

ASTRA

COMPLETE COVERAGE OF MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

DECEMBER 2023



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Why in news?

- Recently Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), met in Nairobi for its third round of negotiations to develop an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution worldwide.

About Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC)?

- The committee is formed to develop the instrument on plastic pollution.
- Comprehensive approach-** It addresses the full life cycle of plastics, including its production, design, and disposal.
- Zerdraft text-** INC-3 was a make-or-break opportunity as countries came together to negotiate the 'zerdraft' text developed by the Committee's Secretariat, with various options for core obligations and control measures.
- UNEA Resolution 5/14-** UNEA adopted a resolution to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.
- Aim-** The resolution has the ambition to complete the negotiations to frame the instrument by end of 2024.
- The INC is responsible for delivering a global plastics treaty by 2025.

What is zerdraft text?

- First draft-** The text is 1st draft of the global plastics treaty that could support progress on reducing, circulating, and preventing plastic pollution.
- Developed by-** INC chair and the Secretariat
- Guidelines-** The draft is based on the mandate given by the INC-2 in Paris.
- Negotiation process-** The text was a good starting point for the negotiations because it catered to ambitions at all levels
 - Strong and binding
 - Moderate and flexible
 - Weak and voluntary
- Role of civil society-** INC-3 saw a high participation of civil society organisations especially from the Global South that advocated for a strong and binding treaty to end plastic pollution.
- Reduce plastic production-** Countries affected by plastic pollution like Kenya, Norway, and the European Union, argue that the life cycle starts at production, in order to include production in the treaty.
- Penalty-** The draft contains options such as imposing a plastic-pollution fee, to be paid by plastic polymer producers.
- Fund-** The draft contains the provisions like reducing the financial flow into projects with a high carbon footprint.
- Environment health-** Countries will have to cut, if not eliminate, fossil-fuel subsidies and investments in environmentally disfavoured technologies such as incineration and waste-to-energy plants.
- Strong binding provisions-** African group of countries and Small-Island Developing States (SIDS) played an important role for the high-impact elements in the treaty.
- Voice for human rights-** They championed the voices of waste-pickers and Indigenous peoples, and approached the treaty from human-rights and public-health perspectives.

What are the challenges faced during the negotiations?

- Opposition-** The negotiations were opposed by a group of like-minded countries that opposed many of the upstream and ambitious measures in the text.
- Flexible measures-** Opposed countries also argued to include a clause on sustainable development to protect their economic interests and investments.
- Bulk size-** INC-3 did not adopt the mandate to proceed with developing the first draft of the treaty, as the draft text had tripled in size with many additions and deletions by the member states.
- Influence of industry-** Fossil fuels and chemicals industry had a high presence of lobbyists at the negotiations. They object to eliminating compounds and polymers of concern and problematic and avoidable plastics, which are key in ending plastic pollution.
- Exclusion of production-** Some countries argued that the life cycle starts at product design, in order to exclude production from the scope of the treaty, this would undermine the effectiveness of the treaty in tackling the root causes of plastic pollution.

- **Financial provisions-** The same like-minded group demanded that provisions like plastic pollution fee and financial control be deleted altogether from the draft.
- **Plastic trade-** The plastics treaty is expected to plug the holes left open by the **Basel Convention**, any restrictions on trade is considered to be impinging on the freedom and sovereignty of nations.
- **Rules of procedure-** In INC-2 there was no concrete outcome in it, even as a handful of countries, including India, continued to demand consensus-based decision-making instead of a two-thirds vote majority.
- **Vagueness-** There is no clear cut definition for "environmentally sound management", instead terms such as best available science and best available technology continue to be used.

What lies ahead?

- The negotiations failed to adopt a mandate for developing the first draft of the treaty, and that intersessional work will take place before the next meeting in 2024.
- INC-3 exposed the considerable influence of industry and revealed those member states that are opposed to a strong binding treaty to end plastic pollution.
- The need of the hour is more pressure and action from civil society and other stakeholders to push for a robust and effective treaty.

Global Cooling Pledge

Environment

Why in news?

- Around 63 countries signed up the world's 1st ever pledge to drastically cut cooling emissions at the ongoing COP28 climate summit in Dubai.

Origins of cooling emissions:

- Refrigerants in appliances: Cooling emissions primarily arise from refrigerants used in appliances like air conditioners and refrigerators.
- CFCs: Historically, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were widely used but were phased out due to their harmful impact on the ozone layer.
- HFCs and HCFCs: Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) replaced CFCs but pose a new problem as potent greenhouse gases.

Leakage and Improper Disposal

- HFCs and HCFCs are released from damaged appliances or car air conditioning systems.
- Ninety percent of refrigerant emissions occur at the end of the equipment's life, often due to improper disposal.
- Electricity used to power cooling appliances, largely sourced from fossil fuels, also contributes to cooling emissions.
- **Impact of cooling emissions on Global warming**
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Cooling appliances like air conditioners and refrigerators contribute to global warming by emitting greenhouse gases. Room air conditioners alone are set to account for over 130 gigatons (GT) of CO₂ emissions between now and 2050. This could account for 20-40% of the world's remaining 'carbon budget'.
- Increased Demand: As the planet becomes warmer, individuals use their air conditioners more frequently, creating more emissions. This creates a cycle of degradation.
- Impact on Climate Goals: The emissions from cooling appliances pose a significant challenge to efforts to limit global temperature rise this century to 1.5°C.

Solutions to address cooling emissions and phasing out HFCs:

- **The Kigali Amendment**
 - Over 150 countries signed the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol in 2016.
 - A commitment to reducing HFC consumption by 80% by 2047, potentially avoiding 0.4 degrees Celsius of global warming by 2100.
- **Phasing Out HFCs**
 - Promotion of climate-friendly chemicals, known as natural refrigerants, such as ammonia, hydrocarbons, and CO₂.
 - These alternatives have lower or zero global warming potential.
 - Proper management and disposal of critical appliances at the end of their life cycle.
 - Emphasizing on sustainable cooling solutions beyond air conditioners..

Why in news?

- International Energy Agency (IEA) has called for government to commit tripling global renewable capacity by 2030 ahead of COP 28, but some key players have not signed the pledge.

Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge

- Led by-** US, European Union and UAE.
- Aim-** Achieve net zero emission by mid-century (2050).
- Coal phase-out-** The pledge calls for "the phase down of unabated coal power" and an end to the financing of new coal-fired power plants.
- It is seen as a crucial step to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as agreed in the Paris Agreement.
 - Target-**
 - Triple worldwide installed renewable energy generation capacity to at least 11,000 GW.
 - Double global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements to more than 4% by 2030.
- Signed-** At COP 28 in Dubai.
- Major non-signatory countries-** India and China
- According to IEA projections, the global share of renewables in power generation is anticipated to jump from 28% in 2021 to 80% by 2050, while coal's contribution will dwindle to 3%.
- Primary renewable energy sources with their share in global power generation-
 - Hydroelectric- 16.1 %
 - Wind- 5.6%
 - Solar-3.8%

What are the challenges of increasing renewables energy?

- Hydroelectric power-** Large dams are difficult to construct due to environmental and regulatory issues.
- Unrealistic goal-** Around 57% of hydroelectric power is of renewable energy, but tripling its capacity by 2030 is unlikely.
- Solar power-** It is limited by daylight hours, land availability, environmental impacts, and import dependence.
- High cost-** Solar panels also need efficient and costly storage solutions to match peak demand and overcome intermittency.
- Import dependency-** Many countries depend on China for solar panels or raw materials, it increases the import costs.
- Wind energy-** It is affected by weather conditions, site availability, and material emissions.
- Structural issues-** Wind turbines also face the problem of intermittency and require backup or storage solutions to provide stable power.
- To triple renewable energy by 2030 the solar and wind output must increase by at least 5 times.
- Issues with fossil fuel-** The COP 28 pledge does not specify reducing fossil fuels, which cause over 80% of greenhouse emissions. The US and other countries still subsidize and use fossil fuels extensively.
- Fund deficit-** The transition to renewables requires massive investments, which can burden poorer countries and affect their budgets for essential services.

What is India's stand with respect renewable energy?

- India's status-** India is the 3rd largest energy consuming country in the world.
- As per Renewables 2022 Global Status Report, India stands
 - 4th globally in renewable energy installed capacity
 - 4th in wind power capacity
 - 4th in solar power capacity
- India has already achieved its target of 40% installed electric capacity from non-fossil fuels.
- Renewable energy target-** India has set an enhanced target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based energy by 2030, which is the world's largest expansion plan in renewable energy.
- Carbon neutrality-** India has also pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070.
- Tripling renewables proposal-** India didn't sign the pledge as a report has found that India would need an investment of about 293 billion dollars to triple its renewable energy installed capacity by 2030.

- **Reliance on coal**- India is not comfortable with the coal phase out target as it needs to focus on poverty reduction and economic growth, hence it did not sign the pledge.

Steps taken by India to promote Renewable Energy

- **National Green Hydrogen Mission**- It focuses on direct and indirect employment, import substitution, and R&D for higher efficiency in renewable energy technologies.
- **PM KUSUM scheme**- It is aimed at ensuring energy security for farmers in India, along with honouring India's commitment to increase the share of installed capacity of electric power from non-fossil-fuel sources to 40% by 2030 as part of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).
- **Investment**- India allows up to 100% Foreign Direct Investment under the automatic route for renewable energy generation and distribution project.
- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)**- Scheme for high efficiency solar aims to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities and exports in the solar sector.
- **Green Energy Corridors**- It is established to create intra-state transmission system for renewable energy projects.
- **International Solar Alliance**- It is a joint effort by India and France to mobilize efforts against climate change through deployment of solar energy solutions with an aim of One Sun, One World, One Grid.
- **Green carbon credits**- It is proposed by India to create carbon sinks through people's participation.

Challenges for Global Goal on Adaptation

Environment

Why in news?

- COP28 at Dubai culminated in the adoption of Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework.

About Global Goal on Adaptation

- It sets the vision for global wellbeing and resilience to protect people and ecosystems.
- **Establishment** – In 2015, a collective commitment under Article 7.1 of the Paris Agreement at COP 15, proposed by the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) in 2013.
- **Aims** – To enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change and thereby contributing to sustainable development.
- **Role** – It is to serve as a unifying framework that can drive political action and finance for adaptation on the same scale as mitigation.
- It will help in setting specific, measurable targets and guidelines for global adaptation action as well as enhancing adaptation finance and support for developing countries.
- **Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme (GlaSS)** – It was created by the signatories to the Paris Agreement at COP 26 in Glasgow in 2021 to better understand, conceptualize and achieve this goal.
- It is a 2 year programme (2022-2023) carried out by
 - The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), the 2 technical bodies that support the CMA (Meeting of Parties to the Paris agreement)
 - With the support of the UNFCCC secretariat

What are the challenges for Global Goal on Adaptation?

- **Determining national action** – It is complex due to differences in national conditions, administrative capacities, and economic development levels.
- This will affect how global goals are adopted locally.
- **Measuring progress** – There is no universal metric for adaptation which makes it difficult to aggregate and compare progress across countries.
- While the GGA is working on developing indicators, it currently lacks specifics on development and implementation.
- **Lack of climate financing**– There is also strong bias in climate financing in favour of mitigation as compared to adaptation.
- The adaptation finance gap is widening, with a need for \$ 71 billion per year until 2030.
- Current finance is insufficient, with adaptation finance significantly trailing behind mitigation.

Why in news?

- Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has lifted the stage III measures of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), allowing BS III petrol and BS IV diesel vehicles to run in Delhi and NCR.

What is Graded Response Action Plan?

- It is a step-by-step plan for the entire Delhi-NCR region, getting on board 13 different agencies of NCR regions like pollution control boards, industrial area authorities, municipal corporations etc.,
- Objective**- To prevent the deterioration of air quality once it reaches a certain threshold in the Delhi-NCR region.
- Notified by** - Union Environment Ministry in 2017 based on Supreme Court directions.
- Implementation**- Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).
- Approach**- The plan does not include yearlong measures and only focuses on incremental actions which get activated on the basis of values of AQI.
- Stages**- There are 4 stages which have different sets of actions to be taken by authorities.
- Recent policy decisions**-
 - Closure of the thermal power plant at Badarpur
 - Bringing BS-VI fuel to Delhi before the deadline set initially
 - Ban on Pet coke as a fuel in Delhi NCR
 - Revoking Stage III action plan under which BS III petrol and BS IV diesel vehicles were restricted

Limitations of CCS and CDR

Environment

Why in news?

- The draft decisions taken at COP28 at Dubai have referred to the abatement and removal of carbon emissions using carbon capture and storage (CCS) and carbon-dioxide removal (CDR) technologies.

About 'unabated' fossil fuels

- Unabated** - Doing nothing to reduce the carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases that are released from the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas.
- According to IPCC, unabated fossil fuels are those "without interventions that substantially reduce GHG emissions."
- At COP28, the term "unabated fossil fuels" has come to mean the combustion of these fuels without using CCS technologies to capture their emissions.
- Abated** - Attempts to decrease the release of polluting substances to an acceptable level.

What are CCS and CDR?

- Carbon capture and storage (CCS)** – CCS refers to technologies that can capture CO₂ at a source of emissions before it is released into the atmosphere.
- These sources include the fossil fuel industry (where coal, oil and gas are combusted to generate power) and industrial processes like steel and cement production.
- It is a three-step process, involving:
 - Capturing the CO₂ produced
 - Transporting the captured CO₂
 - Storing it deep underground
- Carbon-Dioxide Removal (CDR)** – Uses technologies, practices, and approaches to remove **CO₂ from our atmosphere** through deliberate and intentional human actions.
- CDR captures CO₂ from the atmosphere and locks it away for years in plants, soils, oceans, rocks, saline aquifers, depleted oil wells, or long-lived products like cement.
- It can be natural (afforestation or reforestation) or use technologies (direct air capture), where machines mimic trees by absorbing CO₂ and storing it underground.
 - For example: Enhanced rock weathering and BECCS (Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage)

How well dCCS and CDR need twork?

- According to 6th Assessment Report (AR6) of UN's IPCC, climate mitigation relies a lot on the use of CDR in achieving the goal of limiting the world's average surface temperature increase t1.5 degrees C with nor limited overshoot.
- If CO₂ emissions continue at current levels, we will have a 50% chance of exceeding 1.5 degrees C compared tpre-industrial levels in 7 years.
- There is more than a 50% chance of limiting warming t1.5 degrees C assuming if the world can **sequester 5 billion tonnes of CO₂ by 2040** which is more than India emits currently every year.

What are the limitations of CCS?

