

Factly Weekly

Compilation

2023

**For UPSC CSE Prelims
Exam**

**4th Week
December 2023**

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Subject: Polity and Nation

Supreme Court: Physical Training Instructors Recognized as Teachers

Why in the News?

Recently, the Supreme Court held that individuals serving as physical training instructors (PTIs) fall under the categorization of 'teachers'.

What was the Case?

- 1) The Bench was hearing the case of a sports officer/ PTI at Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwa Vidyalaya (university). He was challenging the university's demand to retire him at 60 years of age.
- 2) He had sought parity with the other teaching faculty whose age of superannuation was 62.

What has the Supreme Court held?

- 1) The Supreme Court has ruled that physical training instructors (PTIs) are **recognized as 'teachers,'** even if they don't necessarily conduct classes within the confines of a building as in the case of a Professor/Associate Professor/Assistant Professors.
- 2) The Bench held that **'PTI's teach students the skills and regulations of different sports and games'.**
- 3) **Multifarious duties**– The court held that a physical director holds a range of responsibilities such as overseeing daily student games, handling sports equipment and ground maintenance, coordinating inter-class and inter-college tournaments.

Extended Version of Mission Karmayogi launched

Why in the News?

To commemorate Good Governance Day, Dr. Jitendra Singh, the Union Minister, unveiled the Enhanced Edition of Mission Karmayogi featuring **new features on Mission Karmayogi platform 'iGOT'.**

What is Mission Karmayogi?

- 1) It is a nationwide programme to lay the foundation for **capacity building of civil servants.**
- 2) It focuses on grooming civil servants of the future by making them more technology-enabled, innovative, progressive and transparent.
- 3) **iGOT Karmayogi** is the online learning platform under it.

What are the details of new features launched on Mission Karmayogi platform 'iGOT'?

- 1) **My iGOT**- provides targeted training courses on each officer's homepage, directly addressing their unique capacity-building needs. With over 28 lakh users on the platform, it offers access to approximately **830 high-quality e-learning courses.**
- 2) **Blended Programs**- these programs seamlessly combine traditional in-person classroom courses with online learning elements to meet dynamic training needs of the officials

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- 3) **Curated Programs**- designed to meet the varied learning needs of Ministries/Departments and Training Institutions. Course Providers can tailor learning journeys by selecting relevant content, resources, and assessments from the iGOT repository with a programmatic approach.
- 4) **12 domain-specific e-learning courses**- meant to cater to the specific competency needs of Civil Servants at Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and assist other Government organizations in efficiently managing day-to-day functional matters.
– It has been developed by the Karmayogi Digital Learning Lab (**KDLL**) of the DoPT which was inaugurated in 2021 to develop e-learning courses to build the capacity of the civil servants.
- 5) **VIKAS (Variable & Immersive Karmayogi Advanced Support)**- it is a blended learning programme designed to **enhance the capacity of middle management civil servants** in the Central Secretariat.
– It focuses on development of functional, behavioural and technological competencies required in Central Government.

UGC releases draft norms on recognition of colleges in India

Why in the News?

Recently, the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** published the draft guidelines on recognition of colleges.

What are the Proposed Guidelines?

- 1) The proposed guidelines will be applicable to colleges as defined under the UGC Act.
- 2) For UGC recognition, a college should be affiliated to a university in accordance with UGC regulations.
- 3) The college is required to offer degree or diploma programs spanning a minimum of one academic year and requiring a bachelor's degree for admission.
- 4) A college must also submit documents including establishment year, university affiliation certificate, regulatory body approval, and assure compliance with UGC provisions.
- 5) The responsibility of verification of the documents is with the universities. If the information provided is found to be incorrect, the UGC may remove its name.
- 6) Operational colleges must obtain UGC recognition **within three years from the regulations' notification**. Those established or affiliated afterward must secure UGC recognition within three years of their establishment or affiliation.

Offshore Mineral Blocks Auction Rules

Why in the News?

Recently the Ministry of Mines has published **two draft rules for offshore mineral blocks auction** under the Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act, 2002 (OAMDR Act).

What are the Key Provisions of Draft Offshore Areas Mineral (Auction) Rules?

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- 1) Based on the Mineral (Auction) Rules, 2015 framed under the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act** (MMDR Act).
- 2) **Bidding**- The combined license and production lease will be awarded through an ascending forward online electronic bidding system.
- 3) **Requirement for Auction of Production Lease**: Net worth requirements for auction of production lease will be based on the block's estimated resource value, capped at a maximum of INR 200 crore.
- 4) **Requirement for Auction of Composite License**: The auction's net worth criteria for a composite license will also be determined by the block's estimated resource value, with a maximum requirement of INR 100 crore.
– For blocks with unassessable resource quantities, the net worth requirement is set at INR 25 crore.

What are the Key Provisions of draft Offshore Areas Mineral (Auction) Rules?

