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AUGUST 2024

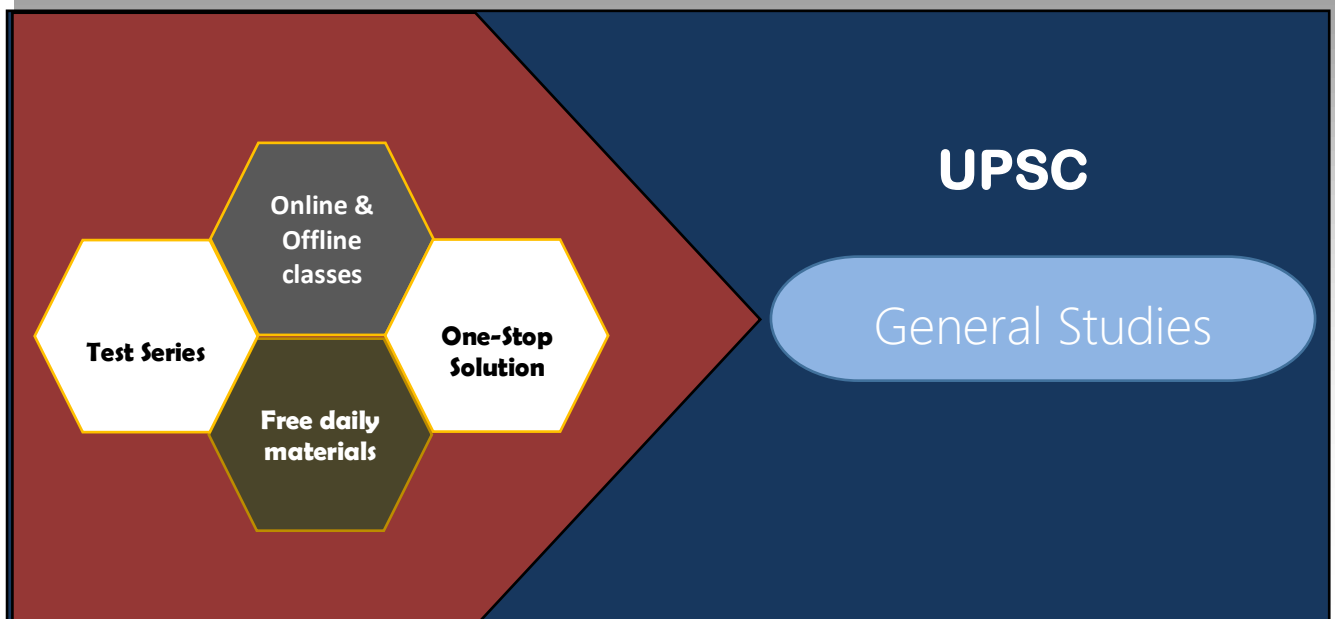
Monthly current affairs magazine

SHIKSHA

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THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**



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GS 1 : Heritage, culture ,Geography of the World and Society

1. Challenges of Indian Himalayan Range Towns

- **Himalayan towns face civic issues due to unique challenges, requiring tailored development, but they often lack the necessary funds and resources.**

Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)

- **Location-** It spans thirteen Indian states and union territories of India
 - Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, West Bengal, and parts of the northeastern states.
- **Geographical divisions-** They are divided into three main geographical entities
 - **Himadri** - Greater Himalaya
 - **Himachal** - Lesser Himalaya
 - **Sivaliks** - Outer Himalaya
- **Trans-Himalayan Ranges-** The northernmost ranges include the Karakoram Mountains, with the Zaskar and Ladakh ranges lying to the south.
- **Major rivers-** It is home to major rivers such as the Indus, Sutlej, Kali, Kosi, and Brahmaputra.
- These rivers are **glacier-fed** and **carve steep gorges** through the Himalayas to flow into the Great Plains.
- **Significance-** It provides water to a large portion of the Indian subcontinent and supports diverse flora and fauna.

Major issues in IHR Towns

- **Civic challenges** - Himalayan towns, including state capitals like Srinagar, Guwahati, Shillong, and Shimla, face significant issues with sanitation, solid and liquid waste management, and water supply.
- **Ineffective planning-** Planning institutions often fail because they adopt models designed for plains.
- **Resource shortage-** City governments are severely understaffed, with a 75% shortage in human resources.
- For example, in the Kashmir Valley, over 40 urban local bodies have only 15 executive officers, excluding Srinagar.

Government initiatives for IHR Towns

- **National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS)** - It focuses on research, technological innovation, and community-based solutions.
- They are tailored to the unique ecological and socio-economic conditions of the Himalayas.
- **Sustainable urban development Initiatives-** Programs like the Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) aims
- **Ecotourism initiatives-** Various state governments in the IHR have promoted ecotourism to balance economic development with environmental conservation.
- **Climate Resilient Infrastructure-** The government is investing in infrastructure projects resilient to climate change, such as flood control, landslide mitigation, and earthquake-resistant buildings in the Himalayan region.

2. Mass wasting in Tibet a cause for worry in India

- **Mass wasting** has increased in the **Sedongpu Gully, Tibetan Plateau**, since **2017** due to rapid warming.
- A geological event, **mass wasting** is the gravity-influenced movement of rock and soil down a slope.
- A **gully** is a landform created by erosion from running water, mass movement or both.

Sedongpu glacier:

- The **Sedongpu Gully**, in the catchment of the **Sedongpu glacier** and its valley, is **11 km long** and **covers 66.8 sq. km**.
- It **drains** into the **Yarlung Zangbo**, or the **Tsangpo River**, near where it takes a sharp turn- called the **Great Bend**- while flowing around **Mt. Namcha Barwa** (altitude 7,782 metres) and **Mt. Gyala Peri** (7,294 metres) to create a **gorge** 505 km long and 6,009 metres deep. This is **one of the deepest gorges on the earth**.
- The **Great Bend** is close to **Tibet's border with Arunachal Pradesh**, where the **Tsangpo** flows as the **Siang River**.
- In **Assam** further **downstream**, the **Siang** meets the **Dibang** and **Lohit** to form the **Brahmaputra**, which flows as the **Jamuna** in **Bangladesh**.

River Choking and Flash Floods:

- China plans to set up a **60-gigawatt project** on the **Tsangpo**, which will [have] **thrice the capacity of the Three Gorges project on the Yangtze**, the **world's largest hydropower plant**, raising concerns about **river choking** and **flash floods** in downstream areas.
- The **Brahmaputra**, one of the most **sediment-laden rivers**, already carries over **800 tonnes of sediment** at **Pandu** in **Guwahati**, increasing to **more than a billion tonnes** in **Bangladesh**.
- **Increased sedimentation** could **worsen flood hazards**, **cause river channels to choke**, and **affect livelihoods dependent on fishing**.
- **More than 700 million cubic metres of debris** have been **mobilised** since **2017** due to **warming** and **earthquakes**.

Patterns of Landslides:

- The **Sedongpu** study analysed **149 satellite images** from **1969** to **2023**, identifying **19 large mass-wasting events** in the gully.
- These events were categorized into **ice-rock avalanches (IRA)**, **ice-moraine avalanches (IMA)**, and **glacier debris flows (GDF)**.
- **Debris** from **IRAs** has **temporarily blocked** the **Tsangpo River**, leading to **catastrophic flash floods downstream**, such as those in **Arunachal Pradesh** and **Assam** in **2000**.

Mass Wasting:

- **Mass wasting**, or **mass movement**, involves the movement of rock or soil down slopes under the force of gravity.
- It differs from other **erosion processes** as the **debris is not transported** by a moving medium like **water, wind, or ice**.
- **Types of mass wasting** include **creep, solifluction, rockfalls, debris flows, and landslides**, each with unique characteristics and varying timescales, from seconds to hundreds of years.
- This process occurs on **terrestrial and submarine slopes** and has been observed on **Earth and other bodies** in the **Solar System**, including **Mars, Venus, and Jupiter's moon Io**.

3. Geological discoveries of moon by Chandrayan-3

- Recently, ISRO announced the significant discoveries about the moon based on the data from Chandrayan 3 Mission.

Characteristics of Moon

- **Moon** - It is Earth's only natural satellite that orbits around the Earth at an average distance of 384,400 km (238,900 mi).
- **Formation** - It was formed about 4.51 billion years ago.
- It formed out of the debris from a giant impact between Earth and a hypothesized Mars-sized body called Theia.
- **Physical parameters**
 - Mass - 1.2% of the Earth
 - Diameter - 3,474 km.
- **Physiography** - It is marked by rocky surface, mountains, impact craters, their ejecta, ray-like streaks, rilles.
- **Atmospheres** - It has a very thin atmosphere.
- **Rocky surface** - Moon was initially molten and the minerals in there slowly crystallised as the lava cooled to form rocks of various kinds and is now covered in lunar dust.
- **Uniformity in soil composition** - All 23 samples comprised mainly ferroan anorthosite, a mineral that is common on the Moon.
- It suggests that the topsoil near the landing site is fairly uniform.
- Aitken basin is one of the largest craters in the solar system, measuring 2,500 km across and 8 km deep.

Significance of the findings

- These findings are the first of its kind about the southern hemisphere of Moon.
- **Supports LMO hypothesis** - Lunar Magma Ocean theory states that when Moon was formed 4.5 billion years ago, it began to cool and a lighter mineral called ferroan anorthosite floated to the surface.
- The **lunar magma ocean theory** was first proposed by two independent groups in 1970, after rock collected during the 1969 Apollo 11 landing was analysed.
- Ferroan anorthosite rocks are very common on the earth and the earth contributed all the anorthosite found on the moon today.
- **Informs about Moon geological evolution** - APXS measurements will serve as the "first ground truth in the south polar highlands and play a key role in the overall understanding of the origin and evolution of the Moon.

4. Cauvery body seeks Centre's nod to conduct environment assessment

- **Karnataka's Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited (CNNL)** is seeking approval from the Union Ministry of Environment to proceed with an **Environmental**

Impact assessment (EIA) and develop an Environment Management Plan for the **Mekedatu balancing reservoir-cum-drinking water project**.

- **Tamil Nadu** is opposed to the project.

Mekedatu Project:

- It is a **multi-purpose** (drinking water and power) project proposed by **Karnataka**, which involves building a balancing reservoir near **Kanakapura** in **Ramanagara** district, **Karnataka**.
- It is about **90 km** away from **Bengaluru** and **4 km** ahead of the border with **Tamil Nadu**.
- The project is proposed at the confluence of the **Cauvery River** with its **tributary Arkavathi**.
- The plan involves building a **99-metre-high, 735-metre-long concrete gravity dam**, an **underground powerhouse**, and a **water conductor system**.
- The capacity of the **dam** is **66,000 TMC** (thousand million cubic feet) of water

River Cauvery (Kaveri):

- It is known as '**Ponni**' in **Tamil**, and it is the **fourth-largest river** in **southern India**.
- It is a **sacred river** of **southern India**. It rises on **Brahmagiri Hill** of the **Western Ghats** in **southwestern Karnataka state**, flows in a **southeasterly direction** through the states of **Karnataka** and **Tamil Nadu**, and descends the **Eastern Ghats** in a series of **great falls** and drains into the **Bay of Bengal** through **Pondicherry**.
- **Left Bank Tributary: Arkavathi, Hemavathi, Shimsa, and Harangi.**
- **Right Bank Tributary: Lakshmantirtha, Suvarnavati, Noyil, Bhavani, Kabini, and Amaravathi.**

5. Rationalizing Monuments of National Importance

- The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has started the rationalization process for delisting monuments of national importance.

Monuments of National Importance (MNI)

- **Monuments** - They are remains of our prestigious past, representing culture, art architecture and structural technology of bygone days.
- **MNI** - India has declared **3695 monuments and sites** as of national importance.
- Majority of these were inherited from a colonial-era list of protected monuments, along with others from the princely states.

- **Declaration** - Central Government issues a notification of its intention to declare any ancient monument as MNI by giving 2 months' notice, inviting views/objections from public.
- After considering the views/objections, the Central Government may declare by publishing a notification in the official gazette.
- **Administration** - It is **managed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act).
- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham, who is also regarded as the first Director General of ASI.

What is delisting of monuments and why it is recommended?

- **Delisting of monuments** - It refers to the process of removing a monument or heritage site from an official list of MNI.
 - In March 2024, ASI began delisting starting with 18 that could not be located.
- It does not necessarily mean the destruction of a monument but rather a reduction in its protection and conservation efforts.
- **Reasons for delisting** - The monument might have lost its historical or cultural significance or for changes in heritage laws or policies.
- If a monument is deemed irreparable or if preservation efforts are deemed unsustainable, it might be delisted.
- **Significance of delisting** - Removing MNI of colonial remnants can help in modernizing the list to better reflect current values and historical perspectives.

Way forward

- ASI should come up with substantive criteria and a detailed procedure for declaring monuments to be of national importance.
- ASI should publish a book of notifications with detailed information about the provenance of MNI.
- Monuments with local importance should be handed over to the respective states for their protection and upkeep.
- Allocation of funds for the protection of MNI should be increased.

6. Cultural Property Agreement

Recently, India and the US signed the first-ever 'Cultural Property Agreement' during the 46th World Heritage Committee hosted by India.

Cultural property

- **UNESCO defines** it as 'cultural property means property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science.'
- **Illicit trafficking** - Cultural properties are illegally excavated or exported from their country of origin for monetary gain.
- **Impacts of illicit trafficking** - It deprives people of their history and culture, it weakens social cohesion in the long term.
- It fuels organized crime and contributes to the financing of terrorism.
- The black-market trade in cultural property undermines legitimate sales and can harm the economy, particularly for communities dependent on cultural tourism.
- **Measures - 1970 UNESCO Convention** on 'Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property'.

Cultural Property Agreement

- **Historical background** - It is culmination of year-long bilateral discussions and negotiations held on the sidelines of the G20 culture working group meetings.
- It was negotiated by the state department under US law implementing the 1970 UNESCO Convention.
- **Umbrella convention** - This agreement is aligned with the under **Article 9 of 1970 UNESCO Convention**, both India and US are signatories to the convention.
- **Objectives** - It aims to prevent the illicit trafficking of antiquities and retrieval of antiquarian objects to their place of origin.
- It is to facilitate the quick seizure of Indian antiquities at US Customs and ensure their smooth repatriation to India.
- The list of items restricted for import in the US will be promulgated by the Government of the US.
- US shall offer to return to India any object or material on the Designate List forfeited to the Government of US.

7. Antarctica's Deep-winter Heatwave

- For the second time in two years, a record-breaking heatwave is sweeping through Antarctica at the height of its winter season.

Characteristics of Antarctica

- **Geography** - It is one among the seven continents of the Earth and contains the geographic South Pole.
- **Size** - It is the 5th largest continent.
- **Atmospheric parameters** - It is, on average, the coldest, driest, and windiest of the continents.
- It is mainly a polar desert, with annual precipitation of over 200 mm.
- **Temperatures** - It holds the record for the lowest measured temperature on Earth, -89.2°C (-128.6°F).
 - **Near the coast** - The temperature can exceed 10°C in summer and fall to below -40°C in winter.
 - **Over the elevated inland** - It can rise to about -30°C in summer but fall below -80°C in winter.
- **Source of water** - About 70% of the world's freshwater reserves are frozen in Antarctica.

Antarctica's deep-winter heatwave

- **Normal Deep-winter temperatures** - It usually vary between **minus 50 degrees and minus 60 degrees Celsius**.
- **Antarctica's Deep-winter heat wave** - For the second time in two years, a heatwave is sweeping through Antarctica at the height of its winter season.
- Heat wave is a period of abnormally high temperatures, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs.
- **Reasons** - It is mainly due to changes in atmospheric and Oceanic variables in the southern hemisphere especially Antarctica and in Southern Ocean.
- **Weakening of the polar vortex** - It a rare event that is only expected to occur once every two decades on average.
- **Polar vortex** is the band of cold air and low pressure systems that spins around the poles of the Earth in the stratosphere.
- The vortex that usually remains strong and stable during winter in the southern hemisphere keeps the cold air trapped over Antarctica and not letting hot air come in.

- This year, the stability of vortex has been disturbed by large-scale atmospheric waves (periodic disturbances in the fields of atmospheric variables).

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. 2024 is the tenth anniversary year of the Act East Policy (AEP).

- The AEP, which replaced the Look East Policy (LEP) in 2014, has laid the foundations for India's engagements with the East.

Act East Policy

- The Act East Policy (AEP) is an initiative by the Indian government, launched in 2014, to strengthen **economic, strategic, and cultural ties** with countries in the **Indo-Pacific region**, with a core focus on the **ASEAN nations**.
- It aims to enhance **regional connectivity, promote economic cooperation, and develop strategic partnerships** to bolster India's influence and integration in the region.
- The policy evolved from the earlier **Look East Policy of 1992, expanding its scope and strategic objectives**.

Key principles

- Develop strategic **security cooperation** and **strategic relations** in the Indo-Pacific.
- Strengthen India's **economic ties** and connectivity with the region through **increased trade and investment**.
- Boost historical **cultural ties**.
- **4C's of Act East Policy**: Culture, Commerce, Connectivity and Capacity building

India- ASEAN Strategic Partnership

- In 2012, ASEAN & India became **strategic partners**.
- ASEAN is India's **4th largest trading partner**.
- India set up a **separate Mission to ASEAN** and the **East Asia Summit** in Jakarta in April 2015 with a **dedicated Ambassador** to strengthen engagement with ASEAN and ASEAN-centric processes.

Achievements:

1. **Positioned India in the Indo-Pacific:** E.g., support for the Philippines on South China Sea dispute.
2. **Strengthened strategic partnerships:** India has upgraded its relations to a **strategic partnership** with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia and Singapore forging close ties with all countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
3. Enhanced links with **BIMSTEC and IOR.**
4. **Greater integration of Northeastern states** with ASEAN, e.g., India-Japan Act East Forum.

