

OCTOBER 2024 —

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 **+91 9611321616 / 9611451616**

 info@believersias.com |  www.believersias.com

06, Skandagraja, 1st Floor 100 ft ring road, 02nd Stage, above
Punjab National bank, BTM Layout, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560076

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Three Gorges Dam

Context

Recently, China's Three Gorges Dam was in news, stating its responsibilities for displacing massive amounts of water which could potentially affect the Earth's rotation.

Three Gorges Dam:



- It is a **hydroelectric gravity dam**.
- It is the **world's largest power station** in terms of installed capacity of **22,500 MW**.
- On an average, the Three Gorges Dam generates **95±20 TWh of electricity per year**.
- It is located on the **Yangtze River** in **Hubei Province, China**.
- The construction of the dam started in 1994 and was completed in 2012.
- The dam is **2,335 metres long** and **185 metres high**, creating a reservoir capable of holding **40 cubic kilometres** of water.

- **Functionality:** Beyond generating electricity, the Three Gorges Dam was built to improve **shipping capacity** along the Yangtze River and reduce the risk of downstream flooding through **flood storage space**.
- **NASA's Concern:** The **redistribution of water** from the dam's reservoir may have a slight impact on the Earth's rotation, though further studies are required to assess the long-term effects.

About the Yangtze River:

- It is the longest river in Asia and third-longest in the world.
- It originates from the **Tibetan Plateau** and dips in the **East China Sea**, stretching for about **6,300 km (3,915 miles)**.
- It is also famously known as the **longest river in the world to flow entirely within one country**.
- The river's basin covers an area of **1.8 million square kilometers**.
- **Major tributaries:** **Yalung, Min, Jialing, Han** (left bank) and **Wu, Yuan, Xiang, Gan** (right bank).

Classical language

Context:

Recently, the Union cabinet approved classical language status for five languages: Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit and Assamese.

Classical languages of India:

- The status of **Indian classical language** or **Shāstrīya Bhāshā** is an umbrella term used for the languages that has **high antiquity**(recorded history over a period of **1500- 2000**

years) and has **valuable, original and distinct literary** heritage.

- Initially, there were only **11 languages** as the Classical languages of India.
- The criteria for the recognition of classical languages was established by a **Linguistic Experts Committee** and is under the **Ministry of Culture**.
- Other Recognised Classical Languages: **Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu(2008), Kannada (2008), Malayalam(2013) and Odia (2014).**

Significance:

- The government promotes the study and preservation of such languages.
- For instance, two **International awards** are given annually to scholars who have made significant contributions to the research, teaching or promotion of that particular language.

Monsoon in India

Context

The article highlights the role, importance and mainly the contrasting nature of two important monsoon patterns of India: The Southwest monsoon and the northeast monsoon.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Overview of the Monsoon's Characteristics and Significance in India
- Southwest vs. Northeast Monsoon: A Comparison
- Northeast Monsoon: Regional Importance
- Urban Flooding: A Rising Concern

- How Global Climate Patterns Influence Rainfall
- Way forward

Overview of the Monsoon's Characteristics and Significance in India

- India experiences two main monsoons: the southwest and the northeast.
- **Southwest monsoon:**
 - It arrives normally in **June** and lasts until **September**.
 - It contributes to nearly **75%** of India's total rainfall.
 - Most of the country's agricultural activities, especially in northern, central, and western India depend on this.
- **Northeast monsoon:**
 - It comes in and around **mid-October** and continues until **December**.
 - Its contribution as compared to southwest monsoon is much smaller.
 - It contributes to around **11%**, but it is very crucial for certain states in southern India like **Tamil Nadu**, which relies heavily on the northeast monsoon for its water needs and agricultural activities.

Southwest vs. Northeast Monsoon: A Comparison

- **The southwest monsoon** brings moisture-laden winds from Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea that showers rain across India. **The northeast monsoon**, however, is more localised and results from the reversal of winds that bring rain mainly to Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and southern Karnataka.

- **Southwest monsoon** is praised for its capability to fill up reservoirs and support widespread farming, the **northeast monsoon** is the lifeline for the southernmost parts of India.
- **Southwest monsoon** is more consistent with minimal fluctuations. The **northeast monsoon**, is more unpredictable in nature, with variations of up to 25%. It even leads to cycles of droughts and floods, especially in Tamil Nadu.

Northeast Monsoon: Regional Importance

- For Tamil Nadu and parts of Andhra Pradesh, the northeast monsoon is the **primary source of water** for drinking and irrigation for important crops like **rice** and **maize**. The farmers in this region depend and plan in accordance with this rainfall.
- **Tamil Nadu:** 48% of the state's annual rainfall comes from the northeast monsoon. Hence, most of the agriculture is directly dependent on this rainfall.
- **Andhra Pradesh:** Deficit in Northeast Monsoon results in food security challenges and water availability.

Urban Flooding:

- One of the biggest concerns in recent years has been the increasing incidence of urban flooding in southern cities, particularly Chennai due to northeast monsoon.
- The unpredictable nature of the northeast monsoon has made urban planning and disaster management difficult in cities like Chennai. Poor drainage systems and inadequate infrastructure have made it worse.

How Global Climate Patterns Influence Rainfall

- Global weather phenomena, like the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), play a significant role in shaping the behavior of the northeast monsoon. El Niño, which refers to the warming of the Pacific Ocean, often leads to reduced rainfall, while La Niña, the cooling phase, tends to bring more rain.
- However, the relationship between these phenomena and the northeast monsoon is not always straightforward. This makes it harder for meteorologists to make accurate predictions. In recent years, there has been increased interest in studying how climate change may be altering global weather patterns, and in turn, impacting India's monsoons.

Way forward:

- The IMD has improved forecasting systems for the southwest monsoon. However, focus must also be made to northeast monsoon as well.
- However, IMD had predicted an 'above normal' northeast monsoon in 2023, forecasting for specific regions and managing urban flooding still remains a challenge.
- Improved weather models are needed to help predict rainfall more accurately, particularly in urban areas prone to flooding. Advances in satellite technology, data analytics, and AI-driven forecast models can help identify patterns in the northeast monsoon and make predictions more reliable.
- Budgets for disaster management need to be increased to account for the growing risks posed by climate change and erratic monsoon patterns

Forecasting better in India, come rain or shine

Context

The article- "**Forecasting better in India, come rain or shine**", discusses the increasing extreme weather events happening in India and also throws light on the recently introduced "Mission Mausam".

Dimensions of the Article

- Rising Extreme Weather Events in India
- Mission Mausam
- Gaps in Weather Data Access and Radar Coverage
- Suggested measures

Rising Extreme Weather Events in India

- **Unpredictable Monsoon and Floods:** According to a study by Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), **40%** of Indian districts experience alternating hazards like floods and droughts. The year 2024 itself has experienced the worst monsoon hits in recent times, with almost every state experiencing some form of flooding. Few places have also witnessed severe droughts during the dry season.
- **Increased Heavy Rainfall:** Data from 40 years of rainfall shows that there has been a sharp rise in the number of days with heavy rainfall by **64%** over the last decade that cause damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and lead to displacement of communities.
- **Limited Forecasting Capabilities:** Although there are sufficient effective warning mechanisms for cyclone, in about two-thirds of the population who are at risk of floods,

only one-third of them have access to early warning systems. There lies a stark imbalance in the forecasting capabilities of the country.

Mission Mausam

- It is a **₹2,000 crore initiative** by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** to expand India's weather monitoring network that got approved in 2024.
- The mission focuses on increasing the number of weather stations and observational platforms and also increase the number of **Doppler Weather Radars (DWRs)** to enhance data collection on weather events.
- **Aim:** It primarily aims to bring more accuracy weather forecasting models by incorporating machine learning.
- It is lead by three key institutions—the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, **National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF)**, and the **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM)**.
- It even explores technologies that could potentially alter weather patterns, such as cloud seeding.

Gaps in Weather Data Access and Radar Coverage

- **Need for More Radars in Vulnerable Areas:** Out of **39 Doppler Weather Radars**, that mostly covers the Himalayan States and the eastern coast, very less radar coverage is with some of the critical areas like the **west coast, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Rajasthan**.
- **Open Access to Weather Data:** Unlike, U.S., U.K., and E.U., which has free access to weather data, India's weather data is

restricted. If made free, researchers and innovators could create useful early warning tools from the data available

Suggested measures:

- **Enhancing User Experience:** "Mission Mausam" should work on making warning systems easy for common people to understand. As, the IMD, currently issues district-level warnings by providing weather information through apps and websites, which most users find it difficult to understand.
- **Improving Early Warning Tools:** Similar level of awareness that are available to cyclones, should also be done to flood risks under "Mission Mausam".
- **Localized Early Warning Systems:** Tools that predict events in real-time needs to be deployed in areas at high risk of floods and other extreme weather events.

Way Forward

- Current restrictions on IMD data access should be made freely available to enhance better analysis, better decision-making, and improved disaster resilience.
- Mission Mausam should be made an easy platform for everyone to understand so that it will help people be prepared to act.
- Improved weather models are needed to help predict rainfall more accurately, particularly in urban areas prone to flooding.
- Advances in satellite technology, data analytics, and AI-driven forecast models can help identify patterns in the monsoon and make predictions more reliable.

- Budgets for disaster management need to be increased to account for the growing risks posed by climate change and erratic monsoon patterns

Cyclone Dana

Overview:

Cyclone Dana is a severe cyclonic storm forming over the Bay of Bengal, expected to impact the coasts of Odisha and West Bengal in India.

- The IMD has predicted its landfall between Puri, Odisha, and Sagar Island, West Bengal.

What is a cyclone?

- Cyclones are weather systems characterized by a **central area of low pressure**, surrounded by closed isobars, with pressure gradually increasing outward.
- It is characterized by **rapid inward air circulation around a low-pressure area** that brings violent storms and adverse weather conditions.
- Air flows into the **low-pressure zone** from all directions, and the Coriolis Effect causes the wind to curve to the right of its original path. This results in a **counterclockwise rotation** around the low-pressure area and convergence of air near the cyclone's center.
- As the air converges, it is forced upward, and divergence at higher altitudes moves air away from the center. Essentially, a cyclone involves low-level air convergence and upper-level air divergence, with rising air in the middle. For a cyclone to form, upper-level air divergence must occur; otherwise, the system cannot sustain itself.

- 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.

forecasting and early warning systems to reduce the impact alongside investing in infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events.

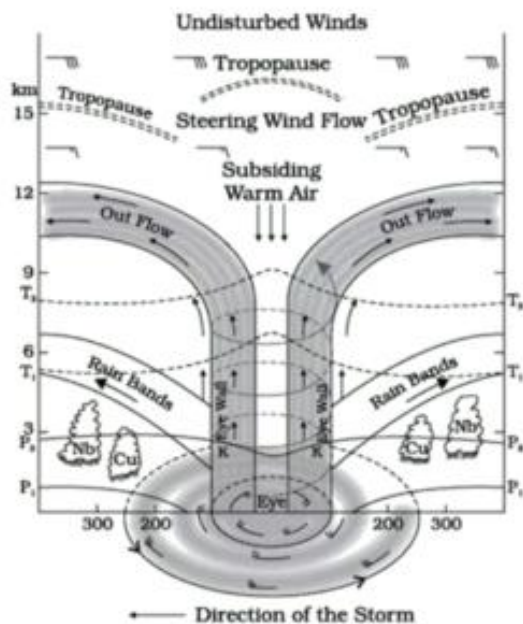
Make in India celebrates 10 years

Context:

The 'Make in India' initiative which was started in 2014, completed ten years.

Key Highlights:

1. **Objective and Vision:** The 'Make in India' campaign was introduced to boost manufacturing in India by attracting foreign investments, fostering innovation, and building world-class infrastructure. It targets increasing the manufacturing sector's growth rate, creating jobs, and raising its contribution to GDP to 25% by 2025.
2. **Make in India 2.0:** In its second phase, the initiative now focuses on 27 sectors, including electronics, defence, automobiles, and textiles, aiming to consolidate India's position as a major global player in manufacturing.
3. **Major Initiatives:** Key schemes under 'Make in India' include the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, which has attracted ₹1.23 lakh crore in investments and generated nearly 8 lakh jobs as of July 2024. Other initiatives include PM GatiShakti, Semicon India Programme, Startup India, and the National Logistics Policy.
4. **Achievements:** India's electronics sector has nearly doubled in size, making the country the second-largest mobile phone manufacturer globally. Indigenous production milestones include the Vande Bharat trains and INS Vikrant, India's first domestically built aircraft carrier. Additionally, India



Types of Cyclones:

Cyclones, hurricanes, and typhoons are essentially the same type of storm, but they are named differently depending on where they occur:

- Hurricanes develop in the North Atlantic and Northeast Pacific.
- Typhoons form in the Northwest Pacific.
- Cyclones occur in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans.

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%**. India must improve weather

has emerged as a global vaccine hub, supplying nearly 60% of the world's vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. **Challenges:** Despite significant progress, challenges persist, including India's low rank (5th) in the Global Manufacturing Index, a relatively low manufacturing contribution to GDP (17% in FY 2022-23), and insufficient skill development in the workforce. Moreover, supply chain disruptions and the need for more substantial investments in research and development remain concerns for the program's long-term success.

The Waqf Bill, 2024

Context:

Recently, the Union Home Minister stated that the government would pass the Waqf Bill in the upcoming winter session.

- The Waqf Bill 2024 proposes to change the management of Waqf properties in India.
- The bill has ignited fire as it is believed that it would possibly dilute Muslim community control over Waqf properties.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What is the Waqf?
- Waqf Bill 2024
- Concerns with the Bill
- Way Forward

What is the Waqf?

- **Meaning:** According to the Islamic law, Waqf is a charitable endowment held in trust in the form

of property donated by Muslims for a specific religious, charitable, or private purpose.

- **History:** The concept of Waqf was active since the days of **Delhi Sultanate**. However, it was criticized during the British Raj in the 19th century but the **Mussalman Waqf Validating Act of 1913** upheld the Waqf system in India.

Waqf Bill 2024:

- The bill plans to introduce changes in the functioning of Waqf properties in India, which are currently overseen by the **Central Waqf Council (CWC)** and **State Waqf Boards**.
- The new bill **intends to reserve seats for non-Muslims** in these bodies whereas the present structure **mandates only Muslim members**.
- It proposes to **remove the expert on Muslim law** from Waqf tribunals.
- The bill has suggested changes on how Waqf properties should be identified, registered, and managed.
- The bill also plans to **deregister older waqf properties** that do not have original documents.
- The bill plans to bring stringent punishments for encroachers and those who do not abide by the new law.

Concerns with the Bill:

- **Inclusion of Non-Muslims in Waqf Management:** The bill proposes to introduce non-Muslims in the Waqf boards which were historically managed by Muslims, creating a dilution in the age-old structure.
- **Lack of Consultation with Stakeholders:** The previous amendments were done by creating specific committees to give

suggestions on the Waqf boards. Accordingly, **Justice Sachar Committee** was created to discuss on the matter. The concern is that the 2024 bill was drafted without broad engagement with Waqf institutions, mutawallis (managers of Waqf properties), or socio-religious Muslim organizations.

- **Violation of Existing Waqf Law:** The existing Waqf law mandates that the **Central Waqf Council (CWC)** be led by Muslims only. But, the Ministry appointed non-Muslim officials, ignoring the statutory requirements and violating the existing law. The Bill also seeks to dilute the 100% Muslim membership of these bodies, which contradicts religious autonomy guaranteed under **Articles 25 and 26** of the Constitution.
- **Disruption of Traditional Waqf Practices:** Drastic changes, such as re-registering waqf properties and removing the Mansha-e-Waaqif principle (the donor's will) will undermine the traditional ways in which Waqf properties were administered for centuries.

Way Forward:

- The Ministry should reconstitute the CWC in accordance with existing Waqf laws.
- The government must ensure that the new bill respects **Articles 25 and 26** of the Constitution, which guarantees religious groups the right to manage their own affairs.
- Rather than weakening the management by diluting the structure, the government should implement measures to bring more transparency in the administration of the board.

Supreme court's verdict on caste bias in prisons

Context:

Recently, the Supreme court of India delivered a landmark judgment addressing caste-based discrimination in prisons. It highlighted few practices that were discriminatory in nature amongst the prisoners.


The Supreme Court Judgment:

Removing bias

The Bench says "everyone is born equal" and cannot suffer lifelong due to stigma attached to their caste.

The directions include:

- States and UTs should revise their Prison Manuals/Rules in three months
- Centre should address caste-based discrimination in the Model Prison Manual 2016 and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act 2023 in three months
- "Caste columns" and references to caste in prisoners' registers should be removed



- The SC highlighted that assigning tasks based on caste hierarchy violates the basic human dignity and accounts to the violation of **Article 15(1)** of the Indian Constitution.

(Article 15(1): Prohibits discrimination by the state).

- The bench also stressed that it amounts to **untouchability** under **Article 17** of the Constitution.
- The SC ordered that the **caste column of the undertrials and convicts in the registers to be deleted.**
- It also emphasized that **members of denotified tribes** should not be subjected to arbitrary arrests or be labeled as habitual offenders, a practice rooted in colonial-era discrimination.
- Few compulsory tasks like **manual scavenging and cleaning latrines**, which were assigned to marginalized caste prisoners was

also considered to be violating their rights.

- The judgment asserted that the provisions of **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**, apply within the prison system.
- It also told the **Central government** to amend **2016 Prison Manual** and the **2023 Act** within three months to rectify the issue.

Way Forward:

- It is a great stance taken by the Supreme court to reaffirm the constitutional values of equality and dignity for all citizens.
- This ruling is expected to have far-reaching implications in addressing institutionalized caste discrimination within the Indian penal system.

