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Contents

Genome India Project.....	7
Bhutan's Order of the Druk Gyalpo.....	11
Removal of UAE from FATF Gray List.....	14
Agni- V.....	17
World Wildlife Day 2024	21
Bleaching of the Coral Reefs	22
India's renewable Energy Projects in Sri Lankan Islands	26
INS Jatayu.....	29
EXERCISE LAMITIYE – 2024	32
Geographical Indication	35
Arvind Kejriwal's Arrest.....	38
International Women's Day 2024	42
Global Climate Report 2023	44
India- Myanmar Free Movement Regime	47
Nuclear Energy Summit 2024.....	52
Model Code of Conduct	58
Pritzker Architecture Prize 2024	63
World Consumer Rights Day 2024.....	66
Pushpak – ISRO's first Reusable Launch Vehicle.....	68

Oscar Awards 2024	71
IMT TRILAT 24	76
Grok Chatbot	79
The Katchatheevu Island Dispute	82
China's Controversial Map	86
World Water Day 2024	88
RBI's Integrated Ombudsman Scheme	90
ASEAN- Australia Special Summit	94
Government's Fact- Check Unit	99
Agalega Island	102
UNNATI- 2024	106
EX- Triumph 2024	108
World Happiness Index 2024	110
Human Development Index 2023- 24	113
Plastic Waste Management Rules 2024	116
World Tuberculosis (TB) Day 2024	120

Genome India Project



Source- INVEST INDIA

Recently: The government's ambitious Genome India initiative achieved a significant milestone as researchers completed sequencing **10,000** healthy genomes from different regions of the country, representing **99** distinct populations.

What is Genome Sequencing?

- Genome Sequencing is the process of determining the entirety, or nearly the entirety, of the DNA sequence of an organism's genome at a single time.

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA):

- It is a **double- helical** chemical substance that holds the instructions required for regulating the growth and development of almost all living things.
- Each DNA strand is made of **four chemical units**, called **nucleotide bases**, which comprise the genetic "alphabet".
- These nucleotide bases are **adenine (A), thymine (T), guanine (G), and cytosine (C)**.
- The sequence of bases along a strand of DNA determines the **genetic code**.
- A gene is a unit of DNA that contains the instructions for making a specific protein or set of proteins.

Genome:

- The human genome is the entire **set of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)** residing in the nucleus of every cell of the human body.
 - There are around **3 billion** pairs of bases in the complete human genome.
 - It carries the complete genetic information responsible for the development and functioning of an organism.
 - From your height, colour of the eyes, the genetic diseases you get or those you are at a higher risk for, everything is determined by the genetic makeup.
 - The sequence of base pairs is identical in all humans, there are differences in the genome of every human being that make them unique.
-
- The process of determining the exact order of the bases in a strand of DNA is known as **sequencing**.
 - Bases exist in pairs and the identity of one of the bases in the pair determines the identity of the other member of the pair.

- The process of deciphering the order of base pairs, to decode the genetic fingerprint of a human is called **genome sequencing**.

Human Genome Project:

- The Human Genome Project (HGP) was an **international scientific research** project with the goal of determining the **base pairs** that make up human DNA.
 - It aimed at identifying, mapping and sequencing all of the genes of the human genome from both a physical and a functional standpoint.
 - It started in **1990** and released its latest version of the complete human genome in **2023 (13 years)**, with a **0.3%** error margin.
 - Now, it takes only about **five days** to sequence an entire human genome and perform all the quality checks.
 - The project costed nearly **\$3 million**.
-
- India **first sequenced** a human genome in **2006** and announced its **first complete human genome** in **2009**.
 - One of its **first practical usages** of Genome Sequencing was in **2014**, when a group of scientists from M.I.T and Harvard sequenced samples of **Ebola** from infected African patients to show how genomic data of viruses could reveal hidden pathways of transmission.

Genome India Project:

- Genome India Project (GIP) is a research initiative led by the **Bangalore-based Indian Institute of Science's Centre for Brain Research**.
- It involves over **20 universities** across the country in an effort to gather samples, compile data, conduct research, and create an '**Indian reference genome**' grid.
- It was approved by the government in **2020** with the aim of creating a comprehensive catalogue of genetic variations found in the Indian population.
- The initiative is funded by **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)** to sequence at least **10,000** Indian genomes in phase 1.
- Researchers who analysed **5,750** of the genome sequences have already identified **135 million** genetic variants found in India.
- With each sequence requiring **80 GB storage space**, the huge dataset of **8 petabytes** will be stored at the **Indian Biological Data Centre** in **Faridabad**.
 - The data can be utilised to develop new diagnostics, targeted therapies, identify new rare diseases, and cure existing ones.
- Inaugurated in **2022**, the IBDC is the country's **only databank**.
 - Prior to that Indian researchers had to host their biological datasets on American or European servers.

Significance:

- A map of genetic diversity is essential for understanding the history of our evolution, discovering the genetic basis for various diseases, and creating therapies of the future.
 - This cannot be done using data available in existing international databases, as Indian genomes are likely to be different from that of other populations.
- This map will create a unique resource. This is because our population of **1.4 billion** consists of more than **4,600 distinct groups**.
- With **endogamy** — marrying within the same community — common in India, the various groups have maintained their distinct genetic makeup.
 - This can help compare and contrast the impact of genetic variations on physical health.

- For example, **MYBPC3**, which leads to **cardiac arrest** at a young age, is found in **4.5%** of the Indian population but is rare globally.
- Another mutation called **LAMB3** causes a **lethal skin condition**, is found in nearly **4%** of the population near Madurai, but it is not seen in global databases.
- It can also help in targeted treatments, especially for rare diseases that usually arise from genetic anomalies.

Bhutan's Order of the Druk Gyalpo



Source- <https://buscadordecoracion.com/bhutan-awards-its-highest-civilian-decoration-order-of-druk-gyalpo-to-narendra-modi/>

Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi received Bhutan's highest civilian award, the '**Order of the Druk Gyalpo**', during his two-day State visit to the neighbouring nation.

- It was announced during Bhutan's **114th National Day** celebrations on **December 17, 2021**.
- Bhutan's king **Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck** presented PM Modi with the honour, making him the **first foreign Head of the Government** to receive it.

- The award has been conferred to Prime Minister Modi in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the growth of India-Bhutan relations and for his distinguished service to the Bhutanese nation and people.
- This is PM Modi's **third visit** to Bhutan since he took over as the prime minister in 2014, with the first two visits in **2014 and 2019**.

What is Order of the Druk Gyalpo:

- It is the **highest decoration** of the Kingdom of Bhutan, awarded in recognition of a lifetime of service to the people and Kingdom of Bhutan.
- It was founded on **7 November 2008** by the **King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck** to reward those who have devoted a lifetime of service to the nation and people of Bhutan.
- Consisting of **two Classes** manufactured in **sterling silver**, the **First Class** comprises a **Breast Star and Sash Badge** while the **Second Class** has only a **Sash and Badge**.

Design:

- The **80mm star** consists of a large ornate **gold-plated back plate** with an enamelled border centrepiece in orange enamel, and a red enamelled centre with the **Royal Symbol in gold**.
- The **60mm** detachable **badge** bears the same design as the breast star, with a top suspension device for attaching to the sash.
- The **ribbon is orange** with large white and darker orange border stripes.

Recipients:

- Previous recipients of the award include:
 - Grandmother of Bhutan Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck - 2008.
 - Je Thrizur Tenzin Dendup (68th Je Khenpo of Bhutan) – 2008.
 - Je Khenpo Trulku Ngawang Jigme Choedra (chief Abbot of the central monastic body of Bhutan) – 2018.

India- Bhutan Relations:

- The bilateral relations between the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and the Republic of India have been traditionally close.
- India shares a **605 kilometres (376 mi)** border with Bhutan.
- Following the Chinese expedition to Tibet in **1910**, Bhutan became a **protected state** of British India, signing a treaty allowing the British Raj in India to "guide" its foreign affairs and defence.
 - A **protected state** is an internationally recognized state under the protection of another usually larger and more powerful state.
- Bhutan was one of the first to recognize India's independence in **1947** and both nations fostered close relations.
- On **9 August 1949**, Bhutan and India signed the **Treaty of Friendship**, calling for peace between the two nations and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
 - Their importance was augmented by the **1950 annexation of Tibet** by the People's Republic of China and China's border claims on both Bhutan and India.
- India **re-negotiated** the 1949 treaty with Bhutan and signed a new treaty of friendship in **2007**.
- From **2003 to 2004**, the **Royal Bhutan Army** conducted operations against anti-India insurgents of the **United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)** that were operating bases in Bhutan.

Removal of UAE from FATF Gray List



Recently: Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has removed the United Arab Emirates from its “grey list”, two years after it identified weaknesses in the Gulf state’s ability to tackle financial crime.

- FATF’s move will improve the reputation of a country that anti-corruption campaigners have painted as weak in enforcing anti-financial crime regulations and slow to help other countries investigate or extradite suspects living in the UAE.
- **Barbados, Gibraltar and Uganda** were also removed from the grey list, while **Kenya and Namibia** were placed on it.

What is Financial Action Task Force?

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.
- It sets international standards that aim to prevent these illegal activities and the harm they cause to society.
- It was **founded in 1989** on the initiative of the **G7** to develop policies to combat money laundering and to maintain certain interest.
 - In **2001**, its mandate was expanded to include **terrorism financing**.
- **Mr. T. Raja Kumar** of **Singapore** is the president of the FATF from **1 July 2022** to **30 June 2024**.

- Mr. Kumar succeeded **Dr. Marcus Pleyer** of **Germany**.
- The FATF **Secretariat** is located at the OECD headquarters in **Paris**.

Membership:

- Currently, the FATF has **40 members**. Of which there are **38 countries** and **2 regional organizations**. The 2 regional organizations are –
 - The Gulf Cooperation Council
 - The European Commission
- In addition to this, the FATF relies on a strong global network of **9 FATF-Style Regional Bodies (FSRBs)**.
 - These FSRBs have an essential role in promoting the effective implementation of the FATF recommendations by their membership and in providing expertise and input in FATF policy-making.
- In February 2024, the FATF **suspended** the membership of the **Russian Federation** due to the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- **India** joined with '**observer**' status in **2006** and became a **full member** of FATF in **2010**.

The "Black and grey" lists:

- The FATF identifies jurisdictions with **weak measures** to combat money laundering and terrorist financing (AML/CFT) in two FATF public documents.
- These two documents are-
 - **FATF blacklist** for **High-Risk Jurisdictions subject to a Call for Action**.
 - **FATF graylist** for **Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring**.
- These lists have been maintained since **2000** and are issued **thrice a year**.
- As of February 2024, the FATF has reviewed **131 countries** and jurisdictions and publicly identified **106** of them.
 - Of these, **82** have since made the **necessary reforms** to address their AML/CFT weaknesses and have been removed from the process.

Black List:

- The Black List includes **Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs)** that support terror funding and money laundering activities.
- For all countries identified as high-risk, the FATF calls on all members and urges all jurisdictions to apply enhanced due diligence.
- In the most serious cases, countries are called upon to apply counter-measures to protect the international financial system from the ongoing money laundering, terrorist financing.
- The enlisted countries are subjected to economic sanctions, problem in getting loans, reductions in international trade and international boycott.
- As of February 2024, the list includes **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Iran and Myanmar.**

Gray List:

- This statement identifies countries that are **actively working** with the FATF to address strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.
- It includes countries that are considered **safe haven for supporting terror funding** and money laundering.
- It serves as a warning that the country may enter the blacklist.
- To be pulled out of the grey list, a country has to fulfill the tasks recommended by the FATF.
- As of February 2024, there are **21 countries** in the **FATF Gray list.**

Why was UAE added on the Gray List?

- The **federation of seven sheikdoms** was added to the list over "**strategic deficiencies**" in countering money laundering in the country.
- UAE serves as a **regional hub of commerce and business**, and several transactions are conducted in cash.
- The UAE's property sector, in particular Dubai's, is fuelled by **foreign money.**
- **FATF's 2020 report** said the UAE had not demonstrated effective supervision of real estate agents and precious stones and metal dealers.
- The UAE is the **financial hub of the Middle East**, home to several international companies' headquarters, and a roughly 90% expat population.

- UAE's role as a safe haven for wealthy individuals facing Western sanctions has been facing greater scrutiny amid US' efforts to counter Russia's invasion of Ukraine and pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

What measures did UAE take to get off the list?

- Measures taken by the UAE to get off the grey list have included **bolstering its Executive Office of Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terror Financing** to crack down on illicit money, and beefing up legislation.
- The country also extradited several alleged financial criminals, introduced an online system for reporting suspicious activity and worked on improving a national registry of companies.
- The UAE's Financial Intelligence Unit pointed to increased compliance activity, including a **79 per cent** rise in reporting of suspicious transactions and activity between **2021 and 2022**, as proof that the state's systems are strengthening.

Agni- V



Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the successful test firing of **Agni-V** ballistic missile by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** under **Mission Divyastra**.

- The flight test named Mission Divyastra was carried out from **Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha, DRDO**.

Agni Missiles:

- Agni is a **long-range missile** developed indigenously by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation, DRDO**.
- The family of Agni missiles has been in the **arsenal** of the **Indian armed forces** since the early **1990s**.
- Medium to Intercontinental versions of Agni missile **systems 1 to 5** have varying ranges — starting from **700 km** for **Agni-1** to **5000 km** and above for **Agni-5**.
- The Agni missile is part of **India's Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP)**.
- In **1989**, India conducted a test launch of the **Agni 1**-class missile.

India's Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP):

- IGMDP was an **Indian Ministry of Defence programme** to research and develop a comprehensive range of missiles.
- It was the brainchild of renowned scientist **Dr APJ Abdul Kalam** that initiated in **1983** and ended in **2008**.
- The missiles developed under IGMDP are:
 - Short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile – **Prithvi**
 - Intermediate-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile – **Agni**

Agni Variants and their respective ranges:

- **Agni I** - Medium Range Ballistic Missile - Range of **700-800 km**
- **Agni II** - Medium Range Ballistic Missile - more than **2000 km**.
- **Agni III** - Inter-Medium Range Ballistic Missile - more than **2,500 Km**
- **Agni IV** - Inter-Medium Range Ballistic Missile - Range is more than **3,500 km** and can fire from a road mobile launcher.
- **Agni- VI** is currently under development. The longest of the Agni series, an ICBM with a range of ICBM **11,000–12,000 km**.

- In **June 2021**, DRDO successfully tested **Agni P**, which are modernised versions of the short-range Agni-1 and Agni-2 variety with a range capability between **1,000 and 2,000 km**.
 - This means that the missile can be launched from road and rail platforms, making it easier for it to be deployed.

Agni- 5:

- The Agni-5 missile is an **intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)** with a range of **5,500 to 5,800 kilometres**.
- Agni-5 started developing in **2007** and has been successfully tested multiple times since **2012**.
- In **December 2022**, a successful flight test of Agni-5 was undertaken off the coast of **Odisha**.
- This latest variant of the missile is equipped with what is known as **MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle)** technology.

MIRV Technology:

- The MIRV can target multiple targets that can be hundreds of kilometers apart with a **single missile**.
- Warheads on MIRVed missiles can be released from the missile at **different speeds** and in **different directions**.
- These missiles can be launched from land or from sea from a submarine.
- As of now, **the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom (P5)** are known to have **MIRV-equipped missiles**.
- While the **USA** had the technology in **1970** and the **Soviet Union** followed suit in the same decade.
- Since then, only a few countries have the MIRV capabilities, a club **India** has now joined.
- **Israel** is suspected to either possess the missile or be developing it.
- **Pakistan** too has claimed to have tested an MIRV-equipped missile called **Ababeel**, first in **2017** and then in **2023**.

- This Agni is capable of carrying **nuclear warheads** and is aimed mainly at thwarting the challenge from **China**.
- The number of warheads that a missile can carry depends on its design, weight, size, range and other parameters.
- Agni- 5 is capable for carrying **3-5 warheads**.

Defence Research and Development Organization:

- The DRDO is the premier agency under the **Department of Defence Research and Development** in the Ministry of Defence of the Government of India.
- It is tasked with the research and development activities for the military and is headquartered in **Delhi, India**.
- Motto - "**Balasya Mulam Vigyanam**"—the source of strength is science—drives the nation in peace and war.
- DRDO was established in **1958** as a small organisation with **10 establishments or laboratories**.
 - Today, it is a network of around **41 laboratories** and **05 DRDO Young Scientist Laboratories (DYSLs)**
- The chairman of DRDO is **Sameer V. Kamat**.

World Wildlife Day 2024



Source- <https://www.edudwar.com/world-wildlife-day/>

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the World Wildlife Day was observed on **March 3rd**.

- World Wildlife Day is celebrated to promote sustainable practices that can help conserve biodiversity and raise public awareness of the need to protect and care for animals.

Theme:

- Each year a special theme is chosen to celebrate the occasion.
- This year's theme is "**Connecting People and Planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in Wildlife Conservation**".
- It highlights the potential of technology to advance conservation efforts.

History:

- World Wildlife Day was first proposed by **Thailand** to the **UN General Assembly** in **2013**.

- The idea was to set aside a day to promote awareness of wild animals and plants around the world.
- The General Assembly adopted a resolution on **20 December 2013**, designating **March 3** as **World Wildlife Day in 2014**.
- The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**, was signed on this day in **1973**.
 - It is a global agreement to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Significance:

- World Animal Day is an important global awareness event for the protection and conservation of animals.
- It serves as a reminder of the inherent value of animals and the need to treat them with kindness, decency and respect.
- It inspires people to take action to prevent cruelty, exploitation and abuse of all animals - wildlife, farm animals and pets.

