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**You Are
Next..**

Union Budget	5	Pench Tiger Reserve: Beaconsing a Respite in Darkness as India's First Dark Sky Park.....	29
2024-25	5	Assam Government's Initiative- Gunotsav 2024: A Panoramic Guide	29
A Comprehensive Analysis of Interim Budget 2024- 25 Unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman	5		
International Current Affairs	6	Science and Technology	30
Restructuring in China's Military Leadership: Recent Developments and Implications.....	6	Elon Musk's Neuralink: Instrumental Breakthrough in Brain-Computer Interface.....	30
Russia Assumes the 2024 BRICS Chairmanship: A Commitment to Strengthening Multilateralism.....	7	Stepping into Uncharted Aerospace: NewSpace India- SpaceX Collaboration	31
Growth and Diversification in BRICS: A New Chapter In Global Dynamics.....	8	Japan Charging Ahead in Lunar Exploration: An In-depth Look at SLIM Mission	32
Pakistan to Receive Last Tranche of \$3 billion Financial Aid from IMF.....	9	Unveiling BharatGPT: Bolstering AI Conversations across India.....	33
The Global March towards the Elimination of Trans Fatty Acids.....	10	Launch of 'Samavesh' for Enhanced Research Collaboration: A Revolutionary Initiative by I- STEM.....	34
SLIM: Japan's Remarkable Leap into Lunar Exploration.....	10	Business	35
Democratic Republic of Congo's Recent Elections: Integrity, Protests and Legacy.....	11	Simmtech's Strategic Investment Fortifies Indian Semiconductor Industry.....	35
France Paves the Way for a Digital Transformation: Fully Digital Schengen Visas for the 2024 Olympic Games.....	12	UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024: Analysis and Implications.....	36
Conflict and Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo.....	13	India's Growth Surge amidst Global and Regional Economic Challenges.....	37
VinFast's Massive Investment Drive in India's EV Sector.....	14	Setting Up the Sixteenth Finance Commission: A Major Step towards Fiscal Federalism.....	38
Disease X: An Imminent Microbial Threat under Spotlight at WEF 2024.....	15	Shifting Trends: Alternation in Traditional Economic Survey Delivery.....	39
Unleashing Fury: Tropical Cyclone Alvaro in Madagascar.....	15	A Comprehensive Digest on RBI's 28th Financial Stability Report (FSR)- December 2023.....	39
Understanding ECOWAS: Mission, Pillars and the Recent Developments in West Africa.....	16	Divergent Perspectives in Indian Economy: A Deep Dive into Recent GST Revenue Data.....	40
Upheaval in ECOWAS: Military Regimes Retreat, Alliance Emerges, and Economic Implications.....	17	Banking and Finance	41
Singapore's Changi Airport Reconquers Its Crown: Best Airport 2023.....	18	Groundbreaking Development in Monetary Transactions: Introduction of UPI-PayNow Linkage.....	41
Exploring the Heavens: A Detailed Look at China's Einstein Probe and its Astronomical Objectives.....	19	New Green Initiative- SBI Green Rupee Term Deposit: A Move Towards Eco-Friendly Financing	42
Novel Initiative: The Incorporation of Green Rooms in Ukraine's Criminal Justice System.....	20	HDFC Bank Eyes Singapore for its Global Expansion.....	43
WHO Certifies Cabo Verde as a Malaria-Free Country.....	21	AiIB's Investment in Renewable Energy Infrastructure in India: A Step towards Cleaner Future.....	44
PM Narendra Modi Inaugurates the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, UAE.....	22	Digging Deep into Green Deposits: RBI Clarifications & Their Significance.....	45
National Current Affairs	22	Defence	46
India Paving the Way in Textile Industry: Establishing 'Bharat Park' and its Implications.....	22	Joint Military Exercise 'Desert Cyclone 2024': Strengthening India-UAE Defence Partnership.....	46
The Launch of 'Sanatan Khadi Vastra': Fusing India's Heritage with Modern Trends.....	23	Indo-UAE Relations: A Comprehensive Look into the Defence Collaboration.....	47
States Current Affairs	24	Indian Navy's Momentous Contribution to Ex Sea Dragon 24.....	48
The 4th Rüsoma Orange Festival: A Platform for Organic Agriculture and Community Spirit.....	24	Embracing the Future: Indian Army's "Year of Technology Absorption".....	49
Arunachal Pradesh: The Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival, Nyishi Tribe, and Wildlife Conservation... ..	25	Uniting Maritime Strengths- Sahyog Kaijin Exercise 2021.....	49
Vision 2030: Tamil Nadu's Roadmap to a \$1 Trillion Economy.....	26	Strengthening Air Defense: Successful Test of New Generation AKASH Missile by DRDO.....	50
'Statue of Social Justice'- The World's Tallest Statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Unveiled.....	27	The Groundbreaking "Sada Tanaseeq"- India and Saudi Arabia's First Joint Military Exercise.....	51
The National Chilika Birds Festival in Odisha: A Manifestation of Preservation and Promotion.....	28		

11th India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise KHANJAR: Bolstering Defense Relationships52	Ranks and Reports 77
Strengthening Military Ties: Desert Knight Military Exercise 2024 53	Francoise Bettencourt Meyers Breaks Record with \$100 Billion Fortune 77
A Leap in Indian Aviation: Introduction of India's First Domestically Produced Aircraft Passenger Seat ... 54	Capitals' Cleanliness Crusade: Bhopal's Success in Solid Waste Management 78
Indian Navy's Strategic Expansion: Establishment of Second Very Low Frequency (VLF) Communication Station in Telangana 55	WHO's Guidelines on Ethical Employment of Large Multi-Modal Models in Healthcare 79
Operation Sarvashakti India's Comprehensive Plot Against Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir 55	Indian Startup Ecosystem 2022: Future Vision, Encouraging Initiatives and State Rankings 80
Decoding Global Firepower's Military Strength Rankings 2024 56	Significant Strides Towards Poverty Alleviation in India (2013-2022) 80
Schemes and Committees 57	Telangana Cities Shine in Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023 81
Proposed Merger of Chiranjeevi and Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance Schemes 57	The Rise in Global Unemployment: A Review of the ILO's Recent Projections and Underlying Concerns 82
Empowerment of Artisans in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) through PM Vishwakarma Yojana 58	Indian Airports Soar High: Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata Airports On Global Punctuality Podium 83
'Maitri' Initiative: A Pioneering Step Towards Community Cat Sterilisation 59	Unveiling the All India Survey on Higher Education 2021-22: A Leap Forward in Indian Higher Education 85
Prerana: Ministry of Education's Initiative to Promote Experiential Learning 60	Transcendent Unfolding: Remarkable Insights from India's SPAI Program on Snow Leopards 86
'My School-My Pride' Campaign: An Endeavor to Revolutionise Education in Himachal Pradesh 61	Awards 87
Mahtari Vandana Yojana 2024: A stride toward Women Empowerment in Chhattisgarh 61	Comprehensive Insights Into The Padma Awards 2024 87
Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana: A Step Towards Solar Power Self-Reliance and Sustainability 62	Accomplishments Celebrated at 2023 ICC Awards 88
Odisha Government's Initiative for Tribal Empowerment: 'LABHA Scheme' 63	The 75th Primetime Emmy Awards: Winners and Insights 88
Streamlining Electronic Toll Collection: NHA's 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' Initiative 64	Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023: A Milestone for Clean Cities 89
Digital Advancement in Governance: Introduction of e-SAKSHI App 65	National Sports Awards 2023: Honouring India's Sporting Might 90
Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY): Reaching the ₹3 Lakh Crore Milestone and Bolstering Small Businesses 66	The Best FIFA Football Awards 2024: Celebrating Excellence In Football 91
Summits and Conferences 67	Miscellaneous 92
Unveiling the Investment Splurge Ahead of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit: A Step towards Economic Momentum 67	Republic Day 2024- Honouring 75 years of Indian Democracy 92
India's Novel Step towards Gender Equity- The Alliance for Global Good 68	Understanding Acid Rain: Definition, Impact, and Mitigation Efforts 93
IndoSpace and Tamil Nadu Government Ink Rs 2000 Crore MoU 68	Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers (VDA SPs): Legalities and Compliance with Indian Regulations 94
India's Active Engagement at the 19th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit- A Deep Dive 69	Global Financial Regulation and India's Role 95
Switzerland to Host International Peace Summit for the Ukrainian Conflict Resolution 70	A New Chapter in Indian Aviation: Inauguration of Maharishi Valmiki International Airport 96
India Set to Chair UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 2024 71	Proposed Recommendation of a Health Tax on High Sugar, Salt, and Fat Foods 97
Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show- A Gargantuan Gathering for Global Trade 72	Revolutionary Collaboration: NHA and NRSC Join Forces for Developing Green Cover Index 97
Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors Summit 2024: A Gateway to the Future 73	The Dawn of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) 98
Gearing Up for Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024: Emphasising Technology and Global Participation 74	Pioneering Leap in Sustainable Infrastructure: India's First National Highway Steel Slag Road 99
Unveiling of Green Fuels Alliance India: A Significant Step towards Sustainable Energy 75	The Risk of Hydroxychloroquine: An Examination of its Mortality Rate and Efficacy 100
Government Schemes Allocations 2024-2025: An Update on India's Economic Blueprint 76	

Union Budget

2024-25

A Comprehensive Analysis of Interim Budget 2024-25

Unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

Introduction and Overview

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the interim budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 on 1st February 2024. This budget serves as a financial provision for the government till the full budget is passed post the general elections.

The Budget Breakdown

1. Key Features of the Budget

- Government expenditure: Estimated at Rs 47,65,768 crore in 2024-25, reflecting a 6% increase compared to the revised estimate of 2023-24.
- Non-borrowing receipts: Expected to reach Rs 30,80,274 crore in 2024-25, marking a 12% rise from the revised estimate of 2023-24.
- GDP: A nominal GDP growth rate of 10.5% is predicted for 2024-25.
- Fiscal and Revenue Deficits: Both targeting a lower percentage compared to 2023-24; 5.1% of GDP and 2% of GDP, respectively.
- New Schemes: Rs 70,449 crore is allocated for new economic schemes, waiting for specification.

2. Tax Proposals in the Finance Bill

- Tax rates are unchanged and tax benefits extended for certain entities till March 2025.

Policy Highlights in Various Sectors

- Railways: Major economic initiatives concerning energy, minerals, cement, port connectivity, and high traffic density corridors.
- Housing: Two crore additional homes under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin over the next five years.

- Health: Nationwide immunisation management using U-WIN; extended health coverage for ASHA and Anganwadi workers under Ayushman Bharat scheme.
- Energy: One crore households to get solar rooftop installations; a phased plan for compressed biogas blending in PNG and CNG; installation of coal gasification and liquefaction capacity by 2030.
- Environment: Measures to boost EV manufacturing and charging infrastructure; Blue Economy 2.0 scheme launch; a new scheme promoting biodegradable polymers, bio-plastics, and bio-pharmaceuticals.
- Agriculture: Promoting investment in post-harvest activities, expanding Nano DAP fertiliser use, supporting dairy farmers, enhancing the PM Matsya Sampada Yojana.
- Demography: High-powered committee to address population and demographic change-related challenges.
- Research: A corpus of Rs. One lakh crore to stimulate private sector involvement in research and innovation.

Comparison of Fiscal Estimates for 2024-25 and Revised Estimates for 2023-24

- Expenditure: 6% increase in the total projected expenditure; Capital expenditure surging by 16.9%, while revenue expenditure growing by 3.2%.
- Receipts: Estimated receipts mark an 11.8% increase.
- Transfer to States: The central government aims to transfer Rs 22,74,541 crore to states and UTs, an 8.4% rise.
- Deficits: The fiscal and revenue deficit targets are lesser than their respective figures for 2023-24.
- Disinvestment: Down from the budget target of 2023-24 and marking the fourth consecutive year of reduction in disinvestment targets.

Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Targets

- FRBM Act, 2003 mandates the central government to reduce its outstanding debt, revenue deficit, and fiscal deficit.
- In 2024-25, the estimated revenue deficit is lesser than that of 2023-24, thanks to a 11% increase in revenue receipts.
- Outstanding liabilities, which had been increasing since 2020, are expected to reach 57% of GDP in 2024-25.
- Interest payments are estimated to constitute 40% of revenue receipts in 2024-25, highlighting the significant share of revenue used for debt servicing.

Sector-wise Expenditure Highlights for 2024-25

- Defence: Rs 6,21,541 crore, the highest allocation, marked a marginal decrease of 0.4%.
- Ministries of Road Transport and Highways, Railways, and Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution: Received significant allocations.
- Department of Economic Affairs: Saw a significant allocation for new schemes.
- Communications Ministry: An increase of 11.8% is expected in allocation for 2024-25, primarily due to capital infusion into BSNL.

This comprehensive analysis of the Interim Budget 2024-25 provides valuable insights into India's changing economic landscape and governmental priorities. A growing focus on health, housing, and energy demonstrates a shift towards human development and sustainable practices, with continuing emphasis on defence and infrastructure development.

International Current Affairs

Restructuring in China's Military Leadership: Recent Developments and Implications.

Introduction: Change in China's Defense Ministry

- As part of recent developments, China has announced a change in its Defense Ministry's top leadership with Dong Jun taking over as the new Defense Minister.
- The appointment comes just two months following the removal of his predecessor, Li Shangfu.
- The announcement was made during a Standing Committee meeting of the National People's Congress in Beijing.

BRICS Expansion

- Parallel to this, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) recently announced its expansion by welcoming Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates as full members.

Profiling Dong Jun: The New Defence Minister

- Dong Jun served as the commander of the navy from August 2021 before being promoted to his current role.
- He has substantial field experience, having been the deputy commander of the Chinese military's Southern Theatre Command which operates in the contested South China Sea region.

String of Military Leadership Changes in China

- The induction of Dong Jun marks a slew of deviations in the hierarchical structure within China's military.

[January Current Affairs](#)

- These changes include high-profile dismissals, such as the removal of Qin Gang as foreign minister in July.

Dong Jun's Influence on South China Sea Policy

- Dong Jun's appointment could have strategic implications in the South China Sea region due to his past role in the Southern Theatre Command.

- Given the ongoing territorial disputes within the South China Sea, Jun's background could significantly influence China's strategic approach to regional security.

Potential International Consequences

- The reshuffle in China's military leadership coincides with budding diplomatic relations between China and the United States.

- High-level dialogues between militaries of the two nations hint at a potential thaw in diplomatic tensions. This perhaps signifies a shift from the previous taut atmosphere following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022.

GK Points:

- BRICS is an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Recently they also welcomed Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE as full members.

- China's new Defense Minister, Dong Jun, previously held the position of Navy Commander and has had crucial experiences in areas of territorial disputes.

- The territorial disputes in the South China Sea involve both island and maritime claims by several sovereign states within the region, making it a sensitive area for geopolitical strategy.

- Fluctuating relations between China and the United States have a worldwide impact, given their influential roles in international affairs.

Russia Assumes the 2024 BRICS Chairmanship: A Commitment to Strengthening Multilateralism

Overview: Russia's 2024 BRICS Chairmanship

- Russian President, Vladimir Putin, announced the initiation of Russia's 2024 BRICS Chairmanship on January 1, 2024.

- The chosen theme for the chairmanship is "Strengthening Multilateralism for Equitable Global Development and Security."

- This theme reflects Russia's commitment to fostering robust collaboration among the BRICS nations- Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa.

Approach and Strategy of Russia's Chairmanship

- Russia intends to maintain cordial and constructive cooperation with the concerned countries during its tenure.

- Its strategy will primarily focus on developing and enhancing BRICS partnerships in areas like politics and security, economy and finance, and cultural and humanitarian interactions.

Priorities for the Russian Chairmanship

- There are several key sectors that Russia will prioritise for cooperation, including science, high technology, healthcare, environmental protection, culture, sports, youth exchanges, and civil society.

- Russia also stressed the need to garner increased support from other countries that align with BRICS principles.

Expansion of BRICS

- The Russian President underscored the requirement for introducing a new category of BRICS partner countries.
- Around 30 nations are being considered for inclusion in the BRICS multidimensional agenda, aiming to integrate new contributors into BRICS activities.

Focus on Foreign Policy Coordination

- Russia assures a commitment to aiding better foreign policy coordination among BRICS nations.
- Its focus lies in developing joint answers to international and regional security challenges and threats.
- The emphasis will be especially on the practical implementation of the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025 and Action Plan for BRICS Innovation Cooperation 2021-2024.

Economic Contributions and Proposals

- The Russian chairmanship plans to positively contribute to energy and food security and seeks to cement the BRICS role in the international monetary system.
 - It also has plans to foster the growth of interbank cooperation, and further the usage of national currencies in mutual trade.
- With Russia's proactive plans and commitments as the BRICS Chair, 2024 is set to witness potential advancements and collaborations among the BRICS nations.
-

Growth and Diversification in BRICS: A New Chapter In Global Dynamics

BRICS: Expansion on the Horizon

- The organisation encompassing Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, known as BRICS, is headed for a significant expansion on January 1.

- New nations set to join the bloc include Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Egypt.
- This move will effectively double the membership of BRICS, enhancing its global influence.

Motivation Behind the Expansion

- The existing BRICS nations laid the groundwork for this expansion in August, sending out invitations to six nations. Only Argentina declined the offer.
- The central intention is linking leading energy producers with significant consumer markets in the developing world.

Progress of Participation and Acceptance

- Representatives from the future member nations have already started integration processes, as demonstrated by their attendance at a BRICS meeting in Durban, South Africa.
- They will also dispatch officials to the upcoming meeting in Moscow scheduled for January 30.

Journey of BRICS: From BRIC to BRICS

- The term "BRIC" was conceived in 2001, indicating the robust economic growth of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- It became "BRICS" in 2010 with the induction of South Africa, a testament to the bloc's evolving dynamics.

Increasing Global Interest

- Approximately 30 countries have shown interest in developing relations with BRICS, verifying its growing global relevance.
- Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister, Sergey Lavrov, has acknowledged the increasing international significance of the bloc.

Future Aspirants

- Nigeria, under the leadership of its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Tuggar, aspires to join the BRICS alliance within the next two years.

Challenges and Setbacks

- Except for India, BRICS has underperformed compared to other emerging-market peers in the last five years.
 - Russia's attractiveness to investors has been diminished due to US-led sanctions.
 - Certain sectors in China, especially technology companies, face sanctions and potential investment bans, posing further challenges to the bloc's overall performance.
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Pakistan to Receive Last Tranche of \$3 billion Financial Aid from IMF

The Immediate Financial Aid to Pakistan Announced by IMF

- Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the transference of the ultimate \$1.1 billion portion of a \$3 billion bailout to Pakistan. This bailout is a measure to support Pakistan amid its ongoing drastic economic crisis.
- This decision holds immense significance as Pakistan is currently confronting apprehensions concerning a potential default on forthcoming foreign debt payments.
- The IMF under the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) of \$3 billion pledged to distribute a financial aid of \$700 million to Pakistan. This decision is aimed at bolstering the sinking economy of the country.
- The final decision concerning the release of funds will be made during an Executive Board meeting set to be held on January 11.
- As it stands, a significant portion of \$1.8 billion of the SBA has yet to be disbursed.
- Initiated in 2019, this SBA is expected to reach its completion in April 2024.

IMF's Economic Projections for Pakistan

- IMF has anticipated Pakistan's economic future in its most recent projections. It foresees a contraction in real GDP by 0.5% by 2024.
- Further, the Consumer Price Index is projected to surge significantly, signalling a potential escalation in inflation.

Pakistan's Endeavours and Achievements amid Economic Woes

- Despite grappling with high inflation, Pakistan has managed to surpass the revenue collection target as set by the IMF for the period of July-December.
- The receipt of the second tranche scheduled for January will further assist Pakistan in acquiring the residual amount in March.

Pakistan's Dependence on IMF: A Historical Overview

- Pakistan joined the IMF back in 1950 and has since been involved in 24 arrangements with the fund, chiefly due to its recurring balance-of-payments challenges.
- Both the ongoing SBA and the forthcoming bailout tranche are indicative of Pakistan's heavy reliance on the IMF.

A Brief Introduction to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- The IMF, an international body, was conceived at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 and established officially on 27th December 1945.
 - It is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and as a specialised agency of the United Nations, the IMF aspires to encourage global monetary collaboration, secure financial stability, and promote international trade, employment, and economic growth globally.
 - The operations of the IMF started with 29 member countries on 27th December 1945. Today, its membership extends to 189 countries worldwide.
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The Global March towards the Elimination of Trans Fatty Acids

Introduction and About

Trans Fatty Acids (TFAs) are harmful substances found both in industrially produced and naturally occurring forms. Predominantly present in processed foods, TFAs unveil substantial health risks such as higher susceptibility to heart attacks and heart disease-related deaths.

Under the Global Spotlight – Why the Elimination of TFAs?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) initiated a global call to eliminate industrially produced TFAs in 2018, setting an elimination target for 2023.
- Despite challenges in achieving complete eradication, the global initiative gained traction with substantial advancements recorded.
- 53 countries have since enforced policies to combat TFAs, thereby enhancing food safety for about 3.7 billion people.

Acknowledging Advances: WHO's Recognition and Global Initiative

- WHO recently released its first-ever certificates recognizing the noteworthy developments in TFA eradication.
- Five nations namely Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand were applauded for their potent policies, and rigorous monitoring and enforcement systems.

Sweeping Impact of WHO's Initiative

- The proactive measures against TFAs improved impressively over the years, with the potential to save nearly 183,000 lives annually.
- However, a whopping 5 billion people worldwide remain unprotected from the detrimental effects of TFAs, thereby escalating their risk of heart disease and mortality.

Monitoring and Compliance: An Unmissable Element

- Rigorous monitoring and enforcement measures are crucial to the success of any food safety policy.
- WHO's validation programme acknowledges countries that guarantee substantial compliance.

India's Step towards a TFA-free Nation

- India launched various initiatives like the 'Eat Right Movement' and 'Swachh Bharat Yatra' focussing on good health through better food choices.
- FSSAI mandated that all food items should contain less than 2% trans fat starting from January 2022.

The Path Forward

- Greater Education and Awareness: Informing people about the health dangers associated with trans fats is essential. This can bring about a behavioural change towards healthier dietary options.
- Intensified Monitoring and Enforcement: Governments should construct robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. This can ensure that food manufacturers adhere to the set limits and label the trans fat content accurately.
- Thriving Research and Development: Research to discover alternatives to TFAs in food products is pivotal. Less perilous cooking oils and food processing methods could serve as effective solutions to achieve TFA-free food.

SLIM: Japan's Remarkable Leap into Lunar Exploration

1. Introduction and About: Japan's New Achievement in Space

- Japan recently marked its space exploration achievement by successfully landing a spacecraft,

Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), on the lunar surface.

- With this achievement, Japan becomes the fifth country succeeding the Soviet Union, the US, China, and India in achieving a soft lunar landing.
- SLIM's landing occurred near the Shioli crater, located south of the lunar equator, marking a milestone with its unprecedented precision.

2. SubAn Insight into SLIM's Expedition and Technical Hurdles

- SLIM underwent a four-month journey from Tanegashima Space Centre in Japan to the Moon.
- The expedition, however, faced a setback due to a power failure as the solar cells stopped generating electricity, forcing SLIM to rely on a limited-time operational battery.
- Despite the setback, the spacecraft stands successful with accurate communication to the ground station.

3. SubProgress of Asian Countries in Lunar Exploration

- The successful landing by SLIM is a significant victory for Asian countries, with only China, India, and now Japan, having achieved this feat in the last decade.
- India, for instance, recorded its successful lunar landing just last year in August.

4. SubInnovation Underpinning SLIM's Landing

- SLIM aimed for a distinctive landing accuracy of 100 metres, improving the precision from previous missions.
- It utilised vision-based navigation technology for imaging the lunar surface, identifying its location, and aligning with onboard maps.
- SLIM introduced a two-step landing approach, which contrasts with previous landers, encountering a 15-degree slope before stabilising on four legs, a factor that potentially affected its solar cells.

5. SubSLIM's Scientific Objectives and Recovery Expectations

- SLIM was designed to eject two small robots to capture images of the landing site.
- Its camera is engineered to search for olivine, a mineral found in the Moon's mantle.
- Should the power be restored, SLIM could provide substantial data about the Moon's history and chemical constitution.

6. SubThe New Space Race: Global and Asian Endeavours

- SLIM's successful landing has strengthened Japan's role in the Artemis Program led by the US, planning to return humans to the Moon by 2026.
- This achievement could heighten competition in lunar exploration, especially among Asian nations.
- The Moon has become a growing area of interest with the ongoing global lunar mission by US company Intuitive Machines and China's Chang'e-6 mission planning to collect moon samples.
- These missions highlight the escalating global curiosity in lunar exploration and the quest for understanding the Moon's mysteries.

Democratic Republic of Congo's Recent Elections: Integrity, Protests and Legacy

1: Introduction and Rundown of Results

- The Democratic Republic of Congo's recent election saw President Felix Tshisekedi securing a dominant victory.
- Held on December 20, Tshisekedi won approximately 73% of the vote, followed by runner-up Moise Katumbi with 18%.

2: Controversies Surrounding the Election

- The election process faced multiple technical problems including the late opening of polling stations and malfunctioning voting machines.
- This resulted in speculation of systematic rigging, with opposition leaders alleging the process was tactfully skewed to favour the incumbent President Tshisekedi.

3: Opposition's Uphill Battle

- Following the announcement of the results, the opposition started organising and calling for mass protests.
- The protests are aimed at expressing their discontent over what they term as rigged electoral results.

4: Government's Response to Protests

- In response to the predicted unrest, the government amplified the military presence in the capital, Kinshasa, hoping to keep the peace and prevent the escalation of unrest to violent levels.

5: The Tshisekedi Political Legacy

- The win by Felix Tshisekedi continues the family's political legacy, following in the line of his father, Etienne Tshisekedi.
- The Tshisekedi family has a history of political leadership, thus carrying forward a notable legacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo's political affairs.

6: Questions around Electoral System Integrity

- The credibility of the Democratic Republic of Congo's electoral system came under question.
- This was especially after Martin Fayulu, the 2019 poll candidate — who was endorsed by the influential Catholic Church — claimed a victory that was not validated by the official results.

GK Part:

- Geographically, the Democratic Republic of Congo is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa and the second largest in all of Africa.
- The country's capital and largest city is Kinshasa.
- The Democratic Republic of Congo has a history of political unrest, civil wars, and corruption, especially in the post-colonial era.
- The country's politics have been marked by strong presences like Mobutu Sese Seko and Laurent-Desire Kabila in the past.

This recent election and its aftermath continue to be significant in shaping the future political landscape of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

France Paves the Way for a Digital Transformation: Fully Digital Schengen Visas for the 2024 Olympic Games

I. Introduction and About

- France has pioneered the initiative of fully digitising Schengen visas, setting a new precedent among the EU nations.
- The implementation of this new system, referred to as the "Olympic Consulate," has been planned for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, scheduled to be held in Paris.
- The revolutionary "Olympic Consulate" system was initiated on January 1, 2024.

II. Beneficiaries of the Digital Visa System

- The digital Schengen visas are designed to benefit approximately 15,000 international athletes, 9,000 journalists, along with various foreign delegations.
- These beneficiaries are expected to apply for their digital visas through the France-Visas portal.

III. The Significance of Online Processing and Applications

- The digital system is expected to manage the processing of nearly 70,000 visa applications, streamlining the previously cumbersome process.
- The primary goal of the digital system is to ease the visa application process and expedite its completion, aligning with EU's future objectives of digitising Schengen visas.

IV. Integration with Accreditation Cards

- Unlike traditional visas, these digital visas will not be affixed to passports.
- They will be incorporated seamlessly into accreditation cards, thus promoting efficiency and convenience for the users.

V. Emphasis on Security and Efficient Measures

- With France hosting the Olympics and Paralympics after a gap of 100 years, timely issuance of visas becomes paramount for the smooth execution of the games.
- France's dedication to provide a secure and successful international sporting event is evident in well-planned strategic investments in security measures.

VI. General Knowledge Aspect

- The Schengen visa allows entry into 26 European countries that constitute the Schengen Area.
 - France, being one of those countries, has taken a significant leap in digital transformation, setting a potentially influential precedent for other EU nations.
 - The 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris offers the perfect opportunity to roll out this digital advancement on a large scale.
 - This pushes the boundaries for what's achievable in global security tactics and international event management in the age of digital transformation.
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Conflict and Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo

1: An Overview of the Current Crisis

- The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is witnessing an uptick in clashes, contributing to a deteriorating humanitarian situation that's drawn global attention.
- Fatal confrontations between the Congolese army and the Rwandan-backed M23 group near Goma in North Kivu province have led to many deaths and prompted thousands to flee their homes.