Challenges:

- Chinese economic influence in **ASEAN.**
- India's economic under-performance, e.g., **trade deficit of over \$43 billion.**
- The Act East Policy lies at the heart of India's initiatives in the Indo-Pacific which aims to strengthen economic, security and cultural ties with ASEAN and other regional partners in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)

- The Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology recently responded to a question regarding the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) in the Rajya Sabha.
- Under the scheme, around 7.35 crore candidates were enrolled and 6.39 crore were trained, out of which 4.78 crore candidates were certified as per the reply.
- Scheme was to bridge the digital divide, specifically targeting the rural population including the marginalized sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC) / Scheduled Tribes (ST), Below Poverty Line (BPL), women, differently-abled persons, and minorities.

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) :

- Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) is a Digital Literacy Scheme by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

The main features of the PMGDISHA scheme:

- The scheme was implemented only in rural areas i.e. Gram Panchayat/Village to cover 6 crore rural households.
- Only one person (14 - 60 years of age) per eligible household was considered for training.
- The beneficiaries were provided with 20 hours of training consisting of 5 modules namely (i) Introduction to digital devices, (ii) Operating digital devices, (iii) Introduction to the internet, (iv) Communications using the internet, (v) Application of internet (includes citizen centric services) and use of financial tools for undertaking digital cashless transactions.
- The training content was made available in 22 scheduled languages and English. This content was made available in both online and offline mode.
- In addition, keeping in view the thrust of the government on promoting cashless transactions through mobile phones, the content on digital wallets, mobile banking, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD), Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS), and PoS were included.

3. Sub Categorisation in Scheduled Caste Reservation

- Recently, the Supreme Court of India allowed the sub-categorisation of scheduled castes in reservations, allowing wider protection for underrepresented groups in a 6:1 landmark verdict.

Sub-Categorisation within Scheduled Castes

- The Supreme Court addressed whether sub-classification of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is permissible for the purpose of reservation.
- This ruling has crucial consequences for states that aim to provide broader protection to certain castes that are significantly underrepresented compared to the so-called dominant scheduled castes.

Significance of Recent Judgements

- **Graded Inequalities:** The principal argument for sub-categorisation of SCs has been the graded inequalities among SC communities.
 - The thrust of it has been that even among the marginalised, there are communities that have lesser access to basic facilities.
- **Unequal Representation:** Some communities are more backward and have less representation than others.
 - For instance, the Madiga community has claimed that the benefits, including that of reservation, meant for the SC category had been cornered by the Mala community, with the Madigas being left out.

□ **Legal Challenges:** The Supreme Court held that the **State did not have the power to unilaterally sub-categorise communities** in the list of SCs or Scheduled Tribes (STs). The Constitution has provided that these lists can only be made by Parliament and notified by the President.

□ **Data of socio-economic status:** The population data related to SC, ST, and OBC categories are not updated since the 2011 census. It hampers the objective and scientific basis for sub-categorisation.

Untouchability: The social and educational backwardness cannot be applied to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The special treatment is given to the SCs due to untouchability with which they have suffered since ages.

Conclusion

- The recent verdict allows state governments to sub-classify SCs for granting reservation benefits in admissions and public jobs. It overturns the earlier ruling that restricted such sub-categorization.
- It recognises the need to address the varying levels of disadvantage within the SC community and provides a more nuanced approach to reservation policies. It's a step toward ensuring equitable opportunities for all.

4. Challenges in Certifying Persons with Disabilities (PwD)

- The recent controversy about an IAS officer who allegedly faked her disability certificate has ignited a debate on the reservations granted to persons with disabilities (PwDs) and the disability certification process.

Who are persons with disabilities in India?

- **PwD** - Person with disability or Divyangjan means "a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others."
- **Person with benchmark disability** - It refers to a person with not less than 40% of a specified disability.

As per 2011 Census, number of persons with disabilities at 2.68 crores implying 2.21% of Indian population.

- India has passed the '**Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act**' in 2016 to entitle them with certain specific rights.

- It was passed to fulfill India's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by India in 2007.
- **21 disabilities** are recognized under the act.

Challenges by PwDs

- They face multiple barriers to their effective participation in society and the workforce.
- **Societal rejection** – Rejection by family and community and the deep rooted ableism.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure** – Lack of infrastructure in accessing public establishments and services.
- **Educational barrier** – Insufficient education models, inappropriate exam curricula and formats to meet the needs of various PwDs.
 - As per Census, 2011, literacy rate of the total PwD population is about 55% (male – 62%, female –45%).
 - Only about 5% of PwDs are graduate and above
- **Employment barrier** – Stigma and biases at the hiring stage and promotion hinders the labour participation of PwD

What lies ahead?

- Functional limitations, rather than medical percentages, should be the basis for assessment.
- Focus should be given to address the systematic issues.
- Increasing the infrastructural and human resource capability of state and district hospitals.
- Sensitizing the public officials about needs of persons with disabilities.
- Making the certification process more accessible.

5. Schemes implemented by the WCD Ministry clubbed into 3 Verticals

- For better implementation and efficient monitoring, all schemes implemented by the Ministry for the betterment of children have been consolidated into 3 verticals:
- These verticals aim to improve nutrition and health indicators, ensure safety and empowerment of women, and provide protection and welfare for children in difficult circumstances.

Scheme Details:

Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0 (Mission Poshan 2.0)

- The Anganwadi Services Scheme, POSHAN Abhiyaan, and Scheme for Adolescent Girls have been reorganized into three primary sub-verticals:

1. **Nutrition Support:** For POSHAN and Adolescent Girls.
2. **Early Childhood Care and Education:** Targeting children aged 3-6 years.
3. **Anganwadi Infrastructure:** Upgrading and modernizing Saksham Anganwadis.

Key Features:

- Fortified rice supplied to Anganwadi Centres to meet micronutrient requirements and control anemia among children.
- Emphasis on the use of millets for **Hot Cooked Meals** at least once a week and **Take Home Ration (THR)** at Anganwadi centers.

Mission Shakti

- **Sambal:** Focuses on the safety and security of women.
 - Includes schemes like One Stop Centres (OSC), Women Helpline (181-WHL), and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP).
- **Samarthya:** Aims at the empowerment of women.
 - Encompasses schemes like Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Ujjwala, Swadhar Greh (renamed as Shakti Sadan), Working Women Hostel (renamed as Sakhi Niwas), National Hub for Empowerment of Women (NHEW), and National Creche Scheme (renamed as Palna).

Mission Vatsalya

- **Objective:** To provide better outreach and protection for children in need of care in a mission mode.
- **Goals:**
 1. Support and sustain children in difficult circumstances.
 2. Develop context-based solutions for the holistic development of children from varied backgrounds.
 3. Encourage innovative solutions through green field projects.
 4. Facilitate convergent action by gap funding if required.

6. SC upholds Tamil Nadu's Arunthathiyar Quota Law

- Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutional validity of the Tamil Nadu Arunthathiyar Reservation Act, 2009, which provides preferential treatment to the Arunthathiyar community within the Scheduled Castes (SC) category.
- This landmark judgment has significant implications for social justice and reservation policies in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, where caste dynamics play a crucial role in politics and governance.

Arunthathiyar Reservation Act

- The Arunthathiyar Reservation Act was enacted by the Tamil Nadu State Legislature to address the social and educational backwardness of the Arunthathiyar community, which is classified under the Scheduled Castes.
- The Act reserves 16% of the seats allocated for SCs in educational institutions and government jobs specifically for Arunthathiyars.
- This reservation aims to uplift a community that has historically faced marginalization and underrepresentation in various sectors.
- The Act defines the Arunthathiyar community to include several castes recognized under the SC category, such as Arunthathiyar, Chakkiliyan, Madari, Madiga, Pagadi, Thoti, and Adi Andhra.
- The introduction of this reservation was a response to sustained demands from the Arunthathiyar community for greater representation and opportunities in education and employment.

Supreme Court's Judgement

- The Supreme Court's decision was delivered by a seven-judge bench, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, with a majority ruling of 6:1.
- The court affirmed that sub-categorization within the SCs is a constitutional necessity to achieve substantive equality.
- The judgment emphasized that the principle of sub-classification is applicable when the social positions of different castes or groups within the SC category are not comparable.
- The court's ruling addressed the critical question of whether states have the authority to sub-classify Scheduled Castes based on their social and educational status.
- The judgment recognized that such classification is essential for ensuring that the benefits of reservation reach the most marginalized groups within the SC category.

Challenges Ahead

- While the Supreme Court's ruling is a victory for the Arunthathiyar community, challenges remain in the implementation of the reservation policy.
- The state government must ensure that the benefits of the reservation reach the intended beneficiaries and that the community is adequately represented in educational institutions and government jobs.
- Moreover, the ruling may face challenges from other SC communities that may feel disadvantaged by the sub-classification.

- It will be crucial for the Tamil Nadu government to manage these dynamics carefully to maintain social harmony and ensure that the reservation policy is effective in achieving its intended goals.

Conclusion

- The Supreme Court's upholding of the Tamil Nadu Arunthathiyar Reservation Act, 2009, marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing discourse on caste-based reservations in India. By recognizing the need for sub-categorization within the Scheduled Castes, the court has reinforced the principles of social justice and equity. This ruling not only benefits the Arunthathiyar community but also sets a precedent for similar initiatives across the country.

7. Rising Role of India in Global health Governance

- With changes to the International Health Regulations and the continuation of talks for a Pandemic Treaty, the recent World Health Assembly signaled a major advancement in the governance of global health. The treaty's adoption is still up in the air, though.
- The main source of conflict is the sharing of diseases and associated benefits; developing nations want fair access to diagnostics and vaccinations made from their genetic resources. To safeguard its interests in these negotiations, India, a significant actor in global health, needs to participate actively.

Lack of Global Census on the Pandemic Treaty

- **Equity Access** - The question of fair access to medications, treatments, and diagnostics during pandemics is at the center of the dispute. While high-income nations are reluctant to join such legally binding agreements, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are demanding assured access to a large share (at least 20%) of these resources.
- **Intellectual Property Rights and Property Transfers** - The management of technology transfer and intellectual property (IP) rights is a significant area of disagreement. LMICs are pushing for policies that would ease the transfer of technology and expertise to support domestic manufacturing of vaccines and medical supplies.

India's Role in Global Healthcare Efforts

- **Pharmaceutical Manufacturing** - India should concentrate on developing and modernizing its pharmaceutical production capacities in order to guarantee a steady supply of reasonably priced medications and vaccines around the world. Putting money into R&D will be essential to advance from generics to innovative drug discoveries in the pharmaceutical value chain.
- **Digital Health and Telemedicine** - India can establish itself as a pioneer in health technology by making the most of its digital health efforts, especially the National Digital Health Mission. To further cement this leadership, developing nations should pool their knowledge of creating and executing large-scale digital health systems.

Way Forward

To move forward, it is crucial for India to actively engage in the ongoing negotiations for the Pandemic Treaty, advocating for equitable access to diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines derived from genetic resources. By leveraging its strengths in pharmaceutical manufacturing, digital health, and traditional medicine, India can play a pivotal role in shaping global health policies. Additionally, fostering international collaborations, investing in research and development, and promoting affordable healthcare models will be essential for India to ensure its interests are safeguarded and to contribute significantly to global health security and equity.

8. SC upholds Tamil Nadu's Arunthathiyar Quota Law

- Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutional validity of the Tamil Nadu Arunthathiyar Reservation Act, 2009, which provides preferential treatment to the Arunthathiyar community within the Scheduled Castes (SC) category.
- This landmark judgment has significant implications for social justice and reservation policies in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, where caste dynamics play a crucial role in politics and governance.

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- **Intellectual Property Rights and Property Transfers** - The management of technology transfer and intellectual property (IP) rights is a significant area of disagreement. LMICs are pushing for policies that would ease the transfer of technology and expertise to support domestic manufacturing of vaccines and medical supplies.
- **One Health Approach** - Reactions to the implementation of the One Health approach—which acknowledges the relationship between environmental, animal, and human health—have been conflicting. This comprehensive strategy is well-supported by many high-income nations, while other LMICs see it as an extra pressure on their already limited resources.
- **Geopolitical Tensions** - Deeper geopolitical conflicts and a lack of trust between states lie at the root of these technical problems. The Covid-19 epidemic, historical injustices in the regulation of global health, and the emergence of bioterrorism have strengthened north-south divides and stoked mistrust.

India's Role in Global Healthcare Efforts

- **Pharmaceutical Manufacturing** - India should concentrate on developing and modernizing its pharmaceutical production capacities in order to guarantee a steady supply of reasonably priced medications and vaccines

around the world. Putting money into R&D will be essential to advance from generics to innovative drug discoveries in the pharmaceutical value chain.

- **Digital Health and Telemedicine** - India can establish itself as a pioneer in health technology by making the most of its digital health efforts, especially the National Digital Health Mission. To further cement this leadership, developing nations should pool their knowledge of creating and executing large-scale digital health systems.
- **Traditional Medicine and Integrative Healthcare** - India ought to support the integration of evidence-based research in ancient medical systems, such as Ayurveda, with contemporary healthcare. India may become a recognized leader in this area by spearheading international efforts to standardize and regulate practices related to traditional medicine.

Way Forward

- To move forward, it is crucial for India to actively engage in the ongoing negotiations for the Pandemic Treaty, advocating for equitable access to diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines derived from genetic resources. By leveraging its strengths in pharmaceutical manufacturing, digital health, and traditional medicine, India can play a pivotal role in shaping global health policies.
- Additionally, fostering international collaborations, investing in research and development, and promoting affordable healthcare models will be essential for India to ensure its interests are safeguarded and to contribute significantly to global health security and equity.

10. Internationalisation of Education in India

- The latest trend of increasing number of Indian students studying abroad and the decline in foreign students in India have led to a \$6 billion deficit in the country's current account balance.
- **Internationalization of education** - It is the ability for teaching and learning to be increasingly involved with international cultures in order to enhance globalized learning.
- **Significance** - Internationalisation of higher education promotes sharing of best academic and research practices through interactions between diverse education systems.
- It helps in developing global citizens through mobility of students and scholars

How education impacts BoP of India?

- **Education and BoP** – Education related expenses by students affects the forex reserve.
- **Forex** means foreign exchange reserves, which are assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies. It includes foreign currencies, government bonds, treasury bills, and other government securities. It facilitates International Trade and Payments for imports and service its external debt.
- **Increased outflow of Indian students** – Over the past decade, education related travel expense has **more than doubled**, rising from \$2.46 billion in FY15 to \$6.3 billion in FY24.
- There are multiple factors contributing to this trend such as
 - Rise in income level of Indian middle class
 - Better employment opportunities with higher wages outside India
- **Decreased inflow of foreign students** – The travel to India by foreigners for education purposes has **more than halved** from \$519 million in FY15 to \$247 million in FY24.
- **Reduced foreigners' spending in India**– The foreigner's spending on education in India started declining sharply before the pandemic began.
- This can be corroborated by the fact that foreign spending in FY18 was \$479 million, which fell to \$186 million in FY19.

Steps taken by India to internationalise education

- National Education Policy 2020 focusses on internationalisation of education in India.
- **Academic collaboration** – University Grants Commission has issued regulations on academic collaborations between Indian and foreign higher education institutes (HEIs), offering dual and/or joint degrees.
- It had also brought about guidelines regarding the establishment of the Office for International Affairs in HEIs to serve as a single point of contact for facilitating foreign students.
- **Foreign universities in India** – Highly ranked foreign universities have also been allowed to set up their campuses inside India.
- This allows domestic students to avail of the internationally relevant and quality curriculum without going outside India.

Way forward

- Efforts need to be taken to improve the quality of government run higher education in India.
- Regulate the cost of quality education offered at private universities.

11. QUAD Foreign Minister's Meet 2024

Recently, the Quad Foreign Ministers met in Tokyo to reaffirm their commitment to the international order and enhance stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

QUAD

- **QUAD-** Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is an informal strategic forum of security.
- **Establishment-** It was established in 2007, which was first proposed by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
- The group met for the first time in 2007 on the sidelines of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- **Objectives-** To keep Indo-Pacific Sea routes free from military or political influence and counter Chinese dominance.
- To promote a rules-based global order, freedom of navigation, and work for a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.
- **Members-** USA, India, Australia, and Japan.

Key affirmations in the meeting

- **UN Charter-** It reviewed progress from previous Quad meetings, reaffirming commitment to the UN Charter, a free and open Indo-Pacific, and sustainable development goals.
- **Women participation** - They affirmed the important role of women and girls in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding.
- **Health Security** - As part of commitment under the **Quad Health Security Partnership**, the Quad efforts in 2024 include training for public health specialists from Southeast Asia to build capability to respond to regional health emergencies.
- **Emerging technologies-** It also focused on critical and emerging technologies (CET), and cyber security.
- They welcome the establishment of the **Quad Cyber Ambassadors Meeting** and intend to accelerate their capacity building projects such as
 - The conference on cyber capacity building in the Philippines
 - The forthcoming **Quad Cyber Bootcamp in India**.
- **Space technologies** - They recognized the essential contribution of space-related applications and technologies in the Indo-Pacific.
- We call upon all States to contribute to the safe, peaceful, responsible, and sustainable use of outer space.
- **Climate crisis** - They recognized the urgent need to address the climate crisis and recall their commitment to the Quad Statement of Principles on Clean

Energy Supply Chains in the Indo-Pacific, and the Clean Energy Supply Chains initiative.

