

Current Affairs MONTHLY

FEBRUARY 2023

By
CivilsTap Himachal



**For HPAS & Other
Competitive
Exam in
Himachal Pradesh**

Prelims

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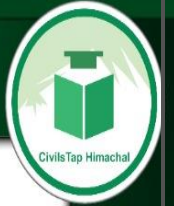
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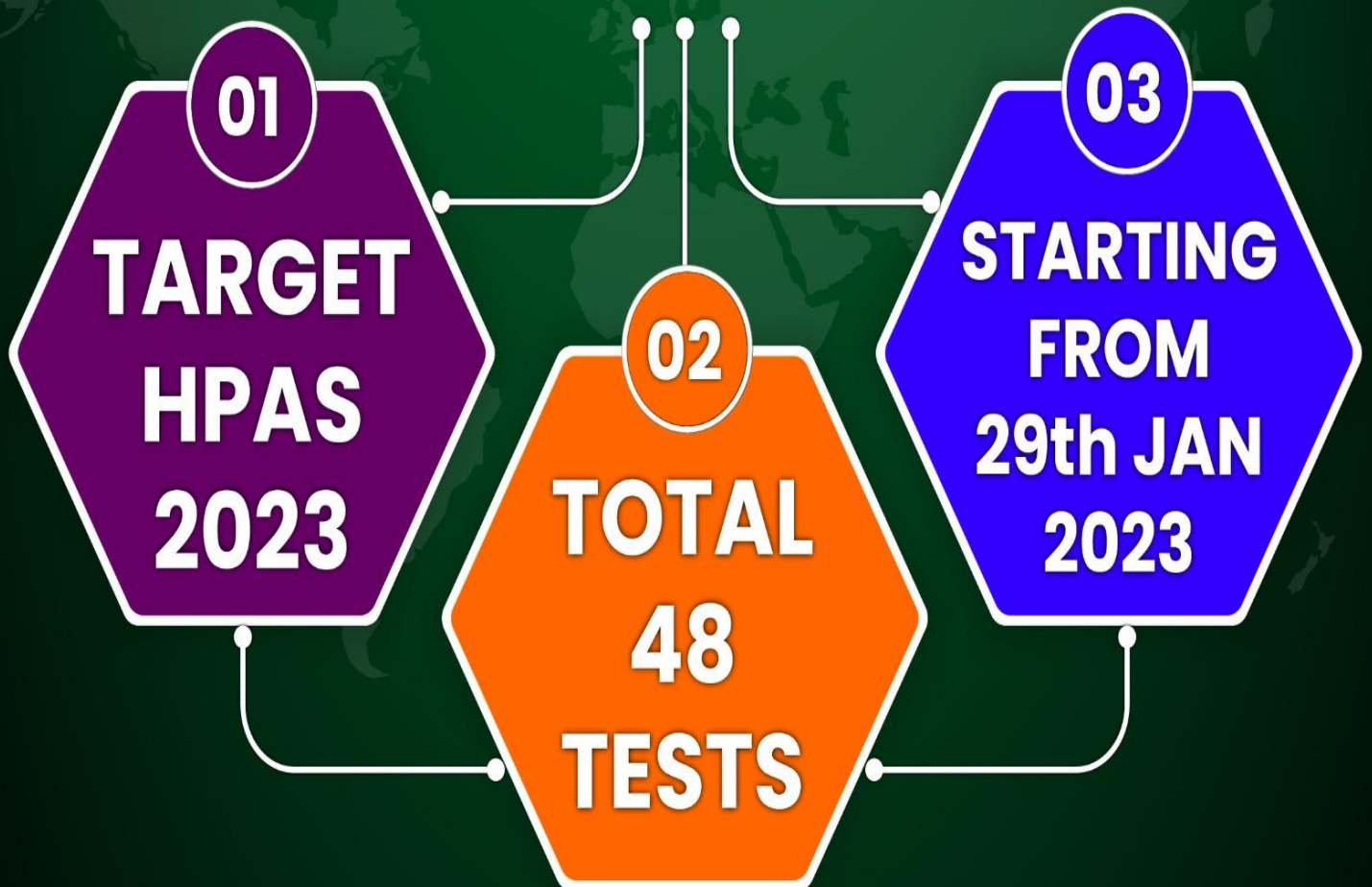
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NATIONAL NEWS

1.1. PM TO FLAG OFF WORLD'S LONGEST RIVER VOYAGE FROM VARANASI ON JAN 13.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the world's longest river voyage — 'Ganga Vilas Epic' cruise from Varanasi to Dibrugarh on January 13.
- The longest river cruise in the world will commence its first journey on January 13, 2023 from PM's parliamentary constituency.
- According to reports, Ganga Vilas Cruise will travel from Kashi to Dibrugarh. It will reach Dibrugarh, Assam via Bangladesh, Patna and Kolkata from Varanasi.
- The river cruise will cover a total of 3200 kilometres through the river route and will reach Dibrugarh on March 1, after a 48-day journey.
- Around 32 Swiss nationals will be onboarding the cruise.

What are the major National waterways in India?

- The Inland Waterways Authority of India Act, 1985 empowers the Government to declare waterways with potential for development of shipping and navigation as National Waterways and develop such waterways for efficient shipping and navigation. 5 National waterways declared under it are as follows.

National Waterway-1

- Allahabad-Haldia
- Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly River system
- 1620 km

National Waterway-2

- Dhubri-Sadiya
- River Brahmaputra
- 891 km

National Waterway-3

- Kottapuram-Kollam
- West Coast canal along with Udyogmandal and Champakara Canals.
- 205 km

National Waterway-4

- Kakinada-Puducherry
- Rivers Godavari and Krishna
- 1078 km

National Waterway-5

- East Coast canal integrated with Brahmani and Mahanadi delta rivers.
- 588 km
- Besides these five waterways, **National Waterway Act, 2016 declared 106 additional national waterways in India.**

Inland Waterways Authority of India:

- It came into existence on 27th October 1986 for development and regulation of inland waterways for shipping and navigation.
- It primarily undertakes projects for development and maintenance of IWT infrastructure on national waterways through grants received from the Ministry of Shipping.
- It is headquartered at Noida with regional offices at Patna (Bihar), Kolkata (West Bengal), Guwahati (Assam) and Kochi (Kerala) and sub-offices at other places throughout India.

1.2. PRINCIPLE OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court ruled that a government cannot be held vicariously responsible for remarks made by its ministers even if the statement relates to affairs of the state.

- It said that a statement made by a minister cannot be attributed to the government by invoking the principle of collective responsibility.

What is the Principle of Collective Responsibility?

- This is the bedrock principle of parliamentary form of government.
- **Article 75** of the Constitution of India says that the **Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha**.
- This means that all the ministers own joint responsibility to the Lok Sabha for all their acts of omission and commission.
- When the Lok Sabha passes a **no-confidence motion** against the council of ministers, all the ministers have to resign including those ministers who are from the Rajya Sabha.
- The principle of collective responsibility also means that the Cabinet decisions bind all cabinet ministers (and other ministers) even if they differed in the cabinet meeting.
- It is the **duty of every minister to stand by cabinet decisions and support them both within and outside the Parliament**.
- If any minister disagrees with a cabinet decision and is not prepared to defend it, he must resign.
- Several ministers have resigned in the past owing to their differences with the cabinet.
 - For example, **B.R. Ambedkar** resigned because of his differences with his colleagues on the Hindu Code Bill in 1953.

Important Judgements of the Supreme Court w.r.t. Collective Responsibility:

- **Common Cause v Union of India case –**
 - The Supreme Court held that the principle of collective responsibility has two meanings.
 - Firstly, that all the members of a government are unanimous in support of policy.
 - Secondly, the ministers are responsible for the success and failures of the policies.
- **S.P. Anand v H.D. Deve Gowda case –**
 - The court held that the principle of collective responsibility means all the ministers are collectively responsible for every decision taken whether their assent is present or not.
 - It means their decisions must have unanimity and confidentiality.
 - This is great weapon in the hands of Prime Minister through which he maintains unity and discipline in his cabinet.

More about News:

- In a 4:1 majority judgement, the five-judge bench of the Supreme Court held that additional restrictions, not found in Article 19(2) of the Constitution, cannot be imposed on the exercise of right to free speech which is guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a).
- The Court ruled that the grounds mentioned in Article 19(2) for restricting free speech are exhaustive.
 - **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression to all citizens of India.
 - This article is subjected to certain restrictions, namely, sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
 - Provisions in clauses (2) to (6) of Article 19 authorizes the State to restrict the exercise of the freedom guaranteed under the article.

Background on the case:

- The case emanates from a rape incident which took place in 2016.
- The then Minister of the State of Uttar Pradesh, Azam Khan, had trivialised the act by dismissing the incident as a 'political conspiracy and nothing else'.
- The Court directed Azam Khan to submit an unconditional apology.
- While doing so, the court noted that this incident raises serious concerns regarding state obligation and freedom of speech and expression.
- The Court, in 2017, made a reference to a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court.

Constitution Bench's Judgement:

- The majority of the five judges ruled that a statement made by a minister even if traceable to any affairs of the state or for protection of the government cannot be attributed vicariously to the government by invoking the principle of collective responsibility.
- The court held that the flow of stream in collective responsibility is from the Council of Ministers to the individual Ministers.
 - The flow is not on the reverse, namely, from the individual Ministers to the Council of Ministers.

Dissenting Judgement by one Judge:

- Justice B V Nagarathna, the fifth judge on the bench, said that while the government cannot be held vicariously responsible for personal remarks by a minister, such liability would exist if the statement also embodies the views of the government.
- All five judges, however, agreed that the right of free speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19 (1) (a) cannot be curbed by any additional grounds other than those already laid down in Article 19 (2).

1.3. TOP US DRONE MANUFACTURER ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP TO MANUFACTURE AERO-STRUCTURES IN INDIA.

- In a move that is expected to help India develop a manufacturing ecosystem for high-end drones, a top US drone manufacturer has announced a partnership with a leading Indian forging company to manufacture main landing gear components, subassemblies, and assemblies of remotely piloted aircraft in the country.
- **San Diego-based General Atomics Aeronautical Systems (GA-ASI)**, a subsidiary of General Atomics, said its partnership with **Bharat Forge Limited** would result in significant capability-building for both companies and provide an impetus to the Indian large, unmanned aircraft industry.
- GA-ASI is eagerly looking forward to working with Bharat Forge in the critical field of aero-structure manufacturing," said Vivek Lall, Chief Executive of General Atomics Global Corporation.
- With over five decades of experience in manufacturing a wide range of high-performance, critical safety components, Bharat Forge offers full-service supply capability from concept to product design, engineering, manufacturing, testing, and validation.
- Bharat Forge's expertise in the field of forging is known globally, and their outstanding contributions in the aerospace sector has inspired us to work together for building the next generation of the world's most advanced unmanned aerial vehicles," Lall said.
- Baba Kalyani, Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Forge Limited, said that aerospace is a high 'technology intensive' domain, which relies on product integrity, reliability, and zero defect.
- "This is a culture by itself and demands a strong focus on people and processes. As part of our Aerospace Growth Strategy, our collaboration with GA-ASI is a strong testimony of our culture in Bharat Forge Aerospace to assimilate and demonstrate the same, as partners to General Atomics, in making India Atmanirbhar," Kalyani said.

1.4. WORLD BRAILLE DAY: BSES LAUNCHES ELECTRICITY BILL IN BRAILLE FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN NEW DELHI.

- On World Braille Day, electricity supply company BSES launched the Electricity Bill in Braille for the visually impaired in New Delhi. On the occasion, General Secretary of the National Federation of the Blind S K Rungta also launched the voice-enabled accessible mobile app and door-step services for the visually impaired.
- These services have been started after consultation with the National Federation of the Blind.
- BSES officials said that the electricity bill in Braille will cater to the specific needs of the visually impaired and empower them to better understand the electricity bill. It said, the households opting for the bill in Braille will continue to receive the regular BSES electricity bill.
- BSES said, the visually impaired can register for the Braille Bill and the Door Step Service through the BSES Mobile App, BSES Call Centre, Voice Bot, Email, and Customer Care Centres.

About BSES

- Reliance Energy, formerly known as **Bombay Suburban Electric Supply (BSES)**.

BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL)

- BYPL has been the frontrunner in implementing power distribution reforms in the capital city of Delhi and is acknowledged for its quality, reliable power supply and customer friendly practices. BYPL is a joint venture between Reliance Infrastructure Limited and Govt of NCT of Delhi with a 51%: 49% share holding. The company started operations on July 1, 2002 post the unbundling of the erstwhile Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB). The company's operations span across its license area of 200 sq km in the Eastern and Central parts of the National Capital.

1.5. HINDUSTAN COPPER LIMITED.

Why in News?

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Hindustan Copper Limited and the Indian Institute of Technology (Indian School of Mines), Dhanbad.
- The pact will address HCL's need for technical assistance, guidance and consultancy works, among others.
- HCL, which is in its expansion phase, will be benefitted from this initiative.
- "The first technical collaboration with IIT (ISM), Dhanbad, is a momentous occasion for HCL, the only copper miner in India, owning all the operating mining leases of copper ore in the nation. Presently, majority of ore production comes through underground mode only and the level of ore production is hovering around four million tonnes per annum," the statement said.

Importance of this MoU:

- Due to the complex geological characteristics of the ore body and the increased depth of mining, various geotechnical and ground water related issues along with technical/ operational problems are being faced during the process of production along with maintaining safety standards and dealing the emerging sustainability issues.

About IIT-IISM, Dhanbad

- IIT-ISM, Dhanbad, being an Institute of national reputation, particularly in mining minerals and its beneficiation and Earth Sciences, will play a key role in solving the emerging geological, technical, environmental, and, sustainable and ore beneficiation issues for achieving the envisaged expansion programme of HCL

About Hindustan Copper Limited:

- Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL), a public sector undertaking, incorporated on 9th November **1967**, is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Mines, Government of India.
- It has the distinction of being the nation's only vertically integrated copper producing company as it manufactures copper right from the stage of mining to beneficiation, smelting, refining and casting of refined copper metal into downstream saleable products.
- **HCL's mines and plants are spread across five operating Units, one each in the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Gujarat as named below:**
- Malanjkhand Copper Project (MCP) at Malanjkhand, Madhya Pradesh
- Khetri Copper Complex (KCC) at Khetrinagar, Rajasthan
- Indian Copper Complex (ICC) at Ghatsila, Jharkhand
- Talaja Copper Project (TCP) at Talaja, Maharashtra
- Gujarat Copper Project (GCP) at Jhagadia, Gujarat

1.6. DECENNIAL CENSUS EXERCISE POSTPONED.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Union government informed States that the decennial census exercise has been postponed till September 2023 and the date of freezing of administrative boundaries has been extended till June 30, 2023.

More about Census

- Census is a process of collecting, compiling, analyzing, evaluating, publishing and disseminating statistical data regarding the population.
- India will soon begin preparations for what is one of the world's largest head-count exercises.
- The Census is the enumeration of the population of the country and it is being conducted at an interval of 10 years.
- It was first started under British Viceroy Lord Mayo in 1872.

- The first synchronous census in India was held in 1881.
- **Who conducts this exercise?**
 - The responsibility of conducting the decennial Census rests with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- **Structure of data:**
 - In the Census, data is collected on demographic and various socio-economic parameters like education, SC/ST, religion, language, marriage, fertility, disability, occupation and migration of the individuals.
 - 2011 marks the first time biometric information was collected.

Difference between the National Population Register (NPR) and the Census

- The process of NPR and Census will begin simultaneously, the two databases are not the same.
- The decennial census is the largest single source of a variety of statistical information on the different characteristics of the people of India.
- While NPR only contains demographic information, more details are required for the census like information on demography, economic activity, literacy and education, and housing and household amenities among others.

National Population Register (NPR):

- **NPR was first done in 2010** and was later updated in 2015 when it was linked with Aadhar.
- It already has a database of 119 crore residents.
- It is mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.
- A usual resident is defined for the purposes of NPR as a person who has resided in a local area for the past 6 months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next 6 months or more.
- The Registrar General India shall act as the “National Registration Authority”, it is also the country’s Census Commissioner.

1.7. MOS FOR CULTURE ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL INAUGURATES ASTRO TOURISM - A SKY GAZING EVENT AT DELHI'S INDIA GATE.

- National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) in association with Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) organised Astro Tourism - A Sky Gazing event at Delhi's India Gate.
- The event was inaugurated by Minister of State for Culture, Arjun Ram Meghwal. The program will continue for next two days with various activities.
- Mr. Meghwal said, the programme will help in developing scientific temper among the people.
- The Astro Tourism event includes various activities like Astro Talks by expert Astronomers, Exhibition on Astronomy, Storytelling related to celestial objects, Experience of using telescope to see craters of Moon, Astronomy Activities, Photographic Panel Exhibition, and Astro-Photography.
- This three-day program will be a great learning experience for children of all age groups

What is Astro tourism?

- According to John Barentine of the International Dark-Sky Association, “Astrotourism is any kind of tourism that involves the night sky or visiting facilities related to astronomy like observatories, and combining that with a broader sense of ecotourism where interaction with nature is what the visitor experience is about

More about Astro tourism:

- The Ministry of Tourism’s Dekho Apna Desh Webinar series titled “Astro- Tourism: The Next Frontier of Nature-based Tourism” held on 06th February, 2021 focused on promoting nature-based tourism which is emerging strongly in a post - COVID world, the major thrust of the webinar was sustainable and responsible travel.
- The webinar focused on exploring the evolution of Astro-tourism as one of the most authentic and environment-friendly ways of travelling along with its immense potential to bring positive social, economic and conservation benefits to remote communities.
- Recently, in a first-of-its-kind initiative, the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)** has announced the setting up of **India’s first Dark Sky Reserve in Hanle, Ladakh.**

1.8. NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHIEF SECRETARIES.

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is recently chaired the national conference of Chief Secretaries in New Delhi.

About National Conference of Chief Secretaries:

- The three-day conference of Chief Secretaries began on January 5, 2023.
- The conference is focused on achieving rapid and sustained economic growth in partnership with the States.
- It will lay the ground for collaborative action for achieving a Viksit Bharat with a thrust on growth and job creation and inclusive human development.
- It will be another key step towards further boosting the partnership between the Centre and the State Governments.
- The discussion during the conference will be held on **six identified themes**.
- These are Thrust on MSMEs, Infrastructure, and Investments, Minimising Compliances, Women's Empowerment, Health and Nutrition, and Skill Development.
- **The first such conference of Chief Secretaries was held in Dharamshala in June 2022.**

1.9. SECTION 6A OF THE CITIZENSHIP ACT, 1955.

Why in News?

- Recently, A Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said it will first take up for preliminary determination whether Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 suffers from any “constitutional infirmity”.

About:

- Section 6A was a special provision inserted into the 1955 Act in furtherance of a Memorandum of Settlement called the '**Assam Accord**' signed on August 15, 1985.
- The accord was a tripartite agreement between the Centre, the Assam government and the All-Assam Students Union, and came after years of protest against perceived demographic change and outsiders in the state.

Section 6A

- It created a **special provision for Assam by which persons who entered between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971, and who are residing in the state, upon being detected as foreigners, will be allowed to register**
- Upon registration, **such a person will have the same rights and obligations as a citizen of India, but will not be entitled to be included in any electoral roll for a period of 10 years.**
- Foreigners who had entered Assam before January 1, 1966, and been “ordinarily resident” in the State, would have all the rights and obligations of Indian citizens including the right to vote.

Acquisition of Citizenship

- The Citizenship Act of 1955 provides for the following ways to acquire citizenship:
- Citizenship by **birth** - for people born in Indian territory
- Citizenship by **descent** - for persons born outside India with Indian parents
- Citizenship by **registration** - for persons whose ancestors were Indian citizens
- Citizenship by **naturalization** - for persons staying in India for a long time
- Citizenship by **incorporation of territory** (by the Government of India)

Termination of Citizenship

- The Citizenship Act 1955 provided provisions for **renunciation, termination, and deprivation** of citizenship.
- **Renunciation of Citizenship:** If an Indian citizen who is also a national of another country renounces his Indian citizenship in a legal manner, he loses his Indian citizenship.
- When a man ceases to be an Indian citizen, his minor children cease to be Indian citizens as well. However, such a child may become an Indian citizen within one year of reaching full age by filing a statement of intent to return to India.

- **Termination of Citizenship:** If an Indian citizen knowingly or voluntarily accepts the citizenship of another nation, his or her Indian citizenship can be revoked.
- **Deprivation of Citizenship:** In some situations, the Indian government can strip a person of his citizenship.
- However, this does not apply to all citizens. It only applies to citizens who have obtained citizenship through registration, naturalization, or Article 5 Clause (c) of the Constitution (which is citizenship at commencement for a domicile in India and who has ordinarily been a resident of India for not less than 5 years immediately preceding the commencement of the Constitution).

1.10. FSSAI RELEASES SURVEY ON DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS.

Why in news?

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) Survey stated that 15% of dietary supplements were found to be unsafe for consumption.
- Unsupervised consumption of such poor-quality products can affect cardiovascular health and kidneys.

About Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

- FSSAI is under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- It is an autonomous statutory body established under Food Safety and Standards Act (FM), 2006.
- FSSA 2006 consolidates various acts & orders that had earlier handled food related issues in various Ministries.
- It regulates and monitors, manufacturing, processing, distribution of food while ensuring safe and wholesome food to consumers.
- Headquarters: Delhi.

1.11. CABINET APPROVED THREE NATIONAL LEVEL MULTI-STATE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES (MSCS) UNDER MSCS ACT, 2002

Why in news?

- Setting up of three national level MSCS will help in achieving the goal of 'Sahakar-se-Samridhis (Prosperity through Cooperation) through inclusive growth model of cooperatives.

National Multi- State Cooperative Export Society

- Act as umbrella organization for exports of surplus goods/service.
- Primary to national level cooperatives societies including primary societies, district, state and national level federations and MSCS can become its member.
- Higher exports will increase production of goods and services and increase employment opportunities.
- Increased export will promote "Make in India" thus leading to Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Help cooperatives in getting benefits of export related government schemes/policies.

National Multi- State Cooperative Organic Society

- Unlock demand and consumption of organic products in domestic and global markets.
- Help farmers to get high price of organic product through aggregation, marketing and branding.
- Provide institutional support for aggregation, certification, storage, processing etc.
- Better management of entire supply chain of products.

National Multi- State Cooperative Seed Society

- Act as an apex organization for production, procurement, processing, branding, labelling, packaging, storage, marketing and distribution of quality seeds.
- Develop system for preservation and promotion of indigenous natural seeds.
- Increase seed replacement rate, varietal replacement rate, ensuring role of farmers in quality seed cultivation.
- Quality seeds production reduces dependence on imported seeds, boost rural economy, and strengthen food security.
- Though 'Cooperative Societies' is a State Subject, **MSCS** is regulated by Centre under MSCS, Act 2002.
- MSCS are cooperative societies whose activities are not confined to one state and serve interests of individuals in more than one state.

1.12. SUPREME COURT (SC) TO HEAR PLEA SEEKING NATIONAL HERITAGE STATUS FOR RAM SETU.

Why in news?

- Ram Setu, also known as Adam's bridge, is a chain of limestone shoals between Pamban Island or Rameswaram Island, off the south-eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, and Mannar Island, off the north-western coast of Sri Lanka.
 - Recently, Tamil Nadu assembly also passed a resolution urging Centre to resume work on **Sethusamudram Ship Canal project (SSCP)**.
- National heritage status is sought in the backdrop of SSCP that envisages dredging of a ship channel across the Palk Straits between India and Sri Lanka.
 - Two channels were suggested - one across Adam's Bridge and another through Palk Bay.
 - SC, in 2007, had stayed the work for project and Centre was also willing to explore another route to SSCP without damaging Ram Setu.
- Significance of SSCP
 - Reduce steaming distances between east and west coasts of India.
 - Strengthen national security by improving navigation for Indian coast guards and naval ships.
- Concerns raised against SSCP
 - Would destroy natural barrier between Bay of Bengal and Palk Bay.
 - Oil and marine pollution associated with shipping traffic will aggravate ecological stress in region.
 - Adam's bridge holds religious sentiments for the people.
 - Threats to coral reef platforms in Gulf of Mannar.

1.13. PM NARENDRA MODI LAUNCHES MV GANGA VILAS CRUISE IN VARANASI.

Why in news?

- The world's longest river cruise, the MV Ganga Vilas, which will travel 3,200 km over 27 river systems in five states in India and Bangladesh in 51 days, was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, January 13, 2022.

Key Points

- The first cruise ship ever built in India, the MV Ganga Vilas, set out from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and will go via Bangladesh to Dibrugarh in Assam.
- Besides connecting National Waterway 1 (NW1) which includes Ganga and National Waterway 2 (NW2) on Brahmaputra, the cruise will cross 27 river systems.
- The 51-day cruise has 50 stops planned, including major cities like Patna in Bihar, Sahibganj in Jharkhand, Kolkata in West Bengal, Dhaka in Bangladesh, and Guwahati in Assam.
- These destinations include world heritage sites, national parks, river ghats, and world heritage sites.
- The luxury cruise has three decks, 18 suites, a capacity for 36 passengers, and all the luxuries facilities.
- 32 Swiss tourists have signed up for the entire duration of the inaugural trip.

1.14. NHAI IMPLEMENTING ADVANCE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ON HIGHWAYS TO REDUCE ACCIDENTS.

- National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is implementing ATMS on highways to reduce accidents.
- ATMS is an integrated solution to manage highway traffic through real time information and ensure safety.
- ATMS has been implemented for around 3,000 km of National Highways.
- In case of commercial vehicles, system check for valid fitness certificate.
- NHAI is also looking at leveraging GIS technology for analysing drone videos and Network Survey Vehicle data for identifying safety issues on highway.

1.15. 'WOMANIYA ON GOVERNMENT EMARKETPLACE' SUCCESS EVENT COMMEMORATED IN NEW DELHI.

1.44 lakh women entrepreneurs have fulfilled 14.76 lakh orders on GeM since 2019: Govt

- According to the data shared by the commerce ministry in a statement on Saturday, women MSE sellers have fulfilled over 14.76 lakh orders worth Rs 21,265 crore in gross merchandise value (GMV) since 2019.
- Women entrepreneurs have a share of 74 per cent in the order value of products sold on GeM and 26 per cent in the order value of service categories.
- Moreover, the top five **product categories** with the maximum number of women entrepreneurs were desktop computers, smartphones, special purpose telephones (smartphone for integrated child development service – ICDS), hopper tipper dumper while the top five **service categories** were manpower outsourcing services – minimum wage, custom bid for services, human resource outsourcing service, monthly basis cab and taxi hiring services, and manpower outsourcing services – fixed remuneration, according to the government data.

About Womaniya

- The “Womaniya” initiative was launched in 2019 and has sought to encourage the participation of women entrepreneurs and self-help groups (SHG) from the informal sector on the GeM portal and facilitate the sale of their products directly to various Government buyers, sans intermediaries.
- Generic product categories were created for a listing of handicrafts and handloom, accessories, jute and coir products, bamboo products, organic foods, spices, home décor, and office furnishings to facilitate ease-in product catalogue listing and procurement from women entrepreneurs.
- The Womaniya initiative is particularly important because nearly 80% of women-owned establishments are self-financed and more than 60% of 8 million units are owned and or led by women entrepreneurs from socially-challenged sections of the society.
 - **The Face of Womaniya on GeM**-The initiative is represented by artist Anukta M Ghosh’s artwork “Magan”, an illustration of women empowerment and grace.
 - The Womaniya homepage will inform procurement officers in various government ministries, departments, and CPSEs about the drive to promote procurement of common use goods and services from women entrepreneurs.

About Government e Marketplace

- GeM is a 100% government-owned company set up under the aegis of Ministry of Commerce and Industry for procurement of common use goods and services by government ministries, departments, and CPSEs.
- GeM was set up in 2016 and has 731,431 product categories, with 180,862 registered sellers and 32,114 government buyers.
- Since inception, GeM has processed 1,171,761 orders worth Rs. 16,976 crores in gross merchandise value.

1.16. ASER 2022: PANDEMIC AFFECTED LEARNING, DIP IN READING, BASIC MATHS SKILLS.

- The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022, released by the NGO Pratham, records the impact of school closures in 2020 and 2021, as well as the return to school of children in 2022.

Key findings

- The overall enrolment figures increased from 97.2% in 2018 to 98.4% in 2022, despite school closures during the pandemic.

Enrollment figures

- Overall enrolment figures for the 6 to 14 years age group increased from 97.2% in 2018 to 98.4% in 2022.
- The proportion of children in this **(3-16 years) age group** who are **not currently enrolled** also dropped to its lowest level ever to 1.6% from 2.8% in 2018.
- **Government schools have seen a sharp increase in children enrolled** from 65.6% in 2018 to 72.9% in 2022, reversing another trend of a steady decrease in student enrolments seen since 2006.

Literacy levels

- Children’s basic literacy levels have taken a big hit, with their **reading ability as compared to numeracy skills worsening much more sharply and dropping** to pre-2012 levels.
- The percentage of children in Class 3 in government or private schools who were able to read at the level of Class 2 dropped from 27.3% in 2018 to 20.5% in 2022.
- This **decline is visible in every State, and for children in both government and private schools.**

- The percentage of children enrolled in Class 5 in government or private schools who can at least read a Class 2-level text fell from 50.5% in 2018 to 42.8% in 2022.
- The drops in basic reading ability are smaller for Class 8 students.
- The ASER reading test assesses whether a child can read letters, words, a simple paragraph at Class 1 level of difficulty, or a story at Class 2 level of difficulty.

Arithmetic skills

- The percentage of Class 3 students who were able to do at least subtract dropped from 28.2% in 2018 to 25.9% in 2022.
- The proportion of children in Class 5 across India who can carry out division has also fallen slightly from 27.9% in 2018 to 25.6% in 2022.
- The performance of Class 8 students in basic arithmetic is more varied.
- Nationally, the proportion of children who can do division has increased slightly, from 44.1% in 2018 to 44.7% in 2022.
- The ASER 2022 report highlights the **widening learning gaps in foundational skills in reading and arithmetic that have emerged as a result of the pandemic and school closures.**
- The report shows that despite an increase in enrollment figures and a decrease in the proportion of children not currently enrolled, there has been a significant decline in basic literacy and arithmetic skills, reversing several years of improvement.
- The report emphasizes the need for urgent interventions to address these learning gaps and support children's continued learning and development.

1.17. BHOPAL DECLARATION RELEASED AFTER DISCUSSION IN TWO-DAY MEETING OF THINK-20 UNDER G20 IN BHOPAL.

- The Bhopal Declaration was released after a two-day meeting of Think-20 under G20 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The Declaration was made by more than 300 intellectuals from India and abroad

About Think 20

- The Think 20 (T20) is a forum of think tanks from G20 countries that provides policy recommendations to the leaders of the G20. It was created in 2012 to bring the expertise of think tanks from around the world to bear on the G20's policy-making process, and it **meets annually** in the lead-up to the G20 summit.

Bhopal Declaration

- Emphasis on promoting traditional medicine systems like AYUSH
- Encouragement of value-oriented development in infrastructure
- Appeal for more inclusive development and care for all sections of society
- Special attention to children and development led by women
- Focus on bridging the gap between North and South
- Importance of localization in achieving G-20 sustainable development goals
- Necessity of triangular cooperation between government, society, and private organizations

1.18. RISING DEMAND FOR KEWDA OIL A BLESSING FOR PEOPLE IN ODISHA'S GANJAM.

- There is a rising demand for kewda oil from Odisha's Ganjam region.
- Ganjam kewda (*Pandanus fascicularis*) oil is steam-distilled from the flower of aromatic screw pine plant and used as an aromatic in the food industry and other sectors.
- Male spike is attractive for its characteristic aromatic odour, whereas female spike is odourless and develops into a woody drupe.
- It is registered under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 by the Government of India.
- The flower is harvested from around 5,000 hectares in the district. Its oil is produced in Ganjam, Chatrapur, Chikiti and Rangeilunda blocks of the district.
- For around 200,000 people living in 220 villages of the district, it is the main source of income. The farmers and collectors receive an advance from Ganjam's oil makers who buy the flowers from them during June to September — the harvesting season.
- An oil maker needs 30,000 flowers to extract a litre of kewda oil.

- Price of a litre of kewda oil has increased to Rs 5 lakh from Rs 4.5 lakh last year.

1.19. NATIONAL LEVEL STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEWS OVERALL PROGRESS OF ATAL BHUJALYOJANA.

- Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal) is a Central Sector Scheme for facilitating sustainable ground water management. It will be implemented over a period of 5 years (2020-21 to 2024-25).
- One of the main objectives of scheme is to bring about **behavioural change at ground level**.
- Scheme is being taken up in nearly **8350 water stressed Gram Panchayats of 7 states** namely **Haryana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh**.
- It is **funded by Government of India and World Bank** on a **50:50 basis**.
- Scheme has **two components**:
 1. Institutional Strengthening & Capacity Building component by facilitating strong data base, scientific approach and community participation in ground water sector.
 2. Incentive Component for incentivizing states for achievement of predefined results.
- Scheme uses **a four pronged strategy**:
 1. Decision support tools for ground water management,
 2. Strengthen community based institutions to foster management,
 3. Improve water use efficiency and
 4. enhance ground water recharge and Fiscal decentralisation.
- Scheme envisages active participation of the communities and panchayats in various activities such as formation of Water User Associations, preparation of Gram Panchayat-wise Water Security Plans etc.

1.20. SUPREME COURT DECLINES TO ENTERTAIN PETITIONS AGAINST CASTE CENSUS.

- The Bihar government had recently launched the caste survey which aims to compile data on each family digitally through a mobile application from the panchayat to the district level.
- However, pleas were submitted to quash the notification on the ground that the caste-based census "violated the basic structure of the Constitution"
- SC refused to entertain the petitions and asked the petitioners to approach the high court.

About Caste Census

- Caste Census is the caste-wise tabulation of population in the census exercise.
- Caste was included as a parameter in Census data only during the 1931 Census.
- Ever since independence, the Census had only the data related to SC and ST populations.
- Caste Census is under the administrative control of Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Earlier in **2011** attempt was made towards Caste Census by conducting the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC).
- Rohini Commission was another attempt by categorization within OBCs for better targeted service delivery.
- Need for Caste Census
 - Obsolete data as the data is nearly 8 decades old.
 - Hindrance to sub categorisation of OBCs as denoted by Rohini Commission.
 - To have sufficient data for Govt policy making.
 - To provide equitable representation to all castes.

1.21. CENTRE ISSUES NEW RULES FOR INFLUENCERS, UP TO RS 50 LAKH FINE IF NOT FOLLOWED.

- The guidelines are aligned with those guidelines issued under Consumer Protection Act (CPA), 2019.
 - Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022 was issued under CPA, 2019
 - It provides a framework for protecting consumers against unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements.

Need for the guidelines

- There has been increased use of social media for promotional activities and influencer violations comprising almost 30% of ads taken up by the Advertising Standards Council of India .
- India's social media influencer market expected to reach 2,800 crore by 2025 (from Rs 1,275 crore in 2022).

Important guidelines

- Any celebrity, influencer or virtual influencer must disclose any material connection (trips or hotel, etc.) with the advertiser.
- Disclosures must be prominently and clearly displayed.
- Endorsements must be made in simple, clear language and terms such as "advertisement;" "sponsored;" or "paid promotion" can be used.
- The product and service must have been actually used or experienced by the endorser.
- Non-compliance can lead to a jail term of up to 2 years and penalty of Rs 50 lakh.

1.22. DOOMSDAY CLOCK 2023 MOVED CLOSER TO MIDNIGHT, GLOBAL CATASTROPHE NOW NEARER THAN EVER BEFORE.

- Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS) moved Doomsday clock to 90 seconds to midnight largely because of mounting nuclear warfare in Ukraine.
- BAS was founded in 1945 by Albert Einstein and University of Chicago scientists who worked on Manhattan Project to build first atomic bomb.
- The world events are discussed by a board of scientists and other experts in various fields, including 13 Nobel Laureates, who determine where to place the hands of the clock each year.
- Doomsday Clock, created in 1947, is a design that warns the public about how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making.
- More than 75 years ago, the clock started ticking at seven minutes to midnight. At 17 minutes to midnight, the clock was furthest from doomsday in 1991 as the Cold War ended and the US and Russia (then Soviet Union) signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.
- Since its debut, minute hand has been reset 25 times.

1.23. SC EASES NORMS FOR PASSIVE EUTHANASIA.

- Supreme Court altered the existing guidelines for 'living will' as laid down in Common Cause vs. Union of India & Another (2018), which allowed passive euthanasia.
 - Living will is a written document that specifies what actions should be taken if person is unable to make their own medical decisions in future.
- Euthanasia is practice of ending life of a patient to limit the patient's suffering. It can be administered only by a physician.
- Euthanasia can be either active' or 'passive:
 - Active euthanasia involves an active intervention to end a person's life with substances or external force, such as administering lethal injection. Allowed in Netherland, Belgium, Canada etc.
 - Passive euthanasia refers to withdrawing life support or treatment that is essential to keep a terminally ill person alive. Allowed in India, Finland, Germany etc.
- Major judgements related to Euthanasia
 - P. Rathinam Case (1994): Struck down section 309 of IPC (attempt to suicide) as unconstitutional.
 - Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011): SC allowed passive euthanasia for first time.

Changes by Supreme court with respect to passive Euthanasia

- **Living will**- An attestation by a notary or a faceted officer to be sufficient for a living will
- **Access to the living will**- living will a part of national health record which can be accessed by Indian hospitals
- **Primary board to examine patients condition** -Three doctors, including treating physician and two other doctors with five years of experience in the specialty, will comprise the primary board of doctors
- **Time taken to decide**- Primary/secondary board to decide within 48 hours on withdrawal of further treatment
- **Secondary board**- Hospital must immediately constitute a secondary board of medical experts.

1.24. COAL INDIA LTD TO LAUNCH M-SAND PROJECTS IN A BIG WAY.

- CIL subsidiaries to Commission Five M-Sand Plants by 2024.

- CIL facilitates processing of waste overburden at its open cast mines under overburden (OB) rocks-to- M-Sand initiative.
- During opencast mining, overlying soil and rocks are removed as waste to extract coal and OB is layered in dumps.
- OB rocks are used in levelling up land for the construction of roads and railway tracks.
- M sand is produced by crushing rocks, and quarry stones to a stipulated size of 150 microns. It is different from River Sand.

Properties of M Sand (Manufactured Sand)

- High concrete strength compared to river sand
- The sand particles of M sand are in cubic form. This makes the bond stronger.
- zero silt content.
- Better quality control from being manufactured in a controlled environment
- Sand Mining Framework (2018) prepared by Ministry of Mine envisages M-Sand from crushed rock fines (crusher dust), sand from OB of coal mines.
- **Benefits of M- Sand**
 - More cost-effective than using natural sand.
 - Reduce the need for mining natural sand, which can have negative environmental impacts.
 - Reduce the amount of water required for construction projects, as it does not require washing before use.
 - Help maintaining water table.
- Sand is classified as a 'minor mineral' under Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulations) Act, 1957, and administrative control vests with State Governments.

1.25. GOVT INVITES EOIs FOR Rs 41,000 CR INTERNATIONAL CONTAINER TRANSHIPMENT PORT IN GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND (GNI).

- As part of holistic development of GNI, Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW) has invited Expression of Interest for building ICTT at Galathea Bay.
 - In 2021, entire **Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary was denotified** to make way for ICTT. It is India's nesting site for **giant leatherback turtles**.
 - Kolkata-based Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port is nodal agency for implementation.
- **Transshipment port** is a hub that handles voluminous cargo between multiple vessels. Cargo at these ports is transported away to another port, rather than being shipped inland via rail, road or waterway.
- **Salient features of ICTT**
 - Strategic location in terms of proximity (40 nautical miles from Malacca Strait) to International Trade Route (Singapore, Colombo).
 - Availability of natural water depth of more than 20 meters.
 - Potential to capture transshipment cargo from all ports in proximity including domestic ones.
- **Significance of ICTT**
 - Reduce logistics inefficiencies and push to allied businesses such as ship supplies and repair, warehousing etc.
 - Save US \$200-220 million a year on transshipment cargo.
 - Create an opportunity to become a large hub for Asia-Africa, Asia-US/Europe container traffic trade.
- Great Nicobar Island is southernmost of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Indira Point on southern tip of this Island is India's southernmost point.