The special status: Fifth and Sixth Schedule

Context:

Ladakh has been in news for its inclusion in the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**, to protect the interests of its indigenous population.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Understanding Asymmetrical Federalism
- Historical Context of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules
- Fifth Schedule and Its Framework
- Sixth Schedule and Tribal Autonomy

- Special Provisions for Northeastern States
- Challenges and Need for Reforms
- Ladakh's Demand for Sixth Schedule Status

Understanding Asymmetrical Federalism

- Asymmetrical Federalism is a system where some regions and states are granted with extra autonomy than others.
- **Unlike the United States, India follows the system of asymmetrical federalism.**
- For instance, all those regions that are included in **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** of the Constitution have special provisions that grant them more autonomy to manage their affairs.
- Asymmetric federalism is important for a country like India to meet requirements of the diverse population, mainly tribal communities.
- Sixth schedule: Enjoy greater powers in managing land, culture, and local laws.
- Fifth Schedule: Receive limited autonomy but still hold significant importance for tribal welfare.

Historical Context of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules

- The roots of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules trace back to **British colonial** policies.
- Historically, tribal communities refrained themselves from the mainstream society.
- When the British started putting **restrictions on the rights** concerned with their own land and forest, it led to

widespread discontent among the tribal populations resulting in many tribal uprisings like **Munda** and **Santhal Rebellions**.

- In order to pacify the tribals and manage their regions separately, the British introduced 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas under the **Government of India Act, 1935**.
- Later after Independence, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules modified on these provisions.
- They were designed to protect tribal rights and safeguard their lands while maintaining a degree of autonomy from mainstream legislative interference.

Fifth Schedule and Its Framework

- The Fifth Schedule applies to 'Scheduled Areas' in 10 Indian states: Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Telangana.
- It is awarded mainly for those regions that has significant tribal populations.
- The **President of India** declares the areas as 'Scheduled Areas' and the areas are selected based on various parameters: **tribal population, economic backwardness, and geographical compactness**.
- The **Governor** holds the power to regulate land transfers and business dealings in these areas, ensuring protection against exploitation.
- He is entitled to even modify laws passed by the Parliament or state legislature as per the needs of the Scheduled Areas.
- However, this autonomy is limited since regulations must receive approval from the Central Government.

Sixth Schedule and Tribal Autonomy

- The Sixth Schedule applies only to certain tribal areas in the **north-eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura**.
- **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs):**
 - It is a statutory body that operates under the **Governor**, to ensure that these tribal regions maintain their own self-governance and protect their culture.
 - The council makes laws on land management, customs, and even educational and healthcare institutions.
 - The councils makes laws regarding land management, customs, and educational and healthcare institutions.
 - This autonomy allows these regions to preserve their distinct identities and manage their affairs with limited interference from state governments.
 - ADCs can also regulate key economic activities like mineral extraction and taxation.

Special Provisions for Northeastern States

- **Part XXI of the constitution** includes **Article 371A for Nagaland, Article 371B for Assam, and Article 371C for Manipur**, to give additional constitutional safeguards and to protect distinct cultural identity of the states.
- These articles protect tribal laws, social customs, and traditional rights unique to each state.
- Example: **Nagaland and Mizoram** enjoy special protections to uphold their **customary laws**, while **Assam and**

Manipur have special legislative committees for their **tribal areas**.

Challenges and Need for Reforms

- The political difference between the State, Centre and the district councils interfere with the governance of the region, ultimately limiting benefits for these areas.
- Laws that needs to be passed must require Governor's assent. And there have been instances when central and state government interferences have diluted governors autonomy.
- Many regions with significant tribal populations, such as parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, have still requested for inclusion under the Sixth Schedule, which needs to be addressed.

Ladakh's Demand for Sixth Schedule Status

- Ladakh, a union territory since 2019, is currently seeking inclusion in the **Sixth Schedule**.
- Cause: Due to the fear that rapid development and the influx of outsiders could erode its unique cultural identity and resources.
- By granting Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh, it will have more powers over its land use, cultural preservation, and local governance.

Conclusion:

Although the Constitution provides significant protections to tribal communities through its Fifth and Sixth Schedules, some states and regions does not seem to cover under this umbrella. Hence, a balanced approach that combines autonomy, protection of rights, and integration into the broader development framework is the path for India's tribal populations.

Cruise Bharat Mission

Context

Recently, the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterway launched Cruise Bharat Mission which seeks to tap into the country's vast coastline, rivers, and inland waterways to attract both domestic and international tourists.

Vision and Goals of the Cruise Bharat Mission

- The Cruise Bharat Mission is a **five-year initiative** to improve the country's cruise infrastructure to cater to millions of cruise passengers.
- It envisions **increasing the number of sea cruise passengers** from 0.5 million to 1 million by the end of the mission and river cruise passengers from 0.5 million to 1.5 million.
- The mission also focuses on building 10 new sea cruise terminals, 100 river cruise terminals, and five marinas across the country.

Phases of Implementation

The Cruise Bharat Mission will be implemented in three phases, spanning from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2029.

1. **Phase 1 (October 2024 - March 2026)**: This phase is about upgrading existing cruise terminals, conducting research, planning, and forming alliances with neighboring countries to boost regional cruise circuits.
2. **Phase 2 (April 2026 - March 2028)**: Here the focus on expanding the number of marinas, cruise terminals, and tourist destinations.
3. The aim is to identify and develop high-potential cruise circuits and tourist sites that can engage more

travelers and boost the appeal of Indian cruise tourism.

- 4. Phase 3 (April 2028 - March 2029):** The final phase will focus on scaling up cruise tourism infrastructure to integrate all cruise circuits across the Indian subcontinent.

Three Segments of Cruise Tourism

- 1. Ocean & Harbour Cruise:** This segment includes ocean cruises, coastal trips, and yachting excursions. It will offer travelers the chance to explore India's coastline and deep-sea regions. Ports and harbors will serve as hubs for these trips, making it easy for tourists to embark on cruises to both popular and lesser-known destinations.
- 2. River & Inland Cruise:** This segment focuses on river cruises, providing tourists with the opportunity to explore India's vast network of rivers, lakes, backwaters, and creeks. This will particularly benefit states like Kerala, West Bengal, and Assam, where river tourism has significant potential. In this category, tourists can experience the natural beauty of India's waterways while supporting local economies.
- 3. Island Cruise:** Island cruises will offer tourists live-aboard experiences, boutique trips to remote islands, and lighthouse tours. This segment aims to tap into the unique appeal of India's islands, such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, offering travelers offbeat and scenic experiences.

Viksit Bharat

Context:

Recently, the Prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, on completing his 23 years in the Public Office, stressed his urge to reach the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Viksit Bharat:

- Viksit Bharat is a **nationwide campaign** to raise awareness through outreach activities to achieve saturation of schemes of Govt. of India across the country covering all Gram Panchayats, Nagar Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies
- The comprehensive roadmap for achieving Viksit Bharat or Developed India was laid down in the full Budget 24-25.
- In **Budget 2024-25**, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman envisaged sustained efforts on the following 9 priorities for generating ample opportunities in line with the strategy set out in the interim budget to achieve Viksit Bharat 2047:
 - Productivity and resilience in Agriculture
 - Employment and Skilling
 - Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice
 - Manufacturing and Services
 - Urban Development
 - Energy Security
 - Infrastructure
 - Innovation, Research and Development
 - Next Generation Reforms.

Objectives of the program:

- It aims to cover all those vulnerable sections who are eligible under various schemes but have not availed benefit so far.
- It aims to create awareness about various schemes to the citizens, especially the needy.

- It plans to enroll potential beneficiaries through details to ensure that the schemes are reached to them.

USCIRF report

Context:

Recently, government of India rejected the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2023 report stating it as biased and politically motivated.

Dimensions of the Article

- What is USCIRF?
- USCIRF's Mandate
- USCIRF's Report on India
- Arguments against the Report from India
- Way forward

What is USCIRF?

- USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government agency that monitors universal right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).
- It was established under the **1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)**.

USCIRF's Mandate

- The USCIRF categorises countries under designations like "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) and "Special Watch List" (SWL), to determine and highlight if that country is violating religious freedoms.
- For instance, a country with a CPC tag, will invite sanctions or other U.S. actions.

USCIRF's Report on India

- The USCIRF's report states that religious freedom in India in 2024 has been on a **deteriorating and concerning trajectory**".
- It classified India as "**Country of Particular Concern**" (CPC).
- It highlighted events where **minorities were killed, lynched** and even had their places demolished.
- Certain acts of the government, like the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), anti-conversion laws, and cow slaughter regulations**, were criticized for being discriminatory.
- Additionally, the report highlighted how Indian officials have repeatedly employed hateful rhetoric and misinformation about religious minorities that led to violence and destruction of religious sites.

Arguments against the Report from India:

- **Perceived Bias:** The Indian government argued that the report was biased and driven by a political agenda to misrepresent facts and create a damaged image of India.
- **Sovereignty and External Influence:** The government asserted that it is an interference with the internal matters of the country and also claimed that the USCIRF, despite being independent, could be influenced by other U.S. foreign policy agendas.
- **Lack of Binding Power:** There have been instances where the recommendations of USCIRF's reports were not considered. It is up to the U.S. State Department to accept or reject the recommendations.

Way Forward

- India should engage in **diplomatic dialogues** with USCIRF to discuss and clarify misconceptions rather than rejecting it.
- It should primarily work on its **policy frameworks** that clearly dictates actions against activities like mob violence, hate speech, lynching and religious discrimination.
- Government should enforce and give more power to **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** to address any such violations.
- As a rising global power, India could work with international organizations to **align domestic policies** with global human rights standards that could help India's image in global forums.

Trachoma

Context:

Recently, WHO declared that the Government of India has eliminated Trachoma as a public health problem.

- India became the **third country** in the South-East Asia Region to achieve this milestone.

About Trachoma:

- Trachoma is a **bacterial infection** that affects the **eyes**.
- It is caused by the **bacterium Chlamydia Trachomatis**.
- Trachoma is **contagious**, spreading through contact with the eyes, eyelids, nose or throat secretions of infected people, if left untreated it causes irreversible blindness.
- It is found in **underprivileged communities living in poor** environmental conditions.

- It was amongst the leading cause of blindness in the country during 1950-60.
- The Government of India launched the **National Trachoma Control Program in 1963** and later on Trachoma control efforts were integrated into **India's National Program for Control of Blindness (NPCB)**.

WHO's stand:

- WHO has termed Trachoma as a neglected tropical disease.
- WHO estimates suggest that **150 million people** worldwide are affected by Trachoma and **6 million** of them are blind or at risk of visually disabling complications.
- WHO SAFE (adoption of surgery, antibiotics, facial hygiene, environmental cleanliness etc) strategy was implemented throughout the country.
- Finally, after years of fighting against Trachoma, WHO declared that India has eliminated Trachoma as a public health problem

Indian Air Force day

Context:

The Indian Air Force (IAF) celebrated its **92nd anniversary** with an airshow at Marina Beach, Chennai.

Highlights:

- The theme of the year is - **"Bhartiya Vayu Sena: Saksham, Sashakt, Atmanirbhar" (Potent, Powerful, and Self-Reliant)**, reflecting IAF's alignment with the nation's goal of achieving self-reliance and building a capable and powerful defence force.

About Indian Air Force (IAF):

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) was established on **8th October 1932** as an auxiliary air force of the British Empire.
- The IAF's motto, "**Touch the sky with Glory**" (**Nabhah Sparsham Diptam**), is derived from the **eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita**.
- The IAF's first operational flight occurred on 1st April 1933.
- It became the **Royal Indian Air Force after World War II**, in recognition of its service, and retained this name until India became a republic in 1950.
- Since 1950, the IAF has participated in several key operations, including:
 - Four wars with Pakistan.
 - Major missions like Operation Vijay, Operation Meghdoot, Operation Cactus, and Operation Poomalai.
 - United Nations peacekeeping missions.
- Structure and Leadership:
 - The **President of India** holds the position of **Supreme Commander of the IAF**.
 - The IAF's operational command is led by the **Chief of the Air Staff**, a **four-star** officer.
 - The rank of Marshal of the Air Force was conferred once, on **Arjan Singh**, making him the **only five-star officer** in the history of the IAF.

Mental Health in India

Context:

The findings from a 2017 study published in **Lancet Psychiatry** highlighted that around **197.3 million people** in India suffer

from mental disorders. Of this, **45.7 million** with depression and **44.9 million** with anxiety.

- The recent Economic Survey also highlighted the increase in mental health issues in India.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Mental Health in India
- Concerns with Mental Health in India
- Suggested Measures
- Conclusion

Mental Health in India:

- **According to WHO**, mental health is a state of well-being where a person is able to reach his/her full potential, manage everyday pressures, engage in productive and fruitful employment, and contribute to their community.
- WHO also states that it isn't just the absence of mental illness but rather an integral part of health.
- WHO estimates that the burden of mental health problems in India is **2443 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) per 100 00 population**; the age-adjusted suicide rate per 100 000 population is 21.1.
- And, the economic loss due to mental health conditions in India between 2012-2030, is estimated at **USD 1.03 trillion**.

Concerns with Mental Health in India:

- **Stigma and Resistance:** The fear of being labelled as mentally ill has created a barrier that stops people from acknowledging that they have problem.

- **Lack of Resources and Support:** Structural incapability of the required resources in mental healthcare of both urban and rural areas have heightened the problem. Lack of trained professionals, insufficient awareness among people, etc., have contributed a lot as well.
- **Workplace Stress:** The recent increase in number of suicide cases due to high-pressure and uncontrolled stress in toxic work-places is another concern.
- **Ignorance about mental health:** Majority of the Indian population do not consider mental illness as a problem. Most of them feel it's a part of life that is common and needs no medication or attention.

Suggested Measures:

- **Focus on Early Intervention:** Awareness must be created to identify symptoms in the early stages for which, people should be informed in their workplaces or their communities. Mental health cell should be integrated in schools and workplaces as a mandatory part of such institutions.
- **Strengthen Mental Health Infrastructure:** Investments should be made to improve mental health infrastructure and policies must be made to expand mental illness services to rural and underserved areas. To start with, free consultations should be given to people by also making sure that follow-ups are made time and again to instill the importance of mental health.
- **Encourage Workplace Mental Health Policies:** Companies should bring policies to create supportive environment and reduce excessive work pressure. It should also penalize any reported misbehaviors that causes mental trauma in their employees.

Conclusion:

Mental health plays a pivotal role for any individual. Both government and the society must work together to address this stigma. Mental health should also be considered a primary aspect of nation building alongside other determinants.

Rice fortification

Context:

The Union cabinet approved the continuation of the **universal supply of fortified rice** as a central sector initiative, as part of PMGKAY (Food Subsidy), from July 2024 until December 2028.

What is Rice fortification?

- According to the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**, it is a process where essential micronutrients are deliberately added to improve the nutritional quality that enhances health and minimizes diseases.

Need for Rice Fortification:

- **High Malnutrition rates:** India grapples with high levels of malnutrition. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)-
 - **35.5%** of children under age five are stunted.
 - **19.3%** are wasted.
 - **32.1%** are underweight.
 - **3%** are overweight.
 - **18.7%** of women aged 15-49 years are malnourished
- **Widespread Anemia:** Anemia affects about **53% of women** and **58% of children** under five in India, primarily due to iron deficiency. Fortified Rice can help reduce this as it contains essential iron and other micronutrients.

- **Hidden Hunger:** It refers to **lack of essential vitamins and minerals in the diet**, even when calorie intake is sufficient. Rice fortification addresses this by enriching rice with nutrients like **iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12**, which are crucial for overall health but often missing from diets.
- **Boosting Cognitive and Physical Development:**
 - Proper nutrition, especially in early childhood, is crucial for brain development and overall physical health.
 - Fortified rice can play a critical role in reducing developmental delays and improving cognitive outcomes among children.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY):

- It is a **food security welfare scheme** introduced by the Central Government in March 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was part of the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP)**, aimed at supporting the poor in combating the impact of the pandemic.
- **Objective:** To ensure food security for India's poorest citizens by distributing grain through the Public Distribution System (PDS). This includes all priority households (ration cardholders) and those identified under the **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)**. AAY, launched in 2000, is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme designed to provide highly subsidized food to the most economically disadvantaged families.
- **Entitlement:** Eligible ration cardholders under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013** were entitled to receive 5 kg of free

wheat or rice per person per month, in addition to the 5 kg of food grains they were already entitled to under the NFSA.

- **Implementing Agency:** Implemented by the **Department of Food and Public Distribution**, under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution**.
- **Merger with NFSA:** In December 2022, PM-GKAY was merged with the NFSA. Following this merger, the full entitlement of 5 kg (for regular beneficiaries) and 35 kg (for AAY beneficiaries) of food grains was made available free of cost. This provided legal entitlement for the poor to receive 5 kg of food grains without any charge, as opposed to the earlier rates of Rs 3 per kg for rice and Rs 2 per kg for wheat.
- **Extension of PM-GKAY:** The government extended the scheme for an additional five years starting January 1, 2024, after its previous extension ended on December 31, 2023.

China, India and New Delhi's Quad dilemma

Context:

The article- "**China, India and New Delhi's Quad dilemma**", discusses the recent developments in India-China relations, focusing on the implications of the Quad meeting attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- It explores the deteriorating state of India-China ties, China's perspective, and the impact of these developments on India's security and foreign policy.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What is the issue?
- State of India-China Relations
- India's Border Security Moves
- China's Perspective on the Quad
- Dimensions of the Tie from China's Point of View
- Implications for India

What is the issue?

- The latest Quad meeting, attended by leaders from Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., concluded with the **Wilmington Declaration**.
- While the **declaration didn't mention China** directly, it was clearly aimed at countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
- India's increasing involvement with the Quad, which is increasingly being seen as a security alliance, has significant implications for its relations with China.

State of India-China Relations

- India-China relations have been **steadily worsening**, especially since the **2020 Galwan Valley clash**. Despite some diplomatic talks, the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains tense.
- India has ramped up its border defense with more troops and advanced military equipment. In areas like Ladakh, there has been no significant progress in disengagement.
- China, on the other hand, continues to assert its dominance and appears untroubled by India's military upgrades, given its much larger defense budget.