2: Understanding the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- The DRC is situated in Central Africa and stands as the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Despite being abundant in natural resources, the nation struggles with persistent political unrest, exploitation, and conflicts, causing severe humanitarian crises.
- Balancing on a thin line of stability, the country's socio-political landscape is marred by decades of civil war, rebellions, and rampant corruption.

3: The Socioeconomic and Infrastructural Challenges

- Compounding the political instability are the country's pressing socioeconomic issues.
- The contrast between the country's potential wealth and its reality is stark. Over two-thirds of the DRC's population lives in poverty, despite the nation's enormous natural resource wealth.
- Infrastructure remains woefully inadequate, which hampers both every day life for citizens and the electoral process.

General Knowledge Points:

- The DRC is the fourth most populous country in Africa and houses over 70 million people, making

its ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises all the more pivotal.

- Rich in minerals, the DRC boasts significant reserves of cobalt, copper, tin, gold, and diamonds. However, these resources have often been a source of contention and conflict, rather than prosperity.
 - History plays a crucial part in the DRC's current situation. From being colonised by Belgium to suffering under dictatorship and numerous civil wars, it remains entrapped in a cycle of crises.
 - The DRC's instability indirectly affects the stability in the Great Lakes region and overall African geopolitics.
 - Understanding the complexities of the Democratic Republic of Congo is key for maintaining up-to-date knowledge of international relations and African geopolitics for various government examinations.
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VinFast's Massive Investment Drive in India's EV Sector

1: VinFast Plots Entry Into Indian EV Market

- VinFast Auto Ltd, a Vietnam-based company, announced the commencement of its construction works in Tamil Nadu for an integrated EV manufacturing unit.
- The company intends to invest a whopping \$2 billion, making its way into the third-largest automobile market in the world.

2: Phased Investment and Capacity Build-up

- The first phase of investment, estimated at \$500 million, will span across a five-year time period starting from the construction commencement date.
- After the completion of the construction, the factory will possess the capacity to produce an impressive 150,000 electric vehicles annually.

3: Economic Boost and Employment Generation in Tamil Nadu

- As per the announcement by MK Stalin, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, VinFast's initiative will bring an investment of ₹16,000 crore, equivalent to around \$2 billion.
- This will play a huge role in propelling the economic growth in the southern part of Tamil Nadu and is estimated to generate around 3,500 jobs.

4: VinFast's Dedication Towards Sustainability

- Tran Mai Hoa, VinFast's Global Deputy CEO Sales and Marketing, highlighted VinFast's steadfast commitment towards zero-emission transportation and sustainable development.
- This investment will play a significant role in boosting India's transition to green energy.

5: State Support and Commitment to Infrastructure

- The Tamil Nadu government expressed its support for the project by pledging to provide lands for the manufacturing facilities, constant power supply, and other essential infrastructures.
- This alliance is a strategic step to create a conducive environment for VinFast to spread its wings in the Indian EV market.

GK Corner:

- VinFast is a subsidiary of Vingroup, one of Vietnam's largest privately held companies.
- The company made its debut in the Paris Auto Show in 2018 and is laying a strong foundation in the global automobile market.
- With its venture in India, VinFast is contributing to India's green trajectory and push towards electric mobility.
- Tamil Nadu, the southern state in India, is becoming a hub for electric vehicle manufacturing, with major global players establishing their presence in the state.

Disease X: An Imminent Microbial Threat under Spotlight at WEF 2024

1: World Economic Forum (WEF) 2024 and Disease X

- WEF 2024 was hosted in Davos, Switzerland, starting on January 15.
- The focus of the forum was on an impending threat known as Disease X.
- World Health Organization (WHO) and other health officials engaged in extensive discussions to address this health issue.

2: What is Disease X?

- Disease X, a term introduced by the WHO in 2017, represents a future unknown but serious microbial threat.
- The disease stands on an equal footing with life-threatening pathogens like Ebola and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).
- COVID-19 is an example of Disease X, originating from an unknown infectious source.

3: Origins and Dangers of Disease X

- A Bloomberg report suggests the possible source of Disease X to be wildlife, considering the myriad of viruses found among animals.
- The principal concern lies in the cross-species transmission of these viruses, leading to unforeseen pandemics.

4: Significance and WHO's Strategy

- WHO underlines the importance of understanding and researching Disease X to be better prepared for similar unknown diseases in the future.
- Lessons from previous pandemics like Ebola and COVID-19 have necessitated a reevaluation of research and development (R&D) approaches.
- Considering the absence of ready-to-deploy tools during the Ebola outbreak, despite extensive research, WHO initiated the R&D Blueprint to

accelerate the development of tools for treating priority diseases.

5: WHO's Current Priority Pathogens

- WHO's list of current priority diseases includes COVID-19, Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, Ebola and Marburg virus diseases, Lassa fever, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and SARS, Nipah and henipaviral diseases, Rift Valley fever, Zika, and Disease X.

6: Reports Published by WEF

- WEF regularly generates globally acknowledged reports that include the Global Competitiveness Report, Global Gender Gap Report, Energy Transition Index, Global Risk Report, Global Travel and Tourism Report.

The discussion on Disease X at WEF 2024 amplifies the need for the world to be proactive and prepared for potential threats, highlighting the importance of global cooperation in health crises. This knowledge of 'Disease X' and WEF's role in global issues will be beneficial for candidates preparing for government exams, enhancing their understanding of current affairs in the health sector.

Unleashing Fury: Tropical Cyclone Alvaro in Madagascar

1: Storm Narrative- The Arrival of Tropical Cyclone Alvaro

- Tropical Cyclone Alvaro made landfall in southwest Madagascar on January 1, 2024.
- It was the first formidable cyclone of the 2023-2024 season for the Southwest Indian Ocean region.

2: Aftermath- The Dire Impact of Cyclone Alvaro

- Cyclone Alvaro came with devastating effects, directly affecting over 17,200 Malagasy people.
- Reports suggest a death toll of five, and around 8,400 individuals have been displaced.
- Various rescue and recovery operations are ongoing to restore normalcy.

3: Previously Reported Disasters – The Historical Implications

- In the past, Madagascar has witnessed increasing cyclonic activity.
- In January 2023, Cyclone Cheneso affected over 90,000 inhabitants.
- Shortly after, in February 2023, Cyclone Freddy caused 17 fatalities and forcibly displaced 19,000 individuals.

4: Constant Challenges- Vulnerabilities in Regions of Madagascar

- Certain parts of Madagascar, like Atsimo-Andrefana in the southwestern region, face substantial flooding woes and are repeatedly at high risk.
- The devastation from Cyclone Alvaro has further escalated these already existing issues.

5: Preparedness and Responses- Actions Against Cyclone Alvaro

- On December 31, the national weather agency, Meteo Madagascar, issued a yellow alert for certain districts. The alert level was elevated to red post-landfall.
- The National Bureau of Risk and Disaster Management reported the relocation of over 400 people as a crucial counteractive measure.
- Infrastructure such as boats, houses, and schools in regions including Haute Matsiatra, Atsimo-Andrefana, and Menabe incurred substantial damage.

GK Part:

- The Southwest Indian Ocean Region, to which Madagascar belongs, often experiences cyclones between the months of November and April.
- Madagascar is the world's fourth biggest island after Greenland, New Guinea, and Borneo.
- This nation is known for its rich biodiversity but also struggles with environmental challenges such as deforestation, soil erosion, and cyclones.
- Atsimo-Andrefana, Haute Matsiatra, and Menabe are regions in Madagascar that have experienced significant impact due to cyclones.
- Authorities and agencies are making continuous efforts to improve disaster management and reduce the vulnerability of the people and places in this region.

Understanding ECOWAS: Mission, Pillars and the Recent Developments in West Africa

I. Introduction and Overview: The ECOWAS

1. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in operation since 1975, is a regional economic and political union of 15 West African nations.
2. Recent events have seen this number reduced to 12, following the immediate withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.
3. ECOWAS's principal mission is to stimulate collective self-sufficiency for its member states through promoting regional integration, economic cooperation, peace, and security.

II. The Pillars of ECOWAS: Framework for Regional Integration

1. Economic Integration: ECOWAS works to reduce tariffs, initiate a customs union, and has plans for a common currency amongst its members.
2. Trade Expansion: Inter-regional trade within the union is given a significant boost, focusing primarily on sectors such as agriculture, energy, and manufacturing.
3. Peace and Security: The establishment of a peacekeeping force and the promotion of political stability are key priorities for ECOWAS. This is achieved through interventions and conflict resolution.
4. Sustainable Development: ECOWAS is committed to combating shared challenges like poverty and climate change and is actively promoting food security in the region.

III. Current Situation: The Withdrawal from ECOWAS

1. The immediate withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS showcases political instability prevailing in these countries.
2. This decision by the military regimes of these nations puts the other member states and the ECOWAS's mission of regional integration in a position of uncertainty.

IV. Significance for General Knowledge and Current Affairs

1. Geographical Knowledge: The structure of ECOWAS gives an insight into regional alliances and the economic geography of West Africa.
2. Political Knowledge: The dynamics of ECOWAS portray the balance of power and the complexities of regional politics in West Africa.
3. Economic Knowledge: Understanding the goals of ECOWAS offers a snapshot of the economic structures and partnerships within West Africa and their global implications.
4. Current Affairs: The recent withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS adds a

contemporary twist to the importance of this regional union's role and relevance.

In conclusion, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plays a vital role in West African regional integration. Its framework for economic cooperation, peace, and security, along with sustainable development, promotes regional self-reliance. However, the recent withdrawal of three nations highlights the potential challenges this union faces in achieving its goals. For anyone preparing for government exams, this topic provides rich insights into regional economic structures, international relations, and current global events.

Upheaval in ECOWAS: Military Regimes Retreat, Alliance Emerges, and Economic Implications

1: Understanding ECOWAS

- ECOWAS is a regional organisation aimed at promoting economic integration within the West African sub-region.

- The organisation was established in May 1975 with headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria.

- Comprising 15 West African countries, ECOWAS has spearheaded significant initiatives for regional economic cooperation.

- It set up a free trade area in 1990 and adopted a common external tariff in 2015, demonstrating its commitment to regional collaboration and integration.

2: Defection of Military Regimes from ECOWAS

- Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have formally withdrawn, perceiving ECOWAS as a threat.

- These countries, already grappling with jihadist violence and poverty, have experienced shaky relations with the regional body after recent coups.

3: The Advent of the 'Sovereign Decision'

- The aforementioned nations term their withdrawal as a 'sovereign decision'.
- They attribute their exit to an 'irrational and unacceptable posture' adopted by ECOWAS.

4: Birth of the Alliance of Sahel States

- Responding to their collective concerns, the three nations have launched the "Alliance of Sahel States".
- The formation of the alliance is spurred by apprehensions about the escalation of conflicts into Gulf of Guinea nations.

5: The Significance of the Sahel Region

- The Sahel region, stretching from Senegal to Sudan, is known for its semiarid conditions and abundant energy and mineral resources.
- Despite the instability, it's a region rich in oil, gold, and uranium.
- The UN recognizes ten countries within the Sahel region.

6: Allegations against ECOWAS

- ECOWAS faces criticism for not extending aid in battling jihadist threats.
- It is accused of straying from its founding principles because of foreign influence.

7: Post-Withdrawal- Economic and Security Implications

- The withdrawal might birth increased trade hurdles, hike in goods' prices, and potential visa re-impositions.
- The impending insecurity is escalated due to the French military's withdrawal from Sahel and a growing Russian footprint.

8: India-ECOWAS Relations: A Snapshot

- India has fostered a strong relationship with ECOWAS, enjoying observer status since 2004.
- The country extended a line of credit worth USD 250 million to ECOWAS in 2006.

- ECOWAS also supports India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Singapore's Changi Airport Reconquers Its Crown: Best Airport 2023

1: The Skytrax Awards & Changi Airport's Stellar Achievement

- Skytrax, an eminent air transport research firm, accorded Changi Airport of Singapore with the prestigious title of the World's Best Airport for 2023.
- Repeatedly setting a high benchmark, this marks the 12th time Changi Airport has been recognized with this honourable award.
- The Skytrax Awards invites worldwide attention for their exigent evaluation process, all set to adjudge excellence in airport services and facilities.
- The evaluation compactly relies on satisfaction ratings from international passengers, making it an accurate reflection of real passenger experiences.

2: The Turnaround Tale of Changi Airport

- In an exciting turn of events, Changi Airport reclaims its title of the World's Best Airport in 2023 after having lost it to Qatar's Hamad International Airport for two subsequent years.
- This triumph speaks volumes about Changi's commitment towards continuous enhancement of its services and its agility in meeting the dynamic needs of global travellers.

GK Nuggets:

- Changi Airport, located in Singapore, is one of the largest transportation hubs in Southeast Asia.

It's an international airport handling tens of millions of passengers annually.

- Skytrax is a UK-based consultancy firm that runs an airline and airport review and ranking site, contributing majorly to the aviation sector through its comprehensive research work.
- Hamad International Airport, which was the previous holder of the title, is the sole international airport in Qatar and is known for its advanced facilities and luxurious aura.

Importance:

- This event portrays Singapore's strategic global positioning in the aviation sector. The achievement of Changi Airport greatly boosts the nation's reputation in providing world-class airport facilities and services.
- The Skytrax Awards hold significant value as it heralds international acclaim and recognition. Winning the award for the 12th time asserts Changi Airport's relentless dedication to service quality.
- The event conveys the importance of customer satisfaction in shaping the aviation industry's progress, embodied by Changi's consistent focus on fulfilling the dynamic demands of international passengers.

Exploring the Heavens: A Detailed Look at China's Einstein Probe and its Astronomical Objectives

1: Introduction- China's Einstein Probe (EP)

- Elevating its pursuits in space exploration, China has launched the innovative Einstein Probe (EP).
- The EP utilises the avant-garde X-ray detection technology to observe dynamic phenomena in the Universe.

- The lotus-shaped satellite was launched from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre rooted in China's Sichuan Province.

2: The Unique Design & Features of Einstein Probe

- The EP weighs roughly 1.45 tonnes, featuring 12 petals and two stamens- each housing its dynamic technology.
- Each petal is equipped with a Wide Field X-ray Telescope (WFT), while each stamen harbours a Follow-up X-ray Telescope (FXT).
- This exceptional structure facilitates the capture of elusive celestial events.

3: Mission Objectives of the Einstein Probe

- The principal objective of EP is to unmask the unknown phenomena present in the Universe.
- Key aims encompass capturing the initial light from a supernova, identifying X-ray signals emerging from gravitational wave events, discovering dormant black holes, and tracing faint transient objects in the outer cosmos.

4: Homage to Legendary Physicist- Albert Einstein

- The satellite's name, Einstein Probe, pays homage to the famous physicist, Albert Einstein, the author of the General Theory of Relativity.
- Yuan Weimin, the chief investigator of the EP mission, emphasises the correlation between Einstein's revolutionary theories and the objectives of the EP mission.

5: Study of Transient Celestial Entities

- The EP mission anticipates advancing our understanding of celestial events like gigantic star explosions, black holes consuming stars, and the collision between neutron stars and black holes.

6: Future Prospects and Anticipations

- As the Einstein Probe's mission unfolds, the anticipation among scientists for unmasking new celestial bodies and phenomena is increasing.
- The potential for groundbreaking findings in the world of astronomy is heightened as unexplored aspects of the Universe continue to be examined relentlessly.

In summary, China's Einstein Probe continues to advance the frontiers of astronomical research. The satellite highlights the interweaving between advanced technology and the quest for knowledge in the Universe, building on the strong foundation laid by luminaries like Albert Einstein in the field of theoretical physics.

Novel Initiative: The Incorporation of Green Rooms in Ukraine's Criminal Justice System.

What are Green Rooms?

- The term "green rooms" denotes specially designed areas inside law enforcement premises, tailored to amplify the comfort level of child survivors or witnesses during investigative and procedural stages.
- These rooms were recently introduced in Zaporizhzhya and Vilniansk police stations in Ukraine, underlining their pivotal role in fostering sensitive interactions with children involved in legal proceedings.

The Blueprint of Green Rooms

- Each green room comprises dual spaces for interaction, divided by special glass, facilitating discrete observations and interactions.

- These rooms also possess recording capabilities, reducing the necessity for child's direct involvement in court proceedings, which in turn diminishes potentials of re-traumatization.
- The child-friendly designs and features of the green room aim to create an environment of safety and comfort.

The Impetus behind Green Room Implementation

- The NGO "Ehida Zaporizhzhia" first mooted the concept of constructing these green rooms.
- The idea gained the attention and support from UNDP and secured financial backing from the Government of Denmark.

Impact on Child Protection in Ukraine

- The introduction of green rooms is a crucial stride towards augmenting child protection in Ukraine's criminal justice system.
- The child-centric approach assures safeguarding of children's rights throughout the process, providing a more empathetic environment for young survivors and witnesses.

Dossier on UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)- A Key Partner in this Initiative

- Founded in 1965 by the United Nations General Assembly, UNDP has been instrumental in providing expert advice, training, and grants to help developing nations, with an increasingly concentrated focus on aiding less developed nations.
- The UNDP Executive Board, consists of representatives from 36 countries globally who rotate in their service.
- The organisation operates exclusively on the voluntary contributions from member nations.
- UNDP forms the heart of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), a network spanning 165 countries and binding together 40 UN funds, programs, specialised

January Current Affairs

agencies, and other entities dedicated to promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- Notably, UNDP is responsible for publishing the Human Development Index, serving as a standard reference for gauging human development across nations.

This current affair injects significant facets relevant to legal systems, child protection measures, international collaborations, and the working modalities of an important global body, the UNDP.

WHO Certifies Cabo Verde as a Malaria-Free Country

Significant Health Triumph, Achieving Malaria-Free Status

- The World Health Organization (WHO) recently declared Cabo Verde as a malaria-free nation. This health achievement has placed Cabo Verde alongside Mauritius and Algeria as the third country in the WHO African region to earn this recognition.

Gaining the Malaria-Free Certification

- To be certified malaria-free by WHO, the country has to demonstrate an interruption of malaria transmission nationwide for three consecutive years at least.

- Additionally, they must employ a robust surveillance and response system to avoid the re-establishment of malaria's indigenous transmission.

Global Scenario and Key Facts on Malaria-Free Certification

- Globally, 43 countries and one territory have been officially recognized as malaria-free by WHO, with Cabo Verde being the latest addition.

- Some prominent countries in the South East Asian region such as the Maldives (2015) and Sri Lanka (2016) had earlier accomplished this distinction.

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- It's noteworthy that India is yet to receive this certification.

Understanding Malaria

- Malaria, a dangerous mosquito-borne blood disease, is primarily caused by Plasmodium parasites.

- Out of five species affecting humans, P.falciparum and P.vivax pose the major threat.

- This disease is prevalent predominantly in tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, South America, and Asia.

Malaria Transmission and Symptoms

- Malaria is transmitted through the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito which becomes a carrier after biting an infected individual.

- The pathogen then gets transmitted to the bloodstream of the next person the mosquito bites.

- Symptoms of this disease comprise fever, flu-like illness, shaking chills, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue.

- Although malaria is harmful, it is preventable and curable.

About WHO (World Health Organization)

- The World Health Organization, established in 1948, is the United Nations' specialised agency responsible for health.

- Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, it is an intergovernmental organisation with 194 Member States, 150 country offices, and six regional offices.

- WHO leads in global health issues, forming the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, advocating evidence-based policies, and offering technical assistance to countries.

- WHO started operating on April 7, 1948, which is now commemorated annually as World Health Day.

PM Narendra Modi Inaugurates the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

1: The Grand Event- Inauguration of BAPS Hindu Mandir

- On 14th February 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.
- Notably, this inauguration event occurred weeks following the consecration ceremony of the notable Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, India.
- The BAPS Hindu Mandir, situated in the Abu Mureikha area, is a significant achievement as it is touted as the first Hindu temple in the UAE.
- Magnificently designed, this temple is foreseen to be one of the largest and most splendid Hindu temples outside of India. Additionally, it holds the proud position of being the largest in West Asia.

2: Background and Evolution: A Journey Highlighting Diplomatic Significance.

- The seeds for the construction of this Hindu temple were sown during PM Modi's maiden UAE visit in 2015.
- During that visit, the UAE government allocated the land for the temple, signifying a significant diplomatic negotiation between the countries.
- This was a momentous visit as PM Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister in 34 years to visit this strategically significant Gulf nation.
- The construction began in December 2019 and reached the stage of inauguration in February 2021 by the same leader who initiated the conversation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

3: Bridging Connections: Key Observations and their Relevance.

- Event: The inaugural event was a monumental step in universal acceptance and inclusion,

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symbolised by the construction of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.

- Importance: As the first Hindu temple in the UAE and among the most prominent outside India, it witnesses increased inclination towards cultural diversity and acceptance.

- Diplomatic Relevance: The whole journey from land allocation to completion symbolises the strengthening relations between India and the UAE.

- Makeup of Key Events: Land allocation in 2015, the commencement of construction in Dec 2019, and the final inauguration in 2021 reflects progressive developments in the India-UAE relationship.

This event significantly contributes to the global general knowledge, highlighting the progressive interconnection between countries representing different religions and beliefs.

National Current Affairs

India Paving the Way in Textile Industry: Establishing 'Bharat Park' and its Implications

I. Unveiling the 'Bharat Park':

- The Indian Government intends to establish 'Bharat Park,' an exclusive trade zone, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- This zone would consist of showrooms and warehouses that stock and display Indian-manufactured goods intended for a global consumer base.
- Union Minister Piyush Goyal emphasised its role in enabling hassle-free, secure international procurement of Indian products straight from the UAE.

II. Harnessing Potential of Man-Made Fibre Textiles:

- Highlighting the growing demand for cotton and the ensuing supply challenges, Goyal underscored the importance of focusing on Man-Made Fibre Textiles.
- He stressed on maximising utilisation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with nations such as Japan, Australia, UAE, and South Korea.

III. Fresh Look at Export Targets and Challenges:

- Export of man-made fibre textiles witnessed a 9% fall, contributing only \$3.1 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year.
- A small rise in technical textile exports was noted, amounting to \$1.51 billion.
- By the end of the fiscal year, the industry plans to surpass \$6 billion in exports and \$3 billion in technical textile shipments. This target aligns with the government's challenging goals for boosting the textile industry.

IV. Call for Greater Governmental Intervention:

- The Synthetic and Rayon Textiles Export Promotion Council advocates for the government to address issues of GST rates and inverted duty structures that serve as obstacles to growth.
- They called for an equal GST rate across the Man-Made Fibre Textiles value chain for simplification and transparency.
- Furthermore, it was suggested that textiles and clothing should be integrated into the Interest Equalization Scheme, enhancing their competitiveness in international markets.

GK Updates:

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE), located in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, has grown into a global business hub, making it a strategic location for 'Bharat Park'.
- Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are deals between countries that aim to cut trade barriers and promote economic linkages. India has several FTAs with countries like Japan, Australia, South Korea, and the UAE.

- The Interest Equalization Scheme (IES) was introduced by the Indian government to boost exports, allowing exporters to borrow money at reduced rates resulting in affordable credit for international marketing endeavours.

The Launch of 'Sanatan Khadi Vastra': Fusing India's Heritage with Modern Trends

1. Introduction: Launch of 'Sanatan Khadi Vastra'

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) unveiled a new clothing line named 'Sanatan Khadi Vastra' on January 17, 2024.
- The launch took place at the Khadi Bhawan, situated in Connaught Place, Delhi.
- To commemorate the occasion, KVIC announced promotional discounts available from January 17 to January 25, 2024. The offers include a discount of 20% on the 'Sanatan Vastra' clothing range and a 10%- 60% discount on other Khadi and village industry products.

2. Manufacturing Process: Merging Tradition with Innovation

- The designs for the 'Sanatan Vastra' range were conceptualised and brought to life at the Khadi Center of Excellence (COEK), housed at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT).
- To stay true to its name, Sanatan, which means eternal or traditional, the manufacturing process for this Khadi clothing line abstains from using any mechanical or chemical procedure. It instead adheres to traditional Indian manufacturing methods.

3. Why is it in the News: Cultural and Economic Significance

- Cultural Aspect: 'Sanatan Vastra' effectively marries India's rich cultural heritage with contemporary fashion trends. It aims to appeal to the youth of the nation and promotes the usage of Swadeshi, or homeland-produced, products.
- Economic Aspect: This new initiative is predicted to enhance the livelihood of numerous rural artisans throughout the country. It will contribute to their economic empowerment, thus also boosting the rural economy.

4. Broader Vision: Reinforcing Khadi as a National Symbol

- The launch of 'Sanatan Vastra' is in alignment with KVIC's larger vision of propelling Khadi as a symbol of national pride and sustainable fashion.
- It also underscores the importance of incorporating sustainability into daily life and preserving traditional Indian arts and crafts which have existed for centuries.
- The launched collection stands for more than just clothing; it is a powerful testament to Indian heritage and the country's commitment to eco-friendly fashion.

GK Part:

- KVIC is a statutory body established by an act of Parliament. It is charged with planning, promoting, organising, and implementing programs for the development of Khadi and other village industries in rural areas.
 - KVIC aims to create self-reliant rural communities through various employment opportunities.
 - Khadi is handspun and handwoven cloth made from cotton, silk, or wool. Khadi played a significant role in India's fight for freedom, and it became a symbol of self-sufficiency and resistance during the Swadeshi Movement.
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States Current Affairs

The 4th Rüsoma Orange Festival: A Platform for Organic Agriculture and Community Spirit.

1: Introduction and Overview of the Festival

- The 4th Rüsoma Orange Festival took place in Rüsoma village, located in the Kohima district of Nagaland, India.
- The festival started on January 24th, attracting approximately 3400 attendees.
- The event is a celebration of organic produce, rural entrepreneurship, and community spirit.
- Stalls decorated with oranges, various activities, and competitions formed part of the grand event, essentially celebrating the orange.

2: Festival's Closing Ceremony

- The closing ceremony was spearheaded by Azha Mezhü, demonstrating a sense of community pride and adherence to local traditions.
- Vizokho Rövio provided the invocation, a significant element in festivals in Nagaland, adding a cultural touch to the ceremony.
- Visier Vimera, the convenor of the festival, delivered a closing speech, expressing gratitude for the collective effort that made the event possible.

3: Mission of the Festival and Visitor Experiences

- The festival's prime objective is to uplift the rural farmers and endorse organic farming.
- It provides a robust platform for local farmers to showcase their produce, thus generating

economic opportunities and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

- Attendees had an opportunity to taste the produce for free and were given guided tours to nearby orange orchards.
- These experiences facilitated a better understanding of organic farming practices among visitors and fostered connections with the local community.

4: Significance of the Festival in Current Scenario

- This event holds high significance as it champions values imperative for current times – sustainability, community empowerment, and cultural preservation.
- More than a celebration of oranges, the festival is a reflection of the vibrant community spirit and rural life.
- It plays a significant role in enhancing the village's overall economic resilience and helps in the preservation and promotion of traditional farming practices.
- In the era of increased consciousness about organic & sustainably grown food, this festival makes a considerable contribution to this trend by promoting organically grown oranges and emphasises the importance of community participation in organic farming.

5: General Knowledge Aspects

- Nagaland, home to the Rüsoma Orange Festival, is a state in northeast India bordered by Myanmar, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur.
- Its rich cultural and traditional practices make it an important state for diversity in India.
- Organic farming is a method of farming that maintains and replenishes soil fertility without the use of toxic and non-biodegradable pesticides and fertilisers. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity, and cycles adapted to local conditions.
- Sustainable economic development and organic farming's role in achieving it is an essential topic in many competitive exams' syllabi focused on environmental studies and geography.

Arunachal Pradesh: The Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival, Nyishi Tribe, and Wildlife Conservation

1: Understanding the Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival

- The Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival (PPHF) is a state festival of Arunachal Pradesh. The 9th edition was celebrated in January 2024 with the theme 'Let Our Hornbills Remain'.
- The festival, inaugurated in 2015, is a tribute to the rich culture of the local tribes and the biodiversity of the region.
- The role of the Nyishi tribe in hornbill conservation is particularly highlighted through this festival.
- The festival aims to promote alternative livelihoods, reducing harmful practices such as hunting and logging.
- It also increases national awareness of the unique biodiversity of the Pakke Tiger Reserve.

2: Spotlight on the Pakke Tiger Reserve

- The Pakke Tiger Reserve, located in East Kameng district, was renamed thus in 2001, from its previous nomenclature, Pakhui Tiger Reserve.
- Covering an area of 862 km², the reserve falls under the Department of Environment and Forest of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The reserve hosts 343 woody species, over 40 mammal species, 296 bird species, 500 butterfly species, along with various reptile and amphibian species.

