

Current Affairs – Feb 2024

WILDLIFE (PROTECTION) LICENCING RULES, 2024:

Why in News?

The central government has enacted the Wildlife (Protection) Licencing (Additional Matters for Consideration) Rules, 2024, which changes the Wildlife Trade Rules, 1983.

- It modified the licensing process and the exclusion of some species. To assist the central banks in their monetary policy objectives by absorbing the excess liquidity in the economy.

ABOUT WILDLIFE LICENSING RULES 2024:

SCHEDULE I:

- According to the guidelines established in 1983, no such permission shall be granted to trade in a wild species designated in Schedule I or Part II of Schedule II to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 unless the central government has previously consulted.
- This criterion has been removed in the revised guidelines, which state that no such licence shall be issued if it relates to any wild animal listed in Schedule I to the Act, except with the prior consultation of the Central Government.
- This implies that the limits on Schedule I species, which include creatures that require the highest protection, such as tigers, elephants, rhinos, and so on, remain in effect, with a provision for consultation.

SCHEDULE II:

- The revised guidelines make a substantial modification by removing licensing limitations for species classified in **Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**.
- This means that licences for trading Schedule II species can be awarded without the need for central government consultation or approval, as was previously needed.
- The new rules also specify the factors that authorised officers must consider when granting licences, such as the applicant's capacity, the source and method for acquiring supplies, the sheer number of existing licences in the area, and the repercussions for hunting or trade of the relevant wild animals.

WHAT IS THE WILDLIFE (PROTECTION) ACT, 1972?

- The **Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972** establishes a legislative framework for protecting diverse kinds of wild animals and plants, managing their habitats, and regulating and controlling commerce in wild animals, plants, and products derived from them.
- The statute also establishes timetables for plants and animals that receive varied levels of government protection and supervision.
- Following the passage of the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019**, the **Wildlife Protection Act of 1972** became applicable to the UT of J&K and Ladakh.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund:

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) to be implemented under Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) with an outlay of Rs.29,610 crore for another three years up to 2025-26 .

Objectives:

- Increase the capacity of milk and meat processing and product diversification to give disorganised rural milk and meat farmers more access to the **organised milk** and meat market.
- Provide the producer with increased price realisation.
- Make wholesome milk and meat products available to home consumers
- Achieve the goal of meeting the country's rising population's needs for high-quality, protein-enriched food and stopping malnutrition in one of the **world's greatest populations of malnourished children**
- Foster entrepreneurship and create jobs.
- Promote exports and boost the sector's export contribution in the milk and meat industries to make premium concentrated animal feed accessible to **cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry**, who can then be fed a balanced diet at reasonable costs.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund [AHIDF] Benefits:

- The beneficiaries are required to **invest a minimum of 10%** of their margin money. The **remaining 90% would** be a loan component that would be made available through scheduled banks.
- Eligible beneficiaries will **receive a 3% interest subsidy** from the Indian government.
- There will be a two-year moratorium on the main loan amount, followed by a six-year repayment period.
- Credit guarantees would be granted out from Credit Guarantee Fund to sanctioned projects that fall within MSME stipulated limitations. Guarantee coverage will be up to 25% of the borrower's credit facility.

Facts for Prelims:

5 New Ramsar sites:

Recently, the union Environment Minister said that five more Indian wetlands have been added to the global list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve:

- It is a human made Village Irrigation Tank built centuries back.
- It is an ecologically important wetland and rich in biodiversity.
- It supports more than 1% of the biogeographic population of Painted Stork and Black-headed Ibis.

Aghanashini Estuary:

- It is formed at the confluence of Aghanashini River with the Arabian Sea.
- The brackish water of the Estuary provides diverse ecosystem services including flood and erosion risk mitigation, biodiversity conservation and livelihood support.
- The wetland helps in traditional fish farming in the estuarine rice fields (locally known as Gazni rice fields), bivalve shell collection and salt production.

Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve:

- It is a human-made wetland which was constructed to store rainwater for irrigation purposes.
- The wetland harbours two vulnerable species, namely Common pochard and River tern and four near-threatened species, namely Oriental Darter Black-headed Ibis Woolly-necked Stork and Painted Stork
- It is also one of the largest wintering grounds for the Bar-headed goose.

Karavetti Bird Sanctuary:

- It is one of the largest inland wetlands of Tamil Nadu, and is a significant source of groundwater recharge for the area.

The Longwood Shola Reserve Forest:

- It derives its name from the Tamil word, "Solai", which means a 'tropical rain forest'.
- The 'Sholas' are found in the upper reaches of the Nilgiris, Anamalais, Palni hills, Kalakadu, Mundanthurai and Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu.
- These forested wetlands serve as habitats for the globally endangered Black-chinned Nilgiri Laughing thrush and Nilgiri Blue Robin and vulnerable Nilgiri Wood-pigeon.

Digital detox

Why in News?

The Karnataka government has recently announced that it will ensure a responsible gaming environment by pursuing 'digital detox' initiatives.

- The government plans to launch the detox initiative in collaboration with **All India Game Developers' Forum (AIGDF)**.

What is digital detox?

- A digital detox is a period of time when one voluntarily abstains from using digital gadgets including smartphones, computers, and social media.
- This can be for a short period of time, like a few hours, or for a longer period, like every week or may be a month.
- One study found that around 25% phone proprietors among 18 and 44 don't remember the last time their phone wasn't right next to them.

Benefits:

- Assist people to overcome addiction to technology: Research shows that approximately 61% of people admit they're addicted to the internet and their digital monitors.

- Improved mental health and wellbeing: Disconnecting from technology can assist lessen strain and anxiety, and may enhance overall mental health and wellbeing.
- Increased productivity and creativity: Taking a break from constant digital stimulation can assist improve cognizance and awareness, leading to increased productivity and creativity.
- Better sleep quality and quantity: Excessive screen time has been connected to bad sleep quality and disrupted sleep patterns. A digital detox can assist improve sleep by reducing exposure to blue light and stimulating content.
- Enhanced face-to-face conversation skills: Spending less time on line can lead to extra time for face-to-face interactions, improving communication skills and overall social connectedness.

