46th World Heritage Committee Meeting

Context

India recently hosted the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee for the first time at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

Key Highlights:

- World Heritage Site of **Hampi** and featuring the **stone chariot** from the Vijaya Vitthala Temple, symbolizes India's architectural and sculptural excellence was used as the session's logo.

- **सह नौ यशः (May our Glory Grow)-** the logo's tagline, was derived from the **Taitiriya Upanishad.**

- It was organized by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** on behalf of the **Ministry of Culture**.

- The event underscored India's growing role in fostering global cooperation and protecting World Heritage properties.

World Heritage Convention :

- The **World Heritage Convention of 1972** outlines the duties of States Parties in identifying potential Cultural and Natural sites for the World Heritage List.

- With 195 member states, India ratified the Convention in **1977**.

- Currently, **1199 properties** from 168 State Parties are inscribed on the list.

- The World Heritage Committee comprises representatives from **21 States Parties** who are elected by the **UNESCO General Assembly**.

India and the World Heritage Convention :

- India was elected to the 21-member World Heritage Committee in 2021 for its fourth term (2021-2025).

- Previously, India served on the Committee in 1985-1991, 2001-2007, and 2011-2015.

- India ranks 6th globally and 2nd in the Asia Pacific Region for the number of sites boasting 42 properties (34 Cultural, 7 Natural, 1 Mixed) inscribed on the World Heritage List, including 12 added in the last decade.

- Additionally, India has 57 sites on the Tentative List.

On uncommon cyclones in the Arabian Sea

Context

Recently, there has been an excitement about a rare August cyclone — named **'Asna'** — born from the transition of a strong land-born depression onto the warm Arabian Sea.

- Unlike the common cyclones, the North Indian Ocean, especially the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea exhibits a unique a unique behavior.

- It experiences two cyclone seasons.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is a Cyclone?

- Why Does the North Indian Ocean Have Two Cyclone Seasons?

- Why is the Indian Ocean Unique?

- The Role of Climate Change

- About Asna, a Rare August Cyclone

- Implications for India

What is a Cyclone?

- A cyclone is a large air mass that rotates around a strong centre of low atmospheric pressure.

- It is characterized by **rapid inward air circulation around a low-pressure area** that brings violent storms and adverse weather conditions.

- It is generally originated in **warm tropical or subtropical waters**.

- And, they are classified into **tropical cyclones** and **extratropical cyclones**.

- The North Indian Ocean that covers the **Arabian Sea** and the **Bay of Bengal** is a key area where cyclones form.

Why Does the North Indian Ocean Have Two Cyclone Seasons?

- Due to the monsoonal wind patterns that dominate the North Indian Ocean region, the area experiences two cyclones, namely: **Before the monsoon (April-June)** and **after (October-December).**

- **Before the monsoon (April-June):**

  o As the sun crosses over the Northern Hemisphere, it heats up the Arabian Sea rapidly.

  o However, Bay of Bengal is relatively warmer than the Arabian Sea but warms further and begins to produce atmospheric convection and rainfall.

  o The trough that brings rainfall in Kerala arrives in Mid-May itself over the Bay of Bengal.

- **The post-monsoon season**:

  o The post-monsoon season is the northeast monsoon season for India that brings significant amounts of rain over several States.

Why is the Indian Ocean Unique?

- **Connections through 'Oceanic Tunnels':** The Indian Ocean has connections to both Pacific and Southern Ocean through oceanic tunnels. Warm water from the Pacific flows into the Indian Ocean, while cooler water from the Southern Ocean enters at deeper levels.

- **Seasonal changes in wind:** The unique double cyclone is attributed by the influence of Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal to seasonal changes in wind patterns.

The Role of Climate Change

- **Warming of Indian Ocean:** Due to the inflow of heat from both the pacific ocean region and the southern regions, it is affecting the **cyclogenesis** (the formation of cyclones). The north Indian Ocean and the monsoon are now responding to related climate change drivers from tropical oceans as well as from pole-to-pole influences.

- **Affecting global weather patterns:** The Ocean's rapid warming is affecting the heat uptake by the Pacific Ocean and the sinking of heavy waters in the north Atlantic Ocean. This is acting like a **clearinghouse for ocean warming** during climate change which affects cyclogenesis, cyclone numbers, and their responses to climate change over the Indian Ocean.

About Asna, a Rare August Cyclone

- Cyclone Asna was formed in August 2023 in the Arabian Sea. It is known to be an unusual event in the region as cyclones are not known to be forming in this region during August.

- This is the first north Indian ocean cyclone in August since **1981.**

- Cyclone Asna, which formed in August 2023, was an unusual event for the Arabian Sea.

- One unique aspect of Asna is that, it developed from a **strong land-born depression rather than forming directly over the ocean**. This depression, which had already caused heavy rains in western India, intensified over the warm waters of the northern Arabian Sea, eventually becoming a full-fledged cyclone.

Implications for India

- The sudden change in the pattern and the unexpected nature of the climate poses a significant challenge for the country.

- The coastal regions are most vulnerable as the region should bare the impacts on the agriculture, infrastructure, and livelihoods.

- After the recent Heatwave in its extreme form during summers, the sudden change in rain pattern inducing heavy rainfall causing floods and inundation in most of the places, and now, the unpredictable cyclone, is a wake up call to India to be prepared for more such extreme weather events in the future.

Way Forward

- According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)- Early warnings, issued **within 24 hours** of a hazard, can reduce the damage of that event by **30%.**

- In-order to cater early warning systems around the world, in line with the **UN's goal** of protecting everyone on Earth in five years**, the Climate Risk and Early Warnings Systems (CREWS) has been initiated.**

- Under **CREWS,** it has invested over **US $100 million** in the world's most vulnerable Small Island Developing

States (SIDS), and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

- Meanwhile, India can utilize **Artificial intelligence** to improve weather forecasting and early warning systems to reduce the impact alongside investing in infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events.

India's zinc consumption is estimated to increase

Context

Recently, **International Zinc Association (IZA),** estimated that India's zinc consumption is going to increase to over **2 million tonnes** in the next 10 years from the current 1.1 million tonnes.

Key Highlights

- The zinc consumption and demand in India is 1.1 million tonnes (MT), which is higher than the current production in India.

- The global zinc market is around 13.5 million tonnes per annum in terms of primary production

More information:

- India is the world's **fourth-largest producer** of zinc and in the year 2022, India produced **830,000 metric tons** of zinc.

- **Reserves:** India is also the **seventh-largest** in the world in terms of zinc reserves. It has an estimated **9.6 million metric tons** of zinc reserves.

- Mines: The country also houses world's largest zinc mines. The **Rampura Agucha mine**, was the third-leading zinc producing mine in the world in 2022.

- India consumes **0.4 kg of zinc per capita**.

- India has **banned open cast mining of zinc since** 2018.

- India began producing zinc with modern technology in 1966 at the Smelter at Debari.

- **Rajasthan** is the largest producer of Zinc in India.

- **Udaipur** is known as the Zinc City because of it mines and smelter.

Pashmina Shawls

Context

Recently, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his visit to the US for Quad Summit, he presented a silver model of a Delhi-Delaware train to US President Joe Biden and a pashmina shawl to First Lady Jill Biden.

About Pashmina Shawl:

- Pashmina shawls are known for its renowned craftsmanship and the use of **fine Ladakhi cashmere wool.**

- It was originated from **Kashmir**.

- The term "Pashmina" means "Pashm," meaning "soft gold" or "soft wool" in Persian.

- Cashmere wool used in the making is sourced from the undercoat of the **Changthangi goat**, also known as the **Pashmina goat (Capra aegagrus hircus), which is** native to the high altitudes of the Himalayas in Ladakh, India, Nepal, and Tibet.

- Kashmir's pashmina shawl for its traditional crafting methods and as a tribute to the rich artisans, has received **Geographical Indication (G.I.)** certification.

Geographical Indication (GI):

- Geographical Indication (GI) serves as a marker identifying goods with distinctive qualities originating from specific geographical areas.

- It was introduced by enacting **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**, which facilitates its registration and overall protection.

- It is also considered and recognized as an element of **intellectual property**.

- The GI tag is valid for **Ten Years.** It is primarily applicable to agriculture, natural and even manufactured products which also includes handicrafts and industrial goods.

- The idea of calling awarding GS tag for products, prevents the sale of similar items under the same name, offering legal protection against unauthorized use.

- Some of the renowned products with GI tags are Basmati rice, Darjeeling Tea, Chanderi Fabric, Mysore Silk, Kullu Shawl, Kangra Tea, Thanjavur Paintings, Allahabad Surkha, Farrukhabad Prints, Lucknow Zardozi, Kashmir Saffron, and Kashmir Walnut Wood Carving.

Ensure LGBTQIA+ couples get ration cards

Context:

Recently, The Union government has directed all States and Union Territories to take necessary measures to ensure that LGBTQIA+ couples are considered part of the same household for the issuance of ration cards.

- This move follows the Supreme Court's ruling in October 2023, which refused to recognize same-sex marriages but directed the government to take interim measures to protect the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Key Highlights:

- **Healthcare Rights and Guidelines**: The Ministry of Health has issued guidelines to all States and Union Territories, enabling partners in LGBTQIA+ relationships to claim each other's bodies when "a near relative or next of kin is unavailable: Additionally, the Ministry is working on guidelines for the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ persons and has framed protocols for medical interventions for intersex children or those with disorders of sexual differentiation.

- **Financial Inclusion Measures**: The Department of Financial Services clarified that LGBTQIA+ couples **cannot be denied the right to open joint bank accounts** and also stated that they **can nominate** each other as beneficiaries, ensuring their financial security and inclusion.

- **Guidelines to Prevent Discrimination**: The Home Ministry spoke regarding prison visitation rights for LGBTQIA+ persons and issued advisories to all the States and Union Territories to make sure that LGBTQIA+ persons do not face violence, harassment, or coercion.

What is a LGBTQIA+ community?

- The acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual.

- The " + " denotes that it holds for further expanding and new understanding of different parts of the very diverse gender and sexual identities.

- It is a group of people who do not identify themselves with cisgender heterosexual "ideals".

- The "Hijras" in India are considered to be a part of this LGBTQIA+ community.

- These communities generally celebrate pride, diversity, individuality, and sexuality.

Conclusion

This step of the central government is a beacon of hope to the LGBTQIA+ community as it addresses their basic rights on equality and non-discrimination. However, the governments should work on policy refinement and the people on their mindsets to bring this community to the mainstream and to give them equal dignity much like other persons in the country.

The new Supreme Court Flag

Context

Recently, the President of India, unveiled the new Supreme Court Flag & Insignia.

Key Highlights

- The symbols in the flag - The Ashoka Chakra, Supreme Court building and the Constitution of India, features India's legal and cultural heritage.

- The new flag is Blue in color.

- The insignia has two words - **"Supreme Court of India and Yato Dharmastato Jayah"** in the Devanagiri script.

- **Yato Dharmastato Jayah** is a Sanskrit word which means - **"Victory lies where Dharma(righteousness) prevails"**.

History of the Supreme Court of India:

- Supreme Court of Judicature at Calcutta as a Court of Record, with full power & authority was established through the **Regulating Act of 1773**.

- **King George – III**, in the year 1800 and 1823 established the Supreme Courts at Madras and Bombay respectively.

- The **India High Courts Act 1861** created High Courts for various provinces and abolished Supreme Courts at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and also the Sadar Adalats in Presidency towns.

- Until the creation of the Federal Court of India under the Government of India Act 1935, these high courts had the distinction of being the highest Courts for all cases .

- The Federal Court had jurisdiction to solve disputes between provinces and federal states and hear appeal against Judgements from High Courts.

- After independence in 1947, with the Constitution of India coming into being on 26 January 1950, the Supreme Court of India also came into existence.

- The first sitting of the Supreme Court of India was held on **28 January 1950**.

Constitutional Provisions:

- The Indian constitution provides for a provision of Supreme Court under **Part V (The Union)** and **Chapter 6 (The Union Judiciary).**

- **Articles 124 to 147 in Part V** of the Constitution deal with the organization, independence, jurisdiction, powers and procedures of the Supreme Court.

- **Article 124(1)**: It states that there shall be a Supreme Court of India constituting of a Chief Justice of India (CJI) and, until Parliament by law prescribes a larger number, of not more than seven other Judges.

Organizational Structure of the Supreme Court:

- Currently, the Supreme Court consists of one chief justice and thirty three other judges.

- Originally, the strength was fixed at **eight** (**one chief justice and seven other judges**).

- The Constitution declares Delhi as the seat of the Supreme Court. Consequently, it also authorizes the CJI to appoint other place or places as seat of the Supreme Court. And this decision to move the seat can be done only with the approval of the President. This provision is only optional and not compulsory.

- This means that no court can give any direction either to the President or to the Chief Justice to appoint any other place as the seat of the Supreme Court.

Appointment of Judges:

- President appoints the judges of the Supreme Court.

- The CJI is **appointed by the President** after consultation with such judges of the Supreme Court and **high courts** as he deems necessary.

- The remaining judges are further appointed by the President after consultation with the CJI and such other judges of the Supreme Court and the high courts as he deems necessary.

- However, the **consultation with the chief justice is mandatory** in the case of appointment of a judge other than Chief justice.

Appointment of Chief Justice:

- The general practice was to appoint the senior most judge of the Supreme Court as the chief justice of India. However, This trend was violated in **1973** when **A N Ray** was appointed as the Chief Justice of India by superseding three senior judges.

- In 1977, M U Beg was appointed as the chief justice of India, again by superseding the then senior-most judge.

- This discretion of the government was curtailed by the **Supreme Court in the Second Judges Case (1993).**

- **Second Judges Case (1993):** The Supreme Court ruled that the senior most judge of the Supreme Court should alone be appointed to the office of the Chief Justice of India.

RTE Act covers admissions to KG classes too, rules Madras HC

Context

Recently, the Madras high court ruled that Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 also includes admissions to kindergarten classes.

Key highlights

- The ruling was in response to a writ after when the parents of the children filed it against two private schools who denied admission to LKG under the RTE act.

- Justice Anita Sumanth highlighted that the ambitious goal of the RTE Act is to ensure education from pre-school to eighth standard and this goal should take precedence over age-specific definitions within the Act.

- The judge also specified that the state government has providing financial support of ₹6,000 per annum for LKG and UKG classes and has been treating children below six years of age as beneficiaries under the RTE Act.

Significance:

- It has increased the scope of free and compulsory education for the younger children as well. Moreover, This ruling has paved way for educational opportunities across different states.

- Although, India's literacy rate is constantly increasing ever since 1951 from roughly **18%** to **74%** according to the 2011 census, there is more scope in this field to attain which makes it easier with such policies coming ahead. It also reduces the dropout rates.

- For certain economically weaker sections, having this access to early childhood education, sets a strong foundation for their future pursuits.

Karnataka declares Dengue an epidemic disease

Context

Amidst the rising number of cases of Dengue fever in the state, the government of Karnataka under the Karnataka Epidemic Diseases Act, 2020, has declared Dengue as an epidemic disease.

Key Highlights

- Under section 3 of the Karnataka Epidemic Diseases Act, 2020, the state government has notified dengue fever which also includes severe forms of dengue fever as an Epidemic disease in the state.

- It also notified all the owners, occupiers, builders, and persons in charge of land, buildings, water tanks, parks, and playgrounds to take responsibility and take necessary actions to prevent mosquito breeding.

- If mosquito breeding is found, a fine of **Rs 400** shall be imposed in **urban areas** and **Rs 200** in the **rural areas**.

- And for commercial properties like schools, colleges, restaurants, etc., the penalty is Rs 1000 in the urban and Rs 500 in the rural areas.

- For active construction sites, abandoned areas, etc, a penalty of Rs 1000 is imposed.

Why is Dengue So Concerning?

- Dengue can cause severe illness and even death.

- Asia alone is bearing 70% of the global burden and the disease is **Endemic in more than 100 countries.**

- Since the primary vectors of this disease are the mosquitoes, especially, the Aedes mosquitoes, it is difficult to curb the rapid spread considering the ongoing urbanization, population movements and climate change.

How Does Dengue Spread?

- Dengue virus primarily transmits through the bite of infected **Aedes aegypti mosquitoes**.

- These mosquitoes live in natural environments both in urban & rural and breed in stagnant water.

- The **virus has four distinct serotypes**, and infection with one serotype provides **lifelong immunity** to that serotype but not to the others.

- Consequently, individuals can be infected multiple times, with secondary infections often being more severe.

Treatment for Dengue

- Dengue treatment is primarily **symptomatic and supportive.**

- There is **no specific antiviral treatment** for dengue.

- However, The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** and **Panacea Biotec** have initiated the **first-ever Phase 3** clinical trial for India's indigenous dengue vaccine, **DengiAll.**

Conclusion:

With the pace in which the urbanization is growing, people generally sideline basic civic sense. The ongoing situation not only requires government action and scientific advancements in the field of vaccine but also from the public where it can be controlled and kept under watch. A well informed and a well aware public is the need for any developing country.