3: Unveiling the Nyishi Tribe

January Current Affairs

- The Nyishi community, the largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh, boasts a population of around 300,000 people.
- The Nyishi language falls in the Sino-Tibetan language family group.
- The community practises polygyny, a social marker of status and economic stability.
- Predominantly agrarian, the Nyishi people rely on jhum cultivation, growing crops such as paddy, maize, ginger, and various vegetables.
- Their traditional attire, especially their distinctive headgear adorned with hornbill beaks, underscores their cultural identity.
- Nyokum festival is a culturally significant event, celebrating their connection to ancestors.

4: The Nyishi Tribe and Hornbill Conservation

- The traditional Nyishi practice of using hornbill beaks in their attire harms the hornbill population.
- Organisations such as the Arunachal Wildlife and Nature Foundation and the Wildlife Trust of India work to curb hunting practices and safeguard the hornbills.

5: Nyishi-Led Conservation Initiatives

- The Nyishi community actively contributes to wildlife conservation, supporting the Ghora Aabhe Society, a recognized conservation organisation.
- With the introduction of Christian missionaries, there has been a shift in the Nyishi's religious beliefs from traditional Donyi-Poloism, exerting an influence on their societal practices including wildlife conservation.

Vision 2030: Tamil Nadu's Roadmap to a \$1 Trillion Economy

INTRODUCTION AND ABOUT

- The Tamil Nadu government, under the leadership of Chief Minister MK Stalin, has announced an ambitious plan to grow the state's economy to \$1 trillion by 2030. This announcement was made at the Global Investors Meet in Chennai held on January 7.

1: THE SEVEN PILLARS OF GROWTH STRATEGY

- The government has outlined seven key principles for achieving this economic vision.

Investments: The state aims at attracting public and private investments valued at \$3.8-4.3 trillion.

Human Capital: Adding 60 lakh women to the workforce and transitioning 1 crore individuals toward more lucrative job roles via upskilling and reskilling programs.

Innovation: Establishing partnerships between industry and academia, incentivizing R&D, and fostering a vibrant startup environment.

Ease of Doing Business: Improving access to resources- land, labour and capital- to create an industry-friendly environment.

Transparent Governance: Ensuring transparency and efficiency in policymaking to foster economic development.

Infrastructure: Focusing on creating resilient and sustainable infrastructure, including social spaces, transport networks, and water systems.

Holistic Growth: Encouraging prosperity across all districts and regions by incorporating sustainability in all initiatives.

2: SECTORAL FOCUS

- The government's strategy includes a focus on certain key sectors:

Startups: With the 'Startup Policy 2023', Tamil Nadu aims to emerge as a leading startup hub.

IT and GCCs: The state aims to emerge as a leader in Software as a Service (SaaS) and data centre hub.

Auto & Electronics: Aiming to transition into an auto parts export hub, the government will encourage semiconductor investments and lead in cell component and EVSE manufacturing.

3: GEOGRAPHICAL EXPANSION

- IT/GCC corridors are planned to be developed in ten cities including Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai to encourage geographic expansion and balanced regional growth.

4: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

- The government is adopting a comprehensive approach by extending its strategy to various sectors including agriculture, machinery, textiles, tourism, infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The focus remains on achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR GOVERNMENT EXAMS

- This initiative highlights the importance of human capital, innovation, industry-academia partnerships, and sustainable practices in driving economic growth.

- It is important to note Tamil Nadu's focus on becoming a major startup hub and IT/GCC corridor.

- Tamil Nadu's aspiration to transition into an auto parts export hub and its focus on fostering semiconductor investments and cell and EVSE manufacturing underline its commitment to technological advancements.

- Recognising and remembering these key strategic points can be invaluable for aspirants preparing for government exams with an emphasis on economic growth and development, public policies, and regional planning.

'Statue of Social Justice'- The World's Tallest Statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Unveiled

1: Standing tall in Andhra Pradesh: A towering tribute

- The State of Andhra Pradesh has unveiled the world's tallest statue of social reformer Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

- Standing at an impressive height of 206 feet, it is ranking among the world's top 50 tallest statues.

- The statue commemorates the crucial contributions of Dr. Ambedkar to the state of Andhra Pradesh and to the nation.

2: Symbolising Pride and Honor

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed pride about this grand accomplishment.

- The statue is a symbol of Dr. Ambedkar's enduring impact on promoting justice and equality.

3: World-Record Breaking Features

- Including the 125-foot statue atop an 81-foot tall pedestal, it has become the tallest structure symbolising Dr. Ambedkar globally.

- Marking a historical event, the statue triumphantly showcases Dr. Ambedkar's principles on a grand scale.

4: Unveiling a "Made in India" Pride

- The project worth ₹404.35 crore spans over 18.81 acres of parkland and has been accomplished using entirely home-grown resources.

January Current Affairs

- Utilising 400 tonnes of steel produced within the country, the statue development exemplifies the self-reliance mantra of 'Made in India' initiative.

5: Revitalization of Surrounding Areas

- The project not only includes the statue, but also the redevelopment of the surrounding area, including Swaraj Maidan.
- The refined area features water bodies and a music fountain adding to the visual grandeur of the statue site.

6: Comprehensive Development with Modern Amenities

- The site is equipped with top-notch amenities such as LED screens, a convention centre with seating for 2,000 people, an 8,000 sq ft food court, and a children's play area.
- The multitude of features indicate a multipurpose and inclusive approach to the project.

7: The 'Statue of Social Justice' and its Legacy

- The statue is not merely a symbol but a testament to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's commitment to justice, equality, and progress.
- As the 'Statue of Social Justice', it reflects the firm commitment of Andhra Pradesh and the entire nation to adhere to these principles.

The National Chilika Birds Festival in Odisha: A Manifestation of Preservation and Promotion

I. Introduction to the National Chilika Birds Festival:

The National Chilika Birds Festival observed in Odisha marks a significant event by endorsing the state's commitment to the conservation of biodiversity, specifically avian life. The festival took off on 26th January at the Chilika Lake, the largest salt-water lagoon in Asia and a Ramsar site of global significance. This high-profile event was graced by the Odisha Chief Minister, Naveen Patnaik.

II. Festival Highlights:

- Bird-Watching Excursions: Visitations to the well-known bird sanctuaries, Mangalajodi and Nalabana, were arranged. Mangalajodi, in particular, is revered as the 'Bird's Paradise of Asia,' making it an imperative part of the festival proceedings.
- Photo Exhibition: A drawcard was the photo exhibition that showcased the extraordinary variety of avian beauty inhabiting Chilika.

III. Why is this News Significant?:

- Encourages Conservation Efforts: State Tourism Minister, Aswini Kumar Patra, pointed attention towards the key role played by Odisha in bird conservation and the importance of Chilika in safeguarding avian heritage.
- Celebrates Community's Role: The festival also threw a spotlight on Mangalajodi's effective model of community-led conservation. This model includes habitat restoration and extensive bird census activities.
- Upholds Sustainable Tourism: The festival emphasised on a harmonious relation between tourism expansion and conservation. Dr. Manoj Nair, Director Nandankanan, stressed Chilika's ecological significance and the need for sustainable measures to protect its biodiversity.

IV. GK Aspects:

- Instils Awareness & Appreciation: The festival leveraged the release of the 'State of India's Birds'

poster and a video to deepen the understanding of India's avian diversity amongst the participants. It served as an educational platform fostering conservation awareness and appreciation for Odisha's natural heritage.

- Boosts Ecotourism: Through displaying the rich variety of bird species in the Chilika Lake, the festival also boosted Odisha's image as a prominent destination for birding enthusiasts worldwide.

V. Conclusion:

The triumph of the National Chilika Birds Festival attests to Odisha's unwavering commitment towards the preservation of its biodiversity and the development of sustainable ecotourism. This annual event does not just offer a visual treat to bird enthusiasts but also plays a major role in spreading the word about the importance of species conservation.

Pench Tiger Reserve: Beaconing a Respite in Darkness as India's First Dark Sky Park

1: An Extraordinary Recognition:

Introduction to Dark Sky Park

- Pench Tiger Reserve, situated in Maharashtra, has earned the exceptional recognition as India's first Dark Sky Park, making it the fifth in Asia.
- The prestigious distinction is awarded by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The title emphasises the night sky as a vital aspect of cultural, historical, and natural resources.

2: The Global Issue: Threat of Light Pollution

- Global light pollution is a formidable threat to these natural resources, prompting the formation of the <https://edupreparator.com/>

Dark and Quiet Skies for Science and Society Working Group.

- The group campaigns for the establishment of Dark Sky Parks aiming to safeguard these vital resources.

3: Measures in Motion: Enhancing Stargazing at the Reserve

- To enhance the celestial experience for stargazers at Pench, a night observatory has been established near Wagholi.
- To control light pollution, over 100 street and community lights have been updated.
- The certification for a Dark Sky Park focuses on factors such as lighting policy, introducing dark sky-friendly changes, outreach, education, and the monitoring of the night skies.

4: In the Wilderness: Key Facts about Pench Tiger Reserve

- The expansive Pench Tiger Reserve extends from Seoni and Chhindwara districts in Madhya Pradesh, all the way to Nagpur district in Maharashtra.
- The reserve is named after the Pench River.
- It incorporates Indira Priyadarshini Pench National Park, Pench Mowgli Sanctuary, and a buffer.
- It provided the exotic setting for Rudyard Kipling's renowned work, "The Jungle Book".
- The reserve's undulating landscape supports varied vegetation from moist valleys to dry deciduous forests.
- It houses diverse fauna including Chital, Sambar, Nilgai, Gaur, tiger, leopard, wild dogs, wolf, and over 325 species of birds.
- Its flora includes teak, saag, mahua, and many other local plants.

Assam Government's Initiative- Gunotsav 2024: A Panoramic Guide

I. Introduction and Overview: Gunotsav 2024

- Assam Government is all set to launch its fifth instalment of Gunotsav in 2024, a comprehensive state-wide student assessment exercise.
- The major objective of this project is to enhance educational quality and foster more desirable academic outcomes in Assam.
- The evaluation phase is set to commence from January 3 and will roll out throughout the month till February 8, 2024.
- The government aims to focus on approximately 40 lakh students studying in public schools across the state.

II. Detailed Insights by Education Minister Ranoj Pegu

- Ranoj Pegu, Education Minister, recently released details of the whole evaluation process in a media briefing.
- The evaluation encompasses an extensive network of 43,498 government schools scattered across Assam's 35 districts, with an approximate student count touching 39,63,542.

III. Enriched Participation: Everyone Has A Role

- Gunotsav inherently promotes communal participation, wherein teachers, students, administrators, and local communities are envisaged to actively involve themselves.

IV. Assessment In Phases

- The Gunotsav evaluation process is divided into three phases to ensure a smooth and organised execution.
 1. First phase: January 3 to 6, will include 12 districts.
 2. Second phase: January 9 to 12, will encompass 13 districts.
 3. Final phase: February 5 to 8, will cover the remaining 10.

V. Focusing on Quality and Comprehensive Assessment

- The idea is not only to assess student performance but also to evaluate schools across various sectors and to identify unique learning gaps in each child.
- The evaluation style is comprehensive, focusing on grade-specific learning outcomes.

VI. Use of External Evaluators

- The government plans to deploy a panel of 18,098 external evaluators which will comprise high-ranking officials to oversee the assessment process.

VII. Tracing the Footprints- Gunotsav: A Historical Glance

- Launched in 2017, Gunotsav prepares to enter its fifth year in 2024.
- This continuous, state-level initiative illustrates Assam Government's commitment to elevating educational standards and fostering an empowering learning environment for students.

Science and Technology

Elon Musk's Neuralink: Instrumental Breakthrough in Brain-Computer Interface.

I. Introduction and About the Neuralink Device

- Neuralink, a neurotechnology company co-founded by renowned entrepreneur Elon Musk in

2016, recently announced the successful implantation of a brain device in a human.

- Named as "Link", the device is roughly the size of a large coin and is specifically designed for implantation in the skull for brain-computer interface.
- This groundbreaking achievement witnessed the birth of a new era in advanced neural interface technology.

II. Neuralink: A Leap Forward in Brain-Computer Interface Technology

- Neuralink aims to revolutionise human communication by creating devices that bridge the gap between the human brain and AI.
- The Brain-Computer Interface (BCI) is the technology that underpins this development, facilitates direct communication between the brain and external devices, bypassing traditional neuromuscular pathways.
- Its potential applications include treating neurological disorders like epilepsy and Parkinson's disease, restoring sensory and motor functions, even enhancing cognitive abilities.

III. The Implantation of the "Link" Device

- The "Link" device was successfully implanted in a human recently under the regulatory approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) under the "investigational device exemption."
- The link is designed to monitor brain activity and even stimulate brain regions for therapeutic purposes, the procedure was achieved with minimal invasive surgery involving a robot designed by Neuralink itself.

IV. Safety and Ethical Considerations around the Neuralink Development

- Despite being a significant development in neurotechnology, it also brings challenges and concerns regarding the safety of brain surgery and potential device malfunctions.
- Ethical discussions around the technology and its implications of enhancing human cognition also arise.
- Neuralink is committed to extensive safety testing and following medical standards in compliance with

regulatory bodies, elevating the importance of ethical considerations alongside technology growth.

V. Future of Neuralink and Human Interaction

- The successful implantation of Link marks a profound advancement in Brain-computer interfaces, priming the technology for wider application in future.
- While the immediate purpose is to treat neurological conditions, the broad applications include enhancing cognitive abilities and even direct communication between the human brain and computers.
- This cutting-edge development charms a promising future for human interaction with AI integration.

General Knowledge Part:

- Neuralink, a California headquartered company, made headlines for its pioneering development in Brain-Computer Interface.
- The team behind this innovation continues to work dedicatedly, striving to explore newer prospects for enhancing human cognition and better understanding the human brain.
- The full potential of this technology might be realised in the foreseeable future, bringing a paradigm shift in how humans interact with the digital world.

Stepping into Uncharted Aerospace: NewSpace India- SpaceX Collaboration

NSIL-SpaceX groundbreaking partnership

- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial subsidiary of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and SpaceX, the American

January Current Affairs

aerospace manufacturer owned by Elon Musk, have formed a historic partnership.

- The development marks India's first collaboration with SpaceX and signifies a substantial stride in space exploration and satellite deployment.
- The GSAT-20 (now GSAT-N2) will be launched on-board SpaceX's Falcon-9 rocket in 2024.

Unfolding the potential of GSAT-N2 Satellite

- GSAT-20 or GSAT-N2 is an advanced Ka-band HTS (High Throughput Satellite) engineered to tackle the burgeoning broadband communication demands in India.
- It's the first Ka-band HTS satellite with capabilities of supporting digital video and audio transmission and high-speed broadband internet services.
- The satellite comprises 32 beams offering pan-India coverage, weighing 4,700 kg, and with a capacity reaching 48 Gbps.
- GSAT-20 is particularly inclined towards addressing the communication needs of remote and disconnected regions in India, including locations like Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands.

Falcon-9 – A technological breakthrough

- Falcon 9, a cutting-edge invention by SpaceX, will facilitate the GSAT-20 launch.
- As the world's first orbital class reusable rocket, it is reputed for its safety and reliability in transporting payloads. Falcon 9 has significantly brought down the costs of space access.

Joint Venture and Elon Musk's Vision

- This joint venture not only allows India's entry into a new phase of space exploration but also comes in line with Elon Musk's vision of extending his Starlink satellite broadband project to India.
- The SpaceX CEO, who is also at the helm of electric car giant Tesla, foresees the GSAT-20 launch as a cornerstone of his plan.

'Demand Driven Satellite Missions' and GSAT-20

- Upholding the Indian government's space sector reforms initiated in June 2020, NSIL is commissioned to handle 'Demand Driven satellite missions.'
- GSAT-20 is in sync with this vision, offering Ka-band HTS capacity primarily for broadband, In-Flight and Maritime Connectivity (IFMC), and cellular backhaul service needs, thereby ensuring cost-effectiveness.
- The GSAT-20 is on course to be launched by the second quarter of 2024, further reinforcing India's spot as a significant player in global space exploration.

Japan Charging Ahead in Lunar Exploration: An In-depth Look at SLIM Mission

1. An Intriguing Leap: Japan's Upcoming Lunar Mission

- Japan is set to join the group of elite nations that have accomplished lunar landing.
- The country's space exploration program, led by The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), has developed SLIM (Smart Lander for Investigating Moon).
- The SLIM mission's milestone is expected to occur when it lands on the lunar surface on January 20, 2024.

2. Unfolding the Pioneering Tech: Components and Features of SLIM

- Launched aboard a H-IIA rocket on September 6, 2023, SLIM is set to revolutionise lunar exploration technology.
- The mission aims to demonstrate accurate landings, thereby upgrading future lunar missions' scientific value.

- SLIM's landing target is the rim of Shioli crater, aiming to land within a 100-metre radius of the target point.

3. The Lunar Sharpshooter: SLIM's Innovative Landing Technology

- SLIM, also nicknamed 'moon sniper', is revered for exceptional precision in landing.
- The vehicle uses an optical navigation system. This system synchronises its on-board camera images with preloaded lunar maps.
- This technology equips SLIM with the capability of autonomous navigation to the intended landing spot.

4. From Landing to Research: SLIM's Scientific Payload

- Upon landing, SLIM would launch two rovers – LEV-1 and LEV-2.
- LEV-1, the hopping rover, and LEV-2, a sphere smaller than a tennis ball, are designed to capture images by rolling around the lunar surface.
- Furthermore, the lander carries scientific instruments to investigate the lunar surrounding.

5. Penetrating the Objective: The Significance of SLIM Mission

- SLIM's designated landing site, near Shioli Crater, is speculated to have exposed the Moon's mantle – a source of valuable information on the Moon and Earth's origins.
- The mission's success would shed light on the lunar history and possibly about the presence of water resources.
- It would also mark a huge step for Japan's space program, underlining the country's advanced technological prowess in space exploration and establishing the groundwork for future lunar bases.

Unveiling BharatGPT: Bolstering AI Conversations across India

1: Introduction and Overview of BharatGPT by CoRover.ai

- CoRover.ai, a pioneer in AI technology has introduced BharatGPT, India's first Large Language Model (LLM).
- The primary objective of BharatGPT is to transform AI conversation in various Indian languages, making it more accessible and intuitive.
- This next-gen AI platform has been designed to seamlessly integrate and interact with both voice and text inputs.

2: Multilingual Integration and Strategic Collaboration

- BharatGPT adds versatility to AI with voice modality feature for 12 Indian languages and text modality for 22 Indian languages.
- It is a significant development under the collaborative effort with the National Hub of Language Technology (NHLT), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's National Language Translation Mission (NLTM).

3: Association with BHASHNI and AI Technology

- BharatGPT garnered appreciation from Amitabh Nag, CEO of BHASHNI, for its scalability and innovative features.
- Nag emphasised on the crucial role of AI, Machine Learning, and Natural Language Processing as agents behind such transformative initiatives.

4: Integration of BharatGPT into CoRover.ai Platforms

- Existing platforms of CoRover.ai such as AI Virtual Assistants for IRCTC, LIC, IGL, and NPCI have benefitted from the integration of BharatGPT.
- It enhances the functionalities of CoRover's Conversational AI platform, providing an edge to developers and business users to establish multilingual virtual assistants.

5: Highlighting Notable Features

- Equipped with astonishing features, BharatGPT ensures data sovereignty, and allows integrability with enterprise-wide automation applications.
- It boasts supporting real-time transaction Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) with the added feature of payment gateways and Aadhar-based authentication for Know Your Customer (KYC) processes.

6: Comprehensive Component Suite Incorporated

- The inclusion of features like dialogue/conversational management, real-time analytics, and sentiment analysis makes BharatGPT a powerful AI platform.
- From converting speech to text and text to speech, the capabilities of BharatGPT are truly impressive.

Conclusion:

The introduction of BharatGPT by CoRover.ai is a significant step forward for AI technology in India. Its unique functionality offers multilingual support and enriches the capabilities of AI platforms, paving the way for a transformative AI future.

Launch of 'Samavesha' for Enhanced Research Collaboration: A Revolutionary Initiative by I-STEM

1: Introduction and details about 'Samavesha'

- 'Samavesha' is a newly launched project under the Indian Science, Technology, and Engineering facilities Map (I-STEM) at IISc., Bengaluru.
- The initiative has been led by the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor under the Government of India.
- 'Samavesha' aims to enhance research collaboration by facilitating easy access to scientific establishments and labs for researchers and industries.

2: Launch Event and Future Plans

- The project was launched at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- There are plans to host around 50 'Samavesha' events across the nation by 2024 to promote and expand this initiative.

3: Online Portal and I-STEM's Vision

- I-STEM's online portal connects researchers and industries with scientific institutions and gives access to advanced scientific equipment through rental.
- This is a step towards achieving I-STEM's vision to connect a million innovative researchers to a network of 10,000 advanced labs in India by 2024, creating a collaborative environment involving startups, industries, and academia.

4: Economic Benefits and Resource Optimization

- The initiative helps prevent duplication of research resources, thereby optimizing resource utilisation and saving capital expenditure that might be employed in other crucial areas.

5: Significance of 'Samavesha'

- The project aims to create a seamless connection, shared resources, and stimulate nationwide research, building a stronger and more collaborative research ecosystem in the country.

6: Objectives and Future Impact

- The primary goal of 'Samavesha' is to provide access to advanced research infrastructure for researchers, startups, and industries.

- It encourages innovation by providing unparalleled access to state-of-the-art facilities, which will result in increased research and product innovation.

7: Anticipated Impact of 'Samavesha'

- The program is expected to boost indigenous product innovation and foster a thriving knowledge exchange ecosystem.
- With 'Samavesha', India aims to position itself as a hub for groundbreaking discoveries and homegrown advancements, elevating the nation's standing in global research circles.

This initiative is an important milestone in the science and technology sector of India and a key fact that should be noted for current affairs and GK portion of government exams.

Business

Simmtech's Strategic Investment Fortifies Indian Semiconductor Industry

I. Simmtech's Investing Boost to India's Semiconductor Domain

A. Introduction and Background

- The semiconductor industry in India takes a leap forward with the initiation of a manufacturing plant in Sanand, Gujarat by the South Korean firm, Simmtech.
- The venture is backed by Simmtech's hefty investment of Rs 1,250 crore, thereby setting gears in motion for an augmented semiconductor landscape in India.

B. Detailed Overview of the Investment and Plant Setup

- Inauguration of the plant was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Gujarat government.
- Simmtech will plant its industrial roots on a 30-acre land located in proximity to Micron's existing facility.
- Construction of the plant is anticipated to commence in the forthcoming 2-3 months with a projected completion horizon of 6-7 months.

II. Role of Simmtech in Enhancing Semiconductor Manufacturing

A. Semiconductor Substrate Manufacturing Capabilities

- Simmtech has exploited its specialization in manufacturing semiconductor substrates, the fundamental materials for numerous components in a semiconductor device.
- This venture marks an evolution in Gujarat's capabilities in semiconductor production.

B. Government Aid and Subsidies for Simmtech

- Simmtech's initiative has secured support from both central and state governments of India.
- The company is a beneficiary of subsidies under the Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS), which incentivizes domestic production of electronic components and semiconductors.

III. "Make in India" Initiative: Aiming for India's First Indigenous Semiconductor Chip

As revealed by Minister Vaishnav at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, Gujarat aspires to manufacture the first Indian-made semiconductor chip by 2024, thus mirroring "Make in India" initiative for promoting self-reliance and innovation in the semiconductor sector.

IV. India's Semiconductor Mission (ISM): A Step Towards Sustainable Semiconductor Ecosystem

A. Genesis and Goals of the ISM

- Initiated in 2021 with an ample funding of Rs76,000 crore from the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), the ISM is an integral part of India's strategy to establish a sustainable semiconductor and display ecosystem.
- The mission's primary aim is to extend financial backing to companies investing in the semiconductor, display manufacturing, and design ecosystems.

B. Role of ISM in Nurturing the Semiconductor Sector

- ISM operates under the guidance of international experts in the Semiconductor and Display industry, ensuring the efficient and seamless implementation of relevant programs.
- The mission provides several schemes that offer fiscal support for the establishment of semiconductor and display fabrication facilities, as well as the incentivization of design development and deployment in the semiconductor sector. These incentives include the Scheme for Semiconductor Fabs, the Scheme for Display Fabs, the Scheme for Compound Semiconductors/Silicon Photonics/Sensors Fab and Semiconductor ATMP/OSAT facilities, and the Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme.

Economy

UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024: Analysis and Implications

Overview of the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024 Report

- The United Nations recently published a report titled 'World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024'.
- This report predicts a drop in global inflation in 2024.
- Alongside this, a rise in food inflation, specifically in developing nations, has been forecasted.
- The report flags these combined incidents, along with climate-related issues and geopolitical tensions, as potential challenges to food security, poverty reduction, and overall economic growth.

India's Position in the Global Economy

- The report projects a GDP growth rate of 6.2% for India in 2024, a slight decrease from the 6.3% estimate in 2023.
- The estimated growth stems from strong domestic demand, and the growing manufacturing and services sectors within India.
- This indicates India's growing influence and role in the world economy.

South Asia's Economic Landscape

- The report anticipates that South Asia, spearheaded by India, will witness a GDP growth of 5.2% in 2024, following a growth rate of 5.3% in 2023.
- The economic progress of the entire region underscores India's pivotal role in driving the economies of not just its own nation, but also its neighbouring countries.

Key Takeaways and Implications

- The fluctuation in global and food inflation presents potential challenges for developing countries, which could hinder global efforts towards poverty reduction and food security.
- From India's perspective, strong GDP growth rate projections solidify its position as a significant player within the global economy.

- The growth trend in South Asia also indicates a positive outlook for the region, highlighting the potential for bolstering regional collaborations in areas such as trade, technology, and climate action.

GK Part:

- UN World Economic Situation and Prospects report is an annual publication of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

- India is the world's fifth-largest economy by nominal GDP and third-largest by purchasing power parity.

- In South Asia, India, being the most sizable and influential economy, plays a critical role in determining the regional economic trajectory.

This detailed analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the UN's projections for the global and Indian economies, highlighting key issues and implications from an economic and geopolitical standpoint.

India's Growth Surge amidst Global and Regional Economic Challenges

1. India: On the Fast Lane of Economic Growth

- India's growth trajectory is on an upward swing as it claims the position of the fastest-growing large economy in 2023.

- The growth is primarily due to the successful completion of various governmental infrastructure projects and substantial multinational investments.

2. Global Economic Scene: A Tale of Declining Inflation

- The United Nations report predicts a significant decline in global inflation from 5.7% in 2023 to 3.9% in 2024.

- This respectably lower inflation rate stands as a testament to the global economic recovery.

3. Regional Challenges: A Potpourri of Fiscal Difficulties and Climate Anomalies

- Economies in the region are grappling with downward pressures due to a mix of reasons which include tighter financial conditions coupled with fiscal challenges.

- The recurrence of the El Nino climate phenomenon has added to these challenges causing potential downturns.

4. Rising Inflation: A Potential Economic Weakness

- In 2024, about 25% of developing countries might experience an annual inflation rate exceeding 10%.

- This sharp rise in the inflation rate may indicate the existing economic vulnerabilities and have an adverse effect on overall economic stability.

GK Snippets:

a. On the Map: India is located in South Asia and is the seventh-largest country by land area.

b. Economical Background: With a mixed economy, India is a developing market economy. Its GDP growth rate has always garnered global attention due to its magnitude and rapid pace.

c. Historical Milestones: India gained independence in 1947, and since then, has established itself as one of the fastest-growing major economies.

d. Importance of Infrastructure: Infrastructure projects play a key role in boosting an economy. India's trajectory is a clear example of this.

e. El Nino Phenomenon: El Nino is a climate pattern that increases the temperature of the ocean surface in the central and east-central Pacific Ocean, causing climatic disruptions. This phenomenon has been known to significantly impact agriculture, thus affecting economies.

In summary, India continues to exhibit strong economic growth, even as it navigates the challenges posed by global economic trends and regional issues. This is a testament to its resilience and the efficacy of its macroeconomic strategies.

Setting Up the Sixteenth Finance Commission: A Major Step towards Fiscal Federalism

1. Introduction: Introduction to the Sixteenth Finance Commission

- In accordance with Article 280(1) of the Indian Constitution, the Government of India has established the Sixteenth Finance Commission.
- The government has appointed Dr. Arvind Panagariya, former Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and a professor at Columbia University, as its Chairman.