1.26. OBC SUB-CATEGORISATION PANEL GETS 14TH EXTENSION.

- Government had constituted the Rohini commission in 2017 under Article 340 to examine issues related to sub-categorisation of OBCs.
 - **Article 340** states that President appoints the Commission to investigate conditions of socially and educationally backward classes.

- **Objective** of Rohini Commission is to examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation (i.e. 27% reservation in jobs and education) among castes or communities with reference to central OBC list.
- Need for sub-categorisation
 - OBCs are currently granted 27% reservation in jobs and education under central government.
 - However, it is perceived that only a few affluent communities in Central List of OBCs have secured a major part of this reservation.
- Earlier commissions
 - First Backward Class Commission report, 1955 proposed sub-categorization of OBCs into backward and extremely backward communities.
 - Mandal Commission report, 1979 proposed sub-categorization in intermediate and depressed backward classes.
 - In 2015, National Commission for Backward Classes proposed that OBCs division into; Extremely Backward Classes (EBC-Group A), More Backward Classes (MBC-Group B), and Backward Classes (BC-Group C).

1.27. CENTRE SETS UP THREE GRIEVANCE COMMITTEES TO TAKE UP USER COMPLAINTS AGAINST SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has established three Grievance Appellate Committees (GAC) under rule 3A of IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- **Composition of GACs**
 - Each GACs consists of a chairperson as Ex-officio, and two whole-time members (one is retired member) for a term of three years from the date of assumption of office or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- **First GAC**- Headed by Chief Executive officers of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under Ministry of Home Affairs.
- **Second GAC**- Chaired by Joint Secretary in charge of policy and administration division in Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- **Third GAC**- Chaired by a senior scientist at MeitY.
- **Role of GACs**
 - Oversee and revoke content moderation-related decisions taken by social media and other internet-based platforms.
 - If a user is unsatisfied with content moderation decision taken by a social company's grievance officer, they can appeal to GACs **within one month**. GAC will have to resolve the appeal within a month of receipt of appeal.
 - Committees can seek assistance of people with expertise and experience while dealing with users' appeals.
 - They will adopt an online dispute resolution mechanism.

INTERNATIONAL

1.28. EUROZONE AND SCHENGEN AREA.

Why in news?

- Croatia adopted the European Union's common currency, the euro, and joined the Schengen Area, Europe's visa-free travel area, on January 1.
- With this, Croatia became the fully integrated member of EU. The country had joined the EU in 2013.
 - It was the last time a country was admitted as a new member nation of EU.

What is the Eurozone?

- All European Union Member States are part of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and coordinate their economic policy-making to support the economic aims of the EU.
- However, a number of Member States have taken a step further by replacing their national currencies with the single currency – the euro.
- These Member States form the euro area, also known as eurozone.
- In other words, it is a **geographic and economic region** that consists of the European Union countries that have fully incorporated the euro as their national currency.
- As of January 2023, the **eurozone consists of 20 countries** in the European Union (EU):
 - Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

What are the requirements for joining the eurozone?

- In order to join the eurozone and use euro as their currency, EU nations must meet certain criteria consisting of four macroeconomic indicators that focus on:
 - **Price stability** by demonstrating sustainable price performance and average inflation no more than 1.5 percent above the rate of the three best-performing member states.
 - **Sound and sustainable public finances** - the government must run a budget deficit no greater than 3% of GDP and hold public debt no greater than 60% of GDP.
 - **The durability of convergence** – It is assessed through its long-term interest rates, which cannot be more than 2 percent above the rate in the three member states with the most stable prices.
 - **Exchange rate stability** - The nation must demonstrate exchange rate stability by participating in the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) II for at least two years without severe tensions and without devaluing against the euro.

What is Schengen area?

- Schengen Area signifies a zone where 27 European countries, abolished their internal borders, for the free and unrestricted movement of people.
 - Croatia became the 27th nation in the passport free Schengen zone.
- **Member of this area include:** 23 of the 27 EU member states and all members of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland).
- Being part of this area means that countries:
 - do not carry out checks at their internal borders, except in cases of specific threats;
 - carry out harmonised controls at their external borders, based on clearly defined criteria.

1.29. INDIA AND AUSTRIA'S AGREEMENT.

Why in News?

- India and Austria will sign a migration and mobility agreement.

Major Highlights

- India will sign a “**Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement**” (MMPA) with Austria.
 - It has similar mobility agreements with France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Finland.
- **Relevance:** India has been keen to finalise these agreements with European countries as a stepping stone to **resolving issues over the long-pending India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement** and **facilitating Indian professionals working** in these countries, the European countries also see them as a way to curb illegal immigration from India.

- This is a much-needed agreement, especially in view of the sharp increase in illegal migration Austria was confronted with last year, including over 15,000 illegal migrants from India with practically no chance of asylum.
- The agreement is now a useful tool to combat illegal migration together, as it enables the swift return of illegal migrants.
- It will regulate multiple entry visas for professionals and student exchange programmes, and will be reviewed regularly by a Joint Working Group (JWG).

Diplomatic relations between India and Austria

- They were established in 1949. Traditionally India-Austria relations have been warm and friendly.
- There has been a regular exchange of high-level visits between the two countries
- Austria, a member of the European Union since 1995 is an important link for India in its relationship with Europe, especially with countries of central and Eastern Europe.
- India's main exports to Austria are Footwear, Textiles, Articles Of Leather, Articles Of Apparel And Clothing Accessories, Vehicles, Rolling Stock (And Parts And Accessories Thereof), Machinery And Mechanical Appliances (And Parts Thereof), Electrical Machinery And Equipment, Organic Chemicals and Pharmaceutical Products.

1.30. THE ASIAN PACIFIC POSTAL UNION (APPU).

Why in News?

- **India will take over the leadership of the Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU) from January 2023.**
- **Dr. Vinaya Prakash Singh**, erstwhile Member (Personnel), Postal Services Board will **take over the charge of Secretary General of the Union** for a **tenure of four years.**
- Secretary, Department of Posts, Vineet Pandey said, this is the **first time an Indian is leading an international organization in the postal sector.**

About Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU).

- The **Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU)** was formed (in its current form) by international treaty through an Asian-Pacific Postal Convention **signed in Yogyakarta on 27 March 1981.**
- The organisation has **origins** dating back to **1961.**
- The APPU is an intergovernmental organization of **32-member countries** of the Asian-Pacific region.
- Its **Headquarters** is located in **Bangkok, Thailand.**

Goal of Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU)

- The goal of APPU is to extend, facilitate and improve postal relations between member countries and to promote cooperation in the field of postal services.

1.31. INDIA-FRANCE STRATEGIC DIALOGUE.

- The 36th India-France Strategic Dialogue has taken place on January 5, with a focus on addressing China's militarization of the Indo-Pacific region and ways in which the two nations can work together to counter it.
- In addition to the strategic talks, Diplomatic Advisor Bonne will also meet with India's Defence Minister and External Affairs Minister.
- Though the Indian government has not disclosed further details about the content of the dialogue, it is clear that India is seeking to strengthen its self-reliance in weapons and hardware with the help of key allies like France due to Russia's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine.

Aircraft Engines and Submarines

- One area where India is seeking French assistance is in the manufacturing of aircraft engines. India is looking for a transfer of technology to enable it to make engines for its indigenous twin-engine fighter, as well as the design and development of next-generation military and civilian engines for future fighter and transport platforms. The Tata group has already teamed up with Airbus to **manufacture C295 tactical transport aircraft** in Gujarat, and this partnership is set to be expanded to include the production of other civilian and military aircraft through a joint venture with France.
- In addition to aircraft engines, India is also interested in continued French assistance with the production of submarines. The **Kalvari (French Scorpene) class submarine** line is set to deliver its final submarine this year,

and India is hoping that France will help to continue the manufacturing line at Mumbai Dockyards. The plan is to retrofit diesel attack submarines with **indigenous air independent propulsion (AIP) systems** for long endurance. It is expected that progress will be made on both aircraft engines and long-range submarines during this year's strategic dialogue with France.

Indo-Pacific Security and Space Cooperation

- Another key topic of discussion during the strategic dialogue will be the Indo-Pacific region, where France is ready to help India with ocean bed mapping and the development of underwater drones and sensors. With the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China becoming increasingly aggressive in the Indo-Pacific, and rapidly expanding its warship and nuclear submarine force, India and its allies must be prepared for any eventualities in the Indian Ocean, which is fast becoming a new frontier. In order to ensure maritime domain awareness and security from the east coast of Africa to the far Pacific, India and France have formed a trilateral group with the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**.
- In addition to security in the Indo-Pacific, India and France are also working together in the field of space technology, sharing knowledge in an effort to counter China's rapid strides in this area.

Terrorism and Regional Stability

- During the strategic dialogue, Bonne will also be briefed by Doval on the posture of the PLA along the 3488 km Line of Actual Control (LAC) between China and India, and the two leaders will discuss ways to bring both Russia and Ukraine to the negotiating table to end the conflict that began in February 2022. Another topic of discussion will be the issue of radicalization in the region, particularly in the Af-Pak region, in the wake of the rise of the Taliban, as well as terrorism emanating from Pakistan and targeting India, as seen in the recent terrorist attacks in Rajouri by the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayebba (LeT) group.

1.32. WHAT ARE UNITED NATIONS INTERIM SECURITY FORCE FOR ABYEI (UNISFA)?

Why in news?

- The Indian contingent, which consists of two officers and 25 other ranks, will work as a platoon in an engagement and specialise in community outreach in addition to carrying out numerous security-related duties.
- This time India is deploying the largest single unit of female Blue Helmets in a UN mission since 2007.
- Recently, India deploys a women-only platoon of peacekeepers to the UN Mission in Abyei on the border of Sudan and South Sudan as part of the Indian Battalion in the United Nations Interim Security Force, Abyei (UNISFA).

What is UNISFA?

- It was established by the UN Security Council in response to the critical situation in the Abyei area of Sudan by resolution 1990 of 27 June 2011.
- Resolution 1990 made provision for the deployment of 4,200 Ethiopian troops to provide security and protect civilians under imminent threat of violence in the disputed border region.

What is United Nations Peacekeeping Mission?

- This Peacekeeping operation is policing and peacebuilding actions carried out by the UN to bring order and stability to war-torn nations.
- The UN Peacekeepers are known as '**Blue Helmets**' or 'Blue Berets'.
- Peacekeepers are the military personnel of the UN that work alongside the UN Police and civilian colleagues to promote "stability, security, and peace processes".
- **Origin:** When the UN Security Council approved the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East in 1948, the UN Peacekeeping Forces were established.
- **Nodal Agency:** The United Nations Charter authorises the United Nations Security Council to take collective action to maintain international peace and security.
- **Structure:** The UN Peacekeeping force is supplemented by personnel from member nations. They are added to the force on a volunteer basis.
- **India's role:** India is one of the largest troop-contributing nations to the U.N. peacekeeping missions. India is the second-highest military and fifth-highest police contributing country to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

1.33. INDIA AUSTRALIA ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND TRADE AGREEMENT: A WIN-WIN FOR INDIA AND AUSTRALIA.

Why in News?

- IndAusECTA was signed last year, on 2nd April, 2022; after Ratification and Exchange of Written Instruments, the Agreement has come into force on 29th December 2022.

Current trade trends between India and Australia:

- India's imports from Australia amount to 17 US \$ billion while its exports to Australia amount to 10.5 US \$ billion. However, what we need to realize that India's imports from Australia are primarily (96%) raw materials & intermediate goods. They are highly concentrated in Coal (74% of Australia's exports to India) out of which 71.4% is coking coal. On the other hand, India's exports to Australia are broad-based and dominated by finished products (consumer goods). India also spends \$ 4 bn approx. each year on education of students in Australia.

The IndAusECTA covers the following major areas:

- Trade in Goods
- Trade in Services
- Rules of Origin
- Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures
- Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation
- Trade Remedies
- Legal & institutional Issues
- Movement of Natural Persons

Benefits under Trade in Goods:

- Indian goods on all tariff lines to get access to Australian market with zero customs duty
- Cheaper Raw Materials, Faster Approval for Medicines
- 90% of Australian exports by value to get zero duty access to Indian market
- 10 Lakh More Jobs, 10 Billion Dollar More Exports in Five Years

Benefits under Trade in Services:

- More than 1 lakh Indian students in Australia to benefit from post-study work visa
- Australian services to get Negative List Treatment after 5 Years
- Protective Features to guard against Unintended Consequences.
- End to Double Taxation

An Agreement Suiting the Specific Requirements of Indian Economy:

- Great care has been taken in negotiating the agreement to suit the peculiarities of the Indian economy. Here are some of its beneficial features:
- India has not provided access and kept out milk and other dairy products, wheat, sugar, iron ore, apple and walnuts from its offers to Australia. This is normally impossible as these are the major exports of Australia.
- Australia hopes for gains for its products such as Coal and Wines plus a few quotas in agriculture / horticulture products (almonds, cotton, lentil, pears, oranges, etc.) which are already being imported.
- Australia has offered Zero duty access to 100% of its lines & trade whereas India has so far offered only 70% of its lines for duty free/ reduced duty access to Australia.
- India can benefit hugely in the pharmaceutical sector. Through the Agreement, drugs approved in other developed jurisdictions will get quicker approval in Australia. This will enable easy penetration of the Australian medical market (India is just 3%).
- Major gains are expected for India's labour-intensive sectors such as textiles/ apparel, leather/ footwear, gems and jewellery, fish products, machinery and electrical goods. They will gain duty free access on par with Vietnam and other countries, making them competitive.
- Liberal grant of work visas to students, employee/ worker visas, agriculture worker visas.
- This agreement hopes to encourage other developed countries such as UK, Canada, Europe to sign similar agreements with India.

- The Agreement allows India to overcome any loss it would have incurred as a result of walking out of RCEP, which was virtually an FTA with China.

Total India – Australia trade expected to cross US \$ 45-50 billion by 2035:

- As a result of the aforementioned provisions, projections point to a number of long-term gains for the Indian economy.
- The coming into force of the India Australia ECTA is expected to consolidate and help in the growth of market share of Indian products and services. New markets for Indian goods in Australia are also likely to emerge. There is an expected growth in pharmaceutical products with the easing of Australian regulatory processes.
- There is expected to be a vertical movement in value chains with the increasing presence of higher value products of advanced technology. Exports are expected to increase by 10 billion by 2026-27 with a creation of approximately 10 lakh jobs.
- The total bilateral trade is expected to cross US \$ 45-50 billion by 2035. It is expected that there will be enhanced job opportunities for Indians in Australia and increased remittance and investment flows to India from Australia.

1.34. SWEDEN DISCOVERS BIGGEST RARE EARTH ELEMENTS (REE) DEPOSIT IN EUROPE.

- Sweden's state-owned mining company says it has identified more than 1 million tonnes of rare earth minerals in the northern area of Kiruna. The REE deposits were discovered in Arctic region of Kiruna, Sweden (home to world's largest underground iron-ore mine).
- Rare earth minerals are vital to making many high-tech goods. They are used in electric vehicles, wind turbines, portable electronics, microphones and speakers.
- REE are a set of **seventeen metallic elements** - fifteen lanthanides on periodic table and scandium and yttrium. The **17 Rare Earths** are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- REE shares some common properties such as **high luster, high electrical conductivity** etc. as well as some distinguishing properties, present in few REE, such as **luminescence, magnetism** etc.
 - Also, Heavy REE (higher atomic weights) are less common as compared to Light REE.
- Although REE are fairly distributed across different geographies, the extraction of REE is most challenging part, because of complex processing and intensive environmental effects.
 - At present more than 80% of the world's rare earths processing capacity is in China.

REE production in India

- India produces only 1% of global output despite having around 6% of world's reserves.
- **Steps taken by India**
 - Set up KhanijBidesh India Ltd. (KABIL),
 - Bilateral agreements like Australia-India Critical Minerals Investment Partnership.

1.35. BACKING SRI LANKA, INDIA SENDS FINANCING ASSURANCES TO IMF.

- Facing its worst economic crisis since independence, financing assurances from creditors is critical for Sri Lanka to get the \$2.9 billion loan from IMF to put its economy on track.
- It is facing multiple challenges such as shortage of dollars, runaway inflation and a steep recession.
- **India, Japan, and China are Sri Lanka's three largest bilateral lenders.**

About International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- IMF was established (in 1944) to provide emergency financing to countries hit by crises and help them to stabilize their economies.
- Unlike development banks, IMF does not lend for specific projects. It also provides precautionary financing to help prevent crises
- Crises can occur due to domestic or/and external factors and can take many different forms such as Balance of Payment issue, illiquid or insolvent financial institutions, excessive deficits and debt etc.
- Lending instruments of IMF include
 - **General Resources Account** on non-concessional terms (market-based interest rates).

- **Concessional financial support** (currently at zero interest rates) through Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust, which is better tailored to needs of low-income countries.
- **Resilience and Sustainability Trust** to help low-income and vulnerable middle-income countries.

1.36. INDIA FAST-TRACKS ARUNACHAL DAMS, EXPEDITES STALLED PROJECTS FEARING WATER WAR BY CHINA.

- In response to Chinese dams being built in north-east, India has initiated its biggest hydroelectric project in Upper Subansiri in Arunachal Pradesh (AR) to reduce the adverse effects of Chinese dam.
- Also, India is moving three stalled hydro projects in AP for possible allocation to National Hydroelectric Power Corporation after recommendations of evaluation committee and in-principle permission by Ministry of Power.
- China plans to construct 60,000MW hydropower project on YarlungZangbo (Brahmaputra) at Medog on border with Arunachal.
- After construction, China plans to divert Brahmaputra water from the project to its northern arid region.
- Three more projects i.e., 640 MW project at Dagu, 710 MW project at Bayu & 800 MW project at Zhongyu is in advance stage of planning.

Concerns associated with increasing Chinese infrastructure

- Impact lower riparian states, particularly India including environmental consequences.
- Diversion of water could strain India's agricultural need in northeast region.
- Use of water infrastructure as a form of territorial demarcation and control.
- Causes flood like situation in Assam and AR.

About Brahmaputra River

- It originates from Kailash ranges of Himalayas. After flowing through Tibet, it enters India through AP and flows through Assam and Bangladesh before joining Bay of Bengal.
- It accounts for around 30 percent of India's freshwater resources and 40 percent of its whole hydropower potential.
- Tributaries: Subansiri, Borgong, Dhansiri(North) Manas, etc on North bank; and Noadehing, Buridehing, Desang, Dikhow, Bhogdoi etc on South Bank.

1.37. INDIA-BANGLADESH FRIENDSHIP PIPELINE TO START SUPPLYING DIESEL TO BANGLADESH FROM JUNE.

- The India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline Project, signed in 2018, will connect Siliguri in West Bengal in India and Parbatipur in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh.
- The Friendship pipeline from India will start supplying diesel to Bangladesh from June.
- The 131.5 kilometer long pipeline has been constructed for importing diesel from India, 126.5 km of which is in Bangladesh and 5 km in India. The IBFPL project aims to facilitate the transportation of imported fuel oil and reduce its transport costs for Bangladesh.
- **Pre-commissioning of Diesel Imports** The pre-commissioning of diesel imports through this pipeline is currently underway. The international pipeline will carry diesel from the Siliguri based marketing terminal of the Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) to Parbatipur depot of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).
- The pipeline has a capacity of one million metric tonne per annum (MMTPA) and is being built under grant assistance from the government of India.
- It will enable fuel oil products to be exported from India's Siliguri Marketing Terminal in West Bengal State to Bangladesh.
- **Dhaka-Delhi agreement on fuel oil**- According to the Dhaka-Delhi agreement, fuel oil would be transported to Bangladesh for 15 years through the pipeline in the first phase and the term would be extended on the consensus of the countries.

1.38. UNION TOURISM MINISTRY PARTICIPATES IN FITUR.

- FITUR is one of the world's largest international travel exhibitions at Madrid

- Ministry of Tourism, Government of India is participating in FITUR from **18th to 22nd January in Madrid** which is one of the world's largest international travel exhibitions.
- India's participation at FITUR is significant to step up the recovery of inbound tourism to pre-pandemic levels.
- Ministry of Tourism has taken a space of 253 sq. mtr., with over 30 participants co-exhibiting with the India Pavilion to participate in the Exhibition.
- Incredible India organized various Culture Performances, Yoga Sessions, Mehndi and Bollywood Dance Performances.

1.39. INDIA CONSIDERS FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF 13A IN LANKA CRITICAL.

- India considers the full implementation of the 13th Amendment in Sri Lanka "critical" for achieving reconciliation with the minority Tamil community, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said recently.

History

- In 1987, India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement to implement the 13th amendment of the Sri Lankan constitution.
- According to the agreement, the Sri Lankan Government will provide powers to the Tamil community in the country.
- According to India, 13A is essential for the Sri Lankan Government to reconcile with the Tamil community in the country.

What is 13A?

- 13A is the 13th amendment of the Sri Lankan constitution.
- The 13A provides for the devolution of power to the Tamil community.
 - Tamilians are the minority in the country of Sri Lanka.
- The Tamil community in the country is demanding a separate state. In 1987, with the Indian Union Government's efforts, the Sri Lankan Government agreed to increase the powers of Tamilians in the country through 13A. However, **13A was not implemented.**

History

- Sri Lanka has had a long history of failed negotiations to end the Tamil claim of discrimination by allowing some form of political autonomy.
- An Indian effort in 1987 that created the system of a joint provincial council for the Tamil-dominated north and east faltered as the Tamils claimed it fell short of full autonomy.
 - Tamils say that not enough power had been devolved to the provincial councils to make them meaningful.
- President Wickremesinghe himself tried an aborted constitutional effort between 2015-19 which too came to be scuttled by the hardline majority politicians.
- The Tamils put forward their demand for autonomy since gaining independence from Britain in 1948 which from the mid-70s turned into a bloody armed conflict.
- Over the years, the Sri Lankan government has been aggressive against Tamilian groups following its war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE ran a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern provinces of the island nation for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

1.40. GLOBE AT NIGHT CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM REVEALS RAPID INCREASE IN LIGHT POLLUTION AROUND WORLD.

- Globe at Night, an international citizen-science campaign, study has highlighted that:
 - Night sky brightness has increased by 7-10% per year from artificial light between 2011-22.
 - Visibility of stars in night sky is declining by 10% per year because of light pollution.
- **Light pollution**, also known as photo pollution, is the presence of anthropogenic light in night environment.
- Impact of Light Pollution: Interferes with astronomical research, disrupts ecosystems, threat to nocturnal wildlife especially birds etc.
- **Skyglow** is a form of light pollution characterized by diffuse illumination of night sky.

- Easily visible over cities, it doesn't include natural light sources such as moon and visible individual stars.

1.41. INDIA, EGYPT ELEVATES BILATERAL TIES TO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP.

- Discussions on India-Egypt relationship were held during Egyptian President's visit as a Chief Guest at India's 74th Republic Day Celebrations.

Important outcomes

- Four elements of strategic partnership include political, defence and security; economic engagement; scientific and academic collaboration; and cultural and people-to-people contacts.
- Both sides signed five MoUs covering culture, cooperation on youth matters, cyber security, information and technology and public broadcasting.
- Both sides reiterated support for Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). India and Egypt are founding partners of NAM along with Yugoslavia, Ghana, and Indonesia.
- Egypt is considering designating a special area of land for Indian Industries at Suez Canal Economic Zone.
 - Suez Canal is one of the busiest commerce routes (facilitating 12% of world trade every day) in world, which links Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea.
 - It separates African continent from Asia and is the fastest crossing from Atlantic Ocean to Indian Ocean.
- Both sides called for 'zero tolerance' for terrorism.
- Both sides set a target of Increasing annual bilateral trade from \$7 billion (2021-22) to \$12 billion over next five years

1.42. UKRAINE'S ODESSA DESIGNATED AS WORLD HERITAGE IN DANGER SITE

- The UNESCO of the United Nations presents the tag of World Heritage in Danger. To protect the sites from catastrophic damages, UNESCO designates them as World Heritage in Danger sites. Presently the list has 55 such sites. Recently, the ODESSA of Ukraine was added to the list.
- Russian forces are conducting frequent air strikes in Ukraine. So, the world heritage site Odessa is in danger. Now that UNESCO has made it a World Heritage Site in Danger, United Nations will now allocate funds to protect the site.

Odessa of Ukraine

- The site is located near the Black Sea and is 500 km from the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv.
- Empress Catherine founded ODESSA. She took away the region from the Ottoman Empire in 1794. The name ODESSA is Greek. Catherine gave religious freedom to the people in ODESSA and also offered them lands.
- No taxes were imposed on the port. This expanded the trade in Odessa attracting several foreign merchants.

Attractions in Odessa

- The city has a giant stairway. There are 200 steps down the staircase. It was built in 1837. The staircase is the entrance point to Odessa
- Vorontsovskiy Palace is a beautiful Turkish Castle in Odessa

1.43. INDIA ISSUES NOTICE TO PAKISTAN TO MODIFY INDUS WATERS TREATY.

- India issued the notice in view of Pakistan's noncompliance in resolving disputes over Kishenganga (on Kishenganga River, tributary of Jhelum) and Ratle hydropower projects (on Chenab River), both in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - India is allowed to construct hydroelectric power facilities on tributaries of Jhelum and Chenab rivers with certain restrictions under IWT, 1960.
- Dispute redressal mechanism provided under Article IX of IWT is a graded mechanism. It's a 3-level mechanism.
- World Bank's (WB) role is largely procedural and limited to designating neutral experts (NE) or chair of **Court of Arbitration (CoA)**.
- India has invoked Article XII (3) of treaty i.e., a provision to amend Treaty. Treaty can be amended or terminated only with duly ratified treaty between two countries.

Development of dispute

- **2015:** Pakistan sought appointment of NE to examine technical objections to Kishanganga and Ratle HEPs.
- **2016:** Pakistan approached WB for CoA constitution.
- Whereas, India asked for appointment of NE and argued that Pakistan's request for CoA violated graded mechanism of dispute resolution in Treaty.
- **2022:** WB resumes process of appointing NE and Chairman for CoA.
- IWT, water sharing treaty, signed in 1960 by India and Pakistan with WB as a third-party guarantor. It delimits the rights and obligations of both countries concerning the use of waters on Indus River System. It allocates Western Rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan and Eastern Rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) to India.

1.44. UNSC DOES NOT REFLECT TODAY'S REALITIES, IS PARALYSED, SAYS UNGA PRESIDENT.

- UNGA President, during his visit to India, underscored the shortcomings of UNSC and asserted for need of reforms in it. His remarks came in the backdrop of Russia, a permanent member of UNSC, attacking Ukraine.
- UNSC, established by UN Charter in 1945, is one of the six principal organs of UN with a primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.
 - The United Nations (UN) has six main organs. Five of them — **the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the Secretariat** — are based at UN Headquarters in New York. The sixth, the International Court of Justice, is located at The Hague in the Netherlands.
- UNSC is composed of 15 members.
 - Five permanent members: China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
 - Under UN Charter, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions.
 - Security Council has power to make binding decisions on member states.
- Issues with UNSC
 - UNSC does not represent contemporary world.
 - Inadequate regional representation. Developing countries are underrepresented, and there are no permanent members from either Africa or Latin America.
 - Lack of transparency and efficiency in decision-making process.
 - Misuse of veto power by permanent members. Russia has vetoed UNSC resolutions on Ukraine.
- India's key demand on reforms include
 - Permanent membership to G4 members (India, Germany, Brazil, Japan and India).
 - Abolition of veto.
 - Equitable geographical representation.
- The Intergovernmental Negotiations framework or IGN is a group of nation-states working within the United Nations to further reform of the UNSC. The IGN is composed of several different international organizations, namely:
 - **African Union** (55 member states)
 - **G4 nations** (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan)
 - **Uniting for Consensus Group (UfC), also known as the "Coffee Club"** (it aims to counter the bids for permanent seats proposed by G4 nations, includes Pakistan, Turkey, Canada, Spain and Italy)
 - **L69 Group** of Developing Countries (it includes developing countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific)
 - **Arab League** (six members: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria) and
 - **Caribbean Community** (a group of 15 member countries called **CARICOM**)

ART AND CULTURE

1.45. LESS THAN 7% PROTECTED MONUMENTS HAVE SECURITY COVER, SAYS REPORT.

- The government is working to boost surveillance at all **3,693 centrally protected monuments (CPMs)** across the country with the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** launching a study on security needs of the monuments in collaboration with **IIT-Delhi**.
- The project comes on the back of acute shortage of security personnel at centrally protected monuments with the ASI recently telling the parliamentary committee probing the matter that **security guards were posted at only 248 of the 3,693 CPMs**. That comes to a dismal 6.7 per cent security coverage.
- The committee notes with dismay that out of the total requirement of 7,000 personnel for the protection of monuments, the government could provide only 2,578 security personnel at 248 locations due to budgetary constraints," the report of the committee noted.
- The panel observed that budgetary constraints should not be an excuse for not providing security guards to protect India's rich cultural heritage.
- It is the bounden duty of the government to protect our heritage sites. A budget should be provided to appoint 7,000 personnel for the protection of the monuments or as per the study conducted by IIT-Delhi.
- There is ban on construction within 100 metres of a Centrally protected monument and regulated construction within 100-200 metres under the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958**.
- The Act protects monuments and sites that are over **100 years old**.

1.46. ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA DISCOVERED TWO 1200-YEAR-OLD MINIATURE VOTIVE STUPAS AT NALANDA.

Why in news?

- Votive stupas (offered in fulfillment of a vow) were discovered near Sarai Tila mound within premises of Nalanda Mahavihara in Bihar.
- Stupa, Sanskrit for heap, is a mound-like (hemispherical) burial structure containing relics of Buddhist monks.
 - E.g. Sanchi Stupa built over Buddha relics.

Architectural features of Stupa

- A hemispherical mound or anda's shaped dome
- A square railing or harmika
- Central pillar supporting a triple-umbrella form (chattra), representing three jewels of Buddhism. >
- Enclosure wall with decorated gateways (toranas) at cardinal directions.
- A circular terrace (medhi) for ritual circumambulation.

About Nalanda Mahavihara

- It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with archaeological remains of a monastic and scholastic institution from 3rd century BCE to 13th century CE.
- Gautam Buddha as well as Mahavira stayed at Nalanda.
- Other famous scholars at Nalanda Nagarjuna, Dharmapala, Dinnaga, JinamitraSantaraksita etc.
- Imminent pilgrim monks like Hiuen Tsang and I-tsing also visited.
- It prospered under Gupta Dynasty, Harsha of Kannauj and Pala Dynasty.
- It includes stupas, shrines, viharas (residential and educational buildings) and important art works in stucco, stone and metal.

1.47. MAKAR SANKRANTI FESTIVAL CELEBRATED ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

Why in news?

- Makar Sankranti is an important festival that marks the day the sun transits into Makara Rashi or Capricorn zodiac. As per the solar calendar, it falls on 14 January every year.
- The festival also marks the end of winter and the beginning of a new harvest season. It has both seasonal and religious significance. It is considered one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu calendar.

- Makar Sankranti is celebrated in different ways across India under different names, each region having its unique customs and traditions.
- In **Tamil Nadu**, it is celebrated as **Thai Pongal**, where the festival is celebrated for four days, with the first day being Bhogi Pongal, the second day being Surya Pongal, the third day being Mattu Pongal and the fourth day being Kaanum Pongal.
- In **Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Goa, Karnataka, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, and Uttar Pradesh**, it is celebrated as **Makar Sankranti**.
- In **Gujarat and Rajasthan**, it is celebrated as **Uttarayana**, and people take a dip in holy rivers and perform rituals to mark the beginning of the sun's northward journey.
- In **Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab**, it is celebrated as **Lohri**, where people light bonfires and perform folk dances around them.
- In **Assam**, it is celebrated as **Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu**, where people light bonfires and feast on traditional food.

1.48. GANGASAGAR MELA DRAWS TO A CLOSE.

Why in news?

- The Gangasagar Mela is organised **during Makar Sankranti** every year.
- On the occasion of Makar Sankranti, thousands of pilgrims, seers & tourists take a **holy dip in the confluence of Ganga and Bay of Bengal**, to mark this event.
- They also offer **prayers at the Kapil Muni Temple**.
- On the day of Makar Sankranti (January 14), when the sun makes a transition to Capricorn from Sagittarius, it is said that the bath becomes a holy source of salvation.
- Gangasagar is the **second largest congregation of pilgrims**, devotees and enthusiasts across the country after the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar.

1.49. JALLIKATTU CELEBRATIONS BEGIN IN MADURAI.

Why in news

- Recently, the bull-taming sport of Jallikattu, also known as 'EruThazhuvuthal' and 'Mancuvirattu', has begun in full swing in the Palamedu of Madurai district.
- This traditional event, which is a part of the Pongal celebrations and is held on the day of Mattu Pongal, is a sport where a bull is let loose among a crowd, and participants attempt to take control of the bull by holding on to its hump for as long as they can.
- The sport is held in various locations across the state, including Avaniyapuram, Palamedu, and Alanganallur.
- This year, over 9,690 bulls and 5,399 tamers have registered online for participating in the Jallikattu.
- **Mann Kuthal Process**
- Before the Jallikattu event, the '**Mann Kuthal**' process takes place where bulls are trained to develop their skills by digging their horns in the wet earth. The bulls are prepared to attack when someone tries to catch their hump.
- The sport is a traditional way of preserving pure breed native bulls for the peasant community. Currently, cattle breeding has become an artificial process. The conservationists argue that Jallikattu is the best way to protect the male animals which otherwise are used only for meat.

1.50. THIRUVALLUVAR DAY OBSERVED TO MARK THE BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE POET.

- Thiruvalluvar Day observed on 15 January as a part of Pongal celebrations to mark his birth anniversary.
- He is also known as Valluvar.
- He was a Tamil poet-saint and philosopher.
- It is believed that he was born in Mylapore, a neighbourhood in present-day Chennai and flourished between 4th century and 6th century.
- In early 16th century, a temple was built within Ekambareswarar temple complex in Mylapore and it was dedicated to Thiruvalluvar.
- In 1976, a temple-memorial called ValluvarKotam was built in Chennai and houses one of largest auditoriums in Asia.

- 133-foot tall statue of Thiruvalluvar stands at Kanyakumari.
- He is best known for his work — **Tirukkural**, a collection of couplets on politics, love, ethics, and matters concerning economics.

1.51. PURANA QILA: ASI REOPENS TRENCHES EXCAVATED EARLIER TO FIND 'FIRST OCCUPANTS'

- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) undertook excavations in 1969-73, 2013-14 and 2017-18.
- Identified as ancient settlement of Indraprastha (capital of Pandavas), a continuous habitation of 2,500 years was established in earlier excavations.
- Findings from earlier excavation include:
 - Painted grey ware from 900 BC, an earthen pottery sequence from Maurya to Shunga, Kushana, Gupta, Rajput, Delhi Sultanate, and Mughal periods.
 - Artefacts such as sickles, parers, terracotta toys, kiln-burnt bricks, beads, terracotta figurines, and seals.
- Purana Qila was **built** by **Mughal Emperor Humayun** as a part of his new city of Dinpanah in the 16th century.
- Apart from archaeology, textual sources such as **Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazal** (16th century), mention that fort was built at site of Indraprastha.

Architectural features of Purana Qila Complex

- **Qila-e-Kuhna mosque**
 - Built by Sher Shah. It reflects a transitional stage between architecture of Lodhis and Mughals.
- **Sher Mandal**
 - Built by Sher Shah, an octagonal structure built in red sandstone and decorated with white and black marble inlay.
 - Humayun made it into a library and died after falling from the steps of this structure.
- Other structures
 - A Baoli for managing water supply and a hammam (bathhouse) is present.
 - **Lal Darwaza** and **Khairul Manazil** are considered part of this complex.
 - Three majestic Gateways: Bada Darwaja, Humayun Darwaza, and TalaqiDarwaza.
 - Wide moat linked to river Yamuna.

1.52. ASSAM: HISTORIC THREE-DAY JONBEEL MELA WITH DISTINCTIVE BARTER SYSTEM ORGANISED.

- This mela is organised annually on the occasion of Magh Bihu (celebrated in the mid-January), in the Morigaon District of Assam.
- The three-day annual event is organised under the traditional king of the **Tiwa tribe** called GobhaDeoraja that once ruled the area.
- **Magh Bihu** is a traditional harvest festival of Assam.
- It has kept alive the system of barter as a means of procuring goods.
- Tribal communities like Tiwa, Karbi, Khasi and Jaintia from nearby hills participate in the fair.

1.53. PYRAMID-LIKE AHOM BURIAL MOUNDS IN ASSAM TO VIE FOR UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE TAG.

- Maidams are the burial mounds of Ahom kings, queens and nobles.
- Though Maidams are found in all districts of Upper Assam, **Charaideo**, first capital of Ahoms was necropolis of almost all Ahom Royals.
- Maidam consists of three major features:
 - A vault or chamber (to keep mortal remains).
 - A hemispherical earthen mound covering the chamber with a brick structure (Chow-chali) for annual offering over it.
 - An octagonal boundary wall having an arched gateway on its west.
- Their sizes vary from a modest mound to a hillock, depending upon the power, status and resources of the person buried.

- Special officer, known as ChangrungPhukan, were appointed for construction of all the civil works including royal Maidam.
- Ahom kings used to be buried along with their treasures and articles of their day-to-day use.
- Presently, there are 40 UNESCO WHS in India: 32 cultural (none in the northeast), 7 natural and 1 mixed type.

About Ahom Kingdom

- Traditionally and culturally Ahoms are members of Great Tai (Tai-Yai) group of people.
- They entered upper Assam region of Brahmaputra Valley through Patkai hills under leadership of ChaulungSinkapha, first king of the Ahom dynasty. He established capital at Charaideo.
- LachitBorphukan was one of the greatest war generals who fought against Mughals.

1.54. GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH NAMED "SHAHEED VEER NARAYAN SINGH INTERNATIONAL CRICKET STADIUM" IN RAIPUR TO HONOUR HIM.

About Veer Narayan Singh

- He was a landlord from Sonakhan, Chhattisgarh.
- He spearheaded the 1857 war in Chhattisgarh. He is also considered as "The 1st Chhattisgarhi freedom fighter".
- His ancestors were from the Gond tribe. Later on, they changed their affiliation from the Gond to the Binjhar tribe.

1.55. MONUMENTS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE LIST NEEDS RATIONALISATION: ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL.

- Currently, India has 3695 MNI under Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958.
- Archaeological Survey of India is responsible for protection, conservation and maintenance of such monuments.

Criteria for declaration of monument as national importance

- Ancient monument or archaeological site is not less than 100 years old.
- It has special historical, archaeological or artistic interest.
- Interested public do not have major objections to declare them as of national importance.

Issues with present list of MNI

- Selection Errors: Around quarter of current MNI may not have national importance.
 - Minor monuments considered as MNI (Example -Kos Minars, graves of British officers).
 - Movable antiquities treated as MNI (Standalone antiquities like sculpture pieces, statues, cannons etc.).
 - Untraceable monuments still being considered as MNI (Around 50 monuments missing).
- Over 60% monuments located in five states i.e., UP, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, MP and Maharashtra.
- Inadequate expenditure on conservation and maintenance of MNI.
- Source of problems is absence of definition of term 'national importance' and lack of prescribed substantive process/criteria for identifying MNI in AMASR Act or National Policy for Conservation 2014.

Recommendations of Report

- ASI should come up with substantive criteria for declaring MNI.
- Amend AMASR Act or introduce executive order for defining national importance.
- Handover monuments of local importance to states.
- Remove standalone antiquities from the list of MNI.
- De-notify untraceable and minor monuments.
- Add new monuments to address geographical imbalance.
- Increase fund allocation for protecting MNI.

1.56. MUGHAL GARDENS AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN ARE NOW AMRIT UDYAN.

- The Mughal Gardens at Rashtrapati Bhavan will now be known as Amrit Udyan, according to an official statement.
- Spread over 15 acres, Amrit Udyan has often been portrayed as the soul of the presidential palace.
- Amrit Udyan draws its inspiration from the Mughal Gardens in Jammu and Kashmir, the gardens around the Taj Mahal and even miniature paintings of India and Persia, according to the Rashtrapati Bhavan's website.

History

- In 1911, the British administration moved its capital from Calcutta to Delhi, involving huge construction to create spaces for its top officials including construction of the Viceroy's House, which today is known as Rashtrapati Bhavan, with a garden.
- While the initial plans involved creating a garden with traditional British architecture, the wife of the then Viceroy wanted something in the Mughal style and urged the planners to create a garden in that style.

