

Factly Weekly

Compilation

2024

**For UPSC CSE Prelims
Exam**

**2nd Week
September 2024**

INDEX

UPSC Syllabus- Polity and nation.....	2
Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES)	2
Enemy Property Act.....	2
UPSC Syllabus- Schemes and Programs.....	3
BHASKAR Digital Platform.....	3
PM E-DRIVE Scheme	4
UPSC Syllabus: Indian Economy	5
Current GST rates and proposal to reduce them.....	5
Agro-Meteorological Advisories	6
Key Findings on Electricity Access in Rural Villages	7
Rangeen Machhli mobile app.....	8
UPSC Syllabus: Science and technology	9
Mission Mausam	9
Montelukast Medicine.....	11
Van Allen radiation belts.....	12
OpenAI o1.....	12
IISc Develops Human Brain-Inspired Computing Platform	13
UPSC Syllabus: Defence exercise	14
AL NAJAH V exercise	14
UPSC Syllabus: Art and culture	16
Port Blair Renamed as Sri Vijaya Puram	16
Great Stupa of Sanchi	17

UPSC Syllabus- Polity and nation

Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES)

What is the news?

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has recently dissolved the 14 member Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES). It said that SCES had a mandate, overlapping with the Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys (NSS).

About Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES)

Established: In 2019 by the MoSPI

Nature: A temporary committee formed to address immediate and critical issues in statistics.

Funding: Funded by the Government of India through the MoSPI budget allocations.

Aims and Objectives

- To advise the Union government on survey methodology, including sampling frame, sampling design, and survey instruments, and
- To finalise a tabulation plan of surveys.

About Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys (NSS)

The **Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys (NSS)** was formed recently to oversee survey-related issues of the **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)**.

Established: In **July 2023** based on the recommendations from the **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**.

Enemy Property Act

What is the news?

The Indian government has announced plans to auction a parcel of land in Uttar Pradesh, previously owned by the family of former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf. The land is being sold under the **Enemy Property Act**.

What are the provisions related to enemy property act?

The word "enemy" signifies any country that has committed an act of aggression or declared war against the Union of India,

The law defines enemy property as properties left behind by people who migrated to Pakistan and China and acquired their citizenship, after the 1947 partition and after subsequent wars (1965 and 1971) with these countries.

1) **Initially**, these properties were taken over by the Indian government **Under the Defence of India Rules (1962)** and vested with the **Custodian of Enemy Property for India (CEPI)**.

2) **Enemy Property Act, 1968:** In 1968, The **Enemy Property Act** was enacted to formalize the process. It allowed the government to regulate and appropriate properties belonging to those who took Pakistani or Chinese nationality.

Besides real estate, enemy property may also include bank accounts, shares, gold, and other assets of such individuals.

3) **2017 amendment:** The act was amended in 2017 to expand the definition of “enemy”.

Now the definition included the legal heirs (in India) of those who migrated and the law of succession does not apply to enemy property. It means their heirs in India cannot make any claim over the enemy property. The properties remain under the Custodian’s control.

The Act also made it clear that once a property is declared ‘enemy property’, it remains so.

Sales of such properties are overseen by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** or the **Custodian of Enemy Property of India (CEPI)**, as disinvestment proceeds deposited into government accounts.

UPSC Syllabus- Schemes and Programs

BHASKAR Digital Platform

Why in News?

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is launching the **Bharat Startup Knowledge Access Registry (BHASKAR)**. It is a digital platform aimed at boosting India’s startup ecosystem.

It is **part of the Startup India program**, and seeks to **centralize and streamline collaboration** among stakeholders such as startups, investors, mentors, service providers, and government bodies.

Need for BHASKAR

India is home to over 1,46,000 DPIIT-recognized startups. This makes India a global startup hub. BHASKAR aims to leverage this potential by providing a **one-stop digital platform that addresses the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and investors**.

Key Features of BHASKAR

- 1. Networking and Collaboration:** Connects startups, investors, mentors, and other stakeholders
- 2. Centralized Resource Access:** Consolidates tools and knowledge for efficient scaling
- 3. Personalized Identification:** Unique BHASKAR ID for each stakeholder
- 4. Enhanced Discoverability:** Powerful search features for locating resources and opportunities
- 5. Global Brand Support:** Promotes India’s reputation as an innovation hub

What are the BHASKAR Platform Objectives?