- **Underdeveloped technology** – CCS haven't demonstrated feasibility at large scale despite decades of development.
- **Higher costs** – It is cheaper tshut down a coal plant and replace it with some combination of wind, solar and batteries in comparison tattaching a carbon capture device tthe plant.
- **Additional energy needs** – It create new energy needs for the transport and long-term storage of carbon.
- **Creates room temit GHGs** - A Germany-based climate science and policy institute, revealed that reliance on CCS could release an extra 86 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases intthe atmosphere between 2020 and 2050.
- **Underperformance** - A 2022 study by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) found that most of the 13 flagship CCS projects worldwide have either failed entirely or underperformed.

- **Direct mitigation** - Reducing our reliance on fossil fuels with renewable energy sources like solar and wind power.

Coastline Erosion

Environment

Why in news?

- Recently, Union Minister cited that over one-third of India's coastline is vulnerable terosion as per the study of National Centre for Coastal Research.

What are the key highlights of the study?

- **Coastal erosion**- It has been noticed in 9 States and 2 Union Territories.
- The report states that the west coast has relatively been stable with erosion in minor pockets like Kerala. In the west, 48% of the coastline is stable, whereas only 28% of the eastern coast has been deemed stable.
- **Accretion**- States such as Odisha (51%) and Andhra Pradesh (42%) recorded the maximum gain (The coast is growing) owing tcoastline changes.

What is coastal erosion?

- **Shoreline retreat**- It is the loss of coastal lands due tthe net removal of sediments or bedrock from the shoreline.
- **Hydraulic action** - This type of erosion is more effective in areas where the rock has many cracks or joints, such as limestone or chalk.
- It can alscreate features such as blowholes, geysers, and sea caves.
- **Abrasion**- It is alsknown as corrosion or sandpapering. It can create smooth and polished surfaces on the rock, such as wave-cut platforms.
- It can alserode softer rocks faster than harder ones, creating differential erosion2.
- **Attrition**- This type reduces the size and shape of the rock fragments carried by the waves.
- It can alsincrease the efficiency of abrasion, as smaller and rounder particles can act as more effective tools for erosion.
- **Solution**- It is alsknown as corrosion or dissolution. It depends on the chemical composition of the rock and the water.
- Some rocks, such as limestone and chalk, are more soluble than others, such as granite and basalt.
- It can create features such as karst landscapes, sinkholes, and stalactites.

What are the factors causing coastal erosion?

- **Waves**
 - It is due to the powerful waves generated by wind and tides erode the coastline over time.
 - The intensity of wave action depends on factors such as coastal geomorphology, wind patterns, and sea currents.
- **Sea level rise**
 - Rising sea levels due to global warming and climate change contribute to coastal erosion.
 - As sea levels rise, waves reach farther inland, leading to erosion of coastal land.
- **Sediment loss**
 - Natural processes like coastal currents and longshore drift can cause the loss of sediment along the coastline.
 - This reduces the availability of sediment to replenish eroded areas.
- **Human interference**
 - Improper coastal infrastructure development, sand mining, construction of harbours, and coastal pollution, can accelerate coastal erosion.
 - These activities disrupt natural sediment movement and alter coastal processes.
- **What are the effects of coastal erosion?**
- **Land loss**- It can have severe implications for coastal communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems. Valuable agricultural land, residential areas, and tourist destinations can be negatively affected.
- **Climate refugees**- Erosion can force communities to relocate as their homes and livelihoods are threatened.
- **Coastal flooding**- As erosion removes natural barriers, such as sand dunes and vegetation, coastal areas become more vulnerable to flooding during storms and high tides.
- **Biodiversity loss**- Coastal erosion affects coastal ecosystems, including mangroves, coral reefs, and dune systems.
- **Economic Impact**- It can damage or destroy coastal infrastructure, including roads, buildings, and ports.
- **Loss of revenue**- It can impact beach tourism and reduced land productivity can also impact local economies.

UNEP Report: The Global Cooling Watch 2023

Environment

Why in news?

- The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) led Cool Coalition** has released a **Global Cooling Watch report** named **"Keeping it Chill: How to meet cooling demands while cutting emissions"**.

About the report:

- The report is released to support the **Global Cooling Pledge**, a joint initiative between the United Arab Emirates as host of COP28 and the Cool Coalition.
- It emphasizes that **"Cooling is a double burden on climate change"**.
 - **Rising demand for power-hungry equipment**, such as air conditioners and refrigeration, will drive greater indirect emissions from the associated electricity consumption.
 - At the same time, these emissions are compounded by **direct emissions from the release of refrigerant gases in cooling equipment**, the majority of which have a much higher global warming potential than CO₂.
- To minimize the multiple and severe negative impacts of cooling growth, **a rapid transition to sustainable cooling is needed**.

Highlights of the report:

- It lays out that **sustainable cooling integrated action is needed in three key areas**:
- **Passive strategies** to address extreme heat and reduce cooling demand in buildings and the cold chain:
 - Passive cooling measures can **dramatically reduce cooling loads** while maintaining indoor thermal comfort as well as temperatures in cold storage.
 - Such passive cooling measures can **curb the growth in demand for cooling capacity in 2050 by 24%**, result in capital cost savings in avoided new cooling equipment of around US\$1.5 trillion to US\$3 trillion (2020 US\$), and **reduce 2050 emissions by 1.3 billion tons of CO₂**.
- **Higher energy efficiency** standards and norms for cooling equipment.
 - To deliver a good amount of reduction, the **global average efficiency of all cooling equipment operating in 2050 would need to be almost triple** the average efficiency of equipment operating today.

- Driving efficiency in cold chain and refrigeration through MEPS and passive cooling **can deliver 30% of the required energy savings by 2050** while greatly reducing food loss and waste.
- **A phase-down of climate-warming hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) refrigerants** at a faster rate than is required under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, while improving the energy efficiency of cooling equipment.
 - If fully implemented, reduce the 2050 emissions from cooling **by more than 60%**.
 - The emission reductions **grow to 96% when these actions are combined with rapid electricity grid decarbonization**.

Drought emergency declared by 23 countries in 2022-23

Environment

Why in news?

- At least **23 countries**, including **India**, declared **drought emergencies** at a **national or sub-national level** during **2022-23**, showed new data from a **global drought map** compiled by the **United Nations**, pointing to unprecedented urgency on a planetary scale.

About the Report

- Title: **Global Drought Snapshot 2023**
- Released by: **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**
- Report is based on reporting by **101 Parties** to the **UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.

Key findings:

- **1.84 billion people** were **drought-stricken**, out of which **4.7 per cent** were exposed to **severe or extreme drought**.
- An emergency was declared in **23 countries** due to the **impact of drought**.
 - Of these, **Europe** had the **highest number (8)** — **Spain, Italy** and **United Kingdom** declaring it in April, May and July 2023, respectively, while **Greece, Portugal, Romania** and **Serbia** in July 2022.
- In **2022**, the **continent** recorded its **largest overall drought impacted area** — over **630,000 square kilometres**, as opposed to the **167,000 square kilometres** annual average between 2000 and 2022.
- In **Asia**, **five countries** declared drought — **India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Kazakhstan** and **China**.
- **Countries that have declared drought-** the **USA, Canada, Uruguay** and the **African countries** of **Ethio[ia], Kenya, Somalia, Niger, Djibouti, Cabo Verde** and **Mauritania, Kiribati, the Marshal Islands, and Tuvalu**.
- On **November 17, 2023**, the **world breached 2 degrees Celsius of warming**, a number the world was constantly warned of not crossing.
- **85 per cent** of people affected by droughts live in **low-or middle-income countries**. Moreover, **98 per cent** of the **32.6 million new disaster displacements** in **2022** were the result of **weather-related hazards** such as **storms, floods** and **droughts**.

International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA):

- First announced by **Spain** at the **77th session** of the **UN General Assembly** in September **2022** to be **officially launched** at the **UNFCCC COP27** in **November 2022**.
- The alliance is **jointly convened** by the **Governments of Senegal and Spain**.
- Interested members of the Alliance see the urgent need to pivot from emergency response to increasing drought resilience through a more coordinated and effective response.

Montreal Protocol Targets in Ozone preservation surpassed by India

Environment

Why in news?

- India has successfully phased out ozone-depleting and **climate-warming chemical HCFC 141b** and is before schedule in eliminating HCFCs.

Facts of the report:

- The report was jointly brought out by the **Environment Ministry and UNDP** during COP28.
- According to the report India did better than expected in reducing harmful substances called HCFCs. They aimed to cut down by 35%, but they achieved a **bigger reduction of 44%** from the baseline in 2020.
- Also, India completely stopped using a specific type of HCFC called 141b.



- India is planning to stop using HCFCs in making new equipment entirely by December 2024, which is earlier than what the Montreal Protocol schedule requires by 2030.

About Montreal Protocol (1987)

- An international treaty designed to protect the Earth's ozone layer.
- It was implemented under the Vienna Convention (adopted in 1985). To eliminate the production and use of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS). **In 2016, countries agreed to the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol. This agreement is about reducing the use of Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).**

What is Ozone?

- Stratospheric Ozone is found at 10-40 KM above Earth's surface, and protects Earth from UV radiation from the Sun.
- The ozone layer shields living organisms from the harmful effects of excessive UV radiation, such as skin cancer, cataracts, and harm to plants and marine ecosystems.
- Ozone in the stratosphere is 'good ozone' while Ozone formed in Troposphere is harmful and is called 'bad ozone'.

What is ODS: Ozone Depleting Substances?

- ODS are human-made chemicals containing chlorine and bromine like Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), HCFC, tetrachloride, etc.
- Examples: chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons, carbon tetrachloride, and methyl chloroform.
- It can break down ozone molecules in the stratosphere, leading to a thinning of the ozone layer.

Some efforts by India to address ozone depletion:

- Phasing out of Hydrochlorofluorocarbons(HFC)** in line with the Montreal Protocol.
- India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)**, which aims to use fewer substances in cooling, help with climate change, and achieve certain development goals. It's a part of India's goal to have no emissions by 2070.
- Ozone Cell** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change for dedicated efforts.

IUCN Updated Red List

Environment

Why in news?

- At the ongoing **COP28 UN climate conference in the United Arab Emirates**, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has shared a new update on the IUCN Red List. This update is notable for including the first-ever assessment of **freshwater fish** on a global scale.

Key Findings

- Global Species Vulnerability:**
 - Roughly 44,000 species are currently under the threat of extinction, indicating an increase of 2000 species within the past year.
- Saiga Antelope Status Update:**
 - The Saiga antelope, a species that has existed since the last Ice Age, has transitioned from the status of Critically Endangered to Near Threatened, signalling positive conservation progress.
- This marks a significant milestone as the assessment represents the inaugural global evaluation of the status of freshwater fish.
- A quarter of freshwater fish species are in danger of extinction, with around 17% directly impacted by climate change.
- Inclusion of Endangered Freshwater Subterranean Fish Species in Kerala:**
 - Endangered Species:**
 - Shaji's Catfish
 - Abdulkalam's Blind Cave Catfish
 - Pangio Bhujia
 - Vulnerable Species:**
 - Gollum Snakehead



About Red List

- The Red List serves as a **crucial barometer for the global biodiversity health** check.
- It provides a comprehensive overview, **encompassing details on range, population size, habitat and ecology, use and trade, threats, and conservation** strategies for various species.
- Species are classified into categories in **descending order of risk**, including **Extinct, Extinct in the Wild, Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened, Least Concern, and Data Deficient**.

Criteria for Red List Assessment:

- The Red List utilizes specific benchmarks to gauge species risk, encompassing:
 - **Population Size Reduction:** Analyzing the overall population decline.
 - **Restricted Geographical Range:** Evaluating the geographical area a species inhabits and potential threats within that range.
 - **Small Population and Decline:** Identifying species with a diminishing population.
 - **Very Small or Restricted Area:** Considering species with a small population or confined to a limited geographical area.
- **Impact of Climate Change on Freshwater Fish:**
 - Affects at least 17% of vulnerable freshwater fish species.
 - Alters seasons, raises sea levels pushing saltwater into rivers, and reduces water levels.

State of Finance for Nature 2023 Report

Environment

Why in news?

- State of Finance for Nature 2023 Report was released by UN Environment Programme recently.

State of Finance for Nature 2023 Report – Key Highlights:

- Tracks public and private finance flows to **Nature based Solutions (NbS)** to tackle global challenges related to biodiversity loss, land degradation and climate change.
- **1st time estimated** global scale of public and private nature-negative finance.
- **Current finance flows to NbS:** Around US\$200 billion which is only one third of NbS finance needed by 2030.
- **Nature-negative finance flows:** Estimated at almost US\$7 trillion per year.
- **Future investment needs:** To meet Rio Convention targets finance flows to NbS must almost triple from current levels to reach US\$542 billion per year by 2030.
- **Nature-negative financial flows** refer to finance flows for activities that could potentially have a negative effect on nature like **fossil fuel subsidies**.

About Nature based Solutions (NbS):

- Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously benefiting people and nature.
- Examples – Reforestation and Afforestation, Wetland Restoration, Green Infrastructure etc.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP):

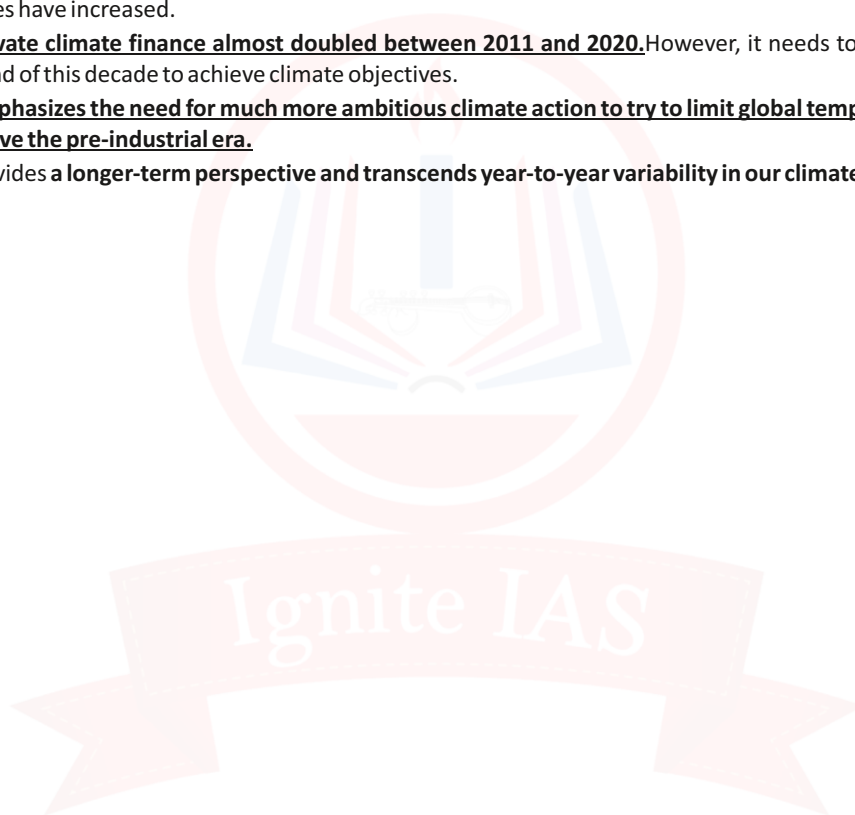
- It is leading environmental authority in United Nations system.
- Genesis – Founded in 1972 following **UN Conference on the Human Environment**
- Objectives – To contribute to the building of a culture of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication, and information.
- Mandate – To find solutions to triple planetary crisis i.e., climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.
- Members – 193 (including India)
- Other Reports – Adaptation Gap Report 2023, Emission Gap report, The Global Environment Outlook, Frontiers, Invest into Healthy Planet.
- Headquarters – **Nairobi, Kenya**.