Challenges :

- Feeling disconnected from friends and family.
- Missing out on crucial information.
- Feeling bored or stressed.
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms like feelings of hysteria, boredom, or FOMO (fear of missing out).

Suggestion:

- Start small: Begin with a short detox, like a few hours, and gradually increase the duration as you get more comfortable.
- Let friends and circle of relatives know about the detox in order that they don't think you are ignoring them.
- Find wholesome activities to fill detox time, together with spending time in nature, reading, exercise, or spending time with loved ones.
- Turn off notifications on gadgets and put them away in a place in which you won't see them.
- Reward yourself for sticking to detox goals.

Conclusion:

Mental fitness troubles, shrinking attention spans and fraying real-world relationships are consequences of digital dependence.

Technology has woven itself firmly into the fabric of all people's lives and being glued to screens has come to be a norm. This is basically because devices offer convenience and connection on the fingertips. At the same time, it's far too expensive.

A digital detox may be an excellent way to enhance mental and physical health, as well as relationships with others. With a little planning and effort, one can have a successful and rewarding experience.

Lakhpati Didi Scheme:

Why in News?

The Union Finance Minister has announced expansion of the Lakhpati Didi Scheme in her Interim Budget 2024–25 speech.

- It aims to create two crore women entrepreneurs in villages.

About the Lakhpati Didi Scheme:

- Launched: December 2023
- Aim: To financially empower women in rural areas and promote their entrepreneurial spirit.

Key Features:

- **Target beneficiaries:** Women members of existing or newly formed SHGs in rural areas.
- Participants in the Scheme must be active members of self-help groups.
- **Documents required:** Domicile certificate, Aadhar card, Ration card, Proof of income and Bank details.
- **Financial assistance:** Interest-free loan of Rs. 5 lakh per SHG for initiating or expanding income-generating activities.
- **Skill training:** Skill development programs in various areas like tailoring, food processing, animal husbandry, etc., based on local needs and market potential.

- **Market linkages:** Connecting SHGs with markets through fairs, exhibitions, and digital platforms.

Significance:

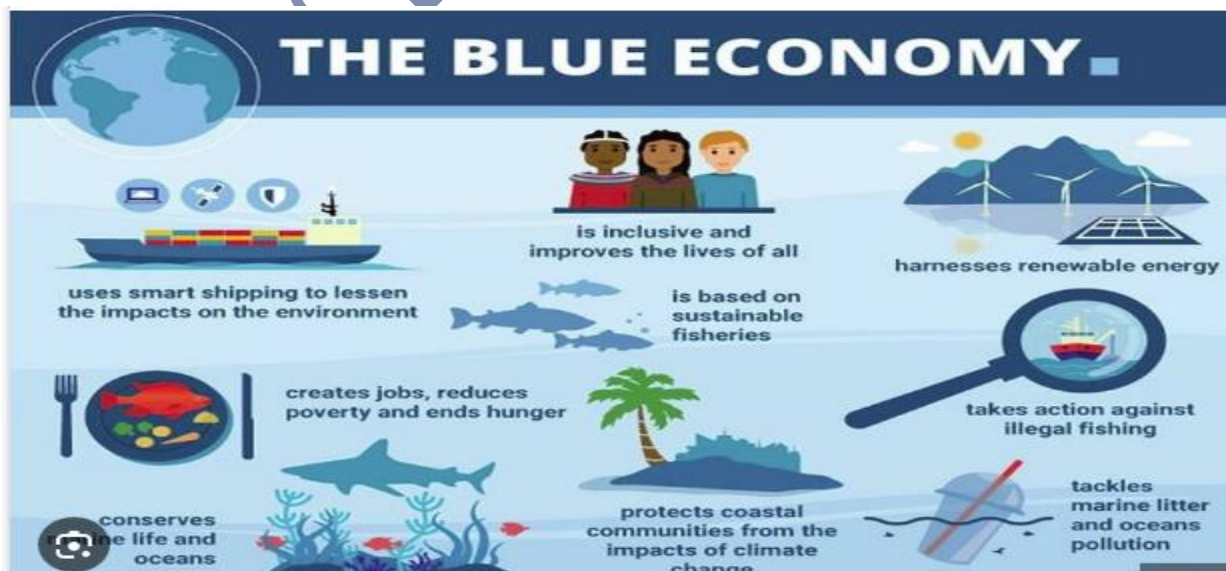
- **Increase in income:** Help women earn a sustainable income of at least Rs. 1 lakh annually per household.
- **Financial inclusion:** Bring more women into the formal financial system by encouraging them to join self-help groups (SHGs).
- **Skill development:** Provide skill training to women entrepreneurs to improve their business capabilities.
- **Women empowerment:** Create a network of successful women entrepreneurs who can inspire and support others.

Facts for Prelims:

Blue Economy 2.0:

Why in News ? The Interim Budget 2024-25 recently stressed on environment-friendly development through the promotion of 'blue economy'.

- The budget proposes to promote climate resilient activities for blue economy 2.0 for restoration and adaptation measures.
- Additionally, the budget outlines plans to set up five integrated aqua parks and enhance the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) to increase aquaculture productivity, double exports, and generate employment opportunities.



Bharat Ratna:

Why in News?

The Union Government announced the Bharat Ratna for former Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani. In January 2024, the government announced the **49th Bharat Ratna award** for former Bihar Chief Minister Karpuri Thakur. Thakur is the **17th personality** to receive the award posthumously.

