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ART AND CULTURE

KANHERI CAVES

In News:

G20 delegates visit Kanheri Caves in National Park

Analysis of Background:

- The topography of the Western Ghats along with the political patronage suited to the development of Buddhist Caves in many of the hills, ravines and cliffs of the Sahayadris.
- The earliest example of excellent rock-cut architecture in the Western Ghats are Kanheri (Krishnagiri originally) Caves (109 in number) which are located north of Borivali in Mumbai within the Sanjay Gandhi National Park.
- The earliest caves were excavated in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. These caves were continuously occupied by the Buddhist monks as well as inland traders as stopovers till the 7th century AD.
- With the increase in the royal patronage and mercantile sponsorships, the interiors of these caves were made more and more decorated.
- At Kanheri, we find both the Chaityas and Viharas. While creating them, the elements of wooden construction have been retained.

PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPT MUSEUM

In News:

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate a palm-leaf manuscript museum with modern audio-visual technology at the renovated Central Archives, Fort.

Analysis of Background:

- The Archives Department in association with Kerala Museum of History and Heritage has set up a palm-leaf manuscripts museum in the Fort area in Thiruvananthapuram.
- The museum is located in a 400-year-old building which now holds the regional office of the State Archives Department.
- It will feature a rare collection of over one crore palm-leaf manuscripts available with the Archives Department with the aim of communicating their importance to the public.
- Manuscripts featuring ancient alphabets, including Vattezhuthu, Kolezhuthu and Malayanma will also be on display.
- Representative ones will be selected from the vast collection of palm-leaf manuscripts, and be put up for display.

- Visitors will first be greeted with an introductory session that highlights the history and importance of palm-leaf manuscripts in the state.
- The museum will be divided into three sections, namely Travancore, Kochi and Malabar and these will again have subsections.
- A heaven for history enthusiasts, the museum is expected to give a strong boost to research into the manuscripts..

About Palm Leaf Manuscripts:

- Palm-leaf manuscripts are manuscripts made out of dried palm leaves.
- Palm leaves were used as writing materials in the Indian subcontinent and in Southeast Asia reportedly dating back to the 5th century BCE.
- Their use began in South Asia and spread to other regions, as texts on dried and smoke-treated palm leaves of Palmyra palm or the talipot palm.
- Their use continued till the 19th century, when printing presses replaced hand-written manuscripts.
- One of the oldest surviving palm leaf manuscripts of a complete treatise is a Sanskrit Shaivism text from the 9th-century, discovered in Nepal, now preserved at the Cambridge University Library.
- The Spitzer Manuscript is a collection of palm leaf fragments found in Kizil Caves, China.
- They are dated to about the 2nd-century CE and are the oldest known philosophical manuscript in Sanskrit related to buddhism.

Regional Variations:

- Southeast Asia : With the spread of Indian culture to Southeast Asian countries like as Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines, these nations also became home to large collections.
- Palm-leaf manuscripts called Lontar in dedicated stone libraries have been discovered by archaeologists at Hindu temples in Bali Indonesia and in 10th century Cambodian temples such as Angkor Wat and Banteay Srei.
- Odisha: Palm leaf manuscripts of Odisha include scriptures, pictures of Devadasi and various mudras of the Kama Sutra.
- Tamilnadu: Palm leaf manuscripts were used in the Tamil grammar book named Tolkappiyam which was written around 3rd century BCE.

SANGAI FESTIVAL

In News:

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi addressed the Manipur Sangai Festival via video message. Labelled as the grandest festival in the state, the Manipur Sangai Festival helps in promoting Manipur as a world-class tourism destination. The festival is named after the state animal, Sangai, the brow-antlered deer found only in Manipur.

Analysis of Background:

- Every year the State of Manipur celebrates the “Manipur Sangai Festival” from 21st to 30th November.
- It started in the year 2010 and has grown over the years into a big platform for Manipur to showcase its rich tradition and culture to the world.
- The festival is being celebrated across 13 venues in six districts of Manipur.
- The theme for the event is “Festival of Oneness”. It promotes a sense of belonging and creates pride in ownership of land among people.
- The festival will reflect the State’s proud cultural heritage and the love for art which is inherent amongst various tribes inhabiting the State of Manipur.
- The State’s classical dance form, ‘Ras Leela’ is quite famous all over the world for its distinctiveness from any other dance forms in India
- Various other folk dance performances like the Kabui Naga dance, Bamboo dance, Maibi dance, Lai Haraoba dance, Khamba Thoibi dance etc. will be showcased at the festival.
- Manipur’s famous martial arts- Thang Ta (a combination Spear & Sword skills), Yubi-Lakpi (a game played with greased coconut like rugby), Mukna Kangjei (a game that combines hockey and wrestling), and Sagol Kangjei- Modern Polo (believed to have evolved in Manipur) will all form part of the festival.

Sangai Deer:

- The sangai is an endemic and endangered subspecies of brow-antlered deer found only in Manipur, India.
- It is found in its natural habitat only at Keibul Lamjao National Park over the floating biomass locally called “phumdi” in the south eastern part of Loktak Lake.
- Its IUCN status is Endangered

HORNBILL FESTIVAL

In News:

The much awaited 23rd edition of the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland will start today, December 1, at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama.

Analysis of Background:

About Hornbill Festival:

- It is also called the 'Festival of Festivals'.
- Organized every year in the first week of December.
- It hosts a colorful mixture of dances, performances, crafts, parades, games, sports, food, fairs and religious ceremonies.
- It highlights the tradition of tribal people and boosts the state's tourism potential.
- It reinforces Nagaland's identity as a unique state in India's federal union.
- It fosters understanding of Nagaland's resourceful architecture and its ethnic cuisine.

Great Hornbill:

- IUCN Red List Status-Vulnerable
- Found in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- State bird of Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

In News

The Director-General of the National Archives of India (NAI) said that "the NAI does not have records of 1962, 1965, and 1971 wars or of the Green Revolution".

The statement was criticized by many historians, with many calling this a plot by successive governments to control the narrative, and saying that the country is losing its history.

Analysis of Background:

National Archives of India (NAI):

- It functions under the Union Ministry of Culture, and is the storehouse of all non-current government records, maintaining them for the use of administrators and scholars.
- In 1891, NAI was established as the Imperial Record Department in Calcutta (The capital of British India).
- In 1911, it was transferred from Calcutta (Kolkata) to New Delhi.

- It keeps and preserves records of the government and its organizations only.
- It does not receive classified documents.
- Classified information is material that a government body deems to be sensitive information that must be protected.
- Its access is restricted by law or regulation to particular groups of people with the necessary security clearance and needs to know, and mishandling of the material can incur criminal penalties.
- As per the Public Records Act, of 1993, various central ministries and departments are supposed to transfer records (more than 25 years old) to the NAI, unless they pertain to classified information.
 - It is up to the respective ministries and departments to authenticate what is classified information.
 - Various ministries and administrations have their definitions of what is classified and what is non-current.
 - Opacity and lack of accessibility are the common problems faced by researchers at the archives.
- There are nearly 151 ministries and departments, but the NAI has only records of 64 agencies, including 36 ministries and departments.
- Several Union ministries and departments have not shared their records with NAI.
- It also holds regular exhibitions the display of declassified files.
- In 2021, the Union Defense Minister ordered his ministry to declassify and transfer war records older than 25 years to the NAI.

PRASAD SCHEME

In News:

The President of India laid the foundation stone for the project 'Development of Pilgrimage Facilities at Bhadrachalam Group of Temples' at Sri Seetha Ramachandra Swamivari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam in the Bhadrachalam District of the state of Telangana.

Analysis of Background:

Bhadrachalam Temple:

- Situated on left bank of Godavari river in the state of Telangana
- Dedicated to Lord Rama
- Has dravidian style architecture with an influence of Mughal Art
- It was constructed in 17th Century by Bhakta Ramdasu (popularly known as Bhakt Raamadaas). He was born as Gopanna.

- The temple at Bhadrachalam, Sri Seetha Ramchandra Swamyvari Devasthanam, is said to be more than 350 years old and is closely associated with epic of Ramayana.
- It is believed that Lord Rama with his wife Goddess Sita and brother Lakshmana spent some part of their 14 years of exile at a village called Parnasala, a part of Dandakaranya forest near Bhadrachalam Temple.

PRASAD Scheme:

- The Government of India launched the PRASAD scheme in the year 2014-2015 under the Ministry of Tourism. The full form of the PRASAD scheme is 'Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual Augmentation Drive'.
- This scheme focuses on developing and identifying pilgrimage sites across India for enriching the religious tourism experience. It aims to integrate pilgrimage destinations in a prioritised, planned and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience.
- The growth of domestic tourism hugely depends on pilgrimage tourism.
- For tapping the potential of pilgrimage tourism, there is a need for holistic development of the selected pilgrimage destinations by the government along with the cooperation of other stakeholders.
- The PRASAD scheme aims at paving the way for the development and promotion of religious tourism in India.

RAMAPPA TEMPLE

In News:

The President Smt. Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the project 'Development of Pilgrimage and Heritage Infrastructure of UNESCO World Heritage Site at Rudreshwara Temple (Ramappa)'.

Analysis of Background:

- Rudreswara Temple, (also known as the Ramappa Temple) at Palampet, near Warangal in the state of Telangana has been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list.
- This was India's 39th World Heritage Site.

About: Ramappa Temple:

- The temple was built by a Kakatiya General Recharla Rudra Reddy, during the period of the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati Deva in 13th
- The temple is a Sivalayam, where Lord Ramalingeswara is worshipped.

- Marco Polo, during his visit to the Kakatiya Empire, allegedly called the temple "the brightest star in the galaxy of temples".
- The temple is named after the sculptor Ramappa, who built it, and is perhaps the only temple in South India to be named after a craftsman who built it.
- The main structure is in a reddish sandstone, but the columns round the outside have large brackets of black basalt.
- The temple is carved with mythical animals or female dancers or musicians, and are "the masterpieces of Kakatiya art, notable for their delicate carving, sensuous postures and elongated bodies and heads"
- The roof of the temple is built with bricks, which are so light that they are able to float on water.

HISTORY

SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH

In News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in a programme commemorating Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary on December 13, 2022. During the Programme PM released a commemorative coin and postal stamp in honour of Sri Aurobindo.

Analysis of Background:

About Sri Aurobindo

- Sri Aurobindo (1872 –1950) was an Indian philosopher, yoga guru, poet, and Indian nationalist.
- He was also a journalist, editing newspapers such as Bande Mataram.
- He joined the Indian movement for independence from British colonial rule, until 1910 and then became a spiritual reformer, introducing his visions on human progress and spiritual evolution.

Contribution:

- He was involved in Anushilan Samiti.
- He was arrested in the aftermath of a number of bombings linked to his organization in a public trial where he faced charges of treason for Alipore Conspiracy.
- However Sri Aurobindo could only be convicted and imprisoned for writing articles against British colonial rule in India.

- During his stay in the jail, he had mystical and spiritual experiences, after which he moved to Pondicherry, leaving politics for spiritual work.
- At Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo developed a spiritual practice he called Integral Yoga.
- In 1926, with the help of his spiritual collaborator, Mirra Alfassa (referred to as "The Mother"), Sri Aurobindo Ashram was founded.
- Works: His main literary works are The Life Divine, which deals with the philosophical aspect of Integral Yoga; Synthesis of Yoga, which deals with the principles and methods of Integral Yoga; and Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol, an epic poem.

KUMBALGARH FORT

In News:

The Sherpas of the G20 countries and invitees from countries and international organisations visited the famous Kumbhalgarh Fort in Udaipur, which is a UNESCO heritage site.

Analysis of Background:

- Kumbhalgarh is situated amidst Aravali hills in the Kelwada tehsil of Rajsamand district about 80 kilometres northwest of Udaipur.
- The fort was built in the 15th century AD by Rana Kumbha.
- It is the second-longest wall of the world after the Great Wall of China.
- The fort has also been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of the group of Hill Forts of Rajasthan.
- The fort contains seven fortified gateways and several Jain temples, as well as the Lakhola Tank, the most famous tank within the fort, which was built by Rana Lakha.
- It is the birthplace of Mewar's legendary king Maharana Pratap.

GEOGRAPHY

CYCLONE MANDOUS

In News:

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued an orange alert for 13 districts in Tamil Nadu for Thursday, and 12 districts. This is in light of a depression over the Bay of Bengal that is likely to continue to move west-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm.

Analysis of Background:

Cyclone Mandous:

- Cyclone Mandous is expected to reach south-west Bay of Bengal, off north Tamil Nadu-Puducherry and adjoining south Andhra Pradesh coasts by December 8, as per a statement issued by National Crisis Management Committee (NCCM).
- It will continue to move west-northwestwards towards north Tamil Nadu-Puducherry and adjoining south Andhra Pradesh coasts during the subsequent 48 hours.
- The cyclonic storm will be named Cyclone Mandous, the name given by the United Arab Emirates, which means “treasure box” in Arabic.

MOUNT SEMERU

In News:

Indonesia’s Mount Semeru erupted on December 4 spewing hot ash clouds a mile into the sky.

Analysis of Background:

- The Semeru is an active strato-volcano located in East Java, Indonesia.
- It is located in a subduction zone, where the Indo-Australian plate subducts under the Eurasia plate. It is the highest mountain on the island of Java.
- Semeru - the tallest mountain on the island of Java contains the active Jonggring-Seloko vent at the Mahameru summit.
- Semeru, also known as Mahameru, has erupted numerous times in the past 200 years.

MAUNA LOA

In News:

Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, erupted after 38 years, spewing ash and debris, and covering the night sky of Hawaii's Big Island in an incandescent red hue

Analysis of Background:

About Mauna Loa:

- Mauna Loa is one of five volcanoes that together make up the Big Island of Hawaii.
- It is the southernmost island in the Hawaiian archipelago in the Pacific Ocean.
- It is an active shield volcano with relatively gentle slopes.
- It's not the tallest (that title goes to Mauna Kea) but it's the largest and makes up about half of the island's land mass.
- It sits immediately north of Kilauea volcano, which is currently erupting from its summit crater.
- Kilauea is well-known for a 2018 eruption that destroyed 700 homes and sent rivers of lava spreading across farms and into the ocean. Mauna Loa last erupted 38 years ago. In written history, dating to 1843, it's erupted 33 times.

PERMAFROST

In News:

Thawing of the permanent frozen land (permafrost) in the Arctic can have consequences exacerbating global warming and be directly harmful to human health, a new study showed.

Analysis of Background:

About Permafrost:

- Permafrost is any ground that remains completely frozen—32°F (0°C) or colder—for at least two years straight.
- These permanently frozen grounds are most common in regions with high mountains and in Earth's higher latitudes—near the North and South Poles.
- Permafrost covers large regions of the Earth. Almost a quarter of the land area in the Northern Hemisphere has permafrost underneath.
- Although the ground is frozen, permafrost regions are not always covered in snow.
- Permafrost is made of a combination of soil, rocks and sand that are held together by ice. The soil and ice in permafrost stay frozen all year long.

- Near the surface, permafrost soils also contain large quantities of organic carbon—a material leftover from dead plants that couldn't decompose, or rot away, due to the cold. Lower permafrost layers contain soils made mostly of minerals.
- A layer of soil on top of permafrost does not stay frozen all year. This layer, called the active layer, thaws during the warm summer months and freezes again in the fall.
- In colder regions, the ground rarely thaws—even in the summer.
- There, the active layer is very thin—only 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters).
- In warmer permafrost regions, the active layer can be several meters thick.

Thawing of Permafrost

- When surface air temperatures rise, below-ground temperatures do, too, thawing permafrost along the way.
- While global warming is upping temperatures around the world, the Arctic is warming twice as fast as anywhere else—and faster than it has in the past 3 million years.
- Scientists estimate there is now 10 percent less frozen ground in the northern hemisphere than there was in the early 1900s.
- One recent study suggests that with every additional 1.8°F (1°C) of warming, an additional 1.5 million square miles of permafrost could eventually disappear.
- Even if we meet the climate targets laid out during the 2015 Paris climate talks, the world may still lose more than 2.5 million square miles of frozen turf.

Impacts of Permafrost Thawing

The loss of greenhouse gas stores

- When plants and animals die, the microbes that decompose their bodies release carbon dioxide, methane, and other global warming gases into the air.
- A deep freeze effectively hits the pause button on that process and preserves organisms and the gases they would otherwise emit underground.
- When frozen soil thaws, the microbial decomposition of those organic materials—and the release of greenhouse gases—starts a new.

Crumbling infrastructure

- About 35 million people live in a permafrost zone, in towns and cities built on top of what was once considered permanently frozen ground.
- But as that solid ground softens, the infrastructure these communities rely on grows increasingly unstable.

- In the northwest of Canada, now we have a short section of the road where it has been necessary to chill the ground to make the foundation of the road colder than it is, in order to preserve the permafrost.

Altered landscapes

- Thawing permafrost alters natural ecosystems in many ways.
- It can create thermokarsts, often characterized by “drunken forests”.
- It can make soil—once frozen solid—more vulnerable to landslides and erosion, particularly along coasts.
- It can alter the flow of rivers and streams, degrade water quality and impact aquatic wildlife.
- Wetlands also deteriorate along with permafrost, as the water sinks further underground without a frozen buffer to keep it in place.
- This can create drier terrain more susceptible to wildfires, which expose even more permafrost to warming.
- The loss of permafrost will contribute to sea level rise.

Risk of diseases

- Just as permafrost locks in carbon and other greenhouse gases, it can also trap—and preserve—ancient microbes. Some bacteria and viruses lie dormant for thousands of years in permafrost’s cold, dark confines before waking up when the ground warms.
- A 2016 anthrax outbreak in Siberia, linked to a decades-old reindeer carcass infected with the bacteria and exposed by thawed permafrost, demonstrated the potential threat.

Steps to stop permafrost from Thawing:

- Reducing carbon footprint
- Investing in energy-efficient products
- To follow a 1.5°C-consistent pathway, the world will need to decrease fossil fuel production by roughly 6 per cent per year between 2020 and 2030.
- Global CO₂ emissions need to be reduced by 45% over the next decade, and that they fall to zero after 2050.
- By supporting climate-friendly businesses, legislation, and policies, we can help preserve the world’s permafrost and avert a vicious cycle of an ever-warming planet.

INDO GANGETIC PLAIN

In News:

The Ganga-Brahmaputra and Indus basins that form the Indo Gangetic Plain, recorded more water flowing in the river channels due to glacial melt even as their total water storage declined in 2021, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Analysis of Background:

- Large areas of the globe recorded drier-than-normal conditions in 2021, which was a year in which precipitation patterns were influenced by climate change and a La Niña event.
- The area with below-average streamflow was approximately two times larger than the above-average area, in comparison to the 30-year hydrological average, according to the statement.
- In India, headwaters of the Ganges River were characterized by above- to much above-normal discharge.
- For the year 2021, the Total Water Supply was much below and below normal on the west coast of the US, in Patagonia, North Africa and Madagascar, central and west, the central part of South America, Pakistan and northern India.
- Major Indian river basins (the Brahmaputra, Ganges and Indus), as well as other important river basins in Asia (Huang He, also known as Yellow, and Mekong), exhibit a gradual decline in TWS over the period 2002-2021.
- On a longer-term basis, the report pointed out several hotspots with a negative trend in terrestrial water storage. These include Brazil's Rio São Francisco basin, Patagonia, the Ganga and Indus headwaters, as well as south-western US.
- As for the reasons, the report said glacial melt was primarily to blame.

Indo-Gangetic Plain

- The Indo-Gangetic Plain, also known as the North Indian River Plain, is a 700-thousand km² fertile plain encompassing northern regions of the Indian subcontinent, including most of northern and eastern India, around half of Pakistan, virtually all of Bangladesh and southern plains of Nepal.
- The region is named after the Indus and the Ganges rivers and encompasses a number of large urban areas. The plain is bound on the north by the Himalayas, which feed its numerous rivers and are the source of the fertile alluvium deposited across the region by the two river systems. The southern edge of the plain is marked by the Deccan Plateau. On the west rises the Iranian Plateau. Many developed cities like Delhi, Dhaka, Kolkata, Lahore and Karachi are located in the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

COLD WAVE

In News:

Cold wave conditions will continue in North India -India Meteorological Department.

