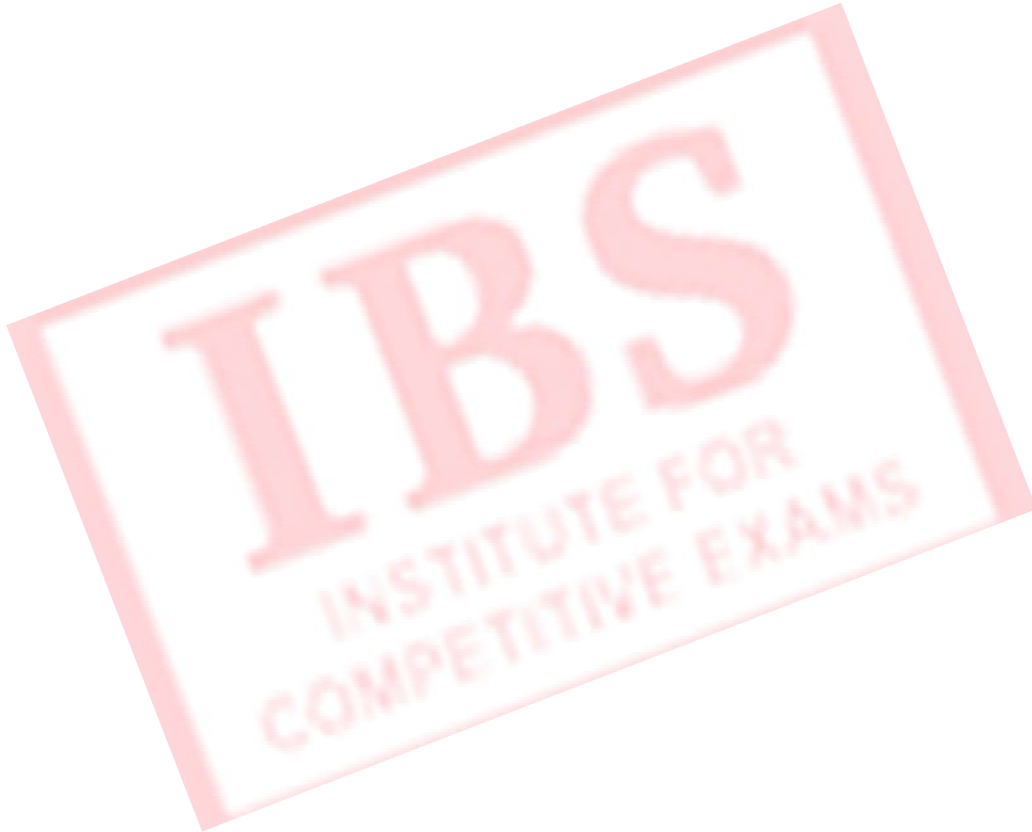


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## NATIONAL

### **RECENTLY, 146 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPS) HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED DURING THE WINTER SESSION OF PARLIAMENT 2023 -**

- MPs in both Houses faced suspension due to their disruption of Parliamentary proceedings in protest of the recent breach of security in Parliament.



#### **Who Can Suspend a Minister of Parliament-**

- The general principle is that it is the role and duty of the Presiding Officer i.e., Speaker of Lok Sabha and Chairman of Rajya Sabha to maintain order so that the House can function smoothly.
- In order to ensure that proceedings are conducted in the proper manner, the Speaker/ Chairman is empowered to force a Member to withdraw from the House.

#### **What are the Rules Under Which the Presiding Officer Suspends MPs-**

- **Rule 373-** Rules The Speaker can direct a member to withdraw immediately from the House if he finds the member's conduct disorderly.
- **Rule 374-** The Speaker can name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of

the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business thereof.

- **Rule 374A-** Rule 374A was incorporated in the Rule Book in December 2001.

#### **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Rajya Sabha-**

- **Rule 255-** The Chairman of Rajya Sabha is empowered under Rule 255 of its Rule Book to “direct any Member whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately” from the House.
- **Rule 256-** Under this rule, the Chairman may “name a Member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the Council by persistently and wilfully obstructing” business.

#### **Drawbacks of the Suspension of MPs-**

- The suspension of MPs in Parliament is a drastic measure that is taken to maintain the order and decorum of the House.
- It reduces the scope and quality of debate and discussion on important matters of legislation and policy.

#### **SC VERDICT ON REVOCATION OF ARTICLE 370 -**

- Recently, **The Supreme Court gave its verdict on the Union government’s 2019 move to amend Article 370 of the Constitution. The abrogation had ended the special status conferred to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.** The court held the Constitutional order that revoked Article 370 as valid.
- SC observed that there is much evidence in Article 370 and the J&K Constitution to show that in regards to Kashmir, a merger agreement was not necessary to surrender its sovereignty.

- Section 3 of the J&K Constitution explicitly states that “the State of Jammu and Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India.”
- On 5th August 2019, the President of India in the exercise of the powers conferred by Article 370(1) of the Constitution issued the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.
- Through this, the Government of India has made modifications to Article 370 itself (not revoked it). With this, the Government of India has dramatically altered the relationship between the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian Union.
- On 17th October 1949, Article 370 was added to the Indian constitution, as a 'temporary provision', which exempted Jammu & Kashmir, permitting it to draft its own Constitution and restricting the Indian Parliament's legislative powers in the state.
- It was introduced into the draft constitution by N Gopalaswami Ayyangar as Article 306 A.
- Article 35A empowers the Jammu & Kashmir legislature to define the permanent residents of the state, and their special rights and privileges.
- The Legislative Assembly in Jammu and Kashmir initially had 100 members, including 24 for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), until 1988 when the seats were increased to 111.
- The 24 Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) seats were not considered in quorum calculation, making the total contestable seats 87, including four for Ladakh.
- After delimitation in 2020, the total seats rose to 114, including those for PoK.

### Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023-

- The Bill seeks to amend the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. This bill proposes to increase the total number of seats in the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly from 107 to 114, of which seven would be reserved for scheduled caste members and nine seats for legislators from scheduled tribes.
- The Bill adds that the Lieutenant Governor may nominate up to two members from the Kashmiri migrant community to the Legislative Assembly. One of the nominated members must be a woman.
- “Kashmiri Migrants” are defined as persons who migrated from the Kashmir Valley or any other part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir after November 1, 1989, and are registered with the Relief Commissioner.
- The Bill adds that the Lieutenant Governor may nominate to the Legislative Assembly one member representing displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

### THE LOK SABHA RECENTLY PASSED THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR REORGANISATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023 AND THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR RESERVATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023 -

- The Special Status of J&K under Article 370 of the Constitution was read down by Parliament in August 2019 and the former State was split into two Union Territories – J&K and Ladakh (through the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019).

### PARLIAMENT PASSES POST OFFICE BILL, 2023, REPLACING 125-YEAR-OLD INDIAN POST OFFICE ACT, 1898 -

- The Indian Parliament recently approved the Post Office Bill, 2023, marking a significant overhaul of the 125-year-old Indian Post Office Act, 1898. The new legislation aims to modernize and consolidate the legal framework governing post offices in India.

#### Key Provisions-

1. Enhanced Powers for National Security- The Bill grants post office employees the authority to open, detain, or intercept any item during transmission in the



interest of national security or public safety. However, this power is subject to specific conditions.

**2. Immunity for Post Office Employees-** While providing immunity for post office employees from liability in delivering services, the Bill includes conditions. Officers are exempt unless they act fraudulently or willfully cause loss, delay, or misdelivery of services.



**3. Interception Authority-** The Central Government, through notification, can empower officers to intercept, open, or detain items in transit by the post office. This authority extends to situations involving security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergencies, or public safety.

**4. Duty Evasion and Prohibited Items-** Post office officers can deliver items, suspected of duty evasion or being prohibited by law, to customs or relevant authorities. The handling of such items will follow legal provisions.

**5. Liability Exemption-** The post office and its officers are exempt from liability for any loss, misdelivery, delay, or damage incurred during the provision of services, except in cases of fraudulent or willful misconduct.

**6. Recovery of Sums-** The Bill includes provisions for the recovery of sums due in respect of services provided by the post office. Failure to pay charges for services renders the amount recoverable as if it were an arrear of land revenue.

**7. Exclusive Privilege and Standards-** The post office retains the exclusive privilege of issuing postage stamps. The Central Government may prescribe standards for addressing items, including address identifiers and the usage of postcodes.

### PM MODI UNVEILS VARANASI'S SWARVED MAHAMANDIR, WORLD'S LARGEST MEDITATION CENTER -

• Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked a historic moment as he inaugurated the Swarved Mahamandir

in Umaraha, Varanasi. This newly constructed meditation center stands tall at seven floors, accommodating an impressive 20,000 devotees at a time for meditation.

- The Swarved Mahamandir is a mesmerizing architectural marvel, seamlessly blending traditional and modern design elements.
- Intricate marble carvings adorn its structure, and towering lotus-shaped domes reflect the rich cultural heritage of Varanasi.
- The seven-floor superstructure stands as a testament to the city's spiritual legacy while embracing contemporary aesthetics.



### CENTRE APPROVED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF OVER 338 CRORE RUPEES TO GUJARAT AND 634 CRORE RUPEES FOR HIMACHAL PRADESH FROM NATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE FUND -

- The National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), constituted under Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, supplements SDRF of a State, in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in SDRF.
- The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), constituted under Section 48 (1) (a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. It is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters.
- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir). The annual Central contribution is released in two equal installments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.



- **Disaster (s) covered under SDRF-** Cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold waves.

**SECURITY BREACH IN PARLIAMENT -**

- Recently, a security breach unfolded in the Lok Sabha after leaders paid tribute to the security personnel martyred during the 2001 Parliament attack.
- The Delhi Police have invoked sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, an anti-terror law, against accused persons, as well as sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) related to criminal conspiracy, trespass, provoking a riot, and obstructing a public servant in the discharge of functions.
- The accused were carrying visitors' passes issued to them during the attack.
- **Rule 386 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha** governs the "admission, withdrawal, and removal" of visitors (referred to as "strangers" in parliamentary terms) during the sittings of the House.
- **Members can apply for visitors' cards only for individuals well-known to them personally.**
- Certification is required, stating, "The above-named visitor is my relative/personal friend/known to me personally, and I take full responsibility for him/her."
- **Cards for admission to visitors' galleries are ordinarily issued for a single sitting, generally for one hour.** These cards are not transferable and are issued subject to the holder observing the conditions endorsed thereon.
- For security reasons, visitors are mandated to carry photo identification along with the certification. Similar rules are in force for visitor entry into the Rajya Sabha.



- **Members are advised to exercise utmost care, especially when facilitating the entry of individuals introduced by someone personally known to them.** Members bear responsibility for any untoward incident or undesirable activity in the galleries resulting from cardholders.

**THE CEC AND OTHER ECS (APPOINTMENT, CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND TERM OF OFFICE) BILL, 2023 -**

- The Rajya Sabha recently approved the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023, which outlines the procedures for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (EC).

### What the new bill proposes

<p><b>WHAT THE LAW IS RIGHT NOW</b></p> <p>CEC, ECs are appointed by the PM and council of ministers, under the seal of the President.</p>	<p><b>THE PLAN AHEAD</b></p> <p>The government tabled the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023 that says:</p>
<p><b>WHAT DID SC SAY ON MARCH 2?</b></p> <p>A bench headed by justice KM Joseph said ECs and CECs will be chosen by a panel comprising PM, LoP and CJI, till Parliament passes a law.</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Search panel, led by the law minister with 2 secy as members, to shortlist five names.</li> <li>• Selection committee - comprising PM, LoP and a Union cabinet minister - to review names and recommend appointments; the panel can also consider other names.</li> <li>• President to ratify appointments.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">"Functioning of ECI was and will remain impartial and transparent, and the govt is committed to ensuring that." — Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union law minister</p>

- The legislation aims to **bring transparency to the appointment process, responding to a directive from the Supreme Court of India.**
- The **Bill replaces the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991.** It addresses the appointment, salary, and removal of the CEC and ECs.

- The CEC and ECs will be appointed by the President upon the recommendation of a Selection Committee. The Selection Committee will consist of the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition/leader of the largest opposition party in Lok Sabha.
- Recommendations of the Selection Committee will be valid even when there is a vacancy in this Committee. A Search Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary will propose a panel of names to the Selection Committee.
- Eligibility for the posts includes holding (or having held) a post equivalent to the Secretary to the central government.
- The salary and conditions of service of the CEC and ECs will be equivalent to that of the Cabinet Secretary. Under the 1991 Act, it was equivalent to the salary of a Supreme Court Judge.
- The Bill retains the constitutional provision (Article 324(5)) that allows the CEC to be removed like a Supreme Court Judge, while ECs can only be removed on the recommendation of the CEC.

**RECENTLY, THE NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (NIA) HAS REGISTERED A CASE AGAINST A KHALISTANI TERRORIST AND SIKHS FOR JUSTICE (SFJ) FOUNDER OVER THE AIR INDIA THREAT -**

- India banned the SFJ as an "unlawful association" in 2019, citing that it was involved in "anti-national and subversive" activities.
- The NIA invoked provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against SFJ.
- The NIA is a federal agency of the Indian government responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes related to Terrorism, Insurgency, and other national security matters.
- Federal agencies in a country typically have jurisdiction over matters that affect the country as a whole, rather than just individual states or provinces.

- It was established in 2009 following the Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008, under the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act, 2008, operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Act, 2019 was passed in July 2019, amending the NIA Act, 2008.
- Civil aviation security refers to the measures and protocols implemented to safeguard civil aviation against unlawful interference, such as terrorist attacks, hijackings, sabotage, and other threats. These security measures aim to ensure the safety of passengers, crew, aircraft, and airport facilities.
- The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) is the national regulator for civil aviation security in India. The BCAS was initially set up as a Cell in the DGCA in January 1978 on the recommendation of the Pande Committee. The BCAS was reorganized into an independent department under the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 1987.
- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) regulates air transport services to, from, and within India. It also enforces civil air regulations, air safety, and airworthiness standards.
- The Ministry of Civil Aviation has introduced the Aircraft (Security) Rules, 2023 to enhance civil aviation security in line with international conventions.

