

Factly Weekly

Compilation

2023

**For UPSC CSE Prelims
Exam**

4th Week

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Subject: Polity and Nation

Governor holds no veto power over Bills says Supreme Court

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court has held that a Governor, in case he withholds assent to a Bill, should return the bill to the legislature for reconsideration. The judgement was based on a petition filed by the Punjab government against its Governor's action to hold back crucial bills.

What are the Highlights of Judgement?

1. **Mandatory to return the bill for reconsideration if assent withheld**– Court has held that under Article 200, if the Governor withholds assent, he must return the bill “as soon as possible” with a message to reconsider the proposed law. A Governor who chooses to withhold a Bill without doing anything further would be acting in contravention of the Constitution.
2. It said the expression “**as soon as possible**” conveyed a “**constitutional imperative of expedition**” which means cannot hold indefinitely. **The court has thus clarified its position on ‘pocket veto’**
3. **Governor enjoys no veto power over Bills**- After returning the Bill for reconsideration, if the State legislature passes the Bill again, with or without amendment and the Bill is presented to the Governor for assent, the Governor shall not withhold assent (Article 200).
4. **Governor only a symbolic head; real power with elected representatives**– The Court reaffirmed that the Governor is an unelected Head of the State and cannot use his constitutional powers to thwart the normal course of lawmaking by the State.
5. **The Governor, under Article 168, is a part of the legislature** and is bound by the constitutional regime.

Social Audit under MGNREGS

Why in the News?

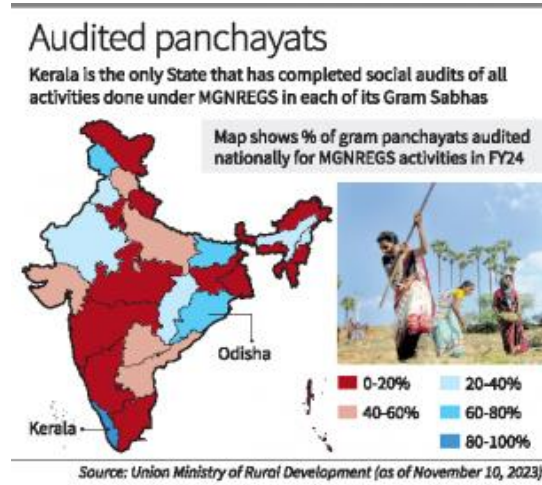
Based on data from the Management Information System (MIS) on Social Audit of Union Ministry of Rural Development, it was found that only 6 states have completed social audit of works done under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in more than 50% of gram panchayats.

What is Social Audit and what is its process under MGNREGA?

1. **According to CAG, [Social Audit](#)** may be described as verification of the implementation of a programme/scheme and its results by the community with the active involvement of the primary stakeholders.
2. **Section 17 of the MGNREGA** states that the gram Sabha “shall monitor the execution of works”.
3. **Each State has Social Audit Units (SAUs)** which are supposed to work independently of the implementing authorities.
4. The Comptroller and Auditor General has laid down the auditing standards. Under these, **every SAU is entitled to funds equivalent to 0.5% of the MGNREGA expenditure** incurred by the State in the previous year.
5. The Union Government provides funds to the SAUs to ensure their independence from the state governments.

- The audit involves quality checks of infrastructure created under the MGNREGA and checking for financial misappropriation in wages and procedural deviations.

What are the Key findings?



Source- The Hindu

Overall States performance	Of the 34 States and Union Territories, only six have completed social audit of works done under the MGNREGS in more than 50% of gram panchayats.
States cover more than 50 percent gram panchayats	1. Best Performing – Kerala is the only State to cover 100%-gram panchayats. 2. Other States are - Bihar (64.4%), Gujarat (58.8%), Jammu and Kashmir (64.1%), Odisha (60.42%) and Uttar Pradesh (54.97%).
Worst performing states	Madhya Pradesh (1.73%), Mizoram (17.5%) etc.

Deed of familial association- Sushma vs Commissioner of Police judgement

Why in the News?

Recently the Madras High Court has asked the Tamil Nadu government to come up with a procedure for registering the deed of familial association to recognise the rights of LGBTQIA+ partners.

What is the background?

- Justice Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court recently heard a petition on the need for familial recognition among the LGBTQIA+ persons who choose to form and retain families and has asked the Tamil Nadu government to work out a deed (agreement) of familial association.
- The plea was filed by Prasanna, who intervened in an ongoing case that began with a plea by a lesbian couple seeking protection from their relatives (Sushma v. Commissioner of Police and ors. case)

What is the significance of a deed of familial association?

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1. The deed of familial association stands as documentary “proof” of their relationship which would **help couples in obtaining various benefits and entitlements** that would previously be impossible.
2. It will **provide legal status to relationships between same-sex couples** and other LGBTQIA+ couples. It will protect them against harassment and violence, and discrimination in matters of employment, housing, etc. and ensure integration into society.
3. The ruling holds significance considering the recent **Supreme Court judgment in Supriyo vs Union of India case** whereby the court refused to recognise the rights of same-sex couples to marry.

What is the Sushma vs Commissioner of Police judgement?

Background- The court was hearing a petition against the harassment faced by same-sex couples at the hands of the police who often file “missing” complaints against such couples, at the parents’ behest. It further sought to establish guidelines for other cases of a similar nature.

Highlights of the Judgement-

1. The Court held that **the LGBTQIA+ community has the right to equality under Article 14.**
2. It held that after the judgments in NALSA vs. Union of India and Naz Foundation vs. Government of NCT of Delhi, prohibition against discrimination in Article 15(1) ‘on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them’ was no longer restricted to just the listed characteristics. It also includes ‘gender identity’ and ‘sexual orientation’.

Guidelines Issued by the Court-

1. The police should close complaints for missing persons once they find that they are in a consensual relationship.
2. Directed the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to enlist and publicise NGOs which would be able to help people from the LGBTQIA+ community. It must also provide shelter in existing government short-stay homes for people from the community who need it.
3. **Prohibition of any attempts to medically ‘cure’ sexual orientation or gender identity.**
4. Change in curriculum to educate students on understanding the LGBTQIA+ community.
5. Inclusivity in hiring policies and extension of work benefits to members of the LGBTQIA+ community.
6. **The right to free legal aid for the LGBTQIA+ community.**

All India Judicial Service (AIJS): President bats for it for equal representation in judiciary

Why in the News?

During the inaugural address at the Supreme Court’s Constitution Day celebrations, the President has called for the creation of an All-India Judicial Service to recruit judges.