Analysis of Background:

What is a cold wave?

- The IMD defines a cold wave qualitatively as “a condition of air temperature which becomes fatal to the human body when exposed.”
- The IMD records a cold wave when
 1. the minimum temperature is equal to or less than 10 degree Celsius at a weather station in the plains,
 2. The min temperature is 4.5 degrees to 6.4 degrees below the normal temperature for that period.
- A cold wave may also be recorded at a station in the plains when the minimum temperature is less than or equal to 4 degree Celsius.
- For hilly regions, a cold wave is declared when the minimum temperature is less than or equal to 0 degree Celsius and the minimum temperature is 4.5 degrees to 6.4 degrees below the normal.
- The ‘normal’ temperature is calculated for every five days by taking the average temperature for these days over the past 30 years.

Cause of this cold wave

- Cold waves usually occur from mid-December to the end of February.
- According to the IMD, the factors that bring cold waves to India include the movement of cold air masses brought about by upper-level winds.
- They can be triggered by strong westerly winds approaching northwest India and transporting cold air towards the southeast direction.
- Build up of an extended area of relatively high pressure over northwest Asia can also bring cold waves.

Western Disturbance and cold wave

- A western disturbance as a cyclonic circulation lies over north Pakistan and adjoining Jammu and Kashmir.
- Western disturbances are storms that originate in the Mediterranean region and bring winter rainfall to northwest India.

- After this western disturbance moves, there is a brief gap. In this gap of five to six days, the IMD expects strong northwesterly and westerly cold winds over north India.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

BETTA – KURUBA TRIBES INCLUDED IN THE ST LIST OF KARNATAKA

In News:

The Lok Sabha passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Fourth Amendment) Bill, 2022 to include Betta-Kuruba in the Scheduled Tribes (STs) list of Karnataka as a synonym for the already categorised Kadu-Kuruba tribe in the State.

Analysis of Background:

Process for inclusion in the ST List

- Under article 341 (2) of the Constitution the power to make changes to the SC and ST list lies with the Parliament and not state legislatures.
- Any change in the lists of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes requires a constitutional amendment.
- In the case of STs, the community must be shown to be a tribe which is isolated, and lives in vulnerable conditions. This has to be proved anthropologically.
- The process to include tribes in the ST list begins with the recommendation from the respective State governments, which are then sent to the Tribal Affairs Ministry, which reviews and sends them to the Registrar General of India for approval.
- This is followed by the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes' approval before the list is sent to the Cabinet for a final decision.
- Once the cabinet finalizes it, then it introduces a bill in the parliament to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.

About Betta – Kurua Tribes:

- The Betta Kuruba tribe lives in the hilly regions of Karnataka and is one of the few indigenous communities of the Nilgiris.
- They belong to the Hindu caste native to the Indian states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- Traditionally, the Kuruba people drew sustenance from hunting, gathering and collecting wild honey.

- They practised sheep/goat and cattle pastoralism, in that they either herded exclusively sheep, or a mixed herd of sheep and goats, or cattle.
- They are generally believed to be the descendants of the Pallavas.
- Consanguineous marriages like cross-cousin marriages are preferred among the Kurumbas.

KERALA'S UNIVERSITY LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILLS

In News:

The State Assembly of Kerala passed two University Laws (Amendment) Bills to amend laws relating to the governance of State universities and to remove State Governor as the Chancellor of the state Universities.

Analysis of Background:

Key Provisions of the Bill:

- The bill proposed to amend the rules of 14 universities established by the Kerala State legislative Acts and to remove the Governor as the Chancellor of the Universities.
- It will empower the state government to appoint eminent academicians as Chancellors of various universities.
- It limits the office term of the appointed chancellor to five years.

Background:

- Recently the Governor's decision to ask the Vice-Chancellors of 11 universities to resign over the process of appointments led to a controversy.
- The decisions and statements made by the state Governors have started a debate related to the power and limitations of the State Governor.

Governor:

- Part VI of the Indian constitution deals with the state executive under Articles 153 to 167.
- The Governor, the chief minister, the council of ministers, and the state's attorney general comprise the state executive.
- Article 153 of the Indian constitution requires that there shall be a Governor for each State.
- Normally, each state has its governor, but the 7th the constitutional Amendment Act of 1956 made it easier to appoint the same individual to serve as governor of two or more states.
- Article 154 vests the executive power of the State in the Governor.

- Article 155 says that the Governor of a State shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.
- Article 156 provides that —The Governor shall hold office at the pleasure of the President.
- Article 157 lay down two qualifications for the office of the Governor:
 - He should be a citizen of India.
 - Must have completed the age of 35 years.
- The term of the Governor is prescribed as 5 years.
 - He can quit at any time by writing the President a letter of resignation.
- Article 158; Conditions of the Governor's office as the following:
 - Shall not be a member of either House of Parliament or State Legislature, and if such a member is appointed Governor, he shall be deemed to have vacated his seat in that House on the date on which he enters upon his office as Governor.
 - Shall not hold any other office of profit.
- The Governor has to take oath/affirmation before entering upon his office, in the presence of the Chief Justice of the High Court exercising jurisdiction to the State, or, in his absence, the senior-most Judge of that Court available to faithfully discharge the functions.

Executive Powers of Governors:

- The Governor is the chief executive of the state; all executive actions must be conducted in his or her name.
- The executive power of the state is vested in the Governor.
- He exercises it either directly or through officers subordinate to him.
- It has been held that ministers are officers subordinate to them.
- The executive power of the state extends to all matters concerning which the State

Legislature has the power to make laws:

- All executive is expressed to be taken in the name of the Governor.
- All orders, instruments, etc are authenticated in the manner specified in the rules made by the Governor.
- Appoints the Chief Minister and other ministers are appointed by him on the advice of the Chief Minister.
- Appoints the Council of Ministers, Advocate General, Chairman and the members of the State Public Service Commission.
- He has the power to nominate 1/12th of the members of the Legislative Council of State.

- The persons to be nominated are required to have special knowledge and practical experience in respect of Literature, Science and Arts etc.

Legislative Powers of Governors:

- The Governor is a part of the state legislature (Art. 168). He undertakes the following legislative tasks in this capacity:
 - The legislative Assembly is summoned, prorogued, and then dissolved.
 - Right to speak to and send messages to the legislature.
- No Bill can become law unless it receives the Governor's approval.
- He has the option of giving his consent, withholding his assent, or exercising his pocket veto over a state bill.
- He has the power of causing to be laid the legislature, the Annual Financial Statement (Budget) and reports of the State Finance Commission.
- Without his recommendation, no demand for a grant can be made by the legislature.
- May reserve Bills for the assent of the President made by the Legislature.

Financial Power of Governors

- The annual financial statement is put before the legislature (Art-202).
- Without the Governor's permission, a money bill cannot be introduced in the State Legislative Assembly.
- In the name of the Governor, the annual and supplemental budgets are introduced in the Assembly.
- No grant request can be made unless he recommends it.
- The State Contingency Fund is under the jurisdiction of the Governor, and it cannot be used without his approval.

Judicial Power

- When the president appoints judges to the State High Court, he consults him.
- According to Article 161, the Governor has the authority to suspend, remit, or commute the sentence of anyone guilty of violating the law that the state's executive power extends.
- Pardon: the accused is fully free of any consequences.
- Reprieves are temporary halts in the execution of the punishment.
- Respite is a reduction of the severity of a penalty for a specific reason.
- Remission: a reduction in the length of a sentence without changing its nature.
- Commutation is the process of substituting one form of punishment for a less severe one.

Concern

- Misuse of discretionary powers: States allege that the Governor acts on behalf of the Union government for political gains.
- Appointment by Centre: The post has become a retirement package for politicians.
- Arbitrary removal before the expiration of their tenure: Even after the Supreme Court Judgement in B.P. Singhal v/s Union of India, a fixed tenure for Governors to encourage neutrality and fairness in the discharge of their duties, is not being implemented on the ground.

HATTI COMMUNITY

In News:

To grant Scheduled Tribes (STs) status to the Hatti community in Himachal Pradesh, the parliament passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Third Amendment) Bill, 2022.

Analysis of Background:

The Process of adding to the ST List:

- The process of adding tribes to the ST list starts with a recommendation from the State governments.
 - It is sent to the Tribal Affairs Ministry, which reviews and sends them to the Registrar General of India, Under the Home Ministry for approval.
 - After approval, it is sent to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and then sent to the Cabinet for a final decision.
 - Once the cabinet finalizes it, then it introduces a bill in the parliament to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.
 - After the amendment bill is passed by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the President's office takes the final decision under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution.

Hatti community

- The Hattis are a close-knit community.
- Harris people take their name from their traditional occupation of selling home-grown crops, vegetables, meat, and wool at small-town markets known as 'haats'.
- Hatti men traditionally dress in distinctive white headgear on ceremonial occasions.
- In Himachal Pradesh, Hattis people live in 154 panchayat areas, and according to the 2011 census; members of the community are around 2.5 lakh.
 - The present-day population of the Hattis is around 3 lakh.

- They live near the Himachal-Uttarakhand border area in the basin of the Giri and Tons rivers, both these rivers are tributaries of the Yamuna.
- The Tons River marks the border between the two states.
 - Hattis live in the Trans-Giri area in Himachal Pradesh and Jaunsar Bawar in Uttarakhand.
 - Both have a similar tradition, and inter-marriages are common among them.
- A rigid caste system operates in the community;
 - The Bhat and Khash are so-called upper caste people.
 - The Badhois are so-called lower caste people.
 - Inter-caste marriages between these 2 castes are discouraged.
- The Hattis people are governed by a traditional council called 'khumbli' which is similar to the 'khaps' of Haryana, they decide community matters.

Tribal Area:

- The Indian Constitution states two types of areas:
 - Scheduled Areas in terms of the 5th Schedule of the Constitution.
 - Tribal Areas in terms of the 6th Schedule.
- "The "Tribal Areas" are also mentioned under Article 244(2) of the Constitution.
- For the declaration of Scheduled Areas, the criteria followed are:
 - The predominance of the tribal population.
 - Closeness and reasonable size of the area.
 - Presence of a viable administrative unit such as a district, block or taluk.
 - Economic backwardness of the area as compared to neighbouring areas.

About Tribal in India

- The Term "Tribal" literally means 'original inhabitants' – are communities who lived and often continue to live, in close association with forests. They are very old Communities, being among the oldest inhabitants of the Sub-Continent.
- They are not a homogeneous population: there are over 500 different tribal groups in India.
- Their societies are also the most distinctive because there is often very little hierarchy among them. This makes them radically different from communities organised around principles of jati-varna (caste) or those that were ruled by kings.
- They practise a range of tribal religions that are different from Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. These often involve the worship of ancestors, village and nature spirits, the last associated with and residing in various sites in the landscape – 'mountain spirits', 'river spirits', 'animal spirits', etc.

- They have their languages (most of them radically different from and possibly as old as Sanskrit), which have often deeply influenced the formation of 'mainstream' Indian languages, like Bengali.
 - Santhali has the largest number of speakers and has a significant body of publications including magazines on the internet.
- In terms of language, tribes are Categorized into 4 Categories:
 - Indo-Aryan
 - Dravidian
 - Austric
 - Tibeto-Burman
- In terms of size, the biggest tribes are Gonds, Bhils, Santhals, Oraons, Minas, Bodos and Mundas.
 - The total population of tribes amounts to about 8.6% of the population of India.
- Based on livelihood, tribes Can be Categorized into Fishermen, food gatherers and hunters, Shifting Cultivators, Peasants, Plantation and industrial workers.
- Tribal Society is a more egalitarian and kinship-based mode of Social organization.
- Tribals were not always the oppressed groups they are now; there were Several Gond kingdoms in Central India.
 - Many of the So-Called Rajput kingdoms of Central and western India emerged through a Process of Stratification among Adivasi Communities themselves.
 - Adivasis often exercised dominance over the Plains People through their Capacity to raid them, and through their Services as local militias.
 - They also occupied a Special trade niche, trading forest Produce, Salt and elephants.
 - Capitalist economics to exploit forest resources and minerals to recruit cheap labour has brought tribal Societies into Contact with mainstream Society a long time ago.
 - They were losing their land to non-tribal immigrant Settlers, and their access to forests because of the government policy of reservation of forests and the introduction of mining operations.

DISTRICT MINERAL FOUNDATION

In News:

Keonjhar district in Odisha is the highest recipient of funds in India under the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) scheme and has spent around ₹3,000 crores under the scheme over the past 7 years.

Analysis of Background:

- Keonjhar district is hugely rich in mineral reserves, especially iron ore.
- The DMF fund is raised with the mining companies' contribution of 30% of their royalty amount for mining leases.
- In Keonjhar, the total DMF fund collection is nearly ₹8,840 crore, the highest for any district in India.
- As per the Census of 2011, the district population has 44.5% Scheduled Tribes and 62% Scheduled Castes.

Background

- The lopsided equation of poverty and social benefits has failed some of India's richest mining districts for decades.
- Mining has benefited mining companies, individual miners and governments, not the communities living there.
- After years of deliberations and negotiations in 2015, the country's central mining law, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) of 1957 was amended and District Mineral Foundation (DMF) was instituted.

Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)

- In 2015, The Ministry of Mines launched the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) for the welfare of areas and people affected by mining-related operations, by using the funds generated by District Mineral Foundations (DMFs).
 - The concept of DMF was introduced through amendment in Mines & Minerals (Development & Regulation) MMDR Act, 1957.
 - DMF is a non-profit body, established in all districts affected by mining-related operations to work for the interest and benefit of people and areas affected by mining.
 - DMF has been established in 622 Districts spread across 23 States of India.

The overall objective of the PMKKKY scheme is;

- To implement various developmental and welfare projects/programs in mining-affected areas, and these projects/ programs will complement the existing ongoing schemes/projects of the State and Central Government.
- To minimize/mitigate the adverse impacts, during and after mining, on the environment, health and socio-economics of people in mining districts.
- To ensure long-term sustainable livelihoods for the affected people in mining areas.

Composition and functions of District Mineral Foundations (DMFs)

- The composition and Functions of the DMF are prescribed by the State Governments taking guidelines from Article 244 of the Indian Constitution, fifth and sixth schedules,
- Funds every mining leaseholder will pay a fraction of royalty, not exceeding one-third of the royalty, to the DMF as per rates prescribed by the Central Government.
- This fund will be used for the welfare of the people affected by the mining of selected areas.
- The Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) will be implemented by the DMFs of the respective districts using the funds accruing to the DMF.

Concerns

- The Centre also observed that states have been found transferring DMF funds to their treasury and consolidated funds, and even to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund and other schemes.
- Ever since its establishment in 2015, the DMF has been portrayed as the saviour of communities' tribals mostly that have benefitted little from mineral exploration and development in the regions they inhabit.
- Six years down the line, there are instances galore where DMF funds have gone to areas that have little or no bearing on the lives of the vulnerable population.

CITIZENSHIP

In News:

The Minister of state for external affairs has informed the Lok Sabha that more than 1.6 million Indians have renounced their citizenship since 2011, including 183,741 this year. This is the highest number in the past 5 years More than 78,000 Indians acquired U.S. citizenship, the highest among all other countries. The Ministry highlighted that the individuals renounced Indian citizenship due to personal reasons, which are unknown to the government.

Analysis of Background:

Indian Citizenship

- Citizenship status in India allows citizens of the Indian State to enjoy all civil and political rights.
- The Constitution of India allows for only single citizenship, that is, Indian citizenship. There is no provision for separate state citizenship.
 - The other federal states like USA and Switzerland adopted the system of double citizenship.
 - In the USA, each person is not only a citizen of the USA but also of the particular state to which he belongs.
- The system of single citizenship provided uniform rights (except in a few cases) for the people of India to promote the feeling of fraternity and unity among them and to build an integrated Indian nation.

Indian Constitution deals with citizenship from Articles 5 to 11 under Part II

- The original constitution only identifies the persons who became citizens of India at its commencement (i.e., on January 26, 1950).
 - It does not deal with the problem of acquisition or loss of citizenship after its commencement.
 - It empowers the Parliament to enact a law to provide for such matters and any other matter relating to citizenship.
 - Parliament has enacted the Citizenship Act (1955), which has been amended from time to time.
- According to the Constitution, the following four categories of persons became the citizens of India at its commencement i.e., on January 26, 1950.
 - Persons domiciled in India.
 - Persons migrated from Pakistan.
 - Persons migrated to Pakistan but later returned.
 - Persons of Indian origin residing outside India.
- The Citizenship Act (1955) provides for the acquisition and loss of citizenship after the commencement of the Constitution.
- Acquisition of Citizenship
- The Citizenship Act of 1955 prescribes five ways of acquiring citizenship, via, birth, descent, registration, naturalization and incorporation of territory.
- By Birth - A person born in India on or after January 26, 1950, but before July 1, 1987, is a citizen of India by birth irrespective of the nationality of his parents.

- A person born in India on or after July 1, 1987, is considered a citizen of India only if either of his parents is a citizen of India at the time of his birth.
- Further, those born in India on or after December 3, 2004, are considered citizens of India only if both of their parents are citizens of India.
- The children of foreign diplomats posted in India and enemy aliens cannot acquire Indian citizenship by birth.
- By Descent - A person born outside India on or after January 26, 1950, but before December 10, 1992, is a citizen of India by descent, if his father was a citizen of India at the time of his birth.
 - A person born outside India on or after December 10, 1992, is considered a citizen of India if either of his parents is a citizen of India at the time of his birth.
 - December 3, 2004, onwards, a person born outside India shall not be a citizen of India by descent, unless his birth is registered at an Indian consulate within one year of the date of birth.
- By Registration - Central Government may, on an application, register as a citizen of India any person if he belongs to any of the following categories, namely:-
 - A person of Indian origin who is ordinarily resident in India for seven years before making an application for registration.
 - A person who is married to a citizen of India and is ordinarily resident in India for seven years before making an application for registration.
 - Minor children of persons who are citizens of India.
- By Naturalization - Central Government may, on an application, grant a certificate of naturalization to any person if he possesses the required qualifications, including adequate knowledge of a language specified in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution.
 - The government of India may waive all or any of the above conditions for naturalization in the case of a person who has rendered distinguished service to science, philosophy, art, literature, world peace or human progress.
- By Incorporation of Territory - If any foreign territory becomes a part of India, the Government of India specifies the persons who among the people of the territory shall be the citizens of India.
 - Such persons become citizens of India from the notified date.
 - For example, when Pondicherry became a part of India, the Government of India issued the Citizenship (Pondicherry) Order (1962), under the Citizenship Act (1955).

- Every Registered and naturalized citizen must take an oath of loyalty to the Constitution of India.

Loss of Citizenship

- The Citizenship Act (1955) prescribes three ways of losing citizenship whether acquired under the Act or before it under the Constitution, via, renunciation, termination and deprivation:
- By Renunciation - Any citizen of India of full age and capacity can make a declaration renouncing his Indian citizenship.
 - When a person renounces his Indian citizenship, every minor child of that person also loses Indian citizenship.
 - However, when such a child attains the age of eighteen, he may resume Indian citizenship.
- By Termination - When an Indian citizen voluntarily acquires citizenship of another country, his Indian citizenship automatically terminates.
 - This provision, however, does not apply during a war in which India is engaged.
- By Deprivation - It is a compulsory termination of Indian citizenship by the Central government:
 - If the citizen has obtained citizenship by fraud.
 - The citizen has shown disloyalty to the Constitution of India.
 - The citizen has unlawfully traded or communicated with the enemy during a war.
 - The citizen has, within five years after registration or naturalization, been imprisoned in any country for two years.
 - The citizen has been ordinarily resident out of India for seven years continuously.

NAI ROSHNI SCHEME

In News:

The Union Minister of Minority Affairs informed the Lok Sabha that under the Nai Roshni Scheme around 40,000 women have been trained all over India during the last three years (2019-20 to 2021-22).