India's Border Security Moves

- To counter China's military buildup, India has been strengthening its **defense capabilities** along the entire

length of the China-India border. It is deploying long-range artillery, missiles, and other advanced systems to ensure readiness.

- Despite assurances from Indian military leaders that the situation is "**stable**," tensions remain high, with increased vigilance, particularly in winter when border patrols can be more challenging.

China's Perspective on the Quad

- China views the Quad as a direct threat to its influence, particularly in the **Indo-Pacific region**. Although the Quad does not formally declare itself a military alliance, the latest developments suggest a move in that direction.
- China's leadership, especially under Xi Jinping, sees the Quad's rise as an effort led by the U.S. to contain China. Xi has made clear in past speeches that China will not tolerate any external interference or attempts to subjugate it.
- The Quad's activities, therefore, are seen by China as provocations, which may lead to a stronger response in the future.

Dimensions of the Tie from China's Point of View

- China has long made territorial claims over parts of India, especially in **Ladakh** and **Arunachal Pradesh**, but these areas are not seen as existential threats by Beijing.
- China's real concerns lie with its **eastern seaboard and Pacific claims**, areas it considers crucial to its sovereignty and future. India's growing alignment with the Quad and the West, particularly the U.S., is viewed by China as more threatening than border skirmishes, leading to greater unease in Beijing.

Implications for India

- India's deepening ties with the Quad and its potential alignment with the U.S. on security matters have both positive and negative implications.
- On one hand, India stands to benefit from stronger defense and diplomatic ties with powerful nations. On the other hand, China is likely to view this as India joining an anti-China coalition, increasing the risk of further confrontations along the border and in diplomatic spaces.
- India must be cautious in navigating its relationship with both the Quad and China, balancing its strategic interests without appearing overly aligned with any particular bloc.

Way Forward

- **Balancing Relations:** India must carefully balance its growing partnership with the Quad and its long-standing ties with China. Engaging in constructive dialogues while maintaining a strong defense posture is essential to avoid unnecessary escalations.
- **Focus on Diplomacy:** Diplomacy remains a key tool for resolving border disputes and other bilateral tensions. India should continue engaging with China through diplomatic channels while simultaneously strengthening regional alliances that do not directly provoke China.
- **Strengthen Internal Defense:** While engaging in international alliances, India must also focus on self-reliance in defense technology and border security to deter potential threats from China without overly depending on external powers.

Context:

Recently, Precision medicine has opened doors to treat and diagnose many diseases by focusing on individualized treatment plans based on genetic, environmental, and lifestyle differences.

What is Precision Medicine?

- Precision medicine provides **customized treatments** to individual patients based on their **genetic makeup** and **specific health conditions**.
- It focuses on identifying the unique variations in each **person's DNA, lifestyle, and environmental factors**, to ensure that the right treatment reaches the right patient at the right time.
- This approach particular focuses on complex diseases like **cancer, cardiovascular disorders, and genetic conditions**.
- It also seeks to **optimize therapeutic outcomes** and minimize the risk of **side effects**.
- Unlike traditional medicine, which may offer the same treatment to all patients, precision medicine strives to provide tailored interventions that offer the most benefit to specific individuals or groups.
- Recent advancements in gene-editing technologies like CRISPR, allowed researchers to make precise changes in a person's genetic code that paved way for this invention.
- **Organ-on-Chips:** These are **small, microfluidic devices** that contain human cells. It replicates the microenvironment of a specific organ or tumor in the laboratory and allows scientists to test drugs in conditions that closely mimic those found in the human body, potentially leading to more accurate and effective treatments.

Precision Medicine

- **Biobanks:** Biobanks are those storage facilities that store **biological samples and genetic data** which are crucial for advancing precision medicine. These repositories enable researchers to access a wide variety of samples, facilitating the development of targeted therapies based on genetic variations. Large and diverse biobanks are especially important for ensuring that precision medicine benefits a broad section of society rather than just a privileged few.

develop targeted therapies for genetic diseases that affect children.

- **Collaborations in Precision Medicine:** India is also seeing increased collaborations in the precision medicine sector. Notable examples include the **Apollo Cancer Centre** and a collaboration between **Siemens Healthineers** and the **Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru**, which are working to deploy artificial intelligence (AI) in precision medicine.

Precision Medicine in India:

- According to industry estimates, the Indian precision medicine market is growing at a **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 16%**, and it is expected to exceed **\$5 billion** by **2030**.
- Currently, it contributes to about **36% of India's bioeconomy**, alongside other significant areas such as **cancer immunotherapy, gene editing, and biologics**.
- Key developments that have marked India's progress in precision medicine:
- **NexCAR19:** In October 2023, the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization** approved NexCAR19, India's first domestically developed CAR-T cell therapy, a breakthrough in cancer treatment. This approval signals India's readiness to adopt and expand the use of advanced therapies.
- **Genome India Programme:** The **Genome India Programme**, a key initiative, recently completed sequencing **10,000 genomes** from 99 ethnic groups across the country. This effort aims to identify treatments for rare genetic diseases and support the development of precision therapies.
- **PRaGeD Mission:** The **Paediatric Rare Genetic Disorders (PRaGeD)** mission focuses on identifying new genes or variants that could help

What does the Global Hunger Index 2024 state about India?

Context:

The **2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI)**, ranks India, 105th out of 127th countries, falling under **"serious"** category with 41 other nations, including Pakistan and Afghanistan

- It highlights child malnutrition, including stunting, wasting, and undernourishment, despite the country's economic progress.

Dimensions of the Article

- India's Hunger and Malnutrition Crisis
- The Disconnect Between GDP Growth and Hunger Reduction
- Proposed Solutions to Tackle Hunger
- Debate on Data Collection Methods

India's Hunger and Malnutrition Crisis:

- India's GHI score reflects alarming levels of hunger, with **13.7%** of its population undernourished.

- Findings from the report-
 - **35.5%** of children under five suffer from stunting (low height for age).
 - **18.7%** experience wasting (low weight for height).
 - **2.9%** of children die before reaching their fifth birthday, showcasing the severe undernutrition and health challenges in the country.
 - India also holds the **highest child wasting rate** in the world, indicating a critical public health issue.

true, as in the India's case which is clearly visible in rural areas of the country where poverty remains a hurdle in accessing nutritious food.

- The GHI report suggests that economic growth must be paired with **targeted pro-poor policies so that it meets** marginalized communities needs.
- The report also shows **India's high levels of inequality** (Income and access to resources) that acts as a catalyst to increase the hunger problem.

Factors Behind Child Malnutrition:

- **Role of mothers:** Poor maternal health of many mothers during pregnancy leads to low birth weights in infants. It also results in stunting and wasting, as nutrition deficits are passed from one generation to the next.
- **National Efforts to Combat Hunger:**
 - **National Food Security Act**
 - **Poshan Abhiyan (National Nutrition Mission)**
 - **PM Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKAY).**
 - However, the GHI report argues that these efforts still needs improvement in terms of meeting nutritional needs of vulnerable populations, especially women and children.

Proposed Solutions to Tackle Hunger:

- **Strengthening Social Safety Nets:** Public Distribution System (PDS), PM Garib Kalyan Yojna, and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) needs to be more efficient in reaching those most in need.
- **Investing in Agriculture and Food Systems:** Priority should be given to growing more nutritious and climate-resilient crops like **millet**s.
- **Improving Maternal and Child Health:** To break the cycle of intergenerational malnutrition, the report emphasizes the need for investments in maternal and child health. This includes improving access to healthcare, better water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, as well as nutritional programs targeting pregnant women and young children. Addressing these underlying factors is crucial to reducing child wasting and stunting rates.

The Disconnect Between GDP Growth and Hunger Reduction:

- The growth of a country does not always reflect its better food security.
- The assumption that higher GDP will reduce hunger is not always

Debate on Data Collection Methods

- The **Ministry of Women and Child Development** blames about the discrepancies between the GHI's figures and the data from **India's**

Poshan Tracker, which consistently shows a much lower child wasting rate.

- According to the ministry, child wasting has been below 7.2% in India, contrary to the 18.7% stated by the GHI.
- On the other hand, the GHI researchers defend their methodology, stating that they rely on globally recognized data sources like **UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank**.
- They argue that using comparable data across countries is crucial to maintaining consistency and fairness in global rankings.
- Changing the data sources for individual countries would compromise the index's credibility and comparability.

Way Forward

- India should work on improving its programs like PDS, PMGKAY, and ICDS and priorities should be made to reach the rural areas and the most vulnerable populations.
- The government should also focus on promoting proper nutrition during pregnancy for mothers and later to the child after the birth.
- India should continue to improve its own data collection systems, like the Poshan Tracker, to monitor progress on key health and nutrition indicators.

Cabinet Approves Increased MSP for Rabi Crops for Marketing Season 2025-26

Context:

Recently, the **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)** approved an increase in the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for all mandated Rabi crops for the marketing season 2025-26.

Key Highlights:

- **Increase in MSP for Rabi Crops:** The government has significantly raised the MSP for Rabi crops. The highest increase is for **Rapeseed & Mustard**, with an MSP hike of **₹300 per quintal**, followed by **Lentil (Masur)** at **₹275 per quintal**. Other crops also saw MSP increases, including:

1. **Gram:** ₹210 per quintal
2. **Wheat:** ₹150 per quintal
3. **Safflower:** ₹140 per quintal
4. **Barley:** ₹130 per quintal

- **MSP for Marketing Season 2025-26 (in ₹ per quintal):**

1. **Wheat:** ₹2425 (₹150 increase)
2. **Barley:** ₹1980 (₹130 increase)
3. **Gram:** ₹5650 (₹210 increase)
4. **Lentil (Masur):** ₹6700 (₹275 increase)
5. **Rapeseed & Mustard:** ₹5950 (₹300 increase)
6. **Safflower:** ₹5940 (₹140 increase)

- **Cost of Production and Margins:** The new MSP rates ensure a margin of at least 1.5 times the All-India weighted average cost of production. The expected margin for different crops is:

1. **Wheat:** 105%
2. **Rapeseed & Mustard:** 98%
3. **Lentil:** 89%
4. **Gram:** 60%
5. **Barley:** 60%
6. **Safflower:** 50%

- **Cost Components:**

The MSP is calculated based on all paid-out costs, including expenditures on human labour, machine labour, material inputs (seeds, fertilizers, manures), irrigation, diesel, electricity, and the imputed value of family labour.

- **Rationale Behind MSP Hike:** This increase in MSP is in line with the **Union Budget 2018-19** announcement to fix MSP at a minimum of **1.5 times the cost of production**. The move is expected to boost farm incomes, ensure price stability, and support crop diversification.

About MSP:

- The Minimum Support Price (MSP) serves as a form of **government intervention** in the market to safeguard agricultural producers from significant declines in farm prices.
- Announced by the Government of India at the outset of the sowing season for specific crops, these prices are determined based on recommendations from the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- The MSP is established by the government to shield farmers from sharp price drops during periods of abundant production. It provides farmers with a guaranteed price for their produce, ensuring protection from market fluctuations.
- When market prices for a commodity plummet below the announced minimum, government agencies step in to purchase the entire quantity offered by farmers at the designated minimum price.

Conclusion:

By raising the MSP for key Rabi crops, the government continues to prioritize the welfare of farmers, ensuring that they receive fair compensation for their efforts. This decision also supports the overall objective of promoting sustainable agriculture and incentivizing farmers to diversify their crop production.

India Commits to Ethical AI Development with New Initiatives

Context:

Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) announced the selection of eight innovative projects aimed at fostering Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI).

- These projects are aligned with the Safe and Trusted AI Pillar of the IndiaAI Mission, focusing on ensuring ethical, transparent, and trustworthy AI technologies.
- This initiative reflects India's commitment to advancing AI while addressing potential risks such as bias, privacy concerns, and the need for ethical AI governance.

Key Highlights:

- **IndiaAI Mission and Expression of Interest (Eoi):** The IndiaAI Mission floated an Eoi under its Safe and Trusted AI Pillar, receiving over 2000 proposals from reputed institutions, startups, research organizations, and civil society groups. A multi-stakeholder committee reviewed these submissions, and eight projects were selected across diverse themes such as **Machine Unlearning, AI Bias Mitigation, Privacy Enhancement, and Ethical AI Frameworks**.

- **Selected Projects and Their Focus Areas:**

The eight projects focus on various critical areas of Responsible AI development, aiming to build indigenous tools and frameworks suited to India's unique challenges. Key selected projects include:

1. Machine Unlearning:

- Project: Machine Unlearning in Generative Foundation Models
- Institution: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Jodhpur
This project aims to develop tools that enable AI systems to "forget" specific data in compliance with privacy and ethical concerns.

2. Synthetic Data Generation:

- Project: Method for Generating Synthetic Data for Bias Mitigation
- Institution: IIT Roorkee
Focused on creating synthetic datasets to address bias in AI models, particularly in the training stages.

3. AI Bias Mitigation:

- Project: Responsible AI for Bias Mitigation in Healthcare Systems
- Institution: National Institute of Technology (NIT), Raipur
This project addresses bias in healthcare AI systems, ensuring more equitable outcomes across patient demographics.

4. Explainable AI Framework:

- Project: Explainable and Privacy-Preserving AI for Security
- Institutions: Defence Institute of Advanced Technology (DIAT), Pune and Mindgraph Technology Pvt. Ltd.
Aims to enhance AI transparency and privacy in security applications.

5. Privacy-Enhancing Strategy:

- Project: Robust Privacy-Preserving Machine Learning Models
- Institutions: IIT Delhi, IIT Dharwad, Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, Delhi (IIIT-D), and Telecommunication

Engineering Center (TEC).
Focuses on developing privacy-centric machine learning models.

6. AI Ethical Certification Framework:

- Project: Nishpaksh: Tools for Assessing Fairness of AI Models
- Institutions: IIIT-D and TEC
This project seeks to create tools for evaluating the fairness and ethical compliance of AI models.

7. AI Algorithm Auditing:

- Project: ParakhAI: Open-Source Framework for Participatory Algorithmic Auditing
- Institution: Civic Data Labs
Focuses on building tools for the auditing and evaluation of AI algorithms to ensure their fairness and accountability.

8. AI Governance Testing Framework:

- Project: Track-LLM: Transparency and Risk Assessment for Large Language Models
- Institutions: Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham and TEC
This project will develop frameworks for governance and risk assessment of large language models, ensuring AI's transparency and responsible use.

Objectives of the Initiative:

- The initiative's primary goal is to advance responsible AI development while addressing issues like bias mitigation, ethical AI deployment, and privacy preservation.
- The projects aim to develop indigenous tools and frameworks

that reflect India's specific needs and challenges.

- This effort also aligns with the government's broader vision of leveraging AI for inclusive growth, ensuring that AI benefits reach all sections of society while maintaining ethical standards.

India's Leadership in AI:

- The IndiaAI Mission, spearheaded by the Digital India Corporation (DIC), is part of India's efforts to establish global leadership in the field of AI.
- The mission aims to democratize AI benefits, foster technological self-reliance, and ensure the ethical and responsible use of AI.
- By supporting projects that focus on bias mitigation, transparency, privacy, and ethical frameworks, India is positioning itself as a global player in AI governance and development.

Strategic Importance for AI Governance:

- These projects, through collaborative research and development, will help India establish governance frameworks for AI that are specific to its unique challenges.
- They will promote multi-disciplinary research and collaboration between academic institutions, startups, and the government, ensuring that AI technologies are developed in a responsible and trustworthy manner.

On the exception to marital rape

Context:

Recently, Supreme Court is hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the marital rape exception (MRE) under Indian law.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Marital Rape Exception (MRE) and Its Origins
- Current Status of MRE in India
- Legal and Social Challenges in India
- Key Judicial Precedents and Ongoing Cases
- Government's Stance and Concerns

1. Marital Rape Exception (MRE) and Its Origins

- It is a legal provision that **protected husbands from being charged with rape** if they have non-consensual sex with their wives, provided the wife is **above 18 years** of age.
- This exception is deeply rooted in colonial laws and outdated societal norms, and its origins can be traced back to the "**doctrine of coverture**" in British common law.
- **Doctrine of Coverture:**
 - The doctrine of coverture was a legal framework in **British common law** that treated a married woman as having no independent legal existence from her husband.
 - Upon marriage, a woman's identity and rights were considered to be merged with those of her husband. This meant that a wife could not make legal decisions or enter

contracts on her own. In essence, she was seen as an extension of her husband rather than an individual with full rights.

- This doctrine also extended to sexual rights, implying that a wife could not refuse sex to her husband, as her consent to marriage was seen as permanent consent to sexual relations.

2. Current Status of MRE in India:

- Initially, MRE was granted immunity for husbands if the wife was over 15 years of age.
- The Supreme Court later raised this age limit to **18 years** in 2017 (in the **Independent Thought vs Union of India** case).
- However, the core issue remains that the Marital Rape Exception still allows husbands to legally force sex upon their wives without the risk of prosecution, provided the wife is legally an adult.
- Many argue that this provision violates women's fundamental rights to equality, dignity, and bodily autonomy.

3. Legal and Social Challenges in India

- India's legal framework on rape offers protections under **Section 375**, but the MRE creates an exception for married couples, essentially legalizing non-consensual sex in marriages where the wife is above 18.
- Other criminal provisions such as **Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** and **civil remedies** under the Domestic Violence Act address related abuses, but none treat marital rape as a criminal offense.
- Petitioners argue that the MRE violates fundamental rights, particularly Articles 14 (equality before law), 15 (non-discrimination), and 21 (right to life and

privacy). They emphasize that the law creates two classes of women: those married and unmarried, who are treated differently regarding sexual violence.

4. Key Judicial Precedents and Ongoing Cases

- The **Karnataka High Court's 2022** ruling allowed for the prosecution of a husband for marital rape, challenging the exemption for heinous sexual offenses. The case was a landmark step, but it remains under appeal in the Supreme Court.
- In the same year, the Delhi High Court delivered a split verdict on the issue: one judge ruled that the MRE was unconstitutional, while another upheld it, arguing it as part of the legitimate expectations in marriage.
- The current petitions, now in front of the Supreme Court, ask whether striking down the MRE would lead to the creation of a "new" offense, or simply remove legal immunity that should never have existed in the first place.