Bleaching of the Coral Reefs



Recently: Australia's Great Barrier Reef has been hit by widespread coral bleaching caused by heat stress, government officials confirmed on **March 8, 2024**.

- Aerial surveys of **over 300 reefs** conducted by the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**, found coral bleaching at around **six islands** in the far northern parts of the Great Barrier Reef at the **Turtle Group National Park**.
 - The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority monitors the health of the coral.

What are Coral Reefs?

- Corals are marine **invertebrates** or animals not possessing a spine. They live in colonies.

Formation:

- Coral reefs are built by an organism called a **polyp**.
 - Each polyp is a **sac-like** animal, usually a few millimeters wide and a few centimeters tall.
 - It has a set of **tentacles** surrounding a mouth-like opening and is gregarious in nature.
 - They use sound to communicate with each other
- A coral group is a **colony** of a large number of genetically identical polyps.
- Every polyp also sheds an **exoskeleton** at its bottom and over many generations this discarded substance accumulates to form a large structure up to several metres wide.
- The polyps organise their lives around this structure. A coral reef is formed when a large number of polyps collect in this way.

What is Coral Bleaching?

- Corals share a **symbiotic relationship** with single-celled algae called **zooxanthellae**.
- The algae provides the coral with **food and nutrients**, which they make through photosynthesis, using the sun's light. They also give corals their bright colour.
- In turn, the corals give the algae a **home and key nutrients**.

- Bleaching happens when corals experience stress in their environment due to changes in temperature, pollution or high levels of ocean acidity.
- Under stressed conditions, the zooxanthellae start producing reactive oxygen species, which are not beneficial to the corals.
 - So, the corals **expel the colour-giving zooxanthellae** from their polyps, which exposes their pale white exoskeleton, giving the corals a bleached appearance.
- This also ends the symbiotic relationship that helps the corals to survive and grow.
- Bleached corals can survive depending on the levels of bleaching and the recovery of sea temperatures to normal levels.
 - If heat-pollutions subside in time, over a few weeks, the zooxanthellae can come back to the corals and restart the partnership.
 - Severe bleaching and prolonged stress in the external environment can lead to coral death.
- A common metric used to assess the risk to coral reefs from high water temperature is the number of weeks that sea surface temperatures have exceeded the mean monthly maximum temperature by **1 degree Celsius**.
 - Significant coral bleaching may occur after **4 weeks** of elevated temperatures, and severe, widespread coral bleaching is likely after **8 such weeks**.

History of Coral Bleaching:

- The **first mass bleaching** event had occurred in **1998** when the **El Niño** weather pattern caused sea surfaces in the pacific ocean to heat up.
 - This event caused **8%** of the world's coral to die.
- The **second** event took place in **2002**.
- The **longest and most damaging** bleaching event taking place from **2014 to 2017**.
- **Global temperature in 2017**, was the **third-highest** to ever be recorded.
 - In the 2014-17 event, more than three times as many reefs were exposed to bleaching-level heat stress as compared to 1998.

Significance:

- Coral reefs **support** over **25%** of **marine biodiversity**, including fish, turtles and lobsters; even as they only take up **1%** of the **seafloor**.

- The marine life supported by reefs further fuels **global fishing industries**.
- This biodiversity is considered key to finding **new medicines** for the 21st century.
- Healthy coral reefs **support commercial and subsistence fisheries** as well as jobs and businesses through tourism and recreation.
- Coral reef structures also **buffer shorelines** against 97 percent of the energy from waves, storms, and floods, helping to prevent loss of life, property damage, and erosion.

The Great Barrier Reef:

- The Great Barrier Reef lies off the northeast coast of **Queensland, Australia**.
- It is one of the **richest** and **most biodiverse** natural ecosystems on Earth.
- Spread across **346,000 square kilometers** (134,000 square miles) of the Coral Sea, it comprises **2,500 individual reefs** and more than **900 islands**.
- The **first European** to sight the Great Barrier Reef was **James Cook in 1770**, who sailed and mapped the east coast of Australia.
- The Great Barrier Reef can be seen from outer space and is the **world's biggest single structure** made by living organisms.
 - It is as big in size as Japan, and bigger than the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Netherlands put together
- It was selected as a **World Heritage Site** in **1981**.
- CNN labelled it one of the **Seven Natural Wonders of the World** in **1997**.
- Australian World Heritage places included it in its list in 2007.
- The Queensland National Trust named it a **state icon of Queensland** in **2006**.
- A large part of the reef is protected by the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park**, which helps to limit the impact of human use, such as fishing and tourism.
- This is the **fifth mass bleaching** of the reef since **2016**.
 - Previous mass bleaching events on the reef occurred in **1998, 2002, 2016, 2017, 2020 and 2022**.
- A **2018** study showed that about **one-third** of the Great Barrier Reef had experienced substantial damage from bleaching.

- In pre-COVID times, it generated **\$4.6 billion annually** through tourism and employed **over 60,000 people** including divers and guides.

India's renewable Energy Projects in Sri Lankan Islands



Source- <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/blog/renewable-energy-development-in-sri-lanka.html>

Recently: Sri Lanka awarded the construction of **three solar and wind hybrid power** generation facilities to an Indian company after scrapping a tender won by a Chinese firm.

- The project involves the construction of **hybrid renewable energy systems** on **Nainativu, Delft (Neduntheevu), and Analaitivu** islands situated in the **Palk Bay**.

How was the project transferred from China to India?

- Within two weeks in early 2021, Sri Lanka reneged on a **2019 Colombo Port terminal agreement**, pulling out of the **East Container Terminal (ECT)** deal with **India and Japan**.

- In **January 2021**, Sri Lanka's Cabinet decided to award renewable energy projects in Nainativu , Delft or Neduntheevu , and Analaitivu islands to **Chinese company Sino-soar-Etechwin**.
- The joint venture deal, secured through a competitive bidding process adhered to the procurement guidelines of the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, a pivotal supporter of the project.
 - The project was to be **financed by an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan**.
- However, India strongly objected to the deal as the three islands are located barely **50 km** from the **southern** Indian coast (**Tamil Nadu**).
- New Delhi then proposed undertaking the same project, offering a **grant instead of a loan** from the ADB.
- Under pressure, the Sri Lankan government scrapped the agreement with the Chinese and is proceeding with the project in collaboration with India.
- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed in **March 2022**, during External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Sri Lanka confirming the transfer of the project to India.

About the Project:

- The three hybrid renewable energy facilities which will have a combined renewable energy capacity of **2,230 kilowatts** will be funded by a **\$11 million grant** from the Indian government.
- The building contract of the project has been awarded to a **Bengaluru**-based renewables firm **U-Solar Clean Energy Solutions**.
 - On March 1, 2024, the Sri Lanka **Sustainable Energy Authority**, the Government of Sri Lanka, and **U-Solar Clean Energy Solutions** signed an agreement for the construction of the project.
- The project will have **530 kw Wind power, 1,700 kw Solar power, 2,400 kwh Battery power** and **2,500 kw of stand by diesel power system**.
- The latest renewable energy deal is the **third** India-backed energy project coming up in **Sri Lanka's north and east**.
 - The **National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC)** is implementing a solar energy project in the eastern town of **Sampur**, where India had previously hoped to build a controversial coal power plant.
 - The **Adani Group** is setting up renewable energy projects in **Mannar and Pooneryn** in the **north**.

India's apprehensions:

- India has expressed heightened sensitivity toward foreign-funded development initiatives in Sri Lanka, particularly in the **Northern and Eastern provinces**.
- India has an interest in maintaining a foothold and dominating the two provinces given the proximity to **India** as well as **Trincomalee harbor**, which is located in a strategic area.
- Notably, the **1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord**, stipulates that if Sri Lanka engages in the development of **Trincomalee Oil Tanks** with a foreign partner, that partner must be India.
 - In January 2022, Indian Oil Subsidiary Lanka IOC was given 49% stake in the joint development of the World War II-era, **Trincomalee Oil Tank farm**, with **Ceylon Petroleum Corporation** keeping **51%**.
- In the last couple of decades, India has been concerned over China's growing presence and influence in its neighbourhood.
- China has been competing for major infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, becoming the island nation's **single-largest bilateral creditor**.
 - This has also been seen as the principal reason for Sri Lanka's plunge into its **worst economic crisis in 2022**.
- India helped Sri Lanka restructure its debt through policy interventions.

INS Jatayu



Recently: The Indian Navy commissioned a new **naval base, INS Jatayu**, in **Lakshadweep** for "**better coverage of the Indian Ocean**".

- Naval Detachment INS Jatayu was **commissioned** by **Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar**.
- INS Jatayu has been commissioned under the command of **Commandant Vrat Baghel**.

INS Jatayu:

- The unit was named after the **mythical creature** in the epic **Ramayana** who tried to stop the abduction of **Sita**.
- It is commissioned in **Minicoy** which is the **southernmost** end of the **Lakshadweep** archipelago in the **Arabian Sea**.
- INS Jatayu is the second naval base in Lakshadweep after **INS Dweeprakshak** in **Kavaratti** which was commissioned in **2012**.
- The existing **Naval Detachment Minicoy**, which is under the operational command of the **Naval Officer-in-Charge (Lakshadweep)**, will be commissioned as **INS Jatayu**.
- A naval detachment has **administrative, logistics, and medical facilities**.

- INS Jatayu will be **upgraded** to a naval base with additional infrastructure such as an airfield, housing, and personnel, after obtaining the requisite environmental and other clearances.

Function:

- INS Jatayu will **'monitor activities of adversaries in Indian Ocean'**.
- The base will enhance operational reach and facilitate the Navy's operational effort towards **anti-piracy** and **anti-narcotics** operations in the **Arabian Sea**.
- With the commissioning of INS Jatayu, the Indian Navy will add to its strength on the western seaboard.
- The proposed airfield will enhance the Navy's capabilities by accommodating various aircraft, including **P8I maritime reconnaissance** and **fighter jets**.
- This extension of operational reach is in response to India countering **Chinese** influence in the **Indian Ocean Region**.
- This has an immediate bearing at a time when India's relations with the **Maldives** have come under strain since the election of the **pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu**.

MH-60R:

- The Navy also commissioned its first **MH-60R multi-role helicopter squadron, INAS 334 'Seahawks,'** at **Kochi**.
- This marks a major capability boost for its rotary fleet and enhances its anti-submarine warfare capabilities.
- The first MH-60R squadron of **48 officers** and **170 men** is commanded by **Captain M. Abhisheik Ram**, an experimental test pilot who has flown over **30 aircraft**.
- The ceremony was marked with a scintillating fly-past by a formation of **Seahawks**, and a traditional water canon salute with **four helicopters** to mark the historic moment.
- India contracted **24 MH-60Rs** under a **\$2.4 billion deal** in **February 2020** through the foreign military sales programme of the **U.S. government**.
- **Six helicopters** have been delivered so far, and the deliveries are expected to be completed by **2025**.
- Indian aircrew underwent intensive training at the **Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego, U.S.** from **June 2021**.
- Since **July 29, 2022**, when India received **its first two helicopters**, the **'Romeos'** have flown over **1,100 hours**.

Lakshadweep:

- **India's smallest Union Territory Lakshadweep** is an archipelago consisting of **36 islands** with an area of **32 sq km**
- The name Lakshadweep in **Malayalam** and **Sanskrit** means '**a hundred thousand islands**'.
- The capital is **Kavaratti** and it is also the principal town of the UT.
- It is a uni-district Union Territory and is comprised of **12 atolls, three reefs, five submerged banks** and **ten inhabited islands**.
- All Islands are 220 to 440 km away from the coastal city of **Kochi** in **Kerala**, in the emerald **Arabian Sea**.
- After independence in 1947, it was merged into the **Madras Presidency of India** on the basis of language in **1956**.
- Then in the same year (1956), Lakshadweep was given the status of a **union territory**.
- Earlier it was known as **Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi**.
 - The name of this region was changed to Lakshadweep in **1973**.
- The Lakshadweep are part of a chain of **coralline islands** in the Indian Ocean.
- It includes **Maldives** to the **south**, and the **Chagos** archipelago farther beyond, to the south of the equator.
- Given their location in the Indian Ocean, the Lakshadweep are of huge strategic importance to India.

EXERCISE LAMITIYE – 2024



Source- PIB

Recently: The Indian Armed Forces participated in the **Tenth edition** of Joint Military Exercise “**LAMITIYE-2024**” between the Indian Army and **Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF)**.

- The Joint Exercise was conducted at **Seychelles** from **18-27 March 2024**.

What is Exercise LAMITIYE?

- ‘LAMITIYE’ meaning ‘**Friendship**’ in the **Creole language** is a **biennial** training event and has been conducted in Seychelles since **2001**.
- The aim of the Exercise is to enhance interoperability in Sub-conventional Operations in Semi-Urban environment under **Chapter VII** of the **United Nations Charter on Peace Keeping Operations**.

The Contingent:

- **45 personnel** each from the **GORKHA RIFLES** of the **Indian Army** and **Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF)** participated in the exercise.

How was the Exercise conducted?

- Both sides jointly trained, planned and executed a series of well-developed tactical drills for neutralization of likely threats that may be encountered in Semi-Urban environment.
- The **10 days** long Joint Exercise included Field Training Exercise, combat discussions, lectures & demonstrations, which culminated with two days of Validation Exercise.

Seychelles:

- It is an **island country** and **archipelagic state** consisting of **115 islands** (as per the Constitution) in the **Indian Ocean**.
- It is the **smallest country in Africa** as well as the least populated sovereign African country.
- Its capital and largest city is **Victoria**.
- **Wavel Ramkalawan** is the current President of Seychelles.

India- Seychelles Relations:

Historical Background:

- India has a strong connection with Seychelles because Indian nationals were among the **first to settle** on the island.
- In the year **1770**, a small group of **five Indians** landed in Seychelles as plantation workers along with **seven African slaves** and **15 French colonists**, and were recorded as the first inhabitants of the Islands.
- During the British colonial period, Seychelles was governed from the **Bombay Presidency** for some time, with regular shipping links and flow of goods and essential commodities from India.

Diplomatic Ties:

- **Diplomatic ties** were established with Seychelles after its **independence in 1976**.
- When Seychelles attained freedom on 29th June 1976, a contingent from the Indian Naval Ship, **INS Nilgiri**, took part in the Independence Day celebrations.
- The **Indian Mission** was established in **1979** in **Victoria**, with the High Commissioner based in **Dar-es-Salaam** and concurrently accredited to Seychelles.
- The **first resident High Commissioner** was appointed in 1987, while Seychelles opened its resident mission in **New Delhi** in early **2008**.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit (**10-11 March 2015**) to Seychelles was the first Prime Ministerial level visit from India in **34 years**.
- In **June, 2022**, statue of **Mahatma Gandhi** was erected in the famous **Peace Park in Victoria**.
 - The statue stands tall amidst those of leaders such as **Nelson Mandela**, first President of South Africa and **Sir James Macham**, founding President of Seychelles.
- The prestigious **Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award** was conferred on **Justice D. Karunakaran** of the **Supreme Court of Seychelles** in **2015**.
 - He is the second recipient of the PBSA from Seychelles after **Dr. V. Ramadoss** in **2006**.

Economic Relations:

- Bilateral trade and commerce with Seychelles is rather modest, mostly due to absence of a direct shipping line between India and Seychelles.
- Presently, Seychelles' main items of import from India are rice, miscellaneous food products, cement, linen, cotton, vehicles & associated transport equipment, medicines, instruments and appliances for medical, surgical & dental use.
- India exported goods worth **US\$ 64.88 million** and imported goods worth **US\$ 8.96 million** from Seychelles during **2022-23**.
- Among the Indian companies present in Seychelles, **Bank of Baroda** has been maintaining a successful overseas branch in Victoria since **1978**.

Defence:

- In **1986**, the Indian navy conducted "**Operation Flower are Blooming**" to prevent a coup and assist the island in achieving political stability.
- The Indian navy has sent **maritime surveillance aircraft** to Seychelles to monitor the island nation's **Exclusive Economic Zone**.
- Furthermore, Joint Military **Exercise Lamitye** has been held since **2001**.
- The Seychelles government leased **Assumption Island** to the Indian Navy in **2015** with the intention of establishing an overseas base of operations there.

Energy and Environment:

- A **Blue Economy Protocol** between India and Seychelles was signed in **August 2015**.
- The two countries have been supportive of each other's position in the international fora on issues related to climate change.
- With the ratification of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** Framework Agreement in **September 2017**, Seychelles has officially become one of the **Founding Members** of ISA.
- On the sidelines of **COP27** in November, 2022, Seychelles signed an agreement with the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** for a project to set up **5 metric tonnes** solar-powered cold storage on **La Digue Island**.

Geographical Indication



Geographical Indication (GI) Tags

Recently: Over **60 products** from across India, including the famous **Banaras Thandai**, have been given the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag**.

- This is the **first time** such a large number of GI tags have been given at a go.

Some Products that received the Geographical Indication Tag:

Assam:

- **Six traditional crafts** from Assam bagged the GI Tag. They are:
 - Asharikandi terracotta craft
 - Pani Meteka craft
 - Sarthebari metal craft
 - Jaapi (bamboo headgear of rural Assam)
 - Mishing handloom products
 - The Bihu dhol
- **Thirteen other products** from Assam have been given tags. These include:
 - Bodo Dokhona - The traditional attire of Bodo women.
 - Bodo Eri silk - Referred as the fabric of peace or ahimsa, which comes from the silkworm *Samia ricini* that feeds mostly on the leaves of the castor plant (*Ricinus communis*), and cassava.
 - Bodo Jwmgra – A traditional scarf.
 - Bodo Gamsa – A traditional dress of Bodo men.
 - Bodo Thorkha - A musical instrument.
 - Bodo Sifung - A long flute.

