

# News Juice Monthly

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For Prelims and Mains

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### 1. Himachal Pradesh passes Bill to raise women's marriage age from 18 to 21 years: What happens next?

#### Why in News?

The Himachal Pradesh Assembly recently passed a Bill to raise the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2024, was passed by voice vote. The Bill amended the Prohibition of Child Marriage (PCM) Act, which was passed by Parliament in 2006.

What amendments has the Bill introduced to the PCM Act? How will the Bill's amendments to a central law come into force?



#### Why did the Himachal Pradesh Assembly pass the Bill?

The Himachal Pradesh State Health, Social Justice, and Empowerment Minister said it was necessary to raise the minimum age of marriage for women to provide opportunities to them.

The minister also highlighted that early marriage and motherhood often severely impact the health of women. According to the 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' provided with the Bill, "The early marriages...act as a hindrance not only in the progress of their (women's) career but also in their physical development."

#### What amendments has the Bill introduced to the PCM Act?

As it stands, Section 2(a) of the PCM Act defines a "child" as someone "who, if male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age". The Himachal Bill eliminates this distinction on the basis of age between "males" and "females". It defines a "child" as "a male or female who has not completed twenty-one years of age".

The Bill also amends Section 2(b) of the PCM Act, which defines "child marriage" as "a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child". The Bill has added a clause giving it overriding effect over "anything contrary or inconsistent therewith contained in any other law...including any custom or usage or practice governing the parties".

This means that the new marriage age for women will apply to everyone in Himachal Pradesh regardless of what any other law may state, or even if the religious or cultural practices of the individuals getting married allow legal minors to get married. The Bill introduces Section 18A

to the PCM Act, which gives the same overriding effect to the entire central law and its provisions.

The Bill increases the time-period for filing a petition to annul a marriage. Under Section 3 of the PCM Act, the “contracting party who was a child at the time of the marriage” can file a petition to annul the marriage within two years of attaining majority (before they turn 20 for women, and 23 for men). The Bill increases this period to five years, allowing both women and men to file petitions to annul the marriage before they turn 23 years old (the minimum age for marriage at 21 years is higher than the age of majority at 18 years).

### **How will the Bill’s amendments to the PCM Act come into force?**

The Concurrent List — or List III under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India — contains a list of subjects that both the central and state governments can pass laws on. Entry 5 of the Concurrent List comprises a number of subjects including “marriage and divorce; infants and minors;...all matters in respect of which parties in judicial proceedings were immediately before the commencement of this Constitution subject to their personal law”. This allows both the Centre and states to enact laws to address child marriage.

Typically, under Article 200 of the Constitution, a Bill passed by a state Assembly will be handed over to the Governor of that state for her assent. The Governor can then declare that she assents to the Bill (making it a law), return the Bill for reconsideration, or “reserve” it for consideration by the President. The President can then declare that she assents or withholds assent to the Bill, or direct the Governor to send it back for reconsideration.

However, the Bill passed by Himachal Pradesh amends the PCM Act by introducing a different marriage age for women, making it inconsistent with the Act passed by Parliament. Under Article 254(1) of the Constitution, if the state legislature enacts a law dealing with a subject in the Concurrent List and that law is “repugnant” — inconsistent or contradictory — with a central law, then the repugnant portion of the state law will be “void”.

The exception to this is provided under Article 254(2). If the Bill in question is repugnant to an earlier or existing law made by Parliament, the Bill must be reserved for the President’s consideration and needs to receive her assent as per Article 201. Only then can the repugnant provision in the state law be valid. So, for the Himachal Pradesh Bill to come into force, Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla must reserve the Bill for President Droupadi Murmu’s consideration, who must then decide to give her assent to the Bill.

This process was seen in action in the case of Uttarakhand’s Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, which provided common provisions for subjects such as marriage, divorce, etc. for everyone residing in the state.

These subjects were previously governed by personal laws (enacted by Parliament) and the customs of residents depending on their religious or cultural identity. The Bill passed by the state Assembly in February became law only after President Murmu gave her assent to it in March.



Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## 2. Supreme Court pulled up AYUSH Ministry over Rule 170 of Drugs Act. Here's what it says

### Introduction

Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta, while hearing the ongoing Supreme Court case against Patanjali Ayurved, pulled up the AYUSH ministry for its July 1 notification asking state licensing authorities "not to initiate/take any action under" Rule 170 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

The rule, introduced in 2018, is designed to prevent misleading advertisements of AYUSH products. The AYUSH ministry's July 1 notification reiterated its position made in a previous letter, dated August 29, 2023.



### What is Rule 170?

In 2018, the government brought in Rule 170 to govern the manufacture, storage, and sale of medicines in the country, "specifically for controlling inappropriate advertisements of Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani medicines".

The rule prohibits AYUSH drug manufacturers from advertising their products without approval and allotment of a unique identification number from the state licensing authority. The manufacturers have to submit details such as textual references and rationale for the medicine from authoritative books, indication for use, evidence of safety, effectiveness, and quality of drugs.

The rule states that the application will be rejected if the manufacturer does not provide their contact details, if the contents of the advertisement are obscene or vulgar, products for enhancement of male or female sexual organs, depicts photographs or testimonials from celebrities or government officials, refers to any government organisation, gives false impression or makes misleading or exaggerated claims.

The rule was introduced after a parliamentary standing committee highlighted the problem of misleading claims, and the need for the AYUSH ministry to proactively pursue the issue.

### **What are challenges to regulate AYUSH drugs?**

Like allopathic medicines, manufacturers of AYUSH drugs also have to seek a license from the drug controller. As per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, phase I, II, and III trials for approval of new allopathic medicines or equivalence studies for generic versions have to be conducted before a drug is cleared for marketing.

However, such trials are not necessary for AYUSH drugs. According to the aforementioned act, most AYUSH drugs can be approved simply based on the rationale provided in authoritative texts of that particular stream. Safety trials have to be conducted only for formulations that use around 60 specific ingredients listed in the act, such as snake venom, snake head, heavy metals such as arsenic and mercury, and compounds such as copper sulphate.

For licensing of drugs containing these ingredients and traditional drugs used for new indications, proof of effectiveness has to be provided as per the Act.

### **Why did AYUSH ministry direct licensing authorities to ignore the rule?**

The Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani Drugs Technical Advisory Board (ASUDTAB), an expert body that recommends actions relating to regulation of AYUSH drugs, in a meeting in May 2023 said that Rule 170 could be omitted as amendments in Drugs and Magic Remedies Act — another law to govern such misleading advertisements — were also being taken up by the health and AYUSH ministries.

It is in this context that the AYUSH ministry made its recommendation to ignore the rule.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## **3. DoT notifies 'Telecommunications (Administration of Digital Bharat Nidhi) Rules, 2024'**

## Introduction

The first set of rules under the Telecommunications Act, 2023, 'Telecommunications (Administration of Digital Bharat Nidhi) Rules, 2024' have been notified.



## Salient features of the rules

1. The Universal Service Obligation Fund created under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 has now been rechristened as Digital Bharat Nidhi vide section 24(1) of the Telecommunications Act, 2024, and it now addresses new areas which may require support from Digital Bharat Nidhi in changing technological times.
2. The rules provide for powers and functions of administrator, who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation and administration of the Digital Bharat Nidhi. The rules also provide for criteria for undertaking schemes and projects under Digital Bharat Nidhi and selection process for implementers.
3. The rules stipulate that funds from the Digital Bharat Nidhi will be allocated to projects aimed at improving telecommunication services in underserved and remote areas and for underserved groups of the society, such as, women, persons with disabilities and economically and socially weaker sections.
4. The schemes and projects funded under the Digital Bharat Nidhi need to meet one or more of criteria stipulated in the rules. These include projects for provision of telecommunication services, including mobile and broadband services and telecommunication equipment required for delivery of telecommunication services, and enhancing telecom security; improving access and affordability of telecom services and introduction of next generation telecommunication technologies in underserved rural, remote and urban areas.
5. The criteria for undertaking schemes and project under Digital Bharat Nidhi also include promoting innovation, research and development; promotion and commercialisation of indigenous technology development and associated intellectual property including creation of regulatory sandboxes, where necessary; developing and establishing relevant standards to meet national requirements and their standardisation international standardisation bodies; to encourage start-ups in telecommunications sector; to create bridge between the academia, research institutes, start-ups and industry for capacity building and development; and to promote sustainable and green technologies in telecommunications sector. These projects are aimed at achieving the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

6. It is also provided that any Implementer, receiving funding from the Digital Bharat Nidhi for establishing, operating, maintaining or expanding a telecommunication network, shall share and make available such telecommunication network/services on an open and non-discriminatory basis.

### Background

The Telecommunications Act, 2023, was passed by the Parliament in December 2023, received the assent of President of India on December 24, 2023.

Guided by the principles of Samavesh (Inclusion), Suraksha (Security), Vridhhi (Growth), and Tvarit (Responsiveness), the Act aims to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India). The provisions related with Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN) are contained in Section 24-26, Chapter V of the Act.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: PIB

## 4. State changes in rape law: How Bengal, Andhra, and Maharashtra bills compare

### Introduction

As street protests against the rape and murder of a young doctor in Kolkata's R G Kar Medical College and Hospital continued to roil West Bengal, the state Assembly on Tuesday unanimously passed a Bill providing for mandatory death penalty in cases of rape where the victim dies or is left in a permanent vegetative state.

## WHY PRESIDENT'S ASSENT IS CRUCIAL

**CONCURRENT LIST** in Seventh Schedule of the Constitution lists subjects on which both the Centre and states can pass laws.

**CRIMINAL LAW** and Criminal Procedure are Entries 1 and 2 in the Concurrent List.

**THE THREE BILLS**, Aparajita, Disha, and Shakti, amend criminal laws in a way that makes them inconsistent or "repugnant" to the original law

enacted by Parliament.

**STATE AMENDMENTS** to central laws (such as BNS, BNSS and POCSO) dealing with subjects in the Concurrent List that are repugnant to the original law require the President's assent to come into force (Article 254 of the Constitution)

**WITHOUT ASSENT**, laws passed by states "to the extent of the repugnancy" will be void.



The Aparajita Woman and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Aparajita Bill) also introduces death as the maximum punishment in all cases of rape, and changes the way in which cases of rape are to be investigated and tried — by a Special Task Force and Special Courts in every district respectively.

To effect these changes, the Bill amends provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), the Bharatiya Nyaya Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), and the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) in the state.

Before West Bengal, the Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra Assemblies had passed laws prescribing the death penalty for rape by amending the criminal laws in force at the time. Neither Bill has received the mandatory assent of the President yet.

Earlier, the Madhya Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh Assemblies had, in 2017 and 2018 respectively, introduced the death penalty for the rape or gangrape of “a woman up to twelve years of age” (Sections 376AA and 376DA of the Indian Penal Code, 1860).

### **West Bengal: Aparajita Bill**

The West Bengal Bill begins by specifying that “Imprisonment for life” in Section 4(b) of the BNS “includes simple imprisonment for life or rigorous imprisonment for life”. Rigorous imprisonment involves hard labour during the sentence.

**SECTION 64 OF BNS:** This section (“Punishment for rape”) provides for both the floor punishment for the crime and for punishment in cases where aggravating circumstances are present, such as rape by a public servant, a member of the armed forces, during communal violence, etc. In both situations, the maximum punishment is “imprisonment for life”.

The Aparajita Bill amends Section 64 to add the words “or with death” at the end of the description of the punishments.

**SECTION 66:** This provision in the “principal act” (BNS) punishes rape “which causes the death of the woman or causes the woman to be in a persistent vegetative state” with a minimum 20 years in prison with the possibility of life imprisonment, “or with death”.

The Aparajita Bill deletes the mentions of all punishments barring death, making the death penalty mandatory in such cases.

**SECTION 70:** This BNS section deals with the offence of “Gang rape”. There is a provision for the death penalty in cases where the victim is “under eighteen years of age” (Section 70(2)), but in the case of older women, the maximum punishment is rigorous imprisonment for life (Section 70(1)).

The West Bengal Bill amends Section 70(1) to introduce the death penalty also for the gang rape of a woman above age 18.

**SECTIONS 71, 72, 73:** For repeat offenders (Section 71), the Aparajita Bill replaces the punishment of simple "imprisonment for life" with "rigorous imprisonment for life". It also increases the jail terms for disclosing the identity of a rape victim (Section 72) and for publishing information relating to court proceedings in rape cases (Section 73).

**ACID ATTACKS:** The Bill removes the lighter punishments for acid attacks (prison terms less than life and fine), leaving "rigorous imprisonment for life" as the only punishment (Section 124).

**DEATH IN POCSO ACT:** The Bill amends the POCSO Act to introduce the death penalty for penetrative sexual assault (Section 4), where the highest punishment currently is life imprisonment.

**TASK FORCES, SPECIAL COURTS:** The Aparajita Bill provides for special institutions with the express purpose of investigating, hearing, and deciding rape cases on strict timelines.

The amendment Bill introduces Section 29C to the BNSS, under which the state government shall create a special Aparajita Task Force in every district to investigate cases of rape. All persons, including government officers, will be obligated to assist the task force "without any delay", failing which they can be imprisoned for six months.

The Bill also reduces the time provided under BNSS Section 193 to complete the investigation into the relevant BNS and POCSO offences from two months to 21 days (which can be extended by another 15 days if necessary).

The Bill introduces Sections 29A and 29B to the BNSS to establish Special Courts in every district "for the purpose of expeditious completion of inquiry or trial" in rape cases, and to appoint a Special Public Prosecutor respectively.

The Bill also amends BNSS Section 346, reducing the time given to complete the trial after the chargesheet is filed from two months to 30 days.

The Bill will now be presented to the Governor of West Bengal who will send it to President Droupadi Murmu, who will then decide whether to give her assent and allow the Bill to come into force.

### **Andhra Pradesh: Disha Bills**

In November 2019, a 26-year-old veterinary doctor was gang raped and murdered in Shamshabad, Hyderabad. Four persons who were arrested were shot dead by police in an encounter on December 6 that year. Then Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy promised to bring legislation to ensure stronger punishments and speedy disposal of cases of crimes against women.

In December 2019, the Assembly unanimously passed the Andhra Pradesh Disha Act – Criminal Law (Andhra Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2019, and the Andhra Pradesh Disha (Special Courts for Specified Offences against Women and Children) Bill, 2019.

The Bills amended the IPC, 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC) for the state of Andhra Pradesh.

**DEATH FOR RAPE:** The Disha Bill introduced the death penalty as punishment for the crimes of rape, including against a minor below 16 years of age (IPC Section 376); gang rape (Section 376D); and for repeat offenders (Section 376E).

Like Aparajita, Disha too, created “Special Police Teams” and “Exclusive Special Courts” in every district to investigate and hear cases of crimes against women, and prescribed shortened timelines for investigating and hearing such cases.

It also proposed a “Women and Children Offenders Registry” in which full details of those “involved in” offences against women would be maintained, and be made available to law enforcement agencies.

Both Disha Bills are pending at the Centre, awaiting President Murmu’s decision on giving assent.

#### **Maharashtra: Shakti Bill**

In 2020, the Maharashtra legislature passed the Shakti Criminal Laws (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill, 2020. The Shakti Bill too introduced the death penalty in rape cases and provided shortened timelines for concluding the investigation and trial.

**OBLIGATION ON WEB PLATFORMS:** The Shakti Bill punished with up to one month in prison “any social media platform or Internet or mobile telephony data provider including any intermediary or custodian who fails to share any data including document or electronic record with the Investigation Officer as requested” in cases of crimes against women.

**DEATH PENALTY:** The Bill introduced the death penalty in “heinous” acid attack cases where “adequate conclusive evidence is there and the circumstances warrant exemplary punishment”.

**POCSO ACT:** Like Aparajita, Shakti too, amended the POCSO Act to introduce the death penalty as a punishment for penetrative sexual assault (Section 4).

Presidential assent for the Shakti Bill too, is pending. Leaders and workers of the NCP (Sharad Pawar) protested in Mumbai on Tuesday demanding assent to the Bill.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

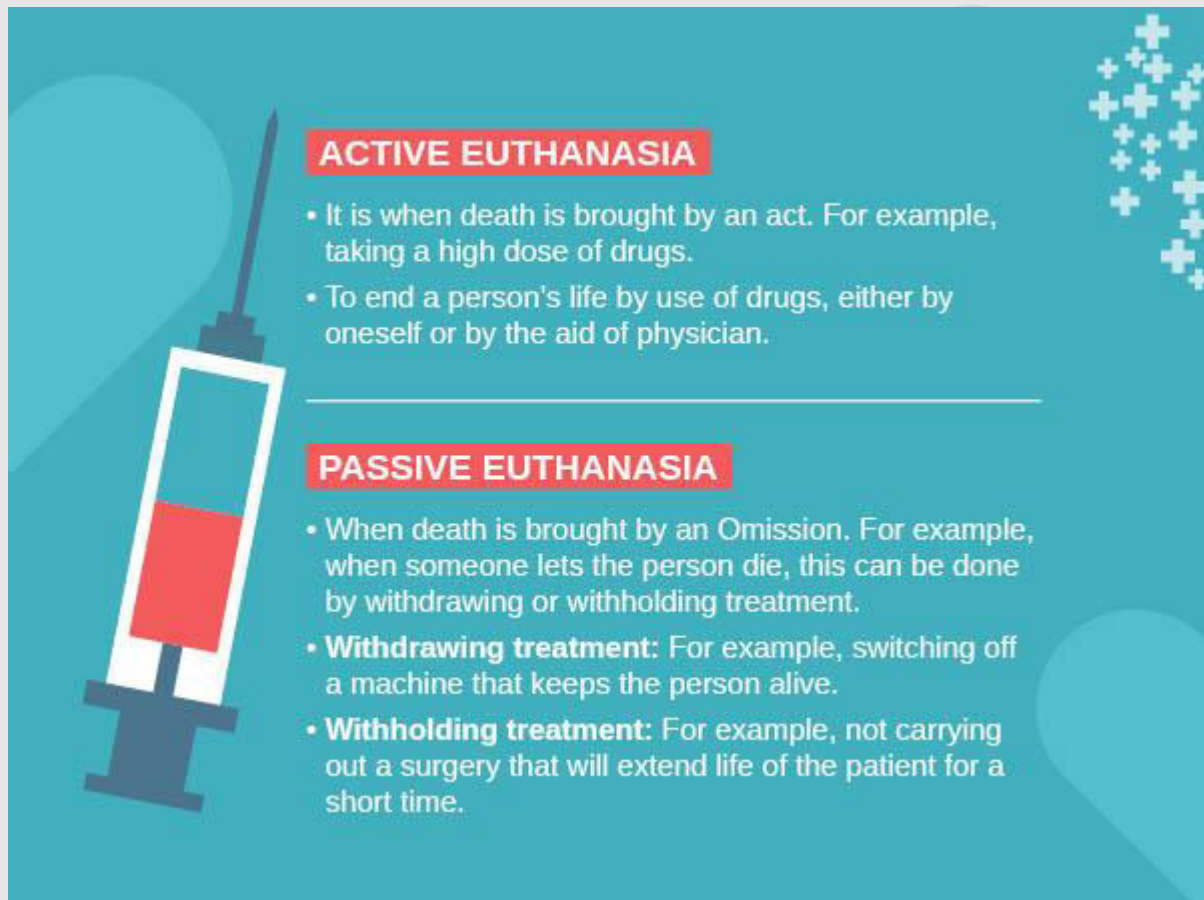
Source: Indian Express

## 5. The law and the ground realities of passive euthanasia

### Introduction

Finding that 30-year-old Harish Rana was not being kept alive 'mechanically', the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court recently rejected a plea by his parents for constituting a medical board to examine if this is a viable case for passive euthanasia.

The case has reignited the debate around the ethics and law that defines passive euthanasia — withdrawing life-supporting treatment to allow a person to die naturally.



### 2011: Aruna Shanbaug case in SC

In 2011, the Supreme Court for the first time recognised the legality of passive euthanasia in the case of Aruna Ramchandra Shanbaug v Union of India.

After being sexually assaulted by a ward attendant of Mumbai's KEM Hospital in 1973 and suffering a brain injury in the process, nurse Aruna Shanbaug was left in a 'persistent vegetative state' for decades, with no possibility of recovery. Journalist and author Pinki Virani, who wrote a book on Shanbaug, filed a petition at the Supreme Court in 2009 seeking an end to the life-supporting treatment the hospital was providing to Shanbaug, arguing that she should be allowed to die peacefully.



The court, while ruling out passive euthanasia in this case, held that Shanbaug was still alive as she did not require life support. However, the court recognised the legality of passive euthanasia, though it clarified that this could only be done with the approval of a High Court.

### **A roadmap**

In 2018, the Supreme Court recognised the legality of 'passive euthanasia' for terminally-ill patients, holding that the 'right to die with dignity' forms a part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The court also laid down detailed guidelines for passive euthanasia, both in cases where the patient left an 'advance directive' or a 'living will' stating that life support should be withdrawn if they fall terminally ill, and in cases where no such directive was left behind.

Among the guidelines was the condition that the living will must be signed in the presence of two witnesses and signed by a Judicial Magistrate. The guidelines also called for multiple approvals before the terminally ill patient's case is cleared – from the treating physician, a suitably qualified medical board, and another external medical board, with representation from the local administration.

In the case of patients without a living will, the family has to give their consent for withdrawal of life support. In 2019, the Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine filed an application for modifying these guidelines, stating that they were cumbersome and unworkable.

In 2023, another five-judge bench allowed the guidelines to be modified in a number of ways. This included introducing timelines for each board to make a decision, and limiting the involvement of the Judicial Magistrate.

### **The tough decisions**

Though the Supreme Court dismissed the plea for passive euthanasia in Harish Rana's case on August 20, the bench was sympathetic to the plight of Rana's parents who had spent a significant portion of their own lives and savings caring for their son who will likely never recover.

Since his fall from the fourth floor of a building in 2013, Rana has been in a 'permanent vegetative state', suffering from quadriplegia with "100% disability in relation to his whole body", according to his hospital records.

According to medical experts, the financial implications are often drastic for patients in a vegetative state. Speaking of the tough decisions families are forced to make while caring for a terminally ill patient, Dr Bhavani Prasad Gudavalli, Head of the Critical Care Department at CARE Hospitals, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, said, "It's not as if they (the families) don't have compassion, but when the finances come into play and you tell them that the financial implications are very high and the chance of recovery is very low, then the family will often want to withdraw treatment."

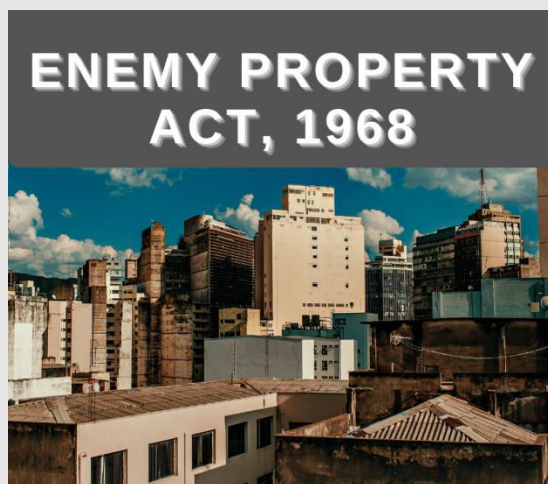
**Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance**

## 6. Pervez Musharraf's ancestral land in UP to be auctioned under Enemy Property Act: What it means

### Introduction

A parcel of land in Uttar Pradesh, previously belonging to the family of former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, is set to be auctioned under The Enemy Property Act.

The Union Home Affairs Ministry said in a notice erected on the plot that around 13 bighas of land in the Kotana Bangar village in Baghpat district has been directed for sale through e-auction.



Under the Act, the Indian government can take control of "enemy property". Here's all you need to know.

### What is enemy property?

In the wake of the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, there was migration of people from India to Pakistan. Under the Defence of India Rules framed under The Defence of India Act, 1962, the Government of India took over the properties and companies of those who took Pakistani nationality.

The Centre vested these "enemy properties" with the Custodian of Enemy Property for India. The same was done for property left behind by those who went to China after the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

The Tashkent Declaration of January 10, 1966, included a clause that said India and Pakistan would discuss the return of the property and assets taken over by either side in connection with the conflict. However, the Government of Pakistan disposed of all such properties in their country in 1971.

### How did India deal with enemy property?

The Enemy Property Act, enacted in 1968, provided for the continuous vesting of enemy property in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India. Through the department, the central government owns enemy properties across many states.

In 2017, Parliament passed The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2016, which amended the 1968 Act and The Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971.

It expanded the definition of the terms “enemy subject”, and “enemy firm” to include the legal heir and successor of an enemy, whether a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which is not an enemy; and the succeeding firm of an enemy firm, irrespective of the nationality of its members or partners.

The amended law provided that enemy property shall continue to vest in the Custodian even if the enemy or enemy subject or enemy firm ceases to be an enemy due to death, extinction, winding up of business or change of nationality, or that the legal heir or successor is a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which is not an enemy.

The Custodian, with prior approval of the central government, may dispose of enemy properties vested in him under the provisions of the Act, and the government may issue directions to the Custodian for this purpose.

### **Why were these amendments brought?**

The amendments aimed to guard against claims of succession or transfer of properties left by people who migrated to Pakistan and China after the wars. The main aim was to negate the effect of a court judgment in this regard.

The statement of objects and reasons in the Bill said: “Of late, there have been various judgments by various courts that have adversely affected the powers of the Custodian and the Government of India as provided under the Enemy Property Act, 1968. In view of such interpretation by various courts, the Custodian is finding it difficult to sustain his actions under the Enemy Property Act, 1968.”

### **What did these court orders say?**

One major judgment was passed in the case of the estate of the erstwhile Raja of Mahmudabad in UP, who owned several large properties in Hazratganj, Sitapur and Nainital.

Following Partition, the Raja left for Pakistan in 1957 and took its citizenship. His wife and son Mohammed Amir Mohammad Khan, however, stayed in India as Indian citizens.

After the 1968 Act, the Raja’s estate was declared enemy property. When he died, his son staked claim to the properties. After a legal battle, an apex court bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhan and Justice Altamas Kabir on October 21, 2005, ruled in his favour.

The verdict opened the floodgates for further pleas in courts in which genuine or purported relatives of persons who had migrated to Pakistan produced deeds of gift claiming they were the rightful owners of enemy properties.

On July 2, 2010, the then-UPA government promulgated an Ordinance that restrained courts from ordering the government to divest enemy properties from the Custodian. The 2005 SC order was thus rendered ineffective, and the Custodian again took over the Raja’s properties. A Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 22, 2010, but it could not be passed during the term of the 15th Lok Sabha and lapsed.

Finally, on January 7, 2016, the President of India promulgated The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Ordinance, 2016, which was replaced by the Bill that became law in 2017.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance  
Source: Indian Express

## 7. What is the Law Commission: its role, members, & recommendations

### Introduction

The Union government has notified the constitution of the 23rd Law Commission of India with effect from September 1. The commission, which was notified on September 2, will have a three-year term. The tenure of the previous Law Commission chaired by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi ended on August 31.



The commission has been notified at a time when some key items on the BJP's agenda, including the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code and holding simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state Assemblies, were given a fresh push by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day address.

### The Law Commission and importance

The Law Commission is a non-statutory commission (not created by a law of Parliament) formed by the Union Ministry of Law and Justice through a gazette notification to help the government review functioning of laws, suggest repealing of obsolete legislation, and make recommendations on matters referred to it by the government.



The commission is usually chaired by a retired judge of the Supreme Court or a High Court, and has legal scholars as members. Serving judges can also be appointed to the commission, according to the notification on the appointment of the new panel.

The 22 Law Commissions appointed since Independence have submitted a total 289 reports to the government. The government is under no obligation to accept the reports; however, the commissions' recommendations have over the decades led to the enactment of important legislation including the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC), and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act).

The process of scrapping more than 1,500 obsolete central laws was taken up by the government after recommendations for their "immediate repeal" in reports submitted by the 20th Law Commission.

### **Constitution of the 23rd panel**

The September 2 notification issued by the Law Ministry's Legal Affairs Department says the panel will have a full-time chairperson, four full-time members including a member-secretary, not more than five part-time members, and the secretaries of the Legal Affairs and Legislative departments as ex officio members. The commission's term will be until August 31, 2027.

The chairperson and four full-time members can be serving SC or HC judges or "other category of persons", who can in theory be any expert chosen by the government. The notifications of the 2020 (22nd) and 2015 (21st) commissions also said this, but the two commissions were headed by Justice Awasthi and former Supreme Court judge Justice B S Chauhan respectively.

The chairperson and members of the 23rd Law Commission are yet to be named. The decision will be taken by the Appointments Committee of Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister, government sources said. The chairperson and members of the 22nd Law Commission were named only in November 2022, which was effectively when the commission's work started.

A serving judge, if appointed to the commission, serves until retirement or expiry of the panel's term, whichever is earlier, and gets no additional remuneration apart from the usual judge's salary. In the "other" category, a chairperson is entitled to Rs.2.50 lakh as monthly salary and a member, Rs.2.25 lakh. The member-secretary must be an officer of the Indian Legal Service of the rank of Secretary.

### **Terms of reference of panel**

The terms of reference of the 23rd Law Commission are broadly the same as those of the past few commissions. The first three terms are: "Identify laws which are no longer needed or relevant and can be immediately repealed; Creating a Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) for periodic review of existing laws inter alia for the undertaking of simplification of language and processes; Identify laws which are not in harmony with the economic needs of the times and require amendments."

Like the 22nd and 21st commissions, the 23rd Law Commission too, has been asked to examine "the existing laws in the light of Directive Principles of State Policy and to suggest ways of improvement and reform and also to suggest such legislations as might be necessary to implement the Directive Principles and to attain the objectives set out in the Preamble of the Constitution".

The Prime Minister's call last month for a "secular civil code" reflects the Directive Principle that the "state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". The 22nd Law Commission also looked into this question; but, its views are not known — the chairperson assumed office as a member of the Lokpal in March, before the Law Commission could submit its report to the government.

The 23rd Law Commission is also mandated to examine laws that affect the poor, carry out a post-enactment audit for socio-economic legislation, and review judicial administration to make it more responsive to the needs of current times.

### **What 22nd panel said**

The 22nd Law Commission presented 11 reports, including one in April 2023 that recommended that Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, the widely criticised law against sedition, should be retained. The commission cited threats to internal security, including from Maoists, militancy in the Northeast, terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir and the Khalistan movement to back its recommendation. However, the commission did recommend certain amendments to "bring about greater clarity regarding the usage of the provision".

This March, the commission presented a report recommending a new law to protect trade secrets. It also worked on a report on simultaneous elections, but this report, like that on the Uniform Civil Code, was not presented to the government.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance  
Source: Indian Express

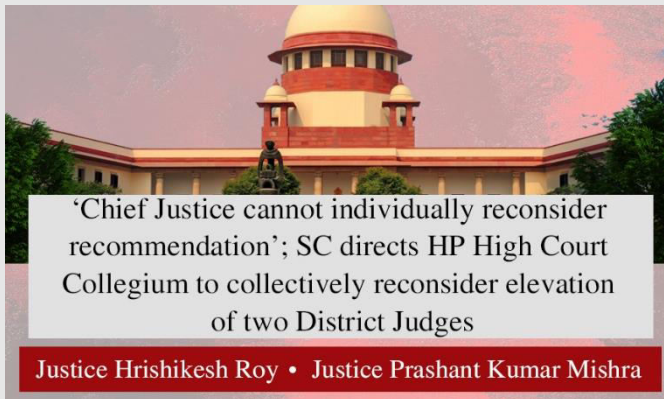
## **8. 'Effective consultation': How SC ruling underlines process of HC judges' appointment**

### **Introduction**

The Supreme Court has directed the Himachal Pradesh High Court collegium to consider again the names of two judicial officers it had first recommended for elevation to the Bench 21 months ago.

The unusual direction came after the affected individuals moved the Supreme Court against the HC collegium's decision to recommend two other names for judgeship earlier this year.

The top court has in the past placed strict limits on when it can review decisions at HCs relating to the appointments of judges, or direct them to reconsider. Recently, a Bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and P K Mishra decided that the current case fell within the scope of review.



### **What is the procedure for appointing judges of High Courts?**

The collegium system of appointment (and transfer) of judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts was laid down by a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in *Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association vs Union of India* (1993), commonly known as the *Second Judges Case*.

The ruling made the recommendations of the SC collegium binding on the Centre, and gave the power to appoint and transfer judges of the higher judiciary to the judiciary. Under the collegium system, judges choose judges — and while the government can delay their appointments, it cannot reject the collegium's choice.

In 1998, in response to a series of questions from then President K R Narayanan, the SC clarified how the collegium system would function. (*Third Judges Case*)

The court said that collegiums for HC appointments would include the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and the two seniormost judges of the Supreme Court. This collegium would be required to consult the "Chief Justice and senior judges" of the HC concerned, the "seniormost" SC judge from that HC, as well as any SC judges who were "knowledgeable" about that HC.

The court also spelled out the limited grounds on which a recommendation could be challenged. First, if there was lack of "effective consultation" with any of these individuals or institutions. Second, if the candidate in question was not "eligible" to be a judge — these qualifications are laid down in Articles 217 (High Court) and 124 (Supreme Court) of the Constitution.

Following the opinion given by the SC in the *Third Judges Case*, the central government and the SC entered into a Memorandum of Procedure (MOP) in 1998, which detailed the process, from the beginning, for the appointment of HC judges.

As a part of this process, the Chief Justice of the HC must consult two other seniormost judges at the HC — together forming the High Court collegium — and send their recommendations, with reasons, to the Chief Minister, the Governor, and the CJI.

The Governor, based on the advice of the Chief Minister, will send the proposal to the Minister of Law and Justice at the Centre, who will conduct a background check and send the entire material to the CJI, who will consider it with the rest of the SC collegium.

### **So what happened in the Himachal Pradesh case?**

In December 2022, the then HC collegium comprising the then Chief Justice and then two seniormost judges recommended district judges Chirag Bhanu Singh and Arvind Malhotra for elevation to the HC.

On January 4, 2024, the SC collegium sent the recommendation back to the HC Chief Justice for "reconsideration". On January 16, the Union Law Minister wrote to the HC Chief Justice, requesting that fresh recommendations be made for Singh and Malhotra.

However, on April 23, the High Court collegium recommended two other judicial officers for elevation to the HC, prompting Singh and Malhotra to approach the SC. They argued that the HC collegium had ignored their seniority (as the two seniormost district judges in the state) by recommending two other judicial officers without first considering them again (Chirag Bhanu Singh & Anr v High Court of Himachal Pradesh).

The SC had in both the Second and Third Judges cases highlighted the importance of considering seniority among judges while making recommendations for appointments.

In a report submitted to the SC by the Registrar General of the Himachal Pradesh HC, it was revealed that the HC Chief Justice had written to the SC collegium on the "suitability" of appointing the two judicial officers on March 6, 2024. The HC argued that this was in "full compliance" of the SC collegium's January 4 resolution, which was addressed only to the HC Chief Justice.

#### **What did the SC decide?**

**MAINTAINABILITY:** The SC first decided whether the case fell within the SC's narrow scope for reviewing recommendations for appointments.

Relying on the Second and Third judges case, the court held that this case was limited to whether there was "effective consultation" after the SC collegium's January 4 resolution, and had "nothing to do with the 'merits' or the 'suitability' of the officers in question".

**PROPER PROCEDURE:** The second issue was whether the HC Chief Justice individually sending a letter (on March 6) could qualify as "effective consultation".

The court held that even though the SC collegium's January 4 resolution was addressed to only the HC Chief Justice, "the language therein by itself cannot be understood as permitting the Chief Justice...to act on his own, in matters of recommendation or even reconsideration, for elevation to the High Court Bench".

The court ruled that the decision must be made only after "collective consultation amongst the three Constitutional functionaries of the High Court i.e., the Chief Justice and the two senior-most companion judges".

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express



## 9. Bail Granted to MP Engineer Rashid

### Introduction

A Delhi court has granted interim bail to Lok Sabha MP Sheikh Abdul Rashid (Engineer Rashid) until October 2, allowing him to campaign for the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections. Rashid, who has been in Tihar Jail since 2019 in connection with a terror funding case, won the Baramulla Lok Sabha seat as an Independent candidate.

### Allegations Against Engineer Rashid

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Rashid on August 9, 2019, in a case involving alleged terror funding. Rashid was accused of using public platforms to promote separatism and having ties with militant organizations. The NIA claimed that he had received funds through hawala channels and was associated with terror groups like the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

### NIA's Case

The NIA registered the case in 2017 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and IPC Section 120B, implicating Rashid in terror funding alongside other separatist leaders. The NIA's charges are based on witness testimonies, an email allegedly linking Rashid to terror activities, and a Facebook post where Rashid allegedly defended Hafiz Saeed, founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba. Rashid's ties to hawala dealer Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali were also cited as evidence.



## Delhi Court Grants Interim Bail To Engineer Rashid

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted interim bail till October 2 to Lok Sabha MP Engineer Rashid in a terror funding case. Rashid has been in jail since 2019 after he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the 2017 terror funding case

### Rashid's Defense

Rashid has contested the allegations, arguing that the evidence presented against him, including the Facebook post and witness statements, is insufficient. He claims he has already been discharged from certain charges under the UAPA and disputes the NIA's interpretation of key evidence, including the email. He has also pointed to procedural issues, such as not being provided with written grounds for his arrest.

### Legal Proceedings

Rashid's first bail plea was dismissed in 2020, and charges were framed against him in March 2022. Despite the slow progress in the case, with only 20 out of 375 witnesses examined, Rashid continues to fight the charges while on interim bail.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## 10. What does dissolution of SCoS entail?

### Introduction



The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has dissolved the 14-member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) headed by eminent economist and former chief statistician of the country Pronab Sen. Geeta Singh Rathore, Director-General of the Ministry's National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), told the SCoS members that its works overlapped with that of the Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys, headed by Rajeeva Laxman Karandikar, former

director of the Chennai Mathematical Institute and this was cited as the reason for dismantling the SCoS. Dr. Sen has said that the SCoS members had questioned the delay in conducting the census, as censuses have long been a crucial source of reliable data for policymakers. He also complained that the members were not given any specific reason for the committee's dissolution.

### What were the key responsibilities of SCoS?

The SCoS advised the Centre on survey methodology, including sampling frames, sampling design, survey instruments, questions, etc. It also played a vital role in finalising the tabulation plan of surveys, reviewing the extant framework, and addressing the issues raised from time to time on the subjects, results, methodology, etc. related to all surveys. The Terms of Reference for the SCoS also included providing guidance for conducting pilot surveys/pre-testing, exploring the availability of administrative statistics relating to surveys/statistics, providing guidance for studying or identifying data gaps, providing additional data requirements, and imparting technical guidance to the Central and State level agencies for conducting surveys.

### **What is the role of the new committee?**

The Steering Committee, which replaces the SCoS, has 17 members and one non-member secretary. The Centre has retained at least four members from the SCoS in the Steering Committee other than officials such as Ms. Rathore. Sonalde Desai, Bishwanath Goldar, S. Chandrasekhar, and Mausumi Bose are the four experts who are retained. The tenure of the Steering Committee will be for two years. Its Terms of Reference are quite similar to that of SCoS, including reviewing subject results, methodology questionnaires, sampling frames, sampling design, concepts, definitions, survey instruments etc. related to all National Sample Surveys. It will also advise the Ministry on survey methodology and finalise the tabulation plan of surveys.

The mandates of both the committees clash in a way, though the composition of the Steering Committee is different as it has more official members while the SCoS had several non-official members.

### **Why is there a pressure for a new census?**

Serious academicians and policymakers have been demanding the Centre to conduct a census. The Opposition said that the lack of fresh data keeps crores of people away from schemes such as the National Food Security Act. The Opposition has also been questioning the numbers on employment and unemployment. On the periodic labour force surveys too, there were questions. Since the Census is conducted by the Union Home Ministry, the Ministry of Statistics has been telling the SCoS members in its meetings that it has no role in deciding the date of census. Statisticians and academics argue that the census can provide State and sub-district wise data on issues such as education and employment.

### **What are the flaws in administrative data?**

While the Centre has been claiming that data provided by the EPFO, ESIC on its enrolments and Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS (K: Capital, L: Labour, E: Energy, M: Materials and S: Services) database gave a rosy picture about the employment scenario in the country. However, questions have been raised as administration data, especially on labour, is threshold-based. It is alleged that such data was airing the perspectives of policy architects or reflecting the government's intentions.

The chances of manipulating the administration data set were also high as Government agencies generated that data and it is also argued that such data has limitations of analytical rigour.

On the other hand, survey-based data, including the census, has universal coverage without any thresholds, providing a wider and bigger platform. However, surveys such as PLFS could not provide State or district-level data, but the census will be able to provide even sub-district data. PLFS also allegedly had an urban bias.