Analysis of Background:

Nai Roshni Scheme

- In 2012-13, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs started the “Nai Roshni” scheme to facilitate the Leadership qualities of Women belonging to Minority Communities.

- The main objective of the scheme is to empower and develop confidence among minority women by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, banks and other institutions at all levels.
 - It includes various training modules like Leadership of women, Educational Programmes, Health and Hygiene, Swachch Bharat, Financial Literacy, Life Skills, Legal Rights of Women, Digital Literacy and Advocacy for Social and behavioural change.

Significance:

- Empowerment of women is an essential tool in our fight for poverty reduction, economic growth and strengthening society.
- Women and children are always the worst sufferers in a poverty-stricken family and need support. Therefore, empowering women, especially mothers, is important as it is in homes that she nourishes nurtures and moulds the character of her Children.
- The scheme is run with the help of NGOs, Civil societies and Government Institutions across the country.
- The agencies approved by the Ministry select the women belonging to minority communities notified under Section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992; Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Zoroastrian (Parsis) and Jain.
- Beneficiaries having an annual income, below Rs.2.50 lakh from all sources, are given preference.
- The agencies also take the help of the head of Gram Panchayat / Municipal Body / Local Authority to identify/select women trainees.
- Recently, the Union Government merged the Nai Roshni scheme with the Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan (PM VIKAS) scheme.
 - PM VIKAS aim to improve the livelihoods of minorities, particularly artisan communities, through skill development, education and leadership training, to support their entrepreneurship interventions.

SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX

In News:

Social Progress Index (SPI) for States and Districts made by the Institute for Competitiveness and Social Progress Imperative was released recently.

Analysis of Background:

Social Progress Index (SPI)

- SPI is a comprehensive tool to measure a country's social progress at the national and sub-national levels.
- The index evaluates states and districts based on 12 components across 3 critical dimensions of social progress;
 - Basic Human Needs: It assesses the performance of states and districts in terms of Nutrition and Basic Medical Care, Water and Sanitation, Personal Safety and Shelter.
 - Foundations of Wellbeing: It assesses the progress made by the country across the components of Access to Basic Knowledge, Access to Information and Communication, Health and Wellness, and Environmental Quality.
 - Opportunity: It concentrates on Personal Rights, Personal Freedom and Choice, Inclusiveness, and Access to Advanced Education.
- The index uses an extensive framework comprising 89 indicators at the state level and 49 at the district level.
- Based on the SPI scores, states and districts have been ranked under 6 tiers of social progress;
 - Tier 1: Very High Social Progress
 - Tier 2: High Social Progress
 - Tier 3: Upper Middle Social Progress
 - Tier 4: Lower Middle Social Progress
 - Tier 5: Low Social Progress
 - Tier 6: Very Low Social Progress

Key Points of the Index:

- Puducherry, Lakshadweep, and Goa emerge as best-performing states.
- Aizawl (Mizoram), Solan (Himachal Pradesh), and Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) are the top 3 best-performing districts.
- Puducherry has the highest SPI score (65.99) in the country, attributable to its remarkable performance across components like Personal Freedom and Choice, Shelter, and Water and Sanitation.

- Jharkhand and Bihar scored the lowest, 43.95 and 44.47, respectively.
- For the dimension of Basic Human Needs; Goa, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, and Chandigarh are the top four states with the best performance in Water and Sanitation and Shelter as compared to the other states and union territories.
- Goa has the highest component score for Water and Sanitation.
- Kerala scored the highest across the Nutrition and Basic Medical Care components.
- Delhi has topped the list for Access to Information and Communication.
- For Health and Wellness, Rajasthan has the highest score.
- Tamil Nadu has achieved the highest component score for the Opportunity dimension.
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands have the highest component score for Personal Rights.
- Sikkim has topped the list for Inclusiveness.

UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

In News:

In Rajya Sabha, a Private member bill was introduced for the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) throughout the country. The Bill aims to create a National Inspection and Investigation Committee for the preparation of UCC and its implementation across India.

Analysis of Background:

Private Member Bill

- All Members of Parliament (MPs) other than ministers and Presiding officers are referred to as Private members.
- Bills introduced by Private members are called Private member bills.
- The introduction of a Private member bill requires one month's notice.
- 2nd half of every Friday, when parliament is in session, is reserved for debating private member bills.
- Private members' bill needs the backing of the government to get passed in Parliament.
- The introduction of the UCC bill was put for voting and was passed through a voice vote, with 63 votes in favour and 23 against.

About Uniform Civil Code

- Uniform Civil Code comes under Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, which lays down that the state shall aspire to secure a Uniform Civil Code for the citizens throughout the territory of India.

- It calls for the formulation of one law for India, which would apply to all religious communities in matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.

Origin of Uniform Civil Code

- The origin of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) dates back to the colonial period when the British government submitted its report in 1835 stressing the need for uniformity in the codification of Indian law relating to crimes, evidence, and contracts, specifically recommending that the personal laws of Hindus and Muslims be kept outside such codification.
- An increase in legislation dealing with personal issues at the far end of British rule forced the government to form the B N Rau Committee to codify Hindu law in 1941.
 - The Hindu Law Committee was formed to examine the question of the necessity of common Hindu laws.
 - The committee, following scriptures, recommended a codified Hindu law, which would give equal rights to women.
 - The committee recommended a civil code of marriage and succession for Hindus.

The Hindu Code Bill

- The draft of the Rau Committee report was submitted to a select committee chaired by B.R Ambedkar that came up for discussion in 1951 after the adoption of the Indian Constitution.
- While discussions continued, the Hindu Code Bill lapsed and was resubmitted in 1952.
- The bill was then adopted in 1956 as the Hindu Succession Act to amend and codify the law relating to intestate or unwilled succession, among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs.
- The Act reformed the Hindu personal law and gave women greater property rights, and ownership.
- It gave women property rights in their father's estate. The daughter is allotted the same share as is allotted to a son.

Arguments in Favour of the Uniform Civil Code

- A Secular republic needs a Common law for all Citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious Practices.
- Courts also Suggested in their judgments that the government should move toward a uniform civil code including the judgment in the Shah Bano Case.
- It will address the discrimination against vulnerable groups and harmonise diverse cultural groups across the country.

- Ensure gender justice, and promote women's empowerment.
- The code will simplify the complex laws around marriage ceremonies, inheritance, succession, and adoptions making them one for all. The same civil law will then apply to all citizens irrespective of their faith.
- Dr B R Ambedkar, while formulating the Constitution had said that a UCC is desirable but for the moment it should remain voluntary, and thus it was added as a part of the Directive Principles of the State Policy in part IV of the Constitution of India as Article 44.

Arguments against Uniform Civil Code

- Cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for a threat to the territorial integrity of the nation.
- Diversity, both religious and regional, Should not get subsumed under the louder voice of the majority.
- Article 25 of the Indian constitution preserves the freedom to practise and propagate any religion that gets into conflict with the concepts of UCC.
 - Fundamental Rights v/s DPSPs: Fundamental rights are justiciable whereas DPSPs are non-justiciable and optional for the state.
- The demand for a uniform civil code has been framed in the context of communal politics. A large section of society sees it as majoritarianism under the garb of social reform.

1st Law Commission on Personal Law

- Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage.
- Cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for a threat to the territorial integrity of the nation.
- The difference does not always imply discrimination.
- Diversity, both religious and regional should not get subsumed under the louder voice of the majority.
- Codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and Stereotypes in every religion would come to light.
- Certain measures in marriage and divorce should be uniformly accepted in the personal laws of all religions.
- 18 years be the minimum legal age for men and women to get married, and different ages of marriage between adults must be abolished as it contributes to the Stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands.

- Need to recognise the role of women in a household. Women should get an equal part of the property gained after marriage in the event of divorce.

AD-HOC JUDGES

In News

To deal with the rising number of pendency, the Supreme Court of India has proposed "out-of-the-box" thinking, including roping in senior lawyers, to act as ad hoc judges in High Courts. The court highlighted that senior advocates in High Courts may not be willing to give up their lucrative legal practices permanently but may be interested in joining the Bench as ad hoc judges under Article 224A of the Indian Constitution for a limited period of 2 years.

Analysis of Background:

Ad-hoc judges

- Unlike standard judges, which are selected through a normal procedure for a set period. Ad hoc judges are nominated by a unique process for a particular case, project, or period only.
- Under Article 127 of the Constitution of India, the Chief Justice of India can nominate a High Court judge as an ad hoc Supreme Court judge for a specified time when a quorum of permanent judges is needed to continue or hold a Supreme Court session.
 - The Chief Justice can only execute this after consulting with the chief justice of the High Court and accepting the prior consent from the President of India.
 - The Ad hoc judge carries all of the power, authority, advantages and obligations of a Supreme Court judge.
- Under Article 224A of the Indian Constitution, the Chief Justice of a High Court, with the previous consent of the President, may request any person who has held the office of judge of that court or any other High Court to sit and act as a judge of the High Court for that State.
- The Ad hoc judge carries all of the power, authority, advantages and obligations of a High Court judge.
- Supreme Court Guidelines for Appointment of an Ad-hoc Judge:
 - The court orally outlined some guidelines for the appointment and functioning of an ad-hoc judge.
 - The Chief Justice of India may appoint a certain [retired] judge if the pendency goes beyond a certain limit.
 - Ad-hoc judges will be treated as the junior most.

- The retired judges would be chosen based on their expertise in a particular field of dispute.

Why ad-hoc judges?

- More than 70 thousand cases are pending in the Supreme Court according to the latest data available on the National Judicial Grid.
- Nearly 60 lakhs cases are pending in the High Courts.
- Over 40 million cases are pending in Subordinate Courts across the country.
- The high pendency of Cases in Some tribunals indicates that the objective of setting them is not achieved.
- According to data compiled from the National Judicial Data Grid, more than one lakh cases are pending in district and taluka courts for 30 years. Over 90% of these cases are pending in just 4 states: Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Bihar

Why is there high pendency in courts?

- Lack of a sufficient number of judges and high vacancies in the judiciary and long leave to judges deteriorate the already grim situation.
- Frequent adjournment of the cases even on frivolous issues.
- India has very few courts compared to its huge population.
- Excessive litigation from the government side, the government is the largest litigant, responsible for nearly half the pending cases and most of them are on petty issues such as interdepartmental conflict.
- The lack of quality judges in the lower judiciary leads to appeals to the higher judiciary in most cases.
- Archaic laws or vague laws present another challenge as it takes time to interpret the law and most of the time matters go to higher courts through appeal.
- Poor police investigation leads to poor collection of evidence and hostile witness thus adjourning the hearing for the next date.
- Increasing the number of use of Public interest litigation (PIL).
- Increasing awareness among citizens about their rights and law courts.

What are the consequences of the pendency of cases?

- Common people's faith in the judiciary declines.
- It denies true justice to under-trial prisoners, many of whom get acquitted after spending many years which is a violation of their fundamental rights and also spoil their whole life.

- The economic cost of pendency is also very huge. Projects worth billions get delayed amid delays in judgement. It is estimated that delay in justice costs 1.5% of GDP annually which also deters future investment in India.
- Delay in justice also fails to create deterrence in the mind of criminals thus crime goes on perpetuating.
- Overcrowding of jails is also a result of a delay in judgment.
- The criminalization of politics keeps on rising as culprits are not punished timely.

Steps need to be taken:

- National Litigation Policy should be revised.
- Address all 3 stages of dispute:
 - Pre-litigation
 - Litigation
 - Post litigation stage.
- Establish Fair accountability mechanisms, Consequences for violation must be provided.
- Appointment of a Nodal Officer to regularly monitor the status of the cases in every department.
- Promotion of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to encourage mediation.
- Coordinated action between government and judiciary.
- Judicial capacity should be strengthened in the lower courts to reduce the burden on higher courts.
- Increase expenditure on the judiciary.
- Improve court case management and court automation system.
- Create subject-specific benches.
- Tax departments must limit their appeals as their success rate is less than 30% at all three levels of the judiciary.
- Robust internal dispute resolution mechanisms
- Step-by-step online dispute resolution must be adopted as done by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.
- Judges should write Shorter and more Pointed judgments.

COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES AMENDMENT BILL

In News

- The Union Government has introduced the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022 in the Lok Sabha.
- The amendment bill aims to make the governance of multi-State cooperative societies more democratic, transparent and accountable.

Analysis of Background:

- The Bill has the provisions of the 97th Constitution Amendment Act which provides Constitutional status and protection to cooperative societies.
- It aims to improve the composition of boards and ensure fiscal discipline.
- The Bill has provisions for setting up a Cooperative Election Authority, a Cooperative Information Officer and a Cooperative Ombudsman.
- Provisions relating to the representation of women and Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe members on the boards of multi-State cooperative societies have been included to promote equity and facilitate inclusiveness.

Cooperative Societies in India

- A Cooperative Society can be defined as a voluntary association of individuals united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural interests.
- It aims to serve the interest of society through the principle of self-help and mutual help.
- The roots of cooperative societies in India were sown when the first Cooperative Societies Act was passed in 1904.
- The Government passed the Co-operative Societies Act of 1912.
- In 1958, the National Development Council (NDC) recommended a national policy on cooperatives and the setting up of Cooperative Marketing Societies.
- National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) was set up under the National Cooperative Development Corporation Act, of 1962.
- Union Government announced a National Policy on Cooperatives in 2002.
- The 97th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2011 granted constitutional status and protection to cooperative societies. This Amendment introduced 3 changes in the constitution:
 - It made the right to form cooperative societies a fundamental right (Article 19).
 - It included a new Directive Principle of State Policy on the promotion of cooperative societies (Article 43B).

- It added Part IX-B in the Constitution “The Co-operative Societies” (Articles 243-ZH to 243-ZT).
- Provisions under Indian Constitution
 - Indian Constitution under Part IX-B contains various provisions related to cooperative societies.
 - The state legislature may make provisions for the incorporation, election, regulation and winding-up of cooperative societies.
- Organisation Structure
 - The board shall consist of some directors as may be provided by the state legislature, but, the maximum number of directors of a cooperative society shall not exceed 21.
 - The state legislature shall provide for the reservation of one seat for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes and two seats for women on the board of every cooperative society having members from such a category of persons.
- The functional directors of a cooperative society shall also be the members of the board and such members shall be excluded to count the total number of directors (21).
- The term of office of elected members of the board and its office bearers shall be 5 years from the date of the election.

Significance of Cooperative Societies:

- The village cooperative societies provide important inputs for the agricultural sector.
- Consumer societies meet their consumption requirements at concessional rates.
- Marketing societies help the farmer to get remunerative prices.
- The Cooperative processing units help in value additions to the raw products.
- They also help in building up storage, warehouse, cold storage, rural roads and in providing facilities like irrigation, electricity, transport, education and health.
- They play the role of a balancing factor between the public and private sectors and also supplement the work of the government and its agencies.
- Many Cooperative societies have Successfully promoted rural development
 - National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)
 - National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED)
 - AMUL and Co-operative Rural Development Trust (CORDET)
- They play an important role in poverty reduction, promoting women's empowerment, and improving literacy rate and skill development.

Concern:

- Cooperative Societies usually do not come forward to organise cooperatives of their consensus, many times it is done by the government or local administration.
- They grant loans only for agricultural operations. Farmers approach the money lenders to meet their other requirements.
- Lack of co-operation, as the people rarely understand the importance of cooperation in their lives. The absence of willing cooperation on their part hinders the growth of the cooperative movement.
- Political interference acts as a barrier to the growth of cooperative societies. The selection of beneficiaries is mostly done on political relations.
- The cooperative credit structure is criticized on the ground that it is mostly managed by landlords and large farmers.
- Poor performance, increasing debt and overdue, inefficient administration and management of Cooperative societies.

NAGALAND STATEHOOD DAY**News**

Nagaland celebrated its 60th statehood day on 1st December. It became the 16th Indian State on 1st December 1963.

Analysis of Background:

- Nagaland is a landlocked state in the northeastern region of India.
- It is bordered by;
 - Arunachal Pradesh in the North.
 - Assam in the West.
 - Manipur in the South
 - Myanmar in the East.
- Its capital city is Kohima and its largest city is Dimapur.
- Rhododendron is the state flower.
- Blyth's Tragopan is the State Bird of Nagaland.
- Nagaland is a mountainous state. It is home to a rich variety of natural, cultural and environmental resources.
- Nagaland has a largely monsoon climate with high humidity levels.
- The evergreen tropical and subtropical forests are found in strategic pockets in the state.

- Ntangki National Park, Pulie Badze Wildlife Sanctuary, Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary and Rangapahar Reserve Forest are some nature reserves in Nagaland.
- The state is also known as the "falcon capital of the world."
- Mithun (a semi-domesticated gaur) is the state animal of Nagaland and has been adopted as the official seal of the Government of Nagaland.
- The state has significant resources of natural minerals, petroleum, and hydropower with agriculture as the state's most important economic activity, accounting for over 70% of its economy.
- Other significant activities include forestry, tourism, horticulture, cottage industries, etc.
- The state has experienced insurgency and inter-ethnic conflict since the 1950s, limiting its economic development.

Nagaland Insurgency

History

- The British annexed Assam in 1826, and in 1881, the Naga Hills too became part of British India.
- The first sign of Naga resistance was seen in the formation of the Naga Club in 1918, which told the Simon Commission in 1929 "to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times".
- In 1946 came the Naga National Council (NNC), under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, declared Nagaland an independent state on August 14, 1947.
- The NNC resolved to establish a "sovereign Naga state" and conducted a "referendum" in 1951, in which "99 per cent" supported an "independent" Nagaland.
- On March 22, 1952, Phizo formed the underground Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA). The Government of India sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and, in 1958, enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.
- On November 11, 1975, the government got a section of NNC leaders to sign the Shillong Accord, under which this section of NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms.
- A group of about 140 members led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who was at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland in 1980. Muivah also had Isak Chisi Swu and S S Khaplang with him.
- In 1988, the NSCN split into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) after a violent clash. While the NNC began to fade away, and Phizo died in London in 1991, the NSCN (IM) came to be seen as the "mother of all insurgencies" in the region.

Peace Efforts

- On June 29, 1947, Assam Governor Sir Akbar Hyderi signed a 9-point agreement with moderates T Sakhrie and Aliba Imti, which was almost immediately rejected by Phizo.
- The Naga Hills, a district of Assam, was upgraded to a state in 1963, by also adding the Tuensang Tract which was then part of NEFA.
- In April of the next year, Jai Prakash Narain, Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha and Rev. Michael Scott formed a Peace Mission and got the government and NNC to sign an agreement to suspend operations that September.
- But the NNC/NFG/NFA continued to indulge in violence, and after six rounds of talks, the Peace Mission was abandoned in 1967, and a massive counter-insurgency operation was launched.

The demand for NSCN (IM)

- A “Greater Nagalim” comprising “all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas”, along with Nagaland. That included several districts of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur, as also a large tract of Myanmar.
- The map of “Greater Nagalim” has about 1, 20,000 sq km, while the state of Nagaland consists of 16,527 sq km.
- The claims have always kept Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh wary of a peace settlement that might affect their territories.
- The Nagaland Assembly has endorsed the ‘Greater Nagalim’ demand — “Integration of all Naga-inhabited contiguous areas under one administrative umbrella” several times.

Recent government initiatives

- Muivah, Swu and other top NSCN (IM) leaders escaped to Thailand in the early 1990s.
- While Nagaland Governor M M Thomas, a Church leader from Kerala, extracted the first positive response from the NSCN (IM), Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao met Muivah, Swu and others in Paris on June 15, 1995.
- In November 1995, then MoS (Home) Rajesh Pilot met them in Bangkok. Subsequently, Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda met them in Zurich on February 3, 1997, which was followed by meetings with officers in Geneva and Bangkok.
- Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee met them in Paris on September 30, 1998. The Government of India signed a ceasefire agreement with NSCN (IM) on July 25, 1997, which came into effect on August 1, 1997.
- Over 80 rounds of talks between the two sides were held subsequently.
- The Modi government continues from where Vajpayee left off.

