FORTUNE
Prelims Precise

MARCH 2023

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FORTUNE IAS
Toppers in Top 100

Rank 6	**Rank 15**	**Rank 21**	**Rank 28**
Meera K 2021	**Sidharth B** 2017	**Dilip K Kainikkara** 2022	**Hamna Mariyam** 2017
Rank 29	**Rank 33**	**Rank 36**	**Rank 45**
Sreelakshmi Ram 2019	**Anand** 2016	**Arya V M** 2023	**Safna Nazarudeen** 2020
Rank 49	**Rank 55**	**Rank 57**	**Rank 58**
Renjina Mary V 2019	**Dr. Arun S Nair** 2020	**Alfred O V** 2022	**Hari Kallikkat** 2018
Rank 62	**Rank 63**	**Rank 66**	**Rank 66**
Aparna M B 2021	**Dheenah Dastageer** 2021	**Akhil V Menon** 2022	**Arjun Mohan** 2019
Rank 81	**Rank 92**	**Rank 99**	**Rank 100**
Malini S 2023	**Devi Nandana** 2020	**Archana P P** 2020	**Kiran P B** 2022

History & Culture

Vaikom Satyagraha

» Kerala and Tamil Nadu Chief Ministers jointly inaugurated the **centenary year celebrations of the Vaikom Satyagraha**.

• Vaikom Satyagraha at the **princely state of Travancore**, lasted for **604 days** from **March 30, 1924 to November 23, 1925** marked the **dawn of the temple entry movement across India**.

Background

• The people of the oppressed classes, especially the **Ezhavas** were prohibited from **walking on the roads** surrounding the **Vaikom Mahadeva Temple**.

• It was started under the leadership of **T.K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan, and K.P. Kesava Menon**. Subsequently it was taken up by the **Congress Untouchability Committee** formed by the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee in January 1924.

The Satyagraha and aftermath

• On every day of protest, **three volunteers from three different communities** were sent to walk on the prohibited roads and were arrested.

• National leaders such as **Periyar, C Rajagopalachari and Mahatma Gandhi** came to Vaikom to offer support and lead protestors.

• Finally, **three of the four roads were thrown open to all castes** and **Satyagraha was withdrawn**.

• In **November 1936**, the historic **Temple Entry Proclamation** was signed by the Maharaja of Travancore.

Kattunayakan Tribe

» The **"Elephant Whisperers"**, which won the **Oscar for the best documentary**, depicts the **conservation legacy of the Kattunayakan tribe** of the Western Ghats.

• Kattunayakan is one of the **75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**, living mainly in the **Nilgiris and surrounding regions**.

• They are also known as **Jenu Kurumbas** and **Thenu Kurumbas** because of their **expertise in honey collection**.

• They are designated **Scheduled Tribes** in **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh**.

• They speak a language which is a **mixture of all Dravidian languages**.

Ancient City of Sisupalgarh

» Land mafias have damaged a portion of the wall of the **2700-year old fortified ancient city of Sisupalgarh, Odisha**.

• Sisupalgarh, believed to have been built around the **7th to 6th century BCE**, served as the **capital of the Kalinga kingdom** and was an **important centre of trade and commerce** during ancient times.

• This is the **only fortified site in India having 8 gateways**. **Shola Khamba**, a constellation of 16 monolithic (now 13) pillars is still visible.

• It was declared a **Centrally Protected Monument in 1948** under the provisions of the **Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904**.

• The urban centre had an **area of 1.2 sq.km** and it was surrounded by a **moat**.

• It has a **unique water management system** and the **fortification** was carried out when **king Kharavela** (**Mahameghavahana or Chedi dynasty**) took up the repair of the city 2100 years ago.

• Sisupalgarh is said to be one of very few **historical references of the present capital city of Bhubaneswar**.

Harichand Thakur

» **Matua Dharma Maha Mela** was recently organised to **celebrate the 212th birth anniversary of Shri Shri Harichand Thakur - the founder of the Matua religious sect**.

• **Matua** is a sect of **Vaishnavite Scheduled castes** in **Bengal**.

• Harichand Thakur was born on **30th March 1812** in **Orakandi in Bangladesh** in a **peasant farmer family**.

• The **Matua Mahasangha**, a **religious anti-caste reform movement** and a sect was formed by him in **East Bengal** in the **mid-1800s**.

• Harichand Thakur devoted his life to the **betterment of the oppressed, downtrodden and deprived people** in undivided Bengal during the **pre-independence era**.

• The Matua Community constitutes the **2nd largest Scheduled Caste population** (3 crore) of **West Bengal.**

Vedic Heritage Portal

• The **Vedic Heritage Portal** of the **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts** (IGNCA) was recently launched.

• IGNCA is an **autonomous institute** under the **Ministry of Culture**.

• The portal **aims to map the Vedic heritage of the country** and to preserve and promote the tradition of **'Vedic chanting'** (part of the **List of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages in India**).

• It gives detailed information about **oral traditions and textual tradition** in the form of **published books/manuscripts**.

Bumchu Festival

» The **Bumchu festival** was recently held in **Sikkim**.

• The festival is celebrated at **Tashiding Monastery, Sikkim** on the **15th day of the first month** of the **Lunar calendar** corresponding to the month of February/March.

• It commemorates a supernatural occurrence that took place in the **18th century** under **Chogyal (King) Chakdor Namgyal**.

• **Bumchu** means **"pot of sacred water" in Tibetan**. The celebration is founded on the idea that the **amount of water in a sacred pot stored on the main altar of the monastery foretells** what will happen to the area in the following year.

• If the **water level** is **higher or lower** then it **signifies ill fortune** such as droughts, diseases and natural calamities.

• The vase is opened during the event, and the water inside is shared among the **worshippers**.

Shyamji Krishna Varma (1857–1930)

» Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi paid homage to Shri Shyamji Krishna Varma on his **Punya Tithi** (Death Anniversary).

• Shyamji Krishna Varma, a **staunch nationalist and Indian revolutionary**, played a key role in the Indian freedom struggle.

• In **1905**, he founded the **Indian Home Rule Society, India House** and **The Indian Sociologist** (monthly publication) in **London**.

• India house, provided a platform for **Indian students** to voice their opposition to British rule

• He became the **first President of Bombay Arya Samaj**, and was an **admirer of Dayanand Saraswati**. He was the **first non-Brahmin to receive the title of Pandit**.

13th Century Hindu Temple

» Recently, a **13th-century Hindu temple** was discovered at **Pushpagiri Kshetram** in the **Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh**.

• The architectural features of the ruins were similar to that of a temple built by the **Kayastha rulers at Vallur**.

• The **Kayasthas (1239 AD - 1297 AD)** were subordinates to the rulers of the **Kakatiya dynasty**.

Pushpagiri Kshetram:

• Pushpagiri is also called as **Hari-Hara Kshetra** and there exist many temples which are dedicated to both **Shiva and Vishnu**.

• It is located on the banks of the **Pennar river**.

• Pushpagiri is often considered as the **second Hampi** because of its **beautiful architecture**.

Navroz

• Navroz is an **Iranian and Persian New year**. The word 'nav' means 'new' and roz means 'day'.

• It is celebrated on **21st March** every year.

• The festival is named after the **Persian king, Jamshed**, who created the **Persian** or the **Shahenshahi calendar**.

• It also marks the **beginning of the spring season** and is celebrated with great fervour by members of the **Parsi community** across the globe.

• It is inscribed in the list of **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of India**.

• In **India** it is known as **Jamshed Navroz**.

Sattriya dance

» Assam's decorated Sattriya mask maker from Majuli, **Hem Chandra Goswami** was awarded **Padma Shri for art and craft in 2023**.

About Sattriya dance

• Sattriya originated in Sattras, as part of the **neo-vaishnavite movement** in the 1**5th century** by **Srimanta Sankardev**.

• Sattriya was given the status of **classical dance** in 2000 by the **Sangeet Natak Akademi**.

• Sattriya dances differ from other dance forms in its **basic stance**. For **males** it is known as **Purush Pak** while for **females**, **Prakriti Pak**. The dance is based on **Vishnu mythological themes**.

• They have special mnemonic bols, typical Assamese music known as **Borgeet**, musical instruments like large **cymbals, drums, colourful costumes** are used.

• Besides having **complicated choreographic patterns**, vocalists use various **talas** for each of the stanzas sung.

• The dance is a combination of other Assamese dances like **Ojapali** and **devadasi**.

• **Nritta, Nirtya and natya** are different forms of Sattriyas dance.

• **Regulated hand gestures** and **footworks** play a significant role in the performance.

Polity & Governance

Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners

» A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that a **high-power committee must elect the Election Commissioners rather than the present set-up**.

• The committee will consist of the **Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India**.

• Presently, the **President makes the appointment of CEC and ECs** on the **advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister** under **Article 324**.

• The **constitution does not lay down** a **specific legislative process** and **qualifications** for the **appointment**.

• ECs hold office for a term of **six years** or until they attain the **age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.

• The **official status, salary and perks of CEC** is equivalent to that of the **Supreme Court Judge**.

• The **Chief Election Commissioner** is provided with the **security of tenure** and can be **removed only on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court**.

Swachh Sujal Shakti Samman 2023

» Recently, the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** organised an event named **'Swachh Sujal Shakti Samman 2023'**.

• Swachh Sujal Shakti Samman 2023 event was organised by the **Union Ministry of Jal Shakti** to honour the **women champions of the rural water and sanitation sector**.