Banaras:

- The famous **Banaras Thandai**, a drink made by blending milk with a nutritious mix of nuts, seeds and spices, also got the tag.
 - The drink was first introduced many centuries ago as an offering to the **Shri Kashi Vishwanath deity** on the occasion of **Mahashivaratri, Rangbhari Ekadasi, and Holi**.

- The Banaras Tabla, Banaras Shehnai, Banaras Lal Bharwamirch and Banaras Lal Peda are among the products that walked away with GI tags in this region.

Tripura:

- The Tripura region secured **two tags**.
- One for the **Pachra-Rignai**, which is a traditional dress worn on special occasions, and the other for the **Matabari Peda**, a sweet preparation.

Meghalaya:

- '**Meghalaya Garo Textile**' weaving, which is linked to socio-cultural and religious rituals, '**Meghalaya Lyrnai Pottery**' and '**Meghalaya Chubitchi**' secured GI tags.

Geographical Indication:

- A geographical indication (GI) is a name or sign used on certain products which corresponds to a specific **geographical location or origin**.
- The GI tag ensures that the product name can only be used by individuals who have been registered as authorised users and live within the geographic territory.
 - Basically, It protects the product from being copied.
- Geographical Indications are covered as a component of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under the **Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property (1883)**.
- GIs have been defined under **Article 22 (1)** of the **WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)** Agreement.
- India enacted the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** has come into force with effect from 15 September **2003**.
- In India, a registered GI shall be valid for **10 years** and can be renewed.
- The GI tags in India are issued by - Geographical Indications Registry in **Chennai**.
- It comes under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

- **Darjeeling tea** became the **first GI tagged product** in India, in **2004–2005**.

Arvind Kejriwal's Arrest



Recently: **Delhi High Court** on Thursday refused to entertain PIL to remove Arvind Kejriwal as chief minister following his arrest by the **Enforcement Directorate** in the **excise policy**-linked money laundering case.

- During the arguments, Delhi HC made oral observations stating that at times, personal interest has to be subordinate to national interest.
- The **Delhi Chief Minister** had been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the Excise Duty Case.
- Mr Kejriwal has become the **first sitting CM** to be arrested in the history of **Independent India** and his party has said he will continue to hold the post.

What is Delhi excise policy?

- The **liquor policy** introduced by the **AAP government** in **2021** aimed at significant reforms in the **excise sector**.
- These reforms included **privatisation** of **liquor stores** and adjustments in **licensing criteria**.
- However, allegations of corruption and favouritism marred its implementation, leading to its eventual rollback.
- Under the new policy, **849 liquor vends** were awarded to **private companies** through **open bidding**.
- The city was divided into **32 zones**, each with a **maximum of 27 vends**.
- Instead of individual licences, bidding was done **zone-by-zone**.
- The new policy marked the exit of the city government from the **liquor business**.
- It was implemented in a bid to increase government revenues, improve customer experience, and end the liquor mafia's influence and black marketing.
- However, the policy was opposed by civil society, religious groups, educational institutions, Parents' Bodies and the opposition alike.
- The Delhi government was forced to roll back the new excise regime and revert to the old liquor policy in **July 2022**.
- A controversy soon erupted after it was alleged that the excise policy 2021-22 of the Kejriwal government was used to extend undue financial favors to the **liquor licensees**.
- This allegedly occurred much after the tenders had been awarded, causing huge losses to the exchequer.
- Currently, the city has **652 liquor vends** operating under **four government corporations**:
 - DSIIDC (Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation)
 - DTTDC (Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation)
 - DSCSC (Delhi State Civil Supplies Corporation Limited)
 - DCCWS (Delhi Consumer's Cooperative Wholesale Store Limited).
- The four government corporations operate both premium and budget vends that cater to customers from all walks of life.
- Now, under the old excise policy, the excise department is mapping every ward as a '**confirming**' or '**non-confirming area**'.
- The government agencies have also managed to open shops in the areas falling under the New Delhi Municipal Council after the civic body earlier rejected a proposal for opening shops there.

The controversy:

- **Two cases**, one by **CBI** and **one** on **alleged money laundering** being investigated by **ED**, have been registered in relation to the excise policy.
- The case arose out of a report submitted by **Delhi Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar** to Lieutenant Governor (LG) **Vinai Kumar Saxena** in **July 2022**.
- The report pointed to alleged procedural lapses in the formulation of the policy.
- The report by the **Chief Secretary of Delhi** also showed prima facie violations of:
 - The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act, 1991
 - Transaction of Business Rules (ToBR) 1993
 - Delhi Excise Act 2009
 - Delhi Excise Rules 2010
- The report said “arbitrary and unilateral decisions” taken by then **Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia** in his capacity as **Excise Minister**.
- It had resulted in “financial losses to the exchequer” estimated at more than **Rs 580 crore**.
- The AAP Delhi government and leaders allegedly received kickbacks from alcohol businesses, resulting in preferential treatment including **discounts, fee extensions, penalty waivers, and pandemic relief**.
- This report was referred to the CBI, and led to **Sisodia’s** arrest.
- Then, following the CBI naming Sisodia and **14 others**, including AAP communications in-charge **Vijay Nair**, in its FIR, the ED informed a court in March that the alleged proceeds of crime exceeded **Rs 292 crore**.
- It emphasized the necessity to establish the modus operandi.
- The ED alleged that the “scam” was to give the wholesale liquor business to private entities and fix a **12% margin**, for a **6% kickback**.
- The ED also alleged that AAP leaders received kickbacks to the tune of Rs **100 crore** from a group of individuals identified as the **“South Group”**.
 - Recently, **K Kavitha**, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader and daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister **K Chandrasekhar Rao**, was arrested allegedly for being part of this ‘South Group’.

Accusations against Kejriwal:

- It was after Kavitha's arrest that the ED alleged — for the first time — that CM Arvind Kejriwal was a **conspirator** in the case.
- Previously, ED had filed **two criminal complaints** against Kejriwal in city's Rouse Avenue Courts alleging **non compliance of the summons by him**.
- Earlier, in a supplementary prosecution complaint, the ED alleged that Kejriwal himself spoke to one of the main accused, **Sameer Mahendru**, over a video call.
- Kejriwal purportedly asked Mahendru to continue working with co-accused **Vijay Nair**, whom he referred to as "his boy."
- **Manish Sisodia** and **Sanjay Singh** had been arrested in the money laundering case and were sent to the judicial custody.

Enforcement Directorate:

- The ED is a domestic law enforcement agency and **economic intelligence agency** responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crimes in India.
- It is part of the **Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India**.
- The ED originated as an "**Enforcement Unit**" on **May 1, 1956**, under the **Department of Economic Affairs**, handling exchange control law violations.
- The Enforcement Directorate's headquarters is in **New Delhi**.
- The leadership structure comprises the **Director** of Enforcement at the helm, who oversees regional offices in **Mumbai, Chennai, Chandigarh, Kolkata**, and **Delhi**, which are led by Special Directors of Enforcement.
- The current director of ED is **Rahul Navin**.

International Women's Day 2024



Source- Canva Pro

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the International Women's Day was observed on **March 8th**.

- It is a global day acknowledging the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women.
- The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

Theme:

- The United Nations has designated the year 2024's theme as '**Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress**' with a focus on addressing economic disempowerment, while the campaign theme for this year is '**Inspire Inclusion.**'
- It highlights the significance of diversity and empowerment across all sectors of society.

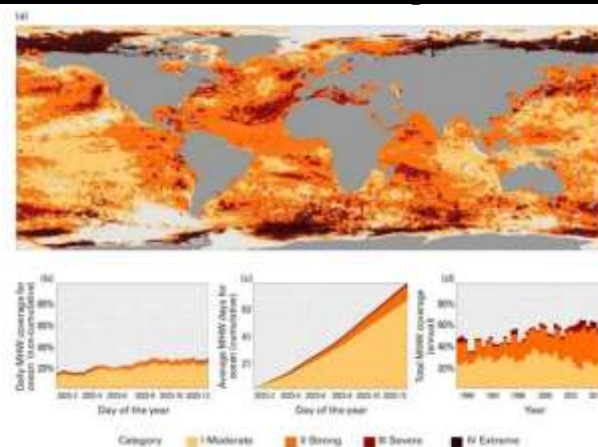
History:

- International Women's Day has its origins in the early **20th century**, which arose from the **labour movements** in **North America and Europe**.
- The **first National Women's Day** was observed in the **United States** on **February 28, 1909**.
 - It was organized by the **Socialist Party of America** to commemorate the **1908 garment workers' strike** in New York, where women protested against working conditions.
- Later in **1910**, **Clara Zetkin** proposed International Women's Day at the **International Women's Conference in Copenhagen**.
- The idea was unanimously approved, leading to the **first observance** in **1911** in several European countries, with over a million participants advocating for women's rights.
- The **United Nations** began celebrating the day in **1975**.
- Two years later, in **1977**, the UN General Assembly invited member states to proclaim March 8 as the **UN Day for Women's Rights and World Peace**.

Significance:

- The significance of International Women's Day lies in its ability to bring attention to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and violence and abuse against women.
- It provides a platform for collective action and collaboration in advocating for women's rights and empowerment.

Global Climate Report 2023



Recently: The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** released the 2023 edition of the Global Climate Report.

- The report highlights the alarming trends in various climate indicators, including record-breaking greenhouse gas levels, surface temperatures, ocean heat and acidification, sea level rise, Antarctic sea ice cover, and glacier retreat.

Highlights of the Report:

Increased Heat:

- The reports confirmed that **2023** is the **hottest year** on record by a huge margin, smashing global temperature records.
- The global average near-surface temperature in 2023 was **1.45 ± 0.12 °C** above the **pre-industrial** (1850–1900) average, making it the warmest year in the **174-year** observational record.
- The previous warmest years were **2016** at **1.29 ± 0.12 °C** and **2020** at **1.27 ± 0.13 °C** above the 1850–1900 average.

- The **10-year average (2014–2023)** global temperature was **1.20 ± 0.12 °C** above the **1850–1900 average**, making it the **warmest 10-year** period on record.
- Globally, every month from June to December was record warm for the respective month.
 - September 2023 surpassed the previous global record for September by a wide margin (0.46 to 0.54 °C).

Greenhouse Gases:

- Concentrations of the three main greenhouse gases – **carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide** – reached record high observed levels.

Surface Temperature:

- The global average near surface temperature for 2023 spiked to **1.45 degree Celsius** — the highest ever on record — above the pre-industrial levels.
- Although the rise in GHG concentrations in the atmosphere is the primary reason for soaring global temperatures, the onset of **El Niño** last year also contributed to the increase in mercury.
 - El Niño refers to an abnormal warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

Ocean Heat:

- As the oceans have absorbed nearly **90 per cent** of the extra heat trapped by GHGs since **1971**, they steadily become warmer and their heat content has increased.
- In 2023, the **ocean heat content (OHC)** — the total amount of heat stored by the oceans — reached its highest level in the **65-year** observational record, according to the report.

Marine Heatwave:

- Due to warmer temperatures, the global ocean experienced an average daily marine heatwave (MHWs) coverage of **32%**, well above the previous record of **23%** in **2016**.

- MHWs occur when the surface temperature of a particular region of the sea rises to **3 or 4 degree Celsius** above the average temperature for at least **five days**.

Food Insecurity:

- The number of people who are acutely food insecure worldwide had more than doubled, from **149 million people** before the COVID-19 pandemic to **333 million** people in **2023** (in 78 countries monitored by the World Food Programme).

Renewable Energy:

- In 2023, renewable capacity additions increased by almost **50% from 2022**, for a total of **510 gigawatts (GW)** – the highest rate observed in the past two decades.
- This surge in renewable energy is primarily driven by solar radiation, wind, and the water cycle, and has the potential to achieve decarbonization targets.

World Meteorological Organization:

- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for promoting international cooperation in the field of meteorology, hydrology, and related geophysical sciences.
- The WMO was established in **1950** and has **193 member states** and territories.
 - The WMO originated from the **International Meteorological Organization**, a nongovernmental organization founded in **1873**
 - It was formally established by the **World Meteorological Convention of 1947**.
 - The Convention **entered into force** on **23 March 1950**.
- **World Meteorological Day** is celebrated annually on **March 23** to commemorate the establishment of the WMO.
- It is headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- **Celesto Saulo** is the current Secretary General of WMO.

India- Myanmar Free Movement Regime



Source- Civildaily.com

Recently: While the Union government is working toward fencing the **1,643 km** long Indo-Myanmar land border, security agencies have identified a section of people who have voiced their **opposition** to the fencing.

- With the porous border a hotbed of drugs and human trafficking and other illegal trade, it is suspected that those expressing reservations against the proposed fencing are directly or indirectly benefitting from such activities.
- In **January 2024**, the Union Government announced its decision to fence the entire length of the India-Myanmar border in order to stop the free movement of people.

What is a Free Movement Regime (FMR)?

- The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to **16 km** inside the other country without a visa.
- It allows communities living along the border to travel to the other country for a period of up to **two weeks**.
- They require a border pass with **one-year validity**.
- The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in **1826** through the **Treaty of Yandabo**, without seeking the opinion of the people living in the region.
- The border effectively divided people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without their consent.
- People in the region have strong ethnic and familial ties across the border.
- The regime facilitated **people- to- people contact** and was supposed to provide **impetus to local trade and business**.

Formation:

- Burma (Myanmar) was a part of the British India colony but in **1937** Burma was split off from India and became a **separate colony**.
- India gained independence in 1947 while Burma gained independence in 1948.
- In **1950s**, Government allowed Indian and Burmese citizens to enter either side without passport or visa up to **40 km**.
 - Burmese could stay for **72 hours** in India, while Indians could stay for only **24 hours** in Myanmar.
- In **1968**, India tightened FMR with a **new permit system**. The permit was to be issued by either side for their citizens for the temporary entry.
 - The rise of insurgency in Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland then had sparked concerns over the FMR in India.
- In **2004**, India limited the FMR distance to **16 km from 40 km**.
 - In addition, instead of allowing people to cross from multiple points, **only three places** were allowed to be used as the gateways - **Pangsau in Arunachal Pradesh, Moreh in Manipur, and Zokhawthar in Mizoram**.
- In **2018**, India and Myanmar signed the Agreement on **Land Border Crossing**.
 - The agreement facilitated the regulation and harmonisation of already existing free movement rights for people ordinarily residing in the border areas of both countries.

Why has FMR been scrapped?

Increase in Immigrants:

- FMR is believed to be the main reason behind the quantum jump in the population of the **Kuki-Zo community**.
- The **Chins** in Myanmar are called **Paites** in Manipur, while their kindred tribe **Kukis** bears the same name.
- So far, more than 200 people have been killed and tens of thousands displaced in the ethnic violence in Manipur that erupted last year in May between the **Kuki and Meitei communities**.
- The Meitei argue that the unchecked entry of illegal immigrants from Myanmar over decades was one of the factors behind the violence.
- The movement of Nagas who are Myanmar's citizens and who frequently venture into India through the shared border in Nagaland--can be regulated properly after fencing through suitable transit routes.

Smuggling:

- It is estimated that **90 per cent** of the smuggling of drugs in India has its origin in Myanmar, including not only **opium and heroin, but also amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)**.
- The India-Myanmar border town of **Moreh** of Manipur is known to be the major hub of drugs.
 - Drugs usually reach Moreh through Myanmar's *Tamu village* and then flow to **Imphal** as well as to Nagaland's capital **Kohima**, and **Dimapur**.
- Two other smuggling routes run from **Kheiman (in Myanmar)** to **Behiyang (Manipur)** and then to Imphal and Dimapur (Nagaland).
- Beetle nuts are also smuggled in through dirt tracks from Myanmar and after crossing into India consignments are ferried by decades-old '**Shaktiman**' vehicles up to the main roadhead.
 - Beetle nut consignments are transported to the railhead in Dimapur or Jiribam and sent to Bihar, where they are used for the manufacture of '**gutkhas**'.
- Other goods smuggled in include Chinese **electronic and consumable products, cigarettes** and construction materials like cement, **sand and tin sheets**.

Trafficking:

- In recent years, **human trafficking** has increased and Myanmar's economic crisis and crackdown against ethnic communities by its ruling military junta are mostly to blame.
- In addition, the **trafficking of weapons** and other military equipment into Myanmar primarily originates from China's Kunming region.

Earlier Fencing Attempts:

- In March **2003**, fencing work began along the India- Myanmar Border due to increasing migration, cross- border insurgency, smuggling, drug trafficking, etc.
- In **2004**, fencing work in the **state of Manipur** along the border was **stalled** due to protests raised by the local Kuki and Naga communities.
- According to them, a huge stretch of land would become Myanmar's territory and foster unrest among people living on both sides of the border.
- In **Manipur, less than 6 km** of the border is fenced.
- As the crisis in Myanmar escalated and the influx of refugees increased, India **suspended the FMR in September 2022**.
- Given the interests of the local population, however, neither the complete removal of the FMR nor full fencing of the border may be desirable.

Government's Plan:

- The government plans to equip the border with an **"advanced smart fencing system"** within **four-and-half years**.
 - The SFS typically includes a combination of physical barriers, sensors, cameras and communication systems, allowing for effective monitoring and response to border threats.
- The two countries share a largely unfenced **1,643 km** border, which goes through the states of **Manipur (398km), Mizoram (510km), Nagaland (215km) and Arunachal Pradesh (520km)**.
 - As of now, land demarcation of **1,472 km** has been completed along the India-Myanmar border.
- The fencing project is envisaged to cost around **Rs. 6000 crores**.
- The **Border Road Organization** is fencing the strategic India- Myanmar Border, starting with a **10km stretch** in Manipur.
 - The next **80km** stretch in Manipur has been **identified** and the remaining **250km** is in the planning stage.