**THAILAND ANNOUNCES VISA-FREE ENTRY FOR INDIANS TO BOOST TOURISM**

- Thailand is taking steps to revitalize its tourism industry by allowing visa free entries for the citizens of India and Taiwan.
- This move comes as the high season approaches and is part of a broader strategy to attract more visitors to the country. Thailand had previously visa requirements for Chinese tourists, a significant source of visitors before the pandemic.
- Starting from 10th November 2023 and continuing until 10th May 2024, tourists from India and Taiwan can enter Thailand without the need for a visa. This decision aims to make it easier for travelers from these

countries to explore the beauty of Thailand and contribute to the country's tourism sector.

- **As per the announcement, travelers from India and Taiwan can enjoy a maximum stay of 30 days in Thailand without the need for a visa.** This new policy is expected to attract a significant number of tourists from these regions and give a much-needed boost to the local economy.
- **In September, Thailand took a similar step by scrapping visa requirements for Chinese tourists.** China was Thailand's top pre-pandemic tourism market, contributing 11 million of the record 39 million arrivals in 2019. This move was aimed at rekindling the flow of Chinese tourists to Thailand and rejuvenating the country's tourism sector.
- **The decision to waive visa requirements for Indian and Taiwanese tourists aligns with Thailand's efforts to boost its tourism industry.** According to the latest government data, from January to October 29, 2023, Thailand welcomed 22 million visitors who contributed 927.5 billion baht (\$25.67 billion) to the economy. These figures indicate a positive trend in Thailand's tourism sector and demonstrate the potential for growth.

#### INDIA'S FIRST SEMI-HIGH-SPEED REGIONAL RAIL SERVICE 'NAMO BHARAT' -

- **India's expanding transportation infrastructure is set to reach new heights with the country's first semi-high-speed regional rail service, Nammo Bharat.** Previously known as RapidX, this innovative project is on the cusp of revolutionizing regional connectivity. This also marks the introduction of the Regional Rapid Train Service (RRTS) in India.
- **The RRTS (Revolutionizing Regional Transit) is a cutting-edge regional transportation system that can**



**compete with the world's best.** RRTS is a new kind of train system that's faster than regular ones and runs frequently. It is a big plan to make intercity travel faster and more convenient. Trains will run every 15 minutes, and they can even run more often, every 5 minutes, if needed.

- **The Nammo Bharat trains are designed with the utmost passenger convenience and safety in mind. Each coach is equipped with six CCTVs, an emergency door-opening mechanism, and a communication button to connect with the train operator.** Moreover, these trains offer features such as overhead luggage racks, Wi-Fi connectivity, and mobile and laptop charging outlets at every seat. A dedicated train attendant is present in the premium coach, ensuring a comfortable and secure journey.
- **Safety is a paramount concern for Nammo Bharat, and this is evident through the implementation of platform screen doors (PSDs) at every RRTS station.** These PSDs are integrated with a signaling system, further enhancing passenger safety and minimizing the risk of accidents.
- **Nammo Bharat offers various ticketing modes to cater to the diverse needs of passengers. Commuters can opt for QR code-based one-time tickets or a card-based transit option for all their journeys.** QR code-based tickets can be generated via ticket vending machines (TVMs) or purchased from ticket counters. The TVMs are UPI-enabled, ensuring a seamless and digital ticketing experience.
- **Fare structures for Nammo Bharat have been meticulously designed, taking into account the distance or stations covered. The minimum fare for the premium coach is set at Rs 40, with a maximum fare of Rs 100.** For the five standard coaches operating on the priority section, fares range from a minimum of Rs 20 to a maximum of Rs 50.
- **The Nammo Bharat trains will offer a remarkable average speed of 100 kilometers per hour.**

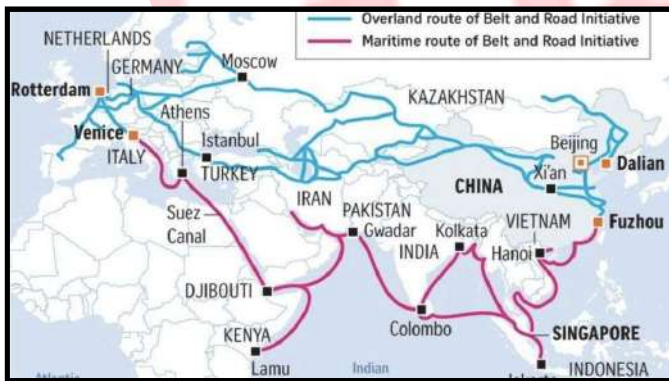


# INTERNATIONAL

## ITALY HAD RECENTLY WITHDRAWN FROM THE BELT AND ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVE (BRI) -

### Why is Italy Pulls out-

- **Mounting pressure from the United States and the European Union** since it has joined the BRI.
- **European countries are pivoting toward “de-risking” their economies** and are reluctant to deepen economic dependence on China.

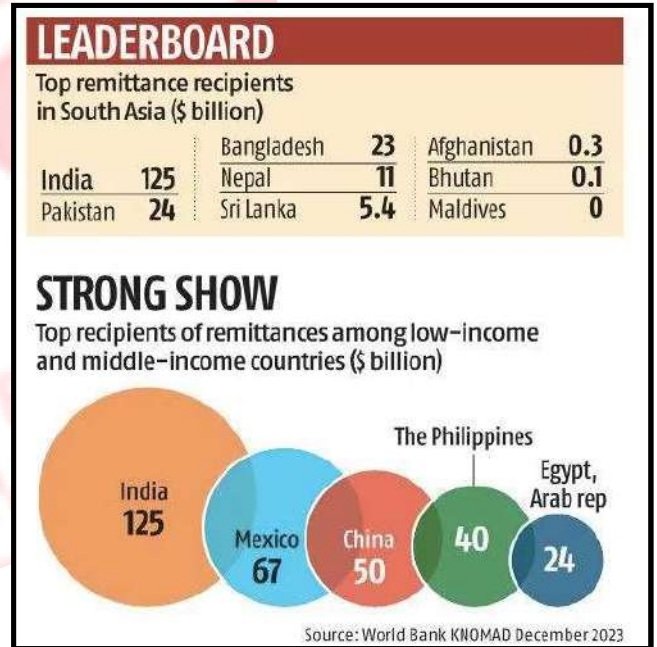


- **Putin’s actions in Ukraine and China’s implicit alignment with Russia** have engendered skepticism about China’s intentions.
- The BRI has already experienced retrenchment, as countries that once eagerly embraced it grapple with mounting debt. **The “debt diplomacy,” as seen in Sri Lanka in 2017**, where an entire port had to be handed over to China because Sri Lanka could not repay its loans.

## INDIA TOPS GLOBAL REMITTANCE CHARTS WITH \$125 BILLION IN 2023: WORLD BANK REPORT -

- **The World Bank’s latest report reveals India’s leading position in global remittances, reaching \$125 billion in 2023.** While remittances to low- and middle-income countries grew by 3.8%, challenges include declines in the Middle East and North Africa. The report underscores the crucial role of inclusive labor markets and social protection policies.

- **Global Remittance Growth-** Remittances to LMICs grew by an estimated 3.8% in 2023, reaching a total of USD 669 billion.

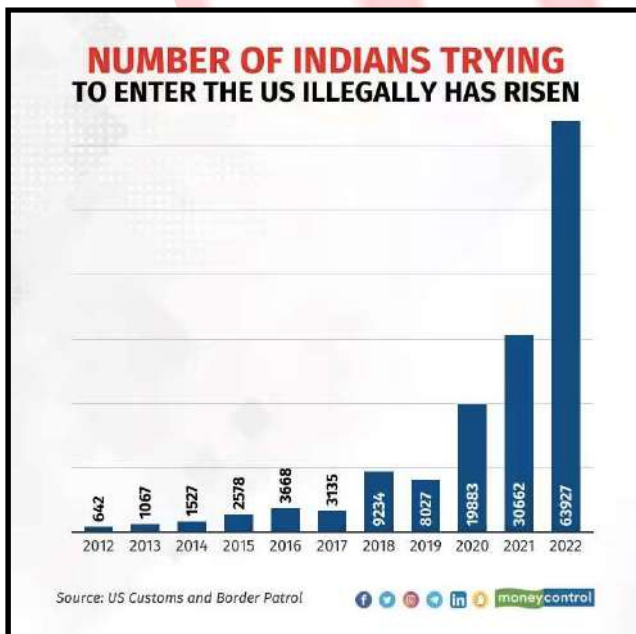


- **India’s Leadership-** India emerges as the top remittance recipient, securing its significant position in the evolving remittance landscape.
- **Contributors to Growth-** Resilient labor markets in advanced economies and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries played a pivotal role in supporting migrants’ ability to send money home.
- **Regional Highlights-** In South Asia, remittance flows to India experienced notable growth, contributing to the region’s overall positive trend. South Asia witnessed a 7.2% increase in remittances in 2023.
- **Indian Economy’s Performance-** The Indian economy outperformed forecasts, reaching USD 125 billion in remittances for the year. This surge was fueled by a tight labor market in the United States and robust employment growth in Europe.

- **Regional Declines-** The Middle East and North Africa saw a second consecutive year of declining remittance flows, mainly due to a sharp drop in flows to Egypt.
- **Top Five Recipient Countries-** Apart from India, the top five remittance recipient countries include Mexico (USD 67 billion), China (USD 50 billion), the Philippines (USD 40 billion), and Egypt (USD 24 billion)..

## ILLEGAL INDIAN MIGRATION TO THE U.S

- **Over the past decade, the influx of illegal Indian Migrants to the U.S. has seen a remarkable increase, rising from a modest 1,500 a decade ago to a staggering 96,917 in 2023,** as per the data from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.



- **The most significant surge in illegal border crossings by Indians has been witnessed since 2020,** marking a departure from historically lower numbers under 10,000.
- Traditionally, the majority of illegal crossings occurred in the U.S.-Mexico border. However, Indian migrants are increasingly opting for the northern border, with numbers rising from under 100 in 2014 to over 30,000 in 2023.

## Reasons for Surge in Illegal Indian Migrants in the USA-

- **There are several push factors such as the lack of sufficient job opportunities and economic prospects in**

**India prompt individuals to seek better employment prospects abroad.**

- **Social conflicts or lack of confidence in the governance structure** in India may drive some individuals to seek a more stable environment elsewhere.
- **The US's reputation for offering better employment, higher wages, and career advancement** acts as a significant pull factor for migrants.
- **The enticement of quality education and prestigious academic institutions in the USA** attracts students and families seeking educational opportunities.
- **Desire to reunite with family members or relatives** already settled in the USA drives some migrants to seek illegal entry for proximity to loved ones.
- **Extreme visa backlogs have driven individuals to explore alternative, albeit illegal, pathways** to enter the USA due to the prolonged waiting times and limited options for legal entry.
- **Misinformation spread through social media and deceptive travel agencies** often misguide desperate migrants.

## ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN TERROR GROUP HAMAS AGREED TO THE RELEASE OF 50 HOSTAGES HELD IN GAZA AND A TEMPORARY PAUSE IN FIGHTING -

- **Both Israelis and Palestinians have been in a struggle for self-determination and sovereignty over the territory, developing respective movements for their causes. (India, Israel and Palestine)**



- **Both Palestinians and Israelis see the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea as their own, and Christians, Jews, and Muslims all hold parts of the land as sacred.**
- **The past seven decades have brought war and uprisings. (15th India-Israel Joint Working Group)**

- A. **Ottoman Empire** - The Ottoman Empire had controlled that part of the Middle East from the early 16th century until control of most of the region was granted to the British after World War I.
- B. **1947-** UN resolution- urging the partition of the land into two independent states — one Arab and one Jewish.
- C. **1948-** Israel declares independence- Israel declared independence in May 1948.
- D. **1967-** the Six-Day War
- E. **1987-** First intifada- A Palestinian uprising, or intifada, brings largely spontaneous clashes, protests, and civil disobedience against Israeli occupation in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel, leading to harsh Israeli military crackdowns.
- F. **1993-** Oslo Accords- The first of two pacts, known as the Oslo Accords, was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- G. **2006-** Hamas elected in Gaza- Israel withdrew its troops from Gaza in 2005.
- H. **2017-** U.S. recognizes Jerusalem as capital
- I. **2022-** Netanyahu sworn in for sixth term

#### ISRAEL DECLARES LASHKAR-E-TAIBA AS TERROR ORGANISATION -

- Ahead of the **15th anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks**, Israel declared the Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) as a terror outfit, the move is in sync with Israel's attempts to support a global war on terror.
- The announcement has come in the backdrop of **Israel's continued military operation in Gaza Strip** that was launched immediately after the attack by Hamas on Israeli targets.
- **Israel's move comes at a time when it has asked India to proscribe Hamas as a terrorist outfit.**
- Israel usually lists terrorist organizations that operate against it within or around its borders, similar to India's practice of listing groups recognized globally by the UNSC or the US State Department.

- **USA, UK, European Union, Canada, Australia, Japan are among the countries and groupings that have designated Hamas as a terror outfit.**

#### INDIA-US 2+2 MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE -

- Recently, **5th Edition of the India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue took place**, where both countries highlighted progress in various areas of bilateral cooperation including defense, semiconductors, emerging technology, space, health etc.
- The 2+2 meetings have been held annually with the US leaders since 2018. The 2+2 meetings signify the participation of two high-level representatives, Ministers holding Foreign and Defence portfolios, from each of the two countries who aim to enhance the scope of dialogue between them.
- **Having such a mechanism enables the partners to better understand and appreciate each other's strategic concerns and sensitivities taking into account political factors on both sides**, in order to build a stronger, more integrated strategic relationship in a rapidly changing global environment.
- **The US is India's oldest and most important 2+2 talks partner. Additionally, India has held 2+2 meetings with ministers from Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia.**



#### What are the Key Highlights of the India-US 2+2 Dialogue-

- A. Defense Deals
- B. Infantry Combat Vehicles and Future Plans Stryker
- C. Advancements in Defence Technology Cooperation
- D. Membership in Combined Maritime Forces
- E. Maritime Security
- F. Space and Semiconductor Collaboration
- G. Discussion on Chinese Aggression
- H. India-Canada Row
- I. Israel-Hamas War

**RUSSIA PULLED OUT OF TREATY OF CONVENTIONAL ARMED FORCES IN EUROPE -**

- **Russia has formally withdrawn from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), citing NATO's expansion as a barrier to cooperation.** The move follows Russia's recent revocation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and a test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile.
- **Signed in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall,** the CFE aimed to limit conventional arms and prevent a rapid build-up of forces between Cold War rivals.
- Moscow, holding an advantage in conventional weaponry at the time, was initially reluctant to embrace the pact.
- **Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared the CFE as "history," stating that the treaty did not align with Russia's interests.**
- They argued that NATO countries had been bypassing restrictions as the alliance expanded, rendering the pact irrelevant to Russia's security concerns.
- **NATO accused Russia of non-compliance with the CFE for years,** pointing to Moscow's suspension of participation in 2007 and complete withdrawal in 2015.
- **Russia, after a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022,** officially denounced the CFE in May 2023.
- The U.S. and its allies had linked ratification of the adapted 1999 CFE to Russia's withdrawal of troops from Georgia and Moldova, a linkage Moscow contested.
- **The Russian Foreign Ministry argued that the CFE Treaty, conceived at the end of the Cold War, no longer served its purpose in the current geopolitical landscape.**
- They noted that the U.S. and its allies failed to ratify an updated version of the accord in 1999, further diminishing the treaty's relevance.

