

Current Affairs – April 2024 – Lecture 01

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MAINS MANIA

1. MHA extends FCRA Registration of NGOs

- The Ministry of Home Affairs extended the license expiration date of all FCRA-registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) till June 30.

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act—or FCRA—what is it?

- The FCRA controls foreign contributions and makes sure they don't compromise national security.
- It was first passed in 1976, and a number of new regulations governing foreign donations led to its amendment in 2010.
- All organizations, associations, and NGOs who hope to accept donations from overseas must abide with the FCRA.
- All such non-governmental organizations must register with the FCRA.
- The registration is good for five years at first, and if all regulations are followed, it can be renewed.

What is the source of overseas donations?

"Foreign Contribution" refers to any donation, delivery, or transfer of any kind made by a foreign source, including any:

- article (with a maximum market value of one lakh rupees);
- money, both foreign and Indian;
- Securities

- Donations from governments, international organizations, businesses, trusts, corporations, and foreign nationals are examples of foreign donations.
- Nonetheless, several organizations are EXEMPTED from the definition of foreign contributors, including the UN, World Bank, IMF, and others.

Who is exempt from FCRA donation requirements?

Foreign donations are prohibited by the FCRA from being accepted by:

- Election candidates
- Editors and publishers of newspapers
- Judges and government employees.
- Political parties and members of legislature etc.

What was the recent Amendment?

In September 2020, the FCRA was modified to include the following new limitations:

- NGOs' administrative costs are now limited to 20% of their foreign donations.
- According to the latest revision, they must hold an account with a Delhi Branch of the State Bank of India.
- Furthermore, it forbids giving grants obtained under the FCRA to any other organization.
- Additionally, it grants the Ministry of Home Affairs broad authority to revoke an NGO's FCRA certificate.
- It made it lawful for political parties to use Indian corporations to accept foreign funding.
- A person's registration may be halted by the government under the Act for a maximum of 180 days.
- Providing Aadhar is mandatory for all office bearers, directors or key functionaries of the organization.

Examine critically the recent changes in the rule governing foreign funding of NGOs under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 1976. (2015)

How can be the role of NGOs be strengthened in India for development works relating to protection of the Environment? Discuss throwing light on the major constraints. (2015)

2. How much should developed countries pay for climate action?

- In preparation for COP29 in Baku this November, global climate negotiators are drafting a new global climate finance budget as the climate bomb ticks closer to detonation.
- Developed nations pledged to spend \$100 billion annually in 2009. But they were unable to accomplish that.

Context:

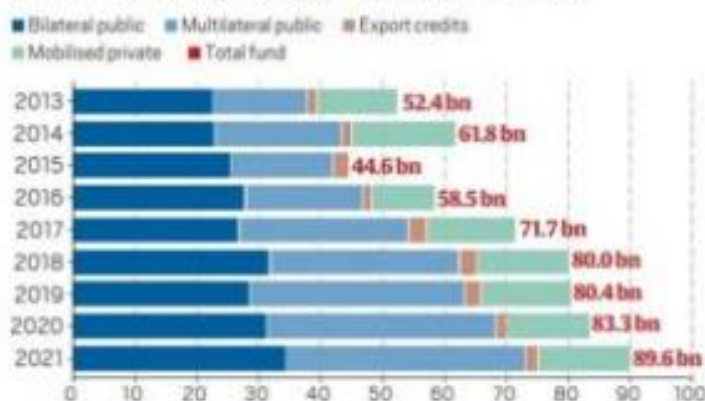
- At the COP 28 climate change summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022, it was determined to create a Loss and Damage Fund.
- These monies would serve as a pledge to triple the amount of renewable energy produced globally by 2030 and to act as a "transition away" from fossil fuels.
- The first minister-level climate summit of the year ended on March 22 in Copenhagen, Denmark, after two days of discussions during which a "New Collective Quantitative Goal" was decided upon.

What is the New Collective Quantitative Goal (NCQG)?

- NCQG is the annual amount industrialized countries will need to collect starting in 2025 in order to fund climate action in developing countries.
- It must exceed the \$100 billion that wealthy nations pledged to generate annually starting in 2020 but were unable to do so.