- 1) Derived from the Minerals (Evidence of Mineral Contents) Rules, 2015, established under the MMDR Act.
- 2) These regulations **outline exploration standards** for diverse mineral types and deposits.
- 3) The proposed regulations suggest a **minimum G2 level of exploration** (General Exploration) for considering a block for production lease auction.
- 4) To qualify for the grant of a **composite license**, exploration must extend to at least **G4 level** or the mineral potentiality of the block must be identified.

Note- There are the four stages of geological assessment i.e. G1 (detailed exploration), G2 (general exploration), G3 (prospecting) and G4 (reconnaissance)

What is the Offshore Areas Mineral (Development & Regulation) Act, 2002 [OAMDR Act]?

- 1) The Act governs the **development and regulation of mineral resources** in India's territorial waters, continental shelf, exclusive economic zone, and other maritime zones, along with related matters.
- 2) The OAMDR Act was recently amended via **Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023**.

Subject: International Relations

Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy

Why in the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the Ministry of External Affairs' proposal to sign and ratify the Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy.

What is Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy?

- 1) The agreement was signed on 2 November 2023.
- 2) It aims to enable **seamless movement of workers, students and professionals** and enhance cooperation on the issue of illegal migration.

- 3) The Agreement locks-in the current Italian visa regime including **mechanisms for post study opportunities, internships, professional trainings** assuring an advantage for India.
- 4) Once approved by both parties, it **stays in force for 5 years**. The agreement will be automatically renewed for successive periods, unless terminated by a participant.

What are the Key Provisions of the Agreement?

- 1) Indian students completing academic/ vocational training in Italy can obtain **temporary residence in the country for up to 12 months** to gain initial professional experience.
- 2) Under the current Flows Decree, Italian side has offered incremental **re-served quotas for both seasonal and non-seasonal workers from 2023-2025**.
- 3) It also formalizes collaboration between the two parties in the efforts to **combat irregular migration**.
- 4) The Agreement establishes a formal monitoring mechanism through a **Joint Working Group (JWG)** that will meet periodically, either virtually or in person, as needed, to oversee its implementation.

Angola quits OPEC amid dispute over oil production quotas

Why in the News?

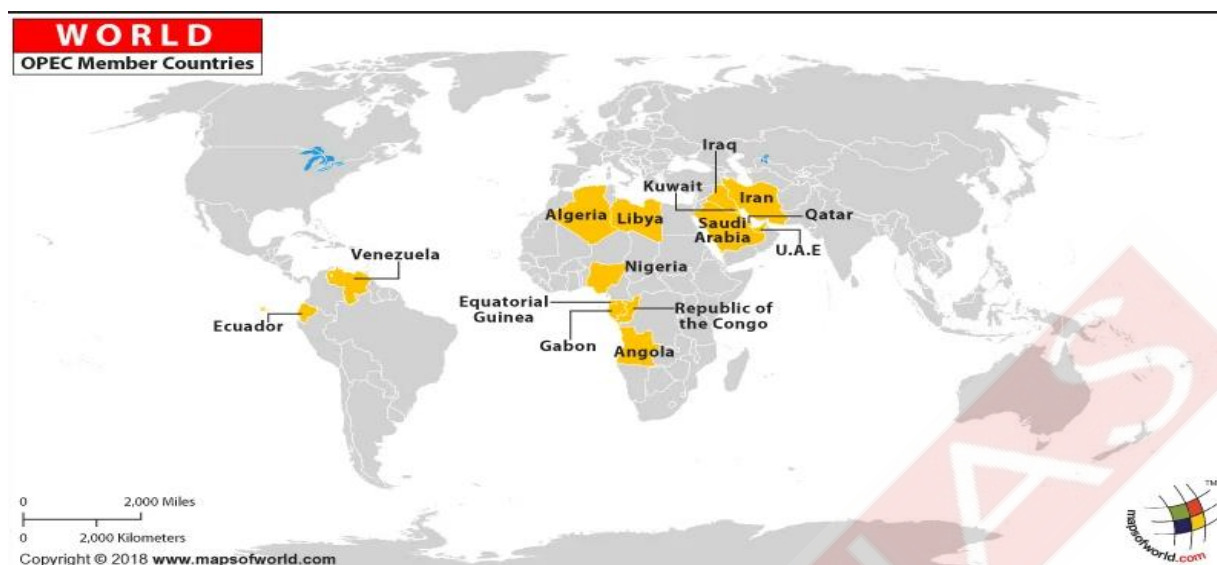
Angola has opted to withdraw from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) due to a disagreement concerning oil production quotas.

Note- Several other members have quit the group in recent years, for different reasons: Qatar, Indonesia and most recently, Ecuador.

What will be the impact of this decision?

- 1) It will **shrink membership** of OPEC to 12 nations.
- 2) Angola's departure raised **concerns regarding the unity** of the organization and resulted in a **drop in international oil prices**.

What is the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)?



