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Important Current Affairs

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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.

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.

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.

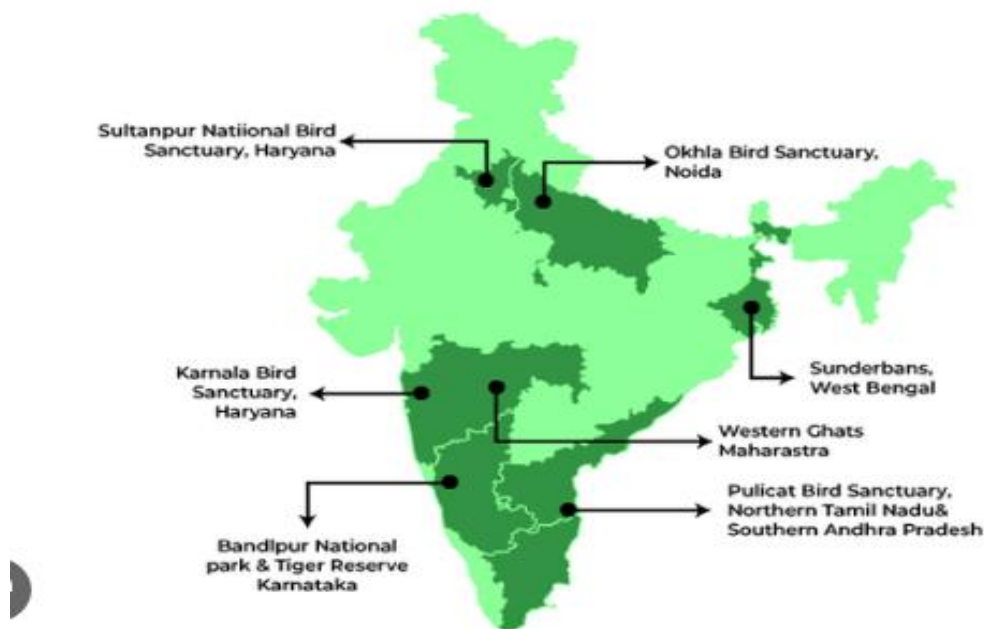
Range:

- 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.

Ecologically Sensitive Zones(ESZ)



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.

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.**

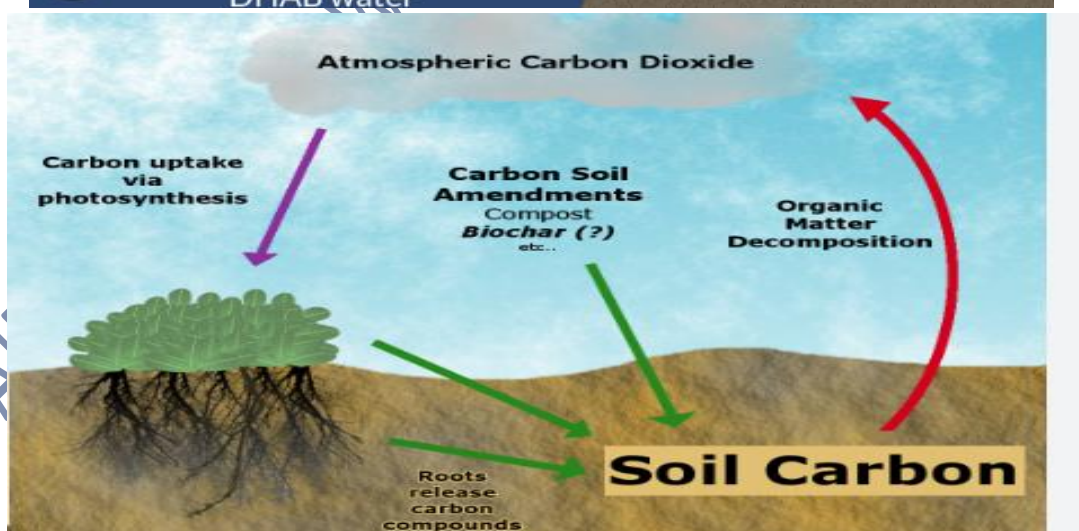
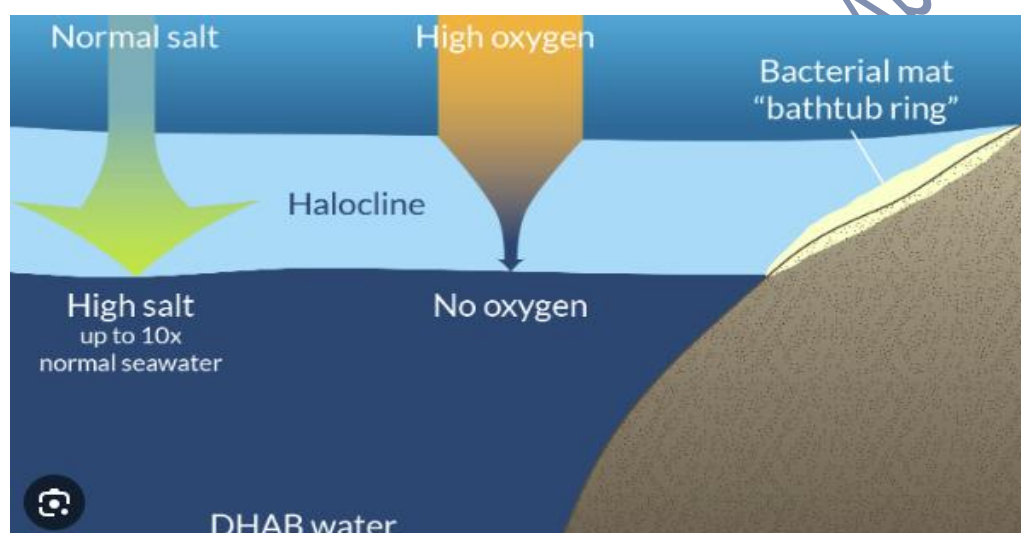
Anoxic Marine Basin :

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



Mayer-Rokitansky-Kuster-Hauser Syndrome (MRKH)

- A rare congenital disorder affecting the female reproductive system.
- Characterized by the underdevelopment or absence of the uterus and vagina, while external genitalia appear normal.
- Affects approximately 1 in 4,500 females.

What are the causes?

- Exact cause unknown, but believed to be related to abnormal development during fetal life.

Two main types:

- **MRKH Type 1 (Isolated MRKH):** No other organ abnormalities, often linked to genetic mutations or environmental factors.
- **MRKH Type 2 (MURCS Association):** Associated with other malformations, such as kidney or skeletal abnormalities, often associated with genetic mutations.

What are the symptoms?

- Primary amenorrhea (absence of menstrual periods) by age 16.
- Pain during intercourse (due to vaginal shortening or absence).
- Difficulty getting pregnant (due to absent or underdeveloped uterus).
- Other symptoms may include:
 - Absence of cervix or fallopian tubes
 - Kidney problems
 - Hearing loss

The Genome India project:

Why in News? The government's Genome India initiative recently announced successful sequencing of 10,000 whole genomes of healthy persons from across the country, creating a genetic map of the population.

- Researchers from 20 science institutes across the country helped in collecting the blood samples, sequencing the genome, developing a methodology, and storing the data.
- With each sequence requiring **80 Gb storage space**, the huge dataset of 8 petabytes will be stored at the Indian Biological Data Centre in Faridabad.
- This data set will be made available to researchers as "digital public good." The data can be utilised to develop new diagnostics, targeted therapies, identify new rare diseases, and cure existing ones.

About Genome India project:

- Genome India Project is an important initiative launched by the Government of India which aims to understand the genome information of Indian citizens in detail and use it for better decision making in healthcare, medicine and other fields. Under this project, efforts are made to group, **analyze and obtain information about the genome of Indian citizens**.
- The Genome India Project collects genomic data that covers various aspects of the genome of Indian citizens, such as their quality, disease resistance, and related information. Its main objective is to help prioritize the health and medical services of Indian citizens.
- Under the Genome India Project, protection, **privacy and security of genomic data** of Indian citizens is considered important, so that their privacy can be protected and their data remains secure.

Significance:

Understanding Genetic Diversity: India is known for its diverse population with various ethnicities, languages, and cultural backgrounds.

The Genome India project aims to capture this diversity by sequencing genomes from different regions and communities. This can provide valuable insights into the genetic makeup of the Indian population and help in understanding human evolution and migration patterns.

Healthcare Implications: By studying the genetic variations within the Indian population, researchers can identify genetic factors associated with various diseases and conditions.