### **How urgent is the next census?**

The country's decennial census has been conducted every ten years since the 1870s, with the last census in 2011. The 2021 census was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and even after three years, the Centre has not provided a roadmap for the next census. Economists and policymakers argue that relying on 2011 census data for statistical surveys, even after 13 years, will negatively impact decision making. So they suggested that the way forward is to conduct the next census at the earliest.

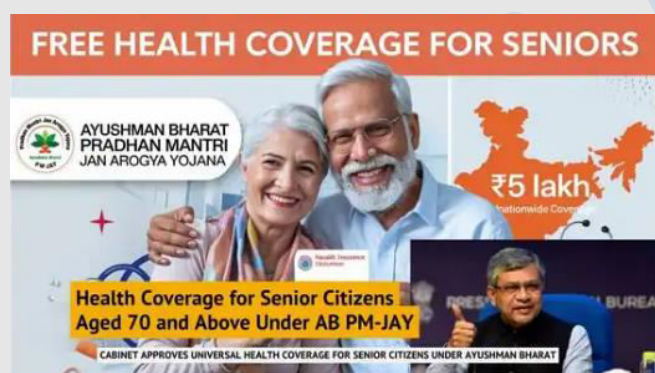
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## 11. All about AB PM-JAY, the universal health cover for Indians aged over 70

### Introduction

A day after the Union cabinet approved the expansion of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) health cover to all Indians of age 70 years and older irrespective of their income, officials said registration for the expanded insurance scheme was likely to begin within a week. The scheme may be formally launched by the Prime Minister subsequently, they said.



AB PM-JAY is already the world's largest public health insurance scheme. It provides free cover upto Rs 5 lakh annually to all members of eligible families — estimated to comprise the bottom 40% of the population economically — irrespective of age.

Expansion of the cover to the country's entire elderly population was one of the

BJP's key promises before the Lok Sabha polls. This is now the first complete age-cohort to receive coverage under the scheme.

### Register for scheme

Those eligible for the expanded cover will be able to register themselves and get the Ayushman Bharat card as soon as the new module is added to the existing portal.

Beneficiaries can register either through the government's Ayushman App or at the Ayushman Bharat counter at any government health facility. Anyone who has turned 70 as per their Aadhaar can register for the new health cover.

There will be no exclusions or waiting period of pre-existing conditions. Beneficiaries will be able to utilise their policy as soon as they complete their eKYC. The portal will also be face-authorisation-enabled, to ensure that even elderly persons whose fingerprints are difficult to read or have changed over time can avail the benefits.

### **Cover, beneficiaries**

Everyone of age 70 or more will be entitled to a cover of Rs 5 lakh annually, shared within the family. This means if there are two elderly beneficiaries in the household, the cover will be split among them.

Elderly members (age 70 and more) of families that are already covered in accordance with their economic status will get a top-up cover of Rs 5 lakh — to be used only for the elderly. These elderly beneficiaries will have to re-register to receive the top-up cover.

The scheme will cover almost 6 crore individuals (from 4.5 crore families), of whom 1.78 crore are already covered by the scheme. "For the additional top-up amount, the financial implication is very little," a senior official said.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme already covers 1,670 procedures across 26 specialities, which includes 25 geriatric packages. More packages for the elderly are in the process of being added, officials said.

### **Those already covered**

Some 80 lakh people are separately covered under various government health schemes — the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme, or cover provided to family members of defence and railway personnel, etc.

Those who are covered under these government health schemes will have the option of choosing either Ayushman Bharat or continuing with their existing coverage.

People who are covered under the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), however, will be eligible to have both their existing cover and Ayushman Bharat. This is because premiums for ESIC are paid by the insured and their employer, not the government.

People who have their own privately purchased insurance cover will be eligible to have the Ayushman Bharat cover as well.

### **Cost to government**

The initial outlay from the Centre for the expansion of the scheme will be Rs 3,437 crore. This will cover the costs for the six months in the current financial year and all of next year, officials said. States will have to contribute 40% to the cost of the scheme.

Ayushman Bharat has not been implemented by Delhi, West Bengal, and Odisha. Officials said that Odisha is currently in talks with the Centre to launch the scheme.

### **Why the scheme matters**

Making health cover universal over the age of 70 is very significant as India's population ages. More Indians are likely to need health facilities in the coming years, and much of the population is currently under-covered by health schemes.



✦ At the time of the 2011 census, only 8.6% of India's population was over the age of 60 years. This is expected to increase to 19.5% by 2050, according to the government's Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI). In terms of numbers, Indians over the age of 60 are likely to be 319 million in 2050 — up more than three times from the 103 million in 2011.

✦ Older Indians are much more likely to be hospitalised and to stay in hospitals for longer. The rate of admission among the elderly already covered under the scheme has been more than 7% — double the 3-4% admission rate for the younger people covered under the scheme, according to officials.

An analysis of Ayushman Bharat data by The Indian Express earlier had shown that almost 12% of all admissions and 14% of the money reimbursed under the scheme was for those who were of age 70 years or older.

✦ The elderly remain largely uncovered by any health scheme. Just over 20% of India's population above the age of 60 is currently covered by any government, employer-provided, or personal insurance scheme, according to the India Ageing Report 2023.

✦ Women make up the larger share of the elderly population — a survey by NITI Aayog found that 58% of the elderly are women, and 54% among them are widows. "This presents a substantial challenge because they may not have healthcare support. This scheme will be of immense help to women, especially those who are widowed," an official said.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## 12. Cabinet Approval for PM E-DRIVE Scheme



### Overview of the Scheme

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) Scheme. The scheme, with an outlay of ₹10,900 crore over two years, aims to promote electric mobility in India.

### Key Components of the Scheme

#### 1. Subsidies and Incentives

o ₹3,679 crore has been allocated for demand incentives to promote the purchase of electric two-wheelers (e-2Ws), three-

wheelers (e-3Ws), ambulances (e-ambulances), and trucks (e-trucks).  
o Support for 24.79 lakh e-2Ws, 3.16 lakh e-3Ws, and 14,028 e-buses.

## **2. E-Voucher System**

o To streamline the buying process, e-vouchers will be introduced for EV buyers to avail of demand incentives.  
o The e-voucher, authenticated through Aadhaar, will be generated at the time of purchase and signed by both the buyer and dealer.

## **3. Electric Ambulances**

o ₹500 crore has been allocated for the deployment of electric ambulances.  
o Safety standards for these ambulances will be formulated in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).

## **4. E-Buses for Public Transport**

o ₹4,391 crore has been set aside for procuring 14,028 e-buses for cities with populations above 40 lakh, such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore.  
o Preference will be given to cities that scrap old buses in compliance with the MoRTH Vehicle Scrapping Scheme.

## **5. Incentives for E-Trucks**

o ₹500 crore will be provided for e-truck buyers, especially for those scrapping old trucks via MoRTH-approved scrapping centers.

## **6. Charging Infrastructure Development**

o ₹2,000 crore has been allocated to set up 22,100 fast chargers for e-four-wheelers, 1,800 for e-buses, and 48,400 for e-2Ws/3Ws.  
o Charging stations will be installed in cities with high EV penetration and selected highways.

## **7. Testing Infrastructure for EVs**

o ₹780 crore has been allocated for upgrading testing agencies to handle emerging EV technologies.

## **Objectives and Impact**

### **• Environmental Impact**

The PM E-DRIVE scheme will reduce air pollution by promoting the widespread use of electric vehicles, especially in public transportation and freight sectors.

### **• Support for Domestic Manufacturing**

The scheme aims to strengthen India's EV manufacturing through the Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP), promoting "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" by enhancing the domestic EV supply chain.

### **• Job Creation**

The development of EV manufacturing and infrastructure is expected to generate significant employment opportunities.

This initiative addresses environmental pollution, promotes sustainable transportation, and strengthens India's energy security.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: PIB

### 13. Kejriwal Granted Bail in Delhi Excise Policy Case

#### Supreme Court's Ruling

Arvind Kejriwal was granted bail by the Supreme Court after being held in Tihar Jail in connection with a CBI investigation into the Delhi excise policy. The court's decision was delivered by Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan, who both agreed on granting bail but differed on whether Kejriwal's arrest in June 2024 was necessary.



#### Disagreement on Arrest Necessity

The judges had differing views on the necessity of Kejriwal's arrest:

- Justice Surya Kant upheld the arrest, stating that the CBI Special Judge had approved the arrest based on valid reasons, such as Kejriwal's "evasive replies" during interrogation.

- Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, on the other hand, found

the arrest "untenable," questioning the timing and the rationale behind it, especially since the CBI had delayed the arrest until after Kejriwal received bail in a related ED case.

#### Timeline of Events

- **March 2024:** Kejriwal was first arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the excise policy case.
- **June 2024:** The CBI arrested Kejriwal while he was already in custody.
- **July 2024:** The Supreme Court granted him interim bail in the ED case, but he remained in jail due to ongoing CBI proceedings.
- **August 2024:** After the Delhi High Court upheld his CBI arrest, Kejriwal appealed to the Supreme Court, leading to the final verdict in September.

#### Legal Debate Over Arrest Procedures

During the hearings, both sides cited the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC):

- **Kejriwal's Argument:** He claimed that the CBI did not meet the conditions for arrest under Section 41(1)(b), and he was not issued a notice under Section 41A before being arrested.

- **Justice Kant's View:** He found that the CBI followed proper procedure and that the notice requirement under Section 41A did not apply since Kejriwal was already in judicial custody.

- **Justice Bhuyan's View:** He disagreed, arguing that Kejriwal's arrest was unnecessary and that being uncooperative during interrogation did not justify arrest. He also cited Kejriwal's constitutional right to remain silent under Article 20(3).

### Bail Justification

Despite differing on the arrest, both judges agreed that Kejriwal should be granted bail:

- Justice Kant noted that prolonged detention without a timely trial would unjustly deprive Kejriwal of his personal liberty, as the trial process was likely to be lengthy.
- Kejriwal also passed the "triple test" for bail: there was no risk of tampering with evidence, he was not a flight risk, and any future witness tampering could be addressed.

### Conclusion

Both Justices concurred that Kejriwal's personal liberty outweighed procedural issues and that he should be released on bail pending trial.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## 14. Why has Supreme Court recalled its reference to CBI as a 'caged parrot'?

### Introduction



For the second time in about a decade, India's highest court has used the expression "caged parrot" in reference to the country's premier crime investigation agency.

In his judgment granting Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal bail in the CBI case over the alleged Delhi liquor policy 'scam', Justice Ujjal Bhuyan wrote: "Not so long ago, this Court had castigated the CBI comparing it to a caged parrot. It is imperative that CBI dispel the notion of it being a caged parrot. Rather, the

perception should be that of an uncaged parrot."

Justice Bhuyan was referring to an observation made by Justice R M Lodha in 2013 while hearing a matter regarding alleged irregularities in the allocation of coal block licences to private companies, which was referred to in the media as the "Coalgate" case.

Here's what the alleged case was, and what Justice Lodha said.

### **The 'Coalgate' case**

The Coalgate case was about alleged irregularities in the allocation of coal blocks by the Congress-led UPA regime. The case was one of the several political scandals that contributed to the narrative of widespread corruption during the second term of the Manmohan Singh government.

The alleged scam was spotlighted by a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India in 2012 that appeared to show inefficient and possibly illegal allocation of coal blocks between 2004 and 2009. The report said the blocks were allocated by the government without a process of competitive bidding, leading to a presumptive loss to the exchequer.

The CAG initially estimated the quantum of presumptive loss to the exchequer at a staggering Rs 10.7 lakh crore, but toned this amount down to Rs 1.86 lakh crore in the final report.

Following a complaint by the BJP, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) directed the CBI to probe the matter for corruption. A report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2013 said allocation of blocks between 1993 and 2008 was done in an unauthorised manner, and that the allotment of all mines where production was yet to start should be cancelled.

The Supreme Court constituted a special court to try all cases related to the coal scam.

### **What Justice Lodha said**

Justice Lodha's observation came amid a raging controversy over the CBI sharing its draft status report on the alleged irregular coal block allocations with the political executive and officials in the Ministry of Coal and the Prime Minister's Office in 2013.

A three-judge Bench led by Justice Lodha was examining a nine-page affidavit submitted by the CBI. Then CBI Director Ranjit Sinha said that then Law Minister Ashwani Kumar had made certain "significant changes" in the agency's draft probe report on Coalgate, and top law officers and government officials, including those from the PMO, had suggested amendments.

In response, Justice Lodha first "loudly berated the attorney-general, the government's top lawyer, for what he said was clear evidence of interference in a CBI inquiry", according to Reuters report from the time.

He went on to say, according to a PTI report: "The CBI has become a caged parrot speaking in its master's voice. It is a sordid saga that there are many masters and giving unbridled power to the CBI is not possible. The CBI has become the police force and is in the administrative control of the Central government. CBI investigations have to be independent."

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

### **15. Arvind Kejriwal wants early elections to Delhi Assembly. What does the law say?**



## Overview

Kejriwal from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has resigned from CM post to prove his innocence in the alleged excise policy corruption case, in which he was granted bail by the Supreme Court last week.



Kejriwal has asked for Assembly elections to be held in Delhi along with Maharashtra, where a new House must be elected before November 26. However, the term of the Delhi Assembly ends only on February 23, 2025.

### Who decides when Assembly elections will be held in Delhi?

Under Article 324 of the Constitution, the powers of superintendence, direction, and control of elections are vested in the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ECI works backwards from the date on which the five-year term of the existing House ends, ensuring that the election process is completed before then.

However, Section 15(2) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, says the election cannot be notified less than six months before the end of the term of the Assembly — unless the Assembly is dissolved before it completes its term.

### Can a Chief Minister force the ECI to hold an election before it is due?

Article 174(2)(b) of the Constitution says the Governor “may from time to time” dissolve the Legislative Assembly. The Council of Ministers can recommend dissolution of the House to the Governor before the end of its term, forcing a decision. Once the Assembly has been dissolved, the ECI has to conduct fresh elections within six months.

In September 2018, the Telangana Cabinet led by then Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao recommended the dissolution of the Assembly, whose term was to end in June 2019. The Governor accepted the recommendation, and Assembly elections were held in 2018.

But Delhi is not a “full” state. In Delhi, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, applies. While Section 6(2)(b) of the Act says the Lieutenant Governor may from time to time dissolve the Assembly, even if a Chief Minister of Delhi recommends the dissolution of the Assembly, the final say is the Centre’s (through the LG).

In any case, in the present situation, Kejriwal has only said he will resign as CM and asked for early elections — he does not appear to be planning to recommend the dissolution of the Assembly. His successor in the post has been announced as Atishi Marlena Singh.

### **What are the things the ECI looks at before deciding the election schedule?**

The new Assembly (or Lok Sabha) has to be in place before the end of the current Assembly’s term, which means the election process, including giving certificates of election to the winners and the completion of all formalities, has to be completed before that date.

The ECI works backwards from that date, planning the schedule based on the weather, availability of security forces, festivals, training of officers, procurement of EVMs, etc.

Before finalising the schedule, the ECI visits the state to take inputs from the administrative and police machinery. It also tries to club together voting in all states where polls are due around the same time.

### **What is the current state of preparedness for elections in Delhi?**

Delhi is not preoccupying the ECI currently. The ECI is currently engaged in conducting the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly election, where voting in the first phase will take place on September 18. Two more phases will be held on September 25 and October 1.

Voting in Haryana will follow on October 5, and counting in both Haryana and J&K will be held on October 8.

Elections to the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assemblies are due next; the terms of these two Houses will end in November and January 2025 respectively.

Usually, a special summary revision of the electoral roll starts a few months before elections are due. The electoral roll of Maharashtra has already been published with the eligibility date of July 1, which means those who have turned 18 by that date have had a chance to enrol.

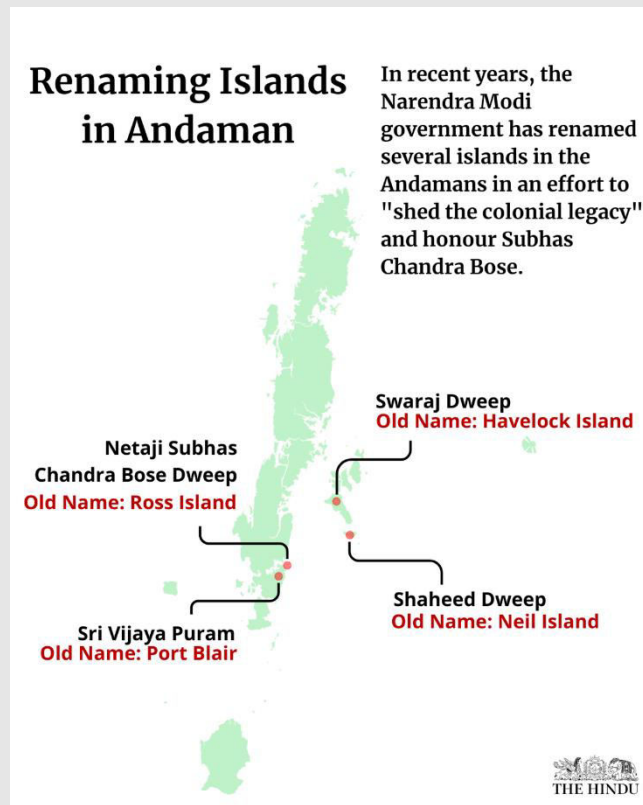
The rolls of J&K, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand were published in August. For all other states and UTs, including Delhi, the annual revision with the eligibility date of January 1, 2025 will be published on January 6, 2025, as per instructions issued by the ECI.

**Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance**

## 16. Port Blair renamed as Sri Vijaya Puram

### Supreme Court's Ruling

Port Blair, now renamed as Sri Vijaya Puram, has a rich historical backdrop connecting it to both colonial and imperial histories. Here's an overview of its historical evolution and the significance of its new name:



### Historical Evolution of Port Blair

#### 1. Colonial Origins:

**O Naming:** The city was named after Archibald Blair, a naval surveyor who conducted a significant survey of the Andaman Islands in the late 18th century. Initially, the natural harbor he discovered was named Port Cornwallis, but it was later renamed Port Blair in his honor.

**O Colonial Use:** The British East India Company established a penal colony in the Andaman Islands, with Port Blair serving as a central point. This site became infamous for its harsh conditions and the infamous Cellular Jail, where political prisoners and rebels were imprisoned.

#### 2. Strategic Importance:

**O Penal Colony:** Port Blair was

reestablished as a penal colony following the Revolt of 1857, housing numerous political prisoners and convicts under severe conditions.

**O Colonial Legacy:** The city's connection with British colonial rule is notable, given its role as a strategic outpost and a place of imprisonment.

### Connection with Imperial Cholas and Srivijaya

#### 1. Chola Empire's Naval Expeditions:

**O Historical Records:** The Andaman Islands were referenced in the context of Chola Empire expeditions during the reign of Rajendra Chola I in the 11th century. The Cholas are believed to have used the islands as a naval base for their campaign against the Srivijaya Empire, located in what is now Indonesia.

**O Inscriptions:** Historical inscriptions from this period refer to the Andaman Islands as Ma-Nakkavaram, which could have influenced the later name Nicobar. This indicates the strategic importance and interaction between the Chola Empire and Southeast Asia.

## 2. Srivijaya Campaign:

**O Reasons for the Attack:** The Chola invasion of Srivijaya is seen as part of Rajendra's broader expansionist goals, either to secure trade routes or to assert dominance over Southeast Asian empires.

**O Significance:** The Chola campaign is significant for its demonstration of maritime power and the extent of Indian influence in Southeast Asia.

## Renaming and Symbolism

- **New Name:** The renaming of Port Blair to Sri Vijaya Puram symbolizes a return to historical roots and a departure from colonial legacies. The new name reflects a connection to the victorious historical narrative of Indian empires rather than colonial pasts.

- **Symbolic Victory:** Union Minister Amit Shah's statement links the renaming to the broader goal of shedding colonial imprints and celebrating Indian history and achievements, especially in relation to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands' role in the freedom struggle.

In summary, Port Blair's new name, Sri Vijaya Puram, reflects a re-evaluation of its historical significance, tying it to the legacy of ancient Indian empires and their interactions with Southeast Asia, while moving away from its colonial-era associations.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## 17. Understanding Commons and the Need for Community Leadership

### What Are Commons?

#### Community ownership

/com-mu-ni-ty own-er-ship/

Refers to a model of collective ownership and management of **resources, assets, or services** by a community or group of individuals who live or work in a particular area.

Commons refer to resources that are shared by a community rather than owned by individuals, groups, or the government. These include natural resources like forests, ponds, grazing lands, and rivers, as well as urban spaces like parks and lakes. Intangible Commons can also include

cultural assets like language, folk art, and traditional knowledge. On a global scale, the polar regions and outer space are considered Commons as well.

### **Importance of Commons**

Commons provide essential ecological and community benefits. However, their open access often leads to over-exploitation and degradation. Managing Commons sustainably is crucial, especially as climate change adds additional pressures.

### **Governance of Commons**

The governance of Commons varies by context:

- **International Level:** Agreements like those for polar regions or the Paris Agreement address global Commons.
- **Urban Areas:** Local governments manage urban Commons.
- **Rural Areas:** Governance is often less defined. Local communities may lack the resources or authority to effectively manage these areas.

### **The Need for Community Leadership**

Historically, Commons were believed to be prone to over-exploitation, a concept known as the "Tragedy of the Commons," which suggested that only government or market intervention could manage these resources. However, Elinor Ostrom's research challenged this view by demonstrating that community-led governance can be highly effective. Her work, which earned her the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009, showed that local management structures could sustain Commons better than external interventions.

### **Examples of Effective Governance**

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006:** This Indian legislation provides forest-dwellers with legal rights to manage and use forest resources, recognizing their role in conservation. The FRA has been a model for integrating community rights into resource management.

### **Current Challenges and Recommendations**

In India, approximately 205 million acres of land, including community forests and water bodies, are classified as Commons. These areas are vital for the livelihoods of around 350 million rural people and contribute significant economic value. To improve governance:

- **Develop Frameworks:** Similar to the FRA, other Commons, especially wasteland areas, need tailored governance frameworks.
- **Legislative Models:** Advocates suggest creating a model Commons Bill to be adopted by states for better management of these resources.

Community leadership and involvement are key to ensuring the sustainable management of Commons, highlighting the need for inclusive governance structures.



## 18. What are the issues faced by EPFO pensioners?

### Introduction



Nearly 78 lakh Provident Fund (PF) pensioners across the country under the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 (EPS-95) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will receive their pension through any bank, any branch from January 1, 2025. The Union Labour Ministry cleared the proposal earlier this month for a Centralised Pension Payment System (CPPS) as part of the EPFO's ongoing IT modernisation project, the Centralised IT

Enabled System.

### What contributed to the formulation of this new arrangement?

At present, if a pensioner decides to migrate, they have to seek the transfer of Pension Payment Orders (PPO) from one office to another. This has invariably resulted in complaints from pensioners about the delay in transfers, and subsequent payments. Moreover, pensioners can draw their monthly pension only through a group of three or four banks empanelled with the EPFO at every zone or region.

The new facility has been made possible in the wake of the implementation of the CPPS, which has been approved by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment, according to the Minister and Chairperson of the EPFO's Central Board of Trustees, Mansukh Mandaviya, in a statement issued on September 4. In the next phase, CPPS will enable a smooth transition to an Aadhaar-based payment system. The pensioners will no longer need to visit the branch for any verification at the time of commencement of pension and the pension shall be immediately credited upon release, the government said. The EPFO expects a significant cost reduction in pension disbursement after moving to the new system.

### Has the announcement satisfied pensioners?

To many pensioners, the Union Ministry's decision has been a disappointment, as they expected the government to provide them with a pleasant surprise, just as it has done for its government staff — a unified pension scheme which seeks to combine many features of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and the New Pension Scheme (NPS).

Trade unions and even Members of Parliament, cutting across party affiliations, have been urging the government to hike the minimum pension amount of ₹1,000. Late last month, a BJP MP from Gujarat, Shobhanaben M. Baraiya, wrote to the Minister saying, that approximately seven years ago, the request for hiking the minimum pension to ₹7,500 along with dearness allowance (DA) and medical allowance was "assured consideration." The Chennai EPF Pensioners' Welfare Association, the EPS- 95 Retired Employees' Welfare Association, Mysuru, and the Provident Fund Pensioners' Association, Kochi, have been seeking ₹9,000 plus DA. The

same demand was raised by trade unions during their pre-Budget consultation with Union Finance Minister.

### **What is the status of applications by PF pensioners and members for pension on higher wages?**

PF members and pensioners are increasingly anxious over how their applications for pension on higher wages are being processed. Many of them had nursed the hope that they would get higher pension immediately after the Supreme Court's judgment in November 2022 which approved, as a matter of principle, the payment of pension on wages that exceeded the PF ceiling. However, a recent reply from the EPFO under the Right to Information Act showed that as of August 7, 2024, the number of applicants who were issued PPOs was 8,401, which included two from those who retired before September 1, 2014. Besides, demand notices were sent to 89,235 other applicants, requiring them to transfer their share of arrears. Nearly 17.5 lakh applications had been submitted online, of which about 1.5 lakh were rejected.

### **What is the Union government's position?**

As regards the hike in minimum pension, the Centre has been citing financial constraints, though it has been increasing its allocation annually for the EPS-95.

The government's contribution to the Pension Scheme is at the rate of 1.16% of the basic wages of employees, apart from providing budgetary support to ensure the minimum pension payment. The Pension Scheme is also getting funds through the transfer of 8.33% of the Provident Fund contributions by employers. An official document reveals that during 2022-23, the government's contribution was approximately ₹8,785 crore and it was ₹ 9,760 crore for 2023-24. For 2024-25, the bill would be ₹10,950 crore. Under these circumstances, it remains to be seen to what extent the Union government will increase the minimum pension amount. On the issue of pension on higher wages, the EPFO was originally against it, as the body had contended that the EPS-95 was meant for economically weak workers, who had, proportionately, contributed more than the high wage earners. The "reverse subsidy" was an "anomaly," which was corrected by the modifications in 2014. Even now, its stand has been that it cannot be liberal in granting pension on higher wages as this would affect the sustainability of the Pension Fund. However, till now, the fund has not witnessed any cash flow problems, despite there being a projected actuarial deficit in the valuation. There has been a widespread complaint that the PF body has been "unrealistic" in seeking very old documents from pensioners, members, and employers.

### **What is the way forward?**

Apart from increasing its contributions substantially to the EPS-95 and revising upwards the ceiling for PF contributions from ₹15,000 which was fixed 10 years ago, the Union government should implement the idea floated by former Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, during his Budget speech in February 2015, that an option be given to employees to invest in the EPF or the NPS, a move which will take care of the issue of returns on investment. This is not to overlook the fact that since 2015, the EPFO has been investing in exchange-traded funds (ETF), as notified by the Union Labour Ministry. The exclusion of the applicability of EPS-95 to those

who joined after September 1, 2014, and earned more than the ceiling has to be removed, making pension eligible to all employees, regardless of the pay.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## 19. Rights Queer Couples Are Fighting For

### Introduction

"Queer" is an umbrella term used to describe people who don't identify as cisgender or heterosexual, and can include people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, or transgender. It can also refer to people who don't fit into rigid binaries of male/female or straight/gay.



A recent advisory from the Finance Ministry marks a significant step toward alleviating some challenges faced by queer couples who cannot legally marry. This guidance, along with a Reserve Bank of India circular, affirms that LGBTQIA+ individuals can open joint bank accounts and designate their partners as beneficiaries.

### Challenges of Unrecognized Unions

Supriyo Chakraborty and his partner, together for 12 years, highlight the harsh realities of unrecognized relationships. In critical situations, such as medical emergencies, their partnership lacks legal acknowledgment, leaving partners vulnerable when it comes to decision-making. The tragic case of Jebin, who had to seek court permission to attend his partner's funeral, underscores the severe implications of this lack of recognition.

Beyond life-and-death scenarios, everyday tasks become complicated. Queer couples cannot access essential documents like ration cards, nominate each other for financial benefits, or receive inheritance rights. Their communications lack the protection afforded to married couples, and they face barriers in organ donation and adoption.

### Supreme Court's Position

In October 2023, the Supreme Court declined to recognize same-sex marriage but emphasized the constitutional rights of queer couples to form unions. The court acknowledged the government's plan to establish a committee to explore entitlements for these couples, indicating a potential path forward.

### Necessary Legal Changes

While recent advisories from financial institutions have made some strides, real change requires more than policy statements. Chakraborty criticizes banks for their lack of sensitivity despite claims of inclusivity. There's a need for comprehensive advisories from various

government sectors and legislative amendments to family and inheritance laws, which are essential for establishing equitable rights for queer couples.

## Conclusion

The journey to secure rights for queer couples is far from over. Although recent developments are promising, achieving full legal recognition and associated rights will take sustained effort and advocacy.

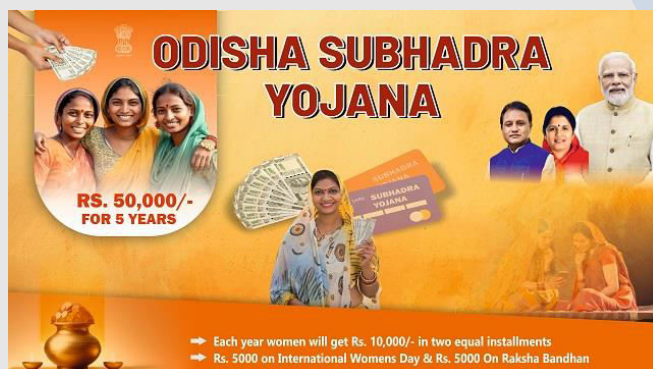
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## 20. All about Odisha's Subhadra scheme, to be launched by PM Modi on his birthday

### Introduction

On September 17, his 74th birthday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the Subhadra Yojana, the Odisha government's scheme to transfer Rs 10,000 per year to eligible women beneficiaries in the state between the ages of 21 and 60.



The Mohan Charan Majhi government has planned a massive congregation of women from across the state at Bhubaneswar's Janata Maidan for the launch of the scheme. Arrangements have been made to telecast the PM's program live at the panchayat and block levels.

Awareness drives are being organised statewide, and all government departments have been asked to use the Subhadra logo in their official communication and social media handles.

The scheme is named after Goddess Subhadra, the younger sibling of Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Odisha. Lord Jagannath, who is deeply revered in the 90%-Hindu state, is always depicted as part of a triad of deities that includes Subhadra and their oldest sibling, Balabhadra.

Over five years until 2028-29, the scheme will provide more than 1 crore women across the state with financial assistance of Rs 10,000 annually. The transfers will be made in two instalments of Rs 5,000 each, on Rakhi Purnima (Raksha Bandhan, which typically falls in August), and International Women's Day (March 8) every year.

More than 50 lakh women have already registered for the scheme.

### How it will work

The money will be deposited directly into the beneficiary's Aadhaar-enabled single-holder bank account. The government has made e-KYC mandatory for the scheme. A Subhadra Debit Card will be issued to the beneficiaries.

A total 100 beneficiaries with the highest number of digital transactions in each gram panchayat and urban local body area will receive an additional incentive of Rs 500.

Women from economically well-off families, government employees, and income-tax payees will not be eligible for the scheme. Women who receive assistance of Rs 1,500 or more per month (or Rs 18,000 or more per year) under any other government scheme will also be excluded.

Banks, post offices, and common service centres across Odisha have been witnessing a rush of women to enrol for the scheme or to update their Aadhaar details. There is no last date to register; the process will continue until all eligible beneficiaries have been registered.

### **Financing the scheme**

Official sources said the government has budgeted for Rs 55,825 crore for the scheme for five years from 2024-25 to 2028-29. For the current (2024-25) financial year, a sum of Rs 10,000 crore has been kept aside for the scheme.

Officers in the state finance department said there will be no financial constraints for the scheme, on which the government will remain focused.

### **The political context**

The Subhadra scheme was the flagship promise of the BJP ahead of the elections to the Assembly and Parliament, which ended 24 years of BJD rule and produced victories for the BJP in 20 of the state's 21 Lok Sabha seats.

Women, especially the 70 lakh members of some 6 lakh women's self-help groups (WSHGs) organised under Mission Shakti, were the biggest factor behind the BJD's electoral success for 24 years. Mission Shakti was launched in 2001 to empower women by providing them with credit and market linkages, and it had over the years managed to create a committed vote bank of women for the BJD.

To counter the BJD's Mission Shakti program, the BJP proposed a scheme of direct money transfer (DBT) in its election manifesto, promising to give a voucher of Rs 50,000 to every woman beneficiary, which could be encashed in two years. BJP workers collected details of women in a certain format during the election campaign and assured them of its implementation immediately after the party came to power, which got much traction on the ground.

The government cleared the implementation of the scheme, with a few changes to its election promise, within hours of taking oath on June 12.



## 21. As Cabinet gives nods to simultaneous elections, what comes next?

### Introduction

The Union Cabinet set the ball rolling on holding simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha, state Assemblies, and local government bodies, clearing the proposal of the High Level Committee on One Nation, One Election headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind.

### HOW THE NUMBERS STACK UP IN PARLIAMENT

#### WHAT PARTIES TOLD PANEL

**32 OF THE 47** parties that gave their opinion to the Kovind panel supported the idea; 15 opposed it. NDA ally TDP didn't give its opinion, but told *The Indian Express* that it backed One Nation, One Election in principle. The BSP was initially against it, but now has come out in support.

**ALL 32 PARTIES** were either BJP allies, or friendly towards the party then. Now, the BJP has turned against the BJP. Of the 15 parties against the move, five are in power in states, including Congress.



Kovind presents report to President Murmu in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah. *File*

#### PARLIAMENT PICTURE NOW

**PARTIES THAT BACKED** the idea of simultaneous elections before the Kovind panel have 271 members in Lok Sabha now. This number includes the 240 MPs from the BJP.

**THE NDA**, including TDP and others who neither supported nor opposed simultaneous polls before the Kovind panel, has 293 MPs in Lok Sabha.

#### NUMBERS GAME IN LOK SABHA

**A TWO-THIRDS** majority of members present and voting is needed for the required constitutional amendment to go through — in the full House of

543, that works out to 362 MPs.

**NDA HAS 293 MPs** — so there is a possibility of passage of the amendment only if 439 MPs vote on the Bill, and the remaining 104 abstain. Alternatively, the government will have to convince non-NDA parties to back it.

#### ARITHMETIC IN RAJYA SABHA

**NDA HAS 121 MPS**, including the six nominated members. The opposition INDIA bloc has 85 MPs.

**IF ALL 250** members are present, a simple majority would be 125 and two-thirds would be 164 MPs. Currently, there are 234 MPs in RS.

In its report submitted to President Droupadi Murmu on March 14, the Kovind Committee recommended a series of constitutional amendments to facilitate simultaneous elections at the central, state, and local levels.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters that the move to simultaneous elections would be effected in two phases — in the first phase, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be aligned; the second phase, which will be held within 100 days of the first, will cover local body elections.

### **What happens after this?**

The One Nation, One Election project hinges on two Constitution Amendment Bills being passed by Parliament, for which the government will need wide agreement across a range of parties. Since the BJP does not have a majority on its own in Lok Sabha, it will have to talk to its allies in the NDA, as well as the opposition parties.

One way to build the required consensus is to refer the Constitution Amendment Bills to a parliamentary committee — this could be a parliamentary standing committee or a joint parliamentary committee. These House panels will have members of the opposition, and a consensus could come out of the discussions.

The Centre will have to reach out to the states as well. To ensure that local bodies too, are included in the scheme of simultaneous elections, at least half the total number of states will have to ratify the required amendment to the Constitution (more later).

While the BJP is currently in power in more than a dozen states, the coming Assembly elections in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand, could alter this arithmetic.

### **What changes will be needed in the Constitution?**

The first Constitution Amendment Bill to transition to a simultaneous election system will require a 'special majority' of both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. For this, two conditions have to be satisfied under Article 368 of the Constitution.

First, half of the total membership of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha must vote in favour of the amendment. Second, of the members present and voting, two-thirds must vote in favour of the amendment.

The second Constitution Amendment Bill will ensure that all local body elections (for municipalities and panchayats) are held within 100 days of the simultaneous elections. For this amendment to go through, an additional condition apart from the two mentioned above must be fulfilled.

This is because "local government" is a subject under the State List in the Seventh Schedule, which means only states have the power to pass laws on this subject. To amend the Constitution such that local body elections can take place alongside simultaneous elections, Article 368 stipulates that "the amendment shall also require to be ratified (agreed to) by the Legislatures of not less than one-half of the States" in the country.

### **What will happen in the event these Bills are passed by Parliament?**

According to the roadmap presented by the Kovind Committee, the President will issue a notification during the first sitting of Lok Sabha after a general election, bringing into effect Article 82A — a new article introduced through the first Bill to facilitate the transition to simultaneous elections.

The date of this notification will be known as the “appointed date”. Any state Assemblies elected after this “appointed date” will be dissolved once the Lok Sabha’s term expires.

The transition to simultaneous elections will require some elected state Assemblies to dissolve before the expiry of their stipulated five-year term. For example, the election to the Bihar Assembly is expected to be held in October or November 2025. However, if simultaneous elections are implemented, the new Assembly will dissolve in 2029 — before the Lok Sabha election scheduled in that year — and not in 2030 as it normally would.

This will allow fresh state Assembly elections to take place at the same time as the Lok Sabha election.

In the scheme proposed by the Kovind Committee, if a state Assembly or Lok Sabha is dissolved before the end of its ‘full’ five-year term, a ‘mid-term’ election will take place.

However, the newly elected state Assembly or Lok Sabha will only serve for the remaining period before the next simultaneous elections are scheduled to take place. This period between a mid-term election and a scheduled simultaneous election will be known as the “unexpired term”.

In case the Election Commission of India (ECI) believes that state Assembly elections cannot be held simultaneously, the Committee’s report states that it can send a recommendation to the President to declare that the election will be conducted at a later date.

However, even if this state Assembly election is delayed, the next election will still take place simultaneously with the Lok Sabha and other state Assembly elections.

The ECI will create a “Single Electoral Roll for every territorial constituency for election in the House of the People, Legislature of a State or to a Municipality or a Panchayat”, the Kovind Committee has said.

This roll — containing details of effectively every voter in the country — will be prepared in consultation with the State Election Commissions. This amendment too, will require ratification by half the country’s states.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## 22. SC hears case on education in madrasas: All you need to know about these institutions

### What are Madrasas?

Madrasa is an Arabic word for an educational institution. In the early centuries of Islam, mosques served also as places of education, but from the 10th century onward, madrasas came to acquire a distinct identity as institutions of religious and secular learning in the Islamic world.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has told the Supreme Court that education imparted in madrasas "is not comprehensive and is therefore against the provisions of Right to Education Act", and that textbooks in these institutions teach about the "supremacy of Islam".



The NCPCR made its submission on September 11 in a clutch of appeals against an Allahabad High Court order of March 22 that had declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 "unconstitutional" on the ground that it violated "the principle of secularism" and fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution.

A Bench of Justices Vivek Chaudhary and Subhash Vidyarthi directed the state

government to "take steps forthwith for accommodating the madrasa students in regular schools" recognised under the UP primary and high school and intermediate education boards.

The UP government had submitted "that no doubt the Madrasa Board is providing religious education and instructions to students, but the state has sufficient powers to impart such education under the Constitution and is rightly permitting such education".

On April 5, a Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud stayed the High Court's order.

### What are Madrasas?

Madrasa is an Arabic word for an educational institution. In the early centuries of Islam, mosques served also as places of education, but from the 10th century onward, madrasas came to acquire a distinct identity as institutions of religious and secular learning in the Islamic world.

The earliest evidence of madrasas comes from Khorasan and Transoxania, corresponding to modern eastern and northern Iran, central Asia, and Afghanistan. The bigger madrasas also had facilities for housing students, especially those from poor backgrounds.

### **Largest number in UP**

As of 2018-19, there were 24,010 madrasas in India, 19,132 of which were recognised madrasas, and the remaining 4,878 were unrecognised, then Minister of Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi told Rajya Sabha on February 3, 2020.

Recognised madrasas come under the state boards for madrasa education; the unrecognised ones follow the curriculum prescribed by the bigger seminaries such as the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama (Lucknow) and Darul Uloom Deoband.

As many as 60% of the country's madrasas were in Uttar Pradesh — 11,621 recognised, and 2,907 unrecognised madrasas. The second highest number of madrasas were in Rajasthan — 2,464 recognised, and 29 unrecognised madrasas, according to statewise data presented by Naqvi.

Several states and Union Territories, including Delhi, Assam, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana had no recognised madrasas, the data showed.

### **Two broad categories**

There are two categories of madrasas in India — Madrasa Darse Nizami, which are run as public charities, and are not bound to follow the school education curriculum of the state; and the Madrasa Darse Aliya, which are affiliated to the state's madrasa education board (such as the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education).