Create world's largest digital registry for startup ecosystem stakeholders and fosters a conducive environment for networking and growth. It also facilitates cross-border collaborations and drives innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation.

Driving Forward India's Startup Ecosystem

The launch of BHASKAR marks a major step in promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation in India. It will serve as a central hub for collaboration and idea exchange, unlocking the full potential of India's startup ecosystem and positioning the country as a global leader in entrepreneurship.

PM E-DRIVE Scheme

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet has approved PM E-DRIVE Scheme to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) in India.

About PM E-DRIVE Scheme

Aspects	Description
About	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) launched to promote EV adoption.2. It replaces the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India Phase II (FAME India Phase II).3. It prioritizes public transportation through incentives for electric buses and trucks.
Implemented by	Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI)
Aim	The primary goal of PM E-DRIVE is to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles by offering upfront incentives and building a robust charging ecosystem.
Subsidies and Incentives	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Subsidies will be provided to promote electric two-wheelers (e-2Ws), three-wheelers (e-3Ws), e-ambulances, e-trucks, and other emerging EVs.2. Support will be provided for 24.79 lakh e-2Ws, 3.16 lakh e-3Ws and 14,028 e-buses.
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. E-Vouchers: Aadhaar-authenticated e-vouchers will be introduced for EV buyers, signed by the buyer and dealer, and uploaded on the PM E-DRIVE portal to facilitate demand incentives.2. E-Ambulances: Rs. 500 crore allocated for e-ambulances, with safety standards set in consultation with MoHFW and stakeholders.3. E-Buses: Rs. 4,391 crore allocated for the procurement of 14,028 e-buses by state transport units.

	4. Demand Aggregation will be managed by CESL in cities with populations over 40 lakh, including Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata.
Impact	1. It reduces air pollution and fuel dependency. 2. It will create employment in EV manufacturing, supply chains, and charging infrastructure installation.

UPSC Syllabus: Indian Economy

Current GST rates and proposal to reduce them

What is the news?

The GST Council recently initiated a potential review to address the increasing demand for a reduction in the 18% tax on health and life insurance premiums. They set a firm 50-day deadline for a new Group of Ministers (GoM) to assess and reconsider the tax rate.

About the Current GST Rate on Health and Insurance Policies

The current Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate on health and life insurance premiums is set at 18%. There has been a growing demand for reducing the 18% tax rate on insurance premiums due to the financial burden it places on policyholders.

GST Rate Changes and Exemptions

- i) The GST Council approved a reduction in the GST rate for three cancer drugs- Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib, and Durvalumab- from 12% to 5%.
- ii) The tax on car seat covers was increased from 18% to 28% to align with motorcycle seat taxes.
- iii) The tax rate on some extruded savoury snacks was lowered from 18% to 12%, removing the distinction between these snacks and items like Namkeens and Bhujia.

Proposals for reducing the GST on health and life insurance premiums

1. Reducing the GST Rate: A key proposal is to lower the current 18% GST rate on health and life insurance premiums, which could make policies more affordable for consumers. This would alleviate the financial burden on policyholders.

2. Complete Removal of GST on Insurance Premiums: There is also a suggestion to completely scrap the GST on insurance premiums. This move would significantly reduce the cost of purchasing insurance, especially important for life-saving policies like health insurance.

3. Exemptions for Certain Categories: The Council is considering providing exemptions for certain categories of insurance policies, such as group insurance policies or policies targeted at specific demographic groups like senior citizens or low-income individuals.

4. Differentiated Treatment for Group Insurance Policies: Special provisions may be introduced to treat group insurance policies differently, which could include lower tax rates or full exemption for certain types of group insurance plans.

5. Revenue Impact Review: Any reduction or removal of the GST on insurance premiums will undergo a detailed review of its impact on government revenues, ensuring that state finances are not adversely affected.

Potential Impact of Reduction of GST: Reducing or removing GST on health and life insurance premiums could offer financial relief to policyholders and boost insurance coverage in the country.

Agro-Meteorological Advisories

What is the news?