A discourse on AI governance that India must shape

Context:

Considering the rapid change that AI has brought in recent times, the need for a global diplomacy on the subject is a must. Hence, under the leadership of United Nations the "Summit of the Future" has been scheduled to happen on September 22-23, 2024.

- The summit mainly focuses on Global Digital Compact (GDC), that creates a multi-stakeholder framework to address issues related to digital divide, advances the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and promotes a secure and inclusive digital environment.

Dimensions of the Article

- Geopolitical Contestation on AI

- Concerns and Challenges

- Implications for India

Geopolitical Contestation on AI

- The UN general assembly adopted **two resolutions** on AI.

- One led by the **United States emphasizing "Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI"** and the other led by **China focusing on "Capacity Building of AI."**

- The U.S. led resolution advocates that AI governance should be more

harmonized and to include member countries to develop shared ethical principles, data protection and transparency standards. It primarily aims to assert dominance in AI technology and dictate the terms of its development worldwide.

- In contrast, the China-led resolution promotes for equitable benefits from AI development, aiming to bridge the digital divide and foster an open, non-discriminatory environment in global trade and technology. It not only prioritizes inclusivity and equitable development but also strategically positions China as an important player in global trade and technology standards.

Concerns and Challenges

- **Dominance of Developed Nations:** The geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China in AI governance risks marginalizing the perspectives and needs of developing countries.

- **Structural Inequalities in AI Landscape:** Countries like India face several structural challenges, such as limited advanced computing infrastructure, inadequate high-quality data sets, and a lack of capital.

- **Digital Divide:** There is a stark gap in digital infrastructure and AI capabilities between developed and developing countries. Many Global South nations lack basic resources like internet access and stable electricity, which are essential for AI development.

- **Limited Participation of Marginalized Voices:** Global AI governance discussions often overlook the inputs of smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs), small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and marginalized communities, especially from the Global South.

Implications for India

- **Geopolitical Influence and Leadership:** Involving in activities like AI governance discussion, will allow India to asset its leadership representing Global South. It also helps India to significantly improve its stance at the geopolitical level.

- **Digital Divide and Developmental Challenges:** If this digital divide isn't addressed, the disparity in AI infrastructure between the developed and the developing nations will widen. It could also limit India's ability to harness AI's potential.

- **Strategic Alignment with Global Standards:** If India does not engage proactively, chances are, that the global standards that could evolve after the summit might not align with India's developmental needs or ethical considerations. It will expose India to international norms that do not adequately benefit the country.

- **Economic Competitiveness:** As AI in the recent times has become critical for economic growth, India's ability to influence AI governance will directly impact its competitiveness in the global AI industry.

Way forward:

- India should focus on strengthening its AI infrastructure and prioritize in advanced computing facilities, high-quality data sets, and internet access to participate more effectively in the global AI landscape.

- In order to reflect diverse range of perspectives, India can push for a multi-stakeholder model in AI governance which includes countries from the Global South which in-turn will ensure that India along with other developing nations are not dominated by the interests of developed nations.

- India, with deep historical legacy with the UN and having successfully concluded climate negotiations where it consistently advocated the principle of equity and climate justice as the basis of global climate action, it can do the same with the AI governance discussions too.

- Last but not least, India should collaborate with like-minded countries and international organizations to form coalitions that can influence the AI governance discourse

India's arms supply to Israel

Context

Recently, a group of retired diplomats, public intellectuals, academicians and activists have filed a petition in Supreme court seeking a halt to arms exports to Israel amid the Gaza conflict.

Key Highlights:

- The petition was filed stating that supplying arms to Israel violates India's obligations under international law.

- It was argued that it breaches the fundamental rights to life and equality and **Article 51C** of the Indian Constitution, which directs the State to respect international law.

- The petition notes **"Genocide Convention"**, arguing that India is legally obligated not to export military equipment to Israel due to the risk of their use in committing war crimes.

Why India Shouldn't Send Arms to Israel?

- Supplying arms to Israel during an ongoing conflict where allegations of war crimes and genocide are involved, **violates the International Law**. The act contravenes India's obligations

under international treaties like the **Genocide Convention**.

- **Article 51C**: It mandates the State to show respect for international law and treaty obligations. Arms exports to Israel against the international treaties may prove to be a violation of this principle.

- Exporting military equipment to a nation engaged in an active conflict is a "serious risk" to India. It may make **India complicit** in those actions, contradicting its stated foreign policy of non-alignment and peace.

- By supplying arms that could potentially be used in a conflict, India risks violating the fundamental right to life, as enshrined in **Article 21** of the Constitution, by indirectly contributing to actions that may lead to loss of life.

What is the Genocide Convention?

- It was the **first human rights treaty** adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1948.

- It signified the international community's commitment to **'never again'** after the atrocities committed during the World War II.

- It showed way towards the **development of international human rights and international criminal law** as we know it today.

- According to the Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in time of war as well as in time of peace.

- **Article II of the Convention** describes genocide as a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. It does not include political groups or so called "cultural genocide".

- It was ratified by **153 member states** including **India**.

Conclusion:

- Beyond legal and constitutional violations, there is also a strong ethical argument against supporting anyone engaged in alleged acts of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity.

- India should not forget its stance of non-alignment and peace. Risking itself by sending arms would mean disrespect for the international law obligations, constitutional principles, and ethical considerations.

Swachh Bharat Mission Drives Significant Reductions in Infant Mortality Rates in India

Context:

Recently, a multidisciplinary science journal named NATURE, has highlighted the impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) on reducing infant and under-five mortality rates in India.

About Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM):

- **It is mass movement launched in 2014.**

- **It aimed to achieve Clean India by 2019.**

- The mission is one of **India's largest national sanitation programs** aimed at eliminating open defecation and improving public health.

- The mission operated in various phases for both Urban and Rural.

- Urban:

  - **Phase-1**: Mainly focusing Urban areas, it covered more than 1 crore households to provide 2.5 lakh community toilets and solid waste management facility in each town.

  - **Phase-2:** This envisioned to make all cities 'Garbage Free' by focusing on source segregation of solid waste, utilizing the principles of **3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle).**

- Rural:

  - **Phase-1:** Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan was restructured into the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin). It focused to ensure cleanliness in India and make it **Open Defecation Free (ODF)** in Five Years.

  - **Phase 2:** Having achieved the milestone of an ODF India in a time bound manner in 2019, this focused on sanitation and the behaviour change campaign to sustain the achievements made under phase-1.

- The study, conducted by leading global experts, presents robust evidence linking improved sanitation under SBM to better child survival outcomes.

Key Highlights of the study:

- The study reveals that the Mission has been instrumental in averting **60,000 to 70,000 infant deaths annually** across India.

- The study highlighted that with **every 10 percentage point increase in district-level toilet access, there is an average reduction of 0.9 points in IMR and 1.1 points in U5MR**.

- Districts with over **30% toilet coverage** under SBM has shown greater reductions by dropping IMR to 5.3 and U5MR to 6.8 per thousand live births.

- The study highlights the comprehensive approach of SBM that combines extensive toilet construction

alongside investments in information, education, and communication (IEC) that played a critical role in transforming public behavior.

- The study also points out that the increase in toilet access under SBM likely contributed to reducing exposure to **fecal-oral pathogens**, thereby decreasing the incidences of diarrhea and malnutrition—two significant drivers of child mortality in India.

Statistics panel dissolved amid 'dissent' over Census

Context

Recently, the Union Minister of Statistics and Programme Implementation dissolved the **14-member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS).**

- It was headed by economist and former Chief Statistician of the country **Pronab Sen**, allegedly after its members questioned the delay in conducting the Census.

Reasons for dissolving the committee?

- **Overlap in responsibilities:** As per an e-mail sent to the Director-General of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the dissolving was due to the overlapping of its role with the recently formed **Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys**.

- **Delay in conducting census:** The government having questioned by the committee on the delay of the conduct of **2021 Census of India** has met with this response from the government.

- **Government's Strategic Shift:** The formation of a new Steering Committee under the National Statistical Commission (NSC) implies that the government is possibly trying to centralize the census methodologies

under a new framework to avoid conflicting opinions and streamline operations.

What are Parliamentary committees?

- It is a group of MPs who are either appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker/Chairman to deal with various matters that cannot be handled by the legislature.

- The **Estimates Committee** is the largest Community of the Parliament. It has 30 members and **all are from the Lok Sabha**, **Rajya Sabha gets no representation** in this committee.

- They draw their authority from Article 105 and Article 118.

- India's parliament has many types of committees. There are two types of parliamentary committees- **Standing committees and Ad-hoc committees.**

Standing Committees:

- They are permanent in nature, however, it is constituted once in every year or periodically.

- They are classified under 6 categories: Financial Committees, Committees to Enquire, Departmental Standing Committees, Committees to Scrutinise and Control, House-Keeping Committees or Service Committees, Committees Relating to the Day-to-Day Business of the House

Ad-Hoc Committees:

- They are temporary committees that dissolves on completion of the task assigned to them.

- They are sub-categorized as Inquiry Committees and Advisory Committees.

Swiss peace summit

Context:

Recently, a peace summit was held in Switzerland to discuss the Russia-Ukraine conflict where India disassociated itself from the outcome of this summit as both Russia and Ukraine were not directly involved in the negotiations. But now, Ukraine is expecting India to endorse the Swiss peace summit document.

Key Highlights of the News:

- India being one of the major democracies is expected to an proactive role in guiding the peace process rather than being a just a mediator or "post office".

- In connection with this, the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is paying a visit to **Saudi Arabia, Germany,** and **Switzerland** to meet West Asian ministers and heads of UN organizations.

- Meanwhile, National Security Adviser Ajit Dova, is attending the BRICS NSA meetings in Russia, engaging with counterparts from countries like **China, Brazil, and South Africa.**

What is the Swiss peace summit about?

- It is an international peace summit for a high-level-dialogue on ways to achieve a comprehensive, **just and lasting peace for Ukraine**, based on International law and the UN charter.

- It was held in **Bürgenstock Resort** in Switzerland.

- It was previously known as the Summit on Peace in Ukraine.

- Switzerland had invited 120 countries, of which, India was also one.

Significance:

1. **India's Reputation**: This highlights the growing stature and credibility of India in the Global diplomacy. This could also help India's profile of becoming a mediator/ peace keeper in international conflicts

2. **Strategic Positioning for India:** If India maintains a nuetral and an independent foreign policy approach, it would help India to strengthen its strategic relations with both the nations which could open greater avenues in future.

3. **Role of Global South**: It is to be noted that the trend of traditional dominance of the Western countries in International peace negotiations is being shifted towards Global South Nations.

4. **India's Diplomatic Leverage in the Region:** India could gain diplomatic leverage not just in the Russia-Ukraine conflict but also in other global and regional issues, enhancing its influence in multilateral forums like the UN and BRICS.

Next Census should be the last enumeration-based one

Context:

India is planning to conduct its long-delayed census by shifting from the traditional **enumeration-based Census in India** towards a **dynamic, register-based census system.**

- The upcoming Census in India will be the first "digital Census".

Dimensions of the Article

- What is a Census?

- Current need for Census in India

What is a Census?

- It is a **complete survey that officially collects detailed information about the population** of a country or a state.

- It encompasses data on **demographics, education, employment, housing, and various socio-economic** indicators.

- The generated detailed information helps the government in **policy-making, resource allocation and planning**.

- In India, Census has been conducted once in every ten years since **1881**. But, the recent Census got delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Although, the **Census of India Act of 1948** gives a legal framework for carrying out the Census, it **does not mention its timing** or periodicity.

- The Census is conducted by the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs.**

- Until 1951, the Census Organization was set up on **an ad-hoc basis** for each Census.

Current need for Census in India:

- Ever since the last Census which was conducted in the year 2011, the country has undergone a substantial change in its demography.

- The need to update data in various fields is crucial for effective policy making. As in the report of **World Population report 2023**, by the **UN Population Fund (UNFPA),** it had stated that - India will overtake China to become the world's most populous country by the middle of 2023.

- There has been a huge gap in the reliable data which helps government formulate policies for various sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development.

- And, without a recent Census, the country lacks accurate data for planning and governance.

About Digital Census and Dynamic Database:

- Digital Census is where data are collected electronically rather than on paper which reduces the risk or errors and it also improves accuracy and speed up the process of data collection.

- The dynamic, register-based census system creates a **continuously updated database** by integrating data from various government registers, such as **birth and death records, voter lists, tax records,** and more.

- In a dynamic system, the advantage lies with the real-time updated data. The changes like births, deaths and even migration are updated on real-time basis. For instance, a child's birth would automatically update in the Census database and eventually register them as a voter when they turn 18. And when a person dies, their name would be automatically removed from the voter list.

- This system is cost-effective and even reduces the need for a massive enumeration exercise every ten years.

- Many countries, including **Austria, Denmark, Finland, and Singapore**, have already adopted or are moving towards register-based censuses.

Advantages of a Digital Census and Dynamic Database

- **Cost-Effective:** The traditional method of enumeration-based Census involves thousands of crores of rupees. The dynamic register-based system is cost-effective. For example, Austria's Census cost dropped from **€72 million in 2001** to just **€10 million in 2011** after moving to a register-based system.

- **Up-to-Date Information:** The new system ensures real-time data update of births, deaths, migration and even voter.

- **Improved Accuracy:** This unlike the paper methods, minimizes the human errors and reduce redundancies.

- **Better Resource Allocation:** With the help of the updated data about various sectors like education, health, etc, Government can plan welfare schemes more precisely.

Challenges in Implementing a Register-Based Census

- **Combining multiple data-base:** One of the greatest hurdle is combing the present multiple databases like Aadhaar, PAN, voter ID's.

- **Requirement of expertise:** Data security is a significant concern when managing such vast amounts of personal information. The requirement of technical expertise and to ensure data privacy safeguards while integrating these records may be hectic.

Conclusion

As India prepares for its next Census, there is a growing consensus that this should be the last enumeration-based exercise. Moving towards a dynamic, register-based census can provide more accurate, up-to-date data at a lower cost. It aligns with the broader goals of "Digital India" and can significantly improve governance, policy-making, and planning processes.

Ajit Doval may meet Chinese Minister Wang Yi at BRICS summit in Russia

Context:

The National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval will participate in a three-day **BRICS and BRICS Plus high-level security** officials meeting with his Russian counterpart **Sergei Shoigu** and China's top diplomat, **Wang Yi**. In St. Petersburg, Russia.

- This meeting is of utmost importance as it discusses on the ongoing India-China border standoff.

Background:

- Following the Galwan - Valley clashes, the two nation has been in a military standoff situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) since 2020.

- Consequently, numerous meetings were held between the officials of the two nationals to restore peace along the LAC.

About BRICS:

- It is a grouping of **world's largest emerging economies** consisting of approximately **3.5 billion** people, representing **45%** of the world's population. It aims to deepen economic cooperation between its member countries and to contrast with the Western sphere of power.

- The countries that were a part of the BRICS until 2023 are - **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.**

- **South Africa was added in 2010,** following the inaugural BRIC summit took place in Yekaterinburg, Russia.

- Additionally, **Egypt, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia** was added in 2023, with effect from 1st January 2024.

- The 15th summit was hosted by South Africa in 2023 and the next, 16th Summit will be hosted by Russia in October 2024**.**

- **It was formed on the sidelines of G8 (now G7) countries with only Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC)**

UAE-India ties are rooted in affinity, trust and respect

Context

Recently, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, to India, Sheikh Khaled had visited India signifying diplomatic engagements and ties between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India.

Dimensions of the Article

- Highlights of the Summit
- India-UAE Relations: A Historical Overview
- Significance to India
- Challenges

Highlights of the Summit

- The visit by the Crown prince reflected a long-standing relationship between India and UAE.

- One notable moment was the planting of tree that symbolizes the bond of the two nations at **Rajghat**, much like his

father and grandfather in 2016 and 1992.

- The visit ended with signing of various agreements on **civil nuclear technology, renewable energy, health innovation,** and **educational exchange.**
The major highlight was the inauguration of the **Indian Institute of Technology Delhi Abu Dhabi** campus.

India-UAE Relations: A Historical Overview

- **Archaeological Evidence:** According to a recent evidence, the potteries found in Abu Dhabi shows connections to the Indus Valley Civilization. And this over the period of time has magnified into a strong partnership based on mutual respect, trust and shared interests.

- **Indian residents in UAE:** More than **3.5 Million** Indians reside in UAE as of today. It is also evident from the fact that there are over 1,500 flights between India and UAE every week, which highlights the importance of connectivity.

Significance to India

- **Economic Collaboration:** India was the **first country** to have the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** agreement with the UAE. It was signed in 2022 and just within one year, the CEPA had led a 15% increase in the bilateral trade.