About Bharat Ratna:

- It is the highest civilian award in the country.
- It is awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order in any field of human endeavor.
- It is treated on a different footing from Padma Award.
- The recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the **Prime Minister to the President of India**.
- No **formal recommendations** for Bharat Ratna are necessary.
- The first-ever Indian to receive this award was the famous scientist, Dr. **Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman**.
- The award was started by former President Dr. Rajendra Prasad on January 2nd, 1954, and announced every year on the occasion of Republic Day except for brief interruption(s) during the years 1978 and 1979, 1993 to 1997, 2020, and 2021. It is suspended many times.
- The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a maximum of **three in a particular year**. It was awarded to **four people in the same year only once -- in 1999**.
- The Bharat Ratna can also be awarded to **non-Indians as there is no written rule against the same**. Mother Teresa, a naturalized Indian citizen was conferred with the award in 1980. **Non-Indians, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Nelson Mandela** have also been awarded the Bharat Ratna.

The constitutional validity of the National Awards:

- In 1996, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the National Awards — Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Sri.

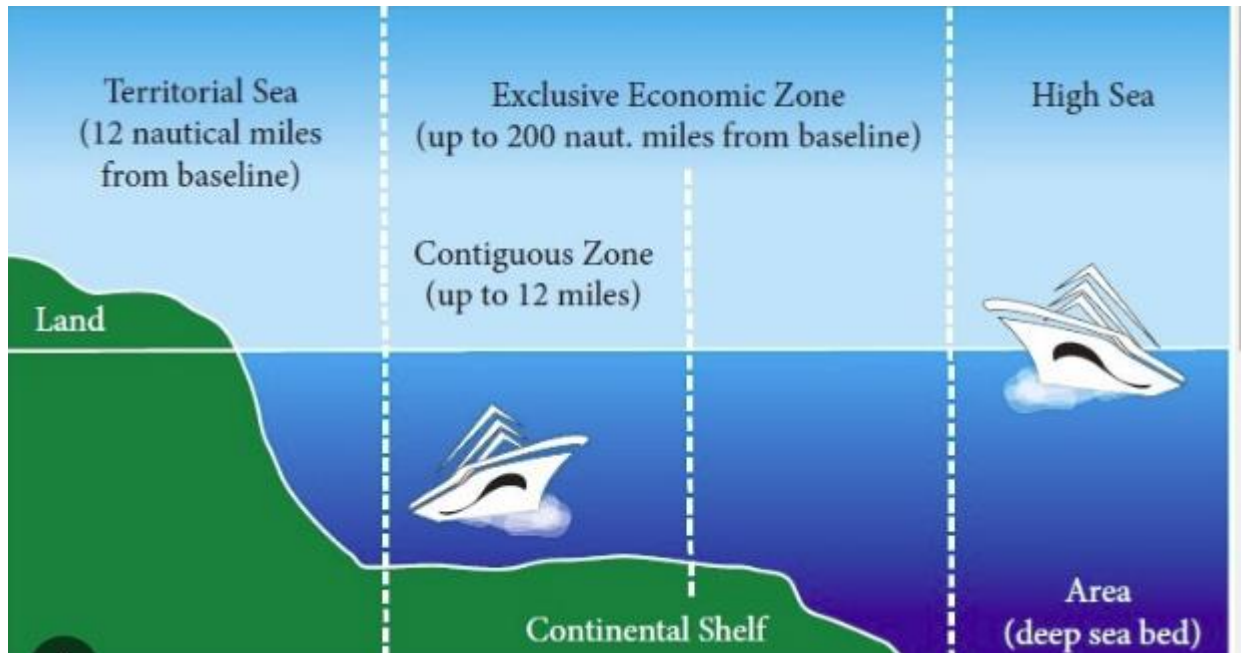
- It ruled that these awards do not amount to ‘titles’ within the meaning of Article 18 which prohibits only hereditary titles of nobility.
- Therefore, they are not **violative of Article 18** as the theory of equality does not mandate that merit should not be recognized.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

Why in News? The Maldives’ government has recently formally requested New Delhi to provide “comprehensive details” of an incident in which Indian Coast Guard personnel allegedly boarded three Maldivian fishing vessels operating within its economic zone without consultation.


About EEZ:

- The Exclusive Economic Zone is a territory outside and near the territorial sea. An Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a concept established at the **United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1982**.
- A coastal State has authority over the exploration and exploitation of marine resources in its neighbouring part of the continental shelf. As per the **UNCLOS**, the Continental shelf is defined as a band of **200 miles from the coastline**.



Characteristics of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):

- It is an area of the ocean that is close to and beyond the territorial sea.
- It can extend up to **200 nautical miles from the baseline**.
- The coastal country has sovereign rights over all living and nonliving natural resources within the EEZ.
- The coastal country has jurisdiction over artificial islands and structures and marine scientific research within the EEZ.
- The coastal country has the right to regulate navigation and overflight within the EEZ. Yet, freedom of navigation and overflight must be respected.
- The coastal country must cooperate with other countries to conserve and manage marine resources within the EEZ.



UNCLOS

**Name: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
(Also called the Law of the Sea Treaty)**

Opened for signature: 1982

Entered into force: 1994

Sector: Guidelines for the use of the world's oceans and marine resources

Has India ratified UNCLOS? Yes

NITISH

Termed Novel Initiative Technological Intervention for Safety of Humanlives (NITISH), the disaster management authority, in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Patna, has come up with a pendant-shaped device that will sound alert to its users through voice message on lightning, floods, **heatwaves and coldwaves**. The device is synced with the Bihar meteorological service centre.

- The device was recently launched in presence of the CM in Patna earlier this week. When the CM learnt about the name of the device, he smiled and said the state government has its eyes fixed on strengthening its disaster management system.
- “The state government has built a high-tech disaster management system inside a building on the premises of Sardar Patel Bhavan (police headquarters), which can withstand an earthquake of over 8.0 magnitude on the Richter scale,”

National Credit Framework:

Why in News?

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has recently urged principals of schools affiliated to the board to start contemplating the pattern for allocating credits to students for subjects, in line with the National Credit Framework (NCrF).

What is NCrF ?

- The National Credit Framework (NCrF) is a single meta-framework that works on the accumulation of credits earned through school education, higher education and vocational & skill education.
- Under this system credit will be assigned to academic learning and skill learning.

How was NCrF formulated?