CLIMATE FINANCE FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Climate finance mobilised by developed countries, in USD billions



Collective Funds need to ensure effective Climate Action:

- UN Climate Change Report (2021): To carry out their climate action plans, poor nations will require about \$6 trillion yearly between 2021 and 2030, according to a UN Climate Change report.
- In the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement, estimation Estimates presented in the final Sharm el-Sheikh accord suggested that until 2050, the world's transformation to a low-carbon economy may cost between \$4-6 trillion yearly.
- Worldwide GDP As A Percentage: Although these figures differ, it is recommended that \$5–7 trillion be spent annually to properly combat climate change. To do this, it would be necessary to allocate between 5 and 7% of the world's GDP to climate action.
- Renewable Energy Capacity: The International Renewable Energy Association (IRENA) estimates that it will take \$30 trillion by 2030 to achieve the goal of tripling renewable energy capacity, as agreed upon in Dubai.

Prospects for a Realistic New Annual Climate Finance Target:

- The UNFCCC, which is in charge of setting up climate conferences and assisting in the implementation of climate agreements, is currently experiencing a serious funding shortfall. Its present funding level is less than half of its budget, which makes it difficult for it to carry out its task.
- Call for Greater Climate Financing: Developed nations are being urged to provide far larger amounts of climate funding. For example, India has demanded that the New Collective Quantitative Goal (NCQG) be set at a minimum of \$1 trillion annually.
- Need for Novel Funding Sources: In order to meet the significant financial requirements for climate action, Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Climate Change, underlined the necessity for novel funding sources.
- Dependency on Contributions: In order to accomplish its mission, the UNFCCC mainly depends on donations from nations and non-governmental organizations.

What will be done with this money?

- On-time Delivery: Achieving a significant impact requires the new cash to be delivered effectively.
- Transparent and Inclusive Monitoring: Developing nations stress the importance of having an inclusive and transparent procedure for keeping track of and calculating the agreed-upon amount.
- Distribution Across Needs: The new funding is distributed across different climate action areas such as mitigation, adaptation, and addressing loss and damage as per need

Clean energy is the order of the day.' Describe briefly India's changing policy towards climate change in various international fora in the context of geopolitics. (2022)

'Climate change' is a global problem. How India will be affected by climate change? How Himalayan and coastal states of India will be affected by climate change? (2017)

3. Solar surge: Moving away from imported solar panels

- The policy of an Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM), which is intended to deter developers of solar power projects from depending on imported panels, is finally being implemented by the government.

About Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules Order, 2019:

- The goal is to increase the production of solar panels in the country by only registering those that use domestically produced polysilicon, wafers, and cells.
- Required Registration: In order to ensure that makers of solar PV modules and cells satisfy specific quality and production criteria, the directive requires manufacturers to register their products.
- Solar PV modules are included on LIST-I, and solar PV cells are listed on LIST-II.
- The only models and manufacturers that are deemed acceptable for use in various government projects and initiatives are those that are included on these lists.
- The National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) has established eligibility standards that manufacturers must fulfill in order to be listed on the lists. These requirements are meant to verify that the products are truly made in the United States and are not imported.
- This order supports home production, guarantees the dependability of solar PV equipment used in installations, and supports government efforts to increase the use of renewable energy sources and improve energy security.

Government initiatives to support homegrown solar manufacturing:

- Import Restrictions: Since China controls a sizable share of the world market for solar supplies, the Approved Models and Manufacturers list was established with the intention of limiting imports from China.
- Ambitious Renewable Energy Targets: By 2030, India hopes to generate 500 GW of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources, with solar power accounting for at least 280 GW of that total. This means that until 2030, at least 40 GW of new solar capacity must be added yearly. Thus, the need to prioritize indigenous solar projects

Challenges ahead:

- Unrealistic Goals: India has set very low goals for adding solar capacity recently, partly because of the COVID-19 virus, while having lofty goals. The nation wants to increase installations to 40 GW to 25 GW a year.
- Dependency on Imports: Imports account for a sizable portion of India's solar installations, which has an impact on local panel makers who must pay for government certification but lose out to lower-cost Chinese panels in orders. For instance, there was a spike in solar panel imports in FY 24 of about \$1,136.28 million compared to \$943.53 million in FY 23.

Describe the benefits of deriving electric energy from sunlight in contrast to conventional energy generation. What are the initiatives offered by our government for this purpose? (2020)

4. Let's make ₹ a global currency: PM to RBI

- In order to address the credit demands of every sector of the nation and to establish the Indian rupee as a globally "accessible and acceptable" currency, Prime Minister Modi instructed the RBI to create a 10-year plan.

What are the main obstacles standing in India's way of making the Rupee a world currency?

