CURRENT AFFAIRS, EDGE IAS

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Current Affairs, February 2024

INDEX

1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1 Lokpal

Justice AM Khanwilkar, an ex-SC judge, is appointed by President Murmu to lead the Lokpal

Context:
- The formation of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for the States was made possible by the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013.These organizations are statutory bodies that do not have any standing in the constitution.The highest institution was established to look into complaints about alleged corruption involving elected officials and public servants.

About Lokpal:
- Established under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013, the Lokpal is the first institution of its sort in independent India. Its purpose is to look into and probe into claims of corruption made against public officials who are covered by the aforementioned Act.
- Anybody who is or has been the prime minister, a minister in the Union government, a member of parliament, or an officer of the Union government under Groups A, B, C, or D is subject to inquiries by the Lokpal into claims of corruption. Chairpersons, members, officials, and directors of any board, corporation, society, trust, or autonomous entity that was founded by a parliamentary act or that receives funding entirely or in part from the federal government or a state government are also protected. Any society, trust, or organization that receives foreign contributions in excess of ₹10 lakh (about US$ 14,300 as of 2019) is likewise covered by it.
- A complaint filed under the Lokpal Act must concern an offense against a public worker under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, and follow the format specified.
- The identity of the person filing such a complaint is unrestricted. Upon receiving a complaint, the Lokpal has the authority to direct its Inquiry Wing or another agency to conduct a preliminary inquiry, or if there is a strong case, it can be forwarded to any agency, including the CBI, for investigation.
- Within sixty days, the Inquiry Wing or any other body will be required to finish its preliminary investigation and present a report to the Lokpal.
- After reviewing the preliminary inquiry report and providing the accused public servant with an opportunity to defend themselves, the Lokpal Bench will determine whether to move further with the investigation or not. It has the authority to launch a thorough investigation, initiate departmental actions, or end those already underway. If the accusation is untrue, legal action may also be taken against the complainant.
- In matters that the Lokpal refers to the CBI, among other central investigative agencies, it would have the authority to supervise and give guidance.
- The President of India appoints the Chairperson and the Members by warrant under his hand and seal, and they serve in that capacity for a period of five years from the date of their appointment or until they become seventy, whichever comes first.
- After receiving the recommendations of a Selection Committee made up of the Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lower House, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a Judge chosen by him/her, and one distinguished jurist, the President appoints the Chairperson and Members of the Lokpal.

1.2 Article 142

- The Supreme Court used the authority granted to it by Article 142 of the Constitution to reverse the results of the January 30 elections for the position of Mayor of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation.

Context:
- The supreme court has clarified the scope and extent of the extraordinary powers granted by Article 142 via a series of rulings.

About:
- The Supreme Court has discretionary power under Article 142, which says that it may exercise its jurisdiction to pass any decree or issue any order that is required to ensure that any case or matter that is before it receives full and fair justice.
- Article 142, subsection 1, gives the Supreme Court the exclusive authority to administer full justice for all parties involved.
- Some distinguished jurists hold that natural justice supersedes the law and that the Supreme Court is fully empowered to issue any ruling that it deems appropriate.
- Consequently, the Supreme Court will exercise these powers and will not allow any rule, law, executive practice, executive circular, regulation, etc. to prevent it from carrying out its mission of justice.
- The founders of the Constitution believed that this particular provision would be extremely important to those who suffer because the judicial system is disadvantaged and causes delays in providing vital redress.

Significance of Article 142:-
- Prevents Injustice: It gives the Supreme Court unique and unprecedented authority to grant full justice to litigants who have endured unfairness or illegality during the procedures.
- Uphold citizens' rights: In order to safeguard the rights of various societal groups, Article 142 has been cited.
- Functions as a system of checks and balances with the legislature or government.

Cases where the Supreme Court has invoked its plenary powers under Article 142:-
- Manohar Lal Sharma v. Principal Secretary (2014): To foster public confidence in the rule of law, the Supreme Court has the authority to address extraordinary circumstances that conflict with the public interest.
- In the 1988 case of R. Antulay v. R.S. Nayak, the Supreme Court ruled that any discretion granted by the court must not be capricious or in any way conflict with the established provisions of any statute.
- Union Carbide Corporation v. Union of India (1989): In the Bhopal Gas Disaster Case, the court established its superiority over parliamentary laws and mandated that compensation be awarded to the victims.

1.3 Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2023

- The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2023 nomination deadline was recently extended to February 12, 2024.

Context:
- On January 3, 2024, the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration, 2023 registration and nomination process opened.

About Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2023:-
- Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances launched it.

- The Award Scheme has been restructured to highlight the District Collector's accomplishments through the use of a saturation strategy in implementation and beneficiary targeting.
- The Award Scheme has been reorganized this year to emphasize the work of District Collectors, with a focus on individual beneficiaries and saturation approach execution.
- Three criteria will be used to evaluate the Awards: quantitative accomplishments, qualitative accomplishments, and good governance.
- The program honors civil servants in two categories for their contributions:
- Category 1: Comprehensive District Development through 12 Priority Sector Initiatives
- This category will see the presentation of ten awards.
- Category 2: Novel Approaches for State and District Central Ministries/Departments
- This category will see the presentation of 6 prizes.
- The Prime Minister's permission is requested for the award recommendations during the review process, which entails shortlisting by a Screening Committee, evaluation by an Expert Committee, and final approval by an Empowered Committee.

1.4 Enforcement Directorate (ED)

- Hemant Soren, the current Chief Minister of Jharkhand, was recently taken into custody by Enforcement Directorate (ED) personnel.

Background:-
- However, Hemant Soren has given Governor CP Radhakrishnan his resignation as Jharkhand's chief minister.

About Enforcement Directorate (ED):-
- Established in 1956, the Enforcement Directorate is a multidisciplinary agency.
- It is an enforcement agency whose job it is to fight economic crime in India, including money laundering and irregularities in foreign exchange, and to enforce laws related to the economy.
- It is operated by the Ministry of Finance's Department of Revenue.
- Headquarter: New Delhi.
- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) (CBI and ED Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002) is one of the Directorate's duties.
- A civil statute known as the Foreign currency Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) authorizes the ED to look into possible violations of foreign currency laws and regulations. Act on Foreign Exchange Management
- The 1974 Foreign Exchange Conservation and Smuggling Activity Prevention Act Sponsoring Organizations under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1973
- The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 (FEOA) is a law that requires the Directorate to seize the properties of individuals who have fled India and are considered fugitive economic offenders, with the intention of apprehending them and confiscating their assets for the benefit of the Central Government.

Director of Enforcement:-
- Appointed by the federal government under the advice of a committee that included the revenue secretary, home secretary, secretary of state, and the central vigilance commissioner. The committee was presided over by the central vigilance commissioner.
- Maximum term of five years.

Recruitment of other officers:-
- It is possible to hire additional officers directly or indirectly from other investigation agency.

- It is composed of delegates from the Indian Revenue Services (IRS), Indian Police Services (IPS), Indian Administrative Services (IAS), and the police, excise, customs, and income tax agencies.

1.5 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023

- The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023 was just made available.

About Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023:-
- Transparency International is the publisher.
- Founded in 1993, this global non-governmental organization is headquartered in Berlin, Germany.
- Every year, the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is used to rate nations according to how corrupt the public sector is thought to be.
- Based on the perception of public sector corruption, 180 nations and territories are ranked by the CPI, which assigns a number ranging from zero (extremely corrupt) to 100 (very clean).
- Examined Factors: Corruption in the Public Sector.
- Law enforcement and Judicial Openness.
- India was rated 93rd out of 180 countries.
- India received a total score of 39 in 2023 as opposed to 40 in 2022, a slight decline.
- A higher score on the index denotes a lower perceived level of corruption and a cleaner public sector. The index rates countries on a scale from 0 to 100.
- New Zealand, Finland, and Denmark are the top three nations.
- Yemen, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Somalia are the bottom spots.

1.6 Motion of Thanks

- The Motion of Thanks on President Murmu's address was recently discussed in both Houses of Parliament.

Context:
- The President had spoken to the two Houses during their joint session.

About:-
- According to the provisions of the Constitution, the President shall address both Houses of Parliament together at the beginning of the first session following each general election to the House of the People and at the beginning of the first session of each year, and he or she shall inform Parliament of the reasons for its summons.
- The Address outlines the policies, projects, and programs that the current government intends to pursue with reference to significant national and international concerns and provides an overview of the government's accomplishments and actions from the previous year.
- In essence, the President's speech outlines the government's goals and policy priorities for the future year.
- The speech offers a general overview of the goals and policies of the administration.
- Following the speech, the Motion of Thanks is discussed in each House of Parliament, and the Prime Minister speaks.
- The motion is put to a vote at the conclusion of the discussion.

Constitutional Provisions:-
- According to Article 86, the President is entitled to address either House of Parliament or both Houses together, and member attendance is required for this purpose.

- Article 87, which addresses the President's Special Address, states that the President will inform the Houses of Parliament of the reasons behind their summons at the beginning of the first session of each year and at the beginning of the first session following a general election to the Lok Sabha.

Significance:-
- The House must approve the motion of thanks; else, the administration will be defeated.
- It is also one method by which the Lok Sabha might convey its lack of faith in the administration.

1.7 Mayor's Election

PC: Hindustan Times

The results of Chandigarh's January 30 mayoral election have been declared void by the Supreme Court.

Who is a Mayor?
- The mayor of a city or town in India is in charge of overseeing the provision of infrastructure and necessary services to the populace.
- Typically, the members of the Municipal Corporation or Council elect the mayor.
- He or she represents the municipal government ceremonially.

History of Mayor's elections in India
- The establishment of municipal corporations in Madras, Chennai, in 1688 marked the beginning of the introduction of municipal corporate processes to India during the British Raj. By 1762, municipal corporations had also been established in Bombay, Mumbai, and Calcutta, Kolkata.
- However, Lord Mayo's Resolution of 1870 established the procedure for an elected President to be appointed in the municipalities.
- Since then, the current format and organization of municipal organizations has been modeled after Lord Ripon's 1882 resolution on local self-governance.
- The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was introduced, granting recognition to urban local organizations such as Municipal Councils, Nagar Panchayats, and Corporations, and transferring eighteen distinct functions to them, including the ability to elect a mayor.

Elections and tenure
- Every Indian city chooses its own mayor, and each has a different election procedure and term.
- The election process in Bengaluru, Karnataka, is indirect and has a one-year term.
- Mumbai, Maharashtra, uses indirect elections with a two-and-a-half-year term, while Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, uses directly elected mayors with five-year terms.

Roles and Responsibilities
- oversees the municipal government.
- various towns have various fixed tenures.
- the city's first citizen.
- has two distinct roles: representing the city and preserving its honor at ceremonial occasions, and in a functional capacity, presiding over deliberations in the civic house alongside elected representatives.
- The Mayor's responsibility is limited to exercising presiding authority in the corporate hall at various corporation-related meetings.
- The Mayor's responsibility is limited to exercising presiding authority in the corporate hall at various corporation-related meetings.
- As the head of corporation during a foreign dignitary's visit to the city, the mayor's responsibilities stretch much beyond the boundaries of his local community and nation. The state government has invited him to greet and represent the people of the city to the honored guest.
- He is honored in municipal, governmental, and other social gatherings.

MAINS

1.8 Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

- Recently, the Uttarakhand Cabinet accepted the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) draft report.

Background:-
- It was presented as a bill for enactment in the state legislature.

About:-
- The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is a general collection of laws that apply to all citizens without regard to their religion.
- Article 44 of the Constitution mandates that the State work toward providing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for all Indian nationals. Article 44 (Uniform Civil Code):"The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India," states this article.

Background:
- In 1985, the Supreme Court ordered the Parliament to draft a UCC for the first time in the case of Muhammad Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum.
- In this instance, Shah Bano used Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to sue her husband for support after he had issued her triple talaq.
- The Muslim Women (claim to Protection on Divorce) Act, 1986, however, limited a Muslim woman's claim to maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, overturning the Shah Bano case ruling.

Need of UCC:-
Gender Justice:–
- It is a well-known fact that nearly all religious personal laws discriminate against women.
- When it comes to inheritance and succession, men typically have the upper hand.
- Muslim women are not permitted to have more than one spouse, but males are permitted to marry more than one wife.

Simplifying the law: It will do away with the need for many laws.

India has distinct codified and uncodified personal laws:-

Hindu Individual Law

- The Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act are the four statutes that codify Hindu personal law.
- For the purposes of these regulations, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists are also referred to as "Hindus." In 1956, the Parliament codified it.

Islamic individual laws

- Muslims would be subject to British personal law, or the Shariat, according to an Act passed in 1939. The 1937 Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Act is a brief statute of five sections. It addresses issues like dissolution of marriage, intestate succession, child custody, and inheritance.
- **Secular' laws:-**

  These laws completely disregard religion. Among them are:

  The Guardians and Wards Act lays forth the responsibilities and rights of guardians, whereas the Special Marriage Act is for interfaith unions.

Additional statutes:

- There are about 200 tribes in the Northeast, and each has a unique set of customary laws. In addition, Christians and Jews are governed by distinct personal laws. A UCC will therefore combine these laws into a single standard.

1.9 CURATIVE PETITION

Curative petition against Supreme Court's 2013 section 377 ruling is closed.

Context:

- On Thursday, a five-judge Supreme Court bench ruled that, in light of the 2018 ruling that decriminalized homosexuality, the curative appeal against the 2013 ruling that upheld Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code—which criminalized homosexuality—had become futile.

Concerning Curative Petition:

- When the review petition is denied or has run its course, the court's final option is the Curative Petition.
- The Supreme Court of India developed this idea in the case of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr., where the issue was whether a party who had been wronged may obtain some kind of remedy against the Supreme Court's final ruling or order following the denial of a review petition.
- Its two goals are to prevent abuse of the legal system and miscarriages of justice.
- Article 137 of the Indian Constitution upholds the notion of the curative petition.

Conditions laid by SC for curative petition:

- The petitioner needs to prove that the ruling has harmed him and that natural justice standards were broken.
- The petition must expressly specify that it was dismissed by circulation on the grounds cited in the review petition.
- In order to seek a remedy, a bench consisting of the three most senior Supreme Court judges and, if available, the judges who rendered the relevant decision must receive a curative petition.
- The subject is scheduled before the same Bench if the majority of judges determine that it needs to be heard.

- A senior attorney may be asked to support the Bench as an amicus curiae (friend of the court) at any point during the curative petition process.

1.10 International Court of Justice (ICJ)

At the ICJ, Palestine charges Israel of apartheid.

Context:
- The legal ramifications of Israel's territorial occupation are being discussed at hearings before the International Court of Justice.

About International Court of Justice :-
- The main judicial body of the United Nations (UN) is the ICJ.
- The United Nations Charter established it in June 1945, and it started operations in April 1946.
- The Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), which was established by the League of Nations in 1922, is replaced by this court.
- The ICJ is housed in The Hague's Peace Palace, just like the PCIJ.
- Of the six main UN organs, it is the only one that is not based in New York City. (The General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, and Secretariat are the other five organs.)
- "To settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies" is the ICJ's own description of its functions. "The principal legal systems and the major forms of civilization throughout the world must be represented by the court as a whole."
- The official languages of the ICJ are French and English.
- Although every UN member is immediately bound by the ICJ statute, this does not mean that the ICJ has universal jurisdiction over conflicts involving them. Only with the agreement of both parties does the ICJ acquire jurisdiction.
- The parties to a case are legally bound by the ICJ's final ruling. There is no appeals process; at most, it can be interpreted or revised in the event that new information is discovered.
- The International Court of Justice's power is dependent on nations' willingness to follow its rulings, so it is unable to guarantee that its orders will be followed.
- The UN Security Council and General Assembly vote concurrently but independently to choose the fifteen judges that make up the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for nine-year mandates.
- A candidate needs to secure the majority of the votes cast in both bodies in order to win.
- Every three years, a third of the court is chosen.
- There are now four Indian members of the ICJ.

1.11 FREE MOVEMENT REGIME

- The Home Ministry suggests that the policy of free movement, which permits those living near the borders of India and Myanmar to go 16 kilometers into each other's country, be immediately suspended.

Context:
- This decision was made primarily to protect domestic security, lessen the possibility of illegal immigration, human trafficking, and drug trafficking, and to mitigate the effects of the violence that has been raging in Myanmar since the military coup in February 2021.

About free movement regime:
- Under the Free Movement Regime (FMR), tribes residing on both sides of the border with India are permitted to enter Myanmar for up to 16 km without a visa.
- 2018 saw the implementation of the FMR as part of the government's Act East policy, coinciding with an improvement in diplomatic ties between India and Myanmar.
  However, because of the turmoil in Myanmar after the military takeover in February 2021, India has halted the FMR till September 2022.
- The boundary between India and Myanmar stretches roughly 1,643 kilometers (1,021 miles), from the tripoint with Bangladesh in the south to the tripoint with China in the north.
- The states of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km) are on the boundary between India and Myanmar.

1.12 RAJYA SABHA ELECTION

February 27 is the scheduled date of the Rajya Sabha's 56 seat elections.

Context:
- The roster of candidates for the Rajya Sabha election has been made public by major political parties. Since the Lok Sabha Election is soon, it is being closely followed.

About Rajya Sabha election:
- The Rajya Sabha is an enduring body that cannot be disbanded.
- According to Article 83(1) of the Constitution, a third of its members must retire after every two years in order to maintain continuity. "Biennial elections" are then held to replace these vacancies.
- A member is elected to a six-year term.
- Of the 245 members, 233 are representatives of the States and the Union territories of Delhi and Puducherry, and 12 are the President's nominees.

Rajya Sabha polls: Who casts a ballot and how?
- MLAs choose the Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament by an indirect election.
- According to Article 80(4), members will be chosen by the state assemblies' elected members using a single transferable vote and a proportional representation method.
- The Rajya Sabha seats are distributed among the states and Union Territories according to the population of each state, as stipulated in the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution.

Rajya Sabha polls have an open ballot
- There is an open voting mechanism in the Rajya Sabha elections, however it is a restricted kind of transparency.
- Votes shall be deemed void if a marked ballot is presented to anyone other than the official representative of the voter's own party. The vote cannot be counted if the ballot is not presented to the authorized agent.

- It is forbidden for independent candidates to display their ballots to third parties.

1.13 CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT (CAA)

- The Citizenship Amendment Act will be put into effect before to the 2024 Lok Sabha election, according to recent remarks made by Home Minister Amit Shah.

Context:

After being first proposed in 2016, the CAA had multiple parliamentary hearings. The Citizenship Act was changed by this 2019 legislation.

About CAA:

- The Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) on December 11, 2019.
- The CAA aims to facilitate the naturalization process for Indian nationals for those who have been persecuted in neighboring nations.
- The Citizenship measure of 1955 was modified by this measure.
- For undocumented immigrants who arrived in India before December 31, 2014, there is the CAA.
- It includes refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.
- It specifically helps people who practice Buddhism, Jainism, Parsi, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity.
- These nations' Muslims are not eligible for this under CAA.
- A foreign national who enters the nation without a valid passport or visa, or who comes with a legitimate document but remains longer than allowed, is considered an illegal migrant under the Citizenship Act of 1955.
- The Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Passport Act of 1920 do not apply to the members of the six communities, as per the Amendment. The Passport Act of 1920 and the Foreigners Act of 1946 outline the penalties for entering the nation unlawfully and remaining here after valid visas and permissions have expired.
- One of the conditions for obtaining citizenship by naturalization under The Citizenship Act, 1955 is that the applicant must have lived in India for 11 of the preceding 14 years in addition to the recent 12 months.
- As a special need for applicants from these six religions (Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian) and the aforementioned three nations (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan), the modification lowers the second requirement from 11 years to 5 years.

1.14 Supreme Court Strikes Down Electoral Bonds Scheme

Pulling the plug

Major takeaways from the Supreme Court verdict striking down the electoral bonds scheme:

- Issuance of electoral bonds to be stopped
- SBI to submit full details of bonds purchased by donors and subsequently encashed by political parties since April 12, 2019 to the Election Commission of India by March 6
- ECI to publish the entire information given by SBI on its website by March 13

- In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the electoral bonds program was "unconstitutional and manifestly arbitrary."
- A five-judge Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud unanimously overturned the plan, citing excessive limitations and violations of voters' rights to information.

Chronology of events in Electoral bonds case
The Telegraph online

- **2017** — Electoral bond scheme introduced in the Finance Bill
- **2017 Sep 14** — NGO 'Association for Democratic Reforms', lead petitioner, moves SC challenging the scheme
- **2017 Oct 03** — SC issues notices to Centre and EC on PIL filed by the NGO
- **2018 Jan 2** — The Central government notifies electoral bond scheme.
- **2022 Nov 7** — Electoral bond scheme amended to increase sale days from 70 to 85 in a year where any assembly election may be scheduled
- **2023 Oct 16** — SC bench headed by CJI DY Chandrachud refers pleas against scheme to five-judge Constitution bench
- **2023 Oct 31** — Fve-judge Constitution bench headed by CJI D Y Chandrachud commences hearing on pleas against scheme
- **2023 Nov 2** — SC reserves verdict
- **2024 Feb 15** — SC delivers unanimous judgement annulling the scheme, calling it 'unconstitutional'

Important Justifications for Ending the Election Bonds Program
Right to Information (RTI) Violation
- The petitioners emphasized that voters have a right to information about political party funding and claimed that the plan violates that right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
- The administration claimed that people had no "right to know" about political contributions, but the court affirmed voters' access to this information by pointing out the close relationship between money and politics.
- In order to prevent quid pro quo agreements, the court emphasized the "deep association" between money and politics and the necessity of transparency.

Indiscriminate Limitations:
- The scheme's donor anonymity, which was supposed to stop black money, was seen to be counterproductive.
- Proponents drew attention to potential gaps that might permit cash donations, compromising the law's ability to effectively combat "black money."

- The court stressed that there were other, less onerous ways to accomplish the goals of the plan, like Section 29C of the Representation of People Act, 1951.

The Public Interest vs. Privacy
- Amidst the government's argument for donor anonymity to safeguard individuals' right to privacy, proponents emphasized the significance of public examination of political fundraising.
- The court rejected complete anonymity made possible by the program, making it clear that donor privacy only applies to legitimate kinds of public funding.

Unrestricted Business Contributions:
- Proponents emphasized how unrestricted corporate contributions have a negative effect on free and fair elections.
- Citing the need to prevent undue corporate influence in politics, the court reaffirmed the cap on corporate political contributions.
- It raised fears that unrestricted donations would encourage quid pro quo agreements, particularly by businesses that are losing money.