- The state's political scenario has changed, with T R Zeliang's Naga People's Front, an NDA ally, persuading all groups in the Assembly, including the Congress, to become partners in an all-party government.

Framework Agreement 2015

- The 2015 Framework Agreement between the Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) to finalise the Naga Peace Accord is now turning out to be the key stumbling block in reaching an agreement between the two sides and finding a permanent solution to the longstanding Naga issue.
- The vague wording of the Framework Agreement and the Centre's belligerent stand on issues of separate constitution and flag for any region in the country after August 5, 2019 decisions on J&K have pushed the Naga Peace process into a stalemate. Even an apparent effort to mollify NSCN(IM) by removing former Naga interlocutor R N Ravi does not seem to have worked for the government.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

In News:

Hansraj Gangaram Ahir was appointed as the Chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes.

Analysis of Background:

National Commission for Backward Classes

- In 1992, the Supreme Court of India in the Mandal case judgement directed the Union government to create a permanent statutory body to examine the complaints of citizens belonging to backward classes (BC).
- In 1993, the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) was set up.
- In 2018, the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act granted constitutional status to the Commission by inserting a new Article 338-B in the Indian constitution.
- The Commission consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and 3 other members.
 - They are appointed by the President of India by warrant under his hand and seal.
 - Their conditions of service and office tenure are also determined by the President.
- The Commission presents an annual report to the President. It can also submit a report as and when it thinks necessary.
 - The President places all such reports before the Parliament, along with a memorandum explaining the action taken on the recommendations made by the Commission.

- The President also forwards any report of the Commission related to state government to the state government. The government places it before the state legislature, along with a memorandum explaining the action taken on it.

Responsibilities of the NCBC

- To investigate and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and other legal safeguards for the socially and educationally backward classes and to evaluate their working.
- To inquire into specific complaints concerning the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the socially and educationally backward classes.
- To participate and advise on the socioeconomic development of the socially and educationally backward classes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union or a state.
- To present to the President, annually and at such other times as it may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards.
- To make recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or a state for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the socially and educationally backward classes.
- To discharge such other functions concerning the protection, welfare, development and advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes as the President may specify.

Powers of the Commission

- The Commission is vested with the power to regulate its procedure.
- The Commission, while investigating any matter or enquiring into any complaint, has all the powers of a civil court, it can:
 - Summon and enforce the attendance of any person from any part of India and examine him on oath.
 - Require the discovery and production of any document.
 - Receive evidence on affidavits.
 - Request any public record from any court or office.
 - Issue summons for the examination of witnesses and documents.
 - Any other matter which the President may determine.
- The central government and the state governments are required to consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.

INDIAN RAILWAYS MANAGEMENT SERVICE (IRMS)

In News:

The Union Ministry of Railways has announced that recruitment to the Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS) will be done through a separate examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) from 2023 onwards. It will be used to recruit officers to Group A services of the Indian Railways.

Analysis of Background:

- The current system of recruitment does not have a unique examination for IRMS.
- Like the Civil Services Exam (CSE), the new IRMS exam has; a Preliminary screening examination and a main written examination and interview.
- For the preliminary screening of candidates, they will need to appear for the Civil Services (Prelim) exam. This will be followed by a specific IRMS (Main) examination which will consist of four papers of conventional essay-type questions.

How is this different from the Current IRMS recruitment system?

- IRMS officers can serve in any of the 10 different organized railway services, divided into three separate cadres:
 - Technical services.
 - Administrative and accounts services.
 - Medical services.
- Currently, recruitment for these three is done through three of the major examinations conducted by the UPSC:
 - Engineering Services Examination for the cadre of technical officers including the Indian Railway Service of Engineers, Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers, Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers, Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers and Indian Railway Stores Service.
 - Civil Services Examination for the cadre of administrative officers including the Indian Railway Traffic Service, Indian Railway Personnel Service, Indian Railway Accounts Service, and the Railway Protection Force.
 - Medical Services Examination for the cadre of railway medical officers.
- Under the new proposed system, the first two cadres will be recruited through the IRMS examination, with a common recruitment process.
- Outcomes of this change
- The eligibility for IRMS candidates will be different from the CSE: the minimum educational qualifications include a degree in engineering, commerce, or chartered accountancy.

- It means that the IRMS will no longer have officers with a background in social sciences or the pure sciences.
- The IRMS exam is likely to benefit CSE aspirants with an engineering or commerce background. Now they will have another avenue open exclusively to them.
- As the new system begins in 2023, the Ministry announced that 150 officers would be recruited through the CSE this year.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI)

In News:

The Satark Nagrik Sangathan has released a report card on the performance of State Information Commissions (SICs) in India for 2021-22.

Analysis of Background:

- The State Information Commission of Tamil Nadu has delivered only 14% of the information desired under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The state has ranked as the worst-performing state under the RTI Act.
- Maharashtra was the second worst-performing state, sharing only 23% of the information asked under the RTI Act.
- The report highlighted that a large number of State Information Commissions (SICs) across the country were returning cases without passing orders.
- Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005
- The Right to Information Act requires timely responses to citizen requests for Public authority.
 - There is no defined format of application for pursuing information.
 - The information seeker is not required to provide reasons for asking for information.
- The main objective is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, curb corruption, etc.
- Under the act, Information is any material in any form.
 - It includes records, documents, memos, e-mails, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, and data.
- A “Public authority” means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted;
 - by or under the Indian Constitution.
 - by any other law made by the Indian Parliament.
 - by any other law made by State Legislature.

- by notification issued or order made by the Government, and includes any body owned, controlled or substantially financed.
- Public Authorities publish the rules, regulations, instructions, manuals and records.
 - He publishes facilities available to citizens for obtaining information.
 - He provides reasons for its administrative or quasi-judicial decisions to affected persons.
- Types of information exempted from RTI
 - Which would affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, and affect the relation with foreign States.
 - Which may constitute contempt of court.
 - Anything under the Official Secrets Act, of 1923.
 - Intelligence and security organisations are specified in the 2nd Schedule.

Central Information Commission

- It is the statutory body constituted under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.
- They are the final appellate authority for RTI Act.
- Central Information Commission consists of a Chief Information Commissioner and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC). They are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee consisting of;
 - The Prime Minister.
 - The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
 - A Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM.
- The members of the Central Information Commission shall not be Members of Parliament or Members of the Legislature of any State or Union Territory as the case may be, or hold any other office of profit or connected with any political party or carry on any business or pursue any profession.
- They are not eligible for reappointment.
- The tenure, salary and allowances of the information commissioners are not fixed.
- RTI Amendment Act, 2019 has empowered the Central Government to notify them.
- They are required to submit annual reports to the Parliament through the Ministry of Personnel and Training.

ST ORDER BILLS

In News:

Recently the Parliament of India passed three Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2022;

- Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022 for Uttar Pradesh.
- Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022 for Tamil Nadu.
- Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Fourth Amendment) Bill, 2022 for Karnataka.

Analysis of Background:

- The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022, for Tamil Nadu was passed.
- It will include the Narikoravan and Kurivikkaran communities in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu.
- The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Fourth Amendment) Bill, 2022, for Karnataka was passed.
- It Bill will include Betta-Kuruba as a synonym for the Kadu Kuruba community in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka.
- The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022 for Uttar Pradesh was passed.
- The Bill will include the transfer of the Gond community from the list of SCs to STs and the inclusion of Dhuria, Nayak, Ojha, Pathari and Rajgond in the list of STs of Uttar Pradesh.

Narikoravan and Kurivikkaran hill tribes of Tamil Nadu:

- The Narikuravar is an indigenous community in Tamil Nadu.
- The main occupation of the people is hunting, but as they were prohibited entry into the forests, they were forced to take up other alternatives such as selling beaded ornaments to survive.
- They migrate from place to place to find a market for their beads.
- Children follow the adults wherever they go, which means they never get to attend school.
- During British rule, they were placed under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 and hence stigmatized for a long time. However, they were denotified in 1952, but the stigma continues.
- Their original name is Kuruvikkaran or Nakkale or Akkibikki but wrongly named Narikurava.

- They speak the unclassified Indo-Aryan language called Vaagri Booli.
- Almost all Narikuravas are well-versed in Tamil.
- Although all they come under one roof based on their common clan they were broadly sub-divided into two sub-divisions: the buffalo-sacrificers and goat-sacrificers.

Betta-Kuruba tribe

- The Betta Kuruba tribe lives in the hilly regions of Karnataka and is one of the few indigenous communities of the Nilgiris.
- They belong to the Hindu caste native to the Indian states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- Traditionally, the Kuruba people drew sustenance from hunting, gathering and collecting wild honey.
- They practised sheep/goat and cattle pastoralism, in that they either herded exclusively sheep, or a mixed herd of sheep and goats, or cattle.
- They are generally believed to be the descendants of the Pallavas.
- Consanguineous marriages like cross-cousin marriages are preferred among the Kurumbas.

The Process of adding a community to the ST List

- The process of adding tribes to the ST list starts with a recommendation from the State governments.
 - It is sent to the Tribal Affairs Ministry, which reviews and sends them to the Registrar General of India, Under the Home Ministry for approval.
 - After approval, it is sent to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and then sent to the Cabinet for a final decision.
 - Once the cabinet finalizes it, then it introduces a bill in the parliament to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.
 - After the amendment bill is passed by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the President's office takes the final decision under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution:
- The criterion followed for the specification of a community, as scheduled tribes are;
 - Indications of primitive traits.
 - Distinctive culture.
 - Geographical isolation.
 - The shyness of contact with the community at large.

- The above criterion is not mentioned in the Indian Constitution. It comes from the definitions contained in the 1931 Census, the reports of the first Backward Classes Commission 1955, on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Committee) 1965.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

G20 FINANCE TRACK

In News:

The first G20 Finance and Central Bank Deputies (FCBD) meeting will be jointly hosted by the Finance Ministry and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and is slated for December 13-15 at Bengaluru.

Analysis of Background:

- Following last week's first round of Sherpa track meetings under India's G20 presidency, the Finance Track will kick off its meetings Tuesday with discussions on economic and financial issues, including global economic outlook, infrastructure development, sustainable finance, global health, international taxation, financial sector issues and global approach for cryptocurrencies.
- India has assumed the G20 Presidency at a time of multiple challenges, which include scarring from the pandemic, sharpened geopolitical tensions, rising food and energy security concerns, growing debt distress, inflationary pressures, and monetary tightening, among others.
- The discussions are expected to feature the fallout from the Russia-Ukraine war in the form of disrupted supply chains, impact on commodity prices and the adverse impact on price and availability of three Fs – food, fuel and fertilisers.
- Additionally, the finance track discussions will also focus on financial crimes and taking measures for a coordinated approach for cryptocurrencies, a step which India has been waiting for before charting its own legal course for the virtual assets.
- G20 Finance Track agenda will "help collective preparedness and needs for future challenges especially for developing and vulnerable economies."
- Discussions in Finance Track will focus on reorienting international financial institutions to meet the shared global challenges of the 21st century, financing cities of tomorrow, managing global debt vulnerabilities, advancing financial inclusion and productivity gains, financing for climate action and SDGs, a globally coordinated approach to unbacked crypto assets and advancing the international taxation agenda.

- On the sidelines of the meeting, a panel discussion will be held on ‘Strengthening Multilateral Development Banks to Address Shared Global Challenges of the 21st Century’ along with a seminar on the ‘Role of Central Banks in Green Financing’.
- A key role of the G20 is to provide “guidance in dealing with such challenges” and during India’s G20 Presidency, supporting the countries most in need and reflecting the concerns and aspirations of developing countries will be at the forefront of the G20’s efforts.
- Discussions in the G20 Finance Track will ultimately be reflected in the G20 Leaders’ Declaration.
- The G20 Leaders’ Summit will be held at New Delhi in September 2023. The G20 consists of two parallel tracks: the Finance track, led by Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors; and the Sherpa track. The Indian G20 Presidency’s theme of ‘One Earth One Family, One Future’ will guide the G20 Finance Track discussions.

INDIA CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS

In News:

Curbing terrorism and terrorist financing in Afghanistan, and the use of trade and connectivity routes via Iran are key to regional security, said India as National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval chaired the first India-Central Asia meeting of NSAs and Secretaries of Security Councils in Delhi.

Analysis of Background:

- The day-long meeting, which was the outcome of the India-Central Asia virtual summit held in January this year, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and agreed to have security chiefs meet on a regular basis to discuss India’s “extended neighbourhood”.
- The Security Advisers discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the security and stability of the region, reiterating strong support for a peaceful, stable and secure Afghanistan, emphasising respect for its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and urging non-interference in its internal affairs

Key outcomes of earlier summit:

- “Delhi Declaration” joint statement: To develop mutual connectivity for enhanced trade and commerce between India and Central Asian countries.
- Proposed a number of high-level exchanges, including bi-annual summits, and annual meetings of the Foreign, Trade and Cultural Ministers and Secretaries of Security to

“strengthen cooperation in the areas of political and development, partnership, trade and connectivity, culture and tourism and security”.

- Adopted a plan to build a “Central Asia Centre” in New Delhi.
- Announced two “Joint Working Groups”(JWGs) on Afghanistan and the Chabahar port
- Stressed on resuming TAPI gas pipeline project that has run into issues over India-Pakistan tensions and the situation in Afghanistan.

India-Central Asia Relations:

- Ties between India and Central Asia are based on a foundation of “deep historical, cultural and civilizational links.”
- India and Central Asia has close trade and cultural linkages since the Indus valley civilization.

Why Central Asia should matter to India?

- Geo-political importance: Central Asia serves as a land bridge between Asia and Europe, and is rich in natural resources. Its geopolitically axial offers whole range of opportunities.
- Geo-economic importance: This region is rich in natural resources like crude oil, natural gas, gold, copper, aluminum, and iron. It can help India in securing energy security.
- Geo-strategic importance: This region is located close to the conflict prone area of West Asia and Afghanistan. Although Central Asia doesn't share borders with India but there are very high chances of spreading out of security threats i.e. terrorism, narcotics trafficking and arms smuggling from this region.

What are the areas of cooperation between India and central Asia?

- Energy security: India launched the civil nuclear cooperation with Kazakhstan to ensure supply of nuclear fuel to Indian nuclear plants. The TAPI project is connecting energy rich Central Asia with energy starved South Asia.
- Economic Trade: India's trade with the five Central Asian Republics—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—was around \$ 2 billion in 2018.
- Peace and security: India and Central Asian countries have a shared interest in the stability of Afghanistan and counter-terror initiatives.
- International cooperation: India's full membership into the Shanghai Cooperation Agreement (SCO) opens up an opportunity for a closer engagement with region but New Delhi still lacks a political-strategic clarity.
- Development cooperation: India provides Lines of Credit to finance development and manufacturing projects in Central Asia.

- **Diaspora:**The “people-to-people” contact has been a defining feature of India’s Connect Central Asia Policy. Indian cultural diversity has been extremely popular in the region.

Measures taken by India to boost relations:

- **Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA):**India provided financial aid to the region and established diplomatic relations. New Delhi signed the Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA) with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to stimulate defense cooperation and deepen trade relations.
- **Connect Central Asia’ policy:**It was adopted in 2012 to boost political cooperation, economic cooperation, strategic cooperation, regional connectivity, information technology (IT), cooperation in education, people-to-people contact, medical cooperation, and cooperation in regional groupings.
- **International North-South (Transit) Corridor (INSTC):** INSTC is a multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe. It was adopted for cutting the costs and time in moving cargo between Russia and India.
- **Chabahar port:** India and Iran are developing the Chabahar port to serve as an alternate route to Central Asia.
- **Ashgabat agreement:** India joined the Ashgabat agreement for developing the shortest trade route between the Central Asian republics and Iranian and Omani ports.
- **TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India)project** adopted to connect an energy-rich Central to South Asia.

Major challenges in India-Central Asia relations:

- **Geographically inaccessible:** India has traditionally attached great importance to its relations with Central Asia. But, unfortunately, the relationship faces constraints due to lack of direct access to Central Asia.
- **Lack of policy:**There is no specific Indian diaspora policy in Central Asia, as the number of Indians in Central Asian Republics (CARs) is quite less.
- **Unstable situation in Afghanistan**and a problematic India-Pakistan relation.
- **China presence:**China has made considerable inroads into the region through its Belt and Road Initiative and its boosting trade with Central Asian states. Growing axis of Russia-China-Pakistan would limit India’s presence in Central Asia.
- **US sanctions on Iran:** India has been taking renewed interest in enhancing its strategic presence in Central Asia, but U.S. sanction on Iran makes it difficult for India to capitalize various opportunities and potentials.

PARIS CLUB

In News:

Paris Club creditor nations are proposing a 10-year moratorium on Sri Lankan debt and another 15 years of debt restructuring as a formula to resolve the Sri Lankan debt crisis.

Analysis of Background:

About Paris Club:

- The Paris Club is an informal group of creditor nations whose objective is to find workable solutions to payment problems faced by debtor nations.
- The Paris Club has 22 permanent members, including most of the western European and Scandinavian nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan.
- As an informal group, it has no official statutes and no formal inception date, although its first meeting with a debtor nation was in 1956, with Argentina.

WASENNAR AGREEMENT

In News:

External Affairs Ministry says India to assume chairmanship of Wassenaar arrangement on 1 Jan 2023

Analysis of Background:

What is Wassenaar Arrangement?

- The Wassenaar Arrangement is an elite club of countries which subscribe to arms export controls, similar to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime.
- The body came into being in 1996 to succeed the Cold War-era Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls.
- The name comes from Wassenaar, a suburb of The Hague, where the agreement to start such a multi-lateral cooperation was reached in 1995.]

Who are all members of the Wassenaar Arrangement?

- The WA has 42 members, the latest entrant being India.
- With the exception of China, all the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are signatories of the WA, which is headquartered in Vienna.

How does the Wassenaar Arrangement work?

- According to the WA website, the goal of the Arrangement is to "promote transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies".
- Participants are required to "ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine the goal".
- The aim, according to WA, is also to prevent the acquisition of these items by terrorists.
- The Arrangement works according to what it calls WA Control Lists. The controls are subject to ratification by the participants.
- WA members agree to exchange information on sensitive dual-use goods and technologies and report on such transfers and denials of controlled items to non-participants.
- Critics see WA simply as a Cold War instrument with a different name. According to them Arrangement perpetuates a digital divide by restricting western companies and governments from supplying crucial technologies to emerging markets.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

In News:

The Government of India and Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$125 million loan to develop climate-resilient sewage collection and treatment, and drainage and water supply systems in three cities in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Analysis of Background:

- The Government of India and Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$125 million loan to develop climate-resilient sewage collection and treatment, and drainage and water supply systems in three cities in the state of Tamil Nadu.
- The financing is the third and the last tranche of the \$500 million multi-tranche financing facility (MFF) for the Program approved by ADB in 2018 to build priority water supply, sewerage, and drainage infrastructure in strategic industrial corridors across 10 cities in the state. The tranche 3 loan covers Coimbatore, Madurai, and Thoothukudi.

About ADB::

- About: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a regional development bank established in 1966.
- HQ: It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines.
- Objective: ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- Members: The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East or ECAFE) and non-regional developed countries. From 31 members at its establishment, ADB now has 68 members.
- Voting: The ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
- Share: Japan and the United States each hold the largest proportion of shares at 15.571%. China holds 6.429%, India holds 6.317%, and Australia holds 5.773%.

SOCIAL ISSUES

INDIA INEQUALITY REPORT 2022: DIGITAL DIVIDE

In News:

- The recently released 'India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide' by Oxfam India shows the digital divide in India.
- Oxfam said the report depended on primary data received from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's (CMIE) household survey from January 2018 to December 2021 on internet access, mobile ownership, computer and broadband availability as well as report analysis from the National Sample Survey (NSS) data.

Analysis of Background:

Key Points of the report:

Gender inequality

- In India, Over 61% of men owned a mobile phone in 2021 as opposed to 31 % of women.