Mughal Gardens, now Amrit Udyan's inspiration came from a book

- It is believed that the wife of the then Viceroy, who wanted Rashtrapati Bhavan to be adorned by a Mughal-style garden was inspired by the book **Gardens of the Great Mughals** (1913) by Constance Villiers-Stuart as well as her visits to Mughal gardens in Lahore and Srinagar.
- While the layout of the Amrit Udyan was in place by 1917, the planting of flora only began in late 1928 and the responsibility was given to Director of horticulture William Mustoe, who planted the garden and was especially skilled at growing roses and introduced more than 250 different varieties of hybrid roses gathered from every corner of the world.

All Presidents leave their touch to Mughal Gardens

- All the presidents who have stayed in the house have left their personal touch on the monument.
 - **C Rajagopalachari**, who was the last Governor General of India, made a political statement during a period of food shortage in India when he ploughed the lands and dedicated a section of the garden to food grains. Today, it is known as the **Nutrition Garden**, popularly known as **Dalikhana**.
 - **President R Venkatraman** added a cactus garden.
 - **President APJ Abdul Kalam** added many theme-based gardens: from the musical garden to the spiritual garden.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

DAYS TO REMEMBER**1.57. WORLD HINDI DAY**

- It is celebrated every year (on January 10th) to promote the use of Hindi Language around the world.
- It is also the day when Hindi was spoken for the first time in UNGA (in 1949).
- It was on this day in 1975 that the first World Hindi Conference was held in Nagpur.
- It is **different from National Hindi Day** which is celebrated every year on September 14 to mark adaptation of Hindi (written in Devanagari script) as official language by Constituent Assembly on September 14, 1949

1.58. THEME FOR NATIONAL SCIENCE DAY 2023 RELEASED

- Union minister Jitendra Singh on Monday released the theme for the "National Science Day 2023", titled "Global Science for Global Wellbeing".
- The theme indicates India's emerging global role and rising visibility in the international arena.
- The theme was in sync with India assuming the presidency of G-20, as it becomes the voice of the global south that is the developing countries of Asia, Africa and South America.
- The National Science Day is celebrated every year on 28 February to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by Indian physicist Sir C. V. Raman on 28 February 1928.
- Dr C V Raman got the Nobel prize for discovery of 'Raman Effect' in 1930.
- **Department of science and technology** serves as the nodal agency for celebrating this occasion.

1.59. 75TH INDIAN ARMY DAY OBSERVED ON 15 JANUARY 2023.**Why in news?**

- Every year on January 15, India celebrates its Army Day and this year marks the 75th anniversary of the Indian army day.
- It is the day on which Field Marshal Kodandera M. Cariappa (then a Lieutenant General) took over as the first Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from the last British Commander-in-Chief of India, General Fransis Bucher in the year 1949.
- Parades, medal presenting and other ceremonies are organized to celebrate the Army Day.
- With "Service before self" as its motto, the Indian Army is the largest component of the Indian Armed Forces.

More on the news

- Originally, the Indian army was formed under the British rule on April 1, 1895 and was called as British Indian Army.
- After India got its independence in the year 1947, it was only on January 15, 1949, when the country got its first Indian chief. Lt Gen K M Carriappa took over as commander-in-chief of the Indian Army in 1949 from General Francis Butcher.
- The transfer of power from the British to India signifies an important moment in the Indian history and is celebrated as Army Day.
- This day also honors the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for the country.

1.60. PM, HOME MINISTER GREET NDRF ON ITS 18TH RAISING DAY.

- National Disaster Response Force Day is observed on January 19 by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)
- The 18th National Disaster Response Force Day was celebrated on January 19, 2023 by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).
- The day has been celebrated on this day since 2006 when the rescue force was officially formed.
- The specialised, multi-skilled rescue force is made up of battalions from the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the Assam Rifles.
- The NDRF is the primary agency responsible for conducting rescue operations during disasters like drowning, building collapses, landslides, devastating floods, earthquakes and cyclones.

About NDRF

- With 12 battalions and 13,000 NDRF personnel spread across the country, the NDRF has managed to save 1.44 lakh human lives and evacuated more than 7 lakh stranded individuals in its 17 years of service.
- In 2021 alone, the NDRF saved 12,000 lives in various rescue operations.

History of NDRF

- India saw a series of natural disasters in the later 1990s and early 2000s.
- These included the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, the Gujarat earthquakes in 2001, and the Mumbai floods in 2005 among others. While Indian Armed Forces were deployed for rescue and recovery missions, there was a need for a dedicated rescue operation-focused response force.
- Therefore, the **Disaster Management Act of 2005** was enacted.
- The act formulated the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as the **apex body** for natural disasters and the **NDRF** as the **specialised rescue force under the NDMA's mandate**.

1.61. PARAKRAMDIWAS 2023 CELEBRATED AS NETAJI SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE BIRTH ANNIVERSARY.

- Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Jayanti or Netaji Jayanti is a national event celebrated in India as ParakramDiwas on January 23 to mark the birth of prominent Indian freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.
- This year nation celebrates 126th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.
 - For the first time, Netaji Jayanti was celebrated as Parakram Divas in 2021 on the occasion of his 124th birthday. In West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tripura, and Assam, it is a recognised holiday.

Importance of ParakramDiwas

- The purpose of the holiday is to recall and honour Netaji's tremendous devotion to the country and his unwavering spirit. Netaji was a prominent nationalist, politician, and freedom fighter. This day has been designated to encourage Indians, especially young people, to aspire to his strength, perseverance, selflessness, and patriotic fervor despite oppression. He oversaw the Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj). He was the founder-head of the Azad Hind Government.

About Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose

- Netaji' was born on January 23, 1897, in Cuttack in Odisha. He acquired a degree in philosophy and was later selected for the Indian Civil Services. He refused to join as he did not want to serve the British Government.
- Later, in 1919, he travelled to England to complete the Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.), finishing fourth in his class with the highest English score. He didn't want to work for the British government; therefore in 1921 he resigned and went back to India.
- **Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das**, who later served as his political mentor, encouraged Netaji to join the Indian National Congress (INC) when he returned to India.
 - Netaji joined the Indian National Congress in 1921.
- He regarded Swami Vivekananda as his spiritual guru and was greatly affected by his ideas.
- Bose was elected president of the All-India Youth Congress in 1923 and later served as president of the Congress in 1938 and 1939.
- During World War II, in Southeast Asia, Netaji formed and led a 5,000-man force known as the **Azad Hind Fauj** (Indian National Army) under the slogan '**Delhi Chalo**'. In order to garner popular support in his home state of Bengal, he also founded a new political party.
- According to government reports, on August 18, 1945, a plane crash near Tohoku, Japanese Taiwan, caused Netaji to suffer third-degree burns. Although the authorities announced his death in 2017, there are still a number of rumors about his whereabouts.
- Netaji started a newspaper called "**Swaraj**".
- He wrote a book called "The Indian Struggle". The book covers the Indian Independence movement between 1920 and 1942.
- The term "Jai Hind" was coined by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.
- With the slogan "Give me blood and I will give you freedom", he awakened the country towards fighting against the British.

1.62. NATIONAL VOTERS DAY CELEBRATED ON JANUARY 25.

- India celebrated its 13th National Voters Day on January 25.

- The first NVD was celebrated in 2011. The Election Commission of India will host the celebrations.
- ECI has released a logo marking the theme of the celebrations. On NVD, the President of India is to present the National Awards in the category of Electoral Practices.
- **Theme of National Voters Day, 2023-** Nothing Like Voting. I Vote for Sure.
- The main objective of celebrating NVD is to create awareness of voting among the citizens.
- On NVD, ECI presents EPICs to the new voters. EPIC is Elector Photo Identity Card.

1.63. WORLD LEPROSY DAY 2023 OBSERVED ON 29TH JANUARY.

- World Leprosy Day (WLD) is celebrated on the last Sunday of January.
- This international day is an opportunity to celebrate people who have experienced leprosy, raise awareness of the disease, and call for an end to leprosy-related stigma and discrimination.
- In India, it is observed on **30th January every year**, coinciding with the death anniversary of **Mahatma Gandhi**.
 - He was deeply committed to the cause of leprosy-affected persons.
- The theme of World Leprosy Day 2023 is “Act Now. End Leprosy.” This year’s theme calls attention to **three key messages**:
 - Elimination is possible: We have the power and tools to stop transmission and defeat this disease.
 - Act now: We need the resources and commitment to end leprosy. Prioritize leprosy elimination.
 - Reach the unreached: Leprosy is preventable and treatable. Suffering from leprosy is needless.

About Leprosy

- It is also known as Hansen’s disease and is a chronic infectious disease caused by **Mycobacterium leprae**.
- The disease affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes.
- It is known to occur at all ages ranging from early childhood to old age. Leprosy is at least 4,000 years old, making it one of the oldest diseases known to humanity.
- It is transmitted via droplets, from the nose and mouth, during close and frequent contact with untreated cases.
 - The disease is not spread through casual contact with a person who has leprosy like shaking hands or hugging, sharing meals or sitting next to each other.
- **Impacts:** Left untreated, the disease may cause progressive and permanent disabilities.
- It is reported from all six WHO Regions; the majority of annual new case detections are from South-East Asia.
 - It is a neglected tropical disease (NTD) which still occurs in more than 120 countries, with more than 200 000 new cases reported every year.
- **Treatment:** It is a curable disease.
 - The currently recommended treatment regimen consists of three drugs: dapsone, rifampicin and clofazimine.
 - The combination is referred to as multi-drug therapy (MDT).

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1.64. 50 ELECTRIC BUSES LAUNCHED IN DELHI WITH SUPPORT UNDER FAME INDIA PHASE II SCHEME OF THE MINISTRY OF HEAVY INDUSTRIES.

About FAME India Phase II:

- **Full name of scheme:** Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India Phase II (FAME India Phase II).
- **Implementing agency:** Department of Heavy Industry.
- **Objective:** Promotion of Electric and hybrid vehicle in the country by offering upfront Incentive on purchase of Electric vehicles and by establishing charging Infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- **Salient features of the scheme:**
 - The scheme with total outlay of Rs 10,000 Crores over the period of three years (2019-20 to 2021-22) will be implemented with effect from 1st April 2019.
 - This scheme is the expanded version of the present scheme titled 'FAME India1 which was launched on 1st April 2015, with total outlay of Rs. 895 crores.
 - Target is to support 10 Lakhs e-2Wheeler, 5 Lakhs e-3Wheelers, 55000 4Wheelers and 7000 Buses.
 - Under the scheme of FAME-II, the demand incentive for e-2W has been increased to Rs. 15,000/KWh from Rs. 10,000/KWh with an increase in cap from 20% to almost 40% of the cost of the vehicle to increase the adoption of e-2W.
 - The phase II of FAME-India Scheme has been extended for a period of two years after 31st March 2022.
- **Benefits:** The scheme will help in addressing the issue of environmental pollution and fuel security.

1.65. MERCURY

Why in News?

- Recently, for the first time, physicists at the University of L'Aquila, Italy have found a complete microscopic understanding of the superconductivity of Mercury.

About Mercury's superconductivity

- **In 1911, Dutch physicist Heike Kamerlingh Onnes discovered superconductivity in mercury.**
- He found that at a very low temperature, called the threshold temperature, solid mercury offers no resistance to the flow of electric current.
- Scientists later classified mercury as a conventional superconductor because its superconductivity could be explained by the concepts of the Bardeen-Cooper-Schrieffer (BCS) theory.
- In BCS superconductors, vibrational energy released by the grid of atoms encourages electrons to pair up, forming so-called Cooper pairs.
- These Copper pairs can move like water in a stream, facing no resistance to their flow, below a threshold temperature.

What is Superconductivity?

- A material can conduct electricity without any resistance. It is observed in many materials when they are cooled below a critical temperature.

What is Mercury?

- **It is a naturally occurring element that is found in air, water and soil.**
- **It is released into the atmosphere through natural processes such as weathering of rocks, volcanic eruptions, geothermal activities, forest fires, etc.**

1.66. WHAT ARE FLOATOVOLTAICS?

About:

- Covering 10% of the world's hydropower reservoirs with 'floatovoltaics' would install electrical capacity equivalent to that provided by all electricity-generating fossil fuel plants in operation worldwide.
- Floatovoltaics, floating solar plants, or FSPV (floating solar photovoltaic) are panel structures that are installed on water bodies like lakes, basins, and reservoirs instead of on solid structures like a roof or terraces.

- The biggest impetus behind the rise of large-scale FSPV has been that it doesn't take up any land space, which could be then used for construction and agriculture.
- **The world's first large-scale FSPV system was installed in 2011, in Napa Valley, California.**

India:

- In recent years, floating solar power plants have become part of India's plans of solar expansion.
- According to a 2020 study by TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute) reservoirs cover **18000 square Kilometer in India and can generate 280 GW through floating solar panels.**
- Currently less than **1% of solar installations are floating.**
- The largest floating solar power plant in India is currently the **Ramagundam in Peddapalli district of Telangana, with a capacity of 100 MW.**
- Currently a plant is being built on the **Narmada' Omkareshwar Dam in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh** is being built with a capacity of 600 MW, which will soon be the **largest floating solar power plant in the world.**
- The project is touted to be worth Rs 3000 crore.
- **What are the benefits of floating solar panels?**
 - The water's cooling effect makes them more efficient than land-based ones;
 - They don't interfere with desert ecosystems; and
 - They keep precious water from evaporating.
 - Even though reservoirs are artificial ecosystems, they provide habitats for wildlife.

1.67. WHAT IS ONE WEEK ONE LAB CAMPAIGN?

Why in News?

- Recently, the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology launched this campaign at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

About One Week One Lab Campaign:

- The One Week One lab campaign of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), will highlight India's global excellence in **technology, innovation and Start-ups.**
- In this campaign, each of CSIR's 37 constituent laboratories, spread Nationwide, will showcase their legacy, exclusive innovations and technological breakthroughs every successive week.
- During the campaign each CSIR lab shall be organizing week-long events including industry & start-up meet, students connect, society connect, display of technologies, etc.
- The campaign will also focus on **academia and skill development**, where interested students from varying domains get to know about the research activities and facilities of the CSIR laboratories and get a connection with prospects.
- Industries & MSMEs Meets are targeted to establish an understanding between Science and Industry based on the requirement of the society or regional needs and to identify potential industries for co-development of Next Gen technologies and products.
- It will be an opportunity to create networks of Govt- Academia-Industry for faster deliveries and deployments of technologies.

What is CSIR?

- It is the largest research and development (R&D) organisation in India which was set up in 1942.
- It is funded by the **Ministry of Science and Technology**

What is the Structure of the Organisation?

- The Prime Minister of India (Ex-officio) is the President of this organisation.
- **Vice President:** Union Minister of Science and Technology (Ex-officio)
- **Governing Body:** The Director-General is the head of the governing body.\
- The other ex-officio member is the finance secretary (expenditures).

1.68. US FDA GRANTS APPROVAL TO LECANEMAB, AN ALZHEIMER'S DRUG.

- US Food and Drug Administration has granted approval to Alzheimer's drug lecanemab (marketed as Leqembi) that has shown to slow cognitive decline in patients in early stages of the illness.
- Lecanemab aims to slow the progression of disease by removing clumps of beta-amyloid — considered one of the main causes of Alzheimer's disease — from the brain.

What is Alzheimer's?

- Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurologic disorder that causes the brain to shrink (atrophy) and brain cells to die.
- It is the most common cause of dementia — a continuous decline in thinking, behavioral and social skills

1.69. VIRTUAL POWER PLANTS (VPPs).

- Companies including GM, Ford, Google would work together to establish standards for scaling up use of VPPs.
- VPP is a network of decentralized power generating units that pool together thousands of energy resources like electric vehicles (EVs) or electric heaters.
- VPPs use advanced software to react to electricity shortages with techniques like switching households' batteries from charge to discharge mode or prompting electricity-using devices to back off their consumption.
- VPPs will enable grid planners to better manage growing electricity demand and make sure grid stays reliable even in extreme weather challenges and aging infrastructure.

1.70. C/2022 E3(ZTF) COMET.

- Recently discovered (by Palomar Observatory, USA) Comet will appear for the first time in 50,000 years.
- Comets are frozen leftovers from formation of solar system (4.6 billion years ago) composed of dust, rock, and ices.
- When a comet's orbit brings it close to Sun, it heats up and spews dust and gases (forming a tail) into a giant glowing head larger than most planets.
- Billions of comets are orbiting our Sun in **Kuiper Belt** (called short-period comets) and even more distant **Oort Cloud** (called long-period comets).

1.71. INDIA AIMS TO SEND THREE PERSONS TO 6000 METERS BELOW SEA LEVEL SAYS MINISTRY OF EARTH SCIENCES (MOES).

Why in news?

- As part of Samudrayaan Mission, under MoES, a self-propelled manned submersible (MATSYA 6000) will carry three persons to a depth of 6000 meters for exploration of deep-sea resources.
- MATSYA 6000 is being developed by National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai.
 - It has an endurance of 12 hours under normal operation and 96 hours in case of emergency.
 - It is being developed under Deep Ocean Mission (DOM).

About Deep Ocean Mission

- DOM aims to explore deep ocean for resources and develop deep sea technologies for sustainable use of ocean resources. It will be a mission mode project to support Blue Economy initiatives.
 - Blue Economy is sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods etc. Its size in India is about 4% of the GDP.
- DOM (MoES as nodal ministry) was approved in 2021 and will be implemented over a period of 5 years.
- **Major components of DOM**
 - Development of Technologies for Deep Sea Mining, and Manned Submersible.
 - Development of Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services
 - Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity.
 - Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration.
 - Energy and freshwater from Ocean.
 - Advanced Marine station for Ocean Biology

1.72. NASA'S JAMES WEBB TELESCOPE DISCOVERS ITS FIRST EARTH-SIZED EXOPLANET.

Why in news?

- The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) discovered its first exoplanet, a planet that orbits another star, formally classified as LHS 475 b, which is reportedly almost the exact size of Earth, clocking in at 99% of Earth's diameter.
- The planet is rocky and almost precisely the same size as Earth, but orbits around its star in only two days.
- LHS 475 b, located in the constellation Octans, is only 41 light-years away.
- Researchers used NASA's James Webb Space Telescope's Near-Infrared Spectrograph (NIRSpec) to observe exoplanet LHS 475 b on 31st August 2022. The team's results were presented at a press conference of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) on 11th January 2023.

Key Points:

- The team chose to examine this target with Webb after carefully reviewing targets of interest from NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), which highlighted the planet's existence.
- With just two transit observations, Webb's Near-Infrared Spectrograph (NIRSpec) was able to capture the planet clearly.
- Only Webb is able to characterise the atmospheres of Earth-sized exoplanets among all other active telescopes.
- By examining the transmission spectrum of the planet, scientists made an effort to assess what is included in its atmosphere.
- The precise light curve of Webb almost immediately showed the planet's two-day orbital period.
- LHS 475 b is closer to its star than any other planet in the solar system. Its red dwarf star is less than half the temperature of the Sun, therefore researchers project it still could support an atmosphere.

1.73. NASA'S JAMES WEBB TELESCOPE FINDS STAR FORMATION IN A DYNAMIC CLUSTER-REPORT.**Why in news**

- NASA's James Webb telescope has found a star formation (Called NGC 346) in a dynamic cluster that lies within SMC.
- NGC 346 is located in the Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC), a dwarf galaxy close to our Milky Way. The SMC contains lower concentrations of elements heavier than hydrogen or helium, which astronomers call metals, compared to the Milky Way.
- Since dust grains in space are composed mostly of metals, scientists expected there would be low amounts of dust, and that it would be hard to detect. New data from Webb reveals the opposite.
- Visible to naked eye from southern hemisphere, SMC is smaller of the two irregular galaxies that make up to Magellanic Clouds.
- These two galaxies orbit the Milky Way once every 1,500 million years, and each other once every 900 million years.
- Magellanic Clouds were formed at about same time as Milky Way Galaxy, approximately 13 billion years ago.

1.74. ISRO PUSHING VENUS MISSION 'SHUKRAYAAN' TO 2031?

- ISRO stated that it is yet to receive approval from Indian government for Venus mission, as a result mission may be delayed until 2031.
- In 2031, Earth and Venus would be aligned in manner that it would require minimum amount of propellant for spacecraft to enter Venus orbit.
- Shukrayaan I will be an **orbiter mission**. Its scientific payloads include high-resolution synthetic aperture radar and ground-penetrating radar.
- Mission is expected to study Venus's geological and volcanic activity, emissions on ground, wind speed, cloud cover, and other planetary characteristics from an elliptical orbit.
- **Mission Challenges:** Venus has crushing air pressure at its surface, which is 90 times more than Earth's, and its atmosphere is **highly toxic** and filled with sulphuric acid that causes a powerful greenhouse effect.
- Other mission to Venus: **Venera program** (Russia); **Akatsuki project** (Japan); **VERITAS** i.e., Venus Emissivity, Radio Science, InSAR, Topography, and Spectroscopy, Mariner 2 and Magellan (NASA); **EnVision mission** (Europe) etc.

About Venus

- Venus is **second planet** from Sun and **sixth** in solar system in size and mass.
- Often referred to as **Earth's twin**. Both planets are almost alike in size, density and gravity.
- At 850 degrees Fahrenheit, it is **hottest planet in solar system**.
- It **rotates on its axis backward**, compared to most of other planets in solar system.

1.75. CANADIAN AND IISC ASTRONOMERS DETECT RADIO SIGNAL IN DISTANT GALAXY USING GIANT METREWAVE RADIO TELESCOPE (GMRT).

- Astronomers from McGill University (Canada) and Indian Institute of Science (MSc), Bengaluru used data from GMRT to detect a **radio signal** originating from **atomic hydrogen** in an extremely distant galaxy at redshift $z=1.29$.
 - **Redshift** represents signal's wavelength change depending on the object's location and movement.
 - A **greater value of z indicates a farther object**.
- Atomic hydrogen is the basic fuel required for star formation in a galaxy.
 - When hot ionised gas from surrounding medium of a galaxy falls onto universe, gas cools and forms atomic hydrogen.
 - This then becomes molecular hydrogen and eventually leads to formation of stars.
- Detection was made possible by **gravitational lensing phenomenon**.
 - In **gravitational lensing**, light emitted by source is bent due to presence of another massive body between target galaxy and observer, effectively resulting in magnification of signal.

About GMRT

- It is an instrument for studying astrophysical phenomena, ranging from nearby Solar system to edge of observable Universe, at low radio frequencies.
- It is operated by National Centre of Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), which is part of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.
- GMRT is located in Junnar near Pune.

1.76. MEITY LAUNCHES TECHNOLOGY FOR AIR QUALITY MONITORING SYSTEM (AI-AQMS v1.0).

- Under the 'National Programme on Electronics and ICT applications in Agriculture and Environment (AgriEnIcs)'– the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (**C-DAC**), in collaboration with TeXMIN, **ISM, Dhanbad** has developed an outdoor air quality monitoring station to monitor environmental pollutants.
- It will monitor parameters like **PM 1.0, PM 2.5, PM 10.0, SO2, NO2, CO, O2, ambient temperature, relative humidity, etc.**, for continuous air quality analysis of the environment.
- The new Air Quality Monitoring System (AI-AQMS v1.0) will soon be available for a wider market as the new technology is already transferred to JM EnviroLab for further commercialization and deployment in different mining and cement industries.
- (MeitY) also **launched the technology for biosensing systems** for the **detection of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals in aquatic ecosystems** for qualitative and quantitative analysis of EDC content in water bodies.

About EDC:

- Endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) are substances in the environment (natural– air, soil, or water) or manufactured (man-made) products that interfere with the normal function of the body's endocrine system.

The most common EDCs are-

- Bisphenol A (BPA) – used to make certain plastics and epoxy resins
- Dioxins – a byproduct in herbicide production and paper bleaching
- Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) – used in a non-stick pan, paper and textile coatings
- Phthalates – used to make plastics more flexible
- Phytoestrogens – found in plants that have hormone-like activity, such as tofu or soy milk
- Triclosan – found in some anti-microbial and personal care products

- Endosulfan – an organochlorine insecticide that caused health hazards in the state of Kerala.

1.77. WHAT IS A 'PANTRANSCRIPTOME'?

- A new study published in the journal Nature Methods, has proposed a “pan transcriptome,” which combines a transcriptome and a pangenome — a reference that contains genetic material from a cohort of diverse individuals, rather than just a single linear strand.

About Pan Transcriptome:

- Using a reference genome from a single organism is not reliable and there exists considerable variation in the intra-specie genomes.
- This gave birth to the pan- genomics, which divides the genome of the specie into three parts, core genome, dispensable genome, and unique genes.
- **Transcriptome** represents all the RNA molecules present in a specie or in an organism.
- Building a pan-transcriptome is necessary for studying and analyzing complex genomes and variations between species.

How it works:

- RNA's most commonly recognized function is to translate DNA into proteins, but scientists now understand that the vast majority of RNA does not make proteins, but instead can play roles such as influencing cell structure or regulating genes.
- When evaluating an individual's genomic data for variation, scientists compare the individual's genome to that of a reference made up of a single, linear strand of DNA bases.
- Using a pangenome allows researchers to compare an individual's genome to that of a genetically diverse cohort of reference sequences all at once, sourced from individuals representing a diversity of biogeographic ancestry.
- This gives the scientists more points of comparison for which to better understand an individual's genomic variation.

1.78. EUROPE'S MISSION TO JUPITER'S ICY MOONS JUICE SATELLITE IS READY.

- Europe's space mission to icy moons of Jupiter is ready for launch. The final testing of Juice satellite will take place in Toulouse in France.
- Subsequently, the satellite will be shipped to South America. The satellite will be launched in April, according to a report.
- JUICE stands for JUpiterICy moons Explorer mission.
- The spacecraft will make a series of flybys of Jupiter's planet-sized moons - Callisto, Ganymede and Europa. The objective is to ascertain whether Callisto, Ganymede and Europa are habitable or not.
- Juice satellite will undertake a journey of 6.6 billion kilometres that will last 8.5 years. It will reach Jupiter in July, 2031.
- Subsequently, it will undertake 35 flybys around the Callisto, Ganymede and Europa. Finally, it will settle around Ganymede by the end of 2034.
- The **European Space Agency** is heading the project. Aerospace company **Airbus is leading the construction** of JUpiterICy moons Explorer at an estimated cost of £1.4 billion, as per the report.
- In 1610, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilee discovered four major moons of Jupiter -- Callisto, Ganymede, Europa, and Io. Juice will not inspect Io.
- There are 80 moons of Jupiter. International Astronomical Union has given names to 57 of them.
 - Main moons of Jupiter are Callisto, Ganymede, Europa, and Io.
- Scientists are curious to study Jupiter as the planet has one of the largest moon systems in the universe.

1.79. IAEA TASK FORCE REVIEWS FUKUSHIMA WATER DISCHARGE PLAN.

- The International Atomic Energy (IAEA) Task Force established to monitor Japan's plan to discharge treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi NPP has completed its second regulatory review.
- Fukushima is to release radioactive contaminated water which was stored at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant on Japan's east coast due to tsunami.

- Before it is stored, wastewater produced at Fukushima is treated to remove almost all radioactive elements including cobalt 60, strontium 90 and caesium 137.
 - But **tritium**—a radioactive form of hydrogen—is left behind.
- When one of hydrogen atoms in water is replaced by tritium, it forms radioactive tritiated water.
- **Tritiated water** is chemically identical to normal water, which makes separating it from wastewater expensive, energy intensive and time consuming.

1.80. 'BHAROS', MADE-IN-INDIA OPERATING SYSTEM, TESTED.

- BharOS is an AOSP (Android Open-Source Project) based operating system with no Google apps or services.
- The BharOS is an Indian government-funded project to develop a free and open-source operating system (OS) for use in government and public systems.
 - A mobile operating system is a software that is the core interface on a smartphone like Android by Google and iOS by Apple.
- BharOS, a new mobile operating system, focuses on privacy and security. The project aims to reduce the dependence on foreign OS in smartphones and promote the use of locally developed technology. It is a huge leap forward to create an indigenous ecosystem and a self-reliant future.
- BharOS Services are **currently being provided to** organisations that have stringent privacy and security requirements and whose users handle sensitive information that requires confidential communications on restricted apps on mobiles. Such users require access to private cloud services through private 5G networks.
- The BharOS was **developed by** JandK Operations Private Limited (JandKops), which has been incubated by IIT Madras Pravartak Technologies Foundation, a Section 8 (Not for Profit) Company established by IIT Madras.
 - The Foundation is funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, under its National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NMICPS). It aspires to put India on par with those few countries that currently possess such capabilities.
- BharOS comes with No Default Apps (NDA). This means that users are not forced to use apps that they may not be familiar with or that they may not trust. Additionally, this approach allows users to have more control over the permissions that apps have on their device, as they can choose to only allow apps that they trust to access certain features or data on their device.
- In addition, BharOS offers 'Native Over The Air' (NOTA) updates that can help to keep the devices secure.
 - NOTA updates are automatically downloaded and installed on the device, without the need for the user to manually initiate the process. This ensures that the device is always running the latest operating system version, including the latest security patches and bug fixes. With NDA, PASS, and NOTA, BharOS ensures that Indian mobile phones are trustworthy.
- BharOS provides access to trusted apps from organisation-specific Private App Store Services (PASS). A PASS provides access to a curated list of apps that have been thoroughly vetted and have met certain security and privacy standards of organisations. This means users can be confident that the apps they are installing are safe to use and have been checked for any potential security vulnerabilities or privacy concerns.

1.81. ASCI ISSUES NEW DISCLAIMER NORMS FOR TV, DIGITAL ADS.

- Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has updated its Guidelines for Disclaimers made in advertisements.
- Key highlights of new guidelines
 - Companies will now have to ensure disclaimers should be kept to a minimum and avoid long and complex format with large blocks of text and difficult words which can be a deterrent to viewers.
 - Duration and readability of a disclaimer in a television commercial, or other video advertisements on digital platforms, should be clear to the consumers.
 - There should not be more than one disclaimer in a single frame of an ad.
 - For regulatory requirements where the disclaimer exceeds two lines additional hold duration should be accounted for.

About ASCI

- The Advertisement Standards Council of India (hereinafter, “ASCI”) was established in the year 1985 under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.
- It has been defined as a “voluntary, self-regulatory council” which has been registered as a non-profit company.
- The ASCI team consists of a Board of Governors, members of the Consumer Complaints Council and a Secretariat.
- The Board of the ASCI consists of a governor and 16 members, which comprise of members of reputable firms including media agencies, advertisers and other individuals involved with the advertising business.
- It is important to note that the ASCI is not a government body and is not responsible for formulating rules for the general public.
- The Consumer Complaints Council is the body responsible for examining and investigating complaints from consumers and the public at large in relation to any contravention of the Code of Conduct of the News Broadcasting Associations and advertisement ethics.

1.82. COUNTRY’S FIRST SOLAR MISSION LIKELY TO BE LAUNCHED BY JUNE-JULY.

- The Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru handed over the primary payload of the country’s first mission to sun to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for integration with the other payloads on board the satellite.
- The payload handed over on Thursday called ‘**Visible Emission Line Coronagraph**’ (VELC) will be the main payload among seven designed to study various aspects of the sun like its atmosphere, solar wind acceleration and the origin of coronal mass ejection.
- The VELC, which was conceptualised and designed in 15 years, may help in solving one of the main puzzles of solar astrophysics — why the sun’s atmosphere called corona is a million degrees hot even though the surface is just over 5,700 degrees Celsius?
- The VELC can image the solar corona down to 1.05 times the solar radius, which is the closest any such payload has imaged. It can also take these observations roughly 3 times every second, and with a high resolution of 2.5 arc seconds per pixel.

About Aditya L1

- Aditya-L1 is India's first space-based mission to study the Sun. The satellite will be carried by the rocket Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- To get an unobstructed, continuous view of the sun, the satellite will travel to the L1 or Lagrange point between the sun and the earth.
 - Lagrange points — there are five between any two celestial objects — are referred to as parking spots in space because the gravitational pull of the celestial objects equals the force required to keep it in orbit. So, a satellite can stay in Lagrange points between any two celestial objects without expending fuel.
- The Aditya-L1 will carry as many as seven payloads - VELC (visible emission line coronagraph), SUIT (solar ultraviolet imaging telescope), SoLEXS (solar low energy X-ray spectrometer), HEL1OS (high energy L1 orbiting X-ray spectrometer), ASPEX (Aditya solar wind particle experiment), PAPA (plasma analyser package for Aditya), and advanced tri-axial high-resolution digital magnetometers.

1.83. IEEFA PROJECTS EXPONENTIAL GROWTH OF BATTERY STORAGE ASSETS IN INDIA.

- A new report has projected exponential growth in India’s **Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)**. BESS — one of the key emerging technologies in the Indian renewable energy sector — can ensure both peak-time power supply and round-the-clock power to help overcome the intermittent nature of renewable energy.
- As the grid demand is lower during the afternoon, grid-scale batteries would help store this excess solar and supply power to the grid during peak demand hours, which is currently being done by coal-fired power plants.
- The study by **Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA)**, a United States-based think tank, identified seven such upcoming projects in the country.
 - Of these, three are standalone battery storage projects, which means that they can be used according to the requirements of distribution companies.

- Battery energy storage systems provide faster responses for balancing the grid than coal-fired power plants, within a matter of seconds.
- The market for storage assets in India is going to grow exponentially going forward. As the market for these assets develops, technology matures and financing improves, there will be ample investment opportunities.
- International Energy Agency's India Energy Outlook 2021 also projected that India could potentially have 140-200 gigawatt (GW) battery storage capacity, the largest for any country, by 2040.

Initiatives

- The Ministry of Power (MoP) notified bidding guidelines for the procurement and utilisation of BESS March 2022.
- India's draft national electricity plan released in September 2022 highlighted the importance of battery storage in the overall energy mix.
- In June 2021, the Ministry of Power ordered the waiver of interstate transmissions system charges for battery storage and pumped hydro systems commissioned until June 2025.
- The MoP also issued a trajectory of Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO) till 2029-2030 on July 22, 2022 and for the first time, included energy storage obligations trajectories till 2029-30.
- The **Production Linked Incentive scheme** offers incentives for creating a localised value chain for the battery industry. This includes financial allocations of Rs 181 billion for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) batteries under the National Programme on ACC Battery Storage.

Limitations

- Currently, India **does not have a time-of-day pricing structure** that could enable a system of energy arbitrage.
 - Time of day pricing (ToD) structure is one where the cost of electricity depends on the time of the day.
- This pricing structure will help scale up BESS investment by consumers and businesses to invest in BESS to use stored energy during peak hours when Electricity prices increase in a ToD pricing system.
- Also low reserves of Lithium and Cobalt.

1.84. RARE GREEN COMET TO MAKE CLOSEST APPROACH TO EARTH THIS WEEK.

- Green comet is approaching close to Earth after 50,000 years.
 - Comets are frozen remnants of solar system's origin made of ice, rock, and dust.
- Termed as **C/2022 E3 (ZTF)**, Green Comet could be visible with telescopes and binoculars.
- The comet was first spotted in March last year by astronomers through the wide-field survey camera at the Zwicky Transient Facility. It was in Jupiter's orbit at the time and has grown brighter since then.
- The green colour of the comet is thought to arise from presence of diatomic carbon - pairs of carbon atoms that are bound together - in head of comet.
 - Molecule emits green light when excited by ultraviolet rays in solar radiation.
- It could be at a distance of 2.5 light minutes from Earth, meaning a "mere" 27 million miles.
- Comet's orbit indicates that it comes from edge of Oort cloud- theoretical spherical cloud of predominantly icy planetesimals.

DEFENCE**1.85. 'VEER GUARDIAN-2023'.****Why in News?**

- India and Japan are all set to hold the joint Air Exercise, 'Veer Guardian-2023' involving the Indian Air Force and Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) at Hyakuri Air Base, Japan from 12th of January

About 'Veer Guardian-2023':

- The Joint Exercise which will continue **till 26th January aims at promoting Air Defence cooperation between the countries.**
- The Indian contingent participating in the air exercise will include four Su-30 MKI, two C-17 and one IL-78 aircraft, while the JASDF will be participating with four F-2 and four F-15 aircraft.
- It will include the conduct of various aerial combat drills between the two Air Forces.
- They will undertake multi-domain air combat missions in a complex environment and will exchange best practices.
- Exercise 'Veer Guardian' will fortify the long-standing bond of friendship and enhance the avenues of defence cooperation between the two Air Forces.

1.86. INDIA CONDUCTS SUCCESSFUL TEST LAUNCH OF PRITHVI-II BALLISTIC MISSILE.

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) carried out a successful test launch of tactical ballistic missile Prithvi-II.
- Prithvi-II missile, which is powered by light propulsion twin engines, has a range of around 350 km and can carry 500-1,000 kg of warheads.
- It uses an advanced inertial navigation system to strike the set target.
- Prithvi was developed by DRDO under Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (conceived by Dr A Pi Abdul Kalam).
- Other missiles under this program: Agni, Trishul, Akash, Nag.

1.87. DAC NOD TO VSHORAD MISSILE SYSTEM DESIGNED BY DRDO.**Why in news?**

- Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) to procure VSHORAD (Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORAD) missile system.
- It is a Man Portable Air Defence System (MANPADS) designed and developed indigenously by DRDO.
- It is meant to target low altitude aerial threats at short ranges.
- These are lightweight and portable surface-to-air missiles.
- These can be fired by individuals or small groups to destroy aircraft or helicopters.
- Propelled by a dual thrust solid motor, it incorporates many novel technologies including miniaturised Reaction Control System (RCS) and integrated avionics.

1.88. ALL INDIAN WOMEN PLATOON LAND IN ABYEI FOR UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION.

- The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) welcomed the deployment of the single largest all-women platoon of peacekeepers from India. The all-women platoon will join forces serving in Abyei , reaffirming India's continued commitment to the implementation UN mandate in the region.

About Abyei

- The Abyei dispute is a long-standing territorial dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over the Abyei region.
- The area is rich in oil and is located on the border between the two countries.
- The dispute centers on the question of whether the region should be part of Sudan or South Sudan, and who has the right to administer and control it.
- The conflict has resulted in a number of violent clashes over the years, causing significant human suffering and displacement.

- Efforts to resolve the dispute, including through mediation by the African Union and other international organizations, have so far been unsuccessful.

UNISFA

- The United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) through Resolution 1990, in order to provide security and protect civilians in the region, who were under imminent threat of violence.
- **UNISFA's mandate** is to strengthen the capacity of the Abyei Police Service (APS) by providing support, including personnel training, and coordinating with the APS on matters of law and order. UN and international peacekeeping efforts continue to be essential in maintaining peace and stability in Abyei.

About UN Peacekeeping Mission

- The establishment of UN peacekeeping missions is **authorized by the UN Security Council**.
- The aim of UN peacekeeping missions is to maintain international peace and security by preventing conflicts, protecting civilians and promoting sustainable peace.

1.89. FIFTH SCORPENE-CLASS SUBMARINE *INS VAGIR* COMMISSIONED INTO THE INDIAN NAVY.

- The Indian Navy on Monday **commissioned the fifth diesel-electric Kalvari-class submarine Vagir**.
- It is among the six submarines being built by the **Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL)**, Mumbai, in collaboration with the French M/s Naval Group under Project 75.
- Four of these submarines have already been commissioned into the Navy and a sixth will be commissioned next year.

What are the specifications of Vagir?

- The latest submarine gets its name from the erstwhile Vagir, a submarine which served the Navy between 1973 and 2001 and undertook numerous operational missions.
- The construction of the new Vagir began in 2009 and it took its maiden sea sortie in February last year. Also known as **Sand Shark**, the submarine was delivered to the Indian Navy in December 2022.

Kalvari-class background

- Vagir is a Kalvari-class submarine, which includes other vessels, such as the **INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj, INS Vela and INS Vagsheer**.
 - Of these, Kalvari and Khanderi were commissioned in 2017 and 2019, and Vela and Karanj were inducted in 2021. Vagir has now been commissioned and Vagsheer was launched in 2022 and is expected to be inducted next year.
- The submarines in the current Kalvari-class take their names from erstwhile decommissioned classes of submarines named Kalvari, which included Kalvari, Khanderi, Karanj and Vela classes — comprising Vela, Vagir, Vagshir. The now-decommissioned Kalvari and Vela classes were one of the earliest submarines in the post-independence Indian Navy, which belonged to Soviet origin Foxtrot class of vessels.
- Like Kalvari – which means Tiger Shark, Vagir has been named after a Sand Fish, a predatory marine species. Khanderi has been named after an Island Fort built by Chhatrapati Shivaji, which played a key role in his Navy. Karanj has also been named after an Island located South of Mumbai.