Impact on Key Legal Amendments
- The Representation of the People Act, 1951, was upheld by the court, upholding the balance between donor privacy and voter access to information by eliminating changes that exempted political parties from declaring contributions over Rs. 20,000. (Part 29C)
- Amendments to the Companies Act of 2013 that had permitted unrestricted corporate contributions were reversed, maintaining electoral integrity and putting a ceiling on corporate political payments. (Part 182)
- Income-tax Act, 1961: This act preserved voters' right to knowledge by nullifying political parties' exemptions from keeping records of donations made through electoral bonds. (Part 13A)

Application of Proportionality Test

Proportionality Test
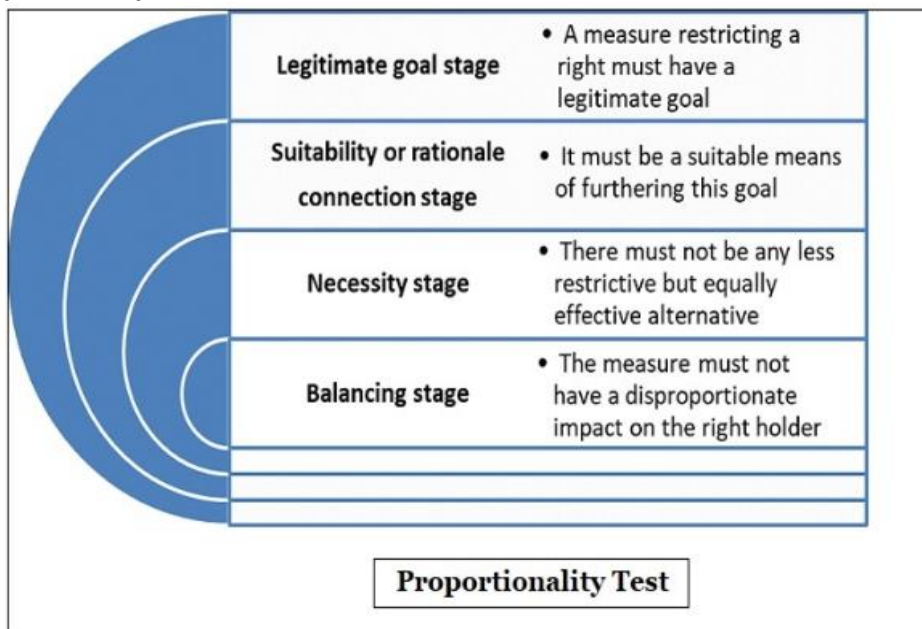
Definition:
- The proportionality test evaluates how well the state's actions to accomplish its goals are balanced against conflicting fundamental rights or interests.
- Four requirements must be met: necessity, legality, rigorous proportionality, and interest balance.

Government's Arguments:
- The administration justified the program by pointing to justifiable objectives like combating illegal money and safeguarding donor anonymity.
- Attorney General Tushar Mehta contended that material that is not owned by the state is not covered under the right to information.

Court's Analysis:
- Using the proportionality test, the court examined how competing basic rights were balanced, highlighting the need of using the "least restrictive" techniques.
- It emphasized how crucial less invasive options, like the electoral trusts plan, are to accomplishing the goals of the system.

Why is this a Landmark case?
- Burden of Proof: According to the court, the state must show that its policies are the "least restrictive" and that there are no other "equally effective" ways to accomplish its goals.
- Balancing Competing Rights: The court is focused on striking a balance between competing basic rights, in contrast to earlier strategies that prioritized the public interest over individual rights.
- Structured Proportionality Test: The state must show that its acts curtailing fundamental rights are commensurate with its goals in order to pass the decision, which employs a structured proportionality test.
- Application of Legal Precedents: Although the legislation was established by the right to privacy verdict, cases such as Aadhaar (2018) and Demonetization (2023) employed the structural proportionality test in their decisions. This is where the electoral bonds decision marks a major divergence.

Conclusion
- The Supreme Court's decision reinforces its dedication to defending democratic procedures and preserving constitutional values.
- The court highlights the need of accountability and openness in electoral financing by overturning the electoral bonds program and reintroducing important legislative provisions.

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

PRELIMS

2.1 AFRICAN UNION

The horrific donkey skin trade is officially outlawed by the African Union.

Context:
- The popularity of Ejiao, an old Chinese remedy usually manufactured from donkey hides, has increased demand for the animals' hides.Africa is home to almost two thirds of the 53 million donkeys that are thought to exist worldwide. In the most impoverished rural villages, people utilize them to transport items like food, water, and other necessities.The killing of donkeys for their skin has destroyed African livelihoods and deprived the continent of its identity, culture, and biodiversity.

About African Union (AU)
- Founded in 2002, the African Union (AU) is a continental organization with 55 member nations spread over the African continent.
- It is the replacement for the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was founded in 1963 and lasted until 1999.
- The main objective of the AU is to move the continent as a whole toward prosperity and peace.
- In an effort to promote development, end poverty, and integrate Africa into the global economy, it encourages political and economic cooperation among its 54 member countries.
- Addis Ababa is home to the African Union Commission, which serves as the AU's secretariat.
- Lagos, Nigeria, is the largest city in the African Union (AU), and Cairo, Egypt, is the largest urban agglomeration.

2.2 OPERATION ASPIDES

Mission Aspides, a Red Sea mission, was just established by the European Union.

Context:
- Numerous Houthi attacks have targeted vessels in the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Gulf of Aden since October 2023. Such attacks violate the freedom of the high seas and the right of transit passage in straits utilized for international navigation, which are guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. They also endanger the lives of civilians on merchant and commercial vessels.

About Mission Aspides:
- The European Union Council initiated Mission Aspides, a new defensive maritime security mission, on February 19, 2024.
- Restoring and defending the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf is the aim of this operation.
- The operation will guarantee the presence of European Union naval forces in the region, offer maritime situational awareness, monitor and defend ships from potential multi-domain attacks at sea, and closely cooperate with other EU operations and like-minded international partners.

- Greek city of Larissa serves as the operation's headquarters.

2.3 Greece's gateway to Asia, India's gateway to Europe

Key Highlights:
- Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's travel to India is a symbol of the momentum Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Greece created in terms of fortifying bilateral ties.
- Both nations understand the strategic significance of their respective locations and the necessity of working together to maintain peace, security, and prosperity.
- Examples of collaboration in the corporate, military, and strategic domains include joint military drills and investment alliances.
- Under the Mitsotakis administration, Greece's economic reforms are intended to promote sustainable growth and establish Greece as a trustworthy partner in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- One potential route to strengthen commercial relations between Greece and India is the idea of the India-Middle East-Europe commercial Corridor (IMEC).
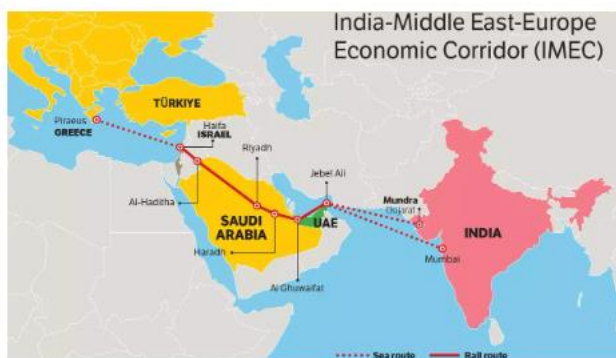
Key Challenges:
- Bilateral cooperation has been moving slowly, which suggests that more momentum is needed.
- Even with current agreements, there's still opportunity for growth and diversity.
- Ensuring continued government and corporate commitment to strengthening relationships in the face of world unpredictability.

Way Forward:
- Prioritizing the execution of current agreements while looking into new areas of collaboration is a good idea for both administrations.
- To broaden and grow ties, firms from both nations must continue to connect with one another.
- Long-term collaboration and mutual understanding can be promoted by funding educational and cultural exchanges.
- It is important to continue high-level visits and communication channels in order to keep the momentum going and deal with new issues.

2.4 VAIBHAV SCHEME

- 75 scientists from the Indian diaspora will return to India as part of the Vaibhav scheme.

Context:
- The program, which aims to draw scientists of Indian descent who are working outside for short-term engagement with Indian universities, has already selected its inaugural batch of 22 fellows.22 scientists

will spend a month or two a year, for a maximum of three years, at host Indian institutes. These scientists are primarily from North American and European institutes, such as the California Institute of Technology, the University of Oxford, the University of Michigan, the University of Geneva, the University of Waterloo, Canada, and the University of Oslo.

About VAIBHAV
- The Government of India's Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology, oversees the Vaishwik Bhartiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Fellowship program.
- The program's goal is to promote cooperation between Indian Diasporan scientists and Indian universities, public funded scientific institutions, and/or higher education institutions (HEIs).

Key Features:
- Knowledge Verticals: Eighteen distinct knowledge verticals are the focus of the initiative, including, among others, computer sciences, material sciences, quantum technology, health, pharmaceuticals, electronics, agriculture, and energy.
- Eligibility: The fellowship is available to exceptional Indian scientists and technicians who are actively conducting research in their home countries. These individuals can be Non-resident Indians (NRI), Persons of Indian Origin (PIO), or Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).
- Duration of Collaboration: For a maximum of three years, selected fellows may work for up to two months a year at any Indian institution of their choosing.
- Fellowship Award: During the collaboration time, VAIBHAV fellows will receive a monthly fellowship award of INR 4,00,000 to assist their research endeavors.
- Travel, Lodging, and Emergencies: Both domestic and foreign travel costs, lodging, and emergency funds will be covered by the fellowship.

2.5 Raising Dialogue

- Today, February 23, is the first day of the ninth Raisina Dialogue, which will take place in New Delhi.

Context:
- The prime minister, Narendra Modi, will open the conference. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the prime minister of Greece, will be the main guest for the inauguration.

About Raisina Dialogue:
- An annual conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics, the Raisina Dialogue attempts to tackle the world's most difficult problems.
- Attendees at the conference from the media, corporate, political, and civil society sectors gather in New Delhi.
- The conference is being hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with the think tank Observer Research Foundation, which is situated in Delhi.

2.6 International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised its forecast for India's GDP growth to 6.7% for the current fiscal year.

Context:
- It has increased by 40 basis points from its earlier prediction of 6.3%.

About the International Monetary Fund (IMF):-
- It is an international organization that seeks to bring wealth and sustainable growth to each of its member nations.
- Founded in 1944; headquarters are in Washington, D.C. (United States of America)
- 190 members
- One of the members is India.
- Any foreign state, whether or not it is a UN member, is eligible to join the IMF.

Structure:–
- The Board of Governors sits atop the organization.
- Overseeing the IMF's daily operations is its 24-member Executive Board.
- The Managing Director serves as the Executive Board Chair and is in charge of the IMF staff.
- Four Deputy Managing Directors support him/her.
- Funding: The money that nations provide as their capital subscription (quotas) is the primary source of the IMF's resources.

Objectives:-
- Encourage international monetary cooperation.
- dependable financial standing.
- promote global trade.
- Encourage strong employment and long-term economic expansion.
- lessen global poverty.
- macroeconomic expansion.
- Financing and policy advice for emerging nations.
- encouragement of a global payment system and stable exchange rates.

Functions:-
- Lending
- The IMF offers loans, including emergency loans, to its member nations that are currently or may in the future facing balance of payments issues.
- The goal is to assist them in stabilizing their currencies, rebuilding their international reserves, continuing to pay for imports, and reestablishing the prerequisites for rapid economic growth while addressing underlying issues.

Surveillance
- The IMF keeps an eye on changes in both the world economy and the international monetary system.
- It highlights hazards and suggests course of action for expansion and monetary stability.
- Development of Capacity
- Governments, including central banks, finance ministries, revenue administrations, and financial sector supervisory agencies, can get technical support and training from the IMF.

FLAGSHIP PUBLICATIONS:-
- World Economic Outlook
- Global Financial Stability Report
- Fiscal Monitor

2.7 Mekong River

A recent dam proposal in Laos across the Mekong River sparked concerns.

Context:
- After the project is finished, more than 500 families should be displaced, and 20 communities will be affected.

About Mekong River:-

- East and Southeast Asian countries share the Mekong River as a transboundary river.
- It is the twelfth-longest river in the world.
- In Asia, it is the third longest.
- The river flows through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam before ending at the Tibetan Plateau.
- Navigation in the Mekong is challenging due to its rapids and waterfalls, as well as its drastic seasonal flow variations.
- The ancient river civilizations of India are linked to the rich historical and cultural legacy of the lower Mekong region.
- A significant commercial route connects Southeast Asia and western China via the river.
- Opportunities for tourism, academic exchanges, and collaboration in fields like science and technology are available throughout the Mekong area.

MAINS

2.8 India sends assistance to cholera-hit Zambia

Zambia, a nation in southern Africa, received material and medical aid from India on Saturday.

Context:
- Over the past few weeks, Zambia has been struggling with a cholera outbreak that has forced the closure of all schools in the nation. More medical assistance has been requested by Zambia to address what is being called a "cholera emergency."

About Zambia:
- Situated at the intersection of Central, Southern, and East Africa, Zambia is a landlocked nation.
- The landlocked nation, which is Africa's second-largest producer of copper after the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has seen tremendous economic progress during the past ten years.
- On Zambia's border with Zimbabwe lie the breathtaking Victoria Falls.

About Cholera
- The bacterial illness cholera is typically transmitted by tainted water.

- Cholera is an infection caused by the bacteria Vibrio cholerae.
- The bacteria in the small intestine creates a toxin that causes the disease's fatal symptoms.The toxin makes the body excrete copious amounts of water, which quickly depletes fluids and salts (electrolytes) and causes diarrhea.
- The majority of persons who come into contact with Vibrio cholerae don't get sick and are unaware that they've been infected. However, individuals can still spread the cholera bacterium to others by contaminated water because they excrete the bacteria in their stool for seven to fourteen days.

2.9 EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION (EFTA)

- India has turned down the proposal from the four members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) for "data exclusivity" clauses to be included in the free trade agreement that they are both discussing.

Context:
- The use of preclinical test and clinical trial data by generic medication manufacturers will be prohibited by data exclusivity restrictions pertaining to previous patent holders. Since January 2008, India and EFTA have been engaged in negotiations for a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement.

About European Free Trade Association (EFTA)
- Four European states—Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland—make up the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), a regional trade association and free trade area.
- Although these nations are not members of the EU, they do take part in the Schengen Area and the European Single Market.
- In order to provide an alternative trading union for European governments unable or unable to join the European Economic Community (EEC), the main predecessor of the EU, EFTA was founded in 1960.
- Through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, EFTA collaborates with the EU in a number of policy areas and has free trade agreements with numerous nations worldwide.
- Geneva, Switzerland serves as home to EFTA's headquarters.

2.10 OUTER SPACE TREATY

- This week, numerous reports claimed that Russia was developing nuclear weapons in orbit with the intention of destroying other satellites, both military and commercial.

Context:
- Russia would be in breach of the Outer Space Treaty if it developed and used such a weapon. Additionally, it will be against the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which forbids nuclear explosions in space. Russia is a signatory to both agreements.

About Outer Space Treaty:
- International space law is based on a multilateral treaty called the Outer Space Treaty.
- In 2024, there were 114 parties to this agreement, which was signed by the US, the UK, and the USSR in 1967.
- The pact restricts the use of the Moon and other celestial bodies to peaceful purposes solely and forbids the deployment of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in space.

- The treaty also states that no nation may claim sovereignty over any portion of space, which is considered to be the common heritage of all people.
- In addition to preventing war or an arms race in space, the pact seeks to advance space exploration and utilization for the good of all nations.
- On January 18, 1982, India ratified the Outer Space Treaty.
- On March 3, 1967, India signed the treaty, but it took another fifteen years for it to be ratified.
- The Moon Treaty, which further limits the use and exploration of the Moon and other natural resources in space, is another agreement to which India is a signatory.

2.11 PARTIAL NUCLEAR TEST BAN TREATY (PTBT)

- This week, numerous reports claimed that Russia was developing nuclear weapons in orbit with the intention of destroying other satellites, both military and commercial.

Context:
- Russia would be in violation of both the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Outer Space Treaty if it developed and used such a weapon. The latter treaty forbids nuclear explosions in space. Russia is a signatory to both agreements.

About Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
- An international agreement known as the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963 outlawed the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, space, and underwater.
- As of 2024, there were 126 parties to the pact, which was signed by the US, the UK, and the USSR in 1963.
- The deal sought to stop the nuclear arms race from getting worse and to lessen the radioactive fallout from nuclear tests.
- The nuclear powers and other nations continued to carry out underground nuclear testing in spite of the treaty's lack of a moratorium.

India's stand
- India declined to sign the PTBT because it believed it discriminated against governments without nuclear weapons and ignored the topic of nuclear disarmament. As a result, India is not a party to the treaty.
- The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), an abbreviation for the Proliferation of Nuclear Test-Ban Treaties (PTBT) that outlaws the use of nuclear weapons for military or civilian purposes, including subterranean tests, was similarly rejected by India.
- India contended that the CTBT did not meet India's security concerns in a nuclearized region and that it was neither universal, verifiable, or non-discriminatory. Additionally, India insisted that it would not sign any treaty that limited its access to nuclear weapons and that it had the sovereign right to carry out nuclear tests for the sake of national security.

2.12 Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA)

- The Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA) - Commonwealth Attorneys and Solicitors General Conference will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi shortly.

Context:
- Cross-Border Challenges in Justice Delivery is the conference theme.

About Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA):-
- In 1971, it was established.
- Headquarters: London, United Kingdom.
- Promoting and maintaining high standards of legal education throughout the Commonwealth is the mission of the Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA).
- With regional Chapters and Committees in Asia, Southern Africa, West Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe, it is an organization that spans the Commonwealth.
- In order to better serve the public and the legal community, the Association aims to elevate the bar for legal education.

Objectives:-
- The Association aims to make legal education both professionally and socially relevant. To this end, it supports distance learning and continuing legal education programs, develops legal curricula and teaching methodologies, and helps law schools get ready for the demands of the profession in the face of the information revolution and other global challenges.
- Although the Association's focus is on Commonwealth nations with legal systems derived from the Anglo-American tradition or common law, this purpose may apply to all jurisdictions worldwide.
- The necessity of making legal education both professionally and socially relevant is the foundation of the Association's Programme of Action.

CLEA activities:-
- Research and Publications
- The Commonwealth Law Lecture Series is an exclusive series that is held throughout the Commonwealth.
- Renowned legal scholars and judges provide lectures.
- Development of Curriculum
- Enhancing Legal Education
- Supporting the principles of the Harare Commonwealth

2.13 India suspends Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar

6-year-long arrangement ends
Union home minister Amit Shah announced the government's recommendation to suspend the regime to ensure internal security

WHAT IS FMR?
The Free Movement Region allowed people from both sides of the India-Myanmar border to travel 16km into each other's territory without a visa, but with a border pass valid for one year that allowed a stay of up to two weeks per visit

1,643-km long India-Myanmar border passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland & Arunachal Pradesh

GOVT'S ACT EAST POLICY
The regime was introduced in 2018 as part of India's effort to boost the region's economy by encouraging trade with Southeast Asian nations

SECURITY CONCERNS
Security officials cautioned in recent months that armed insurgents were using FMR to enter India, and to escape undetected

- The Union Home Minister declared that the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the border with Myanmar would eventually be repealed.

About Free Movement Regime
- The FMR, which was implemented in the 1970s, let residents of India and Myanmar to travel up to 16 kilometers into each other's countries without a visa.

- The 1,643 km border between India and Myanmar runs through the States of Mizoram (510 km), Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), and Manipur (398 km).
- This government acknowledged the strong linkages that exist between communities on both sides of the open border in terms of family and ethnicity.
- The FMR was last updated in 2016 to conform to Act East policy of India. However, because to the COVID-19 epidemic, it has been suspended in Manipur since 2020.

Why does India care about Myanmar?

[A] Geopolitical Perspective
- Border sharing: India and Myanmar share a marine border in the Bay of Bengal as well as a sizable land border spanning more than 1600 km, underscoring the significance of Myanmar's stability for India.
- Myanmar's geostrategic location, serving as a crucial bridge between South and Southeast Asia, is essential to India's "Act East" policy and the growth of the Northeast.
- Multilateral support: Myanmar is essential for regional cooperation because it is the only ASEAN country to border India. It supports India's multilateral involvement by being a part of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation, a member of BIMSTEC, and an observer of SAARC.
- Security Implications: Since rebel organizations such as NSCN-K use Myanmar as a base, cooperation in counterinsurgency operations is required.
- Chinese Influence: India emphasizes the need for closer bilateral ties and views Myanmar as a strategic ally to offset China's growing influence in the area.

[B] Socioeconomics
- Cultural Affinities: India and Myanmar have strong cultural linkages due to their shared ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, which extend beyond their physical proximity.
- Indian Diaspora: People to people ties between India and Myanmar are strengthened by the substantial population of approximately 2.5 million people who are of Indian descent living in Myanmar.
- Infrastructure Investment: To increase connectivity, trade, and investment, infrastructure projects including the Sittwe Port, IMT Highway, and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project are being undertaken.
- Bilateral Trade: With USD 1.03 billion in bilateral trade with Myanmar in 2021–2022, India is the country's fifth-largest trading partner.
- Energy Cooperation: India's energy security depends on Myanmar. Myanmar is the largest receiver of Indian investments in the oil and gas sector in Southeast Asia, with an energy portfolio worth over USD 1.2 billion.

Motives behind the Policy Change
- Drug Trafficking and Insurgency: As a source of opium, Myanmar feeds both drug trafficking and insurgency networks in the northeastern states of India.
- Refugee Inflow After Military Coup: After Myanmar's military coup in February 2021, more than 40,000 refugees fled into Mizoram and about 4,000 into Manipur, raising worries about security.
- Local Government Position: Linking ethnic violence in the state to unrestricted cross-border travel, the Chief Minister of Manipur urged the Ministry of Home Affairs to revoke the FMR and finish border barrier.

Way forward
- Border Fencing: A tender is anticipated shortly, and the government intends to fence roughly 300 kilometers of the border.

- Revisions to the Regulation: Scholars advise improving the FMR to effectively control migration while preserving international relations.
- Commerce and Infrastructure: Some negative effects may be lessened by formalizing commerce at specified entry points and improving infrastructure.
- Community Involvement: Sensitive and efficient border management depends on involving border communities in decision-making.

2.14 India Canada relationship

- In 2022, there was almost $9.5 billion in bilateral commerce in products and $6.5 billion in trade in services.
- With over 3% of the Canadian population being Indian, Canada is home to one of the largest Indian diasporas globally.
- The primary goal of the scientific and technology partnership is to advance industrial R&D by developing novel intellectual properties, procedures, prototypes, and goods. Canada and India have collaborated in space science since the 1990s. ISRO's commercial division, ANTRIX, has launched multiple nanosatellites from Canada.
- As part of the 2010 Civil Nuclear Agreement, Canada was able to supply uranium for nuclear reactors in India.
- China is recognized as a "disruptive global power" in Canada's Indo-Pacific Policy, which also highlights India as a "critical partner" for cooperation on common interests.

