume a portion of the non-recyclable dry waste generated in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) nearby.

WHY DO WASTE TO ENERGY PLANTS FAIL?
While waste-to-energy plants seem like a simple solution, they have several challenges for them to becoming feasible.

- **Low calorific value of solid waste in India due to improper segregation** –
    - The **calorific value of mixed Indian waste is about 1,500 kcal/kg, which is not suitable for power generation**. (Coal's calorific value is around 8,000 kcal/kg.)
    - Biodegradable waste has high moisture content and can't be used for power generation; it should be composted instead.
    - The calorific value of segregated and dried non-recyclable dry waste is much higher, at 2,800-3,000 kcal/kg, sufficient to generate power.
    - However, **segregation (ideally at the source, if not at the processing plant) should be streamlined to ensure the waste coming to the facility has this calorific value**.

- **High costs of Energy Production** –
    - The **cost of generating power from waste is around Rs 7-8/unit**.
    - In comparison, the cost at which the **States' electricity boards buy power from coal, hydroelectric, and solar power plants is around Rs 3-4/unit**.
    - While State electricity boards are considering purchasing power from newer renewable energy sources like waste-to-energy, the price of the power generated needs to be reduced.

- **Improper Management** –
    - Many waste-to-energy projects have failed because of improper assessments, high expectations, improper characterisation studies, and other on-ground conditions.

SOLUTIONS

- **Proper Segregation at Source** –
    - Setting up waste-to-energy projects is complex and needs the full support of the municipality, the State and the people.
    - To overcome its various challenges, **the municipality must ensure that only non-biodegradable dry waste is sent to the plant and separately manage the other kinds of waste**.

- **Proper Planning & Execution** –
    - The municipality or the department responsible for SWM should be practical about the high cost of power generation, and include the State electricity department, perhaps as a tripartite agreement between the municipality, the plant operator, and the power distribution agency.

- It is also **crucial to conduct field studies and learn from the experience of other projects**.

3.17 LIST OF WASTE TO ENERGY PLANTS IN INDIA
PM FORMALISATION OF MICRO FOOD PROCESSING ENTERPRISES SCHEME

- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** launched in 2020 with an **outlay of Rs.10,000 crore**.
- **Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Food Processing Industries.**
- **Duration**: It will be implemented over a **5-year period** from **2020-21 to 2024-25.**
- **Fund Sharing:** The expenditure under the scheme would be shared in a **60:40 ratio between Central and State** Governments, a 90:10 ratio with North Eastern and Himalayan States, a 60:40 ratio with UTs with legislature, and 100% by Centre for other UTs.

OBJECTIVES

- **Formalization of micro units** by means of GST, Udyog Aadhar, and FSSAI registrations.
- **Financial assistance to individual units** for the upgradation of food processing facilities.
- **Quality improvement and skill development** through training and technical knowledge.
- **Financial assistance to Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**, Self Help Groups (**SHGs**), and producer's cooperatives **for setting up common infrastructure facilities**.
- **Branding and marketing support** to FPOs, SHGs, and producer cooperatives.
- Support and **assistance in availing bank loans** and preparation of detailed project reports (DPR)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- **Support to Individual micro-units:**
  - Micro enterprises will get **credit linked subsidy at 35% of the eligible project cost** with a **ceiling of Rs.10 lakh**.
  - The **beneficiary contribution will be minimum of 10%** and the balance from the loan.
- **Support to FPOs/SHGs/Cooperatives:**
  - **Seed capital** will be given **to SHGs (at Rs. 4 lacks per SHG) for loans to members** for working capital and small tools.
  - **Grant for backward/ forward linkages**, common infrastructure, packaging, marketing & branding.

3.18 WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT
India has been ranked at the 126th place among 146 countries in the recently released World Happiness Report.

ABOUT THE REPORT

- It is an annual publication of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).**
- It is based on **global survey** data from people in **more than 150 countries**.
- It is based **on people's own assessment of their happiness**, as well as economic and social data.

- The report considers **six key factors**: **social support, income, health, freedom, generosity**, and **absence of corruption.**

- It assigns a happiness score **based on an average of data over a three-year period.**

- **Highlights of World Happiness Report 2023:**
  - **Finland** has been named the **happiest country in the world** for the sixth consecutive year.
  - **India is ranked 126**, ten places higher than its ranking of 136 in 2022. It remains **below most neighboring counties**, including Pakistan (108) and Sri Lanka (112).

ABOUT SDSN

- It was **launched in 2012 under** the auspices of the **UN Secretary-General**.

- SDSN **mobilizes global scientific and technological expertise** to promote practical **solutions for sustainable development**, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement.

SDSN **works closely with United Nations agencies**, multilateral financing institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

Week 4
CURRENT AFFAIRS

4.1 RIGHT TO INFORMATION

The Supreme Court recently directed all high courts to set up RTI websites within three months.