What is All India Judicial Service (AIJS)?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is a reform that aims to centralize the recruitment of judges at the level of additional district judges and district judges for all states.
First Proposed by	Law Commission’s 1958 ‘Report on Reforms on Judicial Administration’

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Constitutional Provision	1) Original constitution didn't provide for the creation of an All-India Judicial Service (AIJS). 2) Article 312 was amended by 42nd Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1976 to provide for an AIJS by Parliamentary law. 3) It enables creation of the AIJS at District Judge level.
Process for creation of AIJS	Under Article 312, if Rajya Sabha passes a resolution by a majority of not less than two-thirds of Members present and voting, declares that it is necessary in the national interest, Parliament may by law provide for creation of one or more All-India Services (including an all-India judicial service) common to both the Union and the States.

How are district judges currently recruited?

- Under Articles 233**, district judges are appointed by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to such State.
- As per Article 234**, appointments of persons other than district judges to the judicial service of a State is made by the Governor of the State in accordance with rules made by him in that behalf after consultation with the State Public Service Commission and with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to such State.

Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) Bill bars courts from inquiring into privileged communication between Ministers and President of India

Why in the News?

The union home minister has recently introduced Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) Bill in the Lok Sabha along with Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023 and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023.

What is the Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) Bill?

Aim: To introduce precise and uniform rules for dealing with evidence during the trial of cases.
Replaces: Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

Key Provisions of the bill:

Specifications	Details
Privileged Communication between Ministers and President	1) The bill bars the courts from inquiring into any privileged communication between Ministers and the President of India. 2) This will give legal backing to Article 74(2) of the Constitution which states that the advice given by the Council of Ministers to the President of India could not be inquired into by the courts. 3) However, what constitutes privileged communication has not been defined, leaving the provision open to interpretation.
Deletion of British legacy references	1) Words like 'Vakil', 'Pleader' and 'Barrister' have been replaced with the word 'Advocate'.

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	2) Section 166 of the Act relating to the power of the jury to put forward questions has been deleted as the jury system has already been abolished in India.
Definition of Documents	It has been expanded to include electronic or digital records on emails, server logs, documents on computers, laptops or smartphones, messages, websites and locational evidence and voice mail messages stored on digital devices.
Definition of evidence	It has been expanded to include any information given electronically that will enable the appearance of witnesses, accused, experts and victims through electronic means.

Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Fast Track Special Courts

Why in the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the extension of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for fast-track special courts (FTSCs) for three more years (01.04.2023 to 31.03.2026).

What are Fast Track Special Courts?

Fast track courts (FTCs) are specialized courts designed to **expedite the legal process** and resolve cases more quickly than traditional courts. It **aims to improve the overall efficiency of the judicial system.**

Fast-track courts were first introduced in 2000 on the recommendation of the 11th Finance Commission.

In 2019, on the direction of the Supreme Court, a centrally sponsored scheme was formulated by the **government to establish Fast Track Special Courts (FTSC) under POCSO Act.** The **financial expenditure of these courts would be shared by the Centre and State.**

What is the Fast Track Special Courts Scheme?

Aim	1) To ensure swift dispensation of justice, offering quick relief to victims while strengthening the deterrence framework for sexual offenders. 2) The scheme mandated the establishment of exclusive POCSO Courts for districts with over 100 POCSO Act cases
Type	Centrally Sponsored
Initiated in	October 2019
Implemented by	Department of Justice, Ministry of Law & Justice
Funding	1) Centre-State fund sharing pattern is 60:40 and 90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan States. 2) For Union Territories, it is 100% centrally funded.
Progress	30 States/Union Territories have participated in the Scheme, operationalizing 761 FTSCs, including 414 exclusive POCSO Courts

Sixteenth Finance Commission Terms of Reference approved by the Cabinet

Why in the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the Terms of Reference for the Sixteenth Finance Commission.

What is the Finance Commission?

Specifications	Details
Type	Constitutional body
Constitutional Provision	Article 280
Constituted by	It is a non-permanent body constituted by President every five years or earlier.
Composition	Consists of a Chairman and four other members
First Finance Commission	Constituted under the chairmanship of Shri K.C. Neogy in 1952
15th Finance Commission	1) Constituted in 2017 under N K Singh. 2) It made its recommendations for a six-year period from 2020-21 to 2025-26. 3) Previously, various FCs have been constituted for a period of more than 5 years. While the Eleventh FC was constituted for six years, the Fourteenth FC was constituted for five years and two months.

What are the key Terms of Reference for the 16th Finance Commission?

Duration: 5 years starting from April 1, 2026.

Terms of Reference (ToR):

1. To recommend the **distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes** which are to be divided between them and allocation among States of the respective share of such proceeds.
2. To recommend principles that should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India and the sums to be paid to the States by way of grants-in-aid of their revenues under article 275 of the Constitution.
3. To prescribe **measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State** to supplement resources of the panchayats and local bodies on the basis of recommendations made by the respective State Finance Commissions.
4. To **review the existing arrangements on financing Disaster Management initiatives** and make appropriate recommendations.

Subject: International Relations

Near Space Command built by China: What is it and why should the world be alarmed?

Why in the News?

China has reportedly established the world's first 'Near-Space Command'.

What is the Near Space Command established by China?

1. Near Space Command will be the **fifth force of the Chinese People's Liberation Army**. The other four branches are Army, Navy, Air Force and Rocket Force.
2. It will operate in the near space area and will report directly to the highest level of the military.
3. The command will be equipped with modern hypersonic missiles, a large number of spy balloons, solar-powered long-endurance drones and other associated equipment.
4. In the event of future wars, the near-space command will be tasked with carrying out attacks on critical targets and conducting high-altitude surveillance through automated drones and spy balloons.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC): To beat China, India must engage with APEC

Why in the News?

The 30th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2023 summit was held in San Francisco, USA. The US hosted APEC after a gap of 12 years. The summit concluded with the Golden Gate Declaration.

What is the Golden Gate Declaration?

1. This declaration builds upon previous APEC work and focuses on key areas such as resilience, sustainability, interconnection, innovation, and inclusion.
2. **Objective** - The declaration underscores the commitment to "Creating a resilient and sustainable future for all"

Following commitments have been made by the member countries in the declaration:

1. **San Francisco Principles**- These principles focus on integrating inclusivity and sustainability into trade and investment policy.
2. **Multidisciplinary investment environment**- The leaders have reaffirmed their determination to deliver a free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, inclusive, and predictable trade and investment environment.
3. **Commitment to WTO Reform and trade** -The leaders reaffirm the importance of the rules-based multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core and seeks to reform WTO by 2024.
4. **Strengthening supply chain**- They are committed to keeping markets open and addressing supply chain disruptions by building secure, effective, resilient, sustainable, and open supply chains.
5. **Renewable energy capacity building**- They will pursue and encourage efforts to triple renewable energy capacity globally by 2030.