- Women are 15% less likely to own a mobile phone and 33% less likely to use mobile internet services than men.

Caste inequality

- 8% of people under the 'General' caste category had access to a computer or a laptop compared to 1% of Scheduled Tribes (ST) or 2% of Scheduled Castes (SC).
- The chances of access to a computer are more for the General and OBC groups than for the SC and ST populations.

Religion inequality

- Among all religions, Sikhs have the highest chances of having a computer followed by Christians, Hindus and lastly Muslims.
- Among Sikhs, 12% have a computer by the end of 2021, as compared to 2% of Muslims.

Rural-Urban divide

- The urban population is 7% to 8% more likely to have a computer than the rural population.
- The total percentage of respondents without a computer or laptop was 93.5% in January-April 2018, which further increased to 96.6 % by the end of 2021, indicating the widening of the gap after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Only one-fifth of the population could operate a computer.
- Maharashtra has the highest internet penetration, followed by Goa and Kerala, while Bihar has the lowest, followed by Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

Digital Divide

- It refers to the separation that exists between individuals, communities, and businesses that have access to information technology and those that do not have such access.
- Reason:
 - Economic poverty is closely related to limited information technology resources.
 - Lack of awareness among the people.
- Concern:
 - Awareness cannot guarantee sustained use of the system unless the system is also designed in such a way as to deliver a satisfactory outcome.
 - Online safety: The majority of women have experienced online violence, including sexual harassment, threatening messages and having private images shared without consent.

Steps taken by Government to bridge Digital Divide:

- National E-governance Plan formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEITY) and the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) in 2006.
- It aims at improving the delivery of Government services to citizens and businesses with the vision “Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man.”
- E-District Projects under National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) aims at providing support to the basic administrative unit.
- Common Services Centres provide high-quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services, in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment as well as other private services.
- It will offer web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills.
- Bhoomi Project in Karnataka for Online delivery of Land Records.
- Gyandoot is an Intranet-based Government to Citizen (G2C) service delivery initiative in Madhya Pradesh.
- Lokvani Project in Uttar Pradesh to provide a single window, self-sustainable e-Governance solution for the handling of grievances, land record maintenance and providing a mixture of essential services.
- Project FRIENDS in Kerala: FRIENDS (Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services) is a Single Window Facility providing citizens with the means to pay taxes and other financial dues to the State Government
- e-Mitra Project in Rajasthan to facilitate urban and rural masses with the maximum possible services related to different state government departments
- e-Seva (Andhra Pradesh); all the services are delivered online to consumers /citizens by connecting them to the respective government departments and providing online information at the point of service delivery.
- SWAYAM Portal for Online Courses. SWAYAM Prabha Provide HD educational Channels through DTH on a 24X7 basis.
- Bharat Net program to provide high-speed broadband to all the villages, optical fibre has been laid in 1.83 lakh gram panchayats.

MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE

In News:

- According to the Registrar General of India's (RGI) latest 'Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality' for the period 2018 to 2020, the Maternal Mortality Ratio at the national level declined from 130 per lakh live births in 2014-16 to 97 per lakh live births in 2018-20.
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare stated that the country is on track to achieve the target of MMR of less than 70 per lakh live births by 2030.

Analysis of Background:

- Kerala tops in maternal and child health, recording the lowest Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of 19 (per one lakh live births) in the country. Kerala is way ahead of the national MMR of 97.
 - Kerala followed by Maharashtra (33), then Telangana (43) and Andhra Pradesh (45).
 - According to the data, Kerala has achieved the target based on the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, of an MMR of 30 by 2020.
- The maternal mortality ratio in Assam is highest in the country, the state has recorded 195 deaths per lakh live births, which is an improvement from the previous figure of 215 in the period 2016 to 2018.

About Maternal mortality in India

- Maternal mortality is the maternal death of a woman during pregnancy or after pregnancy, including post-abortion or post-birth periods.
- Different countries and cultures have different rates and causes of maternal death.
 - Within India, reasons vary from healthcare access between regions and socioeconomic factors, accordingly, there is also variation in maternal deaths for various states, regions, and demographics of women.
- Women die as a result of complications during and following pregnancy and childbirth or abortion.
 - Most of these complications that develop during pregnancy are easily preventable or treatable.
 - Other complications may exist before pregnancy but are worsened during pregnancy, especially if not managed as part of a woman's care.
- India contributes one-fifth of the global burden of absolute maternal deaths.
- 94% of all maternal deaths occur in low and lower-middle-income countries.

- India's present MMR is below the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target and puts the country on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of an MMR below 70 by 2030.

Steps taken by the Government:

- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) implemented under the National Health Mission (NHM), is a safe motherhood intervention promoting institutional delivery among pregnant women, especially those with weak socio-economic status i.e. women from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.
- PM Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) Providing Cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to Pregnant and nursing mothers.
- Scheme for Adolescent Girls aims at girls in the age group 11-18, to empower and improve their social status through nutrition, life skills, home skills and vocational training.
- Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) provides pregnant women free of cost assured and quality Antenatal Care on the 9th day of every month.
- Mahila Swadhar Greh provides relief and rehabilitation to destitute women and women in distress.
- Ujjawala scheme, a Comprehensive Scheme for the prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.
- One-Stop Center (OSC) to facilitate access to an integrated range of services including medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/ case management, psychosocial counselling and temporary support services to women affected by violence.
- Extending Maternity Leave duration From 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
- Surakshit Matratva Ashwasan (SUMAN) aims to provide assured, dignified, respectful and quality healthcare at no cost and zero tolerance for denial of services for every woman and newborn visiting the public health facility to end all preventable maternal and newborn deaths.
- LaQshya aims to improve the quality of care in Labor rooms and Maternity operation theatres to ensure that pregnant women receive respectful and quality care during delivery.

MISSION SHAKTI SCHEME

In News:

Women and Child Development Ministry has issued guidelines for Mission Shakti Scheme.

Analysis of Background:

Mission Shakti:

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development is the implementing body of the scheme during the 15th Finance Commission period 2021-22 to 2025-26.
- Mission Shakti aims to ensure a lifecycle support system for women through integrated care, safety, protection, rehabilitation and empowerment.

Mission Shakti has two sub-schemes 'Sambal' and 'Samarthya'.

- The "Sambal" is a sub-scheme for the safety and security of women.
- The "Samarthya" is a sub-scheme for the empowerment of women.

Initiatives under SAMBAL;

- One-Stop Centre (OSC) to facilitate access to an integrated range of services including medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/ case management, psychosocial counselling and temporary support services to women affected by violence.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, to address the declining Child Sex Ratio.
- Mahila Police Volunteers, to report the incidences of violence against women
- Women's Helpline.
- Nari Adalats to promote and facilitate alternative dispute resolution and gender justice within families and in society.

Initiatives under SAMARTHYA;

- Gender Budgeting is a tool for mainstreaming gender perspectives at various stages of planning, budgeting, implementation, impact assessment and revisiting of policy/programme objectives and allocations.
- Swadhar Greh to provide relief and rehabilitation to destitute women and women in distress.
- Working Women Hostels for ensuring safe accommodation for women working away from their place of residence.
- National Creche Scheme to provide daycare facilities to children of the age group of 6 months to 6 years of working women who are employed.

- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) Provide Cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and nursing mothers.
- Umbrella ICDS Scheme is also subsumed in 'Samarthya'.

Present Status of the Schemes

- Mission Shakti has a total financial cost of Rs 20989 Crore.
 - The sub-scheme 'Sambal' will be implemented as a Centrally Sponsored scheme with 100% central funding from the Nirbhaya Fund/ MWCD budget
 - The sub-scheme 'Samarthya' will be implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with a funding ratio of 60:40 between Centre and State Governments / UTs with the legislature, except North East & Special Category States / UTs with legislature where the fund ratio will be 90:10.
 - For UTs without legislature, 100% of funding will be provided by the Central Government.

ECONOMY

FDI IN INDIA

In News:

The Foreign Direct Investment into India is continuously increasing since 2014-15. In the last seven financial years, over 443 US billion dollars worth of FDI inflows have come into the country.

Analysis of Background:

What is FDI?

- Foreign direct investment (FDI) is when a company takes controlling ownership in a business entity in another country.
- With FDI, foreign companies are directly involved with day-to-day operations in the other country. This means they aren't just bringing money with them, but also knowledge, skills and technology.
- Generally, FDI takes place when an investor establishes foreign business operations or acquires foreign business assets, including establishing ownership or controlling interest in a foreign company.

Where is FDI made?

- Foreign Direct Investments are commonly made in open economies that have skilled workforce and growth prospect. FDIs not only bring money with them but also skills, technology and knowledge.

Routes through which India gets FDI

Automatic Route

- The non-resident or Indian company does not require prior nod of the RBI or government of India for FDI.
- Foreign Investment is allowed under the automatic route without prior approval of the Government or the Reserve Bank of India, in all activities/ sectors as specified in the Regulation 16 of FEMA 20 (R).

Government Route

- The government's prior approval is mandatory. The company will have to file an application through Foreign Investment Facilitation Portal, which facilitates single-window clearance.
- The application is then forwarded to the respective ministry, which will approve/reject the application in consultation with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce.
- DPIIT will issue the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for processing of applications under the existing FDI policy.

FDI prohibition

There are a few industries where FDI is strictly prohibited under any route. These industries are

- Atomic Energy Generation
- Any Gambling or Betting businesses
- Lotteries (online, private, government, etc)
- Investment in Chit Funds
- Nidhi Company
- Agricultural or Plantation Activities (although there are many exceptions like horticulture, fisheries, tea plantations, Pisciculture, animal husbandry, etc)
- Housing and Real Estate (except townships, commercial projects, etc)
- Trading in TDR's
- Cigars, Cigarettes, or any related tobacco industry

RARE EARTH METALS

In News:

Union Minister Dr Jitendra said, India is not reliant on China for accessing rare earth minerals.

Analysis of Background:

What are Rare Earth Metals?

- Rare Earth Elements or Rare Earth Metals are a set of 17 chemical elements in the periodic table — the 15 lanthanides, plus scandium and yttrium, which tend to occur in the same ore deposits as the lanthanides, and have similar chemical properties.
- 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).
- Despite their classification, most of these elements are not really “rare”. One of the Rare Earths, promethium, is radioactive.

What are Rare Earths used for?

- These elements are important in technologies of consumer electronics, computers and networks, communications, clean energy, advanced transportation, healthcare, environmental mitigation, and national defence, among others.
- Minerals like Cobalt, Nickel, and Lithium are required for batteries used in electric vehicles.
- REEs are an essential — although often tiny — component of more than 200 consumer products, including mobile phones, computer hard drives, electric and hybrid vehicles, semiconductors, flatscreen TVs and monitors, and high-end electronics.
- Scandium is used in televisions and fluorescent lamps, and yttrium is used in drugs to treat rheumatoid arthritis and cancer.
- Rare Earth elements are used in space shuttle components, jet engine turbines, and drones. Cerium, the most abundant Rare Earth element, is essential to NASA’s Space Shuttle Programme.

Dependence on China

- Some REEs are available in India — such as Lanthanum, Cerium, Neodymium, Praseodymium and Samarium, etc.
- Others such as Dysprosium, Terbium, and Europium, which are classified as HREEs, are not available in Indian deposits in extractable quantities.

- Hence, there is a dependence on countries such as China for HREEs, which is one of the leading producers of REEs, with an estimated 70 per cent share of the global production.

India's Concern

- China has about 37 percent of known global REE reserves but produces about 60 per cent of global REE.
- India has about 6 percent of global REE reserves and produces a minuscule 1 percent of global supply.
- If India is not able to explore and produce these minerals, it will have to depend on a handful of countries, including China, to power its energy transition plans to electric vehicles. That will be similar to our dependence on a few countries for oil.
- Industry watchers say that the reason India would not have found a place in the MSP grouping is that the country does not bring any expertise to the table. In the group, countries like Australia and Canada have reserves and also the technology to extract them, and countries like Japan have the technology to process REEs.

India's potential

- Large tracts of the Indian Ocean coastline from East Africa to Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia are host to rich REE-containing mineral sands. India has an extremely high possibility of discovery of new deposits along its coastline and hard rock carbonatites that exist all over the peninsula.
- Availability of such reliable raw material sources would naturally inspire the setting up of downstream industries of refining, value addition, manufacture of Rare Earth Permanent Magnets, and other high-value and high-technology products.
- Reliable domestic supply of these products would be a major attraction to further high-value industries such as electronics, defense, electric vehicles, and many others.
- India is, therefore, in a unique position of giving the comfort of producing “Non-Chinese” REE ore that could command a “reliable supplier” premium in the western high-tech electronics and defense industry.
- This would provide a boost to Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.

VIZHINJAM PORT PROJECT

In News:

The Vizhinjam project, which began on August 17, 2015, was scheduled to be completed by December 3, 2019. However, the project suffered repeated delays.

Analysis of Background:

- The Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport, also known as the Vizhinjam Port is an under-construction port on the Arabian Sea coast at the city of Trivandrum.
- It is proposed to follow the landlord port model, with the intention of catering for passenger, container and other cargo shipping. Vizhinjam International Seaport Limited (VISL) is a special-purpose government company fully owned by Government of Kerala that would act as an implementing agency for the development of this greenfield port.
- Vizhinjam is a natural port near the international ship route. It will also affect existing cargo movement to other ports and will cater to transshipment. Vizhinjam port will co-exist and compete with international ports including ports of Colombo, Singapore and Dubai.

GLOBAL WAGE REPORT

In News:

The Global Wage Report 2022-23 on the impact of COVID-19 and inflation on wages and purchasing power, prepared by the ILO, was released in Geneva.

Analysis of Background:

Effect of War and Global energy crisis

- Inflation and a global slowdown in economic growth due to the war in Ukraine and Global energy crisis are causing a “striking fall” in real monthly wages in many countries, says a report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Wages in India

- In India too, the wages have come down from the pre-pandemic conditions, according to the data provided in the report. The crisis was also reducing the purchasing power of the middle classes and hitting low-income households particularly hard.
- Average real wage index for India, in the category of emerging G20 economy, saw a decrease soon after the pandemic.

Emerging G-20 Economies

- Among the emerging G20 economies, China continues to dominate the ranking in real wage growth, with estimates showing that monthly wages there in 2022 were about 2.6 times their real value in 2008.
- Except for Mexico, in 2022 all emerging G20 economies exhibit average monthly wages that are higher in real terms than the baseline (2008).
- Despite more rapid wage growth among emerging G20 economies, there was still a significant gap between their average level of real wages and that of advanced G20 economies.
- Conversion of all the G20 countries' average wages into US dollars using exchange rates based on purchasing power parity yields a simple average wage of about US\$ 4,000 per month in the advanced economies and about US\$ 1,800 per month in the emerging economies.

Global Monthly Wages

- The ILO estimated that global monthly wages fell in real terms to minus 0.9% in the first half of 2022. The United Nations body noted that it was for the first time in this century that real global wage growth has been negative.

Advanced G-20 Countries:

- Among advanced G20 countries, real wages in the first half of 2022 are estimated to have declined to minus 2.2%, whereas real wages in emerging G20 countries grew by 0.8%, 2.6% less than in 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Causes and Implications

- Inflation was the major reason for decrease in income and the greatest impact was on low-income groups.
- Rising inflation had a greater cost-of-living impact on lower-income earners, the ILO said adding that they had to spend most of their disposable income on essential goods and services, which generally experience greater price increases than non-essential items.
- Inflation is also biting into the purchasing power of minimum wages.
- Income inequality and poverty will rise if the purchasing power of the lowest paid is not maintained. In addition, a much-needed post-pandemic recovery could be put at risk. This could fuel further social unrest across the world and undermine the goal of achieving prosperity and peace for all.

- Although the recent health crisis and the war in Ukraine seem to be the key drivers of uncertainty at present, the fact is that over the past two decades the world has arguably been drifting in a direction that endangers the prospect of achieving prosperity and peace for all, as called for by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

About ILO

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice through setting international labour standards.
- It was created in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice.
- It is the first and oldest specialised agency of the UN.
- The Organization has played a role at key historical junctures – the Great Depression, decolonization, the creation of Solidarność in Poland, the victory over apartheid in South Africa – and today in the building of an ethical and productive framework for fair globalization.
- The ILO has 187 member states: 186 out of 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands.
- The driving forces for the ILO's creation arose from security, humanitarian, political and economic considerations.
- It is the only tripartite U.N. agency. It brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.
- With its focus on international development, it is a member of the United Nations Development Group, a coalition of UN organization aimed at helping meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

ILO Publications

- Global Wage Report
- Social Dialogue Report
- World Employment and Social Outlook
- World Social Protection Report

SAMRUDDHI CORRIDOR

In News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Expressway in Nagpur.

Analysis of Background:

The Samruddhi Mahamargor Nagpur-Mumbai Super Communication Expressway is an under-construction 6-lane wide (expandable to 8), 701-km long access-controlled expressway in Maharashtra.

Route:

- It will be amongst the country's longest greenfield road projects, which will connect the two capital cities of the state, its capital, Mumbai, and its third-largest and vice-capital city, Nagpur.
- It passes through three wildlife sanctuaries:
 1. Katepurna wildlife sanctuary in Akola;
 2. Karanja-Sohol Black Buck sanctuary in Washim; and
 3. Tansa wildlife sanctuary in Thane.

Project Development

- The project is being led by the state infrastructure arm Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation(MSRDC), and is designed under the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) model.

Significance

- The expressway is capable of providing an enhanced connectivity to the Marathwada and Vidarbha regions.
- The expressway will become a prosperity corridor for the overall socio-economic growth of the state.

Samruddhi Mahamarg

The six-lane access-controlled road, designed for a top speed of 150 kmph, is the second in Maharashtra after the Mumbai-Pune Expressway



■ An estimated 30,000-35,000 vehicles will use the Expressway daily

■ Will boost tourism to Shirdi, Verul, Lonar lake, Ajanta, Ellora, Aurangabad, Panchavati, the jyotirlingas

of Trimbakeshwar and Ghrushneshwar, and the hill station of Igatpuri

■ Passes through three wildlife sanctuaries

■ 209 underpasses for animals and pedestrians, and eight underpasses and eight overpasses for wildlife movement

■ It crosses 391 villages, 26 talukas and 10 districts

■ 138.47 MW electricity will be generated by a solar energy initiative linked to the project

GLOBAL AVIATION SAFETY RANKING

In News:

India has jumped to the 48th position — its highest ever spot — in the global aviation safety ranking by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) officials said.

Analysis of Background:

- Four years ago, India was at the 102nd spot in the rankings.
- India's score in terms of effective implementation of key safety elements has improved to 85.49%, putting it ahead of China (49), Israel (50) and Turkey (54).
- India's score in the 2018 Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme was 69.95%.
- This time, India's score for civil aviation organisation rose from 63.64% to 72.73%, personnel licensing and training from 25.58% to 84.71%, aircraft operations from 80.34% to 97.44%, airworthiness of aircraft from 90.20% to 97.06% and aerodrome and ground aids from 72.36% to 92.68%.
- Significance
- The higher ranking means that India has improved its air safety processes. Better aviation safety in home skies also allows Indian carriers to expand faster in overseas markets as permissions for new services are easier to get.

GLOBAL LAYOFFS

In News:

Over the past two months, a slew of U.S. multinational companies including tech giants Amazon, Meta, Intel, Twitter and financial behemoths like Citi and Morgan Stanley, announced massive layoffs.

Analysis of Background:

What is leading to layoffs?

- A potential economic recession is going on.
- With inflation soaring in most parts of the world, central banks have been trying to control it by increasing interest rates so as to make it more costly to borrow and consume. This will eventually affect economic growth and jobs.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has cited forecasts for global GDP growth in both 2022 and 2023 as gloomy, given the pandemic and ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.
- Except for 2008 financial crisis numbers, estimates for 2022-23 and the next by the IMF are the weakest since 2001.

Outlook for the Indian IT industry

- The Indian IT services firms are among the largest employers in the organised sector and any global economic trend is bound to have an impact on their growth projections.

What about start-ups?