• The major objective is to **felicitate women** who have done exemplary work at the grassroots level in the implementation of **Swachh Bharat Mission – Grameen (SBM-G), Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Jal Shakti Abhiyan**.

• **36 women WASH** (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Champions were conferred with the 'Swachh Sujal Shakti Samman 2023'.

Right to Repair

» The Union Government has scaled up its **Right to Repair initiative** to cover four sectors.

• The sectors identified for the right to repair include: **farming equipment, mobile phones/ tablets, consumer durables and automobile equipment**.

• Right to repair refers to **government legislation** that is intended to **allow consumers** the **ability to repair and modify their own consumer electronic devices**, where otherwise the manufacturer of such devices require the consumer to use only their offered services.

• The idea originally originated from the USA, where the **Motor Vehicle Owners' Right to Repair Act 2012** required the manufacturers to provide the necessary documents and information to allow anyone to repair their vehicles.

• The right to repair has been recognized in many countries including the **USA and UK**.

Punchhi Commission Report

» The **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has decided to start the process of seeking the states' comments on Punchhi commission's **centre-state relations report**.

• The **Commission on Centre-State Relations** under the chairmanship of **Justice Madan Mohan Punchhi**, former Chief Justice of India was constituted in 2007 to look into the **new issues of Centre-State relations**.

Key recommendations of the commission:

• The creation of a superseding structure known as the **'National Integration Council'** for matters relating to internal security.

• **Consulting the states** through the inter-state council before introducing bills on **matters falling under the concurrent list**.

• **Appointment and removal of Governors:** State's Chief Minister should be consulted while appointing the Governor and a provision should be there for the Governor's impeachment by the State Legislature.

Swachhotsav 2023

» 'Swachhotsav - 2023' was organised by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** as a part of India's celebration of the **International Day of Zero Waste 2023** on **30th March**.

• Swachhotsav is a **government initiative to promote cleanliness and hygiene** in India launched in **2019**.

• The initiative involves school **children, youth, and technology** to make the cleanliness drive more efficient.

• Its goal is to make **1000 cities 3-Star Garbage Free** by **October 2024** and create a cleaner and healthier India.

New India Literacy Programme (NILP)

» Government has launched **New India LIteracy Programme (NILP)** for implementation during five years from **2022-23 to 2026-27**.

• NILP is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** that aims to cover a target of **5 crore non-literates**. All the **non-literate above 15 years of age** can avail the benefits of the scheme.

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Vocational Skills Development

Basic Education

The scheme has **5 components**

Critical Life Skills

Continuing Education
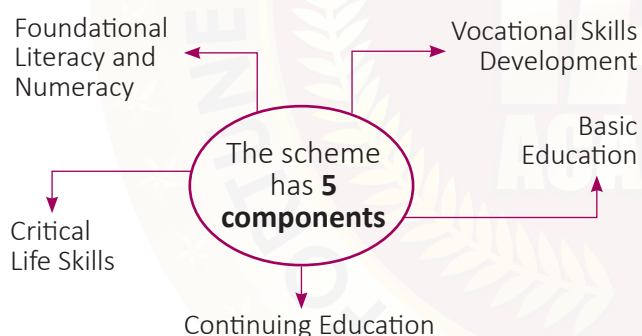
• The beneficiaries under the scheme are identified through **door to door surveys on mobile apps** by the surveyors in the States/UTs.

• The scheme will be implemented predominantly through online mode using **volunteerism**. The **teaching and learning materials are available** on the **DIKSHA platform of NCERT**.

Sealed-Cover Jurisprudence

» The **Supreme Court declined a sealed cover note** submitted by the Centre in the case of disbursal of arrears to retired defence personnel under the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme.

• Sealed Cover Jurisprudence is a **practice followed by the Supreme Court** and sometimes **lower courts** to **seek and accept information from government agencies** in **sealed envelopes** that can **only be examined by judges**.

• The purpose of sealed cover jurisprudence is **to balance the need for transparency in court proceedings** with the need to protect sensitive information from public disclosure.

• There is **no specific law that defines the doctrine of sealed cover**. The Supreme Court derives its power to use it from **Rule 7 of order XIII of the Supreme Court Rules** and **Section 123 of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872**.

The court accepts information in a sealed cover in two cases-

1. When the information is related to an **ongoing investigation** which could be impeded by disclosure.

2. When the information is **personal or confidential in nature** and could affect an **individual's privacy**.

Affinity Test

» The Supreme Court in a judgement held that an affinity test cannot be the litmus test to decide a **caste claim**.

• The Affinity Test is used to relate a **person to a tribe**. It is used to ascertain if the person follows the traditional cultural traits of the community.

• An affinity test mandates the study and preparation of a report by authorities on caste/tribe claims based on the peculiar **anthropological and ethnological traits, deities, rituals, customs, mode of marriage, death ceremonies, methods of burial of dead bodies**, etc, of the particular caste or tribe.

News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA)

» The **News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA)** has instructed some news channels to remove their online platforms videos programmes after it found them to be in violation of the **Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards and Specific Guidelines**.

• The News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) is an **independent body** set up by the **News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA)**.

• It is a **self-regulatory agency** which serves as a **representative of private television news and digital broadcasters**.

• **Composition:** A chairperson who is to be an **eminent jurist** and **members nominated by the Board of Directors**.

• It aims to **protect media agencies** from **carrying out unfair and/or unethical practices or discredit television news broadcasters**.

Electoral Bonds

» Electoral bonds is a **financial instrument** which can be bought by **companies and individuals** whose identities are kept anonymous and donated to a political party, which can then encash these bonds.

• Introduced by the Government of India in 2018 and these bonds are sold in multiples of Rs. **1000, Rs.10000, Rs.1 lakh, Rs.10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore**.

• **State Bank of India (SBI)** is the only bank authorised to issue and encash electoral bonds.

Only registered political parties that meet certain criteria are eligible to receive electoral bonds:

1. The political party must be registered under **Section 29A of the Representation of People Act 1951**.

2. The party must have secured **at least 1% of the votes polled** in the most recent Lok Sabha or State Assembly election.

• The electoral bonds are **valid for 15 calendar days** from the date of issue.

Creation of New Districts

» The Chief Minister of Rajasthan announced the creation of 19 new districts and 3 new divisions ahead of assembly elections.

• The **State governments are entrusted** with the power to **create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts**.

This can be done through 2 ways:

→ An **executive order.**

→ By **passing a law in the State Assembly**.

• Majority of states prefer the **executive route** and **issuing a notification in the official gazette**.

• The **Central government** has **no role** to **create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts**.

• However, the **central government does play a role** when the state wants to **change the name of a district or railway station**.

• The **state government** will have to **send requests to several central government departments** like the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Railway Ministry, the Ministry of Earth Sciences, the Intelligence Bureau, the Department of Posts and the Geographical Survey Of India, **seeking clearance**.

Right against Self Incrimination

» SC had rejected Delhi Deputy Chief Minister's arguments that he had **right against self incrimination**.

• **Article 20(3)** in **Part III** (Fundamental Rights) of the Indian Constitution says, **"No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself"**.

• The right to be presumed **innocent until proven guilty**, and **the right to remain silent in an interrogation** essentially flow from this constitutionally guaranteed right against self-incrimination.

• This right also ensures that **police cannot coerce** anyone to confess to a crime, and obtain a conviction based on that confession.

• Right against self incrimination originated in the **Roman law** and has evolved as a distinct right in the **English Jurisprudence**.

Unique Land Parcel Identification Scheme (ULPIN)

» **'Bhumi Samvaad – IV: National Conference on Digitizing and Geo-referencing India** with **Bhu-Aadhaar (ULPIN)'** was held.

- Bhu-Aadhaar or ULPIN is a "**14-digit alpha-numeric number** generated based on the **latitude and longitude coordinates based on surveys"**.

- ULPIN/ BHU Aadhar has been **launched in all 26 states and UTs**. India aims to **digitise 100% land records by 2024**.

- It is being implemented by the **Department of Land Resources** (**Ministry of Rural Development**) and will be the **world's largest database on land ownership**.

- ULPIN is part of the **Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP)**, a **100% centrally funded scheme**. It was earlier known as the **National Land Record Modernisation Programme** and was approved by the cabinet in 2008. It was later revamped as DILRMP and implemented as a **central sector scheme in 2016**.

Guilt By Association doctrine

» The Supreme Court **restored the doctrine** of **"guilt by association"** in criminal jurisprudence in India.

- Guilt by association, also known as the **association fallacy**, is a **guilt ascribed to someone not because of any evidence, but because of their association with an offender**.

- Under this doctrine, **people** can be **held accountable for the actions of their connections**, even if they themselves had not broken the law.

- SC declared that **mere membership of a banned organisation** will be a crime under the country's anti-terror law - **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967**.

- Under **Section 10(a)(i)**, of UAPA, continued membership of a banned organisation is a crime punishable with a **jail term up to two years**.

Bar Council of India (BCI)

» Recently, the Bar Council of India has notified **Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India, 2022**.

> The rules state that **foreign lawyers and law firms** shall be allowed to **practice corporate work (Non-Litigious Practice)** such as joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, Intellectual Property matters etc.

- It is a **statutory body** established under the **Advocates Act of 1961**.

- BCI **regulates and prescribes** standards for **professional conduct and etiquette** and **exercises disciplinary jurisdiction** over the bar.

- Each Bar Council shall have a **Chairman and Vice-Chairman** elected by the Council in the manner prescribed by law.