- **Strategic Cooperation:** With the recent inauguration of the **Indian Institute of Technology Delhi Abu Dhabi** campus, it is evident that the collaboration extends beyond trade. Other strategic areas include- **civil nuclear technology, green energy, and health innovation.**

Challenges

- **Economic Diversification and Dependency:** Both countries should work on diversifying their trade and investment. They should also ensure to not overly depend on certain sectors like energy. This makes the partnership more resilient to global economic changes.

- **Geopolitical Dynamics:** The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and South Asia can impact bilateral relations. Both countries must carefully manage their foreign policies to maintain a balanced relationship amidst regional tensions.

- **Labor Rights and Welfare:** Given the huge number of Indians (3.5 Million) accommodating in UAE, both countries need to formulate policies related to labor laws, working conditions and human rights to ensure fair treatment of Indian workers in UAE

Way Forward

- It is high-time that both countries should explore new areas like technology, digital infrastructure, and renewable energy and **expand the CEPA**.

- Areas like **defense, cybersecurity and space technology** can be strengthened by joint research and capacity building.

- Alongside the trade relations, promoting **people-to-people connections** through cultural programs, educational exchanges, and tourism can strengthen the soft power aspect of the relationship.

- Addressing **labor rights and enhancing the legal framework** for expatriate workers can further solidify the bond between the two nations.

Health Cover for All Aged 70 and above under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

Context

Recently, the Union Cabinet cleared the expansion of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PM-JAY) to cover all senior citizens aged 70 years and above to provide health coverage worth Rs 5 lakh.

Key highlights:

- The union cabinet has extended AB PM-JAY to provide health coverage to all citizens aged 70 years and above, regardless of their income levels.

- Currently, AB PM-JAY only targeted the bottom 40% of the population economically based on their income levels. It provided **Rs 5 lakh shared annual health coverage to all members of eligible families**.

- Under the new extension, all citizens aged 70 years and above will receive Rs 5 lakh annual coverage **per family.**

- Approximately **6 crore additional people** in the 70+ age group, from **4.5 crore** families, are expected to benefit from this expansion.

- Eligible senior citizens will be issued a **new card under PM-JAY** for availing of the additional benefits.

- Senior citizens aged 70 and above, who are already covered under AB PM-JAY, will receive an additional **(shared) top-up cover up** to Rs 5 lakh per year.

Mission Mausam

Context:

The Union Cabinet recently cleared Rs 2,000-crore - **Mission Mausam**. It aims to upgrade India's weather forecasting infrastructure and fund research into weather modification.

Key Highlights:

- **About Mission Mausam-** It is a transformative initiative to **boost India's weather and climate related services** and research. By **incorporating AI** based advanced observation systems, high-performance computing, and cutting-edge technologies and machine learning, it plans to augment capacity in weather surveillance, modelling, forecasting, and management.

- **Aim:** The aim is to explore **"weather interventions"** like cloud seeding and tweaking cloud structures to control rainfall and it also focuses on suppressing or increasing rainfall from dense clouds and reducing lightning potential.

- **First phase:** Until 2026, the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** plans to procure and install up to **60** weather radars, **15** wind profilers, and **15** radiosondes that will provide regular updates on wind speeds, atmospheric pressure, humidity, and temperature, leading to more accurate rain forecasts.

- **Cloud Simulation Chamber:** It was stated that a cloud-simulation chamber will be set up at the **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune,** which will help model rain clouds with high precision, which could assist in future weather modification efforts.

- **Beneficiaries:** Many sectors like disaster management, agriculture, defence, environment, aviation, power, tourism, shipping, transport, energy, healthcare, etc., are expected to benefit out of this.

Way forward:

- India currently has only 39 weather radars, significantly fewer compared to countries like the United States, which has 160 radars.

- The mission aims to address this gap to better capture India's geographical and climatic variability.

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Restatement of Values of Judicial Life

Context

The recent visit of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the residence of Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud to participate in a Ganesh puja has raised concerns regarding judicial propriety.

The Arguments and Concerns

- **Judicial Independence**: Critics argue that the Chief Justice's participation in a social function with the Prime Minister **compromises the separation of powers** between the judiciary and the executive.

  o Senior advocate **Indira Jaising** stated that the CJI has compromised the independence of the judiciary from the executive.

  o The **Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms** emphasized that the judiciary must be seen as independent to maintain public confidence.

- **Need for Judicial Aloofness**: The document, **"Restatement of Values of Judicial Life,"** suggests that the judges should maintain a **degree of aloofness** to uphold the dignity of their

office and avoid situations that could lead to public gossip or speculation about the impartiality of the judiciary.

- o Senior advocate **Kapil Sibal** stressed that the issue is not the individual (the CJI) but the public perception of the judiciary's impartiality.

- **Defending the CJI's Actions**: However, some say that it was merely a social and religious function, which should not affect judicial decisions.

- o Senior advocate **Manan Kumar Mishra**, Bar Council of India chairperson, defended the CJI, stating that the event does not impact the independence of the judiciary or any judgments.

What is "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life"?

- It was adopted in the year 1997 by the Supreme Court of India.

- The "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life" is a **16-point document** that serves as a **guide for ethical standards and conduct** expected from judges.

- Key principles include:

- o **Impartiality**: Judges' conduct should always reinforce the public's faith in their impartiality.

- o **Aloofness**: Judges are advised to maintain a degree of aloofness and avoid situations that might erode public confidence in the judiciary.

- o **Avoiding Conflicts**: Judges should avoid close associations with lawyers and refrain from discussing political matters in public.

Way Forward

- The independent judiciary being one of the pillars of the democracy should maintain public trust to ensure that it is upholding Constitution's checks and balances.

- Greater awareness and adherence to the "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life" can guide judges in avoiding situations that could lead to perceived biases or conflicts.

- Further, to prevent conflicts of interest, former Chief Justice R.M. Lodha recommended a cooling-off period of at least two years before retired judges take up new roles.

- Learning from international practices, such as life tenure for Supreme Court judges in the U.S., could help frame better policies to protect judicial independence in India.

Accused has right to be silent

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court judge, Justice Ujjal Bhuvan, in his opinion in granting bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind kejriwal, upheld the right **of an accused to remain silent during interrogation**.

Key highlights:

- Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, stated that an **investigating agency cannot presume guilt** or draw adverse inferences if the accused remains silent.

- Justice Bhuyan invoked **Article 20(3)** of the Constitution, which protects an accused from being compelled to testify against themselves, applying this protection not just in court but also during the pre-trial stage and police interrogation.

Criticism of Unjustified Arrests:

- Justice Bhuyan distinguished between the **power to arrest** and the **need to arrest**, stressing that personal liberty should not be deprived without justification.

- He criticized the attitude of "arrest first and then proceed," emphasizing that **arrests should only be made when necessary** and not merely because it's legally permissible.

Article 20:

- Article 20 offers **protection against arbitrary** and **excessive punishment for an accused person**, including citizens, foreigners, and legal entities.

- It includes three main protections:

  - **No Ex-Post-Facto Law:**

    - No one can be convicted for an act that wasn't a crime at the time it was committed.

    - No higher penalty can be imposed than what was prescribed by law at the time of the offence.

    - Applies only to criminal laws, not civil or tax laws.

  - **No Double Jeopardy:** A person cannot be prosecuted or punished for the same offence more than once.

  - **No Self-Incrimination:** No one can be compelled to testify against themselves.

    - This protection covers both oral and documentary evidence but doesn't extend to: Compulsory production of objects and Thumb impressions, signatures, blood samples, or physical examination.

    - It applies only to criminal proceedings, not civil cases.

A human touch to India's mineral ecosystem

Context:

The Modi government in the year 2015 had amended the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act**. The government had created a new body in the form of a **District Mineral Foundation (DMF)** where licensees and leaseholders pay the DMF a certain amount of the royalty

- The article - "A human touch to India's mineral ecosystem", focuses on DMF and its role in making sure that the communities affected by mining activities receive benefits from mining revenues.

- The article highlights the functioning of DMFs, its concerns, their advantages, and all possible solutions to improve their effectiveness.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is a DMF and its Functions?

- Concerns

- Advantages of DMF

What is a DMF and its Functions?

- In accordance to **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 2015,** DMF is a **non-profit body** established under the state governments of those districts that are affected by mining-related operations.

- Their primary function is to collect a **percentage of revenue from mining companies**, which is then used for the development and welfare of the local communities that have been impacted by the mining operations.

- The money collected is mostly used to fund projects related to social welfare programs like health care, education, environmental conservation, etc., The funds collected by DMFs come from two main sources:
  - **For major minerals:** Mining companies contribute up to 30% of the royalty they pay to the government.
  - **For minor minerals:** The contribution is up to 10% of the royalty.

Concerns

- **Lack of Transparency and Accountability:** The main concern is wrt how the funds are utilized. The chances of funds being misallocated or misused is more.

- **Poor Planning and Execution:** Most of the projects chosen do not address the actual needs of the affected community. Moreover, they lack proper implementation which leads to wastage of funds.

- **Exclusion of Beneficiaries:** Few projects have not considered most affected communities, particularly tribal groups and women. This increases the chances of these section missing out from the benefits directly.

- **Administrative Issues:** Lack of trained staff, inadequate monitoring systems and inefficiencies in project management has ,made the management of DMFs weak at the district level.

Advantages of DMF

- **Focus on Local Communities:** The concept of DMFs is to benefit the local communities who bear the brunt of the environmental and social impacts of mining. The wealth generated from mining helps the affected local communities.

- **Improving Basic Services:** DMFs help improve essential services such as health care, education, clean water supply, and infrastructure in underdeveloped mining regions.

- **Environmental Restoration:** It also has a potential to support projects that reduces environmental damage caused by mining activities, such as afforestation, soil restoration, and efforts to control pollution.

- **Contribution to Sustainable Development:** By directing mining revenues into sustainable development projects, DMFs can help transform mining-affected areas into thriving communities.

Conclusion

DMFs play a crucial role in ensuring that the benefits of mining are shared with local communities. By focusing on rectifying the challenges, it will help the money reach those who need it the most and contribute to the sustainable development of mining-affected regions.

The continuing distribution of the death penalty

Context:

The article- "The continuing distribution of the death penalty", focuses on the reintroduction of the death penalty in India. The article also discusses the effectiveness of the death penalty in preventing crime and the need for deeper reforms to address the root causes of such crimes.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is a Death Penalty?
- Rationale Behind Giving Death Penalties
- Concerns with the Death Penalty

What is a Death Penalty?

- The death penalty is a form of capital punishment where a person is sentenced to death by the state as a punishment for the crime that he/she committed.

- In India, the death penalty is retained for certain serious crimes like **murder** and **rape**.

- According to **Amnesty International**, many countries have either completely eliminated or trying to stop its use of practice.

  o **Global Data**: By the end of 2023, **112 countries** had abolished the death penalty for all crimes, and **144 countries** had abolished it in law or practice.

  o **55 countries**, **including India** has still retained the practice.

  o In **2023**, India alone recorded **120 death sentences**, though no executions took place that year.

  o Countries that has abolished: **South Asia, Bhutan and Nepal**.

Rationale Behind Giving Death Penalties

- Death penalty is believed to be a way of delivering speedy and effective justice against brutal crimes like rape and murder and also to serve a message that such heinous acts will not be tolerated.

- After the brutal rape and murder of a doctor in West Bengal, the introduction of **Aparajita Woman and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2024**, which aims to bring in death penalty for rape cases, it was evident that it is also a **societal belief** that

crimes like rape and murder need the harshest punishment possible.

- However, the efficiency of death penalty serving its intended purpose of deterring crime is a question mark. Because, according to **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**,**2022** data, India reported over **31,500 cases of rape** which also involves murder.

- Despite the existence of the death penalty for such crimes, the rate of sexual violence continues to remain high, especially in states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.

Concerns with the Death Penalty

- **Deterrence and Effectiveness**: Research and data shows that death penalty may not be as effective as it is believed to be. The **Justice Verma Committee** recommended against the death penalty for crimes like gang rape, arguing that it does not serve as a sufficient deterrent. Moreover, the death penalty does not address the root causes of violence, such as power dynamics, patriarchy, and gender discrimination.

- **Prison Conditions**: Indian prisons today face an issue of overcrowding. Many death row prisoners who have to live in such conditions, develop psychological and physical health problems. It is argued that mostly the marginalized communities who often lack resources to fight their cases are the main sufferers.

- **Public Sentiment vs. Justice**: The call for death penalty is mostly rooted in the idea of avenging a crime than preventing future crimes, which leads to hasty legal decisions being taken without considering alternative forms of justice, such as rehabilitation and restorative justice.

Way forward:

- **Victim-Centric Reforms**: The system should focus on the well-being of survivors or victims of sexual violence. Priority should be given for their access to education, employment, and psychological support for the future. The families (especially minor siblings) should also be supported to ensure that they have the resources to continue their lives with dignity.

- **Addressing Root Causes**: Instead of focusing only on punishment, it is the duty of the government and the society to address the underlying causes of violence against women and children. Issues like gender inequality, patriarchy, and other economic and social conditions that disproportionately affect marginalized communities must be addressed.

- **Abolishing the Death Penalty:** As advocated by many human rights activists, they believe that life imprisonment without parole, along with better prison conditions, can be a more humane alternative for such criminals. Furthermore, an abolitionist feminist movement should push for societal changes that address the structural factors that perpetuate VAWC.

- **Improving Legal and Institutional Mechanisms**: The criminal justice system must be polished in areas like introducing better training for police, prosecutors, and judges. The legal processes must be made more transparent, and there should be greater accountability to prevent misuse of the law and wrongful convictions.

Bulldozer justice

Context

Recently, the Supreme Court criticized the practice of demolishing properties based on criminal allegations against individuals or their family members, famously known as of "bulldozer justice," as a violation of the rule of law.

What is Bulldozer Justice?

- It is a practice of **demolishing practice of demolishing the property of individuals suspected of criminal activities** or involvement in riots using bulldozers, often without adhering to due legal process.

- This has become a practice in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Gujrat, Maharashtra and Assam.

- Supreme court pointed out that it goes against the rule of law and due process of law as demolishing properties is only based on accusations.

Key highlights:

- The SC has invited suggestions to frame pan-India guidelines on extra-legal demolitions, emphasizing the need for procedural guidelines in legislation to ensure due process.

- **Burden of Proof on Authorities:** In the pre-demolition phase, the burden of proof should shift to authorities to justify demolitions, ensuring the protection of human rights.

- **Notice and Publicity:** Affected individuals must be given reasoned notice with adequate information about land records and resettlement plans, allowing ample time to respond (at least one month).

- **Minimization of Force and Official Oversight:** During demolitions, physical force and heavy machinery should be minimized, and government officials not involved in the process should oversee the operations.

- **Rehabilitation and Grievance Redressal:** Post-demolition, affected individuals must be provided with adequate temporary or permanent housing, and a fast-track grievance redress mechanism should be established for challenging demolition decisions.

Rangeen Machhli App

Context:

The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying has launched the **"Rangeen Machhli" app** to promote ornamental fish breeding and care across India.

Key Features of the Rangeen Machhli App:

- The app aims to provide multilingual information to help hobbyists and professionals in the ornamental aquaculture industry .

- The app is available in eight Indian languages which makes it accessible to a broad audience across India.

- It provides detailed guidelines on **fish care, breeding, and maintenance** practices. This is beneficial for both hobbyists and farmers looking to diversify their ornamental fish stock.

- **"Find Aquarium Shops" Tool:** A unique feature that helps users discover nearby aquarium stores. This directory is regularly updated by shop owners, helping local businesses and ensuring users have access to reliable sources for ornamental fish and related products.

Educational Modules:

1. **Basics of Aquarium Care:** This module is designed for beginners and covers topics like aquarium types, fish species, water filtration, lighting, feeding, and day-to-day maintenance.

2. **Ornamental Aquaculture:** Aimed at professionals, it focuses on the breeding and rearing of various ornamental fish species.

Conclusion

The **"Rangeen Machhli" app** is a step towards promoting the ornamental fish industry in India by offering a user-friendly platform for education and resources. The initiative not only supports local businesses but also encourages sustainable fish farming and provides an opportunity for farmers to diversify their livelihoods.

Finance commission and the high performing states

Context

- Recently, the high performing states like Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu have demanded an increase in the share of the taxes given to them. It highlights the need to revisit the tax devolution framework.

Dimensions of the Article

- Role of the Finance Commission

- Concerns of the States

- Challenges

Role of the Finance Commission

- The Finance commission determines the tax devolution between the Centra and the States.

- It is constituted once in every five years.

- It recommends the union government on its vertical distribution of funds to different states from its divisible pool

of taxes (excluding cess and surcharge).

- It also recommends the horizontal devolution of funds amongst different states.

- The Finance Commission is also responsible for providing grants-in-aid.

- The 15th Finance Commission recommended **41% of the total taxes** collected to go to the States.

- The **16th Finance Commission** is chaired by **Dr Arvind Panagariya**, to provide recommendations for the period 2026-31.