- The Indian start-up layoff tracker by Inc42 showed that more than 15,700 employees had been laid off in 2022 given tightening funding conditions. Byju's, Chargebee, Cars24, Ola, Innovaccer, Udaan, Unacademy and Vedantu are names that have been in the news for layoffs, according to Inc42.
- The tracker showed that the edtech sector has laid off the most employees – 14 start-ups had laid off 6,900 employees in 2022.

ENVIRONMENT

NEW BIODIVERSITY FUND

In News:

There is an urgent need to create a new and dedicated fund to help developing countries successfully implement a post-2020 global framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, India has said at the U.N. biodiversity conference in Canada's Montreal.

Analysis of Background:

- The country said that conservation of biodiversity must also be based on common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR) as climate change also impacts nature.
- As the 196 parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) finalise negotiations for a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) — a new set of goals and targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss — there have been repeated calls for the inclusion of the CBDR principle in finance-related targets.
- Addressing the stocktaking plenary at CBD COP-15, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said the successful implementation of a post-2020 GBF would depend on the “ways and means we put in place for an equally ambitious resource mobilisation mechanism”.
- There is a need to create a new and dedicated mechanism for the provision of financial resources to developing-country parties. Such a fund should be operationalised at the earliest to ensure effective implementation of the post-2020 GBF by all countries.
- So far, the Global Environment Facility which caters to multiple conventions, including the UNFCCC and UN Convention to Combat Desertification, remains the only source of funding for biodiversity conservation.
- At CBD COP15, developing countries have been demanding a new and dedicated biodiversity fund, saying the existing multilateral sources are not up to the task of meeting the requirements of the GBF.
- Differences with rich countries on the matter had prompted representatives from developing nations to walk out of crucial financing talks last week. India said developing countries bear the burden of implementing the targets for conservation of biodiversity and, therefore require funds and technology transfer for this purpose.
- Established as the seventh principle of the Rio Declaration adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992, CBDR is defined as states have common but differentiated responsibilities in view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation.

- However, applying the CBDR principle to biodiversity conservation has not been straightforward as compared to climate negotiations, and there have been repeated disagreements between the global north and south.
- At CBD COP15, the parties are also trying to achieve a consensus on eliminating subsidies that are harmful to the environment, such as subsidies for fossil fuel production, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, by at least \$500 billion annually and using this money for biodiversity conservation.
- India does not agree on reducing the agriculture-related subsidy and redirecting the savings for biodiversity conservation, as there are many other national priorities.
- Biodiversity conservation requires ecosystems to be conserved and restored holistically. It is in this context that ecosystem approaches for conservation of biodiversity need to be adopted rather than going for nature-based solutions. GBF must recognise the responsibility of the developing countries towards poverty eradication and sustainable development.

COP15 MONTREAL: '30×30 ':

In News:

The ongoing 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, is pushing for a 30×30 Target to protect and conserve at least 30 per cent of land and ocean biodiversity by 2030 to avoid a crisis.

Analysis of Background:

About 30X30 target:

- The foundation of the GBF agreement is a pledge to protect 30% of the world's land and oceans by 2030, usually referred to as the 30X30 goal.
- The 30X30 target was first floated in 2019 in an article A Global Deal for Nature: Guiding principles, milestones, and targets published in Science Advances.
- This then became the global call of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People in 2020 and as of October 2022, more than 100 countries are part of it.
- Countries have to commit to protecting 30 per cent of the land and sea by 2030 under this goal.

Concerns over the target:

- It will oust around 300 million indigenous people from their native lands and forests in the name of conservation.
- As soon as an area is notified as Protected areas (PAs), indigenous and local communities will lose access to these areas.

- Even after declaring 15-16% of world areas as protected areas, wildlife loss has not been reduced.
- The Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which talks about 30×30, does not address indigenous rights and territories.
- Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)-

An OECM is defined by the CBD as:

- A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.
- Governments, relevant organizations, Indigenous peoples and local communities are invited to apply voluntary guidance on OECMs to identify, recognise and support OECMs, and report data on OECMs to the World Database on OECMs.

Concerns over OECM:

- OECMs will undermine India’s Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA).
- Under FRA, people from tribal and forest-dwelling communities do not have to show how well they protect the forests to claim rights over their ancestral lands.
- Under OECMs the indigenous communities have to show, through a very long and complicated process, that they are able to protect the biodiversity.

BAN IMPOSED BY COASTAL STATES ON PURSE SEINE FISHING NOT JUSTIFIED, CENTRE TELLS SC

In News:

The Union government has told the Supreme Court that a ban imposed by certain coastal States and Union Territories such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, Odisha, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands on purse seine fishing is not justified.

Analysis of Background:

- The Fisheries Department of the Union government has recommended the lifting of the ban on purse seine fishing based on a report submitted by an expert committee which has noted that this mode of fishing has not caused any serious resource depletion according to the available evidence.

- The committee also recommended that the purse seiners can be allowed to fish in territorial waters and the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which can be subjected to certain conditions.

About purse seine fishing:

- Purse seine fishing is a mode of fishing that involves the use of a wide net to draw in not only the targeted fish but also endangered species such as turtles.
- Purse seining is a non-selective fishing method.
- Purse seines (fishing employing a fishing net) are used in the open ocean to target dense schools of single-species pelagic (midwater) fish like tuna and mackerel.
- A vertical net 'curtain' is used to surround the school of fish, the bottom of which is then drawn together to enclose the fish.
- The main species fished with purse seine gear are southern bluefin tuna, Australian sardine, blue mackerel and jack mackerel.
- It is not only depriving traditional fishermen of catch but threatening the marine ecosystem as a whole in the region.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):

- The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defined the EEZ as a zone in the sea over which a sovereign nation has certain special rights with respect to the exploration and usage of marine resources, which includes the generation of energy from wind and water, and also oil and natural gas extraction.
- The EEZ is an area that is adjacent to and beyond the territorial sea.
- It can extend to a maximum of 200 nautical miles from the baseline. The baseline is normally measured is the low-water line along the coast as indicated on large-scale charts officially approved by the coastal state.
- The EEZ does not include the territorial sea and also does not include the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.
- The EEZ includes the contiguous zone.
- Within the EEZ, the country has rights over natural resources. The country has jurisdiction over some activities for the reasons of environmental protection, among others.
- It also has to respect the rights of other countries in the EEZ such as the freedom of navigation.
- The difference between territorial sea and the EEZ is that the former confers full sovereignty over the waters, whereas the latter is merely a "sovereign right" which refers to the coastal nation's rights below the surface of the sea. The surface waters are international waters.

Rights of the country in the EEZ

The coastal state has the rights to:

- Explore and exploit, conserve and manage the natural resources (living or non-living).
- Produce energy from wind, currents and water.
- Establish and use artificial islands, structures and installations.
- Conduct marine scientific research.
- Protect and preserve the marine environment.

WILD LIFE (PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL 2022

In News:

The Rajya Sabha passed the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2022, which has invited scrutiny on two major issues: the exemption made to allow the transfer of captive elephants, and the sweeping powers given to the Centre to declare species as vermin. Lok Sabha had cleared the Bill in August during the monsoon session.

Analysis of Background:

- In 1927, the Indian Forest Act listed the elephant as cattle.
- When WLPA was enacted in 1972, it identified the elephant, along with bullock, camel, donkey, horse and mule, as a “vehicle”. Given the highest legal protection in 1977, the elephant is the only animal in WLPA’s Schedule-I that can still be owned legally — by means of inheritance or gift.
- Since 2003, Section 3 of the WLPA prohibited trade in all captive wildlife and any (non-commercial) transfer across state boundaries without the permission of the respective chief wildlife warden. This made the live elephant trade go underground as traders switched to dressing up commercial deals as fake gift deeds to bypass the amendment.
- The WLPA amendment Bill 2021 proposed an exception to Section 43: “This section shall not apply to the transfer or transport of any live elephant by a person having a certificate of ownership, where such person has obtained prior permission from the State Government on fulfilment of such conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.”
- Along with conservation and animal welfare groups, the Parliamentary Standing Committee headed by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh objected to the blanket exemption, recommending to limit it only to temple elephants kept for religious purposes.
- Under pressure, the government modified the exemption but worded the amended clause vaguely to allow the “transfer or transport of a captive elephant for a

religious or any other purpose by a person having a valid certificate of ownership shall be subject to such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government” (emphasis added).

- Critics point out that the sweeping ambit of “any other purpose” will empower elephant traders, put wild populations at greater risk of capture, and defeat the very purpose of WLPA.

The vermin conflict

- The damage to the national economy due to crop depredation by wild animals has never been computed. But for lakhs of farmers around India’s many protected forests, it is the biggest challenge to livelihood (not to mention the occasional threat to life).
- Since 1972, the WLPA has identified a few species — fruit bats, common crows and rats — as vermin.
- Killing animals outside this list was allowed under two circumstances:
- Under Section 62 of WLPA, given sufficient reasons, any species other than those accorded the highest legal protection (such as tigers and elephants but not wild boars or nilgais) can be declared vermin at a certain place for a certain time.
- Under Section 11 of WLPA, the chief wildlife warden of a state can allow the killing of an animal, irrespective of its status in the Schedules, if it becomes “dangerous to human life”.
- The state governments took the decisions under Section 62 until 1991 when an amendment handed over the powers to the Centre.
- The purpose was apparently to restrict the possibility of eliminating a large number of animals at a species level as vermin. Under Section 11, the states could issue culling permits only locally and for a few animals.
- In recent years, however, the Centre has started using its powers under Section 62 to issue sweeping orders declaring species as vermin at even state levels, often without any credible scientific assessment.
- For example, nilgais were declared as vermin across 20 districts in Bihar for a year in 2015. The Centre cited “large-scale destruction of agriculture” as the ground for declaring monkeys (Rhesus macaque) vermin in Shimlamunicipality in 2019.
- The issue has since entered the realm of centre-state politics. Since last year, Kerala’s requests for declaring wild boars as vermin have been turned down repeatedly by the Environment ministry.
- That is why the House was divided on the issue, with members from Kerala highlighting the growing number of wild boar attacks in the state, and others seeking a more tempered and scientific approach in declaring a species as vermin.

BAMBOO SECTOR

In News:

The Union Agriculture Minister Shri Narendra Singh Tomar has approved the formation of an Advisory Group for streamlining the development of the Bamboo sector.

Analysis of Background:

- The Advisory group encompasses the representation of various stakeholders viz., academicians, researchers, innovators, progressive entrepreneurs, designers, farmer leaders, marketing specialists and policy makers.
- The inter-ministerial and public-private consultation is envisaged to dovetail the bamboo initiatives of the Ministries/ Departments and to help revamp the developmental architecture of the sector by incorporating synergy between all the sections related to the bamboo value chain.

Status of Bamboo Forests in India

- India is the world's second-largest cultivator of bamboo after China, with 136 species and 23 genera spread over 13.96 million hectares.
- Around 80 per cent of bamboo forests lie in Asia with India, China and Myanmar having 19.8 million hectares of bamboo.
- Bamboo forests have grown from 13,882 million culms (stems) in 2019 to 53,336 million culms in 2021 - Forest Survey report 2021.
- Despite all this, the country's share in the global bamboo trade and commerce is only 4 per cent.

Some Bamboo Initiatives

National Bamboo Mission

- About: With a view to harness the potential of bamboo crop, Department of Agriculture & Cooperation (DAC), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare is implementing a 100% Centrally Sponsored Scheme called Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) in which National Bamboo Mission (NBM) is being implemented as a sub scheme.
- National Bamboo Mission was launched in 2003. The restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) was launched during 2018-19 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- Aim: The Mission envisages promoting holistic growth of bamboo sector by adopting area-based, regionally differentiated strategy and to increase the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.

Project BOLD

- It is an initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission(KVIC).
- Aim: It was launched with an objective of preventing land degradation and developing green cover. To create sustainable income for the local tribal population and also contribute to environment and land protection.

Challenges in Bamboo Sector

- **Untapped Potential:** Bamboo has tremendous untapped potential for transforming India's rural economy. There is vast scope for expanding bamboo in areas outside forests because:
 - Its management is easier in these lands than in natural forests.
 - Due to close to user agencies, economic harvesting is possible.
- **Weak Farmer Industry Linkage:** Emphasis of NBM has, by and large, been on propagation and cultivation of bamboo, with limited efforts on processing, product development and value addition. This has caused weak linkages between farmers and the industry.
- **Land Degradation:** According to the State of India's Environment 2017, nearly 30 per cent of India's land is degraded. With its unique ability to stitch and repair damaged soils, bamboo is ideal for rehabilitating degraded soil.

WORLD SOIL DAY AND LAND DEGRADATION

In News:

December 5 is observed as the World Soil Day (WSD), to highlight the value of healthy soil and to promote the sustainable management of soil resources.

Analysis of Background:

The poor condition of soil leads to degradation, which is a pressing environmental issue all around the world. Soil degradation causes erosion, loss of organic matter and reduces soil fertility.

World Soil Day:

- An international day to celebrate soil was recommended by the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) in 2002. Since the first WSD in 2014, the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) people are connecting and working together to preserve soils with each passing year.

- World Soil Day enjoins individuals to consider sustainably managing soil resources. The main goal of the day is to increase public awareness of the significant environmental issues that soil degradation can lead to, such as erosion, the loss of organic matter, and a drop in soil fertility.
- The theme for World Soil Day 2022 is "Soils, where food begins".

What is land degradation/desertification?

- According to the UNCCD, land degradation is the “reduction or loss of biological or economic productivity... resulting from land uses or from a process or combination of processes, including ... human activities.”
- Land degradation is driven by both by changes in climate or human activities.
- When land degradation occurs in dryland areas, more specifically arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, it is referred to as desertification. Around 69 percent of India falls under drylands.

Status of land degradation in India

State of India’s Environment 2022 Report

- The “State of India’s Environment 2022”, a report released by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) stated that nearly 62% of land in Delhi was under degradation. Almost 30% of India’s geographical area is under degradation.
- Land degradation denoted deterioration or loss of soil productivity for the present and future. In India, agricultural land (46%) and forests (22%) are the two most common kinds of land getting degraded. It affects us all and leads to food insecurity through lower yields and climate change as degraded land releases soil carbon and nitrous oxide into the atmosphere.
- Delhi (25%) is among 14 states that have seen over 10% rise in the share of degraded land between 2003-05 and 2018-19. Among the states that have seen the most degradation, five are in the Northeast. Land in Mizoram (188%), Punjab (80%), Arunachal Pradesh (47%), Assam (46%), Tripura (37%) and Nagaland (29%) degraded the most between 2003-05 and 2018-19. Over 3 million hectares of additional land degraded in India during the same period.

Efforts being taken to restore soil

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

- Globally, the countries have, under UNCCD Convention, already decided to restore one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030. India, on its part, has been working to

restore 26 million hectares of the country's degraded land by 2030. It voluntarily pledged to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) by 2030.

- The LDN is a stage where the amount and quality of land resources remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems, factoring in degradation and restoration. Simply put, any country will not have net loss in terms of land degradation if it achieves LDN through restoration efforts.

ZBNF

- Restoring soil fertility by regenerating organic content and microorganism is one of the key components of the whole land restoration exercises. India's current pitch for fertilizers/pesticides-free 'zero budget natural farming' (ZBNF) is also part of this massive exercise.
- The ZBNF guides the farmers towards sustainable farming practices. It helps in not only retaining soil fertility but also ensuring low cost of production (zero cost) and thereby enhancing the farmers income.

National Mission for a Green India (GIM)

- National Mission for a Green India (GIM) is one of the eight Missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change. It aims at protecting, restoring and enhancing India's forest cover and responding to Climate Change.

Soil Health Card

- The country's 'soil health cards' (SHC) scheme is another attempt which, besides informing farmers of the status of soils, also provides a ground for multiple actions for restoring soil fertility.

Integrated Watershed Management

- Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) is implemented by Department of Land Resources of Ministry of Rural Development. The main objective of IWMP is to restore ecological balance by harnessing, conserving and developing degraded natural resources such as soil, vegetative cover and water.

National Afforestation Program

- Launched in 2000, the overall objective of the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) scheme is ecological restoration of degraded forests and to develop the forest resources with peoples' participation, with focus on improvement in livelihoods of the forest-fringe communities, especially the poor.

KAZIRANGA INDO-FRENCH PARTNERSHIP

In News:

Artificial highlands where animals can escape during floods; more than 200 anti-poaching camps; alternate livelihood training for local communities — these measures at the Kaziranga National Park in Assam will form the cornerstone of an Indo-French initiative announced earlier this year.

Analysis of Background:

- With French and Indian technical and financial support, the Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership will facilitate partnership activities for interested natural parks of the Indo-Pacific region.
- These activities include biodiversity conservation, wildlife management and engagement with local communities.
- The Kaziranga project is a part of a larger Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) for which the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) has committed funding of €80.2 million for a 10-year period, between 2014-2024.
- The project conceptualised the reforestation of 33,500 hectares of land and the training of 10,000 community members in alternate livelihoods by 2024. But it is the 457 sq km Kaziranga National Park that remains the heart of the programme.

About KNP:

- Kaziranga National park's is home to more than 2200 Indian one-horned rhinoceros, approximately 2/3rd of their total world population.
- It is located in the edge of the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspots— Golaghat and Nagaon district.
- In 1985, it was declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.
- It was declared as Tiger Reserve in 2006.
- It is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for the conservation of avifaunal species.

WORLD WILDLIFE CONSERVATION DAY

In News:

On December 4, the world dedicates a special day towards wildlife conservation. World Wildlife Conservation Day aims to raise awareness, conserve and provide protection for endangered species such as elephants, rhinos, and tigers.

Analysis of Background:

- Reportedly, a call to action was put out by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2012 to raise awareness and engage conservationists on Wildlife Conservation Day, December 4.
- The day came into being during an event "Wildlife Trafficking and Conservation: A Call to Action" held at the State Department on November 8, 2012.
- This global day is an opportunity for people to get closer to mother nature and protect other living beings from being destroyed.
- To the unversed, this day isn't a stand-alone occasion for wildlife. Apart from the fact that everyday care is the best for protecting wildlife resources, the United Nations General Assembly decided to proclaim March 3 as the Wildlife day. Months after the globe observes Wildlife day, yet another day mainly aimed at its conservation is marked on December 4

WORLD CHEETAH DAY

In News:

December 4 is marked as International Cheetah Day every year.

Analysis of Background:

- The day is dedicated to encouraging people worldwide to help this animal win the race against extinction.
- Cheetahs are carnivores and they usually chase down their prey and then bite its throat, killing it by cutting off its air supply (suffocation).
- American zoologist Dr Laurie Marker is credited with creating International Cheetah Day.
- Dr Marker founded the Cheetah Conservation Fund in 1991 and she designated December 4 as International Cheetah Day in 2010. Since that year, the world has been celebrating this day.
- Dr Marker chose December 4th as it was the birthday of a cheetah named Khayam who she raised from a cub at Wildlife Safari in Oregon. Khayam was trained for the first research project in re-wilding and inspired her first trip to Namibia in 1977.
- International Cheetah Day is also an opportunity for people to get closer to nature and protect other living beings from being harmed or endangered.
- The cheetah (a big and slender cat with long legs) is popularly known as the fastest animal on earth, it can reach a top speed of 70 mph in just three seconds.

- The animal weighs anywhere from 46 to 158 pounds and, unlike most other big cats, cheetahs hunt in the daytime.