- The **Attorney General of India and the Solicitor General** of India who are ex officio members.

- It conducts the **All India Bar Examination (AIBE)** to grant a **'Certificate of Practice'** to advocates for practising law in India.

Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC), 2021

» **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY)** launched the **Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC)** that will look into social media users' concerns regarding content and other issues.

- It is established under **Information Technology** (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) **Rules, 2021 ("IT Rules 2021")**.

- Users will have the option to **appeal against decision of the grievance officer of the social media intermediaries** and other online intermediaries.

- The **3 member Committee** will endeavour to address the user's appeal within a stipulated **period of 30 days**.

- It is a **virtual digital platform** that will operate **only online**.

Bail

» Recently, the **Karnataka Lokayukta** filed a petition challenging a Karnataka High Court order granting pre-arrest bail to a MLA.

• **Bail** is the **temporary release of an accused** person from police custody with the promise that they will appear at trial.

Types of bail in India

Regular bail

It is generally granted to a person who has been arrested or is in police custody. A bail application can be filed for the regular bail under the **Code of Criminal Procedure, (CrPC) 1973.**

Interim bail

This type of bail is granted for a **short period of time** and it is granted before the hearing for the grant of regular bail or anticipatory bail.

Anticipatory bail

It is granted under **section 438** of CrPC either by **session court or a High Court**. An application for the bail can be filed by the person who thinks that he/she may be arrested by the police for a **non- bailable offence**.

• The court can cancel the bail granted by it, but the court does **not have the power** to cancel the **bail granted by the police officer**.

Economy

Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)

» The Cabinet cleared a plan for setting up 2 lakh **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)**, dairy, and fisheries cooperatives in the country in the next five years.

• PACS are **village level cooperative credit societies** that serve as the **last link in a three-tier cooperative credit structure** headed by the **State Cooperative Banks (SCB)** at the State level.

• Credits from the SCBs are transferred to the **District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs)** at the district level and the **DCCBs work with PACS** which deal **directly with farmers**.

• **Individual farmers are members of the PACS**, and the office-bearers are elected from within them.

• PACS are involved in **short term lending** or what is known as **crop loan**.

• A report published by the RBI put the number of PACS at **1.02 lakh**.

PM MITRA Parks

» The **Ministry of Textiles** announced the sites for setting up 7 **Pradhan Mantri Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA)** Parks for the textile industry.

• PM MITRA park will help in creating **world class industrial infrastructure for textiles**.

• A **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** owned by the **Central and State government** will be set up for each park in **Public Private Partnership (PPP)** mode.

• PM MITRA Parks is envisaged to help India in achieving the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 9** ("Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation").

• The **PM MITRA scheme** was announced in Union Budget for 2021-22.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U)

» The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs** has raised concerns that some people could not avail of the benefits of the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U)**.

• The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) is a **flagship mission of Government of India** launched in **2015** and being implemented by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)**.

• The scheme **covers the entire urban area of the country**, i.e., all statutory towns **as per Census 2011** and towns notified subsequently, including Notified Planning/ Development Areas.

• The mission addresses **urban housing shortage** among the Economic Weaker Section (EWS)/ Low Income Group (LIG) and Middle Income Group (MIG) categories including slum dwellers by ensuring a pucca house to **all eligible urban households**.

• To achieve the target of **Housing for All**, the scheme has been extended until **December 2024**.

Green Tug Transition Programme (GTTP)

» India launched **Green Tug Transition Programme (GTTP)** aiming to become a **global hub for green ship building by 2030**.

• It was announced by the Union **Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways**.

• The GTTP will start with **Green Hybrid Tugs** (a small and powerful boat for towing large boats and ships) powered by **green hybrid propulsion systems** and subsequently adopting **non-fossil fuel solutions** like methanol, ammonia and hydrogen.

• The target is to have the initial Green Tugs working in all major ports by 2025, and **50% of all tugs converted into green tugs by 2030**.

Letter of Comfort

» The **Finance Ministry** recently asked **central public sector undertakings** to issue letters of comfort (LoCs) based on their own financial strength.

• A letter of comfort is a **financial document** which indicates a willingness of a third party to meet its financial obligations of the borrowing party.

• They are usually issued by a **third party** or a stakeholder in the transaction.

• For instance, a holding company can give an LoC on behalf of its subsidiary, or a government can issue a letter of comfort for PSUs.

• It is considered a **quasi bank guarantee instrument**.

• It is **not legally binding** and does not imply that the parent company guarantees repayment of the loan being sought by the subsidiary company.

• It is just an **assurance to the lender** that the holding company is aware of the transaction, the policies of the subsidiary and its intentions in seeking a loan. This provides some comfort to the financial institution to lend money.

• It can also be issued by **banks, NBFCs, and auditors**.

• **Note:** **A letter of guarantee on the other hand is legally binding document**.

Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act, 2018

» India called upon **G20 Nations** to adopt a **multilateral action plan** for faster extradition of **Fugitive Economic Offenders** (FEO) and **recovery of assets** both on the domestic front and abroad.

• GOI enacted **FEO Act 2018**, to crackdown on high-value economic frauds.

It defines offenders as who

◊ **Has left India** to avoid **criminal prosecution**.

◊ **Being abroad** refuses to return to india in order to avoid criminal prosecution

◊ **An arrest warrant** has been issued against him for **any specified offenses** where the value involved is over **100 crores**.

Comprehensive Rubber Information System Platform (CRISP)

» The **Rubber Board** has launched a **mobile app "CRISP"** to inform growers about **rubber cultivation and provides solutions online**.

• **Rubber Board** is a **statutory body** constituted under the **Rubber Act, 1947** under the aegis of **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** for the overall development of the rubber industry in the country.

• **Comprehensive Rubber Information System Platform (CRISP)** has been developed by the **Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII)** in collaboration with the **Digital University of Kerala**.

• **The app will provide** the farmers with **recommendations of RRII** on **production** and **productivity** enhancement, reduction of **cultivation cost**, maintenance of **soil fertility**, **disease control** measures, etc.

• Many of these **recommendations are location specific** and can be linked to **geo-information systems** and delivered directly to the farmers.

SWAMIH Investment Fund

» The **Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH)** Investment Fund has completed 20,557 homes since its inception in 2019.

• The Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Investment Fund is specifically formed for **completing stressed and stalled (brownfield) residential projects**.

• It is sponsored by the **Ministry of Finance** and managed by **SBICAP Ventures Ltd.**, a **State Bank Group company**.

• The fund has been set up as a **Category-II Alternative Investment Fund** registered with **SEBI**.

• **Funding is provided to the projects** that are stalled for lack of adequate funds, projects under Affordable and Middle Income Housing, Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) registered projects, etc.

Infrastructure Finance Company (IFC)

» The RBI has granted an **Infrastructure Finance Company (IFC)** status to **Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA)**.

• IREDA is a **Mini Ratna NBFC (Non-Banking Financial Company)** under the administrative control of the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy**. It primarily engages in extending **financial assistance** for **setting up new and renewable energy (NRE) projects**.

• With the IFC status, IREDA will now be able to take **higher exposure**, meaning more lending, of a **minimum of 75% of its total assets in NRE financing. Earlier it was classified as an Investment Credit Company (ICC) with a 60% limit**.

VAIBHAV Fellowship Scheme

» On the occasion of the **National Science Day (Feb 28)**, the **Ministry of Science and Technology** launched the **VAIBHAV Fellowship Scheme** for the **Indian diaspora abroad**.

• The fellowship offers **Non Resident Indian (NRI) researchers an opportunity to work for a minimum of one month to a maximum of two months a year** with a **research institution or an academic institution in India**.

• The duration of the fellowship is **3 years** with the government offering the researchers an amount of up to **37 lakh for the entire period**.

• Researchers from institutions featuring in the **top 500 QS World University Rankings** will be eligible for the fellowship.

Start-ups, Women, and Youth Advantage Through e-Transactions (SWAYATT)

» The **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** recently commemorated the success of **"Start-ups, Women, and Youth Advantage Through e-Transactions"** (SWAYATT).

• Start-ups, Women, and Youth Advantage Through e-Transactions" (SWAYATT) on Government e-Marketplace was launched in **2019** by the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

- It aims to create an open and socially intrusive marketplace specifically for **Women Entrepreneurs, Self-Help Groups [SHGs], Youths and Startups**.

- **Government e-Marketplace(GeM)** is an **online market platform** set up in **2016**, to facilitate **procurement of goods and services** by the government ministries, departments, public sector undertakings (PSU) etc.

MSME Competitive (LEAN) Scheme

» The **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises** recently launched the MSME Competitive (LEAN) scheme.

- It aims to provide India's MSMEs a road map to **global competitiveness** and to reduce wastage, increase quality, productivity, and performance.

- **National Productivity Council (NPC)** is the nodal agency of this scheme.

- Under the scheme MSMEs will implement **LEAN manufacturing tools like 5S, Kaizen, KANBAN, Poka Yoka** etc.

- The government will contribute **90% of the implementation cost** for hand holding and consultancy fees.

- There will be an **additional contribution of 5%** for the MSMEs which are part of **SFURTI clusters, owned by Women/SC/ST and located in the Northeast region**.

Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D–SIBs)

» The **Financial Stability Board (FSB)**, in consultation with the **Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS)** and national authorities, has identified **Global Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs)** since 2011.

- The **Reserve Bank of India** (RBI) identified **Indian banks that are important to the country's financial system** and designated them as **D-SIBs,** that its failure could cause **significant disruption**.