2. Glimpse into the Constitutionally-Mandated Body: The Finance Commission

- The Finance Commission is an integral facet of fiscal federalism in India, facilitated by the Constitution.
- The Commission's essential function, as mandated by Article 280, is to provide recommendations regarding the allocation of net tax revenue between the Union and the States, and amongst the States themselves.
- It is the President's prerogative to constitute a new Finance Commission every five years. This

<https://edupreparator.com/>

commission includes a Chairman and four other members, with their qualifications and procedures ascent to Parliament's discretion.

3. Extensive Role: Responsibility Spectrum of the Finance Commission

- One of the foremost duties of the Commission is the distribution of net proceeds. It presides over the allocation of tax proceeds in accordance with the Constitution's Chapter I, Part XII.
- Beyond that, the Commission is responsible for defining the principles governing the distribution of Grants-in-Aid from the Consolidated Fund of India to the States.

4. Expansion of Duties: Amendment to Article 280

- In 1992, the responsibilities of the Commission were broadened due to an amendment to Article 280.
- Post-the amendment, the allocation of additional funds from a State's Consolidated Fund for fortifying the resources of Panchayats and Municipalities also came under its purview. Recommendations from the State's Finance Commission form the basis for this decision.

5. Recap of the Sixteenth Finance Commission's Key Figures

- Chairperson: Dr. Arvind Panagariya, former Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Professor at Columbia University.
- Members: Not yet disclosed.

This event is significant for current affairs and general knowledge as it enhances understanding of the integral part of India's fiscal federalism, the Finance Commission. It also marks a notable appointment of a prominent economist to a key position and provides insight into the commission's crucial role in the equitable distribution of national resources.

Shifting Trends: Alternation in Traditional Economic Survey Delivery

Introduction and About:

- In a historic move, the Indian government has decided to diverge from the customary practice of presenting the Economic Survey prior to the Union Budget. The year 2024 will witness this unprecedented divergence owed to it being an election year in the country.
- The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present an interim budget, often called a vote-on-account, on February 1st, breaking away from the long-held norm.

Why is it in the news?

- The decision to refrain from presenting the Economic Survey was made to avoid any potential politicisation that might hamper the usual Budget proceedings due to the upcoming general elections with the prospects of a government change.
- This year, the Ministry of Finance under the guidance of Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran, has put forth a report titled "Indian Economy – A Review". This report serves as an alternative, providing insights into the economic trajectory of India, but does not replace the Economic Survey.

New Occurrence:

- The report "Indian Economy – A Review", although not an official substitution for the Economic Survey, provides a comprehensive analysis and prospect of Indian Economy over the past ten years, and predicts its expected future course.
- The conventional Economic Survey is expected to be presented only after the general elections following the formation of the new government.

Geography and History:

- The tradition of presenting Economic Survey can be traced back to 1950-51. The survey was usually presented before the Union Budget to provide a comprehensive picture of the annual economic development of the country.
- The Ministry of Finance, under whose authority the Economic Survey is prepared, was established on 29th October 1946.

Importance:

- The Economic Survey serves as a significant benchmark, providing an exhaustive and meticulous outline of the Indian economy, which in turn plays a pivotal role in formulation of the Union Budget.
- The step can be viewed as an attempt to insulate the nation's budgetary processes from potential partisan impacts during an election year.

Additional Notes:

- An interim budget or a vote-on-account is presented by the current government if its tenure does not align with the fiscal year. This ensures continuous running of the government till the next government is formed and a full-fledged budget is presented.
- Breaking from the customary practice of annual economic survey discloses a significant shift in the fiscal policies of the Indian government. It's a unique move aimed at preventing potential implications of the upcoming general elections on economic reviews and budget decisions.

A Comprehensive Digest on RBI's 28th Financial Stability Report (FSR)- December 2023

1: Understanding Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

- FSDC, established in 2010, is a robust body aimed to enhance the stability and growth of India's financial sector, with the Finance Minister as its ex-officio chairman.
- It mainly strives for inter-regulatory coordination and fortifying financial stability.

2: Highlighting Key Insights from the 27th Financial Stability Report- June 2023

- Global Economic Challenges: The report recognized the uncertainty in the global banking sector, inflation moderation, and geopolitical tensions as significant challenges.
- Indian Economic Strengths: The resilient Indian economy, characterised by strong macroeconomic fundamentals and consistent growth, was observed in the report.
- Positive Indications: Closure of the current account deficit, augmented forex reserves, fiscal consolidation, and a vigorous financial system emerged as positive indicators.

3: Banking System Sturdiness: Impressive Stats & Facts

- Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) reached new heights in Capital-to-Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR), hitting 17.1%, and Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) ratio at 13.9% in March 2023.
- There was notable improvement in asset quality, with SCBs reporting a 10-year low in Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio at 3.9%, and Net Non-Performing Assets (NNPA) ratio at 1.0% in March 2023.

4: Macro Stress Tests Revelations: Reflecting System's Robustness

- The stress tests conducted demonstrated that SCBs are anticipated to meet minimum capital necessities even under severe stress scenarios.

- The report unveiled projections for system-level CRAR for March 2024, estimated at 16.1% under baseline, 14.7% under medium, and 13.3% under severe stress scenarios, confirming robustness.

5: General Knowledge Focus: Significance of Financial Stability Reports (FSRs)

- FSRs, released by RBI, play a crucial role in reviewing India's financial system sturdiness and identifying potential risks.
- They offer an authoritative overview of the nation's economic resilience, thus informing policy measures and strategies at both national and individual banking levels.
- These reports further highlight macroeconomic factors impact on banks and the inter-linked financial system, making themselves a valuable resource in the policy-making and financial forecasting domains.

Divergent Perspectives in Indian Economy: A Deep Dive into Recent GST Revenue Data

1: Understanding the Genesis of GST in India

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was legislated after the Constitutional (122nd Amendment) Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament in 2016. Following its ratification by over 15 Indian states, the President gave his assent.
- Creation of GST marks a significant step towards a sector-wide indirect tax regime in India, replacing multiple cascading taxes imposed by both central and state governments.

2: Institutional Architecture of GST: The GST Council

- A collaborative platform, the GST Council comprises representatives from both the Central and State Governments.
- The Council is chaired by the Union Finance Minister, and includes the Union Minister of State (Finance) along with a minister from each state who is responsible for finance, taxation, or a relevant portfolio.
- The council recommends to the Union and the states on significant GST matters such as determining the goods and services subject to or exempted from GST, and formulating GST Laws. It also plays a key role in setting different GST rate slabs.

3: Recent Developments in GST Collection: Signs of an Economic Uptick?

- December 2023 GST collections reached ₹1,64,882 crore, marking a 10.28% increase from December 2022's figure of ₹1,49,507 crore. This is the seventh consecutive month where GST collections exceeded ₹1.6-lakh crore, heralding a positive economic trend.
- Between April-December 2023, gross GST collections reached ₹14.97-lakh crore, reflecting a 12% year-on-year increase. The average monthly GST collection during this period was ₹1.66-lakh crore.

4: Dissecting the Numbers: Composition of December 2023 GST Collection

- In December 2023, the GST collection was constituted by CGST: ₹30,443 crore, SGST: ₹37,935 crore, IGST: ₹84,255 crore (including ₹41,534 crore from goods import), and Cess: ₹12,249 crore (including ₹1,079 crore from goods import)
- Post-settlements, the total revenue for the Centre and States in December reached ₹70,501 crore for

CGST and ₹71,587 crore for SGST, indicating a strong fiscal performance.

5: GST Revenue Data and Indian Economy

- Latest GST revenue data, while indicating a strong fiscal performance, also shows uneven consumption growth across Indian states. This unevenness suggests potential disparities in economic recovery across different parts of the country.
- It is vital to study regional variations in economic growth for comprehensive understanding and designing targeted policies for balanced growth.

As GST increasingly becomes instrumental in India's economic machinery, continued scrutiny of revenue trends will be essential in noting economic progress and diagnosing potential areas of concern.

Banking and Finance

Groundbreaking Development in Monetary Transactions: Introduction of UPI-PayNow Linkage

I. Background Information: A Digital Revolution in Cross-Border Transactions

- The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) recently launched the UPI-PayNow linkage.
- This crucial initiative allows for direct monetary transfers between India and Singapore.
- Set up in collaboration between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), the UPI-PayNow linkage aims

to enhance financial inclusion and convenience in cross-border transactions.

II. Working Mechanism: How does UPI-PayNow Linkage Function?

- The linkage involves various mobile applications including BHIM, PhonePe, and Paytm, as well as banks such as Axis Bank, DBS Bank India, ICICI Bank, and SBI.
- Future plans involve onboarding third-party applications and more banks like Bank of Baroda, HDFC Bank, and Kotak Mahindra Bank.
- Indian UPI users can easily transfer to Singaporean PayNow users using their mobile numbers or virtual payment addresses, thus simplifying cross-border transactions.
- This service will be available throughout the year, thereby fostering the growth of digital payments in India.

III. Zooming Into UPI India's Rapid Payment System

- UPI or Unified Payments Interface is a rapid mobile-based payment system used across India.
- It facilitates round-the-clock payments using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA) created by the user.
- The main goal of UPI is to protect user information by eliminating the need to share sensitive bank details during transactions.
- It supports both Person-to-Person (P2P) and Person-to-Merchant (P2M) payments, providing a seamless money transfer service.

IV. Overview of PayNow: Singapore's Instant Funds Transfer System

- PayNow is a quick fund transfer system available in Singapore.
- Accessible to retail customers through specific banks and Non-Bank Financial Institutions (NFI) in Singapore.
- Users can send and receive instant funds from one bank or e-wallet account to another within Singapore.
- Payments are facilitated via mobile numbers, Singapore NRIC or FIN, or Virtual Payment Address (VPA).

V. Importance and Impact:

- The introduction of UPI-PayNow linkage is a significant step towards a digital future.
- This initiative not only aids in the digitalisation of monetary transactions but also significantly boosts the cross-border transacting convenience.
- It can effectively encourage the growth of digital transactions, promoting economic inclusivity and development in the long run.

New Green Initiative- SBI Green Rupee Term Deposit: A Move Towards Eco-Friendly Financing

1. About SBI Green Rupee Term Deposit:

- The State Bank of India, the country's largest public sector bank, has introduced a new fixed deposit scheme called the SBI Green Rupee Term Deposit (SGRTD).
- The scheme aims to promote the development of green finance in India by supporting eco-friendly projects.
- The initiative aligns with India's ambitious goal of achieving net carbon neutrality by 2070.
- Both resident individuals, non-residential individuals, and NRI customers can invest in this scheme.

2. Accessibility of SGRTD:

- To begin with, the SGRTD will be available through SBI branches.
- Future prospects include potentially extending its availability through digital avenues such as YONO and Internet Banking Services (INB).

3. Overview of Interest Rates and Other Features:

- The offered interest rates on this deposit are 10 basis points (bps) below the card rate for both retail and bulk deposits based on the respective tenor.
- Interest rates for retail deposits are 6.65% for 1111 & 1777 days and 6.40% for 2222 days.
- Bulk deposits return 6.15% for 1111 & 1777 days and 5.90% for 2222 days.
- Senior Citizens and bank employees are eligible for an additional interest rate over the standard public rate.
- Premature withdrawal is permitted under the SGRTD guideline.
- The scheme follows the standard guidelines for term deposit or special term deposit.
- A loan or overdraft facility is available against the deposit and Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) is applicable as per income tax rules.

4. Importance in Current Context:

- SGRTD is a progressive stride that positions India's banking sector at the forefront of eco-conscious financing.
- The initiative will be instrumental in channelling investments towards projects that contribute to environmental sustainability.
- It is a tangible step towards attaining India's target of net carbon neutrality by 2070.

5. Gk Part:

- Green Finance is a strategy for financial investment in projects and businesses that are sustainable and environmentally friendly. Governments, financial institutions, companies, and individuals worldwide are increasingly adopting it.
 - Net Carbon Neutrality means achieving a balance between the carbon dioxide released into and removed from the atmosphere.
 - The State Bank of India is the largest Public Sector Bank with a 23% market share in assets, serving over 50 crore customers across India.
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HDFC Bank Eyes Singapore for its Global Expansion

Introduction & About

- HDFC Bank Ltd., the flagship private sector bank of India, is seeking to open its maiden branch in Singapore.
- Singapore is being seen as the next strategic move by the bank after its hefty merger with the Housing Development Finance Corporation during the previous year.

Why in News?

- HDFC Bank's move to expand its global footprints began with a licence application submitted to the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS).
- The ambiguity surrounding the details of this application, which includes the type of licence being sought, has piqued interest among those tracking the banking sector's developments.

The Bank's Vision for the Overseas Market

- The bank intends to exploit the potential of the banking sector overseas by targeting the Indian diaspora in Singapore.
- Their marketed scheme includes the promotion of savings and term deposits, and cross-selling of a variety of products such as mortgages.

Aiming to Serve Indian Diaspora

- Having a notable non-residential Indian diaspora of approximately 650,000, Singapore comes off as an attractive target for HDFC's expansion.
- The bank sees this population as potential clients and aims to cater to them with tailor-made financial products and services.

Anticipating MAS Response

- HDFC Bank's application is still under consideration, with neither approval nor comments issued by MAS yet.
- Currently not licensed or regulated by MAS, HDFC Bank can merely provide advice services

for home loans relating to property purchases in India.

Types of Banking Licences in Singapore

- Three types of banking licences are issued in Singapore- Full Banks, Qualifying Full Banks, and Wholesale Banks, each subject to different levels of operation restriction.
- HDFC Bank's licence application shows its readiness to wade through these regulatory nuances to establish a comprehensive banking presence.

HDFC's Global Presence

- HDFC, in addition to planning for Singapore, already marks its presence in other leading financial centres such as London, Hong Kong, and Bahrain.
- This international advent is a cog in the wheel of HDFC's masterplan, which is to diversify its geographical reach and penetrate international markets.

GK Update:

- HDFC Bank Ltd., established in 1994, is a leading banking and financial services company based in India. It is the country's largest private sector lender by assets, offering a wide range of financial products and services.
- Singapore, a global hub for finance, technology, and trade, is renowned for its robust economic infrastructure, strategic location, and business-friendly environment.
- MAS is Singapore's central bank and financial regulatory authority. Controlling all the financial institutions in Singapore, its mission is to promote sustained non-inflationary economic growth and a sound and progressive financial centre.
- The term "Indian diaspora" refers to Indians settled overseas, their descendants, or people with Indian roots.
- The bank's global footprint expansion aligns with India's 'Look East' policy, aimed at improving economic and diplomatic relations with its eastern neighbours and beyond.

AIIB's Investment in Renewable Energy Infrastructure in India: A Step towards Cleaner Future

1: Unfolding the Transaction

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a multilateral development bank, has recently pledged an investment of INR 4.86 billion (approximately \$58.4 million) in Sustainable Energy Infra Trust (SEIT), India's largest renewable energy Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT).
- This transaction denotes the second instance of AIIB investing in Indian InvITs, demonstrating its continued commitment to promoting sustainable energy in the region.

2: The Impact and Potential of the Investment

- Strongly supported by both Mahindra Susten Private Limited and Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, SEIT operates eight robust solar power assets across India, boasting a combined capacity of 1.54 gigawatts-peak.
- AIIB's sizable investment in SEIT symbolises the bank's commitment to innovative infrastructure financing solutions and the growth of renewable energy.
- The investment enables the sponsors to monetize their stakes in infrastructure assets, thus paving the way for the development of new renewable energy projects.

3: Tracing Past Ventures and Future Prospects

- AIIB had earlier invested in Oriental Structural Engineers InvIT in 2019, centering on road and highway financing. This marked the bank's

consistent drive to encourage private institutional capital for the escalation of renewable energy.

- AIIB Director General Dongik Lee remarks that this newest collaboration aims to spur private sector involvement in financing renewable energy, catering to the emerging power demand in markets, and aiding the achievement of Net Zero targets.

4: Realising National and Net-Zero Targets

- India has set a national target of attaining a renewable energy capacity of 175 GW by 2022, with 100 GW from solar and 60 GW from wind sources.

- By 2030, the nation aims to operationalize 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity.

- In relation to the global push for environmental conservation, India seeks to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2070. The realisation of this objective would necessitate an estimated investment of a staggering \$10 trillion.

5: InvITs – A Sustainable Financing Model

- The significant market success of SEIT magnifies the potential of InvITs as a long-term, sustainable financing model in India.

- It reflects the increasing attractiveness of InvITs for investors around the world seeking to capitalise on India's growing renewable energy sector.

In conclusion, AIIB's investment in India's renewable energy Infrastructure Investment Trusts is a promising indicator of the nation's tangible efforts towards a cleaner and sustainable future. This investment is not only expected to energise the renewable energy sector but also signals a growing global interest in sustainable investments within the Indian market.

Digging Deep into Green Deposits: RBI Clarifications & Their Significance

I. Introduction to Green Deposits

- Green deposit is an interest-providing financial instrument held by regulated entities (RE) for a pre-decided duration.

- The primary function of such a deposit is to allocate funds towards green finance which includes investments into projects that are environmentally friendly and sustainable.

II. Why in the News: RBI's Notification

- Recently, this subject was brought into the limelight after The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) issued a notification on April 11, 2023.

- According to the notification, green deposits fell under the umbrella of the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

III. Understanding Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC)

- The Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) is a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India.

- Its primary role is to provide insurance coverage for bank deposits and guarantee credit facilities offered by registered banks.

- By ensuring green deposits under the ambit of DICGC, RBI is often viewed as strengthening the assurance mechanism for such instruments.

IV. Significance of RBI's Clarification

- This development signifies that the green deposits are now insured, making them a safer option for investors.

- This may drive greater investments into green deposits, thereby aiding the growth of green finance.

- It is also seen as a stride towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, supporting India's commitment to transitioning to a cleaner and more sustainable economy.

V. GK Portion- Geography and Environment

- Green finance and consequently green deposits are a part of the global strategy to combat climate change issues.
- Such financial mechanisms largely support the climate resilience plans of not just India but other nations actively participating to reduce the global carbon footprint.

VI. Looking Ahead: The Potential Impact

- With this insured status, green deposits are expected to witness a surge in popularity among investors.
- As more and more people put their money into green deposits, more funds can be allocated towards sustainable projects, pioneering a positive impact for the environment.
- Overall, this development from RBI signifies a promising future for green finance in India.

Defence

Joint Military Exercise 'Desert Cyclone 2024': Strengthening India-UAE Defence Partnership

Introduction to 'Desert Cyclone 2024'

- The 'Desert Cyclone 2024' is a distinguished military exercise between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

- It is scheduled to commence on January 2 and conclude on 15th of the same month.
- The exercise will primarily be held in Rajasthan, a state in India known for its vast desert landscape, providing an ideal training ground for such operations.

Objectives of the Military Exercise

- The primary goal of this exercise is to bolster interoperability between the Indian and UAE armed forces.
- It encourages the exchange of knowledge, experience, and best practices in different facets of urban warfare.
- The Indian Army, through its official handle, announced this exercise, expressing its enthusiasm for the first edition of the Joint Military Exercise Desert Cyclone.

Expected Outcomes and Significance

- The 'Desert Cyclone 2024' exercise is instrumental in fostering a closer relationship between India and the UAE in the defence sector.
- It is expected to aid in strengthening their military partnership and facilitating effective coordination during war times and peacekeeping missions.
- The joint military exercise will contribute to enhancing regional and global security by ensuring both countries are well-equipped and thoroughly trained.
- Additionally, this exercise underscores the growing prominence of the India-UAE strategic partnership and their willingness to jointly counter security threats.

A Glimpse into the Past

- Historically, India and UAE have shared warm diplomatic relations and mutual respect.
- Their ties have been characterised by regular high-level visits, and they have gradually deepened their cooperation across a range of fields- from trade and economy to security and defence.

- This military exercise is yet another testament to the growing strength of the India-UAE strategic partnership.

Geographical and Strategic Importance

- Geographically, the UAE occupies a strategic position on the Arabian Peninsula, with access to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, offering it marine accessibility.

- For India, having a stronger defence relationship with the UAE not only aids in enhancing its strategic outreach in the Middle East but also in maintaining security in the Indian Ocean Region.

In summary, the forthcoming 'Desert Cyclone 2024' joint military exercise between India and the UAE reflects a growing strategic partnership that is geared towards promoting regional and international security.

Indo-UAE Relations: A Comprehensive Look into the Defence Collaboration

I. Introduction: Indo-UAE Relations and Defence Collaboration

- India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have cemented their commitment towards stronger bilateral cooperation with the recent signing of eight agreements. These pacts aim to enhance collaboration in critical sectors such as investments, electricity trade, and digital payment platforms. The signing of these pacts further strengthens the robust defence bond shared by the two nations.

II. Tracing the Historical Bonds and Foundations

- The relationship between India and UAE is deep-rooted, extending across cultural, religious, and economic interactions spanning for thousands of years. This enduring tie has set a firm foundation for collaborative opportunities in several sectors, including defence.

- Key areas identified for potential bilateral cooperation include the production and development of defence equipment, joint armed forces exercises, information sharing on strategy and doctrines, and technical cooperation in several defence fields such as the development of Intermediate Jet Trainers.

III. Scrutinising Recent Developments in Defence Collaboration

- The defence collaboration between India and UAE has witnessed considerable growth in recent years. This collaboration extends to areas like defence training, supply of defence inventory, and regular exchange programs.

- A significant recent development has been the first India-UAE Joint Air Forces exercise, which took place in September 2008 at Al-Dhafra base in Abu Dhabi. This joint exercise marked a significant milestone in the defence collaboration of the two countries.

IV. Participation in International Defence Exhibitions

- India's active involvement in the biennial International Defence Exhibition (IDEX) in Abu Dhabi, UAE, exemplifies the commitment of the two nations to bolster their defence relations.

- The IDEX platform helps India showcase its advancements in the defence sector and explore collaborative opportunities with the UAE and other global partners. Participation in such platforms also aids India in enhancing its defence technological prowess and in expanding its footprint in the global defence space.

GK Points:

- The UAE, located in Southeast Asia, is a federation of seven emirates including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah among others.
- It is strategically located along the southern approaches to the Strait of Hormuz, a vital transit point for world crude oil.
- The UAE's high GDP and liberal policies have made it a significant player in the regional geopolitics.
- From India's perspective, the UAE is a valued partner with resources and strategic location, and with these recent pacts, the relationship is expected to touch new heights.

Indian Navy's Momentous Contribution to Ex Sea Dragon 24

1: Floating its Presence in the Pacific-India at Ex Sea Dragon 24

- On January 9th, 2024, the Indian Navy marked a significant milestone by contributing its P-8I aircraft to the Ex Sea Dragon 24.
- This Anti-Submarine Warfare exercise organised by the US Navy saw India's proactive participation from the waters.

2: Aim and objectives of Exercise Sea Dragon 24

- The exercise intended to cultivate interoperability and cooperation between the navies of multiple nations including India, USA, Australia, South Korea, and Japan.
- It concentrated on enhancing ground and air coordination and communication, as per the statement released by the Indian Navy.

3: The Spectrum of Activities in Exercise Sea Dragon 24

- The exercise facilitated multitudes of aircraft to track and anticipate both simulated and live underwater assets, thereby aiming to boost Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities.
- The Indian Navy's P8I, US Navy's P8A, Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force's P1, Royal Canadian Air Force's CP-140, Republic of Korea Navy's P3C etc. were key contributors to the exercise.

4: A Lookback at Indian Navy's Previous Engagements

- India's involvement in Ex Sea Dragon 24 didn't come out of the blue, as it had already participated in the La Perouse exercise in March 2023.
- This event was hosted by France aimed at reinforcing maritime security and cooperation and included India among other countries like Australia, Canada, France, Japan, USA, and the UK.

5: The Importance of such Naval Exercises

- These exercises are of paramount importance as they allow for the performing of intricate naval operations and fostering maritime cooperation between different countries.

6: India's maritime Preparedness

- In September 2023, India amplified its maritime defences by procuring an additional six P-8I Anti-Submarine Warfare and surveillance aircraft from the US.
- These aircraft have played a vital role in surveillance in several areas, including Ladakh and during the Doklam crisis.

7: Future Prospects

- The Indian Navy's dynamic participations signal its commitment towards enhancing maritime partnerships and sharpening Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities.

- Such collaborations not only elevate India's standing as a key contributor to regional security but also underline its resolve to protect its maritime interests, paving the way for a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region in the future.

Embracing the Future: Indian Army's "Year of Technology Absorption"

Introduction and Overview

- The Indian Army has announced its plan to observe 2024 as the "Year of Technology Absorption".

- The initiative aligns with the Army's objectives of technology leveraged modernisation, increased operational efficiency, and a boost in collaboration with the domestic defence industry.

Why in the News?

- The Army's focus on technology absorption is drawing attention due to its various objectives and planned activities.

- Key focus areas include leveraging technology for transformation, augmenting cyber capabilities, project SAMBHAV, enhancing infrastructure connectivity, restructuring units and planning human resource initiatives.

Delving into the Focus Areas

- **Technological Transformation:** The Army aims to employ cutting-edge technology for transformative changes, mainly centred around operational and logistic needs.

- **Cyber Capabilities:** A significant thrust will be imparted to enhance the Army's cyber capabilities and train personnel in using this technology.

- **Project SAMBHAV:** It involves the initiation of a secure, 5G technology-based communication system for super-fast connectivity.

- **Connectivity Expansion:** The Army has installed 355 posts for 4G network coverage and is investing in infrastructure at different sites.

- **Restructured Units:** Plans are underway to revamp units and shift to drone technology, thereby phasing out transport animals by 2027.

- **HR Initiatives:** The Army aims to provide employment for about 62,000 retiring soldiers annually, while also focusing on the upskilling of veterans.

Project Background

- The notion of observing 2024 as the "Year of Technology Absorption" comes subsequent to the declaration of 2023 as the "Year of Transformation".

- The previous phase centred on the reconditioning of arms, induction of new human resources, downsizing, and technological infusion.

Significance and Potential Impact

- **Modernisation:** The implementation of this initiative will exponentially contribute to the comprehensive modernisation of the Army and amplify operational readiness.

- **Indigenisation:** The initiative delineates the Army's commitment towards indigenising defence technology.

- **Security Management:** It will also significantly boost the Army's preparedness and security management by bolstering cyber capabilities and providing wider network coverage.

- **Human Resource Management:** The emphasis on human resource initiatives elucidates the Army's commitment to the welfare and optimised allocation of its personnel.

Uniting Maritime Strengths- Sahyog Kaijin Exercise 2021

I. Introduction and Background:

- The Indian and Japanese Coast Guards successfully executed the joint exercise named 'Sahyog Kaijin'.
- This collaborative effort took place off the coast of Chennai, India.

January Current Affairs

- Initiated under the framework of a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) signed in 2006, the exercise forms a crucial part of mutual readiness and understanding between the two nations.

II. High-Octane Exercise Highlights:

- Participant Armada: The exercise was conducted with prominent vessels like Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Shaurya and Japan Coast Guard Ship (JCGS) Yashima, along with supporting vessels and aircraft.

- Scenario Enactment: The drill encompassed a simulated collision and resultant fire between two vessels- MT Matsyadristi and MV Anveshika, accompanied by a crude oil spill.

- Rescue and Recovery: Proactivity was demonstrated via a prompt distress signal response and initiation of rescue operations using fast patrol vessels and aircraft.

III. Beyond Tactical Training:

- This joint exercise was not just limited to tactical training, but also encompassed engaging cultural interactions and sports events, fostering deeper bilateral ties.

IV. Core Focus Areas:

- This exercise concentrated on enhancing skills and procedures in pollution response training, chemical pollution real-time response, anti-piracy measures and efficient search and rescue protocols.

V. The Greater Significance of 'Sahyog Kaijin':

- Fortified Bilateral Relations: The exercise substantially strengthened maritime cooperation between India and Japan.

- Augmented Interoperability: The joint exercise enhanced communication and operational procedures of both Coast Guards, enabling a swifter and coordinated response to maritime threats.

- Knowledge Exchange: The exercise facilitated the exchange of knowledge and best practices,

aiding both nations in tackling maritime challenges more robustly.

- Boost to Regional Stability and Security: It contributed to amplifying regional stability and security, by enforcing preparedness and coordination against potential maritime threats and emergencies.

Knowledge Point (GK Part):

The first Sahyog-Kaijin exercise between India and Japan took place in 1999. Initially, these exercises were confined to anti piracy drills, however, over the years, they have evolved to include a variety of other operations, including maritime search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement.

Strengthening Air Defense: Successful Test of New Generation AKASH Missile by DRDO

Introduction and About

India's premier defence research organisation, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), successfully tested their state-of-the-art New Generation AKASH (AKASH-NG) Missile system. This advanced missile system, designed to intercept high-speed aerial threats, has demonstrated its effectiveness in countering advanced airborne targets, effectively enhancing India's air defence capabilities.

Key Details of The Test

- The test held special significance as it targeted a high-speed, low-altitude unmanned aerial vehicle.