**INDIA-BOUND SHIP HIJACKED BY YEMEN'S HOUTHJI REBELS IN RED SEA, SAYS IDF -**

- **A cargo ship named "Galaxy Leader," en route from Turkey to India, has been hijacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.** Approximately 50 crew members from various nations were on board.
- **The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) confirmed the hijacking but clarified that the ship is not Israeli.**

**Hostage Release Negotiations between Israel and Hamas-**

- **Hamas militants clashed with Israeli forces in Gaza's largest refugee camp. Reports of a potential hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas,** involving women and children. Denial of a tentative deal by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US officials.
- **The Washington Post reported ongoing US-mediated talks for a five-day ceasefire to facilitate aid shipments.** Earlier reports on Qatari mediators seeking a deal for a three-day ceasefire in exchange for 50 hostages.
- **WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus** announced the evacuation of "very sick" babies and health workers.
- **Hamas-run health ministry stated 351 cancer patients in Gaza will travel to Turkey for treatment.** Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, the only oncology hospital in Gaza, was closed due to the Israeli ground assault.
- **Israel declares entering the "next stage" of the war, shifting attention to Khan Younis in the south.** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicates a relentless pursuit of Hamas leaders.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### CHINA BANS EXPORT OF RARE EARTH TECHNOLOGIES -

- Recently, China has banned the export of technology to extract and separate the Rare Earth Metals, as it overhauled a list of technologies deemed key to national security. It also banned the export of production technology for rare earth metals and alloy materials as well as technology to prepare some rare earth magnets.



- The move comes as Europe and the US try to reduce their reliance themselves off rare earths from China, which accounts for 90% of global refined output.
- Rare Earth Metals are a set of seventeen metallic elements. These include the fifteen lanthanides on the periodic table in addition to scandium and yttrium that show similar physical and chemical properties to the lanthanides.
- The 17 Rare Earths are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- These minerals have unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties and thus are used in many modern technologies, including consumer electronics, computers and networks, communications, health care, national defense, clean energy technologies etc.

- They are called 'rare earth' because earlier it was difficult to extract them from their oxides forms technologically.
- They occur in many minerals but typically in low concentrations to be refined in an economical manner.
- India, like many other countries, relies on Chinese rare earth exports. The ban presents an opportunity for India to reassess its dependence and explore diversification strategies.

### GOOGLE UNVEILS PROJECT GEMINI -

- Google has introduced project Gemini, an artificial intelligence (AI) model designed to exhibit human-like behavior.



- This development is expected to fuel the ongoing AI race and raise debates about the potential benefits and risks of the technology.
- Gemini aims to enhance Google's AI-powered chatbot Bard's intuitiveness and efficiency in tasks, particularly those involving planning.
- Google DeepMind, the AI division behind Gemini, emphasizes the model's problem-solving skills in math and physics, offering potential scientific breakthroughs.
- Concerns exist regarding the potential impact of AI on job displacement, misinformation amplification, and even triggering destructive behavior.

**MOON MAY BE 40 MILLION YEARS OLDER THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT -**

- A new study appears to show that the moon is about 40 million years older than previously thought. This finding, based on lunar dust collected in 1972 as part of the Apollo 17 mission, has implications for our understanding of the solar system's history.
- Apollo 17, for now, is the last human expedition to the moon making astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt the last men to walk on the moon.
- The study reveals that the Moon is around 40 million years older than the previous estimate of 4.425 billion years.
- Its formation is now believed to date back around 4.46 billion years, aligning it closely with the early history of our solar system.
- The researchers employed a cutting-edge technique called APT to analyze lunar samples at a nanoscale level.
- APT allowed for a more precise examination of lead clustering in zircon crystals, which in turn aided in dating the Moon's age.
- The scientists reanalyzed crystals from lunar sample 72255, which was known to contain 4.2 billion-year-old zircon.
- Zircon is the oldest mineral known to exist on Earth and, as such, geologists say, it holds vital information about planetary formation, including the Moon's creation.
- The findings support the giant impact hypothesis, suggesting that a huge object called Theia, possibly the size of Mars, collided with Earth during its formation, leading to the Moon's creation.

**GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM TRACKER ANKLET -**

- Recently, a prisoner in Jammu and Kashmir was released on bail after he was tagged with a Global Positioning System (GPS) tracker anklet on his foot to

monitor his movements. This is the first time in the country that a GPS tracker has been put to such use.

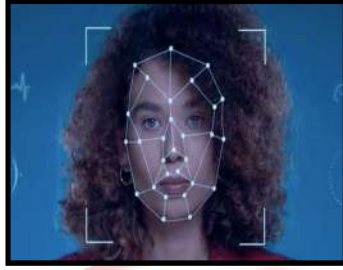
- GPS anklets are small, wearable devices that are attached to the ankles of individuals who are under some form of legal supervision, such as parole, probation, house arrest, or bail.
- The tracker can be put on the ankle or arm of a person. Thus, there are GPS anklets and GPS bracelets.
- GPS anklets are tamper-proof, and any attempt to remove or damage them triggers an alarm. They also have a battery life of several days and can be recharged by the wearer.
- GPS anklets can also be used to enforce curfews, travel restrictions, or other conditions imposed by the court or the supervising agency.
- GPS trackers are a precondition for bail in several countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia.
- Rights activists argue that tracking individuals with GPS is a violation of their fundamental right to privacy and dignity of the offenders.
- The Supreme Court of India in 'Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India' (1978) ruled that the right to life includes the right to human dignity.
- GPS anklets raise some legal and ethical issues, such as the lack of clear and specific laws and regulations governing their usage in India.

**A DEEPFAKE VIDEO SHOWING AN INDIAN ACTRESS HAS SPARKED OUTRAGE AND CONCERN OVER THE MISUSE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) -**

- Deepfakes are synthetic media that use AI to manipulate or generate visual and audio content, usually with the intention of deceiving or misleading someone.
- Deepfakes are created using a technique called generative adversarial networks (GANs), which involve two

competing neural networks: a generator and a discriminator.

- The generator tries to create fake images or videos that look realistic, while the discriminator tries to distinguish between the real and the fake ones.



- Deepfakes require a large amount of data, such as photos or videos, of the source and the target person, which are often collected from the internet or social media without their consent or knowledge.
- Deepfakes are a part of Deep Synthesis, which uses technologies, including deep learning and augmented reality, to generate text, images, audio and video to create virtual scenes.

#### FIRST VERTICAL WIND TUNNEL INSTALLED AT INDIAN ARMY'S SPECIAL FORCES TRAINING SCHOOL IN HIMACHAL PRADESH -

- The Indian Army inaugurated its first Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) at the Special Forces Training School (SFTS) in Himachal Pradesh. This cutting-edge facility provides military trainees with a controlled environment to enhance their Combat Free Fall (CFF) skills by simulating real-life free fall conditions.

- The Indian Army Chief, Gen Manoj Pande, virtually inaugurated the Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) at the Special Forces Training School (SFTS) in Himachal Pradesh.
- This advanced wind tunnel is the first of its kind in the Indian Army and aims to revolutionize military training methods.
- The Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) functions as a free fall simulator, creating a column of air at specific speeds to simulate various Combat Free Fall (CFF) conditions.
- This controlled environment allows trainees to refine their skills and assess their reactions to different free fall scenarios.

#### Benefits of the VWT-

- Enhanced Skills-** Trainees can enhance their combat free fall skills by practicing in a simulated real-life environment, ensuring they are better prepared for airborne operations.
- Stability and Safety-** The VWT reduces potential instability during free fall and parachute deployment, providing a safer training experience for military personnel.
- Versatile Training-** Not limited to beginners, the VWT is a valuable resource for advanced training, catering to both seasoned free-fallers and CFF instructors.

## ECONOMY & FINANCE

### **UTTAR PRADESH BECOMES SECOND-LARGEST ECONOMY IN INDIA -**

- According to an online blogging platform soic.in, Maharashtra has emerged as the largest economy of India.
- It has the largest share of 15.7% in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- It is followed by Uttar Pradesh (UP) with 9.2% share in India's GDP, and Tamil Nadu (TN) with 9.1%.
- The above states are followed by Gujarat (8.2%), West Bengal (7.5%), Karnataka (6.2%), Rajasthan (5.5%), Andhra Pradesh (4.9%), and Madhya Pradesh (4.6%).

### **IMF: INDIA EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE OVER 16% TO GLOBAL GROWTH -**

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said India's economic reforms have helped the nation become a star performer, contributing over 16% to global growth.
- According to which the South Asian country, underpinned by prudent macroeconomic policies, is on track to be one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world this year.
- India's economy has rebounded strongly from the pandemic to become an important driver of global growth.



### **INDIA SET TO EXTEND RICE EXPORT BANS THROUGH 2024 -**

- India, the world's top rice exporter, is expected to maintain its curbs on overseas sales well into 2024, a move likely to hold the staple grain at close to its highest price levels since the food crisis of 2008.
- Lower prices and ample stockpiles have helped make India one of the top shippers globally over the past decade, recently accounting for almost 40% of the total.



- African nations like Benin and Senegal are among the top buyers.

### **MORE THAN 97% OF ₹2,000 NOTES RETURNED: RBI -**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has provided an update on the withdrawal of ₹2,000 denomination banknotes as of October 31, 2023. The central bank's initial goal for introducing these banknotes was to meet the currency needs of the economy after the withdrawal of ₹500 and ₹1,000 banknotes in November-December 2016.
- More than 97% of the ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation as of May 19, 2023, have been returned by October 31, 2023.
- The total value of ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation was ₹3.56 lakh crore as of May 19, 2023.
- This value has significantly reduced to ₹10,000 crore as of October 31, 2023.
- The facility for deposit and exchange of ₹2,000 banknotes at bank branches ended on October 7, 2023.
- The window for deposit and exchange of ₹2,000 banknotes is still open at the 19 Issue Offices of RBI. The RBI encourages the public to use the India Post service to send these banknotes for deposit or exchange, eliminating the need to travel to RBI Offices.
- The introduction of ₹2,000 banknotes was originally intended to meet the currency requirements after the withdrawal of ₹500 and ₹1,000 banknotes in 2016.
- Approximately 89% of the ₹2,000 banknotes were issued before March 2017 and are nearing the end of their estimated life span of 4-5 years.



### **INDIA TO BECOME WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST ECONOMY BY 2027: FM NIRMALA SITHARAMAN -**

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently addressed the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue, highlighting India's remarkable economic trajectory amidst global challenges. She predicted that by 2027, India would surpass Japan and Germany to become



the world's third-largest economy, underlining the resilience of the Indian economy amid global uncertainties.

- **Despite global headwinds, Sitharaman emphasized that India's economic growth is estimated to be just under 7%, the highest among major economies.**
- She pointed out that even conservative estimates from the IMF indicate India's ascendancy to the position of the world's third-largest economy by 2027, with a GDP crossing the USD 5 trillion mark.
- **Sitharaman acknowledged the Indo-Pacific as the world's most economically dynamic region, constituting 60% of global GDP and almost 50% of global merchandise trade.**
- However, she also highlighted the geopolitical challenges in the region due to great power competition.
- **Discussing India's 'Blue Economy,' Sitharaman noted that it contributes approximately 4% to the GDP, representing a sea of opportunities.**
- With nine states and four Union Territories along the coast, 12 major and over 200 non-major ports, and an extensive network of navigable waterways, India stands as a key player in ocean-based trade.

#### **INDIAN GOVERNMENT GRANTS APPROVAL FOR NON-BASMATI RICE EXPORTS –**

- **In a significant move, the Indian government has given the green light for the export of 1.34 million tonnes of Non-Basmati White Rice to seven countries. This export approval has been issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).**
- **The approved exports are intended for seven countries, namely Nepal, Cameroon, Cote D'Ivoire, Republic of Guinea, Malaysia, Philippines, and Seychelles.**

- **The Philippines will receive the largest quota, with up to 295,000 metric tonnes of non-Basmati white rice eligible for export. Cameroon is allotted 190,000 metric tonnes. Malaysia will import up to 170,000 metric tonnes.**
- **Both Cote D'Ivoire and the Republic of Guinea will receive 142,000 metric tonnes each. Nepal is set to receive 95,000 metric tonnes. Seychelles will be supplied with 800 metric tonnes.**
- **The responsibility for executing these exports falls to the National Cooperative Export Limited.**

#### **TATA TO BECOME INDIA'S FIRST IPHONE MANUFACTURER AS WISTRON APPROVES FACTORY SALE –**

- **The Tata Group has taken a significant step towards manufacturing and assembling Apple iPhones in India for both domestic and international markets. This move follows the acquisition of Wistron's operations in India, marking a groundbreaking development in the Indian electronics manufacturing sector.**
- **Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar announced this major venture, which highlights the Tata Group's ambition to establish itself as a key player in the global electronics industry.**
- **The Tata Group has set an ambitious timeline to commence iPhone production within just two and a half years. This endeavor is expected to bolster India's position as a prominent hub for smartphone manufacturing and exports.**
- **Wistron, a significant player in the global electronics manufacturing sector, has granted approval for the sale of its operations in India to the Tata Group. This approval is a pivotal step in the process of Tata Group's entry into iPhone manufacturing.**

## IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS

**VEER BAL DIWAS IS OBSERVED ON 26<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER EVERY YEAR TO COMMEMORATE THE MARTYRDOM OF THE FOUR SONS OF GURU GOBIND SINGH THE TENTH AND LAST SIKH GURU -**

- The four sons were named **Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Jorawar Singh, and Fateh Singh**, who fought against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and his army.
- **Jorawar Singh and Fateh Singh** were captured by the Mughals at the age of six and nine respectively after they had defended their fort of Anandpur Sahib from a siege.
- They were taken to Sirhind, where they refused to convert to Islam and were sentenced to death by being bricked alive in 1705.
- **Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh** were also captured at Anandpur Sahib, but they managed to escape from Sirhind with the help of some loyal followers. They joined their father in his final battle at Sirhind, where he was wounded by a musket shot.
- Guru Gobind Singh's sons sacrificed their lives for the cause of Sikhism and their courage inspired generations of Sikhs.