Source- mapsofworld

Specifications	Details
What is it?	It is an intergovernmental organisation of oil producing nations. They together account for an estimated 44 percent of global oil production and 81.5 percent of the world's "proven" oil reserves.
Objective	To coordinate and unify petroleum policies among its member countries to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers.
Founded in	14 September 1960 in Baghdad, Iraq.
Headquarter	Vienna, Austria.
Members	Total members countries - 13 (Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela) Founding members - Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela
Functions	1) It plays a significant role in influencing global oil production levels to meet market demand and maintain the economic interests of its member nations. 2) Decisions about matching oil production to expected demand are taken at the meeting of the OPEC conference.

About Angola



Source- Britannica

- 1) Angola is a country **located on the west coast of Southern Africa.**
- 2) It is **bordered** by Namibia to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the north, Zambia to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west

Subject: Indian Economy

T+0 Settlement Cycle: SEBI Proposes Instant Settlement Cycle

Why in the News?

The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** has proposed to introduce the T+0 settlement cycle on an optional basis. This facility will be in addition to the existing T+1 (trade plus one day) settlement cycle.

What is the current settlement cycle followed in the securities market?

- 1) Currently on Indian exchanges, the settlement cycle for all traded instruments is **T+1** day, with T representing the trading day. It was introduced in 2021 in a phased manner and was fully implemented in 2023.
- 2) T+1 means **settlements will have to be cleared within one day** after the actual transaction takes place. **For example-** trades executed on Monday get settled on Tuesday, the next working day.

What has SEBI proposed now?

- 1) It suggested adding a shorter settlement cycle as an option for the equity cash segment, alongside the existing T+1 cycle.
- 2) The proposed implementation involves **two phases:**
 - a. **Phase 1** – An optional T+0 settlement cycle (**for trades until 1:30 PM**) is envisioned, aiming to conclude

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the settlement of funds and securities on the same day by 4:30 PM.

b. **Phase 2** – There's an option for immediate trade-by-trade settlement (funds and securities). Trading in this phase will continue until **3:30 PM**.

3) SEBI proposes initially **introducing T+0 settlement for the top 500 listed equity shares**, categorized by market capitalization. This will be implemented in three phases of 200, 200, and 100 shares, progressing from the lowest to the highest market cap.

4) Securities under the trade-for-trade settlement will **not be permitted for T+0**.

What are the Benefits of the New Settlement Cycle?

1) An immediate settlement mechanism allows for the **instant receipt of funds and securities**, in contrast to the current T+1 day pay-out.

2) It will strengthen investor protection by enhancing the control of the investor over the securities and funds.

3) It can position Indian equities as a resilient, cost-effective, and time-efficient asset class, surpassing emerging contenders in alternative asset classes.

Subject: Science & Technology

Milli second burst detected by Astrosat

Why in the News?

Recently a study revealed that AstroSat (India's first multi-wavelength space observatory) has detected intense sub-second X-ray bursts from a new neutron star 'SGR J1830-0645'.

What is 'SGR J1830-0645'?

1) SGR J1830-0645 (a magnetar) is a relatively young and solitary neutron star, with an age of approximately 24,000 years.

2) It was first identified in October 2020 by NASA's Swift spacecraft

What are Magnetars?

1) Magnetars are **neutron stars with an ultrahigh magnetic field** that are much stronger than the terrestrial magnetic field.

2) The emission of high-energy electromagnetic radiation in magnetars is powered by the decay of their magnetic fields.

3) They also exhibit strong temporal variability, featuring slow rotation, rapid spin-down, and bright, short bursts, sometimes extending to months-long outbursts.

What are the findings of the study?

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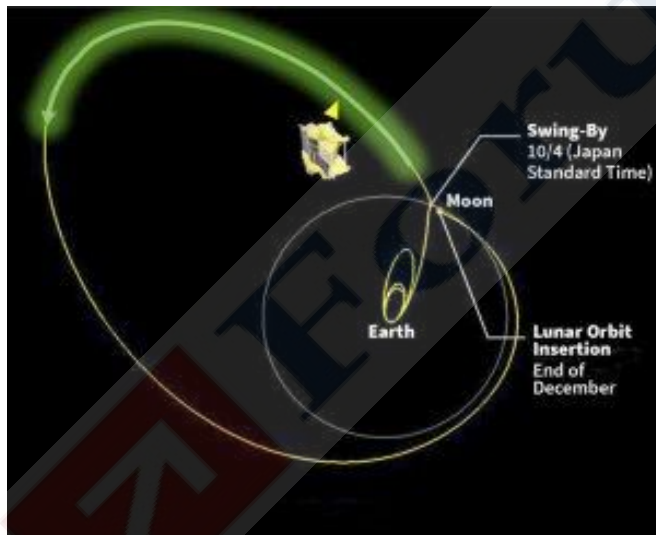
- 1) Researchers from Raman Research Institute (RRI) and the University of Delhi analyzed the timing and spectra of this magnetar using two instruments on AstroSat: **the Large Area X-Ray Proportional Counter (LAXPC) and the Soft X-Ray Telescope (SXT)**.
- 2) A notable discovery included identifying **67 brief sub-second X-ray bursts, averaging a duration of 33 milliseconds**. The most luminous burst among them endured for approximately 90 milliseconds.
- 3) It detected **bright sub-second X-ray bursts** which can help understand the intriguing extreme astrophysical conditions of magnetars.
- 4) The study concluded that SGR J1830–0645 is a **unique magnetar that showcased emission line in its spectra**. The presence of emission lines and its potential origin — either due to fluorescence of iron, proton cyclotron line feature or an instrumental effect — remains a subject of consideration.
- 5) The research team intends to broaden their study to determine the origin of these energetic emissions, discerning whether they have an astrophysical origin or are instrumental in nature.