More than 20 states have their own madrasa boards. State madrasa boards are governed by the state government concerned; teachers and other officials at recognised madrasas are appointed by the state government.

Some 1.69 lakh students sat for the UP madrasa education board examinations — equivalent to Class 10 and Class 12 — in 2023. UP and some other states also have a separate Sanskrit board.

### **NCERT, state curricula**

Education is similar to school and higher education. Madrasa students study to be Maulvi (equivalent to Class 10), Alim (equivalent to Class 12), Kamil (Bachelor's degree), and Fazil (Master's).

The medium of education in the charitable Madrasa Darse Nizami is Arabic, Urdu, and Persian. The Madrasa Darse Aliya use either textbooks published by the state textbook corporation or agency, or the curriculum and textbooks of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).



Most madrasa boards in the country now follow the NCERT curriculum. Mathematics, Science, Hindi, English, and Sociology are compulsory subjects. There is also an optional paper, in which students have the choice of studying Sanskrit or Deeniyat (including the Quran and other religious teachings). Hindu religious scriptures and other religious teachings are taught in the Sanskrit optional paper.

### **Funded by state govts**

The bulk of the funding for madrasas comes from the respective state governments. The central government has a Scheme for Providing Education to Madrasas/ Minorities (SPEMM), under which financial assistance is provided to madrasas and minority institutions across the country.

There are two sub-schemes under SPEMM — a Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM) and Infrastructure Development of Minority Institutes (IDMI). SPEMM was transferred from the Ministry of Minority Affairs to the Ministry of Education in April 2021.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## **23. Bombay HC strikes down Centre's 'fake news' fact check rule — why did it need the opinion of a third judge?**

### **Introduction**

Stand-up comic Kunal Kamra, the Editors Guild of India, the News Broadcasters & Digital Association, and the Association of Indian Magazines challenged the constitutional validity of the Rules, terming them arbitrary, unconstitutional, and in violation of fundamental rights.

The Bombay High Court struck down as unconstitutional a key provision of the amended Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021 which empowered the government to identify “fake news” on social media platforms through a “Fact Check Unit” (FCU).

In a 99-page ruling, Justice Atul S Chandurkar sided with the opinion delivered in January this year by Justice Gautam S Patel, leading to what is now essentially a 2-1 verdict. A two-judge Bench of Justices Patel, who has since retired, and Neela Gokhale, had delivered a split verdict in the case. Justice Patel had struck down the amended rules; Justice Gokhale had upheld them.

This ruling will have a larger impact on FCUs that even some states such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have established.

### **What is the law in question?**

In April 2022, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEiTY) promulgated the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 (2023 Rules), which amended the Information Technology Rules, 2021.

The amendment to Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the IT Rules, 2021 expanded the general term “fake news” to include “government business”.

## Road to verdict

The fact check unit of Ministry of Electronics and IT has faced criticism since it was established on April 6, 2023.

The case against the Centre’s amendment has concluded after over a year. **Highlights:**

**April 10, 2023:** Satirist Kunal Kamra files a petition in Bombay HC against the amendments to the Act, calling them “arbitrary, violating fundamental rights of speech and expression and vague”; Editors Guild of India and the Internet Freedom Foundation join the plea later

**April 24:** IT Rules Amendment does not seem to offer protection to

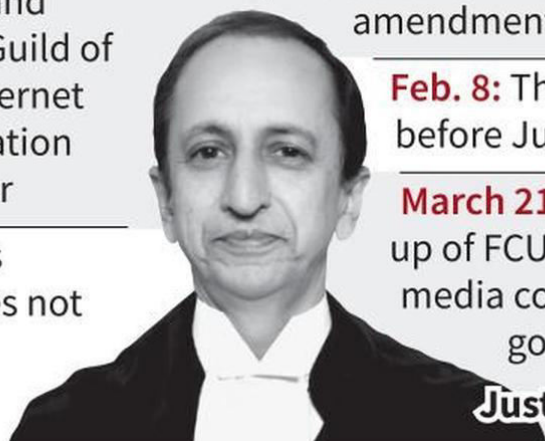
parody and satire, observes Bombay HC

**Jan. 31, 2024:** Court delivers a split verdict with Justice Patel favouring the petitioners and Justice Gokhale upholding the amendment

**Feb. 8:** The case is placed before Justice Chandurkar

**March 21:** SC stays setting up of FCU to monitor social media content about the government

**Justice Chandurkar**



Under the Rules, if the FCU comes across or is informed about any posts that are “fake”, “false”, or contain “misleading” facts pertaining to the business of the government, it would flag it to the social media intermediaries concerned.

The online intermediaries would then have to take down such content if they wanted to retain their “safe harbour”, that is, legal immunity with regard to third-party content published by them.

The Rules raised concerns over free speech and the extent to which the government can regulate it. The FCUs allowed the government to be the “only arbiter” of truth in respect of business concerning itself.

### **How did the matter come before Justice Chandurkar?**

Given the split verdict of January, as per rules of the Bombay High Court, the case was referred to a third judge who would hear the matter afresh.

Justice Chandurkar was assigned the task on February 7. On March 11, Justice Chandurkar refused to grant a stay on the notification to set up the FCU until he gave his final opinion. Following his interim order, the High Court dismissed the interim applications seeking the stay with 2-1 majority.

On March 20, the Centre notified the FCU under the Press Information Bureau (PIB). However, a day later, the Supreme Court stayed the operation of the notification until the Bombay High Court took a final decision on the petitions challenging the amended Rules.

Justice Chandurkar concluded the hearing on August 8 and reserved his verdict.

### **What were the arguments before the HC?**

Stand-up comic Kunal Kamra, the Editors' Guild of India, the News Broadcasters & Digital Association, and the Association of Indian Magazines challenged the constitutional validity of the Rules, terming them arbitrary, unconstitutional, and in violation of fundamental rights.

The Centre said the Rules were not against any opinion, criticism, satire, or humour targeting the government, and were meant to only proscribe or prohibit the peddling of fake, false, and misleading facts on social media related to "government business".

### **On what grounds did Justice Chandurkar strike down the Rules?**

In his opinion on the split verdict, Justice Chandurkar agreed with Justice Patel, and held that the amended Rule 3(1)(b)(v) was violative of Articles 14 (equality before law), 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression) and 19(1)(g) (right to practise a profession or trade) of the Constitution.

He said that the impugned Rule curtailed the fundamental rights of citizens beyond the reasonable restrictions prescribed under Article 19(2), which was "impermissible through the mode of delegated legislation".

The judge held that the expressions "fake, false or misleading" in the Rule are "vague and overbroad", and endorsed Justice Patel's view that under the right to freedom of speech and expression, there is no further "right to the truth". It was "not a responsibility of the state to ensure that the citizens are entitled only to 'information' that was not fake, false or misleading as identified by FCU", Justice Chandurkar said.

He said that the Centre's claim that decisions given by the FCU can be challenged before a constitutional court "cannot be treated as adequate safeguard", and therefore, the Rule cannot be saved by reading it down or making a concession of limiting its operation.

Echoing the views of Justice Patel, Justice Chandurkar noted that the impugned Rule resulted in a "chilling effect" on the intermediary due to the "threat of losing safe harbour", and also on the freedom of speech — and was therefore liable to be struck down.

### **What was the split decision of the HC?**

Justice Patel said that the petitioners were "correct in saying that the State cannot coercively classify speech as true or false and compel the non-publication of the latter". "That is nothing but censorship," he noted.

"The sinister and insidious facet to the impugned amendment is that this new agency (FCU) has far more than a loud bark: it has fangs and claws, for its unilateral view of what is or is not the 'truth...'," Justice Patel said.

In a contrasting view, Justice Gokhale had said alleging bias against members of the FCU merely because they were government appointees was "unfair", and recourse to courts of law was always open in case of any bias.

The Rules "were not directly penalising" the intermediary or the user, and "did not bring any chilling effect on their rights", she said, adding that the challenge to the character of FCU authority which was "yet unknown" was "premature".

Dismissing the pleas, Justice Gokhale held: "Right of citizens to participate in the representative and participative democracy of the country is meaningless unless they have access to authentic information and are not misled by misinformation..."

### **What happens in this matter now?**

Justice Chandurkar's opinion has settled the matter in favour of the petitioners by a 2-1 majority. His opinion will be placed before a division Bench of two judges, which will formally announce the 2-1 majority against the impugned Rule. This is the procedural part.

There is an option of an appeal before the Supreme Court, given that similar issues are pending before the Delhi and Madras HCs too.

Other aspects of the 2021 guidelines are also pending before various HCs. Among the key provisions are mandates for social media platforms to set up a grievance redressal and compliance mechanism, which include appointing a resident grievance officer, chief compliance officer, and a nodal contact person.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## **24. India Achieves Tier 1 Status in Global Cybersecurity Index 2024**

### **Major Milestone in Cybersecurity**

India has achieved a significant milestone by attaining Tier 1 status in the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2024, published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). With an

impressive score of 98.49 out of 100, India joins the ranks of 'role-modelling' countries, showcasing its commitment to global cybersecurity practices.



### **Role of the Department of Telecommunications**

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) served as the nodal agency representing India in the GCI 2024. Hon'ble Minister of Communications, Shri Jyotiraditya M Scindia, celebrated this accomplishment, calling it a proud moment for Bharat. He emphasized that this achievement reflects

India's strong commitment to cybersecurity and highlights the remarkable growth of its telecom sector.

### **Assessment Criteria**

The GCI 2024 evaluated national cybersecurity efforts based on five pillars: legal, technical, organizational, capacity development, and cooperation. The assessment included a comprehensive questionnaire featuring 83 questions and multiple indicators to thoroughly evaluate each country's cybersecurity landscape.

### **Government Initiatives and Legal Framework**

India's strong cybersecurity performance is attributed to various government initiatives aimed at enhancing cyber resilience and establishing robust frameworks for cybercrime laws and cybersecurity standards. The country's legal institutions are equipped to tackle cybersecurity challenges effectively. Additionally, Sectoral Computer Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) provide technical support and incident reporting, further bolstering India's cybersecurity capabilities.

### **Focus on Education and Awareness**

Education and awareness are central to India's cybersecurity strategy. Targeted campaigns have promoted secure online practices across various sectors, including private industry, public institutions, and academia. Integrating cybersecurity into primary and secondary education curricula highlights the country's commitment to fostering a knowledgeable digital citizenry.

### **Skill Development and International Collaboration**

Incentives and grants have driven skill development and promoted research and innovation within India's cybersecurity industry. International collaborations and agreements have enhanced capacity-building and information-sharing efforts, solidifying India's role as a global leader in cybersecurity.

### **Conclusion**

India's elevation to Tier 1 in the GCI 2024 signifies its heightened commitment to cybersecurity. This achievement not only reflects the Government of India's dedication to securing its digital



landscape but also sets a benchmark for other nations. The DoT continues to lead efforts in fortifying India's digital infrastructure on the global stage.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: PIB

## 25. Strengthening the Child Pornography Law

### Introduction

**SC DECLARES CHILD PORNOGRAPHY  
A CRIME UNDER THE POCSO ACT**

NDTV



The Supreme Court has clarified and expanded the interpretation of child pornography laws under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, specifically targeting the storage, viewing, and failure to report such content.

### 1. Expanded Definition of Child Pornography Offenses

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court has broadened the scope of Section 15 of the POCSO Act, which deals with the punishment for storing child pornography. The law now covers:

- **Possession with intent to share:** Failing to delete or report child pornography is punishable.
- **Transmission or distribution:** Sharing, transmitting, or displaying child pornography is an offense.
- **Commercial purposes:** Storing child pornography for profit also attracts severe penalties.

### 2. Court's Interpretation of "Possession"

The court expanded the meaning of "possession" to include not only physical possession but also constructive possession, which refers to control over child pornography even if it is not downloaded or saved. For instance:

- **Viewing content:** Simply watching child pornography online without downloading it is still considered possession because the viewer has control over it.
- **Unintentional access:** If someone accidentally receives child pornography but fails to report it, they are still liable under the law.

### 3. Strict Punishment for Not Reporting

The law mandates that anyone who views or possesses child pornography must report it to authorities. Failure to do so can result in fines of at least ₹5,000 for a first offense, and at least ₹10,000 for repeat offenses.

#### 4. Overruling the Madras High Court Decision

The Supreme Court overturned a ruling by the Madras High Court that had quashed charges against a man for merely possessing child pornography. The High Court had argued that possession alone was not enough to prove an offense unless the material was shared or transmitted. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that possession itself constitutes an offense under Section 15.

#### 5. Inchoate Offenses and Intent

The court emphasized that intent matters. Even if a person deletes child pornography before an FIR is registered, they can still be charged if it is proven that they had the material "at any point." The law focuses on overt steps taken towards sharing or distributing such material, not just the actual act.

#### 6. Police and Courts Must Consider All Sub-sections

The Supreme Court advised law enforcement and courts to thoroughly investigate cases under all sub-sections of Section 15. Even if an offense is not made out under one sub-section, they must check if other sub-sections are applicable, ensuring no loopholes in the legal process.

#### Conclusion: Stronger Protection for Children

The Supreme Court's ruling significantly tightens child pornography laws by expanding the definition of possession and making the failure to report an offense. This move reinforces accountability and aims to curb the spread of child pornography through stricter legal measures.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

### 26. Karnataka High Court Allows Investigation Against CM Siddaramaiah in Alleged MUDA Scam

#### Why in News?

The Karnataka High Court has permitted an investigation into Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in connection with the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) scam. This decision upholds an earlier sanction by Governor Thawarchand Gehlot.



#### What is the MUDA Scam Case?

In July, anti-corruption activists alleged that Siddaramaiah's wife, Parvathi, received 14 housing sites from MUDA in exchange for land illegally acquired by the authority in 2021. This reportedly caused a Rs. 55.80 crore loss to the state. The governor sanctioned an investigation under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) and the

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, despite opposition from the state Council of Ministers.

The Muda Scam in Karnataka refers to allegations of large-scale irregularities and corruption involving the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA). The scam surfaced in relation to the illegal allotment of land, fraudulent land deals, and the misuse of authority within MUDA, a government body responsible for urban planning and development in Mysuru.

### **Key Aspects of the Muda Scam**

**Land Allotment Irregularities:** The core of the scam revolves around the illegal allotment of valuable government land. Allegedly, MUDA officials were involved in allotting land to ineligible individuals by bypassing official procedures, often in exchange for bribes.

**Misuse of Authority:** Senior officials and politicians have been accused of abusing their positions to manipulate land deals, which led to substantial financial losses for the state. There were cases of allotting land meant for public use to private individuals.

**Fraudulent Documentation:** There are allegations of tampering with official records, forging documents, and altering land allotment documents to benefit specific individuals or groups, bypassing the intended beneficiaries.

**Political Involvement:** Several politicians have been accused of being involved or benefiting from the scam, although investigations are still ongoing to ascertain the full extent of their participation.

The Muda Scam came under scrutiny after complaints were raised, leading to investigations by anti-corruption agencies, with calls for legal action against those involved. It caused significant political and public uproar, particularly given the rapid urban expansion in Karnataka and the growing demand for land in cities like Mysuru.

### **Why Did CM Siddaramaiah Challenge the Sanction?**

Siddaramaiah argued that the governor is typically bound by the advice of the Council of Ministers, which had recommended against the investigation. He challenged the sanction, claiming the governor overstepped his authority by ignoring the council's advice without sufficient justification.

### **Court's Decision and Rationale**

The court found that while the governor is usually bound by the council's advice, there were "exceptional circumstances" in this case that justified an independent decision. The court noted that the allegations required investigation, and the governor's decision was not made in "hot haste" but with careful consideration.

The court also clarified that private citizens can request permission to investigate public officials under the PCA, not just police officers. As a result, the interim order blocking the investigation was lifted.

**Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance**

## 27. What is Clause 6 of Assam Accord, which Himanta govt said will implement?

### Introduction

After a meeting with representatives of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma set the ball rolling for the implementation of 52 recommendations of the Justice Biplab Sarma Committee regarding Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, as announced by the Assam government earlier this month.

This comes more than four years after the Centre-appointed high-level committee finalised its report in February 2020.

Notably, 15 key recommendations of the committee will not be implemented for the time being. These, the chief minister said, will require Constitutional amendments to be implemented. "We will take up these matters with the Centre at the right forum," he posted on X on Wednesday.

### What is the Biplab Sarma committee report?

The historic Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Union government and the leadership of the Assam Movement, primarily the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), which was signed in 1985. The accord ended the six-year-long agitation in Assam against the entry of Bangladeshi migrants into the state.

Clause 6 of the accord states that "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

In July 2019, the Union Home Ministry constituted a 14-member committee chaired by retired Assam High Court Justice Biplab Kumar Sarma, and comprising judges, retired bureaucrats, writers, AASU leaders and journalists, to suggest ways to implement the clause. Among the key questions before the committee was a definition of "the Assamese people" eligible for the "safeguards" under Clause 6.

The committee finalised its report in February 2020. But instead of it being received by the Union Home Ministry, which had constituted the committee, the report was received by then Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of the BJP. In August 2020, four committee members released the confidential report in the public domain.

Among the key recommendations made by the committee was that the definition of "Assamese people", for the purpose of implementing Clause 6, should include "Indigenous Tribals", "Other Indigenous Communities of Assam", "Indian citizens residing in the territory of Assam on or before January 1, 1951" and their descendants, and "Indigenous Assamese"

people. Based on this, the committee made several recommendations for reservations for "Assamese people", including in Parliament, the state Assembly, local bodies, and jobs.



#### **What recommendations of the report will the Assam government implement?**

Chief Minister Sarma said that the state government has accepted 1951 as the "cut-off date" for the specific recommendations of the report. He said, however, that this definition of "Assamese people" is confined to only the context of the report's recommendations.

Following a meeting with the AASU on Wednesday, he said that the 67 broad recommendations made by the report can be divided into three broad categories: 40 which come under the exclusive domain of the state government, 12 which will require the concurrence of the Centre, and 15 which are in the exclusive domain of the Centre. The 52 recommendations in the first two categories will be implemented by April 2025, for which the state government will submit a roadmap to AASU by October 25 this year.

These 52 recommendations largely deal with safeguards on language, land, and cultural heritage. Some key recommendations include:

#### **Land**

\* Creating Revenue Circles where only "Assamese people" can own and possess land, and transfer of such land in these areas are limited to them alone;



\* Launching a time-bound, three year programme to allot land titles to “Assamese people” who have occupied a certain piece of land for decades, but are without possession of land documents;

\* Carrying out a special survey of char areas (riverine regions along the Brahmaputra), and for newly created chars to be treated as government land, in which river erosion-affected people should get priority in allotment;

### **Language**

\* Keeping Assamese as the official language throughout the state as per the 1960 Assam Official Language Act “with provisions for use of local languages” in the Barak Valley, Hill districts, and the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District;

\* Making it compulsory for all state government acts, rules, orders, etc. to be issued in Assamese along with English;

\* Constituting an Autonomous Language and Literature Academy/Council of Assam to preserve and promote all indigenous languages of Assam;

\* Making Assamese a compulsory subject up to class VIII or class X in all English medium schools, both under the state board and CBSE;

### **Cultural heritage**

\* Establishing an autonomous authority for the development of sattras (neo-Vaishnavite monasteries), which will, among other things, provide financial assistance to them; and

\* Creating multipurpose cultural complexes in each district to “uplift” the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups.

Chief Minister Sarma said that the autonomous councils of Assam’s Sixth Schedule Areas — namely the Bodoland Territorial Council, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council — will decide whether to implement the 52 recommendations. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides autonomous tribal councils in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram certain legislative and judicial autonomy.

Along with the Sixth Schedule areas, Sarma said that the primarily Bengali-speaking Barak Valley will also be exempted from the implementation of these recommendations.

### **Which recommendations has the Assam government left out?**

Some of the most sensitive recommendations by the committee, however, do not find mention in the 52 points listed by the state government. Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah recently referred to these as the “soul” of the committee’s report.

Among them are the introduction of an Inner Line Permit for entry into Assam as is in place in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram, as well as numerous reservations for “Assamese people”. The latter include 80-100% reservation in Assam’s seats in Parliament, and the same proportion reserved in the state Assembly and local bodies; 80-100% reservation in Assam government jobs; and 70-100% reservations in vacancies arising in undertakings run in partnership between the Assam government and private companies. There was also a

recommendation for the creation of an Upper House (the Legislative Council of Assam) which would be completely reserved for the "Assamese people".

The BJP's political opponents have questioned where the Centre featured in discussions regarding the implementation of the committee's recommendations. Former AASU general secretary Lurinjoyti Gogoi, who was a member of the committee, questioned whether the Union Home Ministry even accepted the report.

"The Home Ministry has still not accepted the report... Until it accepts the report, the recommendations do not have any legal or constitutional value... the fundamental points here are those on political representation," he said.

However, Chief Minister Sarma has said that the Assam government will appeal to the Centre to have talks with AASU, and work towards the implementation of the remaining 15 recommendations.

"Our aim is that we should not let those recommendations which are attainable lie by the wayside because of those which are difficult and may take time," he had said earlier this month.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## 28. Karnataka Government Withdraws General Consent for CBI Investigations

### Introduction

#### JOINS TN, KER, WB

> Alleging injudicious use of CBI, K'taka law minister H K Patil says state will give consent for CBI probe on case-to-case basis

> Joins states like Bengal, Kerala & TN, which have also withdrawn 'general consent'

> CBI now can't probe public servants in the state without K'taka govt's consent. But CBI can take up cases if ordered by court

The Karnataka government, accusing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of being biased in its investigations, has decided to withdraw its general consent for the agency to conduct probes in the state. This move aligns Karnataka with other non-BJP ruled states that have similarly withdrawn consent in recent years.

### Cabinet Decision Amid Allegations Against Chief Minister

The decision comes amid allegations against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah regarding irregularities in the allotment of 14 Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) sites to his wife. However, the government clarified that the withdrawal of CBI consent is not related to this case. A special court has directed

the Lokayukta to investigate the matter.

### Reasons for Withdrawal

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil explained that earlier, blanket permission had been granted to the CBI. However, concerns over the misuse of institutions, including Raj Bhavan, and the perception that the CBI was not acting judiciously led to the decision. The state government will now grant consent to the CBI on a case-by-case basis.

**Allegations of Misuse and Bias**

Minister Patil further alleged that the CBI had been "misused" and operating in a biased manner for the past 18 months, focusing investigations only on members of one political party. He also pointed out that in some cases involving the CBI, no chargesheets had been filed, leading to concerns over the agency's effectiveness.

**Previous Withdrawal of Consent**

In November 2023, the Congress government had withdrawn consent for the CBI to investigate corruption charges against Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, a case initially allowed by the previous BJP government. The case was later referred to the Karnataka Lokayukta police for investigation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

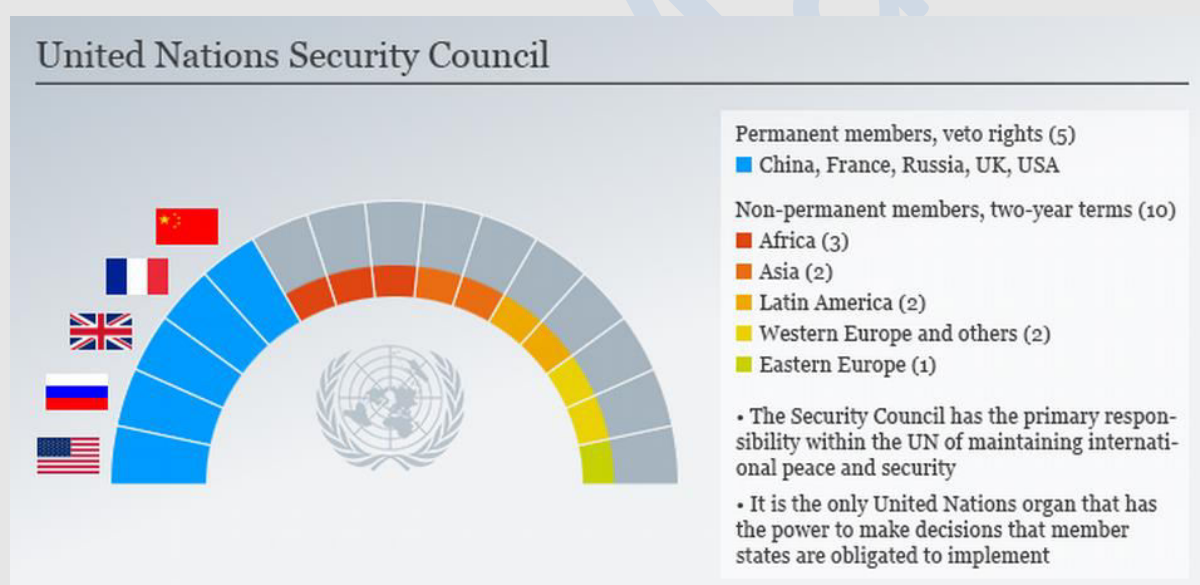
### 1. G4 and L69 Countries Call for Urgent UN Security Council Reform

#### Introduction

India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan, known as the G4, have called for urgent reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as the UN approaches its 80th anniversary. These countries seek permanent membership and a more inclusive UNSC structure. The G4's Foreign Ministers met on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 23 to discuss progress on these reforms.

#### Joint Call for UNSC Expansion

In a joint statement, the G4 highlighted the need for an increase in both permanent and non-permanent UNSC seats to better represent developing countries and nations that significantly contribute to international peace and security. The group emphasized the need for greater representation for regions such as Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean.



#### L69 and C-10 Groups Support Reforms

India is also part of the L69 group, which represents developing countries. On September 23, the L69 group met under the leadership of Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The meeting included a joint session with the C-10 group, representing 10 African countries. Both groups echoed the G4's call for transformative reform to ensure better representation of the Global South in the UNSC.

#### Emphasis on the Global South

The L69 and G4 groups stressed the importance of increasing the participation of developing countries in the Security Council. They argued that these nations play a vital role in maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of the UNSC. The groups also reaffirmed support for the

Common African Position (CAP) based on the Ezulwini Consensus, which advocates for greater African representation.

### Delays Impact UN Credibility

The G4 and L69 warned that delays in reforming the UNSC harm the credibility and legitimacy of the UN. They called for reforms that would make the Security Council more transparent, efficient, democratic, and accountable.

### Cooperation with IBSA

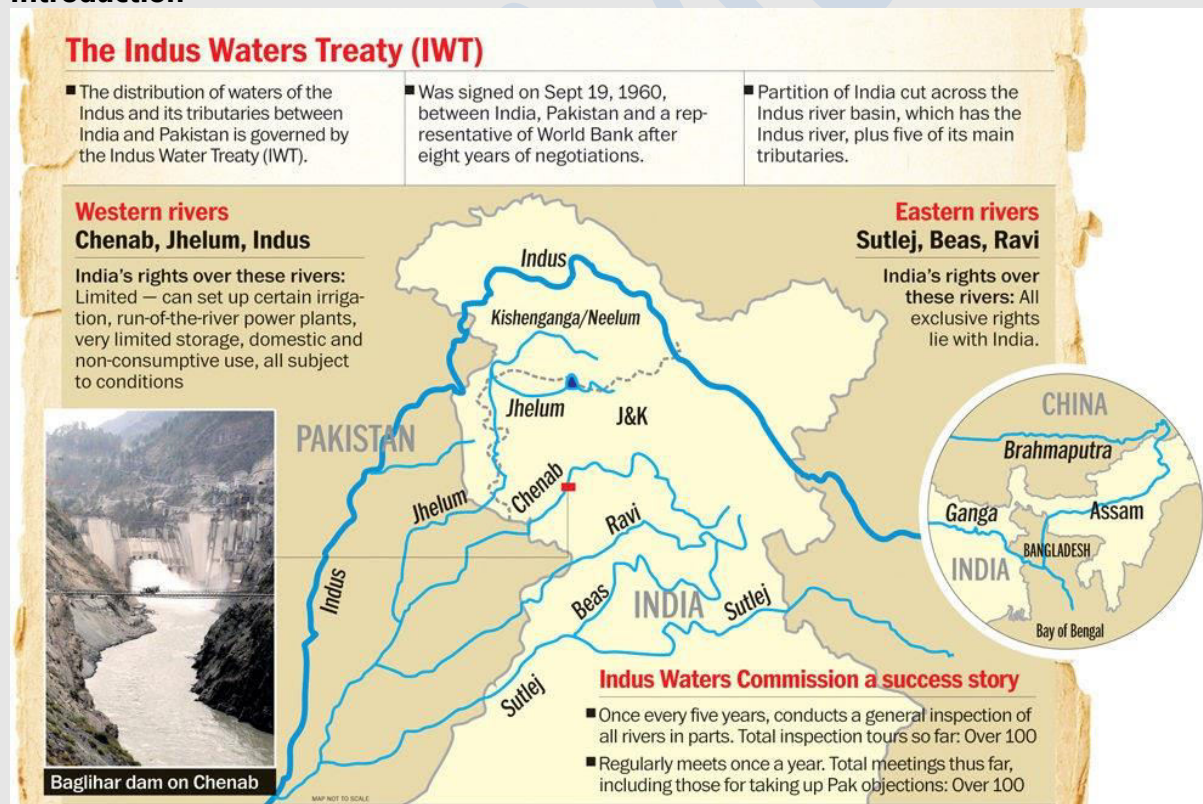
External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also met with his counterparts from Brazil and South Africa, reinforcing their shared commitment to UN reform through the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) group, further strengthening their push for a reformed UNSC.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: The Hindu

## 2. Why India wants 'review & modification' of Indus Waters Treaty

### Introduction



A year-and-a-half after New Delhi issued a notice to Islamabad seeking the "modification" of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in January 2023, India has once again sent a formal notice to Pakistan, this time seeking the "review and modification" of the treaty.



The latest notice, issued under Article XII (3) of the IWT (like the one issued last year), is qualitatively different — the word “review” effectively signals New Delhi’s intent to revoke and renegotiate the 64-year-old treaty. Article XII (3) states: “The provisions of this Treaty may from time to time be modified by a duly ratified treaty concluded for that purpose between the two Governments”.

### **What is the Indus Waters Treaty?**

The treaty between India and Pakistan was signed on September 19, 1960, for the use of water available in the Indus and its tributaries. It was signed in Karachi by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then Pakistan President Mohammed Ayub Khan after nine years of negotiations arranged by the World Bank.

According to the IWT, India enjoys the “unrestricted use” of the three “Eastern Rivers [Beas, Ravi, Sutlej]... except as otherwise expressly provided” whereas Pakistan got control of the three “Western Rivers” [Indus, Chenab, Jhelum]. According to Article III (1) of the IWT, “India is under obligation to let flow” waters of the Western Rivers to Pakistan.

In effect, the treaty gave India about 30% of the water carried out by the “Indus Rivers System” while Pakistan got 70% of the waters.

### **Why does India want to renegotiate IWT?**

Sources said India’s latest notification highlights “fundamental and unforeseen changes in circumstances” that require a reassessment of obligations made under the IWT. Among New Delhi’s concerns, sources said, are the “change in population demographics, environmental issues and the need to accelerate development of clean energy to meet India’s emission targets, and the impact of persistent cross-border terrorism”.

Moreover, the two notifications come amidst a prolonged controversy over the construction of two hydel power projects by India in Jammu & Kashmir — one on Kishanganga, a tributary of Jhelum, in Bandipora district, and the other (Ratle Hydroelectric Project) on Chenab in Kishtwar district.

Both are “run-of-the-river” projects, meaning they generate electricity (330 MW and 850 MW respectively) using the natural flow of the river, and without obstructing its course. However, Pakistan has repeatedly alleged that both these projects violate the IWT.

### **What was behind the notice in January 2023?**

At the time, New Delhi cited Islamabad’s continued “intransigence” in implementing the IWT by raising repeated objections to the two hydel projects.

In 2015, Pakistan requested the appointment of a “Neutral Expert” to examine its technical objections to the projects. A year later, it unilaterally retracted this request and proposed that the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) adjudicate on its objections instead. India refused to engage in the PCA mechanism and made a separate request for the matter to be referred to a Neutral Expert.

Sources said Pakistan's proposal for a PCA mechanism was in contravention to the graded dispute settlement mechanism provided in Article IX of the IWT. According to the treaty, there is a sequential, three-level mechanism where disputes are first decided at the level of the Indus Commissioners of the two countries, then escalated to the Neutral Expert who is appointed by the World Bank, and only then escalated to the Hague-based PCA.

The initiation of two simultaneous processes on the same questions — and their potentially contradictory outcomes — is not provided under any article of the IWT, and thus created an unprecedented, legally untenable situation.

The World Bank in 2016 "paused" the initiation of the parallel processes and requested India and Pakistan to seek an amicable way out. However, despite multiple attempts by New Delhi, Islamabad has refused to discuss the issue during the five meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission from 2017 to 2022, a source said.

In fact, at Pakistan's continuing insistence, in 2022 the World Bank decided to initiate both the Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration processes. This, along with the recommendation of a parliamentary standing committee in 2021, led to the January 2023 notice, the first in over six decades.

In 2021, the Departmentally Related Standing Committees on Water Resources had noted that "although the IWT has stood the test of time... the Treaty was framed on the basis of knowledge and technology existing at the time of its agreement in the 1960s... Present day pressing issues such as climate change, global warming and environmental impact assessment etc. were not taken into account by the Treaty."

The committee, headed by the BJP's Sanjay Jaiswal, had thus found that there is a need to "renegotiate the Treaty so as to establish some kind of institutional structure or legislative framework to address the impact of climate change on water availability in the Indus basin and other challenges which are not covered under the Treaty."

### **So, what has changed since January 2023?**

Here is a brief chronology of important events to have taken place since January 2023.

**April 17, 2023:** The sixth meeting of the Union Ministry's Steering Committee on matters related to the IWT takes place. The Committee met under the Jal Shakti Secretary, and saw the Foreign Secretary of India in attendance. "The meeting took stock of the ongoing modification process of the IWT," the MEA said after the meeting.

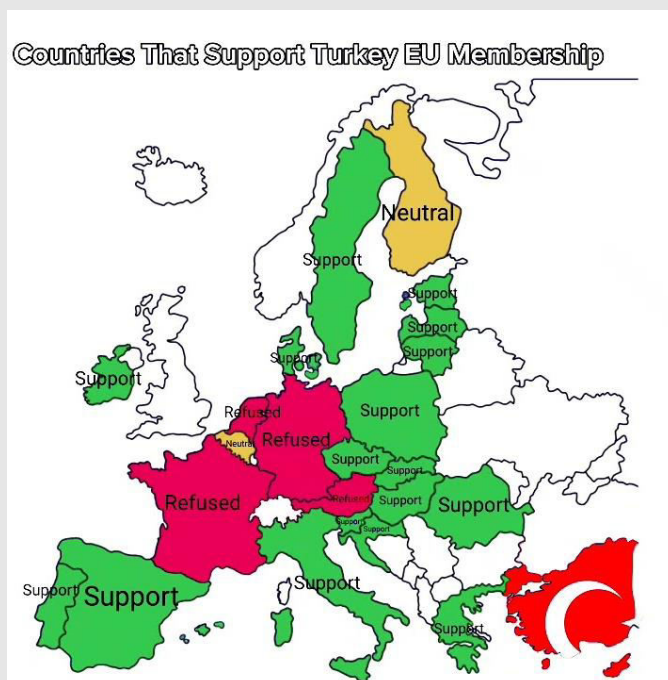
**July 06, 2023:** The PCA rules that it has the "competence" to consider matters concerning the Kishanganga and Ratle hydel projects. India responds by reiterating its "consistent and principled position" that the constitution of the "so-called Court of Arbitration" is in contravention of the provisions of the IWT.

**September 20-21, 2023:** A delegation from India, led by the Secretary, Department of Water Resources, attend a meeting of the Neutral Expert proceedings in the Kishanganga and Ratle matter in Vienna. Senior Advocate Harish Salve acts as India's Lead Counsel in the meeting convened by the Neutral Expert, and attended by representatives of both India and Pakistan. After the meeting, India reiterates its "treaty-consistent" decision to not participate in the parallel proceedings conducted by "an illegally constituted" PCA on the same set of issues pertaining to the Kishanganga and Ratle projects.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

### 3. Will Turkey's Bid to Join BRICS Speed Up EU Accession?



#### Overview

Turkey has officially applied to join BRICS, a coalition of emerging economies, raising questions about its relationship with the European Union (EU). This move could indicate a shift away from the EU or serve as a political strategy to pressure the bloc.

#### Turkey's Position on BRICS

Omer Celik, spokesperson for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party, confirmed the application, stating it is "pending." Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed support for Turkey's inclusion, framing it as a potential counterbalance to Western influence.

#### Implications for EU Accession

Experts are divided on whether Turkey's BRICS application signals a departure from EU ambitions or reflects frustration with stalled accession talks. The EU expects candidate countries to uphold its values, a requirement Turkey has struggled to meet. Reports indicate Turkey's alignment with EU foreign policy has plummeted, highlighting the challenges it faces in pursuing EU membership.

#### Frustration with the EU

Turkey's interest in BRICS may stem from dissatisfaction with the EU's lack of progress on issues like customs modernization and visa liberalization. Turkish officials express that without significant reforms addressing fundamental freedoms and rule of law, EU accession remains unlikely.

### Potential Backfire of Joining BRICS

While some Turkish experts believe joining BRICS could enhance Turkey's leverage in negotiations with the EU, there are risks. Membership might further erode Turkey's credibility in the eyes of EU nations, who may perceive it as drifting away from Western alliances.

### Turkey's Complex Relations with the West

Turkey's foreign policy choices, such as purchasing defense systems from Russia and supporting groups like Hamas, have led to mistrust among Western allies. Despite its strategic importance, Turkey is often seen as a "mistrusted, necessary ally" by NATO and the EU.

### Conclusion

Turkey's BRICS application could be a strategic maneuver in its foreign policy, reflecting both frustration with the EU and a desire to assert its importance on the global stage. The implications of this move for Turkey's EU accession prospects remain uncertain, as it navigates a complex geopolitical landscape.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

## 4. Impact of Morality Law on Afghan Women

### Introduction: Regressive Law and Global Outrage

The Taliban's recent announcement of a law on the "Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" has sparked global outrage. This law imposes the Taliban's strict interpretation of sharia, or Islamic law, on Afghanistan, severely restricting women's rights and regulating many aspects of daily life.



### **Key Provisions of the New Law**

The 114-page law mandates that women must cover their entire bodies and faces in the presence of unrelated men and prohibits them from raising their voices in public. Men are also subjected to strict regulations, such as growing beards and avoiding Western-style haircuts. The law bans all forms of entertainment, restricts travel during prayer times, and prohibits transporting women without a male guardian. The morality police, known as Muhtasib, are empowered to enforce these rules with discretionary punishment.

### **Historical Context: Is This a New Development?**

While many of these regulations were already being enforced in Afghanistan, the official codification of these "morality laws" is feared to lead to more brutal punishments. Afghanistan has a history of women's rights being severely restricted under Taliban rule, despite periods of progress in the past.

### **Afghan Women's Resistance**

Despite the severe restrictions, some Afghan women are defying the new law by singing in public and protesting, while others engage in more subtle forms of resistance, such as running underground schools for girls. These acts of defiance indicate that many women are unwilling to accept the Taliban's draconian measures.

### **International Response**

The international community has condemned the new law, with UN agencies calling it "oppressive" and "utterly intolerable." However, the Taliban's refusal to cooperate with the UN has limited the effectiveness of international pressure. Critics argue that more robust political pressure is needed to make the Taliban respond to global concerns about women's rights. India has also expressed concern, reiterating its support for women's education and the establishment of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

## **5. X Platform Banned in Brazil Amidst Musk-Judge Standoff**

### **Introduction**

Elon Musk's social media platform, X (formerly Twitter), was banned in Brazil starting early Saturday after a ruling by Brazilian Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes. The decision follows a prolonged conflict between Musk and the judge over disinformation issues in Brazil.