5. Government's Stance and Concerns

- The Union government, in its recent submissions, has opposed striking down the MRE. It argues that marriage includes "reasonable sexual access," and classifying non-consensual marital sex as rape could destabilize marriages and invite false accusations.
- The government acknowledges that while no one has the right to violate a partner's consent, labeling such acts as "rape" is seen as too severe.
- However, critics argue that the focus should be on individual rights, not protecting outdated notions of marriage. Bodily autonomy, they stress, should not be compromised for the

sake of preserving traditional structures.

Way Forward:

- **Reform Outdated Laws:** The Supreme Court should align Indian law with modern understandings of equality and privacy. It should alter the present MRE and ensure that married women have the same protections against sexual violence as unmarried women.
- **Awareness to change mindset:** Awareness campaigns and education at grassroots levels are needed to challenge the patriarchal mindset that normalizes non-consensual sex in marriages.

Supreme Court Upholds Section 6A of Citizenship Act

Context:

Recently, the Supreme court upheld the constitutionality of **Section 6A** of the **Citizenship Act, 1955**, that permits immigrants from Bangladesh residing in Assam to secure Indian citizenship.

Key Highlights:

- Section 6A grants citizenship to immigrants who entered Assam before **January 1, 1966**.
- While those who entered between **January 1, 1966** and **March 25, 1971**, can obtain citizenship after fulfilling specific procedures.
- Those arriving after **March 25, 1971**, are not eligible.
- Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud supported Section 6A, calling it a "**balancing act**" between humanitarian concerns for immigrants and Assam's economic and cultural impacts.

- He also noted that the March 25, 1971 cut-off date was reasonable, as it aligned with significant events in the Bangladesh War of Independence.

- The court directed the constitution of a Bench to monitor the implementation of immigration and citizenship laws in Assam, highlighting the need for continuous monitoring due to inadequacies in the existing identification and deportation mechanisms.

About Citizenship:

- It is a membership or a state of being a member or a citizen of a country. It defines the relationship of the person and that country.
- There are two principles on which citizenship is granted:
 - **'jus soli'**: On the basis of **place of birth**.
 - **'jus sanguinis'**: On the basis of blood ties.
 - **Motilal Nehru Committee (1928)**: Was in favour of the enlightened concept of jus soli.

Constitutional Provisions:

- Citizenship falls under the **Union List**, meaning which, **only Parliament** has an exclusive power to make laws on that.
- The constitution of India does not define the term "Citizen" but it has provided clear details in **Part 2** of the Indian constitution from **Article 5** to **Article 11**.

Article 5:

- It provided for citizenship **on commencement** of the Constitution.
- It granted citizenship to **all those domiciled and born in India**.

- It also granted to those who **domiciled in India but was not born in India, but their parents were born in India.**
- Also, It considered those who was **ordinary resident for more than five years.**

Article 6:

- It provided rights of citizenship of certain persons who have **migrated to India from Pakistan.**
- It states that a person who migrated to India before **July 19, 1949**, would automatically get Indian citizenship, if either of his **parents or grandparents** was born in India.
- However, it also laid down that those who entered **after July 19, 1949** would have to register themselves.

Article 7:

- Provided Rights of citizenship of **certain migrants to Pakistan but returned.**
- It allowed those migrants who migrated to Pakistan after **March 1, 1947** but subsequently returned on resettlement permits.

Article 8:

- Provided Rights of citizenship of certain persons of **Indian origin residing outside India.**
- It stated that the person of Indian origin **who are residing outside India, of whose parents or grandparents was born in India, could register to become an Indian citizen with Indian Diplomatic Mission.**

Other Articles:

- **Article 9:** Provided that if any person voluntarily acquired the citizenship of a foreign State will no longer be a citizen of India.

- **Article 10:** It says that every person who is or is deemed to be a citizen of India under any of the foregoing provisions of this Part shall, subject to the provisions of any law that may be made by Parliament, continue to be such citizen.
- **Article 11:** It empowers Parliament to make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all matters relating to it.

The Citizenship Act, 1955:

- It provides for the **acquisition and determination** of Indian citizenship under four ways: **birth, descent, registration and naturalisation.**
- The act has been amended four times — in 1986, 2003, 2005, and 2015.

Section 6A:

- It states that **all persons of Indian origin** who entered Assam before **January 1, 1966** and are residing as **ordinary residents** will be considered **Indian citizens.**
- Section 6A, was particularly made applicable to **Assam.**
- For those people who are **ordinary residents** and have entered after **1 January, 1966** but before **March 25, 1971**, will be granted with citizenship at the expiry of **10 years** from their detection as a foreigner.
- During this interim period, they will not have the right to vote but can get an Indian passport.

Abetment of Suicide

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court delivered a judgement on **abetment of suicide** in the

workplace. The court made it clear that unnecessary prosecutions related to workplace suicides should be avoided, ensuring that only genuine cases see the light of justice.

Case Background

- A salesman named Rajeev Jain who had been working in a company for over 23 years, after facing frequent pressure from his seniors to accept a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), commits suicide.
- Jain's brother filed a case against the senior officers, accusing them of abetment of suicide.
- Initially, the officers approached the Allahabad High Court to have the case quashed. However, the court found enough grounds to further examine whether the actions of the senior officers played a direct role in Jain's death.

What is Abetment of Suicide?

- Abetment of suicide is when someone is encouraged or provoked or forced to take their own life.
- According to **Section 306** of the **IPC** and **Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023**, abetment requires **clear proof of intent**. Which means that there has to be evidence that someone actively incited or conspired to push another person toward suicide.
- Abetment of suicide is a serious offense and is **non-bailable** and the accused can be arrested without a warrant.
- It's also a **non-compoundable offence**, meaning the case can't be settled or withdrawn even if the parties come to an agreement.

The Supreme Court's Stand

- The Supreme Court held that not every instance of workplace harassment leads to abetment of suicide.
- It also stated that **emotional conflicts or job stress** alone do not suffice for such charges and there has to be **solid evidence** that the victim was intentionally provoked or pushed into feeling like suicide was their only way out.

Conclusion:

The ruling sends a strong message that it is important to protect individuals from severe mistreatment at work and also ensure that the law is not misused in situations where mental health complexities come into play.

Prime Minister visits Russia

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a visit to Russia to attend the BRICS summit.

Key highlights:

- Russian envoy Denis Alipov emphasized BRICS as a platform for dialogue free from pressure or interference, highlighting its respect for civilizational diversity.
- BRICS members are pushing for increased use of **national currencies for trade**, with Russia prioritizing this over a common BRICS currency.
- Russia is advocating for an alternative to the SWIFT global payment system, from which it was expelled due to the war in Ukraine.
- Last year's focus was on expanding BRICS, effectively bringing more global

south countries to the platform, as highlighted by South Africa's High Commissioner-designate Anil Sooklal.

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)**



Concerns with the Char Dham Highway project

Context:

The recently launched Char Dham Highway project with an estimated budget of Rs 12,000 crore has sparked controversy for its environmental consequences. A study by **Jürgen Mey of the University of Potsdam** confirms the project's role in exacerbating landslides and destabilizing the region.

Dimensions of the Article:

- About Char Dham Highway project
- Spiritual Importance of the Yatra
- Key Environmental Concerns
- Challenges and Impact on Local Communities
- Way forward

About Char Dham Highway project:

- It is a **900 km** of highway project connecting the **Chardham pilgrimage centres - Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri.**
- It plans to make this journey safer, faster and more convenient.
- The Char Dham highway project intends to act as the strategic feeder roads which connect the India-China border with the Army camps in **Dehradun** and **Meerut** where missile bases and heavy machinery are located.
- **Implementing Agencies:** Uttarakhand State Public Works Department (PWD), Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).

Spiritual Importance of the Yatra:

Each of the four shrines holds profound religious and mythological significance in

Hinduism. The Char Dham Yatra is believed to **cleanse one's sins and lead to spiritual salvation**. For many devotees, completing this pilgrimage is a pivotal spiritual goal, reflecting deep faith and devotion.

- **Yamunotri:** Dedicated to **Goddess Yamuna**, the shrine is located near the source of the Yamuna River.
- **Gangotri:** This shrine is dedicated to **Goddess Ganga**, and is situated near the origin of the Ganges River.
- **Kedarnath:** Dedicated to **Lord Shiva**, Kedarnath is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas and holds immense religious significance.
- **Badrinath:** This shrine is dedicated to **Lord Vishnu** and is part of the Char Dham (four abodes) as well as the Chota Char Dham.

Key Environmental Concerns

- **Landslides:** After heavy rainfall in 2022, the widening of the roads has caused more 300 landslides along a 250 km stretch between Rishikesh and Joshimath which has led to numerous deaths and accidents, especially during the pilgrimage season.
- **Extreme Rainfall:** Climate change models predicted an increase in extreme rainfall events that could worsen landslides.

Challenges and Impact on Local Communities

- **Disruption of Livelihood:** The Uttarakhand region, especially the rural areas is facing increasing migration with some of the villages even being deserted.
- **Affect on Farming:** This large-scale production has also affected the farming sector of the region making it less sustainable. Local

people are forced to look either sell their land or look for alternatives in tourism-based industries.

- **Ecological Damage:** The recent incidents like ground subsidence occurred, unchecked construction leading to sinking foundations and other structural damages in Joshimath and Tungnath Temple areas have increased distress among locals. Although, the state is trying to incentivize locals, the ecological damage is irreversible.

Way Forward

- The government should consider the region's environmental fragility seriously and needs to balance infrastructure development with ecological conservation.
- The authorities should take measures to first improve the locality and make it conducive for this large-scale construction. It should prioritize building proper drainage systems, retaining walls and adhere to best practices in construction that could prevent further harm to the region.
- The government must come up with a long-term strategy to address issues related to land and farming and make it more sustainable and viable for the natives.
- A more measured, cautious approach is the only way forward for preserving the delicate balance between development and nature in this fragile mountain region.

New airports inaugurated under UDAN scheme

Context:

Recently, the PM Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated three airports across the

country under the **UDAN scheme (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik)**.

- The three airports were- Chhattisgarh's Surguja, Madhya Pradesh's Rewa, and Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur.

What is UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) Scheme?

- UDAN is a central scheme that aims to make air travel **more affordable for the general public** in India's **tier II and III cities**.
- It was launched in the year 2017 and is planned to run for 10 years.
- The nodal ministry of the scheme is **Ministry of Civil Aviation**.
- It is a part of the **National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP)** and is funded jointly by the Government of India and the state governments.
 - **National Civil Aviation Policy:** NCAP was released in 2016. Its primary goal is to make flying affordable and ensure safe and affordable travel experiences for air passengers.

Key highlights of the Scheme:

- The scheme is inclined with the aspects of National infrastructure development. It intends to bring connectivity in the remote and regional areas of the country.
- It primarily aims to bring affordability in air travel in the country and accordingly 50% of seats in UDAN flights are given at subsidized rates.
- **Viability Gap Funding (VGF):** It is a mechanism where participating airlines receive financial support shared between the central and state governments.
 - It is designed to assist infrastructure projects that are

economically sound but lack full financial viability.

- Under the VGF scheme, the funding is divided between the **Ministry of Civil Aviation** and the **respective State Government**, typically in an **80:20 ratio**.
- However, for the **North-Eastern states** and **Union Territories**, the funding ratio shifts to **90:10**, with the central government covering the larger share.

Supreme Court Unveils New Justice Statute

Context

Recently, the 'lady justice' was unveiled at the Supreme court which replaced the old statue.

- The new statue has its eyes wide open, without the blindfold and is holding scales in one hand and the Indian Constitution in the other, in place of a sword.
- This change stands a significant step towards decolonizing Indian judicial imagery.

About the lady statue:



- The original 'lady justice' statue was a symbol that came with the British legal system.
- She typically wore a **blindfold**, symbolizing impartiality.
- The new version is different as it does not have the blindfold and is dressing a saree.
- The change brings the statue **closer to Indian traditions**.
- The main striking feature is the open eyes which denotes that— **Indian law sees and acknowledges** every individual, considering the country's social diversity and the discrimination faced by underprivileged communities.
- The Constitution replacing the sword signifies that India's justice system is rooted in constitutional values, emphasizing the supreme authority of the law over any physical power.

Significance of the New Statue

- This transformation symbolizes a move towards **decoloniality**.
- It aims to break away from colonial symbols and practices.
- By removing the blindfold, it acknowledges that justice in India requires a more nuanced, contextual approach. In a country with vast social and economic inequalities, blind justice may not always serve fairness.
- The open-eyed 'lady justice' is a reminder that justice must be **aware, responsive**, and must see every individual and their circumstances.

- The continued presence of the scales signifies that the courts will remain impartial, while the Constitution reminds everyone that the ultimate guiding principle is the law of the land.

Oath taking function at Srinagar Assembly

Context:

Recently, after general elections to legislative assembly of Jammu & Kashmir, an oath taking ceremony of the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and 85 newly-elected members took place in Srinagar.

Highlights:

- National Conference leader **Omar Abdullah** became the Union Territory's first elected head of government since its reorganization.
- The J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha administered the oath and the ceremony was held at the **Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Centre (SKICC)**.
- **Article 164(3)**: It ensures that before any Minister enters his office, the **Governor** shall administer the oaths of office and of secrecy according to the forms set out in the **Third Schedule**.
- Once Governor takes it as read, and the Secretary to the Governor has attested that the oath has been administered, it cannot be legally challenged.
- **The Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019** : Two unions, namely, UT of Ladakh without a legislature, and the UT of Jammu & Kashmir with a legislature was created.
 - However, the legislation on matters of "Public Order" and "Police" were

kept under the Lieutenant Governor (LG's).

- **Section 32** of the **J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019**: allows the assembly to make laws on matters in the state list except "Public Order" and "Police".
- **Article 239**: President, if necessary, appoints an administrator to administer Union Territories.
- The Jammu & Kashmir's assembly is much similar to Puducherry as it is governed by Article 239A.

Timeline:

Abrogation of Article 370:

- **Revocation Date**: On August 5, 2019, the Indian government revoked nearly all provisions of Article 370.
- **Presidential Order**: On the same day, the President issued The Constitution (Application to Jammu And Kashmir) Order, 2019.
 - **Key Change**: This order replaced the term 'Constituent Assembly' in Article 370(3) with 'Legislative Assembly [of Jammu & Kashmir]'.
 - **Amendment Mechanism**: It technically amended the interpretation clause Article 367, using Article 370(1) to do so, rather than directly amending Article 370 itself.
- **Statutory Resolution**: A Statutory Resolution was introduced in the Rajya Sabha to abrogate most of Article 370.
 - **President's Rule**: This action did not require the concurrence of the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly as the state was under President's rule at the time.

- **Reorganization Bill**: On August 6, 2019, Parliament passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Bill, 2019.
 - **Bifurcation**: The bill bifurcated the state into two Union Territories: Jammu & Kashmir (with a legislative assembly) and Ladakh (without a legislative assembly).

India-China Disengagement along the LAC

Context

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to resolve the boundary issue between the two nations. China confirmed for the agreement to resolve their four-year military standoff.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What is the Issue About?
- Recent Developments:
- Significance for India
- Way Forward

What is the Issue About?

- The frequent transgression between India and China in 2020, especially along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) triggering a military standoff with India and then the violent clash in Galwan Valley had created a huge rift between the two nations.
- However, the recent agreement by China confirmed that the troops would be restored to pre-2020 levels, which has given a sign of relief to India.
- The news comes just ahead of the BRICS summit that there could be a formal engagement between India

and China after years of strained relations.

Recent Developments:

- Both the countries agreed to disengage their troops along the LAC, especially from the major points like - **the Galwan valley, Pangong Tso, and Gogra-Hot Springs**, excluding **Demchok and Depsang**, which still remain unresolved.
- The positive step towards disengaging the Chinese troops came after a meeting between India's **National Security Advisor Ajit Doval** and the **Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi** convened, on the sidelines of the meeting of **BRICS NSAs in St Petersburg, Russia**.
- For the very first time the use of an expression- "**narrow down the differences**" was made, indicating an optimistic move for the disengagement.

Significance for India

- **Bilateral Ties:** It can improve bilateral ties that had been frozen since 2020. Trades in sectors such as **investment, travel, and people-to-people exchanges** can be enhanced.
- **Patrolling Rights:** It restores patrolling rights for India in the region enabling the local villagers access the Eastern Ladakh region, which in a way is a crucial victory for the country.

Way Forward

- India must ensure full transparency in the disengagement process.
- India and China must reassess the existing frameworks of their border agreements, such as the **1993 Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement** and the **2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement**, and decide whether a new strategy is

needed to prevent future tensions along the border.

- Proceeding with caution and learning from the past will be crucial to ensuring long-term peace and stability.

Trachoma

Context:

Recently, Government of India reached a great milestone by eliminating **Trachoma** as a public health problem.

- India became the **third country** in the South-East Asia Region to achieve this milestone.
- Due to the impact of Trachoma (through blindness and visual impairment), an estimated economic loss of **\$2.9 to 5.3 billion** is accounted annually, owing to reduced productivity.

About Trachoma:

- Trachoma is a **bacterial infection** that affects the **eyes**.
- It is caused by the **bacterium Chlamydia Trachomatis**.
- Trachoma is **contagious**, spreading through contact with the eyes, eyelids, nose or throat secretions of infected people, if left untreated it causes irreversible blindness.
- It is found in **underprivileged communities living in poor** environmental conditions.
- It was amongst the leading cause of blindness in the country during 1950-60.
- The Government of India launched the **National Trachoma Control Program in 1963** and later on Trachoma control efforts were integrated into **India's National**

Program for Control of Blindness (NPCB).