GENESIS OF RTI:

Genesis of RTI law started in 1986, through judgement of Supreme Court in **Mr. Kulwal v/s Jaipur Municipal Corporation** case, in which it directed that freedom of speech and expression provided under **Article 19** of the Constitution clearly implies Right to Information, as without information the freedom of speech and expression cannot be fully used by the citizens.

ABOUT THE ACT

- It is a law enacted by the Parliament of India "to provide for **setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens**.

- The **Right to Information** is **derived** from our **fundamental right of Expression** under **Article 19** of the Constitution of India.

- The Act **applies to all States and Union Territories** of India.

- Under the provisions of the Act, **any citizen may request information from a "public authority"** (a body of Government or "instrumentality of State") by making an **application in writing** or through **electronic means**.

- The information seeker is **not required to give reasons** for seeking information.

- **Public Information Officer (PIO): Every public authority shall designate** some of its officers as They are **responsible for giving information** to a person who seeks information under the RTI Act.

- **Time Period for Supply of Information**:
  - **In the normal course**, information to an applicant shall be s**upplied within 30 days** from the receipt of the application by the public authority.
  - If the **information sought concerns the life or liberty of a person**, it should be **supplied within 48 hours.**

- The Act also **requires every public authority to computerize their records for** wide dissemination and to **proactively publish** certain categories of **information** so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request information formally.

- **Exemptions:**
  - It also contains **several exemptions** which **enable public authorities to deny** requests for information. It ranges from the **sovereignty and security of India to trade secrets.**
  - Section 24 of the act exempts certain security and intelligence organizations from the purview of the act **except** the information pertaining to the **allegations of corruption and human rights violations.**

OBJECTIVES

- To empower the citizens
- To promote transparency and accountability
- To contain corruption and
- To enhance people's participation in democratic process.

WHAT DOES PUBLIC AUTHORITY MEAN?
"Public authority" means any authority or body or institution of self government established or constituted—

- by or under the Constitution;

- by any other law made by Parliament/State Legislature.

- by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any—

  - body owned, controlled or substantially financed;
  - non-Government organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

4.2 PRADHAN MANTRI VAN DHAN VIKAS YOJANA

Recently, the Union Minister of Tribal said in the Lok Sabha that 15 lakh rupees per **Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK)** were given under the **Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojna** for the support of livelihood activities of tribal people in the country.

ABOUT:

- The Van Dhan Scheme is an **initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED**.

- It was launched on 14th April 2018 and seeks to improve tribal incomes through the value addition of tribal products.

IMPLEMENTATION

- The scheme will be implemented through the Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and **TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.**

- At the State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at the grassroots level.

- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.

- A typical Van Dhan Vikas Kendra constitutes **10 tribal Van Dhan Vikas Self Help Groups (SHG)**, each comprising of upto 30 MFP gatherers or tribal handicraft artisans i.e. about 300 beneficiaries per Kendra.

- The initiative is expected to provide an enhanced livelihood to about 25 lakh tribal gatherers in the country.

4.3 LAUNCH VEHICLE MARK 3 (LVM3)

Recently, Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) LVM3 or GSLV-Mk3 successfully put into space 36 satellites of Bharti-backed OneWeb.
ABOUT LAUNCH VEHICLE MARK 3

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has renamed the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Mark -III as Launch Vehicle Mark-III, mainly to identify its task of placing satellites into a variety of orbits.

- Launch Vehicle Mark III (LVM3) -M2 is the dedicated commercial satellite mission of **New Space India Limited (NSIL), a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Department of Space, Government of India.**

- The LVM3 rocket (earlier called the Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle Mark III or GSLV-MK3) can carry up to **8 tonnes into low earth orbit (LEO-up to 1,200 km above the Earth).**

- The rocket is a **three-stage launch vehicle** consisting of two solid propellant S200 strap-ons on its sides and core stage comprising L110 liquid stage and C25 cryogenic stage.

- The PSLV is much lighter and can carry between 1.4 and 1.75-tonne payloads.

ABOUT ONE WEB
- **OneWeb is a joint venture between India's Bharti Enterprises and the U.K. government.**
- **This is One Web's 14th launch, bringing the constellation to 616 satellites.**
- **This launch represents more than 70% of its planned 648 Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite fleet that will deliver high-speed, low-latency connectivity worldwide.**

ABOUT NSIL
- It is a Central Public Sector Enterprise established in 2019.

- It is the **second commercial entity of the Department of Space** (DoS) after Antrix Corporation Limited, which was set up in 1992 to market the products and services of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

- **Mandate**
  - Transfer technology to industry for producing commercially successful PSLV spacecraft launchers.
  - Outsource assembly of small satellites and the upcoming Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).
  - To commercially exploit the R&D work done by ISRO centres and DoS constituents.