Why in news?

- Recently, The Global Climate 2011-2020: A Decade of Acceleration report was released.
- The report was released at the **UN Climate Change Conference, COP28**.

Key Highlights of the Report

- The rate of climate change surged alarmingly between 2011-2020, which was the warmest decade on record.
- Continued rising concentrations of greenhouse gases fuelled record land and ocean temperatures and turbo-charged a dramatic acceleration in ice melt and sea level rise.
- The Report documents how extreme events across the decade had devastating impacts, particularly on food security, displacement and migration, hindering national development and progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). But it also showed how improvements in forecasts, early warnings and coordinated disaster management and response are making a difference.
- The number of casualties from extreme events has declined, associated with improved early warning systems, even though economic losses have increased.
- Public and private climate finance almost doubled between 2011 and 2020. However, it needs to increase at least seven times by the end of this decade to achieve climate objectives.
- The Report emphasizes the need for much more ambitious climate action to try to limit global temperature rise to no more than 1.5°C above the pre-industrial era.
- The report provides a longer-term perspective and transcends year-to-year variability in our climate.



Why in news?

- Recently 78 opposition MPs have been suspended for disrupting Parliamentary proceedings over the Parliament security breach issue.

About the issue

- Presiding officers of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha suspended the opposition lawmakers for disrupting the parliamentary proceedings.
- They were suspended as the legislators demanded a discussion and a statement from the Home Minister regarding last week's security breach.
 - This was the highest number of MPs suspended in a single day in the history of Indian Parliament.
- The opposition accused the government of failing to provide security on the 22nd anniversary of a deadly attack on the parliament.
- The speaker of the Lok Sabha, has blamed the MPs for breaking the rules of the House.
- At least 149 suspensions have been meted out, both Houses included, since 2019, compared with at least 81 in 2014-19, and at least 36 in 2009-14.
- Over the years, 4 broad reasons have been identified for disorder in legislatures.
 - The lack of time available to MPs for raising important matters,
 - The unresponsive attitude of the government and retaliatory posture by Treasury benches,
 - Deliberate disruption by parties for political or publicity purposes, and
 - The absence of prompt action against MPs disrupting Parliamentary proceedings.
- Parliamentary processes can carry on, following the suspension of the opposition MPs, as the quorum of 10% will be met by the governing party and its allies with an overwhelming majority.

Rules in Lok Sabha dealing with suspension of Members

- Rule 373
 - The Speaker in exercise of his/her disciplinary powers may direct any member guilty of disorderly conduct to withdraw from the House. The member so ordered to withdraw is required to do so forthwith and remain absent for the remainder of that day's sitting.
- Rule 374
 - The Speaker, may, if deems it necessary, name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business thereof.
 - If a member is so named by the Speaker, the Speaker shall, on a motion being made forthwith put the question that the member (naming such member) be suspended from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session:
 - Provided that the House may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated.
 - A member suspended under this rule shall forthwith withdraw from the precincts of the House.
 - The rule relating to 'Automatic Suspension' of a Member
 - In 2001, during the 13th Lok Sabha, a new rule 374A was recommended by the Rules Committee and agreed to by the House.
 - Rule 374A of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha provides that in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a Member coming into the well of the House or abusing the rules of the House persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise, such Member shall, on being named by the Speaker, stand automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the Session, whichever is less.
 - Rajya Sabha rules dealing with suspension of Members
- Rule 255
 - The Chairman may direct any member whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately from the Council and any member so ordered to withdraw shall do so forthwith and shall absent himself during the remainder of the day's meeting.
- Rule 256
 - The Chairman may, if he deems it necessary, name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the Council by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business thereof.

- If a member is so named by the Chairman he shall forthwith put the question on a motion being made, no amendment, adjournment or debate being allowed, that the member (naming him) be suspended from the service of the Council for a period not exceeding the remainder of the Session:
- Provided that the Council may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated.
- A member suspended under this rule shall forthwith quit the precincts of the Council.
- **Consequences of the suspension**
 - When a member is suspended from the service of the House, the following consequences arise from their suspension and remain in force during the period of suspension:
 - i) The member cannot enter the Chamber, the Inner Lobby and Galleries.
 - ii) The member stands suspended from sittings of Parliamentary Committees of which she/he may be a member. Notices of sittings of Committees held during the period of suspension are not sent to member.
 - iii) No item is put down in the List of Business in the member's name.
 - iv) No notice tabled by the member is acceptable during the period of member's suspension.
 - v) Notices tabled by a member prior to suspension from the service of the House are not admitted or included in the List of Business or List of Questions or List of Amendments or List of Motions for reduction of Demands for Grants, etc, during the period of suspension. Questions from such a member which have already appeared in the List of Questions for the sitting held during the period of suspension are removed from those Lists through corrigendum.
 - vi) The member cannot vote at election to Committee held during the period of suspension.
 - vii) The member is not entitled to daily allowance if suspended from the service of the House for the remainder of the Session as her/his stay at the place of duty cannot be regarded as "residence on duty" under section 2(d) of Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954. However, if the member is suspended for a specific period during a session, she/he is entitled to daily allowance for each day of residence on duty at Delhi.

(CGST) Bill, 2023

Polity

- Recently, the Lok Sabha passed Central Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) (CGST) Bill, 2023.

About THE BILL:

- Change in qualification for members of Appellate Tribunal:
 - The Act allows the central government to set up an Appellate Tribunal on the recommendation of the GST Council.
 - The Tribunal comprises the President, a judicial member, and two technical members.

Persons eligible to be appointed as the judicial member are:

- (i) a judge of the High Court, or
 - (ii) a district judge or additional district judge having served for at least 10 years.
- The Bill allows advocates with at least 10 years of experience to be appointed as the judicial member.
 - They must have substantial experience in matters relating to indirect taxation.
 - The minimum age to be appointed as a member or president of the Tribunal will be 50 years.
 - **Age limit:**
 - The Bill increases the age limit:
 - i) for the president of the Tribunal from 67 to 70 years, and
 - ii) for members from 65 to 67 years.



All India Judicial Services

Evolution:-

1958 - 14th Report - Law Comm.
recommended creation
of AIJS

1961 - Ch. Justice's Conference
"Create AIJS, so that no
intervention of Jt/Exe in
appointment"

Art 312 - 42nd Amnd →
Parl. to create AIJS
RS - par resⁿ (2/3rd maj)
for establishing AIJS

In "All India Judges Assoc"
vs. UOI - Govt. was asked
to check feasibility to
establish AIJS.

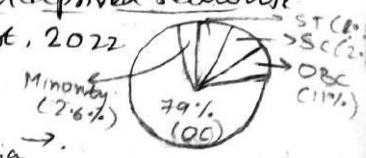
Justice Shetty Commission
- recommended AIJS
setup


Draft bill in 2006 - made
by Parl. standing committee
to setup AIJS

Challenges/issues:-

- (i) Dichotomy of Articles
233 & 312: (Federalism against)
233 sub-courts recruit
by state (Basic structure violated)
- (ii) Language Barriers
Census 2011 - 45% - Mother Tongue
(Hindi)
49% - of cases in SC
translated to Hindi
- (iii) Control on lower courts:-
By HCs in sub-ord courts
(Independence of Jnd)

Need/Advantages:-

- i) Representation from deprived sections:-
• Union Min. of Law report, 2022
• representation of diversity in SC & HC of India

- ii) Strengthens Justice Delivery system:-
"Rule of law Index" (India)
→ World Justice Project, 2021.
India - 79/139.
- iii) Younger judges represent SC & HC:-
Due to merit-based selection process.
- iv) Judicial infrastructure
AIJS - reforms even infra.
Report by Vidhi Centre Legal Policy, 2018 -
15% of Indian courts - lack toilets.
"Building Better Courts".
- v) Legal infra:-
In 2002 - All India Judges Assoc vs UOI -
suggested ratio (Judges: Popⁿ) → 50:10,00,00
within 5 yrs - but only 21:10,00,00 (Census 2011)
- vi) Pendency of cases:-
Nat. Judicial Data Grid, 2020 -
4.7 Cr cases pending in 2030.
- vii) Corruption:-
Transparency International: "Corruption
Perception Index, 2022" - India - 85/180 (least corruption).
- (iv) Separation of Powers:-
Art-50 of Constⁿ (Blw Jnd & Ex)
- v) Local Reservations:- (locals address local
problems are diluted in central test)
- (vi) Basic structure violated:-
NITI Aayog - "Strategy for New India @ 75"
- raised issue of lower court appointments
- (vii) Not a guaranteed solution
Ex:- Vacancy of IAS recruitments by
UPSC - 24%.
(By Min. of Public Admⁿ, 2020).

| Collegium | NJAC | AJTS | Way Forward:- |
|---|--|---------------------------------|---|
| No transparency - nay. (Nepotism) | Compromise of Judicial independence | written exam (Transp@r) | i) <u>Lang. Barriers</u> :- Address through AI software (being developed by India). |
| Deplete b/w Exe & Jud. | Commission consists of Exe (law Min) & 2 eminent persons (undefined) | Violates Art-50 Exe & Jud. | ii) <u>Meritocratic Judiciary</u> :- Sufficient training to be given |
| Criteria for appointments - (X) | No criteria specified | Efficient method of recruitment |  (Countries provided training in Judicial ethics - data by UN) |
| Local courts - by states (remaining by Collegium) | Not specifically mentioned | Uniform throughout Nation | ii) Adequate appointments to be made to meet Judges: Popl ⁿ to 50:1mn |

Postal Ballot

Polity

Why in news?

- The Union Law Ministry amended the Conduct of Elections Rules-1961.

Amendment to Postal Ballot Eligibility

- Senior citizens aged 85 and older now eligible for postal ballots in upcoming elections, an increase from the previous limit of 80 years.
- Amendment made to Conduct of Elections Rules-1961 after consulting the Election Commission of India.
- Postal ballot facility available for a "notified class of electors," including essential services workers, persons with disabilities, Covid-19-infected or suspected cases, and now senior citizens above 85 years.

Implementation and Procedure:

- Poll officials visit the homes of eligible senior citizens to facilitate filling up of postal ballots.
- Procedure conducted after informing political parties and under videography to ensure transparency.
- Initially extended to persons with disabilities, essential services workers, & senior citizens above 80 years in 2019.

Previous Amendments and Changes:

- During Covid-19 pandemic, extended to those infected or suspected of being infected with coronavirus, starting with Bihar Assembly elections in 2020.
- Law Ministry had earlier amended the rule to extend the facility to those above 65 years in June 2020 but was eventually reverted back to 80 years in August 2023.
- EC decided not to extend the facility to those above 65 years due to impracticality in managing polling parties for the expanded age group.

Recent Developments in a nutshell

- As per the electoral roll released on February 8, out of the 96.88 crore eligible voters in India, 1.85 crore were aged above 80 years.
- The rules now allow postal ballot voting for a specific group of voters, including essential services workers, persons with disabilities, Covid-19-infected or suspected individuals, and senior citizens.



- Previously, senior citizens were defined as those aged above 80 years in Section 27(A) (e) of the Conduct of Elections Rules-1961. However, this has been amended to raise the age to above 85 years in the same rule.

All about Postal Ballots

- Postal voting, also known as absentee voting, is a method of voting in which electors cast their ballots by mail rather than in person at a polling station.
- This method is particularly useful for individuals who are unable to vote in person due to various reasons, such as being away from their home constituency, having a disability, or being engaged in essential services on election day.

Eligibility for Postal Ballots

- The eligibility criteria for postal ballots vary depending on the specific election and jurisdiction. However, some common categories of eligible voters include:
 - Service voters: Members of the armed forces, paramilitary forces, and other government employees deployed on election duty far from their home constituencies.
 - Absentee voters: Individuals who are unable to vote in person due to reasons such as being away from their home constituency for work, illness, or disability.
 - Electors on election duty: Government officials and polling staff who are assigned duties at polling stations other than their own.
 - Electors under preventive detention: Individuals who are detained under preventive custody orders during the election period.

Applying For a Postal Ballot

- To apply for a postal ballot, eligible voters must submit an application to the Returning Officer (RO) of their respective constituency.
- The application form typically requires personal details, voter identification information, and the reason for seeking a postal ballot. The RO verifies the eligibility of the applicant and issues the postal ballot if the criteria are met.

Process of Postal Voting

- **Receiving the postal ballot**: Once the application is approved, the RO sends the postal ballot to the voter's registered address. The ballot package typically includes the ballot paper, a declaration form, a secrecy sleeve, and a pre-paid return envelope.
- **Marking the ballot**: The voter marks their preferred candidate(s) on the ballot paper in the secrecy sleeve to ensure confidentiality.
- **Completing the declaration form**: The voter completes the declaration form, providing their signature and other relevant details.
- **Sealing the envelope**: The voter seals the marked ballot paper and the declaration form inside the secrecy sleeve and then places it into the pre-paid return envelope.
- **Returning the postal ballot**: The voter affixes the postage stamp provided and mails the return envelope to the designated address within the specified time.

Counting of Postal Ballots

- Postal ballots are counted separately from votes cast at polling stations.
- On the designated counting day, postal ballots are collected by the postal authorities and brought to the counting centre.
- The RO and election officials scrutinise the postal ballots to ensure their validity and integrity.
- Valid postal ballots are then added to the respective candidate's vote count.

Significance of postal ballots

- Postal ballots play a crucial role in ensuring that eligible voters exercise their franchise, even when they are unable to vote in person.
- They expand the accessibility of the electoral process and contribute to a more inclusive and representative democracy.

Why in news?

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) released its annual report on crime in India for the year 2022.
- The report is a compilation of data on reported crime from across the country, and provides the big picture of broad trends in crime registration.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):

- **About**

- NCRB is an Indian government agency (headquartered in New Delhi) established in 1986 and is part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India.
 - It was set up based on the recommendation of the National Police Commission, 1977 and a Task force, 1985.
- It is responsible for collecting and analysing crime data (as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws).

- **Function**

- It also serves as a repository of such information to aid investigators in tracing crimes and criminals.
- It also acts as a national warehouse for the fingerprint records of Indian and foreign criminals, and assists in locating interstate criminals through fingerprint search.
- NCRB was entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project in the year 2009.
- In 2017, NCRB launched the National Digital Police Portal.
 - The portal allows police officers to look for a criminal or suspect on the CCTNS database and gives citizens with services such as online complaint filing, etc.