GM CROPS

In News:

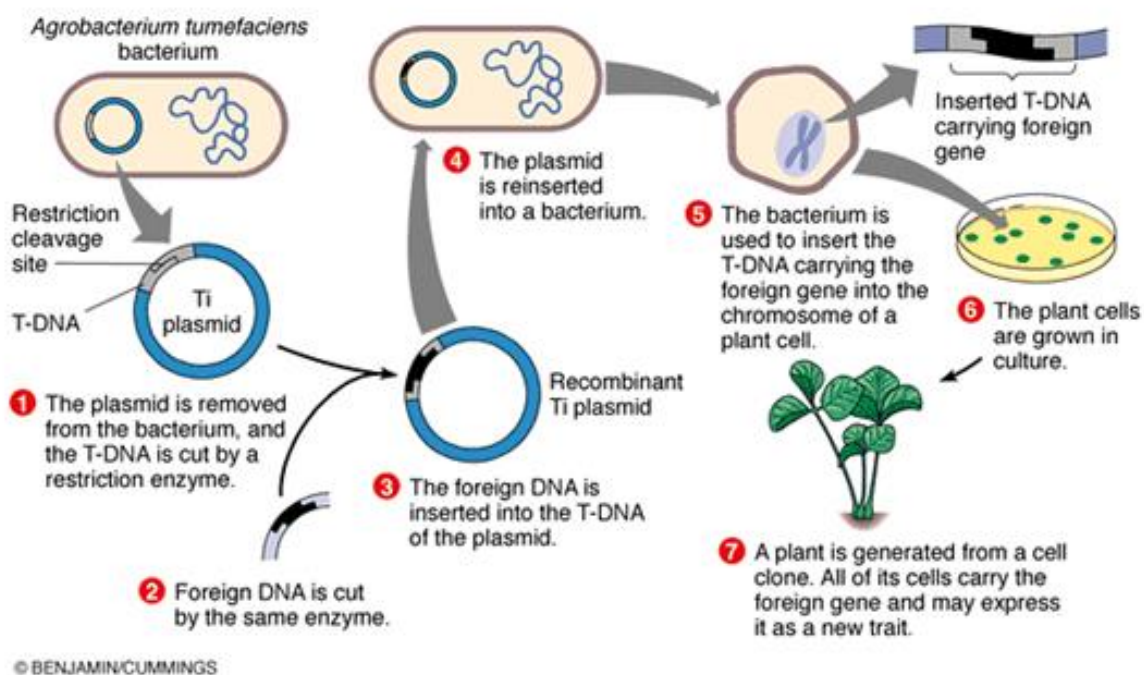
- The Supreme Court expressed concern about the plight of thousands of women agricultural labourers in rural areas, traditionally engaged in de-weeding.

Analysis of Background:

- In rural areas, women are experts in removing weeds. They are a part of the labour force in agriculture in India. It brings them employment.
- If the government permits the commercial cultivation of herbicide-tolerant crops such as GM mustard in India there will be a loss of employment.

What are GM crops?

- GM food involves the editing of genes of a crop in such a way that it incorporates beneficial traits from another crop or organism.
- This could mean changing the way the plant grows, or making it resistant to a particular disease.
- Food produced using the edited crop is called GM food. This is done using the tools of genetic engineering.



The debate around GM Crops

Merits

Reduced input burden

- Since genetically modified crops require minimal pesticides, fertilizers or insecticides the cost of input is greatly reduced.
- Disease resistant and Sustainability
- Through genetic modifications the genetically modified crops are made resistant to diseases. This enhances their sustainability and yield.

Environmental Protection

- According to an Oklahoma State University report, the increase of GM animals and crops often requires less time, tools and chemicals, and may help with reducing greenhouse gas emissions, soil erosion and environmental pollution.

Longer Shelf life

- Genetically modified foods have a longer shelf life. This enhances the ease of transportation and storage.

Affordability

- Due to reduced burden of inputs and longer shelf life hence reduced wastages, the prices of the output will be low.
- This increases the affordability.

Fortification

- According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, some GM foods have been engineered to become more nutritious in terms of vitamin or mineral content.
- This not only helps people get the nutrients they need, but also plays a significant role in fighting against malnutrition in third-world countries.
- Decreased Use of Pesticides
- It has been proven that genetically modified crops do not need pesticides to become stronger against various types of insects or pests that may destroy them.

Demerits

Gene Transfer

- A constant risk of genetically modified foods is that an organism's modified genes may escape into the wild.

- Experts warn that genes from commercial crops that are resistant to herbicides may cross into the wild weed population, thus creating super-weeds that have become impossible to kill.

Antibiotic resistance

- Genetically modified crops have inbuilt antibiotic properties due to their inbuilt mechanisms for disease control.
- This can result in superbugs which can disrupt the health care sector.

Carcinogen exposure risk

- There are researches which show that crops tolerant to commercial pesticides greatly increase the risk of cancer development in rats.
- Genetically modified crops can also pose serious threats to human health.

Lower Level of Biodiversity

- When we remove a certain pest that is harmful to crops, we could also be removing a food source for a certain species.
- In addition, genetically modified crops could prove toxic to some organisms, which can lead to their reduced numbers or even extinction.

Gene Spilling

- It is unclear what effects, if there are any, the genetic pollution resulting from inadequate sequestering of genetically modified crop populations would have on the wild varieties surrounding them.

Exploitation

- Some countries may use genetic engineering of foods as a very powerful weapon against their enemies.

Widening Gap of Corporate Sizes

- This disadvantage can possibly happen between food-producing giants and their smaller counterparts.
- Larger companies might have more political power and might be able to influence safety and health standards.

New Diseases

- As previously mentioned, genetically modified foods can create new diseases.

Economic Concerns

- Consumer advocates are worried that this will raise seed prices to very high levels that third-world countries and small farmers cannot afford them, thus widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

The Case of India

- India allows the import of GM soybean and canola oil.
- The only crops approved for cultivation are (bt) cotton.
- India had an effective ban on other GM seeds for a considerable time. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) earlier this year cleared a proposal for commercial cultivation of GM mustard, and it was also approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- In India, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the apex body that allows for commercial release of GM crops

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

In News:

The Supreme Court sought the government's response about evolving a "Project Great Indian Bustard" conservation programme like the Project Tiger to bring attention to the peril faced by the critically endangered bird.

Project Tiger is touted by the government as one of the most successful conservation programmes for a single species in the world.

Analysis of Background:

- The GIB — the State bird of Rajasthan — is considered India's most critically endangered bird and is protected under the Wildlife Protection Act.
- Its population of about 150 in Rajasthan accounts for 95% of its total world population.
- The captive breeding of GIBs was taken up in the DNP through a project executed by the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India in 2019. As many as 24 GIB chicks are being reared in DNP by a team supported by the International Fund for Houbara Conservation of United Arab Emirates.
- As Rajasthan shares the international border with Pakistan's Sindh and Punjab provinces, it is suspected that the GIBs might have flown across to the neighbouring country's desert amid fears that they could become easy prey for the poachers there.

Great Indian Bustard (GIB):

- GIB is one of the most critically threatened species in India, with less than 150 birds left in the wild.
- GIBs are one of the heaviest flying birds in India.
- Experts say only two districts in Rajasthan — Jaisalmer and Barmer — have a breeding GIB population in the wild.
- The bird can also be found in very small numbers in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

The GIB is among the heaviest birds that can fly

THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

GIB has been put in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature

DID YOU KNOW?
The Great Indian Bustard was proposed as a candidate for the National Bird of India and was under consideration.

The bird is hunted for its meat in Pakistan

PAKISTAN

It migrates from Rajasthan to Pakistan

THREATS TO THE BIRD

- Annual and perennial non-timber crops
- Renewable energy
- Transportation and power lines
- Human intrusions and disturbance
- Invasive and other problematic species, genes & diseases

2011
The year the species was enlisted in the critically endangered category

150
The approx population of the species in 2018

Height
3.3ft tall

Weight
18 kg

THE GIB IS RESTRICTED TO POCKETS IN

1. Andhra Pradesh
2. Gujarat
3. Karnataka
4. Maharashtra
5. Madhya Pradesh
6. Rajasthan

Steps taken by the Government for protection of Great Indian Bustards in the country:

- A site for establishment of a Conservation Breeding Centre for the Great Indian Bustard has been identified at Kota District, Rajasthan, under the project 'Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach'.
- A satellite conservation breeding facility with incubator, hatcher, chick rearing and housing for captive birds has been set up at Sam, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.
- The Great Indian Bustard is listed in Schedule-I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, thereby, according it highest degree of legal protection from hunting.
- Important habitats of Great Indian Bustards are designated as National Parks/Sanctuaries for their better protection.
- The species has been identified for conservation efforts under the component 'Species Recovery Programme' of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)-Development of Wildlife Habitat.
- The Ministry with financial support from National Authority for Compensatory Afforestation Funds has sanctioned an outlay of Rs. 33.85 crores for the duration of five years for the programme 'Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach' to build up captive population of Great Indian Bustard.
- Ministry has also constituted a Task Force for suggesting Eco- friendly measures to mitigate impacts of power transmission lines and other power transmission infrastructures on wildlife including the Great Indian Bustard.
- The Great Indian Bustard has been included in the Appendix I of Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) of the basis of proposal submitted by India. It was also the mascot of the prestigious 13th CMS Conference of Parties held in Gandhinagar giving wider publicity for the conservation of the species.

CLIMATE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIA'S COOLING SECTOR

In News:

According to World Bank report: 160-200mn Indians could be exposed to lethal heat waves annually.

Analysis of Background:

- From 2030, 160 million to 200 million people can be exposed to lethal heatwaves in India every year, and nearly 34 million Indians will face job losses due to heat stress-related productivity decline.

- By 2037, the demand for cooling is likely to be eight times more than the current level, the World Bank has said in a report.
- In this scenario, it is imperative for India to deploy alternative and innovative energy efficient technologies for keeping spaces cool.
- According to the report, “Climate investment opportunities in India’s cooling sector”, this could open an investment opportunity of \$1.6 trillion by 2040, besides reducing greenhouse gas emissions significantly and creating 3.7 million jobs.
- With the demand for cooling shooting up, there will be a demand for a new air-conditioner every 15 seconds, the report said, leading to an expected rise of 435% in annual greenhouse gas emissions over the next two decades.

Solutions proposed:

- Thus, there is a need to shift to a more energy-efficient pathway which could lead to a reduction in expected CO2 levels.
- The report proposes a road map to support New Delhi’s India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP), 2019, through new investments in three major sectors: building construction, cold chains and refrigerants.
- Adopting climate-responsive cooling techniques as a norm in both private and government-funded constructions can ensure that those at the bottom of the economic ladder are not disproportionately affected by rising temperatures.
- The report suggests that India’s affordable housing programme for the poor, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), can adopt such changes on scale.
- It proposed enacting a policy for “district cooling”, which could lead to the consumption of 20-30% less power than the most efficient conventional cooling solutions.
- District cooling technologies generate chilled water in a central plant which is then distributed to buildings via underground insulated pipes.
- This brings down the cost for providing cooling to individual buildings.
- Apart from this, guidelines for implementation of local and city-wide urban cooling measures such as cool-roofs should also be considered. India’s cooling strategy can help save lives and livelihoods and reduce carbon emissions.

WATER WORLDS

In News:

Two exoplanets that may be submerged in water have been discovered by astronomers at the University of Montreal.

Analysis of Background:

- NASA observed exoplanets Kepler-138c and Kepler-138d with NASA's Hubble and the retired Spitzer space telescopes and discovered that the planets could be composed largely of water.
- The temperature in Kepler-138d's atmosphere is likely above the boiling point of water, and there is a dense atmosphere made of steam on this planet. Only, under that steam atmosphere there could potentially be liquid water at high pressure, or even water in another phase that occurs at high pressures, called a supercritical fluid.
- Further, the researchers also discovered a fourth planet in the Kepler planetary system: Kepler-138 e. The new planet takes 38 days to complete an orbit. It is in the habitable zone, meaning it is located in an orbit that receives just the right amount of heat from its star to allow water to exist in a liquid form.

VAINU BAPPU OBSERVATORY

In News:

The several stellar discoveries of the 40-inch telescope at the Vainu Bappu Observatory were highlighted at the celebration of its 50 years of operation.

Analysis of Background:

Vainu Bappu Observatory :

- The Vainu Bappu Observatory is an astronomical observatory owned and operated by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.
- It is located at Kavalur in the Javadi Hills, near Vaniyambadi in Tirupathur district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
- Starting from the Cassegrain photometer and Echelle spectrograph in 1976, the new grating spectrograph in 1978, the fast-chopping polarimeter in 1988 with its replacement in 2016, and the latest NIR photometer in 2021, the observatory has constantly been upgrading its facilities.
- The telescope, whose mirror has a diameter of 40 inches (or 102 cm), was installed in 1972 and started producing important astronomical discoveries soon after.

- The expertise gained by the engineers also enabled IIA to build the fully indigenous 90-inch (2.34 metre) telescope in the 1980s.
- The ongoing programmes include observations of stars, star clusters, novae, supernovae, blazars, galaxies, optical imaging of gamma-rayburst fields, stellar populations, solar system objects and many others.

Role in Astronomy

- The telescope set up by Professor Vainu Bappu has played a significant role in astronomy with major discoveries like the presence of rings around the planet Uranus, a new satellite of Uranus, the presence of an atmosphere around Ganymede which is a satellite of Jupiter.
- Other important research conducted with this telescope includes the discovery and study of many 'Be stars', Lithium depletion in giant stars, optical variability in Blazars, the dynamics of the famous supernova SN 1987A and so on.

ORION SPACECRAFT

In News:

Recently, NASA's Orion capsule splashed down back to Earth on the Pacific Ocean. The Orion capsule was carrying a simulated crew of three mannequins wired with sensors.

Analysis of Background:

About Orion:

- Orion is a partially reusable crewed spacecraft used in NASA's Artemis program. The spacecraft consists of a Crew Module (CM) space capsule designed by Lockheed Martin and the European Service Module (ESM) manufactured by Airbus Defence and Space.
- Capable of supporting a crew of six beyond low Earth orbit, Orion can last up to 21 days undocked and up to six months docked. It is equipped with solar panels, an automated docking system, and glass cockpit
- Artemis program
- The Artemis program that began in 2017 is a United States-led international human spaceflight program.
- Its primary goal is to take humans to the Moon, specifically the lunar south pole, by 2025.

More on details:

- For the Artemis program, NASA's new rocket called the Space Launch System (SLS) will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft away from Earth to the lunar orbit.
- Once astronauts dock Orion at the Gateway — which is a small spaceship in orbit around the moon — the astronauts will be able to live and work around the Moon, and from the spaceship, astronauts will take expeditions to the surface of the Moon.
- The astronauts going for the Artemis program will wear newly designed spacesuits, called Exploration Extravehicular Mobility Unit, or xEMU. These spacesuits feature advanced mobility and communications and interchangeable parts that can be configured for spacewalks in microgravity or on a planetary surface.

Cubesats:

- Artemis 1 is carrying several payloads in the form of small satellites called CubeSats, each of which is equipped with instruments meant for specific investigations and experiments.
- The focus of these investigations is clearly to explore long-term stays of human beings in space, and on the Moon.
- One CubeSat will search for water in all its forms, another will map the availability of hydrogen that can be utilised as a source of energy. Then there are biology experiments, investigating the behaviour of small organisms like fungi and algae in outer space, and the effect of radiation, especially the reaction on their genes.

Orion spacecraft

- The Orion spacecraft, which is specifically designed to carry astronauts into deep space on future missions, will have three dummy 'passengers' — mannequins made of material that mimic human bones, skin, and soft tissue.
- These would be equipped with a host of sensors to record the various impacts of deep space atmosphere on the human body.

Space Launch System, or SLS

- The rocket that is being used for the Artemis missions, called Space Launch System, or SLS, is the most powerful ever built, more powerful than the Saturn V rockets that had taken the Apollo missions to the Moon.
- The giant, 98-metre-tall rocket, weighing 2,500 tonnes, can help the Orion spacecraft achieve speeds of over 36,000 km per hour, and take it directly to the Moon, which is 1,000 times farther than the International Space Station that sees a regular traffic of astronauts.

Organizations involved

- The Artemis program is carried out predominantly by NASA and U.S. commercial spaceflight contractors, in partnership with the European Space Agency and the space agencies of several other nations.
- Other countries have been invited to join the program through signing the governing Artemis Accords, which remain open for signature since October 2020.

Artemis Accords

- This accord ensures that space exploration is conducted in a safe, sustainable and transparent manner and in full compliance with international law.
- As more countries establish a presence in outer space, via research stations, satellites, or even rocket launches, these accords provide a set of principles to create a safe and transparent environment that inspires exploration, science, and commercial activities.
- The other signatories to the accords are the U.S., Australia, Britain, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and Ukraine. Brazil also said it plans to sign.

ARTEMIS ACCORD

In News:

US-Africa Leadership Summit: Nigeria & Rwanda become first African signatories of Artemis Accords on space collaboration

Analysis of Background:

Artemis Accord on space collaboration:

- Announced by NASA and the US Department of State in 2020.
- They are a set of principles to guide the next phase in space exploration and promote the beneficial use of space for all of humanity.
- This accord ensures that space exploration is conducted in a safe, sustainable and transparent manner and in full compliance with international law.
- A total of 23 nations have signed on to the Artemis Accords.
- Nigeria and Rwanda are the first from Africa to sign the accord.
- The other signatories to the accords are the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and Ukraine. Brazil is planning to sign the accord.
- India has not signed the Artemis accord yet.

US-Africa Leadership Summit:

- Held on Dec 13, in Washington D.C., USA.
- To advance space exploration and address issues such as climate change and the global food crisis.
- Commercial space cooperation engaging the private sector was also discussed between US and Africa.
- The World Bank-supported drought risk protection programme known as 'DRIVE' is in collaboration with the governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

OCEANSAT-3

In News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi shares satellite images of Gujarat sent by the newly launched Oceansat-3 from space.

Analysis of Background:

Oceansat:

- Oceansat is a series of earth observation satellites built, launched, and operated by Indian Space Research Organisation, and dedicated to oceanography and atmospheric studies.
- Oceansat satellites facilitate a range of applications including documenting chlorophyll concentration, phytoplankton blooms, atmospheric aerosols and particulate matter as well as marine weather forecast to predict cyclones.

Satellites:

Oceansat-1:

- OceanSat-1 was the first Indian satellite built specifically for oceanographic applications. The satellite carried an Ocean Colour Monitor (OCM) and a multi-frequency scanning microwave radiometer. Oceansat-1 was launched on board a PSLV rocket on 26 May 1999.
- It was capable of detecting eight spectrums ranging from 400 nm to 885 nm, all in the visible or near infrared spectrums. The second, the Multi-frequency Scanning Microwave Radiometer, collects data by measuring microwave radiation passing through the atmosphere over the ocean. This offers information including sea surface temperature, wind speed, cloud water content, and water vapour content.
- Although initially launched with a lifespan of 5 years, Oceansat-1 completed its mission on August 8, 2010, after serving for 11 years and 2 months.

Oceansat-2:

- Oceansat-2 is designed to provide service continuity for operational users of the Ocean Colour Monitor (OCM) instrument on Oceansat-1 and enhance the potential of applications in other areas.
- A swath width of 1420 km is provided. An along-track instrument tilt capability of $\pm 20^\circ$ is provided to avoid sun glint.
- Satellite was launched aboard a PSLV-CA on 23 September 2009.
- SCATSAT-1 was launched in 2016 after SCAT on Oceansat-2 became dysfunctional after its life span of four-and-a-half years. SCATSAT carries a Ku-band scatterometer similar to the one on Oceansat-2.

Oceansat-3:

- Oceansat-3 was launched on 26 November 2022, Oceansat-3 will provide continuity to operators of OCM and enhanced ability in other applications by way of simultaneous Sea Surface Temperature (SST) measurements.
- Earth Observation Satellite (EOS-06) or Oceansat 3.0 is envisaged to observe ocean color data, sea surface temperature and wind vector data to use in Oceanography, climatic and meteorological applications.
- The satellite also supports value-added products such as potential fishing zone using chlorophyll, SST and wind speed and land-based geophysical parameters.

BT BRINJAL AND BIOPIRACY

In News:

The Supreme Court, has ordered the Karnataka High Court to continue hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) on Bt Brinjal biopiracy which it had sent to the National Green Tribunal in 2013.