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- Food Security Roadmap**– They commit to fully implementing the Food Security Roadmap Towards 2030 as a pathway to make our agri-food systems more resilient, productive, innovative, and sustainable.
- MSME Expansion** – They will extend their support for MSMEs to expand into regional and global markets, including by integrating into global value chains, through collaboration with large enterprises, and through the use of digital tools and technologies.
- Digital Transformation and Ecosystem**– They reaffirm their commitment to create an enabling, inclusive, open, fair and non-discriminatory digital ecosystem for businesses and consumers.

What is Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)?



Source: Thailand Business News

Specifications	Details
Established in	1989
Type	Regional economic forum
Headquarters	Singapore
Aim	To leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific and create greater prosperity for the people of the region through regional economic integration.
Members	21 members (Australia, Brunei, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong (as part of China), the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Peru and Chile)
Consensus decisions based	All APEC members have an equal say and decision-making is reached by consensus. There are no binding commitments or treaty obligations.
India	India is not a member of the group (India had expressed interest in joining APEC in 1991 but the group decided to stop accepting new members in 1997). However, India enjoys an observer status since 2011.
Significance	APEC members represent 62% of the world's GDP, 40% of the world's population and 50% of global trade.

Commission on Social Connection launched by WHO

Why in the News?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a Commission on Social Connection.

What is the Commission on Social Connection?

Specifications	Details
Launched by	World Health Organization (WHO)
Aim	1) To address loneliness as a pressing health threat. 2) To promote social connection as a priority and 3) To accelerate the scaling up of solutions in countries of all incomes.
Duration of the commission	3-year initiative (2024-26)
Functions of the commission	1) It will define a global agenda on social connection. 2) Analyze the role social connection plays in improving health for people of all ages. 3) Raise awareness 4) Build collaborations that will drive evidence-based solutions for countries, communities and individuals.
Composition	It consists of 11 leading policymakers, thought leaders and advocates
Secretariat based at	WHO

ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum (AIGIF)

Why in the News?

The 4th edition of the ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum (AIGIF) was held in Langkawi, Malaysia.

What is the ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum (AIGIF)?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is an annual forum organized to strengthen partnership between India and ASEAN Member States (AMS) in the area of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI).
Objectives	1) To give exposure to social innovations in different countries. 2) To strengthen governance in the grassroots innovation ecosystem.
Organized by	1) ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology, and Innovation (COSTI) 2) Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India

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	3) National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India and 4) Science and Technology Ministry of the host nation (Malaysia's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) this year)
Previous editions	1st edition: Jakarta, Indonesia (2018) 2nd edition: Davao, Philippines (2019) 3rd edition: Phnom Penh, Cambodia (2022)
Host Country of 4th edition	Malaysia

What is the National Innovation Foundation (NIF)?

Specifications	Details
What is it	An autonomous body of the Department of Science and Technology
Setup in	2000
Purpose	Help India become a creative and knowledge-based society by expanding policy and institutional space for grassroots technological innovators.
Located in	Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Legion of Honour Award: ISRO scientist Lalithambika conferred highest French civilian award

Why in the News?

V R Lalithambika (ISRO scientist) was recently honored with the Legion of Honour Award for promoting Indo-French space cooperation.

What is the Legion of Honour Award?

1. Legion of Honour (Légion d'honneur) is the **highest civilian award given by France**.
2. The award was **constituted in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte**.
3. The award is given in recognition of **exceptional service to France regardless of the nationality** of the individuals receiving the honor.
4. Previously, **former ISRO chairman A S Kiran Kumar** was also awarded the honour in 2019.

Why was V R Lalithambika given this award?

V R Lalithambika, who was the **director of the Human Spaceflight (Ganganyaan) Programme in 2018**, has been conferred the award for her engagement in space cooperation between France and India.

1. She played a key role in the signing of the first joint agreement for cooperation between the French National Space Agency CNES and the ISRO on human spaceflight in 2018 where the two agencies agreed to work in the area of space medicine.
2. In 2021, she was also credited for coordinating another Indo-French agreement on the Ganganyaan Mission. Under this agreement, the CNES will train India's flight physicians in France.

Subject: Indian Economy

Ministry of Steel meets to discuss first ever initiative to introduce labeling and branding of steel sector's products

Why in the News?

The Consultative Committee meeting for the Ministry of Steel has discussed the progress on the Initiative to introduce branding and labelling of 'Made-in-India' steel products in the global market.

What is the Initiative to introduce branding and labelling of 'Made-in-India' steel products?

Specifications	Details
Launched by	Ministry of Steel and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Purpose	1) Aims to add 'Made in India' labels to domestic steel products and promote them at the global level. 2) The label will have details of the product and a Made in India Logo along with a QR Code.
Phases	1) Phase I: In this phase, all Integrated Steel Players (ISPs) have been included. This phase is expected to be completed by March 2024. 2) Phase II: Made in India Branding will be extended to the Specialized Steel Plants (SSPs).

Investor Risk Reduction Access (IRRA) Platform

Why in the News?

SEBI has launched the Investor Risk Reduction Access (IRRA) platform, jointly developed by India's stock exchanges. It will act as a 'safety net' for investors in case of technical glitches faced by a trading member.

What is the Investor Risk Reduction Access (IRRA) Platform?

What is it?	1. It is a platform developed to reduce risks faced by investors in case of technical glitches at the end of trading members or stockbrokers registered with SEBI. 2. It will provide investors with an opportunity to close their open positions and cancel pending orders in case of technical glitches or outages which render the trading member's site inaccessible.
Developed by	Jointly developed by all the stock exchanges – BSE, NSE, NCDEX, MCX and Metropolitan Stock Exchange of India (MSE)
Launched by	Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)

How it works?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. IRRA can be invoked by trading members when there's a technical glitch at their end across exchanges from both – the primary site and disaster recovery site.2. Even stock exchanges can suo moto initiate the service, if needed, irrespective of any such request by the trading members. – Done only in case of disruption faced across all the exchanges, where the trading member is a member.
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Risk Weights: RBI's latest move to increase risk weights for lending

Why in the News?

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) to reserve more capital for risk weights.

What are Risk Weights?

1. Risk weights are an essential tool for banks to manage credit risk i.e risk associated with the possibility of a borrower defaulting on a loan.
2. **It is a percentage indicating how much capital a lender should ideally hold to cover the risk.**
3. Risk weights vary according to the associated risk of default. For example, higher risk weights for unsecured personal loans.

What is RBI's recent move related to risk weights?

1. **Increase in Risk Weight for Consumer Credit:** RBI has increased it by 25 percentage points, from 100% to 125% for commercial banks and NBFCs. This applies to personal loans (and retail loans for NBFCs), excluding housing, education, vehicle loans, and loans secured by gold.
2. **Credit Card Loans:** Presently, scheduled commercial banks have a risk weight of 125% for credit card loans while NBFCs have 100%. The RBI plans to increase this to 150% and 125%, respectively.
3. **Bank Credit to NBFCs:** The risk weight for bank credit to NBFCs is being increased by 25 percentage points. However, this does not apply to housing finance companies and loans to NBFCs classified into the priority sector.