Features, capabilities and technical details of INS Vagir

- The **design of the Kalvari-class of submarines** is based on the **Scorpene class** of submarines designed and developed by **French defence major Naval Group** formerly DCNS and the Spanish state-owned entity Navantia.
- This class of submarines has Diesel Electric transmission systems and these are primarily attack submarines or 'hunter-killer' types which mean they are designed to target and sink adversary naval vessels.
- The Kalvari class of submarines has an estimated **endurance of approximately 50 days**. They also have the capability of operating in a wide range of Naval combat including anti-warship and anti-submarine operations, intelligence gathering and surveillance and naval mine laying. These submarines are around 220 feet long and have a height of 40 feet.
- It can reach the highest speeds of 11 knots (20 km/h) when surfaced and 20 knots (37 km/h) when submerged.
- The Kalvari class of submarines is capable of launching various types of torpedoes and missiles and is equipped with a range of surveillance and intelligence-gathering mechanisms.

- With this, the Navy now has 16 conventional and one nuclear submarine in service. It includes seven Russian Kilo class submarines, four German HDW submarines, five Scorpene class submarines, and the indigenous nuclear ballistic missile submarine *INS Arihant*.

1.90. INLAND WATER VESSEL POWERED BY CHEAPER, ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY FUEL FLAGGED OFF IN GUWAHATI.

- Demo-run of Vessel named SB Gangadhar in Guwahati, Assam was held in run-up to India Energy Week 2023 (IEW 2023).
- The boat ride was conducted on the 50-seater motor launch vessel 'SB Gangadhar', equipped with two Ruston diesel engines, and will run on MD-15 (15 per cent methanol blended High Speed Diesel).
- IEW 2023, first major event under India's G20 Presidency, follows PM's pledge at COP26 to cut India's emissions to net-zero by 2070.
- IEW 2023 is held under Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

About Methanol

- Methanol (CH₃OH), also known as wood alcohol, is a low carbon hydrogen carrier fuel produced from high ash coal, agricultural residue, CO₂ from thermal power plants and natural gas.
- It has properties similar to ethanol.
- It is used in various products, including plastics, paints, cosmetics etc.
- Significance of Methanol economy for India
 - Blending of 15% methanol in gasoline can result in at least 15% reduction in import of gasoline/crude oil.
 - Would bring down GHG emissions by 20% in terms of particulate matter, NO_x, and SO_x.
 - Although slightly lower in energy content than petrol and diesel, methanol can replace these fuels in transport sector, energy sector and retail cooking.
 - Cost to convert vessels to run on methanol is significantly less than other alternative fuel conversions.
 - Would create close to 5 million jobs.

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ECONOMY

1.91. INVESTOR RISK REDUCTION ACCESS PLATFORM.

- Stock exchanges have been directed by the Securities and Exchanges Board of India (SEBI) to set up an Investor Risk Reduction Access (IRRA) platform. With the growing reliance on technology in the securities market, there is an increase in instances of glitches in trading members' systems, some of which resulted in the disruption of trading services. In these cases, investors with open positions are at risk of the non-availability of avenues to close their positions, especially at times when the markets are volatile.

What is an Investor Risk Reduction Access (IRRA) platform?

- The Investor Risk Reduction Access (IRRA) platform will be jointly developed by the stock exchanges to enable investors to square off their position or cancel the pending orders if there is a disruption of services provided by the trading members. Trading members are those who trade on their own account as well as on the account of their clients.
- According to the new SEBI circular, the trading members can request the enablement of the IRRA service in case they face technical glitches that can cause disruption in the trading services.
- The market regulator has directed the stock exchanges to monitor parameters like connectivity, social media posts, order flow, and others. It also called on the stock exchanges to initiate the enablement of the service if required, irrespective of the trading member's request.
- The SEBI also called on the stock exchanges to put in place a detailed framework to support the reverse migration from the IRRA system to the trading member's trading system when the trading system is revived and a request is made in this regard.
- The stock exchanges are also required to periodically test the IRRA platform from time to time for the seamless functioning of the service.
- The SEBI has asked the stock exchanges and clearing corporations to operationalize the IRRA platform by October 1, 2023.

1.92. BAD LOANS.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Parliament has been informed by the finance minister that banks had written off bad loans worth 10,09,511 crore during the last five financial years.

More about the news

- Out of the total 10.1 lakh crore, only 1.32 lakh crore has been recovered.
 - This comes to only about 13% as a percentage of write-offs.

Background

- **2009:** The RBI brought out norms that set out categories of NPAs and what banks must do as these bad loans age.
 - The RBI's master circular in 2009 started off the journey on NPA recognition.
 - It states that if an asset has been 'doubtful' for a certain period, the value of that asset must be provided for in parts, as the asset ages.
- **2014-15:** India became more stringent in recognising loans as 'bad' in the 2014 to 2015 period.
 - The periodic asset quality review was introduced.
 - RBI stepped in to prevent evergreening of loans.
 - It means lending more to an already stressed asset in the hope that it could be brought back to its feet.
- **2021:** There was a revision in 2021 which made recognition far more stringent.
 - Even if the asset is standard and there is no problem with it, banks are expected to make provisions depending on the risk element for that sector.
 - Like home loans with teaser rates are at greater risk than those that are not. Hence provisions have to be made for such loans.
- **A National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd. (NARCL)** was announced in the Union Budget for 2021-2022 to resolve stressed loans amounting to about 2 lakh crore in phases.

What is a Bad loan and NPA?

- **What is a Bad Loan?**
 - A bad loan is that which has **not been 'serviced'** for a certain period.
 - **Servicing a loan** is paying back the interest and a small part of the principal depending on the agreement between bank and borrower.
 - Bad loans are where there is less certainty that the loan would be paid back in full.
- **What is NPA?**
 - A non performing asset (NPA) is a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment remained overdue for a period of 90 days.
 - **Types of NPA:**
 - **Sub Standard:** A sub-standard asset is one that is classified as an NPA for a period not exceeding twelve months.
 - **Doubtful:** A doubtful asset is one that has remained as an NPA for a period exceeding twelve months.
 - **Loss:** A loss asset is one where loss has already been identified by the bank or an external institution, but it is not yet completely written off, due to its recovery value, however little it may be.

What is the need to recognise NPAs?

- **Health of the financial system:** In the banking system, the government and regulatory authorities need to have a good view of how healthy the financial system is.
 - **A weak financial system** can eventually ruin lives and livelihoods.

Causes and challenges related to Non-Performing Assets (NPA)

- **Lack of SWOT analysis:** The bank lends to the corporations/persons etc. whose creditworthiness is not guaranteed and thus taking a lot of high risks.
- **Lack of understandability:** The banks are not able to diminish their losses by a complete understanding of the sufficiency of the bank in terms of the loan or capital loss at a specific time frame.
- **Redirection of funds:** The funds are being redirected elsewhere by the promoters of the companies.
- **Investing in non viable projects:** The banks that try to fund projects that are not viable results in high NPAs.
- **Lack of information:** Not enough means to collect as well as distribute credit information in between the commercial banks.
- **Non-efficient recovery of the debts** from the overdue borrowers.
- **Delay in legal procedures:** Even if an NPA is fully recognised in a particular year, the fastest of legal processes may not resolve for full repayment.
- **Delays in post-haircut payments:** Not only do banks take significant haircuts when it comes to recovery but the amount to be repaid post-haircut may be delayed.
- **Provisioning:** The bad loans lead to banks having to save a part of their operating revenue to account for bad loans which is called Provisioning.
- **Downfall in the share markets:** Any reduction in the perceived valuation of the banks might lead to loss of share value of the banks, leading to general downfall in the share markets. This could result in wiping out shareholders' wealth from the financial markets.

Impact of NPAs on Financial Operations

- This **reduces the profits** of the banks.
- This reduces a bank or financial institution's **capital adequacy**.
- The banks have become averse to giving loans and taking risks of zero percent. Thus, the **creation of fresh credit is debarred**.
- The banks start **concentrating on the management of credit risk** instead of the bank becoming profitable.

1.93. DOMESTIC SYSTEMICALLY IMPORTANT BANKS (D-SIBs)

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has named the top three lenders in India – State Bank of India (SBI), ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank – as Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs), or banks that are too big to fail. In other words, these banks are interconnected entities whose failure could potentially impact the entire financial system and cause instability. As a result, they are subject to closer supervision and regulation by the RBI.

What is a D-SIB?

- A D-SIB is a bank that is considered to be so important to the financial system that its failure could cause significant disruption. As a result, these banks are required to maintain higher capital buffers to protect against potential losses and ensure their stability. In India, the RBI has established a framework for dealing with D-SIBs, which requires the central bank to disclose the names of designated banks starting from 2015 and place them in appropriate buckets based on their systemic importance.

How are D-SIBs regulated?

- In addition to the usual capital conservation buffer, D-SIBs in India are required to maintain additional Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) capital. According to the RBI's latest press release, SBI must maintain an additional 0.60% CET1 as a percentage of its risk-weighted assets, while ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank must maintain an additional 0.20% each.
- Foreign banks with a branch presence in India that are designated as Global Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs) must also maintain additional CET1 capital surcharges in India as required by the rules for G-SIBs.

Why were only three banks designated as D-SIBs?

- The RBI announced SBI and ICICI Bank as D-SIBs in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Based on data from banks as of March 31, 2017, HDFC Bank was also classified as a D-SIB, along with SBI and ICICI Bank. The current update is based on data from banks as of March 31, 2022.
- In 2015, global rating agency Moody's questioned the RBI's decision to initially designate only two banks as D-SIBs, stating that the central bank's approach was "less stringent" than in other jurisdictions and was therefore credit negative.
- The RBI's designation of SBI, ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank as D-SIBs highlights the importance of these banks to the financial system in India. As a result, they are subject to additional regulatory requirements and closer supervision to ensure their stability and protect against potential losses.

1.94. INDIA'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE REACHES HIGHEST LEVEL IN 16 MONTHS.

- According to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India's unemployment rate reached 8.30% in December, the highest level in 16 months. This marks an increase from the 8.00% recorded in November. The urban unemployment rate also saw a rise, going from 8.96% in November to 10.09% in December. However, the rural unemployment rate saw a slight decrease, going from 7.55% in November to 7.44% in December.
- Haryana recorded the highest unemployment rate at 37.4%, while Odisha had the lowest at 0.9%. In addition to Haryana, seven other states saw double-digit unemployment rates, including the national capital.

Top 5 States with Highest Unemployment Rates in December:

- Haryana: 37.4%
- Rajasthan: 28.5%
- Delhi: 20.8%
- Bihar: 19.1%
- Jharkhand: 18%

Top 5 States with Lowest Unemployment Rates in December:

- Odisha: 0.9%
- Gujarat: 2.3%
- Karnataka: 2.5%
- Meghalaya: 2.7%
- Maharashtra: 3.1%

- Despite the increase in unemployment, Mahesh Vyas, Managing Director of CMIE, noted that the rise in the unemployment rate was "not as bad as it may seem," as it came alongside a significant increase in the labor participation rate, which reached 40.48% in December, the highest in 12 months. Vyas also pointed out that the employment rate had increased to 37.1% in December, the highest since January 2022.
- According to data from the National Statistical Office (NSO), the unemployment rate had actually declined to 7.2% in the July-September quarter, compared to 7.6% in the same period the previous year.
- While the unemployment rate in India reached a 16-month high in December, there are still some positive indicators in the labor market. The increase in the labor participation rate and the employment rate suggest

that more people are actively seeking and finding work. It will be important to continue monitoring these trends in the coming months to see if the unemployment rate begins to improve.

1.95. DEMONETISATION CASE VERDICT.

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court upheld the government's 2016 decision to demonetise currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 by a 4:1 majority.

What is demonetisation?

- Demonetization is the process through which a nation's economic unit of exchange loses its legally enforceable validity.
- It is a drastic intervention into the economy that involves removing the legal tender status of a currency.
- It arises whenever the official currency is changed. The existing kind or types of currency are withdrawn through circulation and supplanted with new currency.

Why countries opt for demonetisation?

- To address issues like hyperinflation and to stabilize the currency
- To eliminate negative situations or actions like counterfeit currency, terror, and tax fraud
- To introduce a new monetary system in some circumstances
- To facilitate trade and access to markets
- To push informal economic activity into more transparency

Demonetisation in India

- **Previous demonetisation** - Demonetisation has been implemented twice:
 - In 1946, RBI demonetized 1000- and 10000-rupee notes.
 - In 1978, the government demonetized 1000-, 5000-, and 10000-rupee notes in order to curb the menace of black money.
- **2016 demonetisation**
 - On November 8, 2016, PM Modi announced the decision of the government to demonetise currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 in a bid to tackle corruption.

Why was demonetisation challenged?

- 58 petitions challenging various aspects of the government's note ban decision was filed in the SC.
- These petitioners contended that the procedure prescribed in Section 26(2) of RBI Act, 1934, was not followed.
 - Section 26(2) of the RBI Act states that on recommendation of the Central Board of the RBI, the Central Government may declare that **any series** of bank notes of any denomination shall cease to be legal tender.
 - The petitioners argued that the word "any" would have to be given a restricted meaning.
 - i.e., RBI has power only to recommend "a particular series" of notes. It does not have powers to demonetise "all series" of a particular denomination.
- They also argued that the demonetisation notification is liable to be struck down applying the test of proportionality.
 - The four ingredients of the proportionality test to be satisfied are:
 - legitimate purpose; rational connection with the purpose; necessity; whether the action taken is proportional or balanced.
- They also contended that the entire decision-making process was flawed in law as the proposal should have been emanated from RBI Board, not from the Centre.

What is the Supreme Court's verdict on demonetisation?

- In its majority 4:1 judgment, it was held that the Centre's notification dated November 8, 2016, was valid and satisfied the test of proportionality.
- The court held that the central government's decision was after RBI board's approval which shows in-built safeguard against centre's powers.
 - The Centre is required to take the action after the consultation with the Central Board and there is an inbuilt safeguard.

- Decision-making process cannot be faulted merely because the proposal emanated from the centre.
- The hardships faced by citizens following demonetisation six years ago cannot be a ground to reverse the decision.
 - The individual interests must yield to the larger public interest sought to be achieved by the impugned notification.
- On creating a fresh window for return of demonetised currency, the majority verdict said it did not have the expertise to frame such a scheme.

1.96. PURCHASING MANAGER'S INDEX.

Why in News?

- The **S&P Global India Manufacturing PMI** surged to 57.8 in December 2022 from 55.7 in the prior month of November, pointing to the highest reading since October 2020.

About Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)

- The PMI data is released at the **beginning of every month**.
- **PMI or a Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)** is an indicator of business activity-- both in the manufacturing and services sectors.
- PMI is a number from 0 to 100. PMI above 50 represents an expansion, under 50 represents a contraction, and reading at 50 indicates no change.
- The PMI is usually released at the **start of the month**, much before most of the **official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP** growth becomes available. It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.

1.97. WHAT IS NEW UMBRELLA ENTITY (NUE) NETWORK?

Why in news?

- Six groupings, which included Facebook, Google, Amazon, Flipkart and others, had applied for NUE licences and all of them have fallen short of the RBI's expectations.
- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is said to have put on hold licensing of the New Umbrella Entity (NUE) network, a fintech institution planned as a rival to the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

What is New Umbrella Entity (NUE)?

- As envisaged by the RBI, an NUE will be a non-profit entity that will set up, manage and operate new payment systems, especially in the retail space such as ATMs, white-label PoS; Aadhaar-based payments and remittance services.
- The entity formed shall be a company incorporated in India under **the Companies Act, 2013**. Currently, the umbrella entity for providing retail payments systems is NPCI, which is a non-profit entity, owned by banks.
- **Promoters:** A promoter will hold at least 25% and up to 40% of the operator. Only those entities that are owned and controlled by Indian citizens with at least **three years of experience** in the payments segment can become promoters of NUEs.
- **Foreign investment:** Foreign companies can own a maximum of 25%, so are teaming up with local players.
- **Capital required:** According to the RBI guidelines, the entity will have **minimum paid-up capital of Rs 500 crore**, with no single promoter group holding over 40 per cent investment in the capital.
- **Governance structure:** The new entity will have to abide by corporate governance norms and the 'fit and proper' criteria for persons to be appointed to the board.

1.98. RBI ISSUES REVISED LIST OF ACCREDITED CREDIT RATING AGENCIES

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday issued the revised list of accredited credit rating agencies for the purpose of assigning risk weight to assets for capital adequacy purposes by the banks. On a review, banks are advised to use the ratings of the six domestic credit rating agencies for risk weighting their claims for capital adequacy purposes.
- The six credit rating agencies are-
- Acuite Ratings & Research Limited (Acuite),
- Credit Analysis and Research Limited (CARE);

- CRISIL Ratings Limited,
- ICRA Limited,
- India Ratings and Research Private Limited (India Ratings) and
- INFOMERICS Valuation and Rating Pvt Ltd.

What are Credit Rating agencies?

- CRA evaluates and assesses an individual's or a company's creditworthiness, means, these agencies consider a debtor's income and credit lines to analyze the debtor's ability to repay the debt or if there is any credit risk associated. The credit rating indicates if the borrower is worth trusting with the new loan.
- In India, CRAs are regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) as per the SEBI Regulations, 1999 of the SEBI Act, 1992.
- The creditworthiness of an individual or a company is decided based on the lending and borrowing transactions done in the past.
- On October 31, 2022, SEBI issued norms regarding the standardization of rating scales used by CRAs.

1.99. PAYRUP: INDIA'S FASTEST PAYMENT APP PAYRUP LAUNCHED.

- India's fastest payment app PayRup was launched in India on 9th January 2023. PayRup is built with the finest technology of web 3.0. PayRup provides an advanced digital payment experience with an outstanding user experience. PayRup users can pay utility bills and landline bills, recharge their mobile, broadband, DTH, and purchase gift cards.

Key Points

- PayRup services are planned to expand across various financial instruments.
- These instruments include multiple payment services such as school fees, pay rent, and other payment collection services.
- PayRup has announced ticketing and booking services for flights, buses, and hotels along with other USPs.
- PayRup opens 24/7 customer care facilities for help and support for users.
- Customer Support desk runs with leading CRM technologies and supports by the global standard.
- PayRup ensured the 5 dimensions of service quality and follows SERVQUAL standards to provide the best service experience.
- PayRup gives 5% cashback for all payments through the app as a New Year offer, and users of PayRup are getting benefits from the cashback offer for day-to-day financial services.
- The launching event was hosted in Lulu Mall, Bangalore, and was launched by MahadevappaHalagatti.

1.100. CENTRE CLEARS RS. 2600 CRORE INCENTIVE SCHEME TO PROMOTE RUPAY, BHIM-UPI.

Why in news?

- Scheme aims to promote RuPay Debit Cards and low-value BHIM-UPI transactions (person-to-merchant) in FY 2022-23.

Features of scheme

- Banks would be provided financial incentives for promoting Point of Sale (PoS) and e-commerce transactions using RuPay and UPI.
- Promote UPI Lite and UPI 123PAY as economical and user-friendly digital payments solutions.
 - **UPI Lite** is an 'on-device wallet' feature by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to allow users to make small-value payments (upto 1200) offline.
 - **UPI 123PAY** is an instant payment system for feature phone (non-smartphone) users.
- In addition, NPCI has allowed Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) with NRE (non-resident external) or NRO (non-resident ordinary) accounts in 10 countries to use UPI platform from their international mobile numbers.
- Member banks have to ensure such types of accounts are only allowed as per extant Foreign Exchange Management Act regulations and RBI rules.
- 10 countries are Singapore, Australia, Canada, Hongkong, Oman, Qatar, USA, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and United Kingdom.
- UPI works on principle of SIM binding for security purposes and till now, it was enabled only for Indian mobile numbers.

- NRIs demanded enabling UPI on international SIM cards for ease of payment and avoiding use of expensive international cards.

Other information

- UPI is a real-time payment system, launched in 2016 by NPCI. It links multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application.
- **NPCI** is an initiative of RBI and Indian Banks Association under Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007. It is an umbrella organization for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- NRE account helps NRIs transfer foreign earnings to India, while an NRO account helps them to manage income earned in India.

1.101. FINANCIAL SERVICES INSTITUTIONS BUREAU (FSIB) RECOMMENDS NAMES FOR MD POSTS OF BANK OF BARODA, BANK OF INDIA.

Why in news

- FSIB recommended MDs for Bank of Baroda and Bank of India.
- FSIB is set up, under Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, for-
 - Recommending whole-time directors and non-executive chairpersons on Boards of financial services institutions.
 - Advising on certain other matters relating to personnel management in these institutions.
- FSIB replaced Banks Board Bureau.
- **Composition**
 - **Chairperson** to be nominated by Central Government.
 - Ex officio members: Secretary in charge of DFS, Department of Public Enterprises, Chairperson of IRDM. Deputy Governor of RBI.
 - Several part-time members with subject matter knowledge.

1.102. OXFAM'S "SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST" REPORT.

- According to a new study by Oxfam International, the richest 1% of people in India now own more than 40% of the country's total wealth, while the bottom half of the population together share just 3% of wealth.
- The study, titled "Survival of the Richest," was released on the first day of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

More on the news

- The report suggests that taxing India's ten-richest at 5% could fetch enough money to bring children back to school.
- Additionally, if India's billionaires were taxed once at 2% on their entire wealth, it would support the requirement of Rs 40,423 crore for the nutrition of malnourished in the country for the next three years.
- A one-time tax of 5% on the 10 richest billionaires in the country (Rs 1.37 lakh crore) is more than 1.5 times the funds estimated by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry (Rs 86,200 crore) and the Ministry of Ayush (Rs 3,050 crore) for the year 2022-23.
- The report also highlights the impact of **gender inequality on earnings**. It states that female workers earned only 63 paise for every 1 rupee a male worker earned.
 - For Scheduled Castes and rural workers, the difference is even starker – the former earned 55% of what the advantaged social groups earned, and the latter earned only half of the urban earnings between 2018 and 2019.
- Since the pandemic began in November 2022, billionaires in India have seen their wealth surge by 121% or Rs 3,608 crore per day in real terms, Oxfam said.
- On the other hand, approximately 64% of the total Rs 14.83 lakh crore in Goods and Services Tax (GST) came from bottom 50% of the population in 2021-22, with only 3% of GST coming from the top 10%. The total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2020 to 166 in 2022.

1.103. NFRA TO INTRODUCE ANNUAL TRANSPARENCY REPORT BY THE AUDIT FIRMS.

- National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has published draft requirements for auditors to prepare and publish annual transparency reports to increase transparency in management and governance of audit firms.

About National Financial Reporting Authority

- NFRA was constituted in 2018 under section 132(1) of Companies Act, 2013.
- It is an independent regulator to oversee auditing profession and accounting standards with jurisdiction extending to all listed companies and large unlisted companies.
- It has same powers as a Civil Court while trying a suit.
- It consists of a chairperson who will be appointed by Central Government and a maximum of 15 members.

1.104. RBI RELEASES STATE FINANCES: A STUDY OF BUDGETS OF 2022-23 REPORT.

- It is an annual publication that provides information, analysis and an assessment of finances of State governments for 2022-23.
- **Theme** of this year's Report is "**Capital Formation in India -The Role of States'**
- **Key findings of report**
 - State's Gross fiscal deficit (GFD) is budgeted to decline to 3.4 percent of GDP in 2022-23 from 4.1 percent in 2020-21.
 - GFD is excess of total expenditure including loans net of recovery over revenue receipts (including external grants) and non-debt capital receipts.
 - States' debt is budgeted to ease to 29.5 percent of GDP in 2022-23 as against 31.1 percent in 2020-21.
 - In 2022-23, states have budgeted higher capital outlay than in previous three years.
- **Recommendations**
 - Increase allocations of capital expenditure for sectors like health, education etc.
 - Create a capex buffer fund during good times to smoothen and maintain expenditure quality and flows through economic cycle.
 - Strengthen timely devolution mechanism to local bodies through State Finance Commissions.
 - Encourage and facilitate higher inter-state trade and businesses.

1.105. WEF LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO UNLOCK \$3 TRILLION A YEAR FOR CLIMATE AND NATURE.

- World Economic Forum HAS launched Giving to Amplify Earth Action (GAEA) to help unlock \$3 trillion of financing needed each year to reach net-zero, reverse nature loss and restore biodiversity by 2050.
- Global initiative is to fund and grow new and existing public, private and philanthropic partnerships (PPPPs) and is supported by more than 45 partners (including India's HCL Technologies).
- Philanthropic financing for climate mitigation has risen in recent years, but still represents less than 2% of total philanthropic giving.
- Advantage of philanthropic financing: It is nimble, more tolerant of risks and is driven by values and long-term outcomes rather than quarterly returns.

1.106. FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS SIGNED UP TO GFANZ INITIATIVE ACCUSED OF ACTING AS 'CLIMATE ARSONISTS'.

- Banks still investing heavily in fossil fuels despite net zero pledges – study
- According to a report, Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) members are continuing to finance expansion of coal, oil and fossil gas industries.

About GFANZ

- GFANZ is **world's largest coalition of financial institutions** committed to transitioning global economy to net-zero greenhouse gas emission.
- It aims to coordinate efforts across all sectors of the financial system to accelerate the transition to a net-zero global economy.
- It was launched in 2021 by UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance and COP26 presidency, in partnership with UNFCCC Race to Zero campaign.
- It has over 550 members from 50 jurisdictions.

1.107. DGFT NOTIFIES AMENDED RULES FOR CALCULATION OF COMPOSITION FEE FOR EXTENDING EXPORT OBLIGATION UNDER ADVANCE AUTHORIZATION SCHEME (AAS).

- Directorate General of Foreign Trade has notified amended rules for extending Export Obligation under AAS.
- Move will help automate entire Export Obligation extension process with minimal human intervention and lead to ease of doing business.
- **AAS** is a duty exemption scheme issued by Government of India under Foreign Trade Policy 2015-2020 under the purview of DGFT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It **exempts payment of import duties on raw materials/inputs required for manufacturing products for export.**
- It allows duty free import of inputs, which are physically incorporated in an export product.
- It additionally allows packaging material, fuel, oil, catalyst which is consumed / utilized in production of export product.

1.108. GOVERNMENT INTERNET SHUTDOWNS COST ALMOST \$24 BILLION GLOBALLY IN 2022.

- Findings are part of a recent report by UK-based privacy and security research firm Top10VPN.

Key findings related to India

- India imposed 34 major shutdowns in 2022, significantly more than any other country in the world.
- Total cost of Internet restrictions was \$184.3 million.
- Shutdowns were highly localised to specific districts, cities and even villages, and tended to be in response to civil unrest, often pre-emptively.
- Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir endured most extensive major Internet outages.

Internet Shutdowns in India

- **Internet shutdown** is defined as an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications for a specific population or location, to exert control over flow of information.
- It can be caused by Internet blackouts, Social media shutdowns or Throttling (reduced speed of internet).
- **Legal provisions** related to Internet shutdowns in India
 - Until 2017, mostly governed under section 144 of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and Indian Telegraph Act 1885.
 - In 2017, Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency and Public Safety) Rules, were notified. Despite rules, government has also used broad powers under section 144.
 - Section 69(A) of IT (Amendment) Act, 2008 gives power to block particular websites.
 - Only Home Secretary of the Union or a state can pass an Internet shutdown order to be reviewed by a committee within 5 days.
 - Under unavoidable circumstances order can be issued by an officer of rank of Joint Secretary or above, authorized by central or state Home Secretary.

1.109. INSURANCE SECTOR NEEDS RS 50,000 CR. CAPITAL PER YEAR TO LIFT PENETRATION: IRDAI.

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) chief said the target is to double penetration in the next five years, and added that it is possible to insure all by 2047.
- **Insurance Penetration** is the ratio of premium underwritten in a particular year to the GDP.
 - It indicates the level of development of insurance sector.
 - In India the overall penetration for insurance is 4.2% as of FY21-end with life insurance at 3.2%, and non-life at 1%.
 - **Insurance density** (ratio of insurance premium to population) has increased from \$78 in 2020-21 to \$91 in 2021-22.
- **Reasons for low penetration:**
 - Lack of awareness,
 - Lack of customised and standardised products,
 - Fewer product innovations, etc.
- **How to enhance insurance penetration**

- Make property insurance compulsory.
- Insurers should have bancassurance arrangements with non-bank lenders, co-operative banks and also payment aggregators.
- Financial sector participants should work together synergistically for deepening the penetration.
- Business conglomerates should channelise funds into the sector.

1.110. 'INFLATION TARGETING' NEITHER NECESSARY, NOR SUFFICIENT FOR PRICE CONTROL: IMF PAPER.

- Paper suggested that for some countries targeting leads to improved outcomes. However for most countries there is limited impact of such framework
- **Inflation targeting** is a technique to bring inflation to a targeted level within a specific time horizon.
- It **controls inflation level by increasing or decreasing interest rate** prevailing in economy.
 - Increasing rate is believed to bring down inflation by curtailing economic activity.
 - Decreasing rate increases inflation level by increasing economic activity.
- Importance of Inflation Targeting
 - More transparent, accountable and coherent policymaking.
 - Price stability allows investors to confidently invest for productive activities.
 - Price stability maintains purchasing power of consumers.
- In 2016, Parliament amended RBI Act, 1934 to change monetary policy, and introduce an inflation targeting framework.
- As per the new framework. central government, in consultation with RBI sets:
 - An inflation target.
 - An upper and lower tolerance level for retail inflation.
- Target has been set at 4%, with an upper tolerance limit of 6% and a lower tolerance limit of 2%.
 - Target and bands are revised every five years, In March 2021; the existing targets were carried forward.

1.111. SEBI LAUNCHES INFORMATION DATABASE ON MUNICIPAL BONDS.

- Database contains a wide range of information in form of statistics and regulations, circulars etc. issued by SEBI and information to be obtained by an Issuer to tap Municipal Bond Market.
- A municipal bond is a **debt instrument** issued by municipal corporations.
 - Bengaluru floated municipal bonds for first time in India in 1997.
- Need for Municipal Bonds
 - Better urban infrastructure requires greater flow of financial resources to Local governments.
 - Reduce dependence of municipal corporations on central or state government.
 - Will enable adoption of innovative and appropriate technologies for waste treatment, tackling of air and water pollution etc.
- Constraints faced
 - Lack of a secondary market inhibits attracting a more extensive investor base.
 - Conditions imposed such as prescribed limits and maximum loan repayment period.
 - Poor accounting standards and low institutional capabilities.
- RBI in a recent report suggested several measures for resource mobilisation through municipal bonds such as:
 - Sound and efficient regulation, greater transparency, and better governance.
 - Listing municipal bonds in stock exchanges for developing a secondary market.

Types of Municipal Bonds

- **General obligation bonds:** for enhancing civic amenities such as water, sanitation, garbage disposal, etc.
- **Revenue bonds:** for a specific purpose such as construction of a toll road or a toll bridge.

1.112. NATIONAL ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY LTD (NARCL) ACQUIRES FIRST STRESSED ASSET.

- NARCL, an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)/bad bank, has acquired its first stressed asset- Jaypee Infratech- from lenders.
- NARCL/Bad bank is a corporate structure that isolates risky assets held by banks in a separate entity. It was announced in Union Budget 2021-22.
- NARCL will take over large value NPA accounts (over Rs 500 crore) from banks with total assets to be acquired of around Rs 2 lakh crore.
- Stressed assets will be acquired through a 15 percent upfront cash payment and 85 percent in form of security receipts (SR).
- NARCL is incorporated under Companies Act with Public Sector Banks holding a majority stake.
- It is registered with RBI as an ARC under **Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.**

Significance of Bad Bank

- Reduce NPAs of banks, improving financial system stability and efficiency.
- Improve recoveries and promote competition, as NARCL allows Swiss Challenge to get the best for banks from stressed assets.
- Opportunities for other ARCs at MSME's level, as NARCL reconstruct assets only where banks total exposure is more than Rs. 500 crore.

1.113. ECLGS BAILED OUT 14.6 LAKH MSMEs, SAYS SBI REPORT.

- As per report, incentives provided by Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) have helped in boosting credit flow to MSMEs.

Important points

- MSME loan accounts worth Rs 2.2 lakh crore improved for entire banking industry.
- Saved 12 percent of outstanding MSME credit from slipping into Non-Performing Asset and livelihood of nearly 6.6 crores.
- MSME units becoming larger with several units crossing threshold of Rs 250 crore turnover and turning into mid-sized corporates by new definition of MSME units.

About ECLGS

- ECLGS is a special scheme to provide 100 percent guarantee coverage to banks and NBFCs to enable them to extend emergency credit facilities to Business Enterprises/MSMEs.
- It is under the purview of Ministry of Finance.
- It was announced as part of AatmaNirbhar Bharat Package with:
 - Emergency Credit Line of upto 20% of total outstanding as on February 29, 2020.
 - 100% Guarantee Coverage with maximum tenure of 4 years from date of disbursement and one year moratorium on principal amount.
 - It is managed by National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC) under trusteeship management
- Other recent steps taken
 - MSME definition was changed in 2020 with introduction of a composite criteria
 - Udyam Assist Platform, developed by SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India), to bring all informal micro enterprises (IMEs) into formal ambit. It would benefit up to 5 crore IMEs.

1.114. NIDHI COMPANIES NEED TO GIVE MORE DISCLOSERS, INFORM ABOUT CHANGE IN CONTROL/ACQUISITION.

- The Government has now made it mandatory for Nidhi companies to inform the authority about change in control of the organisation. This is part of additional disclosers required by these companies. Other information required includes details of collection centres and profit details.
- These changes have been incorporated in the revised forms NDH-1 (return of statutory compliances), NDH-2 (application to Regional Director and intimation to the Registrar), NDH-3 (return for the half year ended) and NDH-4 (form for filing application for declaration as Nidhi company and for up-dation of status by Nidhis).

About Nidhi Companies

- Nidhi Company is a type of Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC) formed with primary object of inculcating saving habits among its members and works on principle of mutual benefit.
- Registered under Companies Act, they are regulated by Ministry of Corporate Affairs for operational matters.
- They don't require a license from RBI but RBI can issue directions to them on deposit-taking activities.
- They are controlled by Nidhi Rules, 2014.

1.115. UNNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP) INDIA LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO DRIVE INCLUSIVE CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

- It is launched in partnership with Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) and will focus on:
 - End-to-end management of plastic waste by promoting segregation of waste at source and collection of segregated waste.
 - Setting up Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) or SwachhataKendras for recycling all kinds of plastic waste along the value chain.
 - Social Inclusion of 20,000 SafalSaathis or waste pickers through access to government welfare schemes and linkages etc.
 - Building capacities of Urban Local Bodies for adopting MRFs model for plastic and dry waste management.
- Initiative is a scale-up of existing partnership under UNDP's flagship Plastic Waste Management Programme to develop a sustainable model for plastic waste management in India. It promotes collection, segregation, and recycling of all plastics to move towards a circular economy.

Circular economy

- An alternative to current linear economy, circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible to:
 - Extend life cycle of products.
 - Reduce waste to a minimum by creating further value.

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POLICY AND PROGRAMME

1.116. INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF MILLETS 2023.

- The International Year of Millets 2023 has officially kicked off.
- The government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi spearheaded the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution for declaring the year 2023 as the International Year of Millets and the proposal of India was supported by 72 countries. **UNGA declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets in March 2021.**
- **January 2023 is the focussed month for the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, and the States of Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, and Rajasthan for conducting events and activities related to the millets year.**
- India pushed for recognizing the importance of millet and creating a domestic and global demand along with providing nutritious food to the community.

What are millets?

- Millet is a common term for categorizing small-seeded grasses that are often called Nutri-cereals. **Some of them are sorghum (jowar), pearl millet (bajra), finger millet (ragi), little millet (kutki), foxtail millet (kakun), proso millet (cheena), barnyard millet (sawa), and kodo millet (kodon).**
- An essential staple cereal crop for millions of smallholder dryland farmers across Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, millets offer nutrition, resilience, income and livelihood for farmers, and have multiple uses such as food, feed, fodder, biofuels and brewing.

Significance and benefits of millets:

- **Millets are nutritionally superior to wheat and rice owing to their higher protein levels** and a more balanced amino acid profile. Millets also contain various phytochemicals which exert therapeutic properties owing to their anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidative properties.
- Further, besides being climate resilient, millet grains are rich sources of nutrients like carbohydrates, protein, dietary fibre, and good-quality fat; minerals like calcium, potassium, magnesium, iron, manganese, zinc and B complex vitamins.
- Most importantly, millet production is not dependent on the use of chemical fertilizers.

Background of millets in India:

- Millets were traditionally consumed, but due to the push given to food security through Green Revolution in the 1960s, millets were less consumed and almost forgotten.
- Before the Green Revolution, millets made up around 40 per cent of all cultivated grains, which has dropped to around 20 per cent over the years.
- Not only has the consumption of millets declined, but the area under production has been replaced with commercial crops, oilseeds, pulses, and maize. These commercial crops are profitable, and their production is supported by several policies through subsidized inputs, incentivized procurement, and inclusion in the Public Distribution System. This has resulted in changes in dietary patterns with preferential consumption of fine-calorie-rich cereals.
- **India produces more than 170 lakh tonnes of millet, which is 80 percent of Asia's and 20 percent of global production.**
- India produces all the nine commonly known millets and is the largest producer and fifth-largest exporter of millets in the world.
- Most of the states in India grow one or more millet crop species. Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana are the major millets producing states.

India's millet trade:

- **India exported millets** products worth of **USD 34.32 million during 2021-22**. In 2020- 21, India exported millets worth USD 26.97 million against USD 28.5 million in 2019-20.
- India's major millet exporting countries are UAE, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Oman, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, the UK, and the US.
- **The major millet-importing countries in the world are Indonesia, Belgium, Japan, Germany, Mexico, Italy, the US, the UK, Brazil, and the Netherlands.**

A look at the trend of MSP:

- The **Minimum Support Price for jowar, bajra, and ragi increased 73 percent, 65 percent, and 88 percent to Rs 2,990, Rs 2,350, and Rs 3,578, respectively, data showed.**

1.117. MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE TREATY (MLAT) BETWEEN INDIA AND SAUDI ARABIA.**Why in News?**

- Recently, India and Saudi Arabia discussed signing a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) to obtain formal assistance from each other in investigations related to criminal cases.

What is MLAT?

- It is a mechanism whereby countries cooperate with one another to provide and obtain formal assistance in the prevention, suppression, investigation and prosecution of crime to ensure that the criminals do not escape or sabotage the due process of law for want of evidence available in different countries.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs is the Central Authority of India for dealing with requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters.
- Section 105 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) explains the reciprocal arrangements to be made by the Central Government with the Foreign Governments with regard to the service of summons/warrants/judicial processes.
- India has so far signed MLATs with 45 countries.

1.118. PRAJJWALA CHALLENGE**Why in News?**

- Recently, the Ministry of Rural Development under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) has launched the Prajjwala Challenge.

About:

- **Aim:** To invite ideas, solutions and actions that can **transform the rural economy**. This Mission is looking for ideas which are broadly categorised into
- Focus on Women and the Marginalized section of the community
- Localised Models
- Sustainability
- Cost Effective solutions
- Multi-sectoral ideas and solutions
- Shortlisted ideas will be acknowledged by the Mission and will be provided mentorship support from an expert panel and incubation support to scale up. The **top 5 ideas will be rewarded with Rs. 2 Lakh each.**

What is DAY-NRLM?

- It is one of the **flagship poverty alleviation programs** which aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms for the rural poor, enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Universal Social Mobilisation:** At least one woman member from each identified rural poor household, is to be brought under the Self Help Group (SHG) network in a time bound manner.
 - **Participatory Identification of Poor (PIP):** All households identified as poor through the PIP process is the NRLM Target Group and is eligible for all the benefits under the programme.
 - **Community Funds as Resources in Perpetuity:** NRLM provides Revolving Fund (RF) and Community Investment Fund (CIF) as resources in perpetuity to the institutions of the poor, to strengthen their institutional and financial management capacity.