4.4 BIOTRANSFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
Recently, a UK-based start-up has claimed that they have developed Biotransformation technology that can alter the state of plastics and make them biodegradable.

WHAT IS BIOTRANSFORMATION TECHNOLOGY?
- Biotransformation technology is a process which **alters the state of plastics** and makes them biodegradable.

- The technology would digest the plastic packaging waste naturally **with the help of microbes** without leaving behind any microplastics.

- It ensures that plastic which escaped refuse streams is fully biodegraded in the natural environment.

PROCESS INVOLVED
- Plastics made using this technology are given a pre-programmed time during which it looks and functions like conventional plastics.

- After expiry and exposure to the external environment, it self-destructs and **bio transforms into bioavailable wax.**

- This wax is then consumed by microorganisms, converting waste into water, CO2, and biomass.

- The technology attacks the crystalline and amorphous region of the polymer structure, rapidly turning it into a wax-like material.

- This wax-like material is no longer plastic and is not harmful to the environment.

4.5 ARMED FORCES SPECIAL POWERS ACT

The Union Home Minister recently said that the Centre has decided to further reduce the jurisdiction of **'disturbed areas'** under the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur.**

WHERE & HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED PRESENTLY?

- The Centre has further reduced the number of areas in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur that were declared disturbed areas under the AFSPA due to an improvement in the security situation.
  - Both State and Central governments can issue notifications regarding the AFSPA.
  - Currently, the MHA issues periodic 'Disturbed Area' notifications to extend the AFSPA only for **Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.**
  - The notifications for Manipur and Assam are issued by the respective State Governments.

- With the latest decision, starting April 1, the Disturbed Areas notification will be lifted from:
  - one more district in Assam,
  - four more police stations in Manipur and
  - three more police stations in Nagaland.

- On the other hand, one police station in Arunachal Pradesh — Chowkham — was declared a Disturbed Area under the Act.

ORIGIN:

The act is **inspired from a British era law** which was passed in 1942 during the Quit India movement.

In the wake of the partition riots, four ordinances were promulgated in 1947. The first was the Bengal Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; this was followed by ordinances for Assam, East Punjab and Delhi , and the United Provinces. These were replaced by a common legislation, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1948. This was meant to be in force for one year, but was repealed only in 1957.

The Act came into force in the **context of increasing violence in the North-eastern States** in 1950s, which the State governments found difficult to control.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958.

It became known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.

Definitions:

- **Armed Forces:**
  Armed forces under the act means **military forces operating and air forces operating, and include any other armed forces of the Union operating.**

- **Disturbed Areas:**
  Areas are considered disturbed by **reason of differences or disputes between members of different religious, linguistic, regional or caste communities.**

Under **Article 3 of AFSPA,** this definition exists. The central government or the Governor of the state or Administrator of any UT can declare an area as a 'DIsturbed Area'.

Special Powers:

Any *Commissioned officer, Warrant officer, Non-commissioned officer* or any other person of Armed forces equivalent rank:

- After giving such **due warning** as he considered necessary, **fire upon** or otherwise **use force even to the causing of death**, against any person who is **acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force** in the disturbed areas.

- **Arrest without warrant** and use of force for that purpose.

- **Destroy any arms dump** or destroy the fortified position and shelter.

- Enter and **search the premises** (including vehicles) over the suspicion without warrant.

IS THIS LAW NEEDED?

Arguments in Favour:

- **Provide more power to the armed forces** to perform their activities to restore the normal situation.

- If AFSPA is prematurely withdrawn the security situation will deteriorate and it **will take more time to store peace.**

- **Law codes (IPC & CrPC) provides limited power** to deal with violent situations.

- In disturbed areas the **involvement of proxy groups** are also there, in order to break that nexus extraordinary powers are required. Extra-ordinary powers are also necessary as the armed forces face **asymmetric warfare** involving lone wolf attacks, etc

- **Effective functioning** - A sense of security in the members of Armed forces is essential to function effectively in insurgency and militancy affected areas.

- **Security of nation** - Provisions of this act have played a crucial role in maintaining law and order in disturbed areas. Thus, protecting sovereignty and security of the nation.

- **Protection of members of armed forces** - It is crucial to empower members of armed forces who constantly face threat to their lives at the hands of insurgents and militants. Its withdrawal would result in poor morale.

Arguments Against:

- **Misuse of the provisions** of Acts leading to abuse of power in the *form of fake encounters, extra- judicial killings, disappearances,* etc. Hence, AFSPA is **described as draconian, repressive, colonial and archaic law in Indian democracy**.

- AFSPA can be seen as violation of all other **constitutional rights** like prevention against arrest and detention, privacy etc.