SLIM: Japan's Moon Landing Mission

Why in the News?

Japan's SLIM spacecraft has entered lunar orbit, aiming for a moon landing on January 19, potentially marking it as the fifth country to achieve a soft landing on the moon.

What is SLIM (Smart Lander for Investigating Moon) Mission?



Source- The Hindu

Specifications	Details
What is it?	SLIM is Japan's first lunar surface mission.

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Objective	To showcase precision landing capabilities on the Moon, targeting a landing within 100 meters of its chosen site near the Shioli crater. Note- Given that the mission aims to soft-land with the smallest ever area tolerance on the moon, it is also being called as Moon Sniper.
Launch	1) Built by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). 2) It was launched on September 7, 2023 , along with the X-Ray Imaging and Spectroscopy Mission (XRISM) space telescope.
Weight	It weighs a mere 590 kg, nearly one-seventh of the weight of Chandrayaan-3 which launched at 3,900 kg.
Features	1) SLIM is lighter because it carries much less fuel. 2) Orbital mechanics- It utilized earth gravity to build kinetic energy, eventually aligning its trajectory with the moon for a slower approach and capture. 3) Once it gets close to the moon, it will get deflected into deeper space by the combined forces of Earth and Moon. 4) This larger, more loopy path that was designed to bring it back near the moon after it had slowed down further, allowing it to get captured by the Moon's orbit. 5) Upon soft landing, SLIM will deploy two small rovers called Lunar Excursion Vehicle (LEV) 1 and 2. They will study the lunar surface near the landing point, collect temperature and radiation readings, and attempt to study the moon's mantle.
Significance for Chandrayaan 4	Success of SLIM, especially with respect to its low weight and precision landing could play a crucial role in the Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) Mission, a joint effort of ISRO and JAXA.

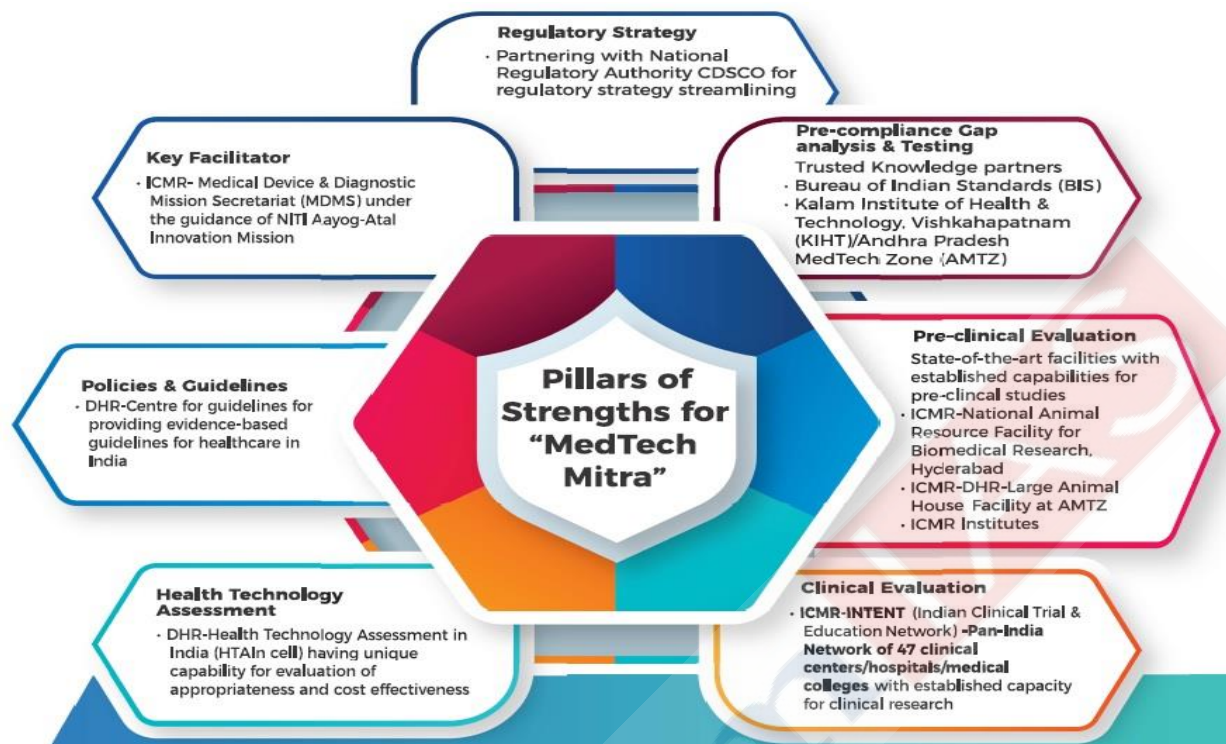
Note- XRISM mission objective is to investigate celestial X-ray objects in the Universe with high-throughput imaging and high-resolution spectroscopy.