Issues/Challenges in India-Canada Relations:
- India had a non-alignment strategy throughout the Cold War, whereas Canada was a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- Canada supported a plebiscite in Kashmir despite the fact that it was against India's interests.
- Canada momentarily suspended any possible nuclear cooperation with India following the latter country's nuclear tests in 1998.
- Through Canada's immigration system, people with a tumultuous past can become citizens and use their status to carry out actions that are hostile to other countries. This poses a significant challenge to maintaining strong bilateral relations in the linked world of today.
- The coalition of pro-Khalistan parties in Canada's coalition government is what makes this particular stance possible.
- Between these nations, a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) has been in the works since 2010. By 2035, the CEPA between them would increase bilateral commerce by up to $6.5 billion, resulting in a $3.8 billion to $5.9 billion GDP gain for Canada.

2.15 India's relationship with UAE

- From February 13 to 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to make an official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Context:

PM Modi is making his third trip to the UAE in the past eight months and his seventh overall since 2015.India's relationship with the United Arab Emirates has developed quickly, rising to the top of New Delhi's bilateral partnerships.

About India- UAE relationship:

- UAE has developed into one of India's most significant strategic allies and pillars of the country's involvement in the Gulf.
- With a growth in bilateral trade to $85 billion in 2022–2023, India now ranks second in terms of export destinations and the UAE as its third-largest trading partner.
- Additionally, USE is India's fourth-largest overall investor.
- Signed on February 18, 2022, the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement intends to grow trade in services to $115 billion in five years.
- A bilateral investment treaty between India and the United Arab Emirates was accepted for signature and ratification on February 1, 2024, by the Indian government. This development will greatly increase bilateral economic ties, particularly in the areas of manufacturing and foreign direct investment.
- Since August 2019, the RuPay card—a crucial part of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)—has been recognized in the United Arab Emirates.
- The rupee was accepted for payments at Dubai's airports as of July 2023.
- When the Indian Oil Corporation paid the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company in rupees for the import of crude oil in August 2023, both India and the UAE operationalized a rupee-dirham settlement mechanism.
- India can also rely on the UAE as a reliable energy security partner.
- Among the few countries that received a special invitation to the September 2023 G-20 meeting, which India will chair, is the United Arab Emirates.
- The UAE established a consulate in Hyderabad in June 2023, and the IIT Delhi Abu Dhabi campus has been built.

Convergence of interest visible through groupings:
- Both nations collaborate closely within the region and are a part of several significant alliances, including the I2U2 or the West Asian Quad, which is made up of the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and India.
- The Middle East-European Economic Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project includes the United Arab Emirates as well.

2.16 From Europe to India, why are Farmers angry?

FARM PROTESTS GLOBALLY

Since 2023, at least 65 countries have reported protests organsied by agricultural workers with reasons ranging from minimum support price like in India, to unfair governmental policies — like in Europe — to outright displacement or eviction of farmers as seen in Benin or Sudan in Africa

Protesting over...

Others | Unfair govt policies | Pricing of produce | Delayed compensation or subsidy
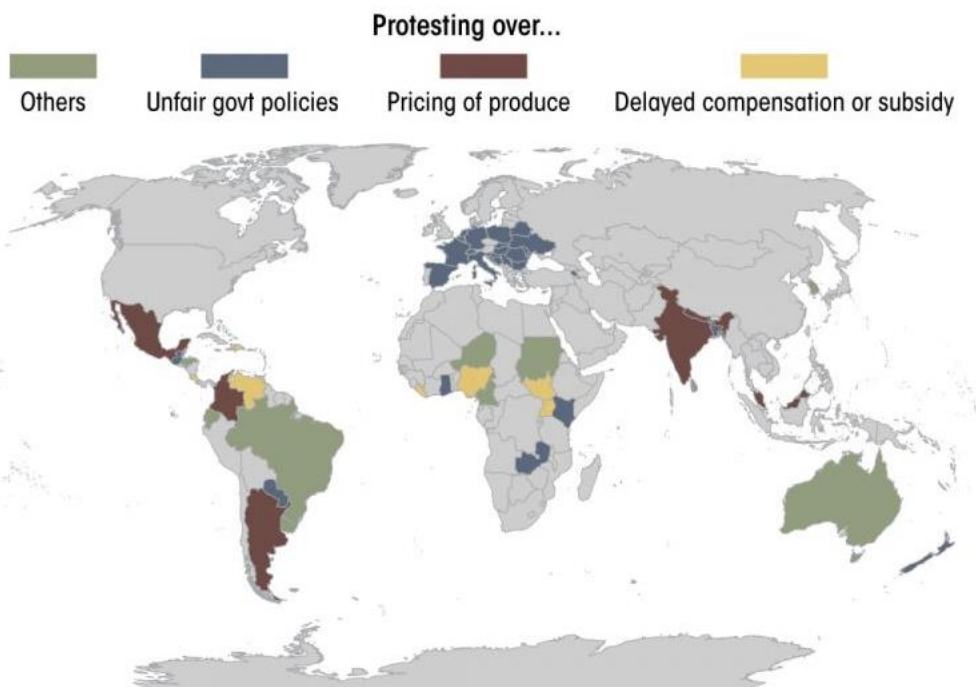
- Around the world, farmers are organizing protests against a variety of topics, such as environmental laws and the reduction of subsidies.
- Across continents, there is discontent that reflects a common struggle against issues affecting agricultural livelihoods.

Farmers Protests: Worldwide Extent
- Europe: To protest subsidy cuts, high energy prices, and cheap imports, farmers in a number of EU member states, including Belgium, France, Germany, and Spain, have used strategies like tractors in city invasions and shop raids. They demonstrate against EU environmental measures, such as programs to reduce pesticide use and restore natural areas, which are intended to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.
- South America: Due to droughts and economic downturns, protests spread throughout 67% of the continent. Brazilian farmers mobilized against the unfair competition posed by genetically modified maize.
- In Europe, protests against low crop prices and growing costs were observed in 47% of the countries. French farmers were particularly against cheap imports and insufficient subsidies.

- North and Central America: Thirty-five percent of the countries saw protests; Mexican farmers protested low prices, while Costa Rican farmers, in debt, sought government assistance.
- Africa: Poor pricing and high production costs caused demonstrations in 22% of the countries; Cameroonian farmers opposed export limits on cocoa, while Kenyan potato farmers demanded higher prices.
- Australian farmers opposed proposed high-voltage powerlines, while New Zealand farmers demonstrated against government controls.

Government Responses
- Germany and France have conceded by reversing the reductions in gasoline subsidies and phasing them off gradually.
- Ahead of elections, climate policies are being changed, and EU lawmakers have voted against proposed pesticide regulations.
- Plans to restore nature have been postponed for the time being.

Issues Prompting Indian Protests
- In line with a 2021 agreement, Indian farmers want legal protection for minimum support prices (MSP) and an expansion of MSP coverage beyond rice and wheat.
- Climate shocks and the import of inexpensive beans and edible oil have affected farmer incomes.
- Higher import taxes, modifications to crop insurance, higher-quality seeds, debt forgiveness, and social security benefits are some more demands.

Conclusion
- Global farmer protests are an expression of a united front against policies that affect agricultural livelihoods and sustainability as well as environmental laws and economic challenges.
- To address these issues and protect farmer welfare and agricultural resilience, broad policy changes and proactive government actions are needed.

2.17 7th Edition of Indian Ocean Conference (IOC)

- Perth, Australia, is hosting the 7th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC).

About Indian Ocean Conference (IOC)
- IOC was established in 2016 and has since become the principal venue for consultation on regional matters among nations in the Indian Ocean area.
- The Conference's inaugural edition took place in Singapore in 2016.
- India Foundation organizes it in collaboration with other regional organizations.

- It seeks to address regional cooperation under the framework of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) by bringing together key states and maritime partners.

SAGAR: What is it?
- "Security and Growth for All in the Region," or SAGAR, was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mauritius in 2015.
- It seeks to preserve strategic alliances with littoral states in Asia and Africa while utilizing the blue economy.
- In line with other maritime efforts like Act East Policy, Project Mausam, and Blue Economy, it aims to transparently lead capacity building and capability upgrading activities.

Key Statements by Dignitaries this Year
- Challenges to the International Rule of Law: Implicitly criticizing China's actions, EAM S. Jaishankar outlined issues with the rule of law from the Red Sea to the Indo-Pacific.
- Demand for Conflict Reduction: In light of the escalating tensions in the region, the Australian Foreign Minister underscored the need to reduce conflict.
- Veiled Allusions to China's Actions: Jaishankar emphasized the significance of abiding by internationally negotiated regimes while alluding to China's troop buildup near the Line of Actual Control and its actions in the South China Sea.

3. ECONOMY

3.1 FAIR AND REMUNERATIVE PRICE (FRP)

The fair and remunerative price (FRP), which millers must pay to cane growers for the fiscal year 2024–2025, was recently authorized by the Union Cabinet.

Context:
- A FRP of ₹ 340 per quintal of sugarcane was approved by the cabinet of ministers for the sugar year that would start on October 1, 2024. Since 2014, this is the highest sugarcane FRP that has been declared. The cost of production is 107% less than the new FRP.

About FAIR AND REMUNERATIVE PRICE (FRP)
- Sugar mills must pay farmers a minimum price for their sugarcane, which is known as the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP).
- In 2009, the government replaced the Statutory Minimum Price (SMP) with the Fair and Reasonable Price (FRP).
- It makes sure that farmers get paid on schedule, regardless of how much sugar mills make or lose.
- Based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), the Union government, specifically the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), sets the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP).

Sugar Cane production in India
- In India, sugarcane is cultivated as a Kharif crop.
- The following geographic circumstances are ideal for sugarcane growth:
- Temperature: A hot, humid climate with an average temperature between 21°C and 27°C is necessary for sugarcane cultivation.
- Rainfall: A range of 75 to 150 cm is ideal for growing sugarcane.

3.2 NATIONAL LIVESTOCK MISSION (NLM)

The extra initiatives were accepted by the Union Cabinet as a further adjustment to the National Livestock Mission.

Context:
- Rashtriya Pashudhan Vikas Yojana, popularly known as the National Livestock Mission (NLM), was created in the fiscal year 2014–15 and updated in 2021–2022.

About NATIONAL LIVESTOCK MISSION (NLM)
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare is the one behind the program.
- The purpose is to develop the livestock industry in a sustainable manner.

Objectives
- to improve the standard of living and nourishment for farmers and livestock keepers—particularly small holders—by means of equitable, safe, and sustainable livestock development.

- to create jobs by fostering entrepreneurship in the small-scale ruminant, poultry, piggery, and feed industries.
- to enhance breeds in order to raise production per animal.
- to boost the output of goat milk, meat, eggs, wool, and fodder.

The mission is implemented with the following three Sub-Missions:
- Sub-Mission on Breed Development of Livestock & Poultry: This sub-mission is concerned with the development of entrepreneurship and the improvement of breeds in livestock, sheep, goats, and pigs. It does this by offering incentives for entrepreneurship development to individuals, FPOs, SHGs, Section 8 companies, and the State Government in order to improve the infrastructure for breed improvement.
- Sub-Mission on Feed and Fodder Development: Through incentives, this sub-mission seeks to encourage entrepreneurs to establish fodder blocks, Hey Bailing, or Silage Making Units by fortifying the fodder seed chain and enhancing the availability of certified fodder seed needed for fodder production.
- The purpose of the sub-mission on research and development, livestock insurance, extension, and innovation is to provide incentives to institutes, universities, and organizations that conduct research and development in the fields of pig, sheep, goat, and feed and fodder as well as extension, innovation, and livestock insurance.

3.3 GLOBAL PULSES CONFERENCE (GPC)

- India is urged by the Global Pulses Conference (GPC) to increase pulse production in order to meet nutritional needs.

Context:
- New Delhi was the site of the most recent Global Pulse Conference 2024.

About Global Pulse Conference
- Every year, the worldwide pulse sector comes together for the worldwide Pulse Conference, which aims to improve commerce, networking, and market insights.
- The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) and the Global Pulse Confederation (GPC) coordinated the 2024 Global Pulse Conference.
- For the 2024 Global Pulse Conference, "nourishing soils to nourish people" was the subject.
- Along with the difficulties and opportunities facing the production of pulses in India and around the world, the conference also covers the role that pulses play in nutrition and environmental sustainability.

Production of Pulses in India
- An essential component of the Indian diet, pulses are a rich source of plant-based protein.
- The world's biggest importer, consumer, and producer of pulses is India.
- About 20% of the land planted to cereals is made up of pulses, which also provide 7–10% of the nation's total foodgrain production.
- Rajasthan will be the state that produces the most pulses in India in 2024. More than 19% of India's total pulse production comes from Rajasthan.
- The states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh are the main producers of pulses in India.

3.4 Review of Maritime Transport 2023

- The Review of Maritime Transport 2023, published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), addresses the problem of greenhouse gas emissions from international shipping and the difficulties associated with decarbonization.

Background:
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) wants to see net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.

Key highlights of the Review:
- Compared to ten years earlier, international shipping contributed to 20% more greenhouse gas emissions in 2023. About 3% of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide and more than 80% of global trade volume are attributed to the maritime sector.
- It is anticipated that containerized trade will increase by 1.2% in 2023 and by an additional 3% in 2024–2028. The volume of trading in oil and gas increased significantly in 2022.
- In January 2023, the average age of commercial ships was 22.2 years, with over half of the global fleet being older than 15 years. Concerns are raised by the fact that alternative fuels are more expensive and not yet widely available, and that the ships that can utilize them are also more expensive than conventional ships, especially as the average age of the global fleet rises.
- Conventional fuels such as heavy fuel oil, light fuel oil, and diesel/gas oil are used by 8% of the world fleet.
- With the exception of LNG, LPG, methanol, and to a lesser extent, battery/hybrid, just 1.2% of vehicles run on alternative fuels. Nonetheless, progress is being made because 21% of the ships that are presently being ordered are built to run on alternative fuels, including methanol, LNG, LPG, and battery/hybrid systems.

3.5 Global Innovation Index 2023

- According to the World Intellectual Property Organization's 2023 Global Innovation Index rankings, India continues to be ranked 40th out of 132 economies (WIPO).

Context:
- The Index is a premier resource for assessing the performance of an economy's innovation ecosystem. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) publishes it every year.

World Intellectual Property Organisation:
- It operates on the principles of supporting intellectual property protection globally and stimulating creative endeavors.
- It is an independent United Nations organization with 193 member states.
- Among the fifteen specialized agencies under the United Nations umbrella is WIPO.

Key findings of the Global Innovation Index 2023:
- In 2023, Switzerland has the most creative economy, followed by those of Sweden, the US, the UK, and Singapore.
- Among the economies of the South East Asia, East Asia, and Oceania (SEAO) area, Singapore has risen to the top five and assumed the top spot.

- Tokyo–Yokohama is projected to be the world's leading science and technology innovation cluster in 2023, ahead of Shenzhen–Hong Kong–Guangzhou, Seoul, Beijing, and Shanghai–Suzhou. China has surpassed the United States to become the country with the most clusters worldwide.

Key findings related to India:
- India placed 40th in the most recent GII 2023, demonstrating a noteworthy ascent from the 81st position in 2015. It emphasizes how innovation in India has grown steadily and significantly during the last eight years.
- India topped the list of the ten economies in Central and South America as well as the 37 lower-middle-income nations. Important metrics, such as notable rankings in ICT services exports, venture capital received, science and engineering graduates, and international corporate research and development investors, validated India's strong innovation scene.
- India has just 4 research and technology clusters among the world's top 100, compared to 24 in China and 21 in the US. Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai are these.
- India's development is credited to a number of factors, including a flourishing startup ecosystem, an abundance of intellectual capital, and excellent work from both public and commercial research institutes.

3.6 e-NAM

Farm-gate and inter-mandi e-NAM sales have shown a spike in FY2024.

Context:
In contrast to the extremely tiny quantity traded in the previous fiscal year, the total traded value of commodities on the digital platform using the farmgate model during April – January, 2023–24, was Rs 79 crore.

About e-NAM:-
- India's eNAM platform is an online marketplace for exchanging agricultural commodities.
- A pan-Indian electronic commerce platform connecting agricultural produce market committees (APMCs) in every state was introduced in 2016.
- It was started with the intention of combining the current Mandis into an Indian "One Nation One Market" for agricultural products.
- It makes online commodity trading easier for buyers, sellers, and farmers.
- Traders no longer need to visit banks or mandis because it offers contactless remote bidding and mobile-based anytime payment.
- The main organization in charge of e-NAM implementation is the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC).
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare oversees its operations.

Benefits:-
- Through technological interventions such as digital weighbridge and weighing scale accuracy, e-NAM has been able to improve APMC mandi operations.
- Precision in assaying with cutting-edge assaying apparatus.
- Current commodity price information available online.
- Increased access to buyers and sellers as well as trade transparency.
- Payment transparency through a variety of online payment methods.
- Increased productivity through digitization in mandi processes overall.

3.7 Inheritance Tax

- According to a survey by Oxfam, 70% of nations do not impose any kind of inheritance tax on wealth.

Background:

- The report is released against a backdrop of widening disparities in wealth, income, and resource ownership.

About Inheritance tax:

- During the period of its inheritance, a certain asset was subject to a tax.
- It falls under direct taxation, and inheritance can be received through the decedent's personal law or through a will.

Status of inheritance tax in India:

- With effect from 1985, the Inheritance or Estate Tax was eliminated. The idea of taxing inheritance is now nonexistent in India.
- If someone were to pass away, their assets would be transferred to his or her lawful heirs without any payment being made in exchange. Therefore, it can be deductible from income tax as a gift.
- The transfer of assets by will or inheritance is expressly exempt from gift tax under the Income Tax Act of 1961.

When should the person receiving the inheritance pay tax ?

- Once he becomes the owner of the inherited assets, the person receiving the inheritance is required to pay tax on any income (rent, interest, etc.) received in relation to those assets.
- When the person sells the inherited asset, capital gains tax is due.

Need for an inheritance tax in India

- It will make wealth distribution more effective.
- By eroding the advantages that the children of the wealthiest families enjoy by default of birth, it will establish a meritocratic society.
- Since indirect taxes account for the majority of India's tax income, the suffering of economically weaker
- The exchequer may receive a sizable amount of revenue via inheritance tax.
- England, France, Germany, the United States, and Greece are among the nations that impose a 40% tax on inherited wealth.

3.8 INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD OF INDIA (IBBI)

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has released a circular directing resolution professionals (RPs) to share copies of their findings with creditors and debtors involved in bankruptcy cases in order to ensure fairness in these cases.

Context:

- The circular identifies situations in which parties did not have equal access to information due to the actions of resolution professionals (RPs), resulting in a discrepancy in comprehension.

About The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI):
- Overseeing bankruptcy processes and companies such as bankruptcy Professional Agencies (IPA), Insolvency Professionals (IP), and Information Utilities (IU) in India is the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).
- It was founded on October 1st, 2016 in accordance with the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, a statute designed to expeditiously and effectively settle insolvency and bankruptcy matters. Under the Companies (Registered Valuers and Valuation Rules), 2017, the IBBI also oversees the regulation of the valuer profession in India.
- Its three tiers of membership are as follows: a chairperson, three central government ex-officio members, one RBI ex-officio member, and five additional members selected by the central government.

Some of the key functions and features of the IBBI are:
- It provides registration to valuers, IUs (information utilities), IPAs (insolvency professional agency), and IPs (insolvency professionals). It also establishes the curriculum for the IPs' qualifying exam prior to enrollment.
- It creates rules and recommendations for how the Code and the Rules should be implemented and then uses sanctions, investigations, and inspections to enforce them.
- It gathers and preserves documents about cases of insolvency and bankruptcy and distributes data about them.
- The organization fosters understanding and investigation of insolvency and bankruptcy issues and interacts with a range of stakeholders, including the government, courts, business community, and academic institutions.

3.9 Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI)

- The Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) recently saw a tentative gain of 3.8% in December 2023 over December 2022.

Context:
- December 2023 saw a rise in the output of coal, natural gas, steel, cement, fertilizers, and refinery products.

About Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI):-
- Ministry: Statistics and Program Execution Ministry.
- The eight main industries that are measured by the ICI are: steel, cement, coal, crude oil, electricity, fertilizers, natural gas, and refinery products. The ICI also tracks the performance of each industry separately.
- Forty-seven percent of the weight of the goods included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) are made up of the Eight Core Industries.
- When measuring trends in the behavior of Industrial Production over time with respect to a selected base year, IIP is a leading economic development indicator.
- The eight core sector industries are listed in decreasing weight order as follows: Products from Refineries: Energy; Steel; Coal; Crude Oil; Natural Gas; Cement; Fertilizers.
- In India, the IIP's current base year is 2011–12.
- The Office of Economic Adviser (OEA), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, compiles and disseminates information about annual and monthly indices.

3.10 Monetary Policy Committee

Following a thorough analysis, the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) agreed on Thursday, February 8, 2024, to maintain the policy repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) at 6.50 percent.

Context:
After six straight rate increases totaling 250 basis points since May 2022, the repo rate increase cycle was halted in April of last year.

About MPC:
A country's central bank uses a set of instruments known as monetary policy to regulate the total amount of money in circulation and foster economic expansion.
- The Central Government established the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which is headed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor.
- The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, which was modified by the Finance Act, 2016, established the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). This modification gave the MPC a codified, institutionalized framework.
- The MPC must convene at least four times a year, and following each meeting, its judgments must be published.
- The MPC Framework's components that contribute to inflation target failure have also been published in the Gazette.

Purpose of MPC:
In order to keep inflation within a given goal range, the MPC was established with the primary responsibility of setting the benchmark policy interest rate, or repo rate. The rate at which the central bank extends credit to commercial banks is known as the repo rate.
- The committee's present mandate is to keep annual inflation at 4% until March 31, 2026, with a 2% lower tolerance and a 6% maximum tolerance.

Composition:
Three RBI personnel and three outsiders appointed by the Indian government make up the MPC's six members. The Central Government appoints members, who serve four-year terms of office. In the event of a tie, the governor has the casting vote. Decisions are made by majority.

3.11 Interim Budget

- The Interim Budget was recently praised by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi as "not merely an interim budget but an inclusive and innovative budget."

Background:-
- "This budget will empower all pillars of developed India – the youth, the poor, women, and farmers," the prime minister continued.

About Interim Budget:-
- The yearly financial statement that includes the government's projected spending and expenses for the upcoming fiscal year is called the 1 Comment.
- Because the current government is unable to publish a complete budget during an election year, the finance ministers present an interim budget that temporarily funds the government's spending and revenue.

- This is until a new administration is chosen and installed.
- Following the Lok Sabha elections, the newly elected government unveils their whole budget.
- The timeline for presenting an interim budget is identical to that of the Union budget during a regular fiscal year.
- Estimates for the government's spending, revenue, fiscal deficit, financial performance, and expectations for a limited period of time are included in the interim budget.
- The interim budget cannot contain any significant policy announcements that could burden the incoming administration.
- An interim budget is not provided for under the constitution.
- But it's now standard procedure for outgoing administrations to do so before elections.
- Cast your vote on an account Through the interim budget, which is approved by the Parliament, the administration can seek parliamentary approval for necessary spending on things like salaries and recurring costs.