What will be the impact of these decisions taken by RBI?

1. **Immediate impact on borrowing:** It will lead to higher interest rates for borrowers, slower loan growth for lenders, reduced capital adequacy (as the loan growth slows down, they will have to maintain lesser capital to meet the capital adequacy requirement) and some hit on profits.
2. **Brings down the growth of unsecured consumer loans:** The higher capital requirement is expected to moderate the excessive growth of unsecured consumer loans.
3. **Impact on NBFCs:** NBFCs will face the most impact because of higher risk weights on their unsecured loans and on account of the bank lending mandates to NBFCs.

Subject: Science & Technology

Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE): How a NASA experiment will study 'air glow' to understand Space weather

Why in the News?

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has launched the Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE).

What is the Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE)?

Specifications	Details
Launched by	NASA
Aim	To study atmospheric gravity waves to understand how they transport energy into Earth's upper atmosphere and affect space weather
Planned under	NASA's Heliophysics Explorers Program
Placed on	The experiment will be placed on the exterior of the International Space Station (ISS).
Key Features	The experiment will measure airglow at the mesopause (85 to 87 km above Earth) . For this, it will use an Advanced Mesospheric Temperature Mapper (ATMT) to scan the mesopause, mapping the brightness of light at specific wavelengths.
Significance	This study is important due to the increasing reliance on satellite-based services for navigation and communication. Hence, understanding space weather is crucial for these services to work well.

What is Space Weather?

1. Space weather refers to conditions in the solar system produced by the Sun's activity.
2. It includes weather events such as solar flares, coronal mass ejections (CMEs) and solar energetic particle events.
3. Space weather can affect Earth and its technological systems like satellite operations, communication systems, power grids, etc.
4. Apart from influences from the Sun-bound emissions, space weather also comes under the impact of terrestrial weather.

What are Atmospheric Gravity Waves (AGW)?

1. Atmospheric Gravity Waves (AGW) are generated when there is an extreme weather event or a sudden disturbance leading to a vertical displacement of stable air.

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2. Natural phenomena like thunderstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes, regional orography and others have the potential to create AGWs in the lower levels of the atmosphere.
3. A stable atmosphere is key for generating gravity waves. When stable air gets pushed up and down due to temperature differences, it creates wave patterns.
4. These waves can even reach space and affect space weather. Understanding them better helps us know their impact on weather and climate.

What is Airglow?

1. Airglow is a **faint emission of light that occurs high in Earth's atmosphere.**
2. It is caused by various processes in the upper atmosphere of Earth such as the recombination of atoms which were photoionized by the Sun during the day, luminescence caused by cosmic rays striking the upper atmosphere among others.
3. It is not noticeable during the daytime due to the glare and scattering of sunlight.

What is the difference between Airglow and Auroras?

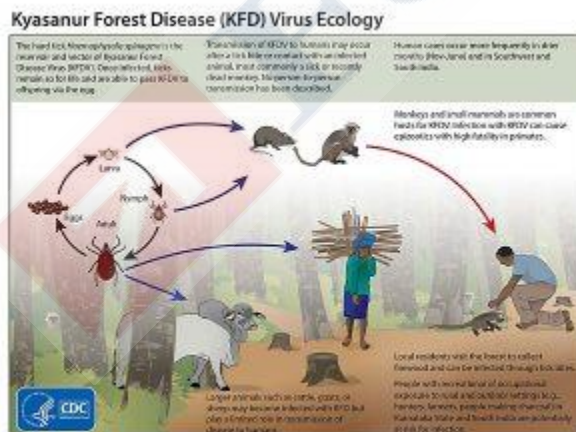
1. Though they appear at similar altitudes, aurora and airglow are produced by different physical processes.
 - Airglow is formed due to emission of light from chemical interactions between oxygen, nitrogen, and other molecules in the upper atmosphere.
 - Auroras, on the other hand, stem from interactions between solar energy and Earth's magnetic field.
2. Unlike auroras, **airglow occurs all around the Earth, all the time.**

Kyasanur forest disease: Study confirms its presence in 2 more Karnataka districts

Why in the News?

A study by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Virology (NIV) has for the first time confirmed the presence of the Kyasanur forest disease (KFD) virus in two more districts of Karnataka.

What is Kyasanur forest disease (KFD)?



Source: Wikipedia

Specifications	Details

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Type	Zoonotic Disease
Caused by	Kyasanur Forest disease virus, a member of the virus family Flaviviridae.
Also known as	Monkey disease/ monkey fever because of its association with monkey deaths.
Transmission	It is transmitted through the bite of ticks and bonnet. Black-faced langur monkeys are highly susceptible to infection. They play a significant role in the spread of the virus in the human population.
First identified in	Kyasanur forest in Karnataka in 1957
Symptoms	Chills, frontal headache, body ache and high fever for five to 12 days.
Mortality rate	2 to 10%
Treatment	There is no specific treatment for monkey fever. A vaccine (Formalin inactivated KFDV vaccine) does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India.

Casgevy: How gene therapy will revolutionize treatment of sickle cell disease

Why in the News?

The UK drug regulator has approved a gene therapy called Casgevy for the cure of sickle cell disease and thalassaemia.

What is Casgevy?

Specifications	Details
What is it?	It is a CRISPR Cas9 based gene-edited therapy developed for the treatment of Sickle cell disease and Thalassaemia.
Working	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Casgevy is a one-time treatment. 2) The treatment involves removing stem cells out of bone marrow from a patient's blood using a process called apheresis that filters out the blood for different components. 3) CRISPR gene editing technology is then used in a laboratory to edit the faulty gene. 4) The edited cells are then infused back into the patient, allowing the body to produce functioning haemoglobin.
Target Gene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A gene called BCL11A which is crucial for switching from foetal to adult haemoglobin is targeted by the therapy. - Note: Foetal haemoglobin which is naturally present in everyone at birth, does not carry the same abnormalities as adult haemoglobin. - The therapy uses the body's own mechanisms to start producing more of this foetal haemoglobin alleviating the symptoms of the two conditions.

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Challenges	1) High Cost is one of the biggest limitations of gene therapies. 2) Absence of local manufacturing facilities which means that the harvested blood stem cells have to be sent across countries.
Significance	This is the first licensed therapy in the world based on the gene editing technology Crispr-Cas9 that earned its innovators a Nobel Prize in 2020.

What is Sickle Cell Disease?

Specifications	Details
What is it?	It is an inherited red blood cell disorder that affects hemoglobin, a protein that carries oxygen through the body.
Characteristics of the disease	1) Normally, red blood cells are disc-shaped and flexible enough to move easily through the blood vessels. 2) In sickle cell disease, red blood cells become crescent- or "sickle"-shaped due to a genetic mutation. 3) Such a shape makes the flow of hemoglobin through the blood vessels difficult and can block blood flow to the rest of the body. 4) The blocked blood flow through the body can lead to serious problems, including stroke, eye problems, infections, and episodes of pain called pain crises.