- Economic Stability: To encourage confidence among foreign investors and currency users, the Indian economy would need to show steady growth and stability.
- Development of Financial Market Liquidity: To handle significant amounts of cross-border transactions denominated in Indian rupees, these markets must be deep and liquid.

- **Capital Controls:** At the moment, India imposes limitations on the inflow and outflow of capital. To encourage international trade and investment denominated in Indian rupees, these would need to be loosened.
- **Legal and Regulatory Framework:** To control the usage of the INR in cross-border transactions, strong legal and regulatory frameworks would need to be in place. These frameworks should include dispute resolution procedures and clearing and settlement systems.
- **Acceptance by Investors and the World:** Together with steps to support its use in worldwide trade and finance, concerted diplomatic efforts would be needed to persuade other nations, companies, and individuals to accept the INR as a global currency.
- **Currency Convertibility:** In order for the INR to become a universal currency, it must be fully convertible.

Indian Intends to Establish the Rupee as a World Currency:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released a study that outlines a roadmap for the internationalization of the Rupee. Actions include adding the Rupee to the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket, encouraging its use in trade invoicing and settlement, easing its usage in offshore markets, and creating financial instruments with Rupee values are just a few of the things this roadmap suggests doing.
- In order to encourage the use of local currencies, such as the rupee, for cross-border transactions, India has been entering into agreements with nations such as the United Arab Emirates.

Way Forward:

- **Rupee Transactions Are Necessary for the Indian Rupee to Be Accepted Internationally:** The Indian Rupee must be freely utilized as a reserve currency for international trade as well as for transactions by both residents and non-residents.
- Exports must rise, and Indian trade must be encouraged outside of Asia. An invoice for each export and import transaction must be issued in Indian rupees.
- **Reducing the Constraints:** Without jeopardizing security issues, legal and regulatory frameworks must be released in order to draw investors for their company profits.

5. Ladakh's residents on a hunger strike

- The well-known environmentalist and educator from Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk, started a 21-day hunger strike in Leh on March 6. Thousands of Ladakh inhabitants have been calling for protections under the Indian Constitution's Sixth Schedule, and this strike was in support of their demands. On March 26, Mr. Wangchuk called off his hunger strike; however, ladies in Leh are still participating in it. The elderly, monks, and young people have all declared that they will gradually join the hunger strike if their demands are not satisfied.

Context:

- The State of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in August 2019. People's exclusive rights to jobs and land were abolished. Ladakh became a UT without a legislature in 2019 under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.

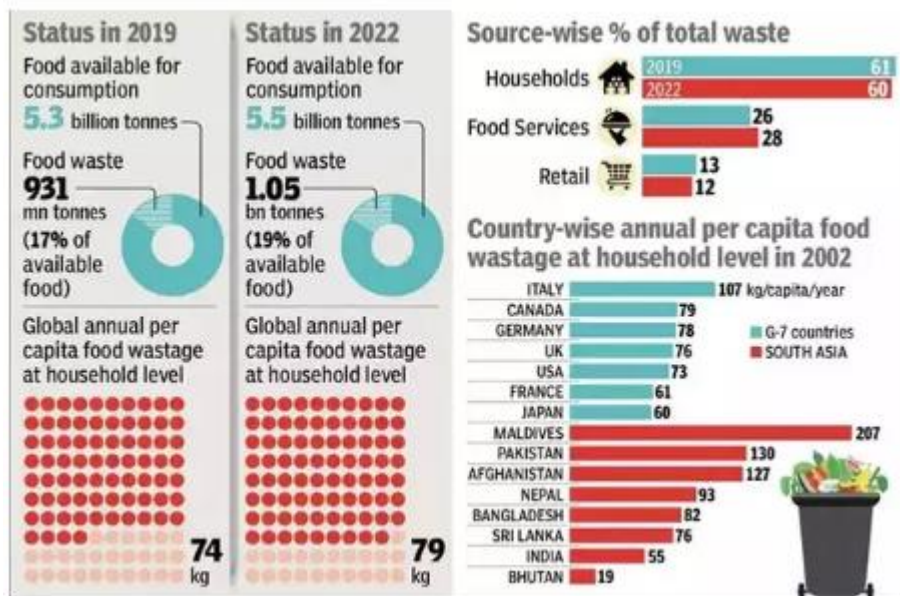
Why a hunger strike

- Ladakh residents claim that a Lieutenant Governor, who does not reside in Ladakh, is in charge of running the UT. There were also a number of bureaucrats who were not Ladakh natives but held important positions and might influence future decisions for the area.
- Furthermore, after Ladakh was designated as a UT by the national government, the already-existing Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs) in Leh and Kargil lost their authority.
- One example is the proposed Ladakh Industrial Land Allotment Policy 2023. Although the draft policy, intended to draw investments to Ladakh, gives the LAHDCs the authority to make decisions about land use and management, it fully strips them of any authority to make decisions about land allocation and leasing.