WHO's stand:

- WHO has termed Trachoma as a **neglected tropical disease**.
- WHO estimates suggest that **150 million people** worldwide are affected by Trachoma and **6 million** of them are blind or at risk of visually disabling complications.
- WHO SAFE (adoption of surgery, antibiotics, facial hygiene, environmental cleanliness etc) strategy was implemented throughout the country.
- Finally, after years of fighting against Trachoma, WHO declared that India has eliminated Trachoma as a public health problem

Economic and Social Significance of Trachoma Elimination

- Reducing trachoma prevalence is considered more of an economic and social victory.
- Trachoma-induced blindness meant lost productivity, draining resources and limiting community growth.
- As infections declined, productivity and economic potential for affected communities surged.
- This transformation can help break cycles of poverty when coupled alongside supportive government initiatives.
- With trachoma under control, communities are better positioned to thrive, both economically and in terms of quality of life.

Way forward:

- Eliminating trachoma as a public health problem doesn't mean eradication, and there's a risk of resurgence. Hence, **continuous surveillance, adherence to the SAFE strategy,** and **improvements in sanitation** are essential.
- The WHO recommends **regular national surveys** to detect any new cases.
- India's success in controlling trachoma should also encourage similar efforts against other diseases like kala-azar and tuberculosis.

Anti-defection law

Overview:

The Anti-defection law was introduced in 1985 to address frequent political instability caused by legislators frequently switching parties. This Anti-defection brought a change in the way how political leaders and their parties functioned there after.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What is Anti-defection?
- Grounds for Defection
- Key Challenges in effective Implementation:
- Way forward

What is Anti-defection?

- Anti-defection was introduced through the **52nd Amendment**, by adding the Tenth Schedule to the Indian Constitution.
- It was mainly introduced to tackle the problem of legislators continuously

switching parties (“Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram”), creating instability.

- The law punishes **individual Members of Parliament (MPs)/Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)** for leaving one party for another.
- However, it allows a group of MP/MLAs to merge with another political party without inviting the penalty for defection.
- And it does not penalise political parties for encouraging or accepting defecting legislators.
- As per the **1985 Act**, a **'defection' by one-third of the elected members of a political party was considered a 'merger'**.
- However, the **91st Constitutional Amendment Act of 2003** revised this requirement, now mandating that at least two-thirds of a party's members must support a "merger" for it to be legally recognized.

Grounds for Defection:

- If an elected member decides to give up his membership of a political party voluntarily.
- If the elected person, without obtaining prior permission, decides to vote or abstain from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorized to do so.
- If any independently elected member joins any political party.
- If any nominated member joins any political party after the expiry of six months.

Key Challenges in effective Implementation:

- **Delay in decision-making:** Speakers of the house have taken

months and years to decide on defection cases, allowing defectors to retain their positions, which undermines the intent of the law.

- **Discretionary power of the Speaker or Chairperson:** It has raised concerns about being impartial. And, another issue is the lack of transparency regarding party whips, which often leaves room for disputes on whether members were adequately informed.
- **Judiciary's reluctance:** The backfoot of judiciary in interfering with defection cases, has led to delayed or arbitrary outcomes, affecting the law's overall effectiveness.

Way forward:

- Two primary amendments have been proposed to improve the law.
- First, establishing a **fixed four-week timeframe for decision-making** on defection cases to prevent delays and misuse of discretionary power.
- Second, **introducing transparency in issuing party whips** to ensure members are clearly informed of the party's stance.
- Furthermore, previous committee reports have recommended additional measures, including an independent tribunal for anti-defection cases, though reinforcing Speaker accountability may be more effective in maintaining legislative autonomy.

Conclusion:

The anti-defection law has played an essential role in preserving government stability, but its existing gaps call for urgent reform. Addressing these loopholes is crucial to protect the electorate's mandate and maintain democratic values.

DGCI finds 49 drug samples are not of standard quality

Context

Recently, **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)**, ordered a recall of 49 medicines after samples failed to meet quality standards.

Key Highlights

- The DCGI directed the manufacturers of 49 drug samples to withdraw their products that did not meet the required quality standards.
- These samples included-
 - Painkillers
 - Antifungal medications
 - Diabetes drugs
- The recalled drugs include common medications like
 - Metronidazole from Hindustan Antibiotics
 - Oxytocin by Pushkar Pharma
 - Metformin hydrochloride from Swiss Biotech Parenterals
 - Paracetamol by Innova Captab Limited
 - Pantoprazole by Alkem Health, and
 - Ciprofloxacin by Cadila Pharmaceuticals.
- **Spurious Drug Cases:** In addition to the quality issue, four drugs produced by unauthorized companies were identified as spurious. The DCGI has taken action to prosecute these manufacturers, underlining the agency's commitment to tackling unapproved and harmful drugs in the market.

Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO):

- Central Drugs Standard Control Organization is the **National Regulatory Authority (NRA)** for the medical devices industry in India.
- It's headquarter is at New Delhi.
- It works under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.
- It is headed by **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)**.
- CDSCO is responsible for: Approval of New Drugs; Conduct of Clinical Trials; Laying down the standards for Drugs; Control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country; Coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations;
- CDSCO and state regulators are responsible to grant licenses of certain specialized categories of critical Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.

Conclusion:

This action highlights ongoing efforts by the DCGI to ensure public health safety and maintain stringent checks on the quality of pharmaceuticals in the Indian market.

National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM)

Context:

The Union Ministry of Culture, recently said that is planning to “**revive and relaunch**” the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) and is mulling the formation of an autonomous body to help preserve ancient texts in India.

National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM)

- It is a program that aims to **unearth** and **preserve** the vast manuscript wealth of India.
- Its biggest and most ambitious project is to create a database of all Indian manuscripts in the country and abroad.
- The National Database of Manuscripts, **Kriti Sampada**, is available on the Mission's website.
- Institutions like **Rampur Raza Library**, **Rampur** and **Khuda Bakhsh Library**, Patna are world renowned for their manuscript collections.
- It was established by **Ministry of Tourism in February 2003**.
- India possesses an estimate of ten million manuscripts, probably the largest collection in the world. These cover a variety of themes, textures and aesthetics, scripts, languages, calligraphies, illuminations and illustrations.

Solar power in India

Context

Solar energy has democratised electricity generation and has empowered communities in enabling home-based power generation.

Background:

- The first rooftop photovoltaic array was installed in 1884, by Charles Fritts.
- Unlike other conventional sources like coal or nuclear energy, solar energy is accessible, environmentally friendly, and operates directly where it's needed — in our homes.

Dimensions of the Article

- Solar power in India
- Significance of Decentralised Solar Power
- Challenges in Solar's Growth and Accessibility

Solar power in India:

- India emerged as the **third-largest Solar Power** producer in 2023, surpassing Japan.
- It generated **113 billion units** compared to Japan, which produced 110 BU.
- China still remains the global producer of solar power, generating **584 BU** in 2024.
- In terms of installed power capacity of solar power, India stands at **fifth**.
- Global solar generation in 2023 was more than **six times larger** than in 2015, while in India it was 17 times higher.

Significance of Decentralised Solar Power

- Solar energy units can be installed anywhere on a **small scale**; this helps communities, especially marginalised groups, benefit tremendously.
- It provides **energy independence**, lowers reliance on traditional sources, and creates pathways for individual and community empowerment.
- It also uplifts women in rural and underserved areas, where energy access remains limited. For example, **women salt farmers in Gujarat's Little Rann of Kutch** have shifted from diesel to solar pumps, raising their income by 94% and significantly lowering CO2 emissions.
- Initiatives like **Barefoot College in India** and **Solar Sister** in Africa train

women as solar engineers, leading to improved health and economic outcomes for families and communities.

Challenges in Solar's Growth and Accessibility

- **Manufacturing Bottlenecks:** Many solar companies operate in a few countries. This disrupts the supply chain, and hence the prices also increase.
- **Installation costs:** The initial cost of installation is very high for solar panels. Although the government provides subsidies, it is still difficult for common households and businesses to afford.
- **Infrastructure:** Very few places have adequate grid connectivity and the required infrastructure.
- **Policy frameworks:** Effective solar policies must be brought in that address key issues like waste management and encourage sustainable practices. The framework should also mandate recycling of the photovoltaic materials.

Way forward:

- **Investment in infrastructure:** India should focus on creating policies to encourage private sector involvement to develop solar energy in the country.
- **Utilise other renewable energy:** India so far has utilised only 15% of its Hydro potential as compared to countries like U.S. and Europe which has utilised more than 90%.
- **Promoting Rooftop Solar:** The government should educate the local households to instal rooftop solar panels to generate their own energy.

Tamil Nadu government declares heatwaves a State-specific disaster

Context:

Recently, the Tamil Nadu government declared heatwaves a State-specific disaster and announced ex-gratia payments of ₹4 lakh for families of individuals who die of heat-related causes, including those involved in relief operations.

What are Heatwaves?

- It is an extended period of excessive hot weather, typically characterised by high temperatures that are above normal for a specific region that can have severe impacts on health, agriculture, infrastructure, etc.

Criteria to declare a heatwave.

- **Maximum Temperature Threshold:** The maximum temperature during a heatwave must exceed the normal maximum temperature for a particular region by a certain margin.
- **Duration:** The extreme heat conditions should persist for a specified number of consecutive days, varying based on the region and climatic conditions.
- **Diurnal Temperature Variation:** Heatwaves often exhibit minimal relief during the nighttime, with higher minimum temperatures compared to normal.
- **Regional Variation:** Different regions in India may have varying thresholds and criteria for heatwave declaration, considering the climatic patterns and local conditions.
- **Local Impact:** Heatwave declaration also considers the adverse effects on human health, agriculture, and other

sectors, based on local reports and observations.

- **Heat Index:** The heat index, which takes into account both temperature and relative humidity, may be considered to assess the severity of the heatwave.
- **Heatwave Warning Systems:** Meteorological departments issue heatwave warnings based on forecasts, which may trigger the declaration of a heatwave in advance.
- **Monitoring Stations:** Monitoring stations across the country record and analyse temperature data to identify regions experiencing extreme heat conditions.
- **Historical Data:** Historical weather data is compared to current conditions to determine if the temperature anomalies meet the criteria for a heatwave declaration.
- **Government Guidelines:** The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and respective state authorities provide guidelines and standards to determine the criteria for declaring a heatwave.

Some state specific disasters in India include:

- Snakebite: Declared as a state specific disaster in Kerala
- Lightning: Declared as a state specific disaster in Assam
- Heat waves: Declared as a state specific disaster in Kerala
- Sunburn: Declared as a state specific disaster in Odisha
- Coastal erosion: A state specific disaster in Kerala
- Strong wind: A state specific disaster in Kerala

- Soil piping: A state specific disaster in Kerala
- Human-animal conflict: A state specific disaster in Kerala

Karnataka government to increase the entry fee at Mysuru Palace

Context:

Recently, the Karnataka Government decided to raise the entry fees for foreign tourists at Mysuru Palace from ₹100 to ₹1,000, sparking discussions on its tourism strategy focused on short-term gains.

Key Highlights:

- **Tourism Potential:** Karnataka boasts 320 km of coastline, UNESCO sites (Hampi, Pattadakal, Hoysala temples), and around 1,500 protected monuments, along with five tiger reserves and multiple bird sanctuaries.
- **Tourism Performance:** Karnataka was not among the top 10 states for foreign tourist visits in 2022.
- **Domestic Tourism Strength:** Karnataka ranked fourth in India for domestic tourism with 182.41 million tourists, after Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, but requires more foreign tourism to boost its hospitality and retail sectors.

India's Tourism Sector:

- India currently ranks at 39th place on the **World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index 2024**.
- As per the **India Brand Equity Foundation's (IBEF)** report, travel and tourism, with a total contribution of about **USD 178 billion** to the

country's GDP, is currently rated as the two largest industries in India.

- It has also generated more than 30 million jobs (6.9% of the total employment in the year 2021).
- As per the Ministry of Tourism, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in December 2023 were 1,070,163.
- **Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs):** FTAs in India surged to 9.2 million in 2023, up from 6.4 million in 2022.
- **Top Attractions:** Key destinations include the Taj Mahal (Agra), Golden Temple (Amritsar), beaches in Goa, Kerala's backwaters, and hill stations in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- **Tourism Market Potential:** India's travel market is projected to reach USD 125 billion by FY27, with international tourist arrivals expected to hit 30.5 million by 2028.
- **Employment Growth:** The tourism sector could support approximately 53 million jobs by 2029, with GDP contributions anticipated to grow at an annual rate of 7-9% until 2030.
- **Travel & Hospitality Expansion:** The airline market, currently valued at USD 20 billion, and the hotel market, valued at USD 32 billion (FY20), are expected to double by FY27 due to enhanced infrastructure and increased travel demand.

A picture of a growing economic divide in India

Context

Recently, the **Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)** released a report titled **Relative Economic Performance of Indian States: 1960-61 to**

2023-24. The report highlighted the disparities in state contributions to India's economy and citizens' per capita income. The report sheds light on the widening regional economic divide in India, with wealthier states like Maharashtra significantly outpacing poorer regions in per capita income and infrastructure. These disparities raise concerns about federal unity and bring attention to both private and public investment patterns that deepen inequality across regions.

Dimensions of the Article

- Key Findings of the EAC-PM Report on State Economic Performance
- Regional Disparities and Growth Patterns
- Threats to Federalism
- A Path Forward for Balanced Growth

Key Findings of the EAC-PM Report on State Economic Performance

Economic Performance Trends:

- **Southern Growth:** Southern states (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu) contribute about 30% to India's GDP as of March 2024, largely due to post-liberalisation growth in tech and industry.
- **West Bengal's Decline:** West Bengal's share of GDP dropped from **10.5%** in 1960-61 to **5.6%** in 2024, with per capita income falling to 83.7% of the national average, trailing states like Rajasthan and Odisha. Key issues include policy stagnation, industrial decline, and talent migration.

- Maharashtra's Leadership: Maharashtra remains the top GDP contributor at **13.3%**, though down from over **15%**.

Per capita income insights:

- Top Earners: Delhi, Telangana, Karnataka, and Haryana have the highest per capita incomes, with Delhi at **250.8%** of the national average.
- Consistent Leaders: Gujarat and Maharashtra continue to maintain above-average incomes.
- Rising States: Odisha's per capita income rose from **55.8%** in 2000-01 to 88.5% in 2023-24.
- Punjab vs. Haryana: Punjab's growth has slowed, with per capita income now at **106%** of the national average, while Haryana's surged to **176.8%**.
- Richest Small States: **Sikkim and Goa**, with respective per capita incomes of **319%** and **290%** of the national average, lead the country.

Challenges in Poorer States:

- Struggling Economies: Uttar Pradesh and Bihar lag in GDP contributions at **9.5%** and **4.3%**, respectively, with Bihar facing slower growth despite some improvements in Odisha.
- Policy Review Needs: The report stresses examining policy influences and state-specific factors to understand and address economic disparities across India.

Regional Disparities and Growth Patterns

- The EAC-PM report reveals stark differences in regional performance, especially between the economically robust western and southern regions of India and the lagging eastern and northern states (with some exceptions).

- Liberalisation in 1991 marked a shift, with southern states advancing due to more private investments thanks to improved infrastructure and governance. Urban conglomerates like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru attract investments, while poorer states receive less funding due to limited market access, weaker governance, and poor infrastructure. The presence of a strong organised sector in wealthier regions further propels their growth, while poorer states rely on the low-paying unorganised sector.

Threats to Federalism

- The growing regional inequality is raising questions about India's federal system.
- Wealthier states argue they are not receiving their fair share of federal resources, contributing more to national revenue than what they receive in return.
- Some states are also wary of political influences on public investment, which, they claim, results in less support for opposition-led states.
- Furthermore, the concentration of wealth in certain areas exacerbates social tensions, as economically underperforming states struggle with low investment, inadequate infrastructure, and poor governance, which only widens the gap.

A Path Forward for Balanced Growth

- To tackle the growing economic divide, policy changes are essential. Both the central and state governments must focus on improving governance, infrastructure, and investment climates in underdeveloped regions.
- States should focus on reducing corruption and increasing social sector spending, while the Centre must

balance support for the organised and unorganised sectors. Strengthening the unorganised sector would improve incomes, boost demand and attract more investments to these poorer regions.

Expansion of AB-PM-JAY to cover all senior citizens aged 70 years

Context:

The PM Narendra Modi 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 of PM Modi's Expansion of Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY

1. Expansion of Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY

- Health coverage under PM-JAY is now extended to all senior citizens aged 70+, regardless of income.
- With the Ayushman Vaya Vandana Card, elderly citizens will receive free hospital treatment, reducing out-of-pocket expenses significantly.
- The scheme offers up to ₹5 lakh in hospitalisation coverage per year.

2. New Health Sector Projects

- Launched health projects worth ₹12,850 crore, coinciding with Dhanvantari Jayanti and the 9th Ayurveda Day.
- Inaugurated four centres of excellence under Ayush Health, alongside upgrades at AIIMS

locations and establishment of new medical and nursing colleges.

3. Technology-Driven Health Initiatives

- Expansion of the e-Sanjeevani scheme has enabled over 30 crore online consultations, enhancing remote healthcare access.
- Use of drones and helicopter services is being introduced in healthcare for emergency and logistical support.

4. Five Pillars of Health Policy

- Preventive healthcare
- Early detection of diseases
- Free and affordable treatments and medications
- Increased availability of doctors in smaller towns
- Integration of technology in health services

India-Germany Meeting

Context

Recently, the 7th round of the India-Germany Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC) was co-chaired by India and Germany in New Delhi.

- Under the theme "**Growing Together with Innovation, Mobility, and Sustainability**," the dialogue aimed to deepen cooperation across technology, climate action, and strategic partnerships.
- Germany's recent move to grant India a special status for faster military approvals further reinforces their commitment to enhanced bilateral ties.