- In late 2023, the government also announced its target of fencing the entire **4,096km** of **India- Bangladesh** Border by **March 2024**.

Challenges:

- Just a month after the decision, the security establishment has realised the challenges in fencing the border.
- If it is to be made impregnable, **constant physical patrolling** is a must, so there is a need to construct a **motorable tract** astride the fencing on the Indian side of the boundary.
- A source in the security establishment pointed out that in Assam when the decision to fence the border was taken in **1985** after the **Assam Accord**, the work only started seven years later in **1992** and is yet to be completed.
 - Proper fencing of the Indo- Myanmar Border may also take year for completion.
- The moot point is that the fencing of the entire Indo-Myanmar border might be **beyond the BRO's capacity** and would need the involvement of private players.
- In **2001, 15 battalions** of the Assam Rifles were raised to guard the Indo-Myanmar border, but now most of these troops are committed to counter-insurgency roles, so the border remains porous.
 - Even if a battalion manages a **60km frontage**, the requirement would still be **28 battalions**, which means an additional 13 border guarding battalions will have to be raised.

Myanmar:

- Myanmar (**formerly Burma**) is a **Southeast Asian nation** of more than **100 ethnic groups**.
- The name Burma was changed in **1989**.
- It borders with **India, Bangladesh, China, Laos** and **Thailand**.
- The capital of Myanmar is **Naypyidaw** and the current leader of the country is **Min Aung Hlaing**.
- Myanmar was long considered a pariah state while under the rule of a military junta from **1962 to 2011**.
- A gradual liberalisation began in **2010**, leading to free elections in **2015**.

- The installation of a government led by veteran opposition leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** followed the next year in **2016**.
- But a **2017** army operation in **Rakhine state** drove more than half a million **Muslim Rohingyas** to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh and India.
- This was confirmed when **Aung San Suu Kyi** and her government were overthrown in a coup in **February 2021**.
- Myanmar is geopolitically significant to India as it stands at the **center of the India-Southeast Asia geography**.
- Myanmar is the **only Southeast Asian country** that shares a land border with northeastern India.

Nuclear Energy Summit 2024



Recently: The **first ever Nuclear Energy Summit**, organised jointly by the **IAEA** and the **Belgium Government**, was held in **Brussels** on **March 21**.

- The summit was co-chaired by the **Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo** and the **Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi**.
- Several world leaders joined the summit to highlight the role of nuclear energy in addressing climate change.

What is Nuclear Energy?

- Nuclear energy is a form of energy released from the nucleus, the core of atoms, made up of protons and neutrons.
- This source of energy can be produced in two ways: **fission** – when nuclei of atoms split into several parts – or **fusion** – when nuclei fuse together.
- The nuclear energy harnessed around the world today to produce **electricity** is through **nuclear fission**, while technology to generate electricity from fusion is at the R&D phase.
- In **1954**, nuclear fission technology was approved for commercial purposes for the first time and the **first nuclear power plant** started operation in the **Russian City of Obninsk**.

What is a Nuclear Reactor?

- A nuclear reactor is a device used to initiate and control a fission nuclear chain reaction or nuclear fusion reactions.
- Nuclear reactors are used at nuclear power plants for electricity generation and in nuclear marine propulsion.
- There are **440 nuclear reactors** in **32 countries plus Taiwan**, with a combined capacity of about **390GWe**.
- The number of nuclear reactors is increasing, with **60 reactors** under construction and **110** in the planning stage, most being in Asia, particularly **China**.
 - China is soon to overtake the U.S. and the nuclear giant France.
 - China has set a target to produce **10%** of its electricity from nuclear energy by **2035** and **18%** by **2060**.
- **Japan's Kashiwazaki- Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant (NPP)** is currently the largest nuclear reactor in the world with a net capacity around **7,965MW**.

What is the nuclear Energy Summit?

- The Nuclear Energy Summit, an initiative in collaboration with the IAEA's '**Atoms4Netzero**' programme, is part of the multilateral approach to decarbonisation.
- The Summit comes in the wake of the historic inclusion of nuclear energy in the **Global Stocktake** agreed at the **UN Climate Change Conference (COP28)** in **Dubai** in December 2023.
 - The declaration signed by **22 world leaders** mentioned the need to triple nuclear energy capacity by **2050**.
 - **India** was **not one of the signatories** of this declaration.
- The summit boasted the attendance of representatives from **30 countries**, including a few heads of state.
- India was represented by the **Department of Atomic Energy Secretary Ajit Kumar Mohanty**.
- The meeting was not meant to produce any decisions or finalise any agreement.
 - Rather, it was another attempt to build momentum for a greater acceptance of nuclear energy which many countries continue to have apprehensions about.
- At the Nuclear Energy Summit, **World Nuclear Association**, along with national and regional nuclear industry associations have issued an **Industry Statement**.
 - The national and regional energy associations included Canadian Nuclear Association, Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Korea Atomic Industrial Forum, Nuclear Energy Institute, nucleareurope, and Nuclear Industry Association.
- The statement sets out the global nuclear industry's commitment to supporting government objectives to expand nuclear energy capacity worldwide to achieve climate and energy security goals.
- To deliver this necessary expansion will require significant investment across the nuclear industry and related supply chains, to develop new projects, capabilities, and a skilled workforce.

Advantages of Nuclear Energy:

Low Carbon Footprint:

- Nuclear Energy is a clean source of energy with a **minimal carbon footprint**. There is negligible release of emissions during the electricity generation process.
- Even when the entire life cycle is considered greenhouse gas emissions are only in the range of **5 to 6 grams per kilowatt hour**, according to IAEA.
 - An entire life cycle accounts for activities like reactor construction, uranium mining and enrichment, waste disposal and storage, and other processes.
- This is more than **100 times lower** than **coal-fired electricity**, and about **half the average** of **solar and wind** generation.
- Nuclear power generation results in avoiding emissions of more than **1 billion tonnes of CO₂** equivalent every year, according to IAEA.
 - In the last **five decades**, this has resulted in a cumulative avoidance of about **70 billion tonnes of CO₂** equivalent.

Availability:

- The other great advantage of nuclear is its **perennial availability**, unlike wind or solar which are season or time-dependent.
- It is thus suitable for baseload electricity generation that solar or wind projects are unable to do unless breakthroughs in battery storage technologies come along.

Apprehensions:

- There has been a serious lack of enthusiasm for the accelerated deployment of nuclear energy.
- Only **31 countries** in the world use nuclear energy for generating electricity. And barely **seven more** are working towards joining this club.
- The number of operational nuclear reactors has actually come down in the last 20 years.
- The average life of these reactors is **more than 31 years**, which highlights the fact that few new reactors have come onboard in the last decade.
- The total installed electricity generation capacity has shown only a marginal increase during this period, from about **360 GW in 2003** to **371 GW now**.
- Nuclear energy accounts for **less than 10 per cent** of global commercial electricity generation, and its share has been declining for almost three decades now.

Safety Concerns:

- Safety concern is a huge issue that dissuades countries from the adoption of nuclear energy.
- Incidents like **Fukushima accident** and the infamous **Chernobyl disaster** have aggravated these concerns.
- The **Fukushima accident** occurred in **2011** in **Japan** when **Fukushima Daiichi power plant** was severely damaged by earthquake and Tsunami.
 - It had a negative impact on the progress in the adoption of Nuclear Power.
- In **1986**, an explosion at a reactor (Guardian) at **Chernobyl** in **Ukraine** spewed radiation enough for **four hundred Hiroshima-sized bombs**.
- The continuing crisis at the **Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (largest Nuclear Power Plant in Europe)** in **Ukraine**, the first nuclear facility to have been caught in a dangerous armed conflict, has also been a source of grave concern.

Cost:

- Nuclear power also happens to be the **costliest** electricity right now.
- Nuclear reactors require **high investments** and technology base, take years to build, and have to operate under a variety of regulations and constraints.
- The kind of technology breakthroughs that have driven down the costs of solar and wind in the last decade, thus enabling rapid adoption, have not happened in the nuclear sector.
- The much-discussed technology of small modular reactors is far from being mature.

India:

- India, which currently has **23 operational nuclear reactors**, does acknowledge the role of nuclear energy in its decarbonisation plan.
 - **Kandankulam Nuclear Power Plant, Tamil Nadu**, is currently the largest nuclear power station in India.
- It is planning for a rapid expansion in the coming years, even though the share of nuclear energy in electricity generation is likely to remain extremely modest in the foreseeable future.
- The currently operational reactors have a combined installed electricity generating capacity of **7,480 MW (about 7.5 GW)**.

- At least **ten more** reactors are under construction, and the capacity is supposed to triple to **22,480 MW by 2031-32**.
- The share of nuclear energy in total electricity generation capacity is just about **3.1 per cent**, among the **lowest** in countries that do use nuclear energy.
- Only **Brazil and Iran** have a lower share of nuclear energy in their electricity generation mix.
- Even after expansion, this share is not expected to go beyond **5 per cent**.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):

- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an intergovernmental organization that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.
- It was **established in 1957** as an autonomous organization within the United Nations system.
- Though governed by its own founding treaty, the organization reports to both the **General Assembly** and the **Security Council** of the United Nations.
- Following the ratification of the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons** in **1968**, all non-nuclear powers are required to negotiate a **safeguards agreement** with the IAEA.
 - IAEA has been conferred with the **power to monitor** nuclear programs and to inspect nuclear facilities.
- It has total **178 members** as **September 2024**.
 - **Eight ratifications** were required to bring the IAEA's statute into force on **29th July 1957**.
- In **2005**, the IAEA and its administrative head, **Director General Mohamed ElBaradei**, were awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** "for their efforts to prevent nuclear energy from being used for military purposes.
- It is headquartered in **Vienna, Austria**.
- **Rafael Grossi** is the current Director- General of the IAEA.

Model Code of Conduct



Source- <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/what-is-election-model-code-of-conduct-1526288849-1>

Recently: On March 16th, the dates for the India **Lok Sabha Elections 2024** were announced and the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) was rolled out with immediate effect.

- Chief Election Commissioner **Rajiv Kumar** asked all political parties and their leaders to strictly adhere to the MCC, which lays down a list of dos and don'ts for leaders and parties ahead of elections.
- The code will be in place till election results are announced.

What is a Model Code of Conduct?

- The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of guidelines published by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.
- It aims to establish standards of conduct for political parties and candidates during the election campaign and polling.
- The rules range from issues related to speeches, polling day, polling booths, portfolios, the content of election manifestos, processions, and general conduct.
- It explains the process for lodging complaints with EC observers in disputes and outlines conduct guidelines for Ministers of parties in power under the MCC.

- Notably, the MCC does not possess any statutory backing but has been upheld by the Supreme Court on multiple occasions.
- In **2019**, a new addition regarding election manifestos was added, instructing parties to not issue promises which were '**repugnant to the ideals of the Constitution**'.

History:

- The journey of the MCC, as documented in the book "**Leap of Faith**" published by the ECI, sheds light on its historical evolution and significance in Indian elections.
- The Model Code of Conduct made its debut during the **1960** Assembly elections in **Kerala**.
- Following its efficacy, it was extended nationwide during the **1962 Lok Sabha elections**.
- ECI's book uncovers that the MCC originated as the '**Minimum Code of Conduct**' by the Election Commission during the Mid-Term Elections in **1968-69**.
- However, it was only in **1974**, just before the mid-term general elections, that the EC released a **formal MCC**.
- This Code was also circulated during parliamentary elections of **1977**.
 - Until this time, the MCC was meant to guide the conduct of political parties and candidates only.
- However, on **September 12, 1979**, at a meeting of all political parties, the Commission was apprised of the misuse of official machinery by **parties in power**.
 - Therefore the EC, just before the **1979 Lok Sabha elections**, released a revised Model Code with **seven parts**, with **one part** devoted to the party in power.
- The MCC has subsequently evolved as an integral part of conducting fair and free elections.
- In response to recurrent violations of electoral norms, the Election Commission opted for stricter enforcement of the MCC during the **1991 Lok Sabha elections**.
 - Since then, it has been revised and updated periodically.
- The MCC was last updated in **2014**, when the Commission introduced **Part VIII** on manifestos, pursuant to the directions of the Supreme Court.

Parts of the MCC:

- **Part I** deals with general precepts of good behaviour expected from candidates and political parties.

- **Parts II** and **III** focus on public meetings and processions.
- **Parts IV** and **V** describe how political parties and candidates should conduct themselves on the day of polling and at the polling booths.
- **Part VII** prescribed that the parties in power should use their official position for the purpose of campaigning.
- **Part VIII** of the MCC provides for guidelines on manifestoes.

Who is bound by it?

- The MCC is applicable to all elections to the **Lok Sabha, State Assemblies**.
- It is also applicable for **State Legislative Council** elections from Local Bodies, and Graduates' and Teachers' Constituencies.
- It is enforced **throughout India in case of General elections**, and the State up for polls in case of Legislative Assembly elections.
- All organisations, committees, corporations, commissions funded wholly or partially by the Centre or State are bound by the MCC.
- While listed political parties and candidates are bound to follow the MCC, even non-political organisations which hold campaigns favouring a political party or candidate are bound to follow specific guidelines mentioned by the EC

What are the guidelines?

- Political parties and candidates are advised to refrain from **commenting** on all aspects of **private life** of the leaders and workers of other parties.
- Social media posts must also refrain from insulting rivals.
- They must also not indulge in activities aggravating existing differences or **create mutual hatred** between different **castes, religious and linguistic communities**.
- Appeals to caste or **communal feelings** for securing **votes** are also prohibited.
- Restrictive or **prohibitory orders** in force at any public place where meetings are held must be adhered to.
- Permission for usage of public spaces and loudspeakers must be taken from local police.

- In case of public procession, details of time and place of start and end point and the route to be followed must be informed and cleared by the police.
- All political workers engaged in **electioneering** must display badges or identity cards and must leave constituency after the campaign period is over if they are not a voter or candidate or candidate's election agent from that constituency.
- Disrupting public meetings of other parties or candidates are also prohibited.
- Parties cannot hold processions along places where other parties are holding meetings or remove/ deface rival parties' posters.
- No political party can make any payment over **₹10,000 in cash**, in a day, to any **person/company/entity**.
- Parties must also not resort to bribing/intimidating/impersonating voters.
- They must not transport voters to and from polling stations or serve/distribute liquor on polling day.
- Canvassing within **100 metres** of **polling booths** is not allowed and demonstrations before house of any individual should not be resorted to.
- Posters, flags, symbols or any other propaganda material shall not be displayed at the polling place.
- Loudspeakers cannot be used between **10 p.m. and 6 a.m.** unless written permission of local authorities is taken. Normally, public meetings are not allowed to continue beyond 10 p.m.
- Holding public meetings during the **48-hour period** before the hour fixed for the closing of the poll is also prohibited.
 - The 48-hour period is known as "**election silence**".
 - The idea is to allow a voter a campaign-free environment to reflect on events before casting her vote.

What is Election Commission?

- The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body given in **Article 324, Part XV** of the Constitution.
 - There are just five **Articles (324-329)** in **Part XV** of the Constitution, that deal with the elections.
- It was established by the Constitution of India to conduct and regulate elections in the country.
- It was founded on **25 January 1950** also known as **Voters day** in India, 1 day before the Indian Constitution came in effect.
- The election commission currently consists of **3-members** – **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) + 2 Election commissioners (EC)**.

- The **Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991** requires that the EC and CEC must hold the post for a period of **six years**.

Evolution of the Election Commission:

- For almost **four decades** of the republic, until **1989**, the Election Commission was a **single-member body**, with only a CEC.
- The first CEC was **Shri Sukumar Sen**.
- The Election Commission was expanded just ahead of the elections to the **ninth Lok Sabha**.
 - It was in an atmosphere of friction between the **Rajiv Gandhi government** and then **CEC R V S Peri Sastri**.
 - These differences had resulted in government decision to **curtail CEC powers** by making the Election Commission a **multi-member body**.
- In **1989**, President R Venkataraman, in the exercise of his powers under **Article 324(2)**, issued a notification creating **two positions in the Election Commission** in addition to that of the CEC.
 - But this arrangement did not last.
- The **V P Singh government** then enacted the aforementioned **Act of 1991**, which gave the **CEC** a status **equal to** that of a **Supreme Court judge**, and his retirement age was fixed at **65 years**.
 - The **ECs** were given the status of **High Court judges**, and their retirement age was fixed at **62 years**.
 - The passage of the EC Act essentially meant that if and when the Election Commission became a multi-member body again, the **CEC would act as its chairman**.
 - The **ECs would be junior** to him.
- **P V Narasimha Rao government** decided to expand the poll body again in **1993**.
 - Also, the government brought an **Ordinance** to amend the EC Act.
 - They made the **CEC and the ECs equal** by giving all three the status of a **Supreme Court judge** and equal power.
 - The amendment also introduced sections that envisaged that the CEC and the ECs would act unanimously.
 - In case there was a difference of opinion on any issue, the majority view would prevail.
- The current CEC is **Shri Rajiv Kumar**.
- The 2 other members are **Shri Anup Chandra Pandey and Shri Arun Goel**.

Pritzker Architecture Prize 2024



Photo Credit: Tom Welsh

Recently: Japanese architect **Riken Yamamoto** won the 2024 Pritzker Architecture Prize, the **highest international award** in the field.