- The Sixth Schedule, according to protesters, could aid in resolving these problems because it permits the creation of district and regional councils, which have the power to enact laws governing the use of land for residential, agricultural, grazing, and other purposes that serve the interests of the local populace.
- With over 2.74 lakh people living there as of the 2011 Census, and over 97% of them being tribal, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes recommended in 2019 that Ladakh be added to the Sixth Schedule.

PRELIMS PROSPECTIVE

1. UNEP Food Waste Index Report, 2024



- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UK-based non-profit Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) have produced the Food Waste Index Report, 2024.

Food Waste Index Report:

- It monitors food waste at the retail, consumer (home and food service) and national levels, as well as the production of edible and inedible parts.
- 2011 saw its initial release.
- It was intended to serve as a tool for tracking advancement toward global goals, like SDG 12.7, which asks for a 2030 reduction in food waste.

Key Findings of the 2024 Report

- Global Production of Food Waste in 2022: 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste were produced worldwide in 2022.

Food Waste Distribution by Sector:

- Of all food waste, 60% came from households.
- Of the overall food waste, 28% was attributed to food services.
- Twelve percent of food waste came from retail.

Food Waste Per Capita:

- In 2022, there were 132 kg of food waste per person on average.

Food Waste's Economic Cost:

- One trillion dollars is thought to be the economic cost of food loss and waste.
- Greenhouse gas emissions resulting from food loss and waste are a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, making up 8-10% of world emissions on an annual basis.
- Regional Trends: There is little difference in food waste amounts between socioeconomic levels.
- Due to restrictions in infrastructure and patterns of consumption, hotter regions typically produce higher levels of household food waste.
- When compared to metropolitan regions, food waste is typically lower in rural locations.
- Policy Integration: Food loss and waste reduction have only been incorporated in 21 nations' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) or climate plans, including Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.

2019: In India, 'extended producer responsibility' was introduced as an important feature in which of the following?

- (a) The Bio-medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998**
- (b) The Recycled Plastic (Manufacturing and Usage) Rules, 1999**
- (c) The e-Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011**
- (d) The Food Safety and Standard Regulations, 2011**

2. UNCTAD Report Highlights Shifts in India's Trade Relations

- The Global trading Report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) showed that India's trading environment was changing, with a greater reliance on China and the European Union (EU).

Key Highlights of the Report:

Important Results Regarding India

- Trade Trends: India's reliance on Saudi Arabia decreased by 0.6%, but its reliance on China and the EU increased by 1.2%.
- Factors: The pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict disrupted supply chains at the time of this change, driving up the cost of food and fuel to all-time highs.
- Policy Measures: India's trade links with China grew stronger despite attempts to lessen reliance on China through programs like the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and Quality Control Orders (QCOs).

Insights from the Report

- Stable Proximity: There haven't been many tendencies toward near- or far-shoring as the geographic proximity of international trade has stayed mostly stable.
- Political Proximity: Nonetheless, trade has become more politically close to nations that have similar geopolitical positions.
- Trade Concentration: Although this trend slowed until the end of 2023, large trade partnerships were increasingly favored by global trade.
- Sectoral Trends: With the exception of pharmaceuticals, transportation equipment, and electric vehicles, the majority of sectors saw a decrease in trade value.
- Global Forecast: In 2023, it is anticipated that the global merchandise trade would shrink by 5% while the global services trade will increase by 8%.

Russia-Ukraine Conflict's Effects

- Trade Shifts: As a result of the prolonged dispute, Russia's reliance on China increased by 7.1% while its reliance on the EU decreased by 5.3%.
- Oil Trade: China became a major trading partner for Russia, and Russian oil moved from the EU to China and India.

- US Trade Dynamics: In 2023, the US was able to decrease its dependency on China by 1.2%, but it increased its reliance on the EU and Mexico.

The Global Infrastructure Facility is a/an: (2017)

(a) ASEAN initiative to upgrade infrastructure in Asia and financed by credit from the Asian Development Bank.

(b) World Bank collaboration that facilitates the preparation and structuring of complex infrastructure Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to enable mobilization of private sector and institutional investor capital.