12. Who are aldermen and why was their nomination by the Delhi L-G been challenged?

- Fifteen months after reserving its verdict, the Supreme Court held on Monday (August 5) that the Centre-appointed Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) has the power to nominate 'aldermen' to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers from the Delhi Government.

Details:

- The **bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and P.V. Sanjay Kumar** held that the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 (DMC Act) gives the Delhi L-G the 'explicit' power to nominate aldermen without any requirement to consult the Council of Ministers, and held that the nomination of 10 aldermen in January 2023 was a valid exercise of power.
- In January, the Delhi L-G nominated 10 aldermen by invoking his powers under Section 3 of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 (DMC Act). However, with the legality of the nomination in question, key functions of the MCD came to a halt.
- The Delhi L-G under Section 3 the DMC Act is empowered to nominate 10 aldermen who must be above 25 years of age and "have special knowledge or experience in municipal administration". Though the aldermen do not have the right to vote in the MCD meetings, they play a crucial role in the functioning of the house through the Ward Committee.

Why Supreme Court ruling on L-G bid to appoint MCD aldermen will hold high stakes for AAP, BJP

- Though the Mayor is the nominal head of the MCD, the Standing Committee effectively manages the functions of the corporation, and it cannot be constituted without the alderman participating in the voting process.
- Without this committee, the MCD cannot perform crucial functions, including entering into contracts involving more than Rs. 5 crore expenditure, appointing MCD officers to key positions, recommending budget revisions, or approving any exercise of power involving expenditure beyond the current year.

Why is the nomination of aldermen in question?

- **Article 239AA** of the Constitution of India contains special provisions for the **National Capital Territory of Delhi**. Crucially, it provides for the creation of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, the Council of Ministers which comprises members of this assembly, and the offices of the Chief Minister and the Delhi L-G.
- The article states that the Council of Ministers and the Chief Minister will “aid and advise the Lieutenant Governor in the exercise of his functions in relation to matters with respect to which the Legislative Assembly has power to make laws, except in so far as he is, by or under any law, required to act in his discretion”.
- The assembly has the power to make laws on all subjects in the State List except for laws that govern ‘Public order’ (entry 1), ‘Police’ (entry 2) and ‘Land’ (entry 18).

What did the court rule?

- The bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and P.V. Sanjay Kumar referred to the five-judge bench decision in **Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2023)** to arrive at its decision. In 2023, the apex court held that Parliament would have the power to legislate over subjects in the State List as well, when it comes to the NCT of Delhi. In this case that would include passing laws over ‘**local government**’, which is subject under the State List and would cover the DMC Act.

13. Anti-Defection Law: Features, limitations and reforms

- Numerous examples in recent time exist in the history of Parliament and State Assemblies where MPs or MLAs have defected from their party. These activities often led to the frequent falling of governments.

Anti-Defection Law

- The **52nd Constitutional Amendment** introduced the anti-defection law through the **Tenth Schedule** in **1985**. It aimed at **tackling political defections** destabilizing governments, especially **after the 1967 general elections**.
- According to this Schedule, a **member of the State Legislature** or the **House of Parliament** who **voluntarily resigns from their political party** or **abstains from voting** in the House contrary to the party’s instruction **may be removed** from the House.
- This **voting instruction is issued by the party whip**, a member of the parliamentary party nominated by the political party in the House.

Process of Disqualification under Anti-Defection Law

Petition:

- **Any member of the House** can initiate the process by filing a petition/complaint with the Speaker (Lok Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha) alleging defection by another member. The **Presiding Officer CANNOT initiate** disqualification proceedings **suo moto** and can only act upon a formal complaint.

Deciding Authority:

- The **Speaker** of Lok Sabha, the **Chairman** of Rajya Sabha, or the State Legislative Assembly decides disqualification petitions under the anti-defection law.
- **Timeframe:**
 - The law **does not specify** a strict timeline for the decision, which has led to criticism due to potential delays.
- **Judicial Review:**
 - The decision **can be challenged** in courts, ensuring a system of checks and balances.
 - The landmark judgment in **Kihoto Hollohan vs. Zachillhu and Others (1992)** upheld the constitutionality of the anti-defection law and affirmed that decisions regarding disqualification are subject to judicial review.
- **Exceptions:**
 - No disqualification if **1/3rd members** of the legislature party **split to form a separate group** (provision **DELETED by the 91st Amendment in 2003**).
 - **Mergers of political parties are allowed** when **2/3rd of the members** of a legislative party agree to merge with another party.

Recommendations on Reforming the Law

- **Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990):**
 - Disqualification should be limited to cases of voluntarily giving up membership or voting/abstention contrary to the party direction only in specific motions.
 - Decision on disqualification should be made by the President or Governor based on the advice of the Election Commission.
- **Law Commission of India (2015):**
 - Proposed shifting the power to decide disqualification petitions from the Presiding Officer to the President or Governor based on the advice of the Election Commission.

14. Bill to amend Waqf law proposes sweeping changes, rename Act

- The **Waqf (Amendment) Bill**, set for introduction in the Lok Sabha, also aims at renaming the Waqf Act, 1995, as the **Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act, 1995**.
- A bill to amend the law governing Waqf boards has proposed far-reaching changes in the present Act, including ensuring the representation of Muslim women and non-Muslims in such bodies.

About New Bill:

- Introduced the '**district collector**' in the Act and has given the post some powers to resolve disputes related to the Waqf Act.
- The draft Bill says that the word "Waqf" will be substituted with "Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development" in the principal act enacted in 1995.
- "Any government property identified or declared as Waqf property, before or after the commencement of this Act, shall not be deemed to be a Waqf property.
- The new Bill has also given powers to the district collectors to settle any disputes between the Waqf Board and the government and says: "If any question arises as to whether any such (identified as Waqf) property is a Government property, the same shall be referred to the Collector having jurisdiction who shall make such inquiry as he deems fit, and determine whether such property is a Government property or not and submit his report to the State Government."
- In case the Collector determines the property to be a Government property, he shall make necessary corrections in revenue records and submit a report in this regard to the State Government.

Waqf Board Act:

- The Waqf Board Act was first enacted in 1954 and was later replaced by the Waqf Act of 1995.
- **Legislative framework** that regulates Waqf properties in India.
- Waqf properties are those that are donated for religious or charitable purposes under Islamic law.
- The Waqf Boards Act provides provisions to manage and designate properties as Waqf and establish a Central Waqf Council for oversight. The act aims to protect the interests of the Muslim community by ensuring that Waqf properties are used for charitable and religious purposes.

- The **Waqf Board Amendment Bill 2024** seeks to introduce necessary **changes** to enhance its effectiveness while making the composition of boards more inclusive **through revisions to Sections 9 and 14**.

15. Guidelines for Organ Transport across the Country

- The Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has **issued a set of guidelines for the transportation of live human organs**.
- The transport protocols aim to **ensure the expeditious movement of life-saving organs** from the point of harvest to their destination through effective use of available infrastructure.
- **The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994**, allows harvesting of organs from living donors or brain-dead patients with the consent of family members.

Guidelines

- The instructions made it clear that human organs for transplant would be transported **only within the territory of India** and no organ shall be transported outside the country.
- While transporting the organs by air (commercial/non-commercial aircraft/helicopter/ air ambulance etc., except drones), the box containing the organ **should be screened** without opening it but passengers carrying it shall not be exempted from pre-embarkation security checks.
- It would be the responsibility of the airport officials **to define a green path** (free from obstruction) and a trolley for the organ box from the ambulance to the aircraft at the point of origin and from the aircraft to an ambulance at the destination.
- The flight captain may request Air Traffic Control to accord **priority take-off and landing** for the aircraft and also make an in-flight announcement about the carriage of a live human organ onboard.
- When organs are transported by road, **a green corridor** may be provided on the request of the concerned authorities/agencies.
- **A nodal officer** from the police department may be appointed to handle issues related to the **creation of green corridors in each State/city**.

16. National Coastal Mission Scheme

- Recently, the Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change informed the Lok Sabha about the National Coastal Scheme.

National Coastal Mission Scheme:

- It was **launched in 2014**.
- It has been envisaged under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change**.
- It aims to address **impact of climate change** on coastal and marine ecosystems, infrastructure and communities in coastal areas through a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures
- It is under the **National Coastal Management Program** is implemented with the following components:
 - **Management Action Plan** on Conservation of Mangroves and Coral Reefs
 - Research & Development in Marine and Coastal ecosystem
 - Sustainable Development of Beaches under Beach Environment & Aesthetic Management Service
 - **Capacity Building / Outreach Programme** of Coastal States/UTs on conservation of marine and coastal ecosystem including beach cleaning drive.
- **Implementation:** The implementing agencies of NCM are the **State Governments** of Coastal States and **Union Territory (UT) Administrations**.

Key facts about National Action Plan on Climate Change

- It was formally launched on **June 30th, 2008**. The NAPCC identifies measures that promote development objectives while also yielding co-benefits for addressing climate change effectively.
- There are eight “National Missions” which form the core of the NAPCC. They focus on promoting understanding of climate change, adaptation and mitigation, energy efficiency and natural resource conservation.”
- The **eight missions are:**
 - National Solar Mission, National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency, National Mission on Sustainable Habitat, National Water Mission, National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, National Mission for a Green India, National Mission for Sustainable

Agriculture, National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change.

17. Nandini Sahakar Yojana

- The Minister of Cooperation has provided some information about the **Nandini Sahakar Yojana**.
 - NCDC has cumulatively disbursed financial assistance amounting to Rs. 6426.36 crore for the development of cooperative societies exclusively promoted by women across the country.

Nandini Sahakar Yojana

- The Nandini Sahakar Scheme was initiated by the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) in 2010**.
- It is a **women-focused framework** providing **financial assistance**, project formulation, hand-holding, and capacity development.
- The scheme aims to **assist women cooperatives** in undertaking business model-based activities under the purview of NCDC.

Features of the Scheme

- Any cooperative society with at **least 50% women as primary members** and a minimum of three months in operation is eligible to apply.
- Assistance is provided in the **form of credit linkage** for infrastructure term loans and working capital, along with subsidies or interest subvention from other government schemes.
- There is **no minimum or maximum limit on financial assistance** for projects by women cooperatives.
- NCDC offers a **2% interest subvention on its rate of interest** on term loans for new and innovative activities.
- A **1% interest subvention** is provided **on term loans for all other activities**, resulting in lower borrowing costs for women cooperatives.

18. Supreme Court to review PMLA verdict

- The Supreme Court has postponed its review of the decision to uphold key provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) to August 28.

Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA)

- The **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA)** is a crucial legislative framework in India aimed at **combating money laundering and related financial crimes**.
- The PMLA was enacted by the Parliament of India and came into **force on July 1, 2005**. It was introduced to **prevent money laundering and provide for the confiscation of property** derived from or involved in money laundering.

How is a Judgment Reviewed?

- The **Supreme Court can review** its judgments or orders under **Article 137** of the Constitution.
- A review petition **must be filed within 30 days of the judgment**. Typically, review petitions are heard through written submissions (“circulation”) by the same judges who passed the original verdict, rather than in open court.
- Reviews are **granted on narrow grounds to correct grave errors causing a miscarriage of justice**. One common ground is “a mistake apparent on the face of the record,” which must be glaring and obvious, such as reliance on invalid case law.

Way forward:

- **Enhanced Transparency and Documentation:** To address concerns about the **adequacy of case presentation by the accused**, there should be a mandate for providing all essential documents such as FIRs, charge sheets, case diaries, and prosecution documents to ensure a fair trial process.
- **Clarification of ED’s Powers and Procedures:** Amendments to the PMLA should **clearly define the scope and limits of the Enforcement Directorate’s powers**, ensuring that ED officers are given appropriate procedural guidelines and oversight mechanisms to prevent misuse of penal powers and uphold due process.

19. Opposition parties prepare to move no-confidence motion against Vice-President

- As many as **50 Opposition MPs**, sources said, have signed a resolution to bring a **no-confidence motion** against Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar under **Article 67(B) of the Indian Constitution**.

How is the vice president elected?

- The Vice President shall be elected by the members of an electoral college consisting of the **members of both Houses of Parliament** in accordance with the **system of proportional representation**.
- Members of the state legislative assembly **do not participate in the vice president election**.

Process of removal of the Vice President

- **Article 67** of the Indian constitution provides for the **removal of the vice president**.
- The Vice President can be **removed from office before the completion of his term**.
- There is **no need for a formal impeachment** for removal of the Vice president.
- He can be removed by a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the **Rajya Sabha (Effective Majority)** and agreed to by the **Lok Sabha (Simple Majority)**.
- It must be noted here that the **effective majority in India is only a type of special majority and not a separate one**.
- Further, this **resolution** can be introduced **only in the Rajya Sabha and not in the Lok Sabha**.
- But, no such resolution can be moved **unless at least 14 days advance notice** has been given.
- If the Opposition moves such a resolution, it will be the **first such occasion in Indian parliamentary history**.

Why is the opposition bringing the resolution?

- The **Opposition complained** that Congress president and the **Leader of the Opposition** in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge's **microphone is routinely turned off**.
- The problems **generated on the floor of the House should be sorted there** but opposition members are told **to visit the Chairman** in his chamber for making any complaint.
- The third accusation that the Opposition has made against the Chairman is on his **personal remarks against members**.
 - **Rule 238(2) of the Rajya Sabha** clearly states that a member while **speaking shall not make a personal charge against a member**.

20. No population Census - in the dark without vital data

- Despite growing concerns, India's decadal Census has been delayed by over three years. In fact, there is an overwhelming misconception among officials

about substituting the Census with alternative ways and means of counting the population.

Significance of Calculating Census

- **Comprehensive Population Data:** The Census provides a detailed population count, which includes **locational, familial, and individual information**.
 - **For instance,** the Census can reveal insights into **population density, age distribution, educational attainment, and employment status**.
- **Foundation for Surveys and Indicators:** The Census acts as a foundational frame for large-scale surveys like the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)** and **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**.
- **Support for SDG Monitoring:** In the context of **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, Census data is crucial for **generating accurate indicators**, particularly those requiring disaggregated data below the sub-national level.

Changes to understand before taking Census Count

- **Population Dynamics:** Since the last Census, significant changes in population count and composition must be understood, including shifts due to migration, fertility, and mortality rates.
 - **For example:** In India, the average annual growth rate of the population has slowed from **2.2% in 1971 to 1.1% in 2021**, with projections indicating further declines to **0.58% by 2036**.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** The pandemic has had a profound impact on health, employment, and livelihoods, which need to be accurately captured in the Census.
 - **For example,** The Indian government reported over **500,000 COVID-19 related deaths**, which have **affected overall mortality statistics and health indicators**.
- **Socio-economic Transformations:** Changes in education, occupation, and employment patterns over the last decade are crucial to understanding current societal trends.
 - **For example,** The literacy rate in India has improved significantly, rising from **64.8% in 2001 to 77.7% in 2011**, with further increases expected.

Demand for Caste Census in India

- **Political Motivations:** The demand for a caste Census is largely driven by political interests, aiming to establish differential entitlements based on perceived representation and deprivation.

- For instance, leaders from the **Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA)** have emphasized the need for a caste Census

Way forward:

1. **Incorporation of Caste Data:** Need to amend the Census Act of 1948 to mandate the enumeration of caste data alongside other demographic information. This would provide a **legal framework** for collecting comprehensive caste-wise data.
2. **Independent Studies and Pilot Surveys:** The government should conduct independent studies at **district and state levels** to gather data on castes and sub-castes.

21. On UP's stringent Anti-conversion law

- The UP Assembly's amendments to its regressive 'Anti-conversion' law appear aimed at facilitating misuse, with over 400 cases registered since the original 2021 law.

Why was the Original 2021 Anti-Conversion Law Amended by UP?

- **Increased Stringency:** The amendments aim to make the **original law more stringent, responding to claims of rising cases of forced conversions** and the alleged involvement of foreign and anti-national elements in demographic changes.
- **Response to Public Discontent:** The government **cited the need to enhance penalties and legal measures to prevent unlawful conversions**, particularly concerning vulnerable groups such as minors and women.
- **Legitimacy of Complaints:** The amendment allows **third parties to file complaints about alleged unlawful conversions**, expanding the scope of the law and potentially increasing its application against inter-faith marriages.

Concerning features

- **Harsh Penalties:** The amended law introduces severe penalties, including **imprisonment of up to 20 years or life** for targeting minors, women, or certain communities through coercion or force.
- **Bail Conditions:** The law imposes **stringent bail conditions** that make it difficult for accused individuals to secure bail, requiring public prosecutor consent and a presumption of guilt.
- **Third-Party Complaints:** The provision allowing anyone to **file complaints against alleged conversions opens the door for misuse by communal**

organizations and individuals with vested interests, potentially targeting inter-faith couples.

What does it state about bail conditions and ‘foreign funding’?

- **Bail conditions:** The amended law states that an **accused individual cannot be granted bail unless the public prosecutor has the opportunity to oppose it**, and there is reason to believe the accused is not guilty and unlikely to repeat the offence.
- **Foreign funding:** The law prescribes **stiff penalties for receiving funds from foreign organizations for unlawful conversion**, with fines and imprisonment aimed at deterring financial support for conversion activities.

Way forward:

- **Promote Awareness of Rights:** Implement comprehensive public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their legal rights concerning religious conversion and inter-faith marriages.
- **Legal and Constitutional Review:** Stakeholders, including civil society organizations and legal experts, should actively pursue legal challenges against the amended law in the Supreme Court of India.

22. India - Maldives ties

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu recently and emphasised New Delhi’s commitment to deepen India-Maldives ties. Jaishankar is on a three-day official visit to Maldives to reset the bilateral relationship, the first high-level trip from India after the archipelago nation’s pro-China president Muizzu assumed office last year.