What is Thalassaemia?

1. Thalassaemia is a chronic and **genetic blood disorder** due to which a patient's body cannot make enough hemoglobin leading to anemia.
2. People suffering from it require blood transfusions to survive.

H9N2: Union Health Ministry is closely monitoring outbreak of H9N2 and clusters of respiratory illness in children in China

Why in the News?

The Union Health Ministry is closely monitoring the reported outbreak of H9N2 cases and clusters of respiratory illness in children in northern China.

What is H9N2?

Specifications	Details
What is it	H9N2 is a subtype of the influenza A virus
Causes	It causes human influenza as well as bird flu.
Origin	Poultry is considered a genetic incubator for the origin of the H9N2 virus.
First time found in	1966 in Wisconsin, US from turkey flocks.

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Symptoms	Mild, flu-like symptoms or eye inflammation to severe, acute respiratory disease or death.
Threats and concerns	H9N2 viruses could potentially play a major role in the emergence of the next influenza pandemic.

Centre exempts CERT-In from purview of RTI Act

Why in the News?

The Central government in its recent official order has exempted the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) from the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

What is CERT-In?

What is it?	It is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents or cyber security threats like hacking and phishing as and when they occur.
Established in	Formed in 2004 under Information Technology Act, 2000 Section (70B)
Nodal Ministry	Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)

Exemptions for Intelligence and Security Organisations from RTI Act

- The RTI Act, enacted in 2005**, states that the legislation shall not apply to intelligence and security organisations specified in the **Second Schedule**, “**provided that the information pertaining to the allegations of corruption and human rights violations shall not be excluded.**”
- So far, there are 26 intelligence and security organisations that are exempt from the RTI Act. This includes Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, Defence Research and Development Organisation, etc.
- The last amendment to the Second Schedule of RTI was made in 2016 to add the Strategic Forces Command to the list of exempted organisations.

Generic drugs made available for Rare Diseases

Why in the News?

The Union Health ministry has made available generic drugs for rare diseases for the first time. Presently, they are made available for four rare diseases Tyrosinemia-Type 1, Gauchers Disease, Wilson’s Disease, and the Dravet-Lennox Gastaut Syndrome.

In the next few months, the Ministry also plans to include Phenylketonuria and Hyperammonemia on the list.

What is the significance of this move?

It will reduce the cost of these generic medicines and make it more accessible.

Diseases for which generic drugs will be made available

Rare Disease	Details
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Tyrosinemia-Type 1	Tyrosinemia type I is an inherited metabolic disorder in which the body lacks an enzyme called fumarylacetoacetate hydrolase (FAH) which is needed to break down the amino acid tyrosine.
Gauchers Disease	Gaucher disease is the result of a buildup of certain fatty substances in certain organs, particularly in spleen and liver.
Wilson's disease	Wilson's disease is a rare inherited disorder that is caused by abnormal copper accumulation in your liver, brain and other vital organs.
Dravet-Lennox gastaut syndrome	Dravet syndrome (DS), Lennox-Gastaut syndrome (LGS) are rare drug-resistant epileptic conditions, characterised by seizures.

What are rare diseases?

1. **There is no universally accepted definition of rare diseases;** However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines rare disease as often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder condition with a prevalence of one or less per 1,000 population.
2. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) defines rare diseases as a disease with one occurrence in 2,500 people.
3. Nearly 80% of these diseases are genetic in nature.
4. The Central Government has prioritised the manufacturing of drugs to treat 13 extremely rare diseases, in order to bring down the exorbitant cost of these medicines.

NASA Psyche spacecraft fired a laser at Earth

Why in the News?

NASA's Psyche spacecraft, currently nearly 16 million miles away in space, has transmitted a near-infrared laser at Earth.

Space communication and the associated problems?

1. **Use of radiowaves for space communication-** Currently most space communication is carried out using radio waves which are characterised by high wave lengths but low frequencies in the electromagnetic spectrum. High wavelength allows them to pass through the atmosphere much more easily.
2. **Problem of data rates-** A limitation of using radiowave is the problem of data rates. Higher bandwidths (range of frequencies) carry more data per second. Scientists would ideally like to transmit data at the highest bandwidths possible to increase the rates of data transfer.
- It is to address this challenge that NASA has come up with with the Deep Space Optical Communications (DSOC) experiment.

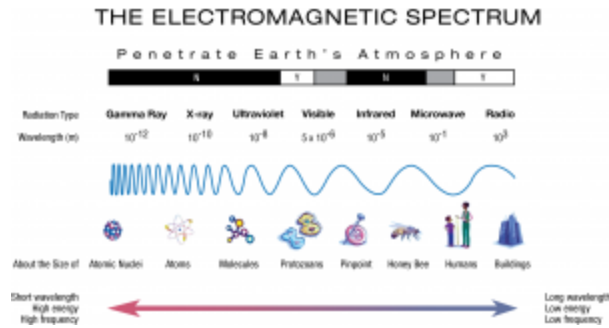


Figure 1. Source- NASA

What is NASA'S Deep Space Optical Communications (DSOC) experiment?

1. NASA'S Deep Space Optical Communications (DSOC) experiment seeks to use near-infrared laser signals for communication with spacecraft.
2. The laser transmission took place on November 14, 2023, is a demonstration of this and has been described as "first light" by NASA
3. The Psyche spacecraft is the first to carry a DSOC transceiver and will be testing high-bandwidth optical communications to Earth during the first two years of

the spacecraft's journey to the main asteroid belt.

What is the Significance of this experiment?

1. DSOC will allow data rates at least 10 times higher than state-of-the-art radio telecommunications systems of comparable size and power.
2. It will enable higher resolution images, larger volumes of science data, and even streaming video.
3. DSOC is taking optical communications into deep space, paving the way for high-bandwidth communications far beyond the Moon.
4. It will help future human and robotic exploration missions.

What is NASA's Psyche mission?

What is it?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psyche is a NASA space mission to explore the origin of planetary cores by orbiting and studying the asteroid 16 Psyche (metal-rich asteroid, orbiting the Sun between Mars and Jupiter) 2. NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) manages the project.
Launched on	October 13, 2023
Features of Psyche Spacecraft	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The spacecraft will not land on the asteroid but will orbit it from August 2029 through late 2031. 2. Psyche uses solar-powered hall effect thrusters for propulsion and orbital maneuvering, the first interplanetary spacecraft to use that technology. 3. It's also the first mission to use laser optical communications beyond the Earth-Moon system.
Significance of this mission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scientists believe this asteroid is the nickel-iron core of an early planet, studying which could provide unique insights into the impenetrable iron core of our own planet. 2. The Psyche mission is expected to provide critical insights into the formation and evolution of our solar system.