- The credit system is already being followed by IITs, IIMs, NITs and other INIs
- The National Credit Framework (NCrF) is developed by the collective efforts of the UGC, AICTE, NCVET, NCERT, CBSE and NIOS.

What are the benefits of NCrF?

- To remove the separations between educational streams, General and Vocational education, Curricular & other activities.
- Establishing equivalence between general and vocational education & training/skilling.
- Mobility between and within General and vocational education & training/skilling.
- Provisions for lifelong learning through multiple entry and multiple exit(ME-ME) options.
- The credit framework provides for a comprehensive and practical approach to include all dimensions of learning i.e. academic education, skilling and experiential learning including relevant experience and professional levels acquired.

Grammy Awards :

- The Grammy Awards are awards presented by the Recording Academy of the United States to recognize “outstanding” achievements in the music industry.
- They are regarded by many as the most prestigious and significant awards in the music industry worldwide.
- They were originally called the Gramophone Awards, as the trophy depicts a gilded gramophone.

- The Grammys are the first of the Big Three networks' major music awards held annually and are considered one of the four major annual American entertainment awards with the Academy Awards (for films), the Emmy Awards (for television), and the Tony Awards (for theater).
- Indian musicians Shankar Mahadevan and Zakir Hussain's fusion band 'Shakti' bagged the Grammy's award for 'Best Global Music Album' this year. The award was for their latest album 'This Moment'.

Facts for Prelims:

Kalaripayattu:

- Kalaripayattu was developed in Kerala. It is considered among the oldest and most scientific martial arts in the world.
- Lauded as the pride of Kerala, it is acknowledged and respected across the world.
- The training begins with an oil massage of the entire body until it is agile and supple. Feats like chattom (jumping), ottam (running) and marichil (somersault) are also integral parts of the art form.
- There are also lessons in using weapons like swords, daggers, spears, maces, and bows and arrows.

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024:

Why in News ? The Central government has recently introduced the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 in Rajya Sabha.

Key points of The Bill:

- The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act was enacted in 1974 to provide for the prevention and control of water pollution.
- The New bill makes various penal provisions for non-compliance or contravention of the provisions punishable with imprisonment.
- The Bill says that outdated rules and regulations causes trust deficit.

- **For example**, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 imprisonment of up to three months for not informing the State Board about abstraction of water from a stream or well.
- The Bill amends it to a fine between **Rs10,000 and Rs15 lakh**.

Other Important Provisions:

- The manner of nomination of the chairman of the State Pollution Control Board is to be prescribed by the Central Government.
- The Central government may exempt certain categories of industrial plants from the application of Section 25 relating to restriction on new outlets and new discharges.
- The Central government may issue guidelines on the matters relating to the grant, refusal or cancellation of consent by any State Board for establishment of any industry.
- for decriminalising of minor offences and replacing it with monetary penalty in case of continuation of contravention;
- the manner of adjudication of penalties by the adjudicating officer who shall be an officer not less than the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India or Secretary to the State government;
- punishment for failure to comply with the provisions of section 25 relating to restrictions on new outlets and new discharges and section 26 relating to existing discharge of sewage or trade effluent, etc.;
- The amount of penalty imposed is to be credited to the Environmental Protection Fund established under section 16 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Basically, there are seven Pollution regulations.

1. The Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and its amendments
2. The Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1974 and its amendments
3. The Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and its amendments
4. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and its amendments
 - (a) National Environmental Tribunal Act of 1995 and
 - (b) National Environmental Appellate Authority Act of 1997
5. Hazardous Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, July 1989
6. The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991.

The Public Liability Insurance Act 1991 has been included as the sixth environmental regulation because it is the first regulation which gives some teeth to the other five pollution regulations listed above.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY):

Why in News? The Centre has recently approved the “Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)”.

About The PM-MKSSY :

- The PM-MKSSY is a central sector sub-scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada for formalisation of the fisheries sector and supporting fisheries micro and small enterprises.
- Under PM-MKSSY, an investment of over Rs 6,000 crore will be done over a period of next **four years from financial year 2023-24 to 2026-27** in all States/Union Territories.
- Under this initiative, a **National Fisheries Digital Platform** will be created to provide 40 lakh small and micro-enterprises work-based identities.
- The Cabinet also approved extension of Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF) for another three years up to **2025-26 within the already** approved fund size of Rs 7,522.48 crore and budgetary support of Rs 939.48 crore.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana 

Aims and Objectives

- Harnessing of fisheries potential
- Enhancing of fish production and productivity
- Modernizing and strengthening of value chain - post-harvest management and quality improvement
- Doubling fishers and fish farmers incomes and generation of employment
- Enhancing contribution to Agriculture GVA and exports
- Social, physical and economic security for fishers and fish farmers
- Robust fisheries management and regulatory framework



Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) :

Why in News ? A study by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Virology (NIV) has confirmed the presence of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) in Karnataka and other states.

About the Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD):

- It is a tick-borne viral illness endemic to Karnataka. The disease primarily affects the Western Ghats region, including Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa.
- Mortality rate is reported to be about **2–10%**.
- Despite vaccination efforts, KFD positivity is expanding across the entire Western Ghats region. The study emphasizes the need for newer potential vaccines and the challenges in implementing control measures.
- Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) is a serious and potentially fatal viral infection that affects humans and animals.
- It is caused by the Kyasanur Forest Disease Virus (KFDV), a member of the Flavivirus family that also includes dengue, yellow fever, and Zika viruses.
- KFDV was first identified in **1957 in Karnataka**, after an outbreak of hemorrhagic fever among monkeys and humans in the Kyasanur Forest area. Since then, KFD has been

reported in several districts of Karnataka, as well as neighbouring states of **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa, and Maharashtra.**



Flue Gas De-sulphurisation (FGD) :

Why in News ? The Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy has shared information regarding the installation of Flue Gas De-sulphurisation (FGD) equipment in thermal power plants in India.

Thermal power plants are mandated to adhere to emission norms specified by MoEF&CC and CPCB.