- The **78-year-old** Japanese talent is known for housing and civic projects including schools, libraries, and city services buildings—the majority in Asia—with designs that encourage togetherness and social interactions.
- Yamamoto will be formally honoured at a ceremony in **Chicago, in May 2024.**

What is Pritzker Architecture Prize?

- The Pritzker Architecture Prize is an international architecture award presented annually to honor a **living architect** or architects.
- The prize, popularly known as the “**Architecture Nobel**”, has been awarded every year since its founding in **1979**.
- The Pritzker Architecture Prize was instituted by **Jay A Pritzker**, the late founder of the **Hyatt Hotels chain**, and his **wife Cindy**.
- It is sponsored by the **Hyatt Foundation**.
- It aims to honour a living architect whose built work demonstrates talent, vision and commitment, who has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture”.
- The award comes with a purse of **\$100,000, a citation, and a bronze medallion**.
- The designs on the medal are inspired by the work of architect **Louis Sullivan**, while the Latin inspired inscription on the reverse of the medallion—**firmitas, utilitas, venustas** (English: **firmness, commodity and delight**)—is from Ancient Roman architect **Vitruvius**.
- The **Executive Director of the prize, Manuela Lucá-Dazio**, solicits nominations from a range of people, including past Laureates, academics, critics and others.
 - Any licensed architect can also make a personal application for the prize before **November 1 every year**.
- The jury, consisting of five to nine "experts ... recognized professionals in their own fields of architecture, business, education, publishing, and culture", deliberates and early in the following year announce the winner.
- **Alejandro Aravena** is the **current jury chair** and **2016 winner** of the award.
- The prize is awarded in **May**, at a ceremony that is modelled on the **Nobel Prizes**.

Winners:

- **Philip Johnson** was the **inaugural winner** of the award in **1979**.
- The **2004 laureate Zaha Hadid** was the **first female** prize winner.
- **Ryue Nishizawa** became the **youngest winner** in **2010** at age **44**.
- Architects from Japan have won the largest number of Pritzkers, including the **2010 prize** that was shared by **Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa**.
 - **Yamamoto** is the **ninth laureate** from Japan.
 - **Kenzo Tange** was the first **Japanese winner** in **1987**.

- It is followed by the **United States** (**eight laureates**, including a shared prize and two architects with dual nationality).
- The only **Indian laureate** is the late **Balkrishna Doshi (2018)**.

Riken Yamamoto:

- Riken Yamamoto is a **Japanese architect** born in 1945.
- The **78- year-old** architect, privileges family and community, the seen over the unseen, above all else in his projects.
- Over a five-decade career, he has built private residences, community housing, schools, university buildings, institutions and public spaces, and led numerous initiatives to encourage local talent and construction.
- As **founder and principal of architecture studio Riken Yamamoto & Field Shop**, Yamamoto's major works include:
 - **Hotakubo Housing (1991)** in **Kumamoto, Japan**, a complex of **110 units** that share a central green space and adjacencies.
 - **Hiroshima Nishi Fire Station (2000)** that has a transparent façade and glass walls and floors that allow passersby to look inside.
 - **Yokosuka Museum of Art (2006)**, a glass-clad structure with a serpentine entrance that locates many galleries underground so as not to interrupt natural views of Tokyo Bay.
 - **Tianjin Library (2012) in China**, a large-scale project with a gridded design that creates a variety of reading room sizes for its collection of five million books
 - **Circle at Zürich Airport (2020)**, a mixed-use hospitality, shopping, and office district located just steps from the terminal.

World Consumer Rights Day 2024



Source- thequint.com

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the World Consumer Rights Day was observed on **March 15th**.

- It is an annual event dedicated to reminding us of the importance of consumer rights in our global marketplace.
- This day emphasizes the need for transparency regarding the quantity, quality, and price of goods, as well as the significance of safeguarding consumer rights.
- Consumers are entitled to certain fundamental rights, including the **right to safety, right to be informed, right to choose, right to be heard, right to seek redressal, and right to consumer education.**
- These rights empower consumers to make informed decisions, seek recourse for grievances, and contribute to a fair and transparent marketplace.
- India observes **National Consumer Rights Day** annually on **December 24th**.

Theme:

- **Consumers International**, the global voice for consumers, has chosen the theme '**Fair and responsible AI for consumers**' for this year's World Consumer Rights Day.
- This theme sheds light on the rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into our daily lives and the necessity of ensuring that AI technologies respect and uphold consumer rights.

History:

- The origins of World Consumer Rights Day can be traced back to **March 15, 1962**, when former **US President John F. Kennedy** addressed consumer rights issues in a historic speech to the US Congress.
- This marked the first time a world leader had formally acknowledged the importance of consumer rights on a global stage.
- Since its official **inception** on **March 15, 1983**, World Consumer Rights Day has been recognized and endorsed by the United Nations.

Significance:

- World Consumer Rights Day holds significant importance in raising awareness about the rights of consumers and safeguarding them against unfair practices, discrimination, and exploitation.

Pushpak – ISRO's first Reusable Launch Vehicle



Source- ISRO1

Recently: The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** has reached a significant milestone in reusable launch vehicle technology with the successful landing experiment of the **RLV LEX-02**.

- The experiment, conducted at the **Aeronautical Test Range in Chitradurga, Karnataka**, marks a crucial step forward in the development of **reusable launch vehicles (RLVs)**.
- The winged vehicle called **Pushpak** was lifted by an **Indian Air Force Chinook Helicopter** and landed precisely on the runway after being released from **4.5 kilometre altitude**.
- The launch marks the **third flight** of Pushpak, following a series of tests aimed at perfecting its robotic landing capabilities under increasingly complex conditions.

What is a Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV)?

- A reusable launch system (RLS, or reusable launch vehicle, RLV) is a system capable of launching a payload into space more than once.
- In **January 2012**, ISRO's design of the RLV spacecraft was approved by the **National Review Committee**.
- After the clearance was given, the **first prototype** was built and christened as the **RLV-TD (Technology Demonstrator)**.
- In **2016**, the space agency conducted the maiden test flight of RLV Demonstrator at **Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota** in **Andhra Pradesh**.
- The experiment involved sending a winged spacecraft on a rocket powered by conventional solid booster (**HS9**) engine used by ISRO into space.
- The spacecraft travelled at a speed of **Mach 5** (five times the speed of sound) when re-entering the earth's orbit and travelled a distance of **450 km** before splashdown in the **Bay of Bengal**.
- It was ISRO's first attempt to develop a space vehicle that can fly numerous times into space like aeroplanes.

What is Pushpak?

- The Pushpak RLV is designed as an all-rocket, **fully reusable single-stage-to-orbit (SSTO)** vehicle.
- Named after the mythical '**Pushpak Viman**' from the **Ramayana**, Isro's modern-day aircraft symbolises **prosperity and innovation**.
- It incorporates several major elements such as the **X-33** advanced technology demonstrator, the **X-34** testbed technology demonstrator, and the upgraded **DC-XA** flight demonstrator.
- The project, which has been in development for over a decade, previously saw a successful test of **RLV-LEX-01** mission in April last year.
 - Here, the vehicle demonstrated an autonomous landing after being released from an **Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter**.
- The recent mission, accomplished by the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC)** along with the **Liquid Propulsion System Centre (LPSC)** and the **ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (IISU)**, builds on the success of the RLV-LEX-01 mission.
 - **Dr S Unnikrishnan Nair** is the current Director of VSSC.

- In this latest mission, the winged body and all flight systems used in RLV-LEX-01 were reused after due certification/clearances, demonstrating the reuse capability of flight hardware and flight systems.
- Based on observations from RLV-LEX-01, the airframe structure and landing gear were strengthened to tolerate higher landing loads.
- With an investment **exceeding Rs 100 crore**, the project sets the stage for future endeavours, including the ambitious goal of establishing the **Bhartiya Antariksha Station by 2035**.

India Space Research Organization (ISRO):

- The Indian Space Research Organisation is the national space agency of India, headquartered in **Bangalore, Karnataka**.
- Operating under the **Department of Space (DOS)**, ISRO is India's primary agency for conducting space research, space exploration and research and development of technologies for space-based applications.
- Indian space programme started with **Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR)** which was formed in **February 1962** under the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** on the insistence of **Vikram Sarabhai**.
- It eventually got **superseded by ISRO** on 15th August **1969** to institutionalize space research in India with **Vikram Sarabhai as its founder**.
- In **1972**, the government of India set up a **Department of Space**, bringing ISRO under it.
- India's first satellite **Aryabhata**, was built by ISRO in **1975** and was launched by the **Interkosmos (Soviet Union)**.
- **S. Somnath** is the current chairman of ISRO.

Oscar Awards 2024



Recently: The **96th Academy Awards** ceremony concluded with flair at the at the **Dolby Theatre** in **Ovation Hollywood** in **Los Angeles**.

About the Academy Awards:

- Academy Awards are annual awards presented by the **Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences** which was incorporated in **1927**.
- These are given out in **24 categories**, including film editing, directing, cinematography, acting, music, costume design, and makeup and hairstyling.
- Winners are conferred with a **golden statuette** known as an **Oscar**.

- The statuette is **hand-cast** in **bronze** and receives a **24-karat gold** finish at **Polich Tallix Fine Art Foundry**.
- The statuettes were stolen in **2000**, leading to the Academy keeping additional statuettes on hand.
- The 1st Oscars were presented in **1929** and were presented by Academy **President Douglas Fairbanks**.
- The Awards were first **aired on radio** in **1930**.
- The **sealed-envelope system** was adopted in **1941** after a leak by the **Los Angeles Times**.
- It was only in **1953**, when the awards were **first televised**, that honouring the best in entertainment became a significant annual event in itself.
- The ceremony faced disruptions in 1938 (floods), 1968 (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination), 1981 (President Reagan's assassination attempt), and 2003 (Iraq invasion).
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **93rd ceremony** in **2021** was rescheduled to April 25th.
- Attendance at the Oscars is by **invitation only**, with no public ticket sales.

The Statuette:

- **Cedric Gibbons**, MGM art director, sketched the Academy Award **statuette** during a meeting.
- The design features a **knight with a sword standing in front of a film reel**, symbolizing different branches of the Academy.
- Adopted in **1927**, the statuette was brought to life in **1928** by sculptor **George Stanley**.
- The **13.5-inch, 8.5-pound statuette** has maintained its original design. The design's base size was standardized in **1945**.
- The first year saw **15 statuettes** presented, with the number of award categories steadily growing over time.
- Special awards, such as the **Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award**, were introduced in subsequent years.

Nominations:

- The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences consists of a **team** of around **9000 filmmakers** and **film professionals**.
- This team of professionals are the people who vote for the Oscars.
- There are two ways how a film can be selected for The Academy, either it has to go through a **rigorous application process** or should be **invited** to join The Academy directly.
- Nominees for each category are selected by votes from members of these **specific branches**.

- But when it comes to the **Best Picture category**, everyone gets to vote for this category.
- In this category, a voting member must submit a list of **five to ten nominees**.
- For every other category, a voting member submits a list of not more than **five nominees**.
- The nomination ballots are initially sorted based on the first-place ranking of the voters.
- If a selection receives a certain number of first-place votes (sometimes referred to as the "**magic number**"), it becomes a nominee.
- This "magic number" is calculated by multiplying the total number of ballots received in a given category by the total number of possible nominees plus one
- After all nomination ballots have been counted, new ballots are distributed to each Academy member.
- After the nominees are chosen, everyone gets to vote on each category from the list of nominees chosen by the category's experts.
- So, while experts in each individual category guide the nomination process, the final winners are chosen by the Academy's esteemed members only.

Academy Awards 2024:

- Best Picture - Oppenheimer
- Best Director - Christopher Nolan, Oppenheimer
- Best Actor - Cillian Murphy, Oppenheimer
- Best Actress - Emma Stone, Poor Things
- Best Supporting Actor - Robert Downey Jr., Oppenheimer
- Best Supporting Actress - Da'Vine Joy Randolph, The Holdovers
- Original Screenplay - Anatomy of a Fall
- Adapted Screenplay - American Fiction
- Animated Feature - The Boy and the Heron
- Production Design - Poor Things
- Costume Design - Poor Things
- Cinematography - Oppenheimer

- Editing - Oppenheimer
- Makeup and Hairstyling - Poor Things
- Sound - The Zone of Interest
- Visual Effects - Godzilla Minus One
- Original Score - Oppenheimer
- Original Song - "What Was I Made For?" (Barbie)
- Documentary Feature - 20 Days in Mariupol
- International Feature - The Zone of Interest, United Kingdom
- Animated Short - War Is Over! Inspired by the Music of John & Yoko
- Documentary Short - The Last Repair Shop
- Live-Action Short - The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar

Other Important Facts about the 2024 awards:

- For the **fourth time**, the ceremony was hosted by **Jimmy Kimmel**.
- **Oppenheimer** emerged as the night's big winner, taking home **seven Oscars** after being nominated in **13 categories**.
- **Cillian Murphy** has become the first **Irish-born winner** of the **best actor award**, as Oppenheimer swept the Oscars.
- **Poor Things** and **The Zone of Interest** also performed well, with **four** and **two prizes**, respectively.
- **Emma Stone** took home **Best Actress for her role in Poor Things**, an upset in a category that many expected performer **Lily Gladstone** to win.
- Politics took centre stage, with protests against **Israel's war in Gaza** blocking traffic near the awards.
- Oscars 2024 ceremony took a wild turn when **John Cena** walked on stage **nude** to present the **Best Costume Award**.
- An action sequence from **SS Rajamouli's RRR** made an appearance at the Awards in a montage celebrating the contribution of the stunt community towards international cinema.
- A video clip of last year's best original song winner '**Naatu Naatu**' from RRR was also played out at the event.

India and the Oscars:

- The 2024 Oscars come after a historic **last year** for India at the Academy Awards.
- In 2023, "**Naatu Naatu**" from **RRR** won the award for **Best Music (Original Song)**.
- **The Elephant Whisperers**, a documentary backed by **Guneet Monga**, secured an award in the category of **Documentary Short Film**.
- This time, the Canadian documentary **To Kill a Tiger**, directed by **India-born Canadian filmmaker Nisha Pahuja** was nominated for the **Documentary Feature Film** category.
 - **Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Dev Patel** and **Mindy Kaling** serve as executive producers on the film, which will release on Netflix
 - However, the documentary feature category was won by **20 Days in Mariupol**.
- **Bhanu Athaiya** is the first Indian to win the coveted Oscar award in **1982**. She received the honour for her work in **Gandhi**.
- The **Richard Attenborough** directorial based on the life of Mahatma Gandhi was not an Indian production.
 - The film was produced jointly by **Richard Attenborough** and **the National Film Development Corporation of India**
- **Satyajit Ray** was presented with an honorary Oscar award in **1992** for **Lifetime Achievement**.
- **AR Rahman** and **Gulzar**, two of India's most prolific musical minds, won the Oscar Award for **Best Original Song (Jai Ho)** for the film in **2009**.
- **AR Rahman** created history by winning not one but two Oscars at the Oscars in **2009** for his work on **Slumdog Millionaire** for **Best Original Score**.
- **Resul Pookutty** won the Oscar award for **Best Sound Mixing** award for **Slumdog Millionaire** in **2009**.
- Over the years, several Indian films have been nominated in the **Best Foreign Language Film** category but the award, however, has remained elusive so far.
- **Mother India** was India's maiden nomination in the Best Foreign Language Film category.

IMT TRILAT 24



Source- PIB

Recently: The second edition of **India-Mozambique-Tanzania Trilateral Exercise (IMT TRILAT)** concluded at **Nacala, Mozambique** on **28 Mar 24**.

- The **week-long exercise** underscores the importance of enhanced maritime cooperation and interoperability between the Navies of India, Mozambique, and Tanzania.
- **INS Tir and Sujata** participated in IMT TRILAT 24 **from 21 - 28 Mar 24** through a series of joint exercises, training sessions and collaborative activities, providing invaluable opportunities for all three Navies to exchange knowledge, enhance capabilities and bolster maritime security in the region.

How was the exercise conducted?

- The IMT TRILAT 24 Exercise unfolded in **two phases**.

Harbour Phase:

- The initial harbour phase from **21 to 24 Mar 24** saw intensive training sessions concurrently held onboard **INS Tir at Zanzibar and INS Sujata at Maputo**.
- Activities included vital training on Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS), Damage Control and Firefighting Drills, communication procedures and medical lectures with CPR demonstration and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC).

Sea Phase:

- The sea phase commenced on **24 Mar 24**, wherein **INS Tir and INS Sujata** embarked sea riders from the **Tanzanian and Mozambique Navies** respectively.
- Joint operations with Mozambique Naval ship **Namatili** and Tanzanian naval ship **Fatundu** showcased significant synergy and sustained efforts with the regional Navies.
 - This was in line with the vision of **SAGAR (Security & Growth for All in the Region)**.
- The evolutions at sea involved simulated VBSS exercises and night manoeuvres.
- The sea riders were imparted training on bridge watch keeping, damage control and firefighting.

Closing Ceremony:

- The closing ceremony, held onboard **INS Tir and INS Sujata at Nacala, Mozambique** featured representatives from all three navies.
- The closing remarks highlighted successful collaboration, understanding of maritime capabilities and shared objectives achieved during the exercise.

Additional Activities:

- In addition to IMT TRILAT, various official and training exchanges, cross deck visits, sport fixtures and Yoga were held as part of the long range training deployment of the ships.
- The ships were open to visitors at **Zanzibar, Maputo and Nacala**, wherein more than 1500 people including school children, Indian diaspora and local populace visited the ship.
- Outreach activities were also conducted at **Mizzizini orphanage center at Zanzibar** and **Obra Dom Orio Reception Centre at Maputo**, fostering bonds of friendship.

