

MARCH CURRENT AFFAIRS

GRIEVANCE APPELLATE COMMITTEE (GAC) PORTAL

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** launched the Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC) portal.

About Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC):

- The **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** were amended last year to require **social media companies to respect the rights** accorded to the citizens under the Indian Constitution (Articles 14, 19 and 21).
- **The Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC)** is established under the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, made **under the Information Technology Act, 2000**.
- The Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC) is **launched by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY)** and was **created by the National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.
- The GAC is an online dispute resolution mechanism.
- The committee **will have a chairperson and other members selected by the central government**.
- The appellate committees will **deal with the pleas by users against the decision of the Grievance Officer** appointed by the social media intermediary.
- The Committee will try to **respond to the user's appeal within 30 days**.
- Within 24 hours of receiving the complaint, this official is required to acknowledge it and offer a resolution within 15 days.
- It is required that **complaints connected to crimes against women be handled within 24 hours in specific situations**.



- The **relevant intermediary is required to follow any orders** made by the Grievance Appellate Committee.
- The Grievance Appellate Committee is an essential part of the entire policy and legislative framework to guarantee that the **internet in India is accessible, trustworthy, and accountable.**

About GAC PORTAL:

- The IT Rules and GAC aim to ensure a **Safe & Trusted and Accountable Internet for Indian users.**
- In accordance with the IT Regulations, 2021, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology developed the Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC) portal.
- The National Informatics Center (NIC) created it.
- It enables consumers to make complaints about objectionable content and ask social media corporations to remove it.
- It will be a **virtual, online platform where all aspects of the appeals process— from filing an appeal to receiving a decision—would be handled electronically through the new portal.**
- The new portal lists detailed FAQs for the convenience of users.
- The appellants can track the status of their appeal through the Appellant Login window.
- **GAC will upload its order on the portal, and the appellant will receive notification of the same by SMS and email.**



RAISINA DIALOGUE

Why in News?

Italian PM Georgia Meloni will be the chief guest at the 8th Raisina Dialogue.

PM Narendra Modi will inaugurate the dialogue.

About RAISINA DIALOGUE:

- The Raisina Dialogue is India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics which is held annually in New Delhi, India.
- This multilateral conference was started in 2016.
- The first Raisina Dialogue was held in 2016 with the theme, "**Asia: Regional and Global Connectivity**"
- The conference is hosted by the **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**, an independent think tank, in collaboration with the **Ministry of External Affairs of India**.
- The name "Raisina Dialogue" comes from **Raisina Hill, an elevation in New Delhi, seat of the Government of India**, as well as the **Presidential Palace of India, Rashtrapati Bhavan**.
- The conference is structured as a **multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion**, involving a variety of global policymakers including heads of states, cabinet ministers and local government officials.
- In addition, the Dialogue also **welcomes major private sector executives, as well as members of the media and academia**.
- It is designed on the lines of **Singapore's Shangri-La Dialogue**.
- The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) is a "Track One" inter-governmental security conference held annually in Singapore by an independent think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).



ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

Why in News?

Supreme Court has recently said that legislatures facing disqualification under anti-defection law cannot attend floor test.

About Anti-Defection law:

- It was **introduced in India in 1985** through the **52nd amendment** to the Constitution of India.
- This amendment added the **Tenth Schedule (10th) to the Constitution**, which lists out the provisions related to defection.
- It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection **by the Presiding Officer of a legislature** based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- This schedule **applies to both Central and State legislature**.
- The main aim of this schedule was to prevent political defections and to strengthen democracy by bringing stability in politics and make members of parliament more responsible and loyal to their parties. (Aya Ram Gaya Ram)



Grounds of disqualification:

A member of any state or central legislature can be disqualified from being a member if,

- He voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- He disobeys the directions of his political party or votes or does not vote in the legislature contrary to the directions of his political
- After the election, he joins another political party.
- If a nominated member joins any political party after 6 months from the day, he becomes a member of the legislature.

Exemptions:

- Disqualification of a member is not applied in case of a merger, provided that this merger with or into another party shall be done with the consent of at **least two-thirds of its legislator**. In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.
- It **exempts the speaker, chairman, and deputy chairman of various legislative houses** from disqualification on the ground of defection.

Deciding authority:

- The decision to disqualify a member under the anti-defection law is taken by the **presiding officer of the house** (Speaker or Chairman accordingly).
- The law **does not specify a time period** for the Presiding Officer to decide on a disqualification plea.
- The **decisions of the Speaker or Chairman** in anti-defection cases are **subject to judicial review**.
- However, there can not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLE

Why in News?

About 6.37 lakh Olive Ridley Sea turtles have arrived for mass nesting at Rushikulya coast this year, setting a new record for the beach in Odisha's Ganjam district.

About Olive Ridley Turtle:

- The Olive ridley turtles are the **second smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world**.
- They got their name from their olive-colored carapace.
- **They are carnivores** and feed mainly on jellyfish, shrimp, snails, crabs, molluscs, and a variety of fish and their eggs.
- They are well-known for their **unique mass nesting known as Arribada**, in which thousands of females gather on the same beach to lay eggs.
- They are found to be inhabiting the warm waters of the **Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian oceans**.
- The ***Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in Odisha*** is home to the world's largest sea turtle rookery (a colony of breeding animals).
- Threats include waste and marine pollution, plastic garbage, trawlers etc.
- **Schedule 1** of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
- **Vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List
- **CITES Appendix I**



ZAORIZHZHIA NUCLEAR PLANT

Why in News?

Russia has seized this nuclear plant amid the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.

About Zaorizhzhia Nuclear Plant:

- The **Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power** Station is located in southeastern **Ukraine**.
- It is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and among the 10 largest in the world.
- It is under the control of Russia since 2022.
- It was **built by the Soviet Union**, on the southern shore of the Kakhovka Reservoir on the **Dnieper** river.



PORTER PRIZE 2023

Why in News?

Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare was awarded **Porter Prize 2023** for successfully managing Covid-19.

About Porter Prize 2023:

- **Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry** has received the Porter Prize 2023.
- It recognized the **government's strategy in managing COVID-19**, also the approach, and involvement of various stakeholders especially **involvement of ASHA workers** in the industry to create PPE Kits.



- The **country's contribution in developing and manufacturing vaccines was also lauded.**
- Porter Prize 2023 was announced at **“The India Dialog”**, which was jointly organized by the Institute for Competitiveness (IFC) and US Asia Technology Management Center (USATMC) at **Stanford University.**
- The theme of this conference was **“The Indian Economy 2023: Innovation, Competitiveness and Social Progress”.**
- Porter Prize is named after **award-winning economist Michael E. Porter**, an economist, researcher, author, advisor, speaker and teacher.

ANCIENT FORT OF SISUPALGARH

Why in News?

Land mafias damage rampart of ancient fortified city of Sisupalgarh.

The Archaeological Department of Government of India have recently excavated a site called “Sisupalgarh” near Bhubaneswar in Odisha, and unearthed the remains of a township which flourished between 300 B.C. and the 4th century A.D.



About Sisupalgarh:

- Sisupalgarh or Sisupalagada is situated in **Khurda District in Odisha**, India and houses ruined fortifications.
- It used to be the **capital of ancient Kalinga.**
- The remains of the ancient city Sisupalgarh has been discovered near Bhubaneswar, today, the capital of the Odisha state in India.
- It is considered **one of the largest and best-preserved ancient fortifications in India.**
- The fortifications are **over 2,000 years old** and date back to the 3rd or 4th century BC.



- The **first excavations** at the site were carried out by **B.B. Lal in 1948**.
- It was also an **important centre of trade and commerce during ancient times**.
- Sishupalgarh was designed and constructed in a **complete square shape** that was surrounded by defensive walls.
- This fortified site in India having **8 gateways**.
- The gates are elaborate structures made of brick and stone.



ATTUKAL PONGALA

Why in News?

Recently, Attukal Pongala was celebrated in Kerala.

About Attukal Pongala:

- Attukal Pongala is a 10-day religious festival celebrated **at the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple** in Thiruvananthapuram in the Indian state of Kerala.
- On the **ninth day there is a huge gathering of millions of women on the temple surroundings**.
- These women **prepare a divine food made of rice in earthen pots and offer it to the Attukal Amma (Goddess of the Temple)**.
- The pongala preparation starts with the ritual called '**Aduppuvettu**'. This is the lighting of the pongala hearth (called Pandarayaduppu) placed inside the temple by the chief priest. This is the earliest Pongala festival in Kerala.
- The **festival is marked as the largest annual gathering of women by the Guinness World Records**.



- The festival commences with the musical rendering of the **story of the Goddess (Kannaki Charitam) during the “Kappu Kettu ceremony”**.
- The story **invokes the presence of Kodungallur Bhagavathy and the slaying of the Pandyan King**.
- This **festival commemorates the victory of Good over Evil**, by the slaying of the Pandyan King.

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Why in News?

ECI has recognised **Eknath Shinde group** as official “Shiv Sena”, allowing them to use the official **“Bow & Arrow”** symbol and **“Shiv Sena”** name.



How are symbols allotted to political parties?

As per the guidelines, to get a symbol allotted:

- A party/candidate has to provide a list of three symbols from the EC’s free symbols list at the time of filing nomination papers.
- Among them, one symbol is allotted to the party/candidate on a first-come-first-serve basis.
- When a **recognised political party splits**, the **Election Commission** takes the decision on **assigning the symbol**.



As per the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) (Amendment) Order, 2017**, party symbols are either:

Reserved: Eight national parties and 64 state parties across the country have “reserved” symbols.

Free: The Election Commission also has a pool of nearly 200 “free” symbols that are allotted to the thousands of unrecognised regional parties that pop up before elections.

How does Election Commission of India (ECI) allocate symbols?

- ECI stated that the recognition of political parties is supervised by the provisions of **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968** and so will the allotment of symbols.
- The Election Commission registers political parties for the purpose of elections and grants them recognition as national or state parties **on the basis of their poll performance**. The **other parties** are simply declared as **registered-unrecognised parties**.
- The recognition determines their **right to certain privileges** like **allocation of the party symbols, provision of time for political broadcasts on television and radio stations and access to electoral rolls**.
- Every national party and every state party is allotted a symbol exclusively reserved for its use throughout the country and the states respectively.
- EC can decide disputes among rival groups or sections of a recognised political party staking claim to its name and symbol.
- The EC is the **only authority** to decide issues on a dispute or a merger under the order and the decision of the Commission shall be **binding** on all such rival sections or groups.

The Supreme Court (SC) upheld its validity in **Sadiq Ali and another vs. ECI in 1971**.