1.119. THE UNIQUE IDENTIFICATION AUTHORITY OF INDIA (UIDAI).**Why in News?**

- UIDAI enables 'Head of Family' based online address update in Aadhaar.
- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has put in place a resident friendly facility to help people update their address online in Aadhaar with the consent of the **Head of Family (HoF).**

- This HoF based online address update in Aadhaar will be of great help to the relatives of a resident who don't have supporting documents in their own name to update address in their Aadhaar.

How it can be done?

- It can be done by submitting Proof of Relationship document like Ration Card, Marksheet, Marriage Certificate, Passport mentioning the names and relationship of both the applicant and HOF.
- In case even Proof of Relationship document is not available, UIDAI provides the resident to submit a self-declaration by the HOF in the UIDAI prescribed format.

Who will be Beneficiaries?

- With people moving cities and towns due to various reasons within the country, such a facility will be beneficial for millions of people.
- This choice would be in addition to the existing address update facility using any valid Proof of Address document prescribed by UIDAI.
- Any resident above the age of 18 can be an HOF for this purpose and can share his or her address with his or her relatives through this process.

About UIDAI

- UIDAI was created with the objective to issue Unique Identification numbers (UID), named as "Aadhaar", to all residents of India that is (a) robust enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities, and (b) can be verified and authenticated in an easy, cost-effective way.
- UIDAI is a **statutory authority** established under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016.
- Prior to its establishment as a statutory authority, UIDAI was functioning as an attached office of the then Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog).
- Under the **Aadhaar Act 2016**, UIDAI is responsible for
 - Aadhaar enrolment and authentication, including operation and management of all stages of Aadhaar life cycle,
 - Developing the policy, procedure and system for issuing Aadhaar numbers to individuals and
 - Perform authentication and
 - To ensure the security of identity information and authentication records of individuals.
- **It comes under the Electronics & IT ministry.**

1.120. 'SMART' (SCOPE FOR MAINSTREAMING AYURVEDA RESEARCH IN TEACHING PROFESSIONALS) PROGRAM**Why in News?**

- The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) and the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS), the two prominent institutions under the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India for regulating medical education and conducting scientific research respectively, have launched 'SMART' (Scope for Mainstreaming Ayurveda Research in Teaching Professionals) program.

About 'SMART' (Scope for Mainstreaming Ayurveda Research in Teaching Professionals) Program:

- It is aimed to boost scientific research in priority healthcare research areas through Ayurveda colleges and hospitals.
- The proposed initiative is conceptualised with an objective to identify, support and promote innovative research ideas in healthcare research areas including Osteoarthritis, Iron Deficiency Anaemia, Chronic Bronchitis, Dyslipidemia, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus, Psoriasis, Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD).
- The eligible Ayurveda academic institutions may apply by 10 January, 2023.
- All details regarding contact information, eligibility criteria and application process has been shared to all recognized academic institutions and hospitals through NCISM.
- The 'SMART' program will motivate teachers for taking up projects in designated areas of healthcare research and create a large database.

1.121. NATIONAL GREEN HYDROGEN MISSION OF INDIA.

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, has approved National Green Hydrogen Mission.
- The initial outlay for the Mission will be Rs.19,744 crore, including an outlay of Rs.17,490 crore for the SIGHT programme, Rs.1,466 crore for pilot projects, Rs.400 crore for R&D, and Rs. 388 crore towards other Mission components.
- MNRE will formulate the scheme guidelines for implementation of the respective components.
- Ministry of New & Renewable Energy will be responsible for overall coordination and implementation of the Mission.

The Mission will result in the following likely outcomes by 2030:

- Development of green hydrogen production capacity of at least 5 MMT (Million Metric Tonne) per annum with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 GW in the country
- Over Rs. Eight lakh crore in total investments
- Creation of over Six lakh jobs
- Cumulative reduction in fossil fuel imports over Rs. One lakh crore
- Abatement of nearly 50 MMT of annual greenhouse gas emissions

The benefits of National Green Hydrogen Mission:

- Creation of export opportunities for Green Hydrogen and its derivatives;
- Decarbonisation of industrial, mobility and energy sectors;
- Reduction in dependence on imported fossil fuels and feedstock;
- Development of indigenous manufacturing capabilities;
- Creation of employment opportunities; and
- Development of cutting-edge technologies.

More about the Mission:

- India's Green Hydrogen production capacity is likely to reach at least 5 MMT per annum, with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 GW. The targets by 2030 are likely to bring in over Rs. 8 lakh crore investments and create over 6 lakh jobs. Nearly 50 MMT per annum of CO2 emissions are expected to be averted by 2030.
- The Mission will facilitate demand creation, production, utilization and export of Green Hydrogen.
- Under the **Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition Programme (SIGHT)**, two distinct financial incentive mechanisms – targeting domestic manufacturing of electrolyzers and production of Green Hydrogen – will be provided under the Mission.
- The Mission will also **support pilot projects** in emerging end-use sectors and production pathways. **Regions capable of supporting large scale production and/or utilization of Hydrogen will be identified and developed as Green Hydrogen Hubs.**
- An enabling policy framework will be developed to support establishment of Green Hydrogen ecosystem.
- A robust Standards and Regulations framework will be also developed.
- Further, a public-private partnership framework for R&D (Strategic Hydrogen Innovation Partnership – SHIP) will be facilitated under the Mission; R&D projects will be goal-oriented, time bound, and suitably scaled up to develop globally competitive technologies.
- A coordinated skill development programme will also be undertaken under the Mission.

1.122. WHAT IS BROADCASTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT (BIND) SCHEME?**Why in News?**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs recently approved the proposal of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting regarding the BIND scheme at a cost of ₹2,539.61 crore up to 2025-26.

About Broadcasting Infrastructure and Network Development (BIND) Scheme:

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** which provides financial support **for the infrastructure development** of Prasar Bharati i.e. All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (DD).

- This scheme will enable the public broadcaster to undertake a major upgradation of its facilities with better infrastructure which will widen its reach, including in the LWE, border and strategic areas and provide high-quality content to the viewers.
- Another major priority area of the scheme is the development of high-quality content for both domestic and international audiences and ensuring the availability of diverse content to the viewers by upgradation of the capacity of the DTH platform to accommodate more channels.
- Purchase of **OB vans and digital upgradation of DD and AIR Studios** to make them HD-ready will also be done as part of the project.
- The Project for modernization and augmentation of broadcast infrastructure also has the potential to **generate indirect employment** by way of manufacturing and services related to the supply and installation of broadcast equipment.
- The Scheme will **increase coverage of AIR FM transmitters** in the country to 66% by geographical area and 80% by population up from 59% and 68% respectively.
- It also envisages free distribution of over 8 lakh DD Free Dish STBs to people living in remote, tribal, LWE and border areas.

1.123. WHAT IS FAIR AND REMUNERATIVE PRICE (FRP)?

Why in News?

- The sugarcane farmers in Haryana sat on dharnas outside the sugar mills across the State recently kicking off the agitation to seek hike in the crop's support price.

About Fair and remunerative price (FRP):

- **What is it?** Fair and remunerative price (FRP) is the minimum price at which rate sugarcane is to be purchased by sugar mills from farmers.
- **Who determines it?** The FRP is fixed by **Union government (Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA))** on the basis of recommendations of **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- **Rules:** The 'FRP' of sugarcane is determined under Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966.
- **Methodology:** Recommended FRP is arrived at by taking into account various factors (cost of production, demand-supply situation, domestic & international prices, inter-crop price parity etc).
- **Benefits:** FRP assures margins to farmers, irrespective of whether sugar mills generate a profit or not.
- This will be uniformly applicable all over the country. Besides FRP, some states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, UP and TN announce a State Advised Price, which is generally higher than the FRP.

1.124. MOS FOR CULTURE ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL INAUGURATES ASTRO TOURISM - A SKY GAZING EVENT AT DELHI'S INDIA GATE

- National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) in association with Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) organised Astro Tourism - A Sky Gazing event at Delhi's India Gate.
- The event was inaugurated by Minister of State for Culture, Arjun Ram Meghwal. The program will continue for next two days with various activities.
- Mr. Meghwal said, the programme will help in developing scientific temper among the people.
- The Astro Tourism event includes various activities like Astro Talks by expert Astronomers, Exhibition on Astronomy, Storytelling related to celestial objects, Experience of using telescope to see craters of Moon, Astronomy Activities, Photographic Panel Exhibition, and Astro-Photography.
- This three-day program will be a great learning experience for children of all age groups

What is Astro tourism?

- According to John Barentine of the International Dark-Sky Association, "Astrotourism is any kind of tourism that involves the night sky or visiting facilities related to astronomy like observatories, and combining that with a broader sense of ecotourism where interaction with nature is what the visitor experience is about

More about Astro tourism:

- The Ministry of Tourism's Dekho Apna Desh Webinar series titled "Astro- Tourism: The Next Frontier of Nature-based Tourism" held on 06th February, 2021 focused on promoting nature-based tourism which is

emerging strongly in a post - COVID world, the major thrust of the webinar was sustainable and responsible travel.

- The webinar focused on exploring the evolution of Astro-tourism as one of the most authentic and environment-friendly ways of travelling along with its immense potential to bring positive social, economic and conservation benefits to remote communities.
- Recently, in a first-of-its-kind initiative, the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)** has announced the setting up of **India's first Dark Sky Reserve in Hanle, Ladakh.**

1.125. WHAT IS NATIONAL SINGLE WINDOW SYSTEM?

Why in News?

- National Single Window System, NSWS Portal for various Central, State, and UT clearances has hit a new milestone by crossing 75 thousand approvals.

About National Single Window System (NSWS):

- The National Single Window System (NSWS) is a **digital platform to guide you in identifying and applying for approvals according to your business requirements.**
- The portal hosts applications for approvals from **26 Central Departments and 19 State Governments.** These approvals can be applied through NSWS.
- NSWS is providing a single interface to apply for all **G2B clearances from various Ministries and Departments** as well as eliminating duplication of work by auto-populating form fields across different approvals based on single investor profile.
- The platform is built to serve as an advisory tool to identify approvals based on user input and is to be used for guidance purpose only.
- The NSWS initiative is an epitome of the **'Whole of Government' approach** with different Central ministries/departments, states and UTs coming together to facilitate investor related clearances on a single portal, with transparency and accountability, enhancing ease of doing business exponentially.

1.126. ASPIRATIONAL BLOCK PROGRAMME.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India launched the Aspirational Block Programme at the second National Conference of Chief Secretaries in Delhi.

What is Aspirational Block Programme?

- The Aspirational Blocks Programme is on the lines of the Aspirational District Programme that was launched in 2018 and covers 112 districts across the country.
- This new programme is aimed at improving performance of blocks lagging on various development parameters.
- This will enable holistic development in those areas that require added assistance.
- The programme will cover **500 districts across 31 states** and Union Territories initially.
- Over half of these blocks are in 6 states—Uttar Pradesh (68 blocks), Bihar (61), Madhya Pradesh (42), Jharkhand (34), Odisha (29) and West Bengal (29).

What is Aspirational Districts Programme?

- It was launched in 2018 and aims to transform districts that have shown relatively lesser progress in key social areas.
- 3C Strategy: The broad contours of the programme
- Convergence (of Central & State Schemes)
- Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors)
- Competition (among districts driven by a Mass Movement)
- **Parameters for Ranking:** The ranking is based on the incremental progress made across 49 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) under 5 broad socio-economic themes
 - Health & Nutrition (30%)
 - Education (30%)
 - Agriculture & Water Resources (20%)
 - Financial Inclusion & Skill Development (10%)

- Infrastructure (10%)

1.127. STARTUP INDIA INNOVATION WEEK.

Why in News?

- Startup India Innovation Week will be organized from 10th to 16th of January to celebrate the Indian Startup Ecosystem and National Startup Day.
- The innovation week is intended to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation in the country.

More about Startup India Innovation Week:

- The Commerce and Industry Ministry said, knowledge sharing sessions for entrepreneurs, aspiring entrepreneurs, officials, incubators, corporates and investors will be organized during the Startup India Innovation Week.
- The Ministry said, as a part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, various startup-related events are being organized in more than 75 places across the country. The events include workshops for women entrepreneurs, training of incubators, mentorship workshops, capacity-building workshops, startup pitching sessions.
- The Ministry said, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade will organize the felicitation ceremony for the winners of National Startup Awards 2022 to commemorate National Startup Day on 16th of January.

What is the Startup India Initiative?

- **Launched on 16th January, 2016**, the Startup India Initiative has rolled out several programs with the objective of supporting entrepreneurs, building a robust startup ecosystem and transforming India into a country of job creators instead of job seekers.
- These programs are managed by a dedicated Startup India Team, which reports to the **Department for Industrial Policy and Promotion (DPIIT)**.
- Under the Startup India initiative, eligible companies can get recognised as Startups by DPIIT, in order to access a host of tax benefits, easier compliance, IPR fast-tracking etc.

Key Pillars of Support for Startups

- **Simplification and Handholding**
 - Easier compliance, easier exit process for failed startups, legal support, fast tracking of patent applications and a website to reduce information asymmetry.
- **Funding & Incentives**
 - Exemptions on Income Tax and Capital Gains Tax for eligible startups; a fund of funds to infuse more capital into the startup ecosystem and a credit guarantee scheme.
- **Incubation & Industry-Academia Partnerships**
 - Creation of numerous incubators and innovation labs, events, competitions and grants.

1.128. 26TH NATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL

- The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, in collaboration with the Government of Karnataka, is organizing the 26th National Youth Festival from January 12th to 16th in Hubballi-Dharwad, **Karnataka**.
- The **theme** of this year's festival is "**ViksitYuvaViksit Bharat**," which aims to empower the youth of India and promote their active participation in shaping the country's future.
- The festival will commence with an inaugural function that is expected to be attended by more than 30,000 youth from across the country. The Prime Minister of India will share his vision for the future with the young attendees, providing them with an opportunity to engage with the country's leaders and policymakers.
- **Learning Activities**-During the five-day event, over 7500 youth delegates, who are recognized leaders in their respective fields of activity, will come together to participate in a variety of learning activities. These activities will include discussions on relevant themes such as student-centric governance and Digital India, as well as exhibitions of traditional sports and competitive cultural events like folk dance and folk song.
- **Adventure Sports**-In addition to the learning activities, the festival will also include a wide range of adventure sports, including scuba diving, providing young people with an opportunity to experience new and exciting challenges.

- **Youth Summit-** One of the highlights of the festival will be the Youth Summit, which will provide a platform for two-way discussions on various themes, including the future of work, industry, innovation, and 21st century skills, climate change and disaster risk reduction, peacebuilding and reconciliation, shared future-youth in democracy and governance, and health and well-being. Many of the events at the festival will be live streamed across the nation, allowing crores of young people to engage with the festival and its activities, despite not being able to attend in person.
- **Green Festival-** This year, the festival is being celebrated as a Green Youth Festival, where only reusable cutlery, napkins, and other materials are being used. All mementos, medals, and stationery are made of reusable materials, and water refilling stations have been set up to reduce the use of disposables.
- **Yogathon-** On January 15th, a YOGATHON is planned between 6 AM to 8 AM, which will mobilize 5 lakh people from across 31 districts of Karnataka.

1.129. MSMEs MINISTER LAUNCHES WEB PORTAL FOR RAMP.

- In an effort to scale up the implementation capacity and coverage of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the country, the Minister of MSMEs, recently launched the web portal for the Rs 6,062.45 crore World Bank-assisted central government scheme, Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP).

Key Points

- The scheme was originally announced back in 2020 to support Covid-hit MSMEs in the country and aims to improve the performance of 5.55 lakh MSMEs, according to a World Bank statement.
- The launch of the web portal for the RAMP scheme is a step towards providing much-needed support to MSMEs in India that have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The scheme, which is backed by both the World Bank and the Indian government, aims to improve the performance of MSMEs in the country by supporting institutional and policy reforms, research studies, and technology upgradation.
- The scheme will initially be implemented in five states, with the goal of eventually scaling up to cover MSMEs throughout India.

About the RAMP Scheme

- The RAMP scheme, which has a budget of Rs 6,062.45 crore, was approved by the World Bank in June 2021. Of the total budget, Rs 3,750 crore was approved by the World Bank, while the remaining Rs 2,312.45 crore will be funded by the government. The scheme aims to improve the performance of 5.55 lakh MSMEs in the country and will be overseen by a National MSME Council headed by the MSME Minister.
- The budget for the RAMP scheme will be used for supporting institutional and policy reforms, research studies, integration of portals within the ministries/departments, increasing firm-level capabilities through technology upgradation, and reducing the incidence of delayed payments over a five-year period beginning in FY23.

Implementation of the RAMP Scheme

- During the first year of implementation, FY23, the RAMP scheme will invite states and union territories to prepare a financing roadmap called Strategic Investment Plans (SIPs).
- The projects or businesses proposed in the SIPs will be funded based on their appraisals by the MSME Ministry.
- The scheme will begin with five states – Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu, which are home to reportedly 54% of all registered MSMEs in the country.
- The financial support under the RAMP scheme will be routed into the MSME Ministry's budget against 'Disbursement Linked Indicators' (DLIs) to back the ministry's various MSME programs. The DLIs will include the National MSME Reform Agenda, accelerating MSME sector center-state collaboration, strengthening the invoice discounting market for MSMEs, and boosting the effectiveness of the CGTMSE scheme.

1.130. CADASTRAL MAPS OF 35% OF INDIA'S 6 LAKH VILLAGES GEO-REFERENCED: GOVT

- Union government has informed that cadastral maps of 35% of over six lakh villages in country have so far been geo-referenced under **Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP)**.

- Cadastral Maps are a **digital form of land records** that show all boundaries of different parts of land pieces based on their length, area, and direction.

About DILRMP

- DILRMP is implemented by Department of Land Resources under Ministry of Rural Development
- It is a Central Sector scheme that has been extended to 2023-24, to complete its original targets as well as expand its ambit with a slew of new schemes.
- 3 Major components:
 - Computerization of land record,
 - Survey/re-survey,
 - Computerization of Registration.

1.131. MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION NAMES FREE GRAIN SCHEME AS PRADHAN MANTRI GARIB KALYAN ANNA YOJANA (PMGKAY).

Why in news?

- Centre has named its new integrated food security scheme for providing free foodgrains to Antodaya Ann Yojna (AM) and Primary Household (PHH) beneficiaries under National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 as PMGKAY.
- It'll strengthen provisions of NFSA, 2013 in terms of **accessibility, affordability and availability** of foodgrains for poor.
- It will subsume two subsidy schemes of Department of Food & Public Distribution
- **Food Subsidy to FCI:** It is in form of consumer subsidy (Difference between Economic cost incurred by FCI and realized Central Issue Price) and buffer subsidy (Cost of holding and maintaining buffer stock).
- Food Subsidy for decentralized procurement states dealing with procurement, allocation and delivery of free food grains to states under NFSA.
- Earlier, scheme with similar name (PMGKAY) was implemented during Covid-19 pandemic.

What is the difference between two schemes?

- Earlier, NFSA beneficiaries were getting food grains entitlement (35 kg per AAY Household and 5 kg per person to PHH) at subsidized rate (Rs 3/kg rice, Rs 2/kg wheat and Rs 1/kg coarse grains).
- Now, government has done away with subsidized prices and is providing foodgrains free of cost for an year. However, additional quantity of 5 kg foodgrains will not be provided.

1.132. "SOUL OF STEEL" HIGH-ALTITUDE ENDURANCE CHALLENGE TO BE LAUNCHED IN INDIA.

Why in news?

- In an effort to test one's high-altitude endurance, a new challenge called "Soul of Steel" will be launched in India. Spearheaded by venture CLAW Global, which is run by veterans and supported by the Indian Army, the challenge will take place in the state of Uttarakhand and is similar to the "Ironman triathlon" long-distance triathlon challenge in Europe.
- The expedition will officially launch on January 14th, and will include 12 Indian participants and six international teams, with the age group for applicants being between 18 and 30 years.

Details

- The idea behind the "Soul of Steel" challenge, according to Major Vivek Jacob (Retd.) of CLAW Global, is "pooling of skillsets and creating a challenge that will unlock the human ability to survive, stabilize and thrive in high altitude areas."
- The challenge will also provide life skill training, youth development, and global promotion of adventure tourism in Uttarakhand, in addition to showcasing the skills of veterans.
- **Stages of the Challenge** The challenge will be divided into **four stages**.
- **Location**-The general area of the expedition will be the Nanda Devi national park, which has several peaks that are over 7000 feet tall. During the actual challenge, various situations will be presented to the participants through navigation points that they must cross.

About CLAW Global

- CLAW Global was established in January 2019 by Major Jacob, a para special forces officer who had to retire from the Army after 14 years of service due to a combat skydive injury. In August 2021, a group of differently-abled people led by CLAW Global trekked up to Kumar post on Siachen Glacier, the world's highest battlefield.

1.133. "SAHARSH" SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM LAUNCHED BY TRIPURA STATE GOVERNMENT.

Why in news?

- The 'Saharsh' was launched in 40 schools of the state on a pilot basis in August last year.
- This year, it will be extended to all government and aided schools in Tripura from the second week of January.

Key Points

- On the inauguration of the 49th state-level science, mathematics, and environment exhibition, Education Minister informed that the state government has been working to make Tripura self-reliant and prosperous.
- The 'Saharsh' initiative is aimed at empowering children to learn with happiness.
- The state government has trained 204 schools for the 'Saharsh' curriculum while 200 more will be trained in the future.
- 30 assistant headmasters from different districts of Tripura were also selected to work as Saharsh implementation ambassadors.
- Under the Saharsh program, Children won't be pressurized to study, rather they will be encouraged to social and emotional learning.

1.134. INDIA EYES RS. 35000 CR INVESTMENTS BY 2047 TO CREATE WATERWAYS NETWORK SAYS CHAIRMAN OF IWAI.

Why in news

- Chairman of Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) stated that plan will include developing waterways and jetties to improve navigable capacity of Indian rivers.
- India has an extensive network of inland waterways in form of rivers, canals, backwaters and creeks that may supplement over-burdened railways and congested roadways.
 - To promote Inland Water Transport (IWT), 111 waterways have been declared as National Waterways (NWs) under National Waterways Act, 2016.
 - Of these, 13 NWs are operational.
- **Benefits of IWT:** eco-friendly and cheaper (less fuel consumption per tonne-km), better connectivity to hinterland, require relatively less maintenance etc.
- **Challenges** faced in IWT:
 - Decreased water flow due to industrial, agricultural and other uses,
 - inadequate water channel depth,
 - Excessive Siltation,
 - Low technology adaption etc.
- **Other initiatives taken**
 - PANI (Portal for Asset & Navigation Information) provides detailed information on various waterways.
 - CAR-D (Cargo Data) Portal, a web based portal for all cargo and cruise movement data of NWs.
 - Ro-Ro/Ro-Pax Service Commenced in Various NWs.

1.135. FOREST DEPT, NABARD TO GIVE SKILL-DEVELOPMENT TRAINING TO THARU PEOPLE.

- Forest department of Katarniaghat division and NABARD planning to give skill-development training to Tharu people that live near Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS).
- **Tharu People** are ethnic group indigenous to Terai region of Himalayan foothills, located in southern Nepal. In India, they mostly lived in Utter Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand.
- They speak various dialects of Tharu, a language of Indo-Aryan subgroup.
- KWS is situated in Upper Gangetic plain falling in Terai of Bahraich district, UP.

- It is part of core area of Dudhwa Tiger reserve.
- It provides strategic connectivity between tiger habitat of India and Nepal.

1.136. 15 R&D PROJECTS CLEARED IN STRATEGIC AREAS UNDER NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEXTILES MISSION (NTTM).

- These 15 research & development projects include key strategic areas such as Speciality fibre, Protective textiles, High-Performance Textiles, Geotextiles, Medical Textiles, Sustainable Textiles, and Textiles for Building Materials.
- NTTM is being implemented over a period of four years (FY 2020-21 to 2023-24). It has four components namely
 - Research, Innovation and Development for development of protective fibre, application-based research in different Technical Textiles (TT) such as geotextiles, etc.
 - Promotion and Market Development aim at taking domestic market size to \$40-50 billion by 2024.
 - Export Promotion ensures 10% average growth in exports upto 2024.
 - Education, Training, Skill Development for Technical education related to TT at higher levels.
- TT are textiles materials and products manufactured primarily for technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic characteristics.
- They are used individually or as a component/part of another product to enhance its functional properties.
- TT is a knowledge-based research-oriented industry.
- TT are broadly classified into 12 different categories.

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ENVIRONMENT

1.137. MUDWANI DAM ECO-PARK.

Why in News?

- Ministry of Coal converts suitable mine areas, after exhaustion of reserves, into eco-parks, sites for water sports, underground mine tourism, golf grounds, adventure, bird watching etc. These sites have good potential for recreation, revenue generation and employment for local people.

About Mudwani Dam Eco-park:

- Mudwani Dam Eco-park, developed by Northern Coalfields Limited in Singrauli and Ananya Vatika Eco-Restoration Park cum Pit Lake developed by South Eastern Coalfields Limited in Dola, both in Madhya Pradesh are unique examples for such initiatives.
- Mudwani Dam Eco-park in Singrauli, is spread over an area of 84,000m² and inaugurated during Vriksharopan Abhiyan 2021.
- Located in Jayant area, Mudwani Dam Eco-park is developed with beautiful water front, walking pathways, children sports area, restaurants and shops for local products will also be part of this eco-park.

Ananya Vatika Eco-Restoration Park:

- Ananya Vatika Eco-Restoration Park cum Pit Lake is developed after reclamation of abandoned OB dump of Sector "D" of Rajnagar Opencast Project of Hasedo Area located in Dola, Madhya Pradesh.
- It is one of the best examples of reclamation and sustainable development in Open Cast Mining Project.

1.138. WHAT IS SOUTH ASIAN BLACK CARBON AEROSOLS?

Why in News?

- According to a study, published in Nature Communications, found that since the 21st century, South Asian black carbon aerosols have indirectly affected the mass gain of the Tibetan Plateau glaciers by changing long-range water vapour transport from the South Asian monsoon region.

About Black Carbon Aerosols:

- **Black carbon aerosols** are produced by the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and biomass, and are characterised by strong light absorption.
- **The South Asia region adjacent to the Tibetan Plateau has among the highest levels of black carbon emission in the world.**
- Many studies have emphasised black carbon aerosols from South Asia can be transported across the **Himalayas to the inland region of the Tibetan Plateau.**
- **Black carbon deposition in snow reduces the albedo of surfaces** -- a measure of how much of Sun's radiations are reflected -- which may accelerate the melting of glaciers and snow cover, thus changing the hydrological process and water resources in the region.
- Black carbon aerosols in South Asia heat up the **middle and upper atmosphere**, thus increasing the **North-South temperature gradient.**
- Accordingly, the convective activity in South Asia is enhanced, which causes convergence of water vapour in South Asia. Meanwhile, black carbon also increases the number of cloud condensation nuclei in the atmosphere.
- These changes in meteorological conditions caused by black carbon aerosols make more water vapour form precipitation in South Asia, and the northward transport to the Tibetan Plateau was weakened.
- As a result, precipitation in the central and the southern Tibetan Plateau decreases during the monsoon, especially in the southern Tibetan Plateau.
- The decrease in precipitation further leads to a decrease of mass gain of glaciers.
- From 2007 to 2016, the reduced mass gain by precipitation decrease accounted for 11% of the average glacier mass loss on the Tibetan Plateau and 22.1% in the Himalayas.

1.139. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES.

Why in News?

- National Commission for Scheduled Tribes recently said that Forest (Conservation) Rules (FCR) 2022 will invariably violate the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

About National Commission for Scheduled Tribes:

- Established in: 2004.

Constitutional Provisions:

- It was established by amending **Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003.**
- By this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely-
 - **The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and**
 - **The NCST w.e.f. 19 February, 2004.**

What is the composition of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes?

- The term of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and each member is three years from the date of assumption of charge.
- The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Minister, and the Vice-Chairperson that of a Minister of State and other Members have the ranks of a Secretary to the Government of India.

What are the functions of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (Under Clause (5) of Art. 338A)?

- To Monitor safeguards provided for STs under the Constitution or under other laws;
- To inquire into specific complaints relating to Rights & Safeguards of STs;
- To advise in the Planning Process relating to Socio-economic development of STs;
- To submit report to the President annually and other times on welfare Measures required related to Socio-economic development of STs;
- To discharge such other functions in relation to STs as the President may by rule specify;

1.140. WHAT IS DIEBACK DISEASE?**Why in News?**

- Dieback disease hits neem trees in Telangana again.

About Dieback Disease:

- The dieback disease was **first reported in the country during the 1990s near Dehradun in Uttarakhand**, while it was first noticed in Telangana in 2019.
- The dieback disease is mainly caused by the **fungi Phomopsis azadirachtae**.
- The dieback disease affects **leaves, twigs and the inflorescence of neem trees** of all ages and it causes almost **100% loss of fruit production in severely infected trees**.
- The dieback is a fungal disease but the neem trees are sometimes hit by insect infestation and the combination of both increases its impact.
- The disease posing a threat to the neem trees has been identified as twig blight and dieback disease in Telangana, and it has reappeared in the state this year on a massive scale.
- The appearance of symptoms starts with the **onset of the rainy season** and becomes progressively severe in the later part of the rainy season and early winter.

1.141. DEEPORBEEL**Why in News?**

- Recently, The Assam Cabinet approved the **construction of elephant underpasses in 7 jumbo corridors between Azara and Kamakhya railway stations along the boundary of DeeporBeel**.

About DeeporBeel:

- DeeporBeel is a permanent freshwater lake and also a bird sanctuary in Kamrup district, Assam.
- It is a riverine wetland, lying in a former channel of the Brahmaputra River, it lies to the south of the main river channel.
- It was designated as a Ramsar site in 2002 for sustaining a range of aquatic life forms besides 219 species of birds and it is the **only Ramsar site in Assam**.

- This lake is a staging site on migratory flyways and some of the largest concentrations of aquatic birds in Assam can be seen, especially in winter.
- Some globally threatened birds are supported, including **Spot-billed Pelican, Lesser Greater Adjutant Stork and Baer's Pochard**.
- The 50 fish species present provide livelihoods for many surrounding villages, and nymphaea nuts and flowers, as well as ornamental fish, medicinal plants, and seeds of the Giant water lily Euryale Ferox, provide major revenue sources in local markets.
- In 2021, the Environment Ministry notified it as an Eco-sensitive zone.

1.142. INDIA RECYCLES ONLY 30% OF 3.4 MT PLASTIC WASTE GENERATED ANNUALLY: REPORT

Why in news?

- Report titled 'Innovation in Plastics, The Potential and Possibilities' was released by Marico Innovation Foundation and developed in association with Indian Institute of Science and Praxis Global Alliance.
- It examines plastic waste management ecosystem in India to identify 2022, challenges and opportunities with special emphasis on business and technological innovations.

Key findings of report

- India produces 3.4 million tonnes of plastic waste in a year, only 30 percent of it is recycled. Rest of plastic waste is sent to landfills or aquatic dumps.
- Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu together contribute 38 percent to total plastic waste generated in India.
- 94% of recycled plastic waste is shredded in India using mechanical recycling method.
- Impact of plastic waste: Greenhouse gas emissions i.e., carbon dioxide, methane; Contamination of entire food chain due to presence of micro plastics; Threats to animals especially marine species etc.
- Recommendations
 - Landfill and incineration taxes must be levied in India to encourage recycling.
 - Authorise pay-as-you-throw system, which requires citizens to pay a variable rate per kilogram for a bag of mixed garbage.
 - Regulate entire life cycle of plastic bags from manufacturing, imports to disposal.

Initiatives for Plastic Waste Management (PWM)

- PWM Amendment rules 2021 banned use of single use plastic(SUP) from July 2022
- Guidelines on Extended producer responsibility on plastic packaging
- National dashboard on elimination of SUP

1.143. WEST USA HIT BY TRUE PINEAPPLE EXPRESS.

Why in news?

- Over the past two weeks, California and other parts of the West Coast have been hit with a series of what meteorologists call atmospheric rivers. Forecasters have said that the rain in California on January 12 was caused by a “true Pineapple Express” – a specific example of a common atmospheric phenomenon that resembles a conveyor belt for moisture.

What is the “Pineapple Express” Phenomenon?

- “Pineapple Express” is a specific example of a common atmospheric phenomenon known as atmospheric rivers.
- Also known as “rivers in the sky” according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, these are long, narrow regions in the atmosphere that transport most of the water vapor outside the tropics.
- They carry a lot of moisture – enough water vapor to equal or sometimes exceed the average flow of the Mississippi River at the point where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico.
- For an atmospheric river to be classified as a “true Pineapple Express,” its **location** is the key. The tail end, where the moisture is pulled into the atmosphere, must start near Hawaii. Then the river must stretch continuously through the atmosphere to the U.S. West Coast. This type of atmospheric river is known to bring heavy precipitation to the West Coast, as it is a continuous flow of moisture.

- Atmospheric rivers occur often on the West Coast but can happen in other locations, including the eastern United States, where they often channel moisture from the Caribbean. They are an essential part of the livelihood of coastal states, which rely heavily on precipitation for their water supply. Between 30% and 50% of the annual precipitation on the West Coast occurs from just a few atmospheric river events, according to the NOAA.

Effects of “Pineapple Express” storms

- When the atmospheric rivers are particularly strong – or come back-to-back in what are called “atmospheric river families” – the effects can be serious. This is the case in California, where the recent storms have led to extensive flooding. The “Pineapple Express” can be a double-edged sword, as it brings much-needed water to the state but also leads to destructive flooding if the storms are too strong.

1.144. NEELAKURINJI PLANT LISTED AS A PROTECTED SPECIES UNDER WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT.

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) has listed Neelakurinji (Strobilanthes kunthiana) under Schedule III of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, including it on the list of protected plants.
- This move is aimed at protecting the plant from being destroyed or uprooted, which has become a major threat to the flowering areas. The new order also includes strict penalties for those found guilty of destroying or uprooting the plant. Environmentalists have welcomed this move, and have called on the Forest department to ensure the protection of the areas where Neelakurinji blooms.

Penalties for destroying the plant

- As per the new order, those who uproot or destroy the Neelakurinji plant will invite a fine of ₹25,000- and three-years’ imprisonment.
- The cultivation of Neelakurinji and its possession is also not allowed. This is a significant move, as it will help in protecting the plant and its habitats.

About Neelakurinji plant

- Neelakurinji is an endemic plant found in a small stretch in the Western Ghats, from the Mangaladevi hills to the Nilgiris hills. The most popular Neelakurinji is Strobilanthes kunthiana which blooms once in 12 years.
- However, some other rare varieties of Neelakurinji are also found in the Western Ghats region. The blooming of Neelakurinji is a major attraction for tourists, who flock to the locations where it blooms. However, this has also led to the destruction and uprooting of the plant, which is a major threat to the flowering areas.

1.145. SURVEY AT ALAPPUZHA WETLANDS HINTS AT A DECLINE IN NUMBER OF VISITING WATERBIRDS.

Why in news?

- A survey conducted as part of the **Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2023** shows the populations of some migratory waterbirds, especially duck species visiting the Alappuzha region of Kerala, are falling.

Highlights of the Survey

- **Major Missing Species:** Duck species like **Northern Shoveler, Common teal and Eurasian wigeon**, sighted in the previous surveys, were totally missing this time around.
- **Climate change** has affected the number of birds visiting the region. However, the precise impact of climate change on bird migration **requires more detailed studies**.

About Asian Waterbird Census

- It is a **citizen-science programme** supporting conservation and management of **wetlands** and waterbirds worldwide.
- AWC is part of the global **International Waterbird Census (IWC)** coordinated by **Wetlands International**. AWC runs in parallel with other regional programmes of the IWC in Africa, Europe, West Asia, the Neotropics and the Caribbean.
- **AWC in India:**

- It was **initiated in the Indian subcontinent in 1987** and since then has grown rapidly to cover major regions of Asia, from Afghanistan eastwards to Japan, Southeast Asia and Australasia.
- In India, AWC is jointly coordinated by the **Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and Wetlands International**.

Significance

- It **gives an idea of the birds at the wetland and the health of the wetland**; the more the waterbirds, the more suitable the wetland is.
- It helps in **better implementation of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD)**.

1.146. RARE SPECIES OF DUCK SIGHTED IN MANIPUR'S LOKTAK LAKE AFTER OVER 90 YEARS.

- **Greater Scaup**- It is a rare species of duck (locally known as Sadangman) that was recently sighted in Loktak lake (Manipur) after a gap of over 90 years.
- Loktak lake is famous for Keibullamjao National Park and Sangai, the dancing deer.
- Greater Scaup is a migratory bird widely distributed across Arctic and Subarctic regions where it mainly nests in coastal tundra habitats.
- It belongs to the family of Anatidae.
- IUCN status: Least Concern.

1.147. UNEP AND S&P GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE1 LAUNCH NEW NATURE RISK PROFILE METHODOLOGY.

- UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and S&P Global have launched Nature Risk Profile.
- NRP is aimed at enabling financial sector to measure and address nature-related risk by providing scientifically robust and actionable analytics on nature impacts and dependencies.
- Its methodology is based on Kunming-Montreal **Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)**, adopted in December 2022.
- GBF includes a target for governments to take legal, administrative or policy measures to encourage and enable businesses to regularly monitor, assess, and transparently disclose their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity.

1.148. RARE 'ORANGE BAT' SPOTTED IN BASTAR'S KANGER VALLEY NATIONAL PARK IN CHHATTISGARH.

- A rare orange-coloured bat, which is a "**near threatened**" species, has been spotted in Chhattisgarh.
- The animal, also known as the '**painted bat**' and characterised by bright orange and black wings, was sighted at a banana farm in ParaliBodal village of the park on Monday
- The bright orange-coloured bat was seen for the third time in the last few years in the **Kanger Valley National Park** located in the Bastar district.
- The national park is **famous for its limestone caves** which also provide a suitable habitat for bats, as per experts.
- The painted bat, whose scientific name is '**Kerivoulapicta**', is a "near threatened" species and commonly seen in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, Ganvir said.
- The painted bats are **aerial hawkers**, which means they catch insects while flying in the air. It is often observed at the time of maize harvest
- The park, spread over an area of about 200 sq km, is rich in biodiversity and sightings of some of the rare species of fauna were reported multiple times in the past.
- These bats **prefer to live in dry areas and dense moist forests**. For roosting, they prefer to take shelter under banana leaves.
- The painted bat is characterised by bright orange and black wings, dense orange fur on the back and warm buff below. Their hairy face has no ornamentation or nose leaf. Their ears are large and funnel-shaped with transparent tragus.

- In India, there are about 131 species of bats and 31 of them are found in central parts of the country.

1.149. SPOT BELLIED EAGLE OWL SPOTTED IN SESHACHALAM FOREST.

- A 'Spot Bellied Eagle Owl' (*Bubo Nipalensis*) was spotted for the first time in the Seshachalam forest, and for the third time in Andhra Pradesh.

About Spot Bellied Eagle Owl

- The bold **predatory bird**, measuring 20-25 inches in length and weighing between 1.5 kg and 2 kg, feeds on **small rodents and lizards**.
- The bird makes a **strange scream similar to humans** and it is hence called the '**Ghost of the Forest**' in India and '**Devil Bird**' in Sri Lanka.
- It is a forest-inhabiting species found in **the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia**
- **IUCN Status: Least Concern**

Indian star tortoise faces twin challenges of habitat loss and genetic diversity, finds study.

- A recent study has revealed that genetic diversity of the species as well as habitat has suffered major losses because of rampant illegal trade.
- Rampant illegal trade has caused major losses and unscientific translocations that have resulted in genetic mixing between different populations.
- Star Tortoises, with their distinct star-like markings on the shell, are found in dry lowlands of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable
- Also included in Appendix I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

1.150. EXPERTS SLAM MOVE TO DEWATER HAIDERPUR WETLAND.

- The Uttar Pradesh irrigation department drained out Haiderpur wetland, a protected Ramsar site that some believe to be the best upland in North India, forcing tens of thousands of migratory birds to leave the most prominent bird site in western Uttar Pradesh.
- Haiderpur Wetland is a human made wetland formed in 1984 by the construction of the Madhya Ganga Barrage on a floodplain of Ganga.
- It is located within the boundaries of Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Species: It supports species like the critically endangered gharial and hog deer (EN), black-bellied tern (EN), Indian skimmer (EN) and golden mahseer(EN).
- **Ramsar Convention** is an **intergovernmental treaty** that provides the framework for conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- India has **75 Ramsar sites**.