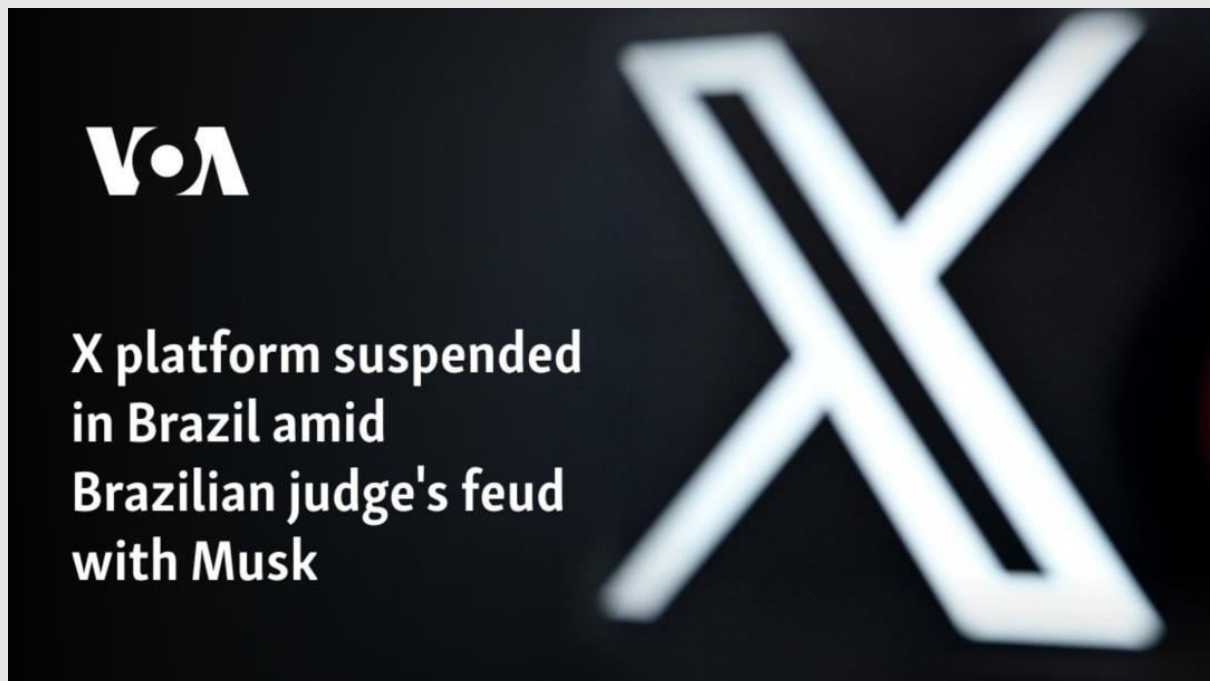
### **Judge Orders Suspension of X**

Judge Moraes ordered the suspension of X after Musk failed to appoint a new legal representative for the company in Brazil. The ban began to take effect on Saturday, with some users in Brazil unable to access the platform.

### **Musk's Reaction to the Ban**



Musk, who also owns Tesla and SpaceX, reacted angrily to the ban, accusing Judge Moraes of trying to undermine democracy in Brazil. He criticized the judge as an "evil dictator cosplaying as a judge" and condemned the ban as an attack on free speech.



### **Ongoing Feud Over Disinformation**

The conflict between Musk and Moraes has been ongoing for months. Moraes is leading efforts to combat disinformation in Brazil, while Musk, who identifies as a "free speech absolutist," has faced criticism for allegedly turning X into a platform for right-wing conspiracy theories.

### **Enforcement of the Ban**

Moraes ordered the immediate suspension of X in Brazil and instructed the national communications agency to enforce the ban within 24 hours. He also threatened fines for anyone using methods like VPNs to bypass the ban. Although Moraes initially ordered Google, Apple, and internet providers to block access to X, he later rescinded that order.

### **Background and Broader Implications**

Musk's conflict with the Brazilian judiciary began when Moraes ordered the suspension of several X accounts linked to supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro, who spread disinformation about the 2022 election. In response to these actions, Musk shut down X's business operations in Brazil earlier this month.

Musk's satellite internet company, Starlink, also became involved when Moraes ordered the freezing of its accounts, alleging it was responsible for fines imposed on X. Musk is currently under investigation for allegedly participating in a disinformation scheme supporting Bolsonaro.

### Brazilian President's Response

Brazilian President Lula da Silva responded to the situation, asserting that any foreign investor in Brazil, including Musk, must adhere to the country's laws and constitution. "Who does Musk think he is?" Lula remarked during a local radio interview.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

## 6. Sudan Conflict: 500 Days of War

### Why is Sudan at War?



The war in Sudan began in April 2023 due to a power struggle between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The conflict stems from tensions over Sudan's political future and the move towards civilian rule, which dates back to the 2019 overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir. A brief power-sharing agreement was disrupted by a military coup in 2021, leading to escalating tensions and eventually, war.

### **Current Situation**

The conflict has led to the deaths of over 15,000 people, though some estimates suggest the toll could be as high as 40,000. The war has created one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with 25 million people in urgent need of assistance, nearly 9 million internally displaced, and over half the population lacking access to healthcare. The situation is further worsened by environmental disasters like floods, which have decimated communities and hampered relief efforts.

### **What Happens Next?**

If the conflict continues, millions could die from starvation by 2027. The war also poses a significant geopolitical risk, with the potential to spill over into neighboring countries and trigger mass migration towards Europe. The disruption of vital operations, such as those of the Suez Canal, could have global ramifications. International intervention is urgently needed to prevent further disaster and stabilize the region.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

## **7. 3 things to know about Brunei Darussalam, with PM Modi's official visit**

### **Introduction**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of Brunei Darussalam, recently for his official visit to the country. The first Indian PM to visit the Southeast Asian nation, his trip also marks 40 years since India and Brunei officially established diplomatic ties.

The prime minister inaugurated a new Chancery of the High Commission of India and visited the Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque. Here are three things to know about the country's population, its strategic significance for India, and its leader.

### **1. Brunei's population and Indian diaspora**

According to official estimates from 2023, Brunei has a population of 450,500 people. Brunei citizens comprise about 76% of the population, with the remaining being permanent or temporary residents. More than 80% of the population is ethnically Malay or Chinese.

The Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release that the first phase of Indians arriving in Brunei started with the discovery of oil in the 1920s. "Currently, approximately 14,000 Indians are residing in Brunei. The contribution of Indian doctors and teachers to the growth and development of Brunei's healthcare and education sectors has been well acknowledged," it added.



## 2. Strategic importance of Brunei

Brunei is part of India's 'Act East' Policy and Indo-Pacific Vision.

The 'Act East' Policy was formulated as the next step to the 'Look East' Policy which originated in the 1990s. In a world without the USSR, which India had close historical ties with, India sought to deepen its relations with other countries, like those in Southeast Asia. Northeast

Indian states, due to their proximity to Southeast Asia, were to be instrumental in this.

In 2014, the policy was revived as 'Act East', imploring greater action towards solidifying those ties. PM Modi has said the 10-member grouping ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) was the "central pillar" of India's Act East Policy. Brunei is also an ASEAN member.

Many Southeast Asian countries have seen rapid economic growth in the last few decades. Therefore, commerce is also central to these ties. Brunei, for instance, is one of the largest oil and gas producers in the region.

The focus on Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific also matters in the context of China's ascendancy in world affairs in recent years. Under President Xi Jinping, it has also taken a more authoritarian turn. While China's economic stature gives it much heft in the region, allowing it to fund several projects and give loans to other countries, it has also irked others over issues like its conduct in the South China Sea. India can thus provide a counter to Chinese influence.

## 3. Longest reigning monarch in the world

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, Brunei Darussalam was the seat of a powerful sultanate. Thus, the current Sultan represents one of the oldest continuously ruling dynasties in the world. Brunei's Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah was crowned as the 29th Sultan of Brunei on August 1, 1968, making him the longest-reigning monarch in the world at present.

The king is equally well-known for his immense wealth. A 2015 Time Magazine article said he reportedly owns more than 600 Rolls-Royces, and his residence — Istana Nurul Iman, the world's largest palace — cost over \$350 million.

According to an article in the BBC, "He is one of the world's richest individuals and in a country where the standard of living is high, appears to enjoy genuine popularity amongst his subjects. More recently however, he has faced criticism over the introduction of Islamic Sharia law in the country."

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

## 8. Why Sri Lanka's newly elected President dissolved Parliament

### Introduction

A day after assuming office, Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake dissolved Parliament and announced a snap election.

Dissanayake had indicated during the campaign that upon coming to power, he would seek a fresh mandate to pursue his policies. There is "no point continuing with a Parliament that is not in line with what the people want," he had said, according to media reports.



### Political situation

Sri Lanka's 225-member Parliament has a term of five years. The previous election took place in August 2020, which means the now-dissolved Parliament was supposed to be in place until August 2025.

However, the socialist National People's Power

(NPP) alliance led by Dissanayake and his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party, had just three seats in this Parliament. This is because until 2022, the NPP largely remained on the fringes of Sri Lankan politics.

The meteoric rise of the NPP, exemplified by the mandate received by Dissanayake in Saturday's presidential election, came on the back of the mass protests that rocked Sri Lanka in 2022. The NPP led the street agitation against years of economic mismanagement and corruption — protests that forced the powerful Rajapaksa family from power and compelled President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, who became President in July 2022, was backed in Parliament by the Rajapaksas' Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party.



In the backdrop of this situation, it was always likely that if he were to come to power, Dissanayake would dissolve Parliament and call fresh elections, in which the NPP would likely make major gains.

### **Sri Lankan system**

Technically, the President and Prime Minister can be from different political parties. But in reality, ever since the President was given executive powers in 1978, the two offices have been closely aligned. This is because for all practical purposes, the Prime Minister acts as deputy to the President in Sri Lanka.

The President is both the head of state and head of government, as well as the commander-in-chief of the Sri Lankan armed forces, and the head of the Union cabinet. The President has the power to dissolve Parliament. The President is directly elected for a six-year term.

The Prime Minister is the most senior member of Parliament and the Union cabinet, and the chief adviser to the President. The PM is also the first in line to succeed the President. Wickremesinghe was PM when Gotabaya was President.

### **What happens now**

Hours before Dissanayake took oath as President on Monday, Dinesh Gunawardene resigned as Prime Minister. On Tuesday, Dissanayake appointed Harini Amarasuriya, one of the three NPP members of Parliament, as Prime Minister. Amarasuriya will head the Union cabinet, which will act as the interim government until elections take place in November. A new PM will be appointed after that.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

## **9. Who is new France PM Michel Barnier? Why did his appointment take so long?**

### **Introduction**

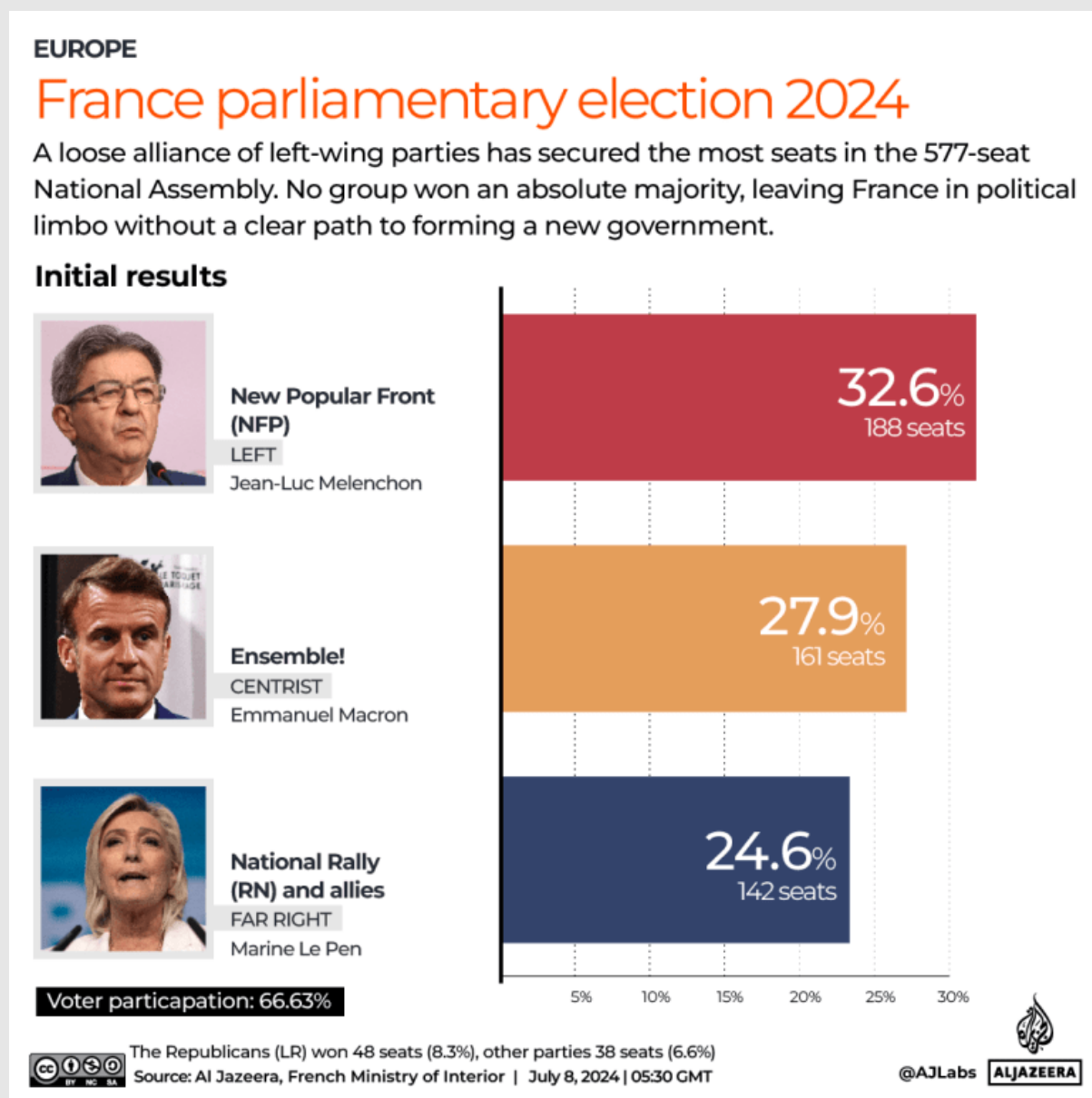
More than 50 days since France's parliamentary elections concluded, President Emmanuel Macron appointed Michel Barnier as the new prime minister.

Barnier takes over from the outgoing PM Gabriel Attal, who continued to serve even as the caretaker prime minister post the election results. This is the longest transition period between two prime ministers since France embraced the Fifth Republic — it had never exceeded nine days previously.

Who is Michel Barnier? Why did the President take so long to appoint a new PM? What comes next for France?

### **Who is Michel Barnier?**

Hailing from Haute-Savoie in the French Alps, Michel Barnier is a career politician who is best known as the EU's chief negotiator with Britain during the Brexit talks in 2016.



He has had a storied political career of over 50 years, serving as France's foreign, European affairs, environment and agriculture minister, and two terms as the France European commissioner. He belongs to The Republicans (LR) party, and had challenged Macron for the presidency in 2022.

At 73, Barnier will be the Fifth Republic's oldest prime minister.

**What was the outcome of the French parliamentary polls? Why did it take so long for Macron to appoint a PM?**

After the second round of voting, tactical withdrawals by the centrist and leftist coalitions successfully thwarted the far right National Rally's (RN's) march to power. Eventually, RN finished with 142 seats, the leftist New Popular Front (NFP) won 188 seats, and Macron's centrist Ensemble won 161 seats.

However, France now had a hung house, with no party or coalition getting close to the majority of 289 seats.

Subsequently, Macron called for "republican forces" (centrist parties) to unite to form the government.

According to the French system, the power to appoint the prime minister rests solely with the president. However, the President appoints that person as Prime Minister who enjoys majority in the parliament.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

## 10. The significance of the first global 'legally binding' pact on use of AI

### Introduction



The United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom (UK) are expected to sign the Council of Europe's convention on artificial intelligence (AI), the first "legally binding" international treaty on the use of the revolutionary new technology.

The treaty, which prioritises human rights in its approach to the regulation of public and private-sector AI systems is seen as the first real agreement among the key players in the development of AI, amid concerns that disparate regulations proposed by individual countries

could hinder the evolution of this technology.

The treaty, officially known as the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, was opened for signature during a conference of Council of Europe Ministers of Justice in Vilnius, Lithuania.

### Pact with teeth, responsibility

The treaty that was drafted over the past 24 months by more than 50 countries adopts a risk-based approach to the design, development, use, and decommissioning of AI systems. It

covers the use of AI systems in the public sector — including companies acting on its behalf — and in the private sector, and will be applicable across geographies.

Signatories will be accountable for “any harmful and discriminatory outcomes of AI systems”, and will ensure that “outputs of such systems respect equality and privacy rights, and that victims of AI-related rights violations have legal recourse”.

Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović said: “The Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence is a first-of-its-kind, global treaty that will ensure that AI upholds people’s rights. It is a response to the need for an international legal standard supported by states in different continents which share the same values to harness the benefits of AI, while mitigating the risks. With this new treaty, we aim to ensure a responsible use of AI that respects human rights, the rule of law and democracy.”

### **Obligations and applicability**

Upon ratification, member states will have to ensure that

- \* their AI systems are “consistent with obligations to protect human rights”;
- \* these systems are not used “to undermine the integrity, independence and effectiveness of democratic institutions and processes, including the principle of the separation of powers, respect for judicial independence and access to justice”;
- \* measures are put in place “to protect...democratic processes in the context of activities within the lifecycle of artificial intelligence systems”, including individuals’ fair access to and participation in public debate, as well as their ability to freely form opinions.

There are a few exemptions in the scope of applicability of the Framework Convention, such as national security and research and development. The treaty puts an obligation on parties to address the risks posed by activities within the lifecycle of AI by public and private actors. The treaty comes at a time when sovereign governments and smaller multilateral groups have come up with a clutch of new regulations and agreements to oversee AI tools, including the G7 pact on AI (October 2023), Europe’s AI Act, and Bletchley Declaration signed by 28 countries (November 2023).

### **Issues and concerns with pact**

Even though the treaty is being called “legally binding”, there are concerns that it does not contain provisions for punitive sanctions such as penalties or fines. Compliance is primarily ensured through “monitoring”, which is not much of a deterrent from an enforcement point of view.

Hanne Juncker, the Director of Security, Integrity and Rule of Law at the Council and who is in charge of the negotiations, was quoted by the Financial Times as saying that 10 participants are expected to be among the first to approve it when the convention opens for signatures. “This is confirmation that [the convention] goes beyond Europe and that these signatories were super invested in the negotiations and...satisfied with the outcome”, she said.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

## 11. Significance of the China-hosted FOCAC summit, with 53 African countries in attendance

### Introduction

Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged \$51 billion of funding to African countries on Thursday (September 5) at the ninth edition of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing. China will support 30 infrastructure projects across the continent, with 360 billion yuan (\$50.7 billion) to be offered as financial assistance.

The move comes as China tries to scale down its big-ticket infrastructure investments amid pressures on its own economy in recent years. Why is FOCAC significant and how have China's relations with Africa evolved?



### What is the FOCAC?

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was established in 2000 to formalise the strategic partnership between China and African nations. A summit is conducted every three years, with the host alternating between China and an African member.

The FOCAC counts 53 African nations as its members – the entire continent except Eswatini, which has diplomatic ties with Taiwan against Beijing's "One China" Policy. The African Union Commission, the continental bloc tasked with ensuring cooperation and economic integration across its member countries, is also a member.

African leaders will engage in bilateral talks with China on political and economic cooperation over three days. The theme this year is "Joining Hands to Advance Modernization and Build a High-Level China-Africa Community with a Shared Future."

According to Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong, FOCAC will be the largest diplomatic event China has hosted in recent years and have UN Secretary-General António Guterres as a special guest.

The last FOCAC summit was held virtually in Beijing and Dakar, Senegal in 2021, owing to Covid-19 restrictions. Commitments to continued economic and political cooperation were made. The current summit is expected to address state governance, industrialisation, agricultural upgradation, and improved cooperation over China's infrastructure financing via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).



A key outcome would be establishing consensus and an action plan for improving China-Africa cooperation over the next three years.

### **How have China's relations with Africa evolved?**

As a Communist nation, China stood for the decolonisation of multiple African countries in the 1950s by supporting their liberation movements and establishing bilateral trade relations. These efforts paid off in the 1970s, as China rallied the support of these nations to displace Taiwan as the official representative of China in global forums like the UN Security Council.

The transnational Tanzania-Zambia railway, completed in 1976, was China's first infrastructure project in Africa. China amped up its investments in Africa in the 1990s and the 2000s to become Africa's largest bilateral trading partner since 2009. Africa-China trade amounted to \$282 billion in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

China gets 20% of the region's exports, mainly primary commodities like metals, mineral products and fuel, and is responsible for about 16% of African imports, chiefly Chinese manufactured goods, electronics and machinery.

Africa is also an integral partner in the BRI, which intends to establish cross-border economic, political and cultural relations akin to the erstwhile Silk Road through land and maritime routes. China has reportedly invested over \$120 billion in supporting infrastructure for the BRI over the past decade.

A big draw for African nations seeking Chinese funds has been the absence of constraints linked to environmental or human rights protections, characteristic of loans from the IMF and the World Bank. China and Nigeria released a joint statement recently, stating, "Both sides... oppose the politicisation of human rights issues, i.e. the interference in other countries' internal affairs under the pretext of human rights." The US investments in Africa have also not kept pace with China in recent years.

However, China has been accused of using the BRI to foster 'debt trap diplomacy'. Geostrategist Brahma Chellaney described this as a situation where the Chinese government extends huge loans to support infrastructure projects in strategically located developing countries, leaving the borrowing country in a debt trap and vulnerable to China's influence.

This argument has been used to explain China's association with the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, which it helped build. But when Sri Lanka failed to pay the debt, a majority stake in the port was sold to a Chinese firm on a 99-year lease.

Another view attributes the defaults to domestic mismanagement by the borrowing country, arguing that China's financing policy is too fragmented and vast to pursue a concerted debt-financing strategy. China has also rejected this accusation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

## 12. What is the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence in war; where India, US and China stand

### Introduction



As the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by the world's militaries grows, the political effort to regulate the way the revolutionary technology is used in warfare is growing too. If the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza are emerging as "AI labs" for warfare, there is also a diplomatic push to establish at least some general norms on how to limit the dangers of its military use.

India, which has been actively engaged with the issues of development and safe use of AI in the civilian domain, has stood apart from the emerging global debate on limiting the technology for military uses. But as new global frameworks for 'AI arms control' begin to emerge, Delhi must shape the process rather than stay away from it.

### What is the REAIM?

The summit on Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (REAIM) beginning in Seoul, South Korea, on Monday (September 9) is part of the new global diplomacy to shape global norms on the military applications of AI. The summit is being co-hosted by Kenya, the Netherlands, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. A wide range of governments, international organisations, technology companies, academia, and civil society from around the world are expected to participate.

This is the second iteration of the summit; the first took place in February 2023 in The Hague, and was hosted by the government of Netherlands. Although there were no dramatic outcomes at The Hague summit, it broadened the global debate on the military dimensions of AI and brought a wider range of stakeholders into the debate.

Until recently, the debate on military AI had been focused on autonomous weapons, the so-called 'killer robots'. The fear that the conduct of warfare would be taken up by computers and algorithms had generated calls for controlling these weapons. Keeping humans in the decision-making loop on the use of force has been a major objective of this discourse. The issues relating to lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) have been discussed within a group of governmental experts since 2019 at the United Nations in Geneva.

Last December, the United Nations General Assembly took up for the first time the question of LAWS, and called on the Secretary General to gather the views of member states and report on the possible ways to address the ethical, legal, and operational challenges presented by autonomous weapons. The Secretary General's report is expected to be presented at this year's session of the UNGA beginning later this month.

### From The Hague to Seoul

The REAIM process widened the debate beyond 'killer robots' to a broader range of issues by recognising that AI systems are finding ever greater applications in warfare. While AI has long

been used by leading militaries for inventory management and logistical planning, in the past few years, the use of AI in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance of the battlefield has significantly expanded.

Major militaries see the capacity of AI to transform the collection, synthesis, and analysis of vast amounts of data from the battlefield as useful in raising situational awareness, increasing the time available for decision-making on the use of force, enhancing precision in targeting, limiting civilian casualties, and increasing the tempo of warfare. Many critics have warned that these presumed attractions of AI in warfare might be illusory and dangerous.

The proliferation of the so-called AI decision-making support systems (AI-DSS) and their implications are among the issues that are now being debated under the REAIM process. The Hague summit called for continuing dialogue, and the second summit hopes to codify a measure of consensus on these issues. The three-fold objective of the Korea summit is to understand the implications of military AI on global peace and security, implement new norms on using AI systems in military affairs, and develop ideas on long-term global governance of AI in the military domain.

### **Focus on responsible use of AI in military affairs**

In an important shift, the REAIM process has moved away from the idea that the AI revolution in military affairs can be reversed and abolished. Instead, it is calling for the “responsible use” of AI. The REAIM process is one of the many initiatives to promote responsible AI — national, bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral.

On the last day of The Hague summit, the United States had issued a unilateral draft political declaration on the responsible use of AI, and formalised it in November 2023. Earlier in 2020, Washington had issued national guidelines for responsible military use of AI by the US armed forces.

The US has also encouraged its NATO allies to adopt similar norms. NATO’s 2021 strategy identified six principles for the responsible military use of AI and unveiled a set of guidelines for its forces in July this year. The objective is to “accelerate” the use of AI systems that could generate military gains for NATO, but in a “safe and responsible” manner.

Simply put, we are going to see more AI in warfare than less; that comports with the historic trend that all new technologies will eventually find military applications. AI is no exception. The REAIM process recognises this — and given the potentially catastrophic outcomes from such use, the idea is to develop an agreed set of norms. The US is also conducting a bilateral dialogue with China on the responsible use of AI, especially on limiting its potential implications for nuclear deterrence.

### **Where the world, India, and China stand on AI use in weapons**

In a parallel effort to the REAIM summits, the US introduced a resolution on the responsible use of AI at the UNGA earlier this year, which was co-sponsored by 123 countries and adopted by consensus. While the UN effort is focused on broad objectives, the REAIM process is aimed

at a more granular discussion of the issues and building a wide international coalition in developing a new set of global norms on military AI.

More than 50 countries have endorsed the US political declaration on the responsible use of AI in the military domain. The US is reaching out to a wide range of countries in the Global South to inform them and win their support for the new AI initiative. On its part, Delhi has been in a 'watch-and-wait' mode in this unfolding debate. It is examining issues of substance and their long-term significance as it observes but holds back from full involvement with the new AI initiatives.

India had not endorsed the "call to action" issued by The Hague summit, and it remains to be seen if it supports a blueprint for global AI action that is expected to be unveiled by the Korea summit. Delhi, however, can't afford to remain a passive bystander in this profoundly consequential global debate on promoting norms for military use of AI.

Beijing, in contrast, has been at the forefront of the strategic as well as regulatory discourse on the military uses of AI. Its military analysts talk about the role of AI in "intelligised warfare". In 2021, China issued a White Paper outlining its approach to the regulation of military uses of AI. It also supported The Hague summit's "call to action" on the responsible military use of AI.

India's bitter experience with nuclear arms control, where political indecisiveness and ideological hesitations cost the nation dearly, is a reminder that it is easier to shape the global normative architecture in the design phase than change it after the new rules are established.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

### 13. India and UAE Sign Historic Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement

#### Introduction



Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, to India.

In a landmark move, India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have signed their first-ever memorandum of understanding (MoU) for civil nuclear cooperation. The deal, between India's Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) and the UAE's Emirates Nuclear Energy Company (ENEC), was signed during the visit of Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the

#### Background of Cooperation

The foundation for this agreement was laid during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UAE in August 2015, where both nations committed to cooperating in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The areas of collaboration include safety, health, agriculture, and science and

technology. Diplomatic sources highlight that this agreement is unprecedented in the history of nuclear cooperation between the two nations.

### **Trilateral Cooperation with France**

The MoU is a result of long-standing discussions between India and the UAE. In September 2022, the foreign ministers of France, India, and the UAE launched a trilateral cooperation format during a meeting at the UN General Assembly in New York. This was followed by a three-party phone call in February 2023, where all parties agreed to promote cooperation in the fields of solar and nuclear energy.

### **Other Key Agreements**

In addition to the nuclear cooperation MoU, the two sides signed several other important agreements during the Crown Prince's visit:

**1. LNG Supply MoU:** A long-term LNG supply agreement was signed between Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd.

**2. Production Concession Agreement:** ADNOC and Urja Bharat signed a Production Concession Agreement for Abu Dhabi Onshore Block 1.

**3. Food Parks Development:** The Government of Gujarat and Abu Dhabi Developmental Holding Company PJSC (ADQ) inked a deal for the development of food parks in India.

### **Strategic Alliances**

India and the UAE are part of the I2U2 grouping, which also includes Israel and the United States. The Crown Prince's visit coincided with the first India-Gulf Cooperation Council meeting, which took place in Saudi Arabia.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

## **14. Strengthening Defense Ties Between Vietnam and the Philippines**

### **Introduction**

In late August, Vietnam and the Philippines agreed to enhance defense cooperation, focusing on maritime security. This development came after Vietnam's Defense Minister Phan Van Giang met with his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, in Manila. Both ministers signed letters of intent to boost maritime and disaster response collaboration and committed to resolving disagreements peacefully under international law.

### **Symbolic Move or Strategic Shift?**

Experts believe that, for now, this move is more symbolic than a major shift in defense relations. Nguyen Khac Giang, a fellow at the Vietnam Studies Program in Singapore, suggested the cooperation may become significant if Southeast Asian nations unite against China's maritime actions. Zachary Abuza, a professor at the National War College in Washington, noted that



although Vietnam and the Philippines' naval capabilities differ, the agreement still promotes more bilateral military engagement.

### The South China Sea Dispute



The South China Sea is a strategic and resource-rich area, with China claiming nearly the entire region. Several nations, including Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan, dispute China's territorial claims. In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled against China's expansive claims, but Beijing rejected the ruling.

Tensions between China and the Philippines have escalated, with recent confrontations over disputed shoals leading to naval clashes. Despite efforts to improve relations, these incidents have fueled distrust.

### ASEAN's Fragmented Approach

The US has pledged to defend the Philippines in case of any attack in the South China Sea, under a defense treaty dating back to 1951. Meanwhile, China has sought to weaken ASEAN's unified response by dividing the bloc. Abuza pointed out that this has led to a "minilateralism" approach, where smaller groups of nations collaborate based on shared interests.

### Vietnam's Strategic Approach

While Vietnam has its own long-standing disputes with China over the South China Sea, it has managed the issue diplomatically since 2011. However, tensions can flare up, as seen in previous incidents like the 2014 oil rig crisis. Vietnam has been fortifying its presence in the South China Sea by building and reinforcing islands. Despite China's discontent, it has not interfered with Vietnam's activities as aggressively as it has with the Philippines.

### Conclusion

Vietnam and the Philippines' growing defense ties may be a symbolic gesture for now, but could signal a shift in regional dynamics, especially as tensions with China continue to simmer in the South China Sea.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

## 15. Political Turmoil in Venezuela: Maduro's Struggles and Opposition Suppression

### Controversial Election Results

Venezuela's July 28 presidential election, in which President Nicolás Maduro claimed victory with 51% of the vote against Opposition candidate Edmundo González's 43%, has intensified the country's political divide. While the National Electoral Council confirmed Maduro's win, the Opposition, supported by the U.S. and other Western nations, alleges that tally sheets from voting machines showed a clear win for González. Maduro, however, received validation of his victory from Venezuela's Supreme Court, which is aligned with his regime.



### Crackdown on Opposition

Following the election, Maduro has cracked down on dissent, with reports from Human Rights Watch stating that 24 people have been killed and 2,400 arrested in connection with protests. The regime has further tightened control by surrounding the Argentine embassy in Caracas, where Opposition members sought refuge. Argentina's President Javier Milei's support for González led Maduro to expel the Argentine diplomatic mission.

### Opposition's Struggle

María Corina Machado, the Opposition's initial candidate, was barred

from running, forcing the Opposition to field González later. The fairness of the election process has been questioned, with authorities delaying the release of polling station results weeks after the vote.

### Maduro's Challenges

Despite consolidating control, Maduro faces multiple challenges. Venezuela's economic crisis, exacerbated by U.S. sanctions, has driven millions to flee the country. Growing regional pressure, including from left-leaning governments like Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, has further isolated Maduro. These countries have urged him to release the full election results, with tensions escalating as Venezuela revoked Brazil's management of the Argentine embassy.

## Conclusion

Maduro's regime has shifted from Chávez's once-popular Bolivarian project to authoritarian control, using socialist rhetoric to justify his rule. While this may keep him in power temporarily, it has come at a significant cost to Venezuela's people, deepening the country's political and economic crises.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

## 16. Changes in Canada's international work permit system to reduce immigration

### Introduction

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced changes to the country's international work permit system, aiming to reduce the number of immigrant workers in Canada.



In posts on X, Trudeau said Canada will grant 35% fewer international student permits this year, with the number going down by another 10% next year.

He said, "We're reducing the number of low-wage, temporary foreign workers and shortening the duration of their work terms" — something he said in August as

well. "We adjusted the program after the pandemic, but the labour market's changed. We need businesses to invest in Canadian workers," Trudeau added.

### Why has Canada curbed international work permits?

Canada issued approximately 4,85,000 student permits in 2024, compared to over 5,00,000 in 2023. The number is expected to further decrease to 4,37,000 in 2025.

This is in line with recent policy changes where the government has cited pressure on cities' infrastructure, higher rents and a "massive" increase in immigration for imposing restrictions. It has also been found that some students used the system to apply for asylum after arriving in Canada. Trudeau said in his post, "Immigration is an advantage for our economy — but when bad actors abuse the system and take advantage of students, we crack down."

The visa-issuance process has been adjusted to detect fraudulent or rejected asylum claims. The proposed reduction in temporary residents, from 6.5 per cent of Canada's population to 5 per cent, will be reflected in the 2025-2027 immigration levels plan to be released by November 1.

### What are the new restrictions on PGWP?

The Postgraduate Work Permits (PGWPs) for international graduates, postgraduates, master's and doctoral programme students in Canada are valid for three years.

The Canadian government aims to reduce the number of PGWPs by 1.75 lakh through stricter rules in the next three years. Spouse work permits will be reduced by 50,000, and given only if one's partner is pursuing a master's programme for a minimum of 16 months.

Before applying for the PGWP, students must now pass a language proficiency test called the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB). The required score is 7 for university undergraduates and 5 for college undergraduates for all applications submitted from November 1 onwards. Earlier, the CLB was only needed to apply for Permanent Residency (PR).

Graduates from programmes at public colleges will still be eligible for a PGWP if they graduate from a field of study connected to occupations witnessing long-term labour shortages in the country (as listed by the government).

Students enrolling in master's and doctoral programs need to get a provincial attestation letter (PAL). Earlier, this condition was only for undergraduate students.

### **What are the challenges for students?**

The future of lakhs of diploma holders who completed their courses in August is uncertain. Those who studied business administration, IT, etc., may find their qualifications no longer suit Canada's long-term job requirements, said Nitin Chawla of Kapri, an immigration consultancy firm in Ludhiana.

Canadian colleges offering such courses may also see fewer international students enroll if they do not introduce new programmes. Punjab-based consultants have noted that students with skills in plumbing, refrigeration and air conditioning/heating, mechanics, AI and machine learning, carpentry, health, and the nursing sector — all seeing labour shortages — have opportunities to obtain a PGWP.

### **What are the alternatives?**

According to data from Canada's Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), there were around 4.90 lakh international student work permit holders in 2017. As of 2023, this number grew to more than 10 lakh. Indian and Chinese students together accounted for more than half of international students in each of the last eight years.

According to Saurabh Arora, CEO of student accommodation service University Living, Canada's decision to reduce the intake of immigrants reflects its commitment towards aligning its international education policy with long-term economic goals.

He added that the shift could encourage Indian students to consider other emerging destinations like Germany, Singapore, Italy and Ireland, which are becoming attractive for educational purposes.

## 17. PM Modi Arrives for Quad Summit in the US

### Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has arrived in the United States to attend the fourth Quad Leaders Summit in Wilmington, Delaware. Here's an overview of the Quad grouping, which includes India, the US, Japan, and Australia.

### Brief History and Structure

The Quad originated after the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004, when India, Japan, Australia, and the US formed an informal alliance for disaster relief. In 2007, Japan's then-PM Shinzo Abe formalized it as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).



However, early efforts faced challenges due to a lack of cohesion and perceptions that it was merely an anti-China bloc. The group faded until it was revived in 2017 amid rising Chinese influence. Unlike traditional multilateral organizations, the Quad has no secretariat or permanent decision-making body. Instead, it focuses on enhancing existing agreements and promoting shared values. It does not include collective defense provisions, opting instead for joint military exercises to demonstrate unity.

The Quad's first significant joint military exercises since its resurgence occurred in 2020-21 with the inclusion of Australia in the Malabar naval exercises. The leaders later met virtually in March 2021, releasing a statement outlining their objectives and goals, culminating in their first in-person meeting in Washington, D.C.



## Key Objectives

The Quad aims to enhance:

- Maritime Security: Safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific.
- Climate Change: Addressing environmental challenges collectively.
- Investment Ecosystem: Promoting regional economic growth.
- Technological Innovation: Boosting collaboration in technology sectors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Quad also focused on vaccine diplomacy. There are discussions about expanding the partnership to include countries like South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam, referred to as Quad Plus.

In a joint statement, Quad leaders emphasized their commitment to a free and inclusive Indo-Pacific region governed by international law, where countries can make their own political choices without coercion.

## Geopolitical Context

While the Quad promotes a range of issues, its primary concern remains the threat posed by China. Each member state has its reasons for being cautious of China's regional ambitions. China has consistently criticized the Quad, with its Foreign Minister labeling it a "headline-grabbing idea" and accusing it of fostering discord in Asia. Beijing views the Quad as part of a strategy to encircle it.

## Conclusion

As PM Modi participates in the Quad Summit, the focus will be on addressing regional challenges and reinforcing commitments among the member nations amid evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

## 18. Hezbollah Pager Attacks: A Timeline and Analysis

### Overview of the Attacks

On September 17, simultaneous explosions from pagers used by Hezbollah resulted in at least nine deaths and thousands of injuries, including Iran's envoy to Beirut. Lebanese Information Minister Ziad Makary labeled this as "Israeli aggression." Following this, walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah also detonated, causing nearly two dozen fatalities and injuring over 450 individuals.



### Rising Tensions in the Region

The pager and walkie-talkie blasts occur amidst escalating hostilities between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah, with ongoing exchanges of fire along the Israel-Lebanon border since the Gaza war began in October. The nature of these attacks could signal a new phase in the long-standing regional conflict. The use of low-tech devices surprised Hezbollah, resulting in casualties among its members and prompting vows of retaliation against Israel.

### **Understanding Pagers**

Pagers, or beepers, are communication devices that have largely been overshadowed by smartphones. They work by receiving radio signals from towers and can be one-way (receiving messages only) or two-way (allowing responses). Pagers are often more reliable in areas with poor cell coverage and are still used in sectors like healthcare and emergency services due to their energy efficiency and resilience.

### **Advantages for Covert Operations**

Pagers offer significant advantages for covert communications:

- 1. Limited Surveillance Risk:** Pagers lack GPS and internet connectivity, reducing the risk of location tracking.
- 2. Difficult to Intercept:** Their use of radio frequencies makes interception harder than with cellular devices.
- 3. Modification Potential:** Pagers can be altered to trigger explosives upon receiving specific messages, making them suitable for covert operations.

Experts suggest that Hezbollah's reliance on pagers stemmed from a belief that their phone systems were compromised, leading them to opt for older technology perceived as safer.

### **The Role of Israeli Manipulation**

It is believed that Israel may have manipulated the pagers used by Hezbollah. Reports indicate the devices bore the branding of Gold Apollo, a company that denied direct involvement, asserting the pagers were produced by a licensed European manufacturer. Analysts theorize that Israel could have set up a front company to sell tampered pagers, embedding explosives within them.

### **Execution of the Attacks**

The attacks may have involved Israeli engineers intercepting and modifying the pagers before delivery. Experts speculate that the explosives, possibly PETN, were integrated into the devices as part of a sophisticated supply chain manipulation, highlighting Israel's control over the distribution of such technology to Hezbollah.

### **Conclusion: A New Era in Armed Conflict?**

The use of pagers in these attacks raises questions about their potential as tools in future conflicts. With their inconspicuous nature and relative immunity to high-tech surveillance, they may become a favored method for covert operations. As regional tensions continue, the implications of this incident are likely to be far-reaching.

**Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues**

## 19. Political Transformation in Sri Lanka

### Overview



Anura Kumara Dissanayake, 55, has emerged as a transformative figure in Sri Lankan politics, rising from a humble rural background to win the presidency. He secured 42.31% of the vote, outpacing Sajith Premadasa (32.71%) and the incumbent, Ranil Wickremesinghe (17.27%).

### Early Life and Background

Born in Galewela on November 24, 1968, Anura's political journey began in the rural heartlands of Sri Lanka. Unlike many leaders rooted in Sinhala Buddhist politics, his identity was shaped by the struggles of Sri Lanka's working class, not academia or ethnicity.

### Joining the JVP and Early Activism

In the early 1990s, while attending university, Anura joined the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Marxist-Leninist party known for its armed uprisings in 1971 and 1987-89. The JVP, once defined by its violent struggles against perceived exploitation, gradually shifted to democratic politics, softening its hardline Marxist goals.