This knowledge can lead to the development of personalized medicine and targeted therapies tailored to the genetic profiles of individuals, thereby improving healthcare outcomes.

Precision Medicine: Genomic data from the Genome India project can be used to develop personalized treatment strategies based on an individual's genetic makeup. This approach, known as precision medicine, has the potential to revolutionize healthcare by providing more effective and tailored treatments for various diseases.

Research Advancements: The genomic data generated by the project can be used for a wide range of research purposes, including understanding the genetic basis of complex traits, studying population genetics, and investigating the role of genetics in response to environmental factors.

Challenges:

Ethical and Privacy Concerns: Genome sequencing involves the collection of highly sensitive genetic information, raising concerns about privacy, data security, and potential misuse of genetic data. Ensuring that proper ethical and privacy safeguards are in place is crucial to address these concerns.

Data Management and Analysis: The massive amount of genomic data generated by the project presents significant challenges in terms of data storage, management, and analysis. Advanced computational tools and techniques are required to handle and analyze large-scale genomic datasets effectively.

Population Diversity and Representation: India is incredibly diverse, with thousands of distinct ethnic groups and linguistic communities. Ensuring adequate representation of this diversity in the Genome India project is essential to capture the full spectrum of genetic variation within the Indian population.

Resource Constraints: Genome sequencing is a resource-intensive process, requiring sophisticated laboratory equipment, skilled personnel, and substantial funding. Ensuring sustainable funding and infrastructure support for the project can be a significant challenge.

Community Engagement and Inclusivity: Engaging with local communities and gaining their trust and participation in the project is essential to its success. Addressing cultural sensitivities, providing education about genetics, and involving communities in decision-making processes are crucial for fostering inclusivity and ensuring the project's relevance and impact.

Overall, while the Genome India project holds immense promise for advancing our understanding of genetics and improving healthcare outcomes, addressing these challenges will be critical to its success.

Mauritius, Maldives and India:

Why in News? The first team of Indian “technical personnel” recently reached the Maldives to take charge of one of the three aviation platforms stationed in the country. They will replace Indian military personnel whose first batch is required to leave the islands by March 10.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth of Mauritius recently jointly inaugurated an airstrip and a jetty that India has built on **Agaléga, a two-island** Mauritian dependency 1,100 km to the north of Port Louis and 2,500 km southwest of Malé.

Recent development in Maldives :

- Soon after coming to power in November 2023, Mohamed Muizzu, the **pro-China President of the Maldives**, requested India to withdraw its military personnel from his country. Muizzu had defeated the incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential election on the “**India Out**” plank.

- The Indian Ministry of External Affairs had said that the two helicopters and a Dornier aircraft in the Maldives would be operated by “competent Indian technical personnel” who would replace the “present personnel”.



The Mauritius case:

- Following Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius in March 2015, India signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the “improvement in sea and air transportation facilities” at **Agaléga island**.
- The MoU, signed in the Mauritian capital Port Louis in the presence of Modi and then Prime Minister of Mauritius Anerood Jugnauth, provided for “**setting up and upgradation of infrastructure for improving sea and air connectivity** at the Outer Island of Mauritius .
- It will enhance the capabilities of the **Mauritian Defence Forces** in safeguarding their interests in the Outer Island.

The presence of India would lead to more effective monitoring of Mauritius' vast 2.3 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone, and equip it to better counter piracy, terrorism, narcotics and human trafficking, and illegal and unregulated fishing, Prime Minister Jugnauth said.

Challenges ahead & role of China:

- China sees great value in having a powerful presence in the Indian Ocean region. “Nine of China's top 10 crude oil suppliers transit the Indian Ocean which is also the primary theatre of transit for China for engagements with **Africa, Middle East, island nations**, and littorals across the vast ocean.
- The Indian Ocean is “also the main trading route between China and Europe.
- China is the only nation with an embassy in each of the six islands in the Indian Ocean — Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros”, and “none of the traditional players — the United States, the **UK, India, or France** have embassies on all six.
- Beijing had gone beyond diplomatic and trade partnerships in the region, and had begun to maintain a consistent military presence as well.

- In 2017, China opened its first overseas military facility in the **Indian Ocean in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa.**
- The Chinese second military facility will soon come up in the Indian Ocean — whether in **Pakistan, Myanmar, or the western Indian Ocean.**

India has deep strategic stakes in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi has to manage its diplomatic relationships with the governments of island nations in the region while continuously pursuing its strategic interests.

Nyerere National Park:

Why in News? Recently, Tanzania has switched on its first turbine of a Julius Nyerere Hydropower Plant in Selous Game Reserve, a UNESCO's World Heritage Site.

About Selous Game Reserve (partially renamed as Nyerere National Park):

- It is one of the largest protected areas and is relatively undisturbed by human impact, located in southern Tanzania in Africa.
- It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982 due to its wildlife diversity and undisturbed nature.

About Tanzania

– It is an East African country situated just south of the Equator, and was formed as a sovereign state in 1964 through the union of the Tanganyika and Zanzibar.



a. Mainland Tanganyika covers most of the area.

– It is bounded by Uganda, Lake Victoria, and Kenya to the north, by the Indian Ocean to the east, by Mozambique, Lake Nyasa, Malawi, and Zambia to the south and southwest, and by Lake Tanganyika, Burundi, and Rwanda to the west.

– Islands: Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia Islands.

– Capital: Dodoma;

a. Dar es Salaam is the largest city and port in the country.

Articles 105 & 194:

Why in News? The Supreme Court has recently ruled that lawmakers cannot claim immunity from prosecution in bribery cases. The court explained that the legal protection provided to MPs and MLAs under **Articles 105 and 194** of the Constitution does not shield them in cases of accepting bribes for votes or speeches in the House.

What has the court said ?

- An individual member of the legislature cannot assert a claim of privilege to seek immunity under Articles 105 and 194 from prosecution on a charge of bribery in connection with a vote or speech in the legislature
- "It (corruption and bribery) is destructive of the aspirations and deliberative ideals of the Constitution and creates a polity which deprives citizens of a responsible, responsive, and representative democracy."
- Bribery is not rendered immune under **Article 105(2)** and the corresponding provision of **Article 194** because a member engaging in bribery commits a crime which is not essential to the casting of the vote or the ability to decide on how the vote should be cast.

Article 105: This article deals with the powers and privileges of the Parliament of India and its members. It grants certain privileges to members of Parliament in order to maintain the independence and integrity of the parliamentary proceedings.

- These privileges include freedom of speech in the **Parliament, immunity** from legal action in respect of anything said or any vote cast in Parliament, and the right to regulate its own procedures.
- Article 105 also empowers Parliament to define its own privileges through legislation. However, these privileges are subject to the provisions of the Constitution and the laws made by Parliament.

Article 194: Similarly, **Article 194 pertains** to the powers, privileges, and immunities of the State Legislatures and their members. It grants similar privileges to the members of the State Legislature as those provided to **members of Parliament under Article 105**.

Like Parliament, the **State Legislatures** have the authority to define their own privileges through legislation, subject to the **Constitution and the laws** made by the respective State Legislature.

Grey Zone Warfare:

Why in News? On the last day of the 2024 Raisina Dialogue, India's Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan said that grey zone warfare is the latest in informal warfare.

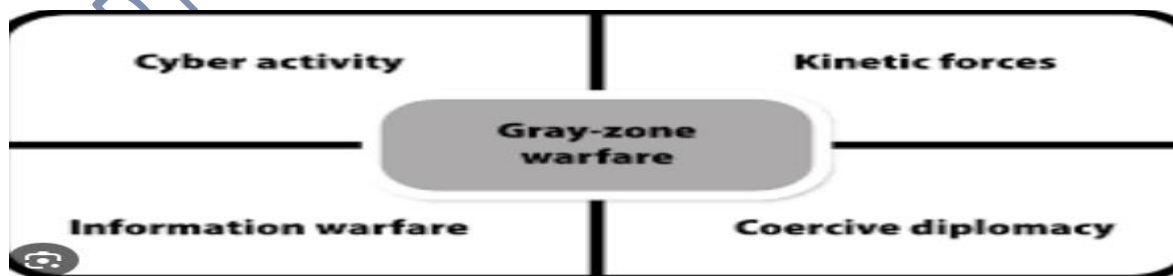
During a discussion titled '**The New Wars: Policies, Practices, and Preparation**', he gave an example of the situation in the South China Sea.