- The AKASH-NG missile system intercepted and destroyed the target successfully. The missile system includes an indigenously developed Radio Frequency Seeker, Launcher, Multi-Function Radar, and Command, Control, and Communication system.

January Current Affairs

- This test served as a validation of the complete weapon system functionality, marking it as a notable achievement for DRDO and Indian defence.

System Validation Technology

- The validation of the missile system was done using advanced technologies such as Radars, Telemetry, and an Electro-Optical Tracking System.
- This validation process confirmed the system's reliability and effectiveness in real-world scenarios.

Test Witnesses

- The test was closely observed by senior officials from DRDO, the Indian Air Force (IAF), Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).
- The collaboration and expertise of these organisations have been critical to the success of the test.

Future Plans

- The successful test opens avenues for upcoming user trials.
- The AKASH-NG system is due for further evaluation in realistic operational scenarios, bringing it closer to induction into the country's defence arsenal.

Commendations

- The Union Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, lauded the collaborative efforts of DRDO, IAF, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), and the industry for the successful test.
- Dr. Samir V Kamat, Secretary, Department of Defence R&D, and Chairman DRDO, also applauded the commitment and expertise of the scientific community and industry partners involved in the test. Both have expressed high confidence for the further development of the AKASH-NG system.

Significance (GK Part)

- This successful test of the AKASH-NG system marks a significant milestone in India's journey towards self-reliance in defence technologies.
- The system's indigenous development underlines India's growing capabilities in the defence sector.

- Enhanced air defence capabilities with AKASH-NG are expected to provide a strategic advantage and strengthen India's national security.

The Groundbreaking "Sada Tanseeq"- India and Saudi Arabia's First Joint Military Exercise

Embarking on Diplomatic Milestone: The Introduction of "Sada Tanseeq"

- This historic inaugural event marks the first joint military exercise between India and Saudi Arabia, appropriately titled "Sada Tanseeq."
- Slated to take place in India's Rajasthan region from January 29th to February 10th, 2024, the event showcases a noteworthy progression in the bilateral relations between the two nations.

Parsing out the Participants of Sada Tanseeq

- The military exercise involves the participation of 45 individuals from the Royal Saudi Land Forces representing Saudi Arabia.
- India is also represented by 45 members coming from a Battalion of the Brigade of the Guards (Mechanised Infantry).

Delving into the Key Objectives of Sada Tanseeq

- Sada Tanseeq aims to foster and enhance mutual understanding and interoperability between the Indian and Saudi Arabian armed forces.
- The primary activity involves a focus on UN mandated counter-terrorism operations to bolster regional security.
- In addition to such training missions, the exercise also fosters camaraderie and trust through interaction between field commanders and soldiers.

In-the-Field Activities during the Exercise

- Involvement and establishment of mobile vehicle check posts will be a critical part of the exercise.
- Counter-terrorism operations will involve Cordon and Search operations, a systematic strategy to locate and neutralise potential threats.
- Training troops in close-quarters combat techniques with house intervention drills.
- Reflex shooting exercises to enhance the troops' marksmanship skills.
- Specialised training, such as slithering from helicopters and sniper firing, will also be part of the exercise.

Revisiting the Past Military Collaborations: Exercise Al-Mohad Al-Hindi

- Prior endeavours, such as Exercise Al-Mohad Al-Hindi, have significantly contributed to shaping enhanced maritime security cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia.
- These tactical manoeuvres and search and rescue operations showed the countries' commitment to ensuring maritime security in the region.

This move to joint military exercises may indicate a growing strategic partnership between India and Saudi Arabia, highlighting their commitment towards regional stability and combating terrorism. The importance of such bilateral engagements, especially in regions like the Middle East, which has sensitive geopolitics, cannot be overstated.

11th India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise KHANJAR: Bolstering Defense Relationships

I. Overview of the Event

- The event discussed in this news piece is the 11th edition of the annual Special Forces Exercise KHANJAR held jointly by India and Kyrgyzstan.
- The exercise began at the Special Forces Training School in Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh and runs from 22nd January till 3rd February 2024.

II. Representation at the Exercise

- Indian Army delegated 20 personnel from The Parachute Regiment (Special Forces) for participation.
- Kyrgyzstan represented by 20 personnel from the Scorpion Brigade.
- This joint exercise underscores the commitment for capacity building and countering terror from both nations.

III. Objectives of the Exercise

- Core objective is knowledge sharing and learning on counter-terrorism and special forces operations.
- The training emphasises on operations in built-up areas and mountainous terrains under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
- Techniques for insertion and extraction in difficult terrains form a crucial part of the training.

IV. Impact on Defence Collaboration

- The exercise acts as a conduit for solidifying defence relationships between India and Kyrgyzstan.
- It provides an opportunity to tackle shared concerns on international terrorism and extremism and boosts preparedness.
- The interaction enhances interoperability, coordination and communication among the forces.

V. Defense Equipment Showcasing

- Participants are given a platform to showcase their prowess in indigenous defence equipment.
- This activity not only promotes domestic defence industries, but also exhibits technological competencies of India and Kyrgyzstan.

VI. Diplomatic and Security

Implications

- The joint exercise also plays a significant role in enhancing bilateral relationships between the two nations.
- By achieving shared security objectives, both countries present a united front against mutual threats.
- This step significantly contributes to strengthening diplomatic and defence ties between India and Kyrgyzstan.

GK: Located in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union and Shanghai Cooperation Organization along with India. The country has been a significant strategic partner for India, especially pertaining to defence and security concerns. This exercise signifies the evolving defence collaboration between the two nations.

Strengthening Military Ties: Desert Knight Military Exercise 2024

1: Introduction and Background

- In the wake of increasing concerns surrounding Houthi militants targeting commercial vessels, a tri-nation military exercise named 'Desert Knight' was held on January 23, 2024.
- This joint military exercise involved India, France, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and took place in the Arabian Sea region.

2: Objectives of Desert Knight Exercise

- The main goal of this military training was to enhance the synergy and interoperability among the air forces of the participating nations.
- It aimed to foster a mutual understanding of operational measures in case of regional security

threats, in this case specifically, those posed by Houthi Militants.

- The exercise holds significant importance in not only sharing best practices but also in creating more robust and cooperative defence dynamics under shared threats.

3: Participation and Assets Involved

- 'Desert Knight 2024' saw the involvement of frontline aerial assets and combat jets from India, France, and the UAE.
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) participated with assets including Su-30 MKI, MiG-29, Jaguar fighter jets, AWACS, C-130-J transport planes, and air-to-air refuelling aircraft.
- The French and UAE air forces operated their aircraft, including Rafale jets, from Al Dhafra air base in UAE, while IAF aircraft operated across various Indian bases, within Indian Flight Information Regions (FIRs).

4: Strategic Implications

- The tri-nation military exercise 'Desert Knight' has significant strategic implications that extend beyond the military realm.
- It has fostered stronger military ties between India, France, and the UAE, emphasising the collective work towards regional security.
- The exercise also aimed to maintain peace and stability in the region, consolidating defence strategies among nations sharing common security interests.

5: Extra Special: Republic Day Celebrations

- Following 'Desert Knight,' French forces participated in India's Republic Day, making it a special occasion.
- An Airbus A330 tanker and Rafale jets from France featured in the aerial display, extra highlighting the military partnership.
- The presence of the French President Emmanuel Macron, as the Chief Guest, has added to the strengthening diplomatic ties

between the two countries. He is the sixth French leader to hold this honour.

- France sent a 95-member marching contingent and a 33-member band contingent for the parade, which was a significant part of the celebrations.

Conclusion:

The 'Desert Knight' exercise of 2024 emphasises the deepening military ties and shared security interests among India, France, and the UAE. This cooperation is significant, given the regional security challenges in the Arabian Sea region and beyond. The subsequent participation of the French forces in India's Republic Day further underscores this evolving relationship.

A Leap in Indian Aviation: Introduction of India's First Domestically Produced Aircraft Passenger Seat

1. Groundbreaking Development in Indian Aviation

- Bengaluru-based engineering firm, Timetooth, has revealed India's first domestically produced aircraft passenger seat at Wings India 2024 event.

- This advancement is a sharp departure from the industry's standard of importing all of the aircraft seats used by Indian-registered airline companies.

2. Pioneering Change: The Vision of Timetooth

- Amitav Chaudhuri, the Co-Founder and Director of Timetooth, brought to light India's current dependence on imported aircraft seats.

- Despite airlines having the independence to opt for their seat sources, the absence of a home-grown alternative has resulted in a 100% import rate.

- With the objective to close this gap, Timetooth, along with DGCA and Indian airline firms, spearheaded the introduction of India's inaugural indigenous aircraft passenger seat.

3. Precision and Comfort: The Focus of the Design

- The manufacturing team at Timetooth designed the seats with an emphasis on both performance standards, adhering to ITSO C39c, and user comfort.

- The project, managed by Janhavi Nene, VP Engineering at Timetooth, prioritised the creation of lightweight seats primarily for commuter aircraft such as the DGCA approved Hindustan (Dornier) 228.

- Furthermore, Timetooth plans to expand its range with regional transport aircraft seats in accordance with ITSO C127c.

4. A Glimpse of Success: Spicejet's Interest in Timetooth's Initiative

- Timetooth's innovation has generated interest from leading Indian airline, Spicejet, which plans to adopt the newly developed seat system.

- They aim to customise these seats in alignment with their brand, touching on their vision for an enhanced user experience.

- The official confirmation from Spicejet arrived through a letter of agreement with Timetooth, made public at the Wings India 2024 event.

5. An Uprising in the Indian Aviation Industry

- The launch of the indigenous aircraft seat by Timetooth is a significant mark in Indian aviation history, signalling a paradigm shift in the industry.

- This development upholds the government's "Make in India" initiative, fostering innovation, collaboration, and self-reliance to meet the demands of the aviation sector.

General Knowledge perspective:

- The engineering company Timetooth is based in Bengaluru, India.

- Performance standards ITSO C39c and ITSO C127c have a critical role in the specifications of aircraft seats.

- The domestic alternative to imported aircraft seats supports "Make in India", an Indian government initiative.
 - Leading airline, Spicejet, shows interest in locally manufactured seats indicating a potential shift in the industry's dependence on imports.
-

Indian Navy's Strategic Expansion: Establishment of Second Very Low Frequency (VLF) Communication Station in Telangana

1: Introduction to the New Navy Project

- The Indian Navy is all set to establish its second Very Low Frequency (VLF) Communication Transmission Station in Telangana's Vikarabad district.
- With the completion targeted by 2027, this development holds strategic importance for enhancing the country's naval capacities.
- The significance of this move lies in the enhanced communication potential the VLF station offers, especially with submarines and ships which are critical entities in naval warfare and patrolling the nation's water borders.

2: Choice of Location and Historical Reference

- Telangana, particularly the Damagudem forest area near Puduru in Vikarabad district has been identified by the Eastern Naval Command as an ideal location for this new radar station.
- Historically, the Indian Navy has had an operational VLF communication station in Tamil Nadu at the INS Kattabomman Radar Station since 1990. This new station in Telangana would hence, be the Navy's second such establishment.

3: Overcoming Land Allotment Challenges

- The proposal for establishing this station had been discussed with the Telangana government since 2010 and necessary environmental permits were secured. However, the project faced issues with land allotment.
- The impasse was finally resolved following an initiative led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, which culminated in the successful allocation of 1,174 hectares of Damagudem Reserve Forest land to the Navy.

4: Project Details and Promises of Ecological Balance

- The naval unit in Vikarabad is planned to consist of about 600 Naval personnel and civilians. The associated township will accommodate around 2,500 to 3,000 residents.
- As part of the project iteration, sufficient measures are being taken to ensure preservation of the biodiversity and the ecological balance of the area.
- A 27 km stretch of road is planned to be built around Damagudem Reserve Forest in affirmation of the project's commitment.

In conclusion, the establishment of the Navy's second VLF communication station in Vikarabad, Telangana marks a major strategic advancement for the country. This move not only strengthens India's naval communication potential but also underscores the importance of ecologically balanced development initiatives.

Operation Sarvashakti India's Comprehensive Plot Against Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir

1. Introduction: Operation Sarvashakti

- Operation Sarvashakti is the Indian army's strategic counter-terrorism initiative aimed at curbing the influence of Pakistani-supported terrorist groups concentrated in the Jammu and Kashmir region.
- The operation addresses the surge of terrorist activities identifiable particularly in the Rajouri and Poonch sectors.

2. Recurrence of Terrorism in the Region

- The operation comes as a response to the heightened terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir, specifically notable in the Rajouri Poonch sector.
- The significance of this operation is underlined by the recent attack on Indian troops on December 21, resulting in the death of four soldiers in the Dera ki Gali area.

3. Strategy behind the Operation

- The operation emphasises a synergy of counter-terrorism operations on both flanks of the Pir Panjal ranges.
- This includes joint efforts involving the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps and the Nagrota-headquartered White Knight Corps.
- The strategic approach also hinges on cooperation from the Jammu and Kashmir Police, CRPF, Special Operations Group, and intelligence agencies.

4. Historical Reference: Operation Sarpvinash

- Operation Sarvashakti bears resemblance to Operation Sarpvinash which was launched in 2003, targeting the same areas in the South of the Pir Panjal range.

5. Leadership Insight: Army Chief's Perspective

- Army Chief General Manoj Pande acknowledged the resurgence of terrorist activities since 2003 and has initiated discussions with Corps Commanders to strategize and counter the evolving threats.

6. Multi-Agency Collaboration

- The operation embodies close coordination involving the Army Headquarters, the Northern Army Command in Udhampur, Home Minister Amit Shah, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Army officials, and intelligence agencies.

7. Strengthening Troops and Intelligence

- The operation represents an augmentation of the troop strength in the Rajouri-Poonch sector and fortification of the intelligence setup in the region.

8. Upholding Ethical Conduct

- The Indian Army adheres to high ethical standards by avoiding firing in civilian areas.
- Swift action against personnel involved in wrongful encounters reinforces local trust and solidarity.

9. Operation Sarvashakti A Unified Front Against Terrorism

- The operation signifies a comprehensive, collaborative, and ethical strategy to counter terrorism in the region.
- Its successful implementation has the potential to significantly ameliorate national and regional peace and security.

10. Geographical Context

- The operation focuses on the Pir Panjal mountain ranges present in the Union Territory, marking their strategic importance.

Decoding Global Firepower's Military Strength Rankings 2024

1: Overview and Methodology

January Current Affairs

- Global Firepower, an internationally recognized defence research entity, has released its Military Strength Rankings for 2024.
- The report evaluates the military capabilities of 145 countries globally across varied parameters.
- The rankings are calculated based on more than 60 factors such as troop count, military equipment, economic stability, geographical location, and resources available.
- A Power Index Score, ranging between 0 to 1, is then calculated for each nation. The lower the score, the stronger the projected military power.

2: Rankings and Positions

- As per the 2024 rankings, the United States emerged as the most militarily powerful nation, obtaining the lowest Power Index score of 0.0699.
- Russia and China were closely behind with Power Index scores of 0.0702 and 0.0706 respectively.
- Other countries in the top 10 for military strength include India, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Italy.
- On the other end of the spectrum, Bhutan holds the position of the country with the least military power, along with other nations like Moldova, Suriname, Somalia, Benin, Liberia, Belize, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, and Iceland.

3: Significance and Analysis

- The Global Firepower Military Strength Rankings play a crucial role in understanding the strengths and capabilities of every participating nation's military.
- The report can also help comprehend the challenges faced by nations having the least powerful militaries.
- Evaluating countries with lower military capabilities gives insights into their potential vulnerabilities and the complex dynamics of global security.

4: Geopolitics and Security Dynamics

- The above-mentioned rankings have substantial implications on the geopolitics and security policy of nations.

- Countries often use these rankings to inform strategic decisions, develop military capabilities, and manage defence resources effectively.
- The report is also a powerful tool for understanding geopolitical power dynamics, highlighting potential threats, alliances, and conflicts in the international political arena.

In summary, the Global Firepower's Military Strength Rankings 2024 offer valuable and comprehensive insights into the state of global military power. This vital resource helps inform not only international defence policies but also steers future defence strategies and global security decisions.

Schemes and Committees

Proposed Merger of Chiranjeevi and Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance Schemes

Introduction and Current Initiative

- The BJP led Rajasthan government has announced plans to merge its state health insurance scheme, known as Chiranjeevi, with the central Ayushman Bharat programme.
- The unified scheme under proposal is titled as "Ayushman Bharat Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme".
- The initiative is currently awaiting approval from the Union Health Ministry.

Highlighting the Scheme and its Benefits

- The new combined scheme will incorporate the current benefits of the Chiranjeevi scheme, which includes a substantial ₹25 lakh insurance cover applicable to both private and government hospitals.
- This insurance cover stands out as it is significantly higher than Ayushman Bharat's provision of ₹5 lakh.
- The scheme is aimed to benefit over 1.42 crore families, giving them comprehensive coverage. The final coverage figures are yet to be confirmed by the health ministry.

Tracing the Historical Background

- The Chiranjeevi scheme was originally launched by then Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot belonging to the Congress party.

4: Future Prospects and Implications

- The amalgamation of Chiranjeevi scheme and Ayushman Bharat programme is in line with the state government's direction to release new health insurance cards by January 26.
- This action also aligns with the nationwide drive to cover all Ayushman Bharat beneficiaries prior to the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Key Points to Remember

- The new combined scheme will retain the comprehensive ₹25 lakh coverage without any reduction.
 - The Chiranjeevi scheme will persist in offering widespread coverage benefits.
 - This consolidation fits well with the subsequent roll out of the new health insurance cards, as well as the imminent Lok Sabha elections.
 - Exact beneficiary numbers are still to be officially confirmed by the health ministry.
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Empowerment of Artisans in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) through PM Vishwakarma Yojana

I. Introduction and About the PM Vishwakarma Yojana (PMVY)

- Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is the first Union Territory in India to implement the PMVY, a central government initiative launched in September 2023. The programme aims to uplift and provide recognition to India's artisans and craftspeople.
- The scheme was launched in J&K on January 2, 2024, with the administration promising its operationalization in all districts.

II. Implementation Plans: Paving Way for Inclusive Craftsmanship

- The administration in J&K plans for widespread implementation of PMVY to ensure broader access and inclusivity.
- It aims to reach out to artisans in all districts enabling them to benefit from the scheme.

III. Salient Features of the PM Vishwakarma Yojana

- Recognition and Certification: The programme provides PM Vishwakarma certificates and ID cards to recognize crafts people's skills.
- Skill Development and Training: The initiative includes basic and advanced training programs for artisans, lasting 5-7 days and 15+ days respectively.
- Financial Support and Incentives: Trainees are offered a daily stipend of ₹500 during training and receive a modern toolkit worth ₹15,000 free of charge upon completion.
- Credit Assistance and Market Support: The scheme provides craftsmen access to credit-based soft loans and marketing support for wider customer reach.

IV. Impact and Further Initiatives: Strengthening the Artisan Community

- The implementation of PMVY is expected to empower the artisan community in J&K, potentially boosting the Union Territory's economy and helping preserve its cultural heritage.
- It reflects the central government's commitment to bolster artisans' livelihood across India by recognizing and supporting their craft.

V. Key Terms and Historical Significance

- PMVY- PM Vishwakarma Yojana is a significant initiative by the central government to uplift India's artisan community.
- MSDE- Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is the responsible ministry for implementing the scheme.
- 'Darzi craft'- is a form of artist-centred craft production prevalent in J&K.
- 'Viswakarmas' refers to artisans and craftsmen in J&K, who are anticipated to benefit significantly from PMVY.

By empowering the Viswakarmas in J&K, the PMVY is playing a pivotal role in preserving and promoting India's rich cultural heritage, while simultaneously enhancing the livelihoods of artisans.

'Maitri' Initiative: A Pioneering Step Towards Community Cat Sterilisation

1. Introduction and Background

- The 'Maitri' Initiative is a joint venture by The Murty Trust and Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA).
- This community cat sterilisation centre was launched in Bangalore on January 1, 2024.

- The project is a representation of the dedicated commitment to address issues concerning India's animal welfare sector.

2. The Objective of the Initiative and Its Significance

- The primary objective of the 'Maitri' Initiative is to regulate the stray cat population and to resolve the overpopulation problem.
- This move is a part of the 'One Health' challenge which focuses on improving the health and well-being of people, animals and environment.
- CUPA has already been successful in sterilising over 5000 community cats since 2018 through its community enablement model for cat Animal Birth Control (ABC).
- With the resources provided by The Murty Trust, it aims to further increase this impact and effectively control the community cat population.

3. General Knowledge Aspects

- The Murty Trust, a philanthropic entity, has been known for its numerous initiatives and endeavours to enhance the welfare of the society in various sectors including animal welfare.
- Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA) is a non-profit organisation, working for the welfare of animals in India. Established in 1991, it is known for its various programs related to pet adoption, rescue and rehabilitation, and animal birth control among others.
- The 'One Health' challenge is an initiative designed to attain optimal health for people, animals and our environment. It is a concept recognised globally, emphasising that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment.

Conclusion:

The 'Maitri Initiative' marks a significant milestone in the field of animal welfare in India. With collaborative efforts such as these, the health and wellbeing of animals can be safeguarded, and

issues such as overpopulation can be efficiently addressed.

Prerana: Ministry of Education's Initiative to Promote Experiential Learning

1: Introduction and Overview of Prerana

- The Department of School Education & Literacy, under the Ministry of Education, has launched a program by the name of Prerana.
- The aim of the program is to empower students from classes IX to XII with leadership qualities and provide them with meaningful experiences.
- The program focuses on instilling Indian values as a part of the value-based education outlined in the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

2: Why Prerana is in The News

- Prerana is grabbing headlines owing to its unique approach towards education that is rooted in Indian values and in line with the NEP 2020.
- Embracing the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), the program is fostering respect for Indian culture and traditions amongst the students.
- The initiative has been designed to not only enhance their academic knowledge but also shape their character and leadership skills for holistic development.

3: About the Curriculum and Venue

- The curriculum of Prerana, developed by IIT Gandhi Nagar, revolves around nine sets of core values.
- Interestingly, the program is organised as a week-long residential program at a historic vernacular school in Vadnagar, Gujarat.

- Vadnagar is known for its ancient heritage sites and monuments, providing students an immersive historical and cultural exposure.

4: Detailing the Activities under Prerana

- The experiential learning program includes diverse activities, ranging from yoga and meditation to thematic workshops.
- Students will also have the opportunity to visit historical sites in and around Vadnagar, further enriching their understanding of Indian culture.
- Prerana equips students with exposure to different knowledge systems and offers opportunities to learn from inspiring personalities and mentors.

GK: Importance of Prerana in the Context of Indian Education

- Prerana signifies a significant shift from traditional rote learning, encouraging students to embrace experiential learning methods.
- It aids in the holistic development of students by focusing on leadership skills and cultural orientation parallel to academic learning.
- The inclusion of Indian values in the curriculum ties in with the major intent of NEP 2020 to provide value-based education, making this program a crucial step towards actualizing NEP goals.
- This initiative is a blend of education and culture, strengthening the awareness of our rich cultural and historical heritage among the youth. This aspect is especially vital in the context of the increasing influence of western culture on Indian youth.

'My School-My Pride' Campaign: An Endeavor to Revolutionise Education in Himachal Pradesh

1. Unveiling 'My School-My Pride' Campaign in Himachal Pradesh

- The Himachal Pradesh government has launched the 'My School-My Pride' campaign under the 'Apna Vidyalaya' programme.
- Intending to align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the campaign is designed to uplift the quality of education in government schools.

2. Stakeholder Involvement and Contributions

- The 'My School-My Pride' campaign encourages active participation from individuals and organisations in adopting schools.
- Roles for the stakeholders include volunteering in career counselling, remedial teaching, exam coaching, and providing community support services.
- Stakeholders can contribute by donating time, expertise, funds for infrastructure development, event sponsorship, scholarships, and support for the Mid-Day Meal programme.

3. Enlisting Government Official Involvement

- MPs, MLAs, and government officers are urged to adopt at least one government school.
- The roles of these officials also include suggesting improvements and monitoring students' progress.
- Education department officers will be given mentorship roles in specific schools.

4. Ensuring Accountability through Online Platforms

- The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) plans on launching an online portal for the 'Apna Vidyalaya' programme.
- The purpose of the portal is to ensure transparency, accountability, and real-time activity monitoring.

<https://edupreparator.com/>

5. SAMVAD Initiative: Nurturing Responsible Citizens

- A sub-component of the 'My School-My Pride' campaign is the 'systematic adolescent management and value addition dialogue' (SAMVAD).
- SAMVAD will focus on educating students about moral values, drug awareness, nutrition, and legal knowledge.
- The initiative is aimed at nurturing responsible and well-informed citizens.

6. Chief Minister's Vision for the Campaign

- Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu emphasised that the programme's goal is to foster civic duty, strengthen the school vision, and create a sustainable model for enhancing education.
- The programme is catered to impact over 55% of students studying in government schools in Himachal Pradesh.

7. Expected Impact of the Campaign

- The 'My School-My Pride' campaign is projected to bring about a positive transformation in education.
- The potential transformation is attributed to an emphasis on community engagement, and providing academic support for educational enhancement.

Mahtari Vandana Yojana 2024: A stride toward Women Empowerment in Chhattisgarh

1. Introduction to Mahtari Vandana Yojana 2024

- Launched by the Chhattisgarh state, the Mahtari Vandana Yojana 2024 is a women-centric scheme

January Current Affairs

inspired by the 'Aarthik Sarkari Ladli Bahna Yojana' of Madhya Pradesh.

- The scheme aims to provide an economic aid of 1,000 rupees per month to women, aggregating to a total sum of 12,000 rupees annually.

2. Why is it in the News?

- Mahtari Vandana Yojana 2024 is designed to empower women in Chhattisgarh economically, beyond financial aid, by promoting self-reliance and skill development.

- It encourages women to manage their expenses and even start small-scale ventures using these funds.

3. Role it Plays in Women

Empowerment

- The state-level scheme aims to enhance the quality of women's lives significantly by providing financial assistance.

- The funds, directly credited to the beneficiaries' bank accounts, can be used for health, personal expenses, or starting small businesses.

4. Eligibility Criteria: Who can Benefit?

- The scheme is open to married women who are residents of Chhattisgarh.

- The annual family income of the applicants must be less than two and a half lakh rupees.

- The scheme has an age criterion, benefiting women aged between 23 and 60 years.

- Special provision for widows, orphans, and abandoned women who can also avail the benefits of this scheme.

5. How to Apply: Required Documents

- To avail of this scheme, eligible women need to adhere to a certain documentation process that includes Aadhar Card, Proof of Age, Bank Account Passbook, Identity Proof, Passport-size Photographs, Resident Proof, and Mobile Number.

6. Impact and Importance: A Shift Toward Inclusive Growth

- The Mahtari Vandana Yojana 2024, a promising initiative, aims to empower women in Chhattisgarh.

- By providing them with economic strength, this scheme contributes to their holistic well-being, ultimately leading to their financial independence and self-reliance.

Conclusion:

Empowering women economically, the Mahtari Vandana Yojana is a promising initiative toward fostering gender equality and promoting inclusive growth. By addressing the financial needs of women, this scheme contribute significantly to boosting their overall well-being and self-reliance.

Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana: A Step Towards Solar Power Self-Reliance and Sustainability

I. Introduction to Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana

- Initiated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana is geared towards promoting solar energy usage in India.

- The initiative draws its inspiration from the energy of Lord Shri Ram and his affiliation with Ayodhya.

- The aim of this project is to enable India to become self-reliant in terms of energy usage, focusing on harnessing solar power.

II. Understanding Rooftop Solar Panels

- Rooftop solar panels are photovoltaic panels attached to the top of a structure that are linked to the main power supply.

- The primary benefits of a rooftop solar system are reduced dependence on grid-connected electricity and significant savings on electricity costs.

- The surplus energy produced through these panels can be transferred back to the grid adhering to the set regulations.

January Current Affairs

- The consumers have a chance to gain financial rewards for surplus power injected into the grid, following the defined regulations.

III. Social Impact of the Yojana

- The Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana primarily aims to benefit the common citizens, with particular emphasis towards the economically weaker and middle classes.

- By reducing electricity expenses, the scheme promotes energy self-sufficiency.

- The plan is to equip up to 1 crore houses with rooftop solar panels, significantly reducing the financial burdens of these households.

IV. Yojana's Vision

- The vision for this initiative was projected after PM Modi's return from Ayodhya.

- The goal is to empower households by providing them with their own electricity through the installation of solar panels.

- The ultimate aim is to stride towards a more sustainable and energy independent future.

V. Technical Details of the Project

- The initiative focuses on rooftop solar systems involving installation of photovoltaic panels on homes or buildings.