### Political Ascent and Leadership of the JVP

Anura's political rise began in 1997 as the national organizer of the JVP's Socialist Youth Organization. He became an MP in 2000 and led the JVP by 2014. His background in the agricultural sector and his role as Minister of Agriculture in 2004 deepened his connection with Sri Lanka's rural working class.

### Modernizing the JVP

After violent insurrections left the JVP associated with militancy, Anura's leadership marked a turning point. He modernized the party, broadening its appeal to younger voters and rebranding it as a platform against corruption and political patronage. This transformation played a key role in Anura's candidacy, which was buoyed by public frustration over economic collapse and political corruption.

### JVP's Evolution from Militancy to Governance

This is the first time in decades that a Marxist party will lead Sri Lanka. Opinions differ on whether the JVP is ready to govern, as its history includes a lack of internal democracy and intolerance of criticism. However, the JVP has matured, moving from its militant roots to a more pragmatic political force under Anura's leadership.

### Foreign Relations with India and China

The JVP originated from a pro-China faction within Sri Lanka's Communist Party, fueling speculation about closer ties with China under Anura's presidency. Historically, the JVP has been anti-India, especially during the 1980s when it opposed Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. However, Anura has signaled a balanced approach to foreign relations, meeting with Indian officials in 2024 and adopting a pragmatic stance.

### **JVP's Stance on Tamil Nationalism and LTTE**

The JVP's relationship with Tamil nationalism and the LTTE has been complex. Initially focusing on class struggle, the JVP later adopted a staunch nationalist position, opposing the LTTE's separatist demands and supporting the military defeat of the Tamil rebellion.

### **Ideological Shifts: Marxism and Pragmatism**

Though Anura comes from a Marxist background, his leadership reflects a more centrist approach. While the JVP retains anti-imperialist rhetoric, its focus under Anura has shifted to anti-corruption, governance reform, and economic issues. His victory represents a protest against traditional political elites, rather than a strict endorsement of classical Marxist ideals.

### **Conclusion: A New Era for Sri Lankan Politics**

Anura Kumara Disanayake's victory marks a significant shift in Sri Lankan politics, driven by public dissatisfaction with the ruling elites. His ability to modernize the JVP and adapt its Marxist ideology to contemporary challenges will be tested as he leads Sri Lanka through its ongoing crises.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

## **20. Modi's US Visit and Key Takeaways**

### **Introduction**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-day visit to the US included a meeting with President Joe Biden and participation in the Quad leaders' summit in Wilmington, Delaware. Here are the major takeaways from Day 1 of his visit:

#### **1. Quad's Endurance and Purpose**

PM Modi emphasized that the Quad is "here to stay" and not aimed against any particular country, highlighting the grouping's commitment to democratic values, international law, and a free Indo-Pacific. The leaders from the US, Japan, Australia, and India discussed cooperation in areas like health, technology, and climate change.

#### **2. China's Aggressive Actions Addressed**

The Quad leaders voiced strong concerns about China's behavior, particularly in the South and East China Seas. They emphasized the importance of adhering to international maritime law and condemned China's militarization and coercive tactics in disputed waters.



### 3. China as the “Elephant in the Room”

US President Biden, caught on a hot mic, mentioned that Chinese President Xi Jinping is “testing” the Quad, reflecting the concern over China’s assertiveness across economic, technological, and diplomatic fronts.

### 4. Quad Summit Deliverables: From Health to Infrastructure

#### Key initiatives announced include:

- **Quad Cancer Moonshot:** India will provide \$7.5 million in cervical cancer kits to Indo-Pacific countries.
- **Coast Guard Cooperation:** A ship observer mission in 2025 to improve maritime safety.

- **Infrastructure Development:** The “Quad Ports of the Future Partnership” will support sustainable port infrastructure.

- **Semiconductor Supply Chain Resilience:** Quad members will work to strengthen supply chains in this critical area.

- **UN Security Council Reform:** Leaders agreed on the need for a more inclusive and effective UN Security Council.

### 5. Strengthening US-India Relations

In his meeting with President Biden, PM Modi underscored the deepening strategic partnership between India and the US, covering a range of global and regional issues. Biden highlighted the strong, dynamic relationship between the two nations, praising the progress made in various areas of cooperation.

### 6. Return of Indian Antiquities

During Modi’s visit, the US handed over 297 smuggled antiquities to India, furthering efforts to combat cultural property trafficking. This brings the total number of recovered Indian artifacts to 640 since 2014.

### 7. Discussion on Bangladesh

Modi and Biden discussed the situation in Bangladesh, particularly focusing on minority rights, as part of their broader conversation on regional stability.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations



## 21. Israeli Strikes on Southern Lebanon: What Happened?

The Israeli military carried out airstrikes on Lebanon and the Gaza Strip after rockets were fired from south Lebanon and Gaza toward Israel.



### Deadliest Day in Lebanon Since 2006

Recent Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon have killed 492 people and injured over a thousand. This marks the deadliest day for Lebanon since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed concerns that Lebanon might face similar destruction as Gaza.

### Intensifying Cross-Border Attacks

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict on October 7, 2023, border clashes between Israel and Hezbollah have increased. Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based militant group, has launched rockets into Israel, claiming it is in support of the Palestinian cause.

Last week, Israel was also accused of using explosive pagers and walkie-talkies in Lebanon, which left more than 30 people dead.

### Escalating Military Action

In retaliation for Israel's assassination of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr, Hezbollah launched hundreds of rockets and drones into Israel in August 2023. Israel responded by sending 100 jets into Lebanon. The situation escalated when Israel warned residents of southern and eastern Lebanon to evacuate as part of a widening air campaign.

Thousands of Lebanese citizens have fled, causing the largest exodus since the 2006 war.

### Israel's Justification

Israeli President Isaac Herzog stated that Israel does not seek war but must defend its people. He claimed that Hezbollah stores long-range rockets in civilian homes, putting Israeli citizens at risk. Israeli Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said that Hezbollah's weapons stored in houses were exploding due to Israeli strikes.

### **Risk of Regional Escalation**

Though tensions are high, experts believe neither Israel nor Hezbollah want an all-out war. Hezbollah is using its attacks as leverage to force Israel into a ceasefire with Hamas, while Israel's superior military capabilities limit Hezbollah's response.

### **Understanding Hezbollah**

#### **Origins and Objectives**

Hezbollah, meaning "Party of God," was founded during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and is backed by Iran. It opposes Israel and Western influence in the Middle East. The group has become a political force in Lebanon and currently holds 13 of 128 seats in parliament.

#### **Military Strength**

Hezbollah is considered the world's most heavily armed non-state actor, with a large arsenal of rockets and missiles. It has an estimated 45,000 fighters, of which 20,000 are full-time soldiers.

#### **Conclusion**

The situation remains volatile, with both sides exchanging fire and civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. While a broader regional conflict has not yet erupted, the risks of escalation remain high.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

## **22. What are retractions and why do they matter? What is a retraction index? Why do researchers use potentially duplicated or manipulated work?**

### **Introduction**



According to the 'Retraction Watch' database, an Indian scientist at an institute in Lucknow has racked up 45 retractions. It also states that another researcher at a university in Kolkata published 300 scientific papers in a year, which is nearly a paper a day and impossible. This individual had six papers retracted, which cover an array of disciplines including chemistry and virology. Paper retractions are becoming more common worldwide even as the research misconduct problem is worsening in India. Retraction Watch is a blog that reports on retractions of scientific papers and

on related topics.

### **What are retractions?**

A retraction is a mechanism that kicks in when a scientific paper published in an academic journal is found to be so flawed as to merit being removed from scientific literature. The academic community is often understanding when a paper is retracted for an honest error but much less forgiving when a paper is pulled because it contains deliberately manipulated material. For example, the case of John Darsee, a young Harvard University cardiology researcher, stunned the academic community in the 1980s. He had over 80 papers retracted for spreading “inaccuracies and falsehoods”.

Scientific fraud is surprisingly endemic: the list with Darsee includes Jan Hendrik Schön, Brian Wansink, Hwang Woo-suk, and of recent Ranga Dias as well, among others. Even Nobel laureates are not spared. Gregg Semenza, a professor at Johns Hopkins University and winner of the 2019 medicine Nobel Prize, has had 12 papers retracted over potentially duplicated or manipulated images.

### **How often are papers retracted?**

Between 2020 and 2022, 2.5 times more papers were retracted than they were between 2017 and 2019. The reasons for retraction include plagiarism, editorial conflicts, image manipulation, and the use of paper mills. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many publishers had fast-tracked the peer-review process for papers they received from scientists. As a result, some 10,000 papers had to be retracted in 2023 because of quality and/or data issues. The number was only around 1,600 in 2013. In 2023, a German neuropsychologist named Bernhard Sabel published the results of using a fake-paper detector he had built: he found that a third of 5,000 neuroscience papers published in 2020 likely had plagiarised and/or falsified content.

### **What is the retraction index?**

A journal's retraction index is the the number of retractions in a given time period multiplied by 1,000 and divided by the total number of published articles, according to a definition provided by scientists Ferric Fang and Arturo Casadevall in a September 2011 paper. They also showed that there's a greater chance of a paper being retracted from a high-impact journal than from a low-impact one. 'Impact' refers to the impact factor: the average number of times a paper was cited in last two years.

### **Why do scientists falsify papers?**

Paper mills are enterprises that churn out fake or low-quality journal papers and sell them to scientists. Thousands of papers published in academic journals worldwide have been linked to Russian, Iranian, and Chinese paper mills.

One reason they're becoming more prevalent is because of research institutes' desire to improve their national and international university rankings, where the primary criterion is research output. In today's academic setting, one's paper count can determine one's chances of being promoted, securing grants and getting awards. PhD students are sometimes required to publish papers to graduate. This “publish or perish” culture encourages paper mills.

Misconduct makes scientists lose trust in one another and in literature. In a 2000 article in the journal Nature, H.N.J. Arst wrote, "All honest scientists are victims of scientists who commit misconduct." Retractions are thus a way for science to correct its mistakes.

Reducing the prevalence of misconduct is an open problem in research policymaking. It needs to answer questions like: can journals detect bad papers with AI and what is a way to evaluate research quality over quantity?

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: The Hindu

## 23. India becomes 3rd Most Powerful Nation in Asia, Surpasses Japan in Asia Power Index

### Introduction

In a major shift, India surpassed Japan to become the third-largest power in the Asia Power Index, reflecting its increasing geopolitical stature. This achievement is driven by India's dynamic growth, youthful population, and expanding economy, solidifying its position as a leading force in the region.



One of the most significant findings in the 2024 Asia Power Index is India's steady rise in the regional power rankings. Witnessing a gradual rise, India is looking to achieve its full potential and exercise its influence in the region.

### Key Factors Behind India's Rise:

- 1. Economic Growth:** India has shown remarkable post-pandemic economic recovery, contributing to a 4.2-point rise in its Economic Capability. India's massive population and strong GDP growth reinforce its standing as the world's third-largest economy in PPP terms.
- 2. Future Potential:** India's Future Resources score increased by 8.2 points, signalling a potential demographic dividend. Unlike its regional competitors, particularly China and Japan, India benefits from a youthful population that will continue to drive economic growth and labour force expansion in the coming decades.

**3. Diplomatic Influence:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership has garnered greater international recognition. India's non-aligned strategic posture has allowed New Delhi to

navigate complex international waters effectively. India ranked 6th in terms of diplomatic dialogues in 2023, reflecting its active engagement in multilateral forums.

Further, India's large population and economic capabilities offer it substantial promise. India's Score in cultural influence has also remained relatively strong, underpinned by its global Diaspora and cultural exports.

In addition, India's role in multilateral diplomacy and security cooperation has been a point of emphasis. India's participation in dialogues, as well as its leadership in the Quad, has allowed it to play a significant role in regional security dynamics, albeit outside of formal military Alliances. India's economic outreach, though limited, has seen incremental improvements, particularly in defense sales, such as the Brahmos missile deal with the Philippines. These Developments, though small in scale, suggest that India is beginning to flex its geopolitical muscles beyond its immediate neighborhood.

### **India's role in Asia**

The 2024 Asia power index shows India as a power to reckon with in Asia. The country's substantial resource base gives it immense potential for future growth. The outlook for India is optimistic. With continued economic growth and a burgeoning workforce, India is well positioned to expand its influence in the years ahead. In particular, India's rising diplomatic influence and its strategic autonomy make it a key player in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Asia power index**

The Asia power index, launched by the Lowy Institute in 2018, is an annual measure of power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region. It evaluates 27 countries across the Asia-Pacific, examining their ability to shape and respond to the external environment. The 2024 edition offers one of the most comprehensive assessments of power distribution in the region to date. Timor-Leste has been included for the first time, reflecting its growing importance in Southeast Asia. The index focuses on both the material capabilities of states and the influence they exert on the international stage.

### **Criteria and parameters of power measurement**

Power in the Asia power index is divided into resource-based and influence-based determinants:

#### **1. Resource-based determinants:**

- **Economic capability:** The core economic strength of a country, measured through indicators like GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP), technological sophistication, and global economic connectivity.
- **Military capability:** Evaluates conventional military strength based on defense spending, armed forces, weapon systems, and signature capabilities like long-range power projection.
- **Resilience:** The internal capacity to deter threats to state stability, including institutional robustness, geopolitical security, and resource security.



- **Future resources:** forecasts the future distribution of resources, including economic, military, and demographic factors projected for 2035.

## **2. Influence-based determinants:**

- **Economic relationships:** The capacity to exercise leverage through trade, investment, and economic diplomacy.

- **Defense networks:** The strength of alliances and partnerships, measured through military cooperation and arms transfers.

- **Diplomatic influence:** The extent of a country's diplomatic reach, participation in multilateral forums, and foreign policy ambition.

- **Cultural influence:** The ability to shape international public opinion through cultural exports, media, and people-to-people ties.

A country's overall power score is derived from a weighted average of these eight measures, encompassing 131 individual indicators. The results offer a nuanced understanding of how countries convert their resources into influence within the Asia-Pacific.

Relevance: GS prelims & mains paper II; International relations

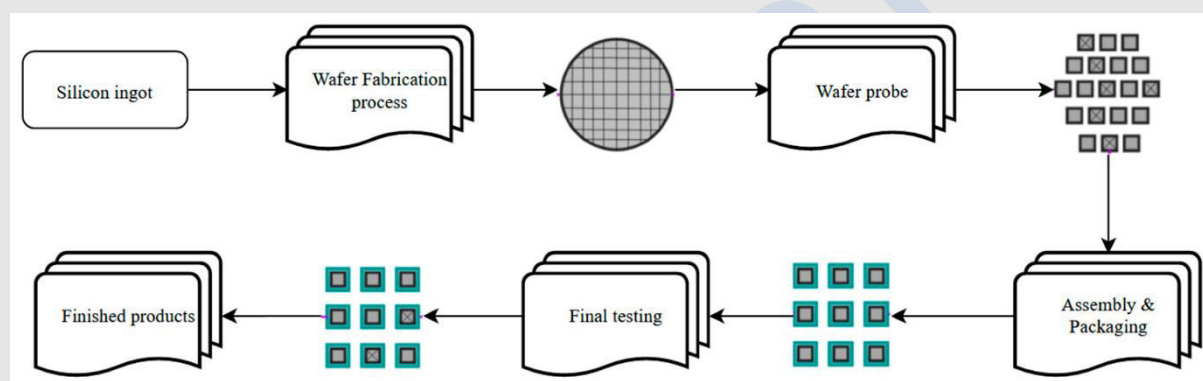
Source: PIB

### 1. India plans \$15 billion second push for chipmaking. Here's what to know

#### Why in News?

The government plans to increase the funding outlay for the second phase of its chip manufacturing incentive policy to \$15 billion from the \$10 billion it had committed for the first phase.

Tata is building India's first commercial fabrication plant along with its Taiwanese partner Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) for a cost of more than Rs 91,000 crore. The government has also approved three assembly and testing plants, which are called ATMP and OSAT in chip parlance.



The assembly and testing plants are less complex than the semiconductor fabrication plant. The first of these three plants was approved in June 2023, and is being built by US-based Micron Technology. Tata is building an assembly plant in Assam to cater to specific clients. The third facility is being built by C G Power and Industrial Solutions of the Murugappa Group, in partnership with Renesas Electronics of Japan.

#### The govt's commitment of money

The four projects will together cost more than Rs 1.48 lakh crore, and the central government will spend almost Rs 59,000 crore in capex subsidies. Here is a breakdown of how much each plant will cost, and the subsidy commitments made by the central government. State governments have sought to sweeten the deal by offering land and electricity to the plants at cheaper rates.

Scheme	Applicant	Total Project Cost (₹ cr)	Eligible Project Cost (₹ cr)	Incentive Approved (₹ cr)

Modified scheme for setting up of semicon fabs in India	TEPL (fab)	91,526	67,956	33,978
Modified scheme for setting up of compound semicon/silicon photonics/sensors fab and semicon/ATMP/OSAT facilities in India	Micron Techonology Inc. (ATMP)	22,516	22,516	11,258
	TEPL (OSAT)	27,120	20,449	10,225
	CG Power & Industrial Solutions Ltd. (ATMP)	7,584	7,002	3,501
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,48,746</b>	<b>1,17,923</b>	<b>58,962</b>
<i>(Source: Government's internal documents)</i>				

### Why chipmaking prowess matters

India currently has virtually no footprint in manufacturing semiconductor chips. The bulk of the global chip production happens in countries like Taiwan and the United States. The US has a chip incentive scheme with an outlay of around \$50 billion, several times that of India's. The European Union too is wooing chip manufacturers and has announced an incentive scheme of size similar to that of the US's.

Domestic fabrication plants will boost India's economic and strategic imperatives, given that chips are used in practically all downstream industries from rockets to power steering in cars to kitchen toasters.

In a global climate of geopolitical tensions, with the relationship between the US and China, two of the world's most influential countries in the technology value chain, at an all-time low, India hopes to seek out opportunities to boost the local industry with help from government-funded schemes.

### It is important to take a realistic view

It is important to note that the Tata-PSMC fab will not produce cutting-edge nodes, which requires a level of technology that is not available with either of these companies.

The entry barriers to chip manufacturing are quite high, as China, which has poured a lot of money into its Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), has

discovered. An enormous amount of technological innovation is needed to manufacture chips of smaller node sizes, which is an area in which companies such as the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Ltd (TSMC) have a massive advantage.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express

## 2. Vistara's Merger with Air India

### End of an Era for Vistara

Vistara, India's leading full-service airline known for its high-quality product and service, will cease to operate under its own brand in November. The airline will be merged into Tata Group's flagship carrier, Air India.



### Final Flight Date

Vistara will continue to operate flights until November 11, after which all its flights will be rebranded and operated as Air India flights.

### Singapore Airlines' Role

Singapore Airlines, a joint venture partner in Vistara with a 49% stake, will hold a 25.1% share in the merged Air India. The Indian government's recent approval of Singapore Airlines' ₹2,059 crore investment into the merged entity was the last regulatory hurdle for the merger.

### Merger Implementation

The merger process will culminate on November 12, with the transfer of Vistara's aircraft and crew to Air India's air operator certificate (AOC). This consolidation is a key element of Air India's transformation plan to elevate its status as a global airline.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express

### 3. SJVN Awarded Prestigious Navratna Status by Government of India

#### Recognition of Achievement

SJVN, formerly known as Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam, has been awarded the prestigious Navratna status by the Department of Public Enterprises, making it the 25th company in India to receive this honor. This recognition is a significant milestone in SJVN's 36-year journey.

#### Leadership Acknowledgment

Sh. Sushil Sharma, Chairman & Managing Director of SJVN, expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi for his leadership, as well as to Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman and Power Minister Sh. Manohar Lal for their continuous support. He also thanked the Government of Himachal Pradesh for its partnership and support.



#### Benefits of Navratna Status

Sh. Sharma highlighted that the Navratna status is granted to CPSEs that have demonstrated strong financial performance and managerial efficiency. This status provides SJVN with greater financial and operational autonomy, enabling the company to pursue larger projects, form strategic partnerships, and contribute to India's goal of achieving 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.



### Expanded Opportunities

With Navratna status, SJVN can now invest in projects without financial ceilings, accelerating its growth. The company can invest up to 30% of its net worth annually, facilitating its ambitious expansion plans. SJVN also gains the freedom to form joint ventures, establish overseas subsidiaries, and undertake organizational restructuring to optimize operations.

### SJVN's Growth Journey

SJVN, which was granted Miniratna status in 2008, has grown into a multi-faceted power entity since its establishment in 1988 as a joint venture between the Government of India and the Government of Himachal Pradesh. The company now manages a project portfolio of 56,802.4 MW, including 13 operational projects with a combined capacity of 2,466.5 MW, and 75 projects under various stages of implementation across hydro, solar, wind, thermal, and transmission sectors.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express

## 4. NHPC Limited Granted 'Navratna' Status

### Introduction

The Government of India has awarded NHPC Limited the prestigious 'Navratna' status. This decision was made by the Department of Public Enterprise under the Ministry of Finance on August 30, 2024. Being a 'Navratna' company gives NHPC greater operational and financial independence.



### Statement from CMD Shri R.K. Chaudhary

Shri R.K. Chaudhary, Chairman and Managing Director of NHPC, called this achievement a historic moment for the company. He thanked the Ministry of Power for their trust and support, which led to NHPC receiving the Navratna status. He highlighted NHPC's significant role in India's power sector, especially in developing hydropower. He also mentioned that NHPC is committed to green energy, expanding into wind and solar power.

### Benefits of Navratna Status for NHPC

Receiving Navratna status provides NHPC with several advantages:

- 1. Faster Decision-Making:** Enables quicker responses to market changes.
- 2. Increased Efficiency:** Improves overall operational effectiveness.
- 3. Employee Empowerment:** Grants more authority and responsibility to employees.
- 4. Support for Investments:** Facilitates major capital expenditure and investment projects.
- 5. Growth and Expansion: Helps expand market reach and achieve long-term growth.**
- 6. Joint Ventures and Overseas Offices:** Allows NHPC to establish partnerships and offices abroad.
- 7. Access to New Markets:** Opens up opportunities in new regions and sectors.
- 8. Innovation and Technology:** Promotes technological collaborations and strengthens market position.
- 9. Mergers and Acquisitions:** Enables strategic mergers and acquisitions to increase market share.

### NHPC's Current Projects and Future Plans

NHPC currently has an installed capacity of 7,144.20 MW and is working on projects totaling 10,442.70 MW. Key projects include:

- 1. Subansiri Lower Project:** A 2,000 MW hydropower project in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
- 2. Dibang Multi-purpose Project:** A 2,880 MW project in Arunachal Pradesh.

Additionally, NHPC is developing projects with a total capacity of over 50,000 MW at various stages. The company aims to achieve an installed capacity of 23,000 MW by 2032 and 50,000 MW by 2047.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

## 5. Why is Google accused of being an illegal monopoly?

### Introduction

Google, the leading American technology company best known for its popular search engine, has lost a Court case filed against it by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2020 accusing the company of being an illegal monopoly. A U.S. District judge ruled earlier this month that the company indeed misused its dominant position in the market to block competitors from freely offering their services in the market.

### Why was Google accused?

Google comes set up as the default search engine in most new phones, laptops and other electronic devices in the market. The company even pays billions of dollars each year, as a share from its advertisement revenues, to device manufacturers such as Apple, Samsung etc. to be featured as the default search engine in their devices. In fact, Google paid as much as \$20 billion in 2022 to Apple to be featured as the default search on Safari, Apple's default browser. Google has also paid web browser providers such as Mozilla to be featured as the default search engine in their browsers. This practice is advantageous to Google and unfair towards other search engine providers as users could end up sticking to the default search engine in their new devices rather than make the effort required to try out better search engines.



### Is Google really a monopoly?

The sheer size of Google, which is the leading search engine in the world with a market share of over 90%, has led many to argue that the company is a monopoly that abuses its dominant market power. Such a dominant position, it is believed, allows Google to dictate terms when

it deals with people who want to do business with it or even use its services. Some also note that a big technology company like Google would have far more influence on regulators and the law in general than smaller companies.

Others, including interestingly the judge who ruled against Google in this case, however, have argued that a large market share alone does not make a company a harmful or illegal monopoly. They note that even though it may be very hard to compete against a behemoth like Google due to certain advantages the company naturally enjoys as the market leader, the fact remains that there are still no legal barriers against entry into the market of competitors who want to compete against Google by offering a better product. Further, there is also no guarantee that Google's absolute dominance of the search engine market will last forever. Microsoft's significant dominance of the search engine market came to an end with the advent of Google. The same thing could happen to Google if a competitor offers a better product, they argue. It is also believed that the threat of entry of competitors with better products will keep Google on its toes and limit the extent to which the company can abuse its market power. Supporters of Google also note that there is nothing wrong with Google sharing ad revenues with device manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung. In their view, the practice of paying to be featured as the default search engine is no different from a company buying key real estate space to gain better visibility. Further, Google's competitors are also free to pay for such privileges. Finally, Google itself has argued that its position as the market leader is not simply due to its ability to pay to be the default search engine but rather due to the superiority of its service.

### **What lies ahead?**

Court proceedings on action against Google are expected to begin next month. The Court could order Google to stop sharing ad revenues with companies like Apple to be featured as the default search engine on their devices. It may also mandate that users should be given the choice to pick the default search engine in their browsers. Another possible action by the Court could be to force Google to share information that it holds about user searches, which is believed to be a major reason for Google's superior performance, helping competitors catch up. And while the chances are remote, the Court may also order that Google be broken up into multiple companies so that there is no single dominant player in the market. Finally, Google may decide to appeal against the Court's order.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: The Hindu

## **6. Why PM Narendra Modi's visit to Singapore is significant for India's semiconductor push**

### **Introduction**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Singapore during the second leg of a two-nation trip to South-East Asia this week, having travelled to Brunei Darussalam in the first leg. It was the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Brunei, and Modi's fifth trip to Singapore.



Brunei is an important partner in India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific vision, and the talks with Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, the world's longest reigning monarch, were focused on trade, defence, space and cultural ties.

The Singapore leg of the Prime Minister's visit was marked by agreements on semiconductors, digital technologies, health and skill development. The PM and his newly elected Singaporean counterpart Lawrence Wong witnessed the exchange of the Memorandum of Understanding on an India-Singapore Semiconductor Ecosystem Partnership.



### **India's push for chips**

Given the critical importance of semiconductor chips in virtually everything from missiles to mobile phones and from cars to computers, the pact with Singapore has great geo-strategic and geo-economic importance.

Supply disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic and the geopolitical tensions arising out of China's aggressive moves in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea have brought great urgency to India's efforts to develop its own semiconductor ecosystem. The global chip industry is dominated by companies from a very small number of countries, and India is a late entrant into this high-tech and expensive race.

The India Semiconductor Mission was launched in 2021 with a Rs 76,000 crore chip incentive scheme, under which the central government offered half the plant's capital expenditure costs as subsidy. In February, the Cabinet approved semiconductor-related projects adding up to investments of about Rs 1.26 lakh crore.



That same month, the government announced a partnership between the Tata Group and Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) to set up a semiconductor fabrication plant. The Cabinet has so far approved five semiconductor units, including four assembly units, under the incentive scheme.

### **Singapore's chip story**

Singapore has a well-developed semiconductor industry, the outcome of an early start and the vision of its first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

The story, according to Chris Miller's *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* (2022), goes that LKY told US President Richard Nixon in 1973 that he was counting on exports to create employment for his people — thereafter, the government of Singapore supported Texas Instruments and National Semiconductors in building assembly facilities in the city state.

By the early 1980s, the electronics industry was already accounting for 7% of Singapore's GNP and a quarter of its manufacturing jobs, Miller notes.

Today, Singapore contributes around 10% of the global semiconductor output, along with 5% of the global wafer fabrication capacity (silicon wafer is a circular piece of ultra pure silicon, usually 8-12 inches in diameter, out of which chips are carved) and 20% of semiconductor equipment production.

Nine of the world's top 15 semiconductor firms have set up shop in Singapore, and the semiconductor sector contributes significantly to the country's economic growth. Singapore has players in all segments of the semiconductor value chain: integrated circuit (IC) design, assembly, packaging and testing; wafer fabrication, and equipment/ raw material production. Some important lessons

In the 1960s and 70s, American chip makers, looking for lower labour costs and a sufficiently skilled workforce, started to offshore parts of their production process to countries in South-east Asia.

What worked especially for Singapore were infrastructure and connectivity, stable business conditions, a critical mass of leading companies based in the country covering the full value chain from design to testing, and suitable human capital.

Semiconductor plants in Singapore are clustered in four wafer fabrication parks spread over 374 hectares, where the government offers customised infrastructure solutions to investors.

To develop talent, Singapore's universities offer majors on microelectronics and IC design, and collaborate with semiconductor companies in doctoral research by their employees.

Singapore is now seeing the benefits of the global focus on de-risking and improving supply chain resilience, as it appears to be a safe bet in the era of sharpening US-China rivalry.

\* In 2022, Taiwan's United Microelectronics Corporation announced an investment of \$5 billion for a semiconductor fab in Singapore that is expected to begin operations this year.

\* In September 2023, GlobalFoundries inaugurated a \$4 billion fabrication plant in Singapore that is capable of manufacturing specialty chips at the advanced "28 nm" node technology.

\* In June 2024, NXP Semiconductors and TSMC-backed Vanguard International Semiconductor Corp announced a \$7.8 billion joint venture for a plant that will make 40 to 130 nm chips for the automotive, industrial, consumer, and mobile market segments. Production is expected to start in 2027.

### **Challenges, opportunities**

In the view from New Delhi, Singapore's semiconductor industry is limited to "mature-node chips" (process node technology of 28 nm or more), which are used in appliances, cars, and industrial equipment. It is not equipped to make high-end logic chips like the ones used in the AI sector (process nodes of 7 nm and smaller, requiring specialised production methods).

As the costs of production increase, semiconductor companies are seeking to diversify some low-cost and labour-intensive operations out of Singapore. For example, Utac, a semiconductor test and assembly services provider, has moved some of its more manual and technologically dated operations to Thailand. Also, Singapore does not appear keen on following the path of countries who are offering incentives to attract semiconductor investments.

As several countries including India work on building domestic semiconductor sectors, the industry in Singapore may come under pressure, especially with the increasing cost of production and the limited resources of land and labour in the country.

From New Delhi's perspective, there is scope for collaboration with Singapore in talent development, and knowledge-sharing about best practices in managing semiconductor industrial parks (called Wafer Fab Parks in Singapore).

India's abundant land and competitive labour costs could encourage semiconductor companies in Singapore to look at the country for their expansion plans. There is also scope for India to engage and collaborate with semiconductor equipment and material manufacturers in Singapore to develop its own semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express

## **7. What is vertical fiscal imbalance?**

### **Introduction**

The financial relationship between the Union government and the States in India is asymmetrical, as in many other countries with a federal constitutional framework. As the 15th Finance Commission noted, States incur 61% of the revenue expenditure but collect only 38% of the revenue receipts. In short, the ability of the States to incur expenditures is dependent

on transfers from the Union government. Consequently, there is the problem of Vertical Fiscal Imbalance (VFI) in Indian fiscal federalism where expenditure decentralisation overwhelms the revenue raising powers of the States.

## Estimation of VFI after devolution of taxes

The 15th Finance Commission had noted that India has had a larger, and rising, vertical fiscal imbalance (VFI) than most other federations

Year	VFI after tax devolution (as a ratio)	The desired share of tax devolution to eliminate VFI (%)
2015-16	0.12	47.82
2016-17	0.13	48.24
2017-18	0.12	47.59
2018-19	0.11	47.38
2019-20	0.18	51.17
2020-21	0.28	56.87
2021-22	0.14	47.90
2022-23 (RE)	0.20	51.42
Average (excluding 2020-21 and 2021-22)		48.94



SOURCE: COMPUTED FROM UNION BUDGET DOCUMENTS, AND STATE FINANCES: A STUDY OF THE BUDGETS, RBI.

### Why should VFI be reduced?

Constitutionally, the financial duties of the Union government and the States are divided. On the revenue front, to maximise the efficiency of tax collection, the Personal Income Tax, the Corporation Tax and a part of indirect taxes are best collected by the Union government. But on the expenditure front, to maximise the efficiency of spending, publicly provided goods and services are best supplied by the tier of the government closest to its users. It is in this context that the extent of VFI merits attention.

The 15th Finance Commission had noted that India has had a larger, and rising, vertical imbalance than most other federations. These imbalances were further magnified during periods of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which drove a large wedge between one's own revenues and expenditure responsibilities at the sub-national level.

The problem of VFI falls under the purview of the Finance Commission, and it deals with broadly two questions. The first question is how to distribute the taxes collected by the Union government to the States as a whole. These transfers are made as a prescribed share of the "Net Proceeds" (Gross Tax Revenue of the Union less surcharges, cesses and costs of collection). The second question is how to distribute taxes across States. The matter of VFI arises as part of the first question.

Apart from devolving taxes, the Finance Commissions also recommend grants to States in need of assistance under Article 275 of the Constitution. But these are generally for short periods and for specific purposes. There are also transfers to the States that fall outside the Finance Commission's ambit. For example, the Union government spends substantial amounts — under Article 282 of the Constitution — on subjects falling in the State and Concurrent lists through centrally sponsored schemes and central sector schemes. But such grants are tied transfers that include conditionalities. In sum, the devolution of taxes from the net proceeds is the only transfer to the States that is untied or unconditional.

### **Calculating VFI in India**

Here we try to estimate the VFI in India after the devolution of taxes to the States. We measure VFI at the level of "all States", and not separately for each State. For this, we use a globally accepted method. We first estimate a ratio where the numerator is the sum of the Own Revenue Receipts (ORR) and the tax devolution from the Union government for all States. The denominator is the Own Revenue Expenditure (ORE) for all States. If this ratio is less than 1, it implies that the sum of own revenue receipts and tax devolution of the States is inadequate to meet the ORE of the States. If we subtract this ratio from 1, we get the deficit in receipts. It is this deficit that we use as a proxy for VFI after devolution.

We can then ask the simple question: how much should tax devolution rise over and above that recommended by the past Finance Commissions to equalise the ratio to 1? Equating the ratio to 1 would eliminate VFI. In the attached table, we show that the average share of net proceeds devolved to the States between 2015-16 and 2022-23 should have been 48.94% to eliminate the VFI. But the shares of tax devolution recommended by the 14th and 15th Finance Commissions were only 42% and 41%, respectively, of the net proceeds.

### **Raising tax devolution**

Many States have raised the demand that the share of tax devolution from the net proceeds must be fixed at 50% by the 16th Finance Commission. They add force to this demand by pointing to the exclusion from the net proceeds of the substantial amounts of cesses and surcharges, which truncates the net proceeds within the gross tax revenue.

Our analysis in this article lends empirical support to this demand. Here, we have assumed the present levels of expenditures of the States as a given. At the aggregate level, these actually incurred expenditures have not only conformed to but also underutilised the borrowing limits specified in the fiscal responsibility legalisations. Even then, we find that the share of net proceeds devolved to the States must rise to about 49% to eliminate VFI. Such an increase in devolution would place more untied resources in the hands of the States to spend on their citizens. It would also ensure that States' expenditures better respond to jurisdictional needs and priorities, and that the efficiency of expenditures is enhanced. Overall, it will be a move towards a healthy system of cooperative fiscal federalism.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

## 8. Can nano DAP replace the conventional granular version in Punjab's Rabi season?

### Introduction



Punjab requires roughly 5.50 lakh tonnes of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) annually, the bulk of which — around 4.8 lakh tonnes — is needed during the Rabi (October-March) season to cultivate wheat, potatoes, and other horticulture crops.

But the supply of the conventionally used granular DAP, the majority of which is imported, has been unreliable, with shortfalls and delays triggering panic among farmers. This is why agro-scientists and policymakers have long been exploring

alternatives, such as Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Ltd-developed nano DAP.

Can this replace the conventional granular DAP in Punjab?

### First, how is nano DAP different?

The indigenously-manufactured nano DAP comes in liquid form. It is logistically easier to manage, and more cost-effective than the granular DAP.

A 500 ml bottle of nano DAP, which costs Rs 600, is sufficient to cover one acre of land. In comparison, a single 50 kg bag of granular DAP costing Rs 1,350 is needed for one acre of wheat. For potatoes, 2.5 to 3 such bags are needed per acre. Apart from the lower price, farmers using nano DAP are likely to benefit from lower handling and transportation costs.

Nano DAP was officially launched by IFFCO in 2023, following the introduction of nano urea in 2021. These innovations are a part of India's broader strategy to reduce reliance on imported fertilisers. In the case of DAP, India uses around 10.5-11.5 million tonnes annually — but domestic production is only around 4-5 million tonnes, with the remainder being imported. Beyond benefitting farmers, indigenously-produced nano fertilisers are also set to ease India's subsidy burden, which is pegged to be Rs 1.88 lakh crore in FY 2024.

But their viability will eventually be determined based on results after large-scale adoption. Some have already raised question marks regarding nano DAP's efficacy compared to the conventional granular form.

### What are PAU's concerns regarding nano DAP?

Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) scientists said that their experiments have found that nano DAP use resulted in a substantial decrease in yield of the wheat crop, compared to granular DAP. They said that they applied the nano fertiliser as per IFFCO's guidelines, but that resulted in shorter plant heights, and sub-optimal results.



PAU scientists also expressed similar opinions regarding IFFCO's other nano fertiliser — nano urea. After two years of field experiments, they observed a decrease in rice and wheat yields. These findings were published in PAU's monthly journal this January, with PAU scientists recommending that conventional urea not be replaced until further field experiments are carried out.

In the last year, IFFCO manufactured around 6 crore bottles of nano DAP which can cover around 2.43 crore hectares of land. India has around 18 crore hectares of agricultural land in total.

### **How has IFFCO responded to PAU's criticism?**

Harmail Singh Sidhu, IFFCO's marketing manager for Punjab, stated other agricultural Institutions like the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) are also testing nano DAP (and nano urea) and unlike PAU, have not made a negative comment yet. He said that PAU scientists should conduct further trials using IFFCO's recommendations on usage.

"The Government of India (GoI) has recommended using nano DAP to replace only 25-50% of conventional DAP at the moment," Sidhu said. "At least 50% of the recommended DAP dose, to be administered at the time of sowing, should comprise conventional DAP. The remaining 50% should be by nano DAP, to be used as a foliar spray after the crop's leaves emerge," he said.

He added that nano DAP can also be used to treat seeds prior to sowing (5 ml per kg of seeds) for better results. "By even cutting down the use of granular fertiliser by 50% would greatly benefit the soil and environment," he said.

In Punjab, 70 lakh bottles of nano fertilisers (nano DAP and urea) have been sold since August 2021, Sidhu said.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

## **9. A new White Revolution: where India stands, where it aims to be**

### **Introduction**

India is the world's top milk producer, with production having reached 230.58 million tonnes during 2022-23. In 1951-52, the country produced just 17 million tonnes of milk.

Operation Flood, launched in 1970, ushered in the White Revolution and transformed the dairy sector in India. On Thursday, Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah announced plans for "White Revolution 2.0". What is the big picture currently in India's dairy sector, and what is the objective of the government's new initiative?



## White Revolution 2.0

The idea of White Revolution 2.0 revolves around cooperative societies, which were also the bedrock of Operation Flood five decades ago.

Dairy cooperatives procured 660 lakh kg of milk per day in 2023-24; the government wants to increase this to 1,007 lakh kg/ day by 2028-29.

For this, it has formulated a strategy of expanding coverage and deepening the reach of cooperatives.

White Revolution 2.0 will "increase milk procurement of dairy cooperatives by 50%...over the next five years by providing market access to dairy farmers in uncovered areas and increasing the share of dairy cooperatives in the organised sector", according to the Ministry of Cooperation.

This will also generate employment and contribute to the empowerment of women in the process, the ministry said.

### Scope for expansion

Since it was created in 2021, the Ministry of Cooperation has focused on expanding the network of cooperatives, in particular dairy cooperatives.

According to officials of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), the regulator of the dairy industry in India, dairy cooperatives operate in around 70% of the country's districts. There are about 1.7 lakh dairy cooperative societies (DCSs), which cover around 2 lakh villages (30% of the total number of villages in the country), and 22% of producer households. These cooperative societies procure about 10% of the country's milk production and 16% of the marketable surplus.

In the states of Gujarat, Kerala, and Sikkim, and the Union Territory of Puducherry, more than 70% of villages are covered by dairy cooperatives. In the states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh, and the UT of Jammu & Kashmir, however, coverage is only 10-20%. And in West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and the smaller states of the Northeast, less than 10% of villages are covered.

### Coverage, funding

NDDB has drawn up an action plan to establish about 56,000 new multipurpose dairy cooperative societies over the next five years, and to strengthen 46,000 existing village level DCSs by providing more advanced milk procurement and testing infrastructure. Most of the new DCSs will be established in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh.