1.151. MASS MORTALITY OF OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES IN GODAVARI REGION OF ANDHRA PRADESH RAISES CONCERNS.

- Several ORT breeding grounds in Godavari region like Sakhinetipalli, Malikipuram, Mamidikuduru and Allavarametcof Andhra Pradesh (A.P) have been witnessing mass mortality of turtles.
- Scientific name of Olive Ridley Turtles (ORT) is *Lepidochelys olivacea*
- ORT are smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles, inhabiting warm waters of Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- In India, they nest mostly in eastern coast in A.P and Odisha (Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary and Rushikulya coast).
- ORT, along with Kemps ridley turtle, are best known for their unique mass nesting called **Arribada**.
- **Threats:** Unfriendly fishing practices, exploitation of nesting beaches.
- Protection: IUCN status: Vulnerable, Schedule I species under Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

1.152. ONGC TO MAP INDIA'S GEOTHERMAL RESOURCES IN SEARCH OF CLEAN ENERGY.

- ONGC plans to map the geothermal energy sources of India in search of clean energy.
- Move comes at a time when India has set an ambitious target of 500 GW of installed renewable energy capacity by 2030 and net zero carbon emission by 2070.

Geothermal Energy

- Geothermal energy is stored in the form of heat beneath the earth's surface and is considered to be clean, renewable and carbon-free.
- Magma in inner layer of earth heats nearby rocks and underground aquifers, as a result hot water is released through geysers, hot springs, steam vents, underwater hydrothermal vents, and mud pots. Hot water and steam can be piped up through underground wells and used to generate electricity in a power plant.
- As per preliminary investigations undertaken by Geological Survey of India, there are around 300 geothermal hot springs in India.
- Puga and Chumathang in eastern Ladakh are the most promising geothermal sites.
- Other sites include Cambay in Gujarat, Tattapani in Chattisgarh, Khammam in Telangana & Ratnagiri in Maharashtra.
- According to estimates, India has a potential of 10 GW of geothermal energy.
- Benefits of Geothermal energy : carbon-free, renewable, provides a continuous, uninterrupted supply etc.
- Disadvantages: location-specific energy source, associated with other emissions like sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulphide, causes mini tremors in area of operation, high initial cost etc

1.153. SOUTH AFRICA INKS MOU TO SEND 12 CHEETAHS TO KUNO NATIONAL PARK (KNP).

- 12 Cheetah from South Africa are expected to arrive by February-March 2023. Earlier in September 2022, KNP had received eight cheetahs from Namibia.
- **Project Cheetah**, approved by Supreme Court in 2020 aims to reintroduce atleast 50 cheetahs over next five years.
- It is world's first inter-continental large wild carnivore translocation project.
- National Tiger Conservation Authority is nodal agency authorized lot funding and supervision of project.

Significance of Cheetah restoration

- Restoring open forest and grassland ecosystems in India.
- Conserve biodiversity and enhance ecosystem services like water security, carbon sequestration etc.
- Enhanced livelihood opportunities for local community through eco-development and ecotourism activities.
- Cheetah is a keystone species (organism that helps define an entire ecosystem) of dry forests, scrub forests, and savannahs.
- It is the only large wild mammalian species that went extinct from India.
- Protected Under Appendix I of CITES.
- IUCN status: African Cheetah (Vulnerable) and Asiatic Cheetah (Critically endangered)
- Major Cheetah range countries: Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola, Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya in Africa, and Iran and India in Asia.

Kuno National Park

- KNP is situated in Vindhyan Hills in Madhya Pradesh.
- It falls under Kathiawar-Gir dry deciduous forest eco-region and vegetation is dominated by Kardhai, Khan and Saki trees.

1.154. KELP FORESTS LOSING UNIQUE TRAITS DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE, SAYS STUDY.

- Kelp Forests are declining because of climate change, showed a new study.
- Due to this, the unique adaptive or evolutionary genetic diversity that the **rear-edge populations** (populations in warm, low-latitudes) may contain is also under threat due to rapid warming.

According to Study

- *Ecklonia radiata*, a **dominant kelp species in the southern hemisphere**, is vulnerable to climate change, especially in regions near the equator.
- Rising temperatures are causing declines in the **species along the eastern Australian coastline and it is expected to decline further in the future globally.**

- In situ protection **may not be possible but its unique genetic diversity** can be preserved through ex situ preservation in culture banks for use in future restoration, hybridization, or adaptation strategies.

About

- **Kelp forests** — underwater ecosystems formed in shallow water by the dense growth of several different species known as kelps
 - Kelps are **large brown algae that live in cool**, relatively shallow waters close to the shore.
 - They attach to the **seafloor and eventually grow to the water's surface and rely on sunlight to generate food and energy**, kelp forests are always coastal and require shallow, relatively clear water.

Importance:

- Kelp forests provide underwater habitats to hundreds of species of invertebrates, fishes, and other algae and have great ecological and economic value.
 - It serves as a pertinent food source **for a variety of marine creatures**. Kelps are responsible for **producing up to 60% of the carbon** found in coastal invertebrates.
 - As a diverse invertebrate and fish ecosystem, **they serve as a habitat for birds to forage**.
 - It releases carbon into the **coastal ecology, increasing its productivity**. New biomass, detritus, and other materials are produced through primary production by kelp.
- Loss of kelp forests will also lead to a decline of the unique biodiversity that they support, the researchers wrote in the paper.

1.155. RED-HEADED VULTURE.

- Red Headed vulture was spotted in India after a gap of 2 decades in Delhi's Bhatti mines.
- Red-headed vulture is also known as Asian King Vulture or Pondicherry Vulture.
- It was extensively found in the Indian Subcontinent but their population was drastically reduced by diclofenac poisoning.
- IUCN Status: Critically Endangered Species.
- Scientific name: *Sarcogyps calvus*.

Noble's Helen Butterfly

- Noble's Helen, a swallowtail butterfly disappearing from its previously known ranges has been sighted in India for the first time.
- Species was recorded at Namdapha National Park of Arunachal Pradesh.
 - Park is named after Namdapha river that flows in a North-South direction of Park.
- Butterflies are considered vital indicators representing state of biodiversity and key ecosystem functions.
- Distribution: Myanmar, Yunnan and Hubai regions of China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

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GEOGRAPHY

1.156. HEAT DOME

Why in news?

- Recently, Several parts of Europe witnessed an unprecedented winter heat wave and experts said that temperatures increased 10 to 20 degrees Celsius above normal.
- At least seven countries in Europe recorded their hottest January weather ever. These included Poland, Denmark, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia.
- Experts said that the continent is experiencing an extremely warm spell because of the formation of a heat dome over the region.

What is a heat dome?

- A heat dome occurs when an area of **high-pressure traps warm air over a region**, for an extended period. The longer that air remains trapped, the more the sun works to heat the air, producing warmer conditions with every passing day.
- Heat domes generally stay for a few days but sometimes they can extend up to weeks, which might cause deadly heat waves.
- Moreover, when air sinks, it gets drier and further raises the temperature of the area.

How is a heat dome formed?

- The heat dome's formation is related to the behaviour of the **jet stream**; an area of fast-moving air high in the atmosphere.
- The jet stream is believed to have a wave-like pattern that keeps moving from **north to south and then north again**.
- When these waves get bigger, they move slowly and sometimes can become stationary. This is when a heat dome forms.

Previous instances of heat domes

- In 2021, a heat dome formed over western Canada and the US, causing deadly heat waves. Portland city in Oregon, US, saw the mercury rise to 46 degrees Celsius while the temperature in Washington hit 49 degrees Celsius.

1.157. COLOUR- CODED WEATHER WARNING.

Why in news?

- Recently India's Meteorological Department (IMD) issued an orange alert in the Delhi-NCR region.
- In Delhi, the day temperature settled several notches below normal and the minimum temperature plunged to 4.4 degrees Celsius, the season's lowest and making the national capital colder than Dharamshala, Nainital and Dehradun.

What is a colour-coded weather warning?

- These are issued by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) for explaining the severity of the weather phenomena which has the potential to cause damage, widespread disruption or danger to life.
- These alerts are also issued during floods, depending on the amount of water rising above land/in a river as a result of torrential rainfall. Warnings are updated daily.
- The IMD uses 4 colour codes:
 - **Green (All is well):** No advisory is issued.
 - **Yellow (Be Aware):** Yellow indicates severely bad weather spanning several days. It also suggests that the weather could change for the worse, disrupting day-to-day activities.
 - **Orange/Amber (Be prepared):** The orange alert is issued as a warning of extremely bad weather with the potential of disruption in commute with road and rail closures, and interruption of power supply.
 - **Red (Take Action):** When extremely bad weather conditions are certainly going to disrupt travel and power and have significant risks to life, the red alert is issued.

India Meteorological Department

- It is the main agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology in India.

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- It operates hundreds of observation stations across India and Antarctica.
- Regional offices are in Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur, Guwahati and New Delhi.
- It is also one of the six Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres of the World Meteorological Organisation.
- It has the responsibility for **forecasting, naming and distributing warnings** for tropical cyclones in the Northern Indian Ocean region, including the Malacca Straits, the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.

1.158. FSSAI SPECIFIES IDENTITY STANDARDS FOR BASMATI RICE.

Why in news?

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has specified the identity standards for basmati rice.
- The comprehensive regulatory standards will be enforced from August 1, according to a statement from the Union Health Ministry.
- These standards apply to **brown basmati rice, milled basmati rice, parboiled brown basmati rice, and milled parboiled basmati rice** and are intended to establish fair practices in the trade of basmati rice and protect consumer interest, both domestically and globally.

Standards for Quality and Identity

- As per the standards, basmati rice must possess the natural fragrance characteristic of basmati rice and be free from artificial coloring, polishing agents and artificial fragrances.
- The standards also specify various identity and quality parameters for basmati rice such as average size of grains and their elongation ratio after cooking, maximum limits of moisture, amylose content, uric acid, defective/damaged grains and incidental presence of other non-basmati rice.

About Basmati rice

- Basmati rice is a premium variety of rice cultivated in the Himalayan foothills of the Indian sub-continent and is known for its long grain size, fluffy texture, and unique inherent aroma and flavor.
- India accounts for two thirds of its global supply.
- Uniqueness is attributed to agro-climatic conditions as well as method of harvesting, processing and ageing of rice.

Adulteration and Standardization

- Being a premium quality rice and fetching a price higher than the non-basmati varieties, Basmati rice is prone to various types of adulteration for economic gains which may include, among others, undeclared blending of other non-basmati varieties of rice.
- Therefore, in order to ensure the supply of standardized genuine Basmati rice in domestic and export markets, FSSAI has implemented these regulatory standards, which have been framed through extensive consultations with the concerned government departments/agencies and other stakeholders.

1.159. NEW STUDIES CONDUCTED TO UNDERSTAND MODERN FORM OF GLOBAL OVERTURNING CIRCULATION (GOC).

Why in news

- GOC refers to equatorward transport of cold, deep waters and poleward transport of warm, near-surface waters.
 - It is responsible for transport of carbon and heat among ocean basins and between ocean and atmosphere.
- GOC is a system of two connected overturning cells:
 - **Upper cell** is linked to formation of North Atlantic Deep Water (NADW) and its shallower return flow to form Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC).
 - **Lower cell** (referred as Southern Ocean Meridional Overturning Circulation) is associated with formation of Antarctic Bottom Water (AMM) and its return flow as Pacific Deep Water (PDW).

- Studies have indicated that tectonically driven changes in ocean gateways such as closure of Central American Seaway (CAS), since late Miocene period, had impacted GOC.
 - CAS is a body of water that once separated North America from South America.
- Now, National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research reconstructed Deep Water Circulation record of Indian Ocean and provided evidence in support of theory that closure of CAS led to evolution of modern form of GOC.
- Indian Ocean does not have any major deep-water formations of its own. It acts only as a host for both GOC components.

1.160. NEW PLATEAU TYPE DISCOVERED FROM MAHARASHTRA.

- A rare low-altitude **basalt plateau** has been discovered in Thane region in Western Ghats (a global biodiversity hotspot and UNESCO World Heritage site in India).
- This is the fourth type of plateau to be identified in the region; previous three are laterites at high and low altitudes and basalt at high altitudes.
- 76 species of plants and shrubs from 24 different families have been found.
- Plateaus are dominant landscapes in Western Ghats. They are classified as a type of **rocky outcrop**.
- Rocky outcrops are **geological features that protrude above the surface of surrounding land**.
- They are formed by **weathering that happens at different rates**, causing the less weathered rock to remain exposed.
- They are found on all continents, in most climate zones and vegetation types.
- **Significance of rocky outcrops**
 - Support **high levels of species diversity and endemism**.
 - They have **seasonal water availability**, limited soil and nutrients, making them **ideal to study effects of climate change on species survival**.
 - They provide critical breeding sites for many top order mammalian and avian predators; nesting sites for colonial species such as seabirds, bats and swifts.

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SUMMIT

1.161. PM MODI TO ADDRESS 108TH INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS ON JAN 3.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the 108th Indian Science Congress (ISC) through video conferencing.
- The 108th annual session of ISC will be held at Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Maharashtra which is also celebrating its centenary this year.
- The first session of the Congress was held in 1914
- The focal theme of this year's ISC is Science and Technology for Sustainable Development with Women Empowerment.
- It will witness discussions on issues of sustainable development, women empowerment and the role of science and technology.
- The participants will discuss and deliberate on ways to increase the number of women in higher echelons of teaching, research and industry, along with trying to find ways to provide women with equal access to Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics education, and economic participation.
- A special programme to showcase the contribution of women in science and technology will also be held, which will also witness lectures by renowned women scientists.

Several other programmes will also be organised alongside ISC.

- **Children's Science Congress** will be organised to help stimulate scientific interest and temperament among children.
- **Farmer's Science Congress** will provide a platform to improve the bio-economy and attract youth to agriculture.
- **Tribal Science Congress** will also be held, which will be a platform for scientific display of indigenous ancient knowledge system and practice, along with focusing on the empowerment of tribal women.

1.162. WHAT IS Y20 SUMMIT?

Why in News?

- Youth Affairs and Sports Minister Anurag Singh Thakur will launch the themes of the Y20 summit, logo, and website in New Delhi on January 6 in the curtain raiser event of Y20 Summit India.

About Y20 Summit:

- The Y20 is the **official youth engagement group for the G20 (Group of 20), the forum for the world's largest and most advanced economies.**
- The Y20 is a process which brings together young leaders from across the globe, to discuss and debate global challenges and agree policy recommendations they would like to see G20 leaders take forward.
- The list of policy recommendations is known as a **communiqué**, which is announced publicly at the Y20 Summit and presented to world leaders as part of the official G20 summit.
- **India is hosting the Y20 summit for the first time.**
- In Youth 20 Engagement Group, India's key focus is to bring young leaders from all across the globe together and discuss ideas for a better tomorrow and draft an agenda for action.
- The activities to be undertaken by Y20 during India's presidency will focus on global youth leadership and partnership.
- In a run-up to the final Youth-20 Summit, for the next eight months, there will be Pre summits on the **five Y20 themes** along with various discussions and seminars at different Universities across the country.

1.163. GUJARAT HOSTS THE 30TH NATIONAL CHILD SCIENCE CONGRESS PROGRAM FROM JAN 27-31

- The National Council for Science and Technology operating under the Department of Science and Technology recently organized the National Child Science Congress, 2023.
- The congress was hosted by the Gujarat Council of Science City. It is being held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.
- The **theme** of the congress was "Understanding Eco System for Health and Wellbeing". More than 1400 delegates will attend the conference.

- **Students at the district level in various states presented their projects to the committee on this theme. The teams from the State Level and Gulf Countries, hereby selected, will represent their respective States/Countries and present their projects at the National Level during these five days.**
- Another highlight of the National Children's Science Congress program is that students can present their projects in any language.
- 658 child scientists from different states, 250 guide teachers and 92 state coordinators will participate in this National Children Science Congress at Science City and SAL Campus from 27th to 31st January, 2023.
- The event will also be participated by 17 National Academic Committee, 70 scientific jury members, 15 eminent scientists and resource persons and Government officials. More than 1400 people are expected to participate in this event. Also, 18 contestants from Gulf countries will present their projects.
- The 5-day event will feature student project presentations as well as numerous activities including cultural programs, special talks, interactive sessions, drone workshops, visits to various thematic galleries of Science City.
- A special "Meet the Scientist" Session will be held during this National Children's Science Congress, in which famous scientists like Shri Nilesh Desai, Director, SAC-ISRO, Dr. Rajat Moona, Director, IIT Gandhinagar, Dr. Deepak Sharma, Scientific Officer (G) BARC, Mumbai etc. will present their subject knowledge on different issues to the students and the people attending the program.

About the Congress

- NCSC program was launched in 1993 by the NCSTC for children in the age group of 10 to 17 years to provide an platform for children to be rational and apply scientific methods to find solutions to local problems, do research and find solutions.
- The focus of the congress is to cultivate problem-solving skills in students. During the congress, the participants will frame solutions to societal problems

Significance

- India is one of the leading countries in the world where students choose science as their stream. This includes STEM subjects such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), India contributes 29.2% of science students in the world. EU accounts for 9.5%, the US: 6%, and China: 26%. The National Child Congress and similar programs are the primary reasons for India to perform well in this area

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INDEX AND REPORTS

1.164. GLOBAL ECONOMIC PROSPECTS REPORT BY WORLD BANK.

- Flagship report (issued twice a year) examines global economic developments and prospects, with a special focus on emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs).
- **Highlights**
 - Global GDP Growth: 1.7% in 2023 -third-weakest pace since 1993, overshadowed only by 2009 and 2020 global recessions.
 - India is expected to grow at 6.6% in 2023.
 - Reasons for slowdown: Elevated Inflation, Higher interest rates, reduced investment and disruptions caused by Russia-Ukraine war.
 - Any additional adverse shocks could push the global economy into recession.
 - Recession is a significant, pervasive, and persistent decline in economic activity -at least for two consecutive quarters of negative GDP for most analysis.
 - EMDEs are facing a multi-year period of slow growth driven by heavy debt burdens and weak investment.
 - This may threaten progress on broader development and climate goals in EMDEs.
 - Small states, countries with 1.5 million people or fewer - are more vulnerable because of their reliance on external trade and financing, limited diversification, elevated debt, and susceptibility to natural disaster.
 - Steps needed for EMDEs include more investment to create jobs and increase output, greater debt transparency, stronger cooperation to increase cross-border trade etc.

1.165. WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (WEF) RELEASES GLOBAL RISK REPORT 2023.

Why in news?

- Report is published annually based on Global Risks Perception Survey.
- It highlights key risks across five categories:
 - Economic,
 - Environmental,
 - Geopolitical,
 - Societal and
 - Technological.
- **Global risk** is defined as possibility of occurrence of an event or condition which, if it occurs, would negatively impact a significant proportion of global GDP, population, or natural resources.
- Global risks ranked by severity over short and long term.

Key findings

- **Top 5 risks for India** are Digital inequality, Geopolitical contest for resources, Cost-of-living crisis, Debt crises, Natural disasters and Extreme weather events over short and medium term.
- Cost of living dominates global risks in next 2 years while climate action failure dominates next decade.
- Economic after effects of COVID-19 and Ukraine war resulted in rising inflation, rapid normalization of monetary policies, low-growth, low-investment era.
- Technology such as AI, quantum computing and biotechnology, etc. will exacerbate inequalities and digital divide.
- Only 34% of climate finance currently allocated to climate adaptation worldwide.
- Recommendations
 - Investing in multi-domain, cross-sector risk preparedness.
 - Improving risk identification and foresight.
 - Re-building and strengthening global risk preparedness cooperation.

About WEF

- WEF established in **1971** as a not-for-profit foundation and is **headquartered in Geneva**, Switzerland.

- It is International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.

1.166. WORLD SOCIAL REPORT 2023: LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND IN AN AGEING WORLD RELEASED.

Why in news

- It is a flagship publication of Department of Economic and Social Affairs of United Nations Secretariat.
 - Report builds on framework of **Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)** and explores social and economic opportunities and challenges that population ageing presents. MIPAA was adopted at second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002.
- **Key Findings**
 - Number of persons aged 65 years or older is expected to double over next three decades surpassing 1.6 billion in 2050 (accounting for more than 16% of global population).
 - Northern Africa and Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are expected to experience fastest growth.
 - Poverty levels at older ages are typically higher among women, due to lower levels of participation in formal labour markets, shorter working careers and lower wages compared to men.
- **Recommendations**
 - Promote labour market participation, increase productivity, uphold good health and prevent poverty throughout people's lifetimes.
 - Policies to reduce inequality and promote economic security at older ages in a fiscally sustainable manner.
- **Other global initiatives for Older people**
 - UN Principles for Older Persons, 1991
 - UN designated 2021- 2030 as Decade of Healthy Ageing

Initiatives in India for the Elderly

- Articles 38(1), 39 (e), 41 and 46 makes it incumbent on state to make provision for public assistance in old age.
- Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
- Various schemes like Atal VayoAbhyudayaYojana, National Programme for the Health Care of Elderly, Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana etc.
- India is a signatory to International conventions on ageing like MIPAA, UN Decade of Healthy Ageing etc.

1.167. WORLD EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL OUTLOOK: TRENDS 2023 REPORT RELEASED.

- It is an annual report of International Labour Organisation (ILO) that provides labour market projections (for 2023 and 2024) and presents trends in labour productivity growth.

Important findings

- Global employment will grow by just 1 percent in 2023, and global unemployment rate has been pegged at 5.8 percent.
- Emerging geopolitical tensions, recovery from pandemic, and issue in supply chains fuelled conditions (or labour market deterioration).
- Labour force participation rate of women stood at 47.4 percent in 2022, compared with 72.3 percent for men.
- In Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, annual employment growth is projected to be around 1%.

About ILO

- ILO is a specialized agency of United Nations **headquartered** in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- It is the only tripartite U.N. agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member states to set labour standards for promoting decent work for all women and men.
- It was created in **1919** as part of **Treaty of Versailles**.
- It was awarded Noble Peace Prize 1969 for promoting fraternity among nations by ensuring social justice.
- **Other reports** released by ILO: Global Wage Report, and World Social Protection Report.

HEALTH

1.168. AFRICAN ANIMAL TRYPANOSOMOSIS (AAT)

Why in news?

- Recently, Ethiopia has released the first edition of an atlas to map a parasitic disease affecting livestock in the country and the vector behind it.
- Ethiopia's National Institute for Control and Eradication of Tsetse and Trypanosomosis (NICETT), through this atlas initiative, aims to establish a reference for the distribution of tsetse flies and African animal trypanosomosis (AAT) in western Ethiopia.

What is AAT?

- It is caused by the parasitic **protozoa trypanosomes**, which are **transmitted** by the bite of **tsetse flies**, an African blood-sucking fly.
- It is a major livestock disease constraining sub-Saharan Africa's agricultural production.
- There is no vaccine, and existing drugs are becoming less effective because of the development of resistance in parasites.
- A human form of the disease also exists, known as human African trypanosomosis or sleeping sickness.

On-going Projects related to AAT

- **The COMBAT project**(Controlling and progressively Minimising the Burden of Animal Trypanosomosis)
 - The **European Commission financed** a four-year research and innovation project in Africa.
 - The project spans from August 2021-August 2025 and houses African countries, including South Africa, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Senegal, Sudan, Chad, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

1.169. WHAT IS VIROVORE?

Why in News?

- Recently, a microbiologist from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the United States found the first known organism that eats viruses.

About Virovore:

- The organisms which **eat viruses** are called virovore.
- It has been identified as an actual species of protist that feasts on viruses.
- These virus-eating species of protists which are their kingdom on the tree of life and are not an animal, plants, or fungi are now classified as Virovores.
- It is a species of **Halteria**; microscopic ciliates that populate freshwater worldwide.
- The microbe Halteria is a common genus of protists known to flit about as its hair-like cilia propel it through the water.
- They're made up of nucleic acids, nitrogen, and phosphorus. It can eat huge numbers of infectious chloroviruses that share their aquatic habitat.
- These organisms can **sustain themselves with viruses**, consuming many and growing in size.
- The new findings may change our understanding of the role viruses play in the food chain at a microscopic level.

1.170. RURAL HEALTH STATISTICS REPORT 2021-22: KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS.

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has recently released the Rural Health Statistics Report 2021-22, providing a comprehensive overview of the state of rural healthcare infrastructure and human resources in India.
- The report serves as a vision document in identifying the gaps in the existing healthcare infrastructure and human resources in rural, urban and tribal areas of the country and is an important source of information for citizens.

Highlights

1. **Health Centers**-The RHS estimates as of 31 March, 2022, has revealed that each sub center (SC) catered to an average of 5691 people, each Primary Health Centers (PHC) to 36049 people and each Community Health Centers (CHC) to 164027 people.

- As per norms, each SC is supposed to cater to a population of 3,000-5,000, each PHC to a population of 20,000-30,000 and each CHC to a population of 80,000-1,20,000.
- 2. **Urban Health Statistics-** There is a **vacancy of 18.8% of doctors, 16.8% of pharmacists, 16.8% of lab technicians and 19.1% of staff nurses at the U-PHCs** (Urban PHCs). The population covered by a U-PHC may vary from 50,000 to 75,000. Urban Community Health Centre (U-CHCs) is set up as a referral facility for every 4-5 U-PHCs. The U-CHC caters to a population of 2,50,000 to 5 lakhs.
- 3. **Rise in Number of Allopathy Doctors-**There has been an over 50% rise in the number of allopathy doctors in primary health centers since the launch of the National Rural Health Mission in 2005, from 20,308 in 2005 to 30,640 in 2022.
- 4. **Shortage of Specialist Doctors-** The RHS report also highlights the **acute shortage of specialist doctors** in the country, with a **shortfall of nearly 80% of the required specialists at Community Health Centers (CHCs)**. The report points out that there is a shortfall of specialist doctors, including surgeons (83.2%), obstetricians and gynecologists (74.2%), physicians (79.1%), and pediatricians (81.6%). Apart from specialist doctors, there is also a shortage of female health workers and auxiliary nursing midwives, with up to 14.4% of these posts lying vacant in PHCs and SCs.

About Rural Health Statistics Report

- The Rural Health Statistics Report is an annual publication of MoHFW since the year 1992.
- This report provides data on health infrastructure including manpower up to 31st March of every year.
- The publication is based on the data uploaded by States/UTs on Health Management Information System (HMIS) Portal and is published only after getting verified by respective States/UTs. The HMIS portal provides periodic reports on the status of the health services performances and Human Resources and Infrastructure services facilities available.

1.171. INDIA'S PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO IHR DEMAND GREATER EQUITY IN ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, ACCOUNTABILITY OF WHO.

- During first meeting of Working Group on amendments to International Health Regulations (IHR), India had proposed several amendments like:
 - Implement IHR in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities of States Parties, taking into consideration their social and economic development
 - Assess human health in congruence with animal and environment health to promote One Health.
 - India also sought a provision for an intermediate public health alert in the event where an outbreak doesn't yet meet the criteria for a public health emergency of international concern but requires timely mitigating measures.
 - Drawing on the learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic, India argues for "equitable access to medical countermeasures."
 - India also sought greater accountability from the World Health Organization (WHO) in how the IHR is implemented and whether Member States are complying.
 - It proposed the Director-General report all activities under the IHR to the World Health Assembly, particular instances when Member States did not share information.
- Working group is expected to submit its report by January 2024.

About IHR

- International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005 is a **legally binding agreement** of 196 countries to build capability to detect and report potential public health emergencies worldwide.
 - IHR require that all countries have ability to detect, assess, report, and respond to public health events.

1.172. 70 DRUG SAMPLES FOUND OF SUB STANDARD QUALITY BY CDSCO.

- At least 70 samples of commonly used drugs were found to be of sub-standard quality by CDSCO after latest round of inspections.

About Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO)

- CDSCO is under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

- It is Central Drug Authority for discharging functions assigned to Central Government under Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- Under Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for:
 - Approval of Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, Laying down standards for Drugs, and Control over quality of imported Drugs in country.
 - Coordination of activities of State Drug Control Organizations by providing expert advice.

1.173. STUDIES FIND ‘IMMUNE IMPRINTING’ MIGHT BE MAKING BIVALENT BOOSTERS LESS EFFECTIVE.

- Since last September, countries like the UK and the US have rolled out variant-specific or bivalent boosters, in the hope that they would provide better protection against the coronavirus infection in comparison to the original vaccine.
- However, a slew of recent studies have shown that a phenomenon in our bodies, called **immune imprinting**, might be making these new boosters far less effective than expected.
- The observed ineffectiveness of the bivalent or variant-specific boosters might be due to immune imprinting, scientists of both studies concluded.

What is immune imprinting?

- **Immune imprinting** is a tendency of the body to repeat its immune response based on the first variant it encountered — through infection or vaccination — when it comes across a newer or slightly different variant of the same pathogen.
- The phenomenon was first observed in 1947, when scientists noted that “people who had previously had flu, and were then vaccinated against the current circulating strain, produced antibodies against the first strain they had encountered”, according to a report published in the journal Nature.
- At the time, it was termed the ‘original antigenic sin’ but today, it’s commonly known as imprinting.
- **Imprinting acts as a database for the immune system**, helping it put up a better response to repeat infections. After our body is exposed to a virus for the first time, it produces memory B cells that circulate in the bloodstream and quickly produce antibodies whenever the same strain of the virus infects again.

The problem

- The problem occurs when a similar, not identical, variant of the virus is encountered by the body. In such cases, the immune system, rather than generating new B cells, activates memory B cells, which in turn produce “antibodies that bind to features found in both the old and new strains, known as **cross-reactive antibodies**”.
- Although these cross-reactive antibodies do offer some protection against the new strain, they aren’t as effective as the ones produced by the B cells when the body first came across the original virus.
- The recent findings of two studies suggested immune imprinting might be posing a hurdle in the success of the bivalent or variant-specific vaccines.

1.174. COUNTDOWN TO 2023: WHO REPORT ON GLOBAL TRANS-FAT ELIMINATION 2022 RELEASED.

- It is an annual status report published by World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with Resolve to Save Lives.
- It monitors global progress towards 2023 target for global elimination of industrially produced Trans-Fatty Acids (TFA).
- **Important findings**
 - 5 billion people globally are exposed to harmful trans-fat, increasing their heart disease and death risk.
 - 9 of the 16 countries do not have a best-practice policy.
 - They are Australia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Republic of Korea.
- TFAs are unsaturated fatty acids that are of two types-
 - Naturally occurring trans-fat occurs naturally in some dairy and meat products.

- Industrially produced trans-fat adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make them more solid. It is found in packaged foods, baked goods, cooking oils and spreads.
- Recommendations: Invest in monitoring and surveillance mechanisms; Develop and implement best-practice policies to set TFA limits, etc.
- Steps taken to regulate TFA
 - REPLACE strategy by WHO
 - FSSAI limit the content not more than 2% by mass of total oils and fats from January 2022.
 - FSSAI made mandatory for food manufacturers to declare TFA content on nutrition label.

1.175. DEMENTIA: WHAT IT IS, WHEN YOU SHOULD BECOME CONCERNED, AND HOW YOU CAN HELP OTHERS.

- According to a 2020 report published by the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India, there are around **5 million people** in India living with **dementia**.
 - Worldwide, 47.5 million people have dementia.
 - The number of people living with dementia worldwide is expected to double every 20 years, going up to 135.5 million by 2050.
- **Dementia:**
 - Dementia is a clinical syndrome caused by a range of diseases or injuries to the brain.
 - The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease.
 - It is implicated in up to 70% of dementia diagnoses.
- **Early Symptoms:**
 - Absent-mindedness, difficulty recalling names and words,
 - difficulty retaining new information, disorientation in unfamiliar surroundings, and reduced social engagement; Impairment in recognising visually presented objects (**visual agnosia**) despite a normal visual field, acuity and colour vision, word-finding difficulties (**anomic aphasia**).
- **Advanced Symptoms:**
 - Marked memory loss and loss of other cognitive skills,
 - reduced vocabulary and less complex speech patterns.
 - monosyllabic speech,
 - psychotic symptoms,
 - behavioral disturbance,
 - loss of bladder and bowel control, and reduced mobility.
- **Prevention:**
 - The WHO has identified **preventing Alzheimer's disease** to be a key element in the strategy to fight the world's dementia epidemic.
 - Economic analyses have found that **delaying the onset** of the disease by even one year could reduce its prevalence by 11%, while a delay of five years could halve it.
 - Prevention programmes usually focus on **lifestyle risk factors** – such as sedentary behaviour, unhealthy diet, smoking, and excessive alcohol use – together with mental wellbeing and risk of cardiovascular diseases.

AWARDS

1.176. PRAVASIBHARATIYA SAMMAN AWARD

- The PravasiBharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) is the highest honor conferred on overseas Indians during the PravasiBharatiya Divas Convention, which will be held from January 8 to 10 in Indore this year.
- The award is presented by the President of India as part of the PravasiBharatiya Divas Convention to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), or organizations established and run by NRIs or PIOs in recognition of their outstanding achievements both in India and abroad. A jury-cum-awards committee, with the Vice President as the chairman and the External Affairs Minister as the vice-chair, considered the nominations and unanimously selected the awardees.

Notable Recipients

- **Guyana's President Mohamed Irfaan Ali:** Ali, who was sworn in as the ninth President of Guyana in August 2020, belongs to an Indo-Guyanese Muslim family. He will also be the chief guest at the convention.
- US-based businessman **Darshan Singh Dhaliwal:** Dhaliwal, a US-based Non-Resident Indian, was sent back from Delhi's IGI Airport on the night of October 23-24, 2021, over his alleged involvement in organizing a langar (community meal) for protesting farmers at Delhi borders against the three farm laws, which have since been withdrawn. Dhaliwal is the younger brother of Surjit Singh Rakhra, who was a minister in the previous Akali Dal government in Punjab.
- DSB Group CEO Piyush Gupta: Gupta is the CEO of DSB Group, a leading business group in India.
- Poland-based businessman Amit Kailash Chandra Lath: Lath assisted Indian authorities during the evacuation of students during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- FedEx Corporation CEO Rajesh Subramaniam: Subramaniam is the CEO of FedEx Corporation, a global courier delivery services company.
- Indian-Australian economist Chennupati Jagadish: Jagadish is a renowned economist with a focus on technology and innovation.
- Kannam Ambalam, associate professor in Ethiopia-based Wolega University: Ambalam is credited with building water springs and small bridges in Ethiopia.
- Reena Vinod Pushkarna, an Israel-based chef: Pushkarna was part of the team that prepared dishes for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Israel in 2017.

Importance of the PBSA

- The PBSA recognizes the contributions and achievements of NRIs and PIOs to their respective fields, as well as their efforts in maintaining a strong connection with their homeland. It is an important event for the Indian diaspora, as it provides a platform for NRIs and PIOs to connect with their roots and contribute to the development of India.
- The PBSA also serves as a way for the government of India to engage with the Indian diaspora and strengthen its ties with NRIs and PIOs. The chief guest at this year's convention, President Mohamed Irfaan Ali, is a testament to the importance of the PBSA and the role of the Indian diaspora in the development of their home country.

1.177. ASSAM'S HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD.

- The Assam government has recently announced the recipients of three prestigious awards: "**Asom Baibhav**," "**Asom Sourav**," and "**Asom Gourav**" for the **year 2022-2023**. These awards recognize and honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the state and its people.

Asom Baibhav

- Asom Baibhav is the highest civilian award given by the Assam government and this year's recipient is **Dr. Tapan Saikia**. A resident of Naharkatia, Dibrugarh in Assam, Dr. Saikia is a patron of the Deesikha Foundation and has made significant contributions towards generating awareness and early detection of cancer in Assam and Northeast States.
- Dr. Saikia currently serves as the Head of Medical Oncology and Research Director at Prince Aly Khan Hospital and the Director of Oncology Sciences at the Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre in Mumbai. In addition, he has worked as an MD and external examiner at AIIMS Delhi and Allahabad University.
- The Asom Baibhav award comes with a cash prize of Rs 5 lakhs and the recipient is entitled to medical treatment at government expense for the rest of their life.

Asom Sourav

- The Asom Sourav award is given to individuals who have made outstanding contributions in their respective fields. This year's recipients are **Krishna Roy, Gilbert Sangma, Dr. Binoy Kumar Saikia, and Dr. SashidharPhukan.**
- The award carries a reward of Rs 4 lakhs and recipients are entitled to medical treatment at government expense up to Rs 3 lakhs each year.

Asom Gourav

- The Asom Gourav award recognizes individuals who have made exceptional achievements in their respective fields. This year's recipients are **Debajit Barman, Rustom Basumatary, Manje La, BinandaHatibaruah, Atul Ch Baruah, ShilaGowala, Dr. JogeshDeuri, Dr. Pankaj Lal Gogoi, SarbeswarBasumatary, Manthang Hmar, Dayal Goswami, Dr. Syed Ifthikar Ahmed, and Dr. Dhruvajyoti Sharma.**
- The award carries a cash prize of Rs 3 lakhs and the recipient is entitled to medical treatment at government expense up to Rs 3 lakhs each year.

1.178. 21 ISLANDS NAMED AFTER PVC AWARDEES

- On ParakramDiwas, 21 largest unmanned islands of Andaman & Nicobar Islands are named after 21 Param Vir Chakra (PVC) awardees.
 - ParakramDiwas is celebrated on occasion of the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.
- Param Vir Chakra (PVC) is India's highest military decoration, awarded for displaying distinguished acts of valor during wartime.
- It was designed by Mrs. Savitri Khanolkar.
- Cast in bronze, it carries state emblem at centre on a raked circle surrounded by four replicas of Indra's Vajra, flanked by sword of Shivaji.
- Major Somnath Sharma (Posthumous) was first PVC awardee.

1.179. PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR (PMRBP) AND SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AAPDAPRABANDHANPURASKAR (APP) AWARDED

- PMRBP-2023 conferred upon 11 children by President of India.
- PMRBP is instituted by Ministry of Women and Child Development, and conferred upon children in the age group 5 -18 years.
- It is given for six categories, viz. **Art & Culture, Bravery, Innovation, Scholastic, Social Service and Sports.**

Subhash Chandra Bose AapdaPrabandhanPuraskar

- Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) and Lunglei Fire Station (LFS), Mizoram, have been selected for Subhash Chandra Bose APP-2023.
- Subhash Chandra Bose APP for 2023 was instituted by government as an annual award.
- It recognises and honour the contribution and service rendered by individuals and organisations in India in field of disaster management.

1.180. UNION MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS ANNOUNCED WINNERS OF PADMA AWARDS.

- Padma Awards, instituted in 1954, are one of the highest civilian honours of India announced annually on eve of Republic Day.
- Padma Awards are presented to honor people from different fields such as social work, education, literature, public affairs, education, etc.
- These are given in three categories
 - Padma Vibhushan for exceptional and distinguished service.
 - Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of a high order.
 - Padma Shri for distinguished service.
- Total number of awards to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should not be more than 120.
- Awardees are presented a Sanad (certificate) signed by President and a medallion. There is no cash prize.

STATE NEWS

1.181. VOKKALIGAS, LINGAYATS GETS SHARE IN RESERVATION.

Why in News?

- Recently, the **Karnataka Cabinet** decided to categorise the two dominant communities, Vokkaligas and Lingayats, as “**moderately backward**” from the “**backward**” category in a move that could increase their share in reservation for **Other Backward Classes (OBC)**.

About

- Karnataka currently has **32% quota for OBC, and 17% and 7% quota for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, respectively, taking the total to 56%.
- The **Panchamasali sub-sect of VeerashaivaLingayats** has demanded inclusion in the **2A category which has 15% quota from their current 3B category** which has 5% quota.
- The Vokkaliga community, which is currently in the **3A category**, will be moved to a **newly-created 2C category with 4% reservation**. And the **Lingayat community**, which is in the **3B category**, will now be in a **new 2D category with 5% reservation**.
- The Cabinet ensures that there is **no sub-categorisation of the Lingayat community**.
- It was decided on the basis of recommendations of the **Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes**, which had submitted an interim report to **Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai** on December 23.
- The increase in reservation from the **one granted currently to these communities — 4% for Vokkaligas and 5% for Lingayats** — via redistribution of the EWS quota will be based on the population of various communities assessed by the **Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes**.
- Karnataka government will petition the Centre to approve the hike in the reservation by including it under **Schedule 9 of the Constitution**.
 - The **Ninth Schedule** contains a list of central and state laws which **cannot be challenged in courts**.
 - It became a part of the **Constitution in 1951**, when the document was amended for the first time.
 - It was created by the new **Article 31B, which along with 31A** was brought in by the government to protect laws related to agrarian reform and for abolishing the Zamindari system.
- Lingayats are considered the most populous community in the state, followed by **Vokkaligas**.