Recently, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) announced plans to revive District Agro-Meteorology Units (DAMUs) under the Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa (GKMS) scheme.

About Agro-Meteorological Advisories

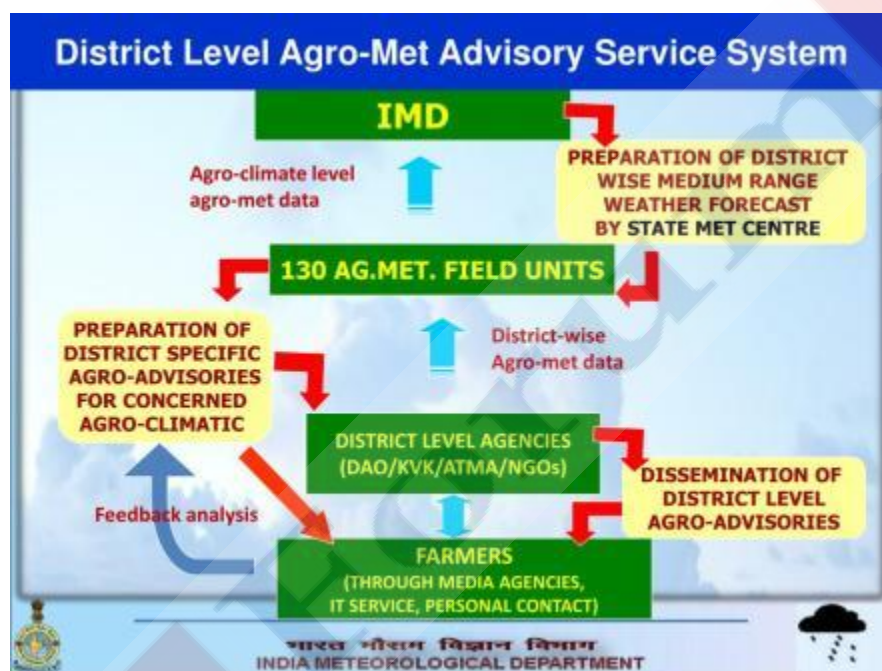


Figure 1. Source: SlideServe

1. Agro-meteorological advisories provide farmers with weather-based guidance to help them make better decisions for farming.

2. This is done through District Agro-Meteorology Units (DAMUs) which are specialized units established to provide localized weather-based agricultural advisories to farmers.

2. DAMUs use weather data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), such as rainfall, temperature, and wind speeds.

3. Based on IMD data, they help farmers decide when to sow, harvest, apply fertilizers and pesticides, and plan irrigation. They also warn early about extreme weather like droughts or heavy rainfall.

4. Advisories are sent to millions of farmers across the country in local languages. These were distributed free-of-cost twice a week.

5. The advisories were shared via text messages, WhatsApp groups, newspapers, and in-person communication by DAMU staff and KVK officers.

About District Agro-Meteorology Units (DAMUs)

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1. DAMUs were set up **under the Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa (GKMS) scheme** by the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** in 2018. DAMUs were **located at Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs)** and staffed by experts in meteorology and agriculture.
2. They **provided local weather data** and **advice to farmers** at the district and block levels.
3. They **sent free advisories** to farmers through **SMS, WhatsApp, newspapers, and face-to-face communication**. These advisories helped farmers plan farming activities and avoid losses due to bad weather.

Impact of Agro-Met Schemes

1. DAMUs helped **improve the adaptability of farmers to climatic variations**, resulting in higher yields and better incomes.
2. By providing localized and easily accessible advisories, the agro-met offices played a critical role in **ensuring farmers were better prepared for climate change impacts**.

Challenges associated with DAMU

1. **Shutdown of DAMUs:** In March 2024, **DAMUs were shut down by the IMD**. NITI Aayog suggested using automated systems and privatizing the service, raising concerns as private services are often too expensive for small farmers.
2. **Concerns with Private Services:** **Private companies** provide similar services **but at high costs (up to ₹80,000 per year)**. This makes them **unaffordable for many farmers**. There's also concern about possible bias in promoting certain brands of fertilizers and pesticides.

Read more: [Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa \(GKMS\) scheme](#).

Key Findings on Electricity Access in Rural Villages

What in the news?