Mozambique:

- Mozambique, a country in **Southeast Africa**, gained independence from **Portugal** in **1975**.
- Its capital is **Maputo**, and the official language is **Portuguese**.
- The country faced a devastating **civil war** from **1977 to 1992**
- Earlier, The Indian state of **Goa** and Mozambique as a whole were both former **Portuguese colonies**.
- After **1947**, independent India's support for the Mozambican freedom struggle established the basis for warm political ties between the leaderships of both countries.
- Diplomatic relations between India and Mozambique were established as soon as Mozambique became independent in **1975**, and India was among the first countries to set up a diplomatic mission in Mozambique.
- Mozambique opened its Mission in New Delhi in **2001**.

Tanzania:

- Tanzania is the **largest** country in **East Africa**. With **eight neighbours**, it is among the top 10 countries in the world with the most international borders.
- It is known for its diverse landscapes, including the **Serengeti National Park, Mount Kilimanjaro (Africa's highest mountain), and the Zanzibar archipelago**.
- The country gained independence from **British colonial rule** in **1961**.
- Tanzania's **capital** is **Dodoma**, while **Dar es Salaam** is the **largest city** and a major commercial hub.

- **Swahili and English** are the official languages.
- The High Commission of India in Dar es Salaam has been operating since **November 19, 1961** and the **Consulate General of India in Zanzibar** was set up on **October 23, 1974**.
- Former President of Tanzania (Mwalimu) **Dr. Julius Nyerere** was held in high esteem in India.
 - He was conferred the **Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for 1974**, and the **International Gandhi Peace Prize for 1995**.

Grok Chatbot



Recently: Elon Musk announced that his artificial intelligence startup **xAI** will launch the latest version of its **Grok-1.5 chatbot** for the social media platform X.

- The development comes as Elon Musk's xAI is looking to compete with **OpenAI's ChatGPT** and **Google Bard** in the generative AI chatbot space.

What is a Chatbot?

- A chatbot is a computer program that **simulates human conversation** to solve customer queries.
- When a customer or a lead reaches out via any channel, the chatbot is there to welcome them and solve their problems.
- Chatbots had a humble start as computer programs that used keywords and pattern matching to respond to users' questions based on a pre-written script.
- Modern chatbots use the latest technologies including **artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), natural language understanding (NLU), natural language processing (NLP)**, etc. to provide human-like responses to queries.
- In **1966**, an **MIT professor** named **Joseph Weizenbaum** created the **first chatbot**. He cast it in the role of a **psychotherapist**.
- Since late **2022**, the field has gained widespread attention due to the popularity of **OpenAI's ChatGPT**, followed by alternatives such as **Microsoft's Copilot** and **Google's Gemini**.

Based on their conversation style, there are primarily **two types** of chatbots:

Declarative chatbots:

- They work from **scripted responses** to hold "structured conversations" with users.
- They are like interactive FAQs that can handle common questions about product or service features, pricing tiers or customer care numbers.

Predictive Chatbots:

- They are **sophisticated, interactive and conversational chatbots** that are also called "virtual, or digital, assistants."
- They use NLU, NLP and AI/ML to understand the behavior pattern and profile of users so that they can provide contextual answers to their queries.
- After repeated use, these digital assistants can learn users' preferences and provide recommendations based on that.

About Grok:

- Grok chatbot is an AI conversational tool developed by **Elon Musk's xAI** that is touted to have a "**sense of humor**" and is also available with the X platform.
- The development comes as Elon Musk's xAI is looking to compete with OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google Bard in the generative AI chatbot space.
 - Recently, the tech billionaire **sued the ChatGPT-maker** and its CEO, for allegedly abandoning its original mission in favor of a for-profit model.
- One of the most important things that differentiates Grok chatbot when compared to ChatGPT is that while **ChatGPT has restrictions** on what it can answer, **Grok is more rebellious** and can understand human language, giving more human-like interactions and answers to spicy questions as well.
- Under the skin of the Grok chatbot is the generative AI mode **Grok-1**, developed over a cluster of thousands.
- **Grok-1.5** is an **advanced and crisper version** of the Grok-1 chatbot.
- The Grok-1.5 chatbot comes with improved reasoning and will provide better answers with a **context length of 128,000 tokens**.
- It was also trained by human assistants, what xAI calls "**AI Tutors.**"
- Last year, xAI extended Grok to **India and 46 other countries**, including Australia, Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Singapore.
- The chatbot is currently available to subscribers of **X Premium+**, the top subscription tier of X.

The Katchatheevu Island Dispute



Source- The Hindu

Recently: PM Modi on March 31 raised the controversial matter of **Katchatheevu**, reigniting the debate, a few weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha poll in **Tamil Nadu**.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted a message on social media saying the Congress has "**callously**" given the island away.
- On March 16, Tamil Nadu **CM M.K. Stalin** contended that Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka despite strong protests by the DMK.

What is Katchatheevu Island?

- Katchatheevu is a **285-acre** uninhabited speck in the **Palk Strait**, between **India and Sri Lanka**.

- It is almost **1.6 km in length** and slightly over **300 m wide** at its broadest point.
- It lies about **33 km (14 nautical miles) northeast from Rameswaram** at the Indian Coast.
- It is about **62 km southwest of Jaffna**, at the northern tip of Sri Lanka, and **24 km away from** the inhabited **Delft Island** of Sri Lanka.
- It was formed due to volcanic eruptions in the **14th century**.
- The island has no source of drinking water.
- **St. Anthony Church** is an early 20th century Catholic shrine and the only structure in the island.
- During an annual three festival at church, Christian priests from both India and Sri Lanka conduct the service, with devotees from both India and Sri Lanka making the pilgrimage.

What is the dispute?

- In the early medieval period, the area was administrated by **Jaffna Kingdom of Sri Lanka**.
- In the **17th-century** – power shifted to **Ramnad Zamindari of Ramanathapuram** (55km northwest of Rameshwaram).
- After the delimitation during British rule it became a part of **Madras presidency**.
- During British Rule, it was ruled by both **India and Sri Lanka**.
- In **1921** both claimed this land for fishing but the issue remained unsolved.
Post Independence India initiated to resolve this conflict.

Post Independence-

- In **1974**, Indira Gandhi made attempts to settle the maritime border between India and Sri Lanka, once and for all.
- The settlement is known as the '**Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime agreement**', in which Indira Gandhi 'ceded' Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka.
 - Reason - She thought the island had little strategic value and that ceasing India's claim over the island would deepen its ties with its southern neighbour.
- The agreement was signed by both **Indira Gandhi** and her counterpart **Srimavo Bandaranaike**, Sri Lankan President.

- The **1974** agreement provided that each country shall have **sovereignty** and **exclusive jurisdiction** and control over the waters, the islands, the continental shelf and the subsoil, falling **on its own side** of the aforesaid boundary.
- **Indian fishermen** were granted access to Katchatheevu "hitherto."
 - This access allowed them to visit the island for various purposes including resting, drying nets, and visiting the Catholic shrine.
- Importantly, the agreement **did not clearly specify the fishing rights of Indian fishermen** in the surrounding waters.
- **Sri Lanka** interpreted the agreement as allowing Indian fishermen to access Katchatheevu **only for specific activities** like resting, net drying, and visiting the shrine, without permission for fishing activities.
 - This **lack of clarity** in the agreement has been **a source of ongoing dispute** between India and Sri Lanka regarding fishing rights around Katchatheevu.
- In **Articles 5 and 6** of the "**Agreement between Sri Lanka and India on the Boundary in Historic Waters between the two Countries and Related Matters, June 1974**", India acknowledged Sri Lanka's sovereignty over Kachchatheevu.

The 1976 Agreement:

- In **1976**, another agreement was made during the period of Emergency in India as supplement.
- This agreement prohibited both India and Sri Lanka from fishing in each other's **Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)**.
- Katchatheevu is strategically located right **at the edge** of the EEZs of both India and Sri Lanka.
- This **geographical position created uncertainty** and ambiguity regarding fishing rights in the waters around Katchatheevu.
- The proximity of Katchatheevu to the EEZs further complicated the already contentious issue of fishing rights in the region.

1983- 2009-

- During this period, **a violent civil war** was ongoing in Sri Lanka.
- The **border dispute** between India and Sri Lanka regarding areas like Katchatheevu was somewhat **set aside** as both countries dealt with more pressing issues related to the conflict.
- **Indian fishermen frequently entered Sri Lankan waters** during this time.

- Larger Indian trawlers were a source of tension as they not only overfished but also damaged Sri Lankan fishing equipment and boats.

End of Civil War (2009):

- The civil war in Sri Lanka ended in **2009**.
- Afterwards, Sri Lanka strengthened its maritime defenses and began focusing on the issue of Indian fishermen in its waters.
- **Indian fishermen**, facing a depletion of marine resources on their side, **continued to venture into Sri Lankan waters** as they had done for years.
- However, they began facing more serious consequences.
- The Sri Lankan navy routinely arrests Indian fishermen who enter their waters.
- There have been **allegations of custodial torture** and deaths in some cases.
- The demand for the ownership and access to Katchatheevu is revived each time incidents like arrests and allegations of mistreatment of Indian fishermen occur.
- Katchatheevu remains a contentious issue in India-Sri Lanka relations, particularly in the context of fishing rights and border disputes.

Tamil Nadu's Stance:

- Katchatheevu was "given away" to Sri Lanka without consulting the Tamil Nadu state assembly.
- In **1991** - After India's involvement in the Sri Lankan Civil War, the Tamil Nadu Assembly sought the retrieval of Katchatheevu and the restoration of fishing rights for Tamil fishermen.
- This marked the beginning of Katchatheevu becoming a recurrent issue in Tamil politics.
- In **2008**, The late **J Jayalalitha**, then AIADMK supremo, filed a petition in court, arguing that Katchatheevu could not be ceded to another country without a constitutional amendment.
- After becoming Chief Minister in **2011**, Jayalalitha moved a resolution in the State Assembly.
- In **2012**, she went to the Supreme Court, requesting that her petition be expedited due to the increasing arrests of Indian fishermen by Sri Lanka.
- However, the Union government's position on Katchatheevu has largely remained unchanged.

China's Controversial Map



Source- <https://www.libertypatriotic.com/edited-from-the-himalayan-border-to-the-indian-ocean-security/>

Recently: In yet another bid to assert its claim on Arunachal Pradesh, China has released a **fourth list** of **30 new names** of various places along the line of actual control (LAC) in India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh (referred as "**Zangnan**" by Beijing).

- This is also being seen as Beijing's diplomatic protest with India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh.
 - During the visit, PM dedicated to the nation, the **Sela Tunnel** built at an altitude of **13,000 feet** in **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The Indian authorities rejected the move "outright" just two days after the release of the list.

Major Facts:

- The fourth list of "**standardised geographical names**" was released by the Chinese ministry of civil affairs, responsible for the establishment and naming of administrative divisions.
- The list of places renamed by China includes **11 residential areas, 12 mountains, four rivers, one lake, one mountain pass and a piece of land**.

- The names have **Chinese characters, Tibetan and pinyin**, the **Roman alphabet** version of Mandarin Chinese.
- It also included detailed **latitude and longitude** and a high-resolution map.
- Beijing released the **first list** of the so-called standardised names of **six places** in Arunachal Pradesh in **2017**.
 - The **second list** of **15 places** in **2021** followed by the **third list** with names for **11 places** in **2023**.

Why does China claim Arunachal Pradesh?

- Arunachal Pradesh is the **largest state in the northeast** and shares a border with **Tibet to the north, Bhutan to the west and Myanmar to the east**.
- The Line **of Actual Control (LAC)** divides India's territory from China's but there has been a dispute over it for decades.
 - While India considers LAC to be **3,488 km** long, China puts it around **2,000 km**.
- In the **Eastern Sector of the LAC – Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim** – the **McMahon Line** acts as the de facto boundary between India and China.
- This McMahon Line that marked out borders between Tibet and British India was agreed upon in **1914** at the **'Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet'** or **Simla Convention**.
- China was represented by the government of the **Republic of China**, which was established when the after the **Qing dynasty** was overthrown and ruled the mainland from **1912 to 1949**.
- The current **communist government** came to power in **1949**, declaring the **People's Republic**.
 - The new Chinese government removed the country from the "unequal" international treaties that the country had adopted during its "century of humiliation". It also called for a **rediscussion of all its borders**.
- The Chinese Government also claimed that Tibet had no independent authority to enter into international agreements.

Significance of Arunachal Pradesh:

- Arunachal Pradesh is the **largest state in the northeast** which was formed from the **North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) region**, and India declared it as a **state** on **20 February 1987**.
- **Itanagar** is its capital and largest town in the state.
- China sees Arunachal Pradesh as part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).

- China may also have a **tactical interest in the district of Tawang** since it offers a strategic entrance into northeastern India.
 - Tawang is a key location in the route connecting **Tibet and the Brahmaputra Valley**. It shares borders with Bhutan along with Tibet.
 - Tawang also houses **Tawang Gaden Namgyal Lhatse or Tawang Monastery** – the **second largest** monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in the world.
- China cites historical ties between the **Tawang monastery and Tibet's Lhasa monastery** to bolster its claims over Arunachal Pradesh.
- Arunachal also has a **strategic significance for India from a military viewpoint**. Thus, control over the state would be advantageous to China.
- Arunachal Pradesh's **resources** are also what interests China.

World Water Day 2024



Recently: The 2024 edition of the World Water Day was observed in **March 22nd**.

- According to the UN, around **2.2 billion** people are living without access to safe water.
- The day focuses on taking action to tackle the global water crisis.

- According to the UN, Asia and the Pacific region have the lowest per capita availability of water in the world, with groundwater use in the region expected to increase by **30% by 2050**.
- World Water Day focuses on the crucial connection between water cooperation and global harmony.

Theme:

- The theme for World Water Day 2024 is **"Water for Peace"**.
- This theme highlights the importance of cooperation in managing water resources and how working together can contribute to global harmony.

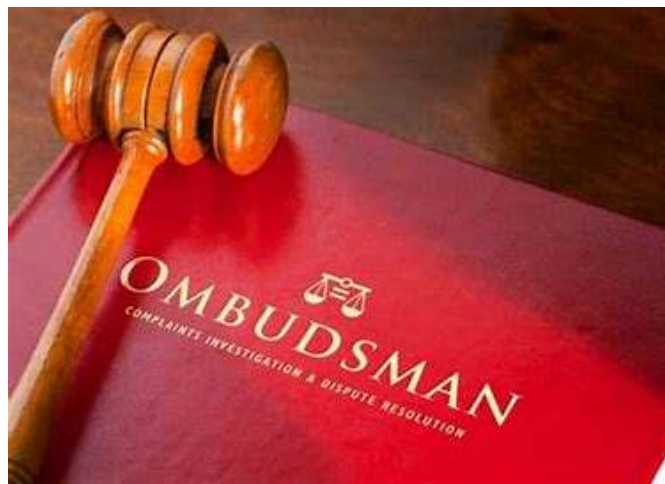
History:

- The World Water Day was first added in **schedule 21** of **1992 "United Nations Conference on Environment and Development"** in **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**.
- In **1993**, United Nations General Assembly decided to celebrate this day as an annual event to increase awareness among the people about the need and conservation of water.

Significance:

- The United Nations (UN) marks this day to advocate for the sustainable management of freshwater resources.
- On this day, the **UN's flagship report on water and sanitation** is launched every year.

RBI's Integrated Ombudsman Scheme



Source- <https://www.macroinsights.in/post/rbi-integrated-ombudsman-scheme>

Recently: The Reserve Bank of India organised the Annual Conference of RBI Ombudsmen, on **March 15, 2024** in **Mumbai**.

- The theme of the conference was **"Protecting the Consumers – Building Robust Systems and Procedures"**.
- **Shri Dipak Misra**, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India delivered the **keynote address**.
 - He stated that the nature of functioning of an Ombudsman is **quasi-judicial** and, as such, natural justice is key element of adjudication of customer grievances by the Ombudsman.
- Earlier, a **pivotal Press Conference** was organized in **Chandigarh** on 07 March 2024 for elevating consumer awareness surrounding the transformative **Reserve Bank - Integrated Ombudsman Scheme, 2021 (RB-IOS, 2021)**.
 - The event was organized under the leadership of **Shri Rajeev Dwivedi, Chief General Manager and Ombudsman, RBI**.

What is an Ombudsman?

- An ombudsman is an official representative appointed by the government or an association to investigate accusations made by citizens against government agencies, businesses, financial institutions, or other public entities.
- Depending on the jurisdiction, an ombudsman's decision **may or may not be legally binding**.
 - However, even if not binding, the decision typically carries considerable weight.
- The word "Ombudsman" evolved from a **Swedish** word meaning "**the legal representative.**"
- The modern meaning of the term emerged when the **Swedish Parliament** appointed an ombudsman in **1809** as "**the official investigator of citizen complaints**" to safeguard the rights of citizens through the establishment of a supervisory agency independent of the executive branch.
- The **International Ombudsman Association** has stated that, based upon its Scandinavian roots, the word ombudsman is **gender-neutral** in origin.
 - The 'man' suffix itself is gender-neutral in the Swedish language.

What is the Reserve Bank- Integrated Ombudsman Scheme (RB- IOS)?