BANDICOOT

Why in News?

Kerala becomes first state in the country to use robotic technology for cleaning machines.

About Bandicoot:

- Bandicoot is a robotic machine that is engineered for cleaning any type of sewer manholes.
- The Bandicoot Robot is the world's first **robotic scavenger**, developed as a **Make in India** and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan initiative by National Award-winning startup **Genrobotics**.
- Bandicoot is inducted under the **Guruvayur Sewerage Project by Kerala Water Authority (KWA)**, as part of the 100-day action plan of the State Government.
- The robot consists of two major units, a **stand unit** and a **robotic drone unit**.
- The **robotic drone unit** will dive into the manholes for the cleaning operations or unblocking operations using robotic hands that are somewhat similar to a man's limbs.
- Bandicoot comes with 4 robotic legs to improve stabilization by adjusting each leg, creating more reliability and more efficiency.
- Bandicoot robots are currently deployed in **17 States and three Union Territories**.
- Bandicoot, developed by Kerala-based Genrobotics, is already in use in urban bodies across the country, phasing out the practice of sanitation workers physically entering the manholes.
- The robot has been named after **Bandicoot**, a terrestrial, nocturnal marsupial omnivores.
- They are **endemic to the Australia–New Guinea region**.
- With their well-attuned snouts and sharp claws, bandicoot are **fossorial diggers**.



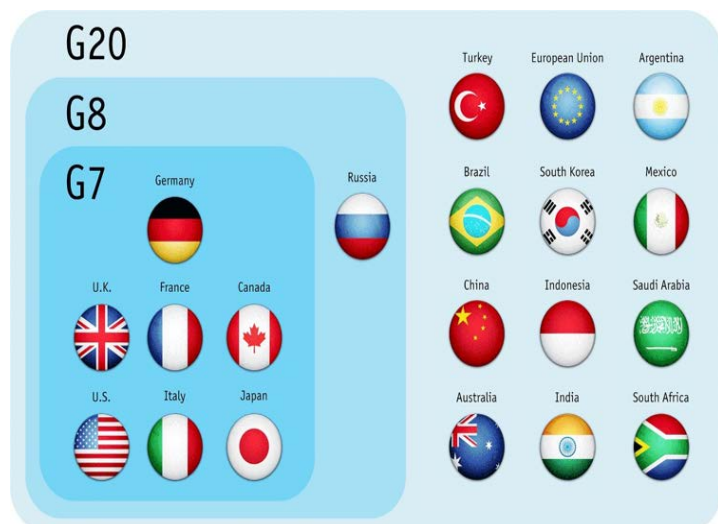
G20

Why in News?

- **India assumed the presidency of the G20** grouping from Indonesia, on December 1, 2022, and will hold the post for a year.
- The G20 is focused on **promoting international economic cooperation** and **addressing major economic challenges faced by its member nations**, including issues related to finance, trade, and global economic growth.
- This offers a unique opportunity for India to contribute to the global agenda on pressing issues of international importance.

About G20

- The G20 or Group of 20 is an **intergovernmental forum** comprising **19 countries and the European Union (EU)**.
- It works to address major issues related to the global economy, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development.
- The G20 is composed of most of the world's largest economies, **including both industrialised and developing nations**.
- The G20 members represent around **85% of the global GDP**, over **75% of the global trade**, and about **two-thirds of the world population**.
- The **G20 was founded in 1999** in response to several world economic crises.
- The G20 is the latest in a series of post–World War II initiatives aimed at international coordination of economic policy, which include institutions such as the "Bretton Woods twins", the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and what is now the World Trade Organization.



G20 Summit:

- The G20 Summit is held **annually**, under the leadership of a **rotating Presidency**.
- The G20 Presidency steers the G20 agenda for one year and hosts the Summit.
- The G20 consists of two parallel tracks: the **Finance Track and the Sherpa Track**. Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors lead the Finance Track, while Sherpas lead the Sherpa Track.
- **India's G20 Sherpa, Amitabh Kant** is presiding over the four-day meeting.
- India holds the Presidency of the G20 **from December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023**.
- The **G20 Logo** draws inspiration from the **vibrant colours of India's national flag** – saffron, white and green, and blue. It juxtaposes **planet Earth with the lotus**, India's national flower that reflects growth amid challenges.
- The Earth reflects India's pro-planet approach to life, one in perfect harmony with nature.
- **Below the G20 logo is "Bharat", written in the Devanagari script.**



UN TREATY ON HIGH SEAS : BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) Treaty

Why in News?

Recently, the **fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC-5)** for the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty was **held in New York**.

About BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction)

- It is **also known as Treaty on High Seas**.
- It is **an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction**.
- This **includes the high seas, which are outside of countries' exclusive economic zones and makeup nearly half of the Earth's surface**.

- These areas are currently poorly regulated and only 1% of them are protected.
- The High Ambition Coalition on BBNJ was launched in February 2022 to negotiate and achieve a comprehensive and ambitious outcome.
- The **fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC-5) for the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty was held in New York.**
- It was held under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to create a new, legally-binding global treaty to govern marine biological diversity in areas of the high seas beyond national Jurisdiction.

What are HIGH SEAS?

- According to the 1958 Geneva Convention on the High Seas, **parts of the sea that are not included in the territorial waters or the internal waters of a country are known as the high seas.**
- **It is the area beyond a country's Exclusive Economic Zone** (that extends up to 200 nautical miles (370 km) from the coastline) **and till where a nation has jurisdiction over living and non-living resources.**
- **No country is responsible for the management and protection of resources on the high seas.**



About UNCLOS:

- The ***United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)***, also called the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea Treaty, is an **international agreement that establishes a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities.**
- As of June 2016, 167 countries and the European Union are parties.
- It is **also known as Law of the Sea**. It divides marine areas into five main zones namely- **Internal Waters, Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic**



**THE LAW
OF THE SEA**

Zone (EEZ) and the High Seas.

- The third session of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III) which was held between 1973 to 1982 **led to the formation of the current convention named UNCLOS.**
- It is the only international convention which stipulates a framework for state jurisdiction in maritime spaces. It **provides a different legal status to different maritime zones.**
- It provides the backbone for offshore governance by coastal states and those navigating the oceans.
- Some of the **important features of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** are listed below:
 - Nations are provided with full money rights by UNCLOS for a **200-mile zone along the shoreline.**
 - **The sea and oceanic bed extending to this area are regarded to be the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of a country** and that country can use these waters for their economic utilization.
 - Another important organization that plays a vital role in UNCLOS operations is the **International Maritime Organization (IMO).**
 - Other important parties involved in Nautical Law and its functioning are the **International Seabed Authority and the International Whaling Commission.**

HAPPINESS CURRICULUM

Why in News?

Delhi Government launches videos of Happiness Curriculum online.

About:

- It is a 36 episode series on you tube.
- The videos are aimed at sharing the philosophy behind the curriculum with people across the world.
- Video series will enable educators across the world to help students learn to live a happy and purposeful life and serve humanity “in the truest sense”.

About Happiness Curriculum:

- Happiness Curriculum was introduced by the Delhi Government in 2018.
- Happiness Curriculum is an educational program for children studying in nursery to grade eight in schools run by the Government of Delhi.
- It was developed by the State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT) with former Deputy Chief Minister and Education Minister Manish Sisodia.
- The objective is to improve the mental well-being of pupils, and it teaches mindfulness, social-emotional learning, critical thinking, problem solving, and relationship building while also empowering them to express themselves independently and creatively.
- The introduction of the curriculum into government schools of Delhi has been called a **reformative step towards school education in India**.
- The curriculum is mostly based on the "Happiness Triad" concept of philosopher Agrahar Nagraj Sharma.
- Philosopher Agrahar Nagraj Sarman introduces **three components of happiness – momentary happiness, long term happiness and sustainable happiness**.



CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation)

Why in News?

Delhi's former Education Minister Manish Sisodia was arrested by CBI.

About CBI:

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the premier investigating agency of India.
- It provides assistance to the Central Vigilance Commission and Lokpal.



- It operates under the jurisdiction of the **Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.**
- The CBI is **not a statutory body** but derives its power to investigate from the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.**
- The establishment of the CBI was recommended by the **Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption (1962–1964).**
- Originally set up to investigate bribery and governmental corruption, in 1965 it received expanded jurisdiction to investigate breaches of central laws enforceable by the Government of India, multi-state organised crime, multi-agency or international cases.
- **CBI is exempted from the provisions of the Right to Information Act.**
- CBI is India's officially designated single point of contact for liaison with the Interpol.
- The CBI headquarter is located in CGO Complex, near **Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.**

Functions:

- Investigate cases connected to infringement of economic and fiscal laws, i.e., breach of laws concerning customs and central excise, export and import control, income tax, foreign exchange regulations, etc. But cases of this nature are taken up by the CBI **either at the request of the department concerned or in consultation with the concerned department.**
- Investigate crimes of a serious nature, that have national and international ramifications, and committed by professional criminals or organised gangs.
- To coordinate the activities of the various state police forces and anti-corruption agencies.
- At the behest of a state govt., the CBI can also take up any case of public importance and investigate it.
- Maintaining crime statistics and disseminating criminal information.

YAOSANG FESTIVAL

Why in News?

Recently, Yaosang festival was celebrated in **Manipur** state of India.

About Yaosang Festival:

- Yaosang is a festival celebrated in **Manipur** for **five days in spring**, starting on the full moon day of the month of Lamda (February–March).
- Yaosang is indigenous traditions of the **Meitei people**, who are predominantly Hindu.
- It is celebrated at the **same time as Holi** and is known as ‘Manipur’s version of Holi’. But unlike Holi, the celebrations go far beyond just colours.
- The five-day-long celebration begins with the **burning of ‘yaoshang’** (a small thatch hut/straw hut) which is constructed with bamboo and straws on the first day.
- The highlight of the festival is the **ThabalChongba**, a traditional Manipuri folk dance where boys and girls hold hands and sing and dance in a circle.
- The festival marks the rejuvenation of the spirit of life and commemorates the **birthday of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu**.
- It commences with worshipers singing hymns and kirtans (recitations), and making offerings to the image of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the founder of **Gauda Vaishnavism** in a thatched hut.



RAJASTHAN’S RIGHT TO HEALTH BILL

Why in news?

Recently, the Rajasthan Government has passed the Right to Health Bill, which gives every resident of the state the right to avail free services at all public health facilities.

About Rajasthan’s Right to Health Bill:

- The Rajasthan Right to Health Act (RTH), 2023, passed on March 21, has created history. No other state in India has enacted such a law. The Act is consistent with

the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution, which has been interpreted by the Supreme Court as the right to live with dignity.