- These systems are designed to decrease reliance on grid-connected electricity thereby leading to considerable savings.

- The initial investment includes the capital cost and minor subsequent maintenance costs.

VI. Governmental Support for the Initiative

- The National Rooftop Scheme has been implemented to bolster this initiative.

- Under its provisions, financial aid amounting to up to 40% of capital cost is provided for rooftop projects.

- The process of selection and execution of these projects is overseen by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

VII. India's Present Solar Capacity

- As of December 2023, India's total installed rooftop solar capacity is approximately 11.08 GW.

- State-wise, the lead is taken by Gujarat with a capacity of 2.8 GW, followed by Maharashtra at 1.7 GW.

- Only a fifth of the total rooftop installations are residential, with commercial and industrial sectors leading.

- Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) suggests potential of rooftop solar energy of up to 637 GW with India's 25 crore households.

- India's total solar installed capacity, including solar parks and roofs, is around 73.31 GW as of December 2023, with Rajasthan at the forefront (18.7 GW) followed by Gujarat (10.5 GW).

Odisha Government's Initiative for Tribal Empowerment: 'LABHA Scheme'

1: Introduction to 'LABHA' Scheme

- The Odisha government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has launched the 'LABHA' scheme, aimed at developing and empowering approximately one crore tribals in the state.

- The acronym 'LABHA' represents 'Laghu Bana Jatya Drabya Kraya', a state-funded Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Minor Forest Produce (MFP).

2: Noteworthy Aspects of the LABHA Scheme

- The state government will annually establish the MSP for the minor forest produce as part of LABHA.

- The scheme will offer tribal primary collectors the privilege to sell their MFP at MSP via procurement centres managed by TDCCOL (Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation of Odisha Limited).

- The scheme integrates with women's self-help groups (SHGs) under Mission Shakti, benefiting

primarily tribal women who form 99% of primary collectors.

- A technological procurement automation system would capture MFP collection data to ensure tribal communities get fair benefits.
- The proceeds from sales will be digitally transferred to the beneficiaries' accounts with a 2% commission for SHGs or designated agencies.
- LABHA advocates for value addition and processing, with TDCCOL responsible for managing e-tendering of further sales.

3: Special Features and Collaborations of the LABHA Scheme

- LABHA pledges to reduce distress sales by empowering the tribal population and lowering their dependency on intermediaries.
- As part of its value addition and processing strategy, the scheme plans to invest INR 25 crores to set up a tamarind processing plant in Rayagada.

4: Importance of the LABHA Scheme in Current Affairs

- The launch of LABHA, directly targeting tribal empowerment, marks a critical shift in the state's policy towards this marginalised group, making it relevant for current affairs.
- Its unique emphasis on women's self-help groups under Mission Shakti showcases the state's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, a significant civics and social studies topic.
- LABHA's use of technology for transparent transactions also highlights India's digital progress and use of e-governance initiatives.
- The scheme's focus on value addition and processing units reflects the rise of small-scale industries- a key aspect of India's economic growth, providing important economic insights for the examinees.

The 'LABHA' scheme provides essential knowledge about how state government initiatives can target socio-economic development, and play a crucial role in educating about the governance, digitalization, small-scale industries, and tribal rights in India.

Streamlining Electronic Toll Collection: NHA's 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' Initiative

Introduction- Revamping the Toll System

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHA) has brought forward 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' Scheme to amplify the functioning of the Electronic Toll Collection (ETC) system.
- The prime objective is to curb the practices of applying one FASTag to many vehicles or using multiple FASTags on one vehicle.

Unraveling the 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' Initiative

- The 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative aims to ensure a direct correspondence among vehicles and FASTags.
- The measure has been taken in response to noted misuses where a single vehicle carried multiple FASTags. This has been leading to evasion of toll taxes.
- Users with valid balances but incomplete 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) compliance risk the blacklisting of their FASTags post-31st January 2024.

Reiterating the Importance of KYC Compliance

- In compliance with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) guidelines, NHA is emphasising the necessity of completing the KYC process for each FASTag.
- The RBI guideline is in line with maintaining transparency and ensuring accountability in the toll collection process.

Triumph over Prior Challenges

- NHAI's latest initiative targets the issues brought forward by the distribution of FASTags without mandatory KYC compliance as per RBI rules.
- The program also addresses concerns regarding delays at toll plazas because of intentional non-adherence to fixing of FASTags.

Impact of 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' Initiative

- With more than eight crore users and nearly 98% penetration rate, FASTag has significantly modernised India's Electronic Toll Collection system.
- The 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative is anticipated to boost the overall efficiency of toll operations, ensuring a smoother journey for National Highway users.

Out with the Old: Phasing out Previous FASTags

- To ensure the proper implementation of 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative, users are to discard all previously issued FASTags.
- Post 31st January 2024, only the FASTag accounts that are in sync with the new initiative will remain active, older tags facing deactivation or blacklisting.

The NHAI's latest initiative serves to enhance the transparency and efficiency of toll operations, simplifying travel for road users across the nation. Staying informed about such government reforms and initiatives is crucial for aspirants preparing for government exams and those seeking to remain updated on current affairs.

Digital Advancement in Governance: Introduction of e-SAKSHI App

1. Introduction and About:

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation presented a new tool for digital governance named e-SAKSHI.
- This mobile application was introduced to closely monitor and capture the funding cycle under the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) with an aim to begin operations in 2023.

2. The MPLADS Scheme:

- Commenced in 1993, MPLADS is a fully government-funded central sector scheme.
- This initiative lets the Members of Parliament (MPs) propose developmental projects designed around the durable community assets based on local needs.
- With an annual allocation of Rs. 5 crores to each MP, the scheme is focused on infrastructural growth and provisioning key services.
- Before the introduction of e-SAKSHI, the administration of MPLADS was primarily paper-based which presented several administrative challenges.

3. Features of e-SAKSHI Mobile

Application:

- Streamlined Fund Flow: This application will serve as a revised fund flow planner for MPLADS, aiming to enhance financial transactions.
- Real-Time Tracking: MPs can now keep a real-time track of project progress, from sanction till completion, via this app.
- Geo-Tagging and Photographic Evidence: The app helps to avoid issues related to 'ghost projects' by capturing evidence of progress using geo-tagging and photographs.
- Transparency and Accountability: It aids in battling corruption and building public trust by giving open access to project details.

- Improved Communication: The app aims to facilitate prompt and efficient communication among MPs, stakeholders, officials, and beneficiaries.

4. Challenges and Possible Solution for e-SAKSHI:

- One of the main setbacks for e-SAKSHI is the digital divide in rural regions and possible inaccuracies in data.
- Future measures should focus on efficiently training MPs and officials on using the app and providing offline functionality for areas with poor or no internet connectivity.

5. Impact on Governance:

- e-SAKSHI, conceptualised under MPLADS, signifies step towards digital governance which could revolutionise administrative efficiency.
- It fosters transparency, accountability and reduces corruption in public administration.
- The application aligns with the wider goals laid out by the Indian government for integrating IT in administration across various sectors.

In summary, the e-SAKSHI app seems to be a promising tool for enhancing digital governance in India. By overcoming the challenges posed by its implementation, it can lead to significant advancements in urban and rural development schemes across the nation.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY): Reaching the ₹3 Lakh Crore Milestone and Bolstering Small Businesses

1: Introduction- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is a scheme launched by Indian Government aiming to provide loans to micro and small enterprises.

- The main objective of this scheme is to promote entrepreneurship among the new and existing businesses by offering them financial support.

2: Current Development: PMMY Hits ₹3 Lakh Crore Milestone

- In a significant move for small businesses, the PMMY disbursed loans amounting to ₹3 lakh crore in December 2023, reflecting a 16% year-on-year growth.
- Loan sanctions neared ₹2,99,457 crore a week prior to the end of Q3 in the financial year by December 22, 2023, surpassing previous fiscal year figures.
- Provisional data suggests the noteworthy milestone of ₹3 lakh crore was reached by December 29, 2023.

3: Women Empowerment Through PMMY

- The Mudra Yojana Scheme has emerged as a major platform for empowering women entrepreneurs, with 70% of the sanctioned loans under the scheme granted to women.
- A considerable 25% of these loans aided first-time petty entrepreneurs, shining a light on the scheme's ability to foster entrepreneurship.
- Reports underline positive trends particularly in Tarun and Kishor category loans.

4: Operational Excellence through Portfolio Diversity and Digitalisation

- The Mudra Loan portfolio exhibited an evenly distributed layout across retail, service, and manufacturing sectors.
- The operational process was streamlined with the help of digitalization before and after loan disbursements, showcasing the scheme's efficiency.

5: Safety Of Bank's Exposure to PMMY Loans

- Economist B Yerram Raju stated that protection mechanisms against negative implications linked with PMMY loans are ensured through strict

procedure implementation and entrepreneur-led initiatives.

- The loans dispensed under PMMY were fully insured, limiting the risk for banks.
- He also highlighted minimal engagement with entrepreneurs both before and after Mudra loan disbursement as a potential area for enhancing risk management and support mechanisms.

General Knowledge:

- PMMY, introduced in 2015 by the NDA government, develops the small/micro non-corporate sector by extending institutional finance.
- Its goal aligns with the vision of 'Funding the Unfunded' and providing loans up to 10 lakh to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises.
- Three categories of loans under PMMY-categorised as Shishu, Kishore and Tarun signify the stage of growth and funding needs of the beneficiary.
- Spotting its success, similar models are being studied for emulation in countries like Nepal and Ethiopia.

Summits and Conferences

Unveiling the Investment Splurge Ahead of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit: A Step towards Economic Momentum

1) Introduction and Overview of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit:

- The Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit is a significant event that amalgamates political strategy and economic planning.

- It is scheduled strategically right before the national elections where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is aiming for a third term.

2) A Sneak Peek into the Preliminary Investment Deals:

- Prior to the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, the state of Gujarat has locked down investment contracts amounting to 7.17 trillion Indian rupees or \$86.07 billion.
- These agreements span across 58 companies from sectors such as energy, oil, gas, and chemicals proactively signifying sectoral diversification.

3) A Glimpse of Key Investment Highlights:

- NTPC Renewable Energy Limited proposes an ambitious plan to invest 900 Billion rupees for developing 15 GW renewable energy parks. It is further offering an additional investment of 700 Billion rupees for fuel cell electric vehicles, green chemical production, and hydrogen-based energy projects.
- Torrent Power has agreed to invest 474 Billion rupees in various sectors. These include solar power projects, green hydrogen, ammonia manufacturing, and distribution networks in the bustling regions of Ahmedabad and Surat.

4) Strategy and Implications for Gujarat and India:

- In a bid to attract both indigenous and international investors, Gujarat has made commendable efforts.
- Even before the current influx, the state had procured \$18.75 billion in investment agreements last month.
- This approach is intrinsically linked to the success of the upcoming Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit and the broader economic goals of India.
- Considering the strategies of Prime Minister Modi, these investments play a pivotal role in fortifying the country's investment landscape.

India's Novel Step towards Gender Equity- The Alliance for Global Good

Introduction and Overview

- In a significant move towards promoting gender equity, India has announced the launch of the "Alliance for Global Good-Gender Equity and Equality initiative.
- The announcement was made at the recently-held World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting.

Key stakeholders of the Initiative

- The initiative is being supported by notable entities, including the World Economic Forum (WEF) and Invest India, both of which are crucial partners.
- Renowned companies like Mastercard, Uber, Tata, TVS, Bayer, Godrej, Serum Institute of India and Novartis along with IMD Laussane, have pledged their backing to the initiative.
- The initiative also counts solid endorsements from more than 10,000 partners from various sectors via CII.
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has also assured its support, and the initiative will be administered by the CII Centre for Women Leadership.

WEF's and Invest India's Role

- Founded by Klaus Schwab in 1971, WEF originally started as the European Management Forum and rebranded in 1987 to become a platform for addressing international conflicts.
- In the new alliance, WEF will serve as a "Network Partner," and Invest India will be the "Institutional Partner."

Genesis of the Alliance

- The idea for the alliance ties back to the G20 Leaders' Declaration, aligning with India's commitment to women-led development.
- Renowned figures like Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani have publicly voiced that the initiative aligns with PM Narendra

Modi's well-documented advocacy for progress for women.

Future Prospects

- The alliance prompts the continuation of the efforts of the G20 Engagement Group and initiatives like Business 20, Women 20, and G20 EMPOWER to empower women.

With such a broad foundation of support and clear, determined vision, the "Alliance for Global Good-Gender Equity and Equality" is a promising step forward in India's ongoing drive for gender equity and women empowerment.

IndoSpace and Tamil Nadu Government Ink Rs 2000 Crore MoU

Introduction and About

- The leading industrial and logistics real estate entity, IndoSpace has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tamil Nadu Government.
- The MoU, valued at Rs 2000 crore was announced at the Tamil Nadu Global Investors Meet 2024.
- The purpose behind this significant move is to contribute to the state's economic growth.

Why is This in News?

- The strategic MoU is currently in the spotlight due to its potential to drive growth in the state's economy.
- Furthermore, it holds the potential to create considerable employment opportunities, thereby making significant contributions towards resolving the unemployment issue.

Implications of the Agreement

January Current Affairs

- This agreement stands as a critical factor in promoting the state's economic prosperity. It's expected to effectuate substantial implications for job creation in the locale.
- Apparently aligning with its continued commitment towards Tamil Nadu's industrial landscape, it strategically positions IndoSpace to foster the overall economic growth of the region.

Historical Significance:

- The Tamil Nadu Global Investors Meet is a major summit, attracting investors from across the globe. It's a platform where groundbreaking deals like the current one are usually announced.

Geographical Importance:

- Tamil Nadu is one of India's most industrialised states and a major hub for industries and startups. It is strategically located with access to major markets and easy connectivity logistics, making it an attractive choice for investors.

Importance of the MoU:

- The MoU is crucial as it can potentially fuel economic development in Tamil Nadu, create job opportunities and enhance the state's economic stability.
- It not only strengthens the state's industrial backdrop but also demonstrates confidence in Tamil Nadu's economic prospects, thereby luring more investors to the state.

Conclusion:

This strategic linkage between IndoSpace and the Tamil Nadu government is a testament to the immense potential that the state holds for industrial and economic growth. Worth Rs 2000 crore, the resultant upswing in economic prospects and job creation showcases the power of such partnerships in fostering regional development.

India's Active Engagement at the 19th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit- A Deep Dive

Introduction & Highlight:

1. The 19th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit was held in Uganda, themed as 'Deepening Cooperation for Shared Global Affluence.'
2. The summit saw participation from over 120 developing nations, including India, a founding member of NAM.
3. Indian External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, represented India at the summit, which showcased India's dedication to NAM's fundamentals.

India's Involvement and Bilateral Talks:

1. India's active participation in the NAM Summit signifies its dedication to fostering cooperation among nations without powerful blocs.
2. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held sideline discussions with his counterparts from Belarus and Egypt, focusing on mutual dialogue, understanding, and reciprocal cooperation.

Regional Engagements:

1. EAM Jaishankar met with officials from the Maldives and Angola to discuss issues related to the withdrawal of Indian military from the Maldives, ongoing development projects, and the expansion of India-Angola collaboration.

Enhancement in Multilateral Cooperation:

1. India's active role in the multilateral forum was acknowledged, evidenced by the visa-free arrangement for Indian nationals provided by Angola.

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)- A brief recap:

1. NAM was established in 1961, amidst the Cold War, anchored on the Panchsheel principle.
2. The main objective of the movement was to prioritise the interest of developing nations during the Cold War rivalry.
3. NAM has played a vital role in decolonization, establishment of independent states, and the democratisation of international relations.
4. The movement comprises 120 member states, essentially making up about 60% of the total United Nations membership.

Founders of NAM:

1. Historical figures instrumental in the establishment of NAM include Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and Sukarno of Indonesia.

NAM Summit History:

1. The first-ever summit was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in September 1961.
2. The 18th summit took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2019, with Azerbaijan holding the chairmanship from 2019-2023.
3. The most recent, the 19th NAM Summit, was held in Uganda.

Switzerland to Host International Peace Summit for the Ukrainian Conflict Resolution

Decoding the Announcement and Its Context

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy secured Switzerland's support to host a global peace summit

aimed at addressing the conflict sparked by Russia's incursion into Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

- At a press conference in Bern, Zelenskiy was seen with the Swiss President Viola Amherd. The two leaders discussed the summit, though they left the details of the participants to be finalised.
- Zelenskiy emphasised an open invitation to nations who respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, implying a commitment to inclusivity.

Key Highlights from the Announcement

- Open Invitation: Zelenskiy invited nations that endorse Ukraine's sovereignty, with specific emphasis on countries from the Global South. This invitation aims to display a unified global opposition against Russian aggression.
- Summit Logistics: The exact details about the summit's date and its location within Switzerland were not disclosed during the announcement. However, Zelenskiy was in Switzerland to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, potentially having sideline interactions with world leaders including the Chinese Premier Li Qiang.
- Zelenskiy's Peace Proposal: The peace formula proposed by Zelenskiy calls for the re-establishment of Ukraine's territorial integrity, followed by the cessation of aggression, the withdrawal of Russian troops, and the release of all detainees.
- Kremlin's Stand: The Kremlin dismissed talks held in Davos concerning Ukraine's peace proposals, stating that any discussion would be meaningless without Russian participation.

General Knowledge Component: Understanding the Ukrainian Conflict

- The Ukrainian conflict began with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and was further fueled by Russia's military intervention in eastern Ukraine.

January Current Affairs

- Since then, it has been a subject of global concern due to its potential to escalate into a larger international conflict, threatening world peace and security.
- Switzerland is known for its neutrality, making it an appropriate choice to host global peace initiatives. Previously, it has successfully hosted various international peace talks and mediations.
- The World Economic Forum in Davos, where the announcement for the peace summit was made, is an annual meeting of global political and business elites, aimed at shaping global, regional, and industry agendas.

Potential Importance and Outcomes of the Peace Summit

- The proposed peace summit is significant because it aims to put an end to an ongoing international conflict and restore peace in a region crucial to European stability.
- It also symbolises the international community's stand against unilateral actions infringing on a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- The final participant list, once finalised, will be telling about the global power dynamics and alliances regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict.
- The outcomes of the summit may significantly influence future geopolitical interactions and strategies, thereby playing a crucial role in international politics and global security.

India Set to Chair UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 2024

1: Historic Chairmanship at The International Heritage Preservation Platform

- The announcement of India chairing the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at the 46th session in 2024 in New Delhi was made public on January 9.

<https://edupreparator.com/>

- India will host the session from July 21 to 31, 2024.
- This occasion stands as a landmark event in the history of Indian heritage conservation and international recognition.

2: A Shining Example of India's Global Cooperation and Collaboration

- The decision to hold the 46th session in India was confirmed during the 19th extraordinary session in 2023.
- This decision resulted from a proposal by Indian authorities in consultation with the UNESCO Director-General.
- It showcases India's cooperation and collaboration with UNESCO in fields such as education, arts, science, and culture.

3: The Pivotal Role of UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee

- UNESCO, a UN agency, is instrumental in recognizing and safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage globally.
- The World Heritage Committee, consisting of representatives from 21 member states, holds an annual meeting.
- They deliberate on vital issues concerning the identification, preservation, conservation, and propagation of cultural and natural heritage sites.

4: India's Global Standing Reinforced

- By hosting the committee, India exemplifies its commitment to UNESCO's principles.
- The event is a platform for India to present its diverse cultural and natural heritage in international discussions with global experts, policymakers, and representatives.
- The opportunity reinforces India's international community standing and dedication to UNESCO's ideals.

5: An Opportunity to Showcase India's Historic and Cultural Wealth

- The 46th session in New Delhi underlines the shared global responsibility to safeguard and celebrate world heritage.
- The event gives the world an opportunity to appreciate India's history, traditions, and heritage conservation initiatives.

6: About UNESCO

- UNESCO, or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN).
- Its mission focuses on promoting peace through international cooperation in Education, Sciences, and Culture.
- UNESCO is a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The organisation manages over 50 field offices worldwide, with its headquarters in Paris.
- It consists of 193 members and 11 associate members (as of April 2020).
- It operates under the governance of the General Conference and the Executive Board.
- Three UNESCO member states (Cook Islands, Niue, and Palestine) are not UN members, while three UN member states (Israel, Liechtenstein, United States) are not UNESCO members.

Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show- A Gargantuan Gathering for Global Trade

I. Introduction and Event Overview

- The Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show was inaugurated recently by Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The event served as the precursor to the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit.

- Uniting leaders globally, the event was graced by President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique, President José Ramos-Horta of Timor Leste, and Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel.

II. Event Significance

- The Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show holds immense significance as it provides a platform for interaction and negotiation between international business communities.
- The event aims to understand and share ideas, investigate partnership potential, sign cooperation agreements, and enhance strategic alliances.

III. Mammoth Scale and Participation

- Staged at Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar, the trade show sprawled over an expanse of two lakh square metres, making it India's largest-ever Global Trade Show.
- More than 100 countries actively participated in the event with 33 countries forming partnership ties.
- Over 1,000 exhibitors from 20 countries, including Australia, South Korea, Singapore, UAE, UK, Germany, and Norway, represented the global research sector at the trade show.

IV. Targeted Focus Areas

- The event highlighted emerging sectors such as electric vehicles, green hydrogen, renewable energy, semiconductors, and cybersecurity, aiming to stimulate discussion and potential partnerships in these arenas.

V. Bilateral Meetings and Discussions

- Prime Minister Modi conducted conversations with international leaders, like the Presidents of UAE, Mozambique, and Timor Leste, to bolster bilateral relationships.
- Potential alliances in various fields were deliberated upon in meetings with global CEOs, like Sanjay Mehrotra of Micron Technology and Toshihiro Suzuki of Suzuki Motor Corp.

VI. India-UAE Collaboration: A Step

Forward

- Marking a key development, PM Narendra Modi and UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan attended a major roadshow from Sardar Patel International Airport Ahmedabad to Gandhinagar.
- MoUs were exchanged between India and UAE, signifying their strengthened and evolving relationship.

Conclusion:

The Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show establishes Gujarat as an appealing destination for global investors, by exhibiting the state's potential in terms of trade and industries. With its heavy focus on emerging sectors and unification of global leaders, it sets the stage for dynamic bilateral relations, economic exchange, and progressive future collaborations.

Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors Summit 2024: A Gateway to the Future

1: Overview and Significance of VGGS 2024

- The 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors Summit (VGGS) is set to take place from January 10 to 12, 2024, in Gandhinagar.
- The biennial event serves as a global platform for leaders to foster collaborations and explore investment opportunities.
- The theme for VGGS 2024 is "Gateway to the Future", underscoring its focus on future-oriented sectors and technologies.

2: High-Profile Participation and Diplomatic Focus

- Several global leaders, including the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic and UAE, as well as the Presidents of Timor-Leste and Mozambique, will be attending the summit.

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- The Summit may feature diplomatic discussions between India and the Czech Republic concerning the arrest of Indian national Nikhil Gupta.
- Timor-Leste's participation reaffirms India's focus on enhancing relations with Southeast Asian nations.

3: Strategic Collaborations and Future-Oriented Sectors

- 28 countries and 14 organisations are confirmed as partners for VGGS 2024, including nations like the UAE, Czech Republic, Australia, Japan, and the UK.
- Emerging sectors such as semiconductors, green hydrogen, e-mobility, renewable energy, and Fintech find a special mention in the theme 'Gateway to the Future'.

4: Investment Expectations and Bilateral Relations

- With UAE's President Al Nahyan's participation, expectations are high regarding the UAE's planned investment of \$2 billion for developing food parks in India under the I2U2 agreement.
- The I2U2 agreement involves India, Israel, the USA, and the UAE. Gujarat is expected to be the primary beneficiary of this investment, given its strategic locational advantage.

5: Focus on the Southeast Asian Region

- Confirming India's diplomatic focus on Southeast Asia is the participation of Timor-Leste's President at VGGS 2024.
- India's recently announced plans to open a diplomatic mission in Timor-Leste, as declared at the ASEAN-India summit, highlight the country's intention to cultivate stronger ties with Southeast Asian nations.
- The visit of Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh to Timor Leste further reinforces this objective.

Each of these elements contributes crucially to India's global diplomatic and strategic image. They underscore India's commitment to exploring new avenues of cooperation, strengthening

existing relations, and embracing emerging technological innovations via platforms like the VGGS 2024.

Gearing Up for Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024: Emphasising Technology and Global Participation

1: Introduction and About

- The "Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024" is an ambitious exhibition hosted by the Indian Government, positioned as an innovative platform for prominent players in the automotive domain.
- Union Minister Piyush Goyal marked the announcement of the logo and booklet for the Expo at a promotional program in New Delhi.
- The Expo reflects the Government's thrust towards making India a significant global player in the automotive sector by leveraging advancements in technology and international collaboration.

2: Brush Up Your Calendar

- The much-awaited Expo is scheduled to take place between February 1-3, 2024.
- The venue chosen for the grand event is Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, located in the heart of the national capital, New Delhi.
- The anticipated turnout for the event is massive, with over 600 exhibitors from more than 50 nations expected to take part.

3: A Sneak Peek at the Highlights

- The Expo will feature advanced technologies presented through various specialised exhibitions. These include an Auto Show, ACMA Automechanika, A large-scale tire exhibition, Urban mobility solutions, EV Infra Pavilion, and Battery Tech Pavilion.

- Not an event to be missed, 27 prominent vehicle manufacturers will unveil new models and electric vehicles at this platform.
- Countries marking their strong presence through pavilions are Japan, Germany, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, along with international representation from a host of countries including the USA, Spain, UAE, Russia, Italy, Turkey, Singapore, and Belgium.

4: In the Spotlight: ACMA Automechanika New Delhi

- The expo will be significantly distinguished by ACMA Automechanika New Delhi, marking a significant aspect of the global expo.

5: Comprehensive Focus: Much More than an Auto Expo

- Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024 is conceived as a comprehensive exercise that extends beyond being a mere automotive show.
- Backed by the government, the industry-led initiative is driven by the Engineering Export Promotion Council India (EEPC India).
- Major battery manufacturers and EV infrastructure services will be a part of the Expo, alongside a CEO Conclave discussing the future of the mobility industry.
- Adding to this, the NASSCOM Auto Techade Pavilion will lend more depth to the event's broad focus on the mobility sector.

GK Insights

- The event emphasises Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to boost India's auto export share to 50%, thereby highlighting the nation's attempt to leverage global economic opportunities.
- The venue, Pragati Maidan, is one of New Delhi's most prominent landmarks and is known for hosting large-scale national and international events.
- Essentially, the expo underscores the importance of technological advancements and international participation in India's mobility sector,

reflecting a more comprehensive approach towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Unveiling of Green Fuels Alliance India: A Significant Step towards Sustainable Energy

Manifesting a Green Future: Introduction to Green Fuels Alliance India

- Denmark launched the Green Fuels Alliance India (GFAI) at the Global Investors Meet (GIM) in 2024. The initiative adds to the Green Strategic Partnership (GSP) signed in 2020.

- This unique alliance's primary aim is to enhance collaboration in sustainable energy solutions and work towards achieving global carbon neutrality.

- The GFAI is significant as it aligns with the target of India to attain net zero emissions by 2070 and highly exhibits commitment towards sustainable energy development.

A Strategic Alliance: Denmark and India for Sustainable Growth

- The Danish Embassy and the Consulate-General of Denmark in India take the lead in GFAI, which focuses on promoting the green fuels sector, with special emphasis on green hydrogen.

- The founding members of GFAI consist of nine leading Danish organisations, including Maersk, Novozymes, and Danfoss.

A Robust Ecosystem: Pioneering Collaboration

- The GFAI fosters collaboration between vital pillars of society like businesses, government bodies, research institutions, and financial stakeholders.

- This collective action helps in strengthening the bond between India and Denmark in the journey towards a greener and sustainable future.

Architecture of GFA Advisory Board and Key Partners

- The advisory board of GFAI comprises eminent entities like India Hydrogen Alliance and the Danish Energy Agency.

- Their active engagement will greatly bolster efforts towards sustainable energy solutions.

In Current News: A Landmark in the Indo-Danish Relations

- As the year 2024 marks the 75th year of diplomatic relations between India and Denmark, the launch of GFAI adds a significant milestone to this long standing partnership.

- During the Raisina Dialogue 2024 in New Delhi, both countries underscored their commitment to broadening collaboration, spanning various sectors from defence and security to emerging technologies.

- Further, potential avenues were explored for Denmark's involvement in the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which implies a shared commitment to regional cooperation and maritime security.

Looking Beyond the Horizon: Emblematic of a Sustainable Future

- The unveiling of a joint logo by ministers of both countries symbolises an enduring bond and shared vision towards green energy.