About Flue Gas De-sulphurisation (FGD):

- It is a technology to eliminate sulfur dioxide (SO₂) from exhaust emissions.

Where does Sulfur Dioxide come from?

- Fossil fuels such as coal and oil often contain high amounts of sulfur, and when these fuels are burned, around **95% or more of the sulfur** is converted to sulfur dioxide (SO₂), which is emitted as flue gas.

- Sulfur dioxide in itself is a major air pollutant which impacts all life. It is also a precursor of acid rain, which has significant adverse impacts on forests, freshwaters, and soils, in turn **killing insect and aquatic life forms**, causing paint to peel, corrosion of steel structures such as bridges, and **weathering of stone buildings and statues**.
- The removal of sulfur dioxide is critical to establishing a safe and clean environment where toxic **emissions are kept to a safe level**.

FGD is a process that uses a sorbent, usually lime or limestone, to react with SO₂ in the flue gas and convert it into harmless products. The sorbent can be injected as a dry powder, sprayed as a wet slurry or circulated as a seawater solution. The reaction products can be collected as solid residues, dissolved in water or discharged into the sea.

Timelines for compliance vary based on the category and location of the power plants:

Category A: Within a 10 km radius of the National Capital Region (NCR) or cities with a population of over one million (as per the 2011 census) - Compliance by 31st December 2024.

Category B: Within a 10 km radius of Critically Polluted Areas or Non-attainment Cities - Compliance by 31st December 2025.

Category C: Areas not included in categories A and B - Compliance by 31st December 2026.

Aestivation /Hibernation:

Why in News?

Hibernation or “winter sleep” is the state of inactivity or low metabolic process animals perform during winter. Aestivation or “**summer sleep**”, on the other hand, is the low metabolic process by the animals during summer.

Aestivation:

- Aestivation occurs in animals living in deserts and tropical regions. This is done to protect themselves from a hot and dry climate and due to the scarcity of food and water.
- This can be seen in earthworms, molluscs, arthropods, reptiles and amphibians. A lungfish can aestivate and survive without water for three years. The sole motive of aestivation is to prevent water loss or dehydration and to save energy.

Hibernation:

- Hibernation is the condition in which the animals go dormant during winter by lowering their metabolic activities.
- This can be seen in reptiles, fish and amphibians.
- To combat the problem of food shortage during hibernation, these animals eat a lot of food and store it in the form of excess fat. This is supplied in the form of energy while sleeping.

Facts for Prelims:

Rafah operation:

Why in News ?

Israel launched a special forces operation that freed two Israeli hostages in Rafah amid air strikes , which local health officials said killed 37 people and wounded dozens in the southern Gaza city.

A joint operation by the Israel Defence Force (IDF), Israel's domestic Shin Bet security service and the Special Police Unit in Rafah freed Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Hare, 70, the Israeli military said.

Nazool Land:

Why in News ? Recently, Uttarakhand witnessed communal tensions over one such property situated on Nazool land whose lease allegedly ended.

What is Nazool land ?

Nazool lands represent government properties leased temporarily to entities like trusts or private owners. The term emerged historically when the colonial British appropriated territories of defeated native rulers lacking ownership records. Independent India inherited these ambiguous lands.

Characteristics of Nazool lands:

- Temporary leaseholders instead of direct state administration

- Leases ranging from 15-99 years, renewed via requests
- Preferential public sector use like schools, hospitals etc
- Private allotments possible for societies, businesses etc
- Governed nationally by Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956
- States can supplement central laws with executive orders

How is Nazool Land Governed?

- Though the Nazool Land is governed by the Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956 but several states have brought in government orders for the purpose of framing rules for Nazool land.

What is Waqf land?

- While Nazool land belongs to the state, Waqf land constitutes properties permanently dedicated for religious, charitable, or pious purposes, as per Muslim law.
- These endowments play a vital role in supporting mosques, educational institutions, and welfare initiatives within the Muslim community.

SC rejects PIL against appointment of deputy CMs:

Why in News ? The Supreme Court has recently dismissed a PIL challenging the practice of appointing Deputy Chief Ministers in States, saying the post does not breach the constitutional provisions.

What was the plea?

- A the Delhi-based Public Political Party argued that states are setting the wrong example by appointing deputy chief ministers, which was done without any foundation in the Constitution.

- The lawyer said that there is no such officer stipulated in the Constitution, and such appointments also breach the rule of equality in the council of ministers

Supreme Court 's interpretations :

- The appointment of a deputy Chief Minister has no bearing in the constitutional sense as the label does not provide any extra perks.
- The minister was a minister first and that the post of deputy chief minister was "only a label."
- The post of deputy chief minister may not be defined under the Constitution, but there is no illegality in appointing senior leaders of the ruling party or a coalition of parties as deputy chief ministers, said the bench.

Constitutional Basis of Dy CM:

- Article 163(1) establishes a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor.
- Article 164(1) outlines the appointment process, with the Chief Minister appointed by the Governor, and other Ministers appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.

Absence of Explicit Mention of Deputy CM:

- Neither Article 163 nor Article 164(1) explicitly mentions the position of Deputy Chief Minister.

Equivalent Rank and Status:

Understanding: Despite the absence of direct mention, the Deputy Chief Minister is considered equivalent in rank to a Cabinet Minister in the state government.

Pay and Perks: The Deputy Chief Minister is entitled to the same pay and perks as a Cabinet Minister.

Appointment Process:

Chief Minister's Appointment: Governed by Article 164(1), appointed by the Governor.

Other Ministers' Appointment: Also under Article 164(1), appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.

Broader Framework of Ministerial Appointments:

- **Article 164(1):** Pertains to the appointment of Ministers, encompassing both the Chief Minister and other Ministers without explicit exclusion of the Deputy CM.

Practical Recognition:

- **Equivalent Status:** In practice, the Deputy Chief Minister is practically recognized as holding an equivalent status to a Cabinet Minister.

Reinforcement of Role Importance:

- **Pay and Perks:** The fact that the Deputy CM enjoys the same pay and perks as a Cabinet Minister reinforces the importance and equivalence of the role.