- So far, India already guarantees its citizens the right to food, education, employment, and information, but no right to health. This Act fills a significant void. It will considerably minimise out of pocket expenditure (OoPE) on health, and reduce morbidities and preventable mortalities.
- **Rajasthan**, with a **population of around 80 million**, is the **largest Indian state in terms of area**.
- Its health and economic indicators put it in the category of “weak” states. The enactment of the right to health is an attempt by the government to enhance access to quality healthcare without any catastrophic expenditure by families.
- **Out-of-pocket expenses are one of the primary reasons people slip into poverty**. According to NSSO estimates for the year 2011-12, nearly 2.9 million people slid into poverty every year.



KEY FEATURES OF THE BILL:

- The Bill provides the **right to health and access to healthcare for people in the state**.
- **Free healthcare services, including consultation, drugs, diagnostics, emergency transport, procedure and emergency care**, will be provided at all public health institutions and select private facilities subject to conditions specified in the rules.
- The Bill makes it mandatory for the hospitals to provide treatment in emergency cases without waiting for medico-legal formalities and give medicines and transport facilities without charging money.
- The **implementation of the law is expected to do away with out-of-pocket expenditure and bring transparency and accountability within the health care system**.
- The Bill **sets certain obligations on the state government to ensure the right to health and maintain public health**.
- **Health Authorities will be set up at the state and district level**.

PURPLE REVOLUTION

Why in News?

About 2,500 farmers in the hilly Baderwah town of Jammu and Kashmir have given up their age-old tradition of growing maize to embrace the profitable lavender farming.

About Purple Revolution:

- The **Ministry of Science and Technology** initiated the **Purple Revolution** or **Lavender Revolution** in 2016 through the **Aroma Mission** of the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**.
- It aims to promote the indigenous aromatic crop-based agro-economy by shifting from foreign aromatics to homegrown kinds.
- First-time producers were offered free lavender seedlings as part of the goal, and those who had previously produced lavender were paid Rs. 5-6 per plant.
- The CSIR-Aroma Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM)'s Initiative have begun lavender cultivation in the Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Lavender farming is done in nearly all of Jammu and Kashmir's 20 districts.
- Particularly, the districts of Kathua, Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri, Srinagar, Bandipora, Budgam, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Kulgam, Baramulla etc. have made huge progress in this direction.
- Sensing the scope of increasing their income, the farmers joined the initiative under CSIR-Aroma Mission in a big way and within five years, 2,500 farmers started cultivating lavender in their fields at several villages, including Tipri, Lehrote, Killar, Koundla, Himote, Saringal, Butla, Nalthi and Nakshari.
- The **government is providing all assistance including funding, technology and marketing to the farmers associated with lavender** so that they do not have to face any problem at any stage.
- The **"purple revolution" has also helped women empowerment in a big way.**
- After harvesting season of maize and paddy crop in October, the farmers used to remain without work for five months during winters, but lavender farming has



given them a new lease of life and they get round the year work in lavender fields.

- Women of the villages have become experts in developing lavender nurseries.

SEMICONDUCTORS

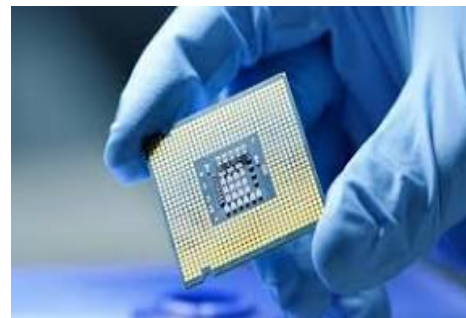
Why in News?

- India and the United States on March 10 signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** that will pave the way for creating a **Semiconductor Sub-Committee under the Commercial Dialogue** between the **U.S. Department of Commerce** and **India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** and the **Ministry of Commerce**.
- It aims to leverage complementary strengths of both countries and facilitate commercial opportunities and development of semiconductor innovation ecosystems through discussions on various aspects of semiconductor value chain.
- The MoU envisages mutually beneficial R&D, talent and skill development.



About Semiconductors:

- A semiconductor is a material which has an electrical conductivity value falling between that of a conductor and an insulator.
- A substance that can conduct electricity is called the **conductor** and a substance that cannot conduct electricity is known as **insulator**.
- **Graphite, the human body, the earth, gold, copper, steel, aluminium** are good conductors of electricity while **glass, air, wood, plastic and rubber** are bad conductors of electricity i.e. insulators.



- Some **examples of semiconductors** are **silicon, germanium, gallium arsenide,** and elements near the so-called "metalloid staircase" on the periodic table.
- After silicon, gallium arsenide is the second-most common semiconductor and is used in laser diodes, solar cells, microwave-frequency integrated circuits, and others.
- **Silicon** is a critical element for fabricating **most electronic circuits.**
- Almost all of today's electronic technology involves the use of semiconductors, with the most important aspect being the **integrated circuit (IC),** which is found in desktops, laptops, scanners, cell-phones, and other electronic devices.
- Semiconductors are employed in the manufacture of various kinds of electronic devices, including diodes, transistors and integrated circuits.
- India imports most of its Semiconductor from **China, United States and Japan** and is the **2nd largest importer of Semiconductor in the World.**

WORLD'S 1ST BAMBOO CRASH BARRIER

Why in News?

World's first bamboo crash barrier installed on highway in **Maharashtra.**

About Bamboo Crash Barrier:

- The **world's first 200-metre-long bamboo crash barrier** has been installed on a highway connecting Chandrapur and Yavatmal districts in Maharashtra.
- It has come up on the **Vani-Warora Highway** in Vidharbha region of eastern Maharashtra.
- The bamboo crash barrier has been named "**Bahu Balli**".
- It is made from **BambusaBalcooa**, treated with creosote oil, and coated with recycled High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE).



- The bamboo crash barrier underwent “**rigorous testing**” at various government-run institutions like the National Automotive Test Tracks (NATRAX) in Pithampur, Indore.
- This was rated as **Class 1** during the Fire Rating Test conducted at the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) in Roorkee.
- It has also been **accredited by the Indian Road Congress**.
- The barrier offers a **cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternative to steel** and has significant implications for the bamboo industry in India.
- This achievement towards achieving **Aatmanirbhar Bharat**, or self-reliant India, is a major accomplishment for the country.

BOBBILI VEENA

Why in News?

The famous Bobbili Veena is likely to get global attention as the **Andhra Pradesh government is preparing to present its replicas as part of cultural exchange to the delegates of G-20 conference**, which will be held on March 28 and 29 in Visakhapatnam.

The G20 Infrastructure Working Group (IWG) conference being held in Visakhapatnam will focus on issues concerning **future-ready urban infrastructure**, financing future infra, increasing private financing and participation among others.

About Bobbili Veena:

- Bobbili Veena, popularly known as **Saraswati Veena**, a large plucked string instrument is used in **Carnatic music**.
- The Veena is **named after Bobbili**, a place where it was invented.
- The making of the veena began in the **17th century during the reign of Pedda Rayudu**, the king of Bobbili Samsthanam who was a great patron of music.
- It has earned a **GI tag in 2011** for its unique design and high-quality craftsmanship.



- However, it is gasping for its survival due to lack of artisans. Only 40 families of Sarwasiddi artisans from Gollapalli and Vadada are into the business.

Features:

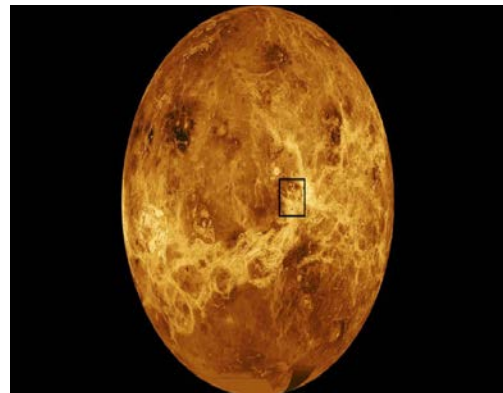
- Bobbili Veena is **carved from a single piece of jackwood** by Sarwasiddi community artisans of Gollapalli under Bobbili Samsthanam.
- The artisans of Gollapalli have **made the veenas by using elephant tusks, stag horns and strings** to get 'SaptaSwaras' during Bobbili Raja's regime.
- They toiled at least 30 days for making of the veena. Later, **they replaced the elephant tusks and stag horns with plastic material** imported from Mumbai.
- Threats includes the emergence **of electronic music instruments** and **digital sound systems** and the **lack of skilled artisans**, as only 40 families are there to make these veenas at present.

ACTIVE VOLCANO ON VENUS

Why in news?

NASA Magellan spacecraft captured images of Venus' surface from different orbits. A few locations, including those suspected to have volcanic activity, were observed two or three times over two years.

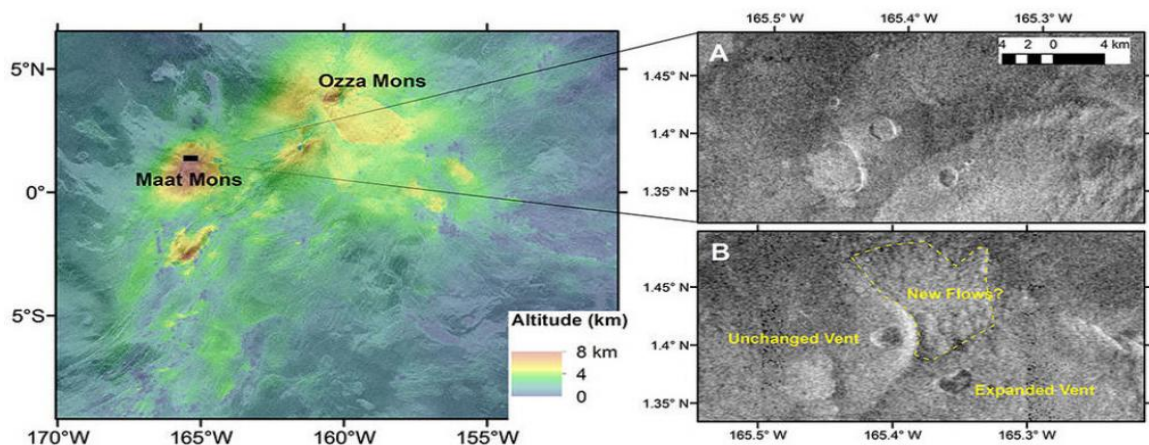
NASA has stated that a volcanic vent was observed to be changing in shape and growing in size in a period of eight months.



