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Why in news?

- India celebrated the 75th anniversary of Operation Polo on September 13, 2023. On this day in 1948, Indian Army launched to integrate the princely state of Hyderabad.

About

- Intentions of Nizam of Hyderabad state, Mir Osman Ali Shah, of keeping his state as an independent entity and did not join India or Pakistan after Independence.
- Standstill agreement:** Nizam signed a standstill agreement with India in November 1947.
- This essentially meant that a status quo would be maintained between the Indian dominion and the Hyderabad state till a solution was found.
- The agreement was signed for a period of one year during which the Indian government would not exercise any authority over Hyderabad.

Operation Polo on the Ground

- The Indian forces were led by Maj Gen Jayanto Nath Chaudhuri, the General Officer Commanding of 1 Armoured Division.
- The Nizam of Hyderabad announced a ceasefire on September 17.
- On September 18, Maj Gen Chaudhuri entered Hyderabad city with his forces and Maj Gen El Edroos surrendered to him.
- Maj Gen Chaudhuri was later appointed the Military Governor of Hyderabad.

Why in news?

- Recently, The G20 Leaders' Summit at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, featured a stunning 27-foot Nataraja sculpture, the world's tallest representation of Lord Shiva in his dancing form.

About

- The statue is an **ashtadhatu** (eight- metal alloy) piece of art, crafted by sculptors from Swamimalai in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. Weighing about 18 tonnes, it was hauled across the country on a 36- wheel trailer.
- 61 year old Srikanda Sthapathy**, who created this statue along with his brothers says that the design draws inspiration from three revered
- Nataraja idols — the Thillai Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram, the Uma Maheswarar Temple in Konerirajapuram, and the Brihadeeswara (Big) Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in Thanjavur.
- All three temples the Bharat Mandapam Nataraja statue is inspired from were originally constructed by the Cholas.
- The Cholas were devout Shaivites, building elaborate Shiva temples across their territories.
- Nataraja is encompassed by flaming aureole or halo which can be interpreted as the circle of the world which the Nataraja both fills and oversteps. In his upper right hand he holds a damru, in his upper left arm, he holds agni, which he can wield to destroy the universe.
- Nataraja also reassures, and shows **Shiva as the Protector**. With his front right hand, he makes the '**abhayamudra**' (a gesture that allays fear), and with his raised feet, and with his front left arm he points to his raised feet, asking his devotees to seek refuge at his feet. Strikingly, Nataraja almost always wears a broad smile.
- Shiva is also the '**Lord of Dance**' or **Nataraja**, who is said to have invented no less than 108 different dances, some calm and gentle, others fierce, orgiastic and terrible.
- The sculptors who created the 27-foot-tall Bharat Mandapam Nataraja trace their lineage 34 generations back to the Cholas. The process used has also been passed down from the time. The crafting process adopted was the traditional '**lost-wax**' casting method, indigenous to the Chola era.
- The project took a total of seven months to complete and **cost around Rs 10 crore**.

Why in news?

- A replica of Konark Wheel from the Sun temple in Odisha's Puri served as the backdrop at the G20 summit.

Highlights

- The Konark Sun Temple was built in the **13th century** by **King Narasimhadeva I** of the **Eastern Ganga Dynasty**. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- The temple follows the Kalinga or Orissa style of architecture, which is a subset of the nagara style of Hindu temple architecture.
- The word '**Konark**' is a combination of two Sanskrit words **kona (corner or angle)** and **arka (the sun)**. The temple is conceived as a giant stone chariot with 24 wheels and 7 horses.
- The Konark Chakra represents the wheel of the Sun God's chariot. The wheel with **24 spokes**, which has also been adapted into the Tricolour, embodies India's ancient wisdom, advanced civilisation and architectural excellence.
- Interestingly, the spokes of the wheels can be used as a sundial. By observing the shadow cast by the spokes, one can determine the approximate time of day.
- This temple was called the "**Black Pagoda**" in European sailor accounts because it looked like a great tiered tower which appeared black. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the "**White Pagoda**".

Why in news?

- Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar raised the national flag at the **Gaja Dwar (elephant gate)** of India's new **Parliament building just days before its first session**.

About

- The new Parliament has six entrances, each signifying a different role.
- The sculpture of an elephant or Gaja has been installed to guard the entrance to the north, since the animal represents wisdom and wealth, intellect, and memory, and also embodies the aspirations of the elected representatives of the democracy.
- According to Vastu shastra, the northern direction is associated with planet **Mercury**, which is the **source of higher intellect**. Also, the Lord of the direction is Kubera, the god of wealth. Therefore, the Gaja is placed to the north.
- In the New Parliament Building, red sandstone sculptures of auspicious animals have been installed as '**guardian statues**' on all the six entrances based on their importance in Indian culture, their aesthetic appearance, positive qualities, and the study of Vaastu Shastra.

Why in news?

- Santiniketan, a residential school and centre for art established by Rabindranath Tagore in Birbhum district of West Bengal, was recently included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List.

About

- **Santiniketan has been recognized by UNESCO as India's 41st World Heritage Site.**
- It is an ensemble of historic buildings, landscapes and gardens, pavilions, artworks, and continuing educational and cultural traditions that together express its Outstanding Universal Value.
- In 1862, Rabindranath Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, spotted this scenic landscape and decided to establish an ashram, building a house called **Santiniketan**, meaning "**abode of peace**".
- The area, originally called **Bhubadanga**, was renamed Santiniketan by Debendranath Tagore due to its conducive environment for meditation.

- In 1901, Rabindranath Tagore chose a significant portion of land and established a school based on the Brahmachary Ashram model. This school later evolved into Visva Bharati University.
- The Ministry of Culture proposed Santiniketan for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List, emphasising its importance in human values, architecture, arts, town planning, and landscape design.
- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has been involved in the restoration of several structures in Santiniketan, preserving its historical and cultural heritage.

Hoysala temples of Karnataka inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage sites

History & Culture

Context

- The Hoysala temples at Belur, Halebid, and Somanathapur in Karnataka were declared as India's 42nd UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Chennakeshava Temple in Belur

- It was built by Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana to commemorate his victory over the Cholas in 1116 AD.
- Beluru (also known earlier as Velapuri, Velur and Belapur in olden times) is situated on the banks of the Yagachi River and was one of the capitals of the Hoysala Empire.
- It is a star-shaped temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, and is the main temple in the temple complex at Belur.

Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebid

- This twin-shrined temple is perhaps the largest Shiva temple built by the Hoysalas.
- The sculptures depict various aspects of Shiva, as well as scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavata Purana.
- Halebid has a walled complex containing three Jaina basadi (temples) of the Hoysala period as well as a stepped well.

Keshava Temple of Somanathapur

- It is a beautiful Trikuta Temple dedicated to Lord Krishna in three forms-Janardhana, Keshava and Venugopala.
- The main Keshava idol is missing, and the Janardhana and Venugopala idols are damaged.

International Literacy Day

History & Culture

Why in news?

- Union Home Minister greeted the nation on International Literacy Day celebrated on September 8.

About

- Since 1967, International Literacy Day (ILD) celebrations have taken place annually around the world to remind the public of the importance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights, and to advance the literacy agenda towards a more literate and sustainable society.
- Despite progress made, literacy challenges persist with at least **773 million adults** worldwide lacking basic literacy skills today.
- International Literacy Day (ILD) 2020 will focus on "**Literacy teaching and learning in the COVID-19 crisis and beyond**" with a focus on the role of educators and changing pedagogies.
- The theme will highlight literacy learning in a lifelong learning perspective and therefore mainly focus on youth and adults.



Why in news?

- The **Indian Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA)** released a report on '**Pathways to Circular Economy in Indian Electronics Sector**' in collaboration with NITI Aayog, aiming to harness e-waste for new opportunities.

Details of the report

- The report suggests changing the approach to e-waste management, creating a system where **discarded electronics can be reused**, and **their components and precious metals reintroduced into new hardware**, potentially offering a \$7 billion market opportunity.
- The Union Government introduced the **E-Waste (Management) Rules in 2022** to digitise the e-waste management process.
- The informal sector in India plays a significant role in e-waste management, with about **90% of collection** and **70% of recycling** handled by the informal sector, often involving repair and spare parts.
- A circular economy for e-waste is important due to the growing demand for electronics, the use of scarce resources, and high emissions in their production.
- India needs a policy push to encourage manufacturers to reuse old components, as seen in China's efforts to incorporate secondary raw materials into new products.
- The report suggests public-private partnerships to establish a "**reverse supply chain**" for collecting, wiping, and processing devices for e-waste.
- Challenges include the large informal sector, concerns about personal data on old devices, and the need for material clustering for recycling plants.
- Developing a formal and reliable approach to e-waste management is crucial, as the availability of '**virgin**' **components** diminishes over time.

Global Bio-Fuel Alliance

Environment & Geography

Why in news?

- India-led grouping came together to give impetus to the production and use of biofuels. An alternative to fossil fuels like petroleum and diesel. The grouping is called the **Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA)**.

About the Alliance

- India, Brazil, and the US are the founding members of the alliance.
- The three founding members of the alliance, the US, India and Brazil contribute about 85% of the global production and 81% of the consumption of ethanol.
- Being set up at par with the International Solar Alliance, the biofuel alliance's focus is on accelerated adoption of biofuels, creating new biofuels, setting globally recognized standards, identifying global best practices, and ensuring industry participation.

International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies

Environment & Geography

Why in news?

- 7th September - The International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies.

About the event

- The theme chosen for the International Day of Clean Air and Blue Skies this year is "**Together for clean air**".
- Air pollution is a significant concern, with lung cancer responsible for 10 million global deaths in 2020, projected to increase by **3.2 million by 2050**.
- South Asia, home to two billion people,
- houses nine of the world's ten most polluted cities, including Delhi.
- Delhi experiences hazardous levels of air pollution every winter, leading to severe health issues, including lung cancer, cardiovascular disorders, respiratory ailments, and mental health problems.

- Air pollution disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women, children, and the elderly.
- In 2019, **1.67 million deaths** in India were attributed to air pollution, accounting for **17.8%** of total deaths in the country.
- Various efforts to combat air pollution are underway, including innovative solutions like the PUSA Decomposer, state-level policies, and startups turning agricultural waste into valuable products.
- Viable solutions to air pollution include implementing car-free zones, green spaces, electrified public transportation, and nature-based solutions, as demonstrated in cities worldwide.
- Some countries, like China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, are taking significant steps to reduce pollution through clean energy, emissions reduction, and biomass projects.
- **UNESCO** is involved in initiatives to combat air pollution, such as an internal carbon tax on flight tickets and the World Air Quality Project, providing **real-time air quality data**.
- Clean-Air-For-Schools spreads awareness and education about clean air, and various activities include adopting electric vehicles, energy-efficient lighting, and green infrastructure.
- Despite global environmental awareness, there is no specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for "**Clean Air to Breathe**."
- In 2019, the UN General Assembly designated **September 7** as the **International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies**.

2nd Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability

Environment & Geography

Why in news?

- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change participated in the virtual '**High Level Dialogue on Human Health and Environment**' convened under the **2nd Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability**.

About the forum

- The Berlin forum on chemicals and sustainability, organised by the German Federal Ministry for Nature, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, aims to promote a common understanding and provide political guidance on key international issues related to sound chemical and waste management, focusing on a '**Just Transition Towards a Pollution-free Planet**'.
- It also aimed to garner support and ensure a high level of ambition of the '**SAICM Beyond 2020**' during the upcoming **5th meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5)**.

Hazardous Chemicals

- It is a chemical that has properties with the potential to do harm to human or animal health, the environment, or capable of damaging property.

Classification

- **Flammable chemicals** - These chemicals can catch fire easily and can ignite at relatively low temperatures. Example - Gasoline, ethanol, propane, and acetone
- **Toxic chemicals** - These substances can cause harm or even death when they are inhaled, ingested, or encounter the skin. Example - Mercury, lead, asbestos, and cyanide
- **Corrosive chemicals** - These are highly reactive and can cause severe damage to living tissues or materials they meet. Example - Sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, sodium hydroxide, and ammonia
- **Reactive chemicals** - These are unstable and can undergo rapid chemical reactions, releasing heat, gases, or causing explosions. Example - Potassium permanganate, hydrogen peroxide, chlorine, and sodium azide
- **Carcinogenic chemicals** - Prolonged exposure to these chemicals can increase the risk of developing cancer. Example - Benzene, formaldehyde, asbestos, and arsenic

Why in news?

- Every year, 16th September (established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994) is observed as the International Day for Preservation of Ozone layer (World Ozone Day). It is celebrated to commemorate the signing of the **Montreal Protocol on Ozone Depleting Substances** in 1987.

About the world Ozone day

- Ozone primarily exists in the Earth's Stratosphere, positioned at altitudes ranging from 10 to **50 kilometres** above the Earth's surface.
- The ozone layer serves as a protective barrier, guarding the planet against the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays.
- Unfortunately, this vital layer is facing gradual depletion due to the presence of **Ozone- Depleting Substances**, which include compounds like CFCs, HCFCs, halons, methyl bromide, carbon tetrachloride, and methyl chloroform.

Why in news?

- A recent study argues that we should broaden our perspective to consider the impact of light pollution on coastal marine ecosystems.

About the light pollution

- Light pollution in the context of marine environments refers to the **overabundance or improper direction of artificial light**, which has detrimental effects on marine habitats and organisms.
- Artificial lighting encompasses light generated from man-made sources, including sources like candles, fire, and electricity.
- Recent scientific findings reveal that approximately **1.9 million** square kilometres of the world's oceans are subjected to biologically noteworthy levels of artificial light pollution, extending to a depth of one metre (or approximately three feet).
- This area accounts for **roughly 3%** of the **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)** worldwide.
- Disturbs the reproductive cycles of some animals.
- Disturbs migration of birds that navigate using the stars and to disorient night-flying insects.
- In humans, it disturbs circadian rhythms that regulate hormones and other bodily functions.
- Excessive blue light emitted from LEDs directly affects sleep patterns in humans by suppressing the production of the hormone melatonin, which mediates the sleep-wake cycle in humans.

Why in news?

- The **International Rhino Foundation (IRF)** published the report, "**State of the Rhino, 2023**", which documents current population estimates for the **five** surviving rhino species in **Africa and Asia**.

About the report

- **Global Poaching Threat:** Poaching still threatens all five rhino species and has increased in several regions that had not previously been targeted.
- **White Rhinos in South Africa:** continues to face devastating poaching losses of its white rhinos.
- **Black Rhino Resilience:** Black rhino populations are increasing despite constant poaching pressure.
- **Conservation Success for Greater One-Horned Rhinos:** This population in India and Nepal continues to grow, due to strict wildlife crime law enforcement and habitat expansion.
- **Challenges Facing Javan Rhinos:** The status and whereabouts of 12 of the approximately 76 remaining Javan rhinos is unknown.
- **Uncertainty Surrounding Sumatran Rhinos:** Signs of Sumatran rhinos are increasingly hard to find, creating more uncertainty about their population in the wild.