Who are Lingayats&Vokkaligas ?

- Lingayats:**
 - The term **Lingayat denotes a person who wears a personal linga**, an iconic form of god Shiva, on the body which is received during the initiation ceremony.
 - The tradition of Lingayatism is known to have been founded by social reformer and **philosopher Basavanna in 12th century Karnataka**.
 - Lingayats had been classified as a Hindu subcaste called “**VeerashaivaLingayats**” and they are **considered to be Shaivites**.
 - The emergence of the **Lingayat sect** can be located within the larger trend of **Bhakti movements** that had swept across **South India from the 8th century AD onwards**.
- Vokkaligas:**
 - The agricultural communities of south Karnataka are called Vokkaligas. People belonging to the Vokkaliga community are known as Okkalia of Utkala Kingdom.
 - As a community of warriors and cultivators they have historically had notable demographic, political, and economic dominance in Old Mysore (region).
 - It is believed by some historians that the Rashtrakutas and Western Gangas were of Vokkaliga origin. The Vokkaligas occupied administrative positions in the Vijaynagar Empire.

Lingayat separate religion demand

- The theological base of the **demand lies in 20th century scholarship of the Vachana movement**, a movement which is given **liturgical (considered holy)** respect among significant sections of the **Veerashaiva-Lingayat sect**.
- This scholarship on the Vachana movement emphasised the movement as a **12th century revolution led by Basavanna against inequality and Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism)**.

- The political and religious leaders of these sections, that is, those who view Basavanna as the founder of the sect/religion and reject the **Vedas and the Agamas**, now call themselves '**Lingayats**' and take pains to show that **they are different from the rest**, whom they call '**Veerashaivas**' as the latter accept the authority of the Vedas and do not give importance to Basavanna in their Guru-parampara.

Reservation provisions in India for OBC

- The **Kalelkar Commission**, set up in **1953**, was the first to identify backward classes other than the **Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** at the national level.
- The **Mandal Commission Report, 1980** estimated the OBC population at 52% and classified 1,257 communities as backward.
 - It recommended increasing the existing quotas, which were only for SC/ST, from 22.5% to 49.5% to include the OBCs.
- The **central government reserved 27% of seats in union civil posts** and services for OBCs [**Article 16(4)**].
 - The Constitution refers to the term 'backward classes' in **Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 340(1)**.
 - **Articles 15(4) and 16(4)** empower the State to make special provisions for any socially and educationally backward class of citizens
- In 2008, the Supreme Court directed the **central government to exclude the creamy layer (advanced sections)** among the OBCs.
- The **102nd Constitution Amendment Act, 2018** provided constitutional status to the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)**, which was previously a statutory body under the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.

1.182. TRIPLE TEST SURVEY ON RESERVATION.

- The Allahabad High Court had ordered the Uttar Pradesh Government to conduct urban local body elections without the OBC reservations as the "triple test" requirement for the quota has not been fulfilled. The state government has recently constituted a commission to conduct the tripe test survey in the urban local bodies.

What is a triple test survey?

- The Supreme Court put forth the triple test in the case **Vikas Kishanrao Gawali vs. State of Maharashtra and others** on March 2, 2021. It involves the government implementing three tasks to finalize the reservation to the OBCs in the local bodies. These tasks are:
 - Constitute a dedicated commission to conduct a rigorous empirical study into the nature and implications of the backwardness in local bodies
 - To specify the proportion of reservation required in local bodies based on the commission's recommendations
 - To ensure that the reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs together do not surpass the aggregate of 50 percent of the total seats.

Why is triple survey used instead of rapid survey?

- In 2017, the Uttar Pradesh government conducted a rapid survey to determine the OBC population. This survey was conducted in each municipality, and based on its result, seats were reserved in proportion to the OBC population in the respective constituency.
- The rapid survey only focuses on the headcount of the OBC population. According to the Allahabad High Court, granting reservations based on the population alone does not consider the backwardness and the political representation of a class or a group.
- Disadvantages faced by a community in accessing education and job opportunities cannot be equated with the disadvantages in the area of political representation.
- This is because increasing participation in local self-government ensures immediate overall empowerment of an underrepresented community to which an elected representative belongs. Whereas, increasing access to education and jobs ensures only the socio-economic upliftment of individuals.

1.183. ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER HAS RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT NO RHINOS WERE POACHED IN THE STATE IN 2022.

About:

- **Distribution:** The Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is found only in the Brahmaputra valley, parts of North Bengal, and parts of southern Nepal.
- **Characteristics:** It has a single black horn that can grow up to 60 cm, and a tough, grey-brown hide with skin folds, which gives the animal its characteristic armour-plated look.
- **Conservation:** The Indian rhino is listed as vulnerable (better than endangered, worse than near threatened) in the IUCN Red List; it was earlier placed in the endangered category.
- **Population:** According to the WWF, there are around 3,700 Indian rhinos in the wild today. Assam's Kaziranga National Park (KNP) alone has 2,613 animals, according to a census carried out in March 2022. There are more than 250 other rhinos in the Orang, Pobitora, and Manas parks.

Rhino poaching:

- Rhinos have been poached for their horn, which is prized in some cultures.
- Ground rhino horn is used in traditional Chinese medicine to cure a range of ailments, from cancer to hangovers, and also as an aphrodisiac; in Vietnam, a rhino horn is considered a status symbol.

1.184. WHAT IS SUTLEJ YAMUNA LINK CANAL (SYL) DISPUTE?

Why in News?

- Union Jal Shakti minister has recently convened a meeting of Punjab Chief Minister and Haryana Chief Minister to resolve the issue. However, the meeting over the issue remained inconclusive.

About Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal (SYL) Dispute:

- The Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal (SYL), is an under-construction canal to connect the **Sutlej and Yamuna rivers**.
- The decades-old dispute over the canal, which is supposed to carry water from Punjab to Haryana, has its origin in a disagreement over sharing of Ravi-Beas water.
- **The river Beas joins river Sutlej in Punjab.**
- The dispute regarding sharing of river water emerged after **Punjab was reorganised in 1966, and the state of Haryana was created (out of Punjab)**.
- After this, **Punjab refused to share waters of Ravi and Beas with Haryana.**

Dispute on water sharing:

- Before the reorganisation in **1955, out of 15.85 million acre feet (MAF) water of Ravi and Beas, the Centre had allocated 8 MAF to Rajasthan, 7.20 MAF to undivided Punjab, 0.65MAF to Jammu and Kashmir.**
- In March 1976, when Punjab Reorganisation Act was implemented, the Centre notified fresh allocations, providing 3.5 MAF To Haryana.
- Later, in 1981, the water flowing down Beas and Ravi was revised and estimated to be at 17.17 MAF. Out of this, 4.22 MAF was allocated to Punjab, 3.5 MAF to Haryana, and 8.6 MAF to Rajasthan.
- To enable Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej river and its tributary, Beas, a canal linking the Sutlej with the Western Yamuna Canal, was planned. The 212-km canal (SYL) was supposed to carry Haryana's share of water to its southern parts.
- 122 km of the canal was to pass through Punjab and the remaining 90 km was to pass through Haryana. Haryana has completed its side of the canal, however, Punjab has continued to delay the construction for over three decades.
- **In 2002 and 2004**, the Supreme Court ordered the completion of the canal in Punjab.
- **In 2004**, the Punjab assembly passed a law, which declared all inter-state agreements related to the sharing of Ravi and Beas waters, as invalid.
- However, **in 2016 the Supreme Court invalidated (cancelled) this law.**

1.185. LADAKH TOURISM DEPARTMENT TO START HYDRO TOURISM IN COLLABORATION WITH NHPC.

- In Ladakh, Tourism Department is adding another feather to its cap with plans to start Hydro tourism. Ladakh Tourism department in collaboration with National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, **NHPC**, is planning aquatic sports to begin Hydro tourism at the world's highest hydropower project on the Indus river, near Alchi in Leh.

- The UT Tourism Secretary Kacho Mehboob Ali Khan directed the official to prepare DPRs and safety guidelines to start the execution of related works in the coming season.
- Aquatic sports like Kayaking, Jet Skiing, Motorboating, Ice Skating during winter, and boating during the summer season will be rolled out in a phased manner.
- Similarly, the tourism department is also introducing border tourism in cooperation with Indian Army.

1.186. WHAT IS PURPLE FEST?

Why in News?

- The first-of-its-kind inclusive festival in India, 'Purple Fest: Celebrating Diversity' is set to begin on January 6, 2023 in Goa.

About Purple Fest:

- It aims to showcase how we can come together to create a welcoming and inclusive world for everyone.
- It is aimed at furthering the spirit of inclusion, the Purple Fest will feature a variety of exciting live performances, sporting events, grand exhibitions, immersive experience zones, accessible movie screenings, & discussions on vital subjects like inclusive education, tourism, employment, & independent living.
- **Who is organising Purple Fest?**
 - The Purple Fest will be hosted by the Goa State Commission for Persons with Disabilities in association with the Directorate of Social Welfare and Entertainment Society of Goa.
- **When is Purple Fest Goa?**
 - Purple Fest Goa will be held from January 6-8, 2023, in Panjim, Goa.

1.187. NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHIEF SECRETARIES.

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is recently chaired the national conference of Chief Secretaries in New Delhi.

About National Conference of Chief Secretaries:

- The three-day conference of Chief Secretaries began on January 5, 2023.
- The conference is focused on achieving rapid and sustained economic growth in partnership with the States.
- It will lay the ground for collaborative action for achieving a Viksit Bharat with a thrust on growth and job creation and inclusive human development.
- It will be another key step towards further boosting the partnership between the Centre and the State Governments.
- The discussion during the conference will be held on **six identified themes**.
- These are Thrust on MSMEs, Infrastructure, and Investments, Minimising Compliances, Women's Empowerment, Health and Nutrition, and Skill Development.
- **The first such conference of Chief Secretaries was held in Dharamshala in June 2022.**

1.188. INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL 2023.

Why in News?

- The International Kite Festival 2023 begin in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

About International Kite Festival 2023:

- The festival is being organized by **Gujarat Tourism on the G20 theme of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future**.
- **Ahmedabad** first hosted the International Kite Festival on the occasion of **Uttarayan in 1989**.
- Apart from Ahmedabad, the International Kite festival will also be organized in Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Dwarka, Somnath, Dhordo, and Kevadia.
- After a gap of 2 years, skies over the Sabarmati River in Ahmedabad will be adorned with colorful unique Kites.
- More than 800 kite flyers from across India and the world will participate and display their unique creations in this Festival.

- This year, kite enthusiasts from different countries will fly Kites at the same time attempting to create a Guinness World Record for the maximum number of kite flyers.
- A special Parade by international and national kite flyers, a theme pavilion displaying the history of kites, and workshops on making and flying kites are among the major attractions of the festival this year.

1.189. RAJASTHAN BECOMES FIRST STATE TO IMPLEMENT BLINDNESS CONTROL POLICY.

- Rajasthan has become the first state to implement a policy to control blindness, with the objective of ensuring the “right to sight”.
- A massive drive will be undertaken in the State to reduce the rate of blindness, and bring light into the lives of over 3 lakh people suffering from visual impairment.
- The State government’s Medical & Health Department released the policy document here over the week-end. The prevalence rate of blindness, which was 1.1% in 2020, will be brought down to 0.3%, through the policy.
- The government is taking a number of measures to improve access to eye care services in the state. The state government under the policy for Blindness Control will mandatorily run **Keratoplasty Center and eye bank in all the government medical colleges.**
- Under this policy, cornea collected by private organizations and NGOs getting financial help from the government will have to be provided to the government institutions on priority.
- Efforts to eliminate visual impairment would be made in the districts in collaboration with voluntary organizations, trusts, hospitals, and other charitable institutions working in this field. The state government will carry out a campaign for eye donation on an extensive level along with the private institutions.

1.190. WAYANAD BECOMES FIRST DISTRICT IN THE COUNTRY TO PROVIDE BASIC DOCUMENTS TO ALL TRIBAL PEOPLE .

- Kerala's Wayanad becomes the first district in the country to provide basic documents to all tribal people.
- The **Akshaya Big Campaign for Document Digitisation (ABCD) campaign** provided Aadhaar cards, ration cards, birth/death certificates, etc.
- These documents are digitized and saved in DigiLocker accounts.
- Digitalising the documents through DigiLocker will help the beneficiaries easily retrieve the documents in case these are lost or damaged.

1.191. KASHMIR’S PASHMINA SHAWLS GET NEW-AGE FRENCH TOUCH.

- First popularised in Europe by 17th century French empress Josephine, Kashmiri shawls at a Parisian exhibition this month became the canvas for abstract art by Frenchman Maximilien Pellet.
- French connection goes back to gifting of Kashmiri Kani shawl by French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte to his wife Josephine in the 18th century
- Pashmina Shawl is known for their signature intricate buta or paisley patterns.
- Pashmina Shawls is made from Pashm - fleece of Changthangi Goat, native to Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.
- Pashmina Shawls have been assigned Geographical indication (GI) tag.

1.192. MANIPUR’S HEIMANG -A VERSATILE INGREDIENT IN ASIAN CUISINES AND PACKS A NUTRITIONAL PUNCH

- It grows widely in Manipur and other north-eastern regions.
- Flowers of heimang tree are used as food and medicine.
- They can be used for common Gastrointestinal ailments purposes and urinary ulcers.
- Other parts of the heimang tree such as its leaves (including abnormal growths or galls on them), roots, stem, and bark are also found to have preventive and therapeutic effects.
- Local communities in state use heimang leaves to prepare herbal shampoo called **chinghi** by boiling them with rice water.
- Despite its extraordinary versatility, heimang has not yet found widespread commercial use.

HIMACHAL PRADESH NEWS

1.193. GOVT SETS UP RS 101-CR FUND FOR ORPHANS & DESTITUTE WOMEN.

- The Himachal Pradesh government has set up a fund of Rs 101 crore to sponsor their higher education, vocational education and overall financial wellbeing.
- The Government has set up the **Chief Minister's SukhashraySahayataKosh** with an outlay of Rs 101 crore with immediate effect.
- It will safeguard their **right to live a dignified and cared-for life** like any other individual.
- The scheme is **broadly aimed** at taking care of the financial needs of the orphan children and destitute women till they start earning.
- Apart from funding their higher education after Plus II in any stream or institution of their choice, the fund will take care of their daily needs as well.
- It's going to be **like a parent-child relation between the government and the beneficiaries of this scheme.**
- The government will even provide pocket money to the beneficiaries, pay for the vacation if the child wants to have one.
- As per the officials, **around 6,000 children and destitute women have been identified** who would benefit from the scheme.
- Sukhu had visited the Balika Ashram at Tutikandi in Shimla immediately after swearing-in as the Chief Minister. "When I was in school, a boy would come from an orphanage. I struck friendship with him and would often invite him home. It was then I realized that how deprived are they of love and affection and how they need to be look after," said Sukhu.
- Apart from the government's contribution, the government will go for the **CSR** also.
- **40 Congress MLAs will donate one lakh each to the fund.** The government will also request the BJP MLAs to Contribute.

1.194. SAXENA HIMACHAL'S NEW CHIEF SECRETARY.

- **Prabodh Saxena, a 1990-batch IAS officer, has been appointed as the Chief Secretary of Himachal Pradesh.** He replaces RD Dhiman, who retired on 31st December 2022 and has been appointed as the State Chief Information Commissioner.
- Born in 1965 in Uttar Pradesh, Saxena is a graduate in economics and law. He was holding the charge of Additional Chief Secretary (Finance, Planning, Economics and Statistics).
- Saxena has been elevated ahead of five officers senior to him — Ram Subhag Singh (a 1987-batch officer), Nisha Singh (1987), Ali Raza Rizvi (1988), Sanjay Gupta (1988) and K Sanjay Murthy (1989).

1.195. HIMACHAL PRADESH RECORDS MARGINAL DECLINE IN CRIME AGAINST WOMEN, NDPS CASES IN 2022.

- Crimes against women and Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) cases declined marginally in 2022, while the cases under IPC and other acts increased by 220 in the state.
- DGP Sanjay Kundu said that the crimes against women declined from 1,700 in 2021 to 1,606 in 2022 while the **NDPS cases witnessed a marginal dip from 1,537 to 1,516 in the same period.**
- A total of 19,053 cases were registered in 2022 in comparison to 18,833 cases registered in 2021, he said.
- The increase in cases is attributed to cases registered under the Excise Act which increased from 2,969 in 2021 to 3,119 in 2022 as a lot of these cases were registered during the Assembly polls, the DSP said.
- Various steps were taken to reduce crime against women and drug trafficking. A trial management system ensuring deposition by the witness and police to reduce the pendency of cases has led to expeditious trials in courts and improved convictions, he said.
- More than 10,000 people were deposed in 2022, Kundu said.
- A total of 543 cases of rape and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act were registered in the state in 2022 as compared to 612 in 2021 out of which 170 have been resolved by the court and 40 per cent led to the conviction, he said.
- The number of cases resolved has also increased from 67 to 170 due to a robust trial system, he said.

- **Himachal Pradesh is the first state to start Register Number 26 to keep a tab on sexual offenders** and 4,300 such offenders have been identified so far out of which 55 are repeat offenders, the DSP said.
- Similarly, Register number 29 was introduced to keep a record of drug peddlers under which 2,300 peddlers were identified in the state out of which 400 are repeat offenders, he said.

1.196. NABARD MAKES Rs 3,681-CR LOAN ASSESSMENT FOR MANDI DISTRICT.

- Mandi Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Jatin Lal launched the **Prospective Linked Credit Plan (PLP)** for the year **2023-24** prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (**NABARD**).
- He said the PLP will meet the required credits for the priority sector of the district.
- He said a credit capacity of about Rs 3,681.62 crore has been assessed in the priority sector of the district for the year 2023-24 through NABARD.
- Of these, Rs 1,956.46 crore has been estimated in agriculture, Rs 1,031.25 crore in micro, small and medium enterprises (**MSME**) and Rs 693.91 crore in other priority sectors.
- The ADC asked all banks and department heads to publicise government schemes to make their benefits accessible to the masses. He also appealed to the heads of banks to ensure banking services reach the needy.

1.197. 4-DAY CHILDREN'S SCIENCE CONGRESS CONCLUDES AT IIT-MANDI CAMPUS.

- The **30th state-level Children's Science Congress** concluded on the campus of the **Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi, at Kamand**. Congress MLA Rajesh Dharmani was the chief guest on the occasion.
- The four-day programme, which began on December 31, was organised by the Himachal Pradesh Council for Science Technology and Environment (**HIMCOSTE**).
- Dr SS Randhawa is Principal Scientific Officer of HIMCOSTE.
- Satpal Dhiman, Joint Member Secretary of the council, gave an overview of the congress. By giving an example of renowned inventor Thomas Alva Edison, he reflected upon the thought that each child has his own potential and that needs to be nurtured for achieving success.
- About 25,000 students participated in the programme from across the state covering about 2,000 schools.

1.198. PALAMPUR-CHUNJA GLACIER ROPEWAY PROJECT DELAYED.

- **The Palampur-Thathri-Chunja glacier ropeway project** has been hanging fire since long in the absence of financial approval from the Central Government.
- Initially, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) was to execute the Rs 605 crore project. Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, had conveyed to the state government in December 2021 that the NHAI had approved the 13.5-km ropeway project. However, no headway has been made till date.
- According to the official sources, there was a **proposal to set up 13 ropeway projects in Himachal** and the Palampur-Thathri-Chunja glacier ropeway project was one of them.
- About six of these projects are at the final stage of completion. The state government has failed to get approval for funding the Palampur ropeway project either by the NHAI or NABARD.
- **The ropeway will connect Palampur with the Chunja glacier in the Dhauladhars at a height of 12,000-ft.**
- Tourists will be able to reach snow-covered peaks within 31 minutes from Palampur.
- The state had also prepared a project report for the ropeway in 2019, trying to seek investors. However, no one turned up because of the high project cost and reserved forests.

1.199. CABINET CLEARS INVESTMENT FOR 382 MW SUNNI DAM HYDRO PROJECT IN HP.

- The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, **approved** the investment for **382 MW Sunni Dam Hydro Electric Project** in Himachal Pradesh by **SJVN Limited**, at an estimated **cost of Rs 2614.51 crore** including Rs 13.80 crore as budgetary support from the Union Government for cost of enabling infrastructure.
- Ex-post facto approval is given for cumulative expenditure incurred amounting to Rs 246 crore till January, 2022.

- Project cost of Rs 2,614 crore, included hard cost amounting to Rs 2,246.40 crore, Interest During Construction (IDC) and Financing Charges (FC) of Rs 358.96 crore and Rs 9.15 crore respectively.
- The revised cost sanctions for cost variations due to quantity changes (including additions/ alterations/ extra items) and time overruns due to the developer will be capped at 10 per cent of sanctioned cost.
- Keeping in view the aims and objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, the present proposal for setting up of 382 MW Sunni Dam HEP by SJVN will **provide various benefits to local suppliers/ local enterprises/ MSMEs** and will encourage entrepreneurship opportunities within the country besides promoting employment and socio-economic development of the region.
- The implementation of the **project will generate direct and indirect employment to about 4000 persons during peak construction of the project.**

1.200. LEOPARD CENSUS STARTS IN UNA.

- The **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has begun a census of leopards in Una district under the project, 'Population estimation of common leopard and black bear in Himachal Pradesh'.**
- The project **funded by the state government** has **first been launched in Una** during the winter, as it is the warmest district of the state. The project will later be implemented in higher altitude areas after the winter.
- The census work, which has two years mandate, is being undertaken under the overall guidance of Dr Lalit Sharma, a scientist at the ZSI headquarters in Kolkata.

About techniques used to count wild animals

- **Prior to 2006, pugmarks of animals** were observed on **soft forest surfaces**. With new technological interventions, **DNA samples** from animal scat and photos captured by motion camera traps installed in forest areas are used to count animals.
- The ZSI scientist says besides population estimation, the project will also include identification of hotspots for animal-human conflicts and plans for their mitigation. He adds the instances of human conflict with black bears and common leopard prompted the Wildlife Department to undertake the project.
- Dar says the **state's forest cover is divided into grids of five by five kilometres**. Each grid where the exercise is to be undertaken is **studied on the basis of satellite images**. Walking trails are documented and four teams comprising two members each, zero in on a designated location from four different directions, identifying potential routes that animals may take and spots for fixing motion cameras.
- He says that teams also collect leopard and bear scat, which not only consists of digested remains of the prey, but also a thin layer of the killer animal's intestinal lining covering the scat. The DNA of leopards and bears is taken from these intestinal lining cells and sent to the ZSI laboratories for further analysis.

Reasons for increasing conflicts between humans and wild animals:

- The **fragmentation of forestland** is the **main reason** for increasing conflicts between humans and wild animals. The animals encounter humans while moving from one forest patch to another.
- The ZSI scientist says the density of prey species like pheasants, mountain goat, wild boar and barking deer is on the decline due to hunting, forcing wild animals to go near human settlements in search of dogs and other domestic animals.
- There is a dire need for a separate wildlife wing in Himachal Pradesh since forest divisions are only performing territorial activities related to conservation and processing of forest wood, pushing the issue of wildlife on to a lesser priority.

Higher Areas to be Covered Later

- The project funded by the state government has first been launched in **Una during winter, as it is the warmest district of the state**. Post-winter, it will later be implemented in higher-altitude areas too

1.201. KULDEEP SINGH PATHANIA ELECTED AS SPEAKER OF THE 14TH VIDHAN SABHA OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

- **Kuldeep Singh Pathania**, five-time Congress MLA from the Bhattiyat Assembly constituency in Chamba district, was unanimously **elected Speaker** of the **14th Vidhan Sabha of Himachal Pradesh**.
- Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri and Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur had moved the proposal for Pathania's election as Speaker.

- The BJP had decided not to field a candidate for the Speaker's post and hence Pathania was elected unanimously with a voice vote.
- He is the **16th Speaker of the Vidhan Sabha**.

1.202. DRONES USED TO CHECK ILLEGAL CULTIVATION IN PONG WETLAND.

- **The wildlife wing of the state Forest Department has started using drones to stop farmers from cultivating land in and around the wildlife sanctuary in the Pong wetland in Kangra district.**
- A large number of local farmers are cultivating the fertile land for the past several years despite a ban on human activities in the sanctuary area.
- Inquiries reveal that farmers of over 30 gram panchayats are cultivating the land on the banks of the Pong wetland for the past several years. The wildlife authorities, which are the custodian of the wetland, have been unable to check illegal cultivation.
- However, to curb the illegal activity, Raginald Royston, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Wildlife, Hamirpur, had recently convened a meeting with panchayat representatives and local farmers and conveyed to them that the **cultivation of land in the sanctuary are violated Sections 29 and 31 of the Wildlife Protection Act**. He said legal action would be taken against the offenders, who were still cultivating the land.
- According to the DFO Wildlife Department had put a stop on illegal cultivation around the sanctuary during the current rabi season. It had been able to check illegal cultivation through drones, frequent patrolling, organising awareness camps and by making public announcements.
- Meanwhile, farmers submitted a memorandum to the DFO, requesting him to allow them to cultivate the land, which is the source of their livelihood. The DFO assured them of exploring a long-term solution to the issue.
- The farmers had cultivated the land in and around the sanctuary, ploughed fields with tractors and were preparing to sow wheat crop but were stopped by the wildlife authorities.
- **The Union Government had in 1999 notified the wetland area as a wildlife sanctuary under the Indian Wildlife Act, 1972.** Farmers use tractors to sow crops, spray pesticides on them and use combine machines for harvesting. All these activities are considered dangerous and inimical to foreign migratory birds, which throng the wetland in a large number with the onset of winter.

1.203. MGNREGA ATTENDANCE GO DIGITAL IN KANGRA DISTRICT.

- After directions from the Ministry of Rural Development, the **attendance of all MGNREGA workers in Kangra district is marked online from January 1.**
- This will **ensure transparency and check fake muster rolls** being prepared manually by panchayat pradhans or ward members in the gram panchayats.
- Authorities of the Department of Rural Development had received many complaints that village pradhans were creating **forged muster rolls** (attendance papers) to please their favourites.
- As per information, the Ministry of Rural Development had initially made it mandatory that the attendance of all MGNREGA works involving more than 20 workers to be marked online a year ago. Following its success, the online attendance system has been introduced for all community works to be carried out in the rural areas involving any number of workers.
- The online attendance scheme has been implemented in the state to check the practice of forged manual attendance of workers in the muster rolls.
- The online attendance of every MGNREGA worker is being marked through the **National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS)** by the elected ward member or other representative of the respective gram panchayat. The attendance is being marked twice on a working day.
- Sonu Goyal, project officer, District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Kangra, said the online attendance of every MGNREGA worker in community works in rural areas had become mandatory now and added this system had been introduced in the district.
- He asserted that the online attendance of workers would ensure transparency and ensure that only genuine MGNREGA workers get their names registered on muster rolls.

1.204. HIMACHAL'S POST-MONSOON RAIN DEFICT 23%

- Post-monsoon seasonal rainfall was deficient in Himachal last year, as per a report of the Indian Meteorological Department.
- According to the data, the **state received 63.9 mm of rainfall during the post-monsoon period in 2022 against its normal 82.9 mm with 23 per cent departure.**
- Actual rainfall in October, November and December was 38.2 mm, 19.5 mm and 6.4 mm, respectively. However, no extreme weather events were recorded.
- **A spell of 5.1 cm snowfall was reported at Hansa in Lahaul-Spiti district on October 10** while Hamirpur, Bilaspur and Una districts were hit by a cold wave at isolated pockets. Mandi and Una districts witnessed fog, mainly during morning hours.

1.205. CULTIVATION OF MOUNTAIN YAM CAN BE ALTERNATIVE INCOME SOURCE

- Cultivation of mountain yam vegetable crop can be an **alternative source of income** for farmers of the state, reveals a study conducted by Dr Tara Devi Sen, assistant professor of botany at Government College, Mandi.
- Mature tubers of mountain yam are **sold at a price of Rs 250 to Rs 500 per kg** because of its organic value.
- Mountain yam is commonly seen growing as a vine in miscellaneous forests and shrub jungles up to an **altitude of 1,500 m.**
- The **tubers, bulbs, inflorescences and young leaves** of mountain yam are **eaten cooked.** The tubers are usually eaten as a seasonal delicacy.
- A variety of traditional dishes like 'bhale', 'siddu', 'parantha' and 'kachouri', etc can be prepared with the stuffing of tubers.

Medicinal value

- Mountain yam is extremely beneficial in **treating high blood pressure, diabetes and heart problems.**
- Its tubers are a good source of vitamins and minerals and help in boosting immunity.
- Tubers are useful in treating **stomach pain, anaemia and rheumatic swellings.**
- Tuber paste is applied on **swelling of joints.**
- The inflorescence of mountain yam is eaten to recover from weakness.

1.206. CHINTPURNI TRUST TO RUN E-VEHICLE SERVICE FOR PILGRIMS.

- The Chintpurni Temple Trust will launch **e-vehicle services for devotees**, which will shuttle between **Mai Das multi-purpose tourist complex** situated near the bus stand to the **shrine premises.**
- Deputy Commissioner Raghav Sharma, who is also chairman of the trust, given green flag to the test run of the e-vehicle on 7th January 2023.
- As per an official communiqué, the temple trust has decided to launch green initiatives and successful test runs of e-rickshaws was conducted some time ago. The test ride for seven seated e-vehicles conducted on 7th January so as to check whether these vehicles can manipulate the road inclines with the load of devotees.
- Once the e-vehicles pass the test, they will enable the devotees, particularly the elderly and physically challenged persons, to gain direct access to the flight of stairs leading to the sanctum sanctorum as private vehicles are not allowed beyond the police barrier, from where the shrine is about half a kilometre away.

About multi-purpose tourist complex, Mai Das.

- The multi-purpose tourist complex is named after Mai Das, a priest. As per the legend, he had a dream that Goddess Chintpurni, in the **form of a stone slab**, was lying buried at a particular place in the nearby forest area. The next day, he dug up the place and found the slab, which he began worshipping. The revered rock formation represents the deity and is enshrined in the sanctum sanctorum.
- The Mai Das tourist complex was constructed with the funding of the Asian Development Bank. Devotees have to first get themselves registered at this place for 'darshan'. A computerised slip is issued to the devotees, which allows them entry into the shrine. The complex also has facilities for boarding, lodging and vehicle parking.

1.207. NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK TO FUND SHIMLA ROPEWAY PROJECT.

- The **New Development Bank (NDB)** has agreed to **fund the Shimla Urban Transport Ropeway Project**.
- The project will be implemented under **the 90:10 financial scheme** by the Centre and the state.
- This information was given by RD Nazeem, Principal Secretary, Transport.
- The **cost of the project, the first of its kind in the country, will be around Rs 1,600 crore**.
- The ropeway will have a **network of 14.69 km**, starting from **Taradevi**, the entry point to the city. It will have **15 boarding and de-boarding stations** close to the circular road.
- The stations will be built along the circular road so that people have easy access to cable cars.
- Parking lots will also be created near these stations,” said Rohit Thakur, Chief General Manager, Ropeway and Rapid Transport System Development Corporation (RRTSDC), the implementing agency of the project.
- “Several **surveys** are being carried out **to assess the social and environmental impact of the project**.
- The **ropeway will lead to decongestion of the city roads**. It will have the **capacity of ferrying around 7,000 passengers in an hour to various parts of the city**.
- It will be like **“Metro on ropes.”**

1.208. CYBER POLICE STATIONS IN MANDI, DHARAMSALA DENOTIFIED DESPITE EXPONENTIAL RISE IN CASES.

- Despite an exponential rise in cybercrimes across the state, **two newly opened cyber police stations at Mandi and Dharamsala have been denotified by the new government**.
- Both police stations were opened at the fag end of the tenure of the last government though their proposals were chalked out in November 2021 by the state CID. Though no infrastructure was created and just officials were posted there, the need to strengthen these was a dire necessity given the rising cybercrimes in the state.
- There are **three police ranges in the state — Southern, Central and Northern**. Each has four districts within its purview. There is barely one such police station in Shimla to handle cases from all 12 districts.
- The two cyber crime police stations were supposed to ease the burden of the lone cyber police station in Shimla by making available specially trained cyber warriors.
- The Police Department was endeavoring to open such police stations in 10 districts, barring the two tribal districts, in view of the increased reporting of such crimes on the **National Crime Recording Portal through toll free number 1930**. On an **average, 5,000 complaints per month are received on the portal**.
- As many as 368 FIRs were registered in the southern range, 129 in the central range and 57 in the northern range from 2017 to 2021. As many as 31 FIRs were registered at cyber crime’s Shimla-based police station.
- Similarly, cases of cyber frauds have registered an steep rise. As many as 1,234 cases have been registered in the last five years in the southern range, 1,669 were registered in central range, 478 in the northern range while 4,302 were registered at Shimla.
- The number of social media complaints too have witnessed an increase with the CID’s cyber police station registering 3,446 cases in the last five years while miscellaneous cases, comprising other cyber-related crimes, touched 3,010 in the same period as per figures secured from Shimla.
- Field officials face handicaps like the delayed receipt of data pertaining to Facebook, WhatsApp usage of an accused as well as the failure to get the pinpoint location of an accused from most cellular companies while investigating a cybercrime. This often impedes investigation as the first few hours of a crime are the most crucial.
- Neighbouring states have taken a lead in stepping up their preparedness like move to recruit experts and opening more cyber police stations.

1.209. CHIEF JUSTICE OPENS LEGAL AID SYSTEM OFFICES AT 6 DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS.

- Chief Justice Amjad A. Sayed, inaugurated Legal Aid Defence Counsel System offices through video-conferencing in **six districts headquarters of Shimla, Sirmaur (Nahan), Solan, Kangra (Dharamsala), Kullu and Una**.
- A Legal Aid Defence Counsel System has been initiated for providing legal aid, assistance and representation in criminal matters in line with the Public Defender System.

- It provides legal advice and assistance to all individuals visiting its office and that of the District Legal Services Authority. Besides, it helps in representation, conducting trial and appeals, including all miscellaneous work in the criminal courts such as Court of Session, special courts and Judicial Magistrate courts.
- **At the first instance, the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System was conceived to be implemented at 12 places, on a pilot project basis,** by the National Legal Services Authority.
- On its successful implementation, it is **now being extended to 365 places in District Legal Services Authorities of 22 states.**
- The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) had **set a target for each State Legal Services Authority to identify 50 per cent of District Legal Services Authorities for running the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System at the district headquarters.**
- The **HP State Legal Services Authority** is thus **ahead of the target** as the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System has been inaugurated at six district headquarters.

1.210. IIT-MANDI ASSISTANT PROFESSOR BAGS YOUNG SCIENTIST AWARD.

- **The National Academy of Sciences (NASI), India, has awarded the NASI-Platinum Jubilee Young Scientist Award 2022 to Dr Garima Agrawal, a faculty member at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi.**
- Garima is an Assistant Professor at the School of Chemical Sciences in the IIT-Mandi.
- She received the annual scientific award in the 'Chemical Sciences' category. She was awarded a **medal, citation and Rs 25,000.**
- The **award** has been instituted to **recognise** promise, creativity and excellence among **young scientists**, who are **Indian or Overseas citizens of India** and are **aged below 35 years.**
- It recognises the contributions of young scientists in any branch of science and technology on the basis of work that is carried out in India.

1.211. CONGRESS GOVERNMENT RESTORES OLD PENSION SCHEME IN HIMACHAL PRADESH.

- HP govt has restored the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for Himachal Pradesh government employees with immediate effect.
- As was promised by the Congress in its election manifesto, the government approved the long standing demand of the employees in its first Cabinet meeting here on Friday.
- The decision will benefit around 1.36 lakh employees of the state who are under New Pension Scheme. With the restoration of the scheme, Himachal has become the third Congress-ruled state to restore the Old Pension Scheme.
- The Congress government further gave in-principle approval to its two other major poll promises – a monthly allowance of Rs 1,500 to women aged 18-60 and generating one lakh job opportunities in a year – and formed Cabinet sub-committees to work out the modalities for their implementation. These committees will submit their reports to the Cabinet in one month.

1.212. NO IMPACT STUDY, HIMACHAL PRADESH REFUSES CLEARANCE TO 4 HYDRO PROJECTS.

- The Himachal Pradesh Forest department has refused to give clearance to four hydro power projects till a cumulative impact assessment (CIA) study on the Ravi River basin is conducted to know their impact on ecology and wildlife of the region.
- The department has categorically told the directorate of energy (DoE), the nodal agency for hydro power in the state, that due to non-availability of a CIA study, a pre-condition imposed by the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) for clearance under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), "it is not possible to process these cases."
- The **four projects**, which have been allotted by the state government and proposed to come up on Ravi river in the tribal Bharmour region of Chamba district, are 4.98 MW **Ghator Top**, 24 MW **Jai Bani Mata**, 2.5 MW **Jay Kartikay** and 5MW **Rudraveer** projects.

1.213. ONLINE BOOKING OF YAJNA AT CHINTPURNI.

Why in news?

- Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri launched a 'yajna' online booking facility for devotees at Mata Chintpurni shrine recently.

Two options

- There will be two types of yajnas (Suksham or Saptshati) to choose from
- 'SukshamHavan' will be of 40 minutes to one hour
- Devotees will have to pay online booking charges of Rs 500 and Rs 1,200 for the material to be used in rituals
- 'SaptshatiHavan' will be of two to two and a half hours
- Devotees will have to deposit booking charges of Rs 1,100 and Rs 5,800 for material required for rituals

1.214. WEATHER RADARS INSTALLED AT CHAMBA, MANDI

Why in news?

- Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has urged the Union Government to enhance the disaster fund for Himachal Pradesh as the state is prone to various types of natural disasters due to difficult topographical and climatic conditions.
- The Chief Minister raised this demand during the inauguration function of setting up of two Doppler weather radars in the state addressed virtually from New Delhi by Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- These Doppler radars have been put up at Jot in Chamba district and at Murari Devi in Mandi district.
- These radars would be able to forecast heavy rain, thunderstorm and hailstorm within 100 kilometer radius in all directions.
- These would especially be useful for short-range forecasting.

1.215. HISTORICAL TEMPLE IN PALAMPUR FACES UTTER NEGLECT

- The 600-year-old Mata Ashapuri Temple situated on the Dhauladhar mountains is in a state of neglect. Situated on the hilltop and surrounded by green hills, the temple provides an eye-catching view of the snow-covered peaks of the Dhauladhars. The ancient temple is visited by thousands of domestic and foreign pilgrims and tourists every year.
- It is believed to be one of the temples where the Pandvas stayed during their exile period when they visited the Himalayan ranges.

Bad state of affairs

- The temple structure is currently in a bad shape. The stairs leading to the temple complex need immediate repair. Locals have been contributing money for its repair and maintenance every year, but still a lot more needs to be done for its upkeep. The narrow road leading to the temple is also prone to accidents.
- The Department of Language, Art and Culture, is responsible for the upkeep of all historical temples in the state.

1.216. CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF HIMACHAL PRADESH SIGNS MOU WITH US INSTITUTE.

- Central University of Himachal Pradesh (CUHP), Dharamsala, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indiana University, Pennsylvania (IUP), USA. The partnership will focus on academic and research collaboration between the two universities.
- Vice-Chancellor (V-C) of CUHP said the universities would make efforts to work on joint and collaborative research projects with emphasis on faculty sharing and student exchange aspects.
- The universities will identify certain vital themes for undertaking collaborative projects, especially in the field of science, tourism, public policy, teacher education, management, journalism and media

1.217. WORK ON KULLU ROPEWAY PROJECT TO BEGIN BY MARCH END: CPS SUNDER SINGH THAKUR.

- CPS Thakur, while addressing a gathering at Bajaura here, said that the work on the Bijli Mahadev ropeway project worth Rs 200 crore would commence by March end.
- He added that the pending work on the Bhootnath bridge and the bailey bridge at Bhuntar would be done on priority.

- Major projects of the Bhubu tunnel and the Jalori tunnel would also be accomplished.