About:

- A study looking into decades-old radar images gave new evidence of having active volcanoes on Venus.
- A **2.2 square kilometre volcanic vent on Venus changed shape in eight months**, indicating volcanic activity.

- A volcanic vent is a spot through which molten rock erupts.
- **It showed signs of drained lava**, hinting at activity and **eight months later, radar images indicated that the same vent had doubled in size** and the lava lake seemed to have reached the rim.
- The vent is associated with **Maat Mons, Venus's second-highest volcano.**
- Maat Mons sits in the Atla Regio, a vast highland region near Venus' equator. These changes were likely due to lava flow escaping the vent, hinting at a possible volcanic activity.
- The changed vent is located in a region where volcanic activity was thought to be most likely.
- Magellan spacecraft was one of the most successful deep space missions of NASA.
- Three missions are being planned to Venus: NASA's VERITAS and DAVINCI and European Space Agency's EnVision are expected to observe our neighbour in the 2030s.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation, too, is working on Shukrayaan-1 to study Venus.
- In the **first image mentioned below, the vent appeared nearly circular.** It showed signs of drained lava, hinting at activity, the study noted. **Eight months later, radar images indicated that the same vent had doubled in size** and the lava lake seemed to have reached the rim.



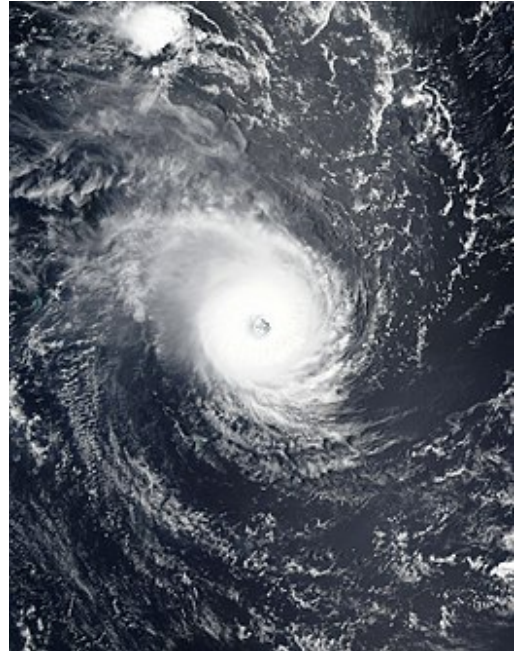
CYCLONE FREDDY

Why in News?

Tropical cyclone Freddy is on track to set a record as the longest-lasting tropical cyclone on record according to the World Meteorological Organisation.

About Cyclone Freddy

- Freddy has sustained for 33 days now and is currently intensifying again near the Mozambique coast.
- Very Intense Tropical Cyclone Freddy was an **exceptionally long-lived, powerful, and deadly storm** that traversed the southern Indian Ocean for more than five weeks in February and March 2023.
- Freddy travelled around 7200km from the southeast Indian Ocean to Madagascar in 15 days.
- Freddy is both the **longest-lasting** and **highest-ACE-producing tropical cyclone** ever recorded worldwide.
- It was the fourth named storm of the 2022–23 Australian region cyclone season, and the second very intense tropical cyclone of the 2022–23 South-West Indian Ocean cyclone season.



About Tropical Cyclones

- A tropical cyclone is a **rapidly rotating storm system** characterized by a **low-pressure center**, a closed **low-level atmospheric circulation**, **strong winds**, and a spiral arrangement of thunderstorms that produce strong winds, heavy rain and squalls.
- Depending on its location and strength, a tropical cyclone is referred to by different names, including hurricane , typhoon , tropical storm, cyclonic storm, tropical depression, or simply cyclone.
- Cyclone refers to their winds moving in a circle, whirling round their central clear eye, with their surface winds blowing counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere.

- Pre-Conditions for Tropical Cyclones:-
 - Large sea surface with temperature higher than 27°C
 - Presence of Coriolis force
 - Small variations in the vertical wind speed
 - Pre-existing weak low-pressure area or low-level cyclonic circulation
 - Upper divergence above the sea level system.

CSTO : Collective Security Treaty Organization

Why in news?

Armenia's Prime Minister has been repeatedly critical of what he described as the failure of Collective Security Treaty Organization, or CSTO, to protect its member Armenia amid a standoff with Azerbaijan over Nagorno- Karabakh region.

About CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organization:

- The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is an **intergovernmental military alliance in Eurasia** consisting of six post-Soviet states: **Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.**
- The CSTO began out of the structure of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and **initially was the Collective Security Treaty (CST).**
- It is an intergovernmental military alliance that was **signed on 15th May 1992.**
- This intergovernmental military alliance (**six countries**) that **came into effect in 2002.**
- **Objective** : To strengthen peace, international and regional security including cyber security and stability, the protection on a collective basis of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states.
- **Headquarter** : **Moscow, Russia.**
- Similar to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, **Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) establishes that an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all.**



- The CSTO charter reaffirmed the desire of all participating states to abstain from the use or threat of force.
- **Signatories are prohibited from joining other military alliances**, like NATO.
- This is also referred to as the **“Tashkent Pact”** or **“Tashkent Treaty”**.
- The CSTO is an **observer organization** at the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**.

BUMCHU FESTIVAL

Why in News?

Recently, the Bumchu Festival was celebrated in the **Tashiding Monastery**, located in the state of **Sikkim**.

About Bumchu Festival:

- Bhumchu (Bhum is a pot, Chum is water) is a Buddhist festival, which on the Tibetan lunar calendar is held on the **14th and 15th day of the first month**, which is **between February and March** on the Gregorian calendar.
- The festival is centred around the opening of a vessel containing holy water, which is believed to be an indicator of the fortunes of the coming year.
- Annual performances of this ancient ceremony are held at the Tashiding Monastery, located in the **western part** of Sikkim.
- The divine vase is filled with water from the **Rathong River** and kept in the monastery.
- The Bumchu festival **commemorates a supernatural occurrence that took place in the 18th century under Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal**.
- In Sikkim, the Bumchu festival is a time of intense delight and celebration. At the event, pilgrims travel to Tashiding from all around India as well as from close by nations like Bhutan.



- The celebrations feature **complex rituals, colourful processions, and traditional music and dance displays.**
- Sacred rituals are carried out by monks and nuns, who also recite prayers and offer gifts to the gods.

REACHOUT SCHEME

Why in news?

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

About REACHOUT: Research, Education and Training Outreach

- The REACHOUT scheme is an important **initiative of the Ministry of Earth Sciences to promote research, education, and training in the field of earth sciences and to create a pool of skilled professionals in the field.**
- Nodal Ministry: **Ministry of Earth Sciences.**
- This scheme is being **implemented for the entire country.**
- The Research, Education and Training Outreach (REACHOUT) scheme consists of
 - 1) R&D in Earth System Science (**RDESS**)
 - 2) Outreach and awareness.
 - 3) Knowledge Resources Center Network (**KRCNet**).
 - 4) BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (**BCWC**)
 - 5) International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography (**ITCOcean**)
 - 6) Program for Development of Skilled manpower in Earth System Sciences (DESK).
- **Objectives :**
 - To support various R&D activities in the thrust areas of different components of Earth system sciences that are theme and need-based, and that would help in attaining the National goals set up for MoES.



- Develop useful collaborations with international organisations for mutual transfer of advanced knowledge in science and technology in Earth sciences and to provide services to developing countries.
- Create awareness amongst the public, students, academicians and user communities about the various fields of Earth system science as well as on the achievements and services rendered by MoES.
- Develop a skilled and trained workforce in Earth sciences with the support of academic institutions in the country and abroad.

SAFE HARBOUR CLAUSE IN IT LAWS

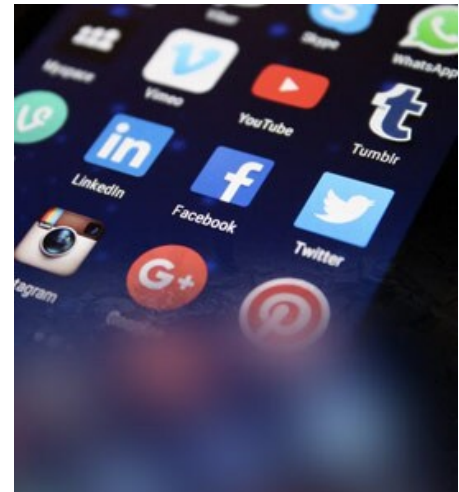
Why in News?

Recently, the **Union Government introduced the Digital India Act, 2023**, which would replace the existing Information Technology Act, 2000.

Under the new law, the government will reconsider the 'safe harbour' clause which provided intermediaries like social media platforms on the internet immunity from liability due to posts made by third parties or users.

About:

- **Safe harbour is prescribed under Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000.**
- Under Section 79 of the IT Act, **ISPs and other intermediaries are not held responsible for any third-party content** that they host or transmit on behalf of others, as long as they comply with certain conditions. These conditions include:
 - They must not initiate the transmission of the content
 - They must not select or modify the content
 - They must observe due diligence in the operation of their services
 - They must remove or disable access to the content upon receiving actual knowledge or notification of the content's illegality.



- **It is a legal immunity that online intermediaries enjoy against content posted by users on their platforms.** This is available as long as these platforms abide by certain due diligence requirements, such as censoring content when asked by the government or courts.
- The idea behind revisiting the concept of the safe harbour has stemmed from the fact that in the two decades since the Information Technology Act was formulated, intermediaries have become more complex.
- Need for balancing fundamental rights (freedom of speech and expression) with the dignity of the individual and misinformation.
- The emergence of **different types of intermediaries like e-commerce, digital media, search engines, gaming platforms, significant social media intermediaries, fact-checking portals, etc.**
- **Owing to this complexity, there is a need to classify different types of intermediaries and form relevant regulations for each of them.**
- The safe harbour provision is intended to encourage the growth of the Internet and e-commerce by providing legal certainty for intermediaries that enable the flow of information and services online, while still holding them accountable for illegal content if they have actual knowledge of it.

OSCAR AWARDS (ACADEMY AWARDS)

Why in News?

India woke up at dawn on Monday to watch the 95th Academy Awards held at Dolby Theatre, Los Angeles, and cheer the two wins.

Director Kartiki Gonsalves' Tamil documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* became the first ever Indian production to win the **Oscar for Best Documentary Short**.

Director S.S. Rajamouli's Telugu film RRR became the first Indian feature production to win an Oscar when its catchy '*NaatuNaatu*' won for **Best Original Song**.