**GOA LIBERATION DAY -**

- **Goa Liberation Day 2023**, celebrated annually on **December 19**, holds special significance as it commemorates the liberation of the state from Portuguese colonial rule. The year 2023 marks the 62nd anniversary of this momentous occasion, highlighting the resilience and determination of the people of Goa in their quest for freedom.
- Goa Liberation Day 2023/ Edition: 62nd
- **The history of Goa Liberation Day is rooted in the struggle against colonial tyranny. Goa, with a cultural**

and religious identity distinct from the rest of India, remained under Portuguese rule for about 451 years. Despite India gaining independence from British rule in 1947, the Portuguese refused to relinquish control over Goa.



- The Indian government engaged in diplomatic discussions, but when negotiations failed, it resorted to the military option to liberate the region. **In 1961, on December 19, the Indian Army successfully captured Goa, marking the end of centuries of Portuguese colonial rule.** The liberation was a pivotal moment in Goa's history, symbolizing the triumph of the people's will over oppression.

**HUMAN RIGHTS DAY IS OBSERVED ANNUALLY ON 10TH DECEMBER TO COMMEMORATE THE APPROVAL OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR) BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 1948 -**

- This year **2023** marks the **75th anniversary of the UDHR**. 2023 Theme: Freedom, Equality and Justice for All.
- Human Rights are **rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.**
- These include the **right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many More.**
- Article 1 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

- And Article 2 says that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms the declaration sets out, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
- The **30 rights and freedoms include civil and political rights, like the right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy and economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health and education, etc.**
- India took an active part in the drafting of the UDHR. The UDHR is not a treaty, so it does not directly create legal obligations for countries.

#### **7 INDIAN STATES & 2 UTS CELEBRATED THEIR FORMATION DAY ON NOVEMBER 1ST -**

- **1st November is recognized as the formation day of seven Indian states and 2 Union Territories. This special day marks the historical moment when Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, along with the Union Territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry, came into existence.**
- **In 1966, Punjab was officially formed as a state on November 1.** The division of the former East Punjab was based on linguistic identity, creating two separate states: Punjab and Haryana.
- People in Punjab celebrate this day to honor their rich agricultural heritage and vibrant culture, taking pride in the establishment of the present boundaries of the state.
- **Haryana, too observes Formation Day on 1st November 1966. It was created by reorganizing the former state of Punjab, primarily to address the specific regional, linguistic and cultural needs of the people in the region.** Since its formation, Haryana has thrived in agriculture, industry and cultural diversity.
- **On 1st November 1956, the state of Mysore was renamed as Karnataka. This change aimed to unite**

**Kannada-speaking regions under one state, acknowledging the cultural significance of the Kannada language.** Karnataka Formation Day celebrates this linguistic and cultural diversity, reflecting the state’s dynastic rule, culture and heritage.

- **On 1st November 2000, the state of Chhattisgarh was carved out of Madhya Pradesh. It is the 10th largest state in India. The creation of Chhattisgarh aimed to simplify administration and curb naxalism in this region, making it an important milestone for the state and the nation.**
- **Madhya Pradesh came into existence on 1st November 1956, making it the second largest state in India in terms of area.** It is often referred to as the “Heart of India” due to its central location and its cultural and historical significance.
- **On 1st November 1956, Andhra Pradesh was formed. Its creation was a result of the States Reorganization Act, which aimed to reorganize India’s states along linguistic lines.** Andhra Pradesh has a rich cultural heritage and has played a vital role in the nation’s development.
- **Kerala Formation Day, celebrated on 1st November, marks the establishment of the state of Kerala in India in 1956.** It commemorates the unification of Malayalam-speaking regions and the birth of the vibrant and culturally rich state.
- **Lakshadweep: The Union Territory of Lakshadweep was formed on 1st November 1956, marking its distinct geographical and cultural significance as an archipelago.**
- **Puducherry: Puducherry, also known as Pondicherry, was created by merging the French colonial territories with Indian regions in 1956, highlighting its unique colonial history and culture.**

# AWARDS, RECOGNITIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

## UNESCO RECOGNITION TO GUJARAT'S GARBA DANCE -

- Recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), during its 18th session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Botswana, officially added Gujarat's iconic Garba dance to its esteemed Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.
- The Garba dance form is the 15th cultural item from India to make it to the UNESCO list. Kolkata's Durga Puja was the last one added in 2021.
- Garba is a form of Gujarati folk dance that is performed during the nine-day Hindu festival of Navratri, which celebrates the victory of good over evil.
- The name Garba comes from the Sanskrit word for womb, implying life and creation.
- The dance also customarily marks a girl's first menstrual cycle and, later, her imminent marriage.
- The dance is performed around a centrally lit lamp or a picture or statue of the Goddess Shakti, who represents the feminine energy of the universe.



## NICARAGUA'S SHEYNIS PALACIOS CROWNED 72ND MISS UNIVERSE 2023 -

- Sheynis Palacios, representing Nicaragua, won the Miss Universe crown at the 72nd edition of the fashion pageant.
- The show took place in San Salvador, El Salvador at Jose Adolfo Pineda Arena on November 19.
- Sheynis was also crowned as Miss Nicaragua 2023 earlier this year and has a strong social media presence.
- For the finale of Miss Universe 2023, Sheynis was seen wearing a stunning embellished body-hugging gown.



## GUJARAT'S DHORDO AWARDED UNWTO'S BEST TOURISM VILLAGE 2023 -

- The beautiful village of Dhordo in Gujarat has garnered international recognition after it secured a place on the list of the 54 best tourism villages announced by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his delight at the recognition of Dhordo as the "best tourism village." He lauded the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of the village and emphasized its potentials to attract visitors from around the world. Union Home Minister Amit Shah celebrated the achievement, acknowledging the PM's efforts to transform the area into a world-class tourism site.
- Dhordo village situated in the heart of Gujarat, has come a long way to earn its place on the global stage as a premier tourism destination. It recently hosted the inaugural Tourism Working Group Meeting of the G20, during India's presidency of the influential group. This gathering of global leaders in the enchanting landscapes of Dhordo showcased the village's capacity to host international events and highlighted its growing importance in the world of tourism.
- The UNWTO's Best Tourism Villages 2023 accolade is a tribute to villages leading the way in nurturing rural regions, preserving landscapes, upholding cultural diversity, safeguarding local values, and celebrating culinary traditions. Launched in 2021, this initiative is a vital component of the UNWTO's Tourism for Rural Development program, which aims to promote sustainable tourism practices.
- In its third edition, the UNWTO's initiative selected 54 villages from diverse regions out of nearly 260 applications. The announcement was made during the UNWTO General Assembly held in Samarkand,



Uzbekistan, from October 16 to 20, where leaders and experts gathered to discuss the future of global tourism.

- Alongside Dhordo, several other villages from around the world achieved recognition, including Barrancas in Chile, Biei in Japan, Cantavieja in Spain, Dahshour in Egypt, Dongbaek in the Republic of Korea, Douma in Lebanon, Ericeira in Portugal, and Filandia in Colombia, among others.

### NOBEL PRIZE 2023 IN MEDICINE OR PHYSIOLOGY -

- **Katalin Karikó and Drew Weissman “for their discoveries concerning nucleoside base modifications that enabled the development of effective mRNA vaccines against COVID-19”.**



- The Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet has decided to award the 2023 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.
- The discoveries by the two Nobel Laureates were critical for developing effective mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 during the pandemic that began in early 2020. Through their groundbreaking findings, which have fundamentally changed our understanding of how mRNA interacts with our immune system, the laureates contributed to the unprecedented rate of vaccine development during one of the greatest threats to human health in modern times.
- In our cells, genetic information encoded in DNA is transferred to messenger RNA (mRNA), which is used as a template for protein production.
- During the 1980s, efficient methods for producing mRNA without cell culture were introduced, called in vitro transcription. This decisive step accelerated the development of molecular biology applications in several fields. Ideas of using mRNA technologies for vaccine and therapeutic purposes also took off, but roadblocks lay ahead.

- In vitro transcribed mRNA was considered unstable and challenging to deliver, requiring the development of sophisticated carrier lipid systems to encapsulate the mRNA. Moreover, in vitro-produced mRNA gave rise to inflammatory reactions. Enthusiasm for developing the mRNA technology for clinical purposes was, therefore, initially limited.
- **Katalin Karikó was born in 1955 in Szolnok, Hungary. She received her PhD from Szeged’s University in 1982 and performed postdoctoral research at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Szeged until 1985. She then conducted postdoctoral research at Temple University, Philadelphia, and the University of Health Science, Bethesda.**
- **Drew Weissman was born in 1959 in Lexington, Massachusetts, USA. He received his MD, PhD degrees from Boston University in 1987. He did his clinical training at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center at Harvard Medical School and postdoctoral research at the National Institutes of Health.**
- 113 Nobel Prizes in Physiology or Medicine have been awarded since 1901. It was not awarded on nine occasions: in 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1921, 1925, 1940, 1941 and 1942.

### NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS 2023 AWARDED TO PIERRE AGOSTINI, FERENC KRAUSZ AND ANNE L’HUIILLIER -

- **Pierre Agostini, Ferenc Krausz and Anne L’Huillier “for experimental methods that generate attosecond pulses of light for the study of electron dynamics in matter”.** This year Nobel Laureates in Physics 2023 are being recognised for their experiments, which have given humanity new tools for exploring the world of electrons inside atoms and molecules. Pierre Agostini, Ferenc Krausz and Anne L’Huillier have demonstrated a way to create extremely short pulses of

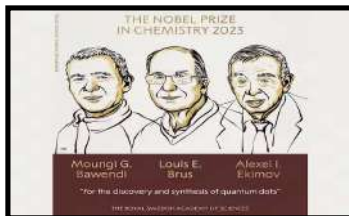


light that can be used to measure the rapid processes in which electrons move or change energy.

- **Fast-moving events flow into each other when perceived by humans, just like a film that consists of still images is perceived as continual movement.** If we want to investigate really brief events, we need special technology. In the world of electrons, changes occur in a few tenths of an attosecond, an attosecond is so short that there are as many in one second as there have been seconds since the birth of the universe.
- **An attosecond is an astonishingly short unit of time, equivalent to one quintillionth of a second, or  $10^{18}$  seconds (1 attosecond equals 0.000000000000000001 second).**
- **Pierre Agostini** (The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA) PhD 1968 from Aix-Marseille University, France. Professor at The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA.
- **Ferenc Krausz** (Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics, Garching and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany), born 1962 in Mór, Hungary. PhD 1991 from Vienna University of Technology, Austria. Director at Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics, Garching and Professor at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany.
- **Anne L'Huillier (Lund University, Sweden)**, born 1958 in Paris, France. PhD 1986 from University Pierre and Marie Curie, Paris, France. Professor at Lund University, Sweden.

### CHEMISTRY NOBEL 2023 -

- The Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2023 was awarded to **Moungi G. Bawendi, Louis E. Brus, and Alexei I. Ekimov.**
- The 2023 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded for the discovery of quantum dots used in light-emitting diode or LED lights. These particles have unique

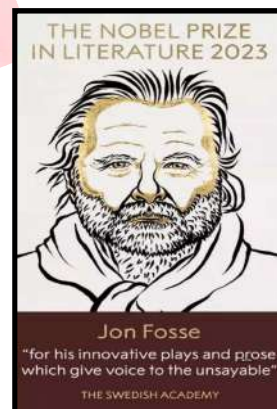


properties and now spread their light from television screens and LED lamps.

- **They catalyze chemical reactions and their clear light can illuminate tumour tissue for a surgeon.**
- In the early 1980s, this year's chemistry laureates Louis Brus and Alexei Ekimov succeeded in creating (independently of each other) quantum dots.
- In 1993, chemistry laureate Moungi Bawendi revolutionized the methods for manufacturing quantum dots, making their quality extremely high which is a vital prerequisite for their use in today's nanotechnology.

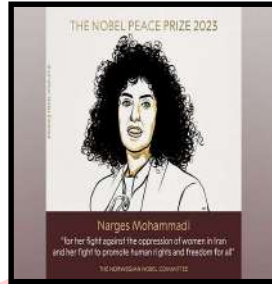
### NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE 2023 AWARDED TO JON FOSSE -

- The Nobel Prize in Literature 2023 was awarded to Norwegian author **Jon Fosse or Jon Olav Fosse**, "for his innovative plays and prose which give voice to the unsayable".
- The Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded by the Swedish Academy, Stockholm, Sweden. The Nobel Prize amount for 2023 is set at Swedish kronor (SEK) 11.0 million per full Nobel Prize.
- **Jon Fosse, born in 1959, is widely considered one of the most important writers of our time.** For almost forty years he has written novels, plays, poems, stories, essays, and children's books. His award-winning work has been translated into more than fifty languages, and his plays have been staged over a thousand times all over the world.
- The Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded 115 times to 119 Nobel Prize laureates between 1901 and 2022.
- The Nobel medal in literature was designed by Swedish sculptor and engraver Erik Lindberg and represents a young man sitting under a laurel tree who, enchanted, listens to and writes down the song of the Muse.