MedTech Mitra

Why in the News?

Recently, the union Health minister has virtually launched 'MedTech Mitra' portal.

What is MedTech Mitra?



Source- ICMR

- 1) It's a web platform with an aim to **foster development of affordable and accessible indigenous medical devices/ In-vitro diagnostics**.
- 2) It is designed to provide strategic handholding **support to MedTech innovators** with assessing clinical viability, regulatory facilitation, and adopting new products.
- 3) MedTech Mitra will address the queries of the innovators and provide personalized guidance in consultation with the Regulator and other relevant stakeholders.
- 4) The portal will be coordinated collaboratively by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)**, under the guidance of NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission.

What is the Significance of this Portal?

- 1) It will enable the indigenous development of cost-effective, high-quality MedTech devices and diagnostics, thereby **reducing the current import dependence** of around 80% in MedTech.
- 2) It will **facilitate innovation and research and development (R&D)** for emerging startups in the field of medical technology.

'UPI Tap and Pay' Facility by NPCI

Why in the News?

The **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** initiated the deployment of 'UPI Tap and Pay' across various digital payment providers.

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What are the Features of UPI Tap and Pay?

- 1) Instead of a camera, it employs **near-field communication (NFC) technology** (short-range wireless connectivity technology) to capture the payee's UPI ID or Virtual Payment Address (VPA).
- 2) This functionality is only available on phones or devices equipped with NFC capability.
- 3) Users are required to find the 'Tap & Pay' button within their UPI app, and the transaction is finalized by tapping the device on the UPI Smart Tag/ Smart QR.
- 4) If a user activates the tap feature for the UPI LITE account, transactions below Rs. 500 will be processed through UPI LITE. **For transactions exceeding Rs. 500, a UPI PIN will be necessary.**
- 5) The feature is available for **both Android and iOS** and is currently **live on two apps: BHIM and Paytm** (only for limited users).

Pegasus spyware

Why in the News?

The Washington Post and Amnesty International report alleges Pegasus spyware targeted journalists in India. The intrusion was discovered in October 2023 following Apple's warning to users, including MPs, about potential 'state-sponsored attacks' on their iPhones.

What is Pegasus Spyware?

- 1) Pegasus is a type of malicious software or **malware designed to secretly collect information.**
- 2) **Developed by** – Israeli security firm NSO Group.
- 3) **Purpose:** Pegasus is designed for three main activities:
 - a. Collection of historic data on a device without user knowledge
 - b. Continuous monitoring of activity and gathering of personal information and
 - c. Transmission of this data to third parties.

How does Pegasus infiltrate devices?

- 1) Pegasus is part of a tier called "**zero click exploits**" whereby it takes advantage of bugs in popular apps such as iMessage and WhatsApp to infiltrate the system.

Note– A zero-click exploit, unlike most cyberattacks, doesn't require any interaction from the users they target, such as clicking on a link. It relies on vulnerabilities in devices and software to gain access.

- 2) Pegasus can also use unsecured websites to infiltrate a device. These are called **network injection attacks**. The device is infiltrated within milliseconds of visiting such a website.

Huntington's Disease

Why in the News?

Recently researchers have advanced their comprehension of Huntington's disease through the examination of fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*)

What are the Findings of the Study?

- 1) Individuals with Huntington's disease harbor a **mutated form of the HTT gene**, responsible for encoding a **protein known as huntingtin (Htt)**.
- 2) Nerve cells require Htt protein for their normal functioning and survival. However, a mutated gene encoding for an abnormal Htt protein leads to the **destruction of neurons** controlling movement, cognition, and memory.
- 3) The mutant HTT gene is considered to be a **dominant gene** i.e the disease is triggered even if one copy of the gene, inherited from either parent, is mutated.
- 4) The scientists **genetically engineered fruit flies** to express the mutated human HTT gene into their nervous system.
- 5) The research found that **excessive expression of Yod1 gene removed all disease-like effects** in the flies, including neurodegeneration. This indicates a possible avenue for therapeutic intervention in humans.