- **Article 270:** It states the **distribution of net tax proceeds** between the Union government and the States.

Concerns of the States

- Holistically, the major argument from these high performing states is about the limited share of tax revenues that they receive from the Centre, which is not sufficient for their needs. Some of the specific concerns include-

- To increase tax devolution from **41% to 50%**, from the central pool.

- As significant portion of tax revenue is collected through cesses and surcharges, it is not considered in the vertical devolution of funds to States.

- **Impact on High-performing States**: States like Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu although contribute the most in taxes, it receives very lesser shares due to the formula focusing on equalizing development across poorer regions.

- Industrially developed States like Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, despite contributing the most in taxes, receive very less shares due to the formula focusing on

equalizing development across poorer regions.

Challenges

- **Low Devolution for High-performing States**: As the current formula focuses on the poorer regions, the maximum funds from the centre is targeted towards them. And states like Karnataka and Gujrat which are capital intensive, mostly proved in their industrial growth and being top tax contributors, get lesser allocations.

- **GST Framework**: It is argued that the introduction of the GST has reduced the states ability to collect its own taxes.

- **Lack of Support for Natural Disasters**: Current formula of the vertical devolution mostly targets the poorer regions. It neglects the need for climate-related expenditure and states which are prone to frequent natural disasters. (Ex: Kerala and Tamil Nadu)

Way forward:

- **Increase State Share in Taxes**: The vertical formula should be revisited, to ensure that the states who are contributing more are also being given sufficiently. The centre should consider the demand of increasing from 41% to 50%.

- **Limit on Cesses and Surcharges**: To ensure that more of the taxes collected are shared with the States, the Centre should cap the collection of cesses and surcharges, as these are outside the revenue-sharing framework.

- **Address Contingency Needs**: In order to ensure that states have the required funds to deal and handle emergencies, the FC should consider including provisions for contingency expenses like natural disasters.

First Mpox case in Kerala

Context:

- Recently, the Kerala Health Department confirmed the State's first Mpox case of a 38-year-old man who came from Dubai who tested positive for the disease.

What is Mpox?

- Mpox- is a **rare zoonotic disease** that transmits from animals to humans.

- It is famously known as monkeypox.

- The disease belongs to the **Orthopoxvirus genus** in the Poxviridae family. This family of viruses also includes the viruses responsible for **smallpox** and **cowpox**.

- Although it is believed that the virus transmits from small mammals like squirrels and monkeys, the actual source of the virus is still unknown.

Transmission and Symptoms:

- The mpox virus is primarily transmitted to humans **through physical contact with an infected individual or animal**.

- This can occur through direct contact with **infected blood, bodily fluids, or lesions on the skin or mucous** membranes.

- The virus can also spread **through contact with contaminated materials**, such as **bedding or clothing**, or through bites or scratches from infected animals.

- **Symptoms:** The infected person will initially show signs of **infection that can start anywhere from 1 to 21 days** after the exposure to the virus. The disease can be seen as a rash that can develop into painful, itchy, fluid-filled blisters later.

  - Other common symptoms include **fever, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy, and swollen lymph** nodes.

  - The symptoms usually last 2-4 weeks.

  - For most individuals the symptoms are mild. For certain groups like children, pregnant women, and immunocompromised individuals, it can be malignant and will be of higher risk of severe illness.

About the MVA-BN vaccine:

- MVA-BN or Modified Vaccinia Ankara-Bavarian Nordic is the **only non-replicating mpox vaccine**.

- It has been approved in **U.S., Switzerland, Singapore, Canada, United Kingdom** and the **EU/EAA**.

- Originally it was developed as a **smallpox vaccine in collaboration with the U.S. government** to ensure the supply of a smallpox vaccine for the entire population.

- MVA-BN has been indicated for use in the **general adult population** in individuals considered at risk for smallpox or mpox infection.

- **Bavarian Nordic** has been a long-term supplier of the vaccine to national stockpiles, and during the 2022-2023 mpox outbreak. The Company supported governments and supranational organizations by expanding access to the vaccine to more than 70 countries worldwide.

India to freeze talks with Pakistan on Indus waters

Context:

Recently, India has sought to renegotiate the 64-year-old Indus Water Treaty (IWT) with Pakisthan, citing new challenges and changing circumstances. But, both nations are facing a diplomatic deadlock with no recent meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC).

Key Developments:

- **No response from Pakistan:** India has been inviting Pakistan ever since January 2023, to conclude talks on the Indus Water Treaty. However, no satisfactory response has been received from Pakistan yet.

- **Suspension of PIC Meetings:** No further meetings of the **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)** will be held until both the governments meet.

(Note: The last PIC meeting took place in Delhi in **May 2022**).

- **Significance of the PIC:** The PIC is a crucial mechanism under the IWT, facilitating discussions between Indian and Pakistani commissioners on water-sharing issues and hydropower projects. The commission has functioned even during wars and disputes between the two countries

India's Reasons for Renegotiation:

- **Demographic Changes:** Ever since the treaty was signed in the year 1960, both nations have developed and a significant population growth has been witnessed on both sides.

- **Environmental Concerns:** Much needed is the need for clean energy development to meet India's emission targets. The development of hydropower projects on the Himalayan rivers shared by India and Pakistan is crucial for producing renewable energy.

- **Cross-Border Terrorism:** Persistent security issues affecting the implementation of the treaty. Incidents of terrorism from Pakistan into India have strained bilateral relations, affecting cooperation on various aspects of the treaty, such as the construction of hydropower projects and dispute resolution processes

- **Dispute Resolution Mechanism:** The existing framework may not be sufficient to handle the complexities of water-sharing disputes in a timely and effective manner. India seeks to **revise and improve this mechanism** to ensure quicker resolutions and more effective conflict management, especially given the evolving geopolitical and environmental context.

Indus Water Treaty (IWT) Overview:

- The Indus Water Treaty (IWT) was signed by India and Pakistan in September 1960.

- It was signed after nine years of negotiations, with the **World Bank as a** signatory.

- It established cooperation on the use of water from the Indus River and its tributaries—**Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Jhelum, and Chenab**.

Key Provisions:

- **Water Sharing:** The treaty divides the rivers: Pakistan has rights over the three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) for unrestricted use, while India has control over the three eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej). Pakistan receives 80% of the total water.

- **Permanent Indus Commission:** Both countries set up a Permanent Indus Commission with

commissioners from each side, required to meet annually.

- **Rights Over Rivers:** While Pakistan controls the western rivers, India is allowed some agricultural use (Annexure C) and can construct run-of-the-river hydropower projects (Annexure D) without water storage.

- **Dispute Resolution:** The treaty provides a three-step dispute resolution mechanism. Issues can be raised in the commission, escalated to a Neutral Expert appointed by the World Bank, and eventually referred to a Court of Arbitration for unresolved disputes.

The Idea of Simultaneous Elections

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the proposal to hold simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The proposal was recommended by a committee led by former **President Ram Nath Kovind**. This proposal has created a widespread debate about its potential impact on India's federal structure and governance.

Dimensions of the Article:

- History of elections in India
- The Idea of Simultaneous Elections
- Why is it Anti-Federal?
- Concerns
- Way forward

History of elections in India:

- The first general election which was held in **1951** was conducted simultaneously for Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies of the States which continued for the **next three cycles** in the year **1957, 1962 and 1967**.

- The cycle was disrupted because of **premature dissolution** of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969.

- The last simultaneous elections was held in **1967.**

- Currently, we have two rounds of Assembly general elections every year.

The Idea of Simultaneous Elections

- Simultaneous elections is about holding Lok Sabha (national parliament) and State Assembly elections together.

- It also envisions to conduct municipal and panchayat elections within 100 days of the general elections.

- The government argues that this approach will:

- Would **reduce the financial burden** on the government.

- **Improve governance** - because without constant elections, political leaders would focus more on governance rather than being in continuous campaign mode.

Why is it Anti-Federal?

- India functions as a **federal structure** where power is shared between the Centre and the States. Government at various levels (national, state, and local) - play unique roles and have different responsibilites.

- People elect their representatives at these levels separately.

- The idea of simultaneous elections is seen as anti-federal for the following reasons:

- **Reduction in Voter Choice:** When elections are held together along with Lok Sabha elections, it may influence voters to focus more on national issues and candidates, diminishing the importance of state-specific or local issues which reduces the diversity of voter choices for regional needs.

- **Weakening State Autonomy:** To bring the proposal into life, it is mandatory to align the State Assemblies cycle with the national election cycle. Hence, it might lead to the dissolution of State Assemblies before the completion of their term. And the new government so formed after elections, would again not serve a full five-year term but would align its tenure with the national election cycle which derails the autonomy of states to govern themselves.

- **Undermining Importance of Local Governance:** Having simultaneous elections, the voter will lack to see the regional needs and for a voter-national, state, and local issues gets combined and the line that differs these will get blurred. This might reduce the significance of municipal and panchayat elections, undermining local governance.

Concerns

- **No Data to Support Cost Cutting:** For a large democratic country like India holding all elections together could make this process even longer and more expensive. Moreover, there isn't any empirical evidence on the simultaneous elections being cost-effective.

- **Governance Impact:** It is argued that the reason stating that the need for simultaneous elections is to reduce the constant campaign mode of politicians is in itself due to the centralizing tendencies in political parties and not because of the election system.

- **Shortened Tenures for State Governments:** Implementing this system would require cutting short the tenure of existing State Assemblies which could undermine democratic processes and cause instability in State governments.

Way forward:

- Having simultaneous elections is not completely bad. However, the advantage of holding separate elections for each level of government ensures that local, state, and national issues receive the attention they deserve. It also allows voters to choose representatives based on specific regional or local needs.

- The Union government should also ensure that any electoral reform respects India's federal structure..

One nation one election

Context:

The Union Cabinet, approved the proposal to conduct simultaneous elections in the country. The proposal was given by the committee led by former **President Ram Nath Kovind**.

What is simultaneous elections?

- It is popularly known as one nation one election.

- Simultaneous elections is when elections are conducted together for Lok Sabha, all the State Legislative Assemblies, and local bodies(Panchayats and Municipalities).

- **In simple terms, a voter can cast his vote for electing the members across various levels on a single day at the same time.**

Key Proposals from the Committee on Simultaneous Elections

- **Constitutional Amendments**:

o Two bills are recommended for amending the Constitution.

  ▪ **Bill 1**: Introduces simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies without needing state ratification.

  ▪ **Bill 2**: Aligns elections for municipalities and panchayats with Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections within 100 days, requiring ratification by at least half of the states.

- **Key Constitutional Changes**:

o **Article 82A**: A new article for establishing the process of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

o **Article 83 & 172**: Lok Sabha and State Assemblies will serve their remaining term after a new election until simultaneous elections occur.

o **Article 324A**: Grants Parliament authority to legislate the simultaneous election of municipalities and panchayats with state and national elections.

- **Single Electoral Roll**:

o The Election Commission of India (ECI), in coordination with State Election Commissions, will create a unified electoral roll and voter ID for all election tiers.

- **Handling Hung Assemblies or Premature Dissolution**:

o In case of a hung House or premature dissolution, elections will be held to fill the position for the remaining term.

- **Logistics and Planning**:

o The Election Commission will collaborate with State Election Commissions to ensure the availability of necessary resources, such as polling personnel and security, ahead of simultaneous elections.

- **Election Cycle Synchronisation**:

o A new electoral cycle will be initiated through a **notification by the President**, marking an "Appointed Date" for synchronised elections. All state assemblies will align with the Lok Sabha's five-year term, regardless of their individual terms.

Way forward:

- Having simultaneous elections is not completely bad. However, the advantage of holding separate elections for each level of government ensures that local, state, and national issues receive the attention they deserve. It also allows voters to choose representatives based on specific regional or local needs.

- The Union government should also ensure that any electoral reform respects India's federal structure

Private sector's involvement in crop procurement under MSP

Context

Recently, the Union Agriculture Ministry decided to remove **"Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme" (PPPS)** from the revamped **PM-Aasha** (Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan) scheme, to prevent private sector's involvement in crop

procurement under the **minimum support price (MSP)** system.

Key Highlights:

- **Removal of PPPS**:
  - The scheme was introduced in 2018 to allow private sector participation in oilseeds procurement at select pilot locations. But it lacked government and states support.
  - Owing to the lack of interest shown by the states and the government, the PPPS was removed from the PM-ASHA scheme.

- **Revamped PM-Aasha Scheme**:
  - Under the revamped PM-Aasha scheme, states can now apply the **Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS)**, not only for oilseeds and pulses but also for vegetables.
  - The PDPS compensates farmers by **paying up to 15%** of the difference between the market price and the government-set price for crops.

- **Bhavantar Model for Vegetables**:
  - States are allowed to adopt the **"Bhavantar"** model for vegetable crops, similar to its earlier application in oilseeds.
  - This model will ensure that up to **15%** of the price difference between market rates and government-set prices is paid to vegetable farmers, preventing them from losses due to fluctuating market prices.

- **Market Intervention Pricing**:
  - For vegetables, while there is no MSP, states have been setting market intervention prices. If mandi prices fall below these levels, the government will intervene to stabilize prices and ensure farmers are compensated.

- **Reasons for PPPS Shelving**:
  - PPPS was removed due to a lack of state interest and the absence of a mechanism to handle the disposal of procured crops.
  - The Centre had initially promised to reimburse up to 15% of the MSP to private agencies along with a 1% administrative cost, but states found the PDPS and PSS (Price Support Scheme) to be more efficient alternatives.

About Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA):

- The scheme aims to provide to guarantee **remunerative prices to the farmers** for their produce.

- It had 3 components and the option was given to the states to decide what they want to implement. With the current removal of PPPS, there remains only two.

  - **Price Support Scheme (PSS):**
    - The central nodal agency alongside state governments, undertake the procurement of pulses, oilseeds, and copra physically.
    - Food Cooperation of India (FCI) along with National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) handles PSS operations in states/districts.
    - The procurement expenditure and losses due to procurement will be borne by **Central Government** as per norms.

Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS):

- o Under PDPS, all oilseeds are covered for which MSP is notified.

- o The difference between the MSP and the selling/modal price will be directly paid to the pre-registered farmers in the notified market yard through a transparent auction process.

- o The payments will be directly done to the registered bank accounts of the farmers.

- o This scheme does not involve any physical procurement of crops, as farmers are paid the difference between the MSP price and the Sale/modal price on disposal in the notified market.

- **Pilot of Private Procurement and Stockist Schemes (PPPS):** *(Recently REMOVED)*

- o In addition to PDPS, states were given options to roll out PPSS on a pilot basis in selected APMCs of districts involving the participation of private sector.

- o It aimed to allow private players to participate in the procurement of crops.

Watching 'child sex abuse' material an offence: SC

Context

Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act.

- Earlier, Madras High Court had passes a decision that mere possession or storage of child pornographic material was not punishable under these laws.

- The appeal was done by the **NGO** *Just Right for Children Alliance*.

- This ruling came in response to the previous judgement of the Madras High court.

What Was the Judgment About?

- The SC highlighted that **holding on to such pornographic material perpetuates the abuse** long after the act has occurred, as it could be circulated and even consumed on digital platforms.

- It was noted that the victims would undergo a deep psychological trauma which adds to the original abuse.

- The SC directed the parliament to **amend the POCSO Act** to replace the term "child pornography" with **"Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material" (CSEAM)**, noting that the term "child pornography" trivializes the serious nature of the crime.

- Meanwhile, it asked Parliament to pass an **ordinance** in the interim to enforce this change and directed all courts to use the term **CSEAM** in their rulings.

Significance of the Judgment

- **Child Protection and Accountability**: It widens the scope of criminal liability to protect children against sexual exploitation.

- **Holistic Approach to Child Abuse**: By replacing the term "child pornography" with CSEAM, the court re-enforced that this act does not fall under the ambit of pornography, but rather a form of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

- **Prevention of Exploitation**: to ensure that that are no loose-ends, the court made it clear that mere possession of such material can be held as criminally liable even if they claim no intent to distribute or transmit it.

- **Constructive Possession Doctrine**: The concept of "constructive

possession" was introduced. It ensures to not let people evade responsibility by deleting content after viewing it. It holds them accountable for having the ability to access, control, or delete such materials.

Conclusion

It is a landmark judgement and a crucial step in fighting against the sexual exploitation of children. The judgement aims to widen the scope of the definition of criminal acts involving child sexual exploitation material and advocates to bring changes in the legal framework, which supports victims and deter potential offender. The judgment highlights the commitment to uphold child rights in India.

India on UNSC reform document

Context

India's recent performance at the Paris Recently, India adopted "Pact of the Future" at a UN summit, which for the first time included a detailed commitment to reform the UN Security Council (UNSC).

- This move highlights the step towards making the council more representative, inclusive, and accountable.

- The adoption of the pact portrays a breakthrough for India in the long-standing demand for UNSC reforms.