- The launch of GFAI reaffirms the commitment to a sustainable energy future and sets a benchmark

for international collaborations in the domain of green energy.

The Green Fuels Alliance India is indeed a momentous step in the path of global sustainability, marking a new chapter in the Indo-Danish relationship.

Moreover, the amalgamation of various sectors under this initiative is a testimony to the possibility of holistic and sustainable growth. It stands as an essential reference for all general knowledge updates and government exams.

Government Schemes Allocations 2024-2025: An Update on India's Economic Blueprint

Introduction

In a show of dedication towards socio-economic development, the Indian government has earmarked significant funds for its flagship schemes for the fiscal year 2024-2025. The allocation has been made across a range of sectors including rural employment, social assistance, housing, water supply, health, agriculture, and nutrition security.

Why in News: Government's Massive Funding Allocation

- The government has allocated a major chunk of the budget to various schemes.
- The 'Core of Core Schemes' includes the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Program with an allocation of ₹86,000 crore, and National Social Assistance Program with ₹9,652 crore.

Key Focus: Housing, Water Supply, and Health

- The 'Core Schemes' bracket includes funds for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) assigning ₹80,671 crore, Jal Jeevan Mission/National Rural Drinking Water Mission with ₹70,163 crore, and the National Health Mission with an allocation of ₹38,183 crore.

Crucial Investments: Agriculture and Nutrition

- Under the umbrella of 'Major Central Sector Schemes', an allocation of ₹14,600 crore has been made for the Crop Insurance Scheme, ₹60,000 crore for Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, and a massive ₹2,05,250 crore for Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

GK Part: Understanding the Government Schemes

1. History

- All these schemes have been introduced by the Central Government of India at different time phases to strengthen the social and economic structure of the country. For instance, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was launched in 2005, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna was introduced in 2015.

2. Geography

- These schemes are not region-specific and are implemented nationwide to achieve uniform development.

3. Importance

- Each scheme targets vital aspects of Indian society. For example, MGNREGA provides wage employment in rural areas, while the PMAY aims to provide affordable housing to all, and Jal Jeevan Mission focuses on providing safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections.

4. Additional Information

- The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi provides income support to all landholding

farmers' families across the country, the Crop Insurance Scheme helps farmers to insure their crops against any unforeseen circumstances. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana is a food security scheme to provide free food grain to approximately 80 crore people in India.

Conclusion:

These budgetary allocations for Indian government schemes in 2024-2025 signify the intense focus on fostering an inclusive and sustainable socio-economic environment. Targeting different segments of society and stretches across various domains, these specific allocations aim to uplift the rural economy, provide social assistance, enhance healthcare facilities, promote housing, ensure water supply, aid farmers, and secure nutrition. This broad span of schemes is a testament to India's comprehensive development plan, crucial for upcoming government evaluation exams.

Ranks and Reports

Francoise Bettencourt Meyers Breaks Record with \$100 Billion Fortune

1: Historic Achievement by Francoise Bettencourt Meyers

- Francoise Bettencourt Meyers, hailed as an international financial power, recently made history by becoming the first woman to accumulate a fortune worth \$100 billion.
- Meyers' exuberant wealth activity strengthens her standing among the global financial elites.
- This achievement is a crucial milestone for France's burgeoning fashion and cosmetics sectors, highlighting their economic potency.

2: Journey to \$100.1 Billion

- Bettencourt Meyers' financial meteoric rise is attributed to the record surge in share prices of the cosmetics giant L'Oréal SA.
- Founded by her grandfather, the company's soaring stock, at its highest since 1998, pushes Meyers to become the 12th richest person globally, just behind Carlos Slim from Mexico.
- The heiress' fortune currently stands at an awe-inspiring \$100.1 billion according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

3: Personal Life and Contributions

- Despite her astronomical wealth, Bettencourt Meyers leads a quiet life, away from the spotlight.
- She is recognized for her scholarly pursuits, which include authoring a detailed five-volume study on the Bible and a genealogy book on Greek gods.
- Apart from her involvement in intellectual projects, she is also an accomplished pianist indicating her multifaceted persona.

4: The Legacy Of L'Oréal

- Bettencourt Meyers currently holds the position of vice-chair of the board of L'Oréal, a company that has marked its international presence in the beauty and skincare market.
- Her family, settling up the largest golden share of almost 35% in the company, then strengthens its reign in the business.
- Founded by her grandfather, Eugene Schueller, in 1909, L'Oréal has been a beacon of innovation and success in the cosmetics industry.
- Bettencourt Meyers inherited the majority of her wealth after the passing of her mother, Liliane Bettencourt, in 2017.

Awareness related to global financial landscapes and knowledge about the world's wealthiest individuals, mostly asked in various competitive examinations, can be enhanced by following such news and understanding the business structures behind massive fortunes. Thus, Bettencourt

Meyers' story serves as an informative source for aspirants.

Capitals' Cleanliness Crusade: Bhopal's Success in Solid Waste Management

1. Bhopal's Prestigious Recognition

- Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh stands as the 5th cleanest city in India among those with a population exceeding one lakh.
- It has achieved a 5-star Garbage Free City (GFC) rating, making it the cleanest state capital in India.

2. Key Practices Ensuring Cleanliness

- Bhopal adopts top-notch waste management practices and groundbreaking innovations.
- The city, generating 850 tons of waste daily, ensures that the entire waste spectrum is processed every day.
- Efforts are aimed towards scientific waste disposal, waste-to-wealth projects, and recycling initiatives, along with the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (3Rs) mantra.

3. Systematic Waste Collection and Segregation

- Bhopal ensures meticulous waste collection and segregation with 469 door-to-door garbage collection vehicles and 202 road sweeping vehicles.
- A methodical segregation system operates at 12 Transfer Stations and 6 Material Recovery Facility (MRF) centres.

4. Green Endeavor: Transformation of Bhanpur Dumpsite

- Bhopal transformed the Bhanpur dumpsite into a green area, reclaiming 21 acres of land and developing a park on 16 acres.

5. Risk Management: Hazardous Waste Treatment

- The city uses hazardous waste as a fuel source.
- In collaboration with Hazargo Industry Pithampur, Bhopal set up the first preprocessing plant for scientific management of hazardous waste.
- A common Bio-Medical Waste Treatment Facility ensures thorough handling of medical waste.

6. Construction and Demolition (C&D) Waste Management

- A 100 TPD processing plant in Thuakheda effectively manages C&D waste.
- The facility segregates waste materials and converts them into useful products like fly ash bricks and paver blocks.

7. Liquid Waste Management Initiatives

- The city has 18 sewage treatment plants (STPs) and 8 co-treatment plants to take care of liquid waste.
- It reuses about 31% of treated water.

8. Ongoing and Potential Cleanliness Plans

- Bhopal's future projects include signing an agreement with NTPC for a 400 TPD dry Municipal Solid Waste to torrefied charcoal plant.
- It plans to establish a Bio-CNG plant with a daily processing capacity of 400 TPD.
- The intention is to stimulate organic manure production and make Bhopal a fully garbage-free city.

WHO's Guidelines on Ethical Employment of Large Multi-Modal Models in Healthcare

1: Understanding the Digital Revolution in Healthcare

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently released guidelines on the ethical use and governance of Large Multi-Modal Models (LMM) in healthcare.
- LMMs such as AI technologies like ChatGPT, Bard, and Bert, have remarkably transformed healthcare delivery and reshaped the domain of medical research.
- WHO recognizes the significance of assessing and addressing the potential risks associated with the implementation of these leading-edge technologies in the healthcare sector.

2: Major Applications of LMMs in Healthcare

- Based on WHO's report, LMMs have five key applications in healthcare, including diagnosis and clinical care, patient-guided use, administrative tasks, medical education, and scientific research.
- It is also crucial to consider associated risks, such as the potential generation of misleading or biased information and the challenges related to data quality and bias.

3: WHO's Recommendations and Growing Concerns

- WHO advocates for a cooperative approach that consists of various stakeholders such as governments, tech firms, healthcare providers, patients, and civil society across each stage of LMM development.
- Key recommendations are listed, including investment in public infrastructure, upholding ethical obligations via regular regulations, and mandatory post-release audits.
- WHO also emphasises the need for international collaboration to effectively regulate AI advancements, underlying potential global implications.

4: Ethical Principles and Governance Guidelines

- These guidelines are grounded on six primary principles: Safeguarding autonomy, Promoting human wellbeing, Ensuring transparency, Encouraging responsibility, Maintaining inclusiveness and equality, Advancing responsive and sustainable AI.
- The guidelines highlight the criticality of ethical considerations and robust governance in the application of AI for healthcare.
- Such principles aim to address concerns related to biased data, misleading information generation, and possible misuse of LMMs, further providing a strategic solution to navigate these challenges.

GK Part:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. Established on 7 April 1948, WHO has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Large Multi-Modal Models (LMMs) are a type of machine learning model that has the ability to understand and generate human-like text. They are instrumental in the prediction and diagnosis of diseases, thereby revolutionising the healthcare sector globally.
- The implementation and regulation of AI and LMMs in healthcare is a subject of global importance due to their potential to dramatically improve healthcare delivery and outcomes, but also because of their associated risks such as data privacy and bias. The ethical use of these technologies is therefore crucial.

Indian Startup Ecosystem 2022: Future Vision, Encouraging Initiatives and State Rankings

Stellar Startup States of India in 2022

- Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu are leading the way in India's startup landscape by providing supportive entrepreneurial environments.
- Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Telangana have also shown promise and are deemed "strong performers."
- Union Commerce Minister, Piyush Goyal, officially released this ranking.

The Process of Ranking – An Overview

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Commerce Ministry conducted the evaluation.
- It compiled information on the startup scenario from 33 states and union territories.
- The evaluation was comprehensive, categorising regions into best performers, top performers, leaders, aspiring leaders, and emerging startup ecosystems.

Upcoming High-level Meeting between Unicorn Startups and Union Minister

- Union Minister, Piyush Goyal plans to meet with representatives of around 40 recognisable unicorn startups, including Lenskart, Zerodha, CarDekho, EasyMyTrip, and Boat.
- The agenda includes discussing strategies for sustainable business growth, risk management measures, mobilisation of domestic capital and fostering innovative ideas.

DPIIT Report's Takeaway Messages

- Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu received commendation for their proactive policies that foster a conducive startup environment.
- The DPIIT report highlighted the successful growth of startups in these states and projected their potential future growth.

Future Vision for Indian Startups

- Union Commerce Minister, Piyush Goyal, highlighted the significant role of startups in transforming India into a developed nation.
- Encouragement was given to citizens – irrespective of age- to engage in the startup ecosystem and contribute to research and innovation.
- Future growth relies heavily on mastering new-age skills, futuristic technology, artificial intelligence and innovation.

A Glance at the Startup India Initiative

- Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 16, 2016, the Startup India Initiative is a major move towards fostering innovation, supporting startups and encouraging ecosystem investments.
- The government officially recognises over 117,000 startups, making them eligible for certain tax incentives.

In the realm of general knowledge, this initiative offers a rich source of information for aspirants preparing for public and government examinations, with core insights into the Indian governmental structure, economic progression, and innovation policies.

Significant Strides Towards Poverty Alleviation in India (2013-2022)

1. Introduction and Overview:

- India made a notable stride in poverty reduction as per a report by NITI Aayog.
- Nearly 24.82 crore people moved out of multidimensional poverty, with the poverty rate dropping from 29.17% to 11.28% over this period.
- The assessment was based on 12 Sustainable Development Goals-aligned indicators that reflected the living standards, health conditions, and educational access among the population.

2. State-specific Progress:

- Uttar Pradesh fronted the alleviation shift with approximately 5.94 crore people being freed from poverty.
- Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were next with successful poverty reduction, counting 3.77 crore and 2.30 crore people respectively.

3. Swift Decline:

- The report highlighted the accelerated pace at which poverty reduction transpired- an average of about 2.75 crore individuals annually.
- The target set by NITI Aayog is to curtail multidimensional poverty to below 1%.

4. Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals:

- India is seemingly on the path to achieving its Sustainable Development Goals, especially the SDG 1.2 (to reduce multidimensional poverty by at least half), ahead of the 2030 target.

5. Key Contributors to the Decline in Poverty:

- Initiatives including Poshan Abhiyan and Anaemia Mukta Bharat enhanced healthcare accessibility resulting in a significant reduction of deprivation.
- India's noteworthy Food Security programs and Targeted Public Distribution System played essential roles in supplying food grains to the rural and urban population.

<https://edupreparator.com/>

- The government's extension of the free food grain distribution initiative "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana" showcased their commitment to poverty alleviation.
- Programs addressing maternal health, distribution of clean cooking fuel through Ujjwala Yojana, increased electricity availability through Saubhagya and campaigns like Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission collectively elevated living standards.
- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and PM Awas Yojana were crucial in promoting financial inclusion and providing secure housing for the underprivileged.

6. About NITI Aayog:

- NITI Aayog, established on January 1, 2015, replaced the Planning Commission, following policies that prioritise 'Bottom-Up' approach and encouraging Maximum Governance, Minimum Government, and Cooperative Federalism.
- The organisation comprises two distinct hubs:
 - The Team India Hub that fosters a middle ground between state and central government.
 - The Knowledge and Innovation Hub drives its think-tank capabilities.
- Some prominent initiatives of the NITI Aayog are the SDG India Index, Composite Water Management Index, and the Atal Innovation Mission.

Telangana Cities Shine in Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023

Overview of the Recognition

- Hyderabad and Siddipet, cities in Telangana, gained substantial recognition at the Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023.
- The awards commemorated their efforts in maintaining cleanliness and sanitation.

Individual Achievements of Hyderabad and Siddipet

- Hyderabad climbed to 9th rank among cities with a population over one lakh in terms of cleanliness.
- Siddipet earned the prestigious title of the cleanest city in South India in the 50,000-1 lakh population category.

Greater Hyderabad's Dual Recognition

- Greater Hyderabad garners a 5-star sanitation rating, becoming the first Telangana city with a population above one lakh to achieve this.
- The city further received a recertification as a 'Water+' city which denotes sustainable water management practices.

Presentation of Awards

- Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Singh Puri presented the awards in New Delhi.
- GHMC Commissioner Ronald Rose and district representatives were honoured at the event.

Details about the Survey

- Swachh Survekshan Awards assessment was a year-long process from April 2022 to March 2023 and included 4,443 local bodies.
- Greater Hyderabad's score is split into services (51%), certification (26%), and people's voice (23%) assessments.

Journey of Transformation

- Remarkably, Greater Hyderabad jumped from rank 275 in 2015 to being among the top 10 in 2023.
- The city administration and the public played major roles in enhancing cleanliness standards.

Siddipet's Role Model Status

- MLA and former minister of Siddipet, T. Harish Rao, hailed the city's achievements.
- He praised Siddipet's garbage collection and disposal systems, and cleanliness initiatives, urging other cities to adopt them as models.

General Knowledge Part: Swachh Survekshan Awards

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India, conducts the Swachh Survekshan Awards as part of its Swachh Bharat Abhiyan mission.
- It aims to encourage cities to improve urban cleanliness while fostering a competitive spirit.
- The assessment parameters include services, certification, and people's voice among others.
- It is one of the world's largest cleanliness surveys covering thousands of cities across India.

The Rise in Global Unemployment: A Review of the ILO's Recent Projections and Underlying Concerns

The Expected Increase in Global Unemployment

- According to a recent report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) titled "World Employment and Social Outlook Trends: 2024", there is likely to be a slight hike in global unemployment from 5.1% in 2023 to 5.2% in 2024.
- This incremental rise is primarily driven by job losses in the advanced economies, citing this group as the primary contributor to the rise.

Underlying Factors and Concerns

- The recovery post-pandemic has not necessarily improved labour productivity as it was expected to. Instead, it has exposed vulnerabilities and puts social justice under threat.

- Advanced economies are expected to bear the major brunt, with projected negative employment growth in 2024 and only minimal improvements anticipated in 2025.
- The global averages conceal significant regional disparities, hinting that both developing and emerging economies may perform better, with stable or decreasing unemployment rates.
- The steady unemployment rate does not negate the persistent issue of working poverty, especially with workers in the informal economy struggling to keep a decent standard of living.
- The report projects a widening income inequality gap, thereby underscoring the need for greater measures towards social justice for a more equitable recovery.

Need for Policy Action

- The ILO underscores that to bolster productivity, generate decent jobs, and protect vulnerable workers, edifying certain prioritised policies by governments and social partners becomes indispensable.
- These policies should include investments in education and skill training, social protection programs, and measures to address the informality in the sector.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) at a Glance

- Established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles, the ILO started as an affiliate agency of the League of Nations (LoN) and later became the first specialised agency of the United Nations in 1946.
- Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the organisation rests its foundations on the belief that social justice is pivotal for universal and lasting peace.
- As the only tripartite United Nations agency, the ILO brings together representatives of governments, employers, and workers of 187 member states.
- The ILO establishes international labour standards, promotes internationally recognized human and labour rights, and all this is driven by consensus reached among the tripartite constituents.
- In 1969, the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize acknowledging its efforts towards fostering peace among nations and social classes.

This recent analysis by the ILO brings to light pressing issues surrounding global unemployment trends and provides a platform for discussions and policies that can address these concerns.

Indian Airports Soar High: Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata Airports On Global Punctuality Podium

1: Stellar Performance by Indian Airports

- The aviation analytics firm, Cirium has identified Hyderabad and Bengaluru airports as global leaders in punctuality in its recent performance review.
- Standing tall on the global platform, these airports claimed the prestigious second and third positions, respectively, revealing an impressive punctual departure rate of over 84%.

2: Vital Factors Driving the Success

- The punctuality of the Hyderabad and Bengaluru airports is primarily due to infrastructure advancements and the dominant presence of IndiGo airlines.
- Ranking fourth among Asia Pacific airlines, IndiGo has shown an on-time arrival rate of over 82%. It operates half of all flights in Bengaluru and about 65% in Hyderabad.

3: The Influential Role of IndiGo

- The operational landscape of these two airports is majorly influenced by IndiGo's substantial presence, underlining the airline's commitment towards punctuality.

January Current Affairs

- The remarkable operational efficiency of IndiGo significantly enhances the overall on-time performance of these airports.

4: Report Card of Other Indian Airports

- Besides the top performers, Kolkata airport also made it to the spotlight by achieving the ninth position in the medium airports category. This was regarding an 83.9% on-time performance.

5: Understanding the 'On-Time Performance' Criterion

- The metric 'On-Time Performance' used by Cirium incorporates arrivals within 15 minutes of the scheduled gate arrival.

- For airports, it means departing within 15 minutes of the planned departure. This universally acknowledged definition is employed to measure punctuality across airlines and airports.

6: Relating to General Knowledge and Current Affairs

- Hyderabad and Bengaluru Airports stepping up as global leaders in punctuality is an important current affair that holds significant relevance for Government exams.

- It reflects the development and achievements of the Indian Aviation sector, which is a crucial topic for various competitive examinations.

- Understanding the role of IndiGo can be important for questions related to the role of major players in the Indian aviation industry.

- The concept of 'On-Time Performance' and its significance can be useful for questions related to airlines' operations and performance metrics.

This accomplishment of Indian Airports is a stepping stone towards the advancement of the Indian aviation sector and holds significant importance from an examination standpoint as well as national pride.

Unpacking the Aging Scenario: A Case Study of Jammu Kashmir from the 2023 India Ageing Report

1. A Glimpse into the Report:

- The 'INDIA AGEING REPORT 2023' was commissioned and executed by the International Institute for Population Sciences and the United Nations Population Fund.

- The report provides in-depth information about the ageing population in Jammu Kashmir, thereby identifying potential challenges and opportunities within this demographic.

2. Elderly Poverty and Life Expectancy:

- There is a low poverty rate (4.2%) amongst the elderly population in Jammu Kashmir, implying a relative economic resilience within this group.

- Elderly individuals account for 9.4 percent of Jammu Kashmir's population, making the state one with notably high elderly life expectancy rates.

- Specifically, the life expectancy for males and females after the age of 60 lies at 20.3 percent and 23.0 percent respectively.

3. Usage of Assistive Devices:

- The LASI survey incorporated within the report highlighted that only 44 percent of the elderly population are utilising assistive devices.

- Common examples of these devices include spectacles and walking sticks.

- Usage patterns correlated with factors such as age, urban residence, wealth quintile, and level of education.

4. The State of Elderly Mental Health:

- In Jammu Kashmir, 15 percent of the elderly population fall into the lowest 10th percentile of the composite cognition score.

- Nearly 30 percent reportedly suffer from depressive symptoms.

- Risk factors include education, age, gender, place of residence, widowhood, living arrangements, and work status.

5. Transforming Living Arrangements:

- Traditional joint family systems in Jammu Kashmir have substantially transformed, thereby influencing the living arrangements among the elderly.
- Circumstances such as elder migration for work and limited assistance have adverse effects on their mental health.

6. The Role of the Private Sector:

- The report calls for intensified involvement of the private sector in ageing-related initiatives.
- Under Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013, companies are mandated to dedicate 2 percent of their net profits towards social development.

7. Bridging the Awareness Gap:

- The report highlights a glaring awareness gap amongst the elderly regarding social security schemes and health insurance coverage in Jammu Kashmir.
- Such gaps need to be addressed at the earliest given the constantly expanding elderly population.

In conclusion, this comprehensive information from the 'INDIA AGEING REPORT 2023' allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complex dimensions and needs of the aging population in Jammu Kashmir. This becomes critical for policy-making and execution of initiatives aimed at promoting their overall well-being.

Unveiling the All India Survey on Higher Education 2021-22: A Leap Forward in Indian Higher Education

1: Introduction and Survey Overview

- The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the academic year 2021-22 was conducted by the Ministry of Education.
- The survey indicates a noteworthy escalation in higher education enrollment, which increased from 4.14 crore (2020-21) to 4.33 crore (2021-22).

2: Why AISHE 2021-22 is in the News

- The survey portrays an impressive growth in India's higher education sector, with an enrollment rise of approximately 19 lakh compared to the previous year.
- It points towards the growing emphasis and participation in higher education in India.

3: Insights from AISHE 2021-22: Enrollment Increase

- The total female enrollment has seen an upward trend, increasing from 2.01 crore in 2020-21 to 2.07 crore in 2021-22.
- This demonstrates substantial progress in promoting gender equity in higher education in India.

4: A Closer Look at PhD Enrollment

- An encouraging rise has been observed in female enrollment in PhD, doubling from 0.48 lakh in 2014-15 to 0.99 lakh in 2021-22.
- This reflects an increasing trend of women participation in advanced research fields, contributing to the nation's intellectual potential.

5: Analysis of Science Stream Enrollment

- The Science stream has registered a total enrollment of 57.2 lakh students, with female students (29.8 lakh) surpassing the number of male students (27.4 lakh).
- This data suggests a shift in stereotypical gender roles in the field of science, promoting diversity in the scientific community.

6: Increase among Scheduled Tribe (ST) Students

- The enrollment of ST students has registered a substantial growth of 65.2%, leaping to 27.1 lakh for 2021-22 from 16.41 lakh in 2014-15.
- This growth underlines the effectiveness of government policies directed towards ensuring equal opportunities in higher education for Scheduled Tribes.

7: Student Enrollment in North-East States

- The total student enrollment in North-East states was reported as 12.02 lakh for 2021-22, wherein females (6.07 lakh) outnumbered males (5.95 lakh).
- This indicates the successful implementation of education policies in these regions, ensuring higher participation of both gender in education.

8: Conclusion

- The AISHE 2021-22 showcases significant strides made by India in the field of higher education.
- Several key areas such as increasing female enrollment, participation of marginalised sections, and gender diversity in science stream, have seen positive growth.
- The continued emphasis on higher education and inclusive policies can help the country in leveraging its demographic dividend and becoming a knowledge-led economy.

Transcendent Unfolding: Remarkable Insights from India's SPAI Program on Snow Leopards

1: Unveiling of Snow Leopard Population Assessment

- Union Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav unveiled an iconic report on Snow leopards in India.
- The said report emerged in the wake of the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Program.
- Aimed at evaluating the population of Snow leopards, the SPAI report revealed a population of 718 Snow leopards in India.
- The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in collaboration with the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, and WWF-India, coordinated the SPAI program.

2: Scope and Execution of the SPAI Program

- Encompassing around 70% of the potential Snow leopard habitat, the study covered around 120,000 km² across the trans-Himalayan region.
- It included states and Union Territories such as Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh for research.
- Employing a two-step framework, the research conducted the spatial distribution evaluation and abundance estimation through camera traps between the years 2019 to 2023.

3: Main Findings and Snow Leopard Estimates Across States

- The fieldwork involved in the SPAI program surveyed trails spanning 13,450 km for signs of Snow leopards and set up 1,971 camera trap locations for 180,000 trap nights, offering robust insight into the Snow leopard population.
- The research recorded Snow leopard occupancy at 93,392 km² and their presence was estimated at 100,841 km².
- A total of 241 unique Snow leopards were photographed. Populations varied across states with Ladakh accounting for the highest population with 477 Snow leopards, followed by Uttarakhand at 124, Himachal Pradesh at 51, Arunachal Pradesh at 36, Sikkim at 21 and Jammu and Kashmir at 9.

4: Expanded Understanding and Proposals for Future Monitoring

- Compared to the pre-2016 research which only covered one-third of the Snow leopard's range in India, recent findings increased knowledge to cover approximately 80% of the Snow leopard's range.
- The report advocates for the establishment of a dedicated Snow Leopard Cell at WII under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change for long-term population observation.
- It also recommends a periodic population estimation approach to be adopted by states and UTs every fourth year, to ensure effective conservation strategies and secure the long-term survival of Snow leopards.

In conclusion, the findings of the SPAI program establish a significant milestone in snow leopard conservation in India. By providing critical insights into the population and distribution of snow leopards, the program enables informed decisions in their preservation and long-term survival.

Awards

Comprehensive Insights Into The Padma Awards 2024

1: Decoding The Honors And Categories Of Padma Awards

- Founded in 1954, the Padma Awards are India's highest civilian honours, aiming to recognize distinguished service in any field.
- They are conferred in three categories: Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri.
- The Padma Vibhushan is the highest of the three, given for exceptional and distinguished services, followed by Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri.

- These awards are presented by the President of India at Rashtrapati Bhawan every year.

2: The Critical Unveiling Of The Padma Awards 2024

- In 2024, the awards list came to light with 132 Padma Awards approved, which also included 2 joint awards.
- The list was diverse, encompassing a broad spectrum of service areas and states, embodying the rich diversity of the nation.

3: An Overview Of The Padma Vibhushan Winners Of 2024

- The top arena, the Padma Vibhushan, is given for distinguished and exceptional service.
- The set of laureates for the year 2024 included eminent personalities from the field of Art, Public Affairs, and Social Work.
- Recognizing contributions to Art, Ms. Vyjayantimala Bali, Shri Konidela Chiranjeevi, and Ms. Padma Subrahmanyam from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were conferred the awards.
- Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, from Andhra Pradesh, was awarded for his distinguished service in Public Affairs.
- Appreciating the relentless Social Work contribution, Shri Bindeshwar Pathak from Bihar was a part of the honoured list.

4: Importance Of Padma Awards

- The Padma Awards serve as an acknowledgment of the recipients' exceptional and distinguished service to the nation.
- These awards foster a sense of responsibility and encourage individuals to contribute more effectively towards societal progress.
- It also reflects the diverse talent and contributions that people from various fields and states make towards building a harmonious and progressive country.

Remember, the Padma Awards are not merely accolades; they represent the aspiration to excel and contribute selflessly towards the betterment of society. They provide inspiration and set an

example for others to emulate in their respective fields.

Accomplishments Celebrated at 2023 ICC Awards

1: Introduction to ICC Awards

The International Cricket Council (ICC) hosts the annual ICC Awards to celebrate stellar performances by international cricket players across all formats of the game. The event aims to motivate great talent, recognizing remarkable accomplishments and contributions towards the sport.

2: In the Limelight- ICC Awards 2023

The prestigious ICC Awards 2023 was a grandeur event that celebrated cricket players who delivered exceptional performances throughout the year. The awardees were:

- ****ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2023:**** Virat Kohli from India, for his outstanding performance in the 50-over cricket format. He was also the player of the tournament at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, playing a crucial role in India's journey to the final.

- ****ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year 2023:**** Usman Khawaja from Australia, recognized for his sublime performance inclusive of 1210 runs in 13 Tests managed during the year. He was key in Australia acquiring their first ICC World Test Championship title.

- ****ICC Women's ODI Cricket of the Year 2023:**** Chamari Athapaththu from Sri Lanka, applauded for her extraordinary year with the bat in ODIs leading her team to a maiden bilateral series win over New Zealand.