About Academy Awards:

- The Academy Awards, **also known as the Oscars**, are awards for artistic and technical merit for the film industry.
- They are presented **annually** by the **Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS)**, in recognition of **excellence in cinematic achievements** as assessed by the Academy's voting membership.
- The Academy Awards are regarded by many as the most prestigious, significant awards in the entertainment industry in the United States and worldwide.
- It was awarded for the first time on May 16, 1929.
- The Oscar statuette depicts a knight rendered in the **Art Deco style**.
- The name of the trophy is known as the **Academy Award of Merit**.
- **Bhanu Athaiya** was the **first Indian to win the Oscar Award** for **costume designing**.
- Her work in the film 'Gandhi' bagged her the 55th Academy Award in the "Best Costume Design" Category.



SATYAMANGALAM TIGER RESERVE

- **Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve** is a protected area and tiger reserve in the Eastern Ghats in the Erode District of the Indian state of **Tamil Nadu**.
- It **lies on the banks of the River Bhavani**, a tributary of the River Cauvery in the foothills of the Western Ghats.
- The Sathyamangalam forest is mostly **tropical dry forest**, part of the South Deccan Plateau dry deciduous forests ecoregion.

KATTUNAYAKAN TRIBE

Why in News?

Recently, an Indian production short movie named **"The Elephant Whisperers"** won Oscar in short feature film. It's based on **Kattunayakar tribe**.

About KATTUNAYAKAN TRIBE :

- Kattunayakar or JennuKurumbas are a designated scheduled tribe in the Indian states of **Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh**.
- The word Kattunayakar means the **king of the jungle** in Tamil and Malayalam.
- The Kattunayakar are **one of the earliest known inhabitants of the Western Ghats**, who are engaged in the collection and gathering of forest produce, mainly wild honey and wax.
- The men wear short dhotis and half-sleeved shirts.
- The women attach a long single piece of cloth round their body just below the neck, leaving the shoulders and arms bare.
- **Monogamy** is the general rule among the Kattunayakar community.
- Kattunayakar **believe in Hinduism** and have a language which is a mixture of all Dravidian languages.
- The main deity of the tribe is **Lord Shiva and Nayakkar under the name of Bhairava**.
- They also worship **animals, birds, trees, rock hillocks, and snakes**, along with the other Hindu deities.
- Kattunayakar are **one of the five ancient tribal groups in Kerala**.
- They live very much in tune with nature. **Hunting and collecting forest produce** are the two main means of living for the Kattunayakar tribe.
- The tribe is one of the **75 PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups)** of India.



ABOUT PVTGS:

- In India, tribal population makes up for **8.6% of the total population**.
- **PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups**. Due to this factor, more developed and assertive tribal groups take a major chunk of the tribal development funds because of



which PVTGs need more funds directed for their development.

- In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)** as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups.
- In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as **PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups)**.
- In this context, in **1975**, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and **declared 52 such groups**, while in **1993 an additional 23 groups were added** to the category, making it a **total of 75 PVTGs** out of 705 Scheduled Tribes.
- The **categorization is done by the Ministry of Home Affairs** and not by the Ministry of Tribal affairs.
- As per census 2001: There are 12 PVTGs having a population above 50,000.
- They generally inhabit remote localities having poor infrastructure and administrative support.
- The criteria followed for determination of PVTGs are as under:
 - A pre-agriculture level of technology.
 - A stagnant or declining population.
 - Extremely low literacy.
 - A subsistence level of economy.
- PVTGs have some basic characteristics - they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, absence of written language, relatively simple technology and a slower rate of change etc.
- Among the **75** listed PVTG's **the highest number are found in Odisha**.

REDDMATTER

Why in news?

Researchers at the University of Rochester have created a new superconductor material called "Reddmatter".

ABOUT:

- **When a material is superconductive, electricity flows through it with zero resistance**, which means none of the energy involved is lost as heat.



But every superconductor made so far has required extraordinarily high pressures, and most have required very low temperatures.

- **But today's superconductors require extremely cold temperatures and high pressures to work, making them impractical anywhere outside special laboratories**
- **But redmatter superconductor is said to be able to work at room temperature and low pressure** when compared to earlier versions.
- The applications of new superconductors can be used in the efficient transmission of power, high-speed trains, nuclear fusion and long-lasting batteries.
- The **new superconductor was made by mixing lutetium, which is a rare earth metal with hydrogen and nitrogen** which was then exposed to high temperatures for two to three days.
- Thus the newly discovered superconductor can work in ambient conditions and doesn't require an expensive cooling system.
- The scientists opine that the discovery of a new superconductor has paved the way for a new era for the practical use of superconductors.

HYPERSONIC MISSILES

Why in news?

In the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Russia unleashed its biggest aerial strike against Ukraine, hitting critical infrastructure.

Among a varied range of powerful missiles launched by Moscow, **there were six hypersonic missiles**, known as **Kinzhals**, or **Daggers**.

About Hypersonic Missiles:

- A hypersonic weapon is a weapon capable of travelling at hypersonic speed, defined as **between 5 and 25 times the speed of sound** .
- A **hypersonic missile is a weapon system which flies at least at the speed of Mach**



5 i.e. five times the speed of sound and is manoeuvrable.

- These missiles are extremely fast and far harder for surface-to-air missile defence systems to target.
- The **hypersonic missile's manoeuvrability differs it from a ballistic missile**, which follows a set course or a ballistic trajectory.
- This makes them extremely lethal because **by the time they are detected by ground-based radars, they are already quite near to their target.**
- Ground-based radars, also known as terrestrial radars, cannot detect hypersonic missiles until the weapon is well into flight.
- This delayed detection makes it difficult for missile attack responders to analyse their options and attempt to intercept the missile.
- There are **two types of hypersonic weapons systems: Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles.** The HGVs are fired from a rocket before gliding to the intended target while the hypersonic cruise missile is powered by air-breathing high-speed engines or 'scramjets' after acquiring their target.

About Kinzhal Missile:

- The **Kh-47M2, nicknamed "Kinzhal" (Dagger)**, is a nuclear-capable, Russian air-launched ballistic missile.
- The Kinzhal **entered service in December 2017 and was one of the six new Russian strategic weapons unveiled by Russian President Vladimir Putin** on 1 March 2018.
- Kinzhal, is **capable of reaching speeds of Mach 10 and greater**, with a range of about 1,250 miles.
- It **can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads** with a payload of up to 480 kg and a thermonuclear option with a 10-50 kg warhead and is usually launched by MiG-31 warplanes.
- This **missile maneuvers during all stages of its flight** to overcome hostile air defense systems.



CITES

Why in News?

- On 3 March, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) celebrates its **fiftieth anniversary**.
- **March 3** is known as **World Wildlife Day (WWD)**, marked annually to draw attention to issues of conservation of flora and fauna.
- This year, the theme is **'Partnerships for Wildlife Conservation'**.

About CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

- CITES is an **international agreement between governments**.
- It is a multilateral treaty to **protect endangered plants and animals** from the threats of international trade.
- Also known as **Washington Convention**.
- It was drafted as a result of a **resolution adopted in 1963** at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The convention was **opened for signature in 1973** and CITES **entered into force on 1 July 1975**.
- **Aim:** It is to ensure that **international trade** (import/export) in specimens of animals and plants included under CITES, **does not threaten the survival of the species** in the wild.
- **Secretariat : Geneva, Switzerland.**
- **CITES is administered by the United Nations under its UNEP** (United Nations Environment Programme) Wing.
- The **Conference of the Parties to CITES, is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention** and comprises all its Parties.
- Currently, there are **184 parties** to the convention, **including India**.
- There are three working languages of the Convention (English, French and Spanish) in which all documents are made available.
- **Participation is voluntary** and countries that have agreed to be bound by the convention are known as Parties.



- Although **CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws.**
- Rather, **it provides a framework to be respected by each Party**, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.
- Both the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau**, a statutory body under the Ministry, are meant to combat wildlife crime.
- The species covered under CITES are listed in **3 Appendices**, according to the degree of protection they need.
 - **Appendix I** – It includes **species threatened with extinction**.
Trade in specimens of these species is permitted rarely, only in exceptional circumstances, such as gorillas, and lions from India.
 - **Appendix II** – It includes **species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to ensure their survival**.
For example, certain kinds of foxes and Hippopotamuses.
 - **Appendix III** – It contains species **that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade**.
For example, Bengal fox or the Golden Jackal from India.

EARTH HOUR

Why in News?

Millions of people across countries celebrated Earth Hour on 25th March and switched off their electrical appliances **to promote awareness around energy conservation and climate change.**

About Earth Hour:

- Earth Hour is a worldwide movement to encourage individuals, communities and businesses **to turn off non-essential electric lights for one hour, from 8:30 pm to 9:30**



pm on the last Saturday of March as a symbol of commitment to the planet.

- It is organized by World Wildlife Fund (WWF).
- It was started as a lights-off event in Sydney, Australia, in 2007.
- It takes place on the last Saturday of March every year.

KALAKKAD-MUNDANTHURAI TIGER RESERVE

Why in News?

- Recently, two researchers from **Tamil Nadu** have spotted a **rare moth species** for the first time in India in the buffer zone of Kalakkad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, after it was sighted 127 years ago at Trincomalee in Sri Lanka in 1893.
- **Mimeusemia ceylonica** is a moth species belonging to the subfamily Agaristinae and family Noctuidae.



About Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve:

- Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) located in the South Western Ghats montane rain forests in Tirunelveli district and Kanyakumari district in the South Indian state of **Tamil Nadu**.
- It is the **second-largest protected area in Tamil Nadu**.
- It is **part of the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve**.
- The Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve was created in 1988 by **combining Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary and Mundanthurai Wildlife Sanctuary**, both established in 1962.
- Kalakkad – Mundanthurai was declared as **the first Tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu**.
- The **river Thamirabarani** originates from this tiger reserve.



- The reserve is also known as the “**River Sanctuary**” with as many as 14 rivers originating from this Tiger Reserve.
- Apart from tigers, the forest is home to Sambar, spotted deer, elephants, leopards, wild dogs, etc., and a large number of bird species, reptiles, etc.

PROJECT GREENSAND

Why in News?

Project Greensand will be the world’s first cross-border carbon storage project.

About Project Greensand:

- It is a carbon storage project in Denmark’s North Sea.
- Project Greensand is a consortium of 23 organizations with expertise in **carbon capture and storage**, including business, academia, government and start-ups.
- The CO₂ was captured at an INEOS Oxide site in Belgium, transported to the Danish North Sea, and then stored in the INEOS operated Nini field in the Danish North Sea.
- By 2030, project aims to store upto 8 million tonnes of CO₂ per year in this area while continuing to make significant contributions to our understanding and growth of carbon storage technology.