Key Highlights

- **Pact of the Future**: It was adopted by consensus at the UN summit to bring comprehensive reforms of the UNSC by acknowledging the urgent need for it to become more representative, inclusive,

transparent, efficient, effective, democratic, and accountable.

- **India's Response**: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri highlighted that although the document does not address every aspect of reform that India advocates, he termed it a "good beginning."

- **Global Recognition of Reform Needs**: The pact emphasizes the importance of redressing historical injustices, especially towards Africa, and to expand the security council to reflect the realities of the present world and include under-represented and unrepresented regions, including Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

About United Nations Security Council (UNSC):

- UNSC is one amongst the other five principle organizations of the United Nations (UN).

- The primary responsibility of the council is to maintain international peace and security.

- The Security Council ensures to act against any aggression and checks the threat to peace.

- Under the Charter of the UN, all Member States are obligated to comply with UNSC decisions.

- It indulges in dispute settlement by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. It even imposes sanctions and also authorizes the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

- **Members:** It has 15 Members, and each Member has one vote.

  - It also has 5 permanent members known as **P5** (**United**

Kingdom, China, France, Russia, and the United States) who have **veto power** over decisions of UNSC .

- o 10 non-permanent members: Each year, the 193-member General Assembly elects five non-permanent members to the UNSC for a two-year term.

- o These members are selected to ensure balanced geographic representation: five from Africa or Asia, one from Eastern Europe, two from Latin America, and two from Western Europe or other regions.

- The Security Council is permanently located at the United Nations Headquarters in **New York** City.

Doctrine of 'Constructive Possession'

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India introduced the doctrine of "constructive possession, while passing its landmark judgment on clarifying that watching child pornographic material without downloading it, also constitutes a criminal offence under Section 15 of **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act**.

What is the Doctrine of 'Constructive Possession'?

- The doctrine of "constructive possession" is a legal concept which means that it is **considered as possession of an item** to an individual **even if they do not have direct physical control** over it.

- In criminal law, this arises when a person has the intention and ability to control an item, either alone or with others. While actual possession involves direct physical

control, constructive possession holds a person responsible for items they can control, even if those items are not physically in their custody.

- The doctrine generally arises in cases that involves **drugs, stolen properties, etc**., and with respect to the above judgement, it was to ensure that no person evades responsibility by deleting content after viewing it.

- It was introduced in order to hold people accountable for having the ability to **access, control, or delete** such materials.

Key Elements of Constructive Possession:

- **Knowledge of the Item's Presence**: The individual must be aware of the item's existence. Just being near the item without knowing it exists cannot constitute Constructive Possession.

- **Ability to Exercise Control**: The individual must have the power and intent to control the item or substance, even if it is not in their direct possession.

- **Intent to Possess**: There must be an intention to possess the item, which can be inferred from circumstances, such as the individual's actions or the item's location.

About the POCSO Act:

- The provides a **comprehensive legal framework to protect children** from sexual abuse and exploitation in India.

- It was enacted in **2012**.

- It applies to **minors under the age of 18** and includes provisions for

sexual assault, harassment, and child pornography.

- Key Features of the POCSO Act:

    o The act defines "child", as any individual **under 18 years** of age.

    o It obligates individuals who are aware of a child being sexually abused to report the offence, with penalties for non-reporting.

    o The Act prescribes a minimum of **10 years'** imprisonment for aggravated penetrative sexual assault, with potential for life imprisonment.

WHO's updated Bacterial Priority Pathogens List (BPPL) 2024

Context

Recently, the WHO released its updated Bacterial Priority Pathogens List (BPPL) 2024 which highlights 15 families of antibiotic-resistant bacteria grouped into **critical, high** and **medium** categories for prioritization.

- The list provides guidance on the development of new and necessary treatments to stop the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

What is AMR?

- Antimicrobial resistance occurs when **bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites** no longer respond to medicines, making people sicker and increasing the risk of disease spread, illness and deaths.

- Increasing AMR is attributed to the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials.

- The updated BPPL incorporates new evidence and expert insights to guide research and development (R&D) for

new antibiotics and promote international coordination to foster innovation.

- The updated Bacterial Priority Pathogens List (BPPL) has categorized the antibiotic-resistant bacteria into **critical, high** and **medium.**

WHO BPPL 2024:

Critical priority:

- Acinetobacter baumannii, carbapenem-resistant;

- Enterobacterales, third-generation cephalosporin-resistant; and

- Enterobacterales, carbapenem-resistant;

- Mycobacterium tuberculosis, rifampicin-resistant (included after an independent analysis with parallel tailored criteria, and subsequent application of an adapted multi-criteria decision analysis matrix).

High priority:

- Salmonella Typhi.

- Shigella spp.

- Enterococcus faecium

- Pseudomonas aeruginosa

- Non-typhoidal Salmonella

- Neisseria gonorrhoeae

- Staphylococcus aureus, methicillin-resistant

Medium priority:

- Group A streptococci, macrolide-resistant

- Streptococcus pneumoniae, macrolide-resistant

- Haemophilus influenzae, ampicillin-resistant

- Group B streptococci, penicillin-resistant

The NCrF framework

Context:

Recently, India with an ambition to become the Global Knowledge Superpower and to transform its education system has introduced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Dimensions of the Article

- About National Education Policy 2020
- Key Features of NEP, 2020
- What is the NCrF?
- NCrF in Higher Education Institutions (HEI)
- Significance of NCrF

About National Education Policy 2020

- The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 much like its previous versions in **1968** and **1986**, is India's educational roadmap for the 21st century that outlines comprehensive reforms in lines with the present requirements by including technical instruction.

- It aims to make India a **Global Knowledge superpower**.

- The recommendations were given by the committee headed by **Dr. K Kasturirangan, under Ministry of Education**.

- The foundational pillars of NEP 2020 are: **Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability.**

- The policy's ambition is to transform both school and college education into entities that are enriched, adaptive, and multidisciplinary.

Key Features of NEP, 2020:

- The policy ensures access to schooling for **all students from pre-primary to Grade 12**.

- The aim of the policy is to provide quality education for all children aged **3-6 years**.

- It has brought in a **new curricular and pedagogical structure (5+3+3+4)** that aligns with age groups **3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years**, covering four schooling stages:
  - Foundational (5 years)
  - Preparatory (3 years)
  - Middle (3 years)
  - Secondary (4 years)

- It also houses **Integrated Learning Approach** by Removing the old rigid separations between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, and vocational and academic streams.

- The policy emphasizes the use of Indian languages and multilingual education.

- **National Assessment Centre, PARAKH:** It plans to establish a center for Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development.

- It also introduces a dedicated **Gender Inclusion Fund** and **Special Education Zones** to support disadvantaged regions and groups.

What is the NCrF?

- The NCrF which is a subset of NEP.

- It provides a framework for schools, higher education, vocational training, and skill development institutions with a flexible approach

to credit allocation across various disciplines and activities.

NCrF in Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

- **Flexibility in Credit Earning**: NCrF gives numerous options to students in HEIs to earn credits as it covers a wide range of activities such as **classroom learning, lab work, internships, on-the-job training, sports, arts, social work, and more**. This approach is to encourage students who are good in their own discipline and also to access multiple avenues to accumulate credits beyond traditional academic paths.

- **Adapting to Change**: It helps educational institutions to adopt curricula inclined with the evolving job market and skill requirements which helps students to bridge the skill gap they need to get a job.

- **Expanding Opportunities**: The aim of NCrF is to go beyond just producing knowledge. It mainly helps students to equip skills needed for modern jobs, entrepreneurship, and self-employment.

Significance of NCrF:

- **Democratisation of Education**: It values vocational and skill-based training alongside academic knowledge that helps in breaking the perception of higher education being all about academic excellence. This in-turn will enhances social equity.

- **Skill and Knowledge Balance**: The NCrF creates a healthy balance between vocational skills and academic learning that are essential for individual and societal progress.

- **Enhancing Employability**: NCrF with its flexible, skill-based courses helps students gain practical skills, increasing their employability and career prospects.

Conclusion

The NEP 2020 and NCrP is another ambitious approach of the government to stay in line with the contemporary needs and future challenges in the educational sector. Although, it poses few challenges, embracing these reforms that focuses on more inclusive, flexible, and skill-oriented education, will help transform the future India to greater heights.

Karnataka Withdraws General Consent for CBI Investigations

Context

Recently, amidst allegations of the CBI being "biased and prejudiced" in its investigations in Karnataka, the Karnataka government decided to withdraw the general consent granted to the CBI to conduct probes in the state.

Background:

- The decision was made after the demand for a CBI probe increased, into alleged irregularities concerning the allotment of 14 MUDA (Mysore Urban Development Authority) sites to CM Siddaramaiah's wife.

- However, the Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, H.K. Patil, clarified that the withdrawal was unrelated to this issue, as the case is already being investigated by the Karnataka Lokayukta.

Key Highlights:

- The withdrawal of the consent that was granted to CBI by Karnataka Cabinet was due to the concerns over the agency's impartiality.

- The state government has now decided to grant consent on a *case-by-case* **basis**, instead of allowing unrestricted investigations.

- Many states, especially non-BJP-ruled states, like West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Punjab, have also revoked general consent for CBI operations in recent years.

Legal Basis and History:

- Under the ***Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946,*** the CBI requires the consent of state governments to conduct investigations within their jurisdiction. Previously, Karnataka had granted general consent for CBI probes.

- The Congress government's decision in 2023 reverses the blanket permission granted by the previous BJP-led government in 2019, which had allowed the CBI to investigate corruption allegations against Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar.

- The case was subsequently referred to the Karnataka Lokayukta police for investigation.

What is CBI?

- It is a top-class investigating police agency in India that assists **Central Vigilance Commission and Lokpal**.

- It functions under **Deptt. of Personnel, Ministry of Personnel, Pension & Public Grievances, Government of India** - which falls directly under the prime minister's office.

- It also coordinates investigation on behalf of Interpol Member countries.

- Its conviction rate is as high as **65 to 70%** and it is comparable to the best investigation agencies in the world.

World Rabies Day: tracing the journey from myths to modern medicine

Context:

After the recent death of a young boy in Kerala due to rabies, it highlighted the continued threat posed by the rabies disease in today's world of medical advancements.

- Meanwhile, September 28 is observed as World Rabies Day to commemorate the death of **Louis Pasteur.**

Dimensions of the Article

- History of Rabies
- Present Challenges
- Way Forward

History of Rabies

1. The history of rabies finds its mentions in many ancient texts of Mesopotamia and India, dated back to about 4,000 years.

2. However, people in those days, followed superstitions and ineffective remedies like consuming dog hair, in an attempt to cure rabies.

3. The real turning point came in the **1880s** when **Louis Pasteur** developed the **first rabies vaccine**.

4. Pasteur hypothesized that a weakened version of the virus could stimulate the immune system to fight off real infections. His successful treatment of a young boy, Joseph Meister, in 1885 marked the first major victory in rabies prevention.

5. Pasteur's work on rabies had a global impact, leading to the creation of the Pasteur Institute in 1888. His vaccine's success was recognized internationally, saving lives and becoming a cornerstone in the development of future vaccines.

Present Challenges

1. India accounts for about **59,000 deaths annually**, which is **33% of global rabies** fatalities.

2. However, Rabies can be prevented if timely **post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** is administered. This involves a combination of rabies immunoglobulin (Rabies Ig) and the rabies vaccine. However, there is still a lack of awareness, and sometimes, victims do not receive the necessary treatment due to delayed medical response or lack of understanding of the risks.

3. Beyond the human toll, rabies places a significant economic burden on India. The estimated cost of dog-mediated rabies is $8.6 billion, reflecting the impact on healthcare resources, vaccination campaigns, and lost productivity.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthening Vaccination and Education**: Increasing public awareness about the importance of immediate medical attention after any animal bite is crucial. Vaccination drives for both people and dogs must be prioritized, along with educational programs that highlight the seriousness of rabies and the need for PEP.

2. **Adopting the One Health Approach**: A comprehensive strategy that involves collaboration between human health, veterinary, and environmental sectors is essential to effectively manage rabies. This approach, called "One Health," recognizes the interconnectedness of human and animal health and focuses on coordinated efforts like dog population management, public awareness, and vaccination drives.

3. **Robust Surveillance and Coordination**: India must establish a strong surveillance system to track rabies cases and dog bites more effectively. This can include using technology like GIS-enabled tracking systems. Additionally, collaboration among government ministries such as health, animal husbandry, environment, and local bodies is vital for achieving the goal of zero rabies deaths by 2030.

Stubble Burning

Context:

Every year during winters, North India particularly the Indo-Gangetic plains suffer the worst air pollutions. The article discusses the importance of addressing this issue to control pollution.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is the Issue surrounding stubble farming?

- Significance of addressing stubble burning.

- Suggested measures

What is the Issue surrounding stubble farming?

- **Paddy Stubble Burning**: The underlying cause for the air pollution is mostly due to large-scale paddy stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. The burning accounts for upto **40%** of the pollutant load in Delhi during October and November.

- **Inadequate Implementation**: Although Supreme court has exclusively told to stop stubble burning, few states like Uttar Pradesh saw a **30%** increase in burning incidents. However, here was a 59% drop in burning incidents in Punjab and a 40% decrease in Haryana in 2023.

- **Operational Gaps**: In-situ (on-field) and ex-situ crop residue management technologies and co-firing straw in thermal power plants have been

proposed to reduce pollution to some extent. Despite that, the unavailability of machines when needed and the absence of a smooth supply chain to transport straw from fields to power plants hinder progress.

Significance of addressing Stubble burning:

1. **Health and Environment**: It leads to severe respiratory issues like asthma, bronchitis, and other respiratory diseases, posing a severe threat to human health. Hence, reducing stubble burning can significantly improve air quality that will benefit millions of people.

2. **Uphold Judicial Mandate**: The Supreme Court has already directed that stubble burning should be eliminated. Ensuring compliance will not only improve public health but also uphold judicial mandates, reinforcing accountability.

3. **Economic Incentives**: Proper management of paddy straw can provide economic benefits to farmers, such as earning income through selling straw for industrial use.

Suggested Measures

1. **Improving Infrastructure and Accessibility**: Government must ensure that the already existing machines for in-situ and ex-situ crop residue management should be made available on a timely basis.

2. **Streamlining Straw Collection and Transport**: It is important to focus on building a robust system for the efficient collection and transportation of paddy straw to thermal power plants or other industries.

3. **Collaborative Effort**: Both the Centre and the States need to work together, setting aside political differences, to tackle the problem of air pollution. A coordinated strategy that includes awareness campaigns, economic incentives, punitive measures, and strong enforcement is essential for lasting impact.

Conclusion

Both Centre and State should work together, as it is a long-term effort between governments, farmers, industries, and the public. Working collectively for a greater cause ensures that it will last for a long-time protecting the environment for future generations.

Mao Council Accepts TPO's Judgment on Traditional Land Dispute

Context:

- Recently, the apex tribal body of the Mao Nagas in Manipur has officially accepted the judgment and order of the **Tenyimia People's Organisation (TPO)** Presidential Council which was regarding a land dispute along the Nagaland-Manipur border.

- This decision is of utmost importance as it aims to promote peace and cooperation between both the communities of the border.

About the Mao Nagas:

- The Mao Nagas are native to **North-Eastern region** of India, especially **Manipur.**

- They are also considered to be one of the **indigenous Naga tribes**.

- The Mao community speak **Mao language**, and they call themselves as **"Ememei" or "Memei.**

Social Structure:

- Mao Naga society follows a **patriarchal system**.

- They are divided into different clans, which are further subdivided into sub-clans.

- Villages are compact and typically located on hilltops or ridges, offering protection and security.

Economic Practices:

- **Agriculture:** Rice is their staple food and they are mostly agrarian communities. They also practice **terraced rice cultivation.**

- **Collective Endeavors:** The Mao Nagas emphasize collective efforts in farming and trade. In earlier times, they engaged in a barter system for the exchange of goods.

Religion and Beliefs:

- Prior to the introduction of Christianity, the Mao Nagas followed a traditional belief system known as *Opfupe Chüna-Chüno* (the religion of their forefathers).

- At present, the majority of Mao Nagas have embraced **Christianity**, which plays a significant role in their cultural and social life.

- **Major Festivals:** festivals: *Chüthuni, Chüjüni, Saleni,* and *Onuni.*

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India and UNSC

Context

Recently, India has shown interest in becoming a permanent member on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, along with leaders from the U.S. and France, also voiced support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

About United Nations Security Council (UNSC):

- UNSC is one amongst the other five principle organizations of the United Nations (UN).

- The primary responsibility of the council is to maintain international peace and security.

- The Security Council ensures to act against any aggression and checks the threat to peace.

- Under the Charter of the UN, all Member States are obligated to comply with UNSC decisions.