**NOBEL PEACE PRIZE 2023 AWARDED TO NARGES MOHAMMADI -**

- Narges Mohammadi “for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all”.
- The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2023 to Narges Mohammadi for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all. Her brave struggle has come with tremendous personal costs.
- Altogether, the regime has arrested her 13 times, convicted her five times, and sentenced her to a total of 31 years in prison and 154 lashes.
- This year’s peace prize also recognises the hundreds of thousands of people who, in the preceding year, have demonstrated against Iran’s theocratic regime’s policies of discrimination and oppression targeting women.
- The motto adopted by the demonstrators – “Woman – Life – Freedom” – suitably expresses the dedication and work of Narges Mohammadi.
- 103 Nobel Peace Prizes have been awarded since 1901. It was not awarded on 19 occasions: in 1914-1916, 1918, 1923, 1924, 1928, 1932, 1939-1943, 1948, 1955-1956, 1966-1967 and 1972.
- To date, the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate is Malala Yousafzai, who was 17 years old when awarded the 2014 peace prize.
- The oldest Nobel Peace Prize laureate to date is Joseph Rotblat, who was 87 years old when he was awarded the prize in 1995.
- The work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been honoured the most – three times – by a Nobel Peace Prize. In addition, the founder of the ICRC, Henry Dunant, was awarded the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901.

**FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON TO GRACE INDIA’S REPUBLIC DAY -**

- In a testament to the enduring friendship between India and France, President Emmanuel Macron is set to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. This marks the sixth instance of a French leader gracing this prestigious occasion, highlighting the significance of the bilateral relationship.
- President Macron follows in the footsteps of his predecessors, with former French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac having been the Chief Guest in 1976 and 1998. Additionally, former Presidents Valery Giscard d’Estaing, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Francois Hollande have all contributed to this tradition in the years 1980, 2008, and 2016, respectively.
- This year’s Republic Day celebrations hold special significance as India and France commemorate the 25th anniversary of their Strategic Partnership.
- Under the India-France Strategic Partnership, the two nations collaborate closely in critical areas such as defence, space, civil nuclear, trade, investment, education, culture, and people-to-people ties. This multifaceted engagement underscores the shared commitment to mutual growth and global cooperation.

**ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISI WINS THIRD TERM AS PRESIDENT OF EGYPT –**

- Egypt’s election authority announced that President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has secured a third six-year term leading the North African nation.
- Sisi won another term with 89.6 percent of the vote, the National Elections Authority said.
- Over 39 million Egyptians voted for the former army chief, who has ruled the nation for over a decade.
- This will be Sisi’s final term in office as the Egyptian constitution only allows a president to sit for three terms.



# PROGRAMMES, SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES

## PARLIAMENT PASSES BILLS TO REPLACE BRITISH-ERA CRIMINAL LAWS -

- The Parliament recently passed three pivotal Bills: Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita, 2023; Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, 2023; and Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill, 2023.
- However, their passage was marked by the absence of 97 Opposition members due to their suspension, creating a contentious backdrop.
- Following their introduction in August, 2023, the bills were referred to a 31-member Parliamentary Standing Committee.



## The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (Second) (BNS2) replaces the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and introduces significant alterations including-

- **Terrorism-** Defined as acts threatening the nation's integrity or causing terror among the populace. Penalties range from death or life imprisonment to imprisonment with fines.
- **Organized Crime-** Includes offenses like kidnapping, extortion, financial scams, cybercrime, and more. Punishments vary from life imprisonment to death, with fines for those committing or attempting organized crime.
- **Mob Lynching-** BNS2 identifies murder or severe injury by five or more individuals on specific grounds (race, caste, etc.) as a punishable offence, carrying life imprisonment or death penalty.

- **Sexual Offences Against Women-** Retaining IPC sections on rape, voyeurism, and other violations, BNS2 raises the age threshold for gangrape victims from 16 to 18 years. Additionally, it criminalizes deceptive sexual acts or false promises.
- **Death by Negligence-** The BNSS elevates the punishment for causing death by negligence from two to five years under Section 304A of the IPC.

## The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS2) replaces the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (CrPC) and introduces significant alterations including-

- **Medical Examination-** It broadens the scope of medical examinations, allowing any police officer (not just a sub-inspector) to request one, making the process more accessible.
- **Forensic Investigation-** Mandates forensic investigation for crimes punishable by at least seven years' imprisonment.
- **Court Hierarchy-** The CrPC organizes India's criminal courts hierarchically, from Magistrate's Courts to the Supreme Court. It previously allowed cities with over a million people to have Metropolitan Magistrates, but the BNSS2 eliminates this distinction and the role of Metropolitan Magistrates.

## The Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill, 2023 (BSB2) replaces the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (IEA). It retains most provisions of the IEA including those on confessions, relevancy of facts, and burden of proof. However, it introduces significant alterations including-

- The BSB2 broadens the definition of documents to include electronic records alongside traditional writings, maps, and caricatures.
- **Oral Evidence-** The BSB2 permits electronic provision of oral evidence, enabling witnesses, accused individuals, and victims to testify through electronic means.



- **Admissibility of Electronic Records-** Electronic or digital records are granted equivalent legal status as paper records.
- **Amended Explanation to Joint Trials-** Joint trials encompass cases where one accused is absent or has not responded to an arrest warrant, now categorized as joint trials.

**RECENTLY, THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER INAUGURATED THE SURAT DIAMOND BOURSE (SDB) IN GUJARAT, MARKING A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIAMOND AND JEWELRY INDUSTRY**

- The SDB stands as the world's largest office complex. It aims to relocate the diamond trading hub from Mumbai to Surat, leveraging Surat's diamond cutting and polishing expertise.
- A diamond is a rare, naturally occurring mineral made up of pure carbon. The word diamond comes from the Greek word Adamas, which means indestructible.
- Diamond occurs in two types of deposits, primarily in igneous rocks of basic or ultrabasic composition and in alluvial deposits derived from the primary sources.
- **Major Diamond Producing Countries:** Russia, Botswana, Canada, South Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- **Russia is the world's largest producer of rough diamonds**, mining nearly 42 million carats in 2022.

**Diamond Industry in India-**

- **India is the world's largest cutting and polishing center for diamonds, accounting for over 90% of polished diamond manufacturing globally.**
- **According to Indian Minerals Yearbook 2019, diamond fields of India are grouped into four regions-**
- Central Indian tract of Madhya Pradesh, comprising Panna belt.
- South Indian tract of Andhra Pradesh, comprising parts of Anantapur, Kadapa, Guntur, Krishna, Mahabubnagar and Kurnool districts.
- Behradin-Kodavali area in Raipur district and Tokapal, Dugapal, etc. areas in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh.

- Eastern Indian tract mostly of Odisha, lying between Mahanadi and Godavari valleys.
- **In 2022, India ranks first among the top exporters in cut & polished diamonds.**

**ONE NATION, ONE STUDENT ID -**

- Recently, several state governments requested schools to seek parental consent for the creation of a new student identity card known as the Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR).
- This is part of the 'One nation, One Student ID' initiative of the Union government, stemming from the new National Education Policy of 2020.
- Under the initiative, each student would get a lifelong APAAR ID, making it easy for the learners, schools, and governments to track academic progress from pre-primary education to higher education.
- APAAR would also serve as a gateway to Digilocker, a digital system where students can store their important documents and achievements, such as exam results and report cards.
- The goal behind introducing APAAR is to make education hassle-free and reduce the need for students to carry physical documents.
- The vision is to create a positive change, allowing state governments to track literacy rates, dropout rates, and more, helping them make improvements.
- APAAR also aims to reduce fraud and duplicate educational certificates by providing a single, trusted reference for educational institutions.



**PM MODI INAUGURATES YASHOBHOOMI CONVENTION CENTRE -**

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked a historic moment as he unveiled Phase 1 of the India International Convention and Expo Centre (IICC), aptly named 'Yashobhoomi.'**

- This **state-of-the-art facility, constructed at a cost of Rs 5,400 crore**, promises to redefine the landscape of meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) on a global scale.
- Yashobhoomi stands as a testament to India's commitment to world-class event hosting, boasting an expansive project area of over 8.9 lakh square metres and a built-up area exceeding 1.8 lakh square metres.

### Key Features of Yashobhoomi Convention Centre-

1. **Comprehensive Convention Centre-** The convention centre spans more than 73,000 square metres and encompasses 15 convention rooms, including the main auditorium, the grand ballroom, and 13 meeting rooms.
2. **Cutting-Edge Technology-** Yashobhoomi sets a technological benchmark with the largest LED media facade in the country, enhancing visual experiences and communication.
3. **Plenary Hall-** The plenary hall within the convention centre stands out with seating for approximately 6,000 guests, providing a grand setting for significant events.
4. **Innovative Seating-** The auditorium introduces an innovative automated seating system, transforming the flat floor into an auditorium-style tiered seating arrangement, adaptable for various seating configurations.
5. **Grand Ballroom-** The Grand Ballroom, capable of hosting around 2,500 guests, offers a splendid ambience for prestigious gatherings.
6. **Connectivity-** Yashobhoomi is seamlessly connected to the Delhi Airport Metro Express line, thanks to the inauguration of the 'Yashobhoomi Dwarka Sector 25' metro station.

### **COUGH SYRUP SAMPLES FAIL EXPORT QUALITY TEST -**

- Recently, **data from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), shows that at least 6% of cough syrup samples from 54 Indian manufacturers failed a mandatory quality test for export.**
- **Gambia, Uzbekistan, Cameroon, and the World Health Organization (WHO) expressed concerns**

following the deaths of children who had taken these medications.



- **Indian manufactured syrups were reported to be contaminated with glycol and ethylene glycol toxic substances that can sometimes be fatal, especially for children.**
- **India's pharmaceutical sector contributes around 1.72% of GDP and the industry is worth approximately USD 50 billion** with more than half coming from exports.
- The CDSCO under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare is a national regulatory authority of India.

### **COP28 CONCLUDES -**

- **The two-week-long COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), concluded on December 13 with member nations engaging in extended talks on the final text. In the closing plenary, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber highlighted the summit's achievements, emphasizing a robust action plan aimed at limiting global warming to the targeted 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial times set in the 2015 Paris deal.**

### Unprecedented Achievements at COP28-

1. **Transition away from Fossil Fuels-** The most significant achievement of COP28 is the historic agreement to begin reducing global consumption of fossil fuels. Unlike previous COP texts that focused on coal, COP28 marked the first time a global commitment was made to transition away from oil and gas, fundamental components of the global economy for decades.
2. **Triple Renewable Energy Capacity and Double Energy Efficiency by 2030-** A groundbreaking "Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge" was signed by at least 117 countries, committing to tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030.
3. **Loss and Damage Fund-** Countries formally established a loss and damage fund on the first day of COP28, aimed at supporting vulnerable nations grappling with the effects of climate change.

**4.Phase-down of Unabated Coal-** The final COP28 text called for “accelerating efforts towards the phase-down of unabated coal power.” While limiting new coal plants was initially in the draft text.

**5.Oil and Gas Companies Commit to Lower Methane Emissions**

**6.Food and Agriculture Declaration**

**7.Declaration of Climate and Health**

**8.Global Cooling Pledge-** Over 60 countries signed the Global Cooling Pledge, a new initiative launched at COP28 to reduce cooling-related emissions globally by at least 68 percent by 2050 compared to 2022 levels.

#### UAE INAUGURATES WORLD’S LARGEST SINGLE-SITE SOLAR POWER PLANT -

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has inaugurated the world’s largest single-site solar power plant, the 2-gigawatt (GW) Al Dhafra Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Independent Power Project (IPP).
- The plant, located 35 kilometers from Abu Dhabi city, will generate enough electricity to power almost 200,000 homes and is expected to displace 2.4 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually.
- The project was inaugurated by Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi, and emphasized the importance of the plant as a symbol of progress in solar power efficiency, innovation, and cost competitiveness.
- The project aligns with the UAE’s Net Zero 2050 goal, reinforcing its leadership in solar energy production on a per capita basis.
- The project is also a testament to the UAE’s commitment to hosting a successful COP28. The country will host the United Nations Climate Change Conference from November 30th to December 12 this year.

#### INDIA GETS ITS 54TH TIGER RESERVE “VEERANGANA DURGA VATI TIGER RESERVE” IN MP -

- Madhya Pradesh, which is home to the most number of tigers in the country, has got a new protected area

for the big cats named ‘Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve’.

- The Madhya Pradesh Government has unveiled the Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve, becoming the seventh tiger reserve in the state and the 54th in India.
- MP retained the “tiger state” status in the 2022 census with the number of big cats in the state rising to 785 from 526 in 2018. Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve has become the seventh tiger reserve of Madhya Pradesh.
- About 1,414 square kilometres in the tiger reserve has been included in the core area and 925.12 square kilometres in the buffer zone, the official said.
- As per the report ‘Status of Tigers: Co-predators & Prey in India-2022’, released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and Wildlife Institute of India in July this year, MP (785) has the highest number of tigers in the country, followed by Karnataka (563) and Uttarakhand (560).
- About Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve is spread across Sagar, Damoh and Narsinghpur districts of Madhya Pradesh. It is spread over an area of 2,339 square kilometres.
- It is the seventh tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh. It will encompass areas within the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary and Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuary.
- A green corridor linking Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) with Durgavati will be developed for the natural movement of the tiger to the new reserve.



## REPORTS & INDICES

**RECENTLY, THE ETHICS COMMITTEE OF THE LOK SABHA IS BELIEVED TO HAVE RECOMMENDED THE EXPULSION OF TRINAMOOL CONGRESS (MP) MAHUA MOITRA FROM THE LOK SABHA -**

- The ethics committee was constituted in 2000. Its objective is to oversee the moral and ethical conduct of members and examine cases of ‘unethical conduct’ referred to it.
- The Committee examines complaints filed against members of the House by other members; outsiders through a member; or referred by the Speaker.
- The Committee makes a prima facie inquiry before deciding to examine a complaint. It presents its report to the Speaker, who places it before the House for consideration.
- The term ‘unethical’ is not defined. It is left to the Committee to decide whether any act is unethical or not.
- While the Ethics Committee handles cases of unethical conduct, the Privileges Committee, or Special Inquiry Committee, deals with more severe accusations against a member. These committees have historical precedence, with a special committee in 1951 finding a member guilty of promoting a business interest through questions in return for financial benefits.
- Parliamentary committees are broadly categorized as Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees.
- Standing Committees are permanent and operate continuously, while Ad Hoc Committees are temporary and disband upon task completion.
- It includes Financial Committees, Departmental Standing Committees, Committees to Enquire, Committees to Scrutinise and Control, Committees Relating to the Day-to-Day Business of the House, and House-Keeping Committees.
- Ad Hoc Committees are subdivided into Inquiry Committees and Advisory Committees. The



Parliamentary committees draw their authority from the constitution.