In February 2023, NDDB launched a Rs 3.8 crore pilot project to set up dairy cooperatives in uncovered gram panchayats in the districts of Jind (Haryana), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), and Chikmagalur (Karnataka). The 79 DCSs established as part of the pilot are together procuring

15,000 litres of milk per day from about 2,500 farmers, sources in the Cooperation Ministry said.

The bulk of the funding for White Revolution 2.0 will come through the National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) 2.0, a new central sector scheme under the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Sources in the Ministry of Cooperation said targets for White Revolution 2.0 have been subsumed under the proposed scheme, the details of which are currently being finalised. A draft note has been circulated for approval from the Expenditure Finance Committee, they said.

Under the scheme, financial assistance will be provided to set up village-level milk procurement systems, chilling facilities, and training and capacity-building. "Assistance will be provided to 1,000 Multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperative Societies (MPACSs) at the rate of Rs 40,000 per MPACS from the resources of NDDB," an official said.

### **Milk scenario in India**

India is the world's top milk producer, with production having reached 230.58 million tonnes during 2022-23. In 1951-52, the country produced just 17 million tonnes of milk.

The average yield is, however, only 8.55 kg per animal per day for exotic/ crossbred animals, and 3.44 kg/ animal/ day for indigenous/ nondescript animals. The yield in Punjab is 13.49 kg/ animal/ day (exotic/ crossbreed), but only 6.30 kg/ animal/ day in West Bengal.

The national per capita availability of milk is 459 grams/ day, which is higher than the global average of 323 g/ day; this number, however, varies from 329 g in Maharashtra to 1,283 g in Punjab.

As per the Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics (BAHS) 2023, the top five milk producing states are UP (15.72%), Rajasthan (14.44%), Madhya Pradesh (8.73%), Gujarat (7.49%), and Andhra Pradesh (6.70%), which together contribute 53.08% of the country's total milk production.

Almost 31.94% of the total milk production comes from indigenous buffaloes, followed by 29.81% from crossbred cattle. Nondescript buffaloes contribute 12.87%, indigenous cattle 10.73%, and nondescript cattle 9.51%, according to BAHS figures. The share of goat milk is 3.30%, and that of exotic cows, 1.86%.

While total milk production increased from 187.75 million tonnes in 2018-19 to 230.58 million tonnes in 2022-23, the annual growth rate of production came down from 6.47% to 3.83% during this period.

The milk group, comprising milk consumed or sold in liquid form, ghee, butter, and lassi produced by producer households contributed almost 40% (Rs 11.16 lakh crore) of the value of output from the agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing sector in 2022-23 — much higher

than cereals. The dairy sector provides livelihoods to more than 8.5 crore people directly or indirectly, of whom the majority are women.

About 63% of the total milk production comes to the market; the remaining is kept by producers for their own consumption. About two-thirds of the marketable milk is in the unorganised sector. In the organised sector, cooperatives account for the major share.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

## 10. The arithmetic of cost and supply: Why ghee is naturally prone to adulteration

### Introduction

Some 5,000 tonnes of ghee are required annually for Lord Venkateswara's laddu prasadam in Tirupati. It is tough to procure pure ghee in such large quantities — more so at the unrealistic price of Rs 320/ kg.



Union Health Minister J P Nadda said he had sought a report on the controversy over the alleged use of animal fat in the preparation of laddus that are distributed as prasadam at the Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh.

TDP spokesman Anam Venkata Ramana Reddy has said that it was “not possible” to supply unadulterated ghee at the price charged by a

supplier who is currently under the scanner.

### The numbers don't add up

Dairies are currently selling fat derived from buffalo milk at around Rs 460 per kg, and that from cow milk at Rs 470 per kg. Adding another Rs 25 towards the cost of melting, packaging, and transport will take the ex-factory realisation for ghee to Rs 485-495 per kg.

Given this basic cost reality, it is difficult to understand how the company, A R Dairy Food Pvt Ltd, based in Dindigul (Tamil Nadu), was able to supply pure ghee — which is clarified and melted butter with 99.5% milk fat content — to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) at Rs 320 per kg.

The TTD manages the famous temple of Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati. A R Dairy Food Pvt Ltd has been blacklisted after its ghee, used for making the iconic Tirupati laddus, was allegedly found to contain “foreign fats”. These fats included palm, coconut, soyabean, sunflower, rapeseed, and other vegetable oils, as well as animal fats (beef tallow, pork lard, and fish oil).

### Vegetable fats are far cheaper

A key incentive for the adulteration of ghee in India is the high price differential between milk and vegetable fats.

Refined palm, soyabean and sunflower oil are wholesaling now at Rs 120-125 per kg; for the more expensive indigenous rapeseed/ mustard and groundnut oil, the wholesale price is Rs 135-150/ kg. Tallow oil is even cheaper — only Rs 80-85 per kg.

The sheer price difference makes ghee naturally prone to lacing with foreign fats by unscrupulous manufacturers.

### **Milk fats are relatively scarce**

The large price differential apart, there is the issue of availability of milk fat.

Cooperative dairies procure an average 600 lakh kg per day (LKPD) of milk. Out of that, they market about 450 LKPD as liquid milk, and probably another 50 LKPD as curd, lassi, and other products.

That leaves roughly 100 LKPD for the manufacture of commodities, namely skimmed milk powder and fat. Private dairies, too, process an equivalent quantity into milk powder and fat. Taking a 5% fat content — the average for buffalo and cow milk — this 200 LKPD (from cooperative and private dairies) would yield an annual ghee production of 3.65 lakh tonnes (lt) by the organised dairies. Compare this figure to the 250-260 lt of vegetable oils availability, which includes 150-160 lt of imports and 100-105 lt of production from domestic sources.

That makes ghee a relatively scarce and premium fat.

### **Dairies are loath to sell ghee in bulk**

The established dairies — the cooperative federations of Gujarat (Amul), Karnataka (Nandini) and Tamil Nadu (Aavin), or private players such as Hatsun Agro, Dodla Dairy and Heritage Foods — are loath to sell ghee as a bulk commodity. They would rather market it in retail consumer packs, if not use the fat for ice-cream that fetches higher realisations.

Amul sells 9,000-10,000 tonnes of ghee in consumer packs a month; Nandini sells about 3,000 tonnes, and Aavin about 1,500 tonnes. The sales of Patanjali Ayurved, which were to the tune of 2,500 tonnes per month five years ago, are now said to be down to a fifth that volume.

The maximum retail price of ghee (inclusive of 12% GST) sold in consumer packs ranges from Rs 600 to Rs 750 per litre, with one litre containing just 910 gram.

### **The tough ask before the TTD**

All this does not make it easy for organisations like TTD to obtain genuine and top-quality ghee for its laddus and other prasadam offerings.

TTD's own annual requirement of 5,000 tonnes isn't small. The reverse auction process, where the lowest bidder gets the supply contract, may not elicit the best result. Any ghee that is



supplied at a price less than Rs 475/ kg today is likely to fail the standard gas chromatography test for detection of adulterants.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express

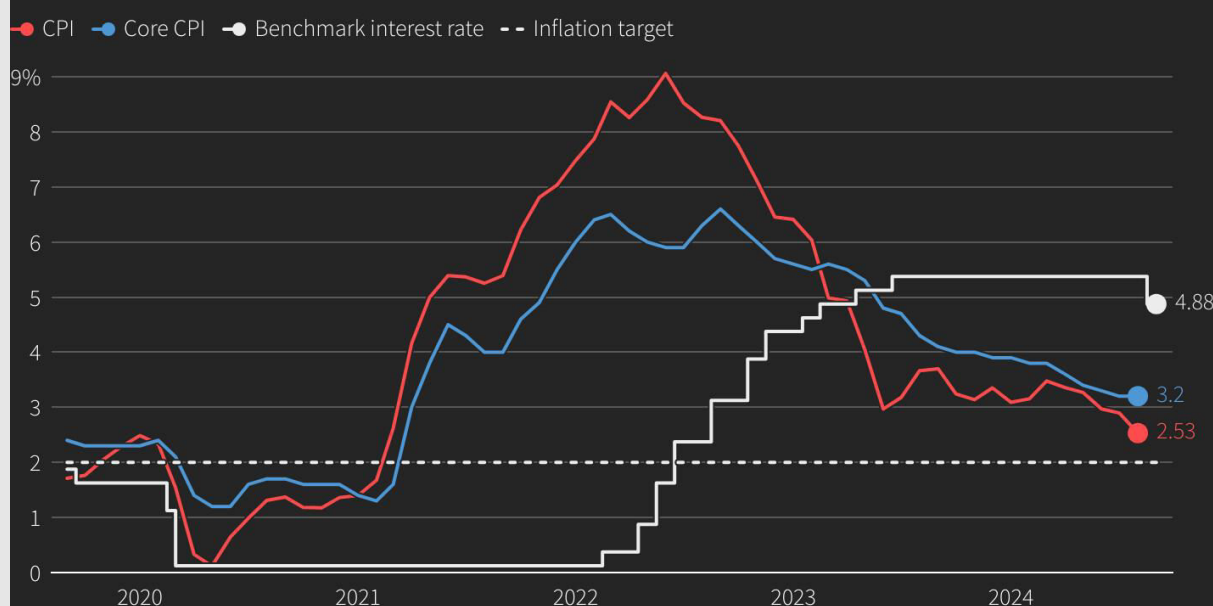
## 11. Why US Fed cut interest rates, how India could be impacted

### Introduction

Changes to the US monetary policy — be it the amount of dollars being made available in the market or the price at which they can be borrowed (the interest rate) — has an impact that goes far beyond the country's geographical borders. Among the most affected are emerging economies like India.

### US inflation and interest rates

Benchmark interest rate and year-on-year change in CPI inflation



The benchmark interest rate is the midpoint of the federal funds target rate. Published September 18, 2024 at 6:06 PM GMT  
Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, LSEG

The United States Federal Reserve (henceforth just 'the Fed'), which is in charge of the country's monetary policy, on Wednesday announced that it will cut the benchmark interest rate — the Federal Funds Rate — by 50 basis points, or half a percentage point.

A cut in interest rate typically incentivises economic activity, promotes growth, and increases job creation by making it cheaper for people to borrow money. Conversely, a hike in interest rates or persistently high interest rates tend to drag down economic growth and employment generation.

Changes to the US monetary policy — be it the amount of dollars being made available in the market or the price at which they can be borrowed (the interest rate) — has an impact that goes far beyond the country's geographical borders. Among the most affected are emerging economies like India.

This is not just due to the US being the world's biggest economy but also because the US dollar is the world's most trusted and traded currency. Several countries hold US dollars as assets.

### **Why did the Fed cut interest rates?**

To counter the economic disruption and a recession experienced in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Fed had brought down interest rates close to zero (0.25% to be precise). However, as the US economy recovered, inflation started rising fast. Russia's war with Ukraine and the associated supply disruptions made matters worse.

Initially the Fed was of the view that the inflationary spike was transitory but by March 2022, as inflation touched historic high levels, the Fed was forced to aggressively raise interest rates to cool down prices. Over the next 15 months, the Fed raised interest rates to 5.5%, and kept them at that high level until this decision.

By July, when the Fed last reviewed its policy stance, most expected a cut in interest rates because inflation had moderated considerably, and started moving towards Fed target rate of 2%. At the same time, as evidenced by jobs data, it was becoming clearer that the restrictive monetary policy was beginning to have a significant adverse impact on unemployment levels. As such, it was widely believed that it is only a matter of time before the Fed shifts its focus from prioritising inflation-control to ensuring maximum employment. These two matters — stable prices and maximum employment — are part of the Fed's "dual mandate".

While announcing the cut on Wednesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell accepted that if some of the recent reports on unemployment and inflation were known in July, the Fed would have started the cycle of cuts in July itself.

According to the latest Summary of Economic Projections (SEP), the Fed is likely to cut interest rates by another 50 basis points before the end of 2024, another 100 basis points in 2025, and another 50 basis points in 2026. With these cuts, the Fed hopes to achieve a "soft-landing" — reducing high inflation without crashing an economy into recession — for the US economy.

### **Will the US economy achieve a soft-landing?**

In 2022, most observers, as well as all past records, suggested that there is no way the Fed can contain inflation (which went as high as 9%) without resulting in a recession. However, as things stand, the Fed may have succeeded in threading that needle.

The US economy continues to grow robustly — SEP estimates GDP growth to be around 2% for the coming 2-3 years — and the unemployment rate, even though it has risen to 4.4%, is still fairly low and expected to trend downwards.

However, it must be remembered that the US will soon start to vote for a new President and all these projections about growth, inflation, and unemployment can change dramatically if a whole new set of policies come into the picture.

For instance, the Republican candidate and former president, Donald Trump has announced that he will impose wide-ranging tariffs on imports. But import tariffs are essentially a tax on domestic consumers — not the foreign country, as is often mistakenly assumed — and they end up raising domestic prices and fuel inflation.

### **How will India be affected by the Fed rate cut?**

There are many different ways in which India will be affected. India is a capital-scarce economy, and is always looking to incentivise foreigners to invest in India. Lower interest rates in the US will likely incentivise global investors to borrow in the US and invest in India — be it in stocks, debt, or in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Repeated lowering of interest rates in the US will also lead to some weakening in the US dollar's exchange rate with other currencies such as the Indian rupee. In other words, the rupee could see its exchange rate strengthen against the dollar. This, in turn, will impact India's exporters (adversely) and importers (positively).

The RBI, India's central bank, is already under growing pressure to cut interest rates. However, it is unlikely that the US decision will be critical in RBI's calculations. This is because India and the US have significantly different inflation targets, vulnerabilities to inflation spikes, and policy mandates.

For instance, while RBI keeps an eye on GDP growth rate, it is not explicitly concerned with unemployment data. As has been seen in India over the past two decades, GDP growth can happen even without commensurate jobs growth.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

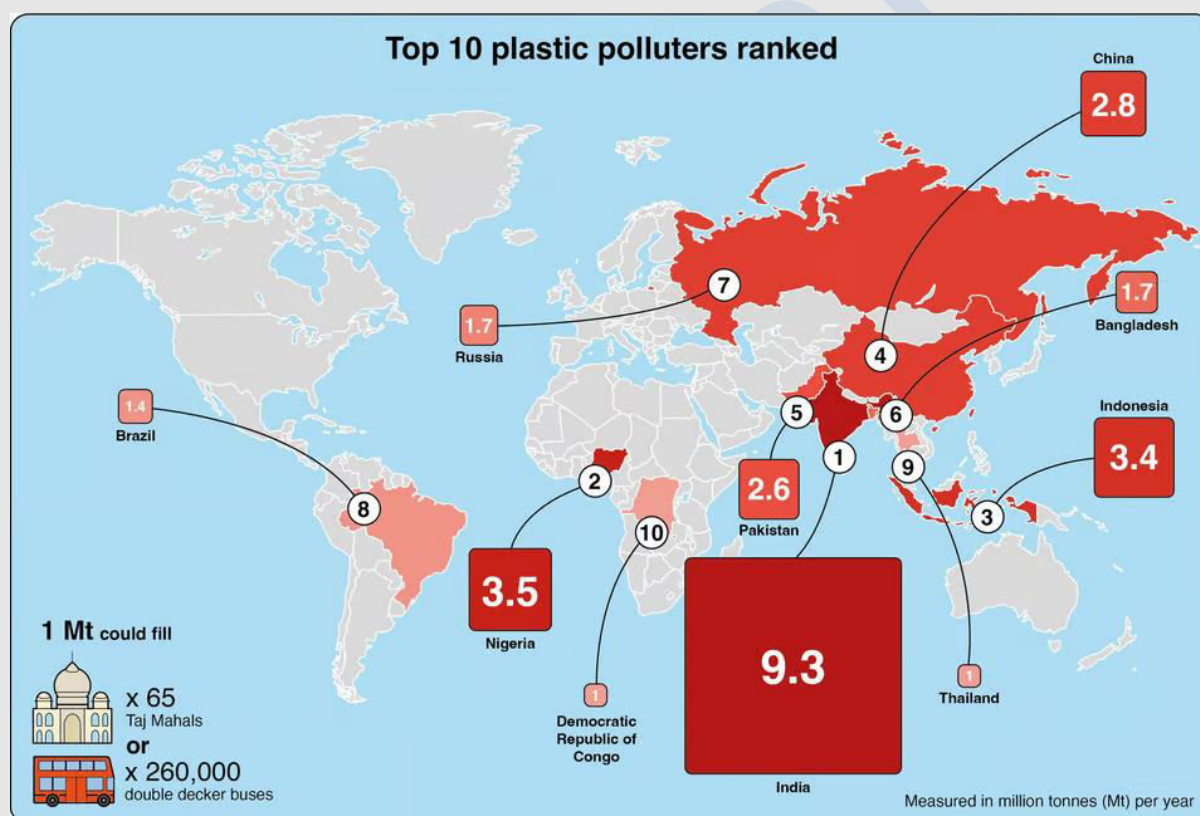
Source: Indian Express

### 1. India generates highest plastic pollution in world: what a new study found

#### Introduction

India contributes to a fifth of global plastic pollution, a study published in the journal Nature last week found.

India burns roughly 5.8 million tonnes (mt) of plastic each year, and releases another 3.5 mt of plastics into the environment (land, air, water) as debris. Cumulatively, India contributes to 9.3 mt of plastic pollution in the world annually, significantly more than the countries next in this list — Nigeria (3.5 mt), Indonesia (3.4 mt) and China (2.8 mt) — and exceeding previous estimates.



#### Problem of 'unmanaged' waste

The study, carried out by University of Leeds researchers Joshua W Cottom, Ed Cook, and Costas A Velis, estimated that around 251 mt of plastic waste is produced every year, enough to fill up roughly 200,000 Olympic sized swimming pools. Roughly a fifth of this waste — 52.1 mt — is “emitted” into the environment, unmanaged.

The authors define “managed” waste as what is collected by municipal bodies, and either recycled or sent to a landfill. Most plastic waste meets the latter fate. “Unmanaged” waste is

what ends up in the environment either as debris — polluting every conceivable place on Earth from the heights of Mount Everest to the bottom of the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean — as a result of plastic burning in open, uncontrolled fires. The latter generates fine particulates and toxic gases like carbon monoxide which have been linked to heart disease, respiratory disorders, cancer, and neurological problems.

Of the unmanaged waste, roughly 43% or 22.2 mt is the form of unburned debris and the rest, some 29.9 mt, is burnt either in dumpsites or locally.

### **North-South divide**

A trend that the study identified was that there is a notable Global North and Global South divide when it comes to plastic pollution. “On an absolute basis, we find that plastic waste emissions are highest across countries in Southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South-eastern Asia,” the study said. In fact, approximately 69% (or 35.7 mt per year) of the world’s plastic pollution comes from 20 nations, none of which are High Income Countries (those with a gross national income per capita of \$13,846 or more, according to the World Bank). This is despite these HICs — which are all in the so-called Global North — having higher plastic waste generation rates than countries in the South. Not a single HIC is “ranked in the top 90 polluters, because most have 100% collection coverage and controlled disposal,” the study said.

Open burning is the predominant form of plastic pollution in the Global South (with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa, where uncontrolled debris comprised a larger share of the pollution pie) unlike in the Global North, where plastic pollution predominantly comprised uncontrolled debris. This, the researchers say, is simply a symptom of inadequate or completely absent waste management systems, and a lack of public infrastructure for the same.

However, “we shouldn’t put the blame, any blame, on the Global South... [or] praise ourselves about what we do in the Global North in any way,” researcher Costas Velis told The Associated Press, adding that people’s ability to dispose of waste depends largely on their government’s power to provide the necessary services.

### **Criticism of the research**

The study comes as treaty negotiations for the very first legally binding international treaty on plastics pollution are ongoing. In 2022, the UN Environmental Assembly agreed to develop such a treaty — which experts say might be the most important environmental accord since the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015 — by the end of 2024. However, consensus on what it should entail has been hard to come by.

On one hand are fossil-fuel producing countries and industry groups, who view plastics pollution as a “waste management problem”, and want to focus on that instead of curbing production. On the other hand are countries in the European Union and Africa, who want to phase out single-use plastics and introduce production curbs.

This “High Ambition Coalition” says that simply “managing” plastic waste to the point where there is no pollution at all is impossible, given the scale of plastic waste generation, and the



economics and complexity of recycling. A study published in April in the journal Science Advances found a linear, direct relationship between increasing plastic production and plastic pollution — meaning a 1% increase in production resulted in a 1% release in pollution. (Win Cowger et al, "Global producer responsibility for plastic pollution", 2024).

Critics of the recent research say that the recent research plays into the plastic being a "waste management problem" narrative. "It risks us losing our focus on the upstream and saying, hey now all we need to do is manage the waste better," Neil Tangri, senior director of science and policy at GAIA, a global network of advocacy organisations working on zero waste and environmental justice initiatives, told The AP. "It's necessary but it's not the whole story."

Notably, plastics industry groups have praised the study. "This study underscores that uncollected and unmanaged plastic waste is the largest contributor to plastic pollution," Chris Jahn, the council secretary of the International Council of Chemical Associations said in a statement.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

## 2. Controversy Over Mumbai's Salt Pans: Why These Lands Matter

### Introduction

The recent decision to transfer 256 acres of salt pan land in Mumbai to the Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt Ltd (DRPPL), a joint venture between Adani Realty and the Maharashtra government, has sparked controversy. Opposition leaders and environmentalists argue that this move could harm Mumbai's fragile ecosystem.

### What are Salt Pan Lands?

Salt pans are low-lying areas where seawater accumulates and evaporates, leaving behind salt and minerals. These lands, along with mangroves, are crucial in protecting Mumbai from flooding. According to the 2011 Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, these ecologically sensitive areas fall under the CRZ-1B category, where economic activities other than salt extraction and natural gas exploration are restricted.

### Mumbai's Salt Pan Lands at a Glance

Mumbai has approximately 5,378 acres of salt pan land, nine times the size of Dharavi slum. A 2014 study by the state government found that 1,672 acres of this land could be developed, with about 31% located in residential and commercial belts. Nationally, 60,000 acres of salt pan lands are spread across Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Gujarat, and Karnataka.

### Why are Mumbai's Salt Pan Lands at Risk?

In land-scarce Mumbai, salt pans are one of the few undeveloped areas. Successive state governments have sought to acquire these lands from the Centre for development projects, particularly for low-cost housing. Former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis proposed using

400 acres for relocating slum dwellers, but his plans were paused under Uddhav Thackeray's leadership. The current Mahayuti government has resumed efforts to build affordable housing on salt pan lands.



**Source:** Downtoearth

### **Environmental Concerns**

Environmentalists warn that construction on salt pan lands could increase the risk of flooding, especially in Mumbai's eastern suburbs. These areas act as natural water catchments during heavy rains and high tides, preventing flooding. Covering these lands with buildings could submerge neighborhoods like Vikhroli, Kanjurmarg, and Bhandup.

### **Impact on the Ecosystem**

Salt pans, along with mangroves, play a critical role in protecting Mumbai from natural disasters and serve as habitats for various species of birds and insects. Critics argue that the government's development plans ignore the ecological value of these lands and the threats posed by climate change.

### **Concerns for Slum Dwellers**

There are questions about the suitability of salt pan lands for affordable housing. Environmentalists argue that relocating slum dwellers to low-lying, flood-prone areas could

compromise their quality of life. Additionally, the high costs of making these lands habitable may render the project financially unviable.

## Conclusion

The ongoing controversy highlights the tension between development needs and environmental conservation in Mumbai. The debate over salt pan lands underscores the importance of balancing urban growth with ecological sustainability. In late August, Vietnam and the Philippines agreed to enhance defense cooperation, focusing on maritime security. This development came after Vietnam's Defense Minister Phan Van Giang met with his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, in Manila. Both ministers signed letters of intent to boost maritime and disaster response collaboration and committed to resolving disagreements peacefully under international law.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: Indian Express

## 3. Cabinet Approves 'Mission Mausam' to Enhance Climate Preparedness

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved 'Mission Mausam', a transformative initiative with an outlay of Rs. 2,000 crore over two years. The mission aims to create a more weather-ready and climate-smart India.

### Mission Mausam: New Era in Forecasting

#### Objectives of Mission Mausam

Mission Mausam will be primarily implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences. Its key objectives include:

- **Tackling Extreme Weather Events:** It aims to improve preparedness for extreme weather events and climate change impacts.
- **Research and Development:** It will boost R&D in atmospheric sciences,

weather surveillance, forecasting, and management.

- **Technological Advancements:** The mission will incorporate cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), advanced sensors, and high-performance supercomputers.

#### Focus Areas

Mission Mausam will focus on:

- **Improved Weather Forecasting:** Accurate and timely information across various scales, including monsoon forecasts, cyclones, air quality alerts, and weather interventions like fog and hail management.
- **Next-Generation Infrastructure:** Deployment of next-generation radars, satellite systems, and a GIS-based automated Decision Support System for real-time data dissemination.

- **Capacity Building and Awareness:** Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders and raising awareness about weather and climate-related issues.

### Benefits to Multiple Sectors

The mission will have wide-reaching impacts, benefiting sectors such as:

- Agriculture
- Disaster Management
- Defence
- Aviation
- Power and Water Resources
- Tourism and Transport
- Urban Planning

### Implementation and Collaborations

Three key institutes from the Ministry of Earth Sciences—India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, and National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting—will lead the implementation of Mission Mausam. They will be supported by other national and international institutes, academia, and industries, positioning India as a global leader in weather and climate sciences.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: PIB

## 4. Transforming Waste into Wealth: Asia's Largest Bio-CNG Plant

### A Revolution in Indore

In Indore, known for its cleanliness, the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) has launched a groundbreaking initiative: the GOBARDhan plant. Inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2022, this facility converts waste from thousands of households into clean Bio-CNG, producing an impressive 17,000 kilograms daily. This endeavor represents not just technology, but a collective commitment to a sustainable future.



### GOBARDhan Initiative

The GOBARDhan plant is a key part of the Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBARDhan) initiative, aimed at turning organic waste—such as animal manure, crop residue, and kitchen scraps—into renewable energy and organic manure. Launched in 2018 under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), this initiative supports Prime Minister Modi's vision of a circular economy where resources are reused and waste is minimized.

## **Celebrating Cleanliness**

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Swabhav Swachhata Sanskaar Swachhata (4S) campaign will run from September 17 to October 2, 2024. This campaign aligns with the annual Swachhata Hi Seva tradition, leading up to Swachh Bharat Diwas on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday.

## **Waste Management Process**

Every morning, segregated organic waste is collected from Indore's homes and markets. Workers operate sophisticated machinery that screens, pulps, and feeds this waste into anaerobic digesters. Here, microorganisms break down the material, producing biogas, which is then compressed into Bio-CNG—an eco-friendly alternative to fossil fuels. The plant also generates over 100 tonnes of high-quality compost daily, enriching local farms and promoting sustainable agriculture.

## **Environmental Impact**

By converting organic waste into energy, the GOBARDhan plant prevents approximately 130,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year. This not only mitigates the greenhouse gas emissions associated with landfills but also contributes to India's climate goals and the global fight against climate change.

## **Commitment to Safety**

Safety is paramount at the GOBARDhan plant. Workers receive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and participate in regular safety drills to ensure a secure working environment. These efforts help maintain high production levels of Bio-CNG and compost while meeting strict safety and environmental standards.

## **Expanding the GOBARDhan Vision**

The success of Indore's GOBARDhan plant highlights the potential for similar initiatives nationwide. Over 1,300 biogas plants have been registered across India, with 870 operational. These facilities not only lessen landfill pressure but also provide farmers with a new income source and job opportunities in waste management and organic farming.

## **The Future of Clean Energy**

The Union Budget 2023 allocated Rs 10,000 crore for the establishment of 500 new "Waste to Wealth" plants, further strengthening India's clean energy sector. The GOBARDhan initiative plays a crucial role in reducing reliance on imported natural gas and fostering sustainable transportation through compressed biogas (CBG).

## **Conclusion**

Indore's GOBARDhan plant exemplifies the potential of waste-to-energy initiatives. With ongoing government support and investment, India is poised for a cleaner, more sustainable future, benefiting both urban and rural communities while promoting a circular economy.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: PIB



## 5. Azerbaijan's Climate Fund Proposal

### Introduction of a New Climate Fund

Azerbaijan, host of COP29, has proposed a climate fund to support developing countries. The fund would be financed through "voluntary" contributions from fossil-fuel-producing countries and companies. This proposal comes as negotiations on a global climate finance agreement struggle to make progress ahead of the COP29 conference in November 2023 at Baku, Azerbaijan.



### The Climate Finance Gap

Developed countries are currently obligated to provide at least \$100 billion annually to help developing countries combat climate change. However, the Paris Agreement requires this amount to increase after 2025. Negotiations aim to finalize a new climate finance agreement, which could include higher targets to reflect the increasing costs of

climate action.

### Challenges with the New Fund

#### 1. Limited Impact of Voluntary Contributions

Although Azerbaijan's proposal is well-intentioned, relying on voluntary contributions raises concerns. Similar funds, even those with mandatory contributions, have struggled to secure adequate financing. For instance, the Loss and Damage Fund, created at COP27, has only received pledges of \$600-700 million, far below the needs of vulnerable countries.

#### 2. Disagreements on Climate Finance Definitions

A major sticking point in the negotiations is the lack of clarity on what constitutes "climate finance." Developing countries have raised concerns about double-counting and say that the actual amount of money flowing for climate action is much lower than what is claimed by developed nations.

#### 3. Neglect of Adaptation Projects

Currently, most climate finance is directed at mitigation projects, which reduce emissions and benefit the entire planet. In contrast, adaptation projects, which help countries adjust to the impacts of climate change, receive less than 20% of climate finance. Developing countries are demanding that adaptation projects receive at least 50% of the funds.

### The New Cumulative Quantitative Goal (NCQG)

#### Need for Trillions, Not Billions

The most crucial element of the new finance agreement is determining the amount of money needed after 2025. Estimates suggest that trillions of dollars are required annually for climate action. Proposals from developing countries, including India, suggest amounts between \$1

trillion and \$1.5 trillion annually. However, given that developed countries have struggled to meet even the \$100 billion target, progress on agreeing to a higher amount has been slow.

### **Calls for More Contributors**

Developed countries argue that wealthier nations like China, South Korea, and oil-rich Gulf states should also contribute to climate finance. These countries were not originally obligated to provide finance under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), but their economies have since grown. However, this push to expand the donor base is seen by some as an attempt to avoid responsibilities.

### **Conclusion: Azerbaijan's Fund May Fall Short**

While Azerbaijan's proposed climate fund is a positive step, its reliance on voluntary contributions and lack of formal negotiations may limit its impact. With current funds already underfunded, this new initiative might not be enough to bridge the climate finance gap required to address the growing challenges of climate change.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

## **6. Project Cheetah: Where things stand after two years**

### **Introduction**

Project Cheetah, which saw the introduction of the African sub-species of the wild cat in India, completed two years on September 17.



The ambitious project has two overarching objectives. First, to establish a stable, breeding population of cheetahs in central India. Two, to use cheetahs as an umbrella species to restore open natural ecosystems such as scrubs, savannahs, grasslands, and degraded forests.

Two years in, Project Cheetah has seen marginal successes. Many challenges remain, as well as questions regarding its long-term outlook. Here is a status check.

Project Cheetah began with the intercontinental translocation of African cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. This translocation took place in two batches of eight and then 12 cheetahs.

These cheetahs were initially kept in soft-release bomas, small enclosures inside the national park to get them adapted to the local environment. Although confined to an area of roughly 1 sq km, the cheetahs hunted live prey inside these bomas. While some cheetahs were later released in the wild, they were later brought back into the enclosures. Mating within the translocated cohort of cheetahs led to the birth of 17 cubs.

Of the 20 translocated cheetahs, eight (40 per cent) have died due to a variety of reasons, from attacks during mating to septicaemia caused by tick infestation under the cheetahs' radio collars. Of the 17 cubs, five (29 per cent) have also perished. As of today, 24 cheetahs (12 adults and cubs each) survive.

The next batch of 6-8 African cheetahs will be translocated to the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, also in Madhya Pradesh.

### **Cheetahs still not in wild**

The project has seen marginal successes, mainly on two fronts. First, with respect to the successful breeding of the African cheetahs in a new climate and ecology, and the survival of 12 out of the 17 cubs born. Second, Pawan and Veera, who were released into the wild last December spent a considerable amount of time in a free range, and travelled to far-off distances north of Kuno, even entering Rajasthan.

However, the project faced a significant setback in August this year when Pawan was found dead ostensibly due to drowning (the autopsy report has not yet been made public). After this incident, all 24 surviving cheetahs have been put in enclosures. This has raised questions about the spotted felines' capabilities to establish their own habitat in the wild. Authorities say that more cheetahs will be released after the monsoon season.

But conservation scientists have criticised the delay in releasing the cheetahs into the wild, and questioned authorities' lack of transparency in the matter. Ravi Chellam, a Bengaluru-based wildlife biologist and conservation scientist, said that a Namibian policy states that large wild carnivores should not be kept in captivity for more than three months. Beyond this period, the carnivore should either be euthanised or held in captivity permanently.

Barring the late Pawan and Veera, who is now in an enclosure, all the other cheetahs have been in enclosures for over a year now. This is contrary to the government's own Cheetah Action Plan which had said that cheetahs will be released in the wild after a 4-5 week quarantine period, followed by a 1-2 month acclimatisation period, according to Chellam.

### **Problem of inadequate prey**

A deficit in the prey base is one of the biggest challenges facing the project. The project's latest annual report has found that the density of chital, the primary prey for cheetahs (and leopards), has declined from 23.43 animals per sq km in 2021 to 17.5 animals per sq km in 2024. The current population of chital in Kuno National Park is about 6,700.

This is far less than the numbers required to sustain the 91 leopards and 12 adult cheetahs in the park. The leopard population would need about 23,600 prey animals and cheetahs about 3,120 prey animals, annually. "With the current population of chital (6700), and other prey (about 100 ungulates), there is a huge deficit of prey in Kuno National Park," Project Cheetah's annual report said.

The report has prescribed immediate intervention by way of prey augmentation at Kuno as well as Gandhi Sagar, the next home for cheetah translocation. According to Chellam, this reflects poorly on the project management given that in 2022, Kuno was specifically chosen due to its prey density. "What has happened to drastically change the ground situation in such a short period of time?", he asked.

### **Road ahead**

Experiences from the project so far have shown that the free-ranging cheetahs often ventured far and wide, often crossing state boundaries or entering human habitats. An analysis of their movements using radio collars showed that Veera travelled a distance of 5.82 km daily, while Pawan travelled 4.75 km daily, on average. Veera often ventured into territorial forests outside the national park. These insights have brought into spotlight the interstate landscape conservation plans.

Conservation of the interstate Kuno-Gandhi Sagar landscape spread over the protected areas, territorial forests of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan has been spelt out as the way forward to establish a population of 60-70 cheetahs in the region. This would be subject to measures such as prey management, setting up of an adequate mechanism for interstate coordination, and the protection of the open ecosystem habitat.

This large landscape criss-crosses several forested patches outside sanctuaries, parks and tiger reserves, and is spread over eight districts of Madhya Pradesh and seven districts of Rajasthan. The conservation of this landscape would be a herculean task as it would involve restoring the habitats adequately, and ensuring that risks to cheetahs are minimised before they can populate the space.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

## **7. Justice is key to tackling the climate crisis: What a new study says**

## Introduction

It is still possible for all humanity to thrive, escape poverty and be safe from climate change, but only if we learn to share Earth's riches equally, according to a new study. For the first time, scientists have connected the planet's safety with the idea of justice for all in the distribution of the planet's critical resources, such as freshwater and nutrients.

“

**Justice is an essential part of the environmental discussion.”**

The study, 'A Just World on a Safe Planet', published in the journal The Lancet Planetary Health, was carried out by 65 leading natural and

social scientists from more than 20 countries. The scientists belong to the Earth Commission, a global team that aims to define a safe and just corridor for people and the planet.

## What are the findings of the study?

The study shows that the over-consumption of finite resources by a minority of the world's population is shrinking the "Safe and Just Space" — a conceptual space in which it is possible to meet everybody's basic needs with minimum damage to the planet. The researchers have found that providing resources to people who do not have enough would be less harmful to the planet than the present situation in which the wealthy minority is consuming more than its fair share.

## Here are some of the key findings of the study:

### 1. Historically marginalised people are suffering the most.

The research follows from Earth System Boundaries, published in 2023, which underlined the safe and just "ceiling" up to which people could continue to extract natural resources and pollute without destabilising the Earth's systems and endangering humanity. The scientists call the present study the "foundation" as it shows what Earth's 7.9 billion human population needs from the planet to live free of poverty.

According to the researchers, 'Safe ESBs' are the levels beyond which tipping points may be triggered, making Earth unstable. Safe ESBs are not necessarily just. 'Just ESBs' prevent significant harm to humans, communities and countries. The study says that in seven of eight indicators for the five domains, the EBSs have already been transgressed. These include climate, surface water, groundwater and natural



ecosystem areas. "The eighth ESB, air pollution, has been transgressed in many parts of the world," says the study.

At the receiving end are people who are historically marginalised, such as those living in former colonies, and the poor are at particular risk. At present, nine million premature deaths are linked to air and water pollution and millions of others are suffering from diseases due to rising heat and extreme weather events. The research adds that, in India, one billion people are living on land with diminishing yields. India is also among the hardest hit globally by water shortages.

The Paris Agreement seeks to limit global warming to below 2 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels but, even then, 30 million people of Bangladesh will be vulnerable to the impact of sea level rise.

## **2. The rich are responsible for the present crisis.**

That the rich are responsible for the present crisis is at the heart of all climate crisis discussions, according to the study. Apart from the fossil fuel-powered industrial revolution of the developed nations, there are statistics on consumerism. In 2020, a study by Oxfam and the Stockholm Environment Institute showed that the richest 10 per cent of the world had caused around half of global emissions in 2015. An unequal 15 per cent of emissions were by the top 1 per cent of the world. On the other hand, the world's poorest 50 per cent were responsible for just 7 per cent and, ironically, they were the ones suffering the effects of the climate crisis the most.

The new study says that the economic growth trajectories, which dominate the global economic policy, threaten to destabilise the global commons. "Current environmental pressures are hugely unequal, with the richest 10 per cent of the global population consuming as much energy as the poorest 80 per cent and being responsible for more emissions than the other 90 per cent," says the study.

## **3. Society needs to move in a safe and just direction.**

The researchers say that the need of the hour is to rethink economic models and technological interventions and ensure that critical natural resources are accessed, shared and managed fairly. Unless these changes are implemented, by 2050, even if every person on the planet had only a basic standard of living, the earth's climate systems would still be overshoot and the planet "would be outside the climate boundary".

"If we want to meet minimum needs and stay within boundaries, we have to change. This is not a very welcome message for governments, businesses, and society at large.

If we can change our production patterns to more circular ones, to more ecosystem-based solutions, we have a safe and just future. Consumption patterns of the rich have to change even in poorer countries like India. Such change can enhance the well-being of people, and reduce their exposure to environmental change,” according to Dr Joyeeta Gupta, lead author of the study and former co-chair of the Earth Commission.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

### 1. OpenAI's Project Strawberry and the promise of AI's next big breakthrough

#### Introduction

OpenAI, the world's premier artificial intelligence research organisation, will likely release its most powerful AI model this fall (September-November), and could integrate it into ChatGPT-5, the new version of the chatbot and virtual assistant that it launched in late 2022.



The secretive project, on which OpenAI has been working for long, was earlier known as Project Q\* (Q-star), and is now codenamed Project Strawberry. It is expected to feature autonomous Internet research and dramatically improve AI reasoning capabilities, and has been billed as OpenAI's push to create Artificial General Intelligence — AI with capabilities similar to that of the human brain.

On August 7, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman posted an image of strawberries growing in two pots to his X account. The tweet was seen as confirmation that OpenAI is working on the new and powerful large language model (LLM).

OpenAI was reported to have demonstrated a version of the new model to national security officials, seemingly a statement of its commitment to transparency at a time when the rapid development of AI has raised serious security concerns among national governments.

#### A wizard at math

The influential California-based tech industry business publication The Information reported on August 26 that Project Strawberry would be better at math and programming than any existing chatbot, quoting “two people who have been involved in the effort”.

Integration with ChatGPT will make the latter the most powerful AI chatbot there is, the report said. ChatGPT has sometimes struggled with math, and experts think the errors could be due to the absence of adequate mathematical information in the training data.

The Information report said that a demo by Project Strawberry staff had shown that the new AI model is capable of advanced levels of thinking, which allowed it to solve puzzles, including The New York Times ‘Connections’, a particularly difficult word puzzle.

### **Need for training**

The Information said that Project Strawberry aims to raise more capital, which OpenAI needs for its next-frontier model, codenamed Orion.

The generation of high-quality training data for Orion is believed to be one of Project Strawberry’s key applications. This is significant because most of the training data on the Internet has already been used, and there is now a dearth of information that is outside paywalls and authentication, and is free to access for the purpose of training AI models. Indeed, OpenAI has been of late making deals with publications to use their content for training.