Key Highlights of the India-Germany Meeting

- **"Focus on India" Document:** Germany's policy document sets a blueprint for collaboration with India on global issues, emphasising innovation, technology leadership, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Expanded Visa Quotas for Skilled Workers:** Germany will increase its visa quota for skilled Indian professionals from 20,000 to 90,000, supporting its demand for talent while providing career opportunities for Indian youth.
- **Digital and Technology Partnerships:** Both nations finalised a work plan covering digital transformation, AI, IoT, digital agriculture, and tech regulations, aiming to drive innovation across sectors.
- **Environmental Cooperation:** The Indo-German Green Hydrogen Roadmap was launched to advance clean energy initiatives. Both nations also focused on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for \$100 billion in climate finance to support developing countries.
- **Defence and Security Cooperation:** Enhanced ties include Germany's special status for India in defence purchases and ongoing collaborations on strategic security matters. Notably, discussions extended to potential co-production projects like the proposed joint development of P-75I submarines.
- **Space Collaboration:** A significant partnership between New Space India Ltd and GAF AG (Germany) will upgrade Germany's Neustrelitz ground station to process data from India's OceanSat-3 and RISAT-1A satellites, enhancing data exchange and space capabilities.

Way Forward

- To strengthen bilateral relations, India and Germany should maintain regular high-level meetings to foster a strategic partnership.
- Expanding Track 1.5 dialogue by involving more stakeholders—including business leaders and civil society—can further enhance mutual understanding.
- Both countries can also focus on a standalone Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) to increase investor confidence and bolster trade.
- Cooperation on global challenges like climate change, security, and defence collaboration will further consolidate their roles as responsible global powers, benefiting both nations and the wider region.

Higher Pension Demand

Context:

Recently, the Officers from Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) have requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure that the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) calculates pensions based on the Supreme Court's November 2022 order instead of the pro-rata basis tied to contributions.

Key Highlights

- The **National Confederation of Officers' Associations (NCOA)**, representing over two lakh officers and retirees across 255 Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), submitted a letter to Mr. Modi and other government officials, asserting that EPFO's actions contradict the rightful pension enhancements for post-2014 retirees.
- The officers urged the government to expedite the processing of joint

applications and withdraw the pro-rata calculation. They also requested compensation for pensioners through interest on arrears caused by pension disbursement delays.

- Retirees are advocating for a uniform calculation method based on the 60-month average salary before exiting service instead of bifurcating it into pre- and post-September 2014, as per the 2014 amendment criteria.

Supreme Court's November 2022 Judgment

- The Supreme Court upheld the Employees' Pension (Amendment) Scheme, 2014, while extending the deadline for opting into the scheme by an additional four months.
- Under **Article 142**, the ruling allows EPFO members using the EPS to contribute up to **8.33% of their actual salaries** (rather than the 8.33% on the **Rs 15,000 cap**) towards pension, giving members another opportunity to maximise their pension contributions.
- In the original scheme, the pensionable salary was calculated based on the average salary over the last 12 months before exiting the Pension Fund. The 2014 amendments revised this calculation to an average of the last 60 months.
- The Court declared the requirement for members to contribute an extra 1.16% on salaries above Rs 15,000 as ultra vires, or beyond the scope of, the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.

New Guidelines Under the SC Ruling

- Employees can now contribute **8.33% of their actual basic salary** (including Basic Pay + DA) towards the EPS, creating a larger pension

corpus and potentially resulting in a higher pension amount.

- Currently, EPS contributions for pensionable salary are capped at **Rs 15,000**.
- For those opting into this scheme, the employer's contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) since September 2014 will be transferred to the EPS, along with any earned interest.

Eligibility Criteria

To avail of the benefits, employees must meet the following conditions:

- They must have been members of EPS before **September 1, 2014**, and remained members on or after that date.
- Both employees and employers should have contributed based on a salary exceeding the previous wage ceilings of **Rs 5,000 or Rs 6,500**.
- They should not have exercised the joint option during the previous window while still being EPS members.

Having private participation in India's nuclear energy

Context:

The article discusses the government's plan to involve private sector in developing technologies like Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) of the nuclear energy sector.

Dimensions of the Article:

- India's nuclear energy sector
- Legal and Regulatory Framework Governing Nuclear Energy
- Private Sector Participation: Opportunities and Challenges

- Regulatory Reforms and Safety Concerns

India's nuclear energy sector:

- Nuclear energy is one of the largest source of electricity for India
- India has over 23 operable reactors and 7 which are still under construction.
- Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI) is currently constructing a **500MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam**, which will be world's first thorium-based nuclear plant.
- Recently, the government had also allowed joint ventures with PSUs to enhance India's nuclear program. And accordingly, **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** is now in two joint ventures with the **National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC)** and the **Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL)**.

Legal and Regulatory Framework Governing Nuclear Energy

- With the Union Budget for 2024-25, the government proposed to involve the private sector in developing **Bharat Small Reactors (BSR)**, **Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMR)**, and other advanced nuclear technologies.
- This move was strategically done to meet India's commitment made at the **COP26 summit in Glasgow**, to **reduce carbon emissions** and achieve **500 GW** of non-fossil fuel energy by **2030**.
- **Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (AEA)** gives legal foundation for India's nuclear energy sector. It gives exclusive control over the **production, development, and use**

of atomic energy to the central government.

- However, the act had not mentioned private companies engagement in nuclear energy activities.
- **Section 3(a)** of the AEA explicitly mentioned that **only the central government has the authority to manage atomic energy operations**.
- Recently, the Supreme Court of India reaffirmed this stance by dismissing a petition challenging the provisions of the AEA.
- In the case **Sandeep T.S. vs Union of India**, the Court upheld the law, emphasizing that the control of atomic power must be carefully managed by the government due to its risks.
- Furthermore, there is a pending constitutional challenge to the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA)**, which adds to the uncertainty surrounding private sector participation in nuclear energy.

Private Sector Participation: Opportunities and Challenges

- The **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**, gives full control of nuclear projects to central government and its agencies (**Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** and **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**).
- The private sector is only limited for **construction and procurement**.
- According to a report by **DAE** and **NITI Aayog**, the government can encourage private involvement by creating a more favorable regulatory framework and

establishing clear guidelines for nuclear liability.

- **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** has historically involved private companies only in the construction of nuclear plants, like working with **Megha Engineering** and **Reliance** for building infrastructure.

Regulatory Reforms and Safety Concerns

- High-profile accidents like **Chernobyl** in 1986 and **Fukushima** in 2011 have highlighted the risks involved in operating nuclear reactors.
- These problems even magnify especially when nuclear reactors are located near human settlements.
- In India, the **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** is responsible for overseeing the safe use of nuclear energy and technology.
- Although the **Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority Bill** was introduced in 2011 to create a more independent regulatory body, it has not yet been passed into law.
- Under the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA)**, the operator (typically a government entity) is held liable for any damage caused by a nuclear accident, and compensation is provided to affected parties through a "no-fault" liability system.
 - This means that victims are compensated regardless of who is at fault for the accident. (However, the constitutionality of this Act is still being challenged in court, and the case has been pending for over a decade).
- Meanwhile, the Indian Supreme Court, in the case of **G. Sundarrajan vs**

Union of India and Ors. (2013), addressed the safety concerns surrounding the **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant** in Tamil Nadu.

- While the Court allowed the plant to operate, it directed the DAE and NPCIL to conduct regular inspections and submit reports to ensure safety.
- This case highlights the need for strict regulatory oversight of nuclear plants to prevent disasters and protect nearby communities.

Way forward:

- Nuclear power is crucial for India's energy security and sustainability.
- The government is focusing on SMRs, which are safer, more cost-effective, and suitable for areas with limited infrastructure, offering a promising future for nuclear energy in India.
- India should also focus on policy changes to allow **private sector participation in R&D**, and ensuring a clear nuclear liability and safety framework to attract investment.

India's Core Sector Output Slips to Nine-Month Low in August 2024

Context

Recently, India's core sector output recorded its first contraction in three and a half years. It shrank by 1.8% year-on-year, marking a nine-month low for core sector output.

- The Index of Core Industries (ICI), which contributes 40% to the broader Index of Industrial Production (IIP), dropped to 155.8,

a 4.2% fall from July, continuing a three-month trend of sequential decline.

Sector-wise Performance:

- **Coal** and **electricity** output: Coal production fell by 8.1% and electricity generation by 5%.
- **Steel** output grew by 4.5%, but this was the slowest pace in 26 months.
- **Fertilizer** production saw a 3.2% rise, while **cement** output dropped 3%, marking its worst performance in nine months.
- **Refinery products** saw a 1% decline, the second contraction in three months.
- **Natural gas** production fell by 3.6%, marking its second consecutive monthly decline.
- **Crude oil** output contracted for the third month in a row, with a 3.4% drop.

Analysis and Outlook:

- The slowdown in output has been attributed to the **base effect** of the 13.4% growth witnessed last year.
- The delayed withdrawal of the monsoon has also impacted the core sector performance in September.
- Moreover, the weak output in cement and steel indicates reduced construction activity in Q2 of 2024.

About Core sector in India:

- The core sector plays a key role in defining the overall health of the Indian economy.
- The sector comprises of eight key industries: **coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement, and electricity**.
- The core sector industries creates a multiplier effect in the economy due to

its interconnections with other sectors. Even a small change in the core sector will drastically impact the entire economy.

Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI):

- The ICI is released by the **Office of the Economic Adviser (OEA)**, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), and Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- It is computed once in every month.
- The ICI comprises various components that collectively reflect the performance and vitality of India's industrial sector. These components include: Coal, Electricity, Crude Oil, Cement, Natural Gas, Steel, Refinery Products, Fertiliser.

ISRO's first Venus Mission

Context:

Recently, ISRO planned its first Venus mission- the Venus Orbiter Mission (VOM), to be launched in March 2028. The mission also was approved by the Union Cabinet.

Highlights:

- The launched is scheduled on **March 29, 2028**.
- It is estimated that it will take **112 days** to reach Venus, with an expected arrival date of **July 19, 2028**.

About the mission:

- The Venus Orbiter Mission (VOM), also known as **Shukrayaan**, is a mission to study the atmosphere of Venus.
- The spacecraft will be launched aboard **Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM-3)**.

- Upon arrival, the spacecraft will enter a **500 km x 60,000 km elliptical orbit** around Venus.
- After 6-8 months, ISRO will use **aerobraking techniques** to gradually bring the spacecraft into a **200 km x 600 km low-altitude science orbit**. This phase will last for five years, enabling detailed studies of the planet.
- **Aim:** The mission aims to study Venus's **atmosphere, surface, and its interaction with the Sun**.
- Key goals include:
 - **Solar irradiance and solar wind interaction**
 - **Dust examination** in Venus's atmosphere.
 - **High-resolution mapping** of the planet's topography.
 - Study of the **solar X-ray spectrum** near Venus.
 - Analysis of **Venusian airglow** and subsurface characteristics.
- **Payloads:** The mission will carry **19 payloads** in total—**16 Indian payloads**, two collaborative payloads involving Indian and international partners, and one **international payload**.

High-Performance Buildings (HPBs)

Context:

With the increase in the global efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to bring sustainability in the building sector, it is important to address energy efficiency in growing urbanizing areas.

- According to Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Indian building accounts for **30%** of national energy use and

around **20%** of the country's carbon emissions.

- The article highlights the adopting the concept of **High-Performance Buildings (HPBs)**

Dimensions of the Article:

- What Are High-Performance Buildings (HPBs)?
- HPBs and the Future of Sustainable Construction
- Significance of HPBs
- Conclusion

What Are High-Performance Buildings (HPBs)?

- High-Performance Buildings are those that aims to deliver a **higher level of energy efficiency performance** through its unique way of construction that incorporates various strategies, techniques, tools, and materials to ensure that, upon completion, the building will **consume a minimal amount of energy for heating, cooling, illumination, and ventilation** during operation.
- It helps in regulating **Green house gas** reduction.
- **Green buildings** and HPBs are often used interchangeably but HPBs go one step beyond as they aim for exceptional results, using advanced technologies and design strategies to optimize performance in real-time.
- HPBs focus on three main areas- **Energy Efficiency, Water Management, Occupant Well-being**.
- It uses **Building Management Systems (MBS)** that monitors the building's performance in real-time and

allows operators to make adjustments that reduces energy and water use.

- Examples of HPBs- Unnati in Greater Noida, Indira Paryavaran Bhawan in New Delhi, Infosys Campus, Bengaluru.

HPBs and the Future of Sustainable Construction

- HPBs are designed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and operational needs, which makes them ideal for a future where flexibility and sustainability are essential.
- Incorporation of smart systems like **AI** into HPBs is becoming more common. For example, smart systems can modulate lighting and temperature based on occupancy patterns or weather conditions, ensuring optimal energy use while improving occupant comfort.
- In real estate market, HPBs are seen as **forward-thinking development** and they signal a transition from age-old construction towards a future where buildings are not just structures but ecosystems that promote the well-being of occupants and the environment.

Significance of HPBs

- **Environmental Impact:** HPBs are closely linked with the concept of net-zero buildings. They can significantly reduce energy and water consumption, thereby lowering carbon emissions. They also operate with minimal reliance on fossil fuels that contributes to resource conservation by incorporating sustainable materials, minimizing waste, and promoting water efficiency.
- **Economic Growth and Resilience:** As it reduces operational costs through energy efficiency and smart resource management, on a long-term they save a lot of money for owners and tenants.

These buildings are also designed to be adaptive, ensuring they can continue operating efficiently even in the face of external challenges.

- **Social and Health Benefits:** Features like superior indoor air quality, optimal thermal comfort, and natural lighting contribute to healthier living and working environments.
- **Meeting India's Urbanization and Climate Goals:** The adoption of HPBs can help India meet its climate goals and its urbanizing population's needs. These buildings will also help India meet its commitments under the Paris Agreement to reduce carbon emissions. By promoting the construction of HPBs, India can also meet global benchmarks for energy efficiency and carbon emissions, positioning itself as a leader in sustainable urban development.

Conclusion:

HPBs represent India's commitment in developing sustainable structures for the growing urban population. Alongside meeting the social needs, it also satisfies the country's environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

Rationalization of Centrally Sponsored Schemes & National Mission on Edible Oils–Oilseeds

Context:

Recently, the Union Government rationalized **18 centrally sponsored schemes (CSS)** and approved **National Mission on Edible Oils–Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds)** to streamline agricultural development and reduce India's dependency on edible oil imports.

Key highlights:

- Rationalization is a strategic approach by the central government to consolidate agricultural schemes into broader umbrella schemes.
- All CSS under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare** have been grouped into two main schemes:
 - **Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY)**
 - **Krishonnati Yojana (KY)**
- The main objective behind Rationalization:
 - To ensure food security and being self-sufficiency in agriculture sector.
 - Address issues like nutrition security, climate resilience, and value chain development.
 - To eliminate multiple scheme-specific approvals and bring a single integrated Annual Action Plan (AAP) to streamline the approval process.
- India's Oil seed production:
 - India stands **4th** globally in oilseed production by contributing **10%** to the global output.
 - Top oilseed-producing states: **Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.**
- Soil Health Management
- Rainfed Area Development
- Agro-Forestry
- Crop Diversification
- Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana
- Agricultural Mechanization including Crop Residue Management
- Per Drop More Crop (Irrigation Efficiency)
- Accelerator Fund for Agri-Startups.

2. Krishonnati Yojana (KY):

- Krishonnati Yojana focuses on addressing food-security and to bring self-sufficiency in agriculture. It also aims to address challenges on climate resilience.
- The scheme also focuses on bringing private sector involvement in agriculture in the oilseed value chain.
- Comprehensive Strategic Document: States are empowered to create state-specific strategies to improve agriculture, focusing on crop production, climate resilience, and developing value chains.

National Mission on Edible Oils– Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds)

- The initiative is launched by the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**, which is set to run from **2024-25 to 2030-31**.
- Main objective: Improving domestic production of oilseeds and reducing over-reliance on imports.
- It also seeks to expand oilseed cultivation by an additional 40 lakh hectares, targeting fallow lands and promoting intercropping.

Key Features of the Schemes:

1. Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY):

- PM-RKVY aims Promotes sustainable agricultural practices across India.
- Components of the yojana:

- **NMEO-OP (Oil Palm):** It aims to increase edible domestic oil production by to 25.45 million tonnes and to increase crude palm oil production to **11.20 lakh tonnes by 2025-26.**

Significance

1. **Focused Implementation:** It helps the governments to prepare personalized strategies and policies to meet the specific requirements in the agriculture sector.
2. **Self-Sufficiency:** The initiative in a way tries to achieve **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in the edible oil sector, as it aims to boost domestic production through advanced technologies, value chain development, and strategic crop expansion.
3. **Economic and Environmental Benefits:** Reducing imports and focusing on domestic production will help save country's foreign exchange. It also promotes sustainable farming practices and efficient use of resources.

- **Demis Hassabis** and **John Jumper** were awarded for their role in developing **AlphaFold 2**, an **AI-based model** that can predict the structures of millions of proteins. This achievement drastically improved upon previous methods, which had only determined around 1.7 lakh protein structures through human effort.

- AlphaFold's ability to predict the complex structures of proteins revolutionized the field of molecular biology and has broad implications for drug discovery and disease understanding.

- **Heiner Linke**, chair of the Nobel Committee for Chemistry, emphasized how these discoveries bridged the gap between a protein's amino acid sequence and its structure.

- The **2024 Chemistry Prize** is notable for being awarded relatively soon after the corresponding work (4-6 years) compared to the typical gap of decades.

- This prize also highlights a continuing trend of **non-chemists** winning in this category, showcasing the broad influence of chemistry across scientific disciplines.

2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Context:

Recently, The **2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry** was jointly awarded to **David Baker**, **Demis Hassabis**, and **John Jumper** for their contributions to protein structure research.

Highlights:

- **David Baker** was honored for his work in **computational protein design**. He led a team in 2003 that developed new proteins using custom software, enabling the creation of **designer proteins** tailored for specific applications.

TRAI Releases Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicator Report for April-June 2024

Context:

Recently, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) published its "Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicator Report" for the quarter ending June 2024.