- These banks are often considered as banks that are **'Too Big To Fail (TBTF)'** because of their **size, activities, complexity** etc.

- RBI has classified **SBI, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank** as D-SIBs in India.

Advance Authorization Scheme (AAS)

» Recently, the **Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** further simplified the process of **Composition Fee** for **Export Obligation Extension** under the **Advance Authorization Scheme**.

- AAS scheme **exempts the payment of import duties** by Indian exporters on raw materials/ inputs required for manufacturing products for export. It is to boost Indian exports.

- The scheme is implemented by DGFT, under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, and has a validity of **12 months from the date of authorization (called Advance Authorisation)**.

- If the exporter is unable to timely export the product and wants to extend the authorisation time line, they can avail of **Export Obligation Extension** provision under AAS.

- Exporters will have to pay a **Composition Fee** as penalty. Simplification in calculation of fee is bound to aid computerisation of the process as well as Ease of doing business.

Green Shoe Option

» The Finance Ministry recently decided to exercise the **green shoe option** on the offer-for-sale of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL).

Offer for Sale is a simpler method wherein promoters in **public companies** can sell their shares and reduce their holdings in a transparent manner through the bidding platform

- A greenshoe option is an **over-allotment option**.

- In an initial public offering (IPO), Green Shoe Option is a provision in an underwriting agreement that grants the underwriter the **right to sell investors more shares than initially planned** by the issuer.

- It is generally done when the **demand for the share is higher than expected**.

Operation Trishul

- » Under Operation Trishul, the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** has **extradited 33 people** hiding in other countries, involved in various criminal activities.

- Operation Trishul involves the **Central Bureau of Investigation**, India's nodal agency **coordinating with the Interpol** to **bring back fugitives** hiding abroad.

- It also aims at **dismantling support networks and generating criminal intelligence** on shell companies, fraudulent transactions and money mules

- The operation involves using the **Interpol's Star Global Focal Point Network**, and using the Interpol's channels to identify dispersal of proceeds of crime by financial criminals.

Bank Run

- » The US witnessed the **second largest bank failure** and the **biggest since the 2008 crisis** as Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) collapsed. SVB was specialised in the tech start-up industry.

- The US Federal Reserve's recent decision to raise interest rates indirectly led to the shut down. The inflation had **impacted start-ups in Silicon Valley** which led to a **bank run**.

- A bank run refers to a situation where a **large number of depositors simultaneously withdraw their funds from a bank** based on fears that the institution will become insolvent.

- With more people withdrawing money, banks will use up their cash reserves and **ultimately end up defaulting**.

Securities Transaction Tax (STT)

- » The government recently hiked the **securities transaction tax (STT)** by **23.52%** on the sale of options and 25% on the sale of futures contracts.

- It is a **direct tax** charged **on the purchase and sale of securities** listed on the recognized **stock exchanges in India**.

- This tax was introduced in **2004** and is levied and collected by the **central government of India**.

- It is governed by the **Securities Transaction Tax Act (STT Act)**.

- Securities such as **shares, debentures, bonds, mutual funds, government equity securities**, and derivatives are all included.

Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU–IND)

- » Recently the **Finance Ministry** notified that **Indian crypto exchanges** will have to report suspicious activity to the FIU-IND.

- It is an **independent body** established by the **Government of India in 2004**.

- It serves as a **specialised agency** focused on **combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and other financial crimes**.

- Its primary objective is to **coordinate national and international efforts** in pursuing global initiatives against money laundering and terrorism financing.

- FIU-IND operates under the oversight and direction of the **Economic Intelligence Council** (**EIC**), headed by the **Finance Minister of India**.

Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) platform

- » TReDS is a **digital platform** that facilitates the financing of trade receivables of **micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** from corporate buyers through multiple financiers.

- Trade receivables are defined as the **amount owed to a business by its customers following the sale of goods or services on credit**.

- **Only MSMEs can participate as sellers** in TReDS and **corporates, government departments, PSUs**, and any other entity can participate as buyers in TReDS.

- Banks, NBFC - Factors, and other financial institutions, **as permitted by the RBI**, can participate as financiers in TReDS.

- TReDS is a payment system authorised under the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 (PSS Act)** and is **regulated by RBI**.

Har Payment Digital Mission

» The RBI has launched the **Har Payment Digital Mission** during the **Digital Payments Awareness Week (DPAW) 2023** (March 6 to 12).

• The mission is the part of **RBI's endeavour to make every person in India a user of digital payments**.

• It will run till the period of **Vision 2025 of RBI** which has its theme **"E payments for Everyone, Everywhere and Everytime (4Es)"**.

• The **75 Digital Village programme** was also launched during DPAW, under which **Payment System Operators (PSOs)** will **adopt 75 villages** across the country and **convert them into digital payment enabled villages**.

Environment, Social and Governance (ESG)

» The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** has introduced a regulatory framework for **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** disclosures by top listed companies.

• Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) refer to a **set standard for a company's behaviour** used by companies to follow **governance, ethical practices, environment-friendly measures**, and **social responsibility**.

• **"E"** in ESG refers to **environmental criteria** that considers how a company performs as a **steward of nature**.

• **"S"** in ESG refers to **social criteria** that examines how a company has managed its **relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities** where it operates.

• **"G"** in ESG refers to the **governance factors** of decision-making, from sovereign policymaking to the distribution of rights and responsibilities among different participants in corporations, including the **board of directors, managers, shareholders**, and **stakeholders**.

• **CSR** is a **sustainability framework** employed by organisations, while **ESG** measures the **organisation's level of sustainability** – increasingly demanded by investors and other stakeholders.

• SEBI has made ESG disclosures mandatory for the top 1,000 listed companies under its **Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR)** initiative.

Surety Bonds

» Recently, **New India Assurance** (largest public sector general insurance company of India) announced the launch of the surety bond business.

• A surety bond is a **promise to be liable** for **debt, default or failure**. It ensures **efficient** use of **working capital and reduces collateral requirements**.

• It's a **three party contract** by which **one party (surety)** guarantees the performance or obligations of a **second party (principal)** to a **third party (obligee)**.

• **Surety** can be **insurance/banks**, principal any contractor and obligee a government.

• A surety bond is **not a bank guarantee and is not an insurance policy**.

Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)

» Indians have invested all their surplus LRS funds in various securities overseas in the past few months to meet the RBI deadline.

• In August 2022, RBI had directed that any money remitted by Indian residents that remains unutilised for **more than 180 days** to be **repatriated back** to India

• LRS was introduced in **2004**, an individual can send a maximum of **250,000 dollars** annually under the scheme abroad. It can be used for **investment or expenditure, like medical expenses or study abroad**.

• It is **not available** for **corporations, partnership firms, HUF, trusts**, etc.

No to Idling Abroad

Indian residents can send up to $250,000 overseas in a year through LRS

The RBI circular comes amid the soaring outflows to tap investment opportunities

$20 billion: LRS remittances in FY22, as against $13 billion in FY21

$6 billion: Funds sent overseas during October-December 2022

Some HNIs have accumulated money overseas even without bona fide expenses

While some individuals may have escaped repatriation by investing overseas, this could expose them to newer risks, experts said

Hall Mark Unique Identification Number (HUID)

» The **Bureau of Indian Standards** (BIS) has **prohibited** the sale of hallmarked gold jewellery or gold artefacts without HUID after 31st March 2023.

• Hallmarking of gold is done as per Indian standards in **IS 1417:2016** with 3 symbols:

• BIS logo as first symbol.

• Purity and fineness of gold as second symbol.

• HUID as third symbol, a unique 6 digit alphanumeric code given to every piece of jewellery to enhance traceability.

• BIS comes under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs**.

• It can be verified in the **BIS care app**. It provides **third party assurance on purity and fineness** of gold jewellery.

Chinese Wall Policy

» **SEBI** has amended rules governing the stock exchanges and clearing corporations to follow a **"Chinese wall policy"** to separate the functions under a virtual barrier.

• The Chinese wall policy is a **virtual information barrier** between those who have **non-public information** and those who don't, to **prevent/ avoid conflicts of interest**.

• It is primarily intended to **prevent misuse of inside information** in securities trading by limiting availability of material, non-public information to departments of firms that might misuse such information **for possible monetary benefits**.

DigiClaim

» The Union Agriculture Minister launched National Crop Insurance Portal's digitized claim settlement module called **DigiClaim**.

• It is under the ambit of **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**.

• It would enable the farmers to track the PMFBY claim settlement process on a **real-time basis** on their mobile phones and receive their claims in a time bound automated manner.

• It is expected to bring the **claim reversal ratio down**.

• **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** is a voluntary scheme to providing affordable **crop insurance** for risk cover for crops of farmers against all non-preventable natural risks from **pre-sowing to post-harvest stage**, on an '**Area Approach Basis'**.
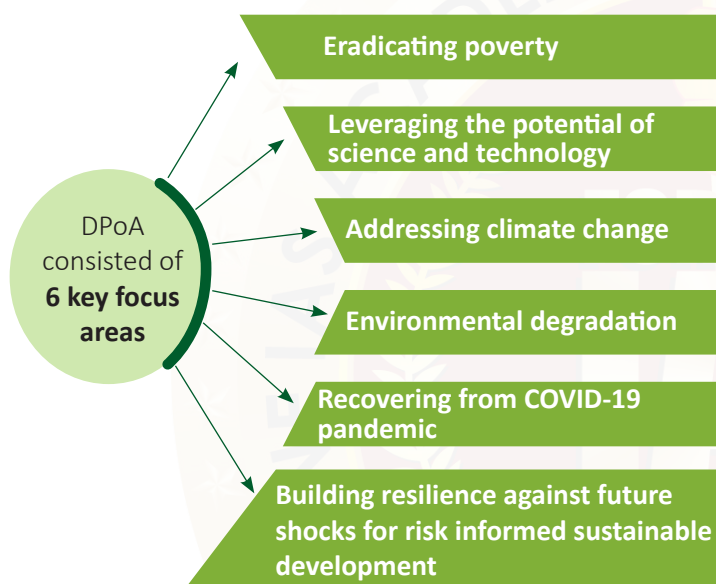
International Relations

Doha Political Declaration

» The **5th United Nations Conference** on the **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)** concluded with adoption of the **'Doha Political Declaration'** by the world leaders.