About:

- Grey zone warfare generally means a middle, unclear space that exists between direct conflict and peace in international relations.
- Multitude of activities fall into this zone — from nefarious economic activities, influence operations, and cyberattacks to mercenary operations, assassinations, and disinformation campaigns.
- Other experts include economic actions too, such as debt traps and economic sanctions.

Features:

- Activities in the grey zone have always been a feature of great-power competition.
- Proxy wars, destabilizing insurgencies, legal warfare (lawfare), and information warfare—by adversaries and allies alike—have been a feature of this conflict.
- Experts claim that such methods are often employed by parties who have not had access to massive resources or power, traditionally. Therefore, such tactics can help gain an advantage over a more technically well-equipped adversary that is more used to conventional warfare.



Article 217 (2):

Why in News? Recently, the former Calcutta High Court judge, Abhijit Gangopadhyay formally joined a **political party, after resigning from his position** as judge of the Calcutta High Court, five months before his date of retirement.

Other judges who have joined political Parties:

- Earlier, there have been two noteworthy instances of active Supreme Court judges resigning their positions for a role in politics, including former **CJI Justice Subba Rao in 1966**, and more recently Justice **Baharul Islam in 1983**, who resigned his position to contest the **Lok Sabha polls in Assam**.
- Other judges such as **Justice Rama Jois** also joined political parties, but much after retirement.

What are constitutional provisions regarding this ?

- **Article 217(2)** lays down the eligibility for High Court judges as follows, it doesn't lay any restrictions on individuals with political affiliations from being appointed as judges.
- **Article 217 (2)** of the Constitution of India: "A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a **Judge of a High Court** unless he is a citizen of India and —(a) has for at least 10 years held a judicial office in the territory of India; or (b) has for at **least 10 years** been an advocate of a High Court or of two or more such courts in succession."
- While there **don't exist any norms or legislation to regulate** the entry of judges into politics or prevent them from accepting post-retirement benefits, the closest we have come to the same is perhaps through the **14th Law Commission Report (1958)** which recommended that **judges should be barred from accepting employment with the Union or the State**.

Arun Goel resign as Election Commissioner

Why in News? The Election Commissioner quit with only days left for the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls, especially when his tenure ends only on **December 5, 2027**. If he had not resigned, he would have become Chief Election Commissioner.

- With the retirement of **Anup Chandra Pandey** in February and Goel's resignation, the three-member Election Commission is now reduced to only one member, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar.
- Other judges such as **Justice Rama Jois** also joined political parties, but much after retirement.
- Goel, a retired bureaucrat, served as a **1985-batch IAS officer** of the Punjab cadre. He joined the **Election Commission in November 2022**.

Appointment:

- The Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioner are appointed by the President of India.
- If it is multi-member body, the **chief election commissioner shall act as the chairman** of the election commission.
- In case of difference of opinion amongst the Chief Election Commissioner and/or two other election commissioners, the matter is decided by the Commission by majority.
- The president may also appoint after consultation with the election commission such regional commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the election commission.

Conditions of Service:

- The President fixes the service condition and tenures.
- They enjoy the same status and receive salary and **perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India**.
- They have tenure of **six years, or up to the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- They can resign at any time by addressing the resignation letter to the president or can also be removed before the expiry of their term.

Procedure for Removal:

- He/she can be removed either on the ground of “proved misbehaviour or incapacity”.
- He/she can be removed by the president on the basis of a resolution passed to that effect by **both the Houses of Parliament with special majority**. majority of two-third members present and voting supported by more than **50% of the total strength** of the house.

- The Constitution **does not use the word ‘impeachment’**, for the removal of the Chief Election Commissioner. The term ‘Impeachment’ is only used for removing the President.

Election Commissioners Bill 2023:

Key features of Bill?

- **Election Commission:** It will consist of a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and other Election Commissioners (ECs). The President will periodically fix the number of ECs.
- **Appointment of the Commission:** The Commission will be appointed by the President, upon the recommendation of the Selection Committee.



The Supreme Court ruling regarding the appointment of CEC and EC:

Anoop Baranwal case, 2023 :

- It held that there has been a legislative vacuum due to the absence of any law by **Parliament in the last 73 years** (since the adoption of the Constitution) with respect to the appointment of the CEC and EC.
- The independence of the **ECI is essential for ensuring free and fair** elections that is paramount for a vibrant democracy.
- It drew reference to various other institutions supporting constitutional democracy that have independent mechanisms for the appointment of its head/members like the National and State

- Human Rights Commission, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), etc.

Committee recommendations:

- **Dinesh Goswami Committee** and the Law Commission report on Electoral Reforms suggested that the CECs and ECs should be appointed by a **committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and the Leader of the Opposition or the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha.**

European Free Trade Association (EFTA):

Why in News? India has recently signed a trade pact with European Free Trade Association (EFTA):

Key Agreements:

- The EFTA countries will invest \$100 billion in India and aiming to generate 10 lakh jobs over a 15-year period in exchange for tariff concessions for their pharma, chemical products and minerals, among other items.
- It will boost innovation and research and development (R&D) across diverse spheres such as digital trade, banking and financial services, transport and logistics, industrial machinery, bio technology, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, food processing and clean energy, and will open up new doors for collaborations.

About the EFTA :

- The EFTA members include Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, which are **not part of the European Union (EU).**
- It is an inter-governmental organization, set **up in 1960**, for the promotion and intensification of free trade.

India's trade with EFTA (in million dollars)			
EFTA countries	Exports	Imports	Trade balance
Iceland	13	5	8
Liechtenstein	0	8	-8
Norway	484	782	-298
Switzerland	1,382	19,657	-18,275
TOTAL	1,879	20,452	-18,574

The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2024:

Why in News? The Environment Ministry has introduced the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2024 to amend the Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016.

- Plastic is the third most commonly used petroleum derivative in the world; each year 200 million tons of plastic are consumed on the planet.
- It comes from a non-renewable source (petroleum), it is contaminating and non-biodegradable (it can take more than 1000 years to decompose).

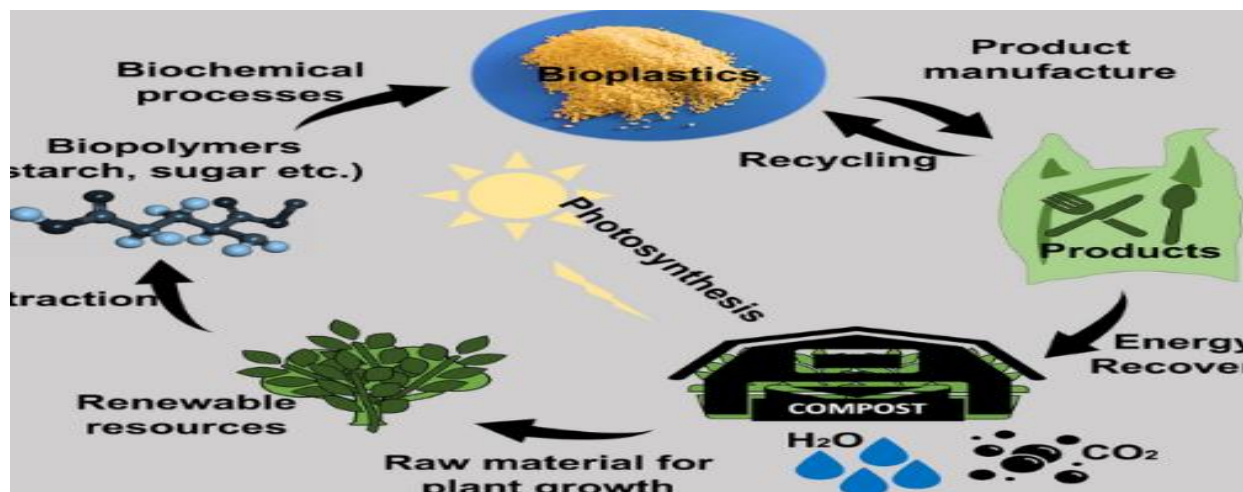
Key points of the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2024:

- It defines biodegradable plastics as not only capable of degradation by biological processes in specific environments such as soil, landfill, but also as materials that do not leave any microplastics.

However, the rules does not specify that-

- Which chemical tests can be used to **establish the absence of microplastics**, or
- To what extent microplastics must be reduced in a sample in order to consider them eliminated.
- The amendment provides that the manufacture of carry bags and commodities shall be permitted to be made from **compostable plastics or biodegradable plastics**.