What is Carbon Capture Storage?

Capture and Storage of carbon dioxide (CO₂) is known as Carbon Capture Storage.

CO₂ is captured and stored underground.

About North Sea:

- The North Sea is bounded by the coastlines of **England, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France.**
- An epeiric sea on the European continental shelf, it connects to the **Atlantic Ocean through the English Channel** in the south and the Norwegian Sea in the north.
- It is more than 970 kilometers (600 mi) long and 580 kilometers (360 mi) wide, covering 570,000 square kilometers (220,000 sq mi).



BARDA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Why in News?

The Gujarat government has proposed a second home for Asiatic lions in Gujarat at Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, about 100km away from their present home at Gir National Park.

About Barda WLS (Wildlife Sanctuary):

- Barda Wildlife Sanctuary is located in **Gujarat, India.**
- It is situated approximately 15 kilometres (9.3 mi) from Porbandar and 100 kilometres (62 mi) west of Gir Forest National Park.
- Barda Wildlife Sanctuary **area falls into two districts, Porbandar and Jamnagar** in the state of Gujarat.
- The sanctuary area supports around **750 'maldhari' families** in 68 'nesses'
- The tropical climate is characterized by very hot summers.
- There are two rivers, **Bileshvary River** and **Joghri River**, and two dams, **Khambala** and **Fodara.**



- There are several forest sub-types, such as southern tropical forest, southern dry mixed deciduous forest and northern tropical thorn forest, while other predominant flora include Euphorbia scrub, dry deciduous scrub, and dry bamboo brakes.
- Important fauna are blue bull, chinkara, blackbuck, and wolf.

EURASION OTTER

Why in News?

First photographic record of the **semi-aquatic carnivorous mammal** has indicated that some stretches of the **Neeru Stream**, a tributary of the Chenab river, are still unpolluted.

About Eurasian Otter:

- The Eurasian otter, also known as the **European otter, Eurasian river otter, common otter**, and Old World otter, is a **semi aquatic mammal** native to Eurasia.
- Scientific Name: **Lutra Lutra**
- The most widely distributed member of the otter.
- Eurasian Otters have a sleek, streamlined bodies, which helps them to move quickly through the water.
- These otters are **active mainly at night**, when they hunt for fish, crustaceans, and other aquatic animals.
- It is **regarded as a flagship species and indicator of high quality aquatic habitats**.
- its **presence in the Neeru stream** is a positive indication of the waterway's health.
- This species is classified as **“near threatened” on the IUCN Red List**, emphasizing the importance of their conservation efforts.
- **CITES: Appendix I**
- **Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972: Schedule II**



- Eurasian Otters are a threatened species due to **habitat loss, pollution, and hunting.**
- Conservation efforts have been put in place to protect their populations, including the **restoration of wetland habitats** and the **reduction of pollution in rivers** and streams.

SOKRA MISAWA FESTIVAL

Why in News?

Tiwa tribal boys wearing headgears call Sakrashata which is made of the inner part of a tree and perform their traditional rituals during the Sokra Misawa festival in Karbi Anglong district of Assam.

About Sokra Misawa Festival:

- Sokra Misawa Festival is celebrated by **Tiwas tribals** in Karbi Anglong district, **Assam.**
- Tiwa tribal boys wearing **headgears call Sakrashata** which is made of the inner part of a tree and perform their traditional rituals during the Sokra Misawa festival in Karbi Anglong district of Assam.
- It is believed that people of Tiwa community who inhabit in the hills are not permitted to prepare their paddy field for the next harvest before performing this ritual.
- It is a **spring time festival of the Tiwas** where they worshipped the deities of nature.
- The major festivals celebrated in Assam are **Bihu, Baishagu, Ali-Ai-Ligang, Baikho, Rongker, Rajini Gabra Harni Gabra, Bohaggiyo Bishu, Ambubashi Mela and Jonbill Mela** and so on.



CHAMELI DEVI AWARD

Why in News?

Dhanya Rajendran, co-founder and editor-in-chief of The News Minute portal, has been declared the winner of the Chameli Devi Jain Award.

About Chameli Devi Award:

- The Chameli Devi Jain Award **for Outstanding Women Mediaperson.**
- It is **an Indian journalism award named after Chameli Devi Jain**, an Indian independence activist who became the first Jain woman to go to prison during India's independence struggle.
- The award was **instituted in 1980** by The Media Foundation and is given to **women in the field of journalism.**
- The criteria for selection include social concern, dedication, courage and compassion in the individual's work.

PM MITRA SCHEME

Why in News?

- Recently Union government announced that **seven mega textile parks under PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA)** scheme will be set up in the first phase.
- The Centre has selected sites in **Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh** to set up new textile parks under PM MITRA Scheme.

About PM MITRA (PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel):

- In 2021, Ministry of Textiles (MoT) launched PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel Parks (MITRAs) Scheme to strengthen the Indian textile industry by way of enabling scale of operations, reduce logistics cost by housing entire value chain at one location, attract investment, generate employment and augment export potential.

- PM MITRA is inspired by the **5F** vision of the Prime Minister. The '5F' Formula encompasses - **Farm to fibre**; fibre to **factory**; factory to **fashion**; fashion to **foreign**.
- The parks will function as centres of opportunity to create an **integrated textile value chain**-from spinning, weaving, processing, dyeing and printing to garment manufacturing- all at one location.
- An integrated Textile Value chain at 1 location will **reduce logistics costs of the Industry**.
- It aspires to fulfil the vision of building an **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** and to position India strongly on the Global textiles map.
- It will be developed by a **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)**, which will be owned by the State Government and the Government of India in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Mode.
- Execution of PM MITRA projects - **Ministry of Textiles**.

CABINET DECISIONS
06 OCTOBER, 2021

Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks (1/2)

- ▶ Cabinet approves setting up of 7 PM MITRA Parks
- ▶ Total outlay of Rs. 4,445 crore over 5 years
- ▶ Inspired by 5F vision of PM Modi - **Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign**
- ▶ To be developed by a Special Purpose Vehicle owned by **State Government and Government of India** in PPP mode
- ▶ MITRA parks will have
 - Core Infrastructure - Incubation Centre & Plug & Play facility, Developed Factory Sites, Roads, Power, Water and Waste Water system etc
 - Support Infrastructure - workers' hostels and housing, logistics park, warehousing, medical, training & skill development facilities

ONE RANK ONE PENSION

Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Centre to show how many persons in the Armed forces have benefitted from 'One Rank One Pension' (OROP) policy.

About One Rank One Pension (OROP):

- One Rank One Pension (OROP), or "same pension, for same rank, for same length of service, irrespective of the date of retirement", is a longstanding demand of the Indian armed forces and veterans.
- OROP means the payment of the **same pension to military officers for the same rank for the same length of service, irrespective of the date of retirement.**

- Before OROP, ex-servicemen used to get pensions as per the Pay Commission's recommendations of the time when they had retired.
- The implementation of the scheme was based on recommendation of the Koshiyari committee, a 10 member all-party parliamentary panel formed under the chairmanship of Bhagat Singh Koshiyari.



- Nodal Implementation Agency - Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare, Ministry of Defence.
- Payment - OROP is not paid as a separate element as it is an integrated part of pension.
- Inapplicability - Personnel who opt to get discharged henceforth on their own request under Rule 13(3)I(i)(b), 13(3)II(i)(b), 13(3)III(iv) or Rule 16B of the Army Rule 1954 or equivalent Navy or Air Force Rules will not be entitled to the benefits of OROP.

McMohan Line

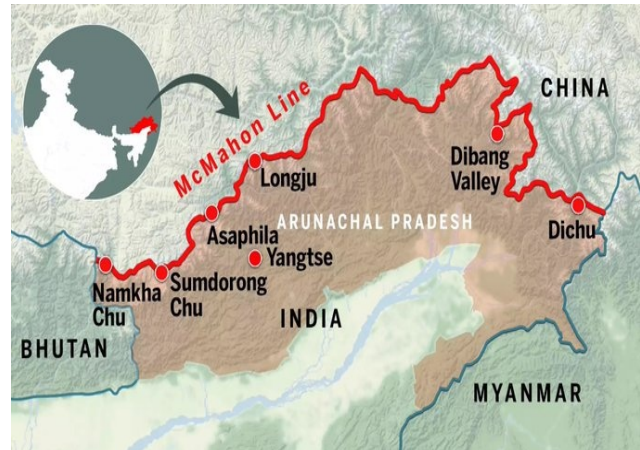
Why in News?

Two United States Senators, have introduced a bipartisan resolution reiterating that the US recognises the McMahan Line as the international boundary between China and India in Arunachal Pradesh.

About McMohan Line:

- The McMahan Line is the boundary between **Tibet and British India** as agreed in the maps and notes exchanged by the respective plenipotentiaries on 24–25 March 1914 at Delhi, as part of the **1914 Simla Convention**.

- The line is **named after Henry McMahon**, *foreign secretary of British India and the chief British negotiator of the conference at Simla.*
- The McMahon Line serves as the **de facto boundary between China and India** in the Eastern Sector.
- **China** has historically disputed the boundary and **claims the state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).**
- **According to China:**
 - Tibet has always been a part of its territory, so the representatives of Tibet are not authorised to accept any agreement without Chinese consent.
 - In 1950, China fully occupied Tibet. Now China neither approved nor accepted the McMahon Line.
 - China also argues that China was not involved in the Simla Convention, therefore the Simla Convention is not binding on it. China claimed its right on Arunachal Pradesh only after the occupancy of Tibet in 1950.
- **According to India:**
 - India believes that when the McMahon Line was established in 1914, Tibet was a weak but independent country, so it has every right to negotiate a border agreement with any country.
 - Also, when the McMahon Line was drawn, Tibet was not ruled by China. Therefore, the McMahon Line is the clear and legal boundary line between India and China.
 - Even after the Chinese occupation over Tibet in 1950, the Tawang region remained an integral part of India.
- **Current status on the McMahon Line**
 - India recognizes the McMahon Line and considers it to be the 'Actual Line of Control (LAC)' between India and China, while China does not recognize the McMahon Line.



- China says that the area of the disputed area is 2,000 kilometers while India claims it is 4,000 kilometers.
- This land dispute between India and China is in Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh), which China considers as the Southern part of Tibet.
- According to the Simla Convention, it is a part of the Indian state Arunachal Pradesh.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Why in News?

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has announced that it has issued an arrest warrant **against Russian President Vladimir Putin** for the “unlawful deportation” of Ukrainian children.