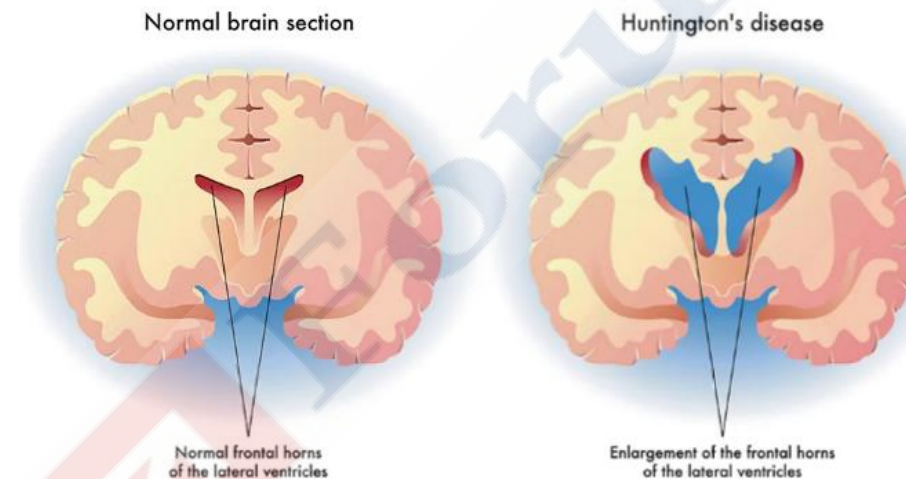


Figure 1. Source- Medium

neurons in the brain.

- 3) **Symptoms:** includes involuntary movements, cognitive decline, and emotional disturbances and typically manifest in adulthood
- 4) **Treatment:** it is currently **incurable**, and treatment **cannot reverse its progression or slow it down**. However, health care providers can offer medications to help with certain symptoms.

What is Huntington's disease?

- 1) Huntington's disease (HD) is a **hereditary neurodegenerative disorder** characterized by the progressive breakdown of nerve cells in the brain.
- 2) It is **caused by a mutation in the huntingtin gene (HTT)**, leading to the production of a defective form of the huntingtin protein which in turn affects the

Subject: Environment

Pong Dam Eco-Sensitive Zone

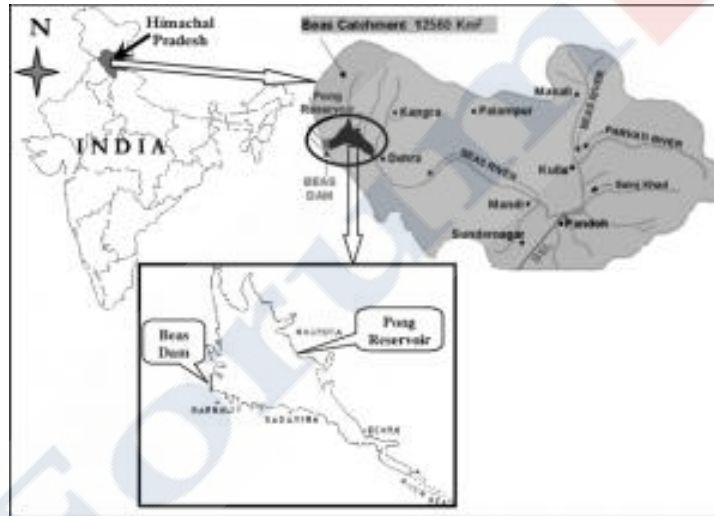
Why in the News?

The Himachal Pradesh state government is reviewing eco-sensitive zone boundaries around Pong Dam to address challenges for locals and support agriculture activities during low water levels.

What are Eco Sensitive Zones?

- 1) Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ) or Ecologically Fragile Areas (EFAs) are areas in India **notified by the Ministry of Environment** around protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.
- 2) The objective of declaring an area as ESZ is to create some kind of “**shock absorbers**” to the protected areas by regulating and managing the activities around such areas.

What is Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary?



Source- research gate

Aspect	Details
Location	1) It is located in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh . 2) It is also known as Pong Dam Reservoir or Pong Dam Lake.
Created in	The dam was created in 1975 and was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 1983 .
Ramsar site	The lake was declared a Ramsar Site in 2002 .
Rivers	1) The lake is fed by the Beas River . 2) Its numerous perennial tributaries are Gaj, Neogal, Binwa, Uhl, Bangana, and Baner.

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Vegetation	The sanctuary area is covered with tropical and subtropical forests .
Flora	Acacia, Jamun, Shisham, Mango, Mulberry, Ficus Kachnar, Amla, and Prunus.
Fauna	1) It includes animals like Sambhar, Barking Deer, Wild Bear, Nilgai, Clawless Otter, and Leopards. 2) The lake's flagship species is the Bar Headed Geese, with other prominent species including Eurasian Coot, Northern Pintail, Common Teal, Great Cormorant, GreyLag Goose, and more.

Note- There is a **Vulture Café** in Pong wherein cattle carcasses are dumped for Vultures.

Achievements of NTCA

Why in the News?

This article explores the accomplishments of the National Tiger Conservation Authority in the year 2023.

What are the Achievements of the NTCA in 2023?