- This is subject to mandatory marking and **labelling** laid down under the rules and the regulations of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).
- The rules require the manufacturers of compostable plastic or biodegradable plastic carry bags or commodities to obtain a certificate from the **CPCB before marketing or selling.**



About Bioplastics:

Bioplastics are a type of plastic derived from renewable biomass sources, such as corn starch, sugarcane, soybeans, or vegetable fats and oils, as opposed to traditional plastics which are derived from petroleum. They are often considered more **environmentally friendly than conventional plastics** because they are biodegradable or compostable and can be produced from renewable resources.

There are two main types of bioplastics:

Biodegradable bioplastics: These are plastics that can be broken down by microorganisms into natural substances like water, carbon dioxide, and biomass under specific conditions, such as high temperature or microbial activity. They include materials like **polylactic acid (PLA)**, **polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHA)**, and **starch-based plastics**.

Non-biodegradable bioplastics: These are plastics made from renewable resources but do not necessarily biodegrade. They may be recyclable or compostable but require specific conditions for degradation. Polyethylene made from sugarcane is an example of a **non-biodegradable bioplastic**.

Mushk Budiji rice:

Why in News? The scientists at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST), Srinagar, has recently reported that altitude and temperature play an important role in the development of the aroma in Mushk Budiji rice.

About the Mushk Budiji:

- The Kashmir Himalayas are known for the cultivation of mushk budiji, an **indigenous rice variety distinguished by its rich aroma and unique taste.**
- Mushk Budiji Rice of Anantnag district received a **Geographical Indication (GI) Tag in 2023.**
- It is grown in higher reaches of the Kashmir valley especially in the Anantnag district.
- Aromatic rice has considerable value worldwide for its distinct **flavour, fragrance, and quality**, its potential to enhance dining experiences, and its appeal to health-conscious consumers.



Major Rice variety in India :

Basmati rice: It is primarily grown in the northern states of India, particularly in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, and parts of Uttar Pradesh

Sona Masuri: Cultivated mainly in the southern states of India, such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

IR-64: A high-yielding rice variety, grown in various states including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

Pusa Basmati: A variety of Basmati rice developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), primarily grown in the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Uttarakhand.

Swarna: Widely cultivated in states like West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh.

IR-36: Another high-yielding rice variety grown in states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.

Jasmine Rice: Also known as Basmati of the East, cultivated mainly in the northeastern states of India like Assam.

Havana syndrome

Why in News? According to a joint media intelligence, members of a Russian military intelligence unit could have targeted the brains of US officials by using “directed energy” weapons.

- The Kremlin has recently dismissed a joint media investigation which found evidence that a **Russian military intelligence unit might** be responsible for the mysterious health condition known as ‘Havana syndrome’ that affected US diplomats and spies across the world.

What did the investigation find?

- The investigation claims that members of a Russian military intelligence unit, called 29155, could have targeted the brains of **US officials by using “directed energy” weapons.**
- The 29155 unit, which has been operational for more than a decade, has been previously accused of carrying out foreign assassination, and sabotage.
- According to US media reports, in the past few years, its officials have reported more than 130 such experiences across the world including at Moscow in **Russia, Poland, Georgia, Taiwan, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Austria,** among others.

- It adds that the first incident probably took place in Germany two years before the cases reported in **Havana in 2016**.
- Since the Cuban incident, American intelligence and foreign affairs officials posted in various countries have reported symptoms of the syndrome.

WHAT IS HAVANA SYNDROME?

No definitive cause has been found, but scientific studies have noted many of the acute symptoms are consistent with exposure to directed radio frequency energy

Acute symptoms (often occurring suddenly) **may include:**

- Pain in one or both ears
- Tinnitus, hearing loss
- Intense pressure or vibration inside the head
- Difficulty with memory or concentration
- Nausea
- Visual disturbances
- Unsteady gait, loss of balance, vertigo/dizziness

Chronic symptoms (can last weeks, months or longer) **may include:**

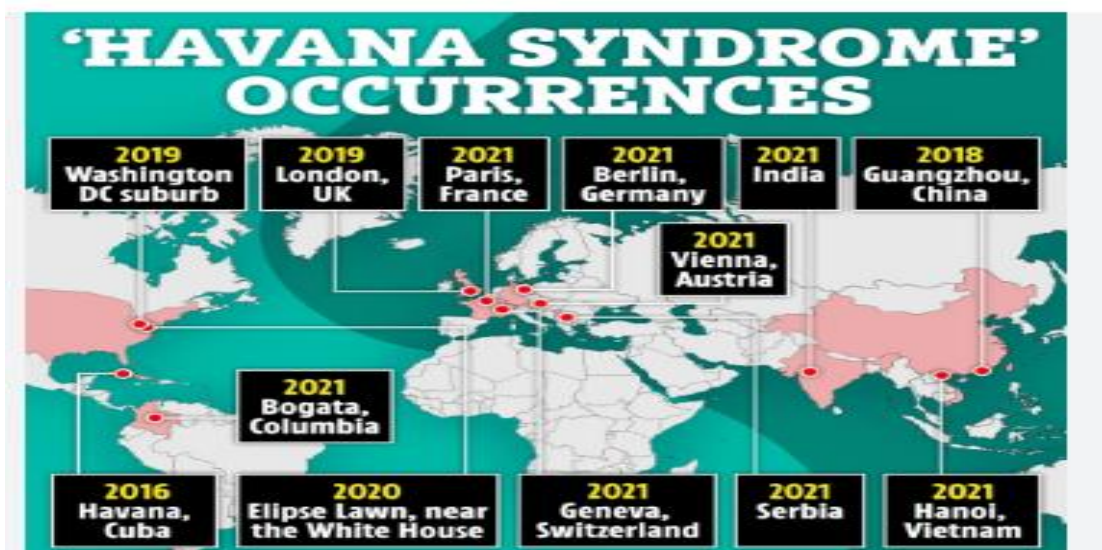
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Impaired balance
- Impaired concentration, memory loss



Source: National Academy of Sciences

What is Havana syndrome?

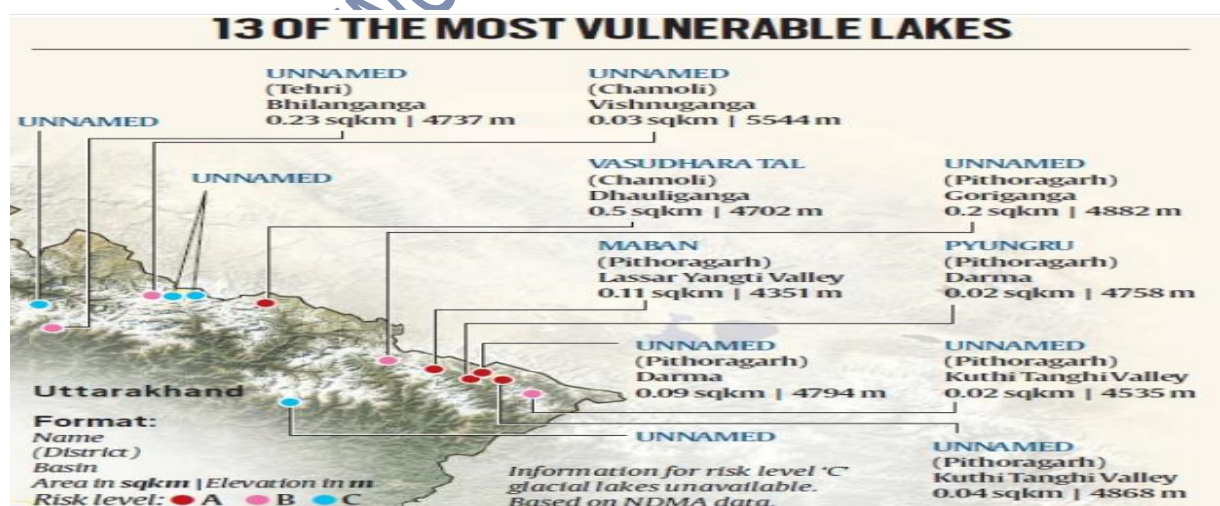
- Havana syndrome refers to a set of mental health symptoms that are said to be experienced by United States intelligence and embassy officials in various countries. Generally, the word '**syndrome**' **simply means a set of symptoms**.
- It does **not mean a unique medical condition**, but rather a set of symptoms that are usually experienced together whose origins may be difficult to confirm.
- Havana syndrome typically involves symptoms such as hearing certain sounds without any outside noise, nausea, **vertigo and headaches, memory loss, and balance issues**.



Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs):

Why in News? The Uttarakhand government has constituted two teams of experts to evaluate the risk posed by five potentially hazardous glacial lakes in the region. These lakes are prone to Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

- The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), which operates under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, has identified **188 glacial lakes** in the Himalayan states that can potentially be breached because of heavy rainfall. Thirteen of them are in Uttarakhand.



What is Glacial Lake Outburst Floods?

- GLOFs stand for "Glacial Lake Outburst Floods." These are sudden, often catastrophic floods that occur when a glacial lake – a body of water formed by the melting of a glacier – breaches its natural dam or moraine, **leading to a rapid release of water**.
- Glacial lakes can form when glaciers retreat and leave behind depressions that fill with meltwater. As the climate warms, glaciers worldwide are melting at accelerated rates, leading to the formation and expansion of glacial lakes.
- These lakes can pose significant risks to communities downstream, particularly in mountainous regions, where they can lead to devastating floods, loss of life, and destruction of infrastructure.

Rwandan /Kigali Genocide:

Why in News? Rwanda's president recently decries 'failure' of international community 30 years after genocide:

Key points of president's address:

- Rwanda's President Paul Kagame has recently said the international community "failed" his country during the 1994 genocide, as he paid tribute to victims 30 years after Hutu extremists tore apart the nation.
- It was the international community which failed all of us, whether from contempt or cowardice.

What was Rwandan Genocide?

- During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, also known as 1994 Genocide Against the **Tutsi** in Rwanda, members of the **Hutu ethnic majority** in the east-central African nation of Rwanda murdered as many as 800,000 people, mostly of the Tutsi minority.
- Started by Hutu nationalists in the capital of Kigali, the genocide spread throughout the country with shocking speed and brutality, as ordinary citizens were incited by local officials and the Hutu Power government to take up arms against their neighbors.

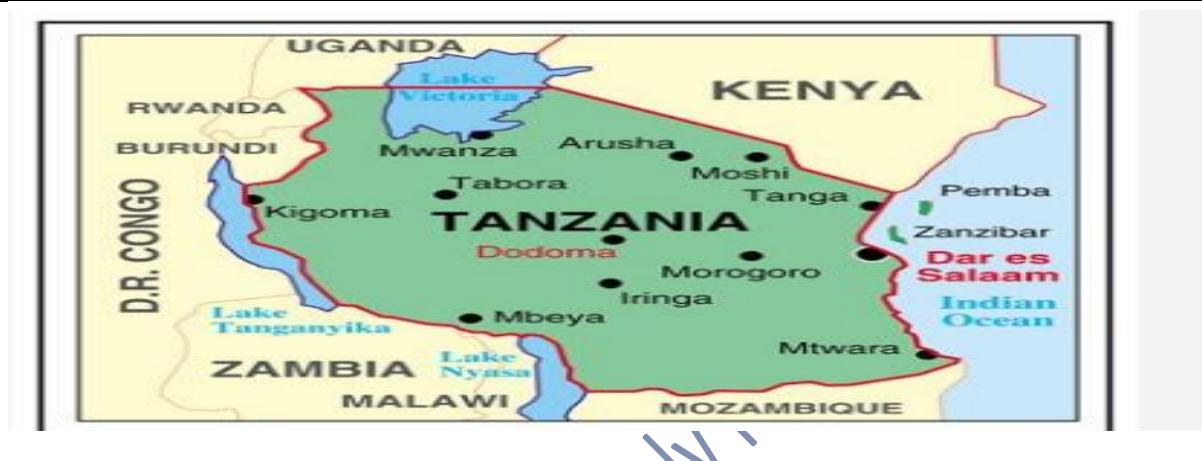
- By the time the **Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front** gained control of the country through a military offensive in early July, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were dead and 2 million refugees (mainly Hutus) fled Rwanda, exacerbating what had already become a full-blown humanitarian crisis.

History of Rwandan Ethnic Tensions:

- By the early 1990s, Rwanda, a small country with an overwhelmingly agricultural economy, had one of the highest population densities in Africa. **About 85 percent of its population was Hutu**; the rest were Tutsi, along with a small number of **Twa, a Pygmy group** who were the original inhabitants of Rwanda.
- **Part of German East Africa from 1897 to 1918, Rwanda became a Belgian trusteeship** under a League of Nations mandate after World War I, along with neighboring Burundi.
- Rwanda's colonial period, during which the ruling Belgians favored the minority Tutsis over the Hutus, exacerbated the tendency of the few to oppress the many, creating a legacy of tension that exploded into violence even before **Rwanda gained its independence**.
- A Hutu revolution in 1959 forced as many as 330,000 Tutsis to flee the country, making them an even smaller minority. By early 1961, victorious Hutus had forced **Rwanda's Tutsi monarch** into exile and declared the country a republic. After a **United Nations referendum** that same year, Belgium officially granted independence to Rwanda in July 1962.
- Ethnically motivated violence continued in the years following independence. In 1973, a military group installed Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a moderate Hutu, in power.
- The sole leader of the Rwandan government for the next two decades, Habyarimana founded a new political party, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (NRMD). He was elected president under a new constitution ratified in 1978 and reelected in 1983 and 1988 when he was the sole candidate.
- In 1990, forces of the **Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF)**, consisting mainly of Tutsi refugees, invaded

Rwanda from Uganda. Habyarimana accused Tutsi residents of being RPF accomplices and arrested hundreds of them.

- Between 1990 and 1993, government officials directed massacres of the Tutsi, killing hundreds. A ceasefire in these hostilities led to negotiations between the government and the RPF in 1992, resulting in the **Arusha Peace Accords**.



The RBI's The current situation index (CSI) :

Why in News ? The latest surveys of the Reserve Bank of India has showed that Indian consumers are quite optimistic about the general economic situation, income spending and employment conditions and also expect inflation to moderate in the one year ahead period.

Key points of survey:

- Consumer confidence for the current period has been on a path of sustained recovery. The current situation index (CSI) rose **by 3.4 points to 98.5** – its highest level since mid-2019, the RBI's Consumer Confidence Survey (CCS) showed.
- Consumer confidence for the year ahead improved further on the back of higher optimism in all CCS parameters, such as **economic situation, employment, price level, income and spending**.
- Higher optimism resulted in the future expectations index (FEI) rising further by **2.1 points to 125.2** – also its highest level since mid-2019, the survey showed.



What is current situation index?

- The **Present Situation Index** is an indicator of consumer sentiment about current business and job market conditions
- Combined with the Expectations Index, the **Present Situation Index** makes up the **monthly Consumer Confidence Index**.

Humane Society International/Trophy Hunting:

Why in News ? Trophy hunting is legal in many countries. Between 2005 and 2014, more than 1.26 million wildlife trophies were imported to the U.S, according to a report by Humane Society International.

- Many of the trophies imported from the continent of Africa are ranked as Vulnerable or Threatened endangered species lists.
- SPCA International is firmly against trophy hunting and supports a full ban on the hunting or importing of animal parts from species on endangered species lists.

- Trophy hunting is the hunting of wild animals for sport, not for food. Usually, the animal is stuffed or a body part is kept for display. Most trophy hunters come from **rich countries and pay high fees for their hunts**.
- Many hunters claim that trophy hunting isn't bad for animals. They say they are **supporting animal conservation**.
- The opposite is true, live animals support the population of their species.
- Lions, elephants, leopards, rhinos, and buffalo, from Africa, are some of the most expensive and popular animals targeted in trophy hunting.

About the Humane Society International (HSI):

It is the international division of The Humane Society of the United States. **Founded in 1991**, HSI has expanded The HSUS's activities into **Central and South America, Africa, and Asia**.

Objective of HSI: Advancing the welfare of animals in more than 50 countries, Humane Society International works around the globe to promote the human-animal bond, rescue and protect dogs and cats, improve **farm animal welfare**, **protect wildlife**, promote animal-free testing and research, respond to disasters and confront cruelty to animals in all of its forms.

Credit-Deposit ratio:

Why in News? The credit to deposit (CD) ratio is estimated to have risen to 78 as of March 22, 2024, which is the highest since **December 21, 2018 when it was 77.9**.

What is Credit-Deposit ratio?

- The CD ratio refers to the credit-deposit ratio in banking parlance. It tells us how much of the **money banks have raised in the form of deposits** has been deployed as loans.
- So if the CD ratio for a single bank or the whole banking system **stands at 75%**, it means that three-fourths of the deposits with that bank or with the system has been given out as loans.
- A low CD ratio suggests **relatively poor credit growth** compared with deposit growth. A high CD ratio would mean strong demand for credit in an environment of relatively slower deposit growth.