• The Doha Political Declaration, adopted on **9th March**, reinforces the **international community's commitment** to the **Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)**.

• DPoA is a **10 year plan (2022-2031)** to put the world's **46 Least Developed Countries (LDCs)** back on track to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
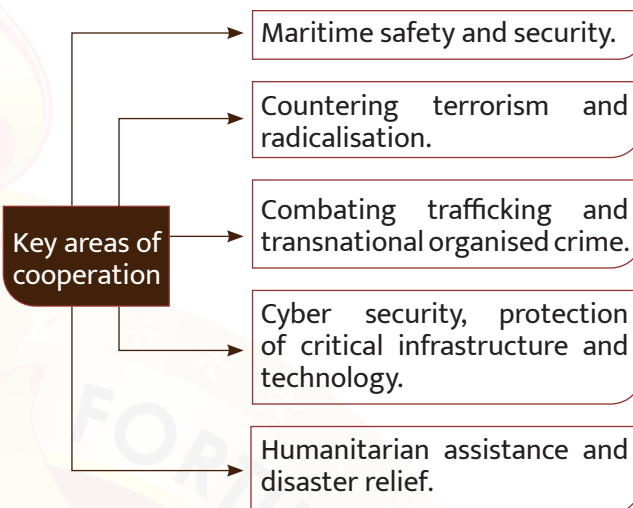
DPoA consisted of 6 key focus areas

- Eradicating poverty
- Leveraging the potential of science and technology
- Addressing climate change
- Environmental degradation
- Recovering from COVID-19 pandemic
- Building resilience against future shocks for risk informed sustainable development

India is **not a member** of **United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries**.

Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)

» The **Indian Coast Guard** organised a tabletop exercise under the aegis of the **Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)** in Kolkata.

• CSC was formed in **2011** as a **trilateral maritime security grouping** of **India, Sri Lanka and Maldives**.

• Later, **Mauritius** joined as the **4th member** and **Bangladesh** and **Seychelles** hold **observer status**.

• The conclave underlines **regional cooperation** and **shared security objectives** concerning **all littoral nations** in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.

Key areas of cooperation

- Maritime safety and security.
- Countering terrorism and radicalisation.
- Combating trafficking and transnational organised crime.
- Cyber security, protection of critical infrastructure and technology.
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Black Sea Grain Initiative

» Russia agreed to extend the **Black Sea Grain Initiative** following talks with the UN for an additional 60 days.

• The Black Sea Grain Initiative, **brokered by** the **UN and Turkey in July 2022** aimed to **alleviate a global food crisis** by allowing **Ukrainian grain-laded ships blocked by Russia-Ukraine war to export grain safely**.

• **Ukraine** is among the **largest exporters of wheat, maize, rapeseed, sunflower seeds and sunflower oil globally**.

• A **Joint Coordination Centre (JCC)** was established to **monitor the implementation of the initiative that includes Russia, Ukraine, UN and Turkey**.

• Later in **July 2023**, **Russia suspended its participation** in the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

» The Prime Minister inaugurated the new **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** Area office and **Innovation Centre** in New Delhi.

• The Prime Minister also unveiled the **Bharat 6G Vision Document** and launched the **'Call before u dig'** mobile app.

• The ITU is the **United Nations specialised agency** for **information and communication technologies**.

• It was established in **1865** as **International Telegraph Union** and became a **specialised agency of the UN** in **1947**.

• ITU has a membership of **193 countries including India**.

• As per the **Bharat 6G Vision Document**, India is gearing up to roll out **high speed 6G communication services by 2030** and has set up a **Bharat 6G project** to **identify and fund research** and **deployment of the next generation technology**.

• **India's 6G project** will be implemented in **two phases** and the government has also appointed an apex council to oversee the project.

• The **Call Before u Dig (CBuD) App,** an initiative of the **Department of Telecommunication** aims to **prevent damage to underlying assets like optical fibre cables** that occur because of **uncoordinated digging and excavation**.

United Nations 2023 Water Conference

» The conference took place in **March 2023** at the United Nations headquarters in **New York**.

• The United Nations 2023 Water Conference was co-hosted by the **Government of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands**.

• This was the **2nd UN conference dedicated to water**, after the **1977 conference** in **Mar del Plata, Argentina**.

• The summit emphasised on **urgently tackling the water crisis** and getting the world back on track on **Sustainable Development Goal 6** - Clean Water and Sanitation.

• Also, a mid-term review of the **UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation** (2018-2028) was held at the conference.

International Monetary Fund

» The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has approved a nearly $3 billion bailout program for Sri Lanka over four years.

• The formation of the IMF, a **specialised agency of the UN**, was initiated during the **Bretton Woods Conference in 1944** after the **Great Depression of the 1930s**.

• Currently with **190 member countries**, the organisational structure is headed by a **Board of Governors**.

• The IMF provides **financial assistance instruments** including **emergency loans** to **member countries**.

Major ones include:

1. **The Extended Fund Facility (EFF)** provides financial assistance to **all member countries** facing **serious medium-term balance of payments** problems because of structural weaknesses that require time to address with a longer repayment period (**3-4 years**).

2. The **Extended Credit Facility (ECF)** provides **medium-term financial assistance** to **low-income countries (LICs)** with protracted balance of payments problems with a **maximum duration of 5 years**.

3. The **Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI)** provides **one-time financial assistance** to **any IMF member country facing** an **urgent balance of payments need**.

4. The **Rapid Credit Facility (RCF)** provides **one-time concessional financial assistance** to **low-income countries (LICs)** facing an urgent balance of payments need.

5. The **Flexible Credit Line (FCL)** is a renewable credit line designed to meet the demand for **crisis-prevention and crisis-mitigation** for **countries with very strong policy frameworks** and track records in economic performance.

6. The **Precautionary and Liquidity Line (PLL)** is designed to meet the liquidity needs of member countries with sound economic fundamentals but with some remaining vulnerabilities that **prevent them from using the Flexible Credit Line (FCL)**.

7. The **Short Term Liquidity Line** provides support (**12 months**) to countries **facing potential, moderate, short- term balance of payment** needs related to capital account pressures that could arise from external developments. **It aims to minimise the risk of shocks evolving into deeper crises and spilling over to other countries**.

8. The **Stand-by Arrangement (SBA)** provides **short-term** (**not more than 36 months**) **financial assistance to countries** (advanced & emerging market economies) facing balance of payments problems.

9. The **Stand-by Credit Facility (SCF)** provides financial assistance to **low-income countries (LICs)** with **short-term** (**12 to 36**) balance of payments needs.

10. The **Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF)** provides **affordable long-term financing** to countries undertaking reforms to reduce risks of balance of payments instability, including those related to **climate change and pandemic preparedness**.

Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals treaty

» Egypt's cabinet passes the **Vienna Convention on Road Signals and Signals treaty (1968)**.

• The convention signed in 1968 - **came into force in 1978**.

• The primary aim is to **increase road safety** and **aid international road traffic , standardising the signalling system** for road traffic (road signs, traffic lights and road marking) in use internationally.

• It has **35 signatories** (USA, China and Japan among others are not signatory).

• **India** is **not a signatory** to the convention but in 1980 deposited an instrument of accession.

Convention on Road Signs

Signatories and ratifications as of April 2023
- Signed
- Ratified
- Accession / succession
- Uses the SADC Convention
- Uses the SICA Convention

Summit for Democracy

» US President Biden co-hosted the **second Summit for Democracy** with the governments of **Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Korea, and Zambia**.

• Summit for Democracy was **first hosted by** the **US President Biden in 2021**.

• It aims to **show how open, rights-respecting societies** can work together to effectively **tackle the challenges of our time** such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and inequality.

• The Summit is centred around **three principal themes**: Defending against authoritarianism, Addressing and fighting corruption and Advancing respect for human rights.

• **India was a participant** of both the Summits held in **2022 and 2023**.

The Five Eyes

» **China** recently argued that alliances like **Five Eyes, Quad and AUKUS** have come up in a vacuum and threaten its reach.

• The Five Eyes is a **comprehensive intelligence partnership between the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**.

• It began as the **Britain-USA (BRUSA) agreement 1943**, later evolving into the **UK-USA (UKUSA) agreement**, with **Canada joining** in **1949** and **New Zealand** and **Australia in 1956.**

• These **nations collaborate closely** on **intelligence matters**, sharing information to protect their shared national interests.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982

» Recently, for the first time, **United Nations members** have agreed on a unified treaty to protect **biodiversity in the high seas**.

• **UNCLOS** (also known as the **Law of the Sea**), is the only international convention which provides a framework for **state jurisdiction in maritime spaces and legal status to different maritime zones**.