Key Takeaways

- Jaishankar’s trip to the Maldives comes weeks after President Muizzu’s visit to India in June to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government.
- The Maldives is an essential ally for India, helping to protect its maritime borders and monitor the wider Indian Ocean region, where China is expanding presence.
- The archipelago is located about 300 nautical miles (560 km) off the west coast of India and about 70 nautical miles (130 km) from Minicoy Island in Lakshadweep.

Key Points on Mr. Muizzu's 'India Out' Campaign and Its Aftermath

- Muizzu campaigned on an 'India Out' plank during last years election, seeking the removal of Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives.
- The Indian military was primarily there to operate aerial platforms for health and environmental emergencies. Approximately 75 Indian military personnel were stationed in the Maldives for these purposes.
- Muizzu used this presence as a focal point for political mobilization. Upon coming to power, Muizzu requested India to withdraw military personnel operating three aviation platforms gifted by India.
- India complied with the request, withdrawing military personnel. India replaced them with civilian personnel to operate a Dornier aircraft and two helicopters.

23. US Antitrust Ruling Against Google

- On August 5, US District Judge Amit Mehta ruled that **Google violated antitrust laws by maintaining a monopoly in "general search services" and "search text ads"** through exclusive deals with companies like Apple and Samsung.
- Antitrust laws and regulations are **designed to promote fair competition and prevent anti-competitive practices** in the marketplace. "Anti-trust" issues refer to situations where companies or organizations **engage in activities that hinder competition**, limit consumer choice, or create monopolies or dominant market positions.
- Google violated antitrust laws by **maintaining its search engine monopoly through exclusive agreements**. Google invests over **USD 26 billion annually** to maintain its default search status, holding **over 89% share** in general search and about **95% on mobile**.
- It paid billions to companies like **Apple and Samsung** to ensure Google was the default search engine on their devices and browsers. This practice prevented competitors from gaining market share and stifled competition in search and advertising markets.

Need for Regulations:

1. **Arbitrary Pricing:** Big Tech's influence on pricing rules in the digital space, leads to concerns about fairness and competition.
2. **Regulatory Vacuum:** Challenges faced by regulators in keeping pace with rapid tech innovation, leading to reactive rather than proactive measures.

24. 20 Afghan Sikhs get Citizenship under Citizenship Amendment Act

- Twenty Sikhs from Afghanistan, have been accorded citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019.

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019

- It amended the **Citizenship Amendment Act, 1955**, making two key changes to facilitate citizenship to undocumented migrants belonging to six non-Muslim communities – **Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian** from **Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan**, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.
- It reduced the period to qualify for citizenship from the existing requirement of continuous stay of 11 years to continuous stay of **five years**.
- However, Pakistani Hindus were anyway eligible for citizenship under **Section 5 and Section 6 (1)** of the Citizenship Act, 1955. The CAA only helped fast track the application process.
- The Rules grant the final authority to accord citizenship to an empowered committee headed by the Director, Census Operations, while the scrutiny of applications filed online on the portal was done by a **district level committee (DLC)** headed by Department of Post officials. On successful verification of documents, the DLCs administered the oath of allegiance to the applicants.

Challenges with the Act

- **The right to equality:** The challenge to the CAA rests on the ground that it violates Article 14 of the Constitution, which says that “the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India”.
- **Secularism:** There is also the larger issue of whether making religion a ground for eligibility for citizenship violates secularism, which is a basic feature of the Constitution.
- **Section 6A of The Citizenship Act, 1955 and Assam:** Section 6A was introduced in the Citizenship Act after the signing of the **Assam Accord in 1985** which determines who is a foreigner in the state of Assam and sets **March 24, 1971** as a cut off date which contradicts the cut off date given in the CAA 2019.

25. Contentious amendments to the Waqf Act and its implications

- The Union government on Thursday (August 8) introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha to amend the **1995 Waqf Act (1995 Act)**.
- The Bill proposes major changes to the **Waqf Act 1995**, by introducing sweeping changes in the **governance and regulation of Waqfs in India**.

- The proposed amendments seek to significantly reform the law by enhancing the Centre's regulatory authority over waqf properties and, for the first time, **permitting the inclusion of non-Muslim members in Waqf Boards.**

Waqf property

- A **Waqf is a personal property given by Muslims** for a specific purpose of **religious, charitable, or for private purposes.**
- The concept of **Waqf (endowment) was introduced in India** with the advent of Muslim rule.
- The Waqf can be formed through a **deed, or Instrument, or even orally.**
- Once a **property is declared as Waqf**, its character changes forever, and **cannot be reversed.**
- While the beneficiaries of the property can be different, the **ownership of the property is implied to be with God.**

Current governance structure of Waqf

- **The Central Waqf Act, 1954** was enacted after independence to provide for the regulation of Waqfs which was ultimately replaced by the **Waqf Act, 1995.**
- Each waqf is **managed by a mutawalli** (custodian) who oversees its **administration.**
- The **Waqf law provides** for the appointment of a **survey commissioner** who maintains a list of **all Waqf properties** by making local investigations, summoning witnesses, and requisitioning public documents.
- A Waqf property is **managed by a mutawalli (caretaker)**, who acts as a supervisor.

Key changes in the proposed law

- The Bill seeks to change the name of the parent Act from the **Waqf Act, 1995, to the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act, 1995.**
- Under the Bill, **only lawful property owners who have practised Islam for at least five years** are authorised to create 'waqf' properties through the execution of formal deeds.
- The responsibility of surveying waqf properties, previously managed by survey commissioners under the 1995 Act, will **now be assigned to district collectors or officers of equivalent rank.**
- The Bill proposed the **inclusion of non-Muslims in key waqf institutions – the Central Waqf Council, State Waqf Boards, and waqf tribunals.**

- **Waqf board** has been changed from a **three-member body** to a two-member body and the **waqf tribunal** will now consist of a district judge and an **officer of joint secretary rank to the State government**.

26. India-UAE Trade Relations : Concerns over Precious Metals Imports

- India is seeking a review of certain provisions of the free trade agreement (FTA) with the UAE, which came into force on May 1, 2022.
- The **UAE** is the **3rd largest trading partner** of India, with bilateral trade amounting to **USD 83.65 billion in 2023-24**.
- The **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** between India and the UAE covers various aspects, including value addition norms and customs duty reduction.
- There has been a significant **increase in imports of precious metals** from the UAE under the trade agreement.
- **Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI)** has raised concerns about the spurt in **imports of gold, silver, platinum, and diamonds** with zero tariffs in the coming years.
- GTRI's report highlights potential **revenue losses** and a shift in import business from banks to private traders, **favouring Dubai-based firms**.
- It also claims that **many imports do not meet the Rules of Origin conditions**, making them ineligible for concessions.

Review of IT Hardware Import Regime

- When asked about the review of the new authorisation regime for monitoring imports of certain IT hardware products, Barthwal indicated that the government would make a decision at the appropriate time.
- The government had previously adjusted import restrictions on laptops and computers, allowing importers to bring in shipments under an 'authorisation' system until September.

27. Overview of governance in Delhi

- The Supreme Court ruled that Delhi's LG can independently nominate 10 aldermen to the MCD which escalates tensions between the Union, Delhi, and local governments.

Constant tension and friction between the Union government and the Delhi government

- **Legal Disputes:** Legal battles have escalated tensions, particularly following Supreme Court judgments that have **altered the balance of power between the elected Delhi government and the Lieutenant Governor (LG)**. For instance, **recent rulings have clarified the LG's powers, allowing for unilateral actions** that bypass the council of ministers.
- **Control Over Key Areas:** The Union government **retains control over critical areas such as police, public order, and land, which limits the Delhi government's autonomy**.
- **Administrative Confusion:** The presence of multiple layers of governance, including the MCD and other local bodies, complicates accountability and governance, leading to **blame-shifting during crises**, such as the recent incidents of electrocution and flooding.
- **Budgetary Conflict:** The Delhi State Government has **accused the Central Government of underfunding the MCD, leading to poor civic services**, while the Central Government has argued that the State Government is not providing adequate support.

How has the Municipal Corporation of Delhi been involved in the power tussle?

- **Multiple Authorities:** The MCD **operates under the Union government's control**, adding complexity to the governance structure in Delhi. For example in **public services and urban management**.
- **Electoral Conflicts:** The MCD's elected representatives have often been caught in the crossfire of political disputes between **the Union and Delhi governments**, leading to inefficiencies and a lack of coherent governance. The recent tragedies in the city have highlighted the consequences of this blame-shifting.

Way Forward:

- **Revisiting Governance Structure:** A constitutional amendment could be considered to delineate the powers of the central government and the Delhi government more clearly. For instance, the area of New Delhi (50-100 square kilometres) could be under central control, while the rest could be governed by the Delhi Assembly.
- **Implementation of triple chain accountability:** Implementing the spirit of the Supreme Court's 2023 judgment, which emphasized a triple chain of accountability, could help restore balance and ensure that all layers of government are accountable to the people.
- **Promoting Consensus-Based Governance:** Encouraging dialogue and consensus between the different layers of government could help mitigate conflicts and foster a more cooperative governance environment.

28. Minister for Minority Affairs has launched a dedicated portal : Jiyo Parsi Scheme.

Jiyo Parsi Scheme

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** launched in **2013-14** by the **Ministry of Minority Affairs**.
- It aims to **arrest the population decline** of the Parsis, a minority community in India.
- It focuses on **stabilizing and increasing the Parsi population** through scientific protocols and structured interventions.
- **Features of the Scheme:**
 - **Financial support** for infertility treatments and related medical care in empanelled hospitals.
 - Assistance for **childcare** and support for **elderly Parsis**.
 - Programs to **raise awareness** and **encourage participation** within the **Parsi community**.
- **Target Groups:**
 -
 - **Parsi married couples** of childbearing age needing assistance.
 - **Young adults and adolescents** in the Parsi community for disease detection, with parental/legal guardian consent.

Significance of the scheme:

- This scheme has successfully facilitated the birth of over 400 Parsi children.
- It preserves the cultural heritage and identity of the Parsi community.
- It ensures the long-term sustainability of the community in India.
- It demonstrates government commitment to supporting minority communities and promoting diversity.

29. Lok Sabha Speaker constitutes six new parliamentary committees for 2024-25

- Lok Sabha Speaker constituted **six new Parliamentary Committees**, including the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which keeps a close eye on government expenditure, to be headed by senior Congress leader K.C. Venugopal.

The new committees are:

- **Public Accounts Committee**
- **Estimates Committee**

- Public Undertakings Committee
- Committee on Welfare of Other Backward Classes
- Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

About the committees:

PAC

The PAC, one of the three key financial committees tasked with keeping a watch on the government's accounts, is usually headed by a senior Lok Sabha member of the principal Opposition party.

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury headed the PAC for five years. Before him, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has also headed the PAC.

- Public Accounts Committee was **introduced in 1921** after its first mention in the **Government of India Act, 1919** also called Montford Reforms. It is existing in the Indian Constitution since then.
- PAC is **one of the parliamentary committees** that **examine the annual audit reports of CAG** which the President lays before the Parliament of India.
- The Public Accounts Committee **examines public expenditure**.
- That public expenditure is not only **examined from a legal and formal point of view** to discover technical irregularities but also from the **point of view of the economy, prudence, wisdom, and propriety**.
- The sole purpose to do this is to **bring out cases of waste, loss, corruption, extravagance, inefficiency, and nugatory expenses**.
- Election of Members -By **Parliament every year with proportional representation** by means of a single transferable vote (A minister cannot be elected)

The functions of the Estimates Committee are:

- to report what economies, improvements in organisation, efficiency or administrative reform, consistent with the policy underlying the estimates may be affected;
- to suggest alternative policies in order to bring about efficiency and economy in administration;
- to examine whether the money is well laid out within the limits of the policy implied in the estimates; and
- to suggest the form in which the estimates shall be presented to Parliament. The Committee does not exercise its functions in relation to such Public Undertakings as are allotted to the Committee on Public Undertakings by the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Lok Sabha or by the Speaker.

30. Why are the number of under trials high in India?

- Speedy Trial, Delhi Excise Policy case, Under trials, Bail, NCRB, PMLA Triple Test, Anticipatory bail, Interim bail, Maneka Gandhi case, Article 21, P. Ramachandra Rao v. State of Karnataka, Right to life, liberty, UPSC
- Recently, the Supreme Court has held that the right to speedy trial is a fundamental right under Article 21 while granting bail to former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister in connection with the Delhi Excise Policy case.

Bail and its provisions

- **Bail**- A legal process by which a person accused of a crime is released from custody, usually by providing a financial guarantee, while awaiting trial.
- Granting bail is largely at the court's discretion, guided by the principles of justice and fairness.
- **Aim** - Balance the accused's right to liberty with the need to ensure a fair and uninterrupted judicial process.
- **Avoid detention**- Allows the accused to be free from detention during the pre-trial period.

Importance of Speedy Trial

- **Speedy trial**- It is the disposal of cases at the earliest possible so as to make the Judiciary more efficient and trustworthy.
- **Ensuring Justice** - Speedy trial ensures that justice is administered without unnecessary delays and protect individuals from prolonged detention.
- **Fair Justice** - The procedure prescribed by law for depriving a person of his liberty cannot be "reasonable fair or just" unless that procedure ensures a speedy trial.
- **Fundamental Right** - Supreme court held that the right to a speedy trial is implicit in Article 21 of right to life and personal liberty.

Article 21 - no person shall be deprived of his life and personal liberty Except according to the procedure established by law.

- It extends to all stages of the criminal process, including investigation, inquiry, trial, appeal, and revision.
- **Reducing Undertrial prisoners** - Speedy trials is essential to reduce those in jail as under trial prisoner and improve the conditions of prisons.
- **Provisions for Speedy Trial** - Section 436A in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provides for release of an under-trial prisoner on bail on

undergoing detention for a period extending up to one half of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for an offence under any law.

- **Plea Bargaining** - The concept of plea bargaining has been introduced in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 to enable pre-trial negotiation between the defendant and the prosecution.
- **Judicial guidelines**- In landmark cases like **P. Ramachandra Rao v. State of Karnataka**, the Supreme Court laid down guidelines to ensure the right to a speedy trial.
 - Courts should utilize their powers under **Sections 309, 311, and 258** of the Code of Criminal Procedure to expedite trials.
 - The High Court can intervene under **Article 226 and Section 482** of the CrPC to provide relief if delays are unjustified.

31. UPSC issues ad for lateral entry into bureaucracy: What is the policy, why it has no reservation provision

- The Centre has opened a fresh round of lateral recruitments, from the **private sector** and elsewhere, into senior posts in the bureaucracy. Such appointments have also been criticised for not **extending reservations to SC, ST and OBC communities**.
- A total of **45 posts** have been advertised with individuals having appropriate qualifications and experience from **State/UT governments, PSUs, statutory organisations, research institutes and universities**, and even the private sector eligible to apply.
- The advertisement mentions that all posts are “suitable for candidates belonging to the **category of Persons with Benchmark Disability (PwBD)**.”

Positions open for lateral entry:

- The **first vacancies for lateral entrants** were advertised in 2018, but only for **Joint Secretary level positions**.
- A **Joint Secretary**, appointed by the **Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC)**, has the **third-highest rank (after Secretary and Additional Secretary)** in a Department, and functions as the **administrative head of a wing in the Department**.
- **Directors are one rank below Joint Secretaries**, and **Deputy Secretaries are one rank below Directors**, although in most ministries, they perform the same job.

Union government’s logic behind introducing lateral entries:

- In 2019, Minister of State for the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) Jitendra Singh told the Rajya Sabha that “lateral recruitment is aimed at achieving the twin objectives of bringing in fresh talent as well as augment the availability of manpower”.
- The idea behind lateral recruitment is for the government to tap into individuals’ domain expertise and specialised know-how, regardless of whether they are career bureaucrats or not.
- **Aim:** It allows individuals with specialized skills, expertise, and experience in specific domains to join the bureaucracy at higher levels.
- By bringing in professionals from diverse backgrounds, it intends to inject fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and specialized expertise into the administrative system.

The idea of lateral entry has been advocated by:

- **Sixth central pay commission:** Recommended lateral entry at higher ranks in the Government to ensure the availability of the best possible talent from within and outside the Government with performance contracts.
- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC):** Recommended an institutionalized, transparent process for lateral entry at both the Central and state levels.
- **Surinder Nath Committee and the Hota Committee** also supported the idea in 2003 and 2004

32. How India deals with refugees?

- India has allowed former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to stay in India since her forced departure from Bangladesh, despite India having no official refugee policy.

Refugees

- **Refugees** – They are people forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country and are unable to return to their own country because of feared persecution.
- **Key international convention** - 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol to protect refugees.
- They provide the universal definition of who is a refugee and outline the minimum standards for their treatment.
- **Principle of Non-Refoulement** – It states that refugees have a right not to be sent back to their country of origin if their life or freedom would be at risk.

- Countries that have signed the Convention are obliged to treat refugees according to the standards outlined.
- **Role of UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the official UN Refugee Agency.
- It promotes States' accession to the Convention and helps governments translate it into national laws.

Constitutional provisions - Refugees are protected under

- **Article 21** (right to life)
- **Article 14** (protection against arbitrary actions)
- **Judiciary** - The Supreme Court has ruled that non-return of refugees is part of the right to life.
- **Foreigners Act & Indian Passport Act** - Refugees entering without a visa are treated as illegal immigrants under these laws.
- **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** - It provides a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim illegal immigrants from neighboring countries, which has faced criticism for being discriminatory.
- **Lack of national policy**- India does not have a formal national policy or law specifically dealing with refugees.
- **Non-signatory to UN convention** - India is **not a signatory** to the 1951 UN Convention or the 1967 Protocol.