- The CD ratio had slipped to historic lows of under **70% in late 2016**, when demonetisation kept bankers busy exchanging banknotes and few new loans were given.



Coordinated Lunar Time (LTC):

Why in News ? The White House has directed NASA to create a time standard for the Moon, which international organisations and private companies can use to coordinate activities on the lunar surface.

- The space agency has been asked to work with other parts of the United States government to finalise by the end of 2026 the strategy to establish a Coordinated Lunar Time (LTC).
- The White House has asked NASA to establish a unified standard time for the moon and other celestial bodies, according to a new report.
- This is part of the United States' plan to set international norms in space as a new space race has started with many more countries and even private companies.
- The chief of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) asked NASA to work with other US government bodies to come up with a plan in two years for setting "Coordinated Lunar Time," or LTC.

- The European Space Agency in 2023 had announced similar plans to give the Moon its own time zone. The idea came up during a meeting between people from various space agencies in Netherlands in late 2022, according to AP. The participants in the meeting agreed on the urgent need for a common lunar reference time.
- This question of setting time in space was something that NASA has dealt with in the past already. That was for the International Space Station.

While ISS does not exactly have its own time zone, it runs on Coordinated Universal Time or UTC, which is a standard kept meticulously by atomic clocks. Using UTC is a compromise between the **united States, Russia, Japan and Europe; all partners in the ISS program..**

CDP-SURAKSHA:

Why in News? The government has come up with a new platform to disburse subsidies to horticulture farmers under the Cluster Development Programme (CDP). The platform is known as **CDP-SURAKSHA**.

The move seeks to push the growth of India's horticulture sector, which contributes nearly **one-third to the agriculture gross value addition (GVA)**.

About CDP-SURAKSHA:

- The CDP-SURAKSHA is essentially a digital platform.
- SURAKSHA stands for "System for Unified Resource Allocation, Knowledge, and Secure Horticulture Assistance."
- The platform will allow an instant disbursal of subsidies to farmers in their bank account by utilising the e-RUPI voucher.

How will the CDP-SURAKSHA work?

- The platform allows access to farmers, vendors, implementing agencies (IA), and cluster development agencies (CDAs), and officials of the **National Horticulture Board (NHB)**.
- A farmer can login using their mobile number and place an order for planting material such as seeds, seedlings, and plants based on their requirement.

- Once the demand has been raised by the farmer, the system will ask them to contribute their share of the cost of planting material. The subsidy amount paid by the government will appear on the screen automatically.
- After the farmer pays their contribution, an e-RUPI voucher will be generated. This voucher will then be received by a vendor, who will provide the required planting material to the farmer.

How is the new system different from the old one?

- In the old system, a farmer had to buy planting materials on their own. They would then have to approach the officials concerned for the release of the subsidy.

About the National Horticulture Mission:

- It is an Indian horticulture scheme promoted by the Government of India. It was launched under the 10th five-year plan in the year 2005-06.
- The Government of India contributes 85%, while 15% is contributed by state governments.

Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
Government of India

National Horticulture Board

The Board implementing the following schemes:

- Development of Commercial Horticulture through Production and Post Harvest Management
- Capital Investment subsidy scheme for construction/expansion/modernization of cold storages for Horticulture Produce
- Horticulture Promotion Services/Expert Services and Strengthening Capability of NHB.
- Technology Development and Transfer for Promotion of Horticulture.

Principal Purpose Test: Treaty Shopping Arrangements

Why in News ? India has signed a protocol amending its tax treaty with Mauritius with an aim to plug treaty abuse for tax evasion and avoidance.

- India and Mauritius has recently signed a protocol at Port Louis, amending the **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** between the two nations.
- The amended pact includes the Principal Purpose Test (PPT), which is in line with the global efforts against treaty abuse, particularly under the BEPS (**Base Erosion and Profit Shifting**) framework.

What is The Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) ?

- **BEPS refers to tax planning strategies** that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations where there is little or no economic activity. This practice erodes the tax base of countries where the economic activity actually takes place.
- The framework is an initiative developed by the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** and the **G20 countries** to address tax avoidance strategies used by multinational companies.

What is Treaty Shopping Arrangements?

- It refers to a practice where a taxpayer from one country utilizes tax treaties between other **countries to reduce their overall tax liability**.
- This typically involves structuring transactions or business operations in a way that takes advantage of more **favorable tax treatment** available under the tax treaties of other jurisdictions.

What is Principal Purpose Test?

- The PPT essentially implies that the tax benefits under the treaty will not be applicable if it is established that obtaining that duty benefit was the principal purpose of any transaction or arrangement.

- The two nations have also amended the preamble of the treaty to incorporate the thrust on tax avoidance and evasion.
- The earlier objective of “mutual trade and investment” has now been replaced with an intent to “**eliminate double taxation**” without creating opportunities for non-taxation or reduced taxation through tax evasion or avoidance including through “treaty shopping arrangements

National Election Fund (NEF):

Why in News ? The Prime Minister’s anguish over the Supreme Court declaring electoral bonds unconstitutional and the consequences of this decision needs to be considered seriously and with a broad perspective.

The former election commissioner of India , S Y Quraishi have been advocating a workable solution, namely, the introduction of a National Election Fund (NEF).

What is NEF ? How It will be different from EB?

- The main argument made when electoral bonds were introduced was that donors want secrecy as they fear reprisals from non-recipients.
- Donations to the NEF would not face any such problem. There are **two ways for the NEF to receive money**:
- Grants directly from the **national exchequer, or donations by corporate** and other donors. Since many people resent the idea of being taxed to fund political parties, we may rule out the first option. But the idea of donation to the Fund is workable. We could even consider **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds**.
- The money collected by the **NEF could be distributed among political parties** based on objective criteria, like their performance in the most recent election.
- I have suggested that if we give Rs 100 for every vote obtained by a political party, it will have enough funds to run party activities. Since the number of votes polled cannot be fudged, reimbursement based on polled votes would be accurate.

- In the last general election, 60 crore votes were cast. At the rate of Rs 100 per vote, the amount would work out to 6,000 crore. Is this adequate? I'd say yes. This roughly corresponds to the amount raised by all political parties together in five years.
- This scheme meets all the requirements of honesty — no extortion, no bribes, no quid pro quo.
- Of course, all private donations could be banned if we follow this system. And party accounts would be subject to audits by the **Comptroller and Auditor General**.
- Donors who are keen to fund a political party and do not fear “**reprisals**” **may still do** so, but strictly by **cheque and under intimation to the ECI**, as has been the practice.

The electoral finance reforms.

One, prescribe a ceiling for political parties' expenditure, as has been done for candidates and make independent audit compulsory.

Two, set up an independent National Election Fund where all tax-free donations could be made.

Three, enforce internal democracy and transparency in the working of political parties and bring them under RTI.

Four, accept the ECI's proposal to legally empower it to cancel elections where credible evidence of abuse of money is found.

Five, debar from contesting elections persons against whom cases of heinous offences are pending in courts.

Six, empower the ECI to de-register political parties that haven't contested an election for 10 years, but have benefited from tax exemptions.

Seven, make paid news an electoral offence with two years' imprisonment, by declaring it a “corrupt practice” (Section 100 of the Representation of the People Act) and “undue influence” (Sec 123(2)).

India's 4 P Model: People and the Planet

Why in News ? The World Bank has come up with the new vision of “a world free of poverty on a livable planet”.

- In this slogan , it is important to learn from India's 4Ps (Delhi declaration) since they are directly relevant to the successful implementation of large-scale transformational programmes.
- In ensuring that no country should have to choose between fighting poverty and fighting for the planet, India's 4 P model can be adopted.

The first P (political leadership) :

- It is perhaps the fulcrum of driving change and impact on the ground.
- India's SBM restored dignity, health and security to communities, especially women and girls.
- The declaration of the goal to achieve a clean India was followed by the creation of institutional and financing mechanisms to implement this massive programme in a federal context.
- The PM also closely monitored the progress of the SBM on the ground, including by the use of technology.