• It has been **ratified** by **169 parties**.

**It divides marine areas into five main zones namely:**

- **Internal Waters:** Waters on the landward side of the baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured. (**Baseline** is the low-water line along the coast as officially recognized by the coastal state).

- **Territorial Sea:** It extends seaward up to **12 nautical** miles from its baseline.

- **Contiguous Zone:** It extends seaward up to **24 nautical miles** from its baseline.

- **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** Each coastal state may claim an EEZ beyond its territorial sea that extends seaward up to **200 nautical miles** from its baseline.

- Within its **EEZ**, a coastal state has:

  ◊ **Sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing natural resources** of the seabed and subsoil and the right to carry out production of energy from the water, currents and wind.

- **High Seas:** The ocean surface and its water column **beyond the EEZ** are referred to as high seas.

Windsor Framework

» The **United Kingdom government** and **European Union** formally adopted a framework on post **Brexit trade** rules that will govern **Northern Ireland**.

- **UK exited the EU on January 31, 2020.** While Northern Ireland is part of UK and is also consequently out of the EU, **the Republic of Ireland continues to be part of EU**. The border between the two Irelands will see goods moving from non-EU to EU territory and vice-versa.

- **Northern Ireland protocol of 2020**, which allowed EU customs rules to apply in Northern Ireland was an ad-hoc measure to coordinate this across border goods trade. This, however, affected the free movement of goods between the Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. This is now replaced with Windsor Framework.

- **2 crucial aspects of the Windsor Framework are–**

- **Green lane system** for goods that will stay in Northern Ireland without checks and minimal paperworks and red lane system for goods that
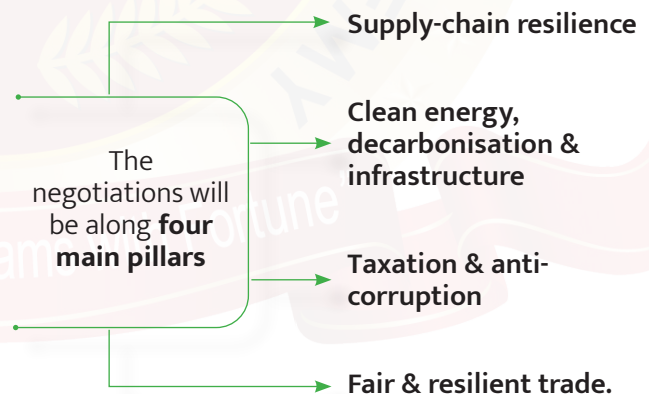
will go to the EU respectively after full customs procedure.

- **Stormont brake:** A mechanism that gives the Northern Ireland assembly the power to object to changes to EU rules that apply in Northern Ireland.
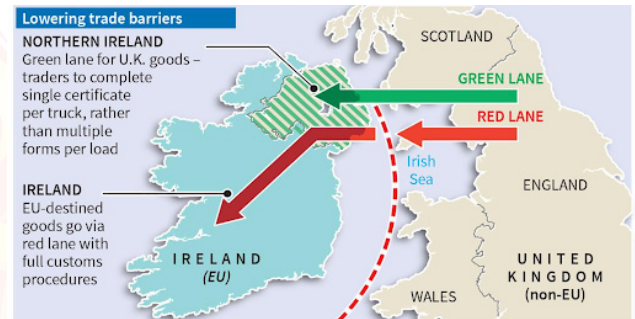
Indo–Pacific Economic Framework

» Recently, the second round of IPEF talks was held in **Bali**.

- It is an initiative launched by **the USA along with countries of the Indo-Pacific region in 2022**.

- Its primary objective is to **strengthen economic partnerships** among participating countries with the objective of **enhancing resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness in the region**.

- The IPEF is **not a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** but allows members to negotiate the parts they want to.

The negotiations will be along **four main pillars**

- Supply-chain resilience
- Clean energy, decarbonisation & infrastructure
- Taxation & anti-corruption
- Fair & resilient trade.

- **Members: Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam.**

AUKUS Alliance

» Recently, the US, UK and Australia have unveiled details of their plan to create a **new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines**.

• A **trilateral partnership for the Indo-Pacific** between **Australia, the UK and the US** was formed in **2021.**

• Under this alliance the **US and UK will help Australia** to acquire conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines.

• The pact emphasises **freedom of navigation in the Indo- Pacific region** including South China Sea also to challenge the regional hegemony ambitions of China.

Environment & Ecology

Global Greenhouse Gas Monitoring Infrastructure

» The United Nations **World Meteorological Organisation (WMO)** has come up with new **Global Greenhouse Gas Monitoring Infrastructure**.

• The Global Greenhouse Gas Monitoring Infrastructure aims to **provide better ways of measuring planet-warming pollution and help inform policy choices**.

• It will integrate **space-based** and **surface-based observing systems** that will result in much **faster and sharper data on how the planet's atmosphere is changing**.

• It will improve understanding of the **carbon cycle** and **help reduce uncertainties in estimates of the strength of natural sources and sinks**.

Aravali Green Wall Project

» The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change inaugurated the **Aravali Green Wall Project** on the occasion of **International Day of Forests**.

• It is an ambitious plan to **create a 1400 km long and 5 km wide green belt buffer around the Aravali Mountain range** covering states of **Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi**.

• The project is part of the **Union Environment Ministry's** vision to create green corridors across the country **to combat land degradation and desertification**.

• In the initial phase, **75 water bodies will be rejuvenated** under the project, starting with 5 water bodies each in every district of the Aravali landscape.

• It is inspired by **Africa's Great Green Wall project**.

Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa Project

» **India Meteorological Department** in collaboration with **Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR)** is rendering District/Block level **Agrometeorological Advisory Services (AAS)** for the benefits of farmers in the country under the scheme **"Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa (GKMS)"**.

• Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa Scheme was started by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** in **2015** to **provide crop and weather-based agro advisories** based on the location for the benefit of the farming community.

• It is implemented by the **Indian Meteorological Department** in collaboration with **State Agricultural Universities / Indian Council of Agricultural Research.**

• The **Agro-meteorological Advisory Services (AAS)** under the GKMS is operated to **prepare biweekly weather based bulletins**.

• The information is transmitted through **multimedia channels** and **SMS** to help farmers plan farm operations accordingly.

Sand Battery

» Recently, Finland installed the **world's first sand battery** that can store heat from **renewable energy sources for months.**

• Sand battery is a **high temperature thermal energy storage** that uses sand or sand like materials as its storage medium.

• It can act as a reliable **high power and high capacity reservoir** for excess wind and solar energy.

Heating up sand

The world's first sand battery in Finland can provide heating for 80 hours
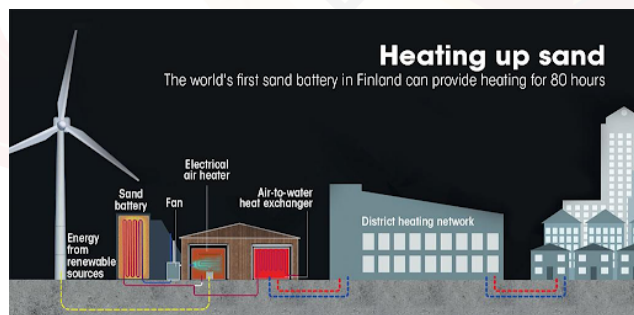
HOW THE BATTERY GETS CHARGED
Using renewable sources, air is heated to 600°C in the electrical air heater. The hot air is blown inside the sand battery through a pipe. The battery is considered charged when the sand at the core of the battery reaches 600°C.

HOW THE BATTERY GETS DISCHARGED
Using fans, air is pushed into the pipe inside the battery casing. Once the air reaches, 200-500°C, it is sent to the air-to-water heat exchanger, where it is used to boil water. The boiling water is sent to the district heating network which is used to keep buildings and public water systems warm and provide hot water for various industrial processes.

Mission Sahbhagita

» It was launched by **Ministry of Environment, forest and climate change (MOEFCC)** with a mission of **rejuvenating wetlands.**

• It primarily includes **healthy and effective management of 75 wetlands** of national and International importance.

• It focuses on enabling a **society ownership approach** with communities leading at the forefront.

• It provides a **platform for sharing the best practices** for wetland management, success stories and associated challenges.

Laccase Enzyme

» **National Center for Basic Sciences** (SNBNCBS), Kolkata, an autonomous institute of **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** tested the efficacy of laccase in degrading some standard dye effluents

• **Laccase** is an **enzyme produced by a group of fungi**, known for its **capacity to degrade various organic molecules**.

• Hence the scientists saw a scope in using it to develop a technology to **treat/degrade the dye effluents emanated from textile industries**.

• The **efficacy of laccase** was proved in **degrading some standard dye molecules** like Methyl Green, Crystal Violet, Thioflavin T, Coumarin 343, and Brilliant Blue.

Project Green Sand

» **Denmark** inaugurated a project to **store carbon dioxide beneath the North Sea**, the first country in the world **to bury CO_2 imported from abroad**.

• Project Greensand involves a **consortium of 23 Danish and international partners**.

• The project aims to store up to **1.5 million tonnes** of CO_2 per year by **2025 - 2026 period**.

Heat Index

» The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** is planning to introduce a **'heat index' warning system** in major cities like Ahmedabad and other parts of the country.

• Heat index, also known as **apparent temperature**, is a measure of how the **temperature feels to humans**.

• It is created under the **Heat Action Plan by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** for **Bhubaneswar** and **Ahmedabad** on an experimental basis.