(c) Collaboration among the major banks of the world working with the OECD and focused on expanding the set of infrastructure projects that have the potential to mobilize private investment.

(d) UNCTAD-funded initiative that seeks to finance and facilitate infrastructure development in the world.

3. 90 years of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

- Recently, the RBI celebrated its 90th year in Mumbai, marking a significant milestone.

About Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

- The RBI is India's monetary authority and central bank.
- In accordance with the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, it was founded on April 1, 1935.
- The Hilton Young Commission's suggestions served as the inspiration for the original concept.
- The first Governor was an Australian named Sir Osborne Arkell Smith.
- Sir C D Deshmukh, the first Indian to occupy the role, replaced him.
- India uses this centralized organization to efficiently control its credit and monetary policies.
- In 1937, RBI relocated its permanent headquarters from Kolkata to Mumbai.
- The RBI was first run as a privately held company until it was fully nationalized in 1949.

Functions and Initiatives:

- **Monetary Authority:** In order to preserve a sound balance of payments, manage inflation, and stabilize exchange rates, the RBI regulates the amount of money in the economy.
- **Issuer of Currency:** Exclusive power to print money and stop the spread of fake bills.
- **Banker to the Government:** Provides short-term loan and financial consulting services in the capacity of a banker to the federal and state governments.
- **Lender of Last Resort:** Offers banks emergency financial support in times of need.
- **Custodian of Foreign Exchange Reserves:** Oversees the Foreign Exchange Management Act of 1999 (FEMA) and maintains foreign exchange reserves.
- **Regulator and Supervisor of Payment and Settlement Systems:** Ensures the effectiveness and security of the nation's payment and settlement systems by supervising them.
- **Credit Control and Developmental Role:** Encourages the growth of the financial infrastructure and makes credit available to industries that are productive.

2012:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) acts as a bankers' bank. This would imply which of the following?

1. Banks retain their deposits with the RBI.
2. The RBI lends funds to the commercial banks in times of need.
3. The RBI advises the commercial banks on monetary matters.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

2013:

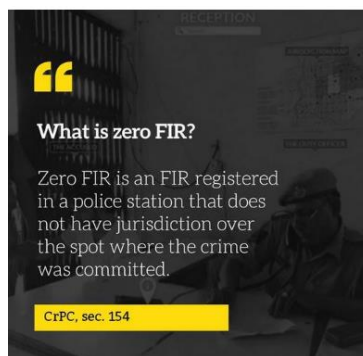
Consider the following statements:

1. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is appointed by the Central Government.
2. Certain provisions in the Constitution of India give the Central Government the right to issue directions to the RBI in public interest.
3. The Governor of the RBI draws his power from the RBI Act.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

4. What is Zero FIR?



- For allegedly making disparaging words about the Telangana chief minister, the Hyderabad Police have opened a zero FIR case against the former minister.

First Information Report (FIR)

- The written report that the police create after learning of a crime that is punishable by law is known as a formal complaint (FIR).
- It's the situation in which an officer has "reason to believe" that a suspect committed the crime and that an arrest is required based on specific criteria, all without a court's warrant.
- It acts as a springboard for the start of the inquiry and any further police action.
- A police officer may file a formal complaint (FIR) for a crime that is punishable under Section 154(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).
- Public employees who fail to record information connected to a cognizable offence may face up to two years in prison and a fine under Section 166A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Zero FIR: What Is It?

- Provision and Goal: Zero FIR permits any police station to file a report for a crime that is punishable by law without first requiring the assignment of a standard FIR number.
- Absent diary: While FIRs are assigned serial numbers, zero FIRs are given the number '0'. Thus, the moniker.

Features of a Zero FIR:

- Quick Action: The relevant police station then files a new First Information Report and opens an investigation.
- Focus on Victims: It is intended to accelerate the filing of complaints without requiring several visits to police stations, especially for major crimes affecting women and children.
- Evidence Preservation: Prompt registration aids in avoiding the misplacement or manipulation of important witnesses and evidence.

- Transferred Jurisdiction: After the crime is committed or the investigation is best carried out, the Zero FIR is subsequently forwarded to the appropriate police station.

How does it work?

- A police station is required to forward a complaint to another police station with the authority to look into the alleged offense once it files a zero FIR.
- The police station with the proper jurisdiction adds a serial number to a zero FIR upon transfer, turning it into a normal FIR.