- **Article 105:** Powers, privileges, etc., of the houses of Parliament and of the members and committees thereof.
- Article 118:** Each House of Parliament may make rules for regulations, subject to the provisions of this constitution, its procedure and the conduct of its business.

**TOP 10 MOST POWERFUL COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD BY MILITARY STRENGTH -**

- Global Military Ranking System explores the most powerful countries in terms of military strength involves employing a Global Military Ranking System.
- This ranking, facilitated by Global Firepower (GFP) and expressed through the PowerIndex, provides valuable insights into the military capabilities of nations worldwide.
- The PowerIndex (PwrIndx) is a numerical representation of a country’s overall military prowess. A lower PwrIndx score signifies a stronger military, with a perfect PwrIndex value theoretically set at 0.000, deemed realistically unattainable by GFP. This scoring system comprehensively considers over 60 different factors, encompassing various aspects of a nation’s military strength.
- These factors include the quantity and capability of military units, financial resources allocated to defense, logistical capabilities, geographical factors,

**GLOBAL STATUS REPORT ON ROAD SAFETY 2023: WHO -**

- Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released a report titled-The Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023, revealing critical findings and insights regarding road traffic fatalities and safety across the globe.
- Road traffic deaths worldwide decreased by 5% between 2010 and 2021, totaling 1.19 million fatalities

annually. 108 UN member nations reported a drop in road traffic deaths during this period.

- **India witnessed a 15% increase in fatalities**, rising from 1.34 lakh in 2010 to 1.54 lakh in 2021.
- **Ten countries succeeded in reducing road traffic deaths by over 50%:** Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Denmark, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.
- Thirty-five more countries made notable progress, reducing deaths by 30% to 50%.
- **28% of global road traffic deaths occurred in the WHO South-East Asia Region, 25% in the Western Pacific Region, 19% in the African Region, 12% in the Region of the Americas, 11% in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and 5% in the European Region.**
- **Low- and middle-income countries bear a disproportionate burden, with 90% of deaths occurring in these nations despite having only 1% of the world's motor vehicles.**
- **53% of all road traffic fatalities are vulnerable road users, including pedestrians (23%), riders of powered two- and three-wheelers (21%), cyclists (6%), and users of micro-mobility devices (3%).**
- **Pedestrian deaths rose by 3% to 274,000, while cyclist deaths increased by nearly 20% to 71,000 between 2010 and 2021.**
- However, deaths among car and other 4-wheeled light vehicle occupants slightly decreased, making 30% of global fatalities.

**What are the Initiatives Related to Road Safety- Global-**

- Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety (2015)
- Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030
- The International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP)

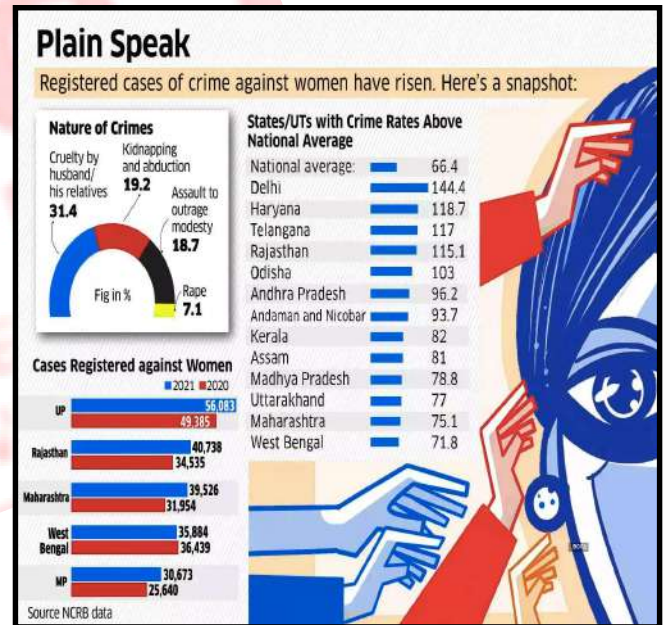
**India-**

- Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019
- The Carriage by Road Act, 2007
- The Control of National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2000

- National Highways Authority of India Act, 1998

**NCRB'S CRIME IN INDIA 2022 REPORT -**

- **The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has recently unveiled its annual report titled "Crime in India for 2022,"** providing a comprehensive overview of crime trends across the nation.



- A total of over 58,00,000 cognizable crimes were registered, comprising both the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special & Local Laws(SLL) crimes.
- The registration of cases witnessed a 4.5% decline compared to 2021.
- The crime rate per lakh population dropped from 445.9 in 2021 to 422.2 in 2022.
- This decline is considered a more reliable indicator, considering the impact of population growth on absolute crime numbers.
- **Kolkata emerged as the safest city in India for the third consecutive year**, recording the least number of cognisable offences per lakh population among metropolises. Pune (Maharashtra) and Hyderabad (Telangana) secured the second and third positions, respectively.

- **Cybercrime reporting surged by 24.4%**, totalling 65,893 cases, a significant surge from 52,974 cases in 2021. Cyber fraud constituted the majority of cases (64.8%) of registered cases, followed by extortion (5.5%), and sexual exploitation (5.2%).
- In 2022, **India witnessed a significant surge in suicides, totalling over 1.7 Lakh cases, reflecting a concerning increase of 4.2% compared to 2021.**
- Major causes included 'Family Problems,' 'Marriage Related Problems,' Bankruptcy and indebtedness, 'Unemployment and professional issues' and Illness'. Maharashtra reported the highest number of suicides, followed closely by Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Telangana.
- The Crime in India report highlighted an overall increase in crimes and atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) persons.
- A total of **4,45,256 cases of crime against women were reported in 2022, marking a 4% increase from 2021.**
- **Cases of crimes against children showed an increase of 8.7% compared to 2021.** A majority of these cases related to kidnapping and abduction (45.7%) and 39.7% were filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.
- **Cases of crimes against senior citizens rose by 9.3% to 28,545 cases compared to 26,110 cases in 2021.** A bulk of these cases (27.3%) related to hurt followed by theft (13.8%) and forgery, cheating, and fraud (11.2%).

#### **INDIAN PARLIAMENT FACE SECURITY BREACH 'INTRUDERS THROW SMOKE BOMBS' AT MP -**

- **Two unidentified individuals entered the chambers of the lower house of India's parliament,** allegedly throwing smoke bombs, marking a significant security lapse.
- **This incident occurred on the 22nd anniversary of a 2001 terrorist attack on parliament that resulted in casualties.** The two person entered the area where

- lawmakers were seated during the zero hour, releasing smoke canisters and filling the space with yellow smoke.
- The two persons, detained for the protest outside the Parliament are identified as—identified as Neelam (42) and Amol Shinde (25).

#### **INDIA RANKS THIRD IN FINTECH UNICORNS, WITH UNITED STATES AT THE TOP -**

- **According to global research firm Statista, India has secured the third position worldwide in the number of financial technology (fintech) unicorns.** The United States and the United Kingdom continue to dominate the field, holding the first and second positions, respectively, both in terms of quantity and overall value.
- **In 2023, India has secured the third position in the global fintech landscape with 17 fintech unicorns. This significant achievement underscores the country's growing influence in the world of finance and technology. India's top profitable companies include Zerodha, Billdesk, Paytm, and others.** Fintech giants like Paytm have exhibited impressive financial growth, with Paytm recording a 32 percent growth in revenue during the second quarter of fiscal year 2023-24. In the world of fintech, **the United States and the United Kingdom maintain their supremacy in terms of both quantity and value. The US is home to an impressive 134 fintech unicorns, producing the highest value in the industry.** Visa, Paypal, and Mastercard are among the dominant players, collectively contributing to a market capitalization of \$1.2 trillion. Meanwhile, the UK ranks second with 27 fintech unicorns, making a substantial mark on the global fintech stage.
- **China, despite having only eight fintech unicorns, has secured the fourth position. Giants like Tencent and Ant Financial have played a pivotal role in elevating China's overall financial market capitalization to \$338.92 billion.** These companies have introduced innovative financial solutions, contributing to China's impressive fintech market presence.

# DEFENCE

## RECENTLY INS IMPHAL WAS COMMISSIONED INTO THE INDIAN NAVY

- **INS Imphal (Pennant D68), the third of four warships of Project 15B that together form the Visakhapatnam class stealth-guided missile destroyers, is commissioned into the Indian Navy.**
- The Visakhapatnam-class destroyers, also classified as the P-15 Bravo class, or simply P-15B, is a class of guided-missile destroyers currently being built for the Indian Navy.
- **It is built by also known by the name Yard 12706 and was built by the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL).**
- The propulsion system includes combined gas and gas (COGAG) configuration with four gas turbines. The maximum speed is 30 knots and range is 4000 nautical miles.
- It is named after the city of Imphal, honoring the strategic and historical significance of the Northeast region.

## MILITARY EXERCISE “VINBAX-2023” -

- **The Indian Armed Forces contingent reached Hanoi, Vietnam to take part in the fourth edition of Joint Military Exercise VINBAX-2023.**
- Exercise VINBAX was instituted in 2018 and the first edition was conducted at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.
- It is an annual training event conducted alternatively in India and Vietnam.
- **The exercise is to foster collaborative partnership, promote inter-operability and share best practices between the two sides under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter on Peacekeeping Operations.**
- The exercise will be conducted as a Command Post Exercise cum Field Training Exercise with focus on deployment and employment of an Engineer Company and a Medical Team.

## HAL AND SAFRAN TO MAKE AIRCRAFT ENGINE PARTS -

- **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited signed an MoU to develop industrial cooperation in ring forging manufacturing for commercial engines with Safran Aircraft Engines**
- **HAL will produce Leading Edge Aviation Propulsion powering Airbus A320 Neo family and Boeing 737 Max engine forgings at its foundry in Bengaluru.**
- Safran is a long standing partner, especially in helicopter programmes, as evidenced by the joint development of the “Shakti” helicopter engine



## GAZA STRIP -

- The recent escalation of conflict between Israel and Hamas militants has thrust the Gaza Strip into the global spotlight.



- Amidst this turmoil, Israel's defense minister, declared a "complete siege" of the Gaza Strip, cutting off essential resources. This move has highlighted the long-standing and contentious issue of the Gaza blockade, which has been in place since 2007.
- The Gaza Strip is situated in the eastern Mediterranean basin, sharing borders with Egypt in the southwest and Israel to the north and east. To the west, it is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea.
- It is one of the most densely populated areas globally, with over 2 million residents living in a tiny area.
- The term "open air prison" has been widely used by academics, activists, and journalists to characterize the conditions in Gaza.
- The Six-Day War of 1967 resulted in Israel capturing Gaza from Egypt and initiating its military occupation of the region. Israel withdrew its settlements from Gaza in 2005, but this period also saw intermittent blockades on the movement of people and goods.
- In 2007, after Hamas assumed power in Gaza, Israel and Egypt enforced a permanent blockade, justifying it as necessary for security. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the blockade has severely impacted Gaza's economy, resulting in high unemployment, food insecurity, and aid dependency.
- Gaza is encircled by walls on three sides, and its western border is controlled by Israel, restricting access by sea.
- Three functional border crossings exist - Karem Abu Salem Crossing and Erez Crossing controlled by Israel, and Rafah Crossing controlled by Egypt.
- These crossings have been sealed in response to recent hostilities.

**INDIA'S JET ENGINE DEAL WITH THE U.S.**

- A landmark agreement to facilitate the transfer of at least 11 critical jet engine technologies is likely to be announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing official State Visit to the United States.
- India and the U.S. have almost finalised details and the White House is set to sign off on the deal.
- GE & HAL – The deal will allow American manufacturing company General Electric (GE) Aerospace to share critical technology with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- Tejas Mk-II – The deal will facilitate for the joint production of GE-F414 jet engines that will power indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk-II.
- India has designed and built a fighter jet but hasn't achieved much success in producing engines to power these aircraft.
- HF-24 Marut – The quest began in the 1960s with the country's first indigenous fighter, HF-24 Marut. The aircraft was envisioned as a supersonic jet, but failed to achieve its potential for want of a suitable engine and was eventually phased out.
- Kaveri programme – A few decades later, India sanctioned the Kaveri programme to develop an indigenous military gas turbine engine for the ambitious LCA project. With Kaveri still a work in progress, India shortlisted American GE-F404 engines for LCA Tejas Mark-1 as an interim measure.
- The deal, however, did not materialise due to U.S. domestic legislation and regulatory hindrances and remained on the back burner for over a decade.





# SPORTS

## HARYANA DOMINATES MEDAL TALLY WITH 40 GOLD, 39 SILVER AND 26 BRONZE IN INAUGURAL KHELO INDIA PARA GAMES -

- The Khelo India Para Games 2023 concluded on December 17 in New Delhi, showcasing the remarkable talents of para athletes from across the country.
- The inaugural edition of the event saw Haryana clinched the top spot, securing a total of 105 medals, including 40 gold, 39 silver and 26 bronze. The competition, which began on December 10, featured around 1,450 para athletes representing 32 states and Union Territories.

KHELO INDIA PARA GAMES 2023				
	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
HARYANA	40	39	26	105
UTTAR PRADESH	25	23	14	62
TAMIL NADU	20	8	14	42
GUJARAT	15	22	20	57
MAHARASHTRA	12	7	16	35
RAJASTHAN	10	20	13	43
PUNJAB	8	2	10	20
DELHI	7	10	19	36
KARNATAKA	7	10	13	30
ODISHA	6	1	4	11

- In a spectacular display of skill and determination, Haryana emerged as the overall winner of Khelo India Para Games 2023. The state’s athletes secured an impressive medal haul, with 40 gold, 39 silver and 26 bronze medals. Among the standout performances was Pranav Soorma’s exceptional achievement in the club throw event, where he not only won gold but also set a new Asian record with an impressive throw of 33.54 meters.
- Khelo India Para Games 2023 is the latest edition to the Government of India’s Khelo India Initiative,

which aims to nurture the sporting culture in the country at the grassroots level.