- It indulges in dispute settlement by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. It even imposes sanctions and also authorizes the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

- **Members:** It has 15 Members, and each Member has one vote.

  o It also has 5 permanent members known as **P5** (**United Kingdom, China, France, Russia, and the United States)** who have **veto power** over decisions of UNSC .

  o 10 non-permanent members: Each year, the 193-member General Assembly elects five non-permanent members to the UNSC for a two-year term.

  o These members are selected to ensure balanced geographic representation: five from Africa or Asia, one from Eastern Europe, two from Latin America, and two from Western Europe or other regions.

- The Security Council is permanently located at the United Nations Headquarters in **New York** City.

Significance of being a permanent member of the UNSC:

- **Veto Power**: The Permanent members (P5 - USA, UK, Russia, China, France) have their exclusive **right to veto any substantive resolution**.
  - With this veto, it gives the member country, the power to block the adoption of any resolution, even if it has majority support in the council.

- **Influence in Global Affairs**: Permanent membership in UNSC also means an entrance to international policies and decisions on key issues like conflicts, sanctions, and peacekeeping missions. The permanent nations have a direct say in matters of international peace and security, giving them strategic leverage over global governance.

- **Prestige and Diplomatic Power**: It even elevates country's status on the global stage. It enhances diplomatic relations, increases opportunities for strategic alliances, and boosts a nation's soft power in global diplomacy.

- **Long-term Stability in Decision-Making**: Unlike non-permanent members who serve for two-year terms, permanent members have a consistent seat on the Security Council. This ensures they have a continuous role in influencing international policies without the need for re-election, contributing to sustained involvement in global governance and international relations.

Reliability and Ethics of deception detection tests (DDTs) in India.

Context:

The recent use of polygraph tests by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in a case involving the rape and murder of a doctor in Kolkata has sparked renewed debate on the reliability and ethics of deception detection tests (DDTs) in India.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What Are Deception Detection Tests?
- Concerns related to DDTs
- Legal Evolution of DDTs in India
- Supreme Court's Landmark Ruling in 2010
- Continued Use and Ethical Concerns

What Are Deception Detection Tests?

- These are the methods that are used by the investigating agencies to determine if the person is being deceptive.

- There are multiple ways/ methods of DDTs:
  - **Polygraph Tests:** This is also known as a **"lie detector test,"**. It analyses certain physiological changes like **increased blood pressure, sweating, or changes in breathing patterns**, that usually occur when a person is lying.
  - **Narco-Analysis:** This is done by taking the accused or the person involved to a semi-conscious state by injecting **sodium pentothal.** This enables the subject to disclose information as it lowers

the subject's inhibitions. It is also called a **"truth serum"** as it is believed to weaken the person's ability to lie.

- o **Brain Mapping:** This is undertaken by **introducing the subject to certain stimuli related to crime** that helps experts to record the brain activity of the subject. IT is based on a principle that the brain shows distinct reactions to familiar stimuli if the person has any knowledge of them.

Concerns related to DDTs:

- Although these methods help the legal system, they are controversial amongst the medical and scientific community due its effectiveness.

- For instance, an accused subjected to any one of the above methods, need not necessarily be proven guilty considering the physiological responses that comes out as a result. Because, these psychological responses can also be a response due to stress and fear which can make the tests unreliable.

- And on the other side, there are many example in the United States where subjects who are good at lying, have actually passed the polygraph tests, once again questioning its credibility.

Legal Evolution of DDTs in India

- Indian courts until 2010, generally administered these tests by sidelining accused's consent.

- The following cases made in clear that modern crimes need modern methods and also upheld that these tests did not amount to "testimonial compulsion," alongside safeguarding the subject's fundamental rights.

- o **Kerala High Court in 2006 (Rojo George vs. Deputy Superintendent of Police)**

- o **Madras High Court in 2006 (Dinesh Dalmia vs. State)**

- o **Delhi High Court in 2008 (Sh. Shailender Sharma vs. State & Another)**

Supreme Court's Landmark Ruling in 2010

- In the famous case of **Selvi vs. State of Karnataka** , it emphasized the importance of consent.

- It ruled that **no person should be forced** to undergo these tests without their explicit consent, aligning with the **fundamental right against self-incrimination under Article 20(3)** of the Constitution.

- It also made it clear that forcing someone to would also violate their right to privacy under **Article 21.**

- It even highlighted the lack of scientific evidence supporting the reliability of these tests in yielding accurate investigative leads.

- It compelled that those consenting to such tests must have access to a lawyer and must be made aware of all potential physical, emotional, and legal consequences.

- However, the **Court did allow for any evidence discovered as a result of voluntary** test results to be used in investigations.

  - o For instance, if an accused person voluntarily reveals the location of a weapon during the test, and the weapon is subsequently found, the weapon itself could be admissible evidence, even if the

statement during the test is not.

Continued Use and Ethical Concerns

- Despite the Supreme Court's restrictions, these methods have been applied in several high-profile cases, such as the **2020 Hathras gang rape**, the **2012 Sheena Bora disappearance**, and the **2022 Shraddha Walker murder case**. This continued use raises ethical and legal concerns:

    o **Informed Consent and Coercion**: It is argued that getting one's voluntary consent in police custody is difficult as many of the detainees might not even fully understand their rights or the consequences of undergoing such tests.

    o **Potential for Abuse**: It was also brought into light where suspects were forced to undergo narco-analysis in which they were exposed to harsh physical and psychological coercion to extract confessions. Like those that happened in **2007 Mecca Masjid blasts and the 2006 Mumbai blasts.**

- Legal experts like senior advocate **Rebecca John** have criticized, calling these tests as **"pseudo-scientific,"**. She argued that if an individual refuses the test, this refusal is often viewed as an of guilt or bad faith, which can unjustly impact their legal standing.

Conclusion

While DDTs play an important role in the legal system, it also sidelines the ethical implications involved. And having a questionable reliability in the use of DDTs, it should be used carefully.

Adopting scientifically valid methods and by considering constitutional rights, justice should remain a priority in India's criminal justice system.

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill is knotty

Context:

Recently, the centre introduced the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill which aims to amend the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The aim of the bill is to address climate-related disasters more effectively.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What is Disaster Management (Amendment Bill), 2024

- The Concern: Centralization in Disaster Management

- Learning from Past Failures: The Need for a New Approach

What is Disaster Management (Amendment Bill), 2024:

- The bill intends to amend the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

- It allows the state capitals and large capitals having municipal corporations to form **"Urban Disaster Management Authority"**, with an exception to union territories of Delhi and Chandigarh.

- The bill empowers the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** and the **State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA)** to prepare the disaster plan at the national level and state level, respectively, instead of the plans made by the National Executive Committee and the State Executive Committees earlier.

- The bill seeks to create a **"disaster database at national and State level"** which will include disaster assessment,

preparedness and mitigation plan, fund allocation detail, expenditure according to type and severity of risk, in accordance with such policy, as may be determined by the Union government.

- The bill shall also grant **statutory recognition** to existing bodies like the **National Crisis Management Committee** and the **High-Level Committee**.

- It also seeks to make provision for a "State Disaster Response Force" by the State Governments.

The Concern: Centralization in Disaster Management

- **More centralized:** Centralization often results in slower responses to disasters, as it creates multiple layers of decision-making. Despite, the current Disaster Management Act, 2005 having a top-down approach, with several authorities and committees functioning at national, state, and district levels, the bill seems to show even more central control over the disaster management processes.

- **Delays in relief and rehabilitation:** It is also argued that the decision to give statutory status to bodies like National Crisis Management Committee and a High-Level Committee that existed before the Act, is invariably going to affect the decision-making and response process during emergencies.

  o Example: During the recent floods occurred in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the funds from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) were delayed.

- **Lack of financial autonomy:** Although the amendment claims to strengthen NDMA and SDMAs by creating 'Urban Disaster Management Authority' , they do not come with a matching commitment of funds. The state authorities eventually have to rely on

central government for resources, which can hinder quick and effective disaster management.

- **Narrow definition of 'Disaster':** According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), in the year 2023, India experienced **536 heatwave days**, the highest in 14 years. But the act does not recognize heatwave as disaster.

  o The Act lists specific events like cyclones, earthquakes, floods, and droughts as disasters eligible for financial assistance.

Learning from Past Failures: The Need for a New Approach

- The bill should learn from the past mistakes and must aim o improve upon the shortcomings of the 205 act.

- It should focus on developing cohesive plan that strengthens cooperative federalism.

- In situations like the floods in Wayanad, Kerala, it is more crucial to work on predicting and managing future disasters rather than debating which government entity is to blame.

Way Forward:

- **Decentralization of Powers**: The bill should focus on empowering local and state-level authorities with decision-making powers and financial autonomy.

- **Revisiting the Definition of Disasters**: The definition of disaster should be made more holistic to include recent climate-induced events such as the heatwaves.

- **Clear Guidelines for Fund Usage**: The focus should be on bringing

more transparency and clarity in the line of disbursement and usage of disaster relief funds.

- **Building Climate Resilience**: Disaster management policies should focus on long-term resilience-building measures, such as sustainable urban planning, infrastructure development, and community awareness programs to minimize the impact of disasters.

States Can Buy Rice Directly from FCI Without E-Auction

Context:

Recently, the government introduced a new policy that allows states to buy rice directly from FCI bypassing an e-auction for Rs 2,800 per quintal under the Open market sale scheme.

- This move was to manage surplus stocks and to ease grain procurement.

Key Highlights

- The rice will be sold at a fixed price of **Rs 2,800 per quintal**, excluding transportation costs and the concerned states and UTs are allowed to buy additional rice beyond the limit of 5 kg per person at the same rate, which has been reduced from Rs 2,900 per quintal.

- **Department of Consumer Affairs** has expanded the **Price Monitoring System** to include 16 additional commodities which makes the total to 38.

- The newly added commodities include Bajra, Jowar, Ragi, Suji (wheat), Maida (wheat), Besan, Ghee, Butter, Brinjal, Egg, Black Pepper, Coriander, Cumin seed, Red chilies, Turmeric powder, and Banana.

- The new version 4.0 of the **PMS Mobile App** was also launched to enhance price monitoring.

Significance

- This new facility helps states and UT's to procure grains more efficiently and easily.

- This policy will help FCI to regulate surplus stock and also to manage new procurements which can avoid wastage. It also ensures better stock management.

- By expanding the commodities under the PMS, the government can formulate better policies that would control food prices and inflation.

- The PMS mobile app, gives real-time information about retail and wholesale prices of the essential commodities has been launched by Department of Consumer Affairs and it also expected to improve the quality of prices data for reporting daily prices by the price reporting centres.

World Bank's growth prognosis for India

Context

Recently, the World Bank, revised India's GDP growth forecast to 7% for the year 2024-25 aligning much closer but slightly below the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Fitch Ratings.

- This invites reassessment of India's economic policies in trade and job creation so as to sustain the growth.

Prelims

- **China plus one Strategy:** It refers to the global trend where companies diversify their manufacturing and supply chains by establishing

operations in countries other than China

- **World Bank:**

  o It was created in **1944 along with IMF** which was also created in the same year**.**

  o It was initially known as the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)** which later became the World Bank.

  o It has 189 countries (India is a member)

  o India was also the **founding member** amongst the other 44 countries that signed the agreements at **Bretton Woods.**

It releases important reports like - **Human Capital Index, World Development Report, Doing business, Global Economic Prospects, Global Financial Development Report, Poverty and Shared Prosperity,** etc

Dimensions of the Article

- World Bank's Growth Expectations for India

- Concerns and Challenges for India

- Trade Strategy: Need for a New Approach

World Bank's Growth Expectations for India

- The latest India Development Update expects the country's GDP to hit 7% for the year 2024-25 from 6.6% in the last year. This revision aligns with the projections of the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). However, it is below the RBI's and Fitch Ratings' forecasts of 7.2%.

- Although there lies a stark disruptions in the supply chain and fluctuations in the commodity prices, World Bank expects India to perform strongly.

- The World Bank has projected **private consumption to increase by 5.7%** and **the agriculture sector to grow by 4.1%** this year.

- It is anticipated that a strong recovery in the agriculture sector would boost rural demand which invariably will bring private investments that will help maintain GDP growth to hover between 6.5% to 6.7% in the coming years.

Concerns and Challenges for India

- **Non Farm Jobs:**

  o As mentioned in the Economic Survey 2024, the Indian economy needs to generate an average of nearly **7.85 million jobs annually** until 2030 in the non-farm sector.

  o Although, World Bank's figures have a positive outlook on India's growth but if India does not create enough non-farm jobs, it is difficult to exceed the forecasted growth rates.

- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes and Employment-Linked Incentives:**

  o The Indian Government has **allocated Rs 6200 crore for the PLI scheme** during the interim budget for FY25.

  o The World Bank recognizes these efforts but warns that it might not be enough to generate the required scale of employment for India's large and growing young workforce.

- **Trade strategy:**

- Despite being one of the largest economies globally, its share in International trade doesn't match its economic size.

- Recently, China stepped back from the labor-intensive manufacturing, which paves way for India to utilize this opportunity.

- **"China plus one"** strategy: Many global firms are currently adopting this and is a significant opportunity to India as well. However, the declining trend in export-related jobs over the last decade and a shift towards more capital- and skill-intensive exports could limit job growth.

Trade Strategy: Need for a New Approach

- India's step towards trade facilitation and free trade agreements (FTAs), especially with the **European Free Trade Association (EFTA),** have limited potential in unlocking new trade opportunities.

- To improve India's trade position, the World Bank suggests **reducing tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and curbs on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).**

- It also suggested India to encourage multilateral and plurilateral trade agreements like the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** which could help the country to integrate into global value chains, increase its share of global trade, and create more employment opportunities.

Way Forward

1. **Focus on Job Creation**: According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), **India's unemployment rate was 9.2%** in June 2024. India should focus on comprehensive policy framework to create more non-farm jobs beyond current PLI and Employment-linked schemes.

2. **Revise Trade Policies:** India should re-value its trade policies alongside considering multilateral trade agreements that could offer new opportunities for export growth and boost trade potential.

3. **Enhance Rural Demand**: A stronger rural economy can spur private consumption and investment. Hence, strengthening the agriculture sector by providing better infrastructure, integrating modern technology in farming, etc is very crucial.

4. **Strengthen Economic Resilience**: India should focus on diversifying trade partners, creating buffers for global commodity price shocks, and maintaining a prudent fiscal and monetary policy.

ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook report

Context:

Recently, the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook was released in Geneva. The report highlighted the role of AI in fall of labour income.

Key Highlights from the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook:

- The report states the **stagnation of Labour Income Share** since a 0.6 percentage point decline between 2019 and 2022.

- The report highlights the **impact of Technological Innovations,** particularly automation and AI that has

increased labour productivity but also has contributed to the decline in the labour income share.

- It draws attention towards the youth Unemployment and Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) rates globally, highlighting ongoing challenges in youth employment and skills development.

- The report also outlines the slow progress on key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), partly due to challenges like declining labour income shares and high youth NEET rates.

International Labour Organization:

- It was established in the year 1919 under the **Treaty of Versailles.**

- It was the first **affiliated specialized agency** of the United Nations in 1946.

- It's headquarters is at **Geneva, Switzerland**.

- The organization owing to its improved peace keeping among classes, pursuing decent work and justice for workers and for providing technical assistance to other developing nations, has been awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** in **1969**.

Way forward:

- The ILO emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy measures to ensure that the benefits of technological progress are more equitably distributed and to mitigate the risks of declining labour income and rising inequality.

Africa can make India's 'critical mineral mission' shine

Context:

Recently, the Union Budget 2024-25 introduced the **Critical Mineral Mission** to boost India's supply of essential minerals needed for advanced technologies.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is the Critical Mineral Mission?

- India's Connections with Africa for Mineral Supply

- Implications for India

What is the Critical Mineral Mission?

- The mission focus on securing essential minerals like lithium, cobalt and rare earth elements which play a major role in sectors like renewable energy, electric vehicles, and advanced electronics.

- The mission aims to achieve three main goals:

  o **Enhancing domestic production**

  o **Prioritizing recycling**

  o **Acquiring overseas assets to ensure a steady supply**

- In order to ensure more inflow of resources to the country, the Indian government amended the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act of 1957** allowing private sector to explore six minerals that were previously restricted for atomic use.

- Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL), was established in **2019** to secure critical minerals from abroad.

- Consequently, the first major agreement of KABIL was signed in **January 2024** to grant access to **lithium blocks in Argentina.**

India's Connections with Africa for Mineral Supply

- India boasts **three million-strong Indian diaspora** and an extensive commercial networks with the continent. Having a strong political, economic, and cultural ties with Africa, it is likely to become a strategic partner for India's mineral needs.

- The continent is also known for **30% of the world's known reserves of critical minerals** and **New delhi has even** enhanced its diplomatic presence in Africa, reflecting the importance it places on the continent.

- India's relationship with Africa goes beyond just trade in minerals. Bilateral trade between the two regions touched **$98 billion in 2022-23**, with **$43 billion from the mining and minerals sector**.

- India imports **15%** of its **oil** requirements from Africa.

- India has even invested in energy assets across the continent.