Recently, an analysis of the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyut Yojana was done. It showed that larger and more populous villages benefited disproportionately more than smaller hamlets with fewer households

Key Findings on Electricity Access in Rural Villages

1. Smaller villages (<300 people) saw limited economic improvement from electrification.
2. Villages with 2,000 people experienced a doubling of per-capita expenditure by ₹1,428 due to electrification.
3. Smaller villages showed negligible changes in per-capita expenditure.
4. Electrification in smaller villages yielded “zero return” over 20 years.
5. Medium-sized villages (1,000 people) saw a modest 13% return, just above cost-effectiveness.
6. Larger villages (2,000 people) achieved a 33% return, with a 90% chance of exceeding initial costs.
7. **Challenges:** Electrifying small and remote villages is expensive and often ineffective. Alternatives like solar home systems or minigrids may be more cost-effective.

About Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY)

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- 1. Launched in:** Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Viduytikaran Yojana (RGGVY) was launched in 2005.
- 2. Aim:** It aim at providing electricity to all rural households.
- 3. Focus:** The scheme primarily focuses on electrifying rural households, especially those below the poverty line.
- 4. Funding Structure:** 90% of the funding is provided by the Central Government and 10% of the funding comes from the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC).
- 5. Features:** The scheme has the following important features:
 - i) Prior commitment of the States has been obtained before sanction of projects under the scheme for: A. Guarantee by State Government for a minimum daily supply of 6- 8 hours.
 - ii) Free of cost service connection to all families Below Poverty Lines

Rangeen Machhli mobile app

Why in news?

Recently, Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh launched the “Rangeen Machhli” mobile app.

Features of ‘Rangeen Machhli’ App



Figure 2. Source: PIB

offers comprehensive guidance on fish care, breeding, and maintenance practices, catering to both beginners and professionals in the ornamental fish industry.

3. Aquarium Shop Locator: One of the key features is the “Find Aquarium Shops” tool, which enables users to locate nearby aquarium shops via a dynamic directory that is updated by shop owners.

1. Launched by: Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying at ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIFA), Bhubaneswar. The launch was supported by the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).

2. Features:

1. Multilingual Information: The app provides information on popular ornamental fish species in eight Indian languages, ensuring accessibility for a diverse audience, including hobbyists, aquarium shop

owners, and fish farmers.

2. Knowledge Resources: The app

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4. Educational Modules: There is also an educational module which covers essential topics such as types of aquariums, water filtration, lighting, feeding, and daily maintenance, aimed at hobbyists and aquarium enthusiasts.

The module focuses on breeding and rearing different ornamental fish species. This module caters to professionals looking to diversify their ornamental aquaculture practices.

Note: Ornamental fish are popular for their vibrant colors, unique patterns, and interesting behaviors

About Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

1. PMMSY is a flagship scheme launched by the Government of India on September 10, 2020.

2. Aim: This scheme aims to bring about a Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector in India.

2. Nodal Ministry: Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries.

3. Components: The scheme has two components — Central Sector Scheme (CS) and Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS).

4. Objectives:

i) Augmenting fish production and productivity at a sustained average annual growth rate of about 9% to achieve a target of 22 million metric tons by 2024-25.

ii) Creation of direct gainful employment opportunities to about 15 lakh fishers, fish farmers, fish workers, fish vendors etc.

iii) Doubling of fishers, fish farmers and fish workers incomes by 2024.