Project Orion, which is being designed to outperform GPT-4, could use a combination of Project Strawberry and high-quality synthetic data that would likely reduce errors and hallucinations compared to its predecessors and other AI models.

### **Creating synthetic data**

Altman has said that in order to try out different ways to train AI models, OpenAI has been testing how to generate large amounts of synthetic data. Generative AI models create synthetic data based on real-world data samples. The algorithms learn patterns, correlations, and statistical properties of the sample data; after it is trained, the model can produce statistically identical synthetic data.

The large datasets that AI models rely on could be prone to biases and errors, or could have incomplete or inaccurate information — high-quality synthetic data produced by Project Strawberry can fill gaps in real-world data sets and provide a more wholesome, inclusive, and balanced training set.

Many believe that the use of synthetic data can help make future AI models more neutral and fair, and reduce noise and irrelevant information — thereby improving both the efficiency of training and the accuracy of the model.

### **Big Strawberry leap**

Based on what is known, Project Strawberry’s improved reasoning, logic, and the ability to plan and carry out research, could allow the model to autonomously conduct experiments, analyse data, and come up with new hypotheses. This could potentially lead to scientific

breakthroughs, including the discovery of new drugs. The models could also offer personalised education, creating educational content and interactive lessons.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## **2. How navigation satellite-based tolling, live monitoring of plazas can lower wait times**

### **Introduction**

After the announcement for the implementation of Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) based Electronic Toll collection in India, Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) said that it has developed a GIS based software for Real-time monitoring' of the waiting time at the Toll Plazas. The system, the Ministry said Monday (September 2), will help the NHAI officials to check the congestion at specific lane level to ensure free flow of traffic.

This new software has been developed by Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL), a company promoted by National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). Initially, this new technology will be implemented at 100 toll plazas, which has been identified by NHAI, for live monitoring. These toll plazas have been selected on the basis of the congestion feedback received through National Highway helpline number i.e 1033.

### **How will it work?**

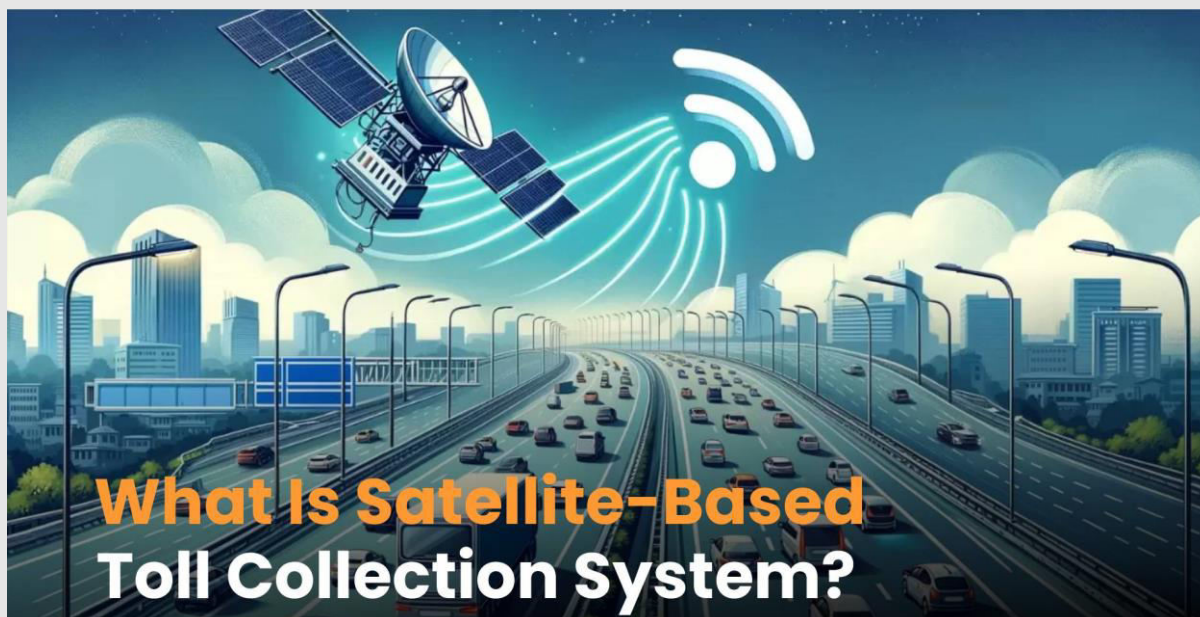
The GIS-based software will provide the name and location of the toll plaza to the officials. "It will also provide congestion alert and lane distribution recommendation, if the queue of vehicles at a toll plaza is more than the prescribed limit," said MoRTH in an statement.

The ministry also said that as the toll plazas have been mapped across the country at respective NHAI field offices, the software will help the officials to get comparative traffic condition analysis on hourly, daily, weekly and monthly basis for the traffic queue & congestion.

Apart from this, the software will provide updates of current weather condition and information about local festivals. "This will help NHAI officials to take pre-emptive measures to manage the traffic load and decongest the toll plazas," said MoRTH.

As of now, the software is being implemented at the 100 toll plazas. The Ministry said that this GIS-based software will be extended to more toll plazas in a phased manner.





### **What is satellite based tolling system?**

MoRTH is currently working on Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) based tolling system, which is expected to replace the current FASTag toll collection system and provide a long-term solution for congestion at tolling booths. It will also provide distance-based tolling where users will pay only for the stretch they have travelled on a National Highway and free flow of Vehicles at High Speed.

On July 02, 2024, Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL) issued a tender for the construction of free flow GNSS Lanes at toll plazas to implement GNSS based Electronic toll collection.

### **How will GNSS work?**

According to IHMCL, the GNSS-based Electronic Toll Collection (ETC) system will be implemented with the existing FASTag ecosystem. It will be initially used as a hybrid model where both FASTag and GNSS will operate simultaneously.

To implement the scheme, a dedicated GNSS lanes will be available at toll plazas to allow vehicles using GNSS-based ETC to pass through freely. After GNSS-based ETC will become more widespread, all lanes will eventually be converted to GNSS lanes. It will have advance reading/identification/enforcement equipment for vehicles so that valid vehicles gets a free flow pass.

When a vehicle passes through the toll gates, the toll charger will receive pings (distance and time stamp) of GNSS vehicles through On Board Unit or OBUs fitted in the GNSS vehicles. The OBUs of GNSS vehicles will be onboarded with the toll charger through Fintechs, similar to the issuer banks concept under the current FASTag System. The payment mechanism shall be similar to the existing FASTag ecosystem, but would involve automatic debit and obviate the need for the boom barriers at toll plazas.

### **How will it help the users?**

The introduction of the ETC system will remove all kinds of time lag that currently people face while passing through the toll plazas. Under the FASTag system, it has been observed that there are still considerable delays in reading the bar code and opening of the boom barrier. These delays sometimes last for up to a minute and causes vehicle pile ups. Due to this, many cases of arguments and fights with toll employees have also come to light.

However, the GNSS tolling system will remove all these kinds of obstructions as there will be no requirement of reader and boom barrier while passing through the toll Plaza. Also, people will be able to pass through the plaza at high speed and the money will be deducted automatically according to the distance travelled on National Highway.

### **How does present system work?**

Currently, the Electronic Toll Collection in India is done through Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, commonly known as FASTag. It was launched in India in 2015 and Since February 2021, FASTag has been made mandatory for the payment of user fees at National Highway toll plazas, with a provision for a 100% penalty for cash or non-FASTag payments.

According to MoRTH, as of March 2024, more than 98% of user fee payments are made through FASTag at Toll Plazas.

The National Highway Authority of India is responsible for the development, maintenance and management of the National Highways. Currently, out of about 1.50 lakh km of National Highways declared by MoRTH, about 70,000 kilometers are managed by NHAI. Apart from this, NHAI collect tolls on these highways as per National Highway Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008.

According to MoRTH, at present toll is collected for approximately 45,000 kilometers of National Highways and Expressways through 1200 toll plazas maintained by NHAI or Concessionaires.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## **3. How Starlink satellites are 'blinding' astronomers**

### **Introduction**

Elon Musk's Starlink satellites are impeding the work of astronomers, a study published recently in the journal Astronomy & Astrophysics found.

Currently, the Starlink "constellation" comprises more than 6,300 working satellites orbiting Earth at an altitude of around 550 km. These satellites deliver high-speed internet to places which otherwise would not have access to it.

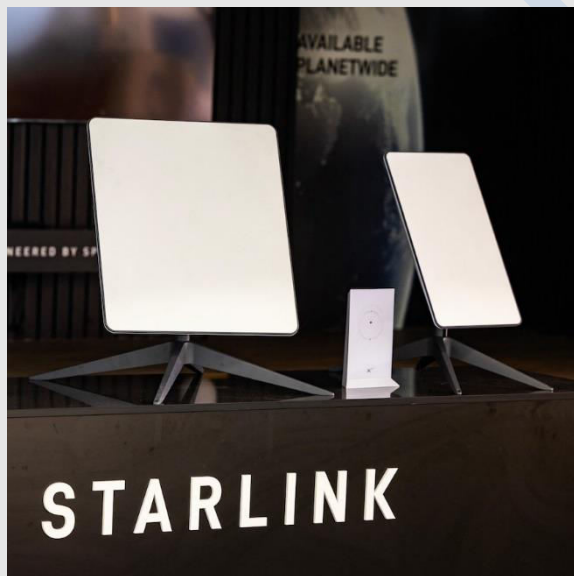
At the same time, they also create “radio noise”, or unintended electromagnetic radiation (UEMR). This is what impedes the work of radio astronomers observing the sky from Earth.

### **Blinded by light**

Radio astronomy is a branch of astronomy that studies celestial objects at radio frequencies. Unlike optical telescopes that detect visible light, radio telescopes are designed to detect radio waves (which have higher wavelengths and lower frequencies) emitted by objects in space. But just like bright visible light can blind the observer — like the bright headlights of an approaching car — the same can also happen at radio frequencies. This is essentially why radio noise is a problem.

For radio astronomers, observing while a satellite is in its field of view is like trying to see the faintest star visible to the naked eye next to a full Moon, Cees Bassa of the Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy (ASTRON) and the lead author of the recent study, told Science Adviser.

Benjamin Winkel, a scientist at the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy who contributed to the study, said the interference is literally “blinding” scientists. “When we say ‘blinded’ it means your eye collects too much light for you to see anything, you are getting saturated. This is exactly what happens with our radio telescopes,” he told DW.



### **Need for regulation**

Things might get worse. The recent study found that Starlink’s second-generation satellites — which currently account for less than a third of the network — emit UEMR at levels 32 times brighter than its first-generation satellites. This is despite Starlink already running into trouble about the UEMR of its first-gen satellites.

“While the generation 1 satellites indeed got dimmer in the last year — so Starlink actually did something to them [to reduce radio leaks] — the new generation unfortunately seem to be brighter again,” said Winkel.

Moreover, as launching satellites becomes cheaper, some estimate that as many as 100,000 satellites could be orbiting Earth by 2030. The number was pegged at 11,330 in June 2023 by the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

Experts say that these developments signal the need for regulations for satellite operators, just like there exist regulations for radio pollution from ground-based electronic sources like cellphone towers. “There is no way to make any electrical or electronic apparatus without this kind of leakage... the question always asked is: how much is leaked?” Winkel said. This is what regulations can help minimise.

Currently, astronomers are largely reliant on forging good faith interactions with companies like Starlink, which put satellites into space.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

#### 4 Eye drops which claim to 'reduce dependency on reading glasses': What to know about PresVu

##### Introduction



Mumbai-based Entod Pharmaceuticals has announced that the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) — the country's apex drug regulator — has approved its new eye drop, which has been "specifically developed to reduce dependency on reading glasses for individuals affected by presbyopia."

According to the company, the eye drop PresVu is the first of its kind in India, and that Entod has "applied for a patent for this invention in terms of its formulation and the process".

##### What is presbyopia?

Presbyopia is an age-related condition in which the eyes gradually lose the ability to focus on nearby objects. People usually start to develop presbyopia at around the age of 40. According to doctors, spectacles are one of the most effective ways to manage the condition.

##### How does PresVu work?

The active ingredient — chemical compounds in medicines that have an effect on the body — in PresVu is pilocarpine. The compound contracts the iris muscles, which control the size of the pupil and help humans see things clearly, thereby enabling one's eyes to focus better on nearby objects, according to Entod Pharmaceuticals.

The company also said that PresVu uses "advanced dynamic buffer technology" — essentially, a base solution — to adapt to the pH level (a scale used to measure how acidic or basic a substance is) of tears. This ensures that the eye drop has "consistent efficacy and safety for extended use, keeping in mind that such drops will be used for years at a stretch".

PresVu is a prescription-only medicine and, according to doctors, its impact is unlikely to last beyond four to six hours. It should not be used by people who have inflammation of the iris. Regular use of PresVu may lead to itching and redness, eyebrow pain, and muscle spasms in the eyes.

##### Is this a novel therapy?



Although Entod's claims make it seem that PresVu is a new therapy, pilocarpine, the main compound used in the eye drop, has been available in India for decades now.

While pilocarpine has been in use as the first line therapy for cataract, its property of temporarily improving the depth of focus is something that has been known for quite some time. The drug has been tried for presbyopia in other countries as well.

The United States Food and Drug Administration approved a pilocarpine eye drop for presbyopia in 2021.

In India, the government decides on the ceiling price of pilocarpine in 4% and 2% concentrations. PresVu has pilocarpine in 1.25% concentration.

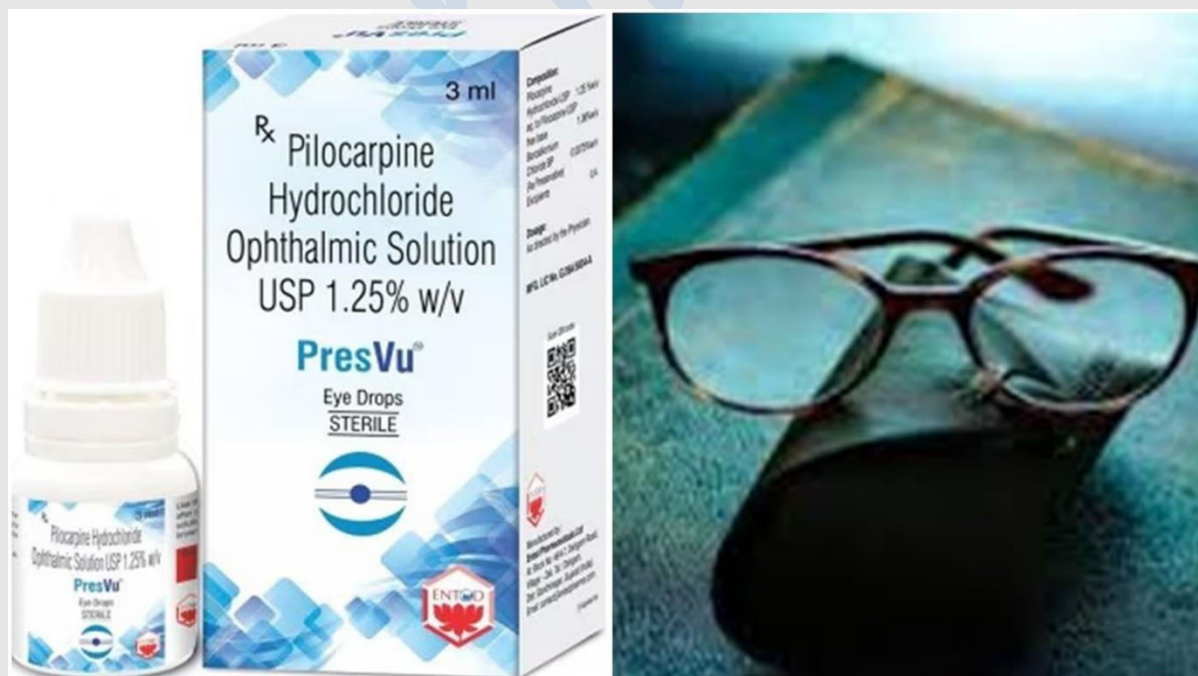
Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## 5. Clarity of Vision: Addressing Exaggerated Medical Claims

### The Problem of Exaggeration in Medicine

Exaggerated claims about medical products often mislead the public and undermine trust in the healthcare sector. This issue has prompted legislation, such as the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, aimed at curbing false advertising.



### Recent Controversy: Eye Drops for Presbyopia



Recently, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) suspended a pharmaceutical company's permission to manufacture and market Pres Vu eye drops for presbyopia due to unauthorized claims. ENTOD Pharmaceuticals claimed their drops could eliminate the need for reading glasses, a statement deemed misleading by the CDSCO, which prioritized public interest.

### **Company Response and Media Influence**

ENTOD argued that their product's approval stemmed from a valid clinical trial involving 234 patients. They attributed the exaggerated claims to viral media reports, denying responsibility for public misconceptions. However, a now-deleted post on social media misleadingly promoted the drops as a groundbreaking solution.

### **Understanding the Drug: Pilocarpine**

The active ingredient, pilocarpine, works by constricting the pupils, allowing for improved vision in presbyopia. While not new, pilocarpine has previously been used for glaucoma treatment but fell out of favor due to side effects. The U.S. FDA recently approved similar eye drops, presenting them as an additional option for those with presbyopia, alongside glasses and surgery.

### **The Role of Regulatory Bodies**

The CDSCO's intervention serves to reinforce the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, highlighting the need for scientific evidence over sensational claims. In an environment rife with dubious medical advertisements, it is crucial for the government to uphold standards based on scientific data and protect consumers from misleading assertions.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## **6. Why the spread of mpox is a concern and what caused the delay in vaccines reaching Africa**

### **Introduction**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) — epicentre of the mpox outbreak that has become virulent and spread to other countries — has received its first donation of mpox vaccines.

Since January 1, 2022, mpox cases have been reported from 121 countries, including 20 WHO member-states across Africa. As of September 5, 2024, a total 1,03,048 laboratory-confirmed cases, including 229 deaths, have been reported from across the world since January 1, 2022. On Monday, India confirmed its first mpox case, which was a travel-related infection.

Despite the surge in the number of cases, vaccines have been in short supply in Africa. Apart from DRC, the only other African country to have any mpox vaccine is Nigeria. That is one of the main reasons why mpox spread rapidly, prompting the WHO to declare the infection a global health emergency last month.

### Why is the spread of mpox a concern?

Mpox, which was first reported in humans in 1970, has come under the spotlight largely due to the spread of its new clade Ib variant.

Organisms belonging to a clade share common ancestors. When it comes to mpox, there are two different clades: clade I and clade II; the former is the deadlier of the two.

Clade Ib seems to be transmitting more rapidly between people than previous variants, including through sexual activity. Clade Ia mostly comes from animals, according to a report in the journal Nature. The new variant is also affecting more women and children in the impacted African countries.



Scientists are still trying to determine the reasons behind these aspects of the transmission.

### What vaccines are being used against mpox?

Three mpox vaccines are available currently. All are weakened versions of vaccinia, a live virus that also served as the basis for the smallpox vaccine. Virologist Dr Gagandeep Kang told The Indian Express, "Both smallpox and mpox belong to the same family of viruses. Mpox is less severe and has lower case fatality rates but is spreading fast because it has animal reservoirs, which smallpox did not have."

The most commonly used vaccine is modified vaccinia Ankara (MVA), manufactured by Denmark-based Bavarian Nordic. It has approval for mpox from both the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and European Medicines Agency (EMA). The DRC has received this vaccine.

The other vaccine is LC16m8, which is produced by KM Biologics, a company in Japan. Only Japan's regulatory authority has approved this vaccine for mpox.

The third is ACAM2000, which is made by a US company, Emergent BioSolutions. It was approved for mpox by the FDA last month.

New mpox vaccines are also being developed. A vaccine by BioNTech, a German biotechnology company, is currently in early clinical development, Dr Kang said. Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) has announced it is developing an mpox vaccine, and hopes for a positive outcome within a year.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) last week called for experienced pharmaceutical companies and research organisations to "collaborate on royalty basis" for developing mpox vaccine and diagnostic kits.

### **Why did Africa not get mpox vaccines sooner?**

The currently available mpox vaccines are too expensive — \$50 to \$75 per dose, according to the WHO — for African countries. As a result, they have to usually rely on direct donations by developed countries and vaccine producers, and on purchases by Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance) and UNICEF.

Another reason is that during previous mpox outbreaks, the number of cases remained quite low. Many African countries did not ask for mpox vaccines as health officials had to tackle far more serious health problems in the region.

### **When should the mpox vaccine be taken?**

Getting a vaccine is recommended for a high-risk population, especially during an outbreak. The vaccine can also be administered after a person has been in contact with someone who has mpox. In these cases, the vaccine should be given less than four days after contact with an infected person. The vaccine can be administered for up to 14 days if the person has not developed symptoms.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

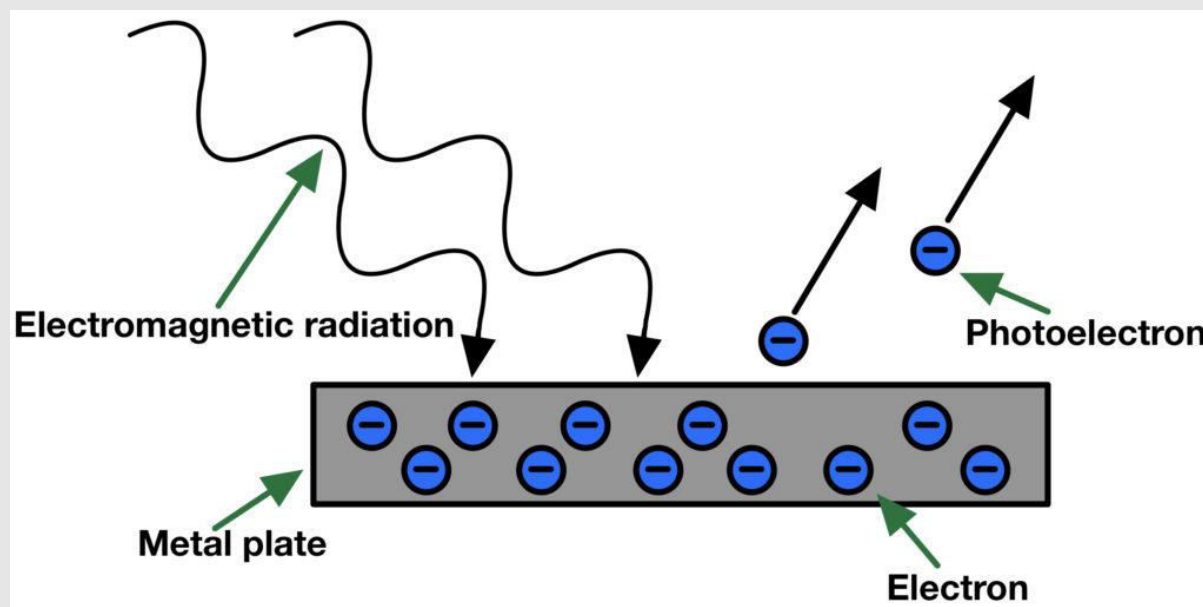
## **7. Superfast Studies of the Photoelectric Effect: A Step Towards Unveiling Matter's Secrets**

### **Introduction**

Albert Einstein's explanation of the photoelectric effect, which earned him a Nobel Prize, was a groundbreaking discovery that revealed how light can eject electrons from a material when it possesses sufficient energy. This phenomenon, fundamental to solar power technology, is now being studied on ultrafast timescales, leading to new insights into the nature of matter.

### **Understanding the Photoelectric Effect**

In the early 20th century, physicists noticed that metals emit electrons when irradiated with light. Einstein proposed that light consists of particles called photons, which can knock electrons out of a metal if they possess enough energy. This explanation was a turning point for both quantum theory and technology, including solar cells, which convert sunlight into electricity.



### Advances in Ultrafast Light Pulses

Recent advancements in ultrashort light pulses have allowed physicists to study the photoelectric effect at unprecedented speeds. In 2023, researchers who contributed to the development of attosecond pulses (one attosecond is  $10^{-18}$  seconds) won the Nobel Prize in Physics. These pulses help capture short-lived atomic events, revealing details about electron behavior.

### Photoionisation Delay: New Insights into Matter

One focus of these studies is photoionisation delay, which measures the time it takes for an electron to be ejected from a material. This delay offers critical information about the electronic structure of matter. For instance, a 2010 study led by Nobel laureate Ferenc Krausz discovered a 20-attosecond delay between two electrons leaving close energy levels in a neon atom.

### Recent Discoveries in Nitric Oxide Molecules

In 2023, researchers from SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory reported a significant photoemission delay in nitric oxide (NO) molecules. They found that core electrons from oxygen atoms were emitted up to 700 attoseconds after those from nitrogen atoms. This unexpected delay was linked to several factors, including the shape resonance effect, where an electron gets temporarily trapped due to the molecule's potential energy.

### Applications and Future Implications

These studies are not just theoretical; they have practical applications. Understanding electron correlation—how electrons interact with each other—can improve fields like protein imaging and the development of next-generation electronics. Scientists believe that by studying the photoelectric effect at this level, they can one day control matter at its most fundamental level, opening the door to designing molecules with specific electronic properties.

### Conclusion

The superfast study of the photoelectric effect is uncovering previously hidden details about the behavior of electrons and matter. As physicists continue to refine their techniques and push the boundaries of what we know, new materials and technologies will emerge from these insights—often in ways that we cannot yet imagine.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu

## 8. India's First Mission to Venus in 2028: Key Details

### India's Upcoming Venus Mission

India's space agency ISRO will launch its first mission to Venus in March 2028. This will be India's second interplanetary mission, following the Mars Orbiter Mission in 2013. The mission will study Venus from orbit, examining its surface, atmosphere, ionosphere, and interaction with the Sun using scientific instruments from both India and international collaborators.

### Why Study Venus?

Venus, often called Earth's twin due to similarities in size, mass, and density, offers valuable insights into the evolution of planets. Scientists believe Venus once had water but became dry and hot due to a runaway greenhouse effect. Unlike Earth, Venus has extremely high surface temperatures (462°C), thick atmospheric pressure, and clouds of sulfuric acid. Its slow rotation and harsh conditions have made past missions challenging, with landers surviving only a few hours.



### Mission Timeline and Details

The Venus mission was initially planned for 2023 but was delayed until 2028. With Earth and Venus aligning closely every 19 months, timing is crucial. The mission will take about 140 days to reach Venus after launch. The satellite will carry 100 kg of scientific payloads and will use aero-braking to gradually reduce its orbit for closer study.

### What is Aero-Braking?

Aero-braking is a technique to reduce the satellite's orbit using Venus's atmosphere to create drag. The satellite will skim through the outer layers of the atmosphere, reducing its orbit from an initial elliptical path of 500 km x 60,000 km to a closer orbit of around



300 km. This process will take six months and must be carefully controlled to avoid burning up or delaying the mission.

### Scientific Payloads

India has selected at least 17 scientific experiments, along with seven international ones. The instruments include radar for surface imaging, thermal cameras, and tools to study dust particles, ionization, and the composition of Venus's atmosphere.

### Other Countries' Missions to Venus

The US, Russia, Japan, and the European Space Agency (ESA) have conducted previous missions to Venus. Future missions include the US's DaVinci (2029) and Veritas (2031), and ESA's EnVision (2030).

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## 9. Global Collaboration in Tackling Cybercrime

Europol takes down "Ghost" encrypted messaging platform used for crime - @billtoulas  
[bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/...](https://bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/...)  
Post übersetzen



### Operation Against Encrypted Messaging Platform Ghost

Europol recently led a global operation to dismantle "Ghost," an encrypted messaging platform used by criminal networks. Ghost allowed users anonymity and featured self-destructing messages, making it a preferred tool for activities like drug trafficking, money laundering, and violent crime. The operation, involving nine countries, resulted in 51 arrests, seizure of weapons, drugs, and over €1 million in

cash.

### Other Major Global Cybercrime Operations

#### 1. Taking Down Encrochat

In July 2020, Europol, alongside French and Dutch law enforcement, dismantled Encrochat, an encrypted communication service used by criminal organizations. Encrochat provided modified smartphones for encrypted communication, often dubbed the "WhatsApp for gangsters." Authorities planted malware on the devices, allowing them to intercept messages. The operation led to 6,500 arrests and seizure of €740 million in cash.

#### 2. ANOM: The FBI's Trojan Horse

Following the shutdown of a Canadian encrypted service in 2018, the FBI launched "Operation Trojan Shield" with a custom-built encrypted messaging platform called ANOM. Criminals unknowingly used ANOM phones, believing they were secure, while law enforcement

monitored their communications. The operation led to 800 arrests, drug seizures, and the dismantling of 50 secret drug labs.

### **3. Sky ECC Takedown**

In March 2021, Belgian, French, and Dutch law enforcement targeted Sky ECC, an encrypted communication network. Authorities used phishing software to track 70,000 Sky ECC users' communications. The operation resulted in over 1,000 convictions and seizures of €183 million by 2024.

### **Conclusion**

International cooperation among law enforcement agencies like Europol, FBI, and others has proven critical in combating cybercrime, with operations targeting encrypted platforms used by criminal networks.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## **10. What the Internet Archive case in the U.S. means for digital book-lending**

### **Introduction**

The Internet Archive (IA) is a non-profit that has digitally archived more than 835 billion web pages and 44 million books and texts. It has also archived millions of audio recordings, videos, images, and software programmes. Its archival efforts have democratised access to them for anyone with an internet connection. Books form a major part of IA's archival mission and the extent of access to digitised books is generally determined by the type of user. For example, persons with disabilities can get access to the full text of books that might be still under copyright protection, while others may generally get only a short preview of the book.

### **Problem experiments**

Two of IA's techno-legal experiments prompted a major copyright tussle with book publishers. The first is the idea of Controlled Digital Lending (CDL): books are digitised and availed to readers on a 1:1 owned-to-loaned ratio. When a physical library has two physical copies of a particular book, only those two copies of that book can be lent. CDL used digital technologies to lend books online in this way. The maximum number of books available to lend corresponded to the number of books IA or its partner libraries owned.

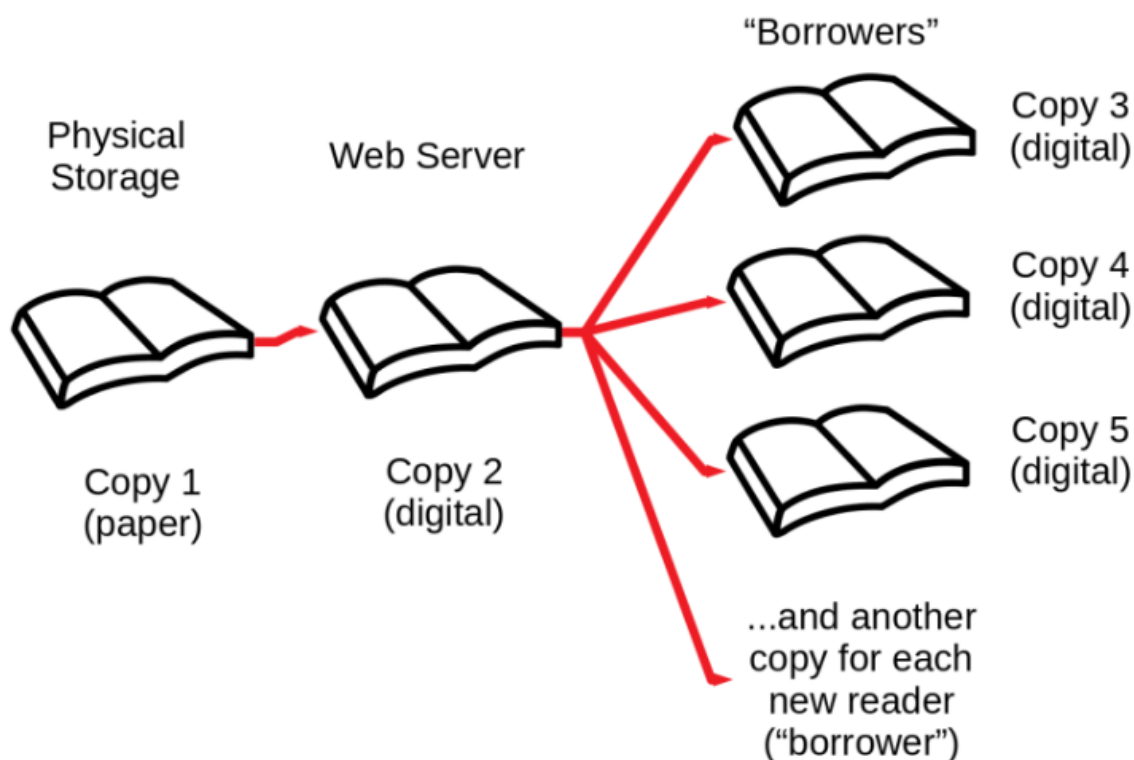
The second experiment was to liberalise the 1:1 policy during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of a 'National Emergency Library'. IA did this for less than three months, stopping when publishers initiated legal action citing violation of copyright, in Hachette Book Group, Inc. and others vs. Internet Archive.

### **The four horses of 'fair use'**

The core issue before the district and the appellate courts was CDL's legality. That is, since CDL involved making digital copies of books, and since IA didn't deny lending those digitised books, did CDL constitute 'fair use' under U.S. copyright law? The district court took the view

that IA did infringe copyright and that CDL didn't qualify as 'fair use'. When IA appealed, the appellate court reaffirmed the district court's verdict in favour of the publishers.

## Controlled Digital Lending (CDL) and the Internet Archive



U.S. courts generally look at four factors as part of a 'fair use' analysis — purpose and character of use; nature of the copyrighted work; amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. The appellate court's perspective on two of these dimensions is worth reflecting on.

Whether the disputed use is 'transformative' is an important sub-factor of the 'purpose and character of use' condition. Drawing on legal precedents, IA argued its use made book-lending more efficient and enabled use-cases not possible with print books or physical lending. But the court held that IA's actions weren't 'transformative' as their copies served the same purpose as that of the original work, without meaningfully adding new features.

Second, some judges and scholars believe the 'effect of the use on the potential market for or value of the works' should be the most important factor in 'fair use' analysis. Here, the appellate court said IA bore the burden of proving there was no market harm for copyright holders. According to the court, while the publishers hadn't produced any empirical evidence, it was "reasonable and logical" to conclude IA's digital books worked as a competing substitute for licenced editions of physical books. The court also opined that if IA's practices were to become

unrestricted and widespread, they would annihilate publishers' markets across formats. The court discarded the data IA had shared regarding the reportedly negligible effect CDL would have had on the sales of copyrighted work.

### **The future of CDL**

It's possible the IA's 'National Emergency Library' project triggered a panic among the publishers and also predisposed the judges to this outcome. This said, the long-term consequences of the court's approach could matter more.

CDL has had a significant effect: it made the book-lending enterprise more efficient in the digital space and era and ensured people around the world could access books in a legitimate manner (without resorting to piracy, for example), and without causing substantial economic harm to the authors and the publishers.

On the flip side, if we extrapolate from the court's logic in this decision, we could argue that even lending by physical libraries falls afoul of the law because book publishers could argue that physical libraries are eating into the sale of their books. However, as experience has taught us, book-purchasing practices can work differently: readers will continue to buy books despite their being available in a library. Copyright laws in different jurisdictions have allowed libraries to let patrons borrow books in view of the broader public benefits, even if it may cause some economic harm to publishers and/or authors.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu

## **11. Everything about Polaris Dawn mission, which will attempt first private spacewalk**

### **Introduction**

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifted off from Florida recently, carrying American billionaire Jared Isaacman and three others into orbit to attempt the world's first private spacewalk.

The five-day mission, known as Polaris Dawn, is the first of three testing and development missions under the Polaris Program, which will be jointly executed by Isaacman and Elon Musk's SpaceX. The program aims to develop new technologies that could be used to send people to Mars some day.

### **First, what exactly is a 'spacewalk'?**

A spacewalk or an "extravehicular activity (EVA)" is a period of activity spent outside a spacecraft by an astronaut in space.

The first-ever spacewalk was carried out on March 18, 1965, by the Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov at the height of the Space Race — the 20th century competition between the US and USSR over who could conquer space exploration first — during the Cold War. Leonov's walk lasted 10 minutes.

Today, spacewalks are usually done outside the International Space Station (ISS) and can last between five and eight hours.



Spacewalks are done for several reasons, including to carry out science experiments. Astronauts can attach experiments to the outside of a spacecraft during their spacewalk, and observe how the space environment impacts different things. They can also test new equipment, and repair satellites or their spacecraft during the walk.

To carry out a spacewalk, astronauts have to wear a spacesuit and use rope-like safety tethers to attach themselves to their spacecraft. "One end is attached to the spacewalker. The other end is connected to the vehicle. The safety tethers keep astronauts from floating away into space," according to NASA, the US space agency.

The other way is to wear a SAFER (Simplified Aid for EVA Rescue). It is put on like a backpack, and consists of small jet thrusters to help an astronaut move around in space. SAFER is controlled by astronauts with a small joystick.

### Who is on board Polaris Dawn?

At the helm of the Polaris Dawn mission is Isaacman, who is the founder of the electronic payment company Shift4. He has bankrolled the mission along with SpaceX, and is the commander of the crew.

This is Isaacman's second trip into space. In 2021, he went into low-Earth orbit for three days, and then splashed down off Florida.

Apart from Isaacman, the crew comprises Scott Poteet, a retired US Air Force lieutenant colonel; and two SpaceX employees, Anna Menon, a lead space operations engineer, and Sarah Gillis, an engineer who oversees astronaut training.

### What are the mission's objectives?

The crew, who are travelling in SpaceX's Dragon capsule, will first aim to get a maximum of about 1,400 km from Earth. This will be farther away from the 1,372 km altitude that NASA's Gemini XI mission reached in 1966, the record for any crewed mission that was not headed to the Moon.



That height means that the Polaris Dawn mission will be well into the inner band of the Van Allen radiation belts — regions in space that encircle the Earth and are highly radioactive — which begins at around 1,000 km altitude. The crew will use this opportunity to “conduct research with the aim of better understanding the effects of spaceflight and space radiation on human health”.

Subsequently, the capsule would drop to a lower orbit for the rest of the mission, which includes a spacewalk. The spacewalk is scheduled for the third day of the mission.

For the spacewalk, all crew members will put on spacesuits and then, all of the air will be let out of the capsule. The hatch will then be opened and the inside of the spacecraft will become part of the vacuum of outer space.

Only two crew members — Isaacman and Gillis — will leave the capsule for the spacewalk. Poteet and Menon will stay inside to manage the safety tethers and observe readings to ensure that nothing goes awry.

The spacewalk’s main aim is to test the spacesuits, developed by SpaceX for this mission. Known as EVA spacesuits, they are equipped with cameras and heads-up displays that display to the astronauts information about the status of their suits outside their vehicle, according to a report by Euro News. The suits also feature an “improved thermal management”.

Once Isaacman and Gillis return inside, the hatch will be closed and the capsule will be repressurised.

During the mission, the crew will conduct 40 scientific experiments. This includes trying to obtain X-ray images without an X-ray machine, with the help of natural showers of radiation in space.

The crew will also test laser-based communication provided by SpaceX’s Starlink satellite network. This technique allows communication among satellites without relying on ground infrastructure to send signals.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## 12. The Grave Threat of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

### Overview of Antimicrobial Resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) occurs when microbes evolve into drug-resistant "superbugs" due to the misuse or overuse of antibiotics. This growing problem in India poses significant health risks, especially for patients with multiple diseases.