• The heat index is **colour-coded to provide warnings** based on the impact of the heat:

» Green	: Below 35ºC
» Yellow	: Range of 36-45ºC
» Orange	: Range of 46-55ºC
» Red	: Above 55ºC

Global Millets (Shree Anna) Conference

» Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **Global Millets (Shree Anna) Conference** at PUSA New Delhi.

• The **Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI),** commonly known as the **Pusa Institute** is India's national institute for agricultural research, education and extension currently located in **Delhi**.

• Based on India's proposal, the **year 2023** was **declared the International Year of Millets** (IYM) by the **UN General Assembly**.

• In this context, the Global Millets (Shree Anna) Conference was organised by the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

• The conference focused on **promotion and awareness of millets** among producers, consumers and other stakeholders; **millets' value chain development**; health and **nutritional aspects of millets**; **market linkages**; **research and development** etc.

• The conference witnessed participation from **102 countries** and various institutions.

SHESHA & Rapid composting Technology

» In the workshop organised by **Atal Incubation Centre (AIC) – Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)**, two technologies namely **SHESHA** (for **wet waste management**) and **Rapid Bio-composting** (for **dry waste management**) were introduced.

SHESHA

• It is a novel, compact **helical shaped waste converter** aimed to manage the **biodegradable wet waste** generated in small housing societies, restaurants allowing decentralised processing of the biodegradable waste.

Rapid composting technology

• It is based on **cellulolytic fungi** named **trichoderma koningiopsis** isolated from tree bark. The formulation is capable of **composting dry waste** like dry leaves including coconut leaves.

• This method being completely **aerobic in nature**, is **devoid** of **foul odour**.

Bamboo Crash barrier

» As part of **Aatmanirbhar Bharat**, India has developed the **world's 1st bamboo crash barrier** which has been installed on the Vani-Warora Highway, Vidarbha, Maharashtra.

• The **200-metre-long bamboo crash barrier**, called **Bahubali**, is made from **Bambusa Balcooa**, treated with creosote oil, and coated with recycled **High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE)**.

• The bamboo crash barrier underwent **"rigorous testing"** and was **rated as Class 1 during the Fire Rating Test conducted at the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) in Roorkee**.

• It has also been **accredited** by the **Indian Road Congress**.

Plastic Rocks

» Marine biologists during routine monitoring of marine litter stumbled upon **plastiglomerate (plastic rocks)** from a beach on **Aves Island** of **Andaman and Nicobar Islands.**

• **Plastiglomerate** is a rock composed of sand, rock fragments, shells and other materials held together by **plastics.** They are formed when **plastic trash melts and fuses together with natural materials** such as basaltic lava fragments, sand, shells, wood, and coral

• It is a new form of **plastic pollution**, discovered in 2014. This is the **first of its kind** discovery in India.

• According to the **2011 census**, there are just 2 people on Aves Island.

Forest Certification

» In the context of **forest degradation**, certifying forests **based on their quality** has become important.

• **Forest certification** is a mechanism for forest **monitoring, tracing and labelling** timber, wood and pulp products and non-timber forest products.

• It is a process through which **quality of management** from environmental, social and economic perspectives is judged against a series of agreed standards.

• There are **two major international standards for sustainable management of forests and forest-based products:**

  ◊ Standards developed by **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**

  ◊ Standards developed by **Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certifications (PEFC).**

• In India, **Uttar Pradesh** is the only state which conducts forest certification and it follows standards developed by the New Delhi-based nonprofit **Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF).**

• There is **no government level forest certification** in India.

Green and Self-Powered Desalination Plant

» The **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT),** an autonomous institute under the Union **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** is establishing a Green and Self-powered Desalination Plant in **Lakshadweep.**

• It is an initiative to provide **potable water** in six islands of Lakshadweep using **Low Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) technology.**

• LTTD is a desalination technique that turns seawater into drinkable water

• The desalination plant will use a **combination of renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and wave energy** to power the plant.

• The plant is the **first of its kind in the world** as it will generate drinking water from sea water using **indigenous technology, green energy and environmentally friendly processes** and it is **self-powered.**
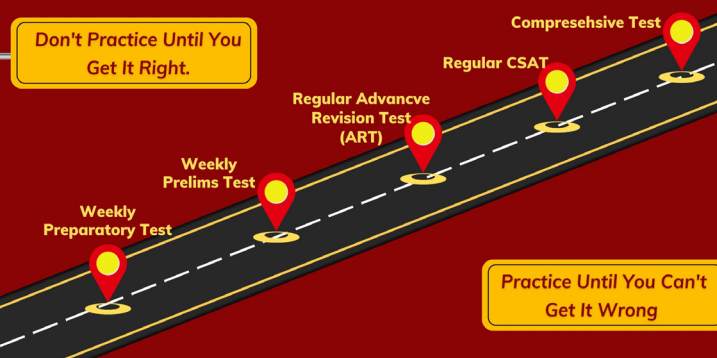
Geography

Landslides Atlas of India

» The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** recently released the **Landslides Atlas of India**.

• Landslides Atlas of India is a **detailed guide identifying landslide hotspots in the country**.

• It is prepared by the **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) under ISRO**.

Key findings:

• **Uttarakhand, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh** reported the highest number of landslides during **1998-2022**.

• **Mizoram** topped the list, followed by **Uttarakhand** and **Kerala**.

• Among all these states, an **alarming situation is emerging from Uttarakhand** and **Kerala**.

• NRSC ranked **Rudraprayag** in Uttarakhand at the top of **147 vulnerable districts**.

Cyclone Freddy

» Recently, Cyclone Freddy set a record as the **longest-lasting tropical cyclone on record** according to the **World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).**

• It originated off the **northern coast of Australia** and it surpassed the record set by **Hurricane John in 1994.**

• It caused severe destruction in **Mauritius and La Réunion**, before making landfalls in **Madagascar** and then **Mozambique.**

• Freddy was the first tropical cyclone in the Southern Hemisphere to undergo six **separate rounds of rapid intensification.**

• It also holds the record for the highest **Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE)** from the Southern Hemisphere.

• **ACE** - It is the **total wind energy** generated by a tropical cyclone throughout its lifetime.

Zealandia

» Geologists have now meticulously mapped the entire continent of **Zealandia**, using data from **ocean floor rock samples**. After **375 years**, it was recently confirmed of its existence.

• Zealandia, **Earth's forgotten 8th continent** with **94% submerged** under water and **6% forms the New Zealand** and its surrounding islands

• The existence of Zealandia was **first recorded** in **1642** by **Dutch** businessman and sailor Abel Tasman.

South Atlantic Anomaly (SAA)

» Scientists from **NASA** are actively monitoring SAA, as they are worried of its effects.

• SAA is a **strange anomaly** in **Earth's magnetic field**, it's a giant region of **lower magnetic intensity** in skies, located between **South America and South west Africa.**

• This anomaly exists because the **Earth's inner Van Allen radiation belt** comes closest to the planet's surface, causing an **increased flux of energetic particles.**

• It's a kind of **pothole in space** and can affect orbital spacecraft when **passing directly through SAA.**

• It poses high risk of **data loss or permanent damage** to billion dollar space projects.
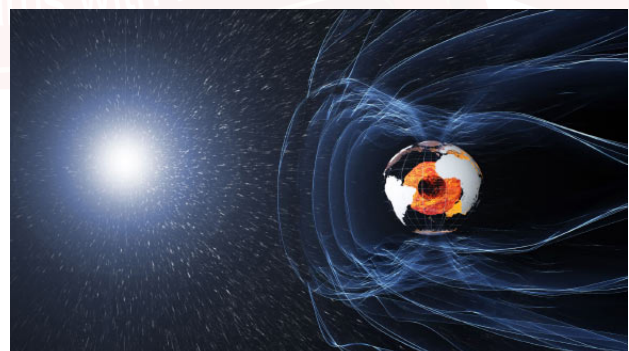
Science & Technology

One World TB Summit

» The Prime Minister addressed the **One World TB Summit** on the occasion of **World TB Day (March 24)**.

• The Prime Minister unveiled the **Annual India TB Report 2023**, which is a compilation of the country's efforts towards **making India TB-free by 2025**.

• One World TB Summit is organised by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** and **the Stop TB Partnership** to mark **World Tuberculosis Day** where international delegates from over 30 countries will be present.

• Tuberculosis is an infection caused by **Mycobacterium tuberculosis** and is the **13th leading cause of death** and the **second leading infectious killer after COVID-19** as per **WHO's 2020 report.**

• The **National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP)**, the **National Strategic Plan for TB Elimination, Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana (NPY), Pradhan Mantri TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyan** etc are some of the measures taken by India to eradicate TB.

Bauxite Reference Material

» **National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO)** has successfully developed a bauxite **Certified Reference Material (CRM)** named **BARC B1201** in collaboration with **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).**

• It could potentially help in evaluating **analytical methods, calibration of instruments** and **quality control** involving bauxite.

• Bauxite is an ore used in the production of aluminum. It is a rock largely composed of **hydrous aluminum oxides.**

• **Odisha** has the largest reserves in India. **Guinea** with **26%** holds the **largest bauxite reserves in the world.**

PALM 400

» The Indian Army has recently tested the prototype version of the **Precision Attack Loitering Munition (PALM) 400 drones** successfully.