- The initiative includes various sporting events such as Khelo India Youth Games, Khelo India University Games and Khelo India Winter Games. The success of the program, running since 2017, reflects its widespread acceptance and support from every corner of the country.

## CRICKET WORLD CUP WINNERS LIST (1975-2023), AUSTRALIA WINS 2023 WORLD CUP -

- As we know the ODI Cricket World Cup 2023 is concluded on 19th November 2023 and Australia won the World Cup final.



- The 2023 ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup is the 13th edition of the Cricket World Cup, a quadrennial One Day International (ODI) cricket tournament contested by men’s national teams and organized by the International Cricket Council (ICC).
- The inception of this tournament dates back to 1975 when it was first introduced in England. The format involved one-day matches with each team playing for 60 overs.
- In 1987, a significant milestone was reached when the tournament was jointly hosted by India and Pakistan, marking the first time it was held outside of England.

**AUSTRALIA LIFTS ICC MEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP BEATING INDIA –**

- **Australia lifted the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023** defeating India by six wickets in the final at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad.
- **Virat Kohli** was awarded with the "**player of the tournament**" title for his exemplary performance.
- He scored a total of **765 runs in 11 innings**, the highest-ever runs scored by a batter in a single edition of the World Cup.
- **Mohammed Shami** finished as the leading wicket taker of the **World Cup 2023**.

**THE 37TH NATIONAL GAMES -  
About 37th National Games-**

- Time period: **25 October- 9th November,2023**.
- The National Games are being held in **Goa for the first time**.
- More than **10 thousand athletes from across the country will compete in over 43 sports disciplines across 28 venues**. The National Games of India stand as a prestigious multi-sport event.
- **Often referred to as the "Indian Olympics,"** these games serve as a dynamic platform for athletes from every corner of India to come together, and compete across various sports disciplines. (Indian Olympic Association)
- Beyond the medals and accolades, the National Games nurture young talent, promote unity, and instil a sense of pride across the country.
- The **roots of the National Games trace back to the early 1920s when India sent its first national Olympic team**

to the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, marking a pivotal moment in the nation's sporting history. The inaugural Indian Olympic Games took place in February 1924 in Delhi, serving as a crucial event to select athletes for the 1924 Paris Olympics.

- **A provisional Indian Olympic Committee (IOA) was established to oversee this event.** The Olympic Games were eventually rechristened as the National Games during the 9th edition, held in Bombay in 1940.
- **The IOA recognized the National Games as a concept to foster sports development and the Olympic movement in India.** During the British colonial era, the Indian Olympic Games were held 12 times until 1946.
- The National Games are a collaborative effort between the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the respective state governments.

**INDIAN PARA-ATHLETES CREATE HISTORY WITH INDIA'S HIGHEST-EVER MEDAL TALLY –**

- **Medal Tally in the Para Asian Games 2023** with 111 medals, including **29 Gold medals 31 Silver medals and 51 bronze medals**.
- India sent its largest contingent this year, consisting of 303 athletes (**191 male & 112 female**).
- Out of the 111 medals, female athletes have contributed **40 medals, i.e. 36% of the medal tally**.
- Be it the Khelo India Scheme at the grassroots level or the Target Olympic Podium Scheme for elite athletes.

## ARTICLE

### 1. FINANCE COMMISSION'S ROLE IN TACKLING STATE FISCAL CHALLENGES

The **16th Finance Commission (FC)** is about to be constituted for recommending the devolution of Central taxes and grants to States. The RBI's just published report: "**State Finances: A study of Budgets**" has red-flagged the issues the FC will certainly be asked to look into, like States reverting to the **Old Pension Scheme (OPS)**, and unsustainable subsidies flowing from the guarantees or freebies promised at the time of elections, regardless of the financial conditions of States.

The Constitution of Finance Commission

- The Finance Commission is a constitutional body that is established by the President of India under **Article 280** of the Indian Constitution.
- It consists of a **Chairman and four other members** who are appointed by the President.
- The Commission is responsible for making recommendations to the President on various matters related to the distribution of tax revenues between the Centre and the states, as well as the grants-in-aid of the states.
- The Commission is constituted every five years or earlier, as deemed necessary by the President.

#### **Why is there a Need to Curb Populism in India?**

##### **Fiscal Imbalance:**

- **Rising Debt:** Between 2014 and 2022, the average **debt-to-GDP ratio of Indian states increased from 22.2% to 34.5%**, with populist states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu witnessing steeper rises.
- **Higher Deficit:** The combined **fiscal deficit of states reached 4.1% of GDP in 2021-22**, fueled by populist spending on free electricity, loan waivers, and social welfare schemes.
- **Revenue Shortfalls:** Tax revenues haven't kept pace with populist spending, with many states relying heavily on central government bailouts or borrowing to bridge the gap.

##### **Economic Distortions:**

- **Investment Decline:** Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow into India declined by 10% in 2022, attributed by some to uncertainty created by populist policies like price controls and protectionist measures.
- **Job Growth Stagnation:** Despite increased government spending, India's unemployment rate remained above 7% in 2023, indicating that populist policies haven't yielded significant job creation.
- **Market Inefficiency:** Price controls in sectors like agriculture discourage production and lead to shortages, disrupting supply chains and impacting consumer welfare.

##### **Erosion of Governance:**

- **Increase in Corruption:** India's ranking on **Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index** dropped from **80 in 2014 to 85 in 2022**, coinciding with the rise of populist rhetoric undermining institutional checks and balances.
- **Declining Transparency:** The Public Affairs Index, which measures transparency in government decision-making, showed a downward trend in several states with strong populist leaders.

#### **What are Some of the Populist Policies taken by States which have aggravated the Debate?**

##### **Reversion to Old Pension Scheme (OPS):**

- Some states in India have reverted to the OPS, abandoning the **New Pension Scheme (NPS)** introduced in 2004.
- The OPS incurs indefinite liabilities towards employees' pensions, unlike the NPS, where the liability is limited to the employees' serving life.
- An internal RBI study suggests that **OPS results in 4.5 times more liability compared to NPS**, with an additional burden of 0.9% of GDP by 2060.
- This move is seen as retrogressive, restricting growth and compromising the interests of future generations.

**Rising States 'Fiscal Deficit:**

- Many states have deficits due to subsidies for populist measures like free electricity.
- States' average spending on subsidies is 0.87% of their **Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)**, with some states spending much more (e.g., Punjab 2.35%, Rajasthan 1.92%).

**How can the Finance Commission help Curb Populism?**

- **Performance Based Incentives :** The **15th FC's** Proposal for measurable performance-based incentives is a step in the right direction. By linking financial transfers to States with specific outcomes, such as improved health, education, and agricultural indicators, the FC encourages responsible governance and discourages populist measures that may not contribute to long-term development.
- **Under Article 280(3) of the Constitution**, apart from recommending the devolution of taxes and grants-in-aid to the States, the FC may be asked by the Centre to look into any other issue "in the interest of sound finance".
- **Objective Criteria for Populist Measures:** While the categorisation of schemes as populist and non-populist may be challenging, the FC can **work on developing objective criteria that take into account the diverse developmental needs of different States.**
- This would require collaboration between the Centre and States to arrive at a consensus on what constitutes populist expenditure.
- **Fiscal Efficiency Parameters:** The FC can give **more weightage to fiscal efficiency** in its criteria for transfers. By emphasizing fiscal consolidation and measuring the tax effort of States, the FC can encourage responsible financial management. This can act as a deterrent to States resorting to populism without considering their fiscal capacity.
- The 15th FC gave only 2.5% weightage to the fiscal efficiency as measured by tax effort (Own Tax to GSDP ratio). This could be reviewed by 16th FC.

- **Public Awareness:** The Finance Commission can play a role in creating public awareness about the consequences of populist measures. By highlighting the strains on finances that freebies create and the long-term impact on economic growth, the FC can **contribute to informed public discourse, putting pressure on political parties to adopt responsible fiscal policies.**
- **Stress on Future Implications:** The FC can draw attention to the long-term consequences of populist measures, such as rising state debts and the burden passed on to future generations.
- This could involve recommending measures that prevent States from borrowing beyond their capacity and ensuring that financial decisions align with sustainable development goals.
- **Consensus Building:** While consensus between the Centre and States on controlling populist expenditure may be challenging, the **FC can act as a mediator and facilitator in fostering dialogue.**
- By promoting cooperative federalism and encouraging open discussions on fiscal matters, the FC can contribute to a more collaborative approach to financial governance.
- **Regular Review and Recommendations:** The FC can continually review the financial health of States and make periodic recommendations based on the evolving economic scenario. This allows for flexibility in addressing emerging challenges, including the impact of external factors such as the **Covid-19** pandemic.

**Conclusion**

A state's populism should be funded by its own taxpayers, not others. The RBI suggests that fiscal transfers should be tied to reforms and fiscal responsibility. If a state chooses populism and borrows without funding, it should bear the consequences.

## 2. INDIA-RUSSIA TIES: THE ART OF DIPLOMACY

The recent Moscow visit by India's Foreign Minister is of considerable significance in the framework of India-Russia relations, extending beyond the established special and privileged partnership. In the evolving global geopolitical landscape a high level of political engagement on international issues and bilateral matters is expected.

### Why the Relationship Between India and Russia is Strategically Significant?

#### Time-Tested Partners :

- **Collaboration since Cold War:** During the Cold War, the Soviet Union, as a superpower, held a key position in the partnership, while India, part of the "developing" nations and a leader in the **Non-Aligned Movement**, collaborated closely.
- **The Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971:** In the wake of the Indo-Pak war (1971) Russia supported India while the US and China supported Pakistan
- **Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership:** In October 2000, India-Russia ties acquired a qualitatively new character with enhanced levels of cooperation in almost all areas of the bilateral relationship
- **Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership:** During the visit of the Russian President to India in December 2010, the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the level of a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership".

#### Energy Security :

- Russia possesses one of the globe's largest reserves of natural gas. And, India has initiated a transition towards increased reliance on natural gas.
- India is actively engaged in importing hydrocarbons from the Russian Far East.
- Russia is an important partner for India in the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- The **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)** is being built in Tamil Nadu with the technical assistance of Russia.

#### Economic Convergence:

- Russia is India's seventh-biggest trading partner.
- The **bilateral trade has reached USD 45 billion** already surpassing the target of bilateral trade of USD 30 billion by 2025
- The two countries intend to increase **bilateral investment to USD 50 billion by 2025.**

#### Balancing Geopolitics :

- **Counterbalancing Chinese Aggression:** The Chinese aggression in the border areas of eastern Ladakh, brought **India-China relations** to an inflection point but also demonstrated that Russia can contribute to defusing tensions with China.
- **Champions of multipolarism:** Both Russia and India support the concept of a multi-polar world. It suits a rising Russia which aspires to recover the 'great power status' and a rising India which aspires to a **permanent seat at the UNSC** and enhanced status in the global arena.
- Moscow has long supported India's desire to expand the circle of permanent members of the Security Council and to enter into the **Nuclear Suppliers Group** - which Beijing is blocking.

#### Enduring Defence Ties :

- It is guided by the **Agreement on the Programme for Military Technical Cooperation** signed between the two countries. Russia currently commands around 47 percent of total arms imports by India.
- However, historically it accounted for 65% of arms imported by India.
- The overwhelming majority of India's armored force consists of **Russian tanks—the T-72 and T-90S**—and so does its fleet of ground-attack aircraft—variants of **MiG-21, Su-30, and MiG-29.**
- The **BrahMos missile** of India has been developed jointly with Russia.
- In October 2018, India signed a 5.43 billion USD deal with Russia for the **S-400 Triumf missile.**
- Over half of India's conventional submarines are of Soviet design.

## What are the Key Issues in India-Russia Relationship?

### Strategic Crossroads for Russia:

#### Russia's Closer Ties with China :

- For **Russia**, with its long border with **China** and adversarial relations with the West, avoiding a two-front confrontation is a key imperative.
- As **Russia** and **China** enhance their military cooperation, engage in **joint economic initiatives**, and align on various **diplomatic fronts**, it introduces a geopolitical dynamic that may impact India's traditional strategic considerations.

#### Increasing Proximity with Pakistan :

- In recent years, Russia has tried to improve its relationship with Pakistan. It might be a response to the **US-India relationship**.

### Diplomatic Dilemma for India :

#### Security Engagement with the United States:

- India has now signed all **four foundational agreements** with the USA. India has bought USD 20 billion worth of arms over the last two decades.
- India's great power calculations create the dilemma to choose between "**comprehensive global strategic partnership**" with the US on one hand, and its "**special and privileged partnership**" with Russia on the other .

### Ukraine Crisis :

- The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has resulted in a global imposition of sanctions as Russia's actions are widely perceived as a violation of the territorial integrity of a sovereign nation and a breach of international law.
- However, **India faced significant criticism** in the West for **refraining from condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine** and for its continued expansion of energy and economic cooperation with Moscow.

### Declining Economic Engagement :

- **Declining Defense Imports:** There has been a **gradual decline** in the orders of India from Russia because of its desire to diversify its defense imports and therefore a heightened competition for Russia with other suppliers.

- **Poor Post-Sale Services:** Dissatisfaction in India with post-sales services and maintenance being offered by Russia.

### What Should the Way Forward?

#### Balancing the Defense Dynamics :

- **Enhance Defense Collaboration:** Continue the strategic defense partnership, with a focus on modernizing and diversifying the defense collaboration.
- **Joint Military Production:** The two countries have been discussing how they can cooperate in using India as a production base for exporting to third countries Russian-origin equipment and services.
- For instance, India and Russia have formed a **joint venture** for production of **Brahmos missiles**.

#### Facilitating Economic Engagement :

- **Diversification of Economic Ties:** Both countries should focus on diversifying and expanding their economic relations. This includes exploring new sectors for collaboration, increasing trade volumes, and encouraging investments.
- **Trade Facilitation:** Both countries should work towards reducing **trade barriers and simplifying trade processes**. Enhance economic collaboration by creating a conducive environment for businesses from both countries to operate smoothly.
- **Rupee-Ruble Mechanism:** Both sides need to resort to the **Rupee-Ruble mechanism** to safeguard bilateral trade from the impact of Western sanctions.