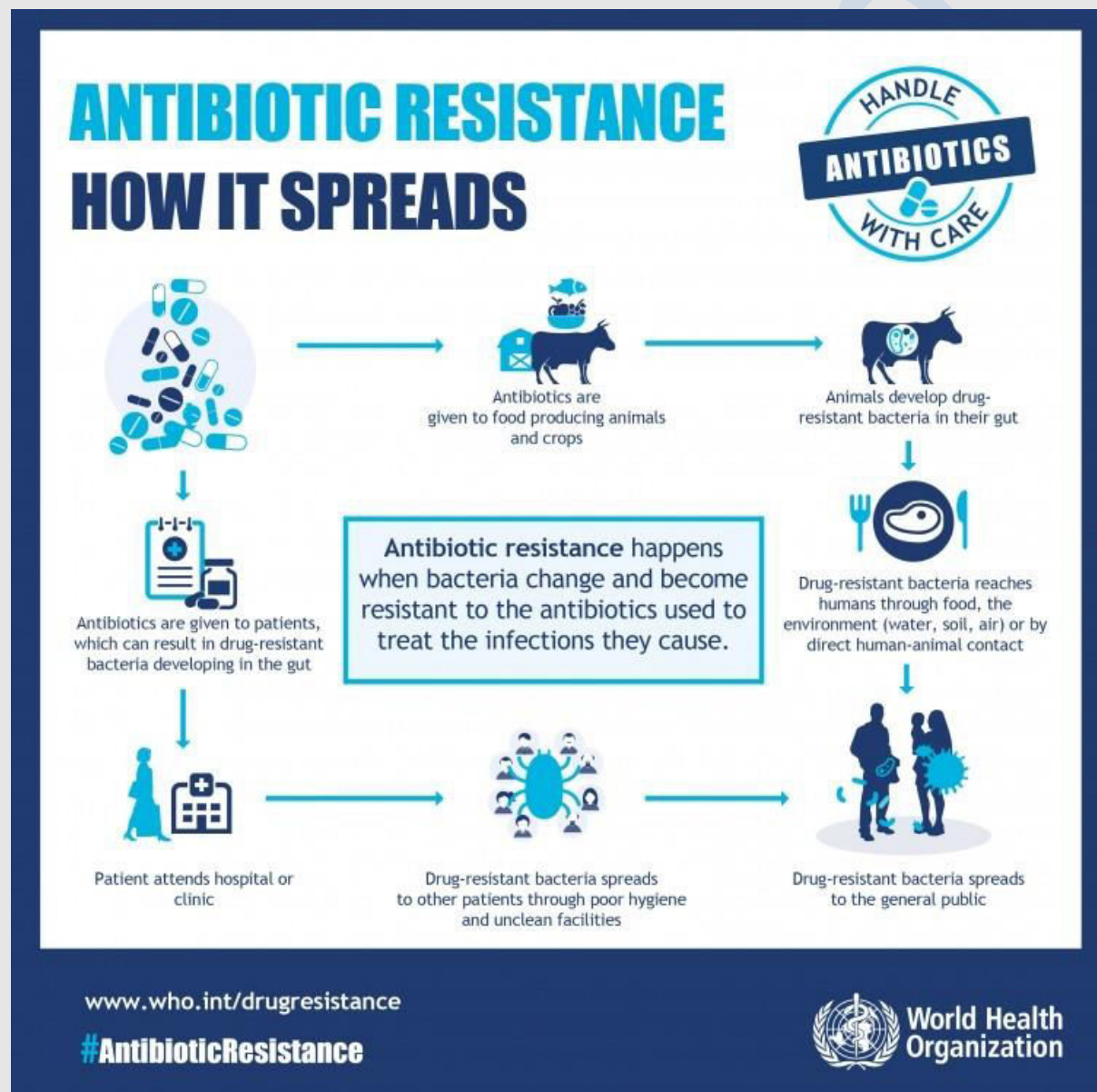
### Key Pathogens in India

A recent report by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) highlights the most common pathogens found in patients:

- **E. coli:** Causes gut infections.
- **Klebsiella pneumoniae:** Can cause pneumonia and urinary tract infections.
- **Acinetobacter baumannii:** Often responsible for hospital-acquired infections.

### Global Concerns and WHO's Guidance on AMR

The World Health Organization (WHO) issued its first-ever guidance on antibiotic pollution from manufacturing, which is contributing to the spread of AMR. This threatens the effectiveness of antibiotics globally, including medicines produced at manufacturing sites.



### Why AMR is Increasing

#### 1. Individual Misuse of Antibiotics

Many people in India misuse antibiotics by taking them for viral infections like the flu, where they are ineffective. This increases resistance in the population.

## **2. Doctors' Prescribing Practices**

Doctors often prescribe broad-spectrum antibiotics that treat a wide range of infections, contributing to resistance. A report from the National Centre for Disease Control found that 71.9% of patients were prescribed antibiotics, with over half being used to prevent, not treat, infections.

## **3. Lack of Diagnostics**

Doctors frequently prescribe antibiotics based on symptoms rather than confirming the cause with diagnostic tests, leading to unnecessary or inappropriate antibiotic use.

## **4. Pharmaceutical Pollution**

The WHO's guidelines on antibiotic manufacturing highlight the environmental impact of pharmaceutical waste, which can promote the development of drug-resistant bacteria.

### **Common Resistant Pathogens in India**

- **E. coli:** Resistance to the antibiotic carbapenem dropped from 81.4% in 2017 to 62.7% in 2023.
- **Klebsiella pneumoniae:** Resistance to carbapenem fell from 58.5% to 35.6% over the same period.
- **Acinetobacter baumannii:** Resistant to 88% of carbapenem treatments in 2023.

### **Measures to Combat AMR**

#### **1. Prevention**

Hygiene improvements, sanitation, and vaccinations can reduce infections and, consequently, the need for antibiotics.

#### **2. Education of Doctors**

Doctors should use antibiotics judiciously, reserving stronger medications for severe hospital-based infections and encouraging diagnostic tests before prescribing.

#### **3. Regulation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturing**

Stronger regulations are needed to control antibiotic pollution from manufacturing facilities, which contributes to the spread of resistance.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## **13. GNSS: The New Satellite-Based Highway Toll Collection System**

## Introduction

India is set to introduce the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) for toll collection on highways, aiming to replace the existing FASTag system. This system will allow vehicles to pay tolls based on the distance traveled, eliminating the need to stop at toll plazas.



## How GNSS Works

Vehicles equipped with GNSS will have their movement tracked by satellite, and tolls will be calculated based on the distance covered. This is a shift from the current system where drivers pay fixed toll amounts. Vehicles can pass through designated GNSS lanes without stopping for a boom barrier, as required in the FASTag system.

## Implementation Timeline

GNSS tolling is expected to be introduced by April 2025. Initially, it will run alongside the existing FASTag system. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has already amended rules to accommodate GNSS tolling, and pilot projects have been completed on highways in Karnataka and Haryana.

## On-Board Unit (OBU) Installation

For GNSS tolling, vehicles will need to be fitted with a non-transferable "on-board unit" (OBU). These OBUs may eventually come factory-fitted in new vehicles, similar to the current FASTag installation process.

## Benefits of GNSS

The GNSS system is expected to reduce congestion at toll plazas, as vehicles will no longer need to stop to have their tolls scanned. This system could significantly cut down wait times at toll booths, which currently cause traffic pile-ups and delays due to the time taken for FASTag barcode scanning.

## Penalties for Non-GNSS Vehicles

Vehicles without GNSS OBUs that enter GNSS lanes will face penalties, including paying double the toll amount. This is designed to encourage wider adoption of the new system.

## What Happens to FASTag?

FASTag will continue to operate alongside GNSS during the initial phase. However, as GNSS adoption increases, all toll lanes will eventually be converted to GNSS lanes. FASTag, which uses RFID technology, has been the primary toll collection method in India since 2015 and remains mandatory for toll payments.

## Conclusion

The GNSS-based toll collection system is set to modernize India's highway tolling infrastructure, offering a more efficient, distance-based tolling system that reduces traffic

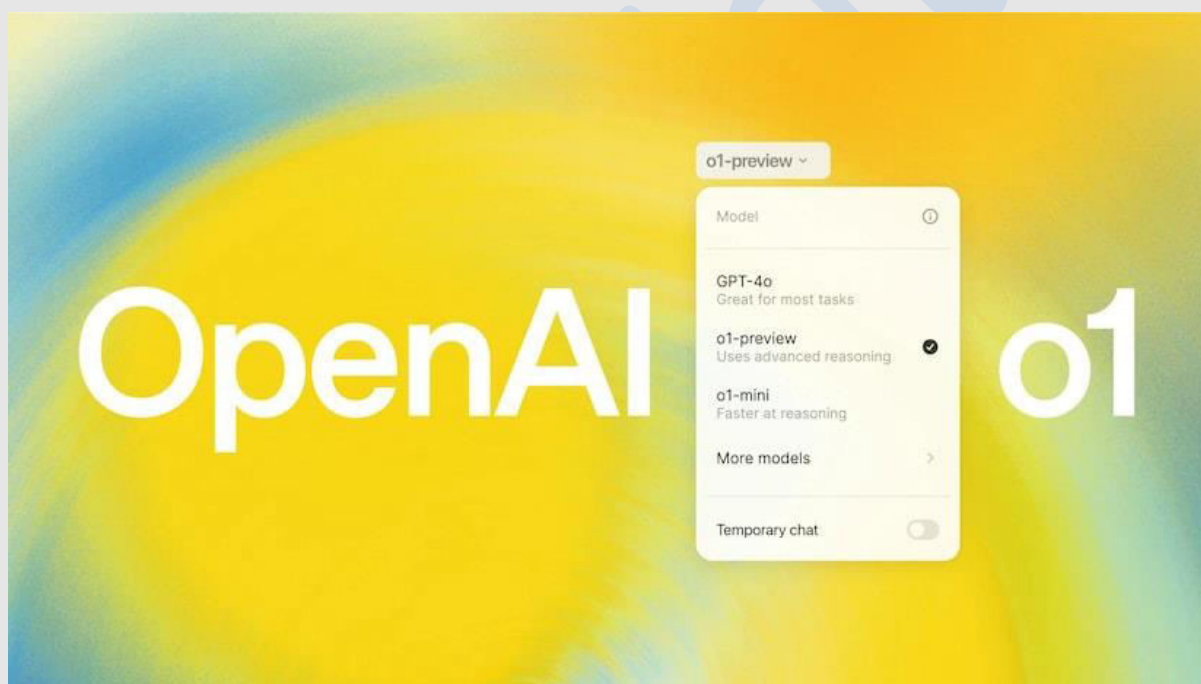
congestion at toll plazas. A Delhi court has granted interim bail to Lok Sabha MP Sheikh Abdul Rashid (Engineer Rashid) until October 2, allowing him to campaign for the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections. Rashid, who has been in Tihar Jail since 2019 in connection with a terror funding case, won the Baramulla Lok Sabha seat as an Independent candidate.

Relevance: GS Prelims & mains Paper III; Science & Technology  
Source: The Hindu

## 14. OpenAI Unveils New AI Model "OpenAI o1"

### Introduction to OpenAI o1

OpenAI has introduced its latest AI model, "OpenAI o1," as part of the secretive "Project Strawberry." This new model is the first in a series of "reasoning" models aimed at solving complex tasks in science, coding, and math. It is designed to improve problem-solving capabilities by approaching problems from different perspectives and learning from mistakes.



### Features of OpenAI o1

The model is built to "think" more carefully before answering queries, similar to how humans tackle difficult problems. OpenAI claims that future updates could allow the model to perform at the level of PhD students in subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology, excelling particularly in math and coding. For example, it solved 83% of problems in a math contest, compared to just 13% by previous versions, and outperformed 89% of coding participants in tests.

### Limitations and Future Updates



Although the OpenAI o1 model marks a significant leap forward, it is an early version and lacks features like web browsing and file management. OpenAI has also released a smaller, cost-effective version, "OpenAI o1-Mini," which is 80% cheaper and targeted at developers for coding tasks.

### **Safety Enhancements**

OpenAI has improved the model's safety by developing a new training method that helps it follow safety guidelines more effectively. The new model scored 84 out of 100 in safety tests, a significant improvement from the earlier version's score of 22. OpenAI is collaborating with governments and safety groups to further test and improve the model.

### **Impact on Jobs and Research**

The advanced reasoning abilities of OpenAI o1 could affect jobs in fields like software development, data analysis, and coding, as it may reduce the need for human involvement in routine tasks. However, it could also open up new opportunities in AI safety and ethical AI use. In research fields like physics, chemistry, and healthcare, the model could assist in solving complex problems, speeding up discoveries and innovation.

### **Access and Usage**

The OpenAI o1 model is available to ChatGPT Plus and Team users, with the option to select either the o1-preview or o1-mini versions. Initial usage limits are set at 30 messages per week for o1-preview and 50 for o1-mini. ChatGPT Enterprise and Edu users will gain access next week, with plans to increase message limits in the future.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

## **15. Nipah Protocol in Kerala**

### **Overview of the Recent Nipah Scare**

On September 9, 2023, a 24-year-old man died of Nipah virus at MES Medical College Hospital in Malappuram, Kerala. The state health authorities confirmed the case after test results from the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune. This marked the second Nipah death in Malappuram in two months.

### **Response to the Positive Test**

Upon confirmation, the health department implemented the Nipah protocol, which included forming 16 committees and identifying those who had close contact with the victim. Kerala's Health Minister, Veena George, declared mandatory restrictions, including the use of face masks and social distancing in public places in Malappuram.

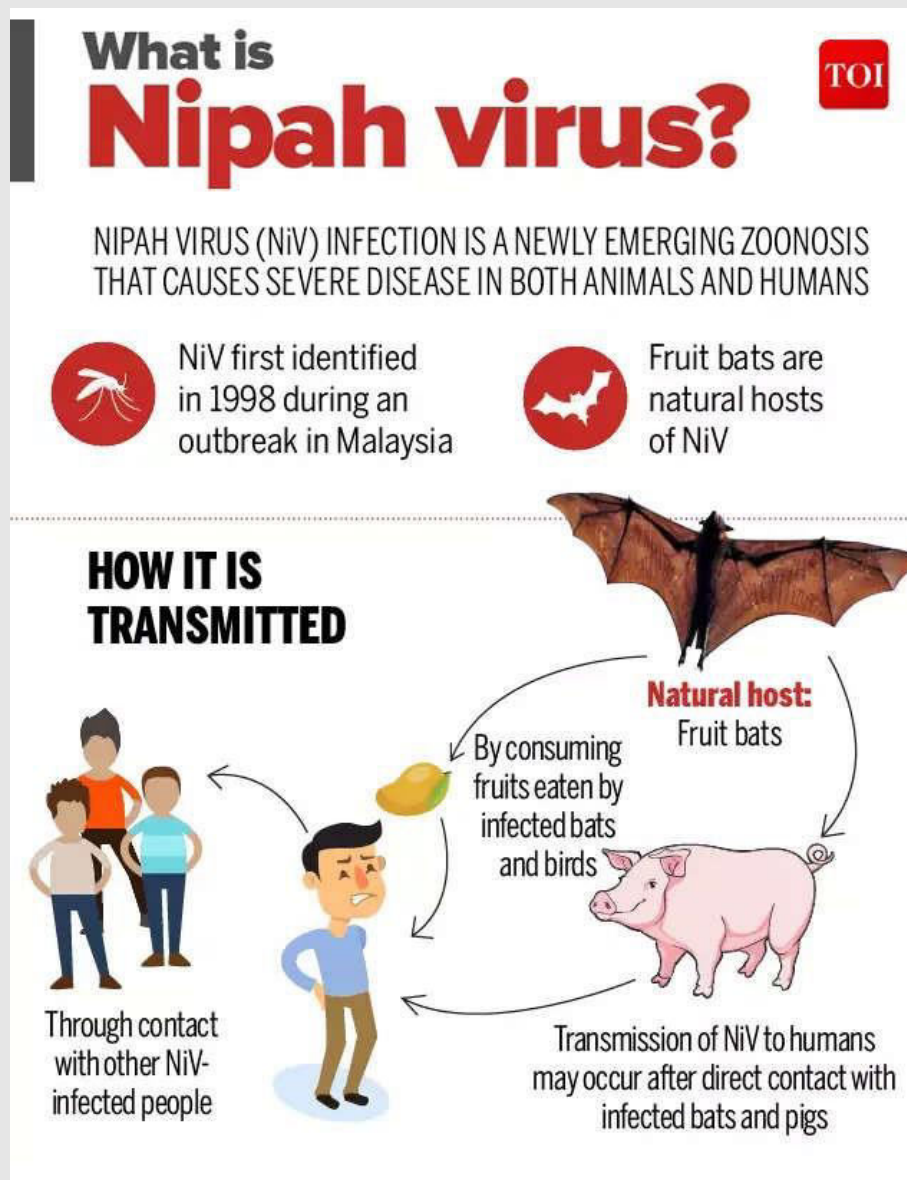
### **Previous Nipah Incidents**

This is Kerala's sixth Nipah outbreak since 2018. The state has reported 22 Nipah-related deaths. The 2018 outbreak in Kozhikode and Malappuram was the deadliest, claiming 17 lives.

Despite interventions, sporadic cases continue to surface, suggesting the virus may persist in the region.

### Delay in Virus Identification

The infected man, a student in Bengaluru, returned home in late August 2023. He sought medical attention for fever and walking difficulty before being admitted on September 8 with symptoms of meningitis or encephalitis. His condition raised suspicions, prompting further tests.



### Government Response

After the case was confirmed, the government acted swiftly by declaring containment zones in five civic wards. Schools, cinemas, and public gathering places were closed, and shops were

allowed to operate only during specific hours. A Nipah control room was set up, and 267 people who had contact with the victim were traced and quarantined.

### **Origin of Nipah Virus**

Bats are considered the primary carriers of the Nipah virus. Transmission usually occurs through the consumption of bat-contaminated fruits or direct contact with infected individuals. However, the exact source of the virus in the recent cases remains unclear.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu

### 1. Who is Indian-origin Kevan Parekh, the new CFO of Apple?

#### Introduction

Apple recently named Kevan Parekh as its chief financial officer (CFO), replacing company veteran Luca Maestri who will transition from the role on January 1, 2025.

In a statement, Tim Cook, the company's chief executive officer (CEO), said, "For more than a decade, Kevan has been an indispensable member of Apple's finance leadership team, and he understands the company inside and out. His sharp intellect, wise judgment, and financial brilliance make him the perfect choice to be Apple's next CFO."



#### Who is Kevan Parekh?

Born in 1972, Parekh is an electrical engineer with a Bachelor of Science from the University of Michigan and an MBA from the University of Chicago.

Before joining Apple, he held various senior leadership roles at Thomson Reuters and General Motors.

#### Role in Apple

Parekh has been with Apple for 11 years — he started as the head of financial support for some of the company's business divisions. Currently, he oversees financial planning, investor relations and market research functions. Parekh took on more responsibility late last year, when Maestri's other top deputy Saori Casey stepped down, according to a report by Bloomberg.

As the CFO of Apple, Parekh will be managing the company's finances and strategy by undertaking major investment and financing decisions, and coordinating with key stakeholders.

#### Indian origin Senior Executives

Parekh has joined the ever-expanding list of Indian-origin people becoming senior executives at global companies. The list includes Microsoft Chief Satya Nadella, Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai, Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen, and Tesla CFO Vaibhav Taneja, among others.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

### 2. Hayao Miyazaki wins Magsaysay Award: Why his animated films resonate with audiences across ages

## Introduction

Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki, considered one of the greatest animators and directors, has won the 2024 Ramon Magsaysay Award. Named after the former President of the Philippines, the awards "honor greatness of spirit shown in service to the peoples of Asia", covering fields such as community service and arts.

The award citation called Miyazaki "one of the industry's foremost exponents of animated films made expressly for children but with a much broader appeal."



### Who is Hayao Miyazaki?

Miyazaki was born in 1941 in Tokyo. His father was the director of a company that manufactured parts for fighter planes during World War II. In his book *Starting Point: 1979 to 1996*, Miyazaki wrote that some of his earliest memories are of "bombed-out cities". By age four, he had witnessed the bombing of Utsunomiya.

Despite having an affinity for manga (a popular style of Japanese comics and graphic novels), Miyazaki initially had trouble drawing people. He spent years drawing planes, battleships and tanks, which found their way into his cinema as well. After studying economics and political science, he began his career as an animator in 1963.

Before the creation of his production company Studio Ghibli, Miyazaki's major projects included the long-running series *World Masterpiece Theater*; and *Future Boy Conan*, which he directed. In the 1969 film *The Wonderful World of Puss 'n Boots*, he worked with other top animators in Japan to execute distinct visual sequences.

### What is Studio Ghibli?

Miyazaki, along with director Isao Takahata and producer Toshio Suzuki, founded Studio Ghibli in 1985 under the publishing company Tokuma Shoten. Most of their films were directed by Miyazaki, with Takahata being the second-biggest contributor.

The Magsaysay Award citation notes: "More than being commercial successes—three Ghibli productions are among Japan's ten top-grossing films—these are works that display a deep understanding of the human condition, engaging their viewers to reflect on their own situation and exercise their humanity."



Their most famous film is perhaps *Spirited Away* (2001). It tells the story of Chihiro, a 10-year-old girl who mysteriously gets trapped in the world of 'Kami' (spirits of Japanese folklore) and must try to return to the human world. *Spirited Away* was the first non-English film to win the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, although Miyazaki refused to attend the award ceremony over his opposition to the Iraq War.

Studio Ghibli has also become synonymous with gentle, aesthetically pleasing visuals — many of which are meticulously hand-drawn by Miyazaki even in the digital age.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Awards

Source: Indian Express

### 3. Everything you need to know about the Emmy Awards

#### Introduction

The 2024 Emmy Awards took place recently at the Peacock Theater in downtown Los Angeles, with controversial Netflix show "Baby Reindeer", kitchen drama "The Bear", and historical Japan-set series "Shōgun" all winning big.



#### What are the Emmy Awards?

The Emmy Awards are the most renowned accolades given to television and emerging media performances. Unlike Oscars and Golden Globe awards, they aren't given for films.

#### When were the Emmy Awards launched?

The Emmy Awards were conceived in 1948 and the first ceremony took place on January 25, 1949. A total of six awards were presented, such as the Most Outstanding Television Personality and Most Popular Television Program.

#### What are the different kinds of Emmy Awards?

Apart from the International Emmy Awards and the Primetime Emmy Awards, the Emmys are also given in the following categories: daytime, sports, news and documentary, technology and engineering, and regional, according to a report by Vox.

While Primetime Emmy Awards honour television shows produced only in America and aired during primetime, International Emmy Awards are for international shows. Daytime Emmy Awards are given to American shows aired during late-morning and afternoon. Regional Emmy Awards are for regional television markets, including state-to-state programming, local news and locally produced shows.

#### Who gives the Emmy awards?

These awards are given by three sister organisations. First is the Television Academy, which administers the Primetime Emmy Awards. Second is the National Academy of Television Arts

& Sciences, which oversees daytime, sports, news and documentary categories. Third is the International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, which is responsible for International Emmys.

Each organisation maintains its own membership of television professionals who vote and decide who will get the award.

### **What does the name 'Emmy' stand for?**

The word "Emmy" doesn't stand for anything and only refers to the award. According to the Emmy Awards website, initially, it was supposed to be named "Immy," which was "a nickname for the image-orthicon camera tube instrumental in the technical development of television." However, it was later modified to a more "feminine" name, "Emmy", because the award statuette "depicts the winged 'muse of art uplifting the electron of science'," the website added.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

## **4. Jhumpa Lahiri Rejects US Award Over Keffiyeh Ban**

### **Incident Summary**

Renowned Indian-American author, Jhumpa Lahiri, declined the 2024 Isamu Noguchi Award from New York's Noguchi Museum. This decision followed the museum's firing of three employees for wearing keffiyeh scarves, which are traditionally associated with Palestinian solidarity. The museum's new dress code bans political symbols and attire, sparking controversy.

### **Museum's Response**

The museum confirmed that Lahiri withdrew from the award in light of the updated policy, which prohibits employees from wearing clothing with political messages or symbols.

### **What is the Keffiyeh?**

#### **Origins and Design**

The keffiyeh is a traditional Middle Eastern headscarf, typically made from cotton with patterns that reflect local culture, such as fishing nets and olive tree leaves. It was historically worn by people from lower classes, including farmers and Bedouins.

#### **Cultural Significance**

While it started as practical protection from the desert sun, the keffiyeh has come to symbolize Palestinian nationalism and resistance, particularly against British and later Israeli rule.

#### **Keffiyeh as a Symbol of Palestinian Resistance**

### Rise to Symbolism

The scarf became a symbol of national unity in the 1930s during the British mandate over Palestine. Its prominence grew after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, symbolizing Palestinian resilience and connection to the land.



### Notable Figures

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and South African icon Nelson Mandela famously wore the keffiyeh in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

### Controversies Surrounding the Keffiyeh

#### Bans in the West

In some Western countries, the keffiyeh is viewed as a symbol of opposition to Israel, leading to occasional bans. After the 2023 Hamas-Israel conflict, several legislative bodies, including those in Canada's Ontario province and Australia's Victoria, restricted its display in government chambers.

### Commercialization Criticism

The keffiyeh gained global attention as a fashion accessory in the 2000s. This sparked backlash from Palestinians, who criticized brands for appropriating the cultural symbol without acknowledging its historical significance.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

## 5. All about Neom, the controversial Saudi project that promises a desert utopia

### Introduction

Earlier this month, The Wall Street Journal published a highly critical report on Neom, the ambitious Saudi megacity project championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"Saudi Arabia's Neom project contends with corruption, worker deaths, racism and misogyny," The WSJ report said. Here is all you need to know about what is the world's largest construction project, and the many controversies that have plagued it.

### What is Neom?

Neom was visualised as part of Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030 project, which sought to diversify the country's economy and thus reduce its dependence on oil.

Spread over an area of 26,500 sq km, Neom is situated in Saudi Arabia's western Tabuk province. First announced by the Crown Prince in 2017, its name is a fusion of the Greek word "neo" meaning "new", and the Arabic word "mustaqbal" meaning "future".

Initially pegged to be a \$500-billion project, the costs have swelled to \$1.5 trillion, according to a Bloomberg report from April 2024. It is set to be completed in 2039.

Neom will comprise five regions, each home to a project ambitious in design, scale and imagination.

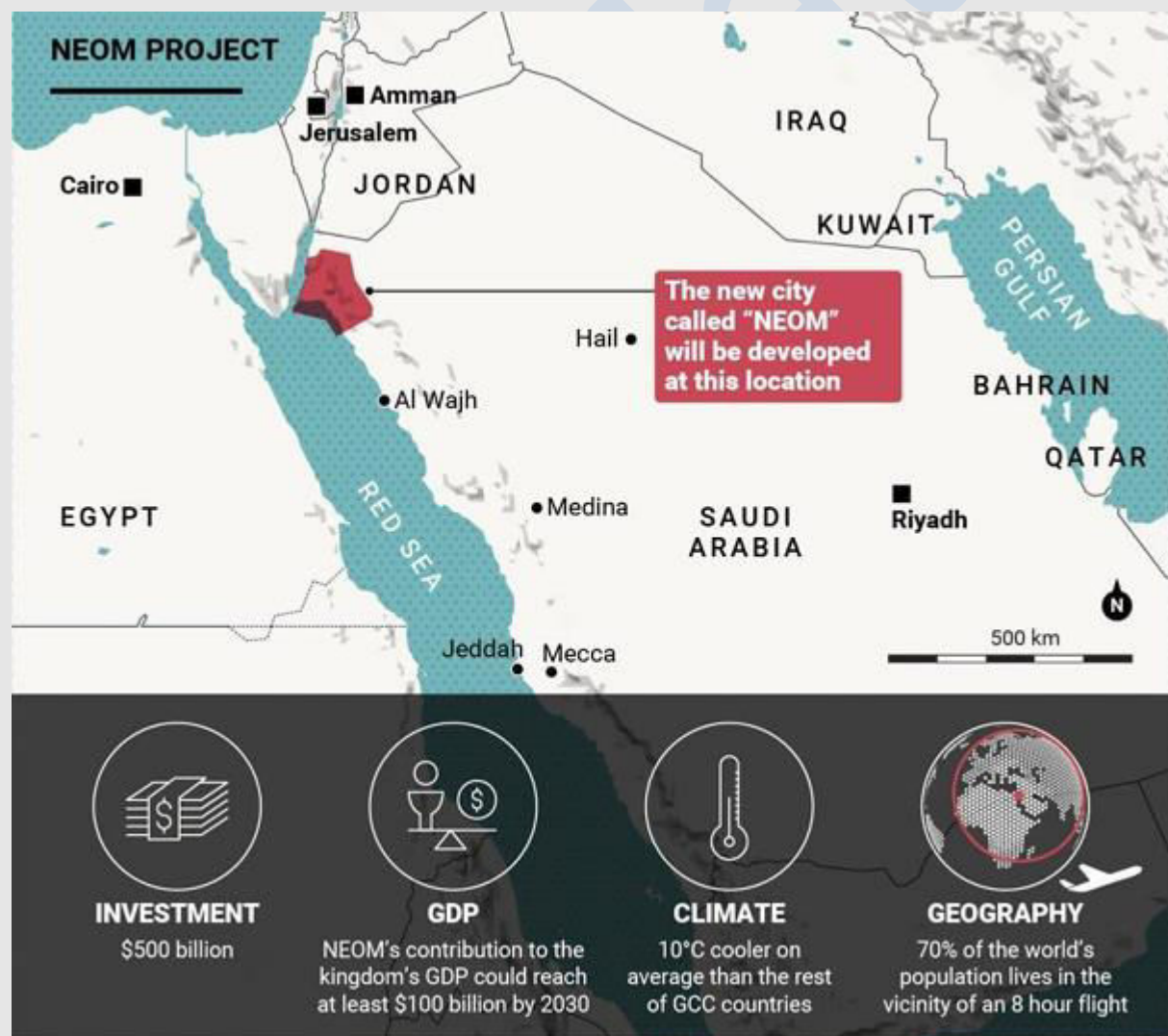
**1. The Line** – Probably the best-known among all the Neom projects, the Line will be built as a 170-kilometre-long mirrored city line spanning 34 square kilometres across the desert. The original plans for the city had "vertically layered" buildings 500 metres tall and 200 metres wide. Designed to be entirely walkable, the city will be powered by 95 per cent renewable energy.

**2. Oxagon** – The Oxagon is an octagonal industrial city which will house an integrated industrial port and residential apartments. Oxagon too will be powered entirely by renewable energy.

**3. Trojena** – Trojena is set to host the Asian Winter Games in 2029. The region is home to Saudi Arabia's tallest mountains, and will house a ski resort. According to the Neom website, Trojena "experiences sub-zero winter temperatures and has a year-round moderate climate that is cooler on average than the rest of the region".

**4. Magna** – Magna is designed to be a luxury lifestyle coastal destination, located on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. The region will house 12 premiere destinations spanning 120 kilometres, and will be home to a nature reserve which aims to be the "gold standard in sustainable tourism".

**5. Sindalah** – Sindalah is a luxury island in the Red Sea, which hopes to rival the likes of the Greek isles, the Caribbean Sea and the Mediterranean coastline, all favoured by yacht and boat owners. Set to open this year, Sindalah will span 840,000 square metres.





## **What are the various controversies that have plagued Neom?**

Neom's development, however, has not been without a hitch. Here are some controversies that have plagued it.

### **1. Displacement of the indigenous residents**

The BBC in 2020 reported that Saudi security forces were resorting to force to evict the Huwaitat tribe, the indigenous residents of the Tabuk region where Neom is being built. Col Rabih Alenezi, a former Saudi intelligence officer, told the BBC in May 2024 that he had been ordered to evict the Huwaitat villagers from al-Khuraybah, located 4.5 kilometres south of The Line. He also said that the Saudi authorities had approved the use of lethal force to achieve the same.

The UN in 2023 expressed alarm at the Saudi government's imminent execution of Huwaiti dissenters for protesting their forced evictions while being charged as terrorists.

### **2. Sluggish progress of the projects**

Bloomberg in April 2024 reported that the Neom project had been considerably scaled down. While the goal was to accommodate 1.5 million of the 9 million residents in The Line by 2030, officials currently believe the mirrored city will only house a maximum of 300,000 residents. Additionally, only 1.4 kilometres of the project would be completed by 2030.

This has raised concern about Neom's readiness to host the 2029 Asian Winter Games in Trojena.

### **3. Apathy of the higher-ups at Neom**

From the start, Mohammed bin Salman has delegated key elements of the project to executives who would get the job done by any means. This often meant basic workplace ethics were given a pass and toxic behaviour was actively encouraged. More troublingly, those who were hired often had to leave their previous jobs due to workplace misconduct or crimes.

Following news of the deaths of three construction workers, Wayne Borg, the Managing Director of Neom's media division felt inconvenienced by the situation and made racist and classist remarks according to The Wall Street Journal. He said, "A whole bunch of people die so we've got to have a meeting on a Sunday night".

Borg went on to call Neom's blue-collar employees, who mostly hail from the Indian subcontinent, "f--ing morons", saying "That is why white people are at the top of the pecking order."

#### 4. Concerns about surveillance

A 2020 Neom press release announced its intent to create “cognitive cities,” which would rely on real-time information to anticipate and offer proactive insights to its residents. In effect, this would imply constant monitoring of internet use, and create a surveillance state, something that critics have raised fears of.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

#### 6. Random checks finds ‘not of standard quality’ drugs in market

##### Introduction

Samples of around 50 medicines, including some common ones such as paracetamol (used for fever), metformin (first line of treatment for diabetes), and pantoprazole (used for acidity), have been found to be spurious or not of standard quality by the country’s top drug regulator. These findings came out of a routine, periodic exercise by the regulator, in which medicine samples are tested randomly for quality.



##### CDSCO and NSQ

Every month, the regulator, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), releases a list of drugs that are found to be “not of standard quality” (NSQ) during checks. Central and state regulators periodically collect samples of various medicines from the market at random and put them through tests.

A list of medicines that fail the test, along with the parameters on which they have fallen short, is published every month.

##### Why this is done

The monthly lists are released to inform the general public, government health departments, industry, and the state drug regulators of the drugs available in the market that may not be of the desired quality.

As the samples are tested at random and the results are made public, it is also a way to tell drug manufacturing companies that their products are under constant watch.

Why drugs fail tests

Drugs that fail quality checks broadly fall into three categories.

**SPURIOUS DRUGS:** These are essentially fakes — products that pretend to be popular brands of medicines, which mislead people into buying them. These fakes may or may not contain the active ingredient, and are not manufactured by the company that makes the drug of that brand name.

For example, samples of telmisartan (used for the treatment of hypertension) and pantoprazole were found to have been not manufactured by the companies whose branding they carried, Glenmark and Sun Pharma respectively.

**POOR QUALITY:** Drugs that may contain a faulty description, or may not dissolve in the proper way, or may have a lesser quantity of active ingredient, etc. are considered to be not of standard quality, or NSQ. These medicines may not actively harm the person who consumes them, but the patient may suffer because the drug fails to do what it is meant to.

Metformin, which is on the recently released list for August, failed the dissolution test, which means that the medicine, once consumed, would not dissolve properly and work in the way it is supposed to.

**ADULTERATED DRUGS:** These contain contaminants or adulterants that can cause direct harm to the person who consumes them. The entire batches of these drugs are usually recalled by the regulator; the company too, could initiate a recall on its own.

### **What you should do**

The drug regulator's alerts are not intended to cause alarm or panic. They are mainly in the nature of flags to companies to self-correct, or to regulators to take necessary action.

That some randomly picked samples of a drug have been found to be NSQ does not mean every pill or capsule of that drug available in the market is fake or dangerous. You can continue to consume these medicines if they have been prescribed to you.

However, the fact that a sample was found to be NSQ in theory also means that there could be other, undetected fakes in the market.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

## Practice Questions

1. Recently Indian-origin Kevan Parekh has been appointed as
  - (a) CFO of Google
  - (b) CFO of Meta
  - (c) CFO of Amazon
  - (d) CFO of Apple
2. Which of the following is a Navratna CPSEs?
  - (a) Airports Authority of India
  - (b) Antrix Corporation Limited
  - (c) Balmer Lawrie & Co. Limited
  - (d) SJVN
3. Recently in News, Rule 170 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act
  - (a) Seeks to promote AYUSH medicines in market
  - (b) Seeks to grant equal status to AYUSH medicines as allopathic medicines
  - (c) Seeks to restrict AYUSH products use in serious illness
  - (d) Seeks to prevent misleading advertisements of AYUSH products
4. Universal Service Obligation Fund has been rechristened as
  - (a) National Telecommunications Fund
  - (b) Rural Telecommunications Fund
  - (c) Digital Sanchar Nidhi
  - (d) Digital Bharat Nidhi
5. The Project Strawberry to develop general artificial intelligence belongs to which of the following companies?
  - (a) OpenAI
  - (b) Apple
  - (c) Microsoft
  - (d) Meta
6. Aparajita bill which prescribes death as the maximum punishment in all cases of rape has been passed by which of the following States?
  - (a) West Bengal
  - (b) Maharashtra
  - (c) Gujarat
  - (d) Andhra Pradesh
7. Law Commission is constituted

- (a) under definite provision of Constitution
- (b) under definite provision of Law
- (c) upon order of Supreme Court
- (d) by Union Ministry of Law and Justice

8. The Prime Minister in France is appointed

- (a) directly by the people of France
- (b) by the members of National Assembly
- (c) by the President
- (d) by the Supreme Court of France

9. According to a recent study published in the journal Nature, which country has been blamed to be largest producer of plastic waste?

- (a) India
- (b) Nigeria
- (c) Indonesia
- (d) China

10. Recently in news, 'PresVu' is

- (a) a new safety feature in vehicles
- (b) a tool to check seismic stability of surface
- (c) an eye drop to rectify presbyopia
- (d) a space cell designed by ISRO

11. Which Middle-East Country has signed recently in 2024 its first ever memorandum of understanding (MoU) for civil nuclear cooperation with India?

- (a) Qatar
- (b) Oman
- (c) Bahrain
- (d) UAE

12. Which of the following countries does not share border with South China Sea?

- (a) Vietnam
- (b) Brunei
- (c) Taiwan
- (d) Thailand

13. What is common among *E. coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae* and *Acinetobacter baumannii*?

- (a) They have become extinct.
- (b) They are meant to survive in extremely hot temperatures.



- (c) They can survive only in animals, not in human beings.
- (d) They have shown antibiotic resistance in the past.

14. The recently launched 'Mission Mausam' to Enhance Climate Preparedness will be implemented by

- (a) Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare
- (b) Ministry of Earth Sciences
- (c) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- (d) Ministry of Science and Technology

15. Recently, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) health cover has been expanded to all Indians

- (a) of age 60 years and above
- (b) of age 65 years and above
- (c) of age 70 years and above
- (d) of age 75 years and above

16. The Supreme Court has repeatedly used the expression "caged parrot" for which government agency?

- (a) CBI
- (b) ED
- (c) NIA
- (d) IB

17. Which of the following places has been renamed as Sri Vijaya Puram

- (a) Mussorie
- (b) Port Blair
- (c) Dalhousie
- (d) Killer

18. Which State has launched Subhadra scheme in which money transfer will be made to eligible women?

- (a) Andhra Pradesh
- (b) Telangana
- (c) Maharashtra
- (d) Odisha

19. Who has the power to dissolve Delhi Legislative assembly?

- (a) Chief Minister of Delhi
- (b) The President of India
- (c) The Prime Minister of India

(d) Delhi Lt. Governor

20. Which is the proposed article to introduce proposal of simultaneous elections in the Constitution?

- (a) 80A
- (b) 81B
- (c) 82A
- (d) 83A

21. Which country is the largest producer of milk?

- (a) USA
- (b) China
- (c) New Zealand
- (d) India

22. Where is India's largest Bio-CNG plant located?

- (a) Indore
- (b) Bhopal
- (c) Gwalior
- (d) Satna

23. Which of the following countries are Members of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)?

- (a) India, Japan, Australia and USA
- (b) India, South Korea, Japan and USA
- (c) India, Australia, South Korea and USA
- (d) India, Japan, South Korea and USA

24. UNFCCC CoP 29 will be held in November 2024 at

- (a) New Delhi, India
- (b) Paris, France
- (c) Baku, Azerbaijan
- (d) Manila, Philippines

25. Which among the following has been recently elected as the President of Sri Lanka?

- (a) Aruna Kumara Dissanayake
- (b) Sajith Premadasa
- (c) Ranil Wickremasinghe
- (d) Mahinda Rajapakasa

26. Which of the following statements correctly conveys the upcoming mission of ISRO?

- (a) ISRO plans to launch orbiter to Sun by 2030.
- (b) ISRO plans to launch orbiter to Jupiter by 2029.
- (c) ISRO plans to launch orbiter to Venus by 2028
- (d) ISRO plans to launch orbiter to moon by 2026.

27. Presently, Cheetah are present in India in which of the following habitats?

- (a) Kaziranga National Park
- (b) Gir National Park
- (c) Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary
- (d) Panna tiger reserve

28. The futuristic city, Neom, is being developed in which of the following countries?

- (a) Japan
- (b) New Zealand
- (c) UAE
- (d) Saudi Arabia

29. Which of the following wearables is used as symbol of Palestinian nationalism and resistance?

- (a) Burkini
- (b) Kippah
- (c) Keffiyeh
- (d) Amulet

30. In recent years, which of the following States has not withdrawn the General consent to CBI?

- (a) West Bengal
- (b) Karnataka
- (c) Kerala
- (d) Uttar Pradesh

### Answer Key

1.(d)	2.(d)	3.(d)	4.(d)	5.(a)	6.(a)
7.(d)	8. (c)	9. (a)	10.(c)	11.(d)	12.(d)
13.(d)	14.(b)	15.(c)	16.(a)	17.(b)	18.(d)
19.(d)	20.(c)	21.(d)	22.(a)	23.(a)	24.(c)
25.(a)	26.(c)	27.(c)	28.(d)	29.(c)	30.(d)