- **Reports published**

- Along with the Crime in India report (oldest and most prestigious publication brought out by NCRB), It also publishes - Prisons Statistics India Report.

- **Compilation of data for NCRB reports**

- Crime in India reports, information is obtained from the police forces of 36 states and Union Territories.
- Similar data are furnished for 53 cities with populations exceeding 10 lakh each as per the 2011 Census, by respective state-level crime records bureaus.

Observations of the report

- **Decline in the registration of cases**

- In 2022, a total of 58,24,946 cognizable crimes comprising 35,61,379 Indian Penal Code (IPC) crimes and 22,63,567 Special & Local Laws (SLL) crimes were registered.
- This was a decline of 4.5% in the registration of cases over the second pandemic year, 2021.

- **The crime rate has declined**

- The crime rate, or crimes registered per lakh population, has declined from 445.9 in 2021 to 422.2 in 2022.
- This is seen as a better indicator, since absolute numbers on crime increase as the population increases.

- **Increase in crime against women**

- 4,45,256 cases of crime against women were registered in 2022. This was an increase of 4% over the 2021 numbers.
- The largest share of crimes against women under IPC sections was registered under:
 - Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives (31.4%),
 - Kidnapping & Abduction of Women (19.2%), and
 - Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty (18.7%).

- **Reporting of cybercrime increased significantly**

- Reporting of cybercrime increased significantly by 24.4 percentage points compared to 2021, to 65,893 cases.
- Around 64.8% of registered cases were of fraud, followed by extortion (5.5%), and sexual exploitation (5.2%).

- **An increase in suicides cases**

- An increase of 4.2% was observed in suicides reported during 2022 (1,70,924 suicides) as compared to 2021.
- Family Problems (other than marriage-related problems) (31.7%), Marriage Related Problems (4.8%) and Illness (18.4%) have together accounted for 54.9% of total suicides in the country during the year 2022.
- The overall male-to-female ratio of suicide victims was 71.8 : 28.2.

- **Headline trends in state-wise data**
 - The states/ UTs reporting the highest charge sheeting rate under IPC crimes are Kerala (96.0%), Puducherry (91.3%), and West Bengal (90.6%).
 - This is the percentage of cases in which the police reached the stage of framing charges against the accused, out of the total true cases (where a charge sheet was not laid but a final report submitted as true, plus the total cases charge sheeted).

The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023

Polity

Why in news?

- On December 28, 2023, President Droupadi Murmu gave assent to the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023.
- The Bill replaces the 'Election Commission Act, 1991'. It provides for the appointment, salary, and removal of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs). According to the provisions of the Bill, the CEC and ECs will be appointed by the President upon the recommendation of a Selection Committee.

Overview of the Bill:

- **Introduction and Purpose:** Focuses on the appointment, pay, and removal process of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).
- **Appointment of the Commission:** The Election Commission will be appointed by the President, upon the recommendation of the **Selection Committee**. This committee includes the Prime Minister, a Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the biggest opposition party). A Search Committee, led by the Cabinet Secretary, **will give 5 names to the Selection Committee**. The Selection Committee may consider any person other than those suggested by the Search Committee.
- Recommendations of the Selection Committee will be valid even when there is a vacancy in this Committee.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Candidates should have worked in a top government position, similar to a Secretary. The CEC and ECs need to be honest, understand and have experience in managing elections, and should have been a Secretary (or a similar role) in the government.
- **Salary and Service Terms:** Their pay is the same as that of the Cabinet Secretary. Before, it was the same as a Supreme Court Judge's salary.
- **Removal:** The Bill keeps the same previous manner of removal of CEC and ECs as specified in the Constitution. An EC can be removed from office upon the recommendation of the CEC. The CEC or any EC may resign at any time by writing to the President.
- **Terms of Service:** 6 years or until 65 years of age.
- **No re-appointment;** however, an EC can become a CEC within these limits.

Constitutional Context:

- **Article 324:** Outlines the structure of the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- **ECI's Role:** Responsible for electoral rolls and conducting various elections.
- **Previous Act (1991):** Set CEC and ECs' salary level, but not their appointment process.

Critical Analysis:

- **Concerns over Independence:** Government dominance in the Selection Committee. Salary control by the government could influence the Commission. Limiting eligibility to bureaucrats might exclude other qualified candidates.
- **Unaddressed Issues in the Bill:** Removal process parity between CEC and ECs. Lack of provision for an independent secretariat for the ECI.

Implications for the Election Commission:

- **Independence at Stake:** The bill's provisions might compromise the ECI's autonomy.
- **Historical Perspective:** Contrast with the Constituent Assembly's vision of a free and independent ECI.
- **Role of the Judiciary:** Supreme Court's emphasis on an independent body for fair elections.
- The Bill plays a crucial role in shaping India's electoral integrity and democratic processes. Requires careful consideration to balance the need for an efficient appointment process to maintain the ECI's independence.

Why in news?

- The new Press & Registration of Periodicals Act, 2023 comes into force; the old PRB Act, 1867 stands repealed.

About the bill

- **Key Features of the Bill Include:**

- Registration of periodicals:

- **Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867**

- The Act provides for the registration of newspapers, periodicals, and books.
 - It also provides for the cataloguing of books.
 - The Act provides that a declaration specifying the printer/ publisher be made to the District Magistrate (DM). The DM sends the declaration to the Press Registrar, who then issues a certificate of registration.

- **Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023**

- The Bill provides for the registration of periodicals, which include any publication containing public news or comments on public news.
 - Periodicals do not include books or scientific and academic journals.
 - The Bill allows the publisher of a periodical to obtain a registration certificate by filing an online application with the Press Registrar General and specified local authority.

- **Foreign periodicals:**

- An exact reproduction of a foreign periodical may be printed in India only with the prior approval of the central government.
 - The manner of registration of such periodicals will be prescribed.

- **Press Registrar General:**

- The Act provides for the central government to appoint a Press Registrar who maintains a register of newspapers.
 - The Bill provides for the Press Registrar General of India who will issue registration certificates for all periodicals.
 - Other functions of the Press Registrar General include:
 - (i) maintaining a register of periodicals,
 - (ii) making guidelines for the admissibility of title of periodicals,
 - (iii) verifying circulation figures of prescribed periodicals, and
 - (iv) revising, suspending, or cancelling registration.

- **Registration of a printing press:**

- The Act requires a printing press to be declared before the DM.
 - The Bill allows for information regarding printing presses to be submitted to the Press Registrar General through an online portal.

- **Suspension and cancellation of registration:**

- The Bill allows the Press Registrar General to suspend a periodical's registration for a minimum period of 30 days which can extend to 180 days.
 - The registration may be suspended due to:
 - (i) registration obtained by furnishing false information,
 - (ii) failure to publish periodicals continuously, and
 - (iii) giving false particulars in annual statements.
 - The Press Registrar General may cancel the registration if the publisher does not correct such defects.
 - Registration may also be cancelled if:
 - (i) a periodical has the same or similar title as any other periodical,
 - (ii) the owner/ publisher has been convicted of a terrorist act or unlawful activity, or for acting against the security of the state.

- **Penalties and appeal:**

- The Bill empowers the Press Registrar General to impose penalties for:
 - (i) publishing periodicals without registration (up to five lakh rupees),
 - (ii) failing to furnish annual statement within the specified time (up to Rs 20,000 on first default).
- If a periodical is published without registration, the Press Registrar General may direct its publication to be stopped.
- Not complying with such direction within six months will be punishable with imprisonment of up to six months.
- Any person may appeal against the refusal to issue a registration certificate, suspension/ cancellation of registration, or imposition of penalty.
- Such appeals may be filed before the Press and Registration Appellate Board within 60 days.



Why in news?

- Recently, India has launched the PM Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan a campaign for the tribals.

About PM-JANMAM scheme

- Launch-** On Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas (Birth anniversary of Birsa Munda) in Jharkhand.
- Objective-** To provide essential amenities (road connectivity, electricity, secure housing, clean drinking water, sanitation) and improved access to education, health, nutrition, sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- The government will showcase and spread awareness of various government schemes made for the tribals.
- The scheme will be implemented by 9 ministries with Ministry of Tribal Affairs playing the key role.
- Beneficiary-** Government has identified 75 tribal communities and primitive tribes with a population of lakhs who reside in more than 22 thousand villages in the country.
- Focus-** 11 critical interventions for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG).
- Ayush Wellness Centres-** It will be set up by the Ministry of AYUSH and AYUSH facilities will be extended to PVTG habitations through mobile medical units.
- Skill enhancement-** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship will facilitate skill and vocational training in PVTG habitations, multipurpose centres and hostels according to suitable skills of these communities.

Why in news?

- The Centre withdraws all three criminal law Bills and introduces new set of draft legislations.

Changes made in the revised criminal reform bills

- Handcuffs**
 - Initial Proposal:** The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) initially allowed the use of handcuffs during arrests for individuals accused of serious offences, including "economic offences."
 - Committee's Recommendation:** The committee suggested restricting the use of handcuffs to select heinous crimes like rape and murder, excluding economic offences due to their varying severity. They recommended deleting "economic offences" from the clause.
 - Incorporated Change:** The revised bill deleted "economic offences" from the clause and made the use of handcuffs for offences against the state more discretionary. It also extended the use of handcuffs to individuals being produced before a court.
- Mercy Petitions**
 - Initial Provision:** The BNSS allowed convicts facing death sentences or their relatives to file mercy petitions, subject to review by the Centre or state government's Home Department.
 - Committee's Recommendation:** The committee proposed establishing a quasi-judicial board for mercy petitions and setting a timeframe for their review.
 - Incorporated Change:** The provision allowing mercy petitions to be forwarded for review was deleted. Additionally, the scope of non-appealable orders under Articles 72 and 161 was broadened, making the Governor's orders under Article 161 unappealable.
- Preventive Detention Powers**
 - Initial Expansion:** The BNSS expanded police powers for preventive action without specifying a time frame for detention.
 - Committee's Recommendation:** The committee suggested specifying a time period for detention and clarifying ambiguous language.
 - Incorporated Change:** The new bill includes a 24-hour limit for detention and clarifies the use of the term "Magistrate" instead of "judicial magistrate."
- Community Service**
 - Initial Provision:** "Community service" was included as a penalty for specific offences without a clear definition.
 - Committee's Recommendation:** Define "community service" and extend its application to specific offences.
 - Incorporated Change:** The revised BNSS now defines "community service" as court-ordered work benefiting the community without remuneration. Additionally, community service was extended as a punishment for

unlawfully engaging public servants in trade and non-appearance in response to a proclamation under Section 84.

- **The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023**

- It is a proposed bill aiming **to replace the Indian Penal Code of 1860**. This bill introduces several changes in criminal offences and punishments.
- It covers a wide range of aspects, including terrorism, organised crime, sexual offences, and more.

Key changes proposed in this bill include:

- **Sedition**

- The Indian Penal Code (IPC) defines sedition as bringing or attempting to bring hatred or contempt, or exciting disaffection towards the government.
- **The Bill removes sedition as an offence and replaces it with penalties for activities such as exciting or attempting to excite secession, armed rebellion**, subversive activities, encouraging separatist feelings, or endangering the sovereignty or unity of India.
- Offences under the new provisions may result in imprisonment of up to seven years or life imprisonment, along with a fine.

- **Terrorism**

- **The Bill defines terrorism** as acts intending to threaten the unity, integrity, and security of the country, intimidate the public, or disturb public order.
- Includes the use of firearms, bombs, hazardous substances, destroying property, disrupting essential services, and activities listed in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- Death or life imprisonment for acts resulting in death, imprisonment term between five years and life in other cases. Offenders may also face a fine of at least five lakh rupees.
- Conspiring, organizing, or assisting in preparing any terrorist act carries imprisonment between five years and life, along with a fine.

- **Organized Crime**

- Continuing unlawful activities such as kidnapping, extortion, contract killing, land grabbing, financial scams, and cybercrime, carried out by violence or intimidation for material or financial benefit, by individuals or crime syndicates.
- Death or life imprisonment for offences resulting in death, imprisonment term between five years and life in other cases, along with a fine.

- **Petty Organized Crime**

- Organized crimes cause general feelings of insecurity, committed by criminal groups/gangs, including pickpocketing, snatching, and theft.
- Attempting or committing petty organized crime is punishable with imprisonment between one and seven years and a fine.

- **Murder on Grounds of Caste or Race**

- Murder committed by five or more people on specified grounds (race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, or personal belief) is punishable with imprisonment between seven years and life, or death, along with a fine.

- **Death Penalty for Gang Rape of Minors**

- The bill extends the provision of the **death penalty for gang rape to include victims under 18 years of age**, broadening the scope beyond the previous provision which applied to victims below 12 years of age under the Indian Penal Code.

- **Sexual Intercourse by Deceitful Means**

- This provision **criminalizes sexual intercourse with a woman through deceit or a false promise of marriage without intending to fulfil it**. The punishment could range from simple to rigorous imprisonment for up to 10 years, coupled with a fine.

- **Extending Offenses to Boys**

- The Bill specifies that importing boys under the age of 18 years for illicit intercourse with another person will be an offence. This provision aligns the law with a gender-neutral approach concerning certain offences related to illicit activities involving minors

- **The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023**

- The new legislation **aims to replace the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973**. The Bill preserves most of the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, but also introduces some changes and reforms.