5. Duration: 5 years from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25.

UPSC Syllabus: Science and technology

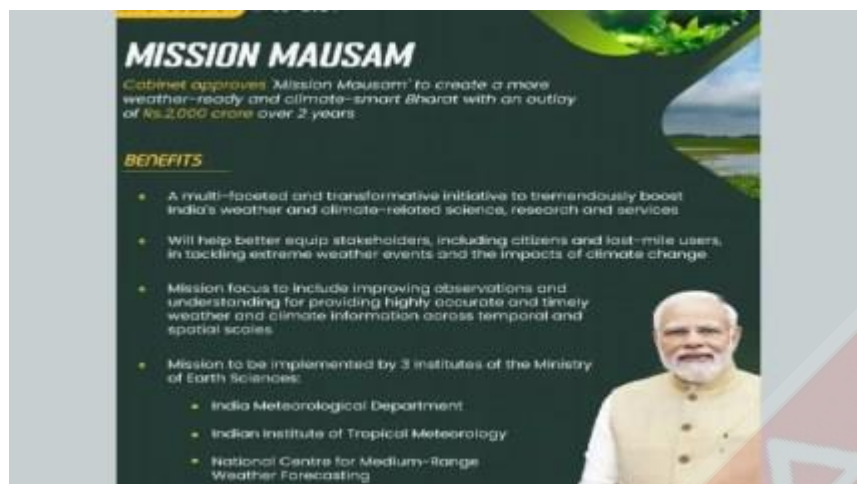
Mission Mausam

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet recently approved 'Mission Mausam'.

About Mission Mausam

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Source: IANS

Aspects	Description
Launched by	Ministry of Earth Sciences
Implemented by	Mission Mausam will be primarily implemented by three key institutes under the Ministry of Earth Sciences: the India Meteorological Department, the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, and the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting.
Aim	Mission Mausam aims to enhance India's capacity in weather and climate science, research, and services.
Focus	The mission will focus on advancing atmospheric sciences, weather surveillance, forecasting, and climate management.
Objective	To strengthen the ability of communities, sectors, and ecosystems to respond to extreme weather events and climate change.
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mission will integrate next-generation radars, satellite systems with advanced sensors, and high-performance computing for more precise weather predictions. 2. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and improved Earth system models will be used for accurate weather prediction. 3. It uses a GIS-based automated system for real-time data dissemination and data-driven decision-making.
Focus Areas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It focuses on providing accurate and timely weather and climate information, including monsoon forecasts, air quality alerts, extreme weather event warnings, and cyclone tracking. 2. It also focuses on solutions for managing fog, hail, rain, and other weather conditions to mitigate their impacts.
Sectoral Benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agriculture: Timely weather forecasts and interventions will directly aid farming practices and crop management. 2. Disaster Management: Enhanced predictive capabilities will help mitigate the effects of extreme weather events.

	3. Multiple Sectors: Other beneficiaries include defence, aviation, water resources, power, tourism, shipping, transport, energy, and health sectors.
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Montelukast Medicine.

Why in news?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a 'black box warning' for montelukast. Similarly, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the U.K. released a health alert indicating that the drug could lead to severe neuropsychiatric side effects. Greater regulation and awareness are needed to prevent misuse and mitigate adverse effects.

About Montelukast



Figure 3. Source: Granulado

tablet, and granules to take by mouth.

7. Concerns with Montelukast:

i) Neuropsychiatric Effects: Can cause aggression, nightmares, depression, and cognitive impairment. Associated with suicide risk.

ii) FDA Warning: In 2020, the FDA added a 'black box warning' for serious neuropsychiatric adverse effects. Similar warnings issued by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency.

1. Montelukast belongs to a class of medications known as leukotriene receptor antagonists (LTRAs).

2. It functions by inhibiting the effects of substances in the body that trigger asthma symptoms and allergic rhinitis.

3. Montelukast is used to reduce inflammation and can help prevent asthma attacks in adults and children aged 2 years and older.

4. It also serves to prevent exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (a narrowing of the airways caused by exercise, also known as exercise-induced asthma) in individuals aged 6 years and older.

5. Mechanism of Action: Montelukast works by blocking leukotrienes, substances in the body that cause inflammation and swelling, thereby improving asthma symptoms.

6. Montelukast comes as a tablet, a chewable

Van Allen radiation belts

Why in news?

Recently, the Polaris Dawn mission made history by surpassing the Apollo program's reach. For the first time since Apollo ventured beyond Earth's usual orbit and passed through the Van Allen radiation belts.