• PALM 400 is an **armed Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV).**

• It is the result of a joint venture between **Israeli defence technology companies AVision Systems and UVision Air Ltd and Hyderabad based Aditya Precitech Private Ltd.**
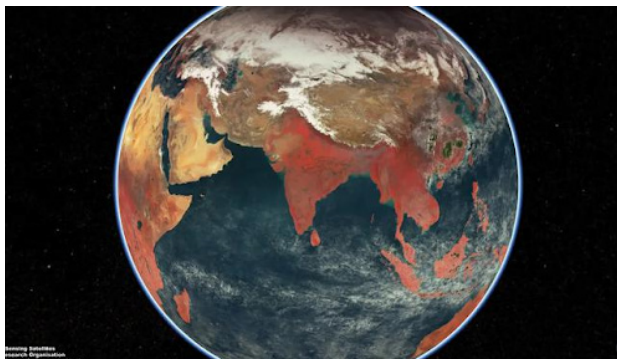
Features:

• It can be discharged from a canister and fly **3000-4000 feet** above the kill zone for up to **120 minutes**.

• It has a range of more than **100 km** and travels at a speed of **90 to 260 km/h**.

• It uses **electro-optical or infrared stabilised cameras** to detect and engage targets both during the day and at night.

• It can **loiter above a target in stealth mode** and collect information.

MAIA Mission

» NASA announced that it is partnering with the **Italian Space Agency (ASI)** to build and launch the **Multi Angle Imager for Aerosols (MAIA) Mission**.

• **Aerosol** is defined as a **suspension system of solid or liquid particles in a gas**.

• The mission is aimed at collecting data to help scientists find **correlations between air pollution and health problems**.

• The mission includes a **MAIA observatory**, which is set to launch in **2024**. The observatory will consist of the **PLATiNO-2 Satellite** provided by the ASI and a science instrument that will be built by **NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL)**.

• During the course of the **3 year mission**, MAIA will focus on **11 primary target areas including New Delhi**.

EOS-06 Satellite

» **ISRO** released images of Earth captured by its EOS-06 Satellite.

- **EOS-06** is envisaged to observe **ocean color data, sea surface temperature (SST)** and **wind vector data** to use in **oceanography, climatic and meteorological applications.**

- It belongs to **Oceansat series,** which was launched by **ISRO** onboard the **PSLV-C54** along with eight **nano-satellites.**

- The satellite also supports **value-added products** such as potential **fishing zones** using chlorophyll and other data.

Lewis Super Acids

» Researchers at Paderborn university, Germany have made a **unique set of catalysts called Lewis super acids.**

- Lewis super acids are based on **Lewis acids** which were named after the chemist **G N Lewis.**

- Lewis acids and bases are described by the **Lewis theory** of acid-base reactions as **electron-pair acceptors and electron pair donors** respectively.

- **Lewis acid** is a **chemical species** that can **accept an electron pair** from a Lewis base. A Lewis acid has an empty orbital and are electron-pair acceptors.

- **Lewis base** is a species that can **donate a pair of electron**. A Lewis base has a filled orbital with an electron pair and are electron pair donors.

- Examples of Lewis acids include: **Trimethylborane, Ag+, H+, AlCl3.**

- Examples of Lewis bases include: **NH3, Cl, OH**

- Lewis acids are often used to **speed up chemical reactions.**

- Lewis super acids are stronger and can even **break toughest bonds.**
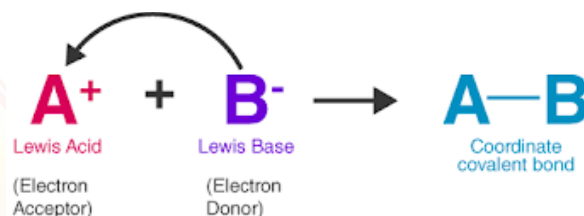
Organoid and Organoid Intelligence

» Recently, scientists have proposed a new area of research called organoid intelligence, which aims to create **biocomputers.**

- Organoids are **lab-grown tissues** that are similar to human organs.

- They are **3-D structures** mainly derived from stem cells.

- They are smaller, simpler versions of an organ and can **replicate the behaviour and function of specific organs in the body.**

- **Organoid Intelligence -** It is the **ability of organoids to exhibit certain behaviours** or responses that are attributes of intelligence, such as problem-solving, learning, or adapting to changing environments etc.

Biocomputers

» They are a type of computer that uses **biological molecules** such as NA or proteins to perform **computational tasks.**

» These computers can perform operations much **faster than traditional electronic computers** and have wider scope of potential in the fields of **medicine and biotechnology.**

PUShP portal

» The **Ministry of Power** recently launched a **High Price Day Ahead Market and Surplus Power Portal (PUShP)**

• It is an initiative to ensure **greater availability of power** during the peak demand season.

• The **power distribution companies** (DISCOMs) will be able to **indicate their surplus power** in block times / days / months on the portal.

• It aims to reduce the **fixed cost burden** on the DISCOMs, and will also enable all the available generation capacity to be utilised.

Day Ahead Market

» It is a **physical electricity trading market** where power is delivered within **24 hours** of the next day starting from midnight.

• They are traded in **15 minute time blocks.**

• The prices and quantum of electricity to be transacted are determined through a **double-sided closed auction bidding process.**

ATL Sarthi

» Recently, the **NITI Aayog** launched 'ATL Sarthi' Framework to support the Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL).

• It is a comprehensive **self-monitoring framework** to promote the Atal Tinkering Labs of the **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM).**

• Its objective is to improve **efficiency and effectiveness** of ATLs.

• **The initiative has four pillars:**

◊ **MyATL Dashboard:** It is a self-reporting dashboard.

◊ **Compliance SOPs:** For schools to ensure financial and non-financial compliance

◊ **Cluster-based Approach:** On-ground enablement of ATLs in collaboration with relevant local authorities.

◊ **Performance-Enablement (PE) Matrix:** It provides ownership to schools to analyze their performance

Atal Tinkering Labs

» It is an initiative to promote creativity and innovation in the minds of school children.

» Under this initiative, children as young as 12 years of age gain access to technological innovation.

Sagar Manthan

» The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) has launched the **Real-Time Performance Monitoring Dashboard** called **Sagar Manthan**.

• Sagar Manthan was developed by the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)** as a platform with all the **integrated data related to the ministry and other subsidiaries**.

• It will enable organisations **to monitor and track the progress** of their projects and **key performance indicators (KPIs)**.

• In addition to real-time project tracking it also **promotes risk management, resource allocation and progress reporting**.

Miscellaneous

India-WRIS

» Recently, the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** informed Rajya Sabha about the identification of **Water Heritage Structures (WHS) of India**.

• The **Ministry of Jal Shakti** had constituted a committee to identify **75 WHS in 2022**.

• WHS are built to **preserve and manage water resources** and includes tanks, wells, step wells, canals, aqueducts, water mills, reservoirs like lakes and dams, irrigation systems.

• The India-Water Resource Information System (WRIS) is a **web portal** that contains information related to water resources and was launched in **2019** under the **National Hydrology Project**.

• It receives data from many central and state agencies such as the **Central Water Commission (CWC), Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Central Groundwater Board (CGWB)** etc.

• The Ministry of Jal Shakti has established the **National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC)** to maintain and update India-WRIS.

• **Jal-Itihas sub portal** under the India-WRIS, showcasing the 75 WHS was launched on **5th January 2023**.

REACHOUT scheme

» The Union Minister of Earth Sciences said that an **umbrella scheme Research, Education and Training Outreach (REACHOUT)** is being implemented by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** for **capacity building** in Earth Sciences.

• It is aimed to promote **research, education and training** in the country.

• **It consists of the following sub-schemes:**

◊ **R&D in Earth System Science (RDESS)**

◊ **International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography (ITCOocean)**

◊ **Program for Development of Skilled manpower in Earth System Sciences (DESK)**

• Its main objective is to support various **R&D activities**, develop useful collaborations with international organizations, develop **skilled and trained manpower** in earth sciences etc.

Vayulink

» The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** inducted an **in-house system** called **Vayulink** to **identify friendly forces in a joint battlespace**.

• Vayulink is an **ad-hoc data link communication system developed by the IAF**.

• It will not only help in the identification of friendly forces in a combat situation, but will also provide **jammer-proof uninterrupted communication** with the base station and provide **accurate weather data**.

• It uses the **Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)** to send radio communication to the base station.

• IAF has already deployed the system on a trial basis at the **western and northern sectors** and is planning to further enhance the reach and applicability of the system in future.

O-SMART scheme

» The **Ministry of Earth Sciences** announced allocation of funds for implementation of **"Ocean Services, Modelling, Application, Resources and Technology (O-SMART)" scheme** for 2021-22 to 2025-26.

• It is a **central sector scheme** that encompasses oceanic research activities for f**orecast and early warning weather systems.**

• It also focuses on **generating and maintaining** a constant update on **marine living resources** and their relation in the **Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).**

• It also helps in **monitoring sea erosion and sea water pollutants** in the region and provide data for associated research.

• The findings will be **submitted annually to Parliament** and uploaded in Ministry website.

c–Veda project

» Recent study, under the **c-Veda project,** has evaluated and compared neurological development and generated brain-development charts across ages, similar to charts for physical growth.

• The **Consortium on Vulnerability to Externalizing Disorders and Addictions (c-VEDA)**, based in India is a project **jointly funded** by the **Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR)** and the **Newton Grant from the Medical Research Council (MRC), United Kingdom**.

• It aims to investigate if environmental and genetic risk factors in industrialised countries and emerging societies distinctly shape **brain function and behaviour.**

• The c-VEDA has established the **largest neurodevelopmental database** in India.