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- 1) The Centrally Sponsored Scheme – **Project Tiger** that has put the **endangered** wild tigers of India on assured path of recovery has **completed 50 years** of successful implementation.
- 2) **India now hosts over 70% of the global wild tiger population**, with a minimum of 3,167 tigers, according to the 5th cycle of the All-India Tiger Estimation 2022 summary report.
- 3) The Prime Minister inaugurated the **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)** during a special program, aiming to **conserve seven major big cat species**—Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma through collaborative efforts of the range countries.
- 4) **Successful reintroduction of the cheetah**– Project for translocation of cheetahs from South Africa and Namibia to Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh was launched. **Work is also under progress at Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh** for establishing the second home for cheetah meta population.
- 5) **Tiger Reserves undergo Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) every four years** by NTCA following the IUCN framework. It is a crucial tool to enhance the management of Tiger Reserves and their landscape connectivity.
- 6) With the declaration of the **new “Rani Durgavati” Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh**, India now has a **total of 54 tiger reserves**, covering more than 2.30% of its geographical area.
- 7) Currently, **23 tiger reserves** in India have received CA|TS accreditation. **Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA|TS)** is criteria set ensuring that tiger sites **meet international standards** for successful conservation.
- 8) In 2022-23, **Pench Tiger Reserves in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, along with Satpura Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh**, jointly received the **Tx2 award**. This international recognition is bestowed by a consortium of organizations including GEF, UNDP, IUCN, WWF, and GTF.

What is NTCA?

The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a **statutory body** established under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.

Subject: Schemes & Programmes

SHRESHTA Scheme

Why in the News?

Under the SHRESHTA Scheme, a total of 2,564 students from Scheduled Castes have enrolled in 142 private residential schools affiliated with CBSE/State Boards for the academic session 2023-24.

What is the SHRESTHA Scheme?

Specifications	Details
Full form	The Scheme for Residential Education for Students in High Schools in Targeted Areas (SHRESHTA)

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Objective	To provide high-quality education for meritorious but poor Scheduled Castes (SC) students in CBSE-affiliated reputed residential schools across the country.
Nodal Ministry	Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
Eligibility	SC students studying in class 8th and 10th in the current academic year.

How is the Scheme being Implemented?

The scheme is being implemented in two Modes:

1) **Mode 1:** SHRESHTA schools

a. Under this, around 3000 SC students are admitted in the best private residential schools affiliated by CBSE/State Boards in **classes 9th and 11th** for completion of education till 12th standard.

b. SC students, with **parents' annual income up to 2.5 lakh**, are selected through the **National Entrance Test for SHRESHTA (NETS)** to be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA).

c. **Total fee for the student would be borne by the Department**, including the school fee (including tuition fees) and hostel fee (including mess charges).

2) **Mode 2:** NGO operated Schools/ Hostels

a. Schools/ Hostels operated by NGOs and other voluntary organizations with classes up to 12, receiving Grant-in-aid from government, will persist based on satisfactory performance.

b. **Grants under the scheme will be provided for School fee and residential charges** for the SC admitted in the schools with a condition that if other than those are admitted, the school shall be allowed to collect the fee from such students.

eSoil

Why in the News?

A recent study by Linköping University's on 'electronic soil' (eSoil) and hydroponics (soil-less cultivation) presents hope for sustainable urban agriculture and food security.

What is eSoil?

1) eSoil serves as a low-power bioelectronic growth substrate capable of **electrically stimulating both the root system and the growth environment of plants**.

2) This innovative substrate has been **derived from cellulose and the conductive polymer PEDOT**.

3) Its **active material** is an organic mixed-ionic electronic conductor.

4) Advantages:

a. It is **environmentally friendly**.

b. It provides a **safe alternative** to previous methods that relied on high voltage and non-biodegradable materials.

c. eSoil employs **minimal energy** and reduces resource consumption.

What is the Significance of eSoil?

- 1) The finding holds significance for hydroponics cultivation and will promote its associated benefits such as **vertical farming**.
- 2) It will ensure the **viability of urban agriculture** and ensure food security.
- 3) It's **low energy consumption offers a sustainable solution** for growing food needs.

Subject: Art & Culture

Veer Bal Diwas

Why in the News?

Veer Bal Diwas is observed on December 26 to honor the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's youngest sons Sahibzada Baba Zorawar Singh Ji and Sahibzada Baba Fateh Singh Ji. They were only 7 and 9 years old, respectively, at the time of their deaths.

How were the Sons of Guru Gobind Singh Martyred?

- 1) During the **Battle of Chamkaur (1704)** fought between the Sikhs and Mughals, Guru Gobind Singh's youngest sons, **Sahibzada Baba Zorawar Singh Ji and Sahibzada Baba Fateh Singh Ji were captured by the Mughals**.
- 2) Refusing to convert or to bow to Wazir Khan, the two were **sentenced to death** and were soon martyred by execution.
- 3) The Guru's mother Mata Gujari and his two elder sons, Sahibzaada Ajit Singh (18) and Sahibzaada Jujhar Singh (14), were also killed within a week.
- 4) A few years later **Baba Banda Singh Bahadur avenged the execution of the Sahibzade**, by attacking, capturing Sirhind and executing Wazir Khan.

Divya Kala Mela 2023

Why in the News?