- Human rights violations in AFSPA areas are not inquired into and followed by adequate action. Thus, it is **against the principle of natural justice**.

- **Diminishing credibility of democracy** - People's disillusionment with democratic setup is tapped by secessionists and terror sympathizers, which leads to more violence & more counter violence creating a vicious cycle.

- **Ineffective** - Critics argue that this act has failed in its objective of restoring normalcy in disturbed areas although being in existence for about 50 years.

Where is AFSPA applicable presently?

- As of today, **some parts of Assam and Nagaland (April 2022) are 'disturbed areas'**.

- Some parts of **Manipur (April 2022)** with the exception of the Imphal municipal area, has been notified by the State government for one year from December 2020.

- In Arunachal Pradesh, **the 'disturbed area'** notification is confined to the districts of Tirap, Changlang and Longding, and the areas falling under Namsai and Mahadevapura police stations, bordering Assam.

- Jammu and Kashmir has a separate J&K Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1990.

Observations on AFSPA:

- **Jeewan Reddy Committee:**
  - Recommended abolition of AFSPA.
  - A comprehensive arrangement can be made under UAPA.
  - Only Commissioned Officers can order use of force if He/She feels necessary.
  - Each district should have a grievance cell. This cell should be independent and competent to enquire into the violation of rights.

- **Justice Santosh Hegde Committee:**
  - While investigating fake encounters in Manipur, the committee described AFSPA as a **'symbol of oppression'.**

- **Justice Verma committee:**
  The committee, on offences against women in war areas recommended that amendments to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and even questioned its continuance in such areas.
  　　　The report has recommended that the **Act's provision of seeking sanction from the central government** before initiating any legal action against an armed forces personnel should be done away with in case of **sexual crimes.** These would include crimes such as outraging the modesty of a woman and rape.

- **Second ARC Report:** The 5th report has recommended repeal of AFSPA.

Supreme Court's viewpoint

- **Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v/s Union of India (1998):**
  There were **questions about the constitutionality of AFSPA,** given that **law and order is a state subject**. The Supreme Court has **upheld the constitutionality of AFSPA in a 1998 judgement**

In this judgement, the Supreme Court arrived at certain conclusions including:
　　a) a **suo-motu declaration can be made by the Central government**, however, it is desirable that the **state government should be consulted** by the central government before making the declaration;
　　b) AFSPA **does not confer arbitrary powers** to declare an area as a 'disturbed area';
　　c) The declaration has **to be for a limited duration** and there should be a **periodic review** of the declaration **6 months have expired**;
　　d) While exercising the powers conferred upon him by AFSPA, the **authorised officer should use minimal force** necessary for effective action;
　　e) The authorised officer should strictly follow the **'Dos and Don'ts'** issued by the army.

The 2016 judgement

- SC ruled that every death caused by armed forces in a disturbed area involving either a common person or an insurgent **must be thoroughly enquired into** so as to find out whether

the killing was extra-judicial or not.

- Thus there is **no absolute immunity for armed forces personnel** who commit a crime even in a disturbed area.

Supreme Court was hearing the **plea demanding probe into 1528 deaths alleged to be fake or extra-judicial** encounters by the armed forces in the **state of Manipur.**

4.5 EARTH HOUR

- It is a **global grassroots movement** uniting people to take action **on environmental issues and protect the planet.**
- It is **organized by World Wildlife Fund (WWF).**
- It was **started by WWF** and partners **as a symbolic lights-out event in Sydney in 2007.**
- It **takes place on the last Saturday of March every year**.
- "Earth Hour" **encourages people to switch off all lights for an hour, from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm local time** to promote awareness of climate change challenges and energy conservation.
- Governments and companies also participate by turning off non-essential lights in their buildings, monuments, and landmarks **to raise awareness about the impact of energy consumption on our planet.**
- **This symbolic act, known as the 'lights off' moment, unites people worldwide** in a show of **support for the planet** and serves as a reminder of the environmental issues facing us.

WHAT IS WWF?

- It is an **international non-governmental organization (NGO**) **founded in 1961** in Morges, Switzerland, **to protect endangered species of wildlife and preserve natural habitats.**
- **Mission**: To **stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment** and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.
- **WWF works** with a broad spectrum of partners, including **governments**, **industry**, and **local communities**, **to find solutions** to the challenges that face our natural world.