Problems faced by refugees in India

India is very reluctant to sign 1951 Refugee Convention as refugees are defined as people who have been deprived of their civil and political Rights but not their economic rights.

- **Temporary measures** - Policy that India has adopted for protecting refugees is an adhoc administrative policy on refugees.
- **Discriminatory laws** - Citizenship Amendment Act 2019(CAA), provides citizenship only to Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, sikh and Buddhist immigrants persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- **Inconsistent laws** - Since refugee law does not exist in India there is no uniformity in the treatment of refugees in the country.

33. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

- Japanese foreign and defence ministers have arrived in India to participate in the **India-Japan 2+2 ministerial meeting**.

2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

- The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue is a **diplomatic summit** held **annually** since **2018**, initially between India and the US.
- It later expanded to include **Japan, Australia, Russia, and the United Kingdom**.
- This dialogue involves the **Foreign and Defense Ministers** of participating countries and focuses on strengthening bilateral relations and addressing common concerns.
- The dialogue **replaced** the **Strategic and Commercial Dialogue** during a 2017 agreement between **PM Narendra Modi** and **President Donald Trump**.
- **First Summit** was held on **September 6, 2018**, between **India and the US** in **New Delhi**, involving discussions on defense partnerships and strategic cooperation.

Key priorities of the Indo-Japan 2+2 Dialogue

- **Update Security Cooperation:** Revising the **2008 security agreement** to reflect current strategic needs.
- **Promote a Free Indo-Pacific:** Collaborating to ensure a **free, open, and stable Indo-Pacific region**.
- **Engage in Strategic Talks:** Holding strategic discussions **between foreign and defense ministers to boost bilateral ties**.
- **Address Regional Security:** Discussing key issues like **Chinese assertiveness, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the Gaza crisis**.
- **Coordinate Quad Efforts:** Exploring cooperation within the **Quad framework**, including a potential summit.

34. India's Policy on Refugees

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How India deals with refugees?

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- **Non-signatory to UN convention** - India is **not a signatory** to the 1951 UN Convention or the 1967 Protocol.
- **UNHCR in New Delhi** - It handles refugee status determination (RSD) for asylum-seekers from non-neighboring countries and Myanmar.

Steps needed to have a fair refugee policy in India

- **Ratifying international conventions** - India should consider ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which set out the rights of refugees and the obligations of states to protect them.
- **Formulating national refugee law** - India should enact a comprehensive national refugee law to provide a legal framework for the protection and management of refugees, distinguishing them from other migrants and ensuring their rights.
- **Ensuring access to basic human rights** - It includes healthcare, education, and legal protection.
- Providing refugees with the right to work and earn a livelihood, which helps in their integration and reduces dependency on state resources.

35. Supreme Court Forms Task Force to Protect Doctors

- The Supreme Court constituted a **National Task Force (NTF)** of senior medical professionals to formulate comprehensive safety protocols for healthcare workers across India.

National Task Force (NTF)

- The NTF has been tasked with the critical responsibility of **devising an action plan to ensure the safety and well-being of medical professionals**, with a

particular focus on preventing gender-based violence and creating dignified working conditions for interns, resident doctors, and non-resident doctors.

- The action plan will address several key areas, including:
 - Enhancing **security in emergency rooms** and other critical areas;
 - Providing **restrooms and gender-neutral spaces** for medical staff;
 - Introducing **biometric and facial recognition** systems, Improving **lighting and installing CCTV** in all hospital areas.
 - Performing quarterly **audits of institutional safety measures**;
 - Applying the **Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH)** Act to medical establishments, ensuring the constitution of an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC).

Challenges faced by the healthcare workers

- **Workload and Burnout:** High patient-to-staff ratios result in overwhelming workloads. Healthcare workers experience burnout due to long hours, high stress, and insufficient time to rest.
- **Violence and Abuse:** Instances of violence against healthcare workers, including verbal abuse and physical attacks, have been reported in several instances.
- **Inadequate Compensation:** Salaries for healthcare workers, particularly those in the public sector or rural areas, are relatively low compared to the cost of living and the demands of the job.

Present Scenario of Legal Protection to Healthcare Professionals

- Currently **no central law exists** to safeguard healthcare workers nationwide.
- As of **2020,19 States** had implemented their statutes, each with varying provisions. Other States and Union Territories had no laws at all.
 - This lack of uniformity meant protection is inconsistent.
- Among States, **Kerala and Karnataka** provide their healthcare workers with the most robust legal protections in India.

Way Ahead

- **Incident Reporting:** Develop a robust mechanism for reporting incidents of violence that ensures confidentiality and protection for those who report.
- **Workplace Safety Policies:** Develop and enforce comprehensive workplace safety policies and procedures to prevent and respond to violence against healthcare workers.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

1. Discarding indexation for LTCG

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's decision to eliminate indexation for calculating long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax in the Union Budget has received a lukewarm response from stakeholders.

Long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax

- LTCG refers to the profit realized from the sale of an asset that has been held for **more than one year**. This includes various types of assets such as **stocks, bonds, real estate, and mutual funds**.
- If an asset is sold before this holding period, the gains are classified as short-term capital gains (STCG) and are taxed at different rates.

Reasons for elimination of indexation for computing long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax

- **Simplification of Tax Computation:** The Finance Minister proposed the change to "ease computation of capital gains for the taxpayer and tax administration." The intention is to simplify the tax process.
- **Uniform Tax Rate:** Long-term gains on all financial and non-financial assets would now be taxed at a flat rate of 12.5%, replacing the previous tiered structure.
- **High real estate return:** The Income Tax department believes that the real estate returns (12-16% per annum) are higher than indexation for inflation (4-5%). Thus, it predicts "substantial tax savings" for a "vast majority" of taxpayers under the new system.

Indexation

- Indexation is a mechanism used to adjust the original purchase price of an asset to account for inflation. It helps in calculating the real gains and prevents inflation from inflating the tax liability. The adjusted purchase price is called the indexed cost of acquisition.

Indexation help in Tax Savings

- **Adjusts the purchase price for inflation:** Indexation increases the original purchase price of an asset to account for inflation between the time of purchase and sale. This results in a lower taxable capital gain.
- **Reduces the taxable capital gains:** By revising the purchase price upwards using the Cost Inflation Index, indexation reduces the difference between the sale price and purchase price. This lowers the taxable capital gains amount.
- **Leads to lower tax liability:** With a reduced taxable capital gain, the tax payable on it also decreases. For example, on a ₹48 lakh gain from selling a house, indexation can bring down the taxable gain to ₹28.6 lakh, saving ₹4,264 in tax (assuming 20% LTCG rate).

Way forward:

- **Transitional Provisions:** Govt. should implement transitional provisions for existing investments to ease the shift from the old system to the new one.
- **Strengthen the monitoring system:** Need to strengthen monitoring mechanisms to prevent the undervaluation of properties and reduce black money transactions.

2. Cereal grains overtaken sugarcane as the primary feedstock for the production of ethanol

- In the current supply year (November 2023 to October 2024), sugar mills and distilleries supplied 401 crore litres of ethanol to oil marketing companies by June 30.
- Of this total, 211 crore litres (52.7%) were produced from maize and damaged food grains, primarily broken or old rice unsuitable for human consumption.
- The remaining 190 crore litres were derived from sugarcane-based feedstocks, including molasses and whole juice/syrup.

Key takeaways

- Modi government has targeted 20% ethanol blending in petrol by 2025. That ratio for all-India averaged 13% this supply year till June, as against 12.1% in 2022-23, 10% in 2021-22 and only 1.6% in 2013-14.
- Ethanol is 99.9% pure alcohol that can be blended with petrol.
- Alcohol production involves fermentation of sugar using yeast. In cane juice or molasses, sugar is present in the form of sucrose that is broken down into glucose and fructose.
- Grains contain starch, a carbohydrate that must first be extracted and converted into sucrose and simpler sugars before undergoing further fermentation, distillation, and dehydration to produce ethanol.

- A further fillip to the programme came when mills started using grains as supplementary feedstock. Companies installed multi-feedstock distilleries that could run on molasses and juice/ syrup during the crushing season (November-April) and on grain in the off-season (May-October), when cane wasn't available.
- These grains were primarily surplus and broken/damaged rice sourced from the Food Corporation of India's (FCI) stocks and the open market.
- This shift has been incentivized by the government setting an ex-distillery price of Rs 71.86 per litre for ethanol produced from maize. This price is higher than the per-litre prices payable by oil companies for ethanol from other feedstocks: C-heavy molasses (Rs 56.28), B-heavy molasses (Rs 60.73), cane juice/syrup (Rs 65.61), FCI rice (Rs 58.50), and damaged food grains (Rs 64).

3. Importance of climate taxonomy

- The 2024 Union Budget features a plan to create a climate finance taxonomy, aiming to boost capital for climate adaptation and mitigation.
- **Climate finance** – It refers to local, national or transnational financing, drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.

Climate finance taxonomy

- *Need of climate taxonomy*– Diverse interpretations of what is considered "green" can fragment markets and confuse investors.
- A one-size-fits-all approach won't work in climate financing as local factors has to be considered.
 - **For example**, different regions will have to adopt different pathways to reach the goal of limiting global warming to under 1.5 degrees C, as required under the Paris Agreement.
- **Climate finance taxonomy** – A system that classifies which parts of the economy may be marketed as sustainable investments.
- **Aim** – To inform companies and investors on making impactful investments towards environmental conservation and combating the climate crisis.
- They are also known as '*green*' taxonomies.
- **Information provided** – It enlists about economic sectors & activities and corresponding criteria that determine if it aligns with larger climate goals.
- **Uses** – They are frequently used to set standards for classifying climate-related financial instruments (e.g., green bonds).

- They serve other use cases where the benchmarking feature is viewed as beneficial, including in the areas of climate risk management, net-zero transition planning, and climate disclosure.

How green taxonomy is relevant for India?

- **Need** – India needs a standardized framework
 - To attract domestic and international investment
 - To guide investments in sustainable projects
 - To align funds with its national and global green transition commitments
 - To boost economic growth while combating climate change
- Many countries like China, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka have already issued green taxonomies to facilitate climate-sensitive investments. The European Union has a prominent Green Taxonomy.

4. Features and benefits of Natural Farming

- In her Budget proposals for 2024-25, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that over the next two years, one crore farmers nationwide will be introduced to natural farming, supported by certification and branding initiatives.
- Among states, Andhra Pradesh is a front runner in adopting natural farming but studies have raised concerns about the sustainability and yield (productivity) potential of this farming method.

National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)

- Government through the mission intends to motivate farmers to adopt chemical-free farming.
- The natural farming scheme under the 'Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati' has a total outlay of ₹4,645.69 crore for six years (2019-20 to 2024-25).
- Government believes that the success requires a behavioural shift from chemical-based to cow-based, locally-produced inputs.

Features and benefits of Natural Farming?

- No chemical fertilizers and pesticides used.
- Promotes traditional indigenous practices.
- Emphasizes on-farm biomass recycling, biomass mulching, cow dung-urine formulations, botanical pest control, and exclusion of synthetic chemicals.
- Improves natural nutrient cycling and soil organic matter.

- It is a diversified farming system integrating crops, trees, and livestock allowing the optimum use of functional biodiversity.
- Potential benefits: increased farmer income, restored soil fertility, improved environmental health, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

Challenges and Concerns:

- Large-scale transition is a matter of concern due to India's large population and food security needs.
- Divergent results from studies on Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF):
 - CESS Study (Andhra Pradesh): Lower costs of biological inputs, improved yields and incomes for farmers.
 - ICAR-IIFSR Study: Significant decline in wheat (59%) and basmati rice (32%) yields, raising concerns about sustainability and productivity.

Way Forward:

- Extensive studies and scientific assessments needed before large-scale adoption.
- Natural farming could be beneficial locally but may not be viable nationwide due to food security concerns.
- Noted economist M.S. Sidhu recommends rigorous scientific tests, especially on crop yields, before nationwide implementation.
- Suggests using natural farming for supplementary foodstuffs rather than staple cereals like wheat and rice.

5. Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 introduced by Govt in Lok Sabha

- Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai presented the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 in the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Proposed Provisions in the Bill

- **Creation of a Disaster Database:** The Bill mandates the establishment of a **comprehensive disaster database at both national and state levels**, which will include disaster assessments, fund allocation details, expenditures, preparedness and mitigation plans, and a risk register based on the type and severity of risks.
- **Urban Disaster Management Authority:** It proposes the formation of an **"Urban Disaster Management Authority"** for state capitals and large cities with municipal corporations, aimed at enhancing local disaster management capabilities.

- **Empowerment of NDMA and SDMAs:** The Bill empowers the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) to prepare disaster management plans, replacing the previous role of the National Executive Committee and State Executive Committees.
- **Periodic Risk Assessment:** The NDMA is tasked with periodically assessing the entire range of disaster risks in the country, including emerging risks due to extreme climate events.
- **Statutory Status for Pre-Act Organizations:** The Bill provides statutory recognition to certain pre-existing organizations, such as the **National Crisis Management Committee** and the **High-Level Committee**.

Need to aim for more clarity

- **Clarification of roles:** The Bill aims to bring more clarity and convergence in the roles of various authorities and committees involved in disaster management, addressing the need for streamlined coordination among stakeholders.
- **Enhanced Local Management:** By empowering local authorities through the establishment of Urban Disaster Management Authorities, the Bill seeks to ensure that disaster management plans are more relevant and tailored to specific regional challenges.
- **Alignment with Development Plans:** The Bill emphasizes the need to mainstream disaster management into development plans, aligning with recommendations from the **Fifteenth Finance Commission** and ensuring that disaster risk reduction is integrated into broader governance frameworks.

Way forward:

- **Strengthening Collaboration with State Governments:** To address concerns about excessive central authority and potential overlaps with state powers, it is crucial to establish a framework for ongoing collaboration between the Central and State Disaster Management Authorities.
- **Implementing a Comprehensive Training and Capacity-Building Program:** The successful implementation of the proposed Urban Disaster Management Authorities and the broader disaster management framework will depend on the capacity of local officials and stakeholders.

6. As Rate Cuts Near, Investors Assess Fed's Soft-Landing Strategy

Fed's Plan for Rate Cuts:

- Fed Chairman Jerome Powell indicated a **potential rate cut in September if inflation cools**.

- This is the strongest signal yet of easing monetary policy soon.

Investor Concerns:

- **Soft Landing Feasibility:**
 - Some believe the Fed may have kept rates high for too long, **risking the chance of a soft landing (lowering inflation without hurting growth).**
- **Reigniting Inflation:**
 - Easing monetary policy when the economy is robust could reignite inflation, limiting the extent of rate cuts.

Market Reactions:

- **Futures Pricing:**
 - Futures tied to the Fed's policy rate show an 87% chance of a 25 basis-point cut in September.
- **Stock Market Performance:**
 - S&P 500 closed up 1.6%, but Wall Street's indexes nosedived after new economic data suggested potential recession risks.

Treasury Yields:

- **Two-Year Treasuries:**
 - Yields dropped about eight basis points to 4.278%, the lowest in nearly six months.
- **Benchmark 10-Year Yields:**
 - Shed nearly four points to 4.1%.

Concerns

- **Too Late for Soft Landing?**
 - Resilient U.S. Economy:
 - Employment data shows resilience despite high interest rates.
- **Rising Jobless Rate:**
 - Policymakers are focusing on avoiding sharp unemployment increases, a common result of high interest rates and slowing inflation.
- **Economic Fraying:**
 - Concerns if fraying at the edges will lead to a full-blown slowdown (Peter Baden, Genoa Asset Management).
- **Lag Effect:**
 - **Timing of Rate Cuts:**
 - Some worry it will take too long for rate cuts to stimulate growth.
- **Risk of Recession:**
 - Starting cuts in September may not be enough to alter the economy's course going into 2025 (Jack McIntyre, Brandywine Global Investment Management).
 - In conclusion, while there is **optimism about achieving a soft landing with potential rate cuts**, significant risks and uncertainties remain,

including the timing and impact of these cuts on both **inflation and economic growth**.

7. Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework for UCBs

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India releases Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework for Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks (UCBs).

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework

- **Introduction** – RBI initiated the Scheme of Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) in 2002.
- **PCA** – A system that the RBI imposes on banks showing signs of financial stress.
- The regulator considers banks as unsafe if they fail to meet the standards on certain financial metrics or parameters.
- **Applicability** – It is applicable to both banks and NBFCs.
- It will apply to
 - All deposit-taking NBFCs, excluding government companies,
 - All non-deposit taking NBFCs in the middle, upper and top layers.
- **Significance** – It will stop bad lenders from going worse rather than brushing the issue aside.
- Safer NBFCs will translate to a safer overall financial system.

Features of the PCA framework on UCBs

Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs), though not formally defined, refers to primary cooperative banks located in urban and semi-urban areas.

- **PCA framework for UCBs** – It will replace the existing Supervisory Action Framework (SAF) and come into effect from April 1, 2025.
- It is largely principle-based with fewer number of parameters as compared to the SAF, without any dilution in the supervisory rigour.
- **Aim** – To provide flexibility to design entity specific supervisory action plans based on the assessment of risks on a case-by-case basis.
- **Criteria's** - The norms to invoke framework for weak UCB are
 - Capital adequacy ratio (CAR) up to 250 bps below the required CAR
 - Net NPAs above 6.0% but below 9.0%
 - Incurring losses during two consecutive years.

Significance of RBI's PCA

- **Early intervention-** PCA acts as an early warning system, allowing the RBI to identify and address potential issues in a bank before they become severe.
- **Financial stability-** It helps maintain the overall health of the banking sector, ensuring financial stability and protecting depositors' interests.
- **Risk management-** Banks under PCA are required to improve their risk management practices, reduce non-performing assets (NPAs), and enhance their capital adequacy.
- **Regulatory oversight-** PCA imposes restrictions and mandates corrective actions on banks, such as limiting dividend distribution, branch expansion, and high-risk lending, to prevent further deterioration.