About Van Allen radiation belts

Aspects	Description
About	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Van Allen radiation belts are two layers of charged particles (mainly electrons and protons) trapped by Earth's magnetic field. It was discovered in 1958 by James Van Allen.2. These belts are a critical part of Earth's magnetosphere, the region around our planet controlled by its magnetic field.
Structure	<p>Inner Radiation Belt: It was located about 600 to 6,000 kilometers (370 to 3,730 miles) above Earth's surface. This belt is composed primarily of high-energy protons. It is relatively stable and is formed by cosmic rays interacting with the Earth's atmosphere.</p> <p>Outer Radiation Belt: It is situated between 13,500 and 58,000 kilometers (8,400 to 36,000 miles) above Earth. This belt primarily contains energetic electrons. It is more dynamic than the inner belt and can be influenced by solar activity such as geomagnetic storms.</p>
Formation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Van Allen belts are shaped and sustained by the interaction between Earth's magnetic field and solar wind (a stream of charged particles emitted by the sun).2. These particles get trapped in the Earth's magnetic field, forming the radiation belts.3. The intensity and size of the belts can fluctuate, particularly in response to solar storms and cosmic events. This can cause the belts to expand and even pose a threat to satellites and astronauts.
Importance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Van Allen belts play a crucial role in protecting Earth from harmful solar and cosmic radiation by trapping these high-energy particles.2. However, they also pose risks to spacecraft and satellites that travel through or near them, as the intense radiation can damage electronic systems and increase the risk of radiation exposure to astronauts.

Read more: [Polaris Dawn Mission](#)

OpenAI o1

Why in news?

OpenAI has introduced a new AI model called OpenAI o1 as part of its "Project Strawberry."

About OpenAI o1

1. About: The o1 series is designed to excel in reasoning, tackling complex tasks in science, coding, and maths.

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2. Availability and Usage: It is available to ChatGPT Plus and Team users, with weekly message limits of 30 for o1-preview and 50 for o1-mini.

3. How OpenAI o1 Works: The model “thinks” before responding, similar to human problem-solving processes. It approaches problems from multiple perspectives, checks its outputs, and learns from errors.

4. Performance and Strengths: OpenAI o1 performs well in subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology, on par with PhD students. It shows particular strength in maths and coding. It solved 83% of maths problems in a tough contest, compared to 13% from previous models. It ranked higher than 89% of coding participants.

5. Limitations: While it excels in solving complex tasks, the o1 model is not yet equipped to browse the web or handle files and images. A cheaper version (80% less costly) targeted at developers, effective in coding tasks.

6. Safety Improvements: OpenAI has improved its model’s safety by using a new training method, boosting its safety score from 22 to 84 out of 100. This progress is the result of collaboration with the UK and US governments and AI safety experts to enhance the model’s reliability.

7. Impact on Jobs:

i) Automating tasks like software development, coding, and data analysis could reduce the need for human involvement in these areas.

ii) Workers may need to develop higher-order skills like creativity and critical thinking.

iii) New job roles may emerge in AI safety, ethical AI usage, and AI maintenance.

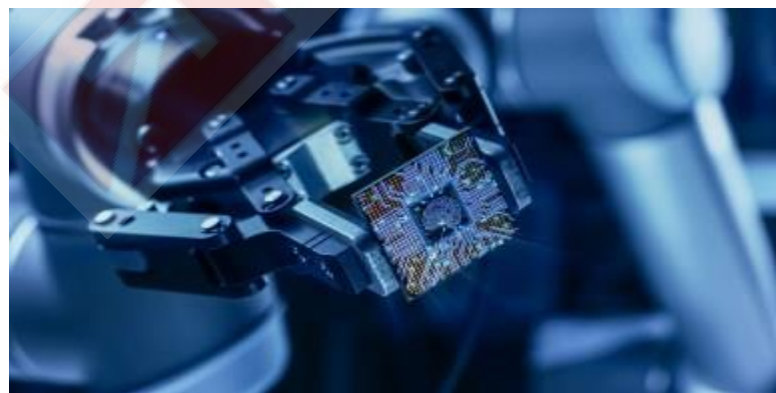
8. Impact on Research: OpenAI o1 could assist researchers in physics, chemistry, biology, and healthcare by speeding up problem-solving and dataset analysis.

IISc Develops Human Brain-Inspired Computing Platform

Why in news?

Researchers from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru have created a revolutionary computing platform inspired by human brain function. The platform mimics brain-like processes and could significantly enhance AI tools’ speed and energy efficiency.

About the ‘Brain on Chip’ Design



1. Developed by: the Centre for Nano Science and Engineering (CeNSE) at IISc.

2. The system processes and stores data, resembling the functioning of a human brain. It offers 16,500 conductance states within a molecular film, far surpassing traditional digital systems which rely on binary (0 and 1) states.