Facts for Prelims:

Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha:

Why in News ? Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated Abu Dhabi's first Hindu stone temple, describing it as a symbol of the shared heritage of humanity and thanking the UAE for scripting a new golden chapter of human history.

- The temple built by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

Key Points :

- The grand temple has been built as per an ancient style of construction and creation mentioned in the Shilpa and Sthapathya Shastras, Hindu scriptures which describe the art for mandir design and construction.
- The architectural methods have been clubbed with scientific techniques here. Over 300 high-tech sensors have been installed at every level of the temple to measure temperature, pressure and movement (seismic activity).

Free Legal Aid:

Why in News ? India recently hosted the regional conference on “Access to Legal Aid-Strengthening Access to Justice in the Global South”.

- It was Organised by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in collaboration with the International Legal Foundation (ILF), the UNDP, and UNICEF.

The conference's focus:

- The role of technology.
- Trans Judicial communication
- Funding of legal aid institutions
- Emphasized the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the legal landscape & its ethical and responsible use.

About the free Legal aid in India:

The **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** provides free legal aid to a person if any of the following criteria are met:

- They are a member of a **Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe**
- They are a woman, child, specially-abled or mentally challenged

- They have been a victim of human trafficking or beggar
- An industrial workman
- A victim of “a mass disaster, ethnic violence, caste atrocity”, natural or industrial disaster

Provisions related to Legal aid in India:

- **Article 39A** of Constitution: State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disability.
- About National Legal Services Authority: It is an apex body constituted to lay down policies and principles for making legal services available under the provisions of the NALSA Act and to frame the most effective and economical schemes for legal services.
- The **Chief Justice of India is the Patron-in-Chief.**

About the International Legal Foundation:

- The International Legal Foundation is an international non-governmental organization founded in 2001.
- It is focused on establishing and strengthening criminal legal aid systems around the world.

Technical Recession :

Why in News? The United Kingdom economy entered a technical recession at the end of 2023. The Office for National Statistics reported that the UK's gross domestic product (GDP) shrank **by 0.3%** in the final three months of **2023**, **and by 0.1%** in the third quarter.

- The National Bureau of Economic Research (an American NGO) defines recession as “a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in production, employment, real income, and other indicators.

What is a Technical Recession?

- When the overall output of goods and services, as measured by GDP, falls from 1 quarter to the next, the economy is said to be in a technical recession.

Technical Recession in India:

- The Indian economy was in a technical recession during the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2020-21, as a result of the spread and effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. However, by the October-December 2020-21 quarter, the economy had begun to recover and India had exited the technical recession phase.
- In the April-June and July-September quarters, **GDP fell by 24.4% and 7.3%**, respectively, indicating a technical recession in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- GDP increased by 0.4% in the third quarter, supporting the Indian economy to exit the technical recession. Electricity, agriculture, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, and other major sectors all contributed to the increased GDP.
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Facts for Prelims:

Subika Painting:

Subika Painting facing a near extinction threat due to lack of awareness.

About Subika Painting:

- It is associated with Meitei community in Manipur
- Significance – An indigenous painting style in use since the 18th or 19th century.
- 6 surviving manuscripts of Subika – Subika, Subika Achouba, Subika Laishaba, Subika Choudit, Subika Cheithil and Thengrakhel Subika.



Eco Sensitive Zones (ESZ):

Why in News ? The Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) norm has caused a concern due to human-wildlife conflicts in Kerala.

- The Kerala legislative assembly recently passed a resolution urging the Centre to exempt the State from it.
- Although setting up an ESZ has been suggested by conservationists, retired Forest department officials and scientists as a way to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

About the Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ):

- ESZ is fragile areas around protected areas declared by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Objectives:

- To create some kind of “shock absorbers” to the protected areas by regulating and managing the activities around such areas.
- Therefore, these areas act as a buffer for protected areas and reduce developmental pressures around a wildlife sanctuary or national park.
- They also act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.

Range:

- All identified areas around Protected Areas and wildlife corridors to be declared as ecologically fragile under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (National Wildlife Action Plan, 2002-2016).
- Eco-sensitive Zone could go upto 10 Kms around Protected Areas.
- In cases where sensitive corridors, connectivity and ecologically important patches, crucial for landscape linkage, are even beyond 10 Kms width.
- Further, Eco-sensitive zones may not be uniform all around and it could be variable width and extent.

Prohibited activities:

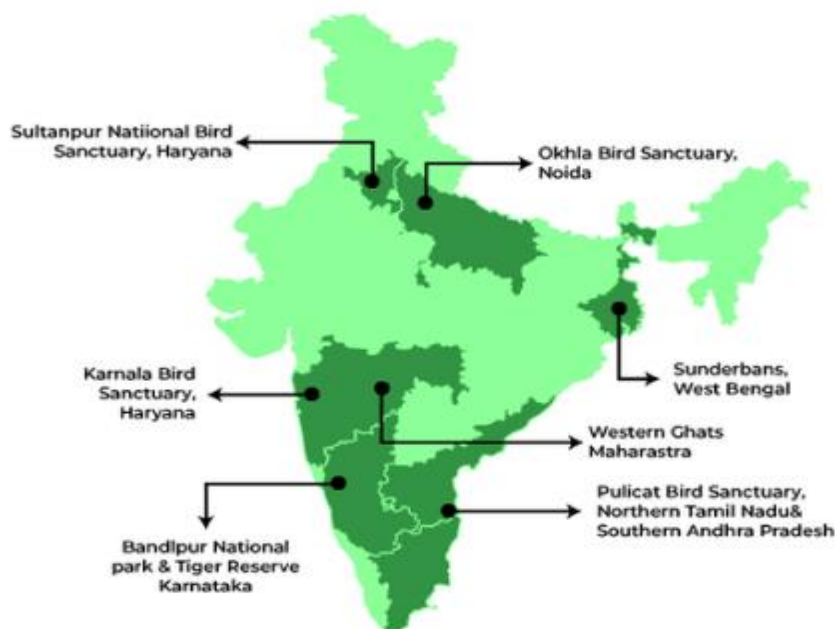
- Activities like industries which cause pollution Commercial mining, saw mills, establishment of major hydroelectric projects (HEP), commercial use of wood, Tourism, discharge of effluents or any solid waste or production of hazardous substances are all prohibited.