8. Significance of Ethical Aspects of Artificial Intelligence

- With its superior data processing and prediction powers, artificial intelligence (AI), or the ability of machines to mimic human intelligence, has the potential to alter industries and improve human capacities.
- On the other hand, as AI becomes more pervasive in daily life, its ethical concerns require immediate consideration.
- There are serious concerns about the technology's ability to reinforce prejudices, violate privacy, and destroy jobs. Furthermore, current legislative frameworks are frequently not kept up with the rapid speed of AI research, which makes concerns of accountability and responsible use more complex.

Key Aspects of Ethical AI

- **Transparency and Explainability** - Users and stakeholders should be able to comprehend and explain the workings of AI systems through their design and implementation. This encourages responsibility and trust.
- **Fairness and Bias Mitigation** - By reducing biases and ensuring justice in AI models and algorithms, ethical AI seeks to stop discrimination against specific people or groups on the basis of characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.
- **Privacy and Data Protection** - Upholding people's right to privacy, ethical AI promotes the safe and responsible processing of personal data, obtaining consent and adhering to applicable privacy laws and regulations.
- **Accountability and Responsibility** - The results of AI technology should be the responsibility of developers and organizations using them. It's crucial to have clear lines of accountability and processes in place for dealing with mistakes or negative effects.

Ethical Concerns Associated with AI

- **Deepfakes and Misinformation** - A major danger to the dissemination of false information and misinformation is the growing complexity of deepfakes created by artificial intelligence.
- **Algorithmic Bias** - Large Language Models (LLMs) significantly reflect gender bias, homophobia, and racial stereotyping, according to a study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- **Challenges of Primary Source Representation** - In order to avoid missing out on primary sources such as archive papers and oral traditions, AI systems frequently rely on secondary materials, written mostly in English. Certain societies and cultures may be under- or incorrectly represented as a result of primary source neglect.
- **Data Privacy** - Privacy infringement and misuse are challenges raised by the acquisition and use of personal data for AI development. Additionally, widespread monitoring and the degradation of civil liberties may result from the increased dependence on AI for surveillance.

Measures to Address AI's Ethical Concerns

International Level

- **Global Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship** - The Schwab Foundation's Global Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship, in collaboration with Microsoft, unveiled a new project on AI for Social Innovation during the World Economic Forum 2024 in Davos.
- **EU AI Act** - In an effort to control the risks posed by AI systems and safeguard EU citizens' basic rights, the European Union has developed the first comprehensive AI regulation, known as the EU AI Act. Nations with their own AI laws or policies include Singapore, China, and Canada.

Way Forward

- To ensure AI's benefits while addressing its ethical concerns, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes robust regulatory frameworks, continuous ethical oversight, and international cooperation. Promoting transparency, fairness, and accountability in AI development and deployment will help mitigate risks and enhance trust, ensuring AI's positive impact on society.

9. Millets are India's solution to global challenges on nutrition, water scarcity and climate change: PM

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted **millet farming** as **India's solution to global issues of nutrition, water scarcity, and climate change.**

Details:

- Modi emphasized a holistic approach of **'One Earth, One Family, One Future'** to tackle **sustainable agriculture and food system challenges.**
- He identified **nutrition**, along with **water shortage and climate change**, as significant **challenges** and presented **millets ('Shri Anna')** as a **superfood requiring minimal water for maximum production.**
- Modi expressed **India's readiness** to share its **millet resources with the world.**

Millets:

- It is a **collective term** referring to a number of **small-seeded annual grasses** that are cultivated as **grain crops**, primarily on **marginal lands in dry areas in temperate, subtropical and tropical regions.**
- Some of the **common millets available in India** are **Ragi (Finger millet), Jowar (Sorghum), Sama (Little millet), Bajra (Pearl millet), and Variga (Proso millet).**
- The earliest evidence for these grains has been found in **Indus civilization** and was one of the first plants domesticated for food.
- It is grown in about **131 countries** and is the **traditional food** for around **60 crore people in Asia & Africa.**
- **India** is the **largest producer of millet** in the world.
 - **Top millet producing states:** Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Initiatives taken by the Government:

- **National Millets Mission (NMM):** NMM was launched in 2007 to promote the production and consumption of millets.
- **MAHARISHI (Millets And Other Ancient Grains International Research Initiative):** An initiative proposed by India towards advancing research in the field of millets and other ancient grains.
- **Price Support Scheme (PSS):** Provides financial assistance to farmers for the cultivation of millets.

- **Development of Value-Added Products:** Encourages the production of value-added millet-based products to increase the demand and consumption of millets.
- **Promoting Millets in PDS:** The government has introduced millets in the Public Distribution System to make it accessible and affordable to the masses.
- **Promotion of Organic Farming:** The government is promoting organic farming of millets to increase the production and consumption of organic millets.

10. Underwater mapping reveals insights into melting of Antarctica's ice shelves

- New research documents never-seen-before **shapes formed at the base of a West Antarctic ice shelf**. An autonomous **underwater vehicle** found these features – including **tear-shaped indents** – exclusively in areas with **higher melting rates by underlying warm ocean water**.

Ice shelf:

- An **ice shelf is a mass of glacial ice**, fed from land by **tributary glaciers**, that **floats in the sea above an ice shelf cavity**.
 - An ice sheet, such as the **West Antarctic ice sheet**, covers vast land areas, holding a substantial amount of freshwater
 - The two major ice sheets in the world, **Greenland and Antarctica**, collectively possess around **two-thirds of the Earth's freshwater**.
- When ice sheets gain or lose mass, they respectively **contribute to a fall or rise in global mean sea levels**.

Dotson Ice Shelf:

- **Dotson Ice Shelf** is part of the **West Antarctic ice sheet** and next to **Thwaites Glacier**, which is considered to have a **potentially large impact on future sea level rise due to its size and location**.
- Brought to the **Amundsen Sea through ocean circulation**, **warm salty water** is a significant driver of **ice melt and, thus, sea level rise**.
- This **bottom-up melting**, called **basal melt**, **thins and hollows out cavities at the base of floating ice shelves**, **reducing or eliminating structural support** for grounded ice that flows into them.
- The **physical dynamics of basal melt** have been poorly understood because the process occurs in **deep water under ice** – **an environment best explored by autonomous vehicles**.
- **Basal melt patterns at the base of the Dotson Ice Shelf (DIS) located in West Antarctica's Amundsen Sea**.

Findings:

- From January to March 2022, the team sent an **AUV with multibeam sonar up to 17 km into a basal melt cavity to chart its topography over 140 sq. km.**
- They found some things as expected, for example the **glacier melts faster where strong underwater currents erode its base.**
- Using the submersible, they were **able to measure the currents below the glacier for the first time and prove why the western part of Dotson Ice Shelf melts so fast.** They also found evidence of very high melt at vertical fractures that extend through the glacier.
- During the expedition, the vehicle also recorded data about the **salinity, temperature, and currents of the water below the ice shelf.**
- Overall, the findings indicate that **previously unquantified basal melt mechanisms are happening beneath Dotson Ice Shelf and likely other ice shelves.**

11. SC Asks Banks to Identify MSME Stress Before Accounts Turn to NPA

Supreme Court's Mandate:

- The Supreme Court has mandated that banks and creditors must identify **incipient stress** in the accounts of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) before these accounts turn into **non-performing assets (NPAs).**

Judgment Details:

- The appeals focused on a notification titled **"Instructions for the Framework for Revival and Rehabilitation of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises"**, issued on May 29, 2015, under Section 9 of the MSMED Act.
- This notification was revised by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** in March 2016, under Section 21 and 35 (A) of the Banking Regulation Act.
- The court held that the May 2015 notification has **"statutory force binding to all Scheduled commercial banks, licensed to operate in India by the RBI."**
- The exercise as contained in the **"Framework for Revival and Rehabilitation of MSMEs"** must be carried out by banking companies before MSME accounts turn into NPAs.
- MSMEs are required to produce **authenticated and verifiable documents/materials** to substantiate their claim of being an MSME before their account is classified as an NPA. **SARFAESI Act Recourse:**

Features

- **Secured creditors (banks or financial institutions)** possess significant rights for the enforcement of security interest under **Section 13** of this Act.
- If the borrower of financial assistance defaults in repayment of a loan or any instalment and his account is classified as a Non-performing Asset by the secured creditor, **the creditor may, before the expiry of the period of limitation, issue a written notice to the borrower** for repayment of dues in full within 60 days, clearly stating the amount due and the intention for enforcement.
- The **SARFAESI Act empowers financial institutions to 'seize and desist'**. They should give a notice to the defaulting borrower asking to repay the amount within 60 days.
- The government amended the SARFAESI Act in 2016 to empower the Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARC). ARCs purchase non-performing assets (NPAs) from financial institutions and banks to help them clean up their balance sheets.
- The **RBI registers ARCs**, and the SARFAESI Act of 2002 regulates them.

12. CIL ASHIS Scheme

- Coal India Limited (CIL) has launched a CSR initiative named CIL ASHIS to provide scholarships to children who lost their parents to COVID-19 and were unable to continue their studies.

CIL ASHIS Scheme

- The CIL ASHIS Scheme, launched by Coal India Limited (CIL), stands for **Ayushman Shiksha Sahayata**.
- The scheme aims to provide **financial support for the education of children who lost their parents to COVID-19**, ensuring they can continue their studies and achieve their dreams.

Features of the CIL ASHIS Scheme

- Each eligible child receives a **scholarship worth ₹45,000 per year**.
- The scholarship is provided for a **period of 4 years**.
- The scheme **targets 1,645 children** who have been identified as needing assistance.
- **Compassionate Appointment for:**
 - Dependents of CIL employees who lost their lives while in service.
 - Beneficiaries need to apply for compassionate appointments through CIL's established procedures.

13. FIVE YEARS OF ABROGATION OF ARTICLE 370

- On August 5, 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the abrogation of Article 370, ending the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Subsequently, Parliament exercised its powers under Article 3 of the Constitution to withdraw statehood from Jammu and Kashmir, creating two Union Territories.
- “With the abrogation came security, dignity, and opportunity for women, youth, backward, tribal, and marginalized communities who were previously deprived of the benefits of development. At the same time, it has ensured that corruption, which plagued Jammu and Kashmir for decades, has been kept at bay,” Prime Minister remarked recently.

Key takeaways

- Five years later, after the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of the process, two questions loom:
 - Did the abrogation achieve its intended goals?
 - What is the way forward to bridge the democratic deficit in the Union Territory?
- On the economic and governance fronts, there have been gains. Last-mile delivery of services has improved, with over 1,000 public utility services digitized.
- Major projects under the Prime Minister’s development package are either completed or nearing completion, and investments worth an estimated Rs 6,000 crore have been realized.
- Tourist visits to the Union Territory increased from 3.4 million in 2020 to 21.1 million in 2023, with the first half of 2024 witnessing a 20 percent increase over the previous year.

Way forward

- Too often, the security situation has been cited as a roadblock to restoring statehood. It is crucial to recognize that viewing democracy and security as mutually exclusive is narrow and limiting.
- While restoring statehood undoubtedly requires a calibrated approach, it is a process that must commence swiftly, with clear timelines.
- The Supreme Court’s September deadline to hold elections could serve as a starting point.

- Only through active involvement of the people in the governance process can alienation be effectively addressed.

14. National Payments Corporation of India implemented new FASTag regulations to improve efficiency.

- As part of the new rules, FASTag service providers are required to complete Know Your Customer (KYC) updates for all FASTags issued between three to five years ago by October 31, 2024. Furthermore, the NPCI mandates that any FASTag older than five years must be replaced.

National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) :

- National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has developed the National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) program to meet the electronic tolling requirements of the India.
- It offers an interoperable nationwide toll payment solution including clearing house services for settlement and dispute management.
- Interoperability, as it applies to National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) system, encompasses a common set of processes, business rules and technical specifications which enable a customer to use their FASTag as payment mode on any of the toll plazas irrespective of who has acquired the toll plaza.

FASTag

- FASTag is a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) passive tag used for making toll payments directly from the customers linked prepaid or savings/current account.
- It is affixed on the windscreen of the vehicle and enables the customer to drive through toll plazas, without stopping for any toll payments. The toll fare is directly deducted from the linked account of the customer.
- FASTag is also vehicle specific and once it is affixed to a vehicle, it cannot be transferred to another vehicle.
- FASTag can be purchased from any of the NETC Member Banks. If a FASTag is linked to the prepaid account, then it needs to be recharged/ topped-up as per the usage of the customer.

15. GST on Health and Life Insurance Premiums

- **Insurance premiums on health and life policies have increased this year,** and the 18% Goods and Services Tax (GST) has made insurance less affordable for many people.

- **Medical inflation**, estimated at **14%** towards the end of last year, along with increased premiums, has made buying medical insurance difficult for many.

GST on Health and Life Insurance Premiums

- GST replaced all indirect taxes like service tax and cess **from July 1, 2017**.
- Currently, GST on health and life insurance policies is **fixed at 18%**.
- According to the formula, the **Centre collects 9% GST** with a matching collection by states.
 - **Before GST**, life insurance **premiums were subject to 15% service taxes**, including Basic Service Tax, Swachh Bharat cess, and Krishi Kalyan cess.

Rational behind the Tax

- **GST Council Recommendations:**
 - GST rates and exemptions on all services, including insurance, are prescribed on the **recommendations of the GST Council**, which includes the Union Finance Minister and ministers nominated by state governments.
 - **Insurance is considered a service**, and **policyholders pay tax on their premiums**, generating significant revenue for the government.
- **Tax Deductions:**
 - **Insurance policies allow certain deductions** while computing income tax under **Sections 80C and 80D of the Income Tax Act, 1961**. Customers can avail deductions on the premium, including the GST applicable.

Arguments for Withdrawing the GST on Premiums

- **High Premium Increases:**
 - Significant increases in premiums on health insurance policies this year have been observed, with some public sector **insurers hiking premiums by 50%**.
 - The **renewal rate of policies is declining** due to frequent premium hikes and medical inflation.
- **Comparative GST Rates:**
 - The Confederation of General Insurance Agents' Associations of India points out that GST on insurance in India is the **highest in the world**.
 - The high GST rate is seen as a **deterrent to insurance penetration**, which conflicts with the goal of "**Insurance for All by 2047**".
- **Recommendations for Rationalisation:**

- The **Standing Committee on Finance** recommended **rationalising the GST rate** on insurance products to make them more affordable.
- Suggestions include reducing GST rates for health insurance, especially for senior citizens, micro-insurance policies, and term policies.

16. Bangladesh Crisis: Potential Shift in Garment Orders to India

- **Impact on Indian Textile and Apparel Sector:**
 - The ongoing crisis in Bangladesh is expected to **impact the Indian textile and apparel sector** in the short term.
- **Statistics:**
 - India exported **\$1.7 billion worth of cotton, cotton yarn, and fabrics** to Bangladesh last fiscal, accounting for **17% of India's cotton textile exports**.
 - Bangladesh exported **\$1 billion worth of cotton garments** in FY23.
 - Bangladesh exports **\$3.8 billion worth of garments monthly, compared to \$1.3 billion by India**.
- **Current Situation:**
 - Reports indicate **trucks stranded** on either side of the border with textile and garment goods.
 - Nearly **30 Indian textile companies** have facilities in Bangladesh.
- **Short-term Shifts in Orders:**
 - According to the **Apparel Export Promotion Council**, it is likely that **garment orders may shift to India** in the short term.
 - The Indian apparel industry may be asked to **fill the gap** caused by the disruption in Bangladesh.
- **Factories Reopening in Bangladesh:**
 - Factories in Bangladesh have been **asked to reopen next week**.
 - While Indian garment units may gain in the short term, **normalcy should return** to Bangladesh as it is a significant buyer of Indian yarn and fabrics.
- **Concerns and Hopes:**
 - The **Confederation of Indian Textile Industry** expressed concerns about the impact on the supply chain and potential delays and disruptions and are **hopeful that the situation will improve soon**.

17. YEN CARRY TRADE

- Recently, major stock markets across the world experienced their sharpest decline in decades and the yen carry trade was one reason behind this decline.

- The yen carry trade is a classic example of how interconnected global financial markets are, and how changes in one country's monetary policy can have widespread effects.

Yen carry trade

- A carry trade is a trading strategy that involves borrowing at a low-interest rate and investing in an asset that provides a higher rate of return.
- It typically involves borrowing in a low-interest rate currency and converting the borrowed amount into another currency.
- The proceeds are generally deposited in the second currency if it offers a higher interest rate.
- Alternatively, the proceeds could be deployed into assets such as stocks, commodities, bonds, or real estate denominated in the second currency.

Yen Carry Trade:

- The Japanese yen is one of the most widely used currencies for carry trades.
- In a yen carry trade, investors, including retail Japanese investors, borrow at a low interest rate at home and purchase assets in another country with higher returns, such as overseas equities and bonds.
- The yen has been popular for carry trades because Japan has maintained a zero-interest rate policy for over two decades. The idea behind low interest rates is to stimulate economic activity.
- For instance, such low interest rates incentivize investors to borrow cheaply in yen and invest in other countries (such as Brazil, Mexico, India, and even the US) to earn better returns. These carry trades are called yen carry trades.

Recent Developments:

- Interest Rate Increase: The Bank of Japan recently raised its interest rate to 0.25%, causing the yen to strengthen.
- Investor Reaction: As the yen appreciated, investors who had borrowed yen were forced to sell their higher-yielding assets to repay their loans, leading to a sell-off in global markets.