1.218. HALDA FESTIVITIES BEGIN IN LAHAUL-SPITI DISTRICT.

- Halda festivities began in Gahar and Ranglo valleys of Lahaul and Spiti district yesterday and would continue in different valleys till February 5.
- To celebrate Halda festival, villagers cut thin cedar branches cut into pieces and tie them together into bundles to make a torch called “halda”. The torch is lit at a house where villagers gather to perform various rituals, besides singing and dancing.
- This festival begins in the second or third week of January every year. It is celebrated in Gahar, Ranglo, Tinan, Tod and Chandra valleys.
- The date of Halda festival is fixed by a lama in the Gahar valley. The festival is celebrated in the Pattan valley on Magh Purnima.
- The aim is to appease local deities, seek better crop yield and ward off evil spirits.

1.219. FOOD PROCESSING UNIT FOR AMB, STONE LAID.

- Foundation stone of a World Bank (WB)-funded fruit processing centre was laid at Behar Bithal village of Amb subdivision.
- A sum of Rs 1.65 crore will be spent on the centre under the HP Horticulture Development Project.
- The centre would process dragon fruit, ashwagandha, aloe vera, fig and stevia.

1.220. PARA SPORTS MEET IN HAMIRPUR.

- More than 300 specially abled persons from 11 districts of the state are participating in the State Para Sports Tournament began at the sports complex in Anu here.
- The meet was inaugurated by local MLA Ashish Sharma. He donated Rs 20,000 to the organisers of the event and said he would raise the issue of promotion of para sports with the state government.

1.221. VICE-CHANCELLOR OF NAUNI UNIVERSITY MEETS PANCHAYAT REPRESENTATIVES FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS.

- Vice-Chancellor (VC) of the Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauli, held a meeting with representatives of various gram panchayats on the main campus yesterday.
- Pradhans and up-pradhans of NauliMajhgaon, Oachghat, Shamrod, DaroDeoria and KotlaPanjola gram panchayats of Solan and Sirmaur districts attended the meeting, which aimed at roping in people of rural areas for the development of community projects.
- The VC said the main aim of the meeting was to understand the needs of these panchayats so that the university could develop community-based projects integrating their resources.
- Various subjects such as traditional beekeeping, plantation of multipurpose trees and fodder-based grasses, natural farming practices, millet production and traditional mud-based community structures for storing agricultural produce were discussed in the meeting.

1.222. SOLAN: QR CODING NOW MANDATORY FOR PHARMA INGREDIENTS.

- The much-awaited quick response (QR)-based system for the sale of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), the raw material used for manufacturing drugs, has become operational from January.
- The new system will ensure that APIs sold in the market adhere to the set standards, thus maintaining the efficacy and genuineness of the manufactured drugs. The code can be scanned to obtain the details of the product.
- Manufacturers have for long been flagging the non-availability of quality APIs, claiming suppliers were re-labelling and re-packing the original product after its import.
- The introduction of QR code would help companies understand when the product was imported, besides ensuring the quality of the drugs. He said the system would also ensure that the product was sold at genuine rates as there was a tendency to hoard the APIs and sell these at inflated rates whenever there was a crisis.

- A committee had recommended the QR code tracing and tracking system in 2019. It was finally notified in January 2022, though its implementation was delayed for a year to allow the API traders to sell their old stock.

Need of such action

- As many as 54 drug samples have been declared substandard in the state over the last two months.
- A majority of these lacked the desired level of assay, which is the active ingredient in a drug that determines its efficacy. Manufacturers, at times, attribute this to the substandard API, which is difficult to be pre-tested before manufacturing.

How it will help

- QR coding will ensure that active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) adhere to quality standards
- The code can be scanned to verify the origin of raw material used for manufacturing drugs
- The system comes following complaints of re-labelling of original product after import

1.223. JUSTICE SABINA APPOINTED ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE OF HIMACHAL PRADESH HIGH COURT.

- The Centre on Friday notified the appointment of Justice Sabina as the acting Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court.
- Justice Sabina, the senior-most judge of the Himachal Pradesh High Court, will assume charge as the acting Chief Justice on Saturday following the retirement of Justice Amjad Ahtesham Sayed, the Department of Justice said in a notification.
- Justice Sayed retired on Friday on attaining the age of 62 years. After his retirement, the Himachal Pradesh High Court will be functioning with only nine judges against a sanctioned strength of 17.

1.224. HIMACHAL TARGETS TO BE FIRST GREEN ENERGY STATE BY 2025: CM SUKHVINDER SINGH SUKHU.

- The Himachal Pradesh government intends to make the state as the first Green Energy State by the end of 2025 by harnessing hydro, hydrogen and solar energy and switching to green products, Chief Minister said.
- He directed all the concerned departments including HPSEBL, HIMURJA, Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (HPPCL) and the Department of Energy to initiate action in this direction and make policy changes, wherever required.
- He said that refurbishing the present system is essential and the departments should focus on harnessing green energy in the best interest of the State. To ease the norms, the Chief Minister directed the officers to make necessary amendments to the existing power policy and open all the solar projects up to 5 MW capacity for allotment.
- The state government would also invest in solar plants and will install 500 MW solar projects during the year 2023-24, out of this, 200 MW would be installed by HPPCL for which land has been identified for 70 MW capacity and the rest of the sites will be finalized soon.
- The Department of Energy and HPPCL will identify sites in other states like Rajasthan where the land is available at discounted rates for installation of Mega Solar Plant.
- During the meeting, CM also reviewed the progress of **Kishau Dam Project 660 (MW)** where the water component was being financed by the Government of India and State in the ratio 90:10 respectively and the Power component to be shared 50-50 by Himachal and Uttarakhand States.
 - Kishau Dam Project is a proposed multipurpose project on **River Tons (a tributary of river Yamuna)** at the border of District Dehradun (U.A.) & District Sirmour (H.P).

1.225. BHUNTAR AIRPORT RANKED 5TH IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.

- The Kullu-Manali airport at Bhuntar in the district has made a quantum jump in the **Customer Satisfaction Index 2022**. The airport has been ranked fifth in terms of facilities for passengers among 56 mid-level airports across the country with a passenger load of less than two million. It was ranked 10th among 57 airports in the nation in 2021.

Was 10th among 57 airports in 2021

- A survey was conducted under the Customer Satisfaction Index on 33 parameters, including cleanliness and better facilities in the airport
- It covered 56 airports across the country with a passenger load of less than two million
- The Bhuntar airport got a rating of 4.94 of five in the survey conducted in two rounds from July to Dec
- It was ranked 10th among 57 airports in 2021.

1.226. SJVN BEGINS WORK ON SUNNI DAM PROJECT.

- The Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) today inaugurated various infrastructure-related construction activities for the 382 MW Sunni Dam Hydro Electric Project.
- The 382 MW Sunni Dam Project is a run-of-the-river project situated in District Shimla and Mandi of Himachal Pradesh on river Satluj.
- On Commissioning, the project shall generate 1382 Million Units annually and the levelized tariff is Rs. 3.90 per unit. The Project is scheduled to be commissioned within 63 months of the commencement of construction works.
- The construction work for the 113-metre double-lane steel truss bridge has been started. The bridge is estimated to cost about Rs 14 crore.
- The widening work on the left bank approach road and the construction work on the right bank approach road were inaugurated. The work on both the roads is scheduled to be completed by March.

1.227. IIT MANDI INKS PACT WITH IAF'S HQ MAINTENANCE COMMAND FOR R&D IN AI, MACHINE LEARNING.

- The Indian Institute of Technology in Mandi signed a pact with the IAF's Headquarters Maintenance Command in Nagpur on Monday to collaborate on research and development in the field of artificial intelligence and machine learning.
- Under the pact, IIT, Mandi, and HQ MC will collaborate for research projects, technology development, and skill development in the areas of artificial intelligence, machine learning, human-computer interaction, and decision support systems, it said.
- The MoU will enable activities such as mutual visits by officers of MC and IIT Mandi faculty for discussion on the collaborative projects, and conducting joint brainstorming sessions and workshops, a statement issued by the IIT said.
- The collaboration will also facilitate the technology development and will look into plans to scale up the prototypes and technologies coming out of the collaboration for fabrication by mutually identified industry partners.

1.228. TIGER PUG MARKS SPOTTED IN PAONTA SAHIB; WELCOME SIGN: DFO.

- In a rare occurrence, pug marks of a tiger have been reported from Paonta Sahib, about half a km away from Simbalbara National Park.
- Wildlife officials are suspecting that the tiger may have crossed over from Rajaji National Park.
- The wildlife officials are, however, not sure whether the tiger has returned or is still around Simbalbara National Park.
- The DFO said a tiger venturing out from the Rajaji habitat complex to a habitat around Simbalbara National Park was a great sign for both places. "It indicates the success of attempts to conserve tigers and its habitats. Normally, a tiger moves out from its original habitat to adjoining areas when its population rises and the competition increases," .
- For **Simbalbara National Park**, the arrival of a tiger will boost its biodiversity and eco-tourism.
- Simbalbara National Park is located in the Paonta Sahib Valley of Sirmour District, Himachal Pradesh, along its border with Haryana. It is also known as Col. Sher Jung National Park.

1.229. RS 25 CRORE OKAYED FOR CHAMBA MEDICAL COLLEGE COMPLEX.

- The state government has sanctioned Rs 25 crore in the first phase to speed up the ongoing construction work of the new building complex of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Government Medical College and Hospital at Sarol near the district headquarter town of **Chamba**.
- Addressing mediapersons here today, local MLA Neeraj Nayar said that the government was serious about the health facilities for the people of the **aspirational district**.
- Nayar said the government was committed to complete the construction works of the medical building complex as early as possible so that the people of the remote district could get all types of health facilities at their district headquarter.

1.230. PILOT PROJECT SOUGHT FOR PASTURE CONSERVATION.

- The Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute (IGFRI) has asked the state government to identify land for a pilot project for pasture conservation. Several hectares in the state are under threat from invasive plant species.
- Invasive species have spread over 14 lakh hectare in all districts, excluding Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti
- Migrating shepherds are facing hardships due to the loss of pasture land in the area
- The institute has asked the government to identify suitable areas to develop model grasslands, which can further be replicated in other parts of the state. The project will benefit several farmers, especially those engaged in dairy industry. At present, several farmers have to purchase fodder from Punjab and Haryana.
- Herdsmen in the state own around 22 lakh sheep and goats. Their livestock are dependent on grasslands. However, the state has no policy for the protection of pastures. Shepherds are losing grasslands either to development projects or invasive species and weeds.
- According to a study of Himachal Pradesh Agriculture University (HPAU), invasive species lead to 90 per cent reduction in the productivity of pasture land. Moreover, overgrazing also allows weeds to dominate over grass species, affecting plant biodiversity, the study mentioned.

1.231. SPECIAL POLICE TEAM FORMED TO CHECK ILLEGAL MINING IN NURPUR.

- The Nurpur district police have deployed a special team in Khanni area in Nurpur to check illegal mining on the Chakki riverbed on the inter-state border. The police team led by an ASI and comprising nine other personnel has started patrolling Khanni, Maira, Mouja Pail, Nakki and their surrounding areas that are affected by illegal mining.
- A delegation of elected representatives of gram panchayats surrounding the Chakki rivulet in Nurpur and villagers had met Chief Minister during his stay here last week and apprised him of rampant illegal mining in their area. In a memorandum submitted to Sukhu, they had alleged that the mining mafia had destroyed their fertile land in Khanni, Maira, Mouja Pail, Nakki and surrounding rural areas and created big trenches due to unscientific mining done with heavy machinery like JCB machines.
- The villagers had appealed to the state government to launch an aggressive crackdown against the mining mafia and save their fertile land from turning barren, underground water resources and the ecology of the area.
- Ashok Ratan, SP, Nurpur, said that on the receipt of complaints from locals and on the directions of the state government, a special mining police team comprising 10 members had been deployed in the affected areas to keep strict vigil on illegal mining.

1.232. PRESIDENT'S MEDAL FOR 5 HIMACHAL POLICE OFFICIALS.

- Five police officials from the state were felicitated with the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service and Police Medal for Meritorious Service on Republic Day.
- The President's Police Medal for distinguished service has been awarded to Satwant Atwal Trivedi, ADGP, State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (SV & ACB), Shimla.
- Four police officials Rahul Sharma, Deputy SP, Forensic Science Laboratory, Junga; Jitender Singh, Assistant Commandant, 1st HPAP (HP Armed Police) Battalion, Junga, Shimla; Sub-Inspector InderDutt, 1st HPAP Battalion, Junga; and Head Constable Susheel Kumar, (SV & ACB), Shimla have been selected for the Police Medal for Meritorious Service.
- DGP Sanjay Kundu has congratulated all award winners for their achievements.

1.233. HIMACHAL PRADESH FARMER CONFERRED PADMA SHRI FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANIC FARMING.

- Nek Ram Sharma, a farmer of Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district, has been conferred with the prestigious Padma Shri award for his distinguished service in the field of agriculture, especially organic farming.
- Sharma, the only Padma awardee from Himachal Pradesh, has expressed his gratitude to the government for this achievement.
- He has been growing nine different grains through organic farming.
- Nek Ram said there is a high need to shun the use of fertilizers in farming.
- Praising the 'International Year of Millets 2023', Sharma said, "People have become aware after the announcement of the International Year of Millets. Earlier there were fewer diseases when people used to get food products directly from the jungles. Now, in order to earn money, people are involved in unethical practices which are causing a lot of diseases in the farm produce." The Government of India spearheaded the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution for declaring the year 2023 as the 'International Year of Millets' and the proposal of India was supported by 72 countries.
- UNGA declared the year 2023 as the International Year of Millets in March 2021. January 2023 is the focused-month for the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, and the states of Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, and Rajasthan for conducting events and activities related to the millets year.

1.234. HIMACHAL PRADESH GOVT BANS GLUE TRAPS USED TO CATCH RODENTS.

- Himachal Pradesh government has prohibited the manufacture, sale, and use of glue traps for catching rats, rodents, small reptiles and birds with immediate effect.
- The notification cites Section 11 of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, that prohibits causing unnecessary pain and suffering to animals and it also emphasises the indiscriminate nature of glue traps, which ensnare not only rodents but also "non-target" animals, including birds, squirrels, reptiles and frogs.
- In its appeal, PETA India had requested that the state government to take immediate steps to implement circulars issued by the Animal Welfare Board of India advising that glue traps be prohibited.

1.235. SKIING & SNOWBOARDING TOURNAMENT CONCLUDES.

- The three-day skiing and snowboarding championship concluded at Solang nullah in Manali today. Over 200 participants from across the state took part in the championship.
- The event was organised under the aegis of Ski and Snowboard India, HP Sports Council, HP Olympic Association, HP Winter Games Association and Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports.
- Skiing and snowboarding competitions were held in 30 categories and age groups during the championship.
- A large number of tourists thronged the Solang valley to enjoy winter sports today.

1.236. MAKE KATHGARHSHIVRATRI FEST STATE-LEVEL EVENT, HIMACHAL GOVT URGED.

- The Kathgarh temple committee and the Social Welfare Club of Indora in Kangra district has urged the state government to declare the Shivratri festival as a state-level event.
- President of the Indora club, said Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri was requested in this regard during his recent visit and he assured the residents to look into the matter.
- Katoch said that the historical temple at Kathgarh was part of the heritage of the state. Many people believe that the army of 'Alexander the Great' got demoralised on reaching the temple and returned to Macedonia from this place.
- According to another reference from the Ramayana, Bharat, brother of Lord Rama, used to pay obeisance to Lord Shiva at this temple on the way to his grandparents home in Kashmir.

1.237. SEX RATIO AT BIRTH: HIMACHAL RANKS NO 2 IN REGION

- The northern states and UTs recorded low sex ratio at birth (SRB) during 2021-22.

- As per a Health Management Information System (HMIS) report released by the government recently, only Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh in the region have recorded a higher SRB than the national average. Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi have registered lower SRB than the national average.
- Even Himachal, J&K and Ladakh are not much above the national average of 934. While Ladakh recorded the highest SRB of 943 in the region, Himachal and J&K followed at the second and third place with 941 and 940, respectively.
- Meanwhile, Punjab (928), Delhi (924), Haryana (920) and Chandigarh (892) are among the 11 states and UTs having lower SRB than the national average. Chandigarh, in fact, is placed just above the last-placed Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.
- Chandigarh, in fact, witnessed a huge drop in SRB during 2021-22 as compared to the previous year. In 2020-21, the SRB in Chandigarh was 941, which dropped by 49 points to 892 in 2021-22. The other northern state and UT in the region to register a drop in SRB are Ladakh and Haryana. While Ladakh's SRB dropped from 973 to 943, it dipped to 920 from 927 in case of Haryana.
- The situation calls for stricter implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act.
 - The Act prohibits prenatal sex determination to promote gender equality.

1.238. RESTORE GLORY OF CHAMBACHOWGANS: VIKAS SAMITI

- The Mugla Vikas Samiti of Chamba town has urged the district administration to focus on the conservation of all five chowgans of the town.
- Samiti president in a representation submitted to the Deputy Commissioner, had said that keeping in view their importance, the government had declared five Chowgans as 'heritage sites'.
- So, the seriousness of the cause should be demonstrated and planting of 'drub', a local grass, be ensured so that their pristine glory is restored.
- These five Chowgans are lungs and heart of the town. Chamba is known for the beauty of Chowgans.
- Minjar fair every year is held here every year.
- Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner maintained that the Chowgan number one had been closed for all activities during the winter till the middle of April to ensure its conservation. Efforts were being made to take out weeds so that 'drub' was not overpowered by these weeds.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

OTHER IMPORTANT ONE LINER

1. Hockey Haryana Women's U-18 team wins Khelo India Youth Games 2022.
2. The country's largest city forest is coming up in the temple city of Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh. The state Forest Department is developing Saubhari Nagar Van in 130 hectares of land near Sunrakh village of Vrindavan.
3. Former Pope Benedict XVI passed away at his residence in the Vatican. He was 95-year-old.
4. Samsung Electronics announced that it has hired former chief design officer of Mercedes-Benz China, Hubert H. Lee, as executive vice-president (EVP) and head of its MX (Mobile eXperience) design team.
5. Chhattisgarh Police's "Nijat" campaign based on de-addiction got international recognition.
6. Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran to head Maharashtra's new economic advisory body.
7. G Kamala Vardhana Rao takes charge as CEO of food regulator FSSAI.
8. Ajit Kumar Saxena takes over as the Chairman-cum-Managing Director of Miniratna Category-I Company "MOIL" (Manganese Ore (India) Limited).
9. Cristiano Ronaldo joins 'Saudi Arabian club Al Nasr FC till 2025.
10. India's Koneru Humpy defeats China's Zhongyi Tan to win silver medal in 'World Blitz Championship' 2022.
11. India assumes the chairmanship of the 42-member 'Wassenaar Arrangement' for one year.
12. Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva sworn in as Brazil's 39th President, Geraldo Alkmín as Vice President.
13. BCCI reintroduces yo-yo test and DEXA scan for selection criteria in Indian cricket team.
14. Hockey Madhya Pradesh beat Odisha 6-5 to win Khelo India Youth Games 2022 Men's Under-18 title.
15. CRPF chief Sujoy Lal Thaosan takes over additional charge of BSF, Pankaj Singh retires.
16. India's leading stock exchange BSE appointed Sundararajan Ramamurthy as its MD & CEO.
17. Dinesh Kumar Shukla took charge as the chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) for three years.
18. 2nd phase of Sari Festival "VIRAASAT" - Celebrating 75 handwoven Saris of India begins in New Delhi.
19. The 129th birth anniversary of Satyendra Nath Bose has been celebrated On Jan 1 2023.
20. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched Utkarsh 2.0, the second phase of its medium-term strategy for strengthening regulatory and supervisory mechanisms.
21. 19-year-old Kaustav Chatterjee became India's 78th Grandmaster and West Bengal's 10th Grandmaster.
22. Union Home and Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah laid the foundation stone of the Central Detective Training Institute (CDTI) and inaugurated the residential and administrative complexes of ITBP at Devanahalli, Karnataka.
23. India's first mobile IVF lab for animals inaugurated in Gujarat's Amreli.
24. DRDO celebrated its 65th Foundation Day on 1 January 2023.
25. Election Commission appoints Classical and folk singer Maithili Thakur the 'state icon' of Bihar, will make voters aware to vote.
26. ECI launches 'Mission 929' for more than 90 per cent polling in Tripura.
27. World Braille Day 2023 celebrates on 4th January.
28. In Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister's Residential Land Rights Scheme (MukhyamantriAavaseya Bhoomi Adhikaar Yojana) will be launched from Bakpura Panchayat of Tikamgarh district.
29. The Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and all three Services have signed MoUs with various stakeholders to facilitate the continued education of Agniveers while serving in the Armed Forces.
30. Last surviving NASA's Apollo 7 astronaut Walter Cunningham dies at 90.
31. India's largest power company NTPC Limited commissions India's first green hydrogen blending project at Kawas, Gujarat.
32. President Draupadi Murmu inaugurates India's first "SamvidhanUdyan" at Raj Bhavan, Jaipur.
33. China becomes the first country in Asia and the second country in the world after Germany to start a hydrogen-powered passenger train.
34. Sweden takes Over Rotating Council of EU Presidency for Next 6 Months.
35. Captain Shiva Chauhan becomes the first woman officer to be posted in the world's highest battlefield area 'Siachen'.

36. 27 overseas Indians will be honored with Pravasi Bhartiya Samman, 2023 award for outstanding achievements abroad.
37. Assam government acquired 'MatiyabaghHawa Mahal' to preserve it as a heritage site.
38. The Central government has conferred first prize of Rs 10 lakh to Pink City's young architect Virendra Saini for designing the country's new bus stop to come up on the National Highways in near future. Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari has agreed on Instagram that very soon the country will see such modern bus stops.
39. Union Cabinet approves renaming of Greenfield International Airport at Mopa, Goa after Manohar Parrikar.
40. African Portuguese speaking country Cape Verde becomes first country to name national stadium in honour of Former Footballer Pele.
41. Jaydev Unadkat created history in Ranji Trophy, became the first bowler to take a hat-trick in the first over.
42. PSG superstar Lionel Messi named 'IFFHS Men's World's Best Player of 2022'
43. Bank of Singapore, one of Asia's largest private banks, appoints Jason Moo as new CEO
44. Odisha Wins 'UN World Habitat Awards 2023' For Slum Upgradation Program "Mission JAGA"
45. A recent bird survey conducted at Silent Valley National Park in Kerala identified a total of 175 species, with 17 of those being newly recorded.
46. The Telangana government has recently made the decision to join the free rice scheme of the Central government under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
47. World's first Palm-leaf Manuscript Museum in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.
48. Rajasthan is set to host the 18th National Scout and Guide Jamboree after a 66-year gap.
49. Spain will be the theme country of the 46th International Kolkata Book Fair.
50. Shashi Tharoor's latest book 'Ambedkar: A Life' launched.
51. Belinda Clark becomes first woman cricketer to get bronze statue at Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG).
52. Varanasi Cantt Railway Station becomes 7th railway station to get 'Eat Right' status.
53. Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurates 'National Center for Genome Editing and Training' in Mohali, Punjab.
54. Satellite 'AzadiSat' built by 750 government school children to be launched by ISRO in January 2023.
55. 700-ft-long mural Wall of Peace thrown opens in Kerala. The wall was done over three and a half years ago and has won many an accolade, including the Eurasia World Record for the largest public art project.
56. Hyderabad to Host First-Ever Formula E World Championship Race.
57. ISRO and Microsoft Signed MoU to Boost Indian Space Tech Ecosystem.
58. First G-20 meeting to be held in Puducherry on January 31, LG Tamilisai Soundararajan unveils G20 logo, stickers.
59. 17th PravasiBharatiyaDiwas starts in Indore, Madhya Pradesh from January 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will formally inaugurate on January 9.
60. Ministry of Home Affairs declares 'The Resistance Front' (TRF) as a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967.
61. US approves world's first vaccine for declining honey bees.
62. India becomes 3rd largest auto market globally, surpasses Japan.
63. Tamil Nadu player M Pranesh becomes India's 79th Chess Grandmaster after Kaustav Chatterjee.
64. India deploys its "largest single unit" of women peacekeepers in UN mission along the border of Sudan and South Sudan.
65. Kerala Becomes Country's First Fully Digital Banking State.
66. Odisha: First-Ever Coal Gasification Based Talcher Fertilizer Plant to be Ready in 2024.
67. Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated a 120-foot-tall statue of a polo player riding a polo at Marjing Polo Complex in Imphal, Manipur. Manipur is known as the birthplace of the game polo.
68. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel celebrated the Cherchera festival at Dudhadhari Math in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.
The Cherchera festival of Chhattisgarh is celebrated on the full moon night of the 'Paush' Hindu calendar month. It is to celebrate the happiness and joy of taking crops to their homes after cultivation

69. Amul Federation's managing director RS Sodhi, who has been leading the dairy giant since 2010, stepped down on January 9 as the board decided to end his tenure with "immediate effect". He has been replaced for an interim period by Jayan Mehta, Amul's incumbent chief operating officer.
70. The decision to replace Sodhi was taken at the board meeting of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), the farmers' cooperative that operates the Amul brand. Anand Milk Union Limited (AMUL) is an Indian dairy state government cooperative society, based in Anand, Gujarat. Formed in 1946, it is a cooperative brand managed by Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd.
71. With the end near for the London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) told banks and other financial institutions to stop using the benchmark as soon as possible and mandatorily by December 31 and move to any Alternative Reference Rates (ARR). Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) and Sterling Overnight Interbank Average Rate (SONIA) are the two popular alternatives, but are nowhere near as popular internationally as Libor, which is being phased out by this year's end. Libor had to be scrapped after a rate fixing scandal was unearthed a few years back. In August 2020, the RBI had advised banks to move away from Libor.
72. The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has developed an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to carry out logistic operations in the Himalayan frontier. The DRDO-developed UAV is capable of flying in the Himalayan Environment with 5kg of payload and even dropping bombs in the areas required. The UAV was displayed at the 108th Indian Science Congress by DRDO. The organization has carried out successful trials of the multi-copter conducted at Sikkim at an altitude of 14,000 feet.
73. University of Kerala bagged the 'Overall Championship' at Padma Tarang, the 36th Inter University South Zone Youth Festival at Sri Padmavati Mahila Viswa Vidyalayam (SPMVV) in Tirupati. Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, came the runners-up. With more than 700 registered participants from universities across South India converging on the campus.
74. Indian Tennis Player Sania Mirza (36-year-old), the former doubles World No. 1, has confirmed her retirement from professional Tennis. She announced that the Dubai Tennis Championships, a Women's Tennis Association (WTA) 1000 event in Dubai in February 2023 will be her last match. Prior to her last appearance, she is going to play in women's doubles at the Australian Open in 16 to 29 January 2023 alongside Kazakhstan's Anna Danilina.
75. Cricket South Africa (CSA) has confirmed that Proteas all-rounder Dwaine Pretorius has retired from international cricket with immediate effect. Since making his international debut in 2016, the 33-year-old has represented South Africa across all three formats in 30 T20 Internationals (T20I), 27 One-Day Internationals (ODI) and three Tests.
76. PM receives a copy of book titled "Braving A Viral Storm: India's Covid-19 Vaccine Story" from Aashish Chandorkar
77. Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song 'NaatuNaatu' from movie RRR
78. Vice President inaugurates 83rd Conference of All India Presiding Officers' in Jaipur. Vice President emphasizes the need for maintaining decorum in the Parliament and Legislatures.
79. According to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), Gujarat has surpassed all other Indian states in attracting new investments from both domestic and foreign corporations. Fresh investments worth Rs 3.98 trillion were announced for Gujarat during the financial year (FY) 2022, representing a 273 percent increase over the FY 2021 figure of Rs 2.91 trillion. Rajasthan, on the other hand, emerged as the second most attractive destination for investments in India in FY 2022.
80. The Kerala government's 'Year of Enterprises' project has been selected as a best practices model in the thrust on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) session during the recent Chief Secretaries National Conference held in the national capital.
81. The Central Government through a notification has reappointed Michael Debabrata Patra as Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India, for a further period of one year with effect from January 15, or until further orders, whichever is earlier. Dr. Patra, a career central banker, is in charge of monetary policy at the RBI and is a member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the central bank.
82. Rehman Rahi Kashmir's first Jnanpith awardee, passes away.

- 83.** Rahi wrote several collections of poems and translated the works of some of the celebrated poets in other languages into Kashmiri. Rahi had received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961 for his poetry collection Nawroz-i-Saba and got the Padma Shri in 2000. He received the highest literary honour of the country — Jnanpith award — in 2007 for his collection 'Siyah Rood JaerenManz' (In Black Drizzle).
- 84.** Jai Hind- The New Light and Sound Program inaugurated by Home Minister
- 85.** Greece's former and last king Constantine II passes away
- Constantine II, the former and last King of Greece who ruled Greece before the country became a republic in 1974 passed away in Athens, Greece, at 82.
- 86.** 'Saarang 2023' India's Largest Student-Run Festival Begins at IIT Madras
- The 28th edition of Saarang, India's largest student-run festival begins at IIT Madras on 11th January 2023. Saarang 2023 will feature more than 100 events.
- 87.** NASA named Indian-American space expert AC Charania as chief technologist
- NASA's new chief technologist to serve as principal advisor to Administrator Bill Nelson on technology policy and programmes at the space agency's headquarters.
- 88.** Uganda Successfully Ends Sudan Ebola Virus Outbreak
- On January 11, 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that Uganda had successfully declared the end of the Ebola disease outbreak caused by Sudan ebolavirus.
- 89.** Horizontal reservation to women in Uttarakhand
- Uttarakhand Governor gave nod to 30% horizontal reservation in government jobs for Uttarakhand women.
 - Horizontal reservation refers to equal opportunity provided to categories of beneficiaries such as women, transgender community, and differently abled, cutting through vertical categories.
 - It is to be applied separately across each vertical category. Here, 30% reservation for women will be independently applied in each category (SCs, STs, OBCs, Unreserved). Example -Reservation under Article 15(3).
 - Whereas, Vertical Reservation is reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.
 - It applies separately for each of groups specified under law.
 - Example - Reservation under Article 16(4).
- 90.** PM pays tributes to Rajmata Jijau on her Jayanti
- Jijabai Bhonsle (or Bhonsale, Bhosale, Bhosle) or Jadhav (12 January 1598 – 17 June 1674), referred to as Rajmata, Rastramata, Jijabai or Jijau, was the mother of Shivaji, founder of the Maratha Empire. She was a daughter of Lakhujirao Jadhav of Sindkhed Raja.
- 91.** White tufted royal butterfly spotted in Kerala.
- It is a rare butterfly species that was spotted recently at Kalliyad (Kerala).
 - It was earlier spotted in Agasthyakoodam and Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary.
 - It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
 - Butterflies, along with the moths and the skippers, make up the insect order Lepidoptera.
 - Lepidopteran life cycle has four stages:
 - egg,
 - larva (caterpillar),
 - pupa (chrysalis), and
 - adult (imago)
- 92.** Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh becomes the 1st Indian district to implement cutting-edge 5G use cases.
- 93.** British linguist Ronald E Asher, specialised in Dravidian languages, passes away.
- 94.** Home Minister releases a book titled "Revolutionaries- The Other Story of How India Won Its Freedom"
Authored by Economist Sanjeev Sanyal.
- 95.** India's first Centre of Excellence in Online Gaming at Shillong by March 2023.

96. Godavari estuary in Andhra Pradesh has become prime habitat for Indian Skimmer, says expert.

- Godavari estuary in Andhra Pradesh has become prime habitat for Indian Skimmer

About Indian skimmer

- Indian Skimmer is water bird found in coastal estuaries of western and eastern India.
- Major Threats: Degradation of rivers and lakes through fishing, predation by stray and domestic dogs etc.
- IUCN status: Endangered.

97. Avani Chaturvedi becomes India's first female pilot, to pilot Sukhoi fighter jet.

- Meta Hires Vikas Purohit As Head Of Global Business Group In India.

98. Sri Lankan journalist Thiru Sivakumar Nadesan to receive PravasiBharatiya Samman Award.

99. Surya Kumar Yadav becomes fastest player to reach 1,500 runs in T20I.

100. 7th Armed Forces Veterans Day celebrated on 14 January 2023.

101. Commerce and Industry Minister to Launch MAARG (Mentorship, Advisory, Assistance, Resilience, and Growth) Portal for Startup Mentorship

102. Cong's Jalandhar MP Santokh Chaudhary dies of heart attack at Bharat Jodo Yatra

103. United States R'Bonney Gabriel crowned 71st Miss Universe 2022

104. 'AarogyaMaitri' project to provide medical supplies to developing nations in crisis

105. Shubra Gupta announces new book "Irrfan Khan- A life in Movies"

106. WPI inflation eases to 4.95 percent in December 2022.

107. Captain Surbhi Jakhmola becomes 1st woman officer to be posted at BRO.

108. Virat Kohli becomes fifth highest run scorer in ODI cricket

109. Startup firm IG Drones, develops India's first 5G-enabled drone that is capable of vertical take-off and landing named Skyhawk.

110. Kollam becomes First Constitution literate district in India.

- Kollam district (Kerala) has become India's first Constitution literate district.
- As part of campaign called 'the Citizen' around 16.3 lakh people in district above the age of 10 have been educated on various aspects of the Constitution.

About Kollam district

- Kollam has a varied colonial past under Portuguese, Dutch and British.
- Kollam has been centre of cashew industry in Kerala from time of the Portuguese and still continues to be largest processed cashew exporter in India.

111. 21st edition of the bilateral naval exercise between India and France, Exercise Varuna, begins on the Western Seaboard.

112. Indo-Russian joint venture produces first batch of Kalashnikov AK-203 rifles; deliveries to Indian Army expected soon

- India is the first country to start producing AK-200-series assault rifles of the world-famous brand, says Rostec

113. Uttar Pradesh tops charts for mobile gaming destination in India.

114. Italian film legend Gina Lollobrigida passes away at age 95

115. UN Declares Pakistan Based Abdul Rehman Makki a Global Terrorist

116. Mukarram Jah Bahadur, Hyderabad's Last Nizam passes away.

117. India's first School of Logistics, Waterways, and Communication was launched in Agartala.

118. SainyaRanakshetram 2.0 Hackathon

- Indian Army conducted the second edition of Hackathon.
- Its objective is to seek solutions to operational cyber challenges and to reduce development time for innovative solutions in the field of Cyber Security.

119. Renowned IPS Officer Pankaj Kumar Singh appointed as the Deputy National Security Adviser

- 120.** The World Economic Forum (WEF) has announced the establishment of a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR Telangana) in Hyderabad.
- The C4IR Telangana will be a collaboration between the WEF and the government of Telangana, with the support of the private sector.
 - The initiative will be led by the Telangana Life Sciences Foundation, and will be an autonomous non-profit organization.
- 121.** Writer K Venu received Federal Bank Literary Award 2023
- 122.** NCERT Launched India's First National Assessment Regulator "PARAKH"
- The National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) has released India's first national assessment regulator, PARAKH.
- 123.** Leading Scientist A.D. Damodaran passes away.
- 124.** Laxman Rawat Clinches NSCI Snooker Open Crown.
- Laxman Rawat of PSPB emerged victorious in the 'Baulkline' NSCI All India Snooker Open, beating fellow PSPB challenger Aditya Mehta 9-6 in a best-of-17-frame final.
- 125.** South Africa's Hashim Amla retires from his 22-year cricket playing career.
- 126.** New Zealand's PM Jacinda Ardern announces resignation.
- 127.** Amazon back as World's Most Valued Brand, Apple down to No 2
- 128.** World's oldest person, Lucile Randon passes away at the age of 118.
- The world's oldest person, French nun Lucile Randon, has died aged 118. Randon, also known as Sister Andre, was born in southern France on February 11, 1904, a decade before World War I.
- 129.** Jammu & Kashmir becomes the first union territory in India to completely switch to a digital method of administration, leading the way in the digital transformation of governance.
- 130.** Nepalese Dr Sanduk Ruit wins Bahrain's ISA Award for Service to Humanity
- He is pioneer in delivering high-quality microsurgical procedures in remote eye camps. He made modern eye care affordable and accessible to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America
- 131.** Goa Manohar International Airport wins best sustainable greenfield airport award.
- 132.** Renowned Assamese poet Nilamani Phukan passes away.
- 133.** David Crosby, the father of American folk-rock, passes away at 81.
- 134.** María Branyas Morera (USA/Spain) is now confirmed as the world's oldest living woman and oldest living person, following the death of 118-year-old Lucile Randon (France).
- 135.** Praveen Sharma appointed as Director of National Health Authority
- 136.** Exercise Cyclone – I.
- It is the first joint exercise between the special forces of the Indian Army and the Egyptian Army.
- 137.** Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi – Chief Guest of Republic Day.
- 138.** Chris Hipkins to be New Zealand's Next Prime Minister.
- 139.** A book title 'COACHING BEYOND: My Days with the Indian Cricket Team' by R. Kaushik, R. Sridhar.
- 140.** Ex-SC judge AK Sikri appointed Administrator of Shooting World Cup 2023.
- 141.** India's deepest Metro station coming up at Pune Civil Court.
- 142.** Punjab has Launched 'School of Eminence' Project.
- 143.** Vikram Dev Dutt named as next DGCA director general.
- 144.** "India's Knowledge Supremacy: The New Dawn" Book Written by Dr Ashwin Fernandes released.
- 145.** 'International Craft Summit' Inaugurated in Odisha.
- 146.** Largest biennial Tri-Services amphibious exercise AMPHEX2023 conducted off in Andhra Pradesh
- 147.** American India Foundation Inaugurated First STEM Innovation and Learning Center in Chennai.
- 148.** Exercise Tarkash 2023
- It is the 6th Edition of Counter Terrorism Exercise between India's NSG (National Security Guard) and US Special Operations Forces (SOF).
- 149.** IIM Ahmedabad named professor Bharat Bhasker as new director.
- 150.** Air Force to conduct Poorvi Akash exercise in Northeast.
- 151.** Field Museum scientist discovers 17-pound large meteorite in Antarctica.

152. BSF conducts 'Ops Alert' exercise to step up security along India-Pakistan border.
153. Shamalbhai B Patel appoints as chairman of Amul.
154. International Customs Day 2023 observed on 26th January.
155. Tata Trusts names Siddharth Sharma as CEO
156. Himachal Pradesh Celebrated its 53rd Statehood Day
157. Himachal Pradesh celebrated its 53rd Statehood Day with joy and enthusiasm across the state on 25th January 2023.
 - In 1971, on this day, Himachal Pradesh became the 18th state of India
158. Balkrishna Doshi, pioneer of modernist architecture in India, passes away
159. Hindustani vocalist Prabha Atre conferred with Pandit HariprasadChaurasia Lifetime Achievement Award
160. Theatre level operational readiness exercise (tropex-23) Indian navy's largest war game, being held in Indian ocean
161. Canada to Commercialise World's First Photonic-based Quantum Computer.
162. Veteran Telugu actor J Jamuna passes away at the age of 86.
163. Sabir Ali, passes away at the age of 67.
 - 'Ironman of India' Sabir Ali, won the decathlon gold at the 1981 Asian Athletics Championships in Tokyo.
164. International Holocaust Remembrance Day observed on 27th January.
165. Visakhapatnam Railway Station awarded 'Green Railway Station Certificate'
166. RBI Approves Appointment of Prabdev Singh as New CEO of JP Morgan Chase.
167. Exercise Veer Guardian 2023 between India and Japan concludes.
 - It is bilateral Air exercise between Indian Air Force (IAF) and Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF).
168. India beat England to win the inaugural Women's U19 T20 World Cup.
169. Data Privacy Day observed on 28 January 2023.
 - Theme for this year is 'Think Privacy First'
170. Naresh Lalwani takes charge as General Manager of Central Railway.
171. First ever India Stack developer conference held in Delhi.
172. Third Edition of Annual Orange Festival 2023 Celebrated in Nagaland
173. New Zealand to introduce Debbie H. Medal to honour women cricketers.
174. Khadi Fest-23 Inaugurated in Mumbai.
175. India's First Green Solar Panel Factory to be Build by Luminous in Uttarakhand.
176. Petr Pavel, Former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Becomes President of the Czech Republic.
177. National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) Signs Champion Boxer Nikhat Zareen As its Brand Ambassador.
178. Woxsen University Launches Project Aspiration for Girls in Telangana



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