About Indian Rhino (IUCN Status: Vulnerable)

- Largest of all Rhino species
- Excellent swimmers
- Found in Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan
- Assam is home to the largest population of greater-one horned rhinos, with more than 90% in Kaziranga National Park.
- Pobitra WS (Assam) has the highest density of Indian rhinos in the world.
- Other states: WB, UP

Chincholi Wildlife Sanctuary

Environment & Geography

Why in news?

- Chincholi Wildlife Sanctuary is spread over a vast arid region comprising seven **north-eastern districts of Kalyana Karnataka**.

About

- It is located around the **Chandrapalli Dam** in Kalaburagi, Karnataka.
- It is the **1st dry land Wildlife Sanctuary (Declared in 2011)** in South India.
- **Chincholi** is also home to **Lambani Tandas**, a protected tribal community that lives in the forests in harmony with nature.
- **Flora:** Home to dry and moist deciduous trees in its core zone and teak, acacia plantations in the outer area.
- Medicinal herbs, sandalwood and red sanders trees are found.
- **Fauna:** It is home Black Buck, Common Fox, Four-horned Antelope, Fruit bat, Hyena, Indian Wolf etc.

Climate Ambition Summit (CAS)

Environment & Geography

Why in news?

- The United Nations Climate Ambition Summit (CAS) held in UN Headquarters, New York. (The summit was announced in December 2022 by the UN Secretary-General).

About the summit

- It is a prominent international event aimed at addressing the pressing issue of climate change.
- The CAS is designed to showcase "**first mover and doer**" leaders from government, business, finance, local authorities, and civil society who have presented concrete action rather than mere promises, to expedite the global economy's decarbonization efforts and ensure climate justice.
- It was held to accelerate climate action in the run up to the **28th Conference of Parties (COP28)** to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- China, the US and India, who collectively account for about **42% of global greenhouse gas emissions** and are the top **three emitters** in that order were all absent from the CAS.

IPBES report on Invasive species

Environment & Geography

Why in the news?

- The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) recently released a report on Invasive Alien Species.

Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

- IPBES, also known as the "IPCC for biodiversity," is an independent intergovernmental body with over 140 member governments.
- It was established by governments in 2012 to provide policymakers with objective scientific assessments of the state of knowledge regarding the planet's biodiversity, ecosystems, and the contributions they make to people, as well as the tools and methods for protecting and using these vital natural assets in a sustainable manner.

- It is not a United Nations organisation. However, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides secretariat services to IPBES at the request of the IPBES Plenary and with the authorization of the UNEP Governing Council in 2013.

Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control

- According to the report, **human activities have introduced approximately 37,000 alien species**, encompassing both plants and animals, to various regions and biomes worldwide.
- Among these, there are over **3,500 invasive alien species**, which have played a significant role in **causing 60% of documented global extinctions** in both plant and animal species.
- The report also highlights that **invasive alien species rank among the top five primary drivers of biodiversity loss** on a global scale.
- The report underscores that the proliferation of alien species has been an ongoing trend for centuries across all regions. However, it is now accelerating at an unprecedented pace, primarily due to increased human mobility, trade, and the expansion of the global economy.
- Notably, roughly **6% of introduced plant species, 22% of introduced invertebrates, 14% of introduced vertebrates, and 11% of introduced microbes** are recognized as **invasive**, posing substantial threats to both natural ecosystems and human well-being.
- This comprehensive study, conducted over a four-year period, involved the collaboration of 86 leading experts hailing from 49 countries. Their research drew upon a vast body of knowledge, encompassing more than 13,000 references.

Major Invasive Species

- The **water hyacinth** is the most common invasive alien species on land in the world.
- **Lantana**, a flowering shrub, and the **black rat** are the second and third most common species on the planet.
- The **brown rat and house mouse** are two other common invasive alien species.
- The **Caribbean false mussel** devastates Kerala's important fishery resources by eradicating native clams and oysters.
- Malaria, Zika, and West Nile Fever are spread by invasive species such as **Aedes albopictus and Aedes aegyptii**.

Methods to control invasive species

- **Physical removal:** This involves physically removing the invasive species from the environment. This can be done by hand, using tools such as traps or nets, or by using herbicides or pesticides.
- **Biological control:** This includes using natural predators or parasites to control the invasive species. This can be a more sustainable approach than physical removal, but it can also be more difficult to implement.
- **Genetic control:** It involves introducing genes into the invasive species that will make them sterile or less competitive. This is a new and experimental approach, but it has the potential to be very effective.
- **Cultural control:** It includes changing the way that people interact with the environment to make it less hospitable to invasive species. This can include things like changing farming practices, cleaning up waste, and controlling the spread of invasive species through trade.

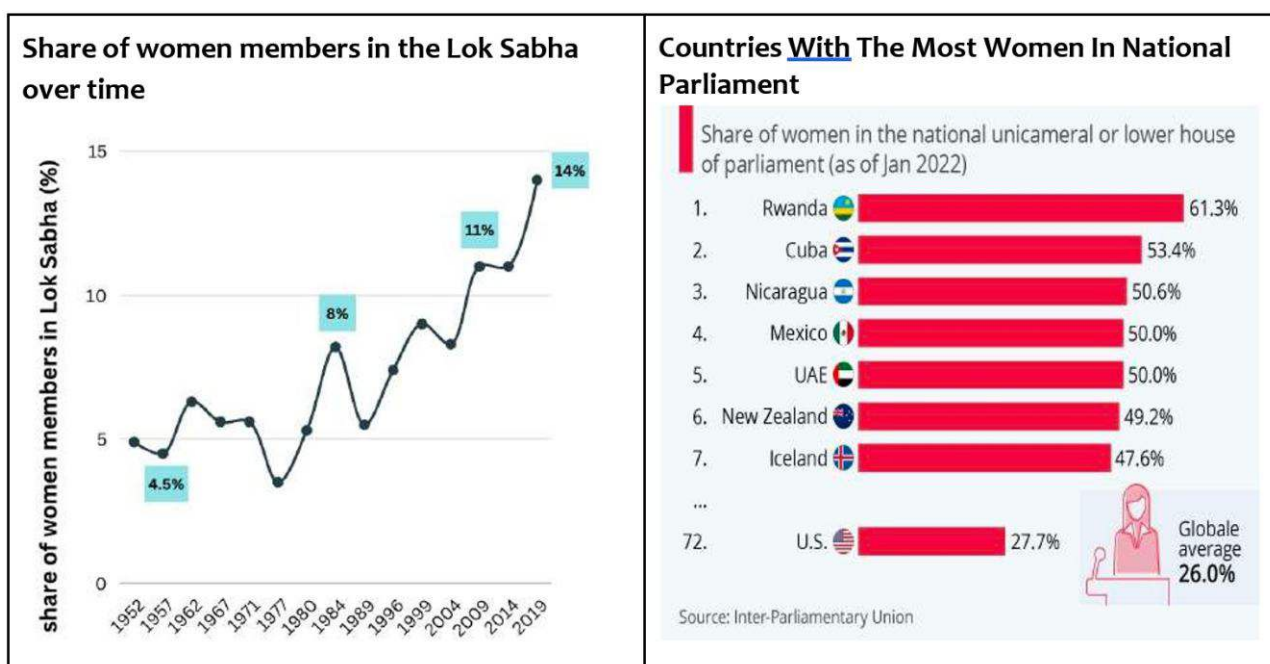


Context

- Recently, the Parliament passed the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 (128th Constitutional Amendment) or Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam.

Historical Background

- 1971:** Government appointed Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). Committee's report "Towards Equality" noted that the Indian state had failed in its constitutional responsibility to ensure gender equality.
- 1993:** Constitution Amendments (73rd and 74th) were enacted, mandating one-third reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities.
- Thereafter, several attempts were made to reserve seats for women in the Parliament - 1996 (H. D. Deve Gowda government), 1998-2003 (Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government), 2010 (UPA government) - but failed.



Current Status

- 14% of the total members of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) are women while in state legislative assemblies, women on average constitute 9% of the total members.
- In 2015, the Report on the Status of Women in India noted that the representation of women in state assemblies and Parliament continues to be dismal. It noted that decision making positions in political parties have negligible presence of women.

Key features of Women's Reservation Act, 2023:

- Reservation for women:** The Act reserves, as nearly as may be, one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. This will also apply to the seats reserved for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and states legislatures.
- Commencement of reservation:** The reservation will be effective after the census conducted after the commencement of this Act has been published. Based on the census, delimitation will be undertaken to reserve seats for women. The reservation will be provided for a period of 15 years. However, it shall continue till such date as determined by a law made by Parliament.
- Rotation of seats:** Seats reserved for women will be rotated after each delimitation, as determined by a law made by Parliament.

Arguments in favour of women's reservation

- **Representation Matters:** When underrepresented groups are not proportionally represented, their ability to influence policy-making is limited. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) emphasizes eliminating discrimination in political and public life. Reserving seats can help achieve this goal.
- **Promotion of Gender Equality:** A 2003 study about the effect of reservation for women in panchayats showed that women elected under reservation policy invest more in public goods closely linked to women's concerns, which can lead to better gender-sensitive policies and development.
- **Increased Women's Empowerment:** The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice (2009) noted that reservation of seats for women in local bodies enabled women to make meaningful contributions and debunked concerns about them being proxies to men. This empowerment of women at the grassroots level can have positive ripple effects.
- **International Best Practices:** Many countries, such as Sweden and Norway, have successfully implemented gender quotas in politics without compromising the quality of representation. These countries have seen a significant increase in women's representation without negative consequences.

Arguments against women's reservation

- **Merit-Based Argument:** Opponents argue that reserving seats for women might lead to the perception that they are not competing on merit.
- **Political Empowerment:** Critics contend that reservation alone is insufficient to empower women politically. Women elected to Sarpanch position often have their male relatives, such as husbands or fathers, wielding significant influence and making decisions on their behalf (**Sarpanchpati phenomenon**).
- **Restrictive Choice for Voters:** Reserving one-third of seats for women in Parliament could limit voters' choices in reserved constituencies. Some argue that alternate methods, such as **reservation for candidates within political parties or dual-member constituencies**, may provide more democratic choices.
- **Parliamentary Deliberation:** Implementing rotation of seats could potentially reduce the incentive for MPs to work for their constituencies, as they might become ineligible for re-election from that constituency. This may negatively impact parliamentary deliberation.

Way Forward

- **Comprehensive Reforms:** Implement broader electoral reforms to address issues beyond reservation.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in training and leadership development for women in politics.
- **Public Awareness:** Promote awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes and norms that may hinder women's political participation. Engaging civil society organizations and women's groups can be instrumental in driving this change.
- **Alternative Representation Models:** Explore dual-member constituencies or reserved seats within political parties for increased women's participation.

Simultaneous Elections

Polity

Context

- Recently, the Central government set up a panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the feasibility of the 'one nation, one election' (ONOE) plan.

About Simultaneous Elections (one nation, one election)

- The idea of ONOE centres around the concept of synchronising the timing of Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections across all States to reduce the frequency of polls throughout the country.
- After the enforcement of the Constitution on January 26, 1950, the first-ever general elections to Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies were conducted simultaneously in 1951- 1952. The practice continued into the three subsequent Lok Sabha elections until 1967, after which it was disrupted.
- Subsequently, due to defections and counter-defections between parties, several Legislative Assemblies dissolved post-1960, which eventually led to separate polls for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

Arguments in Favor

- **Lower Expenditure:** Holding simultaneous elections could significantly reduce the overall cost of conducting multiple elections, including expenses on security, administration, and logistics.
- **Time Lost in Campaigning for Developmental Works:** Political leaders and parties invest the immense amount of time and resources in election campaigns. By reducing the frequency of elections, leaders can allocate more time and effort to developmental works.
- **Model Code of Conduct and Polity Paralysis:** The implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during election periods often results in restrictions on government policy announcements and administrative decisions. This can lead to a temporary paralysis of government activities.
- **Impact on Delivery of Public Services:** Frequent elections can disrupt the delivery of public services. There is often an increased emphasis on populist measures and short-term schemes to attract voters, which can negatively affect the long-term planning and delivery of essential services.
- **Burden on Manpower:** The management and conduct of elections require a significant amount of manpower, including election commission officials, security personnel, and administrative staff. Frequent elections place a substantial burden on these resources, which can be optimized by holding simultaneous elections. Addressing Communalism,
- **Casteism, and Corruption:** Elections in India are often accompanied by heightened communalism, casteism, and instances of corruption. A study by the National Election Watch and ADR highlights the prevalence of candidates with criminal records in elections. By reducing the frequency of elections, there may be a chance to focus on the systemic issues and address them effectively.
- **Higher Voter Turnout:** Some proponents argue that simultaneous elections could encourage higher voter turnout.

Arguments against

- **Premature Dissolution of Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly:** Key challenge with simultaneous elections is what to do in case of a premature dissolution of either Lok Sabha or a Legislative Assembly. If a government collapses mid-tenure, it raises questions about whether elections should be held again in every state or if President's rule should be imposed.
- **Mixing of Local and National Issues:** Critics argue that simultaneous elections can lead to the blending of local and national issues. Since the underlying issues of national and state elections are often different, separating them ensures greater accountability.
- **Legislature's Power to bring down minority government:** Simultaneous elections would require fixing the tenure of legislatures, which could take away the legislature's power to bring down a minority government. The ability to remove a government through a vote of no confidence is a crucial aspect of a parliamentary democracy.
- **Frequent Elections for Accountability:** Frequent elections lead to greater accountability of elected representatives. Frequent elections allow voters to have their voices heard more frequently, and elected officials must stay responsive to the electorate.
- The idea of simultaneous elections offers potential advantages and challenges, it is imperative that a solid political consensus be built through inclusive deliberations and discussions before proceeding with any major electoral reforms.

Personality Rights

Polity

Context

- Recently, the Delhi High Court allowed actor Anil Kapoor's pleas for protection of his personality rights from misuse by third parties. The actor argued that several entities had misappropriated his name, photographs, manner of speaking, gestures, and even his iconic dialogue "Jhakaas" for commercial gain.

About Personality Rights

- Personality rights encompass a person's **right to control and protect their distinctive attributes** - their name, voice, signature, likeness, images, gestures, and other characteristics that are readily associated with them.
- They grant a person the exclusive right to derive commercial benefits from their unique features, and any unauthorized use of these features for commercial purposes can result in a tangible loss of revenue for the individual.



Status in India

- In India, personality rights are not explicitly defined or protected by a specific statute. Instead, they are **rooted in the broader framework of the right to privacy and the right to property**.
- Concepts of intellectual property rights (trademark, copyright etc) can be applied to assess whether a celebrity deserves protection through a court order.