4.6 NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR PROMOTING UPSKILLING OF NIRMAN WORKERS (NIPUN)

The **National Initiative for Promoting Upskilling of Nirman workers (NIPUN)** has recently completed its training program for construction workers engaged in the Central Vista project in New Delhi.
ABOUT THE SCHEME:

- It is an innovative project for the **skill training of construction workers.**
- It is an **initiative of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) under** its flagship scheme of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-**National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM).**
- **Objective**: To **train over 1 lakh construction workers** through fresh skilling and upskilling programmes and **provides them with work opportunities in foreign countries**
- The **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC**), the nodal agency under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India, **will be the Implementation Partner** for the project NIPUN.
- **The project implementation is divided into three parts:**
  - training through **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** at construction sites;
  - training through **Fresh Skilling by Plumbing and Infrastructure Sector Skill Council (SSC);**

- **International Placement** through industries/ builders/ contractors;
- The **courses are aligned with National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)** and will be imparted at accredited and affiliated training centres.
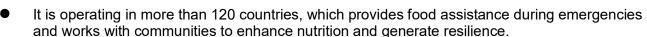- It will **provide trainees with 'Kaushal Bima', three-year accidental insurance** with **coverage of Rs 2 lakhs.**

ABOUT DEEN DAYAL ANTYODAYA YOJANA-NATIONAL URBAN LIVELIHOOD MISSION (NULM)

- It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**, being implemented since 2014-15.
- **Implementing ministry: Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation**.
- **Coverage:** The scheme covers **all 4041 statutory cities and towns.**
- **Objectives**:
  - To **reduce poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households** by enabling them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities.
  - **Providing the shelter** equipped with essential services to the urban homeless in a phased manner.
  - **Providing suitable space, institutional credit, and social security** and **skills** to the urban street vendor for accessing emerging market opportunities.

4.7 WORLD FOOD PROGRAM

According to a new World Food Programme (WFP) report the reach of school meals in low-income countries remains four percent below pre-pandemic levels, despite a recovery overall

ABOUT WFP

- World Food Programme is a branch of the **United Nations** that deals with hunger eradication and promotes food security in the world.
- It is a **member of the United Nations Development Programme** (UNDP).
- It is operating in more than 120 countries, which provides food assistance during emergencies and works with communities to enhance nutrition and generate resilience.
- It has been functioning in India since 1963.
- **Funding:** WFP is funded by **voluntary donations from governments**, corporates and private donors.

REPORT BY WFP

- **Report** released by **the WFP is Global Report on Food Crisis**
  - The Global Report on Food Crises describes the scale of acute hunger in the world.
  - It provides an analysis of the drivers that are contributing to food crises across the globe.
  - The report is produced by **the Global Network against Food Crises**, an international alliance working to address the root causes of extreme hunger.

4.8 ARAVALLI GREEN WALL PROJECT

Recently, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched the **Aravalli Green Wall Project** at a function organised to celebrate the **International Day of Forests** at Tikli Village in Haryana.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

- The project is a major initiative to **green the 5 km buffer area around Aravalli Hill.**

- The Aravalli Green Wall Project is part of the Union Environment Ministry's vision to create green corridors across the country **to combat land degradation and desertification.**

- The project covers the states of **Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi** - where the Aravalli hills landscape span over 6 million hectares of land.

- The project will involve **planting native species of trees and shrubs on scrubland, wasteland** and degraded forest land, along with **rejuvenating and restoring surface water bodies such as ponds, lakes and streams.**

- The project will also focus on **agroforestry and pasture development** to enhance the livelihoods of local communities.

OBJECTIVES

- Improving the ecological health of the Aravalli range.

- To **prevent the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert** and to **reduce land degradation** by creating green barriers that will prevent soil erosion, desertification and dust storms

- Contribute to India's commitments under various international conventions such as **UNCCD** (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), **CBD** (Convention on Biological Diversity) and **UNFCCC** (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

ABOUT ARAVALLIS

- The Aravalli Range is one of the **oldest fold mountains of the world** which runs in a southwest direction, starting near Delhi, passing through southern Haryana and Rajasthan, and ending in Gujarat.

- The highest peak is **Guru Shikhar** at 1,722 metres (5,650 ft).

- Three major rivers originate from the Aravali hills, namely **Banas**, **Sahibi** and **Luni** River (which flows into the Rann of Kutch).

4.9 PARVAT MALA PROJECT

The Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways recently informed the Lok Sabha about the detailed feasibility studies of **eight projects** for **Ropeway implementation** under the **Parvatmala programme**.

ABOUT THE SCHEME

- The National Ropeway Development Programme also known as 'Parvatmala' (Parvat Mala means garlanding mountains) was announced in the 2022-23 Union Budget.

- **Aim:** To decongest mountainous areas where road and train connectivity cannot be upgraded beyond a limit.

- Under phase-I of the project, 30 priority points or stretches will be constructed

- Parvatmala will construct ropeways in mountainous terrains of India under the **Public Private Partnership (PPP).**

- **Nodal Ministry:** The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways undertakes the project.

- The ministry will oversee all the affairs related to the ropeway construction, research, and policy-making.

- **Implementing Agency:** The National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML) has been mandated by the ministry to implement the project. It is a 100% owned SPV of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).