3.12 Highlights of Interim Budget 2024-25

- The Interim Budget 2024–25 has just unveiled.

About :-
- The government is going to start a program to assist middle-class citizens who are "living in rented houses, or slums, or chawls and unauthorized colonies" in purchasing or building their own homes.
- Through rooftop solarization, up to 300 units of free electricity per month will be available to one crore families.
- PM Yojana Awas (Grameen): To accommodate the demand brought on by a growth in the number of families, two crore more homes will be built over the course of the next five years.
- girls between the ages of 9 and 14 receive vaccinations to prevent cervical cancer.
- Anganwadi center upgrades under "Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0" will happen more quickly.
- The U-WIN platform will be implemented as soon as possible to manage immunizations and the heightened activities of Mission Indradhanush.
- expansion of ASHA, Anganwadi, and Helper healthcare coverage under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.
- All agroclimatic zones will see an increase in the application of Nano DAP on a variety of crops.
- For oil seeds, a plan will be developed to attain "atmanirbharta."
- A thorough plan of action to assist dairy farmers will be developed.
- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana implementation (PMMSY).
- The goal for Lakhpati Didi will be increased by the government from 2 crore to 3 crore.
- A fifty-year interest-free loan will be used to establish a corpus of one lakh crore rupees.
- A new plan aimed at advancing "atmanirbharta" and fortifying deep-tech technologies for defense will be introduced.
- There will be three significant economic railway corridor initiatives put into action.
- In major cities that prioritize transit-oriented development, the expansion of Metro and NaMO Bharat will receive funding.
- Funding for viability gaps will be made available to fully utilize the potential of offshore wind generation.
- By 2030, a 100 MT coal gasification and liquefaction capacity will be established.
- A plan incorporating an integrated and multi-sectoral approach to coastal aquaculture and mariculture, as well as restoration and adaptation strategies, will be introduced.

- States will be urged to develop famous tourist destinations thoroughly, branding them, and promoting them internationally.
- As per the latest tax system, taxpayers with income up to Rs. 7 lakh, as opposed to Rs. 2.2 lakh in the 2013–14 fiscal year, are no longer required to pay taxes.
- The corporate tax rate was lowered for both new and established domestic businesses, going from 30% to 22% and 15%, respectively, for manufacturing firms.

3.13 Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)

- PFRDA recently released a request for proposals to select a System Integrator (SI) to handle PFRDA-TRACE (Tracking Reporting Analytics & Compliance E-Platform) design, development, installation, and maintenance.

Background:-
- Intermediaries will be able to submit regulatory and supervisory compliance reports using PFRDA-TRACE, a comprehensive instrument for doing so.

About Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA):-
- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Act of 2013 created the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), a statutory regulatory agency.
- It was set up to supervise the National Pension System (NPS) and control the pension industry in India.

Functions:-
- Parliament established the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) as a legislative entity to oversee, encourage, and sustain the National Pension System's (NPS) and the Act's covered pension schemes' orderly growth.
- Like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), it is a central autonomous body that operates as a quasi-government organization with executive, legislative, and judicial powers.
- PFRDA is responsible for overseeing and managing both the National Pension System (NPS) and the Atal Pension Yojana.
- It is in charge of selecting a large number of intermediate organizations, including the Central Record Keeping Agency (CRA) and Pension Fund Managers.

3.14 UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT (UNCTAD)

In a recent report, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) expressed concern about the growing number of disruptions occurring in shipping routes that are crucial to international trade.

Context:
- Important problems influencing trade patterns are highlighted in the recently released research "Navigating Troubled Waters: The Impact to Global Trade of Disruption of Shipping Routes in the Red Sea, The Black Sea, and the Panama Canal."

About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):
- Promoting the interests of developing nations in international commerce is the United Nations Conference on commerce and Development (UNCTAD), an intergovernmental institution housed inside the UN Secretariat.
- In 1964, the General Assembly of the United Nations founded it.
- Developing policies for all facets of development—trade, aid, transportation, finance, and technology—is UNCTAD's main goal.
- Concerns among developing nations that GATT (now replaced by the World Trade Organization), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank were inadequately structured to address the unique issues facing developing nations led to the creation of UNCTAD.
- The creation and execution of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which encourages the export of manufactured goods from developing nations, was one of UNCTAD's major accomplishments.
- Exports from developing nations can access major export markets duty- and quota-free through the Generalized scheme of Preferences (GSP), a preferential tariff scheme.
- UNCTAD's headquarters are situated in Geneva in the Palais des Nations.
- Its membership comprises 195 nations, which includes Palestine and the Holy See as UN observers in addition to all UN members.

3.15 Antyodya Anna Yojna (AAY)

- A recent extension of the sugar subsidy program for Antyodya Anna Yojna (AAY) families was approved by the Union Cabinet.

Context:
- The plan will be extended for a another two years, ending on March 31, 2026, by the Union Cabinet, which is led by Prime Minister Shri Narender Modi.

About Antyodya Anna Yojna (AAY):-
- Initiated in December 2000.
- Ministry: Food, Public Distribution, and Consumer Affairs Ministry.
- The goal is to offer food grains through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) at a heavily subsidized cost.

Salient Features:-
- Food and other essentials for daily requirements will be provided to all AAY beneficiaries through a subsidized approach.
- Food grains will be distributed to recipients via the public distribution system.
- Rice will cost Rs. 2 per kg and wheat would cost Rs. 3 per kg under the AAY program.
- Families that qualify will receive 35 kg of rice each month.
- Through the ration shop, AAY families can get 1 kg of sugar for Rs. 18.50 per kg.

Identification of beneficiaries:-
- The AAY program's beneficiaries will be determined by the Indian Central and State Governments.
- Following identification of the Government, the AAY household will receive a ration card in a distinctive color.

3.16 Sovereign gold bond scheme

- Subscriptions for the Sovereign Gold Bone Scheme, 2023–2024 will be accepted from February 12–16, 2024.

Context:
- Sovereign Gold Bonds, or SGBs, were introduced by the Indian government in 2015 and have since gained popularity among investors as a cutting-edge gold investment method.

Concerning SGBs:
- Investors are given SGBs as an alternative to actual gold.
- The scheme's primary goal is to decrease the market for physical gold and convert a portion of the money used to buy it—which typically equates to a substantial import bill—into savings through the sale of Gold Bonds.
- SGBs are issued by RBI on behalf of the Indian government and are valued in kilos of gold. Payment for the required amount in rupees is required.
- Investors who are not eligible to engage in the SGB scheme are as follows: non-resident Indians are not allowed to make direct investments in SGB; foreign institutional investors (FIIs) are not allowed to make investments in SGBs; and minors are only allowed to make investments in SGBs through their guardians.
- The bonds are offered in paper and Demat formats. The India Bullion and Jewellers Association's (IBJA) simple average of the closing price for 999-purity gold from the preceding week is used to determine the Bond rate.
- The bond has an eight-year tenor, with an exit option that can be exercised on interest payment days starting in the fifth year.
- A steady interest rate of 2.50% per year is payable to SGB program participants semi-annually, deducted from the investment's nominal value.
- Upon maturity, the investor will get the rupee value equivalent to the amount of gold invested at the going rate, which is determined by taking the simple average of the closing price of 999 pure gold for the three working days prior.

MAINS

3.17 Some Basic Facts about Indian Farmers

- The need for a legal guarantee supporting Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) has become a focal point of the farmer demonstrations, igniting discussions and opposing viewpoints.
- Understanding the complexities of MSPs is essential to appreciating the seriousness of this divisive problem.

Deciphering MSPs: A Primer
- Basic Idea: Minimum Support Prices, or MSPs, are government-set floor prices for a range of commodities that act as a safety net to protect farmers' earnings.
- Consequences: MSPs are important for reasons beyond just agricultural economics; they affect consumer prices, government budgetary allocations, and the livelihoods of farmers.

Backdrop of Farmer Protests
- Escalating Tensions: Widespread farmer protests and attention to the MSP discussion have been sparked by the current Union government's passage and subsequent repeal of three farm regulations in 2020.
- Polarized Discourse: Political division has taken over the conversation surrounding farmer protests, casting a shadow over the real causes.

Key Insights into India's Agricultural Landscape
- A Change in Economic Dynamics
- Historical Perspective: After independence, almost 70% of India's workforce worked in agriculture, which accounted for a large portion of the country's labor force and economic output.
- Current Scenario: The percentage of the workforce that is employed in agriculture is still relatively high, indicating a skewed economic paradigm, even though agriculture's GDP contribution is declining. Approximately 6% of workers were employed in agriculture in 2011.

Changes in Farming Practices
- Growing Labor Dependency: Growing difficulties in maintaining agricultural livelihoods are reflected in the transition from cultivators to agricultural laborers, which highlights how farming methods are changing. Cultivators made up 72% of all farm laborers in 1951; by 2011, that number had dropped to 45%.
- Diminished Assets and Debt: Indian farmers' financial vulnerability is starkly illustrated by their small and marginal landholdings and high debt levels. A 2019 poll found that nearly half of all agricultural households are indebted and that roughly 70% of them own less than one hectare of land.

Income Disparities and Debt Burdens
- Regional Disparities: The diverse character of agrarian distress is emphasized by regional differences in farm revenues and levels of debt. 2019 saw an average monthly income of Rs 10,218 per household, with 50% of farm households having debt.
- Dynamics of Terms of Trade: Farmers' financial problems are made worse by fluctuating terms of trade between farmers and non-farmers, which is a reflection of fundamental imbalances in the agricultural industry. Between 2010 and 2011, the Terms of Trade (ToT) between farmers and non-farmers have either stayed negative or stable.

Comparative Analysis of Agricultural Support from a Global Perspective:
- India defies stereotypes about providing excessive financial help to Indian farmers by revealing stark disparities in its standing with regard to producer protection and agricultural support.
- India is trailing: In terms of producer protection, India is the least developed nation compared by the OECD. It also falls behind other nations and regions in terms of the "total support estimate" (TSE).

Navigating the Complexities Beyond MSPs:
- MSPs play a significant role in the conversation, but solving India's agricultural problems calls for a comprehensive strategy that includes structural changes, income growth, and infrastructure development.
- Prolonged Difficulties: A comprehensive approach is required to address structural weaknesses in the agricultural industry that go beyond band-aid solutions and political platitudes.

3.18 Why India needs deep industrialization

Key Highlights:
- India's long battle with industrialization in spite of numerous reform initiatives.
- a suggestion to move from manufacturing to high-skill services-led growth.

- criticism of conventional industrial policy for failing to solve trade imbalances and unemployment.
- challenges brought on by the service sector's inequality and low employment elasticity of services-led growth.
- Effects of unequal educational opportunities on economic inequality and job market results.
- India's industrial stagnation is a result of cultural influences, such as the devaluation of particular professions and abilities.
- The value of widespread knowledge and our ability to absorb information as a group for innovation and economic growth.

Key Challenges:
- Low employment elasticity of growth driven by services.
- disparities in the service industry, especially with regard to pay.
- unequal access to training in skills and education, which exacerbates socioeconomic divides.
- The negative cultural perceptions of particular professions impede the advancement of innovation and industry.
- Absence of widespread education and a general inability to absorb new technologies.

Facts and Data:
- India's manufacturing output and employment share has remained below 20% and has been stagnating.
- India has been experiencing a growing trade deficit, primarily due to imports.
- Compared to the manufacturing sector, the service industry has more inequality.
- When it comes to education, India is among the most unequal nations on the planet.

Evaluate Critically:
- The article offers a critical analysis of India's past industrialization attempts as well as their shortcomings.
- It challenges established theories of industrial policy and presents a thought-provoking substitute based on high-skill services.
- The research gains depth from the critique of service sector inequality and its effects on socioeconomic disparities.
- India's industrial standstill can be attributed to cultural elements that offer important insights into the country's larger problems.

Way Forward:
- Stress the importance of an all-encompassing strategy for economic growth that takes into account the expansion of the service sector as well as industrialization.
- To increase the ability of the collective to absorb information and to foster innovation, invest in mass education and skill development.
- To encourage naturally occurring innovation in manufacturing, reexamine societal perceptions of particular professions.
- Make sure that inclusive growth and inequality reduction are given top priority in economic strategies.

3.19 Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)
- A two-day regional workshop was recently organized by the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).

Background:-
- Approximately 17.17 State Rural Livelihoods Missions (SRLMs) and other relevant stakeholders convened to discuss the proposed roadmap aimed at enhancing food, nutrition, health, and WASH (FNHW) results for over 9.98 crore Self-Help Group members and their homes nationwide.

About Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM):-
- June 2011 saw the launch.
- Ministry: Rural Development Ministry.
- The goal is to lessen poverty by giving low-income households access to possibilities for skilled wage work and productive self-employment, which will give them more diverse and sustainable sources of income.

Salient Features:-
- DAY-A major initiative of the Indian government to reduce poverty is NRLM.
- It is the biggest effort in the world to help the impoverished in rural areas.

Values:-
- The lowest playing a meaningful role in all processes and being included in them.
- Accountability and transparency for all procedures and establishments
- Planning, execution, and monitoring are all phases in which the impoverished and their institutions play a crucial part in ownership.
- Self-reliance and independence within the community

Components of mission:-
- The Mission invests on four essential components in an effort to fulfill its goal:
- Social mobilization, financial sustainability, and self-management of rural impoverished community institutions are encouraged and strengthened.
- Within a set time frame, at least one woman member from each identified rural impoverished household is to be included to the Self Help Group (SHG) network.

Financial inclusion of the rural poor:-
- It addresses both the financial inclusion supply and demand sides. On the demand side, it helps the underprivileged become more financially literate and gives the SHGs and their federations access to catalytic money.

Sustainable livelihoods:
- By focusing on three key areas, NRLM seeks to improve and stabilize the poor's current portfolio of sources of income: employment, livelihood development, and vulnerability reduction.

3.20 Goods and Services Tax (GST)

- The Delhi High Court has affirmed the Goods and Services Tax's (GST) anti-profiteering clauses' constitutional legality.

Background:-
- On Monday, the Delhi High Court affirmed the Goods and Services Tax's (GST) anti-profiteering measures' constitutional legality. Over a hundred businesses filed petitions against the provisions, among them Hindustan Unilever, Patanjali, Jubilant Foodworks, and Phillips.

About :-
- 2017 saw its launch.
- India uses the Goods and Services Tax as an indirect tax on the provision of goods and services.
- The majority of products and services sold for domestic use are subject to this value-added tax.
- Initially, it was intended to be a nationwide indirect tax.
- There are three varieties.- Central Government levies CGST, States levies SGST, and all interstate supply of goods and/or services are subject to the Internal Growth Tax (IGST).

GST Council:
- The 122nd Amendment Bill, also known as the 101st Amendment Act of 2016, opened the door for the introduction of the GST. (Tijuana GST Appellate)
- According to Article 279-A of the Constitution, the GST Council is a combined forum of the federal government and the states.
- The President may establish a GST Council by executive order under Article 279-A.
- The Union Minister of State (Finance) from each state and the Union Finance Minister (chairperson) make up the Council's membership.
- To "make recommendations to the Union and the states on important issues related to GST, like the goods and services that may be subject to or exempt from GST, model GST Laws," is what Article 279 states.
- It also determines the different GST rate slabs.

Advantages of GST:
- Automated tax ecosystem: It facilitated the nation's shift to an automated indirect tax environment.
- Improved Compliance: Over the previous four years, GST has reduced tax burden and absorbed numerous levies, which has contributed to improved tax compliance.
- E-invoicing and Increased Income: The E-invoicing technology contributed to a decrease in fraudulent invoices. Technology-enabled online bill production has improved consignment transportation and reduced conflicts with officials.

3.21 Index of industrial production (IIP)
- There was a little increase in industrial output in December.

Context:
The most recent Index of Industrial Production (IIP) result for industrial growth is 3.8 percent, which is higher than the November 2023 figure of 2.4 percent.

Regarding the Industrial Production Index (IIP):
- Monthly publication schedule. (IIP)
- The National Statistical Office (NSO) is the publisher.
- Ministry: Statistics and Program Execution Ministry.
- Year of Base: 2011–2012.
- An indicator known as IIP tracks variations in the amount of industrial product production over a certain time frame.

It is a composite indicator that calculates the rate of growth for industry groupings categorized as follows:
- Manufacturing, mining, and electricity are broad sectors.

These three industries have respective weights of 6% for manufacturing, 14.4% for mining, and 8% for power.

- Energy, crude oil, coal, cement, steel, refinery products, natural gas, and fertilizers are the eight main industries.
- They make up roughly 40% of the total weight of the IIP's goods.
- The eight core sector industries are listed in decreasing weight order as follows: Products from Refineries: Energy; Steel; Coal; Crude Oil; Natural Gas; Cement; Fertilizers. Basic goods, capital goods, and intermediate goods are the use-based sectors.

3.22 Farmers demand legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price

- Thousands of farmers are demonstrating for a legislative guarantee of minimum support prices along the border between Punjab and Haryana.

Context:
- The farmer's unions claim that the Center has not lived up to the agreement made at the end of the large-scale protests in 2021 to provide a legislative guarantee for MSP.

About MSP:
- The MSP is the lowest price at which farmers can sell their agricultural products to government procurement organizations.
- In times of market volatility or hardship, it acts as a safety net for farmers, guaranteeing them a minimum revenue for their produce.
- The job of recommending MSPs for different crops falls to the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- The CACP has been in operation since January 1965 and is an associated office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

How is the MSP Calculated?
- Farmers' experienced costs—both implicit and explicit—are taken into account carefully when calculating the MSP. Explicit and implicit expenses are included in the computation. Examples of implicit costs include family labor and rent paid by farmers. The variables A2, FL, and C2 stand for these variables.
- A2: This covers the costs that farmers incur for employing labor, buying pesticides, fertilizers, and seeds, as well as for crop growth, production, and upkeep.
- A2 + FL: This comprises implicit expenses (family labor) in addition to explicit costs.
- C2: This comprises fixed capital assets, rent from farmers, and A2 + FL.
- The market prices of the relevant crops and any fluctuations, information on produce supply, including area, yield, production, imports, exports, and stocks with public agencies or industries, demand information across regions, including total and per capita consumption, processing industry trends, capacity, etc., are some of the other factors that the CACP takes into account when determining the MSP.
- Following the submission of the CACP's recommendations, the Prime Minister of India's Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) makes the final determination regarding the MSP levels.

Key Benefits of the MSP for farmers
- Income Security: In times of market turbulence, MSP provides farmers with a guaranteed minimum price for their products, guaranteeing a steady and predictable income.

- Price Stability: MSP assists in stabilizing market prices by establishing a floor price for agricultural goods, averting abrupt swings that can have a detrimental effect on both farmers and consumers.
- Increases Production: Because farmers are guaranteed a fair reward for their labor, MSP encourages them to increase the yield of crops that fall under its purview.
- Food Security: By encouraging farmers to grow necessary food crops, MSP significantly contributes to guaranteeing food security. By keeping food grains on the market in a consistent supply, this reduces reliance on imports and improves domestic food security.

3.23 ANTI-DUMPING DUTY

- India opens an anti-dumping investigation into solar glass imports from Vietnam and China.

Context:
- Solar panels and modules for the production of renewable energy are made from solar glass. One of the biggest consumers of solar energy is India, which has set a goal to install 450 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

About Anti Dumping Duty:
- A government-imposed tax known as an anti-dumping duty is levied on imported goods that are sold for less than their normal worth in the exporting nation.
- Anti-dumping duties are in place to shield home industries from unfair competition and trade distortions brought on by dumping.
- Through the Anti-Dumping Agreement, which lays out the guidelines for WTO members' investigation, determination, and execution of anti-dumping measures, the World Trade Organization (WTO) regulates dumping practices.
- A WTO member may take anti-dumping measures in accordance with the Anti-Dumping Agreement if it can demonstrate that: The imports are being sold in the exporting nation for less than their normal worth.
- The domestic industry that produces comparable items is suffering material harm as a result of the dumping.
- A causal relationship exists between the two.

Authority to impose anti- dumping duty in India
- The final say over whether to apply anti-dumping duties on imports that are discovered to be dumping and harming home industries belongs to the Ministry of Finance.
- The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), which performs the inquiry and ascertains the existence and degree of dumping and injury, makes recommendations that the Ministry of Finance acts upon.
- Under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) is in charge of managing both bilateral and multilateral trade relations as well as developing and executing the international trade policy.

3.24 Discussions to lower CRR on Green Deposits

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and State Bank of India (SBI) are in discussions to lower the cash reserve ratio (CRR) requirement for green deposits.

Green Deposits: What Are They?
- Definition: Green deposits are fixed-term financial instruments designed for people and organizations that want to contribute to green projects.
- Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investing is reflected in these deposits, which are in line with the expanding trend of sustainable financing.
- Utilization: Initiatives supporting clean transportation, renewable energy, pollution prevention, green infrastructure, and sustainable water management are funded using funds from green deposits.

RBI Framework for Green Deposits
- Greenwashing is prevented by the RBI's framework, which guarantees the veracity of environmental claims made in connection with green deposits.
- Alternatives for Deposits: Banks provide rupee-denominated green deposits, with the option of either cumulative or non-cumulative alternatives.
- Application: This framework is mandatory for non-banking financial organizations (NBFCs), housing finance companies (HFCs), small finance banks, and scheduled commercial banks.
- Eligibility: Investing in green deposits allows both business entities and individual customers to support environmentally friendly activities.
- Allocation: The industries that benefit most from the money raised by green deposits include afforestation, waste management, and renewable energy.
- Limitations: Lenders are not allowed to invest money from green deposits in industries such as nuclear power, fossil fuels, or tobacco.
- Verification: To evaluate the distribution and effects of money raised through green deposits, an independent third-party verification is carried out once a year.
- Supervision: Every year, lenders must assess the effects of the money they've provided for green financing initiatives.
- Financial institutions are afforded flexibility as there are no penalties for underutilizing funds obtained through green deposits.

Distinguishing Green Deposits from Normal Deposits
- Project Allocation: Unlike conventional deposits, green deposits designate money for particular ecologically beneficial initiatives.
- Interest Rates: Lenders set the interest rates on green deposits, which are currently similar to those on conventional deposits.

3.25 Call for imposing Financial Emergency in Kerala

- After the parties' failed negotiations, the State of Kerala filed a lawsuit against the Center alleging arbitrary interference in its financial affairs, and the Supreme Court heard the case.
- A financial emergency was previously requested by the governor of Kerala under Article 360(1) of the Constitution as a result of the State's declining financial resources.

What is Financial Emergency?
- Enshrined in Article 360, it is an essential clause designed to deal with serious financial crises that pose a threat to the stability of the Indian economy.
- Declaration and Authority: The President may issue a proclamation if he is satisfied that there is a risk to India's credit or financial stability, or to any portion of its territory.