Other Cases:

- **Amitabh Bachchan's Case:** A case involving Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan also made its way to the Delhi High Court. The court issued an injunction against the unauthorized use of Bachchan's personality rights, encompassing variations of his name such as "Big B" and his distinctive style of addressing computers as "Computer ji." The court relied on precedents and held that Bachchan's right to protect his personality was valid, emphasizing that his identity was easily identifiable from the alleged misuse.
- **Rajnikanth's Case:** In a case concerning actor Rajnikanth, the Madras High Court observed that personality rights pertain to individuals who have achieved celebrity status. This observation was made in the context of a lawsuit against the producers of the movie "Main Hoon Rajnikanth." The court determined that the title of the movie was so closely associated with the actor that the public would identify it with him alone.

Public Servants Lose Immunity in Pre-2014 Corruption Cases

Polity

Context

- The Supreme Court recently held that its 2014 judgment invalidating Section 6A of DSPE Act, 1946 has retrospective effect.

About

- **2003: Section 6A** was inserted in the **Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946**. It gave officers of the rank of joint secretary and above immunity from even facing a preliminary inquiry by the CBI in the offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. CBI could not conduct inquiry into the offences without prior approval of the Central Government.
- **2014:** Supreme Court declared Section 6A unconstitutional. SC stated that Section 6A was a **violation of the right to equality under Article 14** of the Constitution.
- **2023:** SC held that the 2014 judgment has a retrospective effect. This means that Section 6A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act was considered void from the day it was
- inserted, which was on September 11, 2003. This means that senior government officials involved in corruption cases even before 2014 would no longer be able to avail the protection of prior sanction.

National Judicial Data Grid

Polity

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court, onboarded its case data on the National Judicial Data Grid.

About National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)

- NJDG is a comprehensive database containing information on orders, judgments, and case details from District and subordinate Courts, as well as High Courts across India.
- Its key feature is that the data is updated in real-time and has granular data up to the Taluka level.
- NJDG was built as part of Phase II of the **e-Courts project**, which is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- The platform has been developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

About e-Courts Project

- It is a government initiative aimed at modernizing and digitizing the country's judicial system.
- It is part of the **National e-Governance Plan** and is a **centrally sponsored scheme**. The Supreme Court is responsible for policy planning, strategic direction, and implementation, while the Department of Justice (Ministry of Law & Justice) provides funding.

Why in news?

- The G20 Leaders' Summit resulted in a joint declaration that spells out the major commitments and priorities of the G20 countries in tackling the current and future health challenges.

Key Features of the Declaration

- Resilient Health Systems**
 - The declaration emphasizes the **need to build resilient health systems that are capable of withstanding various challenges**. These systems should be designed to provide equitable access to healthcare services for all.
 - The **focus is on sustainability, inclusivity, and effectiveness**. This involves strengthening primary healthcare services, improving the health workforce, and ensuring that essential health services are readily available to the population.
 - The goal is to **enhance health system capacity to levels that are even better than those observed before the COVID-19 pandemic**. This improvement is ideally targeted to be achieved within the next two to three years.
- Pandemic Preparedness**
 - G20 leaders **acknowledge the critical importance of preparing for future pandemics**. While the declaration addresses current health challenges, it also recognizes the significance of research on the long-term effects of COVID-19, often referred to as "long COVID."
 - This highlights the commitment to proactive measures and research aimed at preventing and managing future health crises.
- Access to Medical Countermeasures**
 - The declaration **commits to improving access to medical countermeasures**, which include vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and other tools used in response to health emergencies.
 - Special emphasis is placed on **ensuring that developing countries have equitable access to these medical countermeasures**. This involves enhancing the production capacity and supply chains in such countries.
- One Health Approach**
 - The **declaration promotes the One Health approach, which involves the collaboration of multiple sectors, including human health, animal health, and environmental health**. This collaborative approach aims to address health challenges holistically.
 - The One Health Joint Plan of Action (2022-2026) serves as a guiding framework to enhance the resilience of health systems by considering the interconnectedness of health in humans, animals, and the environment.
- Climate-Resilient Health Systems**
 - Leaders stress the **importance of developing health systems that can withstand the impacts of climate change**. This is vital for ensuring that healthcare services remain accessible and effective under changing environmental conditions.
 - Collaboration with multilateral development banks (MDBs) is encouraged to support the development of climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems.
 - Support for the work of the WHO-led Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate & Health (ATACH) is highlighted.
- Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**
 - The **declaration recognizes the critical issue of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), where microorganisms become resistant to drugs**. The One Health approach is emphasized in addressing AMR.
 - Efforts to combat AMR include research and development of new antimicrobial agents, infection prevention and control measures, and responsible antimicrobial stewardship efforts.
- Equitable Access to Healthcare**
 - G20 leaders commit to facilitating equitable access to healthcare services**. This commitment is especially significant for low- and middle-income countries, as well as least-developed countries.
 - The goal is to ensure that safe, effective, quality-assured, and affordable vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and other medical countermeasures are accessible to all populations.
- Traditional and Complementary Medicine**
 - The **declaration acknowledges the potential role of evidence-based traditional and complementary medicine in public health delivery systems**. These practices are considered valuable when rigorously and scientifically validated.

- Support for international efforts in this direction is recognized, including the work of WHO's global and collaborating centres and clinical trial registries.
- **Counter-Narcotics Cooperation**
 - Leaders recognize the public health dimension of the global drug problem. **They call for strong international cooperation to combat the production and proliferation of illicit drugs**, including synthetic drugs, and precursor chemicals.
 - This cooperation includes information sharing and capacity building to disrupt the drug trade at various stages, from production to transit and distribution.
- **Global Health Architecture**
 - The declaration **highlights the commitment to strengthen the global health architecture**. This involves enhancing collaboration between finance and health ministries, as well as other relevant stakeholders, under the Joint Finance and Health Task Force.
 - The goal is to enhance pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response capabilities on a global scale.

Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP)

Polity

Why in news?

- GOT Karmayogi Bharat in collaboration with NITI Aayog has launched a new learning module dedicated to the Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP).

About Aspiration Blocks Program

- Building on the success of the Aspirational Districts programme, NITI Aayog launched the Aspirational Blocks programme.
- The purpose of the program is to improve the performance of regions that are lagging behind in terms of various development parameters.
- It was announced in the Union Budget 2022-2023.

Aspirational District Programme

- Launched in January 2018, it aims to quickly and effectively transform 112 least developed districts across the country.
- The main features of the program are convergence (in central and state systems), collaboration (between central, state-level nodal officers and district collectors) and inter-district competition through monthly delta rankings; everything is driven by mass movement.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

Polity

Why in news?

- Prime Minister, PMMSY has expanded inland fishing even to **landlocked States** and has made fishing an occupation for many across the country.

About the scheme

- PMMSY was introduced as part of the 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' package with an investment of Rs. 20,050 crores, the **highest-ever investment** in this sector.
- The scheme is being implemented in **all States and UTs** for a period of 5 years from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25.
- The Government has launched the PMMSY for the **development of marine & inland fisheries**.
- There are provisions of **Ban Period Support to fishermen** (during the period fishing is not permitted).
- The focus will be on **Islands, Himalayan States, and North-east & Aspirational Districts**.

Objectives:

- Harness the potential of the fisheries sector in a sustainable, responsible, inclusive and equitable manner
- Enhance fish production and productivity through expansion, intensification, diversification and productive utilisation of land and water



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- Modernise and strengthen the value chain including post-harvest management and quality improvement
- Double fishers' and fish farmers' incomes and generate meaningful employment
- Enhance the contribution of the fisheries sector to agricultural Gross Value Added (GVA) and exports
- Ensure social, physical and economic security for fishers and fish farmers
- Build a robust fisheries management and regulatory framework.

Digital India Act 2023

Polity

Why in news?

- The recent announcement of the Digital India Act 2023 (DIA) represents a significant step towards establishing a future-ready legal framework for the country's burgeoning digital ecosystem.

About the Act

- The Digital India Act 2023 is a proposed legislation that **aims to replace the Information Technology Act 2000 and provide a comprehensive framework for regulating the digital space in India.**
- According to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the Act will cover topics such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybercrime, data protection, deepfakes, competition issues among internet platforms, and online safety.
- The Act will also **reconsider the concept of safe harbour**, which is the principle that allows social media platforms to avoid liability for posts made by users.
- The Act will be **implemented along with the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill 2022**, which was proposed in November 2022 and will deal with data privacy rights.
- The Act is expected to help India **achieve the target of a \$1 trillion digital economy by 2026.**

Key Provisions of the Act:

- It places a **strong emphasis on online safety and trust**, with a commitment to safeguarding citizen's rights in the digital realm while remaining **adaptable to shifting market dynamics and international legal principles.**
- The Act would **create new laws to protect children** from online abuse and exploitation. It would also require social media platforms to take steps to remove harmful content from their platforms.
- The Act would **create a new data protection framework** for India. This framework would give individuals more control over their personal data and would make it more difficult for companies to collect and use data without their consent.
- The Act would create **new laws to combat cybercrime.** These laws would make it easier for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute cybercrimes.
- The Act would **create a new regulatory body**, the Digital India Authority. The Authority would be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Act and for ensuring that digital technologies are used in a safe and responsible manner.
- Recognising the **growing importance of new-age technologies** such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, the DIA **provides guidelines for their responsible utilisation.**
- It upholds the **concept of an open internet**, striking a balance between accessibility and necessary regulations to maintain order and protect users.
- Additionally, the DIA **mandates stringent Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements** for wearable devices, accompanied by criminal law sanctions.

Benefits of the Act:

- It will **promote the growth of India's digital economy**, which is likely to cross \$1 trillion by 2023.
- It will **foster the development and deployment of digital technologies across multiple sectors**, such as education, health, agriculture, and e-governance.
- It will **address various challenges related to cybersecurity and data privacy**, both of which are critical issues in the digital age.

Challenges in implementation:

- One **key concern** is the potential **impact on innovation and the ease of doing business**.
- It may **face resistance from some social media platforms and intermediaries** who may not agree with the proposed **changes in the safe harbour principle and the moderation policies**.
- It may **require a robust infrastructure and skilled manpower** to ensure effective enforcement and adjudication of online offences and disputes.
- It may have to **balance the interests of various stakeholders**, such as users, businesses, government, and civil society, while ensuring transparency and accountability.
- It may have to **deal with the complexities and uncertainties of emerging technologies**, such as AI, deepfakes, and distributed ledger technology, and their potential risks and benefits.
- It may have to **overcome the challenges of low internet speed and limited Wi-Fi hotspots** in some parts of the country.

National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) Portal

Polity

Why in news?

- With Supreme Court of India onboarding the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) portal, the flagship project of the e-Courts project completes the full circle. Now we have all three tiers of Indian judiciary on NJDG portal. NJDG is recognized as a significant innovation under the ease of doing business initiative of the Government of India.

About the portal

- The NJDG portal is a national repository of data relating to cases instituted, pending and disposed of by the courts across the length and breadth of the country. Now on a click of a button, one may access case related information, statistics such as institution, pendency and disposal of cases, case-types, year-wise break-up of the Supreme Court of India.
- NJDG has been developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) in close coordination with the in-house software development team of the Computer Cell, Registry with an interactive interface and analytics dashboard. The entire database shall be periodically updated on the NJDG portal.
- To date, the NJDG portal remains unparalleled, and the same is accessible at a click of a button to its citizenry. NJDG is sui generis as it has brought transparency, and accountability within the realm of the Indian judicial system by sharing all relevant data of cases instituted, pending and disposed of.
- Since the launch of the NJDG portal, the benefits of the NJDG portal can be summed up as under:
 - increased transparency
 - accountability and responsibility
 - improved efficiency
 - increased coordination
 - informed decision making
 - optimum deployment of resources and manpower
 - single source of data
 - huge potential for high-quality research work

Why in news?

- Union Minister for Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship launched the Malaviya Mission - Teachers Training Programme by the University Grants Commission at Kaushal Bhawan, New Delhi.

About the mission

- This programme will work for the capacity building of faculty members in higher educational institutions.
- One of the primary objectives of the Malaviya Mission is to provide specialized and tailored training programs for teachers.
- Recognizing that teaching methods and educational requirements have evolved, the program seeks to equip educators with the latest knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to excel in their roles.
- This emphasis on tailored training ensures that teachers can adapt to the changing dynamics of education effectively.
- In a symbolic gesture, the Minister announced the renaming of Human Resource Development Centres (HRDCs) as Madan Mohan Malaviya Teachers' Training Centres.
- This renaming not only pays tribute to the renowned educationist Madan Mohan Malaviya but also underscores the program's commitment to elevating the status of teacher training in India.
- The Malaviya Mission plans to establish 111 centers across India to ensure comprehensive coverage.
- These centers will serve as hubs for teacher training and professional development, catering to the needs of educators in different regions.
- The program's reach is extensive, with the goal of building the capacities of 15 lakh teachers in higher educational institutions.
- One innovative aspect of the Malaviya Mission is its alignment with the credit framework.
- By mapping capacity building activities to this framework, educators will have clear career progression pathways.
- This approach not only recognizes the hard work and dedication of teachers but also motivates them to continually improve their skills and knowledge.
- By investing in teacher training and professional development, the Malaviya Mission is laying the foundation for a brighter and more educated India.




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ONE NATION - ONE ELECTION

12/9/23

→ NEED :- (Current issues)

- i) Human Resource :-
Armed Forces & Borders deployed in Elections (Threat to security)
- ii) ↓ Voter's Participation :-
ECI Report: % of voters (in 2019 ele's) 
- iii) ↑ Expenditure :- (As stated in Law Commission - 1999)
→ 2019 ele's - costed 60k cr's
↳ world's highest (ECI Report)
- iv) Criminalised Politics :-
(As stated by Vohra & Bibek Debroy committee)
- v) Frequent implemⁿ of Model Code of Conduct (Hindering Governan-
ce - no new policies).
↳ stated by Vohra comm.

practical limitations

→ Implementation challenges :-

- i) More Const'l Amendments needed (Ex: Art (83, 85) Pres (172, 174) - Governor)
- ii) Amending RPA Act, 1951 :-
(2/3rd + 50% of states consent)
↳ huge procedure of acceptance.
- iii) State list (Local elections)
↳ Federal issue
- iv) Sync of the terms of irregular States' Termes
Ex: - MH, MP - ele's took place in 2022 & India's - abt to take place in 2019.

→ Advantages (+ve)

- i) Overcoming inefficiency of MCC (By Vohra committee)



Gov. impacted for around 4 months

- ii) ↓ Financial Expenses :-
Bibek Debroy comm. estimated
↓ 2000 cr. can be possible.
- iii) Add'l/Doubling arrangements of EVM's, etc. can be ↓ to one.
(States & centre - 2 times ↓)
- iv) Governance Downtime ↓
Ex: - IAS officers deployed in conducting elections.
- v) ↑ Security of India
{ Human resource ≈ 10 mn.
Police station ≈ 1 mn. }
↳ in 2019 (Acc. to Bibek comm.)