4.10 UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES PREVENTION ACT

The Supreme Court of India recently ruled that **mere membership in an unlawful association is sufficient to constitute an offense** under the stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967.

UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES PREVENTION ACT, 1967
Origin:

- It was first promulgated in 1967 to **target secessionist organisations** and considered to be a predecessor of laws such as the **Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA)** and **Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)** (now repealed)

Aims:

- It aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities in India.

- Unlawful activity refers to **any action taken by an individual or association intended to disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.**

- The Act **assigns absolute power** to the central government, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.

Key Provisions:

- **Punishment:** It has the **death penalty and life imprisonment** as the highest punishments. Both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged. It will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner even if the crime is committed on foreign land, outside India.

- **Chargesheet:** The investigating agency can file a charge sheet in a maximum of 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.

Amendments in UAPA

Amendment of 2004:

- The 2004 amendment added the **"terrorist act"** to the list of offences to ban **organisations** for terrorist activities, under which 34 outfits were banned. Till 2004, "unlawful" activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory.

    2019 Amendment:

- It empowers to designate **individuals** as terrorists on certain grounds provided in the Act, only organisations could be designated earlier.

- The Act **empowers the Director-General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA)** to grant approval of **seizure or attachment of property** when the case is investigated by the said agency.

- The Act **empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism** in addition to those conducted by the **DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state**

- Personal/financial information of an individual designated as a terrorist can be shared with various Western agencies.

Issues related with the Law:

- **Misuse of the law by the state:** According to **NCRB data**, from 2016-2019, 4231 FIRs were filed under UAPA, out of which 112 cases have resulted in convictions.

- **Vague Definition of Terrorist Act:** The definition of a "terrorist act" under the UAPA offers an overbroad and ambiguous definition of a "terrorist act" which includes the *death of, or injuries to, any person, damage to any property,* etc.

- **Denial of Bail:** The major problem with the UAPA lies in its **Section 43(D)(5)**, which prevents the release of any accused person on bail if, police have filed the chargesheet that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true.

- **Pendency of Trails:** Given the state of justice delivery system in India, the rate of pendency at the level of trial is at an average of 95.5 per cent.

    - **Anarchy by the state:**
        - It gives the state authority vague powers to detain and arrest individuals who it believes to be indulged in terrorist activities.
        - Thus, the state gives itself more powers vis-a-vis individual liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution.

- **Undermining Federalism:** Some experts feel that it is against the federal structure since it neglects the authority of state police in terrorism cases, given that 'Police' is a state subject under 7th schedule of Indian Constitution.

The observation by Courts on UAPA

- The **Supreme Court** in **Union of India vs K A Najeeb, 2021**, held that despite restrictions on bail under the UAPA, constitutional courts can still grant bail on the grounds that the fundamental rights of the accused have been violated. The Court held that the rigours of UAPA bail restrictions "will melt down where there is no likelihood of trial being completed within a reasonable time.

- The **Delhi HC** in June 2021 granted bail to three persons(Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Iqbal Tanha) arrested during the Delhi riots under UAPA. The Delhi High Court took the reasoning of SC in **Union of India vs K A Najeeb, 2021** a step further, holding that it would not be desirable for courts to wait till the accused's rights to a speedy trial are entirely vitiated before they are set at liberty.

    Way Forward:

- **Prevent Misuse:** The government needs to ensure that the law is not misused to harass genuine social activists.
- **Effective Law enforcement:** It needs to ensure that there are effective law enforcement mechanisms with checks and balances to prevent and punish terrorist attacks and it is put only to this use.
- **Higher standards of proof** must be applied for conviction and there must be provisions like **compensation to victims** or **punishment/enquiry** against those who bring malicious complaints.
- **Role of Judiciary:** Judiciary needs to play an active role and provide early bail to the falsely accused and quash the baseless allegations at the early stage.

4.11 DISQUALIFICATION OF MPs

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was held guilty and **sentenced to two years in jail** in a 2019 defamation case over his remarks about the "Modi surname" by a court in Gujarat's Surat.

The court, which held Gandhi guilty, also granted him bail and **suspended the sentence for 30 days** to allow him to appeal in a higher court.

Gandhi's conviction has led to questions over his **status** as a **Member of Parliament** from Wayanad, Kerala.

A conviction which carries a sentence of two years or more will automatically result in disqualification.