- ****ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2023:**** Suryakumar Yadav from India, bagging this title for

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the second consecutive year with his commendable batting average and strike rate contributing significantly to many successful matches.

- ****ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2023:**** Hayley Matthews from West Indies, appreciated for her notable batting prowess and efficient ball work. She is the second player from West Indies to bag this award post Stafanie Taylor in 2015.

3: General Knowledge Insights- ICC Awards

- The International Cricket Council (ICC) is the international governing body of cricket. It is headquartered in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

- ICC Awards are presented annually to showcase talent from across the world. Released as a part of player awards, it includes nine individual awards across different formats of the game.

- The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup is one of the most renowned world cricket competitions. The 2023 edition was the 13th edition of the World Cup, hosted by India.

- The ICC World Test Championship is aimed at bringing context to bilateral test cricket. Australia won their first-ever title in 2023.

- The Women's bilateral series win by Sri Lanka against New Zealand, a powerful team, was a significant milestone in Women's Cricket.

The 75th Primetime Emmy Awards: Winners and Insights

The 75th Primetime Emmy Awards Event: An Overview

- The Emmy Awards is a prestigious annual event celebrating exemplary feats in the television industry. This grand event marked its 75th year in 2024, in honour of outstanding TV shows and actors.

Host for the Evening: Anthony Anderson

- The illustrious event was hosted by the seasoned actor Anthony Anderson. Anderson is notably recognized for his stellar acting in ABC's comedy show, "black-ish."

Standout Nominations: Succession by HBO

- The Emmy Awards 2024 saw HBO's "Succession" securing numerous nominations. This fact is a testament to its powerful impact and popularity among viewers and critics alike.

The Winners Circle: Major Awards and Recipients:

- Outstanding Competition Program: The award delivery was exceptionally fabulous with "RuPaul's Drag Race" winning this category.

- Writing and Directing for a Comedy Series: Christopher Storer received recognition for his brilliance in writing and directing "The Bear."

- Supporting Actress in a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie: Niecy Nash-Betts was honoured for her performance in "Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story."

- Scripted Variety Series: The award went to "Last Week Tonight With John Oliver," the hard-hitting late-night news satire show.

- Lead Actor in a Comedy Series: "The Bear" actor, Jeremy Allen White, was recognized as the Lead Actor in a Comedy category.

- Supporting Actors in both Comedy and Drama Series: Ebon Moss-Bachrach from "The Bear" for comedy and Matthew Macfadyen from "Succession" for drama were deemed as the best supporting actors.

- Supporting Actress in a Drama Series: Jennifer Coolidge was appreciated for her role in "The White Lotus."

- Lead Actress in a Comedy Series: Quinta Brunson received accolades as the Lead Actress for her role in "Abbott Elementary."

- Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series: Ayo Edebiri from "The Bear" managed to bag the award in this category.

General Knowledge Insights:

The Emmy Awards are named after the word 'Immy.' 'Immy' is an abbreviation for the image orthicon, a camera tube used in television. The TV Academy changed 'Immy' to 'Emmy' to match the feminine statuette. As of today, it is a significant award event that honors exceptional talent in the television industry across the globe.

Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023: A Milestone for Clean Cities

1: The Noble Event and Noteworthy Participants

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) hosted the prestigious Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023.

- The award ceremony was conducted at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

January Current Affairs

- Droupadi Murmu, the President of India, attended the function and conferred the awards on the respective winners.

2: Winners Galore Across Diverse Categories

- Indore and Surat, in a unique turn of events, shared the title of the cleanest city. This achievement marked the seventh successive victory for Indore.
- In the category of cities with a population under one lakh, Sasvad, Patan, and Lonavala emerged as the top three.
- Mhow Cantonment Board in Madhya Pradesh was conferred the cleanest Cantonment Board award.
- Varanasi and Prayagraj were recognized as the cleanest Ganga towns.
- Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh were honoured as the best-performing states in terms of cleanliness.
- Chandigarh was accorded the title of 'Safaimitra Surakshit Sheher'.

3: Highlights and Takeaways from Swachh Survekshan 2023

- The President unveiled the Swachh Survekshan 2023 dashboard during the awards ceremony.
- As part of the event, 110 awards in total were distributed to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts made in maintaining cleanliness.
- "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle" was announced as the theme for the next Cleanliness Survey.
- Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, along with a host of distinguished persons, graced the event.

4: The Accomplishments and Key Facts

- With a staggering participation of 4,447 urban local bodies, the Swachh Survekshan 2023 has emerged as the world's largest cleanliness survey.
- High public commitment towards cleanliness was evidenced by the procurement of twelve core citizen responses in the survey.

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General Knowledge Insights:

- Swachh Survekshan is a cleanliness survey conducted annually by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India.
- The aim of this survey is to encourage large-scale citizen participation and create awareness amongst all sections of society about the importance of working together towards making towns and cities better places to reside in.
- Initiated under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission, the survey assesses cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation in cities and towns of India to foster a healthy competition among them.
- Direct participation of citizens and transparency of the process are some of the unique aspects of Swachh Survekshan.

National Sports Awards 2023: Honouring India's Sporting Might

Introduction: Celebrating Excellence in Sports

The National Sports Awards 2023, organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, took place at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The primary objective of these awards is to recognize and honour exemplary contributions and outstanding performances in the field of sports. This year, individuals and institutions from various sectors of sports were felicitated for their commendable accomplishments.

Glittering Stars of the Show: Award Recipients

The awards were categorised into the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award, Dronacharya Award, and Dhyan Chand Lifetime Award. The key recipients were:

Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award:

- Satwik Sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty for their exceptional performance in Badminton.

Dronacharya Award for Outstanding Coaches in Sports and Games:

- Ganesh Prabhakaran for Mallakhamb
- Mahavir Saini for Para Athletics
- Lalit Kumar for Wrestling
- R.B. Ramesh for Chess
- Shivendra Singh for Hockey

Dhyan Chand Lifetime Award:

- Kavita for her contribution to Kabaddi
- Manjusha Kanwar for her outstanding work in Badminton
- Vineet Kumar Sharma for his noteworthy work in Hockey.

Commending Noteworthy Contributions: National Sports Awards Winners

Apart from these, several other sports persons were commended for their significant contributions:

- Cricket: Mohammed Shami
 - Kabaddi Pawan Sehrawat, Ritu Negi
 - Chess: Vaishali Rameshbabu
 - Athletics: Murali Sreeshankar, Parul Chaudhary
 - Hockey: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Sushila Chanu
- Additional winners hailed from sectors including archery, table tennis, boxing, wrestling, golf, and para canoeing, among others.

Praising Institutions for Boosting Sports: Outstanding Sports Institutions

Not just individuals, but also institutions nurturing and promoting sports were acknowledged. The following institutions stood out:

- Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar emerged as the winners
- Lovely Professional University, Punjab were the 1st runners-up
- Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra were the 2nd runners-up.

General Knowledge Connect: Khel Ratna Award

This award, renamed as Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award, is India's highest sporting honour. It is given for spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sports person over a period of one year.

Concluding Points:

The National Sports Awards 2023 indeed served as a grand salute to India's dynamic sports personalities and institutions. These accolades play a crucial role in encouraging the sports culture in India and recognizing the tireless efforts of athletes and other participants of the sporting ecosystem. The event further consolidates India's commitment to fostering an environment conducive to sports.

The Best FIFA Football Awards 2024: Celebrating Excellence In Football

Introduction and Overview

- The Best FIFA Football Awards of 2024 are internationally celebrated honours highlighting extraordinary contributions and performance in football for the previous year.
- These awards recognized and celebrated the best players, coaches and teams for their estimable performance in the year 2023.

Outstanding Award Winners

- The prestigious award for 'Men's Player of the Year' was given to Lionel Messi. Representing Argentina and Inter Miami, Messi surpassed Erling Haaland in a tiebreaker and became the first player to win this coveted award three times.
- Aitana Bonmati cinched the 'Women's Player of the Year'. Bonmati, representing Barcelona and

January Current Affairs

the Spanish national team, won many titles and was voted the best player in all of them.

- Pep Guardiola was recognized as the 'Men's Coach of the Year'. Under Guardiola's guidance, Manchester City saw a historic treble, echoing his extraordinary coaching capabilities.
- Sarina Wiegman, the coach of the England team, was named 'Women's Coach of the Year', tying the record for most victories in this category.

II Goalkeeper Recognitions

- The 'Men's Goalkeeper' award was claimed by Ederson from Manchester City and Brazil.
- Mary Earps, from Manchester United and England, received the 'Women's Goalkeeper' award.

IV: Other Accolades

- Guilherme Madruga won the FIFA Puskas Award owing to his marvellous overhead kick.
- The 'FIFA Special Award' was earned by the Brazilian football star Marta, and the Brazil men's national team was awarded the 'FIFA Fair Play Award' for their fight against racism.
- Hugo Daniel "Toto" Iniguez, a passionate Argentinian fan, won the FIFA Fan Award 2023.

V: Global Significance for GK and Exam Takers

- Football is the world's most popular sport, and FIFA is the sport's governing body. Knowing the award winners and their contributions add value to general knowledge, current affairs, sports, individuals, and governance sections of the competitive exams.
- Understanding the significance of these awards promotes sporting ethics, sportsmanship, and respect for diversity, crucial for potential candidates for government exams.
- Knowledge about these awards and winners display a candidate's understanding of world events, underscored in almost all government exam syllabi.
- The Best FIFA Football Awards 2024, therefore, weave an important part of current affairs with relevant historical, geographical and contemporary

socio-cultural influences, making it significant for comprehensive exam preparation.

Miscellaneous

Republic Day 2024- Honouring 75 years of Indian Democracy

1: The Significance of Republic Day

- Republic Day is celebrated on January 26th each year, marking a cornerstone in Indian history. The day signifies the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950, which replaced the British-dominated Government of India Act (1935).

- The celebration also stands as a testament to India's transformative journey from being under colonial rule to establishing a democratic, independent republic.

- This year, Republic Day holds a distinct significance, as 2024 marks the 75th year of this historical transition. India's journey from a colonised state to an independent democracy is observed, commemorated, and celebrated.

2: Celebrations and Showcases

- The Republic day event features vibrant and patriotic festivities that beautifully encapsulate the essence of India.

- The highlight of the day is the grand Republic Day Parade that takes place at Rajpath, New Delhi. This parade vividly displays the country's cultural diversity, military strength, and socio-economic progress.

- Additionally, the day is also celebrated at various official buildings, schools, and community centres across the nation with flag hoisting ceremonies, cultural performances, and patriotic songs.

3: Republic Day 2024: Honourable Guest

- The tradition of inviting a foreign head of state as the chief guest on Republic Day aims to strengthen diplomatic relations and showcase India's friendly ties.

- For 2024, Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, has been invited as the chief guest. This is indicative of the robust Indo-French relationship that has strengthened over the years.

Important GK Points:

- Republic Day is celebrated on January 26th to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India.

- The parade takes place in the nation's capital, New Delhi, at the Rajpath, featuring India's military capability, cultural richness, and socio-economic progress.

- Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, is the chief guest for the Republic Day 2024 celebrations, signalling the strong ties between the two nations.

Historical Overview:

- The Constitution of India, adopted on January 26, 1950, replaced the Government of India Act (1935) put in place by the colonial British Government.

- Over the years, Republic Day has grown into an important national festival celebrated with much enthusiasm across the country, epitomising India's democratic spirit and unity in diversity.

Geographical Importance :

- Republic Day celebrations take place across the country, but the grandest display of patriotism happens at the Rajpath in New Delhi, where the President, Prime Minister, dignitaries, and a global audience witness India's cultural and military power.

- It's a day that reminds us of our proud history, robust constitution, and our commitment towards building a better future. Celebrating 75 years of republic status, Republic Day 2024 stands as a symbol of India's resilience, endurance, and democratic values.

Understanding Acid Rain: Definition, Impact, and Mitigation Efforts

1: Delving Into Acid Rain

- Acid Rain, also known as acid deposition, is characterised by precipitation bearing acidic components like sulfuric and nitric acids.

- This rainfall originates from the sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions, primarily from burning fossil fuels and various industrial processes.

- These acidic pollutants interact with water droplets and other chemicals in the atmosphere and subsequently descend to the Earth in various forms including rain, snow, fog, or dry particles.

- Acid rain typically flaunts a pH ranging from 4.2 to 4.4, thus establishing its highly acidic nature.

2: Environmental Repercussions of Acid Rain

- Acid rain inflicts extensive damage on various aspects of the environment such as vegetation, aquatic life, and soil integrity.

- In terms of vegetation, acid rain can lead to nutrient leaching, compromised plant health and water absorption ability, and hindered growth. These potentialities induce crop yield losses and widespread plant mortality.

- The aquatic ecosystems are not spared from the wrath of acid rain either. It triggers the decline in water pH, leading to damaged fish gills, reduced aquatic life reproduction, and altered food availability.

- Soil degradation is also a consequence of acid rain. It interferes with the soil chemistry, stripping away crucial nutrients like calcium and

magnesium, and could potentially release toxic metals such as aluminium, causing harm to both terrestrial and aquatic life.

3: Actions Against Acid Rain

- Several initiatives are in place to mitigate the detrimental impact of acid rain on the environment. For instance, flue-gas desulfurization has led to a more than 90% reduction in SO₂ emissions from coal power plants.

- The Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET), established in 2001, is an intergovernmental initiative aiming to monitor and collect data on acid substance deposition and its subsequent environmental impact. The initiative is managed by the Asia Pacific secretariat of the UN Environment Programme.

4: Additional Efforts in Monitoring Acid Rain

- Apart from the aforementioned initiatives, other programs such as the National Atmospheric Deposition Program and the Clean Air Status and Trends Network are contributing towards monitoring acid rain.

- These programs diligently compile and provide reliable data, thus guiding policy-makers and researchers towards effective mitigation strategies.

This information on Acid Rain is crucial for current affairs and general knowledge pertaining to environmental concerns for government exams. Using this knowledge, aspirants can understand and answer questions related to the definition of Acid Rain, its harmful effects, and efforts to combat it.

Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers (VDA SPs): Legalities and Compliance with Indian Regulations

1. Understanding Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers:

- Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers or VDA SPs are entities extending digital asset services, including but not limited to cryptocurrency exchanges.

- VDA SPs can operate both within and outside the territorial boundaries of India.

2. Why Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers are in the News:

- The Financial Intelligence Unit India (FIU IND) recently issued show-cause notices to nine offshore VDA SPs, which include renowned entities like Binance and Huobi, for unlawful operations.

- It has been identified that these VDA SPs were functioning contrary to the anti-money laundering regulations as per the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

3. Regulatory Framework for the VDA SPs in India:

- Since March 2023, India has set certain regulations for VDA SPs under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), based on the Anti-Money Laundering/Counter Financing of Terrorism (AML-CFT) framework.

- A part of these regulatory measures includes the rigorous process of verifying client identities, maintaining records of financial transactions, and registering with FIU IND as a Reporting Entity.

- Non-compliance with the said regulations can lead to the issuance of notices and requests to block URLs.

4. Current Compliance Scenario:

- As per the most recent data, 31 VDA SPs have already registered with FIU IND, thereby showcasing their willingness to comply with the set norms and regulations.

General Knowledge Connect:

1. About FIU IND:

- The Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND) serves as the central nodal agency responsible for

receiving, processing, analysing, and disseminating information related to suspect financial transactions to enforcement agencies and foreign FIUs.

2. About PMLA 2002:

- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) forms the core of the legal framework put in place by India to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism. PMLA and the Rules notified thereunder impose an obligation on banking companies, financial institutions, and intermediaries to verify the identity of clients, maintain records, and furnish information to FIU-IND.

3. Importance of VDA SPs Regulation:

- The regulation of VDA SPs is crucial in preventing illegal activities like money laundering and terrorism financing.
- It encourages transparency, accountability, and enhances the overall integrity of the financial system by ensuring that VDA SPs follow strict service provisions guidelines.

Global Financial Regulation and India's Role

1: Introduction to Global Financial Regulation

- The topic of financial regulation is brought to light as nations around the globe try to establish standard rules in a bid to control financial activities within their jurisdictions.
- Emphasised recently due to different approaches taken by Dubai, EU and the U.S. towards financial regulation.
- Dubai's regulatory authority, VARA, operates under a distinctive licensing framework.
- The EU, on the other hand, centralises its regulatory efforts around market rules through the Markets in Crypto-Assets (MiCA).

- The U.S. has not yet developed a comprehensive framework, indicating the diverse ways in which nations are dealing with the challenges and opportunities presented by financial markets.

2: A Look at India's Role through the Organization

- A crucial entity formed by the Indian government in 2004, operating out of New Delhi, plays a noteworthy part in the financial regulatory framework of the country.
- This organisation works under the Department of Revenue, Government of India and its primary role is to gather financial intelligence on the crimes related to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
- The entity is a crucial component of India's efforts to counter money laundering and other financial crimes.

3: The Organisational Reporting Structure

- It operates as an independent body, bypassing several layers of bureaucracy to report directly to the Economic Intelligence Council (EIC).
- The EIC is led by the Finance Minister, stressing the significance of the organisation in the country's financial structure.
- This organisational structure ensures the timely and efficient handling of financial intelligence relating to crimes in the financial sector.

GK Part:

- Knowledge about the global financial regulatory frameworks and India's efforts in financial intelligence collection can be useful in various government exams.

January Current Affairs

- Questions pertaining to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, the functioning and the reporting structure of the concerned organisation, and the role of EIC in India's finance infrastructure may be asked.
 - Global comparison of financial regulatory frameworks (VARA in Dubai, MiCA in the EU, and the lack of a comprehensive framework in the U.S.) can also be an area of interest in these examinations.
 - Candidates must keep up-to-date with India's financial regulatory measures and the latest global trends.
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A New Chapter in Indian Aviation: Inauguration of Maharishi Valmiki International Airport

1: Setting the Context

- The aviation sector of India has taken a leap forward with the inauguration of the newly constructed Maharishi Valmiki International Airport in Ayodhya. The Prime Minister of India has inaugurated the airport, which has been named in honour of one of Hindu culture's most revered figures, Maharishi Valmiki.

2: The Legacy of Maharishi Valmiki

- Maharishi Valmiki is a sage and poet who holds a significant respected place in Hindu culture.
- He is traditionally acclaimed as the author of the epic tale 'Ramayana' that is renowned not only in India but across the world.
- Maharishi Valmiki also holds the prestigious title of "Adikavi" which translates to "First Poet" due to the first shloka or verse of Sanskrit poetry attributed to him.

3: The Significance of Maharishi Valmiki's Contributions

- Maharishi Valmiki has made substantial contributions to literature, primarily through the Ramayana.
- The Ramayana by Valmiki constitutes a significant base for Hindu philosophy, morality and spirituality.
- The teachings and works of Maharishi Valmiki continue to inspire millions of individuals worldwide, marking their relevance across generations.

4: Geographical and Cultural Significance of the Airport Site

- Ayodhya, the city where the newly constructed airport is situated, holds immense cultural and religious significance in India as the birthplace of Lord Rama, the central figure in the Ramayana.
- Establishing such a monumental structure in Ayodhya recognizes the city's cultural weight and is likely to boost the regional economy through enhanced tourism and connectivity.
- The choice to name the airport after Maharishi Valmiki underscores respect for the sage's contributions and reinforces Ayodhya's status as a vibrant cultural hub.

5: Indispensable G.K. Nuggets

- The Maharishi Valmiki International Airport joins the list of more than 130 airports in India, regulated by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
 - Its inauguration is aligned with the central government's push to ensure air connectivity in even the remotest parts of the country, enhancing the Pradhan Mantri Udaan Project's vision under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS).
 - This airport is anticipated to not only ease travel for pilgrims and tourists visiting Ayodhya but also contribute to the socio-economic growth of the region.
 - The airport is a testament to the Indian government's investment in infrastructure and promises a boost in job opportunities in the aviation and tourism sectors.
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Proposed Recommendation of a Health Tax on High Sugar, Salt, and Fat Foods

Introduction

- NITI Aayog and UNICEF have jointly commissioned a study proposing a health tax on foods high in sugar, salt, and fat, as well as sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs).
- The tax under proposal is approximately 20-30%, which will be levied along with the Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- The directive underlying the proposal is to encourage healthier eating habits among the population.

Aim of the Study: Encouraging Healthier Eating Habits

- The study is aimed at influencing policies towards promoting healthier eating habits.
- It highlights the detrimental effects of sugar, salt, and fat-heavy foods on health and stresses the need for regulatory actions to control their consumption.

Predicted Impact of the Health Tax

- An essential highlight of this study is the predicted decrease in demand for bulk purchases of sugar.
- The study estimates that the health tax might curtail the sugar demand by 13-18%.

Addressing India's Health Challenges

- Many health-related challenges, such as obesity, are becoming prevalent in India, mainly due to poor dietary habits.
- As the number one consumer of sugar globally, India stands to significantly benefit from measures such as the health tax on unhealthy foods.

Evidences from Other Nations

- Successful implementation of health taxes on similar high-sugar products in countries like Mexico, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and South Africa are referenced in the study.
- These cases demonstrate the potential success and benefits of implementing such a tax in India.

Key Takeaways

- The recommendation calls for the imposition of a health tax in addition to GST on foods high in sugar, salt, and fat.
- The main objective of this study is to encourage healthier eating habits and policy changes that support this initiative.
- The tax's imposition could decrease the demand for sugar by 13-18% in India.
- The tax could be a vital instrument in combating health challenges prevalent in India like obesity.
- Previous successful implementations of health taxes in countries like Mexico, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and South Africa indicate its potential effectiveness in India.

Revolutionary Collaboration: NHAI and NRSC Join Forces for Developing Green Cover Index

1. Introduction to the Collaboration

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has entered into collaboration with the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) under the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).
- This association aims at developing and reporting a "Green Cover Index" for the vast network of National Highways in India.

2. Objectives and Aims of the Collaboration

- The primary objective of this initiative is to determine the Green Cover Index region-wise for National Highways.

- The evaluation process entails recording the initial data, succeeded by yearly cycles, focusing primarily on predicting growth patterns.

3. Green Highways Policy and its Assessment

- The Green Highways Policy, initiated in 2015, lays emphasis on the development of green corridors along national highways.
- The supervision of the Green Highways Policy, earlier based on field visits, will now be performed using remote sensing technology.

4. Advantages of the Innovative Approach

- This innovative collaboration is projected to provide a dependable, time-efficient, and cost-effective solution to monitor the green cover.
- The approach permits comprehensive macro-level analysis of the green landscape alongside highways, capturing data without requiring exhaustive field trips.

5. Key Points: Republic Day 2024 and MoU Signing

- Republic Day 2024 is set to be graced by Emmanuel Macron, President of France, as the guest of honour.
 - It's celebrated with various events depicting India's patriotic fervour and cultural diversity.
 - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between NHAI and NRSC under ISRO for a period of three years.
 - The collaborative technology used helps in monitoring green cover on National Highways.
 - This initiative aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the status and growth pattern of green cover along national highways.
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The Dawn of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC)

Introduction: Unveiling the Inland Waterways Development Council

The Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) was recently launched in Kolkata, primarily aimed at bolstering the river cruise tourism industry in India. Together with the introduction of the 'Harit Nauka' guidelines and the 'River Cruise Tourism Roadmap, 2047', this initiative is set to revolutionise the way India uses its inland waterways.

What's Sparking News: Launch of IWDC

The launch of the IWDC has brought about an impetus for the development of river cruise tourism within the country. This initiative aims to enhance infrastructure, introduce 26 extra waterways, and augment the number of cruise circuits, thus fostering both domestic and international cruise tourism traffic on National Waterways.

Constitution and Mandate

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has been recognized as the organisation behind the campaign. The IWAI is intended to bolster the development of inland waterways for the purposes of shipping and navigation, and transport of cargo and passengers.

Government Endeavours: Boosting Inland Waterways

The central government has thrown its weight behind the council's mandate by instigating numerous measures that seek to boost the role of inland waterways. The government aims to increase the modal share of Inland Water

Transportation (IWT) from the current 2% to around 5% through the Jal Marg Vikas Project.

Key Terms for Understanding

1. Harit Nauka Guidelines: It is a set of guidelines introduced to promote cleaner, pollution-free inland water transport by reducing carbon footprint and improving efficiency.
2. Inland Water Transportation (IWT): Refers to transport networks with rivers, canals, backwaters, and creeks providing a cost-effective, logistically advantageous and environmentally sustainable mode of transport.
3. Jal Marg Vikas Project: A major initiative by the government to augment the capacity of navigation on National Waterway 1 (NW1), providing an alternative and efficient transport system.
4. River Cruise Tourism Roadmap, 2047: A detailed plan to enhance infrastructure and increase the number of cruise circuits to boost local and international tourism.
5. Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC): The council established for the development and advancement of inland waterways in India.
6. Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI): It is the statutory body in charge of the waterways in India. Its primary role is the regulation and development of inland waterways for the purpose of navigation and shipping.

The establishment and objectives of the IWDC exhibits the government's serious commitment towards boosting the usage of inland waterways, fostering sustainability, and promoting tourism in India.

Pioneering Leap in Sustainable Infrastructure: India's First National Highway Steel Slag Road

1: Introduction & Context

- India has inaugurated its first-ever Steel Slag Road, marking a notable shift towards sustainable infrastructure.
- Located on a section of NH-66, this road links Mumbai and Goa, both crucial hubs of commerce and tourism.

2: Technological Development & Innovations

- The technology for developing this road was harnessed by CSIR-CRRI (Council of Scientific & Industrial Research- Central Road Research Institute), exemplifying India's capacity for research and development.
- The institute has carved out a unique strategy of converting industrial waste, in this case, steel slag, into a significant resource for constructing advanced national highways.

3: Specifications of the Steel Slag Road

- Depending on the superior strength of bituminous steel slag, this road is 28% thinner in comparison to traditional roads.
- Despite the reduction in thickness, it boasts enhanced longevity and cost-efficiency, making it an innovation worth replication.

4: The Values Manifested: Sustainability, Innovation, Collaboration & More

- The project exemplifies sustainability by utilising industrial waste, steel slag, in road construction.
- It showcases the innovation of converting waste into usable resources, which can have far-reaching implications for various sectors.
- The partnership between different sectors like industrial waste management, research institutes, and road construction authorities that made this project possible suggests the potential of targeted collaboration.
- Demonstration of cost-effectiveness and efficiency is evident in the making of this road,

particularly because it necessitates lesser materials for construction while offering increased durability.

- The significance of durability in road construction is clearly highlighted, as this thinner road is sturdier than conventional ones, promising a longer lifespan.

5: Geographical GK note

- The first Steel Slag Road, on NH-66, connects Mumbai and Goa, major economic centres in the western part of India.
- NH-66 is a National Highway in India that starts from Panvel (a city in Raigad district of Maharashtra) and ends at Kanyakumari (Tamil Nadu), showing India's commitment to sustainable infrastructure development stretching from the north to the south.

6: A Move towards an Eco-friendly Future

- This venture is a critical step towards sustainable infrastructure development in India.
- By effectively using industrial waste, it addresses environmental concerns and eases the over-use of construction resources.
- The success of this project provides a replicable model for future construction endeavours, propelling India further towards an eco-friendly, sustainable future.

The Risk of Hydroxychloroquine: An Examination of its Mortality Rate and Efficacy

1: Introduction to Hydroxychloroquine and its Historical Use

- Hydroxychloroquine is an antimalarial and antirheumatic drug commonly used to treat malaria.
- The drug functions by terminating organisms that cause malaria and reducing the immune system's

activity, which is beneficial against rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus erythematosus.

- Hydroxychloroquine rose to prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic when former US President Donald Trump endorsed it as a potential treatment for the virus.

2: Hydroxychloroquine in Current News

- A recent study published in the journal Biomedicine & Pharmacotherapy found a potential link between the use of hydroxychloroquine and an increased mortality rate of up to 11%.
- This study has sparked concern as it suggests the drug could be connected to approximately 17,000 deaths.

3: Drug Risk Evaluation and Safety Concerns

- Even though hydroxychloroquine is generally safe, the alarming results from the new study underscore the importance of reassessing its risks before prophylactically administering it to a large group of healthy individuals.

4: Impact on Current Affairs and GK Part

- This research intensifies the debate around the safe and effective use of hydroxychloroquine, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It emphasises the continual need for rigorous scientific testing for medication, even those that are commonly prescribed.
- It creates an urgency for policymakers and healthcare experts to reevaluate the risk vs. benefits of administering hydroxychloroquine, especially as a prophylactic drug.
- The increased scrutiny could lead to stricter regulations and guidelines surrounding the use of hydroxychloroquine in treatment plans thus impacting healthcare policies.
- The issue also highlights the role and responsibility of leaders in disseminating reliable and scientifically verified information to the public, which can be a focal point in future government examinations.

Space For Notes



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