→ Disadvantages (-ve) Impacts

- i) ↓ Accountability :-
fixed term - of nation - leads to Autocratic rule. (LC-2015)
- ii) National ele's > local issues :-
Dominance of National parties upon local ones. (Vohra comm)
- iii) Spirit of Democracy @ Stake :-
Forceful decision of termure by centre (against ppl's choice)
- iv) Voter's Behaviour :-
campaigns influences voters at State, centre, local for single party. (Vohra comm)



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- ⑤ Expenses by Govt, but not by parties } - Not cost effective
(Ex:- Freebies)

⑥ Legal challenges:-

Law Commission (B.S. Chauhan),
Simultaneous ele's - not feasible with existing framework.



- ⑦ Conducting elections at a time - need finances at a time (Burden) - So, more Electoral Bonds to be raised.

⇒ Way Forward :-

① Building Consensus:-

Among Expertise from both - centre & states (Lawcomm-2015)

② Investments in Infra & Tech.

① Manpower (like EVM's, VVPAT's - vote verified paper audit trail, etc.) (Vohra)

③ Establish frameworks to deal with - No conf Motion, Mid-dissoln of Penum, pres rule etc

④ Awareness campaigns:

To ↑ voter's % & also +ves & -ves of Such Ele's.

⇒ Major challenge of Federalism :-

① Autonomy of State is impacted (Bibek Debroy comm) (centre-state rel'n's)

② No clear strategy to adopt during dissolution of state Assemblies, for uncertain reasons.

③ State list - local Bodies (Dominance of Union)

④ Parliamentary → Pres'l form of system

⑤ Influence of National parties on state & local parties (Vohra comm)

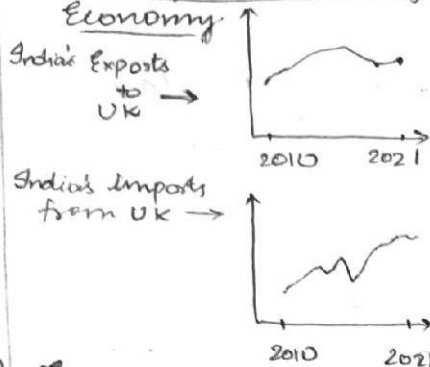
⑥ Contradictory to Art -1.
"Union of states" - Federal nature (Vohra comm)

INDIA - UK - FTA

12/9/23

⇒ Data:-

(i) Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy



(ii) Exports:- UK > India (CMIE)
(\$3232 Bn) - Trade surplus.

(iii) Top 3 Indian goods Exports to UK
→ Metals Manufactures
→ Textiles
→ Refined oil.

(iv) Top 3 India's imports from UK
→ Non-ferrous metals
→ Mech'l power generation
→ Beverages.

⇒ Benefits to India:-

(A) ECONOMIC:-

(i) 0-effect & 0-defect:-

This target could be achieved through India's exports

(ii) Aid in ongoing India's eco progress:-

Prospects of New Tech's.

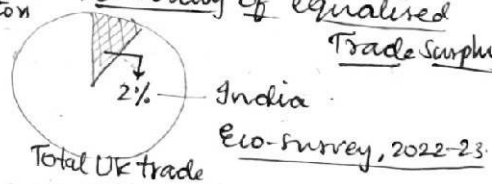
(iii) Investments & opportunities multiply:-

Ex:- \$12 mn invest in Indian Telecom India's subsidiary in UK.

(iv) Trade Barriers:-

Ex:- Custom procedures (Delay), regulatory measures b/w India & UK will

(v) Possibility of equalised Trade Surplus:



(B) Strategic:-

(i) A say in UNSC:-

UK - permanent member can support for India's Permanent membership.

(ii) Groupings - strengthening:-

Ex:- Commonwealth of Nations, WTO, ADB.

(iii) UK-India Edu Research initiative (UKIERI):

Ex:- 50k students (India) are studying in UK.

(iv) China Factor:-

UK-China's Geo-pol Diff's (BRI Investments)

(v) RCEP & Trade barriers:-

One-sided agreement, benefitting China with pre-determined rules on UK (India - not RCEP member)

⇒ BENEFITS TO UK:-

(A) ECONOMIC:-

(i) Opportunities for UK services & invest

(2nd largest source of FDI to India is UK)
Annual report 2020-21.

(ii) Innov & Trade in Digital era

Ex:- AI, semiconductors

(iii) employment to UK workers
(3% of India employees from UK)



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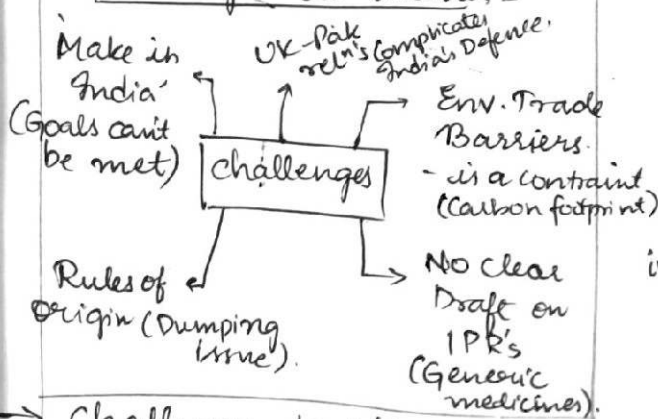


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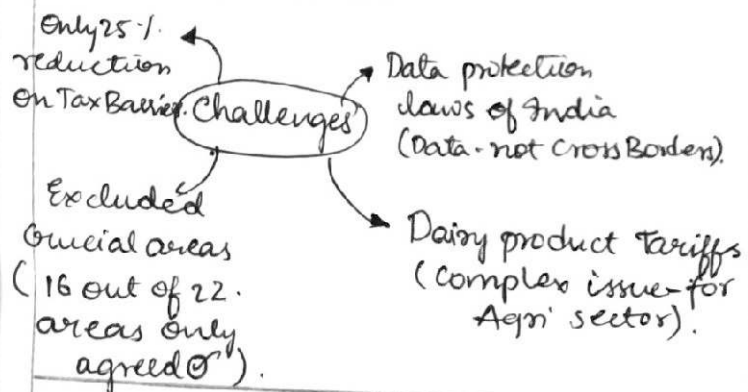
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- iv) Agri Investments:-
UK's economy ①, as it
aids in India's 2nd Green Revol?
- v) Addresses Anti-corruption
(Deloitte Report - "Count on
UK-India FTA, 2022").

⇒ Challenges to India:-

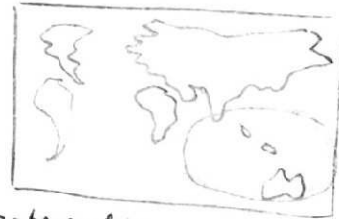


⇒ Challenges to UK



Ⓑ STRATEGIC:-

- i) Educⁿ: Through this FTA, more UK univ's to be opened in India.
- ii) ① Dependency on EU
(Post-Brexit)
- iii) Strategic position in Indo-Pacific region



iv) Tech. Footprint:-

2030 Roadmap for India-UK future relations (Low carbon Tech emerging Tech's)

Way Forward

- i) Transparency in Invest for utilising opportunities.
- ii) Prioritising both India & Pak - for its trade in Defence sector.
- iii) ① Soft power to strengthen ties.
- iv) Improve Strategic Decision-making

TELECOM BILL, 2023

22/12/23

→ Why in News? :-

Recently passed Telecom Bill, 2023, replaces 138-yr old Telegraph Act (1885) & Wireless Telegraphy Act (1933)

→ Data :-

(i) Telecom Sector Contribution (2%)

"Telecom Stats - 2022" by Min. of Comm'n's (to GDP)

(ii) 881.25 mn- Indian Internet subscribers (TRA, 2022).

(iii) UN (Telecom Sector Data) (India - 2nd largest Telecom sector market.

(iv) PLI contribⁿ to Telecom sector 12,200 Cr (2022) - Manuf.

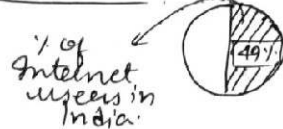
→ Old Act - Issues

(i) Outdated laws. (76 outdated provisions are found in 1885 Act) TRA

(ii) DM's Regulation: No provisions for these platforms. (Net Neutrality violations)

(iii) Addressal of New era: 5G & 6G technologies, need new form of laws to be regulated

(iv) India's Digital needs:



(v) Regulating Cyber crimes:

Although laws exist to punish crimes, No laws to prevent cyber crimes 'Crime in India', 2022.

→ Crime rate (Cyber): 40% (per 1 lakh)

→ Govt. Initiatives related to Telecom

(i) PM-WAN (Wired Access Network Interface)

(ii) Bharat Net project

(iii) One Nation - full mobile no. portability (MNIP)

(iv) PLI Scheme - Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

(v) Telecom Tech. Dev Fund Scheme (TTDF).

→ Provisions of the New law

(i) Prior permission of centre (to establish, operate Telecom services)

(ii) Assignment of spectrum. (Auction - on Admive Basis)

(iii) Power of interception & search. (Msgs b/w 2 / more persons, for public safety)

(iv) Protection of users. (Malware msgs - reporting rights)

(v) Right of way (To companies)

(vi) Appnts of TRA.

(vii) Digital Bharat Nidhi (R&D) (renamed old Fund - "Universal service obligation Fund")

→ Significance of the Bill.

(i) Replaced archaic laws

(Telegraph Act - 1885; Wireless Telegraphy Act - 1933)

(ii) Clarity on Satellite Broadband services.

Why in news?

- Despite being a major food producer with extensive food security schemes and the largest public distribution system in the world, India still grapples with significant levels of food insecurity, hunger, and child malnutrition.

What is Hunger?

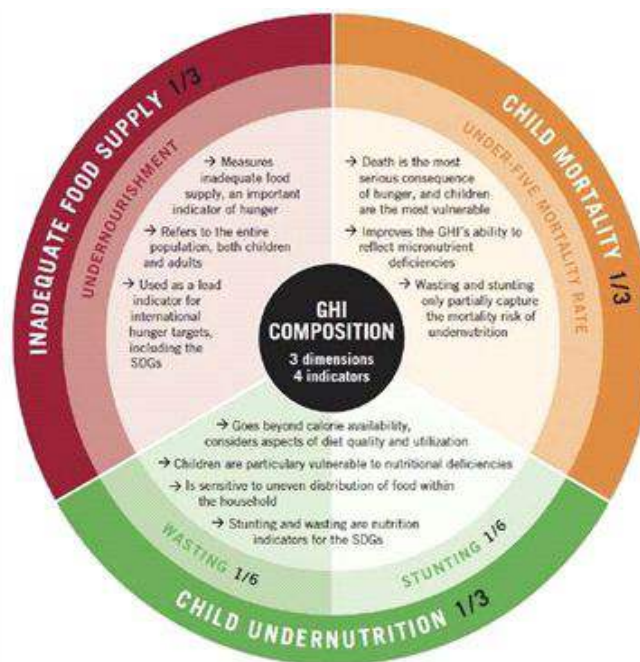
- As per FAO, hunger is characterised by habitual or chronic consumption of too few calories to meet the minimum dietary energy requirements for a healthy and productive life.

About Global Hunger Index (SHI):

- Index Indicators:** The Global Hunger Index uses four indicators among children below age 5: prevalence of calorie undernourishment, under-five mortality rate, stunting, and mortality.
- Published by: Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe

Key Issues:

- Dispute over data & methodology:** India's GHI score deteriorated due to increasing calorie undernourishment. However, the Indian government disputes the findings and cites concerns about data and methodology.
- Lack of National Sample Survey (NSS) data:** No NSS round on nutritional intake since 2011-12.
- Climate change & food insecurity:** Climate change and extreme weather events threaten India's food system and poverty alleviation efforts. Gains in poverty alleviation could be reversed by these shocks.
- Non-communicable diseases:** Rising burden of non-communicable diseases in India, especially among the "middle class". Strongly linked to diet and nutrition.



Recommendations:

- India-Specific Hunger Index:** There is a need for an India-specific hunger index that evaluates hunger and malnutrition at the state and union territory levels.
- This localized assessment is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to hunger eradication.
- Prioritize Young Children's Nutrition:** Elevate the importance of young children's food intake in policies, beyond just "complementary" nutrition.
- Improved Assessments:** Adapt the Food and Agriculture Organisation's household-level food insecurity modules for a better understanding of food security in India.
- Evidence-Based Policy:** Base policies on measuring the availability, accessibility, and affordability of nutritious food, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana:** Consider a strategic initiative led by the Prime Minister's Office to eliminate food insecurity and ensure affordable access to nutritious food, with a focus on young children, to achieve the SDG of zero hunger.

Key nutrition-related programs and initiatives in India:

- National Nutrition Mission (NNM), Poshan Abhiyan:** Started in 2018 to reduce undernutrition and enhance children's nutritional status.
- National Food Security Act, 2013:** Legally entitles a portion of the population to receive subsidized food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System.

- **Eat Right India Movement:** Organized by FSSAI to promote healthy eating habits among citizens.
- **Zero Hunger Program:** Launched in 2017 to eliminate hunger and malnutrition by 2030 through farming interventions, training, and biofortified gardens.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PM-MVY):** Provides cash incentives to pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- **Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman scheme (PM Poshan Scheme):** A school meal program aimed at improving the nutritional status of school-age children.

Women Prisoners in India

Governance & Social Issues

Why in news?

- Recently, the Supreme Court sought views of the Central and the State Governments on the Justice Amitava Roy Committee report on prison reforms that highlighted the dire conditions faced by women prisoners in India.

Key observations:

- The correctional justice system is "evidently gender exclusionary".
- Increase in population of female prisoners by over 11% between 2014-19.

Key findings of the report:

- **Access to basic facilities:** Women prisoners face more significant challenges than men in accessing basic facilities such as medical care, legal aid, paid labour, and recreational activities.
- **Meeting children:** Only jails in Goa, Delhi, and Puducherry allow female prisoners to meet their children without any bars or glass separation.
- **Sanitary napkins:** Less than 40% of prisons in India provide sanitary napkins for female inmates.
- **Sharing facilities:** Approximately 75% of female wards in prisons have to share kitchens and common facilities with male wards.
- **Exclusive women's prisons:** Only 18% of women prisoners are allotted exclusive women's prison facilities.
- **Lodging together:** All categories of female prisoners, including undertrials and convicts, are lodged in the same wards and barracks.
- **Gender-specific training:** Lack of gender-specific training for matrons on how to search women inmates.
- **Complaints against abuse or harassment:** Women inmates can file complaints against jail staff for abuse or harassment only in 10 states and 1 union territory.
- **Medical and psychiatric wards:** Lack of separate medical and psychiatric wards for women inmates.
- **Child delivery facilities:** Inadequate "basic minimum facilities" for child delivery in prisons.
- **Gender-specific healthcare professionals:** Shortage of healthcare professionals to address the gender-specific health needs of female inmates.

Sustainable Development Goals - Gender Snapshot

Governance & Social Issues

Why in news?

- The report titled "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023" was recently released by UN Women (UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women).

What is Gender Equality?

- Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of all individuals, regardless of their gender. It involves ensuring that women and men have the same access to resources, education, employment, and decision-making processes.

Key findings from the report:

- **Social aspects:**
 - **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** If current trends continue, over 340 million women and girls (about 8% of the female population) will live in extreme poverty by 2030.

- **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** One in four experiencing food insecurity.
- Older women face higher rates of poverty and violence than older men, with many lacking access to pensions.
- **Violence:** No country is within reach of eradicating intimate partner violence.
- The number of women and girls in conflict-affected contexts has risen significantly.
- **Political aspects:** Gender disparities persist in power and leadership roles
- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** Women spend 2.3 more hours per day on unpaid care and domestic work than men.
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Climate change may push about 158 million more women and girls into poverty by mid-century.
- **Progress on SDG:** Progress on SDG 5 (gender equality) is significantly off track, with only two indicators nearing the target.
- **Finance aspect:** An additional \$360 billion per year is needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment across global goals.
 - **Wage Gap:** The labour and earnings gap remains persistently high. For each dollar men earn in labour income globally, women earn only 51 cents.



Persistent Challenges:

- Challenges include food insecurity due to climate change, insufficient efforts to combat intimate partner violence, rising conflict-affected contexts for women and girls, a significant number of girls and young women out of school, and persistent earnings gaps between men and women in the labour force.

Recommendations:

- The report calls for greater collaboration, funding, and policy actions to address gender disparities and emphasizes that failing to prioritize gender equality could jeopardize the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Addressing gender gaps in agrifood systems can reduce food insecurity and boost global GDP by nearly \$1 trillion.

Suicides in India

Governance & Social Issues

Why in news?

- The alarming increase in student suicides in Kota, India.

Factors Contributing to Female Suicides:

- **Mental Health Stigma:** The stigma around mental health can deter young women from seeking professional help.
- **Marital Pressures:** Early and forced marriages, dysfunctional marriages, domestic abuse, and dowry harassment increase suicide risk.
- **Housewives:** Over 50% of female suicides in India are among housewives (NCRB data).
- **Societal Contradictions:** The conflict between increasing female education and empowerment and persistent gender disparities.
- **Gender Discrimination:** Disparities in access to education, employment, and decision-making lead to hopelessness and frustration.
- **Social Media and Peer Pressure:** Exposure to cyberbullying, revenge pornography, and peer pressure affects self-esteem and body image.
- **Educational Stress:** High expectations from parents and society cause stress, anxiety, and depression.



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- **Economic Factors:** Financial struggles, unemployment, and financial dependence, such as single mothers facing challenges.

Government steps taken:

- **National Suicide Description Prevention Strategy (NSPS):** Aims to reduce suicides by 10% by 2030.
- **Suicide Surveillance Systems:** Targeted at establishing effective suicide surveillance systems within the next three years.
- **Mental Health Out-patient Clinics:** A goal under NSPS is to set up mental health outpatient clinics providing suicide prevention services within five years.
- **Helplines in Various States:** Several states (e.g., Telangana, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu) have launched suicide prevention helplines.
- **MANAS program in Maharashtra,** strict law enforcement against dowry, child marriage, and forced marriages, and efforts by NGOs like Snehi and Vandrevalla Foundation contribute to suicide prevention efforts.

India Ageing Report 2023

Governance & Social Issues

Why in news?

- The United Nations Population Fund has released the "2023 India Ageing Report," which projects a significant increase in the elderly population in India.

Major Findings of the Report:

- **Elderly Population Growth:** The population of people aged 80+ years is projected to grow by around 279% between 2022 and 2050.
- **Elderly Population Share:** By 2050, the elderly population in India is expected to make up over 20% of the total population (The present share of elderly is about 10% in 2021).
- **Poverty Among the Elderly:** More than 40% of the elderly in India are in the poorest wealth quintile, with over 18% having no income.
- **Gender Differences in Life Expectancy:** Women, on average, have a longer life expectancy compared to men, with variations across states.
- **Sex Ratio Among the Elderly:** The sex ratio among the elderly is increasing, indicating longer survival of women compared to men.
- **Gendered Poverty in Old Age:** Poverty is gendered in old age, with older women more likely to be widowed, living alone, and dependent on family support.
- **Challenges in Demographic Transition:** Significant inter-state variations in the elderly population reflect different stages of demographic transition.
- **Policy Recommendations:** The report suggests policies to address the feminization and ruralisation of the elderly population, increase awareness of schemes for older persons and promote in-situ ageing.

Policy recommendations from the "2023 India Ageing Report":

- **Address Gender-Specific Challenges:** Policies should specifically address the challenges faced by older women, including widowed and dependent elderly women.
- **Promote In-Situ Aging:** Encourage and facilitate ageing at home (in-situ ageing) where possible, ensuring that elderly individuals can stay within their communities.
- **Increase Awareness of Schemes:** Raise awareness about government schemes and programs designed for older persons, ensuring they can access necessary support.
- **Regulate Old-age homes:** Implement regulatory measures to oversee Old Age Homes, ensuring the well-being and rights of residents.
- **Inclusion in Data Collection Exercises:** Include relevant questions related to older persons in national data collection exercises to gather credible data on elderly issues.
- **Focus on Multigenerational Households:** Encourage elderly individuals to live in multigenerational households, promoting better care and support within families.

Government Scheme for Old Age:

- **National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP):** Offers non-contributory pensions for the elderly, widowed women, and disabled individuals. Administered by the Ministry of Rural Development.
- **Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY):** Exclusive pension scheme for senior citizens aged 60 and above. Extended up to 2023 for three more years beyond 2020.
- **Rashtriya Vayoshree Yojana:** Central sector scheme funded by the Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund. Provides aids and assistive living devices to elderly BPL individuals with age-related disabilities.
- **SAMPANN Project:** Launched in 2018, an online pension processing system for Department of Telecommunications pensioners. Direct credit of pension into bank accounts of pensioners.
- **SACRED Portal for the Elderly:** Developed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Citizens above 60 can register to find jobs and work opportunities, and access information and guidance on various issues.
- **SAGE (Senior-care Ageing Growth Engine) Initiative:** A platform offering access to elderly care products and services by credible start-ups, supporting entrepreneurship in the field of elderly care.

Parliamentary Panel Findings on the National Education Policy

Governance & Social Issues

Why in news?

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has advised the Indian government to hold discussions with stakeholders regarding the multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) system proposed in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

About (MEME) system

- The Multiple Entry and Multiple Exit (MEME) system is an educational approach that allows students in higher education to enter and exit their academic programs at various points, not necessarily following a traditional linear progression.

Benefits:

- It offers students greater flexibility by permitting them to leave with certificates or diplomas at different stages rather than completing a full degree program, which can suit their individual needs and circumstances.
- This system is intended to provide diverse educational pathways and enhance access to higher education.

However, the parliamentary panel has criticised the MEME system due to:

- **Uncertainty in Student Numbers:** The panel expressed concerns that the high student population in India makes it difficult for institutions to predict how many students will exit or join midway, leading to uncertainty in managing resources and maintaining pupil-teacher ratios.
- **Geographical Challenges:** Uneven distribution of higher educational institutions across the country, particularly in rural areas, poses challenges in implementing MEME effectively.
- **Lack of Clear Framework:** The panel noted that there is a need for comprehensive guidelines and a well-defined framework for MEME options, including specific eligibility criteria and credit transfer mechanisms. Without these, the implementation of MEME could be problematic.
- **Potential for Devalued Degrees:** Some critics, including students and teachers, fear that the MEME system could devalue degrees by allowing students to exit with lower-level qualifications, potentially leading to a perception of producing cheap labour for the job market.
- **State-Level Opposition:** Some states, like Kerala, have decided not to implement MEME in their colleges and universities, highlighting a lack of uniformity in its acceptance across regions.
- **Dropout Concerns:** Experts and critics have expressed concerns that the MEME system could increase dropout rates, as students may opt for early exits without completing full-degree programs.



Why in news?

- G20 TechSprint 2023 was organised to promote innovative solutions aimed at improving cross-border payments.

About cross-border payments:

- It is a type of transaction that takes place between financial institutions, businesses, and individuals, where the sender and recipient are based in separate countries. The cross-border payments market value is estimated to be \$190 trillion in 2023 and is expected to reach \$290 trillion by 2030.
- **Common types of cross-border payment:** Credit card transactions, International money orders, Digital Wallets and International Wire Transfers.

Significance of cross-border payments:

- **Financial inclusion:** It can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap and enabling underserved communities to participate in the global economy.
- **Access to global markets:** It allows businesses to expand into international markets and reach new customers, suppliers, and partners.
- **Diversification:** It enables businesses to diversify their customer base, supplier base, and investment portfolio.
- **Globalization:** Cross-border payments are a fundamental element of the globalization process.
- **Ease Remittances:** Since 2016, India's cross-border remittances have been growing at a CAGR of 8%.
- **Facilitating Travel and tourism:** In 2021, the travel and tourism industry in India contributed around 178 billion U.S. dollars to the country's GDP.
- **Accelerating foreign investment:** India received a total FDI inflow of US\$70.97 billion in FY 2023.

Challenges:

- **Contradictory regulatory framework:** Different nations have different regulations governing cross-border transactions and it can be a challenge to harmonise them to facilitate such transactions.
- **Lack of standardization of financial data:** Different nations use different accounting standards and digitalisation methodologies of financial data which causes issues in ensuring seamless transactions.
- **Legacy technology platforms:** rely on outdated methods such as batch processing, lack real-time monitoring, and have low data processing capacity.
- **Security risks:** Money laundering, terror financing and cyber fraud.
- **High cost and delay in settlement:** due to several controls, multiple layers, limited operating hours and long transaction chains across different time zones.

Why in news?

- The revised G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance were endorsed at the G20 Leader's Summit in New Delhi, India.

Implementing Revised G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance:

- **Basis for an effective corporate governance framework:** Promote transparent and fair markets and the efficient allocation of resources.
- **Rights and equitable treatment of shareholders and key ownership functions:** Protect and facilitate the exercise of shareholders' rights. Ensure the equitable treatment of all shareholders, including minority and foreign shareholders. Effective redress for violation of shareholders' rights at a reasonable cost and without excessive delay.
- **Institutional investors, stock markets, and other intermediaries:** Disclose and minimize conflicts of interest of entities/professionals that provide analysis/advice for investors, such as analysts, brokers, ESG rating and data providers, credit rating agencies etc. Fair and efficient price discovery in Stock markets.

- **Disclosure and transparency:** Timely and accurately disclose all material matters regarding the corporation, including the financial situation, performance, sustainability, ownership, and governance. Disclosures in accordance with internationally recognised accounting and disclosure standards.
- **Responsibilities of the board:** Strategic guidance of the company including proper risk management, and maintaining high ethical standards. Effective monitoring of management through identifying potential conflicts of interest, conducting independent external audits, overseeing the process of disclosure and communications etc.
- **Sustainability and resilience:** Incentives for companies and their investors to make decisions for the sustainability and resilience of the corporation. Sustainability-related disclosure frameworks are consistent with high-quality, understandable, enforceable, and internationally recognized standards.

Regulation of Crypto Assets in India

Economy

Why in news?

- G20 countries adopted the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration which called for effective regulation of crypto assets.

Crypto regulation in India:

- **Legal framework:** Currently, the exchange, transfer, safekeeping or administration of cryptocurrencies is under the ambit of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002. This would require all entities dealing with crypto to implement mandatory KYC processes, report suspicious activities, and require financial entities/crypto companies to maintain client details for five years.
- **RBI:** RBI has, on several occasions, voiced its concerns about crypto assets -
 - **2013:** RBI issued a statement cautioning users, holders, and traders of virtual currencies, including cryptocurrencies, about the potential risks associated with their use.
 - **2017:** RBI cautioned users, holders and traders of virtual currencies, including Bitcoins, regarding various risks associated with dealing with such virtual currencies.
 - **2018:** RBI issued a circular prohibiting banks and other regulated entities from providing services to individuals or businesses dealing in cryptocurrencies. The circular effectively made it illegal for Indian residents to buy or sell cryptocurrencies.
 - **2020:** The ban was overturned by the Supreme Court stating that it was disproportionate and that it violated the fundamental rights of citizens. This decision effectively legalised the use of cryptocurrencies in India and opened the door for their wider adoption.
- **Tax regime:** In 2022, the Union Budget, for the first time officially classified digital assets, including cryptocurrency, as "virtual digital assets." In the proposed tax regime, the government has announced a flat 30-percent income tax on the transfer of "crypto- assets". The Centre also announced another 1% tax deducted at source (TDS).
- **Regulatory Framework:** In 2022, the Ministry of Finance released a report proposing the creation of a digital rupee, a state-backed cryptocurrency, as well as a framework for regulating private cryptocurrencies. The report also recommended the establishment of a Digital Currency Regulatory Authority (DCRA) to oversee the use of cryptocurrencies in India.

Challenges in Regulating Cryptocurrency:

- **Blanket Ban:** Blanket bans making crypto-asset activities illegal can be costly and technically demanding to enforce. Many technology solutions can achieve circumvention due to the inherent borderless nature of crypto assets.
- **Regulatory consistency:** Achieving consistency in crypto regulations across different countries remains a complex task.
- **Lack of harmonized taxonomies:** Different jurisdictions define and categorise crypto-assets in various buckets, creating ambiguity in understanding the risks posed as well as a lack of clarity for market participants.
- **Fragmentation:** Fragmented monitoring, supervision and enforcement due to a lack of coordination among various law enforcement agencies.
- **Balancing innovation and risk:** Striking the right balance between fostering innovation and mitigating risks remains a delicate task.
- **Cross-border enforcement:** Enforcing regulations in a global, decentralized ecosystem and different national priorities poses significant challenges.

• Why in news?

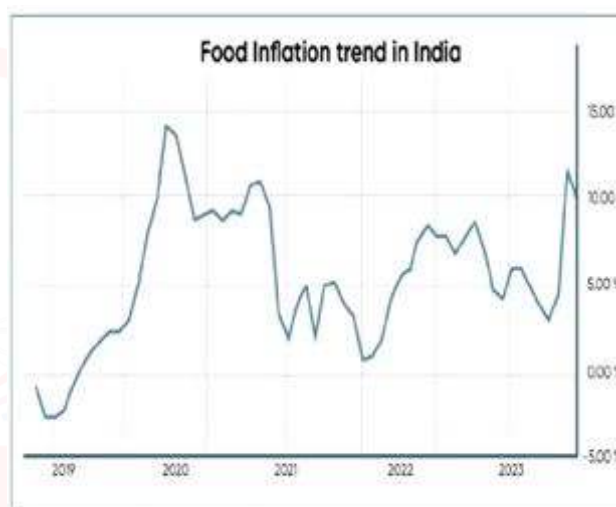
- The Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) has estimated that banning cereal exports will cost farmers at least ₹45,000 crore in 2023.