LEGAL PROVISIONS REGARDING DISQUALIFICATION

- Disqualification of a lawmaker is prescribed in three situations.
    - First is through the **Articles 102(1) and 191(1)** for disqualification of a member of Parliament and a member of the Legislative Assembly respectively.
        - The grounds here include holding an office of profit, being of unsound mind or insolvent or not having valid citizenship.
    - The second prescription of disqualification is in the **Tenth Schedule of the Constitution**.
        - This provides for the disqualification of the members on grounds of defection.
    - The third prescription is under **The Representation of The People Act (RPA), 1951**.
        - This law provides for disqualification for conviction in criminal cases.
- There are several provisions that deal with disqualification under the RPA.
    - **Section 8 of the RPA** deals with disqualification for conviction of offences.
        - **Section 8(1) of the act** includes specific offences such as promoting enmity between two groups, bribery, and undue influence or personation at an election.
        - **Section 8(2)** lists offences that deal with hoarding or profiteering, adulteration of food or drugs and for conviction and sentence of at least six months for an offence under any provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act.
        - **Section 8(3)** disqualifies a convicted person who has been sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years.
            - He is disqualified from the date of such conviction and shall continue to be disqualified for a further period of six years since his release.
    - **Section 9** deals with disqualification for dismissal for corruption or disloyalty, and for entering into government contracts while being a lawmaker.

- ○ **Section 10** deals with disqualification for <u>failure to lodge an account of election expenses</u>.
- ○ **Section 11** of the act deals with <u>disqualification for corrupt practices</u>.

APPEAL AGAINST CONVICTION: CAN IT SAVE DISQUALIFICATION?
- Section 8(4) of the RPA stated that the disqualification takes effect <u>only after three months have elapsed from the date of conviction</u>.
  - ○ Within that period, a person can file an appeal against the sentence before the higher Court.
- Earlier, the law had provided for a **pause on disqualification** if an <u>appeal against the conviction was filed before a higher court</u>.
- However, in the landmark 2013 ruling in '**Lily Thomas v Union of India'**, the <u>Supreme Court struck down Section 8(4) of the RPA as unconstitutional</u>.
- This means that simply filing an appeal will not be enough to prevent disqualification.
  - ○ The convicted MP must secure a specific order of **stay against the conviction** of the trial court.

4.12 SEEKHO AUR KAMAO
Recently, the Union Minister of Minority Affairs informed Lok Sabha about the Seekho Aur Kamao scheme.

ABOUT THE SCHEME
- Seekho Aur Kamao is a skill development scheme for **the youth of the 14 - 35 years age group.**
- It aims at providing employment and employment opportunities, improving the employability of existing workers, school dropouts etc.
- The scheme ensures 75% placement, out of which 50% should be in the organized sector.
- As per scheme guidelines, the implementing organizations will be required to establish linkages with placement services.
- For the candidates interested in self-employment after availing the training, the organization shall arrange easy microfinance/ loans for them through financial institutions, National Minority Development Finance Corporation (NMDFC), banks etc.
- Post-placement **support of Rs. 2000/- per month** is provided to placed trainees for two months as placement assistance.

4.13 DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE
- It is an **open-source identity platform** that can be used to access a wide variety of government and private services by building applications and products on a set of application programming interfaces (APIs) like **India Stack**.
  - ○ It includes digital forms of ID and verification, civil registration, payment (digital transactions and money transfers), data exchange, and information systems.
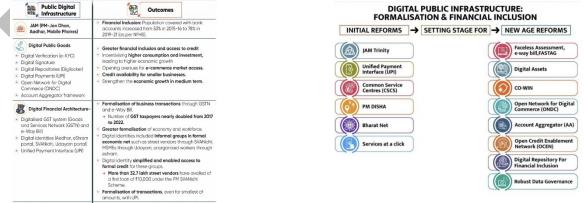
- - It is customisable, localisable, interoperable and leverage public data for open innovation models.
- India is seen as a **global trendsetter** with **multiple large-scale DPIs** like JAM trinity which links Aadhaar, mobiles and bank accounts, Digi Locker, Bharat Bill Pay, UPI, Aadhaar Enabled Payment Systems (AePS) and Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), CoWin (for vaccination), etc.

INDIA STACK

- India Stack is a set of APIs that allows governments, businesses, startups and developers to **utilise a unique digital infrastructure** to solve India's hard problems towards presence-less, paperless, and cashless service delivery.
- The following APIs are considered to be a core part of the India Stack:
  - Aadhaar Authentication and e-KYC
  - eSign, Digital Locker
  - Unified Payment Interface (UPI)
  - Digital User Consent
- It brings **a paradigm shift in the way government** services are delivered, i.e., in a transparent, accountable and leakage free model.

AADHAR AS BACKBONE OF DPI

- India's DPI began as a foundation with **Aadhaar** in 2009.
- Its rebirth happened in **2014** when PM Modi envisaged a far wider and bigger canvas than what was originally envisioned, to become the rocket ship to launch good governance on.
  - Today, over 1,700 Union and States government schemes ride atop it.
- Thus, **Aadhar** was made a **superstructure** which delivers consistent, affordable, and across-the-board value to citizens, government and the corporate sector.
- The UPI is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank).
- The UPI is breaking records under the visionary leadership at the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) as evident by the following:
- It has now crossed eight billion transactions per month and transacts a value of $180 billion a month, or about a staggering 65% of India's GDP per annum.