18. Country's third largest tiger reserve to come up in Chhattisgarh

- Facing a significant decline in its tiger population in recent years, Chhattisgarh on Wednesday approved a long-awaited proposal to establish a new tiger reserve, which will be the third largest in the country.

Process of Notification of Tiger Reserves

- **Proposal and Evaluation:** The state government initiates the process by proposing an area to be designated as a tiger reserve. This proposal is then evaluated by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.
- **Cabinet Approval:** After NTCA's recommendations, the **state cabinet must approve** the notification of the tiger reserve.
- **Integration of Areas:** The **Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve** integrates the existing **Guru Ghasidas National Park** and **Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary**, covering an area of 2,829 square kilometers.
- **Note:** Once a tiger reserve is notified, it **cannot be easily denotified**. The **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, allows for denotification only under **exceptional circumstances** and with approval from the NTCA and the National Board for Wildlife.

Declining Tiger Population in Chhattisgarh

- Chhattisgarh's tiger population has significantly **decreased from 46 in 2014 to just 17 in 2022**, as reported by the NTCA in July 2023. This decline has raised concerns about the sustainability of tiger habitats and the effectiveness of conservation efforts in the state.
- The **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** highlighted that several states, including Chhattisgarh, are experiencing troubling trends in tiger populations, necessitating urgent conservation measures.

Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve

- The newly notified **Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve** is **Chhattisgarh's fourth tiger reserve**, following **Indravati, Udanti-Sitanadi, and Achanakmar**.
- The reserve spans four districts: **Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur, Koriya, Surajpur, and Balrampur**.
- It aims to **bolster conservation efforts and provide a protected habitat for tigers**, thereby promoting eco-tourism and creating employment opportunities for local communities.
- The creation of this reserve is expected to enhance wildlife conservation in Chhattisgarh, as it will facilitate the allocation of **additional budgetary resources from the National Project Tiger Authority** for its operations and surrounding livelihood development projects.

The initiative was taken by the Government:

- **Strengthening Legal Framework:** The **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** provides a legal framework for tiger conservation, establishing national

parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and critical tiger habitats. The 2006 amendment led to the creation of the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.

- **Anti-Poaching Measures: Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF)** has been deployed in tiger reserves to combat poaching. Modern surveillance technologies like **camera traps and drones are used to monitor tiger populations** and deter poaching activities.
- **To avoid human-tiger conflict:** As of 2023, 12,327 families from **173 villages have been successfully relocated from tiger reserves to reduce human-tiger conflict.**

Way forward:

- Undertake habitat restoration measures in the tiger reserves, including **prey base management and removal of invasive species**, to improve the quality of tiger habitats.
- Deploy the **Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF)** in the newly notified **Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve to curb poaching.**

19. Bangladesh Crisis & India's Policy on Refugees

- Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will likely remain in India for some time, as her plans to travel to the United Kingdom faced a technical roadblock.
- Former PM came to India after violent protests against her government forced her to flee Bangladesh.
- The ex-PM had planned to **seek asylum in the UK**, but according to the country's immigration rules, asylum requests can only be processed once a person is in the UK and she does not hold a visa for travelling there.
- On the other hand, India has decided to let her stay in the country despite the **lack of an official policy on refugees.**

Refugee Crisis in India

- **Afghan Refugees:** With the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan, there has been an influx of Afghan refugees into India seeking safety and asylum. Many of them are Sikhs and Hindus facing religious persecution.
- **Rohingya Crisis:** Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar have sought refuge in India due to ethnic violence and persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine State.
 - India has been grappling with their status, with the government taking a firm stance on their deportation.
- **Tibetan Refugees:** Tibetans have been living in India since the 1959 Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule.

- They are granted refugee status and live primarily in settlements in states like Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka.

India's Policy on Refugees

- India has welcomed refugees in the past, with nearly **300,000 people categorised as refugees**.
 - This includes the Tibetans, Chakmas from Bangladesh, and refugees from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, etc.
- But **India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugee**. Nor does India have a refugee policy or a refugee law.
- **Reason:** This has allowed India to keep its options open on the question of refugees.
 - The government can declare any set of refugees as illegal immigrants – as has happened with Rohingya despite the UNHCR verification – and decide to deal with them as trespassers under the Foreigners Act or the Indian Passport Act.
- **All foreign undocumented nationals** are governed as per the provisions of The Foreigners Act, 1946, The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and The Citizenship Act, 1955.
- As per the MHA foreign nationals who enter into the country **without valid travel documents are treated as illegal immigrants**.

Reasons for India's Policy on Refugees

- **Resource Strain:** Hosting refugees puts pressure on resources such as food, water, housing, and healthcare facilities, especially in areas where infrastructure is already stretched thin.
- **Social Cohesion:** Large numbers of refugees can strain social cohesion, potentially leading to tensions with host communities, especially when resources are perceived as scarce.
- **Security Concerns:** There are security concerns related to refugee influxes, including the potential infiltration of extremist elements or challenges in monitoring movements across porous borders.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Hosting refugees can strain diplomatic relations with neighboring countries or countries of origin, particularly if there are geopolitical tensions or disputes involved.
- **Economic Impact:** Refugees compete for low-skilled jobs, affecting the local job market, while their potential contributions to the economy through entrepreneurship or labor may not be fully realized.

Way Ahead

- India can work towards a **comprehensive approach** to managing the refugee crisis, ensuring that refugees receive the protection and support they need while promoting stability and cooperation in the region.
 - **Refugee Status Determination:** Establish clear procedures for determining refugee status and provide legal protections accordingly.
 - **Access to Rights:** Ensure refugees have access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, and employment.

20. Rising Ground-Level Ozone Crisis in Indian Cities:

- In the **summer of 2024**, ground-level ozone is **emerging** as a significant **environmental threat** across **Indian cities**, surpassing the more familiar issue of particulate pollution.
- Recent data from the **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)** shows a **surge in ozone concentrations** in **10 major cities**, including **Delhi-NCR, Mumbai-MMR, Kolkata-KMA, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, and Jaipur.**

Formation and Health Risks of Ground-Level Ozone

- **Ground-level ozone** is formed through **reactions** involving **nitrogen oxides** and **volatile organic compounds** in **sunlight**, originating from **vehicle exhausts, industrial emissions, and natural elements.**
- This **pollutant** poses **severe health risks**, especially for those with **respiratory conditions, children, and the elderly**, by **inflaming and damaging airways, exacerbating asthma, and potentially leading to chronic respiratory diseases.**

Year-Round Ozone Pollution

- **Ground-level ozone** is not just a seasonal issue; it **persists year-round**, with cities like **Mumbai-MMR, Delhi-NCR, and Pune** experiencing **high ozone levels** even at **night.** This **persistent pollution** highlights the need for **continuous, comprehensive air quality management strategies.**

21. Tree Planting Campaigns: Unintended Failures:

- Many **global tree planting campaigns** fail to deliver **real climate benefits**, as seen in **Kenya**, where most of the **50 saplings** planted by environmentalist **Lucy Kagendo** died, reflecting a widespread issue.

- Despite the simplicity of the concept—**trees remove CO₂ through photosynthesis**—numerous initiatives like **northern India’s restoration efforts** and **Africa’s Great Green Wall project** have struggled.
- The **failure of many campaigns** is often due to **planting the wrong trees in unsuitable locations** or at the **wrong time**, as demonstrated by **Turkey’s 2019 initiative** where **98% of the 11 million trees planted died within three months**.

Africa’s Great Green Wall Project:

- Launched in **2007**, **Africa’s ambitious Great Green Wall project** aimed to **restore 100 million hectares (247.1 million acres) of degraded land** in the **Sahel** with vegetation and trees. According to the latest UN figures, just a **fifth of that area had been planted**. Progress is stalled due to a lack of funding, and some of the trees died because they didn’t receive enough water or care.

Importance of Long-Term Care and Native Species:

- **Trees take decades to mature**, making it **crucial to monitor and care** for them long after planting. However, this is often neglected.
- Successful campaigns, like **China’s Loess Plateau project**, thrive by selecting **native, drought-resistant species** suited to **local conditions** and ensuring **long-term maintenance**.

Community Involvement and Localized Efforts

- **Effective tree planting** requires **local community involvement** to ensure **long-term care**, as highlighted by **Kagendo’s realization that trees need to be planted where they can be regularly tended**.
- Incorporating local communities, schools, and women in tree care, as seen in **India** and the **US Green Seattle Partnership**, enhances success rates. These projects emphasize that it is better to plant fewer, healthier trees than many that may not survive.

22. Projects completed under Namami Gange Mission 2.0

- The Government of India has completed and operationalized four major projects under the Namami Gange Mission 2.0 in the first quarter of fiscal year 2024-25.
- **Locations** : The projects are located in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
 - Total cost of the projects is Rs. 920 crores.

- **Munger (Bihar):** Develops a 175 km sewerage network and a 30 MLD STP (Sewage Treatment Plant).
- **Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh):** Intercepts nine drains and rehabilitates six existing structures. Increases sewage treatment capacity to 31 MLD.
- **Ghazipur (Uttar Pradesh):** Includes a 1.3 km Interception and Diversion (I&D) network and a 21 MLD STP.
- **Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh):** Intercepts and diverts 15 drains.
 - Constructs three STPs with a combined capacity of 63 MLD.
 - Aims to improve water quality in the Ramganga River and subsequently the Ganga.
- These projects based on the **Hybrid Annuity PPP (HAM) model** have been designed on the basis of Advanced Sequencing Batch Reactor technology and meet the stringent standards prescribed by the National Green Tribunal NGT.

Namami Gange Mission

- It is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government in June 2014 with budget outlay of Rs.20,000 Crore to accomplish the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of **National River Ganga**.
- With the success of the initial phase, the government has now embarked on **Namami Gange Mission 2.0**, a more ambitious and comprehensive effort to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the river.

Objectives

- **Pollution Abatement:** It aims to intercept, divert, and treat wastewater from open drains through innovative technologies and sewage treatment plants (STPs).
 - Over 200 sewerage infrastructure projects have been sanctioned, with many already completed and operational.
- **Riverfront Development:** Enhancing the aesthetic and functional aspects of the riverfronts, including the construction and modernization of ghats and crematoria, to promote tourism and cultural activities.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Efforts are being made to restore and conserve the river's biodiversity. This includes the development of aquatic species restoration plans and the establishment of rescue and rehabilitation centres for endangered species¹.
- **Public Awareness :** Engaging local communities, urban local bodies, and Panchayati Raj Institutions in the mission to ensure sustainable results.

- **Effluent Monitoring:** Strict monitoring and regulation of industrial effluents to ensure that industries comply with environmental standards and do not pollute the river.

Suggestions and Way Forward

- Namami Gange Mission 2.0 represents a holistic approach to river rejuvenation, integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions.
- By addressing the challenges and building on the achievements, the mission aims to restore the Ganga to its pristine glory, ensuring it remains a lifeline for millions of Indians for generations to come.
- Still there is a need for a multifaceted approach, combining technological innovation, community engagement, strict regulatory measures, and effective coordination among all stakeholders. By tackling these issues head-on, the Namami Gange Mission 2.0 can achieve its goal of rejuvenating the Ganga River and ensuring its sustainability for future generations

23. A closer look at beefng up Jammu's counter-terror grid

- The Jammu region has faced severe security issues recently, exacerbated by troop redeployment to the LAC. To address this, around 3,500 additional troops and Special Forces were deployed.

Present Context of J&K

- **Security Concerns:** The Jammu region has seen a resurgence in terrorist activities, with security forces suffering significant losses. The situation has deteriorated, particularly following the redeployment of troops to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) after the Galwan incident in June 2020.
- **Increased Military Presence:** In response to the rising threats, **additional troops, including Special Forces and Assam Rifles**, have been inducted into the region to bolster counter-terrorism operations.
- Following the **abrogation of Article 370 in 2019**, there has been a **strategic shift in militancy from Kashmir to Jammu**, with militants adapting their tactics and increasing their operational activities in districts like Reasi, Rajouri, and Poonch.

Challenges

- **Integration of New Troops:** Newly inducted troops face the **challenge of quickly orienting themselves to the local terrain and population dynamics.**
- **Divided Local Population:** The local population is divided into subsets that **either support the state, support terrorists, or remain neutral.**

- Gaining the **support of the neutral majority is critical** for the success of counter-terrorism efforts.
- **Operational Control:** Recent trends show a **shift in operational control from battalion-level commanders to higher command levels**, which can hinder effective and timely responses to emerging threats.

Operation Dudhi

- **Historical Context:** Operation Dudhi, conducted in May 1991 by the 7 Assam Rifles, is remembered as a **successful counter-terrorism operation in the Chowkibal area**. It showcased the effectiveness of **battalion-level command in conducting operations**.
- **Lessons Learned:** The operation highlighted the **importance of allowing commanding officers to maintain control over their units**.
 - Recent trends of **centralizing control may undermine** operational effectiveness and responsiveness.

Way forward:

- **Enhance Human Intelligence Networks:** It is crucial to **build robust human intelligence networks by integrating local informants and community members** into counter-terrorism efforts.
- **Integrated Deployment of Forces:** Newly inducted troops should be **strategically integrated with existing units to create a cohesive counter-terrorism grid**. This approach will facilitate knowledge sharing and operational synergy, allowing new troops to quickly acclimatize to the local environment and build relationships with the community.

24. Neelakurinji

- Recently, Neelakurinji, the purplish flowering shrub has been included on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) official Red List of threatened species.

Neelakurinji

- It is the purplish flowering shrub which **blooms once in 12 years**.
- **Habitat:** It is an **endemic shrub** of three-metre height, seen only in the **high-altitude shola grassland** ecosystems of five mountain landscapes of southwest India at an elevation of 1,340–2,600 m.
- **Distribution**
- The species has **34 subpopulations** within **14 ecoregions** of the high-altitude mountain ranges of southwest India. There are **33 subpopulations** in the **Western Ghats** and **one** in the **Eastern Ghats** (Yercaud, Shevaroy Hills).

- They are **semelparous** with showy synchronous blooming and **fruiting at every 12 years at the end of the life cycle, which has been reported since 1832.**
- **Cultural significance:**
 - Nilgiri Hills (Literally meaning the blue mountains), got their name from the blue flowers of Neelakurinji.
 - The **Paliyan tribes** (in Tamil Nadu) use it as a reference to calculate their age.
- **Threats:** It is threatened mainly due to its **fragile habitat** in the montane high altitude grasslands that has been under pressure of conversion for tea and softwood plantations, and urbanization.
- Recent Global assessment of **Neelakurinji** :
 - This is the first ever Global Red List assessment for this **flagship species** of the montane grasslands of southwest India.
 - **Conservation status:** The latest global assessment confirms its threatened status in **the Vulnerable** (Criteria A2c) category of the IUCN.

25. Challenges associated with Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Infrastructure Project

- Recently, the reports of the high-powered committee (HPC) formed by National Green Tribunal in 2023 to revisit the green clearance of Great Nicobar Island (GNI) infrastructure project were submitted before the bench.

GNI

- **GNI** - It refers to Great Nicobar Island (GNI) infrastructure project.
- The Great Nicobar 'Holistic Development' Project was conceived by the NITI Aayog.
- **Budget** - Central Government has granted Rs. 72,000 Crore for this project.
- **Components**
 - Airport, for civilian and defense use
 - International container transshipment terminal (ICIT)
 - Township
- **Area coverage** - In total, the project will be spread over 166 sq km along the island's southeastern and southern coasts along with a coastal strip of width between 2 km and 4 km.
- **Implementation** - Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCO) is the project's implementing agency.
- The project is to be implemented in 3 phases over the next 30 years.
- **Lack of impact assessment** - There is inadequate environmental impact studies and assessment of the impact on Shompen and Nicobarese tribal communities.

- The coastline where the port and the project is proposed to come up is an earthquake prone zone, and saw a permanent subsidence of about 15 feet during the tsunami of December 2004.
- **Threat to tribals** - The Tribal Council of the Islands was not adequately consulted, as is legally required.
 - Consultations with the Scheduled Tribes Commission, legally mandated by **Article 338(9)** of the Indian Constitution.
- **Clearance issues** - There is an opacity in the clearance process and non-compliance with due process in granting statutory clearance.
- **Conflict of interest** - The Secretary, Environment and Forests, of the UT of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, was also the Managing Director of the ANIIDCO.
- **Deforestation** - It involves felling of 130.75 sq km of forests that is 15% of island's area, and a nationally and globally unique rainforest ecosystem.

What lies ahead?

- Conduct comprehensive environmental impact assessment.
- Evaluate the socio economic and health impacts of the project on the islands and tribal groups.
- Ensure that Tribal Council of the Islands are integrated in all decision making processes.
- Make the environment clearances more legal compliant.

26. Allegations Against SEBI Chief Madhabi Puri Buch and the Adani Group

- **Allegations by Hindenburg Research:**
 - **Hindenburg Research**, a U.S.-based short-seller, alleged that SEBI Chief **Madhabi Puri Buch** and her husband held investments in **offshore funds connected to the Adani Group**.
 - These funds were allegedly **used for trading in shares of the Adani Group, raising concerns about a potential conflict of interest**.
 - Buch **denied the allegations** as baseless, asserting that her investments were made in 2015, before her tenure at SEBI.
 - She emphasized that all **necessary disclosures have been diligently followed**.
- **Details of the Allegations:**
 - Hindenburg claims that the Buchs invested in a **sub-fund of the Global Opportunities Fund**, allegedly used by Adani Group associates.
 - In 2017, Buch's husband reportedly became the sole operator of the account, and in 2018, Buch sought to redeem the entire investment.