Walking Pneumonia: Why China is facing this major outbreak

Why in the News?

China is facing a significant outbreak of Walking Pneumonia particularly among children.

What is Walking Pneumonia?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is a milder form of pneumonia.
Caused by	Mycoplasma pneumoniae
Why is it called Walking Pneumonia	It is called walking pneumonia because its symptoms are often milder and rarely require hospitalization.
Vulnerable Group	It is more prevalent among children, particularly those aged 5 to 15
Transmission	It occurs through airborne droplets from coughing, sneezing or talking or making close contact.
Symptoms	Persistent cough, fever, sore throat, headache, runny nose, ear pain, and sometimes chest discomfort due to coughing.
Treatment	Treatment typically involves antibiotics to target the specific bacteria causing the infection.
Antibiotic Resistance	Overuse and misuse of antibiotics has led to the emergence and spread of antibiotic-resistant strains of mycoplasma pneumonia.

Sanchar Saathi Portal: A centralized website to track, recover your lost mobile faster

Why in the News?

Since its launch, Sanchar Saathi portal has received impressive responses from those who lost their mobile devices. According to the portal, almost 11 lakh mobiles were blocked after citizens reported loss/theft. Of these, half the mobiles were traced back and handed over to the owners.

What is Sanchar Saathi Portal?

Specifications	Details
Launched by	Department of Telecommunications
Aim	To empower mobile subscribers, strengthen their security and increase awareness about citizen centric initiatives of the Government.
Services provided by the portal	The portal allows citizens to: 1) Know the mobile connections issued in their name 2) Get disconnected to the connections not required by them

	<p>3) Block/trace lost mobile phones 4) Check the genuineness of devices while buying a new/old mobile phone.</p>
Modules under the portal	<p>CEIR: It facilitates tracing and blocking of lost/stolen mobile devices. If anyone tries to use the blocked mobile phone, its traceability is generated. Once a mobile phone is found it may be unblocked on the portal for its normal use.</p>
	<p>TAF COP: It enables a mobile subscriber to check the number of mobile connections taken in his/her name. The user can also report the mobile connection(s) which are either not required or not taken by the subscriber.</p>

Subject: Environment

'Ghol' declared state fish of Gujarat

Why in the News?

'Ghol' fish has been declared as the state fish of Gujarat at the first Global Fisheries Conference India 2023 held in Ahmedabad.

What is Ghol Fish?



Source: Indian Express

Specifications	Details
Global Name	Black-spotted croaker
Scientific Name	Protonibea Diacanthus
IUCN Status	Near Threatened
Found in	Indo-Pacific region that stretches from the Persian Gulf to the Pacific Ocean. In India, it is found in the marine areas of Gujarat and Maharashtra.
Known as	'Sea Gold' for its high market value.

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Economic Significance	The fish is among Gujarat's high value exports. The air bladder can fetch up to Rs.25,000 per kg. 1) Its meat is a delicacy in European and Middle Eastern countries. 2) In many Asian countries, especially China, it is known for its medicinal properties.
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Nugu Wildlife Sanctuary: NTCA recommends declaring Nugu as a core critical area of Bandipur

Why in the News?

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has recommended to the authorities that the Nugu Wildlife Sanctuary be declared as the core critical tiger habitat of Bandipur Tiger Reserve.

Where is Nugu Wildlife Sanctuary?

Specifications	Details
Located in	Karnataka
Located near	Bandipur Tiger Reserve
Declared as Wildlife Sanctuary in	1974
Part of	Niligiri Biosphere Reserve
Dam Flowing through it	The backwaters of Nugu dam form part of the sanctuary.
Vegetation	Southern Mixed Deciduous Forest and Dry Deciduous Scrub Forest.
Rainfall	The area receives rainfall both from southwest and northeast monsoons.
Fauna	Tiger, Elephant, leopard, wild dog, striped hyena, sloth bear, gaur, sambhar, chital and four-horned antelope. In addition, the sanctuary also harbours two important riverine wildlife species, – smooth coated otter and marsh crocodile.
Significance	It has been declared as a eco-sensitive zone by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

What are Critical Tiger habitats (CTHs)?

1. **Critical Tiger habitats (CTHs)** also known as core areas of tiger reserves are identified under the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA),1972.
2. These areas are required to be kept inviolate for the purpose of tiger conservation without affecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes or other forest dwellers.

3. The **notification of CTH is done by the state government** in consultation with the expert committee constituted for the purpose.

Compressed Biogas (CBG) and Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF): Government announces CBG Blending Obligation (CBO)

Why in the News?

The Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas has announced CBG Blending Obligation (CBO) to promote production and consumption of Compressed Biogas (CBG).

What is Compressed Biogas (CBG)?

1. Biogas is produced naturally (through a process of anaerobic decomposition) from waste / biomass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, municipal solid waste, etc. After purification, it is compressed and called Compressed Biogas (CBG).
2. CBG has methane content of more than 90% which is similar to commercially available natural gas in composition and energy potential.
3. It can help reduce carbon emissions and provide additional revenue source for farmers. It can also help reduce imports of natural gas and crude oil, ensuring energy security.

What is CBG Blending Obligation (CBO)?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is a roadmap for mandatory blending of compressed biogas (CBG) in the transportation and domestic segments of the city gas distribution (CGD) sector in a phased manner.
Aim	To promote production and consumption of Compressed Biogas (CBG)
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To stimulate demand for CBG in CGD sector 2) Import substitution for liquefied natural gas (LNG) 3) Saving in forex 4) To promote circular economy and 5) To assist in achieving the target of net-zero emission
Phase wise implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Voluntary blending: The blending of CBG with natural gas will be voluntary till FY 2024-2025. 2) Mandatory Blending: It will begin at 1% for FY 2025-26, 3% for 2026- 27 and 4% for 2027-28. From 2028-29 onwards CBO will be 5%.
Monitoring Body	Central Repository Body (CRB) shall monitor and implement the blending mandate based on the operational guidelines.

What is Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF/Bio-ATF)?

1. Sustainable Aviation Fuel or bio-jet fuel is produced from renewable sources such as agricultural waste, municipal solid waste, and forestry residues.
2. It has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 80 percent.

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3. However, they are more expensive than traditional jet fuel.

How is the Government of India promoting Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF/Bio-ATF)?

Government has approved the initial indicative blending percentages of SAF in Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF):

- 1% SAF indicative blending target in 2027 (Initially for International flights)
- 2% SAF blending target in 2028 (Initially for International flights).

World Climate Action Summit in Dubai: PM to take part in it

Why in the News?

The Indian Prime Minister will attend the World Climate Action Summit (WCAS) in Dubai during the 28th Conference of Parties (CoP-28).

What is the World Climate Action Summit (WCAS) 2023?