Regulated activities:

- Activities like felling of trees, establishment of hotels and resorts, commercial use of natural water, erection of electrical cables, drastic change of agriculture system, e.g. adoption of heavy technology, pesticides etc., widening of roads.

Permitted activities:

- Activities like ongoing agricultural or horticultural practices, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, use of renewable energy sources, adoption of green technology for all activities are permitted.

Ecologically Sensitive Zones(ESZ)**GBFF :**

Why in News? The first council meeting of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) took place recently in Washington DC, United States.

Major adoptions:

- Adoption of several rules needed to get the Fund running
- The Council agreed to create a more streamlined process compared to past conservation funds for reviewing and approving grant applications.
- A budget plan **through 2025**, as well as guidelines for how donated money to the **GBFF** will divide to support developing countries.

What is Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)?

- In 2021, countries adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the COP15 summit with a mission to “live in harmony with nature” by 2050.
- The framework includes 23 key targets to meet by 2030 that aim to conserve ecosystems, restore degraded habitats and forests, expand protected wildlife areas, and promote sustainability.

Analyzing implications of Farmer's demand for legalising MSP:

The Farmers has again started protest for a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their produce along with other demands, including implementation of the Swaminathan Commission’s recommendations for farmers’ welfare, pensions for farmers and farm labourers etc.

What is MSP?

- MSP refers to the price at which the government purchases crops from the farmers to ensure agricultural producers can achieve a certain level of income and to support agricultural production.
- The minimum support prices are announced by the Government at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops, on the basis of the recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.

Process of awarding MSP:

- MSP is based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). The CACP submits its recommendations to the government in the form of Price Policy Reports every year. It considers various factors such as cost of production, demand and supply, market price trends, inter-crop price parity.

- The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)** chaired by the Prime Minister of India takes the final decision (approve) on the level of MSPs, after considering the Price Policy Report, views of the state governments and overall demand-supply situation in the country.
- Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the nodal agency for procurement, along with State agencies, at the beginning of the sowing season.

Different Production Costs:

A2: All paid-out costs directly incurred by the farmer, either in cash and kind, on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired labour, leased-in land, fuel, irrigation.

A2+FL: Imputed value of unpaid family labour is added to the A2 cost to derive A2+FL.

C2: Estimated land rent and the cost of interest on the money taken for farming is added to A2+FL to get the C2 production cost. It is a more comprehensive production cost

What is the argument in favour of MSP Guarantee Law?

1. **Financial security-** Legally guaranteed MSP would ensure farmers fixed remunerations to the farmers by financially securing them against the vagaries of price instability in the market.
2. **Risk Cover-** Legal guarantee to MSP would provide security to farmers from the risk of crop failure due to climate change, pests attacks and crop diseases.
3. **Promotion of crop diversification-** MSP law would promote crop diversification as farmers would be incentivised to grow less water-intensive crops like pulses and millets rather than water guzzling crops like rice, wheat and sugarcane.
4. **Baseline or benchmark price-** MSP sends a price-signal to the market that if merchants don't offer higher than MSP prices, the farmer may not sell them his produce. Thus, it ensures that the market prices will not be drastically lower than MSP.
5. **Solution to rural economic Distress-** Minimum Support Price (MSP) can help in injecting financial resources into the rural sector. This will help in solving the problem of rural economic distress, which has been exacerbated due to demonetisation and COVID-19. **For**

ex- Increase in MSP would increase the disposable income of farmers and agricultural labourers which in turn would boost the economy.

6. Right to Farmers- According to Shanta Kumar Report, only 6% of the farm households are able to sell wheat and rice to the government at the MSP rates. MSP Law would give legal rights to farmers to sell their produce to Govt agencies like FCI at MSP, in case they fail to get commensurate prices from the market.

What are the arguments MSP Guarantee Law?

1. Huge Fiscal burden on Govt exchequer- Legal guarantee to MSP would put huge fiscal burden on the Govt exchequer. This would increase the fiscal deficit of the Government and will have deleterious effects on the economy. **For ex-** According to an estimate, Rs. 5 trillion would be required for implementation of MSP Law.

2. Risk of undervaluation of crops with low yields- It would change the production pattern of crops in the country as farmers would try to grow crops with higher yields even if they are not suitable to their region. **For ex-** Farmers growing Cotton (Kharif crop) instead of millets in the drought prone region of Marathawada.

3. Increase in Food Inflation- Higher procurement cost due to MSP will result in increased prices of foodgrains, which would eventually affect the lower middle class and the poor.

4. Market Distortionary and economically unsustainable practice- Legal guarantee to MSP will push away private traders whenever production is more than demand. This, in turn, will lead to government becoming the de-facto primary buyer of most **MSP- farm produce, which will be economically unsustainable.** **For ex-** Withdrawal of the Maharashtra government 2018 order, which made it illegal for a private trader to purchase any agricultural produce below the government-fixed MSP.

5. Adverse Impact on India's farm exports- If the MSP is higher than the prevailing rates in the international market, it will adversely affect India's farm exports, which has seen remarkable growth in recent years.

6. Violation of WTO subsidies principle- MSP law would lead to violation of the WTO subsidies principles and India would face opposition in the WTO dispute settlement bodies by the developed nations. **For ex-** US win against China at **WTO in 2019 in case related to China's MSP support** to its agricultural sector.

7. Induce MSP demands from other agri-allied sectors- Farmers engaged in agri-allied sectors like dairy, horticulture, pisciculture will start demanding MSP, if the Centre makes a law to guarantee 100% MSP procurement for the crops.