About ICC:

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) is an **intergovernmental organization and international tribunal seated in The Hague, Netherlands.**
- It is the first and only permanent international court with jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.
- It is distinct from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), an organ of the United Nations that hears disputes between states.
- **Its founding treaty, the Rome Statute, entered into force on July 1, 2002.**
- The ICC began operations on 1 July 2002, upon the entry into force of the Rome Statute, a multilateral treaty that serves as the court's charter and governing document. States which become party to the Rome Statute become members of the ICC.
- **India has not signed the Rome Statute, and thus, is not a member of ICC** because of following reasons:
 - State sovereignty
 - National interests
 - Difficulty in collection of evidences



- Problem to find impartial prosecutors
- Crime definition
- Although the Court's expenses are funded **primarily by States Parties**, it also receives voluntary contributions from governments, international organisations, individuals, corporations and other entities.
- As a judicial institution, the **ICC does not have its own police force or enforcement body; thus, it relies on cooperation with countries worldwide for support**, particularly for making arrests, transferring arrested persons to the ICC detention centre in The Hague, freezing suspects' assets, and enforcing sentences.
- The minimum age of the alleged perpetrator should be 18 years at the time of the commission of the crime.

ICJ vs. ICC

	International Court of Justice (ICJ) La Cour Internationale de Justice (CIJ)	International Criminal Court (ICC) La Cour pénale internationale (CPI)
Year Court Established	1946	2002
UN-Relationship	Official court of the U.N., commonly referred to as the "World Court."	Independent. May receive case referrals from the UN Security Council.
Location	The Hague, The Netherlands	The Hague, The Netherlands
Types of Cases	Contentious between parties & Advisory opinions	Criminal prosecution of individuals
Subject Matter	Sovereignty, boundary, & maritime disputes, trade, natural resources, human rights, treaty violations, treaty interpretation, and more.	Genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression
Funding	UN-funded.	Assessed contribution from state parties to the Rome Statute; voluntary contributions from the U.N.; voluntary contributions from governments, international organizations, individuals, corporations and other entities.

DOHA POLITICAL DECLARATION

Why in News?

“Doha Political Declaration” was adopted by the head of the states during the conclusion of the **Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)** in March 2023.

About Doha Political Declaration:

- It is a key outcome of the **second part of the LDC5 conference** held under the theme **“From Potential to Prosperity”** in Qatar.
- The **declaration welcomed the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)** and strongly committed to its implementation throughout the coming decade.
- The declaration also requested the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the UN system to facilitate coordinated implementation of the Doha Programme of Action.
- The Doha Political Declaration focuses on the **effective implementation of the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)** for least-developed countries.



Doha Programme of Action (DPoA):

- Doha Programme of Action (DPoA) is a 10-year program (2022-2031) which aims to put the 46 most vulnerable countries in the world back on track to achieve UN-mandated Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- **Doha Programme of Action (DPoA)** includes six focus areas:
 1. Eradicating Poverty,
 2. Leveraging the potential of science and technology to fight against multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the SDGs,
 3. Addressing Climate Change,
 4. Environmental Degradation,
 5. Recovering from Covid-19 and

6. Building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development.

IPCC SYNTHESIS REPORT

Why in News?

Highlighting the need for urgent climate action, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its **Synthesis Report** for the Sixth Assessment Cycle in Interlaken, Switzerland.

About Synthesis Report:

- The Synthesis Report is the **final part of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)**.
- It is fully based on the reports of the **three Working Groups of the IPCC** plus the **three Special Reports** (Global Warming of 1.5°C, Climate Change and Land, and on the Ocean and the Cryosphere in a Changing Climate), released by IPCC during the cycle which began in 2015.
- Three Working Groups (WGI, II, and III) covered the following topics: **The Physical Science Basis (WGI); Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability (WGII); Mitigation of Climate Change (WGIII)**.

About IPCC

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an **intergovernmental body of the United Nations** charged with advancing scientific knowledge about anthropogenic climate change.
- The IPCC **does not undertake scientific assessments but only evaluates** the state of scientific evidence on various aspects of climate change.
- **Establishment** - It was created in **1988** by the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** and the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- **Objective** - The objective of the IPCC is to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies.



- IPCC reports - They are also a key input into international climate change negotiations.
- **Members** - The IPCC is an organization of governments that are **members of the United Nations or WMO**.
- The IPCC currently has **195 members**.

NAMDAPHA NATIONAL PARK & TIGER RESERVE

Why in News?

- Recently, a **tiger spotted after an eight-year gap** could have helped uncover timber 'depots' deep inside India's easternmost tiger reserve.
- **Logs and a truck seized from the core area of Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve** in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district.
- Park officials bumped into the **illegal logging activities** while trying to find out why a tiger came out of the core area of the reserve after so many years.



About Namdapha National Park & Tiger Reserve:

- Namdapha National Park is a 1,985 km² large **protected area in Arunachal Pradesh** of Northeast India.
- The park was **established in 1983**.
- Namdapha was originally declared a **Wildlife Sanctuary in 1972**, then a **National Park in 1983** and became a **Tiger Reserve under the Project Tiger scheme in the same year**.
- Its name was a combination of **two Singpho** words, namely **"nam"** which **means water**, and **"dapha"** which **means origin** – the river originates from the Dapha Bum glaciers.



- **Namdapha is the name of a river which originates from Daphabum and meets the Noa-Dehing river.**
- This river **flows right across in a North-South direction of the National Park and hence the name Namdapha** has been given.
- **Flora:** Evergreen Forests, Moist deciduous forests, sub-tropical forests, Temperate Forests and Alpine.
- **Fauna:** Earthworms, Butterflies & Moths, Amphibians, Reptiles etc.

DEFAMATION

Why in News?

- Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been found guilty and **sentenced to two years in prison** in a 2019 criminal defamation case over his remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surname.
- Rahul Gandhi had made a remark about the "Modi" surname during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections saying "Why do all thieves, be it Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi or Narendra Modi, have Modi in their names?"
- He was held guilty and sentenced to two years in jail by a Surat court in a 2019 defamation case, over his remarks.

What is Defamation?

- It is an injury to the reputation of a person resulting from a statement that is false.
- Anyone who feels he or she has been wrongly accused of something by someone in public, through words or gestures, spoken, written, or by inference can file a defamation suit in a court of law claiming that the accusation levelled deals a blow to his/her reputation.
- Defamation essentially must fulfil the following requirements:
 1. The statement must be published (both oral and written forms publication)
 2. The statement must lower the estimation of the person (damaging to the reputation of the person against whom charges have been made).

TYPES OF DEFAMATION IN INDIA:

There are two types of defamation in India: **Civil** and **Criminal**.

Civil defamation: Under this, a person who is defamed can move either High Court or subordinate courts and seek damages in the form of monetary compensation. There is no punishment in the form of a jail sentence.

It is based on tort law (an area of law which does not rely on statutes to define wrongs but takes from an ever-increasing body of case laws to define what would constitute a wrong).

Criminal Defamation: Under this, the person against whom a defamation case is filed might be sentenced to two years' imprisonment or fined or both.

SECTIONS OF IPC:

IPC Section 499 lays down the definition of defamation and **Section 500** lays down the punishment for criminal defamation (two years' imprisonment for a person found guilty of defamation).

Section 499 of IPC : When someone makes or publishes an incorrect or inaccurate statement, accusation, or false imputation about another person, whether through words, oral communication, visual cues, or any other means, it is referred to as defaming that person.

Section 500 of IPC: Punishment for defamation.—Whoever defames another shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

DISQUALIFICATION AS A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT (MP)

Why in News?

Rahul Gandhi was disqualified as a member of Parliament after his conviction by the Surat Court in the criminal defamation case of 2019.

About Disqualification of Members:

There are three disqualification criteria:

- 1) Using **Articles 102(1) and 191(1)** – The grounds here are holding an office of profit, being of unsound mind or insolvent or not having valid citizenship.
 - 2) Using the **Tenth Schedule of the Constitution** – disqualification of the members on grounds of defection.
 - 3) The **Representation of The People Act (RPA), 1951** provides for disqualification for conviction in criminal cases.
- ❖ Though Article 19 of the Constitution grants freedom of speech to its citizens. However, Article 19(2) has imposed certain reasonable exemptions to this freedom such as - Contempt of Court, defamation and incitement to an offense.

What does the Representation of The People Act say?

Section 8(3) of the RPA states: “A person convicted of any offense and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years shall be disqualified from the date of such conviction and shall continue to be disqualified for a further period of six years since his release.”

Section 8(4) of the RPA states that the disqualification takes effect only “after three months have elapsed” from the date of conviction

Within that period, the convicted MP can file an appeal against the sentence before the High Court.

IMPORTANT SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENTS:

2002– Union of India (UOI) v. Association for Democratic Reforms:

The SC held that every candidate, contesting an election to the Parliament, State Legislatures, or Municipal Corporation, has to declare their criminal records, financial records, and educational qualifications along with their nomination paper.

2005- Ramesh Dalal vs. Union of India:

The SC held that a sitting MP or MLA shall also be subject to disqualification from contesting elections if he is convicted and sentenced to not less than 2 years of imprisonment by a court of law.

2013- In Lily Thomas v. Union of India:

The SC held that Section 8(4) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951 is unconstitutional which allows MPs and MLAs who are convicted to continue in office till an appeal against such conviction is disposed of.

The court held that MP/MLA convicted for two years or above would be disqualified immediately.

2015 – Krishnamurthy v. Sivakumar &Ors:

The SC held that disclosure of criminal antecedents (especially heinous crimes) of a candidate at the time of filing of nomination paper as mandated by law was a categorically imperative.

Yes, the Supreme Court has the power to stay not only the sentence but also the conviction of a person.

KUDUMBASHREE

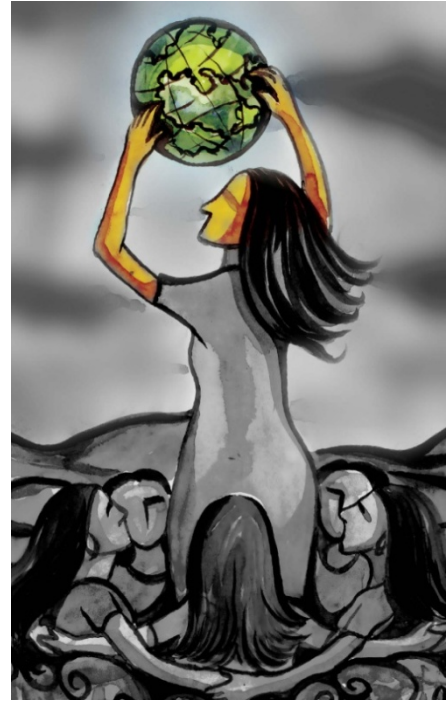
Why in News?