Specifications	Details
Hosted by	UAE, as the host of COP28
Aim	To discuss the challenges posed by climate change and the roles and responsibilities of the world's governments in addressing it.
Attended by	Heads of state and government, leaders from civil society, businesses, youth representatives, Indigenous Peoples' organizations among others.

Dark Sky Reserve: Ladakh will soon have Southeast Asia's first Night Sky Sanctuary

Why in the News?

Ladakh will soon have Southeast Asia's first Night Sky Sanctuary at Hanle.

What is a Dark Sky Reserve?

Specifications	Details
What is it	A Dark Sky Reserve is public or private land with a distinguished nocturnal environment and starry nights that has been developed responsibly to prevent light pollution.
Designated by	International Dark Sky Association, U.S.-based non-profit designates a land as a Dark Sky Reserve
Categories of Designation	Five categories: International Dark Sky parks, communities, reserves, sanctuaries and Urban Night Sky Places.
Criteria	IDSA considers a piece of land suitable for dark sky place if: 1) It is publicly or privately owned, protected for scientific, natural,

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	educational, cultural, heritage and/or public enjoyment. 2) It is accessible to the public partially or entirely during the year. 3) The core area of the land provides an exceptional dark sky resource relative to the communities and cities that surround it.
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Where is India's first Dark Sky Reserve being developed?

Specifications	Details
Location	Hanle, Ladakh
Situated within	Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary
Situated near	Indian Astronomical Observatory, the second-highest optical telescope in the world, of Indian Institute of Astrophysics.
To be developed by	Ladakh administration will work with Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bengaluru.
Significance	1) It will be Southeast Asia's first Night Sky sanctuary. 2) It will boost Astro-tourism in India. 3) It will help in boosting local tourism and the economy. 4) Encourages and ensures the sustainability of dark skies conservation actions.

Rat-hole mining: A technique being used to help rescue Uttarakhand workers

Why in the News?

Rescuers are planning to use 'rat-hole' mining to rescue 41 workers trapped inside the collapsed Silkyara-Barkot tunnel in Uttarakhand.

What is Rat Hole Mining?

Specifications	Details
What is it?	Rat hole mining is a method of extracting coal from narrow, horizontal seams prevalent in Meghalaya.
Process of rat hole mining	1) In this mining process, narrow pits are dug into the ground. 2) Once the pits are dug, miners descend using ropes or bamboo ladders to reach the coal seams. 3) The coal is then manually extracted using primitive tools such as pickaxes, shovels and baskets.

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Types	Side Cutting: Narrow tunnels are excavated into the hill slopes and workers enter these openings to locate the coal seam.
	Box-cutting: In this, a rectangular opening is made and through that a vertical pit is dug. Once the coal seam is found, rat-hole-sized tunnels are dug horizontally through which workers can extract the coal.
Concerns	<p>1) Environmental concerns: Mining process can cause land degradation, deforestation and water pollution.</p> <p>2) Safety concerns: They lack safety measures such as proper ventilation or safety gear for the workers. There is also a risk of loss of lives either due to rat holes flooding or rat holes collapsing.</p> <p>3) Social concern: Due to the small size of the tunnel, they employ children as workers.</p>
NGT on rat hole mining	The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned this practice in 2014 and retained the ban in 2015. The Meghalaya government then appealed the order in the Supreme Court.

Amplifi 2.0 Portal: Urban Affairs Ministry aims to provide data on Indian cities

Why in the News?

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched Amplifi 2.0 portal.

What is Amplifi 2.0 Portal?

Specifications	Details
Launched by	Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Full Form	Assessment and Monitoring Platform for Liveable, Inclusive and Future-Ready Urban India portal.
Aim	To make raw data from Indian cities available on a single platform for academics, researchers and stakeholders to help data-driven policy making.
Features	<p>The portal provides data on various services for several cities such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Total diesel consumption 2) Number of water quality samples tested 3) Average annual healthcare expenditure 4) Total population residing in slums 5) Recorded fatalities from road accidents
Cities on board	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Currently, 258 urban local bodies have been onboarded and data for 150 cities is accessible on the platform. 2) Eventually, data from the more than 4,000 Urban Local Bodies will be made available on the portal.

What is Urban Outcomes Framework 2022?

1. **Released by:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
2. **Developed by:** National Institute of Urban Affairs and PwC India.
3. **Aim:** To develop a transparent and comprehensive database based on cross-city outcomes across 14 sectors.
4. **These 14 sectors are:** Demography, Economy, Education, Energy, Finance, Environment, Governance & ICT, Health, Housing, Mobility, Planning, Safety and Security, Solid Waste Management, Water and Sanitation.
5. **Significance:** The framework shifts the focus from the indices to the data with a comprehensive list of indicators.

– **Note:** Earlier, the Ministry used data provided by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to rank cities based on four indices — the Ease of Living Index, Municipal Performance Index, Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework and Data Maturity Assessment Framework. The government is planning to bring out different reports on subsets of these four indices.

Subject: Schemes & Programmes

Ayushman Bharat centres to be now called Ayushman Arogya Mandir

Why in the News?

The Union Health Ministry has decided to rename the Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres to “Ayushman Arogya Mandir”. These centers will also have a new tagline — ‘Arogyam Parmam Dhanam’.

What are Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)?

Specifications	Details
Started in	2018
Launched under	Ayushman Bharat Programme
Aim	To move away from selective health care to a more comprehensive range of services spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care for all ages.
Target	1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs) to be established. Till now, 1.6 lakh HWCs have been established, which is more than the target.
Funding	60% funding by center and 40% by states.

Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN) Scheme approved by Cabinet

Why in the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the PM JANMAN Scheme.

What is the PM JANMAN Scheme?

Specifications	Details
Full Form	Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan
Announced in	Budget 2023-24
Aim	To improve the socio-economic conditions of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
Type	It comprises both Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
Implementation	The scheme will be implemented by Nine Ministries which also includes the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
Features	The scheme comprises of 11 critical interventions which are part of existing schemes. These are: Pucca housing, road connectivity, piped water supply, mobile medical units, hostel construction, Anganwadi Centers, skill development centers, electricity connections, solar street lighting, Van Dhan Vikas Kendra, and mobile towers.
Other key Interventions	1) The Ministry of Ayush will provide Ayush facilities to PVTG habitations through Mobile Medical Units. 2) The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship will facilitate skill and vocational training in PVTG habitations.