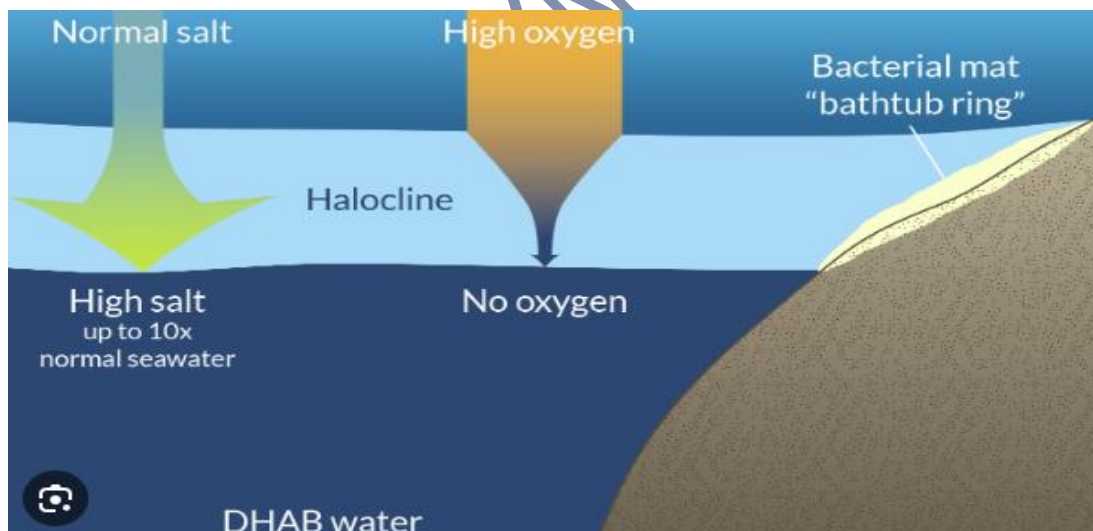
8. Storage and disposal Problems- MSP guarantee will create storage and disposal problems for crops such as Niger seed, Sesamum or safflower which will have few takers through PDS system.

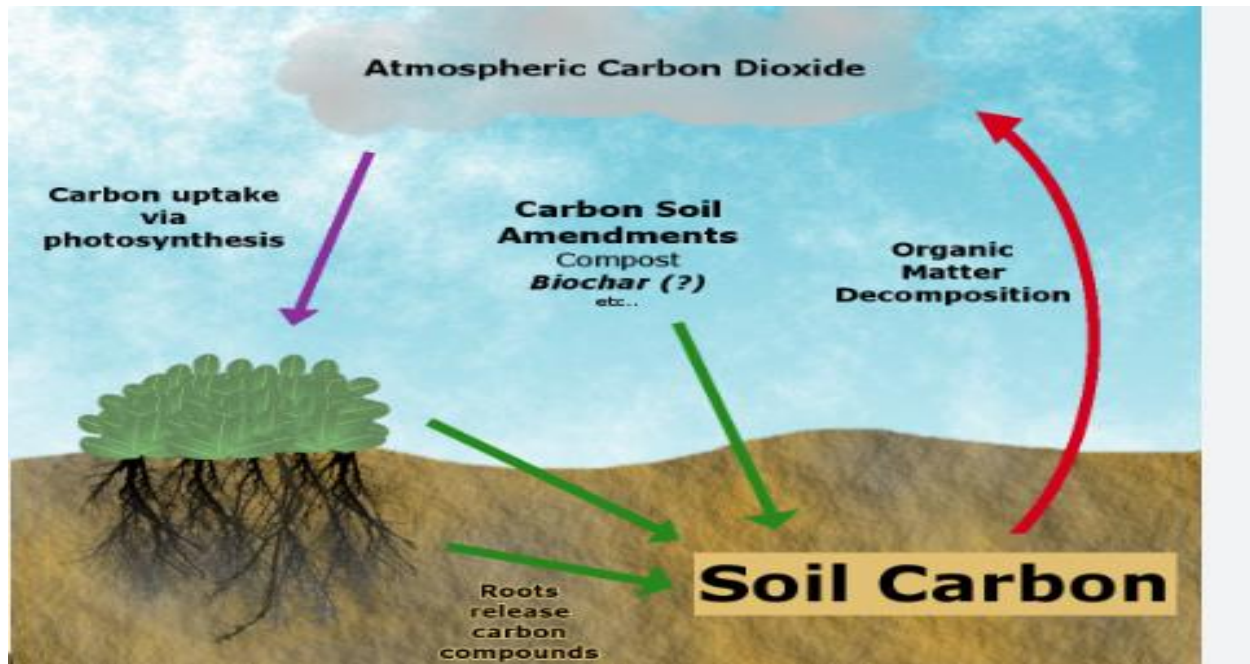
Anoxic Marine Basin :

Why in News? According to a recent study, anoxic marine basins may be among the most viable places to conduct large-scale carbon sequestration in the deep ocean.

About Anoxic Marine Basins:

- An anoxic basin is a body of water without oxygen. Permanent anoxic basins form when there is a strong layering of the water column created in a cup-like formation on the ocean floor.
- The layering is caused by density differences due to salt concentration or temperature.





Guinea worm Disease:

Why in News? The collective global efforts have led to a decline in Guinea worm disease from more than 3.5 million cases in the 1980s to just six cases in 2023, an important step towards eradication.

What is guinea worm disease?

- Guinea worm disease, also called dracunculiasis, is caused by a parasite called **guinea worm** (*Dracunculus medinensis*).
- A parasite is an organism that feeds off another organism to survive.
- The worm's larvae are carried by water fleas found in stagnant water in ponds, open wells, and freshwater lakes.
- When someone drinks contaminated water, the larvae can invade their stomach and intestines.
- **Treatment:** There is no drug to treat Guinea worm disease and no vaccine to prevent Guinea worm infection.
- By 2021, only five countries remained endemic – **Mali, Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Angola**
- **India** eliminated Guinea worm disease in the late 1990s

VAID ICS LUCKNOW