3. Advantages Over Traditional Digital Platforms: Existing digital platforms consume large amounts of energy and time, limiting speed. In contrast, this brain-like computing platform is much faster and more energy-efficient.

4. It allows AI-based tasks to be easily deployed on personal devices like smartphones, laptops, and desktops.

Features of brain-inspired neuromorphic computing platform

1. The brain-inspired neuromorphic computing platform's molecular film enables free ionic movement, creating countless memory pathways and intermediary states, which are inaccessible in conventional digital platforms.

2. Digital platforms can typically only access two conductance states, but this new system offers precise control over molecular kinetics, mapping each movement to a distinct electrical signal.

3. The new system features a neuromorphic accelerator, which can store and process data in the same location, closely mimicking how the human brain operates. This is the first system of its kind, and its tiny molecular changes enable precise and efficient functioning.

Applications and Future Potential

The system could lead to breakthroughs in AI and neuromorphic computing, improving applications like Machine learning models, Edge training, Generative adversarial networks, Memory networks (long-term, short-term) and Transformers.

About Neuromorphic computing

1. It is an innovative field of computing that aims to mimic the architecture and functioning of the human brain.

2. Traditional computers operate using binary logic (0s and 1s) in sequential processing, while neuromorphic systems are designed to replicate the way neurons and synapses communicate in the brain.

3. These systems rely on analog signals and multiple conductance states, enabling them to process information in a manner that closely resembles biological neural networks.

4. Neuromorphic computing is particularly beneficial for AI tasks. By replicating neural networks and integrating processing and memory, these systems are able to perform computations with higher accuracy and efficiency.

UPSC Syllabus: Defence exercise

AL NAJAH V exercise

Why in news?

Recently, the Indian Army contingent departed for the 5th edition of India-Oman Joint Military Exercise AL NAJAH V.

About AL NAJAH V exercise



Source: PIB

Aspects	Description
About	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. AL NAJAH V is a biennial exercise, alternating between India and Oman since 2015. The previous edition was held at Mahajan in Rajasthan. 2. The Indian Army contingent departed for the 5th edition of the India-Oman Joint Military Exercise, AL NAJAH V. 3. The exercise will take place from 13th to 26th September 2024 at the Rabkoot Training Area in Salalah, Oman. 4. The exercise will be conducted in a desert environment, focusing on real-world challenges.
Participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Indian Army's contingent consists of 60 personnel from the Mechanised Infantry Regiment, alongside members from other arms and services. 2. The Royal Army of Oman will also field 60 personnel from their Frontier Force.
Aim	The primary aim is to enhance the joint military capabilities of both nations to conduct counter-terrorism operations under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
Tactical Drills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tactical drills during the exercise will include joint planning, cordon and search operations, fighting in built-up areas, establishing mobile vehicle check posts, counter-drone strategies, and room intervention techniques. 2. Combined field training exercises that simulate counter-terrorism missions are planned to enhance operational readiness.
Benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. AL NAJAH V will facilitate the exchange of best practices in tactics, techniques, and procedures for joint operations. 2. It will strengthen interoperability, camaraderie, and goodwill between the Indian and

	Omani armies. 3. The joint exercise will further bolster defence cooperation and improve bilateral relations between the two countries.
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UPSC Syllabus: Art and culture

Port Blair Renamed as Sri Vijaya Puram

Why in news?

Recently, Union Minister Amit Shah announced that Port Blair, the capital city of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, will be renamed 'Sri Vijaya Puram.' The new name, Sri Vijaya Puram, symbolizes the victory achieved in India's freedom struggle and highlights the unique role the Andaman and Nicobar Islands played in it.

Origin of the Name Port Blair



Figure 4. Source: IE

1. Port Blair was named after Archibald Blair, a naval surveyor and lieutenant in the Bombay Marine. Blair led a thorough survey of the Andaman Islands, making him the first officer to do so.

2. After joining the Bombay Marine in 1771, Blair participated

in various survey missions along the coasts of India, Iran, and Arabia.