- The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 is the existing law that governs the process of arrest, trial, and bail for criminal offences under various laws such as the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

Key changes proposed under the bill include:

- **Detention of Undertrials**
 - Under the current Code, if an accused spends half of the maximum imprisonment period during investigation or trial, release on personal bond is mandated. The new bill modifies this, excluding release for offences punishable by life imprisonment or when facing multiple proceedings.
 - **First-time offenders may secure bail after completing one-third of the maximum imprisonment for the offence**, necessitating an application by the jail superintendent.
- **Electronic Trials**
 - **The Bill proposes that legal proceedings, including trials and inquiries, can be conducted in electronic mode.** This means that court proceedings could take place through digital platforms or electronic communication systems.
 - It allows for the production of electronic communication devices, such as mobile phones and computers, as potential sources of digital evidence during investigations or trials.
- **Medical Examination of Accused**
 - The existing legal framework allows the medical examination of accused individuals in specific cases, like rape, but limits the request for such examinations to at least a sub-inspector level police officer.
 - The Bill suggests expanding this authority to any police officer, providing more flexibility in initiating medical examinations.
- **Forensic Investigation**
 - The Bill mandates **forensic investigation for offences carrying a minimum punishment of seven years of imprisonment.**
 - It ensures that forensic experts visit crime scenes to collect evidence, and the entire process is documented using electronic devices. If a state lacks forensic facilities, it can utilize facilities in another state.
- **Prohibition of Carrying Arms**
 - The existing legal provision empowers District Magistrates to prohibit the carrying of arms in certain public situations for up to six months. The Bill proposes to omit this provision, possibly for reasons related to its non-notification or perceived redundancy.
- **Signatures, Finger Impressions, and Voice Samples**
 - The Bill expands the powers of Metropolitan/Judicial Magistrates to order the provision of not just specimen signatures and handwriting but also finger impressions and voice samples.
 - Importantly, this can be done even for individuals who have not been arrested, broadening the scope of the magistrate's authority.
- **Timelines for Procedures**
 - **The Bill introduces specific timelines for various legal procedures**, such as the submission of medical reports within seven days for cases involving rape victims.
 - It sets timeframes for giving judgments, informing victims of investigation progress, and framing charges in session courts.
- **Trial in Absence of Offender**
 - The Bill allows for the **conduct of trials and pronouncement of judgments in the absence of a proclaimed offender.** This is applicable when the accused person has evaded trial, and there's no immediate prospect of their arrest.
- **Metropolitan Magistrates**
 - The Bill omits the provision related to the notification of metropolitan areas and the appointment of Metropolitan Magistrates in cities or towns with a population exceeding one million. The reasons for this omission are not explicitly mentioned.
- **The Bhartiya Sakshya Bill 2023**
 - The proposal aimed at modernizing the rules governing the admissibility of evidence in legal proceedings in India. By repealing the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, it indicates an intent to update and adapt these rules to contemporary contexts.
- **Admissibility of electronic or digital records as evidence**
 - The bill aims to **update the definition of documentary evidence to include electronic or digital records.** It

expands the scope to encompass information stored in various devices like smartphones, laptops, server logs, & even voice mails. This change essentially equates the legal effect of electronic records to that of paper records.

- **Oral evidence**

- The proposed bill **extends the definition of oral evidence** to include information given electronically, acknowledging that statements made electronically can be considered as oral evidence.

- **Secondary evidence**

- **The bill expands the definition of secondary evidence.** While primary evidence includes original documents and their electronic counterparts, secondary evidence now includes oral and written admissions, as well as the testimony of an expert in examining documents.
- It clarifies that secondary evidence might be necessary not only when the original document is inaccessible but also when the genuineness of the document is in question.

- **Production of documents**

- The bill specifies that while witnesses summoned to produce documents must do so, the court will not demand privileged communications between Ministers and the President to be produced before it. This safeguards certain types of communications from mandatory production in court.

- **Joint trials**

- In the context of joint trials involving multiple accused individuals, the **bill elaborates on the treatment of confessions made by one accused that implicate others.** It also clarifies that trials involving multiple individuals will still be considered joint trials even if one accused is absent or has not responded to an arrest warrant.

Jammu and Kashmir Bills

Governance

Why in news?

- Recently Lok Sabha has passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill and Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill.

What is Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill?

- It amends the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.
- **J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019-** It provides for the reorganisation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir into the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir (with legislature) and Ladakh (without legislature).
- **Number of seats in Legislative Assembly-** 2019 Act amended the 2nd Schedule of the 1950 Act to specify the total number of seats in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly to be 83.
- It reserved six seats for Scheduled Castes. No seats were reserved for Scheduled Tribes.
- **Increase in seats-** The bill increases the total number of seats to 90
- It also reserves 7 seats for SC and 9 seats for ST.
- **Nomination-** Lieutenant Governor may nominate two members from the Kashmiri migrant community and one representing the displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) to the legislative assembly.
- **Social inclusion-** One of the nominated members must be a woman.

What is Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill?

- It amends the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, 2004.
- **J&K Reservation Act, 2004-** It provides for reservation in jobs and admission in professional institutions to members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other socially and educationally backward classes.
- **SEBC-** Under the Act, Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) include
 - People residing in villages declared as socially and educationally backward by the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - People residing in areas adjoining the Actual Line of Control and International Border, and
 - Weak and under-privileged classes (social castes)
- **Amendment-** It seeks to change the nomenclature of a section of people who are eligible for quotas in appointments and admissions.
- **Power of the government-** It may make inclusions or exclusions from category of weak and under-privileged classes, on the recommendations of a Commission.
- **Substitution-** The Bill substitutes weak and under-privileged classes with other backward classes as declared by the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. The definition of weak and under-privileged classes are deleted from the Act

What is the significance of the Bills?

- **Inclusive India-** It reflects a commitment to inclusivity and justice, it also represent a broader strategy to integrate Jammu and Kashmir more fully with the rest of India.
- **Affirmative action-** It ensures equal opportunities for marginalised communities in education and employment by replacing weak and under-privileged with other backward classes.
- **Strong representation-** Increasing seats in the Legislative Assembly for SC & STs will provide a strong political representation.
- **Abrogation of Article 370-** It has significantly impacted the region's security dynamics, leading to a notable reduction in terrorism-related activities.

Advocates Amendment Bill, 2023

Governance

Why in news?

- Recently, Advocate amendment bill 2023 was passed in Lok Sabha which amends the Advocates Act 1961 and Legal Practitioners Act 1879.

Why is it in the news?

- Recently, the Lok Sabha passed the **Advocates (Amendment) Bill**, introduced by the Ministry of Law and Justice.
- The bill aims to amend the **Advocates Act of 1961**, which consolidates legislation related to legal professionals, establishes Bar Councils, and forms the All-India Bar.

Key Features of the Bill

- The bill repeals specific sections related to touts under the Legal Practitioners Act of 1879.
- Every High Court, district judge, sessions judge, district magistrate, and revenue officer (not below the rank of a district collector) is empowered to frame and publish lists of touts.
- The Court or judge may exclude from the premises of the Court any person whose name is included in the list of touts.
- Authorities empowered to frame and publish the list of touts may order subordinate courts to hold an inquiry into the conduct of persons alleged or suspected to be touts.
- Any person acting as a tout while his name is included in the list of touts will be subject to punishment, including imprisonment up to three months, a fine up to Rs 500, or both.

Touts

- Touts are individuals who actively seek to persuade others to hire a particular lawyer and receive payment for providing this service.
- They commonly operate around places like courts or government offices, offering their services to connect people with lawyers in exchange for monetary compensation.

The Post Offices Bill, 2023

Governance

Why in news?

- Rajya Sabha has recently passed the Post Office Bill, which repeals and replaces the Post Office Act, 1898.

About the bill

- The Indian Post Office Act, 1898 was enacted 125 years ago with a view to govern the functioning of post offices in India. This Act primarily addresses mail services provided through the post office.
- Over the years, services available through the post offices have diversified beyond mails. The post office network has become a vehicle for delivery of a variety of citizen centric services.
- Post offices are practically functioning like banking services and there are 26 crore accounts with Rs 17 lakh crore deposited in post office savings services.
- About 3 crore accounts have been opened under the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana with Rs 1.41 lakh crore deposited in them.
- As many as 3.5 crore people are beneficiaries of the direct benefits transfer scheme courtesy of the post office network.
- As many as 1.6 lakh post offices have been connected with core banking and digital banking facilities and 434

post offices have processed more than 1.25 crore passport applications and 13,500 Post Office Aadhaar Seva Kendras have been opened.

- The Post Office Bill, 2023 addresses these changes and provides for a simple legislative framework to facilitate evolution of the post office into a network for delivery of citizen centric services.

Key provisions of the Bill:

- i) The post office shall provide such services as the central government may by rules prescribe.
- ii) The Director General of Postal Services shall make regulations in respect of activities necessary to provide those services and fix the charges for such services.
- iii) The post office shall have the exclusive privilege of issuing postage stamps.
- iv) The central government shall have power to give effect to the arrangements made with any foreign country or territory.
- v) Every person shall be liable to pay charges for availing any service provided by the post office, and if such person refuses or neglects to pay any charge due to him it shall be recoverable as land revenue.
- vi) The central government may prescribe the conditions for denoting the official mark on postal item to be used as prima facie evidence of the fact so denoted.
- vii) The central government may, by notification, empower any officer to intercept, open or detain any item in the interest of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency, or public safety or upon the occurrence of any contravention of any of the provisions of any law for the time being in force.
- viii) The post office and officers of the post office shall be exempted from any liability by reason of any loss, mis-delivery, delay, or damage in course of any service provided by the post office except such liability as may be prescribed.

Concerns on interception provision

- One clause of the Bill drew significant opposition from some MPs for threatening people's privacy by allowing a government-appointed officer to intercept, open or detain any item for national security and allied reasons.
- According to the proposed legislation, the central government may, by notification, empower any officer to intercept, open or detain any item in the interest of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency or public safety, or upon the occurrence of any contravention of any of the provisions of any law for the time being in force.
- Replying to a discussion on the Bill in the Upper House, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw stressed the provision for interception is needed for national security reasons.
- In a society which is as complex and diverse, and times which are as difficult as they are, it is very important that interception is done. This kind of a provision is kept for national security, he said.
- The minister said the proposed legislation entails provisions towards the expansion of India's postal services network.

Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

Governance

Why in News?

- Recently, the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023, was passed in the Lok Sabha that seeks to repeal the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867.

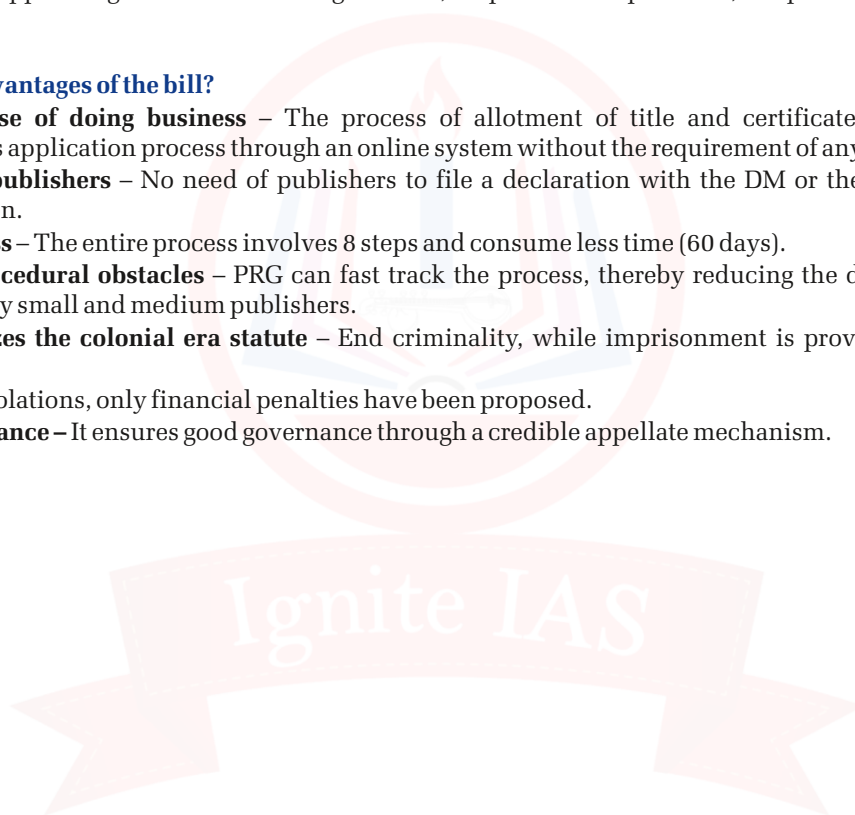
Key features of the bill

- **Press Registrar General (PRG)** – It creates a new position who is entrusted with tasks like
 - Issuing certificates of registration to periodicals
 - Maintaining records of registered periodicals
 - Collecting application fees
 - Disbursing the Centre's funds for the Act's implementation
- **Registration** – A simple online mechanism has been put in place to apply for title verification and grant of certificate of registration.
- **Facsimile edition of a foreign periodical** – Foreign periodicals can be printed in India with prior approval of the Central Government and its registration with the Press Registrar General (PRG).
- **Role of District magistrate/local authority** – It reduced their role with regard to grant of Certificate of Registration and title allotment.

- **Suspension** – It allows the PRG to suspend a periodical's registration for a minimum period of 30 days which can extend to 180 days for
 - Registration obtained by furnishing false information
 - Failure to publish periodicals continuously
 - Giving false particulars in annual statements
- **Cancellation** – The PRG may cancel the registration if
 - The publisher does not correct defects that lead to suspension
 - A periodical has the same title as any other periodical
 - The owner/ publisher has been convicted of a terrorist act or unlawful activity, or for acting against the security of the State
- **Penalties** – If a periodical is published without registration, the PRG may direct its publication to be stopped and non-compliance within 6 months will be punishable with imprisonment of upto 6 months.
- **Press and Registration Appellate Board** – It will be headed by the Chairman of the Press Council of India (PCI) and comprise 2 PCI members.
- It will hear appeals against refusal of registration, imposition of penalties, suspension or cancellation of registration.

What are the advantages of the bill?

- **Improves ease of doing business** – The process of allotment of title and certificate is by a simple and simultaneous application process through an online system without the requirement of any physical interface.
- **Unburdens publishers** – No need of publishers to file a declaration with the DM or the local authorities for authentication.
- **Quick process** – The entire process involves 8 steps and consume less time (60 days).
- **Removes procedural obstacles** – PRG can fast track the process, thereby reducing the difficulty in starting a publication by small and medium publishers.
- **Decriminalizes the colonial era statute** – End criminality, while imprisonment is provided only in extreme cases.
- For certain violations, only financial penalties have been proposed.
- **Good governance** – It ensures good governance through a credible appellate mechanism.



Why in news?

- Recently, a detailed report on the implementation of the Centre's policy on child labour was tabled in Parliament.

About the findings of the Parliamentary report

- The **number of working children has decreased** from 1.26 crore (2001 census) to 1.01 crore (2011 census) and has decreased from 57.79 lakh (2001 census) to 43.53 lakh (2011 census) in the age group of 5-14 years.
- It is practically not possible to meet the international commitment to **eliminate child labour by 2025**.
- Recommendation – Improve coordination** between various Ministries of the centre and the states.
- Improve data collection** – Data on children between 14 to 18 years be collected during the next census exercise.
 - Ministry of Labour & Employment to **conduct periodic survey** particularly in urban areas to identify child labours.
 - Centre can direct **states to conduct surveys** along with their suggestions to address the problem.
- Examine various child welfare acts** – To reduce any ambiguity or delay in securing justice for aggrieved children by rectifying the
 - Discrepancies in criteria of determining age of the child and the nature of offence as cognisable/non-cognisable
- Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 are important child welfare acts.
- Award stricter punishments** – Like cancellation of license, attachment of property, etc., and **fix the accountability** on the principal employer and traffickers.

Who is a child according to the law?