- CoM Advice: The statement, which reflects the executive branch's collective responsibility, is based on the Council of Ministers' advice.

Legislative Approval
- A Financial Emergency may be declared by the President, but it requires the consent of both Houses of Parliament to be extended beyond two months.
- When authorized, it is enforceable until the President revokes it, providing for adaptable financial crisis management.

Effects and Implications
- During a financial emergency, the Center's executive authority greatly increases, allowing it to provide states financial directions.
- Fiscal policy becomes more centralized, with the President able to hold up bills approved by state legislatures for further review.
- To overcome financial difficulties, austerity measures such as reducing public officials' salaries and benefits are a viable option.

Judicial Review and Criticism
- The President's judgment is final and not subject to court review thanks to the 38th Amendment Act of 1975.
- The 44th Amendment Act of 1978, however, made judicial review possible.
- By ensuring checks and balances within the constitutional structure, this amendment prevented the executive branch from acting without power.

Historical Context and Usage
- Despite experiencing major financial crises like the one in 1991, India has rarely used the term "financial emergencies" throughout its history.
- The judicious application of this clause emphasizes how crucial it is to match its execution with federalism and democratic ideals.

Cooperative federalism is crucial for resolving interstate disputes, as demonstrated by the Supreme Court's intervention in the Kerala-Centre financial dispute.

3.26 India's Fintech Landscape: Challenges and Recommendations
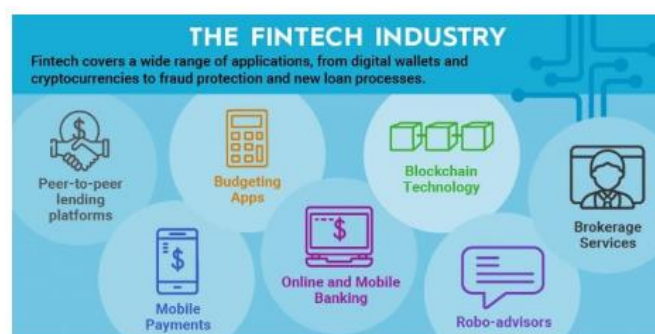
- The prevalence of foreign-owned fintech apps in India's digital payment ecosystem has raised concerns, as recently brought to light by the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology.
- Although UPI controls a sizable volume share of digital payments, its value share is still quite small, which raises concerns regarding the ownership and management of digital payment networks.

What are Fintech?
- Fintech Definition: Fintech refers to companies that use technology to improve or automate financial services. It is a combination of the words "financial" and "technology."
- Fintech companies come in a variety of forms. Some examples are payment systems like Bharatpe, financing platforms like CRED, insurance companies like Digit Insurance, investment platforms like Zerodha, and regulatory technology companies like Razorpay.

Regulatory Framework in India
- Regulatory Environment: Although the RBI does not now directly oversee fintech companies, there are programs like the Fin-Tech Regulatory Sandbox and Payment System Operators license that attempt to accept and control some aspects of this industry.
- Future Regulatory Outlook: In order to promote the orderly expansion of digital lending, the RBI is creating a regulatory framework. It is important to note that lending operations should only be carried out by organizations that are subject to central bank regulation or other applicable legislation.

Why discuss Fintech?
- One of the Fintech markets with the fastest global growth rates is India. The market size of India's FinTech industry is projected to reach ~$150 billion by 2025, from $50 billion in 2021.
- By 2025, the total addressable market for the Indian Fintech industry is projected to be $1.3 trillion, and by 2030, assets under management and revenue will amount to $1 trillion and $200 billion, respectively.

Analysis of Existing Ecosystem
- Regulatory Oversight: Considering the growing trend of digital transactions in India, the Committee emphasizes the necessity of efficient regulation of digital payment apps. It implies that regulating local apps would be more practical for regulatory authorities like the RBI and NPCI than regulating overseas companies.
- Foreign Fintech Dominance: With substantial market shares in terms of transaction volume, foreign-owned fintech companies like PhonePe and Google Pay dominate the Indian market. On the other hand, NPCI's BHIM UPI has a very small market share.
- Regulatory Measures: In order to preserve market equilibrium and manage risks, the NPCI previously placed a 30% volume cap on transactions made over UPI by third-party apps. The deadline for compliance was extended to December 2024 in order to accommodate market expansion.

Concerns about Fraud
- Money Laundering: Pyppl, an app located in Abu Dhabi that is run by Chinese investment scammers, is one example of how the Committee saw fintech platforms being exploited for money laundering. This makes it difficult for law enforcement to follow illicit money trails.
- Fraud Trends: The ratio of fraud to sales has stayed comparatively low, even with the increase in digital transactions. Nonetheless, worries about UPI frauds that impact a tiny portion of users continue to exist.

Impact on the Ecosystem
- Benefits of Local Players: Local fintech companies have an inherent advantage in knowing the requirements of their clients and the larger market landscape. Conversely, foreign fintechs contribute their knowledge of emerging technology and worldwide connectivity.
- Revenue Growth: Because of their low transaction costs, fast payments—including UPI—might account for less than 10% of future revenue growth, according to McKinsey's Global Payments Report. On the other hand, the move to digital payments reduces the expenses related to handling currency transactions by improving security and opening up new avenues for trade.

4. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PRELIMS

4.1 Gaganyaan

- PM Modi awarded "astronaut wings" to Gaganyaan astronaut designates.

Context:
- The four Indian Air Force (IAF) pilots, Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap, and Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla, are the "astronaut designates" who have been training for India's Gaganyaan expedition, which is scheduled for 2025.In the end, just three of them will fly into space as part of the Gaganyaan project.

About Gaganyaan:-
- The goal of the Gaganyaan project is to demonstrate the capability of human spaceflight by sending a three-person crew into a low-Earth orbit (400 km) for a three-day trip, and then safely returning them to Earth by landing in Indian Ocean waters.
- India's first effort for human space flight is called Gaganyaan Mission.
- After the US, China, and the Soviet Union, India will be the fourth nation to launch a person into space.
- Identified as the launch vehicle for the Gaganyaan mission is the ISRO's well-proven and dependable LVM3 rocket. There are three stages in total: solid, liquid, and cryogenic. The LVM3 launch vehicle has been renamed Human Rated LVM3 after all of its systems were modified to satisfy human rating standards.
- In the event of an emergency at the launch pad or during the ascent phase, the Crew Escape System (CES) powered by a series of fast acting, high burn rate solid motors guarantees that the Crew Module and crew are removed to a safe distance as part of HLVM3.
- Crew Module (CM) and Service Module (SM) make up the Orbital Module (OM) that will be in orbit around Earth.
- For the crew, CM is a habitable space with an environment similar to Earth.

4.2 OpenAI launches Sora

- The groundbreaking chatbotChatGPT was created by OpenAI, who also introduced Sora, a new generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) model that can turn a text query into a movie.

Context:
- Algorithms (like ChatGPT) that can be used to produce new content, such as audio, code, images, text, simulations, and videos, are referred to as generative artificial intelligence (AI).The ease of use of new user interfaces that enable the creation of excellent text, pictures, and movies in a matter of seconds has been the driving force behind the recent excitement surrounding generative AI.

About Sora:-
- Open AI, the company behind chatGPT, created the generative AI model Sora, which can turn a written input into a video.
- Sora can produce videos up to one minute in length while adhering to the user's request and preserving visual quality.

- The last several years have seen a tremendous improvement in the generation of images and written responses to prompts on GenAI platforms; however, text-to-video has mainly trailed behind due to the additional difficulty involved in analyzing moving objects in three dimensions.
- In addition to Open AI, several businesses have also entered the text-to-video market. Google's Lumiere, which was unveiled last month, can produce text-and image-based five-second movies in response to a suggestion.
- Several businesses, such as Runway and Pika, have also demonstrated remarkable text-to-video models.

4.3 Cervical Cancer

- Experts have emphasized that in addition to a vaccination campaign for girls, more screening tests should be carried out to identify cervical cancer in women.

Context:
- During the interim Budget presentation, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman declared that the government intends to promote cervical cancer vaccination among girls between the ages of nine and fourteen.

About Cervical Cancer :-
- An illness known as cancer occurs when body cells proliferate uncontrollably. Even if cancer eventually spreads to other bodily sites, it is always named after the original site of the tumor.
- Cells that begin to proliferate in the cervix might develop into cervical cancer. The lowest portion of the uterus that joins the vagina is called the cervix.
- The human papillomavirus, or HPV, is responsible for most cervical malignancies and comes in different strains.
- A frequent infection spread during intercourse is HPV.
- The immune system of the body usually stops HPV from causing harm when it is exposed. But in a tiny minority of cases, the virus lives for years. This plays a part in the process by which some cervical cells develop into cancerous cells.
- It is projected to be the second most common cancer among Indian women between the ages of 15 and 44, and it is the second largest cause of cancer-related deaths among women in India (more than 77,000 per year).
- The recommended screening tests for cervical cancer are VIA (visual examination with acetic acid) and VILI (visual inspection with Lugol's iodine).

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4.5 EUROPEAN UNION'S CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM)
- The European Union's (EU) upcoming Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is expected to have a minimal impact on trade flows, especially in Asia and the Pacific, and only marginally reduce global carbon emissions, according to a recent analysis by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Context:
- One major effort to combat climate change globally is the European Union's (EU) Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

About CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM)
- A mechanism called the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) was created by the European Union to fairly price the carbon released during the production of goods that are imported into the EU and have a high carbon content.
- By guaranteeing that the carbon price of imports is equal to the carbon price of domestic output, it seeks to promote cleaner industrial production in non-EU nations.
- It seeks to level the carbon pricing in the impacted sectors between imported and domestic goods.
- The method is made to comply with WTO regulations.
- The current transitional period runs from 2023 to 2026, after which CBAM will apply in its definitive regime starting in 2026.

Definitive Regime (from 2026):
- EU importers of CBAM-eligible items must register with their home country's authorities.
- The price at which they will purchase CBAM certificates is determined by utilizing the weekly average auction price of EU ETS allowances, which is expressed in euros per tonne of CO2 emitted.
- Each year, importers must turn in the equivalent number of certificates and declare the emissions included in their purchases.
- The equivalent amount can be subtracted from imports if they can demonstrate that a carbon price was already paid during the production of the imported items.

Transitional Phase (2023 – 2026):
- Initially, imports of specific items and specific precursors with carbon-intensive production processes are covered under CBAM.
- Cement, iron and steel, aluminum, fertilizers, power, and hydrogen are some of these items.

- Serving as a pilot and learning phase for all stakeholders is the goal throughout this time.

India's impact
- India may be significantly impacted by the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) of the European Union, especially in industries like aluminum, steel, cement, fertilizers, hydrocarbons, and electricity.

4.6 Hybrid vehicles

- According to recent HSBC research, hybrid cars emit fewer carbon emissions overall than electric cars.

Background:-
- Currently, battery electric vehicles are the main emphasis of India's electric mobility agenda.

About Hybrid vehicles:-
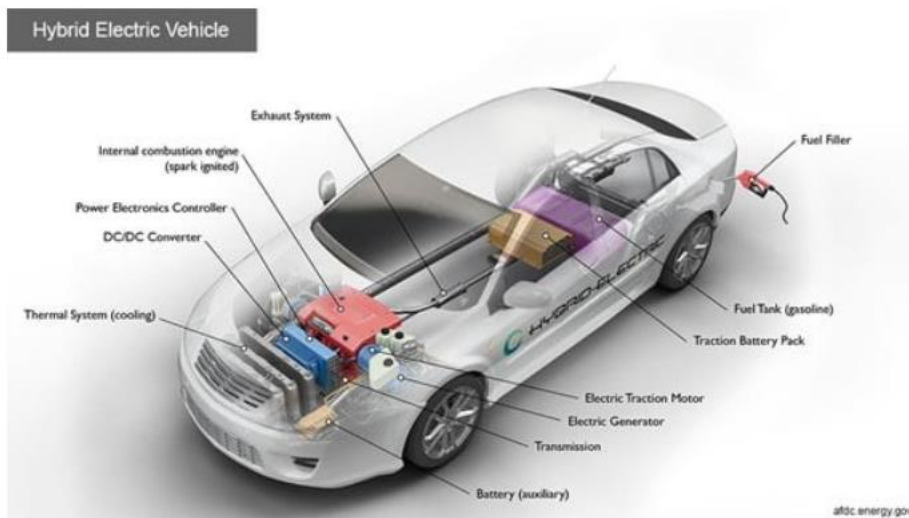
- An internal combustion engine (ICE), such as a gasoline or diesel engine, and one or more electric motors power a hybrid electric vehicle.
- Although hybrid systems come in a variety of forms, the following are the most popular ones:
- Parallel hybrids: the car can run on its own power from the engine and electric motor
- Series hybrids: the engine produces electricity, but solely the electric motor moves the wheels.

Advantages:-
- Fuel efficiency: Compared to internal combustion engines (ICE) vehicles, hybrid cars are designed with smaller engines and lighter cars, which results in higher mileage.
- Greater strength: HEVs may provide instant torque and high torque even at low speeds thanks to their increased overall power and torque.
- Minimum emissions: Vehicles with higher fuel efficiency have a less carbon footprint, which contributes to the achievement of the Paris Climate Accord's objectives.
- There needs to be a revolution in Indian transportation if the country is to achieve Net Zero Emissions by 2070 at a positive growth rate. One effective worldwide approach to decarbonizing the transportation industry is the shift to electric vehicles.

Challenges:
- high starting price
- Limited capacity for domestic manufacturing Limited infrastructure for charging

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- Insufficient knowledge Restricted governmental actions

Government Initiatives to Promote EV Adoption:-
- The National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP), the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) Scheme II, and the National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage
- Go Electric initiative Production Linked Incentive (PLI) program: Financial rewards for producing electric vehicles and their parts

4.7 Nano DAP

- The Finance Minister recently announced the expansion of Nano DAP's application on a variety of crops across all agroclimatic zones at the presentation of the interim budget.

About Nano DAP:-
- Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) developed the product.
- Di-ammonium phosphate, or nano-DAP, is a cutting-edge fertilizer for farming.
- It was created to improve plant nutrition delivery efficiency.
- This product is a special kind of liquid fertilizer that has DAP nanoparticles in it.
- It contains phosphorus and nitrogen, two important basic nutrients needed for crop growth.
- By volume, it has 16% phosphorus and 8% nitrogen.

MAINS

4.8 High-altitude pseudo satellite vehicle (HAPS)

- The first test of a new generation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) powered by solar energy was successfully accomplished by THE NATIONAL Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) in Bengaluru.

Background:
The successful test flight last week places India among the extremely tiny group of nations now working with HAPS, a technology that is still in its early stages of development.

About HAPS:
- Nearly twice as high as commercial aircraft can fly, the high-altitude pseudo satellite vehicle, or HAPS, may reach elevations of 18–20 kilometers above the earth.
- It can stay in the air for months or possibly years since it can produce solar electricity, giving it advantages over a satellite.
- HAPS may travel into orbit without the use of a rocket, and its operational costs are far less than those of a satellite, which is typically positioned at least 200 kilometers from Earth.

Need of HAPS
- The need for constant border area observation, especially in the wake of the Doklam standoff, led to the creation of high-endurance, high-altitude flying sensors.
- Low-Earth orbit satellites that are designed to monitor Earth typically shift within their orbits and do not keep a continual watch.
- Unmanned aircraft driven by solar energy is thought to be a superior option.

Current State of Indias HAPS
- The prototype, weighing only 23 kg and having a wing span of around 12 meters, was able to reach an altitude of approximately 3 km during the test flight, which lasted for approximately eight and a half hours.
- We now need to get this spacecraft airborne for a minimum of twenty-four hours.
- NAL is only going to develop a prototype and the technology. Through industrial links, the actual thing would be manufactured.

4.9 Green Propulsion System

A Green Propulsion System that was created by the DRDO's Technology Development Fund (TDF) program has proved to be functional in orbit on a payload that was launched by the PSLV C-58 mission.

Context:
On January 1, 2024, ISRO's PSLV-C58 launched the X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPOSAT) into an orbit with a low inclination that was eastward.

About Green Propulsion System:-
- Bellatrix Aerospace Pvt Ltd, a Bengaluru-based start-up, was given approval to undertake this project, which is a 1N Class Green Monopropellant thruster for altitude control and orbit keeping of microsatellites (Development Agency).
- Under the direction of the DRDO Project Monitoring & Mentoring Group, the Development Agency completed the entire project.
- An apparatus that generates thrust to move an object forward is called a propulsion system.
- In this project, a 1N Class Green Monopropellant is used to control the height and maintain the orbit of microsatellites.
- The propellant, fill and drain valves, latch valve, solenoid valve, catalyst bed, drive electronics, and other components of the system are all domestically made.
- It has proven to be capable of both pulsed mode and steady-state firing in vacuum, as well as propellant realization, passivation of leftover propellant in space, and filling procedure establishment under TDF.
- Under the "Make in India" policy, the TDF is a flagship program of the Ministry of defense run by DRDO that provides support for innovation in defense and aerospace, particularly to start-ups and MSMEs.

4.10 StarLink

- Russia denied on Monday that Starlink terminals were being used by Russian troops engaged in front-line combat in Ukraine.

Context:
- Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet system was declared unusable by the Kremlin on Monday since it was neither authorized for use in Russia nor formally provided by the country.Russia has been utilizing Starlink for military communications in areas of Ukraine that it controls, according to information released by Ukraine on Sunday.

About Starlink:-
- Thousands of tiny satellites in low-Earth orbit (LEO) make up the Starlink constellation of satellites. In 2019, SpaceX started launching them into orbit.

- Elon Musk created SpaceX, an American aerospace manufacturer and space transportation services provider.
- These satellites, numbering in the over 3,000 range, transmit internet signals to specific terrestrial receivers.
  There is no need for any ground infrastructure with Starlink, in contrast to standard internet providers. Similar to satellite TV, all it takes to access high-speed internet is a tiny satellite dish or a reception device.

Significance:
- Global Connectivity: Starlink wants to provide high-speed internet to everyone, even those who live in isolated places and rural locations where access to typical broadband services is either limited or nonexistent.
- Low Latency: By minimizing the signal delay caused by conventional geostationary satellites, low latency satellites enable better online gaming and video conferencing.
- Reliable and Redundant: In the event of a satellite failure, the high number of satellites in the constellation minimizes service disruptions through redundancy.
- Emergency Connectivity: During natural disasters and other emergencies, Starlink has demonstrated its ability to provide emergency internet connectivity, giving affected communities vital lines of contact.

Challenges
- Space Debris: With thousands of satellites in low-Earth orbit, space debris and its effects on other satellite operations and the space environment have become a source of concern.
- Astronomical Interference: Because of their brightness and effect on the night sky, Starlink satellites have come under fire for allegedly interfering with ground-based astronomical studies.
- Concerns about potential monopolistic control over the global internet are raised by Starlink's increasing dominance in the satellite internet business.

4.11 Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)

New information on a massive black hole 53 million light years away that was originally captured on camera by the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) in 2017 has been released by scientists.

Background:
At the time, the blackhole image obtained with EHT was heralded as a source of "astonishment and wonder" since it revealed "a part of the universe that was off limits."A ring of light that appears brighter on one side surrounds a centrally dark area in the image.The huge galaxy, known as M87 or Messier 87, is located 55 million light-years from Earth, close to the Virgo galaxy cluster.The mass of the super-massive black hole is 6.5 billion times greater than that of the sun.

About EHT:
- The Extremely Large Telescope (EHT) is a global network of radio telescopes that collaborate to examine a shared object in space, rather than a single telescope.
- The very-long baseline interferometry approach, which EHT benefits from, involves correlating the data that one telescope obtains about the object with data from the others using incredibly accurate clocks.
- The event horizon, or the hypothetical barrier surrounding a black hole that symbolizes the point of no return from which no radiation or light can escape, is the inspiration behind the project's name.
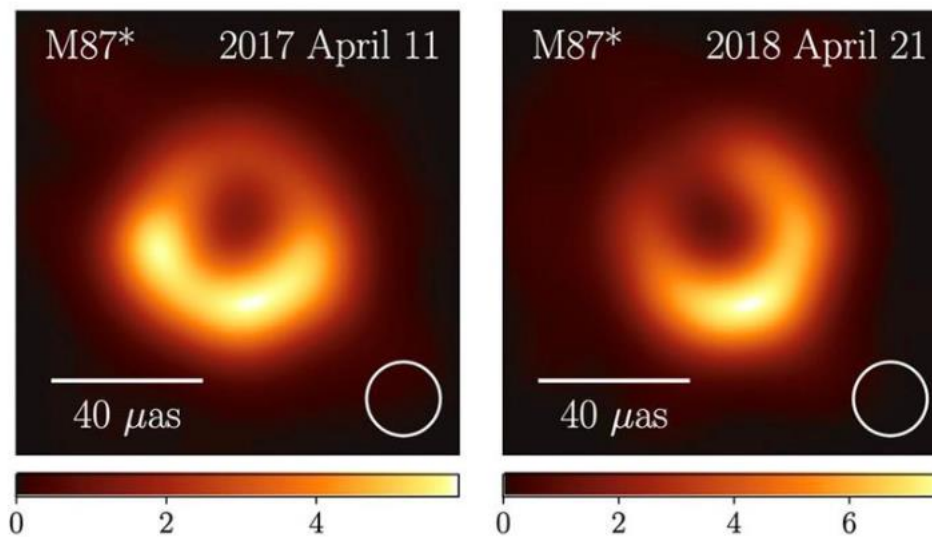
About black holes:

- Space telescopes equipped with specialized instruments can detect a black hole by observing how stars that are in close proximity to the black hole behave differently from other stars. A black hole is defined as an area in space where gravity is so strong that even light cannot escape. This strong gravity can result from matter being compressed into a tiny space, which can happen when a star is dying.

5. ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

5.1 Climate change increasing the probability of extreme weather events

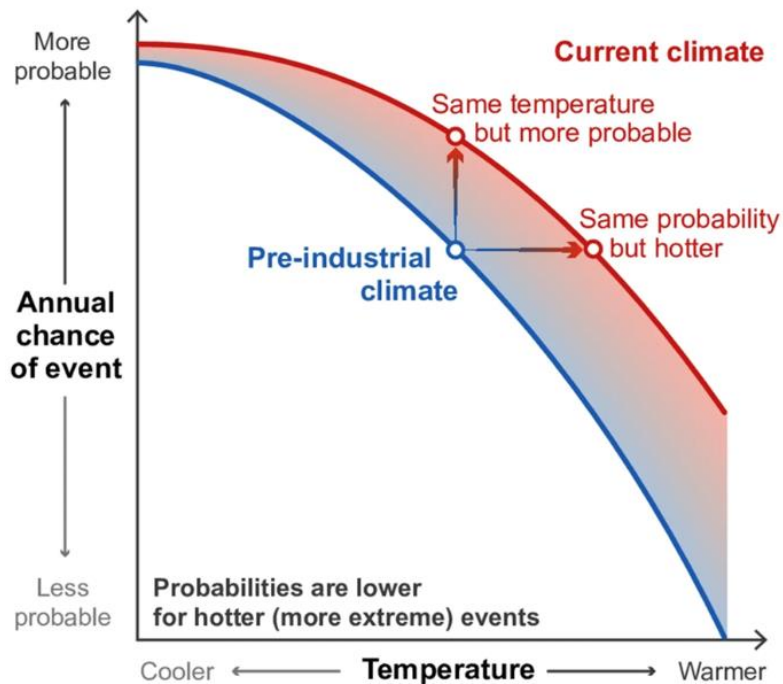- It has been determined that 2023 will be the hottest year on record for global temperatures since 1850, which has sparked discussions about the possibility of extreme weather occurrences in the near future.