3. In 1778, Blair embarked on his first survey of the Andaman Islands from Calcutta, along with two ships, Elizabeth and Viper. Initially, Blair named the natural harbor he discovered Port Cornwallis, after Commodore William Cornwallis, but it was later renamed Port Blair in his honor.

4. Colonial Importance of the Andaman Islands: The East India Company (EIC) decided to colonize the Andaman Islands in the late 18th century, mainly to check the activities of Malay pirates. The island served as a penal colony, with several convicts being transported there for unpaid labor.

In 1792, the penal colony was shifted to Port Cornwallis, but severe disease and death led to its abandonment by 1796.

Connection to the Imperial Cholas and Srivijaya

Chola Naval Expedition: Historical records suggest that the 11th-century Chola emperor, Rajendra I used the Andaman Islands as a strategic naval base during his campaign against the Srivijaya Empire (modern-day Indonesia). An inscription from Thanjavur (1050 CE) refers to the Andaman Islands as “Ma-Nakkavaram land” (great open land), which may have influenced the later British name, Nicobar.

Reasons for the Chola Attack on Srivijaya: Historian Nilakanta Sastri proposed that the Cholas attacked Srivijaya to secure trade routes or expand their empire. American historian G W Spencer interpreted the expedition as part of Chola expansionism, which involved conflicts with other empires in South India and Sri Lanka.

Aftermath of the Attack: Rajendra I captured King Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman of Srivijaya and looted treasures, including the jewelled war gate, Vidhyadara Torana, from the Buddhist empire.

Role of Port Blair in India’s Independence Struggle: After the Revolt of 1857, Port Blair was re-established as a penal colony for Indian prisoners, many of whom were freedom fighters.

It also mark the place where Subhash Chandra Bose first unfurl the Tiranga.

The Cellular Jail, also known as Kala Pani is also located here. It was built by 1906, housing several prominent freedom fighters like Veer Savarkar.

Great Stupa of Sanchi

Why in news?

Recently, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited the replica of the East Gate of Sanchi’s Great Stupa, located in front of the Humboldt Forum Museum in Berlin.

About Great Stupa of Sanchi



Source: The Complete Guide

Aspects	Description
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About	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Great Stupa of Sanchi was constructed in the 3rd century BCE under the reign of Emperor Ashoka. 2. Location: It is located at Sanchi, near Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh. 3. It is one of the oldest stone structures in India and was built to house relics of the Buddha. 4. The stupa was later expanded and embellished during the Shunga dynasty in the 2nd century BCE, showcasing its long-standing religious and historical significance.
Discovery and Early Excavations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The site was “discovered” by British officer Henry Taylor in 1818. 2. The first formal survey and excavation were carried out by Alexander Cunningham, the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), in 1851. 3. The major restoration work was undertaken in the early 20th century under John Marshall, with financial support from the Begums of Bhopal.
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The central feature of the stupa is the dome or anda, which symbolizes the cosmic body of the Buddha. 2. At the top of the dome is the harmika, a square railing representing heaven, and a chhatra, or umbrella-like structure, which symbolizes high rank and spiritual protection. 3. The stupa is surrounded by a pradakshina path, which is a circular walkway used by devotees for circumambulation. 5. The structure is further enclosed by stone railings, which mark the boundaries of the sacred space. 6. The stupa is accessed through four elaborately carved gateways, known as toranas, located at the cardinal points—North, South, East, and West. 7. These toranas are adorned with intricate carvings that depict scenes from the life of the Buddha and Buddhist symbols such as the lotus, wheel of dharma, and Bodhi tree.
Cultural significance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sculptures and carvings on the Great Stupa reflect the rich narrative tradition of early Indian art. 2. The scenes use symbols and metaphors to depict his teachings and various Jataka tales. 3. The stupa represents a transitional phase in Indian sculpture, bridging the gap between the Mauryan and Gupta periods, and showcases early examples of Buddhist art and architecture.
Religious Importance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is a key site for pilgrimage, symbolizing the enlightenment and teachings of the Buddha. 2. It was built to spread Buddhist teachings and house sacred relics. 3. The stupa continues to be an important spiritual site for devotees seeking peace and enlightenment.
Influence on Architecture	Its circular stupa design became a model for similar structures in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and beyond.
UNESCO Status	The Great Stupa of Sanchi was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1989, acknowledging its global cultural significance.