- According to the **Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**, 'child' means a person who has not completed his **fourteenth year of age**.
- The **2016 Amendment** completely prohibits the employment of children **below 14 years**.
- It also prohibits the employment of adolescents in the age group of **14 to 18 years** in hazardous occupations and processes and **regulates their working conditions** where they are **not prohibited**.
- Under the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009**, 'Child' means a **male or female aged six to fourteen years**.
- As per the **Minimum Wages Act, 1948** vide its amendment in 1986 a 'child' is defined as a person who has not completed his **fourteenth year of age**.
- The **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** defines 'child' as a person who has not completed **eighteen years of age**. The term '**adolescent**' is **not defined** in the JJ Act, 2015.

What is Child Labour?

- ILO** defines **Child labour** as 'The work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity and, that is harmful to their physical and mental development'.
- Worst forms of Child Labour:** Slavery, trafficking of children, debt bondage, children in armed conflict, sexual exploitation, prostitution, pornography, use in drug trafficking and organised beggary.
- Key sectors employing child labour in India:** Brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, domestic service, unorganised sectors (e.g. tea stalls), agriculture, fisheries and mining.
- According to **ILO estimates**, there are about **10.1 million working children** between the age of 5 to 14 in India, of which 5.6 million are boys and 4.5 million are girls. **Incidence of child labour** in India has **decreased** by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011.

Child Labour Laws in India

- Factories Act, 1948:** It prohibits the employment of children **below** the age of **14 years** in **factories**.
- The Mines Act, 1952:** It prohibits the employment of children **below** the age of **18 years** in **mines**.
- Right To Education Act, 2009:** It provides **free, compulsory** education to all children **aged 6 to 14**.
- Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016:** It prohibits:
 - the employment of children **below 14 years** and
 - the employment of adolescents (**14-18 years**) in **hazardous occupations**.
- Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986:** Based on the recommendations of Gurupadaswamy

Committee, this act was enacted in 1986. It prohibits children **under the age of 14 years** to be working in hazardous industries and processes.

- **Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act 2016:** It prohibits the employment of Children below 14 years in **all employment** and with the provisions for **prohibition on employment of adolescents** (14-18 Years) in the mines, inflammable substances (explosives) and in hazardous process.
- **National Policy on Child Labour in India:** Formulated in 1987, it seeks to adopt a gradual & sequential approach with a **focus on rehabilitation of children and Adolescent**.

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

- It is a **statutory body** established under the **Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005**.
- It is responsible for the protection and promotion of the rights of children, including **monitoring** the implementation of **child-specific laws**, such as:
 - Right to Education (RTE), 2009
 - Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), 2012
 - Juvenile Justice Act, 2015

Functions

- **Examine and review existing safeguards** for the protection of child rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation.
- **Investigate violations of child rights** and recommend legal proceedings in appropriate cases.



Why in news?

- The Government of India has made a significant move in the Mining Sector by launching the first-ever auction of critical minerals, offering 20 blocks for sale to Private Sectors.
- The mineral blocks are spread across eight states, with Tamil Nadu having the most blocks (seven).

Critical Minerals

- Critical minerals are those minerals that are **essential for economic development** and **national security**, the lack of availability of these minerals or concentration of extraction or processing in a few geographical locations may lead to supply chain vulnerabilities and even disruption of supplies.

Declaration of Critical Minerals:

- It is a **dynamic process**, and it can evolve over time as new technologies, market dynamics, and geopolitical considerations emerge.
- Different countries may have their own unique lists of critical minerals based on their specific circumstances and priorities.
- The US has declared 50 minerals critical in light of their role in national security or economic development.
- Japan has identified a set of 31 minerals as critical for their economy.
- The UK considers 18 minerals critical, EU (34) and Canada (31).

India

- In **July 2023**, the government identified **30 minerals as Critical Minerals** by amending the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957**, through the **MMDR Amendment Act, 2023**, empowering the Central Government to auction blocks of these minerals.
- The **30 critical minerals** are Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.

| Sl. No. | Critical Mineral | Percentage (2020) | Major Import Sources (2020) |
|---------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1. | Lithium | 100% | Chile, Russia, China, Ireland, Belgium |
| 2. | Cobalt | 100% | China, Belgium, Netherlands, US, Japan |
| 3. | Nickel | 100% | Sweden, China, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines |
| 4. | Vanadium | 100% | Kuwait, Germany, South Africa, Brazil, Thailand |
| 5. | Niobium | 100% | Brazil, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Indonesia |
| 6. | Germanium | 100% | China, South Africa, Australia, France, US |
| 7. | Rhenium | 100% | Russia, UK, Netherlands, South Africa, China |
| 8. | Beryllium | 100% | Russia, UK, Netherlands, South Africa, China |
| 9. | Tantalum | 100% | Australia, Indonesia, South Africa, Malaysia, US |
| 10. | Strontium | 100% | China, US, Russia, Estonia, Slovenia |
| 11. | Zirconium(zircon) | 80% | Australia, Indonesia, South Africa, Malaysia, US |
| 12. | Graphite(natural) | 60% | China, Madagascar, Mozambique, Vietnam, Tanzania |
| 13. | Manganese | 50% | South Africa, Gabon, Australia, Brazil, China |
| 14. | Chromium | 2.5% | South Africa, Mozambique, Oman, Switzerland, Turkey |
| 15. | Silicon | <1% | China, Malaysia, Norway, Bhutan, Netherlands |

Table.1 The net import reliance for critical minerals of India (2020) (Source: A report on 'Unlocking Australia-India Critical Minerals Partnership Potential' by Australian Trade and Investment Commission, July 2021)

Significance of Critical Minerals

- **Economic Development:**
 - Industries such as high-tech electronics, telecommunications, transport, and defense heavily rely on these minerals.
 - Additionally, critical minerals are essential for green technologies like solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, and electric vehicles.
 - Given India's significant domestic demand and potential in these sectors, their growth can lead to job creation, income generation, and innovation.
- **National Security:**
 - These minerals are vital for defense, aerospace, nuclear, and space applications, necessitating the use of high-quality and reliable materials capable of withstanding extreme conditions and performing complex functions.
- **Environmental Sustainability:**
 - They are integral to the transition toward clean energy and a low-carbon economy, enabling the reduction of India's reliance on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions.
 - With a commitment to attaining 450 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030, these minerals are essential for achieving India's green objectives.

Monetary Policy Decisions

Economy

Why in news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its bimonthly Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) Meeting has retained benchmark interest rates unchanged for the 5th time in a row.

Policy rates

- **Repo rate 6.5%**
 - Repo rate is the rate at which the central bank of a country (RBI) lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds.
 - Here, the central bank purchases the security.
- **Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) 6.25 %**
 - The SDF is a liquidity window through which the RBI will give banks an option to park excess liquidity with it.
 - It is different from the reverse repo facility in that it does not require banks to provide collateral while parking funds.
- **Marginal Standing Facility Rate 6.75%**
 - MSF is a window for scheduled banks to borrow overnight from the RBI in an emergency situation when interbank liquidity dries up completely.
 - Under interbank lending, banks lend funds to one another for a specified term.
- **Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) 4.50%**
 - Under CRR, the commercial banks have to hold a certain minimum amount of deposit (Net Demand and Time Liabilities) NDTL as reserves with the central bank.
 - The amount of money available to the bank for providing loans is called its Net Demand and Time Liabilities (NDTL), which is basically, the sum of all the deposits made to the bank by people like you, less the amount that the bank has invested in other banks.
- **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) 18.00%**
 - SLR is the minimum percentage of deposits that a commercial bank has to maintain in the form of liquid cash, gold, or other securities.

Why in news?

- The Financial Stability Board (FSB)'s report on crypto-asset intermediaries sought measures to enhance cross-border cooperation and information sharing among local authorities.
- This is to effectively regulate and address gaps in Multi-function Crypto-asset Intermediaries (MCIs) operating globally.

Financial Stability Board (FSB)

- The FSB is an **international body** that **monitors and makes recommendations about the global financial system**.
- FSB was **established in 2009** under the aegis of G20.
- **India is an active Member** of the FSB having three seats in its Plenary represented by Secretary of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Chairperson of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Crypto Assets

- Crypto assets are a **digital representation of value** that can **transfer, store, or trade electronically**. This also includes **non-fungible tokens (NFTs)**.
- **NFTs are blockchain-based tokens that each represent a unique asset like a piece of art, digital content, or media.**
- **An NFT can be thought of as an irrevocable digital certificate of ownership and authenticity for a given asset, whether digital or physical.**
- **Crypto assets are a subset of digital assets** that use cryptography to protect digital data and distributed ledger technology to record transactions.

Multi-function Crypto-asset Intermediaries (MCIs)

- MCIs is an **individual firm, or groups of affiliated firms** that offer a range of crypto-based services, products and functions which primarily revolve around operating the trading platform. Examples include **Binance, Bitfinex** and **Coinbase**.
- **The primary source of revenue** for these platforms are the **transaction fees generated** from trading-related activities.
- These MCIs may also **derive revenue from operating a blockchain infrastructure** for which they may collect transaction validation fees.

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Commerce & Industry has released the 5th edition of "Logistics Ease Across Different State (LEADS) 2023" report, which serves as a guide for stakeholders in the Logistics Sector by providing strategic insights.

Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS)

- The LEADS is an **indigenous data-driven index** to **assess logistics infrastructure, services, and human resources** across all 36 States and UTs.
- LEADS continues to **act as a guiding & bridging mechanism** for the identification of interventions enhancing logistics efficiency at State/UTs. It reflects positively on international indices, like the Logistics Performance Index.
- **LEADS aims to guide stakeholders** in the logistics sector **by offering strategic insights and fostering healthy competition** among states and union territories to improve their logistics performance.
- LEADS was **conceived on the lines of the Logistics Performance Index of World Bank** in 2018 and has evolved over time.
- **Evaluation Criteria:** The report evaluates logistics performance based on three key pillars:
 - Logistics Infrastructure
 - Logistics Services
 - Operating and Regulatory Environment

Key Highlights of the LEADS 2023

• Achievers

- Thirteen states and Union Territories, including Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh, and Gujarat, are categorized as achievers in the **logistics index chart 2023**.
- These regions have shown efficient logistical services that contribute to export promotion and economic growth.

• Fast Movers

- Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland are recognized as fast movers in the logistics index.
- These areas have shown significant progress and improvements in their logistical services.

• Aspirers

- States and UTs in the aspirers category, such as Goa, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand, are identified as regions with potential for growth in their logistics ecosystem. These areas are striving to enhance their logistical capabilities.

• Policy Reforms: The report emphasizes the significance of policy reforms such as-

- Industry status for logistics,
- digital initiatives (PM GatiShakti),
- Logistics Data Bank,
- Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP), and
- the alignment of State Logistics Policies with the National Logistics Policy.

Initiatives Related to Logistics

- Multimodal Transportation of Goods Act, 1993.
- PM Gati Shakti Scheme
- Multi Modal Logistics Parks
- LEADS Report
- Dedicated Freight Corridor
- Sagarmala Projects
- Bharatmala Project

Related information: Logistics Performance Index

- The Logistics Performance Index (LPI), developed by **the World Bank Group**, is an interactive benchmarking tool created to help countries identify the challenges and opportunities they face in their performance on trade logistics and what they can do to improve their performance.
- LPI is the weighted average of the country's scores on the six key dimensions:
 - Customs performance
 - Infrastructure quality
 - Ease of arranging shipments
 - Logistics services quality
 - Consignment tracking and tracing
 - Timeliness of shipments
- India ranked **38th out of 139 countries in LPI 2023**.

NICDP

Economy

Why in news?

- The Government of India and Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a USD 250 million policy-based loan that will continue support to industrial corridor development to make manufacturing more competitive, strengthen national supply chains and links with regional and global value chains.

About National Industrial Corridor Development Programme

- National Industrial Corridor Development Programme is India's most ambitious infrastructure programme **aiming to develop new industrial cities as "Smart Cities"** and converging next generation technologies across infrastructure sectors.

- India is **developing various industrial corridor projects** as part of the **National Industrial Corridor Programme** which is aimed at development of futuristic industrial cities in India which can compete with the **best manufacturing and investment destinations** in the world.
- The same will create employment opportunities and economic growth leading to overall socio- economic development.

11 industrial Corridors

- **Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC)**
 - It is the first industrial corridor which is being implemented in the country wherein substantial progress has been made.
- **Others:**
 - Chennai Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC)
 - Amritsar Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIC)
 - East Coast Industrial Corridor (ECIC) with Vizag Chennai Industrial Corridor (VCIC) as Phase 1
 - Bengaluru Mumbai Industrial Corridor (BMIC)
 - Extension of CBIC to Kochi via Coimbatore
 - Hyderabad Nagpur Industrial Corridor (HNIC)
 - Hyderabad Warangal Industrial Corridor (HWIC)
 - Hyderabad Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (HBIC)
 - Odisha Economic Corridor (OEC)
 - Delhi Nagpur Industrial Corridor (DNIC)

Monitoring and Review Mechanism

- The National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust (NICDIT).
- In 2016, the government approved the expansion of the scope of existing DMIC-Project Implementation Trust Fund (PITF) and re-designated it as NICDIT.
- NICDIT comes under the administrative control of the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- An Apex Monitoring Authority under the chairmanship of the Finance Minister periodically reviews the activities of NICDIT and progress of the projects.

UNNATI on SSE

Economy

Why in news?

- SGBS Unnati Foundation (SUF) became the first entity to list on the social stock exchange (SSE). The Unnati program of the foundation provides vocational training for the underprivileged and unemployed youth in the age group of 18 to 25 years.
- SUF, a not-for-profit organization (NPO), was incorporated in 2011.
- A **Not-for-Profit organization** after registering with Social Stock Exchange may **raise funds** on SSE through **issuance of Zero Coupon Zero Principal Instruments**.

Social Stock Exchange (SSEs)

- The idea of the Social stock exchanges (SSEs) as a platform for listing social enterprise, voluntary and welfare organizations so that they can raise capital was mooted in the Union Budget 2019-20.
- Social enterprise can be defined as a non-loss; non-dividend paying company
- created and designed to address a social problem.
- It **works under** the market regulator **Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**.
- The **aim of the initiative is to help** social and voluntary organizations which work for social causes to raise capital as equity or debt or a unit of mutual fund.
- It provides new and cheaper sources of financing for social welfare projects, while
- showcasing India's independence from foreign aid.
- SEBI had permitted social enterprises registered on SSEs to raise funds through Zero Coupon Zero Principal Bonds (ZCZP).



Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP)

- **ZCZP – Zero Coupon Zero Principle** are financial instrument that are **included in the list of securities under Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956**.
- They **do not give any interest**, and **investors will not get any money back on the maturity** of the bond.
- Eligibility criteria for issuance – **Only by NPO** that are registered with Social Stock Exchange (SSE).
- ZCZP can only be issued for a specific project with specific tenure.
- The project must fall under the list of eligible activities under SEBI (ICDR) Regulations, 2018.
- Issuance - They are issued through private placement or public issuance.
 - Minimum issue size – Rs. 50 Lakh (originally Rs.1 crore)
 - Minimum application size – Rs.10, 000 (originally Rs.2 lakh)
 - Minimum subscription required - 75% of the funds proposed
 - Trade – They shall be issued in dematerialized form only.
- They are **not available for trading** in the secondary market, but they can be transferred to legal heirs.
- **Maturity** – It will mature when the project for which they are raised terminate, or 12 months from the date of allotment.