Context:
- Since 1850, the average world temperature has risen by at least 1.1 degrees Celsius, mostly as a result of human activity that has boosted the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases to previously unheard-of levels.Globally, extreme weather events are becoming more common and intense as a result of the temperature surge. Heat waves, droughts, floods, storms, and wildfires are a few of these occurrences.

About the interconnection between climate change and extreme weather events:
- Because extreme heat evaporates more moisture from the soil, it makes conditions more conducive to wildfires and lengthens the wildfire season. Climate warming has more than increased the chance of intense "fire weather" conditions in Eastern Canada, according to a 2023 analysis by Weather Attribution (WWA).
- Droughts can be made worse by warmer air sucking moisture from the soil.
- As a result of water evaporating at higher temperatures, more moisture is retained in the atmosphere due to the melting of land, oceans, and other bodies of water.
- The atmosphere can retain roughly 7% extra moisture for every degree Celsius that the average temperature rises. This increases the intensity, length, and/or frequency of precipitation, which can ultimately result in severe flooding, making storms more deadly.

- Ninety percent of the extra heat produced by recent greenhouse gas emissions has been absorbed by the oceans. As a result, since 1850, the average sea surface temperature has increased by over 0.9 degrees Celsius worldwide.

5.2 Brumation

Usually seen in the winter, it's a process akin to hibernation.

Context:
Scholars have documented cases of brumation across a range of reptile taxa and environments.

About Brumation:
- It is the term used to characterize a dormant or slowed-down period of activity in reptiles, akin to mammal hibernation.
- It usually happens in the winter, when it gets colder outside and food gets scarce.
- In order to preserve energy and endure these unfavorable environmental circumstances, reptiles go into a state called brumation.
- Reptiles may withdraw to underground burrows, rock crevices, or other protected locations during brumation when temperatures are comparatively more steady.
- Due to a major slowdown in metabolism, they can go for weeks or even months without eating. Reptiles are able to minimize their resource requirements and conserve energy during this phase of decreased activity.
- Box turtles and painted turtles, which burrow into the muck at the bottom of ponds and lakes, are examples of species that exhibit brumation. While lizards may conceal themselves behind rocks or among foliage, snakes may take sanctuary in caverns or underground burrows.

5.3 Marine Heatwaves in the Arctic Ocean

- According to a recent study titled "Arctic marine heatwaves forced by greenhouse gases and triggered by abrupt sea-ice melt," which was published in the journal Nature Communications, there have been unprecedented Marine Heatwave (MHW) episodes over the Arctic Ocean since 2007.

Context:
- An extreme weather event is an MHW. It happens when a specific maritime region's surface temperature rises by three or four degrees Celsius over the course of at least five days.The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) states that MHWs can endure for several weeks, months, or even years at a time.

Major conclusions/highlights of the research:
- From 2007 to 2021, the Arctic saw 11 instances of Marine Heatwaves (MHWs), which are defined by persistently high Sea Surface Temperatures (SST). Record decreases in Arctic Sea ice occur at the same time as these phenomena. According to the State of the Global Climate 2022 Report, the Arctic had severe and intense marine heatwaves in the Laptev and Beaufort seas from spring to autumn in 2022.
- Known to reflect solar energy, the Arctic Ocean's permanent sea ice cover has significantly decreased over the summer and winter since the mid-1990s. A noticeable regime shift from a thicker, more distorted ice cover to a thinner, more uniform one has occurred since 2007. Because the thin ice melts more quickly and is less resilient, solar radiation can warm the water's surface.

- Arctic MHWs mainly happen over marginal seas, such as the Chukchi, East Siberian, Laptev, and Kara seas. These areas are favorable for the establishment of MHW because they have shallow mixed-layer depths and primarily first-year ice cover.
- Marine heatwaves with temperatures above 5°C would not be possible without GHGs. With a 66-99% probability, greenhouse gas emissions are a sufficient cause of moderate marine heatwaves.
- The Arctic is clearly warming over the long run, with the SST rising by 1.2°C every decade between 1996 and 2021. Extreme SST events have been more frequent in the eastern Arctic marginal waters over the past 20 years.

5.4 KYASANUR FOREST DISEASE (KFD)

- In Karnataka, a viral infection known as Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) has claimed the lives of two persons since January 1.

Context:
- The first recorded death from monkey fever occurred in Shivamogga district on January 8, when an 18-year-old contracted the virus, according to the health department. The second death was recorded in the Udupi district at Manipal, where a 79-year-old man passed away in a private hospital.

About:
- Monkey fever, sometimes called Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), is a viral hemorrhagic fever that is endemic to the southwest of India and is transmitted by ticks.
- The Kyasanur Forest disease virus (KFDV), a member of the Flaviviridae virus family, is the cause of KFD.
- KFDV is stored in the hard tick (Haemaphysalis spinigera) reservoir. Ticks carry the infection for the rest of their lives.
- Hosts: After being bitten by an infected tick, rodents, shrews, and monkeys frequently serve as KFDV hosts.
  Human Transmission: Contact with infected animals or tick bites can result in the transmission of KFD to humans.
- KFD has historically only been present in the western and central regions of India's Karnataka State.
- The disease was originally discovered in 1957 when it was isolated from a sick monkey in the Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka (previously Mysore), according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Although supportive therapy and early hospitalization are crucial, there is no specific treatment for KFD.
- There is a KFD vaccination that is utilized in India's endemic regions.

5.5 Invasive thrips

- During a Rajya Sabha meeting, it was revealed that up to 80% of the crop loss in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana could have been caused by the invasive insect species Thrips Parvispinus.
- The invasive pest species Thrips parvispinus is endemic to Thailand and is most common in Southeast Asia. It is also referred to as Southeast Asian thrips or Taiwanese thrips.
- Vegetables, fruit crops, decorative plants, and other plants are among the host plants that Thrips parvispinus can feed on. It can pierce plant tissues and extract their contents, causing severe damage, withering, and yield loss.

5.6 Aldabra giant tortoises

- After a six-year experiment, Madagascar is now home to hundreds of Aldabra giant tortoises, which could be the first time the island has seen a repopulation of these megaherbivores in 600 years.
- The goal of this project is to rebuild the island's damaged ecosystems, which were once supported by enormous tortoises. These habitats include the shrublands, grasslands, and woods. Reintroducing the Aldabra giants may help restore habitat mosaics throughout Madagascar, promoting tourism and biodiversity while also perhaps lessening the effects of climate change.

5.7 Indian Gray Wolf

There have been reports of seeing Indian grey wolves inside the National Chambal Sanctuary (NCS).

Context:
Uttar Pradesh is home to the National Chambal Sanctuary (NCS).

About Indian Gray Wolf:-
- Call it Canis lupus pallipes, scientific name
- It is widely distributed, reaching as far as Israel and the Indian subcontinent. Approximately 3,000 animals, some in captive, can be found in India.
- This subspecies of grey wolves can be found all the way from the Indian Subcontinent to Southwest Asia.
- Its size is in between that of the Arabian and Himalayan wolves, although without the latter's thick winter coat due to its warmer temperature.
- Its size is in the middle of that of an Arabian and Tibetan wolf.
- They hunt at night and wake up early.

5.8 Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR)

- A survey was recently carried out at the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR).

Context:
- The recently concluded synchronous vulture survey recorded over 300 vultures.

About Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR):-
- The first biosphere reserve in India was the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, which was created in 1986.
- The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve covers 5,520 square kilometers in total.
- The Western Ghats are where it's situated.
- Included in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve are portions of Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.
- The reserve receives 500 mm to 7000 mm of rain annually.
- The greatest biodiversity is found in the vegetation, which ranges from arid scrub to evergreen forests and marshes.
- Plants: Adenoon, Poeciloneuron, Wagatea, Jarodina, Baeolepis, Frerea, etc.
- Fauna: Some of the creatures found here include the Nilgiri tahr, Nilgiri langur, slender loris, blackbuck, tiger, gaur, Indian elephant, and marten.

5.9 Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR)

The Odisha government recently revealed plans to build the world's first melanistic tiger safari close to the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR).

Context:
According to the State Forest and Environment Agency, the Similipal Tiger Reserve is now the only place on Earth where melanistic tigers may live in the wild.

About Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR):-
- Place: North East India.
- Similipal, a national park and Tiger Reserve in the northern region of Orissa's Mayurbhanj district, gets its name from the "Simul" (Silk Cotton) tree.
- 2750 square kilometers in size.
- It boasts Joranda and Barehipani, two stunning waterfalls.
- The Kolha, Santhala, Bhumija, Bhatudi, Gondas, Khadia, Mankadia, and Sahara are notable tribes.

- In 1956, it was designated as a "Tiger Reserve."
- Since 1973, it has been a part of the national conservation initiative known as "Project Tiger."
- UNESCO added the STR and a 2250 square kilometer "transitional area" to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves in 2009.
- Flora: A variety of forest types and habitats are predominant, with some semi-evergreen regions dominated by Northern Tropical Moist Deciduous forests.
- Here, sal is the most common species of tree.
- Wildlife includes the Barking and Spotted Deer, Sloth Bear, Mongoose, Flying Squirrel, Royal Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Gaur, Elephant, and Langur.

5.10 Snow Leopards

- The report on the status of snow leopards in India was recently released at the National Board for Wildlife meeting in New Delhi.

Background:-
- The first-ever scientific study to document the number of snow leopards in India, the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Program, has identified 718 individuals.
- The SPAI's National Coordinator was the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

About Snow Leopards:-
- Name in science: Panthera uncia.
- Native to Central Asia's mountainous mountains are snow leopards.
- Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Russia, and Uzbekistan are the 12 countries that make up the snow-leopard range.
- Snow leopards live in the higher Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions of India, where the height ranges from 3,000 to 5,400 meters.
- Hemis, Ladakh is the world's capital of snow leopards.
- The presence of snow leopards serves as a gauge for the condition of the alpine ecosystem.

Conservation status:-
- IUCN: Susceptible.
- Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) contains information about the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.

5.11 Laughing gull

- A laughing gull from North America was recently sighted at Kasaragod's Chittari estuary, marking a first for the nation.

Background:-
- The bird has migrated thousands of kilometers to reach the southern State and is well-known for its distinctive laughter-like cries.

About :-
- These are coastal species that are rarely observed much farther inland.

- The Atlantic coast of North America, the Caribbean, and northern South America are the primary habitats for these birds.
- gull of medium size, measuring from 16 and 18 inches in length.
- Adults have a reddish bill, dark grey wings, and a black head during the breeding season.
- Adults and youngsters that are not reproducing have a mottled brownish-grey look.
- A long, slender bill that droops somewhat, and a black or dark hood during breeding.(The Bird Sanctuary at Atapaka)

5.12 Gangetic dolphin

- In Odisha, a Gangetic dolphin was just saved.

Context:
- There might be more freshwater dolphins in the river as a result of it.

About Gangetic dolphin:-
- Known as Susu in common
- Platanista gangetica gangetica is the scientific name for dolphins.
- IUCN lists this as endangered.
- Habitat: Deep waters in and around river confluences are preferred by Ganges river dolphins.
- Distribution: Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal are the seven states that make up India.
- The Ganga River, from Varanasi to Patna (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), Son and Kosi rivers (Bihar), the upper Ganga River (in Uttar Pradesh), the Chambal River (in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh), the Ghaghra and Gandak Rivers (in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), and the Brahmaputra from Sadia (in the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh) upto Dhubri (on the border with Bangladesh) and the Kulsi River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra
- Compared to men, females are larger.
- They are among the oldest animals on the planet, right up there with some shark, crocodile, and turtle species.
- Generally speaking, Gangetic Dolphins are blind.
- The prey is affected by the ultrasonic sound they release.

5.13 The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

- An elevated road that crosses nine animal corridors used by the animals of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve—often during significant floods—has been approved by the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

Context:
- National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, among other protected places across the nation, are governed by the Forest Land Diversion Regulation Body (NBWL). The organization oversees significant policy choices pertaining to wildlife protection in addition to controlling land diversion.

About National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)
- The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) was established on September 22, 2003, as a statutory board in accordance with Section 5 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972.

- The Honorable Prime Minister serves as the NBWL's chair.
- Nineteen of its forty-seven members are ex-officio members.
- According to the WLPA, every new administration appoints a new board, with the new PM serving as chair.
- It is in charge of directing government decisions regarding the preservation of wildlife and approving projects in protected areas. Practically speaking, a standing committee is assigned many of its responsibilities.
- The Minister of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change serves as the chair of the NBWL standing committee.

5.14 Soda Lake

- Scientists have recently found evidence of a shallow "soda lake" in western Canada.

Background:-
It would fit well with Darwin's theory of "warm little ponds" as the origin of life on early Earth.

About Soda Lake:-
- It is a lake with an average pH of nine to eleven.
- A soda lake, sometimes known as an alkaline lake, is a lake that is on the highly alkaline side of neutrality; its pH usually ranges from 9 to 12.
- The alkalinity of the water is caused by high carbonate concentrations, particularly sodium carbonate. Lakes must meet specific geological, climatic, and geographic characteristics in order to develop. It takes a topography that restricts the lake's water outflow.
- Because of the dissolved carbon dioxide, these are the most productive aquatic habitats on Earth. Both semi-arid and arid regions are where they naturally occur. Prokaryotes, such as bacteria and archaea, predominate in these, particularly in lakes with greater alkalinity levels.

5.15 STATE OF THE WORLD'S MIGRATORY SPECIES REPORT

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) has released the first-ever State of the World's Migratory Species report.

Context:
- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the governing body of the intergovernmental Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

About Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS):
- An international agreement known as the Bonn Convention, or Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), attempts to conserve migratory species throughout their ranges.
- The CMS was signed on June 23, 1979, in Bonn, Germany, and went into effect on November 1, 1983.
- It offers a global platform for the preservation and sustainable use of migrating birds, fish, and terrestrial species along with their environments.
- 133 Parties and 583 migratory species are covered by CMS as of right now.
- Since 1983, India has been a party to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

- In Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India, the 13th Conference of the Parties (COP) to CMS was held in February 2020.
- The 14th Conference of the Parties (COP14) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the most recent CMS convention, took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, from February 10–15, 2024.

Key findings:
- Approximately 44% of the species on the CMS list are experiencing population decreases, and 22% of them under extinction threat.
- Worldwide migration poses an increasing threat of extinction for all species, even those not included in the CMS.
- The two biggest risks to all migratory species, including those on the CMS list, are habitat loss brought on by human activities and overexploitation.
- Of the Key Biodiversity Areas designated as significant for migratory animals on the CMS list, half (51%) lack protected status, and 58% of the sites under observation that are regarded as significant for these species are under unsustainable pressure from humans.
- 399 migratory species that are endangered or very close to going extinct worldwide are not on the CMS list as of yet.

MAINS

5.16 Human Wildlife Conflict

With a wild elephant chasing and trampling a 47-year-old man to death, Wayanad is in a state of upheaval.

Context:
Conflicts between people and wildlife have been happening more frequently in India.People who are impacted by the problem have frequently confronted the state directly and asked it to take more action to protect their property and lives.

Why does human-wildlife conflict occur?
- When human endeavors like resource extraction, infrastructure construction, or agriculture clash with wild animals, it can have detrimental effects on both people and animals. This is known as human-wildlife conflict.

Reasons/ factors causing human-wildlife conflict:
- Urbanization and Development
- Lack of Protected areas
- Population explosion
- Deforestation
- Agricultural expansion
- Climate change
- Invasive species
- Increase in eco-tourism
- Substantial increase in the population of prolific breeders like wild boars and peacocks.

Consequences/Implications of human-wildlife conflict:
- Financial hardship can result from wild animals destroying crops, damaging infrastructure, and killing livestock.
- The safety of humans may be at risk from wild animals, particularly in places where people and wildlife cohabit. Large predators like tigers, bears, and lions can attack and cause severe injuries or even death.
- It might harm the environment in some way. Ecological imbalances can result from human actions such as killing predators, which can raise prey populations.
- It may also create unfavorable attitudes toward wildlife and make it more difficult to put conservation measures into action, which can be a barrier to conservation efforts.

5.17 Radioactive Discharge

After examining radiological data from six nuclear power stations in India over a 20-year period (2000-2020), researchers from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) concluded that there haven't been many radioactive releases from Indian nuclear reactors.

Context:
Protests against nuclear power facilities have been commonplace.The low levels of radiation exposed to the public highlight how safely Indian nuclear power stations operate.The study's conclusions have the power to refute false assumptions and strengthen India's resolve to move forward with its nuclear power program.

Radioactive discharge: what is it?
- It describes the accidental discharge of radioactive materials into the environment by humans, usually from nuclear plants, research reactors, or other industrial processes that use radioactive elements.

Key findings of the analysis:
- It was discovered that the environmental effects of the nuclear facilities' radioactive discharges were negligible. Fission product concentrations outside of a 5-kilometer radius have been found to be below the sensors' minimum detectable activity, suggesting that the values being observed are "insignificant."
- While liquid discharge is made up of fission product radionuclides, radioiodine, tritium, strontium-90, caesium-137, and activation products like cobalt-60, gaseous waste is released into the atmosphere along with noble gases, Argon 41, radioiodine, and particulate radionuclides (cobalt-60, strontium-90, caesium-137, and tritium). Dilution and dispersion are used to carry out radioactive discharges while adhering to stringent environmental and radiological regulatory frameworks.
- At all seven nuclear reactors, the mean gross alpha activity in air particles was less than 0.1 mega becquerel (mBq) per cubic meter.
- All sites had average air particle concentrations of radionuclides (iodine-131, caesium-137, and strontium-90) less than 1 mBq per cubic meter. In rivers, lakes, and saltwater close to the nuclear facilities, the concentrations of strontium-90 and caesium-137 were below predetermined limits.
- Without exhibiting any trend of deposition or accumulation, the amounts of caesium-137 and strontium-90 in the sediments fell within the statistical range of values found in natural sediments. With the exception of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Station, tritium was detectable at all sites above the minimum detectable activity.

5.18 BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ACT, 2002

- The Gupteswar forest in the Koraput district has been designated as the fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) by the Odisha government.

Context:
- According to Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act of 2002, the state governments designate the Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS) after consulting with local organizations.

About:-
- A law known as the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, guarantees the equitable distribution of benefits resulting from the utilization of India's diverse range of living organisms while also safeguarding them.
- India is a party to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, to which the law was passed in order to comply with its provisions.
- The goal of the Biological Diversity Act of 2002 (BD Act) is to carry out the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) requirements while working closely with the Nagoya Protocol.
- The goal of the Nagoya Protocol was to guarantee that the government and the society that protected genetic resources would share in the benefits of using genetic resources for research and commercial purposes.

Features of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002
- The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at the federal level, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) at the state level, and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) at the local level comprise the three-tiered system it provides to control access to and use of biological resources.
- Without the prior consent of the NBA or the SBBs, it is illegal for any individual or organization, domestic or international, to access any biological resource found in India or knowledge related to it for scientific or commercial reasons.
- Additionally, it forbids sending research findings about biological resources or knowledge acquired from India to any individual or organization outside of India without the NBA's consent.
- It also forbids, without NBA approval, the assertion of any intellectual property rights on any innovation derived from research conducted using biological resources or knowledge acquired from India.
- It offers provisions for the preservation and sustainable utilization of biological resources and related expertise, in addition to safeguarding and restoring endangered species and ecosystems.
- It allows for the designation of some places—which are special, ecologically vulnerable, and abundant in biodiversity—as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS). After consulting with local authorities and the federal government, state administrations have the authority to warn certain areas.
- In addition to guaranteeing that the local communities receive a fair portion of the benefits resulting from their use, it allows for the local communities to be involved in the protection and management of the biological resources and related knowledge.
- It allows for the creation of organizations for the documenting and preservation of biological resources and related information, such as museums, gene banks, and repositories.

5.19 Underwater canyon
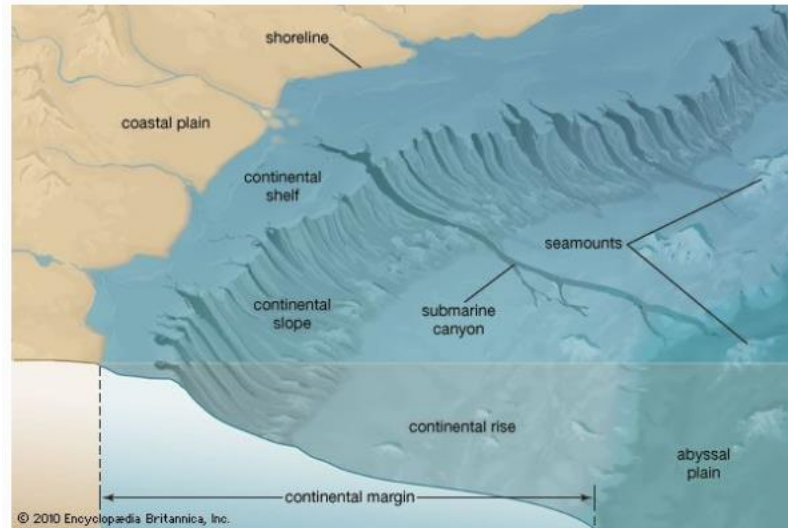
- A previously undiscovered underwater canyon in Cyprus has been dubbed Eratosthenes by the Geological Institute of Israel in honor of the nearby underwater mountain.
- About 5.5 million years ago, during the Messinian Event, this canyon was formed.
- It was created at a period of lower Mediterranean Sea levels and higher salinity, which led to gravity currents and seabed subsidence. It is roughly 10 kilometers wide and 500 meters deep.
- This finding provides insight into the environmental circumstances behind the Mediterranean Sea's partial or near-complete desiccation during the Messinian event, commonly referred to as the Messinian salinity crisis.

5.20 LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY
A nationwide exhibition and program of eco-friendly events centered around the themes of LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) is scheduled to take place at India Gate, Delhi, on February 9 and 10, 2024.

Background:-
- The program will emphasize how young people may encourage behavioral shifts that result in both individual and group action toward living more sustainably.

About LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment):-
- LiFE is a global movement spearheaded by India that encourages people to make little but meaningful environmental changes in their daily lives.
- The goal is to prioritize individual behavior in global climate action.
- LiFE envisions a circular economy—one characterized by thoughtful and intentional use—replacing the dominant "use-and-dispose" economy.