Food Inflation in India:

- Retail inflation was at 6.83% with Food Inflation at 9.2% in August 2023. It is measured by the Year-on-Year Consumer Price Index (CPI). The recent inflation is largely because of the impact of rising food prices, as food and beverages carry 45.9% weight in the CPI basket.
- Major contributors to current food inflation include tomatoes, onions, cereals (wheat and rice), spices, and milk and dairy products.
- Wheat inflation is partly due to domestic factors like heat waves and unseasonal rains and partly a result of international price transmission due to issues like the Russia-Ukraine war.

Government Measures to manage food inflation:

- **Export restrictions:** These include export bans, export duties and imposition of Minimum Export Price (MEP).
- **Stock limits:** Imposition of stocking limits on wheat traders and millers.
- **Direct support to farmers:** Support is provided through subsidies, income support and procurement at Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- **Supply-side measures:** Improving agricultural productivity, marketing, strategic reserves, promoting diversification and value addition.
- **Buffer Stocks:** The government maintains buffer stock and offloads from it under the Open Market Sales Scheme (OMSS).
- **Food Security scheme:** Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana was launched to provide free food grains to more than 80 crore beneficiaries.



Recommendations:

- **Calibrated trade policy:** Instead of a protectionist trade policy, trade policy can be calibrated to control rising inflation with measures such as a timely reduction in import duty.
- **Buffer Stocks:** The government should build buffer stocks for volatile vegetable staples like TOP (Tomato, Onion, Potato) during the harvest season. This will help farmers realize stable prices in the glut period. The stocks can be systematically released over the lean period, or during the festive season when demand is high, to cool down the prices.
- **Development of food processing:** Processed food can provide a viable substitute for consumers during price pressure on fresh produce.
- **Research and Development (R&D):** Increase investment in R&D from the current 0.48% of agriculture GDP in order to augment productivity. It can be directed to areas like innovative farming practices, and drought-resisting seed varieties, adaptive to these changing conditions.
- **Increasing irrigation:** Irrigation coverage can be increased by expanding micro irrigation infrastructure including soil moisture sensors, and drip irrigations.
- **Income support to farmers:** The government can increase its amount of income transfer to farmers under PM-Kisan from Rs.6,000 to Rs.10,000 a year to offset the potential income losses.

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister launched 'PM Vishwakarma' Scheme for traditional artisans and craftspeople on the occasion of Vishwakarma Jayanti.

About PM Vishwakarma scheme:

- Objective:** To enable recognition of artisans and craftspeople as Vishwakarmas, to provide incentives for digital transactions to encourage digital empowerment of Vishwakarmas and to provide a platform for brand promotion and market linkages to help them access new opportunities for growth.
- Type:** Central Sector Scheme.
- Duration:** FY 2023-24 to FY 2027-28.
- Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprise (MoMSME).
- Scheme will be jointly administered:** By MoMSME, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), and the Department of Financial Services (DFS) under the Ministry of Finance.
- Registration:** Free of charge through Common Services Centres using a biometric-based PM Vishwakarma Portal.
- Recognition:** Artisans and craftspeople will be provided recognition through the PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card.
- Approach:** Strengthen and nurture the **Guru-Shishya parampara** or family-based practice of traditional skills rolled out in rural and urban areas with a focus on saturating districts in a phased manner.
- Eligibility criteria:** An artisan or craftsperson working with hands and tools and engaged in one of the recognized (18) family-based traditional trades with a minimum age of 18 years, beneficiary should not have availed loans under similar credit-based schemes of Central Government or State Government for self-employment/ business development, e.g. PMEGP, PM SVANidhi, Mudra, in the past 5 years. Government employee and their family members are not eligible and benefits under the Scheme shall be restricted to one member of the family. (Under the Scheme, a 'family' is defined as consisting of the husband, wife and unmarried children).

Incremental Cash Reserve Ratio

Economy

Why in news?

- Reserve Bank of India announced the discontinuation of the Incremental Cash Reserve Ratio. Earlier, RBI had asked all banks to maintain an I-CRR of 10 percent on the increase in their Net Demand and Time Liabilities(NTDL).

About

- The Incremental Cash Reserve Ratio is an additional cash balance which the RBI can ask banks to maintain over and above the Cash Reserve Ratio (the minimum amount of the total deposits that banks have to keep with the central bank for a specific period).
- The I-CRR was announced as a temporary measure aimed at absorbing the surplus liquidity caused due to the return of Rs 2,000 banknotes to the banking system, surplus transfer to the government by the RBI, pickup in government spending and capital inflows.
- Last time, the RBI imposed the I-CRR in November 2016 to absorb a part of the surplus liquidity in the system following the demonetisation of Rs500 and Rs 1,000 banknotes. The Reserve Bank of India had asked the banks to maintain an I-CRR of 100 percent on the increase of Net Demand and Time Liabilities(NTDL).

GST Appellate Tribunal

Economy

Why in news?

- The Finance Ministry has formally established 31 Appellate Tribunals spanning 28 States and eight Union Territories for the Goods and Services Tax (GST)

About GST Appellate Tribunal

- The GST Appellate Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body proposed to be established to resolve disputes related to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India.

- It will function as an independent body to hear appeals against orders passed by the GST authorities or the Appellate Authority.
- The tribunal will be composed of a national bench and various regional benches, headed by a chairperson appointed by the central government.

Significance

- GST Appellate Tribunal will help resolve the rising number of disputes under the GST regime that are now clogging High Courts and other judicial fora.
- Overall, the establishment of the GST Appellate Tribunal is expected to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the GST system in India.
- The Tribunal will provide an independent and efficient mechanism for resolving disputes related to GST. It will help to expedite the resolution of disputes, reduce the burden on the judiciary, and promote greater certainty and predictability in the GST system.

India can now issue OIML Certificates

Economy

Why in news?

- India became the 13th country with the authority to issue OIML certificates.

About OIML

- International organisation of Legal Metrology (OIML) is an international standard-setting body to develop model regulations, standards and related documents for use by legal metrology authorities and industry.
- established in 1955 and headquartered in Paris, France.
- OIML Certification System (OIML-CS) is a system for issuing, registering and using OIML certificates and their associated OIML type evaluation/test reports for types of measuring instruments based on the requirements of OIML Recommendations.
- OIML certificate is like a special approval or license for certain types of measuring instruments, such as digital balances or clinical thermometers. When a product, like a digital balance, gets an OIML certificate, it means that it has met certain international standards for accuracy and quality.
- India joined OIML in 1956 and signed the metric convention, and became the 13th country with the authority to issue OIML certificates.

Significance

- Since, only 13 countries are authorised, the manufacturers in neighbouring countries can now get their certification done from India
- It is expected to help the Indian Economy in several ways, including increase in Exports, earning of Foreign Exchange and generation of employment.

Periodic Labour Force survey (PLFS) of 2021-22

Economy

Why in news?

- The Periodic Labour Force survey (PLFS) of 2021-22 showed unemployment reducing to 4.1%, much lower than before, but higher than some developed economies. PLFS of 2017 revealed the unemployment rate of India to be 6.1%, the highest ever recorded in India

About Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS):

- NSO had launched the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in April 2017.
- It was **launched as part of efforts to get a better sense of the job situation and provide reliable and timely data.**
- The PLFS is designed with two major objectives for measurement of employment and unemployment –
 - First, to measure the dynamics in labour force participation and employment status in the short time interval of three months for only the urban areas in the Current Weekly Status (CWS).
 - Second, for both rural and urban areas, to measure the labour force estimates on key parameters in both usual status and Current Weekly Status.

Why in news?

- RBI has proposed setting-up a Self-Regulatory Organisation for fintech's

About SRO

- A self-regulatory organization (SRO) is an entity such as a **non-governmental organization**, which has the **power to create and enforce stand-alone industry and professional regulations and standards on its own**.
- In the case of financial SROs, such as a stock exchange, the priority is to protect investors by establishing rules, regulations, and set standards of procedures that promote ethics, equality, and professionalism.
- An SRO is aimed at **protecting the customer and promoting ethics, equality, and professionalism**.
- SROs typically collaborate with all stakeholders in framing rules and regulations.
- Their self-regulatory processes are administered through impartial mechanisms such that members operate in a disciplined environment and accept penal actions by the SRO.
- An SRO is **expected to address concerns beyond the narrow self-interests of the industry**, such as to protect workers, customers or other participants in the ecosystem.
- Regulations, standards, and dispute resolution and enforcement by an SRO get legitimacy not just by mutual agreement of its members, but also by the efficiency with which self-regulation is perceived to be administered.
- Such regulations supplement, but do not replace, applicable laws or regulations, according to the Reserve Bank of India.
- Examples of financial SROs include **Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, Inc.(FINRA) and the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE)**.

Need for an SRO:

- As regulators continue to contemplate, implement, and refine regulations for the **orderly development of the fintech sector**, SROs could play a pivotal role in the fintech industry **by promoting responsible practices and maintaining ethical standards**.
- There have been many instances where a **few fintech players were involved in unethical practices** such as charging exorbitant higher interest rates and harassment of borrowers for recovering loans.
- Proactively addressing issues like market integrity, conduct, data privacy, cybersecurity, and risk management, SROs can help build trust among consumers, investors, and regulators.

Advantages of SRO

- An SRO can **help in establishing codes of conduct for its members** that foster transparency, fair competition, and consumer protection.
- SROs are widely considered experts in their fields and so have in-depth knowledge of the markets they operate in.
- This is helpful to their members as they can be called in to participate in deliberations and learn more about the nuances of the industry.
- Formation of SROs **ensures member organisations** follow a certain standard of conduct that helps **promote ethical ways of doing business**, which can lead to **enhanced confidence in the ecosystem**.
- They can **serve as a watchdog to guard against unprofessional practices** within an industry or profession.

Functions of an SRO:

- The recognised SRO will serve as a **two-way communication channel** between its members and the RBI.
- It will work towards **establishing minimum benchmarks and standards** and help instil **professional and healthy market behaviour** among its members.
- SROs will impart training to the staff of its members and others and will **conduct awareness programmes**.
- It will establish a **uniform grievance redressal and dispute management framework** across its members.

Why in news?

- PM Vishwakarma, a Central Sector Scheme, was launched on 17th September, 2023 by the Prime Minister to provide end-to-end support to artisans and craftspeople who work with their hands and tools

About the scheme

- The Scheme covers artisans and craftspeople engaged in 18 trades, viz. (i) Carpenter (Suthar/Badhari); (ii) Boat Maker; (iii) Armourer; (iv) Blacksmith (Lohar); (v) Hammer and Tool Kit Maker; (vi) Locksmith; (vii) Goldsmith (Sonar); (viii) Potter (Kumhaar); (ix) Sculptor (Moortikar, stone carver), Stone breaker; (x) Cobbler (Charmkar)/Shoemaker/Footwear artisan; (xi) Mason (Rajmistri); (xii) Basket/Mat/Broom Maker/Coir Weaver; (xiii) Doll & Toy Maker (Traditional); (xiv) Barber (Naai); (xv) Garland maker (Malakaar); (xvi) Washerman (Dhobi); (xvii) Tailor (Darzi); and (xviii) Fishing Net Maker.
- The Scheme envisages provisioning of the following benefits to the artisans and crafts persons:
 - Recognition:** Recognition of artisans and craftspeople through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card.
 - Skill Upgradation:** Basic Training of 5-7 days and Advanced Training of 15 days or more, with a stipend of Rs. 500 per day;
 - Toolkit Incentive:** A toolkit incentive of upto Rs. 15,000 in the form of e-vouchers at the beginning of Basic Skill Training.
 - Credit Support:** Collateral free 'Enterprise Development Loans' of upto Rs. 3 lakh in two tranches of Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 2 lakh with tenures of 18 months and 30 months, respectively, at a concessional rate of interest fixed at 5%, with Government of India subvention to the extent of 8%. Beneficiaries who have completed Basic Training will be eligible to avail the first tranche of credit support of upto Rs. 1 lakh. The second loan tranche will be available to beneficiaries who have availed the 1st tranche and maintained a standard loan account and have adopted digital transactions in their business or have undergone Advanced Training.
 - Incentive for Digital Transaction:** An amount of Re. 1 per digital transaction, upto maximum 100 transactions monthly will be credited to the beneficiary's account for each digital pay-out or receipt.
 - Marketing Support:** Marketing support will be provided to the artisans and craftspeople in the form of quality certification, branding, onboarding on e-commerce platforms such as GeM, advertising, publicity and other marketing activities to improve linkage to value chain.
- In addition to the above-mentioned benefits, the Scheme will onboard the beneficiaries on Udyam Assist Platform as 'entrepreneurs' in the formal MSME ecosystem.
- Enrolment of beneficiaries shall be done through Common Service Centres with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication on PM Vishwakarma portal. The enrolment of beneficiaries will be followed by a three-step verification which will include (i) Verification at Gram Panchayat/ ULB level, (ii) Vetting and Recommendation by the District Implementation Committee (iii) Approval by the Screening Committee.

'Bima Sugam' online platform**Why in news?**

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is in the process of establishing the 'Bima Sugam' online platform, a transformative development in the insurance sector often likened to a 'UPI moment.' This platform is set to revolutionize the insurance landscape in India, offering several

Significance

- One-Stop Destination:** Bima Sugam will serve as a comprehensive platform catering to various insurance-related needs. This includes **policy purchase, portability, agent changes, and claims processing.**
- Direct Policy Purchase:** Buyers will have the **convenience of directly purchasing life, motor, or health insurance policies through various channels, such as web aggregators, brokers, banks, and insurance agents.** Insurance companies will be significant stakeholders in this platform, which will operate through an 'e-insurance account' (E-IA).
- Centralized Data:** The platform aims to **centralize insurance data, simplifying the process of policy porting and providing a wide array of policy options to consumers.** It also seeks to reduce intermediary commissions and facilitate the introduction of new insurance products.
- Launch Date:** Bima Sugam is **scheduled for launch in June 2024.**
- Ownership:** Ownership of the platform will be divided among key stakeholders. **Life insurance and general insurance companies will each hold a 47.5% stake, while brokers and agent bodies will own 2.5% each.**

Why in news?

- 28 new mandis are approved recently for integration to take the total count of APMCs to 1389 on e-NAM:

About e-Nam 2.0

- National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal, launched on 14th April 2016, by the Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi, networks the existing APMC mandis. The trading portal leveraging available infrastructure with existing APMCs to create a Unified National Market for agricultural commodities. The portal is managed by "Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)", under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India.
- e-NAM has been able to bring competence in APMC mandi operations via technology interventions: accuracy in weighment via digital weighbridge and weighing scale; accuracy in assaying via advance assaying equipment; real-time online information on commodity prices, access to more buyers/sellers and transparency in trade (due to on-line mode of auction) resulting in competitive bidding and there by better price discovery; transparency in payment via multiple online payment modes and better efficiency in overall mandi operations via digitalization.

Basel III Capital Framework**Economy****Why in news?**

- The RBI has introduced norms on the Basel III capital framework, fund raising, exposure guidelines, and norms on classification and valuation of investment portfolios for All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs), which will come into effect from April 2024.