Benefits

- **ZCZP is akin to a donation made to a charity**. There is greater transparency about the objective of the social enterprise.
- The **end use of the funds can also be monitored** since the enterprises have to disclose details of money utilised and balance amount remaining to exchanges.
- The **listing provides visibility to the social enterprises** and helps them to approach the public at regular intervals if they can show good outcomes.

Purchasing Managers Index

Economy

Why in news?

- The purchasing managers' index (PMI) is an **economic indicator based on surveys of businesses in a given sector**. The most common PMI surveys are the **manufacturing PMI** and the **services PMI**.
- Understanding the PMI can provide insight into recent market conditions and identify potential economic slowdowns.

About PMI

- The purchasing managers' index **consists of several different surveys** of purchasing managers at businesses in manufacturing or services.
- These surveys are **compiled into a single numerical result** depending on one of several possible answers to each question.
- The most common elements include:
 - New orders
 - Factory output
 - Employment
 - Suppliers' delivery times
 - Stocks of purchases
- **Investors use PMI surveys** as leading indicators of economic health, given their insight into sales, employment, inventory, and pricing.
- **Manufacturing sector purchases** tend to react to consumer demand and are often among the first visible signs of a slowdown.

How Does the PMI Work?

- The PMI is a **diffusion index**, meaning that it **measures change across multiple indicators**.
- A diffusion index is particularly useful for **identifying economic turning points**, such as unemployment reporting from the Bureau of Labour Statistics.
- The purchasing managers' index is a diffusion index that **indicates whether economic conditions are better or worse** at the companies surveyed.
- The formula used to calculate the PMI assigns weights to each common element and then multiplies them by 1

for improvement, 0.5 for no change, and 0 for deterioration.

- Here is how the formula appears:
 - $PMI = (P1 * 1) + (P2 * 0.5) + (P3 * 0)$
 - **P1 = Percentage of answers reporting improvement**
 - **P2 = Percentage of answers reporting no change**
 - **P3 = Percentage of answers reporting deterioration**
- A figure above 50 denotes an expansion while anything below 50 denotes a contraction in activity. The higher the difference from this mid-point of 50, greater the expansion or contraction.
- Also, the **rate of expansion** can be judged by **comparing the PMI with that of the previous month reading**.
- If the latest figure is higher than previous month's, then manufacturing or services is
- expanding at a faster rate. If it is lower than previous month, then it is growing at lower rate.

Why is it important?

- The PMI is becoming **one of the most tracked indicators of business activity** across the world. It provides a reliable expectation of how an economy is doing as a whole — and manufacturing in particular.
- It is a **good gauge of boom and bust cycles** in the economy and closely watched by investors, business, traders and financial professionals besides economists.
- Also, the PMI, which is **usually released at the start of the month**, serves as a leading indicator of economic activity. It **comes before the official data** on industrial output, core sector manufacturing and GDP growth.
- Even **central banks use the PMI to take decisions on interest rates**. Besides influencing equity market movements, PMI releases also impact bond and currency markets.
- Since manufacturing sector is often where recessions begin and end, PMI manufacturing is always closely watched. A good reading of PMI enhances the attractiveness of an economy vis-à-vis other competing economies. Suppliers can decide on prices depending on PMI movements.

Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics 2023

Economy

Why in news?

- Recently, Union Minister Shri Parshottam Rupala released Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics 2023 during the National Milk Day event in Guwahati.

Observations of the stats

- Milk, Egg, Meat and Wool Production 2022-23
- The Statistics Report found that the Production of Milk, Egg, Meat and wool in the country is estimated annually based on the results of the Integrated Sample Survey (ISS).
- This is conducted across the country in three seasons, i.e., Summer (March-June), Rainy (July-October) and Winter (November-February).
- The estimates of milk, egg, meat and wool for the year 2022-23 have been brought out and the outcomes of this survey are summarised below:
 - **Milk Production:**
 - The total Milk production in the country is estimated as 230.58 million tonnes during 2022-23 registered a growth of 22.81% over the past 5 years which was 187.75 million tonnes in 2018-19.
 - Further, the production has increased by 3.83% during 2022-23 over the estimates of 2021-22.
 - In past, the annual growth rates were
 - 6.47% in 2018-19,
 - 5.69% in 2019-20,
 - 5.81% in 2020-21
 - 5.77% in 2021-22.
 - **TOP MILK PRODUCING STATES:**
 - In terms of Production, Uttar Pradesh(15.72 %)>Rajasthan (14.44 %)>Madhya Pradesh (8.73 %)>Gujarat (7.49 %) > Andhra Pradesh (6.70 %).
 - In terms of annual growth rate (AGR), Karnataka (8.76%) > West Bengal (8.65%) > Uttar Pradesh (6.99%).
 - **Egg Production:**
 - The total Egg production in the country estimated as 138.38 billion during 2022-23, registering a growth of 33.31% over the past 5 years compared to the estimates of 103.80 billion numbers during 2018-19.

- The production has increased annually by 6.77% from 2022 to 23 over 2021 to 22.
- In past, the annual growth rate was:
 - 9.02% in 2018-19;
 - 10.19% in 2019-20;
 - 6.70% in 2020-21 and
 - 6.19% in 2021-22.
- **TOPEGG PRODUCING STATES**
 - In terms of Production: Andhra Pradesh(20.13 %) > Tamil Nadu (15.58 %)> Telangana (12.77 %), West Bengal (9.94%) > Karnataka (6.51 %).
 - In terms of AGR: West Bengal (20.10%) > Sikkim (18.93%) > Uttar Pradesh (12.80%).
- **Meat Production:**
 - The total Meat production in the country is estimated as 9.77 million tonnes during 2022-23, registering a growth of 20.39 % over the past 5 years as compared to the estimates of 8.11 million tonnes in 2018-19.
 - The production was increased by 5.13 % in 2022-23 over 2021-22.
 - In the past the growth rate was
 - 5.99 % in 2018-19;
 - 5.98 % in 2019-20;
 - 2.30% in 2020-21 and
 - 5.62 % in 2021-22.
 - **TOP MEAT PRODUCING STATES:**
 - In terms of production: Uttar Pradesh(12.20 %) > West Bengal (11.93 %)> Maharashtra (11.50 %)> Andhra Pradesh (11.20 %) > Telangana (11.06 %).
 - In terms of AGR: Sikkim (63.08%)> (38.34%) > Goa (22.98%).
- **Wool Production:**
 - The total Wool production in the country is estimated as 33.61 million kg during 2022-23, registering a negative growth of 16.84% over the past 5 years compared to the estimates of 40.42 million kg during 2018-19.
 - The production has increased by 2.12% in 2022-23 over 2021-22.
 - In the past, the growth rates were
 - -2.51% in 2018-19;
 - -9.05% in 2019-20,
 - -0.46% in 2020-21
 - -10.87% in 2021-22.
 - **TOP WOOL-PRODUCING STATES:**
 - In terms of Production: Rajasthan(47.98%)>Jammu & Kashmir (22.55%)> Gujarat (6.01%),>Maharashtra (4.73%) >Himachal Pradesh (4.27%).
 - In terms of AGR: Arunachal Pradesh (35.75%) > Rajasthan (6.06%) >Jharkhand (2.36%).

Why in news?

- Recently the Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited India, it marks a significant milestone as it is the first State visit by an Omani ruler in 26 years.

INDIA OMAN RELATIONS

- Background:**

- The two countries across the Arabian Sea are linked by **geography, history and culture** and enjoy warm and cordial relations, which are attributed to **historical maritime trade linkages**.
- While people-to-people contact between India and Oman can be traced back **5000 years**, **diplomatic relations were established in 1955** and the relationship was upgraded to **Strategic partnership in 2008**. Oman has been a key pillar of **India's West Asia Policy**.

- Political Relations:**

- Visits at the highest level have been exchanged frequently between India and Oman. Ministerial level visits have taken place regularly.
- The Sultanate of Oman is a **strategic partner of India** in the Gulf and an important interlocutor at the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**, **Arab League** and **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** fora.

- Defence Cooperation:**

- The Ministries of Defence of both countries review their relations annually under the aegis of **Joint Military Cooperation Committee** meeting.
- India and Oman conduct **regular biennial bilateral exercises** between all three services.
 - Army exercise: **Al Najah**
 - Air Force exercise: **Eastern Bridge**
 - Naval Exercise: **Naseem Al Bahr**
- Since 2008, Oman has been extending its support to Indian Navy's **anti-piracy missions** and Indian Naval Ships are regularly welcomed by Oman for **Overseas Deployments**.

- Economic & Commercial Relations:**

- India accords a high priority to expanding its economic and commercial ties with Oman. Institutional mechanisms like **Joint Commission Meeting (JCM)** and **Joint Business Council (JBC)** oversee economic cooperation between India and Oman.
- The bilateral trade and investment between India and Oman remain **robust and buoyant**.
 - India is among Oman's **top trading partners**.
 - For Oman, India was the **3rd largest** (after UAE and China) source for its imports and **3rd largest market** (after UAE and Saudi Arabia) for its non-oil exports in 2018.
 - Major items of India's **exports to Oman** include mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances; articles of iron or steel; electrical machinery and equipment, textiles and garments, chemicals, tea, coffee, spices etc
 - Main items of **India's imports** from Oman include fertilizers; mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances etc.
- Indian financial institutions such as State Bank of India, Public Sector Undertakings such as Air India, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), have presence in Oman. Indian companies have invested in Oman in sectors like iron and steel, cement, fertilizers, textile etc.
- India-Oman Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF)**, a JV between **State Bank of India** and **State General Reserve Fund (SGRF)** of Oman, a special purpose vehicle to invest in India, has been operational.
- Access to Duqm Port:** Oman has allowed India, including its navy, access to its Duqm port, about 550 km south of the capital Muscat. The Port of Duqm SEZ is earmarked to be the Indian Ocean's largest deep-sea port.
- An agreement to **develop Little India, an integrated tourism complex project in Duqm** worth 748 million USD, has been signed between the two countries.

- **Cultural Cooperation:**
- India and Oman have close cultural relations. The vibrant Indian expatriate community in Oman regularly hosts **cultural performances and invites celebrity artists and singers from India.**
- **Indian Community in Oman:**
- The large, diverse and highly regarded expatriate Indian community in Oman is spread over the **entire spectrum of professions.** Thousands of Indians are working as doctors, engineers, etc.
- There are many **Indian schools offering CBSE syllabus** catering to the educational needs of about **45,000** Indian children.

BIMSTEC

International Relations

Why in News?

- India recently seconded a senior diplomat to drive BIMSTEC as its 4th Secretary-General (SG).

What is BIMSTEC?

- **BIMSTEC** – Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.
- It is a regional organization group of littoral countries encircling the Bay of Bengal with own flag and emblem.
- **Established in – 1997** with the signing of the **Bangkok Declaration.**
- 2022 marked the 25th anniversary of BIMSTEC formation.
- **Secretariat at** – Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- **Aim** – To foster **economic and social development** among member countries.
- **Members – 7 members** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand).
- It includes 5 members from SAARC and 2 from ASEAN.
- **BIMSTEC Charter** – It was signed and adopted during the fifth BIMSTEC Summit in Sri Lanka in 2022.

What are the purposes of BIMSTEC?

- **Accelerating economic growth** - Promote joint endeavours, trade and investment.
- **Increasing collaboration** – On matters of common interest in the economic, social, technical & scientific fields.
- **Improving assistance** – In the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional and technical spheres.
- **Effective cooperation** – Maintain beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations.
- **Maintaining peace and stability** – By close collaboration in combating international terrorism, transnational organized crimes as well as natural disasters, climate change and communicable diseases.
- **Improving social progress** – Promoting endeavour to eradicate poverty from the Bay of Bengal region.
- **Developing connectivity** – Creating synergy among connectivity frameworks in the region, as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity.

What are the various BIMSTEC Centres?

- **BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC)** – It is to be housed in the premises of the Central Power Research Institute in **Bengaluru, India.**
- It will also function as the Secretariat of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection Coordination Committee.
- **BIMSTEC Centre on Weather and Climate** - It is located in the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) **in Uttar Pradesh, India.**
- **BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory** – In 2006, it was proposed for the establishment of BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission (BCIC) and the BIMTEC Cultural Industries Observatory (BCIO) **in Bhutan.**
- **BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility** – The Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the establishment was signed in 2022 during the 5th BIMSTEC Summit but its entry into force is awaited.

What are the shortcomings?

- It has decided not to go-ahead with the BIMSTEC Development Fund.
- Negotiation of the BIMSTEC FTA is yet to be completed.
- BIMSTEC grid connectivity and energy projects are yet to take off.



- While the connectivity plan is ready, the real implementation is yet to start.
- The postponement of the 6th Summit has slowed BIMSTEC integration.

What lies ahead?

- 6th BIMSTEC summit under the chairmanship of Thailand will be held in 2024 with promising features like
- Adoption of the BIMSTEC Rules of Procedure
- Adoption of the BIMSTEC Maritime Cooperation Agreement (BMCA)
- Launching of BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030

Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)

International Relations

Why in news?

- Recently, India's National Security Adviser (NSA), took part in the 6th NSA meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) which agreed upon a road map for the year 2024.

About CSC

- **Formed through trilateral meetings involving India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka in 2011**, the CSC aims to address critical security challenges and promote cooperation in the Indian Ocean.
- **The recent NSA meeting in December 2023, presided over by India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, reflects the CSC's commitment to fostering a secure and stable Indian Ocean region.**
- This meeting, attended by Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Seychelles as observers, highlighted the CSC's proactive approach to regional challenges, despite the absence of the Maldives due to domestic political changes.

Evolution and Expansion

- Initially initiated as trilateral meetings, the CSC **faced a temporary suspension between 2014 and 2020 due to strained relations between India and the Maldives.**
- However, it **was re-established and rebranded in 2020, expanding to include Mauritius as a member, with Bangladesh and Seychelles participating as observers, potentially joining as full members.**

Objectives and Pillars

- The CSC operates at the National Security Advisor (NSA) level, focusing on key areas such as maritime security, countering terrorism, cybersecurity, and addressing transnational crimes.
- **Its agenda encompasses five significant pillars, including:**
 - Maritime safety and security.
 - Countering terrorism and radicalization.
 - Combating trafficking and transnational organized crime.
 - Cybersecurity and protection of critical infrastructure and technology.
 - Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Operationalization and Exercises

- The CSC **operationalizes its objectives through regular security-focused exercises.**
- These exercises cover a broad range of areas including maritime search and rescue, cybersecurity, coastal security, and anti-terrorism measures.
- Notably, joint exercises involving India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives were conducted under the CSC's framework, showcasing collaborative efforts in enhancing security.