Legal Provisions for Zero FIR

- In the 1999 case of *Satvinder Kaur v. State*, the Delhi High Court ruled that a woman might file a complaint from any location other than the scene of the assault.
- Justice Verma Committee (2012): The Justice Verma Committee, which was established in reaction to the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape case, recommended the establishment of Zero FIR.
- In the 2014 case of *Lalita Kumari v. Govt. of UP*, the Supreme Court held that filing a formal complaint is required if information is discovered that a cognizable offense was committed.

2021: With reference to India, consider the following statements:

1. Judicial custody means an accused is in the custody of the concerned magistrate and such accused is locked-up in police station, not in jail.
2. During judicial custody, the police officer in charge of the case is not allowed to interrogate the suspect without the approval of the court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

5. Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA) to check Illegal Lending Apps

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) intends to create the Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA) in order to combat the growing threat of cyber fraud.

About Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA)

- By validating and upholding a register of accredited digital lending platforms, DIGITA seeks to combat the spread of illicit lending apps.

Role of DIGITA:

- Public Register: To promote openness and assist law enforcement in locating unapproved platforms, it will keep an up-to-date public registry of verified apps.
- Verification Hub: It will act as a central organization to verify the legitimacy and regulatory compliance of digital lending apps.

Regulatory Implications

- Apps that do not have the DIGITA "verified" signature attached to them will be considered unapproved, which will help law enforcement combat financial crimes committed online.
- Verification procedures will discourage fraudulent activity by fostering accountability and transparency in the digital lending industry.

Progress made so far

- A list of 442 digital lending apps has been provided by the RBI with the IT Ministry for Google to whitelist.
- In accordance with directions from the RBI and DFS to only approve apps from regulated organizations or their partners, Google has eliminated over 2,200 apps related to digital lending from its PlayStore.

2016:

Regarding 'DigiLocker', sometimes seen in the news, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a digital locker system offered by the Government under Digital India Programme.
2. It allows you to access your e-documents irrespective of your physical location.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

MAPPING MASTER

1. AFAR TRIANGLE

- According to geologists, a new ocean may arise in five to ten million years as a result of the fracture in the Afar Triangle that runs through the African continent.



Context:

- This split might keep becoming wider over millions of years and finally fill with saltwater, creating a new ocean. However, based on existing geological knowledge and forecasts, this is a process that would take millions of years. It's an amazing illustration of how our world is ever-evolving and changing.

About AFAR TRIANGLE

- Located in the Horn of Africa, the Afar Triangle, often called the Afar Depression, is a geological depression.
- One of the world's most active geological zones is the Afar Triangle, which is situated in northern Africa.
- The Arabian, Nubian, and Somali tectonic plates are separating at this location.
- The African continent is splitting apart as a result of the rift system this movement has created.

Geological Context:

- The Afar Triple Junction, located in East Africa's Great Rift Valley, is the source of the Afar Triangle.
- It crosses across into the Afar Region of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.
- The area is distinguished by its distinct geological features and has produced fossilized examples of the earliest hominins, or extinct members of the phylogeny of humans.

- It is regarded by some paleontologists as the birthplace of human evolution.

Geographical Highlights:

- The lowest point in Africa, Lake Assal in Djibouti, is located in the Afar Triangle and is 155 meters (509 feet) below sea level.
- The Awash River enters the area, creating a slender green belt that supports the Danakil Desert's flora, animals, and nomadic Afar people.
- The Danakil Depression is the name given to the northern region of the Afar Depression.
- The region is one of the hottest spots on Earth all year round due to its intense heat, severe drought, and little air movement.

2. SYRIA

- A deadly vehicle explosion that targeted a busy market in northern Syria claimed the lives of at least seven people.

Context:

- The town of Azaz was the scene of the attack. As a vital supply route and in close proximity to Turkey, Azaz is strategically significant in the context of the Syrian civil war. The Syrian Interim Government, an opposition organization claiming legitimacy as the nation's government, is based in the town.

About Syria:



- Syria, formally the Syrian Arab Republic, is a West Asian nation situated in the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean.
- The Mediterranean Sea forms its western boundary, followed by Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east and southeast, Jordan to the south, Israel and Lebanon to the southwest, and Iraq to the east.
- Damascus is the largest and capital city.
- Many different ethnic and religious groups call Syria home, with the majority being Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, Circassians, Armenians, Albanians, Greeks, and Chechens among them.
- Muslims, Christians, Alawites, Druze, and Yazidis are among the religious groups.
- Since 2011, the nation has been engulfed in one of the worst civil wars worldwide due to the conflict.