- The RB-IOS, introduced on **November 12, 2021**, represents a significant milestone in RBI's commitment to consumer rights.
- It integrates the erstwhile three Ombudsman schemes of RBI namely:
 - The Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006;
 - The Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies, 2018;
 - The Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions, 2019.
- The Scheme, framed by the Reserve Bank in exercise of the powers conferred on it under:
 - Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
 - Section 45L of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
 - Section 18 of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

- Aim: To provide cost-free redress of customer complaints involving deficiency in services rendered by entities regulated by RBI, if not resolved to the satisfaction of the customers or not replied within a **period of 30 days** by the regulated entity.
 - The Scheme adopts '**One Nation One Ombudsman**' approach by making the RBI Ombudsman mechanism jurisdiction neutral.
- The Scheme also includes under its ambit **Non-Scheduled Primary Co-operative Banks** with a deposit size of **₹50 crore** and above.

Other Important Features:

Deficiency in Service:

- The Scheme defines '**deficiency in service**' as the ground for filing a complaint, with a specified list of exclusions.
 - Therefore, the complaints would no longer be rejected simply on account of "not covered under the grounds listed in the scheme".

Jurisdiction:

- A complaint could be filed in **electronic or physical mode** as well as online through a portal designed for the purpose. The integration will help customers as they now do not need to identify under which scheme to file a complaint.
- The Scheme has done away with the jurisdiction of each ombudsman office.
- A **centralised receipt and processing centre** has been set up at RBI, **Chandigarh** for receipt and initial processing of physical and email complaints in any language.

Representation:

- The responsibility of representing the Regulated Entity and furnishing information in respect of complaints filed by customers against the Regulated Entity would be that of the **Principal Nodal Officer** in the rank of a **General Manager in a Public Sector Bank** or equivalent.

Appeal

- The **Executive Director-in charge of Consumer Education and Protection Department of RBI** would be the **Appellate Authority** under the Scheme.

- The Regulated Entity will not have the right to appeal in cases where an Award is issued by the ombudsman against it for not furnishing satisfactory and timely information/documents.

Resolution:

- For resolution, the RBI regulated entity against which the complaint has been will file a reply **within 15 days**, failing which the ombudsman can pass an ex-parte order or an award and the entity will have no right to appeal against the order.
- As per the scheme, in case the complaint is not resolved through facilitation, such action as may be considered appropriate, including a meeting of the complainant with the officials of regulated entity, for resolution of the complaint by conciliation or mediation may be initiated.

Reserve Bank of India:

- RBI is India's central bank and regulatory body responsible for regulation of the Indian banking system.
- It was established on **April 1, 1935** in accordance with the provisions of the **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**.
- The **Central Office** of the Reserve Bank was **initially established in Kolkata** but was **permanently moved to Mumbai in 1937**.
- Though originally privately owned, since **nationalisation in 1949**, the Reserve Bank is fully owned by the Government of India.
 - It is under the ownership of **Ministry of Finance, Government of India**.

Governance:

- The Reserve Bank's affairs are governed by a **central board of directors**.
- The board is appointed for a period of **four years** by the Government of India in keeping with the Reserve Bank of India Act.
- The board consists:
 - Official Directors- Full-time: **Governor** and not more than **four Deputy Governors**.

- Non-Official Directors- Nominated by Government: **ten Directors** from various fields and **two government Official**.
 - Others: four Directors - one each from four local boards
- **Shaktikanta Das** is the current **Governor** of RBI.
- **Dr M.D. Patra, Shri M. Rajeshwar Rao, Shri T. Rabi Sankar and Shri Swaminathan J** are the **four Deputy Governors** of RBI currently.

ASEAN- Australia Special Summit



Recently: Australia hosted ASEAN member states for the **ASEAN-Australia Special Summit** between **March 4th- 6th, 2024**.

- The 2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit marks **50 years of partnership** and underscores the evolving relationship between Australia and ASEAN nations amidst a changing global landscape.
- The summit was co- **hosted by Laos** which is the current ASEAN chair.

- The summit was also attended by **Xanana Gusmão**, the leader of aspiring ASEAN member **Timor-Leste**, and New Zealand's Prime Minister **Christopher Luxon**.

Association of South- East Asian Nations (ASEAN):

- It is a political and economic union of **10 member states** in Southeast Asia, i.e., **Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia**.
- It was established by the governments of **5 South East Asian Nations- Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand**, the founding fathers of ASEAN, in **1967** with the signing of the **ASEAN Declaration** or the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- **Brunei** joined in **1984**, followed by **Vietnam** in **1995**, **Laos and Myanmar** in **1997**, and **Cambodia** in **1999**.
- The **ASEAN charter** was signed in **2007** and came into force in 2008 becoming a legally- binding agreement.
- The motto of ASEAN is - **"One Vision, One Identity, One Community"**.
- ASEAN Day- **8th August**
- ASEAN Secretariat – **Indonesia, Jakarta**.
- Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
- Indonesia is the current chair of ASEAN.

Australia- ASEAN Relations:

- Australia became **ASEAN's first dialogue partner** in **1974** and has collaborated to make the region more peaceful and prosperous.
- In **2014**, ASEAN and Australia formally became **strategic partners**.
- In **2021**, they established a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, highlighting ASEAN's growing importance as a key trading partner for Australia.
- Australia has also been an active participant in ASEAN-led platforms, being a founding member of the **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)** since its inception in **1994** and of the **East Asia Summit (EAS)** established in **2005**.

- Most recently, Australia joined the **ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF)** launched in **September 2023**.
- Under Australia's '**Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040**', the government has identified several priority sectors that can help boost trade between Australia and Southeast Asia.
- The **2018 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit**, held in **Sydney** on **17–18 March** was the first ASEAN was convened by Australia for a joint summit.
- The summit culminated in the **Sydney Declaration**, which set objectives for future cooperation.

Highlights of the Summit:

Melbourne Declaration:

- Australia and the 10 ASEAN member states endorsed the **Melbourne Declaration**, in the summit.
- The Declaration called for **peaceful resolution of the South China Sea disputes** through legal and diplomatic processes "without resorting to the threat or use of force" in accordance with international law.
 - The summit was over shadowed by the disputes in the South China Sea, where a collision between **Chinese and Philippine coast guard** vessels took place in the vicinity of Philippine-occupied Second Thomas Shoal in the **Spratly Islands**.
 - Australia and the Philippines had pushed for the Declaration to include reference to cite the **2016 arbitration** ruling that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea.
 - But as is now customary for ASEAN, the final document mentions neither the ruling nor refers to China by name.
 - This reflects that some ASEAN member states are unwilling to jeopardize their fruitful economic relations with China.
- On the **war in Gaza**, the Declaration called for an "**immediate and durable humanitarian ceasefire**" and the release of the civilian hostages captured by the Palestinian group Hamas in October.
- Regarding the **Myanmar Conflict**, the declaration stated that the leaders "strongly condemn the continued acts of violence," calling for "effective humanitarian assistance, and inclusive national dialogue."
 - It reaffirmed the **ASEAN Five-Point Consensus** formulated in **Jakarta** in **2021**, as ASEAN's main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar.

- Myanmar's military government was **officially excluded** from the summit, due to its failure to implement ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus peace plan.

Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility:

- Australia announced to back the establishment of the **A\$2 billion (US\$1.3 billion)** Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility.
- This will provide loans, guarantees, and equity to catalyze Australian private sector investments into the region.

Partnership for infrastructure program:

- Through the Partnership for Infrastructure program, Australia will provide **A\$140 million (US\$93 million)** to support infrastructure development as well as attract quality infrastructure financing to ASEAN.

Supportive immigration policy:

- Australia will improve visa access to ASEAN member states by extending the business visitor visa length from **three to five years**.
- Further, the country will introduce a Frequent Traveller stream which will provide a **10-year visa** for eligible ASEAN states.

Hubs for Investment Deal Teams:

- Australia will establish investment Deal Team hubs in **Jakarta, Singapore, and Ho Chi Minh City**.
- The Deal Teams aim to draw on public and private sector expertise to identify and facilitate outbound investment opportunities for Australian businesses.
- As such, the teams will provide market intelligence and advise on regulatory matters for Australian investors.

Technology Landing Pads:

- Australia aims to establish technology 'Landing Pads' in **Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City**.

- These Landing Pads help businesses scale up their technology and break into the market. The first Landing Pad was launched in **Singapore in 2017**.
- Since its inception, the Singapore hub has guided over **120 companies** and delivered commercial outcomes worth over **US\$17.5 million (US\$11.6 million)**.

The Australia-Southeast Asia Business Exchange:

- The Australia-Southeast Asia Business Exchange (SEABX) program aims to help Australian businesses capture new opportunities in ASEAN in addition to helping ASEAN businesses deepen their business literacy on the Australian business climate.

Maritime cooperation

- Australia also announced **A\$64 million (US\$42.5 million)** of funding for the Southeast Asia Maritime Partnerships Initiative to help the country expand its maritime cooperation with ASEAN states.

Government's Fact- Check Unit



Source- PIB

Recently: The Supreme Court stayed the Centre's notification of the **Fact Check Unit (FCU)** under the **Press Information Bureau (PIB)**.

- This stay remains until the **Bombay High Court** arrives at a final decision on the challenge to the amended **Information Technology (IT) Rules**.
- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) **Amendment Rules 2023**, which amended the **IT Rules, 2021**, provided for a **Fact Check Unit (FCU)** for assessing information.

Information Technology Rules, 2021:

- The IT Rules, 2021 mandate social media platforms to exercise greater diligence in content moderation to ensure online user safety and dignity.
- It was framed under **section 87 (2)** of the **Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000**
- It superseded the earlier **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011**.

- Intermediaries must promptly remove objectionable content, educate users on privacy policies, and prevent the circulation of harmful material.
- **Social media companies** are mandated to appoint India-based resident **grievance officers** as part of their due.
- These officers are responsible for overseeing the grievance redressal mechanism of complaints from the people who use their services.

The 2023 Amendment:

- The IT rules 2021 was amended **two times** first in **October, 2022 and other in April 2023.**
- These amendments impose a **legal obligation** on intermediaries to take reasonable efforts to prevent users from uploading such content.
- According to **section 3(1)(v) of IT Rules** that was amended in 2023, the intermediary shall inform its rules and regulations, privacy policy and user agreement to the user in English or any language specified in the **Eighth Schedule to the Constitution.**
- The section also makes it obligatory on the intermediaries to **not to publish, share or host fake, false or misleading information** in respect of any business of the Central Government.
- These fake, false or misleading information will be identified by the notified **Fact Check Unit** of the Central Government.
 - The unit was notified under the **Rule 3(i)(b)(v)** of the IT Amendment Rules, 2023.
- Against such content identified by this unit, intermediaries will have to take action or risk losing their **"safe harbour"** protections in **Section 79 of the IT Act.**
 - Section 79 of the IT Act allows intermediaries to avoid liabilities for what third parties post on their websites.

The Issue:

- Subsequently, **Kunal Kamra, the Editors Guild of India, and the Association of Indian Magazines** filed writ petitions before the High Court challenging this rule.

- A division bench of the **Bombay High Court** on January 31 delivered a split verdict on petitions challenging the constitutionality.
- **Justice G.S. Patel** criticized the amendment for censorship, while **Justice Neela Gokhale** disagreed, saying it didn't curb criticism of the government.
- On **March 20**, Government notified the **Fact Check Unit (FCU) of the Press Information Bureau (PIB)** as the **official statutory body** with powers to police content online regarding the central government under the amended IT Rules.

FCU of the PIB:

- An official fact-checking unit has been in existence in the PIB since **November 2019**.
- The PIB, which functions under the **Ministry of Information & Broadcasting**, is the **media** and **publicity arm** of the **Government of India**.
- Since being set up, The said unit has "fact-checked" thousands of WhatsApp forwards, YouTube videos, and newspaper and digital media articles.
- The unit is based in the **National Media Centre** on **New Delhi's Raisina Road**, and is headed by the **PIB's Additional Director General, Alok Mishra**.
- **Two joint directors** and **an assistant director** are also assigned to the FCU.
- The FCU is mandated to counter misinformation on government policies, initiatives, and schemes either suo motu or under a reference via complaint.
- The FCU only takes up complaints related to the **Government of India**, its Ministries, Departments, Public Sector entities etc.

Agalega Island



Recently: PM Modi and his counterpart of Mauritius **Pravind Jugnauth** jointly inaugurated an **airstrip** and the **St James Jetty** on **North Agaléga Island** in the Indian Ocean.

- India has deep strategic stakes in the **Indian Ocean**.

About the Island:

- Agaléga is a group of **two islands** - North and South Agaléga - with a total area of **26 sq km**, lies approximately **650 nautical miles (1,050 km) north of Mauritius**, and belongs to the island nation.
- It has a small native population of about **300 people**.
- The development of the Agaléga Islands is in the **socio-economic** and **national security interest** of Mauritius, and also aligns with India's maritime vision.
- The islands, a dependency of Mauritius, were not developed for many years.
- The near absence of an **official government or security presence** was a serious vulnerability.

- This vulnerability could be converted to strength by developing the islands and creating facilities that could operate **ships** and **aircraft**.
- Building a **jetty** and an **airstrip** was therefore considered imperative by the government of Mauritius.

India's role:

- Following Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius in **March 2015**, India signed a Memorandum of Understanding in the **Mauritian capital Port Louis** in the presence of Modi and then PM of **Mauritius Anerood Jugnauth**.
 - The agreement focused on the "**improvement in sea and air transportation facilities**" at Agaléga island.
- A **\$250 million Indian investment** was made in an airfield, port, and communications hub on this remote island.
- The most important new infrastructure on the atoll is a **3,000-metre runway**, and considerable apron for **aircraft**.
- Under construction also are sizable jetty facilities in deeper water, and what looks like barracks and fields which could be used by military personnel.
 - India plans a military base in region to monitor and counterbalance **China's growing presence** in the Indian Ocean region.
 - The jetty will facilitate the operation of India's fleet of **US-made Boeing P-8I maritime surveillance** planes.
 - These aircraft are capable of conducting anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, as well as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions.
- The joint development of Agaléga underscores India's commitment to the vision of **Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**.
 - SAGAR Initiative is a maritime initiative that prioritises the **Indian Ocean region** to ensure India's peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region.
 - India unveiled the strategic vision for the Indian Ocean in **2015**.

The recent project:

- The recent projects that inaugurated **new airstrip and St James Jetty** are along with **six community development projects**.
 - There have been several attempts to upgrade the airstrip on the **70-sq-km island** since **2003** that had not been successful.
- For the people of the islands, the two-day passage (if a ship was available) will be cut to less than an hour's flight.
- The development of associated infrastructure will create employment for the local population and improve their overall well-being.
- The new jetty and airstrip will enable a larger and more credible government presence on the islands, and the stationing or forward deployment of ships of the **Mauritius Coast Guard**.
- It will be possible to better monitor and police the vast **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** that extends **200 nautical miles** outward from these islands.

India and Mauritius:

- Ties between India and Mauritius go back to **1948**, 20 years before the country's independence from **Britain**.
- Mauritius is a former **British** and **French colony** that gained independence from British rule in **1968**.
- **Seventy per cent** of the inhabitants of Mauritius are of Indian origin, and the two countries share deep historical, social, and cultural bonds.
- Under British rule, about **half a million** Indian indentured workers were brought to Mauritius between 1834 and the early 1900's.
 - The first batch of these workers, comprising **36 persons**, arrived in Mauritius on **November 2, 1834** onboard the ship '**Atlas**'.
 - This day is now observed in Mauritius as '**Aapravasi Diwas**'.
- On his way to India from South Africa, **Mahatma Gandhi** briefly stopped over in Mauritius from October 29-November 15, **1901**.
 - He steered the destiny of Indian labourers with his **three transformative messages** – the importance of education, political empowerment and staying connected with India.

- In his homage, the **National Day of Mauritius** is celebrated on **March 12** (the date of **Gandhiji's Dandi Salt March**).
- In **1987**, India established the **Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture (IGCIC)** in **Mauritius**, which is India's largest cultural centre abroad.
 - IGCIC holds classes in Hindustani music, Kathak, Tabla and Yoga for over 2,500 Mauritian students every year.
- Since **2004**, approximately 240 youngsters from Mauritius have participated in **48 batches** of the **Know India Programme (KIP)** of the **Ministry of External Affairs**.
- India and Mauritius have signed a wide range of bilateral agreements and MoUs.
- In addition, **Cultural Exchange Programmes** have been regularly concluded since **1971**.
- India is Mauritius' largest trading partner and has been the largest exporter of goods to Mauritius since **2007**.
- Mauritius and India signed a **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)** in **2021**, during the visit of Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.
 - The India-Mauritius CECPA is the first trade agreement signed by India with an **African country**.

Indian Ocean region:

- The Indian Ocean basin is of particular importance for India, as the region's most populous country and geopolitical keystone.
- The Indian Ocean is a vast theater, stretching from the **Strait of Malacca** and western coast of **Australia** in the East to the **Mozambique Channel in the West**.
- It encompasses the **Persian Gulf** and the **Arabian Sea** in the North, all the way down to the southern Indian Ocean.
- The **six** key island nations are **Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles**, and **Sri Lanka**.
- India sees the urgency and importance of working with the governments of all these island nations.

UNNATI- 2024



Recently: The Union Cabinet chaired by **Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi** approved the proposal of the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, for Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme, 2024 (UNNATI – 2024).**

- The scheme will be implemented for a period of **10 years** from the date of notification along with **8 years** for committed liabilities at a total cost of **Rs.10,037 crore.**

What is UNNATI?

- **UNNATI (Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme), 2024** is a Central Sector Scheme, formulated for the development of Industries and generation of employment in the states of **North East Region.**
- **Aim:** The scheme's main objective is to **generate gainful employment**, which will lead to the area's overall socio-economic development.
 - It will create productive economic activity in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Expenditure:

- The financial outlay of the proposed scheme is **Rs.10,037 crore** for the scheme period from the date of notification for **10 years**. (Additional **8 years** for committed liabilities)
- The scheme is proposed to be divided into two parts:
 - **Part A** caters to the incentives to the eligible units (**Rs. 9737 crores**).
 - **Part B** is for implementation and institutional arrangements for the scheme (**Rs. 300 Crore**).
 - **60%** of the outlay of Part A has been earmarked to **8 NE states** and **40%** on **First-In-First-Out (FIFO)** basis.