Key Highlights of the report:

1. **Internet Subscribers:**

- Total internet subscribers has been increased from 954.40 million in March 2024 to 969.60 million, of which, 42.04 million were wired, and 927.56 million were wireless subscribers.
- The broadband subscribers touched 940.75 million showing a growth of 1.81%. Meanwhile, narrowband subscribers decreased to 28.85 million.

2. Tele-density:

- Overall Tele-density: Increased from 85.69% to 85.95%.
- Urban Tele-density: Slightly decreased from 133.72% to 133.46%.
- Rural Tele-density: Increased from 59.19% to 59.65%.

3. Financial Performance:

- Gross Revenue (GR): Declined by 2.16% to Rs. 86,031 crore.
- Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR): Marginally increased by 0.13% to Rs. 70,555 crore, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 7.51%.
- License Fee: Increased to Rs. 5,645 crore, growing by 0.14% from the previous quarter.

4. ARPU (Average Revenue Per User):

- Overall ARPU for Wireless Service: Increased by 2.55% to Rs. 157.45.
- Prepaid ARPU: Rose to Rs. 154.80, while postpaid ARPU saw a smaller rise to Rs. 189.17.

5. Usage Trends:

- Minutes of Usage (MOU): Decreased by 2.16% to 974 minutes per subscriber per month for wireless services.

- Data Consumption: Average wireless data usage per subscriber per month was 21.30 GB.

6. DTH and Broadcasting:

- Pay DTH Services: The total active subscriber base grew to 62.17 million, a slight increase from the previous quarter.
- FM Radio: There are 388 operational private FM radio channels, with no change from the previous quarter.

7. Public Wi-Fi:

- Wi-Fi Hotspots: The number of public Wi-Fi hotspots across the country was 1,64,909, with 13,094 TB of data consumed during the quarter.

Conclusion:

This report highlights steady growth in India's telecom sector, especially in broadband internet and wireless data usage. Despite a slight decline in revenue in some areas, the overall sector shows resilience with a growing subscriber base and improvements in quality of service parameters.

Can India escape middle-income trap?

Context:

The **World Development Report 2024** by the World Bank highlights the "middle-income trap," where countries face slowing growth as they approach higher income levels.

- It focuses on how economies like India face challenges in transitioning from middle to high-income status and suggests strategies to overcome this trap.

Dimensions of the Article:

- India's Middle-Income Trap: What is it?
- Challenges for India to escape the middle-income trap
- Suggested Measures

India's Middle-Income Trap: What is it?

- It is a condition where a country's **growth slows down** after reaching a certain income level.
- For India, this is a major concern as it risks stagnation when per capita income reaches **11%** of the U.S. level.
- Over the past **34 years**, only a few middle-income countries have successfully broken out of this trap, highlighting the difficulty of reaching high-income status.

Challenges for India to escape the middle-income trap:

- **Stagnation in Manufacturing:** Manufacturing which was a main driver of economic growth for most of the developing countries is no longer growing due to some factors such as premature deindustrialization and very less export growth.
- **Wage Growth vs Inflation:** Despite economic growth, wage growth in India is not keeping pace. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), wages grew by only 5-7% between April and June 2023-24. This, coupled with inflation at around 5%, means real wage growth is stagnant, impacting workers' ability to benefit from economic growth.

- **Structural Reversal:** Instead of progressing towards a more industrial and service-based economy, India has seen a reversal, with more people returning to agriculture or low-productive jobs, especially post-pandemic. This hampers the overall productivity of the economy.
- **Power of Big Business:** India's economy is increasingly dominated by a few big business houses, many of which are seen as being close to the state. This concentration of power, without sufficient investments or innovation, limits the economy's potential to grow at a fast pace.

Suggested Measures:

- **Investment in Key Sectors:** India needs to significantly increase investment in its infrastructure, education, and healthcare sectors. Building a robust foundation for growth requires not just physical investment, but also investment in human capital. Education, especially in technology and skills, is essential to drive innovation and productivity.
- **Encourage Innovation and Technology Adoption:** To move forward, India must focus on fostering innovation by adopting new technologies. It needs to create a conducive environment for domestic firms to innovate and compete on a global level. South Korea's success story of blending state intervention with innovation can serve as a lesson here.
- **Strengthen Democracy and Governance:** One key difference between past success stories and India's path is the role of democracy. South Korea and Chile were able to push their agendas under authoritarian regimes, but India must maintain its democratic framework. Strengthening governance, ensuring transparency,

and promoting fair competition are crucial for sustainable growth.

2024 Forest Declaration Assessment Report

Context:

Recently, Forest Declaration Assessment report, 2024 was released. It highlighted the state of global deforestation.

Key Findings:

- **Deforestation Levels:** The report highlights that global deforestation in 2023 was nearly **50% higher than the steady progress** required to achieve zero deforestation by 2030. The target set for the previous year was to limit global deforestation to a maximum of 4.4 million hectares (10.9 million acres), but current rates remain 45% above this threshold.
- **Tropical Regions Affected:** **96%** of all deforestation occurred in tropical regions, with nearly all these areas failing to meet their annual targets. In 2023 alone, tropical deforestation emitted approximately 3.7 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent.
- **Forest Loss:** The world lost 6.37 million hectares of forest in 2023, a 45% increase compared to the 2030 elimination target. Of this, primary tropical forests—crucial for carbon storage and biodiversity—accounted for a loss of 3.7 million hectares.
- **Forest Damage:** The report highlights that forest damage, which does not equate to complete destruction, is ten times more detrimental than deforestation itself, impacting 62.6 million hectares in 2022.
- **Drivers of Deforestation:** The main contributors to deforestation across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean include agriculture, road

construction, fires, and commercial logging.

- **Positive Developments:** On a more optimistic note, Brazil has managed to reduce its deforestation by 9% compared to previous levels, demonstrating that significant progress is achievable. Other countries, including Australia, Colombia, Paraguay, Venezuela, and Vietnam, have also made strides towards the 2030 deforestation target.
- **Biodiversity Concerns:** The loss of **Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)** remains alarming, with over 1.4 million hectares of forest lost in 2023. Protecting these areas is vital for the wildlife and Indigenous communities that rely on them.
- **Forest Fires:** Since 2001, **138 million hectares** of tree cover have been lost to fires, with about a third of this loss occurring between 2019 and 2023.

Recommendations for Action:

The report outlines several steps that global actors can take to achieve forest protection goals, including:

- Ensuring **adequate funding** for forest conservation efforts.
- **Reducing the demand for products** contributing to deforestation.
- Recognizing the **vital role of Indigenous and local communities** in forest preservation.

Conclusion:

The challenges highlighted in the 2024 Forest Declaration Assessment underscore the interdependence of forest conservation and sustainable economic development. Governments, industries, and civil society should prioritize forests and integrate sustainable practices at all levels.

Fairwork India Ratings 2024

Context:

Fairwork India Ratings 2024 was released recently

About the Fairwork India report:

- The report analysis work conditions of platform workers on digital labour platforms in India. (Platform workers are those whose work is based on online software apps or digital platforms).
- It examined 11 platforms - Bigbasket, Flipkart, BluSmart, Ola, Porter, Swiggy, Uber, Urban Company, Amazon Flex, Zepto and Zomato.
- The report examines platforms on 5 major parameters: Fair pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, and Fair Representation.

The Gig Economy:

- The gig economy has emerged as a significant phenomenon in the modern world of work, characterized by its reliance on **temporary and independent work** arrangements.
- Gig workers, as outlined by the **Code on Social Security, 2020**, encompass individuals engaged in **work outside traditional employer-employee** relationships.
- Several factors have catalyzed the expansion of the gig economy:
 - a. **Flexibility in Work Location:** The digital age has liberated work from fixed locations, enabling global talent sourcing and project-specific engagements.
 - b. **Shift in Work Approach:** The millennial generation's

inclination towards fulfilling work rather than conventional careers has altered workforce dynamics.

- c. **Start-up Ecosystem:** Start-ups' preference for contractual freelancers for non-core activities has increased gig work's prevalence.

OpenSAFELY

Context:

Recently, Professor Ben Goldacre and his team from the University of Oxford created OpenSAFELY, a platform that enables access to data of 58 million people in UK, by also upholding privacy standards.

About OpenSAFELY:

- It is a **transparent, secure and an open-source software platform** that records health data electronically.
- All data in OpenSAFELY, being publicly logged are available for **scientific review and efficient re-use**.
- Any code submitted by researchers becomes publicly visible, preventing manipulation of data or results through practices like **"p-hacking,"** where researchers might alter their methods to achieve specific outcomes. This openness ensures that the analysis is clear, reproducible, and trustworthy.
- It provides access to health data of over **58 million people** in UK by protecting their individual privacy.

National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):

- Under this mission, all medical details of the person like **prescriptions, treatment, diagnostic reports and discharge**

summaries of every Indian is integrated under a **Health ID card**.

- It operates under **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)** and is implemented by the **National Health Authority**.
- The people decide to give **one-time access** to their data during their visit to the doctors.
- The access to **confidential medical data** will have to be given separately for each visit due to fears over data confidentiality.
- It aims to provide **remote access** to healthcare services through tele-consultations, e-pharmacies, and other health benefits.

Global Digital Compact

Context

The article discusses about **Global Digital Compact (GDC)**, a non-binding diplomatic initiative by the United Nations aimed at setting shared goals for the governance of digital technologies.

Dimensions of the Article

- About the GDC
- What are Digital Public Goods?
- Concerns with the GDC

About the GDC

- Global Digital Compact (GDC) is a set of shared goals for **governments, private institutions, and stakeholders** to guide their digital governance policies.
- It is **not binding** on the parties but rather a diplomatic instrument for the stakeholders to keep in mind.

- It is similar to other **UN-led initiatives** like the Global Compact for Sustainable Development and Migration.
- The GDC believes that digital technologies offer immense benefits for achieving global development goals but they also present challenges such as data privacy, inequality, and responsible AI governance.
- To address these, the GDC promotes global cooperation based on human rights, sustainability, and responsible use of digital tools.

What are Digital Public Goods?

- These are **digital tools and services** like **open-source software, open data, and AI models** that are accessible to everyone.
- They aim to **gap digital divide** by providing essential services through shared digital infrastructure.
- The GDC suggests that the development of such goods is crucial for promoting social progress, especially in underdeveloped or marginalized communities.
- By making technology accessible, the GDC envisions a world where digital tools foster sustainable development and inclusivity.

Concerns with the GDC

- **Public-Private Partnerships and Openness:** The Public-Private Partnerships often face transparency issues due to legal constraints intellectual property and confidentiality, potentially limiting the openness envisioned by the GDC.
- **Self-regulation of Big Tech:** The GDC's expectations on companies to regulate themselves to protect users and build trust has been criticized as ineffective. Attempts to self-regulate have failed to address critical issues

such as misinformation, data privacy violations, and monopolistic practices.

- **Data Privacy Risks and Interoperability:** As many countries have not upgraded their regulatory systems are weak, the risk of misuse of personal information is more.
- **Corporate Control Over Data:** The GDC proposes more involvement of corporate entities in the governance of data. While corporations play a key role in the digital ecosystem, giving them more power without checks and balances raises concerns about monopolistic control. There is a risk that large corporations could dominate the digital economy, limiting competition and innovation.

Way Forward

- **Data privacy:** The countries and the stakeholders should implement strong data privacy to protect individual rights.
- **Promoting Fair Competition:** GDC should enforce antitrust laws and should promote fair practices in the digital sector to curb monopolistic control by large corporations. This will also help small firms compete with larger companies.

Launch of LSAM 12 (Yard 80)

Context:

On October 10, 2024, the Indian Navy celebrated the launch of the **Missile Cum Ammunition Barge, LSAM 12 (Yard 80)**.

- This vessel is the **sixth** in a series of eight barges constructed as part of an initiative to strengthen the Navy's logistical capabilities.
- The project is being carried out by **M/s SECON Engineering Projects Pvt Ltd**

(SEPPL), an MSME Shipyard based in Visakhapatnam.

- The launch ceremony took place at **M/s Vinayaga Marine Petro Ltd** in Mira Bhayandar, Maharashtra, and was presided over by **Commodore MV Raj Krishna**, CoY (Mbi).

Key Highlights of LSAM 12 Launch:

- **Enhancing Naval Capabilities:** The launch of LSAM 12 is part of a broader project aimed at improving the Indian Navy's operational logistics. These barges will be essential for transporting ammunition and supplies to naval platforms, both at jetties and in outer harbours, thereby enhancing the Navy's readiness and efficiency.
- **Indigenous Manufacturing:** The barges are **indigenously designed and built** in accordance with the naval regulations set by the **Indian Register of Shipping**. This reflects the success of the 'Make in India' initiative, which aims to promote self-reliance in defence production.
- **Technological Testing:** The design of the barge underwent model testing at the **Naval Science and Technological Laboratory in Visakhapatnam**, ensuring the highest standards of quality and performance.
- **Contract and Timeline:** The contract for building these eight barges was signed between the **Ministry of Defence (MoD)** and **SEPPL** on February 19, 2021. The completion of LSAM 12 marks significant progress in this strategic project.

Conclusion:

With the launch of **LSAM 12**, the Indian Navy moves closer to completing its series of **Missile Cum Ammunition Barges**, ensuring enhanced logistical support for maritime operations.

Ensuring a proper social safety net for the gig worker

Context:

The article discusses about Gig workers and the need to provide social protection to them. It also throws light on the Union Ministry of Labor and Employment's initiatives to secure the interests of the Gig community.

Dimensions of the Article

- The Gig Economy
- Gig Economy's Significance in India:
- Understanding Gig Workers and the Social Security Gap
- The Proposed Law for Gig Workers
- Labor Codes and Gig Workers
- Major concerns

The Gig Economy:

- The gig economy has emerged as a significant phenomenon in the modern world of work, characterized by its reliance on **temporary and independent work arrangements**.
- Gig workers, as outlined by the **Code on Social Security, 2020**, encompass individuals engaged in **work outside traditional employer-employee relationships**.
- Several factors have catalyzed the expansion of the gig economy:
 - a. **Flexibility in Work Location:** The digital age has liberated work from fixed locations, enabling global talent sourcing and project-specific engagements.

- b. **Shift in Work Approach:** The millennial generation's inclination towards fulfilling work rather than conventional careers has altered workforce dynamics.
- c. **Start-up Ecosystem:** Start-ups' preference for contractual freelancers for non-core activities has increased gig work's prevalence.

Gig Economy's Significance in India:

- **Blue and White-collar Contributions:** The gig economy significantly **contributes to both blue-collar and white-collar** employment sectors.
- **Projected Economic Contribution:** The gig economy's potential to provide **90 million jobs** in non-farm sectors and contribute **1.25% to the GDP** is crucial in achieving India's economic goals.
- **Government Initiatives:** NITI Aayog's report highlights the expected expansion of India's gig workforce to 2.35 crore by 2029-30.

Understanding Gig Workers and the Social Security Gap

- Gig workers fall under the **grey zone** (outside formal labor protection). **And** although economy is rapidly expanding, they lack social security like health insurance, retirement savings, and protection under traditional labor laws.
- Aggregators like **Uber** and **Ola** benefit from these workers but often categorize these workers as **independent contractors**, avoiding legal obligations.

The Proposed Law for Gig Workers

- The government is planning to bring in for companies (aggregators) to contribute **1%-2%** of their revenue to a social security fund.
- It is also planning to register gig workers under **national portal (e-Shram)** to access benefits.
- The setting up of **welfare boards** and **dispute resolution mechanisms** to protect worker rights is also one of the proposals.

2. **Extend Full Social Security Benefits:** The gig workers should be brought under the social security net to allow them to access maternity leave, minimum wage and other safety measures.
3. **Outside examples:** India can learn from the UK Supreme Court's ruling on Uber, where Uber drivers were classified as workers, and the company had to comply with labor laws.

Labor Codes and Gig Workers

- India has already simplified its labor laws by merging 29 central labor laws into four codes: **wage, social security, industrial relations, and occupational safety.**
- The **Social Security Code 2020** recognizes gig workers and places them in the informal sector but without extending any formal benefits.

Major concerns:

- There does not exist a clear definition of what constitutes a Gig Worker.
- The **Social Security Code 2020** places them outside the traditional employer-employee relationship, which leaves them vulnerable.
- Gig workers do not enjoy **maternity leave, minimum wages, or workplace safety** regulations.
- The lack of clear relationship between gig workers and aggregators, allows aggregators to evade legal responsibilities.

Way Forward

1. **Define Employment Relations Clearly:** The government should draft a policy that clearly defines gig workers and draws a clear demarcation between them and the aggregators.

A food-sufficient India needs to be hunger-free too

Context:

Due to the various reasons like the ongoing global conflicts, climate change and the economic slowdown, the goal to end hunger and food security by 2030 as a part of the SDG goals seems far out of reach.

Dimensions of the Article

- Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: A Global Challenge
- Economic Access and Unaffordability of Healthy Diets
- Unhealthy Diets in India: The Hidden Crisis
- Global Hunger Index and India's Performance

Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: A Global Challenge

- The major global contributor of the food insecurity and malnutrition is the lack of access to and the affordability of healthy diets. Although a country is food sufficient, it will still be facing malnutrition if the available food does not meet the dietary needs of its population.

- According to recent global hunger assessments, the percentage of undernourished individuals is rising especially in **Africa** and **Asia**. About 757 million people (9.4% of the global population) in 2023—were undernourished.
 - Africa has **20.4%** of people facing hunger.
 - **8.1%** in Asia.
 - **6.2%** in Latin America.
 - **7.3%** in Oceania.
- Food may be available in abundance, but the affordability and nutritional quality remains a concern. For example, rural populations and the few urban areas like Slums and semi-urban areas are disproportionately affected due to limited economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and poor access to markets.
- **Gender Disparity is another aspect of food insecurity**. Most often, women face higher levels of hunger and malnutrition than men. Women tend to eat last and least in many cultures, particularly in poorer households, making them more vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies.