Implications for India

- As African countries are transitioning towards focusing on **value addition** rather than the simple **"pit-to-port"** model of exporting raw materials, it is an advantage for India to collaborate.

- Countries like **Tanzania, Zimbabwe**, and **Namibia** are developing policies to process minerals locally to generate more economic benefits. India can utilize this opportunity to collaborate with the African nations and investment in mining infrastructure and capacity-building projects across Africa.

- It can significantly strengthen India's supply chain for its clean energy and technological ambitions.

- However, China has been proactive in the region. It has already made substantial investments in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, where it dominates **cobalt mining** (mineral crucial for battery production).

Way forward:

- India's Critical Mineral Mission is a strategic move to secure essential minerals for its growing technology and clean energy sectors. However, India is still developing its capability in exploring, processing, and manufacturing the end-use products.

- In-order to harness the potential in Africa, India must prioritize positioning itself as a responsible and reliable player in the global critical minerals landscape by focusing on sustainable and value-driven partnerships.

- It should also focus on building a skilled workforce in the related industries across the sectors.

Coffee-table book tracing ISRO's achievements launched

Context:

- Recently, the Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation, S. Somanath, released a coffee-table book brought out by **The Hindu Group of Publications**.

Key highlights:

- The title of the books is - **"ISRO: Exploring New Frontiers - To The Moon, The Sun & Beyond"**.

- The book is curated by, **T.S. Subramanian** who was a former associate of Frontline magazine.

About the book:

- It documents the achievements of India as a space faring nation in detail, from its nascent days in the 1960s to recent programmes like the Mars Orbiter Mission, Chandrayaan-1, 2 and 3, and the Aditya L-1 missions.

- The book also shows behind-the-scenes stories, interviews and spectacular photographs of India's space journey.

About ISRO (Indian Space Research Organization):

- ISRO is **India's National Space Agency** under the Department of Space, Government of India.

- **Headquarters:** Bengaluru, Karnataka.

- **Vision:** Utilize space technology for national development, conduct space science research and explore planets.

- **Antrix Corporation Limited (ACL):** The commercial arm of ISRO, responsible for marketing space products, providing technical consultancy and transferring ISRO-developed technologies.

- and inclusivity of India's pension system.

Centre signs ₹26,000-crore contract with HAL for 240 Sukhoi-30MKI jet engines

Context:

Recently, the Defence Ministry signed a contract worth Rs 26,000 crore with **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)** for 240 AL-31FP aero-engines to be used in Su-30MKI aircraft. The deal was also approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security.

Highlights:

- The license to assemble the Russian 240 AL-31FP aero-engines are held by **HAL** in India.

- India plans to indigenise up to **63%** of the engine components and by approving this contract.

- With a scheduled delivery of 30 engines per year, the complete delivery of 240 engines is expected to complete over the next 8 years.

- The engines will be manufactured at HAL's Koraput Division.

- Additionally, these engines are intended to sustain the operational capability of the IAF's Su-30MKI fleet.

About Sukhoi Su-30MKI:

- The Sukhoi Su-30MKI is a two-seater, twinjet multirole air superiority fighter developed by **Russian aircraft manufacturer Sukhoi** and built under licence by India's **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)** for the Indian Air Force (IAF).

- **Characteristics:**

  o Su-30MKI's aerodynamic configuration ensures relaxed stability.

  o The wing coordination (canard) is such that, it increases the aircraft's lift ability.

  o And it deflects automatically to allow high angle of attack (AoA) flights allowing it to perform **Pugachev's Cobra (the cobra maneuver).**

- The development of this variant started after India signed a deal with Russia in 2000 and the first Russian-made Su-30MKI was accepted for Indian Air force in **2002**. However, first Su-30MKI **assembled in India** entered service in **2004**.

What is Super Sukhoi?

- In November 2023, the **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** granted **Acceptance of Necessity (AoN)** for a Rs 60,000 crore upgrade programme of IAF's Su-30MKI fleet.

- The upgrade will be carried out by **HAL** with the support of **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** and several private companies.

- Under this upgrade many older Russian subsystems will be replaced by more modern Indian subsystems.

SEMICON India 2024

Context:

250 companies from 24 countries will participate in the SEMICON India 2024 that highlights India's semiconductor potential.

Highlights:

- The CEO of the Indian Semiconductor Mission, Shri. Akash Tripathi, stated that the event agenda is to strategically connect with the major semiconductor supply chains across the world.

About India Semiconductor Mission (ISM):

- It was established in 2021 with a financial overlay of **Rs 76,000 crore**, under the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY).

- The objective under this mission is to develop sustainable semiconductor and display ecosystems.

- It also aims to provide **financial support for semiconductor** and **display manufacturing**, and design ecosystems.

- It approved three semiconductor units:

  o **Semiconductor Fab with 50,000 wfsm (wafer starts per month) Capacity:** Tata Electronics Private Limited (TEPL) will set up a semiconductor fab in partnership with Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp (PSMC), Taiwan.

  o **Semiconductor ATMP (Modified Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging) unit in Assam:** Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt Ltd ("TSAT") will set up a semiconductor unit in Morigaon, Assam.

  o **Semiconductor ATMP unit for specialized chips:** CG Power, in partnership with Renesas Electronics Corporation, Japan and Stars Microelectronics, Thailand will set up a semiconductor unit in Sanand, Gujarat.

Challenges Faced by Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) Amidst Falling NPAs in India

Context:

With the Non-performing assets (NPAs) reaching a 12-year low of 2.8% in March 2024, the Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) in India are also facing a slowdown.
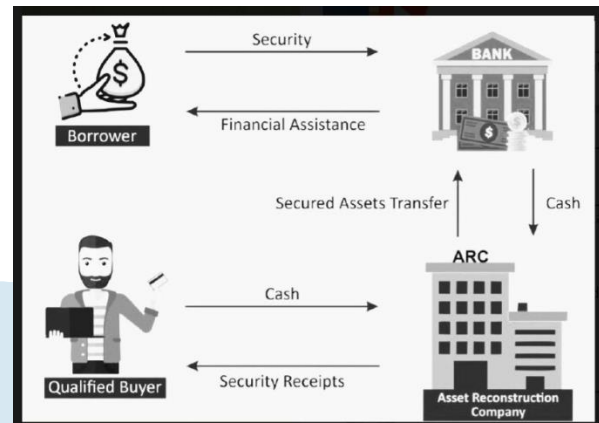
- Ratings agency Crisil projects a **7-10% contraction** in the **assets**

under management (AUM) of ARCs in 2024-25 after a stagnant 2023-24

Key highlights:

1. With fewer new corporate NPAs, ARCs are forced to focus on less profitable retail loans, but retail NPAs have not increased significantly.

2. In October 2022, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** mandated that ARCs must invest at least **15%** in security receipts or **2.5%** of the total issued, whichever is higher.

3. The RBI increased the minimum net owned funds requirement of ARCs' from **₹100 crore** to **₹300 crore** which added more pressure on ARCs' capital and leading to potential mergers or exits.

4. The state-owned National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL) offers government-guaranteed security receipts, making them more attractive to financial institutions.

5. Increased RBI scrutiny and the need for independent advisory committee approvals for all settlements have delayed processes, especially in retail loans.

What are ARCs?

- ARCs are those financial institutions that **buy bad debts from banks** at an agreed value and attempt to recover the debts.

- It was introduced by the **Narsimham Committee-II (1998)** and established under the **SARFAESI Act, 2002**.

- They are registered under the **Companies Act, 2013,** and **the SARFAESI Act,** and are regulated by the **RBI**.

- **Funding**: Raised from Qualified Buyers (QBs) such as insurance companies, banks, and asset management companies.

Non-Performing Asset (NPA)

- RBI defines NPAs as any advance or loan that is **overdue for more than 90 days**. Or in simple terms- "An asset becomes non-performing when it ceases to generate income for the bank,"

- **Types of NPAs**:

  o **Sub-standard Assets:** NPAs for ≤12 months.

  o **Doubtful Assets:** NPAs for >12 months.

  o **Loss Assets:** Uncollectible assets needing full write-off.

Recent Changes in ARCs Regulations by RBI

- It made ARCs to disclose returns and collaborate with rating agencies for more transparency.

- RBI replaced the previous requirement of 15% of all receipts and mandated ARC's to invest in security receipts with atleast **15%** of the transferors' investment or 2.5% of the total receipts issued (whichever is higher).

- Further, in order to enhance corporate governance, RBI mandated that the chair of the board and at least half the directors in a board meeting must be independent directors.

Perils of decentralisation with Chinese characteristics

Context:

The article- "Perils of decentralisation with Chinese characteristics", brings the contrasting approaches of India and China in terms of subnational economic competition. It throws light on the two nations economic models.

- India's model of promoting healthy competition among its states to attract investments.

- China's model of extreme decentralization.

Dimensions of the Article

- Background: China's Decentralization and Economic Growth

- The Problem of Overcapacity

- Shift Under Xi Jinping's Leadership

- Comparison: China vs. India

Background: China's Decentralization and Economic Growth

- In China, a significant portion of government spending of nearly **51%**, is handled by the local governments at the sub-provincial levels, as compared to just **3%** in India.

- Having a much broader qualitative mandate, the **local governments in China, take responsibilities** on unemployment insurance and pensions. Which typically is managed by the national government in India.

- In the **1980s** and **1990s**, China's decentralization, combined with the economic reforms initiated by **Deng Xiaoping**, allowed local governments to experiment with various economic policies to drive growth.

- Local leaders were incentivized to prioritize rapid economic growth as it determined their political success.

- This carved out a model where local governments heavily invested in industrial land at discounted rates, hoping to boost industrial output and generate future tax revenues.

- The strategy ultimate strategy was to attract industries by providing cheaper land, lower costs, and other benefits. And this resulted in a significant increase in exports due to low production costs and a competitive edge in global markets.

The Problem of Overcapacity

- Overcapacity is a situation when there is **more supply and less demand**. It leads to wastage of resources and results in loss-making enterprises.

- China also faced a similar situation of Overcapacity due to its aggressive investment-led growth model.

- This unregulated expansion had its benefits too. Foreign markets absorbed China's excess production and sectors like **steel** expanded rapidly.

- China went from being a **net importer of steel to the world's largest producer and exporter** in just a few years.

- However, as the global demand became stagnant, managing overcapacity became a significant policy challenge.

Shift Under Xi Jinping's Leadership

- Under Xi Jinping, a study by National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in 2014, indicated that half of all investments from 2009 to 2013 were ineffective and resulted in a massive waste of about **$6.9 trillion**.

- The economic model that worked well during the 1990s and early 2000s began to lose steam under Xi Jinping and to overcome this, Xi Jinping moved towards **recentralizing economic control** by tightening oversight on both state and private capital.

- Central policies started becoming more specific, focusing on particular sectors and product lines.

  - For instance: The push for self-sufficiency in semiconductors.

  - Local governments invested heavily in chip-making firms, encouraged by the central government's push.

- However, even after a decade, China still struggles with advanced chip production, and many firms have survived by relying on government subsidies without becoming competitive.

Comparison: China vs. India

- India's federal structure maintains a healthy balance between central authority and state autonomy.

  - In India, the central government controls the critical areas like **defense, foreign policy, and macroeconomic management**. And, it also encourages the states to compete with each other to attract investments which allows for healthy competition without the risk of excessive decentralization like that of China.

  - India's push for competition among states is aimed at enhancing governance, improving business environments, and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI).

- China's extreme subnational competition, which initially created economic growth, has now turned problematic.

  - The model led to a race where local governments prioritized rapid industrial growth over sustainable development.

  - This lack of a "brake" mechanism resulted in resource misallocation and significant financial waste.

Way Forward

- China should focus on transforming from an investment-driven model to one that fosters innovation, consumer demand and sustainable development. Moreover, it must try to improve its global image by repairing its international relations with other super nations.

- For India, it's a great lesson to learn from China's missteps. Rather than focusing more on decentralising, the country should focus on skill development, employment generation and sustainable industrial growth. This balanced approach will help India to invite investments while ensuring inclusive growth across the nation.

AI in healthcare

Context:

The article- "Health care using AI is bold, but much caution first", discusses the idea of providing every Indian with a **free AI-powered primary-care physician** available 24/7 within the next five years.

- The topic is a question about its practicality, challenges, and potential risks.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is a "Free AI-Powered Primary-Care Physician"?

- Advantages of AI in Healthcare

- Disadvantages and Challenges of AI in Healthcare

What is a "Free AI-Powered Primary-Care Physician"?

- It refers to an intelligence system that provides **basic healthcare services to individuals at no cost which could operate round the clock**.

- It will be offering initial **consultations, shall diagnose common health issues** including suggesting treatments through digital platforms.

- It aims to make healthcare more accessible, especially for underserved and remote populations, by reducing the need for physical visits to healthcare facilities.

Advantages of AI in Healthcare

1. **Increased Accessibility and Convenience**: Regardless of the patients location and time, the AI enabled system can be used to diagnose the illness during emergencies. It will play an important role in rural and remote areas where access to doctors and medical facilities is limited.

2. **Efficiency in Handling Routine Tasks**: However, it can used to perform repetitive tasks such as managing medical records, scheduling appointments, providing reminders for medication, and also analyzing symptoms to suggest initial treatments.

3. **Data Analysis and Predictive Health**: AI systems can analyze vast amounts of health data to identify patterns and predict potential health risks. For example, AI could predict the likelihood of developing certain diseases using patient's history, helping in early diagnosis and intervention.

4. **Support for Medical Professionals**: The enabling of AI, if not for patients, shall definitely assist doctors or nurses in offering treatment based on the available datasets. Large Language Models (LLMs) and Large Multimodal Models (LMMs) can also help in medical education by simulating patient interactions and providing targeted learning resources

Disadvantages and Challenges of AI in Healthcare

- **Lack of Human Touch:** Healthcare is not just about diagnosing and treating the diseases. AI will lack the human touch and will fall short in understanding patients' emotional and psychological needs.

- **Data Privacy and Security Concerns**: AI integration will accompany, collecting and processing large amounts of personal data which could pose a serious threat to individual privacy and data leaks.

- **The "Black Box" Problem**: AI algorithms mostly work as a "black box," - i.e., decision-making processes are not transparent or easily understood. In the healthcare sector, understanding the rationale behind a diagnosis or treatment plan is very critical, this problem of AI shall leave healthcare practitioners in the dark about how certain conclusions are reached by AI. Which leads to mistrust and cause potential harm if the AI makes an incorrect decision. And unlike other sectors, errors in healthcare can have life-threatening consequences.

- **Dependence on High-Quality Data**: India being a diverse country with minimal to average healthcare quality to the maximum number of people, the health data is often scattered, incomplete, and inconsistent. And AI to perform accurately, needs accurate information on the healthcare data. This could be a complication. The example of **Naegele's rule** in obstetrics illustrates how outdated or limited data can lead to inaccurate predictions and recommendations.

- **Ethical and Governance Issues**: India's regulatory environment for AI is not as developed as that of other European Unions and in order to use AI in the healthcare sector, a strong ethical framework should be developed as it involves the personal data of vulnerable populations, and chances of exploitation is more as seen in other countries., raising questions about patient rights and data ownership.

Way Forward

- India should implement comprehensive regulations for AI in healthcare that prioritize patient safety, privacy, and ethical use.

- Although AI can be very useful in diagnosing and suggesting treatments, it also comes with errors. Hence, it should be allowed with caution where AI is only used for preliminary assessments, while a human doctor makes the final diagnoses and prescription.

- Rather than planning to replace human doctors entirely, it can be used for managing hospital logistics, predicting medical supply needs, screening medical images, or assisting in administrative tasks

- In order to fully utilize AI's potential, India must also invest in improving its health data infrastructure, ensuring data is accurate, comprehensive, and regularly updated.

Rising Food Inflation

Context:

Recently, the retail inflation in India hit 3.65% in August, particularly on the account of rising food prices.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is Inflation?
- Issue at Hand
- Factors Behind Food Price Inflation
- Advantages of Inflation

What is Inflation?

- Inflation refers to the general increase in price levels of goods and services over a period of time.

- In India, Consumer Price Index (CPI) is used to measure inflation, as it tracks the price changes for a basket of goods and services that are typically consumed by households.

- The RBI in-order to maintain price stability and support economic growth, aims to keep inflation around **4%,** within the range of **2% to 6%.**

Issue at Hand

- According to the recent data released by the NSO, the food inflation has continued to rise.

- The major contributor of this include vegetables like **potatoes, onions, carrots, and brinjals**

- Furthermore, the increasing vegetable prices alongside slow declines in pulses and cereals, have both contributed to overall rise in food inflation which is affecting especially the rural areas.

- Apparently, **core inflation** has also contributed equally. (Core inflation: which excludes **volatile items like food and fuel** — showing signs of resurgence).

  o The increase in the Core inflation is a signal that inflationary pressures might not ease soon.

  o The **irregular monsoon patterns**, is also contributing by affecting agricultural productivity and, consequently, food prices.