About All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs)

- India has five AIFIs regulated by the central bank, namely the Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM Bank), the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard), the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), the National Housing Bank (NHB), and the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI).

Capital adequacy

- AIFIs will be required to maintain a minimum total capital of 9 per cent by April 2024, wherein minimum tier-I capital will need to be at 7 per cent and common equity tier-I (CET-1) capital at 5.5 per cent. For NHB, the implementation date will be July 2024, given that its accounting year is July–June.
- All financial subsidiaries, except those engaged in insurance and non-financial activities (both regulated and unregulated), will need to be fully consolidated for the purpose of capital adequacy, the RBI said, adding that this will ensure an assessment of capital adequacy at the group level, taking into account the risk profile of assets and liabilities of the subsidiaries.
- The central bank has capped AIFIs' investments in capital instruments of banking, financial, and insurance entities at 10 per cent of their capital funds. AIFIs will not be allowed to acquire a fresh stake in a bank's or AIFT's equity shares if the acquisition leads to its holding exceeding 5 per cent of the investee's equity capital.
- Further, AIFIs' equity investment in a single entity cannot exceed 49 per cent of the equity of the investee. While AIFIs can hold this entire 49 per cent stake as a pledgee, if the acquisition is against AIFT's claims, the stake will need to be brought below 10 per cent within three years.
- AIFIs need to evaluate their capital adequacy relative to their risks and consider the potential impact on earnings and capital from economic downturns, it said, adding that an AIFT's capital planning process "should incorporate rigorous, forward-looking stress testing".
- **The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision:**
- It was established by the Central Bank governors of the Group of Ten countries in 1974.
- The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision is an organization made up of 45 members, comprising central banks and bank supervisors from 28 jurisdictions.
- It is the primary global standard setter for the prudential regulation of banks.
- Additionally, it provides a forum for regular cooperation on banking supervisory matters.
- It doesn't have any formal authority over banks due to their decisions having no legal force, the members work together to achieve the mandate set out by it.

- The Group of Governors and Heads of Supervision (GHOS) overseeing the Basel Committee . This group sets out the general agenda and approves the committee's charters.

Basel Norms:

- The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) issues Basel Norms for international banking regulations.
- The goal of these norms is to strengthen the international banking system by coordinating banking regulations around the world.
- The Basel Committee has currently issued three guidelines to achieve its goal: Basel I, II, and III.
- **Basel I**
 - It was introduced in 1988.
 - It was almost entirely concerned with credit risk.
 - It established the capital and risk-weighting structure for banks.
 - The required minimum capital was set at 8% of risk-weighted assets (RWA).
- RWA refers to assets with varying risk profiles. For example, an asset backed by collateral would be less risky than a personal loan with no collateral.
 - Capital is divided into two categories: Tier 1 capital and Tier 2 capital.
- Tier 1 capital is the bank's core capital because it is the primary measure of the bank's financial strength. The majority of core capital is made up of disclosed reserves (also known as retained earnings) and paid-up capital. It also includes non-cumulative and non-redeemable preferred stock.
- Tier 2 capital – It is used as supplemental funding since it is less reliable than the first tier. It consists of undisclosed reserves, preference shares, and subordinate debt.
 - In 1999, India adopted the Basel 1 guidelines.
- **Basel II**
 - In 2004, Basel II guidelines were published by BCBS.
 - These were the refined and reformed versions of Basel I accord.
 - The guidelines were based on three parameters, which the committee calls it as pillars.
- **Capital Adequacy Requirements:** Banks should maintain a minimum capital adequacy requirement of 8% of risk assets
- **Supervisory Review:** According to this, banks were needed to develop and use better risk management techniques in monitoring and managing all the three types of risks that a bank faces, viz. credit, market and operational risks.
- **Market Discipline:** This needs increased disclosure requirements. Banks need to mandatorily disclose their CAR, risk exposure, etc to the central bank.
 - Basel II norms in India and overseas are yet to be fully implemented though India follows these norms.
- **Basel III**
 - In 2010, Basel III guidelines were released.
 - These guidelines were introduced in response to the financial crisis of 2008.
 - The guidelines aim to promote a more resilient banking system by focusing on four vital banking parameters viz. capital, leverage, funding and liquidity.
- **Capital:** The capital adequacy ratio is to be maintained at 12.9%. The minimum Tier 1 capital ratio and the minimum Tier 2 capital ratio have to be maintained at 10.5% and 2% of risk-weighted assets respectively. In addition, banks have to maintain a capital conservation buffer of 2.5%. Counter-cyclical buffer is also to be maintained at 0-2.5%.
- **Leverage:** The leverage rate has to be at least 3 %. The leverage rate is the ratio of a bank's tier-1 capital to average total consolidated assets.
- **Funding and Liquidity:** Basel-III created two liquidity ratios: LCR and NSFR.
- The liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) will require banks to hold a buffer of high-quality liquid assets sufficient to deal with the cash outflows encountered in an acute short term stress scenario as specified by supervisors. The goal is to ensure that banks have enough liquidity for a 30-days stress scenario if it were to happen.
- The Net Stable Funds Rate (NSFR) requires banks to maintain a stable funding profile in relation to their off-balance-sheet assets and activities. NSFR requires banks to fund their activities with stable sources of finance (reliable over the one-year horizon). The minimum NSFR requirement is 100%.

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Why in news?

- Recently, the 'State of Working India 2023' report was released by Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment.

Highlights of the Report:

- About:** It uses data sources like the National Statistical Office, including Employment-Unemployment Surveys and the Periodic Labour Force Surveys, and has revealed major trends in India's labour market.
- Findings:** The analysis was drawn from seven charts from the report on intergenerational mobility and women's workforce participation rates:
- Changing composition of employment type, based on caste:** Between 2004 and 2018, more sons of fathers who did casual wage work are now getting better jobs, except for Scheduled Caste workers, where progress is slower.
 - Between 1983 and 2021, more Scheduled Caste (SC) workers have regular wage jobs, but the proportion is lower than for general caste workers. SC workers also have higher self-employment rates.
- Intergenerational mobility matrices over time disaggregated by caste, for SC/ST groups:
 - Between 2004 and 2018, more sons of fathers who did casual wage work are now getting better jobs, except for Scheduled Caste workers, where progress is slower.
 - Between 1983 and 2021, more Scheduled Caste (SC) workers have regular wage jobs, but the proportion is lower than for general caste workers.
 - SC workers also have higher self-employment rates.
- Industries showing an overrepresentation of Women, SCs:
 - In 2018, there was more economic mobility for sons of general caste casual wage workers compared to SC/STs.
 - Sons of casual wage workers shifted towards informal, semi-formal, and regular wage work.
 - Casual wage work had the highest intergenerational persistence, while regular wage work showed less persistence.
- Relationship between husband's earnings and probability of women's employment:
 - In rural areas, as the husband's income increases, the decline in the wife's employment probability slows down.
 - In urban areas, there's a U-shaped pattern: the wife's employment probability falls until the husband's income reaches Rs. 40,000, then rises because higher-income husbands often have well-educated wives with access to good jobs.
- Female workforce participation rates by education for 2021-22:
 - The presence of an employed mother-in-law significantly increases the likelihood of married women being employed, whereas an unemployed mother-in-law decreases this likelihood.
- On the rising share of workers in the non-agricultural sector, compared to organised/regular wage employment sectors:
 - The share of non-agricultural sector workers increased from the 1980s, reaching 19.8% in 2021 (20.3% in the late 2010s). However, many shifted to casual wage labor or informal work instead of organized or salaried employment.
- Unemployment in India is concentrated among its educated youth:
 - Unemployment rates are highest among graduates under 25, decreasing with lower education levels. As people age, employment probability rises.

Why in news?

- The Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) has taken several steps to address the crisis in the diamond industry due to a lack of demand for polished natural diamonds and studded jewellery in the international market.

About GJEPC

- Appeal to Halt Rough Diamond Imports:** GJEPC has appealed to the diamond industry to stop importing rough diamonds from October 15 to December 15. This measure is aimed at managing the imbalance between supply and demand, as well as stabilizing prices in the face of declining exports and increasing inventories of polished diamonds.

- **Decline in Demand:** GJEPC noted that demand for loose polished diamonds and jewellery from major economies like the USA and China has been declining for several quarters. This decline has resulted in a 25% decrease in exports from January to August, with a similar trend seen in September. As a result, inventories of polished diamonds have increased, leading to softer prices.
- **Outreach to Diamond Mining Companies:** GJEPC has reached out to major diamond mining companies, informing them of the industry's short-term challenges and requesting their support. This suggests a collaborative effort to address the issues facing the diamond industry.
- **Temporary Import Halt:** It was suggested that members of the industry voluntarily halt the import of rough diamonds from mid-October to mid-December. This is seen as a way to better align supply with demand.

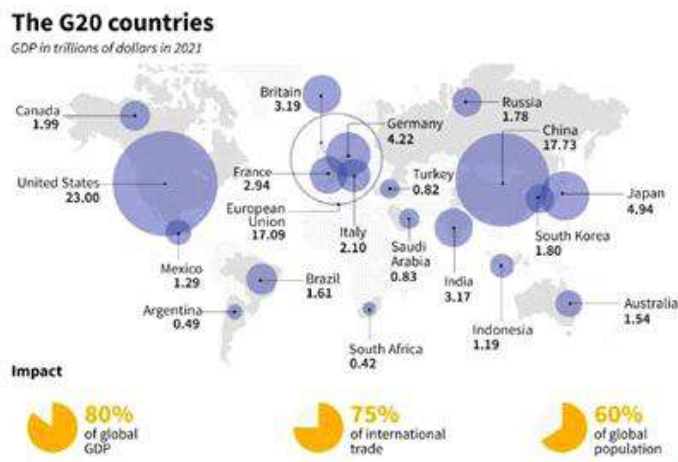


Context

- Recently, the 18th G20 Summit was held in New Delhi. The theme of the summit was "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", which means "The world is one family".

About G20

- G20 is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 countries, the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU).
- Founded in **1999** after the Asian financial crisis as a forum for the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to discuss global economic and financial issues.
- In 2008, it was upgraded to the level of Heads of State/Government and was designated the "premier forum for international economic cooperation".
- Since 2011, the G20 Summit is held annually, under the leadership of a **rotating Presidency**.
- Accounts for around **80% of global GDP**, 75% of international trade, **two-thirds of the global population**, and 60% of the world's land area.
- G-20 operates without a permanent secretariat or staff.
- The Presidency, aided by the countries holding the Presidency before and after it (Troika), is responsible for setting the agenda of each year's Summit.



Outcomes of the 2023 Summit

- New Delhi Declaration:** achieved unanimous consensus, addressing diverse global issues, from Russia-Ukraine tensions to sustainable development, food security, and launching the Global Biofuel Alliance.
- India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor:** network of transport corridors, including railways and sea lanes connecting India, the Middle East, and Europe.
- Global Biofuel Alliance:** an alliance of governments, international organizations, and industry to promote the adoption of biofuels. (covered in Environment section)
- African Union** became a permanent member of G20

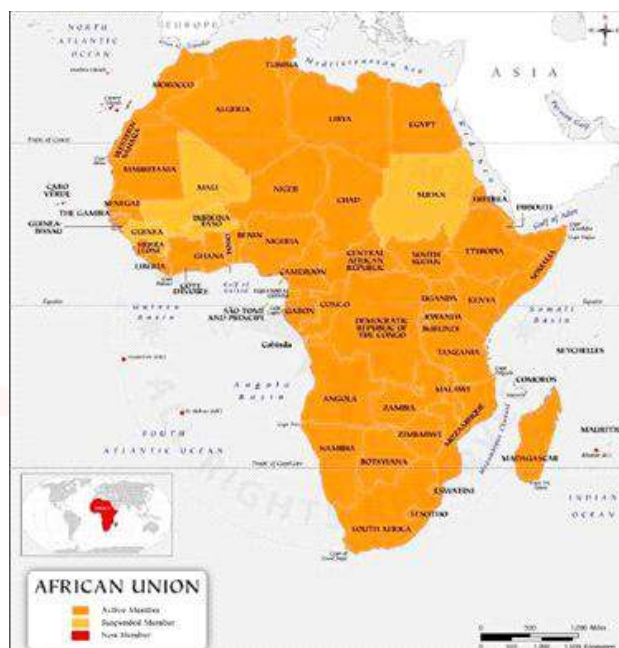
New Delhi Declaration

- On Russia-Ukraine War:** The Declaration urged countries to refrain from the threat of use of force to seize territories and called for the establishment of a "comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine". The declaration also emphasised that the "use or threat of using nuclear weapons is inadmissible", avoiding any direct mention of Russia for the war in Ukraine.
- Strong, Sustainable, Balanced, and Inclusive Growth:** consensus for implementation of the Action Plan against Fugitive Economic Offenders and strengthening international cooperation and information sharing among law enforcement agencies.
- Accelerating progress on SDGs:** eliminating hunger and malnutrition, collaboration on health-related goals and commitment to delivering quality education.
- Green Development Pact for a Sustainable Future:** focus on the need to implement clean, sustainable, and affordable energy transitions and the summit also marked the inclusion of the PM Mission LiFE to combat climate change.
- Multilateral Institutions for the 21st Century:** need for a strong push for reforms in Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and a broader agreement on the reform of the UN Security Council.
- Technological transformation and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** need for building digital public infrastructure with emphasis on crypto-assets and harnessing Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- International taxation:** commitment to OECD's twin pillars - Profit Allocation and Global Minimum Taxation.

- **Gender Equality and Women empowerment:** promotion of equal rights to economic resources, property ownership, and financial services and thus on the same agenda the decision under India's G20 Presidency was made to create a working group on women's empowerment.
- **Countering Terrorism and Money Laundering:** consensus was reached condemning terrorism in all forms and manifestations.

About African Union

- It is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999).
- The most important decisions of the AU are made by the Assembly of the African Union, a semi-annual meeting of the heads of state and government of its member states.
- AU's **secretariat**, the African Union Commission, is based in **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**.
- At the G20 Summit 2023, the AU was admitted as a permanent member to the G20.
- AU is guided by its vision of "An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena." It aims to achieve greater unity and solidarity between African countries and their people.



India-Middle East- EU Economic Corridor

International Relations

Context

- In the recently held G20 summit, an MoU was signed between leaders of various countries to establish the India-Middle East- EU Economic Corridor (IMEC).

About IMEC

- IMEC will consist of Railroad, Ship-to-Rail networks and Road transport routes extending across two corridors:
 - **East Corridor** – connecting India to the Arabian Gulf,
 - **Northern Corridor** – connecting the Gulf to Europe.
- The project forms part of the
- **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)**. PGII was announced in 2021 during the G7 summit in the UK and is seen as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- **Signatories: India, the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the European Union, Italy, France, and Germany.**
- The ancient Red Sea route, dating back to the Common Era, once connected distant civilizations, facilitating the exchange of goods and ideas. IMEC, a recently established trade corridor, is poised to reshape global trade dynamics.
- IMEC envisions the development of a reliable and cost-effective transport network, including railways and ship-to-rail transit, to facilitate the movement of goods and services between India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and the European Union (EU).