Method:
- Emphasis on Individual Behaviors: Jan Andolan suggests turning life into a mass movement by emphasizing the attitudes and behaviors of both individuals and communities.
- Co-create Globally: Through prestigious institutions, think tanks, and international organizations, crowdsource empirical and scalable ideas from the brightest minds on the planet.
- Leverage Local Cultures: The campaign can be driven by utilizing the social norms, beliefs, and everyday household behaviors of various cultures around the world that are climate-friendly.

Objectives :-
- It seeks to encourage "mindful and deliberate utilization" as opposed to "mindless and wasteful consumption" as an environmentally friendly way of living.
- It seeks to make use of the strength of group effort.
- It seeks to encourage people all around the world to make small, eco-friendly changes to their daily routines.
- Its goal is to establish and support a worldwide community of people known as "Pro-Planet People" (P3).
- The joint commitment of Pro-Planet People (P3) is to embrace and encourage eco-friendly lifestyles.
- It aims to use social networks' power to change societal norms related to climate.

5.21 The Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- This year, the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) has not made its yearly visit at the Andhra Pradesh wildlife sanctuary, Rollapadu.

Context:
Despite undertaking routine checks, Andhra Pradesh's forest officials have not been able to locate the bird in the state for the past two years.

About Great Indian Bustard:-
- One of the heaviest flying birds is the Great Indian Bustard (GIB), which is mostly found in the Indian subcontinent.
- There are thought to be less than 140 of these birds left in the world today, and they are primarily found in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list, it is classified as severely endangered.
- Scientific name: nigriceps aradeotis.
- Physical description: Pale head and neck contrast with a black crown on the forehead.
- They consume grass seeds, insects like as beetles and grasshoppers, and occasionally even tiny rodents and reptiles.
- Distribution: Currently, the bustards' only known home is India, where they are primarily found in Rajasthan and Gujarat. There are also small populations in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.
- It is Rajasthan's official bird. Because of its proximity to roads, availability of grasslands, and climate that is ideal for them, Sorsan in Rajasthan has been determined to be the most suitable location for GIB chick rearing, along with the chick-rearing center in Jaisalmer.
- A flagship species of the grasslands, the GIB is essential to their health, which in turn affects many other animal and bird species as well as the dairy industry.

Factors affecting population of GIBs:
- Loss and fragmentation of habitat are the results of urbanization and agricultural expansion.
- The bustards' normal habit can be disturbed by increased human activity like grazing and disturbance from tourists, which can have an impact on the birds' ability to reproduce and feed.
- The Great Indian Bustard is still threatened by poaching. Even though they are legally protected, their meat and feathers are occasionally sought for.
- The semi-arid areas where the birds are found put them at risk of colliding with overhead electricity lines. Deaths and a decrease in population may result from this.

- The availability of suitable habitats and prey species can be impacted by climate change, which could have an indirect effect on the number of bustards.
- Low Reproductive Success: During the nesting season, disturbances may cause birds to abandon their nests or fail to nurture their young. As a result, there may be low reproductive success.GIBs have a modest reproductive rate, laying only a few eggs, and raise their young for nearly a full year.
- Limited Genetic Diversity: The Great Indian Bustard may have less genetic diversity as a result of their limited and isolated groups, which leaves them more susceptible to illnesses and environmental changes.

5.22 TERAI ARC LANDSCAPE (TAL)

- As part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Terai Arc Landscape has been recognized as a UN World Restoration Flagship.

Context:
- A global recognition and support program for large-scale ecological restoration is the UN World Restoration Flagship.
- The Terai region is a lowland region in sections of northern India and southern Nepal that is located north of the Indo-Gangetic Plain and south of the Himalayas. Tall grasslands, scrub savannah, sal woods, and clay-rich marshes are its defining features. In addition, a variety of threatened and endangered animals call it home, including dolphins, tigers, rhinos, and elephants.
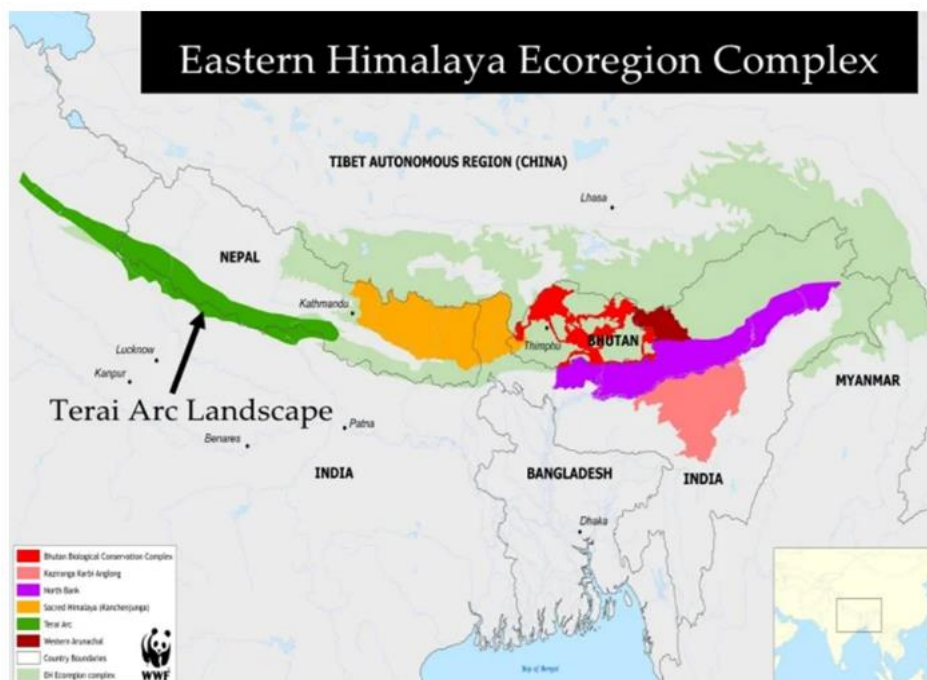
About The Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) initiative
- Together, Nepal and India are working to conserve and restore the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Terai region—home to numerous endangered species like tigers, rhinos, elephants, and gharials—through the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) initiative.
- The project has been named one of the World Restoration Flagships by the United Nations, which honors outstanding initiatives that highlight the advantages of ecosystem restoration for both people and the environment.
- There are fourteen protected areas that are part of the transboundary Terai Arc Landscape (TAL), which crosses both India and Nepal.

The Terai Arc Landscape comprises the following protected areas:

- Parsa National Park, Nepal
- Chitwan National Park, Nepal
- Banke National Park, Nepal
- Bardia National Park, Nepal
- Blackbuck Conservation Area, Nepal
- Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal
- Valmiki National Park, India
- Sohelwa Wildlife Sanctuary, India
- Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, India
- Dudhwa National Park, India
- Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, India
- Corbett National Park, India
- Rajaji National Park, India
- Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, India

6 SECURITY & DEFENCE

6.1 EUROPEAN UNION'S CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM)

- The European Union's (EU) upcoming Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is expected to have a minimal impact on trade flows, especially in Asia and the Pacific, and only marginally reduce global carbon emissions, according to a recent analysis by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Context:
- One major effort to combat climate change globally is the European Union's (EU) Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

About CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM)
- A mechanism called the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) was created by the European Union to fairly price the carbon released during the production of goods that are imported into the EU and have a high carbon content.
- By guaranteeing that the carbon price of imports is equal to the carbon price of domestic output, it seeks to promote cleaner industrial production in non-EU nations.
- It seeks to level the carbon pricing in the impacted sectors between imported and domestic goods.
- The method is made to comply with WTO regulations.
- The current transitional period runs from 2023 to 2026, after which CBAM will apply in its definitive regime starting in 2026.

Definitive Regime (from 2026):
- EU importers of CBAM-eligible items must register with their home country's authorities.
- The price at which they will purchase CBAM certificates is determined by utilizing the weekly average auction price of EU ETS allowances, which is expressed in euros per tonne of CO2 emitted.
- Each year, importers must turn in the equivalent number of certificates and declare the emissions included in their purchases.
- The equivalent amount can be subtracted from imports if they can demonstrate that a carbon price was already paid during the production of the imported items.

Transitional Phase (2023 – 2026):
- Initially, imports of specific items and specific precursors with carbon-intensive production processes are covered under CBAM.
- Cement, iron and steel, aluminum, fertilizers, power, and hydrogen are some of these items.
- Serving as a pilot and learning phase for all stakeholders is the goal throughout this time.

India's impact
- India may be significantly impacted by the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) of the European Union, especially in industries like aluminum, steel, cement, fertilizers, hydrocarbons, and electricity.

6.2 DHARMA GUARDIAN EXERCISE

India and Japan have commenced a fortnightly military drill.

Context:
- Through this exercise, both countries can exchange best practices, advance interoperability, and fortify their bilateral ties.

About The Dharma Guardian:
- An annual combined military drill between the Japan Ground Self Defense Force and the Indian Army is called Dharma Guardian.
- On February 25, 2024, at the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan, India, the 5th iteration of this exercise got underway.
- Origins: As part of the two countries' expanding bilateral defense cooperation, the exercise was started in 2018.
- Goal: Strengthening the strategic alliance between Japan and India and improving military interoperability are the main goals of Dharma Guardian.
- Location Alternation: India and Japan are the alternate locations for this activity. It gives the military forces of the two nations the chance to train together, exchange best practices, and grow from one another.
- Focus Areas: Throughout the drill, soldiers participate in a range of tactical exercises, such as creating makeshift bases, deploying vehicle checkpoints, performing reconnaissance grids, rehearsing cordon and search operations, and carrying out heliborne operations.
- Exhibition of Weapons: In addition to the field exercises, there is a display of weapons and gear. This demonstrates India's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) initiative as well as the nation's expanding defense industry capacity.
- Mutual Benefits: Dharma Guardian promotes cooperation, mutual understanding, and comradery between the Indian and Japanese armed forces.

6.3 Exercise Vayu Shakti-24

- Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 was held recently.

Context:
The event will be conducted by the Indian Air Force.

Regarding:-
Location: Around Jaisalmer, in Pokhran Air to Ground Range.
Joint operations with the Indian Army will also be demonstrated during the drill.
This year, 121 aircraft, including the native Tejas, Prachand, and Dhruv, will take part in the exercise. Additional aircraft involved in the exercise include the Rafale, Mirage-2000, Sukhoi-30 MKI, Jaguar, Hawk, C-130J, Apache, Chinook, and Mi-17.
Akash and Samar, two indigenous surface-to-air weapon systems, will show off their capacity to locate and down an unauthorized aircraft.
Exercise Vayu Shakti will serve as a showcase for the IAF's capacity to operate from several air bases and deliver conventional and long-range, precision weapons precisely, on schedule, and with deadly impact.
- Vayu Shakti, Gagan Shakti, and Tarang Shakti are the three major war games that the Indian Air Force is scheduled to conduct.

*   There will also be displays of special operations by the Indian Air Force's transport and helicopter fleets, which include the use of Garuds and Indian Army components.

6.4 Armado

Mahindra Armado Military Vehicle Debuts at Republic Day Parade Recently.

About Armado:-
*   Because Armado is protected from all directions and up to the B7, Stanag Level II, it has excellent ballistic protection.
*   This indicates that it provides defense against guns that can penetrate armour.
*   The 2-liter turbocharged direct-injection diesel powertrain of the Armado is multifuel capable.
*   With 215 horsepower and 500 Nm of torque, there is a considerable amount of power available.
*   The first Armoured Light Specialist Vehicle (ALSV) in India is this one.
*   For use by the Indian armed services, Mahindra Defence Systems (MDS) created and manufactured this entirely indigenous vehicle.
*   An Armored Light Specialist Vehicle (ALSV) is a multipurpose apparatus of great importance.
*   Quick response teams, Special Forces, counterterrorism operations, border patrolling, and other uses are all possible with this modular vehicle. (Vagir, the submarine)
*   It can accommodate up to eight persons when arranged, with a maximum seating capacity of six, including the driver.
*   The ASLV has an additional 400 kg of load capacity in addition to the usual 1,000 kg.

6.5 Sada Tanseeq

*   Sada Tanseeq, India and Saudi Arabia's first joint military exercise, was recently held.

Background:-
*   The first Joint Military Exercise, called Sada Tanseeq, is being conducted by the forces of Saudi Arabia and India as a significant step toward strengthening bilateral ties.

About Sada Tanseeq:-
*   Date: January 29, 2024, to February 10, 2024.
*   Location: Mahajan in Rajasthan.
*   Saudi Contingent Royal Saudi Land Forces: forty-five soldiers.
*   The 45-man Indian Army Contingent was made up of a Battalion from the Guards Brigade (Mechanized Infantry).
*   Its goal is to exchange best practices for managing operations in non-conventional domains through strategies, techniques, and procedures.
*   Its goal is to facilitate communication between the two contingents.
*   It seeks to enable bonho

Other exercises:-
*   Exercise Al-Mohad Al-Hindi.

6.6 INS Sumitra

The Indian Navy's INS Sumitra recently freed fishermen who had been taken hostage by pirates in the Gulf of Aden and off the east coast of Somalia.

Context:
- Pirates took control of the Iranian-flagged Fishing Vessel (FV) Iman as it cruised the east coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden.

Concerning INS Sumitra:
- Goa Shipyard Limited created the design and construction.
- An advanced naval offshore patrol ship, INS Sumitra, has joined the Eastern Naval Command in Chennai.
- It is the Indian Navy's fourth and last patrol boat of the Saryu class.
- It is built using an original design.
- The vessel is capable of 6,500 nautical miles of range.
- There are two diesel engines powering it.
- It has the capacity to load a single Dhruv/Chetak helicopter.
- Under the Eastern Naval Command, it is located in Chennai and was put into service in 2014.
- Apart from performing anti-piracy patrols, fleet support operations, maritime security of offshore assets, and escort operations, the ship's main duty is to monitor the nation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).
- Its functions include fleet support, patrolling both offshore and on the coast, monitoring of sea lines of communications, monitoring of offshore assets, and escort services.

6.7 MULTILATERAL NAVAL EXERCISE (MILAN) – 2024

The 12th Multilateral Naval Exercise - 2024 (MILAN) will be held in the Indian Navy from February 19–27.

Context:
- In anticipation of this momentous occasion off Visakhapatnam, sailors from all over the world—including the US, Japan, Australia, France, Bangladesh, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia—are lining up to take part.

About MILAN:
- The Indian Navy hosts the yearly Multilateral Naval Exercise (MILAN), a naval war game. 1995 saw the first Milan exercise take place in Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- The navy of Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand participated in the multilateral naval drill, which was organized and hosted by the Indian Navy.
- India's Visakhapatnam is set to host the 12th MILAN edition.
- MILAN 2024 reflects India's "Look East policy" and emphasizes regional security cooperation. The event's theme is "Cohesion, Camaraderie and Collaboration," and it aims to realize the G20 theme of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which means "the world is one family." MILAN 2024 also seeks to showcase India's naval prowess and promote international maritime cooperation.

6.8 National Terrorism Data Fusion & Analysis Centre (NTDFAC)

- The National Terrorism Data Fusion & Analysis Centre (NTDFAC) was recently created by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Background:-

It forced the government to gather data from multiple sources about terrorists and their allies.

About National Terrorism Data Fusion & Analysis Centre (NTDFAC):-

- First open in January 2024.
- The NIA's National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) and the National Integrated Database on Arrested Narco-Offenders, which gathers information about drug offenders' funding sources, available photos, and information plagiarized from the internet, are just two of the many sources of data that the National Terrorism Data Fusion & Analysis Center (NTDFAC) will gather.
- The different databases when combined will provide Indian intelligence access to the social media profiles, videos, photographs, fingerprints, histories, and affiliations with terror groups of the people.
- NAFIS currently has 9.2 million biometric records, and the Integrated Monitoring of Terrorism system is adding data from over 22,000 terrorism instances. It also has a facial recognition technology to look for suspects' faces in CCTV footage. It is modeled after the United States' Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

Significance:-

It will act as a central repository and hub for analysis of data about terrorism and terrorist organizations active in the nation.

7 SOCIAL ISSUES

7.1 GHAR - GO Home and Re-Unite Portal

- The Re-Unite Portal and GHAR - GO Home have just been released.

Background:-

A platform called GHAR – GO Home and Re-Unite (platform for Restoration and Repatriation of Child) has been created and launched by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

About GHAR – GO Home and Re-Unite Portal:-

It is a digital gateway for tracking and monitoring children's return and restoration in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and its rules.(The 2021 Amendment Bill for Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children))

The goal is to digitally trace and monitor children's restoration and repatriation in accordance with protocol.

Ministry: Development for Women and Children.

Important Features:-

- Children in the juvenile justice system who must be deported to another nation, state, or district are tracked and monitored digitally.
- Digital transfer of child cases to the relevant State Child Welfare Committee and Juvenile Justice Board. It will facilitate the children's prompt return home.
- The relevant State Government will be contacted in cases where a translation, interpreter, or expert is needed.
  By digitally tracking the development of the child's case, Child Welfare Committees and District Child Protection Officers can guarantee the appropriate restoration and rehabilitation of children.
- In order to identify the children who are difficult to repatriate or who are not receiving the appropriate compensation or other financial benefits, a checklist format will be included in the forms. The Child Welfare Committees will be given a list of government-implemented programs so they can connect the child with these initiatives to fortify the family and guarantee the child stays with them upon restoration.

7.2 Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN)

- The government's attempt to determine the overall population of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) across the nation is running into roadblock after road due to the indefinite postponement of the 2021 Census.

Context:

- The population data is essential for the government's ₹24,000 crore PM-JANMAN package for PVTGs to be implemented.

About PM JANMAN:-
- On November 15, 2023, PM-JANMAN was introduced for the socioeconomic welfare of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), in keeping with Antyodaya's mission to empower the last person at the last mile.
- In order to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the PVTGs, PM-JANMAN focuses on 11 crucial interventions through 9 Ministries. These interventions include providing electricity, clean drinking water, sanitary conditions, safe housing, improved access to education, health care, and nutrition, as well as road and telecom connectivity and opportunities for sustainable livelihood.

About PVTG:
- Subclassification of Scheduled Tribes: These tribes are more vulnerable than other Scheduled Tribe communities in specific areas.
- Primitive Tribal tribes (PTGs), the least developed of the tribal tribes, were established as a distinct category by the Dhebar Commission in 1973. The PTGs were redesignated as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by the Indian government in 2006.

7.3 Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) scheme

- Five officers were recently suspended by the Karnataka government for neglecting their duties in carrying out the Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) program.

Context:
22 NGOs and 56 department personnel are the targets of a formal complaint.

About Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) scheme:-
The Ministry of Education was established.
Goal: To provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all students with disabilities to pursue a further four years of secondary education following their completion of eight years of elementary schools.

Historical Background:-
- The Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) plan has been replaced by the plan of Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS), which offers support for the inclusive education of disabled students in grades IX-XII.
- Since 2013, this program has been a part of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA). The process of becoming an RMSA subsumed scheme includes the States and UTs as well.

Salient Features:-
As defined by the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) and the National Trust Act (1999) in classes IX to XII, the program covers all secondary-age children enrolled in government, local body, and government-aided schools who have one or more disabilities. These include blindness, low vision, leprosy that has been cured, hearing impairment, locomotory disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness, autism, and cerebral palsy. In the future, it may also cover speech impairment, learning disabilities, etc.
Girls with impairments are given extra attention in order to facilitate their entry into secondary education and to provide them with resources and direction for realizing their full potential. Under the plan, model inclusive schools are to be established in each state.

Components:-

- Components that are focused on the needs of the students, like medical and educational evaluations, books and stationery, uniforms, stipends for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding at the lodging facility, therapy services, teaching-learning materials, etc.
- The hiring of special education instructors, allowing general education teachers to teach these kids, teacher preparation, acclimating school officials, setting up a resource room, creating a barrier-free atmosphere, etc. are additional elements.

Implementing Agency:-

- The implementing agencies are the departments of school education of the Union Territory (UT) Administrations and State Governments.
- When implementing the plan, they could involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with expertise in the field of education for the disabled.

Financial Assistance:-

- For every item covered by the program, 100% central aid is provided.
- The State governments need merely set aside an annual sum of Rs. 600/-for each impaired child's scholarship.

8 MISCELLANEOUS

8.1 Chenab bridge

- The highest single arch railway bridge in the world, the Chenab Bridge, will be officially opened by Prime Minister Modi.

Context:
- After two decades of waiting, the single-arch bridge over the River Chenab in J&K, approved in 2003 and contracted in 2008, is now going to make India's railroad history, all thanks to the fact that it completed all required testing.

About Chenab bridge
- The bridge is 1315 meters long overall and crosses the Chenab River.
- An important route between Katra and Banihal is the arch bridge, which spans Bakkal and Kauri in the Jammu and Kashmir district of Reasi.
- At 1,178 feet above the riverbed, it is 35 meters higher than the Eiffel Tower, a popular tourist destination in Paris.
- Included in the Rs 35000 crore Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) project is the bridge. The project's goal is to improve Jammu and Kashmir's connectivity by offering connection in challenging weather and topography.
- It is anticipated that the bridge will last for about 120 years.
- Additionally, winds up to 260 km/h will not be able to stop it.

8.2 CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY (CAF)

- February 17, 2024, the Central Asian Flyway initiative, which was presented by India, was approved by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP 14).

Context:
- Every three years, the CMS organizes a Conference of the Parties (COP), where member nations examine advancements made and approve fresh plans for migratory species protection. The 14th COP, the first UN wildlife summit in Central Asia, took place in February 2024 at Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

About:
- Within the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), an international treaty whose goal is to protect and conserve migratory animals and their habitats, India is spearheading the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) program.
- The program seeks to improve coordination and cooperation between the range states and other stakeholders, as well as to support the protection and sustainable use of migratory waterbirds and their habitats.
- Between the Arctic and Indian oceans, as well as the related island chains, lies a sizable continental region of Eurasia known as the Central Asian Flyway (CAF).
- A flyway is a specific geographic area where a migratory species, either alone or in a group, completes its yearly cycle of breeding, moulting, staging, and non-breeding.

- Waterbird migration routes within the CAF are numerous and significant; the majority of them stretch from Siberia's northernmost breeding grounds to the southernmost non-breeding wintering areas in West Asia, India, the Maldives, and the British Indian Ocean Territory.
- At least 279 migratory waterbird populations of 182 species, including 29 globally vulnerable or near-threatened species, are covered by the CAF, which spans 30 nations.
- Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Georgia, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom (British Indian Ocean Territory), Uzbekistan, and Yemen are the nations that make up the Central Asian Flyway.

8.3 Dr.M S Swaminathan conferred Bharat Ratna

Giving the late agricultural scientist Dr. M S Swaminathan the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Background:
- The five Bharat Ratna awards awarded this year are more than the four in 1999, making it the most number of awards ever given out in a single year. L.K. Advani, Karpoori Thakur, M. S. Swaminathan, Narasimha Rao, and Chaudhary Charan Singh are the prize recipients.