The government is organising the 12th 'Divya Kala Mela' from 29th December 2023 – 7th January 2024 in Surat, Gujrat. So far 11 Divya kala melas have been organised starting from 2022 in Delhi.

What is Divya Kala Mela?

Aspect	Details
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What is it?	It is a unique event showcasing the products and craftsmanship of Divyang entrepreneurs and artisans from across the country.
Nodal Ministry	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ&E)
Organised by	Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) {DEPwD}, MoSJ&E, GoI through National Divyangjan Finance and Development Corporation (NDFDC)
Aims	1) Strengthen economic empowerment of PwD/Divyangjan. 2) Provide a bigger platform for marketing and showcasing the products and skills of Divyangjan (PwD)
Product Category	Home Décor & Lifestyle, Clothing, Stationery and eco-friendly products, packaged food and organic products, Toys & Gifts, Personal Accessories – Jewellery, Clutch Bags.
Significance	It provides a chance for everyone to support local products, particularly those crafted by determined individuals with disabilities.

What is National Divyangjan Finance and Development Corporation (NDFDC)?

- 1) NDFDC is a Company wholly owned by Government of India, under the **DEPwD of MoSJ&E**.
- 2) It functions as an apex institution for the **benefit of Persons with Disabilities**.
- 3) **Financial assistance** is extended by the Corporation at concessional interest rate for starting/ augmenting any activity contributing directly or indirectly in the income generation of Persons with Disabilities, thus helping them in their overall process of empowerment.

Subject: Miscellaneous

INS Imphal

Why in the News?

INS Imphal, the third warship of Project 15B that together form the **Visakhapatnam class stealth-guided missile destroyers**, has been commissioned into the Indian Navy.

What is Project 15B?

It is a project that aims to construct **four guided missile destroyers** namely Visakhapatnam, Mormugao, Imphal and Surat.

What is INS Imphal?



Source- Wikipedia

Specifications	Details
What is it?	Vishakhapatnam class stealth-guided missile destroyer
Built by	Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL)
Designed by	Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau
Key Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Size- 163 meters in length, 17.4 meters in width, and have a displacement of 7,400 tonnes.2) It has a maximum speed of 30 knots and a range of 4000 nautical miles.3) It is built with 75 per cent indigenous content.4) Arsenal includes BrahMos surface-to-surface cruise missiles and vertically launched Barak-8 surface-to-air missiles.5) It is well-equipped for network-centric warfare, leveraging information technology and computer networking tools.

Indian Navy unveils new epaulettes for admirals

Why in the News?

The new design of epaulettes for admirals has been unveiled by the Navy, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement during the Navy Day celebrations in Sindhudurg, Maharashtra.

What new changes have been made in the design?



Source- The Hindu

- 1) The newly designed epaulettes features a **golden Navy button at the top, followed by an octagon, a crossed Indian sword and telescope, and stars denoting the ranks.**
- 2) The octagon in the new design has been **drawn from the naval ensign** and inspired by rajmudra of Chhatrapati Shivaji.

What is the Significance of the New Design?

Adopting the new design reaffirms their commitment to the two pillars of Panch Pran (Five Resolves) given by PM Narendra Modi during the 76th Independence Day-

- 1) Take Pride in our Roots
- 2) Remove any Trace of Colonial Mindset.

Note- The Navy is also set to rename some of the ranks now in British nomenclature to reflect an Indian connection.

Centre, Assam sign peace pact with ULFA faction

Why in the News?

The **Central Government, Assam government, and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) have entered into a tripartite agreement** aiming for enduring peace, prosperity, and comprehensive development in Assam.

What are the Key Points of this Agreement?

- 1) ULFA representatives agree to **renounce violence, surrender weapons**, vacate camps, participate in democratic process, and uphold national integrity.

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- 2) Out of the 126 Assembly seats in Assam, **97 seats would be reserved for indigenous people**, and future delimitation exercises will adhere to this principle.
- 3) The government has pledged **investment of ₹1.5 lakh crore**, staggered through the years.
- 4) A time-bound program will be made by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, to fulfill the demands of ULFA and a **committee will also be formed for its monitoring**.
- 5) The agreement was signed with the pro-talk's faction of ULFA under Arabinda Rajkhowa while the **other faction led by Paresh Baruah (known as ULFA-I) has not joined** the peace process.
- 6) The settlement is likely to take care of a host of long-standing political, economic and social issues concerning Assam, besides providing cultural safeguards and land rights to the indigenous people.

What is ULFA?

- 1) The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) is a **militant outfit operating in Assam**.
- 2) It was **founded in 1979** by Paresh Baruah during anti-foreigners' movement. Subsequent to internal conflicts, the organization splintered into various factions.
- 3) It advocated for a sovereign state for the Assamese people in response to an influx of Bengali-speaking individuals following the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.
- 4) The Government of India **banned the organisation** in 1990 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act citing it as a terrorist organisation.
- 5) **Rajkhowa faction of the ULFA signed a ceasefire agreement** with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government only in 2011 and has since been in negotiations with the Centre for a peace deal.