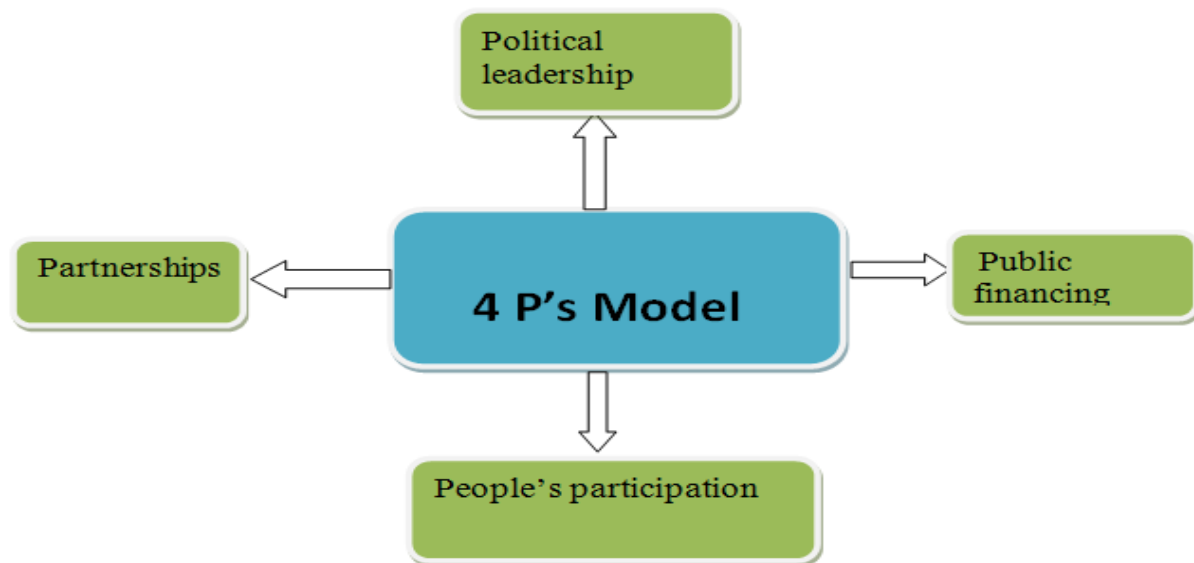
The second P (public financing):

- It is a direct follow-up to the first, through a high-level policy decision to finance the implementation of sanitation across the country.
- In a context where scarce public resources had to be deployed for national developmental priorities, it took a discerning leadership to appreciate that investment in sanitation influenced both poverty reduction and led to an improvement in the quality of life for India's population.

The third P (partnerships):

- It was also very important. The SBM was never implemented as a sarkari programme but in partnership with international bodies such as the World Bank, Unicef, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, state and district administrations, local bodies, panchayats, school children across the country.

What is India's 4 P Model ?



- The fourth P (people's participation) became the hallmark of the SBM, which had captured the imagination of the nation.
- Each of the six lakh villages in India decided to take it upon itself to become open defecation free.
- Rural communities took matters into their own hands and engaged in mass movements to encourage all households to build toilets and use them.
- Unless communities took matters into their own hands and owned and implemented it, the outcomes would not stick.

Facts for Prelims:

Outward Direct Investment (ODI):

Why in News? India's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI), or overseas direct investment, declined by 39 per cent to \$28.64 billion in the year ended March 2024, amid uncertain global economic conditions.

In the year ended March 2023, outward FDI, which is represented by total financial commitment, stood at \$46.96 billion, according to the RBI data.

Reason for decline:

- The global economy being in a state of flux.
- Dip in overseas direct investment last year was because overseas acquisitions by the Indian companies were also not very large.

What is an Outward Direct Investment (ODI)?

- An outward direct investment (ODI) is a business strategy in which a domestic firm expands its operations to a foreign country.
- ODI can take many different forms depending on the company. For example, some companies will make a green field investment, which is when a parent company creates a subsidiary in a foreign country.
- A merger or acquisition can also occur in a foreign country (and so may be considered an outward direct investment).
- Finally, a company may decide to expand an existing foreign facility as part of an ODI strategy. Employing ODI is a natural progression for firms if their domestic markets become saturated and better business opportunities are available abroad.

Anchor Investors:

Why in News? Vodafone Idea (VIL) has announced closure of its anchor book allocation, raising about Rs 5,400 crore from global as well as domestic investors ahead of its mega follow-on public offering (FPO).

Who is an anchor investor ?

- An anchor investor is a qualified institutional buyer (QIB) who submits a bid for value of at least Rs. 1 crore or more in a **mainboard IPO** or Rs. 1 crore or more at SME IPO in the book building process. Bidding for anchor investors begins one day prior to the start of the issue.

QIB investors in an IPO include public financial institutions, banks, mutual funds and foreign portfolio investors, VCFs, AIFs and NBFCs who invest money on behalf of their clients.

The difference between an angel investor and an anchor investor:

- An **angel investor** is an individual who provides financial backing for small startups or entrepreneurs, typically in exchange for **ownership equity in the company**. These investors often provide not only financial support but also mentorship and guidance to the startups they invest in.
- On the other hand, an **anchor investor** is usually a large institutional investor, such as a mutual fund or a pension fund, that makes a substantial investment in a **company's initial public offering (IPO)** to demonstrate confidence in the company's future prospects. The presence of an anchor investor can help attract other investors to participate in the IPO.

What is An IPO (Initial Public Offering)?

- It is a process through which a private company offers its shares to the public for the first time.
- **Mainboard IPO:** Mainboard IPO typically refers to the initial public offering of shares by large, well-established companies that meet the listing requirements of the mainboard of a stock exchange.
- **SME IPO:** SME IPO stands for Small and Medium Enterprises IPO. SME IPOs cater to smaller companies that may not meet the stringent requirements for listing on the mainboard of a stock exchange.

Blood Money:

Keralites living across the world have crowdfunded Rs 34 crore to meet the 'blood money' to enable the release of a Kozhikode native facing the death penalty in Saudi Arabia.

- Abdul Rahim has been in prison for the last 18 years after a 15-year-old boy, who was left in his care and was being kept alive by a life support system, died while being driven in a car by him.

What is Blood Money?

- Blood money, also called bloodwit, is money or some sort of compensation paid by an offender or their family group to the family or kin group of the victim.

What is the concept of blood money in Sharia law?

- In Islamic law, the concept of "blood money" is known as "**Diya**" or "**Diyya**," which refers to the compensation paid to the victim or the victim's family in cases of **intentional homicide or manslaughter**.

The specific definition of blood money in the Quran:

Intentional Homicide:

- If a person intentionally takes the life of another individual, the Quran establishes that the payment of blood money is required. The amount of blood money for intentional homicide is outlined in **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:178)**.

Manslaughter:

- In cases of unintentional killing or manslaughter, the payment of blood money is also required. it is mentioned in **Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:45)**

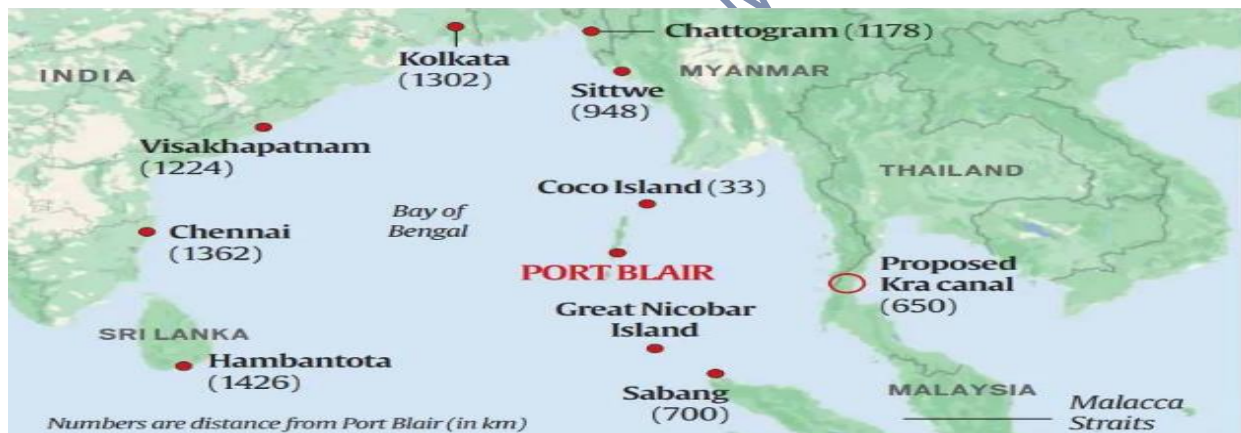
Lombok island /Ombai-Wetar strait:

Ombai Strait is an international strait in Southeast Asia.

- It separates the Alor Archipelago from the islands of Wetar, Atauro, and Timor in the Lesser Sunda Islands.

Lombok:

- Lombok is an Indonesian island east of Bali and west of Sumbawa, part of the Lesser **Sunda Island chain**.
- It's known for beaches and surfing spots, particularly at **Kuta and Banko Banko** (in south Lombok).