Factors Behind Food Price Inflation

- **Mismatch in Demand and Supply:** Extreme weather events and changes in consumer preferences creates an imbalance between food supply and demand which leads to price hikes.

- **Production Costs:** Rising farmer's expenses like fuel, fertilizer, and labor, will lead into higher food prices.

- **Energy Prices:** Rise in fuel prices makes transportation expenses double and eventually affect the food supply chain. This influences consumer prices periodically.

- **Currency Exchange Rates:** Variations in exchange rates can impact food prices, particularly for countries reliant on imported food.

- **Trade Policies:** It affects both imported and domestically produced food prices.

- **Government Policies:** Subsidies, price controls, and regulations enforced by governments can influence food prices.

- **Global Events:** Geopolitical conflicts, pandemics, and trade disruptions can disrupt food supply chains, leading to price spikes.

- **Climate Change:** Climate-related events like droughts and floods can damage crops, reduce yields, and elevate food prices in the long term.

Advantages of Inflation

- Moderate inflation **encourages spending and investment**. People generally tend to buy goods and services even before prices go up. This could accelerate economic growth.

- As inflation **reduces the real value of debt**, the cost of paying back loans is effectively lower. This can ease the financial burden on borrowers.

- Rising prices **encourages businesses to invest** in new projects, with an expectation of increased profits in the future. This can result in job creation and further economic growth.

Disadvantages of Inflation

- **Erodes Purchasing Power**: As prices rise, the same amount of money buys fewer goods and services which will affect people with fixed incomes and can lead to a lower standard of living.

- **Hurts Savings**: If the inflation rate is higher than the interest rate on savings, the real value of savings decreases over time. This discourages people from saving.

- **Increases Uncertainty**: Inflation creates a fear in both consumers and businesses that prices might rise further, or that they might not be able to afford future costs.

- **Impact on Low-Income Households:** As they spend a majority part of their income on basic necessities like food and housing, price rise hits them harder.

- **Undermines Economic Stability**: When prices rise rapidly, the wage demands from workers increases, which pushes the costs for businesses. And ultimately the businesses will again pass those costs onto consumers in the form of even higher prices, creating a vicious cycle.

Way Forward

- As food inflation is majorly contributing to overall inflation in India, its important to improve agricultural productivity.

- Investing in better irrigation systems, timely supply of fertilizers, and on modern farming technologies can bring about an improvement in food inflation.

- Investments in areas related to supply chain like cold storage, transportation,

and market linkages should also be the priority.

- Attending to the core inflation mainly requires structural reforms in industries and sectors driving non-food price increases. The government should bring about policies that reduce bottlenecks in manufacturing. It will improve competition, and lower input costs can help keep core inflation in check.

Mpox vaccine

Context:

Recently, **Bavarian Nordic A/S (OMX: BAVA)**,a vaccine company, announced that it has obtained prequalification from the

WHO for **IMVANEX® (MVA-BN®)** as the first mpox vaccine to be added to the WHO prequalification list.

Key highlights:

- The approval is in the pre-qualification list of WHO.

- Impact in Africa:

  o Nearly **70% of Mpox cases in Congo** are among children **younger than 15**.

  o According to the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention-Children accounted for 85% of Mpox-related deaths in the country.

About the MVA-BN vaccine:

- MVA-BN or Modified Vaccinia Ankara-Bavarian Nordic is the **only non-replicating mpox vaccine**.

- It is approved in U.S., Switzerland, Singapore, Canada, United Kingdom and the EU/EAA.

- Originally developed as a smallpox vaccine in collaboration with the U.S. government to ensure the supply of a smallpox vaccine for the entire population.

- MVA-BN has been indicated for use in the general adult population in individuals considered at risk for smallpox or mpox infection.

- **Bavarian Nordic** has been a long-term supplier of the vaccine to national stockpiles, and during the 2022-2023 mpox outbreak. The Company supported governments and supranational organizations by expanding access to the vaccine to more than 70 countries worldwide.

World Ozone Day

Context

16th of September, is celebrated as the World Ozone Day or the International Day for the preservation of the Ozone layer.

Highlights:

- The day highlights the importance of ozone layer in protecting the life on Earth.

- Theme of the year 2024 is -"**Montreal Protocol – Advancing Climate Action".**

- PM Narendhra Modi inaugurated **'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam'** initiative to promote a sustainable future and protect Mother Earth.

- India also released its cooling action plan **Indian Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)** to phase out **chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) by 2037-38.**

- The Ozone Cell, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India has been

celebrating World Ozone Day since **1995** at the National and State levels.

Indian Cooling Action Plan (ICAP):

- It is an integrated approach by the Ministry of Road and Transport, Highway, Ministry of Power, Urban Development and others to meet cooling requirements across the sectors.

- Under the plan, the primary recommendation is to strengthen public mobility infrastructure like metro, trains and buses to discourage personal vehicles in Tier 2&3 cities and adopt potential low global warming potential (GWP) energy efficiency alternatives.

- Furthermore, it has also recommended the **Department of Science and Technology** for research and development in the area of **low refrigerant charge energy efficiency** in Mobile Air Conditioning.

- It has informed **Bureau of Energy Efficiency** to introduce testing agencies to provide realistic fuel efficiency and emissions profiles and green labelling systems for cars to promote efficient vehicles.

Delhi introduces a 21-point Winter Action Plan

Context:

Recently, the Delhi government introduced a **21-point Winter Action Plan** to combat air pollution.

About Delhi's Winter Action Plan:

- Drones will be used to monitor pollution hotspots across the city, providing real-time data to enhance pollution control efforts, making this the **first ever approach** using drones.

- The plan focuses on areas with the highest pollution levels to control emissions from vehicles and reducing dust pollution through various measures.

- It encourages private organizations grant work from home options for their employees to commute regularly to reduce vehicular emissions.

- Measures to prevent stubble burning and regulate industrial emissions are also taken under this plan.

- Emergency measures such as the **odd-even vehicle rationing**, **artificial rain**, and the **Harit Ratna award** for eco-friendly organizations are still kept in place.

- The Environment Department, Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Traffic Police, Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) are responsible for various aspects of the plan.

Way Forward:

- With the rising pollution levels, Delhi alone cannot combat pollution. Hence, collaboration with neighboring states like Punjab and Haryana is crucial to tackle the problems holistically.

- Active public participation in pollution reduction efforts is the key. And by also promoting eco-friendly practices and implementing green awards like the Harit Ratna, it encourages people to take part in the initiatives.

- Addressing the root causes with both immediate and long-term strategies is essential for reducing the health impacts of air pollution on its residents.

US Federal Reserve's Rate Cut

Context:

Recently, the U.S. Federal Reserve has lowered its interest rates for the first time in four years. After a prolonged period of rate hikes, it was reduced by half a percentage point.

Dimensions of the Article

- How U.S. Fed Rates Affect Developing Economies
- Why Did the US Federal Reserve Cut Interest Rates?
- Other Dimensions

How U.S. Fed Rates Affect Developing Economies

- **Impact on Debt Burden**: Higher U.S. interest rates had led to a stronger dollar, making it more expensive for developing economies to service their debt, especially when that debt is in dollars. The recent rate cut can reduce these burdens by weakening the dollar and lowering borrowing costs. Many developing nations had been struggling to meet their debt obligations, particularly in regions like Africa and Latin America.

- **Foreign Investment**: The Fed's rate cut could result in more foreign capital flowing into emerging markets, including India. When U.S. interest rates are high, investors prefer to keep their money in the U.S. for better returns. Lower rates may push investors to seek higher returns in developing economies, boosting foreign investment, especially in debt markets.

- **Economic Stability**: While the rate reduction might bring some relief, it also reflects underlying concerns about the global economy. Issues such as conflicts in Europe and West Asia, coupled with inflationary pressures, create uncertainty. This could mean that the rate cut is also a sign of potential global economic challenges ahead.

Why Did the US Federal Reserve Cut Interest Rates?

- The major reason was to tackle unemployment and make loans cheaper for businesses and individuals.

- Although Federal Reserve had slashed the interest rates post Covid-19 pandemic, due to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict that disrupted the entire global supply chain, it again raised the rates to balance the rising prices.

- Meanwhile, because of the high interest rates, the recent data from U.S. on unemployment showed that the unemployment was increasing to 4.2% in August 2024 which prompted Federal Reserve to act immediately. And the fact that Federal Reserves work primarily to maintain stable prices and to achieve maximum employment, it was evident that rate cut would help achieve these targets.

Other Dimensions

- **India's Economic Outlook**: India's Chief Economic Adviser, V. Anantha Nageswaran, welcomed the rate cut but noted that its impact on India might be marginal. India has already been attracting significant investor interest in recent years. The easing of U.S. rates may encourage even more inflows into India's markets, particularly in its bond market, but the effect may not be as dramatic as in other developing nations.

- **Challenges for Developing Economies**: Developing countries in Africa and Latin America, which have faced difficulties due to rising borrowing costs, stand to benefit more

significantly from the Fed's decision. Lower rates may enable these countries to invest more in critical areas such as infrastructure and public services, which had been sidelined due to high debt servicing costs.

- **Global Economic Concerns**: While the Fed maintains that the U.S. economy remains strong, the rate cut also signals caution. Uncertainties around global economic growth, exacerbated by geopolitical conflicts, mean that this pivot could indicate more troubled times ahead. The Fed's decision might be an attempt to prevent a broader slowdown, even though its immediate focus is on the U.S. economy.

Conclusion

The U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to lower interest rates brings relief to developing economies by easing debt pressures and potentially attracting more foreign investments. While this move could help countries like India and those in Latin America and Africa, it also reflects global economic uncertainties that require careful monitoring. The Fed's rate cut could be both a positive development for emerging markets and a warning of more challenging times ahead for the global economy.

India needs a 'National Security Strategy'

Context

With the changes happening in global environment, especially like the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and Gaza crisis, the article highlights the need for India to develop a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS).

Need for a 'National Security Strategy'

- The need to develop a holistic National security includes areas like defense, economic stability, and foreign policy.

- India's security strategy must reflect its foreign policy choices, such as "multi-alignment." India balances relationships with various global powers like the U.S. (through the Quad) and China (through BRICS), but it faces the challenge of managing conflicting interests while protecting its own security.

Current Challenges

- **Resource Allocation**: Having limited resources with other important areas to focus like health and education is creating a setback for defense sector. A national strategy must decide the areas of defense that should receive more funds. For instance, it should prioritize improving India's naval and submarine capabilities to match China's power in the Indo-Pacific region.

- **Balancing Threats**: India currently is dealing with China and Pakistan. Moreover, India's military strength, especially its naval capacity, is weaker compared to China, which complicates security planning.

- **Lack of Alliances**: Unlike countries like the U.S. or the U.K., India does not believe in formal military alliances. This creates a challenge in forming strong security partnerships, as India cannot rely solely on others for defense.

Decarbonisation of the Steel Sector

Context:

The Ministry of Steel is considering funding options to support decarbonisation in the steel sector due to the growing environmental concerns.

What is Decarbonisation of the Steel Sector?

- Decarbonisation is the process that involves **reducing carbon emissions in steel production** to create **'green steel'** that aligns with the global climate goals.

- India being the **second-largest crude steel producer** aims to increase per capita consumption from **97.7 kg to 160 kg by 2030**.

- Meanwhile, India is contributing only 4% to global GHG emissions. It is committed to decarbonising its industrial sectors, including steel, to meet its 2070 net-zero target.

How can India proceed Decarbonization?

- With an estimated requirement of **USD 300 billion,** the Ministry in order to finance the decarbonisation goal is considering **PLI schemes**. **India's Green steel policy** is one such move that links several PLI schemes.

- Also, it is advised to substituting coal with natural gas in blast furnaces to reduce emissions

- Import Protection: The government is mulling over import duties and protection measures to shield the domestic steel industry from foreign competition, balancing import-export dynamics.

- Steps can be taken to reduce carbon energy sources and instead use hydrogen, coal gasification, or electricity instead of coal-fired plants.

Economic performance report of states

Context:

Recently, *'Relative Economic Performance of Indian States: 1960-61 to 2023-24',* report was released.

- It highlighted the economic disparities among Indian states over the past six decades.

- It is released by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM).

Key Findings of the Report:

- **Economic Performance**:

  - <u>**Southern States' Growth:**</u> Southern states like **Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu** have totally contributed **30%** to India's GDP by 2024.

  - <u>**West Bengal's Decline**</u>: The report shows a drop in West Bengal's GDP contribution from **10.5% in 1960-61 to 5.6% in 2024.** Its per capita income also fell from 127.5% of the national average to 83.7%.

  - <u>**Maharashtra**</u>: Maharashtra **remains the largest GDP contributor at 13.3%.** However, its share has also declined from over **15%.**

- **Per Capita Income Trends**:

  - **Top Performers**: **Delhi, Telangana, Karnataka, and Haryana** recorded the highest per capita incomes in 2023-24, with Delhi's income at 250.8% of the national average.

  - **Gujarat and Maharashtra**: Both states maintained above-average per capita incomes since the 1960s, with Gujarat at 160.7% and Maharashtra at 150.7% of the national average in 2024.

- **Odisha's Improvement**: Odisha's per capita income rose from 55.8% in 2000-01 to 88.5% in 2023-24.

- **Punjab vs. Haryana**: Punjab's economic growth stagnated, with its per capita income falling to 106%, while Haryana's grew to 176.8% of the national average.

- **Smaller States**: Sikkim and Goa emerged as India's richest states by per capita income, with Sikkim at 319% and Goa at 290% of the national average.

- **Challenges for Poorer States**:

  - States like **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar** lag behind, contributing **9.5%** and **4.3%** to the GDP, respectively, with Bihar showing minimal improvement despite growth in Odisha.

Way forward:

The report emphasizes the need for a comprehensive investigation into policies and factors driving state-level economic growth to address widening regional disparities across India.

India's defence exports and humanitarian law

Context:

Recently, a group of retired diplomats, public intellectuals, academicians and activists had filed a petition in Supreme court seeking a halt to arms exports to Israel amid the Gaza conflict.

- The article - "India's defence exports and humanitarian law", addresses a legal and ethical issue surrounding the issue of India's export of defense equipment to countries like Israel, which are accused of violating international humanitarian law (IHL).

- It also explores the need for India to align its defense export policies with global standards on arms trade and IHL compliance.

Dimensions of the Article

- Background
- About International Law
- Key arguments
- Way forward

Background:

- A petition was filed in the SC, stating that supplying arms to Israel violates India's obligations under international law.

- It was argued that it breaches the **fundamental rights to life and equality** and **Article 51C** of the Indian Constitution, which directs the State to respect international law.

- Apparently, the Supreme Court of India declined to interfere, stating that foreign policy is beyond its purview.

- The central issue is whether India should continue exporting defense equipment to countries like Israel, considering allegations of war crimes in Gaza.

About International Law:

1. **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**: It is a international treaty that aims to regulate the global trade of conventional arms. It mainly checks the purpose of the exporting weapons, and if found that the weapons will be used to commit war crimes, it prohibits those countries from exporting such weapons.

2. **India's Position**: As India is not a signatory to the ATT, it is not legally bound by this treaty. However, some principles of the ATT are part of

customary international law, which may still have implications for India.

3. **Geneva Conventions**: India is a part of this convention and the **Common Article 1** of the Geneva Conventions, places an obligation on all states to ensure respect for IHL. Which implicitly means that India is bound not to supply arms if it is known or expected that these weapons will be used to violate IHL, such as committing war crimes.

Key arguments:

- **India's IHL Obligations**: As a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, India has to refrain itself from exporting arms if it is likely that the importing country will use them to breach IHL obligations.

- **Legal Gap in Indian Law**: Unlike the U.K. or EU countries, India do not have a domestic law that specifically requires the assessment of IHL compliance of countries receiving Indian defense equipment. Moreover, the existing laws like **Foreign Trade Act (FTA)** and **Weapons of Mass Destruction Act (WMDA),** do not impose such a requirement, creating a legal gap.

Way Forward:

- **Amending Indian Laws**: India should amend its domestic laws like the WMDA and FTA to be in IHL compliance of countries like U.K. or EU and also to align India's defense export policies with global norms.

- **Strengthening Credibility**: By integrating the IHL assessments into India's defense export laws, it would help India enhance its reputation as a responsible arms-exporting nation.

- **Judicial Incorporation of International Law**: The Supreme Court of India has, in past cases, used international law to fill gaps in domestic laws. This issue provides another opportunity for the judiciary to use

international legal principles, ensuring that India's defense exports align with IHL obligations. However, legislative changes would provide a more concrete and long-term solution.

Conclusion:

- Beyond legal and constitutional violations, there is also a strong ethical argument against supporting anyone engaged in alleged acts of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity.

- India should not forget its stance of non-alignment and peace. Risking itself by sending arms would mean disrespect for the international law obligations, constitutional principles, and ethical considerations.