Targets:

- The proposed scheme envisages approximately **2180 applications**.
- It is anticipated that direct employment opportunities of about **83,000** will be generated during the scheme period.
- A significant number of indirect employment is also expected to be generated.

Registration and Production:

- **Industrial unit** will be allowed to apply for **registration** from the date of notification **up to 31.03.2026**.
- All applications for registration shall have to be disposed of by **31.03.2027**.
- All eligible Industrial Units to commence their production or operation within **4 years** from the grant of registration.

Categorization:

- Districts are categorized in two zones: **Zone A (Industrially Advanced Districts)** & **Zone B (Industrially Backward Districts)**.

Implementation:

- **DPIIT** will implement the scheme in cooperation with the states.

Implementation will be overseen by following committees at the national and state levels:

- **The Steering Committee**, headed by the **Secretary, DPIIT (SIIT)**, will decide upon any interpretation of the scheme within its overall financial outlay and issue detailed guidelines for execution.

- **State Level Committee**, headed by the **state's Chief Secretary**, will monitor implementation, checks and balances, ensuring transparency and efficiency.
- **Secretary Level Committee**, headed by the senior **Secretary of the state (Industries)**, will be responsible for implementing the scheme, including the recommendation of registration and incentives claims.

EX- Triumph 2024



Recently: The Closing Ceremony of the **Bilateral Tri-Service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Amphibious Exercise** between **India and US**, Tiger Triumph 2024 was held onboard **USS Somerset** on **30 Mar 2024**.

- The Exercise was conducted between **18 to 31 Mar 24**.

Contingents:

- The Indian Army was represented by one **Infantry Battalion Group** including mechanised forces.

- The Indian Air Force had deployed one medium lift aircraft, transport helicopter and the **Rapid Action Medical Team (RAMT)**.
- The participating units from the Indian Navy included **a Landing Platform Dock, Landing Ship Tanks (Large)** including their **integral Landing Crafts and helicopters, Guided Missile Frigate and Long-Range Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft**.
- The US Task Force comprised of a **US Navy Landing Platform Dock** including its **integral Landing Craft Air Cushions and helicopters**, a **Destroyer, maritime reconnaissance and medium lift aircraft, and also, US Marines**.
- **Special Ops Forces** from all the three Services also participated in the exercise and jointly undertook combined operations with the US counterparts at **Visakhapatnam and Kakinada** during the harbour and sea phase.

How was the Exercise conducted?

The Exercise was conducted in two phases:

The Harbour Phase:

- The Harbour Phase was conducted at **Visakhapatnam** from **18 - 25 Mar 24**.
- It included pre-sail discussions, Subject Matter Expert Exchange, Sports engagements, ship boarding drills and cross deck visits.
- Personnel from both Navies celebrated the festival of Holi together on 25 Mar 24, as part of the cultural exchange programme showcasing the vibrant and vivid culture of India.

The Sea Phase:

- The Sea phase was conducted from **26 to 30 Mar 24**.
- It included units of both countries undertaking maritime exercises at sea.
- It was followed by the landing of troops at **Kakinada** for setting up of a joint Command and Control Centre and a Joint Relief and Medical Camp for HADR operations.
- Cross Deck helicopter operations involving **UH3H, CH53 and MH60R helicopters** were also undertaken between ships of the Indian Navy and the US Navy off Kakinada and Visakhapatnam.

World Happiness Index 2024



Source- <https://badisoch.in/trending/world-happiness-index/>

Recently: The 2024 edition of the annual **World Happiness Index** was released.

- The **top 10 countries** in the list have remained the **same** since before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- This year's report is the first to include **separate rankings by age group**, and it brings bad news about life satisfaction among young people in some parts of the world.

What is World Happiness Index?

- It is an annual report released by **UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network** in a partnership with **Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the and an editorial board.**
- The report draws on global survey data from people in more than **140 countries.**
- Countries are ranked on happiness based on their average life evaluations over the **three preceding years**, in this case **2021 to 2023.**

- The report was inceptioned in **2012** and is released annually on the **United Nations International Day of Happiness - March 20**.
- The ranking uses **six key factors** to measure happiness — social support, income, health, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.

Highlights of the Report:

Globally Highlights:

- **Finland** topped the list for the **seventh year** in a row with score of **7.741**, followed by **Denmark, Iceland** and **Sweden** out of **143 total countries**.
- Israel too made it to the top five. It was ranked 4th.
- Afghanistan was deemed as the least happy country, after Congo, Sierra Leone, Lesotho and Lebanon.
- The **United States** fell in ranking from **16th spot** last year to the **23rd spot** this year.
- This year, **Canada** took the **15th spot** while the **UK** was at the **20**, **Germany** at **24** and **France** at **27**.
- Among Middle Eastern nations, the **UAE** was ranked at **22** and **Saudi Arabia** at **28**. Among Asian nations, **Singapore** was at **30**, **Japan** at **50** and **South Korea** at **51**.
- **Singapore, Taiwan and Japan** are the top three happiest countries in **Asia**.
- Worldwide, **women were less happy than men** in every region, with the gender gap widening as they aged.
- While ranking happiness in **young people** (aged **30 and below**), **Lithuania, Israel, Serbia, Iceland and Denmark** ranked in the top five slots.
 - **Finland** has been relegated to the **seventh** rank.
 - **India** ranked at **127th** spot in this.
- With regards to happiness among the **old people** (aged **60 and above**), **Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland** — all Nordic nations — ranked the highest.
 - **India** occupying the **121st** spot.

India:

- India ranked **126th** in the index. It was ranked **126th out of 136** countries in 2023 and **136th out of 146** countries in the 2022 edition of the index.
- The report observed that in India, **older age** is associated with **higher life satisfaction**.
- However, **older Indian women** reported **lower life satisfaction than older men**.
- **Education and caste** played key roles, with older adults with secondary or higher education and those of higher social castes reporting higher life satisfaction than their counterparts without formal education and those from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network:

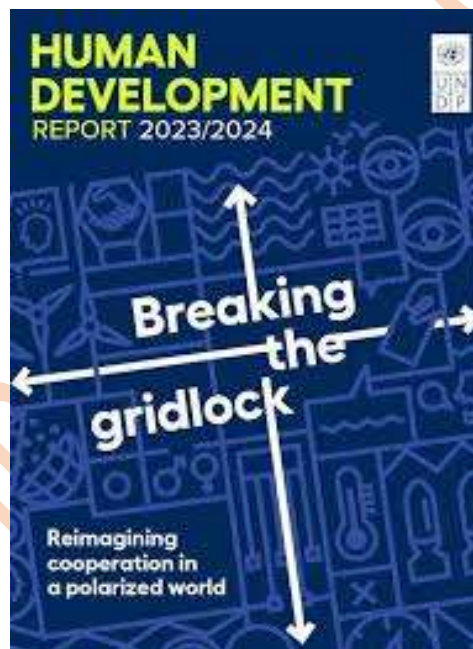
- The Sustainable Development Solutions Network is a non-profit created in **2012** by the United Nations to promote the **17 Sustainable Development Goals**.
- The SDSN began soon after the **Rio+20 Summit** with thematic working groups on a range of environmental, social, and economic topics.
- These groups helped contribute to the adoption of the SDGs, particularly the inclusion of **SDG 11 (cities)**.
- The secretariat of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network is located in **Paris, France; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and New York, USA**.
- The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted by all **United Nations** members in **2015**, created **17 world Sustainable Development Goals**.
- They were created with the aim of "peace and prosperity for people and the planet."

World Happiness Day 2023:

- It is observed annually on **March 20th**.
- The theme for the **2024** International Day of Happiness is **"Reconnecting for Happiness: Building Resilient Communities."**

- The General Assembly of the United Nations on **July 12, 2012**, proclaimed 20 March the International Day of Happiness.
- For the first time, the International Day of Happiness was celebrated in **2013**.

Human Development Index 2023- 24



Recent: The **2023- 24 edition** of the Human Development Index was released on 13th March 2024 by the **United Nations Development Programme**.

- The report titled '**Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarised world**', assesses the dangerous gridlock resulting from uneven development progress, intensifying inequality, and escalating political polarization.

What is Human Development Index?

- The Human Development Index, or HDI, is a report compiled by the **United Nations Development Programme**.
- It was first launched in **1990** and has been released **annually** ever since, with the exceptions of **2012 and 2020/21**.
- Developed by **Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq** in 1990, it embodies **Amartya Sen's** capabilities approach to understanding human well-being.
- The HDI quantifies a country's "average achievement in **three** basic dimensions of human development:
 - Long and healthy life
 - Knowledge
 - Decent standard of living
- A country's Human Development Index value is determined by aggregating the country's scores in a vast assortment of indicators including-
 - Life expectancy, literacy rate, rural populations' access to electricity, GDP per capita, exports and imports, homicide rate, multidimensional poverty index, income inequality, internet availability, and many more.
- These indicators are compiled into a single number between **0 and 1.0**, with 1.0 being the highest possible human development.
- HDI is divided into **four tiers**:
 - Very high human development (0.8-1.0)
 - High human development (0.7-0.79)
 - Medium human development (0.55-.70)
 - Low human development (below 0.55).

Highlights of the report:

Global Highlights:

- **Switzerland** topped the index with a score of **0.967**. It is followed by **Norway (0.96)** and **Iceland (0.959)**.
- **Somalia (0.380), South Sudan (0.381), Central African Republic (0.387)** are the bottom three countries.
- **The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and Monaco** were not ranked in the index.
- The rich countries experienced unprecedented development. But half of the world's poorest nations continued to languish below their pre-Covid-19 crisis levels.
- The two-decade trend of steadily reducing inequalities between wealthy and poor nations is now in reverse.
- Nine in 10 people worldwide endorse democracy, but over half of the respondents expressed support for leaders who may undermine it.
- Also, half of the people surveyed reported having no or limited control over their lives, and over two-thirds believed that they have little influence on their government's decisions.
- Global inequalities have been compounded by substantial economic concentration – almost **40%** of global trade in goods is concentrated in **three or fewer** countries.

India:

- The report stated that while India ranked **135/191 in 2021**, it had moved up to **134/193 in 2022**.
- It has been categorized under **Medium Human Development category** along with **Bhutan and Bangladesh**.
 - **Bhutan** stands at **125** and **Bangladesh** stands at **129** in the index.
- India's southern neighbour **Sri Lanka** has been ranked much ahead at **78**, while **China** is ranked **75**, both categorised under the High Human Development category.
- **Nepal (146) and Pakistan (164)** have been ranked lower than India.
- India's **life expectancy at birth** has slightly improved from **67.2 years** in 2021 to **67.7 years** in 2022.
- There is an overall increase (**5.88%**) in **expected years of schooling (EYS)** from **11.9 years to 12.6 years**, leading to an improvement of 18 places when the EYS aspect was considered.
- The **Gross National Income (GNI)** per capita also improved from **\$6,542 to \$6,951**.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):

- UNDP is a United Nations agency tasked with helping countries eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth and human development.
- The UNDP was founded on **22 November 1965** by the General Assembly of the United Nations.
- Based at United Nations Headquarters in **New York City**, it is the largest UN development aid agency which works in about **170 countries**.
- The **UNDP Executive Board** is made up of representatives from **36 countries** around the world who serve on a rotating basis.
- **Achim Steiner** is the UNDP Administrator since **19 June 2017**.

Plastic Waste Management Rules 2024

Source- <https://sunconsultants.co.in/plastic-waste-management-authorization>

Recently: The **Environment Ministry** notified the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2024 in order to amend the **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016**.

- The new rules make it harder for makers of disposable plastic ware to label such products as '**biodegradable**'.

Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 -

- The PWM Rules, 2016, mandate the generators of plastic waste to take steps to minimize generation of plastic waste and not to litter the plastic waste.
- They also ensure **segregated storage** of waste at the source and hand over segregated waste in accordance with rules.
- The PWM Rules, **2016** cast **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** on Producer, Importer, and Brand Owner.
 - The EPR adds estimated environmental costs to a **product's market price** throughout its lifecycle, primarily in waste management.
 - EPR shall be applicable to both **pre-consumer** and **post-consumer** plastic packaging waste.
- The minimum thickness requirement for plastic carry bags has been raised from **40 microns** to **50 microns**.
 - Microns, also known as **micrometers** (represented as μm) are a length of measurement equal to one millionth of a meter.
- The scope of application has been extended from municipal areas to **rural areas** and in rural areas, the **Gram Panchayat** is entrusted with the responsibility to implement.
- The 2016 rules have been amended **four times** i.e. **2018, 2021, 2022** and **2024**.

The 2018 Amendment:

- The Rules were **amended in 2018**, with changes that activists say favoured the plastic industry and allowed manufacturers an escape route.
- The 2016 Rules did not mention **Single-use Plastics (SUPs)**.
 - Single-use plastics (SUPs) are those that are discarded after one-time use.
 - On **World Environment Day in 2018 (June 5)**, India pledged to phase out SUPs by **2022**.
- It prescribed a central registration system for the registration of the producer/importer/brand owner.
 - The centralised registration system will be evolved by **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** for the registration of the producer/importer/brand owner.

The 2021 Amendment:

- It prescribed for increase in the thickness of plastic carry bags from **50 microns** to **75 microns** with effect from **30th September 2021**, and to **120 microns** with effect from **31st December 2022**.
- The manufacture, sale and use of the following **single-use plastic**, commodities, was **prohibited** with effect from the **1st July, 2022**.
 - Ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene [Thermocol] for decoration, plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays, wrapping or packing films around sweet boxes, invitation cards, and cigarette packets, plastic or PVC banners less than **100 micron**, stirrers.

2022 Amendment:

- The Amendment Rules, 2022, have introduced a definition for **biodegradable plastics**.
- Biodegradable plastics are defined as plastics, excluding **compostable plastics**, that undergo degradation by biological processes under ambient environment conditions, adhering to laid-down standards and certified by the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**.
- It implemented regulations regarding Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for **plastic packaging**.
- These regulations set mandatory goals for EPR, recycling plastic packaging waste, reusing rigid plastic packaging, and using recycled plastic material.
- Those who do not achieve the EPR targets will face environmental penalties, in accordance with **polluter pays principle**.
- The 2022 rules classify plastics into **four categories**:
 - **Category 1** - rigid plastic packaging
 - **Category 2** - flexible plastic packaging of single layer or multilayer, plastic sheets and covers made of plastic sheet, carry bags, plastic sachet or pouches.
 - **Category 3** - Multi-layered plastic packaging (at least one layer of plastic and at least one layer of material other than plastic)
 - **Category 4** - plastic sheet or like used for packaging as well as carry bags made of compostable plastics fall.

The recent 2024 amendment:

- It now defines biodegradable plastics as not only capable of "...degradation by biological means" but also as materials that do not leave **"any microplastics..."**
- **Microplastics** are fragments of any type of plastic less than **5 mm** in **length**, according to the U.S. **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** and the European Chemicals Agency.
- Microplastics are also defined as any solid plastic particle insoluble in water, with dimensions between **1 µm and 1,000 µm** (1 µm is **one-thousandth of a millimetre**).
 - In recent years, they have been reported as a major source of pollution affecting rivers and oceans.
- **Rule 7-A** relating to "Responsibility of Panchayat at District level" has been inserted which lays down similar responsibilities for the **local body has to assess**.
- Definition of **"seller"** has been inserted which means any person who sells plastic raw material for producing plastic packaging is a seller.
- Manufacturers of compostable or biodegradable plastic bags or products approved under the rules must obtain a certificate from the **CPCB** before marketing or selling.
 - They must inform the **CPCB** about the quantity of such products introduced into the market and the pre-consumer waste generated by them.

Central Pollution Control Board:

- It is a part of the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change**.
- It was established in **1974** under the **Water Act, 1974** and is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the **Air Act, 1981**.
- The Chairperson of CPCB is **Dr. Prashant Gargava** and it's Headquartered at **New Delhi**.

World Tuberculosis (TB) Day 2024



Source- Vajiramias.com

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the World Tuberculosis (TB) Day 2024 was observed on **March 24th**.

What is Tuberculosis?

- It is an infectious disease that mainly affects **lungs**.
- Caused by a type of bacteria called ***Mycobacterium tuberculosis***, the disease spreads through the air when infected people cough, sneeze or spit.
- Tuberculosis is preventable and can be treated with a combination of antibacterial medications for a period of **six to 12 months**.
- TB bacteria is also capable to attack other parts of the body be it kidney, spine, or brain.

Theme:

- World Tuberculosis (TB) Day, 24 March 2024, continues with the theme **"Yes! We can end TB"**.

History:

- **March 24, 1882** is considered a significant date in the battle against tuberculosis as it is on this day that **Dr Robert Koch** discovered the bacteria that causes TB.
- This groundbreaking announcement led to better understanding, diagnosis, and eventual treatment of the disease.
- It was not before the year **1982**, on the **centenary of Dr. Koch's discovery** that the **International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD)** proposed observing March 24 as World TB Day to raise awareness about TB and its global impact.
- The **first World TB Day** was officially observed in **1983**, and since then, it has become an annual event.

Significance:

- The day is an annual reminder to continue with the research and investment on treatment strategies, prevention methods and awareness around tuberculosis.
- It aims to unite governments, health organizations, and communities worldwide in their commitment to end the TB epidemic by ensuring access to quality care for all those affected.