Significance of IMEC

- **Historical Revival:** IMEC revives ancient trade routes, particularly the Red Sea route, dating back to the Common Era. It reconnects regions and rekindles the spirit of historical trade.
- **Geopolitical Clout:** IMEC's establishment gathered leaders from India, the United States, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Italy, and the EU. This underscores its geopolitical significance, positioning these regions as pivotal players in global trade.
- **Economic Growth:** IMEC is expected to boost economic cooperation and trade among its participating nations, leading to economic growth and development.
- **Connectivity and Integration:** The corridor aims to restore and enhance connectivity between regions with historical ties, creating a cohesive economic and trade network spanning Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe

Challenges

- **Infrastructure Development:** Building the necessary rail links, terminals, and inland container depots (ICDs) at major Gulf and Mediterranean ports is a complex and extensive endeavour.
- **Cross-Border Connectivity:** Ensuring seamless connectivity across borders, especially in the Middle East, demands cooperation between multiple countries. This includes extending rail networks from the Gulf to Israel through Jordan.
- **Environmental Considerations:** IMEC's commitment to green and sustainable growth involves addressing environmental challenges, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Coordination and Financing:** Coordination among participating countries and securing financing are crucial to overcome financial barriers and ensure the corridor's viability.

ASEAN-India Summit

International Relations

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister attended the 20th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia

About ASEAN

- It is an intergovernmental organization of ten Southeast Asian countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- It was founded in **1967** with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (also known as the **Bangkok Declaration**). Its original members were Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.
- ASEAN is headed by a chair - a position that rotates annually among leaders of member states -
- and is assisted by a **secretariat based in Jakarta, Indonesia**. Important decisions are usually reached through consultation and consensus guided by the principles of noninterference in internal affairs and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

ASEAN and Its Trade Partners

● ASEAN members ● Countries with free trade agreements with ASEAN



Highlights of the India-ASEAN

- India presented a 12-point proposal for strengthening India – ASEAN cooperation covering connectivity, digital transformation, trade and economic engagement, addressing contemporary challenges, people-to-people contacts, and deepening strategic engagement. The 12-point proposal included the following:
 - Establishing multi-modal connectivity and economic corridor that links South-East Asia-India-West Asia-Europe.
 - Offered to share India's Digital Public Infrastructure Stack with ASEAN partners.



- Announced an ASEAN-India fund for Digital Future focusing on cooperation in digital transformation and financial connectivity.
- Announced renewal of support to the Economic and Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) to act as a knowledge partner for enhancing our engagement.
- Called for collectively raising issues being faced by Global South in multilateral fora
- Invited ASEAN countries to join the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine being established by WHO in India.
- Called for working together on Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for the Environment).
- Offered to share India's experience in providing affordable and quality medicines to people through Jan-Aushadhi Kendras.
- Called for a collective fight against terrorism, terror financing, and cyber-disinformation.
- Invited ASEAN countries to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Called for cooperation in disaster management.
- Called for enhanced cooperation on maritime safety, security, and domain awareness.

About East Asia Summit

- EAS is a regional forum comprising 18 participating countries: ASEAN + 6 (India, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, S. Korea) + 2 (US, Russia)

Global Biofuel Alliance

International Relations

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the launch of the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) and urged G20 nations to join the initiative with a plea to take ethanol blending with petrol globally to 20 per cent.

About Global Biofuels Alliance

- The Global Biofuels Alliance mirrors the International Solar Alliance (ISA) piloted by New Delhi and Paris in 2015 to bring clean and affordable solar energy within the reach of all.
- GBA is an India-led initiative to develop an alliance of governments, international organisations and industry to facilitate adoption of biofuels.
- Bringing together the biggest consumers and producers of biofuels to drive biofuels development and deployment, the initiative aims to position biofuels as a key to energy transition and contribute to jobs and economic growth.
- The initiating members of the Alliance are India, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Italy, Mauritius, South Africa, the UAE and the US. Canada and Singapore are observer countries.

Significance of this Alliance

- Biofuels are derived from renewable biomass resources and wastes such as plastic, municipal solid waste, waste gases, etc.
- It seeks to provide a higher degree of national energy security in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner by supplementing conventional energy resources, reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels and meeting the energy needs of India's urban and vast rural population.
- India, which imports over 85 per cent of its crude oil needs, is gradually building capacity to produce fuel from such items as crop stubble, plant waste, and municipal solid waste.
- While India is on schedule to double the mixing of ethanol extracted from sugarcane and agriculture waste to 20 per cent with petrol by 2025, it is also setting up dozens of compressed biogas (CBG) plants.
- The Global Biofuels Alliance is aimed at facilitating cooperation and intensifying the use of sustainable biofuels across sectors, including transportation.
- Its focus is primarily on strengthening markets, facilitating global biofuel trade, developing concrete policy lesson-sharing and providing technical support for national biofuel programmes worldwide.
- Such an initiative is also aimed at helping India's transition to alternative fuels and cutting its import bill, as the country seeks to achieve its net-zero carbon emissions goal by 2070.
- GBA will support worldwide development and deployment of sustainable biofuels by offering capacity-building exercises across the value chain, technical support for national programmes & promoting policy lessons-sharing.



- It will facilitate mobilising a virtual marketplace to assist industries, countries, ecosystem players and key stakeholders in mapping demand and supply, as well as connecting technology providers to end users.
- It will also facilitate development, adoption and implementation of internationally recognised standards, codes, sustainability principles and regulations to incentivise biofuels adoption and trade.
- The initiative will be beneficial for India at multiple fronts.
- GBA as a tangible outcome of the G20 presidency, will help strengthen India's position globally.
- Moreover, the alliance will focus on collaboration and will provide additional opportunities to Indian industries in the form of exporting technology and exporting equipment.
- It will help accelerate India's existing biofuels programmes.
- The global ethanol market was valued at \$99.06 billion in 2022 and is predicted to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.1 per cent by 2032 and surpass \$162.12 billion by 2032.

20th ASEAN Summit

International Relations

Why in news?

- India and ASEAN members agreed to enhance information-sharing and capacity-building in the maritime domain while strengthening cooperation through specialised agencies in the region.

About ASEAN

- ASEAN is an acronym for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which is a regional organization of 10 countries in Southeast Asia.
- ASEAN was established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand to promote economic growth, social progress, cultural development, and peace and security in the region. Later, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia joined ASEAN as well.
- The motto of ASEAN is "One Vision, One Identity, One Community".
- The ASEAN Secretariat is in Jakarta, Indonesia.
- India including the U.S., China, Japan, and Australia are its dialogue partners.

Indian proposals

- Prime Minister presented a 12-point proposal for strengthening India – ASEAN cooperation. It includes: Establishing multi-modal connectivity and economic corridor that links South-East Asia-India-West Asia/Europe.
- Offered to share India's Digital Public Infrastructure Stack with ASEAN partners
- Announced ASEAN-India fund for Digital Future focusing on cooperation in digital transformation and financial connectivity
- Invited ASEAN countries to join Global Centre for Traditional Medicine being established by WHO in India
- Called for enhanced cooperation on maritime safety, security and domain awareness
- Invited ASEAN countries to join Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
- Two Joint Statements, one on Maritime Cooperation, and the other on Food Security were adopted.

East Asia Summit (EAS)

- The PM also participated at the East Asia Summit.
- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a regional forum held annually by leaders of 18 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian and Oceanian regions, based on the ASEAN Plus Six mechanism. The EAS was established in 2005 with the aim of promoting economic growth, social progress, cultural development, and peace and security in the region.
- At the 18th East Asia Summit, Prime reiterated the importance of EAS mechanism and reaffirmed our support to further strengthening it. Prime Minister underlined India's support for ASEAN centrality and called for ensuring a free, open and rules based Indo-Pacific.



Why in news?

- India has become the 13th country in the world that issue Internationally Accepted OIML (International Organisation of Legal Metrology) Certificates.

About OIML

- OIML (International Organisation of Legal Metrology) is a renowned international standard-setting body in the field of legal metrology.
- Established: 1955.
- HQ: Paris.
- Its primary role is to develop model regulations, standards, and related documents for use by legal metrology authorities and industries worldwide.
- These standards are crucial in harmonizing national laws and regulations concerning the performance of measuring instruments, such as clinical thermometers, alcohol breath analyzers, radar speed measuring instruments, ship tanks at ports, and petrol dispensing units.
- India became an OIML member in 1956.
- India signed the metric convention, emphasizing its commitment to international standards in metrology.
- The OIML-CS (Certificate System) is a globally recognized system for issuing, registering, and using OIML certificates, along with their associated OIML-type evaluation/test reports.

Advantages:-

- Indian manufacturers can now export their products with greater ease.
- The certification services provided by India will attract international manufacturers.
- To meet the growing demand for certification services, India is expected to witness a surge in employment opportunities in the legal metrology sector.

Why in news?

- Recently, the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush returned from Russia after representing India at the **Eastern Economic Forum held in the Russian** port city of Vladivostok.

About Eastern Economic Forum

- EEF is an annual international event hosted in Vladivostok, Russia.
- **Inaugurated:** In September 2015, the first EEF took place at the Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok,
- **Aim:** To promote economic growth in Russia's Far East and foster international collaboration within the Asia-Pacific region.
- EEF serves as a vital platform for deliberations on critical topics such as **global economics, regional integration, advancements** in industrial and technological sectors, and the shared global challenges faced by Russia and other nations.

Russia's Far East

- The **Far Eastern part of Russia** is its easternmost region.
- **Border Sharing:** Two oceans, namely the Pacific and the Arctic
- **Five Countries:** China, Japan, Mongolia, the United States, and North Korea.
- **Abundant in Natural Resources:** Diamonds, stannary, borax materials, gold (including 50% of the nation's gold reserves), tungsten, and a variety of fish and seafood.

Why in news?

- The CALIPSO mission that analysed climate, weather, and air quality ended on August 1, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced.

About Mission

- The Cloud-Aerosol Lidar and Infrared Pathfinder Satellite Observation (CALIPSO) mission is a collaborative effort between NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and CNES (Centre National d'Études Spatiales), the French space agency.
- Launched in April 2006, CALIPSO is a pioneering Earth-observing satellite mission designed to study the Earth's atmosphere and provide essential data for understanding climate change, atmospheric processes, and air quality.

Mission Objectives

- Understanding Clouds and Aerosols:
- CALIPSO's primary objective is to enhance our understanding of clouds and aerosols (tiny solid and liquid particles suspended in the atmosphere) and their roles in Earth's climate system.
- Climate Change Research:
- CALIPSO aims to provide valuable data for climate change research by monitoring key atmospheric parameters.
- Air Quality and Weather Forecasting:
- The mission contributes to improved air quality assessments and weather forecasting by providing real-time atmospheric data.

Instrumentation

- **Lidar Technology:**
 - CALIPSO is equipped with a lidar (light detection and ranging) instrument, known as the CALIOP (Cloud-Aerosol Lidar with Orthogonal Polarization).
 - CALIOP uses laser pulses to measure the altitude and properties of clouds and aerosols with high precision.
- **Passive Sensors:**
 - The satellite also carries passive sensors, including the Imaging Infrared Radiometer (IIR) and the Wide Field Camera (WFC), which provide complementary data on clouds and aerosols.
 - Operational Details
 - Sun-Synchronous Orbit:
 - CALIPSO and its partner satellite, CloudSat, operated in a Sun-synchronous orbit, crossing the equator in the early afternoon each day.
- **Measuring Atmospheric Layers:**
 - The satellites measured cloud altitudes and the vertical distribution of various airborne particles, including dust, sea salt, ash, and soot.

Achievements and Discoveries

- **Global Aerosol Mapping:**
 - CALIPSO has produced global aerosol maps, helping scientists understand aerosol distribution, sources, and their impact on climate and air quality.

- **Cloud-Height Profiles:**
 - The mission provides detailed cloud-height profiles, which are essential for improving climate models and weather forecasts.
- **Volcanic Ash Monitoring:**
 - CALIPSO's ability to detect volcanic ash clouds has enhanced aviation safety and provided critical data during volcanic eruptions.

Long-Term Climate Records:

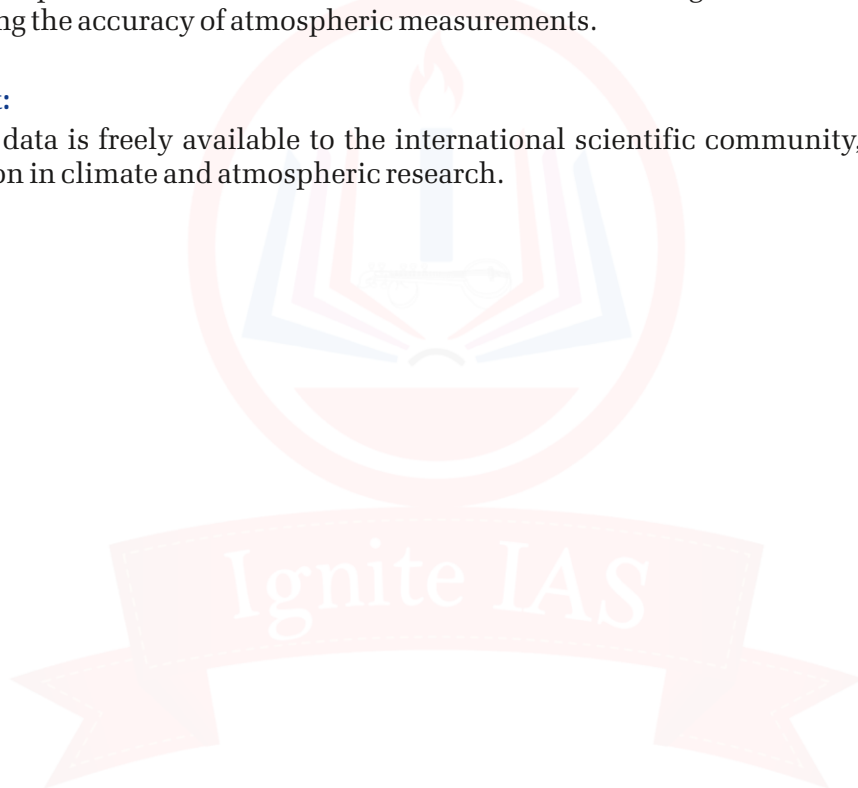
- CALIPSO has contributed to the creation of long-term climate records that are vital for monitoring trends in atmospheric composition.

International Collaboration

- **Collaboration with Other Satellites:**
 - CALIPSO operates in coordination with other Earth-observing satellites like Aqua and Aura, enhancing the accuracy of atmospheric measurements.

Global Impact:

- CALIPSO's data is freely available to the international scientific community, promoting global collaboration in climate and atmospheric research.





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- Primer NCERT series
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- Daily answer writing practice
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