Analysis of Background:

Biopiracy

- Biopiracy happens when researchers or research organisations take biological resources without official sanction, largely from less affluent countries or marginalised people. When researchers use traditional knowledge without permission, or exploit the cultures they're drawing from – it's called biopiracy.
- The term biopiracy was coined in the early 1990s by Pat Mooney, founder of ETC Group– an organization which works to protect the world's most vulnerable people from socioeconomic and environmental impacts of new technologies – to describe the

theft or misappropriation of genetic resources and traditional knowledge through the intellectual property system.

- Some examples of Biopiracy
 - Patenting of Neem
 - Biopiracy of Basmati
 - Syngenta's Attempt at Biopiracy of India's rice diversity

Bt Brinjal:

- The genetically modified brinjalis a suite of transgenic brinjals (also known as an eggplant or aubergine) created by inserting a crystal protein gene (Cry1Ac) from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* into the genome of various brinjal cultivars.
- The insertion of the gene, along with other genetic elements such as promoters, terminators and an antibiotic resistance marker gene into the brinjal plant is accomplished using *Agrobacterium*-mediated genetic transformation.
- The Bt brinjal has been developed to give resistance against lepidopteron insects, in particular the Brinjal Fruit and Shoot Borer (*Leucinodes orbonalis*)(FSB) by forming pores in the digestive system.

SECURITY

INS MORMUGAO

In News:

Indian Naval Ship (INS) Mormugao (D67), second warship of the P15B class of stealth guided-missile destroyers, was commissioned in the august presence of Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai

Analysis of Background:

- INS Mormugao is one of the world's most technologically-advanced missile carriers.
- With over 75% indigenous content, it is a testimony to India's excellence in design and development of warships and a shining example of our growing indigenous defence production capabilities. The warship will meet the present and future needs of our country as well as of our friendly countries across the globe
- The commissioning of INS Mormugao is indicative of the large strides India has taken in warship design and building capability over the last decade. He added that the warship is a true illustration of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India' initiative and it reinforces the Navy's commitment to supporting India's transformation into a global

ship-building hub. The warship, with her multi-dimensional combat capability, will form part of the Western Fleet - the sword arm of the Indian Navy.

- Measuring 163m in length and 17m in breadth with a displacement of 7,400 tonnes, INS Mormugao is packed with sophisticated state-of-the-art weapons and sensors such as Surface-to-Surface Missile and Surface-to-Air Missiles.
- The ship is fitted with a modern Surveillance Radar which provides target data to the gunnery weapon systems. Its Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities are provided by the indigenously-developed Rocket Launchers, Torpedo Launchers and the ASW helicopters.
- Named after the historic port city of Goa on the west coast, the ship is equipped to fight under Nuclear, Biological and Chemical warfare conditions.
- It is propelled by four powerful Gas Turbines, in a Combined Gas and Gas configuration, capable of achieving speeds in excess of 30 knots.

INS VAGIR

In News:

The fifth submarine of the Project – 75, Kalvari Class submarines, Yard 11879 was delivered to the Indian Navy on December 20, 2022.

Analysis of Background:

- Vagir was launched into water on November 12, 2020 and commenced sea trials on February 1, 2022.
- It is having "superior stealth features" like advanced acoustic absorption techniques.
- The sixth and last of the Scorpène-class submarines, Vagsheer, was launched into water in April 2022 and is expected to be delivered to the Navy by end 2023.
- Six Scorpene submarines are being built under Project-75 by MDL under technology transfer from Naval Group of France under a \$3.75 billion deal signed in October 2005.
- The project is about four years behind schedule.
- The first submarine INS Kalvari was commissioned in December 2017, second submarine INS Khanderi in September 2019, third one INS Karanj in March 2021 and the fourth one INS Vela joined service in November 2021.

AGNI WARRIOR

In News:

The 12th Edition of Exercise Agni Warrior, a bilateral exercise between the Singapore & Indian Army, which had commenced on 13 November 2022 concluded at Field Firing Ranges, Devlali (Maharashtra) on 30 November 2022.

Analysis of Background:

- Exercise Agni Warrior, involved showcasing joint firepower planning, execution and use of New Generation Equipment by the Artillery arm of both armies.
- Exercise also included participation by both sides in a joint computer war-game as part of joint planning process.
- Both sides utilised niche technology and Artillery Observation Simulators as part of joint training phase.
- Expert academic discussions were conducted on modern trends in Artillery and refinement of Artillery planning process
- Indigenously manufactured Artillery guns and howitzers also participated during the final phase of the exercise.
- The exercise achieved its aim of enhancing mutual understanding of drills & procedures and improving interoperability between the two armies.

BORDER SECURITY FORCE (BSF)

In News:

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has greeted the BSF personnel and their families on the occasion of BSF's Raising Day. PM also acknowledged the outstanding track record of BSF force while protecting India and serving our nation with utmost diligence.

Analysis of Background:

- The squad will participate for the first time in the BSF Raising Day Parade on 1ST December. This Squad will be the first of its kind in the world.
- The BSF is a central armed police force (CAPF) that functions under the Union government.
- It was raised in 1965 in the aftermath of the India-Pakistan war.
- The BSF Act was passed by Parliament in 1968 and the rules governing the Act were framed in 1969.
- The MHA issues all orders pertaining to the BSF and other CAPFs such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Indo Tibetan Border Police

(ITBP), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), National Security Guard (NSG) and Assam Rifles.

- India is a Union of States and under One Border One Force policy, the BSF is deployed along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders.
- It is also deployed in areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and is routinely deployed for election and other law and order duties on the request of State governments.

About Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs):

- It refers to uniform nomenclature of seven central armed police organisations of the India under the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
 - Border Security Force (BSF)
 - Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)
 - Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)
 - Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)
 - Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)
 - National Security Guard (NSG) and
 - Special Protection Group (SPG)
- Their role is to defend the national interest mainly against the internal threats.
- BSF, ITBP, SSB primary role is border guarding.
 - The primary role of the Border Security Force is to guard the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh borders, it is deployed both on the international border and the LOC.
 - The Indo-Tibetan Border Police is deployed for guarding duties on the Indo-China border from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Diphu Pass in Arunachal Pradesh.
 - The objective of the Sashastra Seema Bal is to guard the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders.
- CISF guarding Security of sensitive establishments.
- CRPF and NSG: Assisting Police to tackle Law & Order, Counter-Terrorist Operations, Counter Naxal Operations.
- All CAPFs are involved in assisting Police in Law & Order situations and also Army in Counter-Terrorist Operations. BSF & CRPF have assisted the army during external aggression in the past.

AKASH SYSTEM

In News:

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) handed over Authority Holding Sealed Particulars (AHSP) of Akash Weapon System (Indian Army Version) to Missile Systems Quality Assurance Agency (MSQAA) in Hyderabad on December 03, 2022. Details:

Analysis of Background:

About Akash missile:

- Akash has a range of 25 km and can simultaneously engage multiple targets in all weather conditions.
- It has a large operational envelope from a low altitude of 30 metres to a maximum of up to 20 km.
- It was inducted in 2014 in the Air Force and in 2015 in the Indian Army.
- Akash is the country's important missile with over 96% indigenization.
- Akash is a medium-range mobile surface-to-air missile defense system developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and produced by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) for Missile Systems, Bharat Electronics (BEL), Tata Power Strategic Engineering Division and Larsen & Toubro for other radars, control centers, launcher systems in India.
- Akash has a range of 25 km and can simultaneously engage multiple targets in all weather conditions.
- It has a large operational envelope from a low altitude of 30 metres to a maximum of up to 20 km. It was inducted in 2014 in the Air Force and in 2015 in the Indian Army.
- It is propelled by an Integrated Ramjet Rocket Engine. The use of a ramjet propulsion system enables sustained speeds without deceleration throughout its flight.
- The Missile has command guidance in its entire flight.

YUAN WANG 5

In News:

The Chinese research and survey vessel Yuan Wang 5 has re-entered the Indian Ocean in what coincides with a planned Indian long-range missile test on December 15 or 16. In a similar incident last month, another vessel, Yuan Wang 6, entered the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) coinciding with a planned Indian missile launch, but the launch was then deferred.

Analysis of Background:

- India had issued a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) for a no-fly zone over the Bay of Bengal for a possible missile launch with a window between December 15 and 16, for a maximum distance of 5,400 km.
- Given the range, it is likely to be the test of the Agni-5 intermediate range ballistic missile.
- While research activities are allowed on international waters as per international regulations, the data generated had a dual nature, including military, and on many occasions, the motive of the Chinese vessels seemed doubtful.
- In August, the docking of Yuan Wang 5 at Hambantota in Sri Lanka had created a major diplomatic situation between India and Sri Lanka.
- Navy chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar said that there were a lot of Chinese ships which operated in the region. He added that there were four to six Navy ships, research vessels and fishing vessels apart from 60-odd ships of extra-regional forces, and as a resident power, the Indian Navy kept track and ensured that “they do not undertake any inimical activities”.
- The Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean began in 2008 under the garb of anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and have since maintained continuous presence in the region, even deploying nuclear attack submarines (SSN) on occasions.
- China had since set up a military base in Djibouti and developed several dual-use ports in the IOR in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan and other countries.

MISCELLANEOUS

HEALTH

E-SANJEEVANI

In News:

Government-free telemedicine service, eSanjeevani has crossed another milestone by clocking eight crore teleconsultations.

Analysis of Background:

About e-Sanjeevani OPD:

- The e-Sanjeevani OPD is a flagship telemedicine platform of the Government, developed by the Centre for Development of Advance Computing (C-DAC), Mohali under the aegis of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- It provides free consultations to Indian citizens and is functioning extremely well.


- However, due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, the demand for doctors is up while the supply has reduced as doctors are being pulled out for COVID ward duties.
- This is where the defence veterans are stepping in to help.

TOI INFOGRAPHICS


e-sanjeevani

How Telemedicine Works

From Google Play store, download the app 'esanjeevaniopd.in' on your android device, and follow these steps



STEP 1
Registration and token generation




- Verify mobile number using OTP
- Fill patient registration form
- Request for a token
- Upload health records, if any
- Receive patient ID and token on SMS

STEP 2
Login


- Wait for SMS to login
- Login with patient ID

STEP 3
Waiting room



- Enter the virtual waiting room
- A 'call now' button will get activated in a while
- Start a video call

STEP 4
Consultation



- Doctor will show up
- Consult the doctor
- Get instant e-prescription

Illustrations: freepik.com

Infographic: Ankur Sharma | Text: Shimona Kanwar

THE TIMES OF INDIA CHANDIGARH

BF.7

In News:

At least four cases of the Omicron sub-variant BF.7, the Covid strain driving China's current surge of cases, have been detected in India so far

Analysis of Background:

What do we know about BF.7?

- When viruses mutate, they create lineages and sub-lineages — like the main trunk of the SARS-CoV-2 tree sprouting branches and sub-branches. The BF.7 is the same as BA.5.2.1.7, which is a sub-lineage of the Omicron sub-lineage BA.5.
- The BF.7 sub-variant has a 4.4-fold higher neutralisation resistance than the original D614G variant — meaning that in a lab setting, antibodies from a vaccinated or infected individual were less likely to destroy BF.7 than the original Wuhan virus that spread worldwide in 2020.

Implications

- The mutations in the spike protein have slowed down, there hasn't been a massive change in around a year. This is why we haven't seen any new variant emerge, just sub-lineages.
- But SARS-CoV-2 is now a human virus and it is here to stay. There could be an increase in the number of Covid-19 cases in the winters, when we usually see an increase in all respiratory infections.”

REPORT ON CERVICAL CANCER

In News:

More than 6,00,000 new cases of cervical cancer and more than 3,40,000 deaths from the disease were reported around the world in 2020, according to The Lancet Global Health journal.

Analysis of Background:

What Is Cervical Cancer?

- Cervical cancer is cancer that starts in the cells of the cervix. The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus (womb).

The Recent Lancet Study

- The Lancet Study used the International Agency for Research on Cancer's (IARC) Global Cancer Observatory (GLOBOCAN) 2020 database to estimate the burden of cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates in 185 countries.

Findings of the Study

- Though the incidence of cervical cancer has decreased in many parts of the world — notably in Latin America, Asia, Western Europe, and North America — over the past three decades, the burden remains high in many low- and middle-income countries.
- In 2020, overall incidence was 13 per 1,00,000 women; mortality was 7 per 1,00,000 women. As many as 172 out of the 185 countries saw more than the 4 cases per 1,00,000 women per year threshold for elimination set by the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- The study has detected encouraging decreases in some high-income countries such as Sweden, Australia, and the UK following successful implementation of HPV vaccination programmes and screening, but globally the burden remains high.
- The study found major declines in cases in Latin American countries including Brazil, Colombia, and Costa Rica; Asian nations like India, Thailand, and South Korea; and Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic in Eastern Europe.
- However, there were increases in cases over the past decade in Latvia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria, in parts of East Africa, as well as in The Netherlands and Italy.
- Reasons for the recent increases might include increased prevalence of HPV among the younger generations of women and lack of effective screening programmes.

Prevention

- Cervical cancer can often be prevented by having regular screenings with Pap tests and human papillomavirus (HPV) tests to find any precancers and treat them.
- The development of effective vaccination against the human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes cervical cancer, and screening programmes have made cervical cancer a largely preventable disease.

HPV Vaccine

- The HPV vaccine protects against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers.
- HPV vaccination is recommended for pre-teens aged 11 to 12 years, but can be given starting at age 9.

- HPV vaccine also is recommended for everyone through age 26 years, if they are not vaccinated already.

WHO Target

- In 2020, the WHO announced a target to accelerate the elimination of the disease as a public health problem, aiming to reduce incidence to less than 4 cases per 1,00,000 women per year in every country by 2030. This study tracks the progress on cervical cancer rates and identifies the countries and regions where scaling-up efforts are required to reach WHO targets.

ALZHEIMER

In News:

An experimental drug is raising hope for the treatment of Alzheimer's. The drug, called lecanemab, slows down Alzheimer's a bit.

Analysis of Background:

What is lecanemab and how does it work?

Lecanemab belongs to a class of drugs called monoclonal antibodies. These antibody-mediated drugs target beta amyloid, the protein deposition that is seen in patients with Alzheimer's disease, and disrupts cells function.

Lecanemab, "might well pave the way for much needed treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

What is Alzheimer's?

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that affects memory, thinking and behaviour. Symptoms eventually grow severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

Why is the burden of Alzheimer's increasing?

- The increasing lifespan and very high burden of diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity are expected to "dramatically" increase the prevalence of dementia in India.
- Dementia is an umbrella term for a group of disorders that lead to impaired memory, decision-making and social skills – Alzheimer's is one of the most common types of dementia.
- The disease usually occurs in people over the age of 65 years with a very small proportion getting early-onset.

- The Dementia in India report 2020 estimates that there are 5.3 million people over the age of 60 years living with dementia, with the prevalence projected to increase to 14 million by 2050.

How to keep Alzheimer's at bay?

- Just like physical exercise, exercising the brain every day is also important.
- "Learning new languages, developing hobbies like music, and solving puzzles like Sudoku keep the brain active and cognitively fit. It is also important for the elderly to go out, make new friends and socialise.
- The disease can also be kept at bay by mitigating risk factors such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity through a good diet, exercise, enough sleep, and doing away with smoking.

Incidence of Alzheimer's after the pandemic:

- The All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) estimates a 15 per cent increase in the number of people getting Alzheimer's, adding that such studies are not available from India.
- The Coronavirus pandemic has unmasked several neurodegenerative diseases and Alzheimer's is one of them. Post-Corona, a number of people have also been facing memory impairment.

.GI TAG's:

GI TAG – 5 AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS OF KERALA

In News:

Geographical Indication (GI) Tag awarded to 5 agricultural products of Kerala.

- Attappady Attukombu Avara (beans)
- Attappady Thuvvara (red gram)
- Onattukara Ellu (sesame)
- Kanthalloor-Vattavada Veluthulli (garlic)
- Kodungalloor Pottuvellari (snap melon)

With the latest five GIs, 17 agricultural products of Kerala have received GI status.

Analysis of Background:

- Attappady Attukombu Avara (beans)
 - It is curved like a goat's horn.
 - Its higher anthocyanin content compared to other dolichos beans imparts violet colour in the stem and fruits.
 - It is helpful against cardiovascular diseases along with its anti-diabetic properties.
 - Calcium, protein, and fibre content are also high in them.
 - The higher phenolic content imparts resistance against pests and diseases, making the crop suitable for organic cultivation.
- Attappady Thuvara (red gram)
 - Compared to other red grams, its seeds are bigger and have higher seed weights.
 - This is rich in protein, carbohydrates, fibre, calcium and magnesium.
- Onattukara Ellu (sesame)
 - Its oil is famous for its unique health benefits.
 - The relatively higher antioxidant content helps in fighting the free radicals, which destroy the body cells.
 - The high content of unsaturated fat makes it beneficial for heart patients.
- Kanthalloor-Vattavada Veluthulli (garlic)
 - Compared to garlic produced in other areas, it contains a higher amount of sulphides, flavonoids, and proteins.
 - It is rich in allicin, which is effective against microbial infections, blood sugar, cancer, cholesterol, heart diseases, and damage to blood vessels.
 - It is also rich in essential oil.
- Kodungalloor Pottuvellari (snap melon)
 - It is consumed as juice and in other forms.
 - It contains a high amount of Vitamin C.
 - Calcium, magnesium, fibre and fat content are also high in it

About Geographical Indications (GI):

- Geographical Indications (GIs) products include agricultural, natural, manufactured goods, foodstuffs and handicrafts.
- GIs are the products that are originated or manufactured in a specific territory, region, or locality.
- There are currently 432 GIs registered products in India.
- To function as a GI, a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place. EX-Darjeeling tea.

- India, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, of 1999 which came into force with effect in September 2003.
- In 2004, Darjeeling Tea was the first Indian product to get the geographical indication tag.
- Geographical Indication tags in India are valid for 10 years following which they can be renewed.
- The Union Minister of Commerce and Industry launched the logo and tagline for the Geographical Indications (GI) of India.

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS (GI) – BEYPORE URU

In News:

The District Tourism Promotion Council, Kozhikode, Kerala has applied for a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for the famous Beypore Uru (boat).

Analysis of Background:

About Beypore Uru:

- It is a wooden ship/sailing boat handcrafted by skilled artisans and carpenters in Beypore, Kerala.
- The Beypore Uru is a symbol of Kerala's trade relations and friendship with the Gulf countries.
- They are purely made of premium wood, without using any modern techniques. It takes between 1-4 years to build each Uru and the entire process is done manually.
- The Beypore region has been a maritime hub for traders from across the world since the 1st Century C.E. and the iconic Uru ships have been in high demand for around 2000 years.
- Several communities are traditionally associated with Uru-making. The prominent people among them are Odayis. Their family name comes from Odam (a type of small ship previously used in interactions/trade between the Malabar Coast and Lakshadweep).
- The Khalasis are another prominent class associated with Uru-making after the Odayis. They are also referred to as Mappila Khalasis as the majority of them are Mappila Muslims.

- ⇒ Recently, 9 new items; Gamosa of Assam, Tandur Redgram of Telangana, RaktseyKarpoo Apricot of Ladakh, Alibag White Onion of Maharashtra etc. have been given the GI Tags. With this, the total number of GI Tags in India comes to 432.
- ⇒ The top 5 states holding the maximum number of GIs are Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala.



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- There are currently 432 GIs registered products in India.
- To function as a GI, a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place. EX-Darjeeling tea.
- India, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, of 1999 which came into force with effect in September 2003.
- In 2004, Darjeeling Tea was the first Indian product to get the geographical indication tag.
- Geographical Indication tags in India are valid for 10 years following which they can be renewed.
- The Union Minister of Commerce and Industry launched the logo and tagline for the Geographical Indications (GI) of India.

Our Initiative For Current Affair Coverage:

DAILY NEWS HEADING (DNH): Highlights Important topics from *The Hindu Newspaper*.

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS (DNA): - Detailed Analysis of current affair from *The Hindu Newspaper and Pib*.

MONTHLY COMPILATION MAGAZINE – *Compilation of Daily News Analysis* for Revision.



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