4.14 IS UPI NOW CHARGEABLE?

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has advised Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPI) fees be applied to merchant transactions on Unified Payments Interface (UPI) beginning on April 1.

WHAT IS UPI?

- UPI is a system that powers **multiple bank accounts** into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.

- It also caters to the "Peer to Peer" collect request which can be scheduled and paid as per requirement and convenience.

WHAT IS NPCI?

- NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.

- It is an initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

- The objective of NPCI is to create a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India.

  - For this, NPCI was incorporated as a "Not for Profit" Company under the provisions of Section 25 of Companies Act 1956 (now Section 8 of Companies Act 2013).

WHAT HAS BEEN ADVISED?

For amounts over Rs 2,000, using PPIs on UPI will result in interchange at 1.1 per cent **of the transaction value.**
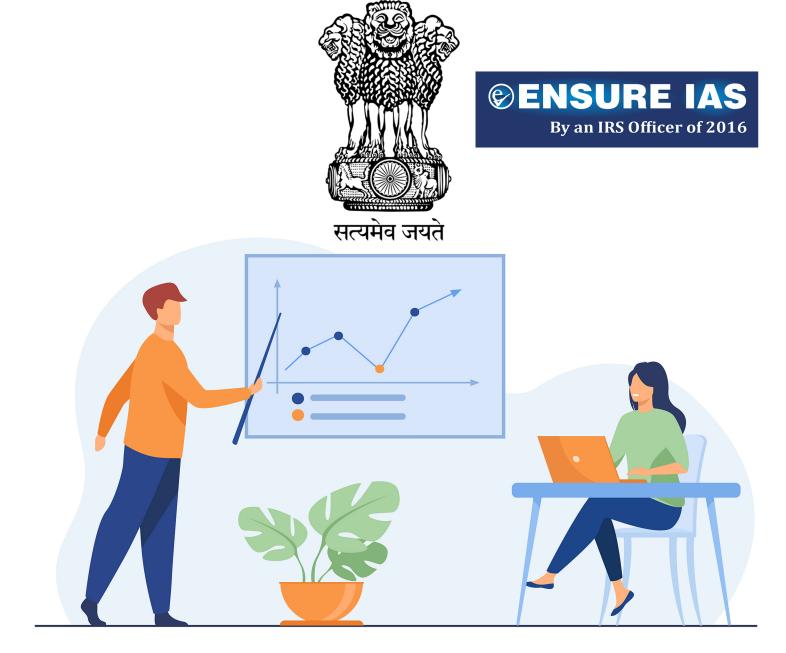
- The **interchange fee** is the fee to be paid to **wallet issuers** like banks, payment banks, etc by **payment service providers** like Paytm, Phonepe, Google Pay, etc. to cover the costs of accepting, processing, and authorising transactions.

- The fee will **not be applicable** for **person-to-person transactions** or **person-to-merchant transactions** between a bank and the prepaid wallet. This means you don't have to pay any additional fees for using UPI yet.

- For UPI transactions of over Rs 2,000 made **via PPI,** there would be an **interchange fee of 1.1 percent** and then there will be **wallet loading charges**.

  - So, the issuer of pre-paid instruments like Paytm or Ola Financial Services etc will have to pay **15 basis points as wallet loading charges** to the remitter bank, i.e. the account holder's bank if more than Rs 2,000 is loaded.

  - NPCI has specified that interchange rates will **vary depending** on the profile of the merchants. For specific industries, charges range from 50 percent of the transaction value to 1.10 percent.

  - For example, UPI payments made to fuel service stations using a prepaid instrument will carry an interchange of 0.5 percent, for education fees paid using UPI, the charge will be 0.70 percent capped at Rs 15 per transaction…and so on. NPCI however has said that this pricing will be reviewed on or before September 30 this year.

  - **To illustrate**: If I have an ICICI Bank account and use a Paytm wallet. Now if I load Rs 5,000 to my wallet from my bank, Paytm will have to pay **15 basis points** as wallet loading fee to ICICI Bank.

  - Let's say I now go to a retailer to buy a laptop using UPI **via my Paytm wallet.** So, the bank or payment provider who acquired the retailer as a merchant on their platform- like Axis Bank or Google Pay or whoever- will have to pay 1.1 percent as an **interchange fee** to Paytm wallet for facilitating the transaction.

- **Peer-to-peer (P2P) and peer-to-peer-merchant (P2PM)** transactions between a **bank** account and a **PPI wallet** do not require an interchange.

  - In P2PM transactions, a merchant is able to accept payments from customers without going through a third-party payment processor.

The pricing will come into effect starting April 1, 2023.

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