Sulthan Bathery:

Recently, The Kerala BJP Chief said that the renaming of Sulthan Bathery is inevitable. The name Sulthan Bathery emerged as part of Tipu Sultan's invasion.

Where does the name Ganapathyvattam come from?

- Sulthan Bathery, one of the three municipal towns in Wayanad (the other two are Mananthavady and Kalpetta), has a stone temple that was once known as Ganapathyvattam.
- The temple, built in the prevalent architectural style of the Vijayanagar dynasty, was constructed by Jains who migrated to Wayanad from areas in present-day Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the 13th century.
- The temple was partly destroyed during the invasions of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysuru in the second half of the 18th century. Between 1750 and 1790, today's northern Kerala was invaded several times by the rulers of **Mysuru, Hyder Ali and his son Tipu.**

World Central Kitchen:

It was recently in news in providing food relief to war affected people.

About it:

- World Central Kitchen (WCK) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that provides food relief.
- It was founded in 2010 by Spanish American chef and restaurateur José Andrés following the earthquake in Haiti.
- It has worked in Hurricane Harvey, the 2018 lower Puna eruption, 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquakes, and the ongoing Gaza humanitarian crisis.

Headquarters : Washington, DC, United States

Junk DNA

Why in News ? Junk" DNA is a term that was historically used to describe segments of DNA that do not code for proteins or have any apparent function.

- These non-coding regions were once thought to be evolutionary remnants or genetic "junk" leftover from the process of evolution. However, it's important to note that this term is now considered outdated and somewhat misleading.
- Advancements in genetics and molecular biology have revealed that many regions of DNA previously labeled as "**junk**" actually serve important regulatory functions, such as controlling

gene expression, chromosome structure, and other cellular processes. These non-coding regions can include elements like **introns** (intervening sequences within genes), repetitive sequences, and regulatory sequences that influence gene activity.

- Researchers now prefer the term "**non-coding DNA**" or "**non-coding regions**" to describe these parts of the genome, as it reflects the recognition that they play diverse and crucial roles in various biological processes, even if they do not directly encode proteins. Studies continue to uncover the complexity and importance of non-coding DNA in understanding genetics, development, and disease.

Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) scheme:

Why in News ? The Haryana-based Hygenco commissioned **India's first green hydrogen** plant for steel production and plans to commission three more by the end of FY25.

The Company CEO recently talked about the commercial viability of green hydrogen projects, boosting domestic electrolyser manufacturing capacity, exploring overseas projects, and more.

About the Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) scheme:

- The Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) Programme, is a major financial measure with an outlay of Rs17,490 crore. The programme consists of two distinct financial incentive mechanisms to support domestic manufacturing of electrolysers and production of Green Hydrogen.
- Request for Selection (RfS) has been issued for Selection of Green Hydrogen Producers for Setting up Production Facilities of 450,000 tons for Green Hydrogen in India under the Strategic Interventions for **Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) Scheme** (Mode-1-Tranche-I).
- A recent report by the World Economic Forum titled **Green Hydrogen: Enabling Measures Roadmap for Adoption in India** highlighted limited on-the-ground traction for green hydrogen. It also noted that key players are mostly adopting a 'wait-and-watch' approach.

What are electrolysers?

- Electrolysers are devices that utilize electricity to induce a chemical reaction known as electrolysis.
- Electrolysis involves the decomposition of a substance into its constituent elements or ions by passing an electric current through it. Electrolysers typically consist of an electrolyte solution or molten electrolyte and two electrodes (anode and cathode) submerged in it.

Yaounde Declaration:

Ministers of Health from African countries signed the **Yaounde Declaration**.

Objective – To end malaria deaths.

Co-hosted by – World Health Organization (WHO) & Cameroon.

Signed by – 11 African nations that account for the majority of global malaria infections and fatalities

- Yaounde is the capital of **Cameroon**, a country in west-central Africa.
- The city lies on hilly land between the **Nyong and Sanaga rivers**.

Green Jobs.

Green jobs refer to a class of jobs that directly have a positive impact on the planet, and contribute to the overall environmental welfare. Jobs involving renewable energy, conservation of resources, ensuring energy efficient means are categorised under the same. In all, they're aimed at reducing the negative environmental impact of economic sectors and furthering the process of creating a low-carbon economy.

- The International Labour Organisation, the International Trade Union Confederation, the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Employers Organisation collectively launched the Green Jobs Initiative in 2008, aimed at bettering placements, training and creating opportunities for individuals to work in 'green jobs'.

The UDGAM portal.

Why in News? The Reserve Bank of India has recently said that various banks are facilitating people to search their unclaimed deposits/accounts through UDGAM portal.

About UDGAM Portal:

- UDGAM refers to Unclaimed Deposits-Gateway to **Access information**, which is an online portal developed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- It facilitates the registered users to search unclaimed deposits/accounts across multiple banks at one place in a centralized manner.

- There are **30 banks, which are part of UDGAM portal**, and they cover around 90% of unclaimed deposits (in value terms) in Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund of RBI.
- All unclaimed deposits/accounts that are part of **Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund of RBI**.

India's first hydrogen fuel cell ferry

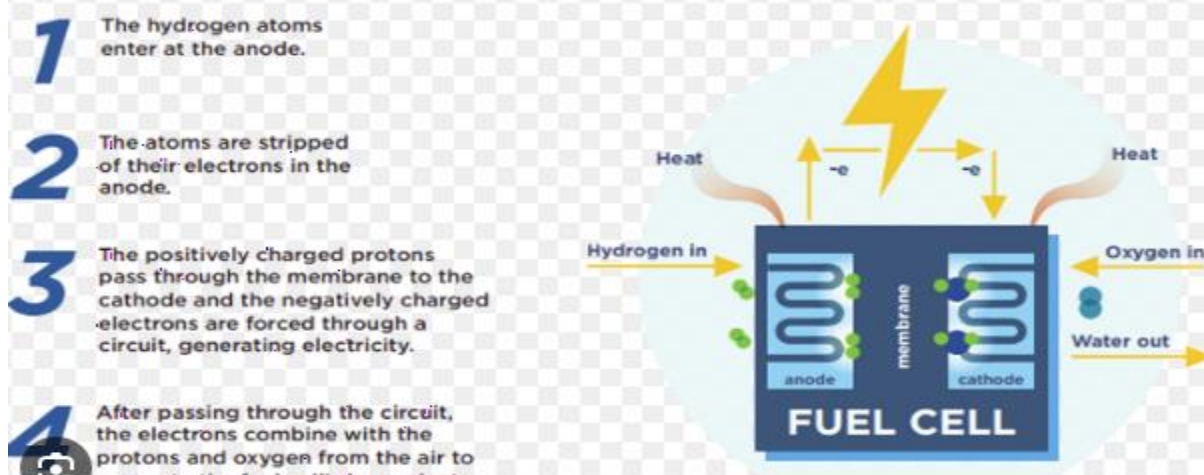
Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday virtually launched India's first indigenously developed hydrogen fuel cell ferry. The vessel, manufactured by **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)**, will be deployed for service at **Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh**.

About Hydrogen fuel cell vessels:

- Hydrogen fuel cell vessels do not use conventional batteries as the primary storage house of electrical energy. The vessels run on hydrogen fuel, which is stored in cylinders.
- This boat has five hydrogen cylinders that can carry **40kg of hydrogen** and support eight hours of operations. The vessel is also fitted with a **3-kW solar panel**.

HOW FUEL CELLS WORK

A fuel cell is an electrochemical energy conversion device – it utilizes hydrogen and oxygen to generate electricity, heat, and water.



Edwards Syndrome (Trisomy 18)

- A condition that causes severe developmental delays due to an extra chromosome 18.
- A first-trimester screening that includes a **blood test and ultrasound** offers early information about a baby's risk of having it. A second trimester blood test called a **quad screen** can also detect it.
- Symptoms include low birth weight, small abnormally shaped head and birth defects in organs that are often life threatening.
- Edwards' syndrome has no treatment and is usually fatal before birth or within the first year of life.

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

Pulses Convention-2024:

The Global Pulses Confederation (GPC) and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) have collaborated to organize the Pulses Convention-2024 from February 14-

17 in New Delhi, India. This is the first time in 18 years that GPC is holding the annual pulses convention in India.

- The GPC represents the global pulses industry with the aim to promote sustainable production and consumption of pulses worldwide. NAFED is an Indian agricultural marketing cooperative that facilitates trade for farmers. Their partnership reflects shared interests in developing the pulses sector in India and globally.

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).

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.