- In India, despite efforts like **"Thalinomics"** to ensure affordable meals, food security and access to healthy diets remain unequal across regions.
 - Thalinomics," - refers to the economics of a simple Indian meal or "thali," attempts to measure the affordability of food in India
- According to recent studies, in 2011, **63.3% of the rural population** could not afford a required diet even if they spent **100% of their income** on food. This means that more than half a billion people in rural India are not getting the nutrition they need.

Unhealthy Diets in India: The Hidden Crisis

Economic Access and Unaffordability of Healthy Diets

- Rising costs of healthy diets have reduced the ability of purchasing quality food. Recent data highlights that the global average cost of a healthy diet was **\$3.96 per person per day**, measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars. made them unaffordable for billions, particularly in low-income countries.
- Purchasing power plays a significant role in food access. Despite the decrease in global numbers of people unable to afford a healthy diet, many still lack adequate nutrition.
- Indian diets, especially among the wealthy, are often unhealthy, with a lack of protein-rich foods and an over-reliance on processed foods. Studies show that even the richest **5%** of Indian households consume far less protein-rich food than they should.
- The affordability issue is not the only factor; lack of awareness, availability, and acceptability of healthy foods are major concerns.
- Even the richest in India consume less balanced diets, indicating that the challenge lies in promoting nutrition education and better access
- The EAT-Lancet Reference Diet The EAT-Lancet Commission, a scientific review of what constitutes a healthy diet, suggests that a diet rich in plant-based foods, moderate in animal-sourced foods, and low in processed foods is ideal for both human health and the environment.
 - However, the cost of following such a diet in India is prohibitively high, especially for low-income households.

- In South Asia, the reference diet could cost as much as 60% of the average daily household income, making it unaffordable for a large segment of the population.

Global Hunger Index and India's Performance

- The **Global Hunger Index (GHI)**, which measures hunger based on child mortality, undernutrition, and stunting, has faced criticism for not focusing solely on hunger but rather on broader indicators of malnutrition. However, regardless of the criticisms, India's low ranking reflects a serious issue with both food security and nutrition.
- According to recent data, **only 3.2%** of the Indian population does not get the minimum of 60 meals per month, equivalent to two meals a day. This suggests that while hunger in its most basic form (lack of food) may not be as widespread, the issue of malnutrition and poor-quality diets is still prevalent.
- A significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas, still lacks access to balanced meals. The government's food security programs, like the Public Distribution System (PDS), focus primarily on providing basic staples like rice and wheat, but these alone cannot meet the nutritional needs of the population.

Way Forward

- **Improve Access to Healthy Diets:** Address both affordability and availability by regulating food prices, promoting local food production, and enhancing distribution systems.
- **Strengthen Nutrition Education:** Increase awareness of the importance of balanced diets, especially among the wealthier population, to reduce the reliance on processed foods.

- **Enhance Food Security Programs:** Build on existing social schemes to make sure vulnerable populations have consistent access to nutritious food, and integrate food banks and anti-waste campaigns to ensure no one goes hungry.

Three AI Centres of Excellence in Healthcare, Agriculture, and Sustainable Cities

Context:

Recently, the Centre has announced the establishment of three Centres of Excellence (CoEs) focused on artificial intelligence (AI) in key sectors: healthcare, agriculture, and sustainable cities.

- These CoEs are expected to drive innovation, research, and job creation in their respective fields, in collaboration with industries and start-ups.

Details of the Centres of Excellence (CoEs):

- The CoE in healthcare will be led by the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)** and the **Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi**. It will focus on applying AI to enhance healthcare delivery, medical research, and patient care, aiming to provide cutting-edge solutions for India's healthcare system.
- The **IIT Ropar** in Punjab has been chosen to lead the CoE focused on agriculture. This centre will leverage AI to address challenges in Indian agriculture, such as precision farming, crop management, and sustainable agricultural practices, thus improving productivity and efficiency.

The **IIT Kanpur** has been tasked with developing the CoE in sustainable cities. This centre will explore AI-driven solutions for urban development, focusing on sustainability, smart city infrastructure, and efficient resource management to make Indian cities more livable and environmentally friendly.

Objective and Significance:

- The AI-CoEs aim to serve as solution providers in their respective fields, creating job opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship.
- The **Union Budget for 2023-24** had allocated **₹990 crore** for these CoEs over a five-year period (2023-28). To ensure effective implementation, an apex committee with significant industry representation has been set up, co-chaired by **Zoho's founder-CEO, Sridhar Vembu**.

Conclusion:

The establishment of these AI-CoEs marks a significant step in India's journey toward becoming a global leader in AI technology. With a strong focus on healthcare, agriculture, and sustainable urban development, the CoEs are poised to deliver innovative solutions, create job opportunities, and promote multidisciplinary research, ultimately contributing to the nation's growth and development in the AI space.

Karnataka Government to impose cess on transactions made on aggregators platforms

Context:

The Labour department of the Karnataka Government is planning to impose

additional cess on transactions made on aggregators platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Dunzo, etc.

Highlights:

- The labour department highlighted that the money collected through cess shall be used for the **Welfare fund for Gig Workers**.
- The department also clarified that the cess will be charged **only on the transport** and not on the products or the goods that the consumers purchase.
- The draft notification for the **Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024** will include the implementation of a fee, referred to as the **"Platform-based Gig Workers Welfare Fee"**, levied on aggregators in order to establish "The Karnataka Gig Workers Social Security and Welfare Fund".
- Once the bill is approved, the platforms will collect the fee ranging from (1-2%) and transfer it directly to the welfare board.

Who are Gig Workers?

- Gig workers are individuals who engage in **temporary, flexible jobs**, often facilitated through **digital platforms** or apps.
- These workers include app-based cab drivers, delivery personnel, freelancers, and other independent contractors who perform tasks on a project-by-project basis.
- Gig work provides flexibility and independence but often lacks job security, benefits, and protections found in traditional employment.

Gig Economy's Significance in India:

- **Blue and White-collar Contributions:** The gig economy significantly

contributes to both blue-collar and white-collar employment sectors.

- **Projected Economic Contribution:** The gig economy's potential to provide **90 million jobs** in non-farm sectors and contribute **1.25% to the GDP** is crucial in achieving India's economic goals.
- **Government Initiatives:** NITI Aayog's report highlights the expected expansion of India's gig workforce to 2.35 crore by 2029-30.

What is Cess?

- A cess is a tax on tax.
- It is generally used for a **specific purpose**. Example, **cess on education**.
- Unlike Surcharge, Cess applies to all taxpayers.
- One important feature of cess is that it is **not a permanent revenue source** for the Government. Once the purpose for which the cess is levied is completed, it is removed.

On climate finance to developing nations

Context:

The article discusses the state of economically developing countries which are amongst the most vulnerable to climate change and the need to fight against it.

Dimensions of the Article:

- What is Climate Finance?
- Why developing countries need them?
- Suggested Measures and the Way Forward

What is Climate Finance?

- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** defines Climate Finance as a **local, national, or transnational fund**, which is sourced from **public, private, or alternative streams**, that mainly seeks to help mitigate climate change.
- In simpler terms, it is that fund which a country utilizes to deal with climate change by reducing emissions or adjusting to the impacts.
- Since, it is difficult for the developing countries to balance development and climate action, the developed countries contribute in the form of grants and loans.
- This flow of funds from the developed nations to developing nations are published by the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**.

Why Developing Countries Need Climate Finance

- Generally, developing countries have smaller domestic financial systems relative to their GDPs and face higher costs of capital which makes it difficult to balance development and climate action.
- Developing nations are exposed to the severe impacts of climate change like **rising sea levels, droughts, and extreme weather events**. Considering their limited resources to tackle these problems, and, since, their dependency on **climate-sensitive sectors** like agriculture, and other activities, they are among the hardest hit as compared to developed nations.
- According to the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**, developed nations have been

responsible for 57% of emissions since **1850**, while the developing world continues to bear the brunt of the consequences.

- Climate finance helps developing nations to balance between economic growth and climate action.
- In 2009, Developed nations committed to providing **\$100 billion** a year by 2020 to aid developing countries.
 - While that goal has not yet been fully realized, it's clear that external funding is crucial for countries with competing priorities.

Suggested Measures and the Way Forward

- With the COP29 approaching, the new climate finance target- **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)** must be more ambitious, ensuring that these funds are actual disbursements, not just promises.
- For instance, India has a target to reduce emissions and boost renewable energy and generate **500 GW** of power from non-fossil fuel sources and produce **five million metric tonnes of green hydrogen** annually, by 2030. For this ambitious dream to come true, India needs consistent and reliable funding.

The case for a nature restoration law in India

Overview:

The article - "**The case for a nature restoration law in India**", discusses about India's environmental crisis and how its land is getting affected by degradation. It also talks about the possible measures

especially to frame a nature restoration law much like the European Union's Nature Restoration Law (NRL).

Dimensions of the Article:

- About land degradation
- India's Environmental and Economic Case
- Suggested Measures

1. About land degradation:

- It is a process in which the **value of a biophysical or biochemical environment** is affected by a combination of **natural or human-induced** processes acting upon the land.
- In simple terms, it is a negative trend in land condition that is caused by either **direct or indirect human-induced processes** including **anthropogenic climate change**, which results in **long-term reduction or loss** of at least one of the following: **biological productivity, ecological integrity or value to humans**.
- It is a global problem.
- In India, **29.7%** of its land (**97.85 million hectares**) is classified as degraded by 2019 and is still worsening in states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Rajasthan.

2. India's Environmental and Economic Case

- India's key economic sectors like Agriculture, services, industry, renewable energy, etc depend on healthy ecosystems for its functioning.
- Agriculture, which covers most of India's landscape is more vulnerable.

- Land degradation results in less productivity and acts as a threat to National food security.
- India's water bodies, especially major rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna, are suffering from pollution and obstruction. Urban spaces, too, are losing their green cover, exacerbating heat islands and declining air quality in cities like Delhi and Bengaluru.
- Restoring degraded lands can generate millions of jobs, boost agricultural productivity, and improve water security.
- Moreover, restoring ecosystems will help India meet its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement, as healthy ecosystems act as effective carbon sinks.

3. Suggested Measures

- India should work on framing and implementing nature restoration laws like the one in EU.
- Alongside implementing this law, India could also set a target to **restore 20%** of its degraded land by 2030, aiming for full ecosystem recovery by **2050**.
- The focus should be on **restoring forests, wetlands, agricultural lands, rivers, and urban green spaces**.
- Wetlands such as the **Sundarbans** and **Chilika Lake**, which play a crucial role in biodiversity and carbon sequestration, should receive special attention.
- Similarly, restoring major rivers and promoting sustainable agricultural practices would go a long way in reversing ecosystem degradation.

Cobenfy

Context

Recently, the U.S. **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** approved a new antipsychotic drug, to treat schizophrenia named Cobenfy.

What is Schizophrenia?

- It is a **serious psychiatric disorder** that affects a person's capability to **think, feel and behave**.
- It typically develops in **late adolescence or early adulthood** between the ages of **16** and **30**, and currently affects about one in every hundred people.
 - Usually men are more likely to develop this disorder than women, and they tend to experience symptoms.
 - Schizophrenia is often associated with social isolation, stigma, and a significantly shorter life expectancy due to related health issues like weight gain, smoking, and substance abuse.
 - Clinical symptoms fall into three categories:
 - Positive symptoms (like hallucinations and delusions).
 - Negative symptoms (such as lack of motivation or reduced emotional expression).
 - Cognitive impairments that affect memory and attention.

What is Cobenfy?

- Cobenfy is the **first antipsychotic drug** to treat **schizophrenia**.
- Unlike traditional medications, it works by targeting **cholinergic receptors**

rather than dopamine receptors, which has been the standard approach for decades.

- The drug is a combination of **xanomeline** and **trospium chloride** with very few common side effects.
 - **Xanomeline** - acts on muscarinic receptors
 - **Trospium chloride** - helps reduce the adverse effects of xanomeline.
- Common side effects: Nausea, Indigestion, Hypertension, and Dizziness.

Significance of Cobenfy's Approval

- Until the invention of Cobenfy, Schizophrenia was treated with drugs that block dopamine receptors, which often came with side effects like weight gain, sedation, and movement disorders.
- Since this new drug targets **cholinergic receptors** it opens up a new pathway for treating the condition.
- For the estimated 1% of people worldwide who will develop schizophrenia in their lifetime, this drug could mean fewer side effects and better control over their symptoms.

Venture capital fund

Context:

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved **₹1,000-crore venture capital fund** to support firms in the space tech domain.

What is Venture Capital?

- Venture capital (VC) is a form of **private equity investment** that supports **startups** and **early-stage**

businesses lacking access to capital markets or traditional loans.

- These companies are often too new, small, or asset-light to secure traditional financing, but they have significant growth potential.
- Although venture capital investments are high-risk, they offer investors the chance for substantial returns, making it a popular choice for funding innovative ventures.

How Does Venture Capital Work?

1. **Fundraising:** Venture capital firms gather money from a range of investors to form a fund, which is then used to invest in promising startups.
2. **Investment:** The venture capital firm identifies startups with high growth potential and invests capital, alongside strategic support, mentorship, and industry connections.
3. **Growth Stage:** With capital and guidance from venture capitalists, the funded companies aim to expand. Additional funding rounds may occur during this stage to support scaling.
4. **Exit:** The main goal of VC investments is to eventually "exit" with a high return. This is often achieved through an initial public offering (IPO) or a sale to a larger company, allowing venture capitalists to realize returns on their investment.

Indian online Gaming sector

Context:

Recently, **Digital India Foundation (DIF)** has recommended the government to establish a '**whitelist**' of compliant gaming companies, ensuring that payment gateways and internet service providers serve only the listed operators to curb money laundering.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Key Highlights of the report
- India's online gaming industry
- Factors that led to the growth of gaming industry
- Challenges of the Industry

Key Highlights of the report:

- The report points out that **money laundering is a major risk** to the success of the Indian online gaming sector.
- The report highlights the use of international online betting sites for money laundering and terror financing as a growing trend in cybercrime and recommends the government to create a '**whitelist**' compliance to gaming companies to ensure legitimacy.
- It advocates for the creating of a **dedicated task force** to target illegal operators and also to make Know Your Customer (KYC) practices more stronger.
- The report calls for action against **misleading advertisements** related to online gaming.
- **Growth of the Indian Real Money Gaming (RMG) Sector:** The Indian RMG sector has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **28%** between FY20 and FY23, with projected revenue of **\$7.5 billion** in the next five years.

India's online gaming industry:

- It is one of the **world's largest** and the **fastest** growing industry.
- The size of the gaming market in India in 2023 was valued at US\$2.2 billion, and is expected to grow to US\$8.6 billion by 2028.
- As of November 2023, there were about **538 million gamers** in India.

Factors that led to the growth of gaming industry:

- The **democratization of technology** has made affordable access to smartphones widely available, and the competitive pricing of mobile data plans has further facilitated its growth.
- India currently has a smartphone base of more than **680 Million**, of which more than 80% have 4G connection.
- With initiatives like **BharatNet** and the **National Broadband Mission**, the internet infrastructure and its connectivity especially in **Tier-2** and **Tier-3** cities have expanded making it feasible for the online gaming sector.
- Moreover, the government's regulatory framework under **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021** for have strengthened online gaming industries.

Challenges of the Industry:

- **Regulation:** Policy frameworks concerning online gaming differs from state to state creating uncertainty for the players. For example: Karnataka is more liberal as compared to Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Tax:** The recent introduction of 28% GST on the total face value of bets has created a problem for the industry , especially in the long-run. It would demotivate small gaming companies.

- **Addiction concern:** The problem of young generation especially below the age of 24 getting involved in gaming has detrimental affects of getting addicted to it.

Way forward:

- The government should regulate whitelist of compliant gaming companies to enhance transparency and restrict access for illegal operators.
- Meanwhile, frequent audits and verifications must be made to enforce Anti-Money Laundering (AML) standards across the gaming sector to reduce the risk of money laundering and terror funding.
- The users should also be made aware about the harmful effects of using illegal gaming platforms to make sure that they don't fall prey to fraudulent gaming operators.

Importing a toxic work culture into India

Context

After a recent incident of a Pune-based multinational consulting firm after one of its young employee in her twenties passed away due to work exhaustion, her mother attributes the tragedy to excessive work hours and strict deadlines that pushed her beyond her limits.

- The article discusses how the influence of multinational companies in India has brought new work norms, some of which are challenging for Indian employees.

Dimensions of the Issue

- Imported Work Culture and Its Impact

- Economic Impact vs. Work-Life Balance Challenges
- Characteristics of a good work culture

Imported Work Culture and Its Impact

- The often termed “**American work culture,**” brings a specific work ethic marked by long hours and relentless productivity targets, which emphasises dedication to work as a virtue.
- The effect of this was seen in India after the 1991 economic reforms, which opened doors for foreign firms.

Economic Impact vs. Work-Life Balance Challenges

- While the entry of foreign firms has fuelled job creation and boosted revenue, it has also introduced practices that are unhealthy.
- For instance, the Big Four consulting firms have taken on hundreds of assignments from the Indian government, generating significant revenue. But critics argue that these firms’ relentless drive for profit could come at the expense of employee well-being.
- Moreover, consulting firms operating in India increasingly prefer foreign expertise over local insights, which may undermine the potential for sustainable, India-centric solutions.

Characteristics of a good work culture

- Desirable work culture that has all shared **institutional values, priorities, rewards,** and other practices that foster inclusion, high performance, and commitment while still allowing diversity in thought and action.

- It promotes effective communication and helps in reducing conflicts among individuals/teams during work.
- A good work culture includes peer respect, recognition of hard work, and freedom to bring new ideas (innovation) that help the long term prospects of the organisation.
- A healthy work culture provides a platform for effective communication among the verticals and horizontals of the organisation, which helps in getting work done effectively.

Way Forward:

- The government should establish guidelines on work hours and stress management, particularly for Indian firms that operate offshore or international shifts.
- Ensuring fair labour practices within multinational firms and developing guidelines for workload expectations will be vital to creating a balanced environment where professionals can thrive without risking their well-being.