#### Balancing the Global Dynamics :

- **Multilateral Engagement:** Coordinate closely in multilateral forums such as **BRICS** and the **SCO**. Collaborate on global issues, advocate for shared values and principles, and work together to address common challenges on the international stage.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:** Strengthen institutional mechanisms for regular dialogue and collaboration. This includes **enhancing the effectiveness of existing agreements and creating new platforms for engagement** at various levels, from government officials to business leaders.

**Forging Technological Cooperation**

- **Innovation and Technology Cooperation:** Foster collaboration in emerging technologies, including **artificial intelligence**, space exploration, **cybersecurity**, and **renewable energy**. Joint research and development initiatives can lead to technological advancements beneficial to both countries.
- **Energy Security:** Explore opportunities for **cooperation in the energy sector**, including joint ventures in oil and gas exploration, renewable energy projects, and the development of energy infrastructure. Addressing energy security concerns can be mutually beneficial.

**Promoting Cultural Connectivity :**

- **Yoga and Cultural Diplomacy:** Leverage the popularity of Yoga in Russia to enhance cultural diplomacy. Promote cultural events, language

education, and exchanges to deepen the understanding of each other's cultures.

- **Public Diplomacy:** Engage in public diplomacy efforts to create awareness and understanding of the bilateral relationship among the citizens of both countries. Utilize media, social platforms, and cultural events to promote positive narratives

**Conclusion**

India-Russia relationship stands resilient amid global shifts, grounded in trust and common interests. Amidst these dynamics, fostering resilience, open communication, and a shared commitment to global peace will determine the success of India-Russia relations in the years ahead. The Indian Foreign Minister rightly held that “Geopolitics and strategic convergence will always keep India-Russia ties on a positive trajectory.”

## IMPORTANT MCQ FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS

- Q1. Which state is home to the Kakrapar Atomic Power Project that recently achieved criticality, signifying the onset of a controlled fission chain reaction ?  
a) Maharashtra                      b) Uttar Pradesh  
c) Gujarat                              d) Karnataka
- Q2. Recently, Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) was making news for undertaking minimum support price operations for cotton in India. Where are headquarters of Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) ?  
a) New Delhi                          b) Bhopal  
c) Mumbai                             d) Surat
- Q3. Swarved Mahamandir, which is World's Largest Meditation Centre, inaugurated recently is located which city ?  
a) New Delhi                          b) Varanasi  
c) Ujjain                                 d) Jaipur
- Q4. Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who was recently on state visit to India, is Sultan and Prime Minister of which country ?  
a) Qatar                                 b) Oman  
c) Yemen                                d) Iran
- Q5. Recently, G7 nations have planned to block the entry of which country's diamonds into their markets ?  
a) China  
b) Iran  
c) Democratic Republic of Congo  
d) Russia
- Q6. In context with India-Vietnam relations, what is VINBAX, that was recently in news ?  
a) Bilateral Military Exercise  
b) Cultural Exchange Programme  
c) Economic Cooperation Agreement  
d) Scientific Research Collaboration
- Q7. Vijay Diwas, celebrated on December 16<sup>th</sup> every year, commemorates the victory of the Indian armed forces over Pakistan during the 1971 war. Who signed the instrument of surrender from Pakistan side on this day ?  
a) General Tikka Khan  
b) General Ayub Khan  
c) General Yahya Khan  
d) General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi
- Q8. Tippani is an Indian folk dance from which state ?  
a) Arunachal Pradesh                b) Gujarat  
c) Haryana                              d) Maharashtra
- Q9. Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the President of which country?  
a) Bolivia                                b) Chile  
c) Slovakia                              d) Turkey
- Q10. BCCI has recently decided to retire the jersey of which former cricketer ?  
a) Saurabh Ganguly                  b) Rahul Dravid  
c) Yuvraj Singh                        d) MS Dhoni
- Q11. Which badminton men's doubles pair is in line to receive the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award ?  
a) Pranav Jerry Chopra and Akshay Dewalkar  
b) Manu Attri and B. Sumeeth Reddy  
c) Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty  
d) Kidambi Srikanth and Parupalli Kashyap
- Q12. Recently, the Anand Marriage Act has been implemented in Jammu & Kashmir. This act gives statutory recognition to \_\_ :  
a) Intercaste Marriage  
b) Interfaith Marriage  
c) Sikh Marriage and Wedding rituals  
d) Hindu Marriage and Rituals
- Q13. Which country has recently surpassed Afghanistan to become the world's largest producer of opium in 2023 according to UNODC ?  
a) Pakistan  
b) Myanmar  
c) Vietnam  
d) China
- Q14. Under which ministry is the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) located ?  
a) Ministry of Defence  
b) Ministry of Home Affairs  
c) Ministry of External Affairs  
d) Ministry of Railways



- Q15. Who heads the Defence Acquisition Council that recently approved capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 2.23 lakh crore for the Armed Forces ?  
a) Prime Minister Narendra Modi  
b) Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh  
c) Defence Minister Smriti Irani  
d) External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar
- Q16. Which country has officially withdrawn from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ?  
a) Kyrgyzstan                      b) Italy  
c) France                              d) Pakistan
- Q17. Which country recently unveiled the world's first 4th-generation nuclear reactor ?  
a) United States                      b) China  
c) Russia                              d) France
- Q18. Which cyclone has hit Myanmar and is one of the strongest storms to hit the region this century ?  
a) Cyclone Mocha                      b) Cyclone Myan  
c) Cyclone Mira                      d) Cyclone Moto
- Q19. The Helmand River originates in which country ?  
a) Afghanistan                      b) Egypt  
c) Israel                              d) Myanmar
- Q20. "Disguised unemployment" Denotes :  
a) a situation where workers are disguised  
b) a situation where too many workers are doing a limited amount of work.  
c) a situation where workers are doing a limited amount of work  
d) None of the above
- Q21. The "bank rate " is :  
a) Free to fluctuate according to the forces of demand and supply  
b) Set by the Reserve Bank of India  
c) set by the Reserve Bank of India as directed as directed by the Union Ministry of Finance  
d) Set by the Reserve Bank of India as directed as directed by the Indian Banks' Association
- Q22. The "National Geophysical Research Institute" (NGRI) is situated in \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
a) Telangana                      b) Maharashtra  
c) Gujarat                              d) Bihar
- Q23. Ulaanbaatar is the capital of which country ?  
a) Vietnam                              b) Cambodia  
c) Kazakhstan                      d) Mongolia
- Q24. Who inaugurated the 54th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa ?  
a) Anurag Singh Thakur                      b) L Murugan  
c) Pramod Sawant                      d) Michael Douglas
- Q25. Who has been appointed as the new director of the Special Protection Group (SPG) ?  
a) Ramesh Kumar                      b) Alok Sharma  
c) Devendra Singh                      d) Anjali Gupta
- Q26. Which technology has been introduced by Indian Railways to prevent accidents caused by elephants on railway tracks ?  
a) 'Hathi Kavach'  
b) 'Gajraj Suraksha'  
c) 'Gaj Suraksha'  
d) 'Gajraj Kavach'
- Q27. Where is the COP-28 summit being organized ?  
a) Riyadh                              b) Nairobi  
c) Sydney                              d) Dubai
- Q28. Where did Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurate the 10,000th Jan Aushadhi Kendra ?  
a) Ujjain                              b) Varanasi  
c) Deoghar                              d) Patna
- Q29. What is the name of the military exercise during which India's Akash missile demonstrated the ability to engage four aerial targets simultaneously at 25 km ?  
a) Brahmashakti  
b) Trishul Shakti  
c) Astrashakti  
d) Agni Shakti
- Q30. In which city was the Swarved Mahamandir, recognized as the world's largest meditation centre, inaugurated ?  
a) New Delhi                              b) Varanasi  
c) Rishikesh                              d) Ujjain
- Q31. Which country's Emir recently passed away, leading to a one-day state mourning in India ?  
a) Saudi Arabia                      b) Kuwait  
c) Qatar                              d) Oman



- Q50. When is Nagaland celebrating its 61st Statehood Day ?  
a) December 1, 2023      b) November 30, 2023  
c) December 2, 2023      d) November 29, 2023
- Q51. What is the main reason behind Foxconn's \$1.5 billion investment in India ?  
a) To support Apple's expansion in the Indian market  
b) To strengthen its presence in China  
c) To diversify its manufacturing beyond China  
d) To compete with technological rivals in India
- Q52. What does COP28 stand for in the context of climate change ?  
a) Climate Observations Program 28  
b) Conference of the Parties 28  
c) Conference on Paris 28  
d) Convention for Ozone Protection 28
- Q53. Rock-cut Sculptures and Reliefs of the Unakoti, which was added in the UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites, are in which state ?  
a) Gujarat                      b) Tripura  
c) Telangana                      d) Odisha
- Q54. Odesa Port City, which was seen in the news, is located in which country ?  
a) Russia                      b) Ukraine  
c) Australia                      d) UAE
- Q55. Open market operations (OMOs) are related to.....  
a) Fiscal policy                      b) Monetary policy  
c) Labour policy                      d) Agricultural policy
- Q56. The increase in economic integration among nations is termed as  
a) specialization                      b) market economy  
c) globalization                      d) equilibrium condition
- Q57. The Vivekananda Setu is built over which river ?  
a) Mahanadi                      b) Hoogly  
c) Krishna                      d) Sutlej
- Q58. Who is the Chief Minister of Jharkhand ?  
a) Hemant Soren  
b) Jairam Thakur  
c) Ashok Gehlot  
d) Pinarayi Vijayan
- Q59. Who has launched the initiative 'Developed India 2047: Voice of Youth' ?  
a) Narendra Modi                      b) Amit Shah  
c) Rajnath Singh                      d) Anurag Thakur
- Q60. Who has been elected as the new Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh ?  
a) Vishnudev Sai                      b) Raman Singh  
c) Shatrughan Sinha                      d) Balaknath
- Q61. What is India's rank in Climate Change Performance Index 2023 ?  
a) 4th                      b) 5th                      c) 6th                      d) 8th
- Q62. Who has been elected as the new Chief Minister of Rajasthan ?  
a) Vasundhara Raje                      b) Rajnath Singh  
c) Balak Nath                      d) Bhajan Lal Sharma
- Q63. Where is the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence summit being organized ?  
a) New Delhi                      b) Mumbai  
c) Chennai                      d) Kolkata
- Q64. Addis Ababa is the capital of which country ?  
a) Ethiopia                      b) Uganda  
c) Rwanda                      d) Nigeria
- Q65. The Arjuna Awards are presented for outstanding achievement in \_\_\_\_ ?  
a) Arts and Literature                      b) Science & Technology  
c) Sports                      d) Defence
- Q66. Where did the team hoist the National Flag during the 'Mission Antarctica' expedition ?  
a) At the peak of Mount Everest  
b) Atop Mount Vinson Peak in Antarctica  
c) Atop Mt Rhenock in the Sikkim Himalayas  
d) Atop K2 in the Karakoram Range
- Q67. Which country ranked first in global remittance charts in 2023?  
a) Mexico                      b) China  
c) Philippines                      d) India
- Q68. Which has become the first Indian airline to carry 100 million passengers in a year?  
a) SpiceJet                      b) Vistara  
c) IndiGo                      d) Air India

- Q69. Who is known as the 'Queen of Millet' and was invited to the G20 Summit in commemoration of the 'International Year of Millets'?
- a) Kundra Bati Mandia      b) Jasra  
c) Raimati Ghiuria      d) Juana
- Q70. When is Good Governance Day 2023 celebrated?
- a) December 25      b) December 26  
c) January 1      d) November 30
- Q71. Who won the Egyptian Presidential Elections with 89% of the vote?
- a) Abdel Fattah El Sisi      b) Anwar Sadat  
c) Gamal Abdel Nasser      d) Hosni Mubarak
- Q72. Approximately, what percent of worldwide trade passes through the Suez Canal that has been recently disrupted by attacks in the Red Sea?
- a) 5%      b) 12%      c) 17%      d) 22%
- Q73. Which University has won the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Trophy 2023?
- a) Gautam Buddha University  
b) Guru Nanak Dev University  
c) Delhi University  
d) Jawahar Lal Nehru University
- Q74. As per the 'Global Energy Monitor's 9th Annual Survey', which country accounted for the highest coal capacity as of 2023?
- a) India      b) China  
c) USA      d) Bangladesh
- Q75. Which Indian city has secured first position in Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan-2023?
- a) Mysuru      b) Gandhi Nagar  
c) Indore      d) Chennai
- Q76. The main source of National Income in India is
- a) Service Sector      b) Agriculture  
c) Industrial Sector      d) Trade Sector
- Q77. Which kind of power accounts for the largest share of power generation in India
- a) Hydro – electricity      b) Thermal  
c) Nuclear      d) Solar
- Q78. Which of the national park located in Rajasthan?
- a) Sariska National park      b) Kanha National Park  
c) Pench National Park      d) Panna National Park
- Q79. Naypyidaw is the capital city of which of the following country?
- a) Myanmar      b) Bhutan  
c) South Korea      d) Namibia
- Q80. Who is the revered poet honoured with the renaming of Ayodhya Airport?
- a) Maharishi Valmiki      b) Tulsidas  
c) Kabir      d) Surdas
- Q81. Which project category does INS Imphal belong to among the guided missile destroyers?
- a) Project 14      b) Project 15  
c) Project 16      d) Project 17
- Q82. Which scheme's enrolments crossed 6 crore, including over 70 lakh in the current financial year?
- a) National Pension System (NPS)  
b) Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PMSYM)  
c) Atal Pension Yojana (APY)  
d) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan-dhan Yojana (PM-KMY)

## ANSWERS

1- c	2-c	3-b	4-b	5-d	6-a	7-d	8-b	9-d	10-d
11-c	12-c	13-b	14-b	15-b	16-b	17-b	18-a	19-a	20-b
21-b	22-a	23-d	24-a	25-b	26-b	27-d	28-c	29-c	30-b
31-b	32-c	33-b	34-a	35-c	36-d	37-b	38-d	39-c	40-a
41-d	42-d	43-d	44-c	45-c	46-b	47-a	48-b	49-d	50-a
51-c	52-b	53-b	54-b	55-b	56-c	57-b	58-a	59- a	60-a
61-d	62-d	63-a	64-a	65-c	66-c	67-d	68-c	69- c	70-a
71-a	72-b	73-b	74-b	75-c	76-a	77-b	78-a	79- a	80-a
81-b	82-c								

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