On May 17, Kudumbashree, Kerala's flagship programme for women's empowerment and poverty eradication, turned 25.

About Kudumbashree:

- Kudumbashree, the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission was **launched on 17th May 1998**.
- It **was inaugurated** by then Prime Minister, **Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee**.
- Aim: **To eradicate absolute poverty within a definite time frame of 10 years under the leadership of Local Self Governments formed and empowered by the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution of India.**

- The Mission launched by the State Government with the active support of Government of India and NABARD has adopted a different methodology in addressing poverty by organizing the poor in to community-based organizations.
- The **Mission follows a process approach** rather than a project approach.
- Kudumbashree is **formally registered** as the **“State Poverty Eradication Mission” (SPEM)**.
- State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) is a society registered under the Travancore Kochi Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act 1955.
- Kudumbashree is a community organization of Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) of women in Kerala.
- It has been recognized as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas by bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights or for empowerment.
- It is implemented through Community Development Societies (CDSs) of Poor Women, serving as the community wing of Local Governments.



KAPPAPHYCUS ALVAREZII

Why in News?

A report released on March 16, 2023, has revealed that the **Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park**, situated in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, is **currently experiencing a concerning coral breach due to the invasive seaweed species Kappaphycus alvarezii**.

The government plans a seaweed park in Tamil Nadu, ignoring the threat that Kappaphycus



alvarezii which is widely grown invasive seaweed, poses to corals in the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park running along the state's coastline.

About Kappaphycus Alvarezii :

- ***Kappaphycus alvarezii***, the elkhorn sea moss, is a **species of red algae**.
- It is seaweed (alga) which is **native to the Indo-Pacific region**.
- The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** lists it as **one of the world's 100 most invasive species**.
- It is **one of the prime threats that killed the corals near Kurusadai** which was deliberately introduced in Ramanathapuram for commercial cultivation some two decades ago.
- 20 years ago, the **intentional introduction of Kappaphycus alvarezii** for commercial cultivation took place in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu.
- Currently, 750 farmers in 18 villages of Ramanathapuram engage in seaweed farming, primarily Kappaphycus.
- **Kappaphycus grows rapidly and seeks out live corals to thrive on, unlike native seaweeds that typically grow on dead corals**.
- Currently, **about 750 farmers are engaged in seaweed farming**, primarily Kappaphycus, in **18 villages of Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu** and it is also likely to be cultivated in Tamil Nadu's proposed seaweed park.
- The **Kappaphycus alvarezii seaweed species has invaded six of the 21 islands of the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park** in Tamil Nadu and **has killed the corals near Kurusadai**.
- It has **also caused considerable damage to Coconut Island in Hawaii, Cubagua Island in Venezuela, Zanzibar in Tanzania, and Almirante and Cristobal in Panama and Costa Rica**.
- In 2021, India cultivated around 34,000 tonnes of seaweed.
- The **Indian government has allocated INR 600 crore to increase seaweed production to 11.85 million tonnes by 2025**, which could exacerbate the invasive seaweed problem in the Gulf of Mannar.
- The government's plan to set up a seaweed park in Tamil Nadu could lead to further spread of Kappaphycus.



AUKUS

Why in News?

Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States on Monday (March 13) unveiled plans to provide Australia with conventionally armed, nuclear-powered attack submarines in the early 2030s to counter China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific.

About AUKUS :

- AUKUS is a **trilateral security pact** between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, announced on 15 September 2021 **for the Indo-Pacific region**.
- Under the pact, the **US and the UK will assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines**.
- The pact also includes cooperation on advanced cyber mechanisms, artificial intelligence and autonomy, quantum technologies, undersea capabilities, hypersonic and counter-hypersonic, electronic warfare, innovation and information sharing.
- The pact will focus on military capability, separating it from the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance that also includes New Zealand and Canada.
- **China has been an aggressive player in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans**, staking territorial claims across the resource-rich region which also hosts some of the world's busiest shipping lanes.
- **AUKUS will contain the rise of China**, particularly its rapid militarisation and aggressive behavior in the Pacific region, especially in and around the South China



Sea.

- The AUKUS deal seeks to address core US concerns of regional security, deterrence, and balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.
- It will enhance Australia's contribution to its other partnerships, including the QUAD.

SIPRI REPORT

Why in News?

India remained the world's largest arms importer for the five-year period between 2018 and 2022 even though its arms imports dropped by 11% between 2013-2017 and 2018-2022, according to the Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

FINDINGS OF THE REPORT:

- **Russia was the largest supplier of arms to India from 2013 to 2022, but its share of total imports fell from 64% to 45% while France is the second largest supplier.**
- **India was the biggest arms export market to three countries- Russia, France and Israel and the second largest export market to South Korea.**
- **India was also the third largest market for South Africa, which was ranked 21 in the list of arms exporters.**
- **Also, India was the third largest arms supplier to Myanmar after Russia and China accounting for 14% of its imports.**
- **Russia accounted for 45% of India's imports followed by France (29%) and the U.S. (11%).**
- **With an 11% share of total global arms imports, India was the world's biggest importer of major arms in 2018 to 2022, a position it has held for the period 1993 to 2022.**
- It retained this position even though its arms imports dropped by 11% between 2013 to 2017 and 2018 to 2022.



About SIPRI : Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

- *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is an international institute based in Stockholm.*
- It was **founded in 1966** and **provides data, analysis and recommendations for armed conflict, military expenditure and arms trade as well as disarmament and arms control.**
- The research is based on open sources and is directed to decision-makers, researchers, media and the interested public.
- **SIPRI's organizational purpose is to conduct scientific research in issues on conflict and cooperation of importance for international peace and security, with the goal of contributing to an understanding for the conditions for a peaceful solution of international conflicts and sustainable peace.**
- SIPRI was ranked among the top three non-US world-wide think tanks in 2014 by the University of Pennsylvania Lauder Institute's Global Go To Think Tanks Report.
- In 2020, SIPRI ranked 34th amongst think tanks globally.



**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX

Why in News?

Recently, Sydney-based **Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP)** released **Global Terrorism Index (GTI) – 2023**.

About Global Terrorism Index (GTI):

- The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) is a report published annually by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).

- The index provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in terrorism since 2000.
- It is an attempt to systematically rank the nations of the world according to terrorist activity.
- The index combines a number of factors associated with terrorist attacks to build an explicit picture of the impact of terrorism, illustrating trends, and providing a data series for analysis by researchers and policymakers.
- It produces a composite score in order to provide an ordinal ranking of countries on the impact of terrorism.
- The index is produced using data from TerrorismTracker of Dragonfly-- which provides event records on terrorist attacks since January 1, 2007 -- and other sources.

GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX

Key Highlights:

- For the fourth year in a row, **Afghanistan is the country most affected by terrorism.**
- At 6,701 deaths worldwide, terrorism-related fatalities are down by 9% from their peak in 2015, a 38 % drop. A decrease in incidences was paralleled by a drop in fatalities.
- It was discovered that **South Asia has the lowest GTI score.**
- The Taliban's transformation into a state actor is blamed for the 9% decrease in terrorism-related fatalities.
- The number of terrorist deaths outside of Afghanistan increased by 4%.
- The **Sahel is the area most affected by terrorism**, accounting for 43% of all fatalities, a 7% increase over the previous year.
- **India ranked 13th on the index**, marking only a marginal decrease from the previous year.
- The number of terrorist-related fatalities in Pakistan increased significantly over the previous year, rising by 120%.
- **Pakistan saw the second-largest increase in terror-related fatalities globally last year**, with a total of 643 dead.

KARNATAKA SCRAPS 4% MUSLIM QUOTA

Why in News?

In recent order, Karnataka government scraps the 4% OBC quota for Muslims and distributed it among Vokkaliga and Lingayat caste.

About:

- **Reservation in India** is an affirmative action system that provides historically disadvantaged communities with representation in education, jobs, government initiatives, scholarships, and politics.
- The Karnataka government announced two new categories for reservation in jobs and education and scrapped the four per cent quota for Muslims.
- The four per cent Muslim quota has been divided between the Vokkaligas and Lingayats at 2% each.
- New 2C and 2D categories have been developed for them (Category 2C: Vokkaliga, Category 2D: Veershaiva Lingayat).
- As a result, the quota for Vokkaligas increased to 6%, while the reservation for Veerashaiva-Lingayats increased to 7%.
- Previously, both were classified as 3A and 3B, which is now scrapped.
- Muslims eligible for quota have been categorised under **economically weaker sections (EWS) now**.
- The government's decision to eliminate the quota without a recommendation from the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission has generated suspicions about the political motivations underlying the move.
- **Since 1995, the Muslim community has received 4% reserve under Category 2B on the basis of being socially and educationally backward.**
- **The Indian Constitution provides for a quota for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), but not for reservation solely on the basis of religion.**



- **Article 15(1) of the Constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth.**
- However, **Article 15(4) allows for particular provisions for the progress of any socially and educationally backward sections of people, as well as SCs and STs.**
- As a result, **reservation for religious minorities is only viable if they are classified as socially and educationally backward.**

VOKKALIGA:

- Vokkaliga is a **community, or a group of closely-related castes, from the Indian state of Karnataka.**
- They are **also present in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu.**
- It is even believed that the **Rashtrakutas and Western Gangas were of Vokkaliga origin.**
- Vokkaliga is a category defined in terms of occupation, and to that extent could be an ethnic category; these are largely farmers by origin.
- **As a community of warriors and cultivators, they have historically wielded tremendous demographic, political, and economic dominance in Old Mysore.**
- Lingayats had distanced themselves from Hindu Veerashaivas because the latter followed the Vedas and supported the caste system, to which Basaveshwara was against.
- Veerashaivas are the followers of the five peethas (religious centers), called Pancha Peethas. These peethas are set up on similar lines to the four peethas set up by Adi Shankara.

LINGAYATS:

- **The term Lingayat denotes a person who wears a personal linga, an iconic form of god Shiva, on the body which is received during the initiation ceremony.**
- **Lingayats are the followers of the 12th-century social reformer-philosopher poet, Basaveshwara.**
- **Basaveshwara was against the caste system and Vedic rituals.**
- The Lingayats are **strict monotheists.** They enjoin the **worship of only one God, namely, Linga (Shiva).**

- Lingayats had been classified as a Hindu subcaste called “**Veerashaiva Lingayats**” and they are considered to be Shaivites.

Classic IAS ACADEMY