- The fund's asset manager clarified that the Buchs' holdings were less than 1.5% of the fund's total inflow and that the fund did not invest in Adani shares.
- **Adani Group's Response:**
 - The Adani Group dismissed the allegations, labeling them as "red herrings" meant to malign their reputation.
 - The group emphasized that their overseas holding structure is fully transparent.
- **Political Repercussions:**
 - India's **opposition parties** have used the allegations to demand a parliamentary investigation, particularly concerning the ongoing SEBI inquiry into the Adani Group.
 - The Congress party called for an inquiry to ensure that **all conflicts of interest are eliminated** in SEBI's investigation.
- **Historical Context:**
 - In January 2023, **Hindenburg released a report accusing the Adani Group of improper use of tax havens and stock manipulation**, leading to a significant sell-off in Adani shares.
 - The current allegations are **seen as an extension of the previous concerns raised against the Adani conglomerate.**

Offshore funds

- **Offshore funds** are investment funds that are **established outside of an investor's home country**. These funds are typically **domiciled in a jurisdiction with favorable tax laws, regulatory environments, and confidentiality policies**. Offshore funds can include various types of investments, such as mutual funds, hedge funds, private equity funds, and exchange-traded funds (ETFs).

27. Talks begin in Montreal on digital sequence information of biodiversity

- **Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Benefit-sharing from the Use of Digital Sequence Information on Genetic Resources meeting**– Montreal, Canada.
- Formed at the **2022 COP15 for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**.

Digital Sequence Information (DSI) on Genetic Resources:

- **Digital sequence information (DSI)** is a term used in the context of **certain international policy fora**, particularly the **Convention on Biological Diversity**, to refer to **data derived from genetic resources**.
- **DSI** refers to **data from DNA or RNA** that can be stored digitally.
- The term is generally agreed to include **nucleic acid sequence data** and may be construed to include other data types derived from or linked to **genetic resources**, including, for example, **protein sequence data**.
- The exact scope of this term is an aspect of ongoing policy discussions.

Key Issues and Challenges:

- Despite the **CBD's efforts**, **benefit-sharing** has been **ineffective**, even with the **Nagoya Protocol implemented in 2014**.
- **Current Challenges:**
 - Existing public databases for **DSI** were established before **CBD's adoption in 1992** and **lack accountability to CBD or its Parties**.
 - Databases do not verify the **legitimacy** or the permission for **DSI** sourced from **countries of origin**, allowing anonymous and unrestricted access.
 - The **US, not being a party to the CBD or Nagoya Protocol**, is not bound by their rules.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):

- The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, a **legally binding treaty** to conserve biodiversity has been in force since 1993. It has **3 main objectives**:
 - The conservation of biological diversity.
 - The sustainable use of the components of biological diversity.
 - The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.
- Nearly all countries have ratified it (notably, the **US has signed but not ratified**).
- The **CBD Secretariat is based in Montreal, Canada** and it **operates under the United Nations Environment Programme**.
- The Parties (Countries) under Convention of Biodiversity (CBD), meet at regular intervals and these meetings are called **Conference of Parties (COP)**.
- In 2000, a supplementary agreement to the Convention known as the **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety** was adopted. It came into force on 11th September 2003.

28. SEBI Board's Code on Conflict of Interest

- **Hindenburg Research** accused SEBI Chairperson **Madhabi Puri Buch** of having a stake in offshore entities linked to the **Adani money siphoning scandal**.
- Buch and her husband clarified that the investment was made before her tenure at SEBI, and **all necessary disclosures** were followed.
- **Definition of Conflict of Interest:**
 - **Conflict of Interest** refers to any **personal interest or association** of a board member that could **influence the Board's decision** on a matter, as perceived by an independent third party.

Role of SEBI in the Indian Financial Market

Here are a few of the key roles and functions of SEBI:

- **Regulatory Functions:** SEBI is tasked with regulating and supervising various segments of the securities market, including stock exchanges, stockbrokers, depository participants, mutual funds, portfolio managers, investment advisers, credit rating agencies, and other market intermediaries. The Act empowers SEBI to formulate regulations, issue guidelines, and prescribe codes of conduct to govern the conduct of market participants.
- **Investor Protection:** The Act aims to protect the interests of investors by requiring issuers of securities to make accurate and timely disclosures, promoting transparency and fairness in the securities market, and prohibiting fraudulent and unfair trade practices. SEBI is authorized to take measures to prevent market manipulation, insider trading, and other market abuses.
- **Enforcement Powers:** SEBI is vested with enforcement powers to investigate violations of securities laws and regulations, conduct inquiries and inspections, impose penalties and sanctions on offenders, and initiate legal proceedings against individuals and entities found guilty of market misconduct.
- **Market Development:** The Act empowers SEBI to promote the development and expansion of the securities market in India by introducing new products and services, facilitating capital formation, encouraging innovation and technological advancements, and attracting domestic and foreign investments.
- **Investor Education and Awareness:** SEBI undertakes initiatives to educate investors about the risks and opportunities associated with investing in the

securities market. It conducts investor awareness programs, disseminates investor education materials, and provides guidance on prudent investment practices, risk management, and regulatory compliance. SEBI aims to empower investors with knowledge and skills to make informed investment decisions and protect themselves from fraud and misconduct.

29. Global practices of green competition

- India is advancing its green steel technology by forming a consortium of research labs, IITs, steelmakers, and equipment manufacturers.

Green Competition

- **Green competition** - A specific form of competition that is focused on the ecological side of the companies' strategies.
- It refers to a green promotion strategy of the companies' goods and services, which is focused on achieving precise entrepreneurial objectives, based on the organizations' promotional mix.
- **Need** - Competition cannot remain insulated from sustainability.
- Combating climate change requires adapting and adopting newer technology that reduces resource consumption and increases innovation through sustainability policies.
- **Strategies** - Competition policy should integrate sustainability economics while considering market failures and collective action problems.
- Through actions like issuing guidelines, the benefits of sustainability will outweigh the potential negative effects on competition.
- Including sustainability considerations in assessments of cooperation among competitors can be a strong measure of benefitting sustainability in markets.

Status of India in pursuing green competition

- **SEBI** - In 2023, the Securities and Exchange Board of India introduced a sustainability reporting framework called Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR).
- **BRSR** - A reporting framework under which the top 1000 listed companies (by market capitalisation) are mandated to disclose their Environmental, Social and governance (ESG) performance.

Challenges for green competition

- **Complex trade-offs** - Balancing environmental and commercial interests can be difficult.

- **Conflict** - Sustainability, a public interest objective, often conflicts with competition law's primary goals of consumer welfare.
- **Disincentive to cooperation** - Competition law can discourage beneficial collaborations for sustainability.
- **Inconsistent goals** - Multiple objectives in competition law can lead to inconsistent application and reduced regulatory independence.

What lies ahead?

- Support agreements encouraging innovation and sustainable consumer preferences.
- Align competition law with constitutional values and sustainability goals.
- Learn from international examples to balance economic growth and environmental sustainability.
- Emphasis on sustainability policies and enterprise collaboration for greener innovations.

30. Mpox: WHO calls for vaccine candidates as dangerous clade targeting children spreads widely

- Ahead of an emergency meeting to discuss the spread of **mpox (earlier called monkeypox)** within and outside the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the **WHO has called for vaccine candidates for fast approval and distribution.**
- The meeting will take a call on whether the latest mpox outbreak is a **public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)** – WHO's most serious alarm.

Details

- WHO invited pharmaceutical companies to submit dossiers for **emergency use listing (EUL)**.
- The strategy is used in times of public health emergencies like pandemics to make the authorisation of new and critical medicines and vaccines simpler. It also facilitates distribution of such resources through global initiatives.

Outbreak:

- Nearly 27,000 cases have been reported in the DRC and 1,100 people, many of them children have succumbed to the infection since the infection began in 2022-23.

- Since last September, **the contagion spread to nine neighbouring countries**, including Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, where the disease was reported for the first time.
- The mpox **caseload has increased 160 per cent in 2024**, according to the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mpox

- Mpox is a **viral zoonotic disease** caused by the monkeypox virus which was first recorded in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
- There are **two known types (clades) of mpox virus: clade I and clade II**
- Mpox can be transmitted to humans through physical contact with someone who is infectious, with contaminated materials, or with infected animals.
- There are **no specific treatments** for Mpox virus infection.
- **In 2022**, the disease was declared a **global emergency** after it spread to some 70 countries. The emergency was withdrawn in 2023.

Emergency use listing (EUL)

- The WHO Emergency Use Listing Procedure (EUL) is a risk-based procedure for assessing and **listing unlicensed vaccines, therapeutics and in vitro diagnostics** with the ultimate aim of **expediting the availability** of these products to people affected by a public health emergency.
- Granting of an EUL will accelerate vaccine access particularly for those lower-income countries which have not yet issued their own national regulatory approval.
- The EUL also enables partners including Gavi and UNICEF to procure vaccines for distribution.

31. Extremophile bacteria have learnt to survive microwaves

- Researchers have isolated extremophile bacteria from harsh environments like volcanic vents, permafrost, acid mines, deep-sea hydrothermal vents, and lakes beneath polar ice caps.
- Extremophiles are **microorganisms that thrive in extreme environmental conditions** where other life forms typically cannot survive.
- For example: **Volcanic vents, Permafrost, Acid mines, Deep-sea hydrothermal vents, dark lakes buried beneath polar ice caps, on the exteriors of spacecraft, around nuclear waste storage sites.**

Adaptation and Evolution:

- Extremophiles have developed **unique biological and biochemical processes** over millions of years to adapt to diverse habitats.
- Unlike more complex life forms, which have one set of proteins, **extremophiles have multiple sets of proteins**, each adapted to specific environmental conditions.
- These proteins are **'activated' based on the surrounding environment**, enabling survival during extreme conditions like high temperatures, lack of water, or high acidity.
- **Significance:** Some scientists believe that **life on Earth may have begun as an extremophile** in extreme environmental niches before spreading and adapting to more temperate ecosystems.

'Earth Microbiome Project'

- It is a **global initiative** aimed at **mapping, organising, and understanding the diversity of microbial life** across different environmental niches on Earth.
- The project was **founded in 2010**.

Objective: To **sequence 200,000 genetic samples** from diverse environments. To **assemble 500,000 microbial genomes**, creating a **comprehensive map of microbial diversity on Earth**

Significance: The project is part of broader efforts to understand the microbial world, which is still in its infancy. It is related to other significant projects like the **'Earth Biogenome Project,'** which **aims to sequence the genomes of all eukaryotic organisms** on the planet.

- Understanding microbial diversity has numerous biological and industrial applications, such as developing **new enzymes for molecular biology or finding** new ways to adapt organisms to challenging environments.

32. Seismic data indicates huge reservoir of water under Mars,

- An immense reservoir of **liquid water may reside deep under the surface of Mars** within fractured igneous rocks, holding **enough to fill an ocean that would cover the entire surface of Mars**, according to seismic data obtained by NASA's robotic InSight lander.

Details:

- InSight was able to measure the speed of seismic waves and how they change with depth. The speed of seismic waves depends on what the rock is made of, where it has cracks, and what fills the cracks.

- The **data indicated the presence of this reservoir of liquid water within fractured igneous rocks** -formed in the cooling and solidification of magma or lava – in the Martian crust, the planet’s outermost layer.
- The water, located about **5 to 20 km below the Martian surface**, potentially offers conditions favourable to sustaining microbial life, the researchers said.
- At these depths, the **crust is warm enough for water to exist as a liquid**. At more shallow depths, the water would be frozen.
- The **Martian surface is cold and desolate today but once was warm and wet**. The study suggests that much of the water that had been on the Martian surface did not escape into space, but rather filtered down into the crust.

About InSight lander:

- The InSight lander touched down in 2018 to **study the deep interior of Mars, gathering data on the planet’s various layers**, from its liquid metal core to its mantle and its crust.
- The InSight mission ended in 2022.

33. Share of Road Transport in India’s CO2 Emissions

- India has 83 of the world’s 100 most polluted cities. Air pollution caused 2.1 million deaths, with 99% breathing air below WHO standards.
- Road transport is responsible for **approximately 12% of India’s total CO2 emissions**. Within this sector, heavy vehicles are a significant contributor to **particulate matter (PM2.5) emissions**, which are particularly harmful due to their **ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream**.
- Studies indicate that heavy vehicles contribute to about **60-70% of total vehicular PM emissions** and **40-50% of total Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) emissions** in urban areas. This highlights the **critical role that road transport plays** in India’s overall air pollution problem.

Why has the vehicular scrapping policy not been effective in States like Karnataka and Maharashtra?

- **Insufficient Scrapping Facilities:** Both states have a **limited number of registered vehicle scrapping facilities (RVSFs)**. For instance, Karnataka has only **two authorized RVSFs located in Devanahalli and Koratagere**, which are unable to handle the volume of vehicles eligible for scrapping.
- **Voluntary Compliance:** The policy’s reliance on voluntary participation has resulted in **low engagement from vehicle owners**. For example, the policy targets around **20 lakh vehicles for scrapping**, but **without mandatory compliance**, many older, polluting vehicles continue to operate on the roads

- **Lack of Awareness and Less Incentives:** There is a lack of awareness regarding the **benefits of scrapping old vehicles** among the public. Although the policy offers incentives, such as **tax relief for scrapping vehicles may not be sufficient to encourage** widespread participation.
- **Bureaucratic delays:** The implementation of the scrapping policy has **faced bureaucratic delays** and inconsistencies. In Maharashtra, despite announcing incentives for scrapping old vehicles, the actual impact has been **limited due to slow bureaucratic processes** and a lack of effective enforcement.

Steps taken:

- The **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)** has taken several significant steps towards enhancing fuel efficiency and reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector through the implementation of the **Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) norms**.
- **Introduction of CAFE Norms:** The BEE has proposed the **CAFE III and CAFE IV norms**, which aim to set stringent targets for carbon emissions from passenger vehicles.
 - **CAFE III**, effective from 2027 to 2032, sets a **target of 91.7 grams of CO₂ per kilometer**, while **CAFE IV**, from 2032 to 2037, **aims for 70 grams of CO₂ per kilometer**. These targets are designed to drive innovation and encourage the adoption of cleaner technologies in the automotive sector.

Way forward:

- **Enhance Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Need to increase the number of registered vehicle scrapping facilities (RVSFs) across states like Karnataka and Maharashtra to make the process more accessible.
- **Strengthen Policy Enforcement and Incentives:** Transition from voluntary to mandatory compliance for the scrapping of old and polluting vehicles. This can be supported by enhancing public awareness campaigns that highlight the environmental and financial benefits of vehicle scrapping.

34. Gross Environmental Product (GEP) Index

- Uttarakhand has become the first Indian state to launch a Gross Environment Product Index. It has not just become the first state to launch a GEP Index, but also the first in the world to go beyond ecosystem services to ecosystem growth.
- Simply put, it does not only calculate what services we get from the environment but also what we put back into the environment.

Gross Environmental Product (GEP) Index

- The Gross Environmental Product (GEP) Index is an innovative metric designed to measure the environmental health and quality of a region. It goes beyond traditional economic indicators by incorporating ecological factors into its calculations.

Purpose and Significance

- **Holistic Measurement:** The GEP Index evaluates both the benefits we receive from the environment and the contributions we make to it. This dual approach helps in understanding the overall ecological impact of human activities.
- **Sustainability Focus:** By quantifying environmental contributions, the GEP Index aims to promote sustainable practices and policies that enhance ecological health.

Components of the GEP Index

- The GEP Index is based on four main pillars:
 - **Air Quality:** Measures the quality and cleanliness of the air.
 - **Water Resources:** Assesses the availability and purity of water bodies.
 - **Soil Health:** Evaluates soil quality and its ability to support plant life.
 - **Forest Cover:** Considers the extent and health of forested areas.
- The formula for the GEP Index is: $\text{GEP Index} = \text{Air-GEP Index} + \text{Water-GEP Index} + \text{Soil-GEP Index} + \text{Forest-GEP Index}$
- The average survival of trees is considered. The number of trees felled for any reason is deducted and then the GEP is calculated. Such a counting also means that the current methods of calculating forest cover- where anything green counted by a satellite goes- will have to be refined.
- Similarly, for water, a calculation will have to be made of man-made water conservation, storage methods- for example, how many amrit sarovars were made. This is different from nature's own methods, eg rain that recharges water bodies. Thus, it measures the contribution of human activities to ecological development.

35. Clean Plant Programme

- The Union Cabinet recently has approved the Clean Plant Programme (CPP) under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture.

Clean Plant Program

- **Clean Plant Program (CPP)** – It is a program to address critical issues in horticulture by providing access to high-quality, virus free planting material.
- **Launch** – It was first announced in Union Finance interim Budget speech in February 2023.
- **Aim** – It aims to increase the yield and productivity of horticulture crops in India and to enhance the quality of fruit crops across the nation.

Horticulture consist of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, spices mushroom, medicinal and aromatic plants. India is the **2nd** largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world after China.

- **Nodal Ministry** - Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- **Finances** - Budget allocation under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) and loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
- **Integration with MIDH** - The CPP complements with the ongoing Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).
- **Implementation** - It will be implemented by the National Horticulture Board in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- **Core components**
 - Development of nine Clean Plant Centers (CPCs)
 - Enhancement of infrastructure
 - Creation of regulatory and certification process

Significances

- **Reduce Fruit Import** - India is a major importer and exporter of fresh fruits.
- In the financial year 2023-24, India exported fresh fruits worth \$1.15 billion, while it imported fruits worth \$2.73 billion.
- **Reduce import of plant materials** - With the rising consumption of foreign and exotics fruits such as avocado and blueberry , demand has specifically increased for their planting materials .
- **Address import bottlenecks** - At present, imported plants having to be kept in quarantine for two years.
- The CPCs will cut this period down to six months.
- Thus CPP can bolster India's position in the global fruit market.