About M.S.Swaminathan:-
- Dr. Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, who was born in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, on August 7, 1925, is revered as the pioneer of India's green revolution.
- The famine that struck Bengal in 1942–1943 had a profound effect on Dr. Swaminathan.
- From 1981 to 1985, he presided as the Food and Agricultural Organization Council's independent chairman.
- The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources elected him president in 1984–1990.
- From 1989 until 1996, he also served as President of the World Wide Fund for Nature (India).
- Among his positions was that of Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Contribution to green revolution:
- Swaminathan provided the fundamental strategic idea for the Indian Green Revolution, which involved establishing a new genetic strain or "plant type" that was amenable to higher fertilizer and water application.
- The traditional wheat and rice cultivars' tall and slender stature was an issue. When they grew, these "lodged," or dropped flat on the ground, and their earheads were loaded with dense grains that were formed in reaction to heat
- Norman Borlaug, who had inserted dwarfing genes into wheat cultivars in Mexico, was approached by Swaminathan.
- In 1963, India began a dedicated breeding program for dwarf wheat.
- Thanks to his efforts, India's wheat production climbed from 6 million tonnes year in 1947 to 17 million tons annually between 1964 and 1968, transforming the country from one that was food insecure.

8.4 Mahamastakabhisheka

- In Venur, Karnataka, the nine-day Mahamastakabhisheka celebrations get underway.

Context:
- Rituals at Venur, in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka, marked the beginning of the Mahamastakabhisheka Mahotsava of Bhagavan Shri Bahubali Swami, the first Mokshagami and son of the first Theerthankara of Jainism.

About Mahamastakabhisheka
- The term "Mahamastakabhisheka" describes the large-scale anointing of the Jain pictures, or abhiṣheka.
- The anointing of the in Karnataka, India's Hassan district at Shravanabelagola is the most well-known of these consecrations.
- One major Jain festival takes place every twelve years. It is an essential component of the complex and old Jain tradition.
- There are numerous significant Jain temples, pilgrimage sites, and monuments in Karnataka.
- The enormous and extensive Jain history of Shravanabelagola, Dharmasthala, Karkala, Moodbidri, Venur, Humcha, and Narasimharajapura is sure to astound the tourists.

About Bahubali
- As per the Jain beliefs, Bahubali is the son of Rishabhanatha, the first Tirthankara.
- The Jains believe that after Bahubali defeated his half-brother in a duel for the kingdom, he gave up on the world and recognized how fleeting life is.
- Then, as per legend, he remained still in the Yogic posture of kayotsarga (literally, "dismissing the body") for a full year, with his arms at his sides and his feet facing front. He was so unaware of his surroundings that anthills sprouted around his feet and vines climbed unchecked up his arms and legs.
- According to the doctrines of the Digambara sect of Jainism, his meditation led him to a true victory over human passion and made him the first human of this kalpa (world age) to achieve nirvana.

8.5 Classical Language

The chief minister of West Bengal gained notoriety for supporting Bangla, the seventh most spoken language in the world, to be recognized as a classical language.

Context:
- The classical language status of many regional languages has been demanded by state governments and political parties in the different regions.

About Classical language
- The Indian government established the requirements for granting designation as a classical language in 2006.
- Guidelines for classical languages are provided by the Ministry of Culture. The first of these is the early manuscripts' high antiquity, dating back between 1500 and 2000 years in recorded history;
- a corpus of antiquated writings that present-day speakers value as a priceless legacy;
- The literary tradition must originate from scratch and not be appropriated from another speaking group;
- There may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots, given that the classical language and literature are separate from contemporary.
- Six languages are recognized as "Classical" in India at the moment. Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), Odia (2014), and Tamil (announced in 2004) are the languages in question.

Advantages:

- A language that has been designated as classical receives funding to establish a center of excellence for its study and becomes eligible for two significant awards given to distinguished researchers.
- Additionally, a request may be made to the University Grants Commission to establish a specific number of professional chairs for classical languages for researchers of distinction in the field, starting at least in Central Universities.

8.6 Satyendra Nath Bose

- Renowned Indian mathematician and physicist Satyendra Nath Bose was born on January 1, 1894, and died on February 4, 1974. He is well known for working with Albert Einstein to create a theory about the gas-like characteristics of electromagnetic radiation.
- Bose is credited with creating the Boson particle, the Bose-Einstein condensate, and Bose-Einstein statistics, among other important contributions to quantum physics.
- Due to his accomplishments, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Statistics for his contributions to Bose-Einstein statistics and received other distinguished honors, such as the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award in India.

Contributions:

- His groundbreaking work bridged the gap between classical and contemporary quantum mechanics by introducing a new class of particles and laying the groundwork for quantum statistics.
- Through their partnership, the Bose-Einstein condensate theory—which postulated the existence of a singular state of matter—was developed.
- derived the radiation law for Planck's Black body without consulting classical electrodynamics.
- Bose's approach was used by Einstein to develop the theory of the ideal quantum gas and to anticipate the Bose-Einstein Condensation (BEC) phenomena.

8.7 Martand sun temple

- A group of Hindus stormed into the Martand Sun Temple recently, disobeying ASI protocol and performing parikrama and hoisting the saffron flag.

Background:-
- On the day of the "Pran Pratishtha" at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, a group of Hindus defied the Archaeological Survey of India staff and broke into the Martand Sun Temple, which is protected by the ASI, in the Anantnag region of J&K.

About Martand sun temple:-
- A Hindu temple devoted to Surya, the principal solar deity in Hinduism, is called the Martand Sun Temple, sometimes called Pandou Laidan.
- In the eighth century CE, it was constructed.
- Lalitaditya Muktapida, the Karkota Dynasty's king, constructed it.
- It is devoted to the God of the Sun.
- Another Sanskrit synonym for Surya is martand.
- The temple is well known for its majesty and creative brilliance and is a superb example of Kashmiri architecture.
- Greek, Roman, Persian, and Indian architectural elements are all blended together in its design.
- Eighty-four lesser shrines formerly ringed the main shrine, which was devoted to the Sun God.
- It is situated amidst an expansive courtyard featuring eighty-six fluted columns.
- The main shrine, where the idol of Sun God was installed, is connected to the courtyard.

8.8 Ayush Diksha

- It was recently announced that the foundation stone laying ceremony for "Ayush Diksha" will take place on January 20, 2024.

Background:-
- The Central Ayurveda Research Institute (CARI), located in Bharatpur, Bhubaneshwar, Odisha, will host the ceremony.

About Ayush Diksha:-
- Ministry: Ayush Ministry. (AYUSH industry)

- Ayush Diksha is the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences' Human Resource Development Center, part of the Government of India.
- With a Rs. 30 crore allocated budget, the Ayush Diksha initiative would promote cutting-edge services.
- Two auditoriums that can accommodate thirty to forty trainees apiece, forty air-conditioned rooms with associated toilets for apprentice housing, and VIP and VIP suites are also part of the building.
- Included are enough parking spaces, a modular pantry, an eating area, a natural library, and discussion rooms, among other essential amenities.
- All national stakeholders in Ayurveda, in particular, and Ayush in general will receive teaching training from the Institute.
- In addition to attaining self-sufficiency, it will support capacity building with other national organizations, bolster Ayurvedic human resources, facilitate research and development, uphold high standards, and generate income.

8.9 Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)

- In just three months, the Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) Portal registered more over 1.45 crore youth.

Context:
- This has been made possible by the easy-to-use interface, which makes registration quick and easy.

About Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat):-
- Date of establishment: 2023.
- Ministry: Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.
- The principal aim of Mera Yuva Bharat, also known as MY Bharat, is to establish it as a comprehensive platform for youth development across the Government.
- MY Bharat, or Mera Yuva Bharat, is an independent organization.
- It will act as a comprehensive, technologically driven enabling mechanism for youth development and youth-led development.

Advantages:-
- Improved synchronization between community needs and youth aspirations.
- Serve as a central resource for youth and ministries.
- Establish a youth database in one location. (the initiative "responsible artificial intelligence (ai) for youth" was introduced.)
- Establishing a physical habitat to guarantee accessibility.

Significance: –
- It will establish a physical ecosystem, which will assist guarantee accessibility.
- It will support the Department of Youth Affairs' increased youth outreach initiatives.

8.10 MERA GAON MERI DHAROHAR

- Recently, the Mera Gaon, Meri Dharohar (MGMD) Program's Indian government decided to map and document every hamlet.

Context:
- On July 27, 2023, a web site about MGMD was also introduced.

About:-
- Launched July 27, 2023.
- Ministry: The Ministry of Culture.
- The project's primary goal is to create a thorough virtual map of India's 6.5 lakh villages, which are spread over 29 States and 7 Union Territories, based on their respective cultures.

Salient Features:-
- It is a National Mission on Cultural Mapping pan-Indian project.
- Information is gathered under the MGMD in seven major categories, which are shown below: Village of Arts and Crafts
- An environmentally conscious village
- Indian Textual and Scriptural Traditions Connected to a Scholastic Village
- Epic Village associated with oral epics and Puranic traditions, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata
- Architectural Heritage Village connected to Local and National History Historical Village
- Any other feature that should be highlighted, like a village that is known for its shepherding, horticulture, or fishing, etc.
- Cultural organizations can apply for financial aid for the promotion of art and culture through the Ministry of culture
- Culture's Scheme of Financial aid for the Promotion of Art and Culture, which consists of eight components.
- The goal of the MGMD is to gather thorough data about the customs, history, and way of life of Indian villages and to make it accessible to both online and in-person visitors. Vigorous Villages Initiative
- This all-inclusive portal displays vital details about every hamlet, such as its location, demographics, and descriptions of customs, decorations, handicrafts, temples, fairs, festivals, and much more.

Benefits:-
It acts as a one-stop shop for learning about, investigating, touring, and pretty much visiting every community in the nation.

8.11 International Energy Agency (IEA)

- The Renewables 2023 study from the International Energy Agency (IEA) was just issued.

Context:
- It presents a nuanced image of the renewable energy industry, emphasizing both achievements and difficulties.

About the International Energy Agency (IEA):-
- It was founded in 1974 as an intergovernmental organization.
- Head Office: Paris
- There are 31 member nations that make up the IEA.
- The organization's goal is to advance clean, inexpensive, and dependable energy for both its member nations and the global community.
- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) oversees the IEA, which was given its current mandate and organizational structure by the Agreement on an International Energy Program (IEP Agreement).

Eligibility Criteria for membership:

- An eligible nation for the International Energy Agency (IEA) must possess reserves of crude oil and/or products (Strategic Oil Reserves) equal to ninety-days' net imports from the previous year. These reserves must be immediately accessible by the government, even if it does not directly own them, and should be sufficient to counteract disruptions to the world's oil supply.
- In 2017, India joined the IEA as an Associate member.
- In order to improve collaboration on international energy security, stability, and sustainability, India and the IEA signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2021.
- India now has 9.5 days' worth of strategic oil reserves.
- India is a significant economic partner but does not belong to the OECD.
- India received an invitation from IEA to become a full Member and expand their partnership.

8.12 Grammy Awards 2024

- At the 66th Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, Shankar Mahadevan and Zakir Hussain's fusion group Shakti took home a prize for Best Global Music Album for their album "This Moment."
- Formation: Following the breakup of the original Mahavishnu Orchestra, Shakti was established in 1973. Album: Eight new pieces from Shakti's 2020 resurgence were included in their first album in 46 years, "This Moment," which was published in 2023.
- The momentous accomplishment of Ustad Zakir Hussain taking home three Grammy Awards in a single evening is the high point.
- The Grammy Awards, also known as just the Grammys, are an annual ceremony that honors exceptional accomplishments in the music business. The Recording Academy is the host of the awards, which span a number of categories and genres including pop, rock, rap, country, classical, and more. Professionals in the music business cast votes to choose the winners. The Grammy Awards event honors musical innovation and artistic brilliance with live performances by well-known performers.

8.13 Kotravai sculpture from Pallava period unearthed

- In Pilrampattu village, Kallakurichi district, a group of scholars revealed a stunning Kotravai sculpture on February 14, 2024. This astounding find takes us back in time to the Pallava era and provides a priceless window into the ancient spirituality and artistry of our ancestors.

Context:

- In Tamil tradition, Koṯravai, often called Kotravai or Korravai, is the goddess of war and triumph. In addition, she is the fertility, agricultural, and hunting goddess, as well as the mother goddess.She is one of the first goddesses in Tamil Sangam literature to be mentioned.She is seen as a goddess with multiple arms that are each holding a different weapon. The Tamil god Murugan is claimed to have had her as his mother.

About Pallavas:

- From 275 to 897 CE, the Pallava dynasty ruled over a large area of the Deccan, also called Tondaimandalam.
- Following the fall of the Satavahana Empire, with whom they had previously been feudatories, the dynasty gained prominence.

- During the reigns of Mahendravarman I (600–630 CE) and Narasimhavarman I (630–668 CE), the Pallavas rose to prominence in southern India and ruled over the southern Telugu region as well as the northern portions of Tamil region for almost 600 years, till the end of the 9th century.
- The Pallava kingdom's capital was Kancheepuram.
- The Shore Temple in Mamallapuram, which is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the best example of the Pallavas' encouragement of Hindu temple architecture.
- Other examples of Pallava-style temples are the Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram and the Mahendravadi rock-cut temple.
- During the Pallava era, the Chinese traveler Xuanzang visited Kanchipuram and praised their kind governance.

9 MAPPING

9.1 Oman

A combined Republic Day musical performance by India and Oman was recently appreciated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the Embassy Reception at the Indian embassy in Oman.

Background:-
- On X, the prime minister wrote: "Very creative." I am grateful to everyone who contributed to this endeavor.

About Oman:-

- Muscat is the capital.
- Oman is located on the Arabian Peninsula's southeast coast, where the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf meet.
- The seaside areas are far friendlier than the bleak interior.
- Nestled between the sea and the highlands is Oman's verdant northern shore.
- There are three main physiographic zones in northern Oman.
- Al-Bāṭinah, a long, thin coastal plain, runs beside the Gulf of Oman.
- From the Musandam Peninsula to a point close to Cape al-Ḥadd at the easternmost extremity of the Arabian Peninsula, the tall, steep Ḥajar Mountains stretch southeastward parallel to the gulf coast.
- A large portion of the range is above 4,800 feet (1,463 meters) in elevation.
- Mount Shams, often known as "Sun Mountain," is the highest peak in the nation, rising to a height of 9,777 feet (2,980 meters).
- The interior has a hot, dry climate, whereas the coast experiences a hot, humid one.
- The official language is Arabic.
- Oman's population is predominantly urban, while there are also a lot of traditional rural villages.

9.2 Nairobi

- Recently, a large fire in Nairobi, Kenya, claimed three lives and injured 300 more.

Context:
- On social media, government spokesman Isaac Maigua Mwaura stated that the fire started last night in the Embakasi neighborhood southeast of the capital.

About Nairobi:-

- Nairobi is Kenya's capital city.
- It is located in the country's south-central region at an elevation of roughly 5,500 feet (1,680 meters), in the highlands.
- The city is located 480 kilometers (300 miles) northwest of Mombasa, the main Indian Ocean port of Kenya.
- The primary industrial hub of the nation is Nairobi.
- Light manufacturing sectors create processed foods, beverages, and cigarettes.
- Another major aspect is tourism.

About Kenya:-
- Kenya is an East African nation.
- Official Languages: English and Swahili.
- It is well-known for its beautiful scenery and vast animal preserves.
- Historically significant ports along the Indian Ocean coast have allowed products from Asian and Arabian traders to reach the continent for many ages.
- Kenya's northern regions are mostly semidesert and desert, with the country's western provinces, which are characterized by lakes and rivers, being forested.
- The Equator cuts it in half horizontally, and longitude 38° E cuts it in half vertically.
- Kenya's borders are as follows: Tanzania to the south, South Sudan and Ethiopia to the north, Somalia and the Indian Ocean to the east, Lake Victoria and the Horn of Africa to the west.
- The large-scale pressure systems of the western Indian Ocean and nearby landmasses regulate seasonal variations in climate.
- Three linguistic groupings are recognized among Kenya's African population, which makes up nearly the whole population: Bantu, Nilo-Saharan, and Afro-Asiatic.
- The largest is by far Bantu.

9.3 KALADAN MULTI-MODAL TRANSIT TRANSPORT PROJECT (KMMTTP)

One of India's premier connectivity projects, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, has encountered a setback following the recent rebel group takeover of a significant town in Myanmar.

Context:
The goal of the Kaladan project was to address northeast India's geopolitical and geoeconomic issues. India is building the $484 million project as part of the Grant in Aid Program.

About:

- India and Myanmar have mutually designated the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) as an important effort.
- Its main goal is to establish a multimodal method of transportation for the movement of goods from India's eastern ports to Myanmar and from Myanmar to the northeastern region of India.
- The goal of the Kaladan Project is to cut the trip to Sittwe from Kolkata by about 1,328 kilometers (825 miles).
- It offers a different path that avoids the constrained Siliguri corridor, popularly referred to as the "Chicken's Neck."
- It improves communication between the northeastern states of India and the rest of the country.

Route and Components:
- The project builds a sea link between the seaports of Sittwe in Rakhine State, Myanmar, and Kolkata in eastern India.
- The Kaladan river boat route in Myanmar connects the Sittwe seaport to Paletwa in Chin State.
- The project continues by road to the northeast Indian state of Mizoram from Paletwa.
- All project elements have been finished, with the exception of the Zorinpui-Paletwa road, which is still under construction. These elements include the Paletwa jetty, Sittwe port, power, and river dredging.
- Conflicts in the area and the development of hydroelectric plants on the Kaladan River's tributaries have presented difficulties for the project.

9.4 RED SEA

Houthi rebels in Yemen ambushed a ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which is close to the Red Sea.

Context:

Concerns about supply shortages have been raised by the Houthis' targeting of ships in the Red Sea due to Israel's offensive in Gaza. One of the busiest shipping channels in the world is the Red Sea, therefore any disruption to the routes might have a big impact on the entire world.

Concerning RED SEA:

- Situated between Africa and Asia, the Red Sea is an arm of the Indian Ocean.
- Through the Gulf of Aden and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, it is connected to the ocean on the south.
- The Sinai Peninsula, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Gulf of Suez (which leads to the Suez Canal) are located to its north.
- The Suez Canal connects the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.
- With ships traveling between Europe, Asia, and east Africa, the Red Sea is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.
- The Red Sea is the passageway for about 12% of all trade, including 30% of all container traffic worldwide.

9.5 Suez Canal

- According to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Houthi rebels in Yemen have attacked shipping, causing profits from the Suez Canal to have "decreased by 40 to 50 percent" so far this year.

Context:

- One of Egypt's primary sources of foreign exchange, given the country's dire financial situation, is the canal.

About Suez Canal:-

- The Suez Canal is a man-made, sea-level waterway that divides Africa and Asia and spans the Suez Isthmus, linking the Red and Mediterranean Seas.
- The 193.30-kilometer canal serves as a vital commercial corridor connecting Europe and Asia.
- It provides the quickest path between the Atlantic and the regions surrounding the western and Indian Pacific Oceans.
- Being one of the busiest waterways in the world, the canal saves up to 7,000 km of travel time by avoiding the need to circumnavigate the African Cape of Good Hope.
- Economic Lifeline: With 12–15% of world trade passing through it annually, the canal still serves as the backbone of all commerce between the West and the East.

Suez Canal's Long History

- Since the beginning of construction during the reign of Senausret III, Pharaoh of Egypt (1887–1849 BC), the canal has existed in one form or another.
- Around 300 years ago, as maritime trade between Europe and Asia became increasingly important for many economies, construction began to pick up speed.
- The French engineer and statesman Ferdinand de Lesseps persuaded Said Pasha, the viceroy of Egypt, to approve the canal's construction in the middle of the 1800s.
- The Universal Suez Ship Canal Company was given the responsibility of building and running the canal for 99 years beginning in 1858, after which the Egyptian government would receive the rights.
- The British and Turkish attempts to block building of the canal, along with other issues, did not prevent it from opening for international navigation in 1869.

- The majority of the canal company's stock was owned by the British and French. As part of a 1936 pact, the British maintained a defensive force along the Suez Canal Zone, using their position to uphold their maritime and colonial interests.

9.6 Lebanon

- According to the Israeli military, its air force attacked Hezbollah militant objectives "deep inside Lebanon" on Monday.

Background:
- Since the Israel-Hamas conflict started more than four months ago, these strikes are some of the deepest inside Lebanon. A day prior, the Defense Minister of Israel had promised to intensify attacks against Hezbollah regardless of the outcome of any cease-fire with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.


About Lebanon:
- Located in the Levant region of West Asia, Lebanon is officially known as the Republic of Lebanon.
- Its borders are to the east and north by Syria, to the south by Israel, and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea.
- Beirut is the largest and capital city of Lebanon, followed by Tripoli and Jounieh.
- In addition to being a founding member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Lebanon is also a part of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Arab League.
- Lebanon disputes the boundary with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights in a small area known as Shebaa Farms.

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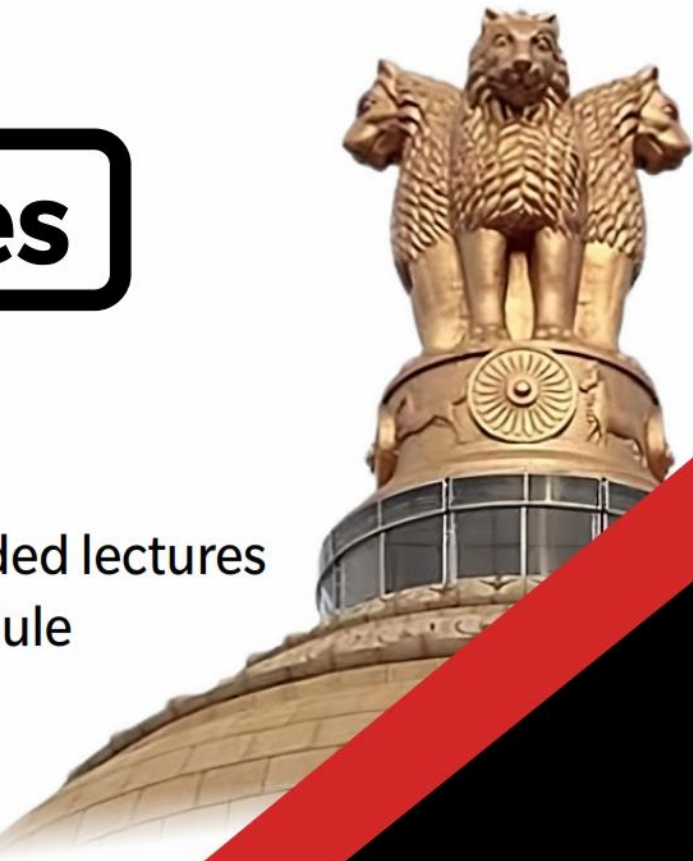
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