Ajit Doval's Perspectives and Institutionalization

- Indian NSA Ajit Doval, during the March 2022 meeting, **emphasized the need for a 'concrete roadmap' and a 'defined charter of objectives' to formalize cooperation.**
- He advocated for focused efforts on addressing drug trafficking and transnational organized crime.
- Moreover, the CSC seeks to establish a structured framework by proposing the involvement of coast guard heads and the formation of joint working groups to address specific challenges.

Changing Dynamics and India's Strategic Vision

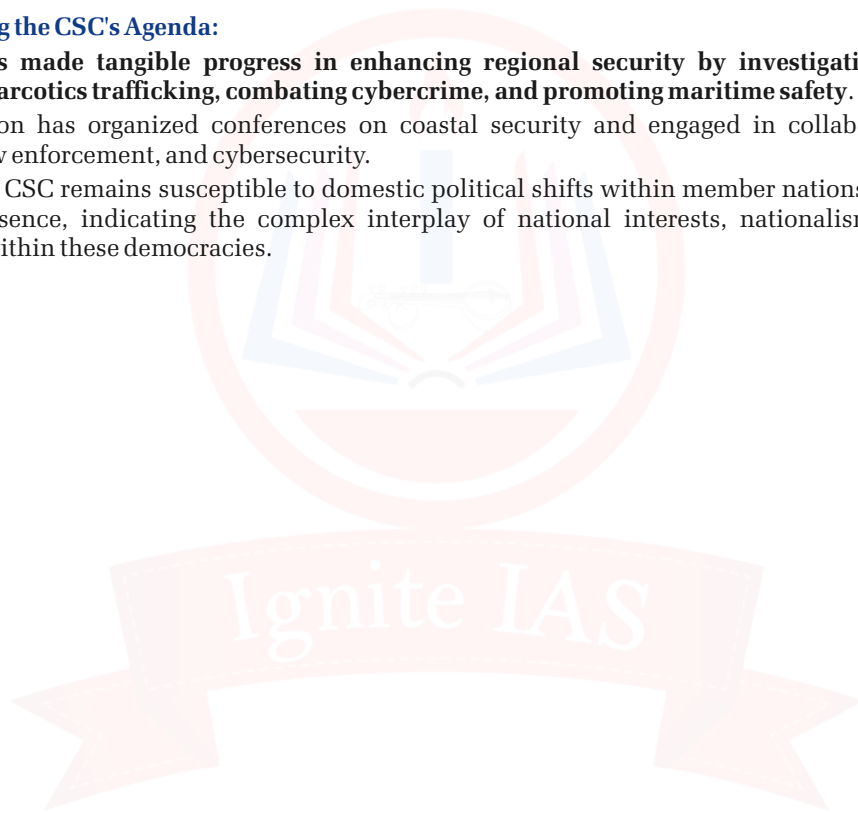
- The CSC's trajectory underscores the evolving dynamics of the Indian Ocean.
- India's initiative to expand the CSC to include Mauritius, Seychelles, and Bangladesh signifies its evolving strategic vision in the region.
- **As a traditional regional power, India views the CSC as an opportunity to strengthen its leadership and contribute significantly to the region's security architecture.**

Navigating the China Factor:

- China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, evident through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and maritime infrastructure projects, has contributed to the CSC's resurgence.
- **Beijing's investments, naval capabilities, and strategic interests in the region are perceived by India as an attempt to curb its influence and secure critical sea lines.**
- Despite concerns, India acknowledges that several regional nations don't view China as a direct threat, leading the CSC to focus on multiple pillars of cooperation to address shared challenges like maritime security, counterterrorism, cyber threats, and humanitarian aid.

Operationalizing the CSC's Agenda:

- **The CSC has made tangible progress in enhancing regional security by investigating terror financing, addressing narcotics trafficking, combating cybercrime, and promoting maritime safety.**
- The institution has organized conferences on coastal security and engaged in collaborations on counterterrorism, law enforcement, and cybersecurity.
- However, the CSC remains susceptible to domestic political shifts within member nations, as evident from the Maldives' absence, indicating the complex interplay of national interests, nationalism, and international alignments within these democracies.



Why in news?

- The 2023 summit of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) held on 12–14 December 2023, in New Delhi, India.

About GPAI

- Launched in** – 2020
- It is a multi-stakeholder initiative with experts from industry, civil society, governments, international organisations and academia.
- GPAI Secretariat** – OECD
 - The 1st 3 GPAI summits were held in Montreal, Paris and Tokyo, respectively.
- Aim** – To bridge the gap between theory and practice on AI by supporting cutting-edge research and applied activities on AI-related priorities.
- Mission** – To share multidisciplinary research and identifying key issues among AI practitioners and **to understand AI impacts**.
- 4 working groups** – Responsible AI, data governance, the future of work, and innovation and commercialization.
- Values** – Based on **OECD Recommendation on Artificial Intelligence** grounded in the principles of human rights, inclusion, diversity, innovation and economic growth.
- Membership** – 29 members.
- It is open to countries, including emerging and developing countries.

What are the major outcomes of GPAI summit 2023?

- Adopted GPAI New Delhi Declaration** on advancing safe, secure, and trustworthy AI and commitment to supporting the sustainability of GPAI projects.
- A call to prepare a global framework for the ethical use of AI.
- India Shines as Global Hub for AI Innovation.
- India brought together all major initiatives for AI – UN Advisory Group on AI, UK AI Safety Summit.
- AI Research Analytics and Knowledge Dissemination Platform (**AIRAWAT**) and **National Program on Artificial Intelligence** and its role in shaping AI ecosystem in India was prominently emphasized.
- Startup community and research community showcased their AI products and services in the expo.
- AI Pitch fest** provided an opportunity to upcoming startups to pitch for their innovation and value-added products and services.
- Taking AI among the masses especially among youths and students.

GPAI New Delhi declaration on AI

- GPAI 2023 has unanimously **adopted the New Delhi declaration on AI**.
- Objectives** – To mitigate risks arising from the development and deployment of AI systems.
- To promoting equitable access to critical resources for AI innovation.
- To support AI innovation in the agriculture sector as a new "thematic priority".
- Governing principles** - A global framework for use of AI should
 - Upheld democratic values and human rights
 - Safeguard dignity and well-being
 - Ensure personal data protection
 - Protect intellectual property rights, privacy, security
 - Foster innovation and promote responsible, sustainable, and human-centred use of AI.
- Contrasts Bletchley declaration** – Unlike UK AI Safety Summit which mainly focused only on security and safety risks related to AI, this finds a balance between innovation and the risks associated with AI systems.

Why in news?

- Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) represent a groundbreaking innovation at the intersection of blockchain technology and governance.

About DAOs

- Legal structure-** It operates without centralized control and is governed by smart contracts and the consensus of its members.
- Decision making-** It uses blockchain technology and smart contract to take decisions in a bottom-up management approach.
- Community driven-** It is represented by rules encoded as a computer program that is transparent, controlled by the respective organization members, and not influenced by a government.
- Smart contracts-** It executes predefined rules without the need for intermediaries, ensuring trust through code rather than traditional authorities.
- Enhanced cooperation-** They enable global, borderless cooperation on an unprecedented scale.
- Constructive engagement-** Participants, often referred to as token holders, can propose and vote on decisions related to the organization's goals and resources.
- Self-executing systems-** This decentralized decision-making process ensures that no single entity holds undue influence.

What is the significance of DAOs?

- Decentralization-** The authority of decision making is broad and made by a collection of individuals independent of third-party intermediaries.
- Transparency-** In DAOs votes are cast via block chain and made publicly viewable.
- Fosters trust-** As vote and their decisions will be made publicly viewable, this will incentivize actions that will benefit voters' reputations and discourage acts against the community.
- Inclusivity-** The concept of a DAO encourages people from all over the world to seamlessly come together to build a single vision.
- Simplicity-** With just an internet connection, token holders can interact with other owners wherever they may live.
- Versatility-** It demonstrates the potential to reshape industries across various sectors like finance, supply chain, governance etc.,

Applications of DAOs

- Finance-** Platforms like Compound and MakerDAO have introduced lending and borrowing services, enabling users to participate in the global financial ecosystem without relying on traditional banks.
- Intellectual property protection-** In the art world, artists are tokenizing their creations and utilizing DAOs to manage royalties and maintain control over their intellectual property.
- Supply chain management-** DAOs offer transparency and traceability in global supply chains, ensuring the authenticity and quality of products.
- Online governance-** DAOs have emerged as tools for decision-making, with platforms like DAOstack facilitating decentralized governance structures for internet communities.

What are the challenges of DAOs?

- Lack of regulation-** It is a new concept and there is lack of regulation and legal frameworks to govern their use, this can create uncertainty and expose to legal risks.
- Technical complexity-** They are built on block chain technology which is difficult and complex to understand.
- Forgery-** Malicious actors could exploit vulnerabilities in smart contracts as they are transparent, use DAOs to launder money or engage in illegal activities.
- Security breach-** DAO hack in 2016 exposed vulnerabilities in the code, leading to a contentious **hard fork** in the Ethereum block chain.
- Lack of Accountability-** DAOs operate through a consensus-based decision-making process, which can lead to slower decision-making and potential conflicts among members.
- Taxation compliance-** DAOs have to comply with various regulations such as Anti-Money Laundering and Know Your Customer further add layers of complexity to the legal framework.
- Dispute resolution-** It often rely on code-based solutions, present a unique challenge in the absence of traditional legal mechanisms.

Why in news?

- Union Ministry of Mines is to launch the National Geoscience Data Repository (NGDR) Portal.

About National Geoscience Data Repository (NGDR) Portal:

- A part of the National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP), 2016.
- All geological, geochemical, geophysical, and mineral exploration data available in the public domain on a digital geospatial platform.
- Spearheaded by – Geological Survey of India (GSI) and Bhaskaracharya Institute of Space Applications and Geoinformatics (BISAG-N)
- Include baseline geoscience data and all mineral exploration information generated by various central and state government agencies.
 - Significances of the portal –
 - Democratizes critical geoscience data by encouraging transparency and knowledge sharing by offering open access.
 - Will expedite, enhance, and facilitate the exploration coverage of the country.
 - Increases the investment attractiveness of the mining sector.

About NMEP, 2016:

- Targets exploration of deep-seated and concealed mineral deposits.
- Aims at accelerating the exploration activity in the country through enhanced participation of the private sector.
- Establishment of a National Centre for Mineral Targeting (NCMT) – Geological Survey of India Training Institute (GSITI), Hyderabad.
- **Key features –**
 - Auctioning of identified exploration blocks for exploration by the private sector on a revenue-sharing basis.
 - Creation of baseline geoscientific data as a public good.
 - To map the entire country with low altitude and close space flight to precisely locate the deep-seated minerals such as gold, silver, copper, etc.
- **Geological Survey of India:**
 - Established in 1851.
 - Function – Creation and updation of national geoscientific data, mineral resource assessment, and air-borne and marine surveys.
 - Ministry – Ministry of Mines
 - Headquarters – Kolkata
 - 6 Regional Offices – Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong, Kolkata

Electronic Cigarettes: Call to Action**Science & Technology****Why in news?**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has released a report on e-cigarettes titled Electronic Cigarettes: Call to Action.

What are e-cigarettes?

- E-cigarettes come in many shapes and sizes. Most have a battery, a heating element, and a place to hold a liquid.
- E-cigarettes produce an aerosol by heating a liquid that usually contains nicotine—the addictive drug in regular cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products—flavorings, and other chemicals that help to make the aerosol. Users inhale this aerosol into their lungs. Bystanders can also breathe in this aerosol when the user exhales into the air.
- E-cigarettes are known by many different names. They are sometimes called "e-cigs," "e-hookahs," "mods," "vape pens," "vapes," "tank systems," and "electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS)."
- Some e-cigarettes are made to look like regular cigarettes, cigars, or pipes. Some resemble pens, USB sticks, and other everyday items. Larger devices such as tank systems, or "mods," do not resemble other tobacco products.
- Using an e-cigarette is sometimes called "vaping."
- E-cigarettes can be used to deliver marijuana and other drugs.

WHO concerns

- Despite being promoted as a less harmful alternative, e-cigarettes are not proven effective for quitting tobacco at the population level.
- E-cigarettes are found to generate substances linked to cancer, heart and lung diseases, and potential issues with brain development.
- Exposure to e-cigarette content on social media platforms increases the likelihood of e-cigarette use.
- Young individuals using e-cigarettes are almost three times more likely to transition to traditional cigarettes later in life.
- Globally, there is a concerning increase in e-cigarette use among youths aged 13-15, surpassing adult usage.
- An example is cited in Canada, where e-cigarette use among 16 to 19-year-olds doubled between 2017 and 2022.
- In response to these findings, WHO urgently calls upon countries to implement stringent measures to control and regulate the use of e-cigarettes, highlighting the potential health risks associated with their usage.
- The report underscores the need for global awareness and action to address the growing public health concern related to e-cigarette consumption.

Regulations on E-cigarettes

- Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act
- The Act and its provisions
 - The Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage, and Advertisement) Act replaced an Ordinance promulgated in September 2019.
 - The Act seeks to prohibit the production, trade, storage, and advertisement of electronic cigarettes.

Electronic cigarettes

- The act defines electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) as electronic devices that heat a substance, which may contain nicotine and other chemicals, to create vapour for inhalation.
- These e-cigarettes can also contain different flavours and include all forms of electronic nicotine delivery systems, heat-not-burn products, e-hookahs, and other similar devices.

Banning of e-cigarettes:

- The act prohibits the production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution and advertisement of e-cigarettes in India.
- Any person who contravenes this provision will be punishable with imprisonment of up to one year, or a fine of up to one lakh rupees, or both. For any subsequent offence, the person will be punishable with an imprisonment of up to three years, along with a fine of up to five lakh rupees.

Storage of e-cigarettes:

- Under the act, no person is allowed to use any place for the storage of any stock of e-cigarettes.
- If any person stores any stock of e-cigarettes, he will be punishable with an imprisonment of up to six months, or a fine of up to Rs 50,000 or both.
- Once the act comes into force, the owners of existing stocks of e-cigarettes will have to declare and deposit these stocks at the nearest office of an authorised officer.
- Such an authorised officer may be a police officer (at least at the level of a sub-inspector), or any other officer as notified by the central or state government.

Powers of authorised officers:

- If an authorised officer believes that any provision of the Bill has been contravened, he can search any place where trade, production, storage or advertising of e-cigarettes is being undertaken.
- The authorised officer can seize any record or property connected to e-cigarettes found during the search. Further, he may take the person connected with the offence into custody.
- If the property or records found during the search cannot be seized, the authorised officer can make an order to attach such property, stocks or records.



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