Subject: Reports & Indices

ILO Report: "A Call for safer and healthier working environments"

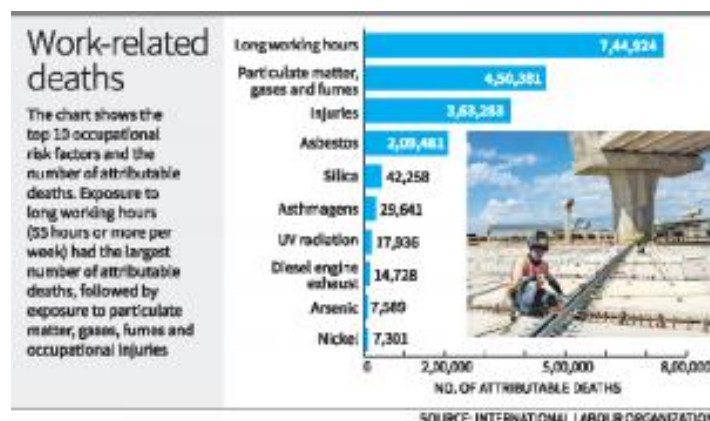
Why in the News?

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has released a report titled "A Call for safer and healthier working environments".

The report will be discussed at the 23rd World Congress on Safety and Health at Work.

What are the key findings of the ILO report?

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Source: The Hindu

Specifications	Details
Work Related Deaths	Around 30 lakh workers globally die due to work-related accidents and diseases. Over 63% of these deaths occur in the Asia-Pacific region.
Primary causes of work-related deaths	1) Long working hours (55 hours or more per week) 2) Exposure to occupational particulate matter, gases and 3) Fumes and occupational injuries.
Deaths attributed to	1) Around 26 lakh deaths were due to work related diseases while work accidents resulted in 3.3 lakh deaths. 2) The diseases that caused most work-related deaths were circulatory diseases, malignant neoplasms and respiratory diseases

What is the 23rd World Congress on Safety and Health at Work?

Specifications	Details
Organized by	International Labour Organization (ILO), Government of Australia, Safework New South Wales and the International Social Security Association (ISSA).
To be held at	Australia
Aim	To hear different perspectives and learn new skills to lead safety and health in the future of work.
Theme for 2023	"Shaping change: Collaborating for a healthier and safer world of work"

Subject: Art & Culture

International Seminar on Santha Kavi Bhima Bhoi and the legacy of Mahima Cult

Why in the News?

The Union Minister for Education inaugurated the 'International Seminar on Santha Kavi Bhima Bhoi and the legacy of Mahima Cult' in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

What is Mahima Cult?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is a unique religious cult practiced in Odisha and other nearby states. It is also called 'Satya Sanatan Mahima Dharma'.
Founder	Mahima Swami
Main Principle	The concept of Brahma or Absolute Monism of the Upanishads constitutes the cardinal thought in Mahima Dharma. It focuses on simplicity, equality and devotion to the formless Divine.
Key Beliefs	1) Single God: Devotion to a single God (parambrahma or the supreme soul who is formless and omnipresent) named Alekha. 2) Rejection of Idol Worship: It discouraged idol worship and rituals, focusing instead on direct communion with the divine through prayer and meditation. 3) Rejected Caste System.
Sects of Mahima Cult	3 sects – Kumbhipatias, the Kanapatias and Ashritas.
Famous Disciples of Mahima Swami	1) Govind Das 2) Bhima Boi

Who was Santha Kavi Bhima Bhoi?

1. Bhima Bhoi was a 19th-century saint, poet and social reformer from the state of Odisha.
2. He was a **follower of Mahima Swami, the founder of Mahima Cult.**
3. He is often **referred to as the "Santha Kavi" meaning the "Saint Poet".**
4. He is known for his spiritual teachings and literary contributions in the form of Odia Bhajans and Chautisa (devotional song).
5. **Stuti Chintamani** is considered the most important poetical work of Bhima Bhoi. The poem is a set of prayers to Brahma, with the poet asking for redemption from the suffering and injustices that humanity experiences in the Kaliyuga.
6. Other important works are Brahma Nirupana Gita, Astaka Bihari Gita, Chautisa Madhu Chakra, and Bhajanamala. Two collections, Atha Bhajan and Bangala Atha Bhajan are written in the Bengali language.

Parthenon Sculptures

Why in the News?

Greece and the UK are engaged in a diplomatic row over the status of the Parthenon Sculptures housed at the British Museum.

What are Parthenon Sculptures?



Source- The British Museum

1. **The Parthenon Sculptures, also known as the Elgin Marbles**, are a collection of classical Greek marble sculptures that once adorned the Parthenon temple (dedicated to the goddess Athena) on the rocky Acropolis hills of Athens. The Parthenon was constructed in the 5th century BC.
2. The majority of the sculptures were created under the direction of sculptor and architect **Phidias**

What is the Controversy and How did they come to the British Museum?

- The Parthenon Sculptures were **removed by Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin and the then British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, in the early 19th century.**
- The marbles were then taken to Britain and later **purchased by the British Museum in 1816. British Museum consists of more than 30 ancient stone Parthenon sculptures.**
- Lord Elgin claimed that he had obtained permission from the Ottoman authorities to remove the sculptures, but Athen accuses Lord Elgin of theft. As the original letter giving him permission has been lost, its text remains disputed.

What are some International Agreements on Cultural Property Trafficking?

UN resolution 2347 related to the protection of cultural heritage.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention: On the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. **India is a signatory to the Convention.**

Subject: Miscellaneous

Exercise SURYA KIRAN: India- Nepal Joint Military Exercise

Why in the News?

Nepal Army has arrived in India to participate in the 17th edition of Joint Military Exercise SURYA KIRAN.

What is Exercise SURYA KIRAN?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is a joint military exercise between India and Nepal.
Started in	2011
Held	Annually
Aim	1) To enhance interoperability in jungle warfare. 2) To train in counter terrorism operations in mountainous terrain. 3) To provide Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief under the United Nations Charter on peacekeeping operations.

9th National Level Pollution Response Exercise (NATPOLREX-IX) conducted by Indian Coast Guard

Why in the News?

The 9th National Level Pollution Response Exercise (NATPOLREX-IX) was conducted by the Indian Coast Guard off Vadinar, Gujarat.

What is Exercise NATPOLREX?

Specifications	Details
What is it	It is a marine oil spill preparedness exercise.
Conducted by	Indian Coast Guard (ICG)
Objectives	1) To test the level of preparedness and coordination between various resource agencies to respond to a marine oil spill. 2) To implement the guidelines as contained in the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP)

What is the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP)?

Specifications	Details
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What is it	It outlines the steps required for the management of responses to marine oil spills
Promulgated in	1996 (and updated in 2014)
Prepared by	Indian Coast Guard (ICG)
Nodal Authority	National Disaster Management Authority, Ministry of Home Affairs.
Objectives of the plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) To establish an effective system for detection and reporting of oil spills;2) To establish adequate measures for preparedness for oil and chemical pollution;3) To facilitate rapid and effective response to oil pollution;4) To establish record-keeping procedures to facilitate recovery of costs;5) To maintain the evidence for the purpose of identifying the polluter and taking suitable administrative, civil or criminal action against the polluter.

Note - The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) functions as the Central Coordinating Authority for response to Oil spills in Indian waters.